



Fred Eaglesmith on DVD **“Pickin’ In The Pines”** [2006] & **“Live Below Sea Level”** [2007]

Rounding off at some seventy-minutes duration **“Pickin’ In The Pines”** was filmed during August 2005 at Fred’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Northern Picnic and Musicfest which took place at the Temiskaming Nordic Ski Club in New Liskeard, Ontario. Fred’s debut performance at the local Fair grounds took place a mere three years earlier – more of which later. On **“Pickin’”** Fred is supported by The Flying Squirrels – at least that year’s incarnation – Luke Stackhouse [stand-up bass], Miss Kori Hepner [drums], Dan Walsh [guitar, dobro, vocals] and career long sideman Willie P. Bennett [mandolin, harmonica, vocals].

The opening sequence taken from the Friday evening performance consists of two cuts from Fred’s, then, current album **“Dusty”** [2004]. Wearing a sleeveless plaid checked shirt, Fred opens with “Codeine” and follows with “Hey Baby.” Between songs Fred, deadpan, offers the insight *“My father wanted me to be a preacher and auctioneer, which is almost the same thing really – doing the same thing, just one sold on commission.”* So go figure whether it was the world of music that won or lost! It’s daytime when Fred’s Saturday performance opens. Having performed “I Ain’t Ever Giving In” the opening cut on **“Falling Stars And Broken Hearts”** [2002], Fred subsequently draws solely from his 1990’s catalogue with renditions of the truck drivin’ themed “Water In The Fuel” [**“Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline”** [1997]], followed by a *not credited on the DVD liner insert* [but noted in the film credits] rendition of “Carter” from **“50-Odd Dollars”** [1999]. “White Rose” from **“Drive-In Movie”** [1996] - *“the neon soul of this one-horse town”* – serves as a recollection of a hard-scrabble upbringing, an anthem about filling stations as well as a comment on the cut-throat, asset stripping nature of commerce. In the fading light of evening there’s mention of another *“one-horse town”* as Fred and the boys deliver a powerhouse rendition of “Rodeo Boy.” The latter number also doubles as a tale of love lost and first appeared on **“50-Odd Dollars”** and is followed by “Summerlea” from the album that began my addition to Eaglesmith’s music, **“Things Is Changin’”** [1993].

The Sunday segment from the Picnic opens with a typically long and rambling Fred monologue titled “Non-Dairy Creamer” [#]. While his thoughts appear random and unconnected, by the close Fred weds the disparate threads into a stinging comment on Nashville and some the music that’s *manufactured* there. Having performed “Ivory Towers [It Was You]” – it appeared on **“The Official Bootleg Series Volume 1 – Live Solo 2002”** [2003] – Fred tosses around a few more *non-dairy* themed narrative links, and offers the insight that he penned the latter tune in Nashville. Yeah, yeah, yeah! Moving on, the phrase *“Sunday I get to preach a little bit”* launches the “Snake” monologue, a sometimes subjectively wayward assessment of modern life. For much of Sunday’s Walsh plays dobro adding an acoustic sounding backdrop to Eaglesmith’s tunes.

“My Funny Valentine,” another amusing monologue, follows performances “Darlin’ Boy” and “Oxford County” – the latter pair of tunes having made their debut on Fred’s ‘wooden’ box set **“There Ain’t No Easy Road”** [1992]. Firearms have been mentioned in Eaglesmith’s lyrics literally from the outset, although “Rifles And Pistols” is a relatively new addition from **“The Official Bootleg Series Volume 2 – The Fred Eaglesmith Texas Weekend 2004”** [2005] - except that it was listed there as “Pistols & Rifles.” In the Fall of 2002 when Fred first performed in New Liskeard, prior to his show, sat in the bleachers at the Fair ground, he wrote the short but ‘to the point’ “Don’t Take No For An Answer.” The concert he was scheduled to play that day was a benefit to support the campaign against construction, locally, of a toxic waste incineration project. Alone on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Picnic stage, Fred closes the DVD by reprising his ‘local’ song of support.

During the winter of 2006 Fred and band – sans Walsh - undertook a European tour that included appearances in his ancestral homeland, The Netherlands, and **“Live Below Sea Level”** captures segments for two of his concerts. Mostly filmed at the Patronaat in Haarlem, but lacking the extended monologues that grace **“Pickin’ In The Pines,”** on **“Live Below Sea Level”** Fred delivers some short between song comments and indulges in light-hearted repartee with the audience. Opening with “18 Wheels” from the, then, recently released **“Milly’s Café,”** he moves on to “Wilder Than Her” [**“Drive-In Movie”**] and then reprises a duo from **“Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline”** – “105” and “Spookin’ The Horses.”

**“The Official Bootleg Series Volume 1 – Live Solo 2002”** [2003] included “Me And Esther,” while “White Trash” is followed by a ninety-miles an hour rendition of “Good Enough,” just as they, sequentially, appeared on **“Ralph’s Last Show”** [2001]. Eaglesmith surveys the price of fame in “Alcohol And Pills” [**“Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline”**] by way of mention of Hank Snr, Elvis, Janis, Gram, Jimi, although the list of musicians who perished due to addiction is literally endless. The hardships associated with a life spent in the saddle herding cattle is explored in the sombre “Tired” [**“Milly’s Café”**] and at the close of the tune Willie P. enhances the desperation and death painted by Eaglesmith’s lyrics by adding some eerie slide licks on mandolin. There’s more Bennett slide mandolin on the rowdy, high octane “Georgia Overdrive” **“50-Odd Dollars.”**

You’d swear, based on Fred’s lyric, that “Little Buffalo” which appeared on **“There Ain’t No Easy Road”** was titled “Restless Nights” since neither “little” nor “buffalo” appear in the lyric. Partway through “49 Tons” [**“Drive-In Movie”**], Eaglesmith introduces the band, following which Willie P. delivers an extended electric mandolin solo. Eat your heart out Jimmy Page, this ‘mature-in-years’ Canuck can really rock even though his instrument is rather small. The question arises, is sentiment expressed in the previously unrecorded “The Dad Song” a little maudlin, or simply dead on? Based on the lines *“So if you’re out tonight, and you’re with your old man, Reach across the seat and quietly take his hand, Because once he’s gone, he’s gone for good, And you can’t get him back, It’s times like this you sure will miss your dad, It’s times like this I sure do miss my dad,”* I’m pulling for the latter. If you’re not already there – in terms of age, that is – there will come a time when the latter quote makes total sense.

In a separately accessed sequence **“Live Below Sea Level,”** at the Café ‘t Keerpunt in Spijkerboor, once again sporting his favourite sleeveless plaid checked shirt, Eaglesmith rips through “Thinkin’ Bout Her” [**“Milly’s Café”**], the amusing “Big Hair” [**“Ralph’s Last Show”**], “Bell” [**“Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline”**] and “Indian Motorcycles” [**“Falling Stars And Broken Hearts”**]. There are no bells, whistles or frills with either of these “blue collar” DVD recordings – ie. no extras, bloopers, out-takes and things you’ll only ever view once anyway, just Fred & Co. pumpin’ out some hot and tasty roots music. For a picker from north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, Americana just didn’t seem like the appropriate word for his music.

#### **Note.**

[#] – There’s a few seconds sequence on this track, featuring Eaglesmith and Walsh, where the film has been printed backwards. Definitely! Deliberately? Knowing Fred.....

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

#### **Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 12/07.

[1190 words]