



Mark Erelli **"Delivered"** Signature Sounds Recordings

In the Spring of last year, via his web site, Erelli enlisted 'investors' to finance his next studio album. Many stepped up to the plate and **"Delivered,"** an eleven song collection, produced by Zack Hickman, bassist in the Josh Ritter band, is the result. Other musicians who contributed to the sessions include current Ritter stickman Liam Hurley, keyboardist Sam Kassirer – the liner also credits 'additional recording' at Sam's Great North Sound Society studio in Parsonsfield, Maine - and Aoife O'Donovan vocalist in the alternative bluegrass band Crooked Still.

Across three hundred plus pages Studs Terkel's book **"Hope Dies Last,"** published in 2003, and sub-titled **"Keeping The Faith In Difficult Times,"** focused on fighting a *just cause*. Terkel is a Chicago based author, historian, actor and broadcaster. Featuring Mark's finger-picked acoustic guitar and voice – Kassirer's keyboard surfaces later in the track - and the repeated line *"Nothing much has changed here,"* in the second verse and onward Erelli's "Hope Dies Last" references an early morning news bulletin that carries details of a[nother] suicide bomb blast in the Middle East, the Huntington, Utah mine disaster, and a *"man of God saying something 'bout New Orleans."* A later verse chronicles the current incumbent's head in the sand approach to 'issues,' *"In the eyes of the president citizens are enemies, He'd rather talk to Jesus than to anyone who disagrees."* Where much of this lyric appears to adopt a glass half empty stance, in the closing verse Mark neatly flips the coin [over] and intimates that, when all is said and done, love is everything – *"I got a love for you so fierce and true it hurts."* The theme of love also permeates the ensuing "Baltimore," although the focus is a last ditch attempt to keep it alive. Therein the narrator travels, at breakneck speed, from Maryland to Massachusetts - Baltimore to Boston, well Somerville actually – *"Wondering what I got to do to make you reconsider me, Honey, don't turn me back from your door."*

"Shadowland" is an electrically powered sound storm replete with intentionally distorted vocal, while "Volunteers," which immediately follows, is a softer, acoustic sounding number that reflects on the same 'issue.' Erelli co-wrote the latter song with Peter Nelson [&]. The term IED [+] appears in the lyric to both songs, as we're catapulted into the 'full on' horror of surviving in a war torn foreign land. The "Shadowland" narrator intones *"There is no evidence of a plan, Just a boy with a rifle in his hand"* and at the close concludes *"In shadowland, There is no evidence of God's hand, In the darkness on the desert sand, The high ground has been lost, At far too high a cost,"* while "Volunteers" highlights America's dependency upon [and manipulation of], in times of conflict, its 'casual weekend soldiers' - *"Me I'm long past of sense of the blood I've spilled, It's hard to believe all this is part of any God's will, And if you find I've fallen after all the smoke has cleared, Let the record show, I volunteered."*

The narrator in "Five Beer Moon," a divorcee, staunches the pain with alcohol as he surveys a life where *"Things didn't work out like I planned."* "Not Alone," which follows, is a bittersweet road song. Where "Shadowland" and "Volunteers" focused on conflict and its ultimate human cost, "Five Beer Moon" and "Not Alone" reference waves out on the ocean. Call it the Styx, the Sanzu or whatever, "Delivered" is an affirmative take on passing beyond the final veil.

Once they became fathers John Gorka and James Keelaghan began reflecting that 'blessed state' in their lyrics. Between his 'official' [*] album releases **"Hope And Other Casualties"** and **"Delivered,"** Mark joined the club – in late July last year actually. A couple of tracks on **"Delivered"** signal the mindset change that comes with fatherhood.

The soul music flavoured "Man Of The Family" focuses on the mantle that passes to the next generation with the death of a parent. On first hearing "Once," purely based on the melody and the phrasing of

Mark's vocal, I pondered *"Who does that sound like?"* As the light bulb flickered into life, back came the answer - Ron Sexsmith. I found that kinda amusing, since, in the opening line, Mark sings *"I turned 33 in Canada."* In truth, "Once" is a poignant celebration of marriage and becoming a parent. "Unravelled," the penultimate track, is another musician on the road themed affair. Almost two hundred years on from Lincoln's birth, Erelli's inspirational "Abraham" recalls an American leader who valiantly led his nation through a period of conflict. In Lincoln's time the nation's wounds were internal. Here in the early twenty-first century it's time for America to heal both its internal 'great divide' – *"We've more in common than divides us, But we need someone to guide us, Through the sorrow and the shadows we have sown"* - and atone for the wounds it has inflicted on nations beyond its borders.

Considering that this collection began with "Hope Dies Lies" and ends with "Abraham," the latter reflects the former in the line *"But what of hope, We need it more than ever."* As for the *fading* instrumental coda that closes "Abraham," played on a keyboard, it brought to mind a tune about "The Fool On The Hill."

Note.

[&] - Nelson cut a couple of albums for Signature Sounds a few years back.

[+] – In military techno-speak, IED is an 'improvised explosive device.'

[*] – Originally intended as a musical gift to 'friends and family' and mostly featuring cover songs **"Innocent When You Dream"** was released during late 2006.

Folkwax score 9 out of 10.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 06/08 & 07/08.