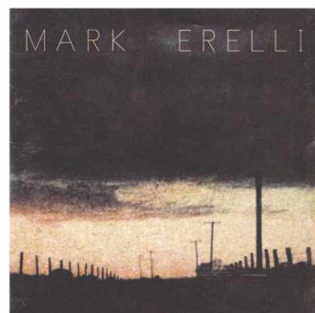


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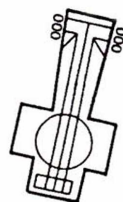
13th. Year



Signature Sounds (1999)



"Mark Erelli"



Signature Sounds (2001)

"Compass & Companion"

Mark Erelli

Jimmy LaFave / Michael Smith & James Lee Stanley / Michael Smith/ Weavermania / Terry Clarke / Bill Ward / Greg Brown / Peter Mayer / Joe Ely / Suzzy Roche / Eric Anderson / Gretchen Peters / Terri Hendrix / Salamander Crossing / Jane Siberry / Chuck Brodsky / Steinar Albigtsen & Tom Pacheco / Peggy Bertsch / Bob Martin / Richard Buckner / Mark Erelli / Bobby Bridger / Denice Franke / Rod Picott / Eddi Reader / Michael McNevin / Carrie Newcomer / Kerrville Kampfire Kuts Vol. 1 & 2 / Kerrville Folk Festival 2000, Vol. 1 / Mickey Newbury / Various – "Mabel Frisco Joy" /



Kerrville-kompacts,
kassettes & other
koincidences.



Peggy Bertsch

Kerrville-kompacts, kassettes & other koincidences.

Jimmy LaFave "Texoma" Southbound Records

Two years on from the 2CD live retrospective "Trail" and four years after his last studio creation "Road Novel," LaFave returns with a *mighty fine* sixteen-track, self-produced studio collection that equally balances the number of covers and originals. The *one from me, one from you* principle. In terms of reworking *well-known* or *hit* songs, LaFave is a master craftsman who rarely fails to make the cover his own. I saw LaFave and band perform Jimmy Webb's "The Moon's A Harsh Mistress" at The River Pub in San Marcos last September. Frankly, it was a revelation. Built on that memory it's been a *hard road to hoe*, over the intervening months, waiting for this disc to appear. "Moon" is everything I expected, but darn if the guy hasn't recorded an even more stunning cover - an interpretation of Gretchen Peters' already classic "On A Bus To St. Cloud." The other covers include an up-tempo reading of the late John Phillip's *hippie anthem* "San Francisco," Bill Staines "Wind River Turnaround" and finally, one each from Jimmy's Okie buddies Greg Jacobs and Bob Childers [although, frankly Bob, I never did and never will really care whether "Elvis Loved His Mama"]. Oh yes, and let's not forget Jimmy's penchant for the tunes of this year's big six-o. This time around it's "Emotionally Yours." As for the originals in this collection, Jimmy kicks off with the stomping rocker "Bad Bad Girl," but fear not reader, there's also a clutch of classy introspective LaFave ballads. "Never Is A Moment" is the first, and later there's the appropriately titled "Tears." Following on from the Bragg/Wilco effort "Mermaid Avenue," I'll swear that Nora Guthrie talked about passing a selection of her dad's lyrics to LaFave, the recording of a Woody/Jimmy album being the objective. Since then, nada. Silence. God knows Jimmy's Okie credentials aren't in doubt, and midway through this set he delivers a powerful reminder. "Red Dirt Song" is followed by the KO - "Woody Guthrie" - a *heartfelt and personal recollection of a song-smith who restlessly sought new horizons*. So here's the message Nora - "We're waiting. Jimmy's your man." A couple more thoughts before I go - *let's hear it for the band* - Larry Wilson [guitar] and David Webb [keyboards] are back in the fold. As for "Texoma" - great title, and a definite *album of the year contender*. Available in your local record store now and by mail order from **Southbound Direct, P.O. Box 11912, Westhill, Aberdeenshire AB32 6GH** and on the web at Orders@southboundrecords.com Stateside, the recording is available from **Bohemia Beat Records** and on the web at www.bohemiabeat.com Also try **Village Records**.

P.S. By the way, this year's six-o is his regal Bobness, Robert Zimmerman.

Michael Smith/James Lee Stanley "Two Man Band Two" Beachwood Recordings [Import]
Michael Smith "There" Bird Avenue [Import]
Weavermania "Live" Depot Records [Import]

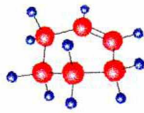
As far as the size of Michael Smith's catalogue of [released] recordings is concerned, it has grown by leaps and bounds in the last six months - three recordings having been added

to his canon. The duet album with Stanley finds the pair exploring self-composed, folk/pop/rock material. Just in case you're curious, there was an album titled "Two Man Band." It featured Stanley and former Monkee, Peter Tork. There are also a number of Stanley solo recordings available. As for Stanley's background, I've discovered zip - but does that really matter. Didn't someone once say, "The thing that matters is what's in the grooves." "Two" contains eleven compositions, five by Stanley, the same number by Smith [none of which Michael has previously recorded] and one cut is a co-write. As for the feel of the set, this pair definitely recall the glory of, *hook laden* and *harmony drenched*, sixties music. I doubt if any of the recording sessions for "Two" involved the use of a lift shaft, or that some of the songs were created while the writer sat at a grand piano located in a sandbox in his living room. I think you follow me. Whatever, this disc is filled with magic and it is a joy to hear - repeatedly. Available from **Beachwood Recording Inc., 4872 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Suite 223, Woodland Hills, Ca. 91364, U.S.A.** Web sites are at www.mcs.net/~jmurdock/michaelsmith.html and www.jamesleestanley.com

Rather than maintain his normal sparse *voice and guitar backing*, on "There" Smith goes for a fatter and fuller sound. His first disc since The Jet Band to adopt that approach. A couple of the decade of tunes have appeared elsewhere - respectively on "Two Man Band Two" ["There"] and "Paradise Lost & Found" ["Painted Horse"]. The melody of the opening cut, "Alexandria," explores the rhythms of North Africa/Arabia. In fact, Michael employs a wide range of musical textures on "There." And of course, Smith rarely fails to pen at least a few numbers on each album that deserve the accolade - classic - here, "Hey Kid" and the tender "Memory Of August" are the cream of this bumper crop. Balancing that, "Kill The Buddha" and "Caribbean Snow" are less than essential. The Beach Boy style harmonies on "Hole In The Sky" would easily have out done those surfin' songsters at their peak. The disc is available from Michael's web site.

Michael, his wife Barbara Barrow, Tom Dundee and Mark Dvorak have been performing a tribute show to The Weavers in recent years, mostly around Chicago clubs. Now they're touring nation wide with *Weavermania*. The "version" of the folk super-quartet to whom they are paying tribute being Lee Hays [MS], Ronnie Gilbert [BB], Fred Hellerman [TD] and Pete Seeger [MD]. You could speculate that if there had been no Weavers, there might never have been a Kingston Trio, Bob Dylan etc. As with all tribute projects, the question eventually arises - "Do you guys have a CD?" Hence, "Live." Instead of taking *easy street* and cutting all the hits - "Wimoweh" [frankly, I've always hated that song, although the blame could probably be laid at Karl Denver's door] and "If I Had A Hammer" are included - this quartet chose to delve [deep, deep, deep] into The Weavers catalogue. They've picked songs written individually or collectively by the quartet, or modified and arranged by them. There's also a couple of covers from that era - for instance, Ed McCurdy's "Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream" and that classic, by *you know who* - "This Land Is Your Land," which takes pride of place as the rousing closer to this collection. Early in their career, Simon & Garfunkel covered the former song. "Live" was produced by Barbara Barrow, and this fifteen-track recording is available from Michael's web site.

Mark Erelli



The interview with Mark Erelli took place on Saturday 5th June 1999, in the lower meadow, on the Quiet Valley Ranch, near Kerrville, Texas. Mark's tent was located somewhere between Camp Nashville and Camp Coho. Big thanks, as always, for all things Signature Sounds to the one and only Michaela O'Brien, and to Mark for all his time on this project and the "Compass & Companion" interview which follows.

Let's start at the beginning. Was you born in 1975.

1974. You were close.

God, I'm always a year out. Where did it all happen.

I was born in Boston and grew in Reading, Massachusetts, which is a suburb of Boston. This was from Nursery School all the way to the last year of High School, and then I went to College. Reading is about twelve or thirteen miles out of Boston.

Do you come from a large family.

No there's just myself and one younger sister. She's three years younger.

Where does the Erelli name come from.

It's Italian. I'm not sure of this – I'm guessing that it used to be a little bit longer, like "somethingErelli." It has been shortened over time. I can't prove that. It's just my feeling.

Have there been other musicians in your family.

No, I don't really come from a musical family. My grandfather played piano a little bit, and my Mom likes to sing when she does dishes and stuff around the house. So, nothing serious that I know of. My sister and I took piano lessons when we were kids. I probably took those for a couple of years, and I was miserable at it.

This was a forced labour of love.

Yeah. I thought I'd like to do it, and went along with it at first, but then it became apparent that I wasn't any good at it. I didn't like to practice. That was my downfall. Every time I picked up an instrument, I just wanted to be good. I thought if you played it for a week, you'd figure it out. It was the same way with guitar, when I first picked one up in seventh grade. Then, I took guitar lessons for three months or so.

This was at school.

No. At a music store in another town near Reading. I was smitten with the idea of being a rock star, which a lot of young kids are when they pick up the electric guitar. It just didn't work. I wasn't very good at it. It took me forever to change chords. To go from G to C, you could measure it in hours and not seconds. Apart from that, I was very involved in musicals when I was in Middle School and in High School.



Mark Erelli, New Folk Songwriting Contest, Winners Show, Kerrville Folk Festival, Sunday 6th June 1999

So you would have been around twelve or thirteen when you took those guitar lessons.

Yeah. Around that age. I was fourteen when I started High School. The lessons lasted a few months, because I got a leading part in this musical at school. It was "Joseph And The Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat." I was the Pharaoh. The rehearsals took so much time and I figured I wasn't getting any better at the guitar thing, so I might as well do the musical. I didn't play guitar again, all through High School. I knew a few chords and I could change between them, after labouring over it for a while. I used to play one or two things I did know - little passages – I'd play them over and over again and my friends who did play electric guitar would say, "For gosh sakes Erelli, will you shut up." So I'd say, "Well, teach me something else." So they'd teach me another little thing.

Did you do other musicals at school.

I did two in Middle School and two in High School. There was "Bye Bye Birdie," "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum." I think they were Broadway musicals at one point or another. I loved to sing.

Although you had yet to master an instrument, where had the intense interest in singing come from. Were you listening to a lot of records.

In Middle School and early on in High School, I was really into *heavy metal* and *hard rock*. A lot of kids at that age are. I used to sing along with MTV all the time. The generation coming up now is a little bit different from the other folk artists in that, I was there the first day that MTV came on. I remember watching the first video and just staying glued to the screen for, like, five years. It was like heaven. I started to sing by emulating the people I heard. Theatre was great, because it really helps you project your voice. I started to develop my singing voice then.

Were you in any church choirs.

No. I was, however, in two or three High School bands, where I was either the lead singer, or I would sing and play drums. I didn't really know how to play drums, but they just didn't want me to sing, so they said "*You have to do something and we need a drummer, so you can play drums.*"

Did these bands last for long.

No, they lasted for about a year each. The first band was called Freddie and Slip. It was a great High School band name. The second band was Dead Flowers, after the Rolling Stones song. The third band was Organic Icecube.

Did you just play cover songs.

The first two bands mostly played cover stuff. In Dead Flowers we did one original of mine. The first song I ever wrote called, "Hell In The Sky."

That sounds like a real folk anthem.

[Laughs]. Well, that's really funny because it's a real long, slow, kind of like Neil Young thing. It's not a *heavy metal* song at all. By the time I wrote it, I was into *classic rock*. We played a lot of Allman Brothers Band and Rolling Stones songs. Little Milton – blues covers and what not. By the time I got to Organic Icecube, we were playing original material. My friend who played bass in the band, his brother and his friend would all do original stuff. We were recording by that time. Mainly records made in the basement. We even went into a studio in Boston one night and recorded all through the night.

Did you release this stuff.

Yeah, just stuck a little four-song tape together. In Organic Icecube, I guess we made one full length tape on our own in a basement, and did one four or five song EP in a studio. I started to get bitten by the bug then. It was like "*Wow, we can do this.*"

How old were you at this stage.

About seventeen or eighteen.

You mentioned your friend was the bass player in Organic Icecube.

OK, this is a complicated family tree here. In Organic Icecube my best friend Tim Moynihan was the bass player. His brother Jim and his brother's friend, Pete McGillicuddy, were the two main songwriters. Tim and I ended up going to College together. When I started doing my own stuff in College and decided to add a band to that, Tim was my bass player. I remember Tim and Jim's basement was always full of instruments. Their Dad wasn't home during the day, and so it was one of the few places in town where people would store their stuff, and come over during the day and just make noise – because you could. There would be a whole wall of amps for three or four kids and two drum sets, and two bass amps, and a PA, and percussion things. It was a real fun thing for a time.

Did that all fall apart once you started to go to College.

Yeah, plus Tim's father started running a business out of his house so we couldn't really make much noise. During the summer between High School and College, is when I picked up the guitar again. I played a lot of tennis as a young kid, and actually played at the National level right up through the end of College. I used to go on these trips down to Florida in the summer where we would train. Three other kids and our coach from up in Reading. We would go down to his parent's condo and play tennis during the morning and the evenings. During the hottest part of the day, we'd hang out on the beach. I remember at nights, the other kids would want to go out on the beach to meet other kids and sneaks beers or whatever. I wasn't into that and my tennis coach had brought his guitar down. I was really into Jimmy Buffett at the time.

So you'd drifted away from rock music.

Yeah, I'd kind of went from *heavy metal* to *classic rock* – like The Who and The Rolling Stones and a lot of British Invasion stuff - and then I started getting into people like Jackson Browne, The Eagles, and James Taylor. Singer songwriters. By the end of High School I had discovered Chris Smither. He was the guy that got me way into folk music.

His influences really come from the blues.

Yeah, blues based, but his lyrics are so much more sophisticated than a lot of other blues writers. Through him, I discovered John Gorka, Greg Brown, Patty Larkin and Bill Morrissey – those were the people I started listening to.

Did you move away from home, when you went to College.

Yeah, I went to school up in Maine. To Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, which is kind of like an old mill town. The town was literally brought to its knees when the mills shut down, and it hasn't been able to get back up since. I was definitely into folk music by the time I got to College. Before I left for College, I would follow Chris Smither around. I would go and see every area appearance that he did. Brook Williams was another one that I listened to and saw. By the time I got to College - it was during one of those Florida trips - the guitar had clicked for me. All of a sudden I could play chords and it made sense. I realised that to play higher up on the neck, you didn't have to learn the whole chord voicing. You could actually use a capo. And play the same chord you already knew, and it would be in a different key.

Had you tennis coach helped you with this revelation.

No, he'd go out at night and leave me with his guitar. I was listening to Jimmy Buffett songs, trying to play along, and it just clicked. It was really cosmic in a way. I don't remember ever learning anything about it - it just kind of happened. I didn't even own a guitar at this point. I got to College and I still didn't own a guitar, but I would borrow Tim's. It was a classical, nylon string guitar. I cut all the nylon strings off and put steel strings on, which, of course, snapped the neck.

Yeah, that would happen since my son tried the same thing. It twists the neck.

I thought I couldn't tune it, but I found out later that it really wouldn't stay in tune for very long. I would play in the stairwells at College - I didn't drink when I went to College, and a lot of the activities were based around parties. I didn't feel like going, so I would sit out on the back stairwell in the dorm and play guitar. It was hard to play and the action was really high. The strings were really hard and it sounded horrible, but I started to learn a few songs. I learned the "Hell In The Sky" song that I'd written. One night - the first night I did it - I kinda opened my eyes after the first song and the lights had been turned on. I looked up and there were friends, from the floor above me and the floor below me, gathered on the staircase. They said, "*We heard you start to sing and we didn't know you did this.*" I said, "*Well, I don't really.*" They said, "*You should play the coffeehouses.*" Bates had a real good coffeehouse scene. Basically, it was an open mike.

Did they have professional acts pass through town.

They did. No big name performers played at those coffeehouses, it was mostly student performers - some of whom were very good. The audiences came

out in droves for these things. It was like, easily one hundred and fifty people in the audience. The first gig I played was to that size of crowd, and I only knew three songs.

And two of them were covers.

Two of them probably were covers. It was definitely "Hell In The Sky," but I can't remember the others. I used to cover Grateful Dead and Bruce Springsteen and stuff. Some Gorka songs. The response was great, because I could sing. I still couldn't really play the guitar, but I could sing loud [Laughs]. I could belt it out and people really seemed to identify with that. I eventually got my own guitar and started getting serious about it. Tried to write more songs.

How long were you at that College.

Four years. I stayed in town an extra year afterwards, to work on my music a little more. I had a band at the school by then and they were going to be there for another year, so I decided "*Well I'll just stay around here and I'll continue to play.*"

Is this where Lorne Entrees enters the picture.

No. These are guys from College. In my senior year, I got this band together which was a drummer - Aaron Belinfanti - he was a year older than me, and he'd graduated and started to work for Admissions at the College. He was local. My friend Tim Moynihan played bass and this guy, Brian Gagnee, who was a freshman at the time, played electric guitar. We started playing at parties around the school. All through my time at Bates, I had booked people to come in and play. The Student Activities Office booked people to come and play too, and I would often get the opening slots for their gigs.

So who were you supporting.

I opened up for John Gorka and Greg Brown. Dana Robinson. Catie Curtis. Dar Williams. Arlo Guthrie. Dan Bern. Eight or nine, really top name acts. I started to do that with the band too.

Did you play at other venues.

We played at other Colleges in Maine. We played down in Portland, a bit, at this club called Raoul's. I started going to the open mikes down there. The music scene in Maine isn't really -

A hive of activity.

Yeah. Everything is kind of spread out, and there are not that many venues. Raoul's brought in blues bands and road-house bands, as well as singer songwriters. I started to get a name for myself down

at Raoul's, and I started to get openers down there. Both as a band and as a solo act for Gorka and Brown.

Were you writing more and more material at this stage.

Oh yeah. I wrote all the stuff that the band played, and when I played solo. I think we might have done one Bob Dylan cover. I recorded a CD right after I got out of College with that band. The songs on there were all mine. That CD has thankfully, kind of disappeared. Some of the songs are good – "Do It Everyday" and "River Road" were written for that CD, and there are a couple of others that I might use again.

Did the CD have a title.

It was called "**Long Way From Heaven,**" which was also the title of one of the songs. Just prior to the CD, we did a tape by The Mark Erelli Band called "**Words Unspoken.**" The four songs on the tape reappeared on the CD, with the full band. We took time to record them in this guy's house. He had a home studio. We sold the CD at concerts and at the College. I sold them at gigs all the way through till the late summer of '98, when I ran out of them. I pressed a thousand, and I sold a bunch of them and gave a bunch of them away. It's funny you know – I felt like I really had to produce a CD so that people would take me seriously, because I was so young. I'd go to folk concerts and I'd be the youngest person there. I was twenty or twenty-one at the time. I felt like I needed a CD to show people, "*Hey I have more than two songs. Look, here are ten songs that I wrote.*" But I wasn't ready for it. I think that's a problem with the folk scene these days. Anybody can make a CD, and everybody does, even people that shouldn't. I don't think I should have made that first disc. I never heard a bad thing about it from fans or from other musician friends of mine – they really like it -

I find one of the hardest things about reviewing folk albums these days, is that there are way too many self-produced, vanity projects. The performer now has access to recording and pressing technology, for a small outlay. That said, careful consideration of the quality of the material, they record, goes straight out the window.

Not only do they not edit certain lines, that are kind of dumb – but whole songs that aren't really up to par with the rest of their catalogue – no one tells them to leave them off. I stand by the songs on the first album. At the time, for the amount of playing and writing I was doing, the performances were as good as I could get.

How many tracks were on the album.

Ten. Ellis Paul came in and did background vocals on one song. I didn't really do too much radio with it, but I did send it down to the WUMB and WERS stations in Boston. WERS would play it every day. They really liked it, and WUMB played a few things. In my opinion, I wasn't really ready. It didn't get me anywhere, in terms of – as soon as I released the album, I started getting all sorts of gigs, but they really didn't have anything to do with me having a CD. It was more to do with my reputation for putting on a good live show.

Which year did you release the CD.

It came out in '97. I'd finished College, and I stayed around Lewiston and we made the CD during the winter of '96 through into early '97. We put the CD out in April of '97, and literally the day after I released it in Maine – and had delivered it to local record stores that would carry it – I moved down to Northampton, Massachusetts and started Graduate School.

To study what.

Organismic and Evolutionary Biology is the official title of the programme.

How long did that course take.

That was a two-year Masters programme, from the Spring of '97 through till this Spring.

Why did you particularly chose Northampton. Was this partly to do with the musical community that had gathered there.

Yeah, there are a lot of songwriters down there. It seemed like a good music scene. I didn't want to move to a city. I didn't want to move to Boston because that was where I was from. I didn't really like the big city. I mean, I was living in Maine where there is no such thing as a big city. I decided to move to Northampton because of the music, and because it didn't seem to have any of the hassles of city living.

What was the name of the College you attended.

It was the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. It's one of the locations of UMAS and they had a good Biology programme there. Through my contacts at Bates, a Professor friend of mine said "*You know I've got this friend at UMAS who has got this project that he needs someone to do. It's already funded, and you could probably get in. It would be a great thing for you to do, because you're going to need a day job anyway, starting out.*" I think back then, people were thinking – although, no one ever said "*You're not going to end up doing music.*" But I think their thought was "*It's a nice little hobby for him. He's*

OK at it. And as long as he still does science, he'll start to realise where his real meal ticket is, and he'll just do music as a hobby." Right from the get-go when I moved down there, it was painfully obvious to me that I couldn't do both – together and indefinitely. It was real obvious which one I wanted to do right now – which was music.

You finished your Master course though.

Yeah, I did. I finished the Master and I'm really glad I did. I used to go to school, Monday through Friday afternoon, and then I would be gone the whole weekend. Every weekend. I'd go off to Boston, to Maine, to New Hampshire, to Pennsylvania – New York – anywhere that would have me. The last three-quarters of a year that I was there, I decided to try and stay in New England – and stay in Massachusetts, mainly. I would go play shows in the middle of the week in Boston. I was coming home at, like, midnight on Sunday or midnight on Wednesday, and I'd have to drive back to Western Massachusetts, and be up, and in school at eight the next morning ready to do work.

Were you still playing these shows with a band.

It was mostly solo stuff by this point. I didn't really meet Lorne Entress till early '98. I got hooked up with him through Signature Sounds. I met the Signature Sounds people at the North East Folk Alliance Conference in '97. I played a song during an open jam in their hotel room and Mark Thayer, the engineer, one of the co-heads of the label followed me out of the room afterwards and said "You know I've got a studio, I'd love to record you." Jim Olson, the other head of the label, is always the one who had picked the acts. Mark really liked me and he made me his little project and tried to convince Jim to sign me. One of the things he did, was he called me down to do demos. I came down and I just reeled off, I think, eight or nine songs totally live and he loved all of them. He started to pitch me to Jim and called up Lorne and said, "I've got a guy here that would be great with a band. If you're looking for something, you should get in right now."

When did you record those demos.

Late '97 and early '98. Around December.

When did Signature finally sign you.

Jim came up – I started working with Lorne as a drummer, and we switched personnel around for a while. We did a couple of one-off gigs with this guy, Paul Bryan, who plays with Catie Curtis and a whole bunch of people. We played at the Fire & Water in Northampton as a little trio. Mark and I convinced Jim

Olson to come up. Jim came and saw the show, and afterwards said, "Let's talk, like tomorrow." We had lunch and started talking about the signing process, and I signed in September of '98 when I started making my first album.

Had you any thought about other labels.

I researched it very carefully. I mean from – as soon as I knew Mark was interested I found out as much as I could about Signature. I called up other people on the label. I called all the business contacts, I'd made over the last year or two. I read books on all the stuff, and really tried to research what it was that record labels did. What you had to give up and what you got. There was another label that was interested, but when I moved to Northampton, I was thinking, "I want to sign with a small label. Preferably local, if there is one, and I want to release an album just as I'm getting out of graduate school, so I can just transition right out." I didn't even know Signature Sounds existed then. Within a year, I found myself talking to them, trying to arrange the very thing that I'd dreamed about when I moved there. I didn't know anyone when I moved down there. No one. So it happened pretty quick. It was a really great thing when Mark started to bat for me and Jim finally took the bait.

How long did it take you to record your first Signature album.

We recorded September through December of '98. The basic tracks were done, mostly live. Me, and the bass and drums. We did that in two, four-day weekend sessions. Then we overdubbed the other players over the next two months.

Speaking about those other players – were Rani Arbo and Dave Dick from Salamander Crossing there because they were on the label – or did you know them.

A little of both. I'd got to know lots of musicians and I'd played at a festival down in Pennsylvania and met them. They really liked what I was doing, and I kept in touch. I'd go see them in concert. Obviously the label contact helped a lot, but by that point Rani and Dave both really liked my music, and they were familiar with it, so it was pretty easy to get them on there.

Duke Levine records and plays on tour with Mary Chapin Carpenter.

He does still. He has a solo band, where he does his own guitar, pyrotechnic stuff. It's great stuff and Lorne was the drummer for Duke's solo band. Lorne has produced a couple of other albums – one for this guy, Bruce MacKay, who is a local songwriter, although that album never got released. And he did

two albums for this soul singer, Mighty Sam MacLean. He'd gotten to know all the big players in the New England scene – Lorne is one of the top five drummers on that whole circuit. Lorne brought in Duke and it was a real treat for me, because Duke Levine played on a lot of the records that I'd started out listening to. A lot of these folk records in the early nineties, when folk was starting to get a little bit poppy, and a little bit atmospheric. Duke was the guy that did that. To get him to come in and play on my album – I told Duke that it was like, Duke making an album and having like John Lee Hooker or some other hero of his come in – it really was that big for me. People tend to forget the generation gap sometimes, but you know, I was 24 when he came in. God, his stuff was wildly influential to me. His guitar playing. To have him on my album was a real treat.

You mentioned the festival where you saw Salamander Crossing perform. Was that at the Falcon Ridge Festival.

No, it was the Columbia Folk Festival. It takes place in Columbia, Pennsylvania and I did a little songwriters showcase. That's where I first saw Salamander Crossing. They came over after their main stage set – a couple of them and sat down and saw me play. We exchanged contact information and CD's. I'm a huge Salamander Crossing fan. Dave Dick is one of the best multi-instrumentalists that I've ever met in my life. Hands down. He plays really whimsically. When he plays banjo or mandolin or guitar – he plays with a real sense of humour. I never heard anyone do that before. It's real – he doesn't do your typical bluegrass things. He can, but he avoids them and he's a real creative guy.

Let's talk about some of the songs on "Mark Erelli." Is "River Road" a real place, or is it just imaginary.

I kind of – I wrote that during the recording of "Long Way From Heaven." I would drive every day from Lewiston to Brunswick, which is along the Androscoggin River. Without even thinking – I mean I'd been in Maine for too long and wanted to get out. At the time, when I wrote it, I didn't think it was very autobiographical. I was actually trying to write a story song. I'm desperately trying to create something that was a little more serious piece of writing – like the Gorka character songs –

It's a pretty deep song though. For a person of your age to write a song about resignation and perceived personal failure. That's a subject that most thinking folks don't pick up on till they are about forty years of age. That song – 99% of the population, if they are listening – is about them. Of course, whether 99% of the population would understand the whole concept is another issue altogether. You're path in life to date, leaves you among the lucky 1% for whom it will never

be an issue. You are currently pursuing a passionate love affair. Most folks only get a dreary day job, which, for them, inevitably ends on "River Road."

I get a little nervous with that, because it's – there's a thing – especially I think in America – I don't know if it's the same way in Europe – where you can have your piece of the pie, and you can have the suburb and the 2.50 kids, and the house and everything. A lot of the time, you have to do that 9 to 5 grind. If you enjoy your job it's almost like it's not work. What I'm doing is certainly not a 9 to 5 thing. It's more like a 12 to 12, 7 day a week thing. I'm always thinking about this. There's not one moment when I'm not thinking about, either the music or the business side of it. It really is a lot of hard work, for not very much compensation at this point in my career. The fact that I love it helps. It's the same with science. I hardly made any money in science, but I loved it. And that was considered a real job.

How strong was your urge to pursue a job in science.

For a while, I really did want to become a biologist. That might very well be where I end up. I'm really not at this point, at 24, going to say "Oh, this is what I'm going to be for the rest of my life." This is what I want to do now. I can't imagine doing anything else. I'll do it until I can't do it anymore, or until it just becomes, not fun.

Do the ideas for your songs come from observing people.

I think they come from being open. You can be open on a variety of different scales. You're open, obviously, to what is going on around you. For example, the "River Road," I lived across the street from this bar in Lewiston. This little *hole in the wall*. People would be stumbling out of there at all hours of the day. I'd wake up for breakfast and see guys coming out of the bar. These guys had obviously been going there their whole life and they weren't going anywhere. I actually tried to write the song for them. About them. As if it was being spoken by them. Only later did I kind of realise that – there was that aspect to it – there was more of me in there, at the time, than I'd realised. You know, trying to stay open to what is going on around you – and also trying to stay open to yourself, and what you're going through personally – is hard. Not as many songs on the album are autobiographical, as people might think. Definitely a huge part of my songwriting is about things I've gone through. But I'm also trying to share them in a way that other people can *get it*. There's nothing I hate more than songs that don't give you any reason to get behind them. I mean, why should I care that your girlfriend left you. It's not enough. You

have to present it in a way, such that people have felt that before. That's kind of the goal for all my songs.

How about "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained." That's a decision song. Was that you contemplating the choice between music or biology.

Oh no, that's a straight disintegration of a relationship song. It's about a real bad, painful break up at the end of College. I was trying to make sense of it. That's a perfect example of a song that I really wrote for me. To try and get me over this hill that I was climbing at the time. I wrote it, and thought it was extremely self-indulgent. I thought it only applied to me and that no one would ever *get it*, and I didn't like to play it. There were a couple of times where I had to play it, because I needed a song – every time, people were like *"Whoa. That's a beautiful song. And I've totally felt that."* It was the same thing that happened with the "River Road." I mean people that had grown up in Maine – I had a High School kid come up to me and say *"In the 'River Road,' the town that you're singing about - that's where I grew up."* You know, when you get people coming up to you and telling that, then you know you are on to something. "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained" was a very specific thing that happened to me. I think the whole issue, of betrayal and loss, where things were never quite fulfilled, is stuff that we've all experienced in one way or another. It just happened to connect with the audience, for which I was glad.

What about "Northern Star."

That was semi-autobiographical. I had this girlfriend in College who – we never really said goodbye, we just kind of drifted apart. She became this world traveller. She would send me a postcard every once in a while from Nepal, or where ever she was. South America. I decided to write her a letter last summer, I guess it was. I sent it to the last address I had for her and said, *"I just want to let you know, I do still think about you sometimes. I'm sorry for what happened, and that we never said goodbye. I'm curious about what you're up to."* We started corresponding again. She's a real good letter writer. She's a biologist and was doing fieldwork in Hawaii at the time. She said *"I still fell this strange connection to you. I'm going to go out tonight and look in the sky to see if the Northern Star and the Southern Cross are visible at the same time."* That line was just *"Whoa,"* and that became the germ of the idea for that song. I wrote it real general. About two people who are separated physically, but not spiritually. She has moved back to Maine, and is hanging out up there. I don't really know what she is doing. We've fallen out of touch again. I've been trying to get her a copy of the song, without much luck. I did send her the lyrics when I wrote it. I'd written a lot of songs for her when I started College.

She was my first girlfriend in College. That song has a real nice, warm fuzzy story to it for me. I'm really proud of that song.

Tell us about "I Thought I Heard You Knocking."

That line, "I Thought I Heard You Knocking" I saw in a poem that a friend of mine wrote, about this woman he thought was in love with him. In truth, she wasn't. I think it was a variation on "I Thought I Heard You Knocking." Something like, "I Thought You Were Knocking." "I Thought You Were Knocking At My Door" – that was the line. It stuck with me. That song is not – I don't even really know what it's about, although I remember writing it. It was the first time I'd ever been in a situation where, I really didn't have a clue where it would go. I still can't really tell you anything specific about the lyric. I've never really analysed it. I've just tried to keep it dark and spooky. Kind of like "What Was It You Wanted" by Bob Dylan. It's interesting what some people have read into it – about regret, or about a spurned lover. It wasn't written with anything particular in mind.

How about "One Too Many Midnights"

That's partially autobiographical. It was written last summer. I was doing field work for my Masters on Cape Cod in Massachusetts and every time I had to do a gig up in Boston or something, I'd have to drive back late at night to be at work the next morning. I was driving back from one gig at Club Passim and was exhausted. I pulled over by the side of the road and tried to sleep – I couldn't sleep – there were no coffee stores open or anything, and I was really out on my own. I felt real isolated and the lights were glaring in my rear view mirror, which made me want to close my eyes and pull off the road. I pulled out my notebook and, at that point, I was still getting over the "Nothing Ventured" relationship. I wrote it almost from a trucker's perspective. More generally from the perspective of someone who is kind of, *out there* – not even necessarily, *on the road*, physically. I mean, on one level, it's about being out on the road. A road. There's another deeper level, about doing your own thing. Kind of going after what you have to, and knowing that there's no way it's really going to work out. Maybe I was feeling frustrated that week. I don't know [Laughs].

Apart from the ten songs on "Mark Erelli" do you have big catalogue of songs that you've yet to record.

I have a decent size catalogue for someone who hasn't been doing it very long.

Are we talking about fifty songs.

Somewhere around sixty or so. I'd say only twenty-five or thirty are songs that I really play anymore. Some of the other ones are good songs – I'm just not into them anymore.

Do you always write on your own, or have to tried collaborating.

The song we played out there with Jonathan Kingham. He's in The Bixbys. We just wrote that together. That's the first time, I've written a song with anybody else. We're actually working on another one now. I'd always wanted to try and write with somebody else. The song was called "Something You Don't Know About Me." The one we're working on is called "Take My Ashes To The River." He's a great songwriter out of Seattle. He and I do totally different things. We've met at other folk festivals and were introduced through my friend, Christopher Williams, who also plays in The Bixbys. We both like the same kinds of music, as it turned out. Earthy, traditional country and folk music. Like Greg Brown. We've always joked about writing together, and finally sat down and did it. I said, "OK, *here's a chorus and the verse from this song I've been working on, that I didn't have time to finish.*" We're going to finish it. Most songs though, I write alone.

You're wearing a Falcon Ridge Folk Festival T-shirt. Have you played there.

I've been volunteering at Falcon Ridge for three years now. I'll be going there this year. Just going, I'm not volunteering anymore. I might be playing. I played one song on the side stage last year, with the house band. Last summer I started getting out to festivals a lot more. I did the Telluride Troubadours Competition at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival. I heard about it on the internet, applied to the showcase, and got accepted. I also did the Rocky Mountain Folks Festival contest and got fifth place in that, last year. I started to meet a lot of songwriters who are here, at the festivals last summer. I've known about Kerrville for a long time – as long as I can remember being into folk music. I remember performers telling stories about the Kerrville Folk Festival, or seeing them mention it in interviews. I'd say 80% of the people who are just prime influences on my music, are from Texas or have some kind of Texas ties. I'd always wanted to go, but it was always during the end of the school year.

Which Texas musicians are we specifically talking about.

Robert Earl Keen. Willie Nelson. Lyle Lovett. Butch Hancock. Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Steve Earle – he's the biggest influence. He's probably my favourite musician. Guy Clark's another one. Townes Van

Zandt. People like that. I loved what they did, because they could rock out and they could also write good songs. They could write the ballads and they could write the rockers. They really straddled that divide.

How did you become familiar with these guys having spent your whole life in the North East of the country.

You know, when I started to get into folk music, I was really into figuring out where all this stuff came from. It astounded me – I got the sense when I was in High School that it had been around for a long time and I didn't know about it. Here's this little seventeen year old kid going "God, I really like folk music." It has been around since the beginning of time. [Laughs]. I would start researching it – like anytime somebody did a cover, I would go and I'd find the original version. And I would get that album. Even the Allman Brothers Band, did a lot of rootsy stuff – a lot of blues. The Allman Brothers were the first people that showed me you can take other people's songs and reinterpret them. When they did "Stormy Monday" I went back and listened to T-Bone Walker. After you do that enough times you get in the habit of reading the liner notes to see who wrote the songs. Or see whom they thank – sometimes they thank their influences. I would go and get those albums – buy them blind. I don't remember exactly who turned me on to a lot of these people. I first saw Steve Earle on MTV, believe it or not. He started out country and got really rocky as his drug habit progressed. I saw him play a solo version of "Copperhead Road" on mandolin on MTV, on this talk show, and I had to have it. I went out immediately and bought it. Once you start paying attention, these names are out there. You'll see them and they'll come to town. As soon as I knew that Steve Earle had once been Guy Clark's bass player, it's like "Oh, who's Guy Clark. I better know about him." It became a habit to investigate where this stuff came from and who else was out there. The breadth of it. I found that a lot of the stuff I identified most with, were the people who couldn't really be pigeonholed into one area. I think Steve Earle is probably one of the greater folk artists of this decade, but he's not regarded as a folk artist. Joe Ely's another one. These guys play killer, acoustic, tender, wonderful ballads and then they rock out harder than anything on the next song.

Did you see these people play live in Massachusetts or Maine.

I had limited opportunities until last summer. I got to see Jimmie Dale Gilmore at Raoul's in Portland and he blew out the PA in the club, he was rocking so hard. I'd also been waiting eight or nine years to see Lucinda Williams and finally got to see her.

So this is your first time at the Kerrville Festival. Your first time to enter New Folk and you go and win. Is it astounding.

It is. You know it still hasn't really sunk in. One of the judges for the contest was Eric Taylor, and Nanci Griffith has covered a lot of his songs. I used to listen to her a lot. I listened to "Deadwood South Dakota" and it blew me away. Here he is shaking my hand as I walk offstage, saying "Congratulations." Telling me how much he loved my songs. [ED. NOTE. The foregoing is a reference to the mainstage announcement, made around 8.00pm on Sunday 30th May, that Mark was one of the 1999 Kerrville New Folk Contest winners. I'd like it to be placed on record that the second person to shake Mark's hand that night, was yours truly].

OK, let's get back to your music. Why did you call your song publishing company, Kill The Messenger Music.

I was just throwing a bunch of things out there. It was going to be River Road Music, at first, but that name was already taken. It was going to be Don't Kill The Messenger Music, but then I thought "Well, that's not very interesting." That's kind of like, the cliché. Then I had the thought – "I imagine sometimes it feels pretty good to kill the messenger." And of course Shawn Colvin had that song called, "Kill The Messenger," on her 1992 "Fat City" album. I wish I could say there was a great story behind it, but it just had a nice ring to it.

Will this album on Signature Sounds give you the opportunity to tour further afield.

I hope so. You know it's too soon to say. As the album was being released, I was finishing up my Masters, so I was probably at the height of what I needed to devote to my school work. I really didn't get a chance to savour it too long. I finally had the CD release party in May at Club Passim. I had a great time. We got a **Billboard** review out of that. Did you ever see that.

No, but one thing I did read about was the Signature Sounds Fifth Anniversary Birthday Party. According to what I heard you and the band blew the place apart.

That was fun. I had my band plus Jim Henry was playing electric guitar. Roger Williams who was guesting with Salamander Crossing on dobro, played with us. Dave Dick and Jim Henry did a duet on "Midnight Train." Ben Demarath, who is a great friend of mine, sang the background vocals. They had all these solo people and it was a long show, and we were right at the end of the first set. I got out there with my band and just rocked out for six songs. I felt like I really turned a corner in Northampton that day.

All of a sudden, not only was my name on this bill, with people who are the most respected in the valley – besides Dar Williams – but I was, like, more than holding my own. Everybody knew what to expect from the other people. I was real nervous before I went on, because I thought, "This is a real big opportunity. It's not that it will never happen, if I don't do good this show, but if I don't do well, people are going to forget about me for a while. And wait for me to get better and then they might tune in later on." I really had a great time that show. Hopefully things like Kerrville will help. It takes a while to build up momentum for albums like this. It takes a while to get the bigger radio stations to get onboard and play it. Even folk radio is hard to crack, although folk radio seems to be doing OK with this. They are playing every track.

Logistically, at this stage, are you capable of taking the band on the road.

I'm taking the band to Seattle this summer, for a festival. I think festivals, definitely. Unfortunately, I'm not really – I know I could hold my own at the main stage, at any festival, especially if I had the band – but other people don't know that. And they don't take chances on new artists. I would give anything to play the main stage at Falcon Ridge with my band. We would tear it up. I guarantee you. I'm so ready for that. It doesn't really bother me playing for that many people, at all. As soon as I get the opportunity to do that, I will. As far as touring around the whole country – it's really a contextual thing, you know – the band could do an East Coast thing, because we can hit eight or nine major markets in a ten day tour. We'll probably do that sometime later this year.

How about the Midwest and the West Coast.

The West Coast is particularly hard, because you can't drive there. If you're going to drive there you really got to have the right vehicle, and have good gigs once you get out there. And also play stuff on the way out. The Midwest is certainly not out. Right now, the next step for me is that I need a booking agent. I can't sit around all day and make phone calls. I got too many songs in my head for that. If I have to do booking calls, or write songs, and I have to make that choice, I'm going to choose the songs every time. I'll just stay home with a bunch of great songs. I'll go hungry, but I just don't feel like it's my job. I feel like there's people that are really good at it, that get paid decent money to do that kind of thing. It's my job to know what goes into that – I have booked myself before – I know what goes into it, and I appreciate that, but I think my talents are better spent playing and writing. Hopefully I'll be able to find someone in the next year that can get me out there.

Like an opening slot on a tour for someone. That would just be killer, if it were the right billing.

Week on week, how many gigs do you currently play in Northampton.

Up until this point I had money from school, as I had a teaching assistantship. So they paid me. Money has been no problem. It's not much, but it was enough to get by. Now I'm going to have to start thinking about it a little more. I'd like to find something where I didn't have to take every little coffeehouse gig from here to Timbuktu. I might be able to substitute teach in my spare time, early in the week. I don't really think it's going to be in my best interests to do every coffeehouse in every state. That needs to be developed to a certain extent. One of my goals in making that album was to represent how I sound with a band. The first goal however, was to do the songs justice. That's always the first goal. The second goal is to show that I can play with a band. The third goal was to make something that was going to stand up in my catalogue. Hopefully my catalogue will stand up against other people's catalogues. I think it's good enough, so that we should be able to go out on the road and play these venues. Of course it costs money to put people on the road. That to me is the main obstacle here. The band and me – it's getting better every time. We just need to find someone who can convince these people how good we are. I don't want to call up club owners and lie to them how many people I can get in there. I know that to get really good at that, you have to spend a lot of time at it.

I'm fascinated by the album cover artwork. Can you tell us how you came up with that effect.

First of all, Star Drooker who runs this little folk venue called Fire & Water in Northampton, has been a huge supporter of mine ever since I moved to the area, and before. He really liked what I was doing and was very encouraging. He's also an incredible photographer. He and his wife, Trish Overstreet – what they do is take pictures with slide film. Most of these pictures on the album are from a session that we did, right down the street from my house. They have these things called slide enlargers that are attached to Polaroid cameras, so it shoots the light through the slide, enlarges the image and focuses it. You can actually fool around with different amounts of red, yellow and blue, and then take a Polaroid of it. They use the old type of Polaroid film that you tear the strip off, after it's done. There are chemicals on that strip, and they take a while to transfer and cure on to what would be the actual picture. If you peel the strip away before it finishes curing, and take a piece of watercolour paper and wet it a little bit, and press the chemically treated strip that you normally throw away on to the watercolour paper and roll it down, and then peel it

away, you get this grainy print effect. You get that effect, because the image hasn't fully transformed.

+++++ Mark Erelli talks about "Compass & Companion" and other stuff

This interview comes to you c/o of the miracle of "modern technology." Nothing is more certain - "Compass & Companion" is one of my Albums of 2001. Re-mortgage your home, and buy it today. The second and title track of this sophomore collection features a duet with Kelly Willis, so that's where we'll begin.....

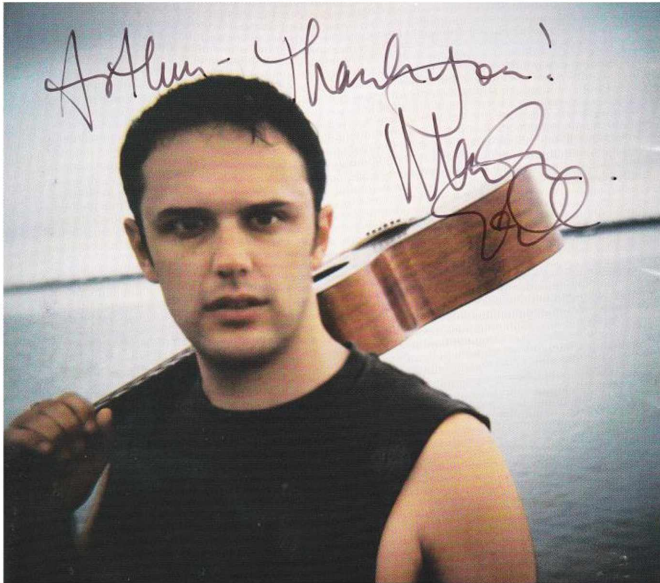
How did you get Kelly Willis to sing on your album.

I've only met Kelly once at a festival in Greenfield MA, and I am quite sure she does not remember. When it came time to figure out who could sing the duet with me, I literally just thought about people I was a really big fans of, and I've been a huge fan of hers for nearly ten years now, since high school. After that it was as simple as sending a tape and then asking if she'd like to be a part of the project. I wish there was a juicy story, but there's not. I hope to be able to meet her again and sing the song live, but we'll see.

Basically, I only have one other question. Well, eleven of them actually. Could you offer some comment, one by one, about each of the songs on "Compass & Companion." Gimme the whole nine yards.....

"Ghost" – It was written in a fury after going on a two week long camping trip in Colorado on which I did not take my guitar. I came home and wrote "Midnight Train," "Ghost," and something else I can't recall. I was reeling from the end of a relationship, and still trying to make sense of it all. I remember many a night I would go to sleep in my tent, in the shadow of the Continental Divide, feeling like this person still very much had a hold on my heart and life. I literally could not move on, even though I knew it was futile to keep holding on and hoping for reconciliation. One of the most literal songs I have ever written...I lived every line.

"Compass & Companion" - My inner censor was telling me that no one cares about songs with lonely musicians on lonely roads travelling and leading lonely and pathetic lives (even though I personally love those songs). So, I decided to turn it around and write about a night ride home with my lover by my side, together on the highway underneath a near pitch black night sky with a crescent moon. It's basically a real challenge to articulate all the different ways you can love someone. However, I'm fortunate to have that kind of relationship, and so I just tried to draw on that and write a variation of the "lonely on the road" song.



Mark Erelli – Liner shot **"Compass & Companion"**

"Why Should I Cry" - It was written after listening to too much Hank Williams...if one can even listen to too much Hank Williams (Sr.). I love western swing, and seem to have a real knack for singing and writing that kind of song. I just find them so fun to write and sing because no one ever expects a "deep" swing tune...they just expect a swing tune to make them swing ! So it's a nice low-pressure situation for a writer. Also, I wanted to see how many chords I could use in one song, and how quickly I could change between them !

"Miracle Man" – I wrote that in a traffic jam on 95N above Baltimore, headed for Philly. Basically, it's about those people who demand things of you that are, a) impossible to accomplish, and b) all your responsibility, even though it's important to meet in the middle on such issues. *"I can't pick you up if you don't want to climb"* pretty much says it all. We all run up against challenges and problems where we need someone's help, but it's near impossible to help someone who doesn't want to help themselves.

"My Love" - Inspired by all these wonderful Cole Porter, Gershwin, Beatles chord changes taught to me by my good friend Cliff Eberhardt. I also threw in a helping of Ron Sexsmith and Roy Orbison. I'm always trying to write a classic, a "Yesterday" or a "Crazy". I will probably never do it, but I always make myself try. I don't want to write new songs that are better than my last song, but rather songs that strive to be as good as anything ever written. Again, I know there's a 99.9% chance that I'll never meet this goal, but it draws the best work out of me in the process. I've not felt the way the character in the song does in a long time, but just cause I'm standing on the peak doesn't mean I can't still see the valley down below. I feel this is my finest song.

"Little Sister" - Is a joke, and I'm glad you finally came around. After all, I do get tired of having to be philosophical all the time ! I didn't want to record this, but I relented, and it's one of my favourites. I wrote it with my girlfriend Polly Mathewson, after calling my sister up to congratulate her on graduating from college. I was going to give her some advice on what her options were after graduation, but found she already had an amazing well-paid job that started Monday. I thought *"My little sister makes more than I do, there's got to be a song in there somewhere."* Polly really wrote most of the good lines, I mostly just turned our brainstorm into a blues song.

"Free Ride" - Perhaps my biggest pet peeve is people who tell me things I already know. I don't know everything (far from it), but people seem to always be handy with advice, and most of it bad. Instead of writing from the perspective of a petulant youth, I turned it around and wrote from the perspective of the crotchety old cynic who's giving a good tongue-lashing to the naive new kid on the block. The riff was inspired by Bruce Cockburn's "A Dream Like Mine". A first take.

"Before I Knew Your Name" - A very sad sounding happy song. It's really about how love can transform the way you look at things, until you're no longer sure which changed, you, or the rest of the world. I am very fortunate to have personally lived through this kind of transformation, and the contrast between before and after is where the song came from.

"Take My Ashes to the River" - Started at Kerrville at about 3 am, while wandering the campground with Jonathan Kingham. We'd just gone to see Chuck Brodsky who had a new resonator guitar tuned in Open G minor. We'd never heard of that before, and before long the lick came to me, and then we decided to try and write a story to go along with it, just for kicks. We finished two verses at Kerrville, finished the last verse at Falcon Ridge the next month, and Jonathan recorded it the next day. I was never a really big fan of it, but everyone who's ever heard it has been really intrigued. It's won awards, and Lorne really wanted to have another go at it (he produced Jonathan's version). I wanted my version to be more, Appalachia meets **"Wrecking Ball"**.

"All Behind Me Now" - I finished this song two years after I started it, partly because I didn't really feel like anything was behind me when I wrote it, and I couldn't really finish it till I actually started to feel as fortunate as the character in the song does. Write what you know is what they say, but they never tell you it might take forever till you really know it.

"Almost Home" - Written in Chehalis WA, the most depressing place I've ever had the misfortune to play.

The last day of my first tour away from home on the west coast. I didn't want to write about wanting to go home and being lonely (see "Compass & Companion"), so I took the metaphorical route. If you listen to Nick Lowe's "Lover Don't Go" and "Withered on the Vine" from the "Impossible Bird," you hear exactly what I was going for. I was in a big Nick Lowe phase at the time, and was shooting for that rootsy soul sound he tosses off effortlessly.

OK, I lied, I actually have some more questions. Are you personally happy with the way your sophomore album turned out.

I could not be happier with this album. I am bewildered that the first one didn't really do anything for me. I don't need tons of fame, but I do need fortune. Not mounds of gold, but enough to pay the rent and buy food and guitar strings, and I literally don't have that. Lots of people told me why the first album didn't do anything for me. I had about \$100.00 of different peoples' 2 cents worth in my head, when I went in to do this album. I got up every day at quarter of seven, ate a good breakfast and warmed up my voice. Then I went to my voice teacher and warmed up again with her, and hit the studio at 11:30 am and sang probably 25 takes a day until 10.00 pm at night, for 5 days straight. I sang 16 takes of "Miracle Man" alone. I worked really hard on every aspect, from writing the songs, doing arrangements, picking players, overseeing the promo materials, choosing the photographer, designer, etc. I even found the fonts that we used for the cover. I could not be more satisfied with the way it turned out. But now the important thing is not what I think about it, because I would never have even released it if I wasn't 210% satisfied - the issue is, what others think of the album. I know it's good, but I don't come to see me play live and buy albums off myself !

Any plans for US tours once the album is out in mid-February - would this be with a band, or is that still a financial no no, except around Northampton, Mass. And how about hitting Europe and the UK - this year, next year.

I would love to play in Europe. I've never been, and would love to hit England and Ireland in particular. I have absolutely no idea how to do it, though if you have any ideas, I'm open. I have enough trouble getting gigs in my home state. I have no agent or manager, so doing any touring is really hard. I am trying to arrange a bunch of shows with the band in Northampton, Boston, NYC, Philly, and Providence RI. I really think, especially for this album that people need to hear these songs fleshed out. I'm pretty decent on my own, but I do feel people miss out on a big part of what makes the songs special. If I have lyrics, guitar, vocal, electric guitar, bass, drums all on

one song, and then I go play the song live with just me and a guitar, people are missing half of the work that was put into making that song so special ! I love folk music, but I would happily relegate the solo playing (and travelling) to a handful of yearly performances if I could.

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Kerrville-kompacts, kassettes & other koincidences.

Terry Clarke "The Sound Of The Moon" Appaloosa [Import]

According to Terry's liner notes, the songs on his second album to be recorded at Merel Bregante's Cribworks Studio in North Austin, are a mix of "torch songs, blue jazz and country laments," all of which take their inspiration from sightings of the moon. The only change in the line-up of support players, relative to the team that produced "Lucky" is that Kenny Grimes [guitar] replaces Jesse "Guitar" Taylor. The remaining members of the quintet are Merel Bregante aka Mr "never misses a beat" Moonlight [drums/percussion], Champ Hood [guitar/fiddle], Lisa Mednick [piano/accordion] and David Heath [bass]. Although he had never worked with him, Terry was much affected by the passing of Walter Hyatt in May of '96. Of course, there's an indelible connection with Hyatt on this recording - Hood having been a member of Uncle Walt's Band. Champ also contributed to Hyatt's subsequent solo work. "The Messenger" is Clarke's rhythmically dreamy and heartfelt tribute to Walter. The moon has possessed a dream like fascination for mankind since the dawn of time, and there are numerous hints that a lunar magic spell has been cast upon the contents of this album - even on the more upbeat tunes. The word *languid* keeps coming to mind. This is another literate winner from one of our best homegrown song poets. Available in the UK from Fish Records. Stateside, try Lubbock Or Leave It, 2311 North Loop, Austin, Texas 78756, U.S.A.

Bill Ward "Skyline" Songdog Records [Import]

The new millennium kicked off quite beautifully, *thank you very much* for Bill Ward. In January 2000 he won the South Florida Folk Festival's Songwriters Contest. In late May, he performed on the main-stage midway through the opening night of the 29th Kerrville Folk Festival. Not before time, in this scribe's book. I guess some folks took a little longer to grasp, and appreciate, the quality of Bill's music. The eleven songs on his third solo effort amply confirm that the kudos he has enjoyed of late is thoroughly deserved. And then some. Before I stray into narrative regarding the songs, I'd like to say that the liner artwork puts the efforts of many major and independent labels to shame. Great concept - so get your own copy to discover what I'm referring to. With a few exceptions, Bill played all the instruments on the recording. And finally, there's Bill's songs. The opener, "Broken Or Not" is a sour, but frank and honest, comment on the rat race that has bred self-obsession. Set in L.A., there has been a violent [not fully defined] act with a gun, which brought film crews in

helicopters to witness "someone's final breakdown, whose fifteen minutes of fame were thirty seconds on the evening news." God bless Andy W for the inspiration, but that's one hell of a couplet Bill. And there's more. In "Gone" a partner in a Savings & Loan goes on the run, after it comes to light that he was embezzling investors' money. The [killer] couplets – "It's funny that the dream he was chasin', Wound up chasin' him" and "He set out years ago to make a killin', Now it's killin' him." Elsewhere, there's "Matthew" a street musician "Still beating in the sixties, as the nineties pass him by," and Mary Ann, the "Only Daughter" who, inherited the wheat fields, years of financial hardship, and the faith to "Do the best I can, Pray for rain and curse the middleman." So there you have some words about four of the eleven keepers on "Skyline." The recommendation – it was one of my "Albums of the Year 2000." Enough said. Available from **Songdog Records Inc., Post No Bills Music, P.O. Box 680246, Houston, Texas 77268-0426, U.S.A.** plus you can catch Bill on the web at www.songs.com/bward and also at www.livefromtexas.com

Greg Brown "Covenant" Red House Records [Import]
Peter Mayer "Million Year Mind" Blue Boat [Import]

The recipe as far as Brown is concerned has been long established. Twenty years a recording artist, with sixteen albums already to his credit including two Grammy nominations during the nineties, this gruff voiced son of Iowa is a folk blues legend Stateside. The opening lines "Half the people you see these days are talking on cell phones, Driving off the road and bumping into doors" to 'Cept You & Me Babe confirm that Greg remains an astute observer of human frailty and our susceptibility to fashion and the [easy] hard sell. That timeless boy/girl duet, aka love, is Greg's principle thrust lyrically on this collection of one dozen originals. A number of them employ poetic devices to mask the plot – but it's love nonetheless. For instance, the narrator in *Blue Car*, uses simile to compare the condition of his old car to that of a love affair that has seen better days. There's even a [closing] hidden track, *Marriage Chant*. Why artists and record companies persist in this practice defeats me. Particularly so, in this case, when there's a sticker on the jewel case proclaiming the fact – maybe it was intended as guidance for the dumb reviewer! Rhythmically, the acoustic strum of *Lullaby* is a million miles from, *Dream City*, the full tilt electric boogie that precedes it, while the decade of other tunes visit various tempos in-between. Produced by long-time collaborator Bo Ramsey, the overall impression created by this collection is of a musician at the peak of his powers. It's just a pity that, lyrically, it is subjectively monosyllabic.

By comparison, Mayer is a relative youngster – this is his fourth solo outing – yet *Million Year Mind* is a revelation, suffused with writing that confirms this native of Minnesota is a master storyteller. Imagine, if you will, songs that contemplate the evolution of mankind "five million years ago" in *Africa*, and the senseless and needless destruction of half a million lives witnessed by *Charlie Porter*, a soldier dressed in union blue. *Holy Now* is a recollection of a childhood structured by weekly church attendance, while, since the dawn of time, humankind has expressed an anxiety over, and a fascination with, the mind's capacity to conjure up evil with the arrival of *The Dark*. In *John's Garden*, there's a deft use of surreal humour as Mayer's talking pumpkins discuss the relative merits of rotting and

dying on the vine, or grasping the once in a lifetime opportunity to shine, with a "jack-o-lantern's heart," on Halloween. I doubt if Mayer intentionally saved the best for last, but *One More Circle* is a masterwork. Laura MacKenzie's border bagpipes and Marc Anderson's percussion set the tone of this Celtic flavoured anthem, in which the narrator contemplates humankind's will to survive "On this planet home that holds our human race." You can probably deduce from the foregoing insight into some of Mayer's compositions, that the structure of each melody compliments the subject matter. *Africa*, for instance, closes with a chorus performed by a primary school choir recorded in Machakos, Kenya. *Million Year Mind*, is a collection that bears repeated listening. What's more, it filled a slot in my "Best of 2000" list. The Greg Brown album is available from **Red House Records, 501 West Lynnhurst Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104, U.S.A.** or, in the U.K. via **Koch Distribution**. Peter Mayer's album is available online at www.peppermintcds.com or by calling 1-800-252-4140. Their mailing address is **Peppermint, PO Box 65645, St. Paul, Minnesota 55165, U.S.A.** In addition, there's a link to Peppermint on Peter's web site at www.blueboat.net

Joe Ely "Live at Antone's" Rounder Records [Import]

Discounting the "Live At The Cambridge Folk Festival" set that Strange Fruit released in 1998, with this release, Joe Ely has maintained a cyclical pattern that began in the UK in 1980. He repeated the feat at Austin's Liberty Lunch a decade later, and it happened once again in the Texas state capital, a couple of miles up the road at, the legendary blues watering-hole, Antone's in late January of 1999. We are, of course, talking about the recording of a live show. With each live release, Ely has succeeded in capturing the essence of his stage act at that point in time. "Antone's" could well be the cream of the crop. Top of the trio. It's worth noting that the Cambridge disc was recorded by the BBC at the 1990 festival, and literally by default it falls precisely into the time pattern parameter. The supporting players on this occasion include original '70's band alumni Lloyd Maines and Jesse Taylor, the [Dutch born] Spanish guitar wizard Teye, plus new boys Joel Guzman, Gary Herman and Rafael Gayol. The fifteen tracks lean heavily on material from "Letter To Laredo" and "Twistin' in the Wind" while Joe reaches all the way back to 1981 and "Musta Notta Gotta Lotta" for, Butch Hancock's "Road Hawg" and Jimmie Dale Gilmore's "Dallas." The remaining quartet of cover songs includes the already recorded "The Road Goes On Forever" and "Gallo Del Cielo" plus two tunes associated with other writers. "Rocksalt and Nails," is a long time Steve Young favourite, while the Norman Petty penned Buddy Holly hit "Oh Boy," closes the proceedings. At the minute, I'm trying to figure out an appropriate venue for Joe to cut his 2010 "live" disc. Available in UK record stores now. Stateside try **Village Records, P.O. Box 3216, Shawnee, Kansas 66203-0216, U.S.A.** or on the web at www.villagerecords.com

Suzzy Roche "Songs From An Unmarried Housewife and Mother, Greenwich Village, USA" Red House Records [Import]

OK, you've always been a Roche. And when you're a Roche the thing that people will always recall, regarding your canon, is the quirky lyrics and great harmonies. So, hey, don't deny it. That appears to have been Suzzy's, aka

Baby Roche, raison d'être when approaching the construction of her sophomore solo set. This album sounds like the gals are still a unit, which for the moment they are not. And let's not go there. Co-produced with long time Roche associate, Stewart Lerman, the guest vocalists include Maggie Roche [*Wise Roche*], Lucy Roche [*Generation II Roche*], Lucy's pop [*aka Loudon Wainwright III*] and Jules Shear. Augmenting Suzzy's tunes are Maggie's humorous "G Chord Song," and the eminently hummable toe-tapper "Cold Hard Wind," a Shear and Steve Booker collaboration [anyone recall Steve's rather fine "*Dreamworld*," circa 1990 – well, the boy sailed off to Nashville and got to be a hit songwriter]. Finally, there's "Love Comes To Town" co-written by Suzzy and Lonesome Val [Haynes]. The opening "Yankee Doodle" [a fond, nursery rhyme styled, recollection of her late father] and the closing "Sweetie Pie" are pure Roche quirk, while the characters and events in "Looking For God" approach the surreal. For down-to-earth – the partners in "To Alaska With Love" discover love, make love, separate and reunite in the closing line of the final verse. Offbeat as ever, here's another episode for addicts of Rocheville. Available from **Fish Records**, P.O. Box 148, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 5WQ and on the web at www.fishrecords.co.uk Stateside, try **Village Records**.

Eric Anderson "You Can't Relive the Past" Appleseed Records [Import]

The opening "Eyes Of The Immigrant," probably the gentlest air on this collection, is a stunning *word video* that unfolds as Andersen captures the arrival of a vessel overflowing with immigrants in New York Harbour. Or at least, the more austere Ellis Island Harbour. "*The shadow of a lady known as Liberty, 'They poured like sheep onto the land and into the streets,' 'Some tried to settle some couldn't out of fear' and 'a kid off the ship could maybe be the president'*" all serve to highlight the milieu of expectation, apprehension and adventure that arrival in "*the land of the free*" brought. Add to that, mid-point Lucy Kaplansky harmonies and you probably have one of the finest songs I'll hear in Y2K [OK, I know what I said about "*Tanglewood Tree*" the album]. I guess this could be filed as one of those "*you had to be there*" moments, and I'll admit to having made a somewhat sombre, but thoroughly enlightening visit to Ellis in 1999. Whatever, "Eyes Of The Immigrant" is one hell of a song. Within seconds of the closing chords fading, Eric is up there rocking hard on the album title track, a song co-written with Lou Reed. "Every Once In A Pale Blue Moon" [seems like a familiar title format] and "Gonna Go Crazy" follow similar rhythmic patterns. By way of explaining this dichotomy, half the album was cut in New York and the remainder in Water Valley, Mississippi. As you'd expect a blues based thread link the Mississippi selections. The other point of interest on this collection is the appearance of a quartet of [previously unrecorded] songs that Andersen and Townes Van Zandt composed, over a couple of nights, fourteen years ago. Namely, "The Meadowlark," "The Road," "Night Train," and "The Blue March [The Isis]." Based on the foregoing selections, it transpires that what once appeared to be isolated pockets of regional songwriters, was, in fact, a single melting pot. Surprised? After all these years, hardly.....anything is [and remains] possible. Available

in UK record stores via **Koch Distribution**. Stateside, try **Village Records**.

Gretchen Peters "Gretchen Peters" Grapevine

Four years on from her rather memorable debut, "*The Secret Of Life*," the UK got first sight [and hearing] of Peters' latest solo effort. Her catalogue is already a regular port of call for country performers who don't write [aka the "hat" brigade etc.], in the last few years Gretchen has infiltrated the rock field by consistently scoring covers by, for instance, Bryan Adams. The Canadian's latest solo album features no less than seven Gretchen Peters compositions. Their co-write, "In A Perfect World" is featured here, the remaining decade of tunes being Peters originals. Co-produced with husband, Green Daniel, "*Gretchen Peters*" adopts a more commercial approach, and is painted on a wider musical landscape, than its predecessor. Already a Suzy Bogguss single, "Souvenirs" which opens the set, is a cynical observation of America's [countless and tacky] tourist traps, as the narrator searches for that great American dream, *the promised land*. "I Don't Know" and "Love And Texaco" serve as adequate angst inspired anthems, but it's on songs like "Eddie's First Wife" that the *alternate* Gretchen Peters surfaces. You see Eddie's spouse has a predilection for other women. Equally inspired by the unconventional, "Picasso And Me" is a *might have been* fantasy, that subtly explores the real-life issues which shape lasting relationships – as viewed by the artist's cat. As for laid back, late night tunes "Like Water Into Wine," fulfils the bill and more. From a religious viewpoint there's even a swathe of lyrical cross-references allied to the latter [song] title. "Lilies Of The Field" also draws similar [but non-religious] lyrical parallels. The closing "Revival" returns to the lyrically inspirational, with lines such as "*this lamb's gone astray*" and "*gonna wash my sins away*." Available in UK record stores via **Fish Records**. Stateside, try **Village Records**.

Terri Hendrix "Places In Between" Wilory Records/CRS [Import]

First – and this feels strange and startlingly new – there's the full-face, main liner cover shot, with Hendrix gazing wistfully into the camera lens. There's a sense of recent loss in her eyes. Tears could well be about to surge forth. In the liner booklet, Hendrix explains "*Last year I took a good look at my fears and wrote songs about them. 'Places In Between' is the result of the confrontation.*" Fifteen songs and forty-five minutes later, you've got to conclude that the San Marcos scribe has decided it's time to move on. Time to cast off the happy-go-lucky chrysalis. Lloyd Maines, predictably, produced this set and contributed musically along with Austin stalwarts Fukunaga, Percy, Allen [Bukka], Osbourn, Barnes and Bowden. "Eagle" and the closing "Moon On The Water" resurface here, having first appearing on Terri's 1996 debut "*Two Dollar Shoes*." The traditional "Motherless Children" and the instrumental bookends "Into" and "Reprise" leave a decade of new Hendrix tunes to delve into. A handful were co-written with Maines. Maybe I should point out that this is not a doom laden set. For instance, "My Own Place," a dream home and neighbourhood wish list, careers along at a breakneck pace driven by some Bad Livers bad-ass banjo. Maintaining friendships, adventurous friends, getting stuck in the proverbial rut, holding on to love and edgy humour

["Invisible Girl"] all come into focus as the forty-five minutes elapse effortlessly. The only failure here, is the spoken Gaelic intro and the sung Gaelic verse in "Joy Or Sorrow" – Terri hon, you need much more phlegm in your throat to produce the guttural sound that defines Celtic speech. Apart from that, **"Places In Between"** irrevocably confirms that this girl has the focus to succeed in the big time, and she can already see the route there. Available in UK record stores via **Fish Records**. Stateside, try **Village Records**.

Salamander Crossing **"Henry Street – A Retrospective"**
Signature Sounds [Import]

Underneath Henry Street in North Amherst, Massachusetts, there's a series of tunnels that allow the local salamander population to commute in safety, hence this aggregation found their performing name in 1991. At various times a trio or quartet, Salamander Crossing decided to *call it a day* last year. While still a fledgling label, circa 1995, Signature Sounds distributed their self-titled debut and during the following year the quartet's sophomore disc, **Passion Train** appeared. Time has confirmed their third set, **Bottleneck Dreams**, to be their swan song. Recorded in Nashville and produced by Canadian Colin Linden, the latter collection was released by Signature Sounds, two years back. This double CD collection brings together the first two Salamander recordings and then some. Disc one is enhanced by the addition of the traditional *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Peace On Earth), while songs composed by Claudia Schmidt, John Gorka and Gillian Welch, plus the traditional *Wade In The Water* flesh out disc two. Never prolific [as writers], in terms of recording original material, **Salamander Crossing** was an *acoustic marriage* that explored material drawn from bluegrass, pop and folk sources during their honeymoon period. In that regard, a high-energy version of Lennon and McCartney's *Things We Said Today* lies comfortably alongside the closing and ethereal rendition of Shawn Colvin's, *Shotgun Down The Avalanche*. With **Passion Train** came a road wise maturity and an inclination to experiment with other genres. Originally, circa 1987, a medium paced ballad on Springsteen's **Tunnel Of Love**, *Two Faces* became for the Salamander's, a fiddle driven bluegrass anthem. They may be gone, but on the strength of **Henry Street** they should not be forgotten. One minor criticism - someone at the label failed to check the artwork prior to production. Not one, but both track listings are numerically wayward ! Available in UK record stores via **Fish Records**. Stateside, try **Signature Sounds**.

Jane Siberry **"Hush"** Sheeba Records [import]

On this collection of ten [cover] songs Jane Siberry, a truly original and unique performer throughout her career in music, explores the universe of, mostly traditional, American and Celtic spirituals. Last century, during the twilight of the seventies, a fledgling Siberry performed folk music as a solo act at the Carden Street Café in Guelph, Ontario. Almost two decades later and supported by an army of musicians, **Maria**, her final album for Reprise, overflowed with jazzy extemporisations. In that regard, Siberry's multi-faceted career path has, musically, been akin to that taken by country-person, Roberta Joan Anderson. With the subsequent birth of her own label, Sheeba, Jane's recordings reverted to simpler musical presentations. During 1997 Siberry collaborated with Darol

Anger on his acoustic masterpiece, **Heritage** [subtitled *new interpretations of American roots music*], and performed two haunting versions of *O Shenandoah* on that disc. The latter song closes this set and forms part of the American contingent that includes *The Water Is Wide* and *O' Man River*. In the process of gathering songs for this collection, and by way of acknowledging her ancestral voice Siberry included the Welsh hymn, *All Through The Night* - her maternal grandfather's favourite. As *I Roved Out* and *False False Fly*, were also drawn from Celtic sources. Geographically, *Ponchartrain* may be set in the American south but the lyric employs the voice of a wandering Celt forced to leave the love of his life. The "young cowboy dressed up in white linen" in *The Streets Of Laredo* recalls the persistently brutal and terminal outcome of gunplay, that was once part of everyday life on the American frontier. Despite the world-weary and sometimes tragic lyrical content of many of the songs, Siberry's arrangements draw this disparate collection into a brilliantly uplifting celebration of life by using her voice as the centrepiece. The minimal use of supporting instruments, mainly piano and keyboard, further underscores the [foregoing] aural essence of the recording. Add to that Jane's two and three part harmonies, as well as the layering and intertwining of the lyrics into what can only be described as *vocal tapestries*, and Siberry's **Hush** deservedly qualifies for the accolade, truly inspirational. Available from **Sheeba Records**, P.O. Box 291, 238 Davenport Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1J6 and on the web at www.sheeba.ca

Chuck Brodsky **"Last Of The Old Time"** Red House Records [Import]

True to form, on his fourth CD outing Chuck spins tales that draw the listener helplessly into a [lyrical] web of intrigue and human interest. Apart from the closing *40 Years*, which celebrates the life of songwriter Jack Williams, there isn't a weak cut in this pack of eleven. Halfway through the set, Brodsky even knocks you sideways with a humorous lyric that consists of the directions by interstate, highway and farm track to a house. The latter may seem a simple enough idea, and one you only get away with once, but the speeding, dobro and drum driven shuffle beat of *Third Dead Cat* underpins a mighty chuckle fest. Especially, regarding the *Third Dead Cat* – "the one that is flat, and looks like a welcome mat." I guess you've already got the idea. Testifying once more to his unflinching love of America's national sport, Chuck weighs in with *Gone To Heaven* and *Bonehead Merkle* a couple of tales from the annals of baseball history. The former recalls the late baseball clown/coach, Max Patkin, who lived in a simpler time, and "never, ever, not one time – sold an autograph." As for *Bonehead Merkle*, Brodsky proves that controversy in sport is as old as time. Toward the close of the 1908 baseball season the frontrunners in the league were the Chicago Cubs and the New York Giants. Already on first base, nineteen-year old rookie Fred Merkle saw his team-mate Al Bridwell hit what seemed like the winning drive. As jubilant Giant fans invaded the field, Merkle failed to touch second base thereby infringing the rarely applied Rule 59. Except that Hank O'Day, the umpire, had applied the rule a few weeks earlier in another Cubs game. Declaring the game a draw, fourteen days later the Giants failed to carry off the pennant. As a result, Merkle became the subject of derision, until four decades later when facing 35,000 Giant

fans in an old-timers game, forgiveness came in the form of a "long standing ovation." With a forthcoming presidential election Stateside, *He Came To Our Town* will deservedly become a radio staple. The lyric pokes fun at the *cosmetic adjustments* to flower beds and buildings etc. that take place prior to a visit by a political candidate. Then, there's the *man of the people* rhetoric – to the extent of misquoting a Bob Dylan lyric. Plus you have to contend with illusion, since politicians always have a *closet* that has been *cleaned*, and a *history* that has been *revised*. **Last Of The Old Time** features many classic stories. In fact, there's barely room to mention the political corruption practised by the *Boys In The Back Room* or the [tongue in cheek] environmental rule that allows you to *Take It Out Back* as long as you "*keep the front yard looking good*." Available from **Red House Records, 501 West Lynnhurst Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104, U.S.A.** or, in the U.K. via **Koch Distribution**. [Note. This review was written prior to the recent US Presidential election].

Steinar Albrigtsen & Tom Pacheco "**Nobodies**" Norske Gramas [Import]

The material on their initial duo release, "**Big Storm Comin'**", recorded in Oslo, was penned [entirely] by Pacheco. Seven years on, their sophomore disc was recorded in Woodstock during the Fall of '99 at Levon Helm's studio. Of the thirteen tracks, seven were penned by the redoubtable Pacheco, one is an adaptation of a traditional blues, and in a *novel departure* – the remainder are Tom and Steinar collaborations. Produced by the duo with Scott Petito, the *local* support players include members of The Band – these were Rick Danko's final recording sessions prior to his death, Happy Traum and John Sebastian. Tom takes the lead vocal on the title cut – an ode to the daily drudgery of life endured by the masses, and he pulls [absolutely] no punches regarding his opinion of the young "Teddy Roosevelt," a man quoted as saying "*There's nothing like a good ol' war*." Opening with Roosevelt's Rough Riders fight to *liberate* Cuba at the end of nineteenth century, Pacheco goes on to speculate that there is a connection between the latter event, the subsequent debacle at the Bay of Pigs and one of the unanswered events of the century just gone. Tom has focused on the latter event in earlier songs. I'm referring to the death John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Texas. Everyone seems to have a Graceland song these days, and I think you can deduce my opinion of *the pelvis* from elsewhere in this issue. At least the story line of "Bobby & Elvis" closes a neat twist. In the vocal stakes, the duo ring the changes – there's tunes on which each take the lead, then there's some where they take alternate verses, the penultimate selection "Nothing To Do" being a prime example. All in all, a neat low-key effort. Available by mail from **Fair Oaks Entertainment Online, 7, Towers Street, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 9AN**, or on the web from <http://www.ahwy.net/fairoaksonline/index.html>

Peggy Bertsch "**Hiding In The Stone**" Side Porch Music [Import]

You have the opportunity to familiarise yourself with young Miss Bertsch's story elsewhere in this issue. As for this ten-track recording, her solo debut, the closing cut "Something Fine" is an *early career* Jackson Browne cover. The remaining material, all self penned, is something of a

revelation. Peggy played a lunch-time set at the Threadgill Theatre during last year's Kerrville Wine & Music Festival. From the *get go*, her songs blew me away. Each is a perfectly crafted gem. "Gravity" explores the discovery, during childhood, of the force of gravity. Usually associated with climbing trees and walls, the song goes on to compare falling in love with wrestling with gravity. Albeit an *abstract* form of gravity. A small community faces a bleak future following the *corporate* closure of the only local factory in "Company Town." The narrator in "Changing Of The Guard," a great grandmother, witnesses with pride the birth and raising of the next generation and the generation after that. Their history, a common bond, is preserved through the retelling of family stories. In this era of the dysfunctional family units, this song is a pure delight. So there, I've covered the first three tracks. Figuratively they're *the tip of a massive musical iceberg* that I strongly suggest you explore for yourself. If you already adore the music of Beth Nielsen Chapman, Karla Bonoff, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Gretchen Peters, Peg is an *alumnus* of the same college. Available from **Side Porch Music, P.O. Box 159246, Nashville, Tennessee 37215, U.S.A.**

Bob Martin "**Next To Nothin'**" Riversong [Import]

Finally, here's the follow up to Bob's stunning 1997 album "**The River Turns The Wheel**." The front liner artwork of "**Next To Nothin'**" stylistically follows the pattern set by mould its predecessor, with a hint of sepia on this occasion. Many touring musicians will relate to the sentiments expressed in "Makin' The Same Mistakes," the humorous, worldly wise opening track. The fact that the musician [narrator] notices the chicken wire stretched across the front of the stage is the first hint; then the bar-keeper warns that the owner likes to "*Skim the door money*." By the end of the night the narrator reflects that "*the money's too light to be skimmin'*" and that you have to be "*four kinds shy of a full deck*" to survive the lifestyle. Elsewhere, there's a considerable degree of reflecting upon the past. A chance meeting with a childhood friend [gender not specified] who still lives in the same "*old house*," finds the narrator in "In This Old Photograph" contemplating what *might have been* had the protagonists taken *the other road* when the opportunity presented itself many years ago. That approach also pervades, the rather obviously titled "My Father Painted Houses," while the down and out in "Wrong Side Of Goodbye" – "*even a dog won't stand down wind*" – dreams of a reconciliation [with his wife], but is shrewd enough to realise that it will never happen. The title track opens in a Merrimac mill town, as the narrator recalls how he and Linda decided to follow the circus, after it came to town. In time, the duo eventually go their separate ways. Having started with practically *next to nuthin'* they end up no better off. Employing pretty much the same team of pickers that helped produced, "**The River Turns The Wheel**," this is another sterling, acoustic based effort from Martin, in the form of forty plus minutes of quality writing and storytelling. Available from **Riversong Records, PO Box 2130, Salem, NH 03079, U.S.A.** and on the web at www.riversong.com

Richard Buckner "**The Hill**" Sixshooter Records/Square Dog [Import]

Michael Smith's adoration of the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters was palpable in [his song] "Spoon River." Given Michael's penchant for theatrical shows with music I have

suspected for many years that he penned a whole suite of Spoon River inspired songs. If they exist, they have yet to see the light of day. So young Buckner has decided to take a bite of this *rather large [and complex] apple*. Masters' "**Spoon River Anthology**" published in 1915, contained 214 *individual poems*, their text being the recollections – or *voices from the grave* – of citizens who had lived in the fictional small town of Spoon River. Masters modelled Spoon River on Lewiston, Illinois. Apart from "The Hill" – hence the title of this set – which opened Masters collection, all the other poems were titled by the name of a former citizen. Employing Masters' words and his own *music*, to be honest, it's a pretty credible effort, although the overall sound is at times brash and raw, with less than subtle – and frankly, occasionally needless – electronic effects. I use the term *music* loosely, since the meter of Masters' words hardly lend themselves to the creation of hook-laden melodies. The liner only credits the use of cello, bass and percussion in this production – I don't think so. There was a vast array of instrumentation at play. The major drawback with this recording is that there is only a single, forty minute track which, along with "The Hill," feature the words of seventeen of Spoon River's former inhabitants. As a result, there is no facility to skip tracks. The concept, I presume, is that the work should be heard as a single, cohesive unit. I'd also suggest that you need to be an Edgar Lee Masters fan [in the extreme] to get through this disc in one sitting. I have struggled *the whole way*, on a few occasions. Available from **Overcoat Recordings, 3831 North Christiana, Chicago, Illinois 60618, U.S.A. and Convent Records, PO Box 1446, Tucson, Arizona 85701, U.S.A.** and on the web at www.richardbuckner.com The review copy was a Canadian version obtained from **Village Records**.

Mark Erelli "**Compass & Companion**" Signature Sounds [Import]

Mark Erelli's self-titled debut for Signature Sounds appeared a few months before won the Kerrville New Folk contest in 1999. His sophomore effort is an absolute *tour-de-force* of memorable songs that you'll subconsciously begin humming the moment you've listened to it once. It's destined for my "Best of 2001" list. There are no doubts on that score. If a disc stays in my car for more than one day – that's a bad sign. A good, bad sign. It means it's a keeper. A great disc. Last winter "**Compass & Companion**" lived in my car for a couple of months. Now that's a really, really bad sign. Overall, the songs cut across so many musical borders, that I guess, it could be viewed by some listeners as a hotch-potch. Personally, I think that variety is its greatest charm and strength. Here's my track by track thoughts on the recording.

Ghost ~ Delivered with a great sense of angst, I think a lot of folks will relate with this sad, reflective, mid-paced ballad. We all have memories that we can't wipe from our minds. "*Something that you can't even see,*" "*haunted,*" "*disappear,*" and "*missing you*" all add to the portrait of helpless loss and despair painted by Erelli. No doubt some reviewer will pick this up – the opening bars where the guitar picks up the melody, are extremely reminiscent of a Dougie MacLean song – trouble is, there are twelve of the Scot's albums to trawl through for the answer. In my book, the latter comment detracts nothing from this fine song.

Compass & Companion ~ great duet with Mrs. Bruce Robison, and the late night image of the "*silver sickle rising in the east*" is a real kicker. An upbeat road song, the question posed by the narrator in "*Go to sleep my darling, Am I the one that you'll be dreaming of*" is clearly answered by her "*I'm just dreaming of the miles we've still to go.*" This is definitely a radio play song – and a great title too. This song could sell in Nashville. Particularly this version.

Why Should I Cry ~ Jeez the kid does western swing as well. Is there no limit to his talent. Bright as a new button, easy going, kind of just motors along. Great electric jazz guitar.

Miracle Man ~ Definitely works as a band song. Upbeat, it's the Everly Bros. [vocally] meet the Byrds [the chiming guitars], with a dash of Tom Petty. The whole nine yards are packed into this tune. This will get folk tappin' their toes – and dancing in the aisles.

My Love ~ The surprise item in the package. Bottom line is that I'm a sucker for ballads and this one is "off the wall," because it's simply not the sort of thing that you expect from Mark Erelli. Does it work? Absolutely. Definitely *the atom bomb* in this collection, it's so gentle and unassuming. The almost spoken lyric adds to the tension posed by the questions therein. This song could easily have been penned between the WW I and WW II. Erelli meets Cole Porter/Hoagy Carmichael/Johnny Mercer.....a neat twist.

My Little Sister ~ Freshly graduated, Mark's sister is earning a mint, while with a great self-deprecating comment [And oh so true !!!] Mark states "*I pay my rent with a gig and a prayer.*" I first looked upon this cut as the throwaway in the pack, and then I saw it for what it was. Nice bluesy harp break. And, on final reflection, a fun song....

Free Ride ~ This is the straighten up your act and fly straight song. Erelli rocks with his band.

Before I Knew Your Name ~ A melancholy love song. He's already won the lady's hand, but there's still something missing. Bemused probably best catches the narrator's state of mind. This gentle and unassuming tune has also sneaked into my subconscious. Great imagery in the line "*I walked these streets before I knew your name.*"

Ashes To The River ~ Hell Erelli's gone traditional [sic. Trad. Arr.], except that this is an original. Definitely on the money with a "*doomed from the outset*" story line. The parson's only daughter, a poor sharecropper, her voice as sweet as falling water, theirs – a love forbidden, and a union cursed by family. As she succumbs to a fever, she hears the angels singing softly – and then there's the final *all consuming* conflagration. The result is an epic of Biblical proportions. To describe it as a modern [traditional sounding] classic, seems like a contradiction....but so true. Written at Kerrville circa '99 with Jonathan Kingham.

All Behind Me Now ~ Another one that works best with a band. Great hook laden melody. .

Almost Home ~ Appropriately titled, reflective ballad – and definitely the best way to close a richly varied set titled "**Compass & Companion.**"

Available on the web at www.signaturesounds.com and by mail order in the UK from **Fish Records**. Stateside, try **Village Records**.

Bobby Bridger "**A Ballad Of The West**" Golden Egg Records [Import]

What follows, is by way of an introduction.....In early 1963, Bobby Durham was eighteen years of age when Archie

Bridger, his maternal uncle, regaled him with tales of their [famous] ancestor, the mountain man and explorer, Jim Bridger. It was the first in a series of epiphanies that determined the subsequent course of Durham's life. Pursuing his passion for music, within a couple of years, Bobby signed a record deal with Fred Foster's Monument label. A number of singles resulted from that relationship, and a subsequent one with the Nugget label. Changing his surname to that of his famous ancestor, at the dawn of the seventies, Bobby cut a pair of *much sought after* folk/country albums for RCA. Concurrent with the foregoing events, while researching the life of his ancestor, Bobby's appetite for, and interest in, the culture of Native Americans was sparked. And why shouldn't that be the case. After all the ancestor had taken three Native American wives, who sadly, all perished, but not before producing a total of five children. Discovering John G. Neihardt's 60,000 line epic poem "**A Cycle Of The West**" led Bridger to that author's Native American history "**Black Elk Speaks**" - and the second epiphany. Neihardt, the poet laureate in perpetuity of Nebraska, was in search of information concerning the Ghost Dancer Movement when he visited the Lakota holy man in 1930. To meet Black Elk, Neihardt journeyed deep into the Pine Ridge Reservation to a location near Manderson, South Dakota. Transcriptions of the ensuing conversations formed the basis for the book. Born in 1863 and a cousin of Crazy Horse, Black Elk died in 1950. In the years following his second epiphany, Bridger wrote two parts of a work that he envisaged, from the outset, as a trilogy.

"**Seeker Of The Fleece**" tells of Jim Bridger's explorations as a fur trapper in the headwaters of the Missouri, and his subsequent [successful] search for a route west through the Rockies. He was the first white man to see the Great Salt Lake. "**Lakota**" gives voice to the Native Americans whose lands were ravaged by the white man, through the words of Black Elk and others. A recording of "**Seeker Of The Fleece**," was made in 1975, and first appeared on cassette. Between the years 1988 and 1995 Bridger undertook an annual *pilgrimage* to Cody, Wyoming, where he performed "**Seeker Of The Fleece**" and "**Lakota**," as stage shows, on a daily basis through the summer months. The third part of the trilogy, "**Pahaska**," was premiered at the Buffalo Bill Historical Centre, in July 1996. Pahaska [Long Hair] was the Lakota name for William F. Cody aka Buffalo Bill. The final part of the trilogy tells the story of this scout, hunter and pony express rider turned showman.

It's a testament to Bridger's vision and perseverance that, almost forty years on, he has released a four CD collection that gathers together the three *cohesive* parts of "**A Ballad Of The West**." Exploration of Bridger's two multi-media web sites, www.bridger.com and www.balladofthewest.com provide visual insight of the disparate range of characters involved, as well as adding additional narrative detail to the story lines of this three part saga which explores the *evolution of a nation and the land they settled on*.

Statistically speaking thirty-two songs constitute the musical extent of Bridger's trilogy, with two discs being devoted to the most recently completed work, "**Pahaska**." Spoken poetic narratives - *heroic couplets* - act as links between the songs, allowing each story to evolve. These narratives furnish a further thirty-two tracks. The total playing time of the four discs amounts to three hours thirty minutes. Believe me, it is time well spent even if you have no current

interest in the *real wild west*. As well as listening to some darned fine music, and three darned well thought out yarns, you will gain an insight into what really happened in the, initially, unpopulated central section of America, during the period 1820-1900. In the process, you'll also learn much about the nature of man - red and white - the devious, as well as the honourable and brave. For those with even a marginal knowledge and interest in *the west*, "**A Ballad Of The West**" is a deeply enriching journey. A quarter of a century elapsed between the first and the final recording sessions for this collection, yet they sit comfortably alongside one another. In part that has been achieved by enlisting practically the same line-up of support musicians for the whole project. The backbone of the supporting players being, The Lost Gonzo Band. Slim Pickens, the movie actor, and a faithful supporter of Bridger's work narrated "**Seekers of The Fleece**." Pickens passed away in 1983, and Bridger has adopted the formers' role on the later recordings.

Rather than go into intimate detail about individual events that form part of this trilogy, I will reflect on just a few of the conclusions I made after listening to this thought provoking work. There's a certain irony in the realisation that William Cody was the finest buffalo hunter of his time, yet in his later years he fought to preserve the species by featuring them as part of his touring Wild West show. Before the mass emigration of European settlers westward on to the plains, that land had sustained 80 million head of buffalo. By the time the carnage ended, only three hundred were left. After the Indian Wars, Sitting Bull and Black Elk, both Lakota Sioux, joined Buffalo Bill's show. In part it furnished them with immunity from prosecution by the American Government. Jim Bridger taught Buffalo Bill Indian sign language, and how to converse in Sioux, Shoshone, Arapaho, Crow and Cheyenne. Jim Bridger was eighteen years of age, and living in St. Louis, Missouri, and indentured to a local blacksmith, Phil Creamer, when he decided to join the Ashley-Henry Fur Expedition in 1822. A handful of years later Bridger was a national legend - the consummate mountain man. Bobby Durham was aged 18 when he learned of the heroic exploits of his ancestor. As youngsters of 9 and 11 respectively, John G. Neihardt and Black Elk fell into comas. As a result of that event, it is believed that Black Elk gained spiritual powers. Although a number of people had sought to counsel Black Elk regarding the Ghost Dancer movement, the only white person he ever acknowledged was Neihardt. The Lakota believe that each spirit has a twin. If not brought into this world together at birth, the twins are destined to spend their lives searching for one another. Upon meeting Neihardt, Black Elk is quoted as saying "*He has been sent to learn what I know and I will teach him.*" The twin sons of different mothers had found each other.

By the time you have listened to all of the discs, you will have gained sight of Bridger's intended message - though each story appears to stand alone, they are irrevocably linked. Available from **Bridger Productions, P.O. Box 49301, Austin, Texas 78765, U.S.A.** and on the web at www.aballadofthewest.com and www.bbridger.com

Denise Franke "**Comfort**" Certain Records [Import]

Opening with David Olney's "Little Bit Of Poison," Franke's sophomore CD also includes Vince Bell's "100 Miles From Mexico." Apart from that, it's a case of "*the rest is all my*

own work." Numerically that amounts to a decade of new songs – well almost, since the penultimate track "Dance Intro" is a saxophone only instrumental, while the atmospheric exploration of angst, "Indifference" [long a personal favourite], first appeared on Franke's 1991 tape only release **"Shadow No More."** As with "You Don't Know Me," Eric Taylor produced this acoustic collection. Rather than stay sequestered in the control booth, this time around Eric plays bass and acoustic guitar on a number of cuts and supplies the duet/harmony vocal on the closing cut "Dance To The Moon." In the song stakes, Franke has always leant heavily towards accurately capturing the countless facets of a relationship. In that regard, there's a palpable lyrical intensity to songs such as "Personally" and "Let Me Go." As for "Kindred Skin" – that's one hell of a classy song, for which Mike Sumler supplies truly harmonious piano fills. Available from **Certain Records, P.O. Box 540682, Houston, Texas 77254-0682, U.S.A.**, plus check out Franke's site at www.denicefranke.com

Rod Picott **"Tiger Tom Dixon's Blues"** Welding Rod Music [Import]

So who the hell is Rod Picott? If you check the liner of **"No Angel Knows"** or **"Broke Down"** you'll discover that he's the some time writing partner of, Slaid Cleaves. "Tiger Tom Dixon's Blues" is his tilt at the big picture. The ten tracks include the already familiar Slaid collaborations "Broke Down" and "Bring It On." Maintaining the Cleaves connection, "Torn In Two" was co-written with [Slaid's producer] Gurf Morlix. The opening, album title cut, tells the story of a boxer, Tiger Tom Dixon, whose preference for alcohol far outweighs his appetite for being a genuine title contender. There's a Mark Knopfler flavour to "On And On" – a song that includes a character named Romeo!! Overall, this collection effortlessly mixes a couple of acoustic cuts with mostly electric interpretations of Picott's music. Available from **Welding Rod Music, 900 Broadmoor Drive, Nashville, Tenn. 37216, U.S.A.**

Eddi Reader **"Simple Soul"** Compass Records [Import]

For solo album five, Reader has adopted an organic approach to recording. The sessions mostly took place in drummer, Roy Dodds' back room. As for the eleven songs featured, apart from a cover of Jackson C. Frank's "Blues Run The Game," "Footsteps Fall" [Hewerdine/Bjergfeldt], the closing "The Girl Who Fell In Love With The Moon" [Hewerdine/Eriksen], and her own "Eden," the remaining songs were created the team of Reader/Hewerdine with the addition of other writers on a couple of occasions. Like a well established trademark, Reader's voice soars skyward and then swoops earthward, as she interprets this, mostly, laid back collection of songs. Available in the UK, in local stores, on the Rough Trade label. Stateside the album is available from **Village Records.**

Michael McNevin **"Songs From The Oregon Trail"** no label no index no. [Import]

Having taken the decision to head West, there's no reflecting on the past for the narrator in the opener, "Up On A Hill." His focus is fixed upon the new home he will soon build. A place where he will have a "A better chance, A better life, A little peace of mind." The "Man On The Levee" recalls the "Battlefield smoke on a hill blue and grey, They all fall down when the bugler plays" – a war that is

thankfully now ended. With the recollection of *"how the freedom came South,"* comes the opportunity to heal the wounds of the nation. Next up, it's 1852 and "Harriet" who is *"eleven or twelve,"* when she travels to Oregon by way of the trail. A six month long, 2000 mile journey, undertaken on foot. For her father, *the prize* is 640 acres of land. For free. Along the way Harriet's mother and younger brother perish, while the journey to *the promised land* is filled with a myriad of wondrous sights and events. McNevin gives vent to his impish sense of humour, by way of the chuck wagon mealtime delight "Critter Stew," while "On The Banks Of The Little Blue," captures the activities of the participants as a wagon train beds down for the night, *"deep in the land of the Pawnee and Sioux."* By the light of the campfire, a world-weary gold prospector, "Willie," – who Michael actually met while camping in the High Sierras – reflects on his life and the possibilities of striking it rich. And that's it folks – there's only six songs on this rather fine collection. You can't fail with McNevin – one of America's finest song scribes in my book. The disc is also available Stateside as part of The Learning Company's software educational package **"The Oregon Trail."** Available on the web from www.michaelmcnevin.com. As for snail mail, once upon a time **Mudpuddle Music, P.O. Box 5062, Pleasanton, California 94566, U.S.A.** used to work pretty well. Michael plans to issue his previous, tape only, **"Napkin Literature"** on CD later this year. Now that's good news indeed.

Carrie Newcomer **"The Age Of Possibility"** Philo [Import] + review of video of same name

The video review that follows contains many details about **"The Age Of Possibility,"** so I'll be brief. Now up to her seventh solo release, Carrie's brand of melodic and ethereal spirituality generally produces one of two vastly opposed reactions – *love or hate.* Co-produced with Mark Williams – and excluding the 1999 live disc **"Bare To The Bone"** – this is their third collaboration in a row. You can tell. It's a smooth well thought out production.

Video - NTSC format, colour 56 minutes duration

At the outset of the year that *industry pundits* claim will see the DVD [Digital Versatile Disc] format become the prime player in the UK's home entertainment market, let's have a word of comfort for that *nearly neolithic* precursor, video. These days, a large proportion of the video cassette players on sale in UK stores are capable of playing American NTSC format video cassettes. In that regard, it seems totally appropriate to review Carrie Newcomer's latest commercial offering, **"The Age Of Possibility,"** although it is only available, meantime, as a NTSC video. Carrie's seventh, solo album for the Rounder imprint, – also titled – **"The Age Of Possibility,"** was released Stateside on Tuesday 8th August last year. A few weeks later, on Friday 8th September to be precise, Newcomer's concert at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre, in her [adopted] hometown of Bloomington, Indiana was filmed by a five-strong camera crew from the Indiana University Television Service [WTIU]. The resulting one-hour concert special, **"The Age Of Possibility,"** was [first] aired on Monday 4th December, in the Bloomington area, by the local PBS television station. Subsequent airings are planned for PBS stations nation wide. A video of the concert special, which has interview segments featuring Carrie interspersed between the songs, is now available on the internet from www.rounder.com and www.cdfreedom.com and by mail order from both sources.

For a limited period, purchasers of the video will receive a free limited edition live CD featuring all thirteen songs on the video. In addition, and for a similar limited period, purchasers of **"The Age of Possibility"** CD via the internet or by mail order, direct from Rounder and CD Freedom, will also receive a copy of the live CD. Between the penultimate and final song on the video, Newcomer offers some insight into her evolution as a songwriter, over the past decade, with the words - *"I think I found my voice in my thirties. It's really not a literal voice. That voice comes from how I grew up. It comes from my landscape and what I've lived in. It comes from my travels. It comes from my family. It's a voice that really comes out of the whole of me. I grew up in the mid-west and I still live here. I love to travel other places and I love the personality of different areas of the country - I really do enjoy coming back home to my little place in the woods in Indiana."* From the foregoing you should deduce that Carrie Newcomer is a spiritually driven individual, and the lyrics of her creations reflect, with honesty, a range of human emotions. With an album newly arrived in the stores, and supported on this concert video by her four-piece road band, it's obvious that the folk/country/pop tinged material leans heavily toward **"The Age of Possibility."** In that regard seven tracks are drawn from that album, although **"Bare To The Bone"** first appeared on Carrie's 1999 live, mail order only, Rounder release of the same name. Four other songs from the latter release reappear here, including a personal favourite **"The Moon Over Tucson."** Inspired by the writing of the Arizona based, best selling novelist, Barbara Kingsolver, I first heard Carrie perform the song during her June 1997 UK tour, when supporting Alison Krauss. Newcomer and Kingsolver have subsequently become friends, and the latter penned **"The Age of Possibility"** CD liner notes. Although she has two sisters, Carrie describes herself as **"My Father's Only Son,"** by way of introducing the song of the same name. It's also the title cut from her 1996 Rounder recording, and explores a wonderfully caring father/daughter bond cultivated during countless, childhood and young adulthood, fishing trips. As far as the eventual maturing of that relationship is concerned, the line *"his only son was expecting a child"* welcomes the next generation. **"A Gathering Of Spirits,"** a hymn to friendship, has yet to appear on any of Newcomer's albums. That said, **"Threads,"** taken from **"The Age Of Possibility"** is undoubtedly an autobiographical paean, that explores the same theme. Reaching back in her catalogue to 1994, with some Dire Straits influenced electric guitar work from Keith Skooglund, Carrie closes the show with a rocking rendition of her prophetic tale of environmental decay, **"Playing With Matches."** Rather than adopt a sophisticated approach and edit the interview segments and songs together, the former stand alone between the full performance of each song. In my opinion, it's always a laudable and intelligent approach to allow the music to speak for itself. And should we care to listen, Newcomer's lyrics have much to say that is worth hearing. For those Kronikle readers who do not have access to the internet, the mail order addresses are respectively **CD Freedom, Artist Development Associates, 47 Mellen Street, Framingham, Massachusetts 01702, U.S.A.** and **Rounder Record Corp., Mail Order Dept., 1 Camp Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140, U.S.A.** By the way, don't be deterred by the cost factor, since the entire

video package equates in value to the full retail price of a major label CD here in UK. Plus you get a free CD.

Various **"Kerrville Kampfire Kuts Vol. 1"** Kamp Records [Import]
 Various **"Kerrville Kampfire Kuts Vol. 2"** Kamp Records [Import]
 Various **"Kerrville Folk Festival 2000, Vol. 1"** Kamp Records [Import]

During the 1996 Festival, a cassette titled **"Kerrpilation - Kampfire Kuts - Volume 1"** was in circulation in the campgrounds. My understanding is that the music had been recorded on the Quiet Valley Ranch during the previous year's main festival. The intention was that the recordings would eventually be upgraded to CD. Well, it took a few years. The duo behind the tape project, now front KAMP [Kerrville Acoustic Music Productions], the organisation currently responsible for releasing recordings made on the ranch. The twenty-one artists featured on **"Kampfire Kuts - Volume 1"** include Dana Cooper, Rex Foster, Jamie Byrd, Steve Fisher, Chuck Pyle, Carol Elliott, Andy Gibson and Buddy Mondlock. Concurrent with the CD release of **"Volume 1," "Volume 2"** appeared. The former disc runs out at sixty-four minutes duration, and while there's only one less cut on the second disc, the tunes stretch the CD duration envelope to three seconds short of seventy-four minutes. Apart from the reappearance of Messrs. Cooper, Fisher, Elliott and Mondlock, the new contributors number Michael Elwood, Steve Gillette, Jon Ims and Peter Yarrow. Oh yes, and don't forget the ever-faithful *kriket khorus* on the night recordings on each disc. You'll note that KAMP's main-stage debut recording is subtitled **"KFF 2000 - Volume 1"**. Available in September last year at the Wine & Music Festival, there's no mention of **"Volume 2"** on the KAMP web site at the moment. It may well arrive during the forthcoming 30th Anniversary main festival. The contributors to **"Volume 1"** include 1999 New Folk winners Suzanne Buirgy and Diane Zeigler, Bill Ward, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Terri Hendrix and thirteen others. As essential as ever, if you're a kommitted Kerrvert. Available from **Kamp Records, PO Box 1411, San Antonio, Texas 78295, U.S.A.** and on the web at www.kampsite.com

Mickey Newbury **"Stories From The Silver Moon Cafe"** Mountain Retreat/Long Hall [Import]
 Various **"Frisco Mabel Joy - Revisited"** Appleseed Recordings [Import]

Ever since I *innocently* purchased a mint, vinyl copy of **"Looks Like Rain"** on the Mercury label in one of those five albums for £1.00 promotional deals many years ago, I've enjoyed a love affair with Newbury's music. Never seen him perform, although I've come close twice. Never failed to buy each new album, and there were a number of occasions when the period between them was painfully long. As for the music, while the tempo rarely changes, Mickey's lyrics never fail to come across as anything less than heartfelt. The guy darned well *lives* each song he performs. A rare skill. From time to time, the marriage of his words and melody leave you breathless, and in awe of the beauty he creates. On **"Stories From The Silver Moon Café," "Dancing Shadows"** - although it has precious few words, and **"A Father's Prayer"** are prime examples of that perfect marriage I mentioned. Thirty years ago, Elektra Records was still in the ownership of Jac Holzman.

Employing many of Nashville's top session musicians, Dennis Linde – a writer and performer in his own right – produced **"Frisco Mabel Joy,"** Newbury's debut for the label. This tribute collection, produced by Peter Blackstock [Editor, No Depression] and Chris Eckman [The Walkabouts], and featuring many performers from the alt. country scene [ED. NOTE. whatever alt. country means ?] is frankly, soul less, patchy and lacklustre for the most part. While the original disc featured eleven tracks, this version contains thirteen. Newbury's "San Francisco Mabel Joy" having already appeared on **"Looks Like Rain."** Added as a bonus cut, it is competently performed by Kris Kristofferson. The other addition, the opening instrumental titled "Prologue," is performed by Bill Frisell, as is "Interlude (Side A)" and "Interlude (Side B)." The foregoing instrumentals succeed in capturing Newbury's ethereal approach, as does Michael Fracasso's contribution "Remember The Good." Silent for half a decade, since he departed Austin for Nashville, David Halley is the only act to truly infiltrate Newbury's spirit with a laid back, yet haunting rendition of "Swiss Cottage Place."

"Stories" is available from **Mountain Retreat, P.O. Box 888, Escanaba, Michigan 49829, U.S.A.** or from **Village Records.** **"Frisco"** is also available from **Village Records.**

Peg Bertsch

I attended the 9th Kerrville Wine & Music Festival last September. The lunchtime programme on Friday 1st September featured a songwriter's-in-the-round concert at Threadgill Theatre. The performers – former Boston restaurateur and now songstress – Mary Gauthier, Jack Saunders – Shake Russell's old partner, and Peggy Bertsch. Familiar with the music of the former pair, Bertsch was the unknown factor. Peggy has yet to record "Who'll Send The Roses," yet the memory of the first song I heard her perform is indelibly stamped on my memory. It poignantly retells the story that following her suicide, former husband and baseball legend, Joe DiMaggio, anonymously had fresh flowers placed on Marilyn Monroe's grave every week. Peggy Bertsch hails from the same college that gave us Karla Bonoff, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Gretchen Peters and Beth Nielsen Chapman. That said, Bertsch's approach to story lines, mark her out as a unique original. The interview that follows was conducted over the Internet between October 2000 and February 2001.

Were you born in Wilton, Connecticut. Was it a rural or urban environment ?

Actually, I was born in Wilmington, Delaware. We moved to Connecticut when I was four and briefly moved back to the Wilmington area, just over the border in Pennsylvania in 1970. My father was very sick with cancer at the time. After he died, my mom moved the family back to Wilton. That was in 1972. I spent all but two of my school years in Wilton, and I really consider that my hometown. It's a suburb of New York City, and just about every dad in town that I

knew commuted into the city every day on the train to some white-collar job in Manhattan, including mine. Most of the moms in Wilton were stay-at-home. It's a fairly typical New England small town – dates back to the 1600's, semi-rural, lots of woods, stone walls around property lines, tree-lined, narrow, winding streets, predominately middle class to upper class. Not very diverse culturally, but close enough to New York so it wasn't too isolated.

Was there a lot of music in the Bertsch household..

I guess my dad was the musical one of my parents. We had a piano from the time I was a little kid. I remember my dad played piano by ear pretty well. I recall playing "Heart and Soul" with him when I was very young – maybe 4 or 5. He died when I was 9, so my memories are pretty hazy. The song "Plain Gold Band" is about how my mom continued to wear her wedding ring after he died, for years and years. My mom and my siblings are somewhat musical, but except for one – my sister Annie, not overwhelmingly so. I would say we all enjoy listening to music very much.



Peggy Bertsch

How many siblings do you have. It sounds like there was an older sister – was she a big influence on you musically and as a person.

I'm the youngest of four. I have two older sisters and an older brother. My sister Annie is closest to me in age – she's four years older. We shared a room until I was about 8. She was the first one to really take up an instrument. My brother Paul got a guitar one Christmas but never really took to it. Annie did. All through High School especially, she played acoustic

guitar and sang at school talent shows and such. She and a friend of hers performed together quite a bit, at nursing homes and things. I think Annie's and my interests as kids mirrored each other a lot - we were both heavily into sports, and music, performed in plays, all that stuff. So I guess she was a major influence on me. I'm very close to everyone in my family, but Annie and I are the most alike.

What's the first piece of music that you remember made you stop in your tracks and listen to it.

Wow. I'm not sure I know! I was *always* listening to records as a kid, but most of it was "kid stuff" - Disney recordings and such. We didn't have videos in those days, you know. I remember listening to my dad's Herb Alpert records - "**Whipped Cream**." I remember "Peter and the Wolf." As far as being fully conscious of stopping in my tracks, I distinctly remember sitting in the living room listening to Elton John's "**Goodbye Yellow Brick Road**" album - it probably belonged to my sister Annie - through headphones, particularly "Bennie and the Jets." There was one part near the end, sort of a duelling organ lick with a lot of stereo separation that sounded so *cool* in the headphones. I remember that blowing me away. I would listen to it over and over. I think the first album I remember buying with my own money was Stevie Wonder's "**Songs In The Key Of Life**."

Did you have piano lessons that you didn't want, as a youngster.

Yes, Annie and I took piano lessons for about a year, from the nuns at school. We went to Catholic school. It wasn't exactly my idea of a good time. My parents were always trying to force us to practice. They eventually gave up and we stopped taking lessons. I kept playing piano now and then after that. Annie had started playing guitar, mostly self-taught, and she would teach me some things on it. When we moved back to Connecticut after my dad died, I ended up going to public school for one year - the class at the Catholic school was full. There was a middle school band with lessons, for free. I took clarinet, mostly because a friend of mine knew someone who had a clarinet they could lend me. I loved being in the band. Once I went back to Catholic school the following year, there really wasn't a lot of money for private lessons. Instead, I spent a lot of time in my room, playing guitar. We had a choir at school, and a group that played at the folk mass at church. I later attended the public high school in Wilton, which had a wonderful fine arts programme. I took music theory, sang in the Madrigal group and did plays. My music teachers in high school had a very profound influence on me. They worked their students pretty hard, and when we performed outside the school - in my case with the Madrigal group - we had to be very

professional. I had a lot of friends in high school who pursued music and performing careers, mostly in the theatre or in classical music - opera and symphony.

When did you first play music in public.

I remember performing Joni Mitchell's "Circle Game" at some kind of assembly in fifth grade. I probably learned the song from Annie. I really don't remember how that came up, or why I performed. It might have been a talent show or something. I don't think the other kids knew what to make of it, but I think the teachers were sort of amused at a little 10 year old girl with this big dreadnought guitar, playing a Joni Mitchell song.

When did you write your first song. Do you keep notebooks and write down ideas.

I might've written now and then as a kid or in college, writing a song or bits and pieces of songs, but never anything where I felt like I had the hang of it or that I spent a lot of time on. After college I moved to California, and something clicked. I joined the Northern California Songwriters Association (NCSA) and took classes and worked very hard at it. I know the first time I wrote a song that really felt like something with potential was after I got my heart broken by a guy -typical story where you love someone who doesn't love you back. It was called "Love Dies Hard." It got me noticed by some people. I used to pitch it to publishers from Nashville and LA at NCSA events, and I got some very encouraging reactions to it. That's when a few *real* publishers started to call me and ask me for more material. I didn't have any other songs at that point. I mean, I had a few others I would play for them, but I knew deep down they weren't at the level they needed to be. It really was the Kerrville Folk Festival that opened the floodgates. I'd met Michael McNevin and Steve Seskin through NCSA and they kept telling me I had to go to Kerrville. I went for the first time in 1993. I was absolutely blown away by all the writers and songs I heard there. I think I had started getting caught up in the whole *write for the radio* thing, because of the publishers I'd started to meet and the feedback they were giving me. I was in this mode of wanting to please *them*. Then I went to Kerrville, and I came back determined to dig a little deeper and write songs that pleased *me*. It was a huge turning point for me. In the end, after I pulled back from pitching songs and paying so much attention to the publishers' reactions, and just focused on writing songs that felt good to me personally, I got even stronger interest from publishers. That's what led to my moving to Nashville. I've never had a formal deal here, but I had some people interested in me. I *did lunch* a few times to talk about possible deals, with some well-known publishers in town. I worked with

some of them informally. A publishing deal can be a double-edged sword. If you already write songs that fit what publishers here want, it's an easier transition. If you are on the fringe of what they want, it's more problematic. You have to make more adjustments, and sometimes it's not what you want to do creatively. If you're signed to them and they're paying you an advance, there is a sense of obligation to give them what they want. I've always been considered a *fringe* writer as far as Nashville is concerned, so I think I was always a little reticent to set my sights solely on going for a publishing deal. Even so, I've been fortunate to find some very supportive people inside the Nashville music industry circles. I'd still like to pursue that side of things, of maybe getting major label artists to record my songs. I just don't know that I want it to be my total focus. There are pitfalls on that road. I'm not nearly as disciplined or prolific with my writing as I'd like to be or need to be. I do keep notebooks, and jot down song ideas or scraps of lyrics. Sometimes I keep a journal, and songs have occasionally come out of that. I have a stifling internal editor that gets in my way sometimes, and I can go long periods without finishing a song. That's something I'd like to change. I wouldn't say I write on the road as a rule, but the road is very good at loosening things up. It's a change of scenery, I guess. When I come off the road, I find it easier to write. There is one song on the CD - "Long Way Down" - that I pretty much wrote in one day in my tent while at Kerrville. It's unusual for me to finish something that quickly.

Are you comfortable with co-writing.

Co-writing is very prevalent in Nashville, but I never quite got into the groove of it. Not because I don't believe in it for some people, but because I have a very introverted writing style. I dwell on song ideas and lyrics during long walks in the woods or long drives. I like to let ideas simmer. I'm not as good at sitting in a room and bouncing ideas around and trying to take a song from start to finish in a matter of hours. I have co-written, though. Steve Seskin, who has a bunch of country hits, and I have written a few songs together. We've known each other a long time. I've written with a couple of people I know through NCSA. I've had a couple of *blind date* co-writes set up by publishers here in Nashville, with other writers they work with. I would definitely still like to try some co-writes with other writers I've become good friends with. I believe some people are more cut out for co-writing, and I might not be one of them. I've had the opportunity to get to know Gretchen Peters a little bit in the last year or so. She invited me to participate in an ASCAP workshop she was moderating in Nashville, and I was struck by how much I identified with what she shared about her own writing process.

She doesn't co-write that much, either, for a lot of the same reasons that I don't. Maybe we're just control freaks when it comes to our songs.

Did you move to California because your family moved there, or because you went to College there.

I moved to California after college. I attended Virginia Tech and was a computer science major and math minor - though I can't remember much of the college math ! I took a job in Silicon Valley. I lived in and around San Jose, just south of San Francisco, for 12 years and worked full-time doing software development at Hewlett-Packard.

Tell us more about Virginia Tech.

The *official* name is Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University - universally known as Virginia Tech, and sometimes VPI for short, among old-timers. It's in Blacksburg, a small town in the southwest corner of Virginia, in the Blue Ridge mountains. My brother and sister-in-law were doing graduate work there when I was looking at schools, which is how I came to know about it.

Tell us the name of the radio show that you played on for six years

It's actually a pretty funny story. I had started jamming with some guys from work, who were a little older than I am and used to have a rock band back in the '60s, but their lead singer wasn't around anymore. They just wanted to get together once a week and jam on the tunes they used to play. I would sing some lead vocals for them. They also let me mess around on keyboards, kind of build up some chops playing with them. I bought a good Korg M1 keyboard and was learning how to program different sound patches and everything. These guys got me listening to classic rock and blues/rock - early Kinks, Rolling Stones, John Mayall - stuff that I didn't really listen to growing up. I started listening to an album-oriented rock radio station - KOME-FM in San Jose - just to get more familiar with some of those bands. The morning show had the typical American radio morning team - a comic and a straight man, doing funny bits and prank phone calls and such in between the music and news and traffic reports. They also did *live* shows once a month, with an audience, at a restaurant or hotel in town somewhere. One time they had Joe Walsh as a guest, and he did a song on acoustic guitar. The comic/DJ - Jeff Blazy - decided they should put together a house band for the shows, so they could have musical guests do full-out performances. The band would play instrumental covers during commercial breaks to entertain the live audience. It was very much like what David Letterman's band does on TV. Blazy decided to hold phone-in auditions. It was really more of a comic *bit*

for him, but he had people call in and put the phone down next to their amp and play for 30 seconds, *live on air*. It really was pretty hilarious. On the day he asked for keyboard players, I decided what the heck and called. I was the ONLY person who called which is the only reason I got the gig. All the *finalists* for the various instruments met at a bar one night with Blazy, so he could see if we looked like responsible people who would get up at 4.00am in time for a 6.00am show. We were on the air from 6.00–9.00am. He picked a drummer, bass player, guitar player and me on keyboards. Called us, The Blazers. Two weeks later, we had our first show, and Greg Kihn was the guest. We played "The Breakup Song" and "Jeopardy" with him. I think Blazy and the folks at the station thought the band would last maybe a couple of shows and the bit would run its course, but it turned out we really weren't bad. We kept going, doing about one show a month for six years. I played with some amazing people. We also played in the local clubs doing cover tunes. It was a pretty popular radio show, but KOME was an Infinity station – a big corporate company that owns a lot of radio stations in the US – and eventually they decided to run Howard Stern's syndicated show on KOME in the morning. That was basically the end of it. A few years later, the radio station folded or got bought out or something. It no longer exists. It was a fun, fun time. I'll never forget it.

Did the show have a name.

The morning show was known as "Blazy and Bob" – the names of the two on-air personalities. They dubbed the monthly live shows we did as, "The Breakfast Club" shows – the audience members were called The Breakfast Club. We were on the air from 1988 – 1994.

Presumably this was while you were still working for Hewlett Packard.

Yes. At first, I would go directly to work from the show and work late those days to make up for it. My managers at HP were very cool. After a while, they let me make up the time over the weekend or whatever – otherwise it was an exhausting day, to get up at 3.00 or 4.00am and work until 8.00pm at night. But I think my HP co-workers got a kick out of me being involved in it, because a lot of them listened to that radio station in the mornings and the live shows. People would stop me in the hallway at work all the time and tell me they'd heard the band on the show.

Did you perform in public as a solo act or in other configurations.

Except for the radio band and my "jam" band, I've pretty much always done solo acoustic stuff.

Sometimes I miss the energy that comes from playing with other people. It might be fun to try a duo or trio sometime.

What was the name of the '60's band that you jammed with.

I'm not sure, to be honest ! I think they told me once that they called themselves Three Penny Opera in college. They said they played campus parties and things like that. I'm pretty sure it was exclusively a cover band that played around San Jose, California area. Most of them went to San Jose State University, I think. Here's some trivia – one of the guys, Ed Oates, was one of the *founding fathers* of Oracle, the software/database giant. He ended up building a really nice house with a recording studio after Oracle's stock went public, so we had a much nicer place to jam after the house was done. The guys were great about letting me bring in songs I'd written – this was very early on, when I really didn't know what I was doing – and we'd work up band arrangements for them. They were great about that, it gave me a safe place to experiment, and they were enormously supportive.

How many live dates do you play a year.

It varies, but I'm not a road warrior. I decided to buy a house a couple of years ago, and I like to actually get to spend some time in it. I'm a homebody in many ways. I play around Nashville at the various writer nights, and I probably average a couple out-of-area dates a month. I would like to increase that significantly in the next year or so, so that I'm playing three weekends a month, and maybe going out on the road for two or three weeks at a time several times a year. Maybe start to play overseas, if possible. I'm slowly building things up, region by region.

Have you ever toured outside the States. Your song "Hiding In The Stone" indicates you've visited Europe.

No, I've never played outside the States. I would like to ! I spent three months in Italy back when I was working full-time writing software. My company sent me there for a project. That's when I went to Florence for the weekend, and saw "The David". "Hiding In The Stone" wasn't written right away. It was several years later. I was writing in my journal and recalled the tour guide saying something about Michelangelo having the idea of something hiding in the stone. That's when the song came into being.

When did you decide to move to Nashville.

I came to Nashville in 1996. I had been thinking about moving for several years, but in part, the timing

was related to getting much stronger nibbles about a songwriting deal. At the time, that was something I was sort of heading towards. Plus, most of my family has migrated over the years to South Carolina, and I wanted to be closer to them. I like being within driving distance, so I can visit more often.

Did you release any tapes before "Hiding In The Stone."

Not really. I had a pre-production tape of about six songs I did with Cliff Goldmacher, my co-producer for **"Hiding In the Stone,"** that I called **"Songs Off The Closet Shelf."** I never really meant it to be released formally. It was a pre-cursor to the CD. I would give it out at Folk Alliance, or trade with other singer/songwriters at Kerrville and such. The production is a little different, but the songs are all on the CD.

How did you meet your co-producer Cliff Goldmacher. I'm intrigued by "Cliff's Walk-In Closet."

Cliff and I met in California, about 1992 or so. He went to Stanford University, and was active for a while in the NCSA. I would run into him over the years after he moved back to Tennessee - he's from Memphis originally. He was working for The Performing Songwriter Magazine, so he would be at Kerrville and other places representing the magazine. Michael McNevin was staying at my house one time in Nashville, and had set up a session at Cliff's studio. Afterwards, Michael told me I should go over there and record some stuff with Cliff, so I did. It is a very small studio in Cliff's apartment. He literally converted a walk-in closet into a recording booth of sorts - hence the name. He does some amazing work in that little space. I think my CD might be the first full-length CD project he produced at that studio. Since then he's worked with a bunch of other artists, including our mutual friend Tom Kimmel. In fact, Tom had heard the pre-production tape I'd done with Cliff, which sort of led to his meeting Cliff and recording his CD **"Short Stories"** there. It was kind of unusual working there, but in a fun way. Sometimes we'd set up to do acoustic guitar parts in the bathroom, which we dubbed "the tile room," because it had nice acoustics. If Cliff's neighbour had the TV up too loud, it would bleed through the wall into the closet and get picked up by the vocal microphones. Cliff would have to go ask his neighbour to turn it down for an hour. Luckily, Cliff's the kind of guy that gets along with everyone, so his neighbours were always very obliging. Actually, during the months I was recording there, one of Cliff's neighbours thwarted a burglary while Cliff was out of town. He confronted a guy walking off with Cliff's TV set and scared him off. Cliff said the burglar had already unplugged all of the studio gear, including his computer where all the mix data was stored, but hadn't had a chance to load any

of it into his car before the neighbour intervened. Luckily we didn't lose anything we'd been working on for the CD !

There's an all-star cast of players on your album, including guitarist George Marinelli (Bruce Hornsby, Bonnie Raitt), Grammy-winner Mark Prentice on bass; Andrea Zonn (Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith), session player John Catchings on strings. Were these all people you knew or Cliff knew.

That was mostly Cliff's doing. The only one I'd met previously was George Marinelli. I'd recorded a demo of a song I'd co-written, at George's home studio one time - my co-writer knew George. I loved George's playing, but I don't know if I would've felt comfortable asking George myself, since I barely knew him. Cliff knows him very well. Cliff knows a lot of people. He not only has a great ear musically, but he's extremely personable. He likes to have fun when he works, and so he finds people to work with who are also fun. The whole experience was just very enjoyable.

I presume your backing vocalists - Michael Lille, Tom Kimmel, Kate Wallace, and Michael McNevin - were all acquaintances from touring.

Michael McNevin and I have been very close friends for about eight years. Tom, Katie, and Michael Lille were sort of acquaintances and friends-of-friends, but in 1997 I spent a lot of time with them at Kerrville, and we got to know each other very well after that. I was lucky to have them on the CD, they're a very talented bunch.

When do you plan to do your next CD.

I think the schedule will be driven by when I have a group of songs together that I like, including some covers of other writers' songs. Ideally, if it works out, I think I'd like to have something out by the end of 2002 or early 2003. I want the timing to be more conducive next time, where I can focus on really promoting the CD heavily once it's done. One thing that limits me right now is time, and the fact that when you are a "do-it-yourself" artist, there is so much to do yourself -including booking and managing your performing career. I can't say I haven't thought about trying to hook up with a label, if one was interested, because that helps so much with the logistics of promotion and distribution - but I also have friends with lots of horror stories about their label experiences. I know it's important to choose carefully and for the right reasons.

Why do you enter songwriting competitions. Is it to satisfy some perverse wish to be disappointed.

Hah ! Honestly, for me, my participation has a lot to do with building relationships - with the sponsoring

festival promoters, with the audience, and particularly with the other writers in the contest. I've made some really amazing friends after having been in one of these contests. It's not a cut-throat thing at all. It's fun, and although it gets a little weird from time to time being *in competition*, I don't think [most] contestants place much importance on winning or losing. Everyone knows it's a very subjective process. At least that's been my experience with these things. On the practical/business side, I've also got gigs from it, been able to expand the areas I tour in, etc. It does help a little in getting bookings with people who aren't otherwise familiar with you. If you can say you've won some of these things, I think some venue bookers are more willing to take a chance on you.

You won the 2000 Wildflower Arts and Music Festival performing songwriter competition. If my memory is correct, Bill & Mary Muse are involved in organising that festival.

Bill and Mary are great people. They were involved with Wildflower up until 1999, helping book one of the music stages, but I don't think they are as much anymore. The people with the City of Richardson, Texas (just outside Dallas), which sponsors this festival, are *great*. They are particularly accommodating of the contestants for the performing songwriter competition, and really make it worth the trip. Chuck Pyle, MC's the contest every year, I think. The folks from Uncle Calvin's Coffeeshouse in Dallas also help out. They are a truly wonderful bunch, and Uncle Calvin's is a really great place to play.

In 1995 you won the Napa Valley Music Festival emerging songwriter competition. Was my pal Toby Rodman running the competition at this stage.

Actually, Toby often tells me I'm "*to blame*" for him getting involved in music festivals. We met through the NCSA, and I guess I was being my usual evangelistic self about festivals like Napa and Kerrville and how great they are, and Toby started getting more involved until one thing led to another, and now he's the contest chairman at Napa. I was a finalist in 1994, and again in 1995 when I was one of the winners, and moved to Nashville six months later. I think Toby took over in 1996 or 1997. By the way, I know we were both saddened to hear about Al Grierson's death. Al and I met as Napa finalists in 1994. That's what I mean about contests being the catalyst for meeting great people.

In 2000 you were nominated for the Just Plain Folks Independent Music Awards. I don't know who Plain Folks are.

Just Plain Folks is sort of a grass-roots organisation of mostly independent artists/songwriters. They have a website (www.jpfolks.com). One of my friends, Mary

Coppin, who I originally met when we were finalists at the South Florida Folk Festival in 1999, told me about them and said I should send in my CD. There is a network of mentors from the industry who answer questions, and then it's kind of a mutual support network for indie artists. I didn't really know what I was getting into when I sent in a copy of the CD, and the next thing I know, I'd been nominated for those awards. I came second with "12.01." That song came out of an interview I saw Ted Koppel do on "**Nightline**" several years back – it's a news TV show here in the US. Koppel has done several pieces on the prison system in the US, and capital punishment, and in this case he travelled down to Texas to witness an execution. He interviewed the convict about to be executed – a man with mental retardation who had the emotional makeup of a child of about 10 or 12 – and his lawyer, and a chaplain at the prison who had to be present in the chamber when the execution was carried out. This chaplain was a very mild-mannered man named Carroll Pickett, and I was very struck by the contradictions the whole thing posed for him – this man of God who preached salvation and forgiveness, and then had to watch a man be put to death. It clearly wasn't easy for him. I changed a few things around in the song, but it is about Carroll Pickett. This all happened before "**Dead Man Walking**" came out (the movie at least), and before I heard Steve Earle's song "Ellis Unit One," which I think is utterly brilliant. It can't be said any better than Earle said it, in that song or in the others he's written on the subject. He's a very outspoken opponent of the death penalty.

You've been a finalist in the South Florida Folk Festival (1999, 2000), the Sierra Songwriters Festival (1999) and the KRCL Founders Folk & Bluegrass Festival (1999). Tell us about them.

South Florida Folk Festival takes place in Fort Lauderdale every January, and is a very nice, intimate weekend festival. They have several Florida artists, who are well-known in acoustic circles, who often play there. For instance, Rod MacDonald, Amy Carol Webb, Sam Pacetti – plus some very good national touring artists like Buddy Mondlock, Kim & Reggie Harris, Melanie. The Sierra Festival is held in Northern California. They've had some site changes over the years, but it's basically in the same location as the High Sierra festival. This is also a nice weekend festival. I think it's just been going on for several years, but attracts some great talent. The year I went, they had Christine Lavin and Guy Clark as two of their headliners. KRCL is a radio station in Salt Lake City, UT and they sponsor a contest there that's tied to a festival in Park City, UT. That's a beautiful part of the country. The contest is a "pre-cursor" to the festival, and as a competition it's just starting to grow a little bit.

What made you write the "Who'll Send The Roses" song. Did you read the story somewhere.

I think I read it in the paper. I was a huge New York Yankees fan growing up, knew all the players past and present, and so I was very tuned into all the news coverage when DiMaggio died. People always talked about how private Joe DiMaggio was, and how he never wanted to talk about Marilyn. Apparently, he sent roses to Marilyn's grave every week for twenty years, but then someone in the press wrote about it or asked him about it, and he stopped because he didn't want any press coverage. He's sort of a tragic figure, really. I think he had a very hard edge to him that was at odds with his image as the unflappable ball player.

Also explain how you came to write the song you played at Threadgill's about Amelia Earhart's male co-pilot.

Somehow, I became fascinated with the story of Amelia Earhart. I mean, of course I'd always known about her and the circumstances of her disappearance, but not really all the details of it. I knew *nothing* about Fred Noonan, her navigator, and that's what really struck me. This very interesting man - he was a merchant sailor at 16, a riverboat captain, a pioneer in airline navigation, and a drunk who lost his job at Pan Am because of his drinking - had sort of been swallowed up by history. I thought there were so many parallels between him trying to find that tiny little island in the Pacific Ocean on that last flight, and him being this tiny footnote in the legend of Amelia Earhart, so I wanted to write the song from his point of view. It's called "Island In The Ocean."

Have you had any covers or holds in Nashville yet.

No, not yet. I honestly don't try as hard as you need to. You need to be very active and persistent in this town, and I don't spend enough time pursuing it. That's where co-writing in this town really helps, it can help you stay more connected to the goings-on down on Music Row.

How many songs have you written in total.

Not many. Like I said earlier, I'm hard to please. A lot of songs I wrote early on, I never play any more. I think I probably have about eight songs that I could still see myself wanting to play in five or ten years time, and another twenty or so that will fall by the wayside. I always find it hard to write the kind of song that doesn't feel like you've outgrown it a year or two later.

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"Hiding In The Stone" - The Songs

There are ten tracks on "Hiding In The Stone," and I've already made it quite clear what I think of the recording. I asked Peg if she'd care to give us an insight into the creation of each song. This is what she wrote.....

"Gravity" - I had started the song and had a sense of the overall concept, most of the chorus lines were in my notebook, but it came into focus when I saw an old but not-very-good Burt Reynolds movie called "Paternity." He plays a confirmed bachelor who wants to have a child, and there's a scene when he's explaining to someone why he wants to be a father. He talks about how kids can do amazing stunts, scary things like riding their bikes on the narrow ledge of a cement wall, because they don't know about gravity yet. But that one day, probably in the fourth grade, their teacher will tell them about gravity, and that will be the day they finally fall and get hurt. And he wanted to be there on the day his kid learned about gravity. That was the one scene in the movie that stuck with me. That concept gave me the metaphor I was looking for in the first verse, and got the song off the ground.

"Company Town" - I was watching a CBS news-TV program that did a report on "the outsourcing of America" - profiling different businesses who had moved their operations overseas to save on operating expenses. One of the segments was about the software industry, and I had been affected by that - several years ago my company had decided to reduce investment in the project I had spent a lot of time and energy on by moving it overseas. Lots of people I worked with were bitter about the way it was handled, including me. I eventually left my job because of it, and rather than take another software job (they were plentiful in California), I moved to Nashville to pursue music. So here I am watching this report, feeling bitter again about the whole experience, when they did another segment called "Company Town" about a small town in Alabama that lost its textile factory to South America. And it wasn't like these people had other jobs to go to, like I did - that factory had been the main employer in town for generations. I realised how lucky I was to have the options I had, and felt guilty for feeling even the least bit sorry for myself. I imagined what it must be like to really have your livelihood taken away, and I wrote the song about that town.

"Changing of the Guard" - This came out of my grandmother's 90th birthday party. My extended family is very close. I spent a lot of time with cousins and aunts and uncles growing up. We were all reunited for the first time in years for that party. We'd had those family gatherings a lot when I was a kid, in that same house, and I was just very aware of the

nostalgia and the sense of generational transformation. The parents were now the grandparents, the children were now the parents. I was very thankful that our family ties were so strong, and were being passed down to the next generation.

"Hiding In The Stone" - Seeing Michelangelo's "The David" was an amazing experience for me. But before you reach the room where "David" is, you pass through a hallway with some of Michelangelo's unfinished works, where he was trying to portray figures as "prisoners" trapped in the stone, that he was trying to free. His philosophy as a sculptor was that he wasn't making something out of the stone, he was just finding what God had hidden inside. I was thinking about that several years later when I was going through a tough time personally, and I realised that philosophy was useful to a lot more than just sculpting.

"12:01" - This came out of a report Ted Koppel did on the ABC TV-news show **"Nightline."** He went down to Texas year's back to cover an execution. There was some controversy about this particular execution. The convicted man was borderline mentally disabled, and had the cognitive skills of a 10 or 12 year-old child. What really struck me was the interview Koppel did with a prison chaplain named Carroll Pickett, who as spiritual advisor, was present at many executions. Mr. Pickett was a very thoughtful, mild-mannered man who struggled with having to watch men that he counselled be put to death. It was very difficult for him, and seemed in direct conflict with his own religious beliefs, but it was his job and he did what he could for the condemned men. I started writing the song that night, after hearing him speak. I took some poetic license with the character in the song, but I hope, on the whole, it's true to what Mr. Pickett felt and believed.

"On Solid Ground" - This just sort of grew out of my experimenting in an alternate tuning on my guitar. And a letter I received from a friend who was going through a long and difficult break up, where he wrote *"love is a lot of things, but easy isn't one of them."*

"Plain Gold Band" - The seed for this one was planted at a songwriters workshop with Jon Ims, who taught for many years at the Kerrville Song School and also a workshop for the Nashville Songwriters Association International. Jon had us do a free-form stream-of-consciousness type exercise where we wrote down things that came to mind when we thought of our mothers. I thought of my mother's wedding band, which she had always worn despite being widowed for twenty-odd years. I tried writing the song several times about my parents specifically, but I always got stuck somehow. After a couple of

years, all I had was the chorus. Then I saw Tom Brokaw interview a woman from Indiana who had lost her husband in WWII. It was probably a precursor to his book **"The Greatest Generation."** This woman had a box with all kinds of memento's, which is something my mother is famous for, too. I started imagining sitting down with that woman and talking to her about her life and her husband, like I sometimes do with my mom. The song just fell out after that. It's not my parents' story exactly, but in many ways, it is.

"Tell Me Something I Don't Know" - I call this my **"When Harry Met Sally"** song, because I have a history of having close friendships with guys that, when one person or the other realises they want more than being friends, all of the sudden you're at a crossroads. It can be terrifying to act on it. The friendship doesn't always survive if both people don't feel the same, but you don't know until you risk it. I've been on both sides of that equation, but one time in particular I was the one who fell in love and finally said it out loud. The response wasn't quite what I had hoped, though.

"Long Way Down" - I'm not sure where it came from. I had part of the first verse and chorus lyrically, and a vague idea of what I thought it might sound like musically. It was running through my head on a drive from Nashville to Kerrville. When I got to Kerrville, we had some rainy weather and one day I was just holed up in my tent with my guitar. The rest of the song sort of fell out. I hadn't really gotten to know a lot of people at Kerrville at that stage, but I played the song around a campfire that night, introducing it as something I wrote in my tent that day. When I was finished, Tom Kimmel said, *"You ought to spend more time in that tent !"* The song became an ice-breaker for me that year at Kerrville. It's how a lot of my friendships with people like Tom, Michael Lille and Tom Prasada-Rao and Kate Wallace (among others) started.

"Something Fine" - I've always loved this Jackson Browne song, one of several from his debut album that remain favourites all these albums later. Some of the imagery in the lyric just knocks me out. The first verse is an absolute favourite of mine. I didn't know for the longest time what the song was about exactly, especially the Morocco reference, except that I identified with the sense of letting life get the better of you sometimes, and needing a good memory that makes you smile to help you through. Recently, someone told me it's about a poet friend of Jackson's who died unexpectedly. The friend really loved spending time in Morocco. For me, I guess listening to a good Jackson Brown song has always had the power to make me smile, give me that taste of something fine.

A Kerrverts Festival 50.



There is a reason, There is a rhyme,
There is a season, There is a time,
and then, there's the latest KERRVERTS FESTIVAL 50.

1. The Dutchman **MICHAEL SMITH** "Michael Smith/Love Stories" Flying Fish FF70404 [1991]. #
2. The Way To Calvary **ROD MACDONALD** "Highway To Nowhere" Shanachie 8001 [1992].
3. Years **BETH NIELSEN CHAPMAN** "Beth Nielsen Chapman" Reprise 9 26172-2 [1990].
4. Memory Of August **MICHAEL SMITH** "There" Bird Avenue BA 002 [2001]. #
5. There **MICHAEL SMITH & JAMES LEE STANLEY** "Two Man Band Two" Beachwood Recordings BAR 24262 [2000]. #
6. Yarrington Town **MICKIE MERKENS** "Texas Summer Nights, Vol. 1" Potato Satellite PS2-1000 [1983]. #
7. Compass & Companion **MARK ERELLI** "Compass & Companion" Signature Sounds SIG 1263 [2001]. #
8. Changing Of The Guard **PEGGY BERTSCH** "Hiding In The Stone" Side Porch Music SP-09702-3 [2000]. #
9. Take It Out Back **CHUCK BRODSKY** "Last Of The Old Time" Red House RHR CD 141 [2000].
10. One More Circle **PETER MAYER** "Million Year Mind" Blue Boat BB1204 [2000]. #
11. Gone **BILL WARD** "Skyline" Post No Bills Music SDR 1002 [2000]. #
12. O Shenandoah/Sail Away **JANE SIBERRY** "Hush" Sheeba SHE008 [2000]. #
13. Before I Knew Your Name **MARK ERELLI** "Compass & Companion" Signature Sounds SIG 1263 [2001]. #
14. Teddy Roosevelt **TOM PACHECO/STEINAR ALBRIGTSEN** "Nobodies" Norske Gramas [2000]. ^
15. The Messenger **TERRY CLARKE** "The Sound Of The Moon" Appaloosa AP146 [2000]. ^
16. A Father's Prayer **MICKEY NEWBURY** "Stories From The Silver Moon Café" Mountain Retreat MR 8160-2 [2000]. #
17. My Father Painted Houses **BOB MARTIN** "Next To Nothin'" Riversong Records RS2A [2000]. #
18. The Prodigal **KATE CAMPBELL** "Wandering Strange" Eminent Records EM-25050-2 [2001]. #
19. Ballad Of Gruene Hall **IAIN MATTHEWS/AD VANDERVEEN** "The Iain Adventure" Perfect Pitch PP 008 [2000]. ^
20. Kindred Skin **DENICE FRANKE** "Comfort" Certain Records DF003 [2001]. #
21. Lucky Penny **EDDI READER** "Simple Soul" Compass Records 7 4302-2 [2001]. #
22. Shenandoah **DAVE ALVIN** "Public Domain" Hightone HCD 8122 [2000]. #
23. Picasso And Me **GRETCHEN PETERS** "Gretchen Peters" Grapevine GRACD 282 [2000].
24. I Just Wanna Get Warm **MARK HEARD** "Mystery Mind" Fingerprint FP0001 [2000]. #
25. Sundance **BOBBY BRIDGER** "A Ballad Of The West" Golden Egg Records no index no. [2000]. #
26. Everybody's Talkin' **VAR./WILLIE NELSON** "The I-10 Chronicles" Back Porch 72438-48991-2-7 [2000]. #
27. I'm A Dreamer **NO GREY FAITH** "Secrets All Told...the Songs Of Sandy Denny" Perfect Pitch PP007 [2000].
28. When We Begin **ELLIS PAUL** "Live" Philo 11671-1229-2 [2000]. #
29. Just To Hold You Through The Night **RICHARD DOBSON** "Global Village Garage" no label/no index no. [2000]. #
30. If It Wasn't For The Wind **DAVID OLNEY** "Omar's Blues" Dead Reckoning DEAR 0016 [2000]. #
30. Out Of The Blue **SUZZY ROCHE** "Songs From An Unmarried Housewife And Mother, Greenwich Village, USA" Red House RHR CD 136 [2000]. #
31. Used Cars **ANI DIFRANCO** "Badlands - A Tribute To Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska" Sub-Pop SPCD 525 [2000]. #
32. Torn In Two **ROD PICOTT** "Tiger Tom Dixon's Blues" Welding Rod Music no index no. [2001]. #
33. Emily Sparks **RICHARD BUCKNER** "The Hill" Convent Records CV01 [2000]. #
34. Single Voice **CHRISTINE LAVIN** "Getting In Touch With My Inner Bitch" Christine Lavin Records CL 003 [2000]. #
35. Riding In My Car **VAR./BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** "Til We Outnumber 'Em" Righteous Babe Records RBR019-D [2000]. #
36. Ode To Camelot **BANDED GECKOS** "Gecko Canyon" Spanish Omelet 00400 [2000]. #
37. Urge To Going **LUKA BLOOM** "Keeper Of The Flame" Evangeline GEL 4015 [2000].
38. Beauty Way **ELIZA GILKYSON** "Hard Times In Babylon" Red House RHR CD 146 [2000]. #
39. Sleepless **JANN ARDEN** "Blood Red Cherry" Universal 012157527-2 [2000]. #
40. Another Woman's Man **CHRISTINE LAVIN** "The Bellevue Years" Philo 11671-1220-2 [2000]. #
41. Say Goodnight **LUCIE BLUE TREMBLAY** "Because Of You..." Maggie & Shanti Musique MSMCD1005 [2001]. #
42. Fire In The Sky **SALAMANDER CROSSING** "Henry Street" Signature Sounds SIG 1261 [2000]. #
43. Prairie Lullaby **SARAH ELIZABETH CAMPBELL & THE BANNED** "Live" 9991 4090-SEC [1999]. #
44. Cloud Song **JESS KLEIN** "Draw Them Near" Rykodisc SRRCD 56 [2000]. #
45. Moon On The Water **TERRI HENDRIX** "Places In Between" Wilory Records WR 30003 [2000]. #
46. O Canada Girls **DAR WILLIAMS** "The Green World" Razor & Tie 7930182860-2 [2000].
47. We Are Each Other's Angels **SARAH HICKMAN** "Spiritual Appliances" Shanachie 8034 [2000]. #
48. Poetry Of Lies **PATTY LARKIN** "Regrooving The Dream" Vanguard 79552-2 [2000]. #
49. Forgiveness **DIANE ZIEGLER** "These Are The Roots" no label/no index no. [2000]. #
50. Heal In The Wisdom **BOBBY BRIDGER** "Kerrville Folk Festival - Live 1986" (cassette only, no index no.) [1987]. #



waitin' their turn - A Saint's Complaint **JOHN GORKA** "The Company You Keep" Red House RHR CD 151 [2001] ; Navy Blue **IAIN MATTHEWS/ELLIOTT MURPHY** "La Terre Commune" Blue Rose BLU CDD231 [2001] ; On Top Of Old Smoky **WEAVERMANIA** "Live" Depot Recordings DEP-025 [2001] ; I Can't Cry Hard Enough **THE GOOD SONGS** "Happiness" Floating World FW009 [2001] :

NOTE. All albums released in the UK, unless marked otherwise. US releases marked #. European releases ^. Japanese releases *. Introductory rhyme taken from the Bobby Bridger song, "Heal In The Wisdom" - The Kerrville Folk Festival Anthem.

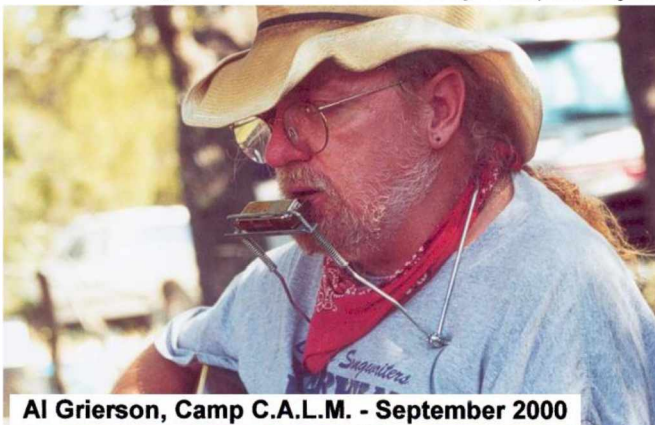
Contents.

Kerrville - kompacts, kassettes & other koincidences	p.2
Mark Erelli interview 05/06/99	p.3
Mark Erelli talks about " Compass & Companion " and other stuff 02/01	p.12
Kerrville - kompacts [cont.]	p.14
Peggy Bertsch interview 02/01	p.23
The latest Kerrville Festival Top 50	p.31

Editorial.

In the closing paragraph of her article about the art of writing songs, in the November 2000 issue of "**Performing Songwriter**," Beth Nielsen Chapman mentioned her recent battle with breast cancer. As of a late January 2001 posting on her web site, Chapman appears to be in good spirits and on the mend. May a full recovery come her way, sooner rather than later.

More sad news. On September 2nd last year Al Grierson was driving to his home in Luckenback, having just taught a music lesson in a local school, when his truck stalled on a weir. Getting out of the vehicle, presumably to try to restart it, Grierson was washed away by a flash flood and subsequently perished. A regular around the Kerrville campfires, Grierson was much admired by his peers. Grierson released two recordings "**Things That Never Added Up To Me**" [1995] and "**A Candle For Durruti**" [1999]. Among a myriad of tributes made at the time of Al's passing, the following came from Dave Carter. "*I always thought he deserved wider recognition than he got in his life time, and he was going to record his next CD in our basement studio. At Kerrville this summer, we spent all one night playing our new stuff for each other up on Chapel Hill, and wandering around to out-of-the-way campfires just*



Al Grierson, Camp C.A.L.M. - September 2000

playing poetry, not worrying about impressing anybody. Al was the first person I ever played a song for at Kerrville. I wrote a song for him called "Girl From Golden," where he is

*cast as Hades in the myth of Hades and Persephone, which, in the song, takes place in the American West. I also have a song called "Gentle Arms of Eden," written for Tom Noe and Linda Silas, which has a secret last verse about Al. Our plan was to include the secret verse of "Gentle Arms" on our next CD, as a hidden track, but in the end it didn't happen." Once the duo's next album "**Drum Hat Buddha**" is released this summer, Dave and Tracy plan to post MP3 recordings of "Girl From Golden" and "Gentle Arms Of Eden" on their web site.*

Over the next couple of months if you go to Mark Erelli's web site <http://www.markerelli.com> you'll be able to download an MP3 track from his archive. The February download was titled, "My Best Was Not Good Enough For You": Over to Mark, "*I wrote this song after having a lengthy discussion with my friend and fellow songwriter Dave Carter about the late, great Townes Van Zandt. To my ears, it doesn't sound like anything Dave or Townes would have written, but such is the strange nature of inspiration. I wanted to paint a picture of the futility that sets in during that surreal moment when you know you can't stop someone from walking out the door.*" The track was recorded during the "**Compass & Companion**," sessions.

As if to compound the air of gloom pervading this Editorial, just as I was finishing off this issue came the sad news that, on Sunday March 18, John Phillips of the Mamas & Papas died of heart attack in Los Angeles. Although his life led from obscurity to commercial success, on to bacchanalian excess and back to relative obscurity, Phillips was nonetheless a great folk/pop composer.

In this age of dot-coms that rise and fall practically in the blink of an eye, for a couple of years, **Songs.com** appeared to be a non-commercialised haven of sanity and tranquillity for acoustic songwriters. They were a Kerrville Folk Festival Y2K sponsor. Last year **Songs.com** were purchased by Gaylord Entertainments, the company that owns and operates such Nashville attractions as the Grand Old Opry. Sadly, Gaylord have seen fit to pull the plug on **Songs.com**, leaving the raft of writers who self release product adrift in a rather large ocean. Well, almost since there are links to some artist's new sites at the old **Songs.com** location. Will a new phoenix rise?

Regarding the contents of this issue, and in no particular order, thanks are due to **Rod Kennedy, Mark Erelli, Peggy Bertsch** and **Alpha Ray**. This issue is dedicated to the memory of the late, Al Grierson.

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12 July 1983

Eden's first rain fell quietly I'm sure,
not like these fury-filled menaces
that thrash and flash and tear into the limbs
of a Central Texas night,
but the slow-falling gentle dripping hum
of a new morning rain -- the kind to makes the hills
still themselves in misty green and know that they are

Alpha Ray

