

Ed Gerhard “the live album”

- *Interview with Ed Gerhard*

Q: Tell us about the new album!

A: It's basically my own private bootleg, compiled from live tapes I made over the last few years. I've got new versions of older stuff- the record kind of spans my whole recording career- and some new stuff as well.

Q: Tell us about the songs on the album- are they much different from the versions you've already recorded?

A: Well, let's see; the album starts with “Tennessee,” which is from my “Luna” album. This version is a little faster, a little grittier. I dig in a little more. There's also a little intro- some of the other tunes on the record include short, improvisational intros as well. Then there's “Malaika,” which is done on a slightly modified Breedlove 12 string. It sounds kind of weird- like a bouzouki on steroids or something. This version is very different from the one on “Counting the Ways,” both sonically and interpretationally.

Q: You've recorded that song twice on this album. Twice???

A: (Laughs) Yeah, the second version, which we call “Tiny Malaika,” was kind of a fluke. The weekend before I recorded it I was at the NAMM show in LA, where I had just bought a “mandotar,” which is a solid bodied 12-string guitar that's tuned up an entire octave. It's tiny, and just cool as hell. I was playing up in Pistol River, OR and my wife suggested I play it in concert. I brought it to the gig, not really knowing what I was going to do with it. “Malaika” was the first thing to come out. (For more info on Ed's Hammertone “Mandotar,” check out the photo gallery at www.edgerhard.com.) The version I got was a little rough to say the least, but there's so much, I don't know, “charm” I guess; there's a kind of humor and sweetness to it, at least to me, anyway, that I thought “What the hell, let's just put it on.”

Q: You also used the modified 12 string on “Isa Lei.”

A: Again, very different from the one on “Counting the Ways.” A little slower, a little more regretful, I'd say. There are so many sides to great songs like these; I like both versions a lot, and every time I play it in concert it's different still.

Q: You have two songs, “Shallow Brown” and “Homage,” played on a very deep sounding slide guitar...

A: Yeah, it's an acoustic lap steel guitar, made in the style of the old Weissenborn guitars from the 1920s. The sound that comes from those things is just hypnotic. “Shallow Brown” is an old slavery song that I heard way back in elementary school. In the Sixties, we were all getting civil-rights savvy, and occasionally you'd get a hip teacher who would turn you on to stuff like this. I forgot about the tune until many years later, when I heard Martin Simpson's version of this song on his “When I was on Horseback” album. I adapted that, plus what I recalled from my own past. “Homage” is one of my own pieces. It's got this circular kind of melody - it sort of collapses into itself, then reemerges. I dedicate this one to Marcel Dadi and Michael Hedges.

Q: You've got new versions of two of your more popular tunes, “The Handing Down” and “The Water is Wide...”

A: I had only two recorded versions of “The Handing Down” to choose from; I don't really play that one in concert much any more. “The Water is Wide...” well, what can you say about that one? It is as perfect a song as I've ever heard. I recorded this one at my annual Christmas concert in Portsmouth, NH last year.

Q: You're known as being an “audiophile” of sorts. How did you approach the recording of the album? (For a more detailed explanation of Ed's recording gear and techniques, check out the “Technobabble” section at www.edgerhard.com.)

A: I approached it in a very casual way. I've been asked regularly over the years, “Do you mind if I tape your concert tonight?” I usually agree, somewhat grudgingly, but I make them promise to send me a copy. I have never received a single tape! When I realized this, I decided I should just bootleg myself. I plugged my portable DAT recorder, or an ADAT right into the audio mixer I use on stage and captured everything that way. I didn't worry too much about checking the audio, because I'm generally skewing everything toward making sure the concert sounds good for the audience. So the record is basically a “board tape,” but I'll be damned if it didn't turn out sounding great!

Q: So you're happy with the way it sounds?

A: Yeah, it's way better than I expected or even intended! (laughs)

Q: How do you define your music? It doesn't seem easy to categorize, with African, Hawaiian, Celtic and blues on the same album...

A: I just call it guitar music.

Q: So what's the next project going to be like?

A: Well, I've got a big backlog of my own stuff I need to finish. I've really been neglecting my writing for too long, but I'm having a lot of fun working with other music... to answer the question, I really don't know. There are some collaborative projects I'm planning, and can't really talk about due to contract restrictions, etc. The one thing I'm real excited about is my new philosophy: NO DEADLINES! I'm going to really take my time on whatever is next. I've got all these wonderful guitars and audio toys, and I just want to have some fun, make a little noise. That's where it starts for me, and I'm anxious to get back to that place again.