

Music That Matters

By Jeff O'Kelley

This month's music column is dedicated to the review of two great CD's. Both of these CD's offer quality music, perfect for your next weekend ride.

Dynamico Mitch Easter

For those of us who were lucky enough to have grown up in the South during the college rock heyday of the early 80's, the name Mitch Easter is synonymous with most of the music that we loved. His touch can be found on mountains of great albums from artists such as REM, Marshall



Crenshaw, The dB's, Don Dixon and Marti Jones, to name but a few. Mitch's resume of credits is quite eclectic and includes duties such as Producer, Engineer, Mixing and multi-instrumentalist (which includes the Sitar). In addition to all of this, he also found time to release three successful albums with his own band, Let's Active.

In more recent years, artists such as The Connell's, Suzanne Vega, Dinosaur Jr., Shalini, Alejandro Escovedo, Drive By Truckers and The Fabulous Knobs have utilized his studio and musical magic. It seems that he can do just about anything, and has.

With such a wealth of music history under his belt, it seems a little strange that he is currently touring in support of his debut release, Dynamico. Yes, you heard me correctly. Released in early 2007, Dynamico is officially the first solo album by Mitch Easter. All of his previous releases have been band projects. When I asked what finally prompted him to release a solo CD, he replied,

"Nothing particularly earthshaking other than the fact that time is definitely marching on here dude, so I'd better do this thing now".

And we're glad he did. Dynamico features 14 tracks of driving pop rock, with a little more emphasis on the rock part.

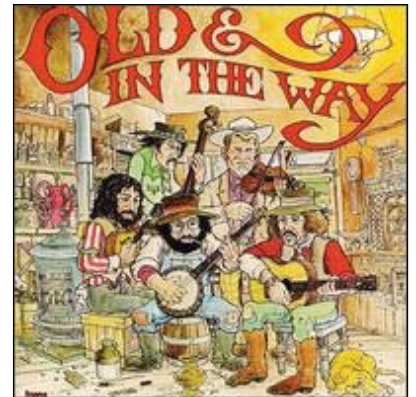
8 Mitch definitely shows that all of those years trapped

behind a mixing console didn't dull his ability to wield his trusty Rickenbacker like a light saber. In addition to some stunning guitar work, Mitch also plays most of the other instruments featured on the CD. Bassist Shalini Chatterjee (also known as Mrs. Mitch Easter) and former Let's Active drummer Eric Marshall contribute a few parts to the project as well. The tracks on this CD are well crafted and intelligent, and offer listeners an alternative to most of today's cookie-cutter, corporate-stamped music. My favorite tracks have to be the rocking sounds of *1 1/2 Way Street* and *Sights Set On Heaven*.

The songs on Dynamico definitely represent a quality standard that most of today's bands don't even know exists. Hopefully it won't be another twenty years before Mr. Easter treats us to some more new music. For fans of great, guitar-driven, pop rock, Dynamico should be your next purchase. I promise you won't be disappointed. Dynamico can be purchased through Mitch's website at www.mitcheaster.com or www.125records.com.

Old & In The Way

Bluegrass. Okay, there, I said it. Now before you bow to your fear of the unknown and skip to the next page, please give me a minute to explain.



I grew up in the foothills of the North Carolina mountains and have always had the influence of bluegrass music intertwined with my varied musical taste. Although it didn't mean much to me during my rock music dominated teen years, I have come to understand its place and influence in nearly all types of music. Bluegrass is one of the very few true American-born creations and it has managed to stand the test of time. Recent artists such as Alison Krauss, Gillian Welch, Emmy Lou Harris, Ricky Skaggs and others have helped to reintroduce bluegrass to a new generation. It seems to be enjoying new life on radio, as well as the big screen. The box office success of "O Brother, Where Art Thou", and the subsequent concert tour "Down From The Mountain" pushed this genre of music even further into the mainstream.

For bluegrass neophytes, Old & In The Way is a perfect primer course on basic bluegrass with a few twists thrown in. Recorded live at the Boarding House (San Francisco) in October 1973, this disc features Jerry Garcia (of The Grateful Dead) on banjo, David Grisman on mandolin, Peter Rowan on guitar, bluegrass legend Vassar Clements playing fiddle and John Kahn rounding out the group on acoustic bass.

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Although they never formed an official band, this group of friends came together to share their love of bluegrass music. During a rare live collaboration, this amazing group of musicians recorded traditional tunes such as “Pig in a Pen” and “Knockin’ on your door”, as well as bluegrass-flavored versions of The Rolling Stones’ “Wild Horses” and Peter Rowan’s “Panama Red”. In all, there are ten tracks on this CD, which work together to represent several styles of bluegrass. In addition to great songs, listeners are treated to some excellent examples of bluegrass fiddle by Vassar Clements and the largely unknown banjo talents of Jerry Garcia. While most Grateful Dead fans may only associate Jerry with his more well-known guitar skills, they may be surprised to know that he was also a very talented banjo player. For those of you who have never cranked up a great bluegrass track while you cruise down the highway, you’re missing something special. Don’t be afraid to try something new. If you’re ready for a new experience, *Old & In The Way* is currently available via several online retailers including Amazon.com and eBay.com. If you like what you hear, any release from Alison Krauss & Union Station would provide a great next step in your journey to bluegrass appreciation.

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