

Music Review: Toulouse Engelhardt - Toulousology

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I've always been intrigued by the possibilities of solo guitar. To me it seems to be the instrument with the widest range of possible voices – classical, jazz, folk, blues and country. I've played solo guitar finger-picking style for many years, and I can attest to the extreme technical difficulties of the art form. Somehow those intricate patterns that I hear in my head don't quite make it down to my fingers. When I get particularly frustrated, I begin to imagine conversations between my hands:

Right Hand: "That was pitiful - try to keep up. And next time, better execution on the bar chords."

Left Hand: "Oh, look who's talking. Weren't you a bit out of control there? And can't you play a bit louder so people can actually hear?"

Me: "Guys, guys, let's not fight. Can't you shake hands and agree to make up? Maybe it's time to go to bed."

So I can appreciate those who really have this stuff down.

Which brings me to Toulouse Engelhardt, the so-called "Segovia of Surf." (Actually, his birth name is Thomas). A self-taught guitarist, Engelhardt grew up listening to a lot of Dick Dale, but he's clearly moved beyond those days. He was a member of the "Takoma Seven," a group of fingerpickers who recorded for Takoma Records in the '60s through the mid 70's. Other members included John Fahey (who originated the label) and Leo Kottke.

Toulousology, a compilation of songs recorded from 1976 Through 2010, showcases Engelhardt's virtuosity and compositional inventiveness. He demonstrates a variety of techniques, sometimes sounding classical, sometimes jazzy, sometimes like a Piedmont guitarist on crystal meth. Most of the solos are performed on 12-string guitar – a few are on electric six-string. Most compositions are his own, and include themes from a wide variety of classical and pop sources. Engelhardt often takes his song ideas from non-musical motifs (which is the definition of a tone poem).

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Dick Dale • eds-pick • John Fahey • Leo Kottke • Takoma Records • Toulouse Engelhardt

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Phillip Barnett is a middle-aged software geek with multiple and conflicting musical fantasies. He has played jazz piano, folk guitar and klezmer clarinet (though not all at the same time). You can follow his meanderings through twitter.

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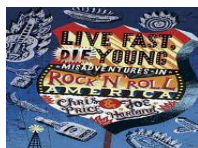
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