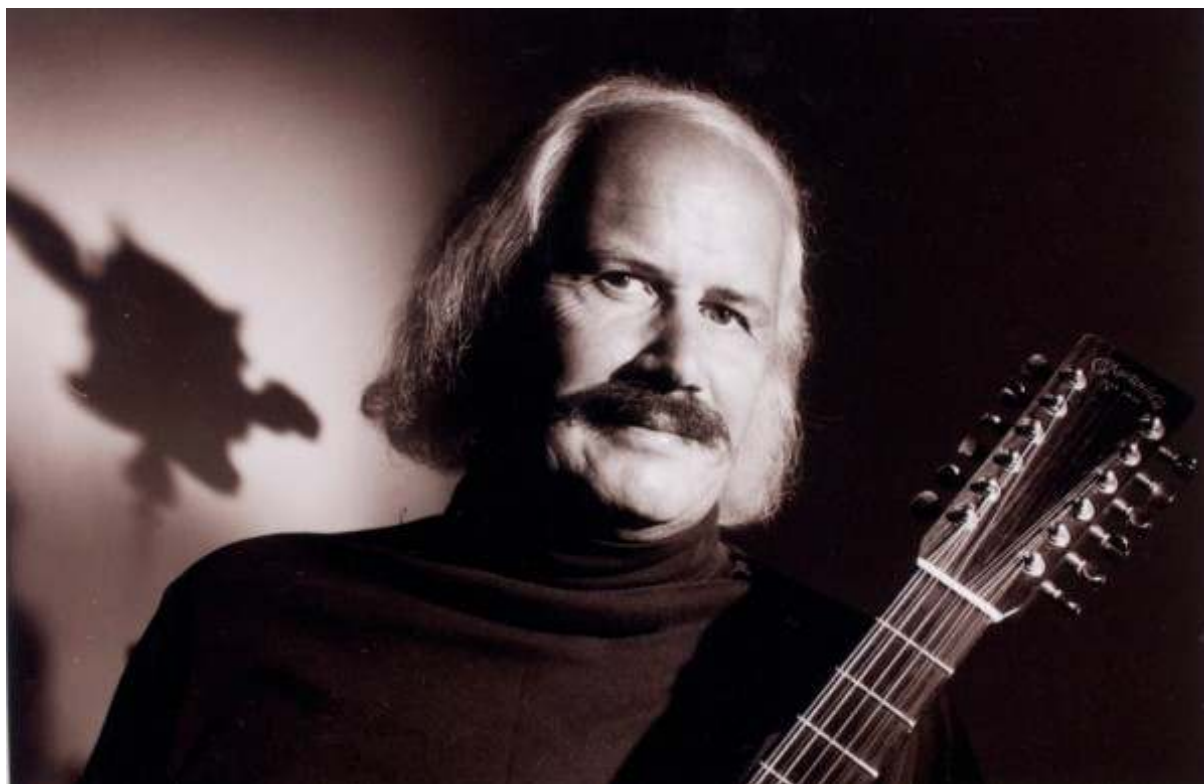




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## [The legend of Toulouse Engelhardt](#)



Legendary finger-style guitarist Toulouse Engelhardt, who plays Alvas Showroom in San Pedro this Friday, Sept. 29 at 8 p.m.

Hits come and go quicker than fads, fame fleets quicker than the fortune, but legends never leave.

“I’m quite humbled to be considered an acoustic finger-style guitar legend... But you know what? It doesn’t always pay the bills!”

Toulouse Engelhardt is a massively accomplished finger-style guitar legend who appears to have eaten more than his share of humble pie over the years. At 61 years aged, he can look back on success as early as his early-twenties, and decades of recording, playing, and touring with stars like The Byrds, Jack Bruce, Remi Kabaka, David Lindley, Ry Cooder, Chris Darrow, Bob Weir & Kingfish, Dick Dale, Dave Mason, Todd Rundgren, Kenny Rankin, and so on. He was dubbed “The Segovia of Surf” by Longboard Magazine, and All Music Guide once effused, “Toulouse Engelhardt plays the guitar with such dexterity that it sounds like the man has at least 15 fingers! He is a showcase of technical brilliance and a master in both composition and performance!” Voodoo Child Magazine said, “Jimi Hendrix would have admired his incredible finger work!”

Yet, sitting and talking with the man over a hot cup of joe outside a street corner coffee shop on a blazing hot Saturday, laughing about stories, occasionally pausing to check out beach babes as they dragged our attention away with them, was like hanging out with an old friend who’s about as hep, hip, or groovy as cats come.

Aside from his “cult” following, some of Engelhardt’s biggest fans are legends themselves. The greater neighborhood might not know his name or recall his tune, but masters like the late John Fahey or David Lindley know him well and consider his playing to be a matter of importance.

Lindley, the legendary stringed instrument maestro, co-founder of the late ‘60s band Kaleidoscope, and musical father figure to Engelhardt, once said to him, “Toulouse, where have you been? You should be playing at Carnegie Hall. Why aren’t you playing at Carnegie Hall?”

While he currently resides in Laguna, it was the manifest destiny of his parents which brought Engelhardt across the country as a child, where his story really begins; in the southern California beach culture of Palos Verdes and Hermosa Beach.

“I’m a South Bay local kid... grew up back east, then my parents migrated to San Francisco, then moved down to Hermosa Beach [in the 50s]... then we migrated to the hill and I grew up in Palos Verdes Estates, right down the street from Lunada Bay... all through high school... did the PV High thing... and that’s when my career really started... I started out doing surf music and playing in surf bands and stuff.”

Engelhardt began playing guitar at the age of 6, but it was during this seminal age of adolescence that his path was shaped in the South Bay.

“There were two big turning points in PV,” he says. “One was my first guitar lesson... Larry Carlton [the guitar great] gave me one of my only two guitar lessons... He said, ‘You need to learn to read music, bro.’ And I said, ‘No, I wanna learn how to play ‘Walk Don’t Run’ by The Ventures.’ I was only ten or eleven, maybe.”

“When I was a sophomore in high school I had kind of outgrown surf music, and I started looking at jazz music. So, one of my heroes was Wes Montgomery. This was back in the early 60s, Wes would do a regular gig at the Lighthouse [Cafe in Hermosa Beach]. So I dragged three of my bros down; they wanted to go hustle chicks down in Hermosa, but I wanted to go see Wes Montgomery.

“I was 13 years old, so obviously I couldn’t go in; but when it was balmy in the summer, they would open the porthole – it was a window right on the street side, you could see the jazz musicians play from there. I was looking over the Dutch door watching him play, my bros got bored and took off to go look for chicks and left me. While I was waiting for Wes to come out and do his last set, I walked around through the back alley, and lo and behold, who was standing there smoking a cigarette but the man himself.

“He looked up at me and said, ‘You play guitar, don’t you kid?’

“I was completely star struck and I said, ‘Yeah, how do you know?’

“‘I saw you outside.’”

“‘Wes, how do you do those double octaves?’ Which was his signature sound that separated him.

“He goes, ‘Lemme show you kid.’ He sat me down on the step of the backdoor of the Lighthouse and reached around the corner and put his big Gibson hollow body in my lap, and he said, ‘Here, lemme show ya.’ And he showed me how to do it, and I was in heaven.

“I got my second only guitar lesson from the master himself. I’ve never had a lesson since.”

The jazz master had blown some smokey life into Engelhardt’s fingers, and they were about to take flight in a whole new way.

“In 1966, somehow The Byrds came to PV High,” Engelhardt recounts. “The original band played at PV High in the gymnasium to raise money to build a swimming pool for the high school. When I heard Roger McGuinn’s 12-string Rickenbacker sound, I was changed forever. I was determined to explore the power of a 12-string guitar, especially acoustic. That’s my specialty now.

“I was a young kid, a freshman. Seven years later [at the age of 22] I was their opening act, chosen to be the supporting act for their final American tour in the fall of 1973!

“That’s when my career went into focus, and that’s when I was discovered by John Fahey from the famous Takoma Records. And in 1976 I was signed by John and his affiliates. Fahey, when he first heard my record he thought it was crap, but he became my mentor, he knew I had talent. He said, ‘You’re the next guy to inherit the throne, the next Leo Kottke.’ ...I was the youngest and last of the infamous Takoma Seven, and the rest is history.”



Classic Toulousions.

After the “new age” came around in the 80s, and with Takoma having sold to Chrysalis Records before folding, Engelhardt simply disappeared for a decade.

“I went on a mental sabbatical to Tibet,” he says with a smile. “But my Tibet was the redwoods of Humboldt County... I couldn’t handle the pressure of the music industry anymore... never stopped playing, just stopped playing in public.”

Far from being a disillusioned hippy, wandering the majestic acres of the northwest in search of wild cannabis, during his retreat away from the spotlight, Engelhardt found the time and peace to pursue two academic degrees in the natural sciences, as well as a Master’s Degree in Botany. He was musically rediscovered in the ‘90s by Walt Disney and got signed to Hollywood Records, and has since been performing on the high-end acoustic circuit. His decision to slide beneath the verdant overgrowth largely accounts for the slip from public mind; but he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“It is what it is,” he says. “It was a personal choice to take a sabbatical away from the insanity of Hollywood and the record industry. As a result, I lost my momentum; but the passion never left, so it’s fun to be rediscovered by the acoustic guitar fandom world. This is why they call me the Zen Cat... myself and my music flow through time, the world goes on and I still do what I do, and people still dig it.”

The Zen Cat happens to also be a timeless rebel. Free from the restrictions of musical theory, never having been taught right from wrong, he’s always strummed to the beat of his own tune, and without the conditioned boundaries of musical education, has found it possible to transcend the limitations of his instrument.

“There are thousands of really fabulous guitar players, but the key is to be... I’m a rebel,” he resolves. “I don’t follow the rules, I never have, and that’s the bottom line. So if someone takes in this album [of mine] to a guitar teacher and says, ‘Teach me this,’ they can’t. I play in really weird time... I like a-tonality... I like to explore new worlds... And most guys are afraid to do that. They don’t have the balls to do it, to be blunt.”



The Zen Cat Toulouse Engelhardt.

The Zen Cat rebel, floating through time like a feather who defied gravity before catching a cosmic ride on the winds of space, has always crafted a sound which sets him apart. To an untrained ear, his highly complex, exhaustively technical compositions can easily come across as being simple, or otherwise dizzily head spinning; but astute music critics have traditionally been challenged in describing “the Toulouse sound”. It’s generally considered to be a mixture of styles, based in traditional Americana, acoustic blues, ragtime and devotion, in

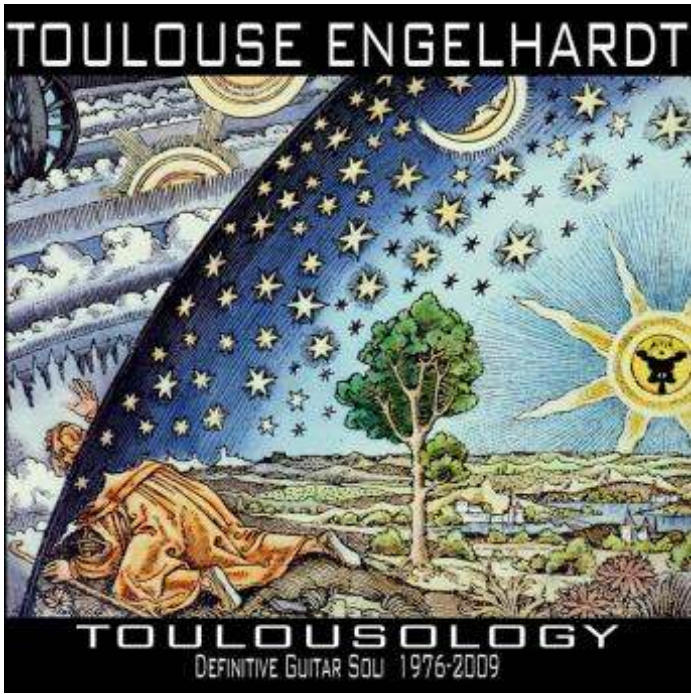
tegrated with early-60s surf sounds and world rhythms. It’s also been called cinematic, impressionistic, ethereal, and meditative.

It’s a sound all his own, and it can be heard in person tomorrow night, Sept. 28, at Alvas Showroom in San Pedro. Engelhardt will be performing an intimate set for his first return engagement to the South Bay since he played at Brixton in Jan. 2011 while touring with David Lindley. He’s just released a CD compiling his best material, *Toulousology, Definitive Guitar Soli 1976-2009*, and is working on a new album which finds him delving ever deeper into both the endless universe of the inner-self, as well as the guitar.

“The more I play the guitar, the more I realize I don’t really know anything at all. The guitar is a universe unto itself. Twelve strings, twenty-plus frets – there’s a whole universe there, the tonal combinations are as infinite as nucleotides of DNA.”

*Legendary finger-style guitarist Toulouse Engelhardt performs the intimate setting of Alvas showroom in San Pedro on Friday, Sept. 28 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 at the door. The venue can be reached at 800-403-3447.*

**[Listen to Toulouse Engelhardt on DirtyHippieRadio.com now!](http://DirtyHippieRadio.com)**



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