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Thursday, Feb. 19, 2009

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Easy road trips spotlighting good music

We saw Ernie Halter, The Benjy Davis Project, and Pat McGee at Hattiesburg's The Bottling Company (126 Market Street, 601-450-1915) on Sunday night, Feb. 8; and were extremely impressed by Ernie's set, which showed why his album snuck into 2008's Top Ten Plus. Benjy's set was good, but somewhat hampered by his lead vocals' low volume; Pat's solo acoustic set contained songs with promise.

Upcoming shows include The North Mississippi All-Stars, Keller Williams, and others; so drive to the Hub City for some cool music. The Bottling Company kitchen is open 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Saturday/11 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday. The disc below features Erik Mongrain, who will be opening for the Derek Trucks Band at New Orleans' House of Blues Feb. 22.

'Equilibrium,' Erik Mongrain (Prophase/MVD, HHH)

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We didn't receive this Oct. 28, 2008, release until the beginning of this month, but here's a review for two reasons: the one stated above and high quality. Erik plays acoustic guitar instrumentals that are surprisingly rhythmic, considering that the only supporting musicians noted are ace bassist Michael Manning and recorder/mixer/master man Bill Plummer on synthesizer. Erik also provides thoughtful notes in English and French that explain motivations/messages underlying his compositions, which mostly reward thoughtful listening. His use of harmonics and percussive tapping on the guitar is displayed on several songs, including "Pandora's Box."

Songs like the solo-sounding "A Ripple Effect" plus more duo-or-trio oriented tunes like "Eon's Illusion" and "Raindigger" equal nice mood music. Get this one if you like things mellow.

Reviews of two new DVDs from Music Video Distributors follow.

'In The 1960s,' Frank Zappa and The Mothers Of Invention (Chrome Dreams/MVD, HHH)

This January 20 DVD presents the story of The Mothers of Invention and the music made during the first incarnation of the band. Group members Jimmy Carl Black, Bunk Gardner, Don Preston and Art Tripp take up the tale and reveal their take on what Frank

Zappa was all about. This program is the most detailed, informative and enjoyable documentary on Frank and The Mothers to emerge. It includes rare footage from throughout the 1960s, archive interviews, seldom seen live performances, and many other features. The music is as baffling as it once was, and the questions raised about the late Mr. Zappa by his former employees are troubling at times; but this is a cool critical analysis of a major figure in American music.

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