

REVIEW**DVD Review: *Leo Kottke: Home and Away Revisited***

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Tim Gebhart

Bringing things out of the vault and adding to them on a DVD reissue can be a risky venture. Fortunately, *Leo Kottke: Home and Away Revisited* is an example of the benefits far outweighing the risk.

The DVD is a reissue of Kottke's 1989 video recording *Home and Away*. The original, a staple for a few years on my local public television station during fundraising week, contained much of a 1988 performance by the acoustic guitarist extraordinaire in Toronto, together with glimpses of his life at home and on the road. The DVD not only adds five songs not on the original, it presents an extended version of an impromptu jam with Doc Watson and Chet Atkins, together with nine "extra" features, including separate backstage jams with Michael Hedges and Michael Johnson.

Kottke is one of the artists who helped give rise to what became known as American Primitive Guitar. He plays finger style, using both six- and twelve-string guitars and occasionally a slide. Having abandoned fingerpicks in the 1980s after suffering severe tendonitis; Kottke uses his fingers and fingernails as picks. The ability to see Kottke's technique is one of the highlights of this recording. While far from making Kottke's hands and fingers the main focus, the film provides an excellent look at not only the picking style of his right hand but also the dexterity of his left hand on the fret board. Perhaps the best examples are his medley of his tunes, "The Train and the Gate" and "Vaseline Machine

Gun," and his version of Duane Allman's "Little Martha."

Yet there's more to Kottke performances than just guitar playing, mesmerizing as it may be. Kottke occasionally sings, although he sings irregularly may be a tad more accurate. Despite his limited baritone range, Kottke pulls it off and, in fact, it fits well with his overall style. Audiences also get a taste of Kottke's droll sense of humor. He admits he often doesn't know what might come out of his mouth as he starts an almost monotone intro to a song. More often than not, it is a joke or some self-deprecating tale.

All this comes through on *Home and Away Revisited*. It's hard to imagine any musician who, in his first conversation with the audience, relates a story about the time he realized he was drooling onto the 12th fret of his guitar while performing. Prior to singing "Rings," Kottke tells the audience one of two stories he heard about the writing of the song. When an audience member asks for the second story after the song, the film cuts to Kottke going to meet one of the songwriters, Eddie Reeves, to learn the song's provenance.

Kottke learns the true story is entirely different than the one he heard and tells the concert audience the phony version is better - and it is. The humor also appears in the snippets of Kottke's daily life. He takes the film crew to a room in his basement, pronouncing that it is "where guitars go when they've been bad." Such pieces and others of Kottke in a guitar store, at the lake and driving, show us both the performer and the person.

At bottom, though, this is a performance film. Kottke's style and technique are well-suited for film. They are difficult to explain and his songs cannot be easily categorized. While playing, Kottke's facial expressions range from studied intensity to grimaces or smiles at a particular phrasing or passage. It is just part of the outward display of a communion between artist and instrument. The film leaves little doubt about his virtuosity. Equally clear is that what Kottke expresses with his guitar is communication on an exquisite level.

Tim Gebhart lives in Sioux Falls, SD, where he practices law in order to provide shelter for his family,

his dog, and his books. His blog de guerre is [A Progressive on the Prairie](#).

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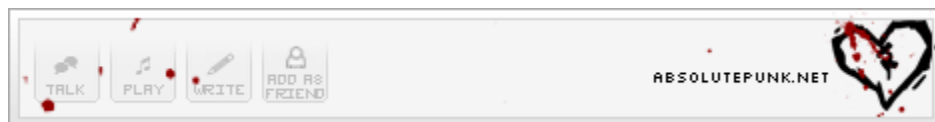
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Author: **Tim Gebhart**

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