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Joe Woodard, *Goleta Electric*

(Household Ink Records, 2021, HI-156)

Faced with the logistical and existential hurdles of the lockdown on music-making, singer-songwriter-situationist Joe Woodard quickly searched for plan b's and decided to heed the mantra of many musicians in this restrictive time:

get thee to a home studio. And enlist the kindly help of fellow musicians in their hunkered homes to join in the party, remotely.

Voila, the end result of the years efforts is *Goleta Electric*, Woodard's "faux folk" follow-up project to his 2002 album, *between*.

While it's a product born of demands and dimensions, *Goleta Electric* is also a heartfelt and occasionally prankster-ish homage to the late, great Robinson Eikenberry, who shepherded many a fine album into being and was something of a studio-painterly guru in Santa Barbara. Eikenberry produced, recorded and spiritually joy-buzzered Woodard's *between*, and the two had discussed working on this follow-up shortly before Eikenberry's far-too-young passing in 2017.

Lacking Eikenberry's fluid and naturalistic technical-sonic touch, Woodard and allies have followed a semi-DIY/low-fi trajectory in creating the album. Edges are rough at times, and there are ambient sneak attacks from the Manitou Cricket Chorus and the dog-and-kitty show of Harper and Annie can be heard in the margins, upon close inspection. It's all part of the package of a folk album recorded during pandemic pandemonium, by a relative neophyte at the controls. This ain't no slick commercial party.

And Woodard couldn't do it alone. Chief among his allies was multi-instrumental Jim Connolly, who made good on a long-standing commitment to help birth the album, playing bass, banjo, pennywhistle, melodica, and—not to forget—the Balkan kaval. Also in the ever-expanding guest musician were Zach Gill, bassist Chris Symer, accordionist Brian Mann, Bill Flores (on saxophones, this time out), drummer Austin Beede, vocalists Ellen Turner, Allegra Heidelinde, Julie Christensen, Shelly Rudolph, Jesse Rhodes and... unnamed, non-union crickets.

Fittingly, this (almost) all-acoustic album kicks off with "Falling in with the Out Crowd," recorded and engineered by Jesse Rhodes—a deep ally of Eikenberry's—for the Eikenberry tribute album, *Be Love Now*. That tune, itself a pay-on to the rich creative community of musicians often with Eikenberry at the hub, segues into a rambling journey of a kaleidoscope of a fun house with some dark corners. Themes of alienation, existential confusion, love quandaries, and mortal musings are set to melodic contours, in the true (and untrue) folk tradition. Have no fear, though: the fizz of humor and absurdity is never far behind (another Eikenberry specialty).

Woodard, who spent impressionable formative years growing up in the rugged, hard scrabble suburban turf of South Santa Barbara, just shy of Goleta, proper, has always had wildly eclectic tastes. Some of that shows up on his new album of folk music--folk, in the small case sense--from waltz-timing ditties to shades of neo-folk rock navel gazer singer song writer fare, (“Look Back in Laughter,” “Enough About Me”), folk art/art song (“Love Slips”), and even semi-secular hymnody (“Amorous Grace”). Listening wise, set your controls for the heart of the stars.

Goleta’s songbook stretches from mid-90s relics – “Anti-Gravity” -to pandemic-era folksy production numbers such as “Freedom in Kentfield.” Just prior to finishing the album, Woodard was inspired by a cryptic Facebook post by artist Holly Mackay, and quickly wrote and recorded “Part Sigmund” in the space of a half hour.

It all concludes with “Beyond (Timeless Lullaby),” which could be a mortality/immortality-themed sequel to the early midlife ruminations of *between*. Or maybe not. Enjoy.

The Haiku Bio: Joe Woodard has been making/writing music for decades, working with ensembles including Headless Household, flapping Flapping, Dudley, Lucinda Lane, Tableaux Sonique... By day, he's usually working in the sentence construction business.

Press bites for *Between* (2002):

“In the best tracks, Woodard, guitarist in Santa Barbara’s Headless Household, combines thoughtful, unexpected guitar playing, intellectually twisted yet painfully honest lyrics and heartfelt singing.”

~Jennifer Kelly, splendid e-zine

“songs of quiet loneliness, yes, but always with a twist in the tale.”

~Ted Mills, Santa Barbara Independent

Goleta Electric songology:

1. Falling In with the Out Crowd
2. Freedom in Kentfield
3. A Season of Things
4. Anti-Gravity (Slight Advance)
5. Anti-Gravity
6. Thanks for Asking
7. High as a Kite
8. Burning Bridges
9. Love Slips
10. Amorous Grace
11. Look Back in Laughter
12. Part Sigmund (Mackay/Woodard)
13. Pleasant Valley Monday
14. Enough About Me
15. The Other Night
16. From the Lighthouses
17. Down to Sleep
18. Beyond (Timeless Lullaby)