



Everyone who hangs around online music forums these days should be familiar with the following situation: A user steps on the scene and invites everyone to check out “his music”. Those who actually accept the invitation, hoping to find a diamond in the rough, are bound to find only one thing – a load of crap! These days, online venues for artist exposure such MySpace and YouTube are encouraging new artists, however untalented they may be, to share their cover songs and original compositions with the world. Most attempts are so bad that it’s hard to decide whether to laugh or cry.

Sometimes still, it is worthwhile to take the time to listen. Every now and then, in the mass of mediocrity, one snags the prize. Les Eason is that *one*. When I found myself on his purevolume.com website in the summer of 2006, I could only think one thing: I want more! At that time, Les had announced his debut album release for the end of 2006. Unfortunately, this did not work out. Over and over again the release date was set back. It was beginning to seem as if it may not be released at all. A release that was supposed to take only three months, eventually turned into a year. Finally, in December 2007, the time had come. Together with his childhood friend Curtis Steen and his band “The Steen Regime”, Les Eason released his debut album “New World” on the market.

The title reflects Eason’s emotional state in two different ways: On the one hand, entering into the professional music business is essentially stepping into a new world. On the other hand, the album’s extensive production process directly influenced the development of Eason’s personality. “While writing these songs, I felt like I was undergoing a transformation. When I began to see the difference it made in my own life and in other people’s lives, I realized that I was waking up to an entirely new world,” says the 23-year-old.

At first, it did not look like the typical musician-career. Growing up in a “hick town” in Texas where you’d probably find nothing but “dirt, high school football and kind people,” Eason initially chose to focus on a career as a professional baseball player. During high school he was an all-state athlete and he eventually joined the US Air Force Academy to play NCAA Division I baseball. Although he had been given his first guitar at the age of six and had written his first song at only ten years old, it was not until Air Force boot camp that he decided he’d rather try it with his music. The decision had been hard to make in the past since Eason’s mother had always told him he couldn’t sing. Fortunately, he didn’t listen to her! With “New World” he undoubtedly shows what a promising singer/ songwriter he is after all.

The album begins with “Share the Moon”, an outstanding reggae-collaboration with Mike Pinto. This song contains everything it needs to become THE summer hit of 2008. Only the reverb effect, which is a recurring feature throughout the album, is a bit overwhelming. Apart from that, the beat and baseline, reminiscent of Bob Marley’s “Stir it up” (only faster), generates a laid-back vibe. Not least due to Mike Pinto’s influence: “Mike’s stuff is infectious; very unique and catchy,” says Eason, “it is exactly the kind of music I want to associate myself with. I felt like something was missing on the song ‘Share the Moon’. Curtis and I agreed that it needed Mike’s touch. I called him up, and a couple of weeks later he was in the studio with us. His part really completed the song.”

“Share the Moon” remains the only reggae-song of the total 14 tracks on “New World”. Folk-pop dominates the other 13 with a pleasant mixture of fast and slow tunes. One song, “Hourglass”, went through a complete evolution during its production. Eason posted a low-budget original version of the song on purevolume.com before starting the album in 2006. At that time it was called Steamboat Willy, and the singing was merely accompanied by guitar, drums and percussion. In the old version, one could easily recognize Eason’s

musical influences (among which are the usual suspects; Simon & Garfunkel, Eric Clapton, Bob Marley, Johnny Cash and John Lennon). He also used that familiar strumming pattern, known from songs such as Flake, Bubbletoes and Mud-football by Jack Johnson. The new version of the song has been enriched by piano, a new bass line, a new drum beat, and a fresh electric guitar solo. Which version is more appealing is left up to the listener to decide; both have their charm - the new version is definitely more pop.

Other tracks worth listening to are “Another Bad Day”, “Rainbow Bridge”, “Old Messenger” and “Talk to Me”. In the final track, the chilled rhythm of “Black and White Photo” masks the rather sad content of the song. The other songs not mentioned, match well with the entire theme of the album. Those hoping for a revised version of Eason’s earlier work “Wave to Heaven” willy-nilly have to remain patient: “Wave to Heaven was the third song I ever wrote, but it didn’t feel complete enough to put on the album. I’m sure I will release it at a later date,” says Eason.

Les Eason is definitely very talented, and someone to keep you eye in the future. The same goes for his friend Curtis Steen, whose contribution to the success of the album is emphasized by Eason: “I’ve worked with a lot of musicians over the years, but Curtis is one of the most talented people I know. I couldn’t imagine making music without him,” he says. This mutual appreciation is positively perceptible on “New World”. One wheel meshes with the other; the album is a nice piece of work. Too bad summer’s not here yet!

[Moritz Böttcher]

