

CD Review

# Guitarist Mark Struhsacker goes electric — and acoustic

- By Art Edelstein Arts Correspondent
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It's been six years since Bluegrass guitarist and singer Mark Struhsacker released his first solo album "Cold Outside," which we called "a welcome addition to the bluegrass library." His second solo project, the EP "Town & Country," was released recently.

On this eight-track, 25-minute EP, we find Struhsacker with a split personality. Half the tracks are country music with electric guitars, some drumming and a lot of hot guitar picking. The remaining tracks are acoustic and bluegrass in style.

While we find all the tracks instrumentally inspired and interesting, we wonder why this fine performer isn't sticking to one style. We're reminded of Ricky Skaggs, a bluegrass wunderkind who changed course mid-career and went all out Nashville country for more than a decade, only to return to his acoustic music routes. Perhaps Struhsacker simply can't make up his mind where his dedication lies.

Struhsacker has played guitar and sung in bluegrass bands for over 35 years. In June 1986, he created and fronted the WDEV Radio Rangers radio show band that is now inactive. He has been a member of Elisabeth vonTrapp & The Blue Train," and sang the national anthem at Boston's Fenway Park in June 2005. Today he sings and plays guitar with Northern Flyer Bluegrass, which has a

lineup that includes Andy Sacker on mandolin, Andy Greene on banjo and Kirk Lord on bass — all four heavy hitters in the world of Vermont bluegrass.

On “Town & Country,” Struhsacker is joined by many of the bluegrass community’s best players. We find, along with his bandmates, such notables as Freeman Corey, Jim Pitman, Patti Casey, Colin McCaffrey and Carol Hausner. Most of the EP was recorded by McCaffrey at his East Montpelier studio.

Whether Struhsacker is flatpicking an acoustic guitar or driving an electric guitar, he shows that he has the chops required for star power in either genre of music. His flatpicking is fast, fluid and true to the style. When he picks up an electric guitar, we get the same sense that this is a musician at home with the power of a Telecaster guitar and solid Nashville instincts.

This is not easy to do. A lot of guitarists who can flatpick an acoustic guitar don’t easily make the switch to an electric guitar. The fluidity just isn’t there. In Struhsacker’s hands, both instruments sound like home ground.

For all his guitar virtuosity, Struhsacker is also a very good vocalist. From “End of The Line,” track one, through “Come On In,” track

seven, he sings lead with authenticity and power. The EP ends with “Single Girl,” a fine duet with Carol Hausner, each playing acoustic guitar. A full album of duos by these two is a project they should pursue. The cut is pure magic. With the exception of the final track, Struhsacker also wrote all the songs.

Mark Struhsacker is a musician and singer to be followed. We find an all-too-short EP of strong songs, great vocals and high-powered guitar playing backed by some of the best players in the Vermont acoustic and electric country scene.