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## In The Treehouse: An Interview with Ned Evett

Good morning everyone. For those who read my blog, you recall that I recently had the honor of reviewing singer/songwriter Ned Evett's new album, "Treehouse". As a result of that review, I was offered the opportunity to present some questions for an interview. I can't say thank you enough to him and Carol at Kayos Productions for the opportunity. Thanks to them, I now get to present to you, dear readers, my conversation, of sorts, with Mr. Evett. Enjoy!

**RR:** Let's jump right into your new album. Musically, it runs the gamut from folk to blues to country. Is this something that came organically, or did you sit down and say, "ok I'm going to play this song this way, this song that way, etc."?

**NE:** The songs came all at once from the heart, lyrics, melody, feel, and changed very little from the original demos to the finished album, we have some of the demos up on [www.soundcloud.com](http://www.soundcloud.com) if your listeners are interested in hearing the evolution. We didn't change up any of the feel of the songs in the studio for any reason. Prior to making Treehouse I went through an extensive period listening to Robert Johnson, and I mean really listening. He became the soundtrack of my move from the West Coast to Tennessee, and upon arriving in Nashville I began retuning my guitars to the open chords favored by many Delta Bluesman. This resulted in some

of the material on Treehouse, and a good indicator where I'm headed for the next album.

**RR:** In connection to the music, lyrically, the lyrics match right with the music of each song. It's so seamless that some people have called Treehouse a musical autobiography. It really does come across that way. It starts off upbeat, then begins to descend mood-wise, only to close out with the hopeful 'Don't Despair'. Was that planned, or did it just end up being sequenced how it turned out.

**NE:** Treehouse is very autobiographical at times. It is about being handed enormous challenges, underestimating them, and then becoming a spectator in your own life as the [expletive] hits the fan. Prior to leaving Boise, I lived in my car, crashed on friends couches, and was doing a lot worse than people knew about financially and personally. Most of my friends were unaffected by the economic downturn, and having simultaneously endured a long divorce and losing my job I completely disappeared from life. I wrote the bulk of Treehouse during this period, then went on the road as the support act for Joe Satriani's world tour in 2010/2011, which is how I met Adrian Belew. Treehouse was recorded immediately after I moved to Nashville, my hometown. I had a huge head start on the new material, and the delta blues sound and tuning really opened up writing the last few songs on the album. This change in sound from the more rock aspect of the blues I'd been doing caused a change in direction with a new manager, and I found myself getting all the support I could ever want to pursue an album.

**RR:** Were there any songs on this record that you really enjoyed recording or that you might have had a hard time with, emotionally being that they seem really autobiographical? What is your favorite memory from making the album?

**NE:** I have great memories of Treehouse getting made in Nashville, Mt Juliet to be precise. Studio Belew has been a working studio for nearly 20

years, and has a lively relaxed state of the art vibe. Adrian and I are both visual artists as well, and his paintings are part of the studio decor. I did a small set of sculptures for his family. My London based manager and Treehouse executive producer Sandra Prow was around for most of the recording, and arrived right as the 13 year cicada hatch was occurring. Adrian's daughter learned 'Sayanora Serenade' on guitar, she is about my son's age who had helped me write the song. There was much humor and supreme team effort getting 14 songs done in 9 days. I had a guitar tech for the first time helping out, Dave Barlow, keeping all of the tunings straight and fixing stuff on the fly; this really took a load off my mind as I have different guitars for different sounds. We launched a successful kickstarter campaign to help pay for some of the album.

As for the band, Malcolm Bruce and Lynn Williams came into the sessions prepared and relaxed, and played the songs with alot of soul while listening to the wishes of the producer and artist. Malcolm and I were thrown together on the Satriani tour, and he just breathes music, not just bass. Lynn's grooves just sound RIGHT. Adrian added some guitar, piano, and percussion stuff, just enough to say hello. Keyboardist Ed Roth added some essential organ and piano on two of the tracks.

14 songs in 9 days, I remember thinking things were going pretty well as we were recording. We worked very short days, 7-8 hours was the norm, no midnight oil burned whatsoever. Also, no home overdubbing outside of the producer's control, which I really enjoyed considering my other albums were mostly done that way. So, I enjoyed the entire experience, Adrian's engineer Daniel Rowland was the final piece of the puzzle getting great sounds. Mixdown and Artwork were experiences unto themselves, and a big part of the story too.

**RR:** I have got to ask about bringing Adrian Belew on board to man the boards for this record. Adrian Belew is known for his work with prog legends King Crimson. King Crimson is just as far from the sound on Treehouse as possible. So how did that connection happen?

**NE:** He was the first person I ever saw play fretless guitar. I'm a longtime fan of Adrian's solo albums as well the King Crimson material, and the Bears, so I knew he was great with songs too. As a producer he has a gold record for Jars of Clay. He and I met in Milan Italy in 2010 while I was on tour with Joe Satriani, and after the gig bonded over some locally produced limoncello. He agreed to the project when he felt the demos I provided met his criteria, plus living in Nashville accelerated the process. When you live in the same town, certain kinds of preproduction are possible, like dinner at Chili's to discuss guitar minutiae.

**RR:** How long did it take in total to record the album before it actually hit store shelves?

**NE:** Treehouse was recorded in 9 days, short days too, and no home overdubbing. After the record was recorded there was a 4 month gap waiting for mix engineer Ryan Hewitt, who was working with the Avett Brothers and Rick Rubin at the time, to finish their album and start mixing Treehouse. After that and somewhat at the same time, the artwork for the album was being realized by Pablo Mandel at Circular Studios. It was mastered by Rick Fisher at RFI mastering in Seattle. So, from preproduction to product shipping was almost ten months. Any misstep in that chain can compromise the art, so we were very careful to be patient and not rush. Working with great people is the key all the way down the line, people who love music first and foremost.

**RR:** You've been around for a long time. Considering the number of albums that you've released, it has to be at least somewhat frustrating not really getting a lot of mainstream attention. Does it ever bother you, or do you prefer to stay a little under the radar? Do you feel more or less pressure to perform and sell records considering the lack of mainstream radio coverage?

**NE:** Career wise I've been more of a leaf on the wind in years past, getting carried up and down randomly, sometimes very visible like when I was on

PBS Television, and sometimes disappearing completely from view. I've never tempered my desire to create music with the realities of the business, and have been very lucky as an artist to be able to record and release albums. I am underexposed by most people's standards. The new album seems to be connecting with people emotionally, so I'm hopeful. I'm a lifetime radio listener, and as long as people drive cars or work together in an office there will be some form of radio, that's where the earbuds are. I had AAA radioplay in 2007, a kind of cinderella story occurred with my song 'Through It' and the Journal Broadcast group.

**RR:** You're getting ready to play some dates to support your album. Over the years that you've played live, are there any venues that you have an affinity for? Are there any that you'd like to play that you haven't gotten to play yet?

**NE:** I love the Fillmore in San Francisco and yearn to play there again, and also love the Aladdin Theater in Portland Oregon. One of my overall career goals is to play Red Rocks in Colorado. I really love doing solo shows in small clubs, it's all about crowd density at the end of the day.

**RR:** Going back to your body of work. You've put out a lot of albums in your career. And every album has got some impressive material. Of all the albums you've released so far, is there one album that you would call your favorite or least favorite? Why?

**NE:** My favorite is Treehouse. Why? It's my favorite because I had such a great team helping me realize every facet of what goes into making a record great. This unburdens me having to do multiple tasks, such as engineering and producing, when I'm actually performing for the record. Beyond that, a great mix team and a mastering engineer really help define a record.

My least favorite album of mine is my first all digital album Circus Liquor from 2003. Why? I did it mostly all by myself, produced it, engineered it,

mixed it. I've never made that mistake again. That was my first vocal solo album too. I was juggling the demands of a being a father and middle class breadwinner, working long hours and really burning the candle.

**RR:** You've been called a "monster guitarist" by Joe Satriani. What goes through your mind being given such a title by someone else who is one of the music world's top names? Have you two ever talked about it? Do you two talk period?

**NE:** Being a child of the 80s, it is nice to get props from your heroes, people that inspired you to learn.

Joe introduced me to jazz theory via his early Guitar Player Magazine interviews. His revelations about studying with Lenny Tristano as a teen, and his frustration with his early institutional music education resonated with me. That he had channeled that inspiration and frustrations into making his own music is what mattered to me most. 'Not of This Earth' was making the rounds in every corner of the guitar universe, at the time, I remember listening to 'Rubina' in the back of Old Boise Guitar Company and buzzing over it for weeks.

For me, the highest compliment you can pay someone is by doing your own thing, writing your own music, and not drop into just mimicking them. That Joe would pay me a compliment is hopefully the fruit of that philosophy. I've known Joe for sixteen years, and I get to catch up with him when the opportunity presents itself, which sometimes means when I tour with him.

**RR:** Staying on the musician page, I have to ask. Are there any artists that you've played with that you consider your favorites to tour or record with? Are there any artists that you'd like to record or tour with?

**NE:** I really like working with Adrian Belew, he is a great drummer as well in the Cincinnati style!

I like recording and touring with Malcolm Bruce, he has a classical background and is always full of interesting ideas that I'm unfamiliar with. Joe Satriani is great fun to tour with, and Jeff Campitelli his drummer and I are good friends too. Todd Chavez, the drummer on the last tour I did, is fun and very grounded.

I would like to tour with Richard Thompson at some point, and have speculated if he has ever considered playing a fretless guitar. I like to back up great singer/songwriters, so I could add any number of greats to perform with, Robert Plant, Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, people who like to tour.

**RR:** I have to close things out. But before I do, I wanted to ask. As long as you've been around in this business, do you have any favorite memories so far from your experiences over the years? If you could pass on any piece of knowledge or advice to young up-and-coming artists/bands, what would it be?

**Favorite memories:** My son jumping into my arms at the airport following my first US tour in 2002, he was two and was excited to see his dad after a month on the road. That, and my first day recording Treehouse.

**Knowledge or advice:** Believe in yourself, get realistic feedback from people you trust about your development and don't give into despair. That and listen to Muddy Waters.