



**CLUELESS - STEVE GOLDBERGER & THE FRINGE LOCALS**

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CD Review by Diane Wells



This brand-new CD is the fourth release by this (Canadian) Niagara musician, following the 2002 release of both *The Niagara-on-the-Lake Rhythm Project* and *Gumbo Dreams* and his solo debut CD, *Come from the Heart*. The latter, a live recording, seems to have gotten its title literally, as it followed shortly after he underwent open-heart surgery. In addition to his capacity as a singer-songwriter, Steve's main implement of creativity is the bass guitar.

In addition to his 30+ years of performing with a long list of solo artists and bands, including Black Creek, which won a Genie for best original score in 1975, he currently plays with The Fringe Locals, the Niagara Rhythm Section and Gayle Ackroyd. In addition to producing his own CDs, he was also at the control board for a CD called *Wild Herb's Cooler Sounds*, released in 2000.

There is absolutely no sense in trying to categorize Steve Goldberger; he is literally a human jukebox aimed to please anybody and everybody, regardless of age, gender and race. The exception might be fans of heavy metal, but I'd be willing to bet he could probably write some of that, too, if requested to do so.

Other than a clever melding of Steve Winwood's "Back in the High Life Again" and Stephen Stills' "Love the One You're With", the songs on *Clueless* were written solely by Goldberger or in collaboration with various other songwriters, including Gayle Ackroyd and one of his Fringe Locals – Eric Mahar. Speaking of which, the band is comprised of Steve Goldberger (lead vocals, bass, acoustic guitar, tambourine and cowbells), Eric Mahar (electric guitar), Ed Kopala (electric and slide guitars), (the late) Joe Ingrao (piano, B3), Dave Norris (drums), Penner MacKay (congas, percussion), Mark Lalama (accordion), Jesse Mackay (dumbek, djembe) and Suzanne Hyatt and Tamica Herod on vocals.

As I'm personally very partial to blues music, my favourite track here was "Blue Shutter Blues", even if it is a direct rip-off of Taj Mahal's "Going Up to the Country" (covered so well by Colin James), but with the lyrics changed to refer to Toronto. Rhythmically, it's also a slight variation on that strollin' song that Downchild covered back in the '70s. It's given a nice touch with Joe Ingrao's piano noodling, probably one of his last recordings before his untimely demise earlier this year.

Apart from the mélange of different styles – country, bluegrass, reggae, soul, gospel, roots, and pop rock, Steve's talents as a songwriter come to the fore with his observations on "Karaoke Kings and Queens", "Clueless", "New Year's Revolution", and "Peace, Love and Forgiveness" (also known as "Peace, Love and for Guinness"). Speaking of Guinness, there is a beautiful Celtic ballad simply

called “Irish Tune” with complex instrumentation featuring Goldberger on bass, guitars, keyboards, mandolin, dulcimer and turntable, Cam MacInnes on dobro, strat ebow, madoguitar and various electric guitars, Conrad Kipping on fiddle and Mark Lalama on accordion.

Although his music has been compared to Jackson Browne, John Hiatt and Don Henley, I’m also reminded of Elvis Costello or Hamilton’s Rob Lamothe. He cites his own varied influences as Steve Earle, Tom Petty, Jimmy Buffett and Delbert McClinton, among various others. Lots to like here, particularly if you are a sentimental kind of person.



Home