

Mp3 Electric Earl - Look, Ma, No Drums!



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Folk-rock songs with intelligent lyrics, great melodies and a beat. 7 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk-Rock, POP: Pop Show all album songs: Look, Ma, No Drums! Songs Details: SEE ElectricEarlFOR LYRICS CHORDS! BIO: Los Angeles (1990-present) I live in a part of Los Angeles known as Silverlake (also spelled Silver Lake). That's a few miles east of Hollywood. From my window I can see the downtown skyline. There's a Webcam view on my Website (ElectricEarl.com). I moved here from Baton Rouge in late 1990. From all I'd heard about L.A., I expected that I'd hate living here. I'd come strictly because of the music industry. But in fact, I love L.A. It's the music biz part of it that never panned out. To begin with, 1990 was the wrong time for a singer/songwriter with a 12-string acoustic guitar to find an audience. The prevailing sound of the time was grunge, later eclipsed by boy bands and soul diva vocal gymnastics, with rap gaining in popularity the whole time. It didn't help that I had an average voice, average looks, and no stage presence. Meanwhile, I kept busy filming bands on a semi-pro basis. (See Jacklandfor some sample clips.) Later in the '90s, after hearing a report on public radio about musicians using a service called IUMA to distribute their music on the Internet, I taught myself HTML and built my own Website (ElectricEarl.com), which resulted in my doing Web work for other local musicians. Baton Rouge (1977-1990) My first day in Baton Rouge, I was visiting with a friend who worked for the local newspaper when someone came into the office and said that it had just come over the news wire that Elvis Presley died. A little later, they said that it's on TV, so it must be true. I thought that was an odd thing for a print journalist to say. Elvis died on my birthday. In rock and roll history, August 16 is also Madonna's birthday, and it's the day that drummer Pete Best got kicked out of the Beatles. Soon after arriving in Baton Rouge, I started performing in local bars and coffeehouses. I mostly did cover songs, with an occasional original. The most memorable show was opening for John Lee Hooker at The Kingfish, which is where the Sex

Pistols played during their 1978 tour. For a short time, circa 1980-81, I played bass in a New Wave band called WHAT4. (The name was my idea. If you do a Web search, you'll come up with other bands and organizations with that name, but I thought of it first.) We did a few original songs, plus a healthy dose of the more popular New Wave songs of the day (Iggy Pop, Ramones, etc.). After WHAT4 broke up, I started opening for bands as a solo act. I put a pickup on my guitar in order to electrify the sound. Remembering that blues man Muddy Waters had once done an album with a psychedelic rock band and called it Electric Mud, I posted some flyers that said "Introducing Electric Earl," along with the show details and my full name. The flyer for the next show continued with that theme: "The return of Electric Earl..." As a result, a few people (including local musician Harry Dog) started calling me Electric Earl. That seemed like a good stage name, so I've billed myself that way ever since. Oddly enough, to this day I have never heard the Electric Mud album. I just remember seeing it in stores and reading the reviews. While I was in WHAT4, I'd bought a 16-channel stereo mixing console for our P.A. system. Later, I started using it for recording and mixing demo tapes. With a few good microphones and a digital delay (echo) unit, I learned how to mix sound. I also did live recording of local bands, setting up my mixing board next to the P.A. board and doing a separate stereo mix, using headphones to monitor what I was doing. I taped the final shows by local B.R. punk band the Shitdogs and all-girl New Wave band the ParalElles. (Trivia note: Singer/keyboardist Catherine Snaith's little boy Shannon grew up to be a successful actor, now going by the name Shane West. He appears as Darby Crash in a soon-to-be-released biopic about the Germs singer, and has occasionally done live shows with the surviving members of the band.) I also helped a few bands record home demos. The most notorious was Chaos Horde, an early proponent of what became known as speed metal. In later years, that demo became a widely traded underground tape, which has only recently been semi-officially released. (Note: The person who financed the release has attached his name alongside mine as a producer, but in fact he had nothing to do with the recording. Aside from the band, I was the only other person in the room when the demo was recorded and mixed.) Chaos Horde was an awesome band. Had they been in another town instead of Baton Rouge - say Detroit or London - they would have been famous. In time, my original material had improved to the point that people were requesting MY songs, so I stopped doing covers entirely. My home demo recordings were getting airplay on the LSU radio station. That led to my forming a band around the musicians who had played on the demos. As Electric Earl the Electrons, we opened for a number of name touring acts

that played in some of the larger clubs. One place we played was The Bayou, which is where a young director named Steven Soderbergh filmed the bar scenes for sex, lies and videotape. Poet and NPR commentator Andrei Codrescu used to hang out there, too. (The Bayou burned down in 2002.) By the end of the 1980s, the Baton Rouge economy was stalled and it seemed like all the cool people were moving away. As for my music, the clubs were tending to book R&B bands that drunks can dance to, not singer/songwriter types like myself. Also, the guy in charge of the LSU radio station got rid of all the veteran announcers in order to make room for more student involvement, so overnight I stopped getting airplay because all the deejays who knew my music were gone. This was before the Internet. You had to go through nightclub bookers and radio people in order to reach the public. You couldn't just upload songs to MySpace and CD Baby. I knew that I needed to move. But where? Austin seemed to be the place where a lot of my friends were going. (Some of them still live there.) But a friend of mine who had already moved to Austin and then relocated to Los Angeles suggested that L.A. would be a better choice.

Bicentennial Wagon Train (1976) Just as I was about to graduate from Penn State, the theatre department was putting together a show to tour with the Bicentennial Wagon Train. There were to be five real life wagon trains starting in various parts of the country and converging on Vally Forge on July 4, 1976. Each wagon train would have a small show troupe which would perform at the campsite each night. The first audition was a massive "cattle call" affair. I didn't make the cut that time, but later was picked to be in "Company 3." After two-weeks of rehearsals, we were flown to Shreveport, to travel with the wagon train through Louisiana and Mississippi. When that wagon train joined up with the one in Tennessee (which was led by Loretta Lynn's husband Mooney Lynn), our show troupe was then flown to Iowa to join the Great Lakes wagon train. From there, we played shows in Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, and across the entire state of Pennsylvania. Like the Monkees, each show troupe was a combination of people with various degrees of musical skill and acting experience. I was primarily a musician, but had also taken theatre classes at PSU. Some of the others were skilled actors who had Broadway-quality voices or were good at choreographed dance moves. In the show, I mainly played bass and sang harmony. But I did get to play guitar on two songs, including one where I sang lead. The earliest video footage I have of myself on stage is from a 1976 documentary that Penn State's PBS station did about the wagon train, "Eastward Ho!" Each day we'd drive our camper to the next campsite and have the stage set up by the time the wagons rolled in. Sometimes, instead of leap-frogging ahead in the camper,

I'd spend the day riding in a wagon. It's so quiet and peaceful - unless the horses get spooked and there's a runaway! I never got into horse riding, but I've ridden hundreds of miles in a covered wagon. The most fun we had was in Louisiana. It was the one state that had its own culture - including the food, the music, even the language. And the people were the friendliest we'd ever met. The first Mardi Gras parade we ever saw was one that we were in! People along the route were going wild, and we thought that they must really like us. It took us a while to figure out that what they wanted was the souvenir "doubloon" coins that we had been given to toss to the crowd. We didn't know that one of the major joys of attending a Mardi Gras parade is collecting the "throws." The most exciting part of the trip was July 3rd, when the wagons made the final trek into Valley Forge. All day, there were mobs of people along the route, waving flags and celebrating our nation's Bicentennial. President Ford visited on July 4th and gave a speech. And then it was back to real life again.

Pennsylvania (1971-77) I went to Penn State and graduated with a B.A. I started out as an Electrical Engineering major, but soon realized that - as I used to explain it to people - I didn't want to study the same thing for four years. I remember looking through the entire course catalogue and realizing that there was not one major that suited me. I really didn't want to concentrate on one field, didn't want to be an electrical engineer, a mathematician, a French teacher, or any other profession. I just wanted "an education," something beyond high school. I was on the verge of dropping out altogether when someone told me about the General Arts and Sciences program. In short, it was like four more years of high school, except that I had a lot more freedom in choosing the courses I took. One thing I found in school was that I often spent more time studying things that interested me instead of what was assigned by professors. I did a lot of outside reading. One big topic of interest was the Watergate scandal. The question of the day was, as Sen. Howard Baker put it, "What did the President know, and when did he know it?" In short, did Nixon know about the bugging in advance? It seemed like everyone was taking up sides based on what they wanted to believe. I didn't want to be one of those people. And so I read the entire transcript of the Senate hearings (nine large paperbacks), Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men*, and the Nixon tape transcripts. Until the release of the "smoking gun" tape, I was still on the fence, believing that there wasn't enough evidence either way. One thing I got out of reading the Senate hearing transcript was a sense of lawyerly critical thinking. It helped me focus my thinking in a more logical way. Years later, while vacationing in Maryland, I took time to stop at the U.S. Archives Annex in Alexandria, Virginia, to listen to the famous Watergate tapes that I'd been hearing about for so

many years. (By agreement between Nixon and the government, the tapes were not to be made available for public distribution, but you could go to the Archives and listen to them.) To me the conversations sounded like everyday office talk, people sitting around a desk chatting about what to do next. Only in this case, the boss's decision - spoken in so many banal words - amounted to obstruction of justice, a federal crime. While at Penn State, I did my first paying gigs. I started out playing guitar instrumentals at a steakhouse. It was background music for people drinking at the bar. Later, while hitchhiking home from class (I didn't have a car yet), I got a ride from a guy named Carl Snyder, an insurance salesman who sang in a Top 40 band called Land Slyde. I ended up playing guitar and bass with them. It was a fun gig. One interesting thing, compared with now, was that if you wanted people to dance you'd play a slow song, a "belly rubber" as Carl would put it. At the end of the night, if the audience wanted an encore there'd be a passing of the hat, and the amount of extra time the band would play depended on how much money was in the hat. The band had its ups and downs, the inevitable personnel changes, and eventually broke up. I started concentrating on the solo gigs, playing singer/songwriter songs of the day. This was probably the golden era for acoustic musicians who played cover songs, since the southern California country-rock sound was dominating the airwaves, Bob Dylan was still having hits, John Denver was doing TV specials, and the folk-rock of the Sixties (including some of the more acoustic-sounding Beatle songs) still sounded fresh. Later in the decade, as disco and New Wave gained ground, new repertoire got to be something of a problem for any acoustic musician without original material. After graduating college and then spending six months with the Bicentennial Wagon Train, I got a job working at a lab at PSU. By the time funding for that project ended, I had decided to move to Louisiana. - TO BE CONTINUED - Tags: pop

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