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## *Red Hot in the 'Cold Cold Town'*



Photo: Daniel McElmury

Sunset District musician and composer Jeff Gutman, with his drummer Gary Fuges, perform at the Red Devil Lounge during Gutman's CD release party in July. He is already working on another CD. See story page 9.

# Sunset Songwriter, Musician Releases Third CD

By Kevin Davis

Sunset District composer Jeff Gutman, 28, just released his third CD, "Cold Cold Town," a 12-track collection about down-sized dreams in the mellow metropolitan post-tech chill-out.

With his accoutrements of gumption, a self-effacing laugh and habit of tugging his hair when concentrating, Gutman expresses a seasoned city-dweller's wistful regret toward the past and change in the new CD.

"It's about how this is an economically tougher place to exist," he says of the collection's primary theme. "People are more guarded and colder to each other. There's a hardness to people, compounded with the economic downturn," he said. "The music scene has suffered, too."

With "Cold Cold Town," recorded at Polk Street Studios for several thousand dollars raised with his bandmates whom he found via craigslist, Gutman says, "I wanted to capture a live, stripped-down sound with minimal overdubs and layering, like the punk rock of the early '70s."

The call and response of foghorns inspired his song "Shipwrecked," about a sailor who loses his crew in a storm: "I am lost in the fog off the shore and the weight of the waves washed away all the days .... Tell me captain now, and please don't lie, how long has it been since we died?"

"Bittersweet," about a pregnant girl he met on tour after she ran away from her boyfriend and family, goes, "Your lipstick tastes like nicotine – with your innocence tattooed on your knees."

A dream inspired the song "Gabriel," about a blind Renaissance sculptor: "Clawing his hands at the darkness of day, Gabriel carved out his halo today."

Gutman gleaned his love of storytelling from his "best friends," mom and dad, a sheriff and hydraulic salesman, while growing up in Almaden Valley. In junior high school he played Dr. Demento-style comedy songs with a blind classmate who taught him guitar.

Gutman tramped through

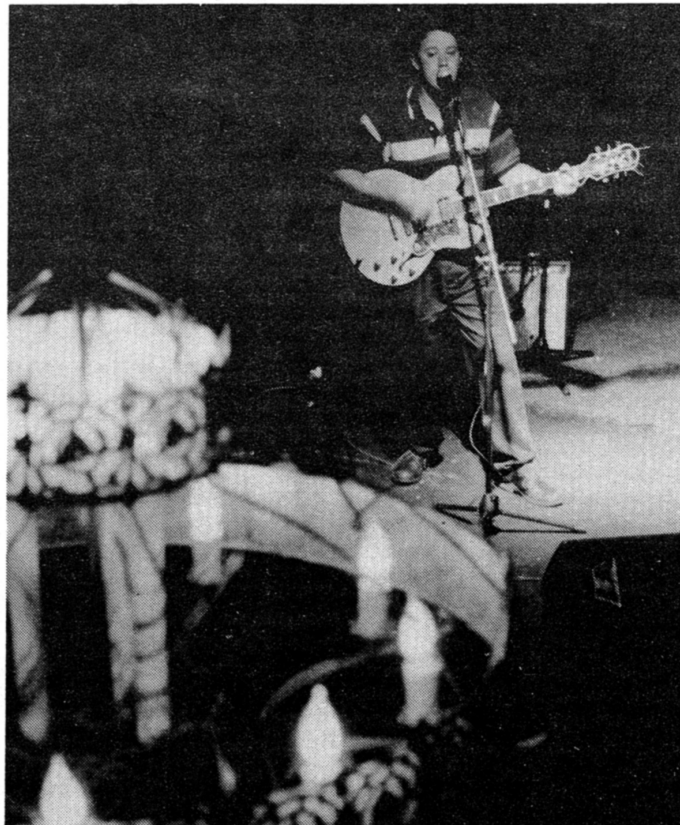


Photo: Daniel McElmury

**Jeff Gutman performs at his CD release party, held at the Red Devil Lounge in July.**

many eclectic, sometimes treacherous, detours before engineering some exposure strumming and warbling. He has worked as a graveyard shift hotel concierge (he was held up at gunpoint), old-fashioned ice cream maker, broadcast at anti-authority Free Radio Santa Cruz, managed the Stonestown Galleria movie theater, and published his own literary journal. He finally ended up touring the West Coast, with the requisite broken-down van, and played his first gig at Ireland's 32 in the Richmond District.

Gutman describes his performance style as edgy.

"I jump around and boom out with my voice to give presence to my style and bring the audience in," he says. He cites as artistic influences Patti Smith, Brian Wilson, Nick Drake, Woody Guthrie and Sun Ra, among others.

In 1995, he recorded his first CD, "The Mindfire Tapes," laying ambient, spare-sound collages on a four-track home studio using experimental noises and effects with drums and bass. Around the time his four-track

died, so did a four-year relationship when, tragically, the woman he intended to marry and start a family with left, never to be heard from again. The episode left Gutman "emotionally handicapped."

"Our identities were intertwined. I wasn't sure who I was or wanted to be," he said.

His second collection, titled "Hellfire Vampire" ('98), was his cathartic response to that event. Living in a cabin near Watsonville, with only his guitar to keep him company, he played 1930s-era country, folk and blues – solo, acoustic, autobiographical performances with no overdubs.

"The Hellfire Tapes got me through and gave me a creative outlet."

"I'm a frustrated novelist with a radio in my head," Gutman said of his songwriting craft. "When I'm on Muni and I get a melody in my head, I call my answering machine and hum it. Then I write words to fit the melody. I'm always trying to challenge myself lyrically, to move forward and to breach new boundaries;

things I haven't experimented with before. I don't want to repeat myself."

Gutman lives in the Outer Sunset, where the Muni N-line train terminates at the sand dunes. He echoes the familiar refrain of most creative types dwelling in the gray stucco desert of the avenues, when he says, "It gives me space to think and focus, to clear my head and let music come to me."

As if that were not enough, he is also producing an album for his current girlfriend, an East Bay songwriter.

"I don't care about fame or money," Gutman says. "It's that the songs touch people – that listening to them 10 or 20 years from now they'll still be relevant. To hear people say 'that was powerful, it moved me,' that's the real achievement, ultimately."

*Gutman's recordings are available at Amoeba Records on Haight Street. He will perform Sept. 29 at the Canvas Cafe, located on Lincoln Way.*

