

STREET SCENE

Mark Eitzel: Now you see him, now you don't



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

my own voicemail, the singer-songwriter who formerly fronted American Music Club left me a message.

It went something like this:

"Hey Stephanie, Mark Eitzel here. Look I can't get through to Ben at Matador because of their stupid voice mail system. Gimme a call or I'll just sit here and look at the phone. At a San Francisco number I'm not at liberty to share O.K. bye."

I saved it. I listen to it every now and then and giggle. Mark Eitzel on his voicemail.

Once we finally got connected, I was greeted with that same, meandering tone he sings with on his latest record, *The Invisible Man*. A true solo effort, Eitzel wrote, recorded, produced and

arranged the music that makes up the record. Gone are the legendary collaborations of his past projects, which instituted the talents of James McNew of Yo La Tengo, Mike McCready of Pearl Jam or REM's Peter Buck.

Writing over 40 songs, he's pared it down to just 13. Much of the music began on the strings of Eitzel's acoustic guitar and ended with ProTools and a Mac, which he says he despises. He worked for two years, mostly alone in his home. "It's a lot more freeing, and a little scary," admits Eitzel with the same sort of honesty that infiltrates all of his music. "There's no filter, ya know. Basically, I had to do all my own editing. I would go and do it. Six hours later, my back was aching."

"I didn't want to make a low-fi record."

A confessed fan of Laika and Mercury Rev, Eitzel doesn't know where his own songs come from. He's simply writing all the time, "whenever something pops

in my head," he said. "Some things are more pregnant with meaning than others. *Seeing Eye Dog* came together in one day, one afternoon. I thought, 'Wow, that was easy.' When I recorded it, suddenly it started sounding good to me. It was dance music sounding. Believe it or not, that was my naive attempt (at a dance song)."

While Eitzel continues to look forward, his fans haven't forgotten the past. "I still get the old AMC fans yelling 'you need a drummer!' But for me, it's not that difficult. I can control all the instruments. I don't have to argue constantly with a bunch of guys."

Substituting real drums for a machine on *The Invisible Man*, Eitzel drifts from melancholy piano keys on *Sleep*, to the quiet elation of *Can You See? He ponders past relationships on *Sleeve I Always Knew* and wanders the streets of San Francisco on *The Boy With The Hammer*. He couldn't get more personal, or*

more truthful.

"San Francisco is my home and I love it," he said of the city that seems to serve as his constant muse. "I hate to go on tour."

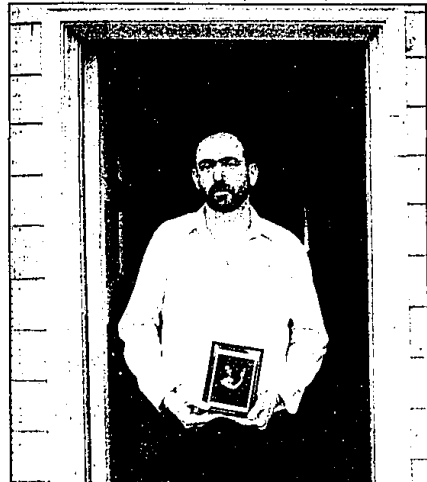
But that's just what he's doing. Don't miss him.

Mark Eitzel with opener David Garza, 8 p.m. Tuesday, July 17, Magic Bag, Ferndale. Tickets \$12. Call (248) 544-3080.

For more, read *Wish The World Away: Mark Eitzel & American Music Club*, a biography of the songwriter who's

earned a cult following, written by Sean Body. (192 pages, Interlink Publishing Group) \$18.95. Hear the Eitzel tribute record, *Come On Beautiful*, which features songs by Calexico and Lambchop. Check out www.matadorrecords.com/mark_eitzel/

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Mark Eitzel



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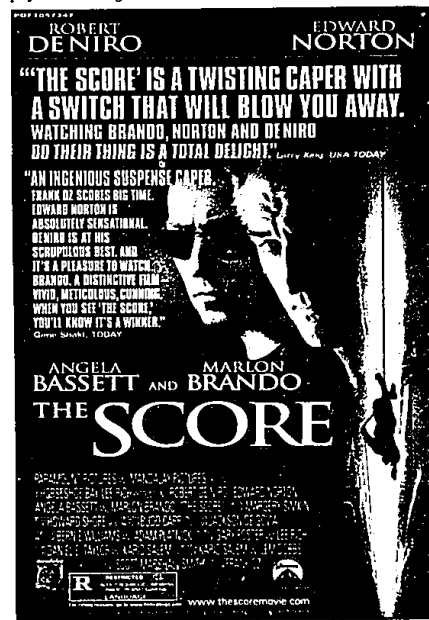
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