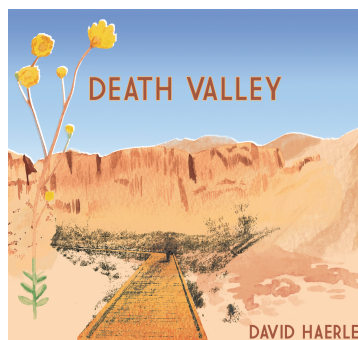


Translated from Dutch

DAVID HAERLE - DEATH VALLEY



At the end of 2018, exactly two years ago, we became aware of "Finding Natalie." It was a song by a certain David Haerle, singer-guitarist from Edendale. Edendale is a beautifully named district of Los Angeles, north-west of Downtown LA, home and setting to most of the major pioneer film studios, the days of the Keystone Cops and the first Charlie Chaplin pictures, just before the exodus to Hollywood by the 1920's. Apparently, something of the film magic has stuck, because 'Finding Natalie' is not only a catchy rock song, but a nice old-fashioned west coast rock song with an intro, a middle section, and crackling and rousing

solos by Haerle on electric guitar working towards a thrilling climax by the incredible violinist Luanne Homzy. But the song also tells a moving story about a childhood sweetheart, a story with cinematic qualities, the kind that keeps ruminating. Comparing what you experienced in your childhood and wondering why it didn't work out better for you. In other words, we all experience something like that and it leaves traces in our soul.

The song was from "Garden Of Edendale," also a beautiful record in its entirety. After 'Finding Natalie' there are twelve more songs, not all equally stunning in performance, but all equally seductive in their diversity. Whether Edendale is a real Garden of Eden, as the title suggests, is left as a question, but for David Haerle it is. Hence, he said that "Garden Of Edendale" is a love story: love for rock n' roll, for his home and region, and for the incredible people he knows there. A look at his life so far. "I tried to transform nostalgia into beauty." So the record is rightfully and proudly 'home grown'. Also, musically: in those seven years he wrote the songs, from scratch, made recordings based on jams, parts of which are still incorporated into the songs. It also gave the opportunity to build a team: most of the musicians are still in the current team.

First fruits? Yes, this turned out to be a debut album, but it doesn't sound like that. Haerle and his musicians are not debutants. David has been in the music business since his earliest days: his maternal grandparents owned the first full-time country radio station in Nashville. His father Martin left Germany with the intention of making it into the country music industry and co-founded the independent CMH Records (in a garage in LA). But David was (and is) a rocker and counted Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, David Bowie and Led Zeppelin among his heroes. In 1990 he took over the company as CMH Label Group, of which he has been president for 29 years. Running the company prevented him from working professionally with making music, singing, playing, writing and producing. There was still the ambition: in 2009 he even took voice coaching, an important step towards resuming music making.

What applies to the debut, also applies in its entirety to "Death Valley," a successor in all senses, a kind of "Garden Of Edendale" volume II: David clearly had a lot more to say, enough for 15 songs. Death Valley ("Valley of Death") is a desert valley that runs north to south through California. In the summer it is one of the hottest places on our planet. At 86 meters below sea level, Death Valley is the lowest point in North America. It is part of the Death Valley National Park, a varied but rugged landscape. That title is therefore no coincidence, in the light of what he is doing, because Death Valley is his favorite place on this planet, an area that gives him inspiration again and again: often the summer vacation ended with a visit to the area and it is always his ideal place for renewal.

To what extent the title of the album hints at the content of the songs is very much the question. The well-cared-for sound of "Death Valley" is a seamless extension of the debut and the melodies' richness seems endless. Once again, the instrumental intermediate parts provide a boost and show time and again what a gifted guitar player David has become over the years. His recognizable singing voice gives the whole unity and identity. Yet "Death Valley" is not a carbon copy of "Garden Of Edendale" at all. For example, there is no cheap copy of "Finding Natalie" on it. Each song is different and unique within the spectrum of the music. Opener "I Want To Be Like Him" and continuation "The Free Show" with wonderful mandolin work by Carson Cohen (who plays bass and keyboards elsewhere) set the tone. Haerle was again assisted by Jose Salazar and Brina Kabler for the production and worked with a number of renowned technicians and mixers, such as Bob Ludwig.

Number three "Edendale" is pure tenderness: you guessed it: it is a declaration of love to his home region. What follows is one of the highlights of this CD: "Go Do That With Sharon." The song starts calmly, but regularly gets an adrenaline rush, which the excellent drummer Reade Pryor gives the impetus to. Strong backing vocals with repetition of the punchlines round out "Go Do That With Sharon" beautifully. The next highlight is already ready: 'Romy And Michele', which refers to 'Romy And Michele's High School Reunion' from 1997, comic film with the most charming and crazy Lisa Kudrow (yes, the Phoebe Buffay from 'Friends'). This film impressed David, probably not for any psychological depth, but because of brilliant acting performances, also by Kudrow's partner Mira Sorvino, the losers turn into winners.

The sing-along "Edendale, Edendale" chorus softens the unmistakable melancholy that the subsequent and refined "Ms. Bell" too. For example, all subsequent songs "Forgiving Myself," "Smoggy Days," the rushing "Tell-ers" and "Self Made Man" tell another aspect of Haerle's deep dive into his past and thus the search for himself. "The Groove Of The Record," "Perfect Lover" "Run And Be Free" and closing track "Eureka!" Not a single song that makes us feel less good. Lyrically there is always something to discover, so that at the end you get a good idea of what makes David Haerle's personality and what drives him. In the surprisingly light-hearted title song "Death Valley," violinist Luanne Hamzy (the one that's on "Finding Natalie") makes a contribution in her own sparkling way.

'Death Valley' is not an earth-shattering CD that will radically change the face of rock or give the nowadays little innovative genre a second wind, but it has a number of other qualities that every music should have: it is honest, pure, personal and meaningful in terms of content. Antoine Légar, Rootstime, Belgium
(www.rootstime.be)