

ERIK KOSKINEN

Erik Koskinen is an American singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, whose music is not categorized by sub-genres. Stylistically he is on his own. Influenced by roots music of the Americas and the world, the rhythmic integrity and musical tone is as important as the lyrical content and the artistic intent.

Koskinen's newest album, *Burning the Deal* is steeped in American roots traditions. Of *Burning the Deal*, he says, "It's not only Americana music. I learned how to play blues music. I learned how to play country music, and how to play folk, bluegrass, jazz, whatever. I learned how to play American music."

The nine songs share a stripped-down, almost naked quality, but complexities lie just under their skin.

Part of that depth can be attributed to the top-notch players Koskinen recruited: Greg Leisz (Jackson Browne, Beck, Joni Mitchell) on lap and pedal steel and mandolin, plus the rhythm section of drummer Jay Bellerose (Alison Krauss and Robert Plant, Willie Nelson) and bassist Jennifer Condos (Don Henley, Marc Cohn, Ray Lamontagne). As for how he managed to gather them together — twice — for recording sessions in Ojai, California, Koskinen quips, "In the music biz, you're always one person away from knowing the president."

Burning the Deal has a moody, shadowy vibe — an occasionally unsettling sense that evil lurks a little too close by. You can hear its murky threat in the slinky, bayou-drenched minor-key drone thrumming under Leisz's mandolin notes on "Down in the Factory," or in the gut-bucket-blues meets second-line-syncopation of "Sell Out" — both of which would have been at home in a "True Blood" episode — or in the quiet whisper of "Crazy," in which Koskinen sings, "It's easy going crazy but it's hard staying sane enough."

If something wicked this way comes, it might take the form of the protagonist in "Gun," so down and out, he's driven to commit a desperate act — and receives a punishment far more serious than the crime. It's loosely based on the saga of a high-school friend whose third strike sent him to prison for life, Koskinen reveals, adding that the character in "Down in the Factory" — where they manufacture jealousy, apathy, gluttony, and anxiety — could be that guy's brother.

Maybe "my kind of music" is the kind that requires patience. Nowhere is that quality more evident than on "Ordinary Fool," a gorgeous, slow shuffle that unwinds gently, its longing ache a gradual dawning.

"I could have made a country record, but I don't want to make a retro-sounding record," he explains. "I like old music. I like old sounds, and I play old instruments through old amps. But I'm not trying to sound like a Chuck Berry record or a Waylon Jennings record."

No, Koskinen is not trying to sound like anyone else at all. He's one of a kind. An American original.

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