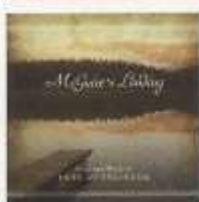


December 2013

## Pete Huttlinger



### McGuire's Landing

Anyone who has seen Pete Huttlinger perform recently knows that his health struggles in recent years (a near-fatal stroke and end-stage heart failure) have done nothing to dampen his inspired guitar playing, storytelling, or sense of humor. If anything, it seems that his creative drive has been stoked and expanded, as evidenced by *McGuire's Landing*, a project that pairs a 15-track album of instrumentals and original songs with Huttlinger's prose story about the album's fictional namesake and his trek from Ireland to a new homestead in the American West, circa 1865. The origins of the project lie in the solo-guitar piece "McGuire's Landing," which Huttlinger wrote in the late '90s when he was the guitarist in John Denver's band. When Denver heard the tune, he asked Huttlinger to let him write lyrics for it, but a plane crash took Denver's life before he completed those lyrics. Huttlinger recorded the instrumental on his 2004 release, *The Santa Rita Collection*, and the larger concept of McGuire's story, which he had related to Denver, stuck with him. He began writing additional *McGuire* material in 2006, and while

recovering from his stroke and heart conditions, Huttlinger re-dedicated himself to finishing the song cycle and the accompanying story.

The result works on a few different levels. Fans of Huttlinger's solo-guitar work will recognize the virtuosity and taste that he's become known for, with his fingerstyle and flatpicking both on display in the arrangements of the lively "Forest Side Reel," "Nickel for Your Thoughts," and a re-release of 1994's "Catch and Release." The album's band includes appearances by mandolin-ace Matt Flinner, Dobro great Rob Ickes, roots stalwart Herb Pedersen (banjo, harmony vocals), session pro Andrea Zonn on fiddle, and a full string section. The band sounds natural and relaxed, as if they've been playing this set for years and are fully committed to bringing McGuire's journey to life. Huttlinger's lyrics serve the story arc, but songs like "The Ghosts from Below" (vocals by Mollie Weaver), "The Blessings of Winter," and "Here Comes the Cold," (vocals by Huttlinger), hold up as independent Americana pieces in their own right. And reading Huttlinger's light-hearted prose and dialog between characters while listening to the album makes you think that he could take the entire production to a theater stage if McGuire is inclined to lead him in that direction.

—D.G.