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## Delving into Mark Islam's *Recent Past*

REVIEW BY  
ROLAND F. PALMER

The fact that I'm always looking to expand my musical horizons may have been what landed me the assignment to review Mark Islam's debut CD *The Recent Past*. (Of course, it might also



**The Recent Past**  
Mark Islam  
Noble Savage Records

Mark Islam's web site:  
[members.tripod.com/markislam](http://members.tripod.com/markislam)

Lesbian & Gay Country Music  
Association  
[www.lgcma.com](http://www.lgcma.com)

life. Mark Islam has his eyes and heart wide open as he uses what we all see in our lives or, in some instances, what we try not so see to find inspiration for his song writing. His songs speak of the bag lady drinking in the park, the office worker, world peace, homophobia, depression, friends, and of course, being gay.

*The Recent Past* is a musical journey through Mark's life. From "Beat-Up El Camino" which he wrote in his dorm room at Boston University to "Just One Paycheck Away," which tunelessly speaks to trying to live during the post-Gulf War recession. "Get Used To It," the most outspoken song on this CD, was partially inspired by an incident in the dorm elevator at UC/Berkeley and is written for "the shrill, hysterical Bible-thumpers that spout anti-gay sentiments on TV talk shows". Mark specifically omitted songs that he wrote for other artists and focused on songs he felt he had to write. "If I was going to make an album," he said, "then it was going to be an

have been the fact that I was wearing a blue plaid flannel shirt and faded blue jeans as assignments were handed out.)

Whatever the reason, I was pleasantly surprised by what I heard.

Mark Islam is probably best classified as a hybrid artist whose music is a wonderful blend of country, rock, folk and pop. If you are looking for songs with "nothing but 'moon/June, love/above' rhymes," you won't find them here.

What you will find is a fascinating mix of songs that explore and celebrate everyday

artistic statement about me, my life, my encounters, my sensibilities."

Being a child in the '70s, Mark Islam was inspired by the singer/songwriter movement of that period. Artists such as Carole King, Carly Simon, James Taylor, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Jackson Brown helped shape Mark as a songwriter and performer today.

In 1995, Mark released his first recording on cassette, *The Calloused Heart Collection*. Included on this collection was

one of his most requested tunes, "Everything Is Gonna Be Alright", which Mark hopes to include on a future release.

Ironically, as Mark worked to get his music noticed, he got a break when "Everything Is Gonna Be Alright" began receiving air time on Dr. Laura Schelessinger's nationally syndicated call-in advice show. If Mark ever decides to release "Get Used To It" as a single, I think the first copy should go to Dr. Laura with a thank-you note.

*The Recent Past* has something for every taste. Whether you like upbeat steel-guitar dri-

ven tunes ("Lose These Blues"), broken-hearted laments ("What'll I Do About Loving You?"), songs that address striving for world peace ("Peace On Earth - What Is It Worth?") or being a woman in the '90s ("Always The Bridesmaid," "The Only Thing That Makes Her Feel Alive"), Mark Islam delivers with his smooth tenor voice and a collection of some of Southern California's finest musicians. What is most amazing about Mark Islam, the songwriter and performer, is that he is a wonderful storyteller, and like any good story, you'll want to hear his songs again and again.

Mark Islam is currently considering two new concept albums. One will include songs that talk about dealing with life's unforeseen tradeoffs in getting to where one needs to be. The other will focus on songs relating to the spirit. When Mark isn't writing and performing his songs, he can be found on stage. He is playing the disciple, Thomas, in Terrence McNally's controversial play "Corpus Christi," which opens in Philadelphia's Theater Double in mid-March. This summer he will reprise his role in the hippie tribe in a production of "Hair" in Nashville. ▼

## Family Friends

REVIEW BY  
M. MAXWELL STROUD

Almost everyone in the queer community knows, or knows of, at least one or two allies. They're the folks who are straight but not narrow. Folks who don't pat themselves on the backs for mere tolerance, but who are active in the struggle for equal rights for GLBT people. Folks who cringe as much as we do upon hearing the expression "love the sinner, hate the sin."

And know 'em personally or not, I'd venture to guess that a few allies appear on our lists of favorite people. My personal list includes my best friend, my parents, my classmates and one of my legislative representatives. My girlfriend's list starts with her brother and goes on to

include the cast of *Will & Grace*.

Allies are an essential, albeit often overlooked, part of our community and our struggle for civil rights. In *Friends & Family: True Stories of Gay America's Straight Allies*, Dan Woog explores the lives of forty allies from across the country. It's easy to find stories that remind you of people you know and respect, but it's just as easy to find tales of folks who surprise you with their courage and dedication.

Woog's seamless relation of these stories leaves the reader with the impression of having sat at the kitchen table over coffee with the regular folks represented in the book. There are opportunities to connect with feisty grandmothers, police chiefs in pride parades, members of the clergy, and even a 12-year-old

ally with a loud, resonant voice.

These allies are people whose lives have been not just touched in some way by members of the GLBT community, but touched in such a way that they feel a call to action. Conversely, they have not just connected with members of the community, but have helped strengthen and shape it.

In describing the people that he met in the course of writing this book, Woog says "They do not 'accept' homosexuality; they embrace it. They do not 'hope' to see homophobia end; they work tirelessly to make it happen." ▼

**Friends and Family:  
True Stories of Gay  
America's Straight Allies**  
Dan Woog



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