

Edie Brickell & New Bohemians

Edie Brickell & New Bohemians' *Stranger Things* represents the honest, unadulterated and utterly charming sound of a longtime band just being itself. Brickell calls this album, (the combo's first studio release in 16 years) a "true beginning," the one effort in which she and her original band-mates perform together as a bonafide group, without the addition of session players or too much production sheen. It's as close to the combo's live sound as a studio recording can get. Opening with an addictive little fuzz-toned guitar riff from guitarist Kenny Withrow on the title track, *Stranger Things* establishes a loose, playful and confident tone.

In spring 2005, the New Bohemians – guitarist Kenny Withrow, bassist Brad Houser, drummer Brandon Aly, percussionist John Bush plus newly recruited keyboardist Carter Albrecht --traveled from Dallas to Brooklyn to join Brickell at the homegrown studio of producer-engineer Bryce Goggin. He's a veteran of both jam-band and indie-rock projects, having worked with artists ranging from Luna to Herbie Hancock and Trey Anastasio. Since 2001, Brickell and the New Bohemians had been informally developing new material whenever they had the chance, with no specific release date looming or label demanding product.

"We definitely needed somebody to guide us," Brickell confesses. "I happened to meet Bryce Goggin about a year and a half ago. He took me over to his Brooklyn studio. I walked in there and saw these jam band records around and asked if he would ever be interested in working with the New Bohemians. We wanted somebody who understands a jam band...I went home and called my band and said, 'I found the guy. Why don't you come up and give him a trial recording session?' It was wondrous, joyful, perfect; the guy is so laid back and his studio is like the funkier garage, with crap everywhere. The guys felt right at home because it looked like all the funky places we used to rehearse in when we were playing the clubs. We set aside another couple of months together, starting in September, to finish the record and everything just fell into place magically after that." All the more appropriate then, that *Stranger Things* should be released by Fantasy Records, home to another notable singer/songwriter – John Fogerty. It's the famed label's first new pop/rock signing in over 25 years.

"We all went to the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing Arts and we learned improvisation there," New Bohemians guitarist Kenny Withrow explains. "And that's the way we approached music – as heavily improv-based music. Edie just did that naturally. I didn't know anybody who could really do that quite like her. That's the way the band started out, that's how we wrote tunes, everybody in the same room hammering them out, minus a few pre-written tunes from Edie. This time, with Bryce, we were all in the same room, playing live. It's a beautiful thing, to know you made the album that, I guess you could say, you always wanted to make, certainly in the atmosphere you always thought could be possible."

The world at large might have assumed that Edie Brickell & New Bohemians had called it quits after the grueling non-stop touring and promoting that followed the surprise, multi-platinum success of the group's 1989 debut album, *Shooting Rubberbands at the Stars*, and its high-pressure 1990 follow-up, *Ghost of a Dog*. Brickell herself did choose to step away from the intense spotlight, a place in which she never completely felt comfortable, but she never forsook her music or the companionship of the guys with whom she started. The relationship turned long-distance and long-term as Brickell left Texas for New York and each of them followed individual musical and personal directions. When they would casually reunite, however, it was clear the chemistry that fueled their earliest encounters hadn't diminished.

"Every time I went to Dallas," Brickell recalls, "we would get together and jam. Hours would pass by, whole days. It was so much fun to see what was in everybody's subconscious, it was as if we were putting a puzzle together at the same time. After working with other musicians here and there, I've learned that the New Bohemians can really jam. They don't say, 'Oh what was that, let's go back,' they don't interrupt the flow. If you just keep playing, verses and choruses happen naturally. As a singer and songwriter you can feel a song evolving and these are guys who understand that and they hang in there with you. If you stop and start and stop and start, you are basically crafting a song rather than feeling it. That's what makes our relationship really unique; everybody understands the art of letting things flow."

A decade and a half has passed since the seemingly overnight success, and now Edie Brickell & New Bohemians are pleased to return to where they began, with no lingering misgivings about the past. As Brickell, who has also released two albums under her own name, puts it, "I don't believe in glory days. I don't measure my life by a hit. Thinking that something should have been better or could have been better – well, I think things are just as they ought to be now. I still have stuff inside that I want to express and I feel lucky to have an outlet and friends to do it with."

There's nothing strange about *Stranger Things*: Everybody loves a happy beginning.