

MARK ERELLI (biography)

Discovered in an impromptu 3 am hotel room jam at a music conference when he was just 23, Erelli was finishing up a graduate degree in evolutionary biology when his self-titled debut was released in 1999. He hit the ground running when he won the prestigious Kerrville New Folk contest, joining the ranks of past winners such as Lyle Lovett and Nanci Griffith. With his sophomore release, **Compass & Companion**, Erelli embarked on a non-stop touring schedule, sharing the stage with the likes of Dave Alvin, John Hiatt, and Gillian Welch. Erelli's albums spent weeks in the top ten of the Americana radio charts and garnered four Boston Music Award nominations.

Perhaps more impressive than his initial career trajectory was that Erelli managed to accomplish so much despite a congenital condition that caused his lung to collapse three times in a year. "It even happened once onstage in Philadelphia," Erelli recalls. In hindsight, Erelli regards the successful surgery to correct the condition as both a medical and musical turning point. "I started out really focused on being a 'singer-songwriter,'" he explains. "After my health issues, I felt a real urgency to become a more complete 'musician.' I freed myself from limits I didn't even know I'd imposed."

Erelli wasted no time in flexing this newfound musical freedom on a wide-ranging trio of records released over the next six years. He eschewed the conventional studio environment in favor of recording live in a Civil War-era civic building for 2002's **The Memorial Hall Recordings**, an ambitious mix of originals, traditionals and covers of tunes by his favorite New England songwriters. Next, Erelli teamed up with Boston country band The Spurs for **Hillbilly Pilgrim**, an entire collection of western swing originals "*brimming over with wry, heartfelt songcraft, invigorating tempos and pedal-steel guitar dazzling as an Arizona sunset (Paste Magazine).*" Finally, in 2006 Erelli and producer Lorne Entress holed up in a basement home studio to craft **Hope & Other Casualties**, a brave and searingly honest tour de force that addresses tough issues with "*the grit of John Hiatt and the melancholy beauty of Ron Sexsmith (Washington Post).*"

Erelli played 11 different instruments on **Hope**, ushering in the next stage in Erelli's startling musical evolution—multi-instrumentalist sideman. He quickly gained notoriety for his instrumental prowess when he joined Warner Brothers Recording Artist (and long-time friend) Lori McKenna's band. Erelli was by McKenna's side in front of 15,000 people each night when she opened for Tim McGraw and Faith Hill's Soul2Soul tour in 2007, as well as on televised appearances on the Grand Ole Opry and Good Morning America. More recently, Erelli accompanied Josh Ritter on a UK tour that culminated in a two-night stand at London's Royal Albert Hall.

Despite his burgeoning career as a sideman in the past few years, Erelli has continued to add to his own catalog with another trio of eclectic projects. In 2007 came **Innocent When You Dream**, a homespun acoustic collection of lullabies and love songs by Wilco, Townes VanZandt, and James Taylor, among others. Erelli then teamed up with producer Zack Hickman to explore modern times and matters of the heart with equal parts courage and compassion on 2008's **Delivered**. Employing new sonic textures like horns and keyboards, **Delivered** had a stark, muscular timelessness, embodying "*the best qualities of the folk-populist lineage that began with Woody Guthrie, and is carried today by Bruce Springsteen (Sing Out!).*" In 2009, Erelli was one of eight artists invited to the UK to write songs inspired by the life and work of Charles Darwin. After a week's composing, their eighteen new songs were debuted at a sold out concert. The resulting live recording, the **Darwin Song Project**, was hailed by *The Guardian* as "*an intriguing, impressive album that results from a brave and unlikely collaboration.*"

Erelli will maintain his prolific streak in the coming year with two forthcoming releases. **Seven Curses**, a collection of murder ballads recorded with friend Jeffrey Foucault, and **Little Vigils**, Erelli's eighth studio album, are both scheduled for release in spring of 2010.

DISCOGRAPHY

Mark Erelli (1999) Signature Sounds
Compass & Companion (2001) Signature Sounds
The Memorial Hall Recordings (2002) Signature Sounds
Hillbilly Pilgrim (2004) Signature Sounds
Hope & Other Casualties (2006) Signature Sounds
Innocent When You Dream (2007) Self-released
Delivered (2008) Signature Sounds
Darwin Song Project (various artists, 2009) SFF Records
Seven Curses (with Jeffrey Foucault, 2010) Self-released
Little Vigils (2010) Self-released

www.markerelli.com