

*Sunday, February 12, 2006*



In my uncle's vast collection of MP3's I have found one of my favourite tunes. It is a rare (not officially released) live recording of the song 'Goodbye' which I have seen in 1997 during the BBC show 'Later with Jools Holland'. (now also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYj8IU-0sAQ&feature=related>). It starts as a simple finger picking tune, then you hear a rough male voice singing. It is not someone who tries to please the listener, it is the withered voice of a man who has obviously walked down many roads. At that time he was just clean from his drug addiction, released from prison, and finished with his sixth marriage. His name is Steve Earle, a country rocker from Austin, Texas,

There is a deep feeling in every note of this four minutes song. The theme is classic: abandoned love: *'can't remember if we said goodbye'*. A gentle strumming guitar is accompanied by a subtly improvisating steel guitar. The lonesome harmonica sound seems to come straight from Steve's broken heart. Emmylou Harris, who has a angel-like appearance, is duetting with him. Heaven and hell is coming together. She calls it "the saddest song ever written". The few lines she is singing are heart- breaking. When she sings about a Carribean breeze her voice sounds soft and warm.



The song is also recorded on Emmylou's album 'Wrecking ball' which has been produced by Daniel Lanois. The recording took place in a big square space in Nashville with musicians (including Steve himself) sitting in a circle. The sound is deep and heavy. Daniel has overdubbed the track with his intense guitar solo which is of a painful beauty as if he is saying: love hurts. With his mysterious soundscape a dark swamp landscape is painted. Sounds are hanging in the air like a fog or drizzle. Not surprisingly, in the book 'American Music' Annie Leibovitz photographs Emmylou in such a muddy environment in Tennessee.



I have seen Steve Earle twice in concert in the late 1990's performing in Paradiso, Amsterdam. Once solo and once with his band The Dukes. At both concerts the song Goodbye was the highlight of the evening. As usual I took my sketchbook with me and these are two of the pencil sketches I did. He made a powerful impression on stage with his overweight body and big muscled, tattooed arms. He was wearing shades, unshaven and long hair with Elvis-style sideburns. One time he was nearly starting a fight with a man in the

audience whose presence was disturbing to him. The atmosphere was tense. Oddly, the man, a fan, was a Steve Earle look-a-like. So Steve was kind of fighting with his ghost. Another time he took on stage his 12-year son. No idea from which marriage.