

Issue Date: Tuesday, July 29, 2008, Posted On: 7/30/2008

## Out of the Box: Hula Girl Highway

Paul Shugrue



Climb aboard and set sail. About ten years ago Mike Aiken brought his sailboat into Hampton Roads for repairs and a temporary layover. He's been here ever since. Turns out this area is the perfect compliment to the music he plays. A seafaring musical troubadour, he writes about his experiences sailing all over the world and his fourth album, *Hula Girl Highway*, makes you feel like part of the crew.

Aiken lives on his sailboat in Willoughby Spit and recorded his first three albums on a tugboat, retro-fitted as a recording studio. For the new CD, however, he went to Nashville to have some studio session pros augment the sound of his already tight touring band. The result is one of the most polished recordings ever put out by a local musician. Virtually every song references his love of the ocean while the arrangements reflect his influences from country-rock to swing, Caribbean, blues and folk. Eight of the songs are originals and so packed with images of the sand and sea, you could get a tan just listening to songs like "Jump Up," "Find Me" and his ode to the artist he is most often compared to—Jimmy Buffett—on "Thank You (My Buffett Tune)." The cover songs he picks are stellar like Guy Clark's "Blowin' Like a Bandit" and "Banana Republic," a Steve Goodman song once covered by Buffett which serves as the album's closer and is so good it makes you want to listen all over again.

It's rare to find an artist who is able to incorporate his lifestyle so seamlessly into his music, much less one who calls this area his home. Anyone who has ever had the wind billowing in their sails will relate and for those who never have, Mike will take you there.

**Listen for songs from the album *Hula Girl Highway* by Mike Aiken on Paul Shugrue's new music show "Out of the Box" on Hampton Roads public radio 89.5 WHRV Mon. through Thurs. from 7 to 9 p.m., Sat. from 1 to 5 p.m. and on-demand at [www.whrv.org/outofthebox](http://www.whrv.org/outofthebox).**