

Out Of The Box - Review by Paul Shugrue
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WATER WORLD:

Warning: listening to this album will make you want to quit your job, buy a boat and live the life of Mike Aiken. *Just Add Salt* is Norfolk-based Aiken's third CD, and it was literally recorded on the Chesapeake Bay in a studio on a tugboat in Willoughby Spit. Aiken's been living here ever since a storm blew his boat into Hampton Roads years ago. He like what he saw and has used the area for musical inspiration while sailing to gigs up and down the East Coast.

Other local players like Lewis McGehee, Bob Zentz and Robbin Thompson help with the mostly acoustic arrangements, and Aiken's vocal harmonizing with his wife Amy is irresistible. Almost every song has a reference to sailing or life near the ocean. "Hillbilly Beach Bum" leads things off with a honky-tonk rhythm, and when he rhymes "señorita" with "margarita," the scene is set for the rest of the album. There are songs about fishing in Alaska, sailing to Cuba, private coves, secluded beaches, hurricanes, swaying palm trees and a guitar that has seen it all. Aiken does two cover songs, Lyle Lovett's "If I Had A Boat" (of course) and The Grateful Dead's "Friend Of The Devil," but it's his original songs that define his party-on-the-water style. He'll be playing Granby North on Feb. 11; listen for a live performance on "Out Of The Box" just before that show.

"Salt on the breeze, saltwater under your keel, salt on the rim on your glass!" explains Aiken of the CD title. *Just Add Salt* is a vicarious thrill ride arriving just in time to blow off the winter blues.

Paul Shugrue is host of NPR's "Out Of The Box" program on WHRV Norfolk, VA.