

PHOTOS BY TYLER SHIELDS



## Val Emmich

### Looking For A Feeling You Never Knew You Needed

It's been said that I don't write a lot of negative press about our Shoreworld artists and the only thing I can tell you is that to date I haven't been wrong. Val Emmich is a perfect example. I was introduced to him during the *Sunlight SearchParty* days (2006) and I reviewed not only that brilliant record but also *Songs, Volume 1: Woodstock* (2007) and the gradual pop return of *Little Dagers* (2008) and I was right when it came to my predictions for Emmich and his stand-alone style that's taken him from one career opportunity to the next. If I could take Val Emmich to task on one negative thing, it would be in the area of him not introducing me to the scads of gorgeous actresses connected to his run as heartthrob on *Ugly Betty* and *30 Rock*.

His latest album titled, *Looking For A Feeling You Never Knew You Needed* has him heading once more into the breach, dear friends, once more into his musical jungle and off the main highway to Hollywood...at least for the time being.

*Looking For A Feeling You Never Knew You Needed* is the prodigal son's full return to his pop roots and features the signature stamp of Near Records producers Ron Haney and Bart Schouder. I'll be honest with you; I was a *Sunlight SearchParty* fan. I felt that SSP (produced by Jason Cupp (Finch, The Elected) and the Woodstock projects were the best direction he had taken to date and I approached this latest project with a grim curiosity for where he would step next. But worry not. Emmich is a guy that would sound good writing country, blues, pop or Louisiana Cajun for that matter. The direction matters less at this point than the content he continues to deliver from within.

The record is lush but sensible. Slick, stark style melds seamlessly within myriads of handclaps; drum patterns, vocal layers and synth patches that scuttle around big, warm electric guitars and pianos like water beetles stroking frenetic patterns on a lake. The truth is that at this point, Emmich would shine with a Silvertone acoustic and a microphone, but these guys make him sizzle.

Leadoff track "I Don't Want To Go Home" spills solid gold all over the CD player as Emmich and crew chug into the main riff, transporting this '80s vibed rocker into a memorable and ultra catchy piece of listening pleasure. Robert Smith from The Cure influence is mighty and the

production feels as cool as a new leather jacket. Definitely the hit on the disc.

The Franz Ferdinand vibe of "Next To Me" comes out of the gate fast and hugs the curve with dance patterned techno, slide and echoplexed guitar and synth runs. This is a fun and bouncy song lead well by Emmich's wide vocal range and the dynamic ability to raise and lower song direction at will.

"Change Of Scenery" uses robotic drum patterns and heavy synth layers to bring its destination to the table. When I was done listening to this song I felt like getting my Capezios and red leather pants out of the attic. Production smarts bring real deal nostalgia to the table and uses it along Emmich's lyrical magic to create a hybrid of "then and now" '80s style. It works well.

Other tracks of stand out interest include "Resume," a song that utilizes strong lyrical wordplay in tandem with carefree Lenonesque production, vocals and backing instrumentation. Little effects like keyboard staccato hits rub up against the body of this stark number.

I also dug the dark velvety feel of "Convince Me" a laid back analog, warm number that features the addictive vocal assist of Allie Moss. Emmich and Moss spin vocal tapestries of harmonic delight in turn and together. Allie is amazing and compliments Val perfectly in this dynamic duet. Production pops with pianos, guitars and drum patterns way in the back, giving the vocals pristine focus. This has hit written all over it and it's my second choice.

This twelve-song platter has many interesting sounds and feelings and seems to place Val back in his early career position of enthusiastically hustling music he believes in on his own grass-roots terms. Not a bad thing at all. Emmich is one of those guys that know the value of taking calculated chances and keeping fresh opportunities on the radar. The buying public will eat this up. More info at [valemich.com](http://valemich.com).



## The Fabulous Baker Brothers

### Summer Joy

Joe and Patrick Baker are your typical good ole' American brothers. Raised on the radio with the likes of Kiss and The Beatles as babysitters, it was just a matter of time before they picked up their own guitars and waded into the pool of original rock and roll music. Over the years the two brothers stuck together and racked up a couple of impressive accomplishments. In 1991

the brothers formed the regionally successful rock band The Semibeings along with Trenton son Keith Monacchio

They kicked some serious musical ass throughout the 1990s releasing albums on the ShimmyDisc and C/Z labels. The Semibeings ran their course and disbanded in 1999 but the Baker brothers continued in Junkygood, a band that had the good fortune of being produced by Andrew Weiss (Rollins band, Ween.) This is the time frame where experimentation really began. With their focus evolving more towards psychedelic and Eastern musical influences, the two veered left of the common pop highway and never looked back.

Over the course of the next few years the Baker boys wrote and sifted thru ideas, sounds and songs, coming up with their current EP titled, *Summer Joy* as well as a soon to be released full length under their current moniker, Bake. Recorded at the duo's own Ewing, NJ studio called The Pipe.

*Summer Joy* is surprisingly live. The production is crisp but not too digital, instead, holding the warm analog ambience close to its core. Most projects that I hear where one or two guys control the process sound one-dimensional and stale, but these two weave organic and band oriented sounds, giving the listener plenty of time to concentrate on the music instead of the production. The compositions are hypnotic and precise, blending acoustic instrumentation with electronica and the occasional vocal supplied by the ever-capable Joe Baker blend well.

"Sunshine Into My Life" leads the disk with its shuffle beats, stepping stoned acoustic guitars and droning electrics. Pianos rumble darkly from behind this movie theme type tune. Vocal inflections remind one of Perry Farrell and the early days of Jane's Addiction combined with the phrasing of Roger Waters of Pink Floyd. Very interesting bridge section and verses. Loose, groovy and reeking with "I Am the Walrus" panache.

"Hickory Morning" breaks free and clean with its dueling acoustics and a you-know-it-don't-come-easy vibe that builds steadily into single reverb-splashed guitar lines, plucked as a harp and kept in dynamic (and simple) check. Lazy and dark slide work dances along the rough edge of this all instrumental gem. This is one of those personal likes for me, that while it will never attract the attention of a record company diva looking for pop garbage, it paints a picture of exactly what's implied in the title. I can see the morning fog along the river right from my CD player.

"Dead Fire Comes Alive" is a tense exploration featuring down-stroked guitars and synths all thrumming along at a super brisk pace (picture one of those fast-forward city videos) and sticking pretty much to a drone-induced free fall into psychedelia and beyond. They could easily cross over into techno here, adding drums and selling their souls, but I'm glad they haven't.

The Baker brothers have released an interesting thumbnail view of what's coming in the future. A combination of fun summer days and the memories of a rock and roll childhood spill onto a colorful canvas in its own haphazard fashion, and it doesn't look bad at all. For more info on Bake, head over to [myspace.com/bakerock](http://myspace.com/bakerock).