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MUSIC

ROAD WARRIOR

Erik Friedlander, Lily Pad, July 18, 2007

By **JON GARELICK**
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Erik Friedlander has gained an impressive reputation playing cello with everyone from Dave Douglas and John Zorn to the Mountain Goats and Courtney Love. So it's a treat to hear him stepping out with his own music on the new *Block Ice & Propane* (Skipstone), as it was at the Lily Pad a week ago last Wednesday night. The new music finds Friedlander working more with pizzicato than bow — going back to his first instrument, the guitar. His work on these pieces also brought back memories of his days as a kid, traveling with his younger sister, Ava, his mother (the choreographer Lynn Shapiro), and father (photographer Lee Friedlander) on his father's summer trips to teaching jobs and photo assignments. The conveyance was a 1966 Chevy pickup truck with a camper top.

Plucked cello and the open road may suggest overly earnest guitar folk, but Friedlander's music is as tough-minded and original as it is elegiac. His bravura playing drew on just about every sound the cello can make (including alternate tunings), but his virtuosity was always in service to pieces that were as tuneful and cohesive as they were far reaching. His first piece, the title track from the new CD, began with a free-tempo flurry of notes of Baroque abstraction before settling into a verse-chorus setup in a fast 4/4 folk theme. He elaborated his themes with rapid double-stopped accents, strummed chords alternating with single-note runs, and sure-tempo'd bass accompaniment to the melody lines. He conjured bagpipes or made his cello scream or whistle as he bowed down near the bridge — and in one song he actually did whistle, like he was calling a dog. The unamplified instrument sounded all the more beautiful in that little room. "Night White," with its accelerations and decelerations, crescendos and decrescendos, and deviations from and return to a simple, quiet four-note ostinato, like passing lampposts, did all music can to suggest the stillness of highway driving at night.

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