

MAN AT WORK

## ERIK FRIEDLANDER

### Block Ice & Propane

Almost everyone has at least a few pictures documenting the family vacations they took growing up, but not everyone's childhood memories were preserved by a renowned photographer. So it makes sense that images from the camping trips cello ace Erik Friedlander took with his father, Museum of Modern Art-approved artist Lee Friedlander, gradually snuck into his subconscious and, eventually, his latest solo album, *Block Ice & Propane*.

"As I was improvising ideas for these songs, I started thinking about these trips I took with my family," Friedlander says. "This project is so loaded down with memories and ideas."

A gentle, cerebral collection of cello compositions that recall the summers Friedlander's family spent driving cross the country in its 1966 Chevy pickup and shell, *Block Ice & Propane* finds Friedlander trying to capture a specific period from both his youth and American history. While much of the disc features improvisations recorded live in the studio, Friedlander prepped for the recordings by listening to Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* and by reading works by storied American authors like John Berryman and Cormac McCarthy.

"Each song evokes different scenes and ideas and sounds from those trips. For instance 'Night White' recalls those long hauls home."

But for Friedlander, who has been stretching the boundaries of what is considered "cello music" for decades, the album's rustic themes felt natural.

Friedlander began playing cello in the third grade and, after discovering bands like Led Zeppelin, began incorporating the traditionally classical instrument into rock music. "I played electric bass in a rock band and would bring the cello for these folk tunes and then switch back to bass," he says. "When I got into the New York music scene, they were open to having me play all these different styles of music on the cello."

While gigging around New York, Friedlander began flirting with the avant-garde downtown jazz scene and collaborating with improvisational masters like John Zorn. "I've always been interested in improvising and if I am not improvising then I am usually trying to figure out how to play the music that is written out so that it sounds like it is being improvised." He also earned a name as an in-demand session musician who's worked with indie sensations

like The Mountain Goats. At this stage in his career, the cellist seems to enjoy bouncing between styles and projects with ease.

"People ask me why I refer to my albums as projects, not records," Friedlander says. "It's because they are ongoing and take on a life of their own. Even pieces off *Block Ice & Propane* have changed since I recorded them."

★ Mike Greenhaus

