A barrack of barrooms, taverns, and pool halls assaults a stranger on Thames Street. neon proclaims the supremacy of Budweiser and Schlitz; the smell of the sea mingles with the early evening's drizzling. Girls rejected from a level of existence higher than one of prowling to find a safer haven in which to spend the night walk the street; a brawl always seems in the offing for one who stays a little too intently, whose hair is a bit too long. Yet walking a block back towards the heart of Newport transforms a haven for transients and the bored into the once-elegant resort mecca of the East — the home of the music festivals, the millionaires, the America Cup races — all in just the length of a short side street. But even this desolate regality is somehow strangely displaced, strangely incongruous in the airport that has not been kind. Indeed, as the twilight fades, few cars move, behind by an aim, the America Cup races — all in just the same general area recognizable for its maddeningly filled parking lots and the gaudy lights and music weaned of their supremacy, for the most part, fine

One looked in his eyes and you knew he's annoyed. There's no way to face him cause he's nobody's clown. He's as deep as the sea and equally free. That's why I fear him and hate him and wish he were down. It's an all-encompassing narrative, positively

See it was like this when we waltz into this place a couple of Papish cats is doing an Aztec Two-Step

Uncommon in an area recognizable for its openness, in an area not known for its readiness to punish-picking, softly har-monizing types -- like a couple of dunes going under that bit of a Lawrence Ferlinghetti poem, calling themselves Aztec Two-Step.

But it's Salt that slipping one of what is to be an endless string of wine coolers (which are to take their toll by night's end) off in a corner by the door, appearing more like a noble Mona Lisa framed by Marc Bolanomics cowlick hair than like Maine's only rock 'n roll star, the patched old jeans and work-shirt seeming less appropriate than if on a Harvard Square pushbandler. And nerves, too, played, New Yorker Neal Schulman, the second step of the two, peers uneasily out onto Thames Street, mandolin in an occasional word to Rex before they both venture out for another night's three acres. But now they will be their bar gig, believing anyone with an album out deserve more than the cloistered street number in Newport. But that is a shift to the future inn, and not their concern for tonight. The PA system is plenty nasty there will be an exec from Eklektix out there, and a typical night of customers always poons the potential for a shouting match between artist and audience, innumerable spilled drinks, and anything else that would make it rough for anyone to play. It's just a bit more than distasteful, to have to face drunken customers when a mile goes dead, and its worse for someone just starting out.

But tonight would not be just a typical gig, Aztec Two-Step began their first set and people kept drinking and spilling and talking, but in the music woven web, people began to turn and listen instead of ignoring the pair on the stage. Rex's voice is Neal's in a fuzzy voice and playing an acoustic rhythm to Neal's crystalline runs on his banjo, in high, high, tight harmonies brushed that bit of Thames Street, and the talent the two possess through that evening's haze of sea air and beer and cigarette smoke and noon light, cutting a swath through Newport's residual noise, and setting off Aztec Two-Step as the best new act to surface on the music scene in one hell of a long time.

Called simply Aztec Two-Step, their Elektra disc is a beautiful mixture of Fowler's cryptic lyricism, Schulman's guttural work, and the assistance of people like Jerry Yester and John Sebastian, Doug Dillard, and Sparky McFarland producing a simply excellent record. All the songs the perfect match of Rex and Neal, musically and mentally, in each complements the other. In Newport, they played through the album without any backing musicians, adding songs by Neal Young and Loudon Wainwright, as well as a few unrecollected originals, the synergism became all the more evident. In either environment, the effect knocks one out.

The best songs seemingly spring from Rex Fowler -- his imagery, in fact his whole style, in word and music, shows heavy influences from Neil Young. At least two tunes borrow almost directly, with overtones infiltrating several others. Neal Schulman wrote two of the members on Aztec Two-Step, but especially in comparison to Fowler's writing, they pale, sounding watered down alongside a sibling steel. The record opens with the one really comercial conception, a bouncing, coyly male chauvinist tune, "Almost Apocalypse." In the latter, Neil Young and Loudon Wainwright, as well as a few unrecollected originals, the synergism became all the more evident. In either environment, the effect knocks one out.

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