

Freddy Koella *undone*



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Although little-known to the general public, **Freddy Koella** has been one of the most in-demand guitarists in France and the United States for over 10 years. He moved to the US in 1990 (New Orleans, Los Angeles). Artists as diverse as **Willy Deville**, **Bob Dylan**, **Lhasa**, **Zachary Richard**, **KD Lang**, **Carla Bruni** and **Francis Cabrel** have called upon his talents in the studio and on stage, and each one has found what they were searching for in his playing: fluidity, desire, invention, poetry... Some have even found gold, just as Freddy did in the 80s as a member of French group **Cookie Dingler**, who scored an enormous hit with ***Femme Libérée***, selling over one million. If he gladly accepts this as a distant memory, it's because he has had many other artistically gratifying experiences since then, whether as a sideman to the artists already mentioned or as a solo performer. On ***Undone***, his second instrumental album, he steps out of the headliners' shadows to reveal his own intimate musical landscape, his 'secret garden', as he likes to call it. Over ten tracks that are simultaneously stripped-down and captivating, he invites us to follow him on a journey that takes in the blues, folk, jazz and minimalist composition, off the beaten track and timeless.

Freddy was born in 1958 in Mulhouse and spent his childhood in Alsace. His father was an educated and eclectic music-lover, a fan of Bach and Indian ragas, his mother an amateur pianist, so music played an important role in his life from an early age. He began to study classical guitar at the age of 12, but found it wasn't really his thing. Two years later, returning from a holiday spent exploring Romania in the family's Renault, his father gave him a violin. Freddy dedicated himself to his new instrument for 5 years and passed the entrance exam for the Strasbourg conservatoire, only to abandon it all of a sudden. In the meantime, his sister had introduced him to the blues with the records she was bringing home from school, their covers adorned with striking portraits of enigmatically-named bluesmen like Big Bill Bronzy and Lightnin' Hopkins. "*The blues changed my priorities. Straight away, I fitted steel strings to my classical guitar. I bought a little amp. I abandoned my musical studies. I was completely hooked. My parents just gave up.*" He taught himself the blues by looping records on a turntable. Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and the Stones only served to inflame his passion further, to the point where it became an unstoppable torrent, sweeping up everything in its path. At the age of 18, he left his family and his school and rented a house with some musician friends. Virginia, his band, played only three gigs, but it was enough to make him believe he might be

able to earn a crust. Having first spent time playing in ballroom orchestras, he then fulfilled a dream when he travelled to New Orleans.

He went on to spend one year there, playing guitar and violin with Cajun musician Zachary Richard, trawling through clubs from Texas to Mississippi. Once this became routine, he returned to France, where some old friends were waiting for him - Cookie Dingler. Between 1985 and 1987, Freddy bathed in the glow of *Femme Libérée*'s success. But when the group split up, the lights went out. *"I couldn't go back to playing the ballrooms. I enjoy a bit of DIY, so I started sorting out some friends' apartments around Mulhouse, sanding floors, painting. I'd moved on."*

It was luthier James Trussart who would bring him back to the fold. He knew Willy Deville was looking for a new guitarist, so he put him in touch with his French friend. Freddy would end up playing with Deville for 12 years, on some of his greatest albums, including *Victory Mixture* in 1990. As his time with Deville was drawing to a close, Trussart again stepped in and made the connection with another giant, Bob Dylan, also looking for a guitarist. In 2003, Freddy joined this living legend of American music on tour. *"Although it only lasted a year, I had nothing but good experiences with him. We share the same tastes, musically. He wanted to get out of his routine, to have fun with some songs he'd been carrying around for decades, and I was his new instrument."* The adventure might have continued had Freddy not been sidelined with a kidney problem for several months. It was during his convalescence that he wrote the pieces that would make up his first solo album, whose title says it all: *Minimal*. Recorded solo on acoustic guitar at home in Los Angeles, this instrumental record is made up of moments where the musician lets his fingers walk over the fretboard, using little accidents to form the root of a theme or paint a melody. The album served as a form of therapy, and a huge boost to his career. *"Many people got in touch when they heard the record, like Carla Bruni, K.D. Lang and Lhasa."* In Montréal in 2008, Freddy took part in what would be the final recordings of the Mexican-American singer. *"We would walk together from her home to the studio in heavy snowstorms, hands in front of our faces against the wind and snow. It was an unforgettable experience."*

This memory of Lhasa, who passed away on 1 January 2010, inspired the drifting melancholy of the piece *Snow* that appears on *Undone*. Recorded in one day at Sunset Sound in Los Angeles, featuring double bassist David Piltch and drummer Jay Bellerose on several tracks, this second album carries on the explorations of *Minimal*. Freed from his duties as a guest instrumentalist and the constraints of playing someone else's oeuvre, Freddy has transformed into music those fragile moments of abandon where the spirit floats to the surface of reality, using a different sonic palette each time. On acoustic or electric, banjo (*Undone*), 1957 Gibson (*J45*) or Dobro (*Walking in G*), he brings his inventiveness to pieces drawing from the blues (*Trio*) and folk (*Covington*) or otherwise deconstructing those forms. *"Undone refers to taking apart the forms of blues, folk or classical music. It might also refer to losing it, having mental trouble, and having your flies undone..."* Not seeking to make a point of his technical virtuosity, above all Freddy strips away anything superfluous to leave these songs with their essential elements, their essence. Hence the feeling of weightlessness that permeates this album, where every track demonstrates a powerful sense of economy. *Undone* is an album that will appeal to fans of J.J. Cale and lovers of ambient, a record for contemplation, ideal for daydreaming as you gaze out of the window. It's a paean to weightlessness, a journey of inner peace, a succession of moments stolen from the frenzy of everyday life, best enjoyed alone or with friends. The perfect antidote to the cacophony that surrounds us.

