

Crenshaw back on the right track – almost

Marshall Crenshaw's dazzling debut left him in the unenviable position of having to follow it up. His releases since then, including *Down-town* and *Mary Jean and Nine Others*, have drawn disappointing reviews and a largely indifferent public. Crenshaw's latest, *Good Evening*, like his others since *Marshall Crenshaw*, fails to completely live up to the promise of his debut. But *Good Evening* is an impressive step in the right direction. Judging from the liner notes, this would seem to be a fabulous album. One is left to figure out exactly why *Good Evening* isn't the classic it should be.

Crenshaw surrounds himself with top-notch talent. Drummer extraordinaire Kenny Aronoff (John Mellencamp) appears on most songs. Other guests include David Lindley, Sonny Landreth, the Bodeans and Syd Straw. From Crenshaw's original trio, brother Robert Crenshaw makes only two appearances on backing vocals. Chris

Brian Springer Album

Donato is completely absent.

Producers David Kerchenbaum and Phil McKenna undermine Crenshaw's sound at some points with overproduction. Most times, they don't interfere with Crenshaw's straightforward, tuneful rock 'n' roll. But keyboards are occasionally allowed to intrude with negative results. Kerchenbaum and McKenna do succeed in helping Crenshaw sow country influences at many points, some of the highlights of the album.

To Crenshaw's credit, he takes chances, both in terms of personnel and material. Few artists would undertake the challenge of covering songs by John Hiatt and Richard Thompson on the same album. That many of the risks do not succeed is not as impor-

tant as the attempt, in this case. One can't help but wonder if Crenshaw has lost confidence to some degree with cover songs being almost half the album. In any case, *Good Evening* is his best release since his debut.

To begin, the most unsuccessful song on the album is the first single, Diane Warren's "Some Hearts." The song itself is not so bad, but it is a slick, predetermined hit. Poppish, hooky and keyboard heavy, this song will be at home on summer radio. However, it can't hold a candle to most Marshall Crenshaw tunes.

Both sides of the album open with a strong Crenshaw composition. "Should've Been There" is a winner, with clear chord changes and hooks galore. Aronoff's drumming on this track is uncharacteristically un-noteworthy. Bassist Graham Maby gives this song its fire. In loneliness, Crenshaw sings, "The only friend I had in sight was an empty chair/You should've been there." Side two opens with "On the Run," which, like Crenshaw's best, recycles dozens of classic hooks and incorporates them into the same song. As with the Smithereens, his strongest work seems like a long-lost greatest hits compilation

from the Sixties.

While John Hiatt's "Someplace Where Love Can't Find Me" and Richard Thompson's "Valerie" are given passable treatments here, both lack the songwriters' unique vocal gifts (Bonnie Raitt is a more fitting singer for Hiatt songs). Crenshaw's voice seems out of place. The song still works, though, largely because of Hiatt's amazing songwriting ability. "Valerie" seems more natural for Crenshaw. The version here, a rockabilly-ish stomp powered by Aronoff's drumming, is faster than Thompson's own.

"Radio Girl" is another Crenshaw-penned winner. One of several country-influenced tracks, the song features Steven Conn's piano and a slide guitar courtesy of David Lindley (Sonny Landreth plays remarkable slide through most of the album). Crenshaw spins a classic rock yarn, singing an ode to the D.J. who "rocks away (his) blues."

One of the best covers is the Isley Brothers' "Live It Up." Crenshaw gives it a proper rock treatment. Even if his singing is not powerful or soulful enough for the original, Crenshaw gives it a valiant effort. This track is surprisingly successful.

The other songs include one Crenshaw throwaway, "She Hates to Go Home," a simply unmemorable filler. Crenshaw's "Whatever Way the Wind Blows" is better, upbeat and country-ish. The final song, Bobby Fuller's "Let Her Dance," is reasonably good party rock, a typical Fuller song. It finishes the album on an upbeat, positive note.

This album doesn't succeed as well as it could because, too often, Marshall Crenshaw is not allowed to be Marshall Crenshaw. This is a very good album, one worth buying. But for Crenshaw to make another record as good as his first, he needs to rely less upon covers. He takes strong influence from country music, with some of the album's best results. Overproduction in spots is excusable for this album, because *Good Evening* is Crenshaw's return from the doldrums. There aren't many here as memorable as "Someday, Someway" or "Whenever You're on My Mind," but cuts like "You Should've Been There" will ease the time until his next album. Crenshaw is to be lauded for making attempts to change his sound, avoiding stagnation. This is the first step back on the right track — now let's hope that he can finally deliver the goods next time.

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Desktop

ware or a certain computer."

Most of Desktop Publishing's business is newsletters, magazines and books, Gardner said. It also produces resumes and pamphlets, she said, and gets some "vanity press" work — people publishing their own novels.

"The big problem with newsletters is having a client who's not organized enough to give you the material all at once," Gardner said. "Most of the clients we have know nothing about design, and the battle is to get the customer to be really well organized in terms of content and to let me do the design."

The newsletters are usually four-to-eight pages long. The magazines are longer, and Gardner said that the biggest problem with them is re-editing if the magazine runs longer than about six pages. That is why she likes to have all of the copy at the start, she said.

Books present few problems and are "relatively easy," Gardner said, because of the few style elements to worry about. Therefore the client, intimidated by the size of the project, will usually give her "carte blanche," she said.

A book about soil science for a North Carolina State University group, a training manual for a chiropractor and a music theory book for a music instructor are examples of books produced by the company. Gardner is still working on the music theory book, and it has required her to learn another software program — a music notation program that plays the music back using the computer's sound system so that the music can be checked.

Books are typed on Microsoft Word, imported to PageMaker and printed out on the LaserWriter, Gardner said. The final product is cam-

era-ready page proofs which are sent to the printer, she said.

The biggest frustration Gardner experienced is "not meeting customer expectations as far as speed — because people expect it to be so much of a timesaver.

"But most of our customers are real happy," Gardner said. "The printer is the biggest time sink we have, because we don't have a spooler — we haven't found a good enough one.

"The secret to our success is that we have really invested in the employees — it's not the computers, it's not the software, it's not the printer — it's the person who's running all those things. Customer service is the most important thing here."

Gardner said she sees Desktop Publishing as a service profession, and also sees the company expanding into bigger space in the future and buying a photocopier to try to market the printing end of the business as well. She said she would like to see the Carrboro store double its employees, equipment and space to match the Durham store.

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