

Dvorak back at home with new CD

You know, people who have talent, have talent. I'd love to take credit for that wonderful bit of insight, but alas, it goes to my mom. She told me that one time, two and a half decades ago when we were talking about Cher (But that's another, unrelated story).

Mark Dvorak is a teacher, guitar/banjo player, writer, storyteller and recording artist. What can you say? This guy's got talent.

Dvorak has blessed us all again with another recording. "Back Home" has ten pieces on it. It has six studio recordings - which are a mixture of covers, traditionals and originals. Three live performances of songs he'd done on his previous studio effort, "Time Ain't Got Nothin' On Me," and a spoken word piece. The spoken word is a non-fiction tale read by the author, from Mark's group of short stories, "Bowling for Christmas and Other Tales from the Road." Like I say...

So, where to start? The beginning? The first three pieces are, in order, a cover, a traditional and an original. The CD starts with a cover of Fats Waller's, "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie." Now, how Mark can make an acoustic guitar and a voice sound like big band jazz, well... Just give it a listen. "Once I Had an Old Banjo," is a traditional that Dvorak has done in concert many times. It's nice to listen (and listen again) to this piece in the comfort of my beat up old car. I've heard Mark do his original, "Pueblo, Colorado" a number of times, live, and it's a thrill to hear it in recorded form now.

The fourth track is Dvorak's excellent essay, "North Platte, Nebraska." The book from which it comes, is a fine work by itself. But, to hear the writer inflect the way he wants us to hear it, gives it an even more intimate feel. The piece goes on for over 11 minutes, and when the writer finishes speaking, we wonder where the time went - and we want more.

Now, as we journey into the middle of the CD, we get a little sampling of what Mark Dvorak sounds like in concert. These three songs were all taken from a broadcast of Mark's performance at the Fox Valley Folk Festival in 2012 for WFMT radio. The first of them is Bartholomew Bean's "Ruben You Can Play Your Banjo." This is a staple of Mark's set, and I'm trying to think of a time when I've seen him play live when he didn't play it. You can tell the crowd's into it just by their singing along. A classic.



Paul Schingle REVIEWS

BY PAUL SCHINGLE

July 24, 2015

The next two are originals of Mark's also performed at that concert in 2012. "I Hate to See the Summer Go" is more of a true blues number followed by "It'll Be Better When It's Better" which has quickly become a fan favorite. Again, listen to the sing along.

Before shifting gears, perhaps a word or two about Mark's performance is in order. Just listen to Mark introduce the song, "It'll Be Better." His easy-going style makes it seem like he's playing just for you in his living room - or yours. As talented as he is, he's really pretty much of a regular guy you just want to hang out with.

The final three songs are a return to studio music. These three begin with the traditional medley, "Over the Waterfall / Arkansas Traveler." It's a simple (and I misuse that word) instrumental - just Dvorak and a banjo. But the beauty in its simplicity brings a tear to the eye. Next, Mark treats us to the Gershwin's famous "Someone to Watch Over Me." I know just about everyone in the world has covered this one, but when I think of it, I think of Tony Bennett - and Mark Dvorak. The CD closes out with another new, original piece recorded in studio. "Old Friends" is one that until now, I was unfamiliar with, but listening to it, it's pure Mark Dvorak. This one has an almost country feel, but without neglecting Mark's traditional folk sensibilities.

Finally, I believe a word is necessary with regards to production. This entire package is a one-man operation. Even including the cover art. With the exception of one photo, that of the artist himself, Mark took all the pictures. He recorded, produced and put the whole CD together himself in his home studio. The structure is a near perfect arc. Are there mistakes in the recording? Of course there are. But that just adds to the live sounding feel. Another reviewer stated, "Although it's clearly a DIY project, even a [fool] would find something to like on 'Back Home.'"

If you listen to this one from beginning to end, and still can't find something to like, well, you might want to get to a doctor and check your pulse.

Like my mom says, when someone's got talent...

Paul Schingle is a writer and blogger who reviews music, writing and culture. paulschingle@yahoo.com.