

A REVIEW OF MARK DVORAK'S "TIME AIN'T GOT NOTHIN' ON ME"

by Paul Schingle

It's been nearly five years since Mark Dvorak has released a disc of mostly original tunes (2006's, "Every Step of the Way"). Mark has blessed his listening public with fifteen new (to disc) songs. Twelve of the songs on the cd are Dvorak's own compositions. It was worth the wait.

Recapping the three non-originals, Mark has finally recorded Bartholomew Bean's "Ruben, You Can Play Your Banjo," which has long been a staple of his live sets. On "Every Step..." Mark paid homage to Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee with "One Couldn't Run, One Couldn't See." On this recording, he allows McGhee to return the favor by covering, "Livin' With the Blues." And, finally, Dvorak does a fine rendition of the civil war era traditional song, "Two Little Boys."

Comparing the songwriting from "Every Step..." to "Time Ain't..." it's easy to see Dvorak's growth as a writer, both musically and lyrically. While the older album had great originals, here the lyrics are even more poetic, more carefully crafted. And the music has a nice, clean, easy-to-listen-to sound. As a whole, this disc has a very country feel. But, true to his (and folk music, in general's) eclectic tastes, there is a sprinkling of blues, bluegrass and traditional sounding folk. Within the genre, Mark can do it all.

The album opens with "The Middle Years." This is a peppy number, and makes for a great start. And, while the theme of the song is not new (none of us is getting any younger), the word choice is poignant without being sappy. The listener is introduced to the title track as the fifth song on the album. This has a very bluesy sound and feel and leads perfectly to the Brownie McGhee cover.

To be true to both blues and country themes, Mark provides his listeners with some sad, universal ideas, especially, with "The Saddest Town in Illinois" (a wonderful follow-up to "Not War" from "Every Step..."), "Song for a Disaml Day" and "Promise of the Promised Land." He also includes songs very personal to him, such as "My D-18." This is not to say that all the songs are sad or morbid. "The Bluebells of Kentucky" is a very snappy, country number and I defy anyone to listen to "It'll Be Better When It's Better" without raising a smile.

Emotionally, this cd runs the gamut, and the listener is only too happy to stick around for the ride. The music is eclectic and the lyrics pure poetry. (From "It'll Be Better...", he gives the listener the line, "...pickin' at the scab is never gonna make it heal..."). As a group of original songs, Mark has never sounded better.

Historically, Dvorak has always been good at surrounding himself with great talent, and "Time Ain't Got Nothin' on Me" is no exception. Mark is the first to tell you that he was pleased with the work of his producer for this album, John Abbey. The sound is incredibly clean without sounding over-produced. As for the musicians who chipped in, Dvorak was assisted by Sue Demel and Debra Lader (two-thirds of "The Sons of the Never Wrong"), Chris Walz (Mark's chum and bandmate from "Weavermania") and a host of others. Almost any musician will tell you (s)he can't do it alone. Mark, wisely, chooses singers and musicians who complement his sound beautifully.

The best endorsement I can think of for an album is how easy it is to listen to. I've owned "Time Ain't Got Nothin' on Me" for about twelve hours and I've listened to it all the way through at least five times (I've lost count). If you're a Mark Dvorak fan, or just a fan of folk music, you can't go wrong with this one.

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