

Marshall Crenshaw



Deborah Fengoid

MARSHALL CRENSHAW is a youngish singer, songwriter, and guitarist who graduated from the Broadway company of *Beatlemania* and then attracted a lot of notice, as a sort of latter-day Buddy Holly, through live gigs around New York City. His debut album for Warner Bros. shows him to be an extraordinary pop craftsman. He's written a slew of concise, tuneful little pop/rock songs, has a wistful yet muscular voice, and fronts a fabulous three-piece band.

Now, pop critics, me included, have a habit of discovering such phenomena every couple of years at least. They're almost a glut on the market, in fact (think of Dwight Twilley or Eric Carmen or Alex Chilton or . . .), and they seem invariably, sooner or later, to disappoint us. So you're going to have to take this on faith: Crenshaw's album has given me more pleasure than anything since I uncovered a virgin mono copy of "The Hollies' Greatest Hits" in a bargain bin in California. Every single song on it sounds like pop heaven, every one makes me want to be seventeen, in love, and driving around in a convertible with the top down and these tunes blasting on the AM radio. They're that wonderful.

Stylistic comparisons with Buddy Holly are actually apt up to a point (check out *Cynical Girl*, which is practically a tribute), but Crenshaw has an incredible ear, and his songs manage also to use some r-&-b influences along with just about everything else that was any good in suburban pop from about 1958 on, including a marked English tinge as a bonus. In general, however, the models for Crenshaw's songs are un-specific. They're just great songs, and since Crenshaw also happens to have one of the most winsome voices in rock history, the combination is irresistible.

I'm hard pressed to single out favorites among the twelve gems on display here. One day I lean toward *She Can't Dance* and the biting guitar solo that slices it in half, another day the sly and utterly adorable rockabilly of *The Usual Thing*. Sometimes what grabs me is the brilliant Merseybeat revivalism of *Soldier of Love* or the gorgeously melodic impact of *Someday, Someway*. Other times I just give up and play the whole album through four or five times in a row while I dance around the room in, as John Lennon put it, wild abandon.

IHAVE TO warn you that this is not particularly fashionable music. The teenagers who lap up the commercial pomp-rock that floods our airwaves may find it anachronistic, and the avant-gardists who think that a tune is a sure sign of artistic bankruptcy will doubtless view it as reactionary. A plague on both their houses, say I. Ironically, what is clearly one of the great rock records of the Eighties might have its initial success on country radio—the crossover potential is there. But let us not pussyfoot; this is the strongest debut album by an American rocker that I have ever been privileged to review. In the immortal words of Redd Foxx: "This is the Big One, Elizabeth."

—Steve Simels

MARSHALL CRENSHAW. Marshall Crenshaw (vocals, guitar); Chris Donato (bass, vocals); Robert Crenshaw (drums, vocals); other musicians. *There She Goes Again; Someday, Someway; I'll Do Anything; Girls . . . ; Rockin' Around in NYC; The Usual Thing; She Can't Dance; Cynical Girl; Mary Anne; Soldier of Love; Not for Me; Brand New Lover.* WARNER BROS. BSK 3673 \$8.98, © M5 3673 \$8.98, © M8 3673 \$8.98.

performances. The obvious improvement is that she's singing on key again, although a couple of these meandering tunes don't seem to call for the singer to strike any definite pitch. *Memory*, the big song from the hit London musical *Cats*, is perhaps not quite in that category, but I think only Cecil B. DeMille might have managed to follow the ponderous, pseudo-stately melody that Andrew Lloyd Webber has grafted onto T. S. Eliot's (and Trevor Nunn's) words. In fact, it sounds as if DeMille commissioned it. Despite the huge orchestral flourishes behind her, Collins gives it a wistful, wide-eyed reading.

I don't think that most of the songs here succeed at what they try to do—Collins did the same sort of thing better in her "Night-ingales" phase—but at least they do *try* things. *Mama Mama*, for instance, has lyrics that sketch out how a woman comes to want an abortion while the melody swirls around like a tilt-a-whirl. There is one little bonus, Judy in her good old voice, with that touch of wildness at the top, singing Hugh Prestwood's *Drink a Round to Ireland*. Overall, this album is at least half a step upward for Judy Collins. *N.C.*

SAMMY HAGAR: *Standing Hampton.* Sammy Hagar (vocals, guitar); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *I'll Fall in Love Again; There's Only One Way to Rock; Baby's on Fire; Can't Get Loose; Heavy Metal;* and five others. GEFEN GHS 2006 \$8.98, © M5 2006 \$8.98.

Performance: **Overbearing**
Recording: **Excellent**

Invite Sammy Hagar into your home and right away he comes on with this swaggering rock-and-roll that knocks off round after round of stock guitar riffs like so many bottles of beer, wipes its chin on its sleeve with a swipe of the synthesizer, burps a bass line, and heaves the empties against the wall with a punishing, single-minded beat. That wouldn't be so bad, but the guy's convinced he's a ladies' man and a deep thinker. Maybe he is, but he seems to have exhausted most of his cleverness here on the enigmatic record jacket. Give him credit, though; he has enough energy to be heard in the back rows of the biggest rock arena. In fact, he muscled me right off the couch and out of the living room. *M.P.*

CHAS JANKEL: *Questionnaire.* Chas Jankel (vocals, keyboards, guitars, synthesizers, percussion); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *109; Johnny Funk; Now You're Dancing; Magic of Music; Glad to Know You;* and three others. A&M SP-4862 \$8.98, © CS-4862 \$8.98.

Performance: **Straight**
Recording: **Excellent**

Chas Jankel, ex-music director for Ian Dury and the Blockheads, is a crack pop composer and arranger, but I wish he'd stop singing! This second solo album from him is a technical gem, danceable in the extreme, and popping with electronic titillation, but it would be hard to image a sillier record (well, maybe "The Ray Coniff Singers Sing the Plasmatics Songbook").

While it may be the last thing Jankel would like to hear, I have to say that "Ques-

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