

REVIEW OF "CROOKED"

When listening to recorded music, I always imagine what it would be like to hear the artist whose work I'm hearing in a live venue. When I have the chance to hear—and see--that artist actually perform, I try to put two and two together and see if they add up to the same person who's represented in the recording.

Jaime Michaels has hit a grand slam in this regard with "Crooked." Not only is this CD a masterful blend of Jaime's original material, co-written material and his creative interpretations of the works of others, but the production is so wonderful that it does not interfere with Jaime as an artist. He does not have to fight with the instrumentation to be able to present these poignant songs. And the best part is, if you close your eyes, you can imagine having a private concert by Jaime right in your living room. Or your car. Or wherever you might be.

Jaime and producer Jono Manson have crafted this CD with just the right mixture of back-up instruments and back-up vocals so that they compliment Jaime's artistry and don't smother it. In fact, it's kind of ironic in a way that the CD's cover is a crooked path (hence the name), since this CD could serve as a road map to others who might want to create a CD that allows listeners the full effect of powerful lyrics and tasteful arrangements rather than having such things buried under an avalanche of misplaced musicians and overwrought percussion.

One of my favorites on this CD is a co-write by Jaime and Jeff Talmadge, "One Spectacular Moon." With lyrics crafted to exactly fit the tune, this song provides an opportunity for listeners to hear Jaime at his best. He believes this song, and it shows. When he says the word "spectacular," no matter what condition the moon is that night, you will believe it is, indeed, spectacular.

That's how it is with Jaime. When you hear him sing, you can tell whether he's smiling, yearning, pining, or questioning. He writes and co-writes songs with special meanings, selects songs written by others that also have statements to make. And make them he does--not with an attitude, but with a sense of purpose, a sense of belief that music is as critical to life as breathing itself.

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