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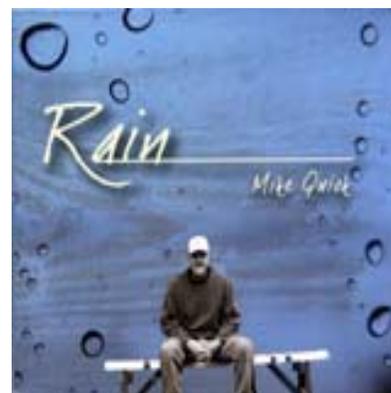
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Mike Quick

Rain

Written by Frank Kocher

Mike Quick follows a tradition of storytelling folk singer-songwriters springing out of the Midwest, in the footsteps of John Prine, Tom Paxton, and the late Steve Goodman. He is a Wisconsin native who has performed all over the country and recorded a country-rock disc with a full band before 2004's *Down Bullfrog Road*, which focused on spare arrangements of folk and blues built around Quick's striking voice. His latest, *Rain*, continues in the same vein, with plenty of gospel in the mix as well.



The music throughout is a subdued canvas of tastefully picked acoustic guitars, piano and organ, light percussion, and excellent background vocals that complement Quick's worn and weathered, but comfortable, singing. The production and mixing by Michael Jerling is first rate. It also helps that Quick changes the musical pace enough to keep things interesting.

The title tune opens the disc with a distinct gospel vibe, a message of transformation with a revival-style chorus. "Penny Arcade" manages to softly transport the listener to a county fair, a calliope-like keyboard in the background as the words tell of carousels, roller coasters, and costumes. For the excellent "Get Right With Your Church," it is more gospel-inspired blues, as Quick fires pulpit lyrics over the top of a rocking beat and nice organ riffing. Hurricane Katrina is the inspiration for "Fats Domino Is Missing," which relates a story about the events "while the storm blew New Orleans away," with some New Orleans touches by the backing band. "Get Me to Nirvana on Time" pushes the beat and stands out, an acoustic rocker that has ear-catching lyrics and a punchy arrangement featuring superb acoustic guitar breaks.

Quick has a kind of easy way with a folk melody and familiar voice that draw comparisons to Gordon Lightfoot - especially on songs like "Honey to My Soul," which sounds like a lost Lightfoot B-side. While his singing lacks the Canadian tenor's depth, Quick seems to share Lightfoot's ability to smoothly move from the soft folk idiom into more country-rock, blues, and gospel forms, both as a writer and singer.

"Vampires" is a solid example, a blues-rocker that tackles a familiar folk topic: civil rights. A lyrical story, based on the disappearance of three civil rights workers in Mississippi, is told to minor chords and powerful electric slide guitar. The storytelling on this song is outstanding, using a nice metaphor to peg racists as bloodsuckers, quoting "America the Beautiful" and observing "God save us from ourselves at last."

Rain gives folk music fans a chance to hear Mike Quick in a batch of songs that demonstrate his considerable talent as a songwriter. His best songs are tales and sermons, which capture the listener's attention the way any good tale or sermon does.

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