

arts and
entertainment

Warren Zevon's second album lacks spirit of first

By Jeff Taebel

It's been a year and a half since Warren Zevon came out with his highly acclaimed, self-titled debut album. At the time of its release, many music writers around the country were buzzing about this young man from Los Angeles.

Zevon's story was chronicled in *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone* and *Time* magazine, and there were those who were calling him "the Bruce Springsteen of the West."

While that comparison might be somewhat less than valid, Zevon gave those writers good reason to buzz. "Discovered" by his friend, Jackson Browne, he had a style quite unlike any of the other famous male vocalists from L.A. His voice, his refreshing lyrical approach and his excellent sense of humor set him apart from most artists of the day.

Although his first album was not a big commercial success, it did contain one song, "Poor, Poor, Pitiful Me," that got some airplay and brought Zevon some exposure. Ironically, another L.A. fixture, Linda Ronstadt, recorded a popular cover version of the song which obscured Zevon's vastly superior original.

album
review

Nevertheless, Zevon handled his first album with such mastery that many expected his subsequent work to be first-rate as well.

However, some artists who have phenomenal debut albums do so because they filled them with the best of their material from the years before they landed their recording contract. Due to the importance of initial success in the recording industry, there can't be any song stockpiling for follow-up albums; if the first one doesn't sell, there won't be a second.

This could be the reason that Zevon's second release, *Excitable Boy*, doesn't seem to be as spirited or as satisfying as his first effort. The freshness exhibited in his

earlier songs seems to be lacking here, perhaps because he has an image to live up to now. Whereas his humor used to take the listener by surprise, now it often seems forced and obvious. His melodies are rather stale as well, with some of them sounding like they were borrowed from songs on his first LP.

Even though Zevon is off the mark on this record, his all-star back-up unit is not. Zevon employs the talents of L.A. session giant Waddy Watchel on guitar as well as a variety of other musicians, including members of Jackson Browne's band and a guest appearance on one number by Mick Fleetwood and John McVie of Fleetwood Mac. Background vocals are added by such luminaries as Browne, John David Souther, Linda Ronstadt and Karla Bonoff, among others.

The band really shines on the first cut on side one, called "Johnny Strikes Up The Band." Zevon delivers a strong vocal on this song, although the lyrics are quite repetitious. Watchel sandwiches some beautiful guitar work into the breaks.

The second number on the side is rather bizarre, to say the least. Entitled, "Roland The Headless Thompson Gunner," the song tells the story of a Norwegian mercenary soldier who is killed by the CIA.

He wanders across the land without a head, wreaking vengeance on those who did him in. Eventually, his services are commissioned by Patty Hearst. The lyrics keep the song interesting, if not morbid, but the melody is virtually a direct copy of his earlier "Frank and Jesse James."

The side's third cut, "Excitable Boy," shows Zevon's deft comic skills reduced to just plain bad taste. Trying to be outrageous, Zevon winds up with a set of lyrics that could offend anyone.

Luckily, "Excitable Boy" is followed by a real gem, called "Werewolves of London." Zevon is joined by McVie and Fleetwood on this song, which tells the hilarious story of a modern-day werewolf.

Zevon howls, *He's the hairy-handed gent/who ran amuck in Kent/lately he's been overheard in Mayfair/Better stay away from him/he'll rip your lungs out Jim/I'd like to meet his tailor, and later observes, "I saw a werewolf drinkin' a Pina Colada in Trader Vic's/his hair was perfect."* It's too much.

Side one is closed by an obligatory love and pain song, or so it sounds, called "Accidentally, Like A Martyr."

Side two goes downhill from there. It opens with "Nighttime In The Switching Yard," a seemingly pointless "train song" which slugs along to a lame garage-band disco beat. Not even another fine guitar solo by Watchel can save it.

"Veracruz," the side's second offering, also fails despite its interesting lyrics, because of its tired and redundant melody. It is followed by a song Zevon co-authored with Jackson Browne, called "Tenderness On The Block." This number sounds like it would be a fine vehicle for Browne, but it seems strikingly out of place on this album.

The side's closing cut, "Lawyers, Guns and Money," is overblown instrumentally and once again shows Zevon forcing himself lyrically.

While *Excitable Boy* is not a total failure and contains enough bright spots to be considered a satisfactory album for many artists, for someone gifted with Zevon's talents, it certainly is disappointing.

Recitals to feature strings, french horn

The UNL School of Music will sponsor three student recitals today. All start at 3:30 p.m. and are free to the public.

Stuart Furman, a senior violin student, has a two-part program. His selections are *Sonata In G (Devils Trill)* by Giuseppe Tartini and *Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 80* by Sergei Prokofiev.

Two junior instrumentalists will perform in the Choral Room of Westbrook Music Building. Debra Stehr will play two compositions on the string bass: *Sonata for Double Bass and Harpsicord* by Benadetto Marcello and *Konzert in F-Dur for Doubt* by J.B. Vanntal. Deb Dillon will be keyboard accompanist.

Larry Ahokas will follow Stehr's performance. His french horn selections are *Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70* by Robert Schumann and *Quintet in E flat for Horn, Violin, Two Violas and Bass, K407* by Wolfgang Mozart.

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