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New Burton LP technologically prime but lacks danceability, lyric quality

By Mike Grant
 Staff Reporter

Woody Allen once said that only Groucho Marx made life worth living. He should have added "and the latest Charlie Burton album." Forget the arms talks, Pete Rose's career-hit record, and the Madonna-Sean Penn marriage. Any time Burton has a new release all other news takes a back seat.

Record Review

When I heard cuts from Charlie Burton and the Hiccups' latest disc, "I Heard That," on my car radio, I put the pedal to the metal and risked a speeding ticket to get my hands on a copy of the log-awaited record.

On the way home, I examined the cover of the album at each stop light.

The colorful album jacket itself is a treat. Just seeing lead singer Burton, guitarist Phil Shoemaker, drummer Dave Robel, and bassist Tom Rierden dressed up in dapper tuxes might be worth the price of the album.

The sound on "I Heard That" is top drawer.

Before, listening to a Burton record was like reading a good book through a cheesecloth. Everything from the drums to Burton's voice sounded "muffled."

But studio mastering, which according to Magazine of the Midlands cost

three times the price of the last Burton recording session, shows up on this record. There's more impact in the drums, more bite in the guitars, and Burton's voice has added nuance. One wonders if the next Burton record will be on compact disc.

But no record is made for its album cover or for its technical quality. It's the songs that count.

From the opening tune "Not Too Much in Common (Anymore)" to the closing "Nanook of the North" there is a strong country feel to the record.

Lead guitarist Shoemaker sounds like he has been hanging around with Johnny Cash for the past year, which isn't at all bad. Indeed, songs like "All Time Low" and the cajun-influenced "The 'O' Song" are good enough to play on radio station WOW.

"I Heard That" is a familiar collection of no-holds-barred raucous rock 'n' roll songs like "Dead Giveaway" to "Hungry for Love," which take balladeering to the limits of tongue-in-cheek. All these songs are backed up by Shoemaker's searing guitar solos.

One standout, "Roadkill," is nothing less than a gross tune about our animal friends along highways and byways who are victims of hit and run. It belongs, for better or worse, on the Dr. Demento show.

"Another Vietnam" is another straight-out rocker with lyrics like "Was that you or Madame Nhu/ At our backyard BBQ/ It reminds me of your daytime dramas — you there, in you black pajamas!"

Burton proves he still is unmatched in his mastery of metaphors.

The best song by far on "I Heard That" is "Bum Ticker," an autobiographical tune about Burton's deceased parents. It's both bittersweet and comical and shows Burton's vocals at his best. I would have never expected anything like poignancy from the man who gave us "I, 41 Don't Care."

Burton and the Hiccups have made it no secret that they expect this album to give them the national recognition they deserve. If it doesn't, nothing will.

Although the recording quality is great, and songs like "Bum Ticker" and "Dead Giveaway" are as good as it gets in Nebraska, or anywhere else, for that matter, the album seems harder to really get into than their other albums.

It's ironic that this, the most technologically perfect of Burton's album's also is the least danceable and with the least amount of memorable lyrics or guitar riffs.

Songs like "Creatures of Habit" and "Nanook of the North" come off as filler material. Rockers from the group's repertoire like "Jezebel" and "Sanitary Landfill" would have served the album much better.

Don't get me wrong, I would still recommend this album on Burton's songs and Dave Roebel's guitar action alone.

It just seems that the technical quality of the album got more attention than the lyrics and the instrumentals, which usually makes any Burton record worth the wait.

Songs mix garage sales, love on Burton album

BURTON from Page 7

to classical music. I guess I got it from a kind of osmosis from the crib," Burton said. "I like writing song-poems with a literary bent."

"So far, Burton said response to the new album is slow.

"It's too early to tell," Burton said. "We've sent out about 500 copies to critics and selected distributors around the country. A record is new for one to twelve months. In the meantime, we're spreading the word."

"We sometimes get tired of playing the same places," Burton said. "And

I'm tired of being a southeastern Nebraska phenomena/institution. But I guess there are no small parts, only small actors."

In a Magazine of the Midlands cover story, rock critic Roger Catlin said that Bob Dylan had heard Burton's song, "Breathe For me, Presley" and told an interviewer the song "really gets me."

"It makes me feel okay he likes the song," Burton said, "but I don't have any illusions. I can't eat on it. Right now I'm the idol of a half dozen and that's it."

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