

'Scarecrow' sincere Americana about love, family, justice, hope

By Kyle Foster
Staff Reporter

John Cougar Mellencamp, "Scarecrow," PolyGram Records
"The highway between John's house and the studio where these songs were recorded cuts through a stretch of Indiana where the land is fertile and full of growth. It is from this land and its people that these songs are born, and though it is not necessary to know this to enjoy and appreciate them, it does lend a certain understanding for those who care to think about such things."

George M. Green, 1985

John Cougar Mellencamp's latest album, "Scarecrow," is a grand achievement that establishes Mellencamp as a major voice in U.S. music today. In "Scarecrow," Mellencamp has tapped into the U.S. conscious better than anyone since Bruce Springsteen's "Nebraska" album. He's done it with sincerity.



Courtesy Polygram Records

Record Review

No flashy image to sell. No flashy backup band. Mellencamp has constructed the songs around drummer Kenny Aronoff's simple, straight and powerful beat. Mellencamp and Larry Crane's acoustic guitar takes the edge off the harsh electric guitar and gives the songs a fuller, richer sound.

Mellencamp's voice has mellowed. He has matured. Mellencamp, no longer the bad boy of U.S. rock obsessed with whips and motorcycles, has established himself as an American visionary — not as insightful as Bob Dylan, without the appeal or history of Springsteen, yet every bit as sincere and emotional.

This album is about family, the nation, liberty and justice. It's about Americana of all kinds. It's about hopes and dreams American style and love. It's about freedom... and justice. Especially justice.

On "Justice and Independence '85" Mellencamp constructs a triplex parallel involving the family, the nation and the importance of justice for both.

He was born on the fourth day of July/ So his parents called him Independence Day/ He married a girl named Justice who gave

birth to a son called Nation/ Then she walked away/

When a mother leaves her baby son, the son cries. When Justice deserts a nation the nation causes war.

When a Nation cries/ His tears fall down like missiles from the skies/ Justice look into Independence's eyes/ Can you make everything all right/ Can you keep your Nation warm tonight?

The justice theme rings throughout the record. On the title track, "Rain On The Scarecrow," Mellencamp asks where justice has left the family farm.

Well there's 97 crosses planted in the courthouse yard/ 97 families who lost 97 farms/ I think about my grandpa and my neighbors and my name/ And some nights I feel like dyin' like that scarecrow in the rain/ Rain on the scarecrow. Bleed on the plow/ This land fed a nation. This land made me proud/ Son, I'm just sorry they're just memories for you now.

The album is dedicated to the memory of his grandfather, Speck Mellencamp. His grandmother sings one of the tracks, called "Grandma's Theme." "Small Town" reaffirms his faith in the rural

life.

No I cannot forget where it is that I came from/ I cannot forget the people where it is that I come from/ I cannot forget the people who love me/ Yeah, I can be myself in this small town/ And people let me be just what I want to be.

"Minutes to Memories" is the story of the wisdom of an old man passing the span of three generations. There are no free rides, no one said it'd be easy/ The old man told me this, my son; I'm telling it to you.

Mellencamp has said that "there is nothing more sad or glorious than generations changing hands."

Even "Lonely Ol' Night," the album's radio hit, is more profound than Mellencamp's earlier hits, "Hurts So Good" and "The Authority Song."

There is a lot of truth in "Scarecrow." Not everyone may agree with Mellencamp's populist ideas, but at the emotional level this record rings true.

The tunes are great too. Where there is truth there will be justice.

I'll give "Scarecrow" 3.985 on the G.P.A. scale.

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