



Courtesy of Digital Music Products

## Instrumental album lacks special traits to separate style from elevator music

By Andrea Christensen  
Staff Reporter

"Without Words" is an incomplete title for Thom Rotella's latest release from Digital Music Products. To be accurate, the title should read "Without Words, Without Dynamics, Without Rhythmic Variety and Without Melodic Interest."

Because the album is entirely instrumental, it needs something special to hold the listener's attention. "Without Words" just doesn't have what it takes.

The problem is that the recording sounds like elevator music. One simple theme is introduced at the beginning of each piece and then is passed between guitar and keyboard without any significant dynamic or melodic variation.

All cuts on the album, written by Rotella, feature the artist on steel string acoustic guitar or classic gui-



Thom Rotella  
"Without Words"  
Digital Music Products  
Rating: 2

Ratings are 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent).

tar. Keyboards and drums comprise the rhythm section.

The first cut on the album, "Since I Met You," is typical of the other tracks. It lasts a mind-numbing four minutes and 53 seconds. The loud one/three drum beat, played by Carlos Vega, detracts from the piece. Rotella's simplistic steel string guitar repeats five times by the end of the song.

The album is a little better when Rotella plays classical guitar. "Machu Picchu" evokes a Latin flavor in the beginning until the drums and bass guitar take over. Apparently Rotella can't decide if he wants to

play ethnic or pop music. He manages to combine the worst of both in this piece.

In "Only Love," Rotella returns to steel guitar. Once again the drums are too loud, and the melody is simplistic.

The title cut includes a cello solo, a welcome change. The shortness of this track — three minutes and 25 seconds — minimizes repetition.

Unfortunately, by the next track, "Carnival (En la Playa)" Rotella returns to the steel guitar, playing yet another innocuous ditty. The song doesn't go anywhere. The first minute sounds just like the last five. Its theme never evolves, and the dynamics and tempo are the same throughout the piece.

The last track is "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Finally, Rotella deep sixes the overbearing drum beat and plays alone. Unfortunately, making this overused piece interesting seems to be beyond his musical ability.

Anyone who just can't get enough of those catchy tunes played in grocery stores, elevators and dental offices should run to a music store and buy "Without Words." Those who like music with a little more pep should probably save their money.

## Collins

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gets funky right along with him. On the fifth cut, Gayden provides one of the funkier bass lines to come along in a long time. Richardson's percussion also complements well, always present but never overbearing.

The only major flaw in the album is the lack of any other solo performers other than Collins. Hollywood Paul Litteral does some soulful trumpet

work on "Blues For Gabe," a tribute to late trumpeter Gabriel Fleming. It's too bad that the talent of the horn line isn't featured a little more often. They play well; they deserve to do more than play backup licks the entire time.

Albert Collins has produced a solid album full of the punctuating riffs and stinging solos that have typified his style. Blues fans will appreciate this album immensely, and newcomers to the blues will find it a good place to start.

## Pianist

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and he promises to be good in return.

"People coming out is good," Williams said. "I'm going to give them the best show they ever did see. It don't matter whether there's two or 200,000. I play because I love to entertain the people."

Along with a specialty on the piano — Williams can't read notes to play anything else — he emphasizes that he can play anything from boogie-woogie to classical.

"(My show) It's a musical roller coaster. I play all sorts of music," Williams said. "It's a God-given

talent." Music is a high pressure business; it wears and tears on the soul. But Williams said he really wouldn't want to do anything else, because there's so much he hasn't done.

"There's a lot of music left in me," Williams said. "My music is straight from the heart. There are several different routes I can go as far as music."

And if people at the Zoo Bar want to know which performer is Jason D. Williams, look at the stage.

"I'll be the fella at the piano," he said. Williams' show begins at 10:30 p.m. at the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St. The Tablerockers open at 9 p.m.; cover is \$8.

## McCray

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the blues. Lines like "If it weren't for lipstick and powder/that girl wouldn't go nowhere/ Oh, the lord is gonna bless me/ I even bought that girl a piece of hair," are scarce in the song, but listening for them is half the fun.

The other true blues song on the album, "Frustrated Baby," shares many of the same qualities, but McCray

does better solo work. He finally puts a little more emotion into what he is doing. When he does this, he sounds really good. He should do it more often.

The rest of album is basically the same, but with different names. Nothing overly original appears, and everything sounds too polished and too clean. McCray is a good player and singer, but as soon as he learns to sing through his guitar, he will be great. Until then, keep trying, Larry.

## JudyBats

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vocals and Johnny Sughrue on acoustic guitar and vocals.

But the JudyBats lose points for absolutely pointless cuts like "Convalescing in Spain," a tale of trying to recover in Spain, and "Waiting for the Rain," which doesn't seem to have a subject.

The group calls "Convalescing in Spain" "a lengthy, lovesick telegram."

That's somewhat accurate: The song is lengthy, and more than likely it will make listeners sick. "Waiting for the Rain" is slightly better; the lyrics are nonsensical, but the background music is pleasant.

Overall, "Native Son" is enjoyable; it should especially appeal to fans of groups like R.E.M. and 10,000 Maniacs. The JudyBats are still evolving, their style is still developing — and this album is a positive step in that growth.

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