

MARSHALL CRENSHAW'S GREATEST HITS

(A Singular Vision)

is as instantly ready as his answer. I'd rather have ten singles. Maybe 'My Generation' by The Who, 'C'mon Everybody' by Eddie Cochran, 'Trapped by a Thing Called Love' by Deniece LaSalle, 'Let's Stay Together' by Al Green ... I could name fifty or five hundred of them.

"I really like singles," Crenshaw expands, shifting in his soft chair at Warner Bros. Records' New York headquarters, where he's spending a brief break during a criss-crossing tour of America. "Singles are what I'm really about. I consider each little song an entity unto itself and an album just a collection of ideas. The format I'm really excited about is EPs and 12-inch singles."

Marshall Crenshaw is a product of Detroit's middle-class suburbs, where he was exposed to a plethora of musical styles. The Detroit upbringing left him with "... a general mania for pop music," Crenshaw says. "I don't care

how old or new something is. My tastes are diverse." Just

how

diverse becomes clear as he lets loose a stream of favorites and influences that spans Bootsy Collins, Lefty Frizzell, Iggy and the Stooges, the Ramones, the Who and, as the TV ads for compilation albums say, much, much more.

Clearly, however, Crenshaw's music is mostly reminiscent of two of pop music's greatest influences: Buddy Holly and the Beatles. With brother Robert on drums, and bassist Chris Donato, Crenshaw makes full use of the trio's harmony singing and background vocals that recall "The Chirping Crickets," Holly's back-up

album would you want?"

Crenshaw peers through his tinted glasses and adjusts the large white cowboy hat that surmounts his close-cropped brown hair. His grin

singers, or the harmonies on *Meet the Beatles*.

Yet no one can accuse this music of being a mere revivalist flash. Crenshaw's sound is not plagiarism but progression, an individual style built on some of the strongest bricks from the base of pop music. "I'm proud of the comparisons," Marshall says in reference to the constantly recurring mentions of these artists, later calling his influences "our cultural heritage." But while many critics have described his music as coming from the Fifties, it is absurd to think of Crenshaw as anything but a product of the Eighties.

Marshall began the Seventies in Detroit, playing guitar for four years in a local bar band. A series of differences with band members, as well as Crenshaw's knowledge that "if you're in a hurry (to get established) and still in Detroit, there's something wrong with your mind," was the incentive behind an unsuccessful 1975 trip to Los Angeles in search of fame and fortune. Crenshaw landed a dismal job with a touring Country & Western band 71-75 before returning home penniless. On a lark, with brother Robert's help, he answered an ad for Beatlemania try-outs with a recording of "I Should Have Known Better." For the next two years, 1976 to 1978, Marshall Crenshaw was John Lennon, travelling the country in the role of his one-time hero.

The pay was good, but Crenshaw felt stifled and left the cast in 1978. He married his high school sweetheart and moved to New York, a city he has adopted with fervor. "This is my town," he says about the Big Apple, before grinning and reminding himself of his Michigan upbringing. But anyone who listens to "Rockin' Around in N.Y.C." on the album's first side, with its joyous Ramones-like brevity, knows where Marshall's heart belongs.

During the end of his tenure with Beatlemania, Crenshaw began compiling an impressive collection of songs. He recorded a number of these on a four-track tape deck, and passed the demo about to most anyone who would listen. One person who took notice was producer Richard Gottehrer, looking for material for the next Robert Gordon album. Crenshaw gave Gordon three songs, and co-wrote another with him, but when Gottehrer split with Gordon, eventually producing the Go-Go's *Beauty and the Beat*, Gordon's album was put on hold. Eventually *Are You Gonna Be the One* was released, and it contained "Someday, Someway," a small hit that revived Gordon's sagging career, and marked just the beginning for the song's composer Marshall Crenshaw. Lou Ann Barton featured Crenshaw's

"Brand New Lover" on her debut album, and slowly the word began to spread.

Warner Bros. got hold of the word, and sent Marshall into the studio. In New York, Crenshaw had begun to build a reputation throughout the club scene, mixing handfuls of lesser-known gems of the past with originals of equal merit, and had already released a 12-inch single on Shake Records. The band entered the Record Plant Studios in hope of capturing the sound that had taken them this far, but soon found themselves bogged down. "The freshness was gone," Marshall recalls, "and there was no way for me to detach myself to look at it." Re-enter Richard Gottehrer, the objective eye that helped the trio complete twelve tracks in six weeks.

It is difficult to describe the energetic simplicity and exuberant beauty that permeates Crenshaw's debut album. Each song stands as an affirmation of rock and roll's ability to thrill the listener. "She Can't Dance" celebrates the pop music fan, "Mary Anne" is a tribute to a female of the Eighties much as "Peggy Sue" remains the ideal of the Fifties. "Cynical Girl" is arguably the album's peak, a jingle-jangle tune that seems to sum up our times, with the song's hero "going out looking for a cynical girl, who's got no use for the real world." Like the Eighties, "Cynical Girl" is a little funny and a little skeptical.

If there's a problem with Crenshaw's debut album it's that it fails to capture all of the energy that comes through in his live shows. Marshall is aware of this, saying that "it's something we're going to try to get next time. As time goes on that's what we're going to be trying to accomplish." Is it that the raw sound in concert packs more power than the refined studio renditions? "There's going to be a lot less over-tracking and less dubbing," Marshall says, hoping that the follow-up album, already in the mental planning stages, will be truer to the full-sounding versions that concert goers have heard. But Crenshaw realizes that there's more to creating memorable music than finding the right mix in the studio. In great recording of the past, Marshall finds "some personality or human spirit that comes across in those records," and hopes that he too can communicate such vitality.

Particularly, Crenshaw loves the immediacy of impact of a good single. "I have only about a five second attention span," he confesses. "That's why all the exaggerated aspects of a single appeal to me. And, if an artist is lucky, maybe there's something of lasting value there, too. The good stuff tends to stay around."

BY ERIC FLAUM

Talk with Marshall Crenshaw, whose debut LP *Marshall Crenshaw* and single, "Someday, Someway," are both ascending the charts, and before long you'll be talking about favorite records. "What if," I say, posing the classic question, "you were stuck on a desert island? What