

Record Reviews

Country-folkie still has it

Murray McLauchlan
Swinging on a Star
Capitol/EMI

by Mike Spindloe

Canada's premiere country-folkie (and I'm sure he wouldn't mind the appellation) is back with his 16th album and first in three years. Actually released in late 1988, *Swinging on a Star* finds Murray McLauchlan in the same, relaxed, good-natured humour that has always characterized both his records and concerts.

The songs on *Swinging on a Star* are mainly about love gained and lost, all written with the gently profound and mature insight we've come to expect from McLauchlan. He's included the lyrics as well as a brief comment on each song on the inner sleeve, but it's not difficult to hear what he has to say.

The overall mood is one of catharsis. The title song is about letting go of "the memories of hurt and bitterness that you

carry through life." Later it becomes clearer that much of this unwanted baggage results from love, or attempts to love. McLauchlan, refreshingly, is not above admitting he may have been a "jerk" at times. But in "Love with a Capital L," he concludes that "Love can only happen with two equal people/standing up side by side."

Swinging on a Star is much more country than folk, and McLauchlan also throws in a bit of rock and roll. As country, his stuff sounds completely uncontrived, in striking contrast with much of the American-major-label-country one hears these days.

McLauchlan uses a full band on all the tracks, which may be the reason for the country sound: he sounds more like a folkie on stage, armed with only an acoustic guitar. Undoubtedly we'll be able to hear some of these songs sooner or later in that incarnation, but for now *Swinging on a Star* is another first-class effort from a real Canadian star.



Bland pap from Najee

Najee
Day by Day
EMI/Manhattan

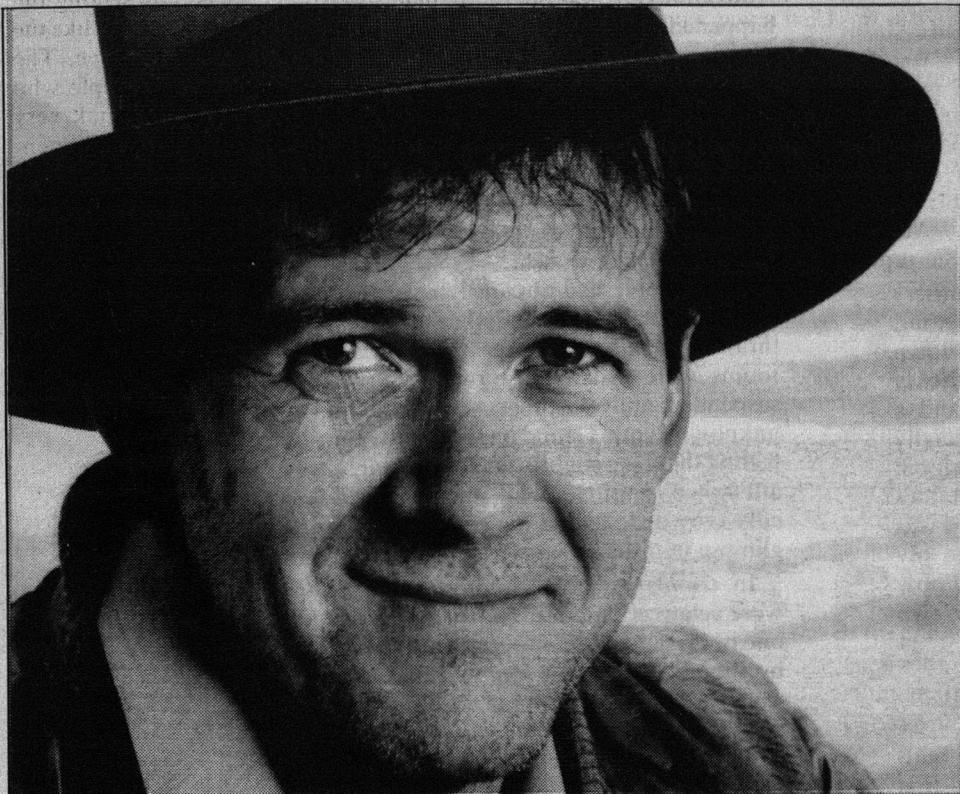
by Scott Gordon

There is jazz, and then there is Jazz. Where does Najee fit into this simple formula? Somewhere toward the right wing of creative elevator music.

This is very unfortunate, because his first album was nominated for a Grammy, and deservedly so. *Day by Day*, however, is a sugar-coated exercise in reviving Barry White. All this album really needs is White's rumbling mumbling and a strobe equipped lava lamp, and you could prepare yourself for a night of sheer horror listening to this musical drivel.

To be fair and honest, Najee is a great reed player and he is backed by exceptional musicians and studio crew. They are tight, disciplined and seem to know where everyone else fits in. But there is no power, no emotion, no life. The songs blend into one another with no distinguishing breaks or features to differentiate between them. The same limp, lifeless and dull melodies and riffs flow and melt together to form a sugar-encrusted lump that cannot be moved by the rare occasions of brilliance that Najee offers.

If easy-listening radio stations had jazz hours, this would get a lot of airplay because it is so nice and inoffensive. Jazz is supposed to be fired up with emotion and power. Najee only offers up the emotions of a mewling newborn kitten.



PARTY!

All Gateway staff are invited to an afternoon/evening of serious debauchery with Harrison and friends.

(TODAY!)

Power Plant Back Room

3:30 pm Thursday

