

Written by Mary Allegre

Saturday, 23 September 2006

Mike Conley's sound is a palatable acoustic rock which most any music fan would be open to. Conley's voice (which sounds a bit like Pearl Jam's Stone Gossard) ranges from confident and knowing to sweet to hurt, always keeping a subtle strength. On Conley's debut album "My Little Secret," the tracks play out like a couple of years in the life of a songwriter, with personal moments highlighted by great harmonies and memorable lyrics.

Some tracks, such as "Chillin' Out" have that "second-listen quiet genius" quality a la' Wilco, with uniquely crafted pretty melodies that get better with each listen. His presence (on the album and in person) is warm and so honest and intimate you feel as though he's sitting next to you and that he's a friend. Conley also uses speed (such as slowing down a happier harmony to great effect) and accompanying instruments to add a substantial richness to his songs.

In "Let Her Go," a song about a fading love and the realization of it, Conley strikingly captures poignant moments with use of delicate momentum. The violins and hushed vocals in the song paint a stunning portrait of such an aching moment of realization. "Why" is a polite telling-off with instrumentation similar to Dave Matthews Band, a little more of a musical escape than tongue-in-cheek intent, yet certainly both ideas prevail in lyrics such as "Is there any room for me in this conversation?"

I'm impressed that "My Little Secret" has an almost universally appreciable sound without carrying the saccharine qualities found in more mainstream music offerings. Conley has a beautiful way of showcasing his confidence and warmth while keeping a little mystery and playfulness to his character. This catchy, endearing, and well-crafted album makes for a memorable soundtrack and reveals that the Fort Wayne music scene has some unique, beautiful-sounding artists.