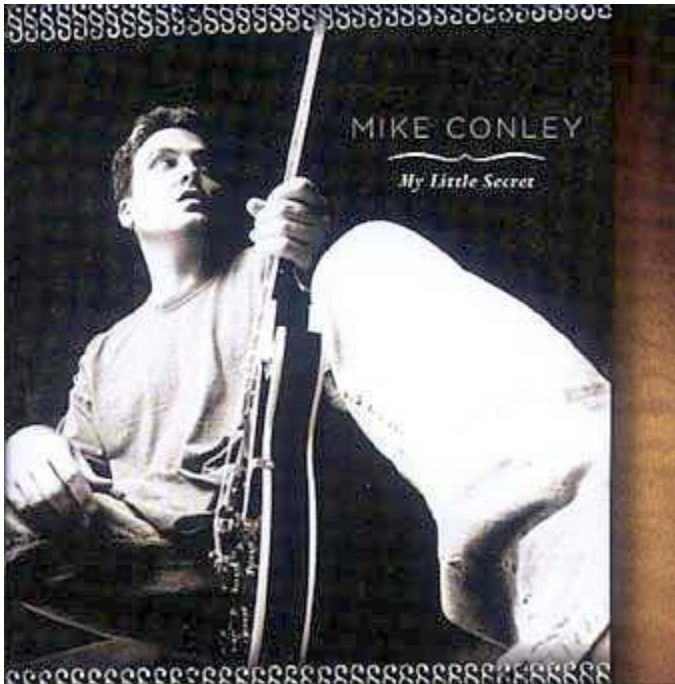


whatzup

Heartland Art, Entertainment & Recreation

My Little Secret



Mike Conley

by Jason Hoffman

Mike Conley is a name that should be well known to every *whatzup* reader. Not only does he constantly perform solo and duo gigs around the area, but he also hosts open mike nights and walked away with two Whammys this past February. I'm beginning to think that he cloned himself (two Whammys, two Mike Conleys - mere coincidence?).

Somehow Conley found time to record his first collection of original songs, *My Little Secret*. As he is known primarily as a solo artist, Conley wanted to make sure that this side was well represented on the album, and a number of the tracks include just a man and his guitar (and sometimes a violin or saxophone). But

some of his songs begged to be fleshed out, and for this he turned to Tim Bushong who ended up engineering and co-producing the project as well as providing electric guitar and trombone. At T-Bush Record Plant they brought in some of the area's finest players: Bryan Bankson (Rosemary Gates) on bass, Jon Ross (Definitely Gary) on drums and Brian Lemert with guitars and trumpet. These "hired hands" gelled so completely that their rock solid foundation sounds as if they have been playing together for years.

The brief instrumental "Startup" appropriately opens the album with lone guitar and eerily altered violin provided by Marty Spriggle. "Home" is an excellent example of Conley's solo material translated to the studio. Two guitars, vocal harmonies and violin present this sad folk song with lots of atmosphere, losing none of the intimacy of the original. Kaylie Duncan provides cello counter melodies for "Let Her Go," another sad song ("She just wants to be free / She doesn't want to be with me") with a light and strangely hopeful sound. "Chillin' Out" is a relaxed summer day that has sounds like the musical cousin to Zeppelin's "Going to California," and "2 Days" is a simple, sweet love song ("I love you with your cheesy little laugh and a smile to die for"), consisting of acoustic guitar and some exhilarating tension-filled harmonies.

As good as these solo songs are, Conley is just as good at writing songs for your standard rock band. "You Were Right" is a mid-tempo rocker that throws in the kitchen sink, including violin and sax accents to humorous lyrics ("I can see that you're still perfect / You insist to point it out"). Although primarily a vigorous pop song, at times the way the instruments work together verges on symphonic. A good-time 70s vibe permeates the shimmering "Dreaming," and the light R&B groove of "We'll Make It," which previously appeared on the benefit CD *A Hot Cat in a Dog's World*, will certainly get your foot tapping. Chris Richardson provides a growling sax to the hard hitting "Why?," where Conley manages to sound a bit like Anthony Kiedis of el Chili Peppers against a wall of horns. For sheer fun it's difficult to beat "Shallow," which opens with a jaunty 20s sound and goes on to wade in psychedelic waters before rolling in the mud of 90s indie rock.

My Little Secret really should come with a bright orange sticker warning the buyer that sticky melodies will stay with them long after the music stops. Conley manages to span both the solo and rock band genres through the impressive strength of his songwriting. This incredible album is available nearly everywhere (at all Wooden Nickel stores, Barnes & Noble, Mitchell Books, B-Sharp Guitars, the Dash-In, Borders and the Sound Cellar in Angola) so you have no excuse not to buy several for Christmas gift-giving.

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