

Marc Cohn: Good Things Come to Fans Who Wait

Singer/songwriter Marc Cohn has some of the music world's most devoted—and patient—fans. Since his 1991 debut, which included the adult contemporary hit "Walking in Memphis" and won him a Best New Artist GRAMMY Award, he has only released two additional records: 1993's *The Rainy Season*, and 1998's *Burning the Daze*.

But Cohn's fans have good reasons for keeping the faith. "I think they trust that I'm attempting to write the best songs and make the best records I know how and that the process takes some time for me," he suggests. "It's not really about how long it takes to write and record eleven or twelve decent songs. It's about writing eleven or twelve decent songs that add up to a cohesive whole. If nothing else, no one will ever accuse me of clogging up the marketplace with product!"

Marc has a deep affinity with the early '70s artists who first inspired him. "I was immediately drawn to records by the likes of Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Randy Newman, Paul Simon, and Jackson Browne," he recalls. "When I first heard those artists as a ten- or eleven-year-old kid in Cleveland, their delivery seemed more honest and authentic than most other singers I'd heard up to that point. Little did I know that they sounded so connected and real because they actually wrote the songs they were singing. I think I responded to that more than anything. I also think that if you're predisposed to music transforming you in the first place, it's the music you hear at that age that touches you the deepest and stays with you the longest."

Cohn says he still feels the same way. "When I hear a classic song or a standard sung by the songwriter, who may or may not be a great singer, I often hear new things in the tune or lyric that I didn't notice before. Case in point: you haven't really heard 'Wichita Lineman,' 'Galveston,' or 'Highwayman' until you've heard Jimmy Webb sing them."

Marc's upcoming fourth album will meld classic singer-songwriter sensibilities with vintage R&B flavors. "These songs are a bit more influenced by some of the early soul and blues records I either grew up loving or have discovered along the way," he reveals. "I very much want the production and sound of the record to reflect some of the earthiness and soul of early records by artists like Al Green, Bill Withers, Sly Stone, and Ray Charles. My ideal record would have some of the feel of the old Hi Records tracks by artists like



Al Green and Ann Peebles, combined with some of the storytelling aspects and lyrical depth from the best of the singer/songwriter tradition."

He pauses, then adds, "see why it takes me so long? This probably can't be done! I actually think Dylan has come closest to attaining that ideal, in some of his classic late '60s records and the records he made with Daniel Lanois."

Cohn writes songs on both piano and guitar. "I actually played guitar first," he says. "I taught myself piano by playing chords I already knew on guitar, searching for them note by note." His current favorite keyboard? A Yamaha MP1 48" Upright MIDIPiano.

"First of all, I have a classic Yamaha upright that's great to write on and that sounds beautiful in my living room. "My new Yamaha is a New York City songwriter's dream," says Marc. I can also switch over a foot pedal, plug in some headphones, and have a great piano sound that has the touch of my acoustic but that I can play at four in the morning without waking up the family or the neighbors."

Songs come in many different ways for this dedicated musical craftsman. But Cohn says there's one constant to his creative process: change. "Change of any kind is good for writing. Change of scenery is good. Life change is good. Even playing a new instrument can open up things you never would have stumbled upon with an old, familiar ax."

Obviously, he notes, this is more applicable to guitars than some other instruments. "For example, most of us can't keep purchasing new pianos. But it never ceases to amaze me how important changing instruments can be. Chords actually feel different coming out of different guitars or pianos. Changes that never would have caught your attention on one instrument might really speak to you on another. Of course, this is a dangerous justification for spending far too much money on music—but as far as I'm concerned, if I get one song out of an instrument, it's served me well. And my new Yamaha piano has already given me one!"

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