

Music: Disc Reviews

Record Review

Darden Smith

Circo

BY [KEVIN C. MADIGAN](#)

Published 06.03.04

Like many laudable troubadours, Darden Smith operates somewhat under the radar, even though he's been out and about in the business for some time. The radar, in this case, is the one that determines the amount of clout and credibility that a given artist is able to muster. At one point, Smith was even signed to the big leagues - Columbia Records - and in typical major-label fashion, he was dropped like a hot potato when the sales figures didn't quite add up to their satisfaction.

Nonetheless, Smith perseveres and herewith offers a new album that adeptly shows what he can do and how well he does it. There's nothing particularly startling about it all, and maybe that's the point. But one does wish for an occasional backbeat, a snap of snare, or a bit more conviction. It's all amiable enough, but a mite soft. Most of the time, his circumspect singing style precludes any interpretation of the lyrics, which could be considered a disadvantage for a singer-songwriter, no matter how good he is.

Darden Smith likens this record to a late night conversation between two people who are trying to figure out how to get along. While this particular chat is not exactly riveting, it is ameliorated by clever instrumentation and deft arrangements, mixing together harmonica, accordion, pedal steel, Hammond organ, nylon string guitars and a beguiling wurlitzer, all of which works very well. The vocal almost gets in the way.

"Make Love So Hard," one of the less sleep-inducing tracks, is a promising collaboration with Kim Richey, who could and should teach Smith a thing or two about edginess. The album picks up momentum about half-way through, with "Turning To You," a lovely shuffler of a song, which gives way to "One Hundred Ways," about the vicissitudes of religious fundamentalism. The subject of deities returns with the surprisingly jazzy "God Loves a River," and "Last Train to London" sounds like Dire Straits re-incarnated.

The word *Circo* comes from the Greek, meaning to turn or revolve. All Smith needs to do is turn up the heat and he'll be just fine.

Darden Smith plays Smith's Olde Bar at 8 p.m., Tue., June 8. \$12.