



Cory Branan
The Hell You Say
Madjack Records

★★★★☆

By Daniel Q. Marek
College Times



To become a singer/songwriter in the new millennium, you need one of three things: 1) you have to be completely off your rocker 2) you feel a profound love of the music you create about lost loves and lonely highways and 3) you have the courage to stand in front of an audience that will cut your isolated self down with heckles and "Freebird" requests if your performance is less than par.

Memphis born Cory Branan has all three, but just to add a bit of flair to the genre, his crackly wisps of country tinged vocals and dramatic one-man-show performances blow the lid off most audiences he encounters.

With his 'major' label debut *The Hell You Say*, Branan reflects his uncanny ability to craft bleeding heart melodies while keeping a bit of comedy to make you laugh at the chorus.

Beginning off the album with his most popular unknown hit, "Miss Ferguson" tells of a cute encounter with a now ex-girlfriend (yet another example of why aliases should be used by musicians) and how he finally worked up the courage to ask, "I was just wondering what you were doing a little later tonight."

Transitioning perfectly into the lightly brushed acoustic "Crush," Branan begins off with an endearing, "That time I mentioned I was moving/and you said you'd help me move/I almost went out to buy some shit so I'd need your help to move/cause I got a crush on you."

Although "Miss F." sounds great with a band (he usually plays it solo), the bare stripped-down "Crush" pays close attention to the silence of the song, which keeps you on the edge of your seat waiting to hear the next lyric of devotion and teen-aged adoration.

Now if you're not into country, you may not like "Jolene," but with a Tennessee boy you're bound to get a handful of twang and in the pocket rhythms. Even if you're not the 10-gallon hat wearing, cowboy boot kickin' type, Branan's clever writing will pull you to the other side before he breaks with a funk introduction to "Skateland South."

Skipping ahead a couple tracks to "Love Song 8," Branan plays like a candle dancing in the wind – soft, yet violent when pushed. With backing harmonies by Kim

Richardson, he drifts off into feeble guitar picking accented with "I love that girl like she was my own."

With *The Hell You Say* Branan quiets down your soul while bringing back recollections of the past. And while he may not end up being the latest Dave Matthews, I'm sure he'd have it no other way. With Memphis seeming like a distant memory after performances on Letterman and Daily, Branan hits the road alone to put his broken heart on display with a shiny guitar picked like a madman out of hell after dousing the flames and watching the steam rise and disappear through his fingers.

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