

## *Undertoner Magazine Review Translated from Danish*

### *Cantinero: Championship Boxing*

*By Lars Simonsen*

Behind the name Cantinero (Spanish for bartender) you will find the English singer-songwriter Christopher L. Hicken. As part of the now dissolved band, Big Mouth, Hicken traveled to New York determined to pursue his dream of becoming a rock'n'roll god. The highlight of the trip was being the warm up act for his fellow countrymen UB40 during their last world tour, which among other things meant that Big Mouth played for an audience of 3000. But the following album did not sell many copies and the band was soon back in New York where they played for 10 to 12 people at their concerts. Big Mouth pulled the plug in 1998. Chris Hicken used the years following the break up to slowly rediscover himself and rediscover his love for music. Or in other words: a good old fashion identity crisis. He lived the life in New York as a self proclaimed 'recovering narcissist' and chose to not give a shit about his ambitions of becoming rich and famous. And while Hicken, using the name Cantinero, was finishing Championship Boxing in his home studio without giving his rock'n'roll dream a thought, he was offered a recording contract.

And it is easy to hear that the tracks are written with the heart. There is an overriding intensity, warmth and honesty in the tracks – that can often be more than difficult to track when you think too much about radio hits, sales number and fame.

Cantinero has written most of the lyrics and music for the 12 fantastic and quite diverse tracks that are filled with warmth. You will for example come across elements of dub, reggae and some that remind you of a lazy rap (in Tuesday), but it is the acoustic guitar or the piano that dominate the most. And the use of the Spanish guitar gives the record a successful Latino sound here and there, as is the case in The Machine, a song about the New York suburbs.

In addition the album spans, also quite symbolically, from the opening tack So Low, where he sings: "I have never felt so low, so low so low / So low, so low, so low / So low...", to the final positive hymn Happy When I'm Down: "I trust in you / Because I trust in me / I'll say goodbye to misery and its twin / The one that you don't believe in." Both are strong tracks, and they are clearly in a majority during the 45 minutes or so of the record. There is for example the quite pretty country inspired The Conversation where he handles the issue of his father's death. "I will always remember / The chance to find / That I'm a lot like you / (Think of those times) / Remember / And laughs because of all of the / Time you were a lot like me / The chance to find / You're a lot like me... / Goodbye."

And then there is the song that is a pure sing-along, Nice Day: "Nice day to get lost in the season / It's a nice day so let's jump / And let's hold hands / Nice day, it's a / Nice day, it's a...", while Jesus Loves You sends critical comments to Christianity. One of the tracks, Make Me an Offer rocks a little, while That Guy has a pretty groovy sound.

But even though Cantinero among other things includes digital synthesizers, etc, the recording gives a predominately acoustic impression that makes most of the tracks subdued. The many small experiments make is so that it is never trivial or boring as you go along. It is namely this way that some elements have been added to each track that weren't in the track before it. In that way you really feel that each song has its own unique personality and it also seems as if Catinero shows his true personality on this very successful debut album.