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Cantinero: Championship Boxing (Rykodisc)

Written by Nigel Valentine



Cantinero sounds like the name of a band; and a band hailing from one of the south western US states bordering Mexico. Probably knocking out music in the same mould as Calexico – all Mexican and country influences interspersed with a touch of everything from jazz to trip-hop. So Cantinero is of course of a solo artist born in West Brom and raised in Birmingham.

Cantinero aka Chris Hicken moved to New York 11 years ago seeking fame and fortune with his band Bigmouth. The band didn't make it, although they did tour with UB40 (but that's hardly a call for celebration in my book) and when the band disintegrated Chris stayed on in New York and during a seven year stint working in bars he picked up the name Cantinero, which is Spanish for bartender, and the name stuck.

Musically he's a singer/songwriter in the vein of Rufus Wainwright or Ed Harcourt although a few tracks give the strong and incorrect impression that they were produced and mixed by Lemon Jelly. There's an eclectic mix of acoustic and Spanish guitars, piano and synthesizers, deep bass and spoken word with a touch of trip hop thrown in alongside random samples from NY life – answering machines, infomercials and dogs barking.

Covering subjects as diverse as the suburbanisation of the city, unobtainable love and positivity it all adds up to something quite special and standout tracks include 'Nice Day', 'So Low', 'Tuesday', 'Make Me An Offer' and 'The Conversation', a song about the death of his father.

Overall it's like a subtle cocktail, easy to enjoy and a pleasure to be repeated.

(3½/5)

Release Date: 07 June 2004



Championship Boxing

Last Updated (Sunday, 06 June 2004)

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