

## Richard Marx

Time goes by fast when you're a busy Grammy-winning songwriter/producer. For Richard Marx, the last seven years have been a time of unparalleled professional success and personal contentment. But during that same period, he worked on a cycle of songs too dark and too confessional, to keep hidden for long. Now, Richard unveils those songs on *My Own Best Enemy*, his first solo CD since 1997. For those who appreciate the art of the song, it's a welcome return by a modern American master.

"I didn't think I'd do this again," says Richard. "I thought I was OK. My producing career kept me happy." The catalyst turned out to be Richard's friend Bruce Lundvall, a legendary music industry executive and CEO of EMI Jazz and Classics, and Manhattan Records. "We were talking a year ago," notes Richard, "and Bruce said to me, 'Let's make a record.' I said, 'Great. Who's the artist?' He said, 'You. I'm sure you have songs to record.'"

Lundvall knew his friend well. Richard had those deeply personal songs never intended for other artists, songs born out of quiet reflection and the singer's resurgent interest in classic poetry. "I fell into poets like Rilke, Dickenson and Neruda," Richard recalls. "Not only did they resonate with me emotionally, they made me think that there had to be a purpose to my creativity."

With the songs in place, Richard and co-producer David Cole chipped away at the recording. "I couldn't carve out a block time," says Richard. "We were doing so many other projects, I fit it in when I could." Using various rhythm sections in Nashville, L.A. and Richard's home studio in Illinois, he created a sound so tight, the results seem more like a full-fledged band than anything else. Among the musicians lending their talents, country star/guitarist Keith Urban, guitarists Michael Landau, Michael Thompson and Shane Fontayne, bassist Glen Whorf, and drummer Matt Laug.

At first glance, *My Own Best Enemy* appears to be a collection of mostly hard-edged rockers and sunny ballads. But appearances can deceive: the lyrics often belie the music's brightness. "I don't like to write happy songs," says Richard. "It's the darkness that appeals to me. That's where the title comes from. I finally admitted that I'm one of those people that tends to throw speed bumps in front of myself."

In twelve songs Richard draws a searing portrait of a soul at war with itself. The album kicks off with "Nothing Left To Say," a midtempo track about love at a standstill ("Days go by in a pulseless haze/Who's that person that's wearing my face"). The edgy debut single, "When You're Gone" features a hot guitar solo from Keith Urban and a clever lyric about impending loss ("Look at me, the guy who's got it all/Trying to read my own writing on the wall").

"One Thing Left" boasts a beautiful melody and taut lyric ("I can always feel the rain/Even when the sun's in the way"). "Love Goes On," one of the album's unabashedly upbeat tracks approaches love from an oblique angle. "Relationships are the hardest thing in the world to maintain," says Richard. "But I believe in the spirit of romance."

"Ready To Fly," a meditation on self-forgiveness, is one of the album's most stirring ballads. "I made myself face some stuff," says Richard. "It hit me that this couldn't be a cookie-cutter pop song." Others, like "Again" and the rocker "Colder" draw on a lifetime of influences. Says Richard, "'Again' is my tip of the hat to Coldplay and U2." But perhaps no song better exemplifies Richard's goal of pinning dark lyrics to incongruously upbeat music than "Everything Good." "It sounds like 'Feeling Groovy,'" he says, "but the guy is literally cleaning the gun."

"The Other Side" is Richard's moving farewell to his late father. Fee Waybill, Richard's frequent writing partner, co-wrote "Suspicion," one of the CD's most finely wrought tracks. "Fee has been the best influence on me as a lyricist," says Richard. "He hates cliches, and he's always pushing me to say things differently." The album ends with "Falling," a beautiful andante with a string section composed by Richard.

While noted in the past for his perfect pitch and polished sound, Richard himself scoffs at the notion these days. "Perfection's boring," he says. "It's the things that are human and wrong that intrigue me."

That human touch is the hallmark of Richard Marx's music. His debut single "Don't Mean Nothing" and self-titled debut album kicked off his career as a solo artist in 1987. He remained a fixture on pop and adult contemporary radio for years, even as he emerged as a top producer working with some of the biggest names in the music business. Among those artists, \*NSYNC, Barbra Streisand, Josh Groban, Vince Gill, 98°, Luther Vandross, Kenny Rogers, Sarah Brightman, Lara Fabian, Sister Hazel, The Tubes and SHeDAISY. More recently, he has written and produced records for Emerson Drive, Natalie Cole, Keith Urban, Paulina Rubio, Kenny Loggins, Chris Botti, Michael Bolton, Chely Wright, Meredith Edwards, Hugh Jackman and Sissel.

In February 2004, Richard won the Song of the Year Grammy for "Dance With My Father," which he wrote with Luther Vandross. It was a big night for several reasons. "It was the award itself," says Richard. "For me and more importantly for Luther. I was proud."

With the release of the new album, Richard is gearing up to tour, something he hasn't done in a while. "For years I lived out of a suitcase," he says, "but I'm totally green again. Now I've got a whole new band of young musicians who will kick my ass every night. That will make me better."

His fans around the world probably disagree that he needs any such kick. For years, Richard Marx has had few equals as a songwriter and producer. Now, with the release of My Own Best Enemy, Richard Marx the solo artist is about to make a lot of new best friends all over again.