

# Mp3 Michael Shelley - I Blame You



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Singer/song writer with lots of point of view, but not too whimpy or overly serious. Like if Aimee Mann were a Man, or Keith Richard backed by Squeeze. 12 MP3 Songs POP: Quirky, POP: Folkly Pop Details: "Wry, contemporary singer/songwriter (who is the sum of every scrap of music he has ever heard) manages to be reverent of his diverse influences while sounding original and contemporary and infusing his songs with subtle humor and loads of unmistakable point of view." There, we said it! Michael Shelley's new album "I Blame You" (Bar/None Records) is his fourth collection ( if you count "Four Arms To Hold You," his side project with Cheeky Monkey ) and it's stamped with his unique brand of well-crafted songs, that are never crafty at the expense of true feeling. For his new album Michael wanted to combine the tight pop feel of his debut "Half Empty" (recorded on a credit card in one room with his N.Y. band) with the more kitchen sink approach of his second album "Too Many Movies" (recorded in the U.K., Los Angeles, Connecticut, and Brooklyn with four groups of musicians). The result is a cohesive breeze of an album that invites repeated listening. Long-time Shelley collaborator Peter Katis recorded the solid rhythm section of Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) on the drums and John Lee (ex-Mercybuckets, and Michael's touring ace) on bass at Tarquin Studios in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The bulk of the overdubs were recorded by Michael in his tiny Brooklyn apartment. "I produced it, but EVERYBODY contributed," Michael says. "John and Dennis really helped with the arrangements and the tempos and feels of the songs. Producing is just getting people to give you all their good ideas." Other friends, lured by a fridge stocked with beverages, who dropped by included a number of folks. Laura Cantrell (Diesel Only recording artist) came over to sing harmonies on "Lets Fall In Hate," and ended up making it a duet. Jon Grayboff, on a break from touring with Amy Rigby, packed a taxi with instruments and added some great pedal steel and some nylon string guitar to "Listening to The Band" (we swear what's on the album is one

take). That's also Jon on the trippy 12-string at the end of "Stoop Sale." Mark Bacino returned a favor (Michael sings on his "Pop Job" LP on Parasol) by adding some layered background vocals. Crooner/trumpeter Lief Artzen added his double-tracked harmonies on horn to "Listening To The Band." Frank Bango (Hoboken singer/songwriter extraordinaire) added vocals and Accordion to "Don't Fence Me Out." To keep his neighbors happy Michael recorded the horn section on "Nine Lives" and "I Blame You" in a studio. It also seemed easier to bring the tapes to the studio to record Dave Amels' vintage keyboard collection, rather than try to lug a Hammond organ, Farfisa organ, celest, mellotron, and Wurlitzer electric piano up three flights of stairs. Not working in a "real studio" had its ups and downs. There was more time to experiment and make up parts, but if you listen closely, you'll hear the sound of the honking of a car horn from the street below captured inadvertently while recording the bridge to "Stoop Sale" (right after the line "camping equipment"). "Recording at home was interesting, fun, and I learned a lot," says Michael. "Looking back, there's a million things I'd change, but I'm pretty happy with the results. The combination of techniques worked for the songs, I think. It was nice inviting people to come over and add something; it was a really relaxed atmosphere, and not having a clock ticking was a real positive change. I was trying to mix the one room cohesive sound of my first album with the recorded-in-several-places approach of my second album. The Shelley moniker appears next to other writer's names for the first time on this album. On "Stoop Sale," which was inspired by walking around his Park Slope, Brooklyn neighborhood one weekend, Michael was assisted by Stevie Jackson (of Belle Sebastian, and a member of Michael's live U.K. band) who was a house guest while Michael was working on the song. The opener "Mix Tape," an almost true story, was an idea Michael had in his head for a while, but couldn't find the right tune for until Jay Sherman-Godfrey (guitarist in Michael's band) offered up a cassette with a few finished tunes, and one was a natural fit. The title song was written with Francis Macdonald (Teenage Fanclub, BMX Bandits) while the pair was touring Spain with their side project Cheeky Monkey. Michael grew up in one of those houses that always had music playing in it. When he was a kid, the family had a few records that were repeated endlessly: Beatles, Sinatra, Kingston Trio, Carol King's "Tapestry" and Christmas albums. Additions to the family record collection were mostly procured through the local Salvation Army. (Michael cherishes his Mad Magazine "Mad Twists Rock Roll" album Mom bought for him there.) Many of Michael's earliest musical memories are from the listening to top forty AM radio from the back seat of the family station wagon. Born in New York City, Michael moved to the suburbs at age 8.

He still has 45's of Alan O'Day's "Undercover Angel" and The Spinners "Games People Play" purchased around that time. For many of his friends "top 40" gave way to the late 70s "classic rock," a phase which Michael is happy never to have fallen in to. (He claims he never "went through a Doors phase"). It was when his older brother brought home the first Ramones album and a Jonathan Richman album that everything changed for Michael, who then started writing songs and formed a band. "Groups like The Ramones and Jonathan Richman were the first time I heard music and equated it with something I might be able to be a part of myself," Michael recalls with a smile. "But probably my biggest influence was the radio, because the radio was always there, the true soundtrack of my life." It took a while for Michael to find a record deal - he initially signed with Big Deal in 1997. In the meantime, he kept busy by playing in bands and toiled at a number of pursuits: being thrown out of film school ("My songs have been described as 'little films,'" he says), working as a P.A. in Hollywood, working as a "sound guy", working in a museum gift shop, working as an overnight engineer at an all-Spanish-language radio station, hosting a Saturday night program for five years on WFMU, and most recently bartending at the Park Slope Brewing Company in Brooklyn. Since the release of his first album, Michael has been lucky enough to be invited to open two tours for They Might Be Giants (whose John Flansburgh took the photos for "I Blame You"), one tour for Shonen Knife and five touring treks of Europe. The press has compared Michael to everyone from Nick Lowe to Aimee Mann, and from Fountains Of Wayne to Freedy Johnson. Michael himself describes his music thusly: "It's the logical regurgitation of all the music in me. My Mom's folk records, early '70s AM radio, late '70s FM radio, new wave, '80s indie rock, '90s thriftshop, and WFMU-record-library explorer. With heavy dose of point of view, and with a sense of humor." BUT DONT TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT! READ SOME REVIEWS FROM THE PRESS: There is something immediately likable and catchy about Michael Shelley's pop tunes on I Blame You. Sort of like a young Elvis Costello covering Ben Folds Five territory. The rich melodies of "Mix Tape" and "Stoop Sale" evoke images of new love and love gone bad, and seem designed to extract precious emotions from the listener. The dreamy "Face in My Pocket" covers the joys of carrying a photograph - a face - in one's pocket, while "Dear Mr. Webster" reveals the limitations of a dictionary to describe a new attraction. The arrangements vary quite a bit, adding horns on several cuts and pedal steel to others. There's a lovely duet with Laura Cantrell on "Let's Fall in Hate" that works as both a good country song and a send-up of the genre. One the best songs among good songs is "Listening to the Band," a melancholy tale of a wild romance turned sour, perfectly brought to fullness

by Leif Artzen's trumpet. Shelley romantically captures the sadness and elation of each song, singing with conviction and assurance. The writing - 99 of it by Shelley - is finely honed; in fact, the lyrics fit so well with each song that they call little attention to themselves. I Blame You passes the listener by quickly, like a nice summer breeze full of memories. It's a lovely release by a confident artist, and will be welcome by his fans and anyone who loves appealing pop music. - Ronnie D. Lankford, Jr. Launch "Homegrown New York City songwriter Michael Shelley is one of those little goblins who surfaces when least expected--a winning troubadour with a handful of perfect pop gems. In the mid-'90s Shelley would have recorded on some major label with a big PR push and small articles in all the hot mags of the day. But this is an anti-quality-pop era, so Shelley is mostly unknown, and that is too bad, for I Blame You is a small classic. From the pleasant "Face In My Pocket" to the puppy-love salute of "Mix Tape" to the mop-top rock of "Stoop Sale," Shelley gets it all right, song after song. Not only does I Blame You revel in grand expensive-sounding production, it even includes a rocking instrumental track called "Rollo." Think Fountains Of Wayne meets the Lovin' Spoonful, or the Monkees fronted by Freedy Johnston. Think Michael Shelley. -Ken Micallef, All Music Guide "After three memorable and impressive releases on the Big Deal label (counting his collaboration with Francis Macdonald as Cheeky Monkey), Michael Shelley returns with his most accomplished and outright best release yet with I Blame You. -Shelley delivers the same witty lyrical playfulness and adventurous instrumental accompaniment that he's become known for, but I Blame You shows an incredible comfort that Shelley obviously has as he bounds from style to style. Compare the pop fun of Dear Mr. Webster to the dazzling country duet with Laura Cantrell on Let's Fall In Hate to the latino vibe of Listening To The Band and you'll here what must sound like three different artists at work. In a way it is as Shelley is so convincing, but his signature vocal and lyrical style keep everything glued together throughout the twelve tracks here. In addition, Shelley offers some solid guitar work here and benefits from the drumming of Dennis Diken of The Smithereens. -These qualities allow Shelley much freedom - the freedom to offer up the simple melodic structure of Favourite Graduate while showing a surprising 60's soul-loving side on Nine Lives (just one of the tracks where Mark Bacino offers a backing vocal). Shelley clearly loves rock and roll, and many of the genres either inspired by it or that supported its birth. What's clearly evident on I Blame You is that he can blend it all together in a way that very few can. -And his talent can take the blame for that. (4 1/2 of 5 stars) -Claudio Sossi, Shake It Up "Alternative rock is not the commercial slop we're forced to listen to on certain radio stations day in and

day out, nor is it a style of music with a label slapped on it by a music conglomerate. Alternative rock is a style all its own, gleefully creating its own noise and choosing whether or not to give the finger to traditional musical mores. -I know. I was in "college radio" at the start of the '90s, when "alternative" began to become the buzzword of the industry. And it's been a while since I heard a truly "alternative" album... that is, until I popped I Blame You by Michael Shelley into the CD player. Shelley's "do it yourself" attitude (recording most of the disc in his New York apartment) has a freshness about it that is sorely lacking in so many commercial "alternative" albums. Blasting through 12 songs in about 35 minutes, Shelley shames some of the pretenders to the throne. -Of course, Shelley has some natural advantages on his side - not the least of which is a rhythm section which includes Dennis Diken from The Smithereens. First and foremost, Shelley has a twisted sense of humor - not necessarily a must in the field of alternative music, but something which sure is helpful in the songwriting department. "Let's Fall In Hate" is a prime example of this skewed view of the world, finding a different way for a couple to work out their differences. Likewise, "Dear Mr. Webster" is a keeper on this disc, as our hero pens a letter to the "author" of the dictionary, chiding him for forgetting to include a word which describes the girl he pines for. -There is not a moment on I Blame You which sags from any kind of weakness. Even the light kick towards country ("Don't Fence Me Out"), the brief instrumental break ("Rollo") and the songs about young love ("Mix Tape") only serve to build up this disc's strengths. Shelley truly is a breath of fresh air, and these songs are like oxygen which fuels Shelley's creative fire. -I Blame You is the kind of disc which is almost guaranteed to become an underground success - but in keeping with the spirit of alternative music, wouldn't it be something if the people who flip for this disc shared the experience with their friends, and got them into Shelley and his music? Consider this my small part in the process; I Blame You is an album that you have to experience. Here's hoping Shelley becomes a bonafide star; he deserves it. -Christopher Thelen, The Daily Vault Michael Shelley's ability to craft witty, unassuming pop songs has developed nicely over the course of two solo albums and a side project. While in the past he's occasionally experienced problems balancing cleverness with tunefulness, he's never sounded stronger than he does on I Blame You. Blame's song titles ("Don't Fence Me Out," "Let's Fall In Hate") suggest that Shelley has surrendered to one side of that equation, but the songs themselves tell a different story. "Mix Tape" opens the album on an appropriate note, wedding a catchy melody to the story of a romantic gesture, but there's more at work here than silly love songs. "Stoop Sale," co-written with Belle And

Sebastian's Stevie Jackson, lists items on the verge of being sold by a disgruntled lover--including, next to baseball cards and camping equipment, a "mix tape that he made her." The unfortunate protagonist of "Don't Fence Me Out" doesn't score much better, but the song reveals a pleasant country influence, even if it's drawn more directly from Cole Porter than Porter Wagoner. "Let's Fall In Hate," on the other hand, is a full-on, pun-riddled country duet with Laura Cantrell, and a good one at that; it fills out Shelley's power-trio lineup with steel guitar, and the sonic diversity serves him well. There's a faint air of menace in the way the guitar line of the otherwise sunny "Favorite Graduate" echoes "Don't Fear The Reaper," while the horn section of "Nine Lives" suggests time spent with the recent Stax box set. On the whole, however, the tone of Shelley's songs--endearing but not cloying--sets *I Blame You* apart, making it another fine recording from one of the most reliably entertaining singer-songwriters around. -Keith Phipps, *The Onion*

This is Michael Shelley's fourth release and true to his talents, we find him continuing his mercurial and quirky style in abundance. He has a knack for well crafted songwriting and clever words. Each song comes equipped with a strong riff that has the listener humming the tune for hours afterwards. It's Alt/Pop in it's pure essence. *Stoop Sale* is about a girl getting ready to sell her goods on her stoop: "Some things just can't be sold". *Dear Mr. Webster* is about having bought this writers book: "Do you sit at night on weekend nights with a pencil sharpened... you have my pity Mr. Webster." Every song tells a quick little story that keeps you smiling. -Most of the songs have an interesting sixties bent instrumentally. Vintage guitar licks and moog-type keyboards paired with the quirky vocals/lyrics bring to mind Warhol's Campbell soup cans. It's a happy and fun album, similar to Joy Zipper. Refreshing after so many downer bands have dominated the scene of late (i.e. Radiohead, Sigur Ros, Arab Strap, etc.). -Tippy Johnson, *Privy Magazine*

"Michael Shelley didn't have a huge budget to record *I Blame You*, but they say a good song is a good song, and nowhere is that more true than here. -"Mix Tape" is a good laugh at reaching for someone desired. Shelley has a distinctive sound, but also reminds me a lot of the amazingly almost unknown group Fountains Of Wayne. And it's not just the vocals but the quirkiness, great hooks, and overall happy-go-lucky track after track. - "Dear Mr. Webster" finds Shelley looking to have his girl added to the dictionary. The tempo hops along at a pronounced toe-tapping pace that would tire even the fittest. "Stoop Sale" tells of those things that cannot be sold no matter the price. "Don't Fence Me Out" will seem familiar, but the country glide is all you need to get sucked in. It seems Shelley has quite a country side to him. "Let's Fall In Hate" is a hillbilly gem whereas "Listening To The Band" explores more south of the

border. -Michael Shelley proves that you don't need to carry around a big record contract in order to have a really good album. The fact that he isn't signed to one of the big boys proves that good music is still being made and not watered down by the industry". -Charlie Craine, Hip Online "In a clever take on the boy-meets-girl trope, the album-opening "Mix Tape" details how the boy "put on my headphones" and "stayed up all night concocting this silly magnetic love letter, song by song" for the girl after the two meet at a party and hit it off talking "in the kitchen about music and all the normal questions." -As with "Mix Tape," the album's other songs tend toward clever twists on all old themes and sound like Nick Lowe delivered with the cool detachment of Elvis Costello. Shelley possesses a wry sense of humor but knows how to use it to craft pop-rock songs grounded in observant details, original images and an honest affection for their subjects. -The narrator tries to find the perfect word to describe his girlfriend and his feelings for her but can't, so he writes a complaint letter to the dictionary man in "Dear Mr. Webster." - In "Nine Lives," the narrator sings about a girl who's "finicky, almost feral" and offers to "be your scratching post, so dig your claws in me." Shelley maintains the girl-as-cat conceit throughout and makes it work without having to force the image or having it fall into silliness. The horn section, Hammond organ and Shelley's Steve Cropper-style guitar give the song a soul-pop feel that fits the lyrical images perfectly. - "Let's Fall in Hate," a duet with singer Laura Cantrell, eavesdrops on two lovers who declare "we can't make it through a meal much less eternity" and set out to have the fight to end all fights, one that will "leave no doubt" and cause "the neighbors to call the cops the way we'll shout." It's an exuberant, genuine-sounding traditional country-pop song powered by guest instrumentalist Jon Graboff's pedal steel and Shelley and Cantrell's harmonies. - "Stoop Sale" plays out like a short movie in which the residents of a neighborhood stop to inspect one woman's possessions and leave behind a little bit of themselves in the small talk they make with her. - At its heart, "I Blame You" is a simple pop-rock album, and Shelley doesn't try to make any Great Statements or change the world with it, but his arrangements, lyrics, melodies and guitar hooks make for a delightful record, the sort of bright and vibrant release that's perfect for spring".-Andrew S. Hughes, South Bend Tribune "...All you really need to know is that this album will leave a smile on your face and melodies that will linger in your head for days". -Jim Testa, The Jersey Journal Impish, earnest, catchy... like the character in his song, "Dear Mr. Webster," who is searching for the means to describe his true love's charm, NYC freeform radio DJ Michael Shelley eludes the proper adjective. Not quite singer-songwriter, not quite power-pop, Shelley is in turns clever, capable and

craftsmanlike... His romances often seem like schoolboy crushes, the kind that require songs like "Mix Tape" to describe their inception, and "I Blame You" to outline their demise. In between, he enlists the help of fellow WFMU programmer Laura Cantrell to duet on the country-ish "Let's Fall In Hate..." and draws us in with one winsome melody after another... Nice, unpretentious pop, with jangly little undertones... check it out! -Joe Sixpack, slipcue A splendid, if quirky, mixture of British-styled pop and They Might Be Giants American-style wackiness. For the dozen tunes presented here, you get a feeling of too much fun, a mirthful blend of humor and solid songwriting. Part of the attraction is the clean sound, along with those vintage keyboards like a Farfisa organ and Mellotron, among others. Shelley knows how to craft a good song, and is quite adept at layering instruments and voices. When things build up, it's often the simple addition of backing vocals that help the swell. The disc features drummer Dennis Diken (Smithereens) and bassist Jon Lee (Mercybuckets) as the rhythm section. The production shines, which is impressive, considering Shelley did a lot of it in his Brooklyn apartment. Smart and fun, through and through. - NY Rock ...his third solo album, finds him once again crafting simple, engaging pop songs with an equal measure of hooks and charm. The opening "Mix Tape" is a near-perfect pop portrait of meeting a girl at a party, feeling the crush bloom, then staying up all night to create "a silly magnetic love letter" and perfecting the tape's artwork to impress her. Elsewhere, Shelley poignantly examines what happens when the relationship doesn't end happily (the girl sells the mix tape outside her apartment in "Stoop Sale") and delivers a punchy, '60s-influenced three-minute rumination on being tongue-tied in a letter to a dictionary author ("Dear Mr. Webster"). -Mark Woodlief, The Portland Phoenix A few years back I bought the Cheeky Monkey disc because Francis Macdonald of Teenage Fanclub and Eugenious fame was half the band. The other half was some guy named Mickael Shelley who I knew nothing about. But together they made some really nice lighthearted pop music, singing about hockey players and lost love with equal conviction and jaunty melodies that were adored by my four-year-old son (that's a compliment). Now Shelley has a solo disc and, while it hasn't yet won over my son (he's listening to that Green Day song 25 times a day right now) I suspect it will in time. On his own, Shelley gets even quirkier in both sound and subject matter. The first track is a love song about the mix tape he makes for his sweetheart, sung in his recognizable nasal tone. It turns bitter by fourth track, though, as she holds a "Stoop Sale" and sells said mix tape as well as everything else of his. Shelley later twists Cole Porter around on the track "Don't Fence Me Out" as he urges his love to keep the toolbox away from the bed. And he pines to Mr. Webster



that his dictionary doesn't have the words necessary to describe his love. Musically, when the songs don't include tinny sounding electric pianos and harpsichords there are the occasional guitar barre chords and he flirts with more country stylings on "Let's Fall In Hate" complete with pedal steel and the pairing of his voice with that of Laura Cantrell. Finally, "I Blame You" has horn blasts that made me think of some They Might Be Giants songs (John Flansburgh also happens to be a friend and took the liner notes photographs). Shelley probably is too flippanant to be taken seriously by music snobs but not hip enough to be embraced by fans of Ween or Weezer. But what he does is genuinely innocent and pure, much like the early work of Jonathan Richman. Those who can appreciate that will enjoy this disc.-James Baumann swizzle-stick. NYC tunesmith Michael Shelley is a storytelling singer/songwriter in the vein of Freedy Johnston, whose country leanings he shares, and Tommy Keene. And I Blame You... finds him once again crafting simple, engaging pop songs with an equal measure of hooks and charm... ." -Mark Woodlief, The Boston Phoenix ...Overall, this is an excellent release that should garner some new fans for Mr. Shelley." -Scott Semet, At The Shore

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