

## Mp3 Mack Starks - Elsewhere



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Captivating, layered, smart but viscerally satisfying roots/pop with a detached, Leonard Cohen-esque heart break factor. Subtle hints of hometown Nashville, more direct nods to Athens, GA. 11 MP3 Songs

POP: Folky Pop, FOLK: Modern Folk Details: Bio by Jonathan Flax Mack Starks has bridged the gap from band member to solo artist with grace and conviction. While he concedes a certain amount of trepidation at the newly focused spotlight ("it's like waking up and going to work only to discover at lunchtime that you aren't wearing pants"), Starks seems remarkably comfortable in his debut record's skin. Elsewhere, an eleven-track paean to star-crossed lovers and fighters, is Starks at his equal parts wistful and volatile best. Not that Starks has disowned his former band's back catalogue and lingering influence. Farmer Not So John, a group lauded by journalists from the Boston Globe, USA Today, Rolling Stone and Pulse!, was in fact, an unmistakable proving ground for the guitarist and songwriter. A visceral, kinetic live act, the four-piece unit honed Starks' clear-eyed vision and firebrand stage presence. With Elsewhere, Starks seems to have simply upped the ante, jettisoning the wailing guitar solos of his previous band efforts for a more focused, cohesive song cycle. As Starks explains: "With no set 'band' and no set 'parts' nailed down beforehand, (producer) Richard (McLaurin) and I could let our minds wander into new territory. The songs themselves were in control." Along with the assist from McLaurin (Garrison Starr, Iris DeMent, Matthew Ryan), Starks also made an inspired choice to draft drumming legend Craig Krampf. "Craig could hear all sorts of subtle shifts in feel and dynamics before they were even there," enthuses Starks. "That created a forward momentum and a general foundation for where we were going. I feel as though we managed to make an interesting sounding record that can, hopefully, participate in the wider conversation of whatever it is that 'pop-rock-soul' music is right now."

Pop-rock-soul music just may be this: the infectiously melodic, radio ready "Mirage"; the touchingly

fragile, cello-inflected indictment of "Shameless"; the hard-driving, harmonically sure "This Isn't the Place (I Had in My Head)." If it's not this absurdly strong opening trilogy of single-worthy heavy-hitters, then perhaps it's the pop-rock-soul-searchers that truly re-set the bar for the well-worn category. For instance, "Where's The Crime," with its evocative lyrics of menace and meditative drum loops, and "Dead Man's House," a druggy, trip-hop laden breather in the midst of Elsewhere's literate intensity, provide for the record a kind of sophisticated post-modern color. And I won't even mention the soul-rending epilogue, the haunting "Corrupted Heart." With an already high buzz-quotient in the traditionally staid Nashville music scene, both Starks and his Elsewhere are making compelling cases for vitality's place at both the Industry's and the record buying public's table. And Starks isn't looking back, either: "I look forward to the possibility of continuing to do this, improve at it, and experiment with new ways of doing things. I look forward to the day when I'm healthy enough to write about something other than love. I look forward to the day when I become the Supreme Ruler of All Things...um... I look forward to when I can finally get a good night's sleep."

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