

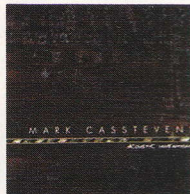
such as “I Ain’t Walking” and “Dangerous Way.” But nothing animates the music so much as Morrissey’s keen eye for detail and ear for the telling phrase. And, of course, there’s that voice. When Morrissey wraps his quivering, whiskey-burnished croak around a line, it feels as warm as the first breath of spring. Highly recommended. (Turn and Spin, [www.turnandspin.com](http://www.turnandspin.com))

—STEVE BOISSON

## MARK CASSTEVENS

### Acoustic Inventions

Longtime session ace and Nashville mainstay Mark Casstevens’s new solo CD sits right at the intersection of fingerstyle chops and pop sensibilities—no surprise given that his brief liner notes cite his twin sources of inspiration as his peers in the Music City studio scene and the Chet Atkins/Jerry Reed axis.



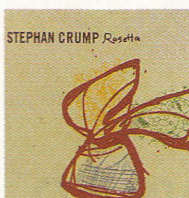
The result is an instrumental record that plays as a collection of great songs, yet grabs your guitar-playing ear from the first note and never lets go. True to the Chet/Jerry school, Casstevens mainly features his nylon-string guitar, accompanied by his own overdubbed bass parts, light percussion, the occasional hi-hat or kick drum, and a few guest turns on fiddle and accordion. The deft arrangements serve Casstevens’s writing well while remaining transparent enough to let his confident, relaxed fingerstyle arrangements shine through. “Sour Mash Rag,” “Gladrags,” “Old Mother Hubbard,” and the steel-string “All Thumbs” come across as virtually solo tunes—ragtime as imagined through a relaxed, Atkinsesque filter. On the bluesier “Okefenokee Blues” and “Underground Railroad,” Casstevens lets out more of his award-winning multi-instrumental side, laying down tasty harmonica, slide, and resophonic guitar. Yet even then, the nylon-string soon comes roaring back, doing the kind of funky things that make guitar players (and even regular people) grin and reach for the replay button. Casstevens wrote all the tunes except for “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”; his low-down, witty take on the classic spiritual finds room for nylon-string chord substitutions and walking-bass moves, a clawhammer banjo breakdown, and a perfectly justifiable Stevie Wonder quote all within three minutes and ten seconds. (JMC Music, [www.markcasstevens.com](http://www.markcasstevens.com))

—DAVID HAMBURGER

## STEPHAN CRUMP

### Rosetta

The unusual textural combination of leader Stephan Crump’s upright bass, Jamie Fox’s electric guitar, and Liberty Ellman’s steel-string acoustic makes *Rosetta* an unexpectedly sophisti-



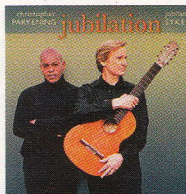
cated stringfest, as each player attacks Crump’s mesmerizing and contemplative jazz compositions with confident, in-the-pocket virtuosity. The warped melody and dreamy plucking of “Tag” veers into the pensive, overlapping melodic exchange between guitar and bass in “Were It a Loss.” In “Kudzu,” the intertwining of a bouncy bass line, a tremolo acoustic guitar, a light overlay of eerie electric-guitar bends, and Ellman’s scat-like acoustic runs slyly conveys the creeping, consuming vines of kudzu, the infamous Southern “shrubzilla.” Other standouts include “Carrousel en Verre,” in which sinuous, flowing bass and confetti-like streams of guitar arrive at a sweeping, mournful close; “Rosie,” a swinging, bluesy, yet elegant lullaby; and “Our Survival,” which opens with a moody swirl of bass notes entwined with arpeggiated guitar riffs and ends with driven optimism. Throughout, this exceptionally balanced, inventive ensemble plays with a lyrical, funhouse feel. (Papillon Sounds, [www.stephancrump.com](http://www.stephancrump.com))

—JULIA CROWE

## CHRISTOPHER PARKENING AND JUBILANT SYKES

### Jubilation

*Jubilation*, by classical guitar master Christopher Parkening and vocalist Jubilant Sykes, traverses more stylistic territory than any other single Parkening album has. The album includes spirituals and folksongs; South American selections from Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina; four Spanish songs (including a flamenco instrumental); and contemporary American, English, and Italian works. Sykes’s rich baritone is heard on 13 of the disc’s 20 selections. Accustomed to projecting over orchestras, Sykes proves his voice can belt or drop to a soulful whisper to blend with Parkening’s guitar.



Parkening opens the disc with a shimmering rendition of Andrew York’s “Jubilation,” a reworking of his energetic chestnut “Sunburst.” Sykes and Parkening demonstrate nearly telepathic ensemble work on “The Water Is Wide” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Of the many standouts on this crossover disc are “Lamento” by Rique Pantoja with its haunting vocals and jazzy progression; Stanley Myers’s famous “Cavatina”; and a poignant and folksy instrumental rendition of “My Country ’Tis of Thee.” The arrangements, performances, and recording quality are top-shelf. Parkening fans will not be disappointed. (EMI Classics, [www.emiclassics.com](http://www.emiclassics.com))

—MARK SMALL



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