

★ COUNTRY ★

Shotgun Willie

BY STEVE DITLEA

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WITH THIS FLAWLESS album, Willie Nelson finally demonstrates why he has for so long been regarded as a C&W singer-songwriter's singer-songwriter. Except for the excellent concept album, *Yesterday's Wine*, his recorded efforts for RCA were debased by the misapplication of Nashville mass-production techniques that drew the curtains over his exceptionally individual style. Since leaving the label, Nelson has moved from Nashville to Austin, Texas, signed up with Atlantic's fledgling country division, and cut this fine album with veteran producer Arif Mardin, assisted by such brilliant sessionmen as pedal-steel king Jimmy Day.

There is more to Willie Nelson than the "weepers" for which he is justly known, though nearly half of the songs on this record feature his gift for turning everyday imagery into eloquent expressions of grief and sorrow. "My oatmeal tastes just like confetti," he begins in "So Much to Do" and I immediately feel the disorientation caused by parting. From the satiric undertone of "Sad Songs and Waltzes (Aren't Sellin' This Year)" to the resignation of "She's Not for You," by way of the rhythmic "Local Memory" and the languorous "Slow Down Old World," Nelson uses a varied palette to portray the faces of love gone bad.

Nelson also proves to be a witty caricaturist. "Shotgun Willie," written in a Holiday Inn during the sessions, touches on the agony of impending deadlines, as well as the comic misadventures of an acquaintance who belonged to the KKK. "The Devil in a Sleepin' Bag," Willie's demonic-looking drummer Paul English, comments on the joys and annoyances of being a traveling musician. English also serves as inspiration to Leon Russell, whose "You Look Like the Devil" Nelson sings as if it were his own. When he goes ahead and does the same with Russell's trademark, "A Song for You," I hear the voice of a master stylist. Nelson's uptempo rendition of Johnny Bush's recent country hit "Whiskey River" and his tribute to Bob Wills, "Stay All Night" and "Bubbles in My Beer," round out the album with some fine toe-tappin' tunes.
