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And, artists like Tom Cochrane who have had stellar careers since their inception awake one day, and find themselves labelled as "mature rock stars." It can be a kind of wake up call that some fear and don't welcome.

Of course this all depends on how the artist handles it, how the public perceives it, and last but certainly not least if the music still has a sense of purpose, originality, and spark.

Without a doubt *Xray Sierra*, the new disc from Tom Cochrane delivers the goods with intensity, intelligence and sheer comprehension of songwriting as a craft.

As honest and soul searching as Cochrane is, he understands that in the back of his mind he must satisfy himself first, his huge fanbase and radio audience second, and of course, like most artists, the critics as a third option.

Xray Sierra works on all those levels.

The mid 40-ish Canuck icon blasts off the disc with the new single *I Wonder* that jumps with a sense of urgency, and gives way to the acoustic worldbeat groove track *Stonecutter's Arms* where Cochrane laments to 'raise a glass or two, and maybe smash a few but that's okay, they'll break their backs for you'.

As usual, Cochrane's material works on many levels and the wordplay on the harrowing track *Northern Frontier* and in particular the song *Art of Listening* proves that in spades.

The latter with the lyrics, "I'm a coward in a good fight, I can be confused but watch out if I know I'm right. Sometimes I can get so close, but sometimes I'm right out of sight." Cochrane finds the every day person's point of view and fleshes it out for the listener.

The mega juno winner borrows from himself when he clanks out the octave ripping guitar signature riff from *Life is a Highway* and let's it ride on top of the sheer commercial crunch of *Heartbreak Girl*.

Elsewhere the tracks *Willie Dixon Said* and *Marianne and Lenny* finds the beat poet groove inside Cochrane's head and heart, while *Beautiful Day* conjures up Cochrane's (and everyone's) search for the quality of life we often take for granted.

On a sonic level I think this is without a

doubt Cochrane's best-sounding disc to date.

Elsewhere throughout the disc Cochrane does a lot of the instrumentation himself playing piano, guitars, and doing a variety of experimentation with atmospheric sounds and he gets by with major help from John Webster, Bill Dillon, Randall Stoll and probably our country's best bassists Ken "Spider" Sinneave.

In the end, this disc bares the uncanny emotional feel of the albums *Victory Day* and *Neruda*, two of Cochrane's most stimulating works.

Whether *Xray Sierra* rises to the status of a work of major artistic significance will be for the rock history books.

However, it must be said that while some of our more well known and more successful artists offer up warmed over recipes of their craft, Tom Cochrane continues to follow his heart and make some of the best music of his entire career! I rate this a nine out of 10.



John Emms
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TOM COCHRANE
 ...releases new disc