



Radney Foster and the Confessions Revival

(Devil's River)

US release date: 31 August 2009

By Cody Miller

Many successful mainstream country acts of the '90s—ranging from Trisha Yearwood, Pam Tillis, Dwight Yoakam, and Raul Malo, just to name a few – have been able to revitalize and revive their careers outside of Nash Vegas since the dawn of the new millennium. Whether it be the eclectic cover record from Malo, or the boundary pushing eccentricity of Dwight Yoakam's tone and texture choices all the way to the classy pop-country (that works as traditional country and soulful pop equally) of Yearwood's latest outing, each artists has found a way to take their former success and build it into something completely different and fresh.

And then there's Radney Foster. The Texan native had a Top 10 hit in the Kim Richey co-written "Nobody Wins" in the early '90s, only to, like so many others, not be able to keep up with the demands of glossy Nashville that started to crank out Shania Twains and Faith Hills seemingly overnight. The difference with Foster is while he may not have been able to keep the spotlight on himself, he went on to pen several big hits for major label Country artists while still forging ahead with his own compelling,

non-mainstream Country music. Foster didn't have to submit to the production code of Nashville; all he had to do was write some good hooks.

And now in 2009 Foster drops an album entitled *Revival* that includes a picture of the singer in full-on praise mode in the sleeve. Has Foster pulled a full-on turn and recorded a gospel album? Or does the title imply a revival in career? Life? Creativity? Turns out, it's a bit of all of those.

A loud, rock-leaning guitar progression opens up the album, kicking into "A Little Revival", a song that talks about rivers and faith and builds into a whooping chorus that has Foster wailing "Hallelujah! / Amen to love!" with enough lived-in gruff and optimism to suggest a new revival in spirit for the often troubled singer-songwriter. The mixture of rock-leaning production with church-inspired lyrics combo follows up on the next track "Forgiveness", which lacks the literate bite of the opening track, but loses none of its energy or hopefulness.

That the one-two punch of the opening numbers is followed by an even stronger tune is both astonishing and surprising. Foster stretches his Texan accent across a laundry list of affirmations on life on what sounds like something from The Old '97s *Too Far To Care* album on the whooping "Until It's Gone". In the hands of a lesser singer (say, Tim McGraw) the song's lyrics would come across as strident, but Foster is a fine vocalist with enough sincerity in his delivery and enough experience in his voice to make the tune work.

The rest of the album may not live up to the excitement of the opening, but Foster manages to deliver a couple of more strong tunes along the way, despite some clunkers. His attempt to make every song have some type of quasi-religious theme doesn't work throughout all thirteen tracks and at times his compositions come across as trying too hard.

"Second Chance" starts off as a smooth Dwight Yoakam-esque burner before cranking into a song about "God and second chances" that is as trite as the title implies. And "I Know You Can Hear Me", "Angel Flight", and "I Made Peace With God" are as saccharine as his own "Godspeed (Sweet Dreams)" in both their lyrics and production. It's a shame, because "Angel Flight" has a lovely, warm delivery. Luckily, The Stones-aping "Shed A Light" manages to lift up the latter half of the album. Foster sounds completely at home behind a choir backing band and a honky-tonk riff that really burns.

Revival has enough moments to suggest Foster could appeal to the fans of Miranda Lambert, Gary Allen, and Jamey Johnson and thus, experience a revival on mainstream Country radio. But, as the closing pair of "Suitcase" and a killer bluegrass revise of the opening track prove, Foster is just fine being both the man behind the big hits and the man fronting the choir