

## CAROLYN MARK NOTHING IS FREE CD (MRD-107)

Like her close ally Neko Case (with whom she once traded as The Corn Sisters), Mark is a country girl with a wild streak. Nimble assisted by members of Canadian folkies Po' Girl, the settings for these songs are standard acoustic guitars, mandolin and strings, but she fills them with enough devilry and sly humour to draw you in to her bitter-sweet world completely. In a wondrous voice that's half Kentucky hick, half Rocky Mountain draught, Mark sings of blonde nymphs in lace panties, tedious wives, racy mistresses and knives driven chestward. 4 Stars **Uncut**

Mark, the other sister to Neko Case in the Corn Sisters is a notable act in her own right, bright and sharp on the up-tempo numbers, and when it comes to the slow heart-tugging ballads she draws favourable comparisons to Texas singer-songwriter Sarah Elizabeth Campbell. 4 Stars **Maverick**

Like Case, she's a literate but accessible songwriter, and her high-lonesome voice is as devastating as it is warm and welcoming. "The 1 That Got Away (With It)", from Mark's just released *Nothing is Free*, is part of a whole tradition of women's bittersweet tales of giving up intimacy for sexual freedom, from Janis Joplin singing "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," in the Kris Kristofferson-penned "Me & Bobby McGee" to Liz Phair's "Fuck And Run". With a spare background of acoustic guitar, violin, and mandolin, Mark sees a choice between the "one that got away" and "the one that's in the way." Mark comes up with another choice, the mischievous one who "just got away with it." She wonders, "If I keep you in the dark, where you'll always have to guess/ If I'm giving you my heart or just taking off my dress/ Maybe I'll be the one that got away with it." She's no weeping willow, though. Mark comes off as the kind of girl you'd have a good cry with before she set out on further adventures. **Pitchfork**

Mark's music is so authentic in its back porch vibe, it seems to come with its own direct link to Loretta Lynn's '60s heyday-like her heroes, Mark is not afraid to rail against a man too drunk to understand his own fuck-ups. Not to say Mark is some kind of saint: Her gigs are known for their off-balance candor and ribald humor as much as the homespun tunes. Go for the music, stay for the dirty jokes. **Metromix New York**

Mark strikes an even more impressive balance between wit and heartfelt observation on her fifth album, *Nothing Is Free*. She still gets a kick out of life's cruel ironies, but her droll insights are subtler and darker - a perfect complement to her most bittersweet songs yet, included the subdued waltz "The 1 That Got Away (with It)" and the noirish "Happy 2B Flying Away." It's certainly a new direction for Mark (fans who prefer her more direct humor should check out the uproarious tour diaries at carolyn-mark.com), and one that suggests her inability to achieve Case's level of success may actually be helping propel her songs closer to greatness. As she sings on "Pirate and Shotgun": "Sometimes where you are is where you've been trying to go." 4 Stars **Time Out New York**

Mark is allegedly a bit of a raconteur in the live environment and the one thing that stands out about 'Nothing Is Free' is that all of the songs are bursting with personality. Mark has a neat line in Americana - ranging from country rock to the tea party jazz of the sort that Mr Zimmerman dabbles in so successfully these days. Lyrically, Mark has a clever turn of phrase and an endearing ability to not take herself too seriously. **Americana UK**

Mark's witty on-stage banter carries over into her cleverly poetic songs, mixing tinges of real emotion and heartbreak with biting sarcasm and a love of good drink. Performing with both an additional guitar player and a violinist, Mark's songs were perfectly suited to the atmosphere

provided by the eager bar patrons, as fiddle-filled songs about boozy days off on tour tend to be.

Performing a set mostly composed of brand-new material from her forthcoming full-length, *Nothing is Free*, these songs tended to showcase Mark's less-funny musical tendencies, highlighting her more subtle abilities as a powerful emotional songwriter. **Exclaim!**

Carolyn Mark, who sounds eerily similar to Case and once played in a band with her, is one of the Great White North's brightest purveyors of twangy alt-country.... Her fifth record is, to put it simply, fun. You'll find yourself smiling, laughing and singing along to nearly every track here.... 1 Thing is a rollicking line-dancing-approved track about love, while *Pictures Of 5* is a simple acoustic number with more energy and enthusiasm than pretty much any new-country disc.... But the disc isn't just fun for her fans; it sounds like Mark is having a blast, too. Even slower songs like *Point Of View* are loose and casual; she sounds relaxed, as if she's sitting around a campfire with her friends. **NOW Magazine**

Her songs combine elements from 1950s country music with modern soft pop/folk...and Ms. Mark always makes things sound completely effortless. *Nothing Is Free* features nice, sparse arrangements and top notch players (Paul Rigby, Paul Pigat, Diona Davies). Enchanting tracks include "The Business End," "Pictures at 5," "Pink Moon and all The Ladies" (our favorite), and "Destination: You." Great stuff, recommended... (Rating: 5++) **babysue.com**



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