



September 2008

By Jeff McCord

Few would dispute that after a long career of starts and stops, RODNEY CROWELL is again firing on all cylinders. After early success with a string of remarkable hits, the Houston songwriter settled in for a champion slump. Yet beginning with 2001's *The Houston Kid*, he released a trio of rejuvenated recordings, and following a three-year hiatus, *SEX & GASOLINE* (Yep Roc) picks right up where those left off. Well, mostly. The angry, muscular rock of 2005's *The Outsider* has given way to an appealing, if slightly more languid, mid-period Dylan sound--albeit one with the distinctive rubbery textures of producer Joe Henry. Crowell has always worn his heart on his sleeve, at times to a fault, but he's found that sweet spot between art and true confessions. By avoiding the latter (only "Closer to Heaven" qualifies here), his lyrical work finds universal appeal. The songs--which, as always, are focused on making sense of the modern world and, more specifically, the women in it--range from fatalistic to idyllic. He's mastered his craft, even if the search for logic still eludes him.