

REVIEWS

JOHN MAYER

*Born and Raised*

[Columbia]

On his fifth album, John Mayer continues his slow shift away from the pop-rock mainstream and back into the singer-songwriter territory of his early days. The mostly mellow tone evinces some country leanings, with his gentle fingerpicked guitar, pedal steel and even some '60s folk harmonica. But there are a couple of low-key classic-rock jams with quiet, rambling electric guitar leads and subtle Hammond organ here—not to mention guest vocals provided by David Crosby and Graham Nash on the title track. Lyrically, the singer and guitarist all too often noted for his controversial statements in interviews maintains the nice-guy image of his music through vague references to love. He fits in one or two allusions to the challenges of fame, but mostly muses on the importance of inner strength and persevering through life's ups and downs. "Did you know you could be wrong and swear you're right?" he asks on "Shadow Days." Perhaps Mayer is gaining self-awareness along with experience. —Amanda Farah

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