

Family-man Marx returns to stage for benefit

By Cathalena E. Burch

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For the past three years, Richard Marx the singer has been hiding in the shadow of Richard Marx the songwriter/producer. Which brings Richard Marx the doting father off the road and out of the shadows so he can sit at the head of the dinner table every night with his three young sons and his wife, Cynthia Rhodes. And Richard Marx the man wouldn't have it any other way.

"The hot news flash is that I much prefer being a producer and writer for other people than making my own records," Marx said last Friday from his Chicago home. "I don't have to go on the road and I don't have to be away and I can maintain my family life, which is the most important thing for me. . . . I have dinner with my kids every night."

Right now, the artist is pushing the father to the back seat as Marx heads back on the road - briefly - to promote his self-produced "Days in Avalon," his first album since leaving Capitol Records in 1997.

He will stop off in Tucson on Tuesday to headline the KMXZ, 94.9-FM, Holiday Cabaret, a fund-raiser for the Southern Arizona Community Diaper Bank. The show starts at 7 p.m. at the Casas Adobes Northwest Center, 10801 N. La Cholla Blvd., at the Casas Adobes Baptist Church.

Armed with just a guitar, Marx will perform a few songs. This tour is the first time in his 18-year career that he's performed without a band or backup singers. "It's been really working well. I was nervous about the response more than the performance, but people like it," he says. "It's fun, actually."

Marx's latest single, "Days of Avalon," is slowly climbing the charts and could join 18 other Marx songs to reach the Top 10. Of those, he landed in the top spot with "Hold On to the Night," "Right Here Waiting," "Satisfied" and "Now and Forever."

But in 1997, Marx saw his hit-making career hit a brick wall. The tide of pop music changed, and guys like him, Phil Collins, Billy Joel, Michael Bolton and Bryan Adams were left hitless. That's when Marx decided to shift gears. "I realized that the climate was not ripe for what I do," he says, then recalls how he got a call from 'N Sync's handlers to produce the boys' version of his song "This I Promise You."

Then came the call from Barbra Streisand, who was teaming up with Vince Gill on Marx's "If You Ever Leave Me." More phone calls, more offers: Natalie Cole ("Angel on My Shoulder"), 98 Degrees ("The Only Thing That Matters"), Monica ("Right Here Waiting") and others.

"Before I knew it, I was a record producer more than I was a singer," he says in a voice itching with renewed excitement. But the singer side of him tugged when he looked down one day and found he had several songs other artists had rejected that cried out to be recorded.

Thus was born "Days In Avalon," which includes a duet with country's Chely Wright on a song the pair co-wrote, and Alison Kraus backing Marx on the country-flavored "Straight From My Heart."

Marx recorded the album on his own label, Signal 21, and is busy promoting the disc with his radio tour.

But the producing side of him isn't far behind. Even while he's pushing his own material, Marx is gearing up to go into the studio Saturday to produce three tracks for Bolton's new album. And next spring, he's producing songs for RCA artist Josh Keaton and country's newest teen, 16-year-old Merideth Edwards.

At the rate he's going, the various faces of Richard Marx are destined to meet in the middle.

That, too, would suit the man just fine.

"If I can kind of do it all in various increments, then you can't beat that."

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QUICK TAKE

Richard Marx in concert

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Casas Adobes Northwest Center, 10801 N. La Cholla Blvd., at the Casas Adobes Baptist Church

Cost: General admission is \$5 or a package of diapers per person. Gold Circle tickets (\$25) include a backstage cast party with Marx.

Et cetera: The show, which will feature Marx doing a few acoustic songs, is part of the KMXZ, 94.9-FM, Holiday Cabaret, a fund-raiser for the Southern Arizona Community Diaper Bank. The evening also features a live radio production of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Tale," with a cast of local celebrities.

Details/Tickets: Call 320-9490