

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Country/Roots

Shawn Camp

Fireball

(Skeeterbit ***)

In a career that has spanned bluegrass and mainstream country with a sparkling, Brad Paisley-like blend of smart songwriting and instrumental virtuosity, Shawn Camp has somehow never made it over the top himself. His main success has come as a writer of hits for Garth Brooks, Brooks & Dunn, and others.

Fireball is another hard-to-deny effort from the guitarist-fiddler with the creamy baritone. The title track gets things off to a fast start with twang-fueled country-rock, "Hotwired" adds a touch of rockabilly and "Beagle Hound" some blues, while "Drank" is rawboned honky-tonk. Many of the numbers have a tangy acoustic texture, with "Just as Dead Today" leaning about all the way to bluegrass.

The songs, from the serious to the clever and witty, display the engaging accessibility that has been Camp's hallmark, and you can imagine a number of them, such as "Love Ain't Leavin' " and "Nothin' to Do With You" climbing the charts.

- Nick Cristiano