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***** Kevn Kinney**

THE FLOWER AND THE KINFE

(Capricorn)

Kevn Kinney's third post-Drivin' n' Cryin' album is a solo effort in name only -- it's more of a collaboration with Warren Haynes, who produces, adds slide guitar (and more) to eight of the 13 stripped-down Southern-rock tracks, and brings fellow Gov't Mulers Matt Abts and Allen Woody aboard for a group effort that also features cameos by Edwin McCain and John Popper. Kinney covers two of his old band's songs, "Straight to Hell" and "Scarred But Smarter," rounding out the album with a fine collection of his trademark loner-at-a-small-dark-bar songs, which draw on his natural talent as a storyteller. If Kerouac, who's one of Kinney's primary inspirations, had written in rhymed pattern, or if the young Bob Dylan (whom Kinney honors by covering two of his songs here) had been less of a mystical poet, either one might have written lines like "I walked 40 miles of red hot clay/Seen Diablo along the way/Diggin' a grave with a pick and a shovel/I said, 'I got no sympathy for you devil.' " Yet anyone familiar with the Drivin' n' Cryin' songbook will recognize that as pure Kinney. Haynes might generate a little extra hype for *The Flower and the Knife*, just as Peter Buck did when he helped out on Kinney's first "solo" album. But, as always, it's Kinney who delivers the real goods.

– Robin Rothman

