Music

Singer-songwriter Dan Hicks proves he still has the hot hand

With the opening lines of "My mother died of asbestos/My father's name was Weed," on the album-opening "Up the Straight," Dan Hicks' first new album in 16 years, the Bay Area hipster immediately serves notice that he hasn't lost any of his wryly sardonic humor in the interim. Hicks and his Acoustic Warriors quartet will perform their special brand of "folk-swing." Saturday at Schubas.

Hicks, whose Hot Licks group Concert line

DAN KERING

recorded a series of cult classics in the '60s, may have taken an extended break from recording, but he's hardly been idle. A star in his hometown of Santa Cruz, Ca. He's recently played Chicago in recent years, most often at the Tracks. "Shootin' Straight" was recorded live at McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica, Calif., and released on Private Music's new On the Spot subsidiary. The 14 tunes feature some fine singing from Hicks and dazzling instrumental work from his band. "Up the Straight" is the song that stays with you. Hicks' hollow humor is evident on songs like the aforementioned "Up the Straight." It's a song that is a reminder of where he's been. "Shootin' Straight" is one of the best songs of his career.

Hicks has not only a strong voice, but a voice that is versatile. The songs of this album are one of his best efforts to date. His voice is strong and his delivery is perfect. The vocals are well-produced and the production is top-notch.

After all the years of people coming up to me at shows and asking me if I was still recording, it feels so good to say that I am again," said Hicks by phone from his Marin County home. Hopefully, this album is a springboard to get me going again. I've got lots of songs and ideas left for other records. The way I figure it is hell, I'm back.

Hicks' musical career stretches back to his folk days in the '60s and a stint with the pioneering San Francisco rock group the Charlatans. But it wasn't until he formed the swampy Hot Licks in the late '70s that he discovered his musical voice. Then and now, Hicks' music incorporates the propulsive swing of disparate artists like gospel, jazz, and world music. His music is a powerful mix of all of these elements.

Paul Kelly writes perceptively about love and the human spirit. His music is a powerful mix of all of these elements. His music is a powerful mix of all of these elements.