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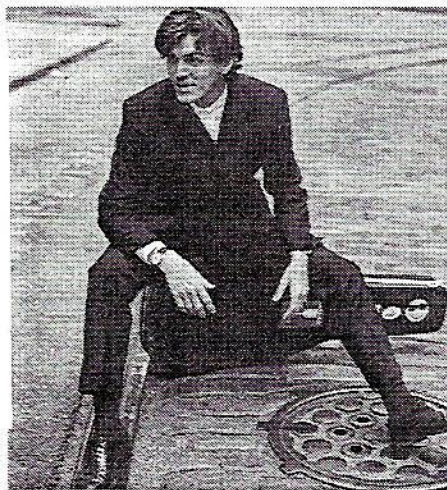
by Chris Morris

FLAG WAVING: "Urban alt.country" is one possible label for the music heard on singer/songwriter **Robert Burke Warren's** debut album, "... to this day," issued on his own Jackpot Music imprint.

Warren's songs have a definite twang to them, and their disquieting lyrics are steeped in the imagery and history of the gothic South. But the musician is also not above dropping a drum machine into his mix for an off-kilter effect.

"I've always liked synthetic sounds," he explains. "Also, when I did that, people were taken aback... It just spoke to me, as a texture in keeping with my life, being that I live in New York City, in an industrial environment."

While Warren may now reside in the Apple, he has covered a lot of ground. Born and raised in Atlanta,



WARREN

he moved to the big town in 1985 as a member of **RuPaul's** band and later played bass for two years with garage-rock titans **the Fleshtones**.

After an unsatisfying sojourn in a band he describes as "a Goth **Led Zeppelin**," Warren portrayed **Buddy Holly** for two years in the London company of the musical "Buddy." His experience in England served to point him toward his true musical mission.

He says that while he was living overseas, "I used to have dreams about the South, and when I came back, we went on several visits [down there]... That was a significant thing. All of a sudden, it seemed like the stakes were so much higher."

He adds, "I started listening and asking [about my family]. My grand-

mother wanted to share all this history with me, and it opened this rich environment to me."

The Warren family tree has some deep roots on "... to this day." The song "Josephus Cries" relates a moving story about the musician's great-grandfather (whose portrait adorns the cover). "Radio Church" recounts the true story of a relative's return to religion through the ministrations of a radio evangelist. "Milledgeville" is a dark tale of yet another family member.

These and other sharply drawn, briskly melodic tunes distinguish Warren's first solo venture. He ties the development of his songwriting skills to participation in a 1996 songwriting workshop held in upstate New York by **Rosanne Cash**.

"She's been almost like a mentor for me," Warren says. "I can't over-emphasize how much that [experience] changed me as a writer."

Warren works around New York as a soloist and in a band context with the group **Turpentine**. He'll play a BMI showcase on Thursday (27) at the Den and will perform with the group on Feb. 4 at the Living Room, both in New York.

Warren, who has been selling his album through his Web site (www.robertwarren.com), is seeking wider distribution for "... to this day." He may be contacted via E-mail at whiskydogg@aol.com.