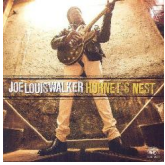


Joe Louis Walker – Hornet’s Nest (2014)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 07 March 2014 16:55 - Last Updated Saturday, 06 March 2021 21:40

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01 – Hornet’s Nest 02 – All I Wanted to Do 03 – As the Sun Goes Down 04 – Stick a Fork in Me 05 – Don’t Let Go 06 – Love Enough 07 – Ramblin’ Soul 08 – Ride On Baby 09 – Soul City 10 – I’m Gonna Walk Outside 11 – Not in Kansas Anymore 12 – Keep the Faith Joe Louis Walker - Guitar and Vocals Tom Hambridge - Drums, Tambourine, Percussion and Background Vocals Reese Wynans - Piano, Wurlitzer Piano and Hammond B-3 Organ Rob McNelley - Guitar Tommy MacDonald - Bass

It’s a time of consolidation for Joe Louis Walker, an attacking blues guitarist who has, forever it seemed, been the best modern player to never get his due. That changed in a big way with 2012’s aptly named Alligator debut, *Hellfire*. All of a sudden, Walker was garnering album of the year awards and, in a move as surprising as it was overdue, induction into the Blues Hall of Fame.

Why mess with a good thing, right? In keeping, Walker’s forthcoming album has a similar feel, and a lot of the same things that *Hellfire* had going for it. If that doesn’t make *Hornet’s Nest*, due February 25, 2014 via Alligator, the same kind of jolt-inducing triumph, it still provides more than enough reasons to recognize Walker for his determined focus in the face of so many years of relative obscurity. Not for nothing, after all, did he once title an album *Blues Survivor*.

As with *Hellfire*, which was somehow Walker’s first new studio effort since 2009, *Hornet’s Nest* features Tom Hambridge as producer, drummer and songwriting partner — and that’s, no doubt, a principal reason for the continuity between the two projects. He imbues most everything with a tough muscularity that suits Walker, just as it did on the most recent Hambridge-helmed albums *Buddy Guy* and *James Cotton*. And, again like those two earlier legends, Walker’s unique instrumental voicings — his guitar is by turns seething and then desperate, salacious or else sad — glues it all together.

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The title track barges out with a tough statement of purpose, surrounded by Walker’s boiling asides. A smart backing band also featuring keyboardist Reese Wynans, guitarist Rob McNelley and bassist Tommy MacDonald then finds a nervy groove on “All I Wanted to Do,” and Walker takes advantage of that space — exploring darker, more lovelorn areas with his vocal, while adding some punchy brass from the Muscle Shoals horn section.

Hornet’s Nest continues with that kind of rhythmic, almost metronomic balance. He unleashes ear-melting outbursts of emotion on “As the Sun Goes Down” and “Ramblin’ Soul,” while winking his way through “Stick a Fork in Me.” He has a ball with a cover of “Don’t Let Go,” then finds the deeper soul in “Ride On, Baby.” He boldly enlivens what sounds like a floorboard-rearranging house party on “Soul City,” only to travel all the way to the bottom of a brown bottle on the slide-driven “I’m Gonna Walk Outside,” Finally, there’s an emotional reaffirmation on the closing “Keep the Faith,” which finds Ray Walker, Curtis Young and Michael Black joining in for their second turn on vocals, following “Don’t Let Go.”

If none of it breaks new ground, if all Hornet’s Nest really does is confirm his newfound legend, well, that’s not such a bad thing. Joe Louis Walker put a lot of miles behind him before arriving at this place. It’s only right that he should drop his bags and sit a spell. --- Nick Deriso, somethingelreviews.com

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