

Mike Zito - Make Blues Not War (2016)

Written by bluesever

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1. Highway Mama 05:20 2. Wasted Time 03:24 3. Redbird 07:00 4. Crazy Legs 03:52 5. Make Blues Not War 04:10 6. On the Road 03:45 7. Bad News Is Coming 06:29 8. One More Train 03:50 9. Girl Back Home 03:01 10. Chip off the Block 03:32 11. Road Dog 05:26 12. Route 90 03:50 Mike Zito – guitar, vocals Rob mcNelley - guitar Tommy McDonald – bass Tom Hambridge - drums + Walter Trout - electric guitar (1) Zach Zito – guitar (10) Kevin McKendree - organ, piano, clavinet (1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12) Jason Ricci – harmonica (5, 8)

This album reminds me of the teenager who got the car keys for the first time and went out on a joyride. He was driving so fast, careening around curves and managing to narrowly avoid at least three accidents in the first half hour, but he maintained just enough control to pull through, grinning from ear to ear confidently the whole time. Mike Zito seems to have a similar unleashed feeling here, making the loud, rocking, intense guitar album he always wanted to make. Lyrics and nuances take a back seat to flat out shredding. In fact, Zito only has co-songwriting credits on four of the dozen tunes. As Zito puts it, “It was so much fun. It’s a completely live album, where the musicians all set up and we just hit record and went for it. The energy was awesome and sometimes we’d just be laughing so hard, because it was all so intense and exciting.”

This is Zito’s 13th album overall– the last three of which he recorded with his band, the Wheel– and he continues to forge his own career, having left Royal Southern Brotherhood in 2014. He enlisted the support of Grammy-winning producer Tom Hambridge (Buddy Guy) for this project, which had been talked about for a while. Hambridge also co-penned nine tunes with his regular writing partner, Richard Fleming, or with Zito.

“It was time,” Zito says, “to get back to the blues and playing my guitar. Tom and I had spoken about making a kick ass blues-rock album for years. I like having fun and cutting loose – that’s what this album is all about.” The assembled musicians include Hambridge’s Nashville cohorts

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Rob McNelley on guitar, Tommy MacDonald on bass and keyboard whiz Kevin McKendree on most tunes. Check out his piano chops on “Chip Off the Block.” Walter Trout guests on “Highway Mama,” and harmonica ace Jason Ricci on the title track and “One More Train.” “Interestingly, as Mike puts it, “Chip Off The Block” was written for my oldest son, Zach Zito, who is the featured guitarist on this track. It’s his first introduction into the music world and he did a great job. I couldn’t be more proud of him. He graduates college next spring and joins me on tour in summer – I can’t wait.” The slower “Road Dog” is the most serious song on the album and has perhaps the best guitar solo. I also find a similarity in that he nods to Luther Allison in “Bad News Is Coming” just as fellow ex-RSB bandmate Devon Allman did on his solo outing, Ragged and Dirty, also produced by Hambridge.

“We hear about everything 24/7 now,” says Mike Zito. “The news never stops and it’s all become propaganda. But when you turn off the news and turn on some blues, the world is a beautiful place. I think music is the cure for all ailments. Always has been. Always will be.”

Let’s hope you have good speakers at home and in your car. This one might just blow ‘em out.
---Jim Hynes, elmoremagazine.com

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