

Jo Harman & Company – Live At Royal Albert Hall (2014)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 08 April 2018 13:34 - Last Updated Thursday, 04 March 2021 16:07

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1 *Through The Night* 2 *Cold Heart* 3 *Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City* 4 *(This Is My) Amnesty* 5 *Underneath The River* 6 *Sweet Man Moses* 7 *Slideways* 8 *Better Woman*
Jo Harman - vocals Dave Ital - guitar and vocals Steve Watts - keyboards and vocals Andy Tolman - bass Martin "Magic" Johnson - drums

Jo Harman is the female shining light of the British Blues scene. That is beyond doubt, the critical feedback on her debut album has been universally positive. The album *Jo Harman and Company Live at The Royal Albert Hall* was recorded at Bluesfest by the BBC in 2013 and it is fitting that it gets its UK release two days before Jo returns to perform with her amazing band this year. ---amazon.co.uk

In 2012, this reviewer and e-zine discovered a blues chanteuse 'across the pond' in the UK named Jo Harman. Back then, she and her ensemble performed *Live At Hideaway*; now they're *Live at the Royal Albert Hall*. This year Jo was selected from six finalists to be "Female Vocalist of the Year" at the British Blues Awards. According to her promotional materials, she revealed, "I'm not entirely sure music should be a competition in quite this way, which is why I never particularly mentioned the nomination or campaigned for votes." This attitude is refreshing in an era of 'winner-take-all', no matter what the endeavor or the cost. Jo is never afraid to be herself above all, giving everything to her sultry take on blues rock and ballads. On this album, it's typically low-key, despite a few fast and gritty numbers. Six out of eight are compositions either written or co-written by Harman herself. The three mentioned below showcase her voice best.

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Says Harman of their finished product, in the liner notes: “This is a caught-in-the-moment, as-it-happened, honest recording made by the BBC. There are no edits, no fixes, no processing, no colouring...What you hear is what we played, raw and untampered.”

Track 02: “Cold Heart” – Slightly reminiscent of Sheryl Crow’s “I Shall Believe”, this original song is almost eerie. It’s a slow burner, but as hot as a certain infernal place. Harman tells her partner what absolutely no one wants to hear: “You’ve got one thing: a cold heart.” It’s an ultimatum as much as a description, the final word in a broken relationship. Steve Watts is understated yet brilliant on piano keyboards, which complement Jo’s lilting voice perfectly.

Track 03: “Ain’t No Love in the Heart of the City” – This cover of an R&B hit by Michael Price and Dan Walsh, popularized by Bobby “Blue” Bland, is absolutely super. “Ain’t no love in the heart of the city; ain’t no love in the heart of town. Ain’t no love, and it’s sure ‘nuff a pity. Ain’t no love, ‘cause you ain’t around.” A timeless sentiment such as this is best backed up by Dave Ital’s rollicking electric guitar solo.

Track 05: “Underneath the River” – With an irresistible rock ‘hook’ and thumping backbeat by Martin “Magic” Johnson, track five just might drive blues rock fans insane with excitement. It’s a surefire party anthem with just the right touch of sweetness amid the spice. “Girls,” Jo explains beforehand, “I think you’ll understand there are times when we feel a little bit crazy, and you know what? The men, too.”

Jo Harman and Co. will delight fans in Britain and worldwide with Live at the Royal Albert Hall!
---Rainey Wetnight, bluesblastmagazine.com

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