

Laurence Jones – What's It Gonna Be (2015)

Written by bluesever

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1 *What's It Gonna Be* 4:17 2 *Don't Need No Reason* 4:22 3 *Evil* 5:41 4 *Touch Your Moonlight* 3:39 5 *Don't Look Back* 4:49 6 *All I Need* 5:28 7 *Being Alone* 3:58 8 *Good Morning Blues* 5:29 9 *Can't Get Enough* 4:17 10 *Set It Free* 5:41 11 *Stop Moving The House* 4:31

Backing Vocals – SJ Mortimer Bass – Roger Inniss Drums – Miri Miettinen
Guitar, Vocals – Laurence Jones Keyboards – Julian 'Mr Jools' Grudgings, Lewis Stephens
Vocals – Dana Fuchs (tracks: 9) Vocals, Guitar – Sandi Thom (tracks: 5)

23 year-old Laurence Jones is at the head of the line of current young UK blues-rockers, having represented his country in the European Blues Challenge, played at the LeadBelly tribute concert that also saw the return of Walter Trout to the stage after his serious illness and was part of the Blues Caravan tour in 2014 alongside Albert Castiglia. His second album in 2014 was produced by Mike Zito with members of Royal Southern Brotherhood backing the young guitarist; this time around Laurence produced the album himself with regular bassist Roger Inniss. The core band is a trio, Finnish drummer Miri Miettinen joining Roger and Laurence with occasional keyboards added by Jools Grudgings and Lewis Stephens; Sandi Thom and Dana Fuchs share vocals with Laurence on one song each. Laurence wrote nine of the songs here and there are two covers. It is also worth noting that part of the proceeds from this album will be donated to the Crohn's and Colitis Research programme; Laurence suffers from this debilitating disease which requires regular blood transfusions and a careful approach to diet and it is brave of him to put that fact upfront in the album sleeve notes.

Laurence has a clear and pleasant singing voice and can certainly play as he proves on most tracks here, setting a solid rhythm and double-tracking his solos. The good thing about Laurence is that he writes tunes with catchy hooks; in that respect he resembles another English bluesman of a slightly earlier generation, Aynsley Lister and “All I Need” is a good example of that comparison. Another melodic rocker is “Set It Free” in which Laurence pleads for more tolerance in the world. “Being Alone” has echoes of classic rock like Bad Company, a coincidence as one of the two covers is “Can't Get Enough”. Laurence sensibly does not try to

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emulate Paul Rodgers' distinctive vocal and his slightly more relaxed version works just fine alongside co-vocalist Dana Fuchs' raspy tones. The other cover is LeadBelly's "Good Morning Blues" which moves from a recording of LeadBelly's voice to a heavy version with some high energy wah-wah. Laurence states that he chose a LeadBelly song because "so many of my British blues heroes were inspired by him" but it seems pretty unlikely that the great man would recognise this version!

Sandi Thom's guest spot is on the almost folkly ballad "Don't Look Back" which is the quietest tune here, the two voices working well in harmony over some gentle guitar work. If high energy blues-rock is what you are looking for look no further than the first four tunes on the album. The title track sets things off with an insistent riff as Laurence sings of the daunting prospect of a new tour with unknown collaborators; "Don't Need No Reason" finds Laurence getting angry with some of those around him who would want to tell him what to do, letting off steam with a tough solo; "Evil" has a really chunky riff and lots of wah-wah before the frantic pace of "Touch Your Moonlight" adds melodic as well as rhythmic qualities. Closing track "Stop Moving The House" shows a good sense of humour in the story of a guy who is so drunk he can't find his way home, the song benefiting from pounding piano and some heavily distorted guitar.

There is plenty to enjoy here for blues-rock fans but also evidence of a broader talent. It will be interesting to hear in which direction Laurence's next project will head. ---John Mitchell, bluesblastmagazine.com

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