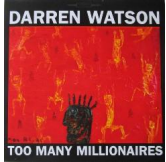


Darren Watson - Too Many Millionaires (2018)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 29 December 2018 12:27 -

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*A1 Hallelujah (Rich Man's War) A2 National Guy A3 Mean Me Right Blues A4 Pilgrim
B1 Too Many Millionaires B2 Un-love Me B3 That Guy Could Sing! B4 Past Tense*
Darren Watson - Vocals, guitar, percussion Delia Shanly - Bass drum, percussion Steve
Moodie - Double bass Dayle Jellyman - Piano, electric piano Terry Casey - Harmonica

New Zealand-based Darren Watson gained notoriety in the late '80s as the principal songwriter and front-man for R&B outfit "Chicago Smoke Shop." This group of young musicians made two albums, had a couple of songs that got some significant radio play, and with a few years of touring were able to secure place in the hearts of New Zealand's music fans. They earned multiple NZ Music Award nominations, and shared stages on NZ tours with such international artists Koko Taylor, The Robert Cray Band, George Thorogood, and The Fabulous Thunderbirds.

Watson's latest, "Too Many Millionaires," is his sixth release as a solo artist, and was recorded 'live-to-tape' at Wellington's Surgery Studios. This new record is a collection of all acoustic performances and features Watson's accomplished fingerstyle and slide guitar along with his powerful vocals. His supporting band includes Steve Moodie on upright bass, Dayle Raymond Jellyman on keys, Delia Shanley on bass drum and percussion, and Terry Case on harmonica. Seven of the eight songs on this collection are Watson's original compositions, while the title track, "Too Many Millionaires," was written by Australia native and fellow New Zealander Bill Lake.

This is a decidedly political work, and it's a good one, at that. Taking aim at endless war and economic inequality, Watson does an effective job of combining old-school, back porch country blues with topical protest lyrics, without becoming overly pedantic.

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Watson obviously knows his way around the guitar, and takes on traditional folk blues motifs and makes them distinctly his own. He is a purposeful picker – each note rings with quiet authority – and his powerful voice gives a raw authenticity to each of the songs' stories. The sound recording is right on the money, giving the listener a great sense of both the well-recorded instruments and the room dynamics. And the mix is just about perfect. All of the instruments are balanced, and lend just the right amount of support to Watson's impassioned vocals.

Some favorite tracks include the opener, "Hallelujah (Rich Man's War)," which laments the absurdity of going to war for wealthy interests in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle.

"National Guy" is a quiet, but powerful lamentation on conspicuous consumption and the preconceptions that so many harbor about the working poor, with just a hint of nationalism thrown in for good measure.

"Mean Me Right" is an airy, slow burning ode to a relationship struggling to reach an equilibrium. "Pilgrim" has Watson channeling Robert Johnson, but with his own particular seasoning, and again railing against politicians who have a difficult time being truthful.

The title track, "Too Many Millionaires," is a musical dissertation on rampant greed in our global society greed run amok. "Un-Love Me" is reminiscent of early Muddy Waters, and Terry Casey does a wonderful job evoking the spirit of Walter Jacobs into his playing on this one.

Throughout the CD, Watson tackles many country blues forms, but each with his own distinctive spin on them. The performances are top-notch, and there's an immediacy to the recording that makes you feel as if you're in the room with this talented bunch of musicians.

All in all, this is an enjoyable collection of timely tunes, with great performances all around, highlighting Watson's soulful guitar playing and his powerful vocals. If you're a fan of country blues done right, I think you might enjoy Too Many Millionaires. I know I did.

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