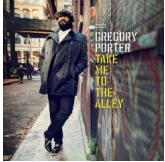


Gregory Porter - Take Me To The Alley (Deluxe) (2016)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 16 May 2016 15:57 -

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1. *Holding On* (5:01) 2. *Don't Lose Your Steam* (3:17) 3. *Take Me to the Alley* (5:16) 4. *Day Dream* (3:51) 5. *Consequence of Love* (3:20) 6. *In Fashion* (4:34) 7. *More Than a Woman* (3:31) 8. *In Heaven* (4:1) 9. *Insanity* (5:37) 10. *Don't Be a Fool* (4:31) 11. *Fan the Flames* (4:12) 12. *French African Queen* (3:44) 13. *Holding On (feat. Kem)* (4:16) 14. *Insanity (feat. Lalah Hathaway)* (5:03) 15. *Don't Lose Your Steam (Aufgang Remix)* (3:26) 16. *Don't Lose Your Steam (Fred Falke Remix)* (3:12)

Alto Saxophone – Yosuke Sato Bass – Aaron James
Drums – Emanuel Harrold Organ – Ondrej Pivec Piano – Chip Crawford Producer, Voice – Gregory Porter Tenor Saxophone – Tivon Pennicott Trumpet – Keyon Harold Voice – Alicia Olatuja

Gregory Porter has a warm, mellow, baritone voice with a heavy bass bottom, plush with soft brass notes that glide like liquid honey. You could take a bath in that voice and it seems a lot of people around the world are happy to do just that.

Porter is surely the most unlikely star in contemporary popular music: a stocky, middle-aged jazz singer who wears a black balaclava (to cover facial scarring) topped off with a cloth cap. His unabashedly old-fashioned style conjures up easy-on-the-ear nightclub jazz pitched somewhere between the warm croon of Nat King Cole and light swing of Moondance-era Van Morrison, with notes of gospel, blues and soul.

The Californian was 38 when he made his Blue Note debut and a grand old man of 42 when he broke out of the jazz enclave and into the mainstream with his million-selling *Liquid Spirit* album. Having achieved global success against the odds, he is not about to make any dramatic changes. He returns with another selection of elegantly crafted songs expressing thoughtful views on life and relationships in clear, clever lyrics set to flowing melodies.

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The high standard of Porter's songwriting is his secret weapon, ensuring he doesn't rely on covering the classic American canon the way so many of his jazz peers do. His polished gems have the quality of standards: simple, attractive verse-chorus affairs that make touching, unambiguous points with a kind of pithy directness often associated with country music.

On the playful In Fashion, he offers sharp observations on the fickleness of celebrity affairs with language that tips towards his namesake Cole Porter: "I'm last year's runway passion / No longer in fashion/ And I find myself obsessed / With how you dress / And whom you'll see / When you're without me". Consequence of Love is a mellifluous, soulful ramble that oozes emotional sincerity, internal rhymes tripping so easily off his tongue you barely register how clever they really are.

The tinkled piano and double bass is always supportive of the voice, while gentle solos subtly fill gaps. It is all impeccable, if unadventurous, with the temperature rarely rising above tepid, although Porter does revel in pushing the tempo on a trio of tracks referencing bebop rhythms and scat singing. It is intriguing to speculate what younger audiences, introduced to Porter by dance remixes and collaborations, might make of it. Last year, he appeared with the UK dance duo Disclosure on the edgy, electro-house banger Holding On. Here, he revisits the song as a dreamy ballad, with soft double bass runs and the lightest of touches on hi-hats.

The gorgeous voice, though, sweeps away all possible objections. It may be resolutely old-fashioned and, for sure, we've heard it all before, but the sheer pleasure in Porter's singing is all but impossible to resist. --- Neil McCormick, telegraph.co.uk

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