

Gwyn Ashton - Sonic Blues Preachers (2019)

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1. *She's what I like* 2. *Candy store* 3. *Fool in your life* 4. *Soul for sale* 5. *The old fool* 6. *Take yourself away* 7. *If I don't feel it* 8. *She's lost her power* 9. *Waiting game* Gwyn Ashton - guitar, vocals John Freeman - drums, percussion

Two-piece bands are always fun.

There's something about them, whether its Royal Blood, or the more earthy sort like White Stripes, or the primal instincts of MV faves, The Picturebooks, there's usually something interesting about them.

That's particularly true here, as these nine songs rather prove.

Sonic Blues Preachers is a collaboration between Aussie/Welsh blues man Gwyn Ashton and John Freeman. Freeman was the drummer in a band called "Fraternity", which featured a chap called Bon Scott who went on to be a touch famous, apparently.....

SBP, though do their own dirty deeds – whether they do them dirt cheap you'll have to ask them. Goodness me, however, whatever they're preaching seems to be mostly to do with the seven deadlies, and if they're on their knees, then it ain't in prayer.

Right from the off of “She’s What I Like” – literally given that the first line is “I got a chick with a kink” – this is fuelled by lust. Like some garage rock take on blues, this has plenty on its mind.

The pair have a chemistry of their own too. Ashton is frequently feted as one of the finest players around – I’ve seen him jam with Walter Trout and it was incredible – and his plugged himself into something positively filthy with these.

“Candy Store” is righteously greasy, “something crazy in the air”, he whispers here. “Coming from you know where.....” and even if you aren’t sure then you can guess. There is a wonderful diversity to the textures throughout. “Fool In Your Life” has a memorable groove, “Soul For Sale” changes the vibe totally, and is more laid back, but even in its brooding there is a suggestion that it could cut loose at any moment.

A key reason for that is that Freeman’s drumming compliments Ashton perfectly, and the swampy brew of “The Old Fool” comes straight from the delta, but is elevated by the rhythms he creates. In many ways, that one contains the key to this whole thing. “This old fool,” sings Ashton, “won’t play the game” and maybe that shines a light on the idea that the duo wanted to push themselves.

“Take Yourself Away” has a 1960’s air. Recalling The Sonics in part, weaving its patterns, while the timeless “I Don’t Feel It” lets its hair down. “If it don’t move me,” it goes, “I am cutting it loose” and there is a real feel that this is from the heart. “She’s Lost Her Power” has a stomp and a bit of soul, but it sounds like its Ashton trying to convince himself that it’s her loss, anyway, and this will show her.....

The collection finishes with “Waiting Game” which has a flavour of the folky, widescreen blues of Mark Knopfler, and it is but another example of the breadth of what this half hour has to offer.

“These two musicians go into a head to head battle” says the details that came with “Sonic Blues Preachers”, and there is a bit of that. But its like Bruce Springsteen used to say: “nobody wins unless everybody wins.” And that’s definitely the case here. ---Andy Thorley, maximumvolumemusic.com

Gwyn Ashton delivers again with his 2019 album *Sonic Blues Preachers*. Ashton, nearing 60 years-old, tours the world doing one-man, psychedelic, electric blues and intimate acoustic shows. For Ashton's ninth studio album, he teams up with John Freeman, who started his career alongside Bon Scott in Fraternity. The veteran blues drummer, Freeman, adds a groovy beat to Ashton's powerful voice and guitar.

Sonic Blues Preachers is a traditional blues interpretation and a dynamic journey through the mind of a man tortured by lust. The album immediately kicks into gear with "She's What I Like," a song hinting at the overall theme of the album and filled with Ashton's dirty feedback as well as one of the best solos on the album. Next up is "Candy Store," a slower song full of innuendo. Mellow vocals and guitar quicken into a faster, dirty chorus and a rocking solo full of reverb. "Candy Store," as well as a few songs later in the album, are reminiscent of Led Zeppelin II or Physical Graffiti, this one perhaps a reference to Zeppelin's "Candy Store Rock." Impressively, the two band members never leave the listener begging for a bassist as they take turns continuously driving each song forward. Throughout the song "Soul for Sale," which immediately calls to Pink Floyd's somber minor-key tracks and AC/DC's juicy intros, Ashton's unique, gritty voice shines.

By the fifth song, "This Old Fool," monotony begins to set in, but Ashton's epic slide guitar skills – present throughout the album – are front and center. His solos on almost every song illustrate an ability to incorporate Delta blues with his mean Australian rocker persona. "Take Yourself Away" brings the album back to life, quickening the pace and giving the listener a huge chorus and heavy bass riffs with kicks of treble. Ashton ends *Sonic Blues Preachers* with two songs, "She's Lost Her Power" and "Waiting Game" that give the album's story continuity and a rich blues-roots feel. Throughout the album the listener craves some complexity in the lyrics, yet listening from start to finish is an experience. Again showing his dynamic ability to incorporate old-school sounds into his psychedelia, Ashton's impressive simultaneous rhythm and bass playing and traditional blues outro in "She's Lost Her Power" lead into the snare-heavy and cerebral "Waiting Game." The latter offers a solo that invokes the feeling of lost love and its associated pain.

Ashton and Freeman offer a treat with *Sonic Blues Preachers*, filling each song with traditional blues and modern effects. Alternating driving bass with fun, bluesy riffs and runs, they give the album impressive instrumentation, complemented by powerful feedback and vocals. This album will be in the running for best blues album of the year, and the two veteran Aussies give hope that they will work together again. ---Spencer Rubin, bluesrockreview.com

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