Jonny Lang – Fight For My Soul (2013)

01 – Blew Up (The House) 02 – Breakin' In 03 – We Are The Same 04 – What You're Looking For 05 – Not Right 06 – The Truth 07 – River 08 – Fight For My Soul 09 – All Of A Sudden 10 – Seasons 11 – I'll Always Be 12 – Breakin' Me (Acoustic) 13 – Never Should Have Lied (Acoustic) Jonny Lang - Composer, Guitars, Producer, Vocals Barry Alexander - Drums David Angell - Violin James Anton - Bass Chris Bruce - Guitar (Rhythm) John Catchings - Cello David Davidson - Violin Conni Ellisor - Violin Marc Harris - Hammond B3 Dwan Hill - Keyboards, Piano James Grosjean - Viola James Philip Lassiter - String Conductor Drew Ramsey - Composer, Guitars, Vocals (Background) Sari Reist - Cello Jason Roller - Banjo, Mandolin Shannon Sanders - Composer, Piano, Synthesizer, Vocals (Background) Tommy Sims - Bass, Composer, Guitars, Piano, Producer, Vocals (Background) Pam Sixfin - Violin Javier Solís - Percussion Akil Thompson - Guitar (Rhythm) James Waddell Beats, Engineer, Keyboards, Mixing Kristin Wilkinson - Viola Nikki Leonti - Vocals (Background) Tiffany Bastiany - Vocals (Background) Bekka Bramlett - Vocals (Background) Luke Edgemon - Vocals (Background) Jason Eskridge - Vocals (Background) Melissa Hale - Vocals (Background) Gene Miller - Vocals (Background) Michael Hicks - Vocals (Background) Jackie Wilson Vocals (Background)

Marketed as a blues-rock prodigy early in his career, Jonny Lang had considerable success at a young age -- in 2004, A Tribute to Jonny Lang was released, arriving nearly a decade into the guitarist's career when he was just about to turn 22 -- so perhaps it isn't a great surprise that the first decade of the new millennium found him a little lost. He found religion, then tried to fuse his beliefs with hard rock on a series of transitional releases, before righting himself with 2013's Fight for My Soul. If the title suggests Lang may still be sorting out spiritual issues in his songs, the album itself bears no conflicted musical personality. Ditching the lingering hard rock along with any outright blues jams, Lang dives headfirst into classic soul and R&B, its elastic, funky grooves allowing the guitarist plenty of space to solo, but this isn't a record where the intent is to showcase instrumental virtuosity. Working closely with co-producer and co-songwriter Tommy Sims, Lang puts the focus on song and, with it, allows himself plenty of little stylistic detours. "All of a Sudden" opens the album on a gentle acoustic note in the vein of Babyface's '90s productions, then the record gets exuberant with "Blew Up (The House)," which brings to mind a

harder-edged, streamlined Sly & the Family Stone; later Lang does a full-on Motown pastiche on "The River." At times, his emphasis on stuttering funk and thick sheets of guitar recalls Lenny Kravitz -- "Breakin' In" and "We Are the Same" are in that mold, while "I'll Always Be" suggests the candied psychedelic ballads that are Kravitz's stock in trade -- but that is by no means a bad thing, as Lang and Sims have given Fight for My Soul a similarly appealing gloss so the album is enjoyable as sheer ear candy, but underneath the surface this is Lang's strongest set of songs yet. It took a little while for Jonny Lang to find his groove, but Fight for My Soul proves that he needed the journey so he could arrive at this destination. --- Seth Bernard and May Erlewine, allmusic.com

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