

Ben Harper – By My Side (2012)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 06 December 2014 16:39 -

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01. *Forever* [03:25] 02. *By My Side* [03:35] 03. *Gold to Me* [04:58] 04. *Diamonds On the Inside* [04:24] 05. *In the Colors* [03:01] 06. *Beloved One* [03:59] 07. *Not Fire Not Ice* [03:40] 08. *Morning Yearning* [04:04] 09. *Feel Love* [03:44] 10. *Happy Everafter in Your Eyes* [02:24] 11. *Waiting On an Angel* [03:53] 12. *Crazy Amazing* [03:58] Brett Banducci - Viola Eve Butler - Violin Oliver Charles - Drums Jon Clarke - Oboe Matt Cory - Bass Rock Deadrick - Percussion Joel Derouin - Violin Matthew Funes - Viola Jessy Greene - String Arrangements, Violin Ben Harper - Drums, Guitar, Guitar (Acoustic), Percussion, Piano, Vibraphone, Vocals, Weissenborn Jesse Ingalls - Bass Suzie Katayama - Cello, String Arrangements Greg Kurstin - Piano (Electric) Greg Leisz - Pedal Steel Timothy Loo - Cello Leon Mobley - Percussion Jason Mozersky - Guitar Juan Nelson - Bass Nicky P - Guitar (Electric) Joel Pargman - Violin Alyssa Park - Violin Ervin Pope - Hammond B3 Jordan Richardson - Drums Patrick Rosalez - Violin Michael Ward - Guitar Jason Yates – Keyboards

The problem with many retrospectives is that they usually place an artist's best-known and/or best-selling songs in a sequence that can defy context. The end result can be a rather jagged listening experience. Ben Harper's *By My Side* seems to address that issue by looking at it directly. Instead of simply letting his label choose a slew of tracks and call it a "hits" or "best-of" collection, Harper handpicked a dozen cuts, and focused on a particular aspect of his work: ballads. In addition to ten standard-bearers from his catalog, he also chose an alternate studio version of "Not Fire Not Ice," which sounds like a nicely recorded demo (and was never available in the United States before), and provided a single new cut, a sparse, sexy, soulful number called "Crazy Amazing" with his Relentless7 bandmates. The remaining tracks are canny choices: the vast majority of them would be the very cuts his fans would choose for such a collection. They span his entire career beginning with "Forever," from *Welcome to the Cruel World*. Also included from that recording is "Waiting on an Angel" near the end of this set. The two tracks chosen from *Fight for Your Mind* are the title track, of course, and "Gold to Me." The title track to *Diamonds on the Inside* is also here. Among the other selections are "Morning Yearning" from *Lifeline* (with the Innocent Criminals), "Beloved One" from *Burn to Shine*, and "Happy Everafter in Your Eyes" from *Both Sides of the Gun*. Taking in Harper's ballads without the rockist guitar pyrotechnics is solid not only in conception but in execution. While there's no

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doubt that fans have most of these tracks already, listening to By My Side's presentation of them as a resonant sampling of a particular area in the larger context of his work adds both depth and dimension to Harper's reputation, not only as a songwriter but as a singer as well.

---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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