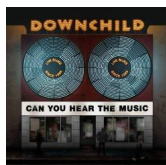


Downchild - Can You Hear The Music ? (2013)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 25 October 2015 16:51 - Last Updated Wednesday, 23 December 2020 10:38

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01. *Can You Hear The Music* (4:06) 02. *I'm Always Here For You* (3:27) 03. *I Need A Woman* (3:48) 04. *Blue Moon Blues* (5:33) 05. *Fasten Your Seatbelt* (3:52) 06. *This Road* (3:10) 07. *My Mississippi Queen* (4:59) 08. *One In A Million* (4:29) 09. *Don't Wait Up For Me* (3:34) 10. *Worn In* (3:44) 11. *Scattered* (3:39) Chuck Jackson – vocals Donnie Walsh – guitar, harmonica Michael Fonfara – piano, organ Gary Kendall – bass Pat Carey – saxophone Peter Jeffery - trumpet Mike Fitzpatrick – drums

First of all, *Can You Hear the Music* is on the Linus label, which is associated with True North, so, before I critique a damn thing, before I set down a word, you know it's top quality. Anything from those cats you can place right beside Stony Plain, Vizztone, that unbelievable set of anthologies that MVD and Catbone issued a couple years back (which still knock me on my keister), and any top shelf blues enterprise one might care to name. The way popular north of the border Downchild's new effort only lusters up that solid rep by trotting out a bunch of tightly packed jump an' reg'lar blues, the opener, the titular *Can You Hear the Music*, knocking you on your ass whether you want it or not.

Downchild's a sextet, and they've imported Pete Jeffrey on trumpet to help out Pat Carey on sax, presenting a small horn section rather than just a soloist, and, man, that really puts the top end on the compositions. Then the throaty Chuck Jackson wails on vocals to flesh out the lyrics and toss the everyday down in the floorboards side of the house. The other front man and main composer, Don Walsh, wields a highly Roy Buchanan-esque guitar in his solos but fades back into other voices and his own when comping Jackson or rhythm sectioning. The guy knows just the right setting each time out. And, damnation!, check this out: these cats number Mike Fonfara among 'em. That's right, the keyboardist from *Elephant's Memory*, *Electric Flag*, Lou Reed's backing band, and many many recording sessions. Niiiiice!!!

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Fasten Your Seat Belt of course glides right back into swingin' jump, as jivin' 'n reet pleatin' as a juke joint night in the delta. Man, I loves me some o' dat stuff, I surely do, and these cats serve it up piping hot and boogeyin'. Jackson here and elsewhere gets close to Buster Poindexter territory (and would someone PLEASE tell Johansen to resurrect that glorious band!!!), and the entire group is on fire—again: thank God they inducted Jeffrey, 'cause he and Carey raise the roof to the heavens—and unstoppable. Even the ballads (This Road, etc.) possess a joie de vivre right beneath their calm veneers. The leashed sizzle never leaps at ya in such cases, but you know it's there, and My Mississippi Queen is pretty much the index for that, showing both sides of the coin.

This, ladies 'n gents, in case ya din't know it, is Canada's most beloved blues unit—44 years strong!—and Can You Hear the Music is their 17th release. The very simple secret behind their remarkable success is something Walsh understands perfectly, making no bones about it: "It's knowing your audience and knowing when to give them what they want. If they want to dance, you step up the groove. If they want to watch, you give them lots of solos". Care to know just how valuable that insight is? Well, Downchild was the inspiration for Ackroyd and Belushi's Blues Brothers. ---Mark S. Tucker, acousticmusic.com

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