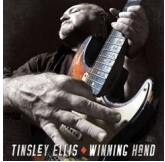


Tinsley Ellis – Winning Hand (2018)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 25 January 2018 10:09 -

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1 Sound Of A Broken Man 4:51 2 Nothing But Fine 3:51 3 Gamblin' Man 5:58 4 I Got Mine 4:13 5 Kiss This World 3:55 6 Autumn Run 6:11 7 Satisfied 2:48 8 Don't Turn Off The Light 4:40 9 Dixie Lullaby 3:14 10 Saving Grace 8:49

Veteran bluesman, Tinsley Ellis, makes his return to Alligator Records with the upcoming release of *Winning Hand*, co-produced by Ellis and keyboardist Kevin McKendree, to be released Friday, January 12th. If you love blues-rock, then you likely know about Tinsley Ellis. He is as consistent as they come—his albums are always good, if not great, and this one is no exception. He marks his 30th year in 2018 recording and playing under his own name, and he will celebrate not only with the release of *Winning Hand*, but embarking on a cross-country tour that will extend into April. If you haven't seen him live, you owe it to yourself to do so.

The album opens up with a bang with “Sound of a Broken Man,” with a wailing guitar and strong backing from McKendree, Steve Mackey on bass, and Lynn Williams on drums. A surprise key change near the end of the song kicks it into high gear, and Ellis finishes with a flourish, a guitar solo emphasizing the wah-wah. Ellis is renowned for his use of the wah-wah, and he uses it to great effect in this song. “Nothing but Fine” keeps the energy going, with a rock shuffle and some soulful singing by Ellis.

“The Gambling Man” slows things down to a traditional Chicago-style blues song, with a soaring guitar solo near the close of the song. It's also the source of the album title with this lyric: “If I was a gambling man, I'd bet on you to come back someday; I won't show my winning hand until that joker goes away.”

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“I Got Mine” is a funky soul-blues number, with a more languid solo from Ellis that resembles, to my ears, some of Clapton’s work post-Cream.

“Kiss This World” is a harder-edged blues-rock number, with the bass and guitar playing in unison to anchor the bottom. Ellis plays three guitars on this track, displaying a range of lightening fast solos with a light touch versus a heavier and harder-edged rock tone. And in case you’re interested, Ellis documents which guitar(s) he plays on every track of this album. “Autumn” is a softer, moodier song than the other songs on the album, with an evocative guitar solo at the end of the song.

“Satisfied” is a rollicking boogie-rock tune with some great piano playing by McKendree, reminiscent of the playing of the great Johnnie Johnson on classic Chuck Berry songs. More fine piano playing is featured in the only cover song on the album, Leon Russell’s “Dixie Lullaby,” a nod not only to Ellis’ respect for the late great singer, songwriter, and keyboard player, but also Russell’s production of Freddie King’s albums. Ellis and McKendree recreate the trading off of the fiery guitar and piano solos that are a hallmark of the original. “Saving Grace” closes the album and is the longest track, but like the rest of the record, not a second is wasted, and ends the album with some glorious guitar feedback that fades from the record but sticks in your memory.

“Winning Hand” satisfies Ellis’ previously stated goal of releasing five albums in five years, and the 19th overall. Four of these five records were issued on Ellis’ own label, Heartfixer, named after one of Ellis’ first bands. It also marks Ellis’ return to Alligator Records, not for the second but for the third time, and Winning Hand is a clear celebration of that return. ---Kevin Porter, rockandbluesmuse.com

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