

Rob Tognoni - Birra For Lira (2015)

Written by bluesever
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1 *Lost Our Blues In The City Of Rome* 3:25 2 *Complicated Love* 3:13 3 *The Blues Ain't Never Fun* 3:11 4 *Dance Like This* 4:38 5 *2:00 A.M.* 2:52 6 *Drink My Wine* 3:34 7 *Down By The Sea* 3:55 8 *Birra For Lira* 4:01 9 *No Longer 1983* 3:29 10 *Hello Me* 4:52 11 *Nonna Rina* 3:04 12 *Triple Espresso (Live Bonus Track)* 1:15 13 *Roadhouse Blues* 4:03
Backing Vocals, Percussion – Heidi Manu (tracks: 12) Bass – Eric Poole, Slawek Semmenuik
Drums – Rick Lloyd Guitar [2nd Guitar] – Terry Cameron Guitar, Vocals, Backing Vocals,
Keyboards – Rob Tognoni

The cover art of “Tasmanian Devil” Rob Tognoni’s latest CD, *Birra for Lira*, is some of the most unique yours truly has seen this year. Not only does it feature a foaming stein of “birra,” but also a lira coin (more on that later) and Tognoni himself, a finger on each side of his head, pointing upward to look like devil horns. One might expect some creative blues on the album inside, with Italian-spiced vocals and a touch of mandolin on the instrumentation. Unfortunately, one would be wrong on all three counts. The thirteen tunes presented here are not blues songs. They’re repetitive hard rock songs that may or may not have the word “blues” in the title. Baby boomers who grew up listening to American stalwarts – of a different ethnicity than Tognoni – won’t recognize their kind of music in what he offers. The only resemblance to it is an unnecessary cover of “Roadhouse Blues” by the Doors, included as a live bonus track. Calling “Rob Tog” a guitar monster would be perfectly accurate, but a blues artist? Not so much.

According to his website, he’s proficient in the three P’s: “POWER – PASSION – PRESENCE.” He displays speaker-exploding power as he performs lead vocals, lead guitar, backing vocals and keyboards. Tognoni’s songs are the sort you would hear at a local bar with an extra hour tacked onto its schedule, after all the other bars are closed for the night. No holds are barred here; no prisoners are taken. Such is this album’s greatest virtue/flip, depending on one’s personal taste. Remember the lira coin mentioned earlier? The word lira comes from the Latin *libra*, meaning “pound” or “balance.” Sounds pound listeners’ ears, even on the relatively calm track “2:00 AM”, but there’s no tonal, vocal, or instrumental balance to be had here. There’s a

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reason why sound producers' boards contain way more knobs than those marked "volume." Nevertheless, when liquor pours and the dance floor roars, who cares? No one under the influence of either.

Performing alongside Tasmania, Australia's Rob Tognoni are Slawek Semmenuik on bass; Mirko Kirch on drums; Heidi Manu on backing vocals and percussion. For the live performance of "Roadhouse Blues," there are Terry Cameron on second guitar; Eric Poole on bass; and Rick Lloyd on drums.

This release's original title track may not be one's father's blues – or one's own. Here's why:

Track 08: "Birra for Lira" – With a growling, guitar intro that sounds more like Jimi Hendrix than Jimmy Reed, this is a baffling earworm up there on the level of "Riders on the Storm". "I'm sittin' in the sunshine, having such a good time. I like to have you here-a, with birra for lira. I want birra for lira." Periodically, he interjects "HEY!" and "WHAT?!" into his guitar riffs, as if a waiter were tapping him on the shoulder and asking him if he wants another cold one mid-song.

Throw musical balance, genre purity, and "inside voices" out the window with Rob Tognoni's Birra for Lira! ---Rainey Wetnight, bluesblastmagazine.com

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