

Zakk Wylde - Book of Shadows II (2016)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Autumn Changes* 2. *Tears Of December* 3. *Lay Me Down* 4. *Lost Prayer* 5. *Darkest Hour* 6. *The Levee* 7. *Eyes Of Burden* 8. *Forgotten Memory* 9. *Yesterday's Tears* 10. *Harbors Of Pity* 11. *Sorrowed Regret* 12. *Useless Apologies* 13. *Sleeping Dogs* 14. *The King*
James LoMenzo - Bass Joe Vitale - Drums Zakk Wylde - Guitar, Organ (Hammond), Piano, Strings, Vocals

27 years after the release of *Book of Shadows*, hard rock guitar slinger Zakk Wylde's debut solo album, he delivers a sequel. The earlier record, now regarded as a classic for its harrowing honesty and expressions of personal darkness, was an anomaly, given its Southern-flavored acoustic roots M.O. (with requisite flourishes of killer electric guitar work).

In the works for years, *Book of Shadows II* was finally put to tape at the artist's studio after the Black Label Society tour in 2014. What's immediately striking is just how much of an actual sequel it is, albeit a far more musically developed one. (Wylde has learned a lot about songwriting in the intervening decades.) Like its predecessor, this date relies heavily on strummed acoustic guitars, Hammond B-3s, simple basslines, shuffling drum parts, and open melodies derived from country-rock and Americana. The mood is relatively somber, but the 15 songs offer enough variation in texture to compel the listener to go deeper. What sets these tunes apart are Wylde's lyrics. No longer wrestling the same demons (he's sober), he offers a more poetically developed commentary on life, its challenges, and its blessings. "Autumn Changes," with its gently swelling B-3, speaks directly and angrily to a ghost in order to settle accounts. The layered vocal harmonies and synth strings float in breezy contrast to a biting, crystalline guitar solo. On "Tears of December," Wylde's vocal delivery simultaneously channels Gregg Allman and Rick Danko. "Lay Me Down" is a killer rock love song with a guitar break that recalls .38 Special's Don Barnes. "Darkest Hours" is a spiritual addressed to the confused man in the mirror, discussing doubt and faith unflinchingly. The guitar break burns with a bluesy passion. "The Levee" is arguably the finest song here. A lament in waltz time, Wylde's use of subtle metaphor in the lyric is extended by the sad lullaby in its melody. Where "Eyes of

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"Burden" walks the line between Neil Young and Anders Osborne, "Sorrowed Regrets" is a midtempo, ringing Southern rocker with lyric poetry worthy of Stephen Stills. There are two versions of "Sleeping Dogs," a minor-key cooker that recalls the dynamic of Young's "Cowgirl in the Sand," and a closing take features Corey Taylor from Slipknot in a guest vocal appearance. Book of Shadows II is not only equal to its predecessor, but due Wylde's growth as a lyricist and singer, it is superior. Should he ever wish to retire the stadium rock guitar heroics, Wylde could easily establish a career as a fine singer/songwriter. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

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