

Neal Morse - Life And Times (2018)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Livin' Lightly* 2 *Good Love Is On The Way* 3 *JoAnna* 4 *Selfie In The Square* 5 *He Died At Home* 6 *She's Changed Her Mind* 7 *Wave On The Ocean* 8 *You + Me + Everything* 9 *Manchester* 10 *Lay Low* 11 *Old Alabama* 12 *If I Only Had A Day*
Backing Vocals, Other [General Input] – Wil Morse Backing Vocals, Programmed By – Gabe Klein Bass – Neal Morse (tracks: 2), Richard Brinsfield Drums – Scott Williamson French Horn – Holly Smith Guitar, Keyboards, Mandolin, Percussion, Lead Vocals, Backing Vocals – Neal Morse Lead Vocals, Backing Vocals – Julie Harrison Mixed By – Rich Mouser (tracks: 1-4, 6, 8-10, 12), Terry Christian (tracks: 5, 7, 11) Pedal Steel Guitar, Dobro – Scotty Sanders Strings – Chris Carmichael Trumpet – Dominique Caster Voice [Shouting] – Joey Pippin (tracks: 9)

You wouldn't guess from The Neal Morse Band's most recent output that their leader was mellowing into soft middle age. 2016's *The Similitude Of A Dream* and 2015's *The Grand Experiment* may have featured his now customary eulogies to the almighty, but they were still multi-faceted prog records. But as anyone who's seen Morse play solo live over the last few years knows, he can do the straightforward stuff well. This collection of easy-going soft rock numbers might prove too bland to connoisseurs of musical sophistication, but they are well-crafted. *Livin' Lightly* and *Good Love Is On The Way* employ irresistible strokes of Eagles-y peaceful easy feelings, the latter a five-minute romance in which 'She's the beauty barista, he's the corny cashier.' But while most of these songs are blissed-out tales of the good life, as the slightly saccharine taste starts to cloy, the mood darkens with the tale of a traumatised veteran in *He Died At Home*. Later, the pedal steel-streaked, violin-laced flavourings of *Old Alabama*, and some sublime guest vocals from Julie Davidson, show Morse's songs sound even better dressed in the battered denims of Americana. ---Johnny Sharp, loudersound.com

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