

## Kirk Fletcher - Hold On (2018)

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1 *Two Steps Forward* 2 *You Need Me* 3 *Sad Sad Day* 4 *The Answer* 5 *Time's Ticking* 6 *Dupree* 7 *Gotta Right* 8 *Hold On* Drums, Percussion – Matt Brown Guitar, Vocals – Kirk Fletcher Organ, Piano, Keyboards [Wurlitzer] – Jonny Henderson Vocals – Jade McCrea (tracks: 8), Mahalia Barnes (tracks: 1)

Kirk Fletcher is a guitarists' guitarist. Picked at a young age to record with the elite of the West Coast scene he went on to serve three years with the Fabulous Thunderbirds and was a featured player on several Mannish Boys CDs. More recently he has played on two of Joe Bonamassa's live albums (Red Rocks/Greek Theatre) and continues to tour widely, both in the USA and in Europe. For this album Kirk recorded in Bristol in the UK with keyboard man Jonny Henderson (Matt Schofield) and drummer Matt Brown in a sort of organ trio with Jonny covering the bass requirements on his keyboard. All the material is original with Kirk collaborating with co-writers on two tracks.

Opening track "Two Steps Forward" has Mahalia Barnes on vocals and develops from an intense organ/guitar intro into a wah-wah feast in the main solo, as well as quoting from several classic rock tunes (including Clapton's "Layla") on the outro. Kirk's vocals have developed and although he is not the strongest singer he does fine here, especially on the quieter songs like "You Need Me" which finds him duetting with himself as his funky rhythm work underpins some gentle wah stylings in the solo. "Sad Sad Day" finds Jonny on piano on a rousing shuffle that really pounds along with an impressively fast-fingered solo from Kirk.

Solid as the first three tracks are the album really takes off on track 4 "The Answer". Co-written by fellow guitarist Josh Smith, Kirk's world-weary vocals at the start express the raw emotion of feeling lost in life, Jonny's warm organ the perfect backing. Over its eight minutes the slow tune builds in intensity and Kirk's superb solo that occupies the second half of the tune is by itself

worth the price of the CD.

After that tour de force “Time’s Ticking” opens with a rocking riff and heavy drums, a track that seems to show the influence of Kirk’s friend JoBo as Kirk plays a torrid solo to close the track. “Dupree” is a delight, a playful instrumental that really lives up to the ‘organ trio’ tag; Steely Dan comes to mind in some of the phrasing here and perhaps the title therefore references the Dan’s “Cousin Dupree”?

“Gotta Right” is another lengthy track that takes us back to the blues with a Chicago style shuffle. Kirk plays beautifully in the intro before he sings of having “the right to sing the blues, well Lord have mercy on my soul, seems like I was born to lose” – it does not get more ‘true blues’ than that! More great playing follows as Kirk gets a thick tone that recalls the late Michael Burks in another fine extended solo. The album closes with the delicate “Hold On” making a heartfelt plea for love in difficult times with Jade McCrea on harmony vocals.

Overall an impressive album that just gets better with repeated listening. With at least three outstanding cuts this one is well worth investigating. ---John Mitchell, bluesblastmagazine.com

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