

Ben Harper And Relentless7 – White Lies For Dark Times (2009)



1. *Number With No Name* 2. *Up To You Now* 3. *Shimmer And Shine* 4. *Lay There And Hate Me* 5. *Why Must You Always Dress In Black* 6. *Skin Thin* 7. *Fly One Time* 8. *Keep It Together (So I Can Fall Apart)* 9. *Boots Like These* 10. *The Word Suicide* 11. *Faithfully Remain*

Ben Harper - Drums, Guitar, Guitar (Baritone), Keyboards, Piano, Slide Guitar, Various Instruments, Vocals, Vocals (Background), Wurlitzer, Wurlitzer Piano
Oliver Charles - Drums
Jesse Ingalls - Bass, Guitar (Bass), Harp, Piano, Vocals (Background), Wurlitzer, Wurlitzer Piano
Jason Mozersky - Electronic Mandolin, Guitars, Hammond B3, Mandolin, Piano, Vocals (Background)
Juan Nelson - Bass
Jordan Richardson - Congas, Drums, Percussion, Shaker, Tambourine, Vibraphone, Vocals (Background)
C.C. White - Vocals (Background)

While it's always been true that Ben Harper has been a musically restless soul with a penchant for changing up his groove from album to album, most of them have been recorded with his longtime unit the Innocent Criminals. As a result, both live and in the studio, a particular vibe existed. Familiarity breeds that, and it also sets up a dynamic. For *White Lies for Dark Times*, Harper put the Innocent Criminals on hiatus and hooked up with a new group: three Austin, TX transplants to Los Angeles called Relentless7, comprised of guitarist Jason Mozersky, bassist Jesse Ingalls, and drummer Jordan Richardson. The end result is, to say the least, explosive. While it's true that this 11-track collection does have some beautiful acoustic balladry on it, and a touch of Harper's brand of soul in its grooves, most of what we find here is balls out Rock with a potent dose of ragged, modern Texas blues thrown in. Indeed this may be the most electric sounding recording Harper has ever issued. He co-wrote six of the tracks with his bandmates, and those he wrote himself have been arranged and/or written to be played with this band. It's in the mix from the opener, "Number with No Name," the slow slide guitar playing an electric blues stomp that's pure Harper, but the drums are pure thud and whomp rather than snap and crackle. The bassline is enormous and the second guitar matches both volume and nastiness with that slide. In other words, this sounds like a band playing this jam, not Harper and his band. One can hear traces of Jimi Hendrix, early ZZ Top, and Johnny Winter in the attack, but it's pure rocking blues thunder and lightning spit out via Texas and the Delta.

Ben Harper - White Lies For Dark

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The more spacy rock of "Up to You Now" is more directly a "Harper" tune with its stretched rhythmic sense and soulful vocal, but the utterly popping bass and wooly distorted guitar mix move it beyond his sensitive singer/songwriter frame. "Shimmer & Shine," the set's first single, begins as a double-timed rocker with Richardson's drum break, but kicks in with a staggered set of power chords that blend angsty punk and anthemic rock. "Why Must You Always Dress in Black" is pure blues-rock venom, the overdriven distortion (engineer and co-producer Danny Kalb did a brilliant job on this set, and on this track in particular) makes the guitars sound like they're breathing fire. The scattershot breaks from Richardson are impressive, especially as underscored with a syncopated bass pattern that marries blues, rock, and funk by Ingalls. Harper's slide chops -- especially when matched against that screaming blues riff of Mozesky's -- marks the toughest cut on the set. And that's saying something, because there isn't a throwaway here. Whether it's the shimmering, gospel-tinged balladry of "Skin Thin," the crunchy wah-wah electric funk-rock of "Keep It Together (So I Can Fall Apart)," the tripped out voodoo-psych, percussion-driven skronk that is "Boots Like These," or the straight up gorgeous, midtempo soul-rock ballad "Faithfully Remain," that closes the set on an uplifting (if reserved) note; it's all inspired and executed flawlessly. And while it's true that many of the tunes have lyrics that reflect anger, disillusionment, and sometimes bitterness, the snarling yet joyous attack in the music balances them. This is the record that finally matches the excitement Harper generates in a live setting and is not to be missed. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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