

Gwyn Ashton - Solo Elektro (2017)

Written by bluesever

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1. Metaphysical Journey 2. Freedom 3. She Won't Tell Me 4. Dawn Of Tomorrow 5. In Your Blood 6. Please Allow Me 7. Late Night 8. I Guess That's What They Call Love 9. Kind To Be Cruel 10. Shine Lover Shine 11. Metaphysical Journey (Reprise)

Having established himself worldwide as power-house rock-blues guitarist, Anglo/Australian multi instrumentalist Gwyn Ashton has lately been focusing on his song writing, as well as immersing himself in experimental alt.blues rooted psychedelia in a one man band format.

The aptly named 'Solo Elektro' is full of the kind of buzz tone, psychedelic drone meets stoner rock that has led to a younger audience pitching up at his gigs. Together with his Melbourne based songwriting partner Garry Allen, he effectively restates of some of his extant influences, while exploring new musical directions that gives him much more freedom from the restrictive expectations of the blues rock market.

Gwyn describes Solo Elektro thus: "A Psychedelic, stoner blues rock album with a difference. It was recorded by one guy with a guitar, vocal mic, bass drum and octave divider – 100% live."

And it's that sense of spontaneity with a melange of guitar tones and a one take vibe that gives this album its rarefied organic feel. He top and tails a wide ranging album with the psychedelic drone style mantra of 'Metaphysical Journey' and 'Metaphysical Journey (Reprise)'. It's not so much a coherent musical journey, as a series of linked audio sketches threaded together by an ever changing musical canvas shaped by the moment. A song is often sparked by a riff, an essential guitar tone, a vocal phrase or even a groove, but the fact there's no safety net makes for a sense of immediacy too often lacking in over produced albums.

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There's a tableaux of mood changes and plenty of contrast as his psychedelic muse weaves itself in and out of the tracks. 'Dawn of Tomorrow' for example, is one of the best tracks on the album, being a tad more restrained with a gentle opening guitar figure, echo laden vocals and an ethereal feel that matches the album as a whole. It's a spacey track with a late 60's psychedelic feel before a sudden tempo change as he jams his way to an acapella finish.

Gwyn apparently set up a mobile studio in 3 separate hotel rooms while on tour and treated his lap top like a tape machine. Being a one man band takes a lot of coordinating, especially when you envelop yourself in the growling buzz tone, and the kind of psychedelic wall of sound that makes 'Freedom' sound like something from a 60's garage band.

Were it not for the growling guitar tone it could almost mark the era when bands like The Pretty Things moved over from R&B to prog and psychedelia. It also emphasizes the durability of the impact The Beatles made with 'Revolver'.

Either way, Gwyn works up a head of steam with some feverish guitar work and a chanted hook that acts like mantra. The great thing about this music is that it spans decades. There's the 'can do' spirit and song writing sensibilities of Jack White and also The Black Keys, but there's also some timeless retro influences that still evoke a time when the counter culture led to social change.

'Into Your Blood' is different again, being a slide-led bluesy stomp full of bluster, while in sharp contrast he veers towards minimalism on 'Late Night', as the atmospheric feel of the track cleverly evokes the song title.

You suspect the overall musical direction and varied tones are a function of instruments and technology at his disposal. There are subtle changes of tone colour, tempo shifts, and gnawing riffs buried deep in a post psychedelic Phil Spector style wall of sound. He often delivers his vocals in unison with his guitar lines, mirroring the fact he needs to keep a consistent rhythm. It all adds to a certain muscularity of approach that lies at the core of music. He chases a vibe and reaches for an eclectic quality that draws on the blues, but is never hemmed in by it, as he explores his muse adventurously.

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Listen for example, to the shuffle driven 'Please Allow Me' on which he works towards a Howlin' Wolf like growl on the other side of some spiky guitar work.

Best of all, is the way the albums flows and each track makes a sufficient impact to draw the listener into the next effort. And it's that between song tension that Gwyn cleverly exploits and subsequently resolves on a bunch of songs that never settle for the clichéd or mundane. He reveals some of his formative influences on the echo reverb intro of 'Kind To Be Cruel' – which fuses a Beatles circa 'Abbey Road' feel with Peter Green's 'Green Manalishi' on a song that ultimately moves into heavier domain as he fuses Sabbath with stoner rock.

If you've never heard Gwyn Ashton before listening to this album, you'd swear he's part of an underground contemporary scene you might have missed. The fact he's been round the block a few times and is able to take his recording career in such a radically different direction speaks volumes about his adventurous spirit and musical vision.

'Solo Elektro' flies the flag for a psychedelic indie blues artist who is only truly happy when he finds new exciting outlets for his oeuvre. It's an album shot through with raw, brash, kick-ass psychedelic tinged stoner rock with a blues heart and is worthy of your attention. ---Walter Trout, getreadytorock.me.uk

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