Harmonica Hinds – I'd Give You Anything If I Could (2012)

1 Stop Complaining 2 Wake The Spirit 3 Anything If I Could 4 Child Of The Universe 5 Take Your Time 6 Don't You Steal My Money 7 Can't Stay Here Forever 8 Way Down South 9 Imelda 10 Cuddle Inn 11 You're Looking Good 12 Goin' Down To The River

The blues, from a technical standpoint, is as simple as music gets, three chords, one scale and a shuffle rhythm and one is well on their way to building up their blues repertoire. But, for such a “simple” music, it is surprising at how many people miss the key emotion that makes the blues the legendary music that it is. At heart, the blues is nothing without a strong emotional proponent behind every bent note, every dominant chord and every twelve-bar recap, and when it is done right, there is something magical about the blues that few other genres can capture. Chicago based blues artist Harmonica Hinds definitely gets this concept, and his album Anything If I Could is filled with everything that makes the blues great.

Whereas the blues has taken a turn towards the more technically proficient artists in recent years, including guitar virtuosos Johnny Lang, Joe Bonamassa, and Kenny Wayne Shepherd, this newfound focus has not only opened doors for artists of a similar nature to walk through, but has also left a taste in modern blues audiences for a more laidback approach to the genre. Hinds satiates this hunger with his relaxed and high-emotion approach to blues. Songs such as “Cuddle Inn” are a good example of everything that makes Hinds’ music great. The song is based around a strong shuffle beat, and the harmonica and guitar solos are notable as much for the notes that they don’t play as the ones they do. By effectively using space in his playing, Hinds creates an atmosphere of both suspense and interaction during the track. Relying on the blues foundation of call and response interaction, Hinds allows each line to breathe before he moves onto his next idea, bringing a sense of organic flow to his phrases that might have been lacking had he tried to relying more handedly on his chops rather than his ears and musical instinct.

Now, don’t confuse laidback and simplified with boring and monotonous. In fact it is just the opposite. Take a song like “You’re Looking Good.” Here, Hinds kicks back on a slow shuffle groove, with some tasty guitar fills backing his Tom Waits style vocals and just enough harmonica work behind the melody to keep the listener wondering what’s coming next. While other artists might have been tempted to fill this space with long feats of fret board gymnastics and screaming harmonica work, Hinds plays with each moment of silence in the same way a skilled painter uses the bare spots on his canvas. These are not “blank” moments that have yet to be filled. They act as musical frames, enclosing and showcasing the moments that Hinds and company create. Listening to the interaction between notes and rests in this ensemble is as entertaining as it gets, which is a lesson that a lot of blues players could learn from.

Anything If I Could has everything that makes the blues great. The songs are well-written, the band is tight and firmly in the pocket on every track, and the ensemble understands that the blues goes beyond three chords and 12 bars. It is about the emotional intent behind each note, something that these musicians bring to the fold on every track. Though the blues catalogue is full of great artists and albums, this record deserves its shot at competing with the big boys. It is a great way to add a new name to even the most complete blues record collection. ---Matthew Warnock, cdbaby.com

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