

Laurence Jones - Take Me High (2016)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Got No Place To Go* (3:57) 02. *Something's Changed* (4:11) 03. *Live It Up* (3:50) 04. *Addicted To Your Love* (5:19) 05. *I Will* (4:02) 06. *Thinking About Tomorrow* (5:28) 07. *Take Me High* (4:25) 08. *Down & Blue* (4:19) 09. *The Price I Pay* (4:21) 10. *Higher Ground* (3:51)
Backing Vocals – Reuben Richards (tracks: 3) Bass – Roger Inniss (tracks: 1-10) Drums, Percussion – Phil Wilson (13) Harmonica – Paul Jones Keyboards, Organ [Hammond] – Bob Fridzema Producer, Backing Vocals – Mike Vernon Vocals – Reuben Richards (tracks: 10) Vocals, Guitar – Laurence Jones (tracks: 1-10)

Britain's hottest gunslinger. Blues-rock's most legendary producer. If the hook-up between Laurence Jones and Mike Vernon sounds mouthwatering on paper, just wait until you hear *Take Me High*. Released in August 2016 on Ruf Records, this fourth album represents a spiritual passing of the baton, with the producer who recorded everyone from Eric Clapton to Peter Green in the '60s now working with the cream of the new blues generation. "It was a great feeling," says Laurence, "to know Mike wanted to make this record." The pair had discussed a collaboration as far back as 2013, but their conflicting schedules had always scuppered the plan. Mike remains much in demand as a producer, and likewise, since last year's acclaimed *What's It Gonna Be* – #18 in *The Blues Mag's 50 Essential Albums Of 2015* – Laurence has barely stopped, playing everywhere from the Royal Albert Hall to Carnegie Hall. But after Mike witnessed an incendiary set at the Great British Rhythm & Blues Festival, he had to clear a space in his diary. "He watched us in the crowd," recalls the bandleader, "and he said to me, 'I think the time is right'."

During preproduction, Laurence and Mike decided on the concept of an album that would flow – "kinda like a book, so you'd listen to it from start to finish and it would make sense" – but also capture the ferocious attitude of a packed club show. "I told him that I really wanted to go for that live feel," remembers Laurence. "I just wanted to create that same energy."

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By January 2016, they were ready to hit Headline Music Studios in Cambridge, with Laurence leading the core band of Roger Inniss (bass), Bob Fridzema (keys/organ) and new drummer Phil Wilson as they tracked live. “We did it the old-school way,” nods the bandleader. “I really feed off an audience, so I remember that Mike said, ‘Just make it as live as you can. Imagine you’re stood in front of a thousand people and give it some;’”

At the end of each night, Laurence and Mike returned to a remote cottage outside Cambridge, where the producer regaled the guitarist with tales of his illustrious clients. “There was no Internet,” smiles Laurence, “so we actually had to talk to each other. Y’know, he’d tell me stories about when he worked with David Bowie, Eric Clapton, John Mayall and Peter Green.”

Needless to say, it’s not easy to impress a producer who has helmed classic albums from 1966’s Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton to Bowie’s self-titled 1967 debut – but Laurence rose to the challenge with the strongest songs of his career. You can hear his momentum in the title track’s brittle blues strut, or “Addicted To Your Love”, with its neck-tingling opening squeal of feedback

The more reflective “I Will”, meanwhile, announces Laurence’s growing maturity as a vocalist. “Mike was really thorough about the vocals,” agrees the bandleader, “because that’s his territory. He’s an amazing singer. He even did backing vocals on this album – we sang them live together.” Elsewhere, the snakecharmer riffs of “Got No Place To Go” reaffirm Laurence’s reputation as a master guitarist, while “Live It Up” features guest backing vocals from Rueben Richards, and “The Price I Pay” sees his stinging fretwork lock in with a stunning harmonica cameo from Paul Jones. “I did a charity night for Paul that he holds every year at the Cranleigh Arts Centre,” explains the bandleader. “I asked Paul to get up onstage with me, and at the end, I said, ‘Well, I’m going in the studio with Mike next week’. And he goes, ‘Oh cool, I’d love to come’. And I was like, ‘That sounds like a good deal!’”

Within a head-spinning ten days, the basic tracking was complete – but Laurence wasn’t prepared for just how good the songs would sound after Mike had finished mixing them at his home in Spain. “He sent me the stuff over, and it was like, ‘Wow’. He’d just fattened everything up. It was just a completely different sound because of him. I’m so happy with this album.”

Released in August on Ruf Records, Take Me High is another step up for an artist who embodies the best of the modern blues boom. Featuring ten new songs that demand to be heard live, the release will also be supported in 2016 by a heavy international touring schedule

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that underlines Laurence's growing popularity across the planet. "We've got a UK tour in November," he reveals. "And we're gonna be working in Poland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Germany, the Caribbean, Norway, Denmark – and even America. So anyone who says the blues is dead; it's really not!" ---amazon.com

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