Ronnie Earl & The Broadcasters - Rise Up (2020)

1 I Shall Not Be Moved 2:20 2 Higher Love 5:53 3 Blues For George Floyd 3:40 4 You Don't Know What Love Is 4:31 5 Blues For Lucky Peterson 10:19 6 Big Town Playboy 4:02 7 Albert's Stomp 4:42 8 In The Dark 6:11 9 All Your Love 8:12 10 Lord Protect My Child 6:11 11 Mess Around 3:42 12 Talking To Mr. Bromberg 3:27 13 Black Lives Matter 6:22 14 Blues For J 6:00 15 Navajo Blues 3:12 Ronnie Earl - Arranger, Composer, Guitar, Primary Artist, Producer Diane Blue - Vocals Paul Kochanski - Bass Dave Limina - Hammond B3, Piano Forrest Padgett - Drums Peter Ward - Guitar

Rise Up is Ronnie Earle's 27th album and his 13th for Canada's venerable Stony Plain label. The blues master's playing style has long been celebrated for its iconic tone and deep well of emotion. None of that changes here, but this set is topically contemporary, a reaction to the history-making year 2020. Earl offers tributes to the recently lost, and solace for those continuing to struggle on the front lines for racial and economic justice. Comprised of originals and covers, most of the album's 15 tracks were cut in Earl's living room studio while he recovered from back surgery; the recording was finished on March 3, 2020. The remainder are live tunes from an earlier performance at Daryl Hall's House Club.

The set opens with a solo acoustic, instrumental read of "I Shall Not Be Moved." Closely associated with the Civil Rights Movement, the song's roots lie deep in the Delta blues (Charlie Patton cut it in 1929). The Broadcasters -- keyboardist Dave Limina, vocalist Diane Blue, bassist Paul Kochanski, and drummer Forrest Padgett -- enter on original "Higher Love." Blue sings about the rarest form of love, agape, its only concern being the good of the beloved. Simmering Hammond B-3 and a swinging drum shuffle frame Earl's stinging tone, underscoring the emotion in Blue's lyric. "Blues for George Floyd" reacts to the brutal street killing of the unarmed citizen by a policeman in 2020, which sparked explosive international protests that continued as the album was released. It's a searing instrumental. Earl wrangles his Stratocaster in pain, anger, frustration, and grief, all while trying to find a way forward. A soulful, humid read of Fenton Robinson's "You Don’t Know What Love Is," cut live, showcases Blue's finest vocal

performance here. Instrumental "Blues for Lucky Peterson" is a muscular and fitting tribute to the deceased bluesman who was Earl's close friend. Blue shines in a sultry, steamy read of Lillian Green's "In the Dark." She dialogues intensely with Earl's guitar line by line with simmering intensity. Bob Dylan's "Lord Protect My Child" is offered as a stirring gospel-blues, with hovering B-3 atop Earl's restrained, resonant fills; Blue thoroughly commits herself to and inhabits the loving, prayerful lyric. "Black Lives Matter" is a mournful slow blues with Limina on piano. Blue wails for the lost before Earl interjects with a talking blues, entwining it all with a resolve for justice. After a swinging version of Jimmy Smith's "Blues for J," the set concludes with "Navajo Blues," a moody, revealing instrumental, addressing the U.S. government's genocide of indigenous peoples. The twin aspects of Rise Up might prove initially jarring, as poignant, mournful, and angry blues sit side by side with buoyant roadhouse rockers. But that's Earl's purpose -- as the son of two Holocaust survivors, he aims to provide empathy, awareness, and healing while unflinchingly addressing injustice and human suffering. You can't ask for more from a blues record. ---Thom Jurek

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