

## Bruce Cockburn - Bone On Bone (2017)

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Niedziela, 25 Marzec 2018 11:21 -

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1 States I'm In 2 Stab At Matter 3 Forty Years In The Wilderness 4 Cafe Society 5  
3 Al Purdy's 6 Looking And Waiting 7 Bone On Bone 8 Mon Chemin 9 False River  
10 Jesus Train 11 Twelve Gates To The City Bruce Cockburn - Guitar, Percussion,  
Vocals, Harmonica, Mbira, Charango, Dulcimer John Aaron Cockburn - Accordion John  
Dymond - Bass Ron Miles - Cornet Gary Craig - Drums, Percussion Colin Linden - Guitar,  
Mandoguitar, Vocals, Slide Guitar Brandon Robert Young - Harmony Vocals, Vocals John  
Whynot - Organ Mary Gauthier, Ruby Amanfu, The San Francisco Lighthouse Chorus - Vocals

2017 release from the veteran Canadian singer/songwriter. Bone On Bone is Cockburn's first album since 2011's Small Source Of Comfort. "There have been so many times in my life when an invitation has come from somewhere... The cosmos... The divine... to step out of the familiar into something new. I've found it's best to listen for and follow these promptings. The song is really about that. You can stay with what you know or you can pack your bag and go where you're called, even if it seems weird - even if you can't see why or where you'll end up." - Bruce Cockburn. ---Editorial Reviews, amazon.com

It's been six years since Bruce Cockburn delivered a studio offering. His daughter was born in 2012, he assembled a career-spanning box set, and wrote a candid memoir, Rumours of Glory. When he was finally free of his writing and curatorial chores, he wondered if there was anything left to say. A book of poems by Canada's greatest 20th century poet, Al Purdy, provided inspiration. The song "3 Al Purdys," in which Cockburn sings and speaks the yarn of a homeless wanderer under the spell of the poet (and weds his words to Purdy's) is one of the finest tracks here (and one of four to feature jazz cornetist Ron Miles). Cockburn's less

concerned with perfection, particularly when it comes to his vocals. In his seventies, his instrument is gruffer, but via Colin Linden's immediate production, it proves a benefit. "States I'm In" is a searing, insightful, rearview look at what Cockburn's witnessed -- beautiful and horrible -- in his global travels as a musician and an Amnesty International observer. He transforms the song from reverie to a meditation on the present realities and in his own life and society. There's a more overt engagement with Christianity on this record, balanced by a sense of "growing tenser with the times" while living in a country led by Donald Trump. The bumping rockabilly shuffle "Stab at Mater" (a wonderful wordplay on the Latin "Stabat Mater") illustrates the experiential grind between spiritual insight and everyday life that deepens them both. Members of his local San Francisco church were recruited as a chorus here and elsewhere, including on the folk-inflected, poetic, yet urgent "Forty Years in the Wilderness." ("...getting to the know the beasts....") "Looking & Waiting" is wafting acoustic reggae. Buoyed by the chorus, it's a hymn to knowing full well that waiting is indeed the hardest part of faith. The title track is a gorgeous instrumental acoustic guitar workout, while "Mon Chemin" is a jazzy, Latinized folk song buoyed by charango and dulcimer, with Miles' cornet, accordionist nephew John Aaron Cockburn, bassist John Dymond, and drummer Gary Craig. The final two tracks also use blues as jumping-off points. On "Jesus Train," Cockburn delivers them through fingerpopping, house-rocking 21st century gospel. It's followed by the traditional "Twelve Gates to the City" (so closely associated with the Rev. Gary Davis). Cockburn makes it his own by adding some new lyrics and a radical NOLA-styled R&B arrangement -- Miles' Louis Armstrong-esque fills and the chorus add soulful weight to the proposition. Bone on Bone is a fine, deep return. This somewhat grimmer and edgier Cockburn is clearly inspired, his lyrics are both jagged and elegant; they dovetail in songs that question and reveal the rough-hewn beauty of a life guided by spiritual principles. He continues to question these principles while affirming their primacy as a witness to the world's brutality. They also struggle with the next right thing and how to accomplish it, even when it seems pointless to try, and that kind of struggle is the kind of hope we need more of. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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