

Night Ranger – High Road (2014)

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01 – *High Road* 02 – *Knock Knock Never Stop* 03 – *Rollin' On* 04 – *Don't Live Here Anymore* 05 – *I'm Coming Home* 06 – *X Generation* 07 – *Only For You Only* 08 – *Hang On* 09 – *St. Bartholomew* 10 – *Brothers* 11 – *Mountain Song* 12 – *Lay It On Me (Live from M3 Rock Festival)* Jack Blades (bass guitar, vocals) Kelly Keagy (drums, vocals) Brad Gillis (lead and rhythm guitars) Joel Hoekstra (lead and rhythm guitars) Eric Levy (keyboards)

'High Road' is Night Ranger's tenth studio album (eleventh if you include 1995's 'Feeding Off The Mojo') and is another sure-fire winner. Those expecting to find the band still 'Somewhere In California' might be a little disappointed, however long-term fans will be rewarded with repeated listens of this slightly more diverse album than its predecessor; although it is not as "left-field" as the opinion-splitting 'Hole In The Sun', '...Road' combines elements of the band's whole career and is full of the distinct NR sounds that we have all come to love over the years; soaring twin guitars, keyboard flurries, driving rhythms, stunning lead and harmony vocals, all of which are mixed in a cacophony of beautiful splendour.

The album features a great production effort by the band themselves who are not only top musicians but also fantastic songwriters, the latter is what, in my opinion, sets them as leaders of the pack. The newest members of the band, keyboardist Eric Levy and guitarist Joel Hoekstra (who has now been in the band six years) have not simply turned up and taken the pay-cheque but stamped their own mark on to the classic NR sound. Every track, with the exception of the instrumental album closer 'LA No Name', is clearly recognisable as NR and, to quote Jack Blades, is "feel-good, high energy kick-ass Rock 'n' Roll".

Opening track 'High Road' epitomizes the latter description and the early drive is maintained with 'Knock Knock Never Stop' featuring the brilliant shared vocals of Blades and Kelly Keagy. 'Rollin' On' is the heaviest track on the album and a throwback to the 'Neverland' and 'Seven'

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albums. 'Don't Live Here Anymore' could have easily appeared on a Keagy solo album albeit for the blistering guitar solos of Brad Gillis and Hoekstra.

'I'm Coming Home' again with its combined vocals is pure bliss and a real album highlight and I could see this featuring in future live sets. Gillis and Hoekstra duel frenetically throughout the whole album, highlighted on 'X Generation' and 'Hang On' that perfectly blend the old school sound with a modern approach.

No NR album would be complete without the odd ballad or two and we have 'Brothers' and 'Only For You Only', the latter rating alongside some of their best. 'St. Bartholomews' is another heavy kick-ass track that contains more melody than most bands put into an entire album. The album concludes with the bonus track, the idiosyncratic, acoustic, instrumental '...Name'.

'High Road' might not rate as the greatest ever Night Ranger album, however it sits perfectly alongside all their other albums in a tremendous back catalogue and will definitely feature in many Melodic Rock fans top albums of 2014. ---Mark Donnelly, rocktopia.co.uk

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