

Fiddlestix

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CD REVIEW:

JASON WILSON *The Peacemaker's Chauffeur*
(Wheel Records, 2008)

It's one of my long-held truisms - and not an original one at that - that there is so much music continually being made in the world, no one person is ever going to hear everything they would like. Not that that will stop any of us trying! Occasionally, an artist of worth only comes our way by dint of their work with someone we're already familiar with, and the feeling of discovery is rekindled and our interest sparked. That, I assure you, is very much the case for Canadian reggae artist Jason Wilson whose most recent CD features a number of collaborations with artists of varying familiarity. Ron Sexsmith is one well known guest, as indeed is Dave Swarbrick who has recently joined Wilson's touring band for a number of gigs, and who only has high praise for the man and his work.

It's easy to understand why. Before anything else though, it must be noted that Jason Wilson has a broad definition of reggae and is rightly unafraid to push its boundaries towards folk, jazz, funk and other musical areas that fit comfortably without much coaxing at all! The vast majority of the material is original, except for the tracks featuring the two guests above - Sexsmith provides co-lead vocals with Wilson on a cover of Elton John & Bernie Taupin's *Madman Across The Water*, which is lightly reggaefied and a fine version. Swarbrick on the other hand revisits the old Fairport classic *Matty Groves* in a way which is both old and new, refreshed and brassy - literally! The lyrics are those directly from 'Liege & Lief' and the arrangement is similar in its format of song / *Famous Flower Of Serving Men* / instrumental outro. But along the way, the atmospherics are very different with flute solos, reggae, almost a ska feel in places, and a more structured instrumental section at the end, with an attractively chaotic finale. Swarb fits well into all of this, and it's great to hear him in this quite different context.

Generally, it becomes apparent very quickly that Wilson has a talent for writing intelligent, lyrical songs and structuring them in a way that is not obvious but can still easily draw the listener in. The combination of reggae with other musical styles is enough proof of this - jazzy elements on the title track, *Begin* and *The Importance Of Being Ernest* (also featuring Ernest Ranglin & Pee Wee Ellis) / almost neo-classical on *If Ye Break Faith* / lovely folk touches on *The Flowers Of The Forest*, a duet between Wilson on piano and Claire Whitehead on violin / intriguing free form experimental jazz in the middle of *Accusation (Reggae Noir)* ... it all works together easily, by the skill of the performers as much as the natural inclination of the music itself.

Wilson's band features instruments such as sax, clarinet, trombone, French horn and flute, while he exhibits great skill on guitar, keyboards, bass, accordion and either lead or shared vocals. It's interesting to note that even the more 'elaborate' tracks such as *Your Love Shines A Light For Me* with 12 musicians featured, manage to not sound over-produced and with clear definition of each sound.

The Peacemaker's Chauffeur is a double CD, though all the tracks could have fit onto one disc. However, Wilson has divided the songs into general themes of War and Peace and so decided to physically split them over two CDs as well. The themes are fairly flexible though; for example a song about boxing, *Langford v Johnson II* appearing on the War disc. It must also be noted that the lyrics are intelligently constructed and can just as easily be read as poetry, especially the closing track *Spirit's Prelude*.

All I can tell you is that Swarb's appearance on this collection is a good enough reason to explore it in the first place, but there is plenty more besides to captivate the listener, and to be glad that music of this quality is still being made and awaiting discovery. If you're already familiar with Jason Wilson's work, you'll know exactly what I mean!

For more details including a biography and CD sales, go to <http://www.jasonwilsonmusic.com>

Wilson and Swarbrick are likely to have more collaborations available in the future, so keep an eye open for details...

MICHAEL HUNTER