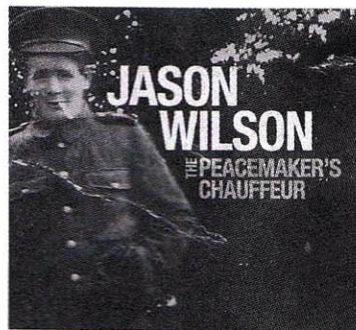




JASON WILSON
THE PEACEMAKER'S
CHAUFFEUR
(Wheel WR0078, 2008)

With its 70 minutes of music over two discs, variety of notable guest artists, impressive packaging and lyrical themes of war and peace, *The Peacemaker's Chauffeur* might appear more ambitious than it could possibly live up to. Ah, but it's Jason Wilson at work here, and he clearly has more than enough talent—and vision—to pull this project together with style.

I say "more than enough" because along with the rest, there's a wealth of diverse but complementary musical ideas given expression here. If you picked up on Wilson's *dREaD & Blue* album with Tabarruk a few years ago, you'll have had a taste of those, but they seem to have



a newfound coherence now. Those musical ideas are informed by jazz, blues, rock and folk (all of which keep the mind involved), although Wilson's solid foundation in roots reggae is what propels them nicely along (which keeps the body involved). Yes, the invigorating yet soothing one-drop is all over the place, together with a smattering of ska and other rhythmic variations, always perfectly executed, perfectly appropriate. Not to forget the rousing dubwise elements judiciously positioned here and there for our pure listening pleasure.

Wilson is a great songwriter, and his own memorable tunes, along with a few collaborations, form the bulk of the album, although he also makes room for Elton John's "Madman Across the Water" and the traditional English ballad "Matty Groves." Sonically, it's a treasure trove: Just listen to reggae stalwart David Madden's jazzy trumpet on the title song, Marcus Ali's gorgeously bittersweet clarinet solo on "If Ye Break Faith," Dave Swarbrick's passionate fiddle; Ernest Ranglin's impeccable guitar; the Mighty Pope's mighty voice; and perhaps most remarkably, a groovy organ track from the late Jackie Mittoo that he had originally provided to Wilson 20 years ago for another project, but which has been digitally brought up to date and now fits beautifully here.

And there's more: flugelhorn, mandolin, lap steel guitar, piccolo, bagpipes, a cello quartet; they all fit in, contributing their own textures, their own delights, with not a hint of awkwardness. Both discs simply overflow with musical magic, thanks as much to Wilson's diversified and inventive arrangements as to the obvious talent of his band and guests.

Continued on page 52

PEACEMAKER

Continued from page 51

As for the lyrics, don't expect reggae's usual generic condemnation of war and preachy pleas for peace. Wilson offers us something considerably more nuanced; it's a mature, thoughtful, humanitarian approach that he shares with us, and he does so with subtle artistry. The universality of the human condition (thus the seeds of war, and of peace) is illustrated rather than proclaimed. He knows that the personal connects with the social which connects with the political, but his approach is to offer evidence and let us come to our own conclusions. On the *War* disc, heavy on history and geography, that evidence includes tales of jealousy, rivalry, revolution and international conflict. On the *Peace* disc, we get contemplation, renewal, ambiguity, compromise, determination, but significantly, never utopia.

The Peacemaker's Chauffeur is ambitious, yes, but what a pleasure it is to listen to a reggae album that not only reaches for such heights, but attains them. If you've just about had your fill of well-meaning but oh-so-pretentious and self-absorbed roots singers chanting their hearts out about ganja or persisting in their adolescent fantasies of burning down Babylon, then treat yourself to this album. This is deeply satisfying reggae for aware, intelligent grownups, and it's a marvel from start to finish.

[www.jasonwilsonmusic.com]]

—Ted Boothroyd