

Coffeehouse Psychedleica

Review of "The Human Condition Live @ Zen"

Tampa Bay is known globally for many things. Cigars, pirates and death metal are the first things that come to mind. When you think of psychedelica you may think of San Fran. Coffee houses bring visions of the flannel clad Pacific Northwest. Most folks don't realize the great musical diversity we have right here in the "Big Guava". I've just received a copy of "Human Condition- Live at Zen". I am greeted by a black and silver cover with a tribal type icon in the center (Courtesy of Austin McKinley). Shotgun barrels and stars encircle the icon. The logo is sort of a western shooting gallery design.

This Bradenton ensemble manages to get it up in a most unique way. The music is a soothing blend of acoustic and high energy "psychedelic jangle rock". It lends itself to vintage organ/keyboard solos (Raphael Aquino), powerful rhythm punches and solos (Mike Carrie) bong rattling solid bass (Mark Pezzo) and groovy psychedelic guitar work (Dave Berry). Vocally, Dean Johannesen conjures a tinge of Brett Scallions (Fuel) and Butch Walker (Marvelous 3) in his vocal tone. I hear some Dave Mathews in his melodies. Overall the songwriting is infectious and the performance is top notch. The listener will be instantly transported out of the frantic oblivion of the sunshine state and delivered to a much more copasetic, comfortable chill zone.

"Nothing's Broken" 3:30 (Track 1) Psychedelic guitar opens this jam. Groovy drum rhythm and acoustic guitar cha-cha with slick bass. This song sports a "far out" electric piano/organ solo. The guitar solos are boss and remind me of Santana. This uplifting number lyrically is an observation of self reflection and optimism offering the notion: "You can find strength in the color of the sky or in her eyes when she says nothing's broken (that can't be fixed)".

"Days That Come" 4:26 (Track 2) Jangly acoustic riff sprinkled with pretty harmonics open this keen-o toe tapper. Rock organ join with danceable rhythms and walking bass. There is a great electric piano solo leading into tasty guitar work. The words suggest moving past a bad relationship while promoting self awareness and triumph.

"Powerlines" 3:40 (Track 3) This acoustic based number slowly builds into a full on jamtastic upbeat romp. "Powerlines" sports hip, mellow guitar intervals and rock organ/electric piano accents. The overall sentiment speaks of lifting yourself up by diverting your negativity.

"Lack of Faith" 4:56 (Track 4) A quick staccato jazz intro drops into an upbeat country cadence that chugs like a train flying down the tracks. Dave Berry sets the tone with a bluesy guitar solo and follows with haunting intervals throughout the song. This number is dynamic. It gets slightly quiet and builds into a full on jam. A full tilt boogie electric piano solo greets you like a familiar friend. The message speaks of bottoming out due to mistrust.

"Beacon Hill" 4:57 (Track 5) A quiet coffee shop vibe with strong jam band elements. It builds quickly into a blues free for all. Vintage moments bring the listener into a "bitchin" feeling of euphoria. This song features a groovy "drum solo" (Mike Garrie). The vocals are subdued in the beginning and gradually erupt into some of the most aggressive on "Live at Zen". "And the sun went running into the sky and I swear I could fly above it" Very uplifting.

"Mr. Delaware" 3:34 (Track 6) Kinda rockabilly with a cool story. This one is upbeat and has a classic "Memphis" groove (ala Cash). Mr. Delaware (born 1895) is a boxer best known for fighting a kangaroo. This is a quirky song with a happy vibe and is a perfect outro to a very unique album.

"Live at Zen" was produced by Steve Connelly and Human Condition. It was recorded live at "Zen Recording Studios" in Pinellas Park Fl. The sound quality is honest and clean. Having been produced by the band, it's a no frills production that lends itself to the great performances and not the producer (which is refreshing). My overall impression is very positive. The music takes you somewhere friendly and leaves you feeling better than you did before listening. Human Condition is recommended for anyone who appreciates solid playing and good songwriting.

- Damond Jiniya