

JOE HENRY

INVISIBLE HOUR

WORKSONGS

"As much as anything, perhaps these are all songs about marriage," writes 53-year-old Joe Henry in the liner notes to his new album. "Marriage as a verb, not a noun, not a thing to be possessed but a habit of one's being, the machinery and the mystery both sparking at the same mercurial fumes. Married describing what it means to truly live (not necessarily unfaithfully), and abide within the moving frame of commitment: commitment to love, to forgiveness, to eternal doubt, to the courage of awareness."

If you didn't already know, this would confirm that Henry's work is thoughtful, carefully crafted and considered - as one might expect from a musician who has been making his own albums for nearly thirty years and producing some of the finest contemporary artists for another fifteen years or so.

In many ways, Henry's albums are out of time in the sense that they are very much reflection of their creator's character rather than reactions to any prevailing fashions. The fact that Henry uses his own increasingly renowned studio, The Garfield House in South Pasadena, has allowed him the facility and, more importantly, the time to create a work of great depth and beauty.

Even back as far as 1990 and his third album, *Shuffletown*, Henry was fashioning beautiful vignettes, a perfect example of which was the world-weary *Spent It All*. That album featured production by T Bone Burnett and jazz players Don Cherry and Cecil McBee.

A quarter century later, the calibre of Henry's musical accomplices is still of a remarkably high standard. Drummer Jay Bellerose, master guitarist Greg Leisz and bassist David Piltch (who accompanied Henry on his last Australian tour) have been his favourites for a long time. Needless to say,



the playing is stunning.

These days also, Henry's son Levon has joined the ensemble and proves himself extremely accomplished on clarinet and saxophone. His playing on 'Grave Angels' is not only lovely but also inventive. (Guests on this album include The Milk Carton Kids and Lisa Hannigan.)

Henry's approach always reminds me of a jazz musician - creating an atmosphere for his compositions, in the same way that Van Morrison used a jazz ensemble for *Astral Weeks*. And like that album, you can listen repeatedly to *Invisible Hour* and discover something new each time. Henry's gorgeous song 'Sign' clocks in at 8.58 and really gives you a chance to become involved in the music.



LUKA BLOOM
HEAD & HEART

BIG SKY/THE PLANET CO.

roots

Following on from 2012's *This New Morning*, Luka Bloom's 15th album features more stripped-back arranging, although this time of predominantly done-to-death covers. His renditions of the maudlin pop songs 'And I Love You So' and 'Gentle On My Mind' are comparatively ho-hum, likewise (sadly) his take on Dylan's vastly superior 'Every Grain Of Sand'. John Martyn's 'Head And Heart' fares marginally better, mainly because of sterling accompaniment from a jazz trio that are under-utilised elsewhere. Bloom (real name Barry Moore) sounds curiously like brother Christy in the traditional Irish ditty 'Banks Of The Lee', and in what must be the thousandth recording of 'Danny Boy'. He's more himself on Ewen MacColl's timeless 'The First Time I Ever I Saw Your Face' and 'The Joy Of Living' - the former closer to Roberta Flack's hit version than the original - and on a fine fingerpicked rendition of Bob Coltrane's 'Lonesome Robin'. *Tony Hillier*



DUB COLOSSUS ADDIS TO OMEGA

IRL/THE PLANET CO.

reggae/dub/jazz/soul/world

The above line offers a stark synopsis of the latest exciting episode in UK multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger, programmer and producer Nick Page's/Dubulah's ongoing project, Dub Colossus. It doesn't convey the full kaleidoscopic quality of *Addis To Omega*, the exquisite weaving together of an impressively wide variety of styles, players and musical colours into a coherent tapestry of songs with a political underbelly. While it moves further away from Dub Col's earlier albums - 2008's *In A Town Called Addis* and 2011's *Addis Through The Looking Glass* - which explored Ethiopian music through a dub prism, the ethiojazz legacy lingers covertly in the leader's serpentine electric guitar lines and in the articulation and structure of some of the brass work.

A progression on the collective's last album, 2012's *Dub Me Tender Vol 1 + 2*, the new offering has a more pronounced UK/Jamaican reggae feel with elements of ragga, dancehall and ska. There's vocal strength in the first half of the set, where the soulful singing of Mykael S. Riley (ex-Steel Pulse) and Jah Wobble associate PJ Higgins is predominant. The section from the title track to the end has a stronger jazz and instrumental bent, which is only interrupted by Page's former bandmates in Transglobal Underground, Natacha Atlas and Tim Whelan, and Egyptian violinist Samy Bishal in the Asian-flavoured 'Shape Of Things To Come' and Tuvan throat singer Albert Kuvezin, whose growling in 'A Voice Has Power' also seems somewhat out of place with the rest of the album (despite the track title).

There's some quite stunning jazz soloing and comping throughout from Dub Col's excellent three-piece brass section, Horns Of Negus, with expert assistance on several tracks from guest trombonist Harry Brown and vibraphone player Orphy Robinson. Nick Van Gelder (Jamiroquai) and Winston Blissett (Robbie Williams, Rod Stewart, Boy George et al) are among a dozen different drummers and bass players. The latter also delivers a heavily accented spoken vocal and tongue-in-cheek song about his dad. *Tony Hillier*

TRACK NOTES FROM NICK PAGE/DUBULAH

'Boom Ka Boom (And The Dub Disciples)'

Via Paris and London, a proper mutant dancehall tune. Vocals by tuff gal PJ Higgins and cousin Joseph Cotton in a dancehall style (both their families are from the same town in Jamaica). Recorded in Paris, London and Spain.

'Family Man'

Like *The Godfather* meets Massive Attack... mandolins and all. PJ Higgins vocal, asking questions of David Cameron and the Bullingdon Club.

'The Casino Burning Down'

Mykael S. Riley lyrics about the casino banking crisis and its effects on all. PJ adds the global soul... a dubadelic track.

'We Are The Playthings Of The Rich And Famous'

Self explanatory really... selling the dream. Mykael S. Riley vocals, Spanish rhythm section and Harry Brown on trombone.

'Fight Back' A song of resistance meets '60s sci-fi fx and full-blooded brass. Like Joe Gibbs skanking with Scritti Politti and the Meters, plus Maceo Parker. Dubbafunkadelic Ben Somers on tenor sax, PJ Higgins on vocals.

'Addis To Omega' From Africa to Jamaica to UK to the world. Reggae and dub gone global, from the start to the end. PJ on vocals.

'Keep On Rocking' Loving and living, when the pressure's up high. Mykael S. Riley sings a tune to wind and grind away the blues. The Horns Of Negus assist.

'Soft Power' Culture as influence and power. Harry Brown and Orphy Robinson play trombone and vibes over a roots backing.

'Madmen' Welcome to the drone-age daydream. Dubulah's vocal debut.

'Mi Dad' Old-time music forward again. A story about the unsung generation, voiced by Winston Blissett, over a ska track about his father.

'Tale Of 2 Cities' One rich, one poor... two realities that co exist, on all continents.

Flugelhorn by Neil Waters, vibes by Orphy Robinson.

'The Shape Of Things To Come' The net shows alternative images of the world. The hopes and fears of the global resistance to misuse of power. Dub as real world music. Samy Bishai on Egyptian violin, Natacha Atlas on vocals, Tim Whelan on piano and Charles Hayward on drums.

'Happy Face' A track about trying to keep up appearances in the face of adversity when work, sleep and worry are wearing your resistance down. PJ Higgins on voice, Winston Blissett on bass.

'A Voice Has Power' Global dub from Tuva to Trenchtown. Albert Kuvezin has a voice that sounds like a 747 taking off. Justin Adams guests on delicate guitar. Recorded in Tuva, London, Malaga.

'Orpheus Underground' Dub goes afrobeat via Kraftwerk. A trans-Europe dub express. Ben Somers on emotive sax and flute solos.



LA CHIVA GANTIVA

VIVO

CRAMMED/THE PLANET CO.

latin rock

If you can imagine Ozomatli on acid or Manu Chao on ice, you have a rough idea of what La Chiva Gantiva sound like with the throttle depressed, which seems to be pretty much all of the time. Their Molotov cocktail of rock, rap and muy rápido Latin rhythms had this old fart running for cover at this year's

WOMADelaide, though they admittedly enthralled the young ragers at party central. These Brussels-based Colombian expats might include folkloric elements, but the champeta and cumbia is well and truly buried in the cacophony. The tempo in *Vivo* is breakneck from the outset, with only one track offering respite and that largely due to comparatively subtle utilisation of the band's clarinettist. Distorted vocals ruins a rural cumbia that might have otherwise been OK.

Tony Hillier