Member's CD Review

The new CD from **Steve McNaughton**, *'hardlysoftlyrock'*, has been produced to a very high standard. Jeff Cripes of A# Studios produced, engineered, recorded and mixed the tracks producing an extremely professional package. The artwork and layout of the CD cover is exceptional. Steve has really put his energies totally into this CD.

The first track, *'Believe In Me'*, rips right out of the speakers with it's riff laden Aussie pub rock sound. Great vocal with a touch of Ray Davis. The chorus really leaps out as well. The sound has a mix of Cheap Trick, the Kinks and the Partyboys in it. A very, very catchy song with a top uptempo ending.

I really like the ideas in *'Stalingrad Still Stands'* as it explores a different lyrical concept to the usual. It starts with an Eastern synth sound then lets loose the dogs of war with full tilt rock. There is a slight essence of Skyhooks in the delivery and feel. The piano comes more to the fore with this piece. The synth and changes in the middle eight add that extra depth. Then the shell like bursts lead into the ending hook chorus. Great song!

'Is It Over' is a softer, more country, sounding piece. Maybe a tinge of the Eagles in the style. A great change to the chorus, which is uplifting and dynamic. The guitar is well featured in this track. I was particularly impressed with the lyric writing in Is It Over.

Track four, *'Didn't Mean It'* is driving rock powered by a stunning guitar riff. Then the vocals accompanies the guitar. A Rose Tattoo, or Angels, atmosphere in there somewhere. Great pub rock that really kicks!

The next track, *'I Did What I Did'* is possibly the best on the album. Not just because John Swan joins Steve on the vocal, but because it is the most striking and the most powerful. The guitar riff and horn combination gives the song a hook start, with a feel in between Cream and the Eurythmics. There is a build that sweeps the listener into the chorus, which is power packed with energy. Once again the middle eight adds a refreshing change, then swings into a horn lead break. The outro finishes the song nicely. Fan-bloody-tastic Steve!! A real rip snorter.

The soft jazzy rock, with it's West Coast lead breaks is a real change from the earlier songs. Inspired by the U.N soldiers in Bosnia it has interesting lyrical rhythms. The modulation in the end codas add that extra spice, while the second vocal gives it an edge.

hardly softly rock

Those who have heard 1997's Society Compilation CD, would recognise *'Can't Be Denied'*, as it was one of the tracks on that CD. However it has gone through a number of changes in production etc, so that it sounds even better. The soft lyrical rock sound is reminiscent of the theme song of 'Greatest American Hero', with it's light jazzy tones. The dynamics are good and the middle eight works well.

The next track on the CD is a cover of Chris Issak's *'Somebody's Crying'*, which Steve gives a good emotional rendition.

The soft West Coast rock feel of *'Be Strong'* has touches of Hall & Oates in it's make up. The use of violins adds dimensions, while the writing has shades of modern soul. Human Nature could cover something like this. Like usual for Steve's material the middle eight has great chordal and arrangement changes.

'Home Coming (You've Come Back Home)' starts with wind chimes and flute in a sea wave, laid back style, which is followed by organ. The lyric once again has that internal rhythm. Steve starts of the vocal then Jenny Lang adds a countering verse then a duet works on the chorus a la "Up Where We Belong." The sax works well and there are good dynamic devises at play in the whole song.

The rocking acoustic guitar and leads add a real country rock flair to the start of *'Find Your Soul'*. The verses continue in this vein to the pre-chorus build. The chorus itself is different, with the vocal use reminding me of Vander & Young's "Down Amongst The Dead Men".

All in all a great set that demonstrates Steve's musical and songwriting talents to the extreme. A package that any writer would be excessively proud of. I must admit I tend to lean towards the rockier songs like *'Stalingrad Still Stands'*, *'Believe In Me'*, *'I Did What I Did'* etc which I feel suits Steve more. However his writing ability is world class, and now he has a product that confirms that. Good luck with it, Steve!

For Sale

Charvel/Jackson custom switch master pro' Elect GUITAR; fast low action, tremelo arm, black body, mother of pearl, single & humbucker pickups. Plus! Solid road case & sans amp classic incl' power adapter. All in immaculate condition.

The lot: **$1000** (ono)

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