

Robert Illesh - Golden - Reviewed in Fireworks

Robert Illesh is best known as the protagonist of classy prog rockers Aquaplanage, however, 'Golden', which is the second solo offering from Illesh, is a beautiful and refreshing acoustic guitar album, which I have to say came as quite a pleasant surprise. Having continually played the self titled Aquaplanage debut album when it came out some three years ago, I have to admit that I had anticipated this solo offering from Illesh containing similarly progressive themes, presented in a grandiose manner. Instead you are taken on a very different, although equally satisfying journey that soothes and relaxes as much as it invigorates and impresses.

Illesh himself has been fortunate enough to perform across the globe with prog heavyweights such as Rick Wakeman, Alan White, Steve Howe and Jon Anderson of Yes (Robert is also leader of the Yes tribute act Fragile), as well as Glenn Cornick and Clive Bunker of Jethro Tull. That in itself should tell you the standard of guitar playing that you can expect from 'Golden' where Illesh uses the gently contrasting sounds of steel stringed acoustic guitar against the softer tones of a nylon string to weave magical music that somehow shape-shifts depending on your mood and surroundings. As I got to know this album, I actually found it to more like a friend providing a gentle soundtrack to my day, with the stripped down structures and stunning arrangements able to move with me no matter what my day threw at me, which is not something many albums can lay claim to. In fact unlike so many albums these days 'Golden' actively stokes the imagination with gentle, yet robust themes that are somehow able to be as effective whether you are driving through the countryside on a stormy day, or relaxing in the garden on a sun soaked afternoon. The songs are all based round Illesh's wonderful, restrained guitar work, but a few slight changes in emphasis are added by the strings of Val Banks on cello and Sarah Turner on violin and viola, while Illesh also plays recorder. He also adds the occasional spot of vocals, but more in an atmospheric way and no lyrics are to be found anywhere on this disc.

To be truthful 'Golden' is not an album that will fit every mood or circumstance, however even the most ardent rocker needs a change of pace from time to time, and I have to say that over the past few weeks I have played this album countless times. Beautifully written, beautifully constructed and beautifully performed, 'Golden' is simply... beautiful.

Steven Reid

Fireworks Magazine

Issue 46

Jul/Aug 2011

http://www.rocktopia.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1433:robert-illesh-golden&catid=910:cd-reviews&Itemid=121



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