

## **Rob Stokes of Room 512, the Wonder Stuff's unofficial website and messageboard, shares his thoughts on the 'Shared' album.**

A package arrived in the post this morning. I ripped the envelope open and found my copy of the new SHARED album in my hands.

Despite the impression of others that I'm some sort of I.T. Geek, I still don't possess an iPod and have never played on a DS, PlayStation, Amiga, X-Box or anything else like that (nothing bettered the Spectrum 128 and QL for me I'm afraid which is why I still have Manic Miner, Chuckie Egg and Jet Set Willy on my PC!). Anyway, the point I was trying to get to is that I like to buy an album and have the physical CD in my hand. A lyric booklet to take out of the packaging and read, thumbing through the pages. Oh and not to forget a CD tray to get narked about when family members break the clips....

The Shared album, like Miles and Erica's *Catching More Than We Miss*, is beautifully packaged in a foldout digipack sleeve with separate sleeve notes booklet. It looks the part, it feels a quality product and if you saw it on a shelf in a shop you'd pick it up out of interest as it draws your attention for not just looking run-of-the-mill as so many albums do these days.

So, that's the packaging I'm happy with(!), what about the album itself?

Well aside from Miles and Erica, I've not heard listened to anything from any of the other acts on the album before - I've not even been a big fan of The Mission to catch much of Wayne's work though I did recognise all three of his songs on the album.

Let me firstly say that this album isn't just six different acts contributing individual tracks to a compilation album. Aside from producing the album, Miles (and Erica) feature on all of the tracks and even Andres has been pulled onboard to help out on one of the tracks, Dirty Ray's *The Rain Song* (indeed a stormer as previously acclaimed by Mr Moke and probably one of my favourite songs on the album).

I'm only halfway through at the moment and already it really is a great album. I wasn't sure at first how I would find it having not encountered music by the majority of acts on the album so didn't know what to expect and I think this could be how many people feel initially, but once you put it on it's a really nice, easy-going acoustic album. The production is spot on and if you close your eyes you could almost imagine that each of the acts are onstage right in front of you. Having now worked for so long in the acoustic arena, Miles knows exactly how to capture the right sound and not muddy or overproduce it in any way.

There are eighteen tracks on the album, with a wide range of different acoustic styles but y'know, it's good. Bloody good, actually, and if you're a fan of the acoustic genre then this is definitely an album you'd want in your collection. This album is like a voyage of discovery to find work by new artists who you may not have come across previously.

As I said earlier, I'm worried that some people may be unsure about taking the gamble of buying an album on which they only know a couple of the acts appearing. This really isn't a problem as if you're comfortable with even just one of the acts on there, then you'll be very happy with the other five acts also. These are beautiful, emotional, often striking songs that make me very interested to delve deeper into the catalogue of the other acts on the album and see them live also. Don't forget that this time it isn't just Miles' fans getting used to someone else's work but each of those other acts have their own fanbase also so this is an opportunity for fans of six different acts to discover music which they may not have encountered before also. This is a really brave move that Milo has made and I really hope the album does well, if only from a selfish point of view that I'd like to see more Shared events and releases.

The album is being officially launched this Saturday at The Horseshoe Inn in Bridges, Shropshire and five of the six acts are booked to perform (Wayne's halfway over the other side of the planet so I don't think it's fair to expect him to trek over, do you?) and if I wasn't already doing something then on the basis of what I'm listening to at the moment, I think I would actually have gone now whereas I hadn't been so sure before. Obviously this is all theoretical as I can't make it anyway but I am surprisingly taken by the tracks on the album and I'd like to hope that many of you will be also. Even if you cannot make it on Saturday, head on over to the Wonder Stuff's website and buy a copy of the album. It's £12.99 so that's less than 73p per track. Could be the best money you spend all week...

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