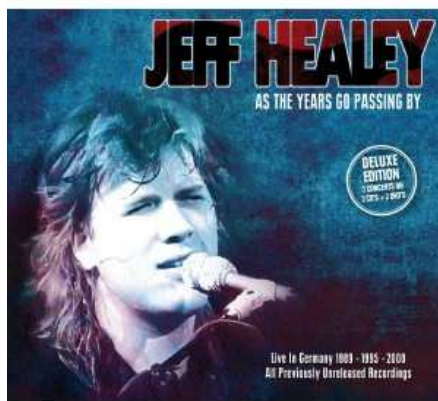



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Jeff Healey - 'As The Years Go passing By' Box Set Review

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There is an old adage, oft repeated, that a person's senses, when deprived in one area, compensate in others. Jeff Healey would seem to be a case in point. Deprived of sight at an early age due to a rare form of eye cancer, his sense of feel and his deft touch would become a legend amongst his many fans and his contribution to the world of the blues and jazz stands as a testament to his enduring ability to paint with his guitar the vistas that were denied to him by fate.

Tragically, fate was to strike again when, at the age of 41, Jeff passed away from cancer leaving behind a body of work that continues to inspire to this day. Five years after Jeff's death comes a very special collection of material that is endorsed by the Healey family and which presents three very different stages of Jeff's career via three stunningly captured concerts recorded in Germany in 1989, 1995 and 2000. The concerts truly capture both the magic of Jeff's soulful playing and the progressive leaps he made over his years as an artist, and fans and newcomers alike will find 'As the years go passing by' a document that presents Jeff in the environment that suited him best, supported by a world-class band and in front of an enthusiastic audience.

Of the three discs on offer, the first one captures Jeff onstage in 1989, full of fire and energy. It is a remarkable set, only nine tracks in length, that mixes up six covers and three Jeff original compositions for a performance that moves from the fluid delights of opening number of 'I'm torn down' to the soulful ballad 'angel eyes' (originally credited to John Hiatt), each track demonstrating Jeff's gritty, tuneful voice and stunningly varied guitar work. This is a man that lived, breathed and delighted in the wonders of music and you can hear form the solos that tear, weep and spiral out of the speakers the passion inherent in Jeff's playing style. 'Angel Eyes' is a grand example - a ballad of no uncommon power, it is Jeff's beautiful solo - melodic, human, warm - that elevates the track from the realms of the everyday to the transcendental and all the while Jeff's sympathetic band (in the form of Joe Rockman and Tom Stephen) provide the backbone, a backbone that is particularly crucial to rocking numbers like a blistering cover of the Doors 'roadhouse blues' with its searing lead work literally blazing out of the speakers. Even better still is the finale of Jeff's own 'see the light' with its Hendrix-styled wah-work setting the crowd alight. It's a white hot performance and one that points to where Jeff would end up in 1995, playing with even greater confidence with an expanded line-up and a penchant for The Beatles.

Disc two sees Jeff belting out twelve tracks (only one of which an original) including two Beatles songs - a blistering 'Yer Blues' that does a good job of matching the original's fire and fury and a stunning 'while my guitar gently weeps' - a Hendrix number ('Angel') - and even the classic 'stuck in the middle' - all the while making it sound like the songs had been written only the day before by him and his band such is the infectious enthusiasm that infects the playing style. It is the sort of performance

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you can imagine changing the lives of the attendees, and we are fortunate indeed that it was recorded for posterity and with such clarity. Once again Jeff's own work does a grand job of standing tall alongside the classic numbers he cherry-picked for the set and, once again, it is the wonderful 'see the light' that represents his own abilities. The expanded line-up of the band (adding Pat Rush on guitar) allows Jeff even greater freedom to perform his guitar gymnastics it is the confidence that is key though, and while one could hardly accuse the Jeff of 1989 of being shy, on this recording we're treated to Pat Rush's beautifully liquid slide work, which dominates 'stop breaking down', gelling perfectly with Jeff's wild soloing, the inspired take on threateningly familiar songs such as 'while my guitar...' and the tight knit performance of a band who have attained the almost psychic level of communication achieved by performers united in a love of the music and the mutual experiences of life on the road together. Arguably, however, the highlight of the disc arrives when Jeff takes the stage alone for the acoustic blues of 'me and my crazy self', upon which Jeff captures the whole auditorium with his genuinely awe-inspiring performance. It's the sort of performance that only a truly stellar artist could pull off and the rapt attention of the crowd highlights both Jeff's skill and the respect that he commands from his audience.

The third disc, recorded in 2000, sees a greater compliment of Healey originals (five out of a total ten tracks) and the mighty Phil Sayce replacing Pat Rush on guitar. Not one to ignore prodigious talent, or selfishly hog the limelight, Jeff gives Phil plenty of room to shine whilst marking himself out, once more, as a guitarist whose sensitive, wonderful playing is a simple joy to behold. Like Rory Gallagher, another guitar talent taken far too early, Jeff's playing is laden with emotion, and you can easily picture the flicker of his fingers over the frets as you listen to these amazing recordings, not least on the ecstatic guitar excursions on the lengthy 'how blue can you get' and the blistering attack of 'confidence man', a John Hiatt song that is pumped full of Jack Daniels and speed and sent out into the world, lurching and belching fire with a crooked grin and a sense of the brigand about it. Phil is given ample room to shine on the near-ten minute 'put the shoe on the other foot', which provides a sure pointer to his future career arc, and then a brilliant run through that old standard, 'roadhouse blues' sees Jeff encouraging the crowd to maintain the pace till the end ("you're dealing with a tired bunch of guys up here...", something they have no problem in doing as 'shine a light' sets off a charge amongst the audience that leaves them utterly dazzled.

Overall this is a box set that is essential, not just for Jeff Healey fans, but for fans of blues in general. Jeff's intuitive feel for the guitar is amply demonstrated across these three discs, whilst his band invariably provide a rock solid backdrop across which he sketched his magnificent works. There is a raw power, an empathy with the subject matter and a direct link between band and audience that borders on the telepathic that makes these live shows utterly electric. Whether it is listening to Jeff tentatively deliver a ferocious set in 1989, or listening to a more accomplished, relaxed Jeff still unleashing the blues with such unswerving passion and dedication in 2000, this set presents the whole story in a light that both thrills and serves as a poignant reminder of Jeff's early death in equal measure. Ultimately though, this is not some tawdry trawl through the vaults but a wonderful celebration of a life lived to the full. Get hold of a copy and bask in the warmth and humanity of Jeff's wonderful guitar work once more.

[Translate]



TAGGED: AS THE YERAS GO PASSING BY, BLUES, BOX SET REVIEW, HARRISON, JEFF HEALEY, JIMI HENDRIX, LENNON, PHIL SAYCE, THE BEATLES, YER BLUES

2 COMMENTS



Pat Rush

March 10, 2013 8:15 am [Reply](#)

Glad you liked the slide, that was me. Jeff didn't play slide. So thanx!



phil

March 10, 2013 9:36 am [Reply](#)

Hi Pat - many apologies for the error - it has been corrected now!

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