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JEFF HEALEY - AS THE YEARS GO PASSING BY: LIVE IN GERMANY 1989 – 1995 - 2000 (ALBUM/DVD REVIEW)



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Jeff Healey

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Monday, 25 March 2013

Written by Simon Ramsay

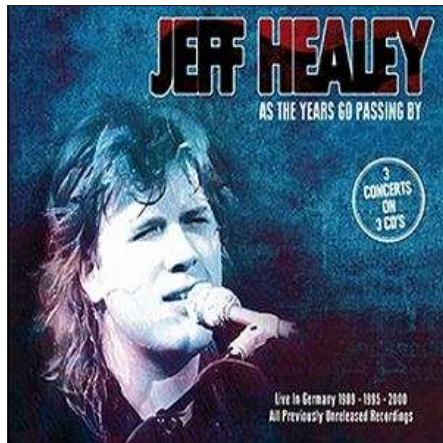


It's been five years since Canadian guitarist Jeff Healey lost his life to cancer at the age of 41. Released to commemorate the anniversary of his passing, this box set is a lovingly assembled compilation of rare archive material featuring three concerts recorded and filmed in Germany over an eleven year period – 1989, 1995 and 2000. It's a riveting collection that shines a light on the inimitable man and his no frills - maximum skills, bluesy rock & roll band, tracing their evolution from fresh faced pups to seasoned pros. With a booklet full of tasty anecdotes from family and fellow

musicians, this is the first posthumous release to have been officially endorsed by his estate. All in all, a fitting tribute to a virtuoso musician who mesmerised and entertained with one of the most bafflingly unorthodox guitar styles ever seen.

Blinded by a rare form of eye cancer aged one, Healey began developing his idiosyncratic playing style two years later. With the guitar flat on his lap and left hand over the top of the fretboard he worked the strings in a unique way, giving him the kind of distinctive signature sound most guitarists spend years failing to achieve. In the mid 80's he formed The Jeff Healey Band with drummer Tom Stephen and bassist Joe Rockman, releasing their Grammy nominated debut 'See The Light' in 1988 and appearing as the house band in Patrick Swayze's 'Road House' a year later. The band released a further 4 albums before going their separate ways.

Recorded 10th May 1989, the first concert shows a band brimming with youthful exuberance and determined to make their mark, ripping up Sonny Thompson's 'I'm Tore Down' followed by the supercharged, bluesy swing of 'My Little Girl'. It almost takes Healey a couple of songs to find his voice, the usual bear chested bellow missing a few words as the adrenalin kicks in! The electrified set draws mainly from their debut, with the wide eyed, blue collar soul of 'I Need To Be Loved' featuring touching harmonies from Rockman and last dance weepie 'Angel Eyes' inducing sizeable goose bumps. The DVD footage is broadcast quality, and their thunderous cover of Dylan's 'When




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The Night Comes Falling From The Sky' is a delightful watch. Healey's lithe  launched off his feet by the song's energy, throwing himself around the stage, playing the guitar behind his head and with his teeth as his inner showman breaks free.

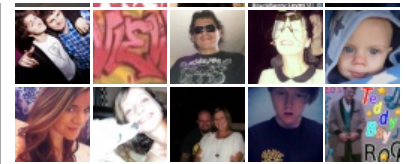
By 1995 the band are absolutely cooking. Augmented by second guitarist Pat Rush, the sound is nicely beefed up, particularly on a wildly entertaining 'Roadhouse Blues' as twin guitar harmonies add delicious meat to the bones and tasty duelling betwixt Rush and Healey steals the show. Pat's the perfect foil for Jeff, bringing classy slide work to 'Stop Breaking Down' and fleshing out 'Confidence Man' with a funkier cadence. His presence also improves Healey's performance. Free of handling the rhythm and lead, he's more relaxed and controlled, his singing stronger and playing more refined. 'As The Years Go Passing By' finds his voice impressively emotive, whilst his solo elicits a spellbinding concoction of superlative technique and passionate phrasing, more mature and measured than his previous youthful onslaughts. A Rollicking version of 'Got A line On You' gets the noticeably larger crowd pumping, before acoustic renditions of 'Me And My Crazy Self' and a beautifully stripped back 'Angel Eyes' add an extra dimension to proceedings. Visually speaking, the accompanying DVD is exceptional. Fearless cameramen shoot close ups over Jeff's right shoulder (he's now standing with his guitar on a raised platform) to give an almost pornographic view of his highly dexterous spider claw sizzling up and down the fretboard, playing lighting sharp licks with idiosyncratic ticks that would bemuse even the most learned pro. On a scale of one to ten, this concert's an eleven!

By the final gig in 2000, something isn't quite right. Turmoil behind the scenes would soon see the band split and they were clearly road weary, with Jeff informing the audience they're "dealing with a very tired group of guys". Moreover, he has a bad cold. Whilst his voice holds together we can see him coughing between verses and he's clearly jaded, with a few cantankerous remarks replacing his usual droll banter. All things considered it's still a good performance, but has the feeling of a well oiled outfit going through the motions without the spark they exhibited on the previous two recordings. The set list reflects that and is notably darker, with 'Which One', 'Love Is The Answer' and 'Feel Better' all hard nosed, moody blues without the grinning feelgood factor for which the band were known and loved. A further problem is Jeff's young protégé, guitarist Philip Sayce. He's an exceptional musician, but his incredible technique doesn't belong here. On 'How Blue Can You Get' he overplays to the point of annihilation, seemingly trying to enter the Guinness book of records for most notes hit in a song. It's just not what The Jeff Healey Band is all about. Where Pat Rush suited their style, Sayce takes it into full throttle rock star territory, stealing the rootsy heart and soul from what's essentially the best bar band going.

This box set is all about honesty and the magic of the moment. It's the sound of cracking musicians playing without gimmicks. Minor mistakes are left in, there's no studio tweaking and the inclusion of a concert where Jeff's struggling with ill health and the group are run down all serve as no BS audio/visual postcards of The Jeff Healey Band at three different points in their career. The blues was built on the unvarnished truth, as is this collection. It's a perfect tribute to the life, career and music of one of all the all time greats. To a lovely man whose sensory deprivation resulted in the creation of a sound and style that brought enjoyment to millions around the world. This compilation shows exactly why he is so revered, so respected and above all else, so sorely missed.

'Jeff Healey - As The Years Go Passing By: Live in Germany 1989 – 1995 - 2000' is available now.

	1. I'm Torn Down Jeff Healey	
As the Years Go Passing By - Live In Germany		
1. I'm Torn Down		4:41
2. My Little Girl - 1989		3:58
3. Confidence Man - 1989		3:32
4. I Need to Be Loved		4:39
5. When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky		6:51
6. River of No Return		3:55
7. Angel Eyes - 1989		5:43
8. Roadhouse Blues - 1989		6:23
9. See the Light - 1989		9:10
10. Got a Line On You		3:45
11. Stop Breaking Down		6:54
12. As the Years Go Passing By		6:39
13. Confidence man - 1995		3:24
14. Stuck in the Middle		4:10
15. Angel		4:32
16. Yer Blues		5:38



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