



Jackson United

Harmony and Dissidence (2008)

Acetate Records

Reviewer Rating:

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Jackson United (formerly Jackson) is back with another full length--and it turns out to be a Foo Fighters jamboree. On this release, Jackson United was missing a drummer which resulted in Foo Fighters Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins covering those duties--and with Foo Fighters session percussionist Drew Hester on percussion along with Wallflowers/Foo Fighters sessions keyboardist Rami Jaffee playing keyboards, you can see how I'd come to that conclusion. The actual band consists of frontman Chris Shiflett (guitarist of Foo Fighters and Me First and the Gimme Gimmes) along with Scott Shiflett (of Face to Face fame) on bass and Doug Sangalang on guitar. Despite all this, the album doesn't sound like the Foo Fighters songs I've heard (which, just so we are on the same page, is a good thing.)

The album starts off with "21st Century Fight Song." With rocking drums, rebellious lyrics and gang chants, make no mistake, this is a rock album. More importantly, this album is a bit harder and less poppy than *Western Ballads*. "Undertow" keeps things going with heavy drums and plenty of guitar. Things really get good when the band goes back to fully playing. The song has plenty going on and it is all enjoyable. The following song, "Black Regret," really goes for it on making things heavy before the drums speed up and Shiflett begins singing a mile a minute, but not so fast he doesn't have time to make sure his singing is as catchy as ever during the chorus. "Lifeboat" heads out into more poppy waters (how bad was that pun? I actually hate myself for even coming up with it) and actually sounds like a song that could have been on *Western Ballads* and, strangely enough for a band without an actual drummer, the drums are once again nearly as front-and-center as the vocals. "Trigger Happy" slows things down for a bit and mellows out, except for a shout-along-requiring gang chorus of "*You know you laugh when you talk about it / Laugh when you talk about it / But you're just scared / You know you laugh when you talk about it / Laugh when you talk about it / But you don't care.*"

"White Flag Burning" goes back to the cross between pop song and rock song and, while leaning a little more to the rock side of things, manages to be both. With a very steady beat and shouted lyrics, the style fits the upset lyrics before things mellow for a verse near the end before going back. "Stitching" starts out with a sole guitar before the rest of the band comes in. With great chorus of "*But you know we've got the same black heart / The same black stitching that pulled you apart*" and some great backup vocals, you'll find yourself singing along in no time. Following is the somewhat ridiculously titled "The Day That No One Smiled" and it begins with heavy, steady drums. While there is some good bass work on this track, the song sounds

out of place--not lyrically, but musically. The choruses sound just a tad darker and the verses don't have an ounce of the pop we've grown accustomed to from Jackson United. But never ones to disappoint, "Damn You" might be the easiest song to sing along to on the album. Admittedly a chorus of "*Damn you and the shit that you put me through / Damn you and the shit that you put me through / Damn you and the shit that you put me through / Damn you, damn you*" doesn't contain the most inspired lyrics I've ever heard, but Jackson United pull it off pretty well. Not overly angry, they are still sung like there's some real meaning behind them.

"Like a Bomb" has a very strong beat to it. Along with that, it has a nice, bouncy bass that still manages to stay within the confines of a song that isn't all that bouncy. Just like so many songs before it, Shiflett knows how to write a hook and did for this song too. Sort of album closer (at least for someone somewhere probably), "You Can't Have It" starts with an ominous sound. Shiflett sings while drawing out his words before things go back to standard Jackson United. By that, I of course mean fun drums, a chorus that is easy to sing and danceable bass, before headed back to the dark sound before once again building itself up slowly before going all out fun for the chorus. Eventually the bridge comes where the guitars really get to wail before heading back into the chorus.

The bonus tracks begin with a Billy Bragg cover in case the numerous politically rebellious songs throughout the album hadn't clued you into Shiflett's political views. "Help Save the Youth of America" is very clearly not a Jackson United song. Still, the song translates naturally to a full band rock song and the lyrics, depressingly, still fit even over two decades later. The band gives the song a great angry feel and Shiflett might do his only snarling vocals on the entire album. Closing out the album is the other bonus track "Loose Ends" and it is very guitar heavy, but in between the guitars is a song that sounds straight off of *Western Ballads*.

Harmony and Dissidence is a solid follow-up to *Western Ballads*, but the question is if you want a pop album of songs about life or a catchy rock album with mostly political songs. While I slightly prefer the band's previous album, there is no shame in what it has released here. It stands as its own album rather than as a sequel and it makes sure to not sound like the same album has been re-recorded while still making it clear that this is Jackson United. If you liked *Western Ballads* you should pick this up and you won't be disappointed.

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