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Album Review: Michael Stanley “The Job”

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He bought his first guitar because of Elvis and wrote awful love songs to his girlfriend. The title track of Michael Stanley's new album, *The Job*, starts off innocently enough. An autobiography of the heartland rocker's career, the song traces Stanley's sudden rise to

stardom where he finds his band playing to “a hundred thousand people underneath the stars.” A reference to a string of attendance records set by the Michael Stanley Band at Cleveland’s Blossom Music Center in the early ‘80s.

But then the song and Stanley’s career takes a turn.

Locked and loaded and out on a roll/But there ain’t no dream doesn’t take its toll./ You could lose your wife, your health, your friends/You know how it starts, never know how it ends.

Stanley goes on to sing...

The roads’ your home but it ain’t got a heart/Called my bluff and it blew it all apart.

A reference to Stanley calling his record company’s bluff during contract renewal negotiations in 1982...the label wasn’t bluffing and broke off talks, leaving the group without a contract. Soon after, the Michael Stanley Band broke up.

That was a million miles ago/Now it’s one more night, one more show/But that’s the job.



Loss and resilience become deeper themes on *The Job*... Stanley’s most personal, powerful, and gripping album to date. While the title track deals with broken dreams, the majority of the album centers around lost love, fleeting hope, and the struggle to carry on. The real job is more than just “one more night, one more show.” It is survival...finding something to believe in so you can make it through one more day. This is especially apparent in “Survive and Advance” where Stanley sings:

Don’t need to worry about tomorrow/When you’re down to your last chance/Won’t be no more curtain calls/And when the hammer falls/You just try to survive and advance.

In the hauntingly beautiful “Dark Angels,” Stanley writes...

Dark angels, movin’ cross the water/Dark angels, bound to have their way/And I’m standing on this shore/All I’ve got are cowboy chords/To try and keep the dark angels away.

The emotional undertones of *The Job* are masterfully woven in an array of musical stylings and performances that allow each of the 13 tracks to stand on their own, while at the same time, creating a steady and impeccable flow to the album.

Stanley offers up lighter, more positive offerings with “You Just Never Know” and “Maybe This Is The Day,” where Stanley sings...

Maybe this is the one that shines forever/Maybe this is the day ‘cause it ain’t over yet.

The song also features a catchy violin solo by Ed Caner, giving the pop-rock tune a slight Americana feel to it, something that fans haven't heard from Stanley (at least on CD) in a while. Additional surprises include a couple of acoustic driven songs, "Survive and Advance" and "Breaking News."



Besides Caner, the rest of Stanley's band (The Resonators) continues to impress as well. Guitar wizard Danny Powers casts his spells on the opening rocker "Everything's Fine" and the hypnotic "Last Good Nerve," an amazing eight minute song that culminates with an entrancing mix of percussion, guitar riffs, and chants.

Having earned his stripes with the Michael Stanley Band, pianist Bob Pelander continues to bring beauty, intrigue, and all-out groove to Stanley's tunes. It's hard to imagine a Michael Stanley album without Pelander...much like it's hard to imagine a Bruce Springsteen record without pianist Roy Bittan.

In the last verse of "The Job," Stanley sings...

There are songs that still need written/There are songs that must get played.

While Stanley's career in the music business has taken many twists and turns, his songs have always provided comfort and strength to those who have listened. It is only fitting that Stanley's "cowboy chords" are now helping him find a bit of serenity as well.

Visit [Line Level Music's website \(http://www.linelevelmusic.com/\)](http://www.linelevelmusic.com/) to purchase a copy of Michael Stanley's *The Job*.

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