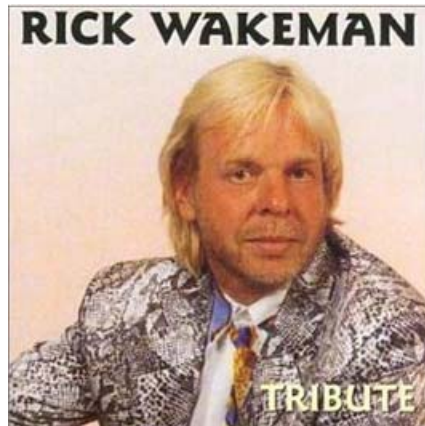




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Rick Wakeman – Tribute



By Gary Hill

Overall Review

Keyboard great Rick Wakeman turns his attention on this disc to the music of The Beatles. It has to be said that for musicians of a certain generation (and Wakeman is certainly in that group) The Beatles were a groundbreaking influence. This has lead many artists to create their own personal renditions of the Fab Four's music. Rick Wakeman's step into the field is a strong offering. He really makes the music his own and turns in some tasty prog rock arrangements of the Beatles classics. I have to say that he also managed to touch on some of my personal favorites from the band's catalog, making this disc even more effective to me.

Track by Track Review

Norwegian Wood: Jumping right in, Wakeman's arrangement of this cut at times reminds me of some of the more melodic music from Jethro Tull. Still, when he takes us on some roller coaster rides of keyboard jamming there's no question whose CD we have in the player. This cut also includes some tasty guitar soloing as Wakeman always seems happy to share the spotlight. There are some definite Yes-like moments here. This one soars through some awesome progressive rock territory and yet the original song still lives and breathes within this arrangement. It's amazing how much Wakeman is able to pack into just under six minutes of music.

You've Got To Hide Your Love Away: As one might guess the modes

that make up the intro to this one are a little less dramatic and “lighter” weight. While this has its moments, I wouldn’t really consider it to be the powerhouse that the opener was. It does manage to “bulk out” and redeem itself later and Wakeman puts in a few classic lines of keyboard pyrotechnics. In fact, the extended solo later in the cut is purely brilliant. We also get an exceptionally tasty guitar solo.

The Fool On the Hill: The opening section here is dramatic and understated. When it launches into the song proper, Wakeman’s keys carry the vocal line in a great manner. This builds in powerful ways, at times feeling a bit like music that could have been included in a James Bond movie. This is pretty and just plain stunning. It’s one of the highlights of the CD.

Eleanor Rigby: This has always been one of my favorite Beatles songs – and I’m sure I’m not the only one to say that. Rather than go for the obvious overblown synth sounds to capture the emotional impact of the piece, Wakeman plays it predominately on piano. This is “taking the high road” in my book. He (and we) are rewarded with an incredibly beautiful piece of music that works well to capture the essence and evocative nature of the original. Mind you, this stripped down approach serves for just about the first quarter of the composition. Then Wakeman shifts it out into a full blown prog arrangement that is again, not the obvious choice. It’s also extremely strong. This is without question one of my favorites on the disc. It probably would have been no matter what Wakeman did with it, but in all honesty he outdid himself here. We get some intriguing wanderings later that are not really tied to the original music, but are stellar. This is just incredible!

Come Together: Well, this is unexpected. We get a disco beat here. That’s not how you would expect anyone to do “Come Together.” The thing is, that’s probably the last thing you’d expect from Rick Wakeman, too. I don’t really think it works all that well and would have to pick this one as the loser of the set. Honestly, this cut needed a total reworking in many ways if you were going to cover it, but I don’t think this direction was the answer. There are some cool passages, but overall this one is lacking.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps: Here’s another of my favorite Beatles songs. This comes in sedate and very powerful. At times I could swear I hear theremin, but there isn’t any listed in the credits. This is exceptionally evocative and powerful as it carries on. Once again, Wakeman did a great job of capturing the spirit and tone of the original but still making it his own. That’s a real gift.

We Can Work It Out: Here we get a frantic sort of jam that has a bit of that disco texture, but not nearly as blatant as on “Come Together.” This is much more effective than that one and rocks out pretty well when it gets going. I’d put it probably somewhere in the midrange in terms of the disc.

The Help Trilogy: Wakeman turns this track into a trilogy by creating the sections “Quartet,” “Help” and “Quartet – Reprise.” They are not tracked separately so, I’ll just review it as a whole. This opens with a classically oriented movement, no doubt the “Quartet” section. This eventually gives way to a sedate, but very emotionally powerful telling of the main musical themes of the classic Beatles number. While this particular track, in its original form, has never been a favorite of mine, I really love Wakeman’s rendition. In fact, this is one of the strongest pieces on the whole disc. As you might guess from the layout of the trilogy, it ends in much the same way that it began.

Things We Said Today: Here Wakeman turns in a fast paced jam that has some smoking keyboard soloing. This is a great track – one of the highlights of the CD. That’s another tribute to Wakeman as I’ve never been a huge fan of this piece as done by the Beatles. A lot of Wakeman’s keyboard work on this is quite reminiscent of the keys flavorings he uses in a lot of classic Yes material. That means this feels like it could have come as a *Close to the Edge* outtake.

Blackbird: Sedate and pretty, the intro to this one doesn't really feel a lot like the Beatles track. It shifts to a motif closer to the original as it moves along. This is a good number, but not really a highlight of the CD. At less than two and a half minutes it's also the shortest number on show.

She's Leaving Home: Both the final cut on the disc and the final of my Beatles favorites represented here. This starts suitably sedate and moody. It raises up a bit as it moves into what you could call the "chorus section." This is a very pretty piece and quite a satisfying conclusion to the disc.



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