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Pop/Rock/World CD Reviews

Nils Lofgren – Old School – Vision Music

Veteran rocker keeps it real.



Published on December 2, 2011



Nils Lofgren – Old School – Vision Music VMCD1016, 44:40 [12/6/2011] ****:

(Nils Lofgren – guitar, keyboards, drums, vocals; Paul Rogers – vocals; Lou Gramm – vocals; Sam Moore – vocals; Greg Varlotta – trumpet, trombone, tap percussion; Jerry Donato – saxophone; Gary Bruzzese – drums, handclaps; Mike Smith – pedal steel, vocals; Todd Chuba – drums, vocals; Mike King – bass, vocals; Jamison Weddle – handclaps, vocals; John Ramirez – handclaps, vocals)

Certainly Nils Lofgren is associated with his twenty-seven year stint with Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. But he is a rocker with a considerable pedigree. As a teenager he became a member of Neil Young's band, and played guitar and piano on *After The Gold Rush*. This provided the opportunity to secure a record deal for his band, Grin. The band lasted only a few years, but secured a devoted following. Lofgren's guitar work and performance theatrics (playing guitar while flipping off a trampoline) excited his fans.

A solo career was sporadic, but produced the critically acclaimed self-titled debut album. He continued to record without much commercial success. A gig as musical director for the Cable Ace Awards kept him in the limelight. In 1984 he joined Springsteen's band and has toured with him extensively. Lofgren continues to record and play with the likes of Ringo Starr, Willie Nelson, David Crosby and Branford Marsalis.

His latest release, *Old School* consists of various formats that express perspective of a sixty-year-old guitar hero. The opening title track finds the singer in motley sentiment. Jagged slide guitar and soulful backup vocals by Lou Gramm (Foreigner) give new meaning to grumpiness. Another strange rumination on aging, "60 Is The New 18" has the unmistakable feel of eighties indie music. Both of these tracks utilize a horn chorus to construct a rougher mix. Themes of youthful rebellion are now replaced by topical subjects, including cell texting and hip replacement. Lofgren's concern with time passage is detailed in the ragged, "Amy Joan Blues" The inimitable Paul Rodgers (Bad Company) delivers a wailing counter vocal. Lofgren is an excellent rhythm guitarist and passionate singer.

The time for teenage, romantic sentiment has passed. In its place is an introspective, sometimes bitter rocker. Lofgren enlists R & B legend Sam Moore on the defiant rock and soul number, "Ain't Too Many Of Us Left". The ode to Ray Charles, "Miss You Ray" serves as homage to departed souls (poignant due to the recent passing of E Street member Clarence Clemmons). The gentle acoustic guitar work is exemplary. This dynamic is also effective on "Let Her Get Away". Lofgren shows off his piano chops on the Bruce McCabe's elegant "Irish Angel".

Old School is an odd concoction. The instrumental texture and arrangements are cohesive. However the invocation of titanium hips, ungrateful kids, and lattes can distract from the music's hooks and grooves. But Nils Lofgren is the real deal, and rocks with the best of them.

TrackList: Old School; 60 Is The New 18; Miss You Ray; Love Stumbles On; Amy Joan Blues; Irish Angel; Ain't Too Many Of Us Left; Just Because You Love Me; Dream Big; Why Me

—Robbie Gerson

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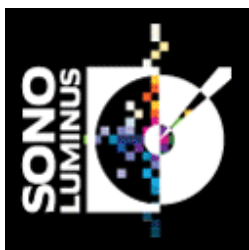
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