

Israel Nash on the way to excellence with *Rain Plans*

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Rain Plans, the third studio album from Texas-based artist Israel Nash, is a real achievement that places the musician firmly on the map of young artists to follow and enjoy.

The album opens on a relaxed note—a slow beat backs the four-chord melody of “Woman at the Wall,” which, despite its major chord-based rhythm, carries a darker intonation that Nash develops later in the album. The last section of the opening track expands into a guitar riff with a dreamy piano carrying the rhythm into the second track, which opens by contrast with a definite foreboding.

It is on the second track, “Through the Door,” that the listener begins to feel the presence of Neil Young, the Canadian singer-songwriter, and in particular the late-1960s work of Young and Crazy Horse. In general, Young’s musical influence is evident on the album without overshadowing Nash’s efforts at originality.

“Through the Door” joins Nash’s acoustic guitar with the pedal steel guitar accompaniment that binds the album’s songs together. Here is where the 1960s- and 1970s-style rock ‘n’ roll of Young emerges, with hints of James Taylor’s unorthodox tone changes.

As in the first track, the song opens up halfway through from a low-key bridge and transforms itself into a minute of organ-accompanied jamming before winding up on the same note on which it began.

The album descends into introspective darkness in the third and fourth tracks, once more with the whining steel guitar tying everything together. The introduction of a harmonica in “Just Like Water” adds an element of heartfelt loneliness.

The album was recorded at Nash’s home in a small town in the Texas Hill Country, outside of Austin, which may help explain its “feel.” Originally from Missouri, Nash moved to Texas after five years in New

York City. Nash is accompanied on *Rain Plans* by drummer Josh Fleischmann, with Joey McClellan on guitar, Aaron McClellan on bass and Eric Swanson on the pedal steel guitar.

With the opening measures of “Myer Canyon,” the listener wonders whether the “desperado” theme will grow tedious. Just at this moment, however, the album takes on a quite different quality. Soft, climbing strings hit the listener with something much gentler than was present in the prior tracks and introduce a hopeful spirit into the album. It is a surprising transition, and Nash does it with power and energy.

On the album’s title track, the chorus, including the high-pitched harmonies of Nash and his vocal accompaniment, resembles Neil Young to such a degree that the listener might confuse the two. This is both a strength and a weakness. *Rain Plans* does not so much return to Young, but one wishes at times that Nash would break free of the older musician’s influence.

Nash slows himself down for the last three tracks on the album, culminating with the light-hearted “Rexanimarum” that gives balance to the album as a whole and adds humor and joy. It comes across as a sort of country version of the Velvet Underground’s “Oh! Sweet Nuthin’” (1970).

Overall, the album’s lyrics, although there are exceptional and compelling moments, tend to be overshadowed by the dynamic sound. The words, in fact, often fade into the background. Unfortunately, they do little but provide vague and mostly prosaic accompaniment to the musical themes that Nash develops over the course of the nine tracks.

“Follow me to hill country,” Nash beckons the listener in “Through the Door,” giving the listener a sense of adventure that blends well with the tone of the

song and of the album in general. In “Just Like Water”, Nash notes that the past is “just like water rolling off my back,” as the words roll along to the song’s drumbeat.

It’s not as though Nash doesn’t have a lyricist in him. In prior albums, he has produced lyrics with the strength of a young man’s melancholy. On his 2011 album, “Barn Doors and Concrete Doors,” the song “Sunset, Regret” contains the following lines: “Sunset/regret/my heart ain’t down yet/I got nowhere else to be/well red bird fly to me,” and later in the same song: “The shore is sleeping now/a rage blows across the sea/it’s got a way of turning/life to memory.”

To be enduring and challenging, this genre requires more than simply quasi-poetic lyrics combined with moving music. Artists like Townes Van Zandt and John Prine, for example, might be regarded as models, artists who poured themselves into their music and were not afraid to give expression to the most painful—and the most euphoric—experiences.

Nash has it in him to make genuinely trend-setting and important music. This reviewer awaits his next effort with considerable anticipation.



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