

Album review: RUBEN HOEKE BAND – Loaded

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Dutch Guitarist Ruben Hoeke is firmly established as both a guitarist in his own right as well as a high profile interviewer, radio presenter and festival booker. His guitar chops are certainly evidence on ‘Loaded’, an album full of fiery guitar work in search of a decent song.

The best two moments are to be found on ‘Love And Emotion’ and ‘End of The Line’ both of which feature the aching Devon Allman style baritone of vocalist Frank van Pardo. ‘Love And Emotion’ also works well because it’s one of the best arrangements on the album with strong vocals, beefy guitar tones and a big slide figure, while the radio friendly ‘End of the Line’ is built round a strong melody.

For the rest of the CD, a clichéd lyrical landscape is populated by ‘Southern Comfort people’, ‘crazy mamma’s’ and ‘bitches’, ‘fire burning in the brain’, or just plain lame couplets as on ‘Mississippi BBQ’: “No need to worry, I will explain; In my backyard we’ve got no rain; I feel so good, I feel like star; When Jesus picks me up in his electric car”.

And that’s a shame because in their best moments you can tell the Ruben Hoeke Band would give any self respecting rock band a good run for their money. ‘Gone But Not Forgotten’ is a southern tinged rock ballad with chiming guitars and features great bvs from Vicky van Zijl, while Ruben nails some fiery licks as the band thunder into AC/DC territory on ‘Give It Up, despite more lyrical shortcomings.

Given the Ruben Hoeke Band’s ability to rock, it is ironic that the closing slide led, smoldering blues of ‘Soul Of A Man’, doesn’t really deliver the big finale you might expect, though Frank van Pardo does sound far happier bringing meaning to his phrasing on this song than on much of what has gone before. *** **(3/5)**

Review by Pete Feenstra