

NIELS HP

PROMISES OF RAIN

Singer/songwriter Niels HP is one of seven children, and that has made him both a team player and an individualist. This can be heard on his long awaited solo debut, Promises Of Rain, which has been on its way since he began writing songs together with his friend from childhood, bass player Asger Steenholdt (from Big Fat Snake), 6-7 years ago. In many ways the solo project has come into being through collaboration with others. Promises Of Rain is the sum of Niels HP's abilities, experience, ambitions and sources of inspiration - he mentions Stevie Wonder, Donny Hathaway, Mahalia Jackson, the Beatles and James Taylor as the most important ones - with elements of today's heavily syncopated R&B with a funky undercurrent which points back to his years as lead singer in the band Ridin' Thumb. The cd covers a wide area: From the funky opener "If You Fall" via the marvellous Cuban-flavoured "He Sits Alone" to the folk-baroque atmosphere on "Mother Nature", the 12 tunes on the cd creep into many different corners, with HP's voice and vision holding it all together.

For this occasion HP has put together a team consisting of Rikke Veth on drums - because, as HP says, "she comes straight to the point and plays without any show-off" - bass player Fredrik Damsgaard and two old friends, guitarist Martin Finding and keyboard player Joakim Petersen. "I like playing with musicians that I know. Being on friendly terms with them guarantees the good vibe", HP explains. As a little extra, HP's wife, Veronica Mortensen, has arranged and sings background vocals on some of the tunes - just like HP participated on her "Pieces of a Puzzle" cd last year.

The basic tracks for Promises Of Rain were recorded live, for then "you don't stop halfway all the time and spend lots and lots of time fiddling with unimportant details", as HP describes it. Instead there's a groove and the magic of good musicians swinging together in telepathic interplay. Moreover, the live situation is what HP prefers - although he actually added the vocals at his family's house in Sweden and at vocal producer Anders Schumann's, and the cd has been given a thorough finish, as he calls it. But spontaneity has been maintained and given pride of place, so the result exudes joy, economy and sociability. "I like leaving lots of space to the musicians and to hear what they come up with", HP says, and adds, smiling, "but of course I lend a 'helping hand' if it's too way out".

Promises Of Rain is in all respects a turning point for Niels HP, who has learned that "even though you choose to become a soloist, you don't have to bear the burden alone. But of course the responsibility for the final result is mine. Now that I've finished the cd I'm even more pleased that my record company is Sundance. I'm not sure that a bigger company would have given me such a free rein. I seem to have reached an age where it feels most natural to make your own decisions".

And HP is not exactly a newcomer. After having studied at the Copenhagen Rhythmic Music Conservatory from 1990 to 1993 he released "Different Moves Different Grooves" with the band Ridin' Thumb in 1994, participated in the musical Hair at the Betty Nansen Theatre in 1996 - where he met his future wife Veronica Mortensen, with whom he has two children - and in 1997 he went with the show to Paris. Together with his wife he started the vocal group Voque in 1999, before turning most of his attention to the solo recording. In addition, HP has taught singing and ensemble playing and dubbed cartoons. But right now the main thing is Promises Of Rain - one of the most promising cd debuts this year.

Niels HP, Promises Of Rain
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