

VAN MORRISON: Keep It Simple (Label: Exile, Polydor)

Written by Bill Buckley
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'Keep It Simple' is Van Morrison's first album of all-new material since 2005 and it's the first in a while where all the songs are his own. But despite what might appear to be some kind of an "originality sabbatical", the Morrison sound remains essentially the same as it ever was. He uses the same musical, lyrical, and philosophical ingredients that he's relied on throughout his career and produced the same mesmerising mix of blues, jazz, soul, and country, all tempered with a deep-felt Celtic sensitivity. There's also no surprise in the fact that though the album's called 'Keep It Simple' there's nothing here that's actually that simple. Even the superficially basic blues opener 'How Can A Poor Boy' shows the complexities that make Morrison one of the few contemporary artists who can still genuinely challenge... and "contemporary" and "challenge" are the key words here. On the lovely and light 'That's Entrainment' for instance, he takes full flight - insisting that the connections his music makes are for the moment... the here and now and not some idyllically -perceived history. It's clear that the past - be it Belfast, New York, Woodstock, LA, San Francisco, even the cosy Cotswolds have impacted on him, but his new music is all about contemporary connection. 'Behind The Ritual' is another of the LP's challenges, with its complex references to the historical symbolism of wine throughout history, while 'Soul' tries to define what is almost undefinable. Elsewhere 'Song Of Home' is a delicious blend of country and Celtic influences, 'Don't Go To Nightclubs Anymore' (with noddling mentions of Mose Allison and Georgie Fame) will bring some solace to all of us as our years advance, and 'Lover Come Back' is one of Morrison's most soulful laments. And let's be clear, Van Morrison's music is all about soul. It might not be classed as "*soul*" in the record store racks, but on 'Keep It Simple' there's passion and pain, care and compassion, life and love, and a genuine, bold determination to face and challenge emotional and philosophical issues...that's soul.

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