

Album Review: Ben Harper

by Zack Harding
Arts & Life Editor

Ben Harper's newest release, *Lifeline* (2007), marks another great collection of songs from the performer, and sets a nostalgic tone throughout.

Lifeline, which was recorded in Paris in late 2006, marks the artist's eighth studio album, and it garnered him a nomination for the recent Grammys for "best pop instrumental performance" for "Paris Sunrise #7." Throughout the release's 11 tracks we see an artist who is never afraid of growing, even if doing it with a sound that comes right out of the late 60's.

The album was recorded entirely analog; as it states in the liner notes, no computers were used anywhere in the recording, editing, or mixing process. The result is a warm, rounded album with punchy bass and clear yet soft-toned highs, but this isn't where the 60's comparisons stop.

The album is relatively short, with a run time just over forty minutes, and compared to his 1995 release, *Fight for your Mind*, this is a tight and straight to

the point musical statement. Seven of the tracks are under four minutes, and only one reaches the five minute mark at 5:17. This creates a very controlled, short and sweet ride. The songs don't need to sink in, and by the time the album has ended you



wonder where it went and start it over.

Standout tracks include "Needed You Tonight" which uses the classic soft/loud

dynamic shift as good as any new song that I've heard lately, and "Fool For a Lonesome Train" which is folk-rock gold. There are a couple of highly energetic tunes like "Say You Will" and "Put it on Me" which feature great back-up vocals and add to the overall feel of quick intensity.

The last two tunes, "Paris Sunrise #7" and "Lifeline," blend together to great effect, with the former working as an instrumental introduction for the latter. This pair sounds the most like Harper's older work and don't fit perfectly with the rest of the tunes though.

One bummer is the overall lack of weisserborn slide-guitar that Harper has been known for. Similarly, Harper's excellent bassist and percussionist are less prominent than they have been in the past.

Lifeline comes across as a short, fun, and direct musical jaunt that is definitely less cerebral than much of his past work. Is it going to go down as a classic like *Fight for your Mind*? Probably not, but is it still a great collection of music? Certainly.

The Clarion

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