

## **Wild Horse – *When The Pool Is Occupied***

**Reviewed by Paul McDonnell (A Band Called Paul)**

### **Brecon Indie Review Team**

Clocking in at an impressive 18 tracks, with a runtime of over an hour, the latest album by Sussex-based trio Wild Horse, "*When The Pool Is Occupied*", is billed as being "genre defying". The album notes continue to describe the songs as "reflecting on growing up in the modern world, relationships, addiction, mental health struggles and the long journey towards self-acceptance." A bold and broad statement indeed. So, does the album live up to its own hype in a relatable and accessible way? Well, yes. Yes, it does. And in maintaining its consistent quality over such a range of stylistic shifts, it really is something special.

The album opens not with a bang, but with a fourth-wall breaking question leading into a piano stomp that rhetorically pleads "why are there never happy love songs anymore?" The sparseness, oddness and confident self-awareness feels like an overture, a short scene-setting mood piece establishing the vocal style carried throughout the album. And, true to form, it teases and tees up the pitch-bending funk of what follows - a most definitely happy love song, the delightful "*Freaky Together*."

Funk is a recurring groove throughout what follows ... indie funk at that, evident in the interplay of rhythm guitar and syncopated, sometimes walking, bass lines - even when the tempo begins to drop down in tracks like "*W.A.N.T.*", dropping further still into a couple of vocal and piano-led tales before becoming arrested by the handclap-led return of the funk in "*Anxiety*".

"*Footprints in the Sand*" makes for an interesting sideways move in being a lead guitar-led downtempo number more reminiscent of 80's stadium rock, but in a contained and understated way. If you told me, it was a cover of a mid-career U2 track I wouldn't be surprised, but it carries a vocal layering that sets it apart ... another recurring texture across the album, used selectively and with flawless implementation.

The vocal tour-de-force that is "*Symphony of Broken Hearts*" leads us to another surprising stylistic shift in "*Playin' On My Mind*" which, to my ears,

wouldn't have sounded out of place on an Oasis album. But while the genre shifts, the quality of delivery remains excellent.

The surprises continue following the return to funk in "*Pray '89*". A Sly Stone style of slow groove in "*Confidence*", the timeless angst of "*Just About Enough*" and "*Breakthrough*" ... all building to a full circle loop to the album's closer, almost a reprise of the opener in being an experimental oddity that again features that pitch-bending weirdness tracks before finally completing the circle, bringing us back to where we started with another breaking of the fourth wall to thank you for listening.

The album a journey, and the band's lead singer, Jack Baldwin, makes for an engaging narrator as we're guided through moods ranging from poignant to flirtatious led by his sandpaper-tenor vocal delivery interjected with effortless falsetto swoops. There's an engaging youthfulness to his singing style that is infused with a maturity befitting the subject matter of each track, from the piano-led angst of "*Coffee In The Morning*" to the downright sexy fun of the recent single "*Freaky Together*.' I suspect that unless you're a death-metal or hardcore drum 'n' bass devotee, there's something in here for everyone. "*When The Pool Is Occupied*" is an extremely confident and assuredly slick collection of songs from the heart.