

## Neal Schon: *I On U*

Neal Schon is a living legend and his new solo project reflects the master craftsmanship of a world-class player who's been writing hit songs for thirty years. What comes to mind when I think of Schon's work with Journey are the hooks. He comes up with these powerful melodies that just stick in your head. With that context in mind, his new disc is a great insight into his expression without the bounds of radio rock. All of the songs have different moods and draw from many styles. It is a perfect soundtrack for working, driving or doing whatever you do.

Overall this disc is geared more towards the smooth jazz market, but there are definitely tracks that are much heavier. There is a lot more shredding on here than you might expect from Schon. The opening track "Blue Passion" starts with mystical sounds then Omar Hakim kicks in with the drums, solid and driving. The lead guitar comes in and right away you hear that tone; that sound of control – of just muscling out the notes and wide vibrato. Yeah that's him alright. The melody line reminds me of one of Gary Moore's ballads.

Schon's guitar work on the next few tracks is equally brilliant using warm clean sounds that you'll recognize from his earlier work. The keyboards by Igor Len have an eighties pop sound and are a bit loud in the mix for my taste. I think a different keyboard player would have been better for the project. Someone like Derek Sheridan, Tony McAlpine or Jordan Rudess would have been more in line with what you come to expect from Schon's earlier fusion work with Jan Hammer.

The best song on the disc is by far track five, "Urban Angel". The bass comes in just rolling – tight with the drums. Schon has a really sweet clean sound for the first parts and plays some incredible bends and stretches that make the guitar talk. The solos interweave and have some very memorable hooks in them. I could listen to this tune over and over.

The other track that I think is the strongest is a slow ballad called "Father", and is a great way to close out the album. There's something about it that just hits me. It's a very simple couple of chords, but finds a way to tug on my emotions.

It is important to recognize that Schon has influenced an entire generation of guitar players, yet he still continues to be influenced by his current peers. You can hear distinct references to other guitar players, specifically Vinnie Moore. Which makes sense, since Journey band mate Steve Smith has played on his recent recordings.

To get the full picture of what Schon is up to now, also check out his disc "World Play" by the band Soul Sirkus. Schon's project, *I On U*, is an amazingly diverse and immaculately produced recording with a lot to give.

By Derek R. Lauer, aia

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