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Imprint (3/5): indulgence and intimacy

3/5 ***

David W Jacobsen, singer/songwriter and guitarist independently released his album “Imprint” on Nov. 5, 2022. It was primarily written between 2020 and 2022 and features elements of rock, folk, and country.

Memory undoubtedly shapes how a person acts in the present. This concept is what Jacobsen explores on this record. According to his personal website, “[many] unconscious ... [and] conscious ... experiences are part of who you are today.” It’s a straightforward concept that many listeners can relate to. So, the question is: how does Jacobsen make his take on the staining and staying power of memory unique?

The answers on “Imprint” are varied. On the opener, “Things I’ve Said (Big Mouth Strikes Again),” the listener acquaints themselves with Jacobsen’s expressive voice that hangs onto each consonant, crooning in his vowels. The lyrics read as an earnest look into his head, catastrophizing after a small slip-up: “Once again, I have fucked up.”

On the next track “Maple Street,” Jacobsen attempts a universal and common narrative about looking back on figures from the past. While the sentiment is lovely, there’s a looseness in the instrumental here. The tempo undulates, which helps diversify the track, yet the drums which quietly pound in the back often fall behind.

The instrumentals on this record generally tend to have this clean sheen to them, lacking a human element when they play. While this effect can be executed with precision, the themes and universality of “Imprint” would be enhanced with a possibly more rustic or overblown sound. Again, on “Maple Street,” a guitar solo comes on during the bridge, which unfortunately falls flat into the rest of the instrumental. If some distortion or fuzz was added in production, it would greatly help it cut through the mix.

However, do not doubt Jacobsen’s intimate pen; his lyrics still are potent. “Do I see / or do I defame?” he sings on highlight “The Same.” It features another guitar solo – perhaps my favorite on the record – and some interesting instrumental development regarding its percussion. Musically, some of the chord shifts here are reminiscent of the ’70s jazz rock era, almost calling to Steely Dan. The piano work on the bridge is very fulfilling as well.

The next three tracks take an interesting turn in commentary, ditching the melancholy for irony. “No One



according to Jacobsen's personal website, davidwj.com.

Many of the rhymes read straight out of a Dr. Seuss poem which gives the track a bit of a humor. I do wish however the last leg the song built to something greater with how turbulent the instrumental on this one is.

On the even funnier “About Last Night,” Jacobsen’s vocals become gritty and indulgent, drunk on love and alcohol, recalling a one-night stand. It’s one of the shorter ones on “Imprint” but definitely packs a punch; its sweetness helps break up the track list. Selfishly, I wish this moment was held onto longer, but it serves its purpose.

This transitions into “Filler” which Jacobsen admits was only added to have the album reach the minimum runtime for an LP – 30 minutes. The drums suffer from a stale quality here, which understandably happens given the track’s filler nature. If Jacobsen maybe was more intentional with the instrumental here, he could have made an absolute anthem. The potential is there.

On “Imprint’s” final leg, a more serious tone is adopted to wrap up these themes on memory. “Nine Days” features guest vocalist Chrissy Roberts singing about Lady Jane Grey, who was the Queen of England in the 16th century for nine days. It’s much moodier than the middle of the record, so in a way it feels like an abrupt deviation from the narrative Jacobsen was constructing. It’s understandable why a track like this was added, however; history is an important part of memory.

“One Day at a Time” features one of the more unorthodox instrumentals on the record, with a bell-like electric piano driving the track. It features some abstract lyrical content and jazzy chord shifts which help it stick out on the album. While I find the keys a little grating, the tune at the core is what ultimately stays.

The penultimate “Not Waving but Drowning” is a tribute, according to Jacobsen, to an acquaintance who recently committed suicide. Lyrically, it’s one of his best. His guitar performance here also impressed me greatly. I thoroughly enjoy the use of silence which gives the song its own sense of humanity separated from the rest of “Imprint.”

To end the album, Jacobsen took a song he wrote in 2006—“New Years Day”—and placed some intimate piano chords under his melodies. It’s a direct and resolute ending to “Imprint” with lovely melodic motifs sprinkled throughout. Jacobsen also gives some closure to his themes of memory: “I resolved not to think you,” which inevitably will cycle back.



Album cover art for “Imprint” by David W. Jacobsen, New York City, NY, US, Nov. 5, 2022.
Photo from davidwj.com.

Overall, “Imprint” is an interesting record that indulges in humor, heart, and memory. What really holds me back from the album enchanting me is the instrumental palettes and sporadic sequencing. If Jacobsen



making a fantastic record.

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