

Rockingham: Steve Strongman calls on old friend Randy Bachman for a favour

Graham Rockingham

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It's not always easy to break out of the blues, the musical kind anyways. Blues purists can be some of the worst snobs. You know the type ... if it doesn't sound like Muddy Waters, then it ain't the blues.

The only problem with that attitude is that it can be a tad confining ... even a little boring. Sometimes a blues lover has just gotta stretch.

That's just what Steve Strongman has done on his new album "No Time Like Now." The 10 tracks on the record, which will be launched at a release party March 3 at Mills Hardware, are still based in the blues.

But they also rock more ... far more ... than any of the Juno-winning blues man's previous solo albums.

"We came out swinging with this for sure," says Strongman, a longtime Hamilton resident, originally from Kitchener. "I wanted to make a real guitar-driven record. I wanted to explore blues as sort of a larger-based sound. People like to put boundaries on you, and I like to push those."

The opening title track starts out pleasant enough with a gentle acoustic guitar strum before bursting out into a monster bass-driven backbeat, flowing into a chorus of echoing handclaps and gang vocals.

Next up is "Bring the Hammer Down," a track powered by a ZZ Top-like shuffle and enough fuzz guitar to send a Billy Gibbons fan to heaven. Track three, Money in the Bank, is down-dirty and swampy. More gang vocals.

And then there's track four — a flash guitar duet with Randy Bachman on the Bachman-Turner Overdrive classic "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet." It's a cover song, for sure, turned upside down and rearranged by Strongman with Bachman's support. No stutter on this version.

"I did want to change it up a little bit because it's such an iconic song," Strongman says. "We recorded it and then I emailed it to Randy. He loved it. He thought it was a fantastic version of it."

It didn't take much to convince Bachman to play on the record.

"He loved it so much he invited me to launch my version of his song with him at his show at the CNE this summer," Strongman says. "It was a great experience."

Strongman has known Bachman since opening for him almost 25 years ago at the Kee to Bala in Muskoka. He also played guitar with Randy's son Tal before leaving the younger Bachman to form the alt-rock band Plasticine with an old friend from Kitchener, Rob Szabo.

Although both embarked on solo careers, Strongman and Szabo remain close friends and collaborators. Szabo had produced Strongman's two previous albums, including the Juno-winning "A Natural Fact."

Strongman returned to him as producer for "No Time Like Now" and Szabo also gets cowriting credits on nine of the album's tracks. They recorded much of the album at Strongman's west Hamilton home, using Szabo's mobile recording studio.

"Instead of going into a large studio, we opted to stay home and not have to watch the clock," Strongman says. "That way we were able to spend more time with it and I think that really led to some amazing guitar tones. It was a very cool experience."

grockingham@thespec.com

905-526-3331 | @RockatTheSpec



Hamilton's Steve Strongman stretches his blues muscles a bit on his latest album, "No Time Like Now."



Steve Strongman's new album "No Time Like Now"

Graham Rockingham is the Hamilton Spectator's music editor.

STRONGMAN

What: Steve Strongman CD release for "No Time Like Now."

When: Friday, March 3. Doors open at 7 p.m., show at 8 p.m.

Where: Mills Hardware, 95 King St. E.

Admission: \$20 in advance, online through millshardware.ca.