



August 8th 2014 - We previously featured Claydon Connor in our monthly **Stray Plectrums post** back in June, the spotlight shining favorably on his cheery, upbeat single 'The Kind of Man I Am' (which, for the record, I haven't been able to get out of my head), with its trad country/English pop merger and catchy hook. Luckily for expectant fans, the resulting album 'Under The Big Sky' (released last week) has that much and more, from the Americana/British indie sounds of 'We Could Have It All', to the deep country roots of 'Whiskey Nights'. Refusing to be anything but himself, the Oldham-born and Isle of Wight resident sings in his own regional accent, automatically infusing the whole record with a certain Englishness that is offset by the wailing pedal steel and descending melodies.

There's a "classic" feel to much of this work; as in, it sounds as if it could have been produced any time in the last 50 years, deep-seated in the country rock and folk/singer-songwriters movements in Britain during the 1960's and 1970's. Claydon adopts these influences quite loyally and faithfully, appropriating them in a way that doesn't come across old-fashioned or copycat, but instead his own fresh incarnation of what it is to be culturally and geographically torn. 'Have You Got Heart?' is just as evocative of old mountain ballads and the traditional country of decades gone past, of the deep south, as 'A Little Piece of Heaven' is representative of a more commercial folk sound that is once more proving popular in his native country.

Yet we don't get the sense that Claydon is chasing trends, and he is firm in his rootsy, acoustic approach, vocals at times raw and sliding off the notes, refusing to be technically perfect. Instead he tells each song's story carefully and emphatically, through the sweet ballad 'A Love Unknown', the bouncy, rockin' 'Makes Me Wonder', and the feel-good Lumineers style of 'Who Would Have Thought'. It's a record that is not only musically varied but also includes plenty of deep, interesting lyrics that range from wonderfully joyful to desperately vulnerable, a well-constructed, well-articulated, and well-orchestrated project that as a result is well-rounded and rich in what it offers. Indeed, the final and title track references a classic song of a similar name, 'Mr Blue Sky' by the Electric Light Orchestra (ELO), borrowing more than a little of the sounds and styles used in the original track, a subtle tribute if you will.

Claydon Connor is a talented songsmith and wordsmith, and 'Under The Big Sky' is a perfect showcase for that. He keeps it simple for the most part but manages to include a decent variety of influences, all woven into a common thread that forms his own identifiable sound. His songs are memorable, well-written and catchy, artfully straddling the divide between so-called American and English music. Not to be underestimated on the emerging UK country scene and the already-established UK Americana scene, this album will stand him in good stead for years to come.