

THE JW VIBE

Music That Sticks To My Soul

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R FOR ROMEO, Plan R

Reuniting through a mutual friend in 2018 decades after first playing in the backing band for Atlantic-signed pop/R&B singer Martee LaBow, the red-hot wired for rock-jazz-funk-blues jamming duo of keyboardist Daniel Stein and guitarist Stuart Ziff had to reach deep into pop culture trivia to find a band name as quirky, fun and off the wall creative as they are. They found it (R For Romeo) in a memorable single line in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* – which naturally led them to title their debut album *Plan R* after the film's emergency war plan in which a lower echelon commander may order nuclear retaliation after a sneak attack.

Digging deeper, the true pop culture related joy of this explosive fusion project can be found in cop shows of the 70s. Though named for a classic Jackie Gleason outburst, “Blabbermouth” is a hard rockin’, wah infused spaced out excursion into 70s’ cop show theme territory. The duo tops that with a fresh look at an existing 70’s cop show tune, repurposing the theme from “Barney Miller” as “Barney’s Groove” – a wild showcase for Ziff’s electric guitar fire and Chris Tedesco’s snazzy trumpet.

One doesn’t have to be hip to the aforementioned lingo and vibes to groove, dance, twist and marvel at the eight scorching, soulful and hard-edged tracks R For Romeo creates with L.A. studio greats like Tedesco,

bassists Rene Camacho (one of Ziff’s longtime cohorts in the band War) and Travis Carlton, drummers Kevin Stevens, Fred Dinkins and Rick Latham and percussionist Marcos Reyes. Stein, who fires up Plan R with his ear-popping mastery on piano and a rack of retro axes like Mini Moog, Wurlitzer, Hammond B-3, Fender Rhodes and clavinet, says it all when he reflects, “This is the kind of music we’ve always wanted to make.”

Other highlights include the Jimi Hendrix/Jeff Beck influenced barnburner “You Can’t Be Serious,” the laid back yet whimsical, reggae vibin’ opener “Checkmate,” the moody organ and guitar driven power ballad “Blue” and the rock/funk/blues romp “Lockdown,” which sounds like the kind of trippy, rhythmically eclectic adventure restless musical cats might come up with after several months in lockdown. The Stein/Ziff partnership is a creatively refreshing blast and all fans of instrumental music off the beaten genre specific path will be hoping for more from them soon.

