

Blues In Britain 2024

Lil' Chuck The One Man Skiffle Machine: So/Lo *Backyard Music*

David Thorpe (aka Lil' Chuck) says he's a genuine 100% one-man band, with all his instruments recorded simultaneously. That's right, old school and no looping. This is his fourth album in this format recorded in Christchurch, New Zealand, his first since 2019. David was born in the UK but moved to New Zealand a while back.

With his faithful Mutt at his side, and clearly inspired by his dog, this latest release has fourteen brand new songs, and with everything recorded in one go this is an impressive album all round.

The one-man band process deserves more credit than it usually gets and this album should be more widely heard because it's very clear that Chuck's quite something, at times a little like Seasick Steve. First and foremost a harmonica man (he teaches the harp as well), here he adds electric guitar, snare, diddley bow and "a few other bits and bobs," alongside resonator guitar, kick drum, hi-hat, harp and vox. Several styles of music are covered here which keeps the whole album sounding fresh, from the old Mississippi feel of 'Diddley Bow', the self-explanatory take on 'You Need A Kick Up The Arse', the homely 'Domestic Stomp' and 'Dog Tricks'. With (as he says) "a back pocket full of songs", he's certainly come up with the goods, writing observations of life with a dry wit. A fine release: fresh, original and enjoyable.

Pete Clack

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LI'L CHUCK-THE ONE MAN SKIFFLE MACHINE

SO/LO

Backyard Music

I have had the pleasure of listening to an album by this guy before, Li'l Chuck aka, David Thorpe. But he may be unheard of by quite a few people. He hails from New Zealand, writes, and plays everything himself, hence the one-man skiffle machine handle. So, to the album, thirteen lovely ditties with differing topics and sentiments. I Can't Give It Away, immediately puts me in mind of the last time I heard a true one-man band, well two actually, this takes me back to the heady days of Donovan and Dylan, both competent wordsmiths with messages for a generation-long since gone. What Li'l Chuck has done here is he's taken that mantra and delivered it as a Skiffle/Blues/Country style album. Believe me, there is a difference between him and the aforementioned artists. Chuck has a better vocal than the other two chaps and highlights his love and knowledge of the Blues to great effect. There is also lots of humour within his writing, as in the wonderful Dog Tricks, which is basically about dog walking in the woods, with references to what Bears normally do in the woods. All this is in the compounds of some great slide guitar and harmonica. A song title that you would not normally expect to see appear on any album, You Need A Kick Up The Arse, which tells me that not only is this a very enjoyable album, I'm certain that Li'l Chuck would go down a storm on the festival circuit, or in a small club, the response from the audience I've no doubt be the same. Domestic Stomp has such a masterful slide guitar running all the way through it, an absolute belter of a tune. This album can be enjoyed on any occasion, in any weather, anywhere, just sit back, relax, and immerse yourself into

Slap That Bass

Reviewed by: Terry Mead 17/01/2024

SO/LO is the 4th album release from Christchurch based British artist David Thorpe, the genuine One-Man Band, AKA Li'l Chuck The One-Man Skiffle Machine. □ SO/LO is his first Li'l chuck release since MONO in 2019, an album recorded in Sugar Rays 1950's studio in Wickford, England with one microphone direct to 1/4-inch tape.

The one-man band is David Thorpe Aka Lil Chuck who plays apart from the vocals all the following instruments- Harmonica, Steel Telecaster, Resonator and Acoustic Guitars, Drums (including snare with a kick pedal) kick drum and Hi hat, and of course the Diddley Bow.

In SO/LO, the 13 original tracks are laid down in true one-man band style with all instruments played and recorded simultaneously. In fact, SO/LO has been a 100% one-man band project, Thorpe wrote, performed, engineered, and mixed the whole album alone, well, 'one man and his dog' with the assistance of his faithful mutt Bo at his side in the studio. Thorpe also created all the handmade artwork and filmed / edited the 2 videos for "You Need a Good Kick Up the Arse" and his newest single "Dog Tricks".

So, let's review track by track :

I Can't Give It Away – So we are off with a superb harmonica intro before Davey breaks in on lyrics and acoustic accompaniment It's a cool bluesy number and a worthy opener.

You Can Do It- Here we start with some slide which continues as a background riff, another great laid-back track with lyrics and instrumental fine tuning giving it a rather chilling affair.

Even Keel – Picking intro with the steel guitar journeys through this track with some harmonica accompaniment. It's a nice easy listening number with both lyrics and music.

Dog Tricks-A tongue in cheek song about teaching a dog new tricks and how it plays on walks, cute little lament with the video of this track was taken at various beaches around Canterbury & Dunedin New Zealand.

You Need A Good Kick Up The Arse- Well the title tells you straight upbeat stomping number has traits of Dave Edmunds in places and a good driving beat.

Diddley Bow – Tribute to the late great Bo Diddley in style of the legend himself. It's a ripper straight out of the blocks with an awesome drumbeat. The Diddley bow played on this track was made out of a \$4 biscuit tin and a broom handle.

Doing This – Love the backbeat sound on this one and the spontaneous harmonica playing, pushes those crossover boundaries in diverse music.

Domestic Stomp – Straight out of the Delta blues of the shanty deep south with this one, a traditional sound that has remained with us, Davey brings it on back.

Hitch A Ride – Catchy acoustic riff runs through this one with the lyrics telling us about the powerful story of hitching a ride back home.

Once It's Gone – A seventies sound to this one I feel with a deep backbeat, the lyrics have some resounding truth in them sung in a very adapt style by Davey.

My Tomorrow – Back to a traditional style laid back blues track which will have you rocking in your hammock. The picking on the steel guitar with some neat harmonica really works this number well.

Sunstrike – Fast moving tune with a choice beat about the sun striking the all familiar screen a scenario we have all been through. Bouncy number with great acoustic accompaniment.

For Steve- To end with a nice little tune remising the memories of Steve Boyer a good friend from Davey's Warwick/Leamington days a big influence no doubt.

**YouTube clips of the tracks Dog Tricks & You Need a Good Kick Up The Arse-
<https://youtu.be/6e8qpXtxTSw?si=wHiVV0cvhzva1Tze> <https://youtu.be/4ePfn0xfuHk?si=T9nQDU5qR7aysMGO>**

So now let's summarise: Well, this is truly a one-man's complimentary album in all the aspects of making it a tremendous feat in itself. I have had the pleasure of seeing Davey live and he certainly gives it everything in his performance and this has reflected in this album. Recommended hell yes grab a copy now you won't be sorry.

20 Oct 2023 // A review by OLDER Muzic.net.nz

September 29th 2023 saw the release of David Thorpe, A.K.A. [Li'l Chuck The One Man Skiffle Machine's](#) 4th album *SO/LO* on a limited run of CDs and digitally on Bandcamp. Originally from the UK, David has been based in Christchurch since 2003 and has performed and released music through multiple creative projects such as Davey Backyard, The Skeatles, The Harmonica Guy, and The Old Fashioned Singalong to mention just a few. He is a full-time musician and a multi-instrumentalist, but he's not limited to playing one instrument OR another - he plays several at once!

For most people, a 'one man band' is an oxymoron meaning someone who runs a business in which they do everything. Sometimes in music we use it to mean someone who, using a combination of their talent on one or two instruments and modern studio trickery, can produce and entire album as though there were multiple musicians involved. David Thorpe is something very special – he can play multiple instruments and sing at the same time and to prove it *SO/LO* is essentially a 'live' studio album recorded with no loops or over-dubs. Just like they did back in the long distant past! Oh, and he wrote, engineered & mixed the album and organised the artwork and PR himself. Actually, it appears he did everything, including making a couple of rather good music videos!

Musically the album comprises of 13 songs, all original and all rich with the sounds of skiffle music which itself is a form of folk music that is influenced by blues, country, bluegrass and American folk music. Based around 12-bar chord progressions (though not always firmly tied to that structure) *SO/LO* has expertly played finger-picked acoustic guitar, warmly driven electric guitar, a glorious harmonica, a bass drum, a high-hat and a vertical snare played by foot. All are stitched together with David's impeccable vocals which suit the music perfectly.

From the moment you start listening it's hard to believe it's just David playing – especially when he is belting out first class lead harmonica breaks over guitar licks that most of us would who play guitar would be proud to have played so well on their own! Add the fact he is also the drummer at the same time, and I have to stop thinking about the brain power required and just enjoy what I'm hearing! And that is rather easy because this is a rather special album.

You'd need to be approaching your 90's to have been around as a teenager for the skiffle music wave that swept post-war Britain in the mid 1950's. It's safe to say few of us were there but its importance in popular music and its influence on what came after is immeasurable. For example, Britain's first ever youth music TV show (*Six-Five Special* in 1957) used a skiffle song for the title track such was the dominance of the genre before rock 'n' roll. Many of Britain's most successful artists that emerged in the 60's and 70's started out in skiffle bands, not least The Quarrymen. Yes Google them and see who they became!

Forgive me the diversion but David's writing and playing is so beautifully rooted in a genre that arguably led directly to much of the Western music we hear today that I needed to give it some context. Listening to *SO/LO* is like listening to echoes of the past coming through to remind us of what's at the heart of popular music.

Regardless of the amazing achievement of playing the entire album solo and simultaneously, the real achievement for me is actually the quality of songwriting and the arrangements. Whilst David stretches himself to play more instruments that should be humanly possible, what he has really done is strip rock music right back to its essential basics. In a way that could be argued as ironic however, the result is a simplicity in the songs that make them very accessible, and relatable.

Whether late at night on the deck, around a camp fire, in the corner of a small country pub, on a street corner, at a summer party outside, you imagine the location and David Thorpe, a.k.a. Li'l Chuck The One Man Skiffle will provide a soundtrack that encapsulates the heart of music. Coming across him playing live you'd be mesmerised and soon tapping your feet.

All the songs on *SO/LO* fit the album perfectly, none jar the flow, and all have a story to tell. I started to note stand-out tracks and realised they far outnumbered the others!

Track 6; *Diddley Bow* – classic rockabilly blues in which David somehow makes the guitar sound like a double bass! In the 1950's this would have been a scandalous song and caused teenagers to scream! Still has that excitement about it now.

Track 7: *Doing This* – Such a beautiful, warm slightly overdriven harmonica – it almost sounds like its straining through an old valve radiogram. Wonderful.

Track 10; *Once It's Gone* – I'm hearing a bit of Bruce Springsteen here. I did say skiffle led to rock!

Track 13; *For Steve* – Beautiful reflective and, for my ears, a sad and personal song. Short, intimate and a fitting way to end the album.

One of the best ways to get a sense of the music David is playing, and how he plays it is to check out his video for *You Need A Good Kick Up The Arse* [on YouTube here](#).

Overall, a stripped-back album of wonderful old-style honest songs that would be perfect in many situations, not least a road trip. David does not claim the album is Hi-Fi, but that aside he has managed to record it really well and capture a natural warmth that suits the music perfectly.

If you have a love for skiffle music, along with the genres around it, you'll find plenty to enjoy here. If you've never heard of skiffle music then *SO/LO* is a fantastic place to start.