

Justin Haigh - People Like Me - Album Review

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From the opening notes of “All My Best Friends Are In Jail” we know that newcomer Justin Haigh (rhymes with vague) is from the same neo-traditional school of country music that Chris Young and Sunny Sweeney and Josh Turner also graduated from. That doesn’t mean that, like the other artists mentioned, Justin Haigh is stuck in some country music time warp for his music is thoroughly modern. The opening track, one of two songs solely written by Justin, features crisp fiddles and quite honestly, it’s the perfect song to get you in the right mood to get into *People Like Me*. The lyrics are about good ‘ol boys who take having fun to the extreme.

Bobby Pinson and the Warren Brothers co-wrote the insanely catchy and melodic “Love Me,” a song about a man who needs to get back with a girl who ‘held on just enough’ to make him crazy and needing love. The title track, written by Lee Thomas Miller and Kelley Lovelace shimmers and sparkles like hits from Brad Paisley while Justin Haigh delivers the lyrics about every day, opinionated people who work hard for what they have. Vocally, Justin Haigh sounds something along the lines of Tracy Lawrence with a dash of early Kenny Chesney thrown in for good measure. George Strait’s manager Erv Woosley co-wrote “Jack Daniels on Ice” with Clint Daniels and it’s a fun shufflin’ little drinkin’ song that will go over well in the Honky Tonks of Texas, where Justin Haigh is based.

The stormy “The Leaving In Your Eyes” feels like the biggest hit on this record. It’s the kind of song that has a vibe that recalls Garth’s “The Thunder Rolls” and is as equally poetic a song, with lonesome fiddle fills from Rob Hajacos (heard on Every Garth Brooks album) and the song leads into an excellent cover of Waylon’s “Rose In Paradise,” last heard on Chris Young’s sophomore album *The Man I Want To Be*. As strong a song as “Rose” is, I never grow tired of hearing it, particularly when a great vocalist like Haigh or Young takes it on. Speaking of Waylon, the next track *People Like Me* is the second song written by Haigh. It’s a soft ballad about a man who will take Waylon’s ‘outlaw way’ and continue to carry the torch.

“Monahans” is one of three absolutely fantastic tracks written by Kevin Higgins, a Texas-based songwriter. While a bit long, the song rolls out a story of young woman who uses her looks to get what she thinks she needs out of life. It’s the kind of song I can see ending up as a track on Kenny Chesney’s next record. “In Jail” is the second of Kevin Higgins’ songs and this one is about a guy who ends up in Jail thanks to a no-good woman with ‘daddy’s money’ who suckered him into robbing a convenience store at gun point. The other tune that Higgins wrote is the album closing “Gathering Dust,” a tune

about a road dog who sounds like a man who is so in love with music that he doesn't 'break hearts' anymore. It's the kind of song that would've fit quite well on the *Crazy Heart* soundtrack.

Jamey Johnson, Randy Houser and Jerrod Niemann co-wrote "Is It Still Cheatin'" and it's easy to hear Jamey singing this one as it feels like something that would feel right at home on his record with a traditional waltz melody and a couple who are still married but sleeping with other people and the stark line "If you're lyin next to him and she's lyin' next to me, is it still cheating?" Mary Gauthier co-wrote "I Ain't Leaving" with Travis Meadows and first recorded the tune on her "Between Daylight and Dark" album. It's a song about a man who has come to the conclusion that life's demons and troubles are best met head on, instead of running away.

Featuring twelve strong songs and performances, *People Like Me* is the kind of country album that used to be commonly made in Nashville. It's from a talent that deserves to be heard by as many people as possible and hopefully that will happen to Justin Haigh as more and more people wrap their ears around *People Like Me*, a record as good as anything coming out of Music Row in 2011.

