

GABRIEL GORDON OVERWHELMED

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■ “Star-potential” is an indefinitely arguable quality. It is much easier to refer to Gabriel Gordon as the perfect example, because the singer/songwriter/soulman has “star-potential”, without a doubt and in abundance.

Paying dues in his hometown of Santa Cruz, California, and in New York, he has played numerous internationally acclaimed solo-gigs and concerts with Meshell Ndegeocello, Natalie Merchant, Lokua Kanza or “Soulounge”, opening for George Benson and Bob Dylan among many others. Musically well rounded, with all the rough edges in place, the Thirtysomething now presents his beautiful new album “Overwhelmed” on Soular Music.

“It feels like my debut, even though it is my fifth album, at least”, he says, disarmingly charming, as usual. “Everything just seems so right and everybody is so supportive.” Recorded in two intense weeks with legendary producer Pete Smith (Sting, Van Morrison, Randy Crawford) and a few hand-picked instrumentalists from all over Europe, the album distils the musical essence of Gabriel Gordon. He sounds more present and immediate than ever – in the lyrics and melodies of his songs, the emotion in his exceptional voice, and the clear lines of his lead-guitar.

The eleven songs on “Overwhelmed” range from a few inspired covers of some of Gabriel’s (and everybody else’s) favourites like the Motown-classic *How Sweet It Is* or *Tempted* by Squeeze, to a host of truly original, sometimes tender and often tempestuous, new compositions.

The title-track *Overwhelmed* really jumps in your ears, thanks to an irresistibly sublime hook. The guitar-rocking *Be Free* liberates all kinds of positive pheromones, while the longing balladry of *Some Time* arouses melancholic bliss. *When I Need a Saviour* is a compellingly simple, truly convincing Gospel-Blues. The lovely mid-tempo of *South of France* makes the impossible possible, inspiring both wanderlust and homesickness.

All of the music on this album is so coherent and beautiful, the words and the vocals so effectively good and, in the best possible way, subtle, it engages you – immediately and uncompromisingly. Thus, the listener stays just a touch more “overwhelmed” than Gabriel Gordon himself. How sweet it is, indeed.

“Music was always here, there and everywhere in my life”, begins one of Gabriel Gordon’s many beautiful life-

stories. “My father is a blues-musician, so singing and playing the guitar were the most natural things in our home. But I had to leave, if I wanted to find my own way.”

To get out of his father’s shadow (and away from Santa Cruz’ constant temptation of sea, sun and sand), Gabriel moved to New York when he was nineteen. During the day he worked at the “Electric Lady Studios” (of the late Jimi Hendrix, one of his musical idols), at night he and his friends played in the bars and clubs on the Lower East Side (their repertoire consisting of a few of their own songs and many by Prince, Frank Zappa, Jeff Buckley, Nick Drake, Neil Young or Stevie Wonder).

During this time, Gabriel also came to the attention of Natalie Merchant and Meshell Ndegeocello, who both hired him as singer and/or guitarist on their tours. Enter fate, that fearless navigator, and another one of those inimitable life-stories takes its course. Gabriel gets a job as tour-manager for Jazz-singer Madeleine Peyroux in Europe. On the last day of the tour, Gabriel’s bag and with it all the money the band made on the tour gets stolen from a car. To earn the money back, Gabriel stays behind in Europe, finding the love of his life and settling down in Montpellier, France, in the process.

“Sometimes I get stranded somewhere and I ask myself: How did I even get here?”, explains Gabriel, whose album-titles *Global Refugees* and *Gypsy Living* can perhaps also be seen as indicative of his lifestyle.

“In the end, it was always music that led and guided me. And I’m really thankful for that. That whole “tortured artist”-thing is a little too much for me. I am happy to be able to play and perform my music and communicate with people on such a personal level. Recording an album like “Overwhelmed” even instils feelings of pride in me. **Back in the days, in the States, people would ask me: What do you do, musically? I always felt that**

this was as strange a question as: What kind of a person are you? Now I feel like telling everybody: This is me! Please listen.”

One could argue how Gabriel Gordon and his music ought to be categorised. To be “overwhelmed” by his new album is not only easier, but better. It may only feel like his debut, but it definitely is a milestone.

