

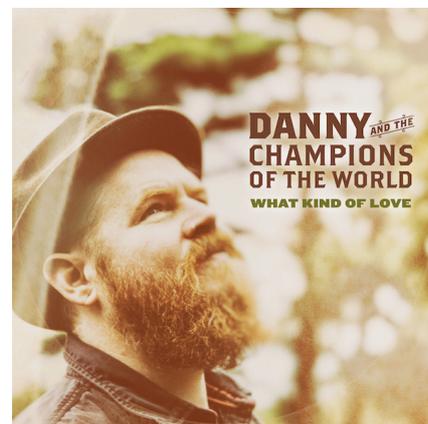
DANNY & THE CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD

Album: What Kind Of Love

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There's something to be said for hitting the ground running, with a good tailwind behind you. Danny Wilson agrees. And his new album is the proof.

Wilson and his band, Danny & The Champions Of The World, spent much of 2014 on the road, playing shows all over the world, the kind of legendary, life-affirming rock and soul revues (with country fringing) that have seduced them a global following, and which they finally committed to wax on last year's glorious concert double-album, *Live Champs!* When their touring schedule drew to a close at the end of the year, you might have thought Wilson and his Champs would hunker down on the sofa for a few weeks, get some much needed R'n'R. But that's not how Champions roll.

"We'd been playing festivals all summer, did 17 shows in Scandinavia in September, and another 25 shows in October," Wilson remembers. "We had all of two days off, and then we went into the studio (Chris Clarke's 'Reservoir Studios'). I had a hacking cough, everyone was ill, but I told everyone, we'll be in the studio two weeks and then it'll be Christmas and we can all collapse."

The momentum they'd accrued on the road carried them through, though, and the music they cut during those two weeks – *What Kind Of Love*, the album you're holding in your hands now – is some of Wilson's very best. There's a glint in his eye as he talks about the vibe within the Champs camp right now. "We're a bit more of a gang than we used to be," he grins. "It's not hard for a band to feel like a gang, because generally you're up against it, but you keep on at it because you're dogged and in love with it. And it feels amazing, like my old bands Soul Green and Grand Drive did back in the early days."

The songs contained therein started life on the road, at soundcheck or back at the hotel after the show, and saw Danny writing many songs with his bandmate Paul Lush instead of penning tunes on his lonesome, as is his usual MO. "We wrote songs in Scandinavia, in Nashville, in the Preston Travelodge," he explains, proud as a new dad. "Going down the pub or partying after the show... you can't really sustain it on tour, and sharing a bottle of wine and writing a song together in the hotel room is really cool. This line-up of the Champs has been together for some time now," he continues, observing that the group that started out as "a loose, lawless thing," a floating collective contrasting to his then-band, Grand Drive, is now a more solid organisation. "Everyone brings so much to the table," he adds, "I wanted them to be a part of it all."

The songs are rich, joyful and moving, opener *Clear Water* another Wilson classic-in-the-making, with its tale of finding yourself far from the ones you love but still feeling the strength they give ("When life gets crazy / I see you", runs the hook). The celebratory horn peals suggest the celtic soulfulness of *Dexys Midnight Runners*, and the reference is no accident, Wilson admits. "We started playing *Seven Days Is Too Long* [the Chuck Wood northern soul burner *Dexys* covered on their debut LP] at soundcheck on tour, and I'd often lapse into Kevin Rowland impressions," he grins. "Kevin's amazing, I've massive respect for him. He's a huge Van Morrison fan, and there's a definite Van Morrison influence to our music."

The theme running through *What Kind Of Love* concerns that most multi-faceted four-letter-word: love, in all its many different permutations. "Every song on the album is a love-song of some fashion," Danny nods. "These are love songs about friends, about ex-friends, about wives... All different kinds of love. Also, the title made me think of some mythical jazz or soul record – you could totally imagine an album on Blue Note called *What Kind Of Love*."

The album takes its title from a song Wilson and Lush penned with friend Joe Kinsey, of the band Billy Vincent. Wilson and Kinsey go way back; Danny's mum taught Joe at nursery school, and the pair share South London roots. Danny



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reconnected with Kinsey after bumping into him in the studio, and they bonded over this remarkable, sweltering slow-burner, which Wilson describes as “Southern-soul. South London soul. Sutton soul.”

There’s more at play in these songs than the simple boy-meets-girl glibness of too much rock and pop lyricism, a maturity and sophistication that may surprise even longtime Danny Wilson fans. “It’s about ups and downs,” says Wilson, of the album’s emotional spectrum. “Life can be glorious, it can also be a strain. I’m 42, and even though I’m a happy guy, I know life’s not just a laugh. I’ve got children, I see the complexity of their lives, of all our lives. Love is a huge subject. The hugest, in fact. And that’s what the album’s about. And I love the title. It has the potential to be the cheesiest album title ever, but I love it for that.”

Wilson knows he can risk a cheesy album title, because there’s not a morsel of fromage across What Kind Of Love’s ten tracks, just songs written and sung from the heart, in a tenor that will feed the soul. As for the Champs, Danny can only see this gang continuing on, soaring ever higher. “I love camaraderie,” he says. “I love friendship, I love people doing stuff for the fucking sake of it. It’s the only reason to do it, and I have no intention of stopping now.”



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