

# Jack Francis

Words by James Gaden

**A**fter paying his dues playing in bars, writing songs and learning his craft, Jack Francis is putting out his debut record. He has already managed to garner some BBC airplay, alongside hugely positive reviews from a variety of musical publications. This magazine is no different, with the record receiving a glowing appraisal last issue. Fireworks called Jack up to learn more about it.

The material is unquestionably pleasant to listen to, but difficult to define due to its eclectic nature. Even Francis himself is hard pressed to identify which genre sums him up best.

"That's a good question," he laughs. "That's basically what I have run into for my entire career. This record is a collection of my influences, so it's singer-songwriter music to me. It's a bit Rock, a bit Country, a bit Folk, a bit Soul, a bit Pop. I don't know how to classify it under one genre. I don't mind the fact it can't be pigeonholed; it is what it is, I just write what I write."

Such wide taste can be traced back to some of Francis' earliest memories.

"I think I always loved music from a really young age," he concedes. "I watched marching bands when I was really young and got into drums. Then when I was at school... that was when I picked up a guitar and started trying to write songs not long after that. It was a gentle, natural progression over a long period of time."

Despite the artist stating the album is a result of his influences, he blends them so well it's difficult to pick out anyone in particular, as he has a sound all of his own.

"That's great, that's a big compliment for me," he responds. "I listened to a lot of my older brother's stuff, which was Brit Pop in the early 90s. I also remember Paul Simon being on the radio in the car. It was quite a mix of things really, I think after that I found Soul music and the Motown stuff and then I discovered The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. I got into older bands, I started listening to a lot of 70s music with groups like The Band, Little Feat... people like that."

As well as enjoying many styles of music, Francis can also turn his hand to a variety of instruments, playing a large portion of what appears on his album, although he is quick to state that is not down to him being a keen multi-instrumentalist.

"That was definitely born out of necessity," he admits. "I made the album with my friends Issy Ferris and Archie Sylvester. They're a brilliant duo; they do a lot of their recording at home so we made it at their home studio. It was mostly just me and Archie, then Issy would come in now and again to help us. Archie and I played most of the instruments between us because that's all we had there. We didn't do any of the drums, my drummer Ross Gordon came

in to do that, but the rest of it was pretty much me and Archie. We've played stuff on records before and felt reasonably comfortable with the instruments because we didn't have to do anything too difficult."

Something else that makes this debut record stand out is that unlike some stripped down "singer-songwriter" efforts; this has plenty going on... not least with trumpets, saxophones and strings being added.

"We wanted to make sure the arrangements were right for each particular song," Francis replies. "The horns really work on some tracks, others required strings or Hammond organ, so we worked on them one at a time, just trying to figure out what was best for each one."

As well as not shirking on the arrangements, the album is getting both a CD and vinyl release.

"We are doing vinyl," he states, "they are on the way; you can pre-order them now on [www.gooddeedsmusic.com](http://www.gooddeedsmusic.com) or through my social media. They are ordered, but the whole vinyl production thing is insane at the moment. There's a massive backlog with most of the resources going to the major label artists and bigger acts, so we're just waiting on them being done. It's frustrating waiting for them but it's great there's such a demand for vinyl, I read it had grown again over the last couple of years."

While lockdown was a nightmare for many people, including many musicians, in a strange way it was beneficial for this particular artist.

"It was in the end, yeah," he agrees. "We didn't start making the album until the summer when things were opening back up again, but yes, the original plan wasn't even to do an album. I basically was going to go and record two songs, but the management I was working with wanted to do a few more because they liked what I was coming up with. Then they wanted a few more after that so I ended up with a full album, which was not my original intention. But that period did turn out to be pretty productive for sure. I'd been writing for a good few years and I'd just got out of a deal which was for a recording and publishing contract with some songwriters who were Pop writers based in Guildford. I'd spent about eighteen months writing for that, for myself, the contract ended and I wound up keeping all of my songs I'd written in that period. So I was able to just pick from those, write some new material and see what worked best to make an actual album."

A particular highlight of the record is the catchy 'Helena' which has received some radio attention, although Francis had a bit of inadvertent help when composing it.

"Yeah, it came to me in a dream!" he laughs. "I dreamt that Bruce Springsteen was outside my house and he was playing it. I woke up and wrote it all down really quickly... lyrics, chords, everything, and then sat on the song for quite a long time. When it came to doing the album, I looked at it again and it just seemed at home with the rest of the stuff. It was very weird, that's never happened to me before or since – it was like when Paul McCartney dreamt 'Yesterday' and he was having to ask everyone if they knew the song because he didn't realise it was original. It was a little bit like that for me, it must have come from my subconscious but it had me wondering if I'd heard it somewhere before. I did spend a lot of time Googling before I recorded it!"

**By the time you read this Jack Francis will have played an album launch gig in London and a headline show in Dublin. His album is worth hearing – check out [www.lnk.to/JackFrancis](http://www.lnk.to/JackFrancis)**

