

JOHN STEPHAN BAND

Know Your Driver

CD Review by Diane Wells, *Rockin' The Blues From Canada* DJ/Host

"Ride Two Horses" (with mix-master/engineer Jeff "Captain Sound" Taylor adding fullness on back-up vocals) and "Restless" (containing the clue to the CD title), start off this collection of mostly original blues tracks from Seattle singer-songwriter-slide guitarist John Stephan. These two laid-back songs would have fit right in on the B.B. King/Eric Clapton collaboration, "Ridin' With the King".

John's vocals actually have a similar pitch and vibrato to B.B. King's as well as that of Canadian guitarist Buzz Upshaw, which is quite evident on the slow blues "Fat Tuesday [a.k.a. Mardi Gras] Blues". John's keening slide guitar style and Dan's furious keyboards complement each other perfectly on this lyrically insightful song in particular, which addresses one town's determination to overcome the deviant forces of nature and mankind.

His solid team of players consists of Danny ("Pianny") Sturner on keyboards (piano, C-3 and Rhodes organs) and vocals, Tom Roesch, on bass and vocals and Stuart Nyren on drums. The only non-originals are the classic "Spoonful" (credited here to Willie Dixon, but attributed to Howlin' Wolf by other artists), an instrumental "Bobby's Rock" (Elmore James) and "Call My Job" ("Detroit" Emery Williams Jr.)

"Nothing Wrong With Love" didn't really appeal to me, in its lounge-jazziness, but fans of the genre would appreciate the assistance of Keith Lowe in bass and Mike Stone on drums, certainly for the diversity in style alone.

Notable tracks are "Red Light Green Light" and "Big House". The former is an explosive instrumental collaboration among the quartet, which also features Paul Green in harmonica and gives Stuart and Tom the opportunity to fully demonstrate their percussive and rhythmic talents. The latter is a slow blues whose melody called to mind Robert Cray's "I Wonder". Lyrics dealing with prison blues tend to be somewhat predictable, but at the same time, anyone who has ever had the misfortune to end up in one could definitely relate to the sentiments expressed. It's also a song about not appreciating what one has until it's gone.

The surprise entry is "Peace in the Northwest", featuring Drew Warren (a.k.a. M.C. Insane) on an intriguing rap-funk blues fusion which somehow reminded me of Blondie's "Rapture". It also features John Marshall on harmonica and "Rustic" Dave Cameron on wah-wah guitar.