

JOHN STEPHAN BAND

Know Your Driver

CD Review by Malcolm Kennedy, Washington Blues Society Bluesletter

I mentioned John Stephan to someone recently, and they quipped "Yeah, he's good, but he's so loud", to which I replied, "Sure, he can peel paint with the best of them, but you really need to hear his new CD, Know Your Driver". I think John is possibly the most over-looked guitarist in town. This man has chops to spare, from blistering leads to impeccable rhythm guitar skills, and all points in between. John is also an accomplished vocalist with a pleasing, seasoned voice. John's got Tom Roesch on bass, Trev Cutler on drums and Jeff Conlin on keys with special guests Steve Flynn and Eric "Two Scoops" Moore adding piano to two tracks. The opening track, "Working On A Building", gets you moving with it's funky groove and guitar solo. This is followed by the title track, where John sings "you best get acquainted before you trust someone with everything you've got", advice that can be equally applied in relationships, as on the open road. I could write something on just about every one of the dozen tracks (nine of them are originals), but lack the space here. My favorite is "Root Hog Or Die", to which John applies a deft touch on slide guitar. Another I particularly enjoy is "Last Call", a tribute to Albert Collins and Isaac Scott, which John infuses with a fat jazzy tone. "Hard Worker Down" got my attention as John sings about the tough times workers face in today's job market. You will find slashing slide work on "Hard For The Devil" and Willie Dixon's "Down In The Bottom", followed by melancholy acoustic stylings on "Treatment Blues", where John informs us that "blues is a pre-existing condition". John imbues "Trouble Machine" with the ghost of Elmore James as he sings the evil car blues, a tune that reminds me of my own ride. The liner photo of John as a young boy in Palmer, Alaska, in a field, standing next to his horse, Prince, is absolutely priceless. Please pick up this excellent CD. Malcolm Kennedy