

JOHN STEPHAN BAND

Know Your Driver

CD Review by Tim Link

John Stephan's new release is a great collection of songs. I heard John talk about how hard they worked on this CD to make it "all killer, no filler," and I will testify they absolutely succeeded in that mission!! I really like the song sequence, just like the perfect set-list for a live show tailor-made for dancers. The band builds great momentum over the first few songs to the fast driving "Hard for the Devil," before taking a breather with their gospel arrangement of Isaac Scott's "Let My Mind Run Back." They continue the gospel vein with "A Day at a Time" before returning to some hard swing for a couple songs as if it was the climax of a live JSB concert. Then John gives us what might be an encore in a live show: an acoustic solo, followed by the bouncing "Hard Worker Down" and cool-down-lap of "Last Call." Besides the title song, John's legendary slide guitar is well-represented, especially on the traditional "Root Hog or Die," a swinging arrangement of Willie Dixon's "Down in the Bottom," and a fast driving original, "Hard for the Devil." With sincere respect to the late great Isaac Scott, this is my favorite recording of "Let My Mind Run Back," it really conveys the story with emotion. John pays Isaac a second tribute--and also Albert Collins--with the closing "Last Call." On "Treatment Blues," John's musical technique and David's recording technique make John's 1937 Kalamazoo guitar sound as big as a room! The production lets the band shine, driven by Trev's fantastic beat and Tom's in-the-pocket bass, with great keyboards from Jeff and NW icons Steve and "Two Scoops," and featuring the masterful guitar work and heartfelt vocals of John Stephan. If you've heard JSB live, and know how their music compels you to get up and dance, this is a great recording to bridge between their live appearances. If JSB is new to you, then this outstanding CD will be a joyful discovery.