

Ghost Town Blues Band – DARK HORSE

With the album's premiere at this past February's International Blues Challenge in Memphis, hometown boys, Ghost Town Blues Band officially avoided the music business curse of the "sophomore slump." The band's 2010 debut, *Dust the Dust*, was a breath of fresh air to a blues scene relying on played-out Strat licks and robotic snare/hi-hat shuffles. Its frenetic vitality and roots-ripping chaos lifted patrons from their chairs. Dark Horse contains that same level of thrill-ride intensity, with a growing sense of confidence and ability to stretch out musically. Call it maturation, or songwriting growth, but these guys are certainly filling out their musical britches nicely.

Vocalist/guitarist Matt Isbell continues to be the lifeblood of the band, but not its only asset. Isbell's country-hush vocals contain inflections of Texas heat, Mississippi moan, and a whole lot of Memphis class. Guitar-wise, he guides a steamy, Albert King-inspired trippy funk of *Another Lover* with a light wah-wah effect and note-perfect phrasing. Finish *What you Started* struts Rick Estrin-like lyrics. Isbell impishly inciting "if she passes you up/you gotta keep your cool/you can't win the game/by ever playing by the rules." Drummer Preston McEwen and keyboardist Chris Dabbo lay down a decidedly Dr. John groove on *Meet Me at the Juke Joint*, showing a depth of instrumental intuition. The band, rounded out by bassist Dusty Sikes, is augmented on the track by Carl Wolfe on clarinet. Wolfe also arranged all of the album's horn sections.

Before you Hit the Ground has crossover radio appeal, the track's subtle hints of gospel chased with faux adult contemporary melodies and light-in-the-dark contemplation. Isbell's breathy vocal and crackling-glass guitar leads float like a warm mist above it all. A voer of Junior Wells' *Messin' With the Kid* caps off the album with a caucous groove and hellhound harmonica from guest Billy Gibson, whose harp has graced the recordings from the *Daddy Mack Blues Band* to Michael Burks.

With a shoot-from-the-hip Memphis attitude, and a STAX-busting explosion of modern blues vision, GTBB represents a welcome changing of the guard.

-Mark Uricheck Living Blues Magazine
April 2012 pg 52-53

"Ghost Town Blues Band is fast becoming the toast of the town, with a sound that blends the earthen fortitude of Mississippi hill country stomp, with the excitement of hot 'n' heavy electric Chicago blues, wrapped up in a funky package. The Band's debut, *Dust the Dust*, is a menacing groover."

-LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE issue #210-vol.41. #6

"Poised to lead the genre into a brave new future."

-LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE issue #210-vol.41. #6

"Thunder and lightning rhythmic punishment of Led Zeppelin."

-LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE issue #210-vol.41. #6

"The band's youthful, free-flowing vibes, spontaneous sense of interplay, and willingness to assume musical risk also make them simpatico with the current jam-band crowd—an audience that has already embraced the band and is rapidly integrating itself into traditional blues."

-LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE issue #210-vol.41. #6

"A rough, revitalizing blues rave-up. GTBB's *Dust the Dust* shows what can happen when the past is distilled through young sensibilities, voices, and instruments. This is 21st century blues at its best."

-LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE issue #210-vol.41. #6

"Fine blues and plenty of humor. Hits all the traditional Blues notes.

* Chris Evans WRUV

Ghost Town Blues Band "Dust The Dust". Inside Sounds 2010. Otro gratificante álbum de la compañía Inside Sounds. En esta ocasión nos presentan a la banda Ghost Town Blues Band, formación liderada por Matt Isbell, un multi-instrumentista que canta y toca la armónica, el órgano, el clavicordio y la guitarra. Matt es también uno de los co-productores del anterior disco de Daddy Mack, con quien ha estado relacionado profesionalmente durante bastantes años y, junto a Eddie Dattel de Inside Sounds y Kevin Houston también producen este cd, En este primer trabajo Matt Isbell y su banda exploran paso a paso elementos del Memphis blues, del funk y del rock, todo ello en once canciones excitantes y explosivas para una buena parte de todos aquellos que estén dispuestos a escucharlas y que incluyen slows, grooves y shuffles. Una introspectiva muestra del sonido y el espíritu de las bandas que actúan con regularidad por la zona de Beale Street, con un intenso trabajo de guitarra, además de una voz energética y profunda que os atraparà en cuanto la escuchéis. MUY BUENO.

Another Inside Sounds gratifying new release. This time they introduce us The Ghost Town Blues Band, led by Matt Isbell, a multi-instrumentalist who sings and plays harmonica, organ, harpsichord and guitar. Matt has co-produced Daddy Mack's cd just reviewed upside, and for many years has also been professionally involved with him and together with Eddie Dattel from Inside Sounds and Kevin Houston, have produced this cd. In this debut album Matt Isbell and his band carefully explore different Memphis blues elements, funk and rock, in eleven exciting powerful songs for those of you who are willing to listen to, that include slows, grooves and shuffles. An introspective sample of the sound and spirit of the bands that regularly perform in Beale Street area, that adds an intense guitar work, plus a strong, deep voice will immediately catch all listeners. VERY GOOD.

<http://www.lahoradelblues.com/criticas.htm>

Never heard "Come Together" done as a blues, most interesting. They do some other covers, more traditional ones I guess you could say, plus several originals, mostly written by singer / guitarist / harpist / organist / believe it or not clavichordist. You just cannot find that many blues bands with a clavichord (and I have known blues bands that were lucky to have three chords, period). Kevin Houston of Inside Sounds recorded and mixed and Kevin Nix of Ardent Studios mastered. Good stuff.

* NIGHT FLYING Little Rock AR

Based in Memphis, the Ghost Town Blues Band features a fascinating foray across several sonic styles on the debut disc *DUST THE DUST*. The opening tune -- "One More Whiskey" -- is an original shuffling ode to male reliance on strong liquid medicine to endure the seemingly unending demands of domestic incarceration. Dave Coen and Daddy Mack Orr join the Ghostly trio on this irreverent but rockin' tune. The remainder of the CD is divided between cover songs -- the staple of most bar bands across America -- and new numbers composed by lead guitarist and bandmaster Matt Isbell. While dirty dancing to classic oldies is always a worthwhile pursuit, it is the fresh compositions on *Dust The Dust* that are most interesting. The title song is an inspired blues-rock number with thunder in the lyrics and lightning throughout the melody. "Suga Mama", another new Isbell tune, is a sensational bluesy salute to a sugar cane sweetie whose powerful loving sparks amnesia. The band's zeal of shapely chicks continues in the upbeat rocker "Comfortable Way". While Isbell isn't Cole Porter or Johnny Mercer, his lyrics are humorously creative and his rhythm structures are topflight. The Ghost Town Blues Band is comfortable with all sorts of traditional pop and down home blues songs. They tackle "Come Together" (imagine listening to The Beatles on steroids), "C. C. Rider", "Baby Please Don't Go", "I Put A Spell On You" (in Creedence Clearwater Revival fashion rather than in the more exotic, bumbling, chaotic Screamin' Jay Hawkins style), and "Goin' Down" (more influenced by Gary Moore than by Freddie King). This is an album that begs for high decibel playing in a spacious room with the capacity for uninhibited footstompin' and tailfeather shakin! These eleven delicious platters deserve a follow-up helping.

*B. Lee Cooper, Ph.D. -Blue Suede News Magazine

Ghost Town Blues Band does blues and some more. Writing good originals, they shine on their totally creative covers and that's what really caught my attention. The opener "One More Whiskey" puts these Beale St. regulars in the mood. From there, geographically, it's only a short trip to the North MS hills where they plant the MacLen classic "Come Together" into a totally different world! Matt Isbell's axe and vocals are as dusty and strong as a Parchman Farm sentence and the rhythm duo of Dusty Sikes on drums and Preston McEwen on bass beats like a summer sun. Visited by Big Daddy Mack and Davis Coen on the 1st cut, it is a runaway steam train plowing down the valley of death. "CC Rider" funks urban smooth while "Baby Please Don't Go" shuffles like an inmate on death row only to have 'Old Sparky' let it fly on Screaming Jay Hawkins "I Put A Spell On You." Next time you're stepping out in Memphis, enter the Beale St. Tap room and you may just be transported by the Ghost Town Blues Band.

* 7 snaves Pearl River-Mike Zito

"This is really good and different." With that said, it's time I ate a little crow and told you exactly what I think about the band's *Dust The Dust*; an album that, based on my research (which may or may not be reliable) is their only release to date. The trio of Dusty Sikes on bass, Preston McEwen on drums, and Matt Isbell on everything else, has only been together since 2009. Isbell, who's been playing since the age of 12, (and co-produced *Daddy Mack Blues Band*'s latest effort, *Bluesfinger*) also wrote half of the songs on the album. He handles lead vocals for the band, plays guitar, harmonica, organ, and the clavichord in various spots on the CD. "One More Whiskey" starts off the set of 11 songs, with Isbell singing the first verse, then welcoming Davis Coen and Daddy Mack Orr to each sing one, as well. The song is a Chicago-style number, filled with great amplified harp playing from Isbell and some clever songwriting. It's a fun tune that doesn't make you think, but certainly isn't elementary, either. It's interesting to note the addition of Coen, here, too. He's got one of the hotter albums at Blues radio, right now, as his record, *Jukebox Classic* enjoys top 10 rotation, according to *Roots Music Report*. The band lets their Rock in fluence shine through on a take of The Beatles classic "Come Together." I will be the first to admit that I hate covers of this song. *Abbey Road* is probably my all-time favorite record, and I genuinely feel like they made the definitive version of this song when they recorded it all those years ago. That being said, the way GTBB arranged the song as a kind of dirty, north Mississippi, slide heavy rocker sounds great. The song whips by at a breakneck pace, and you are left feeling rather impressed with the job they did. I did not hate this cover. The band does a great job putting their own stamp on the covers throughout *Dust The Dust*, which also includes a rather bouncy version of "C.C. Rider," featuring some great work on the kit by McEwen, and a wonderful swell of organs from guest Chris Stephenson, who also features on the organ on an additional four tracks, all originals. Other cover tunes include Rocking versions of *Screamin' Jay Hawkins'* "I Put A Spell On You," Don Nix's "Goin' Down," and Big Joe Williams' "Baby Please Don't Go" that reminds me a little of the version that *Aerosmith* did for their *Honkin' On Bobodisc*. I dig the covers, but I really get into the original material provided by GTBB on *Dust The Dust*. The two halves each bring something to the table, with the arrangements on the cover tunes being the standout for them, and the songwriting being the best part of the original material. That's not to say the musicianship of the originals suffers, however. The title cut, written by friend Kenny Hays, is a crunchy Blues-Rocker that fits the framework of the band well. Stephenson guests on organ here, but Isbell's guitar is front and center, from an instrumental standpoint. "Suga' Mama" is the second of Matt Isbell's songwriting credits on *Dust The Dust*, and one of my favorites from the album. The song, a slow Blues, really excels in every department. The songwriting is very well done, with the common theme of a sinfully sweet lady. Isbell growls the lyrics and plays his guitar with beautiful tone at times, turning on the wah for the solo. "Comfortable Way" is another cool original, with some fantastic organ work by Stephenson. Again, I can't help but mention the songwriting here, as Isbell does a wonderful job describing his love of a t-shirt and jeans kind of gal. "Give Me A Minute" is the next original composition. At this point, you start to catch on to the fact that the arrangements for the band's own material doesn't stray too awful far from one another. This song is a lot like "Comfortable Way," and equally as entertaining. I will add that "Give Me A Minute" features, in my opinion, some of Matt Isbell's best vocal work. "Move On" is the final original song on *Dust The Dust*. It's a story song in the vein of "Take the Money and Run." Sikes and McEwen really lock in behind Isbell, and do a great job keeping this one on the rails in a fun and entertaining way. Some standout work by the rhythm section, here.

Standout Tracks: "One More Whiskey," "Suga' Mama," and "Come Together"

* http://www.fulltimeblues.com/FullTime_Bluesletter-1December2010.html

Midtown Memphis is a haven of indie-rock, producing quality bands from Big Star to Big Ass Truck to Lucero. I've gone out of my way to not mention the blues – not because of any disdain toward the genre; I just want to hype things other than the music of Memphis that's most associated with Beale Street. Then I get a phone call from a young musician who is well-versed in the genre, and I soon realize there are only two or three degrees of separation via cousins from myself and said musician. I meet the guy, he comes to my town and I realize he has done his homework, able to dip into the rich catalog of Memphis blues written by the forefathers, and holds his own on his instrument. That musician is guitarist and vocalist Matt Isbell, who with the Ghost Town Blues Band will return to Durango, playing tonight at the Derailed Saloon and Saturday at The Summit. It's a band that could fit right in with The Allman Brothers, North Mississippi All-Stars or any funk rock jam band.

Ghost Town is rounded out with Preston McEwen on drums and Chris Dabbo on keyboards. For this tour the band is without a bass player, but not by choice. Isbell joked that they left him at a rest stop on the way from Memphis. Truth is, the bass player couldn't get off work. Here's a reality; many touring musicians hold down "real" jobs, as in the case of Dusty Sikes. However, what the band has in Dabbo is a versatile keyboard player who can improvise the bass parts on his instrument. It's not homage to the music of the Doors, who never bothered to add a bassist; it's just making due with what they've got. "It was a question of seeing if the new guy is that good," Isbell joked. "He's an awesome jazz piano player and he's been training his left hand to go along with the drummer."

Memphis is fertile ground for young musicians, playing a major role in Isbell's upbringing. He began playing guitar at 12. He then crashed in on a music-mentoring organization named for the infamous Stax records.

"Stax had a young people's rhythm section at the Stax Music Academy," Isbell said. "I wasn't enrolled in it, but I heard they were looking for a young guitar player. I bought some records and learned everything I could."

That led to stints in funk bands, which paved the way to Isbell's involvement in blues writing, playing and production. He's now frequently recruited to produce other records, while his band often serves as session musicians on others' recordings.

As a music fan, Isbell embraces the music of Memphis, in addition to modern music as well as the classic blues, soul and R&B made famous in the South. "I love everything from Warren Haynes to Queens of the Stone Age, but I want to hear Booker T and the MGs every day," he said.

Bryant Liggett - Durango Herald

Bryant Liggett is a freelance writer and KDUR station manager in Durango, CO.

Saustarkes Blues Rock Trio aus Memphis. Die Jungs wissen zu rocken, hart aber herzlich, rauh und mit Swampy-Feeling. Und ein paar Jam-Rock Elemente bringen sie auch noch ganz locker unter.

Sounds Best -Denmark