

Guitar Red

GUITAR RED: LIGHTNIN' IN A BOTTLE (BACKSPACE)

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Willie Dixon said, "As long as you got lyin' and cheatin', pain and sufferin', you'll always have The Blues. It can't go 'out of style' because it's part of human nature...". So, keeping those profound words of wisdom in mind we shouldn't really be too surprised when an artist such as **Guitar Red** emerges. While it's true most younger Blacks will vent via Rap in the post-Democracy World we live in, older Blacks remember The Blues as the only way to convey pain and anguish. While a trip through any of the Southern cities (populaces over 250,000) would usually turn up at least a couple of guitar or harmonica playin' street performers who had a repertoire with at least some Blues in it, as recently as the 1990s. No one can say with certainty as to why it has now become an absolute rarity amongst professions, but, crack cocaine is certainly to blame for an environment that features brutal and violent robberies for the sake of 2 or 3 dollars (or less!) and many cities have adopted extreme anti-music, anti-street performance ordinance/laws. Having to sing and play whilst worrying about robbery and/or a Police beating certainly would inhibit growth in that profession! While the World and especially, the Blues World, owes the Music Maker label endless support and praise for seeking out and recording many of the remaining Southern Blues purveyors (and let us not forget Broke & Hungry Records, who focus on Mississippi...) the discovery and recording of Guitar Red's debut CD proves once again that there's always 'someone' right around the next corner with something to say or sing and the afore-mentioned labels certainly don't have a monopoly when it comes to discovering bona-fide Blues talent. Brutal honesty is what **Billy Christian Walls** a.k.a. Guitar Red openly conveys and it is the fuel that propels the Greatest of Blues performers. Walls doesn't hide the facts, instead he incorporates them into his Art and identity. He acknowledges being homeless for much of the last decade thanks to a long-standing addiction problem that has waylaid his chances at a serious career in Blues (till now) but everyone who has seen him playing in the streets of Decatur, Georgia has been impressed if not mesmerized. Backspace Records, a local Georgia label formed by **Big Sky** guitarist **Ben Rowell**, quickly and enthusiastically decided Guitar Red was the only choice as debut release and Rowell's belief in Red has paid off with this wonderful album and overwhelming critical acclaim from the Music Media. The first thing that hits you is Red's guitar mastery and his sense of rhythm which is relentless, as he launches into "Box Car No. 9" a tune that is guaranteed to have listeners smiling and saying "Wow!" "Lips Poked Out" is another gem in a more traditional Blues sense and despite Red's unusual upbringing (childhood in New Jersey before heading South) he sounds 100% Pure Southern Blues authenticity-wise, more so than 90% of the under-40 artists who call themselves 'Blues' these

days. One disturbing element that raises its ugly head when perusing Red's biography is the frequent exploitation of Red's stunning guitar work by 'Superstar' bands who finagled contributions to their recordings (and video footage?) by taking advantage of Red's dire circumstances. Red complains of being given 50 bucks and a bottle of Jack in exchange for his brilliant talents. Who says the 'Old Days' of exploitation are long gone? Perhaps this CD will give Red a Bigger Platform to address his victimization and shine some light on an ego-fuelled 'Rock Star' who is one of the biggest Buffoons in Rock History notwithstanding his treatment of struggling addicts. Anyhow, we should all Thank God that Blues (for the most part) is still free of such disgusting people and that Talent still rules over image-making machinery. "Ain't Got Nobody But Myself" is a stark sketch of Guitar Red's Journey of Trouble and Pain and I defy anyone to show me a comparable artist on the current scene. The man strums/picks acoustic guitar like no one else and his ability to turn daily experiences into eloquent songs is a gift from God. "Three Legged Dog Blues" ("my old lady treats me like a three-legged dog...") is as good as it gets for Pure Country Blues. "Chain Gang Blues" is a more sombre song about his family's travels and petty crime fuelled by poverty. Red sings to get the pain out of his system after finding-out his Mother had died while he was imprisoned. Prison ain't the place to grieve properly. "Out Of My Mind" is a perfect finger picked Blues and it is easy to picture Red wowing Festival audiences all over Europe (and elsewhere). "Decatur Boy Blues" is an up-tempo Stomp Blues that brings back memories of **Fred McDowell** and even early **John Lee Hooker**. "I Believe" is a Pop-style tune that shows that Red still clings to Hope despite all the bad cards he's been dealt. "Song About A Jimi Hendrix Song" is a magnificent foray into a topic that seems to have touched Red quite profoundly (no, it's not a "Voodoo Chile" take-off...). The CD closes with Red talking (and singing) in the studio and expressing what this all means to him. I'm inclined to declare "Lightnin' In A Bottle" the Acoustic/Country Blues Album of The Year, and when I really think about it, it's been 3 or 4 years since anything this important, entertaining and moving has come out of North American Blues. 6 Bottles for the epitome of Blues Truth. May Guitar Red get the respect, peace of mind and accolades he so long deserved.