

Blues in Britain Album Review 2024 by John Bottomly (transcript)

Paul Benjaman has long been a perfect torch bearer, proving the Tulsa Sound' is not only alive and licking but also timeless. Here is further proof, a set lovingly recorded in the city's renowned and restored Church Studio, once home of Leon Russell's Shelter Records, the heartbeat of a distinctive sound which first blew through the southern music scene in the early. 70s and then around the world.

Blending blues, rock, country and a dose of sweet soul into a swampy but solid, groove-laden mix, creating something truly distinctive. The sound was soon firmly championed internationally by Clapton and its influence has never really left him.

But those who wish to revisit Tulsa town classics or add their own spin can't simply crank up the volume or add other 'extras'. They can only do so successfully by digging deeper into the existing vibe, while preserving it. In other words. JJ Cale's approach may have been (deceptively) 'laid back' but he was already the finished article fully 'hot-wired'.

Benjaman knows this in spades. Here he and his top-

notch band bring us driving rhythms, soulful shuffle, sweet side and slow blues, all delivered with genuinely pleasing authentic drawled vocals. often accompanied by blistering. up-front lead guitar or the sudden brief thunder of mighty drums. 'Hot Dice' features controlled hard driving (perhaps south across the desert to hook up with likeminded bearded neighbours?) - its riff-powered chorus would suggest dangerously increasing speed if it wasn't already moving at full-tilt. 'Local Honey is pure, ultra-smooth funk while Leon and his studio are celebrated in the pane-punched 'Church Of Space And Time' complete with gospel girl backing vocals.

A gentle but quick shuffle through 'Outlaw Land' soon becomes a ride through JJ Cale badlands while 'Detroit Train' rolls on an insistent riff and powerful drums, building up to explosive lead guitar which in the end dominates the mix completely. Finale 'Blues Skyline' is another slow ride in Cale country, complete with sweeping lap steel, courtesy of Benjamin's guitar sidekick Jesse Aycock.

Benjamin's guitar virtuosity. original songs which do so much more than respect the past. plus his recognition of the value of constant variety all elevate this collection way beyond anything

'retro' to being something both pertinent and special.