

Skyla Burrell Band - Blues Scars (2014)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 27 August 2018 14:12 -

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1 Blues Scars 03:42 2 Bluesin' for your Lovin' 02:47 3 Trouble 02:15 4 Stuck in a Struggle 02:48 5 Love Letter in Blue 03:32 6 Livin' for the Blues 03:16 7 Shut You Down 02:28 8 Life Storms 03:00 9 World Wide Blues 03:09 10 Full Time Gambler 03:28 11 Jace 04:06 12 Juke Jointin' Tonight 02:22 13 6 Mile Cemetery Road 04:38 14 21st Century Blues 03:00 15 Bad Business 03:50
Skyla Burrell - vocals, guitar Mark Tomlinson - guitars Charlie Hilbert - bass Ezell Jones - drums

Originally from California, Skyla Burrell now calls Pennsylvania home though she must spend little time there as she and her band tour a lot. The hard working band is Skyla on guitar and vocals, Mark Tomlinson on guitar, Michelle Lucas on bass and Ezell Jones Jr. on drums. The CD was recorded in Maryland with Todd Stotler at the controls and co-producing with Skyla and Mark. All the material is original, Skyla being the writer of five tracks, Mark nine and the two combining on one. The styles covered include blues, funk and rock.

The range of material can be seen from the opening five cuts. Opener "Blues Scars" is a funky blues with Skyla's voice equally plaintive and commanding. In terms of guitars the sleeve notes helpfully tell us that on all tracks Skyla plays the first lead, Mark the second, so we can assume that the well-judged solo here is Mark. "Bluesin' For Your Lovin'" takes a SRV riff as its base and that twangy Texas rhythm is great, a really attractive tune. Skyla sings of how she hopes that her electric guitar will help attract the object of her desires as the solo utilises some nifty slide work. "Trouble" is a short but sweet rocker with strong drumming and a rock and roll solo and "Stuck In A Struggle" is a fast-paced tune with some exciting guitar work from both Skyla and Mark. Changing the pace Skyla's "Love Letter In Blue" is a ballad which opens with some lovely tone from Skyla and the guitar interplay recalls the Allmans in gentler mode. The song also lets us hear how well Skyla can adopt her vocals to a quieter number.

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“Livin’ For The Blues” has some strong slide work with lyrics that reveal how a good blues band sustains itself when on the road: “when we get to that Tennessee line, gonna get some of that good moonshine”! Co-write “Shut You Down” is a direct warning to Skyla’s man that if he pushes her around Skyla will have to get rid of him. Skyla’s “Life Storms” is an insistent shuffle with a storming solo while “World Wide Blues” has a latin edge to the playing with drummer Ezell setting an interesting rhythm over which the guitarists play some echoey chords and stirring solos, another strong track. Slide is featured on “Full Time Gambler” in which Skyla tells us that her lover’s occupation is a problem for her as he is out at the tables every night. “Jace” is a slower number with lots of spacey guitar riffs and the very short (2.22) “Juke Jointin’ Tonight” is a fast-paced shuffle which you wish would go on longer as the band gets a head of steam going, the guitar solo meshing well with the rhythm riff. The longest track here is “6 Mile Cemetery Road” (4.38), Skyla’s impassioned vocal being matched by some emotive playing from Mark on a slow blues. The album closes with two of Mark’s songs in “21st Century Blues” and “Bad Business”: the former rocks along well on a catchy rhythm riff; the latter closes the album with a stop/start rocker, both tunes again demonstrating the togetherness of the band behind Skyla’s commanding vocal.

There is little or no filler here as the band has kept all the tunes brief and to the point with only two cuts going over the four minute mark. It is great to find a band that is confident enough in its own abilities to do an all-original album: this is The Skyla Burrell Band’s fifth album and they have never recorded a cover – a fine accolade. “Blues Scars” has enough variety and stylish playing to appeal to most blues lovers and is well worth investigating.

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