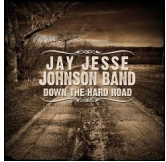


Jay Jesse Johnson - Down The Hard Road (2017)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 19 December 2018 14:11 - Last Updated Friday, 26 February 2021 19:51

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1 *Down the Hard Road* 5:06 2 *Anyway the Wind Blows* 5:10 3 *The Blues Is a Damn Sad Thing* 5:51 4 *Born Under a Bad Sign* 4:28 5 *Drive Me Home* 5:05 6 *Tears of the Angels* 6:11 7 *Guilty of the Blues* 4:47 8 *Bull in the Barn* 2:33 9 *Beer Bottle Blues* 4:26 10 *The Messiah Will Come Again* 5:16 Jay Jesse Johnson - vocals, guitar Reed Bogart - bass Jeff "Smokey" Donaldson - drums Lee Evans - Hammond B3 organ

Road warrior Jay Jesse Johnson delivers a potent album of blues-rock on this album, the sixth solo release in his catalog. But that should come as no surprise to fans of the vocalist/guitarist. He possesses a pedigree that includes work with several of the biggest names in mainstream music.

Born in rural Indiana and with a deep interest in country, rock and the blues, he's been playing professionally since his teen years. At 18, he relocated to New York where he became guitarist for the Arc Angel, a Connecticut-based rock band that was signed to CBS Records and produced the tune "Tragedy," which was in regular rotation on MTV in 1983.

Later in the decade, he joined the hard-rock ensemble Deadringer, which produced one album on the Grunge/BMG imprint and included four Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame inductees in the lineup: Dennis Dunaway and Neal Smith from the Alice Cooper Band, Joe Bouchard from Blue Oyster Cult and vocalist Charlie Huhn, who's worked with both Foghat and Gary Moore.

A powerful guitarist who remains steadily in the blues idiom with rapid-fire slide and single-note runs, Johnson made his solo debut in 2004 with the release of *Strange Imagination*. His 2009 album, *Play That Damn Guitar*, was included by *Classic Rock Magazine* when it featured an

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article entitled The Hottest In New Blues Rock. This CD is a follow up to Jay Jesse's well received 2015 release, Set The Blues On Fire.

Like that one, Down The Hard Road blazes, too, through a set of eight Johnson originals and two covers. Recorded at Cotton Run Studios in Hamilton, Ohio, it features keyboard player Lee Evans, bassist Reed Bogart and drummer Jeff "Smokey" Donaldson with guest appearances by Jimmy D. Rogers for two cuts on piano and Jim Norcross for one on alto and baritone sax in a set guaranteed to blow the windows out of any roadhouse.

A bare-bones slide solo kicks off the opening title cut, "Down The Hard Road," before erupting into a boogie as Jay Jesse describes being only flesh-and-blood and working his life away a day at a time, toiling along what any musician recognizes as a difficult path, partying only when he gets paid. It's a tale enhanced with insights gathered from his father and a preacher, too. The pure blues, "Anyway The Wind Blows," carries the message forward and features Johnson laying down searing single-note runs.

The tempo slows for another burner, "The Blues Is A Damn Sad Thing," delivered from the position of a man staring out the window on a rainy day and dealing with being dead broke and with a lady who's gone for good. Co-written by Booker T. Jones and William Bell and a major hit for Albert King, "Born Under A Bad Sign" follows before a brief, bright keyboard solo introduces the rollicking "Drive Me Home." It begins as a ballad, but quickly picks up steam as the singer requests: "When I get tired of drinkin'/Will somebody drive me home?" It's augmented with more flashy work on the fretboard.

Thunder and a slow-paced guitar solo initiate "Tears Of The Angels," which deals with feelings of loneliness on a rainy night before Johnson adapts a Delta feel to open the original, "Guilty Of The Blues," before achieving a medium-fast shuffle about living life without emotion after losing his woman. Jay Jesse's country roots come to the fore in "Bull In The Barn," which features light-speed single-note picking throughout, before "Beer Bottle Blues" sings the praise of a pretty lady who whispers in his year. The set closes with a rendition of Roy Buchanan's gospel-rich burner "The Messiah Will Come Again."

Available through iTunes and CDBaby, Down The Hard Road is right up your alley if your tastes run to rock-flavored blues. In a world rife with shredders, it's a treat to listen to someone like Jay Jesse who remains faithful to the root amid the musical flames he produces throughout. ---Marty Gunther, bluesblastmagazine.com

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