John Campbell - Howlin' Mercy (1993)

1. Ain't Afraid Of Midnight - 5:16
2. When The Levee Breaks - 6:08
3. Down In The Hole - 4:53 *play*
4. Look What Love Can Do - 5:08
5. Saddle Up My Pony - 7:15
6. Firin' Line - 5:36
7. Love's Name - 4:17 *play*
8. Written In Stone - 5:12
9. Wiseblood - 5:13
10. Wolf Among The Lambs - 6:12

John Campbell - Guitar, Slide Guitar, Vocals
Zonder Kennedy - Guitar
Jimmy Pettit - Bass;
Davis McLarty – Drums

Guests:
Jamie Dardanis (percussion),
Elvin Diablo, Mid Memphis Rhythm Section,
Antoine Salley, Madison Cooper, Edwin Ravel.

Slide guitarist and songwriter John Campbell was a man driven. Before his untimely death, he had pulled out all the stops to play a music that was full of mystery, pathos, dark energy, and plenty of rock & roll strut 'n' growl; it could be frightening in its intensity. Howlin' Mercy was the last of two recordings for Elektra, and is by far the heavier of the two. As displayed by its opening track, "Ain't Afraid of Midnight," Campbell was a considerable slide guitarist who owed his skill to the bluesmen like Lightnin' Hopkins (from his home state of Texas), Fred McDowell, and a few others. His solos are wrangling, loose, and shambolic; they are undeniably dark and

heavy. They cut with elegance across the rhythms and melodies in his songs. This is followed by a version of "When the Levee Breaks" that is a direct counter to and traditional reclamation of the Led Zep version and places it back firmly in the blues canon. As evidenced by "Saddle Up My Pony," Campbell was equally skilled at transmuting the Delta blues and framing them in a very modern context without taking anything away from their chilling, spare power and poetry. And in the modern rock and blues idiom, he was a master, as evidenced by the stomp and roll of "Firin' Line"; "Written in Stone"; and the epic, swamp blues cum overdriven scorcher "Wolf Among the Lambs." This final moment is perhaps Campbell's greatest on record in that it embodies all of his strengths and reveals none of them to be contradictions.

Campbell was living and playing in New York at the end of his life, and that city's conflicting energies are reflected in his playing and writing. They needed each other, it seems, and if ever there were a Delta blues record that visited the Texas roadhouse and settled on the streetcorners of NYC, this is it. Awesome. ---Thom Jurek allmusic.com

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