Jimmy Johnson - Every Road Ends Somewhere (1987)

01. Roots Of All Evil. 02. My Baby By My Side. 03. Blue Monday. 04. Rock And A Hard Place. 05. Street You Live On. 06. Ain't No Way. 07. Black Night. 08. Cut You Loose. 09. End Of The Road. Jimmy Johnson (vocals, guitar). Luther Allison (guitar). John Beverly Randolph Jr. (guitar). Paul Cerra (tenor saxophone). Claude Egéa (trumpet, flugelhorn). Frank Lacy (trombone). Kenny Lee (piano, Wurlitzer piano, Fender Rhodes piano, Hammond B3 organ). Anthony Morris (bass). Willian Ellis (drums). Arnaud Franck (percussion).

Jimmy Johnson’s debut for the German Ruf label alternately strikes creative sparks and smothers the flame. Working from a base that is as much soul as blues, the former Grammy Award nominee employs an uptown approach to both rhythm and backbeat, relying heavily on Kenny Lee’s vamping Hammond organ and a small, tight horn section. All of this is set against Johnson’s tart single-note guitar style and keening tenor vocals.

Johnson wrote seven of the album’s ten songs, and he is at his best when the words crack together with humor and wisdom. Such ditties as "Roots of All Evil," "Ain’t No Way" and "End of the Road" (featuring some energizing lead guitar from guest star Luther Allison) entertain as well as instruct his listeners on the merits of a good heart and a positive attitude. The former Magic Sam and Freddie King sideman also dishes out some tasty R&B with a reggae edge on "The Street You Live On," but this is the only diversion from a studio formula hampered by repetition.

Johnson and company seem unable to let go of a good groove and pad out nearly every tune with extra riffs and some lengthy same-sounding solos. This not only blunts the impact of the really good songs, it stagnates the slighter material. A little focus and restraint would have gone a long way toward improving these solid cover versions of "Cut You Loose" and "Black Night," yet they too are rendered tedious and overlong.

A blues veteran of Johnson's caliber is always worth a listen, but this outing would probably sit best with longtime fans rather than first-timers. — Ken Burke, bluesaccess.com

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