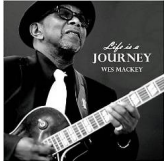


## Wes Mackey – Life Is A Journey (2013)

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01. *Journey* (3:01) 02. *Thank You Carolina* (4:14) 03. *Shine A Light (Dark Night Blues)* (4:11) 04. *Ganges Blues* (3:36) 05. *Blue In Paris* (4:33) 06. *I Got The Blues* (3:52) 07. *Lines (Remix)* (3:16) 08. *Hellhound On My Trail* (4:44) 09. *Rapperswill* (3:24) 10. *Footsie Brown* (3:08) 11. *Blues Rules* (3:32) 12. *Dancing With The Angels* (3:55) 13. *Train* (4:16) 14. *Blues Carry Me Home* (4:38) 15. *Life Is A Journey* (3:32) Wes Mackey (singer, guitarist and bass pedals player) Footsie Brown and Oliver Conway (guitars and bass pedals) Jack Lavin and Cameron Hood (bass) Peter “Sweet Tooth” Selnar and Dave “Hurricane” Hoerl (harp) Chris Nordquist and Shambunata Daniluk (drums) Dave Webb (piano and organ)

The concept and imagery of physical movement is one of the fundamental elements of the American national identity, from the underpinnings of the country’s Manifest Destiny (“Go West, young man”; “Westward Expansion”) to the cowboy myth of a stranger arriving to clean up dirty towns before riding off into the sunset (“Shane”; “High Plains Drifter”); from novels such as Kerouac’s *On The Road* to songs such as Robert Johnson’s “Sweet Home Chicago” or Muddy Waters’ “Louisiana Blues”. Travel is both an escape from what you leave behind as well as an opportunity for adventure, excitement and reward.

Travel is also the central theme of Wes Mackey’s new CD, *Life Is A Journey*. The name of the album itself is an obvious indication, as are many of the song titles, such as “Blue In Paris”, “Ganges Blues”, “Train” and “Blues Carry Me Home”. However, just as the album title suggests both a physical and a spiritual journey, so the lyrics themselves avoid cliché by either adopting a similar double meaning (in “Train”, the runaway train is actually the singer’s own life going off the rails) or through the international aspects of many of the lyrics. In “Blue In Paris”, which also features Dave Crowe’s appropriately atmospheric accordion, Mackey sings: “What can you do, when you’re bluer than blue? You’ve been so many places, you’ve seen so many faces. The only place that comes to mind that never fails the test of time, is Paris.” Likewise, the extraordinary “Ganges Blues” beautifully summons up images of India, although the particular highlight of that song is the interplay between Mackey’s blues guitar and the sitar of Andrew Kim

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of Delhi 2 Dublin. It's a stunning piece of music.

Mackey is one of those interesting characters who – despite a musical résumé going back 40 years and including gigs with the likes of Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters – has somehow flown under the radar when it comes to wider acknowledgement.

Born in South Carolina in 1942, Mackey moved to Augusta, Georgia when he was 17 and soon started playing in local juke joints. He has since spent much of his adult life on the road. After working his way around the United States in various bands and playing a wide variety of types of music, he married a Canadian girl and moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia. After the breakdown of the marriage, he stopped playing music and started wandering (and partying) across Canada before he finally fetched up in Vancouver and started playing blues again. The 72 year old has now released his latest CD, and a very impressive offering it is.

While the travel theme is dominant in the songs, the album isn't a lyrical one-trick pony. Mackey also addresses common blues themes of love, loss and partying. Musically, the songs tend towards the gentler, soul side of the blues, with relaxed grooves being the primary order of the day. Even the upbeat songs like "I Got The Blues" and "Train" are played with restraint and control. Mackey sings with a warm, rough-hewn, gospel-inflected voice and he is also a tasteful guitarist from the "less is more" school. His playing strongly suggests the influence of BB King, while also containing hints of jazz in his refusal to rely exclusively on the minor and major pentatonic scales.

Mackey is a solid songwriter and interpreter, not afraid to experiment. "Thank You Carolina" starts with the ghostly voices of a work gang before the instruments kick in, taking the song in a more modern direction. Mackey's voice, however, has a worn-down, melancholy timbre that perfectly straddles the two eras.

If you like your blues smooth and polished, with intelligent, mature song-writing, you will find a lot to enjoy in Life Is A Journey. ---Rhys Williams, bluesblastmagazine.com

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