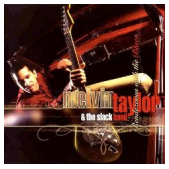
Melvin Taylor – Rendez Vous with The Blues (2002)



1. Comin' Home Baby 2. Help The Poor 3. Rendezvous With The Blues 4. I'm The Man Down There 5. Chill Out/The Healer 6. Help Me 7. Five Women 8. Blue Jean Blues 9. Eclipse 10. Black Queen Personnel: Melvin Taylor (vocals, acoustic & electric guitars); Lucky Peterson (guitar, Hammond B-3 organ, keyboards); Mato Nanji (guitar); Jerry Mallet (tenor saxophone); Sidney Janise (baritone saxophone); Scott Thompson, Marshall Cyr (trumpet); Dave Smith (bass); Steve Potts (drums, congas, percussion); Brian Brignac (congas, percussion)

Rendezvous With the Blues marks another step in the normalization of Melvin Taylor. With Lucky Peterson on keyboards, Taylor is much more the featured lead guitarist in a straight-band context that too often finds him fighting for room to move in the full arrangements. He takes a jazzy lead on the opening "Coming Home Baby," but that runs counter to the measured, mid-tempo groove that dominates the first three tracks and seems like a move to court the contemporary rock-blues audience. So does some of the material -- no originals, with ZZ Top, Stephen Stills, and Carlos Santana's tribute to John Lee Hooker in the songwriter credits on one side and Charles Singleton and Prince for contemporary black funk/rock relevance on the other. Horns kick in to punctuate the slinky, clavinet-anchored funk on "I'm the Man Down There," but Taylor's solo gets cluttered up by a duel with Peterson (on guitar here). Taylor is better-served when he escapes the rock beat straitjacket on "Tribute to John Lee Hooker" -- the Latin-tinged rhythms give his guitar more freedom to float and sting. ZZ Top's slow "Blue Jean Blues" definitely picks things up with blitz distortion solos and nice dynamics, but "Help Me" leaves behind Sonny Boy Williamson's haunted train groove for a plodding mid-tempo blues that winds up anonymous. Eric Gales' instrumental "Eclipse" goes so far down the Wes Montgomery mellow jazz blues instrumental route it could almost be a quiet storm/fuzak format candidate. And Prince's "Five Women" sounds like disjointed parts with a group that never really coheres, while Stills' "Black Queen" is transformed into a rhythmic stomp that goes nowhere. Almost all the songs have moments, but Rendezvous With the Blues is spotty, mostly because Taylor seems to be struggling to force his way through busy arrangements and a less-than-inspired choice of songs. The disc wants to have it both ways -- to distinguish Melvin Taylor as a more versatile and contemporary bluesman, but then saddles him with a regulation-issue sound that

reins in the freewheeling guitar solos that are his greatest asset. --Don Snowden, Rovi

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