Mark Lanegan Band - Blues Funeral (2012)

1 The Gravedigger's Song 3:43 2 Bleeding Muddy Water 6:17 3 Gray Goes Black 4:10 4 St Louis Elegy 4:33 5 Riot In My House 3:53 6 Ode To Sad Disco 6:23 7 Phantasmagoria Blues 3:15 8 Quiver Syndrome 4:03 9 Harborview Hospital 4:31 10 Leviathan 4:22 11 Deep Black Vanishing Train 3:06 12 Tiny Grain Of Truth 7:07 Drums – Jack Irons Guitar, Bass, Keyboards, Vocals, Percussion, Mixed By, Producer – Alain Johannes Vocals, Written-By – Mark Lanegan + Guitar – David Catching, Duke Garwood (2, 11, 12) Guitar – David Rosser (3, 6) Guitar – Joshua Homme (5) Bass – Martyn Lenoble (7, 9) Guitar, Vocals [Singing] – Chris Goss (10) Keyboards – Aldo Struyf (8, 9) Guitar, Vocals – Chris Goss (10) Vocals – Shelley Brien (8)

Those who liked the moodier, more atmospheric material on the last Mark Lanegan Band offering, 2004's Bubblegum, will find much to enjoy on Blues Funeral -- an album that has little to do with blues as a musical form. Lanegan has been a busy man since Bubblegum. In the nearly eight ensuing years, he's issued three records with Isobel Campbell, joined Greg Dulli in the Gutter Twins, guested on albums by the Twilight Singers and UNKLE, and was the lead vocalist on most of the last two Soulsavers offerings. Produced by Eleven guitarist Alain Johannes (who also fulfills that role here as well as playing bass, keyboards, and percussion), Blues Funeral finds Lanegan in a musically ambitious place. His voice is deeper, smokier, but more restrained, even on the few straight-up rockers. The grain in his voice is more pronounced, offering a sense of coiled menace on each track, one that is ready at all points to explode the musical confines these songs erect, and to overwhelm them all. To his credit, he never does. While the album is sequenced seamlessly, with varying textures and dynamics, there are standouts. Of the two tracks that feature the mysterious guitarist Duke Garwood, "Bleeding Muddy Water" is a mournful, midtempo dirge. Dulli's guest spot on backing vocals on the Ennio Morricone-inspired spaghetti westernism of "St Louis Elegy" is beautifully rendered; Joshua Homme lends his guitar to the over-the-rails rock in "Riot in My House." Electronics also have a prominent place on Blues Funeral -- and not merely as atmospheric add-ons: "Ode to Sad Disco," melds a four-on-the-floor drum loop to high lonesome guitars as Lanegan offers a drifting, surreal, quasi-mystical narrative worthy of Alejandro Jodorowsky. "Harborview Hospital"'s meld of keyboards and guitars touch on U2's Joshua Tree period and late-'80s New

Order. Weird as that reads, if anything, these expansive retro sonics provide Lanegan's raspy baritone a foil, with added texture that lends not only a sense of beauty, but walks out the tension between elegiac lyric and harmonic lyricism. "Leviathan" is the only thing that really approaches blues here, though it's via a 21st century approximation of Led Zeppelin's darker, airier moments on Physical Graffiti. Blues Funeral, while an adventurous, strident, and complex album, will likely polarize longstanding Lanegan fans; but if they can't follow him into this new terrain, it's their problem. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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