

Matthew Skoller - Blues Immigrant (2016)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 15 December 2018 14:55 -

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1 *Big Box Store Blues* 3:46 2 *The Devil Ain't Got No Music* 4:20 3 *Blues Immigrant* 5:58
4 *Only in the Blues* 2:50 5 *Tear Collector* 4:56 6 *Story Of Greed* 4:10 7 *747* 3:54 8
Organ Mouth 2:51 9 *My Get It Done Woman* 3:59 10 *Get Down To The Nitty Gritty* 3:59 11
Blue Lights 3:07 Skoller - Harmonica and Vocals Johnny Iguana – Keyboards Felton
Crews – Bass Giles Corey – Guitar Eddie Taylor Jr. – Guitar Marc Wilson – Drums Mike
Avery and Stevie Robinson – Background Vocals + Carlos Johnson – Lead Guitarist Brian
Ritchie – Shakuhachi

Chicago blues harp great emigrated to Chicago from the Big Apple (Brooklyn to be specific; that's important to New Yorkers) to Chicago in 1987. That technically makes him an immigrant to Chicago blues which he celebrates with this fine CD. Featuring a lyrical insert with a tricked up passport from Brooklyn, Skoller wrote eight of the eleven songs on this CD. His soulful vocal and vibrant harp make him a fixture in the Windy City Blues scene, and he showcases his talents on this album.

The songs are very cool and offer many comments on modern life. "Big Box Store Blues" decries the destruction of local business by the Costco's and Sam's membership stores and the mega food and department stores like Walmart. Skoller blows some mean harp and Iguana's piano backs him up sweetly. It is a take off of Sonny Boy's "Welfare Store Blues." Following it is "The Devil Ain't Got No Music." This is a great cut he wrote for Lurrie Bell's super album of the same name. He sings that devil can tempt you and that he's got everything that you need, but as the title says, "The Devil Ain't Got No Music." It's a swampy sort of cut with a tasty groove and Skoller and Company offer another fine performance. The title track follows, an autobiographical piece by Skoller. He sings of his grandparents coming here to Ellis Island and then him emigrating to play the blues. He claims influence by the late 1960's and 1970's social upheaval that began his trek, He goes on to the environmental issues and Reagan in the 1980's which solidified his dissent and precipitated his move to Chicago. Great and thoughtful lyrics and a nice beat along with good musicianship make this a winner. "Only In The

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Blues” jabs at the blues music world where he sings that foundations and clubs keep the blues alive with suppressed wages, nine year olds get the press over long time musicians, and record producers get all the profits. As Skoller sings, “It’s a funky situation found only in the Blues.”

A song of relational woes follows; “Tear Collector” is a somber cut about the icy woman that stole his heart. “Story of Greed” is next, a cut about the rich getting richer. This is Carlos Johnson’s first cut of two and he and Brian Ritchie on shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) and the tribal drums make this very cool sounding as Skoller tells us of corporate greed and the erosion of the world in perhaps a darkly humorous way. Cool Papa Sadler’s “747” is a great cover of a song popularized by Joe Louis Walker. Skoller’s harp adds flavor from prior versions where the piano and guitar did many of the harp parts. This is the second cut with Carlos Johnson, one of my Chicago guitar favorites. The instrumental “Mouth Organ” opens with a real organ intro and then Skoller takes over. He and Iguana trade licks and have a lot of fun with this.

“My Get It Done Woman” offers a driving beat and wickedly hot harp blowing. Skoller sings of his woman who gets things done on all fronts. Luther “Snake Boy” Johnson’s “Get Down to the Nitty Gritty” is the other cover, a hard core 1970’s Chicago blues cut that Skoller does well. Johnson was a protégé of Muddy Waters; Skoller stays true to the big guitar sound and then adds his harp to the mix. Iguana’s piano also give good Chicago flavor to the cut. Taylor’s guitar solo is sweet, too. The album closes to “Blue Lights,” the final cover which is a Papa Lightfoot cut. This is a beautiful slow blues that slips and slides sweetly with ample grease and grime to dirty things up. Thoughtful guitar work, a nice harp lead and piano fills make this a fine instrumental piece.

Skoller is a true presence on the Chicago blues scene. Approaching his 20th year in town, his impact on other’s music and the production of his own excellent stuff truly make him one of the great blues music acts of today. His harp is poignant and tasteful, with traditional phrasing that he tweaks to make his own. His vocals are gritty and authentic and his song writing is top notch. This is an outstanding album that should garner a lot of attention! Most highly recommended! ---Steve Jones, bluesblastmagazine.com

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