

John Clifton - In The Middle Of Nowhere (2019)

Written by bluesever

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1 *I'm Leaving You Baby* 3:15 2 *In The Middle Of Nowhere* 4:02 3 *If It Ain't Me Baby* 5:21
4 *Cool Spot In Hell* 5:52 5 *Poor Boy* 3:23 6 *Keep It Clean* 5:03 7 *Junkie Woman Blues*
4:19 8 *Four Years Ago* 4:32 9 *Ain't Spending No More Money* 6:12 10 *So Tired I Could Cry*
7:40 11 *Honky Tonk Night Time Man* 3:36 Bass – Jake Finney Congas – Edward Fritz
(tracks: 4, 6) Dobro – John Clifton (tracks: 7) Drums – Edward Fritz Guest, Guitar – Roger
Perry (tracks: 11) Guest, Tambourine – John Shafer (tracks: 2, 6) Guitar – Scott Abeyta Lead
Vocals, Harmonica – John Clifton Piano, Electric Organ – Bartek Szopiński

Harp player/vocalist has been a fixture in the Central California music scene since the late '80s, and shows why with this collection of straight-ahead Chicago- and West Coast-style blues and R&B that's both powerful and cliché-free.

Based out of Fresno, where he and brother Bill built their reputation with The MoFo Party Band, Clifton is a veteran road dog whose travels have regularly crisscrossed the U.S. in addition to playing festivals as far away as France, Belgium, Poland and New Zealand.

A State Of California honoree for his contribution to the arts, Clifton's toured in support of Big Bill Morganfield and was a contributor to Morganfield's highly reviewed *Blood Stains On The Wall* CD. He's also a producer whose work with former International Blues Challenge finalists The Boogie Boys won album of the year honors in the Polish Blues Awards.

This is Clifton's third release on the Rip Cat imprint, a follow-up to the 2018 release, *Nightlife*, which spent six months in the Roots Record Report Top 25 charts. This disc follows the same formula, mixing originals with obscure covers. Backed by Rip Cat owner Scott Abeyta on guitar,

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Jake Finney on bass and Edward Fritz on percussion, the lineup also includes Bartek Szopinski, a 10-time honoree in the Polish Blues Awards, on keyboards with guest appearances by guitarist Roger Perry and John Shafer on tambourine.

“I’m Leaving You Baby” opens the action atop a hard, uptempo shuffle and provides Clifton with plenty of space for a tasty, extended diatonic solo before he launches in on the title tune, “In The Middle Of Nowhere,” the first original in the set. It swings from the jump as John describes himself as a “poor country boy...livin’ in a place that’s a big disgrace” and yearning for a change of scene.

Jimmy Rogers’ 1956 Chess release, “If It Ain’t Me Baby,” gets an uptempo redo before Clifton shifts gears for a little West Coast swing with the easy/greasy instrumental, “Cool Spot In Hell,” a six-minute number that features extended solos from Abeyta and Szopinski, but will delight any harp enthusiast, too.

“Poor Boy,” a minor classic by Howlin’ Wolf, and “Keep It Clean,” a tune first recorded by Charley Jordan in 1930, are up next before three consecutive originals. “Junkie Woman Blues” comes across with a ‘30s acoustic feel before “Four Years Ago” fires out of the gate with a Chicago feel as Clifton describes the angry departure of his woman after learning of a past transgression.

Next up, “Ain’t Spending No More Money” is fresh, but feels as if it could have been part of Sonny Boy Williamson II’s catalog as it delivers a message to a lady who’s constantly demanding the singer buy her something new. The disc concludes with refreshingly updated covers of Junior Wells’ “So Tired I Could Cry” and Merle Haggard’s uptempo “Honky Tonk Night Time Man.”

Available through Amazon, Bear Family or direct through the artist’s website, In The Middle Of Nowhere is a keeper for anyone who loves their blues fresh, but deeply steeped with an old-time feel. Strongly recommended. ---bluesblastmagazine.com

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