American Blues - Is Here (1968)

A1 If I Were A Carpenter 5:26 A2 All I Saw Was You 3:46 A3 She'll Be Mine 1:51 A4 Fugue For Lady Cheriff 2:14 B1 It's Gone 2:00 B2 Keep My Heart In A Rage 2:40 B3 Mercury Blues 4:15 B4 Melted Like Snow 3:15 B5 Mellow 2:08 Frank Beard - Drums Doug Davis - Keyboards Dusty Hill - Bass Rocky Hill - Guitar, Vocals

Some bands make their greatest contribution by being reduced to parts, and that sadly seems to be where the American Blues fit into rock & roll history. Despite their name, the Dallas, Texas-based group had very little to do with the blues, instead playing a curious mishmash of hard rock, psychedelia, country-rock, and what would come to be known as progressive rock, and they didn't make much of an impact out of town. However, after they broke up, they contributed bassist Dusty Hill and drummer Frank Beard to ZZ Top, which is the main reason their debut album, The American Blues Is Here, is remembered today. The band is not bad at all; then as now, Dusty and Frank were a solid rhythm section (though Beard sometimes overplays a bit here), and Rocky Hill (Dusty's brother) was a fine lead guitarist, but their material is what sinks this particular ship. The opening freakout revision of Tim Hardin's "If I Were a Carpenter" is a wobbly mess that loses momentum at the halfway point, and "All I Saw Was You," "Fugue for Lady Cheriff," and "Mellow" confirm that songwriting was not this group's strong point, and Rocky's vocals do little to mask the occasional inanity of the lyrics. The best track is a slow, swaggering version of "Mercury Blues" that's also the only indication of the sort of music Hill and Beard would soon make their bread and butter, and it stands out like a sore thumb in this context. The American Blues Is Here is a less than stellar example of the fading end of Texas psychedelia, and it's the sort of album that would be forgotten except by hardcore record collectors if it weren't for the rhythm section moving on to bigger and better things.
---Mark Deming, Rovi

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