

Johnny Childs



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What makes for a great bluesman? What is that special formula; the blend of factors that elevates the average blues player to above average greatness? Is it talent? Is it soul? What about life experience, hunger and determination? The fact of the matter is that a combination of any of these qualities has the ability to result in some fine blues music, but what about those rare occasions when all of these qualities come together in one artist? Well, if you're looking for a contemporary example, you need not look any further than Johnny Childs.

Childs spent almost a decade making a fascinating documentary that chronicled his life and his struggle to obtain a record deal. It is called [THE JUNKMAN'S SON](#) and The American Blues News had the great fortune of reviewing an early cut of it last year, when it was titled BLUES BEFORE SUNRISE. The film gives viewers an inside look at the trials and tribulations of a determined blues artist trying to "make it" in the unforgiving world of the music business as well as presents a life-story that needs to be seen to be believed.

Anyone that watches [THE JUNKMAN'S SON](#) will undoubtedly agree that Childs has life experience, hunger and determination to spar, but what about talent and soul? Thankfully, he has a new album that proves once again that he has those as well. It is titled GROOVE and it is his first studio effort since 2005's self-titled JOHNNY CHILDS. For it, he enlisted the help of Grammy Award winning producer Bruce Bromberg as well as a talented backing band that included bassist Cliff Schmitt, drummer Michael Bram and pianist/organist Dave Keys.

As a writer, Childs is more than adequate, but his real talents lie in his refreshingly unique, energetic and (at times) unorthodox style of guitar playing as well as his smooth/velvety vocals; a voice that could sound equally at ease crooning a standard from the American songbook, as it does pelting out a classically soulful blues lyric.

In addition, with his unique musical style, Childs is an artist that manages to avoid getting lost in the trap of blues cliché. He is one of those great contemporary blues talents that is able to pay tribute to the familiar conventions of the genre without being inhibited by them. He can shred over a 12-bar with the best of them, but is not afraid to explore newer (yet still familiar) territory... and ultimately make the blues his own.

At 65+ minutes and 14 tracks, GROOVE runs a little longer than your average release and it seems to make a substantial effort not to pigeonhole itself as one kind of album. It explores many different facets of electric blues, which can sometimes be a dangerous venture for an artist. Often such albums can feel unfocused and scattered, but in the case of GROOVE, the concept works. Rather than having an air of uncertainty, the album feels like it has a very definite goal to explore the different sides of Johnny Childs and it manages to steer clear of being yet another thrown together hodgepodge of tired blues riffs. From Chicago blues and Texas swing to blues-rock, R&B and even traditional Jewish rhythms, GROOVE paints a picture of an interesting, complex and talented artist.

All in all, GROOVE is a very enjoyable album that is full of both, an abundance of tastefully executed guitar-work and fun compositions. It is definitely worth checking out.