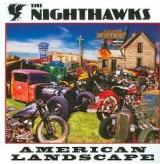


The Nighthawks - American Landscape (2009)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 24 October 2013 16:15 -

The Nighthawks - American Landscape (2009)



01. *Big Boy* 02. *Down in the Hole* 03. *She Belongs to Me* 04. *Matchbox* 05. *Where Do You Go* 06. *Try It Baby* 07. *Jana Lea* 08. *Made Up My Mind* 09. *Don't Turn Your Heater Down* 10. *Most Likely You Go Your Way and I'll Go Mine* 11. *Standing in the Way* 12. *Fishin' Hole Theme* Musicians: Paul Bell - Guitar, Vocals Johnny Castle - Bass, Bass Instrument, Percussion, Vocals Pete Ragusa - Drums, Percussion, Vocals Mark Wenner - Harmonica, Vocals

The Nighthawks probably find their music classed in the blues section of the record store most of the time, which makes a certain kind of sense -- if your lead singer plays harmonica and your lead guitarist plays a lot of slide, you have to expect that. But in fact, things aren't as simple as that; what this band shows is an admirable breadth of tonal and stylistic range within the broad constraints of the blues-rock idiom. *American Landscape* presents a nice mixture of covers and originals, and in this case the originals are sometimes better -- bassist Johnny Castle's rollicking "Jana Lea" is easily one of the high points on this disc. But their jazzy take on the Tom Waits composition "Down in the Hole" (from the *Franks Wild Years* stage show) is brilliant, as is their nicely chugging arrangement of Ike Turner's "Matchbox." The Nighthawks can rock out like nobody's business, as they demonstrate on barnburners like "Big Boy" (listen to Mark Wenner singing through his overdriven harp mike) and the classic meat-and-potatoes R&B of Dan Penn's "Standing in the Way," but they also demonstrate their range and subtlety on the funky swagger of "Where Do You Go" and a startlingly gentle but insistent rendition of "Try It Baby." The closest thing to a misstep on this album is a puzzling one -- a loving but ultimately rather wooden version of Steve Cropper's funky "Don't Turn Your Heater Down," a song that seems like it would be a can't-miss proposition for a band with this particular set of skills. --- Rick Anderson

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