

Mick Clarke - Diggin' Down (2017)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Dry Road Blues* 03:32 2 *Any Place is Paradise* 03:20 3 *Smokestack Lightning* 03:53 4 *Noodle Bar* 04:17 5 *Rhumbatism* 03:26 6 *Hard Hat* 04:50 7 *Yes It Is* 04:09 8 *Crack in the Wall* 03:59 9 *Bluestring* 04:20 10 *Zeitgeist Boogie* 03:44 11 *Sweet Dreams* 03:48 12 *Find You* 05:01 13 *Diggin' Down* 04:04 Mick Clarke - primary artist

Britain's Mick Clarke is an experienced guitar player and vocalist who records at home 'deep in the Low Weald Badlands'...or Surrey as we Brits know it! What started out as an instrumental album grew into a mix: five instrumentals, ten originals, three covers. Stated as being recorded by Mick and the 'Rockfold Rhythm Section' the fact that no credits appear suggests that Mick played everything here and the tongue-in-cheek 'bass and drums by Ebay' comment in the sleeve notes adds to the suspicions. Mick is well known for a rough and ready style and he states that he gave his '1963 Watkins valve amp a good rattling – anything to avoid a clean sound' and he certainly achieves that on some typical Brit blues and boogie.

Taking the instrumentals first "Bluestring" takes a riff from the old Graham Bond tune "Walking In The Park" as its starting point and grooves along pretty well; Don Gibson's "Sweet Dreams" was reworked by the late Roy Buchanan and Mick follows the same approach though he does go a little over the top; "Rhumbatism" has keyboards added as Mick duets with himself, some dirty riffs over a rhumba beat laid down by the drums and bass; the title track closes the CD in churning blues-rock mode but for this reviewer the pick of the instrumentals is the attractive "Yes It Is" on which the drums work well and piano appears in the middle eight before Mick's guitar returns to dominate the outro.

Mick is not a particularly strong vocalist and he self-deprecatingly refers to his 'cheek' in taking on Howling Wolf on a version of "Smokestack Lightning" which thunders along in full-on rock mode, Mick adding some echo to his vocal. The other cover is of no lesser a star than Elvis and

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“Any Place Is Paradise” is covered here with some pretty rough and ready guitar which Mick claims is an attempt to play like Scotty Moore. Amongst the other songs Mick gets all Led Zep on us in “Zeitgeist Boogie”, recalls attending a ZZ Top concert in “Noodle Bar” and targets some contemporary issues such as Donald Trump’s election and Brexit in “Hard Hat” which has some excellent slide work and is the pick of the vocal tracks here.

Fans of Mick’s work will enjoy this. For folk new to Mick this album blends his usual tough style of blues and boogie with some instrumentals that vary the diet somewhat. ---John Mitchell, bluesblastmagazine.com

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