

Billy Jones Bluez - I'm A Bluesman (2013)

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1 *The Iceman* 4:22 2 *I'm Yo Freak* 4:42 3 *Nothin' But The Blues* 4:13 4 *I'm A Bluesman* 7:24 5 *Do It Right Baby* 4:11 6 *Love Nobody Else* 6:20 7 *You And Me* 3:00 Bass – Derrick Kendricks Drums – Reginald Hammeth, Rickey Martin Guitar – Billy Jones Keyboards – Corey Bray Vocals – Billy Jones

Blues music does not have to come out of Chicago, Memphis or the delta, and I am reminded of this as I listen to Billy Jones Bluez's latest CD, *I'm a Bluesman*. Billy Jones hails from North Little Rock, Arkansas, which I had never even considered as being a hotbed of blues music.

Billy Jones has long been a bluesman, having been exposed to the blues as a boy at his grandfather's café and at a nearby juke joint. He was inspired to be like Elmore James and B.B. King, and by the time he was in his early teens he was quite a guitar player. He went on the road at the age of 14 and has not stopped since, playing all over the US and Europe.

His newest CD is a short one, coming in at a little over a half hour. There are seven tracks, including one cover and six original songs. Billy takes care of the guitars and vocals, and he is joined by Corey Bray on keyboards, Derrick Kendricks and Palmalee Byrd on bass and Rickey Martin and Reginald Hammeth on the skins.

I'm a Bluesman kicks off with its only cover tune, "The Iceman," which is a modern interpretation of Big Joe Turner's "Ice Man Blues." This is a fun song with an easygoing vibe, and Billy's voice and guitar playing are smooth and restrained. Bray has good keyboard skills, and his playing helps fill in the spaces in this well done piece.

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After this, you will see that Billy is comfortable enough with his writing and playing that he does not need to be shoehorned into any one genre. "I'm Yo' Freak" has a funky hip-hop beat that is dominated with 1970s synthesizers and heavily distorted guitars. He keeps this funky vibe for "Nothing But The Blues" but the music is harder-edged with more modern keyboard samples and rocking guitar parts. This song has classic blues lyrics and structures, but he has evolved it into something totally different.

"I'm a Bluesman" is a more traditional blues rocker with a dance beat, neat doubled guitar parts and Hammond B3 samples. This title track is the longest song on the album and there is a cool jam in the middle where it sounds like there are five layers of guitars stacked up.

Billy Jones gets back to more traditional blues for "Do Right Baby" which has some fantastic guitar tone over an assortment of different synthesizer sounds. There is a slow rolling 12-bar blues base to this one, and the lyrics include one of the coolest lines ever: "You gonna have to run off and join the circus, baby, if you're looking for a clown." This song fades out while he is still singing, which is an interesting choice as blues songs usually have a distinct conclusion.

There are synthesized strings and heavy organ work on "Love Nobody Else," which ends up with a Latin nightclub flair as Billy channels his inner Carlos Santana. His voice works well with this genre too, and his guitar work is smoking hot. This mood carries over to the final song on the album, "You and Me." His guitar playing on this one crosses over from Santana to Prince, and Corey Bray does a great imitation of Jan Hammer on the keyboards.

Billy Jones' I'm a Bluesman is an interesting piece of work, and shows that he has solid writing, performance and production skills. If you choose to seek it out you will find it is not in a traditional blues form, but it is still fun music to listen to. He performs regularly throughout the Midwest, and I think it would be a kick to check out one of his shows. --- thebluesblast.com

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