

Hans Theessink - Slow Train

Austrian based Hans Theessink is a Dutch Country blues guitarist who has built an international reputation as a leading practitioner of blues and American roots music. And on "Slow Train" has expanded his blues roots to include Gospel and World music genres to great effect.

In fact it is worth making the point that had not both Ry Cooder and Paul Simon been here before with high profile World music albums, "Slow Train" would probably pick up even more accolades than it is already destined to receive.

Hans's yearning vocal style is one that has been honed in over 30 years of learning his craft and he brings an unhurried style of emotive phrasing to bear on some poignant lyrics that deal uncompromisingly with contemporary events. His sublime guitar playing is so subtle that you strain to hear every slight change in emphasis in tone while his sultry slide runs beautifully underpin some warm gospel accompaniment on 'Run On For A Long Time'.

Together with a fine band and three wonderful gospel singers nick named "Ramadu", "Blessings" and "Vusa", Hans tackles songs about 9/11 and Iraq as on "God Created The World" and Mugabe's Zimbabwe as on "Thula Mama-Oh Mother Don't You Weep", without once pandering to sloganising. The biting lyrics are written as if in the first person bringing an extra emphasis to the lyrics. There's a further beautiful blend of gospel blues on "Cry Cry Cry" another album highlight complete with sumptuous slide guitar and deft use of handclaps. There's also a JJ Cale feel to the wistful "Let Go", while "Love You Baby" is a delightful joyous dobro outing, again with tasteful bv's.

Such is the confidence of this project that the spiritual "Old Man Trouble" never once hints at cliché in spite of its lyrics that include the line, 'I thought I heard Blind Willie Johnson sing'.

Ry Cooder would probably love to have written something like this and perhaps the biggest compliment I can give this truly superb blues album is that at the very end of the closing 'When Luther played the Blues' you feel compelled to find out more about an artist who has just cut one of the albums of the year.

Pete Feenstra