

blues matters (UK) 2007.04

Hans Theessink „Slow Train“ Blue Groove 1620 (Proper Music)

The combination of the songs, the playing and the production lead to one of the most enveloping experiences in music this reviewer can remember for some time. Touching on classic blues, gospel, Africana, Americana and roots the songs are superb. Hans Theessink's band are three of Austria's top players – Harry Stampfer, Erick Buchebner and Roland Guggenbichler - and three stunning voices - Dumisani Moyo, Zibusiso Nkomo and Vusumuzi Ndlovu - from Zimbabwe, all working together to create the perfect platform for Theessink's baritone drawl and exquisite picking. This is also a magnificently crafted recording. The sound is clear and placed across an enormous soundscape with every voice and instrument 'just so' in the mix. The guitar work, the banjo and mandolin are played beautifully and Theessink's voice is warm and natural. It is only after listening to the album all the way through once and going back to start again that I began to get a feel for the songs rather than just the fabulous music to be found herein. This is no single paced run through, there is a variety in the songs and sounds that most bands wouldn't touch: the title song is a slow, melodic blues with a fabulous bass line from Buchebner and mournful organ sound: 'Katrina' is Theessink's take on the New Orleans disaster based on an old New Orleans chant – 'Lil Liza Jane': 'Thula Mama – Oh Mother Don't You Weep' tells the story of Zimbabwe as told by one of Mugabe's unfortunate subjects. 'Cry Cry Cry' lifts the mood and the soul with a banjo based riff and close miked backing vocals: 'Old Man Trouble' sounds as though Robert Johnson was overseeing the recording. The variety of influences that have been brought to this album make it a terrific listen and if it isn't in the top ten for the year I will be very surprised.

Andy Snipper