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HANS THEESSINK
“Slow Train”

The world weary autobiographical slow gospel blues title track ‘Slow Train’ is my first introduction to Austrian musician Hans Theesink despite the fact he has 20 albums and 35 years on the road ‘under his belt’. Lauded by none other than Bo Diddley, Theesink’s warm, clean guitar sound with occasional banjo and harmonica give some clues as to his enduring popularity as a stalwart of the blues and jazz festivals. Three Zimbabwean singers contribute to the ‘Lil Liza Jane’ New Orleans chant that accompanies Theesink’s rich baritone voice and lyrical and musical exposition of the tragic Katrina hurricane and its social and political aftermath which so cruelly exposed the divisions in American society.

The heavy subject matter on ‘God Created the World’ (9/11) is juxtaposed somewhat by the relatively upbeat musical treatment ‘inspired by the Mississippi hill country fife and drum tradition accompanied by the gospel trio (as throughout the album).

‘Thula Mama- Oh Mother Don’t You Weep For Me’ charts the initial optimism turned to despair in Zimbabwe. ‘Cry, Cry, Cry’ is not the Johnny Cash song but has a similar tempo. ‘Old Man Trouble’ is a close relation of Robert Johnson’s ‘Hellhound on my Trail’ with yet another reference to that legendary crossroads immortalised in music and film (‘Brother Where Art Thou?’).

Elsewhere there are some very personal songs on this CD but, for me, Hans leaves the best until last- ‘May The Road’ with its Mississippi John Hurt guitar picking and Paul Simon’s ‘Graceland’ feel in the singing; the traditional ‘Run On For a Long Time’ with some nice slide guitar and a great feel from the rhythm section and organist; and finally, ‘When Luther Plays The Blues’, a song inspired by a dream when Hans saw Luther Allison, appropriately this is piece is very laid back and dream like with minimal drums, guitar and backing organ.

The album boasts a nice digi pack presentation as well.

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(Blue Groove 1620)

(Reviewed by Phil Jackson for Zeitgeist)