

Blog Critics

Music Review: Rich DelGrosso / Jonn Del Toro Richardson – *Time Slips On By*

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Most modern blues music is dominated by guitars. Sure, the piano and harmonica play integral roles, and there's room for brass accents. But for the most part, the instrumental formula seems rather fixed.

Which makes *Time Slips On By*, a collaboration between guitarist Jonn Del Toro Richardson and mandolinist Rich DelGrosso, such a surprising delight. The former is a fiery guitarist with roots in the Tex-Mex scene in his native Houston, while the latter, a veteran player and educator, provides unusual textures with mandolin, mandola, and the more conventional bottleneck slide.

DelGrosso isn't the first to bring a mandolin into the blues, of course, and he pays tribute to trailblazers in his own "Mandolin Man," the disc's third track and a bit of a history lesson in song. Elsewhere he credits James "Yank" Rachell, one of the better-known blues mandolinists, as inspiration for "Hard To Live With," a wry and easy-going plea for love despite personal shortcomings.

The playlist is all-original, with DelGrosso contributing eight and Del Toro Richardson six. In addition to straightforward 12-bar fare like the opening shuffle "Baby Do Wrong," "She's Sweet," and "Good Rockin' Johnny," there's lots of variety on offer in both groove and instrumentation to distinguish this collection. "Time Slips On By" has a greasy soul vibe thanks to the punchy Texas Horns, led by the project's producer, saxophonist Kaz Kazanoff. The horns also add a brassy punch to the funkified strut of "Shotgun Blues," while elsewhere it's the atmospheric contributions of guests like Joel Guzman on accordion and excellent harmonica from Sonny Boy Terry that add flavor to the mix. There's a hint of Cajun seasoning (check out the slide and squeezebox on "Katalin"), breezy Tex-Mex on "Summertime Is Here," (as laid-back and laconic as its title suggests), and cool combo jazz on the instrumental "Where's Laura?" Nick Connelly adds keys, his piano on "A Gig Is A Gig" and organ on "The Real Deal" genuine highlights.

Both leaders are masters of their respective instruments, and while they're savvy enough to avoid overindulgence, the fretwork is invariably fiery. They share vocals almost interchangeably, both agreeably gruff and authoritative, relaxed where appropriate and exuberant when it's called for. There's not a weak tune or less-than-stellar performance to be found, and the disc is brimming with energy and impassioned singing and playing. Add in the varied and relatively unusual instrumentation, and it really doesn't get much better than this.

Very highly recommended!