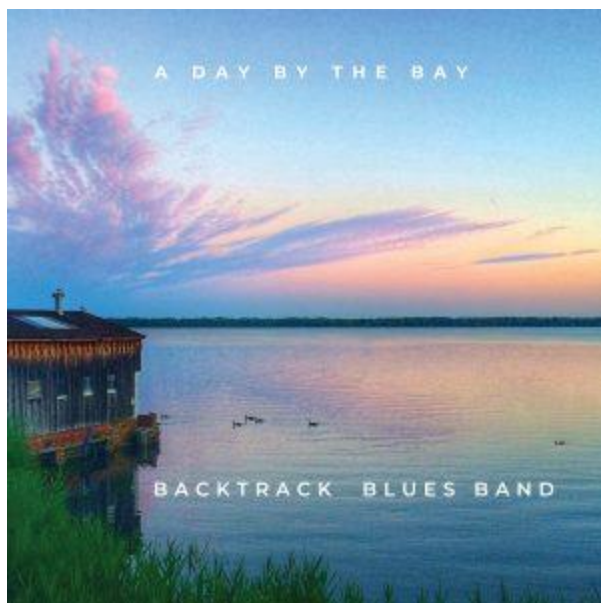




Hot Wax Album Reviews by the ROCK DOCTOR – May 8, 2023

By: **John Kereiff Features**



A DAY BY THE BAY* Backtrack Blues Band (Gulf Coast Records) ****

There's something powerful about live blues that you won't find in studio recordings. Backtrack Blues Band's debut album for Gulf Coast Records, *A Day By The Bay*, is a case in point. Recorded live at the Tampa Bay Blues Festival on April 10th, 2022, this disc crackles with energy and vitality. For any blues fanatic this is the very definition of irresistible.

Founded in 1980, BTBB today consists of Sonny Charles on harp and vocals, Kid Royal on lead guitar and vocals, Little Johnny Walter on rhythm guitar, Joe Bencomo on drums and Stick Davis on bass. On larger shows like this festival gig they're joined onstage by Wayne Sharp on B3 organ and The Backtrack Angels (Latonya Oliver, Dana Merriwether) on backing vocals. "*A Day By the Bay* captures the energy and excitement of the band performing live at a major festival" says Sonny Charles. "We think blues music is best when it's experienced live. This album represents our decades of performing together, and the band's longevity is reflected in the strong guitar, harp and B3 organ that really shine here."

The group's members are serious students of the blues and it shows in the timbre of the performances. They list Little Walter, Albert King Ronnie Earl, Paul Butterfield and Sonny Boy Williamson as influences, and you can really feel that as these Florida boys

lean into some seriously excellent Chicago style blues. The only cover song here is Jimmy Reed's *Natural Born Lover* with Kid Royal contributing two and Sonny Charles the remainder of the tracks. The groove is as wide as Route 66 (or Highway 41 if you prefer) and you can practically feel the sunshine as they settle in to some sweet playing and singing that can make anyone move.

It's no accident that this band has been around for over 40 years; combined these musicians have garnered a Grammy, two Blues Music Awards, a Keeping The Blues Alive Award, and three Tampa Bay Music Awards for "best blues band". It's no secret that as a blues artist (or band) gets deeper into their career that the music itself becomes deeper and richer, and I submit *A Day By The Bay* as Exhibit A. Put this baby on and play it LOUD.

www.backtrackbluesband.com

HOT TRACKS: *Times Is Hard, Best Friend's Grave, Rich Man Blues*