

Rambles.net Review

October 2016

Backtrack Blues Band,
Way Back Home
(Harpo, 2016)

Based in Tampa, formed in 1980, the Backtrack Blues Band takes its name from Little Walter's 1959 instrumental "Back Track." Unlike Walter's classic "Juke," that's one of those numbers not encountered on the usual blues collections. It's mentioned only in passing in Glover/Dirks/Gaines's definitive biography, *Blues with a Feeling: The Little Walter Story* (2002). To know it, you need to have walked a far piece into the blues weeds.

That is where, in fact, you'll find the Backtracks, who practice a form of electric blues that you can't fake. In other words, they will never be mistaken for slumming rockers. These are guys immersed in true blues and seasoned enough to deliver it without frills, albeit with the kinds of chops that come from playing it for a very long time. No, it's not Muddy or Wolf, nor should it be. It is, however, an approach these and other mid-century masters would have appreciated, in other words a thumping, gritty urban sound rooted in the rural Deep South, lots of piercing harmonica (courtesy of Sonny Charles) and the Texas-and-Chicago-style electric lead (Kid Royal), rhythm (Little Johnny Walker), drums (Joe Bencomo) and bass (Stick Davis), with piano (guest Victor Wainwright).

None of this would work, naturally, without robust material, which is not a problem on *Way Back Home*. The originals, from Charles' pen, range from the witty, surely ironically intended "Goin' to Eleuthera" (blues from a Bahamian vacation, not a theme I recall visited in any other blues I've heard; still, a hell of a song) to the politically sharp-edged "Rich Man Blues." There are sure-footed readings of Sonny Boy Williamson II's "Checkin' on My Baby" and "Your Funeral, My Trial."

I do wish, though, that more current bands upheld the blues tradition as ably and admirably as the Backtracks do. Standing out amid a small army of wannabes whose recordings expose their lack of schooling in (or maybe core indifference to) the genre, *Way Back Home* takes you where you want to go.