

VERITAS VAMPIRUS – 9-15-16

BACKTRACK BLUES BAND – *Way Back Home* (2016 / Harpo Records)

The only perplexity you'll have after hearing this CD will be a rather large one, and it will come in the form of a question: "These blistering bastards have been around for 36 years and have released only 5 discs? *What the hell?!?!?!?*", but that's indeed the case, a profound mystery along the lines of sphinxes, women, and hard-partyin' aliens cutting crop circles. *Way Back Home* is their latest, and I suggest you insulate the walls and hoist cement blocks around the speakers 'cause the quintet comes barreling at you right out the gate. Frontman Sonny Charles possesses a classically tart blues voice, charged up with grit and sass tinged with a dram of vinegar, and wields a mean harmonica in the Little Walter school. The band in fact was dubbed after Walter's "Backtrack" and kicks a rompin' stompin' combo of Chicago and Texas blues.

Kid Royal mans the guitar in trad style, peeling off no end of riffs and leads, then oft drops back to double up with Charles for propulsive ostinati grittily decorating melody lines. Little Johnny takes up rhythm duties just behind the two trailblazers as drummer Joe Bencomo switches up between solid foundation work and then splashy coloration. Stick Davis – you may remember this cat as a co-founder of the Amazing Rhythm Aces – puts in the stalwart bass work, relentlessly flanking Bencomo in unflappably solid infrastructure.

It's that tri-fold rhythm section which allows Charles and Royal to go to town, shining like twin beacons on a railyard night. Charles is never less than in full wail, and Royal takes over with lightning flashes and keening peals stretching into the retreating dark. When the band drops into a ballad, it ain't exactly chamber madrigal or Elizabethan plaint but rather an extension of the testosterone and backbone pervading the album. The blues has never been shy about loving the jellyroll, and Charles penned a special tribute to the "Heavy Built Woman". Charles is in fact the band's writer and composer. but the group always tips its fedoras to the classics, here with four standards, including the perennial chestnut "Baby Please Don't Go". Sonny's own "Shoot My Rooster", however, itself stands the very enticing prospect of becoming a standard, a rock-ribbed old-school ditty.

And, yo, Backtrack guyz: let's not wait another half decade before issuing another CD, hm? We have two loons running for prezdawg, so we sure as hell have the blues now...and they'll only increase come December and January. If y'all could come up with some more o' dat stuff like we likes, it surely will go well with the bottle of bourbon I'll be draining...n thank ye kindly. – Mark Tucker