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All Music Guide

Steve Leggett

10 Days Out may well be Kenny Wayne Shepherd's most important and intriguing album, even though the guitarist is hardly the featured artist on any of these tracks, working instead more as a sideman and facilitator for the impressive cast of venerable blues players who get a chance to shine here. Make no mistake about it, this recording belongs to such senior citizens as Henry Townsend, Etta Baker, Pinetop Perkins, and Henry Gray, and Shepherd's presence (and the presence of Stevie Ray Vaughan's Double Trouble rhythm section of bassist Tommy Shannon and drummer Chris Layton) simply helps to focus the attention on these veteran blues players. Shepherd embarked on a ten-day journey into the American South in 2004 with a documentary film crew, a portable recording studio, and Double Trouble as a house band in an effort to catch the blues in its natural habitat of living rooms, kitchens, porches, back yards, and local watering holes, and the performances that resulted are priceless. Here is one-armed harp player Neal Pattman and blind guitarist Cootie Stark turning in a joyous, ramshackle version of "Prison Blues." A little later, Stark delivers further on a delightful song called "U-Haul," complete with a marvelous improvised rap over the tune's run-out coda. Here, too, is the then-96-year-old Henry Townsend turning in a poignant "Tears Came Rollin' Down." Etta Baker, then 93, shows that age hadn't slowed her as a guitarist at all as she delivers an elegant "Knoxville Rag." Shepherd wisely stays in the background on cut after cut, allowing these amazing musical treasures to unfold naturally and without intrusive elements. There are absolutely no hotshot guitar histrionics anywhere on this disc, which speaks to Shepherd's sincere vision for this project. He's after the preservation of blues history with *10 Days Out*, and as if to underscore that aim, five of the album's participants (Neal Pattman, Cootie Stark, Gatemouth Brown, Wild Child Butler, and Etta Baker) passed away before the album and concurrent documentary film were finally completed and released in 2007. Shepherd's name may be above the title, but he knows full well whom this album belongs to, and to his immense credit, those are the voices he lets speak the loudest.