

own band.

Given the evidence here, that's not too surprising. Schnebelen certainly holds his own on guitar, but when Newman steps up to the mic, all the focus is on her. She changes the tone of the band every time she opens her mouth. On the opener, "I'm Goin'," Schnebelen runs the fretboard like Brian Setzer, upbeat swing that could have fallen off a Stray Cats record. But when Newman steps up on "Willie James," the band turns into hellbilly twangsters backing her country-flavored bad-assness. Even when the band goes way off the beaten blues path to tackle Gnarls Barkley's '06 hit "Crazy," it's all Newman, her vocals an unlikely blend of Heart's Ann Wilson and Stone the Crows' Maggie Bell.

Schnebelen takes back the spotlight on Santo and Johnny's '59 instrumental "Sleepwalk," replicating the oddity created by two Brooklyn teens in an era when doo-wop ruled the charts. Older brother Santu Farina had the lead on a triple-necked Fender lap steel, which Schnebelen replicates perfectly on his single-neck model with Newman accompanying him on rhythm. But just when you think you've got Schnebelen and company figured out, they throw another wild pitch at your head. Newman delivers a spot-on version of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" that sounds a clip from the Porter Wagoner show in the late '60s when Parton was his featured singer.

Not content to leave well enough alone, Schnebelen and the band close out the set with Gary US Bonds' 1960 hit "New Orleans." This one gets a complete makeover from head to toe, Schnebelen sliding greasily along at breakneck speed, transforming it from a sing-along rock anthem to a bloozy bar band house rocker.

It'll be interesting to see how the power trio fares without Newman, but with Schnebelen's guitar power and glory and eclectic musical tastes, there's no need to worry, you'll be hearing from this guy for a long time to come.

— Grant Britt

BACKTRACK BLUES BAND

Way Back Home

Harpo Records



Still going strong after more than thirty-five years, the veteran line-up of the

Backtrack Blues Band gets a boost here with the addition of Kid Royal on lead guitar. His beautifully constructed solos add layers of complexity to the band's sound, serving as a counterpoint to the vibrant harp tones from Sonny Charles (Chuck Ross). The driving rhythms are set up by the capable hands of Little Johnny Walter on rhythm guitar, Joe Bencorno on drums, and Stick Davis (Amazing Rhythm Aces, B.B. King, John Mayall) on bass.

The opening shuffle, "Going To Eleuthera," celebrates a Caribbean paradise with special guest Victor Wainwright working his keyboard magic. Another tune penned by Charles, "Tell Your Daddy," boasts a hardy vocal and a killer guitar solo from Kid Royal. Charles delivers one of his strongest vocal performances on Sonny Boy Williamson's "Your Funeral, My Trial," utilizing his full tone on the harp to great effect while Wainwright's playing fills out the arrangement. There is more hearty blowing on "Checkin' On My Baby" while on the brief "Nobody But You," Kid Royal's efforts leave an indelible impression.

"Heavy Built Woman" cruises along with Wainwright again tinkling the ivories with Latonya Oliver and Dana Merriwether adding the backing vocals. Charles struggles a bit vocally on "Baby Please Don't Go," but recovers his footing on "Rich Man Blues," singing and playing with a boisterous exuberance. Not to be outdone, Kid Royal fires off another dazzling guitar passage. He makes another bold statement on the straight-ahead shuffle, "Shoot My Rooster."

The closing track, "Help Me Just This Time," highlights the band's ability to play as a tight ensemble, aiming for a sound that was created by Muddy Waters and Little Walter. Grab a copy of this one if you favor the traditional electric blues styles, because the Backtrack

Blues Band has got you covered from start to finish.

— Mark Thompson

LAURENCE JONES

Take Me High

Ruf Records



British blues-rock phenom Laurence Jones, delivers a powerful and punchy performance in his newly released studio album *Take Me High*. The album was produced by legendary record producer Mike Vernon, who has worked with the likes of John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers, David Bowie, and Fleetwood Mac. All of the songs on *Take Me High* are written by Jones except for a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground".

Jones' guitar bursts out of the speaker, starting the album with a thunderous riff and then pulling back

MARK NOMAD #9

"a gritty pumped up album of bone shakin' blues rockers and plaintive acoustic anthems."

Brian Owens - *Blues Music Magazine*



Available from CD Baby, iTunes, & Amazon

www.marknomad.com