



Octane (Grrr Records) 2008

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By Russ Breimeier

With all due respect to the few other faith-inspired blues-rock artists out there, the Glenn Kaiser Band pretty much remains unchallenged as the best of the best. Granted, we're talking about a niche genre within a niche genre, but Kaiser's simply too good as an all-around singer/guitarist/songwriter, along with bassist/co-writer Roy Montroy and drummer Ed Bialach.

...Kaiser and company avoid sounding overly repetitive by exploring the full range of blues-rock. Songs like "Broken Love" and "Trouble High Trouble Low" follow the familiar conventions of modern blues, but "Depends on Where You Stand" slows things down to a bar band simmer, enough for Kaiser to throw in some harmonica. Then "Bad Times" plays with a cruising shuffle while "U-Turn" delves into biker rock territory (which leads to a decent, if not predictable, gospel metaphor). Kaiser even resembles Robert Randolph with the driving R&B two-step of "Streetcorner Blues," delivering a scorching pedal steel solo.

The band performs capably, as expected, yet what remains most compelling is Kaiser's gift for infusing empathy, faith, and hope into a musical genre that many assume to be a downer.... Few can use blues to sing about judgment and injustice ("Depends on Where You Stand"), God's love as the answer to a sinful world ("Broken Love"), the Lord's ever-present comfort ("This Race"), or the End Times ("What Can Be Shaken") and sound so convincing.

As familiar and predictable as parts of it are, *Octane* is undeniably strong from start to finish and deserves more attention than it's likely to receive. There's no good reason for Christians who enjoy old-fashioned blues-rock to miss out on the Glenn Kaiser Band.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/music/reviews/2008/octane.html>

The Phantom Tollbooth

By Derek Walker

...There is plenty of Kaiser's own typical style here... his voice often dueting with his own guitar lines, and his usual wide range of blues from the speedy twelve-bar "Streetcorner Blues" to the more emotional slow blues of "Depends on Where You Stand" and "Stand by the Window," an evocative missing-you song, which has much of the feel of his mid-years Resurrection Band. In between come songs with a more subtle blues influence, rather like the work of Robert Cray.

Sometimes these middle-ground songs like "Bad Times" sound a bit obligatory, whereas others like "What Can Be Shaken" have from the very first seconds that magical emotional connection that gets you screwing your face up as you feel the music (I can't be the only one who does that?). One of these better ones is Kaiser's guitar-based take on Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," omitting all of the synth and clavinet parts that the original is known for. The good news is that this version sounds just as if the song was written for guitar.

...Kaiser's words are refreshingly real, facing up to the street realities of debt, prostitution, drugs and injustice that industry Christian music often conveniently ignores. He sings them with conviction, a fair bit of growling and, in "Rollercoaster," a Hendrix tone to his voice. Unusually with blues tracks, the lyrics are written with plenty of imagery and style, and can definitely be appreciated straight from the liner notes, even without hearing the music.

As always, Kaiser gives you the whole works—slide, wah-wah, boogie, slow blues, twelve bar and some rifferama. This disc shows Kaiser at his vocally most engaged and giving his guitar a great workout.

<http://www.tollbooth.org/2008/reviews/octane.html>