

Living Blues Magazine



SAUCE BOSS

Peanuts

Swampside Records - SR 211

Bill Wharton, famously known as the Sauce Boss, is more than simply an astute advocate of the blues. He's also a unique entertainer who not only serves his audiences up a unique musical blend, but also feeds them something more, namely the New Orleans-style gumbo that he stirs onstage while playing his gigs. It's a novel idea, and fortunately it doesn't detract from his main preoccupation, which is all about sharing some gut-wrenching blues, as driven by sizzling slide guitar and his astute, emotive vocals. It's a signature sound that's served him well throughout a career lasting more than 30 years while resulting in a loyal legion of fans in the process.

That said, those who are unaware of the Sauce Boss' charms would be well advised to pick up **Peanuts**, a retrospective of sorts that begins with one of his earliest signature songs, the rabid and walloping *Let the Big Dog Eat*, and progresses through several earlier offerings. Notably too, it also includes Wharton's recent contributions to the documentary *Jimmy Carter: Rock and Roll President*,

an award-winning film that garnered Best Original Score honors for Wharton himself at the Los Angeles Film Awards. Given that Carter himself was famously fond of music and the artists responsible for making it, Sauce Boss' down-home delivery found a fine fit with the former president. However, unlike the Allman Brothers, Willie Nelson, and the other artists who found his favor, Sauce Boss' trademark style relies solely on vocals, gut bucket guitar, slide, dulcimer, and rubboard, without sacrificing any energy or exhilaration in the process.

Evidence of that can be found everywhere here, from the surging solo strum of *Zipper Bird* and the frenzied wail of *Outlaw Blues*, to the tangled acoustic ramble that defines *Shiners Blues*, to the slow sprawl of *Smile in Basket* and the emotive ballad, *Song of the Irish Band*. All but four tracks are performed by Wharton alone, further indicating his ability to captivate a crowd all on his own. So too, when he draws on the slow blues of an ominous offering like *Chicago Combat Zone*, those darker designs impart a decidedly dire impression.

While other artists may draw from a similar template, few leave as much of a lingering impression as the Sauce Boss. Wharton is, after all, a determined showman, and it's a mark of his skill and ability that he excels on those realms so assuredly. This particular serving of **Peanuts** definitely packs a punch.

--Lee Zimmerman
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