

Douglas Linton & The PlanBs: *Gloryland*

Now who doesn't like a road trip?

That's what *Gloryland*, the debut CD from Douglas Linton & The PlanBs, sounds like — a twilight journey deep into the heart of American music, with plenty of roadside attractions along the way.

The CD begins with an otherworldly *a cappella* version of the traditional gospel hymn "Gloryland." This serves as a celestial counterpoint to the earthly guitar riff that leads into the next song — the swampy blues-influenced "For Love or Money" — thus alerting the listener that The PlanBs are focused not only on the sky above but also on the saints and sinners down here below. The song is populated by a motley crew of desert hermits, corrupt popes, and even Adam and Eva ("Eva, she looked at Adam/Adam didn't look the same/All she saw was a little bitty snake that someone forgot to name."). The song is an introduction to the humor that the Vienna, Austria-based Texas singer-songwriter Douglas Linton brings to his songwriting, which tells archetypal tales of greed, corruption, spirituality, love, and loss.

The music on *Gloryland* draws deeply from the melting pot of styles that characterize American music — with its musical center located somewhere in the vicinity of New Orleans, close to a revival tent and not too far from a medicine show. From the uptown jump of "Watch Watcha Doin'" to the honky-tonk of "Bad Advice" and the soulful heart-break of "Off My Mind" — this CD draws from a wide magnolia-laced palette that remains true to the spirit of its sources while still being creatively fresh to the ears.

The sound of the band is underpinned by the tight funk-influenced rhythm section, "The Chain Gang", featuring Roman Kovacs on bass and Heli Schiefer on drums and percussion. Standing on top of this rock-solid groove are the rhythmic riff-driven landscape of Alex Gantz's guitars and the soulful maelstrom of Matthias "Doc" Ihrybauer's Hammond organ — or accordion which would be right at home in any late night waterfront bar. Probably, the "secret sauce" of the band is the HoneyBs — Anja Klipic and Ina Eckhard — who, depending on how the spirit moves or what the song requires, can sing like heavenly angels or fabled sirens beckoning sailors too close to the rocks.

A characteristic that sets The PlanBs apart is an exuberant joy that they bring to their music and storytelling. The songs on *Gloryland* have a wit, charm and nuance that becomes fully apparent after repeat listening. And the emotional delivery provided in each performance makes it clear that this is a band that is committed to their music and the performance of each song.

And what songs! *Gloryland* is populated by a strange mix of characters caught in their own universal dilemmas. Consider the narrator of the smoky Rhumba-influenced song "Insomnia." After his girlfriend left him, he managed to find solace in dreams where they remain together — but even this has been taken away from him as he is no longer able to fall sleep. So he lies in bed all night, tormented by the sounds echoing outside his window ("Couple's fighting in the alley/I think they're high on crystal meth.") Another song deals with the understandable difficulty of moving on after having been dumped via text message ("I called you in the

morning/I called you late at night/I even called your sister but it didn't feel right.")

Other songs take the listener to unexpected places. It is safe to say that no one has ever adequately told the story of the 1987 stock market crash in song — certainly not with a rhythm you can dance to. *Gloryland* remedies this with "Drinks on Black Monday," which begins with the line "I was drinking at Elaine's/ the night before/somehow you could just feel it in the air."

Such a jaundiced worldview contrasts sharply with the gospel-inspired "Train to Jordan." This song provides a sincere appeal to renewed hope, framing love as a force that is revolutionary and transformative.

People, people
Join the revolution
Put aside all that divides you and me
Take the path that leads to hope and salvation
And you won't be alone
I'll carry you home

The CD closes with the sparse and emotion-laden "See You on the Way," which reads like a terse note left on a refrigerator door, announcing the end of a relationship. In the song, it is time to go and the narrator has decided to set out early and alone but only after one small act of kindness. ("I just made some coffee/to take on the road/the pot should still be warm when you wake/But there's no need to worry/I'm sure I'll be fine/So I'll see you on the way.") The song finishes with the harmonies dissolving into air, carried forward by a string quartet that leads the listener back full circle to the heavenly spheres where *Gloryland* began.

The eclectic and engaging songs on Douglas Linton & The PlanBs' debut CD point to the emergence of an original creative voice with promise of more to come. Overall, the songs feel like souvenirs brought back by the old blues and ballad hunters when they set off to discover the range and wonder of American music. With *Gloryland*, the listener is carried along on a similar journey.

And as I said before, who doesn't like a road trip?