



During a past life, **JOHN ILLSLEY** was a founding member of Dire Straits, so, I did not know who he was until I heard his latest solo release, "Streets of Heaven" (Creek Records, c/o johnillsley.com).

He can definitely hold his own, as this release shows. With a new back-up band, Illsley examines at his life from a present perspective, sometimes looking at the now, sometimes at the past (but never from the then), but through most of the songs, there is a feeling of the passage of time and regret. Sure, there's the lively, positive numbers, like "Young Girl" (about, I am assuming,

his daughter, as she leaves home), but there's past loves ("I Thought I Saw It Coming"), the rearview mirror glance ("Toe the Line"), and the looking ahead (the title cut, "Streets of Heaven"). Illsley's voice is deep and smoky, sort of like a mid-period Leonard Cohen (which is possibly unintentionally ironic as one of the songs here – a cover – is "No Way to Say Goodbye"). Most tunes are ballads with John's lush guitar (and on two of them, accompanied by Mark Knopfler), and it's not until the last couple of cuts that one can hear the Dire Straits link more clearly. The songs are tightly produced by Illsley and Guy Fletcher in the UK, with all but two written by Illsley (others were by David Kenning). I'd like to make a special mention of Chris White's sax work and Polly Wood's background or co-vocals, both of which bolstered the sound. Also, Paul Spong plays a solid trumpet in the Mariachi-influenced "Tell Me."