



New Riders Of The Purple Sage – 17 Pine Avenue – Woodstock Records WR0037, 59:58 [3/6/2012] **:**

(David Nelson – guitar, vocals; Buddy Cage – pedal steel guitar; Michael Falzarano – guitar, vocals; Ronnie Penque – bass, vocals; Johnny Markowski – drums, vocals; Professor Louie – Hammond Organ, accordion; Lizzy Friel – vocals; Christian Cassan – percussion)

Whether they are referred to as country rock or psychedelic folk, New Riders Of The Purple Sage were an influential presence in the merging of sixties music with traditional country. In the late 60s and early seventies, groups like The Flying Burrito Brothers, Dillard Clark, The Band, Gram Parsons and even Bob Dylan immersed themselves in Western culture. On the San Francisco scene, The Grateful Dead (in particular Jerry Garcia who took up the pedal steel guitar, and earlier the banjo) developed a relationship with a group of musicians that would eventually become New Riders Of The Purple Sage.

David Nelson and John Dawson (who introduced the music of Bakersfield legends Buck Owens and Merle Haggard to the “community”) formed a band that would include (among many), Robert Hunter (future Dead lyricist), Spencer Dryden (Jefferson Airplane drummer), Mickey Hart, Phil Lesh and Garcia. They recorded several albums including the self-titled debut, *Gypsy Cowboy* and *Panama Red* which featured the classic title track. In 2005, the latest reincarnation of the band re-formed and started touring.

17 Pine Avenue is the current release from New Riders, and they haven’t missed a beat. Eleven original compositions (including seven with lyrics by Hunter) and one cover represent country rock at its best. The opening track, “Prisoner Of Freedom” manifests the outlaw vibe of forty years past with a guitar-laden medium tempo and sly vocals (Nelson). The ragged harmonies are sublimely weary. Another Nelson/Hunter tune (“Message In A Bottle”) is up tempo zydeco with an engaging pedal steel (Buddy Cage) and a hard-driving rhythm section (Ronnie Penque and Johnny Markowski). The music has a timeless, listenable feel. The Western imagery and arrangements are transformative...it could be 1970 with references to trucks, passages of time and nonconformity. The identification with bandit lore is evident on “No Time” with visions of flying bullets, a hanging tree and “running out of time.”

Continuing the Nelson/Hunter muse is the hard-rocking “Six Of One” with the humorous refrain, “why do you complain, when I’m doin’ my best?”. The dual electric guitars of Nelson and Michael Falzarano are infectious. In a change of pace, “Suite At The Mission” is melancholic and eternally defiant. “Fivio” tries to capture the romantic idealism of the road with unpretentious conviction. At the core of this album is a veteran road-tested band that believes in their music. They are comfortable with gentle country swing (“Down For The Ride”, a Markowski number), pure country talkin’ blues (“Truth Is Dead”) or Saturday night dance music (“Just The Way It Goes” by Falzarano). Nostalgia enthusiasts will appreciate the Southwestern-tinged, mind-bending cover art of Kevin Morgan.

New Riders Of The Purple Sage were a counterculture institution. *17 Pine Avenue* will remind the public that they are simply a great band.

TrackList: Prisoner Of Freedom; Message In A Bottle; Fivio; Just the Way it Goes; 17 Pine Avenue; Down For The Ride; No Time; Shake That Thing; Suite At The Mission; I Know There’s Someone Else; Six Of One; Truth Is Dead

—Robbie Gerson