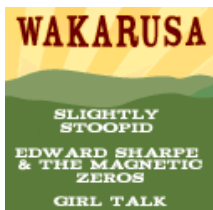




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New Riders Of The Purple Sage

17 Pine Avenue

Woodstock Records

Listen: if somehow you've missed crossing paths with the New Riders Of The Purple Sage since their 2005 renaissance, then you need to understand something. This is not a band of tired, tie-dyed troubadours seeing out their later years, going through the motions and rehashing their greatest hits – these crazy bastards are still full of life; full of fire; full of *music*. *17 Pine Avenue* is the latest round of proof: a killer studio album featuring a dozen cuts that show off the depth of the band's talent and their passion for what they're doing. In short, this is no oldies band, boys and girls – this is a happening thang.

Guitarist Michael Falzarano did duty on both sides of the glass for *17 Pine Avenue*, handling production chores as well as acting as the liaison between the rhythm of the engine room (drummer Johnny Markowski and bassist Ronnie Penque) and the pickers in the wheelhouse (guitarist David Nelson and Buddy Cage on pedal steel). Keep an ear out for Falzarano's off-mic heys and yelps, ushering in Nelson's B-bender Tele or Cage's steel ... they're little, tiny windows into the kind of excitement this bunch still feels when they're in the heat of a jam. The album's mix is just right: fairly dry and immediate, with a few wisps of psychedelic weirdness here and there – but nary a studio trick in sight. (None needed: this is simply a matter of a band of vets playing their asses off and sounding like they're having a good time doing it.)

Johnny Markowski contributes a pair of tunes to *17 Pine Avenue*: *Down For The Ride* contains just the right balance of weariness, sweetness, coolness, and hope, combined with a draw-off-and-let-it-fly singalong chorus and a pedal steel break by the legendary Cage that'll break your goddamn heart. "I Know There's Someone Else" finds Markowski channeling the late, great Marmaduke Dawson with the sort of headneck romp that made the Riders famous in the first place. (Catch the cool Hammond work by guest Professor Louie and the spark-throwing interplay between Cage



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and Nelson in the song's final minute.)

Ronnie Penque (he of the serpentine, syrupy bass lines that both anchor the weirdness *and* encourage it) takes the lead on "Shake That Thing", a funky, nasty shimmyshake with psychedelic undertones. Falzarano's "Just The Way It Goes" is chock full of I-wish-you-well-but-I've-had-enough-of-this-shit bittersweetness and *at least* two arms' worth of tattoo material (example: "I've got my ducks in a row/Now I'm gonna shoot 'em down"). His reworking of the old traditional "Truth Is Dead" takes things home with a message that's as much a challenge as it is a warning. "Hey, darlin' ... wanna dance?" asks Falzarano just before the fade, the consummate cosmic cowboy Nero.

And then you have the tunes penned by David Nelson and the legendary Robert Hunter – a combination of talents that has as much to do with friendship as it does art. Remember, folks – Nelson was part of that Bay Area picking circle with Hunter and a young lad by the name of Garcia all those many moons ago. Roots run deep; and the proofs in the music, my friend.

As with so, so many of his collaborations with Jerry Garcia, Hunter's lyrics for the New Riders often conjure up familiar feelings of "Don't I know this? Haven't I been here before? But how *could* I have?" Consider "Fivio" (infused with tasty bits of Cage's pedal steel), which sounds like it might have been penned in the shade of an apple tree 130 years ago. The lovely "Suite At The Mission" is chock-bursting full of big pictures and even bigger characters. Or how about the title song, a total "Cosmic Charlie"-style Crumbwalk that's loaded with wicked wordplay and rubber-legged-and-droopy-eyed grins. "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too," indeed.

Who'd have thought one would ever use the word "sexy" in a New Riders review? Well, you tell me: crank up the album opener "Prisoner Of Freedom" and let that infectious head-bopping groove (courtesy of Markowski and Penque) settle into your bones. When they let Cage loose after the first chorus, the fuzz-out snarl of his pedal steel is just absolutely *nasty* – I'm talking make-you-blush filthy here, folks. *Jesus* ...

Professor Louie's accordion is the perfect addition to the happy gumbo of "Message In A Bottle". And if you want to hear someone play the living dogs not out of a B-bender Telecaster, check out Nelson's solo at the 2:55 mark of "Six Of One". (All you kids out there pay attention and learn yerselves something.)

Getting older? Who says?

I'll have whatever *they're* having, barkeep. Put it in a bag for me and I'll take it to *17 Pine Avenue*.

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