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On their new album, **Avalon**, JD Malone and his band, aptly named “The Experts”, are not out to invent something, but they sure go a long way towards perfecting it, as only experts do. Stylistically, the band’s music is the sort that you might hear at a backwoods VFW Hall on a Saturday night, drawing on the radio-friendly catalogues of classic American roots-rockers like CCR. Except JD Malone & The Experts are no lame-ass cover band butchering *Proud Mary*.

They are a rock-solid band with a dynamic leader, singer and songwriter in JD Malone (imagine, say, Bruce Springsteen & The E-Street Band if they played country music), and their songs, as instantly recognizable as they may seem, are all Malone originals (with the exception of excellent covers of Fogerty’s *Fortunate Son* on the CD and Tom Petty’s *I Should Have Known It* on the bonus live in-studio DVD). While JD Malone is clearly in charge, much of **Avalon’s** appeal comes from the remarkable chemistry of the band, including Malone (vocals, acoustic guitar), Avery Coffee (electric guitars, bg vocals), Tom Hampton (pedal and lap steel, 12-string, acoustic, resonator & electric guitars, bg vocals), Jim Miades (bass), Tommy Geddes (drums), and the extraordinary guest vocals of Jayda Hampton (especially on the beautifully wrenching *Black Yodel*).

They sound like they’ve been preparing for this moment all their lives, listening to the Everly Brothers, CCR, BoDeans, Allman Brothers, Tom Petty, et al, and crafting songs and a sound that their heroes would be proud of. The band is both tight (well-rehearsed but not rigid) and loose (spontaneous-sounding, not sloppy), placing equal emphasis on vocal and instrumental prowess with a good dose of twang. (Contemporary like-minded acts might include Old 97’s, Blue Rodeo, Band of Heathens, and Girls Guns & Glory.) And, they seem to be having fun doing what they are doing (probably the only thing they really share with that VFW Hall cover band), which comes out loud and clear in the music and is nicely chronicled in the live in-studio DVD included in this package.

The songs are easily accessible, catchy and hook-filled to immediately win listeners, while offering emotional depth that keeps listeners interested. On an album complete with highlights, the first three tracks (*Silver From*, *Still Love You*, and *Leave Us Alone*) and the sixth track, *Just Like New*, are highly infectious stand-outs perfect for the upcoming Summer season, as you’ll want to cruise down the road with the windows down singing at the top of your lungs as if you were discovering (yep) *Proud Mary* for the first time on your car radio.

Warren Catlett ("Cat")
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