

BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

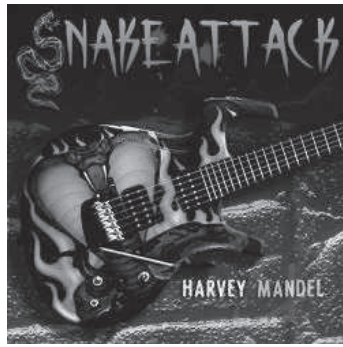
its Creole ear. Keeping fresh and relevant is one of the keys to its longevity. More so than that is its incredible danceability. And Houston-born accordionist Corey Ledet has been doing his part to keep the Gulf Coast dance going, be that from atop countless bandstands or inside a recording studio seven times before this. The dividends paid from going old-school a la Clifton, Boozoo or Buckwheat culminated in a Grammy nomination for 2013's *Nothin' But the Best*. Yet the 35-year-old doesn't always look in the rearview mirror to scope out his path forward. He's been heard zydecanizing everything from Prince's "Purple Rain" to Michael Jackson's "The Way You Make Me Feel." That modernist bent reaches new heights on *Standing on Faith*. Not because the Gloved One receives another nod via an instrumental run at "Love Never Felt So Good." Nor because the funky, transistorized "Intro" to this eight-song set invokes the Purple One. But because Ledet obviously enrolled in nu-school zydeco of the kind Chris Ardoin teaches over in Louisiana. Yes, a riffing accordion still wheezes heavily through "Push Me Away," and a steel-vested frotoir scratches at the grateful title track. But Ledet comes on like never before as an ultrasmooth operator. Today's R&B thoroughly informs "Street Light" as much as "Take Me There," which swabs its horizontal desires in a synthy, lets-get-it-on sheen. By reaching young and old, Ledet keeps zydeco advancing.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

HARVEY MANDEL

Snake Attack
ROCK BEAT

Harvey "The Snake" Mandel is also a lion on guitar. Always has been, starting back as early as 1966 when his serpentine lines first roared through Charlie Musselwhite's *Stand Back!* before doing the same, two years later, on his own *Cristo Redentor* debut. Mandel's advanced skills earned playing time alongside the likes of Muddy and Wolf,



Otis and Buddy. He's an honorary Rolling Stone (that's him tangled into "Hot Stuff" and "Memory Motel"). He's been one of Mayall's Bluesbreakers as well as a card-carrying member of Canned Heat (historically validated on the Woodstock stage). You know that two-handed tapping technique trademarked by Eddie Van Halen and Stanley Jordan? Harvey beat them to the punch on 1973's pioneering *Shangrenade*. Such is the life of an undervalued guitar deity who has been pushing the envelope akin to Beck to Fripp to Holdsworth.

Snake Attack is the ultimate expression of Mandel's turbulent innovation. Namely, he wrote, home-recorded, performed (yes, he's synthsational on all instruments), mixed and mastered this entirely self-contained, self-created world. Complexly patterned pyrotechnics overlay their textures. Those explorations then get diced into 10 bite-sized instrumentals given names as intriguing as their personalities: the hyper "Super Squid," ominous "Exotic Predator," and industrial "Sinister" which pumps its pistons down in an engine room. "A Luscious Life" and "Criminal Intent" contrast with their symphonic majesty, until "Freak of Dawn" U-turns back into the fray. Mandel's adventurous streak runs wild with testosterone leads, dense rhythmic hurricanes and proggy tendencies. It's the sound of a mad genius constructing the exact album heard in his head, as longstanding plans finally convert into tangible licks and beats and, ultimately, the recording of not only Mandel's dreams—but of anyone who appreciates a good envelope pushing.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



MAMADOU KELLY

Politiki
CLERMONT

The riff is "on" in a major way, turning guitars into snakes on the slither. Their rhythmic pulse effortlessly trances out with the assist of native tongues driving drones deeper still with every passing cycle of incantatory call-and-response. All the while, the ancestral granddaddy of drums, a calabash gourd, taps out the beat with a percussive horse-hoofed clip-clop. The telltale signs of desert blues are unmistakably ever-present.

Guitarist Mamadou Kelly was naturally destined to lead the genre. His top-shelf chops earned a spot in the late, great Ali Farka Touré's troupe: the Muddy Waters Band—or, even closer yet, the John Lee Hooker Band—of the Sahara. The music's mystical grip stayed with him after breaking solo. Inevitably, *Politiki* is a real mesmerizer just like Kelly's two prior albums for Clermont Music, a New York label with a West African heartbeat. However, unlike the hard-line traditionalism of 2013's *Adibar* and 2015's progressively wider-screened *Djamila*, *Politiki* now lets in the outside world. Yet does so without compromising the Malian quartet, as drums, bass and the prominent sear from Cindy Cashdollar's steel guitar melt into the groove.

Into and out of the ether jams go. One after the next—"Nakaam" into "Politiki" into "Mahin Nime"—relay a real sense of wide-open expanse that comes from the miles of elbowroom granted all eight tracks—sidewinders and spellbinders, each and every one. For 51 minutes, you're released, flying without wings, infused with a sense of having

momentarily left the planet—the hallmark of efficacious desert blues.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

R.L. BOYCE

Roll and Tumble
WAXPLOITATION

It's just another day at the north Mississippi office—which, in R.L. Boyce's case can be a juke, a house party, a folding chair out on the dirt, wherever he and an electric guitar set up shop. Except, luckily, tape was running this time. And freely so—vacuuming up the entire dicey affair: the bare-bulb ambiance bred by spontaneous outbursts and cackled asides as much as the endless one-chord grooves that become drugs over the course of their pulsating hypnosis. Music made any looser would surely collapse and disintegrate.

And therein lies *Roll and Tumble*'s magnificence. Because Boyce has always been a dish best served raw. That goes for back when he used to thunder as a fife-and-drummer in Otha Turner's squad and most certainly now when plugging the void left in the hill country's guitar legacy after R.L. Burnside died (who plugged after Fred McDowell, who plugged after Sid Hemphill). Astutely, co-producer/co-guitarist Luther Dickinson (North Mississippi Allstars) recorded—not produced—this session so as to safeguard against any remote chance of calculation or predictability. In other words: No polish, no disinfectant, no *practice, practice, practice*, no second takes. No problem for an hour-long set meant to play like you'd just flung open the jukehouse door and the band is right there, tumbling through "Don't Worry My Mind," then heaving "Shotgun" with a nasty, randy

