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“One of the most soulful blues rock guitarists of our time.” Nightflying Magazine

Joe Pitts arrived at his prominence as a hard rocking bluesman from a background that is equal parts traditional deep Southern roots combined with modern American blues influences. He was born September 26, 1958 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas close by the mythic Delta, but was initially inspired in the mid-sixties by the British Invasion blues rock stars Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. Like them, he then followed the blues highway back to the originators B.B., Albert and Freddie King, along with Muddy Waters, Elmore James and Robert Johnson. On top of that, he attended the exclusive Berklee School of Music for a summer session in 1994. The results show an exceptionally accomplished musician with devastating chops and unfailing taste, stone blues vocals and soulfulness that cannot be bought. From 2001 to 2009 the prolific artist released six CDs to a growing following while also becoming an in-demand session cat.

Ten Shades of Blues is a 10-song collection of choice covers that amply display a grasp that matches his reach while leading a tough band of Jimmy Lynn (bass), Lance Womack, George Mitchell and Jahleel Eli (drums), Robert “Frisbee” Coleman (Hammond organ), Terry Bradley (slide guitar), Gary Getts (harmonica) and “Chicken” James Dorris (piano). “Breaking Up Somebody’s Home,” as made famous by Albert King, comes in grooving with a relaxed funk beat as Pitts reveals the devious intent of the lyric with a smoky, menacing drawl. His vocal on the strutting Muddy Waters classic “Cross-eyed Cat” is so dead on that the Chicago blues master seems conjured for the performance. Harpist Getts wails like James Cotton throughout while Pitts answers back with a punchy, fat-toned outro solo featuring dynamic, arcing bends. Walter Trout’s heavy vamping “Clouds on the Horizon” gets the appropriate Hendrix touch as Pitts flaunts his serpentine, minor key licks with a vengeance that echoes the ominous lyrics. The swampy, syncopated Luther Allison track “Pain in the Streets” casts a hypnotic trance intensified by Pitts’ sly vocal and sustained lead lines. The searing slow blues “Freedom from my Demons” by Eric Gales is an epic journey to the heart of darkness, and Pitts is particularly convincing when he sings, “the hell hounds are howling...” while fighting back with anguished licks ripped from his axe and soul.

“Put the Shoe on the Other Foot” as cut by Albert Collins funks along with a second line groove as Pitts acknowledges the wry delivery of the “Iceman” while also biting off nasty, “razor blade” riffs. He next flashes his blazing slide technique on Elmore James’ classic “I’m Worried” while singing through a retro “radio” tone that recalls the legendary “broom duster” on his primal recordings. “No Stranger to the Blues,” as once covered by the Kinsey Report, is a jazzy, atmospheric, slow minor key blues ripe for Pitts’ world weary vocals and fluidly melodic six-string musings. Paying homage to the Brits, Pitts covers John Mayall’s hard shuffling “Walkin’ on Sunset,” utilizing the honking slide guitar of Terry Bradley to levitate the track far above the expected. Extending the tribute, the melancholy solo acoustic country blues “The World Keeps on Turning,” by Peter Green of early Fleetwood Mac fame, perfectly illustrates the cycle of blues that went from the US to England and back again in the sixties.

Pitts absorbed it all and filters it through his refined, yet expressive, sensibility. “Digging deep into every note sung and played, he proves that “you have to pay your dues if you want to sing the blues,” while making a complete commitment to producing evocative music that is both exciting and spiritually nourishing.”

Dave Rubin

“From his days with Liquid Groove Mojo to the series of bluesy solo CDs he has put out in recent years, Joe Pitts has established himself as a guitarist’s guitarist. If you are already familiar with Pitts, then Ten Shades Of Blue should be a no-brainer purchase. If not, this is the perfect introduction to what Joe Pitts is all about.

The in-the-pocket groove of opening track “Feel Like Breaking Up Somebody’s Home” sets the tone. This is music that doesn’t rely on histrionics, instead focusing on feel and soul. The material is a selection of Pitts’ influences, from blues legends like Muddy Waters and Elmore James to contemporaries like Walter Trout, but it never feels like a stale recital. Pitts has a unique style, and it bleeds over into every single track on Ten Shades Of Blue. His excellent tone and subtle phrasing are particularly suited to slow jams like the Kinsey Report’s “I’m No Stranger To The Blues.”

Besides the scorching guitar licks, this CD is Pitts’ finest vocal performance yet. His gravelly, soulful voice sounds like he means what he’s singing, even if these songs were written by others. Gale’s “Freedom From My Demons” shows Pitts pouring out his soul, both on vocals and guitar. The album finishes with a strong 1-2 punch of British blues legends, and Joe does a great job with John Mayall’s “Walking On Sunset” and Peter Green’s “World Keeps Turning.” Ten Shades Of Blue does a great job of putting Joe Pitts in the context of the blues greats, and in the process, suggests he is worthy of their exalted company.

Rob Johnson, Hittin’ The Note

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JOEPITTS.COM

REVERBNATION.COM/JPB

Publicist & Radio: Betsie Brown, Blind Raccoon, [HYPERLINK “mailto:betsie@blindraccoon.com”](mailto:betsie@blindraccoon.com) betsie@blindraccoon.com, 901.278.6850

Management: Tom Kelley - Mystical Images, mystical@suddenlink.net, 501.454.1462

Booking: David Hughes - Unknown Legends Artists, uklartists@yahoo.com, 501.620.3596