



Siftin' Thru Ashes

Review

by Alex Henderson

Blues-rock and blues-jazz are two different worlds. Blues-jazz tends to appeal to Jimmy Witherspoon fans who also appreciate Richard "Groove" Holmes and Jack McDuff; blues-rock tends to appeal to Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan fans who also know a great Jimmy Page or Eddie Van Halen solo when they hear one. But there are times when blues-rock and blues-jazz come together; they have often come together for Robben Ford, and they come together with memorable results on Matt Schofield's *Siftin' Thru Ashes*. This 2005 release finds Schofield leading an organ trio -- Schofield on vocals and guitar, Jonny Henderson on organ, and Evan Jenkins on drums -- and that format helps bring out the jazz element. Organ trios, of course, were a crucial part of soul-jazz in the '50s and '60s; the organ trio was a format that served Holmes, McDuff, Jimmy Smith, Shirley Scott, and many others well. And it is a format that allows for a lot of improvisation on the instrumental "Djam." But instrumentals are the exception instead of the rule on *Siftin' Thru Ashes*; Schofield sings more often than not on this album, which offers a healthy balance of blues-rock muscle and blues-jazz sophistication. Schofield is a loud, gritty, sweaty, burning dynamo of an electric guitarist, but all that toughness doesn't erase his desire to include some jazz complexity in his recipe -- and that ability to balance blues-rock and blues-jazz considerations serves him well on original material as well as an inspired cover of the Box Tops' '60s hit "The Letter." *Siftin' Thru Ashes* doesn't take the jazz element quite as far as some albums by Robben Ford and Dave Specter -- Schofield doesn't include any Thelonious Monk or Charlie Parker tunes -- but even so, this CD is an enjoyable demonstration of what can happen when blues-rock and blues-jazz are united.