



Asleep At The Wheel **"Take Me Back To Tulsa"** Evangeline Records

The front of the CD liner booklet bears the legend "*Play their classic tunes,*" and the fourteen tunes involved are *new recordings*. Prior to their release by UK independent Evangeline, these recordings surfaced in the States in 2001 as **"The Very Best Of Asleep At The Wheel"** on the Madacy 2 label. Apart from *Mr. Asleep* - Ray Benson [guitar, bass, vocals], the current Asleep line-up amounts to *time served members* Michael Francis [Sax], David Miller [bass], Jason Roberts [guitar, fiddle], David Sanger [drums] and *new boy* John Michael Whitby [piano]. The *Featured Artists* include Huey Lewis, Brad Paisley, Johnny Gimble and vocalists, Mandy Barnett and Eliza Gilkyson. There's also a list of *Guest Musicians* [there's a difference ?] and they amount to Lloyd Maines and Carco Claveria, plus former Wheel alumni – Cindy Cashdollar and Lucky Oceans [aka Reuben Gosfield].

The twenty-page line booklet is lavishly illustrated, mostly with cartoons, and Benson has appended comments on the history of each song. The opening cut, "The Letter [That Johnny Walker Read]," featuring Benson and Mandy Barnett on vocals, was the band's only Top 10 Country single, circa the fall of 1975. Their other Country Single Chart entries reinterpreted in this collection include "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" [# 69 in December 1974], "[Get Your Kicks On] Route 66" [# 48 in August 1976], "Miles And Miles Of Texas" [# 38 in November 1976], "Texas Me And You" which features, on this occasion, an Eliza Gilkyson vocal [# 75 in December 1978], "House of Blue Lights" [# 17 in May 1987] and "Boogie Back To Texas" [# 53 in October 1987].

As for the remaining cuts, only one dates from the band's post 1990 releases – "Big Balls In Cowtown" appeared, with a vocal by Benson and George Strait, on **"Asleep At The Wheel Tribute To Bob Wills And The Texas Playboys"** [1993]. Almost thirty years ago, "Take Me Back To Tulsa" opened their debut set **"Comin' Right At Ya"** [1974]. Leroy Preston's "My Baby Thinks She's A Train" was a # 1 Country single for Rosanne Cash in 1981, while Asleep cut their original version for **"The Wheel"** [1977]. "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens" originally dates from the **"Collision Course"** [1978] set, and "Last Meal" featured a Johnny Nicholas' lead vocal when it surfaced on **"Served Live"** [1979]. In the light of the foregoing song title, it seems somewhat appropriate that, these days, Nicholas is proprietor of the Hilltop Café, near Fredericksburg, Texas. From Asleep's more recent catalogue releases there's "Sugarfoot Rag" which was included on **"Western Standard Time"** [1988] while this new version showcases Brad Paisley. "Dance With Who Brung Ya" dates from **"Keepin' Me Up Nights"** [1990].

Produced by Ray Benson, and recorded at locations in Austin, Nashville, Ross [California] and Perth, Australia, *the big guy* penned four of the cuts, and arranged one traditional tune. The band's inspiration Bob Wills, in cahoots with Tommy Duncan, penned - **"Take Me Back To Tulsa"** - the cut that gives this compilation its title.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 04/03