



## BLUES LOVING MAN

Tracy Lee Nelson

Self-release, 2017, 52 minutes, \$20 (\$10 digital download) | Reviewed by **Jeanne Ferris**

SOME PEOPLE CONSIDER blues-rock a guy thing. But there's nothing like an electric guitar wailing at full volume to motivate banal housekeeping. Tracy Lee Nelson's new album of original music, *Blues Loving Man*, got my dirty dishes sparkling like nobody's business. Each song was a new story.

The opening track, "Married to the Blues," was like driving a Shelby Cobra eighty miles an hour, eyes peeled for cops. Shift down into a slow roll through a stop sign...and speed up again into Track 2, "Cold As Ice," which is a cup of joe with a shot of adrenalin.

I loved "My Baby Joanna," its upbeat swing-dance tempo and solid vocals channeling the too-soon-departed guitar shaman Stevie Ray Vaughan.

After wrangling dust bunnies the size of tumbleweeds, I had to sit down to absorb the intro on "Lost in Love" several times. It rivaled "Bridge of Sighs" by the overlooked Robin Trower. Nelson's velvet gravel voice is reminiscent of Stevie Ray.

Asked how he keeps his pipes from drying out, Nelson answered, "Herbal tea and honey! It's amazing how well honey works."

A self-taught student of blue notes, Nelson learned by listening to favorites like Delta bluesman Robert Johnson and Buddy Guy. Counting his blessings as honors, in 2003 he met his musical hero, B.B. King. Nelson strives to embody the parting words King bestowed upon him: "Keep playing the blues, man. They will listen." Nelson captured King's autograph on his Martin acoustic for good luck.

Nelson (Luiseño/Diegueño, Guassac/Mataweer/Duro) spent a rebellious youth skateboarding in the empty swimming pools of North Hollywood. Eventually, it paid off with sponsorships. He traveled like a pro, competing in tournaments.

Skater boy tuneage? Head-knocking punk rock. Nelson hung out with alternative bands like the Dead Kennedys (D.H. Peligro was his roommate) and Social Distortion.

"My friend Ray had the idea we could be like our favorite band, the Beatles," Nelson said. "He owned a gold and brown replica Memphis Les Paul and, having more money, bought me one too. My friend Robert Simmons owned drums and lived down the street."

The die was cast. Johnny and the Ding Bats did a kickflip straight into L.A.'s underground music scene.

Nelson has replaced Gen X sports with walking. Recently, he designed a skateboard, Full Blood, which is included in

the National Museum of the American Indian's traveling exhibition featuring American Indian skateboarders. The San Diego Museum of Man also hosted the display.

Coming full circle, Nelson served as tribal chairman of the Payómkawichum (La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians) from 2002 to 2006. Nelson found his muse embracing rich familial traditions. After that, simple lyrics about complicated issues such as Standing Rock with drumming and Native chanting found its way on to "Protectors" (my favorite track). It's Nelson's one concession, a departure from the hard-driving blues-rock that dominates this album: "Leave Our People Alone," "Dance, Dance," "Blues Loving Man," and "Native Descendents," which memorializes Marven Amago.

"I've made eight CDs, and this took three years. I laid down all the tracks myself: drums, guitar, and vocals. I had to talk my wife, Joanna (Mississippi Choctaw) into singing back up on 'Good Time Tonight.' Andrew Machin at Big Rock Studios is very talented—helped with back-up too."

Nelson considers his success to be the result of living a drug- and alcohol-free life. It's his badge of honor. "People would say, oh you're Indian. Let me buy you a drink. They couldn't believe when I would say, No, thank you, I don't drink or smoke."

His reward for the clean living was the gig of a lifetime with the all-American Indian band Redbone at the 1996 Super Bowl in Tempe, Arizona. They opened for the Four Tops and Hootie and the Blowfish.

"I felt so honored when Pat asked me to step in as a guitarist for Lolly Vegas [Pat's brother], who had had a stroke. And no matter where I am, I'm still asked to perform their hit, 'Come and Get Your Love.'"

His happy place to decompress and fingerpick lyrics at three a.m.? The water closet.

This pastime resulted in Nelson's Sunburst Fender Stratocaster earning a unique name from an ex. Convinced he was cheating with another on the phone in the W.C., she asked, "Who was that b---- you were talking to?"

Don't you think the Fender has earned a new moniker?

True confession: the closing track, "I Want To Know," is three minutes and twenty-six seconds of pure sunshine that got replayed instantly. Loads of clean laundry were folded in record time. This spring, Nelson will coax those worried notes out of his axe at the 2018 Native American Music Awards in NYC—and remember, it's not just a guy thing.