

PHOENIX BLUES SOCIETY - BLUESBYTES

Omar Kent Dykes calls **Omar & The Howlers'** latest CD his "Americana CD. From rockabilly to a ballad, and from country to blues, it's all over the place." Maybe we could stop the review right there, because that's as good a capsule summary as you can get, but it's also worth mentioning that *I'm Gone* (Big Guitar Music) also marks the 50th anniversary of playing music for Dykes. What better way to honor that landmark date than by releasing a collection of the styles of music that inspired him to start down his chosen path?

Growing up in McComb, MS, Dykes was exposed to all of these different types of music, and they have all figured into his playing ever since he started playing, or at least as far back as I remember in the early 80's, when he used to make regular visits to clubs and festivals in Mississippi. Rockabilly gets a bit of a revival (why did it ever fade from the scene?) on the title cut that opens the disc, the enjoyable instrumental, "Omar's Boogie," "Move Up To Memphis," and the wistful autobiographical closer, "Take Me Back."

"Drunkard's Paradise" is a mournful country tune, "Let Me Hold You" is a old school soul ballad, and the restless rhythms of "Wild and Free" pay tribute to Bo Diddley. The primary focus is on the blues, as may be expected on an Omar & The Howlers' disc. "All About the Money" would have been a good fit on Omar's last two collaborations with Jimmie Vaughan, and "Down to the Station" is a nice touch of Chicago blues. The Texas-styled instrumental, "Lone Star Blues," is a show-stopper, and "Goin' Back to Texas" is a fine slow burner.

The disc's lone cover is John Lee Hooker's "I'm Mad Again." If it's possible to take a song from Hooker and make it your own, then Omar probably does that here. His feral growl is at maximum power on this angry track.

Dykes gets outstanding support from some of Austin's finest musicians. Casper Rawls plays acoustic and electric guitars on several tracks, while Derek O'Brien adds electric guitar on four tunes. Ronnie James and Bruce Jones alternate tracks on bass, as do Wes Starr and Mike Buck on drums.

Like any Omar & The Howlers release, *I'm Gone* is a lot of fun to listen to over and over again. There's always plenty of good blues and you always count on Omar to give 110% whenever he plays. I'm looking forward to his next 50 years of making music.

- Graham Clarke