**Featured Blues Review . Blues Blast Magazine. March 17, 2011**

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| **Mike Milligan And Steam Shovel - *Lucky Man***  **Mojo Hut Records**  [**http://mikemilligan.homestead.com/**](http://mikemilligan.homestead.com/)  **Time-39:09**  Blues-rock is the jumping off point employed by Kokomo, Indiana’s Mike Milligan and company in this curious mélange of originals and R&B covers. Mike leads the basic power trio with his guitar, vocal, writing and keyboard skills that get occasional beefing-up by horns, http://www.illinoisblues.com/images/mikemilligancd.jpgharmonica and backing vocals. His hearty voice and his varied approach to blues-rock riffing lend enough originality to keep things interesting. The rhythm section is rock-steady throughout.  A nifty bass intro kicks off what for me is the standout original found within, the gospel driven “The Bridge”. It’s a strong tale of perseverance. It features two guitar parts, one of which is played through a Leslie speaker or Leslie effect. “I’m Not Lost” is Texas slow-burner done-up ala Los Lobos. Vocal and acoustic piano lead-off the deliberate “Sunshine Today” which is topped off by a sax solo that sounds as if it was lifted from The Saturday Night Live Band. “ Meat & Three” sees the band working out on a funky guitar instrumental aided by guest guitarist Bart Walker that owes a debt to the guitar wizardry of Earl Hooker. The title track is a perfunctory ode to the singer’s better half. The song and album is closed out by daughter Lilyanne on toy piano and giggles to bring the family vibe full circle.  My nod for the best cover version would be the slowed down take on Billy Preston’s “Will It Go Round In Circles” that has Stevie Berek’s harmonica taking the keyboard- horn part. Jazz-tinged guitar brings the tune to an end like a stream-train slowing to a stop. The Ray Charles chestnut “Busted” is given its due as Texas-guitar interlock with the driving horn section. The sentiment is apropos of these current financially woeful times. “The Dark End Of The Street” is a pretty much straight reading of the Chips Moman-Dan Penn classic. Mike Milligan’s sigh leading into his vocal on the lead track, Stevie Wonders’ “A Place In The Sun”, seems to be in anticipation of the weird falsetto backing vocal that mars an otherwise ok blues-rock interpretation. (note from Mike: reviewer obviously didn’t read the credits to see that the “weird falsetto” is my 7 yr old son, Maceo, singing with me!)  These guys fit nicely alongside Indigenous or any of the similar-minded current blues-rockers, although they tend to expand the genre along a R&B path at times. Much attention is given to the arrangements. The record doesn’t come off as just songs plugged into a blues-rock blueprint. Boot that “Mickey Mouse” background vocal (see Mike’s note above) and what you have here is blues-rock nirvana taken a step further.  **Reviewer Greg “Bluesdog” Szalony hails from the New Jersey Delta. He is the proprietor of Bluesdog’s Doghouse at** [**http://bluesdog61.multiply.com**](http://bluesdog61.multiply.com/)**.** |