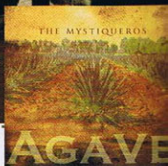




WALT WILKINS AND THE MYSTIQUEROS

Agave
Blue Boot

LSM



Born onstage at Gruene Hall in 2006, the Mystiqueros are Walt "Big Daddy" Wilkins, Bill "El Guapo" Small, Johnny "Gringo" Greenberg, "Baby" Ray Rodriguez and — as soundman, spiritual advisor and additional vocalist — Mike "Sweetribs" Horn. The band made a solid debut with 2007's *Diamond in the Sun*, and the formidable lineup is even more impressive on the new *Agave*. It's only been three years, but there's a tightness here that suggests an almost spiritual connection, as though these guys have been playing together their entire lives. Wilkins has gone so far as to say it's the most fun that he's had with a band in 30 years, and it shows.

All of this goes to say that *Agave* is filled with 14 different songs that are all compelling in their own way. Most of the songs are co-written by Wilkins and his various writing friends, big guns that include Kevin Welch, Monty Warden and Nick Pellegrino and a few others. Johnny Gringo penned a couple of pretty tunes, "Porcelain Heart" and "Worry," and the whole MQ5 band gets credit for "Night Train Rolling By," which is probably the most instrumentally creative song on the disc. Bass player and vocalist Bill Small spent two years studying voice at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. While that served him well, the soulfulness of his voice can only come from the heart. You can hear it on "Miss," a song penned by the great Jimmy Davis, and it'll make you tear up every time. Soul is about honesty, emotion, kindness, appreciation, and love. In music, it's the element that sets a band or musician apart from the rest. If you think about other bands that are often described as soulful — the Subdudes and the Band of Heathens, come to mind right off the bat — you'll see the resemblance in the Mystiqueros. It's hard to describe but you know it when you see it and hear it and feel it. Soul makes good music even better.

Tastefully embedded into the CD artwork are images of Walt's guitar that was stolen from a gig two days before Christmas of 2009. It's a Gibson Americana model, a yellow pine acoustic guitar with two rivet holes and two other circles in the wood. It must hurt to lose your favorite guitar, especially right before Christmas, but it hasn't been a showstopper for Wilkins. He's been a leader of the Americana movement for a long time, and no matter which guitar he uses, it's apparent from *Agave* that he and the Mystiqueros intend to keep it that way.

— TRACIE FERGUSON

