

be found, too, whether it's longtime Zito compatriot Doug Byrkit's sassy bassline on the ebullient *First Class Life* or an impassioned album-closing barrel through the Chuck Berry all-timer *Johnny B. Goode*.

In addition to Byrkit, Zito enjoys top-tier support from drummer Matthew Johnson, who keeps the rhythm sharp and the cymbal bombs flying amidst Zito and guest guitarist Eric Gales' banshee wail through a 12-minutes-plus rendition of Jimi Hendrix's *Voodoo Chile*. Rounding out the set's trio of guitar guests, Dave Kalz's crunchy solo licks bring sizzle to *The Road Never Ends*. This track also offers a sterling showcase to veteran Freddie King sideman Lewis Stephens, whose spirited piano and organ work throughout the recording sets a bluesy bedrock upon which Zito's musical inventions are free to soar.

Impeccably recorded by Jason McEntire, from the essential groundwork of live engineer Tony Bertoglio, **Blues for the Southside** is one of the best-sounding concert recordings so far this year. Mike Zito's holiday weekend party is one that lovers of blues, rock, and all points in between will be happy to crash.

—Matt R. Lohr

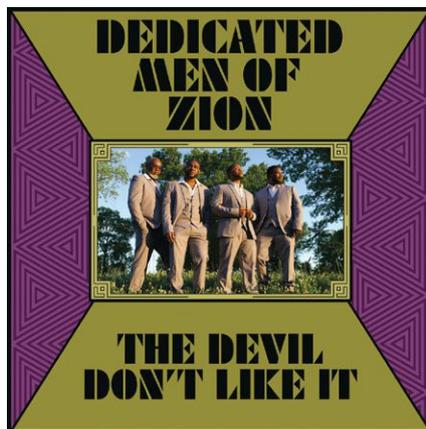
DEDICATED MEN OF ZION

The Devil Don't Like It

Bible & Tire – BTRC 023

This is gospel music at its very best, for it combines the passionate joy of soul music with the deep-down testifying of spirituals. The Dedicated Men of Zion—Anthony Daniels, Antwan Daniels, Marcus Sugg, Dexter Weaver—lift our spirits on every song on **The Devil Don't Like It**, inspiring us to dance, to clap our hands, to sing along, and to move our souls and hearts to the can't-sit-still rhythms. By the end of the album, we've been moved; indeed, we've been transported and redeemed.

The album opens with a funky, Sly and the Family Stone bass line on *Lord Hold My Hand*, a soul shouter propelled by George Sluppick's steady drumming and Will Sexton's and Matt Ross-Spang's crunchy guitar riffs. The feverish call-and-response song raises us up as it pleads with God for God's power and support in the midst of times when it seems like we're getting nowhere in our lives. The title track rides along the strains of Al Gamble's B3 in a slowly undulating rhythm that rises to the rafters on the Dedicated Men of Zion's swelling harmonies.



The bright, joyous *One More River to Cross* burns the roadhouse and the church house down with its infectious pop gospel sound, its slithering lead riffs, and its get-out-of-your-seats rhythms, while the group testifies on the minor-chord *Rock My Soul* through their transportive harmonies. Layers of crunchy guitars and wailing B3 weave a bed of funky Memphis sound under *A Change Is Gonna Come*, while the group delivers a soulful and heart-touching version of the Staple Singers' *I Know I've Been Changed*. The group's joyous version of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's *Up Above My Head* grabs us and won't let go, while the album closes with the slow-burning, swaying *I'm a Soldier in God's Army*.

The Dedicated Men of Zion take us to church, and **The Devil Don't Like It** weaves the sounds of gospel and soul and delivers a soul-stirring sound.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

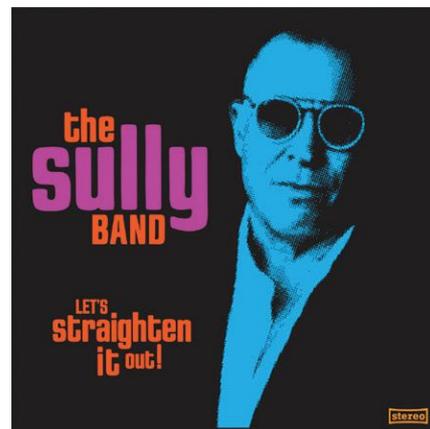
THE SULLY BAND

Let's Straighten It Out!

Blue Élan / Belly Up – BUR001

Robert "Sully" Sullivan is a man of multitudes. In addition to his years as host of the internationally syndicated business broadcast *The Big Biz Show*, he is also the swaggering frontman for his own ten-piece SoCal soul ensemble. Voted Best Live Band at the 2020 San Diego Music Awards, the Sully Band now brings their sound to the masses with debut CD **Let's Straighten It Out!**, a pleasing ten-pack of venerable soul, funk, and blues favorites.

The instrumental chemistry is apparent from track one, Jessie Hill and Mac Rebennack's *When the Battle Is Over*, the horn arrangements of multi-instrumentalist Tripp Sprague setting toes immediately tapping. Sprague's round-toned harmonica is a tasty complement



to Sully's big-hearted vocal attack on the Tempations chestnut *I Wish It Would Rain*. Sully's smooth delivery meshes marvelously with guest vocalist Rebecca Jade on Brenton Wood's *Gimme Little Sign*, an equally lovely showcase for bassist James East, Mark Charles Hattersley's breezy Hammond B3, and an understated trumpet solo from Steve Dillard.

Drummer Tres Hodgens and percussionist Ignacio "Nacho" Sobers are the potent paired powerhouses behind Little Johnny Taylor's *If You Love Me Like You Say*, keeping the rhythm groovy behind a sharp solo from guest guitarist Anthony Cullins. For the album's high point, Shuggie Otis' *Ice Cold Daydream*, the entire band makes a magnificently joyful noise, with standout contributions from Sobers, Hattersley, baritone saxophonist April Leslie, and guitarist Jon Harford.

Sully's lead vocals are rough-edged but surprisingly versatile. He tosses off Ray Charles' *Hallelujah, I Love Her So* with effortless cool; then, amidst the moody horns and tremulous flutes of the Latimore-penned title track, his throaty shouts and falsetto accents ease every iota of heartbreak from the pleading-for-understanding lyrics. Sully romps his way through Billy Preston's *Nothing from Nothing*, bolstered by the unexpected interpolation of Grant Bengiger's buoyant banjo, and the vocalist transforms that energetic vibe into anxious intensity for Nolan Porter's *If I Could Only Be Sure*.

The Sully Band closes their inaugural album by bringing an intriguingly gentle touch to Jackie Wilson's jubilant *Higher and Higher*. Sobers, Sprague's horn charts, and the incantatory backing vocals give the whole affair a rich gospel flavor, Sully's voice entreating for exultation before a feather-light fade out from Leslie's bari clarinet. With **Let's Straighten It Out!**, the Sully Band sets one thing straight for sure: this is an outfit well worth keeping an ear open for in the future.

—Matt R. Lohr