

Sing Out!

Our mission is to preserve and support the cultural diversity and heritage of all traditional and contemporary folk musics, and to encourage making folk music a part of our everyday lives. We are a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, educational organization.



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DOUG MACLEOD

Brand New Eyes (Fresh! FR-703)

When you close your eyes and listen to Doug MacLeod, it's difficult to decide what you like best his expressive guitar technique or his passionate approach to vocals. Both are exemplary and have been over the past 16 releases. The title track, alone, is enough to stop traffic. Digging deeper down, the somber 'Something Dark Is Walking' translates to a late night and something ominous about to happen, while the upbeat 'Train Of Change' delivers a hopeful strain. Yet even in its brightest moments there's a sadness to MacLeod's voice that fits the blues like a well-worn glove.

The slight chug of a bare bones rhythm section takes things up and over the long grade with a lonesome, but winsome sound. The long-time sideman has supported a blues who's who and, as a young man, lived and breathed a somewhat nomadic lifestyle that led him to the origins of the music he loved: St. Louis, Norfolk, New York, Los Angeles. Pure acoustic blues, embellished with strong finger-picked, rhythmic guitar and a voice that underlines his conviction as it translates to that world-weary state that all the best bluesmen project. Add to this the fact that these are all his own compositions and there are few who can touch MacLeod for authenticity.

And, for a player whose guitar playing was once referred to as "sparse", skip forward to the 7th track, 'Somewhere South of Somewhere', in which MacLeod's breathtaking instrumental is anything but. The vocal that steers 'I Rolled A Nickel' is artful in its ability to conjure a soul bleeding itself out. The combination of resophonic guitar and elements of slide further extend its aura of absolute misery. Eric Bibb meets Chris Smither, may help describe the range of MacLeod's sound but not the haunting spirit behind it. To add that many of his songs have been covered by everyone from Albert King to Little Milton further distances him from others.

'The Nature of a Man' continues this trend of excellence while songs like 'Midnight in Memphis' (the sole co-write) single-handedly redefines the potential of acoustic blues to deliver a well-placed goose bump. The final track is a highlight as 'Welcome In Your Home' closes off the party with a memorable slide workout and one of the album's most heartfelt vocals classic MacLeod. It's the perfect soundtrack to, as he hopes, encourage us all to look at the world around us afresh, with Brand New Eyes.

Eric Thom