

Daniel Castro, *Desperate Rain* Reviewed by Joseph Jordan



Daniel Castro has developed into a consummate artist, and a musician fully laden with grace and fire.

Desperate Rain is not for the faint of heart, but a tough, gritty, and brilliant glimpse at Daniel Castro's still burgeoning legacy as one of the finest singer/song-writer/guitarists on the West Coast. He has now emerged at the fore-front of the gifted San Francisco Bay Area blues scene.

Along with his biting, blistering slide and flat-pick work, Castro's powers are in full measure on this, only his third LP (since 1999's *No Surrender*) in an outstanding career. It's a remarkable representation of his full command as a modern blues man. His vocals are stronger than they've ever been, and that's saying something.

With his co-producer, Joel Jaffe, Castro shines in his role as band leader; however, the Daniel Castro Band is just about as important. Bassist Johnny Yu and drummer David Perper, both of whom add superlative background and harmony vocals, are seemingly made for this band. Castro chose both of them well, as Yu's fluid, sharp, and melodic bass lines complement Perper's more than accomplished drum work. This trio sounds huge.

Special guest Julie Friend provides an inspired Merry Clayton-like, not-so background vocal to "Johnny Nitro," a lyrically sly and loving tribute to the late North Beach musical hero and San Francisco blues/rock legend. Friend

also, most impressively, co-wrote all of the songs on the album along with Castro. Together, the two display a strong song-writing maturity.

The 13 cuts (in an over 60-minute CD) provide many standout songs, including, to name just a few, a modern take on the Delta-like "Dark Train" and "Shelter Me," displaying Castro's blistering slide.

Another highlight is the Albert Collins-like 12-bar "Worried Baby Blues," just a marvelous song with a joyful delivery. Castro's solo on that song cuts the song's blues to the bone and if you heard no other tune on the CD, you'd still know Castro's got it, and it's got to come out.

The entire recording's sound is both spare and meaty, excellently produced and mixed, and makes this modern blues and blues/rock effort an incendiary accomplishment.

The CD's artwork by F&B Graphics is superb, from the muted color snap of the band to the cover image of an eerie landscape on a lost highway.

The texture and tone of Castro's assured vocals, along with his compelling presence on lead guitar, just might jump start his band, after all these years, to the national stage. If it doesn't, that's the blues nation's loss, because this band is just aching to be heard.

[Reprinted from the January 2014 issue of *Golden Gate Grooves*, the newsletter of The Golden Gate Blues Society.]