

## RENEGADE CREATION

**Michael Landau (Guitar); Robben Ford (Guitar); Jimmy Haslip (Bass); Gary Novak (Drums)**

Renegade Creation is the new record by veteran musical giants, Michael Landau, Robben Ford, Jimmy Haslip and Gary Novak. Blending together to create a blues-driven sound that not only will satisfy their individual fans but is fresh enough to attract a legion of new fans as well. Delivering both rootsy, blues/rock vocal tunes and fiery instrumentals, the band draws on the unique guitar interplay between guitar giants Robben Ford and Michael Landau who inspire each other to new personal bests.

### Review

Renegade Creation (Blues Bureau International - a division of Shrapnel Records) is a thinking man's blues rock album featuring a dream-team of four top shelf musicians - Michael Landau (guitar), Robben Ford (guitar), Jimmy Haslip (bass) and Gary Novak (drums). Though this is the first time the four have recorded an album together, it's not as though there's no history between these players. Ford and Haslip go back to the pre-Yellowjackets days, Landau has played with Ford many times (including a late-70s west coast tour that included Haslip), both Landau and Ford have used Novak on various tours and recordings, you get the idea. Some of you may envision "west coast jazz" when you think of these musicians, but what they've done here is far removed from that scene. Renegade Creation is a guitar-driven, predominantly vocal rock album, with a heavy emphasis on blues; more akin to Ford and Landau's vocal recordings than any manner of jazz or fusion. And believe me when I say it's "guitar-driven" - this disc is packed with killer playing and to-die-for tones from both guitarists, who also make a great pairing on this type of material.

The bulk of the writing credits on Renegade Creation are split evenly between Ford and Landau, and their penchant for composing smart songs with often heady chords is evident throughout the album. This is blues rock for grown ups; written and played by experienced musicians who have years of experience in the genre, and have an obvious affinity for it.

The disc opens with "What's Up," a fun, bouncy shuffle written by Landau, who also provides all of the lead guitar on the track. His tone on this song is gorgeous; that enviable overdriven clean sound that he always manages to dial in, and is perfect for the blues licks he peels off here. It's followed by a couple of subtler pieces - "Soft In Black Jeans" and "Destiny Over Me," written by Ford and Landau respectively. "Soft In Black Jeans" is a highly layered song, both in it's mood and it's production. Its acoustic touches are well-placed, and Landau's double-stop laden lead work is a great fit. The highly bluesy "Destiny Over Me" has Ford taking center stage for most of the leads. The bare-bones tone he employs easily allows his dynamic touch to shine through.

"God and Rock n' Roll," co-written by Ford and Haslip, is an uptempo rocker that gives

us our first real taste of Ford and Landau trading solos. The two guitarists square off during the outro, and it's a real treat to hear. Landau uses what sounds to be a Voodoo-Vibe on this one, which contrasts nicely with Ford's dry crunchy tone.

Next is "The Darkness," which alone is worth the price of admission. This song is credited to the entire band, and features Ford and Landau working in a style we all love to hear them play - slow minor blues. Ford handles the haunting vocals on this one, but it's the killer guitar playing that will leave your teeth chattering (did I really just write that?). Landau takes the lion's share of the lead guitar on this track, providing all the fills in addition to a solo, and he absolutely burns this thing to the ground with his searing, SRV-inspired licks. Again, his tone here is spot on. Ford chimes in with a solo of his own that's more understated than Landau's, building on a simple motif for his first chorus before leaning into some rhythmic double-stops for his second. What a track. This is the song you wanted to hear if these two guitar giants ever collaborated.

The heaviest song on the album is "Renegade Destruction" - a Landau tune that sounds like something his great mid-90s band the Raging Honkies would have played. Ford plays lead on this one and delivers a performance as rocking and kinetic as anything he's done in some time. Another highlight is the sophisticated blues based piece "Who Do You Think You Are." Written by Ford, this tune is anchored by heavy riffs, and includes some of the disc's best guitar playing. Ford and Landau trade off extensively over some great chord changes in the solo section, and again over the main riff near the end. Their hippest lines on the album are on this track. One of my personal favorites on the the album is "Where The Wind Blows" - a great mid-tempo Landau tune where his gruff vocals suit the song just as well as his blues licks. Like many songs on the album, this one makes great use of layered guitar tracks to present a big sound, without sounding over-produced.

Renegade Creation is essentially a vocal record, but it does feature two instrumentals. The first is a Ford composition entitled "Peace" - a great driving song that sounds very "west coast." This track features some wonderfully subtle whammy-bar work by Landau, which adds to the song's neo-surf music vibe. The other instrumental is the Gary Novak song "Brothers," which closes out the album. Novak also delivers a head-turning performance on bass on this track. It's a stylistic departure from the rest of the album, but a cool track nonetheless. Melodic at times, while heavy at others, this song gives Ford another chance to show what he can do over some cool chord changes.

There's a lot of guitar playing on Renegade Creation, but it doesn't come off like a show-boat album. There are real songs here, with real subtleties to be uncovered upon further listening. And though these four musicians do constitute a "super group" of sorts, they sound like a real band - not just a hodgepodge of player's players thrown together to make a record. Ford and Landau's styles are very complimentary, and the Haslip/Novak rhythm section is always tight and in tune with the rest of the group. Connoisseurs of great guitar tones and playing are going to love this album, as will fans of great blues rock in general.

Richard Murray (Guitar Channel)