

## Mp3 McLemore Avenue - 926 East



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McLemore Avenue--following in the tradition of instrumental groups like Booker T. and the MGs, Medeski, Martin and Wood, and Jimmy Smith--combines elements of southern soul, R&B, jazz and other genres with an original sound that is unique to Austin, Texas 11 MP3 Songs BLUES: Texas Style, BLUES: Rhythm Blues Details: Winner of the 2005 Austin Chronicle Music Poll: Best Performing Bands - Jam "Interesting groove...sounds like the MGs meets the Ventures...I really like the guitar and I especially like the B3 sound. " -Steve Cropper, STAX guitarist/producer The Austin/Memphis Connection: McLemore Avenue, from Austin, Texas takes its name from the street over in Memphis, Tennessee where STAX Records--a name synonymous with Southern soul music--once stood. It was home to a host of legendary recording artists including Otis Redding and Isaac Hayes, as well as Booker T and the MGs, who performed the double role of house band and solo act. Recent Accomplishments: Besides being voted one of Austin's Top 10 instrumental bands, their debut album 926 East was named an Austin Chronicle "Texas Top 10" for 2003 and declared "Fun, fun, fun!" by Living Blues Magazine, and is still receiving critical acclaim: "Rooting themselves in southern soul, they've made a modern record that plays with the excitement and feel of discovering a Stax classic." -Robert Gordon, author of It Came From Memphis Reviews of McLemore Avenue's debut album, 926 East: Being There Magazine- "That this instrumental outfit from Austin, Texas would name themselves and their album after the legendary home of Soulsville, USA is bold enough. That they actually made a Stax-worthy record without sounding like a pale imitation of Booker T. the MGs is astounding. McLemore Avenue obviously have a great deal of admiration for that sweet 60s soul vibe that Stax made famous. But as ably as they play that Memphis music, these 11 original tunes have a unique and distinctively Texas twang to them that defy being defined as 'mere' homage. Not that you'd be blamed for mistaking several of 926 East 's tracks as covers of Booker T.

originals. First of all, organist Patrick Barker-Benfield plays the B-3 like someone who's heard 'Green Onions' a time or twenty. He wrote or co-wrote all the songs, and the arrangements are all anchored around his organ (especially the very 'Onions'-esque 'About Face'). And then there's 'Tree-Hug-Her,' whose name obviously brings the MGs' 'Hip-Hug-Her' to mind (without ripping off its sound). But there are other influences at work here as well. Guitarist Landis Armstrong brings blistering blues and country licks to several of the tracks ('Texas Toast' and 'FUBAR'), not to mention surf guitar and theremin ('A Toy Robot!'). Eric C. Hughes and Chris Johnson lay down one solid groove after the next on drums and bass, respectively. They blend blues, jazz, swing, soul, funk, rock, and Latin rhythms with adroitness (check out 'Me Gusta' and 'FUBAR' to hear many of the above in one song). The band's ability to marry many styles together serves them well. The shortcoming of many instrumental groups in recent years has been a lack of variety. They may have one really cool sounding song, but too often that's all they have-the same song over and over. McLemore Avenue, happily, do not fall in this trap. While they are purposefully grounded in Stax-era soul, every track on the disc has a distinct sound. In this regard, McLemore Avenue reminds me a lot of modern groove/jazz combos like Medeski Martin Wood or the Charlie Hunter Quartet. Those acts have managed to make subtle variations on their signature sounds so that things remain fresh from record to record. 926 East is a great pleasure to listen to, with a rich variety of sounds and textures that sound classic and fresh at the same time. Mr. Jones would approve." Mohair Sweets- "Wicked. A totally hot Booker T and The MGs, intro-soul, R&B and groove monster! Equally fantastic playing, production and tunes. Over the past few years there have been any number of combos trying to nail this vibe and McLemore Avenue has done it full stop. And not only without sounding like they're merely aping the style but by injecting life, energy and style into it as well. Full marks to guitarist Landis Armstrong, bassist Chris Johnson, drummer Eric Hughes and Hammond man Patrick Barker-Benfield. A Mohair Sweets must hear!" Living Blues Magazine- "Who would have thought that an Austin band would have such a Memphis fixation? From the band's name, the album title, and the (mostly) instrumental grooves that anchor this disk, it's obvious that Soulsville, U.S.A. is this group's mecca: guitarist Landis Armstrong opens Ham Slice with a riff that's worthy of Steve Cropper's Telecaster, while Patrick Barker-Benfield lays down some mighty organ chords that scream Booker T. Jones. On cuts like Texas Toast and (The Last of The) V-8 Interceptors, as well as the aggressive About Face, McLemore Avenue explores exotica, instrumental jazz, and Vegas-style lounge music, then returns

to the Memphis theme with Tree-Hug-Her, a twisted variation on Booker T. the MG's 'Hip-Hug-Her'. Fun, fun, fun!" Pipeline Magazine- "Named after the address of the famous Stax label studios in Memphis, Texas quartet McLemore Avenue make no bones about their major influence and 926 East shows them as the closest anyone has come to following in the footsteps of the mighty Booker T The MGs. Led by Patrick Barker-Benfield at his Hammond B-3 organ they pump out eleven originals inspired by various phases of their heroes' career. And we are talking inspiration here, not imitation or pastiche. So yes, the likes of Ham Slice make great companions to Green Onions without being derivative or having an identifiable lineage back to any particular track or tracks. The ones that come closest to that are Texas Toast and About Face (a reference to Small Faces organist Ian McLagan) which have the kind of driving bass riff associated with the Soul Dressing era of Booker T The MGs. And I'm all in favour of that. There are two expressive slow blues in Sad But True and The Indefatigable Jimmy Smits, a taste of early Memphis soul in Ham Slice, more modern uptempo beats on FUBAR and a touch of '60s funk on Me Gusta. A Toy Robot! has a modern smooth feel with spacey Theramin decorations, Tree-Hug-Her has a rolling electric piano riff but a much more expansive guitar sound to lift it right out of the Hip-Hug Her bag. Guitarist Landis Armstrong has the feel of Steve Cropper but an ear for a wider range of sounds and a more fluent lead guitar style. His solo on (The Last Of The) V-8 Interceptors sees him really take off along with plenty of swelling B-3 in support. But his presence throughout the whole album is a major factor in its success, and his relationship with Patrick Barker-Benfield absolutely key. The finale, the title track 926 East, is an intense, slow-rolling extravaganza which allows them both plenty of room to roam as it breaks down for an improvised middle section before the bass and drums kick in again. Bassist Chris Johnson and drummer Eric Hughes are another key partnership as they underpin everything with solid soulful riffs and beats. They keep it simple when necessary and ignite at just the right moments. This is one great album, by far the best release in its style since the '60s in fact." Ear Candy Mag- "The first time I heard McLemore Avenue it was on a Wildebeest Records Sampler cd. Most all the songs on the sampler were instrumentals but I remember their song stood out from the rest. They were smooth beyond description. Memphis soul stew is what they're cooking and you'll love every second of it. If songs like Fubar or A Toy Robot! don't get your foot a tappin' then you better check your pulse 'cause you just may be dead. Patrick Barker-Benfields B-3 is like a B-12 shot and the guitar work of Landis Armstrong would put a grin on the face of Steve Cropper as well as Carlos Santana. Then there's Chris Johnson's bass and Eric C. Hughes

drums locking the whole thing together and moving it on down the road." The Hammond Grounds- "Funk with a Texas Twist! This Texas Funk band under the guise of paying homage to the Stax label has come up with an album worthy of the label itself. Another Booker T. The MG's cover band? Certainly not! They throw in their own influences of Texas Rock and Surf music, turn up the amp and play like they're hungry. Patrick Barker-Benfield wrote all the tracks, with a little help on a few, and mixes up the styles to keep it interesting. We do get some classic Booker T. fare in the direct send up Tree-Hug-Her, some Surf in FUBAR, some funky Soul Jazz in Me Gusta (reminiscent of Funk Inc.), some 60's Mod in (The Last of The) V-8 Interceptors, and some neo-Mod Funk in A Toy Robot. Taking things beyond the formulaic labels, the band is full of talent, energy and surprises. While the band and CD name are tributes to the Stax label (it's the address of the old label), they give Funk their own Texas twist. Looking for a solid CD to Funk up a party? This is it!" The Austin Chronicle- "As is well-known among devotees of Jimmy Smith, Booker T the MG's, and Ramsey Lewis, the Hammond B3 is good for much, much more than churchy hymn-accompaniment. Under the right set of fingers and feet, it's capable of the ultimate soulful grooves. Locals McLemore Avenue would be easy to compare to Booker T Co. (the name refers to the original address of Stax Studios in Memphis); in fact, that's what they're aiming for. Still, guitarist Landis Armstrong is a little more aggressive than Steve Cropper was back in the day, with an amp turned up a bit louder and a few more notes in play -- check the twang on Texas Toast. Very much in the 'Green Onions' patch is About Face, but groove to the percussive lounge simmer of Me Gusta for a change of pace. A Toy Robot! finds the quartet surf-in' 'n' spyin' with the occasional sci-fi flourish on theremin, while returning to greasy grooves for Tree-Hug-Her (Booker T fans, note the name of that one). (Last of the) V-8 Interceptors skulks around with an ominous-sounding backbeat, the perfect soundtrack for flogging your way down the interstate into a horizon full of storm clouds. There's not a bum song to be found on here; whether you're an organ aficionado or not, it's just the thing for getting down to your socks and having a funky soul party." Hammond Beat- "926 East was not an easy theme to grasp at first. The energy of the record is too earthy to be regarded as a simple trip in the way back machine. The Texas-funk tone is a character throughout, but not really the featured player to be put into the "new gimmick" category. But contrary to what their name suggests, this is not a straight-up homage to the Stax catalogue either. Though there are solid, yet contemporary, nods to the late 60s MG's records. The album really plays out like a score to a time-traveling Southern road movie, taking in the mystery and mythos of

a hundred years of stereotype and turning the mirror toward the stranger pointing the finger. That isn't the kind of thing one creates on purpose, but rather is the artist naturally letting his own life experience out of the bottle. Bandleader, main songwriter, producer, and Hammond-ist, Patrick Barker-Benfield, has really provided a fantastic variety of moods for the band to experiment. I'm especially keen on the blues-funk styled Me Gusta, the laidback Jazz'r The Indefatigable Jimmy Smits, and most of all the multi-faced Booker T homage Tree-Hug-Her. The album as a whole swirls with layers of atmosphere that allows for new interpretations with each listen, and it's quite possible that tomorrow the list will be different. The manic FUBAR can be a little too unsettling without some kind of visual to focus on, and wanders into 16 Horsepower territory which is not always welcome. But that's really part of the appeal of this album. It is unsettling, because it is not a collection simply to demonstrate how well they can copy a variety of styles, but rather how they can use those styles to change the listener's perception of their unique voice. The difference being that you can't reliably predict what will come next...a euphoric feeling of hope for the future of country music too. Okay, perhaps that's a little too much pressure to heap on McLemore Avenue when it comes to the mainstream, but for the slightly adventurous it's a fair statement."

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