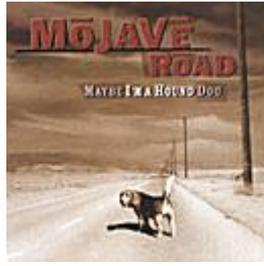


# Mp3 Mojave Road - Maybe I'm A Hound Dog



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Brand new California Country Rock by hot all-star seven-piece band. 10 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Traditional Country, COUNTRY: Country Rock Details: I'm driving through the night on Kagel Canyon Road, unwisely venturing deeper and deeper into California's San Gabriel Mountains. A deer cuts in front of me, and I finally understand where the expression 'deer in the headlights' comes from. Just as I start worrying that I got the directions all wrong and will never see civilization again, I spy the red neon sign: Don Cyn's hideaway--A honkytonk if I ever saw one. I cut my way through the crowd of cowboys, Mexican farm workers and bikers. These aren't urban cowboys, office workers gone country for the weekend, or suburban boot-scooters. This is the real deal. It's 9:00, and the joint is already jumping-free style. The band is smoking. This is a two-night engagement. The boys will be playing old favorites and test-driving new original songs for the up-coming album. My first impression of Keith Baxter, Mojave Road's lead singer, is that he reminds me of Sleepy Labeef--Something about the presence, the 6'5", the booming voice, the poise of the entertainer that can't be stumped. The band is tearing it up on a rendition of "Born To Boogie" that would make Bocephus proud. Steve Pro, the keyboard player seems particularly on fire. The song ends huge. Keith follows immediately with "Return Of The Grievous Angel." The band has been playing this song for two years on the L.A. club circuit. Back then, it was almost an act of radicalism; these days, channeling Gram Parsons almost seems like an obligatory gesture, but not when these guys do it. I now see the other side of Keith--Keith The Sensitive. Couples shuffle across the floor. An old hippy sitting on my right looks like he's about to cry. The pedal steel, the telecaster, the piano, the harmonies... The six-piece band really does the song justice. This is the real deal. Country rock lives! The band kicks off the second set with an original: Pontiac Man, the infectious opening track of Mojave Road's first album, 'Maybe I'm A Hound Dog.' One of the great surprises of the album is the presence-not to say

omni-presence--of Jay Dee Maness. From the 'Sweatheart Of The Rodeo' album to the Desert Rose Band, to his work with Dwight Yoakam, Jay Dee's unique pedal-steel guitar touch has always been a defining factor in the Californian country rock sound. Here, Jay Dee gets to stretch like I haven't heard him do since the first two DRB albums. On 'Maybe I'm A Hound Dog,' Jay Dee's steel guitar connects perfectly with Stephan Franck's telecaster, another key element of the Mojave Road sound. Whether they're trading white-hot solos on the dance-hall romp "Get Up On That Dance Floor," or harmonizing on the emotionally naked country rock ballad "I Just Want To Get Over You," those two share a kind of musical kinship that is hard to explain considering they had never met before (although Stephan cites The Fall Guy's beginning credits as the defining musical experience of his formative years...) Two other noticeable guests on the album are Brantley Kearns and Gabe Witcher, who share fiddle duties, and have also in common that they both belong to the Yoakam universe. In many ways, 'Maybe I'm A Hound Dog,' is reminiscent of Buck Owens, Dwight, Gram, Emmylou and the Hot Band, and the Desert Rose Band, in that it vividly paints a dream-like picture of that other California--that Late Great Golden State living in the pages of Steinbeck and the songs of Buck Owens, that may very well never have existed, but refuses to die anyway. Still, this music feels new. It is non-derivative. It is its own thing, as if the boys of Mojave Road had followed their own journey, and somehow, ended up in the same place as their illustrious predecessors. Reading these guys' bios, it isn't hard to see how that happened. Tony Brock, the band's drummer (who also produced the album), a founding member of the 80's rock band The Babys, and Rod Stewart long time collaborator, is mister arena rock. Even in this fairly small venue, the band sounds huge. Stephan is a hard-core chicken-picking rockabilly twangster, who, like others before him, bring a personal European touch to that telecaster thing. Steve and Keith are country boys with a profound knowledge of everything pop. Keith knows how to put a tune across; sincerity is probably his vocals' central quality. It is even more obvious as he sings his own material (Baxter wrote all ten of the album's original songs--some of which will make a grown man cry.) Rye humor, however, is a key ingredient. Deep down, Baxter is a naughty little boy who's being bad, knows it, and gets away with it (Anybody else who would double-entendre the fact that his wife lets him play guitar in bed into the promise of a mnage-a-3 would probably deserve to be beaten to death on the back of a Walmart parking lot.) But like their author, these songs are disarmingly charming, and hard to resist. The proof is in the pudding. Back at Don Cyn's, the band launches into the live version of 'April's Fool,' one of the catchiest tunes on the

album. Not even halfway through the intro, the two-steppers put down their drinks and flocks to the dance floor, as if mind controlled by some sort of evil honkytonk genius. A special guest is in the house, tonight: the real April; the lady behind the myth. She is tall, pretty, and very subdued; a far cry from the history-making performance that reportedly made such an impression on Keith at the Cowboy Palace, that he had to write a song about a virtual stranger. April listens intently. She turns to me after a verse of two to comment on the lyrics. "Pretty dramatic, don't you think?" On the live shows, Mojave Road rotates the best pedal-steel players in Southern California: Doug Livingstone (of Dukes Of Hazzard fame, along with Jay Dee), Bob Metzger, John McClung. Tonight, McClung is sitting behind his Mullen, trading licks with Stephan, and indulging in telecaster/steel harmonies. During a break, I tell Stephan his guitar playing reminds me of Merle Haggard-something about the freedom of it. Something about every lick he plays feeling like a passing thought, a comment that had to be made at that particular moment but will never be repeated. He scratches his head. "Hum, never heard that one before... but thanks, I'll take the compliment." Stephan glances at Steve, who's sitting at the bar, chatting up three pretty honkytonk angels--apparently a regular occurrence. Stephan shrugs "That's 'cause he plays all that sensitive stuff." 1:30. The boys have been playing for 4 1/2 hours. The band closes with a bang with their warp-speed homage "You Ain't No Ricky Skaggs," just as to remind whoever is left standing that Keith doesn't only sing, he also picks like a son of a bitch. Two guys walk up to the stage to tell Mojave Road they're the best band this place has ever seen. "Hey thanks, man-Thanks for coming." I look at Stephan, who reluctantly puts his guitar back in its case. He evidently lives for this stuff. The CD is coming out soon. There is talk of management, publishing, and more, yet, looking at these guys, I know that wherever they go, they will miss this place. They wouldn't have it any other way. Aldus Mouton, Los Angeles, June 2004

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