

Mp3 Electric Automatic - Travelling Companion



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A passionate, fully realized and somewhat haunting second release from an indie-rock power duo that emulates it's roots. 11 MP3 Songs ROCK: Emo, POP: Quirky Details: After a hiatus of almost two years, Electric Automatic has come back with it's second album, "Travelling Companion." The disk contains eleven tracks of indie pop gems, recorded at the esteemed DNA Studios and Coney Island Studios, both in Madison. Much in the ways of Stevie Wonder and Prince, chief songwriter Waylan Nate Palan plays nearly all the instruments himself. No slouch on the drums, Waylan sets fourth a powerful performance on such awaited tracks as "Sit Closer To Me," "Sun Rise Up the Sky" and "Wish We Could All Be Together."

-Reviews- If you've been out to see Electric Automatic or read much about them, you know that the band functions as a guitar-and-drum power duo. What separates Nate Palan from the crowd is that he outfits a bass string onto his Telecaster where the low-E string should be in order to play guitar and bass simultaneously. In 2001 he and drummer Jay Iverson released their first recording, Be My Battery, which, with the exception of a couple tracks, was a collection of hard-edged power pop. This time around Palan demonstrates his multi-instrumentalist talents by performing nearly all the parts himself. Travelling Companion is much more textured than Be My Battery, with more emphasis on the arrangements, and the sound is more organic. Palan has once again teamed up with Mark Whitcomb, this time at his new DNA Studio digs, and the two spent noticeably more time on the vocals, something that marred the otherwise excellent Battery. One track was also recorded by Wendy Schneider at Coney Island Studio and presumably post-production at DNA. What's apparent right from the start is that Palan is quite a capable drummer. With the exceptions of Scott Beardsley, who plays drums on the Kitschy "Gramma 'n' Grappa" and adds snare to "Sun Rise Up the Sky," and Iverson who plays on "Wish We Could All Be Together," all the playing is Palan's. He wastes no time demonstrating these chops; "Genie Lamp" opens

with a swinging drum intro, then blasts off into the choruses in a resounding salvo. This opening track also embodies Travelling Companion's variations in textures: there's a jazzy, acoustic guitar on the verses, cranked-up electric guitar on the choruses and even a little banjo in between. Melody is Palan's strong suit and he's quite adept at quilting together catchy guitar licks with clever turns of phrase and memorable vocal lines. The best example is Travelling Companion's finest track, "Karaoke Bar," where the strength of the arrangements is underscored by the addition of a cello and violin courtesy of Angela McJunkin and fellow Kissers member Kari Bethke, respectively. Easily one of the best tracks you will hear all year. Other guest include Joy Dragland, who adds some sweet backing vocals to "Sit Closer to Me" and "Northern Lights," Cash Box King Joe Nosek who plays harmonica on the album's other gem, "History of Untimely Visits," and ex-Junker Matthew Stratton who plays lead guitar and lap steel on the country-tinged "Wish We Could All Be Together." "Sun Rise Up the Sky" is another standout, possessing a nearly calypso-style acoustic guitar and a fabulous dynamic build at the end of the song's middle section. "Save The Crutch" is another superb track with a more modern rock approach and Palan's gustiest vocal delivery to date. What makes Travelling Companion an album that should enjoy widespread acclaim is the authenticity in Palan's approach and delivery. This is truly a great album that should be getting airplay. Palan is one of the harder working musicians in town, playing in The Kissers, The Hometown Sweetheart and Waylan St. Palan The Magic Elves as well as doing solo gigs, attending open mics and sitting in with local groups. The fact that musicians (and bands) of this caliber have to struggle to be heard is a crime, one which all those who appreciate artistic talent must work together to remedy. -Rick's Cafe, January 9, 2004 Electric Automatic Traveling Companion Ambidextrous Records

The Hardest Working Man in Show Business: it's a title routinely bestowed upon guys who seemingly do little more to earn the distinction than gig regularly. But there is a strong case to be made that Madison's Nate Palan deserves the title, at least for the greater Four Lakes area. Unless I have lost count, he plays regularly in four local bands, and two of them this year won top honors in Isthmus' reader poll: the Hometown Sweethearts, who mostly play 1980s covers with a perverse twist, and the Kissers, whose Irish rock is a perennial Madison bar favorite. And finally there is Electric Automatic, whom you may first have known as the duo comprising Palan and drummer Jay Iverson. That lineup produced an astonishing amount of sound for just two fellows: Palan played an instrument that had both guitar and bass strings, and when he plugged this device into a Marshall stack, the sonic boom could be heard clear to

Mazomanie. There are elements of that old bombast on the new Electric Automatic CD, Traveling Companion, and Iverson drums on one of the album's 11 tracks, the jazz-rock anthem "Genie Lamp," which opens the collection. But Electric Automatic seems now to exist primarily as a songwriting endeavor for Palan -- and a fine thing, too, because as his projects' variety suggests, his greatest strengths are as an eclectic. And so Traveling Companion has tracks in all kinds of idioms: power pop ("Karaoke Bar"), country ("Wish We Could All Be Together"), even a helping of folky insanity la Leon Redbone ("Gramma 'n' Grappa"). Palan's writing and singing are great throughout, and a who's who of local musicians (Scott Beardsly, Joy Dragland) help make Traveling Companion a work of seemingly effortless polish and professionalism. There's a song, "Save the Crutch," that does something rather different than the rest: It channels a kind of early-Liz Phair minimalism. This is a new direction for Palan, and his kaleidoscopic music career suggests that moving in new directions is what he does best.

Reviewed by Kenneth Burns -The Isthmus

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