



REVIEWS

GOING TO BE TOGETHER

MAD DOG BLUES

Independent

When Mad Dog first revealed his idea for his band's upcoming live recording - record an entire live album in less than two hours in a single evening and hope it all works out - I thought it was ludicrous. Sure, put all your eggs in one basket, bet the mortgage payment on it, and go for broke. Recorded on Friday, December 27, 2024, on a frigid winter evening at The End in Lafayette, Colorado, somehow Mad Dog Blues accomplished its mission: capture eight of its previously released studio originals performed in a live setting.

As live albums often go, the track sequence does not follow the original order of the performance but was rearranged for an optimal listening experience. Occasionally, one may have to turn the volume knob up to properly hear Mad Dog's spoken comments between songs, then turn it down once the music starts. Yet, that's the only audio misgiving. Everything else is captured clearly, and the dynamic interaction between the musicians remains its strongest suit.

In revisiting the previously released material, one can't help but notice how well these selections still sound relevant and fresh. Acoustic guitar ace, Sean Bennight, delivers his songs "Now I Believe You" and "Love Scared the Devil" eloquently and poignantly, suggesting he can be a touring singer-songwriter if desired. Mad Dog, the group's harmonica whiz and fearless leader, shares

deep feelings about the inspiration behind "Shining Through."

On the title track, Mad Dog offers hope and optimism that positivity lies ahead. Since the group is so acoustic based, in places it's easy to imagine it fitting into the Greenwich Village folk scene in lower Manhattan during its 60's heyday. Ironically, recorded in the same year in 1930, the quintet's two cover songs, "Sitting on Top of the World" and "John the Revelator," represent the only new material presented here. After Mad Dog's mournful intro on "Sitting on Top of the World," the group lazily saunters along, with more guitar flat-picking and Jeff Becker's sunny mandolin playing. Surprisingly, the song ends with Mad Dog never finishing the title phrase, but only "Sitting on Top," piquing the listener's curiosity if it has ended, or if there's more to come.

Mark Kaczorowski explains that he learned the one-chord "John the Revelator" classic from an early Govt. Mule album. It's undoubtedly the proceedings most explosive track, where everyone immerses themselves in a deep groove, channeling uninterrupted energy.

However, regarding the plethora of previously released material that has been reprised live, there's a madness to the method, which is logical once you know it. Mad Dog Blues typically uses studio albums to introduce new material and live albums to showcase the songs that get the most response live.

What makes Mad Dog Blues interesting is that it never stops creating and moving forward. A Mad Dog original, "Ain't Nobody Own the Blues," recorded with guest Nic Clark, on resonator guitar and harmonica, was released in May. Amazingly, Mad Dog Blues have already recorded some of the tracks for a 2026 release, which will be its first all instrumental platter.

DAN WILLGING

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