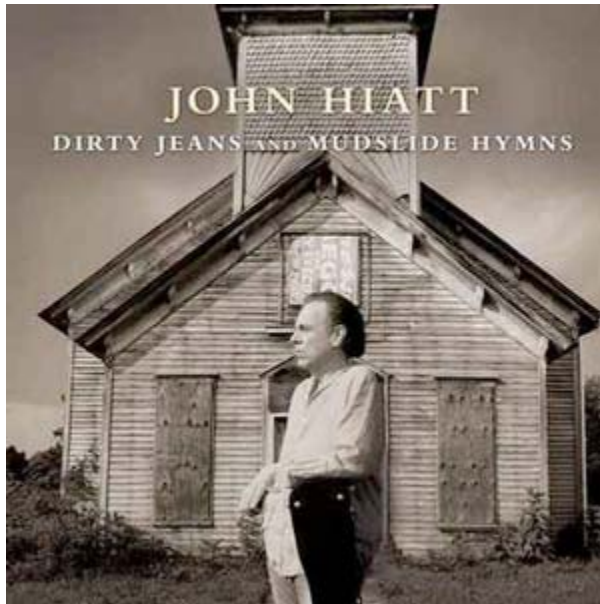


CD Review: John Hiatt — Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns; Plays Callaway Gardens October 9th

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John Hiatt
Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns
[New West](#)

By [Al Kaufman](#)

In the world of Americana music, John Hiatt is royalty. He is quite simply one of the damn best songcrafters working today. Bonnie Raitt ([“Thing Called Love”](#)), Suzy Bogguss ([“Drive South”](#)), and Aaron Neville (“It Feels Like Rain”) have all had big hits with Hiatt-penned tunes. He’s also been covered by the likes of everyone from Eric Clapton and B.B. King ([“Ridin’ With the King”](#)) to Iggy Pop (“Something Wild”). But when he adds his own nasally weathered voice to his songs, he makes them all the more personal.

Dirty Jeans is Hiatt’s 20th album in his 30-year career. It would be fair to say he peaked way back in 1987 with *Bring the Family*, the first album he made while sober (and recorded with future Little Village bandmates, Nick Lowe (bass), Ry Cooder (guitar), and Jim Keltner (drums)), it was a rich and uncompromising look at adult life. From country to rock to gospel, it covered just as rich a terrain musically as it did lyrically.

Since that time, it almost felt as if things had been going a little too well for Hiatt; that he had nothing to write about. All of his releases could be counted on to have at least a couple of keen observations, clever wordplay, and some beefy guitar licks, but sometimes that spark, that passion, seemed lacking.

The spark is back on *Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns*. There is nothing like a bad economy to get the juices flowing for a man who sees retirement on the horizon. The CD opens with [“Damn This Town,”](#) a song with big guitar riffs that recall [“Perfectly Good Guitar.”](#) In it, the narrator, a 58-year-old who still lives with his mother, talks about how the broken down town destroyed his family. He realizes he is doomed to the same fate as he repeats the refrain, “Damn this town, I’m leavin’.” On the haunting “Down Around My Place,” a town has been decimated by flood then drought, he remembers the paradise that once was while the young kids are “Bitchin’ about no cable.”

Other characters long for better days gone by, or loves gone bad. Hiatt makes sure to include his trademark rocking love song, “I Love That Girl,” and heart on his sleeve ballad, “Don’t Wanna Leave You Now.” Those two songs alone are worth the price of admission, but if you come inside and peek around corners, you’ll also find his hard driving ode to the Buick Electra 225 (“Detroit Made”), and his Springsteen meets Steinbeck as filmed by Sergio Leone love song among the ruins (“Hold On For Your Love”).

The album closes with “When New York Had Her Heart Broke.” Hiatt was in the Apple when the towers went down, but his remembrance offers nothing new. “Many heroes died trying to save someone inside,” he sings. “We were dazed in the streets/From the blood and dust and heat.” It’s all true, but it is all stuff we have heard before. Ten years later, one would hope the same heart-jerking stories could be told with a little more creativity, especially when the person telling the story is as talented a storyteller as John Hiatt.

But that’s quibbling. This is prime Hiatt. It rocks, it twangs, and it fits as well as a pair of well worn jeans.

John Hiatt plays the [Callaway Gardens Harvest Moon Festival](#) in Pine Mountain, GA on Saturday, October 8th.