

BLUES REVUE

T H E B L U E S A U T H O R I T Y

CURTIS SALGADO
Strong Suspicion
 Shanachie 9036



REVIEWS

Curtis Salgado's resurgence continues with his third album in five years for the Shanachie label. One of the hardest-working and most committed bandleaders in the category the Handy people dub "soul/blues," Salgado's reach extends into swamp rock (the Sonny Landreth-assisted title track), neo-funk (a snazzy cover of Bill Withers' "Who Is He"), and even Santana-style smooth pop ("At Least I Didn't Do That"), a reminder that Salgado once held the lead-vocalist spot for that band. But instead of such diversity weakening the singer/harpist's core concept, *Strong Suspicion* reinforces it by widening his net while remaining true to his roots.

Salgado says he finds soul in any style of music, so his stunning version of the Beatles' "I'll Be Back" doesn't so much rearrange the tune as find the R&B spirit at its center. His emotional voice and tough band sound great regardless of genre (though the hard rock of "Don't Wait Until Tomorrow" is something of a misstep). The slow funk of "Money Must Think I'm Dead" features witty lyrics ("I'm too broke to pay attention"), a rousing harp solo, and a singalong chorus you'll hum *way* after the track is finished. Salgado raids the Freddie King catalog for the slow blues of Leon Russell's "Help Me Through the Day," a perfect outlet for his R&B leanings and a forum to belt it out

The surging piano rock of "Love Her Just Because," the twin-barreled gospel attack of "Give Me Patience," and the Solomon Burke testifying of "Born All Over" set Salgado's voice in sympathetic settings against great songs. But his rollicking duet with Bekka Bramlett on "Can't Stop Lovin'" might be this terrific album's highlight. Pitting this visionary blue-eyed man against a female counterpart urges both performers to tear it up. It's a track that encompasses the best aspects of Salgado's soul stew.

HAL HOROWITZ