

Music Review: Delbert McClinton, at 76, brings it once again

By Scott Stroud | AP January 18

DELBERT McCLINTON & SELF-MADE MEN



Prick of the Litter

Delbert McClinton and Self-Made Men, “Prick of the Litter” (Hot Shot Records/Thirty Tigers)

Few singers illustrate the gulf between live and recorded music better than Delbert McClinton, whose gruff voice and blues-infused rock have always sounded best in a beer-splashed nightclub.

But McClinton, now 76, also plies his trade in studios, and while his latest album won't win converts as readily as his live shows, it sure won't hurt him.

McClinton has always blended influences, from Texas roadhouse blues to gumbo-flavored jazz to rhythm and blues. Here he nudges things in a new direction, toward the crooner stylings of singers like Johnny Mercer and Nat King Cole. But he gets there with a singing style more sassy than silky, and without abandoning the eclectic assortment of influences he's absorbed over the years.

And, oh yeah, he's still having fun.

Whether confessing that he left his heart in San Miguel or playfully explaining why he gave up meat for salad and jazz for ballads, McClinton always looks to surprise. His bandmates do, too, backing his catchy hooks with exceptional musicianship, from the gentle electric guitar that adorns "Middle of Nowhere," the album's best love song, to the trombone solo in "Rosy," the album's optimistic closer.

Sure to please his devoted followers, "Prick of the Litter" is a natural next step in the long arc of a career that has floated beneath superstar level — more than likely because not enough people have gone out to see him play.

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