

Leave the Blues Behind

Howard Wade

by Greg Johnson

Howard Wade is an exceptional acoustic guitarist from Portland who plays in a variety of stylings from Piedmont to Delta to early ragtime material. His debut recording, *Leave the Blues Behind*, is filled with terrific fingerpicking that makes this traditional music come alive and sounding so fresh. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Wade has been working his craft for more than fifty years, starting out playing folk music, but he has certainly found his true calling in the blues.

Leave the Blues Behind was produced by renowned guitarist Mary Flower, who also appears on two tracks with her signature slide guitar. Wade is quite at home as a songwriter, penning half of the songs on the disc; the rest are well chosen covers from acoustic greats like Reverend Gary Davis, Willie Brown and Blind Willie Johnson. He even throws in a Stephen Foster ragtime piece, "Hard Times Come Again No More." But it is his own material that shines the most brightly on the album. Songs like "Last Go Round", "Shadows on the Wall", "Stumptown Rag" and "Leave the Blues Behind" showcase his gift as a storyteller and a musician. Very melodic and inspiring.

Fans of acoustic players like Mississippi John Hurt, Jorma Kaukonen, Paul Geremia, Terry Robb and Mary Flower will be thrilled with this collection of first rate songs. A wonderful, captivating release by an artist that is more than worth all efforts to check out. Very highly recommended.