

# 'Blues Day Avenue' provides smooth ride

cd review

## "Blues Day Avenue"

**Artist:** John Phelps

**Release date:** Today

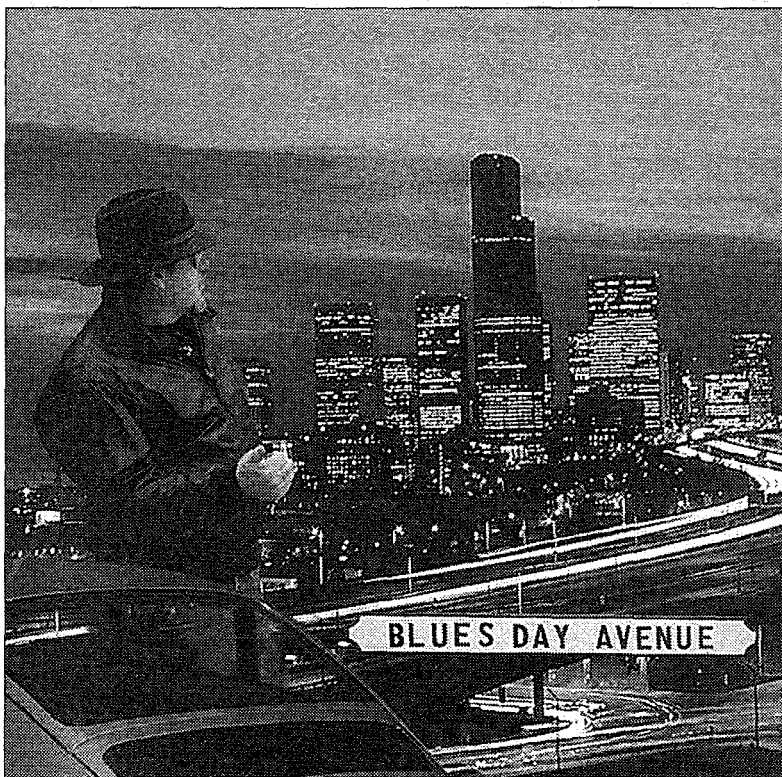
**Label:** Independent

**Details:** Don't let the title fool you. While this album has the requisite number of "bluesy" titles — "John's Blues," "Not Singing the Blues," "Jackhammer Blues," etc. — and enough searing saxophone and guitar solos to be labeled a blues album, singer-songwriter John Phelps drives his latest release, "Blues Day Avenue," all over the musical map from gritty rock 'n' roll to raucous rhythm and blues, and all points between.

When Phelps and company are at their best, the combination of musical styles and intense musicianship creates varied and likable music. It leads to an enjoyable collection of the CD's highlights. There's the simple, but infectious, "Not Singin' the Blues" with a nice horn arrangement, understated guitar work and a couple funny lines to boot. Likewise, "Jackhammer Blues" has a bouncing rock feel and is served up with all the trimmings — sax honks, guitar wails and a devilish vocal growl.

The best cut from the album is the grinding "Union Strings" with a heavy blues influence and absolutely unbelievable harmonica (I better say harp) work.

"Blues Day Avenue" is also paved with strong vocals. Phelps has a rich, rock 'n' roll voice with just a touch of sweetness that makes each tune, even the weaker numbers, lis-



## where to see it

**9 p.m. today**  
**Players Nite Club**  
**Info: Call 234-1031**

tenable.

Speaking of the weaker numbers, there are times that the styles seem to muddle and the focus seems a bit rushed. The album's title cut, for instance, tries to do too much. While it's redeemed somewhat by drummer Bill Keller's inspired performance, the song sounds like what would happen if Brian Setzer

decided to join Chicago.

The almost-metal "Four Sevens" is impressive on a musical level, but is lyrically weakened by too many clichés: "Put your cards on the table. What you got up your sleeve."

A few cuts even defy description, such as "Wishing Well" which is awash, almost drowned, with keyboard and chainsaw guitars, but unfortunately never really goes anywhere.

But, barring these few potholes, the listener should find that "Blues Day Avenue" is an overall a pretty nice cruise.

**Rating:** ★★ 1/2 (out of five)

By Matt Swayne, for the Times