

DARREN WATSON

South Pacific Soul
(Red Rocks Records)

TEN new songs here from blues-based singer/songwriter and guitarist Darren Watson. The erstwhile Smoke-shop singer is in fine form here, evoking Elvis Costello on *This Fool's Advice* and Robert Cray on *All Going Wrong*. Rick Bryant adds his Van Morrison-meets-BB King growl to *Got no Soul*. Watson's idea of the blues is further reaching than just the standard generic 12-bar shuffle and the slow blues ballad. And though, when he wants to, he can do either of those styles — with ease and flair — he's best when he showcases songs that traverse the pop terrain, taking influence from Costello and John Hiatt among others. The stellar cast of *South Pacific Soul* includes the steady backbeat of Darren Mathiassen, the exploratory electric bass of Elliotte Fuimaono and the benevolent producer's wand, as waved by Nick Bollinger (also adding backing vocals and double bass). If you like Joe Cocker, The Windy City Strugglers, Paul Ubana Jones and any of the other artists mentioned here — and, of course, all points in between — then try a slice of *South Pacific Soul*, a refreshing recasting of the blues.

★★★★

Simon Sweetman