

THE GRAVEL PROJECT

Album Title: More Ways Than One
Artist: The Gravel Project
Reviewer's Name: Heath Andrews
Review Score: 4 Stars (out of 5)

Title Of Review: Eclectic Electric Blues

Review Summary:

Though starting as a standard blues/rock album, *More Ways Than One* quickly changes into a more diverse listen than anticipated. The Gravel Project, fronted by singer/songwriter/guitarist Andrew Gravel, is a talented group of musicians, capable of playing various styles of music effectively. Their ability prevents the alternate genres of jazz and reggae from sounding completely out of place amidst the blues backbone, but the genre hopping is still a bit jarring at times. The excellent musicianship makes for a compelling album from start to finish. The Gravel Project is an extremely solid group, though *More Ways Than One* comes across more as a sampler of their ability rather than a cohesive album.

Review:

Andrew Gravel is the lead vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter of the very talented band, The Gravel Project. Primarily a quartet, the group mostly consists of the aforementioned Gravel, Zach Jagentenfl on bass, Tom Major on drums, and Paul Wolstencroff on the Hammond B3. Their ability on their respective instruments is the key factor in making their 2010 album, *More Ways Than One*, so enjoyable. It takes until the third song, the jazz instrumental, "Arugula Politics" to fully realize just how good this band is, but once realized, the impression lasts until the album's end.

The lead-off track, "Dollar Bill" is a kind of standard blues-rock fare, with lyrics that flirt with being a touch to "preachy" in their discussion of the recession of '08 and '09. The following track, "Too Many Drivers" follows the oft-heard rock/blues theme of comparing women and cars. Despite some of the obvious lines, the song is a good piece of fun with a fantastic tone and some great musical backing. "Arugula Politics" is where the band takes off; gone are the lyrics and in their place, Dann Friedman laying down some fantastic saxophone. The other immediate stand-out is Major's drumming. To go from playing the kind of standard 4/4 blues rhythm to a more complex jazz beat isn't the easiest of transitions, but he nails it. It's on this song as well that Jordan Gravel substitutes on the Hammond and his interplay with Friedman is fantastic.

Andrew Gravel's ability as a guitarist features more on the bluesy songs towards the album's second half. "Lost" is a positively enthralling song, likely the best on the album. While Gravel can effectively carry any lyric he sings, his lyrics aren't the most impressive, though the band certainly makes up for this in energy and performance ability. On "Lost" though, Gravel's imagery contained within the first verse, "I walked along an empty road/about 3 days ago/shadows seem to follow me/reflected in the snow" followed by the sighting of a "blood-stained sky" is picture-perfect. Gravel accompanies this with stellar riffing and soloing.

The reggae influenced track, "Feeling Good", further showcases the talents of the band, especially highlighting Jagentenfl as a funky bassist. More over, it's also a convincing reggae song though at this point in the album, it's little surprise that The Gravel Project can pull this genre off with such ease. Their knack for arranging songs is one of their stronger suits, whether it be with something original like "Feeling Good" or the cover they do of The Beatles' "I'll Cry Instead". Though a seemingly random choice of a Beatles song from A Hard Day's Night, the original country like sound carries over well with this fresh blues/rock arrangement Gravel gives it.

The only true misstep of a song of the album's nine tracks is the roughly two minute instrumental, "Mindstream" which serves as a lead-in to "Lost". As previously mentioned, "Lost" is a fantastic song, but "Mindstream" is really lackluster. "Lost" doesn't need any kind of lead-in, and it would've been better for the album to have another true song rather than a weak instrumental. But again, this is the only real forgettable song. Even the uniquely, sparsely arranged "My Baby" is compelling with its loving lyrics and reliance on voice and two guitars (electric and bass).

The album closes on a similar note to where it started. "Blues for LA" is another straight ahead but fantastic blues rocker akin to "Lost". It's fortunate The Gravel Project chose this as their closer as it serves as a reminder of just what kind of band this is for the most part. As capable as they are as jazz musicians, reggae

or funk rockers, they are, at core, a blues band with a high degree of talent. The lack of a consistent sound hinders the cohesiveness of *More Ways Than One* as an artistic piece. But there's also too much musical ability featured here to not find enjoyment in it. So though it may not be perfect from a structural standpoint, it's still a welcome addition to any blues or rock fan's catalog.

Review by Heath Andrews

Review title: Back To The Roots
Review by Wildy Haskell
The Gravel Project - *More Ways Than One*
Rating: 4 Stars (Out of 5)

Boston's The Gravel Project is the brainchild of first-call guitarist Andrew Gravel. A Boston native, Gravel previously lived for three years in Australia and then London, where he played with some of the brightest stars on the London Blues scene. Back in the U.S., Gravel was the guitarist of Entrain before forming The Gravel Project. With their distinctive mix of rock, funk and blues, The Gravel Project have become favorites in Boston, regularly playing to packed houses in venues such as The Middle East, Church, and Tommy Doyles. Their debut album, *More Ways Than One* seeks to capture the live energy of the band in the studio.

More Ways Than One opens with a Muscle Shoals-influenced blue rock paean to the Great Recession and the greed that ignited it. The Gravel Project shows they are the total package right out of the gate. Gravel is top notch on vocals and guitar, and the Hammond makes a serious first impression. "Too Many Drivers" is a tongue-in-cheek discussion of who's in charge, sprinkled with innuendo and gentle misdirection that's as entertaining as the great blues/rock arrangement. The Gravel Project finds a bit of magic on "Arugula Politics" with a funky, sassy horn/guitar combo. The song is highly danceable, but The Gravel Project sticks with the theme a bit too long.

"I'll Cry Instead" is an absolutely brilliant Beatles cover done in pure funk. The Gravel Project does the near-impossible with the Beatles classic; they make it their own without compromising the essential character or feel of the original. From The Beatles to Pink Floyd, a David Gilmour ambience is the focal point of "Mindstream", with ambient, dreamy guitar playing the foil to a shifting bed of sound. "My Baby" is a classic-sounding blues love song, definite mix-tape material. Gravel nails the vocal line, and the song is eminently listenable even if

it does cross the cliché line pretty seriously. More Ways Than One closes with "Blues For L.A.", juxtaposing a lyric vocal line with a gritty blues rock tune.

More Ways Than One turns out to be a highly enjoyable listening experience with a few kinks and wrinkles. The Gravel Project plays tight, blues-influenced rock n roll that explodes with energy. Andrew Gravel is a highly capable front man, driving the band forward with a reclusive yet energetic style that's not to be missed on CD, but is probably best served on stage. Perhaps what is most impressive is that Gravel and his cohorts treat the blending of Blues, Funk and Rock as reverently as if it were its own distinct art form. More Ways Than One is the first stop on a long journey for The Gravel Project. It's perhaps not an album you will listen to all the time, but it is one you'll keep coming back to again and again.

Review by Wildy Haskell

Album Title: More Ways Than One

Artist: The Gravel Project

Reviewed By: Rhonda Readence

Rating: 5 stars out of 5

Title of Review: Blues, Jazz, Rock and More

Review Summary:

With classic blues guitar riffs, signature jazz ensembles, and just enough rock to please the rollers, The Gravel Project has succeeded in effortlessly combining all of the genres and more into their album More Ways Than One. Flawless production and a clear, clean sound lend even more to the brilliant display of talent and skill to which this album is a testament. The Gravel Project has succeeded in creating a unique blend of music that is guaranteed to please music aficionados young and old.

Review:

Andrew Gravel, the singer, songwriter, guitarist and mastermind behind The Gravel Project makes it evident from the opening track of the album More Ways Than One that he is a musician with a wide range of influences and experience. "Dollar Bill" opens this funky album with classic blues guitar riffs and Andrew's voice is sure to please even the most critical of ears. The rhythm is one that will have the feet tapping and the body swaying and "Dollar Bill" would be a fantastic piece to play live. Andrew's guitar work is nothing short of phenomenal and the

backing musicians compliment him with perfection. After hearing the album's opener, the listener is effectively hooked and will be waiting anxiously for more.

"Too Many Drivers" begins with killer guitar work that brings to mind Kenny Wayne Shephard for the new-agers and B.B. King for the old-timers. This track is blues rock all the way. Andrew's voice may be a bit too smooth and not quite as raspy as conventional blues singers, but the vocals are powerful and commanding. The song ends in the classic blues fashion, and "Arugula Politics" starts off with a bit of a Black Crowes feel to the drumming, but that changes almost immediately when the band swings into a psychedelic vibe that in turns slides effortlessly into a jazz medley. This intricate instrumental encompasses several genres of music in a single song. The instrumentation is impeccable and the sound couldn't possibly be more clear. "Argula Politics" is a stand alone piece of brilliance that could conceivably put the rest of this album to shame.

No worries though. The Gravel Project is not about to let you down. They want to get funky with a cover of the Beatles "I'll Cry Instead." Any Beatles fan should be delighted with the unique spin Andrew puts on this classic and the smooth jazzy flow that comes so naturally to. "Mindstream" changes the whole tone of the album with its beautifully psychedelic beginning that is reminiscent of Pink Floyd. The guitar work is fantastic and the calm, soothing vibe of this piece is like a lullaby until the boys in the band snaps the listener out of it with a hard-hitting, ear splitting guitar riff that opens the next track. "Lost" is the signature bluesy jazzy funk that has become synonymous with The Andrew Gravel Project. This track has more of a rock feel to it after the initial jazz/blues rhythm and it's a welcome change at this stage of the album. "Lost" gives the listener a better perspective of the musical diversity of this band as well as the now familiar ear candy of Andrew's stellar guitar playing.

"Feeling Good" takes the album to a whole new level with tones of Bob Marley and Sublime. This classic reggae rhythm is made unique by the band's ability to add their own twist to everything they do. The title of this song says it all, as it truly is a song that is guaranteed to make one feel good. A Caribbean vibe coupled with Andrew's smooth voice and the excellent musicianship makes this piece a fan favorite and the perfect song to perform live to throngs of adoring music lovers. "My Baby" is something of a lullaby as only these guys can perform one. In keeping with the blues genre that the band does so well, "My Baby" is the epitome of slow-paced, well-played brilliance. The sound is astounding. This track is perfectly engineered, mixed and mastered and Andrew's voice goes above and beyond anything he has done on the album yet.

The closing track, "Blues for LA," hits hard and rocks even harder, especially coming after the slower tempo of "My Baby". It's an excellent choice to end the album on. It leaves the listener with an energetic feeling and the persistent

sensation of just having heard something special from the collective that calls itself The Gravel Project. "Blues for LA" is a powerful song that is sure to leave the masses wanting more. Andrew Gravel has proven, with the album *More Ways Than One*, that blues is not dead; nor is jazz; nor is rock, especially when The Gravel Project can so effortlessly combine all those genres and more into a neat nine song album. Music is very much alive, as this band of skilled and talented musicians has clearly shown.

Review by Rhonda Readence

Review: The Gravel Project, *More Ways Than One*

The Gravel Project's debut LP, *More Ways Than One*, tackles timeless themes like greed ("Dollar Bill"), desolation ("Lost" and "Blues for LA"), unrequited love ("I'll Cry Instead"), and women who are too loose with their automobiles ("Too Many Drivers"). Whatever the particular ailment, the Gravel Project suggests the solution is shredding guitar, funky rhythms, and a deluge of blues. Or, to use their own words: "everything the music can heal" ("Feeling Good"). Not necessarily a novel message, but one that feels particularly apt (and quite welcome) as we struggle to cope with lost jobs, foreclosed mortgages, and vanishing 401k's in the post-bailout era.

More Ways Than One is passionate, ambitious, and brilliant in spots. The band sounds like a group of musicians at the top of their game doing what they love. The guitar work of front man Andrew Gravel soars drawing inspiration from blues and jazz icons like John Schofield, Jimmy Herring, and pre-rehab Clapton. The music reaches incredible highs, particularly on "Blues for LA" and the appropriately titled reggae number "Feeling Good." But there are also a couple of lows. A few of the songs sound overproduced in parts, particularly the otherwise enthralling "Lost." Also, like many debut records, the songs, though solid in their own right, lack cohesion. "Mindsream" and "My Baby" sound particularly out of context. But the minor shortcomings do not overshadow the excitement and joy contained in the Gravel Project's stellar debut. When Gravel sings, "It can make you feel so good," even cynics have no choice but to turn up the volume and dance. *More Ways Than One* is a testament that sometimes the best cure for the blues is a funky groove and a killer guitar riff.

- Review by Caleb Warren