

CVILLE

WEEKLY

Fresh air on Road

Mulvaney's mix for a clear head

By ERIC HOOVER

At some point in their careers, even the most basic musicians might try to squeeze some soul out of synthesizers in the name of experimentation, or maybe seek a little studio technology to beef up their sound. Charlottesville's Michael Mulvaney won't be one of them.

His new disc, *Road*, hails from a simpler acoustic-era when songs didn't need polish to shine. A veteran of the regional concert/coffeehouse/festival circuit, Mulvaney has played his blend of classic rock/R&B/jazz for more than 30 years. Dragging a guitar and harmonica, he's opened for the likes of B.B. King, Koko Taylor, John Hammond, and Willie Dixon. That lifetime of live experience emanates on *Road*, where most songs rattle with the off-kilter energy of a live set.

The ivory-ticklin' blues of "Hot Wash With a Cold Rinse" kicks things off, with Mulvaney adding some country flavors to the mix. The classic-rock "I Must Have Seen a Fool" grinds with the one-two punch of a guitar riff that sounds like it comes from the Rolling Stones scrap heap (which is alright if you want to get up and dance).

But before the disc starts working up a gritty sweat, Mulvaney hangs a few left-urns. He delivers "Song For The Fog" as if he's trying not to disturb an early-morning quiet. With phrasings that are wise and wistful, Mulvaney sounds like he knows exactly where he's going when he sings of

wanting to re-connect with the earth beneath him. Paul Brier, owner of Charlottesville's Virginia Arts Studios, glides above the precise lyrics with a soft saxophone line.

Another local favorite, John D'earth, trumpets gracefully into "Send Me" where Mulvaney finds himself soaking up some soul sounds. As this ultra-smooth number fades out, the essence of *Road* reveals itself. There's no telling what the next stop up ahead will sound like, something this traveler has probably learned over and over while traipsing up and down the East Coast.

A more tightly-choreographed album wouldn't tell Mulvaney's stories as well. It's a long leap between the whiskey-soaked, traditional anthem, "Midnight Special," and Mulvaney's delicate "Dear Frances." But it's not that type of half-assed eclecticism that's so popular in these days of bands playing beyond their realm just for kicks. It's more a series of varied glimpses through a bluesy eye.

Road songs
MUSIC—Local singer Michael Mulvaney had loaded up his new disc with all sorts of roasty flavors. The question is, you guilty Top-40 junkies, can you handle music in the raw?



A man you might not find around town, Mulvaney travels year-round to play music—about 80,000 miles every 12 months.

Mulvaney's voice is what holds it all together. In "The Dance of Love," it's tinged with the gravely notes of a hot and boistered Chicago blues man. Then, in "Song for the Fog," it has the warm, oak-tree aura of a Bob Seger ballad. Even in the down moods, there's a hint of humor at the edges. At the end of *Road*, there's a "Last Call For Alcohol," an inclusion that perhaps can be forgiven if one considers how much more meaningful the song would be in a live setting, at the end of a long night.

Road is the strong sound of a musical veteran who brings simple, acoustic pleasures. Mulvaney's last down a full resume, and it sounds believably good. ■

