

It's A Good Day for Aleep at the Wheel and their friend Leon Rausch

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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I've been a Wheel fan for longer than I care to remember. Their music never fails to put a smile in my heart.

By showcasing Leon Rausch, the Wheel honors their rich Western Swing heritage. Having Willie Nelson team up with Rausch on "Truck Driver's Blues" is genius. Eddie Rivers' steel solo on the cut is as smooth as silk.

The band's Dixie Land take on "Basin Street Blues," all horns, woodwinds and toe-tapping beat is a treat. Benson's love of jazz shows up through his orchestration and vocals. Rausch said he had a ball cutting the record and it shows, especially on this cut.

Two of the CD's highlights are "I Didn't Realize" and "Snap Your Fingers." Rausch handles the lyrics of both songs like the front man he was for so long. Love the guitar solos, the piano, and, of course, Eddie Rivers. The songs make me want to find a dance hall, a long neck and scoot my boots all night long.

"Alright, Okay, You Win" pairs Rausch with the Wheel's fabulous girl singer, Elizabeth McQueen. Rausch leads off, with McQueen adding her special brand of joy to the cut. I'd love to see them do this one live.

The band lets loose on "Osage Stomp," the CD's only instrumental. It's a reminder that while the Wheel have been one of the most entertaining bands for 40 years, they're first and foremost top-shelf musicians who know how to lay it down.

Of course, the "big number" on this CD is "Route 66." According to Rausch and Benson, it was the former Texas Playboy who suggested the band add their own boogie woogie style to the 1946 song. Benson was wise to take the advice of his elder. It's the Wheel's signature tune and it's never sounded better.

Rausch and the whole band get to show off, but it's McQueen who steals the show with her wailing vocals. You go, girl.

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This year marks the 40th anniversary of Asleep at the Wheel ... Instead of patting themselves on the back, they chose to honor their heritage by tipping the hat to Rausch, Bob Wills and all those Texas Playboys who came before.

Watch for my interview with Benson and Rausch in Tuesday's *News-Telegram*.

Here's a video about the making of "It's A Good Day." What fun it would have been to be there and watch them making magic.