

Nothin' but the Blues

Every Time I See Her

Long Lonely Night

The Story of Ike Dupree

Ice Water

One Way Street (Down the Line)

Down to the River

Too Cold Ohio Blues

The Rainmaker

Blues Said: "Old Man..."

That Lil' Fice

Steak for Two

Lighten Up

Whelan

The Story of Ike Dupree

Presidio Records #002

Whelan

feat. Fred Wesley



The Story of Ike Dupree



Produced by Sid Whelan & John Kilgore

All songs written by Sidney S. Whelan (ASCAP) c. 2013 & 2014 Achilles Music Publishing

Horn arrangements by Fred Wesley (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12) and Ron Horton (7, 10 & 13)

North Carolina horn sessions contracted/led by Fred Wesley

NYC horn sessions contracted/led by Ron Horton

Backing vocal session contracted/led by Darryl Tookes

Vocals: Sid Whelan, Capathia Jenkins, Robbi Hall Kumalo, Darryl Tookes

Winds:

Trombones: Fred Wesley, Alan Ferber, Victor Wesley

Trumpets: Eleazar Shafer, Ron Horton

Saxophones: Phillip Whack, Michael Blake, Michael Lee Breaux

Harmonica: Randy Weinstein

Rhythm:

Drums & Clave: Richard Huntley

Congas, djembe, bongos, shaker, bell, tambourine: Mark Manczuck

Basses: Marco Panascia

Organ & Piano: Jerry Z

Guitars: Sid Whelan

Recorded, mixed and edited at by John Kilgore at John Kilgore Sound & Recording except:

Horn session on tracks 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12 recorded at Old House Studio Charlotte, NC Engineers Mark Williams & Chris Garges.

Vocal sessions on tracks 4 & 11 recorded at Old House Studio Charlotte, NC Engineer Chris Garges

Mastered by Randy Merrill at Sterling Sound

Photography: Sid Whelan

Graphic Design: Andrew Sheron



You're probably wondering: who is this Ike Dupree? Whelan didn't exactly see him coming when he released *Flood Waters Rising* in 2013. He intended, still intends, to make *Flood Waters* part one of his Americana Trilogy. But in the meantime a new batch of songs came into being, and Ike, this mysterious character, had to be reckoned with.

We hear a good deal about Ike on the title track of this album, of course, but he also makes an appearance as the menacing biker of "That Lil' Fice." "He's meant more as a trope than a fully fleshed out character," Whelan offers. "The idea is inspired by the abuse of police powers in New Orleans after Katrina. So the story of Ike is about how that impacts one particular person who's not a saint, he's not perfect, but he's still victimized by this. He's really a symbol of survival against injustice. I wrote 'That Lil' Fice' first, but there's no room in that song to explain why Ike is so tightly wound. That's how 'The Story of Ike Dupree' came about. This guy's damaged after what he's been through."

Whelan's musical love for New Orleans goes back to childhood, when his father, "a fanatic for the original New Orleans jazz," used to spin records by Jelly Roll Morton and other legends. The story of getting rolled by a hustler — related on "That Lil' Fice" — did happen (in some version) to Whelan on a visit to the Crescent City. He let down his guard, such was his enchantment with the place. But as a resident of Harlem, New York for over a decade, Whelan is no stranger to what he calls "the bad and the good" of street life. "In some ways," he says, "Harlem and New Orleans feel like two neighborhoods in the same city."

Whelan got together with bassist Marco Panascia and drummer Richard Huntley and realized most of the new songs were begging for a horn section. That's where Fred Wesley came in. Working an old connection from 15 years before, Whelan traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina to record eight tracks with the legendary trombonist and arranger, whose work with James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic and many others remains a landmark in modern music. The *Story of Ike Dupree* attains another level of groove, precision and atmosphere thanks to Wesley's genre-defying master musicianship. "Watching him work with that horn section in the studio, I mean, I learned more about wind and brass instruments in those eight hours than I've known in my entire life," Whelan says.

No less pivotal to Ike Dupree are the New York horns. With accomplished jazz trumpeter Ron Horton leading and arranging the New York session, Whelan was able to slap some unusually colorful paint on "Down to the River," "Blues Said: 'Old Man...'" and "Lighten Up." He also brought in tenor saxophonist Michael Lee Breaux, heard on records by Aimee Mann, Fiona Apple and more, to play ripping solos on the politically discontented tales "Ice Water" and "The Rainmaker." (It's tenor saxophonist Michael Blake, brilliant jazz composer and bandleader in his own right, soloing on "Lighten Up.")

Blues is at the heart of Ike Dupree: "Too Cold Ohio Blues" is a musical thank-you note, says Whelan, to the Piedmont greats Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. "Every Time I See Her" is lyrically if not musically inspired by Muddy Waters (and dedicated to Whelan's wife). "Robert Johnson and Willie Dixon as songwriters really stand out as models," Whelan adds. "Why aim low, right? In terms of how the record would sound, I was playing Albert King's *Born Under a Bad Sign*, B.B. King's *Live at the Regal* and T-Bone Walker all summer long. They had the ability to get drums, bass, two guitars, piano, vocals, horns and sometimes backup singers all working together in a seamless way. It wasn't a question of copying their licks, it was just noting how they arranged this large band and made it work so well."

Yet Whelan looks beyond blues as well, giving his songs a personal, contemporary stamp. On the title track there's a distinctly dark and enigmatic Tom Waits vibe; one might hear it as well on "Blues Said: 'Old Man...'" "That Lil' Fice" is "very much influenced by Rickie Lee Jones," says Whelan, "as well as Louis Jordan and jump people like that." And of course "Ice Water," with Whelan's taut, multi-tracked rhythm guitar, is "straight-up James Brown influence right there. I gave no direction at all to Fred — I just said, 'You know more about this music than me.'"

Darryl Tookes, veteran backup vocalist with the likes of Sting, Paul Simon, Diana Ross and many more, led the Ike Dupree vocal sessions much like Wesley did the horns. Again, there's a seamlessness to those beautifully wrought parts, along with potent guest features for Capathia Jenkins on the opening "Nothing But the Blues" and Robbi Hall Kumalo (wife of famed Paul Simon bassist Bakithi Kumalo) on "Steak for Two." "I've been trying to write material for female voices for a while," says Whelan. "It's something that really interests me."

Whether it's stinging leads ("One Way Street") or jaunty acoustic rhythm parts, Whelan puts himself through the paces as a guitarist, even as he centers the whole album with his laid-back vocal drawl. His blues, like all blues on some level, is concerned with matters in the wider world — it's quintessentially Whelan to work in lyrical references to Blackwater and credit defaults. There are also those timeless blues subjects like love gone wrong, or for that matter laughter in the face of what ails us. There's rock, funk, what Whelan calls "Texarkana twang" — anything and everything to get the stories across. Blues tradition is in Whelan's blood, but *The Story of Ike Dupree* couldn't make it clearer: he's an artist of today.

- David R. Adler, New York, February 2015

