

## Sonny Rhodes: This Texas lap steel player gives a new and gritty edge to the blues

The arrival of A Good Day to Play the Blues, the second Sonny Rhodes release on Stony Plain, is cause for celebration. And the applause he's earning for his recent CDs as well as for his blistering live performances is leavened with sheer relief that he's still alive.

This could have been another story altogether; just after the release of his first album on the label, Blue Diamond, Rhodes lost all his possessions in a disastrous fire and explosion that destroyed his van as he was heading toward Canada for yet another north-of-the-border tour. As Sonny, Anne, and the band escaped by the skin of their teeth, they watched helplessly as instruments, clothes, possessions, and vital papers vanished in a cloud of smoke.

It was the disaster that every road warrior bluesman has nightmares about, the almost inevitable result of too many one-nighters spread too far about; the unforgiving rule of the road took effect. Accidents and disasters are almost certainties, eventually, for musicians who drive up to 500 miles every day.

A Good Day to Play the Blues is a song of thanks — thanks for the safe delivery from the flames, and heartfelt thanks for the support of his fellow musicians and the blues community as a whole, which rallied round and put Sonny Rhodes back on the road in record time.

---

Born in Smithville, Texas, in 1940, Sonny made his first record, for an indie label in Austin, when he was 18. His folks had been sharecroppers; he was seeking a better life, and he was playing in local blues clubs before he graduated from high school. He then joined the navy, and after his stint in the armed forces he stayed in California, where he had been stationed.

After learning bass and guitar, he discovered the lap steel; today he is one of the very few blues players who play the instrument, and it gives his music a unique sound. A regular nominee at the W.C. Handy Awards, he now plays some 250 dates a year.

More indie recordings followed, but he began to build a much more solid career in Europe, where he played to enthusiastic crowds and recorded a number of albums. In the '90s, however, he came into his own with critically acclaimed albums for Ichiban and, then, Kingsnake — followed by his Stony Plain debut and, now, his first release of the 21st century.

On stage, with his bejeweled turban and some of the most colourful suits any tailor could create, he cuts a dashing figure — and one that provides a contrast to the gritty power of the songs he writes and the music he makes.