



Gov't Mule
Life Before Insanity
(Capricorn)

Since I was first introduced to the blues-fused Southern rock of Gov't Mule two years ago, I've developed an undeniable fascination with songwriter-vocalist-guitarist Warren Haynes; aside from the obvious (live shows and new albums), the prospect of his sitting in with another band never fails to excite me. This has led to constant ribbing from a buddy who revels in teasing me: "Dude, Warren hasn't had a

headline for three days. What gives?" or "Let's rename jambands.com to WhoWarrenSatInWithToday.com." Shut up. I've watched Haynes sing with the Dead's Phil Lesh and pull off a "Sugaree" that gave me goose bumps. And I've seen him deliver his own "Soulshine"—acoustic, accompanied only by his Mule-mate and fellow former Allman Allen Woody on bass—with so much heart it made me cry. Literally, cry.

That's why, when Mule's third and latest studio release, *Life Before Insanity*, didn't immediately evoke much reaction, I almost wrote it off as lacking feeling. No way, Haynes doesn't do anything without emotion. Now, after numerous listens, the beauty of the album has come on subtly, like a mild winter melting slowly into a soft spring. Really appealing is the out-and-out rocker "Bad Little Doggie," with its blazing harmonica by Hook Herrera, as are several other standout tracks, such as the scratchy, romping seven-and-a-half-minute hidden cover of Robert Johnson's "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day," and an organ-enhanced blues-buster called "Lay Your Burden Down," featuring Ben Harper and Johnny Neel (of the Dicky Betts Band). I'll bet anything that hit-ya-in-the-gut intensity I'm longing for will come when I catch these tunes performed live.

Robin A. Rothman
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