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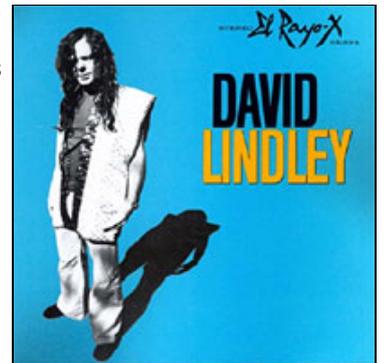
David Lindley • *El Rayo-X*

Asylum/[Speakers Corner](#) 5E-524
180-gram LP
1981/2019

Music 
Sound 

by [Vance Hiner](#) | July 9, 2019

In the hands of lesser musicians, the slide guitar can be little more than a gimmick, a clever sound effect used to add extra flavor to a band's repertoire. Multi-instrumentalist David Lindley's mastery of this extremely complex instrument makes dilettantes and pretenders look foolish. The sheer energy and passion Lindley brings to the rapid-fire, multi-note flourishes on this Speakers Corner reissue of his 1981 solo debut are breathtaking. A quick YouTube search of Lindley's European tour supporting this album offers a glimpse of why he's considered a guitar hero's guitar hero. His high-octane adaptation of K.C. Douglas's classic "Mercury Blues" captures the exhilaration of riding in a tricked-out car so well that you can feel the wind whip your hair as the pedal hits the sonic metal. Before you're even halfway through side one of *El Rayo-X*, it's clear that Lindley's supporting band is road tested and fully certified to handle all the twists and turns on this entertaining set of foot-stomping rock 'n' roll, world-beat fusion and eclectic Americana.



Even though Lindley's musical chops can be heard on dozens of records made by a veritable who's who of icons like Bob Dylan, Jackson Browne, Bruce Springsteen and Linda Ronstadt, the man remains more of a cult figure among industry insiders and music connoisseurs. Part of that has to do with Lindley's decidedly off-beat, reedy tenor that falls somewhere between Frankie Valli, Jimmie Rogers and Sting. On *El Rayo-X*, Lindley selected exactly the right material to fit his eccentric voice, instrumental virtuosity and love of diverse musical styles. For example, on the outstanding reggae treatment of Bob "Frizz" Fuller's "Quarter of a Man," Lindley and his bandmates abandon speed for a deliberately slow approach that is so well arranged that each strategically placed bass note and drum thwack reverberates with emotional tension. Those extra spaces between notes are an ingenious way to lend drama and emotional weight to the song's poignant lyrics about a man who's being slowly and painfully diminished by a troubled relationship.

Another stroke of genius is Lindley's rock-steady take on the Everly Brothers' "Bye Bye Love." By weaving his ethereal guitar lines around Ian Wallace's subtle drum work and Ras Baboo's zydeco-flavored accordion, Lindley makes this classic sound like it must have been written on a magical, foggy night down in the bayou. Unexpected flashes of invention are really what's at the heart of *El Rayo-X*. Whether it's turning "Twist and Shout" into a barrio-style rave-up or enlisting the help of The Band's Garth Hudson to create a genre-blending cocktail like the title track, there simply isn't a dull moment on this criminally underappreciated slab of high-energy vinyl.

The best news of all is that the folks at Speakers Corner continue their impressive track record with this much-deserved reissue. While my original pressing [Asylum 5E-524], mastered by Doug Sax, is a slice of analog heaven, Kevin Gray's 100-percent analog remastering of the original master tape unearths a low-end grunt and upper-register delicacy and bloom that my 38-year-old pressing cut at The Mastering Lab doesn't quite reveal. For example, Bob Gloub's bouncing bass line on "She Took My Romeos" has a melodic solidity that I've never noticed, despite having heard the track dozens of times. On "Pay the Man," it's easier to appreciate Ras Baboo's backing vocals and subtle accordion fills on the Speakers Corner version. While I can hear a bit more snap to Ian Wallace's rim shots and kick-drum thwacks during "Quarter of a Man" when listening to my original copy, I'll take the smoother high frequencies and meatier guitar heard on the newer version.

Add to all this sonic goodness a graveyard-quiet, ruler-flat pressing by Pallas and the team at Speakers Corner earns my highest praise for making a fantastic record sound even better. 🎧

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