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Texas Platters

By Doug Freeman

The Texas Sapphires

Roadhouse Gems: Live at John T. Floore Country Store (Stag)

After last year's excellent local debut, *Valley So Steep*, a live album capturing the Sapphires' honky-tonk attitude would seem an ideal follow-up. Unfortunately, *Roadhouse Gems*, recorded at the John T. Floore Country Store, offers rough cuts at best. Sounding like an open-mic bootleg, the poor quality discounts any lo-fi charm, which flattens the vocals and loses the band. Billy Brent Malkus' lead vox is hollow, while Rebecca Cannon's perfect harmonies are distantly squandered. Though it's impossible to look past the sound, the Sapphires' superior songs still stand out, 19 tracks mining their debut and unearthing covers ranging from Hazel Dickens' banjo-laden "You'll Get No More of Me" to Gram Parsons' "Ooh Las Vegas." Merle Haggard's "Tonight the Bottle Let Me Down" is faithfully rendered, while "Truck Drivin' Man" and the hillbillied "How Mountain Girls Can Love" inject some fire into the mix, but these gems demand a better setting.

★★

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