

# New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



## The Rolling Stones BLUE & LONESOME

According to Keith Richards, the Stones would warm up in every rehearsal by running through blues staples. So it's surprising they took nearly 55 years to charge admission to the private party. The result is *Blue & Lonesome*, a set of 12 covers with a distinctly Chess Records flavour, cut live with no overdubs and recorded over three days last December at Mark Knopfler's British Grove Studios in Chiswick. Long-time producer Don Was presided over the band, with Darryl Jones playing bass and Chuck Leavell's piano and keys added later from The Parlor studio in New Orleans.

Eric Clapton also happened to be in the studio and was drafted in to play, despite suffering from painful hands, on two songs. Far from a respectful trundle through the obvious standards, the setlist is the result of an enthusiastic dig through Mick Jagger's record collection. As well as Willie Dixon's *Just Like I Treat You*, there are numbers by Jimmy Reed,

Eddie Taylor, Lightnin' Slim, Magic Sam, Howlin' Wolf and three Little Walter songs, including lead single *Just Your Fool* - on account of Walter's influence on the Stones frontman's underrated harp playing, which is front-and-centre throughout.

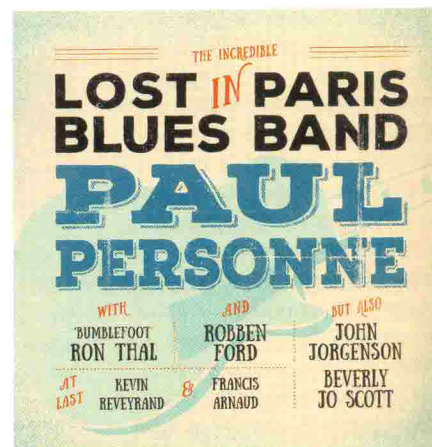
Without doubt, this is Sir Mick's album. Thriving on the raw and improvisational energy of the band and the feel in the room, the 73-year-old delivers emotionally charged vocals, punctuated by on-point harp phrases coated in distortion that strike like lightning and rumble like thunder. The rest of the Stones are content to show off their talent as ensemble players, just like a good blues band should - the rhythm section is dynamic and loping and the guitars are grimy and varied, with expressive licks and interlocking rhythms tumbling from Richards' and Wood's fingers right there in the moment.

Clapton, for his part, leans into the backbeat with toneful slide on *Everybody Knows About My Good Thing* and prowls menacingly around Dixon classic *I Can't Quit You Baby*, the album closer. Overall, *Blue & Lonesome* is a reminder of how much fun a band can still have with the blues, especially when they evidently love it as much as they did when they first heard it.

The Stones promise they'll get round to the original tracks they were working on when this project took over, but after this, surely most of their fans would rather just hear another helping of what the band clearly now does better than anyone else. **CM**

**9/10**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Chicago blues, Little Walter*



## Robben Ford LOST IN PARIS BLUES BAND

It turns out that The Rolling Stones aren't the only band to have knocked out an album of covers with a distinctly bluesy flavour this month, but unlike that much-heralded release we didn't see a collaboration between Ron Thal (Bumblefoot, and the guy who replaced Slash in Guns N' Roses), Robben Ford (the world's smoothest blues-jazz merchant) and John Jorgenson (gypsy jazz and country virtuoso) as being on the cards. It seems as though the three guitarists involved didn't, either - the 13-song set is the result of a spontaneous congregation in a Paris studio, when they were thrown together for a few days to experiment and jam. Despite the wealth of solos and polished musicianship on show, however, the resulting album is for the most part slick rather than exciting - with the notable exception being a rip-roaring version of *Tell Me*. **CM**

**6/10**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *All-star guitar collaborations*

## Dolcetti ARRIVER



It's rare for an album to reveal its influences so overtly and yet be entirely original. However, Italian band Dolcetti manage just that. On first listen, *Arriver* sounds like

the sequel to Steve Vai's *Flex-Able*, but the quirky melodies and synth work dispel any notion you're listening to another Vai clone. It's one of the most interesting and surprising instrumental guitar albums this reviewer has heard in many years. **GB**

**9/10**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Steve Vai, Frank Zappa*

## Sonata Arctica THE NINTH HOUR



The Finnish power-metal outfit explain that the album title refers to a quote from The Bible at the point Jesus died on the cross. Here, that concept is updated,

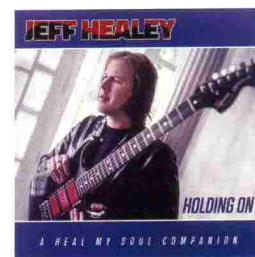
with humankind standing on the precipice of a nuclear war. Despite the album's gloomy premise, the music at least retains an upbeat energy and positive feel, and it's full of melodic high-energy songs and memorable guitar solos. **GB**

**7/10**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Blind Guardian, Nightwish*

## Jeff Healey

### HOLDING ON: A HEAL MY SOUL COMPANION



In 2016, to celebrate what would've been the sadly missed Jeff Healey's 50th birthday, the Canadian guitarist's estate released *Heal My Soul*, a critically acclaimed 'lost album'. As a bookend to that

release comes this extra helping from the vault, comprising five extra recordings from 1996 to 1998 and a 1999 concert in Norway. The studio songs are decent, but the live set sees Healey blazing his unique brand of jazz-inflected blues-rock. **CM**

**8/10**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *SRV, Philip Sayce, Eric Gales*