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BLUES MUSIC Magazine

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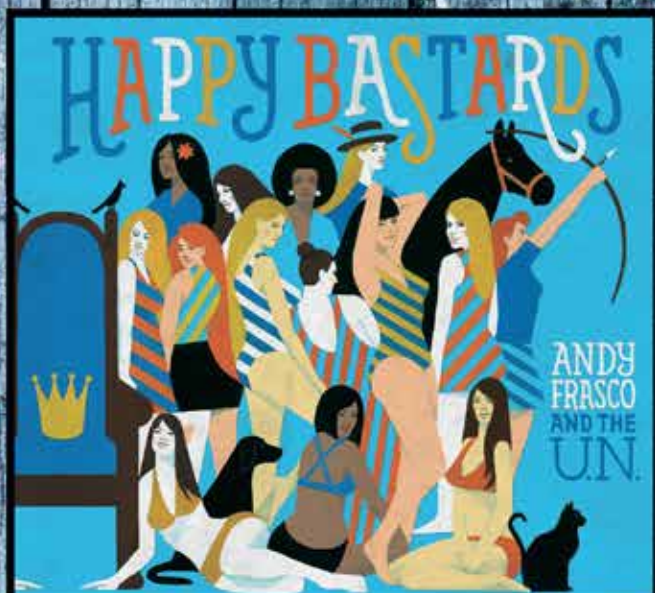
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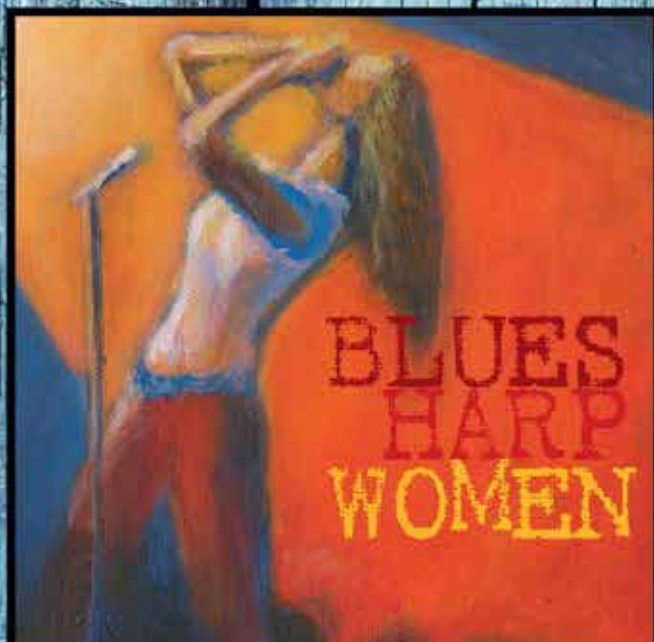
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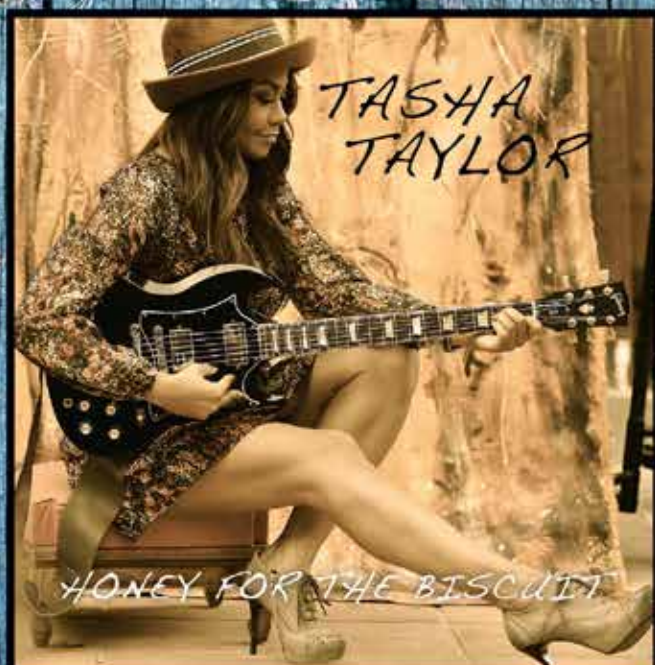
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LRBC #26

by Art Tipaldi



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Blues Music Magazine

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I want to take a moment to welcome Barbara Newman to the blues family. As the newly hired CEO and President of the Blues Foundation, Barbara comes to the post with a deep love of music and Memphis. The International Blues Challenge in January was Barbara's first

opportunity to meet many of blues fans and industry people. As she walked Beale Street, over 40 miles according to her Fitbit, she continually greeted visitors with a welcoming smile and asked, "How is our city treating you?" That's because Barbara is a lifelong resident of Memphis and takes great pride in what her city offers visitors through its music.

Her music background also runs deep. She and her husband, Bruce Newman, a Memphis entertainment attorney and CPA, have co-produced multiple fundraising concerts for a variety of organizations. She is also a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and Folk Alliance International.

She also has an extensive background working with non-profits. Her vision for the Foundation looks to solidify its well-respected programs, build upon the existing high-level communication with and support to its membership, interface and partner with other local, national, and international agencies, build a strong endowment, and open new avenues for members to participate and receive support from the organization. We all wish her well in this exciting time.

At the same time, I want to thank Jay Sieleman for his dedicated service. Coming to head the Foundation at a very difficult time, Jay worked tirelessly for 12 years to solidify the programs of the Foundation, steady its financial footing, purchase a permanent home for the Foundation, and intimately oversee the fundraising, building, and the 2015 opening of the prestigious Blues Hall of Fame. He and his wife Priscilla Hernandez humbly gave a dozen years of their lives to revitalize the Foundation and for that we all deeply thank you both.

During the aforementioned International Blues Challenge, I was quietly reminded of the charm that Memphis and Beale Street radiates. I have been to Memphis twice a year since 1994 for blues events and have witnessed many, many changes.

As I stepped on Beale this year, I felt the excitement of first timers. I saw families of the youth challengers gather for family pictures on this storied street; I saw blues bands from around the world poising for shots to memorialize this bucket list event; I sat in Beale Street eateries and watched tables filled with gleeful blues travelers instagramming pictures of ribs, chicken and waffles, deep fried burgers, and tamales; and I saw all manner of selfies to capture a smile and Beale street neon.

It was an emotional reminder of the way I felt when I first encountered the Street. Oftentimes, during these Blues Foundation events, we run from club to club, jam to jam, and Gus' to the Blues Hall of Fame always looking ahead to the next time-slotted event, and we forget to stop for that moment. To see the event through those once fresh eyes, to watch a mom snap a photo of her son in front of the Rum Boogie captured that pure wonder we sometimes have forgotten amid the rush to get it all in.

Congratulations to the International Blues Challenge winners, the Delgado Brothers (band) and Ben Hunter and Joe Seamons (solo/duo). And to Vanessa Collier's band who, thought it did not make the finals, wowed crowds throughout the week. Her guitarist Noe Socha was the most fascinating guitarist I saw of the over 800 musicians on Beale. Check his work out on YouTube and you'll see what I mean.

"Let the music keep our spirits high."

Art Tipaldi *Editor-In-Chief*

BONNIE RAITT

Excellence

by Art Tipaldi

Watching the Kennedy Center Honors is my yearly ritual. Thus far, two blues giants have been honored on that night, B.B. King in 1995 and Buddy Guy in 2012. And Bonnie Raitt is the one musician who was enlisted to fete both men on this distinguished evening. My question is: When will Bonnie be likewise honored?

She is already in the Rock and Roll and Blues Halls of Fame, is a ten time Grammy winner, and received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Performance from the Americana Music Association. Most recently, in January

2016, she was named to the Austin City Limits Hall of Fame with B.B. King and Kris Kristofferson. At a point when many musicians her age are on a greatest hits tour, she continues to record fresh songs and has been touring extensively for nearly 50 years.

Throughout each evening, the wisdom and maturity that Raitt embodies is transmitted effortlessly throughout the night. Whether speaking, singing, or laughing, her vocals contained a depth of vulnerability that makes it feel like you're the only one she's telling the pains or joys of life to. Though the contrast between her

aggressive and dominating slide guitar and her easy, whiskey wrapped vocals are at the core of every show, it is Raitt and her ever gracious nods to her band, the crowd, or the masters of the blues that puts her every performance into the realm of transcendent.

Raitt's notoriety as a role model cannot be overlooked. It's possible that her 1971 self-titled debut record was one of the first rock albums to feature a woman brandishing an electric guitar, thus opening the door of possibilities for a generation of young women who, up to this point, were playing their electric guitars in solitude.

PHOTOGRAPHY © JOSEPH A. ROSEN

On that debut, Raitt also showcased the music of her blues mentors – Sippie Wallace, Tommy Johnson, Robert Johnson – brought blues harmonica legend Junior Wells and guitarist Paul Pena onboard, and, most importantly, developed the recording blueprint that would serve her through her 50-year journey.

“The process has been the same since my first record,” said Raitt “And basically the recording of the record is the same. Most of the songs are new ways of saying something that are equally true to the songs I was singing on my first record. The only thing different on this record is that I custom wrote songs that I wanted to add into the show that I thought were missing from the live show.”

Dig In Deep, released February 26, 2016 on Raitt's own Redwing Records, is her 20th record. It contains the music we've come to expect from any Raitt offering. There are knockout covers of her favorite singer-songwriters augmented with her own poignant originals which are all skillfully arranged by Raitt and her longtime touring band into a coherent read.

Raitt's search for material begins as soon as the touring for *Slipstream* ended. “I do a tremendous amount of research that's on-going. I spend a lot of time listening to a wide range of singer-songwriters who submit songs. I go through my record collection, the collections of others, and I read a lot of music magazines. I look for songs that don't repeat what I've already said and reframe the same themes of heartache, betrayal, and loneliness.

“Once I line up the tunes, I know this band and I have something really special, so [to me] the finding and arranging the material is the creative part. I love to showcase songwriters that people may or may not know. I've been doing that ever since I covered songs by Chris Smither and Eric Kaz in the beginning. The Gordon Kennedy and Wayne Kirkpatrick song, ‘The Gypsy In Me,’ was written specifically for me. I've done one of their songs on the last three albums. And those songs have basically been the first singles from the record. Ironically ‘The Gypsy In Me’ is the first single released on this record.

“I wasn't familiar with Bonnie Bishop until my friend Al Anderson from NRBQ sent me a tune by this woman named Bonnie Bishop for *Slipstream*. Her singing on the demo was so devastating that I almost didn't record it because I didn't think I could do a better job. I did my own take on it and it ended

***“They are part of my DNA.
Whether it's Mississippi John Hurt,
or Mississippi Fred McDowell, or
J.B. Lenoir, or Muddy, or
Howlin' Wolf, or Sippie Wallace,
they all run through me.
I was such a stone blues fan.”***

up being the best song of 2012 named by New York Times reviewers. Her publisher sent me more songs and ‘Undone’ just floored me. Again, she did a killer version. So we did a very quiet, heartbreaking version where I just basically toned it down and made it very intimate.”

Raitt's most intimate moments, however, surface with the final two songs, “You've Changed My Mind,” by Joe Henry, and her own “The Ones We Couldn't Be.” The former was written in 2010 for *Slipstream*, the latter was written by Raitt on piano and features only her warm voice accompanied by Raitt's somber piano and Patrick Warren's keys. “When I want to write a song that's reflective like that, I tend to write them on the piano. I wrote ‘Nick Of Time’ on the piano. There are just certain songs that lend themselves to the keyboard, and I have a little bit more facility with it.

“I had the idea for the song when I got the epiphany that when your family passes on or your relationships are over that it takes time before you realize the eye opening truth that you had as much to do with this relationship being the way it was as they did. At the time we always feel, ‘If only they weren't acting like this or how sad it is that I don't get to have this or that in a partner.’ What I realized is that others were suffering in the same way from me not being the one they thought I should be.”

That song has maturity, reconciliation, acceptance, and forgiveness. “There's a lot regret in those ballads. That's part of life, you have to sit in the dark and realize I could

have done it better. And how heartbreaking it is that either side of the relationship lets it down.

“Because this album is pretty rockin', it was daunting to figure out where to put certain songs. Even though I knew it was gonna be a complete emotional shift, they fit at the end. To me they go together as a coda, an added piece. ‘You've Changed My Mine,’ recorded in 2010, is really an incredible expression of how I came out of that period of loss and grief.”

But this record also rocks. “The Comin' Round Is Going Through” is the song to play when you need five more minutes on the Stairmaster. It's a Stones-styled rocker featuring some cool word play amid Raitt and George Marinelli dueling guitars. “I wanted to write something that would make my blood boil with all the stuff I was writing about. To write something that felt exactly like what I was saying. I love to play when you have two guitars, it's really fun to go back and forth.”

The opening cut, “Unintended Consequence Of Love,” co-written with Jon Cleary, is a fresh take on their love of funk. While her own Gospel piano song “What You're Doin To Me,” gives her the opportunity to show off another valued member of her band, Mike Finnigan. “Mike Finnigan is one of the masters of the B-3. To be able to write a gospel shuffle for this killer group of musicians to play live.”

The engine that directs her band for decades is the rhythm section of James “Hutch” Hutchinson (bass) and Ricky Fataar (drums). “I don't think it gets any more powerful and versatile and deep than Hutch Hutchinson and Ricky Fataar. You can ask almost any

band and they all tell me that I have one of the best rhythm sections I the world. I totally agree. Hutch has been with me since 1983. Ricky was on the *Green Light* album, and then everything since *Nick Of Time*.

"Ricky and Hutch have an ability to hit every style of music which is a broad range. All these guys in my band are well read, they're well educated musically and culturally, and they keep growing. We play for each other. We play to impress each other as we play to impress our peers and fans. Ricky and Hutch have been a joy and inspiration since I met them." It's this band in the

***"And not just blues, but all music.
I can't separate my love of
Howlin' Wolf from the
Rolling Stones, or Ray Charles,
Aretha Franklin, or Ruth Brown."***

From left to right: Johnny Adams, Robert Cray, Bonnie Raitt, Rufus Thomas, and Keb' Mo'.



studio and on-stage that is the palette Raitt works with. "I basically do certain things really well. One of those things is to look for songs and arrange them. I use the band as much as I use my guitar. I just look for the deepest tunes and the ones that resonate with me at the time. I put my heart into every record and the band works really hard to play great and make it sound fantastic."

Raitt's back-story is well chronicled. She came to the blues

like so many of us, through the blues records in the mid-'60s. But unlike us, upon her matriculation at Radcliffe in 1967, she came upon a thriving folk and blues scene, and sat knee to knee with first generation blues men and women like Son House, Sippie Wallace, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf and every other musician managed by Dick Waterman. And, if the child is father of the adult, then Raitt is forever informed by those experiences.

"They are part of my DNA.

Whether it's Mississippi John Hurt or Mississippi Fred McDowell or J.B. Lenoir or Muddy or Howlin' Wolf or Sippie Wallace, they all run through me. I was such a stone blues fan. And not just blues, but all music. I can't separate my love of Howlin' Wolf from the Rolling Stones or Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, or Ruth Brown.

"I can't even put a finger on who would have influenced me the most. That are all part of what goes in and then it comes out in the way you play, the choices of your phrasing and

singing, the choices of songs, the way you put your rhythm section together, the way you phrase behind the beat or in front of it, it's all informed by every influence you've ever had.

"But I also learned as much from my dad [John Raitt] as I did from watching Fred McDowell throw his head back and play. I didn't learn how to sing torch blues songs from my dad, but there are things about his phrasing, the way he wraps around the words, the way he waits, and the emotion he puts in. It's all incoming and it comes out in your guitar playing and your band and in the way that you feel and sing a song.

"I was always curious where the blues came from, so I'd ask Fred McDowell, 'Which relative did you learn from? And where did he learn it?' I find it incredibly fascinating to investigate the influences on the people who knocked me out. And the great thing about being alive for young people today is that YouTube and the Internet make that infinitely possible.

"In our day, we didn't have a chance to just go on a gadget on our desk and look at Willie Dixon. We had to wait until he came to our town. If we lived in L.A., we had to wait until we were older and could somehow get to Chicago. Now at your fingertips you can see 24/7 the greatest performance of all time of every single artist who was around to be filmed. Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Helen Hume, early Ruth Brown, the Staple Singers. You can look at them in their early years.

"The Lippmann/Rau *American Folk Blues Festival* DVDs on Reelin' in the Years is the greatest gift of my lifetime. If you never see anything else, I can't recommend it more highly. And please pay for it because the filmmakers who made it deserve the money.

"And it just as important to go and hear the blues and R&B live. Go to the festivals and PAY money for the musician's CD. Pay the artists who are out there. There are way too many blues clubs closing and so many of the greats have passed away. But with Shemekia Copeland, the Tedeschi Trucks band, the Alabama Shakes, every time I turn around, there's another unbelievable new band or people playing at the top of their game."

The next task for Raitt is the nearly two years touring in support of *Dig In Deep*. At 66 years young, Raitt is physically and emotionally ready to embark on this daunting endeavor. "I've been blessed with pretty good health and a strong constitution. I do yoga, I ride my bike on the road, I hike, and



I get enough sleep. When I was 37, I looked around and saw that the partying lifestyle, not exercising or eating right, started to either look bad or feel bad. I needed to make a big change. I've been sober for 30 years. What is really involved in the sobriety part is that you take inventory and pay attention to how you treat people and how you treat yourself.

"My parents told me the biggest challenge would be being able to withstand the loss of so many people that I love. When I was in my twenties, I lost five or six of the blues people I was so tight with. That lasted through my 40s. With B.B. King and Otis Clay, there

are so many people gone too soon. I just live and take care of myself for all my friends and family who didn't make it.

"I'm glad I made the move toward health. I could see that down the road, that I was not gonna maintain the kind of career my dad or Tony Bennett had, a career where people are still singing at the top of their game in their 80s. I hope that's gonna be me."

Here's hoping that the Kennedy Center will honor Bonnie Raitt before that.

Women Inspired By Bonnie Raitt

Rory Block

Some things are just the “Gold Standard.” Bonnie Raitt is so talented that it would be impossible to accurately measure her influence on the music business. Her vocals are so evocative, that to this day I think it is the most imitated voice in pop music. I can’t tell you how many singers I have heard, whether on demo cassettes or pop stars on the top of the charts, where I can hear the influence of Bonnie’s incredible vocal style. Her guitar playing and delivery are equally iconic. The image of soulful strength, one woman with one guitar, is the essence of true grit.

In my autobiography *When A Woman Gets The Blues*, in a chapter called “Bonnie’s Rockin’ Slide,” I write about being lifted to the next level of playing slide while mixing her fabulous solo in the studio. I also write about meeting Bonnie in various places over the years and the close connections between certain intersecting elements of our lives – born the same year two days apart, both with fathers in the music business, both of us meeting, and both being inspired by the re-discovered founding masters of the blues, including some of the very same musicians like Son House.

When I first heard Bonnie, she was the quintessential successful rock star, and I was the humble, inconsequential acoustic player who could never compete in the world of electric guitars. Despite our identical age and our history of being inspired by the same music, to me Bonnie was light years ahead of where I could ever be.

Despite her status as a star and her success level, Bonnie has been unfailingly kind, generous, and helpful, talking about me in interviews and from the stage, inviting me to sit in with her, and playing on one of my albums. Once in a back room of a theater in Holland, I cried when telling her about a miscarriage I was going through, and she was so loving and comforting. Thousands of miles from home, bereft and exhausted in the middle of a tour, her compassion essentially saved my life. On stage, at the close of our duet of Tommy Johnson’s “Big Road Blues,” she put her arms around me and said, “I love you.” My broken heart was warmed.

Bonnie has this kind of inner beauty.

Wherever we are, whatever we may be recording, I always know that Bonnie and I are somehow linked. I know something of her mindset, her challenges, her conviction – we both know, in our own individual ways, the determination it really takes. In my own small way, I cheer her on – she is a kind of ambassador for so many others who love and appreciate her. Still, I think Bonnie is humble and doesn’t realize she has this kind of influence. Yes you do girl, you’re a keeper of the flame.

Debbie Davies

I think all artists and guitar players have moments when they see a performance that impacts them so much that it informs their course of pursuit. Popular culture calls this an “Ah Ha” moment. For me, my epiphany moment was seeing my first Bonnie Raitt concert in the mid-’70s at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco. Bonnie Raitt became my role model, and helped me believe that my dream of fronting my own blues band on electric guitar was really possible. I was also immediately conscious of not wanting to copy her, but to have my own style. As a guitarist, I knew immediately that I wanted to emulate the style of her backing guitar player, Will McFarlane.

Bonnie’s level of talent and professionalism is still, to my mind, peerless. With her killer voice, she is a top-notch singer who can make the listener feel every emotional nuance of a song. Her guitar playing was always groundbreaking and still remains spot on. Bonnie’s ability to really entertain and connect with an audience has allowed her to amass and hold on to a huge and loyal fan base and continue with her ever vital career. I remain a loyal Bonnie Raitt fan and look forward to each of her new releases.

Mary Flower

Hearing Bonnie on the radio in 1972 was a life-changing 2 minutes, 54 seconds for me. I knew I was hearing a woman “play guitar like a man” for the first time and I was moved to phone KFML freeform radio to find out more about this phenom. That same year,

I saw Bonnie and Freebo play a 90 seat hall (the Denver Folklore Center) and was greatly inspired by the laid back performance, the honesty and sheer talent. She set the bar high and continues to fuel my ongoing goal of being an accomplished player.

Janiva Magness

It was 1971 in Minneapolis, MN. Lots of clubs, coffee houses, and artists “hang outs” near the U of M. I found myself friends with some great musicians back in that day, including Willie Murphy and the Bumble Bees. That was the first band Bonnie recorded with on Warner Brothers. Great record and great time to be hangin’ ‘round. I was an obviously jail-bait aged girl, that was deeply moved by the music scene. Bonnie was a huge part of that scene, always touring thru town. I’ve seen her perform countless times. But those early shows at The Cabooze, Riverside Café, and Northrup Auditorium were simply captivating. Heartfelt and authentic in her approach to the music whether she was with her band or later as a duo with Johnny Lee Schell. She was unapologetic and unaffected by any difference in gender, race, and genre. To me, Bonnie has always presented her music this way. Her influence on me as an artist, business woman, and role model is immeasurable. It was impossible to not drink it all in as I witnessed her effortlessly glide thru shows. Of course, I studied every album right as it came out, playing them incessantly until I could sing all songs note for note. Ha! I still can!

That’s after all, how we learn in blues, right? Bonnie has always been out front as a strong woman and exceptionally talented artist that can stand her ground with any guitar slinger or singer on any platform. For me and generations of artists to come, Bonnie remains as ever, a consummate musician, superb performer, and champion of the blues.

Shemekia Copeland

You know how you meet a person and you have all these expectations in your head of how they’re going to be?

And then you meet them, and you're disappointed. I am so happy to say that has happened so little in the people that I've met, that I love, and that I respect. I'm grateful for that. Bonnie Raitt, in particular. You look at that sweet little face of hers and those dimples, and she looks like the sweetest person in the world that you're ever going to meet. Then, you meet her, and she's 10 times sweeter than that. She's even better than what you had in your mind, as far as down to earth and sweet and real and just an outright lovely person. Just a sweetie.

One of my first times hanging out and meeting her, the one thing that I loved more than anything was how she took care of Ruth Brown, who I knew well before I knew who Bonnie Raitt even was. I grew up listening to Ruth Brown. When I was watching Bonnie take care of Ruth, just dote all over her, make sure she was doing okay, make sure she's getting the sounds she wants, make sure that everything was happening right. The love and respect and the honor that she showed Ruth was golden for me. Golden."



Iadore Bonnie Raitt! What can I say? She is a beautiful and emotive singer. Bonnie is a masterful country blues picker who's created a languid and soulful style of electric slide playing. I love her songwriting steeped in blues, gospel, country, reggae and American roots music. After meeting Bonnie a few times it was clear how and why John Lee Hooker and most of the late great blues masters fell in love with her. She's the real deal!! Bonnie is capable of playing many styles of music and can play with anyone. I look up to her as a musician and as a person. She is beautiful inside and out. I believe Bonnie is a big reason many girls have the guts to learn to play guitar and play the blues. I know she's inspired me.



Bonnie is a total champion of those who came before her. She took such good

car of Charles Brown. When she first took him out on tour, she asked if he needed a doctor. She first saw Charles play in L.A. and said to him, "Charles, if I win a bunch of Grammys, I'm taking you on the road." She won the Grammys that year and took him out on the road to open with her. Her care for Charles and Ruth Brown was nothing but the best. She adored Charles and Ruth. We never played more than three nights in a row, and she had us in whatever the best hotel was. She was always talking up Charles and Ruth. She made sure they came up with her during her show so that she could re-introduce them.

In the 1990s, she did a Christmas Special Olympics CD and wanted to record Charles' "Merry Christmas Baby." She brought us all into the studio. And she brought us on the Leno Show to perform it. The CD went Platinum and she made sure we all got one.
— Ruth Davies, bass player with Charles Brown and currently touring with Elvin Bishop

Blues Hall Of Fame members
Dick Waterman and Bonnie Raitt



♪ Gaye Adegbalola ♪

I love Bonnie's music; I have danced many a time to "Let's Give Them Something To Talk About," which has become my theme song. However, I want to send her accolades for her activism. I have been blessed to have sat at the feet of Ms. Ruth Brown a few times. She gave her "red-headed stepchild" high praise for all her work to get royalties for the musical ancestors. Bonnie saw to it that they got their "proprs" – the financial respect they deserved. In her concerts, she had the likes of Ruth and Charles open for her. She has used her stardom to right some wrongs in this ol' world of ours.

♪ Rita Engeldalen ♪

Bonnie Raitt is an important inspiration and role model for me, and many other women in blues. She hits me right in the heart, and I think her unique expression across genres makes me also dare to cross several musical roads. I can hear a lot of Bonnie in our own Norwegian blues mother, the late Kristin Berglund. Bonnie is one of the most important women in blues, and a great role model. I never feel alone when I listen to Bonnie Raitt, she gives me peace of mind.

♪ EG Kight ♪

One night several years ago, I was on a date and he wanted to introduce me to one of his friends, so we went to her house. After a while, I saw a guitar leaning in the corner and asked about it. My new friend said would you mind playing a song for me in the key of E. Just follow along. Well, she started singing "Love Me Like A Man" and I almost fell out. At that time, I was mostly performing country music and this bluesy song just blew me away. I asked where she got the song and she said it was by an artist by the name of "Bonnie Raitt." Needless to say I started shopping for albums the next day and bought everything I could find from Bonnie Raitt. Bonnie helped make my transition into the blues easier. I love her guitar playing. She plays so tasteful and knows just when to play and when not to play which is an art unto itself. She's been a great influence and continues to inspire.

♪ Danielle Schnebelen ♪

I'd heard her voice throughout my childhood through my mother, who also sings, but didn't know who she was until

later, so I essentially found Bonnie Raitt twice. The second time was as a teen I was cutting my teeth as a vocalist and fell in love. Her strength as a front person, especially being a woman on a stage full of men, really grabbed me down to my core. She doesn't dress provocatively, but she's still sexy. She's powerful and not overbearing. Bonnie performs in that balance between dreams and reality. It's not easy to find. She knows exactly what she's doing and does it with such a humble confidence. There's such a quiet strength in her voice and music that just takes command of whatever you're doing and demands to be experienced, not just heard. It's completely intentional and it's brilliant.

♪ Fiona Boyes ♪

I clearly remember seeing Bonnie Raitt for the first time at a festival in my hometown of Melbourne, Australia. I felt like crying. It took me awhile to work out what was happening. Although women were the stars of the Classic Era, the blues is often considered a male-dominated genre. A glance through almost any guitar magazine will confirm the same dynamic – even more so. When I saw Bonnie, I realized that in my experience of the blues world to that point, I had

never seen a woman (dare I say it – a mature woman) playing guitar like that, leading the band, and taking possession of a big stage. To finally see a role model was deeply empowering for a young player: thank you, Bonnie!



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Band Members

JOHNNY LEE SCHELL

I played with her ten or eleven years after the *Green Light* record in 1982. In most cases when we go into the studio with her, we just start playing the material and pretty soon it finds its own way. She's committed to the blues through her words and deeds, financially helping people like Sippie Wallace and others. Bonnie and I toured as a duet doing political, homeless, and environmental fundraisers because as a duet, it was the most cost effective way to bring her there without bringing in an entire band.

JON CLEARY

The phrasing Bonnie uses on the slide guitar is where she keeps blues traditions in her music. What happened with blues when it was first played was the superimposition of one set of scales on top of another set of scales. Most importantly singing a minor third over a major chord. This introduced dissonance. In the wrong hands it can be painful; in the right it can be something of profound beauty. I think the way she employs it with her voice and glass is a thing of profound beauty. Like with cooking, it's a matter of getting very delicate flavors right. Like Mac Rebennack, Taj Mahal, Ry Cooder, she studied. They were all passionate fans of blues, and they were all students and hungry for the information from the guys who invented the music. With Bonnie, it was Sippie Wallace. With Bonnie what's important is that she really got that stuff down. And then didn't stay there. She utilized it in other more contemporary forms where it could be applied. She does that very, very tastefully.



TONY BRAUNAGEL

I came into the band in 1984. Bonnie brings in a song that she wrote or searched out and when you get into the studio, she knows where she's heading because of the song. On one song, I was there early for my three o'clock session, and they rushed me asking if I had any brushes. As I reached down to grab my brushes to play, Bruce Hornsby started the intro to "I Can't Make You Love Me." I'd never heard it before, picked up the brushes, and thought this seems like a good place to come in. And that was the take. Allowing that magic to happen is her personality. I always say she's very causative, she's got something going and she puts her heart into it. She's very generous onstage. If there is anyone in the audience that she's worked with or she could honor musically, she'll always talk about them to the audience. She always gives so much respect back.

JAMES

H A R M A

THE ICEMAN

by PETE SARDON

In 2016, James Harman leads the blues world with five Blues Music Award nominations. His Electro-Fi record *Bonetime* is nominated for Album of the Year, Traditional Album of the Year, and his song "Bad Feet/Bad Hair" for Song of the Year. Harman himself is nominated for Traditional Blues Male Performer and Instrumentalist – Harmonica.

His landmark albums include his '80s work *Extra Napkins*, *Mo' Na'kins Please?*, and *Strictly Live In '85*, which all feature musicians like Kid Ramos, Hollywood Fats, Fred Kaplan, Stephen Hodges, Junior Watson, Willie J. Campbell, Gene Taylor, Jeff Turmes, and others. His work for Black Top in the 1990s includes *Two Sides To The Story*, *Do Not Disturb*, *Cards On The Table*, and *Black & White*, all of which also feature an all-star roster of musicians.

In his own words, he is simply James Harman – "Your full service bluesman, since 1962."

"I am a musician, but mostly a songwriter and singer. Many guys play far more harmonica than me, probably because they can't sing. It's

all about singing. I'm a blues artist, not a harmonica player. I walked out of the church choir in 1962 at age sixteen and started singing for money about women and have only had this one job.

"After a couple of years, a talent scout tapped me and said, 'You've been doing great shows around here for the past couple of years, and we think it's time you came to Atlanta and started making records.' I had nine singles (45 RPM) out during the rest of the decade and immediately started touring the South, then branched out into the Midwest and East coast.

"I finally came to the West coast in 1970. I never had time to question whether or not I should attempt a different way of making a living. I've been a recording artist since 1964. Most of these guys you see today are playing in a band, but I painted on a moustache and went to see all the great blues artists when I was a teenager, so I understood the difference between an artist and a player. Artists hire players, players work for artists. I've never been in a band, I always had a band.

"I can play several instruments,

but I can always hire somebody to play every instrument better than me. I am a short story writer; because they must fit into songs, they are very short stories. I'm also a record producer, a blues singer, and a musician. I have no interest in 'blues harp.' I never touch a harmonica except on the stage or in the studio if I decide to use one in a song that I am recording. I tell stories and hire players to play my songs.

"I was born in Anniston, Alabama, in 1946. In rural Alabama, I heard a lot of hillbilly and Rhythm & Blues music. I went to many country suppers where family members sang and played music and I always participated. I heard many stories of my great Uncle Fate Norris who had been a star on Columbia Records in the late-1920s, 1930s and early-1940s. He was a multi-instrumentalist who worked with Gid Tanner and The Skillet Lickers and also did a one-man band act.

"I started piano lessons at age four and found my father's Hohner Marine Band harmonicas in the piano bench. Plus I also sang in the church choir. I also started playing drums at

age nine, I learned bass at age 12 and have done gigs as a drummer and bass player.

"I was already playing piano so it was easy to teach myself; listening to my father and blues records on the radio also helped. I really liked Little Junior Parker, George "Harmonica" Smith, Howlin' Wolf, both Sonny Boy Williamsons, Little Walter, Big Walter Horton, Jimmy Reed, Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, Forest City Joe, Snooky Pryor. They seem more soulful to me. I always used Hohner Marine Band harmonicas; they were about \$1.50, but went up every year for a long time, now they are crazy expensive. Luckily, I am endorsed by Hohner.

"All through the 1960s, I played mostly organ and piano with my horn bands. I always had a few harmonicas sitting on top of the piano and would play them occasional. Back then few people wanted the harp, they would yell 'camp fire' when I played it. I mostly played organ and piano. Then the Rolling Stones, Beatles, and Yardbirds came out, and they were playing harmonicas, so suddenly I was popular because I guess folks started seeing that was the same music I had always been playing.

"I moved to Panama City, Florida, in 1962, Chicago in '65, New York in '66, Miami in '67, New Orleans in '69 and finally California in 1970. I stayed because of the weather.

"Everywhere else was too dangerous. While in the shower in Miami, I heard a machine gun go off in the parking lot of my apartment building. I soon packed my band up and split to New Orleans, where a fellow was shot in the face right in front of my house.

"Nobody wanted to hear real blues, but I would not play rock 'n' roll so it was a bit rough at times. In the South, in the 1960s, I worked both sides of the street by playing hippie love-ins during the day on truck beds and black nightclubs at night. I had the only mixed race band around. I was the first white guy to ever sing at the Jetaway Lounge in Miami. I had two whites, two blacks, and two Cubans playing Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, and others."

Blues Music Magazine: After over 55 years, how would you describe the unique "James Harman sound"?

James Harman: I guess I play all original North American country blues with an Afro-Cuban percussion kick.

BMM: Please tell us about the various musicians that you backed you and who is in your band now?

James Harman: I have backed every real blues artist who was still alive and did not bring their own band. I opened for the rest that did have a band. My band is Nathan James on guitar, James Michael Tempo on percussion, Troy Sandow on bass and Marty Dodson on trap drums.

BMM: Do you play mostly in 2nd position or do you also use other positions?

James Harman: I use the position that suits how I want the song to sound. I can sing in any key, so my choices are unlimited.

BMM: Do you play the chromatic harmonica?

James Harman: Yes if necessary, but I don't really care for them. They are too heavy and awkward. I prefer a soloist tuned Marine Band in third position, when I want that sound.

BMM: What brand amplifier do you use and why?

James Harman: I use a Quilter Aviator. Quilter amps endorse me. Most of my life I used the 1963 Fender Vibroverb I bought new in 1963. I suffered two huge burglaries, one in 2004 and one in 2013, and all of my instruments, amps, cars, and my beloved record collection were stolen.

BMM: What brand harmonica microphone do you use and why?

James Harman: My harp mic is a custom-built solid wood body unit that was a birthday present from my old buddy Billy F. Gibbons 20 years ago. It has an Astatic 151 element.

BMM: Do you ever record songs of other artists as well and if so is there any particular artist that you cover more than the rest?

James Harman: No, not really, for me it's all about telling my own story. I believe you only use old records to learn your craft, but are supposed to learn to tell your own story to be an artist rather than a jukebox with a face.

BMM: How did you get the nickname "Icepick"?

James Harman: I am a student of commercial art and I collect those old wooden handled ice picks from the 1920s when the icehouses were fighting that new electric refrigerator; they had slogans on the handles that said stuff like, "Ice saves food," "Take home enough ice," or "Ice is silent and efficient." Most have a four or five-digit phone number and address. I had them on display in my record room for many years and when the fellows would come over to listen to records they started calling me "Icepick James" I never used it, but after so many years I finally broke down and used it in a couple of song titles in 1991.

BMM: What would you advise someone who wanted to learn blues harp to do?

James Harman: I have no advice for harmonica players who want to play professionally. If you are not a singer, it will be a rough damn game for you. Playing harmonica is meaningless. It's all about singing and writing songs to sing. Writing songs is the only way you can make any money in the music business. If you can't write songs, you will never make any money and if you can't sing, you will always work for somebody who can sing.

I'd say, go to school, figure out something you really want to do and do it. Music is a lot more fun when there is no money in it.

BMM: What CDs should they obtain?

James Harman: They should listen to all the great blues artists, not just harmonica players. Learning good phrasing is far more important than mimicking players, you must breathe with the song, not take A and fold in B and clip on C. Music is mathematical, but blues is about the human condition.

BMM: How do we get the younger generation into the blues?

James Harman: I have no idea; I doubt they will ever care about blues, but if by some strange chance they do hear blues and dig it then I think they should give it a chance and hear as much of it as possible. The most important thing they should learn is to use their instrument to play the blues. NOT to use the blues to get to play their instrument.



by Tom Hyslop

Working Man's Blues

In his four-plus decade career, Billy Flynn has established himself as a musician's musician, the guitarist to call when both authentic technique and deep feeling are required. Just ask Kim Wilson, Mississippi Heat, or the Cash Box Kings. The Wisconsin native recently contributed to the *Muddy Waters 100* project and is a charter member of the award-winning Living History Band; performed in the 2012 all-star Howlin' for Hubert tribute at the Apollo Theater; re-cut classics from the Chess catalog for the major motion picture *Cadillac Records*; and has released 10 albums of traditional electric blues sprinkled with hip jazz, funk, soul, and sitars, including a mandolin blues record and two collections of surf and hot rod guitar instrumentals.

Flynn caught the music bug

early. "I remember hearing Elvis when I was a baby, and I think that was the first time I ever heard blues. And they had a lot of cool stuff on TV. The old Alfred Hitchcock, when they had the jukebox on in bars when the girls would be dancing, there was a little bit of blues comin' through that, right? I bought every record that said 'blues' on it!"

"All the classics: Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins, everything. The hippies had some stores in Green Bay that actually had blues records; they brought culture here that was not just football, it was artistic. I was buying Bessie Smith and Clifton Chenier records; I was totally interested in it."

A club named Clark Kent's Super Joint opened, bringing a stellar lineup to Green Bay. "I was 14 years old and at the time, and it was 21 to get in. I was sitting

outside with my guitar. Jimmy Dawkins saw me and said, 'Whatchu doin'?' And I went in and played with him. At the end of the night, his vocalist, Big Voice Odom, asked me to come to Chicago with him and record! I was too young to understand how to go about that.

"The next week I went back and met Johnny Littlejohn and Jimmy Rogers. This was 1970, and the music was pretty much unchanged from the way it was in the '50s or the early 1960s, when the blues had a different sound to it. It wasn't the modern kind of blues, it was the real Chicago ensemble kind of playing. When I saw Jimmy Rogers singing 'Sloppy Drunk' and 'Walking by Myself,' I said to myself, 'That's what I'm gonna do.'"

"Of course it took me a while to be able to sound like that, but I had that ingrained in my brain. After that I met Mighty Joe Young, who was very encouraging to me. He'd always let me sit in. And I learned a lot from Luther Allison. I used to watch the way he would hold his hands when he played, when he would squeeze the strings; I would watch how he'd pick. Pretty much every time I'd see him I would learn something new. That was my early introduction to the music. The first two weeks, Jimmy Dawkins, Johnny Littlejohn, and Jimmy Rogers, it was an experience for a 14-year-old kid. That stuff just doesn't go away.

"All the things that happened to me between '70 and '71. There was an ad in Rolling Stone for a free issue of 'America's First Blues Magazine,' called *Living Blues*. Howlin' Wolf was on the cover, and the whole story about Magic Sam. It was an awesome issue. Then I *knew* there was some heavy stuff out

there. That really ignited the fire. I met Tom Radai that day when

I went to Clark

Kent's Super Joint for the first time. He was eventually responsible for me joining the Legendary Blues Band. Also that year I met Charlie Musselwhite. So a lot of things were happening to me that ended up being really influential.

"When I graduated from high school, I went on the road with Jimmy Dawkins and Hubert Sumlin, Eddie Shaw, and Junior Wells, a package called the South Side Blues All Stars. That was a heck of a lineup. I started playing with Calvin [Jones], Willie [Smith], and Pinetop [Perkins] in the Legendary Blues Band around '85, that was quite a big thing for me, too. I recorded four albums with them

for Ichiban records. Little Smokey [Smothers] was in that band later, that was another highlight for me, Smokey was such a great guy.”

Flynn raised two daughters with his wife Mary, who has hosted a blues radio show for nearly 30 years now, while routinely working on bandstands hours (and sometimes oceans) away. “I never wanted to be a big fish in a small pond. Being so close to Chicago, but yet so far away, I said ‘People in Europe know everything about blues. Here I am in Green Bay, and no one understands where I’m comin’ from.’ So I always wanted to find the right audience. Milwaukee was very open to me. People would yell out, ‘Hey, Billy! Play some Earl Hooker! Play some Little Walter!’ It made me realize that they love blues music and they cherish the musicians, they respect ‘em. And that’s why I had to go other places. I met so many friends, and I think it helped my career a lot to get out, instead of just trying to find an audience closer to me.”

One key to keeping a full calendar has been Flynn’s positive attitude. “I always wanted to be a working musician. I didn’t want to be a complainer, the person who said, ‘There’s no work in music.’ I wanted to succeed, as far as not being afraid to work hard or to be uncomfortable or to travel. As far as the personalities, they say that some of the people I’ve worked with are difficult, but I never really found that. I always try to get behind a person and understand what they would like for me to do, and I never really had a problem. I’ve heard that Howlin’ Wolf was difficult. When I met him I instantly had a rapport with him. He was a very kind person, very nice to me. And the list goes on.”

Flynn has built a career by putting music ahead of ego. “When I play with a band, I am always asking, ‘How am I going to fit into this?’ Sometimes they already have a lead guitar player, and I have no problem playing second guitar. I would rather do that than play lead and have somebody play behind me who might not sound good. I just try to find the role that’s needed. When you have somebody like James Wheeler or Little Smokey on the other side of the stage, it’s not about how much you know, it’s about how good you can sound. To have the experience of playin’ with guys with such great tone that you pretty much have to sink or swim – you’re like, ‘Aw, man! I want to sound good in this band. I *better* sound good!’

“Beautiful things have happened to me in my career because of my ability to have so much joy and pleasure in the music, and so much soul and so much feeling for it, and how important it is to me. It’s like blood to me in my veins, air in my lungs. I think that spreads. I see a lot of younger musicians starting out, and I see a lot of things that they do, and I say, you know I think I started doing that.

“I can see the influence that I’ve had on some of the guys that have come up since I have, in some of the styles and some of the things that I’ve started that they’ve kind of taken up, maybe with the capo and some of the positions. Everybody hears the records and they don’t know how they actually did it cause they couldn’t see ‘em doin’ it. So everybody comes up with a different way, and that’s how you get your own style. Like Hubert was tellin’ me, ‘I take a little of this, a little of that, and I put some of me with it and I come out with this.’

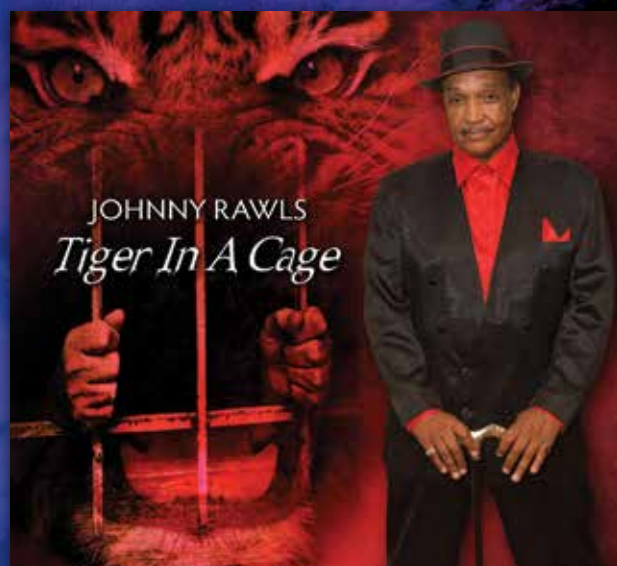
“When I saw Jimmy Rogers play, I said to myself, ‘That’s what I’m gonna do, that’s what I love.’ *Cadillac Records* was my chance to say to everyone, ‘I was there, and this is what I learned.’ So now when people in the future see *Cadillac Records* and they hear Muddy Waters, they know that I did it. I was showing what I could do in that movie, not only Muddy and Wolf and Chuck Berry, but the newer, Etta James soul music from the mid ‘60s. That gave me a chance to show everybody this is what I can do, and it was a beautiful thing.”



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For a younger blues musician, garnering a couple of Blues Music Award nomination is a heady experience. Getting two more nominations two years later can be considered validation for the earlier recognition. For singer, band leader, and harp player Brandon Santini, it is a stunning achievement to be in nominated with musicians who influenced him in his formative years.

"In the Best Harmonica Player category, naturally Kim Wilson has been the beacon for modern blues harmonica players. I got turned onto Little Walter and James Cotton, but Kim was right there in the group of guys that I was floored by. It is amazing to see my name with his like it was a couple of years ago. James Harman and Billy Branch are two more amazing players. And then there is Jason Ricci, who is one of the most unique players there is and, in my opinion, has single-highhandedly changed the way the instrument is played, particularly for younger players. Jason got some of his innovative way of playing from guys like Pat Ramsey."

Santini admits that his 2016 nomination in the Contemporary Male Blues Artist category was quite a surprise. "There are so many dynamic performers in there. Singer Sugaray Rayford is one favorite singers. For a thirty-three year old guy coming out of Memphis to be mentioned with him, Joe Louis Walker, Jarekus Singleton, and Eugene Hideaway Bridges, you can't help but be floored and very, very honored."

Growing up in North Carolina, Santini came from a non-musical family. The only musical memory he retained is being scared silly by his paternal grandmother as she created wierd sounds on the church organ in her home. His parents listened to what is now classic rock, some country, and Top 40 radio, which lead to Santini's first breakthrough.

"I heard a Blues Traveler hit – and I heard a harmonica sound that I had never heard before. My mother got me their CD for Christmas, but it didn't really click to go buy a harmonica. I got another release several years later and, while reading the liner notes, I learned what brand of harmonica John Popper played, That was my light-bulb moment." With his mother's help, Santini visited the local music store where he procured the first of many harmonicas.

Trying to emulate Popper was a daunting task, a case of trying to run before you can even crawl. "John Popper is one of the most amazing



harmonica players ever. In the blues industry, a lot of people would strongly disagree with that statement. They admit that they have never tried to be a blues band. Popper comes from the Hendrix meets jazz bebop horn players mentality when it comes to playing. It was through Popper that I learned about Paul Butterfield, who opened the door to all of the other legendary blues harp players." After hours of playing around the house and jamming in the bedroom with his guitar-playing best friend, Santini starting sitting in at local jams to cut his teeth and learn his instrument. He started his own band in 2001, playing an occasional local gig doing covers with Eric Baker on guitar. Two years later, another guitarist, Justin Sulek, suggested that the duo move to the mecca of blues music, Memphis, TN. By fronting the Delta Highway band, Santini was quickly learning how to be an effective vocalist. The band had a solid six year run before finally flaming out in 2009, just as their recording *The Devil Had A Woman* received a Blues Music award nomination in the Best New

Artist Debut category.

Santini explains, "We were in our twenties, living the lifestyle, and finding a lot of trouble to get into to. Things had been rocky for some time, and it just wasn't worth the exhaustion any more. It was more of a struggle than a family environment, which is what a band should be about."

A primary factor was Santini's battle with alcohol and drug addiction. "A lot of people don't realize that about me. We were feuding because we were strung-out, not getting enough rest, and battling about who is going to drive the van when everyone feels like crap. I was able to quit it all cold-turkey after fighting it for a long time. That issue will always be there in the industry."

"I wish I had kept a cooler head and not gotten caught up in that lifestyle. I'd be much better off if I followed the straight and narrow. I hope that the younger musicians coming up keep a cool head, stay focused on the music, and do the work you need to do to succeed. I would have saved a lot more

PHOTOGRAPHY © MARILYN STRINGER

of the money that I was working hard to make.”

The stress of the break-up lead to a decision to take a year off to get healthy, concentrate on writing songs, and play mostly local gigs. The material he was working on formed the basis for the first release under his own name, *Songs Of Love, Money, And Misery*, released in 2011. The recording showcased Santini's growth as a singer. “My evolution was slow and rough. I really admire people like John Nemeth and Victor Wainwright who sing so well. I am not a perfect singer – it doesn't come naturally, but you work with what you have. Sometimes I get comparisons to Dr. John, which I personally don't hear. The singers I wish I could sound like include Mavis Staples, Otis Redding, or Sam Cooke.”

Circumstances were markedly different by the time his second recording, *This Time Another Year*, hit the marketplace. “For my first album, I was so broke and put it out beyond my means, making the rookie mistake of not hiring a publicist, so the record didn't get out to many reviewers. For the second project, we had a substantially larger budget due to a successful crowd funding campaign.” Recorded at Ardent Studios with Jeff Jensen on guitar and Bill Ruffino on bass, plus James Cunningham on drums with Wainwright and Chris Stephenson on keyboards, the album announced Santini's arrival

as a major blues talent, receiving a nomination for a Blues Music Award for Contemporary Blues Album. Santini was thankful for that honor but a bit surprised, as he has always considered his music to be in a more traditional vein.

Jensen and Ruffino left the band some months after the release of *This Time Another Year* to restart a band under the guitar player's name. Santini hired a Florida musician, JL Fulks, to take over for Jensen and added bass guitarist Nick Hern from Bryan Lee's band. When Fulks decided to head back to Florida, Santini picked Timo Arthur to fill the guitar role. He continues to use a revolving set of drummers based on availability, with Chad Wirl and David Green the current options.

Santini has a list of considerations when it comes to selecting his band members. “The first one is their sound. That is the ultimate thing about music, you want it to sound exceptional. I also consider stage presence. I want someone who will entertain our audience. Additionally, I want them to look good, and we all have to be able to get along. We can be stuck in a van for more than ten hours at a time. Timo, Nick, and both drummers are laid-back guys.”

At the start of 2015, Santini released a live album recorded in Quebec City that captured the current band at its best. “As a musician, I

love live records when they are done right. The problem with recording live is that it is hard to control the setting. If you playing a bar on Beale Street, the patrons could care less if you are recording. I take a lot of pride in our live shows. We like to make people dance, and then pull it back to take the breath out of the room. I rented a recording console, and we ran the feed from the PA board into the console with two audience microphones added in. I am very proud of the results.”

As proud as he is about his accomplishments, Santini harbors some concerns about the future. “The blues genre is not regenerating its fan base. We aren't pulling the younger folks in at the rapid rate we need to. There is a tremendous pool of talented younger musicians out there, but clubs are shutting down all the time, so they have a limited number of opportunities to play.

“The support for live music isn't what it used to be while the audience is getting older. There is also many styles out there, not to mention the issues with streaming and downloads that effect how an artist is paid. We need to help younger people find the beauty, joy, and character in the music that we all fell in love with. One blessing is that the genre is so small that people know each other, creating a real family vibe that makes me feel right at home. We can't let this music die. It's too much a part of history.”

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MARY FLOWER

by Phil Reser

Mary Flower has been honored during her music career with Blues Music Awards nominations for Acoustic Artist of the Year and Acoustic Album of the Year. Renowned for a vision of roots music that blends ragtime, acoustic blues, and folk styles, Flower has performed at folk festivals and concert stages including Merlefest, Kerrville, King Biscuit, Prairie Home Companion, and the Calgary Folk Festival.

She brings a creative spark and low-key mojo to a century old guitar style called the Piedmont blues. In her words, it's a "band in the hand" characterized by a distinct bass line which is played on the lower strings of

the guitar as well as a melody picked on the higher strings. This fingerpicked guitar style distinguishes itself from Delta blues, which is usually slow and mournful.

Originally from Delphi, Indiana, Flower made her way to Denver at the beginning of the '70s, when she was in her twenties, and set up shop in the city's folk community, making a name locally, and putting together the local popular folk band, Mother Folkers. It was a two-week period of study with blues performers Jim Schwall and Steve James at a music workshop that transformed and moved her seriously into the blues.

As she explains, "Piedmont

She brings a creative spark and low-key mojo to a century old guitar style called the Piedmont blues.

style refers to the Piedmont region, up and down the East coast of the United States, between the mountains and the water. That's where many of the solo guitar players lived who played this style. It's synonymous with ragtime. It was so good that it was danceable. This style has always fascinated me because there's so much going on and it's really a complete style."

Historically, Elizabeth Cotten, Blind Blake, Etta Baker, Rev. Gary Davis, Alga Mae Hinton, Blind Boy Fuller, Merle Travis, and Mississippi John Hurt, played a similar alternating thumb and melody style. During the '70s and '80s, Flower helped develop the core curriculum at Denver's Swallow Hill Music School and taught there in the early '90s.

After 30 years in Denver, she moved to Portland, Oregon, in 2004, where she continues to teach students at the Augusta Heritage Center and the Swannanoa Gathering. Nationally she's been part of the Blues in Schools program, developed five instructional DVDs, and teaches workshops at many festivals where she also performs.

Her most recent music releases include, her 2014 solo album, *When My Bluebird Sings* and *The Ragpicker String Band*, the 2016 Blues Music Award nominee for Acoustic Album of the Year. That record brought together the creative talents of Flower, mandolinist Rich DelGrosso, and multi-instrumentalist Martin Grosswendt for this Yellow Dog Records project.

In the following *Blues Music Magazine* interview Flower talks about both of those music projects.

Blues Music Magazine: With your solo album, *When My Bluebird Sings*, what do you feel you accomplished with your songwriting and instrumentation this time out?

Mary Flower: The *Bluebird* album was a challenge to myself to record differently and present my music as it usually is when I travel playing solo. I wanted to see if I could write enough songs for a solo project and perform without the added boost of extra players. Now a buyer can hear exactly what he/she is getting. I have requests at the CD buying table from folks looking for the recording 'that has the least back-up players.' That is one of the things that drove me.

BMM: Any favorite tracks you'd like to mention that have special meaning to you?

Mary Flower: The song "My Bluebird" was another challenge to myself to write a very simple song over a 12 bar blues format with a unique and somewhat complex accompaniment pattern. It does not sound like a traditional blues tune, but fits the bill. Also, "Can't Take It With You" is a song about hoarding that many folks need to hear. It's funny, but to the point. "Ruckus Rag" is a favorite ragtime guitar instrumental.

BMM: How did the Ragpicker String Band come together and what did you enjoy best about working with Rich and Martin?

Mary Flower: Getting together with Rich

and Martin was a bit of a fluke. Rich wanted to record with me and eventually invited Martin into the project. We all brought tunes to a five-day rehearsal in Houston and a month later recorded in Austin. It was just another CD project of Rich's until Mike Powers at Yellow Dog Records took it on. Then it was a whole different animal. Working with both guys was a joy in the studio. We recorded quickly with very few overdubs and everyone was relaxed and totally reliable. My kind of recording.

BMM: With so much talent among the three of you, how did you arrange and construct the solo vocals and instrumentals as well as the sections where you all jam together?

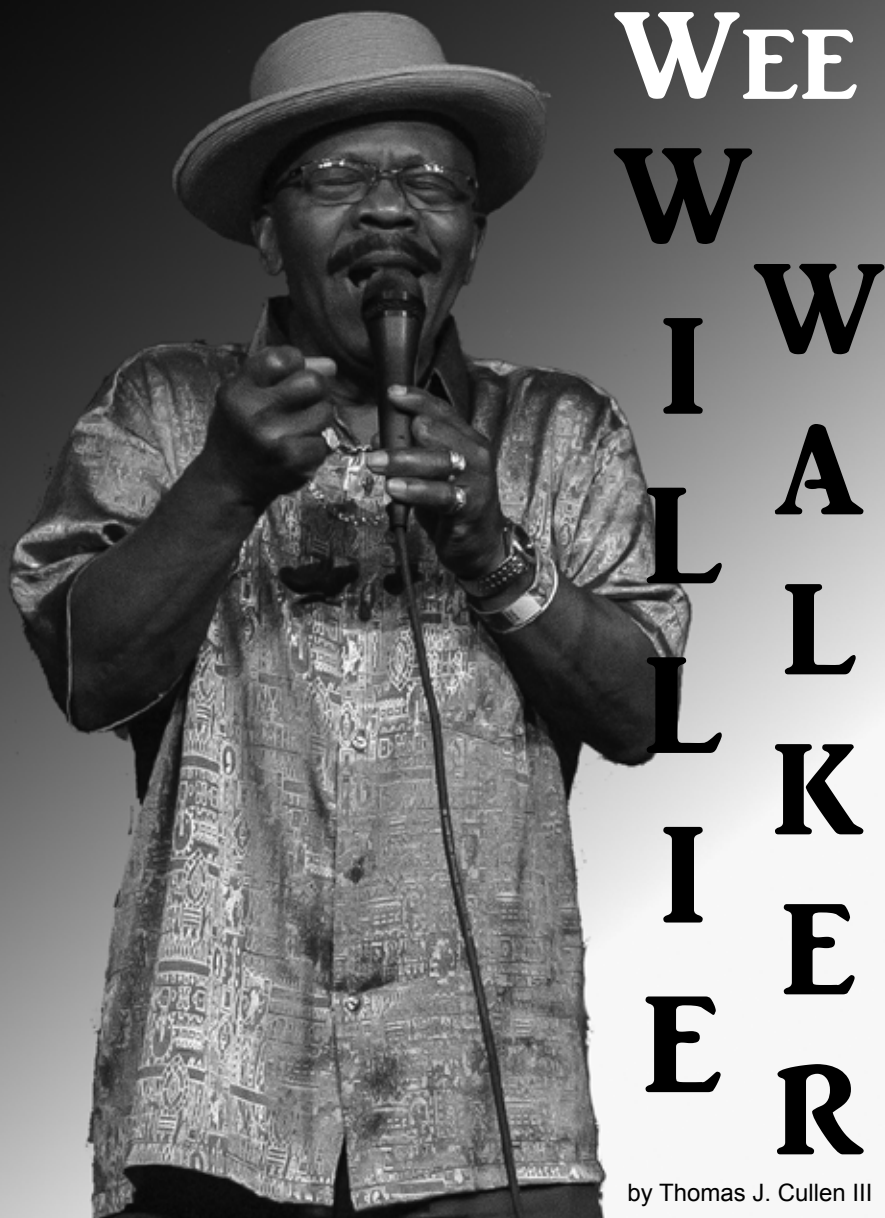
Mary Flower: It was a democratic process and the singer of the song called shots with others throwing in ideas. Like I said, it happened quickly and arrangements were no-frill.

BMM: Where do you feel it took all of you musically and do you expect to tour with each other and possibly record again.

Mary Flower: The studio is always a sacred place of learning, but especially when you are recording with two people with whom you never recorded. It helps when the temperaments are gentle and forgiving and everyone is open to anything that might happen. No big egos here, thank god, and I lucked out by having some players who were not only easy to work with but experienced players. We all have been doing this all of our lives. I don't know about recording again (too early to think of that), but we have some touring coming up which includes three Canadian festivals this summer. Now we'll really see how we get along.

BMM: What do you feel is the key to your years of success as a musician?

Mary Flower: Perseverance is a funny thing. I keep creating and playing gigs, solo and with other folks when I'm at home, and I've watched the business change, not in a good way, over the years, and know down deep that this is my chosen path. But I continue to hear from new listeners, "Why have we never heard of you? You're SO good!" It's a tough path and everyone is scrambling and it seems all of my contemporaries are in the same boat.



by Thomas J. Cullen III

From Mississippi to Memphis to Minneapolis: The Saga of Wee Willie Walker, Genuine Soul Survivor ...

A few summers ago my wife Maureen and I were hanging out with Rick Estrin & the Nightcats after their show at Building 24 Live in Wyomissing, PA. Over the years I've had several in-depth conversations with Rick about music. On this particular night, he was especially enthusiastic and ecstatic when he delivered the news about co-producing a record on veteran soul singer Wee Willie Walker. Estrin's co-producers were Kid Andersen and Jimmy Pugh and the album was being recorded at Andersen's Greaseland Studio in San Jose with a cast of West Coast stalwarts.

Estrin was introduced to Walker by chance through a mutual friend and that is where the tale of this great soul singer's rediscovery (of sorts) starts. I was beaming and filled with

anticipation when Estrin handed me a four-track sampler CD of *If Nothing Ever Changes* (Little Village Foundation), which isn't necessarily a comeback because Walker has been performing and recording in the Twin Cities for five decades.

There have been a few R&B/soul singers named Willie Walker; they are not to be confused with this Willie Walker, a native of Hernando, Mississippi, who in 1967 and 1968, released three collectors item 45s: one on Goldwax ("Ticket to Ride" b/w "There Goes My Used to Be") and two that Goldwax leased to Checker when the Memphis label began foundering ("Lucky Loser" - featuring Duane Allman b/w "From Warm to Cool to Cold" and "You Name It, I Had It" b/w "You're

Running Too Fast").

Problems with promotion and distribution certainly hurt his fledgling recording career. Growing up in Philadelphia, I never heard or saw a Goldwax record nor did I have any knowledge of Walker's Checker singles. In 1960 Walker moved from Memphis to Minneapolis because [he] "had decided at age 15 that Memphis was not the place for a young black man to grow up. Traveling with a gospel group, The Redemption Harmonizers, gave me the opportunity to move to Minnesota." His friend Roosevelt Jamison, who brought Walker to Goldwax, was also in the group. Jamison composed the immortal ballad "That's How Strong My Love Is" (popularized by O.V. Wright, Otis Redding, and the Rolling Stones) and was the mentor and manager of James Carr, Goldwax's biggest star. In Minnesota Walker has performed with Willie Murphy & the Bees, the Valdons, the Royal Jubileers, Paul Mesa, Salt, Pepper & Spice, We "R," and the Butanes (with whom he recorded three albums).

Both Estrin and I are long time, deep soul aficionados who believe that Wee Willie Walker is the equal of other better-known deep soul singers from the Golden Age of Soul and is deserving of greater recognition. Less than a year after its release, Rick Estrin's "realization of a life long dream" is now a universally acclaimed *tour de force* of classic soul, "...a beacon of hope in the survival of genuine soul music" (James Nadal, *All About Jazz*).

The Blues Foundation has nominated If Nothing Ever Changes for Album of the Year and for Soul Album of the Year; additionally, Wee Willie Walker has been nominated as Soul Artist of the Year. Upon hearing the news of the nominations, Walker exclaimed, "My initial feeling was disbelief - no way, are you kidding me? Then excitement, joy, and finally humility. Things haven't changed drastically yet, but it's still early, who knows?"

Growing up in Memphis Walker counted fellow Goldwax artists James Carr, Spencer Wiggins, O.V. Wright, and Louis Williams (the uncanny Sam Cooke-sounding lead vocalist of the Ovations) as his friends. Walker's gritty, gospel-tinged style is comparable to Carr, Wiggins, and Wright (three of the deepest of the deep soul singers), but he can also affect Cooke's ethereal suavity in a manner like Williams.

In explaining the perceived similarities, Walker asserted, "As far as Louis Williams to O.V. Wright and

PHOTOGRAPHY © MARILYN STRINGER

“Who says they don’t make ‘em like that anymore? Pick up the new Wee Walker CD and see how it’s done.” – Otis Clay

James Carr, I think it’s a thing about location. Being from the same city, I think everyone finds something about one another that they like and will consequently emulate.” The tunes he recorded for Goldwax were recorded at the Fame Studio in Muscle Shoals and at Sun Studios. Unfortunately, despite being on the same label as his Memphis buddies, Walker “never had the opportunity to do or share the bill on any shows with them.” This was due to the fact they were Memphis based and he was only back in Memphis for a vacation.

“The Goldwax sessions occurred while I was on vacation visiting family for the first time since leaving Memphis. Roosevelt Jamison and George Jackson heard I was around, called, and suggested I go to Goldwax and audition. I did and from there I spent my vacation recording. Goldwax was on a downhill skid after the release of “Ticket To Ride,” so they leased “Lucky Loser” and “You Name It, I’ve Had It” to Chess/Checker.”

Due to the whirlwind nature of the recording sessions, Walker has no recollection of who played on those sessions. He recorded his vocals and left. He does know that Duane Allman was on “Lucky Loser” from the Muscle Shoals sessions. Allman was usually on sessions with some of the following: guitarists Junior Lowe and Jimmy Johnson, keyboardists Spooner Oldham and Barry Beckett, bassist David Hood, and drummer Roger Hawkins, session giants all as are the probable Sun sessions unit of guitarist Reggie Young, bassist Tommy Cogbill, keyboardist Bobby Emmons, and drummer Gene Christman.

Walker’s nine Goldwax

recordings can be found on various UK and Japanese anthologies and are indicative of the great soul music released on the Goldwax label from 1964 to 1969. Numerous soul and blues singers like Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and Junior Parker (to name a few) have recorded Beatles tunes. One of *If Nothing Ever Changes*’ many highlights is Walker’s duet with Curtis Salgado on the brilliantly re-imagined “Help!,” a transcendent, cathartic, show stopping ballad which could easily be mistaken for gospel.



Walker “has always been a fan of Beatles lyrics and their ability to put them into near perfect form. Other Beatles tunes could be on the horizon!” That precedent was established long ago with the muscular rasp and roll of “Ticket To Ride.” The album’s set list is quite diverse with soul, blues, funk, and even two country tunes: Cindy Walker’s seemingly insouciant, string-sweetened “Not That I Care” and Bobby Braddock/Harlan Howard’s wry palliative “I Don’t Remember Loving You.”

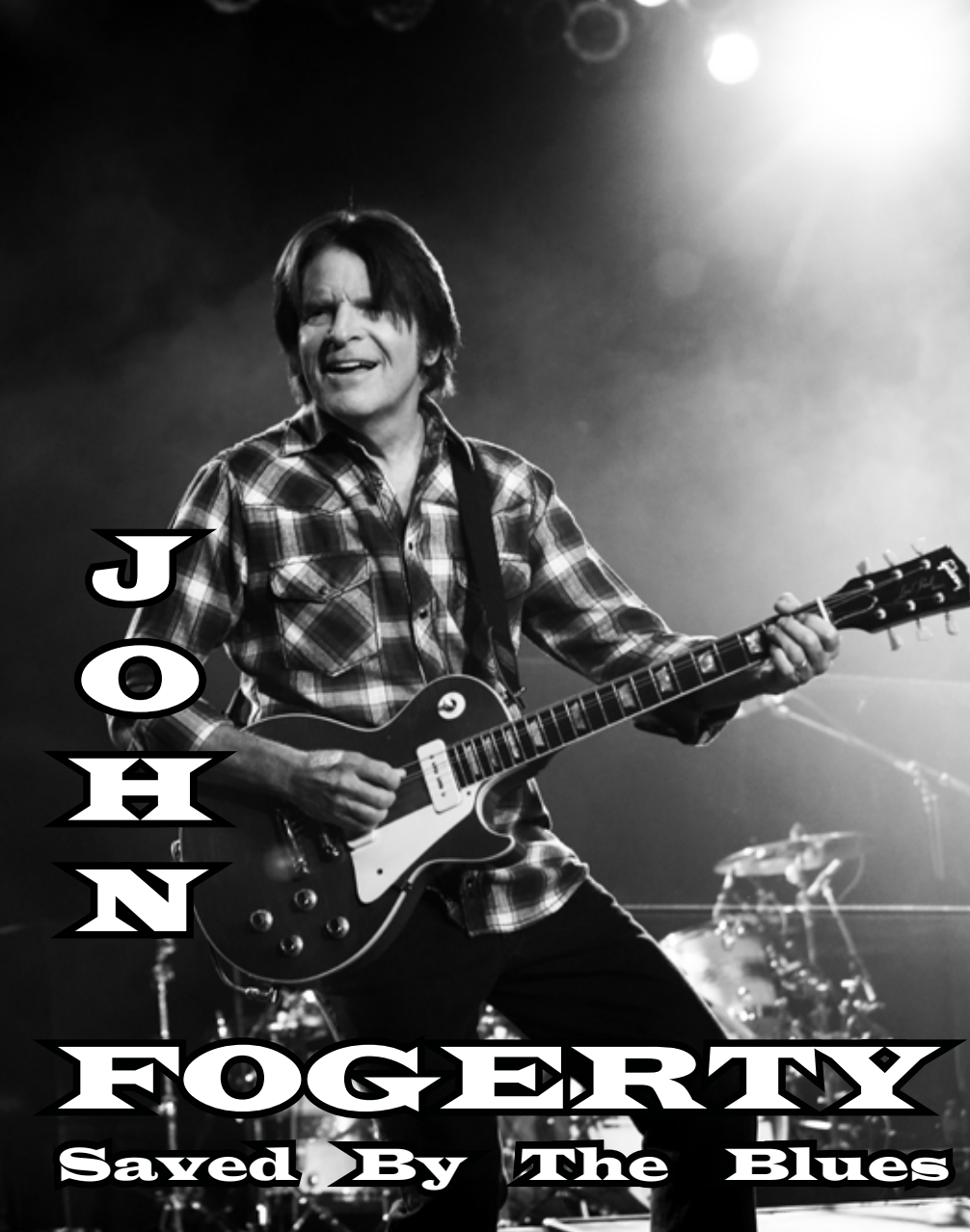
Starting with Ray Charles, there has been a long line of soul singers who recorded country tunes. For Wee Willie Walker there has always been more than subterranean link between country and soul. “Growing up in the mid-South, whether you had any thoughts of singing, there was such a strong influence of gospel, blues, soul, and country melodies. So for me, it’s all connected.” The inclusion of two Eddie Hinton tunes, the swaggering, horn-propelled “Everybody Meets Mr. Blue,” a cautionary tale about everyone’s unavoidable dilemma, and

“Hymn For Lonely Hearts,” a lilting balm for broken hearts, was especially pleasing to this Hinton fan.

Sadly, Walker never crossed paths with Hinton nor did he know much about Hinton’s music until he was in the studio. “I can’t take credit for the choice of those Hinton songs. I never had the chance to meet him, unfortunately. Rick Estrin introduced me to his music in the studio – there I became an Eddie Hinton fan. With the exception of the title track, which was written by a friend of mine, Bruce Pedalty, over 20 years ago, all of the other songs were introduced in the

studio by Rick Estrin, Kid Andersen, and Jim Pugh. And with unified collaboration we chose the tunes that are on the album.”

With the recent deaths of Mighty Sam McClain and Otis Clay, there are even fewer Sixties soul singers left. At age 75, Wee Willie Walker’s passion for classic soul continues to affirm the music’s power and timelessness



"It was at Robert Johnson's grave that a wound was healed."

by Bill Vitka

What is the connecting thread between Stephen Foster and Muddy Waters? Between "Oh Susanna" and "Moaning at Midnight"? It just might be John Fogerty.

As the creative force behind Creedence Clearwater Revival and as a solo artist, Fogerty has written songs that a lot of us still know the words to, jewels that never lose their sparkle including "Green River," "Born On A Bayou," "Who Will Stop The Rain," "Fortunate Son," "Proud Mary," "Centerfield," and others.

Fogerty's musical education was a buffet, a smorgasbord of pop, big bands, blues and country. His mom guided him early on through a menu of music that exposed him to and got him to focus on songwriters: Stephen Foster, Hoagy Carmichael, Irving Berlin,

and Harold Arlen who co-authored the Wizard of Oz songs. There was music played at home and music played on the radio.

Blues Music Magazine: On the radio, as you were growing up, you heard, Muddy Waters, the Wolf, you heard The Staples Singers. If you look at the world through the eyes of a songwriter, you look for that thing that maybe other people wouldn't look for. Taking that into account, Muddy, Wolf, Staples Singers, that's an entirely different tradition. That's the blues.

John Fogerty: Well, yeah. In my house, my older brothers listened to a station from Oakland called KQBR. It was a rhythm and blues station. That's what they called the music then.

It was basically black music. Rock 'n' roll hadn't been invented yet, so, I was hearing people like you just mentioned. Also doo-wop, the very early doo-wop, singing groups, like The Crows and The Chords, who did "Sh-Boom." I really love the sound of gospel harmony, male harmony.

A little later on I discovered Lead Belly and he sang with The Golden Gate Quartet. They did "Midnight Special." That was just an amazing sound to me. When Elvis started doing his gospel-based stuff with The Jordanaires, it made perfect sense to me. (But) that music was a bit outside my mom's. She tolerated it, but she wasn't, let's say the biggest fan.

I was getting that from my older brothers. (Mom) thought Elvis was a little crude, you know? Of course, I had the typical rock 'n' roll experience. "Well, if my parents don't like it, it must be good."

BMM: That is the seal of approval, or once upon a time it was. You know, they say the blues had a baby and it was rock 'n' roll.

John Fogerty: Right. Blues and country, actually, yes.

BMM: You have a big stew in terms of influences. There's the tradition that your mother passes along, and there's the music that you found: early R&B, gospel, country, and there's the blues. That's a big pot, right?

John Fogerty: Yeah. Blues was especially – I don't know how to quite describe it. When I was a kid, Howlin' Wolf especially, he really was big for me. I really loved the images (he conjured up) and the way he sounded. That music was kinda dangerous.

I don't think I felt that way about country music or the folk music that my mom introduced me to: Pete Seeger, Burl Ives and Sam Hinton in the early 50s. But something about blues was kind of threatening or intimidating. I was picking up on that as I began to hear things about mojo and voodoo and spooky stuff in songs, like "Hoochie Coochie Man" and hearing about a mojo hand from Lightnin' Hopkins, and a lot of the Bo Diddley stuff. You know, that just really fascinated me.

BMM: "I can still hear my old hound dog barkin' chasin' down a hoodoo there." That comes from one of your songs.

John Fogerty: Yeah, well there's "Mojo Hand," a song that Lightnin' Hopkins did, one of his, kind of breakout



something that other people weren't talking about, so for me, that made the blues sort of special and different.

John Fogerty: Well, I'll tell you what. My lesson for anyone, even people who are knee deep in blues, go back and listen to Muddy Waters' "Hoochie Coochie Man." Which I think is an answer to

Mississippi Delta. He visited juke joints, the plantation home of Muddy Waters, Dockery Farms, and he started digging deep into the life of the man who comes before all others in the blues, Charley Patton. It was Fogerty who paid for a headstone to mark Patton's grave.

He also went to the grave of Robert Johnson, all three sites where Johnson is said to be buried. It was on Fogerty's first cemetery visit made to Moorhead where something happened. Fogerty found himself talking to Robert Johnson.

He was standing at the pecan tree that the Moorhead postmaster had told him to find. The Zion Missionary Baptist Church cemetery was flooded that day and in Fogerty's mind was a picture of a faceless, cigar-smoking big shot getting rich off Johnson's music. He found himself saying, "It doesn't matter, Robert. Those are your songs. The whole world knows those are your songs."

It was a Jericho moment and "It really happened," Fogerty says.



numbers. Somewhere in the middle '50s. Really great record. Bo Diddley talked about things like that. The Mojo Hand. I learned later that that was a monkey paw, kind of like a rabbit's foot, something you had for good luck.

BMM: When you were talking about the blues, I think there was one thing you left out. Sex.

John Fogerty: Well, at the age of 10, 11, I didn't know too much about it. That was something that was coming along later. You know, everybody was all talking about their woman or their man, two timing and all that sort of thing. I didn't really understand that. I knew it was kind of a boy girl thing, but that was about all I understood as a little boy.

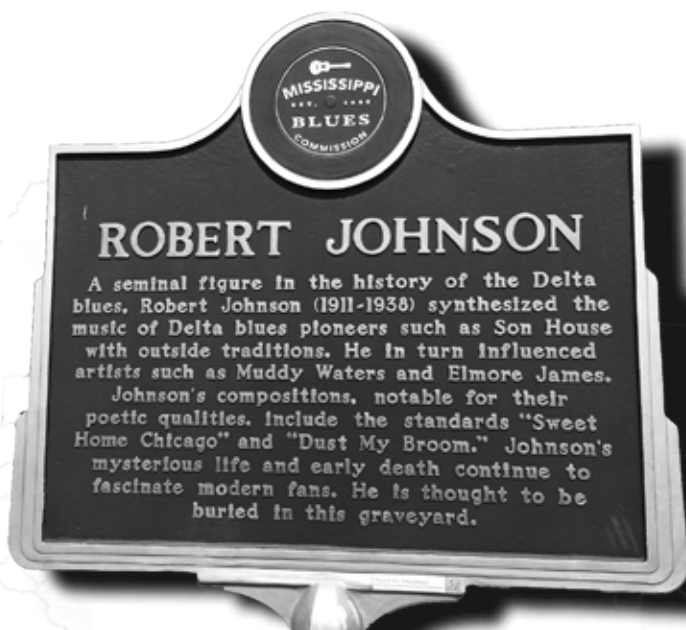
BMM: I came to the blues probably when I was 17 or 18, and when I listened for the first time, what I often heard was somebody talking about

Bo Diddley's "I'm A Man." Muddy Waters (was) just more experienced, let's say. There's such a sound and a feeling and a groove in that song, and he's talking about being your hoochie coochie man. Every time I'd hear that I couldn't help but say, "Well, what do people do when they hear music like this?" Just let your imagination tell you and you will understand."

Blues did something for John Fogerty and Fogerty did something for the blues. In 1972, Fogerty made a vow to no longer perform any of the songs he wrote for Creedence. Fallout from that bitter battle with his record company and his band mates meant Fogerty didn't own his own songs. Years later, many years later in 1990, Fogerty felt a need to go to the

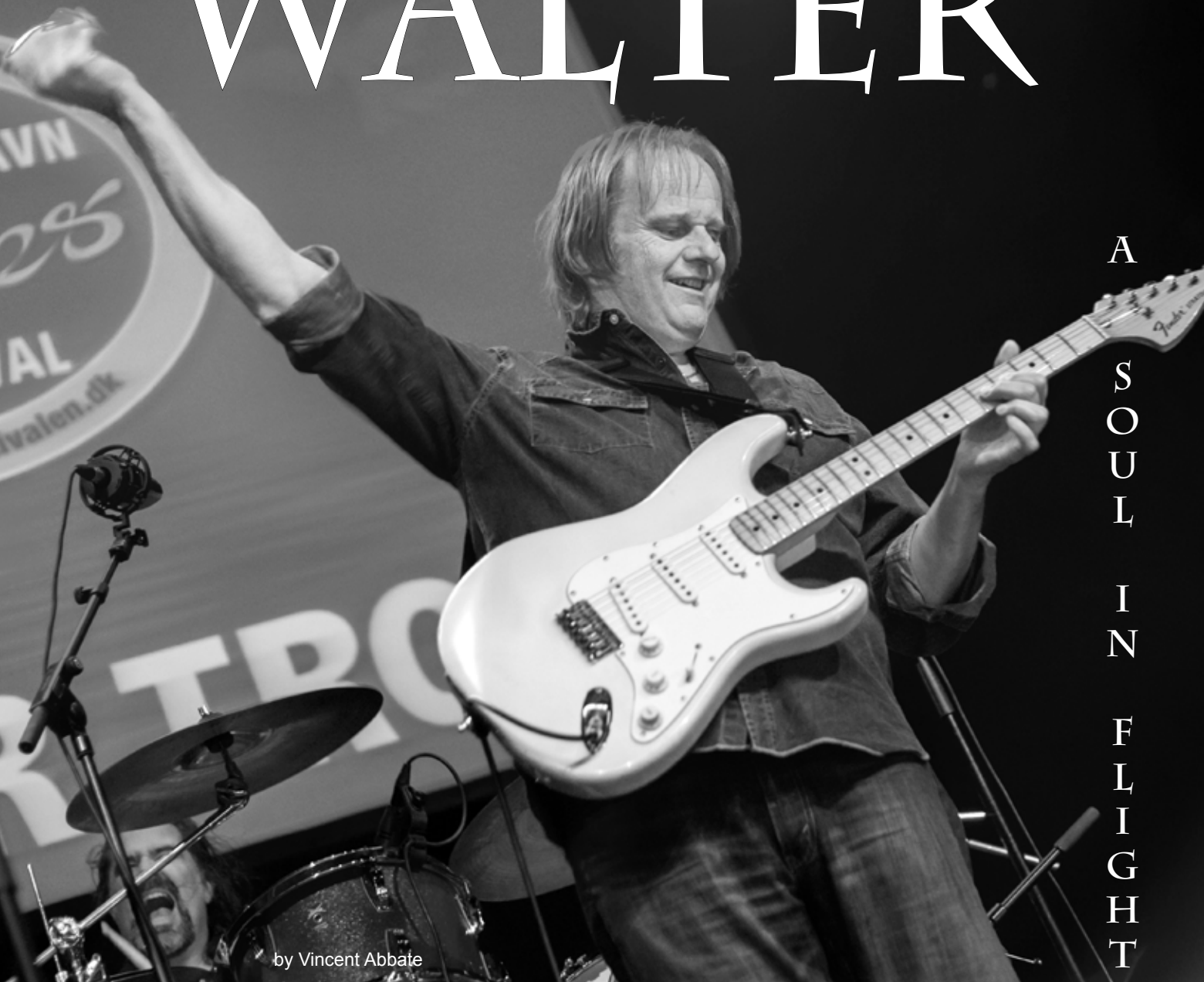
Walls came tumbling down, walls and a vow, because Fogerty realized that what he was telling Johnson's ghost at that very moment was "my story too." It didn't matter who owned the songs. All of them, even the ones he wrote during the Creedence years, are his songs.

It was at Robert Johnson's grave that a wound was healed. It put "Proud Mary" and all the other jewels Fogerty wrote back on stage. With him. Where they belong.



WALTER

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by Vincent Abbate

During the past three calendar years, veteran guitar slinger Walter Trout has shed more than his fair share of tears. In the summer of 2013, at age 62, the New Jersey native was diagnosed with liver failure; the once burly bluesman withered rapidly and soon came face-to-face with the ominous shadow of his own mortality.

Then, as fans rallied around him, donating generously to a Kickstarter campaign that would help him afford life-saving liver transplant surgery, tears were shed for a different reason: gratitude. His protracted physical slide, culminating in a successful transplant in May of 2014, left Trout alive, yet so weak he could no

longer play a single note. Frustration, despair, more tears.

"When I was in the hospital, my oldest son walked in. He'd come over from Denmark. He and my wife brought me a Stratocaster." It was the summer of 2014; Trout was still in recovery at the Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, where surgery had been carried out. "[My son] said, 'Here, you need to keep in touch with who you are, you need to play.' They carried me out of bed, sat me in a chair, set the guitar in my lap and gave me a guitar pick. I could not get one note to come out. I was too weak to press the strings. I told them to take the guitar out of the room. I couldn't even look at it."

Lately – since completing the long climb back to the stage after what was ultimately a two-year hiatus – the waterworks have been going almost nightly. And for good reason. Trout has been overcome by emotion onstage, moved by audiences' open displays of affection, the resounding ovations he receives wherever he plays. Each concert now becomes a mutual lovefest the moment he steps into the spotlight.

His first glimpse of what performing would be like after clawing his way back to good health came at London's prestigious Royal Albert Hall. "It was kind of surreal. I literally had not been onstage for almost two

TROUT

years,” Trout recalled recently. “I didn’t know what was going to happen. The last tours I did after I became ill, I was having severe equilibrium problems, which forced me to play sitting on a chair. I’d had severe hand cramping, where I literally couldn’t bend the strings and couldn’t do a vibrato. I had to rethink how I played. How the hell do you play the blues and not bend a string?”

Prior to taking the stage in London, Trout had a heart-to-heart with singer Eric Burdon, who was also set to appear that evening. “I said, ‘Eric, you’ve probably played here a hundred times.’ He said, ‘Yeah, and I fuckin’ hate it.’ I asked why. He says, ‘Because you can never be as big as this room.’ I knew what he meant. It’s an imposing, high-pressure place.”

After a poignant introduction from his wife Marie, Trout walked out to a booming ovation that shook the rafters of the venerable concert venue. “We both wept like babies and had to pull ourselves together,” he remembers. “But as soon as I went over

and plugged in and was playing my guitar with a band behind me, suddenly I felt: My God, I’m at home. I can do this. I’ve done this 10,000 times. This is the main joy in my life. I cracked a joke, counted to four, we started off – and all of a sudden I felt limitless. I felt like I could play for two or three hours if they’d let me. It was joyous. I flew away. My soul flew that night. It was incredible.”

Before being struck down, Trout had established himself as one of the leading lights in contemporary blues-rock – a task that took nearly four decades. The path led him from his birthplace on the New Jersey shore

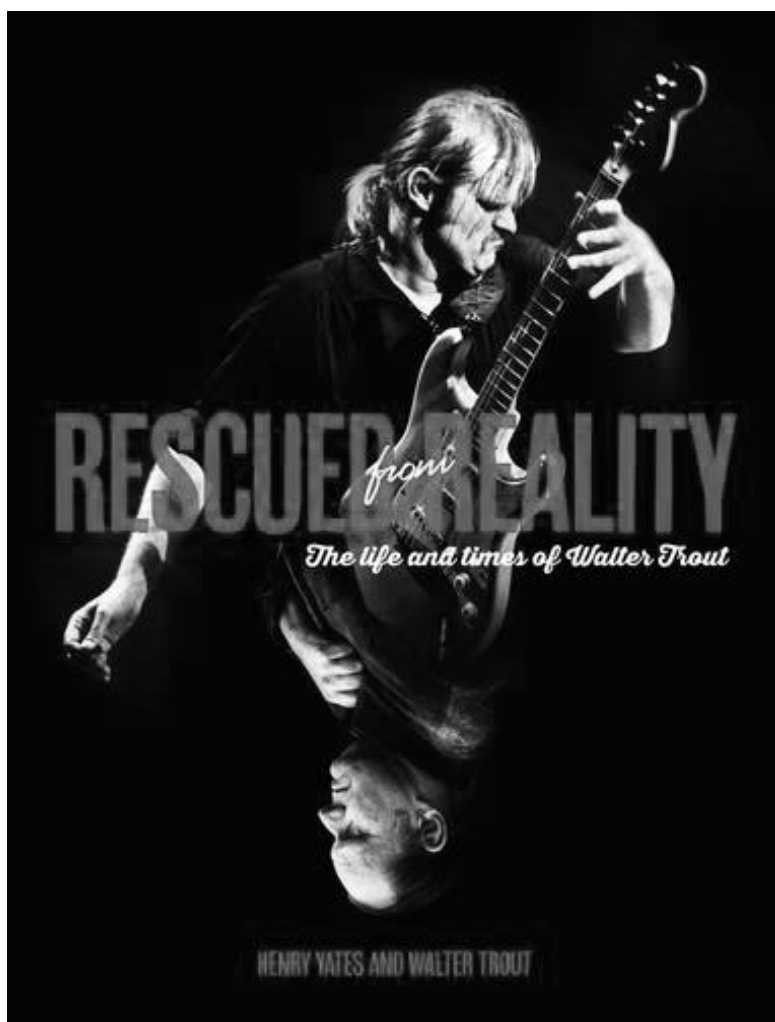
to his adopted home in Southern California, where he initially cut his teeth playing for Percy Mayfield, John Lee Hooker, and others.

His reputation grew upon joining Canned Heat in 1981 and then John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers later that decade. But while tasting success, Trout indulged heavily in drugs and alcohol. He credits Carlos Santana for putting him back on track after the celebrated guitarist chastised him for squandering his talent. He cleaned up and has lived clean ever since, but apparently, the damage was already done.

“My liver is fried, through heroin and alcohol,” he conceded in the pages of *Rescued From Reality*, the biography that appeared around the time of his

The Blues Came Callin’, an album that confronts the life and death issues he was facing in early 2014. He completed it just a few months prior to his liver transplant, knowing it could well be his final statement. “I have a hard time listening to *The Blues Came Callin’*,” Trout now says, “because I’m struggling. I have no air to sing. I have 50 pounds of fluid in my abdomen and it’s pressing on my lungs. So I can’t breathe. I can’t play because my hands are so weak. That’s what I hear when I hear that record.”

Even grimmer days would follow. Trout’s illness led him to the brink of a cold and desolate chasm. “I didn’t think, even if I survived, that I would ever be a musician again. I tried to completely banish those thoughts from my mind.



diagnosis. “But I don’t want to say ‘I regret this’ or ‘I regret that.’ Because I feel like I’m able to put some feeling, some emotion – maybe even a tiny bit of knowledge and wisdom – into my music that if I’d lived a Disneyland life wouldn’t be there.”

Trout has released nearly two dozen records as a solo artist, including

There were times where it would be three or four a.m. and I’m still awake and I’d get my smart phone and I would summon up the courage to watch a video of myself on YouTube.

“I would lie in bed, looking at my phone, watching myself play live. And I could not relate at all to that

person. Who is that guy? That's not me. That can't be me! I can't even stand up. I can't speak. I can barely lift a fork. I didn't eat for almost six months. I had a hose in my nose that kept me alive. I was completely unable to even think about music. I didn't want to hear it. I didn't want to know about it."

Not until he returned to California in September 2014 did the dark clouds begin to dissipate. "When I was better and back home, I thought, 'You know what? I think I wanna make a record.'" But Trout had some work to do. "I had to start over again. I had no calluses. I had no muscles. I had to work out with weights for my forearms. I would

the perspective of a survivor. This would prove to be a challenge, for even as his strength returned and his hands became more dexterous, Trout struggled to find the right words to tell his story.

"Every time I tried to write, it all came out clichéd and flowery. You know Look at the daisies in bloom, smell the roses and all that bullshit. Clichéd crap!" Trout found himself at an impasse until his wife helped him break through. "One day she said, 'I know it's gonna be hard for you, but why don't you relive what you went through? Tell that story.' Once I put my mind to that, the whole thing came out in like ten or twelve days."

The result is the most riveting

My voice came back. I had something to say." He also credits new bassist Johnny Griparic, whose myriad employers have included everyone from Steve Winwood to Slash to Branford Marsalis, for bringing a unique dynamic to the album. "He's brought an entirely new dimension to my band and to my music. We are now four guys working as a team. And you can hear it. Even when the subject matter is dark – and a lot of it is dark – our playing is joyous. A lot of it is live. There's a lot of jamming. We're just having a ball playing together."

Trout certainly has maintained his sense of humor, as evidenced by the upbeat-sounding, tongue-in-cheek

track called "My Ship Came In." He shares the details behind the song without any trace of bitterness. "Before I got sick, for five years, my record label had planned to make 2014 the Year of the Trout. They commissioned a book, they commissioned a documentary, they re-released my back catalog on vinyl. I was booked at big music festivals around the world. It was the publicity push I have been waiting for my whole career. It was going to move me to another level."

That's when his health crisis intervened. A classic case of bad timing. "I had to cancel one

try to play chords and my fingers would bleed."

Little by little, the skills that had made him a star in the blues world reappeared. Once 2015 rolled around, he felt ready. "It took me three months of practicing every day for like six hours. It wasn't long after that that I decided to make a record."

That record, *Battle Scars* – recently nominated as Rock Blues Album of the Year by the Blues Foundation – is, in a sense, Trout revisiting the thematic territory of *The Blues Came Callin'* from

album of Trout's career. With songs such as "Omaha" and "Almost Gone," he allows the listener to enter his hospital room and eavesdrop as desperate thoughts carom around inside his soul. The vividness and attention to detail with which he evokes that painful experience on these and other cuts is almost too much to take.

Yet Trout chooses to focus on the positive. "Recording this record was absolutely joyous," he says, "because my playing was back. It was strong. I wasn't getting cramps in my hands.

entire year of work. All down the drain. I was talking to my wife about [all this] and said, 'Yup, my ship came in and sailed away again.' We both kind of laughed and kind of cried and I thought: Well there's a good title for a song."

Walter Trout has been to hell and survived. His return to good health and to his chosen profession will be celebrated, rightfully, for some time to come. Each time he steps onstage, plugs in and invigorates an audience with his playing, he will feel the love. In that sense at least, his ship has indeed come in.



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Keep On Pickin'

by Art Tipaldi

Before he died, Luther Allison sat with Albert Castiglia at the Fort Lauderdale Riverwalk Blues Festival in 1996 and offered him this sage advice. "He told me, 'Keep on pickin' and good things will happen. If you don't keep on, you'll never get the fruits of hard work.'" Heady advice from a legend to a mid-twenties guitarist. Within a few months, Castiglia would make a name as the young guitarist in Junior Wells' band. A little less than a year after Allison passed along his advice to Castiglia, pronounced ka-steel-ya, both he and Wells had passed away.

Castiglia has become the living embodiment of that advice. After spending ten months with Wells, he handled the guitar duties with Sandra Hall for the next three years and, in 2001, embarked on a solo career that to this date has produced five records on Blues Leaf Records. That "Keep on pickin'" advice did not go unnoticed. In 2014, he was signed to Ruf Records, released his Ruf debut, *Solid Ground*, and toured Europe as a major part of the Ruf Caravan.

"I don't feel I was given the gift of talent," said Castiglia, "I was given the love of the music. Because I loved the music so much, I kept wanting to play and practice and gig as much as I could because I loved it so much. It gets down to those three words, 'keep on playing.'"

Like so many, Castiglia's blues journey began with Eric Clapton. "I was a middle class kid growing up in the suburbs. My dad was a doo wop from the Bronx, and my mom was a Cuban who listened to country music. I wasn't exposed to the blues until Eric Clapton came along. The minute I heard it, I wished I was from that part of town."

It was his tenure with Wells that exposed Castiglia to the authentic blues that percolated in "that part of town." How does a kid working in Florida get a ten-month gig with a major blues icon?

"I was a social worker for the State of Florida Welfare Department doing a day gig. Junior and I had a

mutual friend, Gloria Pierce, who lived in Florida. Junior was in town on New Year's Eve in 1996 and Gloria invited me to go see him. And she told me to bring my guitar.

"His road manager, Michael Blackmore, came up to me during the first set and asked if I wanted to play with Junior. He said, 'You better be good because he's gonna be really tough on you.' I said, 'I work at the welfare office so a bad day with Junior Wells always beats a good day at the office.' I knew what I was in for and I was ready for it."

Castiglia played three songs with the band without Junior. Then Junior came up and he played "Messin' With The Kid," "Little Red Rooster," and a couple of others. "I got off the stage and

When this happened, I knew that I could hang in with guys like that."

For Castiglia, it was back to his daily routine when a phone call changed everything. "A couple of months later, Junior's regular guitar player couldn't do a few dates. So Michael called me and asked if I could do three dates in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit with Junior. I took a leave of absence for about a month to see if I could make it solely as a musician.

"About a month after the gigs with Junior. I was face down, depressed that I wasn't making it as a musician and that I was gonna have to go back to work, and I get another call from Michael. He asked if I could be in Chicago in three days to play with Junior. I didn't hesitate. I dropped everything. I was on a plane to



ran three blocks to a pay phone to call my parents and tell them I just played with Junior Wells. I went back and hung out with Junior and the band, and I felt that I passed the test.

"At that time, I wasn't feeling too good about myself. My job was a real drag, and it was taking its toll on me. I went into the welfare business as an idealist. I wanted to help people, and I didn't feel that I was. But I was always playing nights, no matter what, because I really wanted to play music for a living.

Chicago and didn't know anything about Chicago except it was a blues Mecca.

"I wasn't familiar with the weather so I showed up in late April wearing shorts, and a t-shirt. And it was 45 degrees. Everything changed. I had to find a place to live. I had a cousin who lived in a loft on Belmont and Lincoln on the Northside. I stayed with him, then flopped with another cousin, and even stayed in a hotel right out of the

PHOTOGRAPHY © MARILYN STRINGER



Blues Brothers movie for a week and a half. It was right next to the L, and I was looking out the window thinking, 'This is great!' This is what I wanted to do.

"The gigs when I first arrived were club dates. The first gig was at B.L.U.E.S. Etc. on Belmont. We also played at Rosa's. The first gig with Junior at Rosa's was something. I had the flu that night and at the end, Dave Myers and Bob Stroger showed up. I had to stay on-stage for another hour backing the jam.

"Junior was really tough in the beginning. When I did those three fill-in gigs, they sent me a tape of the material. That's how I learned his music. There were no rehearsals. It was trial by fire so it was unnerving playing those tough clubs. Chicago crowds are really tough. They're not easily impressed. Junior would turn around and give me the stank eye when he didn't like what I was doing. When we did the B.L.U.E.S. Etc. gig, he turned around and his lips were moving, but nothing was coming out. But I could read every word, and it wasn't pretty. I thought I was gonna lose the gig after that.

"I was at the bar after that, and Junior walked up to me and said, 'You'll get the hang of it and be alright.' I got to know him and understand what he wanted from me.

"The biggest lesson I learned from those ten months was how to connect with an audience. Before I played with Junior, I thought it was enough to just put my head down and play. I saw him bare his soul to the

audience every night. Because he opened himself to the audience, they felt like they were part of the show. His stage presence was amazing. That's when I learned there's more to this game than just playing. You have to entertain; you have to engage the audience. I learned how to front a band and how to use cues to convey what you want as the front man."

After a three-year stint with Sandra Hall's band (Castiglia will tell you many stories of unsuspecting audience members who were lured into Hall's risqué finale.), he decided in 2001 it was time to begin his own journey. That road included miles touring, recording, and writing.

"By the time I recorded my sixth CD, *Living The Dream*, my writing has improved because I'm having more experiences, my playing improved, the tone of my guitar improved. When I was a sideman, there wasn't a lot to write about. That changed when I started fronting a band." Castiglia's "Bad Year Blues" was nominated for a Blues Music Award as Song of the Year in 2009. His collaborations with Florida's Graham Drout has also produced memorable songs.

His friendship with Mike Zito opened the door for Castiglia to be signed by Ruf Records in 2014. "Everything changed in a matter of two months. I got a text message from Mike who was performing at the Royal Albert Hall with the Royal Southern Brotherhood and Thomas Ruf. Thomas wants to sign me to his label [Ruf], but he needs me to do his Blues Caravan tour for 2014. I had already recorded the record, *Solid Ground*, and was gonna shop it around. I sent it to him, and he loved it. Those conversations were happening in November 2013 and he wanted me to be on the road with the Caravan in January 2014."

The Caravan tour is a revue-type show where three performers front a rhythm section and each perform a 30-minute set followed by a finale jam. The grueling nature of the three months is the time spent traveling from one European venue to another. The best part is building an audience.

"I think it really opened doors

for me in Europe because after the Caravan tour, I went back to Europe with my own band. People were interested in me from the Caravan, and then they came back to my band tours. I remember playing in a very remote town north of Hamburg and six guys who had seen me play with the Caravan drove 250 kilometers to see me with my band. That happened a lot in all parts of Europe."

As we finished our talk in January 2016, Castiglia was headed back from the Dockside Studios in Louisiana where he recorded his next record to be released in June on Ruf Records. With Zito at the production seat, Castiglia used Zito's band, The Wheel, as the record's musicians.

"Mike Zito was able to get me to do things vocally that I was never able to do. He pushed me to sing harder and hit notes that I never tried. He forced me out of my comfort zone and it really paid off. He also got my guitar very close to what it sounds like live. He really came closest to capturing my live sound.

"I believe my songwriting on this also took a step forward. I co-wrote with Graham Drout, John Ginty, Cyril Neville, and Joel Zoss. Joel wrote songs for Bonnie Raitt's first record and now lives in West Palm Beach. That song is very different from what I usually write."

There was a certain bittersweet aura to this experience. Dockside Studios was the last studio that Junior Wells recorded in a year before his death. "When I joined the band, Junior and Michael told me stories about what a great studio Dockside was. It was very serendipitous to record there, and it was a real full circle thing for me. When I got there, I could feel Junior's presence there. I recorded 'Where Did I Go Wrong' as a tribute to Junior on the record.

"There were also a couple of Luther's guitars present at the sessions, so we recorded his 'Drowning At The Bottom.' That small act of kindness by Luther backstage in 1996 meant the world to me. Their [Wells and Allison] wisdom has always carried me."

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DELTA JOURNEYS

by Roger Stolle

Is It The Water?

"Is there something in the water?" At my Cat Head blues store in Clarksdale, Mississippi, I get variations on this question on a weekly basis. When folks look the *Mississippi Blues Musicians* map poster I carry or check out the free Mississippi Blues Trail app, they are amazed how many household blues names – the foundations of popular music – grew up within a rolling stone's throw of where I sit.

From Charley Patton to Muddy Waters, from John Lee Hooker to B.B. King, from Ike Turner to Sam Cooke, the region raised generations of blues legends out of the fertile cotton fields and small rural towns.

"Something in the water?" Maybe. This is the region that Library of Congress field recordist Alan Lomax labeled the *Land Where Blues Began* in his book about the Delta's blues and gospel circa 1941-42. At the dawn of World War II, Lomax and Fisk University's John Work spent time Clarksdale, Friar's Point, and Tunica juke joints and churches in search of music and the people and history behind it.

What they found, even in the midst of the Great Depression, even at the start of the Great War, were the roots of a blues music that would soon travel around the globe. Recording musicians like Son House, Honeyboy Edwards, and Muddy Waters, Lomax documented a music that was increasingly on the move.

Today, the genre of "blues" music is deeply entrenched in rock, pop, soul, R&B, and beyond. Today, there are blues bands in virtually every country you can name. Doubt it? Just look at the annual International Blues Challenge (IBC) held in Memphis early each year. You'll find a blues battle blazing between Australians and Japanese, Norwegians and Israelis, Brits and Canadians, and on and on. Still, even as the big challenge rolls on north of the Mississippi Delta, visitors swing through Clarksdale, asking, "Is there something in the water?"

TODAY'S WATER IS STILL SOMETHING SPECIAL

Blues travelers who spend a night in Clarksdale, which offers live blues seven nights a week, every week, only further highlights the usual question. And if they spend a Friday or Saturday night and go jukin' at Red's Lounge, well then they don't even need to ask the question.



They will have seen and heard the answer.

On a recent weekend, after an 83-year-old named Leo "Bud" Welch graced Red's stage on a Friday night, a 16-year-old Clarksdale kid who fans call "Kingfish" (and his mother calls "Christone Ingram") amazed and entertained a packed house on that Saturday night with his impressive musicianship and increasing showmanship. Clearly he's been drinking the water as well as listening to the older cats who came before him and practicing, practicing, practicing at home. Sure, Kingfish is impressive because of his young age. But he's more than just a young gun or prodigy. He's a Mississippi Deltan.

Perhaps if he'd grown up in New Jersey or Montana or some non-blues-history type place (no offense meant, y'all), he would be good or even great, but would he be "Kingfish"?

The beauty of here is that in the Mississippi Delta, you can learn from an older blues musician, practice at home (like anyone, anywhere), and then (and this is the ticket, really) work out

the music at the same kind of juke joints and house parties where a young man like Robert Johnson picked up the mantle left by Son House and Charley Patton. In Kingfish's case, he was only 11 years old when he started playing local clubs like Ground Zero Blues Club and jukes like Red's Lounge, backing and learning from older guys with monikers such as

"Howl-N-Madd," "Big A," and "Space Cowboy."

Personally, I think that's "the water." That's where you sink or swim. You can fake it in front of your mirror at home or playing blues in a non-blues town for an early dinner crowd. But at a Mississippi juke joint? Not so much.

"HOW CAN I DRINK THE WATER?"



To see and hear why folks always ask the question, come to the Mississippi Delta for a drink. There are at least five blues museums within an hour or so of Clarksdale, including the two in Clarksdale, and numerous blues festivals, both big and small. The state also boasts a well-developed Mississippi Blues Trail marker system to help guide you to our region's blues history spots. Who knows? You might even catch old-man Leo or young-man Christone a.k.a. Kingfish.

For an online blues "Music Calendar" (and a guide to "Clarksdale"), please visit my web site at www.cathead.biz.

For the Mississippi Blues Trail, check out their app and web site at www.msbluestrail.org.

And come thirsty, y'all.

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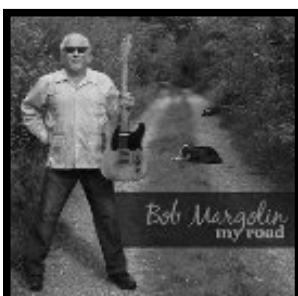
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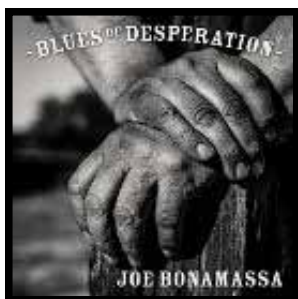
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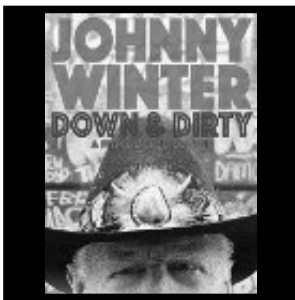
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Navy & Red	White
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AROUND THE WORLD

by Bob Margolin

Recording Blues

In 1980 Muddy Waters walked into a recording studio and declared, "I'm going to make a good album if it takes three days!" Pro musicians, recording engineers, and producers enjoy this true story. We've all done projects that take ten times as long, and we don't get a Muddy album out of it.

Classic blues recordings made when I was born, mid-20th century, pulled me into a lifelong love when I heard them as a teenager learning guitar. I was inspired by the music itself but also taken and shaken by the glorious *sound* of the recordings too – the human grace of great singing, the complex tones of electric and acoustic guitars, pianos, harmonicas, violins and mandolins, real drums played in a warm-sounding room, an intimate or percussive upright bass or the thud of "modern" electric bass, the swirling majesty of a Hammond organ, exciting sax, trumpet, or trombone alone or sweet harmonies of a tight horn section. Some classic

recordings deliver blues performance unadorned but clear and sweet while others are crafted deliberately with reverberation or echo effects, cool-sounding musical spices to complement the warm sound of tubes, tape, and vinyl.

I asked Muddy how Chess Records recorded his classic early-'50s songs. He told me: They used three microphones. One was near the singer, one near the piano, and one near the

upright bass. The other instruments, like guitar amps and harps and drums, were louder and leaked into the mics in a carefully balanced mix by mic placement with a pleasant, real room sound to them.

When I was recording with him on five albums in the 1970s, the band set up in the studio, Muddy told us the key and started playing or counted off the song. As onstage, we'd follow him, and he would sing old or new lyrics. This

the sound of music is that I play it on bandstands since 1965. As recently as 2010, I stood onstage between Pinetop Perkins and Hubert Sumlin and knew I was hearing the best stereo of my life. In the 1970s Muddy did not use vocal monitors onstage. I heard his ultimate singing directly from his mouth to my ears, a few feet away. I often stood in front of a grand piano with an open top and listened to Pinetop playing at the same time. I appreciated it fully then, an unforgettable sensual pleasure.

The recording process for blues music today can reflect its spirit and enhance the music or ruin it if it's not mixed well or the sound is harsh. I can record pro quality tracks at home on my laptop or spend thousands for a few days in a recording studio full of expensive modern and vintage gear, plus a brilliant producer and experienced engineer to do their jobs with both musical souls and technical expertise.

Is one way or the other always better? There are more options now, but it would be oversimplifying and

organic approach is called "live-in-the-studio" and is still often used.

In today's studios, the singer usually sings into a very high quality microphone in a soundproof booth so that the vocal is only picked up by that one mic. That's why you see photos of singers recording wearing headphones. The singing can be re-done later if desired. Muddy didn't do that, he sat in the room with the band all around him and mostly sang perfectly on the first take.

My reality-check reference for

inaccurate to declare all digital recording harsh and all analog recording to be beautiful, or that all studio recording is great and all home recording is lacking. It depends on the technical skills and ear for music of the person recording.

I have 45 years of experience as the recorder and the recordee. Ever since I listened through phonograph pops and scratches and tape hiss and AM radio to hear the music beneath it, all the way to now imagining the fullness of music through MP3s that remove it



solely and soulessly to make a song into a smaller file, I've been aware of and tried to educate myself about recording.

The recording process for my latest album *My Road* is a perfect illustration of a wide range of present approaches for recording blues today. I wrote or chose the songs crafting home demo recordings with guitars and/or bass plus my vocals. I took time to live with them, sometimes stepped away for perspective, and changed them if I thought I could improve them.

I experimented alone to conceive arrangements and individual parts. These demos could serve as complete songs because I recorded them at pro quality so that I could use the songs or individual tracks for the album if desired. It turned out that we did indeed use some tracks and augmented them with drums, harp, or new vocal overdubs, coached by an accomplished, experienced producer. A producer oversees the whole project and helps craft the best overall performance.

I always produced or co-produced my own albums, but this time I engaged the services of Michael Freeman. He had engineered an album I produced for Big Bill Morganfield in 1999 for Blind Pig Records, and produced the 2011 Grammy-winning *Joined At The Hip* for Pinetop Perkins and Willie "Big Eyes"

Smith. He brought his musical soul and studio skills, guiding me this time. Rather than have Michael produce and engineer at the same time, for studio tracking and mixing I got the engineer who works on all of my recordings, the golden-eared Mark Williams from Charlotte, N.C. I booked six days to track at a pro studio, The Fidelitorium, in Kernersville, N.C. We mixed at Mark's East Oak Media mixing studio in Charlotte, N.C.

Our strategy was "whatever works in the service of the music" as

described above. Some of the tracking came easy. Others we worked on for hours with producer Michael's guidance. Mark, Michael, and I mixed and sequenced the finished album. We had the album mastered, the final step before manufacture, at Studio B Mastering in Charlotte. The end result was aimed to be my best album ever, a step forward. Your judgment of that is more important than mine.

In contrast, last November I recorded with Bonny B, a powerful Swiss bluesman whom I have played and recorded with before, and a good friend. His band plus me set up onstage in his club and Bonny's brother, Ice-B, both played guitar and operated the recording

content and recording quality. VizzTone has released about 80 CDs in nine years.

Every summer I hear live and in-the-room the talented young musicians who attend the annual Pinetop Perkins Foundation Masterclass workshops in Clarksdale, Mississippi. It's a thrill, education, and inspiration to hear and jam with our workshopers. Some aim for the traditional, some are very progressive, and all are or will grow to be creative. They are the future of blues, some will be stars soon.

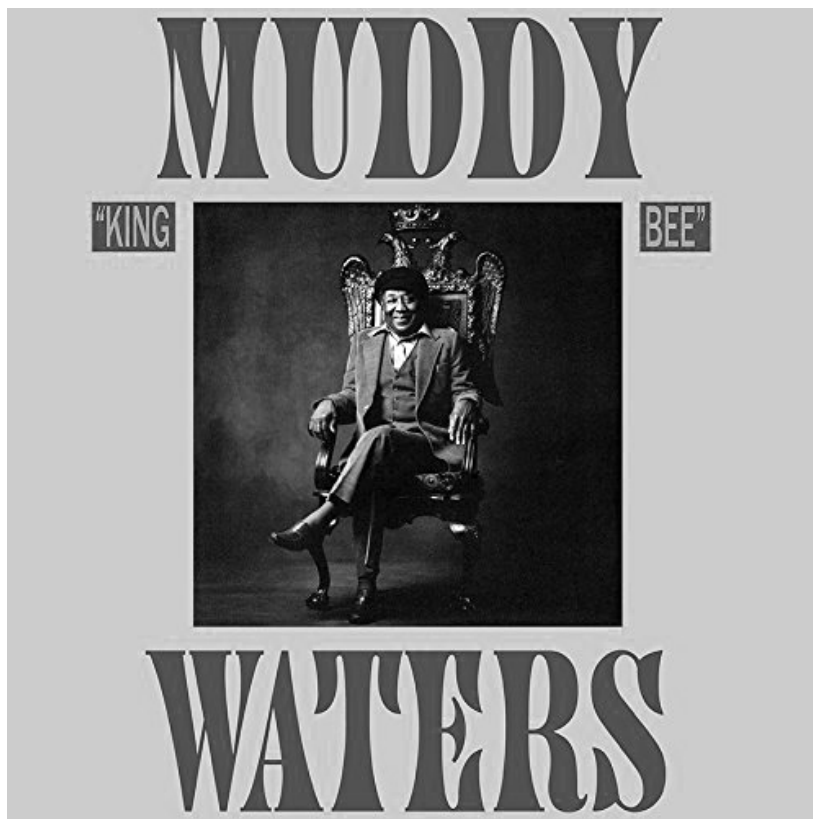
Some are already excellent recording artists. Anyone who dismisses them because they're young would be mistaken. They probably use combinations of old and new recording

techniques, as I do. If I leave this look at the recording process with the young artists' present and future accomplishments, it's a happy ending. Our next workshops will feature a masterclass in recording for those ready for it. I'm sure I'll learn as much as I'll teach. The bottom line is use any recording process or combination that works, from ancient to modern. Recording quality counts, but it's useless without the best possible music under it.

Sadly, in my opinion, Muddy did not fulfill his intention to make a good album in three days in 1980.

His last album, *King*

Bee, lacked the "mojo" of the previous four Grammy winners. Producer Johnny Winter told me he wasn't sure he had a releasable album, but he did his best with what had been recorded and added out-takes from previous albums. After the abundant fun we displayed in those older albums, fun was absent on *King Bee*. People I meet on the road sometimes tell me they love *King Bee* anyway.



controls. We played each song only once or twice. We took two days, only two hours each day, and were done. The result, when mixed, sounds very good. It's the opposite way of recording from what I did for *My Road*.

I'm also a partner in the VizzTone Label Group and independent artists submit their albums to us. I listen to every note out of respect and interest. I hear the results, not the process, and happily report most newly-recorded music I hear sounds good in both

BLUES ALIVE

The recent U.S. concert tribute to Huddie William Ledbetter (1888-1949) at Carnegie Hall was a spirited celebration of his musical importance to generations of Americans.

A mythic figure whose personal life was clouded by prison stints for murder and attempted murder, Leadbelly's songwriting includes "Rock Island Line," "Black Betty," "Pick A Bale Of Cotton," "Midnight Special," "Goodnight Irene," and many more. He had a performing repertoire of literally hundreds of blues, folk, gospel and work songs, making him a seminal figure in American blues and folk history. This is the second tribute concert mounted by Leadbelly Fest, Inc., with the first having taken place at London's Royal Albert Hall in 2015.

The sell-out Carnegie tribute, which featured 20 performers, was testament to the legions of fans of all ages who came to pay homage to Leadbelly more than 60 years after his death. According to Josh White, Jr., who also played the Albert Hall concert, his father, Josh White and Leadbelly played a six-month engagement at the Village Vanguard in the 1940s that was a first at that famous venue.

The men also played Carnegie Hall as well as other New York venues and made recordings as well.

For his set, White aptly chose to sing an a cappella gospel tune, "Precious Lord," that Leadbelly's wife Martha implored his father to sing at Leadbelly's funeral, and "Strange Fruit" (1939) – a somber song requested by the producers about lynching that, according to White, *Time Magazine* called the most powerful American song of the 20th century. In an interview, White noted the professional parallels between his father and Leadbelly, including their age, professional migration from blues to folk, and tandem fame performing for progressive and left wing causes.

White expressed his professional appreciation of the man: "I was a professional performer at a very young age – I started singing at three-and-a-half – and what got me about Leadbelly as I grew older is the amazing number of songs he had written and could play. Then there was his amazing 12-string guitar style. Wow."

Other highlights included

"House Of The Rising Sun"), Guy Davis (performing an excellent version of "Bourgeois Blues" on 12-string guitar), and Walter Trout. Dom Flemons, of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, performed "Poor Howard," and introduced a number of the acts.

Chicagoans Nick Moss on guitar and former opera singer Michael Ledbetter on vocals filled the hall to raucous applause on "How Long?" and "C.C. Rider." In an interview, Ledbetter commented on his relation to Leadbelly: "I always knew that Huddie was my grandfather's cousin, and Ledbetter

might be a great name to have. However, I never wanted to ride his reputation, but be my own self. I believe it was really my mom's love of the blues and R&B that really sparked my appreciation of the blues and Leadbelly."

Following after Guy Davis's "Bourgeois Blues," Tom Chapin's delightfully inspiring "Rock Island Line," and "Midnight Special," with

great keyboard work by John Cobert, nearly ignited the house. Guitar wizard Walter Trout, recuperating from life saving organ transplantation, rocked with incredible energy, opening with his own, "Say Goodbye To The Blues," followed by "T.B. Blues." He received a standing ovation, as did Eric Burdon later in the second act.

The evening was long and many of the acts – including Edgar Winter, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and show closer

Buddy Guy – opted to perform electric guitar on songs not written by Leadbelly. The audience disappointment was palpable, especially when his most famous composition, "Goodnight Irene," was not performed. Still, it was a worthwhile event, and proved that Leadbelly, who died in 1949 from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), is

a performer whose legacy will always be treasured by blues and folk lovers worldwide.



performances by Jerron "Blind Boy" Paxton (playing a rousing banjo on "Mississippi Bottom Blues"), Eric Burdon ("Where Did You Sleep Last Night," and



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SAMPLER NINE

Visit the Members Area at *Blues Music Magazine's* website to download all these amazing songs. Enter your password and click on issue nine's cover. This will open the web page where you can download all the following songs. Congratulations and thanks to all the artists appearing on sampler nine.

1. Keith Stone - "Time To Move On" from the album *The Prodigal Returns* an independent release.
2. The Record Company - "Feels So Good" from the album *Give It Back To You* on Concord Music Group.
3. Jimmy Adler - "No Pain" from the album *Grease Alley* on Sprucewoods Records.
4. Benny Turner - "I Can't Leave" from the album *When She's Gone* on NOLA Blue Label.
5. Joyann Parker & Sweet Tea - "What Happened To Me" from the album *On The Rocks* an independent release.
6. Sam Burckhardt - "Fly Over" from the album *Fly Over* on Airways Records.
7. Magic Sam Blues Band - "You Belong To Me" from the album *Black Magic* on Delmark Records.
8. Anthony Geraci & the Boston Blues All-Stars - "Fifty Shades Of Blue" from the album *Fifty Shades Of Blue* on Delta Groove Music.
9. Bob Margolin - "I Shall Prevail" from the album *My Road* on VizzTone Label Group.
10. Tim Williams - "Anywhere c/o The Blues" from the album *So Low* on Lowden Proud Records.
11. Bonita & the Blues Shacks - "Bad News" from the album *Bonita & the Blues Shacks* on CrossCut Records.
12. Reverend Raven & The Chain Smokin' Altar Boys - "My Life" from the album *Live At The Big Bull* on Nevermore Records.
13. The Beat Daddys - "Been Thinkin'" from the album *Hoodoo That We Do* on Melrose Hill Records.
14. Barry Levenson - "The Visit" from the album *The Visit* on Rip Cat Records.
15. Eric Bibb and JJ Milteau - "Chauffeur Blues" from the album *Lead Belly's Gold* on Stony Plain Records.
16. Billy The Kid & The Regulators - "Ain't Gotta Prove Nothing" from the album *I Can't Change* an independent release.



CD REVIEWS



DION

New York Is My Home
Instant



To millions of baby boomers, Dion is the teen idol who six decades ago recorded such youthful angst-ridden rock and roll hits as “Runaround Sue” and “The Wanderer.” But Dylan bestows additional creds on Dion for his Tampa Red soulfulness and a “haunted voice” of “the most sophisticated crooner in the most articulate way.”

To blues fans Dion Di Mucci is best known for his blues trilogy albums of the last decade: *Bronx In Blue*, *Son Of Skip James* and *Tank Full Of Blues*. On *My Home Is New York*, his just released new CD, he offers 10 new facets of his complex personality. He acknowledges his blues roots in a cover of Lightnin’ Hopkins’ “Katie Mae” while “The Apollo King” borrows closely from Chuck Berry’s ‘50s rocker “Roll Over Beethoven.” But at 76, Dion is so much more than an aging hipster discovering the blues roots of rock and roll.

On “Visionary Heart,” he channels Buddy Holly with a message of hope from heaven 57 years after Holly’s tragic plane crash. And on “Can’t Go Back To Memphis,” “I’m Your Gangster Of Love,” and “Ride With You” he distills three-hour chick flick romances into three-minute songs that prove and improve his prowess 60 years after his first hits as a teen idol. On the title cut he personalizes the Big Apple like a Valentine to his lover.

Paul Simon inspired Dion to write “New York Is My Home” after the big recession of 2008. “He just wanted to reach out and do something special for the city,” says Dion about his friend Paul. “I’m in his apartment, and he’s putting together the Central Park concert, and he says, ‘I want to do something special for the city, give them

a touch of friendship,’ and I thought, ‘Wow! That’s kind of off the Richter scale. Who does something special for a city?’ The resulting ballad, atypical of Dion, features Simon’s vocals and oozes empathy for the Big Apple.

Dion’s partner in this most eclectic CD is Conan O’Brien’s band leader Jimmy Vivino. He produced the CD and plays lead guitar and keyboards that underline Dion’s masterful vocals. Dion’s voice yields no ground to age and upgrade the definition of “maturity” from a mere euphemism sometimes applied to aging icons losing their formerly powerful voice.

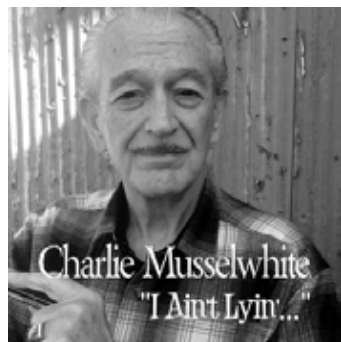
Age seldom is a friend to rock and roll but adds to the gravitas of blues. Dion straddles both worlds with the panache of a veteran and the attitude of a teen idol.

– Don Wilcock

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE

“I Ain’t Lying”

Henrietta Records



Only Charlie Musselwhite possesses his singular embouchure that results in a style of playing that has garnered his place as one of the top living blues harmonica artists. His latest tool kit contains Seydel harmonicas and *Blows Me Away* harmonica mics for those who would try to replicate his unique sound.

I Ain’t Lying combines a live recording from the Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival in Sonoma, CA and studio work done at the Clarksdale Soundstage in Clarksdale, MS. He is backed by Matt Stubbs on guitar, Steve Froberg on bass, and June Core on drums. With Musselwhite handling the vocals and harp playing, any other musicians would be extraneous.

Kicking off with a rhythmic beat and a tease of harp, the set opens with the words, “Come on in, we got good blues tonight!” and does he ever! Stubb’s guitar playing is exquisitely complementary without ever being overpowering, and Core has a exclusive beat that sets up an ease for Musselwhite to snake in his harp punctuations at will. All ten songs are Musselwhite originals with him reprising as an eleventh song, an unedited version of “Good Blues Tonight” to close out the CD.

Musselwhite’s harmonica sound is never harsh, but pleasantly resonant and augments his vocals accordingly. He is the master of a soft warble to close out a tune. It’s difficult to pick a favorite from tunes like “If I Should Have Bad Luck,” “Long Leg Woman,” “My Kinda Gal,” “Long Lean Lanky Mama,” “Blues, Why Do You Worry Me?” or the rest of the titles. They all have merit and make it the next best thing to having been either at the Valley of the Moon Festival or in the studio with Charlie. I ain’t lying by highly recommending this CD for purchase. Please enjoy it as much as I did.

– Pete Sardon

BILLY PRICE AND OTIS CLAY

This Time For Real

VizzTone



Soul brothers Billy Price and Otis Clay first shared an audience in the 1980s in Washington, D.C. at a club called Desperado’s. The song – “Is It Over?” – was one Clay had recorded over a decade earlier. Price had put his own version on his initial record by the same name circa 1979. Clay has since appeared on a couple of Price’s recordings (*The Soul Collection*, 1997, and *Night Work*, 2009). This marks their first, and, sadly, their only

collaboration we now know. Clay died on January 8 this year, a few days short of a month before his 74th birthday. But the music will live; this album serves as a critical achievement as well as a fitting coda to Clay's splendid career.

"After the initial shock of Otis' death subsided a bit, I was left feeling grateful that we were able to finish and release an entire album together," Price told me. "We first sang together in 1983, so we had been at it a long time, and we had always talked about doing a full-length album. I'm glad that we were able actually to get it done, with tremendous help from Duke Robillard and from VizzTone."

An experienced if under-recognized singer of the blue-eyed soul variety, Price has exquisite taste in the music he covers. Clay's input only upped the score on the "taste" meter here. And what a collection they've put together. From the opener, "Somebody's Changing My Sweet Baby's Mind," a John Sayles recording (written by Barry Despenza, Willie Henderson and Gary Jackson) through the finale, a glorious version of "You Got Me Hummin'" (by Isaac Hayes and David Porter and recorded by Stax Records stars Sam and Dave circa 1966), listening is akin to an advanced, exclusive seminar in Southern soul.

There are some brilliant deviations. "Love Don't Love Nobody" is perhaps best known as a Spinners song circa 1982; and Clay's earlier career in spiritual music is evoked by a lovely rendition of Los Lobos' "Tears Of God" (1987). And like the right seasoning in a sauce, they add richness and depth.

"All Because Of Your Love" and "Too Many Hands" are the two here to have been recorded by Clay, the former in 1977, penned by George Jackson and Raymond Moore; and the latter, a Teeny Hodges composition on Hi Records in 1972. The funkier songs are "Going To The Shack" by Syl Johnson, "Broadway Walk" by Bobby Womack and Darryl Carter, and the aforementioned "You Got Me Hummin'."

It should also be said that Price and Clay benefited from the exquisite instrumental support of Robillard and some of his bandmates as well as the current horn section of his former band, Roomful of Blues. They also drew upon the talents of Clay's backing vocalists, Diana Simon, Dianne Madison, and Theresa Davis. Price adds this: "I'm also grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from, work with, and become friends with a master of Otis's stature. He was a beautiful, open-hearted guy,

and I will always miss him."

Buy a copy. Listen to it repeatedly. You'll remember it – and Otis Clay, especially – forever. Together, they were that good.

– M.E. Travaglini

BEY-PAULE BAND

Not Goin' Away

Blue Dot Records



Recorded and co-produced by Kid Andersen at his busy Greaseland Studio in San Jose, Frank Bey and Anthony Paule's *Not Goin' Away* is a magnificent slab of modern soul-blues and an impressive follow-up to their acclaimed *Soul For Your Blues* from 2013. The ten originals (including an instrumental, "Noel's Haze") resound with elements of blues, funk, Southern soul, Motown, and swamp soul, and were penned by various band members and members of the the production staff. Two covers from the Seventies fill out the set: Otis Clay's hopeful "If I Could Reach Out," a prototypical Hi Records shuffle-bump, and Candi Staton's "Someone You Use," an ebullient stroller from her Fame tenure that belies its subject matter of self-pity and helplessness.

I enjoyed all the songs; the biggest surprises were "Black Bottom" and "This Party's Done," both atmospheric swamp soul reminiscent of Tony Joe White with a touch of Eddie Hinton and Dan Penn, and the title track, a rousing shuffle imbued with Wynonie Harris-styled swagger. Bey's deep expressive vocals are suggestive of Clarence Carter, Solomon Burke, and Z.Z. Hill. The versatile Paule plays acoustic and resonator guitars on a few tunes, but it is his searing leads and chunky chords that distinguish him as one of the best guitarists on the current scene. Major kudos to the band: the vibrant wall-of-sound horn section of saxophonist Nancy Wright, trumpeter Tom Poole, and trombonist Mike Rinta, the robust rhythm section of drummer Paul Reveli and bassist Paul Olguin,

and the masterful Tony Lufrano's swirling, capacious B-3 and sparkling keyboards. *Not Goin' Away* is a triumph in every aspect for this Bay Area band and a definite contender for soul-blues album of the year. Highly recommended.

– Thomas J. Cullen III

THE CASH BOX KINGS

Holding Court

Blind Pig Records



The Cash Box Kings are back with more arrangements steeped in the classic blues traditions, offering lyrics that explore contemporary issues. Once again the line-up features a familiar cast of outstanding musicians that garnered the band three Blues Music Award nominations, Blues Album Of The Year, Blues Band Of The Year, and Traditional Blues Album Of The Year.

"I Ain't Gonna Be No Monkey Man" has singer Oscar Wilson making sure his woman knows what he expects, with stellar accompaniment from the twin guitars of Billy Flynn and Joel Paterson. "Download Blues" finds Wilson bemoaning the decline of CD sales and lack of meaningful pay for Internet plays. Joe Nosek takes the lead on "Cash Box Boogie," a driving shuffle with a fiery solo from Paterson plus Barrelhouse Chuck's joyous piano fills. On "Quarter To Blue," Nosek pays homage to Little Walter, his wailing harp seemingly possessed.

The stark performance of "Hobo Blues" features Paterson's guitar and Mark Haines on drums. Wilson expresses his anguish on "Gotta Move Out To The Suburbs," relating details of the gentrification of his neighborhood over Barrelhouse Chuck's Farfisa organ. "Juju" sports a rumba-flavored rhythm as Nosek serenades a captivating woman with full-bodied harp tones. "Everybody's Fishin'" is a jump blues powered by Beau Sample on upright bass with Paterson adding red-hot licks. "Out On The Road" features a slower pace with Kenny Smith on drums and Brad Ber on upright bass. "I'm A Real

Lover" veers into Jimmy Reed territory with Wilson singing with plenty of emotional power.

This could be the Cash Box Kings best effort yet. These veterans infuse Nosek's sharp originals with an old-school feel. Oscar Wilson is a natural-born blues singer who takes his time with a song and the Paterson/Flynn combo provides a steady stream of scintillating guitar licks. Highly recommended!

— Mark Thompson

CHRIS JAMES & PATRICK RYNN

Trouble Don't Last

VizzTone



In many ways, Chris James and Patrick Rynn's record is an accurate medley of gritty, Chicago-styled blues. James the guitarist immersed himself in the pre-war country blues traditions through Chicago electric. His vocals have the command of a singer who has heard the blues in the voices of the men he's backed and then has utilized those vocal marks. At the same time, Rynn on bass anchors the ensemble with a solid nod to the Windy City masters. Though this is their fourth record together, they have a lifetime of activity backing others on record on tour. For this record they enlisted a band of Rob Stone and Aki Kumar on harmonica and June Core on drums. Of the ten songs, James, Rynn, and Stone wrote six originals, proving they know their way around the genre.

James and Stone jab strings and reeds on the high-flyin' five-minute opener. James' earthy vocals and electric Delta guitar are the driving force behind a cleaned up version of Calvin Frazier's 1938 "Lilly Mae," sans the original's more savage violence and hoodoo references. The band puts a swingin' shuffle behind Freddie King's "Lonesome Whistle Blues" and takes Sunnyland Slim's "Roll, Tumble, And Slip" south to Sun Studios with Core's percussive accents, Kumar's chromatic, and James' reverb.

Originals include the dark and

brooding "A Good Idea At The Time," the ensemble-styled "Going Down To The Ocean," and the meat and potatoes "Hard To Keep A Dollar." Anchored by Rynn and Core, the over 50 minutes of music never gets tired or stale. Every tune, whether a cover or original, is a showcase for the long established blues culture and subjects – women, crime, poverty, travel – yet with a fresh and energetic upbeat musical outlook. James and Rynn's over two decades of partnership continues to strike musical paydirt. This duo never opts to record covers of tiresome classics; instead they delve deep into the catalogues of their heroes.

— Art Tipaldi

JOE LOUIS WALKER

Everybody Wants A Piece

Mascot/Provogue Records



Award winning guitar slinger, vocalist extraordinaire, and songwriter Joe Louis Walker's career started in the '60s, and he has performed with everyone from Lightnin' Hopkins (who once threw him offstage) to B.B. King to James Cotton. His legendary lightning licks are bluesy, funky, stinging, and greasy; and on this release the band's super-tight and electric intonation pushes the master to even higher levels of greatness.

"We were on the road, came in, recorded the CD, and went back out," notes bassist Lenny Bradford commenting on their incredible and intuitive playing. Completing the group circle are Phillip Young on keyboards and Byron Cage behind the kit. The opening title cut "Everybody Wants A Piece" is funky and powerful, "Do I Love Her," "Black & Blue," and "Witchcraft" are passionate blues ballads, and "Wade In The Water" has a nice Memphis groove. "Gospel Blues" is spiritual, and "One Sunny Day" has a nice Ten Years After rock feel. "Young Girl's Blues" and "Buzz On You" are barroom shuffles that would be great to see live. Everybody in the band sings. Walker's lead vocals sound like

he's passing the torch to a younger generation with his experienced voice and lessons-to-learn delivery. My favorite cut is "35 Years Old" with Walker ripping on slide, Bradford plucking an upright, and a cameo studio appearance by able axman/producer Paul Nelson (Johnny Winter Band) playing killer guitar.

Walker has released 23 other albums, won four Blues Foundation Music Awards, and been inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in Memphis. This is his latest. This might be his greatest. Very very good blues/r&b music. Keep listening to it

— A.J. Wachtel

BARRY LEVENSON

The Visit

Rip Cat



Guitarist Barry Levenson is probably best known for his long stretch playing with Canned Heat and for several excellent albums he released on the European blues label Storyville. His latest collection, *The Visit*, is a recent arrival on the Southern California-based Rip Cat, sometime home for such other Southland artists as The Blasters, Kid Ramos, Lynwood Slim, etc.

Levenson – not to be confused with similarly named director Barry Levinson whose films (*Diner*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, etc.) make good use of music – prefers to let his vintage Stratocaster do most of the talking, though in something of a recording first he also handles the vocals on four of the dozen tracks on *The Visit* (guest artist Billy Price sings on two others). But it's the six instrumentals that set the album apart.

"I Wonder Why," a tune credited to Mel London, serves as the opening track and sounds as though it might be a newly discovered backing track from the archives of the Chief label that London ran. It has that late '50s Chicago electric groove, with Levenson ably supported by Hank Van Sickle (bass), Mike Sandberg (drums), Mike Thompson (keyboards), and Phil

Krawzak (horns).

The title tune, Levenson's "The Visit," clocks in at 6:24 and is also an instrumental with plenty of melodic room for searing B.B. King-like single-note runs. A versatile player, Levenson then easily shifts to jazz-influenced guitar for "Steel City," which like seven of the other songs is his own composition. My favorite track on this nearly 60-minute disc is "Last Train To Nowhere," where Levenson echoes that shimmering sound Peter Green achieved on those early blues-based Fleetwood Mac albums. Levenson gets especially good support here from sideman Thompson on orchestral-sounding keyboards.

Blues Music Magazine colleague Tom Hyslop in the liner notes talks of Levenson as having both the wild mercurial sound of Buddy Guy and the harmonic sophistication of Wes Montgomery. *The Visit* suggests that's a laser-sighted assessment.

— *Bill Wasserzieher*

ALBERT CUMMINGS

Someone Like You

Blind Pig Records



Formerly a master carpenter, Albert Cummings now coaxes sounds out of wood rather than homes. Assembling a who's who of musicians like Jimmy Vivino (guitar), Mike Finnigan (organ), Reggie McBride (bass), Tony Braunagel (drums), and Teresa James (background vocals) for his fourth Blind Pig release, Cummings completes the ensemble with his vocals, solid Stratocaster sounds, and songwriting skills (he wrote all twelve songs).

His songs, vocals, and beat have a blues-rock feel and the Strat leads are both timely and tasteful. The opening riff to the first cut, "No Doubt," has a Led Zeppelin feel. The fifth cut, "So Strong," is so well recorded, played, sung, and haunting that one could listen to just this song and know that they had their money's worth in buying this CD. His vocals have a tinge of familiar rock-like timbre, and there is a comfort to his tone that one feels that they have heard

this voice before.

"Little Bird" starts out with slow and sultry blues guitar notes and then materializes into a well-crafted down and out lyrical ride. The solos on his songs are not overdone and each note is phrased for both clarity and emphasis. The Strat seems to snake in and out and around his lyrics. His final cut, "Stay Away From My Sister," is a well played and sung admonition that suggest one would be a fool to get any closer to her!

You too will be a fan of his vocals after listening to *Someone Like You* and trust that you will seek out his other recordings. He must be doing something right as he was invited to be on the January 2016 Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise.

Cummings closes the liner notes by stating, "I hope you feel the energy that was with all of us in the studio during the making of this record." After listening to Albert's dozen songs, I trust you will find this to be a most accurate assessment.

— *Pete Sardon*

DEB CALLAHAN

Sweet Soul

Blue Pearl Records



In the last dozen years, Deb Callahan has become a fixture on the Philadelphia area blues scene, but what most people do not know is how widely she was able to tour. She has done extensive touring from Florida to New England, with a lot of stops in New Jersey, Boston, Delaware, and the Carolinas.

A native of Maine, she moved to Philadelphia to attend graduate school for social work. Between the recent arrival of her son, Elijah, and her continuing duties as a social worker in Philadelphia, Callahan, a natural born creative type, has had plenty of fodder for new songs.

She does an excellent job avoiding tired old blues themes on *Sweet Soul* and is accompanied by some expert West Coast musicians on this release, produced by West Coast drummer Tony Braunagel. She opens

with a co-write with her companion, guitarist Allen James, "Big Love," and follows it up with another spry original, "I Keep Things Running," sort of a bluesy ode to soccer moms and busy working women who raise kids everywhere.

This album was a leap of faith for Callahan, who was used to recording exclusively with her own Philadelphia-based backup band. Here, she's accompanied by California veterans Braunagel, organist Mike Finnigan, and slide guitarist Johnny Lee Schell (all have worked with Bonnie Raitt). Of her regular bandmates, only guitarist James accompanies her on.

By this point, Callahan has evolved into such a highly stylized singer, that she offers up convincing covers of the Candi Staton-Clarence Carter tune, "Sweet Feeling," Tom Waits' "Way Down In The Hole," and closes the album with an inspired take on Dr. John's "I Been Hoodood." Anyone who thinks contemporary blues is not evolving enough lyrically or stylistically need only have a listen to Callahan's pioneering originals here to have their faith restored.

— *Richard J. Skelly*

JACKIE PAYNE

I Saw The Blues

Blue Dot Records



Gospel trained at an early age, Jackie Payne cut his teeth singing for 15 years with the Johnny Otis band. In the 1990s, he teamed with Steve Edmonson. That partnership produced the two CDs nominated for Soul Blues Album of the Year. This year, Payne has garnered two additional nominations for this record.

Recorded at Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studio, *I Saw The Blues* features some of the finest soul lovin' musicians and tightest arrangements north of the chitlin' circuit. Andersen and Anthony Paule handle the guitar chores, D'Mar (drums), Lorenzo Farrell (organ), bob Welsh (piano), Endre Tarczy (bass), and the prodigious horns of Ed Early Eric Spaulding, Jeff Lewis, and Frankie

Ramos provide the dynamic musical counterpoint to Payne's weathered vocals.

The CD opens with "Back To Normal," where Payne's characteristic soulful testifying distinguishes his soul blues from the rest. The call and response between Payne's vocals, the bubbling horn swell, and Welsh's unifying piano is the perfect way to start the night. On "When The Blues Comes Knockin'" Payne's personification of the blues come a callin' is similar to Robert Johnson's take in "Me And The Devil Blues," though updated with Payne's warning "to check your caller ID." But later on the record, Payne reconciles with Mr. Blues as he "Kicks Back With The Blues" playing Muddy, Otis Spann, and Bobby Bland to chase away his rainy day.

Payne's "Six Million Dollar Man" zooms along as a double-timed horn and piano boogie romp led again by Welsh. When these masters of the soul game turned down the lights on "Rock Me With A Steady Roll," Payne, like the soul greats of yesterday, fervently proclaims how this daddy likes his lovin'. As the record closes, Payne adds Aki Kumar's harmonica to Little Johnny Taylor's "Somewhere Down The Line," complete with Payne's Bobby "Blue" Bland growl. He closes out the session refreshing Ollie Nightingale's 1995 Southern soul devotion to his lady with eight and a half minutes of "I'll Drink Your Bathwater Baby." The last three minutes of rappin' about the night's preparations, not in Nightingale's original, makes this updated take crazy fun today.

Jackie Payne's veteran soul blues vocals shine through this hour of sweet soul blues. Add in the spot-on arrangements, and all-star musicianship and you have one of the finest records of 2015.

— Art Tipaldi

JOHNNY SANSONE *Lady On the Levee* Shortstack Records



Johnny Sansone can be a mellow guy. His 1996 *Crescent City Moon* and '99's *Watermelon Patch* showed off a kinder, gentler side absent from his raucous 2012 BMA Song of the Year-winning album, *The Lord Is Waiting And The Devil Is Too*. His latest, *Lady On The Levee*, is a return to that mellower side, the title cut a perfect groove for relaxing on your back porch with a tall cool one.

"OZ Radio" is a swampy rocker celebrating the joys of tuning into WWOZ, New Orleans' funkiest and rootsiest radio station. The presentation is as original and otherworldly as many of that station's eclectic broadcasts, Sansone's harp sounding like it's being beamed in by satellite with Sansone narrating in a phlegmy Dr. John patois.

But Sansone and company take it to an even more remote galaxy with "Don't It Feel Good." Sansone unleashes a previously unrevealed falsetto throughout the song, producer/guitarist Anders Osborne providing a reggae vibe with bubbling, ganja-soaked guitar riffs. Sansone stops warbling long enough to throw in a Cajun accordion underliner before contributing some country blues harp while Joe Cabral's sax adds some swamp pop to the mix.

"Lightnin' Bug Rhodes" is a tribute to the South Carolina bluesman Sansone befriended and toured with in the late '80s while living in North Carolina. "He was close to being blind, but he saw more than most people I know," Sansone sings. Sansone jotted down his feelings when he buried Rhodes in '90, but had not done anything with it till the loss of his mother prodded him to revisit and memorialize Bug's life.

"I'm Still Here" is another intensely personal song, inspired by holding his mother's hand during her final hours. Although unconscious, Sansone still felt her presence saying "I'm still here." He told *Offbeat* magazine that he was also touched by a visit with former Jimmy Buffet harpist Gregg "Fingers" Taylor, who now has Alzheimer's. Although he communicated with great difficulty and seemed confused, Sansone says Taylor took him by the hand and told him, "I 'm still alive." That spirit and strength of will is evident in Sansone's heartfelt lyrics, the fading loved one urging her caregiver to "to tell me all of your secrets/whisper low in my ear/I'm still listening/even though you can't tell."

This is Sansone's finest effort, and it's an honor to share it with him.

— Grant Britt

J.B. HUTTO & HIS HAWKS WITH SUNNYLAND SLIM

Hawk Squat

Delmark



This Blues Hall of Fame album from 1968 was among the first three modern blues albums released on Bob Koester's venerable Delmark imprint (the first was Junior Wells' *Hoodoo Man Blues*; the other was Magic Sam's *West Side Soul*). I was fortunate to produce three shows with the legendary slide master and uncle/mentor to Lil' Ed Williams with the Bucks County Blues Society in 1979, '81, and '83.

In 1981, I witnessed one of the greatest performances ever, three electrifying 75 minute sets by a man in questionable health; Hutto played most of the last set on the floor, gyrating through the crowd while boogieing in his fez. His last BCBS performance, four months before his death in June of 1983 at age 57, was one of the most courageous ever. Hutto was in serious pain during his set. He didn't play many fast tunes, his vocals were subdued, and his trademark fez was replaced with a golf cap, but his magnificent slide prowess was undiminished.

Hawk Squat is the definitive album by this sometimes overlooked link between Elmore James and Lil' Ed. This handsome reissue has been re-mastered and includes six alternate takes that were previously unreleased (for a total of 18 tracks). There is an informative 20-page booklet with new and original notes by Bob Koester as well as numerous never before seen photos. Hutto's music was powerfully raw. (In a *Living Blues* interview from 1976 Koester asserted "J.B.'s music has always been so strong...almost violently strong.") His primitive declamatory vocals, peppered with partially enunciated words, garbled lyrics, and feral grunts and groans, perfectly complemented his brash, slithery slide playing.

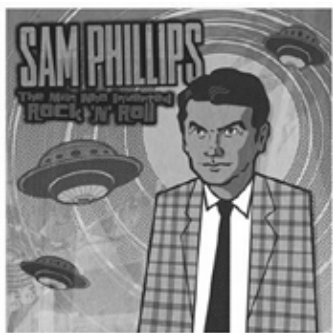
The all-original set is the standard fare of his live repertoire: shuffles, boogies, grinders, and slow

blues (just like his famous nephew). His most covered tunes are included: the rump-wriggling "Hip Shakin'" and the caveat/lament about a besotted lover, "20% Alcohol." Stalwart pianist Sunnyland Slim is heard throughout. Joining the keyboard giant are drummer Frank Kirkland, guitarists Lee Jackson and Herman Hassell (on one track), bassists Junior Pettis and Dave Myers, and jazz saxophonist Maurice McIntyre. It's difficult to imagine any fan of slide guitar not possessing a J.B. Hutto album. If that is the case, this certain candidate for reissue of the year is the best place to start.

— Thomas J. Cullen III

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll
Yep Rock



If you gotta blame rock 'n' roll on somebody, then it should be Sam Phillips. The man gave it the muscle to last for more than a half century. From 1951, when he recorded arguably the first rock & roll record – "Rocket 88" by Ike Turner and cousin Jackie Brenston – through whatever's playing right this moment on Sirius/XM, he's deep in the DNA.

Fifty-five epic tracks that came out of Phillips' recording studios are included on a new two-disc compilation from the Yep Roc label. Every one of them sounds as raw and alive today as they did in the 1950s when the FBI thought them a national threat requiring investigation. It's surprising that J. Edgar's folks didn't issue wanted posters on Phillips' artists, starting with Howlin' Wolf and running through B.B. King, Joe Hill Louis, Rufus Thomas, James Cotton, Roscoe Gordon, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, Charlie Rich, and dozens of others who launched careers under Sam Phillips' direction.

Say what you will about Sam – and there are those who knock him

for shifting focus from black to white artists after fistfuls of Presley money started rolling in – the man had *vision* and *ears*. Without him, America might still be taking musical cues from *Your Hit Parade* and wondering how much that doggie in the window cost.

The compilation begins with Jerry Lee Lewis at his absolute most lascivious singing "Hello, Hello Baby." He's all nasty leer and even nastier innuendo. At least that what the song sounds like and, well, he did marry his 13-year-old cousin about the time he cut the track. The song sets the tone for what rock and rockabilly would become and is promptly followed by Howlin' Wolf's "Moanin' At Midnight," another tune that gave parents conniptions.

From there the collection moves to the Prisonaires (actual prisoners from the Tennessee federal prison), Willie Nix who's going on about a "Lonesome Bedroom," Dr. Ross announcing he's got "The Boogie Disease," Sonny Burgess celebrating "Red-Headed Women," Elvis suggesting "Baby Let's Play House," and lots, lots more. No wonder Mr. & Mrs. America were scared. And they should be still because, though Sam and most of his roster have passed on, they are still comin' for your daughters.

— Bill Wasserzieher

MIKE ZITO

Keep Coming Back
Ruf Records



St. Louis, Missouri singer-songwriter-guitarist Mike Zito is probably best known for co-founding the supergroup Royal Southern Brotherhood along with Cyril Neville, Devon Allman, Charlie Wooton, and Yonrico Scott. Zito first met Allman while working at a Guitar Center in St. Louis. The rest is history.

For four years, Royal Southern Brotherhood rocked roadhouses across the country while releasing two outstanding CDs that met with critical acclaim and a legion of loyal followers. However, in October of 2014, Zito left

RSB to focus on his own career and that's where his band, The Wheel (formed in 2012 and featuring bass player Scot Sutherland, drummer Rob Lee, and saxophonist Jimmy Carpenter) comes in to play.

While still playing with Royal Southern Brotherhood, Zito released his debut album with The Wheel in 2013 entitled *Gone To Texas* on the Ruf Records label. That record was nominated for a Blues Music Award in the Rock Blues Album of the Year category.

Now Zito returns with a soul-packed disc of 12 originals punctuated by his gritty vocals and searing acoustic and electric guitar. Featuring his Wheel bandmates, Zito also enlists keyboard man Lewis Stephens (who currently tours as a member of the Wheel), percussionist Trina Shoemaker, singer-guitarist Anders Osborne and backing singers Suze Simms, Riley Zito, and David Farrell.

From the album's opening title track, "Keep Coming Back," Zito and company tear up the airwaves with electrifyin' musicality, swampy grooves, and Zito's deeply emotive voice. If Zito was struggling with personal demons before, *Keep Coming Back* makes it clearly evident that he's cast those troubles aside to deliver an album of deeply satisfying blues-rock anthems. From the boisterous "Chin Up," the funky, to-the-point "Get Busy Living," the back porch lament "I Was Drunk," to the rockin' "Girl From Liberty," the swampy "Nothin' But The Truth," and the gut-bucket "Bootleg," this album is guaranteed to set Zito on a course to the stars.

— Brian M. Owens

JOE ELY

Panhandle Rambler
Rack "Em Records



Joe Ely's musical explorations are going on 40 plus years now. Since his first solo effort in 1977, he's delved into folk, country, and rock (Ely opened for The Clash in the '70s in the U.K.). With

Panhandle Rambler, he's taken all his influences and artfully sculpted them into a memoir-in-music about growing up and snapshots of life in Texas. It is a flawlessly produced record with tasteful touches of accordion, harmonica, fiddle, flamenco and Spanish guitar, and, of course, the requisite Texas-styled electric guitar.

There are no misfires in the selection of songs, how Ely interprets them or how the large group of studio musicians complements him. With the exception of the Guy Clark and Ray Stephenson penned "Magdalene" and "When The Nights Are Cold" by Flatlander bandmate Butch Hancock, all the songs are written by Ely.

The Texas roadhouse, electric guitar driven twang of "Southern Eyes" will certainly get much airplay. "Here's To The Weary," about life on the road, name drops Woody Guthrie, Bob Wills, Muddy Walters, Pinetop Perkins, and Carl Perkins among others; describing their quests to "find a verse that's never been sung." "Wonderin' Where" revives warm yet melancholy childhood memories of growing up in a small Texas town near a radio station and "wondering where the songs would go." "Four Ol' Brokes" tells the story of hoboes playing a scheming overnight poker game on a traveling freight car. "Early In The Mornin'" seemingly starts as a simple folk song but then tasteful accordion flourishes add a lilting Tex-Mex feel to it. "You Saved Me" is a deeply personal and heartfelt thank you to his wife.

There are certainly song highlights, but really, this album could be one of the best, if not the best, of Ely's career. Along with the recognition of his being named Texas Musician of the Year for 2016, *Panhandle Rambler* will likely make quite a few year-end "best of" music lists and give him the additional respect he more than deserves.

— Mark Caron

TORONZO CANNON

The Chicago Way

Alligator



Thank heavens Toronzo Cannon picked up a guitar at 22 years old and grew up absorbing the sounds of Chicago's blues clubs like Teresa's, Rosa's, Legends, and the Checkerboard. When it came to getting licks down, Cannon simply had to assimilate the styles of the city's legendary blues masters. That lead Cannon to venture to nightly jams where he could begin to make a name for himself. After many, many sideman gigs in the 1990s, he formed the Cannonball Express in 2003. His two national recordings, *Leaving Mood* (2011) and *John The Conqueror Root* (2013), were released to critical acclaim.

This record marks another major step forward for Cannon as a guitarist, singer, and songwriter. Cannon's day job, bus driver for the Chicago Transit Authority, gives him an eye into song topics that rise from everyday, real life situations. Snippets of conversations or bus riding discussions become the perfect subjects for eleven original, new millennium blues songs. That vision is evident in the crying guitar bends that start "The Pain Around Me." It's Cannon looking at the neighborhoods he drives everyday and the hopeless situations he perceives. Hopefully people will stop dancing at shows to hear the message and feel empathy.

In "Bad Contract," Cannon warns us to listen up to all the bad signings one does in love. His hot-blooded guitar wails are supported by Pookie Carlisle on drums and Brother John Kattke on keyboards. The stop timed "Walk It Off" upholds the Chicago way. The humor of Cannon's girlfriend and wife wearing the same dress at his gig is counterbalanced with a violent confrontations that underline the Chicago way, aka to simply walk it off.

Cannon and Kattke add an effective horn arrangement to "Fine Seasoned Woman" and "Midlife Crisis." The latter is a depressing look at those of us who have crossed that line where we have become invisible to the world of millennials. As a left-handed guitarist (he does not play a right-handed Strat upside down), Cannon honors the massive bends of fellow lefties Jimi and Albert King on "Chickens Comin' Home To Roost" and Chicago blues traditions on "Mrs. From Mississippi." He and Kattke attack slow blues on the soulful ballad, "When Will You Tell Him About Me." The CD closes with "I Am" as Cannon, the modern everyman, takes us on a bus ride through the world he sees everyday.

His guitar playing on CD and live has all the fire and spontaneity of the Chicago legends he carries; his songwriting is a timely and original look at the world he sees by day on a bus and in blues clubs by night; and his assertive voice is the perfect vehicle to deliver the message. And don't ever miss his live performances.

— Art Tipaldi

JOHNNY RAWLS

Tiger In A Cage

Catfood Records



Most artists find it difficult to meet the demands of releasing a new record every two years. Not Johnny Rawls. Since he teamed up with Catfood Records in 2008, Rawls has recorded SEVEN critically acclaimed soul blues albums in those eight years. His last two records, *Remembering O.V.* and *Soul Brothers*, featured a dynamic vocal partnership between Rawls and legendary soul vocalist, Otis Clay. Though Rawls is a highly competent soul blues guitarist, here, Rawls concentrates solely on his vocal delivery and again uses the Rays, the Catfood Records house band, to deliver the deep south punch to his messages.

Like the finest soul tunes from past eras, Rawls does not shy away from letting his lyrics point out the social injustices in our society. Marvin Gaye asked, "What's Goin' On," Sam Cooke sang about a change was gonna come, and Rawls' title track is an indictment of America's prison system. The stark reality Rawls addresses is that these young African-American men who are filled with an anger will merely get by the only way they can, by continuing to push dope to America's children. One wrong turn and another young life is forever lost. Since he began his solo career over 20 years ago, Rawls has been a devoted foot soldier logging hundreds of thousands of miles keeping this soul blues tradition alive. "Born To The Blues" provides Rawls the musical vehicle that explains his commitment.

Rawls' "Southern Honey," rooted in a New Orleans rhythm and Arcadia-styled fiddle, features a duet with Eden Brent.

Rawls has re-recorded two fan favs. "Red Cadillac," originally recorded in 2009, celebrates the musical lore of Memphis and is recorded here with the Rays' full horn treatment. "Lucy," originally recorded in 1999, is still relevant as a call to dancers wherever Rawls plays. Other highlights here include his covers of Sam Cooke's "Having A Party," a rousing tribute to Jackie Wilson with "Your Love Is Lifting Me (Higher And Higher), and Rawls soul strutting, horn driven "Beast Of Burden." He ends the record with his own "I Would Be Nothing," recast from his 1996 JSP debut, *Here We Go*.

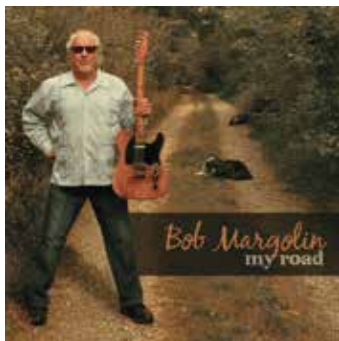
Like the best soul music we remember, Johnny Rawls uses his vocal range to express universal human emotions in a way easily understood. After the untimely passing of Otis Clay, Johnny Rawls remains one of the last remaining soul singing originals.

— Art Tipaldi

BOB MARGOLIN

My Road

VizzTone Records



This release could have been more aptly named *The Other Side Of Bob Margolin* because it is different in two ways from all of his previous recordings. First, he sings and writes much of the material himself, and second, his music is country blues; not the Chicago style this legendary Muddy Waters Band vet is known for and has built his career upon.

Margolin's stripped down renditions, without using a big backing band, allow him to have complete control of the song's groove too. Hear his compositions: "Goodnight," "Low Life Blues," "Bye Bye Baby," "Ask Me No Questions," Bob Codd's "Devil's Daughter," and Terry Abrahamson's "Heaven Mississippi" to hear how his finger picking and choice of chops is uniquely perfect. Unique because no other six-stringer is in his league today.

APRIL 15

THE
BLUES
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Margolin plays slide on the above last two songs – the licks are first rate and the tone unparalleled. I really dig “I Shall Prevail” where one hears his guitar on two tracks. It’s always a pleasure to hear Margolin playing guitar parts against himself – finger picking out of one speaker and powerful chords and supporting notes coming out of the other.

Margolin is on both guitar and bass on some cuts. Chuck Cotton pounds and adds backing vocals and Tad Walters is on superb harp and second guitar. Margolin’s vocals are passionate and sung from the heart. Not just read off a sheet of paper, and the listener can tell the difference. From the first song, Bob Margolin proves he’s one of the best guitarists around in ANY blues genre. This release is a primer for how to play blues guitar in 2016. Great stuff to check out!

– A.J. Wachtel

WEBB WILDER
Mississippi Moderne
 Landslide



Webb Wilder is a character who’s remained true to character for three decades. If you like him – and what’s not to like – you’re going to love this album. A true original, he plucks influences from all over to create music that is infectious in its point-on focus of having fun. It’s as if he’s saying don’t take me too seriously, but never doubt my sincerity.

This white guy from Mississippi released an album called *It Came From Nashville* in 1986 when blues men didn’t admit they came from twang town. *Mississippi Moderne* with an e on the end is not to be taken in the same context as an artist with an e attached. Wilder has a nothing-to-prove attitude and never edits himself to come across as cool or macho, a guy who sincerely tells his concert audience, “If you go out at night, wear white.”

Here Wilder covers songs by country legends Conway Twitty and

Charlie Rich in the same breath as “I Gotta Move” by The Kinks and “It Takes Time” from Otis Rush and Jimmy Reed’s “I’m Gonna Get My Baby” with great originals like “Too Much Sugar” sprinkled in between. The album is bookended by “Stones In My Pathway” a Delta drone so primordial it could have been done in the dust of a cotton field on Saturday night with its foot stomping diddley bow twang that gets crazier the further it gets.

“Yard Dog” is pure “96 Tear Drops.” You can almost see the light show and smell the hair spray on his long hair as Wilder sings about motor scooters, struts, and cuts a rug. “Lucy Mae Blues” is a Frankie Lee Sims classic, a deep groove about a psycho killer doing a happy dance splashing his boots in a puddle of blood with The Joker’s smile on his face. “I’m Gonna Get My Baby” by Jimmy Reed is done Gene Vincent rockabilly-style, laconic but predatory with shimmering silver guitar chords recorded under water with a Jerry Lee Lewis lascivious laugh at the end.

At his best Wilder evokes an Elvis Costello bravura that screams “Yeah, I’m a nerd, but I rock. You wanna make something of it?”
 – Don Wilcock

BRUCE KATZ
Homecoming
 American Showplace Music



Virtuoso keyboardist and master of the B-3, Bruce Katz has recorded his best and most accessible album to date. Katz is supported for the most part by guitarist Chris Vittarello and drummer Ralph Rosen on the ten diverse originals and three covers from traditional sources. Additional musicians include John Hammond (guitar and vocals), Jimmy Bennett (guitar, lap steel, and vocals), Randy Ciarlante (drums and vocals), Marty Ballou (acoustic bass), and Peter Bennett (electric bass). Six tracks contain vocals.

John Hammond’s distinctive

vocals on a jaunty cover of Lightnin’ Hopkins’ “Santa Fe Blues” and a smoothly languid cover of Leroy Carr’s classic “Blues Before Sunrise” are my favorites and feature Katz on piano. The remaining cover is a rousing straightforward take on Elmore James’ lesser known “Wild About You Baby” featuring Jimmy Bennett’s slithery lap steel and reverb-laden rockabilly vocals.

For lovers of B-3 brawniness there are swinging jazz-tinged shuffles like “No Brainer,” “Time Flies,” and “The Czar,” strutting funk with the title track (infused with sparkling electric piano flourishes), and swirling acid-jazz jaggedness with “Just An Expression.” Eleven of the tunes are between four and six minutes in length, providing plenty of time for sharp, expressive solos by Katz and the guitarists. Co-produced by Katz and label owner Ben Elliot with taste, intelligence, and a vibrant clarity of purpose, without any traces of self-indulgent noodling, *Homecoming* will appeal to blues fans as well as jazz organ fans.

– Thomas J. Cullen III

KEVIN SELFE
Buy My Soul Back
 VizzTone



His path in life was originally mapped out as a TV weatherman. But while still in college, Kevin Selfe forsook a career in small screen forecasting to become a guitar slinging bluesman. First with the Fat Daddy Band, then backing Cary Bell and Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater with his own band, the Tornadoes, Selfe’s hard-charging guitar and harp work got him on the Billboard charts with 2013’s *Long Walk Home*.

Although his latest is entitled *Buy My Soul Back*, there’s more blues than soul. The title cut has an Otis Clay feel, with an Albert Collins string popping solo superimposed on top. His vocals sound a bit like Little Charlie and the Nightcats frontman Rick Estrin, but the reed bendin’ harp on “Fixed It Til It’s Broke” belongs to Mannish Boys’

Mitch Kashmar. His guitar work is as twangy as Anson Funderburgh's, but Kashmar provides all the flash on this one, drawing so hard it sounds like he's about to inhale a tonsil or two. "Diggin' My Own Grave" is a swampy, hoodooed tome about toiling away at a blue collar job, Selfe's slide moaning like a lost soul on this hill country flavored dirge.

Bruce Springsteen's "I'm On Fire" is faithful to the Boss' version with a bit more of a country feel, thanks to some old fashioned C&W-style lonesome harp from Kashmar. Selfe keeps it rural with some smooth Western swing on "Don't Tear Me Down," morphing into jump blues when Chris Mercer and Brad Ulrich drop in for some low down sax action, Selfe adding some jazzy Charlie Batty licks to the mix. Instead of coleslaw and beans, the instrumental "Pig Pickin'" gets a Texas-flavored shuffle to go along with the whole hawg, Former Tommy Castro organist James Pace's B-3 providing plenty of burble on the side.

"Starting At The Bottom" finishes out the set with a gospel flourish, lively as the altar call at a holy ghost camp meeting tent revival, Selfe proclaiming that he's so fed up with being buried so deep that he's stopped trying to get up and is just gonna dig on through to the other side. For this former weatherman wannabe, the forecast is clear and hot, for the foreseeable future.

— Grant Britt

AL BASILE *B's Expression* Sweetspot



A cornet, for those with a need to know, is smaller than a trumpet and has a mellower tone as a result of thicker tubing. It has been Al Basile's primary instrument since the early 1970s when he turned professional with Roomful of Blues and what you hear him playing on his own releases and many of Duke Robillard's albums as well. Basile's latest disc, *B's Expression*, has him singing and playing cornet on 13 original compositions, with Robillard

and several other Roomful alumni, including Carl Querforth and Doug James, backing him.

Basile's not a roadhouse kind of bluesman. The man wears good suits, received a premium education at top-flight schools, and writes literate songs that he sings with a mix of sophisticated polish and fine-grade grit. His lyrics tend to be about middle-aged men lamenting that women like younger guys, not that it causes men going gray to quit the mating game.

This subject is a long-time music subgenre, perhaps best addressed by Ronnie Hawkins' classic line that "I'm not as good as I once was, but I'm as good once as I ever was" (which country music blowhard Toby Keith has appropriated). Basile's take on the subject emphasizes that a mature man's between-the-sheets skill more than makes up for, say, a diminished testosterone level (editorial aside: one can hope).

Curiously enough when Basile's not singing about performance issues on such songs as "Whole Lot Of Good Good Lovin'," "It Wasn't That Good," and "Not Like I Do," he tends to favor songs of religious faith. "Have I Given My Best?" and "Even Jesus Fell" — good as they are individually — seem a bit out of place in context. But then maybe you can't have good blues without both God and his/her opposite.

Besides Robillard on guitar and Querforth and James joining Basile on horns, Mark Teixeira is plays drums, Brad Hallen bass and Bruce Bears keyboards. The album clocks in at approximately 53 minutes.

— Bill Wasserzieher

ANDRA FAYE & SCOTT BALLANTINE *Coulda Wouda Shouda* VizzTone



The baker's dozen of tunes on *Coulda Wouda Shouda* take the listener on a pleasant aural romp in Andra Faye and Scott Ballantine's second recording together. Vocalist and multi-

instrumentalist Faye performs on a full size stand up and electric bass, mandolin, and violin. Ballantine's vocals are only on a few songs, but his acoustic guitar playing is beyond proficient. His tools are a National Duolian Resonator guitar and a Martin 000-28 acoustic guitar.

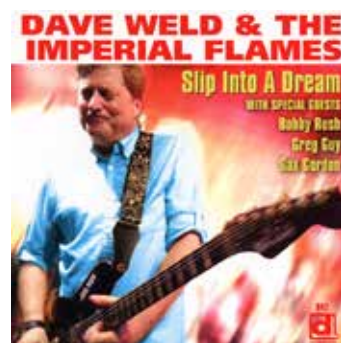
There is a sense of fun, joy, and pathos in these recordings. Their rendering of John Hiatt's "Feels Like Rain" is a masterpiece as Faye's vocals provide just the right resonance for the lyrics while Ballantine's deft and ringing acoustic notes dance around Faye's bass lines. Self-deprecation is manifested in Faye's singing "Too Much Butt (For One Pair Of Jeans)" while "Blues For A Crappy Day" reflects a similar sentiment. The interplay between Faye's mandolin and Ballantine's fingerpicking and their vocals in "Standing In The Need Of Prayer" is a Public Domain gem that I doubt has ever been surpassed.

Their most clever song is Mike Dowling's "When You Going Stop Your Drinking?" which includes the retort: "When a better way is found to get the whiskey down!" (which probably is a resounding "never!") Their talents are equally shared at they co-wrote five of the songs, and Faye penned two with Ballantine writing one, "Crackheaded Man."

If your library lacks a tuneful, melodic CD that features pure vocals, interesting lyrics, spot-on acoustic guitar accompaniment, and enough variety of material to play a CD frequently, then *Coulda Wouda Shouda* should be on the shelf with the rest of your CDs.

— Pete Sardon

DAVE WELD 7 THE IMPERIAL FLAMES *Slip Into A Dream* Delmark



When Chicagoan Dave Weld was a kid being pushed on a park swing, Chuck Berry began wildly duckwalking through the radio waves wildly, Ray Charles was tearing them up with his

torrid performances, and the Coasters crooned and soothed everything. Stax Records started back then in Memphis, but around Weld's hometown, Muddy Waters reigned as the blues king bee.

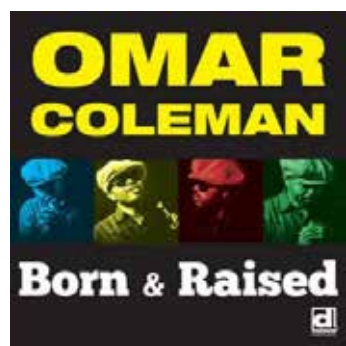
Even at that young age, Weld loved spinning ancient blues 78s on a windup Victrola. So, once the kid latched onto a guitar, all these disparate but interconnected things were in there somewhere. Today, they all inform his playing, and his way. Jazz guitar lessons, a spot in the great Hound Dog Taylor's band, an infatuation with the equally great J.B. Hutto, and spending a decade as one of the guitarists with Lil' Ed Williams in the Blues Imperials built up Weld's talent and legend. By the time in the late 1980s he formed the first incarnation of his own Imperial Flames, Weld was a top draw on Chicago's West Side.

Nowadays, the Flames feature Weld's lady Monica Myhre singing, and she's really something to behold on *Slip Into A Dream*, the band's second album for the esteemed Chicago blues label, Delmark. According to Weld in the liner notes, "We just wanted to go in the studio and play our ass off." Well, that's apparent throughout these dozen originals and one Hutto cover. "Sweet Rockin' Soul," the second track, really sets the tone of this raucous, party-style

album of real as hell Chicago blues and things. The song just kicks ass, Weld singing gleefully. Myhre steps up in short order for "Lookin' For A Man," and all hell breaks loose as one of the most passionate singers you've ever heard floors you with some floorboard stompin' blues. "Take Me Back" has a real 1960s funk and groove feeling to it, and "Sweet Love (Dulce Amor)," a horn-pumped, Latin way. In every song, Weld steps up with something sweet. Jagged and real, and very soulful but rockin', this music strikes home as some of the best real-deal coming out of the Windy City right now.

— Tom Clarke

OMAR COLEMAN
Born & Raised
Delmark



For his auspicious Delmark debut, the 42-year-old singer/songwriter/harmonica player from Chicago's West Side offers a 14 song set of original blues, funk, and soul. Coleman claims Junior Wells and Bobby Rush as his main inspirations, and fans familiar with their music will hear the funk influences from those harp-slinging, soul-blues progenitors as well as a bit of Syl Johnson. Furthermore, Coleman is reminiscent of another important, sometimes overlooked, soul-blues progenitor, Detroit's Little Sonny (Aaron Willis) who is best known for the three albums he recorded for the Enterprise label (a Stax subsidiary) in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

It is astonishing, as it is admirable, that Coleman didn't start playing harmonica until he was 25. He was mentored by Billy Branch and Sugar Blue, but did not become a full time musician until 2010. The music herein is worldly wise, confident, and forceful, equally tough and tender, with gritty, growling vocals and sinewy, wailing harmonica evocative of the aforementioned. Integral to the album's success is the versatile core band of guitarist Pete Galanis, keyboardist Neal O'Hara, bassist Ari Seder, and drummer Marty Binder. Special guest guitarists Toronzo Cannon, Mike Wheeler, and

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David Herrero are featured on two tracks each.

There is not a weak or questionable track. The sequencing of tunes is well paced; I especially enjoyed the eighth and ninth tracks: the surging shuffle of surrender "You Got A Hold On Me" with a bristling solo by Cannon followed by the autobiographical title track, rump-wriggling funk *a la* Bobby Rush with a wiry wah-wah propelled solo by Galanis. *Born & Raised* is one of the best harmonica albums of the year, a triumph in every aspect, and deserves utmost consideration for purchase.

— Thomas J. Cullen III

THE JIMMYS

Hot Dish

Brown Cow Productions



The Jimmys are a seven-piece aggregation poised to spread their horn-driven amalgamation of rockin' blues and soul to wider audience with this spirited effort. The band is lead by Jimmy Voegeli (vocals and keyboards), veteran Perry Weber (guitar and vocals), John Wartenweiler (bass), Mauro Magellan (drums), Peterson Ross (sax and clarinet), Darren Sterud (trombone), and Mike Boman (trumpet).

Tracks like "Lose That Woman" and "I Wonder" are brimming with energy sparked by Voegeli's energetic lead vocals and plenty of powerful horn embellishments, particularly on the later track. "What Chur Doin'" is straight blues featuring Weber's gritty voice over his fluid guitar work. It is more of the same on "You Say You Will," only this time with an authentic New Orleans R&B feel. "Freight Train" has Voegeli at the forefront on organ and vocals over a rock-solid groove. Even better is the slow, barrel-house blues "Saddest Man," an exceptional performance on an arrangement that showcases the band's many strengths. "She's Wild" is a full-bore rocker with pounding piano and a rip-roaring solo break from Weber.

Several cuts provide the band members with space to further demonstrate their instrumental skills.

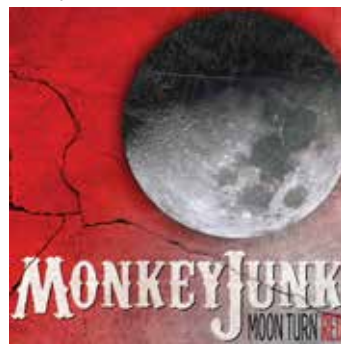
"Jacqui Juice" offers fine solo breaks from Weber, Ross on tenor sax, and Voegeli on the Hammond organ. Another highlight is "Funk Schway," which has a darker, moody tone that would have been right at home on the Sopranos TV series. The same trio makes the most of their solo space while the horn section repeatedly adds new dimensions to the arrangement. It all adds up to a disc that offers plenty of invigorating sounds from start to finish. This is one of those recordings that does fulfill the promise of the title!

— Mark Thompson

MONKEYJUNK

Moon Turn Red

Stony Plain



If anyone cares, this CD is more about stomping rock bravura than it is blues. I've always said that the fans define the genre, and if this Canadian band wants to record for the blues label Stony Plain, bring it on and let you, the listeners, decide if you like it, as you have for three previous LPs and numerous festival appearances.

For the blues police, stop whining and chalk it up to a guilty pleasure, because these boys slather on the axle grease, strip your gears, and take you for an I-can't-drive-65 cruise that taser guns the lower chakra and gives the band an all access pass to most blues festivals. This is the good stuff! Think Bad Co. without the British accent or Leslie West's Mountain with the fat stripped away.

Led by a former producer and session man Steve Marriner, this power trio with two guitarists and no bass player rides on bigger than life hooks that breathe with the kind of dynamics blues fans love. With 20 Maple Blues Awards, one Blues Music Award, and a Juno nomination, they are long in tooth but never short of breath, their press release bragging of guitarist Tony D who's claim to fame is playing for three days in Buddy Guy's band at age 19.

Canadian guitarist David

Wilcox guests on a redo of his "Hot Hot Papa," apparently a Canadian rock staple that includes the lyric: "Hope you don't bend/I know how to get it/I can sip hot lead and spit out rivets/Hot hot papa/ Hot hot papa." Actually, "Hot Hot Pappa" is one of the weaker cuts on the ten-cut CD of otherwise all originals, many clocking in between four and five minutes that provide the rock equivalent to a Hill Country drone but with lyrics bursting with eroticism and macho posturing. "Show Me Yours" must be heard at 125 decibels for the old men to get, but the little girls understand. "Love Attack" has a touch of reggae, and "Meet Me At Midnight" is a rock ballad addressing a lad poised for seduction: "If you want more than some fantasy/then walk out that door/Let your heart be free/Meet me at midnight....we'll leave it all behind."

— Don Wilcock

Paul Deslauriers Band

PDB

Big Toe



From Montreal comes guitarist/vocalist Paul Deslauriers and band mates Sam Harrison (drums) and Greg Morency (bass). Deslauriers is a two-time Maple Blues award winner, a recent second place nod in the 2016 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, and has previously recorded with bands and in an acoustic setting. This self-produced debut includes seven mostly slide-propelled originals and three chestnuts ("Love In Vain," "Nobody's Fault But Mine," and "Not Fade Away"). The average length (eight minutes) of the covers is an indication that these may be showcase tunes when performed live, especially the thunderous *tour de force* "Not Fade Away."

Their spry and muscular brand of blues-rock (except for the folk-tinged ballad "Baby Come Home) often reminded me of gritty British blues-rockers like Humble Pie and, because of Deslauriers' limber slide playing,

George Thorogood. The first two tracks, "Going Down Slow" and "She Should Be Mine," are the album's bluesiest fare with MonkeyJunk's Steve Marriner's raw, bellowing harmonica providing the blues stamp; Marriner also contributes keyboards on "Love In Vain" and "Baby Come Home." The lone instrumental, "Green Stripe," is a frenetic string-thrasher reminiscent of Link Way and latter day Dick Dale. Fans of George Thorogood, Jimmy Thackery, Damon Fowler *et al* will find much to their liking on the crackling *PDB*.

— Thomas J. Cullen III

DAVE FIELDS

All In

FMI Records



In 2014, I had the pleasure of having Dave Fields agree to play at a fundraiser to acquire a headstone for 1920s blues diva Mamie Smith, whose "Crazy Blues" in 1920 integrated the music recording industry. Having never heard Dave play before, I was amazed at his guitar prowess, songwriting, and charismatic stage presence. You should have seen the audience rock when this unassuming-looking player took the stage and plugged in. *Yowza*.

Field's current CD, *All In*, has become one of a small number of CDs that rotate in my CD driving collection as the album takes repeated listening and offers the listener new surprises upon each spin. One round, the percussion intrigues; on another play, it's Field's driving guitar/vocal combo, and overall, the songwriting tells you you're listening to an all-around pro performer and producer.

All In features nine original Fields compositions, and two surprise covers, Fields's reinterpretations of Led Zep's "Black Dog" and a murderously fun version of the classic, "Cross Road." Joining Fields on *All In* are personnel who have played with him on three previous albums – Andy Huenerberg on bass and Kenny Soule on drums, while Vladimir Barsky ratchets things up on

keyboard on a number of tracks. Soule's aggressive drumming opens up a number of tracks, whetting the appetite for the imminent vocal/guitar fireworks that Fields manages to ignite on almost every track.

Outstanding tracks, in addition to the covers, include the heavy blues rocking "Voodoo Eyes" and "Wake Up Jasper," with an opening guitar/percussion kick that recalls the Doors' "Roadhouse Blues." On "Wake Up Jasper," Fields lets it all hang out with some heavy duty vocals, tasteful single string riffs, and straight-ahead lead guitar that segues into "Black Dog." "That's All Right" is another track that demonstrates Fields's professional combo of writing and performing. The album's eleventh and final track is a relatively easy-listening ditty titled "Lover's Holiday," that lets the listener down easy with an upbeat, rhythmic love song featuring finger snapping rhythms and harmony singing that brings this exciting trip of an album full circle. The wah-wah pedal is a nice retro touch.

This is an upbeat powerhouse of an album, which might be pigeonholed as blues-rock, but with a substantially gritty blues leitmotif that lifts this album from a mere display of rock prowess into a well-sequenced, powerfully performed, heavily blues inflected instant classic that will stand among Field's best work. It's Field's driving, insistent lead guitar playing and sweet, yet gritty, tenor voice that grab the listener. The unique guitar licks, straight-ahead powerhouse playing and concomitant artistic subtlety – he knows how ensemble playing should work – making this album a real keeper.

— Michael Cala

RACKY THOMAS

Goin' Home

Self-released



Boston-based Racky Thomas takes a ride in the waaaay back machine for this 11-track gem, highlighting tunes made popular early last century by blues pioneers Charley Patton, Tommy

Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, and Lead Belly, along a few by the more recognized Willie Dixon and Otis Spann, and even a Fats Domino rock 'n' roller from the '50s. That's about as close to the 21st century as it gets and that's a good thing in this case.

Thomas, known for his tremendous talent on dobro on side stages, along with harp and guitar with his full band, has a love for old-school, obscure material and it shows. (The record closes with "Good Night Irene.") It opens with the catchy "France Blues" (also called "Mobile Line") by Jimmie Dale Gilmore, a Texas country boy. The song has its share of twang, but more on the bluegrass side of the street, with some excellent fiddle, and piano by Matt McCabe, who excels on keys throughout the record.

Four of the best tracks are the title, "Goin' Home" an old Charley Patton song that absolutely gels in Thomas' hands; Spann's "Must Have Been The Devil," Dixon's "Down In The Bottom," recorded by Howlin' Wolf, and Lead Belly's "Mary Don't You Weep," a real old-timey march featuring accordion by John Juxo.

Thomas, sounding a bit like Clapton with a hint of a Boston accent now and then, handles the vocals nicely with a big boost from two fabulous ladies, Carrie Johnson and Shavonne Moore on back-up vocals. (Watch out, Darlene Love!) Pete Henderson on lead guitar (lots of slide) is another pleasant surprise, especially on Johnson's "Big Road Blues." The disc gets wonderful enhancement from Juxo's accordion on several tracks, and he really nails it on the Lead Belly song.

The whole band, which includes Michael "Mudcat" Ward on bass, Michael Avery on drums, and Tony Schultz on mixing board is incredibly tight, with layers of emotion and instrumentation making for an enjoyable spin on the old Victrola or CD player or iPod or streaming device. It's vintage, but it resonates. And it's good.

— Karen Nugent

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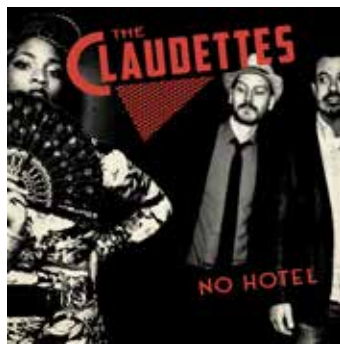


E-mail: Service@BluesMusicMag.com

CLAUDETTES

No Hotel

Yellow Dog Records



The Claudettes walk into a bar. That'll keep you busy for awhile. Pianist Johnny Iguana (Junior Wells) and drummer Michael Caskey (John Sinclair, Koko Taylor) take up enough musical space for a whole band. The stuff they lay out seems to be the result of a blindfolded treasure hunt through a thick stack of fake books, scanning the lead sheets at warp speed and spitting out their own twisted versions in a manner that's quite disturbing and extremely entertaining.

Nothing is sacred. Irving Berlin gets a makeover, his "There's No Business Like Show Business" turned into a raucous boogie-woogie romp. California's unofficial state song of California, 1921's "California Here I Come," is reworked into a raunchy strut fit for a '50s era stripper to fling her lingerie willy-nilly about the stage while the band leers and pounds along lustily after her.

For this outing, the duo has added an additional distraction. The Claudettes are named after the Korean bar owner who initially hired them as her house band, then started renting them out along with her and a traveling bar to their clubs after she lost her lease. Although the duo's eclectic antics are enough to satisfy even the most jaded bar denizens, Claudette had a tenant lying around who she thought would be effective just standing around onstage as eye candy. Nigerian-American Yana is easy on the eyes, but she's also an accomplished singer. Her sensuous vocals on Serge Gainsbourg's '60s era French pop bauble "Chez Les Ye-Ye" and body language on the accompanying video gets the crowd so worked up, crowding the stage with so many enthusiastic go-go dancers that Iguana and Caskey quit playing midway through the tune and retire to a bar down the street to re-hydrate their wilted egos.

But they don't stay gone long, coming back to lay down some low-down, boogie that takes off mid-tune with a gallop on "The Swinger Goes Straight," before giving last call with the rattly rocker "Life Is Such Fun And Then Seems To Disappear." Belly up to the bar, throw back a few, and hang on tight. The Claudettes are in the house, and the joint is jumpin'.

— Grant Britt



Line-up announced and tickets go on sale March 11.

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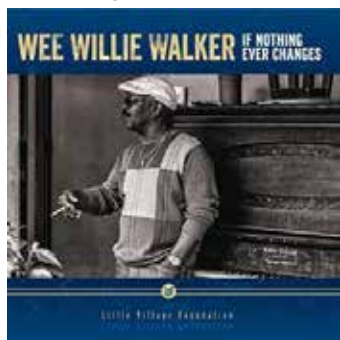
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WEE WILLIE WALKER
If Nothing Ever Changes
 Little Village Foundation



Wee Willie Walker has a vocal style that exudes the soulfulness of Memphis, which is where he cut his first records for the Goldwax label. After going unnoticed for decades, it took Executive Producer Jim Pugh and his Little Village Foundation label to finally place Walker in the kind of setting that showcases of majesty of his vocal talents.

Pugh worked along side producers Rick Estrin and Kid Andersen to select a batch of songs that challenge the singer to utilize the full scope of his artistry. The trio also picked a star-studded cast of backing musicians that includes Pugh (keyboards), Andersen and Bob Welsh (guitar and keyboards), Rusty Zinn (guitar), Randy Bermudes (bass), J Hansen (drums), plus Terry Hanck and Nancy Wright on saxophone.

The opener, "Read Between The Lines," is brimming with the palpable energy of Walker's performance. His weathered tones sound tailored-made for two Eddie Hinton tunes, "Everybody Meets Mr. Blue" and "Hymn For Lonely Hearts." Over the full-blown arrangement on "I've Been Watching You," Walker leaves no doubt that he is in a cheating mood. His tender side comes to the fore on the sweet "I Don't Remember Loving You." The band conjures up a swinging, funky strut on Estrin's "Is That It," carrying that feel onto the break-up song, "Funky Way," featuring one of Estrin's patented harp solos.

Walker invites Curtis Salgado to join him on Lennon/McCartney's "Help" for a magnificent duet that recasts the song as a deep soul ballad. Equally fine is the title track, which sets a much darker mood as Walker examines human failings before offering a bleak forecast for the future. By the end of Estrin's spellbinding ballad, "What Love Can Do," the rich textures of Walker's voice are supplanted by his unbridled cries of ecstasy. With two Blues Music Award nominations for the recording plus one for Soul Blues Male Artist, Wee Willie

Walker is finally getting some long overdue recognition. He certainly is not an overnight sensation – but we can be thankful to Pugh, Estrin, and Andersen for reminding us of what we have been missing.

– Mark Thompson

James Burton, Albert Lee, Amos Garrett, and David Wilcox
Guitar Heroes

Stony Plain Records



One should thank the lovely songstress Emmylou Harris and Canadian duo Ian & Sylvia for the genesis of this one-time gathering of Telecaster greats at the Vancouver Island Music Fest. When James Burton left Harris' Hot Band, Albert Lee stepped in. When Amos Garrett left Ian & Sylvia's Great Speckled Bird, David Wilcox was his replacement. Burton, a Louisianan by birth, has a Telecaster pedigree second to none and has backed Ricky Nelson, Elvis, Gram Parsons, and others. He is affectionately known as the "Master of the Telecaster." Both Amos Garrett and David Wilcox (the Canadian musician – not the open tuning wizard from Ohio) also arm themselves with Telecasters, but Albert Lee, with his unique picking style, has switched from the venerable Telecaster to his own special Ernie Ball Telecaster-style guitar.

Live concerts have always impressed me more than studio recordings as one has to produce pure musical talent devoid of corrections by protocols or re-recordings to make the music saleable. This concert gives each guitarist free range to demonstrate his licks accordingly and the liner notes tell the order in which each guitarist is taking his break on the eleven songs. After awhile, you can close your eyes and readily identify the singular guitar styles of each musician. Stony Plain Records is releasing this both on CD and on vinyl, with that version giving the buyer a free download to these eleven tunes.

The concert kicks off the concert with "That's All Right (Mama)," Elvis' first single, and then slides into a haunting

version of "Susie Q." The standout cut is song "You're the One," which invites the listener to hit the replay button over and over. There is also a great rendition of "Polk Salad Annie" where you can sense both the professionalism and camaraderie between these top-notch players. *Guitar Heroes* is certainly a labor of love and worth giving a listen.

– Pete Sardon

LARA PRICE
I Mean Business
 VizzTone Records



Although she may not yet be a household name on the Midwest and East coast blues festival circuits, San Francisco Bay area vocalist and songwriter Lara Price, like Deb Callahan, has plenty to offer to blues and folk festival audiences with her fresh takes on classic blues and soul tunes and her inventive originals, all served up on her VizzTone debut, *I Mean Business*.

Price was born in South Vietnam shortly before the formal close of U.S. military actions in that country, and was part of Operation Baby Lift, a mass evacuation of orphans from that country to the USA. Ninety percent of these orphaned babies did not survive, but Price was part of the 10 percent that did. Just that bit of background lets you know that she knows a few things about how to live.

Price arrived in the San Francisco Bay area in 1997 determined to pursue her dreams of singing with a band, even though she already played several instruments. She became a fixture on the still-healthy Bay area roots music scene and befriended soul-blues women like Ann Peebles and Candi Staton. She was drawn to '60s and '70s soul blues tunes with great backing bands and great backup vocalists. After releasing a handful of albums independently and touring parts of the U.S. and China, she recorded at guitarist Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studios. Aside from Andersen, she is accompanied by many other road and Bay area studio veterans, including

organist Jim Pugh (Robert Cray), guitarists Mighty Mike Schermer (Marcia Ball), and Chris Cain, a full complement of horns, and the Sweet Nectar backup singers, Sue McCracklin and Maureen Smith.

Standout tracks include the opener "Get It When I Want It," and her originals "Happy Blue Year" and "I Mean Business." If you enjoy the soul blues stylings of women like Trudy Lynn, Etta James, and Etta Jones, you'll find plenty to latch onto with Price's *I Mean Business*.

— Richard J. Skelly

ROBERT CRAY
4 Nights of 40 Years Live
Provogue



No one is smoother than Robert Cray, no one. So it's no wonder that the blues icon has enjoyed a highly touted 40-year career in the music business. On his latest offering, *4 Nights of 40 Years Live*, available on the Provogue label, Cray captures the best performances over four nights in four different venues in the Los Angeles area with his stalwart band, bassist Richard Cousins, keyboardist Dover Weinberg, and drummer Les Falconer. The result is an inspiring, soul-filled collection of songs that span Cray's 20 album releases over his four-decade career.

Cray and company are tighter than anyone on the circuit today on *4 Nights of 40 Years Live*. His voice is smooth and powerful while his guitar playing is pristine, soulful, and distinctive. Punch in the flawless accompaniment of his band along with guest appearances by Fabulous Thunderbirds frontman, Kim Wilson on "Wrap It Up," harmonica master Lee Oskar on "Sittin' On Top Of The World," and the horn section of tenor sax man, Trevor Lawrence, trumpeter, Steve Madaio and saxophonist, Tom Scott and you've got a definitive recall of why Cray has been so successful and beloved all these years.

Tracks of particular note include the album opener "I Shiver," "Poor

Johnny," "Your Good Thing Is About To End," "Love Gone To Waste," the soul-drenched "These Things," the stellar hit from *Strong Persuader*, "Right Next Door (Because Of Me)," and "The Forecast (Calls For Pain)."

There isn't a bluesman alive today making music as powerful and soul stirring as Robert Cray and *4 Nights of 40 Years Live* proves Cray's meddle and prowess is still fully intact all these decades later. Outstanding!

— Brian M. Owens



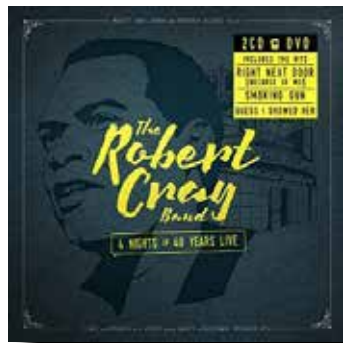
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DVDS

ROBERT CRAY BAND
4 Nights Of 40 Years-DVD
Provogue



This video companion to the 13 track audio live CD that captures the most recent edition of veteran Robert Cray and his band running through the paces in the titular time period is more than just a recorded show. Rather the short-ish 90-minute documentary takes the 73 minutes of performances (available on the CD) and splices them with another 20 of archival and interview footage. Also included are short segments with predictably glowing if undoubtedly genuine praises about Cray from such blues luminaries and peers as Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Keith Richards, Bonnie Raitt, and others. Cray also provides his own background information in short segments.

It's a much-deserved tribute to Cray's remarkably dependable four decade (and counting) run. Producer Steve Jordan gets a fair amount of time, both as percussionist/drummer for some of the selections and as a sort of mentor imparting his influence on Cray's live set list and musical approach. While the vintage pieces are interesting (their audio is available on a second, short, additional CD included in the deluxe edition), it's 2014's concert selections that provide the real excitement. Here Cray and group dig into his bulging catalog with gusto, reprising older hits like "Bad Influence" and "Right Next Door (Because Of Me)" (but notably not "Smoking Gun"), adding some sharp covers ("Sittin' On Top Of The World," Sam & Dave's "Wrap It Up") and excavating less recognizable original material like "These Things" and "Time Makes Two." The band, usually with horns, is in rugged form, loose yet taut, and Cray seems to be enjoying himself, something that cannot always be said about his somewhat stoic stage persona. The camera work, lighting and sound are superb, crisp (particularly on the Blu-ray)

and as classy as you would expect from an artist with Cray's professional experience. Guests such as the Fabulous Thunderbirds' Kim Wilson and War harpist Lee Oskar make short, not particularly riveting, guest appearances on the new material.

While the recently shot video is uniformly excellent, there just isn't enough of it. Cherry picking from four days of the Cray band's live work should yield more than just over an hour of footage. Perhaps a full documentary detailing Cray's extensive career with a separate DVD grabbing highlights from the four shows would have been more revelatory and musically satisfying than combining the two. The lack of specific track information is also frustrating for a historical release of this sort.

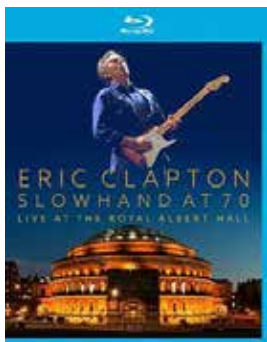
But the good far outweighs the downside of this impressive DVD that focuses on one of contemporary blues and soul music's most consistently satisfying, if arguably not innovative, performers over the past 40 years.

— Hal Horowitz

ERIC CLAPTON

Slowhand At 70-Live At Royal Albert Hall-CD/DVD

Eagle Vision



Despite this being Eric Clapton's 70th birthday concert, judging from the set list it could just as well be his 60th, 50th or even earlier. With a few exceptions, songs such as "I Shot the Sheriff," "Crossroads," "Tears in Heaven," "Layla" (the acoustic version), "Wonderful Tonight," and the ever-present set closer "Cocaine" have been mainstays in his show for decades. Most have been on other Clapton concert albums and DVDs which makes their appearance, yet again, disappointing.

Even the staunchest Slowhand fans, perhaps especially them, would hope that on a special occasion such as this, he would have made an effort to dig a little deeper and excavate more

unusual selections or at least ones that would prod him out of his comfort zone. When he is challenged, as on 2009's Steve Winwood duo concert, he rises to the occasion with stunning, heartfelt playing. And while nothing here is phoned-in, there is little that pushes beyond what most would expect from a typical Clapton show.

That said, the playing by a stellar band featuring the double keyboard whammy of Paul Carrack on organ (he also sings lead on an unnecessary cover of Joe Cocker's maudlin "You Are So Beautiful") and Cocker/Grease band veteran pianist Chris Stainton, long time bassist Nathan East (who gets a spotlight on Blind Faith's "Can't Find My Way Home") and expert session drummer Steve Gadd is never less than splendid. The song selection for the nearly two hour show *does* include a few surprises such as an opening JJ Cale obscurity "Somebody's Knockin' On My Door," a solid "Tell The Truth" from Layla and "Let It Rain," a blast from his debut that hasn't been in his repertoire of late. Clapton seems in relatively good spirits throughout, plays with his usual proficiency and the lights (lots of deep blues), camera work and sound on the DVD are professional, slick, and reflect the song being played.

Clapton spends a substantial amount of time with blues material. He runs through a rugged "Hoochie Coochie Man," an emotional acoustic version of Charles Brown's "Driftin' Blues," an upbeat ragtime arrangement of "Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out," and an absolutely mind-blowing 17 minute slow blues take on Robert Johnson's "Little Queen Of Spades" that, with Clapton's blistering solo, is alone almost worth the price of the set.

A closing "High Time We Went" (another nod to Cocker) ends things on a rousing note that makes you wish Clapton had colored outside the lines for the rest of the gig. Still, at 70 he could be laying back and collecting royalties instead of touring the world; he doesn't need the cash or acclaim, has nothing left to prove to anyone, and isn't looking for radio play. So let's take what he's got to offer and appreciate the highlights of an intermittently engaging gig that shows old Slowhand still has most of the faculties that have rightfully made him a living legend.

— Hal Horowitz

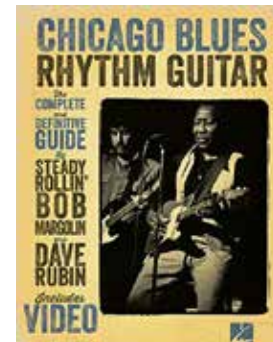


BOOKS

CHICAGO BLUES RHYTHM GUITAR The Complete and Definitive Guide 114-page book w/DVD video

by Steady Rollin' Bob Margolin and Dave Rubin

Hal Leonard Books



No one is better suited to author a Chicago Blues Rhythm Guitar book than blues six-stringer, Bob Margolin. His time playing with Muddy Waters from 1973 to 1980 is well chronicled in history books while his collaborations with blues luminaries like Ann Rabson, Jimmy Rogers, Jerry Portnoy, The Nighthawks, Big Joe Duskin, Pinetop Perkins, Hubert Sumlin, The Band, and countless others, along with a storied solo career, has garnered him strictly solid blues credentials.

For this Hal Leonard book, *Chicago Blues Rhythm Guitar*, Margolin opens the lessons with how Muddy Waters' playing inspired him. By standing next to Muddy on stage and watching the blues master in action, night after night, Margolin gained considerable reverence for Muddy's technique and "endlessly creative guitar parts in support of other instrumentalists." Margolin was there. He witnessed it first hand, and he wants to share the education he received with readers of this comprehensive guide. And so the journey begins.

Margolin outlines the many guitars and amplifiers used by Chicago blues musicians. You must remember that these early players were the progenitors of modern day electric blues. Gibson, Guild, Fender, and Gretsch electric guitars were just coming in to vogue while many of these blues pioneers were still strumming on acoustics. Margolin reminisces about Muddy's earlier, "more affordable"

instruments like his Silvertone Aristocrat, Gretsch Synchromatic, and resonator guitar before acquiring a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop and finally the guitar that he would become most associated with, the Fender Telecaster.

Although the guitars of that era, which are highly collectible and still sought after to this day, were the foundation of electric blues, Margolin notes that, "identifying the amps of postwar Chicago blues guitarists is problematic. The artists were not as concerned with amp gear as much as later guitarists would become." By his best accounts, Margolin cites smaller Fender, Gibson, Supro, and Ampeg amplifiers as the amps of choice in those early days. Only until the famed Fender tweed Bassman was built did bluesmen truly find an amp worthy of their cause.

Once the choice of guitar and amplifier is explained, Margolin begins to delve deeper in to the specific style of Chicago Blues rhythm guitar: Background, perspective, and context. He outlines the fact that Chicago musicians created a distinctive sound that became associated with the Windy City. He questions readers: What are you searching for? Is it tone, cadence, volume? He proceeds to make good sense out of all these important, "general considerations" while keeping the reader engaged. Once through the necessary basics, Margolin unleashes page upon page of comprehensive notes transcribed by Dave Rubin along with tab that includes the stylings of Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, Little Walter, Robert Lockwood, Jr., Luther Tucker, and Louis and Dave Myers as well as change-up rhythms, major and minor keys, funky beat rhythms, early blues-rock, heavy blues-rock, lead and rhythm guitar combined, playing with a pianist, and finally, humbly playing with someone famous.

While the book can become complex to beginner guitarists, exploring the many facets of Chicago rhythm guitar is carefully outlined in the DVD (or access to videos online), making light of these complexities with easy, hands-on visuals from Margolin himself. That along with priceless photographs of Margolin with his mentor, Muddy, Eric Clapton, The Band, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Jimmy Rogers, and Pinetop Perkins makes this a lesson book worth its weight in blues scripture.

— Brian M. Owens — *journalist, songwriter, guitarist*

QUICK HITS

by Art Tipaldi

With so many CDs released in 2015, there just isn't enough room to adequately cover all the albums in the piles around the office. In no particular order, here's a quick note or two about some worthwhile music you should be hip to.

JOEY GILMORE, *Brandon's Blues*, Mosher St. Records — Good old fashioned soul blues sung and played by Joey Gilmore. South Florida's Gilmore takes on blues classics like "Cheaper To Keep Her," "Cold, Cold Feeling," "As The Years Go Passing By," and "That's What Love Will Make You Do," and soul tunes like Otis Redding's "Nobody's Fault But Mine" and Sam Cooke's "Somebody Have Mercy." The record's title cut, a deep and riveting slow blues opus, references this father's grief understanding the untimely death of Gilmore's 33-year-old son Brandon, who died in 2014. Throughout, Gilmore's timeless voice, pinpoint guitar, and seasoned arrangements capture the perfect mix of soul and blues.

TOOTS LORRAINE, *Make It Easy*, Greaseland Records — Take it from me: Whatever comes out of Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studios is outstanding music! Here, Andersen and his studio mates, June Core (drums), Mike Phillips (bass), Lorenzo Farrell (keys), and Aki Kumar (harmonica), back Florida's Toots Lorraine and Chad Mo (guitar) on an upbeat set of swinging standards and originals. The star of the set is Lorraine's voice. From the opening title tune, her voice commands attention. It's much more reliant on nuance not yelling. Top picks: her jumpin' take on Big Joe Turner's "Low Down Dog," her "you give me fever" take on the Civil Rights anthem "Wade In The Water," and her after hours emotional gush on "Hindsight."

JOAKIM TINDERHOLT, *You Gotta Do More*, Big H Records — Tinderholt is another guitarist and singer schooled through Norway's love of American blues. Tinderholt, the cousin of Kid Andersen, utilizes Ike Turner's shivery tones on the CD opener and on Otis Rush's "Double Trouble." He morphs into Jimmie Vaughan on "I Need A Woman (Cause I'm A Man)." The addition of piano, horns and a second guitar strengthen the retro feel. Tinderholt's originals range from the Texas -influenced "Another Rainy Day" to "Gold Top," the instrumental tribute to his guitar to his rock 'n' roll take on "You Gotta Move." He ends with a New

Orleans nod to Earl King ("Those Lonely, Lonely Nights"), Willie Dixon ("I Don't Care Who Knows"), and Camille Bob ("I Got Loaded").

BONITA AND THE BLUES SHACKS, CrossCut Records — When you combine B.B. and the Blues Shacks, one of Europe's most respected blues bands, with Bonita Niessen, one of South Africa's most soulful singers, you get one of the most stunning records of the year. The musical craftsmanship of the Arit brothers, Andreas on guitar and Michael on vocals and harmonica, and the world-class vocals of Niessen expertly explore the connections between blues and soul that existed in the 1950s. "Don't Call Me Baby" opens the record with a Niessen-Arit duet sounding like Little Esther meets Johnny Otis. Check out Niessen's walk on the dark side of the street on "Love Ain't Never Hurt Nobody" or "You Keep My Hanging On." Or her expressive voice on the gorgeous Gospel-tinged closer, "Never Let Me Go."

JEFF JENSEN, *Morose Elephant*, Jeff Jensen Music — WOW. *Morose Elephant* accurately captures all the excitement of a Jeff Jensen live show, flailing hair and all! By adding Memphis-styled horns into the mix of the CD opener "Make It Through," Jensen has recorded a greasy Memphis appetizer. But Jensen is no one trick pony. "Fall Apart" features Jensen's restrained guitar and subdued horns providing a beautiful counterpoint to this mournful ballad. "Paper Walls" explodes in his live shows; it slinks along in fine fashion here. Friend Victor Wainwright (keys on four tunes) joins Jensen vocally on Memphis Minnie's "What's The Matter With The Mill" and "Bad, Bad Whiskey." Reba Russell (vocals) and Annie Harris (fiddle) help the relaxed feel to "Ash And Bone." Jensen takes on the T-Bone Walker ballad "I'll Always Be In Love With You" in an up-tempo, horn central B.B. King shuffle. Jensen ends the CD with "Empty Bottles," an acoustic confession between he and Gary Allegretto (harmonica).

D. L. DUNCAN, *15 South Records* — With his pen in hand, D.L. Duncan writes his heart. That smart song writing is accompanied by Duncan's raspy, Elvin Bishop-styled vocals and his economical guitar playing. His core band includes Kevin McKendree (keys), Muscle Shoals' David Hood (bass), and Vince Santoto

(drums). Guests include Delbert McClinton, Sonny Landreth, Lynn Williams, and the McCrary Sisters. McClinton joins Duncan on his "You Just Don't Never Know," a tribute to the late Dennis Taylor who played sax with both. "Sending Me Angels" features the background voices of the McCrary Sisters and Duncan's evocative slide. Other standouts include his humorous "I Ain't The Sharpest Marble," the fast-paced "Dickerson Road," and "I Know A Good Thing," where words and music mesh to make a memorable statement.

BETTY FOX, *Slow Burn* – In 2015, Fox represented the Suncoast Blues Society at the International Blues Challenge and was one of nine finalists of 117 bands from around the world. Her multi-octave voice wowed judges in Memphis and likewise is the star here. The funky opener "Think About It," with her scat singing, is the perfect tune to play as you roll down the windows for a summer night's drive. Amid this album of 14 originals, "Sweet Memories" provides Fox the opportunity to step into the emotional release. Her voice flutters in the high range, but always with a restraint that suggests, I can dig even deeper. Her vocals caress the delicate theme of the title cut and builds to an emotional crescendo a la a slow burn. "Who's Holdin'?" reminds me of something Janis Joplin might have sung with Big Brother at Monterey Pop. Though many occasionally compare her to Joplin, Fox will tell anyone her influences are more James Carr and the gospel harmonies her grandparents taught she and her cousins.

ANDY POXON, *Must Be Crazy*, EllerSoul Records – The afro may be trimmed down, but Poxon has turned up the intensity on these 13 originals. If the fat tones of a Gibson Archtop touch your soul, then Poxon delivers on his third release. The title cut opens the record with a Elmore James-styled guitar augmented with piano and sax with a 1950s flair. Poxon swings some jump blues ("Next To You"), shows off his affinity for T-Bone Walker ("Cold Weather"), and demonstrates a vocal confidence on the delicate ballads ("Harder Everyday" and "Already Gone"). He closes the record with "Rebound," a relaxed, jazz-tinged exercise between Poxon's guitar and Yates McKendree's organ. McKendree's father, Kevin, co-produced the record, plays keys throughout, and co-wrote four of the songs with Poxon. Looking for smart, upbeat music, look no further as Poxon has recorded one of the finest traditional blues albums of 2015.

AWEK, *Nine* – Hailing from Toulouse, France, AWEK continues to accurately cover American blues styles from Chicago's south side to earthy Texas shuffles to West coast jump. AWEK features a two fisted guitar and harmonica attack. The skilled guitar, strong singing and competent song writing of Bernard Sellam pairs perfectly with Stephane Bertolino's varied electric harp techniques. Anchored by a solid rhythm section, AWEK showcases energetic interplay between guitar and harmonica. Within the 11 originals, they accurately capture the gritty Texas blues on "The Way You Dance" and "Open That Door." Sellam takes the driver's seat on "My Woman" and the frantic "Sunshine In My Bedroom." On Bertolino's instrumental, "Gaultier Rouge," Bertolino leads the way with his fat-toned chromatic then passes the musical ideas to pianist Julien Brunetaud. Led by polished songwriting and first class musicianship, AWEK is worth searching out.



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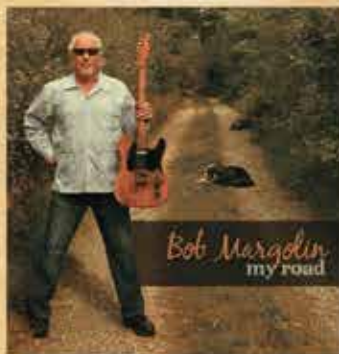
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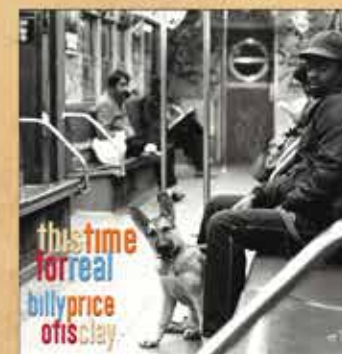
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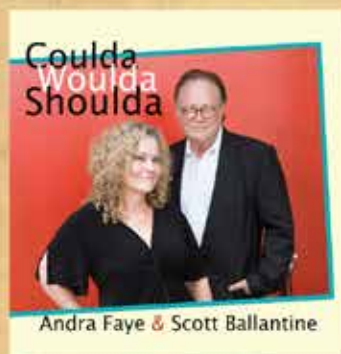
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Mr. Sipp's Gospel Brunch



Deva and Taj Mahal



Reverend Raven



Ronnie Baker Brooks



Grady Champion, Toranzo Cannon, and Elvin Bishop



Albert Cummings

by Art Tipaldi



Sugar Blue

#26



Ruthie Foster



Mighty Mo Rogers

Here is what happened during the first 45 minutes of the first night jam on the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise (LRBC). Ronnie Baker Brooks and his band hosted the 12:30 a.m. show. While leading off with his "Born In Chicago," Ronnie turned around to see a grinning Elvin Bishop who stayed for the next song. When Ronnie started up Albert Collins' "Frosty," Colin James and Tommy Castro joined. Then James led the way on Freddie King's "Goin' Down." As James and Castro left the stage, Rico McFarland took the lead on Albert King's "I'll Play The Blues For You." Then Mike Wheeler replaced McFarland as Toranzo Cannon waited to plug in. And there was an entire week still to come.

The January 2016 sailing was the 26th LRBC and, with 23 diverse bands, four piano bar hosts, and four special guests, provided outstanding musical experiences for every taste. Flying under the Jolly Roger flag and its "Our Ship Kicks Ass" logo, the boat offers

one-of-a-kind musical pairings.

Here, performers finish a show and then are asked to join the next band on the stage. Or one musician sees friends in the audience and calls them up to join in the fireworks. Translated, that means music happens on these stages that doesn't happen anywhere else.

Because there are five to six stages pumping out non-stop music, the most important decision facing cruisers is: Do I watch a complete show of a performer or do I catch a three-song sampler of five different bands. Whatever you choose, one can never experience everything.

That said, after Ronnie's opening night jam, here are some of my most memorable moments running from bow to stern. Last October, Allen Toussaint performed on the LRBC. A week after the boat docked, Toussaint died suddenly in Spain. The Returnee Party on the first night featured a massive tribute to the maestro. Anchored by the

Kelley Hunt band, the Elvin Bishop band and the Phantom Blues band, a dozen singers honored Toussaint's spirit. Highlights included Leon Blue who sang "Working In A Coal Mine," Kelley Hunt added "Yes We Can" and "Brickyard," Mighty Mo Rodgers handled "Fortune Teller," Darryl Coutts rocked "Night People," and Taj Mahal finished the show with "Get Out Of My Life Woman." Later that night on the same stage, Elvin Bishop and Mickey Thomas revitalized their huge 1975 hit "Fooled Around And Fell In Love."

Ruthie Foster was re-united with her full band and touched all the women with her "Phenomenal Women" song and the Staple Singers' "The Ghetto." Then she and Hadden Sayers gave the crowd "Goin' Back To The Blues." With Leon Blue, Victor Wainwright, Shinetop Jr., and James Pace, the piano bar is a huge cruiser favorite. But for two nights, Steve Willis, Ruth Davies, and Bobby Cochran from Bishop's band held court.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY © ART TIPALDI



Accept No Substitute!

The night I was there, Ed Early and Elvin joined for the two and a half hour set giving the audience an intimate evening with the acoustic Elvin Bishop band.

Mississippi musicians Mr. Sipp, Eddie Cotton, and Grady Champion hosted the Gospel Brunch. Mr. Sipp brings a Gospel feel to all he sings. He never totally ends a song, but rather preaches and testifies between songs as the band simmers behind him. His finale, "A Change Is Gonna Come," transported this sea-going audience back to a Delta religious revival. Sugar Blue's finale "Another Man Done Gone" was a haunting one-man dirge of dark harmonica while his son, two and a half year old Little Blue, sat in his stroller playing air snare with his drum sticks urging the audience on.

As usual, crowd favorites included Taj Mahal with the Phantom Blues Band, Tommy Castro, Tab Benoit, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Danielle Nicole, Samantha Fish, and Latimore.

But the week's highlights are always the new talent Roger Nabors books for his LRBC cruisers to discover. On this ship, Toronzo Cannon, Albert Cummings, Canada's Colin James, Eddie Cotton, Reverend Raven, Mighty Mo Rodgers, and acoustic guitarist Rocky Lawrence continually played to full houses. Cannon, Bishop, and Champion blew the top off the Crow's Nest; Cummings took the stage with Brooks; James' stripped down, acoustic show was a top highlight; Cotton turned the Queen's Lounge into a late night, Mississippi juke joint; Rev. Raven and Westside Andy delivered a rockin' blues bash; Rodgers rapped a hilarious indictment of today's Facebookers; and Lawrence performed his one man tribute to Robert Johnson.

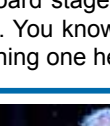
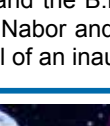
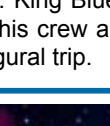
And the week ended much as it began. Ronnie Baker Brooks was one of the final acts of the week and it was also his birthday. After he was presented with a cake to the tune of "Happy Birthday," Brooks gave a present back to the boat. With his horn section on full blast, he called Mr. Sipp, Cummings, Fish, Castro,

One future note. The October LRBC will sail from San Juan, Puerto Rico with bands to perform and ports to visit listed on the website. The January 2017 cruise will be the first music charter on Holland America's newest ship, the Koningsdam, which holds about 500 more cruisers and features many music stages including the Lincoln Center and Billboard stage and the B.B. King Blues Club. You know Nabor and his crew are planning one hell of an inaugural trip.








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In Puerto Rico**

and James for 15 minutes of "Frosty." Brooks took charge of the conductor's baton and directed solo after solo. And as with the first night jam he hosted, I didn't have my camera. (Thankfully, it's been uploaded on YouTube titled Ronnie Baker Brooks Birthday jam LRBC#26.)





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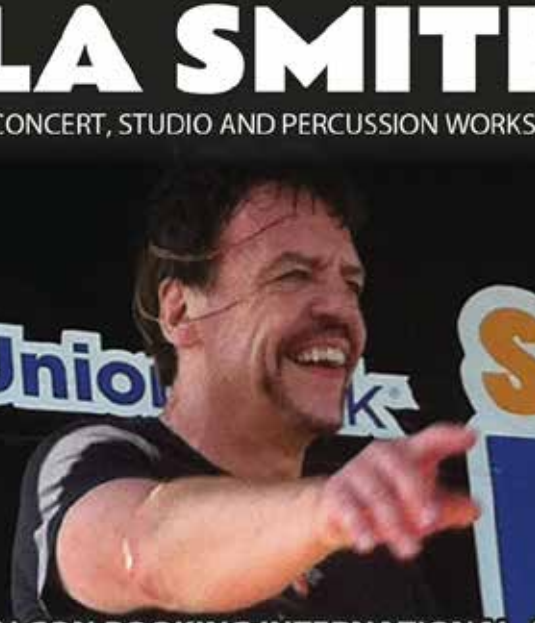
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