

NIECIE

Motor City Powerhouse

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- **Blues Music CD Catalog**
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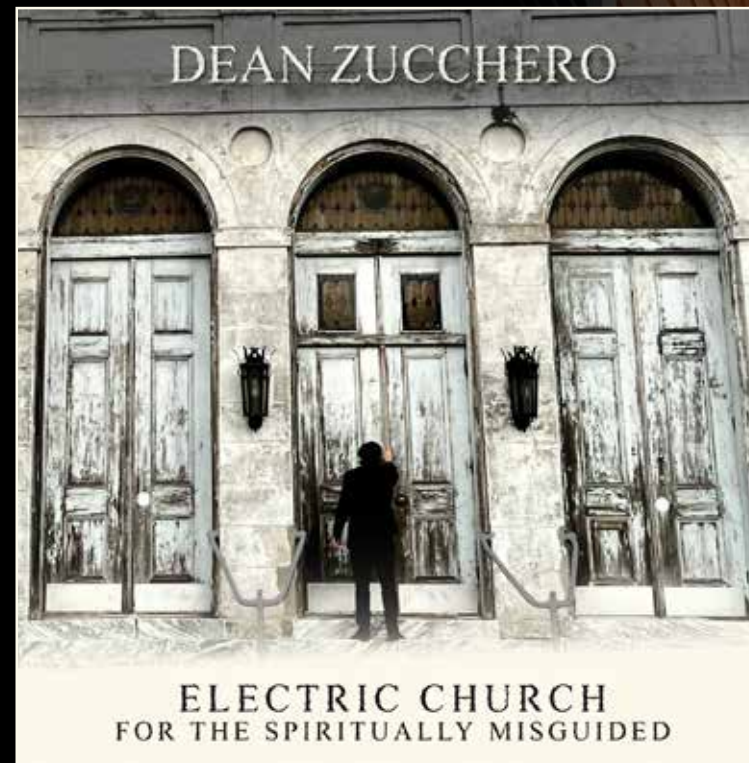
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BLUES MUSIC ONLINE

April 23, 2023-Issue 45

Table Of Contents

- **NIECIE** - *Motor City Powerhouse*
By Jack Sullivan
- **Blues Music Catalog 80 Albums & Bonus Issues With Purchase!**
- **Eleven Album Reviews**
By Various Writers



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NIECIE

Motor City Powerhouse

By Jack Sullivan

Blues Music Online: Tell our readers about the music that you were hearing growing up in Detroit?

Niecie: Being born and bred in Detroit, I was exposed to a rainbow of musical genres. Being a child of the 60's, I was immersed with the Motown sound. This was a segway for my love of Rhythm And Blues. My father was a Jazz buff so our house was always on jam with the Jazz greats. On the Rock tip, I was a huge fan of the MC5 and Grand Funk Railroad. The Detroit bluesmen that I listened to were John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Eddie Kirkland, and Johnnie Bassett.

Blues Music Online: How and when did you first discover the blues?

Niecie: Up until the mid-90's, I was gigging in the rock and R&B scenes. It wasn't until 1995, when I had a once in a lifetime encounter with Magic Slim, that I ignited my passion for the blues. Magic Slim will always have my heart. He was the one responsible for giving me my push into the Blues. While I was on tour with a rock band out of Boston, he heard me singing at a bar in Lincoln, Nebraska while he was on break from the Zoo Bar. Later that evening I was on break and he came up to me and said "girl, you need to sing the Blues" and invited me up to sit in with him. The rest is history.

Blues Music Online: Who were the first blues artists you listened to?

Niecie: I was always into guitar driven blues. My favorites were the 3 Kings Albert, Freddie and BB. Digging these 3 lead me to groove on Stevie Ray Vaughn and Eric Clapton. As far as females, my first exposure was Bonnie Raitt, Big Mama Thornton, Etta James and early Tina Turner.

Blues Music Online: What was it about the blues that spoke to you?

Niecie: The raw honesty of the blues really speaks to me. The truth of life and experiences is prevalent in the blues which is very often a reflection of what is personally going on in my life and the world. This includes joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, the good and the bad.

Blues Music Online: Where did you learn to sing?

Niecie: I've been singing since I was young. I started out in musical theater when I was 8 years old. A lot of my learning process came through the years from performing. I began fronting rock bands, which we would now consider classic rock, when I was in my late teens and early twenties. Throughout my school years I was a member of several choirs. This is where I honed my skills in harmony. When I made the commitment to pursue my passion as a recording artist, I was living in Boston. I embarked in formal vocal training through Berklee College of Music auxiliary courses to up my game.

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Blues Music Online: Can you explain your learning process? Records, lessons, jams, what helped you learn music.

Niece: I'm always schooling in all areas of the music business. The best lessons can be had from surrounding yourself with those who are out there already making it happen. I try to align myself with heavies in the business and A-listers. This has been fruitful for me being based out of Nashville with the enormous talent pool that resides there. I've been blessed to continue to write with Grammy winning songwriters that school me in hitmaking songwriting. It's beautiful how open they are to sharing and mentoring. In the studio, I learn a lot by experimenting. I continue to pursue teachings in music theory, chord structure, ear training and performance.

Blues Music Online: Who were some of the mentors you were able to play with?

Niece: A few of the mentors that have been blessed to share the stage with are Koko Taylor, Magic Slim, Johnny Neel and Larry McCray. My fondest memory of Koko Taylor was when I did a show with her in 2002, The Detroit/Chicago Women of Blues. This was the first time I had the pleasure to meet her and it was the first time that she saw me perform. I guess she really dug me because she blessed me with one of my promo quotes I use "Niece is definitely someone to look out for. She reminds me of me in my younger years". I am forever grateful.

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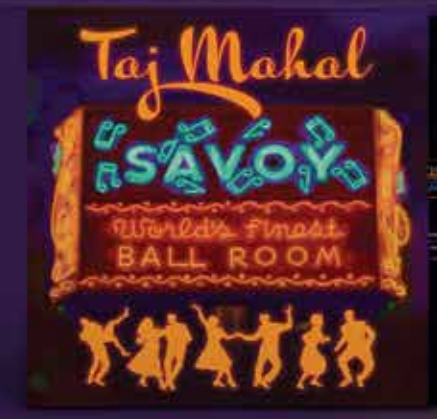
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Blues Music Online: What are some of the most important musical lessons about the blues these mentors taught you?

Nicie: One of the most important lessons I have learned is to be steadfast with your passion. You must believe in yourself, your talents and your dreams. The music industry is a tough one and is not for the faint of heart. You must keep pushing no matter what. It is very important that when you achieve any level of success to remain humble. You must remember that you did not get there by yourself, it takes a team.

Blues Music Online: Which vocalists were your inspirations? What did they teach you?

Nicie: Wow, that's a loaded question! I have had a plethora of inspirations. A few that stand out are Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Etta James, and Patti LaBelle. They taught me to be authentic with my sound and be unique. They also were key to teaching singing with power but at the same time incorporating subtleties for dynamics. They were also wonderful role models for demonstrating performance and keeping the audience engaged.

Blues Music Online: How do you keep the traditional elements of the blues alive in your contemporary songs?

Nicie: I try to stay true to the blues chord progressions while adding my own nuances. I add the different styles of blues on all my releases including 12 bar blues, 1-4-5's and shuffles. I also stay true to the core of the blues from

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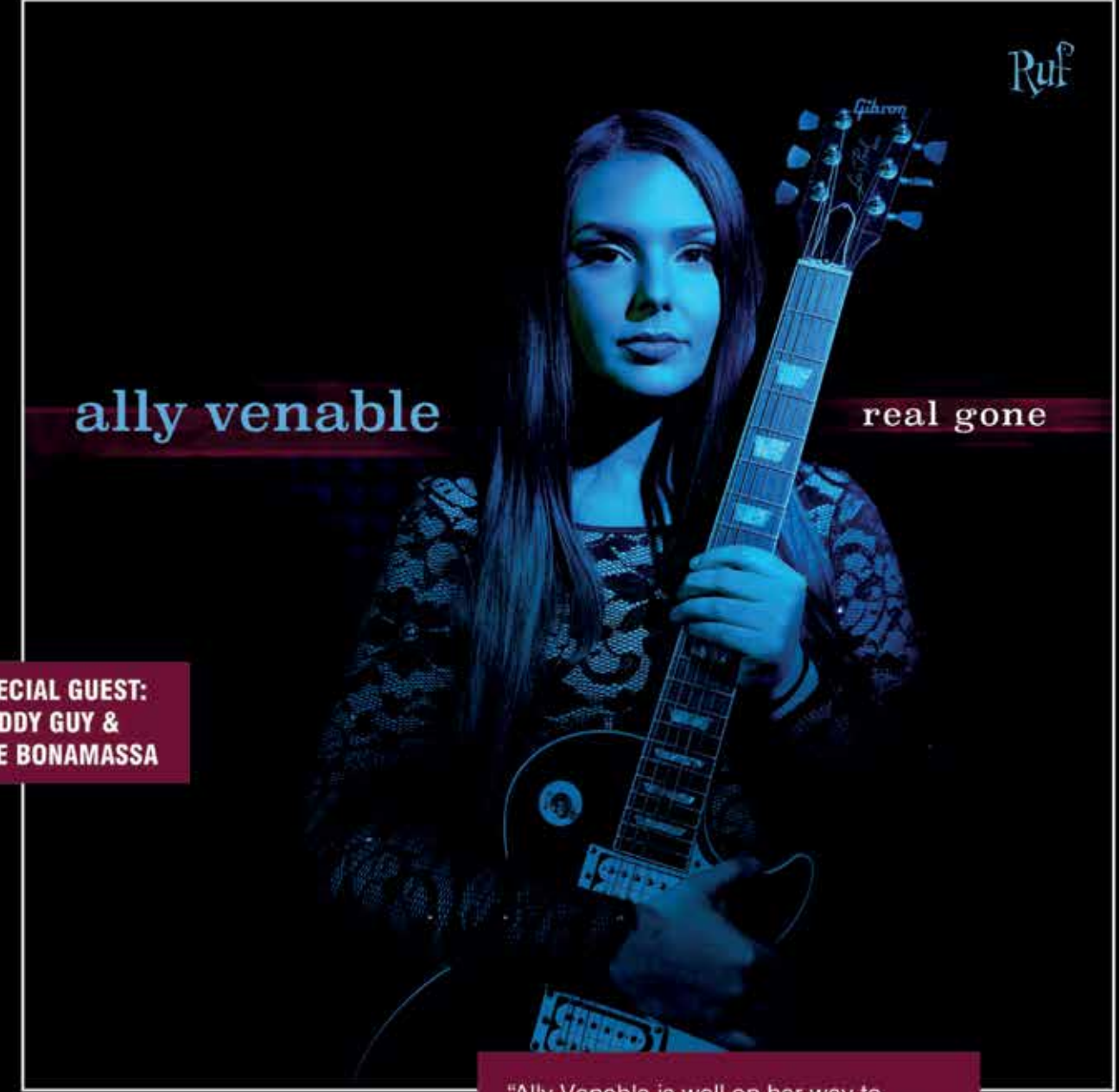
which it was based through storytelling and portraying emotion.

Blues Music Online: Tell us about your new album.

Niece: I first want to start out by saying I'm extremely proud of my latest release Queen Of The Hill. I'm thrilled at how well received it was with the fans and the radio. It received rave reviews all over the world including the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Germany and of course here in the US. We started working on it pre-covid and released one single, "Every Kinda Blues", before covid hit and shut down the world. We decided to slow up and wait to release it when it made sense. We took the Covid break to do deep with the songwriting and arrangements. Out of the 12 tunes, I penned 8 of them. Although blues/rock based we wrote a variety of grooves that added to the success. It was also a blessing to work with my producer, Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner former Allman Brothers Johnny Neel. He is definitely a musical genius. The album, as well as a few of the singles, are up for awards for the International Singer Songwriters Association and the Holland Red Carpet Awards in the Netherlands. It also made the first-round nominations for the 2023 Grammy Awards. - **BMO**



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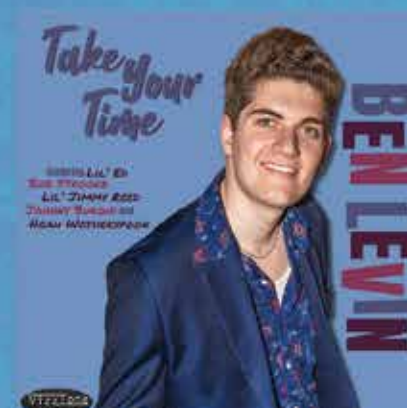
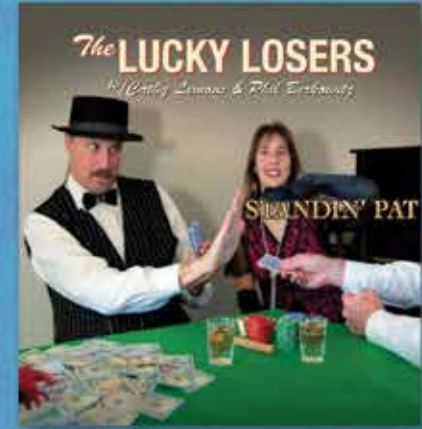
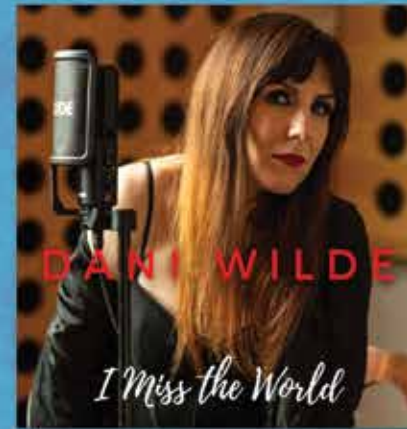
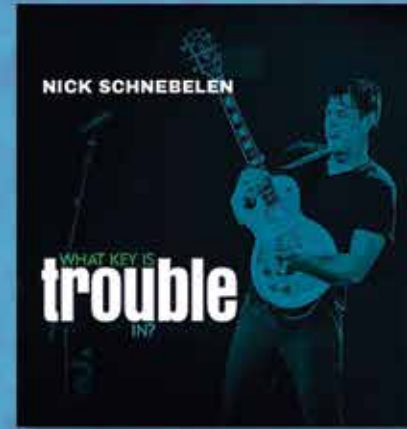
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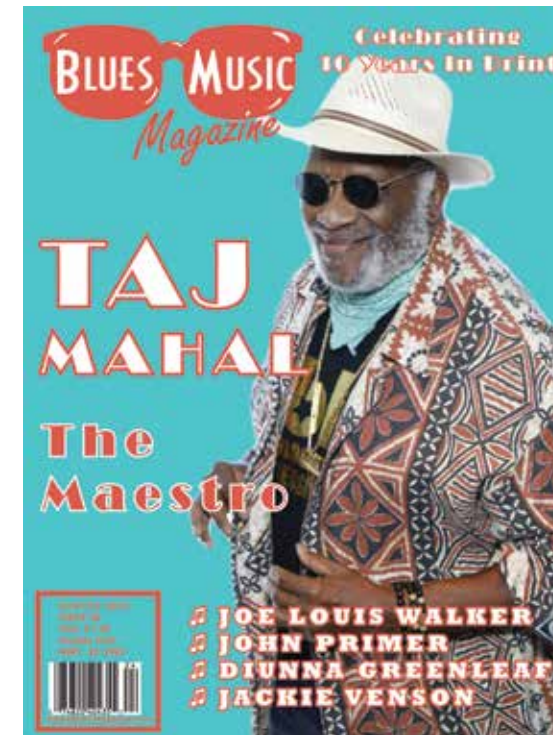
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The following Album reviews appeared originally in *Blues Music Magazine* Winter Edition released January 2023. This issue starts our tenth year in print and digital. Join us and help continue our mission of:



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ALBUM REVIEW

RUTHIE FOSTER

Healing Time

Blue Corn



Ruthie Foster is tapped into a soul pipeline that Rgushes out of her every time she opens her mouth. For her latest, *Healing Time* on Blue Corn Records, Foster has the release valve jammed wide open, spewing tanker loads of soulful fuel. She's got a few high profile, heavy duty haulers to assist her on this outing. Anders Osbourne steps in on guitar on "Soul Searching," Foster's celestial, soaring hymn to a loved one she's reunited with. Sonny Landreth slides in to ignite the volatile gas she's pumping out on "Finish Line," splattering Foster's Ronnie Spector vocal ghosting with some greasy Louisiana swamp juice.

Robert Randolph contributes pedal steel on the title cut, Foster whomping up on the congregation like Mavis Staples with the help of a funky gospel choir featuring Sheree Smith, Angela Miller, and Tamara Mack who also appear in some combination on background vocals for most of the cuts. Sounding like he's working out on a Theremin, the outerspatial sounding instrument that you wave your hands in front of to manipulate, Randolph's wiggly, sacred steel solo walks this one down the aisle and out the church door while Foster grunts Mavis-ly in the background.

But as usual, Foster proves that she doesn't need help to bolster her sound. She's a soulful orchestra all by herself, pumping out her message with such power and resonance that she really doesn't need electronic amplification to get her message across. On her Merlefest debut in 2007 on one of the smaller stages, a thunderstorm came up, and the stage shut down. As people started to leave, Foster yelled out, "Wait! Don't go, I don't need a mic," and proceeded to prove that standing on the side of a muddy hill in a raincoat projecting her soulful sound so well that by the end of her set she had a worshipful crowd of dripping people huddled around her that rivaled some main stage big shots.

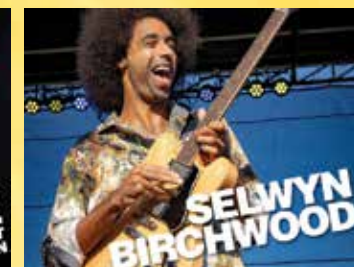
As usual, Foster has one leg in the church and one in the secular world, crossing back and forth across the aisle for some heavenly inspiration to her soulful meanderings. Drop in anywhere on the new record and she'll lift you up. "Feels Like Freedom" is a feel good anthem promoting spiritual healing, Foster taking church to the streets, preaching unity as a cure all. "I Was Called" is deep dish gospel soul, a spiritual banquet celebrating Foster being tapped to carry His message through song.

Foster's tonsils are tangled up with tendrils of Joan Armatrading, Aretha Franklin, Mavis Staples, and Roberta Flack, creating a blend that touches your heart and soothes your soul

– Grant Britt

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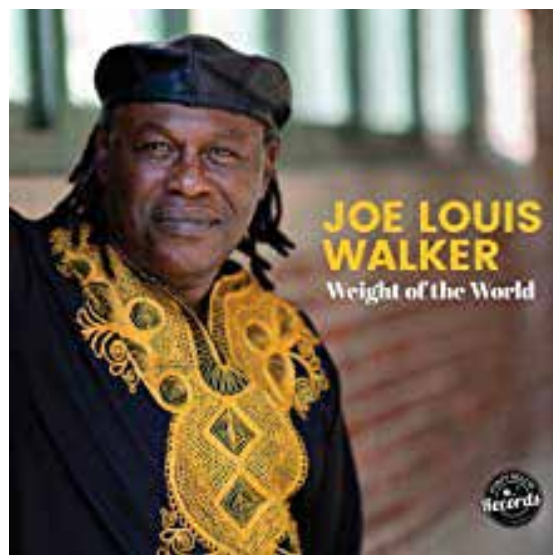
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ALBUM REVIEW

JOE LOUIS WALKER
Weight Of The World
 Forty Below Records



This release from Joe Louis Walker finds him in great form, with his commanding, immediately identifiable voice and nuanced guitar taking the listener through an excellent ten song set that – as is the veteran bluesman’s penchant – draws from a mixture of styles.

Roughly half of the tracks here could be described as soul, and are marked by producer Eric Corne bringing in background vocals, as well as strings and horns, to create a platform for Walker to climb onto and step to the front of. Good examples of entries in this style are the title track, “Is It A

Matter of Time?” and “Bed Of Roses.” Several other songs broadly fall into the realm of blues, including the percussive “Waking Up The Dead,” “Root Down,” and “Count Your Chickens.” And, as one might expect, they’re more stripped down, though they still sound extremely clean.

It’s from these two categories that the album’s two most memorable songs emerge. “Hello, It’s The Blues” is its most interesting track. To be sure, it’s not blues, and it doesn’t pretend to be. Rather, Walker personifies it as a confidant to the listener.

That’s only part of what makes it so interesting. The other component is its unusual arrangement: it alternates between a slow and relatively loose conversational monologue that counters the tighter, steadily building rhythm and chorus that holds the song together. Crucial to this working is Walker himself, who has to convincingly sell this split up, uneven, slightly off-balance concept without losing his way. He does all this and much more, placing an intricately delicate guitar solo in amongst the strings.

If that is the album’s most interesting song, “Blue Mirror” is its most surprising one. It’s about a rockabilly jam, and it plays like one: straight ahead, loose, with a seat-of-the-pants feel, and wrapped around what builds up to an epic, three tiered guitar solo. The kicker here is that – just as it often goes down at a real jam, you probably won’t realize what’s happening with that solo until it’s well underway and then, when it’s over, you’ll spend the rest of the song wondering if you really did hear what you thought you heard... only to be left with the satisfied, cackling laugh of the man who just pulled it off.

Lucky for us, all we have to do with “Blue Mirror” and *Weight Of The World* is hit rewind.

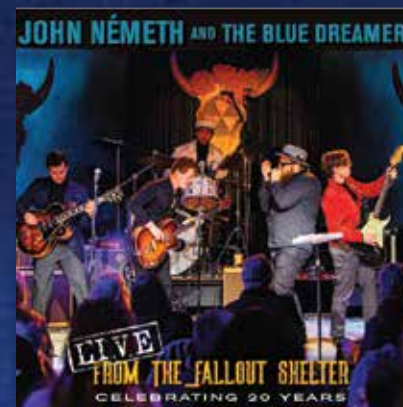
– *Matthew MacDonald*



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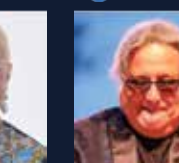
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 Instrumentalist-Piano
 (Pinetop Perkins
 Piano Player)



MARK KAZANOFF
 Instrumentalist-Horn



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 Contemporary Blues
 Female Artist



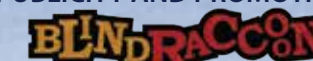
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ALBUM REVIEW

ANGELA STREHLI

Ace Of Blues

New West/Antone's



I first met Angela Strehli in 1993 at the place where she was most likely to be found in those days, Antone's blues club on Guadalupe St. in Austin, Texas. I walked in and within five minutes Clifford Antone came over and introduced himself, invited me out to the parking lot where his staff were cooking up barbecue and introduced me to Angela. I hadn't mentioned I was in town to cover SXSW for a then-prominent and now very defunct weekly. Clifford and Angela just knew I wasn't a local and wanted the club they called home to be a welcoming place.

Clifford Antone is long gone now, having passed in 2006, but there's still a club with his name above the door, only at a different

location, and Angela Strehli has a new album out, her first in 17 years, and it's on the Antone's label – which she co-founded – and is back in business thanks to a deal with New West Records. What's her new album like? Pretty much like the old ones, and that's a good thing.

Ace Of Blues offers a dozen strong vocal performances, solid material, top-notch accompaniment, and a sense of blues history. After all, Strehli played a big role in Texas blues from the time she moved in her early 20s from Lubbock (home of Buddy Holly, Delbert McClinton, Joe Ely, etc.) to Austin and went to work at the club. Over the years, besides her own performances, she found herself on stage with everyone from Muddy Waters and Otis Rush to the Vaughan brothers, Jimmie and Stevie. The songs on *Ace Of Blues* celebrate those years and those associations.

She opens the album with a cover of Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Two Steps From The Blues," an audacious choice as it's almost beyond her vocal range. As she says in the liner notes, it was the most difficult track to record, but she pulls it off. From there it's a luxury cruise through Elmore James' "Person To Person," Willie Dixon's "I Love The Life I Live," Chuck Berry's "You Never Can Tell," Otis Rush's "Gambler's Blues," Howlin' Wolf's "Howlin' For My Darling," and a half-dozen other classics, concluding with "SRV," Strehli's own tribute to her late friend Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Beyond the dozen songs with a total 40-minute running time, *Ace Of Blues* comes with a 24-page booklet in a triple-fold sleeve, containing dozens of photos and a detailed history of the blues artists Strehli is celebrating. It's the best single-disc blues package I've seen in years and makes me nostalgic for those old days in Austin.

– Bill Wasserzieher



ALBUM REVIEW

TEXAS HORNS

Everybody Let's Roll

Blue Heart Records



Rarely in the last two years have I heard such a radio ready album. The Texas Horns – tenor man/harp player Mark “Kaz” Kazanoff, trumpeter Al Gomez, and baritone saxman John Mills – deliver on all 13 tracks on *Everybody Let's Roll*. Far from jumping on the shoulders of fellow Austinites, prominent people like Jimmie Vaughan and Marcia Ball, their new album is a celebration of central Texas roadhouse blues that touches on many sub-genres along the way.

Kazanoff, Gomez, and Mills do a terrific job blending their stellar solos into some great songs. The opening title track is a

standout, showcasing the always-ready Carolyn Wonderland on vocals and Anson Funderburgh on guitar. Other guests include Vaughan on vocals and guitar on “Too Far Gone” and “J.B.’s Rock,” Ball on “Ready For The Blues Tonight,” and Johnny Moeller, a young guitarist Clifford Antone championed back in the 1990s, on “I Ain’t Mad With You,” “Apocolypso,” and a Beatles cover, “I Want You [She’s So Heavy].” Other guests include Guy Forsyth, Mike Zito, Brannan Temple, and Hammond B-3 master Mike Flanigan.

Every track is well-engineered and production values are good, as prominent vocals are not lost to clear, distinct horn arrangements. *Everybody Let's Roll* brought me back to mid-July in the 1990s when I would go down to Austin for Clifford Antone’s nightclub anniversary parties at the former Antone’s location on Guadalupe, near the U.T. campus, next door to Ruby’s Barbecue.

One night back in those days, I met saxophonist Kaz Kazanoff, near the front entrance to the club, where many of us would hang around to take a break in the somewhat cooler night air. This album brought back great memories of good shows I saw in those days with a very young Gary Clark, Jr., Anson Funderburgh and Sam Myers, Jimmie Vaughan, Sue Foley, drummer-songwriter Doyle Bramhall, Sr., and Miss Lavelle White. Unfortunately, so many of these great people are gone, but at the same time – in spite of skyrocketing housing prices in Austin, forcing so many artists and musicians who made the place great in the first place out of town – it’s good to know Austinites haven’t lost their natural love and affinity for American roadhouse blues.

– Richard J. Skelly

The album cover features a central image of an acoustic guitar resting on a wooden chair against a white brick wall. To the left of the guitar, the text "BOB MARGOLIN and BOB CORRITORE" is written in blue, followed by "SO FAR" in large blue letters, and "with special guest JIMMY VIVINO" in smaller blue text. To the right of the guitar, the same text is repeated in white on a dark blue background. Below the guitar image, the website addresses "BOBMARGOLIN.COM • BOBCORRITORE.COM" are listed. At the bottom right, the VizzTone label group logo is displayed. An inset photograph shows Bob Margolin and Bob Corritore performing together, with Margolin playing guitar and Corritore singing into a microphone.

A photograph of the exterior of the Cat Head blues store. The building has a weathered, yellowish facade. A sign above the entrance reads "CAT HEAD delta blues & folk art, inc." in red and white. A yellow banner above the glass doors says "DOWNHOME CHRISTMAS". A white sign in the foreground also features the "CAT HEAD" logo. A red text box in the upper left corner of the image reads "Celebrating 21 years of music and mayhem at Mississippi's blues store in Clarksdale, y'all!".

Shop at 252 Delta Avenue every day at 11am or online at www.cathead.biz

ALBUM REVIEW

CATFISH KEITH

Still I Long To Roam

Fish Tail Records



There was a reason why the National Guitar company would have Catfish Keith, Doug McLeod, and Mike Dowling share their talents at their booth at many NAMM shows in the past as, in their hands, their Reso-Phonic guitars spun musical magic for the lucky attendees.

Catfish Keith's 21st album takes a few National Baritone guitars through their paces and captivates the listener as it's more than just an instrument and a vocal being presented. The engineering is such that you feel you're *inside* of his guitar and Keith displays a range of sounds that include his

voice, feet, whistling, yodeling, expressive slide work, and a deft use of harmonics with harmonic bends (try *that* one, you guitarists out there). His singular talents have been recognized throughout the years for six BMA and 14 Grammy nominations as well as inclusion in the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame.

Ringed by both his Nationals, a Ralph Brown Stella type 12 string, his Santa Cruz Catfish Special guitar, and his Diamond bottleneck, Keith laid down 13 tracks that summon up those who went before him. "Stomp That Thing" by Frank Stokes, Rosetta Tharpe's "He'll Understand And Say Well Done," Tommy Johnson's "Cool Drink Of Water," that contains the classic line, "Asked for water, brang me gasoline," and the Mississippi Sheiks' salacious "Bed Spring Poker," warning "Bed Spring Poker is the ruination of many men."

The opening cut, "I'm A Wanderer, Fare Thee Well," is a captivating original that plumbs the depth of sound with his Baritone National Reso-Phonic. His vocals are pleasing, precise, and especially poignant as is his phrasing and yodeling on Jimmie Rodger's "Daddy And Home," a song for his own Dad who passed a week before this version was recorded. His soulful yodeling on this waltz is pure perfection and you can feel both his love and sorrow for the memory of his own father.

Keith's rendition of Mississippi John Hurt's "Louis Collins" is the cut that demanded the most replays as its melody and lyrics are the reason why this tune has been recorded by so many who also want to share it's timeless appeal with others. Dancing around the fret board with his enviable harmonic notes, Catfish Keith singing both normally and in falsetto on Skip James' "Cherry Red." If you enjoy finger picking and the sound of Reso-Phonic guitars, you're sure to both enjoy and love this CD.

— Pete Sardon

The advertisement features the NOLA Blue Records logo in the top left. The main text reads "NOLA BLUE RECORDS PROUDLY PRESENTS". To the right, a photo of Lil' Jimmy Reed playing guitar is shown with the text "LIL' JIMMY REED WITH BEN LEVIN" and "BACK TO BATON ROUGE". A "COMING MAY 19" banner is in the top right. A photo of Ben Levin and Lil' Jimmy Reed is on the left. Text in the center says "It's musical magic when two-time Blues Music Award nominee Ben Levin (age 23) debuts in the producer chair for this capstone album from 84-year-old Louisiana bluesman Lil' Jimmy Reed." Below this, it says "ALSO AVAILABLE ON NOLA BLUE AND BLUE HEART RECORDS" with a row of album covers. At the bottom, there are social media links for NOLA Blue Records and Blue Heart Records, and a BlinDraccoon logo for publicity and promotion.

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The advertisement features a photo of two men performing on stage. The man on the left is wearing a white suit and a hat, and the man on the right is wearing a brown suit. The text "the Cash Box Kings" is written in a large, stylized font with a crown over the 'K'. Above the photo, it says "“FEARLESS, FULL-TILT CHICAGO BLUES...FERVENT VOCALS AND SOARING HARMONICA” -CHICAGO TRIBUNE". In the bottom left, there is a logo for "OSCAR'S MOTEL" with a "NO VACANCY" sign. At the bottom, it says "OSCAR'S MOTEL Available at alligator.com and other fine retailers GENUINE HOUSEROCKIN' MUSIC SINCE 1971" with a small logo of a house with a crown.

“FEARLESS, FULL-TILT CHICAGO BLUES...FERVENT VOCALS AND SOARING HARMONICA” -CHICAGO TRIBUNE

the Cash Box Kings

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GENUINE HOUSEROCKIN' MUSIC SINCE 1971

ALBUM REVIEW

ANNIKA CHAMBERS & PAUL DESLAURIERS

Good Trouble

VizzTone Label Group



Newly waxed by newlyweds Paul and Annika, *Good Trouble* will be justifiably called “Great!” It will be called “Uplifting!” It will be called “Powerful!” I’d rather just call it “Mom.”

No album will ever love you more. Forty-five seconds into “You Got To Believe,” the most adoring, hopeful lullaby Mama or Papa ever crooned at your crib-side. Energizing and empowering, it opens a soul-gripping set that never lets up on the passion, the fun or – thanks to Deslauriers and longtime co-picker JP Soars – some of

the most mesmerizing string work since God played cat’s cradle with the Devil.

Defying all odds, without taking a breath, *Good Trouble* rolls into a second national group hug alternative to “The Star Spangled Banner.” “Stand Up” is a road-burning, glory-bound dream machine gunning her engine at the lip of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, announcing to John Lewis’ whimsical battle cry “Your ride is here.”

Like any self-respecting matrimorphosized song set, *Good Trouble* would be expected to throw in a prayer. Rising to the task, the Category 5 pipes powering Chambers’ catalytic conversion of the Quiet Beatle’s “Isn’t It A Pity?” deliver an unexpectedly funkified dose of “We can do better!” that you *know* would’ve had George smiling “My Sweet Lord!”

Then, Paul and Annika do it again with a gospel home run admittedly born on third base. “I Got To Live The Life I Sing About It In My Song,” already broken in like your big sister’s first baseman’s mitt by Mahalia Jackson, fits them like a glove, riding the DesLauriers’ Further *and Funkier* Bus from the Amen Corner to a shadowy street corner an hour after closing time.

From the fist-pumping dance at the head of the parade that is “We Got The Blues” to the *bama lama bama lu* tapped-out toe-tapper “Money’s Funny;” from Paul’s Leslie West-inspired “Mississippi Queen” link next to “homage” in his French/English dictionary to their closing Selma-to-Montgomery-worthy hell-to-heaven haul “I Need More Power,” *Good Trouble* does Congressman Lewis – and our music – proud with an album of blues that will love you like only a mother could.

– Terry Abrahamson

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ALBUM REVIEW

VANESSA COLLIER
Live At Power Station
Phenix Fire Records



Yoga teaches the union of body, mind, and soul through chakras concentrated in different areas of the body. Blues tends to emphasize the lower, more guttural chakra. In three of Vanessa Collier's previous albums, *Heart Soul And Saxophone* (2014), *Meeting My Shadow* (2017) and *Honey Up* (2018), she has demonstrated her mastery of the more cerebral chakras.

A 2013 graduate of Berklee College of Music with dual degrees in Performance and Music Production and Engineering, she has the academic credentials to create original contemporary music from a young woman's point of view. She isn't singing about sleeping under hollow logs.

Her primary instrument is the saxophone, but she plays both sax and resonator guitar, and in eight years has wracked up an impressive set of awards including two Blues Music Awards for Horn Player of the Year. Her buttoned-down approach on original material has earned her chart success that in the blues world is analogous to that of Taylor Swift in the much bigger commercial pop arena. Swift removed herself from being under the thumb of a contract that prevented her from owning her own recordings. So, she simply re-recorded her early hits and re-released them. Collier, on the other hand, finds her creative freedom in this live recording of ten songs from the three albums mentioned above.

On a go funding webpage soliciting money to record *Live At Power Station* she wrote, "This record allows me to get out from under a previous record contract that just was not the best thing for me and to re-record songs that are no longer restricted the way I want to. So, it's freeing to make this record!" Kinda like Taylor Swift's leap to freedom.

In 2019, Collier told me, "I think the saxophone in particular is very close to the human voice. It's just as expressive to me." Add to that the phenomenal lead guitar work of Laura Chavez and a backing band that's only been together since August of 2021 but feels like a forever groove, and you have the makings of a powerful live performance.

But that doesn't begin to tell the story. On stage, this demure, shy young woman cuts loose as if the spirit of Howlin' Wolf has taken over her soul. She's a banshee with the energy of a race horse. If you haven't heard her live, you haven't experienced her at 100 proof.

From *Heart Soul And Saxophone*, she reworks "The Run Around," "I Can't Stand The Rain," and "Tongue Tied." From *Meeting My Shadow*: "Whiskey And Women," "When It Don't Come Easy," and "Two Parts Sugar One Part Lime." From *Honey Up*: "Sweatin' Like A Pig, Singin' Like An Angel," "Love Me Like A Man," and "Icarus."

Collier has been quoted as saying, "We tend to find things that I wish had been there on the original recording." That's an understatement.

— Don Wilcock

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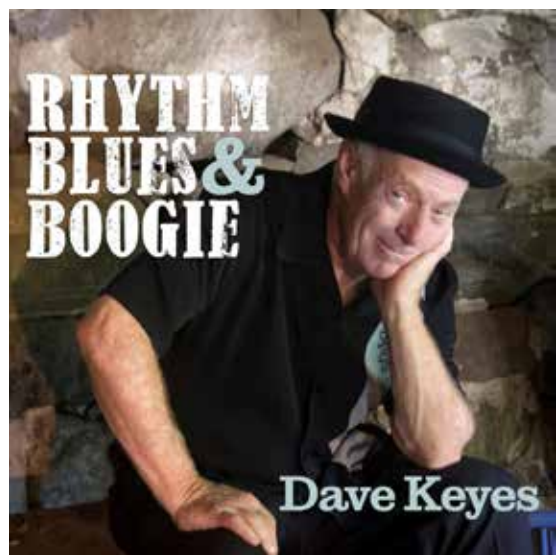
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ALBUM REVIEW

DAVE KEYES

Rhythm Blues & Boogie

Blue Heart Records



With 30 years of musical experience and five albums recorded for blues fans, Dave Keyes' *Rhythm Blues & Boogie* offers up yet another opportunity to enjoy this three-time BMA nominee's talent. His vocals are authentic and the ten selections appear to be organized thematically, starting out with a rousing "Shake Shake Shake" acknowledging, "Everybody loves the sunshine but nothing grows without the rain." The inexorable passage of time appears to prevail throughout the selections with a poignant vocal and piano solo of Willie Nelson's, "Funny How Time Slips Away." This leads into songs entitled "Ain't Doing That No More," "Ain't Going Down," and "Not Fighting

Any more." Keyes' then offers a clever tale called "Invisible Man," lamenting his current age situation thusly, "When it comes to pretty girls, you might as well be, might as well be the 'Invisible Man.'" Not to be all gloom and doom, Keyes cleverly has Doug McLeod's acoustic guitar and singular voice assessing his situation with some down home advice, which you'll have to hear for yourself!

There are ten other musicians who contribute to this CD, including fellow New Yorker Popa Chubby. (Check out Keyes' website and catch he and Popa Chubby offer up a rousing version of Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight.") Guest guitarist, Early Times, tears up the solo on "Blues And Boogie" as a complement to Keyes' piano work enhanced by a competent horn section.

Keyes also pays homage to Newark Jazz Station WBGO with his "WBGO Boogie." This piano solo is quite catchy and sounds like his left and right hands are disembodied as they are going in different directions, yet adhere to the same tune. This tune should definitely be considered for lyrics as well in the future. Being influenced by the likes of Dr. John and Professor Longhair, Keyes carries on their sound with aplomb. John Putnam handles the guitar work on half of the cuts and his playing is quite enviable. Jeff Anderson's bass is nicely centered in the mix on five of the contributions with the late David J. Keyes' (no relation) bass used on the track "Not Fighting Any more" which was recorded at Popa Chubby's studio.

Dave Keyes' final selection, "7 O'Clock Somewhere," is listed as a special bonus track and pays homage to our pandemic/front line heroes. Despite some of the inevitable passage of time for many, this is a very rousing selection of songs, The opening cut does set the tone as you'll notice yourself swaying to the music in the opening minute. Consider making Dave Keyes' *Rhythm & Blues Boogie* one of your next CD purchases.

— Pete Sardon

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— Kim Field, author, *The Blues Dream of Billy Boy Arnold*

...a jaunty batch of songs that pit the swing of the Dorsey Brothers with the playful pizzazz of Louis Jordan.

— Michael Kinsman, *Blues Music Magazine*

George consistently brings traditional blues and infuses it with something entirely new that is a welcome treat...

— David Mac, *BLUES JUNCTION Productions*

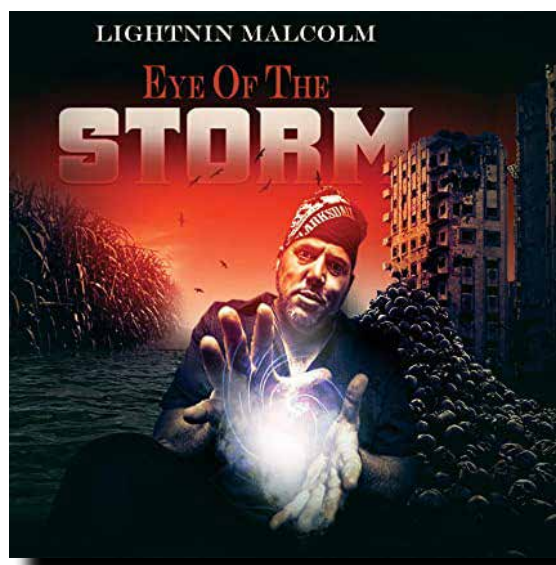
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ALBUM REVIEW

LIGHTNIN' MALCOLM
Eye Of The Storm
 Whiskey Bayou Records



Singer/songwriter/guitarist Lightnin' Malcolm is one of the leading purveyors of North Mississippi Hill Country blues that was brought to prominence by artists like R.L. Burnside, Junior Kimbrough, T Model Ford, and the North Mississippi Allstars. These trance inducing raw blues are known for their repetitive hypnotic grooves of which they are plenty on Malcolm's Whiskey Bayou Records debut.

Malcolm is accompanied by bassist Tony Hall (Dumpstafunk) and drummer Brady Blade. Producer and label owner Tab Benoit provides drums on three tracks including the title track. Most of the 11 originals are characterized by lurching rhythms, crashing chords, infectious

hooks, piercing single notes, and deep moaning vocals. The players must be sharing a musical telepathy of some kind on these open structure tunes. Once they lock into the groove they are adroitly unwavering in their delivery.

The gut-wrenching first track "Lord Above" opens with fulminating drums, droning chords, and skin-peeling string bending and sets the tone for the powerful music that follows. It is one of several tracks with spiritual concerns as Malcolm implores the listener to "hold on and lean on the Lord above." "Provide" expresses a belief in the providence of the universe. The title track is a shimmering ballad that views love as "a lighthouse in the distance" and "a spiritual flame." A downcast Malcolm seeks release from the devil's grip on "Latest Devil" and release from existential loneliness on "Crawlin' Baby." "Louisiana Breeze" is a paean to the music and culture of the Pelican State." The lone instrumental "Jungle" conjured up the image of an intrepid explorer thrashing through a vine covered wilderness with a dull edged machete.

Favorite tracks are "Too Many Nights," hip swaying funk about road weariness and "Let's Get Together," a jangling neck-snapper with three spoken interludes advising potential one night hook-ups about showing mutual respect. The album's longest tune sounds like a perfect closer of a long live set. In addition to Malcolm's obvious Hill Country influences, his music often made me think of Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, and Jimi Hendrix. *Eye Of The Storm* is the perfect choice for fans looking to be entranced by some of the rawest and roughest electric blues they are likely to hear.

– Thomas J. Cullen III

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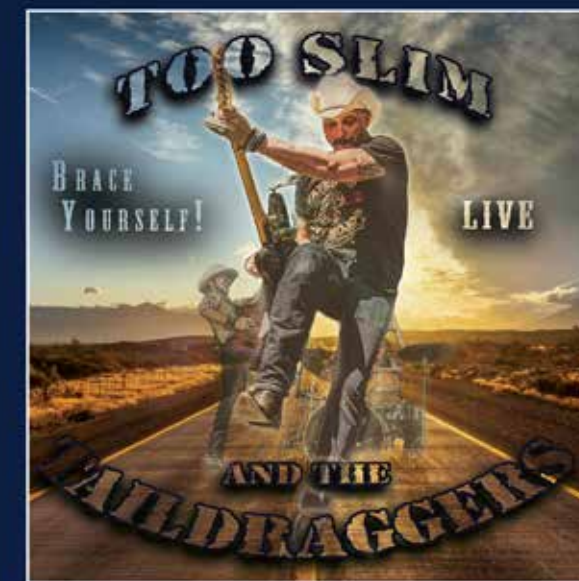
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ALBUM REVIEW

GA-20

Crackdown

Karma Chief Records



This third full length album from GA-20 is raw and retro, with the trio effortlessly blending different musical DNAs to the point that – for the most part – it’s difficult to discern what’s what, even though it all sounds vaguely and pleasantly familiar. Though not such an easy trick to pull off, it is an extremely easy one to enjoy.

The ten tracks here – featuring nine originals co-written by singer/guitarist Pat Faherty and guitarist Matthew Stubbs, and another one written with drummer Tim Carman – are all short (most come in under three minutes), punchy, and catchy, with a constant groove and a few well-structured guitar solos to move

them along.

At the center of all of this is Faherty, whose earnest and urgent singing brings a lot of that aforementioned rawness into the mix. While his vocals aren’t screaming or out of control, there is an underlying primal element to them that brings its own edge to the music... a conclusion easier to draw because – with his wild hair and beard – he kind of looks like he just came down from the hills to stock up on provisions and ammo for the winter.

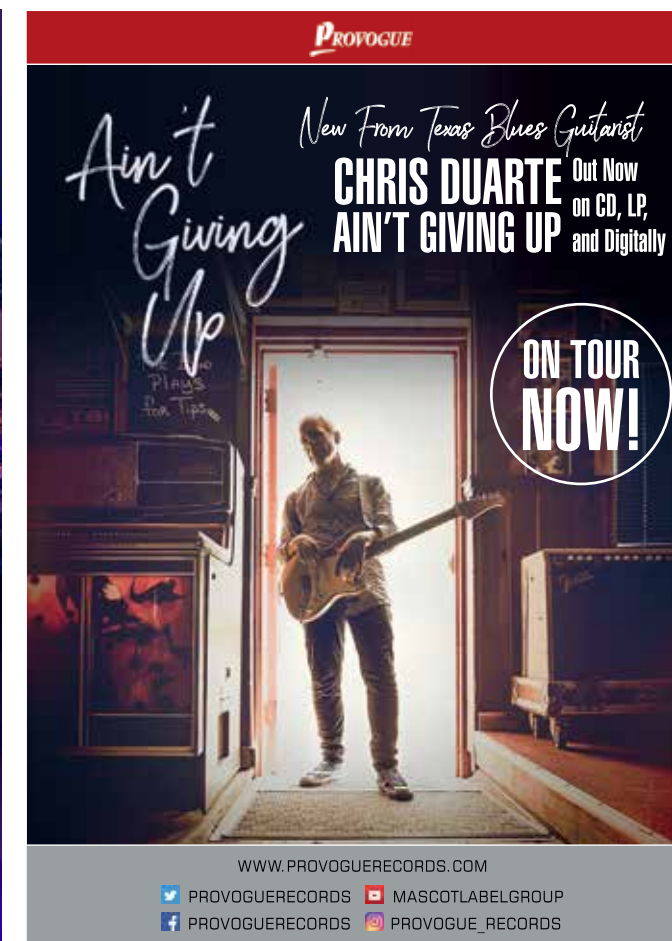
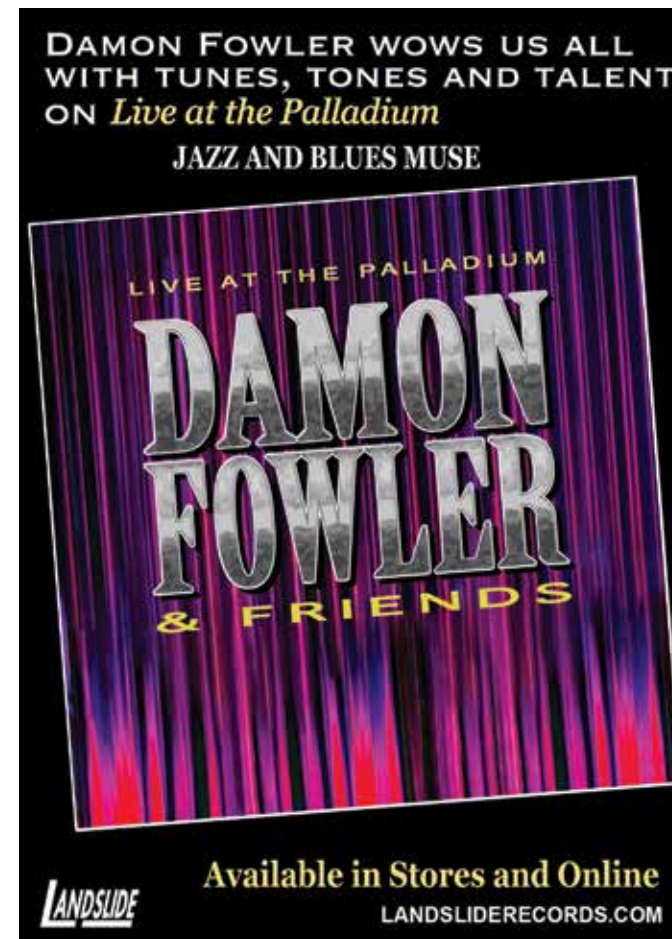
Much of the retro is brought by Stubbs, who handles the main guitar duties. The longtime veteran of Charlie Musselwhite’s band plays like it: tasteful, with a bag full of eclectic riffs and the sense to pull the right one out and bring it in (or not) at just the right time.

Stubbs also produced *Crackdown* and further put the retro stamp on it by bringing a bunch of old amps and guitars into the studio, mixing and matching their sounds, and –having found the right ones – recording the tracks using vintage techniques.

From the opening and closing versions of “Fairweather Friend” to the harder blues of “Easy On The Eyes” and “I Let Someone In” to the percussively propulsive “Double Gettin’,” those old styles and sounds are right there in front of the listeners’ ears, while demonstrating the admirable restraint to not hit us over our collective heads with them. Even on the two tracks whose music is easily recognized – “Dry Run” (“Walking To New Orleans”) and “Gone For Good” (“It Hurts Me Too”) – it doesn’t matter: it’s all GA-20.

The cover of *Crackdown* is graced with an incongruous pink seal of approval that reads “ALWAYS FRESH.” For this band and album, that’s an entirely appropriate description.

– Matthew MacDonald

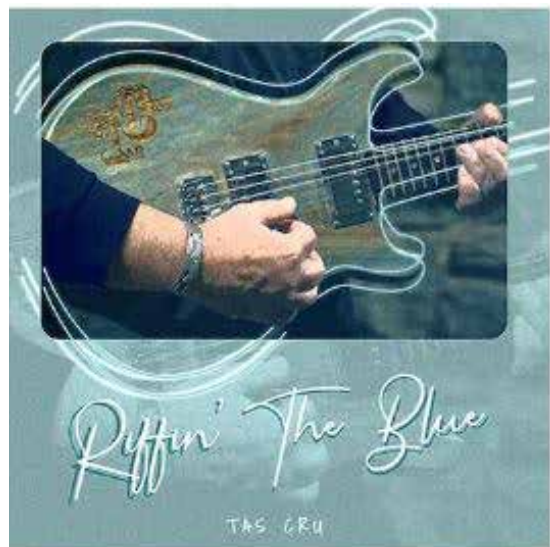


ALBUM REVIEW

TAS CRU

Riffin' The Blues

Subcat



Tas Cru keeps making up for lost time, and that's a good thing for the blues. The New York-based singer, guitarist, and songwriter – whose resume includes a stint in the Navy and a Ph.D. in education – has kept a busy schedule since devoting his career full time to the blues, with a new CD release every year or two.

On his 11th album, *Riffin The Blues*, the guy who once answered to the name Richard Bates, delivers another collection of original music that expands his repertoire

and showcases his versatility as a songwriter, guitarist and singer. The album kicks off in a lighthearted fashion with the title track, a blues shuffle that serves as a call to arms, referencing his love for rock 'n' roll, soul, gospel, and "six-string fever." Cru hammers the riff but leaves the lead work to guitarist Mike Zito. Zito also contributes slide guitar on the album's closer, the somber "Memphis Gone," a song 180 degrees in the other emotional direction.

In between those bookends, Cru keeps the mojo flowing. "Brown Liquor Woman," kicked off by drummer Andy Hearn, is driven by rollicking piano by Bruce Katz, who plays on ten of the album's 11 tracks. "Stand up!," a gospel-infused anthem, features a memorable guitar riff from Cru and rich vocal support from singer Mary Ann Casale. She also co-wrote with Cru "Miss This Man," another upbeat track. A bluesy piano intro from Katz opens "One More Time," a quiet ballad that features some of Cru's most melodic guitar work on the album and is the disc's longest track, clocking in at over seven minutes. The sparse, uncluttered arrangement puts the spotlight on his soloing.

Cru and the band gets funky on "Crazy Getting In My Way," which features some inspired sparring between Cru on guitar and Katz on organ. "Heal My Misery" rides a similar vibe. "House Of The Blues" is another slow burner and showcase for Cru's guitar soloing, laced with Katz's organ. "Let it Happen," an antidote to anxiety, offers a great example of Cru's playful lyrics, courtesy of a doctor's advice: "You eat too much bacon and not enough beans, but that ain't why you're suffering. You worry too much. Why don't you let things be." Thanks, Dr. Cru.

– Michael Cote

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GA-20



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