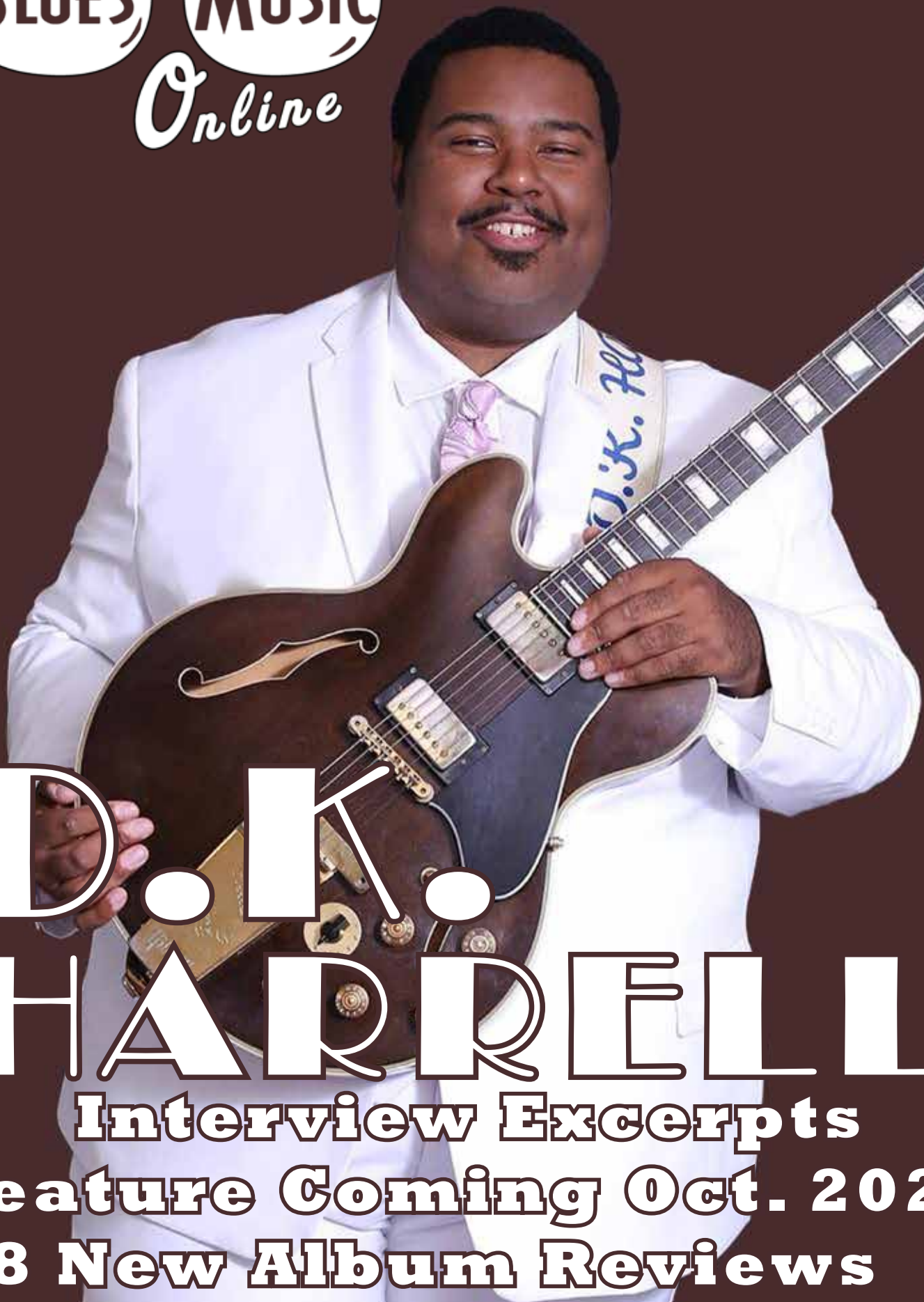


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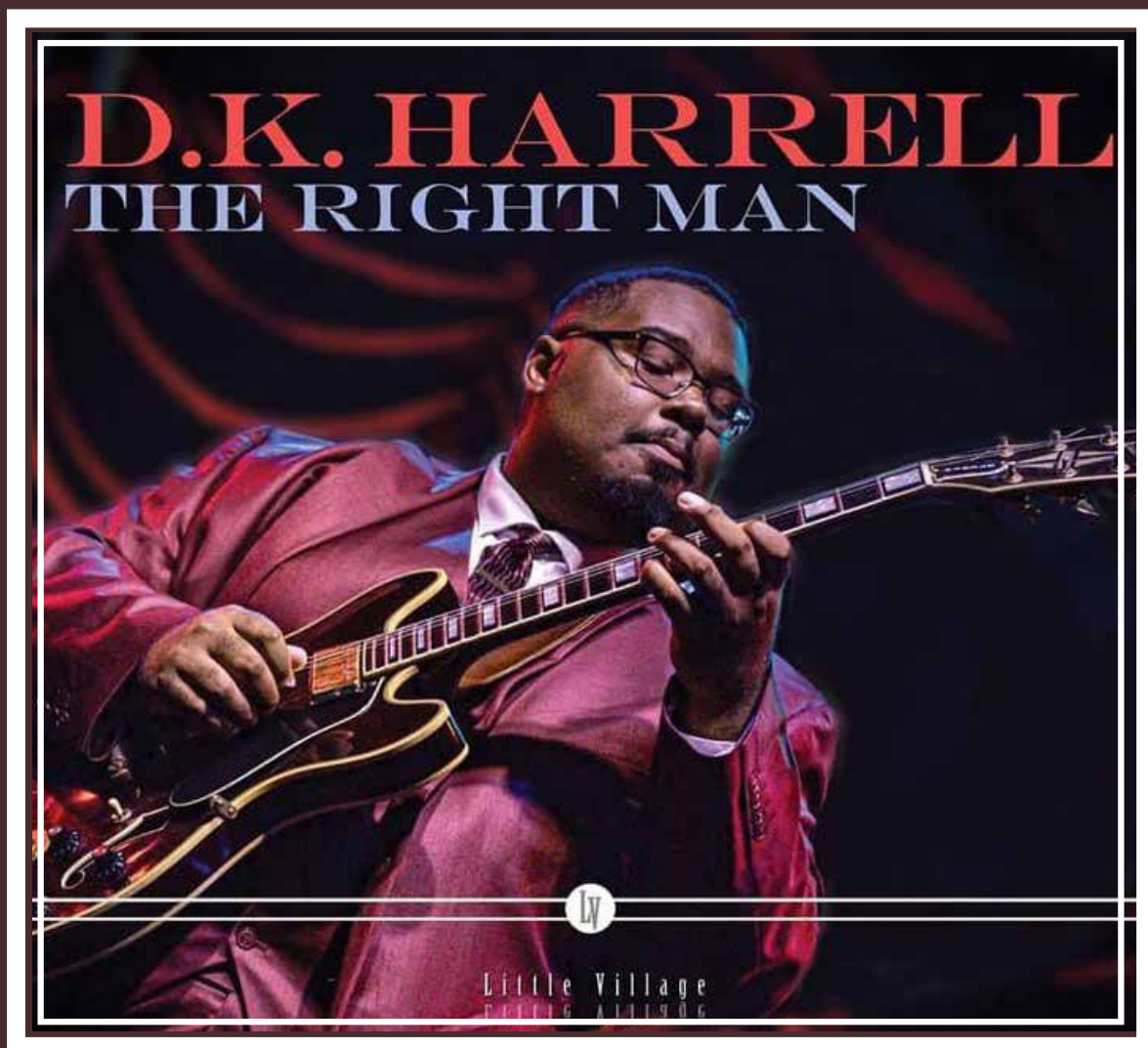
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D. K. Harrell

Interview Preview

PHOTOGRAPHY © Marilyn Gipson

By Art Tipaldi

At 25 years old, D.K. Harrell is the newest talent in a line of exciting young blues musicians. In the fall 2023 issue, we are planning an extended feature on him. Here are some excerpts from my lengthy talk with him in June. Look at these quotes as an appetizer that will encourage you to search out his debut CD, *The Right Man*, at BluesMusicStore.com, and also subscribe to the fall issue of *Blues Music Magazine*.

On his first paying gig:

“My first paying gig was the 2019 B.B. King Symposium. I credit Robert Terrell and the B.B. King Museum for my first paying gig. I had just moved to Bossier City LA, across the bridge from Shreveport. I was going through the materials I had from when I visited the museum in 2014, when B.B. was put on hospice care. I met Robert Terrell, the museum’s director. I sent him a video of my playing, and he wrote back saying, ‘Man, you got potential. You’ve got that vibrato down.’ But I was outta tune and stuff at the time.

I found Robert’s card in 2019 and said, ‘I’m gonna send him a video of me playing now and see what he thinks.’ He called me and asked if I’m free the first Thursday in September to come to the B.B. King Symposium.

“Because I didn’t have a car, my Aunt and my Mom bought me a Greyhound bus ticket, put me on the bus and I rode all the way to Indianola, MS. Robert had them pick me up at the bus stop. When I meet Robert again, he bragged about me to everybody, I meet

Walter Riley King, B.B.’s nephew, I met Willie Mae Bland, Bobby’s widow, then I met Tony Coleman, B.B.’s longtime drummer, and Lil’ Ray Neal.

“I’m sittin’ at the Symposium, and I’ve got my guitar and Lil’ Ray says, ‘You might as well put that up, today’s your day.’ Robert pulled out a guitar case with a Gibson Lucille, the Lucille they made for B.B. when the museum opened.

“He tuned it and handed it to me and said, ‘You gonna be playing Lucille.’ I got up there and did ‘The Thrill Is Gone’ and ‘Sweet Sixteen.’ I got back to the hotel and opened the folder they gave me and in it was a check for \$200.

“I called Robert and told him that I thought the check was for somebody else and he started to laugh and said, ‘That check is your check. We pay all the artists when they come out here.’ I text my Mom and told her that I just got paid \$200 for coming out here.”

On his relationship with Indianola’s Club Ebony and its importance:

“You haven’t been to a real authentic blues club until you step inside Club Ebony and see all those wonderful pictures of the artists who are gone who once played here. In the 1940s and ‘50s, you had B.B., Ike Turner, Little Richard, Albert King, Freddie King, Sam Cooke, James Brown, you name the artist and they came through Club Ebony. Even Count Basie played there. The significance of Club Ebony is that it’s in B.B.’s hometown and only a couple of blocks from the Museum. It’s sad that it’s not only one of the oldest

juke joints, in Mississippi, with such a rich history, but it really needs a lot more recognition than what people give it.

In June of 2023, Indianola hosted the re-opening of Club Ebony. D.K. wasn't supposed to be there, but a phone call changed all of that.

"Susan Tedeschi messaged me a week before and asked me if I was gonna be there for the reopening. I told her that I wasn't invited, and out of respect I don't like to go somewhere when I'm not invited to the event. She told me that she and Derek wanted me to be there to play a song or two together. I asked Robert if he was good with me coming and he said that was fine. I showed up and after we played, she and Derek offered any assistance they could to help me in the future."

On two songs from the CD:

"The song 'Get These Blues Outta Me' was a song I'd written when I was 16 years old. I told Kid Andersen that I wanted it to be a modern blues. I told him that I hear violins on it. I pulled up Sting's song, "It's Probably Me," and I said that I want these changes at the 1:50 mark and happening throughout the song.

"Kid sat there for ten minutes, went to the Wurlitzer and has me sing the song. When I got to the part where he did those changes, I actually stopped singing and started smiling because he hit the good spot and got me excited. We worked on that song the next day, and Jerry Jemmott's bass on it is amazing.

"I performed the song live for the first time at the Baton Rouge Blues Festival. One of the local musicians, Sundance, was in the crowd, and he was in awe with the song. He said to me, 'Where in the hell did you find a song like that.' I told him that I wrote it. Then he said, 'You wrote that song! How did you get a song like that!' I told him I wrote it at 16, and I just recorded what I heard in my head.

"The Right Man' also came from my very first book of songs. B.B. King has a song called 'Treat Me Right' and that was the inspiration for my song. B.B. does this thing when he has his solo where he kinda pauses a split second, and then he goes into this solo.

So when I did my solo on 'The Right Man,' there's a slight pause in my playing so I did the same lick that he did when he started his solo. I got chills in the studio when I heard the rough mix. Adding the horns was just the icing on the cake. That was also exactly how I wanted that to go." - **BMO**

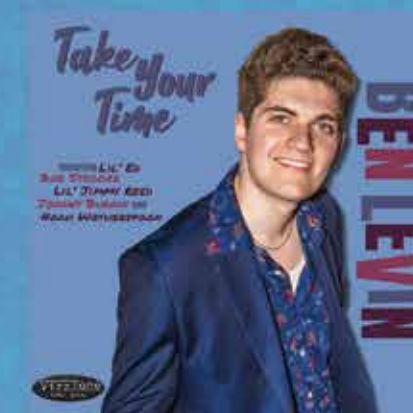
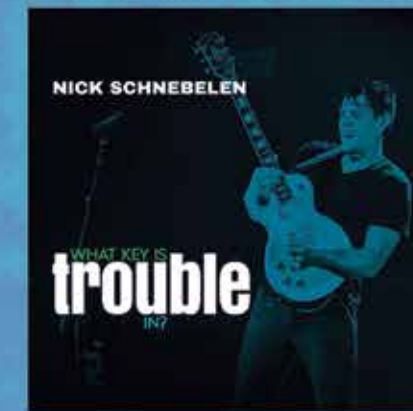
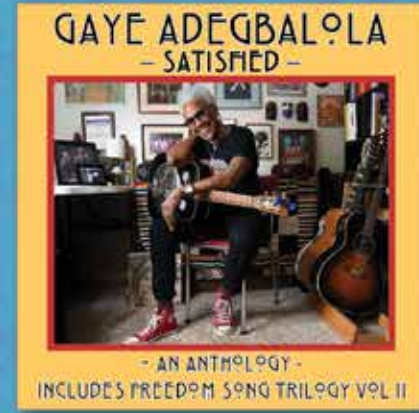


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ALBUM REVIEW

D.K. HARRELL
The Right Man
 Little Village



Though the title of D.K. Harrell's debut CD is ostensibly about a love's choice of one over the other, it more likely suggests that Harrell is **The Right Man** for the blues of 2023. Harrell stands tall as another young African-American male who has eschewed the popular culture's fascination with Hip-Hop in lieu of the blues. And like those who proceed him – Christone “Kingfish” Ingram, Jontavious Willis, Dylan Triplett, Steven Hull, Mathias Lattin, Shawn McDonald, and others – Harrell rises from the Southern dirt that long ago fertilized the genre's birth. Like the aforementioned talents, his 25 years are filled with an intensive study of the elders essential in the genre's growth.

For more on Harrell's story, read the short excerpts from my interviews with him in this issue and also the

longer, complete profile that will run in the fall issue of *Blues Music Magazine*.

The mark of Harrell's importance is in the record label and musicians that are in this DEBUT recording. The album began with his meeting with Little Village founder Jim Pugh on the January 2023 Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise. From there, Pugh added the Little Village core recording studio, Greaseland, and its producing wizard, Kid Andersen. When Harrell was asked whom he preferred to man the rhythm section, Harrell answered, “Tony Coleman (drums) and Jerry Jemmott (bass).” For context, Coleman was B.B. King's drummer for 30 years and Jemmott was the bassist when King recorded “The Thrill Is Gone” in 1968.

That's the historical depth Harrell wanted, and that's exactly where the album begins. The opening track is 100% B.B. circa 1950s. “The Right Man” features the mature musical conversation between Harrell's stinging B.B. vibrato answered by Pugh's massive B-3 and the prodigious brass section. Because B.B. is such a huge influence on Harrell, there are other songs that honor his musical legacy. “Honey Ain't So Sweet,” “You'd Be Amazed,” “One For The Road,” where he introduces the all-star studio musicians, “Hello Trouble,” which is a nod to John Lewis' inspiring call to “good trouble,” and the orchestral string-heavy “Get These Blues Outta Me,” which recalls the strings from B.B.'s “The Thrill Is Gone” breakthrough and comes with a Bobby “Blue” Bland vocal delivery.

But Harrell's 11 originals show that he's no one trick, blues pony. “You're A Queen” shows off the soul stylings of Little Johnny Taylor, “Leave It At The Door” comes from the Albert King, Stax era, “While I'm Young” puts Harrell's delicate and expressive tenor center stage, “Not Here For A Long Time” comes in two parts. Part 1 is funk-a-licious while Part 2 continues the funk with a Greaseland soul stew attitude (Fittingly, Jemmott was the bassist on King Curtis' seminal “Memphis Soul Stew.”).

There are few albums released as blues that live up to that heavy promise. With his traditional musical approach wrapped around his contemporary lyrical images, D.K. Harrell has thrown himself onto the blues stage as one to closely watch. To me, this is the 2024 Debut Album of the Year.

– Art Tipaldi

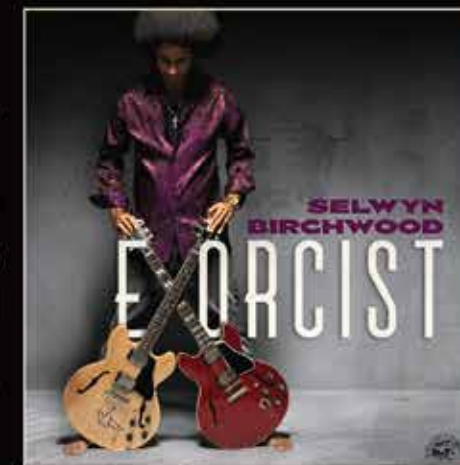
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**Album Review Originally
Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine*
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NICK MOSS BAND FEATURING DENNIS GRUENLING

Get Your Back Into It!

Alligator



For their third Alligator album, Chicago's Nick Moss Band gets more than their backs into the 14 originals (12 by Moss, two by Gruenling) inspired by the blues and R&B of the forties, fifties, and sixties. Guitarist/vocalist/co-producer Moss and harmonica master Gruenling are superbly accompanied by bassist/co-producer Rodrigo Montovani, drummer Pierce Downer, and pianist Taylor Streiff. (Guests include Sax Gordon on a number of tracks and organist Brother John Kattke on one track).

Five tracks evoke classic Muddy Waters with slithery slide, declamatory vocals, Little Walter-styled harp, and deep rumbling Otis Spann-like piano. They include the mid-tempo title track of amatory encouragement that made me think of Shakespeare's line in Othello "making the beast with two backs," the mournful slow blues "Living In Heartache," reminiscent of Muddy's "Standing Around Crying," the stop-time shuffle "It Shocked Me Out," a tribute to Montovani, the foremost acoustic bassist on the current scene, the mid-tempo warning "Lonely Fool," and sage counsel with the churning "Losing Ground," redolent of Muddy's "Bird's Nest On The Ground."

Gruenling deftly wails like Sonny Boy II on the swampy "Aurelie," a sad tale of would be romance with a French woman hindered by the language barrier. They demonstrate their mastery of brawny high energy jump blues with the cautionary "The Bait Is In The Snare" featuring rapid fire guitar licks and rafter raising harp blasts. And "Man On The Move," with Gruenling's no nonsense vocals and boisterous chromatic on his original about the life of a touring musician. Gruenling's other original is the intuitive "Your Bark Is Worse Than Your Bite," grinding Hookerish boogie with soaring and swooping harp. The soul-blues shuffle bump "The Solution" about a romantic dilemma is dedicated to Jimmy Johnson with a stinging solo by Moss in the manner of his late friend.

Three varied instrumentals are in the mix: the swinging organ-infused "Out Of The Woods" featuring Kattke's surging organ and Gruenling riding the low end of the chromatic to complement Sax Gordon's bop licks, the Tex-Mex rumba rocker "Bone's Cantina" that playfully references "La Cucaracha," and the reverb-laden, frayed wire string bender "Scratch-n-Sniff" inspired by Link Wray instrumentals like "The Rumble," "Switchblade," and "Jack The Ripper" with ample space for Gordon to bleat and blast in the manner of R&B honkers Red Prysock and Big Jay McNeely.

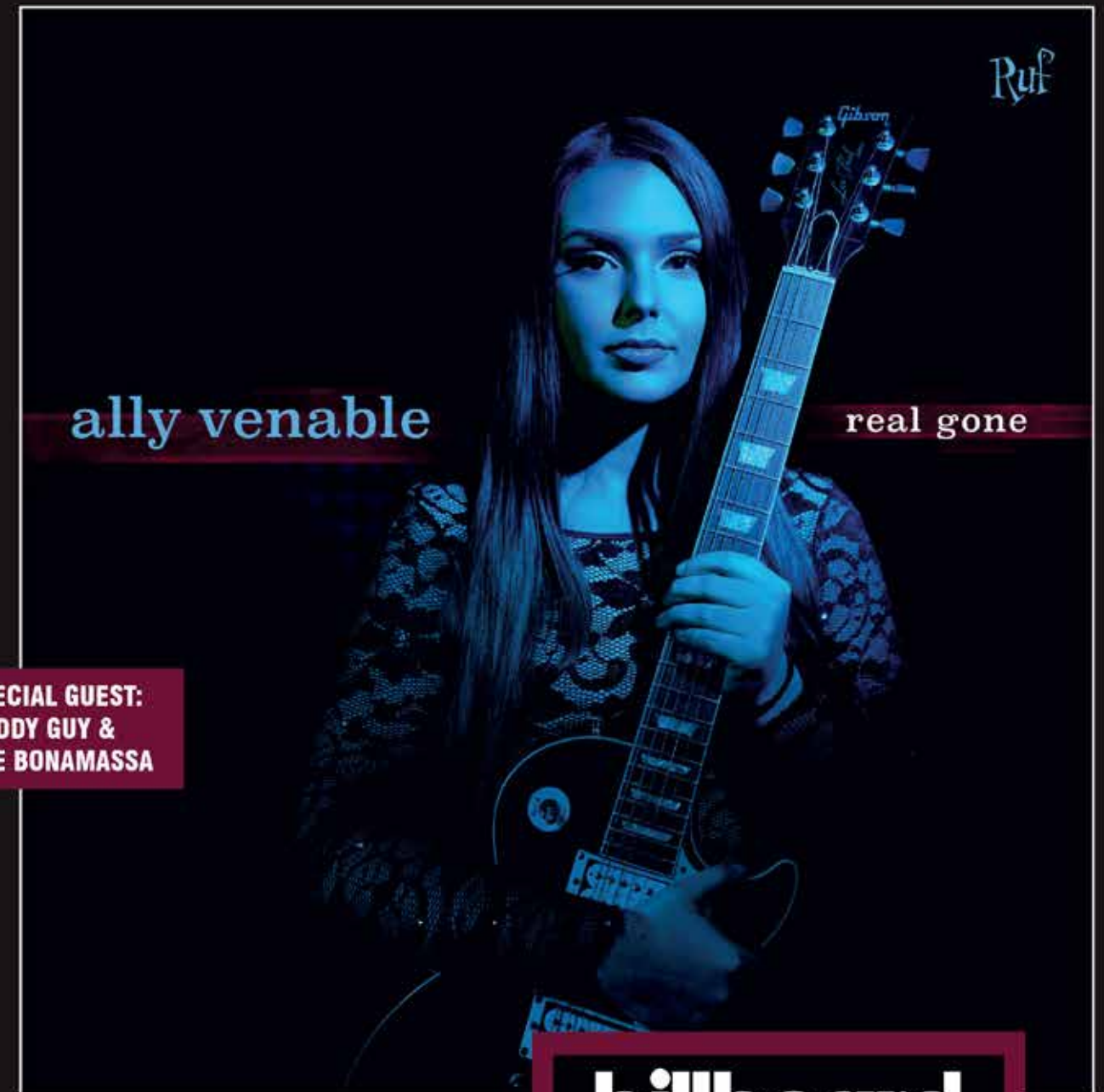
This album is an exemplar of ensemble playing at its finest and a certain contender for Album of the Year.

— Thomas J. Cullen III

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**Album Review Originally
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VAN MORRISON
Moving On Skiffle
Exile/Virgin



After two disappointing releases in recent years (one of them a double) where Van Morrison spent most of his time railing about government overreach pertaining to COVID lockdowns and vaccinations with tunes sporting absurd titles like “Why Are You On Facebook?” and “Sometimes It’s Just Blah Blah Blah,” he has finally decided it’s time to be “moving on,” as this album’s name implies.

Morrison has long taken on the grouchy old man of blues/jazz/soul guise, albeit one whose steady stream of surprisingly strong albums seemed to be in competition with Neil Young and Willie Nelson to see which old dude could release the most material in the shortest time.

Here he returns to the sounds that first inspired him as a youngster in Belfast. Over the course of 23 tracks, clocking in at 90+ minutes, Morrison lends his still youthful vocals to often imaginatively rearranged, and occasionally lyrically rewritten, classics and traditionals.

Skiffle music, a combination of folk, country, jazz, and pop, smothered with a dose of jittery rhythm and propelled by an ever present scraped washboard (similar to Zydeco), never found much of an audience in the States. But in the UK and Ireland, it consistently hit the charts and was, for a while in the late ‘50s through ‘60s, a popular pre-British invasion genre.

Those following Van Morrison’s voluminous output might remember he already paid tribute to the style on 2000’s live *The Skiffle Sessions*. And as recently as the title track of *Three Chords And The Truth*, he sang “Donegan was king,” a reference to Lonnie Donegan whose “Rock Island Line” is arguably the genre’s most popular piece. But here he jumps in with both feet, reimagining country classics such as Hank Williams’ “Cold Cold Heart” and “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” with a modified skiffle beat.

Thankfully Morrison keeps the approach fresh with creative arrangements that shift from routine to slightly more contemporary, altering the disc’s mood and keeping it from becoming repetitious. Kicking off with a sprightly version of Elizabeth Cotten’s “Freight Train” that’s so invigorated it seems to be sung by a man half Van’s 77 years, the singer chugs through these songs with astonishing vigor.

At this stage, Morrison could be excused for phoning in at least some of this. But that’s not the case as he charges through selections from decades ago as if he just heard ‘em, sometimes adding sax and harmonica and generally bouncing around the lyrics with astonishing optimism, sincerity and an innocent, almost childlike energy far removed from his cantankerous persona.

We’ll even forgive him changing the title and words of “Mama Don’t Allow” to “Gov Don’t Allow” and inserting some anti-freedom rhetoric because he’s having so much fun doing it. Even musty warhorses like “Cotton Fields” and “Greenback Dollar” take on a jumpy, caffeinated vitality when Van and his tight backing combo tear into them.

A nine-minute take on the ancient standard “Green Rocky Road” lets the singer stretch out like he used to on songs like “Hymns To The Silence” and “Listen To The Lion.” The hypnotic groove floats between sumptuous backing vocals and a glistening fiddle that soars like an eagle in a cloudless sky. It’s arguably one of Van’s finest recent recorded performances and closes this quite remarkable set on a pensive yet thrilling note.

– Hal Horowitz



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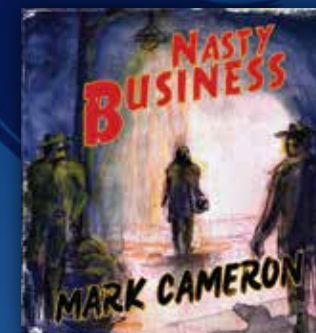
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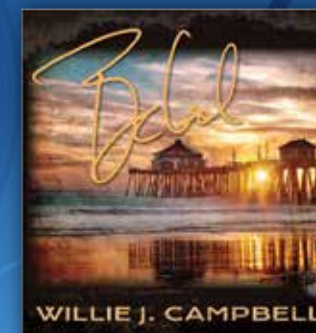
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**Album Review Originally
Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine*
Summer 2023 Print Edition
Released July 2023**

JOHN NÉMETH

John Németh and the Blue Dreamers: Live From The Fallout Shelter Celebrating 20 Years

Memphis Grease/Nola Blue



When John Németh recorded his last album, 2022's *Maybe The Last Time*, he wasn't sure if it would be his last ever. Faced with the removal of his lower jaw due to a tumor, the singer/harpist had no guarantee he'd ever perform in public again. He put his heart and soul into that offering, and it's a hard act to follow. Németh is reportedly back on the road again, still healing but playing and singing once again. To placate followers eager for more Németh on record, he is releasing the last live show he did before his surgery with his band, the Blue Dreamers, in 2022 at the Fallout Shelter in Norwood, MA. He admits he was drained both physically and emotionally from the exertion and the stress of a long coast-to-coast tour, but it's hard to tell from what's captured live here.

"I Can See Your Love Light Shine," from his 2020 album *Stronger Than Strong*, sounds stronger than ever, faster and more percussive than the original version, which is closer to ska than the up-tempo reggae pulse of this one. Németh does sound a little huskier than normal on "Deprivin' A Love," from that same 2020 album, his vocal a stand-in for what a Delbert McClinton take would sound like. His 2014 CD, *Memphis Grease*, is represented here by a couple of offerings. "Elbows On The Wheel" sports an Elvin Bishop, good ole boy in overalls feel, while "My Baby's Gone" is a hard-core blues thumper with a sinister vibe that Németh stirs up with frenetic harp work sustained by Jon Hay and Jad Tariq's dueling chainsaws guitar offerings. His 2017 *Feelin' Freaky* sired "Get Off Dat Butt," featuring Németh as dance floor ringmaster haranguing the crowd to get up and shake their asses instead of sitting on 'em. "Country Boy" from 2009's *Love Me Tonight* sounds laid back at first, just shuffling along, but Németh keeps upping the ante, bending reeds till the things are at their breaking point, his harp screaming for mercy.

This one's a hard act to follow as well, but if Németh's past is any indication, he'll keep overcoming obstacles, singing like a fallen angel, putting out some of the best harp-driven blues on the planet.

– Grant Britt



NOLA BLUE RECORDS

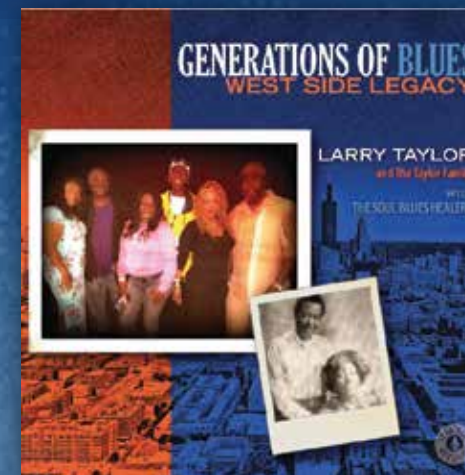
LIL' JIMMY REED with Ben Levin
Back to Baton Rouge



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.

"The vocals are warm and well recorded ... the Jimmy Reed-flavored tracks exhibit honest flavors but are not simply imitations of the Vee Jay singles of that era." - Dave Gallaher, *Talkin' the Blues with Microwave Dave*

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Album Review Originally Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine* Summer 2023 Print Edition Released July 2023

SELWYN BIRCHWOOD

Exorcist
Alligator



Early in the career of next-generation singer, songwriter, and guitarist Selwyn Birchwood, some PR rep or reviewer decided to dub him a “visionary.” The label stuck. Let’s stay there a moment. A visionary is someone bold enough to expand upon or even break with tradition. A leader, not a follower. Someone whose trailblazing ideas have the power to inspire others. Whether Birchwood fulfills those lofty criteria – if you Google “visionary bluesman,” it leads straight to him – is up for debate. At the very least, this marketing instrument creates expectations that are not easy to live up to.

That said, the best songs on *Exorcist* – Birchwood’s sixth album and fourth since joining Alligator Records – bristle with the originality that is his calling card. Paired with seasoned producer Tom Hambridge for the second time, the 38-year-old Florida native has created a sophisticated package of primarily funky, Southern-flavored electric blues. The album’s density puts greater demands on the listener than your standard-issue blues record, but it’s a worthwhile journey.

Take the title track, “Exorcist.” On the surface, it’s the classic story of a woman with supposedly evil powers who has bewitched the song’s protagonist. But Birchwood and his band do so much to pull you in. The horns, keys, guitar, rhythm section, and backing vocals combine into a swirling haze of sound that’s the sonic equivalent of the burning sage smoke referenced in the lyrics. Birchwood’s musical battle to cleanse himself of evil is nothing short of compelling.

We hear that sort of risk-taking again on “Florida Man,” which may piss off a few people in the singer’s home state. To a churning funk groove, he draws on recent newspaper headlines to suggest that the citizens of the Sunshine State have a unique knack for absurd behavior. Accurate or not, the lyrical ambitiousness shown here is refreshing.

Of course, it’s possible to ignore the quasi-biblical imagery of songs like “Exorcist,” “Lazarus” and “Horns Beneath Her Halo” and simply get off on the album’s infectious rhythms and Birchwood’s inventive soloing. His playing is fiery, his tone often stinging in an Albert Collins kind of way, yet he manages to sound cool, confident, and generally under control. Even “Hopeless Romantic,” dull in comparison to the cuts that precede it, is brightened by his nifty fretwork.

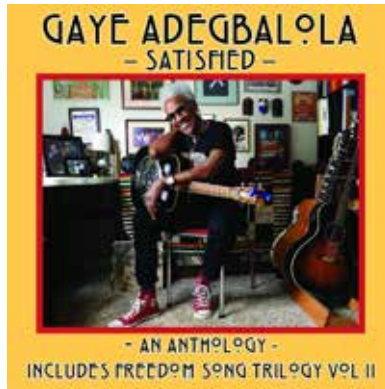
The album’s back half loses focus, though, with a resulting loss of forward momentum. A different group of backing musicians feature on pair of swinging, West Coast-style tracks; while fine on their own, they might have been better served elsewhere. The bouncy instrumental closing number “Show Tune” feels more like an overture. Despite these missteps, *Exorcist* as a whole should solidify Birchwood’s reputation as one of the contemporary blues’ foremost innovators.

– Vincent Abbate

www.bobcorritore.com

**Album Review Originally
Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine*
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Released July 2023**

GAYE ADEGBALOLA
Satisfied
VizzTone



Just about the only thing I don't love about this album is that I can never figure out how to pronounce Gaye's last name. That makes me uncomfortable, but then Gaye has made a career out of creating great music that makes a lot of people uncomfortable, first with Saffire The Uppity Blues Women beginning in 1984 and then as a solo artist since 1999. This record is an anthology of songs from nine of her solo releases that addresses issues of race, gender "differences," and even some charming children's music.

Since the era of field hollers when slaves shouted out messages sometimes relating to escape plans through the underground railroad, the lyrics of African-American music have often been circumspect and in "code." Gaye's original music is the antithesis of code. Blues music as a genre is judged on its truth, and Gaye is the poster child of truth, unvarnished, in your face, no holds barred TRUTH.

She addresses issues that most African-American women only reveal to their closest confidants at least until the Black Lives Matter and Women's Equality movements, but she's been upfront about the issues of both movements for at least four decades. Who else would name their bi-racial group Saffire – The Uppity Blues Women in 1984?

And the fact that she's an excellent lyricist and is always backed by a crack band only adds to her appeal, and to the overall effectiveness of her presentation. There are 20 songs on this anthology, a collection of 15 originals and five cover tunes from her nine solo albums. That's twice the amount of music usually offered on one CD.

"Big Ovaries Baby" is a boast about having the feminine version of big balls. "Look At The Forehead Maury" informs an errant father that the physical qualities of a child proves that he's this man's son. "3 Hour Shoes" complains about the pains she goes through to dress to impress. "The Dog Was Here First" puts her man in his place, and "Hetero Twinges" is sung from the perspective of a lesbian woman's guilty pleasure. There are children's songs including "Blues For The Greens (The Broccoli Song)" and there's even a gospel cut, "Let Go, Let God."

This is one of those albums that deserves to be in every blues fan's collection. It's a Whitman's Sampler of numbers by an extremely witty lady who lets the world in on the kind of thoughts that most blues artists only hint at. She dedicates the album to Ma Rainey and other classic blues women who "berthed" her, but she bests them all in her own way. So much so that her lyrical sharpness makes those women sound like Mary Poppins.

– Don Wilcock

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**Album Review Originally
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SAMANTHA FISH & JESSE DAYTON

Death Wish Blues

Rounder Records



Turns out the stretch from Texas country and rockabilly to shiny Kansas City leathers and pumps that electrify the blues as if kicking it onto a third rail, is not that long a stretch at all. Jesse Dayton and Samantha Fish are an inspired pairing. Although raised on Hank, George, and Lefty, Dayton digs the Clash and has worked with Rob Zombie. Fish, meanwhile, sprang from the big world of blues rockin' ladies slingin' a guitar. She has become a singular, spicy artist with a large palette. Fish and Dayton's wildly divergent paths collide and erupt in blues-anchored, audacious style on *Death Wish Blues* as if destined to.

The two initially warmed up last year in a New Orleans studio, cutting frenetic rock and roll and sweet country. The three-song *Stardust Sessions* EP that resulted only hinted at what they would cut several months later in Woodstock, New York. Jon Spenser produced *Death Wish Blues* as a feast of strident riffs and evocative commentary. Bassist Kendall Wind, drummer Aaron Johnston, and keyboardist Mickey Finn deliver the live off the floor propulsion behind Fish and Dayton's guitars and vocals. Both play with imagination and trade lead vocals.

The album thunders off like a massive, rusty machine with "Deathwish," Fish singing in a hand-on-a-cocked-hip sexy voice, the song displaying in no uncertain terms the high level of skill involved and the resolute power in store. They then dive headfirst into the thick "Down In The Mud," Dayton summoning hints of Buddy Guy in both voice and guitar, the song's fuzzy, off-kilter rhythms and indictments working like banged up charms. "Settle For Less" clicks madly and hammers home the message that settling just to feel good, may not feel so good in the end. Although that song mines territory like Larkin Poe's, Fish distinguishes herself with fierce aplomb.

Dayton takes the lead on "Trauma," singing with persuasion and underscoring the missive about a pain in the ass lover with a tempo change that slyly references the riff in Led Zeppelin's "Heartbreaker." Fish then finds her inner Tammy Wynette and Dayton his George Jones for "Lover On The Side," a naturally engaging, neat break in the action.

The song sequencing is as genius as the performances and production; the album never comes close to losing the listener. The gentle ballad "You Know My Heart" at the end of *Death Wish Blues* goes right to the heart of Samantha Fish and Jesse Dayton's success. They play songs with as much variety and power as there are beautifully grimy, highly memorable hooks.

– Tom Clarke

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**Album Review Originally
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JOANNA CONNOR
Best Of Me
Gulf Coast Records



Despite releases on several major labels earlier in her career, Joanna Connor never quite captured the attention of the wider blues audience. Acquiring two weekly gigs in several well-known Chicago clubs allowed her to stay close to home while raising her two children. Her 2021 release, *4801 South Indiana Avenue* on Joe Bonamassa's Keeping The Blues Alive Records, made it clear that her guitar work is as captivating as ever.

Her new album finds her on Gulf Coast Records, run by Mike Zito and Guy Hale. They wisely had Connor record with her band, giving the proceedings several extra layers of tightness

that comes from deep familiarity with the ten originals and one cover. Her songwriting partner on most tracks is Shaun Gotti Calloway, who consistently lays down some deep grooves on his bass guitar. Jason J Roc Edwards is the other half of the crack rhythm section, adding taut accents with his expert stick work. Dan Souvigny handles the rhythm guitar duties, and plays keyboards on three tracks, while Curtis Moore Jr. plays a variety of keyboards throughout the project.

The opening declaration from Frank Pellegrino, of Kingston Mines fame, reminds listeners that Connor embodies funk, soul, and blues, with plenty of love in her heart. Once the band kicks in on "House Rules," Connor immediately proves the accuracy of his assessment. The Grooveline Horns spice up the arrangement, with guest Eric Demmer contributing some hearty saxophone solos. "Pain And Pleasure" glides along with a soulful strut, giving Connor and guest Josh Smith space for a dynamic guitar dialogue. The title track wraps a sorrowful Connor vocal into a swirling musical landscape that forces listeners to feel every bit of her despair.

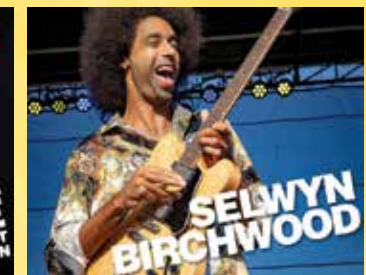
The horns return on "Two Of A Kind," a funky rocker complete with one of Connor's red-hot guitar soliloquies. The lone cover, the classic "Mercury Blues," is a feature for Connor's blazing slide guitar skills while the jaunty "Highway Child" finds her sharing the spotlight with Bonamassa for another guitar rave-up. Zito makes an appearance on guitar on "Shadow Lover," as Connor pleads for some loving caresses.

The closer, "Shine On," is a hard rocking tune with key contributions from Gary Hoey on guitar and Jason Ricci on harmonica. But it is the six-string magic from Connor that leaves a lasting impression, just as she does throughout this fine album that showcases her many talents in fine fashion.

– Mark Thompson

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**Album Review Originally
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DUKE ROBILLARD & HIS ALL-STAR BAND

Six Strings Of Steel

M.C. Records



Duke Robillard's latest album circles back to the music that first inspired him as a teenager – including the first song he ever learned to play on guitar – and fast forwards to a couple of newly penned songs that broke a self-described writer's block.

Throughout the aptly titled *Six Strings Of Steel*, Robillard offers plenty of examples of his wide musical palette. The 12-track album is bookended by a pair of guitar-driven instrumentals: jazz guitarist Barney Kessel's "Get With It!" and Link Wray's "Rumble." The latter is that first song a young

Robillard learned to play and one he remarks in the liner notes, "marked the beginning of a revolution in the electric guitar."

With "Love Struck," Robillard revisits a Chuck Willis song he first recorded in 1977 on the first album by Roomful of Blues, the Rhode Island band he co-founded. He sang the lead on that version, but for this update he recruited vocalist Chris Cote to do the honors. Cote, along with fellow bandmates Marty Ballou (bass) and Mark Teixiera (drums) co-wrote with Robillard "In Perfect Harmony," a straightforward love song Robillard dedicates to his wife, Laurene.

Ballou and Teixiera also teamed up with Robillard to write the album's other original, "Groovin' In The Swamp," an instrumental Robillard said was "meant to be a Telecaster feature for two of my earliest heroes, James Burton and Steve Cropper." It sounds more like an outtake from a Creedence Clearwater Revival album. Surely, John Fogerty also aimed to emulate Burton and Cropper.

Robillard alludes to his association with Bob Dylan (most notably appearing on the 1997 *Time Out Of Mind* album) with a cover of "Watching The River Flow," which features a great vocal take from Cote and fiddle solo from Asleep at the Wheel's Katie Shore. While Robillard leaves the singing to Cote on most of the vocal tracks, he lends his voice to a couple of songs, including the lighthearted "Lima Beans," originally written and sung by Eddie Ware for Chess Records in 1951. (Robillard notes that none other than Chess harmonica star Little Walter Jacobs played guitar on the original recording.)

As always on Robillard recordings, horns compete with guitars for dominance. Long time collaborator Doug James contributes baritone and tenor sax, sparring with Robillard on the instrumental "Billy In The Lion's Den."

– Michael Cote

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JOHN PRIMER

Teardrops For Magic Slim (Live At Rosa's Lounge)

Blues House Productions



If *Teardrops For Magic Slim* wins a BMA, a Grammy, and an Oscar for Best Performance by a Mortal in the Role of Everything About Chicago Blues That Changed Pop Culture, John Primer would still deserve more. *Teardrops For Magic Slim* is more than the tribute any artist would dream of receiving; it's an historically rich labor of love and a resonating reminder of the Brits' regifting of the blues back to America; it deserves the Nobel Prize for The Blues.

Hats off to Magic Slim, an icon of Chicago blues, for hosting Primer's epic tour of duty as the genre's most illustrious Teardrop this side of "The Sky is Crying," and for inspiring a work that is truly monumental. Slim made Chicago blues a celebration of what electricity could do for a guitar, while keeping his music as much a part of Mississippi as an Off can next to a Tunica dealer. Primer and the reunited Teardrops deliver all that, and something way more significant: the humanity of Chicago blues.

It's Primer's voice weaving his soul through the Temple of Blues that is Rosa's Lounge like sacred vapors, conjuring Muddy, Elmore, and Sonny Boy as they cook that petrie dish, chemically and spiritually conjoining the South Side to the South. What we hear is what the radio brought to Chris Youlden, Peter Green, all them cats, all the way from Sweet Home Chicago. It gave Relf and Burdon and Jagger their swagger, their identities, their voices: everything we skimmed off the crests of wave after wave of the British Invasion, music that'd been playing for a decade every night down the street, and a world away at the Zanzibar and Silvio's: every draggin' tail and every kickin' mule.

From "Buddy Buddy Friend," featuring Primer's playing at its most exquisite, to "Troubles Of My Own," a song so atmospherically rich, it's basically its own universe, Primer delivers the gruelingly endearing agony of the blues intact from 23rd and Michigan with a joyful heartfelt authenticity that hasn't been replicated since Czyz became Chess. *Teardrops For Magic Slim* is a love letter written in a language seldom spoken as eloquently as John Primer, evoking echoes of the BBC's seldom-appreciated turn as messenger of the Gods.

– Terry Abrahamson

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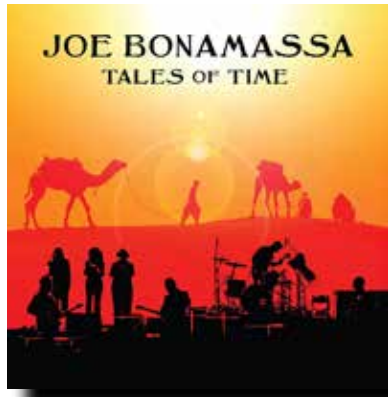
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Album Review Originally Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine* Summer 2023 Print Edition Released July 2023

JOE BONAMASSA

Tales Of Time

J&R Adventures



Every time I see a pristine vintage car on the road here in California, I feel joy and pride in that classic American icon. You guitarists out there will feel the same way watching Joe Bonamassa's DVD as there are several stunning vintage American Fender and Gibson guitars being played during his concert. You'll see and hear vintage Les Pauls, vintage Telecasters, a vintage white two pickup Thunderbird, a vintage Flying V, a vintage red Stratocaster, a unique Thinline Telecaster with a B-Bender and a mint red vintage ES 335 with a Bixby.

Performed at the outdoor Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado, *Tales Of Time* has ten long tracks on the CD and the full concert has 17 chapters on the DVD. Backing Bonamassa

are Josh Smith on guitar, Reese Wynans on two keyboards and an organ, Calvin Turner on bass and Lemar Carter on drums. Mahalia Barnes, Jade MacRae, and Dannielle DeAndrea provide backing vocals. Bonamassa's handpicked ensemble provides a sound full enough to fill this beautiful venue yet the concert is enhanced even more with a massive visual wall behind the stage that is quite captivating.

"Time Clocks" is an outstanding cut as it appears to be Bonamassa's most introspective song with lines like, "As the rain chilled me to the bone, I'm flat out tired and alone, I put it away, now it's locked – was never a good puncher of time clocks." His pathos is sung and played to his audience with unbridled transparency.

His prescription for life is spoken towards the end of his evening's performance: "You wake up in the morning and live every day to the fullest no matter what obstacles are in front of you. Sometimes all good things do come to an end and you just have to embrace it, move on and live your life to the fullest extension."

Bonamassa has co-writes on most of his songs with the exception of "Evil Mama" by Gary Moore. These creative lyrical collaborations work quite well in their extended playing time. Also for you fellow guitarists out there, Seymour Duncan's Custom Shop now has Bonamassa's 1963 Stratocaster and Smith's Telecaster pickups available in limited quantities and both are signed by the artist.

Joe Bonamassa's life journey in the blues, along with his acquisition of an enviable arsenal of vintage guitars, which are the tools of his trade, has propelled him into the pinnacle of the blues genre. I urge you to please add his CD/DVD to your music library. I guarantee you will listen/watch it often as it becomes even more familiar and enjoyable each time it's heard/seen.

– Pete Sardon

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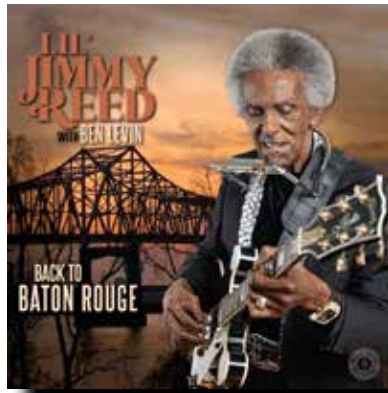
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**Album Review Originally
Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine*
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LIL' JIMMY REED
Back To Baton Rouge
Nola Blue



Louisiana native Leon Atkins has been performing as Lil' Jimmy Reed for over 60 years. He's recorded three albums on small labels before *Back To Baton Rouge*. At 84, he's poised to reach a wider audience with this set of five old school covers and five originals. Recorded in Cincinnati by producer/pianist Ben Levin who leads the band of his guitarist father Aron, bassist Walter Cash, Jr., and drummers Ricky Nye (three tracks) and Shorty Star (seven tracks).

Jimmy Reed (1925-1976) remains one of the most important blues artists of all time. His extensive oeuvre has been covered by numerous artists of various genres. According to Will Romano's *Big Bossman: The Life And Music Of Jimmy*

Reed, Reed sold more records than Chess' big four of Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson combined.

Accompanying himself on guitar and racked harmonica, Lil' Jimmy Reed sounds remarkably like his hero, but they're not the exactly the same. His vocals aren't as languid, and there is a slightly brisker tempo to the Jimmy Reed songs that he covers. The instrumentation isn't as sparse as Jimmy Reed's either. Reed recorded with just harmonica, guitars, and drums most of the time. Occasionally, he used a bassist, and rarely a piano during his Vee-Jay tenure (1953-1965). Thus, the sound here is more full-bodied thanks mainly to Ben Levin's robust playing.

Kudos to LJR for eschewing classics like the much covered "Big Boss Man," "You Don't Have To Go," and "Baby What You Want Me To Do." Instead there are lesser known gems like "Down In Virginia," "A String To Your Heart," and "I'm The Man Down There," an answer to Sonny Boy II and Elmore James' "One Way Out," and G.L. Crockett's "It's a Man Down There." Slim Harpo's rumba rocker "Mailbox Blues" and Joe Liggins' R&B shuffler "In The Wee Wee Hours" round out the covers.

LJR's homage to the Levin's hometown "Cincinnati's The Place To Be" is slinky funk. The Levins composed the Reed-like "Wish You Wouldn't" and with LJR co-wrote "Engine Light" reminiscent of Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning," and the autobiographical slow blues "They Call Me Lil' Jimmy" and "Back To Baton Rouge." The only quibble is the 35-minute length. A few more lesser known Jimmy Reed tunes or a few more swamp blues nuggets would be welcome. Nonetheless, this crisp, concise collection is a flame keeper triumph for Lil' Jimmy Reed and a candidate for Traditional Blues Album of the Year.

– Thomas J. Cullen III



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Album Review Originally Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine* Summer 2023 Print Edition Released July 2023

DOUG DEMING & THE JEWEL TONES

Groovin' At Groove Now!

Endless Blues Records



On so many levels, this live recording was a long time in the making. First of all, Doug Deming and his Jewel Tones is perhaps the genre's hardest working band. For more than a decade, he and the band have regular Thursday through Sunday gigs at a variety of venues in his Florida stomping grounds. So one would think that a live recording could have been released years ago.

Enter the Basel, Switzerland's The Groove Now! concert. Deming was hired to play the event in 2020. Guess what happened next: COVID. So the gig was postponed until Europe opened in 2021. Deming added a roster of guest artists to regulars Andrew Gohman skilled in subtlety and energy on bass and Zack Pomerleau on drums and harmonica. By adding Terry Hanck and Sax Gordon (saxophones) and Bill Heid (keyboard), Deming and the Jewel

Tones morphed into a diamond-studded Basel blues performance.

The set was recorded and, upon further review, deemed perfectly suitable for a live CD release. Veteran Deming show goers will recognize the four+ minute format of these 11 tunes. High energy start, dense and complicated instrumental solos, followed by an over the top climactic ending, all held nicely together by Deming's expansive guitar knowledge of blues, R&B, jazz, jump, and early '50s R&R. His opener, "East Side Hop" starts the show with a call to the dance floor. Each artist's solo weaves in and out with Deming's delightful chording as the constant. (Follow that chording throughout.) The set follows with the bluesy "Only Time Will Tell," featuring Pomerleau's unique drum and Chicago-styled harmonica. Also Pomerleau's double reeds and skins duty is featured on Willie Dixon's "Oh Baby." Tell me the last time you've seen a drummer who can expertly handle an in-the-pocket shuffle and Chicago blues harmonica at the same time!

Every Deming show features the band's '50s rock 'n' roll energy on the Fats Domino classic, "I'm Ready." Here, the spirited reed work of Sax Gordon drives the engine. The frantic Jewel Tone pace slows with the dreamy, R&B ballad, "Every Night When I Get Home." Pay close attention to the warm tones Deming coaxes from his archtop and how the piano and saxophones reinforce the mood.

Two other Deming set list regulars, "Bloodshot Eyes" and "Mamma Didn't Raise No Fool," come with all the muscle the band brings every week to its Florida regulars. "An Eye For An Eye" is the band's deepest blues, with Pomerleau's harp in a starring role again, sounding like any Muddy Waters' 1950s style Chess recording.

For years, every blues fan living in the Sunshine State has followed this inspired trio at its weekly gigs. This live outing is the perfect way to either take the show home with you or experience a Sunday afternoon show at the Cortez Kitchen eating a grouper sandwich with a cold, long neck.

— Art Tiplaldi

NEWS from *Endless Blues*...



Endless Blues Records is thrilled to welcome **Doug Deming & the Jewel Tones** to the label family! Their new album *Groovin' at Groove Now!* was recorded LIVE in Basel, Switzerland and is available now.

Mick Kolassa's new, all acoustic, album *Wooden Music* is set to release July 2023. PLUS, we have many new digital-only *essential releases* for you to check out!

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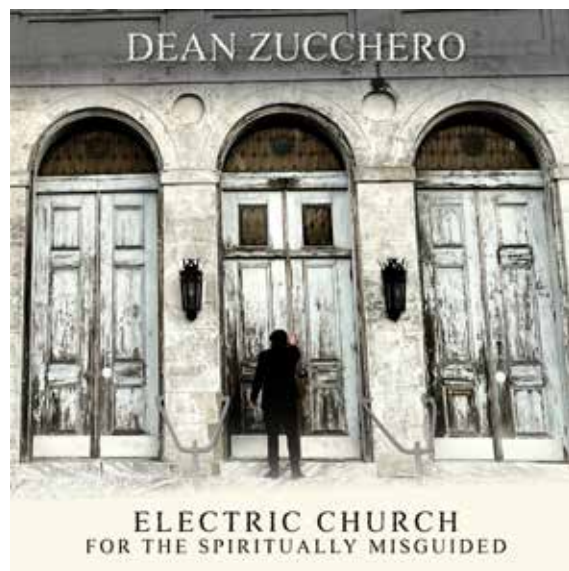
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ALBUM REVIEW

DEAN ZUCCHERO

Electric Church For The Spiritually Misguided

Pugnacious Records



Bass player Dean Zuccherro has had a peripatetic career. A New York City native, he spent years there as a session player and go-to bassist before migrating to Europe for a decade stint with bands The Healers! and Sugarpie & The Candymen. For the last decade he has been a denizen of New Orleans and has become a fixture on the blues and Cajun music scene there, organizing events and collaborating with such regional notables as Little Freddie King, Cyril Neville, and Johnny Sansone.

This set of 11 tunes, all written or co-written by Zuccherro, showcases his skill with songwriting as well as his bass artistry. We begin with “Big

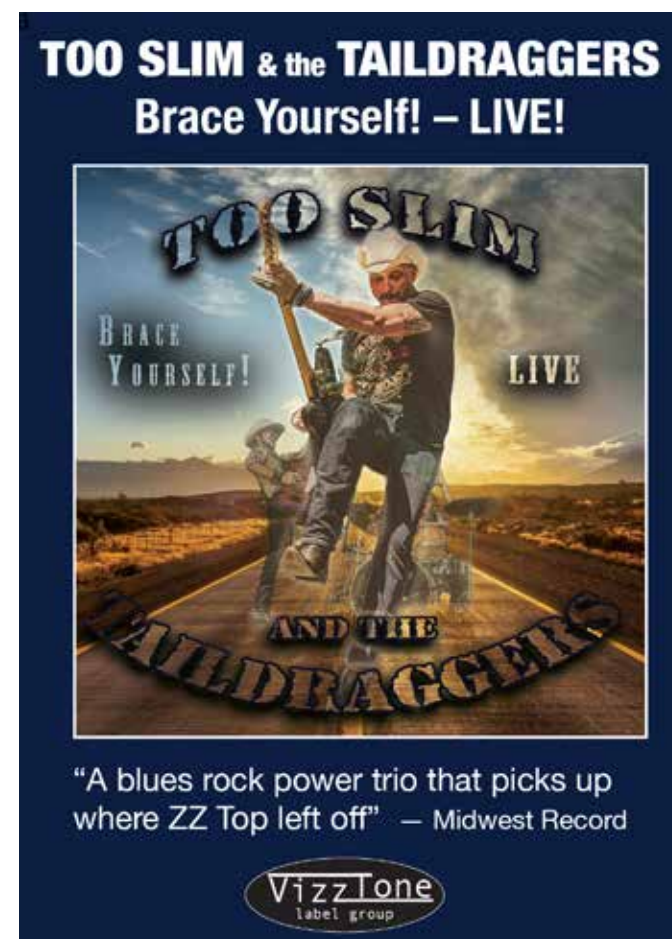
Boss Boy,” a jazzy mid-tempo shuffle graced by the vocal of award-winning soul blues singer Johnny Rawls and the pithy guitar lead of Johnny Burgin. Halfway through the set Burgin reappears on “Stack It,” another mid-tempo romp on which he also handles the vocal. “Independence Day” introduces a new ensemble of musicians, with Dale Spalding doing the singing and blowing harp and drummer Doug Belote making one of his five appearances. Belote or Terrence Higgins ply zesty percussion on all but two of the tracks, the others courtesy of Zuccherro.

On “Craft Beer” Jonathon “Boogie” Long steps forward on guitar and spoken word vocal. The tune is catchy and will be either amusing or cringe-worthy, depending on one’s attitude toward alcohol: “Craft beer don’t count/Getting drunk on stout/enhances my clout/ Or so it seems/just before the blackout...” Right after is “Last Minute Packer,” one of my favorite tracks, a ‘Nawlins’ Cajun rocker featuring Wayne Thibodeaux on fiddle, Alex MacDonald on washboard, and Ghalia Volt, a frequent Zuccherro collaborator, on vocal.

In a more traditional vein, we have “Empty Postbox,” a spare country blues with bass and percussion by Zuccherro and vocal and warbling harmonica by Bruce “Sunpie” Barnes. Succeeding it is “La Belle Poursuite,” one of the two brief instrumentals of the album, with guitar by John Fohl and organ by famed New Orleans keyboard man Joe Krown, who also enlivens three other tracks. It and the other instrumental, “DBA,” with award-winning harmonica Jason Ricci, exhibit skilled musicianship but seem to wander somewhat without intensity.

After “DBA” is “Mortal Man,” harmonica and raspy vocal by Sansone, and then the set churns to an end with another of my favorites, “American Dream,” guitar and singing by Jeremy Joyce, Zuccherro sounding in top form on bass.

– Dan Stevens



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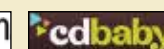
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ALBUM REVIEW

DUANE BETTS

Wild & Precious Life

Royal Potato Family



“My mother she married a ramblin’ man,” Duane Betts sings in “Taking Time,” the snappy little tune that kicks off his 2018 debut EP, *Sketches of American Music*. The heritage that pours out of Betts in reference to his father, Dickey Betts of the original Allman Brothers Band and Great Southern (in which they played together for ten years), speaks volumes. But so does DNA. Never mind the striking physical resemblance. Duane Betts’s singing voice, and his tone and approach to playing guitar uncannily reflect that of his father. Betts recently enjoyed well-earned success with Gregg Allman’s son, Devon, in the Allman Betts Band. On his first full-fledged solo album *Wild & Precious Life*, Duane Betts continues to

unabashedly embrace his roots while managing to forge an identity of his own.

A compelling balance drives this experience. Guitar fans will be thrilled by the ten catchy and inventive performances. But concise, meaningful songcraft takes precedence just as well. Right away, “Evergreen” blossoms with a pledge of devotion underscored by old-school, Florida-styled country-rock. The Betts legacy shimmers there but even more so in “Waiting on a Song.” Duane Betts plays inspired, lyrical couplets in the song as he reflects on the patience and confidence gained from life’s simple pleasures, all the while recalling the brilliance of 1970s vintage Great Southern.

The classic Allman Brothers dual guitar symbiosis has evolved in the relationship Betts enjoys with Johnny Stachela, one of the four Allman Betts Band members present besides bassist Berry Oakley, Jr., and keyboardist John Ginty. Tyler Greenwell of Tedeschi Trucks Band plays drums (the album was recorded at Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks’ home studio). Stachela plays especially rugged slide to Betts’ pungent leads in “Sacred Ground,” a blues on a gospel-tinged, hoodoo prowl. Trucks joins in on “Stare at the Sun,” titled for his in-studio description of the elder Betts (“Your dad’s a player not afraid to stare directly into the sun”), whom Trucks played with in the Allman Brothers. It’s one of the album’s several pinnacles, the players building hills and valleys of daring, swinging melodies, the overall effect, and especially that of the guitars, staring right up at the sky that was, and perhaps could have been, The Allman Brothers Band.

Guitarist Marcus King adds Duane Allman influenced guitar playing to the blues-rocker “Cold Dark World,” and Nicki Bluhm colors the cowboy-folk lament “Colors Fade,” mirroring in perfect harmony Duane Betts’s own scratchy-sweet tenor. Duane Betts covered quite a bit of ground with confidence here. His *Wild & Precious Life* brims with sunny entertainment, familiarity, and huge promise.

– Tom Clarke

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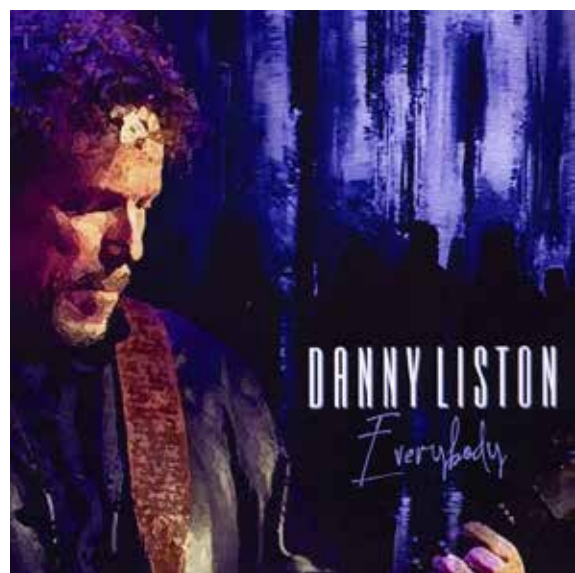
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ALBUM REVIEW

DANNY LISTON

Everybody

Blue House Records



The veteran St. Louis guitarist/singer/songwriter returned to recording after a ten-year hiatus with the legendary Jim Gaines producing the ten originals that comprise the album. Liston's band Mama's Pride recorded two albums in the late Seventies, opened shows for Gregg Allman, and served as Allman's band after their set.

On *Everybody* Liston is supported by an excellent cast that includes drummer Steve Potts, guitarist Will McFarlane, bassist Dave Smith, pianist Mark Narmore

(with Cory Edwards and Bob Lohr one track each), and organist Rick Steff (with Michael O'Hara on one track); a horn section of trumpeter Alan Branstetter, and saxophonists Brad Gunn and Buddy Leach are heard on several tracks and add some Southern soul flavoring.

Although there are blues influences present in Liston's playing and vocals, there are no traditional blues herein. The loping Southern rocker "Didn't Find My Blues," despite the word blues in the title, is about his search for his musical/spiritual muse rather than his search for blues *per se*. The uplifting title track, a Southern rocker about helping others, is abetted by Bekka Bramlett's gritty vocals. Other Southern rockers are "Scandal" (about a young woman's life struggles) and the strutting "Made To Rock & Roll."

Country influences are prevalent as exemplified by the sparkling honky-tonk of the self-effacing "Goodbye Jack Daniels" (and to "the powder from Peru") and the lilting rockers "Love Everybody" and "Old Friends" (sung with his brother Pat Liston with whom he formed Mama's Pride). His most soul-baring vocals are heard on the country-tinged introspective ballads "Real Man" and "Right As Rain" and the gospel-infused tale of redemption and rebirth "A Change Has Come." The well performed and well produced *Everybody* is more for fans of Southern rock, country rock, and electric Americana than for more traditional minded blues fans.

— Thomas J. Cullen III

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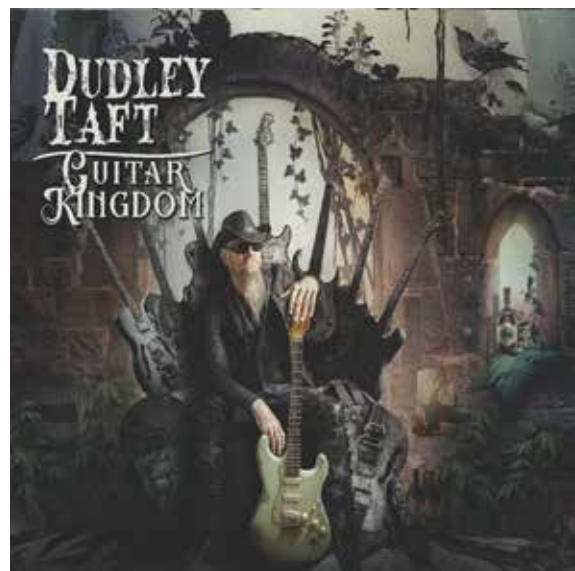
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ALBUM REVIEW

DUDLEY TAFT
Guitar Kingdom
Self-release



Dudley Taft's second track on *Guitar Kingdom*, "Old School Rocking" is an autobiographical account of his musical history, "I fell in love when I was 13 years old, the electric guitar had me at 'hello.' Well, that's when I found my muse, learning to play rock & roll and blues." He goes on to demonstrate it quite well on ten more tracks, all penned by him. Saving a treat for the last song, Taft closes out the CD with Tinsley Ellis's "A Quitter Never Wins."

You will win big listening to this CD. His vocals are well enunciated and at times he will speak a few phrases that make you feel that he is singing just to you. There is an

instant positive energy to his guitar playing with melodic synergistic backing from bass, drums, keyboards, and occasional backing vocals.

Bob Dylan sang, "Everyone must get stoned!" Johnny Ramone countered with "I Wanna Be Sedated" while Taft renders his song "Get Stoned" describing his pleasant street with the repetitive line, "I just want to get stoned!" for emphasis. It sure sounds like he was having fun making this CD in his home studio. Taft changes gears in "Darkest Night" as his pensive vocal is buttressed by his acoustic guitar with sympathetic backing vocals and instrumentation. His command of the guitar is impeccable.

Musically, he is no slouch as he was at the Berklee College of Music as well as having been in several bands and has produced all eight of his recordings. In his "Guitar Kingdom" song he offers, "Guitar is a way of life and it's where my spirit guides and it makes me feel alive." His "My Favorite Things" is a hoot as he sings about his "1970 Chevy with a 454, a 1959 Les Paul Standard Burst and holding and kissing my baby are my favorite things." Both the drumming and bass are propulsive and offer the perfect back beat to Taft's dominant forceful guitar. "A Quitter Never Wins" is a standout cut with the weaving of Taft's vocals with the delicious tones of his '59 Les Paul guitar.

Dudley Taft's own words reveal more about him than mine, "A great song creates an emotion and a mood...listening to the radio, guitar music seeped into my brain and body. Exceptional songwriting and guitar playing have always been my goal." He certainly has achieved this goal in *Guitar Kingdom*.

– Pete Sardon

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ALBUM REVIEW

THE COLD STARES

Voices

Mascot Records



Voices is the sixth album from this Indiana based blues/rock band, and is its first release as a trio. In its preceding ten years, the duo had built a large following through its constant touring and its music being featured in everything from commercials to video games. With singer/guitarist Chris Tapp out front, drummer Brian Mullins protecting the beat, and new addition Bryce Klueh holding the line on the bass, this version of The Cold Stares presents, with *Voices*, 13 compelling originals written by Tapp.

Most of them fall into the blues/Southern rock category, with a hard driving guitar riff, muscular vocals, and a grittiness making for

a speed limit violating ride (it's no wonder that a couple of those commercials were for Dodge and Chevy). But listen to what Tapp is singing about, and there's a deep darkness lurking behind the defiance. Even by blues standards, *Voices* is grim, and in that tradition, it succeeds because of its humanity.

"Nothing But The Blues" starts things off, setting the course – its fist pumping delivery masking a very real despair – for an album chockful of Hooker-esque inner demons. The self-doubt induced paralysis of being unable to get out of a destructive situation ("Thinking About Leaving Again," "Got No Right"), the fear and uncertainty of bad times returning ("Waiting On The Rain," "Come For Me"), and the misery and guilt of the title track and "Sinnerman" all get served up in head on fashion.

But it's the quieter tracks that bring things into sharp focus. "Sorry I Was Late" is a slow and spare keyboard song meditating on a mistake that cannot be undone, and the helpless hurt that goes along with it; "Throw That Stone," one of two acoustic guitar blues, muses on not being up to the task at hand. Revisiting *Voices* with those in mind reveals its dark, relatable path; log enough lifetime miles and these songs may unlock some doors.

The genuine bright spot is "The Joy." Beautifully constructed, with the tension and release of the music matching perfectly with the lyrics, it's life affirming. But it appears early on, making it – in hindsight – seem like a brief rally in a long, losing battle. Which makes the closing acoustic track so chilling. "The Ghost" is hollowed out and undisguised, with Pratt – haunted and haunting – "killing time until Jesus makes the call." And that's the way this journey ends.

– Matthew MacDonald



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