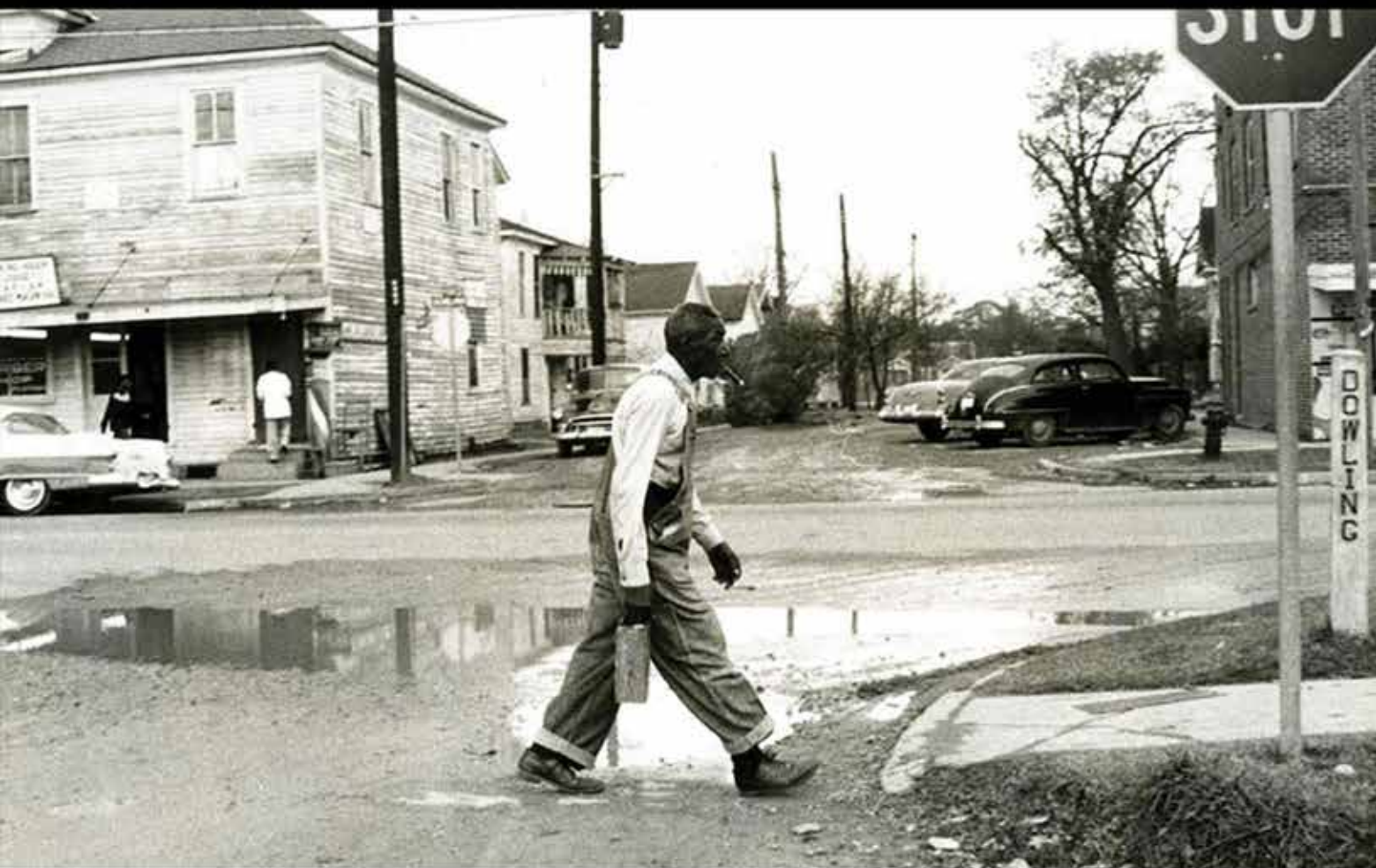




PLAYING FOR THE MAN AT THE DOOR



*Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick
1958-1971*

*Eric Clapton - The Definitive 24 Nights Album Review
PLUS: 18 Additional Album Reviews*



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BLUES MUSIC ONLINE

August 6, 2023-Issue 48

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Playing For The Man At The Door: Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick, 1958 – 1971

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

If you are a fan of excited men rummaging through dusty relics of America's past on American Pickers, this enormous set of music, history, and field work is the blues equivalent of walking through blues researcher Mack McCormick's attic of forgotten treasures.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has just released *Playing For The Man At The Door: Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick, 1958 – 1971*. This is a three CD/six LP set of previously unheard field recordings from McCormick's enormous archive. Included in the package is a 128-page book of photographs from McCormick's vast collection and essays by leading blues scholars from the Smithsonian and beyond.

So who exactly was Mack McCormick? My introduction to him was seeing his name during the 1980s and 1990s in various blues publications with his research mostly related to Robert Johnson. I first heard his voice and saw his face in some of the Robert Johnson films during that same decade. His name was also turning up regularly in many of the blues books I was reading, specifically Peter Guralnick's 1989 *Searching For Robert Johnson*, which was based on Guralnick's interviews with McCormick in the mid-1970s, Lawrence Cohn's 1993 *Nothin' But The Blues*, which focused mostly on McCormick's 1959-60 field recordings, Francis Davis' 1995 *The History Of The Blues*, Gayle Dean Wardlow's 1998 *Chasin' That Devil Music*, Elijah Wald's 2004 *Escaping The Delta*, Ted Gioia's 2008 *Delta Blues*, and Wardlow's 2019 *Up Jumped The Devil*.

As early as the 1970s, there were references to McCormick's detective work around the death of Robert Johnson, and the subsequent hints that he had rock solid proof about who killed Johnson and had a book prepared to shed intense light on the man and myths. That book, *Biography Of A Phantom*, was never published during his life,

but Smithsonian Books finally published his *Biography Of A Phantom* posthumously after his 2015 death.

His life was one of paranoia about those looking to steal his work, which resulted in his reclusive protection of his vast amounts of research and recordings. You can form your own opinions of his odd character, but one cannot dismiss his importance as a dedicated folklorist and collector.

McCormick was best known for his unstoppable obsession with discoveries of blues talent throughout the Greater Texas region – Western Louisiana, East Texas, and sections of Oklahoma and Arkansas. Many of his recordings were with important blues luminaries – Lightnin' Hopkins (seven solo cuts and three with others), Mance Lipscomb (five tunes), CeDell Davis (three cuts), Hop Wilson (two tunes) – but the vast majority of his recordings shed a light on the lesser blues singers who were essential in keeping cultural traditions thriving.

In many ways, he was a treasure hunter following in the footsteps of Alan Lomax and later Chris Strachwitz (whom he introduced to many of the musicians Arhoolie recorded) searching for obscure rural blues singers. Recorded everywhere from nightclubs to prison farms to street corners, these 66 performances accurately capture a wide range of African-American musicians, styles, and important histories in McCormick's region.

Because McCormick never published or released most of these materials, his collection became a thing of legend and intense speculation among scholars, blues aficionados, and musicians alike. Like a family's B&W photos tucked under the rafters in an attic, these 66 selections are the dusty relics of primitive blues field recordings.

They are field recordings without today's over-produced studio techniques. No auto tune, pitch corrections, modern Shure dynamic mics, no pro tools, and no converting digital tracks to sound like they were recorded on analog tapes. McCormick's process was simple of the times, haul a tape machine from

Mack McCormick

Field Recordings

3 CDs and 128 Page Book

Set Review

By Art Tipaldi

PHOTOGRAPHY © Chris Strachwitz Courtesy Of
The Smithsonian Institution

the car's trunk, thread a reel, adjust a mic, and press record. So, you are hearing exactly what McCormick heard in these intimate and personal moments including many spoken remarks pre- and post-song.

Fifty-eight of the 66 songs span from 1958 through 1969, with one from 1971. Most of those with dates come from 1959 recordings. Most of these Texas musicians come from a sub-genre of singers called songsters. Many of these songsters were able to survive through a repertoire that includes country blues, spirituals, folk tunes, ragtime, and other popular musics of their day. That's why many of McCormick's recordings are from the places where a singular musician, not a band, could set up to entertain with a set list of popular music of the day mixed with traditional, well-known songs and verses from the past.

The Hopkins and Lipscomb performances are the essence of the set. Fittingly, the collection opens with Lightnin's seminal "Mojo Hand," a song just inducted in 2023 into the Blues Hall Of Fame. The accompanying notes indicate that McCormick recorded his performance during a hootenanny on March 15, 1962, at Houston's Alley Theatre. Hopkins' "Ma Pa Cut The Cake," "World's In A Tangle," which is Lightnin's look at world problems in 1959, and "Mr. Charlie," with Lightnin's hilarious introduction, also come from the 1962 Alley Theatre performance.

From 1959, Hopkins sings the oft-covered "Corrine Corrina," which he told McCormick that it's a song "older than me" and "Blues Jumped A Rabbit," with ties to Blind Lemon Jefferson's songs. Hopkins also backs Long Gone Miles on "Natural Born Lover" and Melvin "Jack" Johnson on "The Slop."

Lipscomb and Hopkins offer back-to-back takes on "Tom Moore's Farm." Recorded a year apart, the song chronicles the well-known brutality of Moore and his family throughout the region. Since history books never told of these atrocities, it was up to these singers to report them to their public. Lipscomb also sings Blind Willie Johnson's popular gospel blues "God Moves On The Water," "Tall Angel At The Bar," "So Different," and the popular

railroader ballad "Casey Jones."

Other tunes and performers of interest include Doc Webster's "Medicine Show Pitch," Andrew Everett's "Hello Central Gimme 209," a take on the songs of Lead Belly and Hopkins of a similar name, Billy Bizer's harmonica dash on "Fox Chase" accompanied by Hopkins, the Spiritual Light Gospel Group's "My Work Will Be Done," Hop Wilson's take on B.B. King's 1950's R&B hit, "3 O'Clock Blues," the spiritual "Come And Go With Me To That Land," a song I heard often during the 1960 folk craze, and auctioneer Walter Britten's vocal accelerating on "Auctioneer."

There's Jimmy Womack's anxiety in his "Atomic Energy" and his "Talkin' Blues," illustrating a song form hugely popular in the early music of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and later Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, and others. Don't miss the three performances by Bongo Joe Coleman, a street performer accompanied by only his rappin' voice and steel drum. There's the street corner, one-man call and response of Bongo Joe Coleman on "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is," his pitch for the presidency on the collection closer, "George Coleman For President, Nobody For Vice President," and "This Whole World's In A Sad Condition."

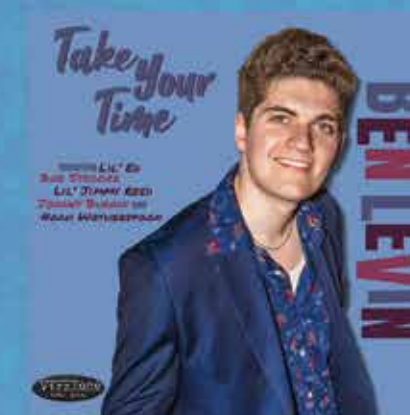
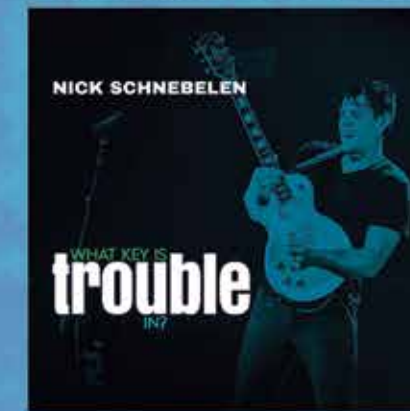
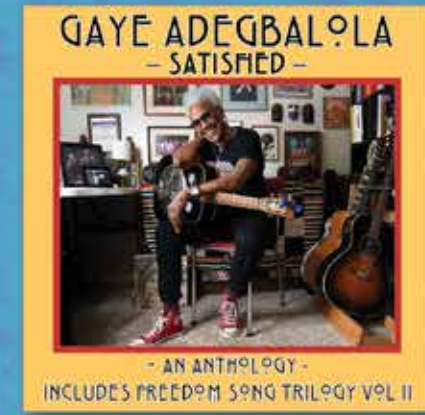
Perhaps the recording that carries the deepest historical ties to the past is Joe Patterson's "Quills." Texan Henry "Ragtime" Thomas played quills and guitar during his early 20th century career. Some of Thomas' earliest recordings of "Fishin' Blues," "Bull Doze Blues" (an early form of "Goin' Up The Country"), "Railroadin' Some," and many others from his 1927-29 recordings feature quills accompanying his guitar and vocals. Quills, like spoons and bones, vanished into antiquity as modern instruments became more available to these rural areas.

Many of the songs McCormick recorded also offer an intimate look into the lives of African-Americans throughout the South during the first half of the 20th century. The aforementioned "Tom Moore's Farm," "St. James Infirmary" (recorded Cajun style in both French and English with fiddle, washboard,

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and concertina), "Little Red Rooster," "Shorty George," "Matchbox Blues," "Bad Lee Brown," "Deep Ellum Blues," "Big Road Blues," and others demonstrate how popular blues recordings by one songster might be quickly reworked by many others.

Thought heavily weighted towards guitar players, McCormick also sat with and recorded the area's piano masters like E.B. Busby, Robert Shaw (three songs), Buster Pickens (six songs), Allen Vann, and The Grey Ghost (two songs) who demonstrate mastery of all forms of piano blues from boogie-woogie to barrelhouse to styles closely related to Chess Records Chicago blues during the 1950s.

Missing in this collection is any representation of the area's women. A side note in the booklet briefly addresses this critical omission. Blues fans should not ignore women's indispensable views of the lives they were relegated to and the celebrations that arose. By not sharing their essential contributions to carrying the traditions of the culture, we listeners sadly only get to hear half its substantial history.

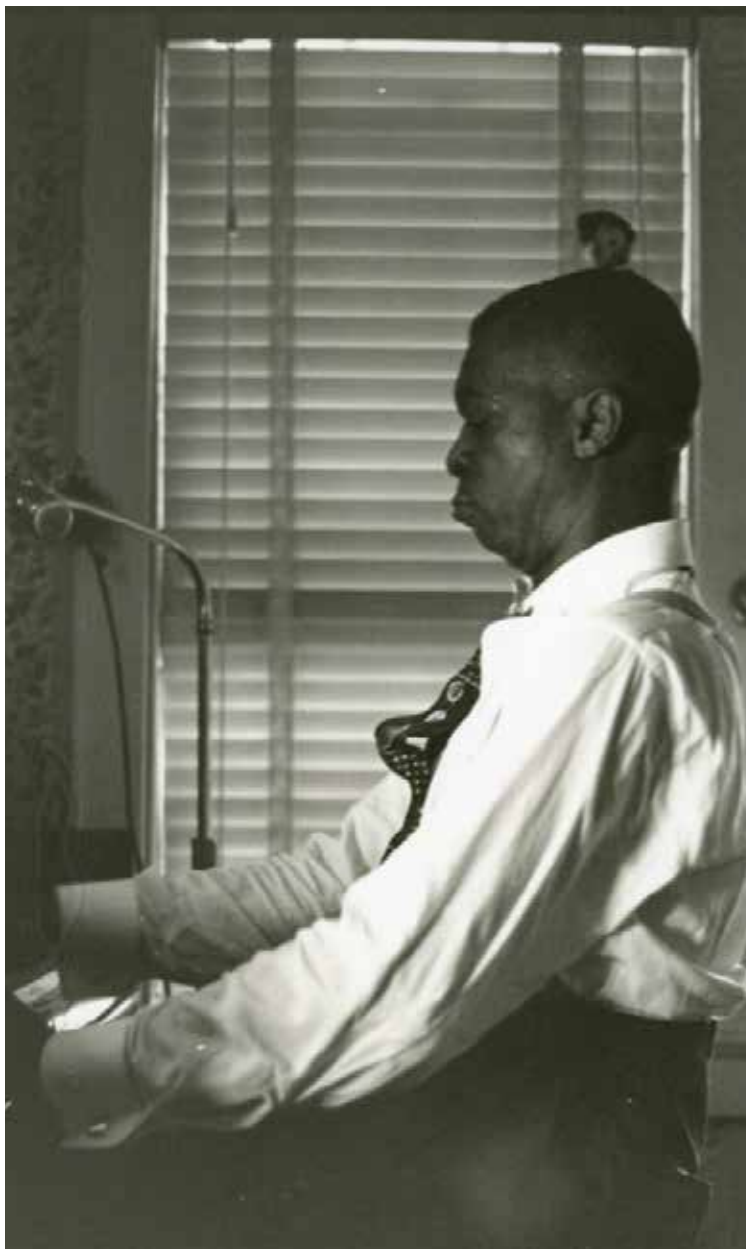
The 128-page booklet is a treasure trove of information about McCormick, Texas blues and its African-American population in the state's history, an extensive essay detailing exactly who this McCormick phantom was in life, almost eight pages about the collection, 20-plus pages of artist biographies, and 30-plus pages about all 66 recordings.

And there are photos, black and white, in homes, in jukeboxes, on porches, cigarettes dangling, instruments lovingly held – all recalling a bygone era, a time when cultural enclaves reveled in joyous celebrations of solidarity. In those days, one's hard life beat these 50-year-olds to look like they were 80. That said, these pictures capture men long past their prime, but still revered in their environments for the music, stories, and songs they have been entrusted to carry forth.

In addition to McCormick's photos from his archives of these long-forgotten musicians, there are three pages of almost 600 entries of McCormick's field research tapes in his

collection, 15 of McCormick's recordings from 1959 to 1998, and 40 entries of sources for further reading.

If your love with blues began with today's ubiquitous blues-rock or the SRV guitar of the 1980s or the folk blues revival of the 1960s or the Chicago blues of the 1950s or the mystery of Robert Johnson's songs or the scratchy Delta recordings that inspired Johnson, Mack McCormick's vast archives of these mostly forgotten musicians needs to be added to every fan's perception of blues history. Once appreciated, it becomes essential in understanding how the past roots of the blues provided life and essence to its present status. **-BMO**



ERIC CLAPTON
The Definitive 24 Nights
Warner/Reprise



Time to update your Eric Clapton collection. Up until now, one of the most memorable Eric Clapton albums was his two CD, 15-song collection from his Royal Albert Hall residency in 1990 and 1991. Those 15 songs provided we fans with, at that time, a feeling that we could experience Clapton's worldwide fame without traveling across the pond to the Hall. But those songs and accompanying home video were merely appetizers of this iconic event.

Thirty-two years later, Warner has enlisted Clapton's team to restore and upgrade the collection to now include SIX hours of music adding 36 previously unreleased tracks to the original 15. These selections were culled from Clapton's 18 shows in 1990 and 24 concerts in 1991. The current box set is divided into three separate collections, rock, blues, and orchestral,

and comes in a variety of purchase possibilities. Fans can purchase either the full box set as a six CD or eight vinyl products, each with accompanying Blu-ray discs of the show or, for the more budget conscious, separate individual two CD/DVD packages of each separate collection. The full box set includes a thorough, hard bound 50-page booklet with extensive liner notes by *Rolling Stone Magazine's* David Fricke, 30 pages of event photos with Peter Blake's iconic pop art illustrations from those nights, set lists, and band members from each night.

Fricke's essay includes *Rolling Stone* interviews with Clapton augmented with tidbits from Fricke's own 2007 and 2016 interviews illuminating a Clapton we thought we knew. Other verbal recollections and contributions include thoughts from Chuck Leavell, Jimmie Vaughan, and guitarist Greg Pillinganes.

Most interesting to readers of *Blues Music Magazine* is the blues part of the set. These 14 oft-recorded blues chestnuts are presented in a blues band format with heavy guitar solos, gritty Chicago blues harmonica, and some head cutting fireworks among Clapton's slew of blues royalty. Those invited guests include Buddy Guy, Albert Collins, Robert Cray, Jimmie Vaughan, Jerry Portnoy, Chuck Leavell, Johnnie Johnson, and Richard Cousins working their way through a collection of blues standards including an all out blues jam finale on "Sweet Home Chicago."

Clapton handles the lead vocals and most of the guitar on six of the 14 blues cuts. Collins leads on "Black Cat Bone," Johnnie Johnson rocks the 88s on "Johnnie's Boogie," and Cray contributes the lead on "Reconsider Baby." From both years, Buddy handles "Everything's Gonna Be Alright" and "Something On Your Mind" from 1990 and, from 1991, "My Time After A While" and the "Sweet Home Chicago" friendly head cutting jam which then leads to a short, three-minute reprise of "Watch Yourself" with Buddy and Jerry Portnoy sparring in a South Side guitar and harmonica call and response. (Interesting tidbit. Jerry recently told me that when he joined Eric's band, the first item was that he and the other band members were sent to be fitted for Armani suits. Looks like that's the suit Jerry is wearing throughout this Albert Hall gig!)

. Throughout these songs, Clapton clearly shows off his immense talent in expressing a variety of emotions on six strings. Surrounding himself with arguably the four finest blues guitarists of 1990 and 1991 clearly pushes Clapton into otherworldly blues guitar realms.

Fittingly, "Crossroads," "Layla," and "Sunshine Of Your Love" all get the rock treatment,

ALBUM REVIEW CONT.

ERIC CLAPTON
The Definitive 24 Nights
Warner/Reprise

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Fittingly, “Crossroads,” “Layla,” and “Sunshine Of Your Love” all get the rock treatment, but are also standouts in the Orchestral performances. Some rock highlights include Clapton’s timeless wah-wah in “White Room,” the 12-minutes of another Cream favorite, “Sunshine Of Your Love,” complete with the an all out drum (Phil Collins) and percussion solo, Nathan East’s airy tenor on Blind Faith’s “Can’t Find My Way Home,” the reggae treatment of “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door” and “I Shot The Sheriff” with Phil Collins on drums.

Clapton’s nine-piece band is ably augmented with National Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Michael Kamen. Like any orchestra’s symphonic performance, there is a four-minute grand introduction

to the evening’s musical plan before turning to “Crossroads.” Nine songs from the rock 18 songs are repeated here with a formidable orchestral approach. Including “Crossroads,” the massive orchestral treatment is in full force on 11 of the 15 tunes – “Bell Bottom Blues,” “I Shot The Sheriff,” “Edge Of Darkness,” “Wonderful Tonight,” “White Room,” “Layla,” “Can’t Find My Way Home,” “A Remark You Made,” and “Sunshine Of Your Love.”

If you attended a prom or wedding during the ‘80s or ‘90s, you likely heard “Wonderful Tonight” over and over. Here, Clapton delivers the ubiquitous tune twice, first with the rock ensemble and later an almost ten-minute symphonic arrangement with the complete orchestra treatment.

Most impressive is Kamen’s 29-minute tour de force “Concerto For Electric Guitar,” illustrating how an electric rock and blues guitar can fit into a classical score. The final five-minutes is a climactic, 4th of July finale exploding over and over with Slowhand’s emotional release buoyed by Kamen’s strings, brass, reeds, and percussion as support. This is exactly what Beethoven would have composed if his world had electric guitars!

Here ARE some items from Fricke’s liner notes. Clapton first played the Royal Albert Hall on December 4, 1964. Since then, he has he has played the historic venue more than 200 times, including 186 headlining solo concerts. The 1991 blues concert added Jimmie Vaughan, who admits that Clapton’s call to play was exactly what he needed as he was shrouded in the grief of Stevie’s 1990 death. In March of 1991, a month after Clapton’s final night with the orchestra, his four-year-old son Conor died in the tragic accident that shook Clapton’s world.

Chuck Leavell couldn’t remember any rehearsals for the 1991 blues shows, “My gut is that we did not, maybe we did a sound check together. We had enough information to know what the song was, what the key was. And, Buddy takes charge whenever he’s on stage.”

Finally, my most memorable item from those Royal Albert Hall days was Eric’s proclamation that Buddy Guy was the greatest living blues guitarist. In 1991 that announcement immediately skyrocketed Buddy’s recognition in the U.S. I can personally attest to the fact that before the EC proclamation, Buddy played a tiny 150 seat venue in my area twice a year; after that, Buddy moved to the 1,500 seat theater in the same town and has never looked back.

– Art Tipaldi

ALBUM REVIEW

D.K. HARRELL
The Right Man
Little Village

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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.

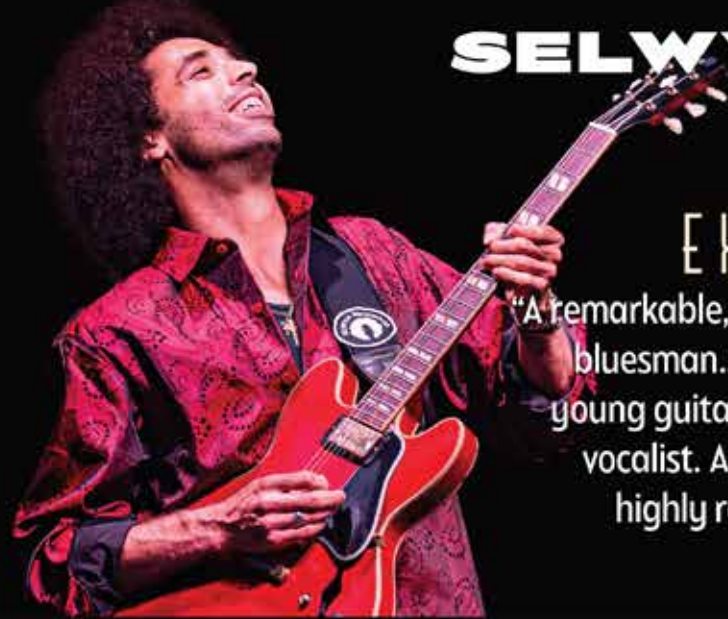
That’s the historical depth Harrell wanted, and that’s exactly where the album begins. The opening track is 100% B.B. circa 1950s. “The Right Man” features the mature musical conversation between Harrell’s stinging B.B. vibrato answered by Pugh’s massive B-3 and the prodigious brass section. Because 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

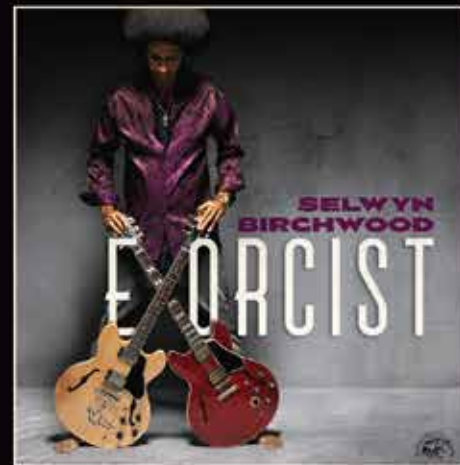
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For their third Alligator album, Chicago's Nick Moss Band gets more than their backs into the 14 originals (12 by Moss, two by Gruenling) inspired by the blues and R&B of the forties, fifties, and sixties. Guitarist/vocalist/co-producer Moss and harmonica 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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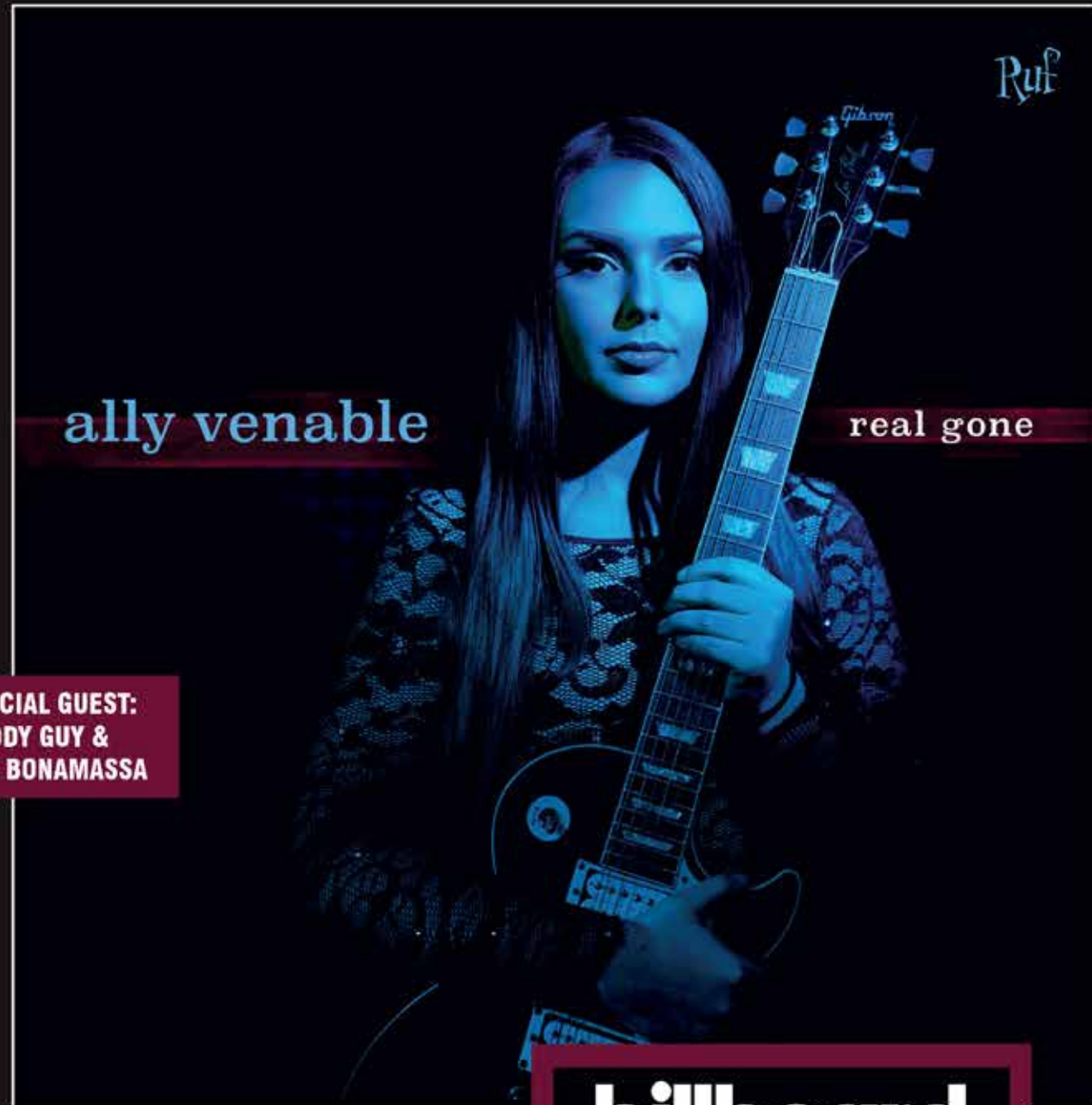
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SAMANTHA FISH & JESSE DAYTON

Death Wish Blues

Rounder Records

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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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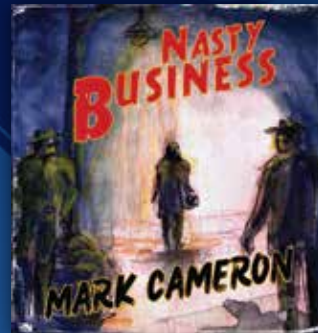
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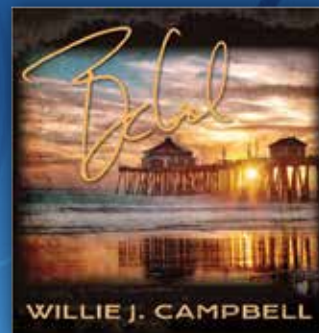
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Album Review Originally
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Summer 2023 Print Edition
Released July 2023

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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.

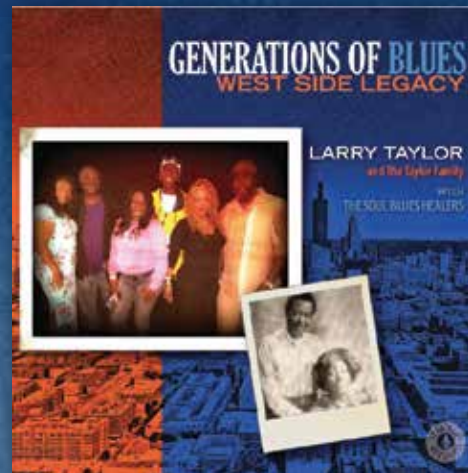
"The vocals are warm and well recorded ... the Jimmy Reed-flavored tracks exhibit honest flavors but are not simply imitations of the Vee Jay singles of that era." - Dave Gallaher, Talkin' the Blues with Microwave Dave

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Larry Taylor and his siblings honor the 100th birthday of their father Eddie Taylor, one of the originators of post-war Chicago blues, in this historic collection of 13 songs performed by the Taylor family's second and third generations.

"There's just no end to this family's talent, as Larry Taylor and the Taylor Family's 'Generations of Blues' so powerfully illustrates." - Bill Dahl



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

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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.

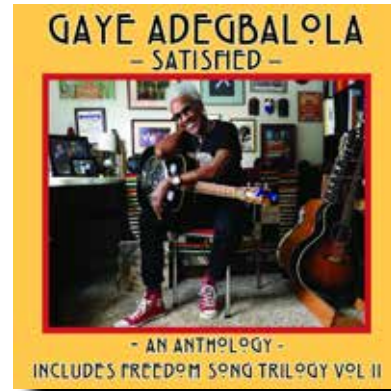
The album's back half loses focus, though, with a resulting loss of forward momentum. A different group of backing musicians feature on pair of swinging, West Coast-style tracks; while fine on their own, they might have been better served elsewhere. The bouncy instrumental closing number "Show Tune" 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

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

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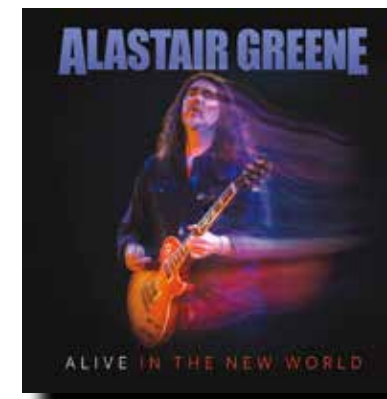
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Album Review Originally Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine* Summer 2023 Print Edition Released July 2023

ALASTAIR GREENE
Alive In The New World
Whiskey Bayou Records

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Recorded in May of 2021 over six nights at Chicago's City Winery – where Greene was opening for Tab Benoit – *Alive In The New World* is the singer/songwriter/guitarist's follow-up to *The New World Blues* and serves as the live version of that album. As on that 2020 studio release, Greene is backed by Benoit on drums (yes, drums) and Corey Duplechin on bass. It's a stripped down set-up that lends itself to live recording.

For those who enjoyed *The New World Blues*, this album will sound familiar, with its ten tracks playing close to the originals. This shouldn't be too much of a surprise; the recording of the studio album was an isolated event and was released during the COVID shutdown. Consequently, the 2021 performances caught on *Alive In The New World* were some of the earliest opportunities for Greene, Benoit, and Duplechin to get in step.


Greene has been recording under his own name since 2001, and during the last 20 years he has backed a who's who of headliner musicians on bandstands around the world. His music spins on the axis between blues and rock, but with the ubiquitous Benoit producing, both of these albums tilt hard toward the former.

Taken alone, *Alive In The New World* is a fine release by three outstanding musicians. Listened to alongside *The New World Blues*, a layer is added to the mix. What is an album if not a musical snapshot recorded at a given place and time? So making another recording of that same music at a later date and in a different place that is considerably less controlled can make for an interesting experience trying to find the changes.

In a way that may channel their times, these changes jump out on two tracks. "Heroes" sounds more surefooted than the original, as the trio alters its approach enough to change its reflective message to a more anthemic one that adds assurance and perseverance to it. "Bayou Mile" – a highlight of both albums – is also significantly different. The original is moody, for a moody period. The live version is, as well, but it brings a steam that steadily picks up each time Greene nails its articulated riff and finally blows when he launches into two slide solos that scream *I'm so happy to be playing live for people again!*

And – when you come down to it – isn't that what it's all about?
– Matthew MacDonald

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JOANNA CONNOR
Best Of Me
Gulf Coast Records

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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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DUKE ROBILLARD & HIS ALL-STAR BAND
Six Strings Of Steel
M.C. Records

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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 Teixiara (drums) co-wrote with Robillard "In Perfect Harmony," a straightforward love song Robillard dedicates to his wife, Laurene.

Ballou and Teixiara 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

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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.

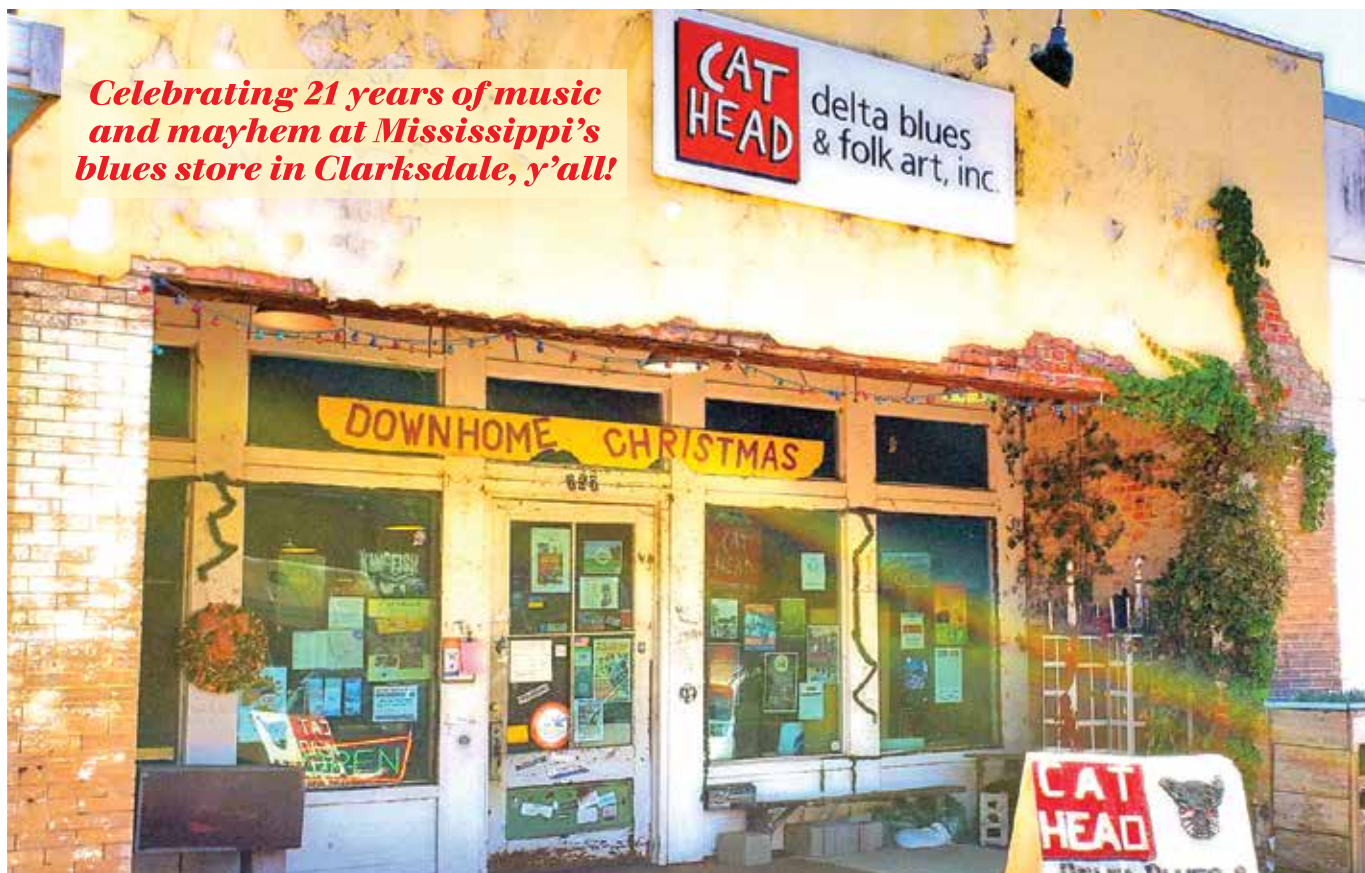
It's Primer's voice weaving his soul through the Temple of Blues that is Rosa's Lounge like sacred vapors, conjuring Muddy, Elmore, and Sonny Boy as they cook that petrie dish, chemically and spiritually conjoining the South Side to the South. What we hear is what the radio brought to Chris Youlden, 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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BOB CORRITORE
Women In Blues Showcase
 VizzTone

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Finally, here is a great collection of women blues singers, some of them sadly no longer with us, expertly recorded and showcased on *Bob Corritore & Friends: Women In Blues Showcase*. The singers and the tracks flow seamlessly into one another on this well-mixed, well-engineered recording.

The women are all here in fine voice: Barbara Lynn, Koko, Carol Fran, Francine Reed, Dianna Greenleaf, Valerie June, and Shy Perry. I've had the pleasure of seeing Koko Taylor many times in New Jersey and at the Chicago Blues Festival over the years, but for me, this album brings back memories of trips to Austin in the 1990s for Clifford Antone's annual Antone's anniversary parties in mid-July, when one could enjoy some cold spring swimming or golf during the hot dry days, and some great music and barbecue at night.

It was there, at the old club on Guadalupe, that I first heard and saw Barbara Lynn, a formidable guitarist and singer-songwriter, and late Carol Fran with her partner, Clarence Holliman. While many people at that time might not be as familiar with a singer like Francine Reed, thankfully, another big roots music aficionado from Texas, Lyle Lovett, took her on several national tours with his band, so she picked up new fans that way. Make no mistake, the only thing more difficult than making it as a blues singer is making it as a jazz singer.

A young Barbara Lynn opens the anthology with "You're Gonna Be Sorry," and a young Koko Taylor sounds terrific here on "What Kind Of Man Is This." Ditto for Greenleaf on Willie Dixon's classic "Don't Mess With The Messer." With 36 musicians recorded here, good people like John Primer, Doug James, Bob Stroger, Kid Ramos, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, and dozens of others, you may find yourself listening to this disc again and again in your car or home stereo, "discovering" things you didn't hear the first or second go-round.

– *Richard J. Skelly*

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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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DOUG DEMING & THE JEWEL TONES

Groovin' At Groove Now!

Endless Blues Records

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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 Tipaldi

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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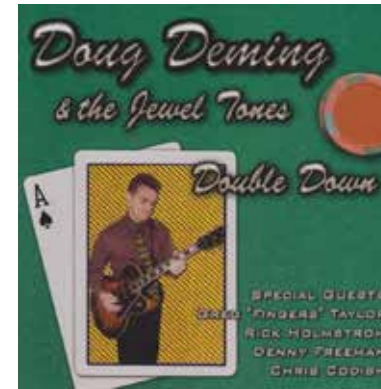


Endless Blues
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DOUG DEMING & THE JEWEL TONES
Double Down – Twentieth Anniversary Reissue
Blue Bella Records

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With a chance discovery of a forgotten 8MM Hi-Def video recorder, guitarist Doug Deming also rediscovered a matching tape with a recording of the record release party for his debut album, *Double Down*, some 20 years ago – and what a party it was!

The Detroit blues community was well-represented, with Lazy Lester, Kim Wilson, and Rick Holmstrom part of the festivities. Deming arranged to have the audio files stripped off the tape, selecting some of the live tracks to add to this special release, which is being issued on Blue Bella Records, the label run by guitarist Nick Moss.

The four bonus live tracks jump with plenty of swinging energy from the solid rhythm section of Bob Connor on upright and Fender bass plus Jason Cittinger on drums. But the real treat is hearing Greg “Fingers” Taylor blowing up a storm on harmonica, setting Deming up for some equally scintillating guitar forays. If you only know Taylor from his work with Jimmy Buffet, his hearty blowing on “Black Jack,” or his impressive up-tempo excursion on “Goodbye Baby” serve as reminders that he was masterful blues harp player. The slow blues “Let Me Be” provides an additional testimonial to the depths of his talent.

The 12 original studio tracks span the gamut of Deming’s musical palette. The fact that many of songs are still featured in his live shows highlights their staying power. Whether he is testifying about late night loving on “On The Midnight Shift,” delivering a mesmerizing guitar solo on the up-tempo instrumental title track, or bemoaning a mistreating woman on the slow blues classic “It’s A Crime,” a track steeped in the T-Bone Walker legacy, Deming impresses at every turn.

“Mr. Blues” is a rousing shuffle, with Brian Miller getting a deep tone on his harp in response to a biting solo from the leader. The studio version of “Black Jack” proceeds at a slower pace without losing any of the power of a groove that always fills the dance floor. Instrumental support was provided by Dale Jennings on upright bass, Don Gruendler Jr. on drums, Denny Freeman on piano, and Chris Codish on organ.

Two decades later, Deming is touring internationally with four additional recordings under his name, including a new live set. The lessons he learned backing Taylor, Lazy Lester, Wilson, and Gary Primich, combined with his passion for all things that swing, from Walker to Ella Fitzgerald, continue to be firmly ingrained in his musical approach. This Anniversary set gives us a glimpse of the past, leaving no doubt that all of the hallmarks of Deming’s vibrant style were there right from the start.

– Mark Thompson



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Album Review Originally
Appeared In *Blues Music Magazine*
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BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS
High Rise Blues
VizzTone



Bob Corritore's "Friends" include (get ready for it) Jimmy Rogers, Magic Slim, Chico Chism, Luther Tucker, Koko Taylor, Manuel Arrington, Eddie Taylor Jr., Sam Lay, John Primer, Pinetop Perkins, Bo Diddley, John Brim, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, Eddy Clearwater, Bob Reid, and Lil' Ed. The 14 recordings were done by Corritore from his studio in his Rhythm Room Club in Arizona and, after listening to each song, Corritore should continue to release more, if not all, of the recordings from his vault.

Corritore wasn't just a passive listener/engineer in these recordings as his harmonica is included in the backing bands. As you listen throughout *High Rise Blues* you'll enjoy the continuity of Corritore's blues harp skills, as it is the instrument that weaves these 14 tracks together. The guitar playing is pure Chicago, oftentimes with single note blues phrasing. The most salacious track is Manual Arrington's "Candy Bars," where he name checks a score of different confections that are pure delicious double entendre. Not to be outdone by Arrington, Pinetop Perkins performs "Grinder Man," which discusses the pleasures of the flesh, not candy.

As these artists had originally cut LP recordings, most of these songs fall in around the three-plus minute time in length, which was also conducive for 45-rpm recordings. John Primer, however, recorded an angry six-minute "Why Are You So Mean To Me." The band seems to sense the tenor of his tale and ratchets up their playing accordingly for a truly outstanding track.

Eddy Clearwater and Bob Reid also breach the six-minute mark with an upbeat "Sail A Ship" tune. Lil' Ed closes out the disc with his seven-minute "Caught In The Act," a lament about unfaithfulness. If this set had been recorded live on-stage with each act following the other at one gig, you'd be knee deep in a head-cutting contest as each track is a gem.

Let me stop for a second and describe the recording. I don't know what techniques Corritore used, but these vaunted singers ply their vocals into a tightly supported backing band that is produced so well that each performer sings as if they were young once again.

Not only would I highly recommend purchasing *High Rise Blues*, I'd be on the lookout for any new "From The Vaults" offering by Bob Corritore. A big THANK YOU is in order.


– Pete Sardon

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GRAINNE DUFFY
Dirt Woman Blues
GDB Prospect Ltd.



Three years ago, I reviewed Grainne Duffy's release *Voodoo Blues* and labeled it, "no-holds-barred blues rock." Well, she is back, in tandem with her guitarist husband Paul Sherry, for more of the same: nine original songs clocking in at a little over a half hour. The set again relies on its greatest strength, Duffy's powerful vocals. Contributing essential ensemble backing are guitarist Marc Ford, with his son Elijah Ford on keyboards and bass and JJ Johnson on percussion.

Kicking off the festivities is "Well Well Well," an unapologetic rocker replete with alternately crunchy and droning lead guitar. The title track then slows the beat, lead guitar lyrical rather than bombastic, with Duffy's singing bringing to my mind the vocal character of contemporary blues women Beth Hart, Ghalia Volt, and Susan Tedeschi. "What's It Going To Be?" is a jaunty track affording Duffy the opportunity to inject the merest hint of country twang into her vocal while also delving into a high falsetto range. She maintains a similar approach on "Running Back To You," an amalgam of 1950s pop, country, and Motown soul.

Variety is introduced on "Rise Above," an insistent drum cadence the foundation for Duffy's supple vocal, enhanced here by the presence of several harmonious backing vocalists. The five minute long track, "Sweet Liberation," evokes memory of the pop classic "Sweet Inspiration," with syncopated lead guitar riffs and a succinct but effective mid-song solo by Marc Ford. The somewhat ponderous but still effective "Hold On To You" benefits from the addition of guest keyboardist Peter Levin, and "Yes I Am" makes a 20-second feint as a slow blues before morphing into an unabashed rocker with stinging guitar accentuating Duffy's vocal.

The set ends with "Killycrum," a tribute to Duffy's home area in Ireland, this time acoustic guitar as foundation. (Liner notes neglect to identify which of the three guitarists, Ford, Sherry, and Duffy, is lead on each track.)

- Dan Stevens

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CHRIS DUARTE
Half As Good As Two
Provogue Records



If you're in the mood for some grindin', Stevie Ray-style geetar antics. Chris Duarte is your man. The Austin, TX-based guitarist labels his sound "ferocious rockin' blues," and is often left bloody-fingered from his hard-charging shredding. For his latest, *Half As Good As Two*, on Provogue Records, even though Duarte introduces some new influences into his work, he's still a hard-core string buster. The guitarist has said that John Coltrane is his main musical god, but there's more hard-rockin' blues than jazz evident in these latest offerings.

The title cut, "Half As Good As Two," is a blistering honky-tonk shuffle touting the virtues of a made-up lover put together from two women to help him get over the cardiac pain one heartbreaker superwoman has already put him through. "Try to find a lover that will make me sweat/Searching and I'm searching haven't found her yet." "Nothing compares to the way that two do," Duarte laments. "Two girls is what it takes for me."

"Lies, Lies Lies" sounds like Johnny Winter chewing on the strings, hard rockin' blues with a corral full of twang and thump. Even though it's an original, "Gimme Your Love" is vintage Stevie Ray, a clanking and grinding string squeezer with lyrics advocating a softer approach to your loved ones' well being and longevity than the title implies: "Be strong for your women/Be strong for your man/Never turn your back and make a stand/Be strong for each other/While you can."

"Can Opener" is also in the Stevie Ray canon, a shrieking, searing instrumental with Duarte showing off his octopus technique, all eight arms busy shredding his prey to bits. Duarte gets all Hendrix on the feedback-saturated "Big Fight," mashing up Robert Plant Led Zep- era vocals with pedal effects antics of mass distortion. Recorded live in the studio with vintage gear, Duarte's latest has that fresh, in-person and unfooled with sound you'd associate with a live gig. Shuffles are the predominate means of delivery here, but the guitarist keeps things so stirred up with his muscular solos that the form seems new with every appearance.

— Grant Britt

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BIG HARP GEORGE
Cut My Spirit Loose
 Blues Mountain Records



Well, why mess with a good thing...especially when it just keeps getting better? Chromatic harmonica maven George Bisharat, a retired defense attorney and law professor living in the San Francisco area, released his first album in 2014 and has recorded with the same adept ensemble in each album through his fifth and newest, *Cut My Spirit Loose*.

A harp player couldn't wish for a better band. Producer Chris Burns mans the keyboards, D'Mar and June Core share percussion, Joe Kyle Jr. plucks the bass, Kid Andersen deals out six-string expertise, and Mike Rinta and Michael Peloquin handle the trumpet and sax respectively. The Sons of the Soul

Revivers send out sweet backing vocals, and a few others make brief appearances, including canine Lulu Bisharat with barking on the aptly titled "My Dog Is Better Than You."

That song's title suggests the wit of many of the 13 tracks, all but one of which were composed by Bisharat. It's a jaunty jump blues, effectively employing the horns. Equally swinging is the opening tune, "It's Tuesday," in this instance propelled by Andersen's stinging lead guitar. "Pile Driving Sam" is an ostensible lament of envy about the titular gentleman who has a perplexing attractiveness to women. "Give Me The Dark" continues to swing, albeit at a slightly slower tempo, followed by the horn-driven instrumental "Bustin' Out," even a tuba participating. Next is the only cover song, the Lennon-McCartney Beatles' song "She's A Woman," replete with Burns on organ and with the horns razzing in the background.

An upbeat and optimistic vibe persists for the first nine tracks; it's hard to listen without popping one's fingers and smiling broadly, both at the musicianship and the well-crafted lyrics. Bisharat's harmonica playing, if it needs saying, is alternately saucy and sibilant; he definitely knows how to play that big (chromatic) harp!

At track ten the set pivots to a traditional twelve bar slow blues, "Behind The Eight Ball"; it's one of the best of Bisharat's smooth and evocative tenor vocals. The ensuing "Take A Knee" is a brief but pithy condemnation of social inequality, with some fine acoustic guitar by Andersen. The loose and loping instrumental "Sunrise Stroll" affords delightful interplay between harmonica, guitar, and horns. The set finishes on a literal high note – actually multiple high notes courtesy of flute by Ben Torres – with "Captain Jack," all the principals collaborating in a fine culmination.

– Dan Stevens



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