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Bits

BLUES IN THE SOUTH

SEPTEMBER 2024

Issue #449

INTERVIEW WITH
DOGHOUSE SAM

Doghouse Sam

INTERVIEW WITH
HENRY SLIM

INTERVIEW WITH
GREG HASTY

LAWRENCE LEBO'S
FAREWELL

MAGIC SAM-JOHN
HOLMES

REVIEWS

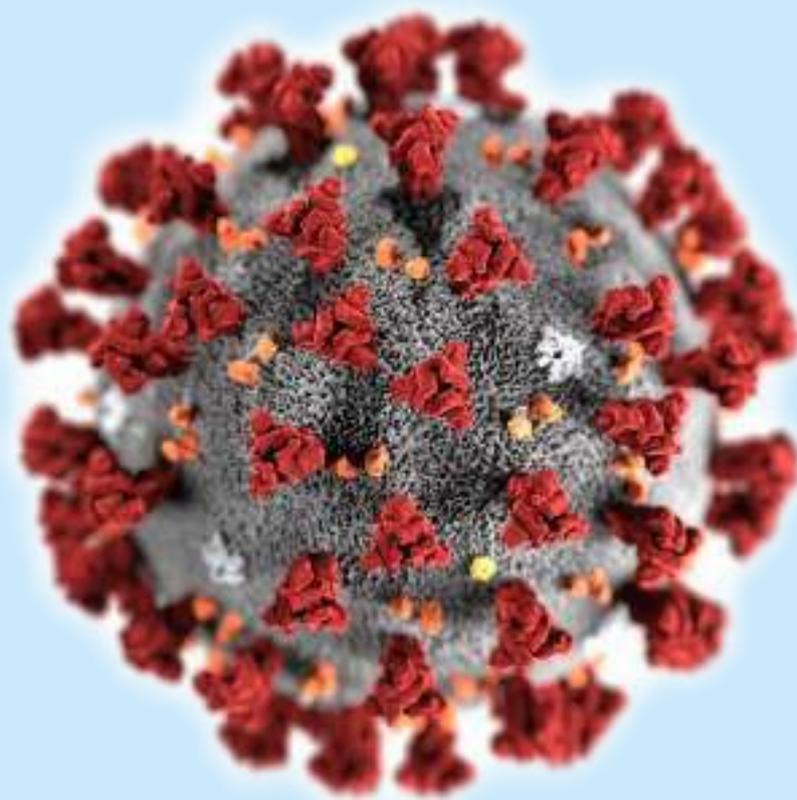
VIDEOS



YET AGAIN, WE HAVE A NUMBER OF GIGS IN THIS EDITION FOR YOU. ALTHOUGH MANY HAVE BEEN CANCELLED OR POSTPONED, IT APPEARS THAT THINGS ARE SLOWLY RETURNING TO NORMAL. BITS WILL CONTINUE CAREFULLY TO MONITOR THE SITUATION AND WE FULLY EXPECT MORE AND MORE GIGS OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. IN THE MEAN TIME, DON'T GO TO GIGS IF YOU ARE NOT ABSOLUTELY SURE THEY ARE COMPLETELY SAFE,

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE AND REMEMBER:

IT AIN'T GORN YET!!



**The CORONA VIRUS DOES NOT CIRCULATE
PEOPLE CIRCULATE IT**

BLUES GIGS: FROM EXMOUTH TO EASTBOURNE AND A BIT MORE BESIDES

- 04/09 SOUTHERN FRIED GROOVE QUEENS @ The Bridge Inn, Topsham with Jeff Horsey. 19:00.
- 05/09 LIL JIM @ The Bullfrog Blues Club, The Dockyard Club, Onslow Road, Southsea, PO5 2NH, <https://webplus.barkingspider.abelgratis.com/> ,19:30.
- 05/09 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, 83 Catherine Street, Salisbury SP1 2DH, 19:30.
- 06/09 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Royal Oak, Bath, 21:00.
- 06/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Prestongate Inn, Bude, 21:00.
- 07/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Union Inn, St Ives, 21:00.
- 08/09 KABOODLE @ Poole Hill Brewery, Bournemouth, 15:00.
- 08/09 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Southgate Inn, Devizes., 17:00.
- 11/09 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, Salisbury, SP1 2DH, 20:00.
- 13/09 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Riff Corner, Clevedon, 21:00.
- 19/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ Newquay Rowing Club, 21:00.
- 20/09 OTIS JAY BLUES BAND @ Meeting House Ringwood BH24 1EY.
- 21/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Cobweb Inn, Boscastle, 21:30.
- 28/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Old Ale House, Truro, 21:00.
- 29/09 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Bullers Arms, Looe, 19:00.
- 03/10 HARRY SKINNER @ The Bullfrog Blues Club, The Dockyard Club, Onslow Road, Southsea, PO5 2NH, <https://webplus.barkingspider.abelgratis.com/> , 19:30.
- 03/10 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, 83 Catherine Street, Salisbury SP1 2DH, 19:30.
- 05/10 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Elephant at Port Eliot, St Germans, 20:30.
- 06/10 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Southgate Inn, Devizes, 17:00.
- 09/10 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, Salisbury, SP1 2DH, 20:00.

- 11/10 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Devon & Cornwall Inn, Millbrook, 21:00.
- 12/10 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Old Duke, Bristol,@,21:00.
- 13/10 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Boathouse, Bradford On Avon, 21:00.
- 19/10 ABB @ Central Bars, New Milton, 21:00.
- 19/10 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Driftwood Spars, St Agnes, 21:00.
- 24/10 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Teignmouth Jazz and Blues Club, 21:00.
- 03/11 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Southgate Inn, Devizes, 17:00.
- 03/11 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The White Hart, Truro, 17:00.
- 07/11 JOHNNY MARS & THE COLD HEART REVUE @ The Bullfrog Blues Club, The Dockyard Club, Onslow Road, Southsea, PO5 2NH,
<https://webplus.barkingspider.abelgratis.com/> ,19:30.
- 07/11 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, 83 Catherine Street,
 Salisbury SP1 2DH, 19:30.
- 08/11 ABB @ Thomas Tripp, Christchurch, 21:00.
- 10/11 JON AMOR TRIO @ The Three Horseshoes, Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts, 15:00.
- 10/11 PETE HARRIS & BOB PEARCE @ The Platform Tavern, 17:00
- 13/11 PETE & PHIL'S BLUES JAM @ The Bell & Crown, 83 Catherine Street,
 Salisbury, SP1 2DH, 20:00.
- 24/11 OTIS JAY BLUES BAND @ Poole Hill Brewery Bournemouth BH2 5PW
 15:00.
- 29/11 OTIS JAY BLUES BAND @ St Peter's Church Bournemouth BH1 2EE, 13:00.
- 29/11 THE MIGHTY HOWLERS @ The Bullers Arms, Looe, 21:00.



HELP WANTED

For a number of years now, Andrew Cadwell has been valiantly supporting BiTS by being the GIG GUIDE COORDINATOR.

This is an honorary post, which is a polite way of saying, "There's no money in it"!

The job involves managing the GIG CALENDAR on the BiTS website

(www.bluesinthesouth.com), receiving emails from artists, searching if possible for gigs in the BITS area, which is roughly defined as the area of England south of the M4 (with a line extended in to the North Sea) and doing whatever you consider necessary to keep the site one of the best gig guides you will find. The direct link to the site is <https://www.brownbearsw.com/freecal/BITS>)

Andrew has decided to retire and we are looking for a replacement for him in this key job. There are hundreds of hits on the site every week and it is considered a key resource by both musicians and venues. Are you interested? Support will be given by Andrew and by Ian McKenzie as required..

To find out more please contact Ian McKenzie at editor@bluesinthesouth.com

By-the-way, there may be non-monetary ways in which we can re-imburse you, which as you are a blues person, you might find useful.

- A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR -

When BiTS was first published in 1987 under the editorship of the Southampton blues musician Bob Pearce, it was intended to be a guide to blues and related gigs in the Southampton area. When it started it was two sides of A4. Since then it has grown a bit!

The 'advert' above tells a story, not only about Andrew Cadwell's 'retirement' but also about the gig guide itself. The need for a Gig Guide Co-ordinator is clearly revealed if you examine the pages immediately before this. In the last few months we have (often) had close to or more than, one hundred gigs per month. Andrew has stopped chasing people and venues, and there are fewer than 50 gigs entered on the website *for the next four months*.

A couple of years ago, Blues DJ Ian McHugh, called the BiTS gig guide one of the best he had ever seen. I for one, want to maintain that.

If you are a gigging musician, a gig organiser, a venue, a festival organiser or whatever EITHER

1) Enter the details of gigs directly into the website at:

<https://www.brownbearsw.com/freecal/BITS>

2) Send details of the event to gigs@bluesinthesouth.com and they will be entered for you.

LET'S MAKE BiTS GREAT AGAIN

MBCA



Most Played Album Top 40 – July 2024

Collated from the playlists of the Independent Blues Broadcasters Association members

Position	Artist	Album
1	GILES ROBSON	SEVEN BLUES CLASSICS
2	CHRIS CAIN	GOOD INTENTIONS GONE BAD
3	ERROL LINTON	BREAK THE SEAL
4	ROBIN BIBI BIG BAND	BLOWING A STORM
5	THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS	STRUCK DOWN
6	NEIL SADLER	PAST TO PRESENT
7	TOM MANSI & THE ICEBREAKERS	EYEBALL
8	THE ZAC SCHULZE GANG	LIVE & LOUD
9	JOHN MAYALL & THE BLUESBREAKERS	WITH ERIC CLAPTON
10	ALICE ARMSTRONG	LIVE AT AREA 88
11	BYWATER CALL	SHEPHERD
12	DOUG DUFFEY & BADD	AIN'T GOIN' BACK
13	ALBERT CASTIGLIA	RIGHTEOUS SOULS
14	THE BAD DAY	THE IRISH GOODBYE
15	CONNOLLY HAYES	REMEMBER ME
16	ROBERT JON & THE WRECK	RED MOON RISING
17	CHRISTOPHER WYZE & THE TELLERS	STUCK IN THE MUD
18	JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR	HEAVY SOUL
19	WILLIE BUCK & THE DELMARK ALL-STARS	LIVE AT BUDDY GUY'S LEGENDS
20	MISTY BLUES	I'M TOO OLD FOR GAMES: A LIVE TRIBUTE TO ODETTA
21	RORY BLOCK	POSITIVELY 4TH STREET
22	SEAN WEBSTER	SUMMER HAS GONE
23	KELLY'S LOT	THE BLUES REMIND ME
24	TREVOR B. POWER BAND	ARE WE EVER FREE
25	ELIZA NEALS	COLORCRIMES
26	ADAM SWEET	LIVE AT CRESCENT RECORDS
27	JOE BONAMASSA	LIVE AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL WITH ORCHESTRA
28	ANDRES ROOTS	SOLO PIECES
29	THE MILK MEN	HOLY COW!
30	AMANDA FISH	KINGDOM
31	JAMES OLIVER BAND	LESS IS MORE
32	THE COMMONERS	RESTLESS
33	THE DIRT ROAD BAND	RIGHTEOUS
34	DAMON T	STAND MY GROUND VOL. II
35	THE CINELLI BROTHERS	ALMOST EXACTLY...
36	DIANA BRAITHWAITE & CHRIS WHITELEY	FOREVER BLUES
37	BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE	HOT NOSTALGIA RADIO
38	CEK & THE STOMPERS	MR. RED
39	PHIL COYNE & THE WAYWARD ACES	PHIL COYNE & THE WAYWARD ACES
40	JOHN MAYALL	THE SUN IS SHINING DOWN



Most venues are now OPEN For music gigs



Are you a musician?
When you get new
bookings, don't forget to

put them on the BiTS website 'Gig Guide.'

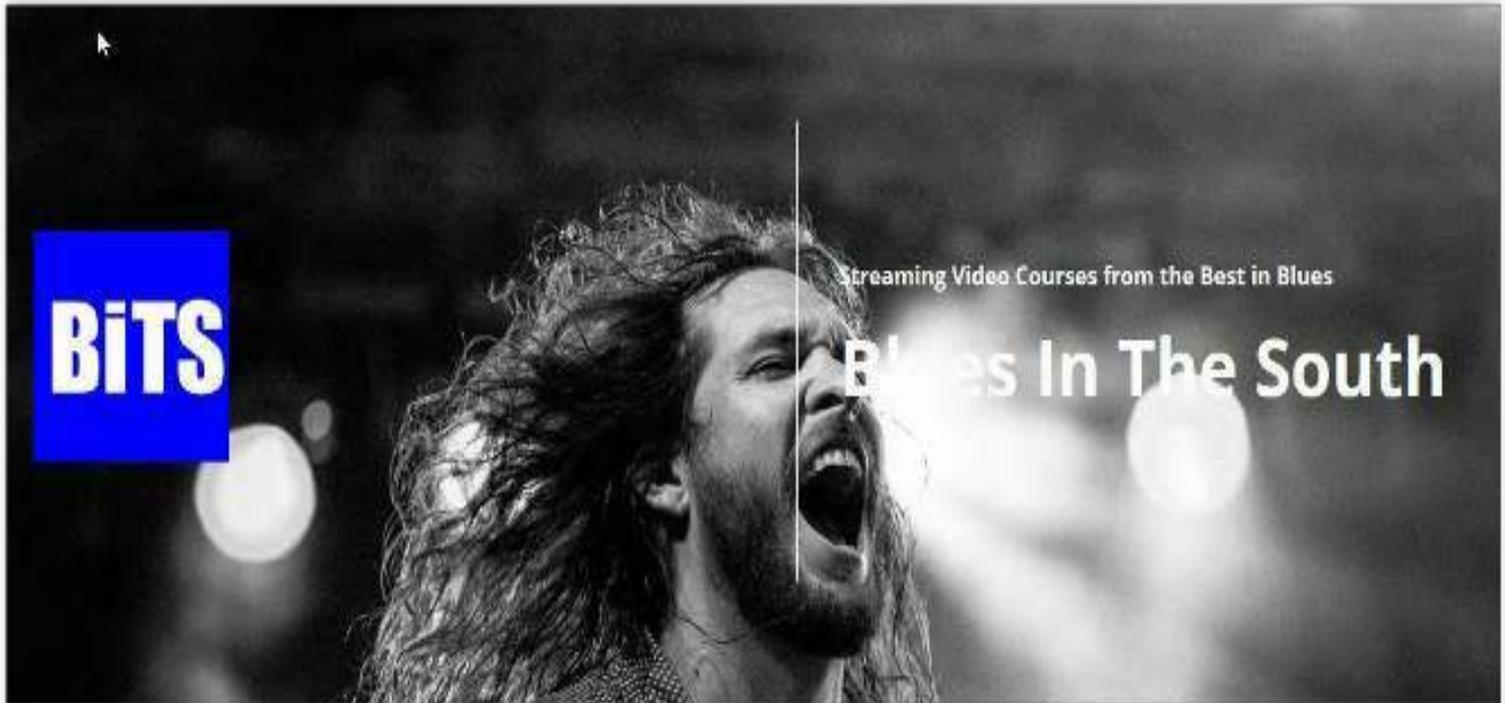
www.bluesinthesouth.com/gigs

YOU CAN ENTER THE GIGS THERE YOURSELF—IT'S VERY EASY—OR AS AN ALTERNATIVE, SEND THE INFORMATION DIRECT TO [<gigs@bluesinthesouth.com>](mailto:gigs@bluesinthesouth.com)

THE BITS GIG GUIDE HAS BEEN CALLED "THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE GIG GUIDE I HAVE EVER SEEN" BY DJ AND GIGGING MUSICIAN IAN MCHUGH (Jazz FM). Tell your friends about it too.



BiTS is delighted to announce a new partnership with MusicGurus who provide music courses & training from the world's top musicians. Watch video lessons



MusicGurus courses offer a structured approach to learning new styles and techniques through a series of high quality video lessons. All lessons feature HD video & sound, as well as helpful camera angles which allow you to see exactly how it's played.

You can also chat and exchange videos with artists to find out exactly what you need to practice next.

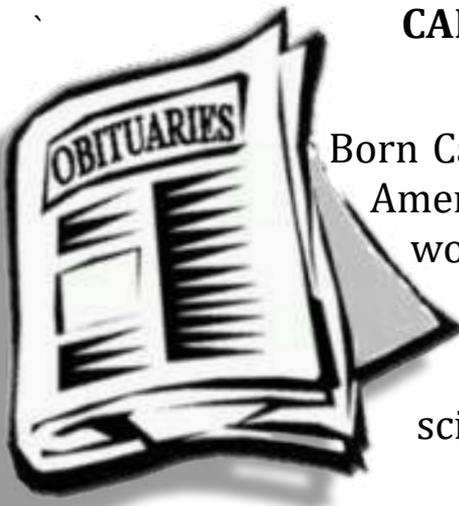
Getting valuable feedback from professional musicians is simple with MusicGurus. Simply start a chat with a tutor of your choice to agree on a subject for your session, then upload a video of yourself playing. Your tutor will check out your playing and send a video with their feedback and tips. It's as simple as that! One-to-one music tuition without the hassle.

Total freedom.

Learn any time, anywhere. Only pay for what you use.

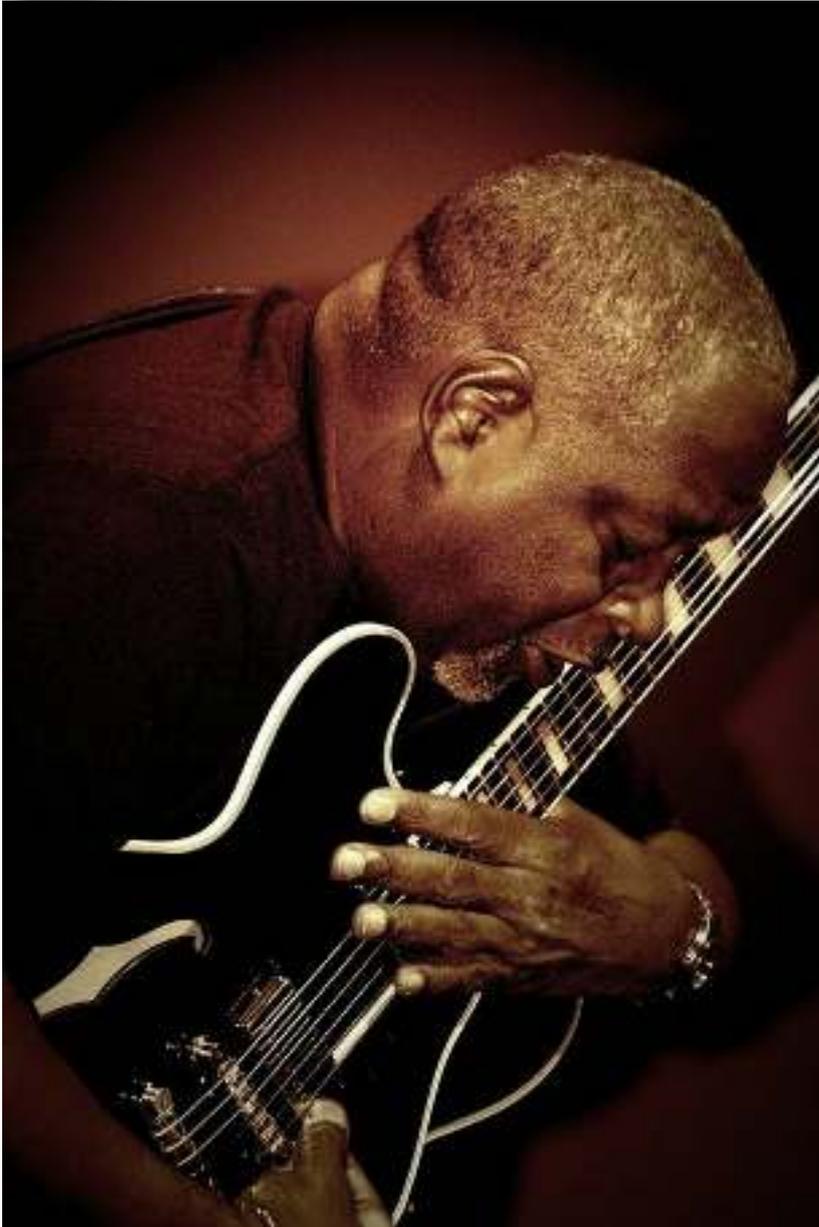
MusicGurus and BiTS believe that you should only pay for what you use so we don't charge subscriptions. Buy lessons and personal tutoring sessions with a one-off payment and that's it, they're yours to watch whenever, wherever and as many times, as you want.

**CARL WEATHERSBY (24 FEBRUARY 1953, AUGUST 9,
2024 (AGED 71))**



Born Carlton Weathersby in Jackson, Mississippi. Carl was an American electric blues vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter. He worked with Albert King and Billy Branch, among others.

Mixing Southern charm, soulful vocals, and fierce guitar-playing, Carl played the blues, from down-and-dirty to scintillating Albert King influenced chops.



Carl joined the US army and after serving in Vietnam, found employment as a steel mill worker, as a prison guard and even a police officer.

Weathersby was Albert King's rhythm guitarist between 1979 and 1982, and then spent some 15 years with Billy Branch's Sons of Blues as lead guitarist before striking out on his own. His debut solo album on Evidence Records, "Don't Lay Your Blues On Me", was nominated for the W.C. Handy 'Blues Album of the Year' award.

He then started filling-in for the guitarist of the Sons of Blues, Carlos Johnson, who Weathersby described as "a pretty shaky guy, you know. He could show up just as easy as he couldn't show up..." Eventually the band hired Weathersby as their full-time guitarist, a position he held for the next fifteen years.

Billy Branch wrote on his Facebook page "Over the years I watched as Carl's guitar and singing skills continued to develop and mature, ultimately making him one of the most skilled and dynamic bluesmen of our times. His vocals were heartfelt and passionate. His guitar skills were unmatched. He had come into his own."

Ian K McKenzie

BiTS INTERVIEW: Doghouse Sam

Over the last 10 years, Belgium based Doghouse Sam & his Magnatones have achieved a unique reputation in Europe with their instantly recognizable sound, re-interpreting the Rhythm'n'Blues music of the past and present . They have played concerts in more than 15 different countries and won the Belgian Blues Challenge in 2015. On top of that they made second place at the European Blues Challenge 2016.

In June 2024, Doghouse Sam won the 2024 Belgian Blues Federation award for "Best Vocalist".

Ian McKenzie spoke to him on the telephone.

BiTS: First of all, let me ask you what do I call you? Is Doghouse okay, or Sam, or what do you want to be called?

DS: Actually, everybody in the music scene calls me Sam.

BiTS: Okay, Sam, I'd be pleased to call you that. But what is your full name, actually?

DS: Yeah, my birth name, so to speak, is a genuine Flemish Belgian name. It's called Wouter. Actually, the English way of saying it would be Walter. But again, everybody in the music scene knows me as Sam, Doghouse Sam [laughing].

BiTS: Sam, let's talk a bit about your background before we go any further. How did you get into blues music in the first place?

DS: I came into the blues music not through the genre of music, but through the instrument of the harmonica,



the blues harp. I fell in love with the blues harp, and when I was like 15/16 years old, I wanted to learn to play the harmonica, the blues harp and it turns out that blues music was a music genre, a genre of music where the harmonica, the blues harp was featured a lot. And so that's how I ended up being a huge fan of blues music through my love for the blues harp, actually.

BiTS: What harp players were you listening to when you first started out?

DS: When I first started out, there was one guy I listened to the most and that was Sonny Terry, and it was like more country blues, acoustic blues. He formed the duo with Brownie McGhee. Some of your listeners may know them. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and that actually was my first love for harmonica.

Of course then after a while, all the blues greats followed, particularly also Little Walter. I'm a huge fan of Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williamson and when it evolved, I became a big fan of more contemporary blues harp players like Rod Piazza, James Harman. Today, nowadays, I like guys like Kim Wilson a lot who are really virtuoso on the instrument. For me, the harmonica is the

love of my life.

I've been playing it since I was 15-years-old, so more than 35 years, and later on in life I started learning to play the guitar as well.

BiTS: Well, congratulations on both of those things. Your harp playing is absolutely excellent and your



guitar playing is pretty good as well. And of course, you've just won an award for singing too.

DS: Thank you. Yeah, yeah, I was very, very honoured, actually, because it's the first time that they organised it in my country where I come from, it's Belgium, and it's the first time they made the federation, the Belgian Blues Federation.

There were, for the first time ever, the Blues Awards, and I won the award for Best Blues Vocalist of Belgium. So that's quite an honour because it's very personal because the voice, the human voice is an instrument just like the guitar and the blues are. But it's very personal because it's your own voice, of course. So yeah, I was very, very happy with that.



BiTS: I've seen a picture of the award that you got. It's absolutely lovely.

DS: Yeah, it's with a blue star in it. Yeah, they put in a lot of effort to make it something, and I appreciate it. The music scene in Belgium, together with the Netherlands, actually it's one big blues scene. We call it the Benelux, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Benelux, the blues scene is quite big actually, and so I'm very fortunate to be able to play a lot in Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. With my own

band, Doghouse Sam & His Magnatones, we've played in more than 15 countries all over Europe, actually. So it's quite fun being a blues musician, and there are a lot of opportunities and possibilities to play at great festivals all over Europe, as the UK festival, which I played recently.

BiTS: Yes, I gather that you did. I wasn't there, incidentally. I found out about you because of your winning the prize. I was notified that you'd won the prize.

DS: Okay, yeah. The band is doing good actually. We're very, very happy with it because we're only a simple blues trio. I want it that way. I have always wanted to have it. We have an old school upright bass. We have old school drums and I play harmonica, guitar and I sing. So it's a blues trio, and we've done quite good in the prizes [chuckles]. We've won the Belgian Blues Challenge as the best blues band of Belgium. We got 2nd place at the European Blues Challenge, where all the European countries participate and our



drummer was voted by a jury of radio promoters and festival organisers and booking agencies, as the Best Blues Drummer of Holland. He's from Holland.

And now recently, the latest prize is me as a vocalist. So I've got to be quite honest, I appreciate those prizes a lot, but even if we don't win the prizes, we keep on playing the music we love because that's the reason why we do it. We don't do it to win prizes. We play music because we love the rhythm and blues, and we love writing our own songs. And yeah, there will be a new album out. Yeah, we're on a blues high at this moment [chuckles].

BiTS: Tell me about your albums, Sam.

DS: Yeah, so we've got three albums out already which are available on all streaming platforms and what we always do is try to make it our own sound

because rhythm and blues people have been playing that for over 100 years, of course because it's such a wonderful genre also. But we try to always bring something new to the table in a scene that is rather traditional and astounding, but we try to add always some original and authentic features in it, and I think we succeed there. It's all original songs. I write my own music; I write my own lyrics.

BiTS: Tell me something about your songwriting. Do you have ideas for lyrics to start off with and then put melodies to them, or what happens?

DS: For me, it's very important that we don't do cliches, that we try to be original and authentic. All the music and the songwriting that I do is from personal experiences, personal things that we experience in life and that makes it fun. But I do always like to use my words, my lyrics, in a way that anyone could put his own meaning to the lyrics. So I like to write my lyrics



like a poem. Not too obviously and keep a little bit of mystique around the lyrics. So I like that.

When it comes down to music, as apart from lyrics, I try to always have a good hook, a good blues riff which is recognisable and typical for that one song and then we've got to arrange the song with some good drums, some good bass and make it catchy, make it danceable. What is always very important for Doghouse Sam & His Magnatones is that we try to tell a story.

Each song tells a specific story and that's fun and it can go about any subject, about being drunk or falling in love, finding a woman. Losing a woman, but also bigger things in life. We've written songs about environmental problems worldwide, so we are not shy to write about some more serious stuff as well.

So yeah, we've got a song which is called 'Back In The Ring', for example, I wrote it after a difficult period, and it was about getting back on your feet and taking on life again. So it's all very personal stuff, but that makes it fun, and I think that's also part of why the band is doing so good when we perform on stage. People hear the story and relate to the stories. It's not that we fake our music. Somehow an audience knows when the musicians on stage mean the songs that they play and are serious about it and they experienced it themselves. So yeah, that way we try to keep it simple and keep it honest and keep it authentic and that's what we do.



BiTS: Sam, tell me what the future looks like for you. What do you expect to be doing, say, in a year's time?

DS: Yeah. Actually, due to circumstances, we haven't played for four years and the last year

we picked up music again because my personal life was a little bit rocky [laughs] due to circumstances which were out of my hands. Now since one year we are back, and it warms my heart actually because when we started out back again with the band after being away for four years, I thought, and I told the guys, men, people, they have forgotten us.

But the phone started ringing, and festivals and blues clubs started calling, and we've played every week this last year and at great festivals and all over Europe, and it's been great. It's so good, actually, that we are aiming higher for the future, and the first step is we want to make the new album. We hope to deliver a great album and I think we will. And then we want to play more

and bigger festivals and the band is actually quite ambitious looking towards the future.

BiTS: That's excellent. Tell me something about the new album. Does it have a title?

DS: Yeah, probably, but we haven't decided yet, but probably the title of the album will be "Stories To Tell". Like I just told you that's because all the songs we write are stories that we have to tell, stories that we've gathered over all the years that we toured with the band with Doghouse Sam & The Magnatones, but of course, all the members have also a history in different blues bands. But all the guys are very experienced musicians and have been playing all over during these past decades. So yeah, we've got some stories to tell, and people will be able to listen to them with the new album. It will be out like October, November 2024.

BiTS: Sam, I'm not going to take any more of your time. Thank you very much indeed for talking to me. I'm delighted to have found your music. I think it's absolutely excellent and I shall be playing some more stuff on my radio show before very long.

DS: Yeah, that's great. That's great. I would appreciate that, and I really appreciate your support. We have played in the UK. I've played at the Linton Festival. That was not with my own band, and I've played the Rockabilly Rave, but we'd love to come a little bit more to the UK, so I'm glad for your support and your interest from the UK in our Belgian blues music. I appreciate that. Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.

DS: Thank you very much. Yes, yes, all the best. Bye-bye.

BiTS: Bye then. Bye.



THE GOOD NEWS AND THE SAD NEWS



Dear BiTS Readership,

The GOOD news is that my recording and performing career is recovering from the devastation of the global pandemic. I'm busy again booking live gigs, performing and all that goes with that! I'm energized again and beginning to write and organize my next album.

This brings me to the SAD news. It's time for me to leave my feature column here at BiTS and put all my focus on the momentum I've worked so hard to re-establish.

I can't thank amazing BiTS Publisher/Editor Ian McKenzie, and the BiTS READERSHIP enough for having me. It's been a blessing to continue to write, stay connected to and support my music community during difficult times for all. What began with my covering live show reviews of artists such as Bobby Rush, Doug MacLeod, Teresa James and Lindsey Beaver, turned into writing artist interviews post pandemic. It's been my pleasure and honor to publish over 45 interviews!

I thank my music industry peers such as Ruthie Foster, Fantastic Negrito, Dave Alvin, Chris Cain, Sass Jordan, Early Times, Kaz Hawkins, Jon Walmsley, Shaun Murphy, Victor Wainwright, Anthony Geraci, and Ben Levin to name just a few!

I thank industry leaders such as Blues Music Foundation's Barbara Newman, Michael Freeman and Kimberly Horton, Big Blues Bender's A.J. Gross and Bruce Iglauer of AlligatorRecords, for sharing their insights.

I thank Blues radio DJ's "Blueshound" James Nagel and Ashwyn Smith for granting me access. I thank EVERYONE who graciously participated and opened up to my BiTS readership.

In the November 2018 issue I was honored to grace the BiTS cover with my "Old School Girl" CD release. I'm hoping to again be considered for a BiTS cover with a new album very soon! And who knows! If BiTS will have me, I might just drop in from time to time with a surprise special interview!

So, here's to the future, momentum and to tons of gratitude ...

Cheers,

Lawrence Lebo

~ © Lawrence Lebo 2024

Lawrence Lebo is an award winning, critically acclaimed Blues recording artist living in Northeast Ohio, USA. She can be contacted at lawrencelebo@lawrencelebo.com. She can be found on the web at www.lawrencelebo.com

Selected pictures of VERY recent gigs by Lawrence Lebo.



A Note from the Editor

Just a quick note to say how much we have enjoyed Lawrence's presence as a regular contributor to the pages of Blues in the South.

Lawrence has battled the problems of slow and occasionally non-submission by people she sought to interview and always with a smile and good grace.

It has been a delight to work with her and most certainly there will be a space here if she ever decides to do a special or even return to the fold.

Thanks Lawrence — from all at BiTS. Onward and upward!



"I BELIEVE IN YOU"

Greg Hasty Interviewed by Norman Darwen

Throughout his long career, Johnnie Taylor sang gospel in the 50s, moving to blues and soul in the early 60s and even had a disco hit (which was actually a funk number). In the 60s he

recorded both for Sam Cooke's SAR label and for Stax. There has not been a biography about him - until now. "I Believe In You" by Greg Hasty is available on Amazon, with input from Johnnie's son T.J. Hooker Taylor.

Greg lived in Oak Cliff, a suburb of Dallas - where Johnnie lived later in his life - he died in 2001.

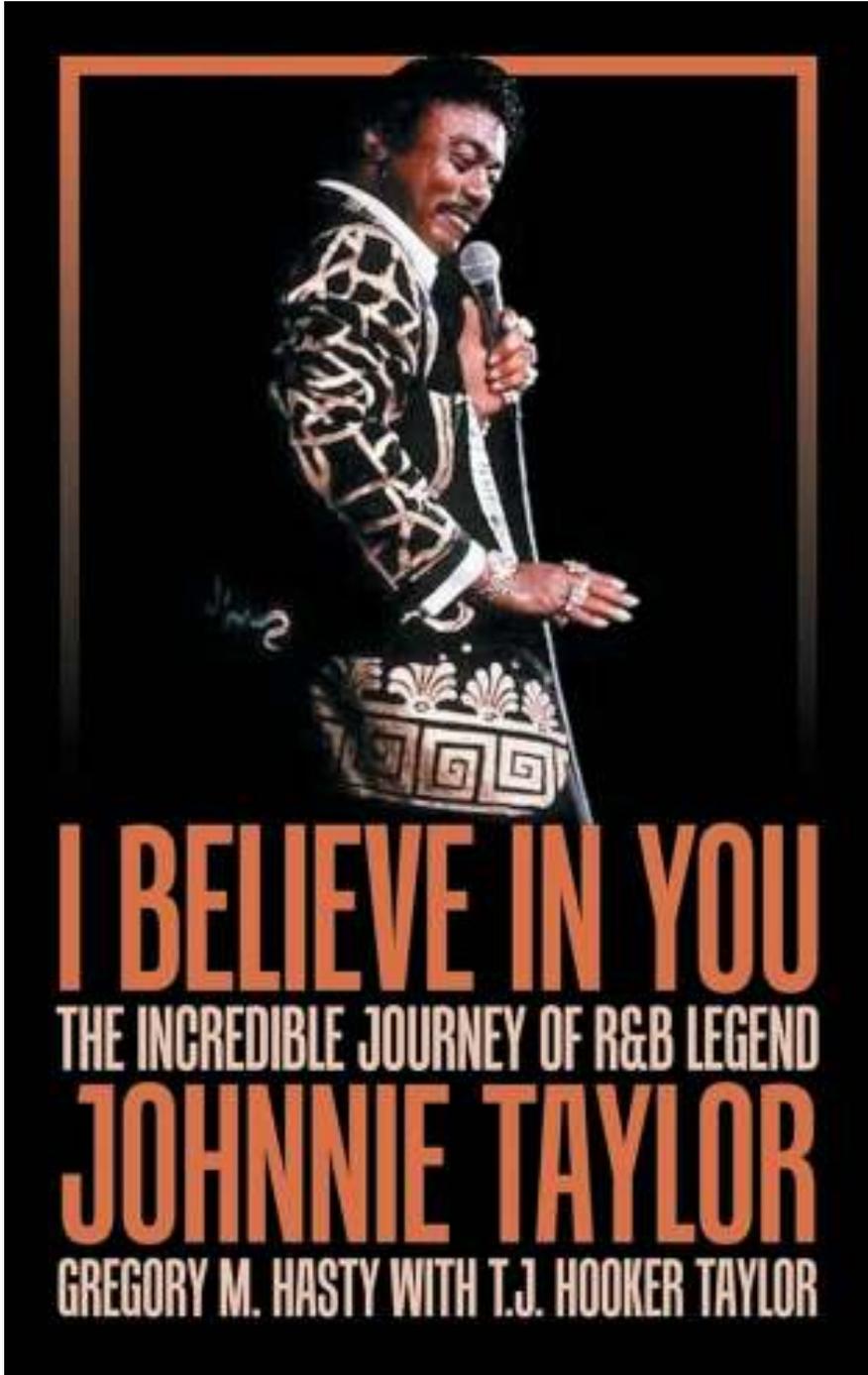
Here Greg gives Norman Darwen some background:

ND: What was the impetus for the book - does Oak Cliff still remember Johnnie?

GH: The project was initially begun after talking with T.J. and Fonda, hearing how their dad was always overlooked, ignored or passed over when it came time to hand out accolades and awards. After researching his career, it was puzzling why, first, no one had written a biography on his career - as famous as he was. Second, how successful he was when compared to his peers and again receiving very little acclaim. My objective then became to honour his

accomplishments in the hope of elevating his status among fans and those that weren't familiar with his work and to give him the recognition he so justly deserves. This is especially true as it relates to his induction into the Rock N Roll Hall of Fame, Memphis Music Hall of Fame and the State of Arkansas where he was born. We're now making headway with each of these efforts. The book, I think, will be integral in attaining these goals.

Many people vividly recall the days of Johnnie Taylor in Dallas and in Oak Cliff. Oak Cliff was its own city until Dallas annexed the area in 1903 - which now has around 500,000 people. His office was in Oak Cliff and he lived in the suburb and was a frequent visitor of local clubs and churches. The Longhorn Ballroom is technically in Dallas and only a stone's



throw from Oak Cliff, separated only by the Trinity River. Most everyone has a story about Johnnie. Even those in later generations remember him from listening to their parents talk about him and playing his music, so not only do the 'old-timers' have special memories, but their kids and grand-kids know and love him. I test this theory when I meet a younger person and they say, "I love me some Johnnie Taylor" by asking them what their favourite song is, and they always respond promptly with a recognizable song. To answer your question, to the Black residents, he's a local legend. He is virtually unknown to the majority of White citizens.

ND: How easy was it to write the book?

GH: The book was in ways difficult to write. I had to walk a tightrope between the acknowledged kids of Johnnie's and the unacknowledged children. T.J. and Fonda, being unacknowledged, gave me strict instructions not to contact the others. The two factions are at odds and I was told the acknowledged may try to sabotage the project. What's sad is they're missing an opportunity to celebrate their dad, rather than their petty bickering. Finding pictures of Johnnie and his family was also difficult - most Black people during that era didn't have cameras and very few had any quality photos. I quickly found out that any history about Johnnie is beginning to disappear. At times it was difficult to find anything written about him, especially his youth - there wasn't much documented at that time.

ND: How important was T.J. Hooker and in what ways?

GH: T.J. was important in a number of ways. First he was a strong proponent to having his father recognized, which was his primary goal. It was his idea for the book. He was also instrumental in making introductions to local blues artists, studio musicians, promoters, other unacknowledged children, their parents and others that provided quotes throughout the book. Without these introductions I wouldn't have been able to complete the project. T.J. served as a strong advocate for the story and was a constant source of information and inspiration. He also supplied many of the photos that found their way into the book.

ND: How do the blues artists in the area recall Johnnie?

GH: Everyone still has fond memories of Johnnie. I frequently talk to Bobby Patterson, Ernie Johnson, Bobi Bush and Gregg A. Smith, long-time, local blues entertainers and they have the highest regard for him both as a person and as an entertainer. Most said he was 'just a regular guy', very down to earth, and seemed to remember where he came from. He was admired, respected and revered. To a person, they all looked up to Johnnie for direction, support and advice. He was wise in ways and would help anyone who wanted to get ahead.

ND: How do the churches consider Johnnie?

GH: The local Black churches thought the world of Johnnie. They considered him a local superstar who would grace their congregations whenever he would appear and sing. He was a celebrity of the highest calibre and received a great amount of love from congregant

and pastors. They seemed to know his reputation for being a womanizer and drug user, but it didn't affect how he was venerated.

ND: What would you say is his legacy?

GH: In my mind, Johnnie's legacy should be how he produced six decades of quality music. Very few can be said to have done the same. He lived fast and hard, but he gave his all when performing and delivering what his listeners wanted to hear. He was an entertainer's entertainer, the best of the best.

ND: What's your favourite Johnnie Taylor song - soul, blues and gospel?

GH: My favourite of all his songs is 'Last Two Dollars' - the lyrics are relatable and how he delivers the message, the bass, background singers, and stellar guitar seem to emanate the qualities I like in a song. 'Little Blue Bird' is my favourite pure blues song. I tend to like the slow burners. Whenever I was in college and got down or depressed, I would put on some slow rollers that bemoaned their situation and it made it feel like I had a friend with similar or worse problems. It actually helped me get out of my funk - many times. 'For The Love Of God' and 'Stand By Me Father' are my favourite gospel tunes. I like these because they focus on Johnnie's vocal quality and his technique - besides the fact he's delivering a message we could all benefit from.

ND: How has the book been received?

GH: Great! "I Believe In You" has been sought out by many here locally as well as in places like Memphis, Charlotte, in Georgia and especially his home state and we haven't even begun the promotional efforts in Dallas. We will begin marketing in Chicago and L.A. where he was active and will probably find those areas just as interested. There's a lot of interest in the EU with reviews being written in France, Sweden and Belgium with, of course, his many fans in the UK. I knew American blues artists were popular in Europe, but had no idea of the extent - this has been a pleasant surprise. Johnnie would be honoured to know this.

ND: Thanks, Greg, I appreciate that very much.

Norman Darwen



THE BiTS INTERVIEW: HENRY SLIM

A BiTS AREA EXCLUSIVE

Henry Slim is the harmonica player and principal vocalist with the Slimline Shufflers, based in Bristol. This four-piece band have just released their first album "Suspicious Blues" purveying a brand of music strongly linked to New Orleans. The band are starting to make a name for themselves in the area and have recently played at the Gloucester Blues Festival 2024. Ian McKenzie spoke to Henry on the telephone at his Bristol home.

HS: Hey, Ian. How's it going?



BiTS: Hello, Henry, how are you?

HS: Yeah, all good, thanks.

BiTS: Can you hear me?

HS: Yeah, I hear you.

BiTS: That's wonderful. Can I start by asking you something about yourself? How did you get into the blues in the first place?

HS: Well, I saw a video of Muddy Waters' band on YouTube, and yeah, just loved what I heard. It was just

this amazing sound and had Otis Spann on the piano, and is it James Cotton on harmonica? And yes, the James Cotton sound in particular, I loved.

BiTS: What about learning to play the harmonica? Who were your influences there?

HS: I listened a lot to Sonny Boy Williamson II. Yeah, he was my main one. I used to lock myself in my bedroom and just put his records on and play along to those. And then I got more and more harmonicas as I went along, so I was able to play along to more and more songs [chuckles].

BiTS: What age were you when you started?

HS: I must have been 20/21.

BiTS: Oh, quite old then by comparison with some.

HS: Yeah, yeah. I guess, yeah.



Eric Arthur (piano), Max Harrison (drums), Henry Slim (harp & vocals), Adam Newton, (bass & vocals).

BiTS: Did you just learn to play licks or something like that? I mean, one of the things that always bothered me, not that I'm a harp player, but it certainly affected me playing the guitar, is at the time when I was wanting to learn there were no instructions and I didn't know anything about open chords or stuff like that. How did you learn about cross harp and different positions and all that sort of thing?

HS: I remember just sort of jamming along, not really knowing about cross harp at first. And then I can't remember what it was, I think I must have talked to someone or seen something online or something that mentioned it, and I was like, okay, so I've got a C harmonica, I'm supposed to play that in G, and then it sort of clicked from there. I was like, oh, okay, that makes sense. So then you just sort of draw in breath more often than you're blowing and you're able to get the bends that way. So that's when that all started clicking.

BiTS: I just did a review of an album by harmonica man Giles Robson. I'm sure you know Giles Robson, and one of the things that I said in that was that there's a great deal more sucking than there is blowing.

HS: Yeah, right. Yeah, that enables you to get those bends going, and well, I guess when you're blowing, you can get the high bends. But yeah, that comes later. That's quite advanced.

BiTS: Tell me about setting up the band then. The Slimline Shufflers are, I take it, named after you?

HS: Yeah, I said it as a joke in our first band practice and it kind of stuck [chuckles].

BiTS: [Laughing] It sounds like you should be advertising Schweppes ale or something like that.

HS: Yeah, yeah, it's a funny one. Hardly anyone can pronounce it properly when they first hear it.

BiTS: Okay, so how did you start the band? I gather it's about nine years since the band first started? Has its membership stayed the same?

HS: No, it's actually changed a little bit. We had a different drummer. We started out and then he got very busy and became less and less available. So we tried out a few drummers. There was this great drummer called Emma Holbrook, who plays a lot of stuff in Bristol and further afield. She played a few gigs with us and then there were one or two other kind of jazz drummers we tried out and then we settled on Max Harrison, who I knew from open mics since 2012. He started playing with us more and more and we realised that he was the guy because he could sing as well, some blues stuff, and soul kind of things. He's stayed in the band from about 2017/18.

BiTS: It's an unusual lineup with no guitar.

HS: Yeah, again, we've collaborated with guitar players over the years, and we decided that it was best without guitar because there's a lot going on without it. It kind of gets a bit too cluttered if we have too much going on in that way. So guitar was the obvious one to lose. Eric's got such an amazing full sound on the piano that we don't really need much more than the harmonica and the drums and bass really.

BiTS: Do you carry with you your own amplifiers and all that sort of thing?

HS: I have a Blues Jr that I use and a little Laney Cub 10 for smaller gigs. Eric, he needs to get an amp, but he just goes with the PA usually with his keyboard.

BiTS: Tell me about the other people in the band. How did you meet them all? Did they make themselves known to you or are they people you've known for a long time?

HS: Eric, the piano player, I met him at The Old Duke. He used to go down there every Tuesday for the open mic night to get over his stage fright, basically. He used to play piano after the open mic finished and while people were still kicking around. I was there just kind of hanging out and heard him playing this amazing New Orleans blues piano.

I was like who's this guy who looks like an accountant but he's playing the most



amazing piano. So I went over there and start jamming on harmonica with him. And then he said, I've got this band. We need another soloist. Do you want to come and have a jam with us to see what happens? And that went pretty well. So I joined that band.

It was an unusual one because it was sort of a New Orleans blues bass, but it had a guy on beatbox instead of drums. So we wanted to do something more traditional after about a year, year and a half or something and that's when the Slimline Shufflers came about. I wanted to play with a drummer and a bass and do more traditional stuff.

BiTS: And what about your drummer? You mentioned him just now, I think.

HS: Yeah, I met him at the open mic scene at Mr Wolfs. There's a place in the centre of Bristol called Mr Wolfs, and he plays guitar and sings as well, so I would sometimes jam with him when he did open mics on guitar. And so I knew him and when we came to need another drummer, he was the first guy that came to

mind because he could sing as well, yeah, and that was great because I'm quite a reluctant front man.

BiTS: Just before I started to speak to you, I was watching your video online, recorded if I'm right, at some place called – at least now called The Old Duke, which I imagine was not after *the* Duke Ellington when it first was founded.

HS: It might be. It was named after him, and there's a photo of him there that they put up. But yeah, I'm not sure if it was always The Old Duke, but it's been there a long time.

BiTS: That's a pub in Bristol, is it?

HS: Yeah, that's right, in the centre, just off the Welsh Back, they call it.

BiTS: You seem to have plenty of gigs coming up over the next couple of months. No problem getting them in?

HS: Yes, it's alright. People know me and know the band by now. It's been about ten years. So yeah, we've made a little name for ourselves locally. We are trying to break out on a more national scene. And with that in mind, we've kind of put



The Slimline Shufflers Busking on Frenchman Street, New Orleans

together like an album of original songs, which is our next kind of goal. We started writing some stuff for that. We actually went to New Orleans recently for inspiration.

BiTS: Well, I wanted to ask you about that. We'll come back to that in just a minute, if you don't mind. Tell me something about making the album that you've got.

HS: Yes, "Suspicious Blues". It was a surprise to us, really. It's like a last-minute decision to just get in the studio because it was around January when everything was pretty quiet. And yeah, we just wanted to record a little demo really like four or five tunes, and it turned out that we put down 14 songs in this one session.

So yeah, we thought we might as well make an album with it and Eric really wanted to have some vinyl, so he put forward the money for that. So we ended up having CDs and vinyls and a few T-shirts as well [chuckles].

BiTS: Well, have you been able to sell some?

HS: Yeah, vinyl has been a bit tricky, but we've pretty much sold out of the CDs, so that's been good. We need to get some more of those.

BiTS: And I gather from what you just said, plans to make a new one. Tell me something about that.

HS: Yeah, well, we want to just do original songs really more and more. So yeah, that's the goal is to have a second album like all originals, and I think that will get us more noticed on the festival circuit and things like that.

BiTS: How far is that down the line now?

HS: We're hoping to make it a pretty quick turnaround, just kind of get it out for maybe next year like 2025.

BiTS: Oh, wonderful.

HS: We've already got a few songs down. We wrote one in New Orleans. Our bass player came up with a great song about food called 'Hamburgers and Po Boys'.

BiTS: [Laughing] Tell me something about the trip to New Orleans. Did you all go together?

HS: Yeah, we managed to get all four of us there in the end. Adam's pretty busy with his young kid, so he almost didn't make it, but he managed to escape for the two weeks and join us. So that was, yeah, all four of us.

BiTS: And what did you do while you were there?

HS: Just a lot of eating [laughs], a lot of music. We did one gig. Didn't make any money, but we're not supposed to. And then we had two sort of busking sessions, which just made a little money. And we joined this guy called Les Getrex, who's like a local blues legend. And the fact he didn't kick us off after one song, was a good compliment to us. We played a few sets with him, and just a general sort of going to see other people play and busk and stuff. Yeah, it was brilliant.

BiTS: You went out in the streets busking, yes?

HS: Yeah, there was Frenchman Street we were staying very close to. A literal stone's throw, really. So we busked there twice. Managed to get on the coattails, basically, of another band who we knew from Bristol because they came over. Well a few of them anyway, so we'd already had their few connections. And they said, oh, you want to just kind of look after our slot before we go on, you can sort of go on around six in the evening and then we'll sort of go on after you. But that was really, really helpful.

BiTS: I've been to New Orleans a couple of times and it's an absolutely fabulous trip. The food that you mentioned is magnificent, generally speaking. What were

the great experiences that you had while you were there, something that you, you know, feel you'd be able to tell your grandchildren?



HS: Well, we saw The Meters guitar player: Leo Nocentelli. Yeah, he was playing right in front, almost at arm's reach from us. We were given free tickets to his gig from the venue we played at the night before

and so yeah, we went to see him and that was amazing, just seeing the guy who wrote 'Cissy Strut' perform it right in front of us. Yeah, that was probably my highlight.

BiTS: Got any thoughts about going back?

HS: Oh yeah, definitely would. I'm personally going to try and get back every other year at least, but it's pretty expensive, that's the thing. So yeah, try and make some extra money somehow.

BiTS: Now tell me something, how typical of your live performances is the album? Is it the sort of thing that you play when you're playing live?

HS: Yeah, pretty much. That was all songs culled from our set list of the past, you know, eight, nine years. And it was as like, you know, basically live in a studio.

So what you hear there is what we're like live really. I'd say a little better live because that's our sort of natural habitat really.

BiTS: And you write some songs as well. How do you go about writing songs? Do you have to wait for inspiration, or do you constantly jot things down?

HS: Yeah, it's a case of constantly jotting things down. And yeah, sometimes you just have to force yourself to kind of sit down, turn off the Internet and just write some stuff. You plonk yourself down at the keyboard or just get the harmonica out, whatever it is. So there's some quite bloody mindedness to it a lot of the time. I think waiting for inspiration is a bit of a myth really. Yeah, I think you just need to be constantly thinking about it and just writing things down.

BiTS: I see you've got a festival in your gig lineup coming up fairly shortly.

HS: We've got a little Gloucester Blues Festival. We're playing in the Pelican in Gloucester. I think it's like multiple pubs sort of playing on a Blues Festival, as far as I'm aware.



BiTS: Bit like they do at Swanage.

HS: Yeah, we're looking forward to it. Should be a nice one.

BiTS: Do you have any plans for more festivals? I mean, really what I'm asking you here is where do you aim to be, say, in a year or so's time?

HS: Yeah, doing way more festivals of the blues variety, I guess, and just general more touring around. We want to get around the country and maybe even Europe. Definitely back in the States at some point. But yeah, I think that's going to be where we need to sort funding for that. I think we would do that again, but yeah, definitely the UK and Europe as a first stop.

BiTS: Are you planning to do some sort of a tour?

HS: Yeah, we're trying to put something together for this autumn/winter sort of time. It's proving quite difficult because there are unknowns, you know, further

away from outside the Southwest. We are going to try and pester some venues and blues clubs and things.

TS: I've really got one more question for you and that is if you had the opportunity of supporting any artist, contemporary artist, who would it be?

HS: We'd love to open for Mud Morganfield, Muddy Waters son, so that would be a real close connection to all the old stuff that we're into. That would be the dream.

There's also a band I love called Daddy Long Legs from the States. They play some real balls to the wall kind of rock and roll blues stuff. I actually sent an email to their management being like, oh, you guys coming back over? We can support if you want [laughs]. So I don't know if they'll get back to me, but that would be great too.

BiTS: Do you work as the manager for the band?

HS: I guess. I mean, it's like a democracy. I guess we all chip in with various stuff. Max books some things, Eric will sometimes book something. But yeah, I guess I tend to be the sort of driving force of it. I do need to get better actually at booking things and the admin side of stuff. And we're all pretty hopeless at the marketing and all that. We need to get better.

BiTS: I'm not going to take any more of your time. Henry thanks indeed for speaking to me and you have a wonderful rest of the day.

HS: Yeah, you too. Catch you soon.

BiTS: You look after yourself.

HS: Yeah, likewise.

BiTS: Bye then. Bye.



MAGIC SAM - THE GUITAR LEGEND WHO LEFT US FAR TOO SOON

By John Holmes

In 1950s and 1960s Chicago much of the electric blues music of the time fell into either the 'Southside' or 'Westside' category, the latter being epitomised by artists such as Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and Magic Sam. Rush, and especially Guy, eventually received worldwide acclaim for their music, but the arguably equally talented Magic Sam has become rather overlooked since his untimely death in 1969.



Samuel Gene Maghett was born at Henderson Farm, about 8 miles east of Grenada, Mississippi, on February 14 1937. Unfortunately, his mother Hetha Anna, died when Sam was a small child, suffering from diabetes and pellagra (a dietary disease often linked with over dependence on maize as a staple food), so he and his younger brother James were mostly raised by their great-grandmother, Lou Anna Knox. After their father remarried he put the boys to work on the farm, and wanted them to stay there, but as young teenagers they rebelled against that, and their stepmother, who they said was 'really mean'. They therefore moved to Chicago to live with an aunt, Lilly P. Brough some time in 1950.

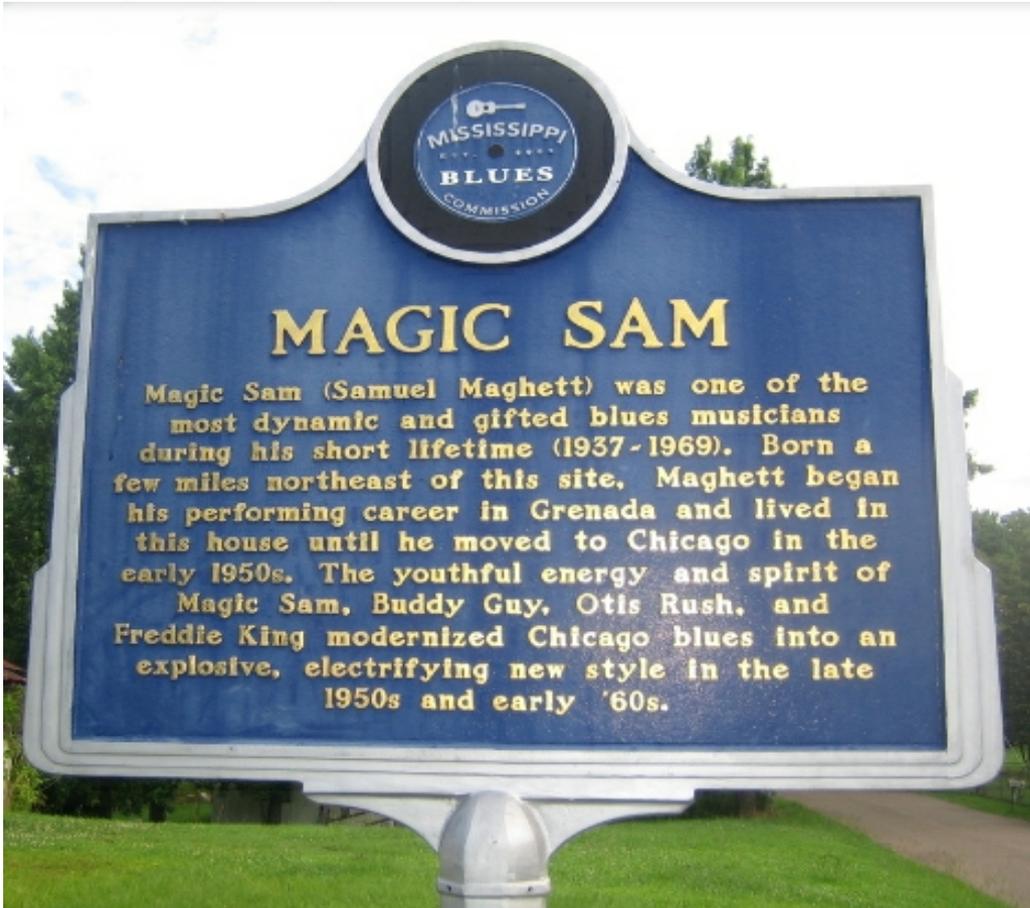
As far as music was concerned, it had caught the ear of Sam at a very young age. However, it was not necessarily the

blues, because in that area of Grenada County fiddle music, hoedowns and square dances were more popular with the African American population, and black fiddler Roy Moses was both a mentor and inspiration to the young musicians of the area. However, Sam was more interested in the guitar, and like so many blues men he made his first instrument by stretching a length of wire from the wall to the ground - a one string guitar of sorts!

Sam was as uninterested in school as he was in farming, but music had garnered his passion, as his aunt remembered - "I think he could play music better than he could eat, 'cause he would eat a little bit and get that box and blow a harmonica. He said it's what

he wants to do, and what he wants to do all his life". Indeed, his aunt confirmed that he was pretty adept at piano, drums and bass, as well as guitar and harmonica.

Blues guitarist Syl Johnson (whose brother Mack Thompson played bass for Sam throughout most of his professional career) recalls Sam playing guitar in a "hillbilly style" when he first heard him in Chicago. His later rhythmic style of blues playing was probably derived from the dance tempos of the reels and breakdowns he heard in Grenada. Indeed, he assimilated the blues by closely listening to, and watching, the Chicago blues stars of the day - especially Muddy Waters and Little Walter.



By 1954 Sam had a small combo, with Syl and Mack, and occasionally harp player Shakey Jake or Blues King (I had never heard of him either!). Shakey Jake, who had a career as a professional gambler before becoming a blues man, had spotted Sam playing on the street one day, a year or two earlier, and kept in touch with him, encouraging him in his pursuit of a career in music (he eventually married Sam's aunt). Sam was initially interested only in

playing guitar in the band, but Jake encouraged him to sing, pointing out that it would give him much more freedom to do what he wanted to do. To that end he also joined a gospel group, Morning View Special, which really helped to reveal his distinctive soulful singing style.

One day in 1955 Shakey Jake took him to the 708 Club, on East 47th Street, where Muddy Waters was playing. Ever the gentleman, Muddy let him sit for the second set, and the club owner booked him there and then for a regular slot.

In 1957 Sam and his band (augmented by Little Brother Montgomery on piano, Willie Dixon on upright bass and Bill Stepney on drums) recorded some tracks for the independent Cobra label. He recalled that label owner Eli Toscano had a novel way of creating studio reverb, by sending the sounds through some pipes in a back room! These recordings included one of Sam's later best known songs - 'All Your Love'. (This is not the same song recorded by Otis Rush, and later John Mayall).

Listening to his playing and singing on that number it is obvious how much passion he injected into his music, and his stinging finger picking guitar style was a match for any other blues player of the day. The song was an immediate local hit record, and its somewhat unusual structure would become synonymous with Sam, via a number of similar recordings, throughout his career.

Sam had previously been working under the name of 'Good Rockin' Sam', but was unable to use it on the recording because it was already being used by someone else. It was



apparently bassist Mack Thompson who had the brain wave to change his name around a bit, to become 'Magic Sam'!

The following year (1958) he was back in the studio again, with only Dixon remaining from the previous session, cutting 4 more sides, one of which was another classic - 'Easy Baby', which is similar to All Your Love, but still a very strong recording.

Just when his career seemed to be starting to take off, Sam was

drafted into the US Army for his national service. He hated it, eventually deserted, was arrested, and served 6 months in jail before receiving a dishonourable discharge.

He effectively was back to square one with his music career, but over time was able to re-establish himself on the Chicago club circuit, in spite of the Musicians Union levying a \$1,000 dollar fine on him (which was still outstanding when he died!). In addition to these problems, Cobra Records had suffered financial problems and gone out of business.

When not working in Chicago, he often ventured north, to clubs such as The Avant Garde, in Milwaukee, where he was recorded live on June 22 1968. 45 years later it saw the light of day on Delmark Records, in a 67 minute cd (Live At The Avant Garde) that showcases Sam at his best, accompanied by just bass and drums. Considering that it was an amateur recording, using a reel to reel tape recorder, the sound is remarkably good. Jim Charne,

the teenaged enthusiast whose recording it is, said “Sam could not have been more gracious and accommodating when I showed up with my gear”, even though he probably realised that he would see no financial benefit from the exercise.

Working live, with gigs often going on until 4am, and on many occasions using whatever amplifiers were available at the venue, Sam became a consummate “jammer”, drawing from his wide repertoire of covers from Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Freddy King, Otis Rush and many others, he turned them into his own tours de force. He also rarely had a fixed band, and would hire or borrow other musicians as required. For example, he turned up (very late) for his appearance at the prestigious Ann Arbor Blues Festival, with just his bass player, and simply borrowed drummer Sam Lay, who was there with his own band.

Sam loved his life as a bluesman - he enjoyed women, the on the road camaraderie of other musicians, partying, fishing, and cooking (he said he was “a spare rib cook first and a bluesman second”!). Blues writer Dick Shurman remembered him as a gracious and entertaining man, who acted “as though he didn’t have a care in the world”. Although he loved the lifestyle, it was a hard life, with long working hours in smoky clubs, and probably far too much drinking, and many blues men suffered in later life, or didn’t make it to old age at all. Violence was never too far away either, and according to Dick Shurman

he was once shot in the leg, just prior to going on tour planned to promote his first Delmark album. In fact, Shurman reported that “it was far from the first time such an event occurred “.



Cobra Records being no more, Sam was given another opportunity to record, this time by Mel London’s Chief label, which had been founded in 1957. His 1960 and 1961 sessions, which included contributions from such luminaries as guitarist Earl Hooker, sax man A. C. Reed and drummer S. P. Leary, produced 4 fine singles, including the classic ‘Every Night About This Time’. He didn’t record again until the mid 1960s, with one single on Al Benson’s Crash

label (featuring the excellent ‘She Belongs To Me’ on the B-side), this time with the incomparable Otis Spann on piano.

None of the 11 singles he released were anything other than local hits, but now have virtually legendary status among collectors. As a result, Sam continued to be a top club attraction in Chicago, but found it difficult to break into the wider circuit. He was often to be found in Chicago at Club Alex, where he doubled with Muddy Waters, and was a frequent broadcaster on the Big Bill Hill shows on station WOPA from his dates at The Copacabana. He was also a regular at Sylvio’s blues club, often supporting Howlin’ Wolf, or once again, Muddy Waters.

His brief flirtation with the Crash label was ended by having the opportunity to record for another independent label, but one with a much larger footprint in the blues world - Delmark Records. The 2 albums he recorded, "West Side Soul" (1968) and "Black Magic" (1969) were both classics, containing some of Sam's finest singing and playing. Both albums were inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame, as a "classic of blues recording", in 1984 and 1990 respectively. As well as regular band members Odie Payne (drums), Mighty Joe Young (guitar) and Mack Thompson (bass) "West Side Soul" also refers to one 'Stockholm Slim' on piano, which I assumed was a pseudonym for Memphis Slim, but who is actually a Swedish player called Per 'Slim' Notini.

Recording for Delmark gave Sam an introduction to a much wider white audience, and

opened the door to opportunities to play abroad, as well as touring more widely in the US, but he was beginning to have some health problems. In 1969, on tour as the opening act for Charlie Musselwhite, he collapsed, in Louisville, Kentucky, and had to be hospitalised in Chicago. At first it was thought that he had bronchitis, but tests proved it had been a heart attack.

August 1969 saw Sam playing at the prestigious 3 day Ann Arbor Blues Festival, in Michigan. The idea of the festival was to try to bring the laid back jam atmosphere of a small Chicago blues club to a much larger audience, and included many of the greats, such as Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Freddy King, Otis Rush, Fred

McDowell, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sleepy John Estes and others too numerous to mention. My mouth is watering just thinking about it! In spite of moderate applause from the 10,000 audience when the band took the stage, Sam absolutely tore the place up, at the

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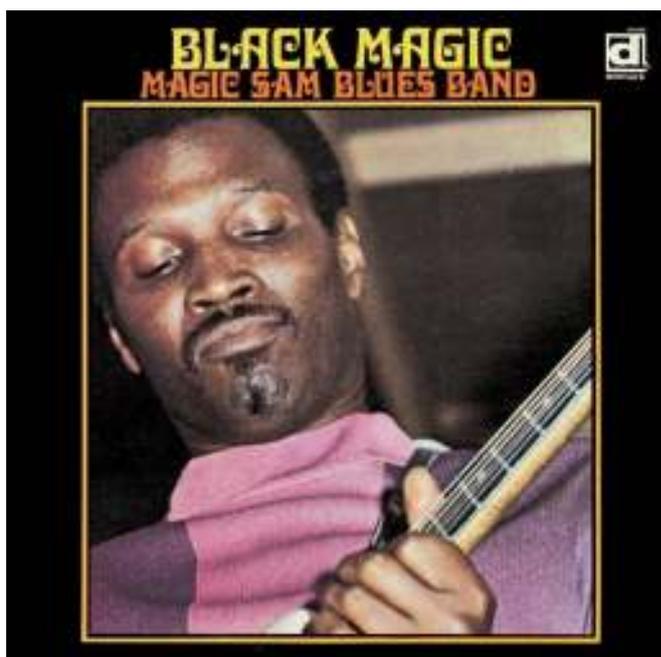
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* ALL PROGRAMS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

end of the set leaving to prolonged acclaim, and calls for an encore, which unfortunately there was no time for. All in all it was a great success, in spite of some less than enthusiastic local authorities, who were not happy about the noise or the numbers of people attending.

In October 1969 Sam was included, together with Juke Boy Bonner, Earl Hooker, Whistlin' Alex Moore, Clifton Chenier and Carey Bell, as part of the Lippman- Rau American Folk Blues Tour, which kicked off in London on October 3, and ended in Geneva on October 25. I was privileged to be at that London concert, and was suitably wowed by both Sam and Hooker. Little did I know that neither would return to the UK. According to reports, he returned to the US looking fit and rejuvenated.



Sam then went off on a tour of California, to complete the final bookings for his old management prior to a change. He was apparently poised for the biggest breakthrough of his career, with the promise of more lucrative bookings from his new management, and a major recording contract (rumoured to be Atlantic/Stax Records) in the pipeline. After returning from the tour his second Delmark LP, "Black Magic" was released in November, to excellent reviews.

Unfortunately, it was not to be - on December 1 1969 Sam had just finished his breakfast when he suffered chest pains. His lifestyle had caught up with him. He tried to make it to the bedroom, collapsed on the way, and was pronounced dead by the time he was able to be taken to Chicago's St. Anthony Hospital. He was survived by his wife Georgia, and buried in the Restvale Cemetery, in Alsip, Illinois, a suburb south west of the city. I don't know whether he had any children - some sources refer to children, without mentioning the number, whilst in others there is no reference to any offspring. It is an historically black cemetery, and amongst the many blues musicians interned there are Muddy Waters, Earl Hooker, Walter Horton, Hound Dog Taylor and J. B. Hutto. A heavenly jam indeed!

I have heard it said that, with his soulful singing, and crystal clear guitar style, if he had lived long enough Magic Sam could have become Robert Cray before Cray himself came along! But we will never know, although I'm sure that, even with blues going a little into the doldrums in the 1970s, he would still have been young enough to take advantage of the second blues explosion in the 1980s. As it is, he remains almost a mythical character amongst the Chicago blues musicians, but he definitely deserves to stand alongside the best of them.



BITS BLUES NEWS

Two British Blues Stars Nominated for USA

"Independent Blues Awards"

British Blues stars Emma Wilson & Oliver 'Mississippi' MacDonald have both been nominated in the prestigious USA based 'Independent Blues Awards' which celebrate International Independent Blues Artists.

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Emma is nominated in two categories, "Best New Artist" and "Best New Artist Release" for her excellent album 'Memphis Calling!' and Mississippi MacDonald is nominated in "Traditional Blues Band", "Traditional Blues CD" for 'Heavy State Loving Blues' and "Traditional Blues Song" for 'Heavy State Loving Blues'

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Ritchie Dave Porter and Debra Susan took the 'Silver Crystal' award for the international duo of the year in the recent International Singer Songwriter event in Atlanta, Georgia.

Ritchie told BiTS: Many thanks to everyone supporting our original Ritchie Dave Porter and Debra Susan music. Truly wonderful to have our latest Ritchie Dave Porter/Debra Susan single 'Dance with Me In The Pale Moonlight' played on the big screen at Sandy Springs Performing Arts Centre in Atlanta, Georgia, USA when we walked up to receive the award.





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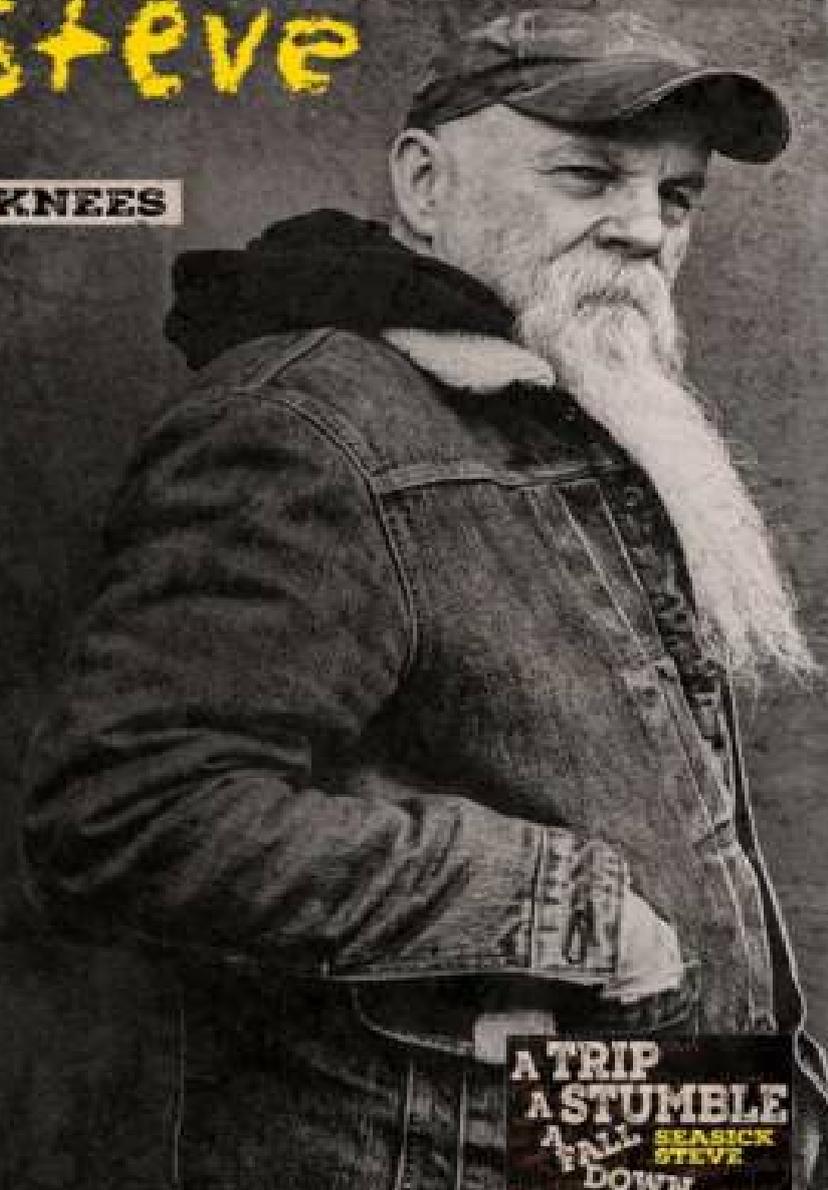
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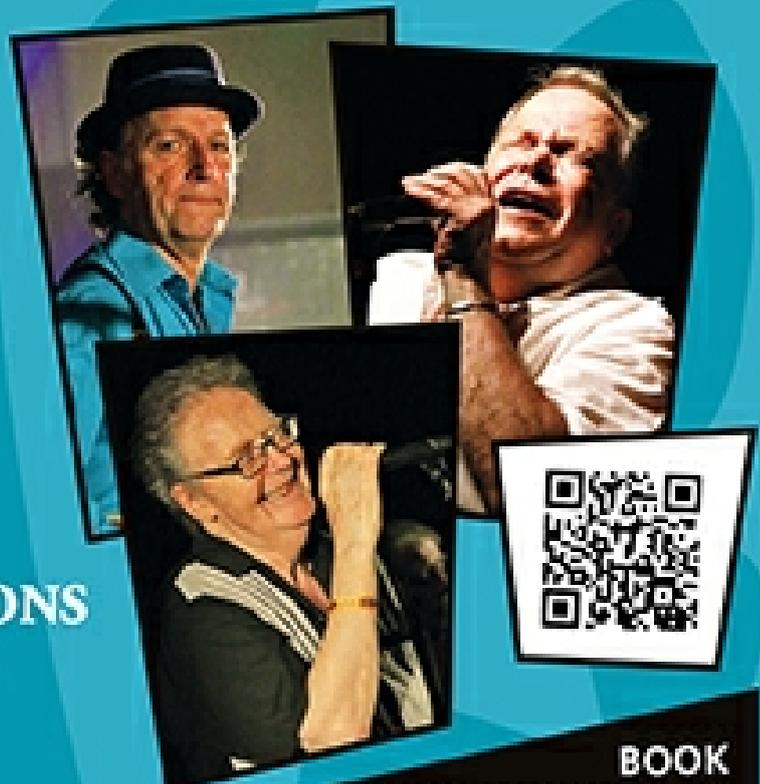
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It's hot jazz for Easter at Mill



London jazzier Rob Lovers, playing at Reskin Mill in Nailsworth this weekend. 25491577905

Festival promises a bonanza of exciting musical happenings

Three days of the blues

by Adam Horovitz

THIS Easter sees the second Blues & Beyond Festival take over the venues of Stroud with a welter of wonderful blues musicians.

The three-day event will include concerts, dances, workshops and lectures and is to be held at The Subscription Rooms and The Space.

The festival kicks off on Thursday March 24 with a concert by Michael Messer and Ed Genis, who have won accolades from all the international blues forums, backed up by Sons of Delta and the ever popular Dave Sutherland.

On Friday and Saturday there will be a number of workshops and open mic sessions, but Friday really gets under way with Geoff Aitchison and his band Soulriggers. This band really rocks and will set The Space alight with their rollicking original set of blues, funk and soul.

Also on the bill are Mike Dowling, one of America's foremost blues and country

guitarists, and the fabulous SPIKEdrivers.

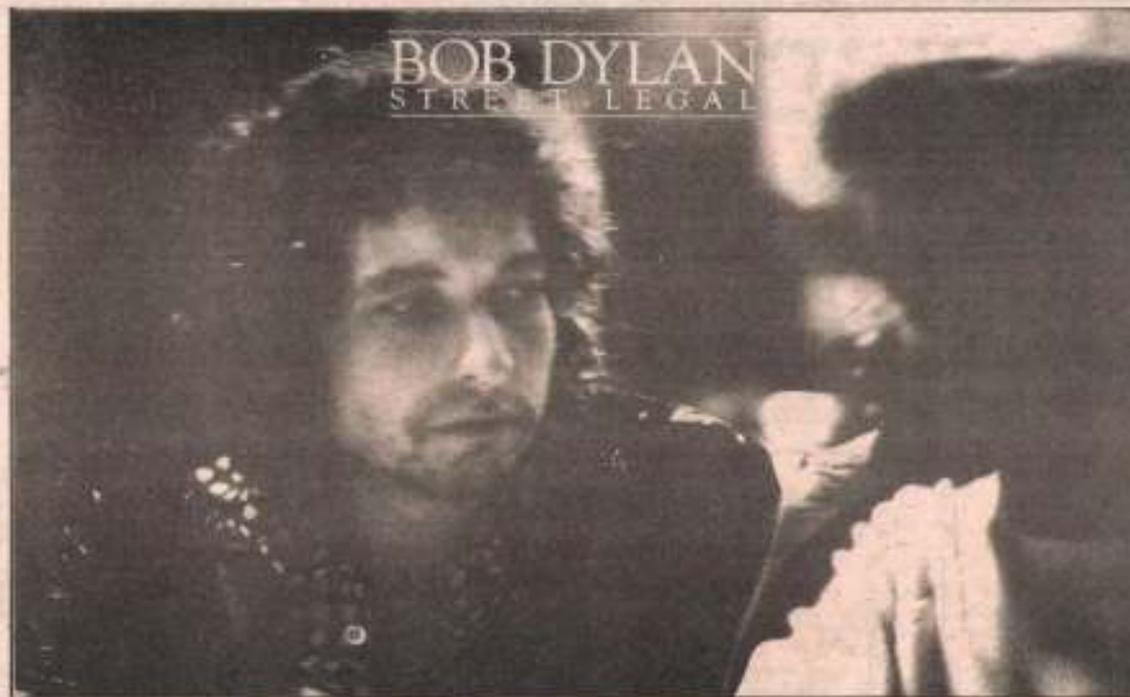
Dr Feelgood close the festival with an evening of storming, stomping, driving music that is guaranteed to get audiences on the dance floor wishing it would never end.

"This is very much a 'hands on' festival and as such there are plenty of opportunities for all new and existing enthusiasts to take part in workshops and learn from the artists performing over the weekend," said co-organiser John Eeles. "For full details of workshop times and artists check out our website - www.bluesandbeyond.co.uk - or pick up a programme from the Stroud Tourist Information Centre. There's so much going on!"

Tickets for the Blues & Beyond Festival are available at £35, along with tickets for individual concerts. Tickets are available from Stroud tourist information or from www.bluesandbeyond.co.uk



SPIKEdrivers, one of the fabulous blues bands playing the Blues and Beyond Festival in Stroud this Easter. 25260898



BOB DYLAN: no false pretences

Dylan: not momentous, but no let downs

BOB DYLAN 'Street-Legal'

even though it's kept her far back in the mix. There follows a hefty dose of R&B on 'New Pony' with Dylan

go about it. All they'll end up with is cynical reactions. John

necessary reins and turns of their own. Apart from the occasional, almost embarrassed business, the album's main fault is that it sounds awful on the 1961 Victrola which passes as an office stereo and that's as good a guide as any to how it'll come over on a CD. So, maybe you should forget any Paul Barrett record of the week hopes boys.

But, even if they didn't see us in a year, it's still the perfect weekend selection for any actual or potential concert Minkem track.

And I didn't even have a million... PETER SILVERTON

COLIN BLUNSTONE 'Never Even Thought' (Epic EPC 82835)***

THE INTERIM period between Colin Blunstone's last album, 'Never Even Thought' and his last EP, volume 'Penny', has been marked by the man's decision to quit Britain and set up home in America. A move that resulted in this, the 5th solo album since the Zombies broke up in the autumn of 1968.

It's been five years since Dylan last made an impression on the charts with 'I Don't Believe In Miracles' and judging by the merits of 'Never Even Thought' it's no great surprise that Epic are pinning their hopes on plundering the 'creative' market that survives on a constant supply of Mink albums.

A gamble that might well pay big dividends, Stroud at least. In that respect Blunstone is not only well equipped to see off the majority of the competition he will encounter from similarly minded balladists. But if it's the excessive, breathless voice that carried you through 'See's Not There' or 'Time Of The Season' that you're most interested in hearing that I'm afraid you're not for him.

Eight of the ten cuts are co-written by Blunstone and the all American production by Bill Schnee (best known for his work with Kiki Dee and Randy Edelman) is typically sugar sweet. Although exception 'Never Even Thought' is both short of the banal and disappointingly profound lyrical qualities that made



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McTell goes back to his roots



BYLINE MISSING:
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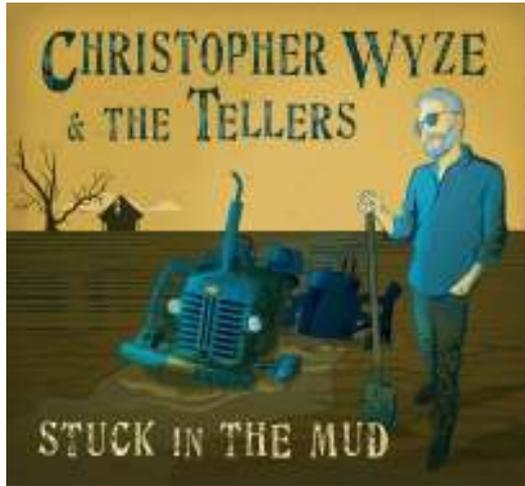
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REVIEWS



Christopher Wyze & the Tellers—Stuck in the Mud—Big Radio

'Three Hours From Memphis' opens this set with a strong early 70s Rolling Stones sound, though it was recorded at Muscle Shoals. Next up, 'Stuck In The Mud' is one of three tracks here recorded in Clarksdale, Mississippi, a blues with slide guitar and a fine rhythm section, harp, backing vocalist Dana King - added in Muscle Shoals - and maybe a nod to Creedence Clearwater Revival (who seem to be pretty popular at the moment!).

Christopher is a distinctive singer, harmonica player and song-writer - all thirteen numbers here are originals - from Indiana, and this is his debut album. He has spent years fronting standard blues bands, but the emphasis here is on the songs, with some titles giving a good idea of Christopher's concerns, as for example, 'Cotton Ain't King' or 'Back To Clarksdale'.

'Money Spent Blues' is a Jimmy Reed beat number, beautifully played and with good lyrics - though I doubt that Jimmy would have sung "I was always kind of partial to product information". 'Hard Work Don't Pay' has a tough edge, and funky blues-rock is the order of the day with 'Caution To The Wind', whilst 'Looking For My Baby' has a fine early- to mid-60s blues feel. Then there's the pounding, Hill country-styled blues, 'Good Friend Gone'. As you might have gathered, each track of the album is fiercely individual.

Christopher's main collaborators on this CD are North Mississippi Hill Country blues guitarist Eric Deaton (who may be known for his work with The Black Keys), guitarist Cary Hudson, co-writer of three numbers on the album, and co-writer and multi-instrumentalist Ralph Carter. A fine set - Christopher is certainly a name to watch.

Norman Darwen

(www.christopherwyzeandthetellers.com)



Tom Mansi & the Icebreakers—Eyeball—Lunaria Luna-0015CD

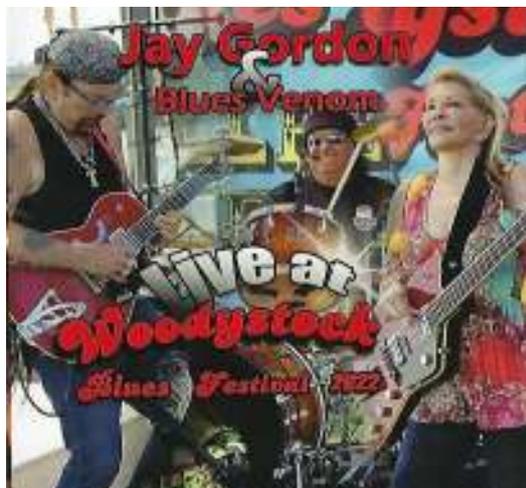
'Pushback Blues' the opening track, is a fine, tough, 60s soul-inflected slab of gritty R'n'B from this London-based trio under the leadership of double bass player and sometimes quirky lead singer Tom Mansi. Not your usual bandleader, but then, this CD isn't exactly your usual either.

Unlike some of the other releases from Lunaria, this isn't a blues set as such. The title track is a slow-ish number sporting an impressive slide guitar solo and a gospel-ish outro, which brought to mind late 60s Rolling Stones. 'Maybe Baby' is a punky blues-flavoured number with a riff that brought Black Sabbath to mind, a vocal that made me think of a mutated Elvis impersonator, and some almost free-form heavy blues guitar licks by Paul White.

So yes, this is more of an alt- rock and -blues set. Think of people like Jon Spencer's Blues Explosion with its dirty sound and an approach that isn't afraid to mix it up. There's some psychedelia to 'The Shot', whilst 'Should Be Easy' has elements of The Doors and T.Rex, to my ears! 'Thinking Of You On The Moon' is a fairly straightforward, relatively mellow ballad, whilst 'Got To Be Gone' and 'No Face Blues' end this interesting release with a catchy acoustic number with Americana touches and a country-tinged sing-along respectively.

Norman Darwen

(www.lunariarecords.com)



Jay Gordon & Blues Venom—Live at Woodstock 2022—Shuttle Music SHU142041

This is a live recording from the Woodstock Festival (yes, that "y" is very important!) in Laughlin, Nevada. Although Jay recorded with the great Phillip Walker, there's not much trace of that here. This offers straight-forward, full-on blues power trio stuff, gruff vocals and plenty of loud, dirty guitar work, including slide, over a functional rhythm section who know they are there mainly to keep the groove going.

It certainly goes down well with the crowd, if the noise they make is any indicator. Jay and band tackle a few standards like 'Hoochie Coochie Man', and a perhaps revealing cover of Robert Johnson's 'Crossroads' - no prizes for guessing the most likely source of this one, though there is also a Hendrix influence. Among the remaining tracks are 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl', most likely from Ten Years After, George Thorogood's 'I Drink Alone', southern rockers Blackfoot's 'Train Train', and a medley of Creedence Clearwater Revival's 'Green River' and swamp-rocker 'Suzie Q'.

All tracks here except two run over five minutes, giving plenty of time for Jay to stretch out. So, this is an hour's worth of in-your-face, high energy blues-rock, loud and proud - if that's what you crave, look no further.

Norman Darwen

(www.bluesvenom.com)



Mean Old Fireman - Rescue 3 - Independent

Blues and a bit of rock is the order of the day here from Boston, Massachusetts-based Mean Old Fireman, a.k.a. gravel-voiced singer and slide guitarist Ned Bollé, and his group. What might stand out most to many UK readers will be the two versions of 'Werewolves Of London', the Warren Zevon hit from 1978. Both the acoustic (mainly banjo and slide) and reggae-tinged electric version work well and certainly brought a smile to my face, and if you're looking for the blues connection - well, both Mick Fleetwood and John McVie played on the original.

The remainder of the set though does tend towards more obvious blues items. The opener, 'I'm Not Crying' is a busy, almost boogaloo styled blues, with gutsy sax playing by Marty Phillips (who gets all sleazy on the following track, '12 Bars') and a hot organ break by John Wadkins. I guess I should have expected the Scottish touch to 'Highland Blues', 'Lynn, Lynn' is a heavy rock number, and 'The Emptiest Drum' is another gritty rock-flavoured

item. 'Dirty Water' is a slow grinding blues with blues harp by Peter Chase, and a fine electric piano break, whilst 'Romp' is a pleasant instrumental.

All in all, an interesting and enjoyable set. Worth checking out.

Norman Darwen

(www.meanoldfireman.com)



Milwaukee and Friends—Crossing Borders—ZOUNDR

This German five-piece is not a blues band as such, but kind of comes into the “related musics” category. What first attracted my attention was the presence of the UK blues and soul singer Emma Wilson - she sings two wonderfully mellow, sultry and slightly jazzy numbers, the Tedeschi - Trucks item ‘Midnight In Harlem’, and Randy Crawford’s ‘Rio De Janeiro Blue’, and does so wonderfully.

I was already impressed though with the CD opener, a very fine version of The Band’s classic ‘The Weight’, a great song that sounds amazing when sung well. Try to hear the Staples Singers version on “The Last Waltz”; this version may not be quite up to that standard, unsurprisingly, but yes, it is indeed well-sung.

Elsewhere the songs flit around 70s rock, Americana and jazzy soul, and the many guests involved, from both Europe and the USA, reflect this eclectic approach. Many songs feature fine blues and blues-rock flavoured guitar, so the set is certainly interesting and listenable - but it does require a much wider taste than simply the blues!

Norman Darwen

(www.facebook.com/MilwaukeeAndFriends)



Black Cat Bones—Troublemaker—Independent

Let’s clear things up, particularly maybe for older readers - this is not the late 60s band that contained two later members of Free. Neither is it any of the other six bands of this name listed on “Last FM”. No, this five-piece was formed in 2004 and as the sleeve states (perhaps necessarily!) is out of Tucson, Arizona.

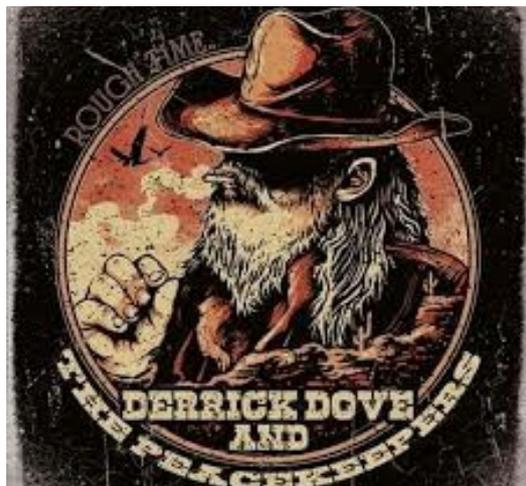
Like those groups listed though, this outfit plays blues-rock - there are several guitarists involved on this album (and there is some top-notch guitar sparring), so I can’t tell you who is playing the early Cream-era Clapton styled guitar on the title track, but whoever it is, they have the tone and style down to a ‘T’. To confuse things again, maybe, I’d have sworn the drumming on ‘Act Like You Don’t Care’ is Simon Kirke of Free, and the guitar work sounds influenced by Paul Kossoff of the same band.

I must add though that this band do all their own material, and founder member and chief songwriter Charles Pitts has a very fine blues-rock voice. Listen to him on the despairing slow blues of ‘Yesterday’s Gone’, or over the infectious groove of ‘Playing Games With Words’ for just

two examples. So whilst the name might not be exclusive, the band's sound is certainly distinctive - and worth checking out.

Norman Darwen

(www.blackcatbones.net)



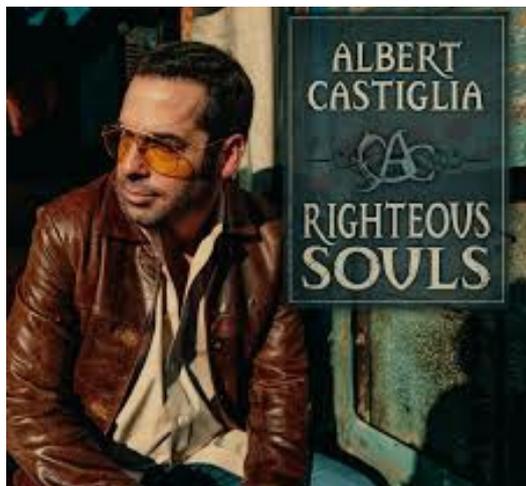
Derrick Dove and the Peacekeepers—Rough Time—Independent

Derrick and his band look like a classic southern rock band on the sleeve, and whilst the opening rocker leans towards the classic rock sound of Deep Purple, the next track up (also the album title) is an impassioned southern soul styled number as played by a bunch of blues-rockers and with a fine gospel-styled backing vocal deep in the mix - in other words, it has a classic southern rock sound. No surprise then to learn that this outfit is based in Tifton, Georgia.

'You & My Guitar' has a hint of bluesy outlaw country, and 'Daddy Was A Bluesman' is a straight-forward shuffle, with guest blues harp too, and 'Farm In Tennessee' is a lightly skipping country number with some down-home lyrics, fine guitar work and honky tonk piano. 'Life's Games', 'Hard Rain', and 'Sweet Sadie Mae' are strong southern rockers (the latter also has a lovely, jazzy organ break from out of left-field!), and 'Sunday Coming Down' is a curious, intimate-sounding confessional, almost a mood-piece. 'When Did I Get Old' is beautifully reflective (and maybe a little too relevant!), ensuring a fine ending to a very listenable release.

Norman Darwen

(www.derrickdove.com)



Albert Castiglia—Righteous Souls—Gulf Coast Records ASIN : B0D54NHWLX

After two years touring as the Blood Brothers Mike Zito and Albert Castiglia decided to concentrate on solo projects next but Albert felt that he didn't have enough new material, so Mike suggested that he get a 'few' friends in to help and also include some covers. 'Righteous Souls' was the result with Joe Bonamassa, Josh Smith, Popa Chubby, Kevin Burt, Ally Venable, Monster Mike Welch, Danielle Nicole, Rick Estrin, Alabama Mike, Jimmy Carpenter and Kingfish Ingram all getting involved and with Mr. Zito and Kid Andersen producing at Andersen's Greaseland studio. The basic band

is Albert (guitar, vocals), Jim Pugh (keyboards), Jerry Jemmot (bass), Derrick D'Mar Martin (drums), Jon Otis (percussion), Jack Sanford (baritone sax) and Lisa Andersen (vocals).

The album blasts off with 'Centerline' a powerful rock blues with Popa Chubby helping out on guitar and vocals and on 'Get Down to the Nitty Gritty' Alabama Mike adds his vocals to a song featuring great guitar and organ. 'Mama I Love You' is a dramatic ballad with Kevin Burt guesting, while the old Bo Diddley chestnut 'You Can't Judge a Book By the Cover' is enlivened by Albert's daughter Rayne helping out singing and also Kingfish Ingram swapping guitar leads with Albert. The old Clapton/Rick Danko song 'All Our Past Times' is huge, featuring not only Joe Bonamassa's blistering lead guitar but also Danielle Nicole's heartfelt vocals and 'Till They Take It All Away'

also features a female guest in young Ally Venable. Albert played in bluesman Junior Wells' band and he includes two of his old boss's songs 'Come On In This House' and 'What My Mama Told Me' both featuring Rick Estrin on harp and with the latter also featuring Monster Mike Welch on guitar. 'You Were Wrong' is Stax-style soul with Jimmy Carpenter on sax, 'The Dollar Done Fell' is an old Buddy Guy song with Josh Smith on guitar and 'No Tears Left to Cry' is a nice acoustic track with Gary Hoey on slide guitar. This is a really good album with lots of variety from all the different guests but Albert himself isn't over-shadowed as his own vocals and guitar are prominent on every track.

Graham Harrison



Bywater Call—Shepherd —CRS—ASIN : B0D8LLDGWK

I guess if you were trying to describe Canadian band Bywater Call's music you'd say they sound a bit like the Tedeschi Trucks Band in that founding member Meghan Parnell has a dynamic blues voice and co-founder guitarist Dave Barnes specialises in slide guitar. The rest of the band is John Kervin (keyboards), Mike Meusel (bass), Bruce McCarthy (drums), Stephen Dyte (trumpet) and Julian Nalli (tenor sax). This is their third album and comprises all original songs with 'Everybody Knows' blasting us off with Barnes' explosive rhythm guitar and Meghan's heartfelt throaty vocals. I wasn't as keen on the ballad 'Colours' but 'Sweet Maria' is lilting southern soul built on Kervin's electric piano and with Barnes' slide guitar and the ensemble brass.

By contrast to what we've heard so far 'Holler' starts off with Meghan's echoey vocals over acoustic guitar with the rest of the band coming in later and the song building to a powerful climax. The ballad 'For All We Know' also starts with a restrained acoustic section and although the rest of the band do also come in eventually, it is a much more gradual build, while 'Roll' is a beautiful song based on a lilting piano riff with the rest of the band adding arpeggios but leaving lots of space for Meghan's vocals. 'Now and Never' is funky with stabbing brass and 'As If' is also built on funky drums and bass, with more stabbing brass plus organ and electric piano and on top of everything Meghan's expressive vocals. The band sign off with 'Sign of Peace' which takes us to New Orleans, a marching band rhythm with the brass (featuring Christian Overton on trombone and Jay Burr on tuba) really cutting loose on top - then out of nowhere comes real NOLA piano playing and we then double the pace to the rousing climax - phew! Although Meghan out front with her outstanding voice is the obvious star here the band also play their part in creating a very full-sounding backing for her to sing over, that sound is rooted in the past but has a modern edge and songs like 'Everybody Knows', 'Roll' and 'Sign of Peace' are really excellent pieces of work. The band are touring Britain in October definitely one to go and see live!

Graham Harrison

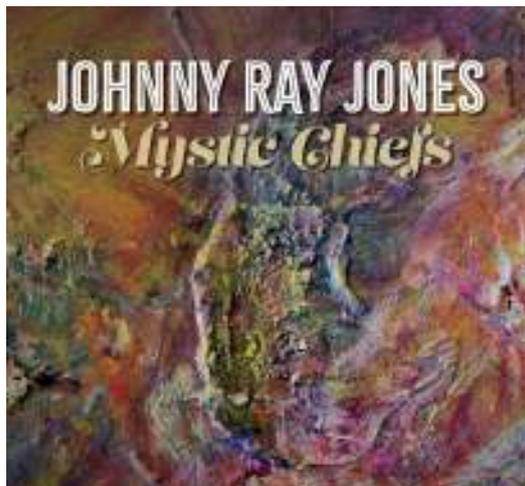


SirJo Cocchi & Balta Bordoy—Heads Up—Continental Blue Heaven ASIN : B0D4B3KY7K

SirJo Cocchi is an Italian pianist and singer and Balta Bordoy is a Spanish guitarist and together they have made this album which has been mixed and mastered by Kid Andersen who says of them “The real stuff, great playing and singing. Some of the finest European blues recordings I’ve ever heard”. Indeed opening track ‘Love and Pain Blues’ sounds like the Chicago West Side blues of Otis Rush or Magic Sam with not only Balta’s great guitar but heart-felt vocals from SirJo and ‘Transmutation Blues’ features great harp from Victor Puertas,

while the title track is an instrumental at the jazzy end of blues. The rhythm section is Santi Ursul (bass) and Micky Izquierdo (drums) and ‘Blues for the End of the World’ has Nil Mujal on tenor sax, while Puertas is back on harp for Leroy Carr’s ‘Midnight Hour Blues’. Elsewhere ‘Tell Me’ is a nice authentic-sounding Bo Diddley-style rocker with pounding rhythm section and also a curious piano middle section that breaks up the song! Otherwise, this is an interesting album of authentic blues from the two principals as well as the supporting musicians.

Graham Harrison



Johnny Ray Jones—Mystic Chiefs—Moondogg Records

This is Californian vocalist Johnny Ray Jones’ third album and features his band the Mystic Chiefs recorded in Johnny Lee Schell’s Ultratone Studio in Studio City, California. Johnny (Ray Jones) got his start in blues listening to and sitting in with Lester Butler’s Red Devils and half the tracks on this album are from The Devils’ repertoire. The Mystic Chiefs are Junior Watson and Johnny Lee Schell (guitars), Carl Sonny Leyland (keyboards), Tex Nakamura (harmonica), John Bazz (bass), Stephen Hodges (percussion) and J.R. Lozano (drums). Lester Butler’s ‘Automatic’ starts us off with Leyland’s pounding piano and great harp from Nakamura (who replaced Lee Oscar

in the band War) and we also get a great-sounding version of Slim Harpo’s ‘Shake Your Hips’ (as also done by the Stones).

Billy Boy Arnold’s ‘Wish You Would’ (1st. single by The Yardbirds) is another blaster with more harp from Nakamura and a nice guitar solo from Watson and we also get a slightly speeded-up version of Willie Dixon’s ‘I’m Ready’. ‘Sugar Sweet’ is a nice fast shuffle with more superb piano from Leyland and Sonny Boy Williamson’s ‘My Younger Days’ is a mid-tempo contemplative song and we finish with a slow blues ‘I’ll Be Around’ with piano from Leyland and lead guitar from Junior Watson. Johnny Ray Jones hasn’t got a particularly distinctive voice but he does sing with the authority of a blues shouter and he’s assembled a great band here from musicians who have played with SoCal acts like Bonnie Raitt, Tom Waits, Los Lobos, The Blasters and James Harman and who produce an authentic Chicago blues sound on the West Coast.

Graham Harrison



Big Joe Kennedy—Amalgamation—Big Joe Kennedy

I'd never heard of Big Joe Kennedy but apparently he's a classically-trained pianist/singer out of the Midwest who's worked in Chicago and New Orleans but the sound of Joe and the band isn't just NOLA R&B and rock and roll, it's also very much Crescent City jazz. We start off with Junior Wells' 'Messin' with the Kid' but no harmonica here this is piano and ensemble brass led and Lee Dorsey's NOLA classic 'Working in a Coal Mine' is also given a jazzy twist. Joe's band is Mark Brooks (bass), Doug Belote (drums), Zach Lange (trumpet), Marty Peters (sax) and Stephen Walker (trombone). Alan Toussaint's 'Brickyard Blues' (as done by Frankie Miller and Little Feat) is taken at a fast pace and then we get two jumping, jazzy instrumentals - the frenetic 'Fidgety Feet' and 'Mahogany Hall Stomp' with both featuring brass and piano solos.

Then everything goes a bit easy listening with a song by another NOLA legend Louis Armstrong 'What a Wonderful World', followed by a jerky take on 'Exactly Like You' (with Joe Dexter Woodis on clarinet) and Gershwin's 'They Can't Take That Away from Me'. I thought that Ray Noble's 'The Very Thought of You' would be more mainstream fare but Joe delivers it solo with rolling New Orleans piano to give it a new twist and we finish with a solo piano instrumental the charming 'Dorothy'. Big Joe is a fine piano player and has a honeyed, controlled voice and the band handle both fine ensemble playing and also take their solos well but I'd like to see them all cutting loose a bit more - which I suspect they would do on live gigs. Probably one for jazz fans rather than blues fans.

Graham Harrison



Bobby Christina's Caravan—True Blues Brother—Nola Blue ASIN : B0D17ZG59V

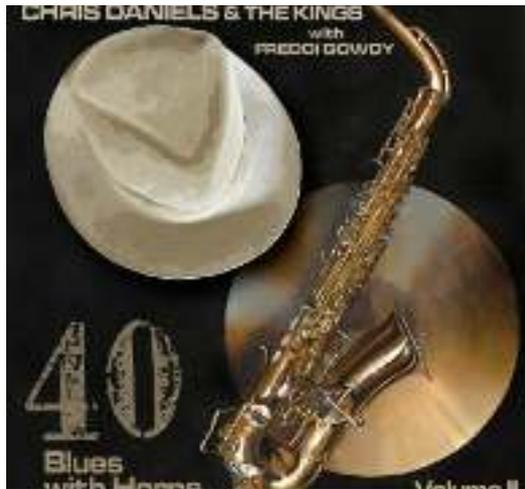
Guitarist Matt Murphy was born in Mississippi but moved to Chicago in 1948 when he was 19 and he went on to work with blues legends like Howlin' Wolf, Memphis Slim, Little Junior Parker and James Cotton but it was as a member of The Blues Brother's band that he really achieved fame in the 1980s. In the year 2000 he had a series of strokes that caused him to retire from music but in 2018 he began to work on an album with drummer and producer Bobby Christina (brother of The Fabulous Thunderbirds' Fran Cristina) but Matt died suddenly the same year after only recording three songs. However,

Bobby decided to issue a tribute album to Matt including these three new songs as well as contributions from musicians who were fans of Matt. After putting out the call Bobby was inundated with musicians wanting to take part and the project had to be expanded from one CD to a 2x CD set.

We kick off with one of the new tracks 'Matt's Boogie' a rocking instrumental with Bruce Bears on organ and Fran Cristina on drums, then Dave Howard fronts a version of Chuck Berry's 'You Never Can Tell' with The Mitchfest Horns. There are two songs from Matt's old boss Memphis Slim a country inflected 'Mother Earth' with fiddle and mandolin and the jazzy 'I'm Lost Without You'. Elsewhere there is soul with 'Something's Got a Hold on Me' with Christine Ohlman and 'Think' with Toni Lynn Washington, as well as blues on Otis Rush's 'I Can't Quit You Baby' with

Troy Mercy on guitar and 'Way Down South' with Steve Cropper on guitar and Lee Oscar on harp. Another instrumental with Matt on guitar opens CD 2 'Matt's Shuffle' again with Bruce Bears on organ and Matt also plays on 'Tired of Sleeping Alone' alongside Ricky 'King' Russell. Side 2 also features Muddy Waters-style blues with 'Evil' featuring Bob Margolin and Jerry Portnoy and also 'Let Me Hang Around' with Joe Beard and Billy Boy Arnold. Elsewhere there's a great version of Don Nix's 'Same Old Blues' with Tracy Nelson singing and also involved are Ronnie Earl, Duke Robillard, Doyle Bramall II, Bill Kirchen, Tom Hambridge and a bewildering legion of other players. This profusion of players leads to great variety but also give the albums no overall identity and I do wonder if Matt Murphy has got slightly lost in the project.

Graham Harrison



Chris Daniels and The Kings with Freddi Gowdy—40 Blues with Horns Volume II—Moon Voyage Records

The Colorado based band KINGS, who were formed in 1984, celebrate 40 years of playing together this year (2024), with the release of their 20th album entitled "40 - Blues With Horns Volume II."

They possess the exuberance of 'The Tower of Power' with the grit of 'Blood Sweat and Tears' and smoothness of 'The Average White Band'.

Chris Daniels is on rhythm guitar and vocals while Freddi Gowdy, takes lead vocals with Steve Ivey on drums, John Thornburg; bass and vocals, Colin "Bones" Jones; lead guitar, Bob Rebholz; alto saxophone and flute, Darryl "Doody" Abrahamson; trumpet and vocals, Darren Kramer; trombone. Guest artists; Sam Bush; fiddle and mandolin, Sonny Landreth; slide guitar, Tom Kapek; B3 and keyboards, Christian Teele; percussion, Steve Conn; accordion and B3 and Hazel Miller vocals.

The opener 'Jump (When My Baby Says)', is a splendid toe-tapping swinger, horns, percussion, fiddle and guitars all sweetly mesh together. While, 'I Like Funky Music', has a wonderfully infectious, head nodding, hip swinging urban groove. 'Everybody's A Millionaire', possesses a sunshine infused feel with horns sweetly flying high. Even at one's lowest ebb 'Need Some Good Luck Bad' lifts you up, with its positively, pulsating horns and grooving guitar work. 'Dance, Dance, Dance', is a rather splendid floor-duster with its rocking guitar and funky, swinging horns. A fierce, attacking 'Congo Square', delivers a sneaking, snaking accordion paired with a raw lithe slide. The late night, Sunday morning laidback 'Stealin' Candy', delivers wistful horns and introduces a sweet acoustic guitar. 'I Like Your Shoes' is simply an enticing, funky rolling groove. 'Under Pressure' is a horn laden unsocial urban commentary. 'When You're Cool (The Sun Shines All The Time)' is a goodtime, strutting, horn swinging tale of Cool!

Recommended!

Brian Harman



Tom Buenger—Blues From Caucasia—Independent

After more than ten years in the US Military and followed by five years inhabiting corporate America, Tom finally decided that music was his true vocation. Tom has played in dark Texas bars, Southern music halls, California wine bars, and in and around the Seattle area. This is his second album which features ten original numbers and one cover.

Tom is on vocals, guitar, harmonica, piano, and kazoo, with Rafael Tranquilino; drums, bass and guitar, Chris Eger; bass and electric guitar, Teresa Russell; electric guitar and Cyrus Zerbe and Richard Williams; drums.

The album has a loose, fresh feel, as the enthusiastically racing Rockabilly opener 'Above The Sun', entices you in. 'Start A Fire', is a slowburn, love letter, with the richly ringing guitar, raising and roaring as it goes along. 'That Ain't Right', is in the same vein but, with a maudlin drawling harmonica taking the lead. On 'What You Gonna Do', an enticing acoustic slide guitar gently duels with an ear catching electric guitar.

'Mean Things', is a delightfully picked acoustic guitar piece with gentle electric guitar interjections. 'Get With Me' is another splendidly enticing Rockabilly number, featuring a lively kazoo solo adding to the harmonica underpinning.

The pleasing, gospel influenced 'Don't Stop', contains infectious inviting, layered vocals while the R&b Ballad 'Feel Alright', possesses a sensuously late night, laidback feel. On 'Fight No More', Tom not only takes lead vocals and harmonica but, adds his multi layered harmony vocals to great effect.

The enticing, easygoing 'Talk To Me', is delivered in a very pleasing and relaxing Piedmont guitar style. Blind Willie Johnson's 'Soul Of A Man', possesses a stunning and reverentially delivered multi layered vocal arrangement.

Recommended!

Brian Harman



Teresa James & The Rhythm Tramps—Rose Coloured Glasses Vol.2—Blue Heart Records BHR1054

Teresa and Terry Wilson continue to deliver their rose tinted outlook, with twelve more smooth tunes. Here again, Teresa takes lead vocals and piano, Terry; vocals, keyboards, bass and guitar, Billy Watts and Kevin McKendree; guitar, Vince Melamed and Bennett Salvay; keyboards, Tony Braunagel, Jay Bellerose, Brannen Temple, Richard Millsap and Herman Matthews; drums, Matthew Quave; strings, Matt Lomeo; harmonica, Horns; Darrell Leonard and Paulie Cerra on woodwinds and saxophones.

On 'I'd Do It For You', Teresa once again delivers a sultry, horn rich, inviting blues, her vocals proclaiming just what she'll happily do for him. 'Better Angels' matches gently rising horns with a crisp piano underpinning the slow grooving funk. In 'Lean On Love' gentle horns soften a sorrowful R&B tale of pill popping to stay afloat.

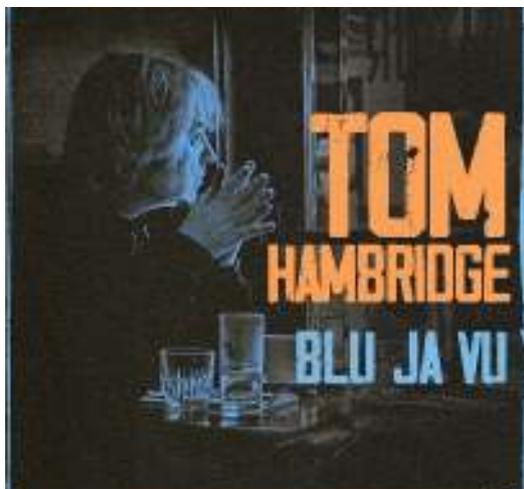
The swaying, late night lost love, ballad 'The Idea Of You', has a sympathetic piano underpinning a forlorn, hopeless vocal. 'That's What I'm Talking About', features a splendid blend of understated guitar and resonating saxophone solo. 'I Don't Need Another Reason', is a warm horn, singalong roller, about a satisfying tale of good love. 'Flip Flop', oozes laidback Caribbean and Reggae infused late night emotions.

On the slowburning, 'The Heart Wants What It Wants' a desolate sultry, soul filled vocal hopes of love. 'Ain't Nothing For Certain', has a sweaty soul groove with a wailing harmonica giving a blues infusion.

The enticingly horn drenched, slow grooving soul of 'Just Don't Think About It' and 'Brand New Flame', deal with anticipation, fear and loss. Whereas, 'Second Chance', is a powerful but, subtly grooving horn driven tale of allowing people to make mistakes and still find love.

Recommended!

Brian Harman



Tom Hambridge—Blu Ja Vu—Quarto Valley Records QVR 0172

This is Tom's follow-up to the album The NOLA Sessions, in 2018. Here, he enlists friends and stars for this 13 track blockbuster. In the studio Tom handles drums, percussion, vocals and production duties, with Rob McNelley and Bob Britt; guitars, Tommy Macdonald; bass, Kevin McKendree and Jon Coleman on keyboards.

The opener is 'Ain't It Just Like Love', a rocking piano shuffle with Buddy Guy on fiery guitar and vocals. 'That's My Home', is a hard driving, blues guitar rocker, delivered by Joe Bonamassa.

The rocking shuffle 'Wear You Out', concerns a 1954 Stratocaster, a Cadillac Eldorado and a woman who wants more!

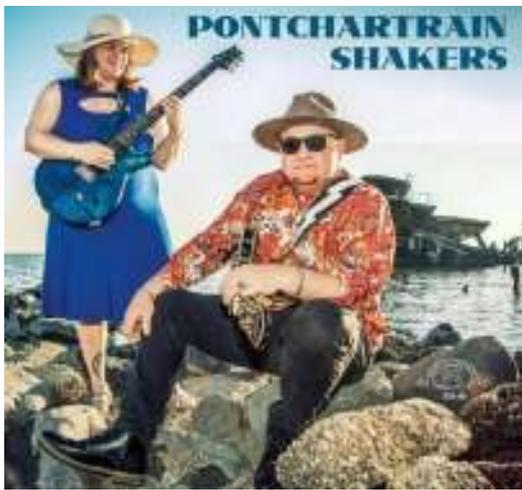
'Blues Don't Care', has Chris "Kingfish" Ingram lending vocals and guitar on this pleasant shuffler. 'Sick With Love', is a straight down the line grinding rocker. 'Automatic' is a rolling, rocking ode to a V-8 '65 Ford Thunderbird. 'Symptoms of Love' is a stomping percussion driven roller. 'Brother John Boogie' features a splendid harmonica performance from the late James Cotton. 'Get Outta Town', is a very pleasant, piano driven rocking roller! 'Smarter Than I Was', is the tale of a woman never, coming back, the powerful, driving guitar here is from Josh Smith, which entices you in.

The wailing and screaming guitars on the rocker, 'Johnny Winter' questions as to why he hasn't been inducted into The Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

'Meet Me in Chicago', is a fiery, fuzzy guitar led rocking ode to the "windy City", courtesy of Rob McNelley. Bringing the album to a close is 'End of the Line', which, is a slowburn shuffler, dedicated to the last man to leave a musical evening.

Recommended!

Brian Harman



Pontchartrain Shakers—Pontchartrain Shakers —Southland and SCD-46

Nice to see the venerable Southland label is still releasing new music from its New Orleans base, and of course, given the name, this is a local act. Pontchartrain Shakers is a blues duo formed in 2018 and comprising vocal, guitar and bass player Amedee “A5” Frederick and vocalist/ guitarist and producer Jojo Wright. They have a keyboards player and a rhythm section helping out here.

The album is bookended by a mix of wistful soul and mellow southern rock on opener ‘Time To Make A Change’ and a laid-back, slightly gospel-ish ‘We Need Love’. In between, it is almost exclusively the blues. Just listen to the romping Jimmy Reed styled ‘Going Fishing’, an excellent slow blues with ‘I Need A Creole Woman’, swamp-blues fashion for the lovely ‘Miss You Baby’ - the first vocal of the album for Jojo - and a Hookerish, self-descriptively titled ‘A5 Boogie’.

The second half of this release - another five tracks - keeps the blues groove going with a tough, insistent ‘You Don’t Know’, another fine vocal by Jojo on a nicely grooving, swamp-inflected ‘Dead Snake Blues’, and a low-down ‘Cain Snake’. Randy Newman’s ‘Louisiana 1927’ - not a blues -has become something of a standard for musicians from the Pelican State, and Amedee, Jojo and co. handle it very well.

Well worth tracking down!

Norman Darwen

(www.pontchartrainshakers.com)



Levee Town—Stories—Hudtime

Levee Town, under the leadership of the acclaimed Kansas City, Missouri based guitarist and singer Brandon Hudspeth, lay down some fine straight blues and blues-rock here -and this is blues-rock firmly in the blues tradition for the most part. Listen to a track like the insistent ‘Where I Lay My Head’ or the pop-tinged blues of ‘Worn Soul’.

It is a nicely diverse set too.. Try the Chuck Berry flavoured rocker, ‘I Got A Hole In My Pocket’ or the fine guitar showcase instrumental ‘Shuffling Sea’. The opening track, ‘The Healthy Woman’, has a tough, slightly Hendrix- and vintage Cream-flavoured guitar riff, ‘Harley Lou’ is kind of California meets the bayou meets blues-rock, and the closing ‘Back Then’ is a fine shuffle with echoes of southern rock in the guitar work. ‘My Daughter’s Eyes’ is a fine number that avoids being mawkish or overly sentimental, whilst ‘Dumb Old Smart Phone’ is a fine old-time blues ballad about a rather modern problem.

Bass player Jacques Garoutte and drummer Adam Hagerman have been with Brandon for a good few years now and they know just what the music needs and provide it perfectly. My only criticism of the set is the short playing time - 30 minutes. I’ll happily listen to a lot more, guys!

Norman Darwen

(www.leveetown.com)

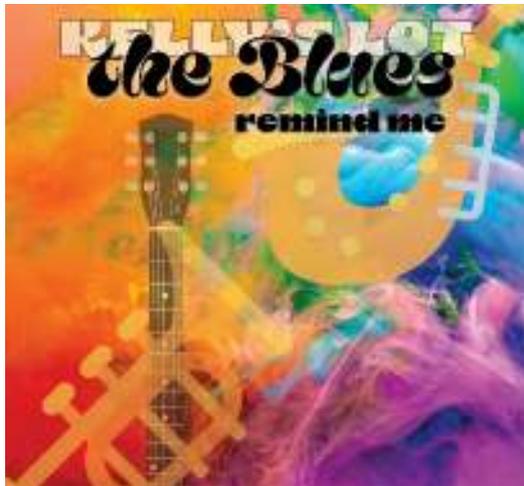


Taj Mahal—Giant Step/ De Old Folks at Home—Floating World FLOATM6466

This was Taj Mahal's third set, released in 1969 and as was something of a fashion at the time, it was a double vinyl set; it is now a single 67 minutes long CD. "Giant Step" is an electric set with Taj handling vocals, harp, banjo and guitar backed by his then regular band of Jesse Ed Davis on guitars, piano and organ, Gary Gilmore bass and Chuck Blackwell drums. The repertoire consists of blues like 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl', gospel in the form of 'You're Gonna Need Somebody On Your Bond' (transformed into a romping blues performance), country with the truckers' anthemic 'Six Days On The Road', southern soul with 'Farther On Down The Road', and one of Taj's own favourites, 'Take A Giant Step' - he has cut this Carole King song several times.

There is also a Leadbelly song, 'Keep Your Hands Off Her', and "De Ole Folks At Home", the second half of the original release, opens with the same artist's work song, 'Linin' Track'. This is a completely solo album, and at times almost comes across as a field recording, particularly on 'A Little Soulful Tune', the vocal accompanied by Taj's patting, a ragtime-ish banjo instrumental in 'Colored Aristocracy', and the fine, self-explanatory, 'Blind Boy's Rag'. Reverend Gary Davis' 'Candy Man' was very much a staple of the time, 'Stagger Lee' draws more on Mississippi John Hurt than the credited Lloyd Price and Henry Thomas' 'Fishing Blues' is one of my all time Taj Mahal favourite performances. Actually, that goes for this entire set... the two distinct halves complement each other beautifully.

Norman Darwen



Kelly's Lot—the Blues Remind Me—Independent

Celebrating thirty years together, Kelly's Lot have a very fine contemporary blues set, from 'I Gotta Sing The Blues', the excellent, opening, gospel-tinged duet between Kelly Zirbes and keyboards player Mo Beeks about what the blues reminds them of, to the closing 'Love And Understanding', a jaunty blues with fine vocals, subtly jazzy, acoustic based backing, and a fine, upbeat feel. In between are another eight impressive, varied and rather memorable numbers.

'Boogie Bus' is an appropriately driving groover (with fine harp too); in contrast 'Mama's Blues' has a lovely, classic, southern soul lilt and apparently autobiographical lyrics. 'It Ain't Always' has a strong 70s feel, with a soul tinge underlined by the excellent horns arranged, as elsewhere, by saxman Bill Johnston. 'Man In The Moon' is a thoughtful, considered and jazz-inflected performance.

'Without You' rides a heavy, angry, guitar riff, leaning towards a blues-rock sound and with some nicely political lyrics - it's not difficult to figure out who Kelly will be voting for, it won't be the man with the tiny fists! 'Just Tell Me The Truth' has a tinge of a 60s pop-soul approach and a flute break and fills by Aviva Maloney, adding a slightly different flavour. Tight control is a feature of the arrangement of 'Blessings', allowing Kelly's voice both to whisper and to soar, and it makes the organ break all the more effective, whilst 'Aces' is a fine straight-forward fast-paced blues with wailing harp.

As I said at the beginning, this is a fine contemporary blues set. Do investigate!

Norman Darwen

(www.kellyslot.com)



Lil' A and the Allnighters—A Blues Project—New Shot NSR-16082023

“Authentic undiluted southern California blues” it says on the front cover. Singer and harmonica player Alex Woodson grew up seeing and listening to the likes of William Clarke, James Harman, The Red Devils and The Mighty Flyers in the 90s, and being inspired by them to take up the blues harp. Fast forward to 2008 and he formed his own band, recording his debut album, “Special Project” live in the studio two years later. It was mainly intended to send out to promoters, but a few copies were sold at gigs.

Renato Bottani somehow heard it and felt it should be released to a wider public. As luck would have it, he'd just started a record label in Italy - New Shot - with Marco Melzi and he negotiated this (slightly renamed) reissue. Lovers of the sound so accurately described on the sleeve will be grateful.

The album is squarely in the tradition of those just mentioned. The leader's voice is fine for this type of material; at times there is the characteristic slightly jazzy, jumping California sound, or covers of Little Walter's 'Off The Wall', and Jimmy Rogers' s tougher 'Left Me With A Broken Heart', both wonderful examples of the classic 50s Chicago approach. Do note too the guitar playing throughout.

Then there is a meaty William Clarke style on this version of his 'Saturday Night Blues', jump blues with 'Ain't Gonna Do It' (lovely guitar again), and a rocking 'Hands Off'. Guitarist Anthony (AC) Contreras wraps up something of a nearly lost masterpiece with his wild uptempo instrumental showcase, 'A.C. Boogie'.

Norman Darwen

(www.newshotrecords.com)



The Pzenny Project—Smokey Bourbon—Independent

Whew! After the first three numbers I'm still trying to catch my breath! This is the follow-up album to last year's self-titled album from muscular blues-rockers The Pzenny Project out of Lexington, South Carolina, under the leadership of singer and guitarist Mark Pzenny. That opening trio finds the energy level cranked up way past ten, all slashing guitars and growled vocals. It's loud - and then some...

No frills bar-room blues-rock is certainly the order of the day here— for the most part. But don't mistake that for musical simplicity. The opening 'I Digress - You're The Best' shows that Mark and crew can throw in some unexpected twists.

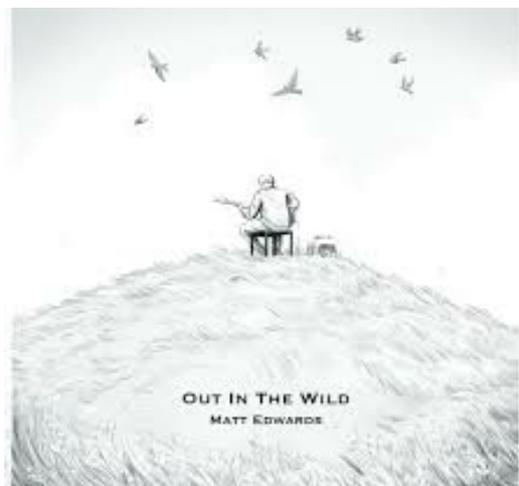
The title track takes things down a few notches, an intriguing, slightly jazzy blues, before 'Hoochie Mama' - a remastered version, like several other tracks here - rolls in strongly, high

energy and riding a strong riff, and 'Shake It' has elements of supercharged rock and roll. The remade 'What The Funk' does indeed have funk tinges, and 'Baby Cries' is a rock ballad.

The last three songs balance the album nicely - another three high energy blues-rockers, with 'Highway Jammin' a southern rock-tinged instrumental, with some fine organ playing from Moses Andrew III adding a strong underpinning to fierce guitar work from the leader. Blues-rockers should check out this release - and do play loud!

Norman Darwen

(www.pszennyproject.com)



Matt Edwards—Out In The Wild—Self Release

I must admit that Matt Edwards is a new name to me despite him having been on the British blues scene for some time. Based in the south of England "Out In The Wild" is his fourth solo album.

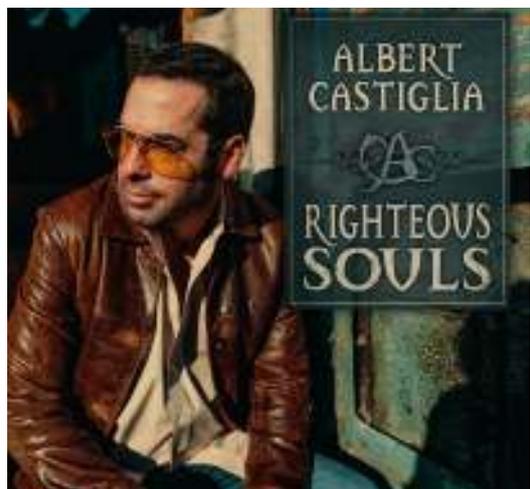
The album opens with some nice country blues riffing on 'Never Get To Sleep'. 'Swamp Street' is a swing twelve bar blues with a hint of the Fabulous Thunderbirds in there. 'Time To Pay' is a laid back minor blues, I quite liked this one. There's some more snappy guitar riffing to be had with 'The

Tide' whilst 'Home' had more of a light jazz feel to it.

'Robbery' for some reason brought to mind the style of Elvis Costello which ain't a bad thing. 'When's It Going To Be' has that British blues boom sound to it, something like an early Savoy Brown if you will which once again ain't a bad thing! There is a nice gutsy guitar riff to 'Underground' before the album closes with hints of Americana on 'Say Please'.

There is some really good guitar work here from Matt, he has a good guitar vocabulary taking in all the blues styles and quite refreshingly does not over indulge on solos. However, I did find the vocals a little unconvincing and a bit disjointed at times or maybe they just don't sit right in the mix but overall a good blues rock album.

Ged Wilson



Albert Castiglia—Righteous Souls—Gulf Coast Records

Albert Castiglia is well known on the blues circuit having started out in Junior Wells backing band and more recently working with Mike Zito. Albert was raised in Miami USA and has become a blues award winning artist and here he has assembled a fine list of guests for his latest album, "Righteous Souls".

The album opens with a great guitar driven blues rocker, 'Centreline' which features Popa Chubby on guitar. 'Get Down To The Nitty Gritty' is a straight forward blues shuffle that hits the spot. Things slow down with the more sombre heavenly tale, 'Mama, I Love You' with Kevin Burt hitting some great vocals. Christone 'Kingfish'

Ingram gets to shine on the Willie Dixon classic, 'You Can't Judge A Book By The Cover' before Joe Bonamassa no less hits the spot on 'All Our Past Times'.

'Till They Take It Away' is a greater bluesy rocker, I really liked this one. The slow blues classic 'Come On In This House' features the distinctive harp work of Rick Estrin. Things get upbeat and funky on 'You Were Wrong' with Jimmy Carpenter in fine form on sax and the funk vibes continue on Buddy Guy's, 'The Dollar Done Fell'. There is a nice light acoustic vibe with slide guitar on 'No Tears Left To Cry' before the album closes with another Junior Well's classic, 'What Mama Told Me' with Rick Estrin once again on harp duties.

Albert Castiglia has a good defined strong vocal and his guitar work is exemplary throughout. The album is well produced with good instrumentation and great use of dynamics so credit to Mike Zito for the production. By assembling a fine array of top notch guest artists Albert has come up with a great album that I'm sure all blues fans will enjoy.

Ged Wilson



Jubu Smith—Jubu—Little Village Label

Jubu Smith is a top guitarist particularly in the world of Jazz, Blues and Soul. He has a great pedigree having worked with the likes of Whitney Houston, Luther Vandross and George Benson just to name but three. Now based in Atlanta USA he has just released his self titled album, "Jubu".

The album opens with some funky bluesy guitar licks on 'Hamster Wheel'. 'Jubu's Poem' is far more laid back and melodic. 'Carroll Drive' has a more jump blues vibe, sort of a Blues Brothers, 'Everybody Needs Somebody...' style with hints of Stevie Ray Vaughan in there too. There is a more gentle soul feel to 'Kwik-Way Nostalgia' whilst 'Organizations Sake' has a good old solid funk beat.

'E G Is Here' as the names suggests features Eric Gales, then there's some more jazzy blues vibes on 'Extreme Pleasure'. 'At Long Last' is stripped back and gentle whilst 'McLeansville Blues' is a good old style blues shuffle. The album closes with the slow and understated 'Totally Convicted'.

Jubu Smith is undoubtedly a very talented and accomplished guitarist who plays with a seemingly almost effortless style and is well suited to the Jazz Blues genre. However, as all these tracks are instrumentals there is a tendency to meander. Some just don't really go anywhere and go on far too long with excessive noodling which can become exhaustive on the ears!

Jubu is up there with the likes of Ronny Jordan, Robben Ford and Larry Carlton but unlike that trio he just doesn't quite pull off tunes with their conviction and purpose but there is no denying his talent so please check him out.

Ged Wilson



Duke Ellington - It Don't Mean a Thing (1943)



Rick Estrin & The Nightcats - Contemporary



The Jubalaires - Noah

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