



MIKE STERN
Who Let The Cats Out?
Heads Up (HUCD 3115)

Look at the cover of guitarist Mike Stern's latest album, *Who Let The Cats Out?*, and if you don't know Stern, you might take him as another blues-rock axe-slinger. After all, that's a Fender Telecaster he's posing with. And you'd be right, sorta.

Stern has carved out a career most musicians would envy, playing with a host of jazz and fusion giants including Billy Cobham, Miles Davis, Jaco Pastorius, and Michael Brecker. Unlike his peer Pat Metheny, Stern has always kept an element of rock and blues in his playing, and he's just as apt to wow an audience with a purple haze as he is with a mood that's indigo.

Who Let The Cats Out? finds Stern and his many musical friends (such as vocalist Richard Bona, tenor saxist Bob Franceschini, drummers Dave Weckl and Kim Thompson, and bassist Anthony Jackson) bopping, blowing and generally having a blast across 11 tracks of changing mood and dynamics.

"KT," named for drummer Thompson, builds in intensity as Thompson and bassist Me'Shell Ndegéocello lay down a wicked beat before Stern fires a solo into the cosmos. The meditative "We're With You" is a touching piece, dually dedicated to Stern's friend Brecker, who is battling myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), and his current bandmate Franceschini, whose wife died from heart failure earlier in 2006. Gregoire Maret's harmonica playing on the song is sublime. Several tunes on *Cats* feature the incredible vocals of Bona, whose wordless singing across "Language" creates a vocabulary all its own. The closing track, "Blue Runway," begins with a slinky, minor-key groove on the back of Jackson's bass and progresses through some lovely, singing sax from Franceschini. The song first simmers, then builds to a rolling boil as Stern unleashes a scalding solo followed by Franceschini's own fury.

The question isn't "Who let the cats out?" but "who's been keeping them caged?"

— Todd Whitesel

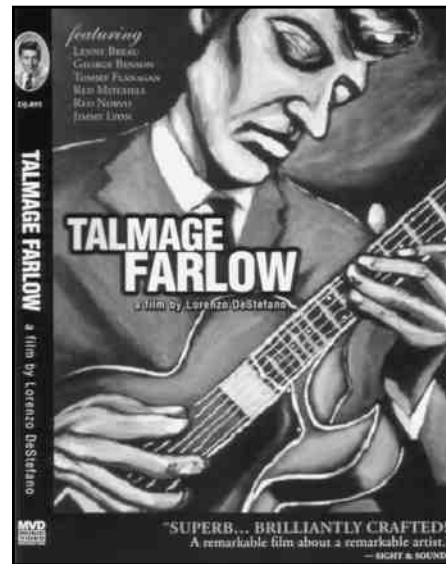
MIKE STERN
Mike Stern Live: The Paris Concert
In-Askustik (INAK 6456 DVD)

Electric guitarist Mike Stern manages somehow to be criticized by some as an overplaying closet metalhead and by others as a writer of too-sugary pop-jazz confections. In the last few years, though, he's been doing some good work that avoids either of those extremes.

Stern's new DVD of a live 2004 Paris show probably won't convert anyone who's not already devoted to the guitarist, but it's a very good set and an excellent demonstration of the leader as a mature, finished player. The band of drummer Dennis Chambers, tenor saxophone player Bob Franceschini and electric bass star Richard Bona are just right for Stern: They can groove effortlessly in a rock/jazz vein, but they're also nimble and alert to the nuances of Stern's compositions. There is a slickness to the overall band sound — increased by the digital sheen of the recording — but the players pull a grittiness out of Stern's compositions that hasn't always been evident on his studio recordings. Bona is hardly an under-player himself, but somehow his busy bass here is a joyous, goosing counterpart to Stern's nimble lines.

Of course, Stern plays some remarkable, singing solos. This is a must-have for Stern's fans and is cautiously recommended for those not altogether convinced of the guitarist's greatness.

— Paul Olson



TALMAGE FARLOW
Talmage Farlow — A Film By Lorenzo DeStefano
Music Video Distributors (DJ-895)

By the early 1950s, the phenomenal jazz guitarist Tal Farlow held the attention of music fans worldwide. The Greensboro, N.C., native had already worked with Buddy DeFranco, Artie Shaw, and Red Norvo and was starting to garner the acclaim of an artist standing at the precipice of unlimited fame. In 1958, Farlow stepped quietly out of the limelight to devote his time to painting signs and fishing in the oceanside town of Sea

Bright, N.J. After 22 years of self-imposed semi-exile, Farlow was tracked down by filmmaker Lorenzo DeStefano. Instead of finding a man who had completely turned his back on music, DeStefano was surprised to find that practice and performance were still an integral part of Farlow's life. *Talmage Farlow*, a 59-minute film, tells a story that seems to run contrary to the expectations of the music press and ardent fans: For some musicians, it's all about the music; fame just gets in the way of the enjoyment of playing. MVD has now released the 1981 short film, long held in high regard by jazz historians, in DVD format.

Talmage Farlow spends much of the film observing the guitarist in quiet moments around his Sea Bright home. The film is prefaced by comments from a young George Benson, remarking that Farlow's rather large hands allowed him to form chords and realize techniques that were much more difficult for other guitarists. Viewers are able to see the master at work, using his thumb to barre chords and deftly applying the lightest touches to lightning runs. Whether seen trading licks and advice with visiting admirer Lenny Breau or rehearsing and performing with the equally amazing pianist Tommy Flanagan and the incredible Red Mitchell on bass, Farlow's gifted ear and unique style are evident. The film climaxes with an August 1980 performance by the trio at New York's Public Theatre, Farlow looking every bit as confident and satisfied as he does when earlier painting a name on a boat back in Sea Bright.

Following the film's initial release, Farlow reconnected with fans who'd been wondering where he'd been, and he launched into recording and touring once more. But again, he chose to slip back to the quiet life before passing away in 1998 at the age of 77. *Talmage Farlow* serves as both a documentary of the guitarist and as a study in the motivations of those who pick up an instrument. The viewer can't help but wonder how many incredible performers there are in the world that will remain unknown simply because they choose, for peace of mind, not to reveal themselves.

— Mark Polzin

MAGIC SLIM & THE TEARDROPS/
JOE CARTER WITH SUNNYLAND SLIM
That Ain't Right
Delmark (DE 786)

With *That Ain't Right*, Delmark dusts off some old blues classics that never saw the light of day 29 years ago and brings them to a new audience — helping to ensure this pair of Chicago bluesmen will not be forgotten.

First up is Morris Holt — aka Magic Slim — and his Teardrops, who have been bowling over blues audiences for more than three decades. This is deep-down Chicago blues at its finest.

Originally slated for release in 1977, this would have been the American debut disc from Magic Slim And His Teardrops. Unfortunately, the music business being what it is, the slated deal fell through and the master tapes from these sessions were put into a vault, never to be heard. Of these half dozen tracks, the highlight is the instrumental Slim-penned "Soul Blues," where his sizzling guitar sings and gets you groovin'.

Next up is Joe Carter, an underground Windy City musician who passed away in 2001, before his true legacy was known. Carter opens his set with the Elmore James classic "I'm Worried." James' trademark slide is evident in Carter's style, and overall this performance echoes the vintage postwar blues of the likes of James and Muddy Waters. Carter is joined on these sessions by Sunnyland Slim and his killer piano work. Listening to these lost licks takes you to a smoky club on Chicago's West side. Thankfully, Delmark unearthed these lost souls and remixed the original sessions so a new generation of blues aficionados can hear these timeless sessions. For it sure ain't right that these recordings were left buried for so long.

— David McPherson

KANSAS CITY FRANK MELROSE/
PETE DAILY/BOYCE BROWN
Bluesiana
Delmark (DE 245)

Recorded in Chicago in 1940, *Bluesiana* brings a legend (who died too young at 33) to a new generation of jazz lovers. Barrelhouse pianist Kansas City Frank Melrose was an animated character on the Chicago jazz scene during the prohibition era. He was influenced by the great Jelly Roll Morton, and legend has it that many of Melrose's early records were mistaken for Morton's.

With Melrose leading a boisterous band that included talented players such as Pete Daily on cornet and Boyce Brown on sax, his talented and rapid tickling of the ivories finds this septet of first-rate players keeping pace. If you close your eyes listening to "Sugarfoot Strut," you can picture an old saloon packed on a Saturday night with men swinging their ladies 'round the tables. This is vintage dance music, the soundtrack for young lovers letting loose 66 years ago.

A little ragtime, a little swing and a lot of hot jazz, these sizzling sessions will appeal to lovers of a forgotten jazz form. Tackling a variety of show tunes by the likes of George Gershwin ("I Got Rhythm," "Lady Be Good") and Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart ("You Took Advantage Of Me"), *Bluesiana* is a barrel full of fun that will surely get you up and doing a boogie and stompin' along to these 18 jazz hits of a bygone era.

— David McPherson