

others that grow seven minutes long. Africa cannot get more blue or entrancing than this. So, be cautioned: Earworms begin to bore their way in even during *Douma Tabolo's* 12-minute teaser video on YouTube.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**ROBERT FINLEY**  
*Goin' Platinum!*  
EASY EYE SOUND

He scorches, he swoons. Such is the crater-low, sky-high span of soul bluesman Robert Finley. One minute “Three Jumpers” has gotcha chug-a-lugging a stomp from life’s gutbucket, made all the heavier by sacks of hammers tied to every downbeat. Then, at the next turn, ecstatically seizing the (carnal) moment behind a rallying cry of “Get It While You Can.” No problem. The secretly famous phenomenon from Louisiana has both the fortitude as well as the pipes to handle both extremes.

Whatever the mood, Finley wholly invests. Lyric scenarios, veering between the throat-shredding “Honey, Let Me Stay the Night” and the falsetto fantasia of “Holy Wine,” invoke the battle scars in his bucket-of-nails voice. Listen to his heart bleed out

“Complications,” a semi-psychedelic ball of confusion. It’s as if he’s personally endured these 10 hard-won tracks just to save you the emotional trauma.

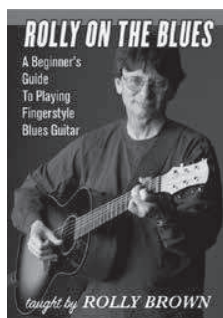
That gritty authenticity is the exact kind that labels mined in the Deep South during the Sixties and Seventies. Finley’s, however, didn’t debut until—2016. By then, he was a spry, yet grizzled 64 years old.

Although the fittingly titled *Age Don’t Mean a Thing* whipped around heads and topped critics’ lists, *Goin’ Platinum!* proves a thousand times more so that Finley’s time is right now.

The music—bold and backdated—never wilts in Finley’s presence. If anything, might confronts might. The Black Keys’ Dan Auerbach, who also produced everyone from Dr. John to Lana Del Ray, sees that the guitars alone can holler just as loud. Arrangements also swirl in a kaleidoscope of horns, vibraphones, Wurlitzers and the coolest of backup singers. The wall of sound is intense, ramrodding “You Don’t Have to Do Right,” then tenderizing “Empty Arms.” “Real Love Is Like Hard Time” maxes out on Spectorian power when mashing Wilson Pickett with the Ronettes. Even if *Goin’ Platinum!* doesn’t quite attain self-fulfilling prophecy, Finley’s indestructible aspirations win highest praise.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**ROLLY BROWN**  
*Rolly on the Blues: A Beginner’s Guide to Playing Fingerstyle Blues Guitar*  
STEFAN GROSSMAN’S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

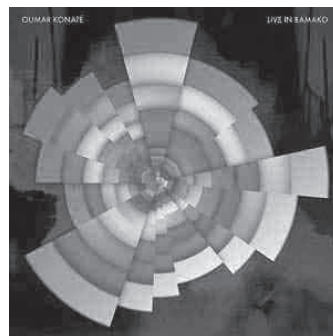


In full disclosure, Rolly Brown openly cites his solo, acoustic blues inspirations as Lightnin’ Hopkins, Blind Blake, Rev. Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt. Their esteemed approaches are what most often historically tint this *Beginner’s Guide to Playing Fingerstyle Blues Guitar*. Not a bad bunch of role models, huh? However, that does not exclude Big Bill Broonzy or Dave Van Ronk, for example, from exerting their technical sway over the lesson, too. Brown then becomes the glue tying together all the enlightenment with his own Zen-like manner, methods and mantras.

In the true spirit of a starter’s manual, these 95 minutes cover the basics: introducing blues scales and chord shapes; familiarizing the way to marry

bass with melody; filling up your first bag of licks; adding hammer-ons, pull-offs, vibrato, bending, double stops, and other skills to the arsenal, too. Although classics from “Corrina, Corrina” to “Hoochie Coochie Man” get cited along the way, the *Beginner’s Guide’s* mission is not to connect the dots for specific songs. Better than being left stranded on an isolated blues or two, you’re instead given the foundational blocks on which to build beachheads.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**OUMAR KONATÉ**  
*Live in Bamako*  
CLERMONT

Live in Bamako catches fireball Oumar Konaté on a typical work night. For 46 minutes, you are counted among the blissed-out patrons being pushed around the dance floor of a club lost somewhere in Mali’s capital city. Konaté’s guitar-championed band is doing the pushing with their feisty Afro blues-rock. Late Saturday evening bleeds into early Sunday morning. The bewitching hours move into full swing as “La Plus Belle” locks into a chopped riddim prime for synching bodies into motion. “Albarka” jumpstarts with one of Konaté’s excited yelps, then pulses back and forth in call-and-response. Frantic and torrid, “Hayadihayo” is a speed rush.

Then, midway through, the music’s texture temporarily shifts more toward roots, as Konaté trades his full-on, distortion-inclined electric guitar for an acoustic one. Even then, his rapid, razor-sharp picking is electrifying, thanks to a dash of amplification. So, the nimble runs through “Merde a la Paix,” similar to the machinegun strums inside “Chancouchara,” still refuse to let

you off the hook. But from past records, we already know that Konaté is not wired for mellow. His urgent restlessness always tugs at the leash; his taut guitar and tauter voice grab control of every situation.

Not until “Soyeya” finally chimes out can adrenaline levels begin to settle back down. Because *Live in Bamako*, unlike 2017’s stage-touring *Live in America*, is anything but a concert—its the actual soundtrack from African dancehall nights.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**MARC REISMAN**  
*Strong Way*  
FISH EMPIRE

The creative freedom that comes with making a solo album was not lost on Marc Reisman. After four decades of cutting records with fellow hometown heroes such as the Houserockers and acoustic picker Ernie Hawkins, Pittsburgh’s singing harpist finally has *Strong Way*, a full-length album that can now be filed under his own name. Calling every shot, Reisman has a natural ball ricocheting from peppy guitar rock (“When”) to horn-fired pogo pop (“Strong Way”) to the reggae sunsplash of “House of a Hundred Souls.” Out of the jumble also tumbles “Moline,” which majorly slinks along to a “Rock Island Line” mantra, leaving “Broken Glass” to speak its hardboiled words like a Raymond Chandler noir given a funky backbeat. The super-breezy, sun-dappled ballad “Tell You Something” positions itself as the resident charmer.

Reisman’s harmonica selectively weaves through here and there, for sure. But since *Strong Way* is about showcasing his complete skill set, about validating a well-rounded

**BLUES REVIEWS**  
CONTINUED

identity, harping is not the universal focus. And rather than being overtly blue, attacks adapt to the prevailing mood, which means Little Walter, Junior Wells and Paul Butterfield-stoked fire doesn't necessarily come gusting out. A Hohner Marine Band totally steals the show from the droning Indian squeeze box that gives "Shruti Blues" its title. But, drifting like smoke across an instrumental landscape of acoustic slide guitar and surging strings, the ultra-rich reediness yearns for the cinematic expanse of the silver screen, haunting all the way. Yet another example of Reisman's tuneful knack for embedding hooks in melodies as grabby as choruses are catchy.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**JOHN MAYALL**  
*Three For the Road*  
FORTY BELOW

At 84, John Mayall remains a road warrior, who continues scoring victories by bringing cheering crowds to their feet. *Three For the Road* finds him doing just that in Germany last year. Yet, more than rousing appreciative Autobahn audiences, this live set also unveils the recent Blues Hall of Fame inductee's new trio format. As such, the bond between bassist Greg Rzab and drummer Jay Davenport remains. Gone, though, is—gasp!—guitar. Although hard to fathom, Mayall—who fledged Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Mick Taylor, Walter Trout, Coco Montoya and the most recently exited Rocky Athas—is found without a guitar. That goes for either his own or that of a hired hand. Because, despite the album cover picturing Mayall with a six-string slung over his shoulder,

the multi-instrumentalist only doubles up here on harmonica and keyboards—and often stunningly both at once.

However, the downsizing does create cozier textures, while freeing up extra soloing space. The harp gets a longer green light for threading melodic ribbons through "Ridin' on the L&N," while allowing the organ to slink its way all the further around the contours of "Streamline." "Tears Came Rollin' Down" grows into nine stellar minutes of piano-tumbled heartache taken at a minor-key creep. "Congo Square" jams for a bit more than that on its tribal drumbeat. Regardless of band logistics, the ageless Mr. Mayall remains just as enjoyable as ever rolling out perennial crowd pleasers like "I Feel So Bad" and "Big Town Playboy" or fretlessly reconfiguring "Lonely Feelings" with the best-ever swirling vibes effect.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**EBO TAYLOR**  
*Yen Ara*  
MR BONGO

Ebo Taylor has long been in the business of public transportation. Moving people around dance floors began as early as the 1950s via his enlistment in sweaty ensembles that pumped out highlife, Ghana's musical lifeblood. But his mission kicked into earnest overdrive during the 1960s and '70s, when the singing guitarist compared notes with Nigerian godhead Fela Kuti, and began splicing highlife into its own propulsive style. That's also the seminal period when the prolific performer/composer/bandleader/producer became linked to merry makers as cherished as the Ghana Black Star Band, the Uhuru Dance Band, the Pelikans, and his solo

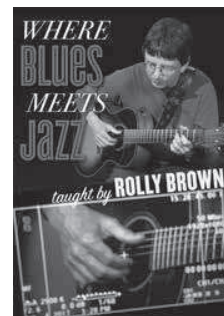
self. (So good are Ebo's grooves, in fact, that Usher sampled 1977's "Heaven" for "She Don't Know.") One way or another, Taylor has kept anyone within earshot of his work in perpetual motion over the decades.

The compulsively danceable *Yen Ara* maintains that reputation. Although being a brand-new, freshly cut session, its kinetic Afro-funk reeks of those glory days. That means horns have mandates to take to the sky, trumpet and trombone turbulently riffing all the way, leaving polyrhythms to shake the earth below. Sandwiched between is where Taylor and the rest of his hot Saltpond City Band work tirelessly. Without offering a place to sit, floor fillers string together into one nonstop party: call-and-responded "Mumudey Mumudey" burns into "Krumandey," out of which the particularly old-school "Aboa Kyirbin" effervesces. Whether singing in secret alphabets ("Aba Yaa" with its flirtatious, brassy shimmy) or occasional English (the shout-along "Mind Your Own Business"), the still hip, still touring, now 82-year-old legend guarantees *Yen Ara* to be a dancehall ambush waiting to pounce, nine joyous times over.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**ROLLY BROWN**  
*Where Blues Meets Jazz*  
STEFAN GROSSMAN'S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

The demarcation line between blues and jazz is neither defined nor restrictive. And it's in that bubbling grey zone where Rolly Brown and his acoustic guitar instructively work for two hours. Concepts and their finger-on-string application travel back and forth along the continuum from jazzy blues to bluesy jazz, viewing what life is like from the other side. Importantly, Professor Brown makes commuting between both camps readily doable. "Route 66," "Drown in My Own Tears" and "Lover Man" put method into action. To do so, the



trophied National Fingerpicking Champ who absorbed jazz string theory directly from Joseph Federico and John Carlini, pits arpeggiated jazz structure against scale-based blues. Beauty versus the beast, in coarsest terms. Chord movement and melodic choice get reconciled. Flat fifths and 12 bars mingle within the mindset. Aspects of bass motion, progressions, and the cycle of fifths are among the many highpoints spanning the in-between. Hey, you Robert Johnsons out there: Feed your inner Django. And vice versa.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**ROCKWELL AVENUE BLUES BAND**  
*Back to Chicago*  
DELMARK

The Rockwell Avenue Blues Band is a new cooperative of veteran players: Essentially, a squad of in-demand mercenaries that pooled their personal powers for the collective good. The lineup? There's the soul man who blows a blue harp (Tad Robinson). A resourceful guitarist with a marksman's eye (Steve Freund). The piano man with a devilish streak (Ken Saydak). And an inboard rhythmic motor, courtesy of bassist Harlan Terson in lock with drummer Marty Binder. Out of the deal, the ensemble also generates its own songwriters as well as three singers who bridge the gap from Robinson's silk to Saydak's sandpaper (with Freund splitting their textural difference). As for the Chicago history who've benefited from their past individual services, that tally