

Moral Words, Classic Sounds

Clarence Fountain & Sam Butler: *Stepping Up & Stepping Out* (Tyscot 984182; 43:41) ★★★★★ Fountain co-founded the Blind Boys of Alabama in 1939 and was the backbone of the group until a nasty split two years ago. Though few noticed, the Boys' latest album, *Down In New Orleans*, suffered for his absence. Now he's recorded with fellow ex-Blind Boy Butler on a heavenly array, from Jim Tullio songs originally written for a Mavis Staples project to Butler's paeans to the Almighty. The lyrics have such urgent moral imperative to singers Fountain and Butler (who also plays guitar) that even non-believers will be moved. Tullio's production provides a suitable setting, with background vocals working in communion with a soul-blues rhythm section and on one number the melodica of Donald Fagen.

Ordering info: fountain-butler.com

Greg Nagy: *Walk That Fine Thin Line* (Big O 2412; 36:42) ★★★★★: Formerly of the blues band Root Doctor, Nagy has the stuff to get noticed beyond the Midwest. There's psychological depth and narrative momentum to his singing, and his blues guitar playing rings true in a personal way, even when in the spirit of Albert King or Jimmy Johnson. In addition, Nagy's songwriting is studded with winning connections to blues, r&b, soul, gospel, jazz, rock, country. The pan-stylistic title track is richer than a cr me de cacao. One dud: Keb Mo's "You Can Love Yourself."

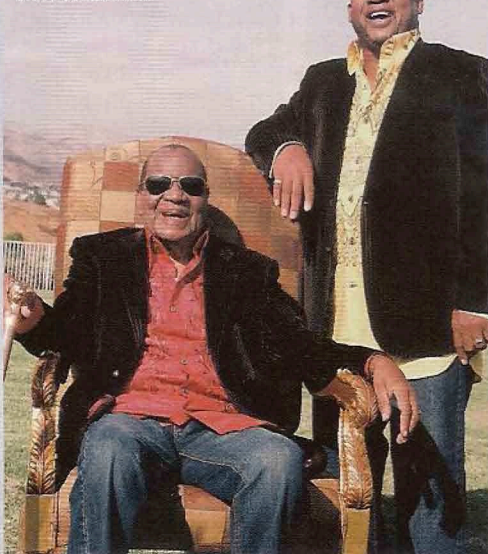
Ordering info: big-o-records.com

B. B. King: *Live At Montreux 1993* (Eagle Eye Media DVD 39181; 100:00) ★★★★★ It's redundant to roll out all the flattering adjectives in a thesaurus for Mr. King. Here he's with his eight-piece band on a particularly good night. The man puts his heart into "Caledonia" and the rest.

Ordering info: eaglerockent.com

Lavay Smith & Her Red Hot Skillet Lickers: *Miss Smith To You!* (Fat Note 0003; 55:47) ★★★★★: Vibrant vocalist Smith and bandleader-arranger-pianist Chris Siebert are connoisseurs of classic jazz and blues, so it no wonder that their third album spills over with sparkling arrangements of gems identified with Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Charles, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and

Clarence Fountain & Sam Butler: soul-blues communion



SHIRLEY/AGE OXENIS

New Orleans parading. Nice surprises are a triad of Smith-Siebert blues, including "With My Man" (for Etta James), and the inspirational blues singing of trombonist Danny Armstrong. Besides Siebert and Armstrong, the swinging Bay Area band has tenorman Ron Stallings, trumpeter Bill Ortiz and several more fine soloists.

Ordering info: lavaysmith.com

Mr. B & Bob Seeley: *Back To Back Live* (Megawave DVD 0296; 97:00) ★★★★★ Mr. B (Mark Lincoln Braun) and Seeley—Houdinis of boogie-woogie piano—have made a loving tribute to Albert Ammons and other past champions of the popular piano blues style that went from barrelhouses to Carnegie Hall in the 1930s and early '40s. Torrents of cross-rhythms and ostinato bass patterns wash over the mostly geriatric audience present in the auditorium of a Michigan museum. Each pianist does his own spontaneously inventive take on a classic and pounds out an original boogie before launching into a two-piano battle then sitting together for the climatic, miraculous "Cheek To Cheek Boogie."

Ordering info: megawaverecords.com

Old Jawbone: *Old Jawbone* (Jackalope 001; 55:22) ★★ Performing in the Santa Rosa area since 2006, this strings-and-harmonica trio has a fond and secure clasp on the old-timey music of the American South. Their harmony singing and instrumentation have willful, engaging qualities that insulate original songs and well-traveled material like Reverend Gary Davis' "Angels Singing" from sentimentality. But lead vocals are undistinguished. DB

Ordering info: jawbonemusic.com

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