

## new releases

guitar track reminiscent of Dixon's *Killin' Floor*. He sings about finding a pistol in a pawn shop and maybe "committing a crime" because of a woman who keeps testing his patience, reminding us of another Chicago-styled Howlin' Wolf favorite. *Automobile Blues* goes back to the Lightnin' Hopkins plate, this time with lyrics delivered like slow-cooked ribs drenched in a thick Texas barbecue sauce. The honey-drip tremolo of Wasner's rhythm guitar perfectly complements the sweet tone of Ford's guitar against his tangy lyrics as he begs to please let him be her chauffeur and drive her brand new automobile. Meanwhile, Jeff Coffin's tenor sax is dripping, hot-buttered soul all over the plate before the dish is cleared.

The fifth and final track, *Your Champion*, is another Ford original that serves as a dessert after the four-course appetizer. An all-instrumental workout, Dave Martinnon drives the bass and Nick D'Virgilio pumps the funk shuffle drums, while Ford serves up a clean-yet-dirty melody that segues effortlessly into a two-chorus solo. Martinnon even sneaks in a chorus before the trio brings the tune to an abrupt ending just within the 3.5-minute

speed limit, and suddenly it's time to pick up the tab.

Without question, *Made to Last* is a blues food flight—a genuine tapas experience for the ears. As long as you can continue serving up tasty dishes such as these, keep em' rockin', Robben.

—Wayne Goins

## MUDDY WATERS

### Live at Rockpalast

MIG – MIG 90782

By 1978, in the midst of a late career renaissance, Muddy Waters' signature style—a rich soup that included a dash of Son House, a pinch of Robert Johnson and a heaping helping of Big Bill Broonzy—unquestioned charisma, Delta-infused vocal phrasing and otherworldly slide playing had made him a star of the European festival scene.

When he strode to the stage at Germany's legendary Westfalenhalle Dortmund venue for the December 10, 1978,

taping of the TV program *Rockpalast*, Waters, at age 65, remained a formidable performer. The first DVD of this two-DVD, two-CD soundtrack package features the electric performance captured by TV cameras in front of an enthusiastic crowd. A June 1996 performance by the Muddy Waters Tribute Band at the Rockpalast Open-Air Festival at St. Goarshausen, Germany's Loreley amphitheater is featured on the second DVD and CD.

Waters rips through 13 of the strongest songs in his catalog backed by one of the finest blues bands ever assembled: Pinetop Perkins (piano), Bob "Steady Rollin'" Margolin (guitar), Luther "Guitar" Johnson (guitar), Calvin "Fuzz" Jones (bass), Willie "Big Eyes" Smith (drums) and Jerry Portnoy (harp), who all would leave Waters' employ to form the Legendary Blues Band in 1980. It may be 40 years old, but great audio quality and first-rate camera work and editing capture a band that's clearly enjoying itself.

Following a couple of enthusiastic "danke schoens," Muddy, seated with his trademark red and white Fender Telecaster in hand, begins the show with the first strains of *Hoochie Coochie Man*. The band is locked in from the jump, powered by the deep-as-a-well

## JOHNNY TUCKER SEVEN DAY BLUES



A throwback to the old-school approach, Johnny Tucker delivers the command performance of his lifetime.

Featuring appearances by:

**Big Jon Atkinson**

**Bob Corritore**

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pocket inhabited by Smith's nuanced drum attack, counterbalanced by Jones' thick-as-molasses four-string thump.

Perkins lays down note-perfect keys on *Soon Forgotten*, with Portnoy serving up alternately measured and wailing harp. On *They Call Me Muddy Waters*, Muddy shows why he took a backseat to no one on the slide guitar, and up-tempo numbers like *Walkin' Thru the Park*, *Kansas City* and *Caledonia*, featuring Perkins on vocals, whip the crowd into a frenzy.

Waters rises from his seat to testify like a preacher in the pulpit on *Mannish Boy*, and it's a treat to watch him—amid crowd chants and cheers—trade a few dance steps with Portnoy during a furious take on *Got My Mojo Working* before Waters departs the stage for the band to close with *Sweet Home Chicago* with Johnson on vocals.

The Tribute Band concert, while not as riveting as the first DVD, has some great moments as well, although the show was hampered somewhat by recurring bouts of feedback. Margolin, Johnson, Smith and Jones remain with the band and are joined by Chicago singer and harp ace Carey Bell. Every member of the band takes a turn at the mic, but the unit really soars on the three songs sung by Johnson, *Clouds in My Heart*, *Walkin' Thru the Park* and *You Can't Lose What You Ain't Never Had*. Margolin is in rare form on the slide and even channels Waters on vocals on the rowdy closer, *Mannish Boy*. Smith remains a shuffle groove savant throughout, while Bell's masterful harp and soulful vocals, especially on *Everything Gonna Be Alright*, are a welcomed ingredient in the mix.

If your concert video collection is short on examples of how live blues should be played, this DVD/CD package is a must-have.  
—Rod Evans

## THE REVEREND SHAWN AMOS

### *Breaks It Down*

Put Together Music – PTM-00007

With the country deeply polarized and troubling headlines in the news every day, it's a great time for musicians to bring protest and social commentary into their work. On ***Breaks It Down***, the Reverend Shawn Amos treats listeners to a glorious mix of passion, outrage and hope buoyed by top-notch musicianship. Amos may have grown up in Los Angeles, but his collection of "21st century



freedom songs" channels the spirit of music made in Memphis and Muscle Shoals during the height of the civil rights movement.

2017 is the first of many politically charged songs. As Amos sings, "We've got to think about what our children's eyes have seen / in the year 2017," Michael Toles' guitar and Charles Hodges' keyboard riffs lay down a soulful groove. *Hold Hands* keeps the socially conscious mood going. Musically, this track also betrays a strong Staple Singers influence.

Yet, the unique mix of fury and hopeful pleading in Amos' vocals is his alone. The heart of ***Breaks It Down*** is a trio of songs titled *Freedom Suite*. The a cappella *Uncle Tom's Prayer* was recorded at a true civil rights landmark—the Clayborn Temple in Memphis. *Does My Life Matter* is the album's most intense and haunting track. Chris Roberts' searing, distortion-laced guitar riffs match the fury in Amos' voice as he asks, "Does my life matter / or does it matter less?" The joyful funk arrangement of *Come Together* ends the *Freedom Suite* on an upbeat note. Tightly arranged horns and a percolating rhythm section bring Amos' message home.

While ***Breaks It Down*** is heavy on social commentary, the album does have its lighter moments. Covering a beloved rock classic has always been a reliable way for blues artists to get airplay. Amos' raw, stripped-down rendition of David Bowie's *The Jean Genie* has found its way onto a few radio stations' playlists. Gospel-tinged harmonies and beautifully played organ riffs take Nick Lowe's (*What's So Funny 'Bout*) *Peace, Love and Understanding* to church. ***Breaks It Down*** is not only essential listening—it's an

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