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Koko Taylor



## Blues and The Alligator: The First Twenty Years of Alligator Records

By **Christel Loar** 24 October 2011  
PopMatters Associate Music Editor

Arguably, the best—or at least the most notable—moment in the documentary *Blues and the Alligator: The First Twenty Years of Alligator Records* comes about halfway through the feature when Koko Taylor opens a baseball game by belting out the national anthem. Taylor, the Queen of the Blues, is indisputably Alligator Records' best known recording artist, and the segment on her is reason enough to see the film, but she's not its sole asset.

*Blues and the Alligator* is a film by Jim Downing, shot 20 years ago for Swedish television and now available on DVD as part of the celebration of the label's 40 year dedication to the blues (there is also a two CD collection of tracks by Alligator artists available). The film tells the story of the first two decades of the Chicago blues label founded in 1971 by Bruce Iglauer, a blues fan who initially started Alligator to record and release music by local artist Hound Dog Taylor.

Hound Dog Taylor sadly passed away in 1975, but Alligator Records has endured. The film follows Iglauer through days in his office with his small staff and on excursions to interview artists, as well as to hear them play in clubs and in their homes. In addition to Koko Taylor, *Blues and the Alligator* features the great Lonnie Brooks, footage of the legendary Sonny Boy Williamson, and a then-new generation of young blues players such as Lucky Peterson, Kenny Neal and Billy Branch.

Blues is a much larger musical community than it was in the late '60s when he became passionate about the Chicago sound, which means that it has moved away from its roots in the Southside and Westside Chicago neighborhoods to a certain extent as artists go



### Blues and the Alligator: The First Twenty Years of Alligator Records

Director: [Jim Downing](#)

Cast: Bruce Iglauer, Koko Taylor, Lonnie Brooks

(US DVD: 23 Aug 2011)

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to the places where there is more money to be made, and Iglauer is aware of his part in this process. He states, "The irony of it all is that while Alligator has helped Blues survive and reach a broader audience, we've also helped take the music away from its traditional environment and when that happens, the music changes."

Text: A A A

However, Blues Iglauer remains certain that the blues he loves and continues to champion will always be around. "Blues is a healing music!", he explains, "and as long as there's a need to be healed, the Blues will live on."

And so it does. *Blues and the Alligator: The First Twenty Years of Alligator Records* has no bonus materials on the DVD, but the film features music from the Alligator Records catalog, including favorite songs like "Sky Is Crying", "Roll Your MoneyMaker", "Sweet Home Chicago", "Devil Child", "Stormy Monday", "Snatch It Back and Hold It", "Like Father, Like Son", "Can't Let These Blues Go", "You Don't Love Me", "You Got Me Running" and a blistering live duet performance of "It's a Dirty Job" by Lonnie Brooks and Koko Taylor.

Rating: 

Christel Loar is a freelance writer and editor, a part-time music publicist, and a full-time music fan. She is often an overreactor and sometimes an overachiever. When not dodging raindrops or devising escape plans, Christel is usually found down front and slightly left of center stage reveling in a performance by yet another new favorite band.

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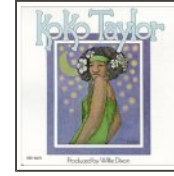
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