

## BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

“Piana’s Savannah Boogie” both slip their leash and kick out the jams in quite thunderous flash. With this much fun in the sun, it’s the middle of June all year-round.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



### VARIOUS

#### Classic Blues Artwork from the 1920s: Vol. 13

BLUES IMAGES

(CALENDAR & CD)

So many records, so little time. That’s why having a year’s worth of deliriously rare shellac—black gold, so to speak—handpicked for you is so invaluable. Better yet: The treasure comes tucked within a beautiful 2016 *Classic Blues Artwork from the 1920s* calendar. It’s Blues Image’s annual tradition, now 13 years and running. Thank John Tefeller, who is forever in hot pursuit of extinct, old records. Really old records. Records from the 78-rpm era, back when godheads (Blind Blake, Ma Rainey) and utter unknowns (Charlie Kyle, Spark Plug Smith) vied for the buying-public’s coinage and a spin on their phonograph. Back when Jim Jackson stoically sang about his peaches (“My Monday Blues”), only to have Black Billy Sunday tamp down the fun with intensely scalding, party-poopers brimstone (“Will You Spend Eternity in Hell”). Back long, long before these records grew so crazy scarce that only one or maybe two copies knowingly exist now. Unveiling themselves here are prewar blues that collectors and historians alike had given up hope of ever hearing. The decades-overdue debut of guitarist Jaydee Shortt’s heavily riffed “Tar Road Blues” and Hattie Hyde’s “T

& N O Blues” (with Memphis Jug Band members riding shotgun) are resident examples.

But these are more than glorious, old records. They’re brittle, circular, ten-inch, double-sided epiphanies. So much so you can still shock at Blind Willie Johnson’s horrifically gruff voice in the act of confronting “When the War Was On.” You can picture folks actively interacting with the whoosh of Papa Charlie McCoy’s bodily instructions on how to “Boogie Woogie.” Because these beaten, aged recordings reach through dusty time and space, cut through any sonic scars remaining after their impressive digital scrubbing, to shake you awake (“Wabash Rag”). Make you shimmy like a pail of worms (“Georgia Cake Walk”). Zap a ghastly chill up your spine (“Lectric Chair Blues”). And ultimately leave you high for the entire day on the all-natural, jug-band exhilaration of “Beale Street Breakdown,” a sure-fire tonic for whatever ails ya. Because these ancient moments deceptively do the same now just as they did generations ago: Move you in ways both physical and emotional.

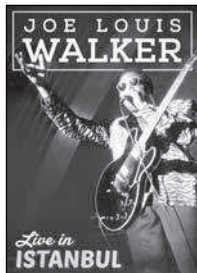
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### JOE LOUIS WALKER

#### Live in Istanbul

MVD (DVD)

With *Blues of the Month Club* freshly coursing through his system, Joe Louis Walker trekked the 6,700 miles from his native Bay Area to personally gig the album (and more) onstage, *Live in Istanbul*. For everyone who—rightly—believes his 20some records already brim with impressive energy, an in-person visit can be a revelation, watching the guitarist take advantage of a bandstand’s extra room to stretch out his chops and just feverishly jam a while.



This 85-minute, ten-song set, played to a packed house in 1995, is audiovisual proof of that scorching showmanship, capturing Walker at his most vivid: howling into the mic with trademarked fervor while continuously feeding his Gibson’s humbuckers with tense, treble action. Following him straight out of the studio are his Boss Talkers, a top-notch band whose love to perform pumps in all the more zip and thrill. “Funkin’ Blues” is their revolving showcase, its vamp serving as a springboard for second guitarist Tom Rose, super enthusiastic organist Mike Eppley, and drummer Curtis Nuttall to each cut loose. But Tony Saunders’ crazed bass eruptions win out as the wildest of the wild. That is until matched against any of Walker’s sweat-soaked solos which, regardless of song, tend to run out of fingerboard during their escalation. “Rain in My Mind,” along with the gutbucket “Bluesifyin’,” gets bottlenecked. “You Got to Lose” and “I Didn’t Know” intensify barehandedly. And “Lost Heart” into “Hidden Feelings” pour an encore shot of soul. To hear—and, especially, see—Joe Louis Walker deliver his brand of contemporary blues on such an adrenalized night as this makes for quite the rush.

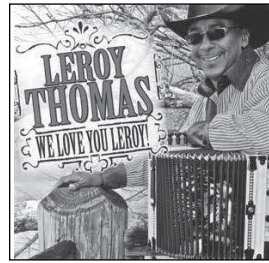
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### LEROY THOMAS

#### We Love You Leroy!

MAISON DE SOUL

We Love You Leroy! Indeed we do, for Thomas is always raring to go all Louisiana squeebo on you, flashing any mundane moment into an instant party with the bright, transmissible energy of his zydeco overdrive. His tenth album wastes no time affirming its mission statement of “Everybody Dance” with the kind of grabby grooves that naturally run within his family. Leroy, you see,



was born into zydeco: Keith Frank and Geno Delafosse are cousins; Leo “The Bull” Thomas is his drumming father (and also the bristly guest who bawls the all-night-long blues, “Rock Me Baby”). So driving the dancehall traditionalism of “Cherokee Waltz” or some peppered “Zydeco Two Stepping” is second nature for his bejeweled accordion. But zydeco has long looked to outside sources for fresh ideas, and Thomas’ repertoire is no different. His Zydeco Roadrunners, in turn, devour Ray Charles’ “What I’d Say” with the same swampy fervor as Bob Dylan-via-Old Crow Medicine Show’s “Wagon Wheel.” Rolling down Nashville country roads, by way of “Stars on the Water” and a coming-to-grips “Troubadour,” is a particular specialty, one which gets Ronnie Rue’s guitar excitably outspoken. (Finding Buckwheat Zydeco moonlighting behind the Hammond organ is a nice unexpected surprise.) Amid the fun, midlife crises get buoyed: “Hey Goffie (Pick It Up),” for him; “She Can’t Hen Like She Did Back Then,” for her. “Friday Night (You Don’t Even Know),” however, remains perfectly pained all the way around, making a stately showcase for—if you love deep, impenetrable voices—one of the music’s truly great singers. Even better than a night inside El Sido’s, *We Love You Leroy!* throws your own personal zydeco bash.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

### SAM BUTLER

#### Raise Your Hands!

SEVERN

Sam Butler plays guitar for God. Hallelujah for that! For years, though, the

throaty, gospel blend of the Blind Boys of Alabama was the immediate beneficiary of all that fervent fretsman-ship. But now, for the first time, Butler has cut out the middle men and gone direct, with a blessing of a debut long overdue. Hallelujah, again! Just don’t come expecting tranquil prayer time. Here, spiritual solace equates to sanctified incitement to *Raise Your Hands!*, stomp your body, then holler out praise for righteously amplified guitars and the divine release they can so wildly preach. In layman terms: Butler rocks. Roosevelt Collier’s uncontainable pedal steel dizzily assists. Yet even with Collier’s Pentecostal fire-breather roaring quick licks amid the power and the shout-along glory of say, “Heaven’s Wall,” a devilish twist is afoot. Because a disparate congregation of songwriters—not expressly in the holiness business—bountifully filled a collection plate passed around to genre heroes as far afield as Johnny Cash, the Bee Gees, and Curtis Mayfield to U2 and Lee Ann Womack. Butler’s naturally fuzz-toned voice grinds syllables into gravel aboard Tom Waits’ “Gospel Train” en route to “God’s Hotel,” built by Nick Cave. With honeyed humility, Van Morrison’s “Full Force Gale” instead calms to a sweet, soul-lifting breeze. Even more so with Blind Faith’s “Presence of the Lord”—except for the final 104 furious seconds that arc so heavenly high you’ll see the light. Conceptually, the act of wringing an album’s worth of sacred from out of the secular is ingenious. Hearing Butler give the project wings is the real

