

Play 'Em Where They Lay

Joe Louis Walker, *Live In Istanbul* (MVD Visual DVD 75050; 85:00 ★★★½) In 1995, Joe Louis Walker was the most exciting blues performer on the international circuit. On this DVD, he's taking on Turkey, where his Boss Talkers (sonic adventurer Tony Saunders plays electric bass) work the kinks out on opener "Can't Get You Out Of My Mind," then transform the concert hall into a hot-aired Turkish bath occupied by a young audience that looks startled by the music's intensity. The sheer power of Walker's vocals and guitar work magnifies his confidence as he sweats his way through top-grade songs of hard experience like Ike Turner's "You Got To Lose" and his own "Lost Heart." Penalized a half-star because of imperfect film production.

Ordering info: mvdvisual.com

Barrence Whitfield & The Savages, *Under The Savage Sky* (Bloodshot 230; 35:47 ★★★½) Boston transplant Barrence Whitfield's unwavering commitment to raw, pulverizing r&b reaches fabulously hysterical levels. His maniacal raving—indebted to Little Richard and Screamin' Jay Hawkins—has its match in original Savages guitarist Peter Greenberg's icepick-through-the-cranium riffing. A dozen wild tracks—a grab bag of Greenberg-scribed peculiarities and new demotions of obscure old material from the likes of Timmy Willis and Kid Thomas—suit an outrageous dance party that would have the Bride of Frankenstein and her date Jerry Lee Lewis gyrating to "The Claw" to the point of collapse.

Ordering info: bloodshotrecords.com

Nicole Willis & The Soul Investigators, *Happiness In Every Style* (Timmion 12001; 49:10 ★★★½) On her third album in a 1960s soul-blues-r&b groove, this Brooklyn native now living in Helsinki sings original tales of romantic security, hope and ruin like she meant every word. No matter that her strength of personality is slight compared to '60s royalty Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight and Candi Staton, even second-level singers Mable John and Lorraine Ellison. Willis' composure is perfect for "Paint Me In A Corner," a minor triumph improved by a sparkling vibraphone and funk guitar; several more originals are nearly as enjoyable. Making a good impression, the Soul Investigators (five-piece rhythm section, five horns) no longer confine their lively yet muted retro sound to the Petri dish.

Ordering info: timmion.com

Andra Faye & Scott Ballantine, *Coulda Woulda Shoulda* (VizzTone AFSB 01; 46:34 ★★★½) An easy chemistry of folk, blues and country exists between acoustic guitarist Scott Ballantine and ex-Saffire fiddler-mandolinist-bassist Andra Faye on their first collaboration. Unfortunately,



Barrence Whitfield (center) and The Savages

the duo's consistently fine instrumental craft tends to be eclipsed by Faye's vocals, which show little instinctive kinship with the blues, and often come off as sultry and attitudinizing. Ballantine's lead vocal on a reordering of the old spiritual "Standing In The Need Of Prayer" has a more personal than postured point of view. They have good fun treating the catchy ditty "Blues For A Crappy Day."

Ordering info: vizztone.com

David Michael Miller, *Same Soil* (Food For The Soul 54:57 ★★★½) In western New York state, singer-guitarist-bandleader David Michael Miller recognizes Southern blues, soul and r&b just as assuredly as he puts his own spin on the genres to present a modern roots-music vision. "Doing Me In, Doing Me Wrong" belongs to Muddy Waters' Chicago, yet carries a surprisingly fresh spirit. "Go Them Blues" projects an aisle-dancing church rapture with pastor Miller packing a heaven-bound slide guitar that quotes an angelic Jimi Hendrix. These and nine more blues or mixed-genre songs are well-crafted and full of empathy.

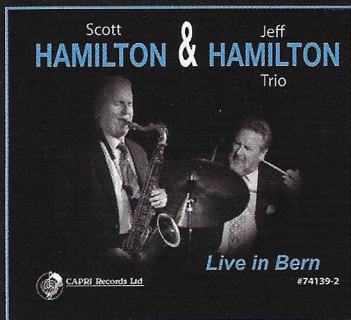
Ordering info: davemillermusic.com

The Nightowls, *Fame Sessions* (Super Sonic Sounds 001; 31:37 ★★) Austin's little big band proves that recording on special American music turf, Muscle Shoals' FAME studios, is no guarantee of a good album. Despite walk-ons by legends Spooner Oldham and David Hood, this album sounds as if it could have been made anywhere. The central figure is Ryan Harkrider, whose vocals don't begin to encompass superior soul or soul-blues singing, lacking both churchy uplift and earthy sensuality. The band sticks with fair-to-middling in-house material.

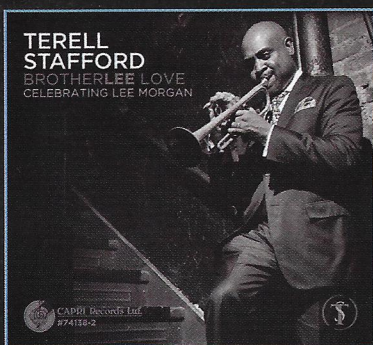
Ordering info: wearethenightowls.com

Christian Collin, *Spirit Of The Blues* (C-Train; 52:35 ★★★½) Based in Chicago but not a Chicago bluesman per se, singer and guitarist Christian Collin pledges his craft to musical diversity on his second album. The results are convincing. Guitar-friendly shuffles, slow blues and other song types carry the auras of Johnny Winter, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Memphis soul and southern rock. Everything coexists without blanketing the bandleader's agreeable personality. Jen Williams' supporting vocals are a nice touch. **DB**

Ordering info: christiancollin.com

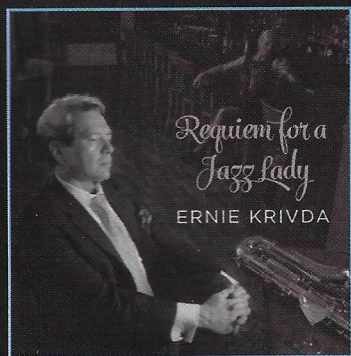


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