

## Prog-Psyche

Meet Chicago singer-songwriter and producer, William Steffey, the *Reality Jockey* (Aquariphone). His 11-track manifesto includes two engaging instrumentals but it's his kaleidoscopic worldview punctuated by bursts of surprising alacrity that made me sit up and take notice. It's all over the musical



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map from progressive splashes and power-pop to funky mainstream rock and psychedelic flourishes. Horns figure mightily into the mix, and the textures thereof permit an expressive and expansive program that will have you returning to its charms over and over again.

## Gospel-Rock

The collection of *Songs Of Inspiration* (Woodstock Records), from Professor Louie and The Crowmatix, date back to the eighteen-hundreds. It's been five decades and counting for the Professor—aka Aaron Louis Hurwitz—who collaborated with The Band for over 15 years and was dubbed "Professor Louie"



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by the late Rick Danko. His vocals, Hammond B-3, and accordion are all over these 11 soul-saving songs. Everybody from Blind Roosevelt Graves in 1929 to Johnny Cash in 2003 recorded the African-American spiritual "I Shall Not Be Moved," which became a staple of the civil rights movement. Meanwhile, "You'll Never Walk Alone," a Broadway song from the 1945 production of *Carousel*, was popularized by Jerry Lewis every Labor Day on his telethon, when it became sport to see when during the song Lewis would start crying (I never

missed it.) "Motherless Child" dates back to slavery. Paul Robeson sung it in 1926. Richie Havens sung it at Woodstock in 1969, but I was too stoned to notice. Louie wrote some, produced it all, and leads his Crowmatix through a rollicking version of another traditional gospel, "I'm On My Way," written about the Underground Railroad that delivered slaves to freedom and was emphatically recorded by Odetta in 1956. Harmony abounds and the instrumentation is acoustic and organic. Highly recommended.

## Mandolinist Extraordinaire

Get on the *Monroe Bus* (Shefa Records) and ride, as mandolinist extraordinaire Andy Statman swings, rocks, rolls, bops, strolls, and meanders through a litany of genres that started out as a Bill Monroe tribute but ended

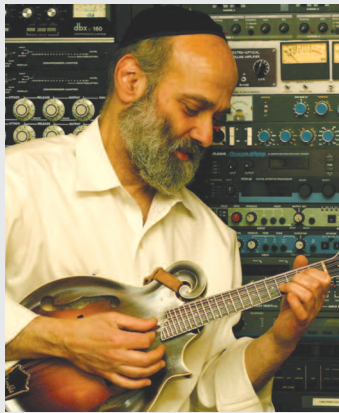


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up as a trip through the world. Sure, bluegrass is at the album's core, but between the clarinet choir of "Reminiscence," the prog rock-meets-jazz fusion of "Ice Cream on the Moon" and the dance-inducing "Burgers and Fries," poor old Bill gets lost in the shuffle. He might not have even approved of "Old East River Blues," a modal drone of Central Asia with Turkish drums and a Persian spike fiddle.

Statman was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment of the Arts in 2012. With his dozens of albums ranging from klezmer to jazz-grass, from country to folk, he's an American treasure. And since the NEA itself is in danger of being dismantled by the current administration, you might want to check out this and other NEA award-winners before it all goes away.

## Boogaloo Meets Bitches Brew

In the nineteen-sixties, Latin audiences in New York City went wild for what was known as boogaloo, a hybrid dance sound of funk, salsa, jump blues, and mambo, that went national when Dick Clark introduced it on *American Bandstand*. It fell out of favor in the mid-seventies, although James Brown used to say, "excuse me while I do the boogaloo," before cutting the

proverbial rug and dancing like no other.

Enter New York City hotshot guitarist and producer Oz Noy to resurrect its classic components on *Booga Looga Loo* (Abstract Logix)—a mixed bag of



R & B, jazz-rock fusion (like Miles used to do on *Bitches Brew*), and funk. The soul factor is evident on way-cool covers of The Beatles ("Eight Days A Week"), Ray Charles ("I Got A Woman," where the funk really pops), the Beach Boys ("God Only Knows"), and Thelonious Monk ("Bemsha Swing"). Coming off the heels of his *Twisted Blues* (a live album recorded in China), and the funkier-than-thou *Who Gives A Funk*, this brand of boogaloo—which comes complete with Oz Noy's searing electric solos atop three drummers, three bassists, and two keyboardists—is guaranteed to put a strut in your step.

## They're Clever

This debut album rises out of the deep Ozark hollows of Cane Spur, Arkansas. *Blue* (Mountain Home Music Company), by The Cleverlys, contains down-home, acoustic back porch Appalachian versions of hits by—get this!—Justin Bieber ("Baby"), Beyonce ("Irreplaceable"), Kelis ("Milkshake"), the Zombies ("She's Not There"), LMFAO ("Party Rock Anthem")



PHOTO BY SANDLIN GATHE

and equally-surprising others. The faux family band—they all sing—features Dr. Digger Cleverly on guitar, Sock Cleverly on fiddle, DVD Cleverly on banjo, Cub Cleverly on mandolin, and Ricky Lloyd Cleverly on upright bass, kick drum, and vocoder. There's plenty of humor in this pop-bluegrass fusion. There's also a dead-serious take on Ralph Stanley's "Oh Death." Go figure.

## A Posthumous Debut

*The Music Never Stops* (Blue Engine Records), is the first posthumous release of Betty Carter since her death from

cancer in 1998 at the age of 69. She was always a fierce, independently-minded pioneer. Rather than give into being cheated out of royalties like so many of her peers, she started her own damn label, Bet-Car Records, in 1969 that lasted 18 years. The bands she led were feeding grounds for many jazzers who became stars. No one told her how to sing or swing, not even Lionel Hampton, from whose band she was fired seven times in three years because she absolutely hated swing and would scat like a bebopper princess (so much so that Hamp's wife called her Betty Bebop, which she also hated). Yeah, she was feisty alright. Yet Ray Charles and Charlie Parker wanted her to sing in their bands. A 1980 documentary, *But Then, She's Betty Carter*, cemented her legend. *Saturday Night Live* chose her as one of its first musical guests.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GABRIELLE HOWARTH

This 1992 live recording has never been released. It was one of the first shows at the esteemed "Jazz At Lincoln Center" series. She's masterful in leading—depending upon the track—a full orchestra, a string section, and three different piano trios. She takes three songs—"Why Him," "Where Or When," and "What's New"—and makes it into a gorgeous 16-minute "Question Suite." Besides her own poignant originals, she takes a rotting chestnut like the 1944 Margaret Whiting hit "Moonlight In Vermont" (which doesn't rhyme) and makes it new again, forcing the audience to listen to it in a new way, emphasizing lyrics to ferret out the underlying significance of what was originally intended to be a simplistic ode to a pretty state. Ditto for Tony Bennett's 1963 hit "The Good Life" which she steals to make it hers alone. Her version drips with sarcasm unlike the dozens of other recorded versions. In her hands, Cole Porter's 1938 "Most Gentlemen Don't Like Love" is an indictment of a gender. Artie Shaw took "Frenesi" to #1 in 1940. It's been covered by hundreds of artists since. Carter does the Gigi Gryce arrangement which turns what started out as a folkloric Mexicali vehicle for a marimba band into pure bop.

It's safe to say Betty Carter was an American treasure. Her fire, her will, her unyielding stance in the face of the British Invasion that crippled the careers of most American singers at the time, including her, is legendary.