BLUES

by Frank-John Hadley

Communions

The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series **(MVD Audio 5067/68)** Chris Barber, the distinguished British jazz and blues trombonist, recently came upon tapes of unreleased concert and radio performances by several American performers he'd brought over to Britain in the late '50s and early '60s. On ***Volume 1*** **(79:25)** ★★★½, singer-guitarist Sister Rosetta Tharpe, solo or with Barber's capable trad jazz band, responds to her royal reception at the Manchester Free Trade Hall by taking the audience on a delightful emotional journey illuminated by spirituals, blues and little fillips of stage chat. Next, harmonica player Sonny Terry and guitarist Brownie McGhee assert themselves as experienced folk-blues storytellers on "Midnight Special" and a dozen more repertory favorites.

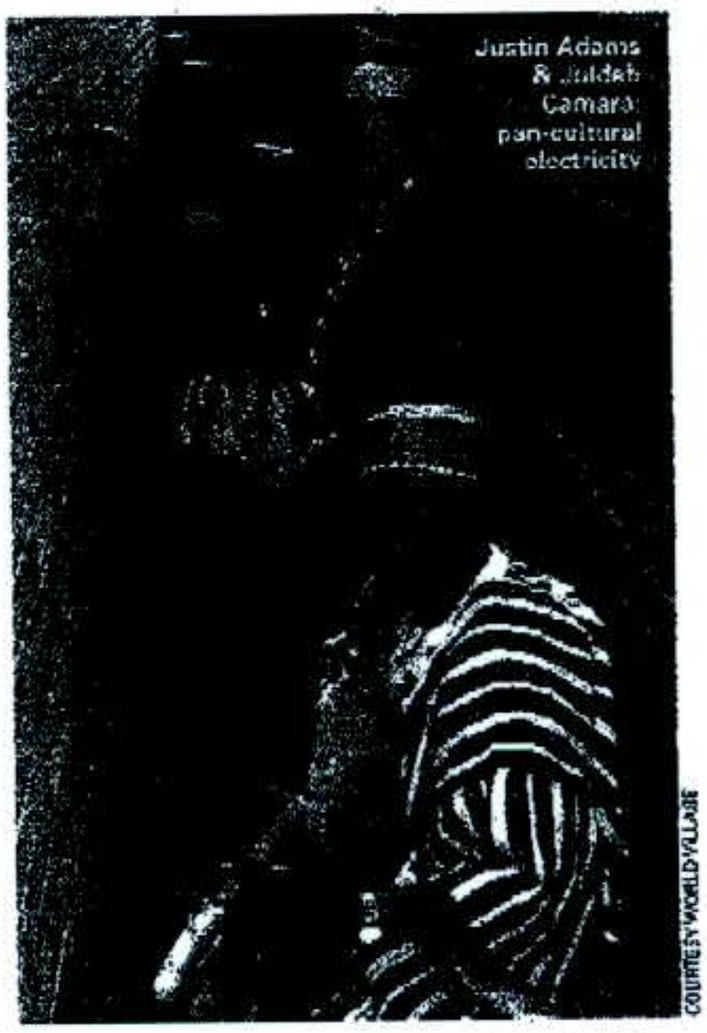
Volume 2 **(78:05)** ★★★½ opens with acceptable radio tracks of Terry and McGhee, then shifts to Muddy Waters and his pianist Otis Spann, their 1958 performance marking the first blues invasion of England. Waters is a commanding singer and electric guitarist, especially when "all alone this time" on "Rollin' Stone," displaying an arsenal of nuances of dynamic phrasing and texture. No wonder local youths named their band for the song. Closing the album, New Orleans pianist Champion Jack Dupree entertains listeners with three curiosities, and fading jump-blues star Louis Jordan matches up well with blues singer Ottilie Patterson and the rest of the Barber band on "T'Ain't Nobody's Business." Series sound quality: mostly acceptable.

Ordering info: blueslegacy.net

Justin Adams & Juldeh Camara: *Soul Science* (World Village 468076) ★★★★ Gritty pan-cultural electric blues from two open-minded musicians based in England and a Gambian griot. Tinariwen producer Adams' guitars interlock with Camara's one-string violin, banjo and vocals over Salah Dawson Miller's percussion on songs conjured in a U.K. garage studio by Adams and Camara, some adorned with traditional Fulani melodies. Their sensational Bo Diddley homage, "Ya Ta Kaaye," spews sparks like a downed, dangerous power line, with fiddler Camara as wild as Cajun Doug Kershaw and Adams as passionate as Johnny Ramone.

Ordering info: worldvillagemusic.com

Afrissippi: *Alliance* (Hill Country Records 1004; 58:42) ★★★½ It was a good day for modern American blues when Senegalese griot Guelel Kumba settled in Oxford, Miss. As with one earlier band album, he sings robustly here in a dialect of the Fulfulde language of his nomadic Fulani people in West Africa while the rest of Afrissippi spins rapturous, grinding grooves in the service of his songs about life back in West Africa. "Naaa" and "Gade Naara" are stirring Fulani recitals.



COURTESY WORLD VILLAGE

Ordering info: hillcountryrecords.com

Markus James: *Snakeskin Violin* (Firenze 00122; 50:25) ★★★½ James deepens his instinctive grasp of the bond between U.S. blues and the indigenous music of sandy Timbuktu. A frequent visitor to Africa the past 14 years, this San Franciscan vocalist and multi-instrumentalist has a spirit, curiosity and tough-minded determination that surfaces on well-knit songs he wrote about real or imagined emotional dislocation. "Are You Ready," a boogie, is deserving of an award because of James' provocative channeling of intensity. More than a dozen Malian musicians respond to their American friend with a common spirit of adventure.

Ordering info: firenzerecords.com

Daniella Cotton: *Rare Child* (Cottonwood/Adrenaline 101041; 39:01) ★★★ On her second album, New Yorker Cotton supplies good original songs in a 1970s blues-rock style. She sings her lyrics with a potency that affirms she has insight into the complications of life. Although the other musicians gravitate toward bombast, they temper their excitement perfectly for the compact standout tune, "Righteous People." **DB**

Ordering info: daniella.com

James Hunter

The Hard Way

HEAR MUSIC/GO 30669

★★★½

English singer and guitarist James Hunter has been hot stuff in the United States since earning a 2006 Grammy nomination for his album *People Gonna Talk*. He's grouped with Amy Winehouse as a leading exponent of old-style soul, and he has had high-profile gigs as the opening act for Aretha Franklin and Willie Nelson, along with TV shows and headlining gigs at top rock clubs. Not bad for a bloke that started his career in the 1980s known as Howlin' Wilf.

The Hard Way sticks to the same formula Hunter's worked since his 1996 debut album *Believe What I Say*. His pleading voice, reminiscent of Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, James Brown and Bobby Bland, glides on handsome melodies as his combo with two jazz-savvy saxophonists swings along as if it were still the heyday of soul-jazz and New Orleans r&b. Hunter's lyrics, as always, revel in the quiet wonder of romance; their imagery and wordplay pretty much timeless. Sporadic, terse displays of his blues guitar might elicit approving smiles from Roy Buchanan and Scotty Moore.

As for new wrinkles, Allen Toussaint shows up on three songs, notably channeling the specter of Professor Longhair on "Believe Me Baby." Other fresheners are a string section, vibes, brass, a too-shy pedal steel guitar and a honky-tonk organ. *The Hard Way* entertains well, but you can't beat Hunter's 1999 release, *Kings Are Coming Around*, with the heavenly "Mollena."

—*Frank-John Hadley*

The Hard Way: The Hard Way; Tell Her; Don't Do Me Favours; Carina; She's Got A Way; 'Til The End; Hard To Jacqueline; Class Act; Ain't Goin' Nowhere; Believe Me Baby; Strange But True. (38:40)

Personnel: James Hunter, vocals and guitar; Damien Castle, tenor saxophone; Lee Badau, baritone saxophone; Andrew Wilson, bass; Kyle Koehler, organ; Jonathan Lee, drums; Allen Toussaint, piano (1, 11), electric piano (6), backing vocals; Jimmy Thomas (2, 4, 8), George Chandler (2, 4), backing vocals; Dave Priseman, trumpet (6, 9), flugelhorn (2); Andrew Synowiec, vibraphone (1, 2, 10), piano (4), percussion (3, 5–11); Ed Pickford, pedal steel guitar (4); Echo Strings (1, 2, 4, 7, 10); Tom Pigott-Smith, cello (2, 4, 7).

Ordering info: hearmusic.com

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