

Plundering The Vaults

John Mayall's Bluesbreakers Live In 1967



FORTY BELOW Let's get the nasty bits out of the way first. *Live In 1967*, despite being recorded at five different London locations in the spring of that year, basically sounds like crap. As explained in the liner notes, the original recordings were made by a Dutch fan on a one-channel reel-to-reel recorder, not by a professional recording crew. Less than ideal conditions, in other words—as anyone who's ever heard audience-originated tapes of rock concerts from that era will understand, this is pretty rough stuff. OK, so it's distorted and muffled and lacking in sonic clarity and dimension. Deal with it, because what you've got here is worth hearing anyway: more than one hour, 13 tracks, of live vintage **John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers**, which, at this time, consisted of **Peter Green** on guitar, **John McVie** on bass and **Mick Fleetwood** drumming. Pretty soon, those three would go on to form something called Fleetwood Mac, but for now, they were all about burning the blues. And on familiar tracks like the Otis Rush opener "All Your Love," Willie Dixon's "I Can't Quit You Baby" and T-Bone Walker's "Stormy Monday," that's all that this stellar quartet does. Audiophiles may run screaming, but blues people are going to be very forgiving.

Jeff Tamarkin

Ata Kak Obaa Sima

AWESOME TAPES FROM AFRICA



The story behind this enigmatic music is compelling enough—one of only a handful of known copies of a cassette purchased by an American traveler and music lover at a market in Ghana launches a highly regarded MP3 blog, raising the question as to who made these energetic

hip-hop-inspired, '80s-keyboard-heavy dance songs. The recordings—made by a Ghanaian expat who'd moved from Germany to Canada—stand on their own, even without the backstory. The aggressively staccato rapping, hyperactive drum programming and the jabbing keyboard blasts sound like Bel Biv DeVoe as reimagined and reengineered from another world. The title track is deliriously weird enough to be at home on an Ariel Pink record. The rhythmic energy in the rap-singing and the coiled precision are highlighted by the backing tracks, which somehow manage to be dense while still leaving breathing room. *John Adamian*

Half Japanese

Volume 2: 1987-1989 **FIRE**



This three-CD set is volume two of an ambitious and elaborate reissue project of the records of **Half Japanese**, a band admired by Kurt Cobain, Neutral Milk Hotel, John Zorn and many others. Imagine a group connecting Daniel Johnston, Violent Femmes and Pavement, and it would sound like Half Japanese. The three records—*Music to Strip By* (1987), *Charmed Life* (1988) and *The Band That Would Be King* (1989)—represent the band at their unhinged peak. With over 100 songs (including some alternate takes), most no longer than two-and-a-half minutes, this a musical flood from a prolific band that could go from art-noise to primitivist rockabilly and deformed pop. A single disc of excellent raw songs like "Said And Done," "Sugar cane," "Ashes on the Ground," "Lucky Star" and a dozen or so others might be more rewarding, cutting out the more sociopathic ear-abuse and boiling down the band to its shrill, pipsqueaky, outsider-art nature, but it might miss the bigger point, too.

John Adamian

Various Artists

The Rough Guide to Unsung Heroes of Country Blues



ROUGH GUIDES Don't feel bad if you're a blues fanatic but you've never heard of most of the artists collected on this 24-song roundup of

acoustic recordings from the late 1920s and early '30s. The compilers, too, readily admit that this is some seriously obscure stuff. "Very little is known about many of these featured early blues artists, other than the simple fact that their classic recordings are like arrows through time and have a cutting edge coolness which defies the age in which they were recorded," states the liner notes. And that's what makes these antiques so intriguing: Listening for the first time is akin to discovering several new species of birds in a jungle previously thought to be thoroughly decimated. These are mostly raw and rough, both musically and sonically, these sides by the likes of **Texas Alexander**, **Lane Hardin** and **Lottie Kimbrough**, yet they're familiar, too—the guitar picking and keening vocals are not dissimilar to what's long been available to modern-day listeners by other blues pioneers. While some of the songs, including "Tain't Nobody's Business if I Do" (**Frank Stokes**) and "Roll and Tumble Blues" (**Hambone Willie Newbern**), have been heard before by others, it's fascinating to know that these "lost" versions were evasive for so long—and to wonder how many more are still out there. *Jeff Tamarkin*

The John Coltrane Quintet featuring Eric Dolphy

So Many Things: The European Tour 1961



ACROBAT Last year, the Acrobat label released the 4-CD *All of You: The Last Tour 1960*, a collection of live European recordings by the Miles

Davis Quintet from 1960. That was the final time that **John Coltrane** would serve as a member of Davis' touring outfit; he was restless and ready to move past the music he'd been making to that point. *So Many Things* is where the following year found him. Also four discs, it culls live dates—from Paris, Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm—by a band that virtually defines the free-spiritedness jazz was engulfing as the '60s unfolded. Coltrane on tenor and soprano saxophones, **McCoy Tyner** playing piano, **Reggie Workman** on bass and **Elvin Jones** beating the drums—with multi-instrumentalist **Eric Dolphy**, one of the more serious boosters of the new progressivism, matching Trane's innovative sensibilities and quite often dominating. In order to understand just how open-ended this combo's approach was, one only needs to consider the six different versions of "My Favorite Things" (the title track of Trane's then-recent breakthrough album) that comprise much of the real estate here. While there are, naturally, thematic similarities from take to take, stark differences emerge: Where one version might lean toward the reserved and melodious, another is full of rage and dissonance, with Dolphy, Trane and Jones, in particular, engaged in fierce battle. Similarly, Coltrane's own "Naima"

and "Blue Train" morph from show to show, from hard and churning to contemplative and conversational. Coltrane was just finding, at this juncture, how much adventurousness he could get away with; the European audiences he encountered in November 1961 were more than willing to support that quest, and the quintet jumped in without looking back.

Jeff Tamarkin

Tom Waits

A Small Affair in Ohio



ALL ACCESS For those whose introduction to **Tom Waits** was in the form of *Rain Dogs*, *Bone Machine* or even *Mule Variations*, hearing the more conventional sweep of his Asylum years for the first time is somewhat of a shock to the system. The Howlin'-Wolf-conjuring-kitchen-sink-juke of the past 30 years was but a glimmer in his steely eye when he was deep in the throes of the nouveau Los Angeles jazz-pop scene that spawned the likes of Rickie Lee Jones and Chuck E. Weiss. The live setting, however, allowed Waits version 1.0 the freedom to test out the parameters of his future weirdness, as this excellent 1977 live album so sublimely showcases. The date of this show, beautifully captured from a crystalline FM broadcast via WMMS-FM at the Agora Ballroom in Cleveland, Ohio, came less than a month removed from the release of his jazzbo classic *Foreign Affairs*. But only one tune from the *FOREIGN* was performed on this night—"I Never Talk to Strangers"—with the barfly bard and his killer live band, comprised of tenor saxophonist **Frank Vicari**, bassist **Fitzgerald Jenkins** and percussionist **Chip White**, focusing their attention more so on 1976's *Small Change*. However, the slurred, stripped-down versions of such album faves as "Jitterbug Boy," "Step Right Up" and "Invitation to the Blues" are revelations. If you are an Island/Anti-purist looking for a way into the Asylum age, then *A Small Affair in Ohio* is a great primer. *Ron Hart*

Various Artists

Speak Easy - The RPM Records Story, Volume 2 1954-57



ACE RECORDS Of the 54 sides in this installment of the RPM story, half of the tunes are based on the simplest form of the blues: three chords and a shuffle beat. Some lean heavier on vocals, others highlight guitars, but they're all cut from the same cloth and that makes for a somewhat tedious long-term listen. In the short term, though, there are a couple dozen cuts that really shine. The 12/8 ballads like **The Teen Queens'** "Eddie My Love" and **Lover Boy's** "The Way You Used to Treat Me" are nearly perfect. A fresh-voiced **B.B. King's** double breakdown on "16 Tons" is worth a couple of listens, as is **Lonnie "The Cat"**'s "I'm A Man" mashup, "I Ain't Drunk." **The Fox's** spoken-word piece, "The Dream," makes Jim Morrison's poetry sound like "See Jane Run," and **The Chanters'** slightly naughty "She Wants to Mambo" reminds us not every "race record" could be reconstituted for the white man's console stereo. Though a little much for even the deepest R&B aficionado, when taken in pieces, this is a choice selection. *Michael Verity*

John Mayall's Bluesbreakers

