

BLUES REVIEWS



POPS STAPLES
Don't Lose This
ANTI-

Don't Lose This is very much the sound of heaven on earth. Even far more than usual for Roebuck "Pops" Staples, once you roll in the sad fact that he just released this newest and greatest solo album of his 40some years of recording—despite dying way back in December 2000 at the age of 85. No, not even mortality can silence Pop's unmatched downhome glory on saintly blues and swampy soul, his absolute specialty. For on his deathbed, the Staple Singers' patriarch handed a tape over to daughter Mavis. It came with his one simple, but ultimate instruction: "Don't lose this." She didn't. You just couldn't, given that its contents were his final testament, a glowing handful of bare-boned solo tracks from a raw 1998 session. Fifteen years later, those skeletons have now been fleshed out, their grooves activated, their spirit rejuvenated from on high.

Perfect, since Pops always radiated a certain godliness not quite of this earthly domain. It's his angelic presence, the warmth of his gentle voice, the calm conviction in every syllable he sings. That almighty murmur swimming off his reverb guitar. All told, his music's otherworldly power never fails to hit you, inside.

Jeff Tweedy, frontman for rock's Wilco and architect of Mavis Staples' 2010 Grammy winner, *You Are Not Alone*, was mindful of all that when gifted the nearly-bare ferric canvas with only Pops' resonant singing and his trusty Fender's oceans of tremolo.

Maintaining a minimalist creed of *less is more*, Tweedy's uncluttered production reaps huge rewards by selectively filling in some—emphasis on "some"—of the room with his own bass, his son Spencer's drums, and the wraparound vocal backing of Mavis and her sisters Cleotha and Yvonne. Vital, though, was leaving lots of essential space to let Pops' aura beam right through.

And beam it does, illuminating the tensile strength of "Friendship," irradiating societal ills with "No News is Good News," and rendering "Sweet Home" suitably haunting with its prophetic ponderings over "Lord, I wonder, will I ever get home?" Even Dylan's stone-cold truth of universal inevitability—that you "Gotta Serve Somebody"—gets spilled with heightened significance. Starkest, though, is the age-old spiritual "Nobody's Fault but Mine." Seemingly nothing more than a devastating soliloquy between a true believer, his maker, and a very juiced guitar, it's also proof positive that somewhere way, way down beneath all that watery amplifier shake lie the trappings of a Delta bluesman, whose teen years spent on Dockery Plantation earned him personal witness to Charley Patton and Robert Johnson. As sonic epitaphs go, *Don't Lose This* couldn't express the feeling any more perfectly. Yes, this is that valuable.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

HENRY GRAY & BOB CORRIATORE
The Henry Gray/Bob Corritore Sessions Vol. 1: Blues Won't Let Me Take My Rest
DELTA GROOVE

Their first order of business is "Let's Get High," a gin-soaked battle cry if ever there was. Immediately, that blast establishes piano legend Henry Gray and go-to harmonica Bob Corritore's priority for the next 51 min-

utes: *Blues Won't Let Me Take My Rest* will enthusiastically honor its title, in full, by bellying up to the bar and pounding shot after shot of old-school South Side blues. Because true to Gray's long-standing approach—including those 12 defining years rumbling with Howlin' Wolf—blues is a participation sport. So choruses are kept simple, curt, and eminently sing-alongable. That way you can actively contribute to the rowdiness of "They Raided the Joint" or "That Ain't Right," even if you have liquidly respected the album's opening decree. And the music remains big-boned and propulsive at all times, whether grinding slowly ("Blues Won't Let Me Take My Rest") or grinding a bit less slowly ("Can't Afford to Do It"). Never, however, do they rock, pop, funk, or soul out. And in this be-all-things age of melting-pot fusion, that's a high blues compliment.

But the Gray-Corritore connection isn't even the half of it. Accumulated over a 12-session, 19-year span beginning in 1996, this cohesive jumble of ensemble-minded romps (only four of which have ever been heard) boasts a guest list overflowing with name guitarists and bassists. Yet the gutbucket heroes are deep-pocket drummers like Chico Chism and Steve Cushing, who make "Trouble Blues" lurch and "I'm Gonna Miss You" lunge. And while Gray does nearly all of the boisterous hollering, John Brim, Nappy Brown, and Tail Dragger each rough up a song while leaving "Ramblin' on My Mind"



for Robert Lockwood to rightfully claim. But amid all the comings-and-goings, there are always three key constants: Gray tamps out rat-a-tat-tat piano, Corritore dynamically burrows or barges his harp through, and the spirited racket is non-stop. What could be better? That this is only Volume 1.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



DADDY MACK BLUES BAND
A Bluesman Looks at Seventy
INSIDE SOUNDS

Once upon a time, the Fieldstones ruled the whole of Memphis from the juke joint bandstand in Green's Lounge. That was during their fabled reign from the 1970s up into the '90s. Then *poof!*: The band evaporated, the infamous oasis burnt down, that hard-bruising magic slipped off into hometown blues mythology. That is until former members rebanded, reshuffled and repurposed under the giant-sized lead of Mack Orr, aka Daddy Mack. Now seven albums in, the Daddy Mack Blues Band—their no-glitz name accurately signifies their no-glitz sound—has rightfully reclaimed the city's bar-stained heavyweight title. In other words: Orr's four-piece—James Bonner's second guitar, brother Harold Bonner's bass, Fast Eddie Lester's drums—is precisely what you always hope to encounter roughing up a neighborhood joint with their bare-knuckled presentation.

Toughly pounding "Lucky for You," eerily smoldering "I Like Fishin'," then muscling the chug-a-

lug funk of "Champagne Fantasy," this ensemble is the South's unapologetic rebuttal to the North's Magic Slim & the Teardrops: They're rugged and forceful. So despite sporadic concessions to urbane recordmaking, neither the drive-by horns nor the intermittent shadowing of backup singers can gussy up *A Bluesman Looks at Seventy*. Nothing here gets fancy. Orr's guitar solos are terse, stocky, hardened, and invincible—the work of a far, far less citified Albert King. For added insurance, he sings with gritty, world-weary coarseness, his delivery almost conversational to a point. His groans are everyman groans: That there's an unfortunate surplus of daily hardship, yet an even more unfortunate shortage of cash ("She Loves Money"). Sex, too, as "Fix It When I Can" suggestively wants to do you-know-what just as badly as does the blunt "You Don't Have to Love Me" ("to make love to me," Mack adds, dramatically ramping up the libido without fazing the band's underlying humpty-hump thump). Just as much as Furry Lewis or those Fieldstones, Daddy Mack is the definition of what blue Memphis sounds like.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



VARIOUS
The Rough Guide to East Coast Blues
WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

The coping mechanism is audibly quite different, even right from the start, as caught here during the early span of 1926-1941. Rather than embracing Mississippi's mantra of *miseria loves company* to its musical fullest, *East*

Coast Blues stylists tended to buoy their emotional loads with a swift undercurrent of lighter, brighter guitar-work. Ragtime zips generally replace hellhound trudges. Perfect example? Windswept Blind Boy Fuller quite brilliantly preferred “Truckin’ My Blues Away”—not grinding on them. Not that William Moore’s “One Way Gal” or Brownie McGhee’s “Unfair Blues” are the work of a cockeyed optimist, either. Not in the least. However, the brisk, fancy picking used to dispense their troubles seems to already initiate the healing process. Heavyweight champs Blind Blake, Blind Willie McTell, Rev. Gary Davis and Josh White continue administering six-string medicine with as much imaginative creativity as nimble dexterity. So do less-known daredevils like Bull City Red (his Sunday-go-to-meeting blues “I Saw the Light”) and elaborate Willie “South Carolina Rag” Walker, who remains a phantom even to this day. (Hey you, out there in the cold: Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, Pink Floyd’s obscure namegivers, each get to heat up the strings too.) Yet no matter how cleanly Carl Martin’s breakneck fingers flew or how fanciful Curley Weaver’s bottlenecking grew, life still ended up brutalizing wooden Stellas and steely Nationals akin to their Delta counterparts. Because whether in Atlanta, Durham or Chapel Hill, murder still earned you a prison cell (“Ninety Nine Year Blues”). Lovers still painfully parted (“Runaway Man Blues”). Mistrust still raged (“Jealous Hearted Blues”). And death still came a-creeping (“I Want to Die Easy”). It’s just that a more immaculate mojo got worked doing so.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS

Muddy Waters 100
RAISIN’ MUSIC

“Got My Mojo Working” kicks off *Muddy Waters 100*, an all-star party for what would be the Father of Chicago Blues’ 100th birthday this year. His sig-

nature anthem still explodes, still raises your heartbeat. But a newer mojo, updated for the times, now works here. Its hoodoo verses trade between John Primer and guest Shemekia Copeland, the guitars flash sharp edges, and electronic drums join the heavy thunder: It’s no longer 1956. But *100* is, after all, a living, breathing celebration of Muddy—not a museum reenactment—where historically anointed classics sew their oats anew.

Sometimes that means the past reconciles with the present, tweaking arrangements, playing with beats, nervously fibrillating “Trouble No More” with added percussion loops and clavichord accents. “Mannish Boy” likewise revolutionizes its chest beating, letting a burbling synth and android handclaps splash in the testosterone.

Sometimes the past gets left well enough alone. “She Moves Me” plays it straight, like back in ’51, where a thick weave of slide and harmonica coils about a kick drum’s leaden downbeats. “Feel Like Going Home” keeps starker yet, upholding 1948’s dark, echoey space around a bottleneck sharply snapping off its riffs. And one of the deep reaches beyond what perennially resides on every “Best of Muddy” playlist is “Rosalie,” making its string-band return from Waters’ Stovall Plantation days.

At all times, though, neither spirit nor respect get sacrificed. Ensuring that is a long A-list of expert collaborators. The ad hoc Living History Band does all the baseline shuffling and grinding, with diehards like drummer Kenny “Beedy Eyes” Smith and fretsman Billy Flynn. Icing the cake

are guests as blustery as harpists James Cotton and Billy Branch, and as fierce as guitar-slingers Gary Clark Jr., the late Johnny Winter, and Derek Trucks, whose particularly nasty slide jacks the menace of “Still a Fool” with every drastic swerve out of bounds. That frees up Primer—who, before becoming one of Magic Slim’s Teardrops, served as the Muddy Waters Band’s final guitarist, right up until Waters’ death in ’83—to bawl ’n’ moan just as did Mud with his own Delta drawl.

To ensure his highest of standards on yet another class-act package, two-time-Grammy-nominated producer Larry Skoller goes two steps further by also commissioning an extended essay from Muddy biographer Robert Gordon and then flooding the handsome hardcover booklet’s 48 pages with a barrage of striking period photographs you don’t often run into.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



LITTLE FREDDIE KING
Messin’ Around The Living Room
MADEWRIGHT

Pep: It’s so overrated. Why needlessly expend all that energy with high-drama bellyaching when downshifting your gripes about “Bad Bad Julie” or the soon-to-be-bruised wrongdoer “Hey Tom, I Saw You” sound so much more low-down in low gear? Think of all the great slo-mo mojo men: Jimmy Reed, Big Smokey Smothers, the whole Excello gang. And, in this case, Little Freddie King, who, at 74, still imbeds his grooves with the same highly relaxed, seep-into-your-bones method he brought to New Orleans’ rough-and-tumble Lower Ninth Ward from his native

Mississippi. Although B.J.’s Lounge is where the King and his guitar typically hold court, this time Little Freddie’s *Messin’ Around The Living Room*, a 1930s church-turned-studio that came stocked with the bonus guitars of nephew Vasti Jackson and slider Luke Winslow King to tangle with King’s own.

Flooding

out—like misery at high tide—come wave after wave of immersive blue chill-out: “Brother Hay Shaker,” a bottlenecked rumproller instrumental. “Soul Serenade,” the old King Curtis swoon except with Mississippi saxophone mewling in place of actual sax. “Back at the Bucket of Blood,” a live-to-tell tale of that infamously sanguineous dive where King once used to romp. They’re all thick, barroom molasses washing over you.

Yet King’s *Messin’ Around* isn’t beholden to default “ooze” mode. “I Wanna See Dr. Bones” delivers less of a laidback mauling, noticeably cranking up both the rowdy pace and the guitar meanness. Plus, being a juke jointer, one never quite knows what’s up his sleeve. Cue the unpredictable surprise of “Do Da Duck Quack Quack,” a workout with the kind of fowl dance moves that a few too many swigs would happily endorse. Then again, even the low perpetual moan beneath the kiss-off of “Two Days, Two Nights” is, in its own squalid juke joint way, catharsis for body and soul. Because the King of Downhome Cool is always looking out for your good time, even if it’s at his own personal emotional expense.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

STEFAN GROSSMAN
Fingerpicking Blues

Guitar in the Key of G
STEFAN GROSSMAN’S
GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

What pizzazz *Fingerpicking Blues Guitar in the Key of G* may lack in title

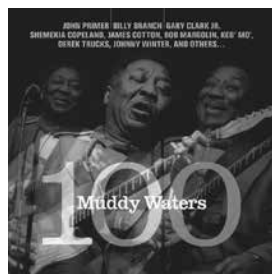
gets overcompensated by the dazzle of its six spotlighted beauties coming to your repertoire’s rescue. (And, yes, each is in the key of G, as



promised.) Being handpicked by walking country-blues library Stefan Grossman assures none are the typical same-old. So trust in him to not only snatch shellac gems from the blues’ back pages, but to then personally guide you through every move needed to swing or rag these 70- to 80-year-old songs back to life.

You’ll learn “Try Me One More Time,” a springy Paramount side just as exceptionally hard to hunt down as is any history on its maker, mystery man Marshall Owens. Let fly on “Bye Bye Baby Blues,” Little Hat Jones’ mad dash which ended up insistently toe-tapping itself into the eccentric soundtrack to Terry Zwigoff’s 2001 cult classic *Ghost World*. And meet poor Jim Jackson, who, having died by 1937, never knew he spawned a whole cover-me fan club stretching from Janis Joplin and Robert Nighthawk to the Lovin’ Spoonful and Jim Kweskin’s Jug Band, both of whom had to harness the frisky strum-and-pick power of his “Wild About My Loving” for themselves. That makes Blind Boy Fuller the celebrity of the bunch. His “Baby Quit Your Low Down Ways” is an incredible lickfest, whereas “I Crave My Pigmeat” is more a visceral treat. And “Baby Let Me Lay It On You” totally breezes. (Likewise famous analogues from Rev. Gary Davis and Memphis Minnie are also stuffed into the bonus audio. But to hear Bob Dylan’s variant, “Baby Let Me Follow You Down,” you’ll have to dig out his 1962 debut.)

Grossman also tucks supplemental pointers throughout the lesson, teaching Gary Davis-style variations, “rollin’” and “stumblin’”



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technique, and that “monster” C7 chord, all of which he learned personally from the good Reverend himself. Another handy tip: Grunt out “pigmeat is kicking today, today, something I do crave” atop a ragtime whoosh, and you’ll doubly stun listeners.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



JEFF BECK
Live+
RHINO/ATCO

Upon stages strewn about his 2014 American tour route, Jeff Beck towers 200-feet tall. Or so his Olympic-white Stratocaster comes off sounding throughout *Live+*, its gargantuan presence befitting the guitar god’s larger-than-life stature. After all, Beck, now a hale 71, originally fledged in the same 1966 Yardbirds nest with Jimmy Page. If that alone wasn’t enough to warrant superstardom, he’d stroll on from those Nehru-jacketed days and take a huge artistic leap on his own, soon introducing rockers to a vastly different language that fused his knockout power with jazz’s wordless, improvisational freedom. A new breed of guitar hero was born in the process.

Live+ radiates that very fact with the kind of you-are-there vibrancy that rewards every click of volume you can feed it. Compiled from the thrills put on nightly display last August, reborn chestnuts and fresh finds alike verify that Beck’s discovery phase is still very much ongoing. Half the performances are sung, from out of the blow-the-house-down depths of ex-Wet Willie Jimmy Hall’s oversized lungs. Half are (only) strung, as pure dia-

logue between Beck, drummer Jonathan Joseph (Joe Zawinul, Joss Stone), bassist Rhonda Smith (Prince), and second (synth)guitarist Nicolas Meier.

The set roams freely. “Morning Dew” dates from as early as ’68, when the post-apocalyptic blast last detonated on *Truth*, Beck’s solo debut. “Superstition,” the Stevie Wonder tune, still compresses down into the rubbery thunder that Beck, Bogert & Appice first synthesized in ’73. And Hendrix’s “Little Wing” flies on. So “Why Give It Away,” a tense workout in stuttering funk, becomes the appointed newcomer. Around it, deep expeditions launch into the Mahavishnu Orchestra’s oblique “You Know You Know,” then into Beck’s own metallic “Big Block.” But for the blowout finale, this blues ‘Bird goes out in a blaze of glory by letting “Rollin’ and Tumblin’” frenetically light the fuse for a nuclear “Going Down.” Loudest of all, though, is the sound of individualism, fearlessly shot from an amplifier with a tone unlike any other gunslinger on the planet.

Because Beck paints sound. On a grand scale, with every bend and release of a string, tap along the neck, right-hand embouchure manipulation, chronic dip of the whammy bar. Melody can become impressionistically abstracted (“Where Were You”) just as sliplessly as when lyrically streamlined (“A Day in the Life”). Those same pickups molding free-form aggression into the atmospheric rudeness of “Loaded” can then sweetly “sing” you such an impossibly gorgeous “Danny Boy.” Not often does rock guitar strive to shred its amp with a humanized heart.

But as encrypted in its title, *Live+* delivers more than a valuable souvenir from the road. The + (plus) part stands for the encore addition of two new studio experiments. Of the disparate pair, “Tribal” is the neuron scrambler: sensory overload right from Ruth Lorenzo’s

get-go feral scream to the wondrously abrasive blizzard in its wake. “My Tiled White Floor” instead opts not to redline its nu soul. Whether under stage lights or behind recording glass, Jeff Beck continues to take that road less traveled, intently en route to his longtime destination—new horizons.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



SONGHYOY BLUES
Music in Exile
ATLANTIC

Rather than simply start up, newly-born bands don’t typically explode into being from out of nowhere like this. Their debuts aren’t supposed to be so incredibly irresistible right out of the gate. But such is *Music in Exile*, a symbolic blast-off from a very-soon-to-be-famous squad of young Malians who, under the apt banner of Songhoy Blues, burn through music rather than perform it.

Fire makes all the difference. Not an inner-flickering flame lit from want for the spotlight or a paycheck, but an inner-raging inferno ignited by ruthless rebellions tearing apart your life. Neither the group nor their first long-player could be named any better, any more honestly: For this *is* music in exile (recorded in Bamako, an unwanted but life-saving 1,000-kilometer flee-to-safety from their Timbuktu home). And the four displaced Songhoy souls truly are stricken with Songhoy blues.

Just hurtling through the rhythmic maw of “Soubour” into panicky “Al Hassidi Terei” with its dizzyingly spiraled solo, you thrillingly sense that guitar shredder Garba Touré, laser-voiced singer/second guitarist Aliou Touré, bassist Oumar Touré, and drummer Nathanaël

Dembelé banded together, plugged-in, and are exorcizing demons—fury, homesickness, misery—through a microphone, a stressed-out amplifier, and enough rocked-out passion to meld all 11 of their refugee blues into an instant African classic. “Nick” is no less tauntingly close to spilling over into full abandon, chugging the daylight out of its thick, Hooker-like boogie groove. But so as to not breathlessly exhaust you all at once, “Desert Melodie” does settle down, wafting a cooled, calm majesty. So does “Jolie,” but far more snaky, markedly far more blue. Yet just as successful in its cultural exchange of emotion.

Truth is, accessibility needn’t always hinge upon interpretable translation. Despite having no idea what’s being sung in native tongue—though, no doubt enumerating the myriad ways life can hollow you out, given their own personal plight—you’re nonetheless compelled to improvise up a dialect of your own just to actively join in. Simply try not to sing—or drum or air-guitar or jump—along. Resistance is futile. Even when completely unplugged, to tenderly coo a heartbroken lovesong to their fractured homeland of “Mali,” Songhoy Blues still electrifies. Now even more so in these troubled times of ours, we’re reminded that music does equal freedom by a special album that’s overfull with life and fun, even when it’s venting.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS *The Rough Guide to Unsung Heroes of Country Blues* WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

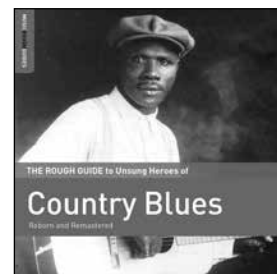
That formative Golden Era of prewar blues wasn’t all Johnson, Fuller, Patton and Jefferson, you know. Not even close. Curator Neil Record has handpicked the indisputable proof: a particularly spectacular six-string roster of *Unsung Heroes of Country Blues*. How spectacular and how unsung? For start-

ers, the fantastically dismal “Cherry Ball” lives here. But not the expected Skip James one. No, only the deepest digging retrieves Caldwell “Mississippi” Bracey’s droning masterpiece of the same name, the one that never got its due. And that’s just one of 24 such rarities which have been unfairly remaindered off into underdog obscurity.

So you may have never heard of Charley Jordan, but you sure won’t forget the wordplay brilliance of his “Keep It Clean.” Same goes for Otto Virgial and his rhythmic manic panic through “Little Girl in Rome.” “Cottonfield Blues—Part 2” charges even more fiercely, a real proto Hill Country juggernaut thrust along by the blurred hands of north Missisippians Garfield Akers and Joe Callicott. But just as secret are slide studs like Blind Joe Reynolds or Peg Leg Howell, who respectively chomps bites out of “Married Man Blues” versus skidding through “Please Ma’am” with dainty stings.

What about the name Hambone Willie Newbern? Ring any bells? Likely not. Yet his 1929 “Roll and Tumble Blues” would become the template Delta anthem whose galloping gloom legions still continue to ride. Another anthem, “Sweet Home Chicago,” resides here as well, in its prototypical form as “Old Original Kokomo Blues.” And “Fishing Blues” lays out the blueprint from which Taj Mahal built one of his greatest hits, except for those interludes on Old World quills that Henry Thomas also puffed in between pumping guitar.

Yet you’d hardly know all this is 80some-year-old history revolving at 78 rpm.



So remarkably vibrant is the remastering that Gus Cannon's blackstrap bawling now fills up the room, while you can practically feel the breeze coming off King Solomon Hill's bottleneck cracking its way down the frets.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



DATURA4
Demon Blues

ALIVE NATURALSOUND

Finally, here's an hour around the turntable that everyone from Ozzy and Jimi to Humble Pie and Deep Purple could all thoroughly dig. Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, too. That's because *Demon Blues* is quite the bellbottomed mindbender of a Marshall-stacked miracle. Not only is it Datura4's absolute all-time greatest album. Lucky for us, all this panoramic guitar distortion is also only their first. The supergroup's superpowers derive from its four veterans of West Australia's underground being up to backdated warp speed, instantaneously.

Welcome back to the kind of longhair blues that made the turn of the '70s so worth worshipping. Just don't strain your brain trying to recall which Fillmore show bred the stretched-out "Love to Burn" jam or what gatefold LP first withstood the crush of "Hoonsville" getting slugged. Rest assured, no matter how gloriously their throwback wall of Marshall and Orange amplifiers screams out that it's 1971, it's really not. It's just that Datura4's profound creativity dials a flashback mindset to when blues-rock took on serious sonic tonnage after being plundered from out of 1960s garages. Every two-ton psychedelic swirl here is brand-new. They just flow like vintage lava—thick, heavy and

blistering—out from bass, drums, and two crossfire guitars that couldn't sound any cooler, their dirty-as-hell stoner riffs encased within licks and lots of filthily overdriven decibels. No keyboards, no horns, no chance to go soft or bright.

Frontman Dom Mariani howls into his mic lyrics that bid you anything but to have a smiley-faced nice day. General disdain ("Pissing up the Wall") and loathing ("You Ain't No Friend of Mine") shove through the squalling hurricane he and fellow guitarist Greg Hitchcock maintain. Rocking on a tone-nasty-ing pedal sprays "Out with the Tide" out in shockwaves. "Journey Home" instead cosmically travels the space-time continuum aboard a flying saucer even weightier than Hawkwind once piloted. Damn near perfect retro-roaring from the good ol' daze.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



LITTLE FREDDIE KING BLUES BAND
Live at 2015 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival
JAZZFESTLIVE.COM/
MUNCKMUSIC.COM

You're in luck—actually, extremely good luck, as you'll learn below—if somehow you missed when the Little Freddie King Blues Band transformed the 2015 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival's Blues Tent into a makeshift juke joint. Because that very act of magic is faithfully captured here in its entirety, the whole wiggling set, starting with the opening welcome and ultimately crashing down onto the runaway "Train Wreck" finale.

What happens in between, with tape rolling, is precisely why Little

Freddie King reigns as the Fest's perennial favorite for 45 years running (!) as well as New Orleans' prized bluesman for even longer than that: He habitually baits an oily hook. It's a handy skill perfected from hearing his dad's guitar shake cottonpatch shacks around the McComb, Mississippi of his 1940s youth. It's also one that never fails to snag its catch. Here, King reels you in, along with all the other attendees, with every grungy groove he casts: "Walk with Freddie," "Run Here Baby Run," the slow syrup of "Two Days and Two Nights" that's made far stickier with guest Luke Winslow King's slide guitar. Drums and bass generate tons of traction beneath the already lowly grumblings off King's guitar. Bolts of harmonica reach up a wee bit higher. But live, loose and unleashed, King and his propulsive sidekicks get to go long, alternately steam-rolling ("Sad Sad News") then smoldering ("Mean Little Woman") well beyond the seven-minute mark, working the outdoor crowd the same roughhouse way they do those stuffed inside the band's natural dive-bar habitat every night.

Now you won't miss out on all the fun, thanks to JazzFestLive.com and its mothership, MunckMusic.com, serving as absolute goldmines of live recordings—especially if you've been neglect in attending any of the constellation of New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival sets over the past handful of years. Or any Allman Brothers Band show, of late. Or any onstage performance of ...

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ANDY T—NICK NIXON BAND
Numbers Man
BLIND PIG

Ever since debuting in 2013, the Andy T—Nick Nixon Band has been on a nonstop roll. And based upon the continued impeccable thrust of *Numbers Man*, these synergistic Nashville cats aren't slowing up in the

least. If anything, momentum is actually gaining (marvel at the title track's comprehensive grandeur). That's impressive, given this now makes their third ingratiating installment on an apparent album-a-year plan. That's also great news for blues traditionalists who hold the tight, bright exquisiteness of T-Bone Walker or even Albert Collins-styled torridness in high esteem. Credit the clean, taut zing from Andy "T" Talamantez's guitar and James "Nick" Nixon's plummeting-off-the-cliff baritone for their consistent approach that's as comfortably unconcerned with the need to rock as it is truly infatuated with the desire to sting and swing. Because tricks are for kids, and both these men are anything but novices: Talamantez emboldened Smokey Wilson's band, then Guitar Shorty's; Nixon instead worked the joints lining Nashville's notorious Jefferson Street in the 1960s. They're two of a perfect pair, reaffirming the soaring power of sophisticated blues muscle.

Naturally, horns and Hammond B3 organ are very much an integrated part of their propulsion. (It's as if the whole jump 'n' jitter band is bluesing atop a trampoline, given the tremendous bounce beneath "Tell Me What's the Reason.") Even some accordion manages to squeeze into "What Went Wrong," its thick Louisiana drawl just right for Bourbon Street strutting. The excitement ends up baiting in Kim Wilson's harp and producer Anson Funderburgh's guitar, which came up a storm apiece. Yet dual spotlights remain where they naturally belong: on



the velvet force of Nixon's voice compressing frustration into an agitated mini-opera like "This World We Live In," all around which T meticulously engraves distress with teardrop treble notes. That's but only one in a slew of expertly tailored originals. So, with covers kept to a select few, picking both "Blue Monday," the creeping weeper for which Collins had a fondness, along with "Gate's Salty Blues," Gatemouth Brown's own gut punch, reveals where stylistic allegiances lie. With all the genre jumpers and fusion-happy blenders out there nowadays, the unmuddled Andy T—Nick Nixon Band is incredibly refreshing in its blue single-mindedness.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



JEFF HEALEY
The Best of the Stony Plain Years
STONY PLAIN

The Best of the Stony Plain Years compiles 12 of the late Jeff Healey's most torrid love letters to Victrola-era jazz. Yes, that same Jeff Healey who scaled *Billboard* heights with 1989's "Angel Eyes" and then kept right on rocking the blues with a guitar laid across his lap in trademark fashion. But through the 2000s, the Canadian followed his boyhood bliss, beating up strings—and also lighting up a trumpet—in the name of jazz. Old jazz. Back when jazz was expressly "hot." Back when songs had the heebie-jeebies—melodies bounced, leapt, swung, sprung, and ultimately boiled over. When accelerated beats-per-minute were as valid a measure of your pulse's response to the music as of the music's go-go-gusto itself. When Hoagy Carmichael, Bix Beider-

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CONTINUED

becke and Paul Whiteman were household buzzwords. When clarinets held more clout than did saxophones, and violins were confirmed jazz cats, sawing away to beat the band. Back when jazz was still a real hoot.

And Healey was hip to it all. An absolute natural, he gladly backdated himself, his chops, his voice, and his speakeasy repertoire, reveling in the glory of crooning “My Honey’s Lovin’ Arms” like a love-drunk Valentino. Of playing the speed-strummed Eddie Lang to violinist Drew Jurecka’s blister-bowed Joe Venuti on 1927’s fireball instrumental “Wild Cat.” Of trumpeting out “Stardust,” the go-to standard of its day, in calm cahoots with an oh-so-cool Coleman Hawkinsesque tenor sax.

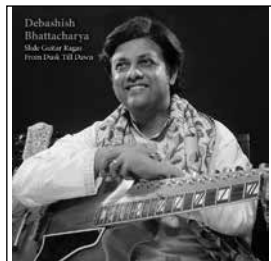
It helped that his own Jazz Wizards—a gang of sharp, equally shellac-crazed instrumentalists—could drive a tune as hard as could any territory band with Syncopators or Serenaders in their name. And none of their magic needed smoke-and-mirrors, since live performance was just as—if not even more—contagious. Like that time in 2006 when the Montreal Jazz Festival stage nearly burnt to ash under their blow-out scorching of “Sheik of Araby.” Or the year earlier, when “Sweet Georgia Brown” almost washed away a Toronto club with a sea of notes flooding from out of eight buzzing musicians getting their licks in, round-robin-style, starting with a violin capable of ultrasonic pitch. For 54 minutes, it’s as if “In the Mood,” Bird, or, surely, rock ‘n’ roll hadn’t ever yet been invented.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

STEFAN GROSSMAN

Fingerpicking Blues Guitar in the Key of A
STEFAN GROSSMAN’S
GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

Rather than relying predominantly on specific scratchy, old 78-rpm blues as set templates for relaying the art of *Fingerpicking Blues Guitar in the Key of A*, Stefan



DEBASHISH BHATTACHARYA

Slide Guitar Ragas From Dusk Till Dawn
RIVERBOAT

Slide *Guitar Ragas From Dusk Till Dawn* is the stuff of conscious dreaming and voyaging afar, without ever venturing one single step. The secret? Its five instrumental masterpieces serve as departure points and Pandit Debashish Bhattacharya is the pilot. Sequentially rotating through a song cycle of richly-detailed ragas linked to specific times of day, Bhattacharya ends up covering the whole emotional spectrum that the night holds, continuously drawing you deeper into those witching hours with every whisk along the strings. It’s a prime case of hypnosis at first listen.

And Bhattacharya’s virtuosic hands have been casting guitar spells ever since his first concert broadcasted across All India Radio airwaves—at the age of four. Now 52, he mesmerizes on a global scale, as indexed by worldwide tours, a Grammy nomination, and multiple ascents up *Billboard* charts. 2013’s *Beyond the Ragosphere* even spliced genres in cahoots with star dobroist Jerry Douglas and Western guitar guru John McLaughlin.

But first and foremost, Bhattacharya is the reigning master at translating the ancient history of north Indian classical music through one of the purest forms of sliding. Doing so requires a balancing act between pre-set ritual and spontaneous creation. Namely: taking

improvisational flights within each raga’s disciplined guidelines. Hitching impeccable methodology to utmost creativity, *Dusk Till Dawn* is a traditional, solo recital.

Occasionally, the telltale patter of tabla drums seconds his microtonal emotions. Essentially, though,

it’s pure Calcutta slide.

A wild menagerie of customized guitars does the flying. Included is a souped-up Gibson S400 and the beastly *chaturangui*, Bhattacharya’s patented invention with orchestral, sitar-like grandeur derived from six primary strings, four supporting strings, two drone strings and 12 sympathetic strings. Gliding out come whole sonic universes: infinitely intricate, mysterious and gorgeous, profound and sublime.

You enter under the cloak of nightfall, through the stark, dark “Aarti (The Evening Ritual).” The midnight hour, when the blues notoriously come down the heaviest, is the realm of “Ras Tarang (The Waves of Desire),” the solo of all solos: 20 minutes of incandescent burn through open, black space. Ragas keep delving, each with its own dynamic development, its own temperament. Because in a flick of the wrist, events go from pensive introspection to breathing fire, fog and mist become lightning flash and thunder-clap, meditation transforms into mercury. You eventually touch back down to earth at daybreak, just as the sunbeam three-chord flourish of “Vasundhara (Mother Earth)” softly dissolves away. But for those 75 minutes—and thousands of miles—between takeoff and touchdown, you are totally gone, on a faraway journey simply taken by nothing more than donning a pair of headphones.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



GUITAR SLIM GREEN
Stone Down Blues
ACE/BGP

Listen to what exquisitely rare sounds like. For even back then, in its prime, 1970’s *Stone Down*

Blues was a record not even the keenest of hunting skills could track down without extra help from pure serendipitous luck. It’s one of the blues’ deeper secrets, a greasy, full-body immersion into which regrettably few have ever plunged. But that’s certainly no fault of Guitar Slim Green.

No, not “Guitar Slim” of “The Things That I Used to Do” prestige—that’s renowned Eddie Jones. This is anonymity’s Norman Green: A Texan by 1920 birthingright who chased dreams of his idol T-Bone Walker out to California, following Walker’s migratory footsteps straight into 1947 Los Angeles (ultimately dying there in ’75). Yet fame never came. His guitar’s formative crush on T-Bone never reached fruition either, instead sidetracked off into its own scruffy interpretation, quagmired somewhere—mid-strive—between upscale backwoods and citified raw. Gigs with Fresno celebs Jimmy McCracklin and L.C. Robinson didn’t earn him any more recognition than with his own nameless bands back in L.A. Nor did the handful of lost sides he began cutting in late in the ’40s for a handful of dinky West Coast labels.

Eventually, a few hard-working decades later, Slim got this shot to extendedly groove, to cut an actual long-player, a whole trove of creeping trouble. And the conditions were perfect. He’d head a trio as low-down dirty as he was. But a low-down dirty trio you’d have never predicted: On drums and occasional piano is the “Godfather of Rhythm & Blues” himself, Johnny Otis; his son, cult legend Shuggie Otis, mops up the rest on rhythm guitar, bass, and quicksand harmonica.

United, the three come on like a heat wave, smothering your ears with the laidback kind of warm and humid thumping that elicits the same toothy grin as does listening to, say, any Smokey Smothers or Slim Harpo record.



DENNIS ROZANSKI

Because Green's fine with slowing life down, working his mojo at half- or even quarter-speed, doing whatever it takes to wring every bit of blue from out of such heartbreakers as "My Little Angel Child." Three-minute shots of melancholy majesty ("Play On Little Girl," "5th Street Alley Boogie"), along with the aberrant bout of amour ("Make Love All Night"), keep oozing out like grease through an eyedropper, their slow flow all the more viscous when coated by Green's mudslide voice.

Except for "Shake 'Em Up." That one's a blatant dance move, where Shuggie constantly baits your body into active participation with the funkier of his wildly wiggling chords while Slim sweats up a storm selling it as the newest and hottest sensation, even sprinkling in spoken marketing endorsements like "It's somethin' else!"

Yet for all this great hypnotic grinding, fate still wouldn't cut him a break. Not even a sliver. By 1970, the once-mighty Kent Records was in declining health, *Stone Down Blues* never sold big, never really got the chance. Being the last straw, Guitar Slim Green got banished to obscurity's silent abyss, his gutbucketing only worshipped by in-the-know crate diggers.

Now twelve persuasive reasons (the LP's original 10, plus two unearthed bonus tracks) take a fresh swipe at refuting obscurity's unjust verdict. Graced by its signature cover—that snapshot of Slim reeking of downhome persona—*Stone Down Blues* resurrects better than before. Old artwork and notes get joined by new liners and a rarer-than-rare encore: that pair of never-heard solo cuts where Green shuffles out "My Marie" and shakes down "Rock the Nation" under only his guitar's unglamorous power.

All hail the could-have-been, should-have-been Next Big Gutbucket Thing.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



JIMMY BURNS
It Ain't Right
DELMARK

Jimmy Burns, at 72, remains a bit of a tricky guy to pin down and then pigeonhole. Credit him for never being one to get stuck in a rut across his lengthy tenure. *It Ain't Right* superbly points out why. Oh, the Delta-dredged Chicagoan is a bluesman, without doubt. That we assuredly know from Burns' string of past Delmark discs and now from the bulk of this stellar fifth one. Not to mention he is one-half of real-life blues brothers: Elder sibling Eddie Burns is the Detroit sensation with historic ties to John Lee Hooker. So Jimmy can run down "Big Money Problem" boogie or pivot into a far grander expression of trouble, melodically swaying "Snaggletooth Mule" with tremendous B.B.-like movement and a barrage of precise single-shot notes from his guitar. He's also the one squeezing puckery harp through "A String to Your Heart," much as Jimmy Reed's original blueprint called for. Little Walter's covered too, except on frets, rather than through reeds. But bigger news is that somebody done hoodooed the Hoodoo Man: Junior Wells' tough "Messin' With the Kid" got messed with, brilliantly. Along with overhauling the central riff, a whole new West Side funk now surrounds it.

As Burns' music career migrated from decade to decade, traces of his assorted other fascinations travel with him, occasionally erupting along the way. "Wade in the Water," for example, blows down the chapel doors like back when singing gospel as a teen in the 1950s. Through the '60s, he left a trail of soul 45s. Although brand-new, "Will

I Ever Find Somebody?" picks up the old scent with sad-eyed glee. "Crazy Crazy Crazy," like Ben E. King's "Stand By Me," identifies as classic R&B. And Burns owns it all. Familiarity with his regular working band, a hot squad with Anthony Palmer's second guitar, certainly helps. So does producer Dick Shurman, who gilds the session that much more by availing a shimmering bank of horns. When that entire team locks their full-force attention onto melodies, the results are particularly special. Depending on your mood, either the blue "I Know You Hear Me Calling" or Percy Mayfield's golden "Long as You're Mine" will wear out the replay button.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



RONNIE EARL & THE BROADCASTERS
Father's Day
STONY PLAIN

By all rights, he should be classed as a genre unto himself: Nobody anguishes like Ronnie Earl. He'll crush you with only the fewest of effortlessly sculpted, cripplingly sensitive, lump-in-your-throat blue notes ever to levitate off a Stratocaster. Your heartstrings are bent and hammered right along with his guitar strings over the rain-soaked course of Fats Domino's "Every Night About This Time," into *Father's Day's* pensive title track, and out through Magic Sam's "All Your Love." For somewhere along the way, Earl's devotion to the fretboard emotionalism of Otis Rush took a proprietary turn, developing a style, attack, and devastation unmistakably his own. Likewise distinctive are his Broadcasters, who, enhanced by Dave Limina's burbling Hammond B3, can accommodate mood swings

as extreme as when throting "Follow Your Heart," one of three originals, after having just suspended Brook Benton's "I'll Take Care of You" upon the faintest haze of a pulse. But now sporting two guest vocalists—Diane Blue and new collaborator Michael Ledbetter, Lead Belly's relative and the Nick Moss Band's vocalist—Earl's typical need for instrumentals has downsized. "Moanin'"—yes, the ultra-catchy groover tied to Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers—is sole resident. However, the headline is that *Father's Day* finally grants longstanding wishes by spectacularly re-embracing the golden power of horns. How spectacularly? Play "Right Place Wrong Time" and plan on Rush's lonely lament holding you under nearly eight majestic minutes of emotional paralysis.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE
Freedom: Atlanta Pop Festival
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/ LEGACY (2 CDS)

Temperatures already exceeded 100 degrees without any extra help that Fourth of July. However, the blistering scorch didn't really hit until after the stroke of midnight, coinciding with those opening, slashing octaves to "Fire." A more apropos kickoff for the next 82 minutes of that hothouse night couldn't be scripted.

It's 1970. You and a human sea of 200,000+ others huddle, wall-to-wall, in wide-open soybean country. The rural Georgia hamlet of Byron has been inundated, converted into the second Atlanta Pop Festival. Bad acid circulates. Fireworks burst above. B.B. King, Cactus, Johnny Winter, the Allmans and



30some other acts already lit the weekend-long fuse leading up to this very performance. With Fender in hand, tone-dirtying pedals and stomp boxes underfoot, and huge amplifiers awaiting impending violence, the inferno lights, the genius ignites, the show is on. There is history to be made.

Jimi Hendrix stupefied his largest ever American audience right here: more than at Monterey, more than Woodstock. He goes about doing so by commingling newer, fleeter, strummer pieces like "Message to Love" and "Freedom" with a dense run of the old reliables—"Foxy Lady," "Purple Haze," "Hey Joe" with a flamenco preamble. By letting "Red House" resolve its jilted-lover blues through a creeping cycle of bent-string tension and weightless cathartic release, yanked along by the towline that is Billy Cox's bassline. And by eventually feeding it all into the majestic maw of "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," the apocalypse transcribed for Stratocaster.

The set embeds extra treats. "All Along the Watchtower," for one. Sonically embodying that key narrative line—"the wind began to howl"—to maximal extreme, Hendrix's cover whips up an electric hurricane well beyond Dylan's wildest imagination. Yet, for all its fame, "Watchtower" was never a frequent encounter in the Experience's onstage recordings. Neither was "Room Full of Mirrors," with its wah-wah gallop. "Spanish Castle Magic" isn't necessarily a rarity, but that sly, oh-so-cool nicking of old pop song "The Breeze and I" during the first solo's incineration is a bonus twist.

Under Hendrix's restlessly creative hands, songs could change shape a bit like that from night to night, city to city. Take the behemoth "Hear My Train a Comin'." At nine minutes and 32 seconds of lead-booted, heart-brooded trudge, the ultimate rambler's sendoff still bears down hard and

BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

heavy, brutalizing its chords as usual. But that midpoint break, the eye of the storm, is especially distinctive. Life grows spooky quiet, disquietly quiet as spindly ghost figures escape from beneath the tremolo bar, then a little evaporating filigree, before the huge blues returns back to the task at hand: of tearing itself apart with the aid of Mitch Mitchell's drum bombardment.

Unknowingly, Hendrix and the Experience were in the near-final throes of their last American tour, of their last anywhere tour—ever. The clock ticked down his remaining time. Seventy-six days and 13 gigs later, Jimi's lifeless body was discovered in London's Samarkand Hotel, suite 507. But right here, across these two discs on which Hendrix's legendary engineer Eddie Kramer worked his ferric-to-digital magic, rock's greatest bluesman is intensely alive again.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS

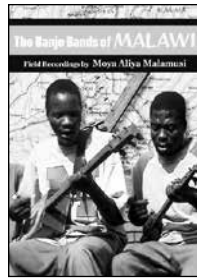
The Banjo Bands of Malawi

VESTAPOL (DVD)

Valuable travel tip: Don't run out of gasoline in Malawi. Because you'll be forever stranded, unable to lug back a spare gallon. Evidently, the southeast African nation's supply of squared-off metal cans has been scavenged in the name of grooving—more specifically, to concoct the world's most surreal banjos. Shockingly crude, heroically ingenious, and explosively loud, these primal instruments get handmade by impaling one of those five-liter cans with a wooden handle strung with found wire or fishing line. Then they're mercilessly drubbed by their DIY virtuosos. Monster one-string diddley-bow basses and scrap-pile percussion rigs typically ride shotgun.

For 78 drop-jawed minutes, you and expert tracker Moya Malamusi go on safari for the greatest junkyard orchestras you'll ever hear this side of Lilongwe. Red-dirt villages hide jack-

pot after startling jackpot. There, as recently as 2010, amid chicken free-for-alls, tumbledown rubble, and spontaneous fits of dancing, is where the Makambale Brothers Band hangs, conspicuous rockers commanding a bandstand of packed clay. And where the peewee Tiyese Nawo Band, darling pride of Masakamila, dispenses smiles with every buzz and bang. Unlike the others, Evans



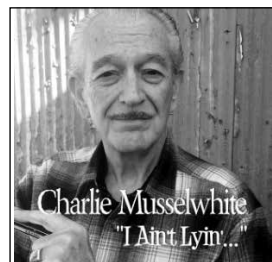
Manyozo is a one-can band, even managing to plunk out a solo despite holding down the fort all by himself. Still, there's no denying that the show gets stolen when 13-year-old Sila Chaphadzuka whips his paint-can drums like a pint-sized Elvin Jones while chirping out lines in Chichewa. Never in a million years, though, would you guess such frenetic, jangling joy could be so blue, its euphoric rhythms and soaring sky-high vocals actually camouflaging gloom ratted out in translations like "When Going to the Grave" and the far subtler "Joyce in the Bar, No!" You definitely needn't be in love with the banjo (or even its crazy cousin) to relish this rare chance to gawk at the brilliant spirit of music-making in its rawest, whatever-it-takes form. You just have to be willing to be absolutely astounded.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE *I Ain't Lyin'*

HENRIETTA

Mr. Musselwhite's latest announcement is worth YouTubeing. What's so great about its 76 seconds is



that it's pure Charlie: plain-spoken, amiable, genuine. Best of all is the news itself: "Hey, everybody: I just want to let you know I got a new CD done." And just when everyone was rock certain that 2013's rave-reviewed,

Grammy-nominated *Juke Joint Chapel* was their new favorite harmonica album, along comes this follow-up rival. Like its predecessor, *I Ain't Lyin'* is a live gig with the same bustling band that includes Matt Stubbs' sharply biting guitar. Except this time the four of them tear up Sonoma, California's 2014 Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival. Full to the brim with straight-up, mostly original blues, this engaging set is easily another shoe-in contender as a fan favorite. "My Kinda Gal" is a mad dash, streaking past in an extended rush of streamlined gusting and Stubbs' breakneck fingerpicking. "Good Blues Tonight" works its rumba bump as deftly as "Long Lean Lanky Mama" does a swinging release. "If I Should Have Bad Luck" instead prefers to shuffle, hard, when building exquisitely detailed passages that freely escalate up into the harp's highest end. Then those reeds hit upon an old, familiar meander—"Cristo Redentor"—whose slow, smoky pull was first felt on *Stand Back! Here Comes Charlie Musselwhite's South Side Band*. That debut record marks its 50th anniversary next year. Although now far from being a 22-year-old upstart, Charlie is certainly making some of the best music of his life right now, and right here.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

WEBB WILDER *Mississippi Moderne*

LANDSLIDE

If dirtball blues mean anything at all to you, dive straight into the gutbucket cordoned off near the close of *Mississippi Moderne*. That's the relegated splash zone, where Webb Wilder gets even wilder, sparser, grim-

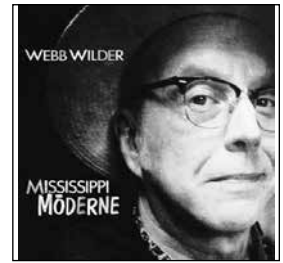
er, messiest. Either a liability move to prevent instantly shocking the faint-of-heart or the simple fact of physics whereby heavier stuff naturally sinks to the bottom has saved the crustiest for last. Bathed in bare-bulb ambiance, the album's final performances grow increasingly cruder by the minute. Stripped to nothing more than a rudimentary drum-beat and raunchy guitars, Frankie Lee Sims' battered "Lucy Mae Blues" feeds into "I'm Gonna Get My Baby," which the Wilder bunch drags where Jimmy Reed never could without such dirtied chords. Then, rock bottom. If worthiness had its way, "Stones in My Pathway" would have been rightfully carved into an old, beaten 78: Sometime in the 1930s, a scissor-throated preacher performs one of the more intense slide-guitar exorcisms ever to be cut inside an echo chamber. Or so it sounds. Not that *Mississippi Moderne's* lead-up is necessarily a sane cakewalk. No, not coming from the cracked one who unleashed *It Came from Nashville* upon an unsuspecting world in 1986. (He's been secretly famous ever since.) With a rockabilly hiccup always close in his throat and a hankering to dial up his guitar's reverb shake, Wilder continues to hint at willful lunacy while blazing a zigzag trail of fuzzed Kinks homage ("I Gotta Move"), countrified breezing ("Too Much Sugar for a Nickel"), 1959 greaser rock ("Lonely Blue Boy"), and garage-skronk from '66 ("Yard Dog"). Come on, electric sitars as gatekeepers to "Only a Fool"? That's so Webb.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ELMORE JAMES *The Complete Singles: As & Bs (1951-62)*

ACROBAT (2 CDS)

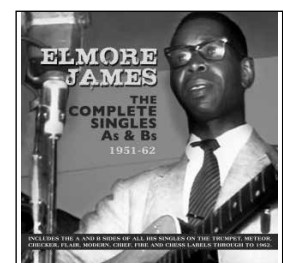
History is funny that way: You don't always know at the time that you're altering the course of human events. Such could be said for when a Mississippi radio repairman by the name of Elmore James cut a one-off A-side for the dinky Trum-



pet label. It was 1951. "Dust My Broom" was the title, a rambler's blues picked up in the 1930s Delta from rambling companion Robert Johnson. Except James hit it with a band; one which even starred King Biscuit harpist Sonny Boy Williamson. Far more revolutionary, though, was that James plugged-in. That made the slide technique, likewise lifted from Johnson, all the more excitingly violent when slashing his guitar. His raspy shout was no less voracious, no less overwhelming. But that electrified bottleneck riff—the riff heard round the world—is what shattered everyone's composure; what instantly made James a hot commodity; secured his immortal fame; supercharged the blues; launched the turn-it-up decibel race; and sewed the seed of pin-you-to-the-wall rock-and-roll—all within only two minutes and 44 seconds.

No one had wreaked such havoc before. Especially not with a typically meek acoustic guitar—a cheap-o Kay, in fact. What forever changed the game was wiring in DeArmond pickups and then going one ferocious step further by also electronically juicing the amplifier. Positively crackling with dirty, overpowered volume, Elmore's rig breathed fire. So prepare to be buzzed and blasted, gloriously. And, of course, broomdusted—in *excelsis*—for two-and-a-half straight hours.

A whole lot of broom-



dusting got crammed in before James' 45-year-old heart finally gave out in '63. But how do you cover that full span, across the years (1951-1962) and the labels (Trumpet, Meteor, Checker, Flair, Modern, Chief, Chess, and, finally, Fire)? A fantastic, intelligent way is by using the very tracks—54, in all—that record execs originally chose to define their star and, most importantly, hook consumers' ears. Namely, by amassing *The Complete Singles: As & Bs*. (True to the double-disc set's stated completeness, the neglected "Dust My Broom" B-side lives here: "Catfish Blues." Credited to "Elmo James," the Delta drone was actually throbbed by Bobo Thomas.)

Preordained classics live here, too. "Shake Your Money Maker," "The Sun is Shining," its tear-blinded inverse in "The Sky is Crying," and a sorely empathetic "It Hurts Me Too" reflexively spring to mind at mere mention of Elmore James. Not so for deeply-held secrets like the fabulously cacophonous "Elmore's Contribution to Jazz" or "1839 Blues," with its "I ain't seen my baby since 1839" punch line. Yet as long as James was driving, even the cowbell rumba of "No Love in My Heart" and "Goodbye Baby," which concedes to modern urbaneness with, of all things, cooing backup singers, still slammed. Even instrumentals were dangerous, intensifying from toe tappers ("Sax-Ony Boogie") to hip shakers ("Country Boogie") out to whole-body convulsers ("Hawaiian Boogie").

That's because the music's heaving, visceral power openly reflected the path James would regularly beat, back and forth, between wild Chicago clubs and wild Mississippi juke. Plus, like their fearless leader, Elmore's Broomdusters were the baddest around, heaving the hardest, rocking the loudest. So bad, in fact, that the classy saxophone got corrupted into becoming a bruiser. They

were a rotating cast, through which pianist Johnny Jones, drummer Odie Payne, and guitarist/pianist Ike Turner passed. A murderer's row—guitarist Eddie Taylor, bassist Willie Dixon, drummer Fred Below—backed "Cry for Me Baby." The same could be said for "Coming Home," an explosion of Elmore, protégé/cousin Homesick James, and Taylor reportedly playing through the same overstressed guitar amp.

But if truly unhinged battering means anything at all to you, jump straight into "Please Find My Baby," then "Hand in Hand"—twin tornadoes said to have been captured inside a Canton juke-turned-make-shift-studio. Recorded so super hot, their raw power blares through the crusty fidelity, only enhancing the you-are-there feel: standing beneath the room's poor, besieged PA system.

Every music collection needs Elmore James; *The Complete Singles* vividly sums all his gutbucket greatness.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



BALLAKÉ SISSOKO & VINCENT SEGAL
Musique de Nuit
SIX DEGREES

The sun sank, finally shaving a few degrees off the daily African broil. With it also went the daytime bustle. Up on a rooftop, in the middle of Bamako, the cool, ambient sounds of midnight Mali—a sleepless goat, a distant truck, the evening's hum—took over, serving as faint backdrop, the stamp of alfresco authenticity. Right then and there is when the wordless conversation began. A little night music. *Musique de Nuit*, to be precise. Hometown Ballaké Sissoko's thumbs and forefingers are in constant blur,

tumbling off sheets of intricately detailed notes from the skein of strings on his kora, an ancient West African harp, of sorts. Its tinkling sparkles. Meanwhile, rivers of sorrow flow from every deep drag of Vincent Segal's bow. But the French cellist is just as wise to extracting bassy growls, percussive thwacks, pizzicato bumping, and a mighty convincing impersonation of a flute during "Balazando." Only once—"Diabaro"—do actual vocals impinge upon the back-and-forth between both instruments. Despite disparate backgrounds, Sissoko and Segal are perfectly attuned to each other's mindset and moves, their thoughts deeply entangle as leads steadily pass back and forth. This meeting is even more of a transportive experience than their last, *Chamber Music*.

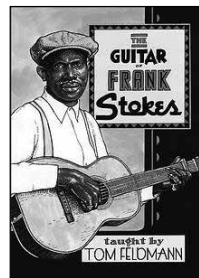
Off you go to places never before reached, somewhere pitched in consciousness between dreaming and waking, occupying a space that is utterly timeless and, for that matter, independent of geography or genre. An eight-minute "N'kapalema"; the breakaway chase through "Niandou"; "Samba Tomora," with all its squirm: None are at odds with nighttime silence, solace, or sadness. *Musique de Nuit* is created, not composed; recorded, not produced; live, with no chance for overdub. Here are 42 free, fluid minutes of hanging out with only Sissoko, Segal, and the stars above. Nothing short of beautiful, this is elegant magic at its most entrancing.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

TOM FELDMANN
The Guitar of Frank Stokes

STEFAN GROSSMAN'S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

For being the crowned "Creator of Memphis blues," Frank Stokes never really gets his rightful ovation. His fame is not of



the everybody-knows-your-name kind. Nevertheless, he was dutifully there, already hustling on the city's streets and backcountry fish fries not long after the 1900s dawned. Then helping Doc Watts Medicine Show whoop it up, and eventually beating the Mississippi Sheiks onto record, by three years, with his own Beale Street Sheiks, the fruitful partnership

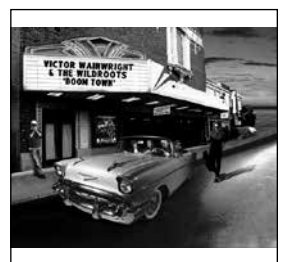
with second guitarist Dan Sane. That was all prior to 1930. Having died by '55, however, meant missing out on any firsthand chances to fire up folks during the blues revival, to be a comeback darling of the 1960s festival circuits, much as did the subsequently more recognized Furry Lewis. Fortunately though, Tom Feldmann studiously caught Stokes Fever. And it's such an easy one to catch—given the music's straightforwardness, easily managed chord progressions and overall goodtime contagiousness—that you and he breeze through "Stomp That Thing," "Mr. Crump Don't Like It," and eight other zoomers. And zoomers they are: Stokes' lively approach typically relies upon three chords and a cloud of dust. Even stuffed to the brim with creatively aching lyrics, no amount of emotional burden is going to derail their sweeping sense of linear motion. So let "Mistreatin' Blues" coil its worrying grip. Allow "Take Me Back" to desperately plead away. Because beneath, pick 'n' pluck campaigns rally so undeterred that you're shielded by strings that zip and hop along without a hint of worry.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VICTOR WAINWRIGHT & THE WILDROOTS
Boom Town
BLIND PIG

Whenever you need a balmy shot of way-down-South, Victor Wainwright is your sunshine superman. The Memphis-

based Georgia native is, in a way, also this generation's Dr. John: a piano punisher for whom life below the Mason-Dixon is pure oxygen. Except Wainwright's huge, friendly persona is more down to earth. Fuzzier, growlier. Boomier. And without all the gris-gris hoodoo. His infectious idea of a good time is dishing out homemade blends of roly-poly rhythms that speak directly to your feet. It's part bluesy bluster, swampy rock-and-soul, churchy fever, sipped sweet tea: the tenets of Southern roots. Though above all is *Boom Town's* instant accessibility. "If It Ain't Got Soul-Part 1" delivers the band's calling card in audible, partyable format. Scented by cornbread and honeysuckle, "Genuine Southern Hospitality" and "WildRoot Farm" each craft sincere, detailed loveletters to the platitudes of the Southern experience. "WildRoot Rumble," however, is just pure burn: an ultra tight, tense, and tireless (breathless, for harpist Stephen Kampa) instrumental. And at seven pieces, the WildRoots nicely fill the room with whatever's on their mind. With three-sevenths of them being saxophones, extra golden strength is always at the ready. That's what freely tosses "Stop Bossin' Me Baby" about like a beach ball. What slams those downbeats peppered about the organ-slinked "Reaper's on the Prowl" with such locomotive force. Yet being the Blues Music Award's "Pinetop Perkins Piano Player of the Year" for 2013 and 2014, Wainwright can scorch the porch with little to no accompaniment, pumping a mighty mean boogie woogie. "Two Lane Blacktop Revisited" and



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-pooper 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.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

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.



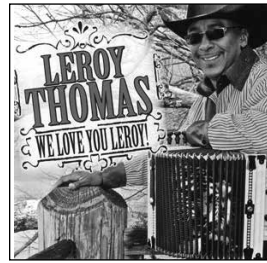
This 85-minute, ten-song set, played to a packed house in 1995, is audiovisual proof of that scorching showmanship, capturing Walker at his most vivid: howling into the mic with trademarked fervor while continuously feeding his Gibson’s humbuckers with tense, treble action. Following him straight out 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 Nutall 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.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

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 squee-zebox 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.

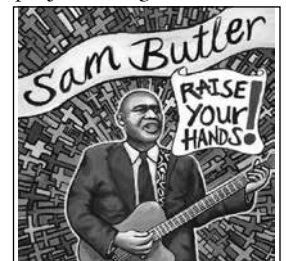
DENNIS ROZANSKI

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



godsend, even if only for “Sanctuary,” a bruised soliloquy that movingly ekes comfort with every intimate exhalation from Butler’s heaving lungs and every excitement from Collier’s sweeping hands.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

FERNANDO PEREZ
West African Music for Fingerstyle Guitar

STEFAN GROSSMAN’S
GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

Right on cue, *West African Music for Fingerstyle Guitar* arrives just in time to scratch the world’s growing obsession with so-called “desert blues,” a catchall for any moody hypnosis typically originating from a Saharan address. Fernando Perez knows the regional secrets of how to make six strings emote that distinctively forlorn way. But none of the reliant skills, songs and perspectives were absorbed from, say, a pile of Ali Farka Touré records or a spin of Baaba Maal’s *Djam Leelii*. Instead, Perez trekked his inquisitive guitar across Africa’s burning sands, straight into enlightenment with the masters themselves, the resident griots, on their home plots of dirt. That’s the source of this tutorial’s how-to wisdom. Perez even works in little techniques to inventively simulate the open-string ring of kora and a balafon’s percussive rumble, two indigenous mainstays of acoustic West African traditionalism. Rich with tumbling arpeggios, nimble phrases, and evocative melodies set adrift upon almighty grooves are six original and traditional spellbinders steeped in the mystique of Mali and Senegal. All are instrumentals; each is more alluring than the last. Perez’s own “Mali Blues” provides welcoming sanctuary for Delta licks to blend in amongst the Timbuktu flow. “Kulanjan” is an ancient Manding song,



one of the music’s proud cornerstones, the root of the roots, if you will.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JOE STANLEY

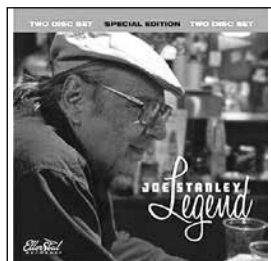
Legend
ELLERSOUL (2 CDS)

Joe knew everyone. Well, certainly everyone who ever made music around the nucleus of Washington D.C., starting back in those pomade-and-pompadour days, as R&B began morphing into rock-and-roll, when he and the Saxtons reigned as kings of the capital. Right up to his passing in 2007, Stanley was the

hometown, go-to saxophone brute, whose hard-shelled, barroom-friendly horn blasted forth with the hugest heart of gold. His client list smeared across genres, reading like some Hall

of Fame dream team: Big Joe Turner, Link Wray, Sam Cooke, Charlie Daniels, Marvin Gaye, on and on. Wave after wave kept coming: Danny Gatton, Roy Buchanan, then drummer Big Joe Maher and ace keyboardist John Cocuzzi.

So, *Legend* sounds just about right. Yet to ride this time machine, your heart needn’t skip a beat with mention of Benny’s Rebel Room, Diamond Jim’s, or any of the other beloved 1960s hotspots along 14th Street (all of which Billy Hancock hits while strolling down memory lane on an extended bonus interview). Its fun is totally unconditional. So much so that the double-disc set doesn’t identify session dates or locations. All we know for sure is that one hour is studio, one hour is



live, and both are phenomenal. Both also find Maher and Cocuzzi among those helping turn back the clock by way of “Deep Purple,” “September Song,” and “Walkin’ with Mr. Lee.” “Pennies from Heaven” even rips. And tough tenor? You best don hip waders for the dirty depths of an alternate run through “Jambalaya,” the Hank Williams tune. Around Stanley, grand old tunes are ageless, not nostalgic.

Each session boasts its own charms. Behind the glass, Stanley croons a wee bit, but instrumentals keep his embouchure locked onto the reed most of the time. Plus, the organ escort is so decadently cheesy, you’re grateful for the bump in cholesterol. Onstage, singing is a lot more plentiful, piano overtakes organ, and there’s all the priceless bandstand banter that turns any room into 219 Old Town, circa 1996.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



LAZER LLOYD

Lazer Lloyd
LOTS OF LOVE

Israel isn’t exactly known to be a wellspring of blues players, let alone conspicuous ax men. And so it came to pass that Lazer Lloyd went out from the land of New York and has become the instantly recognizable fuzzy face of Israeli blues. Wearing an Old Testament beard yet rocking out guitar solos as wiry as his mane of whiskers makes him easy to spot. And given the honest conviction of his performance, Lloyd is being spotted on bandstands everywhere from Mike’s Place and the Yellow Submarine, in Jerusalem, to Rosa’s Lounge and Buddy Guy’s Legends, in Chicago. “Rockin in the Holy Land”

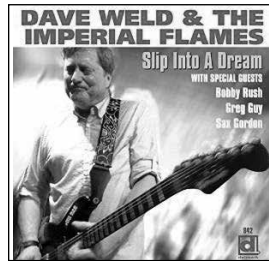
tells some of that biographical story in song, with the gist being that he’s been tearing up stages and studios ever since arriving on vacation in 1994. This self-titled session, cut in Tel Aviv for the Chicago-based Lots of Love label, covers the stylistic bases in the span of 12 songs. In concert, Lloyd’s been heard to dip into “Sunshine of Your Love” and “Purple Haze.” Here, his originals remain the emphasis, with Hendrixian bluster (“Set My Soul Free”), proverbial slow blues (“Time to Love”), and blue-eyed soul (“Broken Dreams”). His music is certainly full of heart; his own heart, in fact. So for every time the weight of the world comes crashing down, Lloyd then warmly extends his hand with a positive affirmation. Using that math, his heavy, north Mississippi saunter through “Burning Thunder” sparks “Never Give Up,” a beautifully languid hang-in-there pep talk. But then life’s pendulum swings back again, as the distorted crunch to “Out of Time” yells out that the land of milk and honey isn’t always such.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

DAVE WELD & THE IMPERIAL FLAMES

Slip Into a Dream
DELMARK

Guitar hellion Dave Weld hung with all the Chicago rowdies. He tore up Sweet Peas on 43rd with Hound Dog Taylor’s infamous Houserockers. Then headquarters shifted to the 1815 Club, another West Side hole-in-the-wall, with Eddie Shaw and Hubert Sumlin, Howlin’ Wolf’s old pack. He palled around with mentor/slideslinger J.B. Hutto. Most well-known, though, were those ten



years roughhousing joints alongside Lil’ Ed, as one of the founding Blues Imperials. Understandably, Weld’s mindset is pure unhinged attack. Blast away, in other words. Most times that equates with bottlenecking the bejesus out of whatever’s around. At all times it means singing like Hutto: Shouting out your thoughts as another way to keep listeners’ adrenaline jacked. Co-vocalist Monica Myhre also belts (and purrs). That way your whole presentation—hothead guitar, ram-bunctious band, hyper song tempos—tugs continuously at the leash. Time to catch a breath becomes spare. Though to be fair, Weld’s arrangements cut no one slack, forcing even the horn section to race—trumpet, tenor, and trombone, huffing and puffing—after “Take Me Back.” Bobby Rush does his own form of huffing and puffing when spiking “20% Alcohol,” the lone cover, with a stiff shot of harmonica. Brashly more conspicuous is the cameo debut of Greg Guy, Buddy’s expectedly fire-handed son, whose guitar goes stone crazy on “Too Bad, So Sad.” All this unruliness eventually bottoms out with “Tremble,” *Slip Into a Dream’s* lowlife highlight. It’s an unrelenting boozy stomp that, between Sax Gordon’s baritone squalor and Weld’s caterwauling, slaps you sober.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



SONNY SIMMONS
Reincarnation
ARHOOLIE

Resurrection. Rebirth. *Reincarnation*: All terms apply to that metamorphic period when sound adventurer/alto saxophonist Sonny Simmons began to emerge from the darkness.

BLUES REVIEWS

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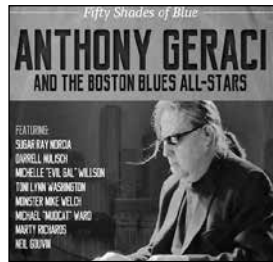
He was one of the 1960s jazz avengers, whose horn had joined the avant-garde revolt proffered by the likes of Albert Ayler and, unmistakably evident here, John Coltrane. Sonny Rollins, Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus, and McCoy Tyner could all vouch for him.

Then, the plummet. Close to two decades were spent lost, surviving on the streets of San Francisco: homeless, divorced, destitute—busted, all the way around. So went the '70s and '80s. That's why this particularly inspired club date is so significant. Because unless you were seated at Barb's BBQ, in Olympia, Wash., that June night in 1991, this live performance comes as a brand-new, never-heard epiphany of Simmons at the very cusp of reclaimed eminence. He's not blowing free-form pandemonium, though. But more shapely stuff instead, with distinct heads (and tails) declared in unison with the likewise fiery trumpet of Barbara Donald, his ex-wife. And with heavy backbones too, vamped by pianist Travis Shook's chordal chanting, Court Crawford's threading bass, as well as the drum violence and cymbal splatter of Zarak Simmons, their son who serves exceedingly audible notice that he'd indeed trained with Elvin Jones. That means percussion never relegates to the background. Just perfect, since Simmons is in a Trane kind of mood: entering with reed ecstatically afire, declaring themes in unison with Donald before widening the space with protracted improvisational explorations as tense as they are heated.

The setlist ends up mapping out the future, its songs foretelling Simmons' impending studio comeback albums. The harp-bop title track and more mercurial "American Jungle Theme" are extended exertions with his then 57-year-old fingers ranging

restlessly up and down the horn, shrieking, squawking, straining, sailing—searing. "Ancient Ritual" is the real voyage, taking 17 minutes of sustained heat to resolve. Only the (some-what) sweet and (intentionally) sour moments of "Body and Soul" calm the beast, whereas "Over the Rainbow" is Donald's own showplace for the balladic lyricism cast aside up to that point. An amazing snapshot capturing the moment when Simmons, now 82, relit the fuse to greatness.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



ANTHONY GERACI & THE BOSTON BLUES ALL-STARS *Fifty Shades of Blue* DELTA GROOVE

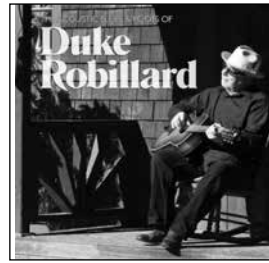
Anthony Geraci was an original founding member of both Sugar Ray Norcia's Bluetones and Ronnie Earl's Broadcasters. But yelling out loudest and clearest through *Fifty Shades of Blue* are those invaluable nights the pianist flapped keys alongside Big Walter Horton, Hubert Sumlin, and a million more first-generation heroes just as championed. (Jimmy Rogers remains his personal favorite.) The atmosphere here wafts thick with the aroma of yesteryear. Clearly, everyone within this cohesive ad hoc Boston bunch read the memo about laying down a session with traditional craftsmanship. That goes for guitar stud Monster Mike Welch as much as for harp masters Norcia and Darrell Nulisch. Geraci's crisp, detailed solos do their part injecting character into a rather Muddy "Sad But True," the Ray Charles' haunted "Your Turn to Cry," and the rest of a setlist seemingly weathered by storied pasts. Truth be told,

every single track came from Geraci. Yes, even the fine bit of Delta-to-Detroit storytelling locomoting through "Heard That Tut-wiler Whistle Blow." Since Geraci is a devoted piano man, all vocals get farmed out. Those two singing harpists claim the bulk. Michelle "Evil Gal" Wilson helps get corpuscles flowing from her tad naughty interchange with Norcia, while handcuffed to the title track's T-Bone bounce. Yet no voices are required to levitate the "Blues for David Maxwell" memorial—only Otis Rush-via-Ronnie Earl-like magic. "Don't Keep Me Waiting" is as pained as any of them. But aberrantly elegant too, akin to a champagne sipper misplaced at the beer-and-shots corner bar. Then again, hurting isn't simplistically monochromatic; it comes in *Fifty Shades of Blue*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

DUKE ROBILLARD *The Acoustic Blues & Roots Of* STONY PLAIN

Away from the amplifiers and far from any neon, guitarist Duke Robillard exalts the porch song using only organic gusto to electrify these *Acoustic Blues & Roots*. However, a bit more room that a porch was needed to fit Duke's band, singer Maria Muldaur, fingerpicker Mary Flower, harmonica Jerry Portnoy, and the updrafts from Billy Novick's indispensable clarinet. All of them plus the whole Providence Mandolin Orchestra, too. Still, a rustic, backdated mindset is what steers this tour through the renaissance of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, when genres were being defined by the likes of the Delmore Brothers ("Nashville Blues"), Tampa Red ("What Is It That Tastes Like Gravy?") and Charlie Christian (whose "Profoundly Blue" is notably rendered in duet with Jay McShann, the late piano legend). Helping turn back the clock are Duke's guitars, mandolins and ukuleles, each as old as the



songs themselves. (Gearheads will drool over the track-by-track crediting of every vintage axe, from the turn-of-the-century Joseph Bohmann model and a 1938 Gibson L-7 to that killer tenor harp, a wood-headed banjo that paints "My Old Kentucky Home" in perfect sepia tones.) A few tracks are live, direct from the bandstand. "I'm Gonna Buy Me a Dog (To Take the Place of You)" is both: his own crowd pleaser cheered on by a Rhode Island crowd. Harvest moons, muddy water, and those doggone "Big Bill Blues" keep Robillard's self-styled croon busy. But only the dobro-swept "Jimmie's Texas Blues" provokes actual yodeling. That's right, yodeling.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

FRED SOKOLOW *Blues for the Ukulele* *Songs of Hawaii for the Ukulele* *Ukulele Legends* STEFAN GROSSMAN'S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVDs)

Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster" is the real culprit, the thunder-clap from out of a sunshiny sky, the bad seed which transforms—corrupts, some may accuse—the adorable ukulele from happy camper into gnarly hellhound. Well, almost. Your eyes will bug nonetheless watching the unthinkable act of rumbling a bottleneck roughshod down its neck. Because right there, spitting out that wily slide riff, the world's friendliest instrument actually scraps and scuffles. But then instructor Fred Sokolow keeps

plowing ahead, imparting whatever other blues moves—Muddy's "Hoochie Coochie" lick, dirty finger slurs, Blind Blake's sportin' right hand—get the uke's mini-mojo workin'. Its characteristically strummy personality toughens up, zapping out pinpoint notes. Blue notes, no less. And chord-melody playing only beefs up the attitude that much more with extra harmony oomph. Perfect, since the eight-song *Blues for the Ukulele* repertoire is the real deal. Enter Bessie Smith's chordally rich "Wasted Life Blues," the cryptic "Diddie Wah Diddie," the Skid Row anthem "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out." Memphis Minnie's "When the Levee Breaks" likewise floods out dire emotion with a nifty dip-down lick of its own. All told, you get fed a steady diet of historic grooves and groans that fed everyone from Lead Belly and B.B. to the Stones and Led Zeppelin. Not bad company. But speaking of bad company: From now on, the sweet, little ukulele ain't sweet no more.

No—ukulele does not mean "party animal." But close, though. "Jumping flea" is the rough translation from its native Hawaiian tongue; nonetheless a comparable referral to its pint-sized, fun-loving nature. In its honor, Sokolow lays out a complete luau of hapa-haoli songs, a feast of Tin Pan Alley types whose lyrics paint tropical visions of grass huts, moonlit shores, and those pretty "Pearly Shells." You're set wise to the vexing question of "I Wonder Where My Little Hula Girl Has Gone." And, better yet, to the secret pineapple chord. "Blue Hawaii" gently sways in all of its utter loveliness, just as enchanting as when Bing and then Elvis became infatuated. Don Ho's songbook supplies crowd pleasers as irre-



sistible as the quintessential singalong “Tiny Bubbles.” As always, Sokolow comes researched well beyond all the chords, licks, and lyrics, dropping tidbits of historical insight amongst the technical know-how. He’s not just a captivating pair of hands to gawk at, you know. Not even when he’s speed-strums “On the Beach at Waikiki.”

Biggies in the mini-world of ukulele: That’s who Johnny Marvin and Roy “Wizard of the Strings” Smeck are. Same goes for the five other *Legends*, each honored here for their own signature way of charming the beloved instrument into public consciousness. Younger generations might have a better shot of identifying Cliff “Ukulele Ike” Edwards as the wish-upon-a-star voice of Disney’s Jiminy Cricket. But back when the uke was one vital third of the 1920s uniform (rounded out with raccoon coat and a porkpie hat), he was the cat’s pajamas, plucking out sunshine like “Singing in the Rain.” Of questionable purity is goofy George Formby’s “My Ukulele,” 1930s-grade innuendo mischief. “12th Street Rag” is just great hotsy-totsy shenanigans based on three notes and one snazzy flick of the strings. And by the time TV sets turned on in the ‘50s, Arthur Godfrey was waiting, pitching sweet woo via his stardusted “Making Love Ukulele Style.” Ian Whitcomb’s “The Uke Is On the March” could well be the collective anthem, but instead freshly salutes the ukulele’s current upsurge in popularity. The big finale? “Tiptoe Through the Tulips,” of course. Being for ukulelians what “Lady of Spain” is to accordionists, it’s a mandatory must, so it’s here. (Fortunately, Tiny Tim’s fingers-down-a-blackboard falsetto is not). To all this classic fun Sokolow adds a sparkling handful of miniaturized solos and chordal spins around the circle-of-fifths.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



ZAC HARMON
Right Man Right Now
BLIND PIG

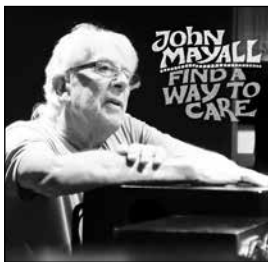
His blues got soul. Hip, contemporary relevancy, too. That makes forward-thinker Zac Harmon a man of the times: *Right Man Right Now* even says so right in its title. Now in his 50s, the Jackson, Mississippi-born journeyman began his career at 16, playing guitar for Sam Myers. At 21, he was in 1980s Los Angeles, working as a studio musician, then songwriter and producer for albums, film, television, and commercials. At one point, Michael Jackson signed his staff-writer paychecks. But since 2003, Harmon has been performing his own blues and filling his mantle with the trophies they’re awarded. Grounded in gently rocking groove and flush with a remarkably unforced style, this sixth album is quite the natural seducer. No wonder there’s an understandable impulse to liken Harmon to a modernized “Down Home Blues”-era Z.Z. Hill. Just beware, though, that embedded within all the mannered smoothness and contagious choruses can be sharp-tongued commentary. “Back of the Yards,” “Stand Your Ground,” even “Long Live the Blues,” pack a bite in their messaging. “Raising Hell,” on the other hand, just wants to have fun. Helping out is the guest turbulence from Lucky Peterson’s talkative organ, a shot of Anson Funderburgh guitar, and a full-on duet with Bobby Rush (on, aptly enough, the jellyroll-king anthem “Hump in Your Back”). Although Harmon can effortlessly sidestep the need to play anyone else’s music by filling entire albums with his own original creativity,

harnessing the dark vengeance of John Lee Hooker’s talking-blues “I’m Bad Like Jesse James” proved too tempting. Covering Little Milton’s “Ain’t No Big Deal on You” immediately afterward was then needed to cleanse the palette with lots of funky jiggle.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JOHN MAYALL
Find a Way to Care
FORTY BELOW

John Mayall just turned 81, in November. Yet, after making handfuls of fresh records in every decade since the 1960s, after flogging guitar heroes with names of Clapton, Green, Montoya, and Trout, the Godfather of British Blues refuses to idly rest on his illustrious laurels. The original Bluesbreaker is still actively out there touring as well as giving his studio all for albums like *Find a Way to Care*. Here, the distinguishing twist is not necessarily the snazzy horn charts occasionally popping up around his regular three-piece touring band. But that, more often than not, the production intentionally keeps Mayall’s multi-instrumental hands on a keyboard. Any species of keyboard: “I Feel So Bad” wields a fleet Wurlitzer, while clavinet wraps sexy urges in “Ropes and Chains.” “Crazy Lady” is a double-fisted piano pumper. That saves those heavier, grander Hammond chords for blanket-ing “Ain’t No Guarantees.” Still, “Mother In-Law Blues” fires him up enough to bust out the harmonica. And that’s Mayall placing Muddy’s “Long Distance Call” via his own unhurried guitar. However, guitarist Rocky Athas is usually the one zapping concentrated



heat into tight spaces, as in the Lonnie Brooks shuffle “I Want All My Money Back.” Half the setlist keeps on borrowing, hitting up Percy Mayfield, Lightnin’ Hopkins, then Charles Brown, whose suavely chilled blueprint for “Drifting Blues” is similarly followed with brushed drums and tinkling piano. The other half originates directly from Mayall himself, who, in taking stock of life, shares blissful “Long Summer Days” and the title track’s gentle wisdom.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



HANOI MASTERS
War is a Wound, Peace is a Scar
GLITTERBEAT

Devastatingly haunting blues are devastatingly haunting blues, regardless of language, category or protocol. You don’t need a doctor to diagnose Pham Mong Hai’s grieving heart as heavy. Or a translator to tell you that the news from “Road to Home,” delivered amid a zither’s pelting shower of rain, can only be bad. The prevailing sense of untamed melancholy speaks for itself, as all the little boxes on life’s Have a Dreadful Day checklist get checked off, one-by-one: “Doomed Love.” “Help Us in This Life.” “Taking Your Spirit to the Next World.” Still, you’d never file the aching innards of *War is a Wound, Peace is a Scar* between, say, Son House and Otis Rush records. Not conventionally, at least. Emotionally, though? Deservedly so.

Because these spectral field recordings, taped inside dingy backrooms hidden about Hanoi over the summer of 2014, are of inarguable blues. Vietnamese-style. Unadorned, strangely beautiful, universally hypnotic,

painfully private, and totally immersive. But, above all, skin-and-bones bare: musically as well as psychologically. Insulated from outside influence and immune to the passage of modern time, they’re a sort of country blues played on exotic, acoustic instruments nearly as ancient as the emotions they stir. Whammy-bar technology—nineteenth-century, no less—creates taut strings with that telltale queasy quiver, making already fragile, jittery melodies tremble all the more, perfectly complimenting an indigenous singing style that’s also inherently shaky. Clickety-clack percussion mimics drip-drop metallic raindrops. And the *k’ni*, a mutant fiddle partially clenched between the teeth, turns Quoc Hung’s mouth into a bizarre resonator with each pluck of its string. In turn, “The Wind Blows It Away” becomes an android recital on the world’s most primitive vocoder.

Ian Brennan, the Grammy-winning producer/songcatcher who grabbed the world’s ear with Tinariwen, the Malawi Mouse Boys and, just earlier this year, the Zomba Prison Project, ups the stark realism by recording everyone close. So claustrophobically close that the oxygen gets sucked out of your lungs whenever someone inhales before going on a vowel-rich vocal run. So near that you can just about feel every twinge and twang of a treble string. (YouTube the album’s mini-documentary for an actual peek.)

Here, there is no redo, no retouch. So when the crooked voice of Vo Tuan Minh, the Skip James of the bunch with a crooked falsetto that works far above his guitar, breaks and momentarily disintegrates on its skyward ascent through “I Long to Return to My Hometown,” that perfect imperfection stays put as a badge of authenticity. After all, the blues are a dish best served raw.

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