



**2018**  
**SAVE**  
**THE**  
**DATES!**

**APRIL 21**

**JUNE 23**

**ALONZO'S**  
**SEPT 3**

**OCT 20**

**NOV 24**

**BBS**

**SHOWS**

**MOJOWORKIN.COM**

**BLUES REVIEWS**  
CONTINUED



saxophonist Johnny Griffin thrice dials up the suspense. First, locked onto the trademark cresting riff that cycles through “Full House.” Ten minutes and 48 seconds later, the hall absolutely explodes in applause after having just been divinely treated. “Round Midnight,” the after-hours evergreen, wafts into the careening momentum of “Blue ’N Boogie/West Coast Blues.” Wes lights the fuse, but Griffin’s pungency eventually grabs the reins, even taking the coda, unassisted.

Three years after “Twisted Blues” eventually shut down the evening, after popcorning and cascading for a shave under 14 minutes, Montgomery was stolen by a sudden heart attack, at age 45.

Up to now, such a fabled performance has only lived on—illegitimately—in the form of bootlegs. Coveted bootlegs, but bootlegs none the less. Gallantly, *In Paris* is the first-ever official release. Worthy of the honor, Resonance Records—being the class-act, nonprofit label “devoted to preserving jazz and discovering the rising stars of tomorrow” that they are—has lovingly remastered the original Office of French Radio and Television (ORTF) reels. The result (actually, the label’s fifth Montgomery rescue mission) is a sonic feast with immaculate, widescreen fidelity. Thirty-two pages of essays (including an interview with Mabern, the ensemble’s lone survivor) and gig photos gild the double-disc set. (For the full tour, check out its own YouTube video.)

As guitar heroes go, let rock have Jimi at *Winterland*, and blues their B.B. *Live at the Regal*. Jazz now finally has the definitive *Wes In Paris*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**ROBERT NIGHTHAWK**

*The Robert Nighthawk*

*Collection: 1937-52*

ACROBAT (2 CDS)

**T**he slide guitars of Muddy and Elmore are among those owing a debt of gratitude to Robert Nighthawk. Granted, the telltale way Waters would swoop down and gouge out strings or how James violently broom-dusted them were different beasts from Nighthawk’s waves of molten glass. Versus, say, Earl Hooker’s fluid glide, over which Nighthawk’s buttery fingerprints were audibly smudged. But whether covertly or overtly seeding inspiration, the calm, cool and collected bottlenecking inferno from Helena, Ark., set up shop on the ground floor of Chicago blues.

1937 was the year. For perspective: Robert Johnson was up on the third-floor of a Dallas building cutting “Hellhound on My Trail,” along with the second half of his cottonpatch canon. Muddy, Elmore and Wolf were still years out from crossing the Mason-Dixon. And Chicago’s next eventual future—Magic Sam, Otis Rush and Buddy Guy—was barely yet born, hanging out in cribs instead of clubs. Yet Nighthawk was already on the job in Illinois, pouring forth side after side with a Bluebird label glued atop. “Tough Luck,” “G-Man” and “Lonesome World” were among the many. His right-hand man for the lion’s share was none other than Sonny Boy Williamson I, the conspicuous hurricane on harmonica. Early on, Big Joe Williams’s second guitar rounded out the trio of Delta studs, as the densely tangled “Sweet Pepper Mama” attests. Within months, though, a piano rolled in, pumped “Mean Black Cat” with a more metropolitan demeanor, and ended up sticking around (via the likes of Speckled Red and Pinetop Perkins) as near-constant companion for the duration of Nighthawk’s studio career.

Trivia: Robert’s 1909 birth certificate never read

Nighthawk. McCollum was his actual name. Though thanks to a brush with the law, his stack of shellac records credited an evolving parade of alter-egos disguised as Robert Lee McCoy, Ramblin’ Bob, the quizzical Peetie’s Boy—all of whom perform here. The alias that famously stuck—to the point of becoming a brand name—was, of course, Robert Nighthawk, lifted straight from his “Prowling Night Hawk” theme song.

As if on cue, that cut is the first of 48 by which the double-disc *Robert Nighthawk Collection* tracks his acoustic-to-electric span of 1937-1952. Not an easy task. For not only did the renowned rambler beat a path back and forth between Delta juke joints and Chicago studios. But when in town, he promiscuously hopped from label to label, with Decca, Aristocrat, Chess and United Records all grabbing pieces of the Nighthawk mystique.

And mystique it was, pairing that silkiest of smooth slides with the smokiest of smooth voices. Magically, dilemma (“Feel So Bad”) or even crisis (“Prison Bound”) turned into calm soliloquy. “Friar’s Point Blues,” which had to have billowed into Muddy’s impressionable ear, was a formative masterpiece. But for pure technique, “Anna Lee Blues” and the sexually-charged “Black Angel Blues” were the epitome—grease was no match for their frictionless properties.

But Nighthawk didn’t always ooze downhome composure. With the flip of a switch, out blasted the rocking “Take It Easy Baby,” the downhome bummer “Bricks in My Pillow” and the incredibly basal “Nighthawk Boogie.” This was the kind of intoxicating stuff that got Maxwell Street stomping.

All told, what more could you ask of a *Collection* that offers a two-hour chance to enjoy exactly what the Robert Nighthawk fan club (B.B. King and Son Seals were members, too) enjoyed? How cool is that?

DENNIS ROZANSKI