

Film Shakedowns

The American Folk-Blues Festival:

The British Tours 1963-1966 (Hip-O

B0008353; 77:00) ★★½ It was one

hell of an exchange program: Young

British r&b musicians invaded the

States while many of the blues play-

ers they idolized journeyed to the

continent. This fourth DVD in the

commendable series of black-and-

white performance footage of the

caravan is a blockbuster. Big Joe

Williams uses his piercingly urgent

style to put a head lock on "Baby,

Please Don't Go" and Howlin' Wolf

proves he's in full possession of all

his paranormal facilities. Sonny Boy

Williamson, dressed to the nines,

uses his harp to get to the subtle

beauty of deep emotion in "Keep It

To Yourself." The pace never flags

with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Lightnin'

Hopkins, Muddy Waters, Big Joe

Turner, Lonnie Johnson, Junior

Wells, mere mortal Sugar Pie

DeSanto and superlative sidemen like

Hubert Sumlin.

Ordering info: reelintheyears.com

Memphis Slim: Live At Ronnie Scott's

London (Image 3494; 58:00) ★★½ Just

when you figure this mid-'80s club date for

a thrilling evening of Slim—his vocals,

blues-and-boogie piano and facial expres-

sions all rivet your attention—workaday

local musicians appear from off camera

and stick around. No help either that old

bebop jive talker Slim Gaillard briefly

pounds the 88s and then vanishes. Still, this

DVD is worth viewing because it's the only

one available showing the expatriate in his

last years.

Ordering info: image-entertainment.com

B.B. King: Standing Room Only (S'More

07002; 62:00) ★★★ This Atlantic City, N.J.,

casino appearance, circa 1989, has the

beloved guitarist and his seven-piece band

following the familiar script like clockwork—

"The Thrill Is Gone" and other favorites get

played, the blues icon hands out mono-

grammed guitar picks to the audience and

so on. But King has a commanding pres-

ence and immerses himself in the music.

Ordering info: smoreent.com

Bobby Rush: Live At Ground Zero Blues

Club (MVD Visual 1399; 74:00) ★★★ Rush, a

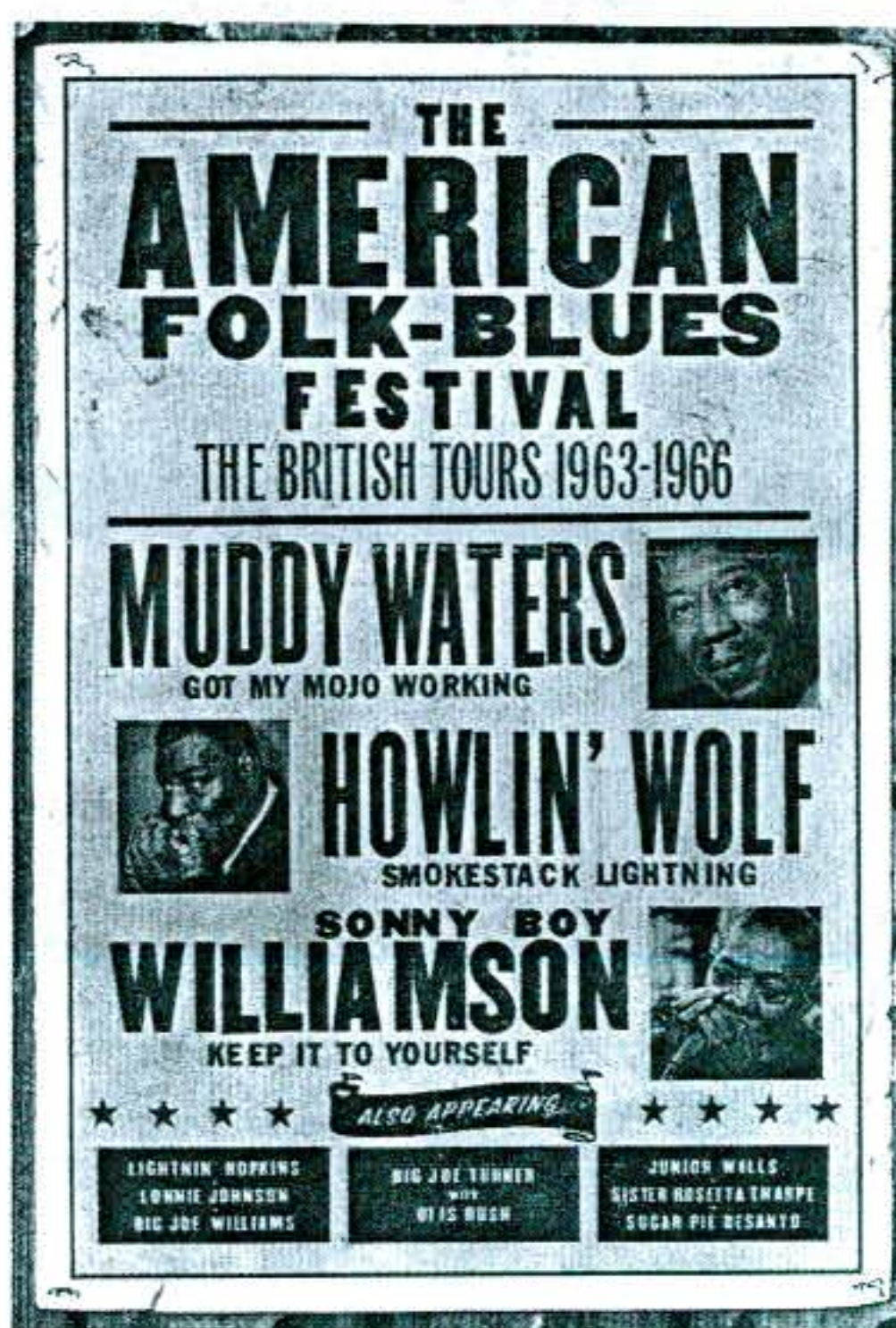
well-respected veteran of the Southern

chitlin' circuit, works hard giving his two

cents on the strains of marital relations laid

out in the lyrics of songs performed a few

years ago with his hot band at actor



Morgan Freeman's place in the Delta. He

mixes bawdy fun—four female dancers

rotate their rumps so often you'll scream

for them to stop—with dead-serious blues

and funk business.

Ordering info: mvdvisual.com

Carey & Lurrie Bell: Getting' Up (Delmark

1791; 74:18) ★★★ Did ailing Chicago blues

master Carey have his own mortality in

mind when he sang and blew harmonica on

two hometown club dates last year along-

side his guitar-playing son, Lurrie, and

band? What crossed his mind during a

glowing four-song duo recital with Lurrie in

his son's home? It sure sounds as if Carey,

who died this past spring, was secure in his

knowledge that making honestly felt music

gave purpose to his time on Earth.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Eddy Clearwater: Rawa Blues Festival

(Cleartone 001; 90:00) ★★★ Clearwater

once rode a horse onto an outdoor concert

stage. Nothing so outlandish happens here

in a Polish auditorium in 2004—The Chief

wears a colorful Native American war bon-

net (he's part Cherokee), does a few Chuck

Berry hops and plays guitar behind his

head. Backed by his A1 touring band, the

youthful 69-year-old brings an emotional

authenticity to choice classics like Robert

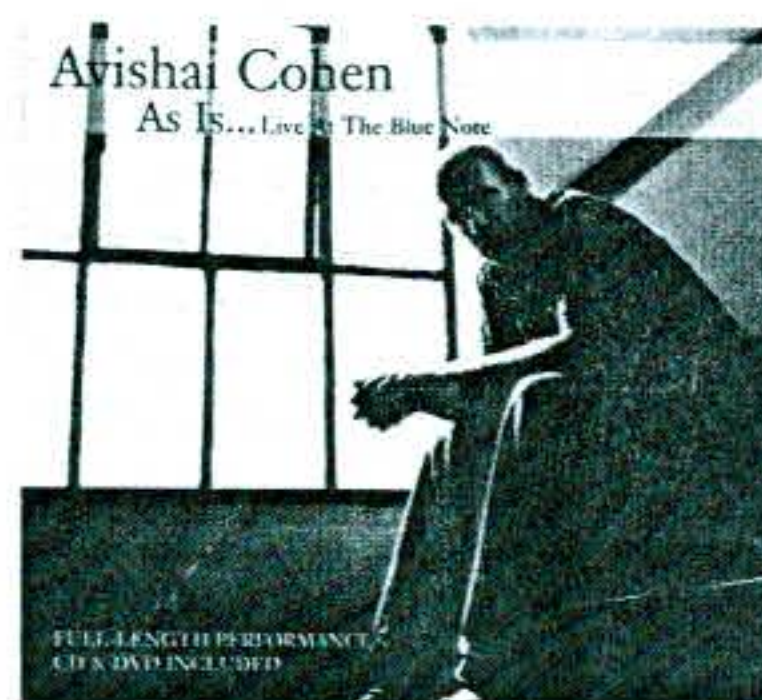
Johnson's "That's All Right" and to long-

lasting original numbers. Minor annoy-

ance: too many slow blues songs stall the

set's flow. DB

Ordering info: eddyclearwater.com



Avishai Cohen

As Is ... Live At The Blue Note

RAZDAZ/HALF NOTE 4531

★★½

Those lucky enough to catch Avishai Cohen

play at the IAJE Conference in New York in

January left with a renewed appreciation for the

Israel-born bassist's overtly physical, fearless

approach to playing and music making. He

pounded, slapped, slid and fast-walked his way

through a set of original compositions that

reflected his roots in jazz, classical and Middle

Eastern traditions. The same holds true for *As Is*,

recorded a few months earlier over the course of

an extended engagement at the Blue Note in

Manhattan.

A nearly 15-minute "Caravan," on which

Cohen plays electric bass, is the date's sole stan-

dard, and it's retrofitted with a harmonics-laden

opening, a rhythm-tricked head and a walking-

to-rocking bridge, incorporating references to

Jaco Pastorius and "Watermelon Man." Saxophonist

Jimmy Greene's inquisitive and

expansive soprano brings the tune to a boil

before Sam Barsh takes over on melodica.

Cohen also applies his electric to the ascending-

and-descending patterns of the opener, "Smash,"

another opportunity for Greene's searching

soprano lines to complement and challenge

rhythm players Cohen, keyboardist Barsh (using

heavy wah-wah) and drummer Mark Guillian.

Cohen really shines on acoustic bass. His

dark, beautifully centered, resonant tone comes

to the fore as he trades lines with Barsh on the

delicate ballad "Elli." Another piano trio piece,

"Remembering"—similarly laid back and

poignant—has the leader countering Barsh's

lines and, later, taking off on another bass solo.

Cohen goes it alone on "Bass Suite #1," setting

up a Latin-funk groove for an elongated melody

played by Greene and trumpeter Diego Urcola.

The double-disc release (it includes a sepa-

rate DVD documenting the gig) offers another

convincing demonstration of Cohen's instru-

mental prowess and earthy, refreshing musical

sensibility. —Philip Booth

As Is Smash; Elli; Bass Suite #1; Feedio; Remembering; Caravan; (62:16)

Personnel Avishai Cohen, acoustic and electric bass; Sam Barsh, keyboards, melodica; Mark Guillian, drums; Diego Urcola, trumpet; Jimmy Greene, saxophones.

» Ordering info: avishaimusic.com