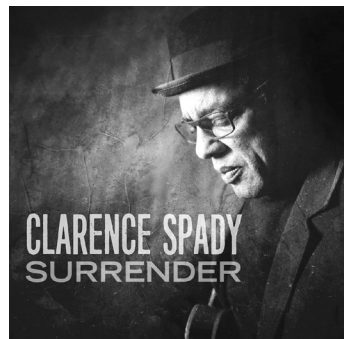
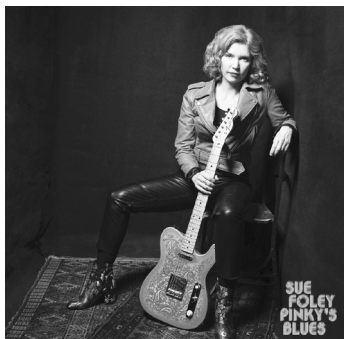


BLUES REVIEWS



SUE FOLEY
Pinky's Blues
STONY PLAIN

Think Texas roadhouse. Because *Pinky's Blues* is the most raw, real, longhorns-and-longnecks session that Canada's Sue Foley and her shocking-pink Telecaster ever committed to tape. And that's saying something, having been a fixture around Austin and atop the hallowed bandstand at Antone's. Not to mention all those jams with Jimmie Vaughan.

That sense is due, in part, to Texans permeating the setlist: Lavelle White ("Stop These Teardrops"), Frankie Lee Sims ("Boogie Real Low"), Angela Strehli ("Two Bit Texas Town"), Gatemouth Brown ("Okie Dokie Stomp"). Even in its new skin, Robert Nighthawk's "Someday" comes off as a high-plains drifter rather than a South Side grinder. And "Dallas Man" sounds for all its worth to have been boogying locally for dusty decades despite just being newly born from Foley's own pen.

But the roadhouse aura predominantly stems from the synergism between loosened players and Mike Flanigin's brilliantly sparse production. Namely, these blues sound just how they should: as if you're tucked into the back of a hole-in-the-wall beer joint as the band plays on, giving the instrumental "Pinky's Blues" a solid midtempo wringing and then shaking down "Southern Men," only to crawl inside "Say It's Not So." Accordingly, instinct figures heavily here since what you're hearing is live, off-the-

floor telepathy between Foley, Double Trouble drummer Chris Layton and compadre bassist Jon Penner (from Foley's early Antone's days). Twice, Flanigin's Hammond B3 pipes up. And once, Jimmie Vaughan's guitar snakes a rhythm line around "Hurricane Girl." The entire session feels winningly off the cuff, confirming that less is more when it comes to blues.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

CLARENCE SPADY
Surrender
NOLA BLUE

He has never been one for filling the shelf with his recorded works. But know this: After 13 years without an album, Clarence Spady's got his mojo working again. *Surrender*—six studio tracks plus three previously unreleased recordings from a 1999 gig at the River St. Jazz Café in Plains, PA—clocks in as only his third album in a quarter century. 2008's *Just Between Us* came before and, 12 years before that, was 1996's *Nature of the Beast*.

Spady, now 60, has much to reflect upon since last we met. He lets down his guard to do so with personal tales of pitfalls and gut punches that scratch their way up his throat as well as out from his guitar. Yet, in spite of the storm clouds, silver linings get found. The hellhounds snapping at "Addiction Game" give way to the cleansing epilogue that is "Surrender," a survivor's affirmation scarred by jail cells, rehabs and other broken shards of his past.

Arrangements do their part to also help buoy any emotional weightiness, as with the soulful treatment of "If My Life Was a Book" or, especially, the easy loping gait to "K-Man," a tribute devoted to Clarence's son whose life was cut short at only 25. "Good Conversation" lets Spady's teenage guitar protégé Adam Schultz get in his share of licks to set the jazzy R&B mood. On the other hand, "Down Home Blues," Z.Z. Hill's Saturday night anthem, comes off far down-homier when reduced to acoustic instruments that includes a prowling harmonica. Still, "Jones Falls Expressway" offers the most spectacular spot to view Spady fume away on guitar. The instrumental has Baltimore on its mind when racing through 10 fantastic minutes of sparring with saxophone and organ.

Spady demonstrates here—and onstage at the Reading Blues Festival in November—that a stethoscope isn't the only means of listening to a heart. A microphone or a guitar amplifier do the job just fine.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS
Classic Blues Artwork from the 1920's—Vol. 19

BLUES IMAGES
(2022 CALENDAR + CD)

Clearly, 2022 is the Year of Lead Belly. The larger-than-life songster is plastered on the cover of this year's *Classic Blues Artwork from the 1920's* calendar. He likewise owns January, again seen posing with 12-string in-

hand—but also heard wagging a slide up and down "Packin' Trunk," an early Blind Lemon Jefferson spinoff which serves as the accompanying CD's lead-off track. And if still not convinced, Lead Belly also grabs nine of the other 23 remaining tracks to relive a pair of his radio broadcasts: an audience-participation performance from 1945 followed by a curtain-call four years later. Combined, the set lists cover a cross section of his repertoire, from popular songs ("Skip to My Lou") and work songs ("Take This Hammer") to spirituals ("Swing Low, Sweet Chariot") and blues ("Good Morning Blues").

Rarity is only half of it, though. Granted, John Tefteller's six sense keeps finding needles in ancient blue haystacks with annual precision. Another resident example is Washboard Walter's long-lost Paramount pairing of "Wuffin' Blues" with "I Don't Care What You Do," sniffed out from the void. But the sonic quality of these shellac beauties is likewise staggering. Now just listening to Blind Willie Johnson rasp out "John the Revelator" in Technicolor fidelity hurts your throat. New appreciation also arises for the strangeness of Henry Thomas' pan pipes or the richness in Victoria Spivey's hornlike voice blowing through "The Alligator Pond Went Dry."

Rest assured all this rarity and fidelity are deeply rooted in the bitter earth of the blues: fortune tellers and two-timers, mighty floods, the hangman's scaffold, deep-sea drownings, cotton-hungry boll weevils, plus a dog named Blue (exalted in Kansas City Jim Jackson's rhyme-a-thon). Sex, too, of course. Memphis Minnie ("You Can't Give It Away"), Furry Lewis ("Jellyroll") and Blind Blake ("Back Door Slam Blues") see to that.

But no less valuable is the calendar, handily chock full of blues

dates. Without it you might forget that Mother's Day coincides with Robert Johnson's birthday this year, bringing new meaning to "Kind Hearted Woman" on May 8.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JIMMY CARTER

Blind Faith

RENAISSANCE/RPM STUDIO

Jimmy Carter has been there since Day 1, when a clutch of students at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Deaf and Blind banded together in heavenly song as the Blind Boys of Alabama. That was in 1939, and the last standing member of that original bunch has been running on blind faith ever since. But after all the records he's made with his gospel brethren, Carter just now cut his first solo album ... at 90ish years of age. Hold on, Father Time.

Blind Faith—both literal and metaphoric in Jimmy's case—refrains from a one-size-fits-all approach to gospel, trotting from the allegorical "Find Your Way Home" to the gypsy tango of "After the Storm" to a bluesy dialogue between Carter and his Maker that blindly asks "Why Me." Ron Pullman's production layers in elements both rustic (fiddle, an elastic dobro) and cosmopolitan (horns, a crystalline piano). Carter also shines brightly with help from Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica), Preservation Hall Jazz Band (melodic joy), Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind Choir (alma mater lift), Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh (Steel City lift) and Alan Parsons (engineer). "I Am With You Still," the album's first single, touchingly memorializes Jimmy's late friend and fellow Blind Boy, Clarence

Fountain, with choral-swept imagery that comes alive on its YouTubeable video.

Carter's singing voice may be a husk of what once was. But when it comes to soul music in its truest, humblest, human form, spirit always wins out. Listen to that heart-warmed conviction of a true believer ascend "Crossing the Threshold" on downy angel wings right after affirming *Blind Faith's* title track.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

REV. PEYTON'S BIG DAMN BAND

Dance Songs for Hard Times
THIRTY TIGERS

Rev. Peyton is a big man with a big beard and a Big Damn Band, best named for their hulking sound rather than the size of the squad. But as thunderous trios from Hound Dog Taylor to Link Wray once taught us, the quantity of players never has to hinder the quality of the hell being raised. Same goes for Peyton, whose primal force—triangulated by his wife Breezy's rat-a-tat washboard and Max Senteney's drum whippings—more than makes up for limited personnel.

Even more so here, when rocketing away from the country blues of 2017's *Front Porch Sessions* or 2011's starker revival of ol' Charley's songbook with *Peyton on Patton*. The Reverend's holler still fills the room with vibrato tremors. The added pin-you-to-the-wall part comes from slamming his 1954 Supro Dual Tone guitar into an amplifier to magnify those big, damn bunches of slide-n-snarl.

Dance Songs for Hard Times comes on strong for its entirety, an unobtrusive shake-the-shack disturb-the-neighbors soundtrack.

"Ways and Means," the lead single with its own YouTubeable laundromat video, sets off a chain reaction of 11 original explosions. "Rattle Can" snaps its tether in a gonzo rush of hard-slapped rockabilly energy, hiccupping out desirous requests. "Nothing's Easy But You and Me" does its pile-driving at a lurching grind. Just don't let grievances aired by the bleak ("Till We Die"), the woeful ("Sad Songs") or the desperate ("Come Down Angels") fool you, since none are afforded the moody atmosphere to wallow. This is, after all, a kickass dance album.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

SEAN CHAMBERS

That's What I'm Talkin' About: Tribute to Hubert Sumlin
QUARTO VALLEY

What separates *That's What I'm Talkin' About* from other tributes to the late, great Hubert Sumlin is that this one is personal. Having served several influential years as bandleader to number 43 on Rolling Stone's "100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time" meant Sean Chambers, a fretburner himself, would rip through 10 of these 11 tracks on a nightly basis alongside his mentor. "Hubert's Song," an original homage, is the newcomer.

Expectedly, the setlist is heavy with the scent of Howlin' Wolf, with whom Sumlin gained his immortality. But, for as familiar as you may be with such churners as "Louise," "Sittin' on Top of the World" or even the wickedly lurching "Howlin' For My Darling," never before have they blistered like this. Because, true to form, the swashbuckling Chambers redlines Stratocasters with fretwork scorched by blues-rocked intensity.

"Chunky," an instrumental of Hubert's, is first in line to be adrenalized. Bass, drums, and burbling organ up the urgency, tonnage, muscle and edge. In succession follow "Do the Do," sliced by a series of slide outbursts best described as frenzies, and then "Rockin' Daddy," sawed back and forth by its recurring crosscut riff. The sludge-trudge through "Forty Four" gives way to the massive string bends gouging out "Tailerdragger." Still, of all this fast, furious, finely-detailed licksmanship, "Goin' Down Slow" stands apart, precariously stacking its tension upon tension upon tension into quite the showstopper among showstoppers. As Wolf would say, ooh-ooh-wee.

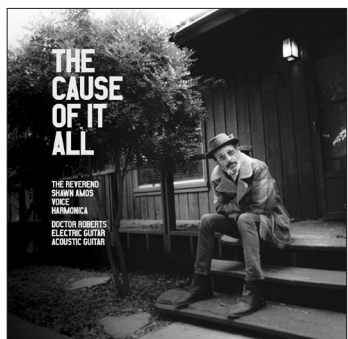
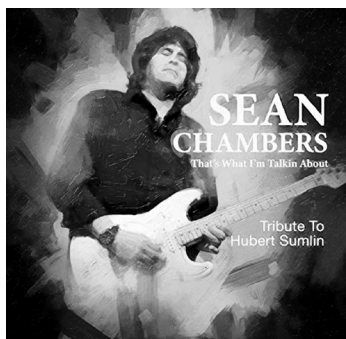
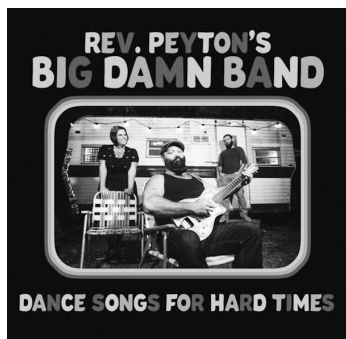
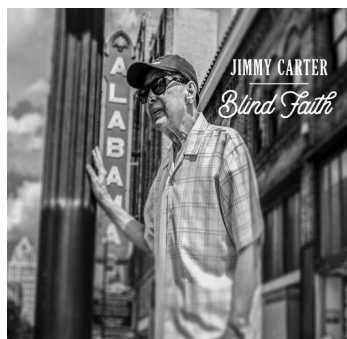
DENNIS ROZANSKI

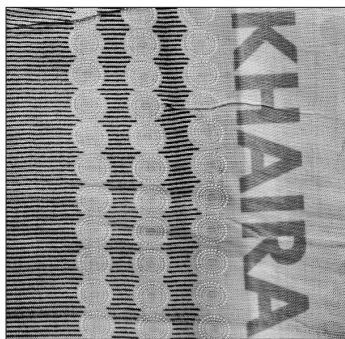
THE REV. SHAWN AMOS

The Cause of It All
PUT TOGETHER

Trips to the boneyard are inevitable. Everyone goes—if not for a deep-rooted sense of inspiration or reaffirmation, then surely for an iconic song ... or 10. Gary Clark Jr., for instance, has pinched Stevie Ray, who pinched Jimi, who pinched Elmore, who pinched Robert. Then again, everyone—hellhounds included—hits up poor Robert.

Such is the case with *The Cause of It All*, Rev. Shawn Amos' stripped-down covers of founding fathers Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter. However, the opening moments of the Reverend's fourth studio album—as a harp eerily levitates its note until a quite electrified guitar locks into the tell-tale "Spoonful" riff—waste no time asserting that Amos' trip





BLUES REVIEWS CONTINUED

melds reverence with independence and adventure. That first raw flash also cements the bare-boned bond between Amos, his harmonica, and Chris “Doctor” Roberts’ guitars, which lasts for the duration as nine more classics, from “Serves Me Right to Suffer” to “Little Anna Mae,” get personally tailored.

“Still a Fool” and “Goin’ to the Church” bathe in dirty, crunchy distortion, pegging the meters with their judicious amplification. Beware of the nasty, reedy shrapnel Amos blasts through “Color and Kind.” Not until “I’m Ready” does the filth and fury clear to reveal the session’s (largely) unplugged second-half. Here is where “Baby, Please Don’t Go” and a fantastically divebombed “Hoochie Coochie Man” live in relative calm and quiet.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

KHAIRA ARBY

Live in New York 2010
CLERMONT

The walls blistered that night. And as luck would have it, tape rolled the entire time as Khaira Arby turned upstate New York’s Bard College into a Bamako hothouse. The Nightingale of Timbuktu had brought her commanding titanium voice and her torrid band 4,500 miles on their first North American tour that left behind a trail of stunned audiences like the one here. This heart-racing, ultra-passionate performance from 2010 bears witness to why Arby’s fame quickly extended far beyond the sands of her Mali homeland.

Her band’s boundless energy certainly contributed. Especially the hysteria whipped up from

two electric guitars that often reach feverish pitch. Bass, percussion and, for a rustic twist, a West African three-stringed *ngoni* add texture. Amidst this, backup vocalists also kick in, echoing Khaira in call-and-response. It’s all quite the rush.

Still, no groove is thick enough to hinder Arby (1959–2018) from slicing through in order to rocket above. And none of the 10 here travel for under six minutes, affording ample time to work a frothy hypnosis. But midway through “Gourma,” the third track in, is when things significantly intensify, as those guitars notably slip their leash and overtake the rhythm’s clip-clop gait. From that point forward, they repeatedly startle the synapses with top-quality freakouts.

The fireball that was Arby and her band hit at peak power here, escalating from Sub-Saharan cadences (“Ya Rassoul”) through rock-infused hybrids (“Youba”) en route to universally white-hot highs awaiting atop “Haidara Moulaye” and “Ferene” while scorching the ground in between with music meant as much for dance as for dizzying ecstasy.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS

Blues Society of Central PA: Backyard Blues

BLUE HEART

Backyard Blues takes the pulse around Harrisburg, the Blues Society of Central Pennsylvania’s home turf. Having hosted a Thursday night jam for the past 20plus years endows BSCP with a panoramic view of local blues-based talent. That, plus a four-piece House Band already primed and ready for anyone showing up without a crew of their own. What results is a cavalcade of nine area bands,

pulled from bandstands as far and wide as York to Hanover to Lancaster, taking 16 tracks to introduce themselves. An emphasis on original material provides an even deeper showcase of what regional favorites from Roger Hammer to Rose Hudson’s encounter with Barrelhouse to the Ben Brandt Trio have to offer.

Also unveiled are two singing guitarists who each lean on the House Band, Bob Wineland and the smoother Rocky Rothrock (whose “Ball and Chain” is embedded with hooks galore). The Mighty Klucks instead lean “More Whiskey” on a zigzag riff. Blues on the Loose defends their title as Saturday night floor-fillers with “A Bad Influence,” a highly danceable energizer likely to be unleashed live at the 2021 Lancaster Roots & Blues Festival in October. Harmonicist Nate Myers’ trio, kings of Grotto Pub in Enola, Pa., sews “Catfish Blues” into some halting “It’s My Music” talking-blues. Eventually, though, everything comes up against “True Force of Nature.” Its six minutes, whipping in the howling winds of guitars, harp and Drew Kiniry’s perfectly rugged holler, claim the roots-rocked mountaintop above central PA for Buzzard Luck with the kind of spirited abandon that can’t be faked.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

MARIA MULDAUR WITH TUBA SKINNY

Let’s Get Happy Together
STONY PLAIN

Between her sandpapery spunk and their old-timey swing, *Let’s Get Happy Together* cakewalks out from a match made in rascally Dixieland heaven. Maria Muldaur, on her 43rd album, is instantly at home within the time warp created by

Tuba Skinny, the acclaimed New Orleans street band whose sweet spot is dialed back for jazz and blues of the 1920s and ’30s.

Their cornet, clarinet, trombone, tenor banjo, two acoustic guitars, percussive washboard rig, and, yes, of course, tuba, generate a joyful, tuneful turmoil that keeps the First Lady of Roots Music high-stepping all around while dishing out lyrics in the style she honed with jug blowers, string dusters, floor stompers and similar rowdy sorts in the past. She curls the mild grit in her throat around lines with requisite impish delight (“Swing You Sinners”) or occasional lilt-ing dejection (“Road of Stone”).

One after the next, “I Like You Best of All,” the roll-with-the-punches title track, and “Be Your Natural Self” take turns shaking like jazzy jelly. Then, “Delta Bound” slows festivities to more of a scuffed-sole drag. The whole lot, regardless of the level of pep and fizz, is as truly vintage as it sounds, hailing from the shellac era when records were stamped with names as colorful as Frankie “Half Pint” Jaxon, Sweet Pea Spivey, and the Goofus Five or brands as established as Billie Holiday and Ivy Anderson, a songbird with Duke Ellington’s orchestra. Behind a mile-wide communal smile, Muldaur and Tuba Skinny elevate *Let’s Get Happy Together* from a mere album title into an outright mission statement for a whooping good time.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

GERALD MCCLENDON

Let’s Have a Party!
DELTA ROOTS

First thing you’ll notice about Gerald McClendon’s new album is that, like 2020’s *Can’t Nobody Stop Me Now*, *Let’s Have a*

Party! continues thriving in slow burns designed to soak up all the thwarted ambitions (“I Just Can’t Take Anymore”), crushing disenchantment (“Pack Your Bags and Go”), and burning temptation (“I Just Can’t Help Myself”) that are the common currency of old-school soul and blues.

McClendon’s trend starting kicking into action after 1999’s *Choose Love*, a slick slice of contemporary R&B. Back then, the Chicago native swooned suavely. But year-by-year and record-after-record, he’s since gravitated to pledging allegiance to vintage soul stylings, digging down for the scratch—rather than the sugar—in his voice in order to emotionally justify crises like “Throw This Dog a Bone” or “If It Ain’t the Blues.” Twist Turner, the album’s veteran drummer/songsmith/producer, sees to it that the sound stays classic, steeped in Hammond B3, sturdy saxophone and lots of tear-stained guitar solos which stream from aces like Rico McFarland and Melvin Taylor. “Let’s Have a Party” goes as far as validating its mid-paced nostalgia by openly namechecking Little Milton and Johnnie Taylor.

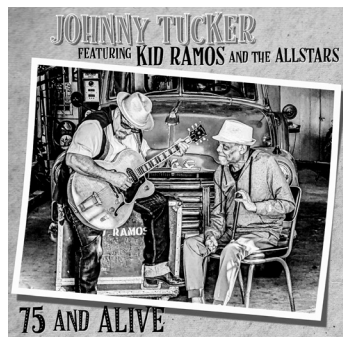
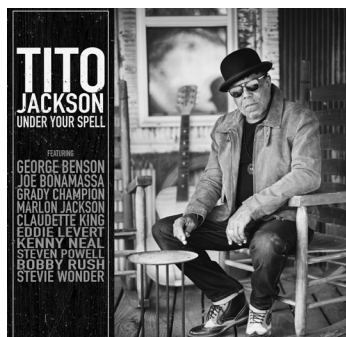
McClendon keeps right on fortifying his title as the Soul Keeper, whether setting a tender trap (“Start All Over Again”) or motivating the disheartened (“You Got to Be Strong,” laid atop a soft bed of Fender Rhodes) before ultimately getting down to the business of “Funky Stuff.”

DENNIS ROZANSKI

TITO JACKSON

Under Your Spell
GULF COAST

Yes, that Tito Jackson. Fringe vests, “ABC,” the Ed Sullivan Show, “Dancing Machine,”



Motown, Soul Train, phenomenon status with brothers Jermaine, Marlon, Jackie and Michael. Except fast forward to today, where Jackson, now inching all the closer to turning 70, has himself a highly contemporized blues album, actually. But *Under Your Spell* is no fluke since he’s been spotted on the road fronting B.B. King’s Blues Band. Yes, that B.B. King.

Musicians from those onstage gigs also show up in the studio here. But ties with King peak on “Rock Me Baby” when Jackson and B.B.’s daughter Claudette impart the 1964 classic with a fresh, funky bounce. Jackson, despite multitasking as singer, songwriter, guitarist, producer and arranger, leaves plenty of room for a slew more A-list helpmates. Stevie Wonder blows a little harp, as only Stevie Wonder can do. George Benson and Joe Bonamassa stretch some guitar strings with signature style. Bobby Rush, Eddie Levert (the O’Jays), and brother Marlon lend voices. The session also baits out songwriting legends Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff—who penned “Enjoy Yourself” for the Jacksons and, to greater fame, architected the Philly Sound that gave Motown a run for their money in the 1970s—out of retirement to make funk ooze from their “All In The Family Blues.” And horns rarely stand silent, being just as likely to bolster sexy-tongued thumps (“Dyin’ Over Here”) as jacked-up cadences (“Wheels Keep Turning”). For all the talk of mojo, Muddy, and a “Big Leg Woman,” Tito Jackson stands at one of the hippest of crossroads that only he could have found.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JOHNNY TUCKER FEATURING KID RAMOS AND THE ALLSTARS

75 and Alive
BLUE HEART/HIGHJOHN

You’d never know from listening but *75 and Alive* is a burning shot of skillfully tight ad-lib blues. The one-day, loose-limbed, seat-of-the-pants, (often) first-take, all-original session evolved organically. The perpetually excitable Johnny Tucker pulled lyrics out of thin air while guitarist-producer Kid Ramos etched licks into grooves he impulsively called out to a band of can-do Allstars. Bing, bang, boom: Tucker’s hardest kicking album to date ... done in a couple of hours. That’s saying something.

That particular day—October 17, 2020—turned out to be Johnny’s 75th birthday. But age is only a misplaced number for the youthful singer who still hits like a triple shot of espresso. Whenever excitement boils over, his serrated buzzsaw of a voice crescendos atop the crescendos in spontaneous shouts. And he stays fired up on a steady diet of action, action, action fed by Ramos’ curvaceous Gibson guitars and those saxophone-shoved Allstars, which includes harpist Bob Corritore and notorious piano punisher Carl Sonny Leyland.

“What’s On My Mind” jumps. So does “All Night Long, All Night Wrong.” “Treat Me Good” does laps in Magic Sam’s pool of aqueous Magnatone vibrato. “Can’t You See” shuffles. “There’s a Time for Love” smolders on a bed of T-Bone-like embers as horns hammer the downbeats. Tucker justifiably takes a deserved breather, sitting out “Snowplow” and “Hookline” to let the band instrumentally imagine Albert Collins’ wiriness and Earl Hooker’s funky sliding. But then he’s right back to making “Have a Good Time Tonight” hyperventilate.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JAMES HOLVAY

Sweet Soul Song
MOB TOWN RECORDS

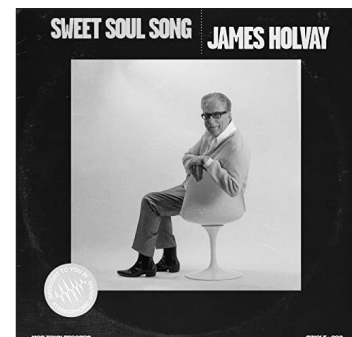
The cover shot lets the cool cat out of the bag. James Hol-

vay—soul singer, time tripper—takes us on a retro ride to match his straight-out-of-1963 threads and tulip chair. Close your eyes and sink back into “Working On It,” a finger-popper with spring in its step and curlicue guitar licks lining the way. Those three sunshiny minutes open *Sweet Soul Song*, a five-song EP that pledges allegiance to a simpler time filled with starry-eyed hearts going pitter patter at swinging dance parties.

When it comes to soul music—specifically, the Windy City species—Holvay isn’t a poseur; he actively participated in Chicago’s polyester heyday. If not performing, then writing a constellation of songs for others. Among those fed by his pen were R&B’s Dee Clark (“I Can’t Run Away”) and the Buckingham, who sold a million copies of his “Kind of a Drag.” That same year, 1966, Holvay also inaugurated his rock & soul horn band, the MOB.

After four decades out of the limelight, the singer-songwriter-guitarist has returned to offer refuge to young lovers and vintage sentimentalists alike in warm, lustrous arrangements awash in horns and strings and backup singers who oh-so-smoothly go “hey, hey, hey” or “doot, doot, wah.” Holvay goes the extra mile by nodding to his personal idols in Curtis Mayfield (the softness in his voice’s honeyed highs) and Gene Chandler (compare artwork between *Sweet Soul Song* and Chandler’s *Just Be True*). The Frug-worthy title track (name-checking Curtis and Gene) begs just as hard as does the majestically swooned “Still the Fool” to waft out from a hi-fi console across a sea of shag.

DENNIS ROZANSKI





BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

RODD BLAND AND THE MEMBERS ONLY BAND

Live on Beale Street: A Tribute to Bobby "Blue" Bland

NOLA BLUE

Who better to specially reconvene the ol' gang? Six years after going quiet due to the passing of their illustrious leader, the Members Only Band was back in force on Beale, oozing their way through "St. James Infirmary," the slow pull of its graceful melancholy set aglow by Lord-have-mercy horns. Perhaps 1961 had come calling once more. Except this time, the team is under the inherited direction of Rodd Bland, son of the late, great Bobby "Blue" Bland. The *ad hoc* reunion rallied around a mini-set built from his father's repertoire. That special evening of homage held inside B.B. King's Blues Club in May 2019 plays out here in all of its grandeur.

The 45-year-old has long acted upon his heritage by keeping in the family business, as not only evidenced by this Memphis showcase but any of Rodd's assorted other projects that make him a nightly staple around Memphis. This Bland doesn't sing the blues, however; he drums them instead, fronting the band from behind his kit while farming out vocals to Jerome Chism, Chris Stephenson and Ashton Riker, who take turns rotating up to the centerstage microphone. Horns, however, are ever-present, gracing all six songs with their brassy presence, which includes brightening "(Get Your Money) Where You Spend Your Time" with gleaming riffs. *Live on Beale Street's* tribute extends from reawakening the soulfully scolding "I Wouldn't Treat A



Dog (The Way You Treated Me)" or a nicely funkified "Sittin' On a Poor Man's Throne," right down to visually recreating the black-tie cover of 1985's *Members Only*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

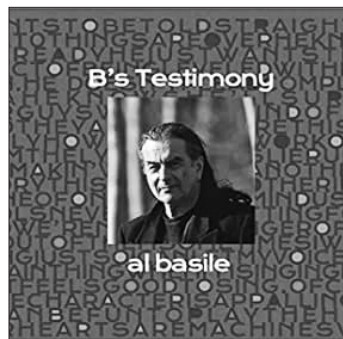
VARIOUS

Landslide Records: 40th Anniversary

LANDSLIDE (2 CDS)

1981 gave us Post It Notes, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," newborn Johnny Lang, "Hill Street Blues," the McRib, a Super Freak, a Double Dutch Bus, MTV—and Landslide Records. Paul Rothschild's label sprang into inaugural action that year by unleashing on the world two sets of experimentalists: Col. Bruce Hampton's jazz-rock concoction, the Late Bronze Age ("King Greed"), and Curlew ("Panther Burn"), whose avant-jazz was the soundtrack inside shrines to irreverent pioneer spirit like New York's Knitting Factory and CBGBs. By continuing to take that road less traveled, Landslide was also the first to arrive at other key destinations, raising the curtain to debut the Derek Trucks Band (rethinking saxophone god John Coltrane's "Mr. P.C." for slide guitar) as well as the jam-inclined Widespread Panic ("Travelin' Light").

And Landslide has never stopped scouting roads. Their *40th Anniversary* confirms so 33 times, sampling across each of the past four decades to do so before ending up at Damon Fowler's doorstep in 2021. Eclecticism runs rampant: high-volt blues guitar (Tinsley Ellis, Sean Costello), New Orleans funk (Dave Bartholomew), Atlanta New Wave (the Brains), Melbourne rust and rawhide (Geoff Achison), smooth-jazz chill (Paul McCandless), mod-



ernist hayrides (Blueground Undergrass), soulful levitation (Mike Mattison, minus Tedeschi Trucks Band), and some *Hot Fish Laundry Mat*. Come on, how can you pass up a chance to herd the Steam Donkeys, Scrapomatic, Piano Red, and Webb Wilder & the Beatnecks into one corral?

DENNIS ROZANSKI

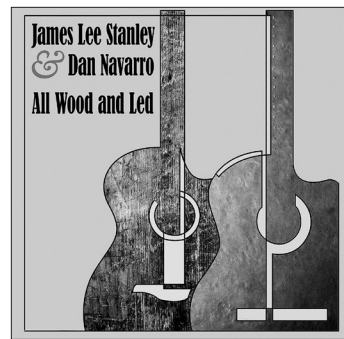
AL BASILE

B's Testimony

SWEETSPOT

Al Basile, who came to prominence in the 1970s as Roomful of Blues' first trumpeter, is on his way to making a million albums. Sure, he's got a ways to go. But his recent album-a-year pace combined with a creative wellspring just as deep with productivity creates the impression of such intent. *B's Testimony* ramps up this ambition all the more. Basile becomes quite the traffic cop this time out, directing all aspects of the new project, from writing the songs to arranging, singing, playing, mixing and mastering them, too. And after two song-cycle albums told complete stories in 2018 (*Me & the Originator*) and then in 2020 (*Last Hand*), the songsmith returns to the more traditional album format with *B's Testimony*.

Change is afoot elsewhere as well. Basile's classy touch remains intact but blues structure has strengthened its grip. Plus, his cornet issues a brassy soliloquy on every song. And besides Bruce Bears' frothy organ, the highest profile sparring partner is Kid Andersen's guitar which brings a distinctly different zing from that of Duke Robillard's, the gold standard for so many Basile records. Andersen isn't shy, diving right in by bending strings up into "Don't Kid Yourself, Baby," massaging "He Said, She Said"



with wang-bar tremors, and using the closing three minutes of "Through Thick and Thin" to emphatically demonstrate how six-string antics and riffing horn charts can live in perfect, heated harmony. Yet whether bouncing off the ceiling or being drug over the coals, Basile keeps coolly singing about love, longing, or lobbying for love.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JAMES LEE STANLEY

& DAN NAVARRO

All Wood and Led

BEACHWOOD

And so it was said: "If you listen very hard, the tune will come to you at last... to be a rock and not to roll." Heed that call. But avoid being within earshot of "Houses of the Holy" unless you have the full 42 minutes to spend mesmerized by the entirety of *All Wood and Led*. Because, like the Doors and the Rolling Stones before them, Led Zeppelin has likewise become beneficiaries of James Lee Stanley's acoustic redesign program that does so much more than simply unplug.

Rock anthems as colossal as "Dazed and Confused" or as thunderous as "Good Times Bad Times" magically acclimatize from the arena down to the pub or, better yet, the porch. Anthemic lyrics, cast within fresh arrangements navigated by Stanley and Dan Navarro's interwoven acoustic guitars and harmonized singing, tease with nagging familiarity. A nudge of bass and some equally understated percussion assist. The result—without the 100+ decibels or the bilious throb or the double-headed guitars or the Golden God screech—really hits the spot when craving a hammering of the gods, but without the metallic hangover.



Borrowing again from Zeppelin liturgy: The song does *not* remain the same. Most definitely not, as each newfound alter ego reveals a noble surprise. “Whole Lotta Love” swirls gorgeously around ghost whispers. “D’yer Mak’er” springs pastoral with a misty mountain hop. Hymnal, hypnotic qualities impart unto “Rock and Roll.” “Ramble On” lifts out from the darkest depths of Mordor. “The Battle of Evermore” remains fought deep in the dark woods.

And fear not: There still walks that lady we all know, who’s sure all that glitters is gold. Except here, “Stairway to Heaven” ascends all the way through dreamlike instrumental passages. Lift your lighters into the air for *All Wood and Led*.

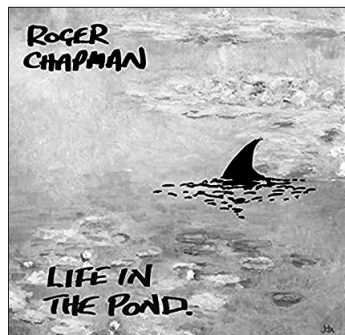
DENNIS ROZANSKI

VARIOUS

Party for Joey: A Sweet Relief Tribute to Joey Spampinato
TRUE NORTH

Lit by an eclectic constellation of headliners, this *Party for Joey* is made for stargazing. What are the odds of running into Bonnie Raitt, Penn & Teller, Deer Tick, Peter Case, Los Lobos, and Charlie Musselwhite at the same affair? But they’re only some of those who responded to a call to help Joey Spampinato—founding member of the genre-busting, rule-breaking NRBQ (New Rhythm and Blues Quintet/Quartet)—who was in dire straits in a battle with cancer. The musicians, the Sweet Relief Musicians Fund and this very album came to the singer-songwriter-bassist’s rescue. All for one—put into altruistic action.

The guestlist’s diversity reflects the far reach of ‘Q’s peer-to-peer fan club. Rallying behind the “world’s greatest bar band,” whose



ambitious output extends from their mountain of records to working on “The Simpsons,” “Space Ghost Coast to Coast,” and “Day of the Dead,” are blues mavens, troubadours, the Nudie suit crowd, and rockers of all stripes. Each snap up a piece of NRBQ’s repertoire credited to Spampinato.

“You Can’t Hide” baits back guitarist Al Anderson, yet it’s the band’s current lineup who rally behind Raitt and her bottlenecking via “Green Lights.” Jim Lauderdale and Buddy Miller jointly rattle “How Will I Know” down rutted backroads. “Like a Locomotive” is another riff rider, except fueled by the pairing of Keith Richards’ guitar and Charlie Musselwhite’s harp with Ben Harper’s singing. The dulcet tones of She & Him offer “How Can I Make You Love Me” as the chillout antidote to the raging mashup of Chris Spedding with the Nils over “That’s Alright.” The best news comes when the man of honor gratefully celebrates his own *Party*, sweetly cooing out “First Crush” beside his wife.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ROGER CHAPMAN

Life In The Pond
RUF

Roger Chapman and his balmed-fist vibrato were once all about Family. That’s Family with a capital F: 1968’s *Music In A Doll’s House*, England’s psychedelic underground, budding progressive rock, Hyde Park in 1969. But after the experimental band imploded, their frontman kept right on singing into a solo career launched by 1979’s *Chappo* album. Four decades and a subsequent mound of records now deliver us at the doorstep of *Life In The Pond*.

Chapman’s voice, knocking on the door of 80 years old,



remains the centerpiece. Age has traded its trademarked tight shiver for more of a gnarled grumble—fitting for the splay of new narratives brought to the session. As thoughts roam from the literal and metaphorical to the existential, reference to the blues creeps in more than a few times. “Naughty Child,” in its personal look back at the glory days, talks of black cat bones and T-Bone Walker as much as Dylan and the Byrds. It’s also a thrill to hear the sage rage and rasp on rockers like “The Playtime Is Over” or “Collar Turned Up” with two of his old mates: multi-instrumentalist John “Poli” Palmer (from his Family days) and guitarist Geoff Whitehorn (from his post-Family days). The whiplash is fierce when going from the savagely kicking “After the Rain” or a steel-toed march through “Nightmare #5” into the perfectly twinkly, cottony cocoon of “On Lavender Heights.” Either mode finds itself light years removed from when Chapman and his Family first took you on a tripped-out “Voyage” some 19,000 midnights ago.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND

Holler If You Hear Me
BLIND PIG

The warning is clearly posted on the cover of *Holler If You Hear Me*: Altered Five Blues Band front man Jeff Taylor—profiled mid-roar—is a wrecking ball wielding a microphone. However, what you *don’t* see—and can’t plan for—is just how much of a second punch Taylor’s four mates—guitarist Jeff Schroedl, bassist Mark Solveson, keyboardist Raymond Tevich, drummer Alan Arber—deliver as he steamrolls lyrics with that cressote baritone of his. “Guilty of a



Good Time” and “Fifteen Minutes of Blame” become adrenaline shots without even getting out of second gear, as opposed to “Full Moon, Half Crazy” and the gone-bonkers “If You Go Away (She Might Come Back)” being designated battering rams. The hyperactive mojo ramps up all the more with Schroedl’s every touch of the strings. The welcome wild card is guest harpist Jason Ricci spraying reedy wails, wah-wahs and squeaks over a handful of the session’s 13 original tracks.

By keeping Tom Hambridge in the producer’s chair for *Holler If You Hear Me*, the Milwaukee quintet’s sixth studio album sounds as tough, taut and engaging as did their 2019 chart-topping *Ten Thousand Watts* and 2017’s *Charmed & Dangerous* before that. Hambridge, having also worked magic with Buddy Guy a few triumphant times and, most recently, with Christone “Kingfish” Ingram, knows how to put the Altered Six on the warpath (“Where’s My Money”) while balancing Taylor’s boom with Schroedl’s blast (“Big Shout Out” to blues greats from Albert Collins through Junior Wells). Best surprise? When that white-hot squall gets the green light at the midpoint of “I Got All I Need.”

DENNIS ROZANSKI

NINA SIMONE

Little Girl Blue
BMG

Nina Simone never needed training wheels. When officially entering the recording world that December 1957 day, she did so as an artist fully conceived, mature far beyond her 25 years. Artistic dignity assured that neither trepidation nor impetuosity were part of the plan. Three years earlier she was Eunice Waymon; a decade later

BLUES REVIEWS CONTINUED

came her coronation as the High Priestess of Soul. Yet up until Bethlehem Records distilled 14 creative hours of New York studio time down to 11 tracks, she hadn't broken out. Astoundingly, *Little Girl Blue* is a debut. Simone's now-hear-this entrancing entrance.

The session lives well up to its billing of "Jazz as played in an exclusive side street club." The closeness of the room comes through. Crisp, lean arrangements and the personnel to uphold them also do their part. Sometimes only Simone's piano accompanies. Other times, bassist Jimmy Bond and drummer Tootie Heath do, tactically filling and leaving space as they once did for Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk to John Coltrane and Wes Montgomery. What results is a palpable atmosphere, a mood, a feel.

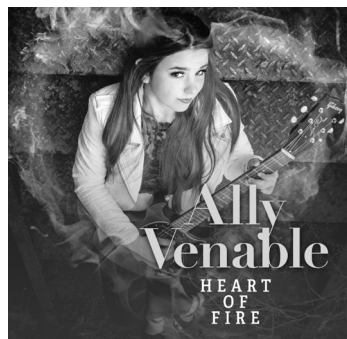
With understated patience, Simone categorically emerges as a deeply penetrating interpreter of song. Levitating her murky voice through the shades of grey enveloping "Plain Gold Ring" and "Don't Smoke in Bed" casts them both as hypnotically beautiful dirges. Equally arresting is "Little Girl Blue," floating in diminuendo, embracing its ache, surrendering to the supervulnerability. Yet "Love Me or Leave Me" swings like a bell. Her gorgeous classically-minded pianistics, shepherded by Heath's snappy brushwork, likewise seize upon Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo" and her own wordless "Central Park Blues." All this plus "I Loves You, Porgy," the rocket fuel that launched Simone's career.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ALLY VENABLE

Heart of Fire
RUF

Eight minutes and 52 seconds of a guitar expressively stretched out in full flight. Patiently pacing itself across a landscape in constant evolution, shifting between haloed tranquility to moments of torrid tension to periods of serene release and high-velocity excitement.



Fire versus ice. It's a thoughtful, creative, original act of homage from one native Texan to another. And the wisest choice was delivering "Tribute to SRV" without uttering one single word. Instead, Texan blues rocker Ally Venable lets her Gibson issue all the praise.

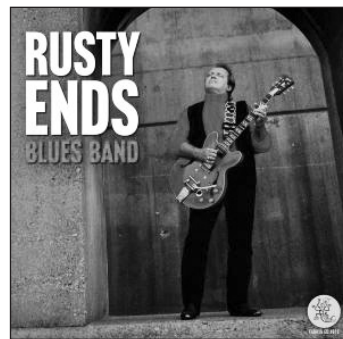
However, before reaching that rollercoaster ride you must first pass through the dirty swirl of wah ("Heart of Fire") followed by a bout of slide jitters ("Played the Game"). Venable is very much using momentum off the buzz around 2019's *Texas Honey* to springboard into *Heart of Fire*. A readily audible index of just how high her stock has risen since 2016's full-length debut *No Glass Shoes* is the presence of visiting fretsman Kenny Wayne Shepherd ("Bring on the Pain") and Devon Allman ("Road to Nowhere") as much as Jim Gaines (Stevie Ray to John Lee), whose production hikes the contrast between Venable's screaming guitar and her clearwater 20-something voice. Fire versus ice, again. Secured in that camp are the bracingly loud, energetic rockers "Do It in Heels" and "Sad Situation." Even more so with "Hard Change." And in the process, Bill Withers' "Use Me" gains a burred edge to its funky stutter-step move. Gaines also pulls a trick from up his Grammy-winning sleeve by inviting Bessie Smith back from 1924 to open "Hateful Blues" before Venable's horn-free trio accepts the baton.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

RUSTY ENDS BLUES BAND

Rusty Ends Blues Band
EARWIG

The new Rusty Ends Blues Band album is an old Rusty Ends Blues Band album. Their self-titled introduction didn't have much of a chance to make



a splash when first issued in 1996, no thanks to Rollin' & Tumblin' Records promptly folding soon after. Now, the pride of Louisville, Kentucky, is back for a second round. Better late than never for *Rusty Ends Blues Band*.

Ends, who first recorded in 1969 and still remains active on the scene to this day with his Hillbilly Hoodoo band, is easy to spot as the centerpiece. He's the one towering in a scarlet turtleneck with the matching all-see-this hulk of a Gibson ES, which serves as the source of all the pointed, prickly notes flying around. "Sinner's Strut," an instrumental with a hard slap, hits the jackpot. But what ensures a unique listening experience is Ends' compositional originality, expressed through 16 more songs as well as the voice delivering them.

Ever run into "Sloppy Joe Blues"? Or rumbaed around the room dazed by "High Beams"? And, yes, "Secrets in the Street," the horn-leavened "Heart Stealer" and "I Wanna Know" with its nervously buzzing harmonica, also pack a distinctive wallop. But best of luck trying to come across anything close to the kinked "Whips & Chains." Then add the extra twist of how Ends can sing with *Nuggets*-grade intonation, whether pushin' hard on the brisk, brittle Seeds-like attack of "What Next" or sneering out the talking blues of "Don't Call It Love" as if the Standells were back in business.

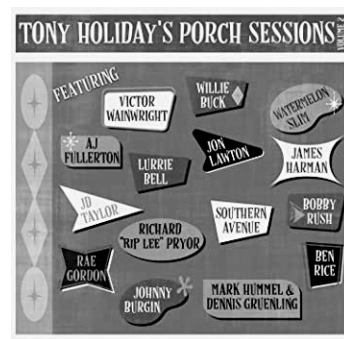
DENNIS ROZANSKI

TONY HOLIDAY

Tony Holiday's Porch Sessions—Vol 2

BLUE HEART

So successful was 2019's first round of *Porch Session* that harpist Tony Holiday reopened the turnstiles, letting through a



new flood of groaners, wailers, fretters and harpers. The guiding rules for participation remained simple: One shot. One take. Raw and straight to tape without any overdubs. Plus, we come to you, turning porches into studios. The idea being that, say, the harp-only duel over "Cake Walk" between Mark Hummel and Dennis Gruenling lives in the moment. That the ragged glory from Willie Buck's scrappy bark, Rusty Zinn's slide guitar, and Kim Wilson's harp crashes through very loud and clear on "Honey Bee." Or that Bobby Rush delivers "Get Outta Here (Dog Named Bo)" the way it should: Mississippi-style, as an *cappella* toast fit for any juke joint's clientele. Lightning stands a far better shot of getting captured in the bottle under those conditions.

And Holiday's roll of the dice pays off big, 16 times. Spontaneity breeds serendipity. Watermelon Slim bellyaches "Smokestack Lightnin'" with nothing more than his slop-jar voice and the grumble off his slide guitar. J.D. Taylor's "Family Tree," stricken with creeping paralysis, weighs heavy. And some interesting chemistry results in pairing Lurrie Bell with Mark Hummel's wah-wah-wahs, and Rip Lee Pryor with a gutbucket combo.

Although Holiday plays the gracious host by sitting out more often than not, "She's Tuff" (the Jerry McCain-via-Fabulous Thunderbirds' stomp) baits in his harp as well as Victor Wainwright's barroom piano. "Going to Court 2," however, is his personal favorite: six ripping minutes with his since-late mentor, James Harman. Real spirit beams out like a supernova from these *Porch Sessions*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



BOUBACAR "BADIAN" DIABATÉ
Mande Guitar
LION SONGS

Behold: an acoustic air-guitar album. That is, one of those virtuosic recitals so captivating as to spark your fingers to fly right along, vicariously sharing in the thrill, leaving behind a mix of awe and envy. Yeah, *Mande Guitar* is that spectacular. Boubacar "Badian" Diabaté, the fingerstyle dreamweaver from Mali, makes it all sound astonishingly easy. But it's not. What's more, his impeccably honed technique is anything but a dry, brittle, academic boast. Instead, expertise weaves amongst feel. The resultant 11 instrumental voyages spin off so many sparkling, warm, little details that a love affair with your headphones will surely rekindle. Start "L'Amour" and drift away for 60 minutes.

It's serious business when Banning Eyre starts his own label. So, Badian making the maiden voyage is a big deal for Lion Songs Records (est. 2021). Especially figuring in all the years and years, as well as kilometers and kilometers, of searching for Africa's premier guitarists done by Eyre, lead producer for the Peabody Award-winning public radio program *Afropop Worldwide*. *Mande Guitar* is the first volume in what promises to be an outstanding go-to source of mostly acoustic, mostly African music not available on other platforms.

Lifting limits on time and space gets rewarded. If "Sené" kicks up a breeze from its revolving runs for eight minutes, so be it. "Miri" needs only three to float down a river of crystalline notes. "Bagounou" splits the difference, distinctly applying big string theory to its emulation of *ngoni*, the guitar's ancient West African



ancestor. Half the time Diabaté works alone. The other half, he bounces ideas off brother Manfa's second guitar. And on "Bayini," he and Eyre go around opening doors and entering rooms filled with mood, imagination and, ultimately, fire. "Fadento," percussed by tama drum and the click-clack of calabash, is as full-blown as the session gets.

Time after time you'll find yourself shaking your head and grinning at what Diabaté pulls out from nothing more than six (sometimes 12) simple strings attached to a wooden box. Transportive. Exquisite. Mesmerizing. Brilliant.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ETTA JAMES
The Montreux Years
BMG (2 CDS)

We've been without Etta James since 2012. That gaping loss only magnifies the preciousness of these 2.5 hours, especially knowing how the Montreux Jazz Festival consistently brought out the very best in her onstage performance. Twenty-one potent examples prove that to be fact, consuming a pair of handsomely packaged discs to do so.

A lot of ground gets covered in the process. Not only do *The Montreux Years* attend the 1975, 1977 and 1978 shows but also the ones from 1989, 1990 and 1993. That spread across three decades affords a deep repertoire in addition to time well spent with her various punchy, brassy bands through which pass the likes of guitarists Brian Ray and Cash McCall, saxophonist David "Fathead" Newman, and even Rick Wakeman, the caped crusader who flew keyboards for prog-rocking Yes.

Yet regardless of whatever onstage crew was furnishing

unbreakable support. Or whatever songs arose during that year's setlist. Or whatever phase of her career each particular song represented: the greenhorn years (1955's "W-O-M-A-N," given a funkified facelift), the elegant period ("At Last/Trust in Me/Sunday Kind of Love," sewn together in medley), the first comeback (1967's "Tell Mama"), the second comeback (1988's "Come to Mama"), the soul 'n' blues default woven copiously all along.

Whatever the variable, there always was a guiding constant: Etta leaping into your ear, time and time again, with a voice that could say as much with a willfully restrained whisper ("A Lover Is Forever") as a knockdown roar ("Breakin' Up Somebody's Home"). Either way hit home. Sometimes both strategies joined forces to devastate all the more ("I'd Rather Go Blind").

Jamesetta Hawkins packed a lot of living into her 73 years. She began working as a teenager under the stage name of Etta James (an inversion of her first name), given by Johnny Otis. She left behind ferric mementos of herself at Chicago's Chess Records, L.A.'s Modern Records, Muscle Shoals' FAME Studios and a parade of more labels and locales. Crossed paths with B.B. King and Elvis, the Grateful Dead and Def Jam. Won six Grammy Awards, 17 Blues Music Awards and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993, the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1999, the Blues Hall of Fame in 2001, the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2003. Ranked number 22 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of the 100 Greatest Singers of All Time. And traveled a road pitted along its way by drug troubles, police arrests, jail time, and heartbreak by the score.

That all funneled into her contract. A lifetime of peaks and pitfalls vouched for the been-there-done-that realism that majestically wounds "Damn Your Eyes." Likewise for the power—vocal, emotional—behind "Beware" or, for that matter, any of the powerhouse treatments given to Elmore James ("Dust My Broom"), Jimmy Reed ("Baby What You

Want Me to Do"), T-Bone Walker ("Stormy Monday") and yet more Jimmy Reed ("Running and Hiding Blues").

These *Montreux Years* are very much alive, as vetted by spontaneous rapport between James and her appreciative audiences as well as the bristling feedback loops with her bands, whereby one instigates the other to higher and higher ground. Although escalation is common practice throughout here, brace yourself for "I Sing the Blues For You." It's quite the blowout. The harder Etta hammers a deadbeat lover, the more heated the horns grow. The more heated the horns grow, the farther down the neck the guitarist goes. And the crowd goes wild!

DENNIS ROZANSKI

HOUND DOG TAYLOR & THE HOUSEROCKERS
Tearing the Roof Off
JSP (2 CDS)

There is gutbucket—and then there is Hound Dog Taylor-grade gutbucket. The guitarist's rudimentary way of bombarding the senses with a steel slide and an overloaded amplifier made Elmore James sound like a pussycat. Crashing in around him was Brewer Phillips, pulling low-end rumble out of his second guitar in place of a bass, and Ted Harvey, bashing out elemental drumbeats. But delivered with a smile and a cackle. For as jagged and raw a bite that the music had, the intent was always centered around having a good time. A loud soundtrack for dancing, drinking, and/or emotional abandon. If the harmless campfire ditty "Coming Round the Mountain" could be weaponized with distortion and speed, imagine the possibilities for rowdiness. The HouseRockers were a testament to just how fun ferocious can be.

Tearing the Roof Off raids the JSP vaults for two CDs of fun ferocity that hasn't seen the light of day in a dog's age. The inebriating brew of 35 songs, instrumentals, boogies, shuffles and blues—captured as both live-action and studio moments from multiple sources—makes for a wild ride. Their new sonic scrubbing maximizes impact even better than before. In all, the music's analgesic powers are administered for 2.5 hours, man-

BLUES REVIEWS
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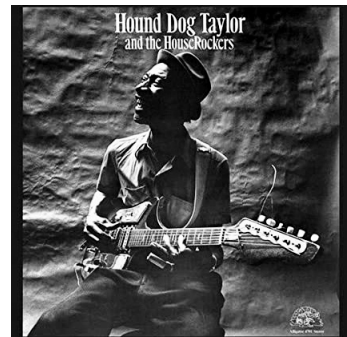
aging to skirt the band's Alligator catalog with unique material the whole while.

By starting in 1962 with "Christine" and its "Alley Music" flipside, what you're hearing is almost as early as you can go in Taylor's recorded history. It's proof, at 45 rpm, of his formative faithfulness to Elmore, broomdusting like his role model in the company of Lafayette Leake's piano and Blind Jessie Williams' bass. "I Know You Don't Love Me No More," originally unissued and incorrectly credited to second guitarist Homesick James, adds to the early pile.

Live, Taylor held audiences in the palm of his six-fingered hand. The obvious rhythmic crunch blasted from the bandstand was perfect for bodies—no matter how drunk—to synch their motions. Because in the presence of this music, remaining motionless is not physiologically possible.

That goes for onlookers as far away as the First Australian Blues-Rock Festival, which Levi's sponsored in 1975. The deal was: Buy a pair of jeans, and receive a promo EP as a memento from the event. "I Held My Baby Last Night," milking those high hanging slide notes right at the start before drums make a kamikaze drop into the first verse, was the HouseRockers' contribution. It's a rare goodie.

But the motherlode of on-site performance resides in a cache that finds the band at work in their natural hometown habit, circa 1969: Florence's Lounge, on Chicago's South Side. The sound is ideal: rough, real and packed with you-are-there ambiance as vouched for by audience chatter, shouts and whistles. The set rolls out a stream of instrumentals, both familiar ("Funky," the pogo blues of "You Can't Sit Down") and not ("Juke Joint Boogie," the Brewer-attacked "Stingin' the Blues"). They especially unload on "Walking the Ceiling" and



"Mother In Law Blues." Not only does Taylor take advantage of a hot mic to sing "Rock Me"; so does Lefty Dizz, a renown firestarter in his own right, who sits in for a couple of numbers. His "No Hair" is a sort of prequel to Taylor's "Give Me Back My Wig," whereby gifting a wig (as well as dentures) instead of reclaiming it. "Ships on the Ocean" puts the brakes on for a slow, tortured sail through what Muddy buffs would recognize as "Just to Be With You."

The sizeable, unforeseen bonus is *Whole Lotta Blues*, Phillips' solo shot from 1982, seven years after Taylor's passing at the age of 60. Its 11 cuts marked the move from sideman to frontman. Yet Brewer's leads are no less instinctual as Taylor's—just minus the bottlenecking. Still not a soft corner in sight; just miles and miles of sharp fretted edges. Harvey's drumming, now bonded with an actual bass guitar, locks down the bottom. Fans of Magic Slim to Jimmy Dawkins will relate to the driving force behind "Poor Boy Blues" or the wordless "Cleo," into which Phillips then twists his Telecaster dagger, stabbing and slicing all the way through.

All told, a massive amount of firepower is packed into these discs. An accompanying booklet fills in the historical blanks with informative context, dates and remembrances as well as some great photos. Like the ones of a literally wigged-out Hound Dog gashing at his Teisco guitar beneath a fluffy mop of extra hair. Ultimately, though, all this hellraising talks—well, roars—for itself, ever true to the cause of *Tearing the Roof Off*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

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presents
A BLUESMAN CAME TO TOWN
a blues odyssey

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