

LUKE WINSLOW-KING
I'm Glad Trouble Don't Last Always
 BLOODSHOT

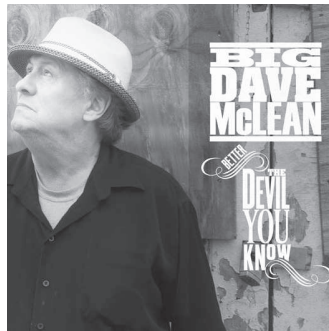
There is something to said for emotional devastation. For out of the ashes rises Luke Winslow-King. Leveled by a recent divorce, the Michigan-born, New Orleans resident put pen to paper and bottleneck to guitar string. What came out of that cathartic exorcism is the melancholy majesty that is *I'm Glad Trouble Don't Last Always*. Winslow-King's output has always found him blending blues with folk and roots-rock, the bulk of which has come out on Bloodshot Records, home to such dignitaries as seedy, alt-R&B king Andre Williams and punk-soul savage Barrence Whitfield. But unlike before, this fifth disc dredges what's been swirling around his freshly cracked heart.

Given the choice, Winslow-King would usually rather slide than pick. (The same goes for equally aqueous second guitarist Roberto Luti.) That bluesy trend suits itself to keeping the song cycle in compositional character. Accordingly, the title track plays the heavy. Its massive riff slowly circles around, gathering momentum up in those storm clouds blanketing the album cover, before divebombing down to deliver its wrathful payload. But rather than scorch words, his voice always dishes them cool, even in the face of whiter-knuckled stuff like a strummed-and-fiddled "Heartsick Blues" or the locked-and-loaded "Louisiana Blues."

Yet for being the sound of a lovin' cup gone bone-dry, "Act Like You Love Me" compensates with second-line revelry. "Watch Me Go" soulfully

dresses an ultimatum with burbling bass and organ; "Change Your Mind" surges its last-ditch shot at salvage. "Esther Please" is pure crack-back wobble. Escape hatches exist in the lyrics, too, allowing for resilience to get mustered and rebuilding to start anew. From out of the black, through the blues, and on into the glint of light, "No More Crying Today" and "On My Way" are down but not out, soaring while still knee-deep in life's smoking rubble. So, let Marvin have his *Here, My Dear*, Tammy her *D-I-V-O-R-C-E*, and Bob his *Blood on the Tracks*. Luke now has his very own breakup masterwork, a lifeline for the broken and forlorn.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



BIG DAVE MCLEAN
Better the Devil You Know
 BLACK HEN

Into the miraculous recording booth Big Dave McLean and a steel-bodied guitar crammed. Two minutes and seven seconds later, "Pet Rabbit" popped out. Yet in that flash, the 1947 low-fi Voice-O-Graph—the closest thing this world has to a genuine time machine—stripped away decades, intentionally leaving behind a rumpled vestige of the 78-rpm era. Or so the severely-backdated result sounds: Confirmation that Big Dave could've hung with Charley Patton as easily as with Johnny Shines. However, *Better the Devil You Know's* 12 preceding rootsy rambles have not been pre-aged. Veteran producer Steve Dixon sees to it that McLean's bottleneck remains sharp; that his harmonica flickers in the present. Plus, aside from a band rustically equipped from fiddle to saloon piano, Dixon is always there himself to intensify

the mood with just the right sort of string lick: the stroke of mandolin, a banjo's dead plunk, or, of course, every voicing of slide guitar. But McLean's commanding presence already fills the room with a boom that rumbles about love, homicide and roadside specters. "Angeline" points the accusatory finger for Blind Willie Johnson's death. "Deep Down in Florida" is one of two nods to Muddy Waters, who counted the Canadian among his personal friends in the 1980s. (Having written "Muddy for President" certainly helped.) Yet the 65-year-old's throat doesn't always grind rock into gravel with big, bold gestures. Behind a sunny sing-along delivery, "Swingin' on Heaven's Gate" sweetly toys with its seriousness of purpose.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

SUGAR RAY AND THE BLUETONES

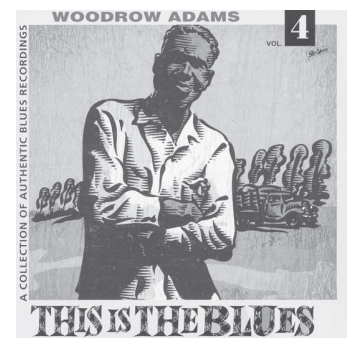
Seeing Is Believing
 SEVERN

At first chance, Sugar Ray Norcia and the Bluetones go for the throat. For mere seconds, "Sweet Baby" flutters on only Norcia's brawling harp before his roughed-up voice, Monster Mike Welch's guitar and Anthony Geraci's piano come crashing in, setting the tone for *Seeing Is Believing*, a most worthy successor to 2014's *Living Tear to Tear*. Then, as if somehow that introductory roar left you doubting their immaculate muscle, the granite-hard swing of "Blind Date" and Sugar Ray's big blow through "It Ain't Funny" pile on, seconding and thirthing the fact that five pieces telepathically interlock into one cohesive slam. Although recently inducted into the Rhode Island Music Hall of



Fame after 35 years of reliable creativity, the Bluetones specialize in the kind of tough, thunderous stuff that used to go down in joints like Pepper's: Chicago-minded fury delivered in a jacket and tie. That classic sound works in the service of new, original romps that sound like old, borrowed romps. The lone exception is the sweet sting from B.B.'s "You Know I Love You," stung by Monster Mike's uncontested lead singing the instrumental the whole exquisite way through. After all this churning, cream eventually does float to the top in the buttery form of "Not Me." But not for long, as rowdy commotions like "Got a Gal" immediately break any momentary stillness. It's hard to imagine how *Seeing Is Believing* could have come out any better.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



WOODROW ADAMS
This Is the Blues: Volume 4
 BE: SHARP (LIMITED-EDITION LP)

Good rule of thumb: When "Wine Headed Woman" lives on a record, you're in for a gutbucket of a good time. So, best brace yourself. After all, this is also a Woodrow Adams collection—and the blues were always on their roughest behavior whenever an electrified guitar or a harmonica was clutched in his calloused Mississippi hands. (Neither his mudslide voice nor his heroically scuffed-up bands were any less brutish, though.) Never did "Pretty Baby Blues," "She's Done Come and Gone" or any of his other gloriously crude performances skimp on the blues' most vital commodity: raw emotional commitment reinforced with non-disinfected chords. He remained unswayed by etiquette, trends, or, at times,

BLUES REVIEWS

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even skill (the brittle harp solo stumbling across “Sad and Blue” is a magnificent mess).

That’s why Adams has always been one of those great secret stashes revered by lowdown diehards. Yet, for being largely unknown, he made the radar of Sam Phillips (who recorded him at Sun in 1952), the Chess Brothers (who issued those tracks on Checker) as well as the Bihari Brothers (who, three years later, toughened the Meteor label with a juiced session of their own).

This Is the Blues: Volume 4 is a one-of-a-kind roundup of 16 such rumpers that, at best, have only been sprinkled around on assorted (and sordid) compilations. Most of the tracks have never been issued. Some were even cut inside Adams’ 1967 home-turned-juke-joint, which sat on the shoulder of Highway 61. That’s the source of “Pony Blues.” For five intoxicating (and intoxicated) minutes, Adams’ bottleneck keeps a stranglehold on the strings, cyclically slurping down the guitar neck, sweeping a wobbly riff out through a trembling amplifier. The pace doesn’t break beyond much more than a shaggy trot; the attitude, however, rages far rowdier. The drumming—and shouting—of Fiddlin’ Joe Martin only compounds the wildness. (Taper David Evans recalled Martin later passed out atop his kit.) Now that’s real world blues.

If you don’t already own a turntable, this wicked record is incentive to do so. Just move quickly before its 500 limited-edition copies become extinct.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ALBERTO LOMBARDI

Birds

STEFAN GROSSMAN’S GUITAR WORKSHOP

Alberto Lombardi has a roaming ear and verve in his fingers, a dangerous combination for a guitarist. As a result, *Birds* beats its completely acoustic, predominantly solo, largely instrumental path between tender and gorgeous (“Almeno Tu Nell’Universo”) and whirl and spin (“Balkan Dance,” done gyp-



sty-style as a Django-Grappelli violin duet). A taste for classics compliments that technical command: Classic pop (a dream-away “Georgia on My Mind”). Classic rock (Bowie’s “Life on Mars?,” sung as well as strung). Classic Italiano (the pendulously swinging “Volare”), too. Meanwhile, originals like “The Roadrunner Show” make bids to become future classics among fingerpickers with their fleet melodic whoosh. Spontaneous waterfall licks keep flowing through the Beatles’ “Come Together” as well as “Birds,” another heated duet, but with second guitarist Tim Sparks this time. Here is a world of stately harmonic tings and percussive string thwacks. Where Hoagy Carmichael mingles with Elton John at the villa of Renato Carosone, the Neopolitan Hoagy Carmichael. Where soft glides live in perfect harmony with tempered speed. It’s all the better with Lombardi’s richly resonant guitar sitting only millimeters away from you and your speakers. Stefan Grossman’s lifelong dedication to the acoustic art of fingerstyle guitar certifies Lombardi as the newest must-hear ace on a label already flush with aces like Rev. Gary Davis, John Renbourn, John Fahey and Grossman himself.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



ZUCCHERO

Black Cat

WRASSE

If you’re in the know, you know Zucchero. Says who? Miles Davis, Luciano Pavarotti, Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Solomon Burke, Buddy Guy, Joe Cocker, Brian Wilson, Jeff Beck, John Lee Hooker, Ray Charles, and Stevie Ray Vaughan could all personally vouch for Italy’s bluesman and maverick pop icon. Not a bad list of references. At one point or another, they’ve each shared stage or studio with the biggest-selling Italian artist of all time. Over 25 million record buyers can’t be wrong, either.

And that wildfire still burns uncontrolled. Fellow icons continue lining up to work with the 61-year-old. Here, he’s pulled up with Elvis Costello and U2’s Bono for a little songwriting, letting the guitar of Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits) infuse a pair of tracks which includes “Streets of Surrender (S.O.S.),” a tribute to the 2015 Bataclan horror in Paris. Producers T-Bone Burnett (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), Brendan O’Brien (Pearl Jam, Springsteen), and Don Was (Rolling Stones) fought for a piece of the pie. In all of its resulting grandness, *Black Cat* is an event (scheduled to consume the Fillmore Silver Spring with its World Tour on April 5).

Visually, Zucchero is a cross between Dr. John and Leon Russell: scruff and shag under a top hat. Vocally, he’s his own powerhouse with a Peter Gabriel tinge whenever hitting calmer waters. He’s an affective force at both extremes, unfolding drama in Italian as well as English. “Ti Voglio Sposare” rocks with tremendously hard energy and a metallic guitar. “Voices” soars with twilight ballad beauty. Elements of blues—echoes of Southern work chants, a bellyaching slide guitar, rhythmic floorboard stomps—do flash here and there without consuming prevailing styles. “Turn the World Down” and the spiritual “Hey Lord” are prime examples, pulled heavily by their rustic

beat.

As for *Black Cat*’s appeal? Between “13 Buone Ragioni” and the piano-pounded “Partigiano Reggiano,” their newly-released videos have already amassed over 10 million YouTube views. And so Zucchero fever goes on.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

ALBERTO LOMBARDI

Fingerpicking Adventures

STEFAN GROSSMAN’S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

Spider-walked artificial harmonics, Merle Travis picking, string-tickled birdcalls, string bends, ‘snare drum’ notes, double stops, “Stairway to Heaven,” Hammond B3-ish natural harmonics, finger skids, James Bond and blues licks. Phew! And all that only builds one of Alberto Lombardi’s *Fingerpicking Adventures*: “Volare,” the standard on which Domenico Modugno, Dean Martin, David Bowie, and Barry White also consecutively swung. Nearly three hours of Lombardi’s personal instruction are devoted to just this classic plus three more classics. But each is a mini symphony richly arranged for solo guitar. Each is anything but static, constantly evolving over its course with lots and lots of gorgeously moving parts. Aug-



mented chords, diminished chords, suspended chords, triads, morphing bass, Chet Atkins licks, legato licks and blues licks figure into “Georgia on My Mind.” “Blue Moon” follows exceptionally creative suit by rolling in Ella Fitzgerald’s chord structures, Australian guitarist Tommy Emmanuel’s rhythm, Frank Sinatra’s horn stabs, piano licks, a marching band. That and blues licks, too. And, yes, blues licks are also a part of the carousel whirl to “Tu Vuò Fa’ L’Americano,” most recently heard in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* soundtrack. Not only does Lombardi provide the step-by-step *how* to all of this, but also the concept-by-concept *why*. That