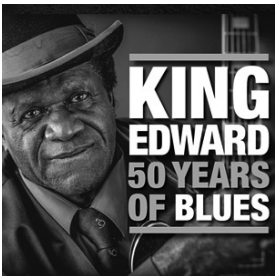


# BLUES REVIEWS



**KING EDWARD**  
*50 Years of Blues*  
HIT THE ROAD

Sometimes, radar just flat out fails. Or else Edward Memphis Antoine—crowned King Edward—surely would oversee a far more expansive domain by now, had his bluesman powers been better detected. (Same goes for brother Nolan Struck.) Rightfully meriting fanfare, yet woefully underappreciated: That's what *50 Years of Blues* gets you.

Over those past five decades, King has been spotted in any number of hard-luck joints: Zydeco clubs scattered between Louisiana (his 1937 birthplace) and Texas first fledged a teenaged guitarist learning to sizzle behind cousin Clifton Chenier. Throughout the '60s, Chicago's toughest blues lounges—from the Checkerboard to Theresa's—served as proving grounds for his lead attack. By '75, the storied Subway Lounge, the Queen of Hearts and other jukeboxes around Jackson, Miss., had become home. Nowadays, the King is still easily encountered around those parts, regularly holding court on bandstands along the path he beats between there and Vicksburg, a 45-minute ride on I-20 West. So, although 1999's *History of King Edward* was the last time he and a studio made magic, Antoine has not been idly rusting away.

Far from it. That much we know from this stellar plow through unclouded, everyman blues. In other words: King is up to his

usual spectacular self. No genre jumping, no fusionist promiscuity. Not even brass or keys. Just his stinging guitar and molasses voice, a bruising three-man backstop, and one broad-shouldered groove after the next. "Bring Your Pretty Self Home" hustles out of the gates first, its lover-man persuasiveness delivered with crosscut motion.

But King's sweet spot really lies in mid-paced steamrolling, excelling at philosophizing about loss and lust with an ease that lets the plaintive catch in his throat match the daggered treble notes peeling off his Gibson ES knockoff. B.B.'s pinpoint etiquette is fully in play here—just tougher and more downhome. Beneath, Doug Lancio's rhythm guitar stays ever colorful, even squishing a wah-wah pedal to great elastic effect on "You Don't Love Me." New originals, select covers, and crowd pleasers long embedded in King's onstage repertoire intermingle. That's how the fabulously bummed-out "Today I Started Loving You Again" gets to commiserate with "My Nerve's Gone Bad" and the anthem of remorse, "The Things I Used to Do." Heavily thumping, "Darling, I Love You" and "King of the Castle" reign as the resident stompers, genuine dance music for juke-joint Saturday nights. After all, you don't rule as King without being regally blue.

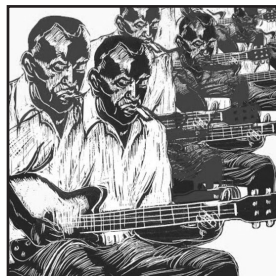
DENNIS ROZANSKI

**LUM GUFFIN**  
*Lum Guffin*  
SUTRO PARK/MISSISSIPPI (LP)

Just as was done for crotchety Lattie Murrell, spine-tingler Bishop Perry Tillis and all the other great unknowns he uncovered, Bengt Olsson arrived with his mobile "studio" on yet another household doorstep. It was 1973, and the Swedish folklorist was again sweeping through

the South on a recording jag to uncover country-blues geniuses in the raw. This time was Columbus Guffin's shot at beating silent anonymity. To show the world how he could sure make that guitar of his ring out. Here lies stellar proof that the legit Tennessee bluesman ever existed at all. Sure, Lum (1902-1993) busked on the streets of Depression-era Memphis and later built quite the local reputation as a human jukebox. But recognition outside of Shelby County proved unjustly elusive—except to crate diggers lucky enough to score the LP memento from Olsson's visit. Because 1973's rare *Walking Victrola*, a reference to Guffin's songster capacity, was his one and only full-length. And a standout one at that. Newly retitled as *Lum Guffin*, the wondrous contents of that old Flyright record are now no longer impossible to find.

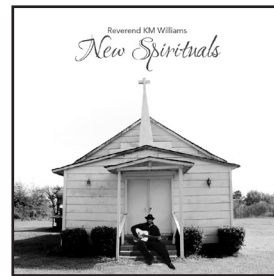
Once again we're back inside 6208 Old Brownsville Road, there in the room as Guffin cleanly picks apart "St. Louis Blues" not long after having chugged "Railroad Blues" on the sharpest of razored bottleneck slurs. He's a natural, bypassing any need to consistently rhyme couplets on "Key to the Highway," while letting that slide intermittently grab the reins from his mudslide voice to sing lines of "Jack O Diamonds" on its own. Ten fingers do the work of 20 on those strings—except when visitor Bill Barth actually does entwine a second guitar around



"Moanin' and Groanin' Blues" (plus two others).

In this golden age we live, where vinyl-only labels like Sutro Park and Mississippi Records lovingly reclaim lost blues treasures like *Lum Guffin*, it just doesn't seem right unlocking the woozy bottlenecked secrets of "Old Time Piece" or the stately slide eulogy for "Johnny Wilson" as a sterile stream of binary code. Dropping in a stylus is the cherished way to ride their groove.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**REVEREND K.M. WILLIAMS**  
*New Spirituals*  
CDBABY.COM

Raw power is what enables faith to shake the rafters, to unhinge chapel doors. It's also what turns Reverend K.M. Williams, a Holiness preacher who founded the Sound Gospel Bible Ministries, into God's cyclone. Blessed with the triumphant force of his hardened voice and a guitar with a very voluble nasty streak, the 59-year-old Texan's presentation is judiciously unbridled and supremely rhythmic. Sort of like a holy John Lee Hooker or a sanctified R.L. Burnside, foot stomp and all. (In title alone, "Jump Up For Jesus Boogie" is an obvious tipoff.) That particular denomination of six-string fundamentalism makes entire meals out of one chord, unfurled in a nonstop, unbroken churn. Accordingly, *New Spirituals*,

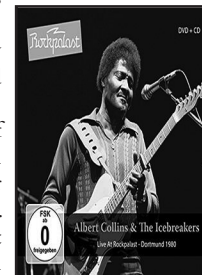
the latest in a ton of the good reverend's albums, comes across as a glorious blast of Sunday-go-to-meeting romp, of gutbucket gospel groove. Over the span of its 10 solo affirmations and revelations, the clapboard church merges with the pressboard jukejoint into one inseparable space: The wolf indeed dwells with the lamb. That bond snugs tighter yet from all these conversations between a man and his maker getting stripped down to barest bones. It's only Williams, his guitar (an Oscar Schmidt acoustic, beefed with a DeArmond pickup, or a Harmony Stratocaster copy), an amplifier that begs mercy, and a separately-miked box beneath his perpetually pumping foot. The message—"You Set Me Free," a slide-sheared "I'm Going Home on the Morning Train," "Lord, I Thank You," even the heaven-bound "Hoboin' On My Way Home"—is divine. The delivery, however, couldn't lurch any more wickedly.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**ALBERT COLLINS & THE ICEBREAKERS**  
*Live at Rockpalast—Dortmund, 1980*  
MVD (DVD + 2 CDS)

As time machines go, Albert Collins' *Live at Rockpalast—Dortmund, 1980*—an MVD exclusive release—is a dream come true: Not only do we get to hear a complete 13-song set scorched across two CDs, but the accompanying DVD also lets us gape at all 95 in-color minutes from the front row.

So, back to a particularly jaw-dropping November night in Germany we go. *Frostbite* had just hit the record bins, and Collins was on the road with a stripped, fancy-free version of his Icebreakers—no horns, no keys, no frills. Rhythm



guitarist Marvin Jackson, bassist Johnny B. Gayden, drummer Casey Jones and esteemed saxophonist A.C. Reed fearlessly hold down the fort until 'star time,' pounding "Sweet Home Chicago" and Reed's own "She's Fine" with South Side brawn.

Then, the Iceman cometh. And with Collins arrives that blistering Texas heat for which the acknowledged Master of the Telecaster was universally known. The temperature inside the German hall spikes higher yet whenever he steps back from growling into the mike and just wrings out hot clusters of burnt Tele treble for a while, descending into "Cold, Cold Feeling" before rising up to shake out "If You Love Me Like You Say." The newly unveiled love/hate song "Brick" lodges its masonry threat amid a series of high-tension breaks, whereas the most lyrical Fender work gets saved for pleading his case through "The Things I Used to Do." "Skatin'/Ice Pick" brings the first funk, woven around back-and-forth riffing between Collins' capo-choked strings and Reed's muscle-bound horn. Deeper yet are the open waters of "Cold Cuts": a plunge of nearly 15 minutes into fatback funk, authenticated right down to its slap-and-pop bass. So how can all this spirited thrashing get topped for a finale? By snowballing "Frosty" out among the audience, of course. Compared to its miniature studio version, the signature instrumental grows to thrice its typical length from Collins snaking through the howling crowd, hyper-extending his solo and blowing minds in the process, without ever missing one single scalding note. Oh, what a night.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

#### TASTE

*What's Going On: Live at the Isle of Wight*  
EAGLE

Six hundred thousand folks got their first—and/or last—Taste on a



late summer's day in 1970. Ireland's superscrappy blues-rock trio had already released a pair of records by then, including their 1969 debut. However, the gig couldn't get any grander, the audience (seemingly) any larger, exposure any more ideal than onstage at the Isle of Wight Festival—the then heavyweight world champion of rock concerts. That's a 22-year-old Rory Gallagher pulling mile after brittle mile of barbed wire from out of his beautifully battered, wood-bare Stratocaster. Thrashing around him are bassist Richard McCracken and drummer John Wilson. Together, Taste upgraded blues for the longhair rock-and-roar generation. Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon counted themselves as fans. Tons more immediately signed on after this possessed live exhibition.

The strident march of "Sinner Boy" rings with slide outbursts, only to have that bottlenecked guitar boldly take over as Gallagher's sole accompaniment when crying "Gambling Blues." "Sugar Mama" and "I Feel So Good" trudge and boogie, respectively, into eight-plus-minute explorations. "Catfish Blues" is the jammed culmination, a quarter-hour's worth of sinew distinctively seared quite unlike any other blues-rocked preparations of the old Delta anthem.

Like Blind Faith and Cream (for whom they both opened), Taste likewise succumbed quickly to mounting inner strife that even bubbled over on that magnificent August afternoon. Total implosion was only a few calamitous weeks away. (Gallagher would go on to other great

things, including playing on Muddy Waters' *London Sessions* and Albert King's *Live*; being nearly poached by the Rolling Stones as Mick Taylor's replacement; and, of course, building an illustrious solo career, right up to his premature passing in 1995, at age 47.) But, from the initial three-way battle for *What's Going On's* title track until the final clash over their third encore, "Blister on the Moon," Taste left quite the tombstone: Rise and demise packed into one meteoric set.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

#### VARIOUS

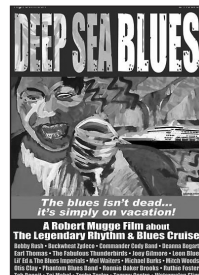
*Deep Sea Blues*  
MVD (BLU-RAY)

Just about everyone you'd hope for is onboard: Taj Mahal, Bobby Rush, Otis Clay, Ronnie Baker Brooks, Buckwheat Zydeco and on and on. Even Watermelon Slim stowed away. Packed stem-to-stern with blues power, no wonder Roger Naber's *Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise* has been duly noted as the "Woodstock of the Waves." Acclaimed music-filmmaker Robert Mugge, who swung open the doors into Mississippi's hardcore juke joints with 1991's *Deep Blues*, beautifully documents that floating nirvana from atop the ocean-breezed, guitar-strewn, horn-heated lido deck—as well as inside the performance lounges, at the piano bar, the autograph parties, Mardi Gras Night, Taj's culinary demos. En route to the Caribbean in 2007, *Deep Sea Blues* quickly piles up vicarious thrills capped between the Fabulous Thunderbirds melting down "Painted On" and seductive soul man Mel Waiters chilling out "Smooth Sailing." But more than sampling from the 70some shows, Mugge's lens also manages to capture the intangible magic which bonds blues cruisers with musicians into family.

Upgrading to Blu-

ray offers 118 minutes of visually sparkling benefits. The turquoise waters lapping against the sands of St. Barts and Grand Turk are just as vivid as the Les Paul getting an inspired beating at the hands of Michael Burks over "As the Years Go By." So crisp is the view, you can even now distinguish individual sequins shaking in Lil' Ed's scarlet fez during an outrageous bottlenecking of "Icicle in My Meatloaf." All this heightened vibrancy just about makes for a wholly new film.

But what does make *Deep Sea Blues* twice as great is squeezing in Mugge's *All Jams on Deck* as a mega bonus. The sequel film from 2010's voyage charts a vastly different course from its predecessor. Instead of the grand tour, its central thesis focuses on the art of the jam session. Discussions



**A Robert Mugge Film about The Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise**  
Taj Mahal • Ronnie Baker Brooks • Bobby Rush • Otis Clay • Buckwheat Zydeco • Watermelon Slim • The Fabulous Thunderbirds • Mel Waiters • Les Paul • Michael Burks • Johnnie Winter • Edgar Winter • The Blues Brothers • The Roots • Charlie Taylor • Tinsley Ellis • Clarence Avant

with Tommy Castro, Larry McCray, Coco Montoya and other headliners offer an insider's vantage to the ins-and-outs of jamming. But even just one of the cruise's late-night Pro Jams is worth a million words: On stages crammed with hungry soloists, spontaneous alchemy bubbles over from unpredicted combinations. No longer do you have to imagine the nuclear reaction from Kim Wilson, Lee Oskar, John Nemeth and Rick Estrin all harping on "Take a Little Walk With Me." Or what a mash-up of Elvin Bishop with Johnny and Edgar Winter might roar like. What about Rev. Billy C. Wirtz and the Lost Planet Airman himself, Commander Cody, jointly carving up a piano? Onboard the *Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise*, dreams do come true.

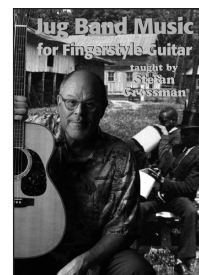
DENNIS ROZANSKI

#### STEFAN GROSSMAN

*Jug Band Music for Fingerstyle Guitar*

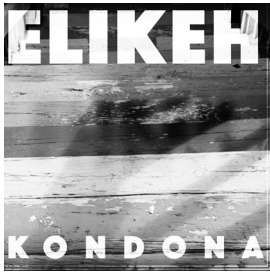
STEFAN GROSSMAN'S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

Unlike the hard, rotgut stuff, jug band music is the champagne of the blues world: typically effervescent, festive and fun—making it all the more intoxicating. During the formative period of the 1920s and '30s is when kingpins like Will Shade's Memphis Jug Band and Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers began uncorking the genre. Then the blues revival of the 1960s sparked a popular resurgence of both the songs and the band format. "Stealin' Stealin'" re-lived as a staple of primordial Grateful Dead sets, circa '66. The Rooftop Singers renovated "Walk Right In" for their one-hit-wonder smash of '63. That's also when the Even Dozen Jug Band sprung forth. Having been a member (along with David Grisman, John Sebastian and Maria Muldaur), Stefan Grossman knows the inside scoop about the bubbly business, sharing two hours of his firsthand insight by arranging *Jug Band Music for Fingerstyle Guitar*. Here, you'll conquer the "unfriendly" Rev. Gary Davis/Merle Travis C7 chord; the fanciness of diminished chords; the string-pinched loveliness of "Mississippi River Waltz," as well as five other singalong stomps. "K.C. Moan," a chugging railroad piece, receives the Lonnie Johnson



treatment, right down to extracting honey from its D chords. "Shine on Harvest Moon" uses the same rustic recipe as when Texas bluesman Mance Lipscomb cooked it, unjugged. Historic audio recordings dating as far back as 1909, along with 1950s footage of Will Shade and Charlie Burse in ragged-but-right action, are among the DVD's hidden surprises.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**ELIKEH**

*Kondona*  
ROPEADOPE (EP)

If Afrobeat or highlife or even juju means anything remotely exhilarating to you, then Elikeh is joyful reason for palpitation. Yet should heroes like Fela, E.T. Mensah and King Sunny Ade fail to ring any bells—or accelerate the heartbeat—then all you need know is that extreme Afrogroove is spoken here. Compulsively danceable, it's a jumper cable for heart and feet. The incredibly convenient part is that you needn't trek to the western coast of Africa for the experience. Luckily, leader/vocalist/guitarist Massama Dogo made the long trip so you don't have to. He and his homeland's *abadja* beat emigrated from a village in Togo, arriving on U.S. shores in 2000—and Washington, D.C., has been rhythmically all the better for it ever since. Plus, the bright, bold energy of his well-oiled big band is readily encountered, live: the Rock & Roll Hotel, in D.C., hosted the album's release party; the Baltimore Rhythm Festival headlined them this past fall; and they've lit up Gypsy Sally's, another D.C. hang, as recently as January.

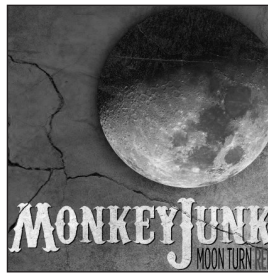
*Kondona* manages to bottle that funky lightning. Cut and mixed in Lomé, Togo, as well as in Beltsville, Md., Elikeh's fourth disc may be incredibly brief, but it's incredibly mighty, too. With electric guitars flickering (Nigerian guitarist Frank Martins is their second ace) and horns punching away atop Kweku Owusu's percolating Ghanaian percussion, 16 ecstatically kinetic minutes are nowhere near long enough. Not for something this special. No matter: Consider this EP an extremely intense distillation

of Elikeh's homebrewed fusion of all the great and groovy things about the modern sound of Africa. (And quite the teaser for their upcoming full-length.) Inevitably, you'll end up letting the disc's three densely layered tracks loop over again and again, anyway. Because "The Conversation," "Heaven," and the sung "Adja" are addictive, round-and-round juggernaut jams that need to be heard a few hundred times in a row. Yet listen once, and immediately you're a lifelong Elikeh fan.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**MONKEYJUNK**  
*Moon Turn Red*  
STONY PLAIN

Monkeyjunk isn't quite the same MonkeyJunk of yore. The three Ottawa-based blues-rockers have grown even more daring as they have wise and muscular since 2009's bust-out debut. The band that nicked their say-what name from an old Deltaism once sputtered by Son House—"I'm talking about the blues; I ain't talking 'bout monkey junk"—continues to rely on hot guitar licks, nasty slide riffs, smashmouth harp, and tales often drawn from life's dark corners. Even the Mississippi sloganeering of *shake 'em on down* invades the shout-along chorus bolting through "Light It Up." But with MonkeyJunk, it's always been about how those elements get distinctively applied for a hardnosed attack that's wholly their own, a sound that refuses being confined to any one box. Along with a fair share of sonic fury, creativity through songwriting reaches all-time highs with *Moon Turn Red*, now their fourth on Stony Plain. Entering "Live Another Day" through a spectral "Chest Fever"-like prelude, before the chorus begins channeling its central guitar spiral from the finest 1970s rock, is brave. Then there's that cool, little interstellar interlude from the massive vibratory hook that gives "Show Me Yours" its quake. The ballad



"Learn How to Love" sifts through the rubble of a crumbled relationship at the bottom of an ocean of reverb. The subtle detail of a lolling Hammond organ is indispensable to kinking the Canadian reggae chop on which "Love Attack" soapboxes its rescue plan for the world. So by the time their forceful boost of David Wilcox's "Hot Hot Papa," the lone cover, arrives, that line bragging about sipping hot lead and spitting out rivets sounds perfectly feasible coming from this wrecking crew.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**TOM FELDMANN**  
*Mississippi Hill Country Blues Guitar*  
STEFAN GROSSMAN'S GUITAR WORKSHOP (DVD)

Mississippi Hill Country Blues Guitar is actually codename for Groove 101, Tom Feldmann's crash course on the highly potent strain of drone-and-moan grown amongst the kudzu, up north of the Delta. Riff riders from the Black Stripes to the North Mississippi Allstars were spawned from this heavily rhythmic stock. Yet six of the original architects for the region's guitar trances are the honored role models here. Heroes who shook 'em on down at backwoods house parties, like Fred McDowell and his local competitor, Ranie Burnette. And Jessie Mae Hemphill, Queen of the Hill Country, who, with aunt Rosa Lee Hill, was part of the Hemphill clan, Mississippi fife-and-drum royalty. Of the nine grooves that Feldmann works out, none rely on use of a slide for their hypnosis. A thwack-happy thumb, an unwound third string, the

steady pump of your foot? Yes. But no slide, this time. Here, life gets stripped down to the utmost basics of an elastic chord (or two) and an almighty riff that gets ridden for all it's worth. "Dough Roller Blues" is Burnette's snaky hybrid of "Roll and Tumble," just as McDowell's "That's Alright" is John Lee Hooker's "Hobo Blues." As a twist, "Count the Days Until I'm Gone" delivers its gut punch in crossnote tuning. And for your dancing pleasure, R.L. Burnside's "Jumper Hanging Out on the Line" and the incredibly percussive "Poor Black Mattie" share long histories of quaking juke joint floorboards around Marshall County, just as the sloshing motion of "Meet Me in the City" did its share of moving bodies inside Junior Kimbrough's joint. Prepare to shake the shack.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**CHRIS RUSSELL'S CHICKEN WALK**



*Drive*  
CHRIS RUSSELLSCHICKEN WALK.COM

Chris Russell's Chicken Walk, firmly rooted in the riff-and-rhythm of north Mississippi's Robert Belford and especially R.L. Burnside, grinds its blues. Except cranked to wake-the-dead levels of energy, wattage, and pulverization. *Drive*, their third such blast, is a real hill-country monster, wrapped thick with kudzu around its juke-joint esthetic—yet spawned in the sludge of Melbourne rather than of Holly Springs. Never does its grip loosen, its ferocity wane, its roar relent. Voracious, immersive and overwhelming, this is the kind of nasty good-time that forces you to holler along, right into the maw. Because Russell knows full well how to blow the fuses in your head by coming so unsparingly close to popping those in his

guitar's amplifier. Around such crunch extraordinaire, only the whiplash of Dave Folley's drums deems worthy of riding shotgun. Counterbalancing their sonic tonnage are sinister plots yielded from Russell's keen eye for detailing the underbelly of society, a landscape inhabited by noir-worthy femme fatales ("Snub Nose .38") and slithering serpents ("Cottonmouth") far, far more sexual than John Lee Hooker's tame "Crawling Kingsnake." Down here, where darkness is the default, life is shadowy at its utmost brightest: "Drive All Night" catches that last glimpse of light before "Ain't Got No Family Tomb" goes pitch. Yet Russell remains the perennially cool customer, his deeply-smoked voice perfectly suited to dish out "Cry Yourself to Death" just as unflinchingly as the doomful tale of "Blackwater." For being an army of two, Chicken Walk cements up quite the wall of sound. Don't even try to overpower *Drive*: These grooves can handle all the dirty decibels you can feed them.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**THE GOOD ONES**  
*Rwanda is My Home*  
IRL

Horribly dark blues lurk just beneath—yet you'd never know. Never do the simple, sunburst songs weep. More remarkably, never does the tone of those heavenly harmonized voices snitch on unthinkable horrors survived. Adrien (their lead man), Janvier, Stani, and Javon (the newcomer) are dirt-poor Rwandan farmers who keep a sideline going as an angel band.

Meet the Good Ones, who come by their name honestly. (Who could also come by the Lucky Ones just the same for having lived to tell about their central African nation's bloodred bouts of genocide.) *Rwanda*





**CHRIS ARDOIN & NUSTEP ZYDEKO**  
*Zydeko Fever*  
MAISON DE SOUL

**Y**ou say you want a revolution? Look—and listen—no further. Because spearheading southwest Louisiana history from behind an accordion has been the Ardoin family business ever since Amédé, the absolute root of the root, first drew up the blueprints to Creole music in the 1920s and became the ill-fated Robert Johnson of the bluesy two-step in the process. Then came Bois Sec and, later, Lawrence: Each did their active part to advance Old World rustic towards zydeco explosion.

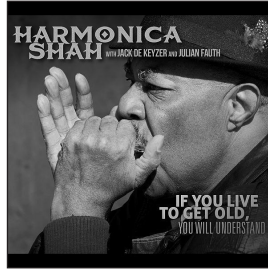
Enter Chris Ardoin, now 34. He's the prolific trailblazer for today's generations, the bold envelope-pusher bringing a sea change of modern relevancy to the genre in the form of Nustep Zydeko. The freshest edition of his grab-a-hold grooves is *Zydeko Fever*. The title track, along with "La Louisiane Waltz," is the stripped sound of throwback traditionalism. More often, his layered vocals dish streetwise poetics on adult concerns—the sexy pluses ("Steady Rock," "Hit the Lottery") and minuses ("Drunken Promises")—with an R&B undertow designed to shrink the space between two bodies. Yet true to the Ardoin bloodline, a gregarious button-accordion remains king of this brave new world. And albeit reshaped, the familiar unrelenting shove of zydeco creates an instant dancefloor wherever you are.

But not only does Mr. VIP set the future-forward norm, he also performs (all but an occasional instrument or two), writes, arranges, publishes, produces, records, mixes, and masters it, too. Everything except for—perhaps—manufacturing the actual discs onto which the revolution gets burned. Chris Ardoin has a firm grip on doing what an Ardoin was legendarily born to do: Bliss you out by dancing you up, without ever letting on that the status quo has just been majorly disturbed.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**HARMONICA SHAH**  
*If You Live to Get Old, You Will Understand*  
ELECTRO-FI

**F**ace it: Having the blues can be absolute hell. Luckily, Harmonica Shah is always there to harden the blow. His slop-jar Detroit



etiquette has a way with words that's just as savage as his Motor City mojo. Who else is out there finessing such traumatic poetry as "Congratulations, That New Love You've Got is My Wife" or the no-less thorny "She Used to Be Beautiful"? Displaying the same junkyard grace that once dredged up "All My Kids is Ugly" and "Don't You Feel like a Dog Covered in Fleas" for some of his five prior Electro-Fi albums, gut punches never get sugarcoated. Good thing, since none of their meaty shuffles cater to mainstream manners either. Not even the rumba bopping behind "She May Be Your Woman" can diffuse the gravity of the testosterone-fueled situation at hand. It's yet another grand case of Shah's unvarnished voice barking out crotchety talk inevitably laced with threats of impending violence. The ex-Ford Motors worker is one tough s.o.b.—and that's even before he and his four accomplices dish their rowdy alley music. Julian Fauth's piano classes up the joint—a tad. Even then, his chattering is no match for the dirty shiver of Jack De Keyzer's slide guitar or, of course, Shah's own roughhouse harping. "Baby, You Have Got to Change" sets the tone from the start. Its heavy, fibrillating guitar riff is on you in a flash, shocking the system as Shah lays down his ultimatum. Life only deteriorates from there: "I Just Don't Want You No More" gives the heave-ho; "Two Legged Grey Mule"

readies for battle. And by continuing to show a healthy disregard for decorum, *If You Live to Get Old, You Will Understand* elevates Shah to new lowdown heights.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

**MAGIC SAM BLUES BAND**

*Black Magic: Deluxe Edition*  
DELMARK

**I**969's *Black Magic* was the latest and greatest revision of "Magic Sam" Maghett's blueprint for innovating Chicago blues: a proprietary blend of sweat, soul and saturated tremolo. Equally essential, though, was the glowing quiver in that supertight vibrato of his, as foolproof as any DNA for identifying the high-flying voice as Sam's. He, like fellow neighborhood contemporaries Otis Rush and Buddy Guy, was busily and brazenly inventing a whole new breed of guitar-centric thrill over on the city's West Side. Crisp arrangements with a modern snap never lumbered like those Old World blues from across town. His band helped with that by hoarding hometown aces: fellow guitarist Mighty Joe Young, pianist Lafayette Leake, bassist Mac Thompson, and Odie Payne, Jr. on drums. New to the mix this time around were saxophone punches thrown by Eddie Shaw, the heavyweight who battled beside Muddy before doing so for Wolf.

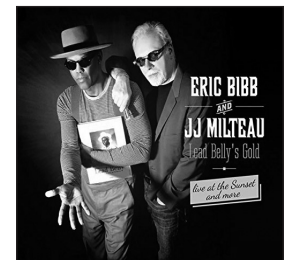
Kicked off with a James Brownian grunt that's followed up with a wicked three-minute shimmy named "I Just Want a Little Bit," the original record cooks straight through until the climactic blast from Otis' "Keep On Loving Me Baby" shuts it all down, nine tracks later, at the 39:04 mark. In between is where Freddy King's rubbery "San-Ho-Zay" bounces a mile high and Sam's Epiphone Riviera spills a slow, steady stream of teardrops over "You Better Stop." Just don't miss that 25-second fuse of skimmed notes burning down before "Same Old Blues" begins



gnashing: It's sublime.

Turns out that not only was this Magic Sam's second full-length masterwork—adding upon 1967's inaugural *West Side Soul*. But, released mere days before his 32-year-old heart gave out in December of that year, *Black Magic* also became the last album he ever actively made, his unexpected goodbye. Newly remastered from the analog mother tapes, this *Deluxe Edition* adds eight orphans with most of their pre-start banter left intact. Rich with alternate takes (two never before heard) plus a pair of outtakes (a smoky "Blues for Odie Payne" instrumental; some "Keep On Doin' What You're Doin'" grinding), the set now pushes to the 68:19 mark. That makes for a slew of sparkling Magic Sam riffs: Those urgently unhurried hooks that snag ears, whether spraying sunshine ("Everything's Gonna Be All Right") or acid ("It's All Your Fault").

DENNIS ROZANSKI



**ERIC BIBB & J.J. MILTEAU**  
*Lead Belly's Gold*  
STONY PLAIN

**L**ead Belly's *Gold* is an acoustic evening of idol worship that plays out largely before an intimate audience snuggled inside the Sunset, a famed Parisian jazz club. Headliner Eric Bibb finds the perfect partner in J.J. Milteau, France's harmonicist of note, who ups the level of intimacy by

## BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

sculpting lines as well as an array of reedy tones with subtle grace. Light drums and intermittent bass add a little push. So pristine are the 11 live performances that, aside from warm applause the set rightfully earns, they're indistinguishable from the five overflow tracks cut in a nearby studio. That's just how effortless and natural Bibb is at caressing guitar melodies as well as the stories and emotions embedded within. In his ever tasteful hands and soft-speaking throat, Bibb calmly tames that telltale Lead Belly gruffness, whether chugging aboard the railroad rhythm of "Midnight Special" or levitating "The House of the Rising Sun" as a near-motionless weep. Also benefiting from that softened, warmhearted touch is the universal singalong "Goodnight, Irene" and its acid-tongued counterbalance, "Chauffeur Blues." "Bring a Little Water, Sylvie" gains the most, now a real work of beauty. Milteau performs his own brand of magic, as when drawing "Grey Goose" from his harp with the kind of chordal richness that's virtually symphonic. "When I Get to Dallas," an original venture between Bibb and Milteau that tells of their celebrated honoree's early street-singer days, doesn't hail from the Lead Belly canon. Nor does "Swimmin' in a River of Songs," another more personalized tribute that brings the project to an inspirational close.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

### LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

*Shootin' Fire*

CICADELIC

### LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS & BILLY BIZOR

*Wake Up the Dead!*

CICADELIC (2 CDS)

April 11, 1969. The conditions were ideal—perfect, in fact—for a Lightnin' strike that Friday: Hopkins was loose, bummed out and amped up. Plus, the Texan was on home Houston turf, there inside ACA Studios, when lashing

out at life while hunched over his electrified guitar. A modest rhythm section flanked him. But misery invaded him, as diagnosed when self-confessing "the blues is on Lightnin's mind" right before kickoff. So, all that was needed was for producer Roy Ames to flash the roll-tape signal from across the glass for Hopkins to unleash his melancholy majesty onto *Shootin' Fire*.

Hearing "Got a Letter This Morning" and the bloodthirsty "Born in the Bottom" drop down into lowest gear, you'd think happiness was Lightnin's own personal kryptonite. Strategically creeping up and down the frets, 57-year-old fingers drip notes of the deepest blue that pool into story-songs as classic as "Shinin' Moon" or as rare as "Baby Please Don't Do Me Wrong." The slow drag of his drawl further ensures these as affirmations of grief rather than mere performances. Life at its lowdown best was a particular specialty.

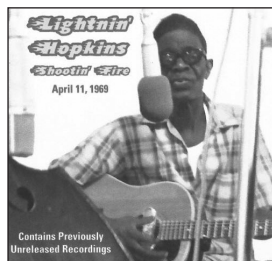
But no matter how fantastic the minor-key wallowing is, no fixed tempo rule exists. "Moving On Out" hits the road by hopping the boogie. Between Hopkins' runs on the strings and the skip to Cedric Hayward's piano counterpoint, the unfettered swingmatism of "Mistrust My Baby and She Mistrust Me" almost reaches jazzy freedom. But it's the red-eyed onrush of libido which spurs "Shake That Thing" and "Feel Like Ballin' the Jack" to pick up the pace to a brisk trot.

True to form, the country bluesman is uninhibited. That allows his wellspring of impromptu creativity to invent some "Stinking Foot" shtick on the spot, then spontaneously sew "Go Ahead" onto a juke-joint version of "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Under such haphazard conditions, Hopkins openly directs traffic during play, prodding his band to take another pass through a section here or to lay out there. Even to follow him off the cliff on a

rhythmic plummet to even lower depths.

But if the volume wasn't already cranked to revel in the gutbucket glory of Lightnin's bass strings, those skyward treble twists, or the rip in his throat whenever exclamation points need be stabbed onto a lyric, then "Good as Old Time Religion" will force your hand. The cut-loose jam is a real dustup, a moral paradox wrestling a sanctified title against its inherent hellraising. So good is the emotional release that, midway, Lightnin' spontaneously blurts out "Ooo-wee!" as the session runs hotter yet. How hot? At one point, he's overheard warning: "I'm shootin' fire." Sure got that right.

That same blaze burns through *Wake Up the Dead!*,



a double-disc set picking up right where *Shootin' Fire* leaves off. For space purposes, a handful of outtake and mess-around tracks remaining from the April '69 date live here; "Mojo Hand," however, is a fully-formed rocket blast. But—fortunately—Hopkins was no less scorching inside ACA, roughly one year earlier. Neither was he any happier nor any quieter on that June 17th. "Wake Up the Dead" and "Lonesome Life" offer fabulously miserable, speaker-rumbling proof. "I'm Tired of Trouble" and "You're Gonna Miss Me" are dredged from out of that same bitter earth.

However, Billy Bizar, Lightnin's cousin, makes a significant addition to the mourning. They're quite the pair: Hopkins, behind dark shades, clanging his wired guitar against the rhythm; Bizar instead weaving his backcountry harmonica through it, from beneath

a fedora. (Or is some of that wheezing also George "Wildchild" Butler's harp? The researched liner notes stoke the controversy.)

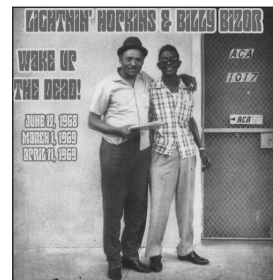
But they can whoop it up back in the alley, too. You needn't be bombed—or even tipsy—for the Third Ward ghetto romps "Pine Gum Boogie" and "How Dooz It" to work their rumpled brownbag magic. By pulling out all the stops, both wildly intoxicating instrumentals achieve a certain sonic violence, an inherent sense of careening—Elmore Nixon's piano tumbling away; Bizar huffing; Hopkins punishing that poor pickup wedged into his axe—as if the band might actually topple off the tracks.

*Wake Up the Dead!*'s second disc is the biggest surprise of all. The contents belong fully to Bizar, whose scant work—especially solo stuff—is a real hard-find. That makes this March 1969 session the proverbial needle in a haystack. Its blend of unplugged harp/guitar demos and band blowouts builds an airtight case against his unjust obscurity, while also doubling as a terrific collection of country blues with an invigorating urban tint.

Vocally, Bizar isn't the bawl-and-moaner that Hopkins is, but more of a blaster. Denominationally, though, Billy is a groovist. Bass and the adamant drums of Linda Waring lock onto a bonded pulse down in the basement; the ace guitar of Duke/Peacock session man Clarence Hollimon works right above. Bizar commands everything else, blowing up a storm by buzzing reeds with an endless selection of wah-wah-wahs and loop-the-loops. Workouts typically hover around the six-minute mark, allowing ample time to go long and wheezy. If you thought the lazy insistence of "I'll Miss You So" giving way to the accelerating insistence of "Tell Me Where You Stayed Last Night" is a pulmonary test, then marvel

at the control required of "Let's Pitch One," a wordless, breathless swinger. "Screwdriver" pounces, too, but doesn't give out until nine minutes later.

But alas, all these Clarity sessions could've remained forever abandoned. Heroically, Cicadelic Records was not about to let perfectly great Lightnin' recordings fall by the wayside just because previous mixes were horrendous. Worse yet were the gobs of excessive reverb. That's likely why all past issues got piecemealed, at best, onto compilations. So, it's an all-out rescue mission to save a vital chunk of Texas blues history. Devotedly returning to the original three- and four-track masters, the tainted veneer gets stripped away to reveal



newly balanced, in-your-face fidelity. That same love and commitment continues into the booklets, packed with exhumed session mementos like photos, log sheets, recording contracts, and even Lightnin's well-earned paycheck for \$800's worth of blues.

Best of all is that every blue note and every uttered syllable (sung or chattered off-mike) committed to tape has been finally rounded up. Several even had been doomed to stay on the shelf, unheard until now. Among them are the instrumental mash-up "Moving on Out When the Saints March In" and "Old House Torn Down," a crusher hand-delivered with sparkling string-dashes. Never before has this reunion happened.

Thanks to archeological work of the highest order, *Shootin' Fire* and *Wake Up the Dead!* now stand as definitive versions of prized sessions.

DENNIS ROZANSKI