

herself to be a winning lyricist, as well as a stylist, who excels within complex but unpretentious neo-soul/light-jazz blend. This is the side of Big Baby that the Friday night regulars at Memphis Sounds know best; along with the nuanced sophistication and suppleness she shows on most of the disc's other offerings, it whets our appetite for volume two.

—David Whiteis

FAST EDDIE CLARKE

Make My Day—Back to Blues

Secret Records - (No #)

Hard rock guitar legend Fast Eddie Clarke, formerly of Motorhead, has presented a fairly straight-forward album of all-original, mostly blues material—some of it quite soulful—titled **Make My Day—Back to Blues**.

How could the heaviest, nastiest, nuttiest of British metal's pioneering guitarists—a man guilty of creating the brutal riffs to such

classic songs as *Overkill*, *Bomber* and *Ace of Spades*—slow himself down and mellow himself out enough to accomplish such a task? Age, maturity, and meeting the right musicians with whom to collaborate are certainly among the answers. Another could be that the man had the blues in him all the time. Doubters should just listen to Motorhead from any era of their almost four decades together and deep inside the cacophony will be the blues—speeded up and amplified to utter insanity, but still the blues.

Clarke grew up in England with blues music all around him. He admired the Yardbirds, the Rolling Stones, and John Mayall, along with other British blues/rock greats as a youth. He then went on the road to offer his guitar talent to Curtis Knight and his band, replacing Jimi Hendrix, in fact, before winning his gig with Lemmy and Co. in the mid-1970s.

In 2008, Clarke found himself at what he calls in the liner notes to **Make My Day** “a loose end.” At a party he was introduced to blues/jazz keyboardist Bill Sharpe of the English jazz/funk group Shakatak. The two hit it off immediately, beginning work on a few blues tracks in the studio. After some delays, for which Clarke has taken full responsibility, **Make My Day—Back to Blues** was issued. The at-times surprising, but always satisfying disc offers a wonderful insight into Clarke's current sense of the blues.

Thankfully, Clarke opted to sing on this album. He almost didn't. Rarely seeming fully confident in his vocal abilities since he first sang on Motorhead's **Step Down** in 1979, Clarke presents a rough, edgy, everyman voice that is highly personal and works as an agreeable accompaniment to his sharp, stinging guitar. A better-known comparable singer might be Ron Wood. “Even I like them,” Clarke has said of his vocals on the new disc.

The album's second cut, *Mountains to the Sea*, indicates this will be no novelty album, with Clarke, Sharpe, and wonderful female backing vocalist Jill Seward, also of Shakatak, melding on what amounts to a relaxed, grooving, modern-day British blues/rock masterpiece. With production values at times reminiscent of Malaco Records of the 1980s and '90s, the touching and beautiful title track of the album sounds as if it could be sandwiched between the later recorded works of Bobby Bland and Little Milton on one of that Jackson, Mississippi-based label's great samplers of the era.

Clarke does not forget his hardcore fans, the Motorheadbangers, nor adherents to the band he later co-founded and still leads

sporadically, *Fastway*, and provides these aging mobs with some wicked ear candy on the raging blues rockers *Heavy Load* and *Walking Too Slow*.

The remainder of the 12-song disc is a collection of expertly delivered, energetic and sometimes even rollicking, piano/guitar blues, filled with Clarke's idiosyncratic, highly personal lyrical themes.

Make My Day is Clarke's inaugural solo blues record and it will surely be the hope of most of those who hear it that it's just a first peek into this guitarist's deep and unique ability to present the musical form with insight, spirit, taste and variety.

—Steve Sharp

GREG IZOR & THE BOX KICKERS

Close to Home

Tangle Eye - 1021

Austin-based singer and harmonica player Greg Izor kicks off the opening track of his second full-length album with an air of power and authority. “Get my money / I know you heard what I said,” he warns. “I don't want you comin' around here / Until you've got all my bread.” Izor penned all 12 tracks on **Close to Home**, and this one, appropriately titled *Get My Money*, features a scorching first position harp solo with one of the fiercest blow bend runs in recent memory.

Izor, a native of Vermont who was one of the featured artists in **LB's** special harmonica issue last year, is a legitimate powerhouse and a throwback to the heyday of players such as Little Walter, Rice Miller and Big Walter Horton. Never anachronistic or derivative, however, Izor combines a deep respect for tradition with the same ability to innovate that defines the work of some of today's best contemporary harmonica players (think Mark Hummel, Kim Wilson or Annie Raines).

When he's not on the road touring in Europe or handling vocal and harp duties for Anson Funderburgh and The Rockets, Izor can be found playing several nights a week in the Austin area, his home base after relocating there from New Orleans in 2006. One of the benefits of recording **Close to Home** in Austin was that it gave Izor the opportunity to work with an outstanding ensemble of musicians, most of whom are also based in the Texas capital: The Fabulous Thunderbirds guitarist Mike Keller and his brother, Corey Keller, on drums; bassist



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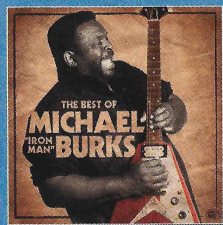
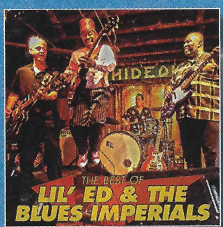
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