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Southern Skies

Keith Stone, *The Prodigal Returns* (Self Release; 50:38 ★★★★★) On his latest album, singer-guitarist Keith Stone, back home in New Orleans, is in happy service to the r&b royalty he met and admired as a performer in French Quarter clubs in the 1980s and '90s. One of them, Dr. John, turns up on "Just A Closer Walk With Thee," a meeting place for gospel, blues and traditional jazz. An ordained preacher who kicked hard drugs, Stone lavishes eight of his well-grounded original songs with authentic feeling. Slow blues "First Love," carrying his stone-cold sober vocal and anguished guitar work, is a masterful self-study of the relationship between light and darkness. Throughout, Stone's faithful rhythm and horn sections draw upon technique and spirit equally.

Ordering info: keithstonemusic.com

Johnny Winter, *Down & Dirty* (Megaforce DVD; 101:00 ★★★½) Greg Olliver's latest film capably chronicles guitarist Johnny Winter's sudden vault to rock stardom in the late 1960s, his lost time on heroin and his drug-free return to blues potency not long before his death in 2014. The focus, though, is on the later period, when the cameramen accompanied Winter on tours of the States, Europe and Asia. In interviews, Winter, vexed by OCD nervousness, reveals much of his narcissistic inner-self, and what it was like growing up as a near-blind albino in Texas. His drunken carousing on the road is difficult to watch. Guitarist Warren Haynes and Johnny's brother Edgar are among those with something pertinent to say about the late Texan.

Ordering info: megaforcerecords.com

Fats Domino And The Birth Of Rock 'n' Roll—The Big Beat (Shanachie DVD 999; 142:00 ★★★★★) This documentary by Joe Lauro persuasively advances the proposition that pianist Fats Domino is not only a giant of New Orleans r&b but also, as the film title says, a parent of rock 'n' roll. Its primary construction is a narrative driven by Domino's articulate biographer Rick Coleman, though the film features ample interviews with the pianist and close colleagues like Dave Bartholomew, Allen Toussaint and studio owner Cosimo Matassa. The black-and-white concert sequences are priceless.

Ordering info: shanachie.com

Jeff Plankenhorn, *SoulSlide* (Lounge Side 0012; 44:17 ★★) Austin's Jeff Plankenhorn, striving on his first album for a merger of blues and Southern rock, is a singer and slide guitarist whose main asset is proficiency. His songs are an uninteresting bunch. He's better off working with



Keith Stone

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the Resentments and the Purgatory Players than out on his own.

Ordering info: loungesiderecords.com

Etta Baker, *Railroad Bill* (Music Maker LP 174; 17:55/17:52 ★★★★★) Piedmont-style blues guitar picker Etta Baker was in her early 80s when supporter Tim Duffy recorded her performing traditional ballads at her home in rural North Carolina between 1995 and '98. She's marvelous, showcasing the pristine art and craft of storytelling through gentle, intricate music. Baker sang on her only other solo record, *One Dime Blues*, not this.

Ordering info: musicmaker.org

Various Artists, *Zydeco Crossroads—A Tale Of Two Cities* (MVD Visuals DVD; 87:00 ★★★) This film by Robert Mugge and Diana Zelman was part of Philadelphia radio station WXPN's recent series on the music and culture of French-speaking black Creoles in southwestern Louisiana. The first section with visiting zydeco performers in concert near the Quaker City isn't much, but things perk up when the cameras travel to Lafayette. Generations of the Williams and Ardoin families tap reservoirs of dance-inducing r&b and blues. So do accordion experts Stanley "Buckwheat Zydeco" Dural Jr. and undervalued Major Handy. Music historian Michael Tisserand supplies a crash course on zydeco. But some of the editing is dicey and several directorial decisions are puzzling—such as their decision to interview notables outside the famous El Sido's club near noisy street traffic. **DB**

Ordering info: mvd2b.com