

Oscar Wilson, Chicago Blues Festival, 2017. Photo: Mike Stephenson.

OSCAR WILSON: One Room Blues

Airway Records AR-4769 (47:55)

When I Was Young/ Lost Mind/ Found Love/ Blackjack/ Reconsider Baby/ Texas Turnaround/ The River's Invitation/ I'm Lost Without You/ Farther On Up The Road/ Your Letter/ Every Day I Have The Blues/ One Room Country Shack/ Happy Reunion

For those not aware, Oscar Wilson is the singer with Alligator Records' new signing The Cash Box Kings. Although billed as his album, this release is really a collaboration between Oscar, sax player Sam Burckhardt, Cash Box Kings guitarist Joel Paterson, Pete Benson on keyboards, Beau Sample on bass and drummer Alex Hall. This team of musicians was put together by Burckhardt and Paterson for the 2017 Basel Blues Festival in Switzerland, and this album, recorded in Chicago in the early months of 2017, thus ensued.

Airway Records was originally the label of the late Sunnyland Slim and, with agreement with his widow, Burckhardt has been able to continue the label. It's a set of jazz and swing-inflected old school blues and is a joy to listen to, from start to finish. With covers ranging from the likes of Percy Mayfield, Ray Charles, and Lowell Fulson amongst others, and with two originals, one each from Paterson and Burckhardt, you know it's going to be a good one from the outset.

It kicks off with a tribute to Sunnyland via 'When I Was Young', an up-tempo swinging outing with a great tom tom beat and some fine sax work from Burckhardt, and some great guitar lines from Paterson, and it sets the tone for the whole album. It goes without saying that the vocals of Oscar are superb throughout. The superb melancholy music of Percy Mayfield is a perfect fit for this ensemble, and both 'Lost Mind' and 'The River's Invitation' are truly excellently executed by all. 'Texas Turnaround', written by Paterson is a great instrumental romp that allows the artist to show off his considerable understated skills on guitar. 'Farther Up The Road' is a superb number at any time and this version allows Oscar to show off his excellent vocal style and once again Paterson fills the gaps with some superlative guitar runs. The last track, 'Happy Reunion', written by Burckhardt, is a fine mid-tempo instrumental allowing him, Paterson, and Benson to stretch out a little on their respective instruments set to an irresistible shuffle beat.

I would love to see this crew live as I bet they would tear the house down with their retro and understated style. In the meantime, this excellent disc will suffice.

Mike Stephenson

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG: Live From The North Side Of Chicago

Rock Beat CD 3386 (41:20)

Cruisin' Down Highway 99/ That's All Right/ Whole Lotta Lovin'/ I Can't Quit You Baby/ Baby Please/ Stormy Monday/ Turning Point/ Wise Fool's Express

As Willie Dixon puts it in a brief note accompanying this splendid live recording (great soundboard fidelity) from ex-boxer Mighty Joe Young's long-time local haunt – Chicago's fabled Wise Fools Pub – in July, 1978: "I used Joe on many sessions because of his ability to interpret the particular feeling of a song. He has a traditional sound which he is able to suit to a very modern style, using this combination to emphasise a mood."

In other words, Young was a master at creatively synthesising the blues with the very forthright, quickly developing, soul/jazz music idiom – a

point underlined by the title of Young's 1971 debut Delmark album, 'Blues With A Touch Of Soul'. Accompanied here on a long unavailable reissue by Freddie King's brother, Benny Turner on bass guitar, drummer Willie Hayes, organist Tommy Giblin, and pianist Lafayette Leake, Young is in his prime on an inspired mix of covers and originals.

Framed by a pair of soul-drenched, energetic instrumentals (the descriptively entitled 'Cruisin' Down Highway 99' and 'Wise Fool's Express', a roaring homage to the venerated club) Young keeps the patter to a minimum and shines on all the remaining titles – favourites encompass an in-the-groove cover of Jimmy Rogers' 'That's All Right', an angst-ridden recall of Otis Rush's compelling, signature song 'I Can't Quit You Baby', a too-brief, yet palpably invigorating, redo of Percy Mayfield's plea 'Baby Please', and, to these ears, the set's highlight, a deeply reflective yet hair-raising version of T-Bone's 'Stormy Monday'.

An exemplary addition to Young's too brief discography as a band leader, originally produced by the Wise Fools folks and released briefly on their Intermission imprint.

Gary von Tersch

★ *Alternative* **TAKES** ★

ROY BUCHANAN: Loading Zone/You're Not Allowed

BGO Records BGOCD1279 (Two CDs: 41:03; 40:07)

Roy Buchanan has always held a fascination for blues fans, not least because of the three albums he waxed for Alligator in the 1980s, his early association with Johnny Otis, his recordings with Dale Hawkins and Ronnie Hawkins, and reputedly as the 'man who turned the Rolling Stones down' not sure for whom or when.

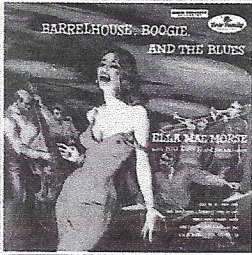
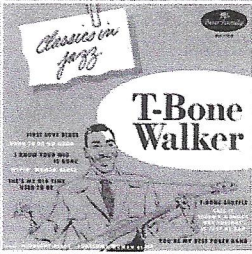
The fact is that he was a damn fine guitar player – at one point in the early 1970s he was described as the 'best unknown guitar player in the world'.

His 1972 instrumental cover of Patsy Cline's 'Sweet Dreams' on Polydor found its way onto my shelves when it first got airplay and the track is now regarded as a guitar classic. He had joined Polydor in 1972 – eventually cutting five albums for them and going gold in 1973 with 'Second Album'. In 1976 he joined Atlantic for three albums (including the two here) and he cut one further album for AJK – and then quit recording.

Bruce Iglauer at Alligator coaxed him back into the studio and he cut three fine blues-based albums for the label. Roy sadly became a chronic alcoholic and died in 1988 – he tried to commit suicide while in a police cell and died on his way to hospital – although there are suggestions he may have been beaten while in custody.

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