

BIG CITY Rhythm & Blues

REVIEWS

BIG CITY RHYTHM & BLUES 30TH ANNIVERSARY SAMPLER #37

Special 2 CD Set

blues@bigcitybluesmag.com

As a way of saying thank you to all our wonderful subscribers, Big City Rhythm & Blues magazine goes one better than the usual enclosed sampler. It's BCRB's 30th "Pearl" Anniversary and what better way to celebrate than



to issue a two CD set of tunes. Here are 37 select gems for your audio perusal by some of our favorite artists.

All of the selections featured in this collection have been reviewed by the magazine in the past and, as a loyal subscriber, here is a way to listen to some of the best of the best while you're chilling and reading BCRB or doing whatever you love to do.

Disc 1 starts out with Bettye LaVette singing "Plan B" from her album simply called "LaVette!" This is a great tune to open this double album as LaVette gives it to you straight. She's unapologetically approaching her career and living her life the way she wants to and knows how. And she ain't got no plan B! It's got a slight funky lilt, with a touch of reggae that really hits the spot. Chicago royalty John Primer follows, with "Born in Mississippi,"

as the singer-guitarist takes it all the way back to his acoustic roots. This is Primer at his "prime" best spotlighting some of his premier slide playing and vocalizing. Charlie Musselwhite shows up here with "Storm Warning." He brings the fire in his vocals as well as signature harp playing that defines why he is a blues legend. It's a nice small combo cut that balances a somewhat laid-back vibe, with a sense of urgency. Tommy Castro & The Painkillers' "Crazy Woman Blues" is a great addition here when you wanna kick back and absorb a relaxed and moody kind of track. The production is streamlined and bare bones where you hear every little nuance. And Castro fills up each niche with a measured mix of vulnerability and bravado. Next up is Kenny Neal and Micah Willis, with "Devil's in the Delta." The father and son team really deliver on a track that shines a light on the plight of the farmers in this country. It's a powerful and soulful statement that truly elevates the roster of this sampler. New Orleans mainstay Little Freddie King brings us the gospel-tinged "Coming Home to Jesus." It's a simple and direct message of love for the Lord that will connect with your soul if you let it. Vasti Jackson's "Voodoo Boogie" jumps out of the speakers, with an arresting beat and a larger than life vocal that will cure what ails ya! Music is a healer, so let that voodoo boogie get in your soul! Moving on, Bobby Christina's Caravan, in a tribute to Matt "Guitar" Murphy per-

forms a dynamite take on the standard "Evil." In particular, Jerry Portnoy lays it down heavy on harp. A nice slice of funky blues rock is the order of the day for Rare Union's "Blues Be Strong." If you're a fan of Govt. Mule, or even vintage Black Crowes this might be up your alley. "Which Way Do We Go?" by Brandon Santini is another powerful message track that's not so preachy as it is cathartic. You just feel better when you hear the spiritual intensity and conviction of Santini's delivery. Christopher Wyze & The Tellers spin a tale of the Delta, with "Cotton is King." It's kind of like a mini-movie in the way they clearly and articulately describe the atmosphere of Clarksdale and everything surrounding cotton farming and the birth of the blues. Chris Vincent & The Raw Deal give us "Midnight After All." And it is, indeed, raw and rustic, with just the right amount of poetic charm and attitude. Gopher Broke is a strong horn and harmonica-based blues combo that gets down and dirty with "Cloud Up and Rain." It's a nice slow blues that lightly swings and features some tasty lead vocals as well. "Never Picked No Cotton" by Reggie Boone is a fun up-tempo piece. It's got that funky southern soul vibe, with great backing vocals and a killer horn arrangement. Check it out! OC Soul & The Soul Patrol Band definitely keep that party feel going here with "It Don't Take All Night." They are a soulful bluesy outfit that puts the capital "G" in groove. Be prepared to grab your dancing

shoes for this one. The Backstreet Blues Band's "Ice Cold" delivers a bluesy Cleveland welcome, with their Midwest brand of roadhouse music. Crunchy guitars and honey-dripping harmonica adds some rootsy energy to this track. Allison August's "Afraid of Love" is a funky soul-stirrer that is sure to satisfy. Her stratospheric vocals and a tough horn chart really make this a highlight. Redd Velvet's "Fish and Light Bread (The Juke Joint Song)" talks about being homesick and wanting to get back to a "low top juke joint for some fish and light bread." Sounds good to me! It's a funky little horn-infused track that's as greasy as some catfish and cheesy grits. Finally Disc 1 concludes with the title track from the 2024 release from Liz Pennock and Dr. Blues called "Christmas Eve Present." She plays some boogie at a tall piano and he picks a mean guitar, and they both usher in the Holiday season with sweetness and soulful charm.

Disc 2 is just as diverse and compelling. You get Big Chief Monk Boudreaux & Spy Boy Jwan Boudreaux of The Golden Eagles doing "Slip Don't Fall." This bursts out of the gate and packs a punch, with a loud and proud message and attitude. It's funky, with plenty of New Orleans spirit and healing power. Larry McCray just dropped a new album and "Heartbreak City" is the title track. The pride of Saginaw, Michigan is back, baby, with some of his best guitar work and songwriting in years. Brad

Vickers & The Vestopolitans offer the short and sweet "Dumb Like a Fox." It features their signature sound of exciting jump blues and an infectious rockabilly feel. Marc Stone WSG/ George Porter Jr. give us "Love is Everything." It's a nice slice of down home Memphis soul, with a great chorus and stellar arrangement. Garrett Collins Project's "Better Days" is an exciting and incendiary track that was made for these times. Collins brings an uplifting message on the wings of some wicked guitar work. Cannonball Red plays it straight and to the bone when he wants to "Put My Blues on You." The blues never sounded so good and he has a classic sound that blues lovers should pick up on immediately. Brooks Milgate brings us "I Should've Known" and displays why he is the "go to" organ man and pianist to many of the stars. Candace Ivory does a cut off her "New Southern Vintage" album called "Lookin' For My Baby." It's a lively cut that is as much fun as it is urgent in Ivory's piano-driven search to find her man! Harmonica ace and singer-songwriter Max Hightower is here with "Double Bubble." It's a track taken from his excellent release "Nothin' But the Truth." "Love's a Full Time Job" by Teresa James is packed with plenty of soul and her signature style that she exudes on the festival circuit. In the style and spirit of some of our best blues shouters and psychedelic instrumentalists, The

Alexis P. Suter Band sonically pummel you with the heart-wrenching and supremely soulful "God Gave Me the Blues" off their latest "Just Stay High" release. Bev Conklin fronts the BC Combo, with a terrific mid-tempo track called "Hooked on a Long Chain" from their MoMoJo Records release "Glass Half Full." Robbin Kapsalis WSG/ Joe Louis Walker sets some sparks flying, with the killer shuffle and title track from her current album "The Blues is in the House." Next generation singer-songwriter and blues guitar great D. K. Harrell has a brilliant cut here with "Liquor Stores and Legs" off his latest full-length Alligator release "Talkin' Heavy." Another Alligator Records alum Chris O'Leary makes an appearance, with "Lost My Mind." It's a powerful swinging affair propelled by O'Leary's mighty vocals and superb harmonica work. BCRB's own Bob Monteleone's band shows up, with a live track from his Stumbling Mice band called "Know Yice Rider." It's an excellent tune in the wheelhouse of Dire Straits, The Grateful Dead and C.S.N & Y. And, by the way, kudos to Bob for his, always superb work, curating and producing these fine samplers. Finally, these last two selections are well worth waiting for. And they both come off these individual artist's latest albums. Singer-songwriter/guitar virtuosos, Chris Cain and Toronzo Cannon deliver "Fear is My Roommate" and "Can't Fix the World" respectively. As you can clearly see, this is a fantastic and com-



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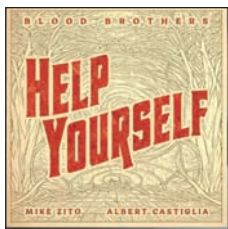
SHACK UP INN

prehensive statement on what's happening in contemporary blues today. Thanks for being there as listeners and supporters. And here's looking forward to many more years of Big City Rhythm & Blues!—**Eric Harabadian**

BLOOD BROTHERS Help Yourself

Gulf Coast Records

Mike Zito and Albert Castiglia are back with their explosive brand of rock and blues that is rooted in tradition, but, in this reviewer's estimation, is giving modern rockers out



there a run for their money.

Following on the heels of their 2023 "Live in Canada" release, these multi-award-winning singer-songwriter/guitarists return with the rousing "Help Yourself." What you have is a strong studio album that is reflective of the raw chemistry and emotional simpatico you'd find at their live shows. Every song is a banger and, save a delightful rocking cover of J.J. Cale's "Low Down," it's a collection of some of the most impassioned and exciting rock and blues that's happening today.

Blood Brothers Zito and Castiglia are joined by their killer band consisting of bassist Scot Sutherland, keyboardist Lewis Stephens and drummers Matt Johnson and Ray Hangen. Together it is a combination that mercilessly will bowl you over with frenzied power and soul.

The title track grabs you from the outset, with its captivating blend of boogie

brilliance mixed with a treatise on self-reliance. "Can't Be a Prophet" is an amusing and self-deprecating take on being treated like a king on tour and then returning to humble reality upon coming home. The slide guitar work and groove are off the charts. Zito lays it on the line, with an Allman Brothers Band-like feel on the autobiographical "Alive." He sings about losing his wife a few years ago and being thankful for a second shot at life. His screaming guitar work seems to articulate where mere words can't and, hence, says it all with his instrument.

"Soulard Serenade" is a cool, late-night-sounding instrumental that swings in a bluesy jazz and fusion kind of way. "The Best I Can" is a southern soul belter that sounds like something Otis Redding could've done. It's somewhat jazzy and very real. "Prove My Love" is, perhaps, one of Zito's best lead vocals on the album and has a nice groove and sweet harmony leads. For all you rabid vinyl collectors out there Zito and Castiglia have a song called "Ol Victrola." It's all about the vintage practice of putting needle to groove and listening to your favorite rock and blues sides. This sure took me back! The album winds down with two strong rockers in "Running Out of Time" and "Do What You Gotta."

Blood Brothers have been notoriously spanning the country on tour with guest Bill Murray and hitting some of the famed venues in the U.S. like Red Rocks, Sony Hall and The Ryman Auditorium. The incendiary riffs and melodic interplay these axe masters are laying down is so inviting and cool that any fan of modern guitar and soulful songwriting will become an instant fan....guaranteed!—**Eric Harabadian**

MUD MORGANFIELD Deep Mud

Nola Blue Records 2025

Larry "Mud" Morganfield is the oldest son of McKinley Morganfield, the iconic bluesman whom we all knew as Muddy Waters. After growing up in a rough Chicago neighborhood, Mud spent his early adult years driving a truck. It was only after Muddy's 1983 death that Mud began singing, and he didn't release his first album



until 2008. Several lauded releases followed. This, his sixth album, confirms his comfort wearing his dad's blues genes.

This generous set of fourteen tunes, clocking in at over an hour, also confirms Mud's songwriting talent: twelve of the numbers are his own. He is backed by a stellar group of Chicago blues musicians, expert at mining the Windy City vibe. Guitar chores are courtesy of Mike Wheeler and (former Muddy bandmate) Rick Kreher, keyboards by Roosevelt Purifoy and Sumito Ariyoshi, drums by Melvin Carlisle, and bass by E.G. McDonald. The set was produced by Studebaker John Grimaldi, who also wields harmonica skillfully.

For the most part, the album sticks to straightforward, twelve bar electric blues without frills. That's what we're here for, right? And the ensemble delivers. The tropes are familiar, as well: mainly woman praised, women lamented. The rhythm section grooves like they have played together forever, and Studebaker John weaves his harp fills in and out, all with the well-realized intention of high-

lighting Mud's vocals.

And...what vocals! Mud's deep baritone, slightly less raspy than Muddy's, nonetheless sounds indisputably like his dad's. Unsurprisingly, the resemblance is most marked in the two cover versions of Muddy's songs, both standouts of the set: "Strange Woman," and especially "Country Boy," the latter capturing not only Muddy's tone but also his phrasing. (That track also sports some of the stinging, galvanizing slide guitar wizardry at which Muddy was adept.)

The album concludes with its most moving number, "A Dream Walking," a tribute to Mud's mother; it's a slow, gospel-style song bolstered by organ and the backing vocals of Kristen Lowe, Demetrias M. Hall, and Jacole Avent.

Mud Morganfield is proudly and successfully carrying on the Chicago blues tradition exemplified by his father.—**Steve Daniels**

BILLY BRANCH & THE SONS OF BLUES

The Blues Is My Biography

Rosa's Lounge Records 2025

A Chicago native raised in Los Angeles, Billy Branch is entering his sixth decade as one of the masters of blues harmonica. Grammys, Emmys, Blues Music Awards...he has won acknowledgment from them all and has his place in the Blues Hall of Fame. A widely-traveled performer, he is also a renowned blues educator. He has appeared on over three hundred albums, including fifteen of his own, and he has led The Sons of Blues for forty-eight years!

His new album is his most personal; he calls it "the most important and best work I've ever done." The endeavor is ably backed by the current version of The Sons: guitarist

Giles Corey, bassist Marvin Little, drummer Andrew "Blaze" Thomas, and keyboard artist Sumito Ariyoshi. That ensemble has been together for over a half decade, and their comfort with each other is apparent as they delve into the eleven tracks penned by Branch.



The set opens boisterously with the shuffle "Hole in Your Soul," which features the instantly recognizable half-spoken vocal of guest Bobby Rush as that famed nonagenarian declares that the blues "is the mother of all music; if you don't love the blues, you probably don't love your mama." Amen! In this long set there is only one other guest, award-winning vocalist Shemekia Copeland, who shares her pipes with Branch's pleasant baritone on "Begging for Change"; the lyrics are a double entendre signifying both the need for hard cash and the necessity of social progress.

Much of the pleasure of this album derives from its variety. Despite Branch's life-long involvement in classic electric Chicago blues, there are only a couple such tracks, "Real Good Friends" (about deceitful friends) being the best. "Dead End Street," in contrast, is a funk blues augmented by horns. The horns stick around for the slow title track, which is distinguished by some really pretty piano and guitar contributions and some of Branch's most evocative harp playing. Syncopation and some fine bass characterize "How You Living?" and bass and drums drive the reggae-like "The Ballad of the Million Man March." The beautiful slow blues of "Toxic Love" precedes the

album's closer, the instrumental "Roaches," which gives the band room to stretch.

How about Branch's harp wizardry? Well, it's embodied in the album's longest track, "Harmonica Man," which confirms that Branch can range through the instrument's entire register while maintaining clear tone. At times he makes the harmonica sound not only like a "Mississippi saxophone," but also like a clarinet, flute, or even oboe. His solos are jazzy as well as bluesy, and consistently creative.—**Steve Daniels**

GEMINII DRAGON Moonlight Movin' and Groovin'

Nepotism Recordings

www.facebook.com/GeminiiDragon

The Louisiana-based vocalist states in her biographical material that she is "a lover of knowledge and the mother of four beautiful children. Spread love and the things of love in all its forms. This is our purpose and the key to heal the world we live in."

Well, you can't argue with that! I think we can all agree we need a little more love in this world. Perhaps, now more than



ever! And the red-haired chanteuse delivers a message as vibrant and urgent as her striking and captivating presence. Her rich smoky tone and silky textures enrapture a lyric like no other. And the album's mix of rock, blues and soul deftly straddles the line between old school and contemporary values.

Just to give a little context, Geminii Dragon's debut singles "Like it Or Not" and "A Storm is A-Comin'" were released in

February 2021. They quickly built a heavy buzz throughout the blues community. Her 2022 debut album, "Fighting Fire With Fire," received global rave reviews. The next album, "Equinox," kept that fan energy and interest going. The latest album, "Moonlight Movin' and Groovin'," returns with the infusion of a more heritage blues sound.

The overall feel of this album has a classic Malaco Records-type vibe to it. Christian Simeon's production is stripped down, with everything placed clearly and strategically in the mix for maximum effect. Ms. Dragon's full-bodied vocals cut through with authority. And principal collaborator Linwood Taylor's guitar wafts effortlessly in the background atop, what appears to be, warmly programmed drums and keys. Clarence Carter, Z.Z. Hill and Little Milton come to mind, with a smooth blend of '80s/'90s-flavored R&B and some gut bucket down home blues.

Over a roster of 11 penned tracks by Dragon and Taylor, some stellar cuts include the biting guitar and swampy soul of "Blues is So Good" and "Low Down Dirty (Duck.)" "Pressure" introduces a guest guitarist, Santiago Ortega. He brings a gritty swagger to his playing that is a nice complement to Taylor's more mellow style. "Mr. Slip and Slide Man" spotlights Dragon's lyrical prowess, with lines like, "Telling lies can't speak the truth, going 'round stealing women's youth, your tongue is faster than a snake's, speeding 100 miles an hour with no brakes." "Slow, Slow Moan" is kind of an updated "Stormy Monday" and up-tempo cuts "Blues Party" and "Juke Joint Jumpin'" feature guest Julia Dill on harmonica and really bring out the ebullient and joyous feel of

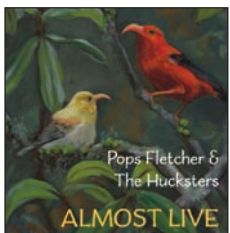
Ms. Dragon's Louisiana roots.

This is the fourth full length release for Gemini Dragon and her collaboration with Washington, D.C. guitarist Linwood Taylor and producer Christian Simeon is a winning combo. She is a fresh face and sound on the blues scene, so keep an eye and ear out for this authentic and exciting artist.—**Eric Harabadian**

POPS FLETCHER & THE HUCKSTERS *Almost Live*

Popsfletcher.com

Longtime Wisconsin musician Pops Fletcher has led his band, the Hucksters, for about a dozen years, but *Almost*



Live is his first release. The album is called *Almost Live* because the basic tracks and scratch vocals were recorded live, and later, the keyboards, guitar solos, and vocals were added, as scheduling can be difficult when band members reside in different cities and are busy with other musical projects. Pops and company have been fulfilled playing live all these years, but as Fletcher entered his 70's, the realization came that "I have multiple albums' worth of material, so I've gotta get it recorded!" *Almost Live* is an enjoyable collection of 11 well written, original songs, all by Fletcher. The swinging "Trickle Down" starts things off with a bang, followed by the slide guitar vehicle "Johnny Gets Around", featuring Glenn Davis, who also appears on "You Don't Write". His virtuosic slide playing invokes Duane Allman and

Derek Trucks, even a bit of Lowell George. In fact, the production of the album reminds me of some mid-70's Little Feat records, with Todd Phipps' omnipresent Wurliitzer electric piano and B3 Hammond organ laying down a warm blanket for the tracks to lay on. The variation of styles on the session is also reminiscent of some of Delbert McClinton's best work. "The Pleaser" deftly switches gears from half-time to briefly swing, and "Toxic" features Pops' fat, nasty guitar tone. Along with Fletcher's vocals and lead guitar throughout, most of the session includes the rhythm section of drummer Nic Fugate and bassist Tim Walter with JD Mitchell on guitars and, of course, Phipps' keyboards. Here's hoping Pops Fletcher and his crack band bring us more nuggets like those found on *Almost Live* in the near future.—**Bob Monteleone**

THE BLUES PROJECT *Live 2025*

Globe Records

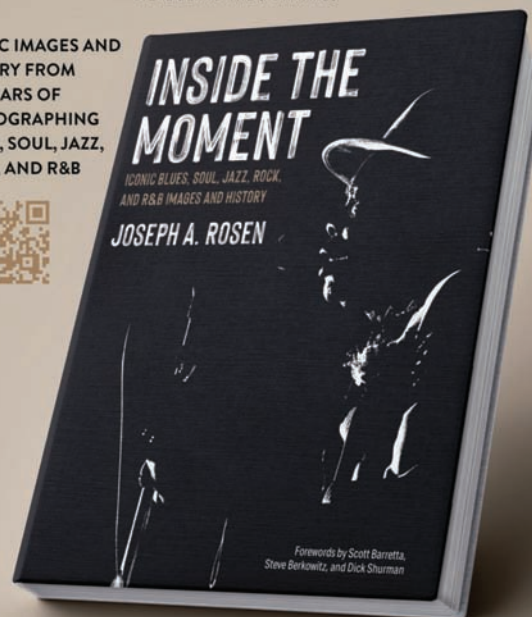
The original Blues Project existed from 1965 until shortly after its appearance at the infamous Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. The five NYC/Greenwich Village musicians were guitarists Danny Kalb and Steve Katz, drummer Roy Blumenfeld, bassist/flutist Andy Kalberg and Al Kooper on organ. Kalb and Blumenfeld reformed the influential group with different band mates to record the albums *Lazarus* (1971) and *Blues Project* (1972). The reunion of the classic lineup toured in 1973, culminating with the live LP *Reunion at Central Park*. Various mini-reunions occurred through the years, including the 2012 tour with Kalb, Katz and Blumenfeld. Fast forward

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AVAILABLE APRIL 8, 2025 ON AMAZON

to 2021 and Blumenfeld put an all-new lineup together with stellar San Francisco Bay area musicians and recorded the album *Evolution* (2023). *Live 2025* continues the legacy of this important



group, recorded at the famed Oakland venue Yoshi's and at Rancho Nicasio. The current Blues Project includes guitarists David Aguilar and Mark Newman, Ken Clark on keys, bassist Tim Eschliman and of course, Roy Blumenfeld behind the drum kit. All five musicians take turns singing lead, with Blumenfeld and Clark doing the bulk of that task. The 13 tracks on *Live 2025* include 4 songs from the recent *Evolution* album, 4 Al Kooper-penned songs from the band's heyday including the popular "Flute Thing" and "Wake Me, Shake Me." And there's 5 songs written or co-written by the current band members. Covers include the post-Robbie Robertson Band gem "Remedy" and ZZ Top's "Heard It On the X." An eclectic range of songs and styles that respects and continues the legacy of the classic and influential Blues Project. —**Bob Monteleone**

EARLY TIMES & THE HIGH ROLLERS *Fallen Angels*

Dealer's Choice Records

Early Times is originally from Sacramento, and while in California, the musician was nominated for an unprecedented 10 Sammie Awards. In 2001, he was a pioneer in satellite radio, hosting a daily show on Sirius Blues until the channel's closing in

2008. He returned to the airwaves in 2016 and is currently hosting an entertaining and informative show daily on BB King's Bluesville channel on Sirius XM Radio. Currently based in New York City, he runs his own label Dealer's Choice Records, and curates for Piranha radio. A true Renaissance man, he's never stopped performing or recording. His latest release, *Fallen Angels*, recorded with his band the High Rollers, contains 10 new original songs. The music leans heavily on the "rock" por-



tion of the blues/rock label. Early Times fronts on guitar/vocals/organ a powerful trio with Jeremy Portwood on drums and Conrad Korsch on bass. Chriscell Eminizer and Tim Ouimette provide sax and horns on a few tracks. The single "Walk Out On Me" opens things up, with a rollicking 6/8 groove reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix's "Manic Depression." And Early shows that he can get around his B3 organ's keys quite well, thank you, on this song and many others. The catchy "Candy Girl" about a girl who "lives on Sugar Street" is a highlight, with the gang vocals singing "hey hey." The touching "Sooner or Later" takes a more serious tone which tells of getting a doctor's prognosis that no one wants to receive. The rollicking "Until the World Burns Down" closes things on a high note with a Stonesey horn chart that makes the listener yearn to hear more. —**Bob Monteleone**

BOOK

INSIDE THE MOMENT: ICONIC BLUES, SOUL, JAZZ, ROCK AND ROLL, AND RHYTHM AND BLUES IMAGES AND HISTORY

By Joseph A. Rosen
Schiffer Publishing, 2025.

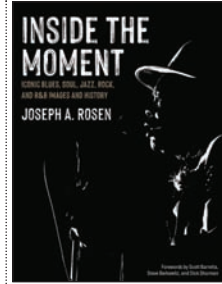
Just from the front cover photo of John Lee Hooker—an up-close black and white performance portrait shot in such deep contrast that it's almost a silhouette—you can tell that *Inside the Moment* is a fine art production. Featuring 158 stunning black and white images, the book has forwards by Scott Barretta, Steve Berkowitz, and Dick Shurman; an introduction by Joe Rosen (the photographer); eight chapters based on music genres, each introduced by an expert in the field (including Billy Price for Soul Music and The Rev. Billy C. Wirtz on Rock and Roll); an index of artists photographed; and a wonderful gift of Rosen's notes on each of the artists and sometimes details of where and how he took the picture. The notes, accompanied by a thumbnail of each photo, are at the end of the book; the layout of the book proper emphasizes the arresting images and frames the pages with undeveloped filmstrips.

Rosen is a veteran photographer, with 45 years of commercial and editorial work behind him, including being published in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Sports Illustrated*, and having his work on over 30 album covers. He found a passion for the blues the first time he saw Muddy Waters in 1976. *Inside the Moment* represents close to a half-century of

work photographing over 500 musicians (see Kingfish Ingram when he was truly young, and Buddy Guy with hair!), with some never before seen pictures of Lightnin' Hopkins, B.B. King, Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Eric Clapton, and others, while other images might seem familiar—I've seen Rosen's shot of the Holmes Brothers elsewhere, I'm sure. A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, Rosen was awarded the Blues Foundation's Keeping the Blues Alive Award in Photography and Art in 2002. In 2008, he was chosen as the "embedded photojournalist" to document the second Bluzapalooza Tour of Iraq and Kuwait. He's also the lead photographer and workshop instructor for the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruises.

Rosen worked with Schiffer Publishing in 2015 to produce his book *Blues Hands*, but obviously *Inside the Moment* has a wider intended audience, basically anyone passionate about American music based on the African American traditions of the subtitle. Readers will know most of the artists in *Inside the Moment*; three of the eight chapters focus on blues, and then there are bluesy chapters for Soul, Jazz, Louisiana Riches, Rhythm and Blues, and Rock and Roll. The late Dick Waterman (blues historian, photographer, manager of such as Son House, Buddy Guy, and Bonnie Raitt) had this to say about Rosen's art: "Joe Rosen has an innate creativity to see the unseen, to move beyond the obvious and to bring forth an image that is brilliant today and timeless for the memory."

The photos in *Inside the Moment* certainly bear out Waterman's praise. Some of the pic-



tures are staged portraits, some are closeups of the artists during performances, and some are shots of performance. The most interesting staged portrait for me is of Les Paul: he's posing with a guitar and a harmonica rack in front of and beside a blowup of a photo of a boy with a guitar and a harmonica rack, and then you realize, looking at the two faces, that the boy is Les Paul! I also especially liked Tito Puente posing with his drums and Grover Washington Jr. handling two saxes while playing one of them. In Latimore's closeup you can see the sweat rolling off his bare shoulder, and Aretha's face is expressing an intensity that Rosen's closeup captures exquisitely. I have many favorites of performance shots: Nappy Brown with his arms spreading onto the opposite page; Big Mama Thornton emerging from the shadows, sitting in a chair on stage, with a cigarette in her hand and her eyes looking toward heaven; Big Jack Johnson wearing his blues on his face; Johnny Shines seemingly shouting his blues; Etta James with the sequins on her sleeve shimmering in sparkles of light; Mavis Staples supplicating with her hands; James Carr looking like he's feeling the pain of the dark end of the street.

I thought that "inside the moment" was akin to musicians being "in the zone." But it means more than that. Steve Berkowitz provides some context in his forward

about how Rosen captures so much depth of emotion in his pictures: "Joe is beloved personally and professionally He understands and loves the music, the musicians, and the moment, and his subjects appreciate that insight and passion. It's clear he has soul, and it's recognized and responded to." Rosen himself explains that "For a photograph to succeed, those [technical] elements must be present, but it's about more than that. There has to be insight, a humanity, connection of the subject to the viewer, and that instant where all three are present and in sync. Then something special is revealed. That is what I have strived for with these photographs: to render with beauty the spirit, the energy, the music, the artist, and the instant when it is all one."

I think you will agree with me that Rosen captures that moment magnificently in the images here. *Inside the Moment* is dedicated to Rosen's mentor and friend, the great jazz photographer Herman Leonard. And there's a wonderful Rosen portrait of him holding an old-fashioned camera, ready to shoot, positioned in front of a blown up photo of Dizzy Gillespie. That sets the tone for the whole book. As do Leonard's words of wisdom to Rosen: "Above all, enjoy the music." —

Karen McFarland

An amateur photographer, Karen McFarland is a retired college English professor, former organizer for the Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, and former director on the board of The Blues Foundation. She lives in historic Greenbelt MD, and can be reached at somanybonnets@hotmail.com.

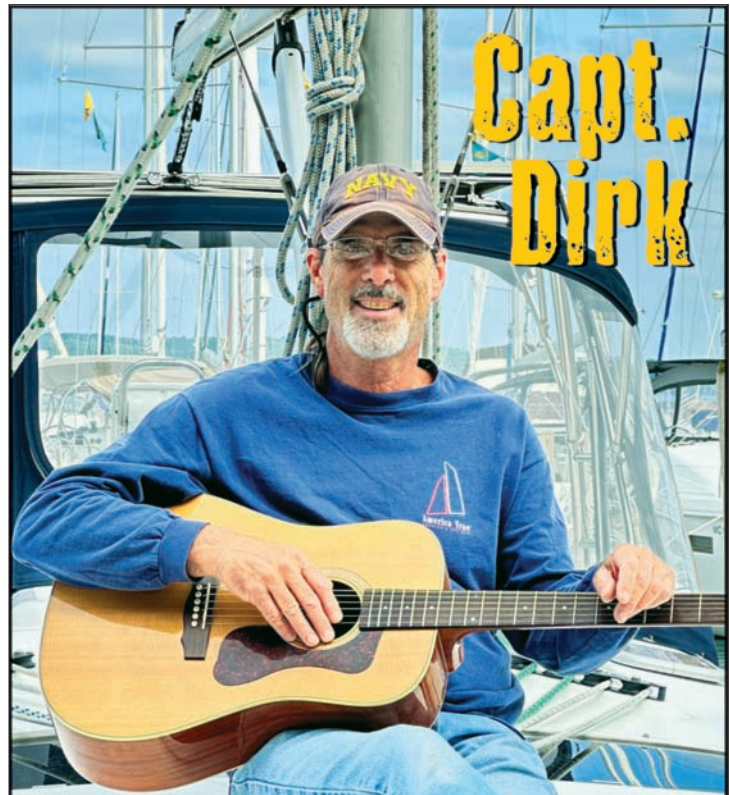


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