

# BIG CITY Rhythm & BLUES

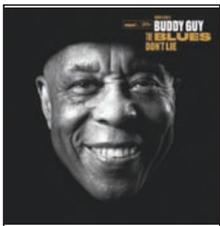
# REVIEWS

## Buddy Guy

### *The Blues Don't Lie*

Silvertone Records/RCA

This is the 34th studio album for Buddy Guy and from the big grin he beams on the cover he's telling you the blues continues to be alright! He's got Grammy Award-winning producer Tom Hambridge back at the controls again and, man, this is some powerful stuff! At 80-plus years old Guy proves that, not only the blues keeps you young, but it gets better with age. And, in the spirit of collaboration and giving back, Hambridge and Guy



included a series of stellar guests that really add character and unique entertainment value to the project.

This is the kind of album that shows all sides of Guy as an artist, as an individual and as a concerned citizen of modern society. The personal moments always have a mix of lightness, with an auto-biographical quality. "I Let My Guitar Do the Talking" and "Blues Don't Lie" are prime examples of this. The leader spans the gamut in these intro pieces by giving you detailed accounts of his life story and how the blues saved his life. And armed, assuredly, with his polka dot Fender, he blasts out of the speakers, with that signature sound that inspired Hendrix,

Clapton, Mayall, Vaughan and a litany of others. "The World Needs Love" is an enduring sentiment that could have been recorded in any era. But Guy's poignant delivery amid all the societal chaos occurring today seems more vital and urgent as ever. Another highlight on this star-studded album is Guy's collaboration with Mavis Staples on "We Go Back." It's a soul-stirring walk by the two down memory lane that starts out somewhat pedestrian in describing the costs of things and how times have changed. But then Staples makes reference to the assassination of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King and it goes into much deeper territory. It melds the blues and racial justice as they sing, "We go back when the blues were everywhere....We go back trying to get our share." "Symptoms of Love" features Elvis Costello and it shifts gears into more of a mystical rock/blues throw down. Over a throbbing JL Hooker-type beat Guy performs some of his most uninged and exhilarating lead work to date. "Follow the Money" pairs the legendary axe man with James Taylor for an atypical acoustic piece. It's a somewhat laid back and understated track, with some biting commentary about dirty dealings and unscrupulous behavior as it pertains to money and power. "What's Wrong With That" is another collab between Guy and the ubiquitous Bobby Rush. Atop a funky mid-tempo funky beat the duo rattle off, in no uncertain terms, about the simple things in life that they like; butter on a pancake, a big back seat

for comfort with lots of padding on the dash and on and on. The dialogue between them is unfiltered, fun and the groove is off the hook!

"Gunsmoke Blues" follows and takes a look at gun violence, particularly as it affects children in schools. In it, Guy sings, "Some folks blame the shooter, some folks blame the gun, but that don't stop the bullets and more bloodshed to come." It's a show and pensive tune, with Americana singer-songwriter sensation Jason Isbell helping out on vocals. Direct from the TV show "The Voice," finalist Wendy Moten chimes in with the master of the Stratocaster for "House Party." Although Moten may be a recent discovery to much of the nation, she is a veteran Nashville-based session vocalist and solo artist who really engages the party atmosphere, with her golden pipes and spirited call and response. There are some other prime moments on here as well such as the vintage rave up "Sweet Thing," the jazzy "Last Call" and the acoustic and serene classic "King Bee."

Guy has, indeed, outdone himself on this one. He puts it all on the line and is living proof that if you are singing and playing your truth, the blues don't lie!—**Eric Harabadian**

## DR. JOHN *Things Happen That Way*

Rounder

This is kind of a bitter-sweet recording in that this is the final release for the legendary Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack. But, having

said that, it is cause for celebration because the legendary New Orleans-based singer-songwriter/pianist concluded his career run on this planet in style! This release has all the passion, pathos, mysticism and funk one would expect from the man they called "The Night Tripper."

"Funny How Time Slips Away" is the Willie Nelson classic that gets a jaunty, slow and steady treatment here. The good Doctor pauses and reflects on the lyrics, with backing vocals and a piano approach recalling Ray Charles and his Raelettes. Hank Williams Sr.'s "Ramblin' Man" maintains a small



combo groove of guitarist Shane Theriot, bassist Will Lee and drummer Carlo Nuccio. It's pretty brass tacks, with a signature mystical feel. Rebennack's vocals are right up front, clear and precise. This is a star-studded affair, with Willie Nelson actually joining the good Doctor for the traditional gospel piece "Gimme That Old Time Religion." Jon Cleary adds some spice on B3 as the two pair angelically on union and harmony vocals. Nelson's son Lukas and his band Promise of the Real make an appearance on the voodoo-flavored "I Walk on Guilted Splinters." This is an eerie piece, with a mix of singing and recitation that blends New Orleans sensibilities and patois, along

with spacey sonics and psychedelia. Another Hank Williams Sr. gem represented is the perennial "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." Simply put, this is Rebennack at his most heartfelt and authentic, giving a raw and unbridled response to the melancholy lyrics. Theriot's lap steel work here is especially poignant. "End of the Line" is a Traveling Wilbury's tune that serves as a great group vocal piece fronted by Aaron Neville. Nashville session songstress and Rounder recording artist Katie Pruitt also factors significantly on this track. This gets a whole new perspective from the original. The gospel-tinged "Holy Water" spotlights more prominent vocalizing with Bonnie Raitt-like soul singer Pruitt. Primary guitarist Theriot captures a moment that blends the secular and sacred in a single bound. Dr. John's signature New Orleans swampy funk is further explored, with heavy syncopation and horns on "Sleeping Dogs Best Left Alone." There is pause for reflection and self-discovery on the original "Give Myself a Good Talkin' To." Its stripped-down combo feel and relaxed pace recalls his early '70s hit "Such a Night." The album appropriately concludes on a somewhat somber and poignant note, with the ballad "Guess Things Happen That Way." Rebennack interprets the words of composer Jack Henderson Clement in a heartfelt piece that deals with loss and perseverance. In light of the fact that this was the revered musical statesman's final bar, it serves as a fitting

and powerful finale.—**Eric Harabadian**

## MUD MORGANFIELD *Portrait*

Delmark CD

68-year old Mud Moganfield, Muddy's eldest son, has the same inviting baritone voice and spot-on knack for blues phrasing that made his dad a blues icon and him a closer on the current blues circuit. On his first album for the revered



Delmark label, and fourth overall, he delivers fourteen POWERFUL numbers (including a pair of previously unreleased titles) surrounded by a coterie of top-notch blues masters on the order of guitarists Rick Kreher and Billy Flynn, drummer Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith, pianist Barrelhouse Chuck and the harmonica handiwork of both Harmonica Hinds and Bob Corritore along with "arranging" by "Studebaker" John Grimaldi—nicely replicating the Chicago blues ensemble sound that Muddy all but created. As liner contributor Randy Wetnight (really) comments—"Mud seamlessly merges a traditional blues sound with twentieth-century sensibilities. With understated crooning and fluid, molten-metal instrumentation, Mud's blues

glows red-hot as Damascus steel being poured in a foundry." Choice cuts include an adventurous "Short Dressed Woman" (composed by enigmatic Chess studio pianist Lafayette Leake), an eerily moody cover of the Muddy tune "You Can't Lose What You Ain't Never Had," a laid-back, organ-studded version of Billy Flynn's original "Money (Can't Buy Everything)" and the philosophical "Go Ahead And Blame Me," a Corritore composition. Standout numbers among Muddy's eight originals comprise "Catfishing," the lengthy, soulfully mysterious and unerringly tasteful "Midnight Lover," the sparkling "Love To Flirt" and the reflective "Leave Me Alone." Muddy is smiling somewhere.—Gary von Tersch

### DAVE KEYES *Rhythm Blues & Boogie*

Blue Heart Records

The aptly-named keyboard wizard is a native New Yorker whose musical reach includes Broadway, TV and accompanying some of the greats of rock, blues, folk, soul and gospel, including Odetta, Ronnie Spector, Bo Diddley, Sleepy LaBeef, Ruth Brown, Lou Rawls and many others. That vast compendium of experience is culminated in his seventh solo release "Rhythm Blues & Boogie." It's a ten-song set of, mostly, Keyes' originals that encompass a wealth of musical flavors and styles.

A storied show biz tactic is that you've got to grab your audience from the first note. And that is certainly the case with the swinging "Shake, Shake, Shake." Keyes has a robust and gutsy voice that suits the opening high-octane groove to a tee. Tight horns and hefty harmonies comfortably frame the leader's spirited piano passages and runs. "That's What the Blues Are

For" seems to mine Billy Preston, Dr. John and Sly Stone territory. Featured is a taut mid-rangy guitar solo from John Putnam. "Blues and Boogie" (I think I see a theme here!) is a powerfully feverish good time. A great hook, guitarist Early Times' gritty fret work and Frank Pagano's backing vocals make this a stellar moment. The works of Willie Nelson seem to permeate all aspects of the music industry and his sense of the blues is not lost on Keyes. Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" is a showcase for



the leader's more than ample piano skills and thoughtful phrasing. The great Bernard "Pretty" Purdie makes his presence known, with his classic beats all over this album. A case in point is "Ain't Doing That No More." The song's catchy horn chart and Purdie's New Orleans shuffle shift this cut into a second-line free-for-all. Purdie continues his trademark drumming on the declarative "Ain't Going Down." It's got a great message about fighting the powers that be and not giving up. Keyes steps out on the Wurlitzer and gives it a nice funky edge. "WBGO Boogie" is an instrumental tribute to the legendary NYC jazz and blues radio hub. This is a fun little showpiece that establishes Keyes as one of the modern heirs to boogie woogie royalty like Eubie Blake, Professor Longhair and Jelly Roll Morton. "Not Fighting Anymore" has a cool '60s feel to it. This track features wise words from a man that has done a fair share of living and knows a thing or two about choosing one's battles. Smooth horns and a

relaxed salsa feel set the tone here. Those of a certain age (over 55, perhaps?) might relate to "Invisible Man." Keyes and fellow acoustic guitar and vocal compadre Doug Macleod discuss, in song, the ups and downs of still appealing to the young women out there. It's certainly lighthearted but, with Keyes, there's always a grain of truth at the core. He and Macleod sing, "The young ladies look good to you, but you don't look good to them....When it comes to pretty young girls you might as well be the Invisible Man." Aww!!! For a bonus track Keyes gives back to the first responders and frontline heroes that serve our communities so well, with an upbeat tribute called "7 O' Clock Somewhere." This is all about celebration, pure and simple, with some of the best honky tonk piano you are ever gonna hear!

Keyes is at the top of his game, with a collection of new and diverse blues-flavored classics for enduring fans and new converts alike.—Eric Harabadian

### VARIOUS ARTISTS *The Blues According To Hank Williams*

Richard Weize Archives

As Hank Davis, author of *Ducktails, Drive-Ins And Broken Hearts: An Unsweetened Look At '50s Music*, comments in his lucid introduction to this fascinating 28 track project: "There were many



earlier (if unsuccessful) examples of Black artists recording country & western songs, but it wasn't until Ray Charles' 1962 landmark album, *Modern*



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*Sounds In Country & Western Music*, that any stigma for a black artist to embrace country music was finally erased. The message of that hugely successful album was unmistakable—a Black artist could thrive on the songs of a genre—country and western—from which he or she was racially and culturally apart.” Here we see that Hank Williams, a barely educated, unsophisticated, poor white boy from Alabama, in particular, was a rich source of inspiration for Black artists as well. In fact, no 20th century country artist crossed genres more effortlessly or more often than Hank Williams. Picks include Piano Red’s rowdy reshape of “Hey Good Looking”; The Delta Rhythm Boys’ ultra-elegant, pristinely harmonized version of “I’ll Never Get Out Of This World Alive”; Joe Hinton’s gospel-grounded recall of “Lovesick Blues” while Paul “Fat Man” Robinson turns “My Bucket’s Got A Hole In It” into a jaunty jump blues and The Five Blind Boys Of Alabama contribute an inspirational, pew-rattling revision of Hank’s “I Saw The Light.” Also noted are a couple of numbers by Fats Domino—a lively, horn-laced rendition of “Jambalaya (On The Bayou)” and an easy, rock ‘n’ rolling “You Win Again.” Love the full-page picture of Louis Armstrong in a huge white cowboy hat! Bill Dahl’s comprehensive liners put it all in perspective. Recommended for big ears! - Gary von Tersch

**ANNIKA CHAMBERS & PAUL DESLAURIERS**

Good Trouble

Vizztone 2022

Here is a newly minted blues duo attempting to alchemize a touching love story into lasting blues glory.

Annika Chambers, from Houston, followed a familiar path from the world of

gospel music into blues, and was nominated for a Blues Music Award for Best New Artist in 2015. Six more nominations have ensued, including wins in 2019 and this year as Soul Blues Female Artist of the Year. During essentially the same time span DesLauriers was blazing a trail through the blues scene of Canada, winning six Maple Blues Awards (Canada’s equivalent of the BMAs), among them Guitarist of the Year and Entertainer of the Year twice each.

Chambers and DesLauriers became



acquainted in 2018 and within a few months of a mutual recording session the next year, they were married! This is their first release as a romantic and musical couple. For it they went to the Florida studio of drummer Chris Peet and enlisted his talent, as well as that of award-winning fellow Floridian, guitarist JP Soars. A few comrade musicians appear as well, but that quartet dispenses most of the music.

It’s ample - almost a full hour of eleven songs - and full of sizzle and swagger. There’s no hesitation here; it’s game on, right from the start, with “You’ve Got to Believe,” which is an original gospel tune written by the five principals, belted out confidently by Chambers; for good measure, DesLauriers adds some tasty mandolin. “Stand Up” is another original, an anthem urging a fight for one’s ideals during difficult times; it demonstrates the accuracy of the album’s promotional notes, which describe the set as “Mavis Staples meets the Rolling Stones.”

A little listener attitude adjustment is required for the following tune, a cover

of the late Beatle George Harrison’s meditative, pen-sive “Isn’t It A Pity.” The ensemble renders it funky, augmented by the Hammond B-3 organ stylings of Barry Seelen. Well done; as is another cover, Joe South’s “Walk a Mile in My Shoes,” over seven minutes of persuasive urging by Chambers of tolerance and empathy. It sports a nifty guitar solo (DesLauriers or Soars?), and backing vocal by Paul. It’s definitely DesLauriers on lyrical guitar on the next cut, “I Need Your Love So Bad,” a slow blues cover with shared vocals by him and Annika.

You get the idea?

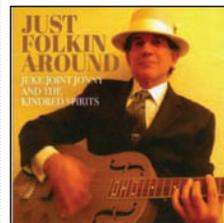
Variety, with consistent strong vocals and pithy guitar work. “We Got the Blues” is a danceable shuffle; “Money’s Funny” is an unabashed rocker, as is the ensuing cover of “Mississippi Queen” by the now defunct band Mountain. The album finishes with the rousing ten minute “I Need the Power,” an amalgam of the church and political assertion fully exhibiting Chambers’ vocal and DesLauriers’ guitar skills. You know that a lot of politicians will want to use this track; it’s irresistible.—Steve Daniels

**JUKE JOINT JOHNNY AND THE KINDRED SPIRITS**  
*Just Folkin’ Around*

Self-produced 2022

After some investigation, I finally discovered who Juke Joint Johnny really is. (It is pretty certain he wasn’t named that by his parents.) There are at least two other Juke Joint Johnnys traceable on the Internet, but this is John Rizzo, an acoustic bluesman in his early 70s who has toured Europe extensively and over two decades ago collaborated with now-popular blues rocker Albert Castiglia. After being sidelined with health problems and the Covid pandemic, he and the Spirits have arisen and delivered an enjoyable album.

All but one of the dozen songs are cover versions, and most are revivals of hoary and respected blues and folk tunes. The composer list is a litany of musical greats: Willie Dixon, Charles Brown, Muddy Waters, Son House, Bob Dylan, Taj Mahal, Robert Johnson....No quibble about the song choices,



and no criticism of the execution. The Kindred Spirits are led by Johnny wielding his talented fingers on acoustic guitar as he sings. Aiding him are percussionist Mike Stevens, bassists Dave Peterson and Ben Bernstein, and harmonica player Steve Rusin. They sound like they’re having fun.

A representative sample is Muddy’s “I Can’t Be Satisfied,” which opens the set. The band deals out a solid four minutes of symbiotic styling, and Johnny leads with jaunty slide guitar work. His vocal, as in much of the set, is raspy and often verges on talking rather than singing, but it fits the ambience and attitude quite well.

Much of the pleasure of hearing cover versions, of course, is appreciating change in approach. The ensemble attacks “Walkin’ Blues” (here attributed to House rather than Johnson) in a more lilting, smoother way than often heard, although Johnny’s slide is still gutsy. “Driftin’ Blues,” the Charles Brown classic, in contrast is juiced up to a mid-tempo shuffle. Surprisingly, the much-covered “Dust My Broom,” historically most identified with Elmore James’ slide treatment, is played entirely without slide. It’s one of the few weak tracks of the set, with harmonica being the

prominent instrument and Johnny’s vocal sounding a little strained.

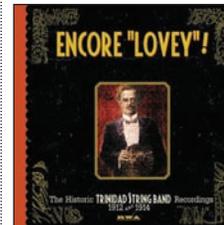
One of the high points is the only original tune, “Terre Haute Blues,” written by Rusin and Rizzo. It’s a brief and spare venture with Johnny singing over some expert finger-picking; Rusin is credited as guitarist on the number, but I think that during short intervals I hear both he and Johnny playing. There assuredly is only the Juke man playing guitar on one of the unabashedly folk, not blues tracks, the cover of Dylan’s “If Tomorrow Was a Long Time.” It’s another high point. No criticism implied of the capable rhythm section, nor Rusin’s harp forays, which are skillful in a limited Sonny Terry-type mode, but the solo tracks more clearly reveal Juke Joint Johnny’s nimble guitar prowess.—Steve Daniels

**ENCORE LOVEY!**

*The Historic Trinidad String Band Recordings 1912 & 1914*

RWA Records 3-CD

Encore “Lovey!” was the oft-repeated cry of dancers at the many engagements played by the Trinidad-based string band led by violinist George Robertson Lovelace Baillie—“Lovey.”



In 1912, a dozen bandsmen (including their leader) journeyed to New York City for a series of dates in the Big Apple. During their stay they were recorded by both the Victor Talking Machine Company and the Columbia Graphophone Company which were the first waxings by a band from the English-speaking West

Indies. The novel Spanish American pre-calypto character of their instrumentation cemented the band’s reputation, so much so that in the last days before the outbreak of The First World War Columbia engineers visited Trinidad and recorded at least 50 sides in a series of sessions in early August 1914. This triple CD collection encores recordings that survive from the 1912 sessions and reprises forty of the fifty or more selections obtained in 1914. The repertoire reflects a variety of paseo rhythms from several Caribbean islands as well as mainland South America.

Though not jazz or ragtime (which was fading at the time) Lovey’s band proved a “hot” dance music style with 19th century roots captured via sound recordings for the first time. An image-laden, 48-page booklet contains salient essays by Ted Olson, Steve Shapiro and John Cowley, a comprehensive “notes on the melodies” section along with a full discography. Choice numbers include “Trinidad” (the first calypso melody ever recorded), “Mary Jane (Mari-Juana),” a waltz titled “Flores de Trinidad,” a Venezuelan dance tune “El Liro,” a couple of dance tunes from Barbados (“I’ve Got A Little Man” and “Oh! Not A Cent, Not A Cent”) and a waltz, “Poncha Crema,” that pays homage to a popular Trinidadian libation made with milk, sugar, rum and spices. Yet another great deep-dive project from the Richard Weize Archives. - Gary von Tersch

**STEVE STRONGMAN AND GUESTS**

*The Strongman Blues Remedy, Volume 1*

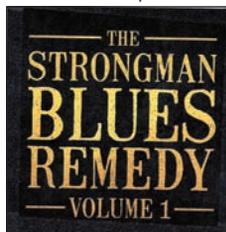
Stony Plain 2022

This album is indeed a remedy of Blues Vitamin C’s, good for what ails ya: Canadian, capability, chops, collaborators,

charisma, class.

Steve Strongman is one of the most prominent artists in the flourishing Canadian blues scene. The multi-instrumentalist has won the Canadian Juno award for best blues album of the year, several Maple Blues Awards, and in 2019 he won the Blues Foundation's honor as best solo guitarist at the International Blues Challenge.

Speaking of challenges, the Covid pandemic presented a major one to him, as to countless perform-



ers. He responded by gathering several fellow luminaries of the blues world north of the U.S. This album is a result of their in-person and online efforts. Complementing Strongman's guitar work is the combo of drummer Dave King, keyboard whiz Jesse O'Brien, and bassist Alec Fraser.

Although brief at slightly more than half an hour, the set of ten songs is high in quality. It commences with "Hard Luck," a rocking shuffle burnished by Steve's tenor vocal, keening guitar, and nice piano licks by O'Brien. Fellow multiple award-winner Steve Marriner, of the band Monkey Junk, joins on "Swansong," providing the vocal, Strongman crunching guitar chords en route. There is also some understated harmonica, uncredited but probably attributable to either Strongman or Marriner, both mouth harp adepts. The pace is slowed on "Fine Young Man," this vocal by yet another award winner, Montreal's Dawn Tyler Watson.

Next up: "I Don't Miss You" and "I Like to Ride," the latter readily identifiable as a salacious double

entendre, both distinguished by the singing of Hamilton, Ontario's veteran bluesman Harrison Kennedy. Recipient himself of many accolades, Kennedy has just entered his ninth decade but has lost none of his talents, still releasing stirring albums of his own. On these two tracks his vocals are superb, bringing to mind the strong and soulful singing of Michael McDonald of the 1970s Doobie Brothers.

Four of the last five tracks feature the basic quartet, giving ample time to appreciate their skills. Slow blues? Done well, as exemplified by "White Lightnin'." The jaunty "Gettin' Stoned" reveals its view in the title; "True to Me" and the upbeat "Love Comin' Down" end the session...but not before the appearance of one final distinguished guest: chanteuse Crystal Shawanda, fervidly belting out "Tell Me I'm Wrong."

Another potential title of this outing: "All-Star Canadian Blues Artists Prevail over the Pandemic"—**Steve Daniels**

### It's Doo Wop Christmas Time

Various Artists  
Koko-Mojo CD

### CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

Various Artists  
Atomicat Records

Seasons greetings from the Rockstar Records complex with this heady pair of imaginative releases. The thirty track Doo Wop set digs deep as well-known names rub shoulders with an abundance of anomalies. Sourcing sides from the early 1950s up to the dawn of the 1960s it's a contemplative as well as a celebratory compilation with delights including sides by the likes of Danny And The Juniors ("Oh Holy Night" and "Candy Cane Sugary Plum"), the

Ravens ("Silent Night"), Marvin and Johnny ("It's Christmas Time"), the Four Seasons ("Christmas Tears") and the Platters with "Jingle Bell Rock" as well as absolute oddities on the order of Lonnie And The Crisis ("Santa Town USA"), the Shantons ("Santa Claus Is Coming To Town"), the Dippers Quintet ("It's Almost Christmas"), Nino And The Ebb Tides ("The Real Meaning Of Christmas") and the Cashmeres with "I Believe In St. Nick."

*Christmas Around The World* is just that—28 tracks with a few titles from different countries (Belgium, Mexico, France, Hawaii and England), some performed with a enervating twist tempo (



the Twistin' Kings with "Xmas Twist," the Marcells with "Merry Twist-mas," Tommy Regan's "Santa Twist" and Little Cori's



"Picture Of Mommy Twistin' With Santa") and for all-around appeal a few perennials are included—Hank Locklin's "Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer," the Shantons' "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town" and Jan and Dean's "Frosty The Snowman." Further favorites include the Stanley Brothers' "Christmas Time Is Near," Ernest Tubbs' "I'll Be Walkin' The Floor This Christmas," Wayne Brock's "Santa Claus Has A Secret" and "Space Age Santa Claus" by the Hal Bradley Orchestra and Patty Marie Jay. Crank up the volume and dig and dance to these holiday

musical nuggets!—**Gary von Tersch**

### LAURA TATE

*Smokey Tango*

Blue Heart Records 2022

One question could be: how does Laura Tate even have time to sing?

A native of Dallas, she began singing publicly before age ten. Subsequently she received university level education in singing, and lessons in acting at two prestigious schools.

She became part of theatrical touring companies performing throughout the U.S. She then segued into appearances on broadcast and cable television, which led to a further career advance into directing music videos, commercials, and documentaries. Now living in El Paso, she is active in many social justice organizations there. Oh, by the way, she is an expert cook.

Tate recounts that her father drove her family to New Orleans when she was a child to expose her to NOLA jazz and blues, and her sixth album leans strongly in that direction. It is produced by songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Terry Wilson, who co-wrote one of the songs with his wife, Teresa James, who provides several backing vocals. A third member of the acclaimed band Teresa James and the Rhythm Tramps on this outing is principal guitarist Billy Watts. Returning from Tate's last album, "Live from El Paso," is pianist Jeff Paris, who also lays down some mandolin riffs. Richard Millsap handles drum duties, and horns are courtesy of Paulie Cerra and Darrell Leonard, the latter formerly of the Phantom Blues Band.

With such a stellar cast, it's hard to go wrong. The dozen tracks well display Tate's sultry and mellifluous voice. The set commences with "Yellow Moon," an Aaron and Joel Neville number augmented by syncopated rhythm and

soulful horns. "A Certain Guy," a jaunty shuffle with energetic backing vocals, is attributed by different sources to another Neville, Naomi, or to the late New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint. "It Tears Me Up," sung notably by Percy Sledge, receives a fine treatment, with Tate's passionate singing complemented nicely by the horn section.



One of the most enjoyable tracks is its only original, "Rougarou," composed by Teresa James and Terry Wilson. It's a tongue-in-cheek cautionary tale about a mythical Bayou monster called the rougarou, and Paris' Hammond B3 accompaniment is right on. Yet another high spot is the title tune, all components combining synergistically, including Terry Wilson's daughter Lucy on backing vocal. The group does a very credible version of the familiar "Smoke on the Water." Even when the horns take a break on "School Boy Love," this ensemble sounds in perfect synchrony, buoyed by Laura Tate's compelling vocals.—**Steve Daniels**

### JANICE HARRINGTON

*80 Years of International Friendship*

Hip & Happy Records 2022

Well, let's start with an unavoidable first reaction to this album, and the least relevant to its musical merit: the CD sports one of the most politically incorrect album covers since legendary rock trio Blind Faith's 1969 album featured a topless eleven-year-old girl. This cover depicts eighty-year-old Janice Harrington looking shocked as her breasts are groped by...presumably her husband, trumpeter

Werner Gurtler. Minnesota Senator Al Franken resigned his Congressional post a few years ago for feigning a similar act without actual physical contact.

Now that we're over that...Harrington is a heralded singer of gospel, jazz, and blues who settled in Oslo, Norway, in 1980 after her band toured there; she has remained there ever since, and her name is under-recognized in U.S. blues circles. Here we have a reprise of sixteen songs, lasting over an hour, ranging from 1982 to January 2022, almost all composed by Harrington solo or in cooperation with others. No less than five bands are credited, from Denmark, Austria, Germany, and Norway (two).

The compendium is comprised of both blues and jazz tunes, and Harrington is equally comfortable with both. The subjects deal extensively with the common blues trope of love and sex,



required and not. There is ample humor in the lyrics, as exemplified by "Seven Day a Week Man Blues," wherein Harrington details the strengths and flaws of her different lovers, each assigned his day of the week; "Telephone Blues" and "Wheeler Dealer," each from 1988, explore similar territory. "Blues Rocking," from way back in 1982, shows that she can successfully deliver an upbeat funky blues.

At the other end of the spectrum is a number like "Too Soon to Tell," a slow jazz track appropriate for a late night at sophisticated champagne bar. Then, from 1994, there is "Hallelujah I Love Her So," a number evoking the 1940s with no less than fifteen horn players from the

Austrian Rat Big Band.

Inevitably, a collection of this sort leads to comparison of Harrington's voice through the years. "Old Age," from 2021, and the closing number, Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," from 2022, show that Harrington has developed a slight tremolo in her vocals but can still hit the mark impressively...ironically, to my ear, even more so than on some of the 1980s songs, when she can sound very slightly off pitch while still giving a pleasant listening experience. Harrington deserves to be recognized, along with Chicago's Mary Lane and the late Alberta Hunter, as a singer adept into her 80s.—**Steve Daniels**

### JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

*Los Angeles Forum*  
4/26/69

Legacy/Experience Hendrix CD

A heavy dose of musical magic occurred at Los Angeles' fabled sports arena, the Los Angeles Forum, on April 2, 1969, when Jimi Hendrix headlined a bill that included the Chicago Transit Authority and Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys. His set opens with a sixteen-minute version of "Tax Man," an extraordinary, dynamically kinetic instrumental jam (that has never been included on any Hendrix album or single) composed by the Swedish instrumental jazz duo of (Bo) Hansson and Janne Karlson with whom he'd recently shared bills with in Stockholm. He also gives the audience (floor seats were a mere \$6.50) a tantalizing glimpse of his profound reinvention of "The Star Spangled Banner" four months ahead of his show-stopping August performance at Woodstock—at the Forum, however, his still-working-it-out take ran a mere two-minutes. Classic songs from his trio of albums then available (*Are You Experienced*, *Axis*:

*Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland*) follow in short order—from the supercharged, feedback-rife "Foxy Lady," with its turbulently stormy yet passionate guitar work and the fiery, testimonial rave-up "Purple Haze" to the vividly psychedelic, lyrical as well as musically, masterpiece "I Don't Live Today" (a concert staple) and "Red House"—a raw, desolate 12 bar blues with an ungoverned overload of adventurous guitar work. Also noted is a 12-plus minute reading of the jarringly raucous "Spanish Castle Magic" as well as a seventeen-minute blend of



"Voodoo Child (Slight Return) and Cream's "Sunshine Of Your Love" as he happily embraced another group's hit and makes it his own—much as he did with both "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "All Along The Watchtower." Liners author Randy Lewis sagely comments: "The Forum set additionally demonstrates the communal vibe that Hendrix fomented at his concerts; he's often heard talking to the audience, as if in conversation—both between and during songs, helping break down barriers between rock stars and fans. A 22-page, image-laden booklet also features a cogent, flashback essay by Billy Gibbons, whose pre-ZZ Top band, The Moving Sidewalks, had shared a number of Texas concert bills with the Experience.—**Gary von Tersch**

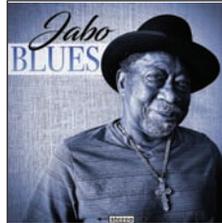
### JAMES JABO HOUSTON

*Jabo Blues*

Self-produced 2022

Anyone familiar with Austin's East Side blues

scene knows James Jabo Houston and his band Jabo and the Ol' Dogs. Jabo's latest record features Jabo and Roy Crawford as vocalists, with Bobby Terrell on sax. First call Austin bass player Eric Przygocki appears on all



of the album's 10 tunes and organist Billy Cummings, drummer Nico Leophonte, and guitarist Jack Ederly round out the lineup. Jabo also plays organ on a few of the tunes.

Blues fans love covers, and the album begins with a nice rendition of "Down Home Blues." This song needs to groove, and the band doesn't disappoint. Eric Przygocki lays down a solid bass line and the rest of the band makes Jabo's vocals shine. An original tune follows as Jabo explains, "My first name is Jabo, and my second name has never been told." Jack Elderly's guitar adds a nice classic blues edge to the song.

BB King's "Woke Up This Morning" is true to the original as the strong vocals lead the tune before it changes from a rumba to a shuffle and really rocks. "Down in Louisiana," another Jabo original, is reminiscent of a Little Walter-type slow Chicago blues—and the guitar work has a Muddy Waters' band feel.

"Change My Mind" is a great R&B-influenced number with strong organ-influenced groove driven by Nico Leophonte's strong drumming. One of the album's gems is Guitar Slim's "The Things I Use To Do," with Jack Ederly echoing Guitar Slim's classic swampy licks behind Jabo's authentic vocals. Everyone in Austin knows that the "Night Time Is The Right Time" and the lilting

shuffle has a genuine Austin Sixth Steet beat.

Some think that songs like "Stand By Me" are overplayed, but Jabo brings authenticity and a modern sound to this old standard. While many bands play this song too slowly, the rhythm section here keeps the tune moving and upbeat proving that oldies can still be goodies!

Bobby Bland's "Twenty Room House" shows that the band can do justice to an up-tempo blues tune. The 2/5 change adds a jazzy overlay to this upfront and driving tune. Bobby Terrell's sax brings an interesting 1970s-type jazzy experience.

During the heyday of Chicago blues, bands like the Muddy Waters Band would use tunes like Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" to show off their jazz chops. Jabo's band doesn't need to show off, but their version of this classic is very nicely done with the rhythm section never faltering.

Anyone looking for classic Austin, Texas blues with a nod to Chicago should pick up this recording. Jabo's vocals are still strong, and the band is successful in showcasing his skills. And when you're in Austin, be sure to attend one of Jabo's dynamic shows—**Richard Radbil**

### CLASSIC BLUES AND ARTWORK FROM THE 1920's Calendar and CD Set

Blues Images/ P.O. Box 1727/ Grant's Pass, Oregon/ 97528-0200

It's a dirty shame that a "perfect storm" of events has resulted in this 20th Anniversary edition of John Teffeller's clever blues calendar/CD combo that this year's will be its last—"due to rising printing, production and postage costs, as well as a world where many no longer use wall calendars nor appreciate CD quality sound." Nevertheless, this year's more-than-just a calendar is a treasure

trove of original advertising artwork for pre-war blues 78's (including six color images) and photographs of pre-war blues artists with an enclosed CD of obscure pre-war and post-war recordings is probably their best ever—highlighted for yours truly by four songs by Detroit bluesman Playboy Fuller (circa 1953) from the original J-V-B master tape. The pre-war numbers include: Bessie Smith's swan-song for Columbia Records from 1931, "Shipwreck Blues;" a never-before-heard song, "Old Rounder's Blues," by Funny Paper Smith; a pair of religious songs by Brother Fullbosom—the satirical commentary "A Sermon On A Silver Dollar" and its flip, the energetic "Moses Go Down To Pharaohland; "Lexington Kentucky Blues" by the often overlooked Papa Charlie Jackson and His Blue Banjo; a couple of unreleased Paramount test pressings by Irene Scruggs with Little Brother Montgomery (his first record appearance) with takes 1 and 2 of "St. Louis Woman Blues" and Ma Rainey's back door man saga from 1927 "Big Boy Blues." I also understand that a comprehensive



Rainey box-set is in the offing. Which brings me to the four songs by the fore-mentioned Playboy Fuller—whose vivid slide guitar and high-pitched vocals on titles like the tumultuous "Gonna Play My Guitar—A Letter To Muddy Waters," the captivating "Sugar Cane Highway" and the stirring leaving-blues "Going Back To Mobile" are worth the price of admission alone. Closing affairs with Frank Stokes' reflective "I'm

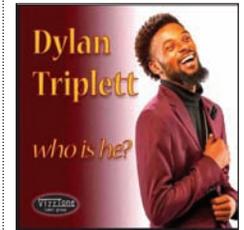
Going Away" is a nice touch.—**Gary von Tersch**

### DYLAN TRIPLETT

*"who is he?"*

Vizztone Label Group

Dylan Triplett is a young soul/blues singer from St. Louis with a voice that shows maturity and chops way beyond his years (21 at the time of this recording). "who is he?" is a collection of soul and blues numbers with a formidable supporting cast showcas-



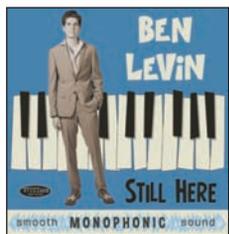
ing the versatility of this dynamic vocalist. As much as "who is he?" is a celebration of this young man's talent, it is also bitter-sweet. Longtime Roy Hargrove Quintet drummer (and a huge part of the St. Louis music scene after relocating back home in 2013 after 13 years in NYC), Montez Coleman, who plays on the entire album, sadly passed away early this year, as well as legendary keyboard sideman Mike Finnigan (Jimi Hendrix, CSN, Taj Mahal and many more) who plays on three of the ten tracks. Christine "Kingfish" Ingram makes a notable guest appearance on the opener "Barnyard Blues" and the Lonnie Brooks cover "Feels Good Doin' Bad." Larry Fulcher produced, played bass and co-wrote four of the songs, two with Triplett, and Dylan penned "I'll Be There Waiting." Four of the ten tracks ("Barnyard Blues," "Junkyard Dog," "She Felt Good" and "Feels Good Doin' Bad") are what could be considered straight blues. The Bill Withers cover "Who Is He (And What Is He To You?)" is obviously in that 1970s soul groove while the Marvin Gaye cover (written by the legendary Motown songwriting/production

team of Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong) seems to borrow a lot of the textures and vibe of "I Heard It Through The Grapevine." The Miles Davis standard "All Blues" is given a unique funk treatment and uncovers the jazz side of Dylan Triplett's instrument, as he effortlessly scats a remarkable solo. "who is he?" is a triumph, the production stellar, and my guess is the public won't be asking "Who is he?" for long. Highly recommended. —**Bob Monteleone**

**BEN LEVIN**  
*Still Here*

Vizztone Label Group

Ben Levin, at 22 years of age, is an "old soul" who happens to be a master of blues piano. *Still Here* is already his third release for the Vizztone label. The title refers to a close call that Ben's father, Aron, who is the guitarist on the album, recently had with Covid-19. Ben was mentored by world-renowned blues/boogie



pianist Ricky Nye at a young age and became a full time member of his dad's Cincinnati-based blues band, The Heaters, by the age of 15. *Still Here* is a straight ahead recording, with the quartet, which also includes bassist Chris Douglas and drummer Oscar Bernal, seemingly playing live in the studio, with no apparent overdubs other than an occasional vocal harmony. With all the accolades written about Ben's piano chops, it's surprising his singing talents aren't always mentioned. His vocals are a perfect match for his piano playing and the total package might remind a listener of Mose Allison. Eight of the twelve tracks were written

by Ben or co-written with his dad. "That's The Meal" is a Ben Levin original that I swore had to exist many years earlier. There's a charming humor that permeates the session, as in the song just mentioned, and in the 12-bar instrumental "Crown Jewel" where Ben quotes the theme from the 60s TV show "Get Smart." Aron Levin plays perfectly complementary guitar throughout the session, with his vintage tone laying back and stepping out with taste and originality when needed. For instance, he contributes a tasty slide solo in "Please Let Me Get One Word In," some biting (no pun intended) Stratocaster in "That's The Meal" and some big box guitar comping on the opener "Love And Friendship." All in all, *Still Here* is an unpretentious, intimate and very enjoyable listening experience. —**Bob Monteleone**

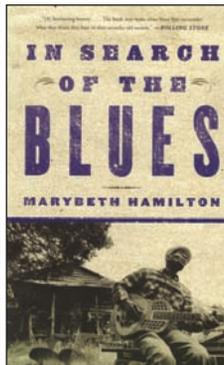
**Book**

**IN SEARCH OF THE BLUES**  
*By Marybeth Hamilton*

Basic Books 2008

Being a multi-decade aficionado of the blues, I have long been interested in discussions of its origin. The orthodox opinion is that blues originated in West Africa and was brought to North America by enslaved Africans, that percussion instruments, fife, and gourd were seminal in its development, and that field hollers, work songs, and church tunes were its basis.

A year ago in this magazine I reviewed *The Blues* by contemporary musician Chris Thomas King. He argues against the orthodox interpretation, instead claiming the primacy of Spanish, Portuguese, and Caribbean influences and the genesis of blues in 19th century New Orleans and vicinity, rather than the Mississippi Delta. In his book is a brief mention of Marybeth Hamilton's



book, which led me to it. Her book, rather than being a history of blues, is a history of several fervent musicologists (all white) who dedicated much of their lives to pursuit of the origin of the art form and documentation of its purveyors. Some of the names are familiar, particularly John Lomax and his son Alan; some are obscure. Several of them were guilty of racist assumptions and, willfully or inadvertently, propagated those further. Their stories reveal the inevitable - although often uncredited - profound effect of blues music on U.S. culture.

Hamilton's first subject is Howard Odum, who as a graduate student in the early 1900s embarked on a study of "The Negro," spending months in the Deep South interviewing people, including musicians, and making some primitive recordings, which, tragically, he simply threw away twenty years later. Dorothy Scarborough, an academic based in Manhattan, performed similar studies, with similar crass pre-suppositions about her subjects. John Lomax took explorations further, accompanied by his son Alan, with whom he had a wrenching split in the 1930s and 1940s due to Alan's liberal and anti-racist political beliefs. Both Lomaxes provided invaluable research into the development of blues. John's career is tarnished by his exploitation of Huddie Ledbetter, who famously became

Leadbelly (or Lead Belly). After aiding Ledbetter's release from a notorious penitentiary, Lomax paraded him through performances as an exemplar of Black primitivism, until Leadbelly revolted and left to pursue his own path. Others portrayed are Charles Smith, William Russell, and Frederic Ramsey, a disparate trio allied in their interest in blues, and forerunners of folk musicologist Harry Smith. Perhaps most fascinating is James McKune,

an eccentric loner who became obsessed with collecting the rarest recordings, and amassed a collection of over two hundred that he secreted under his bed in the stark YMCA room in which he lived for years. In the early 1940s he became the founder of what became known as the Blues Mafia, a coterie of similar obsessives arguably more concerned with rarity and rural primitivism than with musical quality.

More than a compilation of biographies, the book is in addition a history of early recording devices, from Odum's cylinders to the bulky and heavy battery-powered recorder that John Lomax carried in the back of his Ford on his travels. It is also incidentally fertile material for the provocative debate about which preceded which, blues or jazz, and indeed if they are really different genres.—**Steve Daniels**

**The blues reviews in this issue and previous issues are also online at [bigcity bluesmag.com](http://bigcitybluesmag.com)**

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