ONCE MORE, WE HAVE NO GIGS TO PUBLISH. ALL HAVE BEEN CANCELLED OR OCCASIONALLY POSTPONED. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY WHEN THINGS WILL RETURN TO NORMAL, BUT BIT’S WILL CAREFULLY MONITOR THE SITUATION AND WHEN THINGS START TO RETURN TO NORMAL WE SHALL LET YOU KNOW.

IN THE MEAN TIME, DON’T GO TO GIGS, MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE AND REMEMBER:

THE CORONA VIRUS DOES NOT CIRCULATE

IT IS PEOPLE THAT CIRCULATE IT
Ian McHugh may be best known as the DJ behind Blues is the Truth but during the lockdown he rediscovered an artistic streak, making portraits of blues legends and his friends on the blues scene in the UK. One of those portraits was of the late Jules Fothergill who passed away at the age of just 40, from cancer. In his memory, and in the hopes of raising some much needed funds for Cancer Research UK, Ian has decided to release a limited edition print of the drawing, with all of the profits going to the charity. There will be just 40 prints, signed and numbered by Ian at A4 size and with a certificate of authenticity and each print will be just £40. If you are interested please visit https://www.facebook.com/Ian-McHugh-fine-art-portraiture-105206641240609 for more details.

**TAKE ANOTHER LISTEN...**

It's been some time since this was in the player, which, to be honest is quite a shame, because taking another listen is something I should have done ages ago.

This 1999 Catfish Records release of "Shotgun Blues" by Sonny Boy Williamson (KATCD125) contains twenty four tracks of early Chicago blues with some well respected artists backing Williamson, Walter Davis, Robert Lee McCoy, Speckled Red, Yank Rachell among them.

It's taken this long for me to acknowledge just how good John Lee Williamson actually was. So, with head hanging down in shame, I urge anyone just getting into any kind of harmonica blues to check him out as soon as possible. My excuse, if I'm permitted one, was that I was always more interested in Aleck 'Rice' Miller, aka Sonny Boy Williamson No.2. because back in the early nineteen sixties it was his stuff being issued on Chess Records (Pye International in U.K.). Back then we were all playing "Help Me", or, in my case "Lonesome Cabin".

This compilation is well worth searching out, every track is worth the cost of a CD.... try "Stop Breaking Down" with backing from Tampa Red and Big Maceo, how much better could it get?! I'm more than pleased that this was given another listen, great stuff.

Bob Pearce

**Michael William Hugh Vernon** (born 20 November 1944) is an English music executive studio owner, and record producer from Harrow, Middlesex. He produced albums for British blues artists and groups in the 1960s, working with the Bluesbreakers, David Bowie, Duster Bennett, Savoy Brown, Chicken Shack, Climax Blues Band, Eric Clapton, Fleetwood Mac, Peter Green, Danny Kirwan, John Mayall, Christine McVie and Ten Years After amongst others.

Recently he has worked with his own band ‘Mike Vernon & The Mighty Combo’.

Vernon was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 Birthday Honours for services to music.
Spencer Davis 17 July 1939—19 October 2020 (age 81)

Between 1965 and 1967, the Spencer Davis Group were one of the hottest names in the crowded field of British pop. Their chart-topping singles Keep on Running and Somebody Help Me were fiery eruptions of soul and R&B, and the Top 10 follow-ups Gimme Some Lovin’ (co-written by Davis) and I’m a Man cranked the intensity even higher. With the last two they also cracked the US Top 10, and in 1971 Chicago’s version of I’m a Man reached the US Top 50 and No 8 in the UK.

(Source Guardian, Oct 21, 2020)

Davis was born on July 17, 1939, in Swansea, Wales, where he first sang in a boys' choir before he became influenced by jazz and rhythm and blues in his college years (source NPR).

Later in 1964, along with Pete York, Steve Winwood and his brother Muff Winwood, the group formed a band known as the Rhythm and Blues Quartet. Although Davis was often outshone by the teenage Steve Winward, the band's name was later changed to the Spencer Davis Group in 1964, where the group garnered success with several rock hits throughout the decade.

Winwood left to form Traffic in 1967, Davis and the group recorded two follow-up records before eventually splitting up in 1969, according to Rolling Stone. Another version of the group with Davis and York formed years later before disbanding once again.

Davis moved to the United States in 1970, where he formed an acoustic blues band. He also worked as an executive at Island Records in the mid-'70s, working hand in hand with artists including Bob Marley and Robert Palmer, before he led the independent Hollywood record label A&R for Allegiance Records in the early 1980s.

In a tribute post, Gary Kemp, musician and actor wrote, "RIP Spencer Davis. He led a magnificent band, one of the greats of the '60s, along with Muff and Steve Winwood. Keep [on] Running and Gimme Some Lovin’ were r&b classics. He drove soul into the white rock sound of the time".

He has been called the founder of British blues
## Most Played Album Top 40 – September 2020
Collated From The Playlists Of The Independent Blues Broadcasters Association Members

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<th>Position</th>
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<td>Jimmy Regal &amp; The Royals</td>
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<td>Chris Bevington Organisation</td>
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<td>Elvin Bishop &amp; Charlie Musselwhite</td>
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<td>Trevor Sewell</td>
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<td>40</td>
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We are on the street, Farish Street, where I was raised up and I've named my record label after that, Farish Street Records, and I added Mississippi so that they know I'm from there. I was born in this area, which is a historic district, and I performed on this street at the Alamo Theatre, which is something similar to the Apollo Theatre, and they probably have this type of establishment in every big city. I know Hattiesburg and Vicksburg had them and so this is where I came where they used to have talent shows here every Wednesday night. A DJ used to MC the show and I was like eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen on this big stage, which is as big as some of the movie theatres we go to. It was very frightening being on there but it was a great experience for me, because I call it my classroom for what I'm doing today; I learnt my profession from this stage. On the talent shows back then was nothing but men, no female ever appeared when I was performing. I didn't set that up, it just happened to be that way. The only person who was my age or close to it was Tommy Tate and he was a very good friend and he lived out in the west of Jackson and he might have been the first person to come and get me to perform with a band, because he was already with this band and the band was all white and Tommy was the drummer and singer, the only black person in the band. They wanted a female artist so Tommy knew me and where I lived and he asked me, so that's how I got with that band and we went on to sing in a white club. I could perform in this club but I couldn't sit down in it and have a hamburger or anything like that, because it was as it was in the sixties. I ate in my dressing room but performed on stage and got big tips. It was crazy stuff then but I didn't look at it so much, I just wanted to perform and that was their problem.

What drew me into singing was my great grandmother who raised me and I started singing in the church choir at the age of five, six and seven. I was a lead singer and that's where I learned how to use a microphone. The pianist told me how to use it because I didn't know how to use one and evidently she was a music major to know all of that type of thing; she taught the choir and she taught me how to use that microphone. I sang traditional gospel music in the church, Shirley Caesar type and The Davis Sisters and The Caravans, all that type of gospel music. I knew that music because of the radio. I had a radio but didn't have a record player, so I learnt songs when I heard them from the radio.
might not get all the words when they played it one time, but I waited until it came on again and then would get the second verse and then wait till the next time and get the third verse. So that’s the way I learnt stuff and I also put the words under my pillow and I woke up the next day knowing it. It was God, I think.

When I got to the Alamo later on, I was singing nothing but blues, until they later on had a gospel talent show and then I would appear on that. I won a lot of times, both gospel and blues shows. There was a house band backing us at the Malaco talent shows, which was the Sam Myers band and he played up and down Farish Street at different clubs. They had a lot of music here back then. The doors would be wide open and you could hear it as you passed through with my great grandmother when she went to pay her bills, like electric bills and getting the groceries and own some loans where she had borrowed some money or put her furniture up for collateral. Then the owner of the loan company would come and put tags on drawers and which ones not to use, because we had borrowed it until she paid for it. She never lost any of her furniture, she paid for it. Also one of the house bands was Cadillac George Harris and we all lived in this area and we knew each other, but Sam and George were older than me. I was the only one in school except Tommy Tate when he would appear. I found out later on they called me the pipsqueak when I appeared at the Alamo, because I was winning all the time. It was mainly the money that attracted me to music and of course it took a commitment. We used to get paid if you won on those talent shows, it was less than $20. My great grandmother escorted me to the Alamo as I was in school and the shows started at 6.00 p.m. and she was my chaperone and she would sit down in the front all of the time and she would tell me where she would be sitting, so when I got through I would go and find her and we would go home after we got our money. Jobie Martin was the MC and he was a disk jockey on W.O.K.J., the only black station in Jackson at that time. His talent show was the greatest thing he could have done for me. I never did forget that, I always made an award for him at The Jackson Music Awards. I paid for his plaque at those awards, so as to respect Jobie for what he had done for music.

I then got discovered by a simple knock at my door by a record producer as he had heard around town that there was a girl singing and he had just opened up a studio and he came to my mother’s home late one night when we were both in bed and she went to the door and this tall white man was there. We wondered what that was about, as the Freedom Riders and the civil rights was going on back then in the sixties, so seeing a white man come to your door was a bit unusual and it was like if you saw a black person on TV, we used to turn it on and up. We would call each other about that. It was Bob McRee who called and he wanted me to record for him. Instead of doing straight recordings, I did background work for other stars at his studio. He would record a single every now and then, but I did
mostly background work for other artists that came through using his studio. People like Freddy Fender, a country and western guy, and Peggy Scott and Jo Jo Benson doing ‘Pickin’ Wild Mountain Berries’, I was on that. The Pointer Sisters came through and we did the background for them, it was me and two others who were really The Poppies later on. Later on we became The Poppies because the producer it came to him that idea to have us as a group, because The Supremes and things were happening and The Marvelettes and all those people. Bob’s studio was in Clinton, Mississippi and he had bought up this big movie theater that went out of business and he put all his recording stuff in there and we were with him for two years because after that we became The Poppies. I was the lead singer of that group for everything and we went on to have an album called ‘Lullaby Of Love’ and that was on the Epic label. Bob took us to Epic to record for a big label. Bob didn't have a label, he just had a studio and he took us to Billy Sherrill in Nashville who recorded Tammy Wynette. The keyboard player was Larry Butler who went on to be Kenny Rogers’ manager, he was my keyboard player for The Poppies. We all started somewhere I guess. The other singers in The Poppies were Rosemary Taylor and Patsye McCune and we were all going to college and I was in high school going on to freshman when that happened and I majored in voice and minored in piano. We were out on the road promoting that album but I didn’t get any money, it was a salary that we got instead.

After The Poppies I think came Malaco but they didn’t sign me immediately, they waited until I got older. It might have been on my great grandmother’s advice, I’m not sure, but they signed me in 1973. They knew about me because the label was in Jackson and everybody knew about me then, and they all knew about Tommy Tate, as I was singing everywhere like all the colleges and everywhere where there was somewhere to perform. Malaco approached me about being signed by them and I did a bunch of background singing for them. They didn’t have no money going for them then and I finally recorded with them and it was just three sides, as they didn’t have the money to do an album. They didn’t want to invest in an album if you didn’t have a hit as it cost money probably. So they did singles and they did three on me and one of them was ‘Misty Blue’, but they didn’t release it; they released some other songs instead and waited two years later to release ‘Misty Blue’. One of the other songs I did was ‘Cry Like A Baby’ which was written by Ashford And Simpson who were with Motown and, as a matter of fact, Isaac Hayes recorded that same song eventually and he did it for Stax years later I’m sure. Stax wanted me also, but I was signed to Malaco. I did a bunch of background vocals for Malaco even after I did ‘Misty Blue’. I did work with Jean Knight and King Floyd who went on to make it big and I was singing because it was something I could do, I didn’t think about being a great star or anything. It’s like a basketball player playing basketball, it’s something they can do. I did the
background to get some money, a few dollars. I was poor at that time. We didn’t have a car at that
time, we walked or caught the bus, like walking to church or walking to the Alamo when I was
young. That was me and my great grandmother and I was with her when she had my granddaddy
too, but he passed. Me and my great grandmother did everything together. My great grandmother
raised me, my mother, her daughter, and her daughter’s son and daughter, so she raised everyone
and we called her ‘Mama’ and her name was Minnie.

‘Misty Blue’ became a big hit but I didn’t know it straight away and then Malaco told me and asked me to go on the road performing. I had
to get a manager and stuff. By this time Malaco couldn’t afford to release ‘Misty Blue’ all over the U.S. as it was selling too
fast, as they didn’t have the money back then, so they got
T.K. Productions to distribute, which was owned by
Henry Stone and he had people like Latimore and Betty
Wright and K.C. And The Sunshine Band and Gwen
McCrae, George McCrae and on and on and then he
got me. I was married then and had two children. They
released ‘Misty Blue’ as a single in November 1975,
some people say it was released in 1976 but it was
1975. Three months later in February 1976 it was
nominated for a Grammy, just three months. So after
‘Misty Blue’ became a hit I went back into the studio
and recorded more songs for Malaco. I was in England
picking up an award for ‘Misty Blue’ and on the stage
at the London Palladium and I was the opening act, the
big stars were a big rock act. I didn’t know how big and
important the London Palladium was. I thought it was like
the Alamo, just another stage, and I was interviewed by lots of
magazines. They had a whole load of stuff lined up for me when I
was there. ‘Misty Blue’ went gold in the U.S. and Canada. So I recorded a bunch of other songs for
the ‘Misty Blue’ album and that came out in 1976. I got tired of making songs happen for other
people. I went on to record other albums for Malaco at that time. One was ‘Once Moore With Feeling’
that had a painting of me on the cover which I didn’t like at all and which I felt didn’t help me at
all. I was still doing background vocals for Malaco, as well as for people like Johnnie Taylor, Denise
LaSalle and Little Milton. Bobby Bland personally asked me to do background for him but I didn’t
and I wished I had done because he was a great singer and I respected him. I was doing this work
even though I was out on the road for myself, but when I was at home and wasn’t doing anything
they would call me and ask me to come in and do something, it was like keeping my chops up. I was
having fun being with Jewel Bass, another background singer for Malaco. I stopped doing background
in the eighties, some time when Thomisene Anderson came in, because she worked there full time,
although I did some things with her, us being background singers. I worked with Johnnie Taylor
for three months when ‘Misty Blue’ hit. I was on the road with him. He had ‘Disco Lady’ at number
one and my ‘Misty Blue’ was number two in the charts. All these artists became good friends of
mine and they helped me to dress up and look nice because they looked super and I learned a lot
from them. I was also out on the road with The Manhattans and also the 5th Dimension who had
that ‘Age Of Aquarius’ thing out.
That’s where we went—to Vicksburg, Hummingbird Studios. The spirit of the studio felt so good and I couldn’t wait to get in there to start recording. Then I went to call up my friends who are writers as I don’t specialize in writing. I called Jim Weatherly and Gregory Abbot and E.G. Kight and Eddie Floyd, who is a good friend, we toured together in the past and still do from time to time, and everybody sent me a song. Some I got one, some I got two and Jim sent me ten. I listened to them all and I love listening to them, but I picked one of Jim’s, two of Eddie’s, and two of E.G’s and one of Gregory Abbot’s and I have done a Willie Nelson song, ‘Crazy’, as I’ve always loved that song. I’m thinking of a title for the album at present and it may be ‘Happy With The One I Got Now’. It’s one of E.G’s songs and I thought that would be a positive thing in any way you want to make that, such as happy with the man I’ve got now, or happy with the job I’ve got now, or whatever. How I picked the musicians is, several of the musicians have played for me already and the arranger had already played for me, his name is Kimble Funchess, he is a trumpet and flugel player. I called him and asked him to do the arranging as my last arranger, Harrison Calloway, passed. He was my past band leader and arranged a number of my past albums. My brother was also helping on some of my recordings in the past. His name is Housecat, his real name is Melvin Hendrix, he and I have the same father. All the musicians on my new album are all from Mississippi and I chose who I wanted and the arranger chose who he wanted and I love who we got, as they have all played with me before, here and there and every now and then. We also have Jessie Primer on sax on the album. There is a nice variety of songs and music on the album. I try to cross the musical board because that’s what I am and do, and from that Malaco didn’t know where to put me. I record stuff that I like. I’m a gospel singer and rhythm and blues singer, pop, jazz, country, I can yodel. I usually have a country number on most of my albums. There is a musical creativeness on my new album, what with all those wonderful musicians and we lived off each other’s creativeness in the studio. Everybody made suggestions on how it should sound or how a song could be arranged. When we recorded the album we were all in the studio, so we could see one another and that helped make it all happen. We are looking for worldwide distribution for the new album.

There was a time when I used to have horns in the band on my live shows, sometimes three and other times four, along with my rhythm section and I used to have background singers as well. I still do a gospel number on my live shows.
Dorothy Moore—I’m Happy With The One I’ve Got Now—Farish Street Records 10092

The simple review would be that if you love quality soul and blues from the likes of Malaco Records in their heyday, then just go and purchase this superb release from Jackson, Mississippi based singer Ms. Moore. If you need more detail then please read on. It is an all Mississippi affair having been recorded in Vicksburg and with all the musicians coming from that state, and what a crew they are. With many years of musical experience shared between them all, that includes a big and bold brass section of six, two backing singers, and arrangements via Kimble Funches, a veteran of many a soul blues session and who also features on trumpet and flugelhorn.

There is equal quality in the songs on offer from the creative pens of Eddie Floyd, EG Kight, Willie Nelson and Gregory Abbot. Deep, emotionally powerful, full blown soul ballads are heard on ‘You Don’t Say No’, ‘Sad Sad Sunday’, ‘You Don’t Have To Tell Me’ and ‘I’ll Get By’. All are exquisitely performed with Dorothy wringing every ounce of emotion from the song with her beautiful voice and the band accompaniment is sublime in its backing. The title track will take you back to the aforementioned Malaco Records soul blues sound. ‘Everything About Your Lovin’ will hook you in double quick time, such are its infectious rhythms and sing-along chorus line. Dorothy has always been partial to country music and with this in mind she covers Willie Nelson’s ‘Crazy’. Overall this eight track outing of sophisticated music finds Dorothy at the top of her game and comes highly recommended to all of you.

Mike Stephenson
BiTS: Hi Emma. Tell me something about yourself and how you got into music.

EW: Gosh! Well, I was always singing and whistling as a little child, always making sounds and noises and my dad used to say 'what's that little tune?' and sometimes I didn't know, or it was a cartoon, or it was something from the Pink Panther or Bod or something and I was always very musical. At primary school, they let me be in the choir and then at secondary school they let me be in the choir and I just was so into music and singing. I was really lucky that when I was 16, 17, I got to join a local band in Teesside, and it went from there really. I just continued being in bands and exploring music and learning new songs. Then ultimately, I put my own band together, which was quite a leap of faith but has been a lot of fun.

BiTS: Was there music in your house when you were a kid? Did your family listen to music?

EW: Most definitely, yes. My parents, my mother's a big Dickie Valentine fan. That's going a long way back but an incredible, really great singer, so we had a lot of Dickie Valentine. My dad was into everything from Miles Davis to the Beach Boys and I've got older siblings, two sisters and a brother who were a few years older than me. There was vinyl all the time. We had a big record player in the house and a lot of the day surrounded playing all the vinyl records, yes.

BiTS: Tell me something about putting the band together. Did you run auditions, or how did it happen?

EW: No, I've never really been one for auditions. I've never really had the need. I've been quite lucky that I've known people and created a bond with them or seen them play and asked them to jam. You don't really audition, do you? You'll know about this. You sort of jam and see if there's a spark or you're finishing notes at the same time and stuff and I was really lucky. I've had different line-ups, but the only reason the line-ups have changed is because people either changed their lifestyle and they'd go out of music, or they'd go with a different band or they go solo. At the moment I'm really happy with my line-up. I've got three fantastic guys working with me. Adam Featherstone on drums, Al Harrington on Guitar and John Daniel on bass and Alessandro Brunetta on harmonica and keyboards. I'm really fortunate, but I'm always open to guests. We sometimes include the fabulous Pipe Brothers who front the band The Mentullls. That's their own. They're like
a prog rock blues band, I'm sure you'll know of them. They live around the corner and sometimes we say oh, do you want to jump on with us and they play guitar and keyboard? I'm very open and I also work with a lot of other people as a singer.

**BiTS:** How did the blues find you, Emma?

**EW:** [Laughing] Oh, Ian, gosh. I wonder if we mean emotionally, metaphorically, musically, literally, all of those?

**BiTS:** All of the above, as they say.

**EW:** Do you know what, if I had to pin it down, it would be the ‘Aretha Now’ record and also followed up by ‘Aretha Sings the Blues’. Two Aretha albums. I was really heavily into Motown, Stax, early Atlantic soul recordings, Fox and people like that. All the great soul and blues singers and Aretha, her more commercial tracks didn't really grab me. I was in my mid-teens, so ‘Think’ and ‘Say a Little Prayer’ and ‘Natural Woman’, great songs but they sort of still felt semi-light. It was only when I got the albums that I heard her more bluesy songs that were a bit more raw, for instance, ‘Today I Sing the Blues’, which is one of the ones I cover. [Singing] Without a word of warning, it hit me that there was a style of music that was more deep, more guttural, more earthy, more sad and I think that's when I started to hear the blues.

**BiTS:** You don't need to have the blues in order to sing the blues, in my opinion?

**EW:** Well, that's true yes, but I have to say, as I've got older and life's thrown things at me, you do. It's a funny thing, Ian, it's not like you go on stage and think about your ex-boyfriend and think [singing] my man's left me. You're not thinking about that, it's a subconscious thing. It has to get into your fibre. You have to be on the stage, and you have to be looking at the audience and you have to think I'm going to give them it. I like to think of it as all the groovy poets, the Kerouac's and people like that, they talk about stream of consciousness. I believe that. I believe that when you're performing, you have to tap into this kind of, if you're over conscious of what you're saying, Ian, it becomes cheesy. If you're not conscious enough, it's not believable, so you have to find that middle spot.

**BiTS:** I see what you're saying. I think that's absolutely right. Do you ever get lost in the song?

**EW:** Yes [laughing], you do, but you've got to be careful because it's very interesting because I do get lost in a song and I go for notes and it's a fascinating thing because you're lost in the emotion, but there's a small part of you, there's a small part of me still that's trying to be technical.
**BiTS**: [Laughing].

**EW**: [Chuckles] Yeah, because I trained as an opera singer. I did two years opera and then my teacher started saying 'stop spoiling Mozart by bending the notes'. And she told me off, so I have got that kind of technical brain at the back but when I'm developing a song, for instance, if I do, 'I'd Rather be Blind', which I still do even though everybody does it, but I still do it. If I'm going for the story and I'm like really pushing and pushing, in my mind I know I can go up again and up again and up again, in my heart, but in my mind I'm thinking I hope I can get that note, ahh! Yes, it's a mixture. You've got to be true, you know.

**BiTS**: One thing the operatic training will teach you though, or train you to do, is to breathe properly.

**EW**: Yes, diaphragm breathing is something that just comes naturally now and it's always lovely, a friend of mine's mum was in the audience once and she trained at some fabulous school in Holland, a classically trained singer and I thought she wasn't enjoying the concert because she looked really stern. I thought oh, she's not enjoying it. Anyway, I just went for it and she came up to me at the end and said, your breathing's fantastic! [Chuckles] I was really happy.

**BiTS**: I don't know if you ever listen to any Mahalia Jackson, but Mahalia Jackson was the most awful breather. Breathing in the middle of words and heaven knows what else.

**EW**: Well, I know her music, but I've never really thought to listen. I'm going to have a listen now, yeah.

**BiTS**: You're going to have to because there's unfortunately quite a lot. I mean the most magnificent voice, her skill and style, but awful breathing on occasions. Anyway, let's move on.

**EW**: Yes, move on.

**BiTS**: Tell me what your plans are for the future. I guess you've been closed down for COVID the same as everybody else.

**EW**: Yes, I have. COVID stopped us gigging early March. I had gigs booked up 'til, well continuing on from March into next year and we know that all the gigs have been cancelled, so I was really not doing anything creative. I was just trying to listen to music and feel inspired and my mother actually said, try and do something because you've got this lovely following. You've got the support from the DJs for your previous EP which was 'Live and Acoustic' that came out last year.

**BiTS**: And was fabulous.

**EW**: Thank you so much for your support. Thank you. And first of all I thought, oh mum, I don't know what to do, so I beetled away and I got my laptop open and I realised I had two unreleased songs that were piano and voice and a couple of other vocal tracks and what came out of that was the album 'Feel Good' which was a piano and vocal album that came out in June. I put it together, four tracks. A friend of mine sort of mastered it, so it just sounded cohesive, sound
wise, and yes, as you know, it was received so well by the IBBA DJs, and it got to number one in the IBBA charts, which was mind-blowing.

**BiTS**: That’s wonderful, absolutely terrific stuff. What about gigging as well? Have you got any proper gigs coming up?

**EW**: The next proper gig, I’m performing on the introducing stage at the Great British Rock and Blues Festival at Skegness in Butlins and that’s January, Sunday 17\textsuperscript{th}. I hope I’ve got the date right. Fingers crossed it goes ahead. Five o’clock on the Sunday, I’m doing Butlins.

**BiTS**: Do I understand from what you’ve said that you actually play piano yourself?

**EW**: No, no, no. I don’t play the piano. The piano on the album was two different piano players, George Hall and Dean Stockdale.

**BiTS**: Do you play any instruments?

**EW**: I played the clarinet to grade five, which I can’t believe and cello to grade two and it’s like what Woody Allen said, 'she was the only cellist in the marching band'.

**BiTS**: [Laughing]. I haven’t heard that before, that’s wonderful.

**EW**: You can play cello and sing. When you’re a teenager, you don’t think you’re going to need to play the clarinet unless you’re going to be a professional clarinettist, but I am considering, this is a slight exclusive, I am considering buying a tenor saxophone.

**BiTS**: Are you now?

**EW**: I am, Ian, and I haven’t said that to anybody.

**BiTS**: That’s a very big, heavy instrument, maybe you’d be better starting off with an alto or something before you get that.

**EW**: I know, but I know how to play the tenor. The alto’s different fingering, isn’t it? Well, yes, I never thought of that [laughing]. Maybe I’ll just rest it on a stool and be lazy, but I think I could bust out some solos, but I’d love to play the guitar. I have visions of playing slide guitar, yes, I’d love to play slide guitar. It’s one of my absolute dreams. I thought oh, slide looks easy. That looks easy, you just wangle the bar up and down the strings. That looks dead easy. That’s easier than playing lead [laughing]. What a fool I was. I’d love to strap on a guitar and play a slide solo in the
middle of the track, but that's something I might do in the future. At the moment I'm writing my next record, which is called ‘Siren’.

**BiTS**: Yes, tell me more.

**EW**: Okay, so I started putting it together in January at a studio in Darlington, near Durham and I have a wonderful engineer who's great. He understands how I work and I demoed about eight songs, Ian, with Alessandro who played some keyboards and we put basic rhythm tracks down and then, of course, I'd only done guide vocals because we thought oh, we've got all the time in the world to come in and out. That was put on hold, but the good news is I have been going back occasionally to the studio because it's a big open, airy room and me and the engineer can social distance safely and all that and we've started to piece it together and I've written a few more numbers, but I have two amazing guests joining me on the album. First of all, Terry Reid who is a wonderful guitarist, singer-songwriter, legendary musician, and he was going to be playing Glastonbury this year because he played the first Glastonbury, and he was going to do the 50th-anniversary show.

**BiTS**: I know what's coming next.

**EW**: And he was going to come from Glastonbury to Durham to record my album because he's got family in Durham. He's from Durham, so it worked brilliantly and, of course, this didn't happen. But we've been working remotely, Ian. He's got a studio in California and he's been sending me amazing files of Dobro guitar and Gretsch and all fabulous guitar parts to put on my songs.

**BiTS**: There's a lot of people doing that stuff at a distance now. I've got an album which is an entire 12-piece big orchestra, all recorded separately in different parts of the world.

**EW**: Really, oh, how gorgeous.

**BiTS**: It's incredible what people can do these days, so go for it is what I say.

**EW**: Yes, it just gets a little frustrating, I mean Terry was on WhatsApp and we had him on the desk and we were talking about the mix and he was saying oh, I wish I was there because Terry's experience of mixing and editing and mastering is absolutely amazing. What he doesn't know you could write on a stamp. He's just brilliant and talking about all sorts of techniques of splitting sounds. I won't tell you the secrets because it's going to be on the album, but it would be lovely if he was here, but we have to work with what we've got and it's working out. I have another exciting guest coming on my album. I was on the phone to him yesterday, Joe Bowie, who was the founder of...
the band Defunkt in New York in the 1980s. You'll know him, yes, and Joe is going to play trombone and possibly a couple of other things.

**BiTS**: That sounds absolutely fabulous.

**EW**: It's great, isn't it? I can't get over it. I sometimes sit eating my cornflakes thinking oh, I've just got to ring Joe Bowie! Flipping' eck, it's just mind-blowing. I'm so lucky. I'm so lucky.

**BiTS**: Talking of eating cornflakes reminds me of a question that I wanted to ask you. Have you got a family? Have you got kids and that sort of thing?

**EW**: No, I don't have kids. I don't have kids. I have seven gorgeous nephews and nieces, but no, I missed the boat with the children, but that's cool. I've got a lovely family. I've got my mum. Not my dad anymore, he died, sadly, but he's always around me and as we say up north, he was a cushtie chanter, which means good singer.

**BiTS**: I'm not from the north as you can guess from my accent, but my wife is Scottish and it's funny there are many of those sayings that actually just drift across the border into Glasgow.

**EW**: Brilliant, so you understand that, yes..

**BiTS**: Okay, well let's leave it at that then.

**EW**: Thanks, Ian. I really appreciate it, honey, I really do and it's lovely to keep getting these little vignettes, interviews and bits and bobs in the magazines. I'm so grateful because I do it all myself, as you know.

**BiTS**: Thanks very much for that and thanks very much for talking to me.

**EW**: You're welcome.

**BiTS**: Have a wonderful rest of the day.
Born in Savannah, Georgia, USA, blues and boogie singer, songwriter and pianist Victor Lawton Wainwright, Jr., is better known as the “Piana from Savannah”, the title of his 2005 debut CD! Since his first release Victor has toured internationally, won six total Blues Music Awards, charted #1 in the Top 10 on the U.S. Billboard Blues Chart and was Nominated for a 2019 GRAMMY.

Fast forward to May 2020 and Victor’s 8th release titled Victor Wainwright and The Train—Memphis Loud. Reuniting The Train band from his previous recording, the work consists of Victor on keys and vocals, Pat Harrington on guitar, Billy Dean on drums and percussion, and Terrence Grayson on bass. Also, former Roomful Of Blues players Doug Woolverton on trumpet and flugelhorn, Mark Earley on sax and clarinet appear on most tracks, and producer Dave Gross fills in on guitar and percussion across the album. Guests include Victor’s former band mates Greg Gumpel (guitar), Monster Mike Welch on guitar, Nick Black (vocals), Mikey Junior on backing vocals and harp, Chris Stephenson on B3 and Stephen Dees, Patricia Ann Dees, Reba Russell, Gracie Curran, Francesca Milazzo and Terrell ‘Peanut’ Reed on backing vocals. Victor wrote all the songs, eight by himself and four with assistance; Greg Gumpel on two, Stephen Dees on one, Pat Harrington and Billy Dean on one and Chris Stephenson on one. Whew!!!

On Memphis Loud, Victor parks his boogie style piano and gravel-rich vocals under the blues umbrella along with soul, gospel, jazz and definitely rock. Pair that with rockus arrangements, folksy lyrics and we’re all just chugging along down the tracks together enjoying the ride!

I asked Victor to tell us a bit about himself and Memphis Loud. This is what he told me ......

LL: So, please tell us about where you grew up and what kind of music you were exposed to?
VW: I had the pleasure of growing up in the beautiful city of Savannah, GA, which is an area of America often referred to as the “Low Country,” so called because of its relatively low elevation. Basically, I grew up in a house near tidal marshlands, and with that, got to take in a whole lot of nature growing up. Birds, crickets, frogs, they all made music constantly, and along with them could often be heard strumming guitars and singing from the porch. I also had the pleasure of being raised by a family of musicians. They played mostly early American Roots Music, comprised of low country blues, honky tonk, genuine rock n’ roll and boogie woogie. I guess one could say I’ve been in the music since the moment I was conceived!

LL: Let’s just get this one out of the way, shall we! Are you any relation to American singer/songwriter Louden Wainwright, III, and his children Rufus and Lucy Wainwright Roche?

VW: No relation to the other Wainwrights, I’m afraid.

LL: You studied to be an Air Traffic Controller and worked in that profession in Memphis, TN. Not the most easy-going of jobs! What interested you in this kind of work? How’d you manage the stress, and do you have any “near miss” stories to tell?

VW: Air Traffic Control was an idea encouraged by my parents as they struggled to find a career opportunity for me as a young adult that wasn’t solely being a professional musician. My father, grandfather and uncle all knew how hard life was as a musician, and that success stories come few and far between for those entering the profession. Knowing this, they wanted me to have the opportunity to make my own choices, but to have just that, choices. My mother too... she insisted I go to college and get a degree, and they afforded me that opportunity which I’m still very thankful for. The aircraft, the technology side of things, that did interest me for a time growing up, and I felt Air Traffic Management was as good a challenge as any, not knowing any better at the time. Let’s just say, being a musician won out... I had no “near misses” but there’s only so many times you can show up to work, with sunglasses on from the evening before playing a juke joint, and feel like you’re doing a safe and good job. I had to follow my heart, which of course was music filled.

LL: Did you study music privately or academically, or are you self-taught?

VW: I was taught to play piano by my grandfather, who also played piano. He called it “piana”! My grandfather was completely self-taught, and didn’t know how to read music or know much about music theory. It was all ear for him, which is the way I learned. I don’t know much more than what I know, but what I know has evolved naturally by being inspired and challenged by countless records, and fellow musicians. I play by ear, don’t know how to read, and don’t know much about music theory. I just play from the heart, and I enjoy creating and entertaining people.
LL: Let’s talk about Memphis Loud. Can you tell us a bit about your concept for this album musically and lyrically?

VW: Memphis Loud is a direct continuation, musically and spiritually, from our 2019 GRAMMY Nominated record Victor Wainwright and the Train. I’m excited to say that we took the same formula, the same team, and the same musicians, and then continued where we left off. We’re carrying more boxcars now... but the album is just that... it’s the next set of boxcars to The Train. Musically and lyrically, it’s an escape and journey from the norm. Once you climb onboard, our goal is to take you on an exciting journey through what we consider the best of Contemporary American roots music. Not just looking out the window, but we’ve taken real care to make each boxcar different, unique and colorful. Musically, you climb on board the Train to take a trip. We just want it to be one of the most exciting and breathtaking trips of your life.

LL: My mom was a great pianist! She was old enough to be my grand mom when she had me, so she came up schooled by her teacher on ragtime and stride. She had that mean left-hand bass going on! She definitely contributed to my musical sensibilities. On “History of Boogie” you pay tribute to your Grandfather’s musical contribution. I think I hear a little Dr. John influence in there too! Who all has influenced your sound?

VW: Thank you! It’s amazing how much our musical family contributes to our musical sensibilities! It’s awesome. On the piano, definitely my Grandfather as you mentioned. Dr John, sure. Pinetop and Otis Spann, Meade Lux Lewis, Pete Johnson and all the outrageous boogie players. Jerry Lee Lewis was a huge influence.

LL: The whole world is definitely struggling during these trying times. America is no exception and has its own unique issues. What is it you are saying in your song “America”?

VW: It’s true that I wrote the song “America” before all of what this year has born to bare. However, I think that the lyrics say what they mean, and mean more now than ever. “To Just begin to heal the pain, we must know we’re all the same. Left or right, a path we must choose. We shouldn’t wager more than we can lose. Information, everyone’s online, all the lies... strangers in, a great divide.” Politics and differences aren’t what define us. We’re each much more than that. At the very least, we’re all human, and need to start there first, and recognize how beautiful THAT one thing, that we all have alike, really is. We are all on the same journey in the end.

LL: “My Dog Riley” is a fun tune! Tells us some more about Riley, please! What kind of dog is he and what does he look like? How did he come to you? What’s Riley’s story?!!!

VW: Riley is a Boston Terrier with a lot of attitude and personality! I wasn’t a dog guy until Riley,
and then all of a sudden.... now I’m SOLD. Riley’s been a constant source of happiness and cheerfulness, always energetic and ready to go. As with many musicians, I find myself struggling with my fair share of anxiety and depression. It’s a very powerful thing having a pet. There’s a lot of emotion involved. A lot more than I expected even. I had to write a song about him, but I didn’t want to be like everyone else and wait until it was a sad song... I wanted the song to match his personality... and it does just that! In fact, his bark is featured twice in the song. If you listen carefully you can catch it!

**LL:** What was your inspiration for your tune “Recovery”?

**VW:** “Recovery” is a song about looking forward, keeping your spirit up, and believing in yourself during a time when you may be struggling. There is light ahead. We all know that illness takes many forms, whether it’s mental or physical health, the many forms of addiction... recovery is a process we all must go through during our lives. This song is an anthem to that process.

**LL:** Can you tell us a bit about your band and personnel on Memphis Loud?

**VW:** Memphis Loud is a recording of my live touring 6-piece band, The Train, accompanied by a few boxcars of long-time crew members and previous band mates, close friends and guests. It stretches over 15 years of musical relationships, with myself as conductor, and I’m happy to say that our band and team on Memphis Loud all share the same vision. We play music that’s uniquely us, highly entertaining, positive, and that honors the past while challenging and pushing the art form forward. Everyone listed in the liner notes are there because they love the team, and I consider them all family.

**LL:** The Coronavirus pandemic has pretty much ended live performing for musicians at this time. How have you adapted your career and this release to the new normal?

**VW:** Like many I’ve been forced to get highly creative during these times. Luckily, I’ve been pretty fortunate, and I’ve been able to stay very productive, turning my attention and focus towards the video side of things. In particular, I created “Late Night w/ Wainwright Productions” which started as a live streaming variety show and has now moved into a professional video performance production, which is ongoing on Facebook. I also started the YouTube series “The Big Bite w/ Wainwright” which is my own new cooking show where I incorporate some of my favourite foods with music! I’m going to be releasing episode #3 soon! Episode 1 was Ribs and episode 2 Ribeye Steak in a cast iron Skillet! [https://youtu.be/e3uAM1Oj9UU](https://youtu.be/e3uAM1Oj9UU)
Musicians will have to continue to be creative for now and for the foreseeable future. It’s not the easiest... I’d much rather be performing in front of a live crowd, however, I think one plus side of things will be that many musicians will return with new skills that hopefully they can invest into their careers of music. As far as our album Memphis Loud goes, which was released right in the middle of the pandemic, I think it has brought a lot of people joy and a break from the turmoil, and that makes me happy if nothing else... that it can be available for people during a hard time... that’s pretty awesome! So, I encourage everyone to take a break, and take a ride... might as well be on The Train!

~ Lawrence Lebo

Lawrence Lebo is an award winning, critically acclaimed Blues recording artists living in Los Angeles, CA, USA. She can be found on the web at www.lawrencelebo.com

“To back up the recently created statement on diversity issued by the Federation, we ask the question... where are the BAME participants and musicians in the UK blues scene?

It has been suggested that there are not enough British BAME role models to try and attract more younger people of colour into the blues scene so we are looking at a 21-year-old African American blues guitarist 'Chris Kingfish Ingram' who is taking America by storm.

Born in Clarksdale, the legendary town in the Mississippi delta that brought us Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Ike Turner, Sam Cooke and many more, the young Kingfish learnt his craft at the schools blues programme run by the Delta Blues Museum. He furthered his education in workshops run by the Pinetop Perkins Foundation every summer and by the time he was 15 he was playing not only the local blues venues in Clarksdale but also for Michelle Obama at the White House.

As his reputation grew, Bruce Iglauer of Alligator Records saw him at the 2017 Chicago blues festival and before long Kingfish had signed to the greatest blues label in history. His debut cd “Kingfish” released in May 2019 was Grammy nominated and won 5 awards in the 2020 American Blues Music awards including album of the year.

It is hoped that when it is safe to travel that a UK tour could be arranged for Kingfish and then the young aspiring British blues guitarists can see firsthand someone who will be at the forefront of blues for years to come.”

Words by Pete Evans.
KING KING ANNOUNCE STEVIE NIMMO AS THE NEWEST MEMBER
PLUS OCTOBER 2020 UK TOUR
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+ RESCHEDULED FEBRUARY 2021 UK TOUR

King King are going to be back on tour again in the UK this year! The Glaswegian rockers’ October UK Tour went on sale on Friday 17th April via www.kingking.co.uk/tour and www.thegigcartel.com. What’s more, guitarist Stevie Nimmo will join King King on the tour as the band’s newest member!

Says Alan Nimmo: “As it already felt like it was so long since we had the chance to play in front of our UK fans, the tour in April had us so excited with anticipation. So, you can imagine our disappointment when it had to be postponed!!!
However, it brings us great joy to know that we’ll be playing some dates in October and that at least for some… the wait will be over!
I am really looking forward to properly showcasing the new line—up for our fans. I can confirm that the lads are super excited to get out there and play for you. We have been working so hard on the new album and the results have been so satisfying... the response to our first single “I Will Not Fall” which was A—listed on Planet Rock has been amazing.
As I have done on several occasions in the past when it comes to writing... I enlisted the talents of my big bro (Stevie Nimmo) to add some of his flavour to the songs alongside the other lads and when you hear the new album you’ll be able to spot his voice in the background on several songs. This started me thinking that it was time to take the next step in the natural evolution of King King! So not only will Stevie be present on the new album but when we embark on our October tour you will see an addition to our already outstanding line—up of Jonny Dyke, Zander Greenshields and Andrew Scott… we will welcome Stevie to King King as our newest member!
This is something that I have been thinking about for a long time and I feel now is the right time. I am extremely happy to bring Stevie in to the band as I feel that musically we raise to another level and it will be so exciting not only us but for our fans too who I know already have a lot of love and respect for him!


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   Academy
   Saturday 17 October 2020

Exeter Phoenix
   Sunday 18 October 2020

Edinburgh Queens Hall
   Tuesday 20 October 2020

Leeds Uni Stylus
   Wednesday 21 October 2020

Planet Rock’s Rocktober – Sheffield O2
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ALBUM ‘THE BOOKENDS’ OUT NOW VIA PROVOUGE

“One of the best, if not the best guitar player in the world” – Joe Bonamassa

“He is absolutely incredible” – Carlos Santana

“How Eric Gales isn’t the hugest name in rock guitar is a total mystery” – Dave Navarro

“This guy could be the best player on Earth” – Mark Tremonti

Eric Gales has rescheduled his 2020 UK tour to February 2021 and has added two extra dates at the Brighton Concorde (Feb 3) and the Dover Booking Hall (Feb 4). The tour follows the release of his album ‘The Bookends’ via Provogue/Mascot Label Group earlier in 2019. The album features collaborations with B. Slade, Doyle Bramhall II and Beth Hart. Tickets for the Brighton Concorde and Dover Booking Hall shows go on sale via www.thegigcartel.com. Tickets for all the other shows that have been rescheduled are still valid.

Special guest on all shows is the critically acclaimed British Blues rock guitarist Danny Bryant. Hailed as “A National Blues Treasure”, Bryant recently released his 11th studio album ‘Means of Escape’ via Jazzhaus Records to a great fanfare.

The challenge for making ‘The Bookends’ was for Gales to push himself. “As a guitar player it’s been established that I can play a little bit, just a little bit”, he smiles. But for this album he not only wanted to motivate himself as a musician, but also as a vocalist, to build up his vocal discography. “What spearheaded that was the artists that I have on the record”, he says.

Written over a nine month period, the album was recorded at Studio Delux, Van Nuys, California, The Dog House, Woodland Hills, California, Blakeslee Recording, North Hollywood and the day before he was due to fly to LA for pre—production the original producer David Bianco tragically died. It was Bianco’s management who then suggested Matt Wallace. “I heard his work and the kind of people he has produced such as Maroon 5, Faith No More and all these cats. When we met up together it was just perfect. I just trusted the guy and it ended up being great, I love Matt Wallace”, says Gales.

For more information, click here – www.noblepr.co.uk/press—releases/eric—gales/2021—uk—tour.htm

ERIC GALES – FEBRUARY 2021 UK TOUR
WITH VERY SPECIAL GUEST DANNY BRYANT

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Stan's Blues Jam
at The Platform Tavern

Free Entry - Backline Provided
Jamming from 8.30pm - 11.00pm

Third Wednesday Every Month

The Platform Tavern
Town Quay
Southampton
SO14 2NY

www.stansbluesjam.co.uk
New Moon Jelly Roll—Freedom Rockers—Stony Plain  ASIN : B08CG4YCWJ
This album was recorded in pianist Jim Dickinson's Zebra Ranch Recording Studio in Coldwater, Mississippi over a couple of late nights way back in 2008 and features Jim, his sons Luther (guitar & mandolin) and Cody (drums), plus Charlie Musselwhite (harp & vocals), Alvin Youngblood Hart (guitar & vocals) and Jimbo Mathus (bass & vocals). It features a mix of originals like Charlie Musselwhite's opener 'Blues Why You Worry Me?' together with assorted covers, including Alvin Youngblood Hart's take on Hendrix's 'Stone Free'. It is also nice to hear Jim Dickinson (who died the following year) singing on a couple of cuts - the traditional blues 'Come On Down to My House' and Wilbert Harrison's 'Let's Work Together'.

Although the playing is quite loose it is also focussed, there is no self-indulgent soloing, everything is directed towards the song rather than the individuals but you can clearly hear that all those involved are really enjoying themselves. Take 'Strange Land' - (has Charlie Musselwhite ever sounded better?) - with his swinging vocals and powerful harp playing over Cody's chugging drums and Luther's superb guitar playing and 'Shake It and Break It' features Jimbo Mathus but Jim's piano drives this melodic rocker. And Alvin's plaintive version of The Mississippi Sheiks' country blues 'Stop and Listen Blues' is a lovely way to round off the album. Apparently a volume two is to be released in 2021 - let's hope it is as good as this record.

Graham Harrison

Bobby Rush—Rawer Than Raw—Deep Rush  ASIN : B08C9CPP6H
Listening to this album it's hard to believe that Bobby is 86, both his singing and his playing are still very powerful despite (or maybe because of) his many years touring on the Chitlin' Circuit and recently surviving a bout of Covid-19. The album is a follow-up to his 2007 acoustic album 'Raw' and features just Bobby playing guitar and harp to salute his favourite artists including Skip James, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson II and Elmore James, it was recorded over several years with engineer and executive producer Randy Everett.

We begin with a charming, relaxed Rush original blues 'Down in Mississippi' a homage to his adopted state, then it's 'Hard Times' a take on Skip James' 'Hard Time Killing Floor Blues', then it's another original 'Let Me In Your House', which like the following version of Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightning' is done 'trance blues' style. Bobby follows this with another Howlin' Wolf song 'Shake It for Me' which shouldn't really work as an acoustic song but Bobby pulls it off, and without trying to impersonate Wolf's vocals. In the 50s Bobby was a contemporary in Chicago with Wolf, Muddy, Sonny Boy and Elmore James (although he was not quite as successful) and he also tackles Muddy's 'Honey Bee, Sail On', Sonny Boy's 'Don't Start Me Talkin' and Elmore's 'Dust My Broom', again Bobby doesn't try to replicate these artists' performances but performs the songs in his own style.
It's obvious that Bobby has great affection for the Chess artists and their classic songs that he covers, however probably my favourite song on the album is Bobby's own 'Sometimes I Wonder', a sensitive, introspective song with plaintive harmonica.

Bobby has long been the most popular bluesman with southern audiences on the Chitlin' Circuit with his mix of blues and soul, suggestive lyrics and showboating and although I understand that he has recently started to do acoustic shows I do wonder how his more recent (Grammy-winning) material will go over with his traditional audience.

Graham Harrison

Bobby Parker—Soul Of The Blues—1960’s Records  ASIN : B08DQ1CT99

The late Bobby Parker was born in Louisiana, raised in Los Angeles before eventually settling in Washington DC, where he later became associated with the Go-go scene. Although he initially played as a sideman with many R&B and R&R acts including Bo Diddley, Paul Williams and Jackie Wilson, his big record was 'Watch Your Step' recorded in 1961 which The Beatles used to play in Hamburg and which they adapted for the intro to their 1964 single 'I Feel Fine'. I was lucky enough to see him in Manchester in 1968, where he performed the wonderful 'It's Hard But It's Fair' which he recorded for the Blue Horizon label during the trip. He was a charismatic performer, a very soulful singer and a good guitarist - qualities evident even on his first single from 1958 the dramatic 'Blues Get Off My Shoulder' (which also had 'You Got What It Takes' as the B-side and which Bobby claimed was stolen by Motown's Berry Gordy for Marv Johnson). In the 90s he recorded the albums 'Bent Out of Shape' and 'Shine Me Up' for Black Top Records and I'm glad to say that this compilation includes all his big songs and selections from these albums, and it's great to have them all together in one place to celebrate his legacy.

Graham Harrison

Fantastic Negrito—Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?—Cooking Vinyl Limited  ASIN : B087L4PDQV

Bay area-based Fantastic Negrito (Xavier Amin Dphrepaulezz) has won two Grammys for Best Contemporary Blues Album but this his third album moves further away from the 'rootyness' of his first two albums which merged blues with more contemporary hip-hop sounds. Here the influences seem to be more Gil Scott-Heron, Sly and the Family Stone and Prince as he comments on social issues over complex, layered productions and, despite the title, the record was actually recorded before lockdown and the BLM movement. "How Long" is probably the most bluesy track, at its heart it's a slow blues with nice lead guitar, probably my favourite track. 'Chocolate Samurai' is a good first track, funky with nice cheesy organ and the soulful 'I'm So Happy I Cry', features powerful vocals from Tarriona 'Tank' Ball of New Orleans’ Tank and the Bangas. 'All Up In My Space' is a nice soul ballad and 'King Frustration' is loping funk that reminded me of classic mid-period Stevie Wonder, while we check out with the psychedelic soul of 'Platypus Dipster' - very Sly Stone. I did prefer the more bluesy first two albums but this is a well put together record - similar
to recent work by other younger black artists (such as Gary Clark Jr. and Son Little) who also combine blues with more modern musical styles.

Graham Harrison

**JD Taylor—The Coldwater Sessions—VizzTone**  
ASIN: B08B3MTFWZ

Despite singing and playing harp with the group Little Boys Blue for twenty five years this is JD Taylor's first solo album, it features 11 original songs recorded at Jim Dickinson's Zebra Ranch Studio near near Coldwater, Mississippi and uses musicians from the Grammy-nominated Southern Avenue, plus Hammond organ by Rev. Charles Hodges. We get off to a good start with 'Got Me Where You Want Me' a relaxed blues shuffle that sounds really authentic but the nice Hammond from Hodges and the jazzy backup vocals just add a little extra something—not forgetting JD's big-toned harp solo. 'Ooh Wee' is another shuffle where we get some Stax-style brass and chicken-pickin' guitar, more brass on 'Nothing Left To Say' a slow soul ballad and 'Cocomo' is a laid-back shuffle with understated guitar and harp.

I loved 'At First Glance', a melodic soul ballad in the Percy Sledge mould, whereas 'By All Means' ups the tempo as does 'If It Ain't Good' a slab of funk with brass and stinging blues guitar. 'Honey Honey Baby' is pure Jimmy Reed - a chugging 12-bar with that Reed-style blow bend harp and 'Anastasia' is a moody slow blues featuring chromatic harmonica and we play out with 'Coldwater Swing' an instrumental where everyone gets to step up and take a solo, with JD again on the chromatic. There is nothing new here, but I did like its mix of blues and soul sounds which I found quite original and added a pleasing variety. JD is a good singer and harp player and all the playing is very good throughout but Charles Hodges’ Hammond is particularly excellent.

Graham Harrison

**Bobby Lewis—Mumblin', Tossin' and Turnin'—Jasmine Records**  
JASCD 1034

Now THIS is R&B the way it should be, accept no substitute. Yep, the real deal. All tracks recorded over a ten year period, 1952 - 1962 and only one big hit among ‘em: Topping the Billboard pop chart for seven weeks and the R&B charts for ten, selling upward of three million copies in the process, the title of that massive hit was, ‘Tossin’ And Turnin’” (1961).

The cd contains twenty seven thumpin’, pumpin’ jump blues, including his first record cut for Chess, the controversial and definitely non-PC 'Mumbles Blues'. Comprehensive booklet notes from Roger Dopson, label shots on the inside of the case, and strangely, the artist’s photo is on the back. (Why not the front?)

Bobby Lewis was born in 1925 and sadly died in April this year (2020), aged 95, it would've been nice for him to have known about this release, hopefully he did.
‘Tossin’ And Turnin’ can be heard in the movies “American Graffitti” and “Animal House” (two good’uns there), and no doubt will continue to be used in film and television productions. So, unless you’re blessed enough to own the single or even his first album, this is quite possibly an essential purchase. Grab your copy quick!

Bob Pearce

Laura Tate—Live From El Paso—811 Gold Records LLC

Laura, grew up in Dallas, Texas with her mother, opera singing father and three sisters. She first sang in front of an audience at the age of nine and went on to study voice at the University of North Texas, while there she joined a touring repertory theatre company to pursue an acting career. After relocating to Los Angeles she moved into the television industry appearing in an array of programmes, after an on-set gig she began to focus upon directing music videos, documentaries and commercials. Now, she resides in El Paso, Texas and is a member of The Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Radio and Television Artists, after going back to college she gained both a Bachelors and Masters Degree from the University of Texas-El Paso.

The concert was performed at The McKelligon Amphitheatre in aid of Laura’s own El Paso Community Foundation fund for the Arts. Backing Laura is a fine set of musicians including Terry Wilson on bass with Tony Braungel providing drums, Jeff Paris on keyboards and guitarist Doug Hamblin. Teresa James is on hand delivering backing vocals. The twelve numbers here are a very relaxed selection from Laura’s previous albums. To give an indication of how relaxed the set is, the first half of Thin Lizzy’s ‘The Boys Are Back In Town’, is delivered as a slowburning ballad which then gently swings. Laura’s relaxed vocals are well suited to the slow swinging rumba rhythms of ‘No Place to Hide', the subtle and delicate horn section provided by Joe Sublett on saxophone with Lee Thornburg joining on trombone and Darrell Leonard blowing trumpet. The bluesy supper club piano feel on ‘I Need A Man’, allows Laura to stretch her slinky alluring vocals while the horn section entwines and entices all. The pace moves up a notch on Irma Thomas’s ‘Hittin’ On Nothing’, with the horn section delivering a smooth New Orleans feel. The late night sensuous groove continues on ‘Can’t Say No', with a lascivious vocal from Laura and splendidly sinuous piano and horn. As a tribute to her favourite composer Mel Harker, Laura delivers a heartfelt rendition of ‘Cowboy Jazz’, the horns and piano are firmly in sync with Laura and her emotions. Splendid.

Greatly endorsed!

Brian Harman.
Dudley Taft—Cosmic Radio: American Blues—Artist Group

Washington D.C. born Dudley spent his early years in the Midwest and now lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the past, he founded and recorded in bands such as ‘Space Antelope’, ‘Sweet Water’, ‘Second Coming’ and ‘Omniviod’. As time passed he became more and more involved in writing music and since 1995, he has pursued a successful career in film and television, he formed the present Dudley Taft Band in 2007. This album was started last autumn and was completed during lockdown, as he and his family, were ensconced together in their home during this time; it gave his daughter Ashley Charmae, the opportunity to provide backing vocals. Joining Dudley, who takes lead vocals, guitar and piano on these 12 numbers, is Kasey Williams and John Kessler on bass with Walfredo Reyes Jr. and Jason Patterson providing drums.

The album opens with the rocking love song ‘Cosmic Radio’, which was, (according to Dudley) written on a family holiday in the Bahamas, (with the aid of a little bit of nature’s illegal leaf,) as was ‘Hey, Hey’, they are both heavy, fast paced guitar-ringing, no nonsense rockers that certainly demand your attention, Dudley’s enticingly raw edged guitar work has splendidly dark echoes of ‘The Forest Rangers’, (‘Sons Of Anarchy’.) ‘One in a Billion’, is an 8 minute guitar soaring and spiraling epic, that reminds one of Hendrix and a good number of hard rock bands of the seventies. Dudley’s splendidly roaring vocals only add to the proceedings. On the satisfyingly strong blues orientated slowburning ‘Relentless’, Ashley Charmae, not only provides confident and stunning lead vocals but, she also co-wrote the number with her father. ‘All For One', seems to be a blistering, roaring and menacing heavy-metal tale that gives us all a dire warning of the consequences of continuing to abuse this planet and its wildlife. ‘I Will Always Love You', is a pleasant departure from Dudley’s comfort zone; a gentle, sweet piano and acoustic guitar driven ballad with an accompanying tender vocal from Mr Taft.

Greatly endorsed!

Brian Harman.

John Nemeth—Stronger Than Strong—Nola Blue Records NB 013

During his youth in the early 90’s John was firstly enticed musically to the harsh earthy, uncompromising world of hip, hop and rock until, his friend Tom Moore introduced him to the recordings of Buddy Guy and Junior Wells. From then on John began a different path joining with Tom to form ‘Fat John & The Three Slims’. Over the following years John began playing the harmonica and fronted local bands until he released his debut album ‘The Jack of Hearts’, in 2002. He relocated to San Francisco in 2004, while there he worked with Anson Funderburgh for two years. In 2013 he settled in Memphis, Tennessee and proceeded to work with Scott Bomar, the Bo-Keys creator, on the 2014 album ‘Memphis Grease.’ Also, he later
released two albums for the Blind Pig label. Since then he has worked upon solo and collaborative projects. In the latter part of last year he reunited with his road band which comprises Danny Banks on drums with Mathew Wilson on bass and John Hays, guitar, to record this, his 10th album, John takes lead vocals and harmonica.

The first of a number out of the speakers is ‘Come And Take It', which is enjoyably dominated by a muzzy vocal and fuzzy guitar that delivers an enticing old timer hill-country toe-tapper with John blasting a lively and aching harmonica that pulls you right in. The lively retro percussion and harmonica feel continues the mood with a Fat Possum influenced mover entitled, ‘Fountain Of A Man.’ Little Junior Parker’s 1958 ‘Sometimes', is a splendid rendition, that is drenched in a slow, swampy tremolo filled atmosphere. The thought provoking ‘Bars', is a somewhat less than respectful but, nonetheless accurate, sombre and melancholy slow blues ode to the present POTUS and his actions. Jesse Belvin’s ‘Guess Who', amply displays John’s heartfelt vocals on this slowburning ballad that features a searing, melancholy guitar from Matthew Wilson. ‘Sweep The Shack', is a joyously swinging, goodtime blues toe-tapper featuring a swinging, ringing guitar that guarantees to blow the cobwebs away.

Greatly endorsed!

**Brian Harman.**

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Adam Sweet—Sink or Swim—Independent Release

Adam Sweet is well known on the British Blues circuit both as a solo artist and with his band. This new album is with his band, Ian Jennings on bass and Garry Kroll on drums.

Some nice bluesy guitar on ‘Working On It’ opens the album. ‘You or Me’ has a bit more of a country feel and bounces along nicely with some tasty harp playing from Ian Briggs, really like this one. ‘Like It or Not’ is slower paced with some great keys from Josiah J. Manning.

‘Something From Nothing’ introduces some funky edge with a nice rocking wah fused guitar solo. ‘Good Enough’ has that country feel once again bordering on Southern Rock, with some well constructed lyrics that really compliment the song that makes for great listening and you can almost sense a whiff of ‘Sweet Home Alabama’ in there.

Adam really starts to shine with some tasteful guitar on the minor blues ‘Miss You So’ that has that less is more feel about it. ‘Devils Lake’ is a bluesy guitar based instrumental with shades of the Allman Brothers. ‘Not a Moment Too Soon’ has a great haunting blues sound that I really like and its up close and personal lyrics really touch the soul.

‘Here to Nowhere’ is one of those songs that gradually builds up into a great song with some lifting backing vocals that help to carry it along to the big finish. It almost felt like an album closer but that comes next with ‘Something'll Happen', an interesting song that has a bit of a Robben Ford feel about it. It has some nice acoustic guitar picking and quirky lyrical delivery, I really liked this song.
First and foremost this is a great album of well constructed songs. This album is bluesy with hints of rock and Americana in there too. The album is well produced, the rhythm section is spot on and I really liked the way the keys underpinned the songs at the right time. Adam demonstrates what an accomplished guitarist he has become. Whilst Adam has a good voice and good vocal delivery I feel if he could just squeeze a little more out of the lead vocal it would make such a difference. But hey, that said, this is a great album. Please check it out.

Ged Wilson

Trevor Babajack Steger—The Solemn Truth and Barefaced Lies—Independent Release

Trevor Babajack Steger has been nominated for blues awards based upon his first class live solo acoustic performances that have made him a crowd favourite on the British blues circuit. Here we have the eagerly awaited new album, The ‘Solemn Truth and Barefaced Lies’, a title to conjure with!

‘Live Forever’ generates a great rhythm to kick off the album with some great guitar and harp work that really drives things along. ‘I’m Up I’m Down’ gives us another good chugging rhythm to stomp along to with a nice burst of ‘Pick a Bale of Cotton’ thrown in there for good measure. ‘Devil Inside’ is just a good old dirty slide blues.

What I am noticing here is that Trevor has a vocal style that really suits and enhances his music. It’s not just the down home growl you might expect but has depth and good diction so the lyrics are there to be heard and appreciated.

‘Red Dress’ gives the album a nice chilled out interlude whilst ‘Deep River’ has a great haunting vibe of harp and slide. ‘Can’t Get Along With You’ is a foot stomping blues with some lovely slide guitar and harp and the odd John Lee Hooker style ‘How How How’ in there too! Trevor pays homage to the old traditional blues number ‘In My Time Of Dying’ and he really excels to do it justice.

The album closes with the title track ‘The Solemn Truth and Barefaced Lies’—a true masterpiece. It’s a great mixture of World Music sounds that wrap around the lyrics and make for such great listening. I really like this one.

Make no mistake this is a great album. You get the feeling that Trevor is enjoying himself here and that really comes across throughout the album. It’s not just about the singing and playing of Trevor but the way he has managed to create so many different soundscapes, moods and vibes that have all been enhanced with great production. The sprinkling of backing vocals from Lily Skinner really blends in with the vibe too and the title track is just food for the soul and that’s the Solemn Truth not Barefaced Lies!

Ged Wilson
The Private Dicks Band—Private Eye—Independent  Release

Back in the early 1990’s when I fronted my old band ‘Blues at Ten’, we would often come across a great band called ‘The Private Dicks’ playing on the North West / West Yorkshire circuit. They were one of my favourite bands back in the day to play at the regular Wednesday blues night at ‘The Waterside’ in good old Summerseat near Bury. Alas those halcyon days are long gone and the Waterside has disappeared too, so fast forward to 2020 and I’m eager to listen to their new album ‘Private Eye’. They have had a slight name change since the old days and are now known as the ‘The Private Dicks Band’.

The album kicks off in style with some great harp and slide guitar on ‘Wrong Side of Town’. There is some super guitar riffing going on with ‘Black Cat Afternoon’ and some more good rocking upbeat Rhythm & Blues with ‘Bad Blues Music’.

Some nice sax playing leads us into the title track ‘Private Eye’. This could quite easily sit as a soundtrack for a Micky Spillane movie with some great lyrics to match. I really like this song.

The rhythm section of Mick Garrah on bass and Pete Bradley (Steve’s brother) on drums really holds this band together and drives them forward. There is some great guitar work from the two guitarists, Steve Bradley and Chris McParland with Steve adding some tasty slide. The lineup is complete with lead vocals from Pete Cooke who also stars on harp and sax. ‘Too Much Trouble’ has that ‘Help Me’ vibe about it with some great lyrics that really made me smile! The album closes with great guitar work on ‘Late Night Man’ and a nice burst of sax too.

In these days of people pushing the boundaries of blues music it is actually quite refreshing to hear an album of good old style British R&B. This is upbeat music that will get your foot tapping. There are shades of Dr Feelgood and Rick Estrin & the Nightcats woven in here with the odd splash of rockabilly. The lyrics are slick and well delivered, there are some American references in there like ‘sidewalk’ and ‘electric chair’ but they all sit (no pun intended) well with the music. These guys do not overplay, the guitar work is tasteful and well thought out. With just the right amount of harp and a sprinkling of sax they get the overall balance right.

This album has a real swagger about it and I’m pleased to say that thirty years down the road The Private Dicks Band are alive and kicking—go check them out.

Ged Wilson

The James Oliver Band - Twang – the Last Music Co. 2REV101

James Oliver plays rock and roll guitar and he’s good at it too. OK, so the tough-sounding and now well-known ‘Misirlou’ isn’t a blues – it’s perhaps the definition of surf guitar as played by Dick Dale - and neither is fellow instrumental ‘The Missing Link’, but set against this are performances like his revival of Big Joe Turner’s ‘T. V. Mama’ where he recreates Elmore James
broom-dusting slide guitar licks from the original (and he sings pretty well too). Big Joe also supplied ‘Honey Hush’, here given a rock and roll treatment worthy of Johnny Kidd’s Pirates.

The original ‘She Was The One’ is more akin to the Canvey Island sound of Dr. Feelgood in approach and sound, whilst the opening ‘American Cars’ is Chuck Berry (and others) re-imagined singing about the motors found around James’ native South Wales - nice lyrics! ‘Stay Out Of Trouble’ has a rocking Cajun flavour thanks to the accordion work of otherwise keyboards and harmonica man Billy Lee Williams, whilst ‘Outside Help’ is the longest track on the album, pandering to the blues guitar audience with the lengthiest solo of the set – it actually runs to more than four minutes (that’s the track length, not the solo)! And there’s ‘Mean Little Mama’, which is a big, big sounding rocker...

Overall then, a good-natured and good-timing release. Check it out if you are partial to vintage sounds.

Norman Darwen

Samantha Martin & Delta Sugar - the Reckless One - Gypsy Soul Gsro13
(www.samanthamartinmusic.com)

Out of Toronto, Canada, Samantha Martin easily won me over with this set’s predecessor, ‘Run To Me’ in 2018. It may sound like damning with faint praise if I write “here’s more of the same”, but it certainly is not meant like that. The earlier set impressed with its excellent soul-based approach and stylings. Here Samantha works from a similar base - soul, blues, R ‘n’ B, funk but there’s even a Bob Dylan cover here, with his bluesy original ‘Meet Me In The Morning’ transformed with a Meters-ish arrangement. The remaining eleven tracks are all originals.

Musically, Delta Sugar are right on the button, whether conjuring up a wall of sound, Phil Spector style, on ‘Sacrifice’, coming over all funky on the opening ‘Love Is All Around’ or aiming for and getting an Otis Redding type sound on ‘Don’t Have To Be’. Vocally, you can pick more or less any track at random, and you’ll be as impressed as I was. If pushed, though, I’d say that I must mention ‘I’ve Got A Feeling’, with its classic southern soul sound.

Do check this out if you appreciate the likes of Sharon Jones, Teresa James, Janis Joplin or Beth Hart - or just good soul and roots-rock sounds. It’s worth it!

Norman Darwen
Vanessa Collier - Heart on the Line - Independent
(www.vanessacollier.com)

Vanessa Collier is sometimes compared to Bonnie Raitt, with critics commenting on the similarity of their vocals. Don’t expect the guitar work though - Vanessa is actually a sax player, which certainly adds a different angle. She also spent nearly two years working with Joe Louis Walker and toured across Europe with Ruf’s “Blues Caravan” package in 2017.

So, don’t expect a blues-rock set then. What we do get is a skilful and thoroughly enjoyable blend of blues and soul - and funk, listen to the huge-sounding cover of Randy Newman’s ‘Leave Your Hat On’. The set’s other two borrowed selections are the opener, James Brown’s ‘Superbad’—as funky as you’d expect—and a delicate tune from Bonnie Raitt’s repertoire, ‘I Don’t Want Anything To Change’, with its hints of Americana. The personal statement of ‘Take A Chance On Me’ does maybe fall into that blues-rock category though—certainly it has nothing to do with Abba!

Each track here is quite distinct and individual, though all drawing on blues or soul music. For the blues pure and simple, take a listen to the slide guitar (played by Vanessa herself) driven, acoustic-based and slightly Wolf-ish ‘Bloodhound’ or the stupendous West-side Chicago styled ‘Weep And Moan’ (Laura Chavez excellent in full Otis Rush/ Magic Sam mode) but better still, just keep your ears open to everything.

Norman Darwen

Kurt Allen - Whiskey, Women & Trouble - Independent
(www.kurtallenmusic.com)

Right from the front sleeve - a rather pleased looking Kurt in a bar flanked by two lovely ladies - it is apparent that this is an old-skool blues and blues-rock release. Based in Kansas City, and backed by a tight little band (including some excellent horn-playing) Kurt has a no nonsense style that ranges from the heavy, riff driven blues-rock of the opening ‘Graveyard Blues’ with its lived-in vocals and fine slide guitar break to the out-and-out rocking closer, ‘Sweet T’.

In between these two you’ll encounter the likes of the rather traditional and slightly menacing ‘Watch Yo Step’, the slow blues ‘How Long’ (with its faint echoes of vintage Led Zeppelin), the homage to soul food that is the aptly-titled ‘Funkalicious’ (think Stevie Wonder’s ‘Superstition’, or maybe Jeff Beck’s cover). Then there is also the sweet soul of ‘Count On Me’ to show some fine vocals, a New Orleans-ish ‘Voodoo Queen’ and the original composition, ‘Roadrunner’, which does however show its inspiration in Bo Diddley’s similarly named tune.
All of which makes for a fine and enjoyable release. This might not be about to set the blues world on fire, but it is indeed an excellent example of the blue collar blues.

Norman Darwen

**Head Honchos—Blues Alliance—Grooveyard**
(www.theheadhonchosband.com)

This outfit is led by Detroit’s Rocco Calipari Senior, who will be known to some as the lead guitarist of Howard & The White Boys who recorded with Buddy Guy; he has also worked with Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry and Carl Weathersby, among others. In this outfit he trades fiery licks with his blues guitarist son, Rocco Calipari Junior, with the line-up completed by the experienced Mike Boyle on bass and Will Wyatt drums.

‘Stuck Between The Middle’ makes for a loud, blues-rocking opener with plenty of screaming guitar work - ditto track two, ‘Mr. Bad’. ‘Number One’ has something of a classic rock sound, albeit driven along by a memorable slide guitar riff, and the just over six minutes long, celebratory ‘She Got That Thang’ adds a fine funky approach to the mix, whilst the pulsating ‘Find Me A Woman’ and ‘Can’t Be Satisfied’ (an original, by the way) are perhaps more in a “traditional” blues-rock bag.

‘Evil’ is indeed the Howling Wolf song, though this version owes more to Wolf’s psychedelic cover than to the original. ‘We Will Win’ leans more than a little to southern rock, and “stay close to the rock ‘n’ roll” is the advice of the track ‘Rock ‘n’ Roll’ which does just that, before the blues takes over. The volume does go down for the acoustic based blues closer, ‘I’m A Ram’.

As some old vinyl albums used to say: “Play Loud”. The Head Honchos have certainly taken that to heart! But then, they don't take any prisoners here...

Norman Darwen

**Nikki O’Neill—World Is Waiting—Blackbird**
(www.nikkioneill.com)

All these tracks were recorded in Los Angeles, with the exception of ‘Take Back What I Said’, which was laid down at Royal Studios in Memphis. Singer/ songwriter Nikki opens strongly with ‘That’s How You Lose Her’, an excellent slab of mid-60s styled R ‘n’ B before moving onto ‘A Man For All Seasons’, part country, part soul, and even a little reggae-tinged, and then the contemporary gospel ballad of ‘A Place At The Table’.

The inspirational title track has a fine bluesy groove and guitar work, and ‘All I Wanna Be Is Yours’ has a nicely retro pop feel, with a slight hint of country in the delivery, whilst ‘You’re The Only One
Who Gets Me' again has a bluesy vibe and a soul tinge mixed with Americana. The closing number is the aforementioned Memphis recorded item, a solo piece with just Nikki’s vocals and guitar suggesting a much bigger, soul-flavoured arrangement. I have a nagging feeling that Nikki has listened to a lot of Al Green...

Whatever, Nikki’s soul and r’n’b influences mark her out as unusual for an Americana artist. But that should not worry any readers here very much. Impressive...

Norman Darwen

Copperhead County—Brothers—Continental Record Services (www.copperheadcounty.com)
This digital album is not a blues set as such. However, it is southern rock in the grand old fashion, and with the crossover into the blues that has happened with the likes of The Allman Brothers and more recently The Allman Betts Band and others, this is likely to be of definite interest to some readers.

These guys do the sound so well - ringing, interlocking guitars (try the instrumental ‘Tskaro’), organ cushion, driving rhythm section and a roots based sound. Lend an ear to the wonderfully grooving 'Pacific Street', which also has an element of The Rolling Stones of the late 60s and early 70s, and as the title of the final number puts it, these guys sure do have that ‘Southern Feeling’.

If you’ve not heard label-mates The Leif De Leeuw Band then it might come as somewhat of a surprise to learn that Copperhead County is a young Dutch band, with singer/ guitarist Corvin Silvester, guitarist Robert van Voorden, organist Jordy Duitscher, bass player and drummer Niels Budel and Alex Stolwijk respectively, with occasional backing vocalists Ashley De Jong and Marja Boender. The names may not be what you might tend to associate with Alabama, Florida, Georgia and the like, but the music most certainly is.

Norman Darwen

Kirsten Thien—Two Sides—Screen Door Records  ASIN: B08DV5L48V
It's tempting to compare Kirsten Thien with Bonnie Raitt - both are red-haired singer/guitarist/band-leaders but I'm afraid that Kirsten isn't really in Bonnie's league, although this album does have its moments, with seven of its eight tracks being written or co-written by Kirsten. We begin with 'Shoulda Been', I'm afraid I found the lyrics, the vocals and Kirsten's slide guitar all a bit clumsy but 'Sweet Lost and Found' is a lot better, a nice countryish song with a catchy chorus. 'After I Left Home (Song for Buddy Guy)' is a song inspired by Buddy's own song 'When I Left Home', again I wasn't too keen on Kirsten's vocals - I think she's much better when she takes it easier and doesn't scream - but the song does feature nice blues guitar from Arthur Neilson (one time guitarist with Shemekia...
Copeland's band). The others in the core band are Tommy Mandel (keyboards); Eric Boyd (bass and production) and Steve Holley (drums). ‘Say It Out Loud’ is a nice Bo Diddley-style song, 'Montanas' is a sexy a Bossa Nova featuring Kirsten singing in Spanish, with guitars by Raul Midon and John Benthal, and piano from Cuban born jazz pianist Fabian Almazan and the album closes with a version of Leon Russell's 'I'd Rather Be Blind'.

Graham Harrison

Kim Wilson—Take Me Back—M.C. Records ASIN : B08GDK9JRJ
Kim’s last album was 2017's excellent 'Blues and Boogie Volume 1' - sadly a volume 2 never materialised however, he has now moved back to Mark Carpentieri’s M. C. Records and this new album carries on in a similar style - very authentic sounding Chicago blues with lots of Kim's world-beating harmonica (and also his superb vocals). The album was recorded ‘live in the studio’ in mono at Big Jon Atkinson’s BigTone Studios with its classic analogue equipment, with Kid Andersen, Atkinson and Rusty Zinn (guitars), Robert Welsh (keyboards), Jonny Viau (sax), Troy Sandow (bass), Marty Dodson (drums) and Mr. Andersen also producing. The songs are a mixture of Wilson originals and classic blues, including four songs from ex-Muddy Waters sideman Jimmy Rogers - 'The Last Time', 'Money, Marbles and Chalk', 'Goin' Away Baby' and 'If It Ain’t Me'.

I've got to say the music does sound great, so authentic - it's hard to believe that this is music recorded in the 21st. century and Kim's harp tone is just fabulous, really thick, deep and rounded. However, for me there is always the slight problem of why 70 years later people are still slavishly trying to recreate that 50s sound and it does give the album a rather samey overall sound. Having said that I did really like the blistering version of Larry Williams' 'Slow Down' - once a very popular song with Merseybeat bands - and the cover of Howlin’ Wolf’s 'No Place To Go' is handled very subtlety and Kim’s own song 'Fine Little Woman' and his other original songs fit in just fine with the blues' classics. There is some wonderful playing here from both Kim and also the band but personally I would like to hear him trying to take the music forward rather than trying to recreate the past.

Graham Harrison

William Shatner—The Blues—Cleopatra Records ASIN : B08DVTZ18X
Over the years William Shatner (Star Trek's Captain Kirk) has released many albums in many different genres, with the 'joke' on all of them being that he can't sing and speaks the lyrics in a dramatic way, as Peter Sellers used to do back in the day. The first time you hear this it's mildly amusing, the second time it isn't and the third time it is just plain annoying. I had wondered if this album was going to be Mr. Shatner saying that he was in fact a life-long blues fan and he had finally got the chance to perform the
music he loved but no, the record company had the idea of a blues album and apparently Shatner didn't even know what blues was. There are some brilliant musicians involved here—Kirk Fletcher, Ronnie Earl, Canned Heat, Albert Lee etc.—but for me the vocals just drag the whole thing down. Sonny Landreth plays wonderful slide guitar on Cream's 'Sunshine of Your Love' but I couldn’t stand to hear it once, let alone consider ever listening to it again. I would say the album is a 'joke' but I didn't find it at all funny and am surprised the musicians involved agreed to take part (maybe they were all Star Trek fans?). I'm not a blues purist and I do have a sense of humour but I’m afraid that as a blues fan I felt this record was a travesty.

Graham Harrison

Kirk Fletcher—My Blues Pathway—Cleopatra Records ASIN: B08DJP7SHZ
This new album from Kirk Fletcher features a mix of originals, covers and two co-writes with Robert Cray's bass player, Richard Cousins and on the opener 'Ain't No Cure For The Downhearted' it's Mr. Cray that Kirk most reminds you of, on this very soul-leaning blues - especially with his very eloquent, effortless guitar solo. The band is Jeff Babko (keyboards), Travis Carlton (bass), Lemar Carter or David Kida (drums), Joe Sublett (sax) and Mark Pender (trumpet). Like Robert Cray the sound throughout the album is very smooth soul, with keyboards and brass, and with Kirk's stinging guitar adding that blues edge - although some of the covers are rather surprising—'Rather Fight than Switch' is by sax player A.C. Reed and 'Fattening Frogs for Snakes' is the Sonny Boy Williamson song given a complete reimagining here. However, 'Heart So Heavy' is a powerful slow blues in the B.B. King tradition, with Kirk excelling himself on guitar and the whole band backing him up perfectly. The final track 'Life Gave Me a Dirty Deal' is an acoustic version of the old Juke Boy Bonner song with Charlie Musselwhite on harp and Josh Smith on National guitar, a nice contrast to the rest of the album. Kirk has been around for a while as a sideman with various bands and artists (including Mr. Musselwhite) but I think this very good album, with its excellent guitar playing, finally sees him moving into the first rank of blues artists.

Graham Harrison

Elvin Bishop and Charlie Musselwhite—100 Years Of Blues—Alligator ASIN: B08D4F8NW5
I've loved Elvin's last two records with his Big Fun Trio and as well as harp player supreme Charlie Musselwhite up front, his record also features Bob Welsh from the Trio on 2nd. guitar and piano. It was recorded at Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studios in San Jose and Bishop's own Hog Heaven Studios in Lagunitas, with Kid also helping out on bass. Elvin and Charlie are old friends (and fishing buddies) having met in Chicago back in the 60s when Elvin was with Paul Butterfield's band and Charlie headed north from Memphis looking for work, before they both relocated to the West coast. We get off to a great start with the knock-about 'Birds of a Feather' with Elvin singing about "a whole
bunch of blues lovers gathered together" with great guitar and harp (lovely typical solo from Charlie), then it's a nice version of Rosevelt Sykes' 'West Helena Blues' with Charlie on vocals.

'What the Hell' is a state-of-the-nation blues by Elvin, where he answers his own question "know what I like about this President? not a goddam thing!" - that's one thing I love about Elvin, throughout his career he has always (uniquely) combined blues and humour. 'Good Times' is a slow blues featuring slide guitar, and 'Old School' is a nice song featuring Elvin expounding his philosophy on life - "don't send me an email, send me a female...", while 'If I Should Have Bad Luck' is a rocking blues. The pair combine for an atmospheric reading of Leroy Carr's 'Midnight Hour Blues' and 'Blues Why Do You Worry Me' is one of Charlie's songs that here is powered along by Bob Welsh's boogie piano. We then get a great version of Sonny Boy Williamson's 'Help Me' (as featured on Charlie's first LP in 1967) before the record ends with '100 Years of Blues' where the pair of septuagenarians tell their life stories, starting with their time in Chicago "If you like what you hear and think we've paid our dues, I just want you to remember, we bring you 100 years of the blues". I did like what I heard, this is straight ahead blues, spontaneous and raw but beautifully played by all involved and Mr. Andersen's production captures the proceedings brilliantly, with Elvin's humour just adding that extra something.

Graham Harrison

Sugar Ray & The Bluetones—Too Far From the Bar—Severn Records ASIN : B085RNW22

This is Sugar Ray Norcia with a version of the Bluetones featuring their original keyboard player Anthony Geraci and on guitar Charlie Batty formerly of Little Charlie and the Nightcats - indeed these are probably Charlie's last recordings before he passed away in March 2020 - with a rhythm section of Michael 'Mudcat' Ward (bass) and Neil Gouvin (drums). The album was produced by Duke Robillard (Mr. Norcia played with Duke's band Roomful Of Blues in the 90s) and features nine originals (including six written by Norcia) as well as covers of songs by Sonny Boy Williamson, Otis Spann, Jerry McCain and Little Walter. From the opening track The Five Royales 'Don't Give No More Than You Can Take' the album has a much more jazzy 'jump blues' feel - featuring both Batty's guitar and Geraci’s piano - I've got to say that personally I prefer the more Chicago sound of recent Bluetones' albums featuring Mike Welch on guitar. However, Little Walter's 'Can't Hold Out' is a superb authentic version of this classic Chicago blues with great harp and vocals from Sugar Ray and the band supporting him wonderfully.

Sonny Boy Williamson's 'Bluebird Blues' also captures that early 1940s Chicago blues sound and Otis Spann's 'What Will Become of Me' is a lovely loping piano blues with subtle vocals from Sugar Ray and Charlie's guitar skipping around in the background. More great vocals on the jazz standard 'I Got A Right To Sing The Blues' and I also liked the Norcia original blues 'Numb and Dumb' “yes, she’s got me under her thumb...I’m gonna’ keep drinkin’ until I’m numb and dumb” and Geraci's 'From The Horse's Mouth'. For fans of Duke Robillard he also adds his guitar to 'Too Little Too Late', 'The Night I Got Pulled Over', the instrumental 'Reel Burner' and 'I Got A Right To Sing The Blues'. As I say the jump blues here isn't really to my taste but I've got to admit this is a fine album. Everything is very well-played and sounds very authentic.

Graham Harrison
Ronnie Earl and the Broadcasters—Rise Up—Stony Plain  ASIN : Bo8CFVQBBN

Ronnie's latest album contains both tracks recorded in his living room in March 2020 while he was recovering from back surgery, as well as live cuts from a January 2019 performance at Daryl's House Club. His band is Dave Limina (keyboards), Diane Blue (vocals), Paul Kochanski (bass) and Forrest Padgett (drums), with extra guitar (and liner notes) from Peter Ward. The material here is a mix of familiar songs such as Eddie Taylor's 'Big Town Playboy' and Dylan's 'Lord Protect My Child', together with more topical originals such as 'Blues for Lucky Peterson' - an extended instrumental in memory of the late bluesman who died in May this year - and 'Blues for George Floyd'.

We begin with a lovely acoustic instrumental version of 'I Shall Not Be Moved', followed by the original 'Higher Love', which merges into Fenton Robinson’s 'You Don't Know What Love Is'. Both these live cuts feature Diane on vocals with stinging blues guitar from Ronnie. 'Albert's Stomp' is a pounding instrumental, while Lillian Green’s 'In the Dark' is a slow blues that plays Diane's relaxed vocals against Ronnie's biting guitar, closely followed by an authentic reading of Magic Sam’s 'All Your Love'. The whole band do a great bluesified version of Dylan's 'Lord Protect My Child' then its an instrumental romp through Ray Charles' 'Mess Around' with Limina pounding the piano. The album then finishes with another four instrumentals, including Jimmy Smith's 'Blues for J'—featuring Limina on organ - and the original 'Navajo Blues' written by Earl and Ward to highlight the plight of native Americans disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 virus. This album, recorded in unusual circumstances, does really hang together and works surprisingly well, indeed it sounds a lot like Ronnie’s other recent albums and like those The Broadcasters do an excellent job in backing him all the way.

Graham Harrison

Various Artists—Songs Of Isolation—The Crawdaddy Club

Songs Of Isolation is compilation album created to raise money for NHS nurses, which features songs by artists that were written during and about the Covid-19 Lockdown.

This NOT a blues album, abut the roots credentials of many of the artists are well to the fore.

Contributors include James Sayer, Michelle John, Brent Carter, Fred Vigdor, Rob Aries, Rumer, Mark Butcher, Martin Harley, John Fiddler, Bill Wyman, Elles Bailey, James Maddock, Jo Harman, Christopher Holland, Connor Selby, Hollie Rogers, Kiki Dee and Carmelo Luggeri, and Fred Mollin. Outstanding tracks for me are Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings with a cracking version of Slim Harpo’s ‘Got Love If You Want it’ and a super version of Rival Son's ‘Jordan’ by Elles Bailey.

Volume 1, is still available and you can get both by making a minimum donation of £25 or individual albums for a minimum donation of £15 each. GO TO https://www.songsofisolation.com/shop

Donations received will fund childcare grants, PPE and food drops to NHS workers in need, all over the country. Please donate today.

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