

September/October 2008

Blues ART Journal



music by Jimmy Copley

CD - DVD - Reviews



BIG PETE PEARSON

I'm Here Baby

Blue Witch BWR 102

VARIOUS ARTISTS

House Rockin' And Blues Shoutin'!

Blue Witch BWR 103

DAVE RILEY & BOB CORRITORE

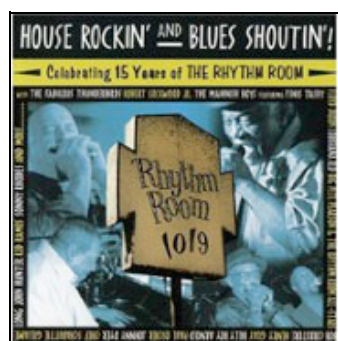
Travelin' The Dirt Road

Blue Witch BWR 104

TOMCAT COURTNEY

Downsville Blues

Blue Witch BWR 105



www.bluewitchrecords.com

During 'Family Meeting' (Ruf), the excellent movie focussing on Finland's Wentus Blues Band, Kim Wilson is talking to Louisiana Red and mentions an album Red made in Phoenix, Arizona with "Bob" – "it's a killer, man", opines Kim. Well, Bob is Bob Corritore, harmonica ace, record producer, tireless champion of the Blues and boss of the Rhythm Room in Phoenix. He is also responsible for these four albums, all very different from each other but all real blues.

Singer Big Pete Pearson has a fine, big blues voice; he is of a generation old enough not to be influenced by 'soul-blues' and those kind of singers are hard to find nowadays. His major influence seems to be BB King and his very sympathetic backing band is the Rhythm Room All-Stars (Bob on harmonica, Chris James and Johnny Rapp guitars Patrick Rynn on bass, and Brian Fahey on drums), augmented by such high calibre guest as guitarists W.C. Clark (who also duets on vocals on two numbers), Ike Turner and Kid Ramos, harpman Johnny Dyer, pianist Leon Blue and drummers Chico Chism and Richard Innes (that is not to denigrate those I have overlooked, just that these names are more likely to be known to many readers). This is a straightforward, classy album of gritty, impassioned blues singing.

The Various Artists set next. I could just list the artists, but that would be the easy way out. This set has the subtitle '*Celebrating 15 Years Of The Rhythm Room' and some party it is. The Fabulous Thunderbirds open with a lovely down-home stomper (the first of three offerings they have here) and we're off - through offerings from the likes of local artists such as Chief Schabuttie Gilliam (with harpman Johnny Dyer and pianist Henry Gray) through well-known and highly respected blues acts such as Louisiana Red, Long John Hunter (solo and revealing his Lightnin' Hopkins roots), Sonny Rhodes and his wailing lap steel turning in a soulful Elmore James cover, a solo Robert Lockwood Jr., the romping jump-blues of Floyd Dixon, and Chicago's Billy Boy Arnold as impressive as always, and on to the wonderful mixture of blues originals and revivalists as The Mannish Boys with Finis Tasby (and I haven't mentioned Big Pete Pearson or Paul Oscher yet, whilst Henry Gray also has a fine boogie-woogie, in which Kid Ramos takes a memorable guitar solo). Again, the collective backing includes such talented musicians as the renowned Bay Area bassist Henry Oden, pianist Leon Blue and the Rhythm Room All-Stars again. This CD should be sold by the Phoenix, Arizona tourist board - it's enough to make me want to buy a plane ticket there right now!*

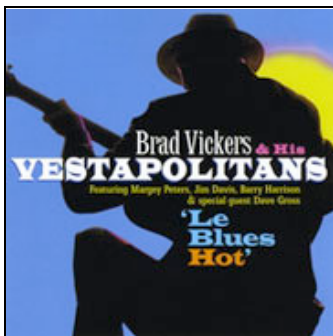
Bob's set with Dave Riley has won all kinds of acclaim and it is all deserved. Dave is on guitar and vocals with Bob on harp, plus Johnny Rapp on guitar on eight titles, Matt Bishop piano on three

and bass duties shared between Dave Riley Jr. and Paul Thomas. Tom Coulson drums on the eight tracks on which Rapp appears. The guys work through a programme of numbers that reflect Dave's Hattiesburg, Mississippi background, and are all Riley-penned originals apart from 'I'm Not Your Junkman' and 'Doggone Blues', which Dave learned his blues from his friend and mentor, the late John 'So Blue' Weston; other influences on Dave include Sam Carr and Frank Frost. It goes without saying of course that he has a no nonsense approach to his music, reflected in the down-home concerns and musical approach of much of the material. Bob himself grew up in Chicago and studied the likes of Walter Horton, Louis Myers, Little Willie Anderson and others; he certainly learned well if his rich, varied and always appropriate playing on this set is any indicator (and it is!). If you don't enjoy this set, chances are you don't like the blues.

Finally to Tomcat Courtney's album then – I remember reading about him in *Living Blues* many, many years back and actually heard him on Advent's 'San Diego Blues Jam' LP from 1974, but he is hardly a household name. Maybe this set will help to change that, at least bringing him recognition on the wider blues scene – he deserves it. Tomcat was born in Texas in 1929 and grew up in the town of Downsville, where his father ran a juke-joint. Later he worked on a minstrel show, where he began singing the blues, and later was inspired to take up the guitar after hearing John Lee Hooker's 'Boogie Chillen'. In 1951 he married the niece of bluesman Smoky Hogg, and picked up his stage name in Albuquerque some time in the same decade. After some time in Los Angeles, he settled in San Diego and became a mention to up-and-coming guitarist Chris James (yes, he of the house band at The Rhythm Room) – which is how this CD came about. With support from Bob Corritore, Chris James, Patrick Rynn and drum duties split between Brian Fahey and former Muddy Waters employee Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith', this is a very fine album with Tomcat's vocals and guitar offering strong hints of those early post-war Texas country blues, perhaps leaning a little more towards the Chicago sound when Bob blows. Some of the songs are topical but all are undeniably traditional in execution – and not just such venerable items as 'Meet Me In The Bottom' and 'Bottle Up And Go'. Please Bob, let's have more from the Tomcat soon – very soon.

Yes, Kim Wilson is right – Bob Corritore does make killer albums!

----- Norman Darwen



BRAD VICKERS & HIS VESTAPOLITANS

Le Blues Hot

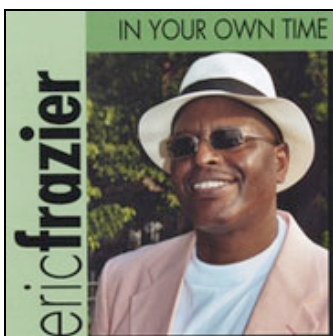
ManHatTone 1050

Contact: Vestapolitans@aol.com

Brad Vickers may be known to some from his recordings with Pinetop Perkins, Hubert Sumlin or Little Mike & The Tornadoes; or maybe you've been lucky enough to catch his shows. He tunes his guitar in 'Vestapol', hence the band name – and what a band.

Sax and clarinet master Jim Davis (Hubert Sumlin, Paul Oscher) adds an old-fashioned jazzy feel, drummer Barry Harrison is best known for his work with Johnnie and Shemekia Copeland – which speaks for itself – and bassist and sometime fiddler and singer Margey Peters is a familiar name to New York blues watchers (both she and Barry play with Big Frank & The Healers). Special guest the up-and-coming Dave Gross supplies guitar and upright bass too, but this is Brad's album, as he turns in excellent slide guitar numbers (occasionally tending towards the Hawaiian, or on 'I'm Homesick', guess who?), skiffle, hokum and/ or ragtime styled tunes, or fine down-home blues. A very distinctive and appealing sound.

----- Norman Darwen



ERIC FRAZIER

In Your Own Time

(Own label)

www.ericfraziermusic.com

This New York singer/ conga player/ bandleader is certainly an interesting character. It would be difficult to pigeonhole this CD. There is plenty of jazz, much of it with a bebop flavour, though a couple have a strong blue tinge; there's a little blues, R'n'B and soul music, influenced by the jazz-blues great Lou Rawls; there's some Latin jazz and salsa too. Most of the tracks – the ones that have vocals anyway – are in English, though there is some Spanish too. It is a highly energetic release, with a good feeling and sense of enthusiasm that is infectious. His band is with him all the way. Don't let the brevity of this review deter you – if what you have read interests you, then do check this out, chances are you'll enjoy it a lot.

----- Norman Darwen



GUITAR RAY & THE GAMBLERS

Poorman Blues

JR911125

www.bluesgamblers.com

It is all too easy these days to forget that there was a time when the Blues was more than someone who owned a Stratocaster and never plays it below the twelfth fret. Back in the sixties it was a prerequisite that a bluesman kept his tracks to three and a half minutes – maximum – on record at least, which meant the instrumental break had to be concise, to the point, and meaningful. Alternatively, you could go the instrumental route – as Freddy King did, and how long is it since you heard a really good blues guitar instrumental, as opposed to a jam. Well, on this evidence, Italian Guitar Ray (Scona) remembers, as on this set he demonstrates a strong feel for the music, as do his band.

Take 'The Conspiracy Boogie' for example – yes, it is indeed a piano feature – 'nuff said, in one sense, Ray doesn't hog the limelight. But do listen to the dynamics – as on several numbers, this is an old fashion sense of dynamics, keeping something in reserve, a facet too often overlooked these days. Or try maybe 'A Poor Man (Like Me)', largely a slab of Mexican flavoured pop-rock, recalling the days when a bluesman was not averse to incorporating seemingly different elements. And I mentioned instrumentals, didn't I? If you nodded your head to my earlier question, lend an ear to the Ike & Tina inspired 'Everything Is Gonna Be Alright/ Cry For Jerusalem. Yes, there are very few around these days with the taste, class and ability to pull off such a satisfying set as this. International blues ace Otis Grand could do it maybe. Oh, did I mention that Otis produced, arranged (and do listen to some of those arrangements) and provided a lot of the material? No? – well, you might have guessed it anyway, and Ray certainly deserves our thanks for bringing it to fruition.

----- Norman Darwen

THE JEFF HEALEY BAND

See The Light

SPV/ Blue 305742 CD

Hell To Pay

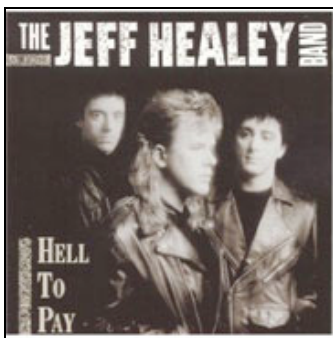
SPV/ Blue 305732 CD

Feel This

SPV/ Blue 305722 CD

www.spv.de

(Please note that the above are in chronological, not numerical order)



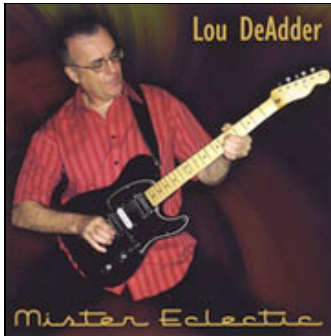
Released in October 1988, Jeff Healey's 'See The Light' was one of the earliest successes of the current Blues revival. Back at that time, Robert Cray was still young and still having to convince everyone of his worth, and Stevie Ray Vaughn was heading for blues-rock stardom. Jeff Healey burst onto a scene ready to accept him, a young blind guitarist with a different way of playing (flat on his lap) and rock sensibilities. 'See The Light' quickly became a hit album; even its cover became something approaching iconic in the blues-rock scene, and Healey went on to enjoy popularity with heard-rock audiences too. It is often stated that the band peaked too soon, this debut album being a peak from which they could only go downhill, and there is some justification to this viewpoint. There are many highlights to the set: 'Don't Let Your Chance Go By' is a boogying outing with screaming guitar work and Jeff's harmonica playing, Freddy King's instrumental 'Hideaway' was nominated for a Grammy award, whilst another instrumental, 'Nice Problem To Have', approaches a down-home sound, and Jeff's cover of ZZ Top's slow 'Blue Jean Blues' and the more up tempo, searing title track are the very definition of blues-rock. The John Hiatt-penned Eagles-ish ballad 'Angel Eyes' reached the Top 5 of the American charts when released as a single, and 'River Of No Return' is akin to Creedence Clearwater Revival. With hindsight the influence of this album on the present blues-rock scene is quite easy to hear.

'Hell To Pay' was not quite as popular as its predecessor – though some enthusiasts rate it as Jeff's best. It depends on your taste; there is little blues *per se* on this sophomore set, even if Healey's playing is shot through with the blues. Much of it sounds like American rock of the time, though interestingly a couple of numbers sound like The Yardbirds circa 1966, and the cover of The Beatles 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' (which has George Harrison as guest) has ensured that it is fondly remembered. 1992's 'Feel This' is certainly bluesier, right from the boogie based opener, and many of the tracks fit quite comfortably into a (loud) blues-rock bag – except for the cover of Tom Petty's 'Lost In Your Eyes'. However, that may be quickly forgotten as it is immediately followed by the bulldozing 'House That Love Built', the heavy blues 'Evil And Here To Stay', the rocking 'My Kinda Lover' and the excellent blues-flavoured 'It Could All get Blown Away'.

This bluesy groove then stops unfortunately with the ballad 'You're Coming Home' and the strange rap-metal of 'If You Can't Feel Anything Else'. The two final numbers opt more for a traditional rock approach. For this set, the basically trio sound of the previous two albums is augmented by keyboards, which does provide a slightly different sound overall.

Jeff Healey died tragically young on 21st March 2008, just before his first blues-rock album for eight years was due to be released. These albums, and particularly 'See The Light' indicate what a loss this was; Jeff could certainly turn in excellent blues-rock when he wanted.

----- Norman Darwen



LOU DeADDER
Mister Eclectic
 Start It Up TLDC08

www.loudeadder.com

This is the fourth CD from Ontario, Canada based singer and guitarist Lou, and as with its predecessors, it definitely gets the thumbs up. Lou is a blues guitarist, but equally, he is unafraid to 'mix it up'. The opener is a fine example; is it blues or is it jazz? It is accomplished enough to please fans of both genres, I guess. Next up is a tough piece of funk-blues, then some more or less straight blues, with Lou's cool singing throughout. 'Drivin' Down The Line' is a blues, though with a curious riff that owes a lot to jazz and rock. As the CD title indicates, the set continues in this eclectic vein with blues, soul ballads, funk and even some country-rock. As the backing musicians include two horns, the famed blues harpman Carlos Del Junco and Bob Taillefer on pedal steel guitar, Lou always has the band to pull it off. How come no big label has signed this guy up yet? Buy this and be one step ahead.

----- Norman Darwen



PAUL MARK & THE VAN DORENS
Blood & Treasure
 Radiation Records RDTN 5901

www.paulmark.com

Recorded at Ardent Studios in Memphis, Tennessee in 2008 for Radiation Records, the label Paul founded in 1995, this is multi-instrumentalist Paul Mark's seventh CD. Checking out his website, it appears that Paul specializes in American roots music – of numerous kinds – though the predominant vibes on this set are, unsurprisingly given the recording location maybe, the Stax sound and vintage rock 'n' roll. It is not purely unadulterated either, as the opener is a modern sounding rocker, but then try 'Raise The Roof' (Rick Steff's Hammond organ is a real stand-out here). 'Lotta Things To Say' is a bopping slab of 'neo-rockabilly meets Bob Dylan' (Dylan influences crop up elsewhere too) and 'Let Them Talk' a relatively conventional cover of Little Willie John's proto-soul hit, but many of the songs switch naturally and imperceptibly from rock to blues to soul – and do take a listen to the storming, supercharged instrumental 'Ruff House'. There's rather a fine sense of humour to be found in places too, both lyrically and musically. The result is a very interesting release indeed.

Nice to see too that "Paul Mark endorses no products of any kind" – that's pretty refreshing!

----- Norman Darwen



JAMES GOODWIN
Blue-eyed Devil
 Blonde On Blonde JGCD-01

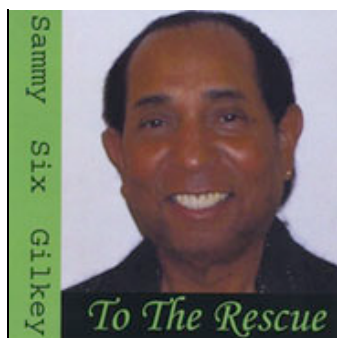
www.jamesgoodwin.co.uk

The Shakedown Blues gigs in the east of England regularly present obscure blues acts such as Shorty Billups and Joe Jonas, and enjoy a formidable reputation among lovers of the hardcore blues sound. James Goodwin is the pianist of choice for the band backing these visitors and this solo blues piano set demonstrates just why.

All the tracks are originals, though occasionally influences surface – though you may have to listen carefully to pick them out, just a riff here or the inflection of a bass line there. James is aware of the blues tradition from its earliest days (both ragtime and vaudeville) and here there are plenty of slower, thoughtful blues, plus the odd boogie-woogie or two, of course, and even on to the New Orleans R&B tradition.

Some are pure improvisations whilst others are the result of years of playing. There are few releases of solo blues instrumental piano albums these days, but even if there was a lot of competition, this would still be worthy of your attention.

----- *Norman Darwen*



SAMMY SIX GILKEY
To The Rescue
 Chueffa CD60010-2

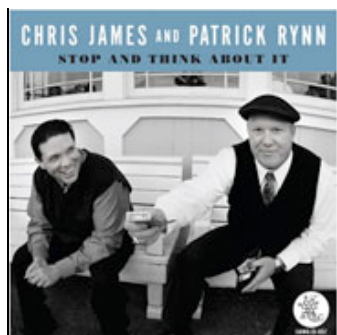
www.ChueffaRecords.com www.sammysix.com

This is the kind of CD that comes along too infrequently these days - grass-roots blues by a guy who certainly knows and enjoys what he is doing.

Singer Sammy Six was born in Mississippi, raised in Saint Louis, Missouri and spent his teens in Detroit. He has a light, confident singing voice, sounding a little like Little Milton in places, and here he is backed by the excellent little band of label boss Frank Ace, including some excellent sax work from Orlando Zuniga and guitar work again akin to Little Milton's clean playing, or the more subtle side of Albert King.

The numbers range from straight blues - though Jimmy Reed's 'Big Boss Man' is given an unusually imaginative arrangement - to some old school R&B numbers and some soul inflected material - there is a fine version of the deep soul of 'Members Only'. I enjoyed this unpretentious CD a lot.....

----- *Norman Darwen*



Artist: **Chris James and Patrick Ryan**
 Title: **Stop and Think about It**
 Label: Earwig CD 4957

For more information go to: www.earwigmusic.com
 and www.thebluefour.com

In one way or another Chris and Patrick have been involved with the blues before their early teens; growing up in San Diego Chris was first introduced to the blues by his stepfather. The music of Chuck Berry was an early influence and he was playing the blues on piano at the age of eleven Patrick meanwhile in his home of Toledo was receiving a classical music education on the bass.

They met each other in Chicago in the early nineties when Chris went to the Guitar Centre where Patrick was working, to invest in some picks and a harmonica.

After a less than wonderful beginning they formed a partnership that would lead to the formation of the band The Blue Four, during the eighteen years in which they have been playing together a strong musical bond has been created between them and has now evolved into them striking out on their own and performing under their own names.

The album is a twelve number strong collection of covers and original compositions which seamlessly merge together to establish a genuine post-war Chicago sound which lifts you up and draws you closer to the rough and tumble musical world of the period. I hasten to add that the music found on the album is no well intentioned and affectionate tribute but a no holds barred sweaty, hoarse, hard as iron Chicago session relying on serious musical know-how and invigoratingly muscular playing.

Some of the numbers that recklessly grab you by the throat are the likes of; Elmore James's "Hawaiian Boogie" "Got to Move," "Early One Morning" and "My Kind of Woman," together with a rollicking version Bo Diddleys' "Mona." Self penned numbers such as; "You're Gone" and "Mr Coffee," are equally stunning.

If you are a lover of classic period Chicago Blues then this is an album for you!

----- *Brian Harman*



Artist: **Tim Lothar**
 Title: **In it for the Ride**
 Label: TLPCD02

For more information go to www.timlothar.com
 or www.myspace.com/timlothar

Tim 'Lothar' Petersen to give him his full name; is with this, his second album proving to be a very