

BIG CITY Rhythm & Blues

REVIEWS

KEVIN BURT & BIG MEDICINE "Thank You Brother Bill—A Tribute to Bill Withers"

Gulf Coast Records

This is the second release on Gulf Coast Records for singer/harmonica man/guitarist Kevin Burt. His first was 2020's "Stone Crazy." The Iowa native is an award-winning artist, with a strong soul presence that seamlessly walks that line between R&B and straight-ahead blues. Burt has a penchant for telling stories and painting pictures in his songs. And his smooth and robust delivery makes him the perfect candidate for such a tribute as this new release.

In the liner notes Burt is pictured with Withers, who shares some of the songwriting and storytelling wisdom on the young protégé. "One of the nuggets of insight was to tell the stories that make you feel most vulnerable," recalls Burt in conversation with Withers. "That's what people connect with." And Burt has done a marvelous job of distilling and interpreting the message and feel of Withers' unique and soulful style.

This album reads like a soul-drenched hit parade, starting with "Who is He (And What is He to You)?" It's a moderately funky vamp of a song that pivots on a groove that don't move! Right from the get-go Burt's voice is uncannily on par with Withers himself. Ken Valdez' lead guitar work stealthily weaves its way between vocal phrases and bass

runs like a snake. "Kissing My Love" is about as funky as it gets. Burt vocally blends the guttural with the melodic for phrasing that just sizzles. And the blend of his harmonica and Valdez's guitar work is superb. Drummer Eric Douglas and bassist Scot Sutherland dig deep for grooves that are locked and loaded. "World Keeps Going Round and Round" is a moody mid tempo piece that blends acoustic



folk elements with soul and blues. Withers' tale of perseverance in the face of adversity is embraced to a T emotionally by Burt. The band really digs in here and gives him unlimited fuel to spin this epic tale. After such a dynamic piece a little respite might be in order. "Just the Two of Us" is, perhaps, one of Withers' most celebrated and best-known works. But, instead of instrumental breaks from Grover Washington Jr's tenor sax, Burt's harmonica more than ably fills the gap. What is nice about this tribute are the deep cuts Burt has unearthed like the soul-stirring and heart-wrenching "I'm Her Daddy." It's a song about a man trying to reconnect on some level of acknowledgement with his daughter and, man, is it powerful! The combination of Burt's vocal rage and Valdez's fiery guitar is palpable. And, of course, no

Bill Withers tribute would be complete without the perennial "Ain't No Sunshine." But, as one might expect, Burt and his compadres jazz it up a little in the mid-section, with added bongos and an extended jam. Burt and the band really get to the heart of the song, with their down-home take on the classic "Lean on Me." It's nice and relaxed, with a measured and resonant vocal that truly brings out the humanity of the track. "Let us Love" is one kicking track! The sentiment is simple and direct; let's love one another...let's love our brother. I think we can all get behind that?

And then you've got Burt's wonderful legato harmonica running all through this thing. If this track doesn't brighten your day, nothing will! Another deep, but essential cut, is "Just Another Day to Run." This is a bluesy acoustic track that is all about living life by the drop and realizing each day is precious. Withers always had good words to live by and this is one of his best. Another personal favorite that cuts right to the heart of what family is all about is "Grandma's Hands," and Burt delivers a version that's as much about southern rock as it is straight blues. It kind of comes off as a hybrid of Lynyrd Skynyrd meets Buddy Guy. "The Same Love That Made Me Laugh" is a jazzy-flavored and easy-going rocker. This song serves as another vehicle for some of Burt's more advanced vocalizing. "Hope She'll Be Happier" is a reflective and contemplative piece

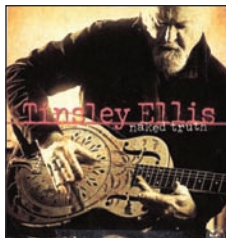
and the only Burt-penned composition here is a little ditty called "Thank you Brother Bill."

Kevin Burt and Big Medicine is a band to watch and, dare I say, serve up just what the doctor ordered. This is a rare and heartfelt love letter to an essential and visionary artist.—Eric Harabadian

TINSLEY ELLIS Naked Truth

Alligator Records 2024

Although this is his 21st album, it's the first acoustic release by Georgia bluesman Tinsley Ellis. Since receiving his



first guitar at age seven, Ellis has never looked back. His early influences included Southern rockers, 1960s "British invasion" blues aficionados, and traditionalists like B.B. King. After a stint in the early 1980s as guitarist for the Atlanta blues band The Heartfixers, he ventured on his own in the late '80s and has since established a wide following, toured extensively, and garnered eight Blues Music Award nominations for Blues Rock Artist or Album of the Year.

Of the dozen songs on this acoustic foray, Ellis penned nine. The few covers are well chosen. Most striking is Son House's

classic "Death Letter Blues." The longest track of the set, it demonstrates Ellis's facility at slide guitar, and his raspy vocal, while not as compelling as House's, is more than competent. The second cover, Willie Dixon's "Don't Go No Further," finds Ellis primarily dealing out guitar chords rather than single note cascades to accompany his vocal and is accompanied by the rhythmic foot-stomping evident on most tracks. The third cover is "The Sailor's Grave on the Prairie," composed by Leo Kottke, here given a restrained but lyrical slide treatment.

Among my favorites of Ellis's own compositions is the opening track, "Devil in the Room." While maintaining a steady rhythm, it nonetheless gathers momentum as Tinsley adds syncopated percussion to his driving guitar. It's succeeded by another favorite, "Windowpane," a slow and haunting blues wherein Ellis adopts the guitar and haunting high-pitched vocal mode of the legendary Nehemiah "Skip" James. Similarly, the style of Robert Johnson, "the king of the Delta blues," is evoked in "Tallahassee Blues," a reworking of Johnson's much-covered "Walking Blues."

In "Hoochie Mama," a slow blues, Ellis provides some skilled fingerpicking, and "Horseshoes and Hand Grenades" is a measured re-imagining of the classic "Sitting on Top of the World." Sandwiched between those two tracks is the zesty and danceable "Alcove Breakdown." The penultimate number of the

set is the uptempo "Grown Ass Man," and the closer, another instrumental, "Easter Song," is brief but gentle and moving.—Steve Daniel

BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS Phoenix Blues Rumble

Vizztone/SWMAF 2023

Harmonica ace Bob Corritore moved from Chicago to Phoenix in 1981, and over four decades there has established himself as a performer, radio programmer, blues club owner, album producer...and archivist. His collection of blues is obviously extensive, and we listeners are the fortunate recipients of some of



it. This is the eighth "Corritore & Friends" release, and his fifth album release of 2023. I do not feel sated at all.

This edition has twelve tracks extending to almost an hour. Since the recordings span thirty years, from 1987 to 2017, there are a lot of musicians involved. Familiar names include guitarists Junior Watson, Kirk Fletcher, and Rusty Zinn, drummer Richard Innes, pianists Henry Gray and Fred Kaplan, and saxophonist Doug James. Those others whose names you may not recognize are equally talent-

ed. Corritore, of course, appears on each track, consistently incorporating stirring leads and tasteful fills.

The album's focus, however, is on "showcasing Phoenix blues singers." Nine different vocalists are presented, award-winning Sugaray Rayford being the most renowned; perhaps you have also heard Dave Riley and Big Pete Pearson. Their appearance with the other six in the collection enhances the listening experience by exhibiting an intriguing range of vocal styles.

Singer Chico Chism starts off the set with "Big Fat Woman 480 Pounds," a real three-minute barn-burner that will induce chuckles as well as the urge to boogie. Chief Schabuttie Gilliam does the singing on its successor, "Come to Me Baby," introduced by some of Corritore's best harp vamping, and the Chief also sings on "Leopard Speckled Baby," on which the ivories are tickled by Gray, erstwhile pianist with Howlin' Wolf. The subsequent brief numbers, "Walking in the Park" and "Matilda," have a 1950s vibe enhanced by King Karl at the microphone. Then we get "Jennie Bea," courtesy of Dino Spells, with Johnny Rapp, present on half of the set's tracks, dealing out some stinging guitar licks.

On "I Was a Fool" and "Nine Times Out of Ten" the simmering guitar is courtesy of Jon Atkinson, backing singer George Bowman. Between those two tracks is "Real Bad Day," sung by Tommy Dukes, who also shares guitar duty. The last three cuts present Dave Riley in "Laughing Blues," which is faithful to its title; Sugaray displaying all his laryngeal power in "The Glide," and Big Pete in "I'm Evil" showing why he is one of the most under-recognized of blues vocalists.

Keep 'em coming, Bob.

This set emphasizes the appealing variety that standard twelve bar blues can provide.—**Steve Daniels**

MISTY BLUES *Live at the Cavern Club*

Guitar One Records 2023

By my calculation, this is the sixth album released by this western Massachusetts group since 2020. Perhaps they think that quantity will gain them the recognition that they deserve; I hope that it does. The good news for us is that quantity has not in the least degraded quality. This latest release, their second live album of 2023, is really good.

The set was recorded at the Cavern Club in Liverpool, England, which



was a popular jazz and rock venue from its opening in 1957 until its demise in 1973. (It reopened in 1984.) Perhaps you recall a group that played there frequently in the early 1960s; they were known as the Beatles. Misty Blues' set there comprised well over an hour of lively blues. There are only eleven tracks, but the shortest is more than four minutes, and the longest over fifteen. That latter number is a cover of "Wang Dang Doodle," composed by Willie Dixon, first recorded by Howlin' Wolf in 1960, and made famous by the late "queen of the blues," Koko Taylor. The band eases into the song, with some jazzy noodling by saxophonist Aaron Dean, guitarist Seth Fleischmann, and organist David Vittone, with the

rhythm section of drummer Rob Tatten and bassist Diego Mongue percolating in the background. Then the band gathers steam, and is joined by its powerful vocalist, Gina Coleman. Tempo waxes and wanes, every instrument gets a hefty (and impressive) solo, and by the ending the crowd is enthusiastically appreciative.

I was equally smitten by the band's version of the double entendre blues classic "I Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl." First recorded in 1931 by "the empress of the blues," Bessie Smith, it has since been covered memorably in 1967 by Nina Simone and by Rory Block and myriad others. Here it receives a slow and lascivious treatment, with Coleman growling and crooning her way through it seductively. Let me here laud Coleman's vocals, whose deep baritone-to-bass range evokes comparison to contemporary singer Alexis B. Suter and to the late folk icon Odetta (Holmes), whom Coleman cites as one of her main influences.

The remainder of the tracks are all written or co-written by Coleman. There is plenty of variety. The opening number, "Hear My Call," is a gospel rocker; "How the Blues Feels" is in a late-night piano bar style; "Swing My Blues" mines the 1940s swing band era. The length of each track affords time for the band members to shine without overindulgence. Many of Dean's sax solos are delicious, and Fleischmann delivers some equally good guitar solos, particularly on "Freight Car." The focus throughout, however, is rightfully on the unique singing of Coleman.

"Live at the Cavern Club" should be a candidate for best live blues album of 2023.—**Steve Daniels**



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WINESTONED COWBOYS

Live From The Old Miami

Melody Lane Records

The Winestoned Cowboys are a band of musical misfits who are currently blazing a trail throughout the Detroit original music scene. They started up about four years ago with a rotating line up



featuring a couple of members of Uncle Kracker's touring band, performing sets of outlaw country along with a bunch of Flying Burrito Brothers tunes. Original members guitarist Elliott Moses and singer/multi-instrumentalist Matt Shovel Horne are now joined by drummer John Porter, pedal steel player Jordan Siden, bassist Nick Chiccetti, guitarist Bob Monteleone and singer Brenda Horne. *Live From The Old Miami* features eleven original songs, mostly written by Matt Horne. The band likes to call its music "cosmic country" and that's as good a description as any. Moreover, it's rockin' country with a jam band mentality. These Cowboys fit in more with the Mountain Music Festival folks than with the Faster Horses crowd. For example: "Alibi" morphs into a five minute Grateful Dead-inspired jam ("Okay, Jerry") featuring some magical moments during Matt Horne's extended guitar solo. The lyrics throughout the album drop many local references most Metro Detroit residents would recognize: Royal Oak, City Club, Fort Street, the Anchor... The subject matter involves a lot of drinking, and being from the

Motor City...cars. The lyrics can get dark: a sample from "Alibi" - "covered the house in gasoline". And the lyrics can be sardonic: the first line in "Domestic Beer" - "Ain't no Coors or Budweiser, That could make me not despise her. Drink 'em every night just to be sure." Siden's pedal steel is a melodic constant and the rhythm section of Chicetti and Porter is explosive. Moses plays a high-strung Nashville-tuned acoustic and Monteleone's Stratocaster contributes some biting rhythms, tremolos and keyboard-inspired sounds. And these guys even have a theme song! How many bands can say that? —

Andy Moss

CEDAR COUNTY COBRAS

Homesick Blues

Self-produced 2023

Only the second album release by this Iowa duo, who have been together for almost a decade, it's one worth the wait. The duo is comprised of Tom Spielbauer, who performed solo for over a decade before beginning his collaboration nine years ago with its other member, April Dirks. Popular and busy in the Midwest, the duo won the 2023 Iowa Blues Challenge and made it to the semifinals of the 2023 International Blues Challenge.

An adept guitarist, Spielbauer augments his string prowess with a thumping foot drum, while

Dirks contributes steady bass and mandolin accompaniment. Tom handles most of the vocal leads, with April harmonizing pleasingly.

Although only slightly longer than a half hour, this set of ten concise tracks provides variety as



it delves into early 20th century rags and gutbucket back porch blues, with a decided tinge of bluegrass.

The duo's chemistry is evident from the get-go, with the opening number, "Utah," melding fingerpicking guitar with thrumming bass. The pace is slowed on "Country Records," and then revs up again on "Long Time Gone," two original songs benefiting from Dirks' mandolin deftness. Following is "Gimme Lightnin'," an up-tempo danceable cut, a melding of Mississippi hill country blues with folk music. It leads into "Poor Boy," the first cover, a version of a 1927 tune by Gus Cannon in which Spielbauer this time wields mandolin as well as guitar. Its haunting main melody fits perfectly with Tom's tenor vocal.

Next are two tracks reflecting the Cobras' confidence as they cover two songs by legends of the blues, Muddy Waters' "Trouble No More" and

"Walkin' Blues," here attributed to Eddie "Son" House. I particularly dig the latter, an album highlight, which begins at a languid pace with Tom playing some fine slide guitar, then segues into an acoustic rave-up.

Concluding the set is another trio of zesty cuts. "Voodoo Doll," an original, is succeeded by an exemplary cover of "Shake It Right" by the late Mississippi hill country icon Jessie Mae Hemphill. The closer is the title track, again allowing Tom to deal out some fancy slide guitar. No wonder this group is so popular.—Steve Daniels

DAVE EDWARDS BAND

Every Time I Roll the Dice

Dave Edwards Music

Dave Edwards is the lead singer/guitarist for Michigan rock band The Look. The Look enjoyed some national and regional success with songs like "We're Gonna Rock" and "You Can't Sit Down" in the late 70s/early 80s. He has been releasing solo albums at a regular clip for about twenty years now. *Every Time I Roll the Dice* is a loving tribute to veteran Texas singer Delbert McClinton. The thirteen tracks here have either been written, co-written or notably covered by McClinton. The musicians on *Every Time I Roll the Dice* were handpicked by Dave and producer "Motor

City Josh" Ford and represents some of the Detroit area's finest musicians: the rhythm section of drummer Todd Glass and bassist John Barron, guitarist Bob Monteleone, keyboardist Dale Grisa, singers Tosha Owens and Raye Williams, harmonica player Carl Caballero and the saxophone and horn arrange-



ments of Keith Kaminski (Bob Seger). This late 2022 release won a Detroit Music Award last year for Outstanding Blues Recording. The arrangements stick fairly loyal to the original recordings but add a decidedly Detroit feel. The songs picked show the diversity and range of the McClinton canon: a healthy dose of Stones-y rockers like the title track, "Living It Down" and "Old Weakness"; funky numbers like "I'm With You" and "Giving It Up For Your Love" along with the gospel stomper, "Turn On Your Love Light," originally by Bobby Blue Bland but covered by dozens of artists. Dave Edwards has one of the most distinctive and durable voices in the Midwest and shows his versatility and emotional depth on the John Hiatt ballad "Have a Little Faith in Me," which features some tasty slide guitar

work by producer Ford. Kaminski's horn chart really lifts "Been Around a Long Time," reminiscent of Allen Toussaint's work with The Band's *Rock of Ages* album, taking these Detroit musicians all the way down to Bourbon Street. All in all, *Every Time I Roll the Dice* accomplishes what it sets out to do: showcasing the wide range of Delbert's art and especially the versatility and talent of the veteran Michigan vocalist Dave Edwards. —Andy Moss

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

Strange Pleasure

Bear Family Records

Texas-based guitar singer Jimmie Vaughan is, perhaps, best known for his long tenure with blues-rockers The Fabulous Thunderbirds. But after his stint in that band and making the emotional trek back from the devastation of



losing his brother Stevie Ray Vaughan in a 1990 helicopter crash, he released his first solo album in 1994. That album, "Strange Pleasure" has been lovingly re-issued on heavy grade audiophile vinyl by Bear Family Records.

This is a two record set packaged in a sturdy gate-



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fold jacket, with detailed personnel credits and liner notes. Cracking this album open was a "pleasure" indeed, as the rousing shake down "Boom-Bapa-Boom" erupts on Side A. This is a toe-tapping pub rocker that will get one on the dance floor in a heartbeat. It's one of those classic I-IV-V pattern shuffles that defines what classic rock and rockabilly are all about. Next up is another Jimmie Vaughan original, "Don't Cha Know," which keeps that high octane shuffle going full throttle. "Hey-Yeah" finishes Side A, with a kind of sparse and retro Motown-influenced drum feel. Rhythm section stalwarts, drummer George Rains and keyboardist Bill Willis help out on the guttural vocal "yeahs." Side B shifts the focus to more of a Tex-Mex flavor, with the stylish "Flamenco Dancer." Long-time guitar tech to Vaughan, Rene Martinez opens the track with a beautiful Spanish guitar intro that leads into a straight-up bouncy shuffle. Vaughan wears his heart on his sleeve here as he professes his affection for the lovely seniorita. The ubiquitous guitarist-turned-producer Nile Rodgers was at the helm for this record and brings a sophisticated R&B edge to various points throughout the album as well. One example is the laid back "(Everybody's Got) Sweet Soul Vibe." Rodgers co-wrote this with Vaughan and it is, arguably, one of the leader's best vocals on this package. This is "real" soul music that recalls classic Curtis Mayfield or Sam Cooke. It's got a great hook and that finger-poppin' feel by backing vocalists Fonzi Thornton, Ken Williams and Curtis King, Jr. is simply beautiful. Vaughan concludes Side B, with the instrumental "Tilt-A-Whirl." Here's a swinging tune that is moderate in tempo but drips of cool nostalgia

and bravado. Kudos go out to Joe Sublett, who walks that fine line between bebop and honky tonk on tenor sax. As aforementioned, this album, originally released in 1994, was, not only Jimmie's first solo record, but his earnest re-entry into recording after the death of his younger brother Stevie Ray. Well, Side C kicks off with a respectful dedication to his departed sibling called "Six Strings Down." In it, Vaughan describes how heaven must've needed another guitar player of Stevie's stature to complete the band. This features some of Jimmie's best acoustic guitar work, with stellar support by The Neville Brothers and pianist Dr. John. "Just Like Putty" seems to conjure up images of Jimmy Reed and early John Mayall, with pianist Junior Brantley and Hammond B-3 man Bill Willis laying a solid bed for some of Vaughan's most heartfelt electric guitar work. "Two Wings" follows and is a nice gospel-flavored track by Vaughan and Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack. Side D continues that Vaughan and Rebennack love affair, with another spiritual-type cut called "Love the World." As they wind it down things get contemplative and reflective on the Django Reinhardt-flavored title track "Strange Pleasure (Modern Backporch Duende)." It spotlights the real artistry of Vaughan's acoustic work in concert with Dr. John's stark piano. And then, when you least expect it, Vaughan and company return for an extended take on the stirring rocker "Boom-Bapa-Boom."

This is a great package by the folks at Bear, as we look forward to more of these re-issues featuring some of the world's favorite and most essential artists.—**Eric Harabadian**

SUE FOLEY "Live in Austin Vol. 1"

Guitar Woman Records

Singer-songwriter/guitarist Sue Foley did a monumental set on May 19th, 2023 at the Continental Club in Austin, Texas and this is a gritty and rich document of that event. It's a basic rock and blues set up, with Foley fronting on guitar and vocals, Jon Penner on bass, Corey Keller on drums, Derek O'Brien on guitar, with background vocals from Angela Miller and Lauren Cervantes.

The first thing you notice upon first listen is



the sparseness of the instrumentation and, hence, the raw delivery in which Foley and company come across. This is a live recording in every sense of the word. Foley erupts from the gate with a series of back-to-back gems from her catalog, including the high octane "New Used Car," followed by the grooving "Walking Home" and the melodic "Highwayside." The blend of her guitar work with counterpart O'Brien is a seamless symphony of sound. One can't quite discern where one leaves off and the other grabs the baton but it all works incredibly well in an unpretentious and down-home manner. Willie Dixon's "Howlin' for My Darlin'" is an uptempo and bouncy blues rocker that clearly distinguishes and puts the spotlight on Foley and O'Brien's guitar interplay. It's got a pocket as big as the Grand Canyon and really seems to connect with the crowd. "Queen Bee" is a James Moore standard that seems to

epitomize what the Texas shuffle is all about. Foley sings sultry and cool, with a nice guitar mix of layered clear rhythms and some minor twang in tow. Jodi Williams' "Hooked on Love (aka Lucky Lou)" features Foley in a guitar tour de force where she reaches deep in her trickbag of six string delights. The drums and bass are lightly grooving, more than ably putting the spotlight on some of the smoothest Texas-brand guitar mastery you're ever gonna hear. Foley also blends some classic rock and such into the mix via Bob Dylan's "Positively 4th Street." She brings out all the messaging and nuance of the lyrics and the band's straight-ahead country rock feel is right on point. The guitars are somewhat understated, with an approach that's delicately robust and tasteful. "Me and My Chauffeur Blues" picks up the pace, with a toe tapper that'll get you on the dance floor. Again, there's a country kind of feel at play here that's really engaging and brings out the best in Foley's vocals and overall punch. "Better" is a Foley original that preaches freely in a loose and bawdy manner. The rhythms are flexible and swinging, with an insistent shuffle and plenty of guitar pyrotechnics, as she claims, "If you wanna be my man....I can love you better than your other girl can!" Perhaps one of the interesting things about Foley is her ability to step out of tried-and-true musical barriers and make them her own. A case in point is the album closer "High Roller." This is a Cheap Trick-penned rocker that seems to register exceptionally well in Foley's orbit. The backing vocals of Miller and Cervantes really shine in the chorus. Rarely will you find a better harmonious marriage of blues and rock.—**Eric**

Harabadian

BRENDON LINSLEY Live In Detroit

BrendonLinsleyMusicLLC

Brendon Linsley is a 23-year-old guitarist who has been a fixture at Detroit area blues open mics since his teens. He is now an established member of the Metro Detroit blues community, performing with his own group and was a sideman for a bit with Chicago Blues Hall of Famer John Watkins. He recently performed with Nick Taborius (Nicky T) at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis at the Rum Boogie venue. He has been taken under



the wing of guitarists Bobby Murray (Etta James) and the legendary Jim McCarty (Detroit Wheels, Cactus, Rockets). *Live In Detroit* was recorded at the Mount Clemens venue Three Blind Mice by the crew from Motor City Josh's Sound Shop Studios. From Hop Wilson's six-decade old "Black Cat Bone" to covers of recent artists like Gary Clark Jr. ("Next Door Neighbor Blues") and

Jonny Lang ("Angel of Mercy", "Rack 'Em Up"), the album's seven tracks are an eclectic mix of blues covers. On the opening track, "Black Cat Bone," Linsley let's the rhythm section of bassist Chris Rumel and drummer Dan Durecki set the table and places some nice chord stabs around the verses, before busting out some wah wah screams during the solo. Linsley shows a maturity beyond his years, understanding space is just as important as sound, and doesn't try to fit a million notes into every solo like a lot of current and older guitar slingers. His tone is always pure, no gimmicks, with his beloved '60s Gibson ES-335. Albert King's "Drowning On Dry Land" is a highlight. The slow blues is over six minutes, and during the stops he evokes King's string bending prowess while also exhibiting a deft touch with some nice jazz voicings within the same track. On the closer, "Catfish Blues," Linsley steps out of the box with some descending chromatic chops, perhaps implying there might be some surprises lurking in his bag of tricks. *Live In Detroit* is a stripped down affair and a perfect introduction to this talented young man whose promising future appears unlimited—**Bob Monteleone**

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