

BIG CITY Rhythm & Blues

REVIEWS

MARIA MULDAUR *One Hour Mama*

Nola Blue Records

Well into six decades of her successful career, Chanteuse Maria Muldaur has chosen to dedicate an album to one of her heroes and mentors, Victoria Spivey. The result is another notch in the list of Muldaur's accomplished releases.

Muldaur and Spivey share many traits. Spivey,



a Texas native who lived from 1906 to 1976, achieved fame in various realms. As a singer, she recorded with luminaries ranging from Lonnie Johnson through Louis Armstrong to Bob Dylan. The latter, along with Muldaur, appeared on Spivey's own record label in the 1960s, at a time when record labels were mainly the exclusive purview of men. Spivey performed in vaudeville, on stage, and in films, and began her career in her family's string band.

String bands were also Muldaur's initial homes, both with the Even Dozen Jug Band and then the Jim Kweskin Jug Band. At that time Muldaur wielded fiddle as well as singing. After leaving Kweskin's group to go on her own, she achieved pop fame with the huge popularity of her 1973 hit "Midnight at the Oasis." She has garnered multiple Grammy

nominations and twelve Blues Music Award nominations.

"One Hour Mama" is Muldaur's fortieth album. Spivey recorded all the songs during her career and penned six of them; Muldaur chose songs wisely. She produced the set, and performed it with three different ensembles, each proficient and each buttressed by effective horn sections, plus an occasional banjo and washboard. Some of the songs will be familiar to blues lovers - "Organ Grinder Blues" and the title track, for example - and some are obscure but worthy.

Consistent with the female assertiveness and unabashed sexual attitudes shared by Spivey and Muldaur, the set begins with "My Handy Man," its lyrics still delightful: "He shakes my ashes, greases my griddle/churns my butter, strokes my fiddle/My man is such a handy man." You betcha, Maria, who imbues the tune with her still supple and seductive voice. A duet with Elvin Bishop follows: the Lonnie Johnson classic "What Makes You Act Like That?" enhanced by the graceful piano of Neil Fontano and guitar of Danny Caron (formerly with the late Charles Brown).

More double entendre and suggestive tracks follow, as revealed by their titles: "Don't Love No Married Man," "Organ Grinder Blues," "No, Papa, No," "Any-Kind-A-Man"... and all are saucy and well crafted. Another of Muldaur's colleagues from yesteryear, Taj Mahal,

cooperates winningly on "Gotta Have What It Takes." The two of them sound like they are having a joyful time bantering in the half-sung, half-talking blues. I sure liked it, and I predict that you will, too.—
Steve Daniels

ROOMFUL OF BLUES

Steppin' Out

Alligator Records

There are, arguably, few bands active on the blues scene today that are as influential and iconic as



Roomful of Blues. These jump blues and R&B stalwarts have been dedicated to their craft since 1967, spreading the good news about traditional and retro rock and blues to all that will hear.

They've been members of the Alligator Records family since 2003 and "Steppin' Out" is their 20th release. After 19 albums fronted by male singers, this is the first release featuring a female in the lead vocal chair. The soulful and very accomplished D.D. Bastos is the new face of the band, along with long-time guitarist/vocalist Chris Vachon, keyboardist/vocalist John Ceasrine, upright bassist John Turner, drummer Mike Coffey, tenor/alto saxophonist Rich Lataille, tenor/baritone saxophonist Craig Thomas and trumpeter Christopher Pratt.

This album is fresh in terms of production and performance, but the group holds on to those gems and touchstones of the blues which are as vital today as ever. This is a no-holds-barred album in the sense that the music is very open and free, yet still stays within that roots rock and good time blues framework. You get 14 tracks reflecting the songbook of some of the greats of Americana music like Little Richard, Don Robey, Z.Z. Hill, Big Mama Thornton and Richard "Louie Louie" Berry. This is a program designed to get you on the dance floor and work up a sweat like nobody's business!

Check out the opening numbers "Satisfied" and "You Were Wrong." These are mid tempo cuts that are sure to get you moving and grooving. Vachon's guitar work is sharp and stinging, with stellar accompaniment by Roomful's signature wall of sound and Bastos' sweet but robust vocalizing. The entire roster is essential when you're talking about post-war and 50's/very early 60's-era content and style. From the swampy and laid back "Steppin' Up in Class" and rock standard "Slippin' and Slidin'" to the moody "Please Don't Leave" and swinging pop of "Good Rockin' Daddy," this ensemble covers all the bases.

All the members of Roomful of Blues are musical scholars in their approach and interpretation of these classic nuggets and deep tracks. But, since the early 70's, it has been under the direction of Rich Lataille that

this ensemble has dedicated themselves to rescuing and preserving long-lost and somewhat obscure songs that you will find here. Do yourself a favor and pick up this album or, better yet, catch them live. And, oh, don't forget to bring your dancing shoes!—**Eric Harabadian**

MIKE HENDERSON *Last Nite at the Bluebird Live*

Qualified Records

How is it that until I received this album, I had never heard of Mike Henderson? Well, if that is also true for you, I'm here to introduce you to him, an introduction that you may well appreciate.

Henderson, who died unexpectedly in his sleep in 2023 at age 70, was a multi-talented musician



who played mandolin, fiddle, and harmonica as well as his primary guitar. A Missouri native, he moved to Nashville in 1985 after playing in several Missouri bands. For the subsequent four decades he did session work and lent his skills to a few other groups, playing blues, country, and roots music. He was also a prolific songwriter whose tunes were covered widely. He won a Grammy among his four nominations, and two Country Music Awards.

For more than thirty years Henderson held

down a Monday night gig at the Bluebird Cafe in Nashville, fronting either his own band or myriad guests. This set of nine tracks features Pat O'Connor on drums, Steve Mackay on bass, and the renowned Kevin McKendree on piano, with Henderson handling vocals and guitar. There are only nine tracks, but most of them extend over five minutes, giving Mike and the band time to stretch.

The longest track is the opener, "Weepin' and Moanin'," an original which begins with a sizzling guitar solo; it lasts almost seven minutes and includes Henderson's exhortations to the audience to make some noise and party. They do, and so does the band, as exemplified by the pedal-to-the-metal rocker that follows, "Matchbox." The tune's composer is credited as "Jefferson," presumably the early 20th. century legendary Blind Lemon Jefferson, who recorded "Match Box Blues"; he sure wouldn't have recognized this version, although he may have liked it...although perhaps it's meant instead to be an updated rendition of Carl Perkins's 1957 "Matchbox."

One of the skills to be savored on this set is Henderson's slide guitar prowess. It's evident on "Too Much Alcohol," which evokes memories of "the king of the slide guitar," Elmore James. Showing his virtuosity as well as the wide range of his influences, Mike starts "One Room Country Shack" with a brief Jimi Hendrix figure, and then his approach and



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his vocal bring to mind none other than Johnny Winter in his gritty prime. "When I Get Drunk" stirs memories of J.B. Hutto, and "Have a Good Time" allows Henderson to demonstrate his chops on harmonica. The familiar Bo Diddley guitar riff is employed in "Pay Bo Diddley," which laments how the late rocker was ostensibly ripped off by record labels.

As with many live recordings, production values are not optimal; some vocals especially are a little muddy. Fortunately, Mike's guitar generally sounds clear, as does the consistently excellent keyboard artistry of McKendree. The result is a rollicking reminder that Mike Henderson deserved the many accolades that he received.—**Steve Daniels**

TOM HAMBRIDGE "Down the Hatch"

Quarto Valley Records

Tom Hambridge is a name that might not be referenced on a daily basis, but if you're a fan of Buddy Guy, Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Keb' Mo' or Bo Diddley, you are familiar with his work. The four-time Grammy Award-winning producer/drummer/songwriter/vocalist has written over 1000 songs and produced 100 albums. So, even if you might not immediately recognize the name, his imprint on blues, rock and Americana music for the past few decades is indelibly present.

With his current release, "Down the Hatch," he wanted to perform some of his favorite songs by artists like Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy and Chuck Berry that resonated with him and inspired him to become a musician in the first place. As he says in the press material, "this album is me doing what I love. I love rock 'n roll, I love the blues and I love



Buddy Guy. It's me being me, and it's in my blood."

So, taking time out for himself, Hambridge hits the scene on the heels of his 2023 solo release for Quarto Valley Records called "Blu Ja Vu." And it unleashes the floodgates on a rocking raver called "Willie Dixon's Gone." Hambridge's vocals have a raw, unvarnished quality, not unlike George Thorogood. With his powerhouse drumming and swinging resolve, this tribute to the influence of the legendary bassist/singer/songwriter Dixon reigns supreme. And there are so many other stellar moments on this album as well, like some of the downright fun and unbridled boogie numbers such as "What Does That Tell You," "Making Lemonade" and the Chuck Berry tribute, "You Gotta Go Through St. Louis." There are ambient and atmospheric mid-tempo tracks like "I Want You Bad" and "Hard Times." And, ultimately, ripping guitar workouts, with "How Blues is That" and "Believe These Blues."

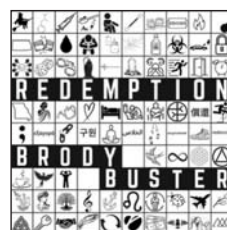
There is a real love for Hambridge that is reflected in the depth and breadth of sidemen from major bands fronted by Bob Seger, Smashing Pumpkins, Joe Walsh, Johnny Winter as well as an appearance by Buddy Guy himself. So, it's really great when a musician/producer of this stature steps into the spotlight because you get the best of the best on display. Hambridge has been a part of the lives and careers of so many major stars in the rock and blues biz. It's nice to see him get his due as one of the lead-

ers of the pack.—**Eric Harabadian**

BRODY BUSTER *Redemption*

BrodyBusterMusic.com

This is singer/harpist/guitarist Brody Buster's first official release; however, he's no rookie to showbiz. Teaching himself to play the harmonica at age 7, he quickly became a child prodigy. Soon, he was fea-



tured on countless TV shows, including The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Dateline, Jon Stewart and even the sitcom Full House. He was a featured artist at BB King's Blues Club and was even joined onstage many times by the "King" himself. At some point, the novelty of being a child phenom wears off, and so do the lucrative offers nationally and internationally. Long story short, Brody has paid many dues in the years since, reaching a low point during the COVID period. He has since cleaned himself up, and the result is his excellent album, accurately named *Redemption*. It's a rockin', soulful album. Lyrically, most of the originals speak of the hard truths of a rough life, leading either to tragedy, or ultimately... redemption. Of course, Brody's harmonica playing is extraordinary, as well as his scorching guitar solos. His vocals are truly heartfelt, grasping the gravity of the subject matter. Some of the tracks sound like they could have been found on a Black Crowes album in their heyday. Joining Buster on the session are Jackie Myers on keyboards, Ian Pond on

drums, Teddy Dry on bass, Howard Mahan on slide guitar, Jacque Gardutte on bass, guitar and background vocals and Danielle Nicole on backing vocals. Looking forward to hearing more from this talented soul. — **Bob Monteleone**

ROGER CONNELLY *Lifetime of the Blues*

Lyin' Dog Records

Musician Roger Connelly and his band, the Blues Merchants, have been performing and recording for over 20 years. Connelly, known primarily as a blues guitar-slinger, is also a prolific songwriter as well. His songs have been placed in various movies, such as Rodney Dangerfield's *Back By Midnight* (the song "Dine Behind the Wheel") and he has 3 of his compositions in the recent film *Big Life*. Also, his cover of the Gordon Lightfoot gem

"Sundown" is featured in a film about the aviation history of Catalina Island called *Wings Across The Channel*. In fact, Connelly had resided on that isle off the Southern California coast for a dozen years and was a huge part of the music scene there. A highlight of this time was a col-



laboration with the famous British artist Spencer Davis ("Gimme Some Lovin'"), which resulted in the 2012 album *Spencer Davis & the Catalina Island Allstars*, which featured 3 of Roger's songs. *Lifetime of the Blues* is Connelly's latest album, recorded in Nashville. "Epitaph" is a blues rocker that opens the album, fea-

turing some tasty lead and slide guitar work. The 11 original songs mostly stray from the 12-bar progressions typical of many blues artists, making for a varied, pleasurable listening experience. However, "Teach You How To Dance," a highlight, is definitely a slow burning blues track, with some righteous B3 organ from Dave Siebels. Connelly handles all the vocals, guitar and harmonica on the session, joined by Dave Criger on drums, Anthony Hood and Randy Landis on bass. Al Rappoport contributes saxophones and Siebels provides various keyboards throughout. "A Song For Kathy" is a thoughtful instrumental for Roger's late wife, for whom the album is dedicated. *Lifetime of the Blues* mixes fine, tight musicianship with some well-written, introspective songs.—**Bob Monteleone**

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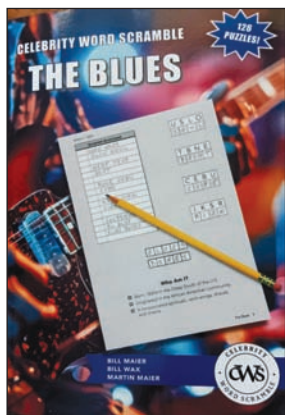
By Bill Maier, Bill Wax, and Martin Maier.

This is a fun book, a good one to bring on vacation or to linger over after reading the Sunday paper. One in a series of Celebrity Word Scramble books, *The Blues* features 126 puzzles, the answer to each of which is the name of a blues personality.

The layout of the book is meant to help you solve the puzzles. The opening pages have a list of all the blues names that are the answers to the puzzles (in alphabetical order by first name), and then is an outline of the rules to the scramble, with examples for how to play. The back of the book has not only the puzzle answers but also an alphabetical dictionary of words to use when you're doing the unscrambling.

You will recognize the names of the blues artists included in the book, from Bessie Smith and Bonnie Raitt to Johnny Shines and ZZ Hill. Each of the puzzles has a scramble section with a handy lined scratchpad on each page. Biographical information for each blues celebrity is listed at the bottom of the puzzle, underneath the blocks for the eventual letters of the artist's name.

The authors recommend that you cover up the biographical clues with an index card—provided!—and solve the scramble first; it's more fun that way. I cheated and looked at the biographical clues first. Then I was able to guess correctly 4 out of 5 randomly chosen puzzles by looking at the given number of letters in the celebrity's name.



Almost all the blues people featured in the book are in the Blues Hall of Fame—the “historical” legends, and the possibility exists for a second volume of puzzles with more contemporary blues artists emphasized. Author Bill Wax is a former teacher, and creator of and long-time contributor to Bluesville on SiriusXM radio; he's still a DJ on WPFW 89.3 FM in the DC area with his Roots and

Fruits show every Saturday at 2. He was persuaded to collaborate on this book by 2 of his former students, who had found success with other Celebrity Word Scramble books. Bill Wax also contributed most of the photos of blues personalities that are a bonus in this book.

Celebrity Word Scramble: The

Blues is widely available—check Amazon, Cathead in Clarksdale, or the Blues Foundation. If enough people get the book, maybe we could figure out how to organize a tournament!—Karen McFarland

Karen McFarland is a retired College English Professor and former organizer for the Mississippi Valley Blues Festival. She lives in historic Greenbelt MD.



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