

BIG CITY Rhythm & BLUES

REVIEWS

CHRISTONE KINGFISH INGRAM *Live in London*

Alligator Records 2023

By now, every blues fan, and many others exposed to him on national television and radio, know who Kingfish is. Still only twenty-four years old, this prodigy was astounding observers with his precocity while still in his teens. His first two albums earned widespread acclaim, and he has already won a Grammy and multiple Blues Music Awards and Living Blues Awards.

His third album, and first live one, was recorded in June 2023 at a concert at The Garage in London, England. On this gig he was accompanied by a different rhythm section than on his previous releases. Wielding the bass guitar effectively is Paul Rogers, dealing out steady and powerful percussion is Christopher Black, and producing fine and often beautiful keyboard stylings on both piano and organ is Deshawn Alexander. We and the audience are treated to seventeen numbers, many of them extended to well over five minutes, in all comprising almost two hours of blistering blues and blues rock. Judging by the audible crowd reaction, the audience was in an appreciative frenzy.

Well, while I am not in a frenzy while writing this review, I am in awe of Kingfish's talent. The man can definitely sing! His vocals, somewhere between tenor and baritone in pitch, are strong, and he can easily morph

into a soul blues mode effectively. It's his guitar wizardry, though, which is mind-blowing. He plays with clear, crisp tone, uses the entire fretboard of his axe, and can go effortless-



ly and instantly from boisterous and brawny to poignant and pensive...often within the same song. His playing often evokes comparison to Buddy Guy, one of his influences and current admirers, with echoes of Jimi Hendrix, B.B. King, and Prince among others. Ingram also cites Lightnin' Hopkins and Robert Johnson as influences, and indeed there are several tracks toward the end of the set in which he eschews his trusty electric guitar for an acoustic and plays skillfully.

There is variety in the seventeen tracks, which certainly enhanced the appeal of the live show. There is seething blues rock, emotional slow blues, rock (although, ironically, the track "Rock & Roll" is not a rock-and-roll song), acoustic, and even a few hints of country flavor.

Mid-set there are three songs of less than four-minute duration. The other fourteen numbers are long, and almost every one is a guitar tour de force, in which Kingfish reaches for high notes, plays the same note for

multiple bars, deploys a wah-wah pedal, and delivers bar after bar of rapid-fire single notes breathtaking in speed and technical virtuosity. That leads to my only caveat about this album: most of it is not composed of songs with any discernible hook or melody, but of demonstrations of instrumental prowess. Like several other famed guitarists, Ingram seems constitutionally incapable of resisting the urge to strut his stuff. Lovers of instrumental genius will be enthused and sated; some of us may prefer to hear more songs rather than repeated exhibitions.—**Steve Daniels**

COCO MONTOYA *Writing on the Wall*

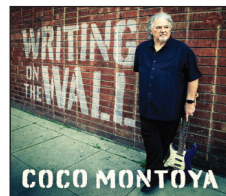
Alligator Records

This is his sixth release for Alligator and Montoya's songwriting, selection of tunes and personal musicianship just keeps getting better and better with time. The former drummer for Albert Collins and guitarist for John Mayall's Bluesbreakers lays it on the line with this new record.

Montoya has a great core band that is also comprised of "in house" songwriters as well. Keyboardist/vocalist/guitarist Jeff Paris, bassist Nathan Brown and drummer/vocalist Rena Beavers complete the band, with guest contributions from Ronnie Baker Brooks on guitar and vocals and rhythm guitarist Dave Steen. Grammy Award-winning drummer/producer Tony Braunagel provides that delicate mix of grit

and sheen that makes all 13 songs shake, rattle and roll.

"I Was Wrong" opens the musical floodgates, with an emotional and plaintive ballad that sizzles. The leader is in fine voice with a delivery that will stimulate your senses. In the Steen-penned tune Montoya asks his woman for forgiveness in no uncertain terms. And from the get go his honesty and soulful sincerity shine through. "Save It For the Next Fool" has a bumping and percolating bass and drum line that underpins a mighty lead guitar and



vocal approach. With clean backing vocals and a gospel-like feel Montoya is taking charge of his life and moving on from a cheating relationship. Don Robey's "You Got Me (Where You Want Me)" has a bit of a rough and tumble Chicago flavor to it. In the spirit of Buddy Guy and the like, this cut really swings, with a tasty guitar exchange from Brooks. In fact, everyone is on board and brings the fire here. Paris' "(I'd Rather Feel) Bad About Doin' It" is an extremely clever song that employs sly Biblical references to Adam & Eve, Samson & Delilah and so forth. It's all about that age-old balance of flirtation, sin and temptation, with a ton of groove and ripping guitar. Montoya basically asks the ques-

tion, "What's so bad about feeling good?" Anyone that grew up listening to '70s FM radio will immediately recognize this rocking soul nugget by Frankie Miller called "Be Good to Yourself." This track was tailor-made for Montoya as his weighty and emotive voice rivals the original. This is funky R&B at its finest and fits very comfortably in the leader's wheelhouse. The track list is shifted slightly for the Lonnie Mack classic "Stop," a slow and stirring ballad that erupts with some righteous and heart-wrenching vocals and lead guitar. Beaver's drumming is solid and provides a stellar pocket as well. The title track takes another musical detour and introduces some streamlined piano boogie and driving acoustic layers beneath the leads. The group harmonies are a highlight too. "Late Last Night" is another Montoya original that keeps that up tempo and fun-filled feel going. It's simply a throw down party song that cries out for audience participation in the chorus. "What Did I Say?" smacks of a crossover hit to this reviewer. Montoya projects a delivery not unlike Latimore or, even, Teddy Pendergrass. Paris' jazzy piano and assorted keys grace this track, supporting a tale of love, honesty and a mutual fear of intimacy in a relationship. Again, the leader bears his soul as it connects on a really deep and somewhat furtive level. "A Chip and a Chair" bears a wise gambling analogy that offers food for thought about staying in this game of life.

That leads into the up tempo and riotous "Baby, You're a Drag," featuring some fiery and lighthearted vocal and guitar exchanges from Brooks. Perhaps a new Christmas classic for the upcoming season could be the Charles Brown-like "The Three Kings and Me." The Steen-penned song is a clever jazzy and cool take on being alone for the Holidays with some of your favorite records by "The Three Kings," B.B., Freddie and Albert. And the moral of the story is that, with blues royalty of that caliber by your side, everything is gonna be alright. It's a baker's dozen and a firecracker of a closing tune when Montoya's "Natural Born Love Machine" comes on. This is a real funky rocker featuring stellar hooks and harmonies that will get you moving and on the dance floor.

Henry "Coco" Montoya leads the blues pack with this new release. And the combination of his soulful robust voice and searing guitar work is in a league by itself.—**Eric Harabadian**

CHAIN REACTION *Still In The Game*

Vision 561

Chain Reaction is a 4-piece band out of the west side of Detroit that formed in 1987. Chain Reaction's music has been described as "rock, blues, light improvisational fusion, with some alternative and psychedelic overtones." They have played many music venues throughout Michigan and Ohio, and have opened for notable

rock acts like Fishbone, Kings X and Gary Hoey. The EP *Still In The Game* is the group's 7th release, featuring founding members Bobby D (Drozdowski) on guitars and Eric Harabadian on vocals and guitars. Longtime collaborators, bassist Larry Fritzeley and drummer Jeff Phillips, complete the lineup. The five original songs were written by Harabadian, with the exception of the opening track, "Playmaker," co-written with Bobby D, who produced and mixed the sessions at the Beech House studio. The songs feature an omnipresent fuzzy guitar track throughout, sometimes wah wah drenched, like on "Playmaker," but never obscuring the vocals. This approach might remind one of the acid rock phase of electric Hot Tuna, particularly the album *Hoppkorv* (1976). Even the way the vocals sit in the mix and are treated is reminiscent of Tuna's Jorma



Kaukonen. The first three songs rock pretty hard which makes the 4th track, "American Son," a nice change of pace, with some added percussion, female backing vocals, violin and acoustic guitar. Eric Harabadian is a noted documentary filmmaker (as well as a staff writer for this publication and the LA based Music Connection) and "American Son" is featured in his doc "We Thrive." The very colorful CD package was designed by renowned graphic artist Dennis Loren, whose credits include Creem and Goldmine magazines as well as Frank Zappa and the White Stripes. Chain

Reaction is poised to become a more active live unit in support of the fine *Still In The Game* so keep an eye out for them! — **Bob Monteleone**

OLE LONESOME *Tejas Motel*

Gulf Coast Records

Ole Lonesome is a hard-hitting Southern rock group out of Beaumont, Texas. Beaumont is near both the Gulf of Mexico and the Louisiana border and of course the birthplace of the legendary



Winter brothers, Johnny and Edgar. Ole Lonesome would easily fall right in with any number of 70s rockers from below the Mason-Dixon line with a sound that is definitely a retro one - and that's a good thing. *Tejas Motel* follows the late 2019 release *Turn It On*, and while both albums feature ten well-written guitar riff-based original songs, the riffs on *Tejas Motel* hit heavier and the grooves are deeper. The band produced *Tejas Motel* with Gulf Coast head and noted guitar-slinger Mike Zito, who makes a cameo on "Lo Key." Versatile lead singer/guitarist Zachary Feemster has a soulful voice and at certain points is reminiscent of Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ronnie Van Zant. In fact, a lot of the group's lumbering grooves and riffs harken back to the early 70s British band Free, one of Skynyrd's main influences (and the song "Easy Street" somehow manages to nick two different tunes from Jacksonville's finest: "Needle and the Spoon" and "Gimme Three Steps.") The first six songs of *Tejas Motel* are glorious

examples of hard Southern rockin' fun, with plenty of interweaving guitar harmonies to enjoy. The 7th tune, "Ain't No Good," brings it all home with a slow burning blues. Guitarists Feemster and Greg Achord harbor great vintage amp and axe tones throughout, and keyboardist Gregory "Gmoe" Mosley makes use of electric piano more than you might expect to go along with the typical B3 organ usage. Of course, none of this would matter if the rhythm section of bassist J. Wesley Hardin and drummer Jimmy Devers wasn't powerfully excellent. Note to Hollywood music supervisors: *Tejas Motel* would provide an excellent soundtrack to a movie set in the American South during the 1970s. — **Bob Monteleone**

THE CHITLINS *Die Another Day*

Chit Creek Music

THE CHITLINS *Peace, Love and Chitlins*

Chit Creek Music

The Chitlins are a 5-piece rockin' blues band from Gulfport, Mississippi. These two recent releas-



es, *Die Another Day* (2019) and *Peace, Love and Chitlins* (2022) features the same lineup: Scott Henry (vocals/harmonica), Bucky Cole (guitar), Jay Patricks (bass), David Whitehead (drums), with guitarist Jimmy Mack replacing Charlie McGinn on the latter album. Wayne Sharp provides keyboards on each recording. Both albums are mostly original songs, with the tasteful



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exceptions of the Manhattans' "Kiss and Say Goodbye" and the Delbert McClinton associated "Every Time I Roll the Dice" on *Die Another Day* and ZZ Top's "A Fool For Your Stockings" on *Peace, Love and Chitlins*. These long haired fellas follow in the Southern rock tradition of the Allmans, Molly Hatchett, Blackberry Smoke, etc.. with a decidedly more emphasis on the blues. The first half of *Die Another Day* leans on some crafty, heavy handed guitar riffs, supporting the powerful vocals of Scott Henry. This makes the surprising cover of the soul classic "Kiss and Say Goodbye" all the more lethal, showing some nice musical diversity for the group. "Down Here" follows with some clean electric guitar, keeping the vibe relatively calm before launching back into the blues rock the Chitlins are known for, the shuffle "Down Here", which features the virtuosity of Charlie McGinn's slide guitar. On *Peace, Love and Chitlins*, the Chitlin's agenda remains relatively unchanged from the previous recording. The title track comes the closest to the heavy, bluesy rock approach of *Die Another Day*. The band shows growth on *Peace, Love and Chitlins*, which seems as a whole a bit more soulful that its predecessor. "A Fool For Your Stockings" is faithful to the original but arguably improves on it with the addition of B3 organ, some tasty saxophone by Buddy Leach plus uncredited female background "oohs". The Chitlins seem to perform mostly in the American southeast but

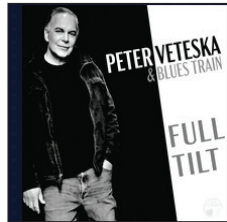
are worth checking out live as they can most definitely "bring it!" — **Bob Monteleone**

PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN *Full Tilt*

Blue Heart Records

New York Blues Hall of Famer Peter Veteska is going strong releasing his sixth album in seven years! He's a man on a musical mission and his commitment to the blues, in all its configurations, is presented here. Veteska and crew are superb at what they do as they bring a diversity and style to the blues genre that is fresh and remains intact.

You won't be



disappointed with tracks like "Go Find Another Man." This features East Coast harmonica sensation Mikey Junior and the cut is, as the kids say, "fire!" The band is running on all cylinders, with Veteska's mighty vocals and muscular guitar syn-copation center stage. It's a great tune that establishes the pace. Frequent guest vocalist Jen Barnes sets the band ablaze on "I Wasn't Wrong." This is a funky tune heavy on organ and guitar. The harmonica is gritty and very present as well. They shift gears and display a mellow side on the ballad "Sad and Blue." This is a soulful number in the style of T-Bone Walker, with rich jazzy chords and some nice solos from Veteska on guitar and Jeff Levine on organ. Albert King's "I Get Evil" is a nice fit for this band. The addition of a fierce horn chart and a tasty guitar and sax exchange is a stunning

highlight. Veteska richly explores his vocal range on the rootsy rocker "Pack of Lies." It's got a wide-open pocket that's aided by some great solos and poppy hooks. "2:00 in the Morning" brings in those powerful vocals from Barnes again. It's another high-octane blues-rocker that seems to define a signature sound for this band. This is kind of a rarity from the Lennon/McCartney catalog, but the bluesy "1 After 909" is an excellent song choice here. It's got a real earthy quality that's acoustic and also features Mikey Junior's ace harp work. Jen Barnes tears it up on "Take Back What You Own." It's gritty, in-the-pocket and takes flight via some hot guitar and organ leads. So many people, from Bessie Smith to Eric Clapton, have tackled the standard "Nobody Knows You (When You're Down and Out)," and you can add Veteska and band to the list. The leader effectively delivers the classic message and melody, accompanied by some stellar piano work by Levine. "Slow Down You Crazy Fool" is a lean and mean guitar shredder, with a slow shuffle feel. It's a cautionary tale about excess and taking the high road. "Man About Town" is a cool grooving instrumental track featuring Mike Scott and Jeff Levine on horns and keys. And just in time for the Holidays we have Charles Brown's perennial "Merry Christmas Baby." Veteska and Levine cap the album on a festive and upbeat note.—**Eric Harabadian**

JACKSON STOKES *Passengers*

Create Records

Jackson Stokes is a young and contemporary singer-songwriter/guitarist from St. Louis, MO firmly rooted in the classic soul and blues tradition. At the tender age of 11 years old he met neighbor, and son

of Gregg Allman, Devon Allman who encouraged the young musician to pursue his guitar studies. Stokes took his advice playing with various bands and even earned a college degree in music therapy. In 2017 Stokes joined the Devon Allman Band and in 2018 he did a world tour with Allman's Project Band.

So, here we are with a follow up to his 2019 self-titled debut and it is pro-



duced by Luther Dickinson and executive produced by Devon Allman. With that kind of cache, there is no mistaking this current EP's seamless blend of musical Southern charm and soulful sophistication. Just check out "Until the Morning" for starters. There's a laid-back vibe from the outset where Stokes shows you his innate sense of groove and style. His vocals are articulate and relaxed, with guitar rhythms that float over the listener in a mid tempo Van Morrison-like vamp. Clocking in at a little over the minute mark, "Interlude" feels like a continuation of the first track. Stokes compactly shows his guitar prowess and unleashes some righteous riffage. "Early Riser" seems somewhat streamlined and meticulously crafted. Stokes doesn't seem to waste a lot of space with his vocal or guitar statements. Oh, he is most able in all areas, but this song is evidence where less is more. The groove is king, with a tastefully jazzy bridge to boot. "Ride" sort of ties in with the EP's theme. Stokes makes references to things on the road being a "long strange trip." The

relentless rhythms really drive the feel of movement and travel home. Backing vocals by Devon Allman, R. Scott Bryan, Mattie Schell, Allie Vogler, Joanna Sorenko and Chris Turnbaugh really give this tune, in particular, a smooth and poppy sizzle. "Gemini" is a cleverly worded take on astrology, self-awareness and challenging dichotomies. In it, Stokes claims he has "country manners and urban charm." He's also "scared of the dark but needs the starry sky." It's an introspective piece where he's reaching out to a potential partner stating, "I hope your sign works well with mine. Tell me can you hang with a Gemini?" The EP's finale is "Don't Tempt Me." It's got a world weary feel to it that is funky and gets straight to the point. In no uncertain terms he's telling his woman, "I'm sick and tired of wasting time. I can't read your mind." The song is bumping and built on a cool groove where "actions speak louder than words." Stokes has a tight core band in bassist Paul Brackens, drummer Ben Bicklein and keyboardist John Ginty, with some nice string arrangements by Mark Hochberg. Here's an artist with a lot of promise and a mature musical vision for the future.—**Eric Harabadian**

CANDICE IVORY *When the Levee Breaks; The Music of Memphis Minnie*

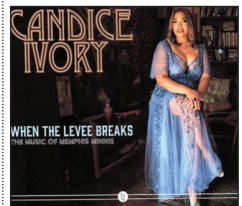
Little Village Foundation 2023

If you don't know who Memphis Minnie was, Candice Ivory will facilitate an introduction.

A Tennessee native, Ivory has been creating music for over two decades. She comes from a family of musicians steeped in both gospel and blues. Ivory has been singing professionally since her mid-teens, and

received education in jazz both academically and in many onstage appearances with notable performers. Currently she is herself an educator of vocal technique as well as a performer.

This, Ivory's fourth album, is her first as a blueswoman. It is produced by prominent jazz guitarist Charlie Hunter, who plays both guitar and bass on it. Able colleagues are drummer George Sluppick, percussionists Atiba Forie and Brevan Hampden, and pedal steel guitarist



Dashawn Hickman.

Candice Ivory, of course, is not the first to honor Memphis Minnie. That blues legend, whose birth name was Lizzie Douglas, was one of the most popular and revered blues performers of the 1930s and 1940s. (She was born in 1897 and lived until 1973.) A compelling singer, she was also a formidable guitarist; fellow legend Big Bill Broonzy touted her instrumental talent and related that she bested him and Tampa Red in a "cutting contest" of guitar skill. An assertive and independent woman, Minnie was highly influential and her songs have been covered by Maria Muldaur, Rory Block, and many others.

Ivory's set of a dozen Memphis Minnie tunes ranges from the familiar, like "Me and My Chauffeur" and "When the Levee Breaks," to the more obscure. Her bandmates on this outing are deft, but respectful of the singer; in fact, one of the pleasures of the album is the restraint that the musicians show. Although the playing is excellent - much of

the percussion is particularly scintillating - the band cedes the spotlight to Ivory.

The result is a set representative of Memphis Minnie's era: solid and soulful music without needless or heedless flourishes. In this milieu, Ivory thrives. Her vocals are full of emotion, and appropriate to Hunter's acoustic guitar backing on "Blues Everywhere" and his electric stylings on "Pile Driving Blues." My favorite tracks are the lilting "HooDoo Lady," and "Crazy Crying Blues," in which Ivory unleashes her full emotive range. But then, every track of this album is worthy.

Welcome to the blues world, Candice Ivory.—
Steve Daniels

JEFF PITCHELL *Playin' with My Friends*

Deguello Records 2023

New England guitarist, singer, and songwriter Jeff Pitchell won an award for his guitar talent in Connecticut when he was...fifteen! He hasn't looked back. "Playin' with My Friends" is his ninth album, and its thirteen tunes, tracking at almost a full hour, do indeed allow Pitchell to disport with multiple musical colleagues, to beneficial effect.

Nine of the numbers were composed either solely or in partnership by Pitchell. Although he can accurately be labeled a blues rocker, the proclivity here is for shuffles, which comprise the majority of the set. Why not? Pitchell is comfortable with them, and excels at them. The listener will find confirmation in the first track, "Eye for an Eye," a song that sufficiently impressed John Mayall that he also recorded it. Pitchell handles the vocal, as he does on all but one track, with skill and gusto, deploying

a clear, resonant baritone. His guitar leads are equally crisp and compelling without being self-indulgent. "Prisoner of Love" sustains the same shuffle



mode with some snazzy drumming by Marty Richards, and then Pitchell attacks the standard "So into You," abetted on saxophone by Charles Neville. He then segues into "Your Magic Eyes," with a guitar approach immediately reminiscent of the late icon Stevie Ray Vaughan. "Out in the Cold" returns to the shuffle format, with guitar chores being shared with Tyrone Vaughan, Stevie Ray's nephew and Jimmie Vaughan's son.

How about a rocking boogie next? You have it with "All Night Long," a headlong rave-up with Jimmy Biggins providing sax appeal and Duane Betts on second guitar. Then another six-string hero arrives in the person of Rick Derringer, who shares guitar and vocal duties on "Unsung Hero of the Blues." On "Not Guilty," the first cover song, the tempo slows, composer Bruce Feiner owning the keyboard while Pitchell delivers some of his most lyrical guitar fills.

My least favorite track, "Blinded by Desire," follows, characterized by heavy guitar licks poised between grunge and psychedelia, but order is restored with "Fat Cigars," the title track of Pitchell's album of twenty-six years ago; it's still really good. On "I Like the Rut," Jeff harmonizes successfully on vocal with Christine Ohlman, and then the title track cedes the vocal spotlight to B.B. King's daughter, Claudette, with a back-

ing chorus and some choice piano licks by Danny Fontanella. The set closes with a song identified with Bobby Blue Bland, "I Wouldn't Treat a Dog." Displaying Pitchell at his best as singer and guitarist, supported only by bass and drums, it's an apt conclusion to a fine album.—**Steve Daniels**

JHETT BLACK *Babel*

Rumblestump Entertainment 2023

Here is a new blues album that is different than the mainstream, and worth an appreciative listen.

Black is a multi-instrumentalist who represented the San Angelo (Texas) Blues Society at the 2022 International Blues Challenge and emerged as second place finisher in the Solo/Duo category,



while winning as best harmonica player. On "Babel," his first full-length release, he primarily plays guitar, including a lot of slide, and digs deeply into ten original songs and a cover of the Freddie King classic, "Going Down." On most tracks his only collaborator is percussionist Dusty Skins. ("Jhett Black"? "Dusty Skins"? If these aren't pseudonyms, my name is Howlin' Wolf.)

Speaking of Howlin' Wolf: one of the most intriguing aspects of this album is Black's vocals, which indeed on some tracks elicit memories of Wolf's renderings. Other singers who also come to mind are Omar Kent Dykes, Tom Waits, and (although not a singer, the late 1960s-1970s radio programmer) Wolfman Jack. Most similar to Black's vocalizing, though,

is the style of Little G Weevil, a contemporary Hungarian bluesman whose recordings are also worth sampling.

The music itself is a conglomeration of Mississippi hill country blues and grunge rock; think the Black Keys as an apt comparison. On almost every track Black vocalizes in a deep baritone over sparse drum accompaniment. "Devil Ain't an Only Child," a melancholy number, does feature keyboard by Dena, and "12 Bar Blues Again" has bass by Robbie Coleman and the album's only harmonica inclusion, by Joe Waters. The "Again" of that song's title is misleading, since it is has only true twelve bar format on the album. It is a zesty, propulsive number distinguished by some excellent slide guitar deployment by Jhett.

Appropriately for an innovative album, it ends with a re-imagined cover of "Going Down," replete with the fuzzed guitar tones, reverb, and deep, committed vocal present in the preceding original tunes. I don't know what Freddie King would have thought, but I like it.

In summary, an album which is far from contemplative, but is successively pithy, piercing, and provocative, and will get you moving.—**Steve Daniels**

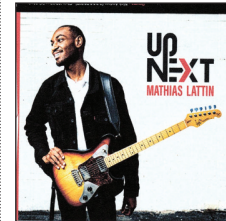
MATHIAS LATTIN *Up Next*

VizzTone 2023

Barely voting age, Houston, Texas native Mathias Lattin ("la-teen") already has an impressive resume. He played at local jam sessions before his mid-teens, he was a member of the Keeshea Pratt Band, which won the 2018 International Blues Challenge. With his own band, Lattin won the IBC this year, as well as its Albert King Award as best

guitarist.

His debut album clocks in at just over a half hour, but it's time well spent. The eight songs (with two reprises) are all originals, and they reflect Lattin's admiration not only for blues icons such as B.B. King and Albert Collins but also jazz greats like Wes Montgomery. Perhaps most noteworthy (pun intended) is that Lattin for the most part resists the self-indulgent displays of fancy and frenetic digital dexterity which seduce



many other young blues performers.

Refreshingly, instead of the usual rocking opener typical of most albums, the album begins with a slow shuffle, "Who's Been Loving on You?" It's a showcase not only for Mathias's guitar handiwork, but also for his tenor vocals, and even at his young age it places him firmly in the upper echelon of contemporary soul blues singers. On this and the other tracks he is supported by a sturdy rhythm section augmented on several cuts by trumpet and saxophone.

One of my favorite tracks is "I Tried So Hard." It has fine organ accompaniment by Andrew Douglas, and parts of it sound similar to one of my all-time favorite blues songs, "Fare Thee Well" by the Nick Moss Band from its 2014 album "Time Ain't Free." Lattin doesn't have the spectacular vocal chops of the late Michael Ledbetter of the Moss Band, but he comes very close, and his deft guitar work is sublime. This cut is worth the price of admission.

My only caveat: Lattin

needs to diversify his song topics. Almost every track on this set deals with unrequited or betrayed love, and the theme begins to wear. Undoubtedly as Lattin's experiences accumulate, his topics will expand. Also undoubtedly, "Up Next" confirms the emergence of another highly talented young blues artist.—**Steve Daniels**

BOOK

WHOSE BLUES? *By Adam Gussow*

University of North Carolina Press 2020

This book addresses a crucial question of interest to all lovers of blues music. Kudos to Adam Gussow for facing the issue head-on, with intelligence and wit.

Gussow is a professor of Southern Studies and English at the University of Mississippi, and the author of several previous treatises about blues music. He is also a skilled professional blues musician, a harmonica player who has released multiple albums to considerable acclaim. He maintains a robust presence on the Internet as a harmonica teacher and historian.

Whose Blues? addresses the dichotomy between two at least superficially conflicting views of the blues genre. As Gussow phrases the controversy: "Should we embrace the postmodern globalization of the blues as a kind of progress, a victory for blues music as a cultural form, or critique that global spread as a crisis of cultural expropriation and dilution, a tragic erasure of the burdens and meanings of black history as lived by the music's originators and encoded into the very fabric of the music?"

More simply, white blues lover Gussow labels these positions "black bluesism" and "blues univer-

salism.” Black bluesism is assertively expressed by Black musician James Whiting, a harmonica maven who performs as Sugar Blue: “These Blues are not of you or for you [white listeners]....These blues are in spite of you....These Blues are mine and my children’s as they were my grandfather’s and his father’s.” Blues universalism is summarized by Gussow as:

“No Black. No white. Just the blues.”
Revealing his deep research into blues history, as well as his personal experience playing the music and interacting with fellow historians and musicians, Gussow concludes right at the beginning of the book that “Each ideology has a partial purchase on the truth....The first has a greater purchase....” In support of that conclusion,

Gussow embarks on an academic but grounded exploration of the provenance and development of blues music. He divides the book’s journey into twelve chapters or “bars,” corresponding to the traditional twelve-bar format of a blues song.
Several chapters discuss the music’s origin as “blues” well back into the 19th. century, in the process dispelling some

prevalent myths. For example, Gussow presents evidence that in the early 20th. century urban blues music migrated into rural regions, rather than the opposite. Likewise, he demonstrates that the icons of ostensibly seminal Mississippi Delta acoustic blues - think Robert Johnson, Son House, Charley Patton, Tommy Johnson - were not unsophisticated blues artists

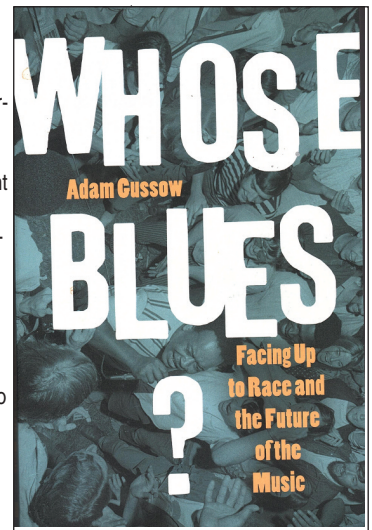
playing the music of oppression from their tortured souls, but typically were itinerant performers who incorporated jazz, swing, folk, vaudeville, and ragtime into their repertoires to satisfy their audiences.

Three chapters are devoted to Black

American literary and cultural giants whose relationship to blues was profound: W.C Handy, commonly (although arguably inaccurately) called The Father of the Blues; Zora Neale Hurston, writer, sociologist, and frequent and chronicler of juke joints; and Langston Hughes, purveyor of blues and its predominant themes in poetry. He also centers blues in the Black Arts movement situated in New York City, cites and discusses the revival of blues spurred in the 1960s by the “British invasion,” and analyzes the decline of Black interest in the music as the 1940s big band era segued into the 1950s rock and rhythm-and-blues period and then into the 1960s of rock, psychedelia, and white emulation.

Gussow investigates the actual nature of blues music, with its roots in Southern poverty and violence but also communality and love. He breaks down its composition into blues conditions, blues feelings, and blues ethos. He acknowledges the primacy of Black experience and simultaneously the “marriage between black artistry and the emotional response such artistry compels [in everyone].” The result is a tour de force book not only on blues, but also about racism as it has manifested in U.S. politics and popular culture.

Not least, in a few brief lines Gussow distills for me the essence of the music that I love: “Blues feelings are despair backed by euphoria....But the blues are also eupho-



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