

GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

THE EVOLUTION OF TERRIE ODABI—HOW THE WEST WAS WON

by Amy Lou



Photo by Tina Abbaszadeh

I would like to introduce you to one of the best singers in the San Francisco Bay Area today. I consider her to be one of the best singers I have ever *heard*. The Bay Area is a virtual gold mine of musical talent and she is like the rare diamond in this mine. Outside of her astronomical vocal range, we have a lot in common as 50-year-old, single, singer moms who bust our butts working day jobs, while taking care of our families, managing and booking our bands, and rocking the mic at night. So we hit it off right away and I totally get it when she says, "I have to do this. I love this. There is nothing else that I want to do." A few of her dreams are coming true right now and, as a friend, a fellow singer, and a fan, I could not be happier for her. I feel like I'm

witnessing a future superstar's imminent rise to fame. Yes, friends, I believe she is going *there*. And if she doesn't get there, well, then, I can only assume that the whole world has gone deaf. She was born to do this and you know that the first moment you hear her. She is no overnight success story, though. She has been singing and blowing audiences away in the East Bay for the past 20 years or so, and it's high time that everybody in the Bay Area and beyond knows who she is. She has been compared to Aretha Franklin, Etta James, and Jill Scott. How often do you hear people say things like that and find it to be absolutely true? With Terrie, it is. *[continued on page 3]*

FROM THE EDITOR

Deb Lubin



It's been a while since the last issue of *Golden Gate Grooves*. We're now in the middle of winter. The Golden Gate Blues Society is sending two entries to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, which will be held next week! Representing TGGBS is Terrie Odabi and Evolution Blues in the band category (see article on Terrie beginning on page 1) and Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood in the solo/duo category. Several TGGBS members are traveling to Memphis to cheer them on and experience everything that is the IBC. The ad that TGGBS placed in the IBC program is shown following the article on Terrie. Also, please see (and listen to) *Bobbi Goodman's* video links for some of the winning music and the bands in the finals held at Biscuits and Blues in September 2013. We wish Terrie and her band and Wendy and Kirk the BEST of luck in Memphis! Bring it on home to the Bay Area! 🎸

The Golden Gate Blues Society will be holding annual elections in March/April (date yet to be set). We're always looking for and appreciate volunteers with a deep interest in the blues and the community to assist in various capacities. If you're interested in becoming more involved, please contact any member of the Board (see the names of all Board members on the next to last page of this newsletter) personally or through the TGGBS website. We are also looking for a dedicated person to take over the publication of this newsletter! If you're interested, or know someone who would be a perfect fit, please contact me! A blues society is only as strong as the commitment of its members to make a difference; the more the merrier! 🎸

In addition to the article on Terrie Odabi, this issue also includes an interview with Anne Harris, who is the violin player extraordinaire in Otis Taylor's Band, by journalist *Julie Jenkins*. Anne will be at Biscuits and Blues in San Francisco with Otis's band on January 26! Please check out the wonderful interview with Anne and join us in seeing the band later this month! Throughout the month of January, Biscuits is offering a 50% discount at the door for the second show (9:30 or 10:00 pm) to all TGGBS members showing a valid membership card. Thank you, Steven Suen and Tina Zhou! 🎸

We again have 10 CD reviews in this issue (see the table of contents below for the listing) by noted blues reviewer *Tom Hyslop*, *Joseph Jordan*, and *Dorothy L. Hill*. Hope you enjoy the reviews and are moved to purchase a CD or two; a few of the reviewed CDs are by TGGBS members! Also, check out *Bob Cosman's* photos from the benefit produced by *Aki Kumar* and *Kid Andersen* at the Club Fox for blues singer Finis Tasby, who suffered a stroke more than a year ago and needs help paying his medical bills. The blues community again came together to support one of its own! Information regarding how you can also help Finis is provided on the photo page. 🎸

On a sad note, the passing of Chick Willis—the original Stoop Down Man and one of my personal favorites—has left a hole in the blues world. RIP, Chick. You are deeply missed. Let's treasure the musicians while they're still here to hear it, folks! You never know what will happen tomorrow. With the CD reviews are editor's notes on those touring musicians who will be playing in the Bay Area in the next few months (Rockin' Johnny Burgin, Smokin' Joe Kubek and Bnois King, Greg Nagy). Hope to see you at some of the shows! Please also support our local artists! 🎸

🎸 Go out and support live Blues! See you on the Blues trail. 🎸

IN THIS ISSUE

1. The Evolution of Terrie Odabi—How the West Was Won by *Amy Lou*
2. Benefit for Finis Tasby, *Photographs* by *Bob Cosman*
3. CD Reviews: Various Artists Remembering Little Walter and Macy Blackman and the Mighty Fines by *Tom Hyslop*; the Daniel Castro Band and the Rockin' Johnny Band (two CDs) by *Joseph Jordan*; and Charlie Owen, Sugaray Rayford, Smokin' Joe and Bnois King, Kara Grainger, and Greg Nagy by *Dorothy L. Hill*
4. Anne Harris: Musical Diamond, Interview by *Julie Jenkins*, Photo by *Mike Lovato*



Steve Turre, trombonist in the Saturday Night Live Band and a Professor of Jazz Trombone at the Juilliard School of Music, dubbed her, "A jewel from the Bay Area." I simply call her amazing. She has this incredibly soulful and powerful voice and sings with seemingly zero effort. She is going to Memphis with her band, Evolution Blues, this month to represent The Golden Gate Blues Society and compete against the world's best blues bands in the International Blues Challenge. If ever there was a time that the Bay Area could bring home this coveted musical prize, it is now, with Terrie Odabi and Evolution Blues. Terrie has worked hard and never gave up her dream to be a professional singer. She has paid her blues dues. This *is* the evolution of Terrie Odabi.

Some of you might wonder why I am writing this story. After all, we competed with each other at the TGGBS IBC Finals at Biscuits and Blues to win the shot to go to Memphis, and I lost. There are no hard feelings here, and anyone who knows me, knows this is true. When I heard her sing for that first time at Neto's in the preliminary round, I was pleasantly surprised and blown away. We became friends and after the Finals, I felt compelled to share her story. It's a great story and I want you to know who she is and get behind her. (My daughter Michelle is over my shoulder right now reading this. She said to me, "It's not about you, mom." Ha. Kids! You got to love them.) When I first saw her at Neto's, I remember thinking to myself, "Aw, shit. Who the hell is this girl? Who is this incredible singer? Oh, my God..." I knew right then that it was going to be tough to beat "Aretha," but I'm not feeling bad about losing at all. My band and I had a great time and I made a new friend. She deserved to win. A voice like that was made to be heard by the masses and shared. I truly appreciate and support local music and I especially enjoy those who are really talented and move me. "Where the hell has she been?" I thought when I first heard her because she's so damn good and I'd never heard of her. (Note to self: Get out to the East Bay more often!) I consider myself up on the Bay Area blues scene, but realize there's a whole lot more great blues to find across the Bay. I concluded that a lot of other people in the Bay Area might not have heard of her yet either, because a lot of people were excited to discover her through the IBC this year. Her career has taken her countless places, but locally, she has performed mostly on her home turf in the East Bay. So here I am, with my writer's cap on, to help bridge the gap and call your attention to the fabulous Terrie Odabi.

It's not every day a singer like Terrie comes along. The buzz about her is totally justified. She is a sweet and

humble gal with a huge voice and range. Once you hear her, you don't forget her. She's a singer's singer, the kind of singer that can make another singer feel inspired...inspired to do greater things or inspired to quit altogether and move out of the way. She's that good. A week after the finals, we met for lunch and had a nice long chat on a sunny Saturday in Hayward. We laughed and swapped stories on our dreams, our struggles, our families, our music, and our men. It was most delicious. It was daytime so I was wearing jeans, a pony tail, and last night's makeup and she walked in looking every bit like a glamorous celebrity in town, a true diva who commands attention just for stepping into a room. She has the essence of a star, but is truly down to earth and friendly. We could have talked for hours, but she had a gig to get to so I dove in and thoroughly enjoyed our time together. We sat outside and I recall seeing several people look our way while I was interviewing her. They all had that "who is that?" look on their faces. Well friends, I have a good feeling that's gonna change.

Terrie was born in Albany, Georgia, to a military family and had lived in Sacramento and Novato (California) and for 2 years in Turkey before settling down in Oakland when she was 10. Her beloved father, Granville, served in the Air Force and the family was accustomed to moving around, but Terrie fell in love with Oakland. She was happy to settle there when they did. She is the middle child of four, with two sisters and a brother and parents who loved them very much. She says she had a happy childhood. They were a close family that did not have a television in the early years. They sat around and sang songs to entertain themselves. Songs like, "We Shall Overcome" and "If I had a Hammer." She smiles at the memory and says her mother has a beautiful voice. She then laughed a bit and said that her dad loved to sing, but couldn't carry a tune if he tried. She always loved it when he did, though. Terrie says they would sing for hours and that they were harmonizing and didn't know it. I asked her if they were a church family and if she grew up singing in a choir, but she says they didn't and she wasn't a church girl. They just loved to sing. "Singing just came naturally." Well, she could have fooled me! Her voice has got church all over it with gospel qualities that shake me, wake me, and bless my soul. She is as soulful as they get. Some of her earliest influences were the Pointer Sisters, Chaka Khan, Ricki Lee Jones, Betty Wright, and Aretha Franklin. She laughed when she remembered how she used to belt out "Dr. Feelgood" as a little girl. If only they had video back in the day!

Terrie was named after her father's sister. They were called "Big Terrie" and "Little Terrie," and her aunt was a major influence in her life and the matriarch of the family. Her aunt loved to spend time with her nieces and nephews, the kids she never had. She loved her family and built the family's culture by starting the annual holiday traditions that brought them together and kept them close. Terrie has many fond family memories and thanks her aunt profoundly for her love and generous heart. Big Terrie thought it was important that each child had opportunities to try different things to determine what they loved and were good at. She asked each child what he or she wanted to try and paid for their lessons. There were tap and ballet classes, clarinet, sports, and a piano for the family who loved music. Terrie received a gift that would change her life and set her path. She was given singing lessons from the very talented and accomplished singer, John Patton, Jr., who lived in nearby Richmond. Terrie said he was a big influence on her. Patton was a professional singer and a vocal coach who studied at Juilliard in New York City. He was also an actor, a scholar, a lecturer, and a teacher in African American studies. He was extremely dedicated to teaching black pride to youth and considered an expert in authentic African American spirituals. Although known for his singing, Patton was most famous for his role as the preacher, Shug's father, in Steven Spielberg's classic, *The Color Purple*. Terrie says he never achieved the success she thought his voice warranted. "He was an amazing singer." Patton taught Terrie to sing arias, Spanish songs, spirituals, and jazz. He exposed her to different kinds of singing and helped shape that beautiful voice into what you hear today. She worked with him until high school and then studied for 5 years under classically trained soprano, Gwen Brown, in exchange for babysitting. Terrie received excellent vocal coaching until she turned 21 and has worked for many years to enhance and hone her exquisite and soulful voice. The result of all this training is evident to anyone who hears her sing, whether it's blues, jazz, R&B, soul, spirituals, arias, or world music.

She has wanted to be a singer since she was 6 years old. She says she can't remember a time when she didn't want to sing. She gave many concerts in her living room, but didn't start singing publicly until she got into high school and joined the choir. Her smile brightens as she recalls her friends in school and those times. She says the kids were awesome and extremely motivated. They sang and let it all out. This was a great place for Terrie to be and she loved it. "Unfortunately, our music teacher was more focused on the band than

the choir and the school didn't have a lot of money for the arts, so we kids kind of took over and took it upon ourselves to make things happen. We got together and practiced outside of school and had a great time." They sang all over Oakland and performed any chance they could. Her proud father helped drive the kids to their shows. "We must have played at every church in Oakland. We were good. People loved us and we had a lot of fun. That was the church tour." She reveled in the moment, remembering those times and how they got into their performances. "These were really talented kids who sang their asses off like pros." Not surprisingly, she stood out. Invitations started rolling in and they were invited to sing at parks, churches, parties, you name it. She was building a name for herself in her community and she was only 16.

She started sneaking into Dock of the Bay and Ivy's to sing when she was under age. She met legendary saxman, Jules Broussard, in the early '90s, and he hired her to do jazz gigs with him. She met Alvon Johnson, formerly with the Coasters, a singer, guitar slinger, and respected bluesman, 10 years ago. She and a girlfriend would go to Rumors on Foothill Boulevard in Oakland every Sunday to catch his show and sing. She learned a lot and started to meet the local musicians. She sang jazz, R&B, and blues and Alvon helped put her first band together. She was making her way around the clubs and getting to know some great musicians. She played in several bands over the years, including the San Jose band, TYT, which opened for the Average White Band and Lenny Williams. She joined the all-female, multicultural percussion group, D'Cuckoo, and after that, its offshoot, Rythmixxx. She travelled to Japan with Rythmixxx but missed an opportunity to go to Cuba because she was attending Cal State Hayward at the time and would have missed her final exams. Terrie said it was her first high tech band that used midi; they were an electric world music band with dancing and costumes and beautiful singing. She did all of the choreography, danced, and sang lead. It was during this time that she dabbled in the music of other cultures and learned to imitate voices. She loved to explore; Rythmixxx would mix things up, like take a Cuban song and put it to an African rhythm. She really enjoyed that experience and says, "We were the hit of Silicon Valley." Oracle founder Larry Ellis loved them. So did Bill Gates and Paul Allen of Microsoft. Ellis hired them for private parties at his home and when they played at the America's Cup, he provided a budget for their elaborate costumes.

Terrie is grateful for all of the opportunities she has had to sing and for all of the people she has met along the

way. Singing is her passion and she never takes for granted the voice God gave her. She is serious and takes care of her voice. In 2008, she had a scare when nodules were discovered on her vocal chords. She had to be completely silent for a month. She was told by her doctor, "Either you don't talk at all or you have to have surgery." She chose silence. Thankfully, the nodules went away, but she had to work hard to get her voice back. She does her best not to talk before any show whenever possible, so she can save her voice for the gig. For that reason, her BFF and biggest cheerleader, Constance, has offered to help Terrie at the IBC and will be acting as her road manager, speaking for her, as a favor. Terrie is surrounded by so many friends who love and support her. She's got a busload of friends and family going all the way to Memphis to cheer her on in person (myself included)! She is extremely grateful for the support.

Terrie cannot imagine her life without music, but she gave it up for a few years. She did what she thought was right at the time, but it was hard to walk away. She went back to school and worked on her undergraduate studies to become a teacher, but knew in her heart that she was more interested in a music career than a teaching one. Her marriage ended and so did her sabbatical. She went right back to singing and found her bliss again. A good friend had always told her, "Your gift is supposed to be your livelihood. The world needs to hear you." That is something she never forgot and it resonated deep inside her. She was determined to get back to it, take it to the next level, and pursue her dream as a full time professional singer. These days, Terrie has a wonderful boyfriend who is very supportive of her. Stephen is an amazing artist himself and threw her a party to celebrate the Evolution Blues band IBC win at the art studio where he works in Oakland. It was a wonderful time with 100 or so of Terrie's closest friends and supporters. She and Stephen have been together for the past 5 years and are very supportive of each other's careers. I also met her lovely daughter Chanel, her mother, and sister, and some of her close friends that evening. Terrie was most gracious and introduced me to her guests as the one to beat at Biscuits, and invited me to share the stage with her for one song. Lady Bianca was also in the house. She gave one helluva rousing performance with the Evolution Blues band as well, but the star of the evening was Terrie and boy did she shine. It is very clear to me how much she is loved and supported by her family, friends, and fans. It was awesome and I was honored to be there and share in her celebration.

For the past 10 years, Terrie has pursued a solo career and has shared stages with people too numerous to mention, but the list is impressive. She has performed at Yoshi's, the Concord Pavilion, and the Monterey Bay Blues Festival with Paula Harris and Mz. Dee for the 3 Queens of the Blues show. One show she remembers fondly was her tribute show to Etta James with the Medicine Ball Band in 2012. Her father loved Etta and used to play her records when Terrie was growing up. Terrie loved how Etta would belt out every song with passion and considers Etta one of her heroes. She performs regularly with the fun and eclectic Medicine Ball Band, formed by her "other BFF that I can't live without," David Sturdevant. David consistently changes the lineup in this exciting band and the feel-good sounds showcase performers such as Ylonda Nickell, Nancy Wright, Richard Howell, Chelle Jacques, Janice Maxie Reid, Mads Tolling, Larry Vann, Pee Wee Ellis, and Terrie Odabi. 2013 was an exceptionally good year for Terrie. She performed at the Fillmore Jazz Festival;



the Polk Street Blues Festival; the benefit concert for the Black Coalition on AIDS featuring Bay Area jazz divas Paula West, Denise Perrier, Jennifer Bryce, and Daria Nile; and sold out the Fenix in San Rafael three times in a row. She had a special guest at her last Fenix gig. Her old vocal coach, Gwen Brown, was in town from Los Angeles

and caught Terrie's show. She hadn't seen Terrie in over 20 years. Terrie was thrilled to see her again and Gwen told her that night: "You are the total package." Terrie performs in nightclubs and dives all across the Bay and winning the TGGBS IBC Finals in September was validation that she is on the right track to her dreams.

Speaking of the IBC, she had planned to enter the event a couple of years ago, but missed the deadline to enter by one day. She did a demo for it and wrote, "I Can't Keep," but, alas, it was not meant to be. Not one to get discouraged, she set out to prepare for the next IBC opportunity and specifically worked on writing blues songs. She had never written a blues song before, and so many were pushing her to enter this contest. She loves to write her own songs, but at that point, wrote mostly R&B and soul tunes, so she embraced the challenge and focused on blues. Terrie turns out to be a

pretty damn good song writer too. At this year's IBC Finals, she performed all blues originals and they were good; really good. The stand outs for me were, "Daddy-O," a sweet and swiny shuffle that she wrote for her beloved father, who passed away 2 days before her birthday in 2011. She used to call him "Daddy-O." She loves singing that song and the audience loves it too. I can still hear the crowd at Biscuits singing along to this one! She tantalized them with her gritty and sassy slow blues, "Dirty Girl Blues," and stole the show with her amazing and powerful performance of "Evolution of the Blues," her searing plea and tribute to her beloved hometown of Oakland. Her lyrics cry and depict the pain in her heart for the violence and sorrow that Oakland experiences on a daily basis. "Have you seen the news today, nothing left for words to say. Another war we gotta fight, yet they take away our rights. Bullets blast, our future dies, hold down my head and cry. Lord, do you hear my prayers? I swear no one seems to care. This is the evolution, the evolution of the blues. Sorrows change, just as people do." Terrie loves Oakland in spite of its problems. She says it's a beautiful city filled with culture, great people and lots of music. She loved growing up there and prays for an end to the city's alarming rise in gangs, drugs, and violence; she remains hopeful for change.

Earlier in 2013, Terrie put her blues band together to compete in this year's IBC. The Evolution Blues band



members are David Sturdevant on rhythm guitar and harmonica, Julian Hoover on lead guitar, Bill Norwood on drums, Darrel Broadnax on bass, and Roscoe Galo on keys [not pictured]. This fine group of musicians complements Terrie's blues and gives life to her originals. The band is working hard and looking forward to performing in Memphis, where they are proud to represent The Golden Gate Blues Society and hope to win. Terrie has been busy recording an EP to take to

Memphis at Angelo Rossi's The Cave studio in Mountain View. In addition to the band, some stellar musicians appear on the EP: Christoffer "Kid" Andersen, Guitar and Hammond; Terry Hiatt, Guitar;



Simon Russell, Keys and Vocals; AJ Crowdaddy, Guitar; Ken Cook, Keys; Prince Damons, Keys; Greg Jones, Bass; Peter Booras, Drums; and Greg Heumann, Harmonica. This is gonna be one great CD. You can catch Terrie and her band at the Fenix once a month and at various other venues around the Bay Area. She would love to see you there.

Terrie loves her day job as an Employment Specialist for the Oakland School district. She's been there for 22 years, but tells me, "It's time. It's time. I want to sing full time." I asked her where she sees herself 5 years from now and she said, "Well, I don't really know, but I'd love to do major tours around the world and perform with the most incredible musicians." If things go her way in Memphis, that vision could surely be a reality. Everything she has done up to now, all of the people she's met along the way, and all of her hard work has brought her here. This is her evolution. I wish Terrie and the fellas the best of luck in Memphis. I know she will blow them away and they will do us proud. You can find Terrie on the web at www.terrieodabi.com and on Facebook at Vocal Stylist Terrie Odabi.

"Terrie Odabi is easily the most dynamic blues and soul woman to have emerged in the Bay Area since Etta James came out of San Francisco's Fillmore District in the Fifties. Terrie has a powerful set of pipes, writes terrific tunes, leads a kicking band, and has onstage movements that perfectly match the rhythms of her material. Surely stardom awaits her." Lee Hildebrand, contributor to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *East Bay Express*, and *Living Blues*

Photo Credits:

Page 5, by *Nia Jordan* at the Fillmore Jazz Festival
 Page 6, column 1, *Evolution Blues* by *Jennifer Marvin*
 Page 6, column 2, Terrie and Angelo Rossi in the studio by *Bobbi Goodman*

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TERRIE ODABI & EVOLUTION BLUES
BAND WINNER 2014 IBC

Terrie Odabi & Evolution Blues

“Terrie Odabi is easily the most dynamic blues and soul woman to have emerged in the Bay Area since Etta James came out of San Francisco’s Fillmore District in the Fifties. Terrie has a powerful set of pipes, writes terrific tunes, leads a kicking band, and has onstage movements that perfectly match the rhythms of her material. Surely stardom awaits her.”

—Lee Hildebrand, contributor to the San Francisco Chronicle, East Bay Express, & Living Blues

“There’s no better cure for the blues than the blues and no better example of that than Boogie Woogie Queen Wendy DeWitt. Her infectious smile, foot-stomping rhythms, and sheer pizzazz will jolt you out of your life for a few sweet hours.”

—Robert Feuer
Blues Revue,
Blues Music Magazine



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WENDY DeWITT with KIRK HARWOOD
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Wendy DeWitt with Kirk Harwood

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Mark Hummel Entertains the Large Crowd



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LINKS TO VIDEOS OF IBC BAND PERFORMANCES AND MORE

By Bobbi Goodman

PERFORMANCES BY IBC FINALIST BANDS

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN_NK51yAjE

Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood's winning performance at the solo/duo event at Bobby G's

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5iPafLPUBA>

Terrie Odabi and Evolution Blues' winning performance at Biscuits and Blues

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8fgT10PSwg>

Finalist: Scary Larry and the Monsters

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u34IRHXVJCE>

Finalist: Amy Lou

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qa6lzR44-2g>

Finalist: The Bornia Boys

FINIS TASBY BENEFIT

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVUKIZtiT84>

Kim Wilson in finale

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcC7ex1gDdA>

Rick Estrin and the Nightcats

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8v81rG3tGE>

James Harman

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wez4WN9cv4>

Mark Hummel

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZYNO3HkK2s>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZYNO3HkK2s>

Stan Erhart and Amy Lou

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-93yEg_DCsc

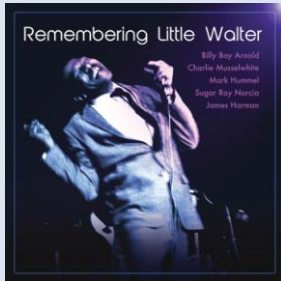
David More and JC Smith

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3TvQ9yYoR0>

Big Cat Tolefree and Ronnie Stewart

CD REVIEWS

Billy Boy Arnold, Charlie Musselwhite, Mark Hummel, Sugar Ray Norcia, James Harman, *Remembering Little Walter* by Tom Hyslop



Latter-day harp men talk about Big Walter's tone, emulate the conversational styles of both Sonny Boys, admire the power and playfulness of Cotton, and dig Junior Wells's attitude. Some may work on Jimmy Reed's high-end approach, or give lip service to Snooky

Pryor or even Louis Myers. But Marion Walter Jacobs was The Man, the player whose stylistic innovations revolutionized the way the instrument was played, and whose technique, taste, and tones continue to baffle and inspire musicians more than 60 years after his debut, and nearly 45 years after his untimely death. Little Walter's influence is so pervasive, therefore, that a certain amount of sarcasm seems almost a requirement when confronting a blues harp CD named *Remembering Little Walter*. What are the odds? At some level, after all, nearly every record prominently featuring harmonica blues could bear that title.

Built entirely from Walter's catalog, many of the songs on this album have been recorded countless times already (and, if you are like I am, you do not care if you never again hear "My Babe," though you undoubtedly still dig "Can't Hold Out Much Longer"). What, then, distinguishes this release? Enough that it is nominated for two Blues Music Awards, in the Album and Traditional Blues Album categories and for a Grammy. After years of organizing his Blues Harmonica Blowout tours, producer Mark Hummel has some practice at assembling successful packages, practice that carried over to this show, recorded at Anthology in San Diego. Start with the band. The superb rhythm section is made up of June Core (drums) and RW Grigsby (bass). The guitarists are well experienced at working with harmonica players: Nathan James (with James Harman and Ben Hernandez) and the legendary Little Charlie Baty (with Rick Estrin, in the Nightcats). The unit interprets the sounds originally laid down on Checker by the Aces and Robert Lockwood and Luther Tucker with swing, subtlety, and deep understanding.

The singers/harmonica players under whose names *Remembering Little Walter* was issued are an enviable all-star assemblage: Hummel, Harman, Charlie Musselwhite, Billy Boy Arnold, and Sugar Ray Norcia. Together they make up something like 50% of any reasonable person's list of the pre-eminent living harmonica players, and the environment, as one might expect, makes for committed and spirited performances. Sugar Ray's intense "Mean Old World" is dynamite, as is Musselwhite's take on the up-tempo "One Of These Mornings," a relative rarity, which also features a daredevil guitar break. Tone and dynamics are at an impossibly high level throughout—Hummel and the band dial in a perfect late-night mood on "Blue Light," and the way Harman drives "Crazy Mixed Up World" hard before breaking it down to a whisper at the end is masterly. Billy Boy's "Can't Hold Out Much Longer" is splendid on every level.

That recaps only about half of the program, but the rest of the songs (each performer sings two) are excellent as well. The closing number, "My Babe," features all five marquee players (not to mention Baty, who started on harmonica before becoming a universally recognized genius guitarist) blowing inspired solos on their horns. Chances are that you have already made the decision to buy *Remembering Little Walter*. You will not regret it.

Blind Pig Records — 2013

Check out: www.blindpigrecords.com

Macy Blackman and the Mighty Fines, *I Didn't Want To Do It* by Tom Hyslop

The pianist Macy Blackman, a long-time music educator and piano expert, has been an active performer since the 1960s, specializing in jazz and rhythm and blues, in particular the R&B music of New Orleans. He recently released his third album with his band The Mighty Fines. The 14 tracks on *I Didn't Want To Do It* supply everything necessary for a rollicking good time except the partygoers.



The rock-solid Mighty Fines are Jack Dorsey or Adam Goodhue (drums), Bing Nathan (bass), Ken Jacobs

(baritone saxophone—delicious!), and Nancy Wright (tenor saxophone, vocals), supporting Blackman (piano), whose singing is excellent and interesting. In contrast to the Mighty Fines' lively and infectious music, Blackman's vocal style is pretty far from excitable—not deliberate, exactly; languid perhaps comes closer. Although I have no sense that Blackman is trying to imitate the great Professor Longhair, and any similarity lies more in feeling and attitude than in sonic resemblance, his resonant timbre and playful, yet somehow grave, quality do recall Fess. That is no small asset for anyone singing Crescent City music.

The playlist, reflecting Blackman's long history and close involvement with this repertoire, includes standards and obscurities alike. The latter category includes the woozy rocker "Help Yourself," credited to Allen Toussaint, and "The Good Book," a brooding, gospel-inflected number in a minor key. Blackman sings the standard "What Do I Tell My Heart" beautifully, his 12/8 piano figure reflecting Fats Domino's version; the saxophone charts are sublime. Blackman's friend Dr. John penned the lovely ballad "Just The Same" and, with Doc Pomus, the sly, bouncing "Never Fool Nobody But Me." More familiar are "Who Shot The La-La," a classy take on Irma Thomas's "Somebody Told You" with a solid Wright vocal, the title track—a romp from The Spiders' catalog with a chorus and a descending hook that you'll recognize at once if you have ever heard it—and Chris Kenner's immortal "I Like It Like That," one of those songs that seems to encapsulate everything about New Orleans music: rippling piano, soul-clap snare hits, honking saxophones, Afro-Caribbean flavor, stop-time rhythms, and an instantly memorable melody and lyric.

Blackman draws from other sources as well. The deep soul ballad "Dreams To Remember" is presented in an arrangement not far from Otis Redding's original, with Blackman, playing the only guitar part on the album, filling Steve Cropper's role. Blackman's piano rhythms are quietly spectacular on a jaunty "Something's Got A Hold On Me." Wright sings lead on that Etta James classic and on Ike and Tina Turner's "A Fool In Love," which is enhanced by a tough sax solo and such delightful touches as the bold fill by Dorsey at 2:31. The Brook Benton-Dinah Washington duet "Rockin' Good Way," shorn of strings and its politely rocking, straight-eighth-note rhythm, is recast as a syncopated, shuffling New Orleans strut, and Jackie Wilson's immortal "Higher And Higher" closes the program on a high note, sounding very much like a one-pass (and maybe one microphone) take that builds on Blackman's block-chorded introduction, with rowdy hand claps,

uninhibited drumming, and wild saxophones creating an irresistible, pure party atmosphere.

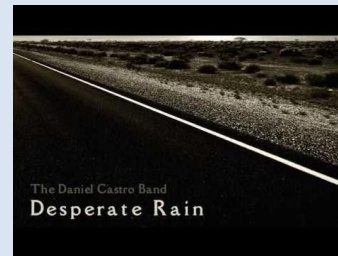
That sense of fun is at the heart of what most of us think of when it comes to the R&B of New Orleans, and Macy Blackman and The Mighty Fines convey it perfectly. *I Didn't Want To Do It* goes further, showing rarer aspects of New Orleans music: Saturday night and Sunday morning, romance and heartbreak, high seriousness and low clowning, all skillfully played and sung.

MamaRu Records — 2013

Check out: www.macyblackman.com

[TGGBS and Tom Hyslop received review copies of this CD from Blackman's publicist PR by DR.]

The Daniel Castro Band, *Desperate Rain* by Joseph Jordan



Daniel Castro has developed into a consummate artist, and a musician fully laden with grace and fire.

Desperate Rain is not for the faint of heart, but a tough, gritty, and

brilliant glimpse at Daniel Castro's still burgeoning legacy as one of the finest singer/songwriter/guitarists on the West Coast. He has now emerged at the forefront of the gifted San Francisco Bay Area blues scene.

Along with his biting, blistering slide and flat-pick work, Castro's powers are in full measure on this, only his third LP (since 1999's *No Surrender*) in an outstanding career. It's a remarkable representation of his full command as a modern bluesman. His vocals are stronger than they've ever been, and that's saying something.

With his co-producer, Joel Jaffe, Castro shines in his role as band leader; however, the Daniel Castro Band is just about as important. Bassist Johnny Yu and drummer David Perper, who both add superlative background and harmony vocals, are seemingly made for this band. Castro chose both of them well, as Yu's fluid, sharp, and melodic bass lines complement Perper's more than accomplished drum work. This trio sounds huge.

Special guest Julie Friend provides an inspired Merry Clayton-like, not-so background vocal to “Johnny Nitro,” a lyrically sly and loving tribute to the late North Beach musical hero and San Francisco blues/rock legend. Friend also, most impressively, co-wrote all of the songs on the album along with Castro. Together, the two display a strong songwriting maturity.

The 13 cuts (in an over 61-minute CD) provide many standout songs, including, to name just a few, a modern take on the Delta-like “Dark Train” and “Shelter Me,” displaying Castro’s blistering slide.

Another highlight is the Albert Collins-like 12-bar “Worried Baby Blues,” just a marvelous song with a joyful delivery. Castro’s solo on that song cuts the song’s blues to the bone and if you heard no other tune on the CD, you’d still know Castro’s got it, and it’s got to come out.

The entire recording’s sound is both spare and meaty, excellently produced and mixed, and makes this modern blues and blues-rock effort an incendiary accomplishment.

The CD’s artwork by F&B Graphics is superb, from the muted color snap of the band to the cover image of an eerie landscape on a lost highway.

The texture and tone of Castro’s assured vocals, along with his compelling presence on lead guitar, is something that just might jump start his band, after all these years, to the national stage. If it doesn’t, that’s the blues nation’s loss, ‘cause this band is just aching to be heard.

Daniel Castro - Julie Friend — 2013
Check out: www.danielcastro.com/

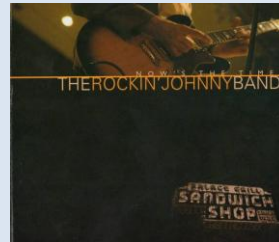
The Rockin’ Johnny Band, *Now’s the Time* and *Grim Reaper* by Joseph Jordan

These two vivid albums, recorded 2 years apart, display the mighty blues and soul chops of Chicago’s (by way of South Carolina) very-popular Johnny Burgin, aka Rockin’ Johnny.

After playing music since the early ‘90s, and after a nearly 7-year hiatus from music, Rockin’ Johnny hit the comeback blues trail in 2009, and has been blistering the Chicago scene ever since. The two LPs, one an indie and one from major blues label Delmark Records, present a good look and listen to an artist whose

tributes to others mark him as a student of the Chicago scene and a man whose loving tributes (over five recordings) to his musical fathers are clearly evident in most every groove.

His fealty to the many greats that inspired him are all over the 13-track *Now’s the Time*. The whole CD took an overnight session of only 6 hours to record, which is remarkable. Among the tunes covered are versions of titles written by Buddy Guy, Willie Dixon, Lowell Fulson, and Jimmy Dawkins and they butt-up to hard and creatively faithful versions of tunes by a host of somewhat lesser known, but no less worthy, artists, such as Luther Tucker and Willie James Lyons. (One cut, “Sweet Love,” was recorded live at the famed Chicago nightclub, B.L.U.E.S. on Halsted in 2000. Now how’s that for going back?) Burgin also displays his song-writing skills on the slow burning title track, “Now’s the Time,” as well as the delightful “Walking the Dog” groove of the instrumental “Hippie Dance.”



On *Grim Reaper*, Burgin contributes 4 of the album’s 15 tracks. It’s a better sounding album, but just as vital and commanding as its 2010 predecessor. Big D’s harmonica adds tremendously to the slow blues title track, as well as to “One and One Ain’t Two.”

Rockin’ Johnny’s guitar epitomizes the Westside and Southside Chicago sound. His guitar tone is a bit thin throughout, but in no way makes the tunes less than biting and crucial.

One reviewer remarked on Rockin’ Johnny’s “economy” of playing, and that is an astute observation. No rock-star posing here, nor is it at all necessary as his original and cover tunes and guitar chops are vital. His voice is just fine, and serves the songs well, but most people will come away raving about his guitar playing and not necessarily his vocal interpretations.

His slow blues, of which there are, thankfully, a few, are marvelously crafted as interpreted by Burgin—just gritty stuff.

One looks forward to more of this man and his cohorts. Now that he’s back, we ought to do our best to support and keep him around for a long time to come.

Now's The Time, 5105 Music — 2010
Grim Reaper, Delmark Records — 2012
 Check out: www.rockinjohnnyband.com

[PLEASE NOTE: Rockin' Johnny Burgin will be in Northern California with everywhere-man Aki Kumar in February, with gigs at The Pocket in Santa Cruz on February 14; the Poor House Bistro in San Jose on February 15, and the Torch Club in Sacramento on February 19. If you're in the area, don't miss him. He'll also be at Cadillac Zack's gigs in Long Beach and Tarzana the following weekend.]

Charlie Owen, *Worth the Wait* by Dorothy L. Hill



Charlie Owen has been a fixture on the San Francisco Bay Area music scene for a long time and, in the early '80s, he fronted the R&B-influenced band, The Dynatones, touring nationally and backing some of the finest national acts of

the day. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, Owen grew up in Washington, D.C., where he began his musical journey in school. Recently relocated to Maryland, Owen has now recorded a CD that was produced by Jim Pugh, longtime keyboard player for Robert Cray.

This CD consists of 15 old school R&B and soul-influenced covers, a fair mixture of obscure and familiar tunes. This is a vehicle for the smooth vocals of Charlie Owen and a good number of local musicians came along for the ride. The major support team consists of Owen on vocals and trumpet, Todd Swenson on guitar, Steve Ehrmann on bass, Jim Pugh on keyboards, Paul Revelli on drums, Rob Sudduth on tenor sax, Johnny Bamont on baritone sax, and Marvin McFadden on trumpet. Jon Cleary (acoustic piano) and Curtis Salgado (duet vocal) are special guests on one cut each. To mention a few of the other supporting players, Nancy Wright is on tenor sax and Christoffer "Kid" Andersen contributes on lead guitar and electric sitar.

Owen opens up with "I Sowed Love and Reaped a Heartache," slowly building to a boil with a satisfying funky beat and moving smoothly into "I Wouldn't Treat a Dog (the Way You Treated Me)." Owen's measured

vocal approach is captivating on "I Don't Know Why" (Willie Mitchell and Earl Randle). On the Little Milton tune, "So Mean to Me," Owen's vocals are appropriately earthy and Kid Andersen's lead guitar support stands out. Allen Toussaint's "On Your Way Down" is superbly done and is a highlight—Cleary's acoustic piano playing adds lush layers and the rhythm section is driven to a mighty high place with Nate Keezer on congas.

Curtis Salgado is featured on a vocal duet on the crisp "That's Where It's At." In a departure, Owen tackles "No Pride at All" (Jesse Winchester), a lovely ballad that is bound to captivate you, and Owen's wry sorrow is just the right touch. He follows with a funky "It Ain't the Same Thing" with the horns punching the melody, and delivers a rumbling "Cheaper to Keep Her." On "Hijacking Love," Owen pulls off a full-on funky attack that would make Johnnie Taylor proud. The Lloyd Price tune "Just Because" features Nancy Wright on tenor saxophone with Owen playing trumpet and vocalizing in a nicely done effort. The concluding cut is a lovely ballad, "Soft Place to Fall," and Owen handles the country-influenced ache-filled vocals with conviction.

Don't wait any longer - check out this Charlie Owen CD and I think you will find a whole lot to like!

Charlie Owen — 2013
 Check out: www.cdbaby.com/cd/charlieowen

Sugaray Rayford, *Dangerous* by Dorothy L. Hill



Texas native Caron "Sugaray" Rayford is one of those rare performers who has "it." I first became a fan when he appeared at Biscuits and Blues in San Francisco with the band Aunt Kizzy's Boyz, and have made it a point to catch his shows whenever he comes

to town. Randy Chortkoff, head honcho at Delta Groove Music, wisely gave Sugaray that lucky break that he so richly deserved by adding him to the Mannish Boys project. Sugaray was featured on their CD, *Double Dynamite*, which won a Blues Music Award for Traditional Blues Album of the Year in May 2013.

Everything about this CD is immense—14 tracks and a supporting cast of 15 musicians in addition to Sugaray!

Here's the all-star cast supporting Sugaray in alpha order: Chris "Kid" Andersen, Jimi Bott, Willie J. Campbell, Randy Chortkoff, Ron Dziubla, Anthony Geraci, Franck Goldwasser, Fred Kaplan, Gino Matteo, Sugar Ray Norcia, Mark Pender, Bill Stuve, Big Pete van der Pluijm, Monster Mike Welch, and Kim Wilson.

The first cut, "Country Boy," is a Chicago-influenced original written by Sugar Ray Norcia, who tears loose with an explosive harmonica solo that enhances the down-to-earth lyrics and Sugaray's vocal interpretation. This duo continues with a fun excursion on the other tune composed by Sugar Ray Norcia, "Two Times Sugar," trading off on the vocals..."two times sugar, two times better than one..." featuring Monster Mike Welch on guitar.

On the Chortkoff composition "I'm Dangerous," Sugaray exhibits controlled vocal power with great result that lifts the rather assertive staccato melody. The added touches of Anthony Geraci's piano flourishes and Sugar Ray Norcia's expressive harmonica support provide notable results.

Sugaray co-wrote three of the tunes on the CD with Ralph Carter, including "Stuck for a Buck," "I Might Do Something Crazy," and the standout tune "Need a Little More Time." The latter is a fantastic excursion with Franck Goldwasser accompanying on National steel guitar, Kid Andersen on rhythm guitar, and Randy Chortkoff lending some harmonica. This is my favorite track; it's the downhome country hill-styled blues that I love and Sugaray's vocal take on it is perfectly inflected.

On Pee Wee Crayton's "When It Rains It Pours," the slow jazzy-blues tempo gives Sugaray the opportunity to show his command of understated emotional power. Fred Kaplan on piano and Franck Goldwasser on guitar layer the tune with a lush background. Chortkoff's original tune "Goin' Back to Texas" is a perfect vehicle for Sugaray to wax nostalgic about his home state; Kim Wilson is featured on harmonica, Goldwasser on slide guitar, and Welch on rhythm guitar. "In the Dark" (Junior Parker/Don Robey) is an uptown blues that swings like crazy thanks to Andersen on lead guitar, Goldwasser on rhythm guitar, Chortkoff on harmonica, and Sugaray's jaunty vocals. It also features Fred Kaplan on piano and a horn introduction with Ron Dziubla on tenor and baritone saxophones and Mark Pender on trumpet. "Surrendered" is a slow burner with Sugaray begging with soaring, gospel-tinged vocals and Kim Wilson's stupendous harmonica solo. The final cut is a Son House tune titled "Preaching Blues" and the jump melody lends itself to Goldwasser's gripping slide

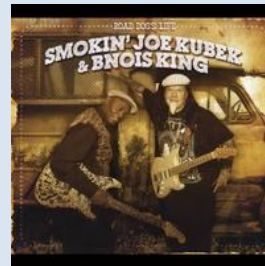
guitar with preacher man Sugaray testifying, walkin', and talkin' the blues.

Finally, the blues world has an opportunity to experience the vital raw emotion of Sugaray Rayford. Most articles point out his massive frame, standing all of 6 feet, 5 inches tall, but I would add that his talent matches that and more! This CD is a compelling representation and I predict that there will be much more to come from Sugaray. Meantime, you need to get yourself a copy of this CD and see how good real down deep blues can be...highly recommend this one!

Delta Groove Music — 2013

Check out: www.deltagroovemusic.com and www.sugarayblues.com

Smokin' Joe Kubek & Bnois King, *Road Dog's Life* by Dorothy L. Hill



The prolific twosome, Smokin' Joe Kubek (guitar) and Bnois King (vocals/guitar) have another hit—this is their 15th recording together since hooking up in 1989. Over the years, I have had the pleasure of reviewing many of their CDs (starting with Rounder Records) and seeing them live on numerous occasions and the quality of their work has never wavered. They have honed their brand and it is a uniquely distinctive sound—call it Texas blues, but that it is just the starting point and they notch it up on this compilation of 12 songs, including 10 originals, and unexpectedly paying homage to the Rolling Stones and the Beatles with the 2 cover tunes. This is their second offering on Delta Groove Music and again they have drawn on the vast resources of that label for support—Willie J. Campbell on bass, Jimi Bott on drums, and Randy Chortkoff on harmonica and vocals. Stepping up to the plate as guests are Kim Wilson (Fabulous Thunderbirds front man), Chris "Kid" Andersen on guitar on one cut, and Kansas City bassist Patrick Recob.

The first cut, about a gambling man, "Big Money Sonny," crackles with an infectious beat and King's lyrics relate the story about a character in the "sporting life." Drummer Jimi Bott drives "Come On In" with an infectious staccato beat and King's vocal timing is on point as he tries to coax an ex-lover to stay. "Nobody But You" is a harp-driven shuffle that cooks like crazy

with an exuberant tempo and a delightful trio vocal tradeoff with King, Wilson, and Chortkoff.

The title track "Road Dog's Life" (penned by Phyllis Kubek, Joe's wife) has a rockish punch with inventive guitar styling. "K9 Blues" is one of the CD's highlights featuring Wilson on harmonica and King's nuanced vocals. "That Look On Your Face" has an intricate polyrhythmic underpinning and is sensitively augmented by Kid Andersen's guitar rendering. Kubek gets incendiary with a guitar-stoked exercise on the deep shuffle of "Face To Face." Covering the George Harrison tune "Don't Bother Me," King's sturdy sense of phrasing pushes the lyrics with stunning virtuosity and Kubek's irresistible groove on guitar is understated and magnificent. The other cover tune, "Play With Fire" (Rolling Stones), is an interesting interpretation and demonstrates the ability of this duo to deconstruct a tune of another genre and make it their own. "I Ain't Greasin'" is a catchy fun tune that should have the most hardened purist shakin' it with Wilson rocking it on harmonica and contributing vocals.

"Talkin' 'Bout Bad Luck" is a winner and King's raw vocals channel a combination of Muddy and John Lee Hooker on a churning shuffle that features Kubek on slide guitar—definitely a highlight and my favorite.

Kubek and King raise the bar when it comes to accessible blues with just the right amount of rock whether in live performances or on their many recordings—you can't find this kind of quality on every corner—and they hit the mark once again.

Delta Groove Music — 2013

Check out: www.deltagroovemusic.com and www.smokinjoekubek.com

[PLEASE NOTE: Smokin' Joe and Bnois will be performing at Biscuits and Blues in SF on March 13, 2014.]

Kara Grainger, *Shiver & Sigh* by Dorothy L. Hill

Australian born Kara Grainger moved to Los Angeles in 2008 after gaining recognition in her home country performing with a blues band, Papa Lips, with her brother, Mitch Grainger (who also plays harmonica on this CD). Her work on slide guitar places her in a rarified position in blues and that, along with her understated vocal style, has resulted in comparison



with Bonnie Raitt. This recording certainly proves she has the chops to deserve that stature.

This is her third solo recording and although it features a large cast of the finest musicians, it still retains an intimate rootsy

feel. In addition to brother Mitch, other musicians include Hutch Hutchinson on bass, Mike Finnigan on keyboards, James Gadson and Jimi Bott on drums, Kirk Fletcher and Josh Sklair on rhythm guitars, Lenny Castro on percussion, and Paulie Cerra on saxophone and horn arrangements, Paul Litteral on trumpet, and George Stanford on trombone (together, the Pacific Coast Horns).

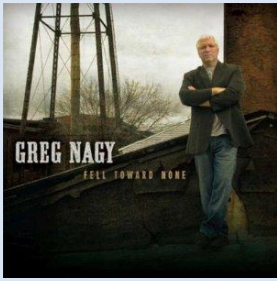
The opening track is an original, "Little Pack of Lies," with an intoxicating beat and sassy warning: "I ain't your little girl...." The title cut is a little slick and will no doubt have a wider audience appeal to pop fans. Grainger's soulful vocals on her original "Lost in You" shine with wistful longing and the R&B influenced melody is quite effective. The outstanding track "Shut Down" features Grainger's floating vocals on another original and an alluring exercise on guitar. Blues validation comes on the delivery of yet another original, "I'm Not Ready," and the sparkling blues delivery is just lovely with Grainger using lightness and agility in her vocals. Another gem is the upbeat "No Way You Can Hurt Me Now" featuring outstanding keyboard work by Mike Finnigan. "C'mon in My Kitchen" alone is worth getting this CD—Grainger's slide guitar treatment of this Robert Johnson tune is extraordinary and her brother's harmonica solo punctuates the haunting melody. I kept playing this one over and over; her nuanced vocals are perfection in their sparseness. The last track is a blues lover's delight also: "Overdue for the Blues" has a gorgeously dreamy acoustic guitar treatment and emotionally earnest vocals.

Frankly, I was surprised by how much I liked this CD; the 11 tracks all pleased my taste for different reasons. There is much to like here and Kara Grainger should be on your "check it out" list.

Eclecto Groove Records — 2013

Check out: www.eclectogroove.com and www.karagrainger.com

Greg Nagy, *Fell Toward None* by Dorothy L. Hill



Flint, Michigan, would appear to be an unlikely breeding ground for a blues musician, but Greg Nagy caught the bug via the backdoor of the region's Motown influence. Nagy joined the popular and successful soul group Root

Doctor in 2004 and, after leaving the band a few years later, received critical acclaim and a Blues Music Award nomination for Best New Artist Debut in 2009 for his album *Walk That Fine Thin Line*.

For this venture, Nagy enlisted the services of former Root Doctor bandmate Jim Alfredson (now with Janiva Magness). Not only does Alfredson elevate the music with his dynamic keyboard playing, but he also composed two tunes and co-wrote three with Nagy. Also having a hand in some of the original compositions are other band members: Jim Shaneberger (bass) and Kevin Depree (drums, percussion). The Motor City Horns are featured on a few cuts (Keith Kaminski on saxophones, Mark Byerly and Bob Jensen on trumpets, and John Rutherford on trombone). The first track is the only one of 11 that's not an original, an obscure choice, but notable as a Freddie King cover tune.

Nagy's eclectic selections cover a wide berth. He delivers a richly laden vocal take on the opener "Pack It Up" and follows with a heavy rock treatment on "Wishing Well"—lots of wah-wah effects and heavy percussion. "I'll Know I'm Ready" is an exquisite tune with a shifting melody exploring loss and Nagy's vocals are crisply soulful and well complemented by Alfredson's sweet keyboard technique. One of my favorites is "Still Means The World To Me;" the jaunty melody really highlights Nagy's superb vocal and guitar skills. The two groovy offerings, "Facebook Mama" and "Here Comes My Baby," are fun excursions and lighten the mood. The title tune, "Fell Toward None," is an extraordinary Nagy composition; it's one of those tunes that leaves you wanting more when it's finished.

This concoction of tunes is substantial and full of emotions and contrasts. Here's looking forward to hearing Nagy's next recording--this one raises the bar

and places this guy at the top of the heap; his vocals jump out at you and his guitar delivery is blistering at times and tasteful all the time.

Greg Nagy/Big O Records — 2011

Check out: www.gregnagy.com,
www.big-o-records.com, and www.vizztone.com

[PLEASE NOTE: In June, Greg Nagy will be back in San Francisco (Biscuits and Blues on June 14) and in Sacramento (June 13 at the Torch Club).]

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ANNE HARRIS: MUSICAL DIAMOND

Interview by Julie Jenkins, Photo by Mike Lovato

Anne Harris was born and raised in Yellow Springs, a small college town in southwestern Ohio, in a house full of music.



“My parents love music and my Dad even played violin for a short time as a boy. When I was growing up, he always prided himself on having a really good stereo system complete with a Heathkit tuner he put together himself. He had a big vinyl collection that was pretty eclectic. He loved jazz, classical, pop, gospel, opera, and country, among

other things, and my mother loved musical theater. So they would swing from Mahalia Jackson to "Camelot" to Tchaikovsky to Ray Charles all in an afternoon.

When she was all of 3 years old, her mother took her to see *Fiddler on the Roof*, and it was at that young age that she became enchanted with the violin.

“In the opening sequence, Isaac Stern is shown in silhouette on a rooftop playing violin and she said I just pointed to the screen and told her, ‘That's what I want to do.’ I kept bugging her about it until she realized I was serious and I began formal studies with a teacher around age 8. I studied classical all the way up to college and sat first chair in the orchestra and played in a trio. I remember that, early on, one of my violin student teachers gave me my own vinyl copy of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* because I had just begun working on one of the movements. It was one of the first records I ever owned and I remember playing it over and over and getting lost in its journey. And then, quite a few years later in middle school, I was scouring my Dad's collection for something I hadn't listened to and I found a copy of Stevie Wonder's *Innervision*. That completely rocked my universe to the core and from that point forth I began to hear pop music totally differently. I just about wore the grooves off that one.”

From that point on, she began exploring music and inviting a bit of anything that moved her into her life.

“My musical tastes have always been pretty broad and through the years, they just continue to expand. I listen

to a wide range of artists. As far as blues goes, John Lee Hooker, R.L. Burnside, Buddy Guy, Mavis Staples, Ruthie Foster, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, Corey Harris, and Markus James are a few favorites. Other artists I love are Gary Clark Jr., Cassandra Wilson, Meshell N'Degeocello, Prince, Tinariwen, and TV on the Radio.”

Her main influences, however, are not famous musicians. “My heroes, I would have to say, are my parents. Looking at the time in history in which they grew up and the challenges they faced, is very humbling to me. And they have never stopped their quest for knowledge and expansion. They are two of the most well read, intelligent, compassionate, and articulate people I know.” Family is sacred to her and time spent with them is paramount in her life when she is not performing. “My spare time belongs to my daughter and husband. My family is my true gift and blessing and I wouldn't be able to do what I do without their support and grounding.”

The beauty of Anne's ability to play the violin while dancing as gracefully as a swan and as powerfully as a shaman, moved me to joyful tears. Bearing witness to her performance left me completely awestruck and mesmerized. At times, she moves with a gentle ease, and then with sudden and wild abandon. Surely, it follows suit that she has had extensive training, but it appears to just spring naturally from her solar plexus. To watch her perform is hypnotizing. It was pretty much all I could talk about for several days.

“I love dance and the language of body movement. I had an ear on my radio and my older sister's record collection. I began soaking in the funk, pop, rock, and dance music, especially R&B and funk. That was where I could feel the pulse of my heart because rhythm impacted me on a cellular level and I could express this through dance. I studied ballet, modern jazz, and African dance. And though I never approached it with the mindset of doing it professionally, it's always been an important emotional expression for me. I feel I have the soul of a dancer, and when I'm dancing, I tap into a space of great joy.”

I asked Anne to leave us with one final thought and, of course, it was as alluring and boundless as the creativity within Anne herself.

“The beautiful thing about music is it is infinite in all ways, so the journey of discovery is limitless.”



THE GOLDEN GATE BLUES SOCIETY

www.tggbs.org

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