



GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

HOWELLDEVINE: HEADING TO MEMPHIS! TGGBS INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE WINNERS

The finals were held at Biscuits & Blues in San Francisco on October 28, 2012. Many thanks to the other IBC preliminary round winners who participated: Pinkie Rideau and Blind Resistance, Nancy Wenstrom and Blues Kitchen, and the Feral Moon Band! Congratulations to HowellDevine and good luck in Memphis! Check them out at www.howelldevine.com.



HowellDevine (Josh Howell on guitar and harp, Pete Devine on drums and rubboard, and Joe Kyle Jr. on bass) by Tina Abbaszadeh



HowellDevine (Josh Howell, Pete Devine, and Joe Kyle Jr.)
by Bruce Fram



After the win: TGGBS President Dorothy L. Hill and Pete
Devine by Tina Abbaszadeh

FROM THE EDITOR

Deb Lubin



Happy New Year Blues fans! I whole-heartedly apologize to TGGBS members and, most of all, to the contributors to this issue of *Golden Gate Grooves*, for the lateness of this issue. Given the holidays, my birthday, and work commitments, it was difficult to find the time needed to put together a quality publication. Hopefully, you'll find that this issue is worth the wait! 🎵

First and foremost, I'd like to congratulate **HowellDevine** on their stellar win at The Golden Gate Blues Society's final International Blues Challenge event for 2012! The band will soon be heading to Memphis to compete with winning bands from blues society IBC events held around the world! This is our third year sending bands to compete in Memphis, and we are very proud of the previous winners: Tip of the Top in 2011, which made it to the semifinal round in Memphis, and Paula Harris and Blu Gruv, which came in THIRD overall out of 110 bands last year. Paula has since been nominated for a coveted Blues Music Award for Best New Artist Debut with her new CD, *Turning on the Naughty!* (Congratulations, Paula, and good luck!) We all feel that HowellDevine is a worthy successor to represent TGGBS in 2013! We're holding a fund raiser this Sunday, January 13, to send the band to Memphis. Please see the flyer for that event on the facing page and join us at Club Fox this Sunday to see what all the fuss is about and help make their trip a reality! 🎵

As promised, in this issue, **Johnny Ace** follows up with another interview with **Tommy Castro** several months after the start of his new band, **The Painkillers**. Check it out to see how Tommy's been doing with his new crew. 🎵

Also, in a continuing feature on the local blues clubs that enrich our lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, **Joe Lempkowski** focuses on **The Poor House Bistro** in San Jose. The Poor House is a wonderful outdoor venue with a covered roof that has become one of my personal favorites. After you read Joe's article and see the related photos, please visit the Poor House Bistro often and support owner **Jay Meduri**, as well as the great bands that Jay books. And the food is good too! Okay, I'll stop now and let Joe fill you in. 🎵

Also in this issue, we present a book review and eight CD reviews. **Joseph Jordan** reviews **Buddy Guy's** new book, *When I Left Home*. This is our first book review! **Tom Hyslop** reviews two new CDs by **John Németh**, *Blues Live* and *Soul Live*, in addition to new CDs by **John Primer**, *Blues on Solid Ground*, and **Deanna Bogart**, *Pianoland*. All three of these artists have been nominated for 2013 Blues Music Awards! **Jeana Baron** reviews the new **Blues Broads** CD/DVD combination of the same name, and **Dorothy L. Hill** reviews CDs by **Zac Harmon**, *Music Is Medicine*; **Smokin' Joe Kubek and Bnois King**, *Close to the Bone*; and **Cassie Taylor**, *Blue*. Hope you enjoy the reviews and are moved to purchase a CD or two and the book!

Finally, **Steve Cagle** reviews the inaugural **Big Easy Music Festival** sponsored by The Poor House Bistro in September 2012, and **Bob Cosman** shares his photos from that event. Maybe you can make it out to the second annual fest this year! 🎵

In the last issue of *Golden Gate Grooves*, blues journalist **Julie Jenkins** contributed an article on local Blues legend **Jimmy McCracklin**, who, sadly, passed away on December 20, 2012. R.I.P. to a legend! 🎵

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

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The Golden Gate Blues Society

Road to Memphis Revue



www.tggbs.org

Sunday
Jan. 13,
2013

6pm-10pm



2209

Broadway

Redwood
City

650-fox-7770

Chris Cain

Terry Hanck

Tip of the Top

Wendy DeWitt

Paula Harris

Howell Devine*

with special guest

appearance by

Tommy Castro



\$20

tggbs.org

\$25

at door

* Proceeds from this fundraiser will go directly toward airfare and hotel costs for our winning SF Bay Area band. This band was selected to represent TGGBS in The Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge in Memphis, January 29—February 2, 2013.

TOMMY CASTRO TALKS ABOUT HIS NEW BAND AND THE FUTURE

Part 2 of the Interview by Johnny Ace

Hello to all blues lovers out there in the Bay Area and all over this wonderful planet. About a year ago, Tommy Castro and I spoke about his musical past for *Golden Gate Grooves*. On Wednesday, October 3, 2012, Tommy and I met again at Biscuits & Blues in the heart of downtown San Francisco, where his old band mate, tenor saxman Keith Crossan, who is now on his own, runs the Wednesday night jam.



Photo courtesy of Tommy Castro from the Biscuits jam

I arrived about 10:30 p.m., while Keith's fine band was on a break. Keith had a special guest artist from Brazil, guitarist Big Joe Manfra, plus Tommy Castro and yours truly, and we had a very fine and tasty jam that (unfortunately) ended at about 11 p.m. To me, that's when it should get started. Or more like 2 or 3 a.m.; I guess those days ended long ago. Too bad!

After sayin' our goodbyes to all, Tommy and I, with my trusty little portable, old-school, battery-powered cassette player, slowly strolled over to a local diner. Tommy had eggs with hash browns and toast that he didn't eat. I guess he's watchin' his waistline. I had a pretty juicy cheeseburger and fries. When the grease was very pleasantly devoured, I let Tommy speak about his present and future.

Now you can very calmly and comfortably sit back and relax and READ what my ol' pal and blues brother had to say. Enjoy and stay on with the blues and try to get out and hear LIVE blues. THANKS!

ACE: *Tommy, the last time we spoke, you mainly rapped about your past. How about now you talk about your present happenings and your future.*

TC: Alright. My old bass player Randy McDonald came back to the band in February [2012]. He never really wanted to stop playin', but he took a break for a while for personal reasons. When the time came to start playing, it dawned on him that he might want to check with me first. As it turned out, Scot Sutherland, my bass player at the time, lives in Des Moines, Iowa, with his family. Now he's a great player and person, but he couldn't move out here and I really needed someone who lived out here in the Bay Area. So the timing was good for Randy to come back. I took it as a sign. This is what needs to happen.

ACE: *Plus you and Randy are like brothers.*

TC: Well, yeah. I wanted to change my sound. I would go see bands like Taj Mahal or Tab Benoit playing with a trio and I saw that a lot of really good music can be played with a smaller group. Some of the cooler stuff that I've been listening to didn't involve horns and it seems that I needed to make a change.

ACE: *And with the bad economy, a smaller group on the road is more economical. Plus you can have more space in the music. You can allow more space with not as much sound. Sometimes less is more.*

TC: Yeah. So we got a thing now called Tommy Castro and The Painkillers. It's me and Randy and a couple of young guys, Byron Cage on drums and James Pace on keyboards. I've done a lot of looking around and really lucked out. I found a couple of really cool members for the band. Everybody works hard and is happy to be there. It's a lot of fun. I feel a lot like when I started out. Except when I look in the mirror (laughing), that's different. I wake up in the morning and I feel a little different. (Still laughing) But in my mind and in the music, gettin' on stage and playin', it feels a lot like havin' that kind of fun.

ACE: *(laughing) Come on Tommy, as much fun as the old days? You can't B.S. me!*

TC: (laughing) Well, I guess that was what it was then and, yeah, we'll never see those times again. But for now, this is way cool! And it's a different kind of fun! MERCY!

ACE: *O.K. I can dig it.*



TC: We got a new release now out on a 45 record. We have a few new songs on it. It's on that really cool green clear vinyl. There's a reason for that. One of the songs is called "Greedy." It's a song about corporate greed and how I think greed is the problem. But I won't get into that now.

Just then a very down and out homeless person with not the best body odor in the world comes in the empty diner and asks us for a handout. We both give the guy a buck as the waitress asks him to leave.

TC: It's coming out on Alligator Records. It comes with a download code for those people who like to listen to music on the computer or their ipod or iphone or any kind of mp3 player. However when you listen to music digitally, you can download the song either on the Internet or you can buy the 45 from me at a show and it will come with that code so you'll get both!

ACE: *Pretty smart! And with the new times, and stickin' to the past...VINYL!!*

TC: Yeah, you'll have it digitally, but you'll be able to buy something as cool as a 45. I'm just very excited about this. You know I like old records, you like old records. Everybody really grooves when you get a chance to listen to vinyl. Especially the cool old stuff; so I say, why not the new stuff?

ACE: *Then do you see the CD business goin' out? As the whole situation with blues?*

TC: It's just a format. For years, there were records. Shellac 78s, vinyl 45s, and vinyl LPs. Then 8 track tapes and cassettes. Then CDs came out and that seemed to be the magic format for a long time. They're easy to make and they're compact. You get a lot of music on a small disk. That worked out for a while. But more and more people aren't interested in CDs. Cause you don't really have to bother with it. Now, it can go right through the Internet to your player. You can take your record collection and load it right onto a CD and your computer. You can have it in your house, or carry it around in your pocket. So there's a lot less use for actually listening to a CD being played on some kind of player.

But vinyl is cool. People who are younger and never even knew what a vinyl record was are now buyin' vinyl. And they're going "wow," this is the coolest sound! It sounds so great! We love it. So you got people like us, our age, who still love vinyl and there's a new crowd of people who love vinyl. And I think it's great and it's a thing of the future. I don't know how long it's gonna last,

this vinyl buzz, but I always wanted to put out a 45. I think it's cool.

So the answer to your question about CDs is yes, they are becoming obsolete. Everybody knows that.

ACE: *Everybody? You said EVERYBODY!!! My mother doesn't know this. In fact, she doesn't even know what a CD is! The old newspaper guy down on Columbus Avenue, he doesn't know this. Ok, I'm just kiddin'. So, are you gonna make a new CD in the future?*

TC: (laughing) Oh you're a real riot, Ace! Alligator does want a full length album, so it'll probably be on CD and vinyl.

ACE: *So before this year ends, what are your plans musically? What are you gonna be doin'?*

TC: Blues cruse comin' up this month [October 2012]. We got a gig in Poland, so we're gonna fly to Denver and hook up with our funky old bus. It's in Boulder, Colorado, so we don't have to bring it all the way back to California and then go back east again. We have really good mechanics in Boulder. And they're a bit cheaper there. Well, everything is more expensive in the Bay Area. Then we drive out to the East Coast, play some gigs on the way. And fly to a gig in France and in Poland. Come back all the way home and then go out to Puerto Rico and go on the blues cruise. We're on the cruise for a week, then New Jersey, where our bus will be parked waiting for us, and we'll get out in that thing for a month playin' all kind of gigs all over the USA. Johnny, I'm EXHAUSTED thinkin' about it! (laughing)

ACE: *DAMN! Me too! MERCY! I don't envy you! I hope you bring a lot of vitamins! (laughing) Then you'll be back here for The Nitro Christmas gig at The Saloon and New Year's Eve?*

TC: Yeah. The whole month of December will be kind of slow. I'll spend time with the kids, the family. Get together with friends. Our blues brother Walter [drummer, Walter Shufflesworth] left for Florida; he's NOT in the neighborhood anymore, so we're gonna have to find a new place to have a Christmas Party with friends, but that shouldn't be too hard to figure out.

ACE: *What do ya' mean? No one can replace Walter! Plus ALL his records BLASTING! It really hurts me that he's gone. Plus ALL that GREAT food! I don't know Tommy. We can't go out to Florida!*

TC: Well you're right, but we'll figure something out. Don't worry. Then the Christmas gig at The Saloon in Johnny Nitro's memory. We'll ALL get together and RIDE



with all of our friends. That's basically a given funky good time! Of course, no one can EVER replace Nitro and all the great fun that we used to have doin' those Christmas shows at The Saloon. Damn, we all miss him so! Then



New Year's, we have a place to play at The Mystic Theater. There you go! Then in January, we'll do a fund raiser for The Golden Gate Blues Society. My friend Frank DeRose and those guys are involved in that. It'll be a lot of fun. That's about as far ahead as I can think! (laughing)

Maybe recording more for the album we want to have released in the spring.

ACE: Well, you still love playin'?

TC: I do. I really enjoyed tonight sittin' in with Keith and his band. That was fun. Big Joe Manfra all the way from Brazil. And you. Well, I don't have to say nothin' there. It just all comes back. I tried out a new guitar that I haven't had a chance to play with live. I was really surprised that it sounded so good. As soon as I felt the notes comin' out, man. You know how happy it makes you when you

got a good sound. The band is RIDIN'. You can play with the right feel. I love to play! Especially when all those things are lined up perfectly.

ACE: Oh yeah! Is there anything that you'd like to say before we PACK UP?

TC: Johnny, it's always good to see you and I trust you with my words. And
RRRRIIIIIIIIIIIIIDDDDDDDDDDEEEEEEEEE!!!!

ACE: I'll ALWAYS HAVE to do my best! So, PACK UP! Now after all that hard work, how about a couple of burgers for the road? Or maybe a nice fat, greasy slice of pizza pie?

TC: No way!! I think those days are gone. As it is, I'm gonna have to ride off this meal tomorrow on my bicycle. Johnny take care of yourself and I'll see you in December. RIDE!!!

ACE: You too!!!!!! And safe travelin'! Always wail it out with all your heart 'n' soul! Now, PACK UP!!!!

Johnny Ace can be reached through Facebook.

*Tommy Castro can be reached through his website:
www.tommycastle.com*

Photo of Tommy Castro and The Painkillers on this page by Dana Curley.

Shown in the photo on page 4: Tommy Castro, Ronnie Smith, and Johnny Ace.

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BOOK REVIEW

Buddy Guy with David Ritz *When I Left Home — My Story*

Reviewed by Joseph Jordan



Oh, the stories he can tell.

Other than B.B. King, there is no one in the blues world who is better known or more respected than Louisiana-to-Chicago's Buddy Guy.

Since the mid-'50s, he's blazed a fundamental trail of vital rhythm and lead guitar playing and amazingly raw and steady vocals to pile up one of the most impressive careers in the history of mid-

period and contemporary blues.

Now 76 (born in July '36) and in the wonderful twilight of his career, but with all of his personal and professional faculties, all of them, intact, this club owner (Legends), recording artist, (Silvertone and Jive), and pioneering Chicago Blues player, George "Buddy" Guy has cowritten a biography that is, all clichés aside, a must read for any modern blues fan.

Released in May 2012, Buddy's *When I Left Home* is a masterpiece of storytelling and a primer on the history of pre-modern and modern Chicago blues. Co-authored with stellar biographer David Ritz (Ray Charles, Etta James, Marvin Gaye, Bettye LaVette, and others), Guy tackles his extraordinary life and times with the sharp-edged, cutting style that is also a trademark of his innovative playing.

You name it, most of the legends of the post-war genre are within the pages of this book by way of informative quips, lengthy professional endeavors, and frequently hilarious life situations: B.B. King, Muddy (of course), Junior Wells (with whom Guy teamed for more than 20 years), Little Walter, Lonnie Johnson, Gatemouth Brown, John Lee Hooker, his mentor Willie Dixon, Ike Turner, and Guy's biggest influence, Guitar Slim, along with a most

generous host of others, including contemporary players, such as the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and the late Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Buddy covers his early life, his sexual dalliances, his marriages, his kids and grandkids, and much more. He was the middle child of five children, and lived with his share-cropping family in Louisiana's deep south, and he picked cotton alongside them when he was 8 years old. Guy grew up in a house with no electricity and no running water. He went on to become a dedicated house guitarist at the legendary Chess Records in Chicago and later was a club owner of note in that same town. He played all the clubs: Theresa's, The Checkerboard Lounge, Silvio's, the F&J and many others, just to get his music over.

Guy's and Ritz's writing is fluid and clean, without embellishment or hyperbole. Then again, there is no need to embellish, as Buddy Guy has lived this story. It's that rare gem of a page-turner biography and highly informative tome.

The book includes 16 marvelous pages of black and white photographs (showcasing everything from the now 76-year old Guy's beloved father to Buddy's publicity photos) and a compendium of all things Guy ("the blues chase the blues away" and "My health is good, my fingers still work, and my voice has held out. My fans haven't left me. They accept what I offer and give back plenty love. What else can a man want?")

Guy received the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors in December 2012.

Blues fans will eat this book up, if they give it even a glance. From Guy's shit-eatin' grin on the front cover to the Keith Richards' quote on the back flap, and all of the 280 pages in between, Buddy Guy's *When I Left Home* is a God-send.

De Capo Press, 2012

THE POOR HOUSE BISTRO: SAN JOSE'S BLUES MECCA

by Joe Lempkowski

It was a rare autumn evening in the Bay Area in the middle of October. The weather was perfect. The temperature was a balmy 80 degrees at 7 pm. The wind was blowing through the palm trees in front of the Poor House Bistro. Steve Freund was on the bandstand with his trio. Joining him was one of the founding members of Roomful of Blues, Doug James, on saxophone. It was another fabulous evening of music at the Poor House Bistro.



The Poor House Bistro at 91 South Autumn Street in San Jose, California, is on the list of National Historic Resources. Built in 1905, it is a part of San Jose's rich historical and architectural legacy.

Prior to being purchased by the Meduri family in the late 1940s, it

was a sorority house on 11th Street near San Jose State University. After its purchase by the Meduri family, a new foundation was laid and the building was moved to its current location. The family lived there from the 1940s to the 1960s. It was rented out during most of the 1970s and 1980s.

During the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, the building's current owner, Jay Meduri, was playing in blues bands. In 1988, Jay landed a job with American Airlines. His love for music and his new job allowed him to travel to locations with rich musical heritage, such as Memphis, Mississippi, and New Orleans. He immersed himself in the music, the food, and the culture.

He started going to New Orleans several times a year. He coordinated his visits to coincide with musical events, such as the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. It was then that he fell in love with the New Orleans culture, the music, the funkiness of the town, the food, and the people. Less than a week after he returned, he found himself missing New Orleans.

In the meantime, he was playing in bands and working his way through college at San Jose State University. Eventually, he got married. He spent less and less time working as a musician and focused more time on completing his college education.

Around that time, he changed his major from Business Management to Hospitality Management. He started learning about the restaurant business. He did some internships in various roles at some local businesses, including Roman's Deli and the Rock Bottom Brewery. He went on to work at Armadillo Willy's, starting in the kitchen and eventually managing several locations.

In 1993, Jay Meduri moved in and started the rehab process at 91 South Autumn. During his 7-year residence at the location, he had New Orleans-themed parties in the driveway and side yard featuring music provided by many of his musician friends, such as Sid Morris.

From 1993 to 2000, he planned to move into the restaurant business and combine that knowledge with his love of the music business.

During his trips to New Orleans, Jay befriended a lot of restaurant owners who helped him with recipes. Other recipes he had to recreate. Jay describes the assistance he received: "One, in particular was Mother's Restaurant in the business district. Joe Balderas is the manager there and we would talk on the phone and I would say, 'Hey Joe, I'm gonna make these Po' Boys like you do there.'" And he said, 'well, yeah, sure, but don't use the same name; if you have questions, let me know?' With some of the recipes, I had to emulate my favorite foods, like barbecued shrimp. Pascal's Manale is the creator of barbecued shrimp in New Orleans. I didn't use their same recipe and I kind of created it similar to that, but I added a little bit more spice to it."

Regarding his decision to have music and musical entertainment, he felt it was a requirement. He said, "I feel that, to have a New Orleans restaurant, the true vibe, the whole feel, you've got to have music and food. If it's not live music, you have music going on and some food. I've got to be honest with you. I think it makes the food taste better. There is a lot about senses, your eyes, your ears, your nose, and your taste, all that stuff comes together. If you come in here and I've got rap music playing, I'm sure your dining experience would be a lot different. I always felt that I'm never going to serve bad

food and I'm never going to serve bad music. That's why I've tried to maintain a certain level of quality."

He had a plan, but he didn't have a location. He said, "I was looking out the window and I looked at different locations downtown and I just saw some people walking to the train station and the HP Pavilion. I realized that this is the spot. I'm going to turn my house into a restaurant, thinking that I'm going to get this done in a year."

That was 2000.

Jay had a vision. He knew how he wanted the restaurant to look, but he didn't know how to accomplish it. It was an onerous undertaking. City bureaucracy placed a lot of hurdles in front of him. He had the city Historical Society telling him that he couldn't make changes to the exterior of the building, e.g., replacing a historical piece of the exterior, such as the front door, while the Fire Department was telling him to change the door to a more modern crash bar door. He had to get both parties together to reach a compromise. Conflicts like this took time and their resolution required precious financial resources.

Jay said, "It took me 5 years to do this. It took a lot of money. It was a lot of pressure. Everybody that said they were going to help going in on it backed out because of the economy at the time and left me hanging. I was on a train, but I didn't know where I was going. I couldn't get off it. There was already money into it. There was already stuff working on the house. I couldn't go anywhere. So I kept moving forward and trying to finish it. Eventually, we opened up in May 2005."

Gary Smith played the Grand Opening. Gary describes his experiences of the opening weekend and the early



days of the Poor House Bistro: "The place itself has a cool vibe. In the early days, Jay would do a set with us. He'd break out the Ray, Snooks Eaglin, Smiley Lewis, all that New Orleans shit that was Jay and the Po' Boys."

The first several months were very challenging. The situation was intensified when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Jay recounts, "It was tough; I opened in May 2005 and Katrina hit in August down in New Orleans. So,

I'm just getting going, all my friends and everyone down there in New Orleans, my product, my bread I was getting from down there, everything just stopped, but my problems were small compared to theirs, but it just blew my mind. I was hurt in a lot of different ways."

"One bright side to it. A lot of New Orleanians who got displaced, they made their way out here and some of them came in here. There were nights where you would see a couple people come in and just sit at a table with a smile on their faces because they were at home. I'd go sit and talk to them and it made me feel really good to make someone displaced feel at home."

In 2007, the first of many partnerships was formed at the Poor House Bistro. On the last Sunday of every month, the Poor House Bistro hosts the School of the Blues student jam. Harmonica player and teacher David Barrett approached Jay about the possibility of running the student jam on the patio. In a recent discussion with David about the event, he described the traits that originally made the Poor House such an attractive location.

"I chose the Bistro due to its location, the fact that they allow all ages and that there was no stage. The jammers, band, and students were at same level, making it a less-intimidating experience. It creates a real nice atmosphere. The Bistro has been everything we have wanted it to be. Everyone there is very nice and easy to work with. It's everything a local venue should be. It's great to have the relationship. We both are serving a part of the blues market. We pump out the musicians, they give them the location to play!"

The environment is also popular with the School of the Blues students. Bass student Rich Fell describes what he likes about performing at the Poor House Bistro: "The



jam has given us the opportunity to take our individual skills learned from lessons and practice to the next level, playing with a band. Over time, I was able to focus more on details, like

listening to others, dynamics, signals from the leader, how to start and end songs. The PHB is a great location for our student jam because it is a "real" performance venue, but it's also a very casual and low-pressure



atmosphere on Sundays. Good food and drink add to the relaxed feel. I wish more students, other players, and any blues lovers would come out to the jams; it's fun and we can use all the support we can get from people who enjoy the blues."

Harmonica student Dave Tauber provides additional insight: "[The Poor House Bistro is] a place to meet regularly where the students can get up and play in a very nonthreatening environment with the support and encouragement of the other students in attendance. It's also an opportunity to meet other students, make friends and social connections, trade stories and experiences, and ask advice. Since there are usually students at all levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), it's a great place to absorb the lessons and experiences that others have to offer. The staff is very friendly and responsive to the jam and the students; plus, they seem to really enjoy having folks there playing music and having a good time.

The success of the School of the Blues jam has given the Poor House Bistro the opportunity to make it a weekly event and expand into other musical genres. In the words of Jay Meduri, "We do Sunday brunch, too. We have some good Southern grits and jambalaya scramble, red bean omelets that we do just one day a week. We do different music on Sundays, whether it is Gail Dobson's Jazz with her students, Noel Catura with his students, Wally Schnalle and his jazz students, David Barrett and the School of the Blues. I'm very pro family and I want the younger generation to learn and to love live music. That's how I was brought up in a musical family; it was always around me."

As things were just starting to get going, the City placed some roadblocks in the path of success for the Poor House Bistro. The San Jose Fire Department began to enforce City Fire Code regulations on venues with outdoor patios. The tent covering the patio was in violation. Other local businesses were affected, too. Gordon Biersch, the Smoke Tiki Lounge, the Miami Beach Club and the Sonoma Chicken Coop were all affected.

Determined to keep the music going, Jay closed the patio during construction and the music was moved to the back parking lot. They also held a couple of "Raise the Roof" benefits to help construct the current structure covering the patio, the stage, and an additional restroom. Fortunately, the City of San Jose Redevelopment Agency and a Poor House Bistro customer offered loans.

A number of great musicians turned up to help raise funds to "Raise the Roof," including: A.C. Myles, Andy Just, Andy Santana, Andre Thierry, Anthony Paule, Bob



Welsh, Bryant Mills, Dennis Dove, Gary Smith, the Gators, Jan Fanucchi, JC Smith & his Chicago friends, John Nemeth, Johnny Cat, Kedar Roy, Kid Andersen, Lara Price, Nancy Wright, Paul Revelli, Screamin' Iain, Sid Morris, Terry Hiatt, Tim Allen, Timm Walker, Wally Schnalle, and many

more.

Since construction of the roof, stage, and enhanced sound system, the Poor House Bistro has become a favorite of performers and patrons alike.

On alternating Mondays, Steve Martin hosts a ukelele jam at the Poor House Bistro. Steve, a high school teacher by day, is a very laid back host with a musical theme. Jay describes his thoughts on the ukulele jam: "I love the ukulele and it's something I thought would be a little bit different. You can do a night of Rolling Stones on the ukulele, another night you can do some blues stuff. The thing I like about it is that it's low volume music. I like to have some low volume stuff on a weekday."

Tuesday night is open mic night. Jay explains his philosophy on open mic night: "On Tuesday, anything goes. Comedians to blues to rock to folk to whatever you want to do, but there is no drum set. You can bring percussion instruments, but there is no drum set. It brings it down to make all the instruments come up a little bit and the vocals are at the forefront."

Wednesday nights feature Ron Thompson. November 2007 began one of the longest running weekly blues engagements in the South Bay: Ron Thompson has been performing at the Poor House Bistro. While in college, Jay became a huge fan of Ron Thompson after seeing him perform at #1 Broadway in Los Gatos. Ron performed as a solo act or with a drummer. Owner Jay Meduri states: "To me, he's a human juke box. He reminds me of one of my favorite guitarists in New Orleans who passed away, Snooks Eaglin. I'd go see Snooks. Snooks could play anything, any second. He just knew it and that's the way Ron is here. You call off any song. He can just do it. He's so talented. It's amazing to me that this place isn't as packed because he does play

every Wednesday, so people say, I can just see him next Wednesday, but he is a true jewel of the Bay Area.”

On Thursday evenings, the PHB tends to present a variety of musical styles that are best described by Jay: “Thursdays we have been all over the board. Sometimes, we’ll get a touring band from New Orleans on a Thursday, or some nights, like tonight, we’ll have Steve Freund.”

“We’ll mix it up, get some of the local acts, some bands that have been trying to get a chance to play here as well as some of my regular All Star guys like Steve. My goal is to have everybody enjoy the music, but I want the artists to be happy when they leave. That’s very important for me. To have the artists feel like they have had a good time and they feel like they’ve made some money and want to come back. That’s very important for me.”

Based on the feedback from musicians who perform at the Poor House Bistro, Jay is successful in achieving that goal. When asked about his experience at the Poor House Bistro, guitarist Steve Freund explains, “I have always had a good time there. They feed you and give you a few drinks, and supply a decent PA system. I have always felt welcome there. The Poor House Bistro seems to attract a lot of knowledgeable music fans and it’s also a place where many of my musician friends hang out. It’s always fun to perform in front of that kind of an audience, and it makes for very cool impromptu jams.”

On the weekends, the Poor House Bistro features great



local bands or some fine bands on tour with no cover charge. When not on tour, Chris Cain, Mark Hummel, John Németh, and JC Smith regularly appear at the Poor

House Bistro. Some of these artists have a long history and friendship with Jay.

JC Smith remembers his early days: “I met Jay when we were going to college at De Anza. I was in the Back-to-Back Blues Band. He was in the Redevelopment Blues Project when he started Blues on Tap. I played quite a few gigs with them. I love the Poor House because I love Jay. He is a great cat, so that gig ain’t about the cash. I play some very large venues for a lot of dough, but the Poor House just feels right. The staff, the fans, and friends, it’s a real down house party vibe. Jay is a

musician and knows how to treat other musicians well. That’s why we play there!”



Aki Kumar, harmonica player and vocalist for Tip of the Top, describes his early days at the Poor House Bistro: “I got a lot of my early blues education sitting

on the stairs of the Poor House Bistro, watching local blues harp greats like Mark Hummel, Andy Santana, Gary Smith, and R.J. Mischo deliver incredibly inspiring performances.”

“In 2008, I played a couple of shows at the Poor House Bistro with Peter Brown’s Swing Shift band. Shortly thereafter, I started performing there regularly with Tip of the Top. I’ve known Jay since 2005, when I started attending shows regularly at the Bistro. He’s always been a warm and welcoming host with an exceptional taste in music.”

One of the first artists to perform at the Poor House Bistro was R.J. Mischo. Now residing in Arkansas, R.J. regularly stops at the Poor House during his annual Bay Area tour: “I think I started playing the Poor House in the first year. Jay and the whole staff have always been a pure delight to work with. Jay is a musician and treats artists with respect. The venue has a comfortable atmosphere and the clientele is always cool.”

“When I’m booking gigs in northern California, I always put the Poor House Bistro on the top of my call list. Fortunately, I’ve always been welcomed there. It has a spot in my heart because I performed a wedding there. I’ve played many wedding parties, but there, I actually pronounced man and wife.”

The Poor House Bistro is not only popular among artists, it is also popular with its many regular patrons. Suzy Tyler describes why she keeps coming back: “the cool thing about the Poor House Bistro is the live blues bands that play. It allows me to stop in on a work night to hear great music and not have to be out so late [ed. note: the shows at the Poor House Bistro typically run from 6pm to 10pm on weekends, and from 6pm to 9pm on weekdays.]. On nights I don’t work, I can often hit two venues in the same night without missing a beat. Knowing there will be someone I know any night I go there is great too.”



The Bistro attracts a number of regular patrons. Michael and Francine Salvaggio frequent the Poor House several times a week.



Michael describes their love of the place: "The Poor House is a favorite place of ours because of the diverse talent that Jay brings in. He brings local

artists in on a regular basis and also brings touring acts. You get to see a variety of musicians. It's not always straight blues, but a variety of genres or different types of blues."

Aki Kumar provides an interesting perspective regarding the success of the Poor House Bistro: "The music is 100% free and the venue is family-friendly and easily accessible. The atmosphere is always cheerful, casual, and party-like. The food is top quality and the staff is very friendly. Most importantly, to me, this venue is a musician's venue where musicians can hang out and enjoy their peers in action. In my opinion, the PHB has single-handedly kept the blues going strong in the San Jose area for the last decade. A lot of this has to do with the high bar that Jay has set on all fronts. I hope all

blues/live music venues take note and I hope every blues fan in this area continues to support this outstanding venue for years to come!"

Photo credits:

Page 8, Front of the Poor House Bistro by Ernie Prendez

Page 9, column 1, Jay Meduri and Phil Franco by Deb Lubin

Page 9, column 2, Rich Fell by Deb Lubin

Page 10, column 2, John Németh and Kedar Roy by Joe Lempkowski

Page 11, column 1, Phillip Benson and mentor Chris Cain by Deb Lubin

Page 11, column 2, Andy Santana, Aki Kumar, and Gary Smith by Joe Lempkowski

Page 12, column 1, Michael and Francine Salvaggio by Deb Lubin

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CD REVIEWS

John Németh, *Soul Live* and *Blues Live* by Tom Hyslop

Bay Area-based songwriter-harmonica player-singer John Németh has made his mark with multiple Blues Music Awards nominations and Living Blues Awards, and is widely recognized as one of the most striking vocal talents to appear on the scene in some time. A decade into his recording career, he is both a relative newcomer and, with a pair of independent CDs and three CDs for Blind Pig Records—all of them acclaimed—a veteran artist.

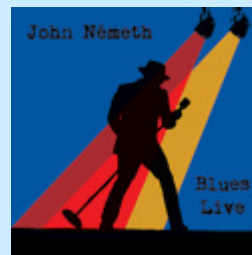
In February 2012, Németh decided to present an ambitious overview of his music. He assembled a crackerjack band – John Lee Sanders (keys), Tommy Folen (bass guitar), Nick Fishman (drums), and Bob Welsh, A.C. Myles, and Kid Andersen (guitars) – for performances at the Point Arena Theater, the Poor House Bistro, and Biscuits and Blues; recorded those shows; and distilled them into two albums, each dedicated to an aspect of his music interests. One reflects Németh's *Blues Live*, and the other concentrates on his *Soul Live*.



Soul Live begins with nine Németh compositions. Most tilt toward the hard, up tempo style of R&B that flourished alongside the deep and sweet soul sounds of the '60s. All transcend genre to sound quite compellingly contemporary.

"Too Good To Be True" grafts an indelible melody to a rumbling, ska-like bass line, and ices it with chicken-pickin' guitar. (Yes, that's right: chicken-pickin'.) "Blue Broadway" has that push-pull rhythm that encourages listeners to push back the furniture and take off their clothes. A solid four-on-the-floor beat, breakdowns in the verses, ascending chords in the chorus, a truly tuneful bridge, and a hummingbird-wing guitar solo make "Love Me Tonight" unstoppable. The irresistible "Name The Day" channels the sweet sound of Chicago soul à la Tyrone Davis. Want funk? Németh and band hint at Parliament in "Do You Really Want That Woman" and James Brown in "Funky Feelin'," which stars tough harp and bass solos and hip, interlocking guitars (dig the superb single note rhythm and the auto-wah!). "Magic Touch" features ace guitar solos incorporating Chuck

Berry-isms, tuning machine bends, twin-guitar harmony – the whole kitchen sink! – as well as dynamics that seem almost impossible in this roots-rocking context. The only breaks in an otherwise high-energy set come in the lilting "Fuel For Your Fire," and in "Said Too Much," quite a lovely deep soul ballad, sensitively played and beautifully sung. Solomon Burke's "Home In Your Heart" and a hard-charging take on local legend Rodger Collins's "She's Looking Good," which approaches revival-tent fervor, round out this stunning disc.



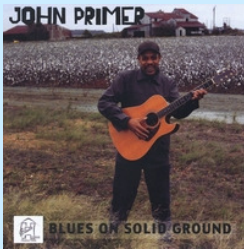
The same cast plays blues just as effectively. The proof is all over the sister CD, which also features nine Németh originals. A supple, dynamically charged reading of Fats Domino's "Every Night About This Time" leads into the pile-driving original "Country Boy," where the band repeatedly builds and releases in intensity behind Németh's harp solo. Al Simmons's wild, down-home (down-home Fresno, that is) rocker "Ain't Too Old" follows. "Daughter Of The Devil" and "Mother-In-Law" are other fine lowdown numbers, and "Just Like You" is what blues rock would sound like in a dream world in which The Red Devils and The Blasters defined the style. Want blues with a touch of soul? Sweet and stinging, Magic Sam's "She Belongs To Me" grooves deep. Slinky and diamond-hard, "You Know" and "Love Gone Crazy" are raw enough to sit in a blues set, funky enough to have been included on *Soul Live*. And the show-stopping slow blues "Blues In My Heart" may well fool you into thinking you are hearing Buddy Guy and Junior Wells in their prime. In all, *Blues Live* is a dynamite display of solid rhythms, gritty and inventive playing, with great tone, from the guitarists and Németh on harp, and stellar singing.

Both CDs are exceptional documents that showcase Németh's remarkable vocals and sharply focused songs, and make clear the power of a rhythm and blues band that knows how to play the music, and leaves everything on the stage.

John Németh Music – 2012

Check out: www.johnnemethblues.com

John Primer, *Blues on Solid Ground* by Tom Hyslop



John Primer spent the '70s alongside Sammy Lawhorn in the house band at Theresa's Lounge, frequently playing behind Junior Wells, before joining Willie Dixon's Chicago All Stars. Eventually he was tapped to lead the last great Muddy

Waters Band lineup. Primer next spent 14 years as Magic Slim's bandleader, providing the foundation of the Teardrops' quintessentially rock-solid Chicago blues sound on record and on tour, all the while continuing to maintain his South Side credentials with an artistic residence at the famed Checkerboard Lounge. His solo career has produced a dozen excellent albums for Wolf, Telarc, Atlantic, and his own Blues House Productions imprint.

Despite his accomplishments, Primer has remained criminally under-rated, partly due to his tendency to stick close to his Chicago home base. But that is changing, due to well-deserved attention from the press, a widening national and international touring itinerary, and the accumulated gravity of his recorded legacy, in particular 2010's *All Original*, which earned glowing reviews and a Blues Music Award nomination for Traditional Blues Album of the Year. Primer's splendid new offering, *Blues On Solid Ground*, ought to keep the momentum going his way, and has also been nominated for a Blues Music Award for Acoustic Album of the Year.

Solid Ground breaks new ground for Primer in that it is his first unplugged-style session: Primer plays acoustic guitar on nearly every song, often backed by an all-star combo featuring one of the blues' great pianists, Barrelhouse Chuck; Kenny Smith on drums; E.G. McDaniel on bass; and Russ Green's unamplified harmonica. Like its predecessor, entirely comprised of Primer originals, *Solid Ground* demonstrates anew the guitarist's thoughtful songwriting. Familiar blues tropes resonate in the solo, Delta-flavored "When I Get Lonely" and "Rambling Blues;" in the Chicago-style guitar-harmonica duo "Crazy For My Baby;" and in "Poor Man Blues," one of the few tracks where Primer plugs in an electric guitar, the better to evoke Elmore James; he, Barrelhouse Chuck Goering, and Green each turn in rollicking solo choruses.

In "Take Care Of Me" and "Hiding Place," Primer's lyrics and his nuanced singing work together to convey a strong sense of contentedness and devotion, proving his

absolute mastery at portraying romantic love. Primer extends a clever metaphor throughout the excellent "Power Of Attorney," which spotlights sensitive lead breaks on piano and electric slide guitar, and reveals some autobiographical details in "When I Met The Blues," while echoing the deep sounds of a Muddy Waters-Otis Spann duet. And the emphatically positive message of "Blues On Solid Ground" (a family affair, featuring an introduction by Primer's young daughter Aliya) ought, by rights, to make the title song an enduring blues anthem.

Blues House Productions – 2012

Check out: www.johnprimerblues.com

Deanna Bogart, *Pianoland* by Tom Hyslop



Multi-instrumentalist Deanna Bogart, now in her third decade as a recording artist, explores new territory on her latest CD. For the aptly titled *Pianoland*, the Washington, D.C.-area-based artist has sidelined her saxophone and arranged the

set's 11 songs to concentrate on solo keyboard performances, with occasional input from a small band. Bogart's unique touch and deep proficiency on the instrument are front and center throughout *Pianoland*, which benefits from dynamic, open recording, and her singing, like Marcia Ball's, is evocative, nuanced, and soulful where it needs to be.

Pianoland is stylistically adventurous, with almost no straight blues numbers, and just a few instances of Bogart's bread-and-butter boogie-woogie. Those are devastating: Bogart blasts through Pete Johnson's "Death Ray Boogie" and delivers the challenging chords of Errol Garner's "Boogie Woogie Boogie" (it's a long way from "Misty"!) with aplomb. Accompanied by Jeff Reed's upright bass and Mike Aubin's brushwork, her take on "I Love The Life I Live" is jaunty and jazzy, highlighted by a fine, smoky vocal. A radical reworking of "Over The Rainbow" gives off a late-night, cocktail lounge atmosphere, improbably serving as an ideal precursor to Bogart's brief instrumental "Blues At 11," an exercise in *Nighthawks at the Diner*-era Tom Waits cool.

Several other songs, all Bogart originals, are closely related in tone. "In The Rain" is a driving, gospel-tinged album opener. In "On And On And," where a rather odd, even Eno-esque, introduction resolves into a solid, driving R&B groove, Bogart decorates with ear-catching,



staccato runs in the treble, and punctuates with low-end thumps. The splendid "Where The Well Never Runs Dry" has a world-weary, Southern flavor, something like Dr. John jamming with the Band (Scott Ambush's bass line recalls Rick Danko at his syncopated best), and a hip, and highly effective, funky breakdown in the middle.

Other songs are harder to fit into the picture. Springsteenian melodrama echoes through the ballad "Couldn't Love You More," where Bogart's solo piano is very reminiscent of the playing of The E Street Band's Roy Bittan. At a little over 7 minutes, the title track is clearly intended to be epic in scope, but apart from a catchy chorus, the song seems directionless and bombastic, more Meat Loaf than Springsteen. The mileage listeners get out of the last track, "Close Your Eyes" (another ballad), will likely depend on their appreciation of the mellow, singer-songwriter approach of its author, James Taylor.

Blind Pig Records – 2012

Check out: www.blindpigrecords.com and www.deannabogart.com

The Blues Broads, *Live CD/DVD*

by Jeana Baron



It's a delight to review this Delta Groove release for TGGBS, not only because I've adored each of these women for decades, but also because of the very local story behind the collaboration of these fabulous mostly Bay Area-

based artists.

The Blues Broads bring it and they bring a whole lot more than just blues. Their individual histories reveal the breadth of the musical diversity that comes into play here. From rock and roll to folk to blues to R&B and soul to flat-out gospel, often with a little twist of Texas thrown in, they join forces in a splendid way – showcasing their own individual styles while melding their remarkable voices. With two centuries of collective experience behind them, what they create together is some powerful stuff.

A bit on each Broad:

Powerhouse Tracy Nelson started as a folksinger, but changed direction after meeting Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, and Howlin' Wolf in early '60s Chicago. In 1966, she formed the beloved San Francisco blues/rock group Mother Earth, which produced six albums and regularly

shared the bill at the Fillmore Auditorium with Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. She received her first Grammy nomination for "After the Fire is Gone," a duet with Willie Nelson. After a lengthy hiatus from recording, Nelson returned to collaborate with Marcia Ball and Irma Thomas on the Grammy nominated album *Sing It*.

The magnificent Dorothy Morrison began singing in church at an early age and folks in her East Bay neighborhood took notice. At age 13, she released her first single "I Am Free," along with her singing siblings, The Combs Family. Her exposure through the church community in Oakland and San Francisco ultimately led to her joining the Edwin Hawkins Singers, and she skyrocketed to international renown as the lead singer on "Oh Happy Day," the biggest-selling gospel hit of all time. On the secular side, Dorothy has worked with Van Morrison, Simon and Garfunkel, and others.

The mighty Annie Sampson has long been a Bay Area fixture. As a child, Annie sang in Bay Area school choirs and churches. As a young woman, she landed a principal role in San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater's long-running hit musical "Hair." From the theater, she went on to become the lead singer in the internationally acclaimed rock group Stoneground. Since the mid-1980s, Annie has been touring and performing with her own band and has recorded with Taj Mahal, Elvin Bishop, and many others.

Soulful Texas songbird Angela Strehli comes from a musical family in Lubbock. She was one of the driving forces that helped the acclaimed Austin club Antone's become one of the blues meccas in Texas. It was the encouragement of Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Otis Rush, and other artists that finally persuaded Angela to step on stage and find her voice. Angela eventually came to be called the "First Lady of Texas Blues." Relocating to the Bay Area in the early 1990s, she and her husband own and operate the west Marin venue, Rancho Nicasio, where the Broads first presented.

On stage, the Broads create big magic and much of that magic was captured on this CD. Recorded live at Mill Valley's Throckmorton Theater in November 2011, the CD kicks off with Tracy Nelson's impassioned "Livin' The Blues" and it just keeps getting better. Taking turns featuring songs from their respective careers, the energy builds and the electricity is palpable. There are many gems here, including a blistering version of Ike & Tina's "River Deep," a moving a cappella on "Jesus, I'll Never Forget," and the sultry "Blue Highway."

When listening to the Blues Broads, I feel compelled to blather a barrage of 'B' words—brilliant, bold, and

bodacious immediately come to mind, but I would be remiss not to mention one of the most important 'B' words, as in the bad-ass Baltimore-based Bogart. Deanna Bogart is a musical phenomenon who is off-the-charts talented. She fuels the flames by lending her stellar piano and sax playing skills to the mix. Deemed "too young to be a Broad," Deanna has been bestowed with the title "Honorary Broad." Although busy with her own blossoming career, she sits in with the Broads at every opportunity.

The talent backing the Broads leaves the 'B' words behind. This tight 'A list' group of veterans features Petaluma native Gary Vogensen on guitar (Boz Scaggs, Etta James), Bay Area local Steve Ehrmann on bass (John Lee Hooker, Roy Rogers), S.F.'s Paul Revelli on drums (Charlie Musselwhite, Bo Diddley), and the North Bay's Mike Emerson (Percy Sledge, Elvin Bishop) on a second keyboard.

The DVD included in this set is a nice bonus, but for me, it didn't even begin to capture the high-voltage excitement of seeing the Broads live—something I'd highly recommend. If you can't get out to see them, the sound quality on this live CD is great—crank up the volume and get your soul stirred!

Delta Groove Music – 2012

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

Zac Harmon, *Music Is Medicine*

by Dorothy L. Hill



Jackson, Mississippi, native Zac Harmon has excited audiences worldwide with fiery performances that have earned him innumerable awards, including a Best New Artist Debut 2006 Blues Music Award for his CD *The Blues According*

to *Zacariah*. *Music Is Medicine* is his first studio recording in 3 years and is dedicated to his late father, George "Doc" Harmon, who was a prominent figure in the African-American community.

The 11 tracks are all originals and Harmon's aggregation consists of his touring band members along with some featured guests. In addition to Harmon (vocals, guitar, bass guitar, keyboards and drums), his band includes Cedric Goodman (drums, vocals), Corey Lacy (keyboards, vocals), and Buthel (bass). Featured artists are Christopher Troy (keyboards, drums), Ralph Forrest and Lavelle Jones (drums), BR Millon and Gregg Wright

(guitar), James Strong (bass), and Sueann Carwell (vocals).

"Miss American Girl" kicks off the CD with a tribute to the appeal of American women enhanced by a terrific vocal excursion on this catchy R&B tune—the backup vocals sweeten the pot, but Harmon demonstrates how good a singer he is on this one. "Blue Pill Thrill" tastefully covers a subject well known to men of a certain age and Harmon's stinging guitar styling drives a satisfying bluesy swagger. "Running From The Devil" takes a rockish turn with Goodman's drums driving a relentless beat emphasizing Harmon's earnest and emotionally alluring vocals and twangy guitar effects. The soul-infused "Grandma's Prayer" slowly burns with contributing vocals by Goodman and Lacy. "Drowning In Hollywood" is a rockish ode to Harmon's stint as a studio musician, writer and producer (... "I can't go back home, I make it here or die tryin' ...). On "Country Boy," the backup vocal refrain is hypnotizing with Harmon's guitar creating a propulsive tension. "I'd Rather Be With You" is a change of pace with a light reggae influence and this theme continues on "Talk To Me," which has a smooth soul sound. The standout cut "Wounded" is a powerful ballad featuring the duet of Harmon and Carwell alternatively pensive and reflective, then filled with sparks and fire supplied by a beautifully rendered guitar explosion and ending with a vocal ache. "I'm A Healer" relates to the CD title, expounding on the theme that music is medicine in a delightfully upbeat swinger. The final cut of "Joanna" features the band members and Lacy's keyboards stand out on this tune—this one crackles with an infectious beat.

Be forewarned—this CD delves into contemporary music with blues roots, but it is far from the shuffle blues—hardly a one in sight! However, it is a solid, inventive effort and, in my opinion, is darn good fun with every listen. Let's face it, we all need something exhilarating on our playlist and this one fits the bill at every turn!

Check out: www.zacharmon.com

Smokin' Joe Kubek and Bnois King, *Close to the Bone* by Dorothy L. Hill



Texas Smokin' Joe Kubek and Bnois King have been riding the roads of the country since they began their collaboration in 1989. They complement each other perfectly—with the reverb-loaded guitar styling of

Kubek tempered by the jazz influenced vocals and tasty



guitar of King. They have had a prolific recording career with their own brand of Texas roadhouse blues.

This CD is unplugged and the one I have been waiting for; although I have been a longtime fan, I got to experience this acoustic duo live on the October 2010 Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, and they were the highlight of the cruise for me. It is a gem and likely one of the best CDs of the year.

Contributors Randy Chortkoff, Bob Corritore, Lynwood Slim, and Pieter "Big Pete" van der Pluijm handle harmonica on some tracks. Kirk Fletcher and Paul Size on acoustic guitars, Shawn Pittman on National Steel guitar, Fred Kaplan on piano, Willie J. Campbell on bass, Jimi Bott on drums, and Jeff Scott Fleenor on suitcase foot drum round out the featured guests. Most of the 14 tracks are originals.

"Poor Boy Blues" is a mid-tempo vocal exploration by King with Kubek's interesting flamenco guitar flourishes. On "Can't Let Go," King's alluring vocals are punctuated by tasty guitar supplied by guests Fletcher and Pittman and Bott's unobtrusive drum support. King's lovely ballad "My Best Friend" features Kubek on a splendid acoustic slide guitar solo. The pace picks up with a shuffling "Keep Her Around" and harmonica expressions by Chortkoff and Corritore; this one seethes with exuberance. "Get Out There and Get It" showcases Fletcher's luscious guitar solo; King's vocals are vibrant on this catchy number. "Yankin' My Chain" spotlights the duo of Kubek and King acoustically turbocharging it with energy and passion. The band backs up King's soulful vocals on "Drowning In Red Ink"—just beautiful; this one is definitely a keeper. "My Hat's Off To You" has a catchy melody and King's vocals are whimsically luscious. "Ordinary Man" is a blues-styled shuffle and King's silky vocal delivery has inflections in all the right places. On "Mama's Bad Luck Child," King's vocals are haunting with simplicity emphasized by Kubek's stripped down guitar styling and Lynwood Slim's poignant harmonica backdrop.

Kubek's judiciously restrained guitar playing is impressive and technically brilliant. King's vocals are magnificent, probably his best effort ever on a recording. Together, it just doesn't get any better than this! And, to top it off, there's a group of the best first-class guests that one could assemble for support.

Delta Groove Music – 2012

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

Cassie Taylor, *Blue* by Dorothy L. Hill



bassist.

Cassie Taylor is probably a blues artist you don't know about - that is, unless you are a fan of blues roots artist Otis Taylor. Cassie, now 26 years old, spent 11 years performing with her father's band as a background vocalist and

bassist. Cassie wrote the 10 tunes on this CD and is the featured vocalist along with playing bass and keyboards. Jeremy Colson on drums and James Rooster Olson on guitars round out the band. Additional musicians include Eric Gales on guitar, Steve Marriner on harp, Tim Tucker and Rusty Anderson on guitars, and Fat Willie on B3. Hazel Miller, Denise Gentlini, Lindsay Solonyce, and Alyssa Clotfelter are featured on background vocals.

The first track, "Memphis," is an upbeat pop-styled rocker with an infectious beat and Taylor's vocals are dynamically fluid. She follows with a slow tension-filled melody on "Spoken For," which has a nice harmonica background. "Black Coffee" is a slow burner extolling the virtues of just a little loving and a good cup of coffee in the morning and Taylor's vocals have a pleasant dream-like quality. One of the best tracks is "Make Me Cry" with an upbeat incessant beat and spiky rock guitar riffs—Taylor's vocals exhibit a wonderfully supple resonance. "Bought Borrowed Stolen" is an outstanding example of Taylor's sweet-toned vocal style with a haunting melody. "Keys" is given instrumental texture by the crisp drumming and angelic harmonic backdrop. Another standout is "Haunted," with Taylor's trancelike vocals punctuated by a tasteful rhythmic underlay and appealing melody. "Waste of Time" closes out the CD with a mesmerizing ballad sensitively enhanced by spare orchestration.

This CD is like a slow drip—it takes a while to absorb, but when you get the full effect, you're hooked. The band is perpetually inventive and brilliantly offsets the light and airy, almost sultry, vocals of Ms. Taylor. It is definitely a departure from the norm and is more like blues/rock meets pop, but in a good way—put it all together and her blues pedigree is evident.

Hypertension – 2011

Check out: www.cassietaylorband.com

BIG EASY MUSIC FESTIVAL DEBUTS IN A BIG WAY

September 8, 2012, Arena Green Park, San Jose

Article by Steve Cagle, Photos by Bob Cosman

Poor House Bistro proprietor Jay Meduri and the Silicon Valley Black Chamber of Commerce joined forces to bring a single-day musical extravaganza to downtown San Jose that surpassed a number of the multiple-day, high-profile festivals both in quality of artists and caliber of performances. It was quite an impressive achievement from start to finish, and with a lineup heavily populated by Bay Area-based musicians, the event was unquestionably a testament to this region's highly esteemed music community. This was a day of infectious nonstop smiling and sudden unavoidable urges to dance, brought on by the continuous flow of soul-satisfying music.

Two stages were arranged across the expanse of the park from each other, with rows of booths flanking the sides between them occupied by food, artwork, music, and clothing merchants; local community radio station volunteers; and a table where artists signed CDs and talked with friends and fans.

San Francisco band Con Brio opened on The Poor House Bistro-sponsored "Dis" stage, as a steady flow of festival goers began filling the lawn. With horns, fatback organ, and a rhythm section fronted by guitarist/vocalist Xandra Corpora, Con Brio's harmonious, avant-retro musical elixir was the ideal formula to set the day in motion, an addictive amalgam of classic-style soul, funk and R&B grooves cooked up with catchy rock melodies in a heady jazz veneer. By the set's conclusion, the growing audience had surrendered to Con Brio's vibrant, groove-laden spell.

As soon as the band concluded its set, the audience's attention was diverted 180 degrees to the "Dat" stage, sponsored by Wells Fargo, where the accordion and washboard-propelled Zydeco Flames wasted no time filling the park with their distinctly New Orleans-influenced rhythms. The Marin-based quintet stirred up **a dancing frenzy** as attendees jumped en masse from

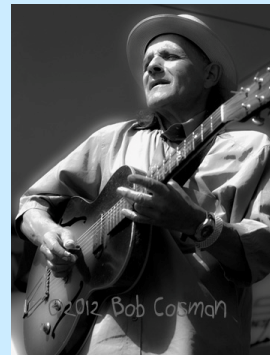


blankets and lawn chairs to immerse in the revelry. The Flames' music is a spicy groove gumbo of

Cajun, N.O. funk, and blues beats that quickly rises to the boiling point where it remains, to the delight of the

receiving end. A steady, cool breeze was barely an antidote for the rhythmic swelter that emanated from the stage and engulfed the grounds.

When the smoke cleared at "Dat" end, the "Dis" stage reignited in equally combustible bliss as The Poor House Bistro All-Stars greeted the rotating audience. This was the first of three ensembles of well-known and highly respected Bay Area musicians whose combined talent and stage presence created a virtual festival within a festival. The internationally renowned members of this particular world-class collective included "go to" producer, guitarist/multi-instrumentalist and one-third of Rick Estrin's Nightcats, Chris "Kid" Andersen. Flanking Andersen's towering frame were veteran harp purveyor Gary Smith, slide guitar legend **Ron Thompson**,



journeyman pianist Sid Morris, former Joe Louis Walker Band and current Blues Broads drummer Paul Revelli, and Jump Kings bass man Dave Chavez. It was all energy and no ego for these masters, who seamlessly generated a powerful crowd-pleasing set that included an exhilarating rendering of "40 Days and 40 Nights" and a slow-grinding

take on "Tin Pan Alley." The almost telepathic interplay among the artists was evident, a likely result of the many nights this unofficial house band has convened at The Poor House Bistro to make music together.

Back across the lawn, Oakland's **Beaufunk** let the good times roll for an energized 40 minutes of New Orleans-flavored funk and classic R&B that kept the energy level



elevated. The front stage grounds quickly filled with dancing revelers as the band broke into James Brown's "Get Up Offa That Funk," then kept them moving with

reggae and deftly delivered versions of Johnny "Guitar" Watson's "A Real Mother Fo Ya" and the Average White Band's "Pick Up the Pieces."

The day's program had barely reached the halfway point as the focus shifted stages for the second allstar revue. It was the women's turn to put their collective music-making mettle on display, and Girls Got the Blues had no problem convincing all witnesses to their jaw-dropping performance that they are a musical force to be reckoned with.



Bandleader and vocal powerhouse **Lara Price** took opening honors at the mic and demonstrated how, after years of nonstop performing, she has evolved into an artist of the highest caliber. Her "big break" is way past due. As an ever-growing crowd amassed around the stage, Lara and company got the dance party rolling.

Lara shared the role of lead vocalist on a revolving basis throughout the set with two of the Bay Area's finest soul singers, the legendary Annie Sampson (who is currently



enhancing her legend as a member of the blues supergroup, The Blues Broads) and the soon-to-be-legendary **Pam Hawkins**. Backing the trio were the exceptionally talented vocal duo known professionally as Sweet Nectar and supporting the entire proceedings musically was an extraordinary rhythm section

comprised of bassist Jan Martinelli, drummer Robin Roth, and Lara's former guitarist Laura Chavez (now with the Candye Kane Band), with additional help from saxophone player Dolly Rappaport and Pamela Charles Arthur on the ivories.

The energy swelled up on stage and poured onto the crowd, which, by this time, had already been whipped into a frenzy. The collective continued to treat their



audience to an increasingly energized performance, from a relentlessly rowdy version of "Gonna Move" through a crunching rock rendition of "Addicted to Love" and finally bringing the power surge to a slower, yet still intensified, groove with **Annie Sampson's** signature reading of Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," at one point

cutting the electricity to belt out a verse unassisted by technology that was audible well into the park.

Wrapping up with a spirit-moving medley of "Still Waters Run Deep" and "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," the big question that hovered over the park when the roar of the crowd died down was "how can anyone come on after this show-stopping spectacle?"



The undisputed King of Idaho Soul, **John Nemeth**, dared to step up and face the arduous task of holding his own after the Girls Got the Blues revue set the bar high enough to induce a nose bleed. The Oakland-based soul master with the pipes of gold was backed by his extraordinary band, which had been together less

than a year. Still, they delivered the goods with note-perfect precision and crackling with youthful energy, tearing through their set of classic-style soul and R&B peppered with blues and served with a rock sensibility. John performed a faithful rendering of the Dan Penn classic "The Dark End of the Street," with deep Memphis soul oozing between the notes while his voice channeled Sam Cooke, James Carr, and Percy Mayfield simultaneously. Throughout the set, he displayed his harmonica-playing prowess that rivals his dynamic vocal range.

John rewarded his young lions (including guitarist **A.C.**



Myles) for their stellar efforts by allowing them to stretch out on the finale with a hard rocking instrumental jam that at one point morphed into "Freebird" before reigning it back in, in the name of good taste. But all in all, Nemeth and his band managed to keep the proceedings afloat as the performances continued to reach

greater heights.

And greater heights were the ultimate goal of the third and final all-star presentation, billed in the program as "music that has never happened before – and may never again." The Ray Charles Project was yet another festival in its own right that had been dropped into the bigger all-day festival, and it would have been worth the admission price alone to witness this showcase. Mounting a production of this caliber had to be the result of countless months of preparation and rehearsal, not to mention the difficulty getting this top shelf lineup of esteemed artists together simultaneously. This was a first class act that would have easily fit into any big-city concert hall season schedule, with black tie optional.

As with the previous all-star ensemble, the “RCP” was fronted by three veteran vocalists, all world-class artists and crown jewels of the Bay Area music community: Grammy-collector Tony Lindsay, heir-apparent to B.B.’s throne; Chris Cain; and reincarnated Big Band era crooner Glenn Walters. Walters set the music in motion with “What I Say,” joined by “Raylettes” Lara Price and Pam Hawkins on backing vocals and fueled by a band of masters including Cain on guitar and facial histrionics,



David K. Mathews (who played with Etta James for many years and is now with the Carlos Santana Band) on keys, DeWayne Pate on bass and Dezmond Claiborne pounding the skins. Glenn completely enthralled the audience with his impeccable intonations, so pitch-perfect they would have caused Ray himself to do a double take.

Master ivory-tickler Mathews was in fine form and good spirit, as he displayed his virtuosity on the keys while at the same time inciting a face-making contest with undisputed world champ Chris Cain during “I Got a Woman.” In return, **Cain** took his place at the piano next



to **Dave**, who announced “I’m about to learn something here” before the band broke into song. And without question, Cain’s

command of the keyboard is nothing short of amazing, a fact that is often overshadowed by his sheer genius on the guitar. Chris led the triumvirate of vocalists through a rollicking “Let’s Go Get Stoned” and “Mary Ann” before handing the reigns to Tony Lindsay, the multi-Grammy recipient and household voice thanks to his contributions to Santana’s gravy years recordings and tours.

The Bay area-based singer took it downtown with “Let the Good Times Roll” and “Georgia,” the latter featuring



a slamming Chris Cain guitar solo. Surrogate Raylettes **Lara Price and Pam Hawkins** added additional spice to “Unchain My Heart” with their high-powered choral accompaniment. The set

concluded with a reprise of the opening “What I Say,” which incited the biggest dance contingency of the day and a resounding call/response exchange to the signature Ray Charles phrasing of “Hey”/“Oh.”

The musical thrill ride wasn’t quite over yet, with New Orleans legend and original Meters drummer Zigaboo Modeliste giving the proceedings a stamp of authenticity as he laid down a “real deal” mix of NOLA funk, soul and Cajun-flavored R&B. Although the crowd began thinning out, those who remained were treated to a celebratory set that validated the day’s “Big Easy” theme.

Being the headliner on a day jam-packed with more stellar performances than imaginable could be a blessing or a curse. **Lydia Pense** and Cold Blood occupied that



spot on this day’s roster of West Coast royalty, and they took it in stride, delivering a solid set of inspired, horn-powered rock and soul that’s been their trademark over the years since their origins in the late ‘60s. The reasons this band has had staying power for decades was evident from the first funky notes of their opener “I Just Want to

Make Love to You,” a staple in Lydia’s songbook that belongs to her as much as to composer Willie Dixon. When the proverbial curtain closed, there was no doubt that this first-time event was a huge cultural success, and we hope the first of many such world-class music events to come. A standing ovation is in order to everyone involved.

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