

A YEAR OF HAVING THE BLUES

One of my favorite columns to write is this double-shot that looks back to the best of the blues of this past year and forward to blues of a new year. In no particular order, I'd like to introduce some choice blues I've discovered in 2002.

TINSLEY ELLIS: *Hell or High Water* (Telarc)

Tinsley Ellis' debut on Telarc has two of my favorite blues songs released this past year, the revved up "Ten Year Day" and soulful "Real Bad Way." These cuts touch me in the same way that "Sweet Home Chicago" or "Loan Me A Dime" (Fenton Robinson's original or Boz Scaggs' remake with Duane Allman) did back in the day. There's 10 others with a Southern blues accent on this CD, but these two cuts really bring Tinsley's guitar pyrotechnics home. Ellis has recorded on Alligator and Capricorn, but I'd like to think that he's found a home with producer Eddy Offord (the long-time YES producer) and Telarc.

JODY WILLIAMS: *Return of a Legend* (Evidence)

If you like Howlin' Wolf's "Evil" or Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love," you've heard Jody Williams. Jody worked the local blues circuit in the 1950's and sat in on some of the best music out of Chess studios. He had a hit in the late '50s with "Lucky Lou" and Tinsley Ellis plays with Jody on some complex blues progressions. Jody Williams' early career is a sad story of what might have been, big time. Less than scrupulous folks stole Jody's writer credits and subsequent royalties. He then put his guitar under his bed and focused on his family and his day job, but I'm glad Jody's back. For blazing blues guitar, you can't beat Return of a Legend.

PLANETARY BLUES BAND (Brothers from Neptune): *Blues For Our Grandfather* (Self-Released)

Last year, The Chicago Blues Posse made my list of favorites. There's a similar feel to *Blues for Our Grandfather* from the Planetary Blues Band. This CD honors the Schaefer-Murray brothers' grandfather Martin H. Schaefer,

and it belongs in every *Midwest BEAT* readers' CD player.

Brothers from Neptune – Martin, Michael and Robert – are a powerhouse with Posse member Glenn E. Wierzbicki on drums. When the brothers play Elmore James' "Talk to Me Baby" or Muddy Waters' "Cross-Eyed Cat," they honor their grandfather and the blues. *Blues For Our Grandfather*, was produced by The Wiz and engineered by Rick Watson at Valparaiso's Back Porch Tracks.

Find The Planets' CD at Front Porch Music in Valparaiso, at their shows and at their website – www.planetaryblues.com. Or send a check for \$10.00 to The Planetary Blues Band at: 1711 N. Washington St., Valparaiso, IN 46383

TAB BENOIT: *Wetlands* (Telarc)

I have the good fortune of seeing Tab Benoit live, and you can too at Chord On Blues in St. Charles on Dec. 13th. Put that at the top of your blues calendar this month, because his shows are an amazing stew of Louisiana music from Wetlands.

His take on Boozoo Chavis' "Dog Hill" takes us to a smoky juke joint in Louisiana, and Otis Redding's "These Arms of Mine" gets the Benoit treatment – funky-up swamp guitar and mighty soulful vocals. Benoit's apprenticeship includes work with Tabby Thomas (a Hoodoo King and proprietor of legendary Baton Rouge nightspot Tabby's Blues Box) and the late, great Luther Allison. For Louisiana blues, Benoit is the real deal.

BERNARD ALLISON: *Storms of Life* (Tone Cool)

Last summer, I said in my CD Spin on Bernard Allison's second Tone Cool CD that "this scorching disc showcases one of the most exciting guitar slingers of the younger blues generation." It still does, particularly when Bernard dabbles in reggae, jazz, soul, and some down home blues.

For me, "Snake Bit Again" and "Mean Town Blues" honor their main inspirers, Anders Osborne and Johnny Winter. "Speed Slide" and "Fist Full of Dirt" really do it for me, because they show that Bernard is carrying the blues

torch high in the shadows of his late father, Luther Allison.

OTHER GREAT RELEASES...

While I spend most of my time listening to the blues, I also discovered some great music from other genres of music. Some highlights from 2002 include: O.A.R.'s double live disc *Any Time Now* (Everfine), a collection of the finest island vibe jam rock ever played; folksinger Eliza Gylkison's *Lost and Found* (Red House), a collection of finely wrought stories, and James McMurtry's *St. Mary of the Woods* (Sugar Hill), and The Flatlanders' *Now Again* (New West).

Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely and Butch Hancock regrouped this year as The Flatlanders after going their separate ways more than 25 years ago, and this CD is one of my favorite Americana records.

LAST MINUTE PICKS FROM 2001

There were many CDs released in late 2001 that I didn't discover until 2002, and I'd like to shout about some of them. One of my favorite CDs is the debut from Little Johnny and the Unknown Blues Band, *Workingman Blues* (Fat Man Records). Available at www.littlejohnny1.com. There's some great blues from a true Chicago blues talent on this disc. Little Johnny was in a bad motorcycle accident last summer that would have sidelined mere mortals, but check out how he's bounced back at the *Bottoms Up Blues Jam* in Lansing on Sundays.

The Chicago Blues Angels' *Movin' Out* (Blue Bella) is pure blues. When I heard Armando Cortez rip into "Don't Blame Me," I knew that this band knew the blues cold. Turn up "Rooster Blues" or "Good Time Charlie," and preview this exciting local band at: www.chicagobluesangels.com.

There you have it. I'm going to play some other choice discs until I return in a couple of months, including Biscuit Miller's *Come Together* or Sam Cockrell & The Groove's *Colorblind*. May your holidays be as joyful as the music I've picked as my favorites from 2002.

Until next month, let's play the blues.



Midwest Blues Beat WITH ERIC STEINER