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Booker's Guitar •••

Eric Bibb, Telarc

The blues can at times be (and praised be to its messengers) the opium of the soul in its hour of sorrow and loss. The blues is more than just music and less about anything in particular. And yet, depending on who you are, the blues can be a potent force to reckon with. The blues can be your life's story in one breath. And some blues, like Eric Bibb's Booker's Guitar, are more like our life's book. Look around as you listen to "Wayfaring Stranger" or "Nobody's Fault But Mine" and then ask yourself "How Goes My World Today?" Truthfully, it's a chilling sight to behold. Darkness, desolation and an emptiness of wants and needs have unleashed their destructive forces on earth's population (rich and poor) as if there is no tomorrow and no new beginning. Every which way we turn the blues is singing our blues.

And blues is what Booker's Guitar is about. In essence it is the extensive juxtaposition between the wailing, sweet-honeyed guitar sounds and the bluesy, poetical voice of Mr. Bibb which gives this feast of music its seminal quality of moving both inevitably and eventfully towards an enormously rewarding album, befitting its tribute. Mr. Bibb wants us to hear his plaintive story on songs like "With My Maker I Am One," "Flood Water," "Walkin' Blues Again," "Sunrise Blues," "New Home," "One Soul To Save," and "A Good Woman." Get the picture? On another note, I should add that the guitar that Mr. Bibb played here belonged to the famous Delta bluesman, Bukka White 1909-1977.

According to Mr. Bibb, "The experience of playing Booker White's guitar took my personal connection to traditional country blues to another level. It actually felt like an initiation and a bene-

diction. I felt the time was right to offer an handmade tribute to the music and musicians of a bygone era. I want coming generations to remember him and his world."

Dark Eyes •••

Tomasz Stanko Quintet, ECM

Trumpeter Tomasz Stanko is in fine form with a performance that is imaginative, affectionate, rhythmically alive and beautifully detailed in collaboration with a stellar group of musicians that include Alexi Tuomarila (piano), Jakob Bro (guitar), Anders Christensen (bass), and Olavi Louhivuori (drums). Good nature goes with inventiveness and compositional brilliance in the best of Mr. Stanko's music, and we can only sit back and enjoy the richly endowed ideas that hark back to Miles Davis on pieces like "The Dark Eyes Of Martha Hirsch" and "Dirge for Europe." On other pieces like "Samba Nova" and "Etiuda Baletowa No. 3" the Quintet gives us an affirmative, powerful reading in the slow movement with Mr. Stanko's trumpet producing the required ethereal effect. This is an outstanding jazz album with its innate beauty and warmly sensuous temperament, most notable on "May Sun."

Starbound •••

Robin Verheyen, Pirouet Records

A very light-hearted album from Robin Verheyen (soprano and tenor sax) with some exceptional pieces held together by intricately beguiling displays of ingenuity, like the somber and haunting "Lamenting," a jazzy and theatrical "Long Island City," the sweetly melancholic "Narcis," and the sumptuously innocent "Tree Line."

Chiaroscuro •••

Ralph Towner/Paolo Frescu, ECM

The music of Chiaroscuro is a rare and fascinating blend of trumpet (Paolo Frescu) and acoustic guitar (Ralph Towner). Mr. Frescu's trumpet may be neither as dramatically striking nor as melodically individual as Miles Davis but his infectious lyricism and control of broad spans of subtly inflected polyphony, is often masterful in the very best of contemporary jazz traditions. The tonal lustre and sheer muscle of the title track, "Chiaroscuro," conveys all of Mr. Frescu's ripely romantic vision with equally idiomatic, and assured results. The two musicians considerably embroidered symbiosis must have made a convincing declaration in the recording studio, judging from the success of the beautifully rearranged "Punta Giara," the ambient warmth of "Sacred Places," heard in two

versions, and "Double Up" decorously fronted by Mr. Towner's new baritone guitar. Two previously released pieces, "Wistful Thinking" (Open Letter, 1992) and "Zephyr" (Ecotopia, 1987) were both performed with full range of lyrical fervor and subtlety of nuance, wonderful precision and a lilt-ing rhythmic pulse. "Blue In Green" (a Miles Davis and Bill Evans score) was natural and alive, full of luminous and subtle sonorities. The album ended with "Two Miniatures" and "Postlude," two fresh and exhilarating improvisations that showcased Mr. Towner's 12-string guitar.

City Beat •••

Harbor Breeze Records

Saxophonist Michael J. Thomas recently released his debut album, City Beat, an instrumental R&B-pop collection that opens with the sophisticatedly cool and cosmopolitan, "Midtown Manhattan," showcasing a versatile artist on tenor, alto and soprano sax. A gorgeous melody laid over the pitter-patter of a gentle brushed drum beat, "Wedding Song (Forever Always)" poignantly pledges eternal love. On another track we hear a taut rhythm section comprised of bassist Eric Lampley and drummer Jonathan Davis laying down the funk on "30-A Degrees." A huge Michael Jackson fan, Mr. Thomas decided to cover the Gloved One's most famous song, "Billie Jean," adding a haunting ambient intro while staying faithful to the original version. A lustful soprano sax seduces us on the sensual "Pretty Skin." On "Mind Your Step," Wallace's electric guitar riffs combine with the rhythm section to create a deep-pocketed groove that is ignited further by the gritty urban sound of turntable pyrotechnics. Mr. Thomas indulges his love for wine on "Amante Del Vino." Keyboardist Diki Ross helps welcome Mr. Thomas "Back Home," a warm and cozy ballad. Closing with "Cali Trippin'," Mr. Wallace's wailing electric guitar and Paul Scurto's classy trumpet solos spark the journey piloted by Mr. Thomas' tenor.



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