



Otis Taylor: dark compassion

Where All-Stars and Lowlifes Gather

Otis Taylor: *Clovis People, Vol. 3* (Telarc 31849; 49:52 ★★★) Like a modern-day Blind Lemon Jefferson, Taylor sings with evocative power so formidable that one can feel the tense darkness animating the dozen songs of his latest release. Risk-taking listeners are made privy to his moral and aesthetic preoccupations, to the drift of his haunted imagination. Peer into a dark hole of grief over the playground murder of a child ("Little Willie"), identify with sad romantic goodbyes ("She's Ice In The Desert") and encounter the grave desperation of an adulterer ("Rain So Hard"). With honesty and tough compassion, Taylor cauterizes emotional wounds through trance-grooves set by bass, drums, Malian percussion, pedal steel guitar, organ, violin, cello, even jazz cornet and theremin. His overseas friend Gary Moore provides top-grade lead guitar solos, but guitarist Jon Paul Johnson just clutters up "Little Willie." Taylor's vibrant, difficult blues remains fascinating, yet never entirely fathomable.

Ordering info: telarc.com

Terry Biersh: *Terry Biersh* (self-released; 39:05 ★★★) Toronto-based singer-guitarist Biersh is like the ideal fifth starter on a pitching staff. He goes about his work with confidence and efficiency, not concerned about his lack of recognition south of Ontario. Not beholden to a particular blues style, this veteran writes good bluesy songs that even reference antecedents like '70s white-soul and toned-down, dreamy Jeff Beck and Jimi Hendrix. "I Don't Need No" is an outstanding merger of personal expression and lyricism with expert craftsmanship. His reliable sidekicks include organist Garth Hudson of the Band.

Ordering info: terrybiersh.com

Joe Price: *Rain Or Shine* (Blues Acres #2; 33:39 ★★★) Somewhere between traditional and unconventional, this seasoned low-wan singer-guitarist sounds fully involved with controlling the tension in his plain-spoken "ruff

and tumble" blues. Neither showy nor too self-effacing, he applies his metal tube to strings in mostly solo performances, adding his talented guitar-playing wife, Vicki, on three songs.

Ordering info: joepriceblues.com

Coco Montoya: *I Want It All Back* (Ruf 1153; 53:46 ★★) Produced by Keb' Mo' in hopes of a commercial breakout, guitar hero Montoya relies on the attractive qualities of his vocals to get across the pleasantness of tunes from populist tunesmiths like David Steen and Jackson Browne. Harmonica player Rod Piazza and his wife, Honey, on piano help rustle up a blues feeling for "Fannie Mae," a song staler than last month's bread.

Ordering info: rufrecords.de

Nick Curran & The Lowlifes: *Reform School Girl* (Eclecto Groove 509; 39:20 ★½) Ex-Fabulous T-Birds guitarist Curran's main achievement here is approximating the mayhem of young Little Richard and other r&b hysterics of the Eisenhower and JFK years. The last revival as over the top as Curran's was in the early-'80s when Barence Whitfield, a more maniacal screamer and deeper versed in degenerate r&b history, crawled around on sticky barroom floors.

Ordering info: eclectogrooves.com

Various Artists: *Dr. Boogie Presents Rarities From The Bob Hite Vaults* (Sub Rosa 271; 50:43 ★★★) Canned Heat co-founder Hite had a priceless blues and r&b record collection, but sometime after his death in 1981 it was plundered like a pharaoh's tomb. His drummer, Fito De La Parra, managed to save some 78s from the wolves, and 19 songs surface here, all but one from the 1950s. The general tenor of these period pieces is excitement, involving the well-known (Elmore and Etta James, Otis Rush, several more), collector's favorites (Eddie Hope, Chuck Higgins), the forgotten (Mad Mel Sebastian, the Hot Shots) and a ringer (Bill Haley). **BB**

Ordering info: subrosa.net