

Hit List

the queen of gospel music teamed with Wilco's Jeff Tweedy and scored another artistic bull's eye.

Producer Tweedy wisely used the trio that has been Staples' touring unit in the wake of 2007's stripped down *We'll Never Turn Back* (featured on 2008's *Live: Hope At The Hideout*) – guitarist Rick Holmstrom, bassist Jeff Turmes, and drummer Stephen Hodges. What augmentation there is (Patrick Parenti's keyboards, Tweedy's acoustic, some background vocals) is tasteful and unobtrusive.

Likewise, Tweedy contributes three of the songs without the album turning into "Staples Does Tweedy." Indeed, the title track (featuring a soulful, economical Holmstrom solo), "Creep Along Moses" (with Holmstrom getting more aggressive), and "Only The Lord Knows" (recalling the

soul groove of the Staple Singers' '70s hits) are perfectly suited for Mavis.

The cover choices are equally winning. "In Christ There Is No East Or West" is probably better known as a fingerpicking instrumental (by John Fahey, Leo Kottke, and others), so it's nice to hear the lyrics for once. John Fogerty's "Wrote A Song For Everyone" is reminiscent of the Staples' *Last Waltz* rendition of "The Weight," while "Last Train" sticks close to Allen Toussaint's *Southern Nights* version. Little Milton's hit "We're Gonna Make It" becomes a duet with soul crooner Donny Gerrard, and Rev. Gary Davis' spirited "I Belong To The Band" is sure to raise the hair on the back of your neck. Both are propelled by stinging solos from Holmstrom, who wisely opts for the late Roebuck "Pops" Staples' tremolo on Randy Newman's

"Losing You," which, in Mavis' hands, resembles "He Knows How Much We Can Bear." And Pops' "Downward Road" provides a highlight in a set filled with them. – **DF**



Oli Brown

Heads I Win Tails You Lose

Ruf Records

Guitarist Oli Brown is a bright light in the world of blues guitar. While plenty of youngsters are playing, not many in their mid 20s are carving a sound and feel of their own.

On *Heads I Win Tails You Lose*, Brown shows an affinity for standard blues and funk, but he's a clone of

nobody. He has chops to burn, but his playing is tasteful, especially given his age.

"Makes Me Wonder" is a jazzy shuffle highlighted by fine ninth-chord comping and his skill building a solo. While considered a blues artist, Brown is not afraid to push the envelope. "Speechless" is a soul/pop tune full of tasty soloing and a mix of single lines, double-stops, and one-note pops. He's got a real penchant for writing hooky lyrics, too, proven by "Keeping My Options Open" which also has a pinched-out solo that drips with soul. "No Diggity" is similar, but with its own hook and a nasty solo.

The sky just might be the limit for Brown, who is the proverbial "triple threat" of the blues – and guitar, in general – could use if it is to thrive. – **JH**

extra! EXTRA!



GEORGE THOROGOOD AND THE DESTROYERS, *Live in Boston 1982*

(Rounder Records) There's no mystery about what you get with Thorogood. This 1982 set, though, finds the band cookin' with his guitar pushing everything along. All the usual songs are here, plus a rollicking cover of the Human Beinz "Nobody But Me" to finish. – **JH**



CLAUDETTE KING, *We're Onto Something*

(Blues Express) B.B. King's youngest daughter does her dad proud on her debut CD. Along with four tracks produced by Bay Area (and Etta James' preferred) journeyman guitarist Bobby Murray, the album features several tunes penned by Dennis Walker – in collaboration with Robert Cray, Cray's keyboardist Jim Pugh, and guitarist Alan Mirikitani, whose work encompasses Bettye LaVette and Long John Hunter. – **DF**



BUTCH BALDASSARI AND VAN MANAKAS, *Leavin' Tennessee*

(SoundArt Recordings) When Baldassari passed away in January '09, everyone who knew him mourned his passing. This posthumous release features him playing with Van Manakas on guitar, Stuart Duncan and Bobby Hicks on fiddle, and Scott Vestal on banjo. The 17 instrumentals amply demonstrate why Butch's playing was so special. – **SS**



WENDY BIRD, *Natural Wonder*

(Beaumont Classic Records)

John Ellis' pedal steel is the perfect complement as the Canadian country-folk singer Wendy Bird wraps her rich pipes around 12 fine songs written or co-written by Blue Shadows' Jeffery Hatcher. Elvis Costello's guitar solo on "Deliver Me" is a nice plus, but this one is great anyway. – **RA**



GREG GEORGESEON, *Imaginary Theme Songs*

(Self-distributed) Georgeson has fashioned a batch of songs with a retro sound that's just what the title implies. He plays with perfect tone, dialing in whatever the song calls for. After the "theme" portion of the disc there's two nice covers of '60s tunes. – **JH**



STEVE GULLEY AND TIM STAFFORD, *Dogwood Winter*

(Rural Rhythm) Populated by 14 original co-written songs, this album also features Gully and Stafford's lead vocals, using the duo style first popularized by the brother groups of the '30s. Joined by Ron Stewart on fiddle and Adam Steffy on mandolin, every song is a gem. – **SS**



DR. JOHN, *Tribal*

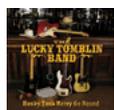
(429 Records) Derek Trucks contributes nice slide to "Manoovas," but Mac's touring band, the Lower 911

(with guitarist John Fohl), anchors another great addition to the Night Creeper's formidable catalog. Mr. Rebennack co-produced the album with 911 drummer Herman "Roscoe" Ernest III. Somebody please explain why this American treasure isn't already in the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame! – **DF**



KENNY NEAL, *Hooked On Your Love*

(Blind Pig) The son of Baton Rouge blues harpist Raful Neal, guitarist Kenny has been cranking out albums since the late '80s while also recording with Lazy Lester, Sonny Rhodes, his dad, and others. He's at his best when he lends his blues guitar and gritty vocals to old-school R&B, like O.V. Wright's "Blind, Crippled And Crazy" (mysteriously mis-credited to Neal) and Little Milton's "If Walls Could Talk." – **DF**



THE LUCKY TOMBLIN BAND, *Honky Tonk Merry-Go-Round*

(Texas World Records) Never concerned with reinventing the musical wheel, the Tomblin Band just plays good songs by good writers (Mel Tillis' "Wine," Floyd Tillman and Jimmy Davis' "It Makes No Difference Now"), cut a few of their own (Redd Volkaert's "She Loves Anything That Swings," Tomblin and Sarah Brown's "The Other Side Of The Blues")

and entertain those who come out to see them. – **RA**



CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE, *The Well*

(Alligator Records) The veteran harpist's latest finds him still feeling the music, even if the voice is a little older and – for lack of a better word – wiser. Dave Gonzales supplies wonderful guitar throughout and Mavis Staples guests on the beautiful "Sad and Beautiful World." A nice addition to his discography. – **JH**



LAURIE ANTONIOLI, *American Dreams*

(Intrinsic) A mixed bag from this Bay Area jazz singer, running the gamut from an otherwise nice, mid-tempo take on "Moonlight In Vermont" (with some ill-advised scatting) to originals that owe as much to Joni Mitchell as, say, Carmen McRae. "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning" (from *Oklahoma*) would border on cabaret were it not for the jazz chops of the quintet, featuring guitarist Dave McNab. – **DF**



MIKE FARRIS AND THE CUMBERLAND SAINTS, *The Night The Cumberland*

(Self-distributed) Guitarist Kenny Vaughan (Marty Stuart, Lucinda Williams) joins singer Farris and mandolinist Sam Bush to spice up the

old-timey country gospel on this lively five-song EP. Some of the proceeds go to the Rose Memorial Fund to benefit victims of the recent Nashville flood. – **RA**



THE BLUE CANYON BOYS, *Mountain Bound*

(Self-distributed) The BCB's fourth album proves that Colorado-based bluegrass is alive and well. Guitarist Jason Hicks and mandolinist Gary Dark do most of the singing and songwriting, and include tunes from Bill Monroe, Louvin Brothers, Delmore Brothers, and for balance, Don Reno. Their originals are all well-written and played with verve. – **SS**



THOM STARR & THE GALAXIES, *South Bay Surf*

(Sundazed) Though derivative of contemporaries like Dick Dale and the Belairs, this first-generation surf guitarist possessed stronger compositional skills than most. The CD combines 1963's never-released *Sons Of The Beach* album with 12 tracks produced by Belairs/Challengers drummer Richard Delvy. A rare find and nice (though not necessarily essential) addition to any intro surf fan's collection. – **DF**



THE AUTUMN DEFENSE, *Once Around*

(Yep Roc) Ready for some frothy processed pop? On their fourth Autumn Defense album, Wilco members John Stirratt and Pat Sansone offer shades ELO sonic splendor mixed with a folkish acoustic innocence, creating an overall sound that's fresh, yet familiar. If you love late Beatles and Badfinger, you'll enjoy this. – **SS**