

REVIEWS REVIEWS

Of course, he does it with so much affable style, you might never notice; in particular during one of Rush's raucous live performances. This album gives you that chance.

— Nick DeRiso

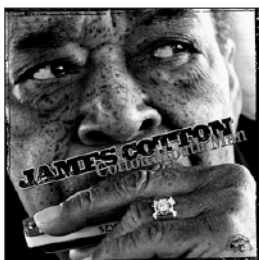
JAMES COTTON

Cotton Mouth Man

Alligator

I've known James Cotton for over 40 years, produced half a dozen shows with him, am familiar with his solo recordings and his extensive work as a sideman, and have seen him live countless times; however, this is the first time I've reviewed a new album by him. I can say without hesitation that this is his best album in years; the two main reasons are the 12 well-crafted originals co-written by renowned producer/drummer Tom Hambridge (seven with Cotton) and, most importantly, the 78-year old Cotton's masterful harmonica, fierce-toned and lyrically raucous, similar to his visceral playing on mid-Sixties albums like *Johnny Young And His Chicago Blues Band* (Arhoolie), Otis Spann's *Chicago Blues* (Testament), and the three Verve releases that auspiciously launched his solo career.

Cotton's regular vocalist, the always soulful Darrell Nulisch, is heard on six songs, Keb' Mo' on two, and Gregg Allman, Delbert McClinton, Ruthie Foster, and Warren Haynes (also guitar) on one each. Cotton's long life in the blues is celebrated in the title track boogie (featuring Joe Bonamassa on lead guitar), the assertive Muddy-esque stop-time shuffle, "He Was There," the plaintive tale of childhood, "Mississippi Mud," the leisurely satori gently propelled by Glenn Worf's throbbing bass, "Wasn't My Time To Go," the slinky swamp-grinder whose title says it all, "The Blues Is Good For You," and the bristling "Midnight Train," which starts with train effects from Cotton's wailing harp and then bursts into a frenetic blend of blues and funk. Muddy Waters' "Bird



Nest On The Ground," nascent soul-blues from 1967, is the lone cover (oddly enough, there was no harmonica on the original). The set concludes with "Bonnie Blue," a harmonica and resonator guitar duet with Colin Linden that features Cotton's talk-singing raspy whisper. As I was extolling Cotton's playing to my wife Maureen when we first listened to this Album of the Year contender, she turned to me and said, "It's like he's defying time."

— Thomas J. Cullen III

DOUG MacLEOD

There's A Time

Reference Recordings

Doug MacLeod continues to breathe fresh ideas into his music. MacLeod's warm, almost conversational, vocals coupled with his pinpoint finger picking have been the center of his art for decades. On every stage, live or recorded, MacLeod regularly sings and plays with deep reverence for this art form and those originators whom he has learned from. If you see him live, songs are accompanied by stories of gentle blues souls like Ernest Banks, George "Harmonica" Smith, and many other legends. Those stories are here, but imbedded with the lyrics of his stories.

To that end, MacLeod introduces each song in the sleeve notes with its history. For example, he honors Banks' sage advice in "Run With The Devil." Played on his National Style O, MacLeod modernizes

the advice to fit the many ways we "run with the devil." He explains that the idea behind "The Entitled Few" came from those who erroneously own a blue handicapped card and park in those entitled spaces. Then he ends with Memphis Slim's classic "mother earth" reference to those posers. On "I'll Be Walking On," MacLeod takes an idea from a B.B. King verse and turns it into a better way to end a relationship. He describes his six-minute "Black Nights" as "the lonely feeling when you can't understand what's going on with the one you love." With its heavy acoustic bass under MacLeod's vintage Gibson, this precisely picked, middle of the night hurt accurately addresses those tore up times.

Sometimes, you can put the notes aside and let the song tell the story. "Dubb's Talkin' Religion Blues" harkens back to an era in folk music when every artist, Guthrie, Seeger, Dylan, recorded some version of "Talkin' Blues." This bouncy, six-minutes illustrates a conversation where Dubb (George Smith's nickname for MacLeod) debunks religious absolutes with a street corner zealot. (These ironies remind me of Dylan's, "whether Judas Iscariot had God on his side.") Other highlights include MacLeod's hilarious "My Inlaws Are Outlaws," the picturesque "St. Elmo's Rooms And Pool," and the grave vision on "The Night Of The Devil's Road."

On this effort, MacLeod, bassist Denny Croy, and drummer Jimi Bott traveled to George Lucas's sound studios at Skywalker Sound and spent days holed up in this spacious, state of the art edifice and lovingly recorded these 13 MacLeod originals. This studio is the sound production and recording division of the Lucas'



films. Vast orchestras come her to record the music of his films. Bott told me during these sessions this high tech studio "tuned" the room to fit the exquisite sound of this trio.

Decades ago, Doug MacLeod learned that a bluesman reaches people and makes them feel something that helps them get through our world easier. Every song he plays touches the world in that way.

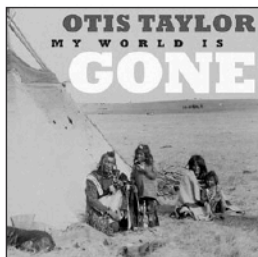
— Art Tipaldi

OTIS TAYLOR

My World Is Gone

Telarc

There are two things Otis Taylor is known for: his patented "trance blues" style and his socially conscious songwriting. On *My World Is Gone*, Taylor delivers both in style. Inspired by a conversation with his collaborator Mato Nanji, the record is a



departure from much of his previous work, which focused on the African American experience, and slavery in particular. Thematically he returns to the same overarching meta-narrative of displacement, identity crises, and culture clash in a supposedly egalitarian society. The harsh message is a little easier to hear when it's couched in the kind of deep soulful, blues that Taylor brings.

Nanji fronts the band Indigenous, with a style that is all American blues and rock. On the surface, his style is informed by Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan, but goes much deeper. There is an ethereal quality to his electric and acoustic

leads, a perfect complement to Taylor's heavy, rhythm-dominated approach. Channeling John Lee Hooker, Taylor lays down droning bass lines that put the focus on the stories of these songs. If you haven't heard Taylor's work, "trance blues" isn't just a catch phrase. The throbbing drone of banjo, guitar, bass, and percussion truly seems to change your mental state.

The standout track for me is the mellow groove of "Blue Rain In Africa," written from the perspective of a Native American who sees a sacred white buffalo. And here Taylor plays with anachronicity – the natural and woody strumming of an acoustic guitar, Nanji's electric leads are clean and modern, the vocal harmonies are spot on. The much grittier "Huckleberry Blues" is the best of the "trance blues" sound on the disc, with the percussive banjo anchoring the tune. A different kind of banjo keeps "Girl Friend's House" fun and bouncy, and the band is joined by brass that lends an almost-Mariachi feel to this number. It's a song about a man who discovers his wife is cheating on him with her girl friend, so it needs that bounce.






BADLANDS
TRAMPLED UNDER FOOT



MORELAND & ARBUCKLE
7 Cities

One of the hottest up-and-coming blues bands on the circuit today, this young sister/brother/brother trio is heavily inspired by classic blues and rock as well as their Kansas City roots.

TELARC

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Roots-rockers Moreland & Arbuckle unveil *7 Cities*, produced by Matt Bayles (Mastodon, The Sword), telling the story of Spanish explorer Coronado and his fabled search for the Seven Cities of Gold in their homeland, the Kansas prairie.