

## THE HARPOONIST & THE AXE MURDERER: Checkered Past

**The Harpoonist & The Axe Murderer HAM003 (43:29)**

The blues audience has changed a lot over the last few decades, but it is only when a set like this comes along that you realise just how much. A younger generation than most of B&R's readership (I'd guess) has no difficulty accepting groups like The White Stripes or The Black Keys as blues artists, and there is an even louder, punkier sub-category. Not that this Canadian duo – who don't just play harp and guitar – fall into that latter genre other than by the name maybe, but their style relies on reconstructed standard blues techniques, losing much of the simplicity of the original music and replacing it with pop and rock flavours from the last forty years or so. Some might find the experimental approach interesting but I can't honestly see many readers going for this. <www.harpoonistaxemurderer.com>

*Norman Darwen*

## THE KINGMIXERS: Riding With Mr. Blues PB 103 (54:39)

This Canadian trio is led by singer/harpman/keyboards player Gary Preston and the repertoire stretches from a basic vocal, harmonica and rhythm 'Southern Train' via New Orleans and Chicago to a creditable cover of Ray Charles' 'What'd I Say' and the humorous 'Granny's At The Wheel'. Gary is more than capably backed by Anita Bonkowski on bass, drums and piano, and guitarist David Schade – a nice, cool, jazz workout from him on 'Creepin'' – and the set makes pleasant enough listening. Gary's voice is light and takes a bit of getting used to; I do know someone who has definitely been put off by it, so it might be best to check the website first if what you've read interests you. <www.garypreston.ca>

*Norman Darwen*

## PADDY MILNER: The Curious Case Of Paddy Milner Re-Opened Blues Boulevard 250313 (58:44)

Milner can play the piano, that's never in doubt. However, this new CD takes things rather too far from the blues root for this writer. Citing influences including the Beach Boys and the Beatles, he plays a whole slew of original material, plus covers of songs by Dave Brubeck ('Unsquare Dance'), Memphis Slim ('Mother Earth'), Jack Bruce, Nick Drake, and Nirvana (whoever the last two may be...) and 'reinterprets' Muddy's 'Louisiana Blues', Robert Johnson's 'Come On In My Kitchen' and, of all things, 'The James Bond Theme'.

Sorry, it did nothing for me, but if you have listened to him in the past and liked what you heard, then by all means check this release out for yourself.

*Phil Wight*

## SHRIMP CITY SLIM: Rio Angie Erwin Music EM-2012 (40:56)

Gary Erwin (aka Shrimp City Slim) has released plenty of blues and roots music albums on his own label from his base in Charleston, South Carolina. This CD is a little different, a collection of solo piano improvisations by Slim, re-working compositions – not blues – that he wrote between 1971 and 1980. These are not blues recordings – I hear hints of ragtime, jazz, gospel, classical, parlour and ragtime piano in this delicate and gentle music – though the blues does surface from time to time, an odd note here or there, or far more than that on the New Orleans-ish 'The Sound Of Late Night'. Very relaxing – but as I said, certainly not blues per se. <www.shrimpcityslim.com>

*Norman Darwen*

## THE BLUESMASTERS: Volume Two – In Memory Of Our Dear Friends Pinetop Perkins And Hubert Sumlin

**DMD 0005-2 (41:46)**

'Volume 1' was reviewed in B&R 260 – Mickey Thomas, ex Jefferson Starship, was the main vocalist there, and he returns for the follow-up, though only on three tracks (and one of those is a duet). Cassie Taylor, daughter of bluesman Otis Taylor and whose last album was produced by Bluesmasters' guitarist Tim Tucker, plays bass throughout the album and sings six songs straight plus two duets, one with Thomas and one, the double-entendre 'Fine Cadillac', with Memphis blues-rocker Eric Gales. She has a fine, flexible voice, ranging from sexy and sultry to sassy shouting, and the older Hazel Miller supplies fine vocals on a further two. 'Dear friends' Pinetop and Hubert both also appear on the album, though neither noticeably so, and fans of British blues might be interested to note the presence again of drummer Aynsley Dunbar – but Cassie is the main attraction here.

*Norman Darwen*

## ★ BOOKS ★

### THE CHICANO ARCHIVES, VOLUME 6: THE ARHOOLIE FOUNDATION'S STRACHWITZ FRONTERA COLLECTION OF MEXICAN AND MEXICAN AMERICAN RECORDINGS

**Agustín Gurza with Jonathan Clark and Chris Strachwitz  
(Los Angeles, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center,  
2012; distribution: Seattle, University of Washington  
Press), xiv + 226 pp. ISBN: 978-0-89551-148-5; pb,  
\$19.95**

Invisible behind this large-format (8" x 11.5") paperback is the reason for its existence: the archive described in its (also large-format) title. Nobody else in the roots music and collector world was interested in Mexican-American and Mexican music when Chris Strachwitz started acquiring all the discs – and photographs, posters, catalogues and other ephemera – he could lay his hands on. Buying up radio station and distributor stock, and the inventory of record labels that went out of business, was usually more productive than junking; records that survived in private hands had often been played to death. The Strachwitz Frontera Collection comprises – deep breath – 33,472 performances on 78s, some 50,000 on 45s, 4,000 LPs and 650 cassettes, and is, needless to say, by far the largest archive of this music in existence. Thanks to grants from various foundations, and notably to a share in \$500,000 from regional superstars Los Tigres del Norte, by late 2010 all the 78s and about half the 45s had been digitised, and entered into a database at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. This is accessible via <<http://frontera.library.ucla.edu/index.html>>, although for copyright reasons only the first 50 seconds of each recording is available to computers off-campus.

The book under review explores some of the possibilities for research enabled by this resource. First, though, there are chapters about Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie Records, and an account of how the Frontera Collection came into existence, through Chris's encounters with the late Guillermo Hernández, a professor of literature who turned to studying border music and corridos after seeing Les Blank's film, 'Chulas Fronteras', and learning of the existence of Strachwitz's collection. Chris himself contributes a short history of the recording industry, with particular reference to Mexican music.

This is a good place to note that this music (like zydeco and many blues singers) is known about, and documented, in large measure thanks to the efforts of Chris Strachwitz. It's also the place to observe that Mexican and Mexican-American recordings seem, far more than many vernacular discs, concerned with history as experienced from below. Guido van Rijn's series of books about American presidents has shown how blues and gospel music can function as a people's almanac and editorial page; but the corridos and tragedias of the borderlands seem a far more extensive and deliberate attempt to memorialise and comment on events of historical and local importance, and on the pleasures and (more often) hardships of life in Mexico and America. The Frontera Collection offers an almost limitless resource for the study of Mexican-American sociology and history; and, of course, a lot of it is simply wonderful listening.

'A Century of Corridos' responds to Guillermo Hernández's article, 'What Is A Corrido?' (reprinted as an appendix), using recordings in the collection to amplify, and sometimes to take issue with, the characteristics Hernández identified through a study of thirty corridos. There are nearly 4,000 items in the Frontera Collection listed as corridos; some are recordings of the same song by different artists, but this enables fruitful comparison of different versions.

Love, sex and their discontents are nevertheless the most represented topics in the collection, of course, and 'Transcending Machismo' considers the range of responses to love and loss. As the chapter's title implies, it argues, with supporting examples, that there's a lot more to the Mexican male's reaction to being dumped than machismo. It's unfortunate, however, that 'machismo' is nowhere explicitly defined in the discussion. The OED offers 'macho: ostentatiously or notably manly or virile; assertively masculine or tough; producing an impression of manliness or toughness', but Gurza characterises it both more narrowly and more vaguely: 'the macho response – from murderous rage to debauched despair – can certainly be found in these songs...'

'Gringos, Chinos, and Pochos' looks at 'intercultural conflict in Mexican Music', and is commendably honest about the stereotyping of blacks, Gringos and – especially, it seems – Chinese people. Gurza pithily sums up Xavier Cugat's 'Chino Soy': 'it's notable that so much musical thought

can go into a subject so inane'. Needless to say, Mexicans have been and are subjected to racist stereotyping and hostility themselves, from the War of 1846-8, to the zoot suit riots, to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina ('FEMA – Find Every Mexican Available' was one of the jokes going around in New Orleans). 'Pochos' are Mexicans who try to act Anglo; they are the frequent subject of musical mockery and scorn, although 'El Pocho' by Conjunto Hermanos Rojo makes the practical point that hiding one's Mexican identity also hides one from La Migra.

Jonathan Clark, author of 'El Mariachi From Rustic Roots To Golden Era', has worked in mariachi groups as a guitarrón player for many years, and has done as much as anyone alive to research the roots and history of the music that exemplifies Mexican culture for many outsiders. This account of the music's origins and development, with biographies of notable artists, constitutes an immensely valuable section of the book. The final chapter tells the story of major funding contributors Los Tigres del Norte, four brothers and a cousin from a poor village in Mexico who became the biggest stars in the music. Along the way, somewhat to their disquiet, they inadvertently inaugurated the narcocorrido genre with their first, and much-covered big hit, 'Contrabando y Traición'.

The book concludes with eleven appendixes, mostly designed to show ways in which the database can be searched – for music from elsewhere in Latin America, for the 'top ten' (#1 'Cielito Lindo', 147 versions present), for most represented songwriters, genres and performers, and so on. Archivist Antonio Cuéllar (the only person alive who has listened to every 78 in the collection) contributes 'Seventy-Eight Favorite 78s', Jonathan Clark lists 'Forty Notable Mariachi Recordings', and Mister Chris enumerates his 'Fifty Favorite Mexican and Latin Recordings'. These listings may seem like self-indulgence, but in fact they are useful guides, by knowledgeable escorts, to the places where one should look for quality, entertainment and historical significance. I won't say that they're anything as formal as an attempt to define a canon, but that may turn out to be a by-product of the existence of the Frontera Collection, and of its accessibility (albeit in excerpts, and via what seems to be a slow server) worldwide.

The only thing that remains to be mentioned is that the illustrations are wonderful, and that \$19.95 is a remarkable price. This book is a fitting celebration of the achievements of a man who, according to his biography within, 'doesn't speak a lick of Spanish'. (Actually, he speaks enough to phone a Mexican record shop and find out what time it closes; I went there with him shortly afterwards, and bought an Alegres de Terán CD).

Chris Smith

## ★ OTHER STUFF ★

**CLASSIC BLUES ARTWORK FROM THE 1920'S 2013 CALENDAR (VOL. 10) – (with 21 TRACK CD)**  
Blues Images Volume 10

**CD TRACK LISTING (66:58): BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON: Dark Was The Night-Cold Was The Ground; BLIND BLAKE: Diddie Wa Diddie/ Police Dog Blues; MEMPHIS MINNIE: What's The Matter With The Mill?; LIL McCLINTOCK: Sow Good Seeds; BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON: Peach Orchard Mama; BUDDY BOY HAWKINS: Snatch It Back Blues; ARDELL BRAGG: Pig Meat Blues; HARUM SCARUM: Alabama Scratch (Parts 1 & 2); CHARLEY PATTON: Frankie And Albert/ Some These Days I'll Be Gone (Takes 1 & 2); CLIFFORD GIBSON: Ice And Snow Blues; REVEREND EMMET DICKENSON: The Devil And God Meet At Church; BLIND WILLIE DAVIS: I Believe I'll Go Back Home Again/ Trust In God And Do The Right; HI HENRY BROWN: Titanic Blues/ Preacher Blues; LAURA RUCKER WITH BLIND BLAKE: Fancy Tricks; FREDDIE SPRUELL WITH WASHBOARD SAM: Ocean Blues/ Y.M.V. Blues**

For the tenth year in a row, Blues Images presents their 'Classic Blues Artwork From The 1920's' calendar with an enclosed CD. This time around, the cover art is particularly graphic with December's Paramount

artwork featuring Jesus facing off against Satan, referencing Reverend Dickenson's fiery sermon, 'The Devil And God Meet At Church' while the music on offer is the usual inspired mix of stunningly re-mastered, calendar-reflecting country blues or gospel sides – Blind Willie Johnson's classic 'Dark Was The Night-Cold Was The Ground', whose artwork features a newly-discovered, vivid photo of Johnson starts the year off with a bang – along with nine super rare and/or previously unreleased bonus tracks. Among them not only a pair of great sounding guitar gospel transfers (Paramount 12979) by the obscure Blind Willie Davis from 1929 but two, also recently unearthed, 1935 efforts by the Chicago-based team of Freddie Spruell and Washboard Sam, and both takes of Charley Patton's harrowing farewell, 'Some These Days I'll Be Gone'. Two sides by Hi Henry Brown ('Preacher Blues' has never sounded better!) and a rough-sounding version of Laura Rucker singing about her 'Fancy Tricks' (accompanied by guitarist Blind Blake on what turned out to be his final recording) complete the bonus material.

Blind Blake also shines on a pair of calendar-accompanied tracks with superlative sounding (thanks to Nick Perls) transfers of his two-sided hit (Paramount 12888) – the 'hot and bothered' 'Diddie Wa Diddie' and the clever, dazzling guitar-infused 'Police Dog Blues' – along with Buddy Boy Hawkins on his descriptive, acoustically recorded 'Snatch It Back Blues' (great ad art!), Memphis Minnie with Kansas Joe McCoy on their original version of Muddy's 'Can't Get No Grindin'' (accompanied by a clear Vocalion promo photo of the rough and tumble blues woman) and long-fingered Clifford Gibson with his weebegone 'Ice And Snow Blues'. Other picks feature recondite South Carolina blues and gospel singer/guitarist Lil McClintock's final record, 'Sow Good Seeds' (Columbia Record No 14 02-D/10 inch, 75 cents) along with a full-size advertising flyer photo of the top hat-bedecked Mr. McClintock; little known Ardell Bragg singing her good-timey 'Pig Meat Blues', accompanied by jazz pianist Tiny Parham (check out the hilarious advertising art!) and the hokum-oriented super-group, Harum Scarum (Big Bill Broonzy, Georgia Tom Dorsey and sassy Mozelle Alderson), with a delightful, two-part 'Alabama Scratch'. The perfect holiday gift for blues fans of any stripe.

Gary von Tersch

**BIG MAYBELLE: I Got A Feeling (2:57)/ TERRY TIMMONS: Got Nobody To Love (2:40)**  
Outta Sight R&B RSV 010

**LITTLE ARTHUR MATHEWS: I'm Gonna Whale On You (2:09)/ WILLIE WRIGHT & HIS SPARKLERS: I'm Gonna Leave You Baby (2:39)**  
Outta Sight R&B RSV 011

**BILLY HAMBRIC: Flaming Mamie (2:31)/ THE UPSETTERS: Jaywalking (2:38)**  
Outta Sight R&B RSV 012

Best known for their Northern soul singles series, Outta Sight now launch an r&b series, whose clever label design evokes memories of Sue, Pye International, Top Rank and R&B Discs, which is an achievement in itself. In the main, their choice of music is as good as their design flair, too.

Everything about 'I Got A Feeling' is big, the clomping beat, the billowing ensemble brass, Sam 'The Man' Taylor's tone on his tenor sax solo, and most of all Maybelle Smith's broad, Southern-inflected voice as she sings of her sneakin' suspicions. Sounding more recent than its 1954 P-date would suggest, this side is what the fondly remembered radio DJ Tony Hall would have called a 'zonker'. Terry Timmons, whose recording career encompassed a few sessions in the first half of the 1950s, apparently cut 'Got Nobody To Love' for RCA in 1952, though it is not listed in the standard discography. Mid-tempo, blaring and blousy, it shakes its thing without being earth-shaking.

Little Arthur's recording career was even briefer; here's one of just four sides he saw issued. 'Whale On You' shows him to be a serviceable r&b singer, but the backing from a smallish Johnny Otis band, with cluttering drums, clangorous guitar, busy piano and well-greased tenor sax lifts it out of the rut. Five years later, in 1960, Willie Wright cut 'I'm Gonna Leave You' for the same label, Federal, with the urgent, falsetto-flecked voice of future Chess singer Jesse Anderson out front. Calvin 'Willie' Wright played either the socking drums or the plangent guitar on the record, depending in which discography you