

What'd I Say

BY JIM HYNES

Take That Cool Blues Walk

*I went to a blues hangout
Just to hang out with the blues
The joint was really jumping
And the blues was walking there too
They was walking baby
Everybody doing that cool blues walk
I ain't got no time to talk y'all
I want to get up and do
That cool blues walk
—Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater*

Go ahead. Get your disc or MP3 player and a good pair of walking shoes and take that cool blues walk. Here are five albums from lesser-known artists, a group to make your walk last a good long time. Some of your friends may even think you've disappeared. And, in a sense, you have—into your own little world of guitar and blues heaven. This array of recordings covers just about all familiar blues and R&B styles, but you're still guaranteed some surprises.

Let's start off at a brisk pace with Matthew Stubbs' *Soul Bender*. He takes you right to the heart of that Stax or Hi Records instrumental groove with “Sax” Gordon Beadle leading a horn trio and blowing his tenor soulfully in response to or behind Stubbs' tasteful lines and chording. The beauty of Stubbs' playing is his “less is more” approach, leaving plenty of space for the ensemble to kick in. These licks will leave you smiling and you might even break into a jog.

Now it's your choice. If you're ready for something new, try Neil Haverstick's *Way Down By the Mississippi*. Apart from the title track, his album is an instrumental blues guitar tribute. Though rooted in a blues-rock tradition that echoes Hendrix, T-Bone Walker and Hubert Sumlin, Haverstick's guitar carves out original sounds, ranging from aching strident to sparingly beautiful. Haverstick is

known for playing fretless and for developing a microtonal system that takes the octave to 12, 19, 31 and 34 tones. The last two cuts are examples of his 19-tone treatment. If you'd rather stay closer to Stubbs' feeling, go with Montreal guitarist Steve Rowe's *Five*. You'll get a rocking sound akin to John Mayall's early Bluesbreakers with the B3 of opening track “Believe I'm Gonna Go Back Home,” followed by funk (“Black Hole”), jazz (“I Ain't Buying”), swing (“A Cat Like That”) and raging guitar (“La Vie on Blues”). If you miss British guitar gods like Rory Gallagher, check out Rowe.

By now you may be exhausted from listening to three guitar slingers. Take a break. Go to Fontaine Brown's *Tales from the Fence Line*. These are all Brown originals delivered in a refreshing mix of blues, R&B and pop-rock with bizarre twists, like an electric sitar-based tune. Brown has a long history, beginning with Chess in 1962 and later with Bob Seger and Motown. He blows a mean harp, and these harp-driven tunes are among the best on the disc—try “Fence Line,” “Southside Story” and “Got to Git,” and dig the harmonies on “Love Come Rescue Me.”

So, you're into the last leg of your excursion and you're seeking a wrap-up disc. The twin-guitar jam band sound of Motu & the Roadhouse Jesters' *No Refunds/No Exchanges* is a seamless 45-minute romp through familiar blues classics by John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf and Elmore James, to name a few. What makes it work is the deft slide work of Richard Michelson (Motu), complemented by George Gashonia's rhythms and leads. Gospel vocalist Dolores Chetta, heard best on “Angel from Montgomery,” adds the finishing touches.

That's it—now we need a cold beer, a cold drink of water or a shower. We'll be walking with these guys again. ●



Top: Steve Rowe; bottom: Neil Haverstick



STEVE ROWE: COURTESY OF STEVE ROWE; NEIL HAVERSTICK: MELLE WEIJTERS