

a New Orleans radio station and evokes shades of Joe Strummer's The 101ers, especially in the vocal delivery. 'Don't Try' is a bit of an outlier, the band dipping into the studio toy box for appropriate effects. 'Hold On Tight' sees guest percussionists and a djembe player over a John Lee Hooker style groove, plus clever guitar licks from Williams. 'What Mickey Did Next' is a nod towards some shady South London characters and could've featured in a 1970s TV crime series. 'Until I Die' has a more mainstream blues structure before the album wraps up with 'Well Boss', a harp-led instrumental. This is another well-balanced album that makes full use of the band's instrumentation and that of their guest players.

Russ Cottee



The Jive Aces: Good Rockin' Tonight - The Roots Of The King

Golden Age Recordings

Anyone who has seen The Jive Aces will need no introduction: the finest swing and jive band in the UK. After over thirty years visiting over forty countries, they've recorded an album subtitled *The Roots Of The King*, and sure enough, it's music made famous by Elvis Presley, more specifically, music that inspired the young Elvis on his road to superstardom.

Ian Clarkson and his Aces deliver a dozen classic rockin' blues songs from the opening 'Mystery Train' right through to the heavy foot-tapping title track. All rooted in solid blues, it's an album that's hard not to love. The band rock the joint in a style very much their own, great vocals from Ian alongside honking saxes, wailing harmonica, boogie piano,

solid double bass, and drums carrying the beat. You can safely call this a house-rockin' party of a record!

These tracks really get a fresh lease of life here but never lose what made them great in the first place: 'Mystery Train', 'See See Rider', 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy', Mama Thornton's famous 'Hound Dog', 'Corrinne Corrina', Arthur Crudup's 'That's All Right Mama' and 'Rip It Up' – what an incredible choice of songs Elvis found to build his career on in those early Sun Record days. There's also a nice slice of gospel, 'Up Above My Head' – Elvis certainly loved his gospel music and this is a great version.

The blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll: and here it is in its full richness, a band taking us on a journey that's both blues and rock n roll.

Pete Clack



Dani Wilde: The Vizztone Sessions

Vizztone

Multi-talented British blueser Dani Wilde made her name with Ruf Records, from 2008, but the current release compiles her later work for Vizztone, consisting of her 2017 *Live At Brighton Road* album and ten digital singles that are appearing on CD for the first time. The variety of Wilde's work is impressive; electric and acoustic tracks, duo tracks and tracks with bands of various sizes, original songs and wide-ranging covers, and blues and singer-songwriter material. Throughout her guitar playing is articulate, her singing is technically excellent and emotionally engaging, and her arrangements imaginative.

Of the covers, there's a

passionately sung version of Memphis Minnie's erotically-charged 'Bumble Bee', performed with her brother Will Wilde, an exceptional harmonica player. On Jimmie Davis's 'You Are My Sunshine', Wilde emphasises the song's lullaby-like qualities and omits the more embittered lines, such as *"If you leave me to love another, you'll regret it all some day"*. On Lieber-Stoller's 'Hound Dog' she (wisely) uses the lyrics sung by "Big Mama" Thornton rather than those sung by Elvis Presley; on Bob Dylan's 'Masters Of War' her voice for part of the song wails in wordless despair; and she sings Ida Cox's 'Wild Women Don't Have The Blues' and Ma Rainey's 'Don't Fish In My Sea' assertively, relishing the songs' feminist sentiments. Her own 'Baby Please (Stop Smoking That Weed)' is similarly assertive with Wilde threatening to leave her partner if he doesn't stop turning on.

Many of her own songs, including 'Vagabond Child' (about the need for freedom), the empathic 'Refugee' (*'Is there a place for me,'* she sings plaintively) and 'Howling At The Moon', on which she sounds demented with grief, have little blues content but are convincing as singer-songwriter-type material.

Trevor Hodgett



Peter Parcek, Most Of The Time

Own Label

Bostonian Peter Parcek's blues has real soul with a distinctive style and *Most Of The Time* is very much in that mould: 15 songs, including two bonus cuts, half self-penned, half borrowed standards, but all beautifully played. The album opens with the punchy

rock-edged 'Twistified', Parcek's voice a smoky timbre, his guitar emotive. Duke Robillard is also in there stoking the flames, a great start. 'How Many Times' has a samba rhythm conjured up by Tim Carmen on drums, with lovely touches on the Hammond from Tom West. Parcek's take on Dylan's sublime 'Most Of The Time' features vocal reflections from Danielle Miraglia: it's a great re-invention, faded memories or just imagined? Mose Allison's 'I Don't Worry 'Bout A Thing' proves deeply delicious, Carmen and West setting the scene for the meaty guitar to break out. John Hiatt's 'Mississippi Phone Booth' and Elmore James's 'Stranger Blues' are brilliant, Peter's voice and style making them distinctively personal.

'Poor Boy' is pure Chicago blues, with Marcus Silva on harp, a superb old school, scorching soulful blues. A foot-stomping, tub-thumping 'When I'm Dead And Gone' has Luther Dickinson trading riffs and more wonderful harmonica. Fred McDowell's '61 Highway' and a swampy Bill Withers 'Grandma's Hands' close, but Jessie Mae Hemphill's 'Lord Help The Poor And Needy' (raw, hammered percussion, painted with mesmerising guitar) feeds into a take on Freddie King and Sonny Thompson's 'Swooshy', an instrumental demonstrating the superlative musicianship on show here..

Graham Munn



Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour: Watching The Tide

Provogue

Steve Cropper sadly passed in December 2025 but up to the end he remained as musically active

as he'd been during his long and illustrious career. This posthumous album consists of tracks he'd been working on with friend and collaborator, the songwriter and producer Jon Tiven, and features a number of guest appearances from guitar luminaries. The name of the studio band and the album title of course reference two of Cropper's most well-known collaborations, with Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding respectively.

The bane of being a guitarist who doesn't sing, however good you are, is that you're reliant on finding a singer that can give expression to your musical ideas – unless you find an outfit as funky as Booker T and The M.G.'s and just play instrumentals! Cropper worked with some of the very best singers we've ever seen, including the two above, and it's perhaps unfair to compare the Midnight Hour's vocalist, Roger C. Reale, to those greats but, being honest, his voice doesn't add much colour to what are some pretty groovy backing tracks, many of which demonstrate the guitarist's ability to still find the sweet spot in a guitar pattern that gives a song its distinctive hook. The opening instrumental track, 'Tandoori Chicken' contains a lot of Cropper's classic licks and is lot of fun. Eric Clapton guests on 'Ticket First', which has a tasty, repetitive riff and some nice playing but, otherwise, is rather formulaic. Brian May takes lead vocals on 'My Angels Are Calling', the lyrics of which are sung from the guitarist's perspective, looking back on his career. This is one of the standout tracks here and features two excellent solos, from May first and then from Billy Gibbons. Ronnie Wood adds nice slide playing to 'Until Now'. A lot of songs, like 'Blood From A Stone' and 'House Of Cards', kick off with a killer groove that the rest of the song fails to live up to. 'It's Gonna Get Worse' is driven by a superb Cropper guitar part and is another standout track. There's a lot of good things going on, and it's a pleasure to hear the great man's playing, but this won't be the

album you'll want to remember him by.

Simon Green



Sunjay: Split The Sheets

Mighty Tight

Sunjay is an amazing blues talent, his voice superb, his guitar playing equally so. His most recent album was a beautiful birthday tribute to Chris Smither on which his voice caught Smither's songs at their finest. And here, on what he describes as "a love album", on fourteen songs he's joined by some of the finest musicians in British blues today; the keys of Bob Fridzemma and the brilliant Jonny Henderson, the guitars of Joe Wilkins and Josh Creal taking to the drum stool.

You'll know some of the songs, some not so much, opening with Steven Bruton's 'That's Love', leading into Bob McDill's 'It Must Be Love' made famous by Don Williams. Sunjay brings another Chris Smither gem to our ears with 'Hundred Dollar Valentine' – this fits his voice like a glove. Then we have Jimmy Reed's 'Take Out Some Insurance', where the band drive the beat, as good as it gets. His take on 'Killing The Blues' (another that Smither has done) is as good if not better than most, the band's rhythm laid low behind Sunjay's voice and guitar. Townes Van Zandt's 'If I Needed Someone' is a great song with a great version here. Dorsey Burnette's 'Its Late' appears, a classic given another fine performance here. Elias McDaniel, better known as Bo Diddley, gets in on the act with 'Who Do You Love', upbeat and original.

Before the album closes, there are two simply amazing tracks: the upbeat blues of 'My Baby Don't



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