

Decades of Pain, Pleasure

Mitch Woods, *A Tip Of The Hat To Fats* (Blind Pig 5170; 40:36 ★★★★★) Woods holds court as one of the leading exponents of New Orleans r&b-blues piano, even though he doesn't have a permanent address in the Crescent City. (He hangs his Panama hat in San Francisco when not touring the world or visiting Louisiana.) Saluting Fats Domino and Professor Longhair on his new release, Woods pounds the 88s to high heaven in front of an approving crowd at last year's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Yet, no matter how ecstatic he gets with all those triplets and boogie patterns, Woods retains the control of a master. As a singer, his robust voice and strutting, confident style project the lyrics of, for example, "Crawfishin'" and "Jambalaya." The hand-picked local band, brimming with joyful pleasure, includes saxophonists Roger Lewis (Dirty Dozen Brass Band) and Amadee Castenell. Mitch is no Fats, of course, but he's tons of fun.

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

The Texas Horns, *Get Here Quick* (Severn 0075; 51:35 ★★½) Presenting just its second album since forming as an Austin-based band in the mid-1990s, Mark "Kaz" Kazanoff (tenor saxophone), John Mills (baritone saxophone) and Al Gomez (trumpet) render a specialized synthesis of Lone Star State blues, Southern soul and jazz. The band soulfully imprints its musical personality on 10 originals (five of them spirited instrumentals) and on two by renowned tunesmith Gary Nicholson (the Texan sings both, decently). One standout is Mills' "Guitar Town," with Gary Forsyth applying tender strength to his task of singing. Another is "Sundown Talkin'," in which the excellent vocalist Curtis Salgado, recorded remotely from Oregon, reaches the light/dark emotional core of the Mills opus.

Ordering info: severnrecords.com

Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith & The House Bumpers, *Drop The Hammer* (Big Eye 0005; 51:17 ★★) Drummer Smith has one foot in modern blues and the other planted in the classic Chicago style championed by his father, "Big Eyes" Willie, of Muddy Waters Band fame. Disappointingly, Smith's album is of limited interest, more tedious than intriguing. The bandleader's voice lacks nuances of tone and provides few sparks of expression. The tunes are lightweight, so even skillful playing by Smith, guitarist Billy Flynn and other Chicagoans isn't enough.

Ordering info: bigeyerecords.com

Big Daddy Wilson, *Deep In My Soul* (Ruf 1259; 44:34 ★★★★★) Based in Germany the past quarter century, Wilson only recently returned to the South to make his first



American album, produced by Jim Gaines in Memphis and Muscle Shoals' FAME Studios. He sings the words of soul-blues songs with a warm tone, refined phrasing, good diction and an emphasis on natural, levelheaded expression. This graybeard has duende, a rare cool. Simpatico support, especially at medium tempos, comes from Bay Area guitarist Laura Chavez and first-call Memphis studio regulars.

Ordering info: rufrecords.de

Bob Corritore & Friends, *Do The Hip-Shake Baby!* (SWMAF 13; 49:26 ★★★★★) The 14th entry in Corritore's discography finds him in the company of 40 friends from around the country at eight sessions held during the past three years. Funneling a deep sense of blues harmonica history into his music, while getting the right mix of bravura and steadiness, is second nature to this Arizonian. Whether in party-hearty or downhearted moods, Corritore and various groupings of friends knock the dust off well-selected old r&b and blues numbers, like Jimmy Reed's "Bitter Seed" and Hank Ballard's "The Twist." Not pretending to be a singer, Corritore counts on legit vocal practitioners Alabama Mike, Mighty Joe Milsap and, among others, Sugaray Rayford. The latter unleashes a ferocity worthy of Howlin' Wolf on "Keep The Lord On With You," a profane Rayford "prayer."

Ordering info: swmaf.org

Yola, *Walk Through Fire* (Easy Eye Sound 008; 41:17 ★★½) On her debut, the ironclad honesty of Yola's outstanding voice connects lyrics on heartache to her largeness of spirit. The Brit's singing has the personalization and emotional intensity of a fine blues singer, even as producer Dan Auerbach points her in a neo-soul direction. Country music touches don't flatter her. **DB**

Ordering info: easyyeyesound.com