

Vagabond Lives And New Collections

Tim Woods: *The Blues Sessions* (Earwig 4962; 58:03 ★★★) Woods, a guitarist in Pittsburgh, has recorded this likable album as a salute to the various blues friends he's made over the past quarter century; 16 of them recording with him in the Chicago, Atlanta or Delta studio, including David "Honeyboy" Edwards, B-3 dynamo Ike Stubblefield and young first-call drummer Kenny Smith. Woods has the clear-eyed intelligence, assurance and personality needed to restore luster to "Spoonful," "Built For Comfort," "Do The Do" and eight more long-tarnished classics. Listeners new to the blues are encouraged to start here then move on to the masters' original recordings.

Ordering info: earwigmusic.com

John Jackson: *Rappahannock Blues* (Smithsonian Folkways 40181; 57:00 ★★★) Jackson, who died in 2002, was a second-level American treasure whose warm singing and Blind Boy Fuller-influenced guitar picking on his arrangements of folk blues like "John Henry" and "Candy Man" exemplified the resiliency of the human spirit. Always profoundly honest in his music, the Virginian performed many times at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, where these 20 tracks were taped between 1970 and 1997.

Ordering info: folkways.si.edu

Various Artists: *I'm Going Where The Water Drinks Like Wine—18 Unsung Bluesmen, Rarities 1923–1929* (SubRosa 287; 74:00 ★★★½) From Belgium comes this carefully assembled compilation of two dozen 78s that, despite tape hiss, brings to life such country blues workmen as Sylvester Weaver, Arthur Petties, Kid Bailey and Noah Lewis (the latter known for songs covered by Grateful Dead). Though lacking the magical touch of Robert Johnson or Charley Patton, these accounts of the vagabond life, jail and thankless hard labor are invested with harrowing passion.

Ordering info: subrosanet.com

Hot Tuna: *Live At New Orleans House Berkeley, CA 09/69* (Collector's Choice 6003; 68:21 ★★★) When the rest of Jefferson Airplane began politicizing their rock, guitarist Jorma Kaukonen and bassist Jack Casady formed a side band where they could express their enthusiasm for acoustic folk blues. This previously unreleased concert set is a godsend. Kaukonen possesses a power and resonance rarely found in white bluesmen then or since. His heartening elan is a distinct quality audible within



Dave Weld: purposeful debut

his original songs and his revivals of Blind Blake, Rev. Gary Davis and Jelly Roll Morton material.

Ordering info: ccmusic.com

Dave Weld & The Imperial Flames: *Burnin' Love* (Delmark 806; 65:40 ★★★) It took more than a decade—with his ailing mother to look after and many gigs with his Chicago-based Flames band or Lil' Ed's Blues Imperials—but Weld has delivered his first feature album. Using a metal slide, the guitarist draws on lessons learned from the great J. B. Hutto and makes his emanations of power and energy ever so purposeful. He's a passable singer and songwriter, often concerned with the vagaries of love. At no loss in entertainment, two Flames, singing drummer Jeff Taylor and vocalist Monica Myhre, take charge of two songs apiece. The band saxophonist is Abb Locke, a true Chicago blues hero.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Various Artists: *This Is The Blues, Volume 2* (Eagle Rock 201752; 70:18 ★★★½) This commercial-blues collection of tracks from albums produced by Cream lyricist Pete Brown in the 1990s featuring artists like John Lee Hooker, Rory Gallagher and Southside Johnny rises way above the moderately enjoyable when 1960s British-blues holdover Dick Heckstall-Smith outrageously slams "I'm Leaving" on the head with his saxophone. Fair warning: Volume 1 in this series is as unpleasant as a rabies shot.

Ordering info: eaglerockent.com



Marco Benevento *Between The Needles And Nightfall*

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY 1535

★★★½

Marco Benevento has a gift for writing instantly gratifying melodies, and his latest album has the kind of visceral quality that teenagers in the '80s and '90s will associate with John Hughes' best films. It also achieves an artistic goal that's much more adult. Building songs from a place of patience and structure, Benevento heightens both the cerebral and emotional experience of music by working his way into the precise point at which those things intersect.

His previous albums at times were so focused on exploring the possibilities of his arsenal (usually an effects-tweaked baby grand piano, a slew of circuit bent toys and various retro members of the organ family) that they favored jagged sounds and repetitive grooves. Here, Benevento seems to distill every positive aspect of past recordings. The result? Edgily atmospheric anthems for what might as well be an army of determined, if broken, toy soldiers.

The first three tracks establish Benevento's familiar voice: repeated chord sequences building in meaning as they're teased out by fuzzy effects and squiggles or held down by the highly competent lineup of Reed Mathis and Andrew Barr. With "Numbers," things unravel a bit as Benevento takes more risks with growling effects, honks and his mostly unfiltered acoustic piano—which the album could admittedly use more of.

Whether brooding with nostalgia ("Between The Needles"), rock-driven and replete with climax ("It Came From You") or somewhat sexily off-kilter (Amy Winehouse's "You Know I'm No Good"), the measured patience within each thickly textured layer of each song speaks to a newly minted level of artistic maturity.

—Jennifer Odell

Between The Needles And Nightfall: Greenpoint; Between The Needles; Two Of You; Numbers; It Came From You; Ila Frost; RISD; You Know I'm No Good; Music Is Still Secret; Wolf Trap; Snow Lake, (64:07)

Personnel: Marco Benevento, piano, optigan, circuit bent toys, various keyboards; Reed Mathis, electric bass; Andrew Barr, drums, percussion, electronic drums.
Ordering Info: royalpotatofamily.com