

BLUES & RHYTHM

Atlantic Blues Originals



Mr. R&B Interviews Part Two

Who Was Shifty Henry?





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PETER KING & HERBERT: King's Zydeco; **PAUL McZIEL & GERNGER:** Allons À Lafayette; **ALBERT CHEVALIER:** Zydeco Sont Pas Salés; **HERBERT SAM:** They Call Me Good Rockin'; **WILLIE GREEN'S ZYDECO BAND:** Green's Zydeco; **FRÉMONT FONTENOT:** Le Two Step À Jules; **BEE FONTENOT:** La Porte De La Prison/ Make It To Me/ Pain De Maïs
CD Two: **CLARENCE GARLOW:** Bon Ton Roula/ Za Belle/ Make Me Cry; **LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS:** Zydeco (Zolo Go); **CLIFTON CHENIER:** Clifton's Blues/ Ay Teet Fee/ The Things I Did For You/ Squeeze Box Boogie/ Where Can My Baby Be/ It Happened So Fast/ Louisiana Blues/ Clifton's Waltz/ Hot Rod/ Ma Nègresse; **BOOZOO CHAVIS:** Paper In My Shoe/ Forty One Days/ Bye Bye Catin; **THADDEUS DECLOUET:** Catch That Morning Train; **DUDLEY ALEXANDER:** Baby, Please Don't Go; **LONNIE MITCHELL:** Louisiana Slo-Drag; **LEO MORRIS** with **MARCEL DUGAS:** Wanta Know How You Feel; **BOIS-SEC ARDOIN & CANRAY FONTENOT:** Quoi Faire?/ Bonsoir Moreau/ Les Barres De La Prison

Going back to the 1970s, the only two zydeco albums I had back then were the Arhoolie set entitled simply 'Zydeco' (F1009) and a U.K. release of Clifton Chenier's Specialty material – which actually means that I had a decent proportion of the material on this double CD set. Of course, at that time Zydeco was a lot harder to find – a decade or so later Paul Simon had used Rockin' Dopsie on his huge selling album 'Graceland' (and name checked Clifton Chenier), Rockin' Sidney had become (reasonably) famous with 'My Toot Toot' and Buckwheat Zydeco was touring with Eric Clapton. The music's international popularity may have declined a little since those heady days, but still, it is no longer the cult novelty that it once was to the international market. Readers of this magazine should not need a written explanation of what zydeco is.

In examining the music's roots – or at least as much of them as can be gathered through the use of records, this set starts with the ground-breaking records made by accordionist and singer Amédée Ardoin in the company of white fiddler Dennis McGee, truly ground-breaking material that sounds totally archaic now. Amédée sounds little different from his Cajun contemporaries on much of his material, though once the blues come in – and 'Les Blues De Crowley' is outstanding – the relationship to the later zydeco sound becomes far more explicit. It was only recently that it was realised that Douglas Bellard preceded Amédée as the first black Cajun/Creole musician on record, and this is the first reissue for the track 'Moi, J'Connais La Cause Que Je Suis Condamné', sung by accordionist Riley; fiddler Douglas sings 'La Valse De La Prison' which was previously reissued on the Tompkins Square album, 'Aimer Et Perdre: To Love & To Lose Songs, 1917-1934'. The examination of pre-war Creole music is completed with the inclusion of material recorded by Alan Lomax in 1934. From Godard Chalvin's 1956 titles onwards, the first CD contains fascinating post-war material, albeit in older styles, by lesser-known musicians, though the two Fontenot brothers were cousins of celebrated fiddler Canray Fontenot (of whom more later).

Once past Clarence Garlow's French-inflected r&b (and some Chenier-styled accordion playing on 'Make Me Cry'), and Lightning's organ approximation of the style, the second CD really belongs to Clifton Chenier, generally rocking and upbeat and always bluesy, and showing just why he still is the undisputed 'King Of Zydeco'. Sometimes though, he gets nicely low-down as on 'Where Can My Baby Be', a fine slow

blues with the low-in-the-mix accordion the only concession to zydeco as opposed to the lovely if definitely non-blues 'Clifton's Waltz', an Arhoolie recording from 1965. Boozoo Chavis' 'Paper In My Shoe' sounds just a little less chaotic after many years of listening to it, Dudley Alexander performs 'Baby Please Don't Go' in both English and French in a 1959 recording made by Mack McCormick in Houston, Texas, the same city where Lonnie Mitchell recorded 'Louisiana Slo-Drag' for Ivory Records in 1961 and where Leo Morris laid down his track, with its strong echoes of the swamp-blues sound and Marcel Dugas on accordion. Rounding things off rather nicely, the set closes out as it began, with an Ardoin on accordion and vocals ('Bois-Sec' Ardoin, Amédée's cousin), accompanied by a fiddler – black this time though; Canray Fontenot was a cousin of Douglas Bellard and son of Amédée's great rival Adam Fontenot. The session was integrated too – Rodney Balfa is on accordion, and although the sound quality is much improved on that of those Columbia 78s, the music sounds similarly archaic.

If you have a large collection of zydeco on your shelves already, you can probably pass this over, unless you really need that previously unreissued Douglas Bellard & Kirby Riley number. However, if you need an excellent introduction to the music, you should certainly consider this collection.

Norman Darwen

★ Alternative TAKES ★

JO' BUDDY: Meets Funky Kingston Ram-Bam RAM 008 (38:20)

Finnish guitarist and singer Jussi 'Jo' Buddy' Alamo has featured in these pages quite regularly over the years, either for his jumping r&b recordings or his more down-home albums. Here he has taken a detour down into the Caribbean, with the help of his compatriots, the ska revival band Funky Kingston. What is impressive is that Jo' Buddy keeps his blues roots intact, with a set that draws strongly on the r&b (and r&b-inflected) sound of Jamaica. The closing 'What Good's Life Still Giving' is a '50s-styled ballad with hints of a southern soul flavour, and the instrumental 'Doo Wop Christmas' reminds me more than a little of Jamaican legend Jackie Edwards' 1960 ballad, 'Tell Me Darling', itself strongly U.S.-influenced. Then there are numbers like 'You Mine All Mine' which starts off like classic Little Richard rock'n'roll before the reggae beat kicks in – but the rocking feel still remains.

The accompanying band show a thorough understanding of the music required, whether it is the late '60s reggae sound of 'Run Sister Run',

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**THE YEAR OF JUBILO: 78rpm Recordings Of Songs From The Civil War
Dust To Digital DTD-47 (59:00)**

Observing news and current affairs in the U.S. today, you could get the impression that a century and a half after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the American Civil War has still never really ended. White supremacists still march the streets, Confederate flags still fly from southern civic buildings, reactionary politicians still hide their racial prejudice behind talk of states' rights. In the wake of the latest mass shooting, one commentator even linked the proliferation of guns in contemporary America to the fact that, when accepting Lee's surrender, Ulysses S. Grant made the concession of allowing the former's officers to keep their sidearms.

This stuff runs deep, in a way that – I readily acknowledge – it's difficult for a non-American quite to understand. In the 1920s, when most of the recordings here were made, there were still men alive who had fought in it, many more whose families no doubt still felt the impact and legacy of the slaughter, and many – including plenty of musicians, no doubt – whose sense of who they were and how they related to the world was still informed by the same sectional divisions.

In his accompanying essay, Kevin Fontenot expresses the frustration of the fact that, despite the fact that so many contemporary written records exist of the War, so few of them mention music, other than in passing. When they do, it's mostly references to fiddle players and indeed, around the start of the twentieth century, fiddle contests organised by the Old Fiddlers' Association of Texas were apparently dominated by Civil War veterans. Henry Gilliland and Capt. M.J. Bonner were members, and their fiddle tracks are among the disc's highlights.

There are examples of the campfire drinking song, the tragic narrative song and the boasts of brave fighters. African-Americans (many of whom fought and died in the war) appear only as 'darkies', or 'The Poor Old Slave'. The lyrics of the title track by Chubby Parker now seem positively jarring in the way they satirise racial relationships at the end of the War. The McGee Brothers' 'Old Master's Runaway' is another version of the same, and as Tony Russell's notes point out, you'd get the wrong impression of the song's content from that title. Divide the last word into two shorter words to get a proper impression of what the song is about.

The annotation of the collection is exemplary, the presentation very attractive and the music fascinating and often quite brilliant (although the final 'Dixie Division', by Fiddlin' John Carson & His Virginia Reelers, often teeters on the edges of chaos). Every disc was taken from the collection of Joe Bussard, who conceived and programmed the set, so you can be assured of outstanding sound quality.

Ray Templeton

the bass heavy '70s sound of 'Joy Of Life' (the vocal sounds like Jussi has definitely been listening to Bob Marley), the breezy New Orleans-tinged ska of 'Don't Have To Worry', which has the band augmented by U.K. pianist Diz Watson and veteran Jamaica percussionist Tony Uter, or the early '70s funky reggae of 'No Wheels-A'. Jussi even references the Jamaican penchant for male/female duets with a bluesy 'Right Here In My Arms', Marjo Linemen adding a fine vocal.

This is a very enjoyable set for those with a taste for the sounds of Jamaica, especially those sounds that lean towards the bluesy side. If that's you, do check it out. www.ram-bam.com

Norman Darwen

COXSONE'S MUSIC

Soul Jazz SJRCD 323 (Three CDs: 40:40; 37:16; 41:32)

The musical road from 1950s American r&b, as played by DJs at dances in Jamaica, to the emergence of fully-fledged ska around 1963 has been well documented, and in recent years numerous albums of this transitional music have hit the market. As a rule (though, like many rules, there are exceptions) Jamaican recordings from the late 1950s until the first few years of the following decade were based on U.S. r&b of a few years earlier, and indeed plenty of American tunes, slightly 'adapted' to use the islanders' word, entered the repertoire of those bands and singers who were active at the dawn of the Jamaican recording business.

Numerous Jamaicans tried their hand at record production during this time. Some, like Duke Reid and Prince Buster, stayed the course, others like Simeon Smith and Charlie Moo soon dropped out of music. But the



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longest-lasting and perhaps most successful was Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd, who released singles prolifically on labels such as Worldisc, D. Darling and Sensational and even bravely issued the occasional LP. It is from his catalogue that the 46 tracks on this album have been licensed.

The collection opens with a typical example of that early '60s sound in 'Roll On Sweet Don', featuring trombonist Don Drummond and tenor saxman Rolando Alphonso trading fluent, jazz-informed solos over a bright, shuffling rhythm. Dodd was prolific in the studio, recording any up-and-coming artists who showed promise; as the trio of discs unfolds, most of the leading names on the early Jamaican music scene make at least one appearance. There's the doo-wopping Iving Juniors on 'Over The River', the fiery young Owen Gray with 'Twisting My Baby', the soulful Blues Busters duo on 'Tell Me Why' and the pioneering pair Simms & Robinson, reputedly the first artists to make an r&b recording in Jamaica, whose tilt at the Clyde McPhatter & The Drifters arrangement of 'White Christmas' falls into the heroic failure bracket.

Nearly half the selections are instrumentals, usually with the horns to the fore. Some, like 'What Is This Thing Called Love' by pianist Cecil Lloyd and his quintet, are in the mainstream jazz idiom beloved by Dodd, but most are rousing r&b workouts, probably based on the tunes of obscure U.S. records played at his sound system dances, like Don Drummond's 'Schooling The Duke' and Rolando Alphonso's 'Just Cool'. Prominent amongst these is 'Silky' by Clue J. (bassist Cluett Johnson) and his Blues Blasters, a rousing *tour-de-force* for Alphonso, trombonist Rico Rodriguez and guitarist Ernest Ranglin, a record which encapsulates the drive and energy of this formative music.

The slipcased set comes with a fat, glossy booklet filled with facts and photographs, and overall it's a fitting tribute to Jamaica's musical pioneers of the pre-ska era – as well as being a whole lot of fun.

Mike Atherton

HAÏTI – MERINGUE & KONPA 1952-1962

Frémeaux FA 5615 (Three CDs: 73:10; 74:17; 77:55)

Although Haiti is most often associated with voodoo (voodoo) in popular culture, its recorded popular music was initially related to the neighbouring, Spanish-speaking, Dominican Republic's *merengue*, and there are also numerous examples here of the 'contre danse', originally imported from Europe but rapidly creolised – though don't expect these performance to be archaic survivals. There are also Cuban and American jazz influences to be heard on this collection – America occupied the country between 1915 and 1934 – alongside some folk inflected material from the dancer Jean-Léon Destiné, recorded for Elektra in 1955. Most tracks on these three CDs though have brass sections, often with accordion in the rhythm section and the percussive *graj* quite noticeable, and are sung in Haitian creole. The old 'Come Dancing' Latin styles came to mind more than once.

1955 was a crucial year for Haitian music, as it was then that tenor sax player Nemours Jean-Baptiste launched his new group, with its new sound, the slower paced *konpa*, mixing meringue with mambo and cha-cha-cha, other Latin sounds (sometimes there sounds like a strong Mexican influence) and the *contre danses*. Within two years he ruled the roost, with his only major rival his former band-mate Wébert Sicot. Some of the recordings here by Ensemble Aux Calebasses may contain both men ('Cabaret Des Calebasses' was a local club). Of definite historical interest too is the earliest track here: 'Choucouné', better known in the English speaking world as steel band favourite 'Yellow Bird' but here sung by Émerante De Pradines with just percussion accompaniment, circa 1952. There is some fascinating material here, much of it very rare indeed, and guaranteed to appeal to lovers of vintage Latin music and Caribbean sounds.

Norman Darwen