

## BLUES LEGENDS LIVE

Kenny Wayne Shepherd continues his own personal mission to honor the generation of blues legends he learned from.



### KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

#### Live In Chicago

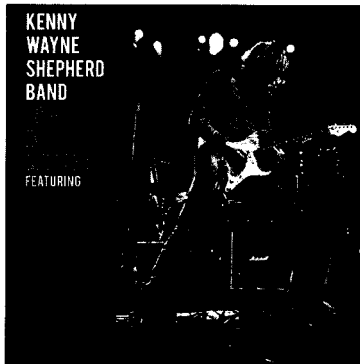
RoadRunner Records

This 14 song, live shot recorded in Chicago captured Kenny Wayne Shepherd and his friends touring in support of the Blues Music Award winning, Grammy nominated *10 Days Out: Blues from the Backroads*. As evident with that record and DVD, Shepherd's mission has been to shine a light on the legends he has learned his blues from. This tour featured blues giants Hubert Sumlin, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, Byron Lee, and Buddy Flett as featured guests.

Shepherd's band always hits town with double edge attack. Shepherd understands his place on stage and record is to let the blues flow through his guitar. His woodshedding with every blues great has encouraged him develop a modern punch to his rock toned, blues guitar. Noah Hunt, Shepherd's lead vocalist since they first paired in 1997, prowls the stage with his aged leather voice.

Before he calls out the guest list, the night starts with four Shepherd originals: the easy shuffle of "Somehow, Somewhere, Someway," Riley Osbourn's B-3 fueled "King's Way," the raw and energetic "True Lies," and the string and piano assault featured on "Deja Voodoo."

With the audience, and home listener, primed, Shepherd and Hunt roll out the Red Carpet of the blues. Guitarist and songwriter Buddy Flett joins the band for a cover of B.B. King's "Sell My Monkey"



and his own "Dance For Me Girl," an inventive blend of Flett's assertive slide guitar and Shepherd's raw tones. Guitarist Byron Lee spotlights Chicago blues with Howlin' Wolf's "How Many More Years" and New Orleans R&B with Dave Bartholomew's "Sick And Tired."

When the music moves to firmly into Chicago blues, Smith first handles the vocals and harmonica on Jimmy Reed's "Baby, Don't Say That No More" and his own "Eye To Eye." The sharp interplay between Shepherd's guitar, Osbourn's piano, Smith's harmonica, and Layton's double shuffles and marches pays homage

to the Windy City's ensemble blues.

The real star of the show is the legendary Hubert Sumlin. Playing with strength and intensity, Sumlin lays down riffs that are both historic and contemporary on his own "Feed Me." It's on Howlin' Wolf's "Rockin' Daddy" that Sumlin really shines. For over three minutes, it features the traditional Sumlin improvisational guitar. His hip licks are a joy for every fan to feed on. Few blues guitarists have explored the creative possibilities of the guitar as eloquently as Sumlin, and Shepherd has accurately captured that here.

The night's fireworks end with Shepherd laying down a Peter Gunn-styled groove on Slim Harpo's "I'm A King Bee." Shepherd and his team deserve kudos for sharing another historic blues moment.

— Art Tipaldi

solo over the upbeat soul opener "Off The Market"), and a dramatist's understanding of dynamics. He is conversant in the vocabularies of many blues greats: "Mean Streak" channels Lightnin' Hopkins; "Kissin' In Memphis" finds him trying on Jimmie Vaughan's latter-day style; and his solo break in Lowell Fulson's "Love Grows Cold" tips a figurative hat to Ike Turner, Otis Rush, and Junior Watson. "Born Operator" is a devastating West Side pastiche straight out of the Magic Sam playbook; "Howlin' With Hubert" takes off from organist Bill Doggett's "Hold It" riff into a showcase for a sneakily stunning guitar duel in which Jones pulls some tricks from Albert Collins's bag to stand up to Hubert Sumlin; and it's safe to say that the "Sen Sa Shun" quote in "Games" will bring a smile to the face of anyone with a Freddie King *Best Of* collection.

Jones's band is excellent (Jesse Whiteley's keyboards in particular are indispensable), and he continues his tradition of inviting guests. Along for this ride are Sumlin (very strong on his three cuts) and Charlie Musselwhite, whose contribution is brilliant on Jones's Wolf-style boogie "I Don't Go For That." Those demanding a harsher approach may remain unpersuaded, but at its core, Jones's straightforward style is refreshing.

— Tom Hyslop

### LES COPELAND

#### Don't Let the Devil In

Earwig

Singer-songwriter Les Copeland is a skilled guitar stylist and yet another of those flying-under-the-radar guys who's been

doing his thing quietly for decades. Considering the quality of his new release, you have to ask: Where has he been hiding? The answer: about 250 miles northeast of Vancouver in the small community of Vernon, British Columbia. In fact, Copeland — who discovered the blues through Delta legend Mississippi Fred McDowell — has been playing professionally since the age of 15, performing at clubs and festivals throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The fifteen almost exclusively original tracks on *Don't Let the Devil In* were recorded during the past two years in the artist's native province. Most have a distinctly rural flavor, transporting the listener to a place of fresh air and big sky and conjuring the majesty of the mountainous, lake-dotted landscape Copeland calls home. The music feels unhurried and organic, and the singer's pleasantly rustic

vocal makes one want to pull up a chair and listen in.

There's a lot to like here. Copeland puts his considerable skills as a fingerstyle guitarist to work in a number of settings, some jazzy, others more rough-hewn and bluesy. His use of the bottleneck on the instrumentals "Riding The Sky Train" and the appropriately titled "Ry Cooder" has a gentle, elegiac quality that lends these songs a spiritual beauty. Lyrically, he's good for some unexpected twists and turns, for example in the slowly emerging ambivalence of "Everyday People," a witty, urbane look at modern society. The more straightforward "Long Lost Girl" sounds like it could have arrived in the New World a few centuries ago, having been sung by some weary traveler on the boat ride over.

Though it's fascinating to hear Copeland and David "Honeyboy" Edwards poke around musically on a pair of tracks, the conversation between the two guitarists never quite takes off. Edwards' partner Michael Frank does add some nice flourishes on harp. But ultimately it's Copeland's album, and he does a fine job with a work that should appeal to blues fans, guitar aficionados and all lovers of traditional North American music.

– Vincent Abbate

## **ALBERT CASTIGLIA**

### **Keepin On**

Blue Leaf Records

Known as a promising blues guitarist since his early days with Junior Wells, Miami based Albert Castiglia became a relevant blues force when he released "Burn," his 2004 debut that boasted the sound of a seasoned veteran. Now on his fifth CD, he's doing just that, and moving forward as an electrifying and reputable blues performer.

Recorded with minimal overdubs, it possesses the sought-after excitement of the live atmosphere amid studio clarity. And although it's quite bluesy throughout, Castiglia pushes the buttons and rocks the music to the max. While often creamy and smooth, his guitar sound also gets distorted and dirty, adding to the live-in-the-studio ambiance. Indeed, it's a brazen and gutsy tone here, more so than most of his previous releases.

Though five are originals, the remaining seven are interesting cover choices, beginning with the album's opener, "Cadil-

lac Assembly Line." Put aside thoughts of the more laidback versions of this one by Mack Rice, Albert King, Bernard Allison, and even the one previously recorded by Castiglia, because it's much dirtier and in-your-face. The riff is funk injected still, but the guitar is cranked and dirty, and the rhythm section is potent. That energy continues in Bob Dylan's funky and addictive "Till I Fell In Love With You."

Castiglia's rhythmic chops sometimes scratch a nerve and bite deep down into the soul, as can be heard in John Lee Hooker's "Goin' Upstairs." The compulsive rhythmic drive pauses only when frenzied slide and lead soloing is unleashed. Sandy Mack wails harmonica to the slow blues of Peter Green's "Could Not Ask For More." Castiglia also flaunts acoustic flair in "Robert Nighthawk's "Murderin' Blues" and his own "Sweet Southern Angel," the latter with Toby Walker on dobro.

The album's closer will undoubtedly leave fans smiling. Originally released acoustically on his debut, he reprises the melancholy "Closing Time" electrically here. Though the original potency is there, the addictive riff and slow blues progression as well as the down-and-out lyrical atmosphere is intensified tenfold by an intoxicating rhythmic drive.

Castiglia displays the whole package in *Keepin On*, proving once again he's a solid blues performer. With Castiglia's guitar playing in the forefront, and with a singing voice that's similar in quality and energy to Stevie Ray Vaughan, he's up there as one of the finest blues vocalists today.

– Brian D. Holland

## **DAVE WELD AND THE IMPERIAL FLAMES**

### **Burnin' Love**

Delmark Records

Dave Weld has been a part of the Chicago blues scene for decades, beginning with his days with the post-Hound Dog Taylor House Rockers, continuing through his time with Eddie Shaw, his apprenticeship under J.B. Hutto, and his achievement as a co-founder of The Blues Imperials with Lil' Ed Williams. This arc culminated in starting his own band, the Imperial Flames (a home away from home for Lil' Ed), but family demands forced him into performing and recording inactivity for the last decade and more. Now Weld is back with a new album.

Anyone making a guess at Weld's sound based on his resume stands a good chance of landing close to the mark.

*Burnin' Love* gives up a baker's dozen of '60s- and '70s-style Chicago blues, staunchly in the J.B. Hutto mold – characterized by tough rhythms and plenty of keening, slightly ratty-toned guitar – that has served Lil' Ed so well. Williams, in fact, is the second guitarist on this CD, taking a couple of solos and singing his own "Ed's Boogie." That song and Hutto's doom-laden, stop-time "Things Are So Slow" excepted, the set list consists of new originals by Weld and band mates Monica Myhre (vocals) and Jeff Taylor (drums). Weld splashes savage, careening guitar like acid over the songs, from the R&B-flavored title cut to Myhre's rockabilly-esque "Talk Dirty," which sounds like Wanda Jackson fronting the Rock & Roll Trio, to Taylor's humorous "I Got Mad," and his Jimmy Reed-influenced "All Of These Things." The slow blues "Donnie Lee," the raunchy shuffle "She's Lyin'," and the intense minor blues "Ramblin'" (in which Weld name-checks Hutto) feature tough sax breaks by veteran Abb Locke, part of a band that also includes premier bassists Herman Applewhite and Bernard Reed.

If there's a weak spot, it is in the vocals. Weld's singing is refreshingly unaffected but simply not that strong – a deficiency only highlighted by the vocal contributions of Williams and Taylor. Still, in certain musical situations, like "Peace Of Mind," he sounds fine. The Weld-Myhre harmonies featured on many tracks may likewise be an acquired taste. On balance, though, I will take a session like *Burnin' Love* – well-written, strongly performed, honestly recorded – that unabashedly takes its inspiration from the glory days of Chicago blues over most of the current competition.

– Tom Hyslop

## **CHRIS O'LEARY**

### **Mr. Used To Be**

Vizztone Records

Anyone who caught a show by Levon Helm's great blues band The Barn Burners a half dozen years ago knows this CD is long overdue. An unlikely looking bluesman with his short-haired clean-cut appearance, former U.S. Marine Chris O'Leary is such a great singer and front man that even back then, you hardly