

## MARK ROBINSON

### *Quit Your Job, Play Guitar*

Blind Chihuahua Records

Mark Robinson was just another frustrated working class musician hustling gigs at night and humping a day job while living in Bloomington. He became seriously infected by the blues bug after a short, post-college stay in Chicago, performing with legends like Lonnie Brooks, Koko Taylor, and Son Seals. Robinson would later return to Indiana, where he lent his guitar talents to a number of blues, rock, and Americana artists.

Still, that itch to play the blues continued to grow, and as Robinson says himself in the notes for his excellent debut, *Quit Your Job, Play Guitar*, "I quit my monkey job and moved to Nashville." He's been playing his guitar full-time since 2004 and he's never been happier. Given the diverse range of Robinson's musical experience, it should come as no surprise that *Quit Your Job, Play Guitar* offers a nuanced mix of blues, soul, and twangy roots-rock in its grooves.

While Robinson brings a swampy guitar vibe to the working class blues of "Payday Giveaway," the song's mournful ambiance assisted by Johnny Neel's timely keyboard riffs, Robinson's talents as a singer and guitarist are displayed in a brighter light by his original songs. "Runaway Train," for instance, is a spry mix of Texas blues and Southern rock, with a driving rhythm and Ben Graves' blasts of harmonica working nicely alongside Robinson's gruff vocals and serpentine guitarplay.

As the CD rolls on, Robinson successfully balances bluesy ballads with mid-tempo rockers, all of which feature his taut fretwork. The old-school blues of "The Fixer" sound right at home, evoking the spirit of Albert King on this crooned tale of a man who fixes broken hearts. The upbeat "Back In The Saddle" provides a nice change, blasts of horn adding an R&B feel to this country-rocker, while "Try One More Time" is a soulful ballad in a Stax Records vein, Robinson channeling his inner Otis. It's a fitting way to end the album, and a good example of Robinson's songwriting skills. Expect big things in the future from this "self-employed" singer/songwriter.

— Rev. Keith A. Gordon

## CHRIS JAMES

### & PATRICK RYNN

### *Gonna Boogie Anyway*

Earwig

You kind of wonder how Chris James and Patrick Rynn play music that sounds like it was recorded 60 years ago and still make the music seem fresh. Perhaps, it's just that they play it right.

James and Rynn are disciples of the 1950s, when Muddy Waters was a giant and blues was being transformed from the fields of the South to the dark alleys, intimidating streets, and mysterious clubs of urbane Chicago. The San Diego-based guitarist and bassist cover only four of the 12 songs on this CD, yet each new song seems to have been born in a South Side blues club.

*Gonna Boogie Anyway* is a rousing series of songs from Chicago. James and Rynn served a long-term apprenticeship, playing behind Robert Lockwood, Jr., Detroit Junior, Sam Lay, Jody Williams, and an assortment of others. The long hours they spent talking with Aces' bass player Dave Myers was part of dedication to getting it right.

Here, they may cover Bo Diddley ("Dearest Darling" and "Little Girl"), Jimmy Reed ("Can't Stand To See You Go") and Robert Jr. ("Money Don't Like Me"). But their dedication to the blues craft — particularly as it was practiced in the 1950s — is clearly evident here. When James launches into the vocals of a song such as "You Can't Trust Nobody" or "Gonna Boogie Anyway," you are hearing him channel the passion from a long-ago time into everyday life in 2010.

The duo chooses sidemen wisely. Henry Butler and Dave Maxwell have impeccable keyboard credentials as do drummers Sam Lay and Willie Hayes. Harp player Rob Stone was part of their band when they lived in Chicago, and West Coast sax players Jonny Viau and Allen Ortiz clearly have done their homework.

Rynn, nominated at this year's Blues Music Awards as Bass Player of the Year, isn't afraid to drive the song with his instrument. James, on the other hand, is a strong guitar player and singer of unusual force, skills he demonstrated on last year's *Stop And Think About It*, which got the two men a Best New Artist nomination at the 2009 BMAs.

Perhaps the reason their CDs sound so well is that these guys are not trying to play like anyone but instead are being themselves and playing the only way they know how. You can't fake authenticity.

— Michael Kinsman

## JACK de KEYSER

### *The Corktown Sessions*

Blue Star Records

Jack de Keyser is more at home on stage than anywhere else, well-weathered Strat in hand, it's where he seems most alive. And while some players work hard at becoming better musicians, a precious few are utterly consumed by it. Surrounded by a band driven by intuition, acclimatized by countless miles on the road, de Keyser and band *live* this music — and it sounds it. Earning a 2010 Juno Award (Grammy equivalent) for Blues Album of the Year, *The Corktown Sessions* reveal the de Keyser canon in its natural state — in front of an adoring crowd? depicting an evolution from rockabilly to full-fledged blues-cum-soul man. Constant gigging and endless session work have provided de Keyser two distinct voices, his evocative, soul-drenched vocals merging seamlessly with colorful guitar work, melding a love for rock, R&B, jazz, and blues.

Less retrospective than a definition of where he is today, *Corktown Sessions* mines a healthy sampling of originals and simpatico covers: Isaac Hayes' "Hold On, I'm Coming," Stevie Wonder's "Sign, Sealed, Delivered," and Robert Johnson's "When You've Got A Good Friend." Framed against such classics, de Keyser's originals reveal themselves as solid equals; his sophisticated songwriting ability proving an integral component in his consistent rise in popularity. His "Blues Thing" reveals a deeper shade of blue than his jazz-inflected treatment of Albert King's "Let's Have A Natural Ball." de Keyser has a foil in keyboard man David McMorro who buttresses the band's sound with solid solos and rhythmic punch. His punchy B-3 solo across "Blues Thing" complements Jack's fleet-fingered intro before both launch into definitive solos.

Not all tracks are winners — the Johnson cover wails and the Wonder cover proves a vocal stretch. Yet, it's tracks like his signature "King Of The Blues" which reveal what de Keyser does best, injecting equal