

portions of funk and soul into blues for satisfying returns and a guitar tone to die for into a fun, lively track that won't quit. The triple threat of three originals in a row – variations on lust, love and loving gone bad – show de Keyser's gift for solid hooks, powerful lyrics and stinging guitar lines against a backdrop of burbling organ and a solid rhythm (bassist Alan Duffy; drummer Danny Lockwood) to drive things home. The coup de grâce? "Soul Lover," another de Keyser classic that proves him to be a soul man with jazz-weaned fingers trapped, sweating and swinging, inside the body of a blues man.

– Eric Thom

GRADY CHAMPION

Back in Mississippi Live

Earwig

Grady Champion. What a classic blues name. Sounds like a cross between Fred Sanford's junkyard homeboy and 1970s boxing legend Smokin' Joe Frazier. What's better, it fits the music being laid down by this native of Canton, Mississippi to a tee. Skillfully walking the line between the modern and the traditional, Champion's blues are lowdown, dirty, intoxicating, and pack a wallop like a left hook to the jaw.

Anyone wanting to experience Mississippi juke joint atmosphere on record need look no further than his latest release. *Back in Mississippi Live* was recorded on a hot summer night in Jackson's 930 Blues Café, and bristles with the close club atmosphere of a sold-out house. Champion, on harp and vocals, works his crowd with confidence and charm, and is assisted by capable players including Calvin Wilson on keys, Frank White on drums, and son Marquis Champion on bass. Guitarist Eddie Cotton Jr. features most prominently, delivering biting, trebly leads on cue and deftly accompanying the frontman throughout.

The band could be accused of relying a little too heavily on blues standards like the Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed titles that open the set. Then again, when you step onstage in Jackson on a Saturday night, entertaining the audience with familiar fare is almost certainly part of the job description. Besides, Champion possesses more than enough personality to make songs like "I'm Ready" his own. His raspy, pleading voice often recalls that of Wilson Pickett, and works well with his soul- and funk-influenced elec-

tric blues. Having begun his career as a rapper in the early 1990s, the singer has retained his gift for storytelling. Each performance here, even on material we've heard before, contains a note of drama.

Still, it's Champion's own material that has the greatest impact. "You've Got Some Explaining To Do" and "Policeman Blues," each written with producer Dennis Walker, tackle traditional themes in unconventional ways. (Champion even has a rapper named Jacktown Swift punctuate his tale of police harassment.) "Love And Memories" is an elegant, gospel-inflected tribute built upon Wilson's amen corner chords. "I'm Yours" wanders gently into the area of contemporary R&B. And "1-800-Blu-Love" is about as earthy and soulful as it gets: If no one was dancing to this, there must have been no room left on the dance floor.

It's a potent, well-rounded package – one that led to Champion taking home the top prize in the band category at this year's International Blues Challenge. Now moving on to bigger stages like the Chicago Blues Festival and the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, this earnest student of blues history looks poised to be a part of its future.

– Vincent Abbate

DELTA MOON

Hell Bound Train

Red Parlor

It may be the year's coolest song. Fast forward to "Ghost In My Guitar," pick up your own battered axe, and see what might happen. D-Mooners Tom Gray and Mark Johnson "crossroads" meeting happens on a stormy night in a hotel room tradin' licks with the supernatural force that inhabits the box. Gray and Johnson's haunting, double slide guitar shade the song with as ominous a color as any midnight meeting. This is a great vehicle for explaining how every guitar player comes under the spell of obscure, country blues.

The other 10 songs are just as riveting. Gray's scratchy, dirt road vocals tell the tales as he and Johnson articulate a variety of string arrangements from lap slide to banjo to a deluge of twin slide guitars. There's the hard driving title track, a top down, slide guitar ride through the Mississippi hill country, the smooth glide of "Get Gone," with Johnson's banjo augmenting Gray's eloquent slide, and the back porch arrangement of

Mississippi Fred McDowell's "You Got To Move."

To make it all work, Delta Moon's rhythm section of Franher Joseph (bass) and Darren Stanley (drums) drive the sound. The steam rollin' rhythm section drives the Delta Moon engine on "Ain't No Train" and "Room 429." The pounding groove and hardcore slide of "Lonely" only adds to the feelings of abandonment. "Stuck In Carolina" features a broke and dejected Gray reachin' out to his girl. As the CD ends, the band off-roads on "Take The Back Road Home," a country tonk styled tune lead by Gray's weathered voice and finishes with "Plantation Song," a dirge to the horrors of the Southern plantation system. Acoustically performed with only a solemnly picked guitar, Gray calls out with the statement, "We're all from Dixie too."

The consistent mood and atmosphere created here makes this 11 song record a pleasure each time it plays. With clever songwriting, stripped down arrangements, and Gray's toughened vocals, Delta Moon has crafted a solid album.

– Art Tipaldi

CHRIS BEARD

Who Am I and What I Do

Electro Glide

The first three friends on Chris Beard's MySpace page are Michael Burks, Bernard Allison, and Ronnie Baker Brooks. Beard shares with them a muscular guitar style that's as much hard rock as it is blues. Brooks co-wrote with Beard the first three songs on the CD and is credited as the only writer on "Hard Out Here," a basic boogie bitching about a musician's plight: "Ain't a darn thing funny 'cause I need some money." Bernard Allison wrote "That's The Way Love Was Meant To Be," a soul blues number. While Burks had nothing to do with this CD, all three artists are second generation blues musicians with high profile fathers who got them started in music as toddlers with similarly dynamic styles. In fact Chris' father Joe Beard sings on "Gotta Find My Baby," a Syl Johnson soulful blues number first recorded in 1953, and the best showcase of Chris' guitar on the twelve-cut CD.

While Joe's voice has a kind of Byther Smith weathered urgency, his son admits in his interview with *Blues Revue* Editor Art Tipaldi in the liner notes that, as a singer, he didn't have "enough air to finish my