

GRADY CHAMPION

Back In Mississippi Live at the 930 Blues Café EARWIG MUSIC

Mississippian Grady Champion has been singing the blues and playing harmonica for a number of years, having self-produced his debut CD and then he had two albums on Shanachie before returning home to Canton, Mississippi in 2002, where he played locally with Eddie Cotton before putting together The Grady Champion revue. In 2007 he recorded the CD "Back In Mississippi Live At The 930 Blues Cafe," that was issued on GSM. Earlier this year, he was the winning performer at the International Blues Challenge and is appearing on a number of major festivals as a result. Earwig has just taken over the distribution of "Back in Mississippi Live."

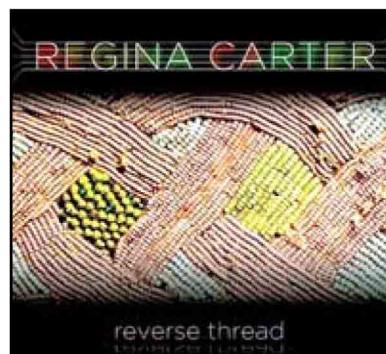
I have had the original release of this and have listened to it at various times over the past two years. The album's strengths include the fact that Grady is a terrific vocalist who exhibits considerable personality and enthusiasm as he sings and has a first-rate backing band, with standout guitar from Eddie Cotton (his playing on "Lonesome Bedroom Blues" is simply one example of his exceptional guitar playing throughout this recording). We do not need new recordings of "I'm Ready" or "Spoonful," but he does place his own vocal stamp here as well as on the hard-edged "Baby What You Want Me Do." He is an effective, credible harp player if not a virtuoso, with Rice Miller being an obvious personality. Champion also writes some very interesting original material including "You Got Some Explaining To Do," with a nice funky groove as he tells his woman that too many of her stories just don't add up or ring true, or "1-800-Blu-Love," the number for a woman to call when her man ain't at home. The latter number has a nice harp break.

There is social commentary on "Policeman Blues," where he sings about being stopped and beaten by Mr. Policeman. It is curious how restrained Grady's lyrics are compared to the language a rapper would use (and there is a rapper "jacktoen Swift" on this track who is a bit more forthright about this mistreatment.) Of the songs covered here, the slow, doomy rendition of "Lonesome Bedroom Blues" stands out, with Cotton's afore-mentioned guitar playing and Grady's fine singing. "Love and Memories" is a heartfelt R&B ballad dedicated to his mother's memory. "Wine and Women" don't mix and leave you with a terrible fix is the message of the rocking shuffle that Grady and Eddie Cotton co-wrote and is followed by "Brother, Brother," which oddly evokes (in these

ears) the Doobie Brothers with a nice groove and rhythm. Then there is a lovely ballad, "I'm Yours," as he sings "your my heart, my everything ... you can count on me, I'm your lover, I'm your friend, I'm your man." The disc closes with a fine holiday blues, Grady's "Blues on Christmas."

There's plenty of music here (71 minutes or so), and even if some of the material might be overly familiar, there is plenty new material, some of it being really good songs. It is certainly helpful that Earwig has picked this up which, along with Grady's greater visibility from winning the IBC, should ensure that he becomes a more familiar name to the blues world.

Ron Weinstock



REGINA CARTER

Reverse Thread

E1 ENTERTAINMENT

Violinist Regina Carter is certainly best known for her music in the jazz idiom, but is equally at home in classical, R&B and pretty much anything else she chooses. Never to be labeled "predictable," Carter offers up a new side of her musical prowess with each new recording. "Reverse Thread" is no exception, as she enters the world music arena with a beautiful, very well crafted collection of traditional African songs delivered with enough of a contemporary flair to appeal to a very wide audience.

She visited the World Music Institute in New York and found a wealth of material, including ethnographic field recordings. Two of these songs are based on field recordings from the Ugandan Jews. Carter penned one song, "Day Dreaming On The Niger," a beautiful, mesmerizing song, which should see a lot of airplay worldwide.

She teamed up with some excellent musicians using instruments such as the accordion and the kora, a West African harp, played by the celebrated, Mali-born Yacouba Sissoko. The instrumentation here consists of violin, kora, accordion, bass and drums/percussion, with guitar added for a few songs. The band takes you on a wonderful journey with bright melodies continually popping up along the way.

In short, this is a first class album blending world music with jazz. Sound interesting; be sure to check out some songs at Amazon. Very nice indeed!

Bill Wahl

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