



**Grady Champion (featuring Eddie Cotton Jr.)
Back in Mississippi Live at the 920 Blues Cafe
GSM Music Group LLC (© Grady Champion)**

Grady Champion...where to begin? I was introduced to Grady's explosive style last June during an open house at the Blues Heaven Foundation in Chicago after Saturday's Blues Fest. The inaugural Blues Heaven wang dang doodle was pitched to celebrate completion of the first round of renovations at the historic Chess Records studio, where Willie Dixon's family continues his Foundation's work on behalf of blues musicians past, present and future. Word of the event was circulated via email beginning just a short few days before Blues Fest, and Willie's wife Marie and other members of the family and inner circle worked a booth at the festival to get the word out about the Foundation and about the upcoming open house/fund raiser. We were told when we arrived that a local band who had been scheduled to entertain unkindly pulled out at the last minute, and that a most gracious visiting Mississippi bluesman had offered to step in.

As Grady took the stage, he told the capacity crowd in this small and pleasantly intimate setting that he was honored to be allowed to perform and he proved it in every way imaginable. He was a perfect gentleman; very respectful toward the history of the venue and the other performers in the house, and of Willie Dixon's wife and family. Most notably though, he proved it by absolutely blowing the place apart. It was a performance nobody who was there will likely ever forget.

When this CD came up for review I jumped on it even though it was the same one I had already purchased that night at Blues Heaven. I had been meaning to write something about that experience all this time, so this was my motivation to finally get it done. I honestly can't say how much seeing his live shows has informed my opinion, (he was back at Blues Fest again this year), but I do believe this live album does him justice. He masterfully presents a few standards to get the crowd warmed up, doing *I'm Ready* and a medley of *Baby What You Want Me To Do* and *Bright Lights, Big City* that does Willie, Muddy and Jimmy proud. A selection of solid originals follows, with *You've Got Some Explaining To Do* being my personal favorite of these. The classic *Spoonful* demonstrates enough originality to be fresh while still being faithful to the classic version, which is just the way I like it for singing-horribly-in-the-car purposes. *Lonesome Bedroom Blues*, credited to Delmark's Curtis Jones, is a nice slow tune, followed by *Love and Memories*...a tribute to moms, (Grady's in particular), that really puts the blue in blues. (Y'all call your mamas!) BB King's classic *Why I Sing The Blues* is the last cover on the disc; the rest are Champion originals. The Grady Champion Revue took first place at the IBC in Memphis in February, and the website, www.gradychampion.com, says that Grady is working on his movie debut in the upcoming "Rites of Spring". There are also plenty of YouTube videos...check him out!

Natalie Carter



**Rocky Jackson
Testify!
High Life Records (© Rocky Jackson)**

Jackson, a native of Austin Texas, started out this CD with the song "I Just Want to Make Love to You" and leaves one with the impression that, although a different slant on the Willie Dixon tune, this is going to be a ho-hum CD. Not so, as the first is probably the weakest song on the CD. Although that first song is not bad, it left me ambivalent. The second song, gets into something a little bit more original but again, on a variation on an age old theme-"Big Legs Don't Mean Fat".

The third song, "Voodoo Spell" is a blues rock song that is OK. Original but not remarkable. "Stop Breakin' Down" is a cover that I thought was Eric Clapton when I first heard it (if you've heard one, you've heard the other).

Finally, the fifth song, "Like Magic" gets into some dirty blues with great harp playing by Michael Fell. The guitar shines on this mid-tempo tune also. This is a great song and sets the tone for the rest of the CD. My favorite song on the CD is "Shoulda' Never Left Texas". This slow bluesy guitar song is 9:16 long and never gets boring.

"Chicken Legged Woman" is an acoustic song with two dobro guitars and no other instruments. It is a fine song that you can't help but like. Jackson's musical ability is unquestionable. This and the following songs prove his talent. McKinley Morganfield's "Long Distance Call" is another stand out blues song. The last song is a dancing tune with slide guitar, called "L.A. to Austin" with a driving bass and great slide.

This CD gets a thumbs-up from me. Go to www.rockyjackson.com or myspace.com/rockyjackson for more.

Bob Brown