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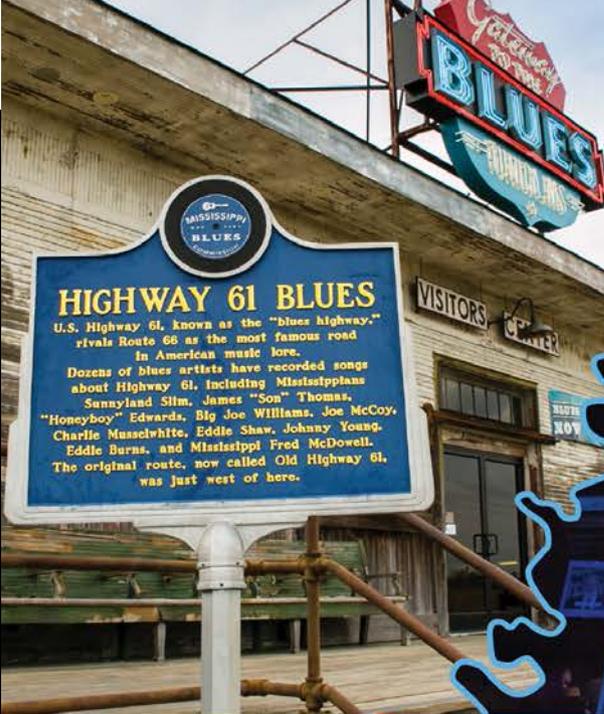
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# BLUES MUSIC ONLINE

May 05, 2021 - Issue 31

## Table Of Contents

**06 - CHUCK LEAVELL INTERVIEW**

**The Tree Man**

**By Tom Clarke**

**20- Album Review - Mick Fleetwood & Friends-Celebrate the Music of Peter Green and the Early Years of Fleetwood Mac**

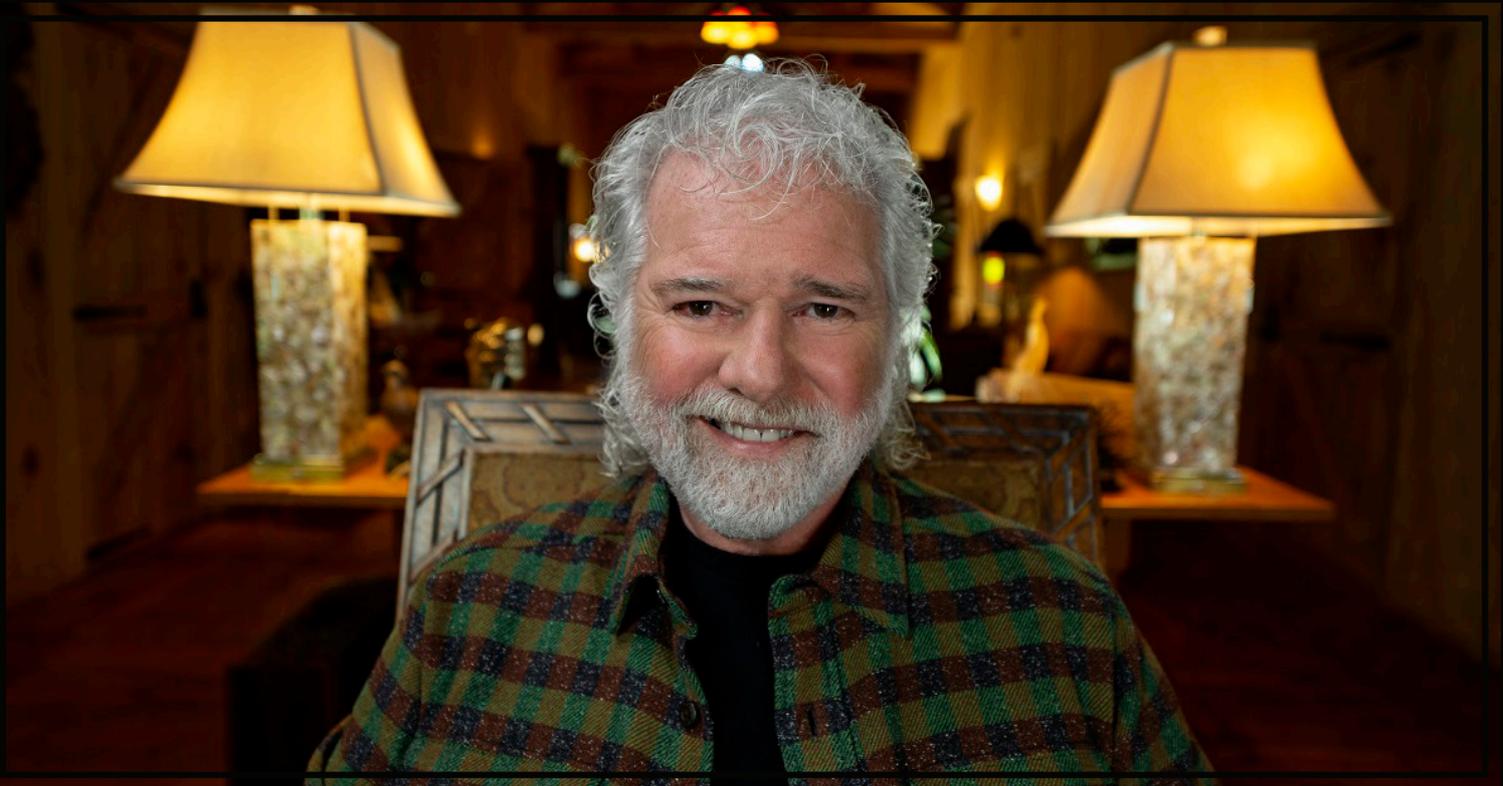
**By Hal Horowitz**

**22 - BOOK REVIEW: The Last Soul Company: The Malaco Records Story**

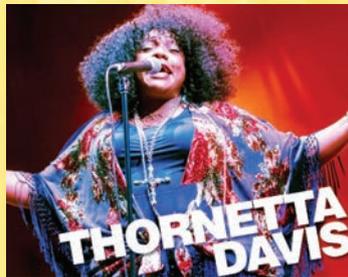
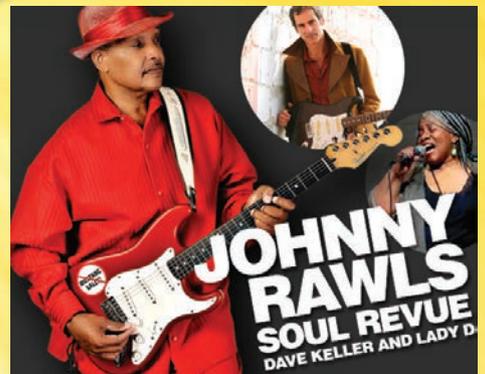
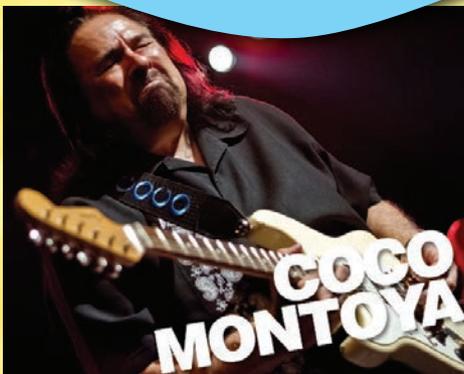
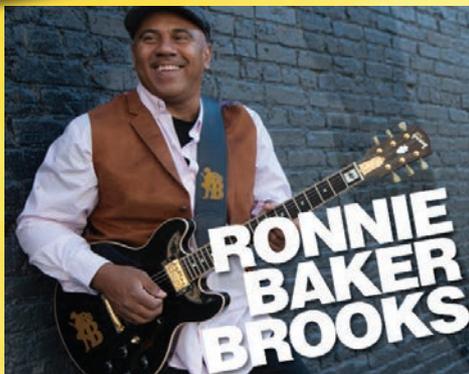
**By Bill Wasserzieher**

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CHUCK LEAVELL  
**THE TREE MAN**

A FILM BY ALLEN FARST

**Interview by Tom Clarke**

PHOTOGRAPHY © COURTESY CHUCK LEAVELL

**B**orn and raised in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 68 years ago, Chuck Leavell likely has the richest resume of any pianist in the history of rock and roll. The wonderful new documentary, *Chuck Leavell: The Tree Man*, makes that case abundantly clear. But the film also shines a bright light on the man as a devoted husband and father, and on his renown as a working tree farmer and expert in forestry. Between his time as a 19-year-old backing Dr. John to his 40<sup>th</sup> year now playing piano in the Rolling Stones, Chuck Leavell has travelled countless miles playing with a who's who of artists and bands. His extensive musical history is impossible to elaborate on in one film, but *The Tree Man* does a fine job in presenting many of the highlights. *Blues Music Magazine* caught up with Chuck by phone from his home on his 4000-acre Charlane Woodlands and Preserve in the great state of Georgia.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Good morning, Chuck. Thanks for taking the time for me, and for *Blues Music Magazine*. My wife and I watched Allen Farst's documentary about you, *The Tree Man*, the minute it was released on Amazon Prime. We loved every second. The way it presented you – the world-renowned pianist, the husband and father, and the acknowledged expert in forestry – it was all so inspiring. Can you tell me a little about each aspect of the film – I'll call all three of them love stories – and how they tie together?

**Chuck Leavell:** Morning Tom. Well, from the beginning of the idea of doing this, that was my desire, to tell the three things pretty much equally if possible. It may have landed a little heavily on the music side, because we

were just so fortunate to get so many yes's to do the interviews. When Allen and I made the deal, the contract said, "Chuck must make his best efforts to contact the people he's worked with through the years," and I thought *Oh God, what have I done? I've gotta go make these asks*. But we made a good tag team. I'd just send a very simple email or text saying, "Hey we're doing this project, would you be willing to speak to my documentarian?" We thought maybe if we got fifty percent we'd be doing great, but gosh, we got almost one hundred percent. There were a couple of folks we tried real hard to get, but schedule-wise, it just didn't work out. Like Sheryl Crow and Keith Urban. But we were shocked and very, very pleased with the acceptance by so many of the musical artists.

**Blues Music Magazine:** You and I have spoken before, so I know this, but by all accounts, and the film depicts it well, you're a good and humble man. What's made you that way, and what's grounded you, especially in the context of living within the rock 'n' roll world all these years?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, thank you. I'm not sure I deserve that title [Laughs]. My parents were great role models for remembering to be humble; to be grateful for the blessings that come your way; to be a good listener; and to be respectful and gracious to others. But also, living in the world of trees and forests also has had a really positive effect in that way. I mean, it kinda helps you understand what's really important in life. To work in nature and realize the dynamics of nature and how important it is to respect that, and to do what we can, especially in this time of climate change and other challenges, you

know, widespread population growth and all of that that puts pressure on our natural resources. It's a really important time to recognize those things, and a blessing for me to work in that arena.

**Blues Music Magazine:** When did you start playing piano, and how did you learn?

**Chuck Leavell:** I first learned from my mom. She was not a teacher, or a professional, but played for the family's enjoyment. Being the youngest of three children, oftentimes it was just the two of us in the house when I was five to six years old. She would show me very simple things and sometimes leave me to my own resources, telling me to play anything I wanted, make something up, play a chord, any chord, just explore. Thanks, mom!

**Blues Music Magazine:** Wonderful. I just finished reading [original Capricorn Records producer and staff musician] Paul Hornsby's autobiography with Michael Buffalo Smith.

**Chuck Leavell:** Yeah, I just got my copy and haven't been able to go through it yet. What did you think?

**Blues Music Magazine:** I liked it. It was a different type of a read; it's really a collection of thoughts and recollections. Paul's memories of you as a teenager playing with Dr. John fascinated me. When exactly was that?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, that would have been, if I'm correct, 1970, into '71. What had happened is we had a band together of Tuscaloosa musicians that were backing Alex Taylor, James Taylor's elder brother who was on the Capricorn label. We had toured a couple of years with Alex, and Alex had a falling out with Phil Walden and decided to pull off the road and not work. So we were a band without an artist. At the same time, Phil had signed Dr. John to a management contract right at the time he released *In The Right Place*, the album, which of course had the hit "Right Place, Wrong Time."

It was suggested that we audition for Mac since we had a pretty tight little band. And we did. He was at first quite a tough taskmaster. He drilled us pretty hard. [Imitating Dr. John's rasp] "You boys don't got that second line thing down! Ya'all got to work on dat!" So we did; we worked under his tutelage very hard, and listened to other records and tried to follow his lead. And we did get the gig.

Of course, with him being such a great piano player, I was mostly playing Hammond B-3. But there was a couple-three songs where he jumped on guitar, and I would get on the piano. But for me, it was such a great, what Mac would call "Eja-ma-cation," because I got to watch and listen and learn from his techniques. We remained friends all the way to his passing, which was a real tragedy. He was one of the guys, one of the two, that I would have loved to have had in the film. Mac and Gregg Allman. But both of them, they had just become too ill to get in front of a camera.

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***Blues Music Magazine:*** What other pianists inspired you back in the early days?

**Chuck Leavell:** Leon Russell, certainly – huge influence. Nicky Hopkins – huge influence. Billy Preston and Ray Charles. And then going forward into the Allman Brothers-Sea Level era, artists like Chick Corea, God rest his soul, he just passed as you know. Herbie Hancock. Keith Jarrett, who unfortunately has had a stroke and can't play anymore, but boy, he's left an incredible body of work. I have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for him.

***Blues Music Magazine:*** You're considered one of the greatest pianists in rock and roll history, and yet you play so many styles, from blues to jazz to jam, pop, rock, whatever. Do you have a favorite style to play in?

**Chuck Leavell:** Whichever style the artist asks me to do! [Laughs]. I will say this, my time spent with Ian Stewart early on with the Rolling Stones – Stu really helped me to better understand and better perform the boogie-woogie arts, especially what he showed me and taught me and made me listen to concerning the left hand, and working on left and right hand independence. So, that's a style that's difficult, and takes a lot of work and concentration and focus to try to let your mind go, so your two hands do two different things. When you get to a point – and I'll never call myself a master – when you get to a point where you can do that to an extent, it's a really great feeling.

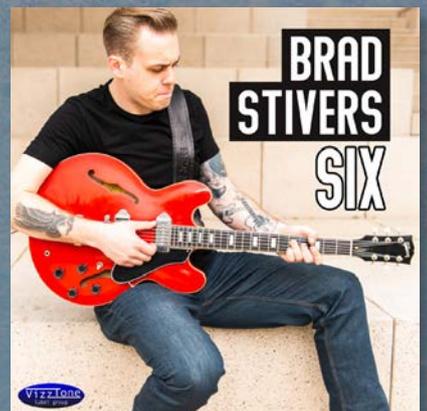
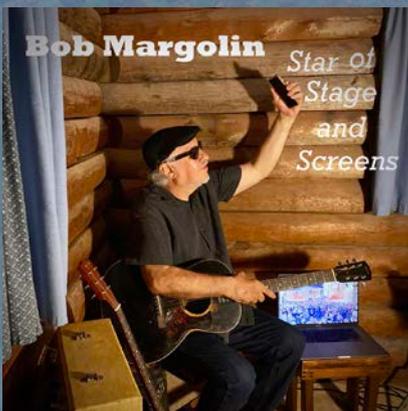
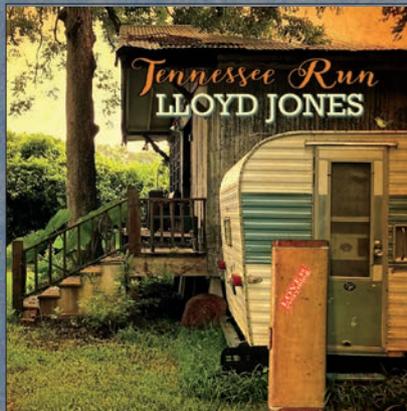
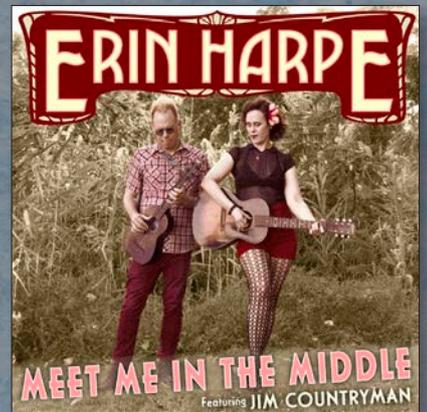
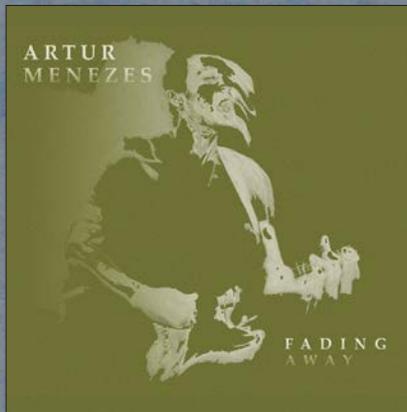
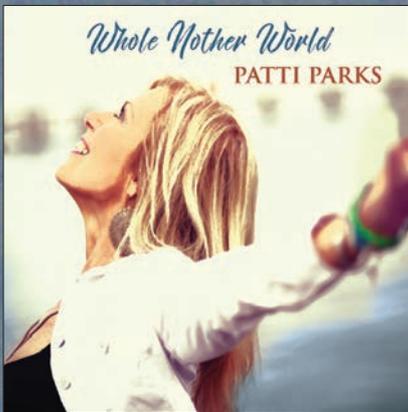
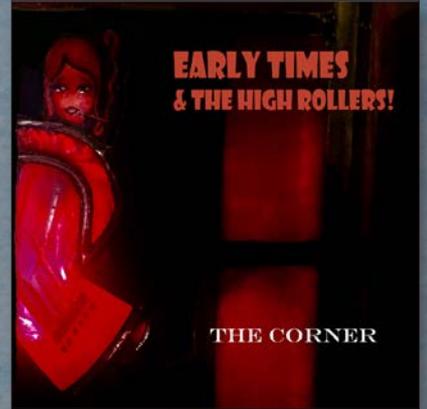
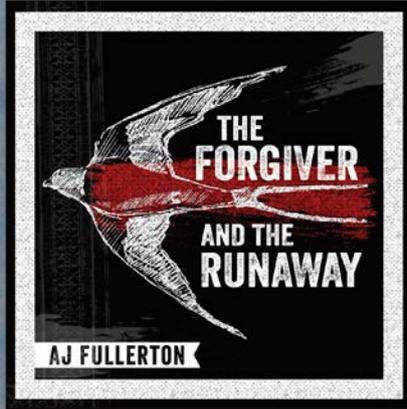
***Blues Music Magazine:*** What was it like playing with one of my old favorites, ex-Stones guitarist Mick Taylor, when he was a guest on the 2013 Stones tour?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, bless Mick Taylor's heart. In the era he was in the Stones, what a brilliant player! He contributed so very much to the band. I wish I could say that after the time he spent with us then that he'd put together a band and made a great record, but he went back home, out of the spotlight. I think that's a bit of a shame, because he is so immensely talented. It was a joy to have the privilege to play with him.

***Blues Music Magazine:*** How is it sharing a stage with Keith Richards night after night?

**Chuck Leavell:** I like to think of Keith Richards as the Count Basie of rock 'n' roll! You know, Count Basie was not known for being a flashy or a heavy-solo player with a lot of fire and lightning. But he was always tasteful and inventive. Keith has the fire, but he has it in such a wonderful, understated way. And the other thing I call Keith is the riff-meister. Only Keith could come up with these little short riffs that you know within three seconds what the song is.

***Blues Music Magazine:*** And tells you instantly it's a Stones tune, or in the case of another guitarist imitating it, a Stones-y tune.



**Chuck Leavell:** Yeah, you know all you have to do is think about “Start Me Up.” It’s two chords and three beats, and boom, you know exactly what it is. “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” the same thing. Of course “Satisfaction,” and we could go on and on. “You Got Me Rockin’,” for a more contemporary take on that. But he’s just got this incredible, innate ability to come up with these things, and it’s a blessing for the band, it’s a blessing for me to be able to play along with that.

**Blues Music Magazine:** You mentioned Count Basie, and that goes right along with my next thought. We saw you play two years ago in Savannah in a park around the time of your *Chuck Gets Big* album. You led the Savannah Jazz Orchestra, and it was such a beautiful night of big band music. But you all played Stones and Sea Level and Allman Brothers songs, and ended with “Georgia On My Mind.”

**Chuck Leavell:** Oh yes, thanks for that, Tom! I was really pleased with that. First of all, hats off and kudos to the Frankfort Radio Big Band. I was invited to go to Germany and play with these guys. I had some degree of trepidation. I thought, you know, *this could be fun, but I don’t have any charts*. Well I sent them a dozen songs on mp3. They had three different arrangers do the arrangements, and then they had one rehearsal without me, and then one rehearsal with me. When I walked into that room and heard the professionalism and crisp playing and incredible charts that those guys did, I said to myself, *Chucky boy, you got to step it up here, son, ‘cause these cats ain’t foolin’!* [Laughs]

It was intimidating; I have to be honest about it. So I just had to do the best I can. We made some minor changes to the arrangements, and the next day was the show. It was so well recorded by the German engineers from HR1. But I sat on the files for seven years or something, and then one day I just had an inkling to go back and listen to that stuff, and I said, “*Wow, it stands up,*” and I thought we should make a release of it. So I made a deal to lease the masters from the German company and then we started re-mixing.

Here’s the thing; it was so well recorded and so well isolated for a live performance that I said to the engineer, let’s see if we can take the audience out, and we did, and it worked, and I couldn’t believe it. I wanted it to be more of a direct, intimate experience without the distraction of applause that goes along with most live records. I was really over the moon with the way that came out. It’s not an easy thing to put a 17-piece band together and go tour, so I thought, *how can I do some shows?* The Savannah thing came up through a good friend of mine, Howard Paul, who is the president and CEO of the Benedetto Guitar Company in Savannah, and who is also a brilliant guitarist.

He said, “You know, we have a Savannah Jazz Orchestra and if you’ve got the charts, I think we could do a gig. I did have the charts, and we made some adjustments and boom, there it was. Also, I have to credit my good friend Paula Fogarty, who basically runs the Savannah Jazz Fest and who really made it happen. The only other time I was able to do it was during the last Stones tour in 2019 at the Gramercy Theater in New York. We were able to get the most phenomenal of New York’s top, crème de la crème brass players and other musicians. It was the same thing, send them the record to listen to, send



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them the charts, one day rehearsal, and then the gig. It was also just a really powerful performance.

The plan was in 2020 when we [The Rolling Stones] were gonna tour, we were looking at an L.A. option, maybe a Chicago option. The band likes to have three days off, so we were looking at concepts like, for instance, universities that had strong music programs that might have a big band on staff that we could work with. But of course Covid hit, Tom. Once we get out of this mud hole here, hopefully that can be revived.

**Blues Music Magazine:** You don't rest much, do you?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, you know, ya gotta make hay when the sun shines. I love to play, and you look for these unique opportunities. It's fun! To work with a big band, all these great players? It's a pleasure, a joy.

**Blues Music Magazine:** I could see that on your face the entire night at the Savannah show! What do you think attracts a big band like that, or so many stars, The Stones, The Black Crowes, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, David Gilmour, and on and on, to your style of piano playing?

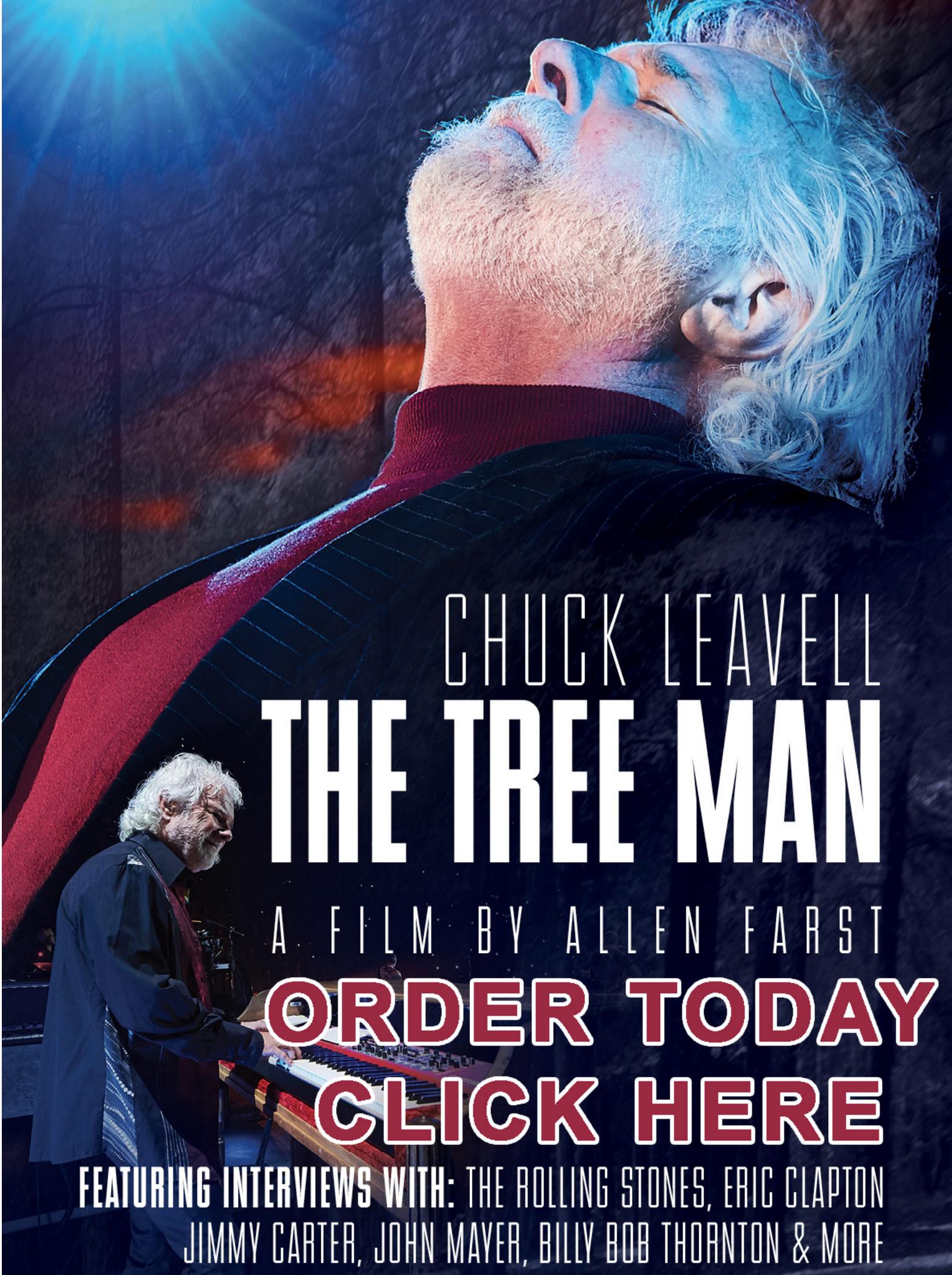
**Chuck Leavell:** In reality, you'd have to ask them, but you know, there were a lot of very nice comments made throughout the course of the film. But I will say this, I strive to be a very good listener. So whatever situation I'm in, I wanna know, what does the artist expect, or the producer if it's a recording. *What is he or she looking for? How can I do what I do and contribute?* Other things I ask myself are like *what does this particular song want me to do? Does it want me to stand out front and take a solo or two, or does it want me to just put some color in there?* So, being a good listener and trying to have a solid, full understanding of what the artist is looking to do, and knowing what you're good at and how you can contribute.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Gregg Allman must have seen that way back, as you were asked to play on his first solo album, *Laid Back*. Then, you became a member of The Allman Brothers Band from, what, 1972 to 1976?

**Chuck Leavell:** That's right.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Tell me about Gregg Allman, the blues singer?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, there's no blue-eyed soul or blues singer that ever existed that could top Gregg Allman. I used to watch the Allman Joys in Tuscaloosa at a place called the Ft. Brandon Armory. Some of us would go down any time they were around. I was just in awe of Gregg's voice and Duane's guitar, and their presence as well. Gregg had a wonderful understated presence; Duane was a little more animated, of course. They were



CHUCK LEAVELL  
**THE TREE MAN**

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just fascinating to me.

**Blues Music Magazine:** So how did you get involved with them, what, seven or eight years later?

**Chuck Leavell:** Johnny Sandlin, who was the producer on the solo record, called me and told me about the project and asked me if I wanted to come play on it. I said, “*You’re damn right I do, thank you very much!*” It was a real thrill. I thought he [Gregg Allman] had some real beautiful material that did not necessarily fit the Allman Brothers. He had “Multi-Colored Lady,” the Jackson Browne song “These Days,” and there were some strings on some songs that gave it a completely different flavor than an Allman Brothers project.

But what happened was that during the course of doing that record, there were these after-hours jam sessions in which all the other Allmans, Dickey, Berry Oakley, Jaimoe, and Butch Trucks, would come down and we would just have a go at it. Three weeks or so of this, I get a call from Phil Walden’s office. “Phil wants to see you in his office.” I thought, *Oh God what have I done wrong, you know?* I went in and there’s all the guys in the band and eventually the shoe drops and he says, “You know the band thinks this is a really interesting direction,” and it’s obviously not trying to replace Duane Allman, which would be an impossible task anyway, but he asked “Would you be interested?” I said, “*Yes, I most certainly would, thank you!*” I’ll just say, it was a natural, organic development, nothing planned.

**Blues Music Magazine:** You made two albums with the Allmans, including their commercial breakthrough Brothers and Sisters. What’s your favorite song to play, Allman Brothers or otherwise?

**Chuck Leavell:** You mean, what’s my favorite child? Well, I have a lot of “children!” If you force me, my kid “Jessica” is always a good girl!

**Blues Music Magazine:** That, and “Blue Sky,” are my two favorite Allmans songs. We’ll get to “Blue Sky” in a bit, but you did one more album with the Brothers, and then they broke up. You, drummer Jaimoe, and bass player Lamar Williams, moved on to form Sea Level. Can you talk a little about Sea Level and what you guys were trying to do musically?

**Chuck Leavell:** Yes, absolutely. It grew out of Jaimoe encouraging us to listen to these jazz players and jazz records. Now let me say right off the bat, I’d never consider myself an adept jazz piano player, but I found the style so interesting and so intriguing and technically challenging. So, we tried to incorporate a little of that into a trio we had with just Jaimoe and Lamar and myself that we called We 3. We never went public with that thing; it was just for fun, maybe at Jaimoe’s house, or at somebody’s party.

But when the Brothers did disband, we looked at each other and said, “*Well, we can go our separate ways or we could try to make something out of this.*” We decided to do the latter. But I felt like we needed a quartet and called my friend Jimmy Nalls, a brilliant guitarist I’d worked with backing Dr. John and Alex Taylor, and he fit the bill nicely. From the get-go, the idea was to have a band that would be partly instrumental and partially vocal and I, at least at that time, was not all that confident about my vocals, so I thought it would be good to find some other members who could come in and contribute. So the first thought was Randall Bramblett. I just love Randall’s music, his songwriting, his voice, and his multi-instrumental talent. Randall had been working a lot and writing a lot with Davis Causey, so Randall said, “If I come in, how would you feel about Davis coming in?” I said, “*I think it’d be great,*” and Jimmy welcomed it. Jimmy said, “Yeah, I’d love to be able to do some twin guitar stuff.” So then, as you know, the personnel changed for the second record and actually somewhat changed for every record going forward. It was a good run, we sold respectfully, 250,000, 300,000 records. We had a lot of fun touring, playing some really nice theaters. I’m glad we did it, but it ran its course in 1980. I think that was the year we all went other ways.

***Blues Music Magazine:*** You made five albums with Sea Level. Since then, you’ve cut six solo albums, one a beautiful Christmas record, one a tribute to the pioneers of the blues, the big band set we discussed, and another a live kind of retrospective. Each of the eleven has a very different feel. You’ve written some great songs on them. Do you have any favorites?

**Chuck Leavell:** I am much more of an instrumental writer than I am a lyricist. Speaking of “children,” both songs I wrote for them are definitely favorites: “Song for Amy” and “Ashley.” But I can’t leave out their mother, the song I wrote for Rose Lane called “Blue Rose.”

***Blues Music Magazine:*** You’ve played with so many blues-oriented bands. How do you play with the Fabulous Thunderbirds for instance—and I happened to be fortunate enough to catch that once—and then Eric Clapton, and still make it sound like Chuck?

**Chuck Leavell:** Well that’s a good question. I would say in short, the accents are different. You know, like, the Thunderbirds have a Texas accent, I have a Georgia accent, and you know, I say this sometimes, my fingers, my hands, have a Georgia or Alabama accent. Of course Eric has a British accent. So those things, your culture that you grow up with, absolutely affects the way that you play, and the way that you interpret the blues. There’s a lot of crossover, of course, but I really think that has a lot to do with it.

***Blues Music Magazine:*** Switching gears back to the Allman Brothers, I saw you perform as their guest in 2001 at one of their incredible Beacon Theatre shows in New York, and it was quite a treat. Last year, the surviving members and others performed as The Brothers

at Madison Square Garden, to celebrate what would have been their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You were an integral part of that band, and that show. I flew up from Savannah to attend, and it was spectacular. What did that whole experience mean to you?

**Chuck Leavell:** Oh, man, it was such a joy. The original plan when Gregg was still alive was that the band was going to do a final run and they were going to end at Madison Square Garden. But Gregg became too ill to fulfill that, and so they couldn't do it. But as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary rolled around, Warren and Derek and [Band manager] Bert Holman, of course, and other members of the band said, "It's still the anniversary, and wouldn't it be nice if we fulfilled that and did the Madison Square gig as was planned?"

So, they called me in as a "quote unquote" special guest, *the only* special guest, and of course I jumped right on it. I'll tell ya man, everybody stepped up to the plate, but *definitely* Warren Haynes. I mean, doing all those vocals as well as he did, and playing so brilliantly. Of course, Derek was great. Reese Wynans, I have to give him kudos on the Hammond; he just did a fabulous job. And also Duane Trucks; he channeled his uncle [Drummer Butch Trucks] very well.

**Blues Music Magazine:** He sure did; they all sure did. It was thrilling to hear your beautiful piano playing in so many of those songs that night, and I was pleasantly surprised when you sang "Blue Sky." I thought that was such a special moment. How did that come about?

**Chuck Leavell:** It came about because a while back, and I can't remember the exact instance, it was at a festival somewhere [The Charlie Daniels Band's 2018 Volunteer Jam], I sat in with Duane Betts and Devon Allman. They wanted to do "Blue Sky," and they said, "Do you want to sing a verse?" I said, "*Yeah, I'd love to.*" So I did it with them, and I started just singing it on my own from time to time, doing the whole song. When this opportunity came around, Warren asked if there's anything I'd like to contribute, and I said, "*You know what, I'd love to do 'Blue Sky.'*" So everybody agreed to that.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Super. The last concert on earth, as some have called it.

**Chuck Leavell:** Well it was! I was actually doing a ZOOM yesterday with Warren, and he made the comment that I'd sort of forgotten about, how last-minute it was to get that show done, because there was concern the day of, that they may cancel it due to Covid. So we were all kind of on pins and needles. Finally, I guess it was mid-morning or so, they gave us the all-clear, and we got it done. But you're right, I mean, the next day and boom, almost the whole country shut down!

**Blues Music Magazine:** It sure did. I hope it comes back soon and this virus is history. It's hurt so much and so many.

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, me too. I've had my two shots, my wife has. The vaccines seem to be rolling out quicker now, which is encouraging. Some articles from promoters are saying basically, that outdoors shows could be possible by mid to late summer or early fall, depending on how things progress from here. That's very encouraging, and I certainly hope it's true. But let me just say this before we get off the subject of The Brothers. Man, I sure would like to take that on the road a bit. I know it would be a big push to coordinate everybody's schedules, 'cause Warren's got his ting, and Derek and Susan have theirs, and, of course, Duane has Widespread, and Reese Wynans has Joe Bonamassa. But I just thought it worked so very well, that it would be something that a lot of people would like to see. You know, my hope would be that at some point in time we could do at least a dozen or 15 shows across the country.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Is there interest inside the camp for that?

**Chuck Leavell:** I think there could be, but again, there's also interest in everybody's independent projects. It would take, maybe not as much as a miracle, but it would take a lot of coordination to set it up. Maybe by 2023 we could work it out, because I know everybody wants to get back to their own thing in 2022. Or, maybe by late 2022, or something like that? I just loved it so much, and it was such a great representation of the band, and I would like to see it happen more than just that one time.

**Blues Music Magazine:** Oh, me too, me too! One last question if you don't mind. I've loved all of your records, and really loved the blues album you did [*Back To The Woods*]. Do you have any new music of your own planned, and do you think you'll ever do another blues record?

**Chuck Leavell:** I have given that thought, and that's on the backburner for sure. The other idea I've had is to do a gospel record, not so much necessarily from a spiritual standpoint, but to show how gospel music and styling have influenced rock piano. Because it all comes from the church. When you think of Little Richard, you think of Jerry Lee Lewis, other early rock 'n' rollers, a lot of that style comes directly from the church, and from gospel styling. So I thought it would be kind of interesting to do a record that would represent that.

**Blues Music Magazine:** I'll be the first to buy a copy!

**Chuck Leavell:** Yeah, man, thanks. It wouldn't hurt to have elements of spirituality thrown in. I mean, even songs like "My Sweet Lord," or you think of "Shine A Light," by the Rolling Stones, along with all the earlier, traditional gospel songs that could be done.

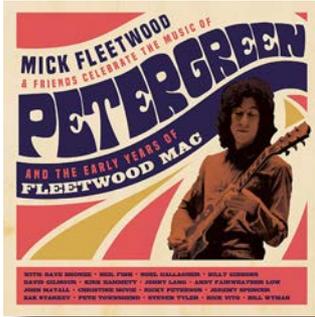
**Blues Music Magazine:** Like I said, I'll look forward to that! Thank you, Chuck, for your time! It's been a real pleasure. We went overtime and you were so gracious. Thanks.

**Chuck Leavell:** Well, I sure appreciate the interest, and appreciate the opportunity to get the word out on the film. Thanks, Tom! **-BMO**

# ALBUM REVIEW

## Various Artists

Mick Fleetwood & Friends-Celebrate the Music of Peter Green and the Early Years of Fleetwood Mac  
BMG



Back in the late 60s, Fleetwood Mac wasn't just another solid UK act influenced by American blues musicians; they were one of the best, if not THE best of an impressive batch, which included the Rolling Stones. That was in large part due to the phenomenal musicianship of the late frontman/founder/lead guitarist Peter Green. He started Fleetwood Mac in the latter part of 1967-early '68 with drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie, both fellow refugees from John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. That was the beginning of a long and often twisted saga, one that is still playing itself out. Green's association with the band was relatively brief though; he left in early 1970 after the legendary *Then Play On* album and tour, arguably the highlight of his tenure with the band. Drug and psychological issues plagued him for decades, even after a late career return with the Splinter Group, and his playing never regained the fire,

imagination and sheer intensity of his work with Mac. In February 2020, before the COVID pandemic shut down live shows, Mick Fleetwood organized this rather awkwardly titled tribute to his old band mate Green. The guitarist passed in July of that year.

While neither Green nor original bandmate John McVie take part in this 2 ½ hour concert, other previous and current Mac members are on board. They include guitarist Rick Vito (one of the evening's backline band), Christine McVie, Jeremy Spencer, and even newer Mac recruit Neil Finn. Other guests such as Johnny Lang (another featured backline player who remains on stage most of the night), Billy Gibbons, Mayall, Pete Townshend, Steven Tyler, Noel Gallagher, David Gilmour and others also appear. Drummer Zak Starkey joins Fleetwood on a second kit, perhaps not entirely necessary considering how dominant a musician Fleetwood is.

It's an impressive lineup and this predominantly blues show brings out the best and most humble aspects of these musicians (well except for showboat Tyler) as they dig into Green's rich early catalog. All the songs you would expect are accounted for, most in versions that, if not besting the originals, maintain the high standards set by Green in his writing, singing and playing. Jeremy Spencer's subtle slide work on "The Sky is Crying" is at least up to his playing in the '60s, and perhaps better. Vito and Lang are in top form for "Rolling Man," "Homework," "Sandy Mary," a superb and poignant "Need Your Love So Bad," and a crackling seven minute "Black Magic Woman." The latter extends its final shuffle into an explosive closing, showing just how potent, powerful and in the pocket Fleetwood's drumming has always been.

Tyler and Gibbons rip into the sleazy "Rattlesnake Shake" and "Oh Well (Pt.1)," Gilmour joins for lovely, refined takes on the seldom covered instrumentals "Oh Well (Pt. 2)" and especially a sublime lap steel lead on "Albatross," a song as dreamy as anything Pink Floyd played. A brief two tune acoustic set in the middle of the gig features Gallagher, who acquits himself remarkably well considering he doesn't actually rate as a blues musician. Townshend fronts "Station Man," the only non-Green selection of the night, mentioning how he ripped off the riff for his own "Won't Get Fooled Again."

As usual for these events, the entire lineup joins for a shambling closing which is eight minutes of "Shake Your MoneyMaker." With about eight guitarists each soloing, it's not surprisingly a bit of a mess, but a heartfelt one. Everyone is clearly enjoying themselves, even the notoriously stone-faced Bill Wyman.

Camera work, lighting and audio is all professionally done which helps make this a consistently enjoyable visual experience. A double CD is also available but the real thrill is watching these musicians interacting with each other and bonding over the songs and performances of Peter Green.

"It's a dream come true," says Fleetwood in his closing remarks to this one-off extravaganza, one that is unlikely to be replicated. It's required viewing for any fan of Green's, which is likely any fan of the blues.

- Hal Horowitz



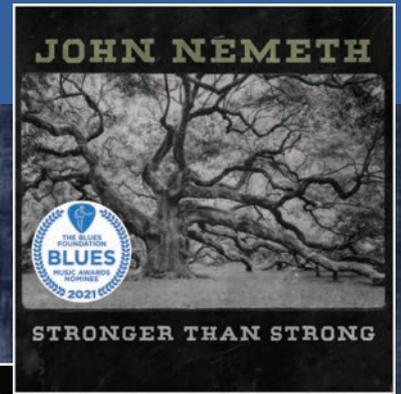
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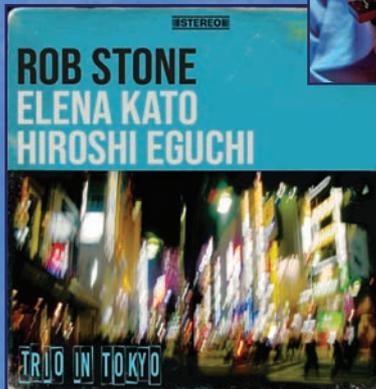
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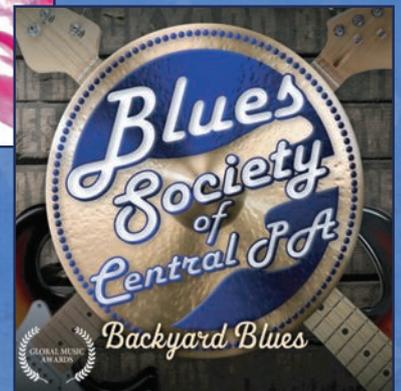
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# BOOK REVIEW

## The Last Soul Company: The Malaco Records Story

By Rob Bowman

Malaco Press



*The Last Soul Company* is an outsized volume, measuring 12x12 inches and weighing a couple of pounds, telling the story of Malaco Records. It is illustrated with scores of never-before-seen photos and author Rob Bowman's vibrant text tracing the label's more than half-century history of bringing Southern African-American music to the world from its headquarters in Jackson, Miss.

It's an improbable story, as Bowman says, that a company that began by booking black musicians for white frat-house parties at Ole Miss – where only a few years before students had rioted when James Meredith enrolled – should not only survive and but prosper. It's a rewarding story.

Malaco Records started in 1967 as an offshoot of Malaco Attractions, which college students Tommy Couch and Wolf Stephenson launched as undergraduates at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. In the label's early days, Couch, Stephenson, and third partner Mitchell Malouf took local artists into a makeshift studio and then licensed the recorded results to established companies, initially placing singles and a Mississippi Fred McDowell album, *I Do Not Play No Rock 'n' Roll*, with Capitol, the home to the Beatles and the Beach Boys. The album surprised everyone by earning a Grammy nomination.

In 1970, the Malaco principals worked out a deal with New Orleans producer Wardell Quezergue (Fats Domino, Professor Longhair, Earl King), who offered to supply their new label with artists in return for studio time and session musicians. The first of Quezergue's crew arrived in a borrowed school bus. Among those aboard were King Floyd who recorded "Groove Me" and Jean Knight who cut "Mr. Big Stuff," both in their first week at Malaco. Each tune became a No. 1 hit on R&B charts, after Atlantic and Stax initially passed on them, for Malaco on its own new Chimneyville label.

The Malaco founders quickly capitalized on their chart successes, signing such soon-to-be famous artists as Little Milton, Denise LaSalle, Latimore, Johnnie Taylor, Z.Z. Hill, and the already established Bobby "Blue" Bland. Over subsequent decades, Malaco has flourished while other labels that focused on African-American music (Chess, VeeJay, Jewel, Ace, King, etc.) have gone out of business or lost their independence (Motown, Atlantic, Stax). The Malaco recording empire today includes the world's largest gospel music catalog, numerous Christian rock recordings, and a vintage jazz label while it continues to issue R&B and blues recordings. It even acquired the famed Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in 1985.

Malaco's success story gets a full outing in *The Last Soul Company*, a sumptuous new book put together by Grammy-winner Bowman (*Soulsville, U.S.A. – The Story of Stax Records*). He is the director of York University's graduate program in Ethnomusicology & Musicology in Toronto and has a long history of working on programs for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and providing liner notes for such prestigious releases as the 50th anniversary reissue of the Rolling Stones' *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Peter Guralnick, best know for his fine books on Elvis, Sam Phillips, and Sam Cooke, provides a foreword.

– **Bill Wasserzieher**



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Thanks to all the artist who contributed their music to this Song Sampler. All the songs are available for download at the [BluesMusicStore.com](https://bluesmusicstore.com).

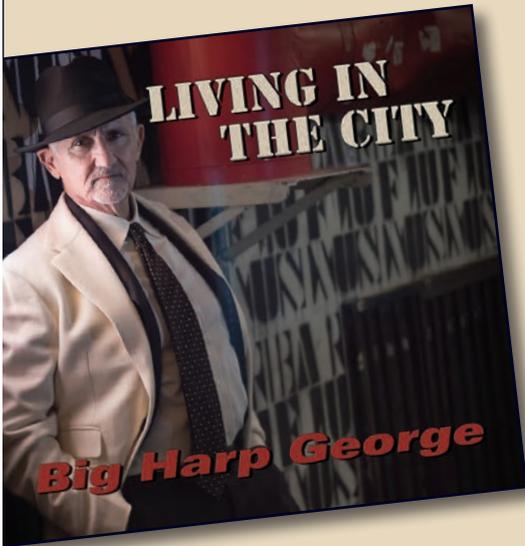
- 1) Steve Cropper – “Fire It Up” from the album *Fire It Up* on Provogue Records
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- 5) The WildRoots – “Move Along Part 2” on the album *Wildroots Sessions Vol. 1* on WildRoots Records
- 6) Maria Muldaur with Tuba Skinny – “Let’s Get Happy Together” from the album *Let’s Get Happy Together* on Stony Plain Records
- 7) Quinn Sullivan – “How Many More Tears” from the album *Wide Awake* on Provogue Records
- 8) Chickenbone Slim – “Vampire Baby” from the album *Sleeper* on Self-released
- 9) Billy Jones & Delta Blues Outlaws– “My Love Is Real” from the *Self-titled* album on Delta Blues Records
- 10) Ryan Perry, Whitney Shay, and Jeremiah Johnson – “Ain’t Afraid To Eat Alone” from the album *Blues Caravan 2020* on Ruf Records
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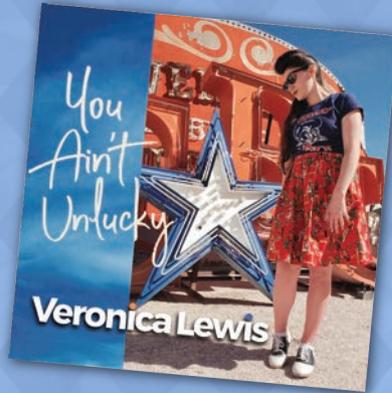
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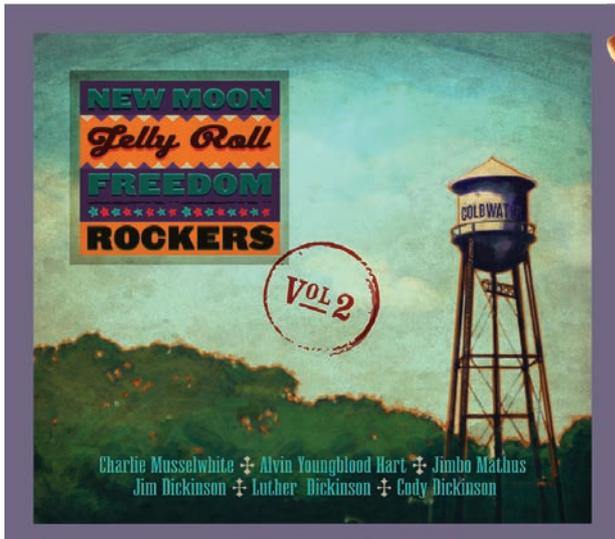
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