



Otis Clay (pictured) collaborates with Johnny Rawls on their new album *Soul Brothers*.

DRAGANTASIC

Gone Like Tomorrow

Otis Clay & Johnny Rawls: *Soul Brothers* (Catfood 021; 39:04 ★★★½) The studio collaboration by these two veteran singers is one of the brightest stars in the 21st century soul-blues universe. Both have an uncanny sense of dramatic exactitude, projecting bracingly honest professions of faith or apprehension about matters of the heart. Bassist Bob Trenchard joined Clay and Rawls in composing solid, inviting songs that have a vivid kinship to the rich soul past. Outside material from the 1960s and '70s also suits the spry elders; they validate the enduring worth of Jimmy Ruffin's broken-dream "What Becomes Of The Broken-hearted?" and the blue-eyed rock-soul hit "Only You Know And I Know." Special mention to ever-resourceful Catfood guitarist Johnny McGhee, formerly with Marvin Gaye, Les McCann, many more.

Ordering info: catfoodrecords.com

JW Jones: *Belmont Boulevard* (Blind Pig 5162; 50:00 ★★★½) JW Jones, submitting his ninth album but first for an established American label, gives all of himself to finding a tone of emotional credibility in his rockin' blues. Unlike many peers, the talented Canadian guitarist deals in clarity and substantive excitement, not testosterone-heavy grandstanding. Jones may not be a top-level singer, but the appeal of his voice increases in interest with each listen. He and producer-drummer Tom Hambridge, in great demand these days, did the bulk of the writing, maintaining adequacy among songs with lyrics personal to Jones. They picked two undervalued evergreens to cover: Bobby Parker's "Watch Your Step" and Buddy Guy's "What's Inside Of You."

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

Big Harp George: *Chromaticism* (Blue Mountain 01; 47:29 ★★★½) San Franciscan George Bisharat isn't your everyday law professor; he's also a blues harmonica player. At age 59, he realizes his dream of recording his first album, furthering the West Coast blues tradition that identifies with the freedom and swing of jazz. Once schooled by the now-deceased maestro Paul deLay, Bisharat impresses with tone, creativity and control of his large, customized chromatic Hohners in entertaining originals and choice selections from the 1950s linked to Jesse Stone and T-Bone Walk-

er (swing-era drummer Gene Krupa, too). Like so many harp players since Paul Butterfield, Bisharat feels compelled to be a lead singer. Fortunately, he's more than satisfactory.

Ordering info: biggeorgeharp.com

Kaye Bohler: *Handle The Curves* (Kaye Bohler Productions; 38:27 ★★★) Kaye Bohler, a belter of the highest order, with Etta James hardwired in her DNA, holds nothing back about her strengths as a woman in 10 original songs on her fifth record. With guitarist Pete Anderson enamored of Stax in his production, too much really, Bohler sets up and relieves tension while "keeping the fire burning" in carnal love encounters and in coping with modern life.

Ordering info: kayehohler.com

Marcia Ball: *The Tattooed Lady And The Alligator Man* (Alligator 4964; 43:21 ★★★½)

As she's done on 13 previous albums over four decades, Marcia Ball, a newly inked carnival attraction, taps into an elixir of Gulf Coast r&b and blues. The self-aware element to her vocals gives an aura of personal revelation to the lyrics of her typically appealing, intelligent songs—none better than the brokenhearted slow blues "The Last To Know." In the autumn of her career, some strain affects the flow of her vocals. Ball's boogie-and-blues piano is as potent as ever at heady or slow paces. Her working band, including excellent guitarist Mike Schermer, bristles with avid devotion to the music.

Ordering info: alligator.com

Markus James: *Head For The Hills* (Fizzenze 014; 55:34 ★★★½) That is, Mississippi hills once frequented by R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough. Markus James has a background of creative exploration in blues, and this session, recorded in the Magnolia State and back home in California with only a drummer, is his take on rough, knife-in-the-gut sounds. His singing, ranging from heavy whisper to ecstatic shout, and his invasive slide guitar work reside in dark, unforgiving originals that are wakeup calls about looming personal or global chaos. In lesser hands, James' efforts would come off as pretense run amuck, but he has the creative ideas, the boldness and the conviction to transcend that trap.

DB

Ordering info: markusjames.com



Frank Catalano/Jimmy Chamberlin/Percy Jones/Adam Benjamin/Chris Poland *Love Supreme Collective*

ROPEADOPE

★★★

Tony Fitzpatrick's disrobing cover gal here, allied to unabashed association with *A Love Supreme*, John Coltrane's agonizingly chaste open letter to God—which celebrates its 50th anniversary this winter—equals bona fide jazz blasphemy. But unstoppable Chicago tenorist Frank Catalano's runaway career is characterized by lack of squeamishness (despite horrified memories of car accidents and finger truncation, survival from which he attributes to God's grace).

There is some canny bashfulness here in that his EP suite is 10 minutes shorter than the epochal Impulse! date from 1964. While jazz pedants might be unsettled by bandmembers' affiliations with such groups as Megadeth and Smashing Pumpkins, guitarist Chris Poland, drummer Jimmy Chamberlin, Kneebody keyboardist Adam Benjamin and Brand X bassist Percy Jones really bolster Catalano's gushy flights of feeling.

The tenorist emits a preemptive rasp within 20 seconds of the fade-in that recalls a screech from Trane's arsenal and references the "A Love Supreme" riff, but the buttery tone heralding "Resolution Of Purpose" owes more to Chicago sax titan Ari Brown. Unshackled with dubious comparisons, the music refreshes traditional tropes of avant-garde catharsis with new textures and timbres.

Ostinato hums from Jones wrap splintered sci-fi colorations from Benjamin and Chamberlin's driving tubs in a warm blanket, making this "Acknowledgement Of Truth" more acceptable to non-improv-friendly ears. Chamberlin and Jones fuel "Pursuance And Persistence," and Catalano rides Benjamin's rocket before persistence retards. "Psalm For John" shimmers like a Jim Jarmusch soundtrack with Poland's guitar fielding Catalano's restrained soprano.

—Michael Jackson

Love Supreme Collective: Acknowledgement Of Truth; Resolution Of Purpose; Pursuance And Persistence; Psalm For John. (22:01)

Personnel: Frank Catalano, tenor and soprano saxophone; Adam Benjamin, keyboards (1–3); Chris Poland, guitar (4); Percy Jones, bass; Jimmy Chamberlin, drums.

Ordering info: ropeadope.com; catalanomusic.com