

TORONTO BLUES SOCIETY MAPLE BLUES

TBS is a charitable organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Blues 

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Calgary's
Cindy
McLeod
is John
Valenteyn
Blues
Booster of
the Year

Blues Booster Cindy McLeod
Alana Bridgewater
Loose Blues News

Blues Reviews
Blues Events
and More

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The 2020 TBS Annual General Meeting was like no other, but business was taken care of, including voting in a new Board of Directors (yes, that finger in a cast was Sarah French's "yae" vote)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Layla Zoe CD Premiere

Wednesday, January 6 | 8pm (ET)

"Pray" from upcoming album "Nowhere Left To Go".

Bookkeeping for Musicians

Sunday, January 17 | 2-3pm (ET) Online (TBS Facebook Page & Zoom)

24th Maple Blues Awards, Every Monday throughout February 2021

8pm ET via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TorontoBluesSociety>

Monday, February 1st | Alana Bridgewater and Johnny Max hosting from Toronto w/performance from Dione Taylor and Jack de Keyzer

Monday, February 8th | Angelique Francis and Matt Sobb will be hosting the stream from Ottawa with JW-Jones and Crystal Shawanda

Monday, February 15th | from Montreal and hosted by Dawn Tyler Watson and Ben Racine w/performance from Durham County Poets and Matt Andersen

Monday, February 22 | from Vancouver and hosted by Dalannah Gail Bowen and Jim Byrnes w/performances from Liam Docherty and Lindsay Beaver

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Blues Booster of the Year

Cindy McLeod



The Toronto Blues Society board of directors is pleased to announce Calgary's Cindy McLeod as the winner of the newly renamed John Valenteyn Blues

Booster of the Year award, a very special Maple Blues Award honouring outstanding contribution to the Canadian blues music industry. The esteemed award has been renamed in honour of the late John Valenteyn, a co-founder of the Toronto Blues Society, long-time radio DJ, and dedicated volunteer.

"Every city needs a leadership figure like Cindy McLeod to keep the flames of music strong. Cindy's personal passion for the Calgary Blues Festival and projects related is an inspiration for all and makes her a deserving recipient of the annual John Valenteyn Blues Booster honour," says Derek Andrews, President of the Toronto Blues Society.

A "jill of all trades", McLeod is a founder of the Calgary Blues Music Association (CBMA) as well as the Calgary International Blues Festival and the Calgary Midwinter Bluesfest, Cindy acts as Producer and Artistic Director for the organization and has been instrumental in creating what has become one of the largest blues music festivals in Western Canada.

A recognized leader in Canadian music, she has been asked to sit on multiple juries for the Western Canadian Music Awards (WCMA), Eastern Canadian Music Awards (ECMA), PEI Awards, JUNO, Harvard, FACTOR, the International Blues Challenge/Edmonton, and the Mayor's Arts Awards, and has sat on various boards including Calgary Blues Music Association, Jazz Is Society of Alberta, JazzYYC, the Alberta Music Industry Association, PAL Calgary and the Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta. Cindy received the 2019 Industry Person of the Year Award for Calgary's YYC Music Awards. She is also the host of The Blues Witness radio program, which can be heard weekly on CJSW Radio 90.9FM in Calgary and online.

On receiving the news McLeod remarked "It is a great honour to be a part of the blues community in Canada. It is humbling to be acknowledged with this award. With some of the finest talent on the planet, loyal and dedicated fans, and volunteers that are like one big family, it is a privilege to be a part of it all. May 2021 bring us all together again to gather at festivals and venues across the nation to celebrate the gifts we have in blues!"

The 24th annual Maple Blues Awards are going virtual in 2021, with the winners being announced and streamed from four different cities with local performers and hosts from Toronto (February 1), Ottawa (February 8), Montreal (February 15), and Vancouver (February 22).



Attention TBS Members!

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, TBS is unable to deliver a physical copy of the MapleBlues January issue. However expiring, new & renewing members can expect a letter from us soon. Please e-mail info@torontobluesociety.com if you have any questions and be sure to follow TBS accounts on social media for immediate updates.



MONEY MATTERS

Managing Your Finances & Bookkeeping For Musicians
Sun, Jan 17 | 2pm-3pm



Hosted by Julian Taylor

Speakers: Arif Uddin, Chris Enns, Geoffrey Blasutti, Ingrid Denda



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Tune in to TBS Virtual events

Layla Zoe CD Premiere

"Pray" from upcoming album "Nowhere Left To Go"

Wednesday, January 6 | 8pm (EST)

Maple Blues Band MBA Performance

Wednesday, January 13 | 6pm on TBS Youtube channel

24th Maple Blues Awards, Every Monday throughout February 2021

8pm ET via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TorontoBluesSociety>

Monday, February 1st | Alana Bridgewater and Johnny Max hosting from Toronto w/performance from Dione Taylor and Jack de Keyzer

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Also, watch for upcoming new events from TBS including: TBS Pioneer Profile Series and new interviews with Jay Douglas and others!



Maple Blues Band

Notes & Quotes

Alana

For this edition of Notes & Quotes, Alana Bridgewater is the person of interest. With a multi-faceted career, featuring multiple acclaims, Bridgewater, who started her career as a singer, has also worked as an actress with the Soulpepper Theatre Company, amongst other projects.

Women's Blues Revue alumna Bridgewater, who studied Musical Theatre at the University of Windsor, says that the performing arts has always been something that she nurtured simultaneously with her musical abilities. She has been involved in theatre since her youth, so amalgamating her musical talents with her skills as a theatre performer has always been an organic process. With a career peppered with accomplishments, she was asked to name a few of the highlights that come to mind when considering her career. Alana responded:

"Meeting Quincy Jones and performing for him was definitely a highlight. I like to think about projects I'm currently working on as highlights as well."

One project Alana is currently working on is a note to readers of Maple Blues Magazine, and the Canadian Blues music fan; Alana will be co-hosting the Toronto portion of the Maple Blues Awards this year. When asked

what she thought about being a part of the upcoming event, Bridgewater offered this;

"With respect to hosting the Toronto portion of this year's Maple Blues Awards with Johnny Max – I'm looking forward to taking something that has been historically grounded in Toronto, geographically, and taking it across the nation. This will help people have insight on what the Blues landscape looks like in each city across Canada."

When asked what advice she would provide any musical artists who are thinking about expanding their careers and introducing performing in the theatre arts to their attributes, Bridgewater offers this; "In Toronto especially, I think you have to have a diversified portfolio. It's a matter of asking yourself the tough questions to be good at what you do. When considering theatre, you are delivering a story; just like in music, so the two are connected, it's just a different delivery. The other thing I would say is for people to get as much experience as possible. For example, if you sing, learn to play the guitar. Also, I would tell people to stay the course – this line of work is a marathon, not a race."

Alana Bridgewater is also in the midst of recording for an upcoming musical release in the near future. To learn more about Alana Bridgewater, visit www.alanabridgewater.ca.

For more information on this year's Maple Blues Awards, please visit www.torontobluesociety.com.

- Erin McCallum



This month's recommended listening by Brad Wheeler, music writer for the Globe and Mail
Twitter: @bwheelerglobe

- Wall Matthews *The Plum Women's Blues* Tompkins Square
- Cristina Vane *Old Played New Blue* Tip
- *Steve Hill *Desert Trip* Self
- *Bill King *Mondo Jumbo* Self
- Selwyn Birchwood *Living in a Burning House* Alligator
- Alabama Slim *The Parlor*, Cornelius Chapel
- Bette Smith *The Good, The Bad and The Bette* Ruf
- *Layla Zoe *Nowhere Left to Go* Self
- Kim Wilson *Take Me Back: The Bigtone Sessions* MC Records
- Duke Robillard & Friends *Blues Bash!* Stony Plain
- Catfish Keith *Blues at Midnight* Self
- Sonny Landreth *Blacktop Run* Provogue
- The Doors *Morrison Hotel (50th Anniversary Edition)* Rhino
- *Tony D *Speak No Evil A Flurry of Instrumentals* Self
- Songhoy Blues *Optimisme* Fat Possum
- *Endrick and the Sandwiches *Green Room Rumble* Self
- Rev. John Wilkins *Trouble Goner* Records
- *Rick Fines *Solar Powered Too* Raf
- New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers *Volume 1* Stony Plain
- *Miss Emily *Live at the Isabel* Independent
- *Downchild *Live at the Toronto Jazz Festival* Linus
- *Smokewagon Blues Band *The Ballad of Albert Johnson* Self

*= Canadian



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Many in the blues world mourn the passing of Amoy Levy, (far right) who was a regular at Ken Whiteley's Gospel events alongside her sister Ciceal ("The Fabulous Levy Sisters") and in addition to her powerful voice, many have noted that she was a true virtuoso on the tambourine

anywhere and Bill Garrett is in demand as a producer.

Ken Whiteley remembers Amoy Levy:

"I first heard Amoy Levy as a soloist with the Youth Outreach Mass Choir in the summer of 1992 and felt awe in her vocal prowess and spiritual intensity. She'd been singing all her life, starting as a young girl in a family group, "Zion's Youth" and soon she took over from her older sister, Pauline, as the director of Youth Outreach Mass Choir. I was working on an album eventually titled "Thank You, Lord", showcasing Toronto gospel artists. As well as her solo with the choir, Amoy sang backup for several artists on that project. Her incredible ear for harmonies impressed me so much I began using her on different sessions and asking her to accompany me on stage, usually with her younger sister, Ciceal Levy.

Word soon got out and it wasn't long before others began putting her amazing voice to work. She would go on to become a full time singer, harmonizing with pop singers including Celine Dion, Andy Kim, Ron Sexsmith, Michael Bolton, Olivia Newton John and Tom Cochrane.

She could authoritatively sing blues, jazz, pop, R&B or rock but Gospel music remained her passion. She got a Juno nomination in 1998 for her work with Youth Outreach Mass Choir. A few of the gospel artists Amoy worked with include Toronto Mass Choir, Danny Brooks, Fred Hammond, Hezekiah Walker and John P. Kee. She released one solo album, "Testimony", which came out in 2014.

Totally fluent in contemporary styles, she could also effortlessly reach back to older, traditional styles. One of the highlights of running the Sunday Gospel series at Hugh's Room for many years was sitting in the office/dressing room before the show, singing with Amoy and Ciceal as we'd pull out one old song after another. Many times those unplanned tunes would spontaneously make it to the stage for moments of spiritual magic.

She is survived by her three sisters, Sonia, Pauline and Ciceal and many beloved nieces and nephews. She leaves family, friends, fans and a large group of singers and musicians all over the world who are already missing that voice and spirit. I feel overwhelmed knowing that my dear Amoy, with that fearless voice, won't be joining me again in person."

More Passings: Roly (Roland Harold) Greenway was bassist for Crowbar and co-wrote the Canrock anthem "Oh, What A Feeling" with bandmate Kelly Jay, for which they were inducted into the Canadian Songwriting Hall of Fame. He died on December 22, after a long battle with cancer, at age 78.

Greenway was born in Guelph and was a much-beloved member of that city's music scene. He picked up the guitar in 1958 when



Blues Booster John Valenteyn. The annual Blues Booster Award determined by the TBS Board of Directors has been renamed in honour of John Valenteyn the late co-founder of the organization. John's untimely passing in October continues to reverberate in the community as he left a huge legacy. As you can see in this publication we have recruited a pool of scribes to cover off his monthly "John's Picks" review column, a group that includes Richard Flohil, Sandra Tooze, Eric Thom, Terry Parson and others including the recipient of the booster, Cindy McLeod. As mentioned last month, CIUT's Ken Stowar is considering options to fill John's spot on the air at 89.5 and others are dealing with his enormous collection of recordings, books, magazines that were acquired over the years. He attended virtually every edition of the Chicago Blues Festival which included a store at Bob Koester's Blues and Jazz Mart, but he was serviced by all the labels with box sets and all the latest including his penchant for Rolling Stones, Dylan and even classical music. The TBS plans to assist in the process of handling the cumbersome archive which spans a complete history of Canadian blues and beyond.

Borealis Records Bows Out: The Borealis imprint remains (via Linus Entertainment) but after 25 years of putting out some of the best Canadian folk and roots music, the principals

of Borealis Records, Grit Laskin and Bill Garrett, have announced that as of January 1, 2021 the Borealis catalogue will shift to the management of Linus Entertainment, a leading Canadian rights management company whose portfolio of labels includes True North Records, Stony Plain Records, The Children's Group, and Solid Gold Records.

In a joint statement, Laskin and Garrett said of the transition, "We have partnered with Linus Entertainment for some 13 years in distribution and they have been our partners in the best sense."

Geoff Kulawick, President & CEO of Linus Entertainment, said of the transition, "It has been a joy to work with Grit and Bill and their wonderful artists.

Taking on the responsibility of managing the Borealis catalog, which includes many ever-green musical gems of Canadian culture and folklore was a natural fit as we know the music well, so transition for the artists and our global distribution partners will be seamless."

Ken Whiteley stated, "Certainly as an artist I will miss the great work that Linda Turu did running the the day-to-day operation and I've had one good conversation with Geoff Kulawick and looking forward to seeing where that goes."

Laskin & Garrett continued, "We have been most fortunate in being able to work with a large number of very fine artists over the years. Their music has been a constant source of inspiration and the friendships made will be life-long." Grit Laskin continues to craft some of the best acoustic guitars made





Last week, ACTRA Toronto announced **Jani Lauzon**, a Métis multi-disciplinary artist and our recent host at the Rez Bluez 25th Anniversary online concert series, as its 2021 Award of Excellence recipient. Jani (she/her) is an award-winning screen actress, a Juno-nominated singer-songwriter, a Gemini Award-winning puppeteer, a multi-award-winning stage actress, a director and filmmaker.

he was 16 years old and two years later, he was working as a professional musician, Guelph Today reports. He played with such visiting stars as Zsa Zsa Gabor and Liberace, and in 1969 Greenway joined the backup band for Ronnie Hawkins. When he and his bandmates were fired a year later, they formed Crowbar. Crowbar disbanded and reunited several times before Kelly Jay's death in June 2019.

Greenway continued to perform, write and record with a number of groups over the years but he never enjoyed the same level of success and was forced to pick up a side gig as a landscape contractor to pay the bills.

Over the holidays, the local music scene also lost a couple of folks who were always around at music events, mostly in the audience supporting local players. Gerry Lebrun was an excellent photographer and often provided photos for his favourite musicians to use for promotion. He was a regular at the Local, Gate 403 and is fondly remembered by the Roncesvales crew.

Gary Webb-Proctor (aka "Gary17") was a great supporter of the local music scene, and faithfully published a series of newsletters that listed every live music event in every corner of the city.

Julian Taylor remembers, "He was like a circus ring master and he knew the whole Toronto music scene like the back of of his bicycle gloves. Being just kids the scene felt like the swinging sixties to us and in a lot of ways it was. Gary would write about it and you'd see his T.O. Night magazines everywhere... An odd duck, a real character and a one of a kind individual who tried his best because at the end of the day he cared a lot about the music, the musicians and the scene. If there was ever an unsung hero for the Toronto Music Scene he would certainly be one of them."

Buckside Blues News: Patrick Monaghan whose radio show, Buckside Blues Cruise, just honoured for best Jazz and Blues Programming from the National Campus and Community Radio Association is part of a group of blues music enthusiasts who are starting a blues society in Haliburton.



Blues from the 'Soo: The Sault Blues Society is presenting a virtual Blues Miniseries which has been in the works for several months. What a great way to bring in 2021 with 5 concerts with all local musicians playing all original songs.

The first band Blues Shop will be released on Thursday January 7th at 8 pm on 3 different platforms. The following 4 bands will be released the following 4 Thursdays at 8pm. Details at www.saultblues.com

Muchas Gracias

Renewing Members: Glenn Marais, Mike Nagoda, Raoul Bhaneja, John Tackaberry, Jenie Thai, Meghan Parnell & Dave Barnes, Lily Sazz, Fraser Melvin, Madagascar Slim, Suzie Vinnick, Geoff Kulawick, Andrew McIntosh, Barbara Harrington, Bob Crawley, Bonnie Baker & John Mulligan, Brian Taylor, Brian Gallagher, David Myhre, David Shuken, Debra Power, Doug McFadden, Ed Baranowicz, Frank & Rosemary Sheehan, Gary Paradis, George Baumann, Gordon Young, Henry Baranowicz, Ian McLaurin, Jan Dinsdale MacDonald, Jeff Shnier, Jerry Salfi, Jim Corrigan, Jordan Safer, JW Jones, Larry Hershfield, Marcel Spidalieri, Marie Pearce, Martha Ireland, Michael Rowlands, Michael Kudrac, Nicole Gaboury, Norma Brem, Paul Sanderson, Peter Gregory, Rene Coxworthy, Richard Hamilton, Robert Kennington, Robert Weinper, Silvio Caldelari, Wayne Wanamaker, Cindy McCleery, Diana Taseckas & Peter Mulyk, Doug MacVicar, Irene Ippersiel, Janice Seidelin, Lester Brown, Alfred Doucette, Michael Stubbs, Paul Normandeau, Sherrill Middleton, Mark Convery, Jamie MacDonald, Lee Fraser, Gerardo Turrin, Lisa Owen Struthers, Rick Brouckxon, Erin Gilbert, Ken Whiteley, Mike Harrison, Ken Wilson, Jackson Park, Lawrence Sauder, Ken Simms, Bruce Barton, Christopher Caddell, Ian Robertson, Linda Partington, Susan Simpson, Cindy McLeod, Dana Clarence, Donald Orr, Eric Thom, Gary Latchford, Gary Craig, Jamie Cole, Jerome Godboo, Jim & Elaine Cooledge, Joel Goldberg, John Robshaw, Martyn Rix, Norman Robinson & Diane DiPinto, Phil Worthington, Spencer Mackenzie, Alka Sharma, Brian David Johnston, Christine Hennings, Danny Ogaki, David Brennan, David Simpson, David & Susan Reid, Doug & Sheri Bredewold, Dougal Bichan, Elaine Justein, Garry James Asselstine, Gary Brown, Gerald Bailie, Glenn Smith, Henry Kiiskinen, Jacques Lapointe, James Melvin, Jim Carter, Ken Brophy, Leigh-Anne Stanton, Margaret Wood, Michael Dudley, Michele Gare, Moyra Fulwell, Nick Koppel, Norm Stewart, Patricia McCully, Rico Ferrara, Robert Wayne Nicholson, Rose-Marie Ker, Stacey Shannon & Sue Wells, Aimée Osunduba, Barbara Claiman, Bob Walton, Jim & Susan Hiraiishi, Mary Jane Russell, Peter Phillips, Brant Zwicker, Brian Allen, Chris Churchill, Gary Lamourie, Lynn Wintercorn, Paul Norton, Vance Cooper, Hal Hannaford, Rick Goodwin, Tom Rowe.

New Members: Brian Stephen, Elizabeth Harte, Herbert Uhlir, James Martens, Mark Livingston, Ramon Taranco, Sandra Tooze, Stanley Grizzle.

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Illustration by Nathaniel Mesner



Kat Danser *One Eye Open*

Having earned the moniker, “Canada’s Swamp Blues Queen,” Edmonton’s Kat Danser lives up to the title with yet another golden album. *One Eye Open*, Danser’s sixth release, continues her collaboration with guitarist/producer Steve Dawson, releasing the album on his Black Hen Music label, with distribution handled by True North Records.

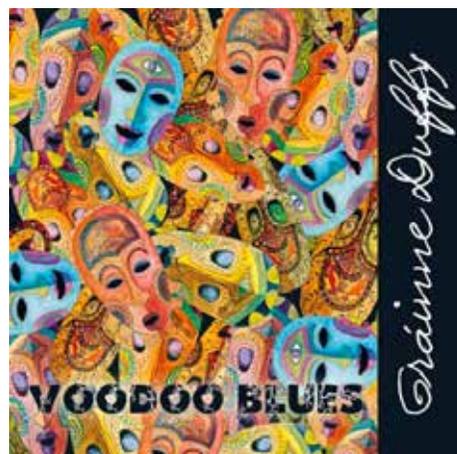
Danser’s lifetime work is an exploration of the sounds and culture of the south, her living and studying, immersing and infusing parlayed into her musical creation. Danser has collected nuggets along the way to bring to life in what is perhaps her finest writing to date. There’s a looser sound to this album, as though the artist has given herself permission to step out and released herself from an invisible bond.

Marked by sophisticated lyrics and rich arrangements, the album features Danser’s original songs and two carefully selected standards. All have been woven into a lyrical gem of an album. Recorded remotely due to the times, there is still a “live” feel to the album, a presence that oozes a sense of immediacy. The album features a core trio of Dawson (guitars), Jeremy Holmes (bass) and Gary Craig (drums) and a horn section of Dominic Conway, Jeremy Cook and Malcolm Aiken.

“Do What I Do” kicks off the album and underscores the sense that Danser has freed herself from any preconceived notion of what “should” be, its easy approach and relaxed vocals honest and genuine. This track exudes fun and *laissez faire*. In keeping with that sentiment, Frenchman Street Shake is an observation of the exuberance and decadence of the New Orleanian spirit, a commentary on the

characters who populate the fabled street. The title track, “One Eye Open”, deftly portrays the edgy, angry feel that dominates the streets in 2020 as the cries for change roar. “Please, Don’t Cry” is a tender love song that holds the listener close as Danser stretches her vocal range and showcases Dawson’s slide guitar. The two covers, 1920’s Gus Cannon song “Bring It With You When You Come”, and Jessie May Hemphill’s “Get Right Church”, fit seamlessly in the story Danser weaves, while “Mi Corazon”, sung in Spanish, features the horn section in this Cuban flavoured offering.

Overall, this album perfectly describes Danser’s evolution as an artist, with a colourful tale of the cultural fabric of the southern US all the way to Cuba. Recommended for any lover of blues and roots music. (Cindy McLeod)



Voodoo Blues - Gráinne Duffy

Voodoo Blues is a showcase for the intense, electrifying vocals of Irish singer and guitar player Gráinne Duffy, who wrote all the songs on this album with her rhythm guitarist, Paul Sherry. Her blues-infused rock packs a potent punch. She was voted best female vocalist in 2014 and best artist in 2015 by *Blues Matters*, a U.K. publication. Her artistry has been honed with a degree in music, and she has four previous albums under her belt. Her guitar influences include Peter Green and B.B. King, and she was initially inspired as a songwriter by Carole King’s *Tapestry* album.

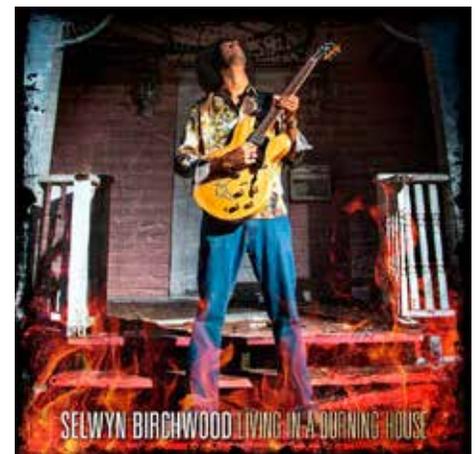
Voodoo Blues blasts off with the title track, a hard rockin’ number that leaves no doubt as to Duffy’s impressive voice. It’s raw and expressive with a toughness that is anything but ladylike. The dense, driving rhythmic instrumentation of “Mercy” is perfectly offset by her soaring vocals as she begs to be saved in this soul-drenched number. Duffy lightens it up but stays in the groove with the buoyant, hip-shakin’ “Blue Skies.”

Her guitar work moves to the fore in the captivating “Shine It on Me.” Duffy slows it down for “Don’t You Cry for Me,” a gospel-tinted ballad that shines a spotlight on her

exceptional voice. It’s an effective contrast with the effervescent vigor of “Roll It.”

“Wreck It Up” is a highlight of the album, launched with a gritty rock-guitar intro reminiscent of the Stones, an early influence, then Duffy tears up the joint with her rousing vocals and more guitar. The mood turns wistful, but she keeps her passion dialed high for “No Matter What I Do.” In “Tick-Tock,” she boosts the energy, enhanced by prominent guitar backing. To close the album, Duffy revs up the horsepower and lays down the law with “Hard Rain,” a fierce, driving declaration of determination.

It’s a short ride and may not appeal to blues purists, but *Voodoo Blues* is a superb vehicle for Gráinne Duffy’s vocal prowess, as well as her songwriting skill. Her band lays down a full, robust sound, rich with organ and muscular rhythms, to ramp up the edginess of her music. We’re left convinced that Duffy is a talent to watch. (Sandra B. Tooze)



Selwyn Birchwood *Living in a Burning House*

At 35, Selwyn Birchwood is hardly the ‘typical’ blues artist. Yet, being pegged a maverick has little to do with his age. His musical epiphany came at age 13 upon first hearing Hendrix and, tracing the artist’s love for the blues, a chance to see Buddy Guy live sealed the deal for this young guitarist. He not only realized what he wanted to do but was also fortunate to study under Sonny Rhodes’ tutelage – on the road of hard knocks. Refining his guitar skills, learning lap steel under Sonny and realizing that the blues masters he most revered were the authors of their own stories, Birchwood wanted to do the same – connecting with others through sharing his life experiences. Getting his MBA, releasing a self-produced album and capturing top honours at Memphis’ International Blues Challenge added to the picture. Two successful releases on the Alligator label later, this is Birchwood’s third – with 13 new originals and production helmed by Tom Hambridge. Band members Regi Oliver (on distinctive

baritone/alto/tenor sax), Donald Wright (bass), Philip Walker (drums) and newly-christened B3/keyboards player, Walter May, join Hambridge, Diunna Greenleaf and Cece Teneal on additional backup vocal support. From the opening notes of the high-energy "I'd Climb Mountains", there's clearly a bigger band presence, May's keyboards greatly filling out the sound with Birchwood's distinctively gritty vocals clearly front and centre. The equally energetic "I Got Drunk, Laid and Stoned" adds lap steel atop baritone sax and a somewhat funky backbeat. Things warm up considerably with the title track and, despite an inconsistent vocal, Birchwood's big voice is sometimes reminiscent of a young Gil-Scott Heron. Throughout this big arrangement, the baritone duels – back and forth – with Birchwood's spiky lead guitar. The positively upbeat "You Can't Steal My Shine" suffers from some reaching vocals yet the congruence of this band around its leader is impressive, Birchwood's snakelike guitar accenting this positive stance. Equally adept at adding a significant soulful edge to his vocals, the dark, streetwise "Revelation" offers a prediction of doom that benefits from droning horns, a wall of percussion and Birchwood's searing guitar. Likewise, "Searching For My Tribe" seems a call-to-action, featuring incendiary guitar sweetened by a catchy chorus. The sweet-soul of a love letter shifts gears with "She's A Dime" while "One More Time" adds another soulful, jazz-oriented time-out, riding on Oliver's sax solos, Teneal's backup and May's heady B3. "Mama Knows Best" delivers a stand-off life lesson as Birchwood's duets with Greenleaf's sturdy 'Mom' as she talks some sense into her son. Comparing the offbeat, repetitive boogie of the lap-steel-laden "Freaks Come Out At Night" to the more joyous "Through a Microphone", one realizes no two Birchwood songs are alike. A man of many 'voices', his explorative spirit plays a big part in his appeal. Songs like "Rock Bottom" contrasts with the acoustically-driven "Happy Place" to reveal a young artist's search for his proper place. In the meanwhile – the rest of us can bask in his journey. (*Eric Thom*)

Layla Zoe *Nowhere Left To Go*

Nowhere Left To Go is the latest offering of ten new original songs from Layla Zoe. Now residing in the Netherlands, this album shows a much deeper, more reflective side, of this fiercely independent artist.

The album also has a rich diversity about it, not in part from the impressive list of co-writers that contributed to the line up. Brought about by the necessity of staying home in a pandemic, it is the most heartfelt

and personal set of tunes she has released in her career, so far.

The album opens with a pair of cuts, co-written with Jackie Venson. "Pray" is a powerful Gospel-based message of awakening and hope in these dark times, while the title track draws from the horrific images of the Australia wild fires.

Up next is "Sometimes we Fight", an exploration of the often rocky nature of one-on-one relationships, that was co written with Bob Fridzema. The fourth cut, "Don't Wanna Help Anyone" was written with the legendary Alistair Greene, drawn from very personal experiences with someone who demands help constantly, yet refuses to help others.

The fifth cut, "This Love Will Last" is a funky little ditty inspired by the unconditional love of a pet, that was inspired by her dog and co-written with Dimitri Lebel. The sixth cut, "Susan", focuses on the insecurities we all have, another co-write with Bob Fridzema.



Next up is "Little Boy", in which Layla explores a real life story loosely based on personal experience, brilliantly brought to life with co-writer Guy Smeets, who also worked with Layla on the next cut, "Might Need To Fly" which is an homage to a dear friend, Janet Zopfi of Toronto, to whom the album is also dedicated.

The ninth cut on the album was co-written with Brandi Disterheft. "Lies" is a scathing rebuke of issues that some might dismiss as conspiracy theories, but are coming to light as horrific realities. The album closes with a beautiful and touching tribute to her mother, co-written with Suzie Vinnick. "Dear Mom" is the perfect finish to an deeply personal, often rowdy, journey through the heart, mind and music of Canada's Darling of the Blues.

For longtime fans it is a special sonic treat. For the uninitiated, it is a wonderful introduction to a powerful vocalist, impressive writer and beautiful soul. (*Terry Parsons*)



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