

Topper Price & the Upsetters
Long Way from Home
Vent Records

Anyone who has ever been a witness to the testimony of Topper Price late at night in a smoke-filled bar knows the intensity of a live performance from the Upsetters. Topper's new CD brings his gut-wrenching blues into your living room with the same feeling.

Topper delivers his fastball, straightforward, right-in-your face blues. Price offers no frills here, just great music. With his growling vocals and world class harmonica skills, backed by his equally talented band, Price gives the listener a history lesson in the Blues. With passionate readings of timeless Blues standards and a few originals, the Upsetters' CD establishes them as a force to be reckoned with in the music world.

Recorded in three nights at Ross Roberts' Front Row Studios, *Long Way From Home* is Topper's first release as well as the coming-out for Vent Records. This recording gives Birmingham a voice in the over-commercialized music business with an independent record label dedicated to exposing local Blues artists to a national audience.

From the first cut, Willie Dixon's "I'm Ready," to the last song, Price's "Someday I'm Gonna Take You Home," this band proves that feeling is what discerns great music from mediocre music. These guys play with pure emotion. Bunky Anderson on drums, Don Tinsley on bass, and Tim Boykin on guitar keep the groove going for Topper and his harmonica gymnastics. Boykin and Price swap tasteful solos over the flawless rhythm of Anderson and Tinsley in the tradition of the great Chicago Blues of the '50s and '60s. Howlin' Wolf's "Worried Bout You Baby" and "Who's Been Talkin'," Jimmy Reed's "You Don't Have To Go," Willie Dixon's "Mellow Down Easy," and Sonny Boy Williamson's "Help Me Baby," are good examples of the famous Chicago sound this band emulates. Topper goes into the deep Blues language with a nice arrangement of Robert Johnson's "Kind Hearted Woman" and "Terra Plain Blues." He displays his versatility on the title cut, a song he wrote with guitar whiz Rick Kurtz, and "Someday I'm Gonna Take You Home," a Price original that was done with Scot Boyer on acoustic guitar. Appropriately titled, "Where's Topper?" is a short instrumental featuring Boykin's Freddie King meets Stevie Ray Vaughn guitar licks.

Long Way From Home establishes Vent Records as a national contender in the Blues market, and marks the long awaited release from Topper Price & the Upsetters, Birmingham's voice for the Blues.

Bill Ledbetter - 1994

Magic City Blues News

James Booker

Resurrection of the Bayou Maharajah

Rounder Records

Recorded at the Maple Leaf bar in New Orleans between '77 and '82, these are some of the last recordings of the legendary piano wizard before his death in 1982. No band is needed here, just James Booker and the piano. It is impossible to pin-point Booker's style as he emulates the sound of people like Professor Longhair, Thelonious Monk, and Chopin--all in one sitting. Booker had a major influence on numerous piano players around New Orleans, including Harry Conick, Jr. who used to skip school to hang out and jam with him. Despite Booker's vast influence and musical genius, his recordings are few, doing some session work on Blues and Dixieland records, and pop recordings with the Doobie Brothers, Ringo Starr, and Maria Muldaur. Booker's solo recordings are limited to a couple of LPs, some obscure singles, and a couple of live albums on European labels. This CD covers a lot of territory while Booker displays his diverse piano style and wailing voice to a small audience at the Maple Leaf.

Many of the cuts are extended medleys of two or three songs that flow together. The first track is a medley called "Slow Down/Boney Maronie/Knock on Wood/I Heard it Through the Grapevine/Classified." Followed by two more long medleys is Chopin's "Minute Waltz" where Booker flows from boogie-woogie, Barrelhouse-Dixieland type playing to classical, and never loses stride. "All By Myself" has a rocking tempo reminiscent of Professor Longhair, and "Save Your Love for Me" features some of the coolest Blues piano ever recorded. Two of the best songs are "Junco Partner" and "St. James Infirmary", both emotional testaments from Booker who suffered from years of drug addiction, and what close friends called mental illness.

James Booker was a musical genius and piano virtuoso with a style of playing that drew on just about every form of music known to the Western world, yet he still maintained his own unique sound. This collection captures the best of all of Booker's talents, and reveals the soul of a genius.

Bill Ledbetter - 1994

For The Record - Fun & Stuff Magazine

Sean Costello, and his Jivebombers

Call the Cops

Blue Sun Records

Sean Costello plays and sings with a level of maturity far beyond his mere seventeen years. Costello's mastery of the guitar is evident from the first note until the final cut as he coaxes incredible tones and colors from his instrument--a range that travels from twangy, biting, stratocaster wailing, to a clean and fat sound from his hollow bodied Gibson ES models and Gretch Chet Atkins model, none of which were manufactured before 1960. While tipping a hat to his admitted heroes like Charlie Christian and Magic Sam, Costello takes the time to pay homage to his biggest influence, Robert Lockwood Jr. with some tasty and clean slide playing, as well an acoustic number.

Costello composed seven of the fifteen cuts listed on the liner notes, and rips through another one that was, accidentally I suppose, omitted from the credits. Along the way he does fine renditions of songs by Willie Dixon, Little Walter, and Lockwood Jr.

An accomplished vocalist and songwriter, Sean Costello is working on his second album, playing festivals, club dates, and finishing his last year of high school at North Atlanta High School. Joining the ranks of recent teenage prodigy artists like Texans Kenny Wayne Sheppard and Ian Moore, Costello proves that great American roots music lives into the 21st century. An artist always strives for an original voice--a sound, a hook, or an idea that can set him apart from all of the other voices struggling to be heard. Costello hangs in the balance of traditional roots Blues with a contemporary attitude that demands the listener's attention.

Backed up by a tight band featuring Paul Linden on harmonica and piano, Terrence Prather on drums, and Carl Shankle on bass, Sean Costello's debut, "Call the Cops" is a wonderful introduction. Check it out!

Bill Ledbetter - 1997

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