

Blues Society of Tulsa Celebrating 18 Years! 2002 - 2020

Volume 18, Number 1

www.bluessocietyoftulsa.com

March/April/May 2020

“KEEPIN’ THE BLUES ALIVE”

by Larry Watt



Do you like Blues music or would like to know more about this Uniquely American genre? If so, we welcome you to join our group! Over the years we have sent multiple artists to the **International Blues Challenge** in Memphis, Tennessee, which allows them to showcase their talent to people from all over the world as well as make career-advancing connections. We produce and distribute “Blues News”, our quarterly newsletter which you are probably reading right now. We also support our **Blues in Schools** program., headed by **David Bernston**, who introduces youth to the history of blues music as well as how music can play a positive role in their lives. The presentations teach them positive life lessons and each Student is given a harmonica to take home. We also fund our **Student Grant Award Program**. The **Blues Society of Tulsa** offers a \$500 Grant to promote the musical development of young Blues musicians in the Tulsa metropolitan area. The grant is awarded to a High School student (selected by our grant committee) who is pursuing further education and musical development and has a genuine interest in the Blues genre. These are just a few examples of the types of programs we offer and support. The Blues Society of Tulsa is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization aimed at promoting and preserving the blues in northeastern Oklahoma, although our reach goes much farther than that. This organization is completely funded with donations that help to fund our programs and accomplish our mission of “**Keepin’ the Blues Alive**”.

For membership forms, meeting dates, times and locations visit:
www.bluessocietyoftulsa.com



BBQ n Blues Festival

With Spring in the air, that means the annual **BBQ n’ Blues Festival**, hosted by the **Rotary Club of Bixby**, is coming soon! The family-friendly event includes BBQ competition, kids zone, retail row, plenty of food and drink, and, of course, free live blues music at **Washington Irving Park** the weekend of May 1-2. The event is celebrating its 19 Anniversary and continues to grow. The festival is the club’s biggest fundraiser to help support there many grants and service projects.

I’m very excited with the 8 bands that will play this year. Six well-recognized local band will play as well as two bands from KC that will headline the two nights. **Heather Newman’s** band will return to our festival for a second performance. The other band from KC, **Nick Schnebelen** will bring a lot of energy. You don’t want to miss this show!

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INSIDE:

Oklahoma Blues Legend - Lowell Fulson, Blues Choice Awards, CD Reviews and more ...

Welcome Our New Members!

ATTENTION MEMBERS:

We don't want to miss "What's Happening." Send us pics and notes regarding events and performances.

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Blues Society of Tulsa, P.O. Box 2836, Tulsa, OK 74101, is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization with the purpose of preserving and promoting the blues in Tulsa and Northeastern Oklahoma. Blues News is published bi-monthly and encourages your support through personalized membership card and the Blues News newsletter. BST members are encouraged to submit articles, photos and other materials for publication. Deadline for both editorial items and advertising is the 1st of the month (30 days) prior to publication.

Blues Society of Tulsa

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If you live outside the USA please add \$10 to the single and family memberships listed above.

☐

ATTENTION: A check mark in this box indicates that your annual membership payment is due. Thank You!

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The festival, and live music, begins Friday at 5pm. Saturday, the festival begins at 10am with the live music beginning at 1pm. For BBQ lovers, don't miss the \$10 taster kits sold only on Saturday from 11:30a - 1:00p. to sample the delicious BBQ smoked and grilled by the competitive BBQ teams. The music both nights will end at 10:30pm.

Here is the line up...

Friday, May 1

5pm Ronnie Pyle and the Drivers
7pm Dustin Pittsley Band
9pm Heather Newman Band

Saturday, May 2

1pm Darell Christopher & the Ingredients
3pm Hydramatics
5pm Heather Buckley Band
7pm Dylan Whitney Band
9pm Nick Schnebelen

LOCAL BIRTHDAYS

March: 1 – Rob McLerran; 5 – Pat Cook, 10 – Polly Ess; 11 – Calvin Youngblood, Josef Glaude; 13 – Jordan Hanson; 16 – Junior Markham; 18 – Wanda Watson; 22 – Rusti Love (2009); 23 – Mat Donaldson; 25 – Virgil Broyles; 27 – Steve Elmore; 28 – Mark Bruner; 31 – Lowell Fulson (1995);

April: 1 – Randy Crouch; 2 – Leon Russell (2016); 4 – Dave Russell, Rockin' John Henry (2004); 6 – Larry Bell (2015), Steve Fields; 7 – Bill Pitcock IV (2011); 9 – Gus Hardin (1996); 15 – Roy Clark; 18 – Walt Richmond; 22 – Bob Childers (2008); 25 – Earl Bostic; 27 – Jim Keltner; 29 – Debbie Campbell (2004)

May: 1 – Bill Raffensberger (2010); 2 – Susan Herndon; 5 – Heather Buckley; 6 – Steve Munson (1990), Barney Kessel (2004), D.C. Miner (2009); 11 – Ernie Fields (1997); 13 – Perry Thomas; 15 – Pete Marriott; 16 – James Groves; 22 – Doug Wehmeyer; 24 – Frank McPeters (2009); 29 – John Mabry; 30 – Dustin Pittsley.

BST MONTHLY MEETINGS

BST MONTHLY MEETINGS HELD THE 3RD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH

Next monthly meetings are

March 17th , April 21st , and May 19th @ 7pm.

Meetings will be held at Swamp House, 1529 E. 3rd St., Tulsa



OKLAHOMA BLUES LEGEND – *Lowell Fulson*



Lowell Fulson (March 31, 1921 – March 7, 1999) was an American blues guitarist and songwriter, in the West Coast blues tradition. He also recorded for contractual reasons as **Lowell Fulsom**. After **T-Bone Walker**, he was the most important figure in West Coast blues in the 1940s and 1950s. Fulson was born on a Choctaw reservation in Atoka, Oklahoma, the son of Mamie and Martin Fulson. He stated that he was of Cherokee ancestry through his father, but he also claimed Choctaw ancestry. His father was killed when Lowell was a child, and a few years later he moved with his mother and brothers to live in Clarita and attended school at Coalgate. At the age of eighteen, he moved to Ada, Oklahoma, and joined **Alger “Texas” Alexander** for a few months in 1940, but later moved to California, where he formed a band which soon included a young **Ray Charles** and the tenor saxophone player **Stanley Turrentine**. Fulson was drafted in 1943 and served in the U.S. Navy until 1945.

Fulson’s recording career started in 1946 and lasted well into the 1990s. His best known songs are Three O’Clock Blues (1948), Reconsider Baby (1954), and Tramp. His most memorable and influential recordings include “3 O’Clock Blues” (now a blues standard); “Every Day I Have the Blues”, written by Memphis Slim; “Lonesome Christmas”; “Reconsider Baby”, recorded by Elvis Presley in 1960, by **Eric Clapton** in 1994 for his album From the Cradle, and by **Joe Bonamassa**; and “Tramp”, co-written with **Jimmy McCracklin** and later covered by **Otis Redding** with **Carla Thomas**, **ZZ Top** (for the 2003 album Mescalero), **Alex Chilton**, and **Tav Falco**. **Jackie Brenston** played in Fulson’s band between 1952 and 1954. His 1965 song “Black Nights” was his first hit in a decade, and “Tramp” did even better, restoring him to R&B stardom. A show entitled “California Blues: Swingtime Tribute” opened In 1993 at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, California, with Fulson, **Johnny Otis**, **Charles Brown**, **Jay McShann**, **Jimmy Witherspoon**, **Jimmy McCracklin** and **Earl Brown**. Fulson’s last

recording was a duet of “Every Day I Have the Blues” with Jimmy Rogers.

A resident of Los Angeles, Fulson died in Long Beach, California, in March 1999, at the age of 77. On June 25, 2019, The New York Times Magazine listed Lowell Fulson among hundreds of artists whose material was reportedly destroyed in the 2008 Universal fire. In the 2004 film Ray, a biopic of **Ray Charles**, Fulson was portrayed by the blues musician **Chris Thomas King**.

ZZ Top included a version of “Tramp” on their 2003 album Mescalero, citing Fulson’s guitar prowess as an inspiration to recreate the song. The **Beatles** song “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road?” as performed by Fulson was used on the soundtrack of the 2007 crime film American Gangster; he had covered the song on his 1970 album, In a Heavy Bag. **Salt-N-Pepa** recorded a contemporary version of “Tramp” in 1987, on their album Hot, Cool & Vicious. A cover of Fulson’s song “Sinner’s Prayer” appeared on Eric Clapton’s album From the Cradle (1994) and on Ray Charles’s first album, Ray Charles (1957), and (with B.B. King and Billy Preston) on his final album, Genius Loves Company (2004). **Harry Belafonte** also recorded “Sinner’s Prayer” on his Belafonte Sings the Blues album.

Awards:

1993: Inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame

1993: Blues Foundation Hall of Fame, Classics of Blues Recording – Singles or Album Tracks, for “Reconsider Baby”

1993: Blues Foundation Blues Music Award, Traditional Album of the Year, for Hold On

1993: Rhythm and Blues Foundation, Pioneer Award

1995: Grammy Awards, Best Traditional Blues Album of the Year, for Them Update Blues

1995: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, “Reconsider Baby” included in the “500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll”

2010: Blues Foundation Hall of Fame, Classics of Blues Recording – Albums, for Hung Down Head.

A true Oklahoma Blues Treasure! – **Larry Watt**

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CD Reviews



The Mary Jo Curry Band: **FRONT PORCH** (Blind Raccoon)

Mary Jo's new release - "Front Porch" - brings to mind another saying that I can tell you holds a lot of truth, "Good things are worth waiting for", and this is a very good thing.

The nucleus of The Mary Jo Curry Band consists, of course, of Mary Jo on lead vocals; husband **Michael Rapier** on guitars; **Chris Rogers** on bass and backing vocals; and **Rick Snow** on drums and backing vocals; additional band members include: keyboardists **Ezra Casey** and **Brett Donovan**; and saxophonist **Brian Moore**. Additionally, after several of her friends razed her for not including them on her first release, she jumped on the offer and the band wrote songs for those special guests. They are: **Albert Castiglia** and **Tom Holland** on guitars and **Andrew Duncanson** on vocals. The disc's eleven tracks include nine band originals, another written for Mary Jo, and one cover.

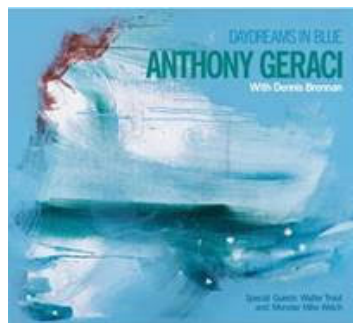
If you want to hear what could very well be the disc's best vocal performance, there is no need to go "Lookin'" (M. Rapier) any further. Although the rhythm is fueling the track and Michael is sliding in some monster guitar licks, Mary Jo and Andrew Duncanson just take this one and run with it. Sounding like they may have had the same vocal coach, these two are the proverbial match made in heaven. The facts that it is Andrew's only performance and that this is arguably the disc's best track, easily make it the replay special. *Side note to Mary Jo* - If you don't feature Andrew on your next release, I'll, be the one complaining.

According to the notes on the accompanying one sheet, "House Is Lonely" (M. Rapier) is regrettably about the loss of some of Michael's loved ones. Inasmuch as sad and beautiful can be polarizing words, music seems to be a place where they fittingly come together. Many a sad song have been so beautifully sung and performed. Mary Jo's emotional vocals; Michael's soothing guitar notes; the dulcet affect from the dual keyboards of Bret and Ezra; and the relaxing rhythm from Chris and Rick; all genuinely make this one of them.

So, when **Andrew Terrill Thomas** wrote this song specifically for Mary Jo Curry to perform, he was the Leonardo da Vinci to her being the Mona Lisa. The song is titled "Explaining The Blues" and it could not have painted a better picture when it came to showcasing Mary Jo's intense, attention demanding and range roaming vocal skills. The drift of the song is about the difficult time Mary Jo has explaining the blues associated with a bad relationship, yet all you gotta do is hear her sing it and that's all the explaining you'll ever need. Yeah, there was a ton of masterful music going on here as well, but this would have sounded good even with a child banging a spoon on a pot. WOW!

After a commanding performance like that, I think the disc's producers knew that right about now, most of us listeners probably needed something light. Enter a bouncy instrumental titled "Shake & Bake" (M. Rapier). It's an up tempo number in which Tom Holland and the guys collectively have a good ol' time jamming together while passing the lead around. Fun stuff for sure.

With the International Blues Challenge - where the "Best Self Produced" CD is awarded each year - having just ended; and with the Blues Music Awards voting about to end any day now; I may be a bit premature when I say this, but if this product makes it into the hands of the right people - and with Blind Raccoon representing it, it will - look for "Front Porch" by The Mary Jo Curry Band to be in the running of both of those competitions. - **Peter "Blewzzman" Lauro** (Mary4Music.com)



Anthony Geraci: **DAYDREAMS IN BLUE**

(Shining Stone Records)

Boston-area-based pianist/songwriter **Anthony Geraci** follows up his multiple Blues Music Award- nominated recording, *Why Did You Have To Go*, with *Daydreams In*

Blue, releasing April 24 on Shining Stone Records. Boston roots/blues music hero **Dennis Brennan** is the featured vocalist and adds harmonica on two tracks. *Daydreams In Blue* also features special guest appearances from guitarists **Walter Trout** and **Monster Mike Welch**. This 12-song CD has Anthony writing 10 new originals, one tune penned by **Dennis Brennan**, **Peter Wolf** (J. Geils Band) and **Troy Gonyea**; and a classic blues composition by **Earl Hines** and **Billy Eckstine** ("Jelly, Jelly"). Anthony's scintillating piano is the binding factor here, embellished by the rhythm section of **Jeff Armstrong** and **Michael Mudcat Ward**, two of Boston's finest.

"This by far is the most exciting recording I've done under my own name," Geraci says about the album sessions. "Having all these great musicians on the recording is a 'Daydream' come true. And having **Walter Trout** on the song, 'No One Hears My Prayers,' is something that transcends beyond just a recorded track. Musicians supporting each other, willing to give themselves to others is something we should all aspire too."

Anthony Geraci will support the release of Daydreams In Blue with two special area shows:

April 24 - Highland Center for the Arts – Greensboro, VT

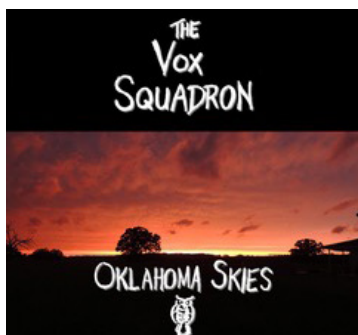
April 26 - Spire Center for the Performing Arts - Plymouth, MA



“Music- all kinds of music - defines my life; and many of my friends, whether they are musicians or fans,” he says. “Where do we retreat to when things just aren’t right? A song is where I go to. It could be a song by **Muddy Waters**, **John Coltrane**, ‘New World Symphony’ by **Antonín Leopold Dvořák**, or a **Hank Williams** tune - it’s all music. Or I go to my piano and just play. The compositions on *Daydreams in Blue* were written over about a year’s time, some only a few weeks before the recording session. I’m very sensitive as to who I may want to bring into the recording studio. I have a vision for each song and who I’d like to have play on it. Immediately after I wrote ‘No One Hears My Prayer,’ I thought of Walter Trout. We had done a few shows together recently and he graciously asked me to sit in with his great band a few times. But it was his sound, his spirit that made me want to ask him. Mike Welch has been my friend for a very long time, since the original House Of Blues was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I was part of the Blue Monday Band. He was in his early teens and was already (almost!) as good as he is today. Dennis Brennan is truly a roots music hero here in Boston - his vocals and harmonica playing captures the soul of a bluesman - straight from the heart.

Anthony Geraci has a long history in the American Blues Community. He is an original member of **Sugar Ray and the Blue-Tones**, and **Ronnie Earl and the Broadcasters**; he has recorded with both artists extensively. Anthony has been nominated for the prestigious Pinetop Perkins Piano Award for the last five years by the Blues Foundation in Memphis. In 2019, Anthony received nominations from Living Blues Magazine: Outstanding Musician-Keyboard; Traditional Blues Album/Blues Band of the Year/Male Blues Artist from Blues Blast Magazine; and Best Traditional Blues Band from Making-a-Scene.

Anthony’s last recording, *Why Did You Have to Go* (Shining Stone), received world-wide accolades. It debuted at #4 on the Living Blues Radio Chart, and was in the top 50 most played recordings for 36 weeks on the Roots Music Report. 2019 Nominations from the Blues Foundation included: Album, Traditional Album, Song of the Year (“Angelina, Angelina”), Traditional Male Blues Artist, Band of the Year - Anthony Geraci and the Boston Blues All-Stars. Anthony has been featured on over 50 recordings with some of the biggest names in blues music. He has recorded with blues pioneers: **Big Walter Horton**, **Carey Bell**, **Odetta**, **Big Jack Johnson**, **Charlie Musselwhite**, **Lazy Lester**, **Snooky Pryor** and **John Brim**; as well as contemporary artists: **The Proven Ones**, **Kenny Neal**, **Sugaray Rayford**, **Debbie Davies**, **Otis Grand**, **Welch/Ledbetter**, **Zora Young**, and **Duke Robillard**; and garnered a Grammy nomination for his playing on the *Super Harps I* album (Telarc). - **Mark Pucci** (Mark Pucci Media)



Vox Squadron: **OKLAHOMA SKIES**

Most of us mere mortals are fortunate to have one good gift getting us through life that hopefully results in happiness, financial security and makes this world a better place. But when you are the head surgeon

at a hospital with patients putting their lives in your hands you would think it would be enough. When **Dr. Jack Myers** lays down his scalpel, he sometimes unleashes a lot of frustration, hopes and dreams by being a very good composer, guitarist and vocalist.

His Tahlequah-based band **Vox Squadron** has released its second album, *Oklahoma Skies*. It is a follow up to their initial album, *Crashing Down* released four years ago. (See CD review, *Blues News* September/October 2015). There have been very few records I’ve listened to and enjoyed as much as *Oklahoma Skies* and *Crashing Down*. That’s how much I love this band. *Oklahoma Skies* continues the journey launched from the first album, but the new one also ventures more into a blues zone, while the boys continue an uncharted journey as real rockers.

This is also an even tighter, better group, than it was a couple of years ago. **Aaron Lee**, who had just switched from drums to keyboards when *Crashing Down* was released, reminds me of back in the day watching the blossoming of a **Jesse Aycock** (**Higher Education and Hard Working Americans**) and **Beau Roberson** (**Pilgrim**). Today Jesse can play guitar and lap steel with anyone, while it is no accident Beau received the 2018 Blues Choice Award for Vocalist of the Year. Throughout *Oklahoma Skies*, Aaron gives this album a richness and fullness filling me with pride as he plays the B-3 organ and keyboards.

A wonderful addition is **Jacob Martin** on drums who joined the band two years ago and adds power, sometimes aggression and a dose of funk to the group. Then there is the rock on bass, veteran **Richard Wood**, who joins Jacob to magically drive the rhythm. Richard also designed the oh-so-cool owl band logo as well as directed the art, while Aaron designed the attractive CD package.

Vox Squadron won the 2018 **Ozark Blues Society of NW Arkansas’ Blues Challenge** and Jack specially pinned one of my favorite songs on their new release for their appearance in the **2019 International Blues Challenge**. It was during this time the band recorded *Oklahoma Skies* at historic **Sun Studio** in Memphis.

I Do simply has a great beat with intriguing lyrics. “Rustle up sixpence to pass for tithe, Ain’t nobody looking from across the aisle. Maybe you don’t believe him. But I Do.”

Another favorite is the title track. “Maybe we were designed to collide and drift apart, and then back again like the falling leaves. So I stare time away, with these daydream eyes, and this lonesome wistful sigh. You know it’s all beneath, wrapped up nice and neatly. A brilliant perfume ray of summer shine in the Oklahoma Skies.”

The vocals on *So Do I* are filled with anguish and after four-plus minutes the tempo increases as the band transcends into an aggressive, if not angry instrumental.

Change Change was written by **James Townsend** and arranged by Jack. Jack also penned the other dozen songs on this record. *Change Change* has a nice picking guitar for the first three minutes before the axe is cranked up a bit with a thick, heavy bass. Any old hippy should love the lyrics such as, “I was looking into the stars at night. Swear I felt cosmic rain. Pink rain down upon my being. Maybe

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Tulsa Drummer Recalls Life on the Road with Leon and Elton

by BILLY AUSTIN MARTIN



Brandon Holder with Elton John backstage at the BOK Center, Nov. 12, 2010.
In the background is the man who wrote Delta Lady, Leon himself.

Drummer Brandon Holder found out what's it's like to have your life changed in a New York minute. It was 2008 and he was a banker by day and drummer by night. It was a call from Tulsa music icon Brian Lee who was playing keyboards for Leon Russell. The phone call came on a Wednesday and Brian said Leon's drummer suffered a stroke and they needed someone to play a date. "Can you learn the songs by this Saturday," Brian asked. "Sure," said Brandon. So the songs from the set list were emailed to Brandon. A couple of days later at an Oklahoma casino, Brandon played his first gig with the music legend who organized the historic Mad Dogs and Englishmen tour for **Joe Cocker** in 1970. Brandon assumed it would simply be a one-time gig and when he got up from the drum kit to leave the stage Leon hurried over to him and shook his hand, paying Brandon with \$100 bills. Leon then left without saying a word. Observing the brief exchange was Bassist **Jackie Wessell** who stated, "I've never seen that before!" Following the show, Brandon no sooner got home when he received a phone call from Leon whose solo career was preceded by his countless classic rock sessions with everyone from **Jerry Lee Lewis** to **Phil Spector** and **The Rolling Stones**. Brandon recalls Leon saying, "I've never had that happen before where a guy I'd

never met or played with shows up and plays my show 98 percent correct. Do you want a job?" Within a few days he was playing his first gig as a band member on Long Island in New York. His second gig was playing the B.B. King Blues Club and Grill in Times Square. He remained with the band for eight years until Leon's passing in 2016. Brandon fondly remembers the tour bus breaking down while on the road and the band had to travel to a few gigs in a RV and sleeping on the floor. "But I didn't care because I was touring with Leon," he recalls.

In 2010 Elton John, who had been a longtime admirer of Leon, approached the Okie about collaborating on a duet album. With the release of *The Union*, subsequent tours included Europe and the U.S. where Leon's Band would play a set, followed by another set featuring Leon and Elton, with the final set being Elton and his band. Brandon was able to soak in the whole thing first hand while playing drums for Leon. Brandon recalls before each show, the "Rocket Man" would spend 30 minutes or so with band members that included a pep talk and sharing stories. "He was always real nice to us," Brandon notes.

In February there was a little déjà vu for the drummer as he visited for the first time a recording studio on Grand Lake once owned by Leon. He joined a number of other Tulsa musicians in a collaborative recording for Horton Records. The studio now features a lot of photos and memorabilia of Leon, who recorded 33 albums and won two Grammys. Countless rock legends such as **Bob Seger** used the recording studio.

Meanwhile, Brandon is certainly capable of playing different genres of music, but leans more to a rock, funk and blues style. His early influences were **Stewart Copeland (The Police)** and **John Bonham (Led Zeppelin)**, but later added **Steve Gadd (Steely Dan)** to his list. At one time he was pounding skins for **Baby M**, a well-known Tulsa punk rock band that was part of a documentary, *Oil Capital Underground*, about the evolution of punk music in Tulsa from the late '70s to the mid-90s. In Tulsa these days most of Brandon's performances are with multi winners in the Blues Choice Awards, **Dustin Pittsley Band** and the Jennifer Marriott Band. Brandon receives his first two Blues Choice Awards for Best Rhythm and Best Band (Dustin Pittsley) at the Blues Society's 18th Birthday Celebration and awards ceremony March 28th at the Centennial Lounge.

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it's just my brain. I've changed, I've changed. My mind's been rearranged."

New Shoes is the bluesiest song on the album with an extended cool, dirty Gibson solo.

Crashing Down (Slight Return) is a remake of the title tune from the band's first album. While similar, one could say they switched from regular gasoline to premium the second time around. "Oh years for days. The fault line strains. The backbone sways. The wish comes crashing down."

Irish Green reminds me of why I so often immerse myself in music. It can be a way of dealing with regret. "Hands of time. If they could grab the wheel, spin it left to make it right. Feels improbable this thing we've stumbled on. But it's coming 'round. Feels alright if for a minute. Fleur delis. This autumn dream. Return to be my Irish Green." This tune is representative of the sincerity, emotion and feeling in Jack's performance throughout the album.

The instrumental *Bastard In A Blanket* closes out this gem. It is a very nice piece that seems to say, I've had my say, I've unleashed a few things and now I feel better.

Oklahoma Skies is available at CDbaby.com and to stream on all digital platforms.- **Billy Austin Martin**

2019
BLUES CHOICE AWARDS
AND
Annual Birthday Bash
with Dustin Pittsley Band
and the Hydramatics

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