

STREET BEATS

Testament Records Sampler — Various artists

Twenty-three tracks, spread over 73 minutes — this is the sort of collection that fans of roots blues and black folksong will fawn over, and with good reason. What a great compilation!

The comprehensive liner notes from famed blues producer Pete Welding, the founder and owner of Testament Records in 1963, are chock full of insights and inside information, and make an enjoyable read. He tells us that Bill Jackson, his first signing, was a songwriter along the lines of Mance Lipscomb and Jesse Fuller. Jackson's version of "Titanic Blues," with superb guitar playing and vocals, points to a man who deserved wider recognition. Welding also writes of blind street singer Connie Williams, an alumni of the same school for the blind that Ray Charles later attended. He normally played accordion, but, as his version of "One Thin Dime" demonstrates, in the Rev. Gary Davis kind of ragtime style, he was a first-rate picker.

"First-rate" is certainly the operative word here, as one can easily glean from the roster here. J.B. Hutto & The Hawks check in with a wicked "Pet Cream Man." Otis Span plays a wonderfully blue "Nobody Knows My Troubles." Mississippi Fred McDowell is joined by the Hunter's Chapel Singers on an inspired version of "Jesus On The Mainline" and comes back later to shake it down with "Goin' Down South."

Johnny Shines checks in with a rockin' "So Cold In Vietnam," an ironic combination of hot rhythm with heartbreaking lyrics, then comes back in the program with a killer version of "Hoodoo Snake Doctor Blues," a song dripping with the ghost of Robert Johnson.

Flint's Dr. Isaiah Ross, the fondly remembered one-man band that was such a presence hereabouts 20 years ago, plays "Cat Squirrel," a song I recall first hearing from Jethro Tull in the late '60s. John Wrencher's classic "I'm going to Detroit" is here, too.

Eddie Taylor (on a classic Chicago-style "Peach Tree Blues"), Robert Nighthawk (with a "Sweet Black Angel"-sounding "I'm Getting Tired"), Johnny Littlejohn (on a standup version of "Dust My Broom") and Billy Boy Arnold ("Pleading and Crying") share space with lesser known, but rarely less impressive players, like John Lee Granderson (who offers a gracious "A Man For The Nation" from a compilation of songs written after the assassination of John F. Kennedy), Eddie Lee "Must-tright" Jones, The Chicago String Band, Jimmy Walker & Erwin Hefner, Ruby McCoy (with a superb Delta-style "Black Mary"), Johnny Turner & Blues With A Feeling and others.

This is most decidedly not a collection that will appeal to those blues fans who think the blues was made to rock with a volume knob. This is raw and this is real. This is the music that ultimately gave birth to rock 'n' roll, but as Fred McDowell once said, "I do not play no rock 'n' roll, y'all. Just the sweet and natch'l blues." And that's all you're going to find here.

—Mark E. Gallo

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Band surprised by promotional push

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

The Presidents of the United States of America are convinced that their record company, Columbia Records, is conspiring to create a false sense of security for the band.

Wherever they go, the Detroit-area included — the quirky first single "Lump" is played on the radio.

"I'll never forget driving into New York on our first promotional tour and turning on (precedent-setting radio station) Z100. Within five minutes they played 'Lump.' I thought, 'Oh my God. This is insane,'" said three-string "guitabassist"/vocalist Dave Dederer during an interview from his Seattle home.

"And then we were in France during a promotional tour and we turned on FUN radio, the big station in France, and 30 seconds later the song came on. I'm thinking that these people (record company executives) must be orchestrating this to impress us."

"Lump" has captured a big percentage of the votes from alternative rock listeners making it a Top 5 track at alternative radio stations nationwide. A video for "Lump," shot in Seattle and directed by Roman Coppola, is an MTV Buzz Clip.

While the music in "Lump" is upbeat, Dederer sees it as a somber song. (With lyrics like "Lump sat alone in a boggy marsh/Totally motionless except for her heart/Mud flowed up into Lump's pejsamas/She totally confused all the passing piranhas" it's hard to think otherwise.)

"There's no definite idea of what it's about. It's just the way the words play off each other. It's not a very goofy song. It's about a sort of disaffected, unconnected woman. A young slacker who's not very in touch with herself or any other people."

Founded on the premise that a good time is the only kind worth having, The Presidents of the United States of America didn't become a "real band" until eight months ago, according to Dederer.

Vocalist/two-string "basitarist" Chris Ballwe and Dederer performed together for eight years around Seattle until drummer/vocalist Jason Finn of Love Battery joined on.

After self-producing a tape, The Presidents of the United States lost Finn temporarily when he went off to tour with Beck. Upon his return, he found his new band's 10-song demo had sold 600 copies over the course of five shows.

In November 1994, The Presidents played a Democratic rally in downtown Seattle for the President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton. Finn quit Love Battery in early 1995.

Dederer admits that when Columbia approached his band, he was apprehensive about signing a deal.



Hall to the chiefs: The Presidents of the United States of America — from left, three-string "guitabassist" Dave Dederer, drummer/vocalist Jason Finn, and vocalist/two-string "basitarist" Chris Ballwe — will try to win the votes of alternative music fans on Wednesday, Nov. 8, at St. Andrew's Hall.

"We got a great record contract. I am very happy with it. Record contracts are really designed to screw the artist. Even if you're a superstar, there's not much you can do about it. ... It's hard to fathom the way this thing worked out."

But he's warned the record company to keep the push to a minimum.

"In fact we totally don't capitalize on that. We discourage the record label from doing anything in red, white and blue. ... That would be the death of us. We're already wacky and

funny enough. We'd be instantly dead."

Their inaugural address, a remastered version of their self-titled indie debut, tells stories of, among other things, a kitty who needs some "pet-tin" and lovin' on his rain-soaked hide ("Kitty"); a funky boll weevil who "spends all day on his big butt and he don't ever get outside;" and the joys of eating "Peaches."

They also cover the MC's "Kick Out The Jams."

"I think every song on the record is

great. There's a bunch of major league singles on the record."

"We just did a video for 'Peaches' and I have one word for you — Ninja. It's good. It has absolutely nothing to do with the song."

The Presidents of the United States of America and opening band Love Battery perform at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 8, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$7.50 in advance for the all-ages show. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.

Our Lady Peace explores spiritual issues

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Our Lady Peace guides its listeners through fairly ominous waters on its debut album "Naveed" (Relativity).

The album's first track "The Birdman," a story of betrayal by someone who seemed to be trusted, sets the mood. "Hopefully a man starts to feed you day/Once he was there you never looked back/How did you think that his words might just fade away/He seemed harmless enough so you let him in and now you'll pay," vocalist/songwriter Raine Maida sings alien-like.

Despite lyrics like those, Maida insists the darkness is underlain with optimism — starting with the album's title.

"Naveed is an ancient Middle Eastern term for bearer of good news, encompassing the distance between mysticism and reality," he said.

Spirituality is an important part of Maida's life, and therefore comes through on "Naveed."

"Everyone needs something to believe in and it keeps you going. I never try to hit people over the head with what I feel," he explained.

Raised a Catholic, Maida said the religion's belief system "never really gelled with me." By his mid-teens, he was seeking other means of spirituality.

His guiding force now is "not something that's completely defined for me," Maida said. It's more of a patchwork of beliefs from different religions brought similar to that which he was taught at mental arts classes.

"One of the best teachers I ever had said there's no one right martial art to study. You pick all the good points out of one of them and make it your own."

The alternative rock band Our Lady Peace formed about three years

ago when Maida, a first-year criminology student at the University of Toronto, and guitarist Mike Turner met and began playing with a succession of rhythm sections.

After agreeing in principle to seek out players with as little musical common ground as possible, they joined forces with visceral bassist Chris Ekerdt and then-recent high school gradus Jeramy Taggart, a drummer weaned on the jazz of Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

"When the project started, the guitarist Mike and I were looking for something that was different," Maida explained.

"We were looking for people who could bring something different to the band. I could have found a drummer and bass player differently and had derivative music."

Once Taggart and Ekerdt came into the fold, "it made it really tough at some points." Four musicians with different influences getting together and writing songs often created more arguments than songs.

"When you finally do (come to an agreement), you can walk out of your rehearsal space knowing you have a good record," Maida said. That happened about 11 times — once for each song on "Naveed," Maida explained.

Maida's influences range from Sinead O'Connor and Janis Joplin ("because these women are more willing to get naked vocally") to Middle Eastern singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who records for Pathe's Real World label.

"Mike and I saw him in Toronto and it was one of the most incredible experiences in my life. I like to listen to music that is inspired in culture and their society. It is a type of religion. The vibe was no intense that it was like the audience was listening to a really interesting one-hour sermon



Spirituality abounds: Toronto's Our Lady Peace blends spiritual lyrics with a "non-derivative" sound on its debut album "Naveed." The band opens for Candlebox and Sponge at The Palace of Auburn Hills on Saturday.

somewhere on the edge of their seats with music that transcended any kind of language barrier."

Maida hopes to capture "a tangle of that vibe" during Our Lady Peace's slot opening for Sponge and Candlebox at The Palace of Auburn Hills on Saturday.

"(They'll hear) something a little different than on the CD. There's no point in coming to see the CD performed verbatim. We add little things

here and there. We grow musically on stage. If you're listening to the CD, you might understand it (the meaning) a little better at the show."

Our Lady Peace opens for Candlebox and Sponge at 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 4, at The Palace of Auburn Hills, a Championship Drive, (I-75 and Lapeer Road), Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$15 in advance for the all-ages show. For more information, call (810) 377-0100 or (510) 645-6668.

Flow, River of My Soul — Single Gun Theory

"Energy never dies" is the motto of Australia's Single Gun Theory. Unfortunately they should mention energy, because it's sorely lacking on their newest album, "Flow, River of My Soul" (Netwerk/I.R.S.).

The two women and one man who make up the band have been working together for almost a decade, reportedly to cult audiences and critical acclaim in Australia. Singer Jacqui Hunt is talented and pleasant to listen to, but her soothing voice can't distinguish most songs from the next, or more importantly, beg for a second listen.

The provocative imagery of the name Single Gun Theory is the opposite of their generic "mood" music. Mixing odd soundbites with programmed beats and New Age-ish instrumentation, the sound is pretty but languid. A typical track begins with some unwieldy enigma of dialogue such as "Consider the probable reality that all time is simultaneous," and then a very artificial drum track starts up over looped female voices chanting in the background.

In surprising contrast, "motherland," the last song with vocals, has both personality and gentle hooks suitable for the average late-rock radio station. And the opening track "transmission," although brief, is just lively enough to set the listener up for a disappointment. There is hope — the majority of these songs prove far more interesting if the listener takes a break from each one or puts other discs on "shuffle." But after a few tracks like "declamated," "phenomena," and "metaphysical," most people won't want to bother they'll either be rubbing their crystals contentedly or enjoying a light nap.

—Todd Wicks

A Rochester Hills resident, Todd Wicks is a student at Michigan State University.