

sions while updating the harmonies and applying the Tangleweed treatment.

This band may not be for every taste, but give them a try and you'll find some fine contemporary stringband music on *Most Folk Heroes Started Out As Criminals*. — TD

CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE

Waitin' on Roosevelt

Champagne Charlie 2008-6

As works of scholarship and devotion go, this is a biggie. The songs — all old, and ranging from stringband to blues — are all about FDR, and the thick booklet is little short of an academic work on the late president who took the Depression by the scruff of the neck (meaning that its timing is very apt). The source, however, is a little surprising, since Champagne Charlie hail from Holland. They do what they do very well, with some superb playing, deft arrangements that mix things up a bit, and singing that sounds as American as anyone you'll ever hear. So what's missing? Quite simply, it's too buttoned up. There's too much reverence — for the man, for the material, and for the music. It's clean, it's beautiful, but it's not loose in the way of the old bands and performers, where humanity and spontaneity were vital parts of the performance. This is just too perfect. For all that, however, it makes great listening — an odd conundrum. You won't hear a wrong note or an awkward accent, and you'll perhaps end up knowing more than you ever needed about FDR. Figure it out for yourself. — CN

VARIOUS

Art of Field Recording, Vol. 2

Dust-To-Digital 22

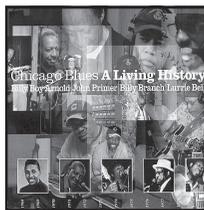
Listening to the wide range of expressive, deep-rooted folk and traditional music on this four-disc companion and sequel to Grammy-winning Volume One, I'm struck once again by the pretty haphazard job that the commercial record industry did in documenting and preserving the regional music of rural America in its pre-war heyday. As booklet preface author Nathan Salsburg notes: "despite the years of revivals, re-revivals and rediscoveries, what Alan Lomax called the 'deep river of song' — the living stream of musical inheritance, reinterpretation and reinvigoration — can never be fully sounded."

The overall layout of this project, once again based on selections from fifty years of field recordings by folklorist Art Rosenbaum, parallels the first volume in that the initial

disc is a multifarious survey of many types of playing and singing (from the blues of Scrapper Blackwell and Shirley Griffith to the Cajun dance music of the Balfa Brothers and the mountain fiddle strains of Ross Brown), while disc two is devoted to religious material — from the soul-stirring intoning of Otha Cooper and the cathartic, House of God steel guitar of James Elliott to the African-derived slave ring-shouting of the McIntosh County Shouters and hymns by the Pilgrim's Rest Primitive Baptist Church, Reverend Willie Mae Eberhart and sacred groups like the Traveling Inner Lights and the Silver Light Gospel Singers.

However, unlike Volume One, the third disc features 25 ballads and songs with instrumental accompaniment. Favorites include the low-down juke joint blues of pianist Mabel Cawthorn, guitarist Jack Bean's compelling version of Tin Pan Alley's "Steamboat Bill" and the Chance Brothers string band rendition of the "rounder" song "I Wish I Was A Mole In The Ground." Unaccompanied vocalists are spotlighted on disc four — from Alice Gerrard and Greg Brown to vintage ballad singers Mary Lomax (no relation) and Maude Thacker to 7-year-old, Southern migrant farm worker Ray Rhodes (a lively take on "Frankie and Johnny"), art student Stan Gillian (with a medley of "dance tunes") and Oscar "Doc" Parks, who had previously recorded for Lomax.

Rosenbaum is also an accomplished artist and, with his photographer wife Margo, they personalize affairs with paintings and photos throughout the track-by-track annotated, 96-page booklet. Highly recommended. — GvonT



VARIOUS

Chicago Blues: A Living History

Raisin' 1003

Larry Skoller's brainchild, this 2-CD set features new recordings of Chicago blues material from 1940 to the present performed by two generations of the idiom's greatest living traditionalists — Billy Bo Arnold, John Primer, Billy Branch and Lurrie Bell. Deftly accompanied by the Living History Band (guitarist Billy Flynn, keyboardist Johnny Iguana, bassist Felton Crews and drummer Kenny "Beady Eyes" Smith), with guest shots by local veterans

Carlos Johnson, Mike Avery and Matthew Skollar, the quartet pays deep-veined homage to the numerous architects and sound innovators of the genre.

Disc one begins with Arnold taking the vocals on Sonny Boy Williamson I's "My Little Machine," Tampa Red's "She's Love Crazy" and Big Bill Broonzy's "Night Watchman Blues." It then traces the piano-dominated 1940s with revivals of songs by both Memphis Slim and Big Maceo, pauses for a scintillating cover of B.B. King's influential "Three O'Clock Blues" and visits the early 1950s emergence of the electric guitar-led ensemble sound — highlighted by an explosive harmonica style — with representative emulations from the songbooks of Muddy Waters, Elmore James, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter.

John Primer, with Billy Branch on harmonica, leads off disc two with a jumping redo of Muddy's "Sugar Sweet" and eases through the succeeding decades, song-checking the likes of Jimmy Reed, Magic Sam, Earl Hooker and John Lee Hooker along the way. Bell particularly impresses with lyrical takes on both Otis Rush's "My Love Will Never Die" and Buddy Guy's tormented "Damn Right, I've Got The Blues."

An accompanying booklet is packed with photos and biographies of all concerned. Plus, an impressive website at <chicagoblueslivinghistory.com> carries this timely and much needed documentary effort forward. Should be in any blues fan's collection. — GvonT

GUY DAVIS

Sweetheart Like You

Red House 211

On *Sweetheart Like You*, Guy Davis continues to make very organic connections between the traditional blues and African American songster traditions with folk music, rhythm and blues and contemporary songwriting. The album begins with a conversational, bluesy interpretation of Bob Dylan's "Sweetheart Like You," a song he first recorded a few years back on *A Nod to Bob*, the Dylan-tribute album featuring various artists signed to the Red House label, before moving into a series of blues standards and Guy's in-the-tradition originals.

I particularly like it when Guy puts an unusual spin on a familiar song. A good example is Muddy Waters' "Can't Be Satisfied," probably one of the most-recorded standards from the blues repertory. Guy makes it sound fresh and new by arranging it for banjo. Another is Son House's "Down South Blues." Guy's arrangement seem-

continued on Page 115 ...