

Blues" is a country number with great Nashville harmonica and pedal steel guitar. Although this disk has just ten cuts, it's the best of the four compilations we've looked at in this article.

On all these collections there is little in the way of liner notes, but then they're not intended for the serious student of a particular genre. They offer a sampling of the music for the casual fan wanting a taste of something different from time to time or who is looking through the limited selection of music found at a giant discount store. For someone wanting a more in-depth look at Cajun, zydeco, swamp pop or New Orleans music there are more extensive collections on Rounder, Arhoolie, Swallow and other labels. They are not as readily available, but with a little effort are easily located.

John Tallaksen

Vicki Victoria: I'm Having a Good Time

This CD truly was a pleasant surprise. Vicki is one of those singers who can bring a song alive.

Her phrasing and different styles of singing fit with the different styles of songs. She obviously was very choosy about the tunes she sang. She sang songs from Peggy Lee, Ida Cox, Alberta Hunter, Bill Broonzy



and Joe McCoy. The songs she sang were deliciously authentic, soulful, and straight from the heart. The melodies were classy backdrops of honky-tonk, Tin-Pan-Alley styles and then there's a tune "Black Coffee" which is a slow, smokey Jazz filled number and a couple of Blues shuffles. The musicians she used were the finest of the finest. Don Stille played piano on the first nine songs. He is an excellent, fine-tuned piano player who combined different styles of piano playing throughout the songs. Willie Murphy played on the last five songs. Willie always plays the right thing at the right time. He also produced and mixed this CD, along with Jeff Roberts and Kirby Binder. Willie did a really nice job with some backup singing and piano playing on the song "Why Don't You Do Right?" It's one of those 'just too much fun' songs. Willie and Vicki have a man-woman discussion about where all the money's going. Next up is the master wizard of the horns, Rick O'Dell who gave the songs that magic touch. He played clarinet, soprano, alto and tenor sax and layered the horns when needed. Dave Maslow was the bass player. He did a superb job especially on Vicki's sixth tune, "Mama's Gone Goodbye." The song featured Dave playing the intro to the song. He gave the tune the hook it needed with some simple smokey Jazz felt bass lines. Vicki sang some nice smooth vocals in this tune. The drummers she used were Rich Snyder, who played the first eight songs and Michael Valesquez, who did the last six songs. My father had a Dixieland

band for many years and when the drummer was ill, one of my two brothers or myself would sit in. My father would lecture us on using the brushes the right way and how some drummers don't have a clue. Both of these drummers Rich and Michael knew how to use those brushes and accent in the right places. The different styles of piano playing that both Don Stille and Willie Murphy used was just a treat to listen to. Vicki sang a great version of "I Cried For You" written by Arthur Freed; smooth crisp lyrics. Her timing as a vocalist shined in this song, especially since the tempo picked up at the end and she and the band turned it into a swing at the end. "Cry To Me" is a tune that is a warm, soft rhumba boogie that can easily stir your dancin' feet up. One of my favorite tunes on this CD was Peggy Lee's "I Love Being Here With You." Vicki Victoria shined on this song. Her vocals are bright and light-hearted. The song actually bounces along. It's a nice shuffle. Big Bill Broonzy's song "Give Your Mama One Smile" was another one of my favorites. Don Stille's piano playing excelled. Now that's Tin Pan Alley piano playing. Rick O'Dell did some nice sax fills as did the drums of Rich Snyder. There's those brushes comin' at you again. Vicki did a nice job on Lil Green's tune "What Do You Think." She sang like a sexy 1930's or 1940's songstress. Rick O'Dell playing clarinet was a real treat to listen to. Willie Murphy's intro and piano playing sparkled on "Wild Women Don't Have The Blues." He boogie woogied it and shook it out. Rick O'Dell layered his horn tracks. Vicki did a fine job of doing this song. Vocally she was on top of the song and she brought out the lyrics and swung it out. Another favorite was the song "Black Coffee" which is a smokey slow Jazz filled tune. This song made you feel like you traveled back in time to a dim-lighted Prohibition Era type club. Smokin' and drinkin', dressed to the max and maybe waitin' up for that man to come back. Vicki proved she could sing Jazz numbers just fine. Willie shined on piano as did Michael's textured drumming style. Last song on the CD was "Honky Tonk" which is a fast boogie shuffle featuring Willie Murphy rollin' it out on piano and Rick O'Dell shining on his sax and also layering his horns again. Vicki swung it out in a sexy honky-tonk voice and sang it loud and proud. I really feel Vicki Victoria is an important singer in the fact that she did her homework for this CD. She brought these tunes out of the attic, dusted them off and with her smooth crisp vocals, gave them life. She is an emotionally uplifting vocalist who cares about crisp lyrics you can understand and is extremely comfortable to listen to. I enjoyed this CD very much and I hope this CD gets the radio attention it deserves. KBEM has been playing it.

The CD is available at all Electric Fetus stores and independent record stores.

Jean Vorstraete

CD Review: Easy- The Big Bang

The Big Bang's new CD, independently released at the end of this summer, delivers the first new material since their first album "Smokin'" was released in 1995. "Easy" has eleven tracks and over 49 minutes of mostly original, rocking bar room blues their many fans have grown to expect. The band is joined by several guest artists on this recording including Renee' Austin on backing vocals, Andy Bailey on keyboards, Mike Bullock and Daryk Narum on saxophone, Matt Darling on trombone, and Todd Stewart on baritone sax. Except for three cuts all songs were written by members of the band which include guitar players Michael James and Ted Larsen, Jeff Hayes on bass and Michael Rey Larsen on drums.

This is a solid album featuring some fine song writing, excellent guitar playing and the exuberant energy the band always brings to their live shows. The newest member of the band, Michael James, is featured song writer on the first two cuts. He also plays some nice lead guitar on these two songs as well as handles most of the lead vocals on the album. The songs range from the steady back beat of the opening cut "I Really Do," to the slow-tempo "Don't Touch Me," to the faster paced "Tragedy," to the rockabilly stylings with "Juke Joint Jenny," to the Fenton Robinson classic, "You Don't Know What Love Is." The band did Fenton justice on this cover. In fact at Robinson's recent show at the Blues Saloon I told him one of our local bands had recorded his song. He seemed genuinely pleased and was looking forward to hearing it.

Just like their live shows the band members share duties on vocals and lead guitar on the album. This allows the band to explore varied territory drawing on their different interests. Jeff Hayes' song writing shines as usual and he takes the lead vocals on his rollicking "Juke Joint Jenny," a fun, fast paced tune that demonstrates Jeff's incisive humor. His song "Tragedy" has some catchy lyrics. One of the better songs on the CD is the Jeff Hayes penned "Don't Want To Say Goodbye." This song features the fine organ playing of Andy Bailey and some super guitar and vocals. My 16 year old son was "very" enthused about this song. He says it has some great guitar playing throughout and was the one song on the CD that jumped out at him when he first listened to it. Ted Larsen turns in some tasteful guitar playing that ranges from the sublime on the Junior Wells song "I Could Cry" to the clean-touch and emotion filled blues guitar on "Changes." The one instrumental on the album by Ted is the final cut on the CD called "Air Stream Chili."

I'm not sure if they want this secret out but there is a special treat on the album. It has an unfisted bonus track at the end. If you wait for one minute after the eleventh cut, "Air Stream Chili," you will get to the bonus track which I think is called "Love Gone Wrong." This is an entertaining parody of a country song done with Jeff's tongue firmly planted in cheek. The band's official position on the CD is... "What Hidden Track?" As Michael Rey said, "we just can't go into any environment, even the studio, and be serious the whole time."

Ray Stiles

(See review of the Big Bang's CD release party at Bunkers in September.)