

The Cash Box Kings - Black Toppin' (2013)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Blues Falling Down On Me* — 3:48 02. *Black Toppin* — 3:47 03. *Trying Really Hard (To Try And Get Along With You)* — 3:01 04. *Oscar S Jump* — 2:32 05. *Money, Marbles & Chalk* — 3:36 06. *My Tinai* — 4:06 07. *Too Late* — 3:27 08. *Walking Blues* — 5:07 09. *I Don T Wanna Fight* — 3:37 10. *Tom Cat Blues* — 3:30 11. *Hot Biscuit Baby* — 3:34 12. *Gimme Some Of That* — 3:10 13. *Run Run Run* — 3:42 Barrelhouse Chuck - Organ, Piano Jerry DeVivo - Saxophone Billy Flynn - Guitar, Guitar (Rhythm) Mark Haines - Drums Alex Hall - Drums Gerry Hundt - Bass (Electric), Guitar (Rhythm), Vocals (Background) Joe Nosek - Harmonica, Vocals Joel Paterson - Guitar, Guitar (Rhythm) Beau Sample - Bass (Electric), Bass (Upright) Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith - Drums Oscar Wilson – Vocals

It's 2013, and most of the blues and R&B performers who once recorded for labels like Vee-Jay, Specialty, Chess, Aladdin, Duke and Peacock have departed for hopefully happier shores. However, the music that once emanated from these vintage labels – by Larry Williams, Louis Jordan, Wynonie Harris, Gatemouth Brown, Memphis Slim, Mama Thornton, Lightnin' Hopkins and many more – seems to have become part of our DNA.

That's why, when we hear, say, The Cash Box Kings' (CBK) version of "Walkin' Blues" emanating from the player, we look up, like startled deer, searching for the source of that mesmerizing sound. The band's label – Blind Pig Records – is a capable stand-in for those labels of yore wherein great American blues was laid down for posterity.

The CBKs specialize in putting down tracks that recall the golden years of post-World War II American blues and R&B and that tap into that primal place where this music resides. Listen closely, and you can hear the nascent stirrings of early rock and roll as channeled by the Kings.

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With a repertoire that spans New Orleans R&B to classic Chicago electric blues, the virtuoso musicians in this band carry the message of the music – which is all about feeling the blues, whether ballad or jump or that moveable place where blues meets rock and roll.

Most of the tunes are capably penned by two band members: producer/harpist/vocalist Joe Nosek, and vocalist Oscar Wilson. Covers include “Too Late,” an upbeat blues by Willie Dixon, “Tom Cat Blues” by Jerry West, and an offbeat blues-rock selection of “Run Run Run” by art rocker Lou Reed. “Walkin Blues” is listed here as “traditional,” although its roots are in Robert Johnson’s “Walkin’ Blues,” plus Skip James’s “22-20 Blues” and “32-20 Blues.” This is a tune that’s been covered often, most notably by Johnny Winter on his Parchman Farm album in the 1960s.

Why is this band so good? One reason is the stellar musicianship. Another is the selection of tunes that lend themselves to arrangements featuring strong Chicago-style harp playing in the manner of Shaky Horton, a driving Tele lead, funky, behind the beat blues drumming by Willie “Big Eyes” Smith scion Kenny, and over-mic’d, gritty vocals that recall all those great old Specialty records from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Black Toppin’ – the title track having been penned by Oscar Wilson – is a CD that bears repeat playing, each time calling forth the fine string work, then the period-inflected blues vocals, the rocking percussion and irresistible harp playing. This is one of the better blues albums thus far in 2013. Recommended. ---Michael Cala, nodepression.com

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