

ing. They stay on the road with "Gotta Go," a saxophone leading the way, some female vocals in the back seat and Michael's guitar solo put it into cruise. The instrumental "The Deuce" reveals the Packer Band's solid chops. Packer revitalizes two songs best remembered by Paul Butterfield, reworking "Born in Chicago" into "Born in NYC." He keeps the harmonica, but brings the intensity down and personalizes it to his own story of the big city.

"I Got a Mind to Give Up Living" is resurrected with bongos, a walking bass line, and a growling flute. Michael's easy swinging vocals make this song a real reinvention that could be played in a coffee house or concert stage. Packer's guitar on "All Along the Watchtower" sounds closer to Dave Mason than Jimi Hendrix. He drives this version of the Dylan classic along at a steady but relentless pace. Michael's folk scene is brought back on Utah Phillips' "Going Away," with country picking guitar, swinging vocals and an easy loping bass strutting out of the city. Bleeker Street finishes out this CD as Michaels pays tribute to the city he lives in and loves.

The CD *Bleeker-Bowery* was recorded in 2005 but has just been re-released on Random Chance Records and Packer has had three other live recordings released this year. Maybe nobody wants you when you're down and out, but Michael Packer is back on track and has found an outlet for his blues, giving it a big apple polish and a big city sound. —

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HANDS OFF!

Dolly Cooper/Zola Taylor/Helen Humes/Donna Hightower/Linda Peters

Ace CDCHD—1163

From the early 1950s, when R&B was slowly but steadily morphing into rock 'n' roll, comes this 27 track (10 previously unreleased) compilation of five female artists—none of whom were with Hollywood's Modern label for more than a year. They had no hits, but all save one were able to parlay the sides they did for Modern into successful careers. In fact, 81 year-old, cover girl vocalist Donna Hightower was still active as of June, 2007!

Hightower is a talented songwriter as well. Of her nine offerings here, all except a spirited version of Jay McShann's cat-

fighting title song are Hightower originals. Her steamy, come-hither vocals, buoyantly accompanied by tenor sax legend Maxwell Davis and his top-notch band, are particularly catchy on numbers like the clever novelty "Bob-o-Link," a sweet-sounding ballad "Since You" (reminiscent of her teenage days singing with the Horace Henderson Orchestra), the rockabilly a la Wanda Jackson-sounding "He's My Baby" and the beatnik blues jiver "Cool Daddy Cool," that also features some great guitar work from one Herman Mitchell.

Like Hightower, Helen Humes began early, cutting her initial session as a blues singer for Okeh Records in 1927. Her five sides here date from late 1951, and were no doubt focused on an answer song to John Lee Hooker's recent chart-topper titled "I Ain't in the Mood." The other songs run the gamut from a tart take of Cole Porter's lively "The Laziest Gal in Town" (a hit for Marlene Dietrich at the time) to the on-the-spot spontaneous blues jumper "Hey, Hey Baby." Once again, Davis leads the band—this time around with jazzier Mitchell "Tiny" Webb on guitar.

There is a degree of mystery concerning Dolly Cooper, who was born and recorded for Gotham Records as Thelma Cooper and also, more than likely, cut a session as Linda Peters for Modern. The two Peters singles here are typical of R&B as it was shifting into rock 'n' roll, with her vocals on items like the Davis-authored "One More Chance" and "Central 1609" distinctly influenced by Humes and her early contemporary Ella Johnson. As Dolly her six tracks vary from a torrid version of Humes' "He May Be Your Man" and the early-ska sounding "Ay La Bah" to a cover of Gloria Mann's then-hit "Teenage Prayer" and the Chuck Willis-flavored "Down So Long," also penned by Davis

Two sides by a teenage Zola Taylor, later of the Platters, close things out. A fetching version of the jazz standard "Make Love to Me" backed by her willow vocal on her own "Oh, My Dear" appeared as RPM single 405 in 1954 and was her sole Modern release. All in all, a top notch set with a twelve-page booklet full of label shots, photos, a selected discography and comprehensive liners by Tony Rounce. Recommended as are all the Modern label reissue projects. Check out Ace at acerecords.com for details.—**Gary von Tersch**

SEAN COSTELLO

"We Can Get Together"

Delta Groove Music Inc. www.deltagroovemusic.com
www.seancostello.com

From the first notes of Sean Costello's new CD "We Can Get Together," his voice and guitar grabs you and makes you take notice. Sean showcases the wealth of experience that he's amassed while working his way down that blues highway that he's spent the better half his life traveling. At the age of 28, that road is more impressive than most musicians twice his age.

Starting out at 16 with the Jive Bombers, Sean got his education on the road and in clubs he was too young to frequent without a chaperone. Teaming up with Susan Tedeschi as her guitar player, Sean came of age as he worked with some of the best blues artist on the scene. Here Sean steps forth as a mature seasoned guitar slinger, and his voice has a dry sultry sound of a man who puts both his body and soul into the music and means every word he sings. It's Sean's songwriting that grabs listeners and keeps their attention. It takes you deeper into his world—a world where Sean is at the top of his game as singer, song writer, guitar player and producer.



Sean wrote most of the songs on this CD, many of them about relationships: the good and some of the rougher aspects of being in love. He starts off with the guitar romp and refrain of "Anytime You Want" (we can get together) which hooks the listener with a driving guitar lick and the soulful tone of Sean's vocals makes you smile. "Can't Let Go" swings in with some jazzy guitar licks and the soulful heartfelt emotion that Sean puts into his vocals gives the impression that he has nothing left to lose but still believes in the miracles of love. Some love doesn't last and with titles like "Told Me A Lie," "Hard Luck Woman," "How In The Devil" and "Have You No Shame" Sean has seen his share of heart ache and is letting out his pain in song. "Told Me a Lie" gives an unconventional edge to his blues by adding a sousaphone, accordion and the Northside Men's Choir, but it's the heartfelt edge in Sean's voice and his searing guitar that gives it a soul bearing gospel feel. "Going Home" brings back the male choir for a true southern gospel version of this traditional blues tune where Sean's guitar does as much testifying at the choir. The upbeat "All This Time" (I've been waiting for you) brings that heart felt emotion back as the guitar and organ give it a soulful edge. The southern rock of "Feel Like I Ain't Got a Home" shows Sean's got enough rock in his wrist to bring the rock 'n' rollers in the audience into the folds of the blues. The final song, "Little Birds" is a complete change of pace, a melancholic traditional folk song with a hauntingly sparse electric guitar and a slide guitar lick that soars until it trails off at the end leaving the listener wanting to listen to the CD again.

"We Can Get Together" released on Delta Groove is a strong CD with no

filler, each song can stand alone and doesn't disappoint the listeners. This is a bench mark for this young songwriter, guitarist, vocalist and producer, he wears many hats on this project and we take our hat off to him. — **Roger and Margaret White**
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PHILLIP WALKER

Going Back Home

Delta Groove DGPCD-115

Legendary Gulf Coast guitarist and vocalist Phillip Walker was born in 1937 in Lake Charles, Louisiana but spent his teenage years in Port Arthur, Texas. There he began performing and occasionally recording with the likes of Rosco Gordon, Clifton Chenier and border favorite Long John Hunter. After leading his own band throughout the 1950s, Walker relocated to Los Angeles in 1959. He was eventually discovered by L.A. producer Bruce Bromberg, and his career began picking up steam as albums appeared on Playboy, Hightone, JSP, Alligator and Black Top.

According to liner notes author Scott Dirks, the plan for this project, Walker's debut on Delta Groove, "was to revisit the man's roots and record some of the songs he'd heard directly from his early influences such as fellow Texas and Louisiana musicians Frankie Lee Sims (a barrelhouse rowdy version of the up-tempo "Walking With Frankie" is here), Lightnin' Hopkins (likewise, a penetrating "Don't Think 'Cause You're Pretty") and Lonesome Sundown (likewise, the swamp blues ravers "Leave My Money Alone" and "If You See My Baby") among others."

Walker is still at the apex of his game with his jazz-tinged yet feisty guitar attack and character-rich, expressive vocals. He is accompanied by label mates Al Blake, Fred Kaplan and Richard Innes of Hollywood Blue Flames, along with solid support from Bay Area guitarist Rusty Zinn, who especially shines on a pair of rocking originals by producer Randy Chortkoff. Other supporting players are boogie pianist Rob Rio, multi-instrumentalist Jeff Turmes (great sax work on a funky redo of Percy Mayfield's "Lying Woman"), tenor saxist David Woodford and Walker's own band bassist James W. Thomas.

Other ear-catching covers in a more soulful vein include Lowell Fulson's tough