



SHAUN RYDER OWNS UP★JOHNNY KIDD

RECORD COLLECTOR

SERIOUS ABOUT MUSIC

GABBA
GABBA
HEY!

PUNK'S
PIVOTAL
YEAR

PLUS!

BUDDY GUY
FREEDOM'S
CHILDREN

HELDON

STAIRWAY
ZAPPA STYLE

BBC SOUND
FX DISCS

BIRTH OF THE
CONCEPT ALBUM

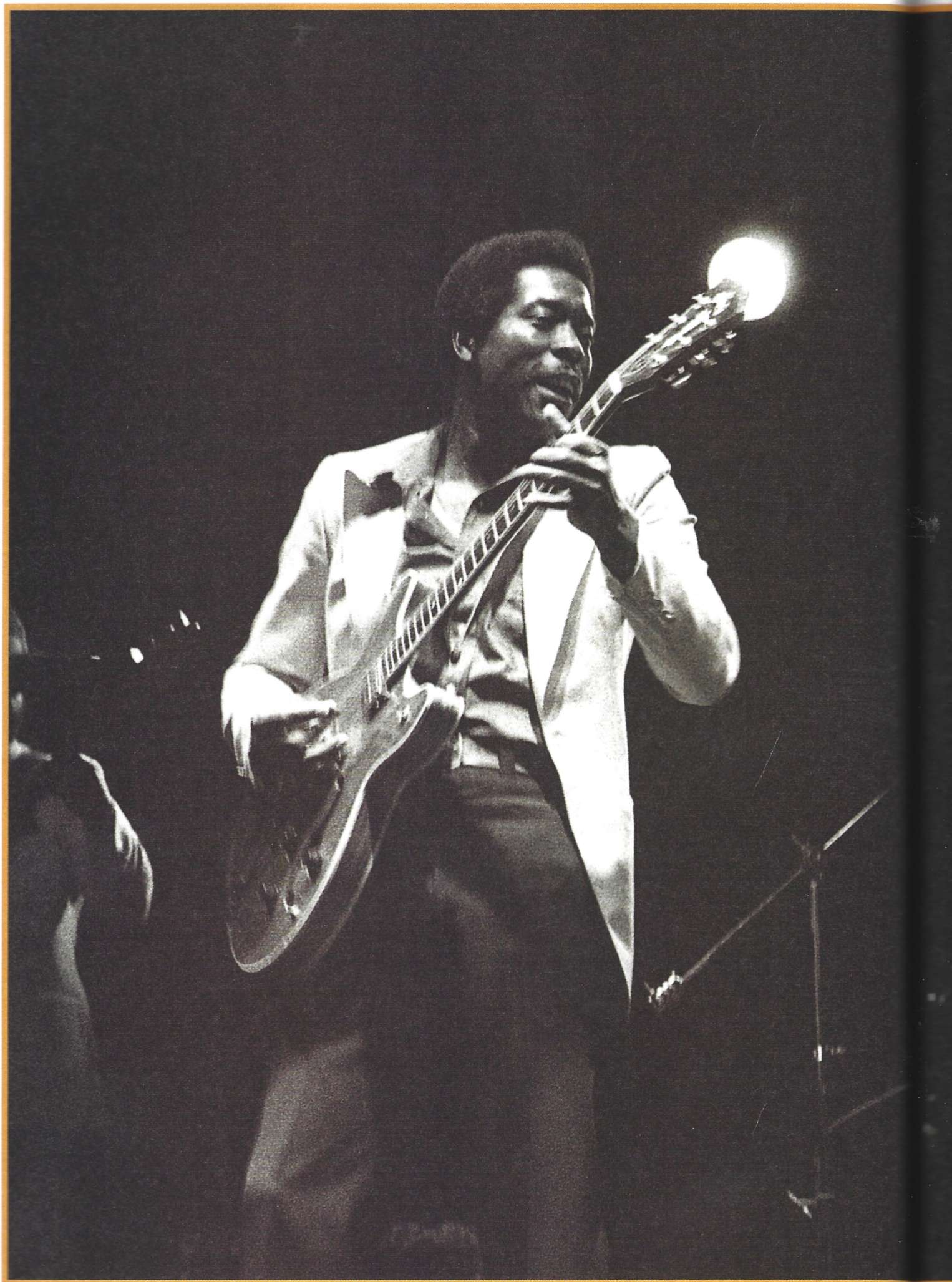
LIVE LPs

PURPLE RAIN
GOES LUXE

SOUL'S FEMALE
ORGASM!

AUGUST 2017 No 469 £4.40
www.recordcollectormag.com





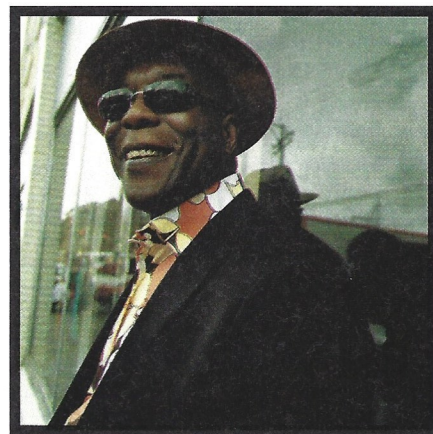
FREE AT LAST

Rock guitar icon and undisputed king of the blues, at the age of 80 **Buddy Guy's** reputation seems unassailable. But it was a tough road to the top – his early career was beset by false starts and shackled by false expectations, as Alan Harper explains

The first time I saw the name of Buddy Guy was in *The Story Of The Blues*. Music historian Paul Oliver wrote: "In the playing of Otis Rush, Albert King, Freddie King, Magic Sam and Buddy Guy may be heard the reverberating echoes of BB King and through him, the guitar of T-Bone Walker and Guitar Slim." He went on to describe Guy as "perhaps the best and most flamboyant of these guitarists".

Oliver wrote that in 1969, when Guy was 33 and had been a musician in Chicago for 12 years. Winning a "Battle Of Blues" against Otis Rush, Magic Sam and Junior Wells at The Blue Flame in 1958 led to a recording deal with Cobra: two 45s, one produced by Willie Dixon and the other by Ike Turner, were released on the label's Artistic subsidiary.

Otis Rush was Cobra's star bluesman and guitarist of choice, and his playing enlivened the first of two stolidly produced Dixon songs, *Sit And Cry* and *Try To Quit You Baby* (Artistic 1501) on which the young Guy's vocals veered between BB King and those of Rush, a similarity perhaps exaggerated by the acoustic qualities of the Cobra studio. The youngster showed greater promise under the more sympathetic direction of Turner with *This Is The End* and *You Sure Can't Do* (Artistic 1503), contributing accomplished gospel-blues vocals over a full and rich big-band sound. He was also allowed to accompany himself, with some



stinging lead guitar that borrowed heavily from the styles of his two main men, Guitar Slim and BB King.

These first two Buddy Guy singles sank without trace, followed in short order by Cobra itself and not long afterwards by its proprietor, Eli Toscano, who was discovered in Lake Michigan – the victim, it was said, of a mob hit.

But Guy was beginning to make his mark. He supported BB King at the Trianon Ballroom, and was playing regular gigs in clubs as far south as Gary, Indiana, when one day in 1960, reputedly at Muddy Waters' insistence, he was called in to Chess Records HQ at 2120 South Michigan Avenue.

Leonard and Phil Chess obviously didn't have a clue what to do with him. They must

have sensed by 1960 that the glory days of their big blues heavyweights, Muddy, Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter and Howlin' Wolf, were behind them. But folk music was selling, and jazz was looking interesting. The label also had a good line in comedy records, and of course there was still rock'n'roll: Chuck Berry's first single, Maybellene (Chess 1604) had sold over a million copies in 1955, and he and Bo Diddley continued to sell. With Buddy Guy, the Chess brothers could see they had a serious musician on their hands, but he was a blues musician, who was still developing his own sound. This sound wasn't a jaunty cocktail of R&B and country like Berry's, which had so effortlessly built a bridge to the white teenage market, but an intense and emotional synthesis of BB King's high, tremulous, wailing gospel and Guitar Slim's dirty, dazzling instrumental virtuosity. At Chess, supervised by Willie Dixon, they gave him songs to sing that came from way down in the dark, superstitious swamplands of his Louisiana childhood: "First time I met the blues I was walking down through the woods/I found my house burnt, blues you know you done me all the harm that you could. The blues got after me, people, you know they ride me from tree to tree."

Little Brother Montgomery wrote that one, and played the piano during Guy's first Chess recording session in March 1960 (Chess 1753). But on the other side of that 45 Guy's own lyrics on I Got My Eyes On You were pitched some way wide of the rock'n'roll market, beyond regular, wholesome sexual suggestiveness into someplace strangely feral: "You got my nose open, baby, but I got my eyes on you."

From his second session, in December, Ten Years Ago (Chess 1784) was a soulful blues full of yearning and regret: "There's been so many sad, sad years since I had my fun/Every person I meet now keep telling me, son your life has just begun."

But it would be a weird teenager who'd wear that one out on daddy's radiogram. It wasn't rock'n'roll, and the label realised Guy wasn't going to be the new Chuck Berry. But he was a good-looking kid, and even the Chess brothers could see their little country boy could play. They just needed to find him the right material. One bizarre and incongruous attempt to pitch the young bluesman into the white youth market was a song called American Bandstand. Ironically, it was pretty good. Guy's vocals were smooth yet admirably committed, the lyrics were blandly on-message – it was a song about the popular TV show, after all – the session musicians were outstanding, production was top-notch, and the whole marshmallow-cream confection was underpinned by the polished steel of Lacy Gibson's rock'n'roll guitar. This was music not for the Southern juke-joint, but the chrome-trimmed radio of a pink Chevy convertible filled with well-scrubbed white teenagers. It was never released.



"Guy's playing was exciting, incendiary and frequently brilliant"

Other experimental efforts included novelty dance numbers that owed more than a little to Ray Charles, pop tunes with trilling, all-girl backing vocals sharing the vinyl uncomfortably with Guy's proto-rock guitar, driving sax-led R&B, and instrumentals no doubt intended as Chess's answer to Federal's string of Freddie King hits – though the comparison served merely to show that Guy lacked the spherical Texan's powers of composition. There were also shining soul numbers, the lively dance-band jazz of the unreleased Buddy's Boogie and even some primal funk in Buddy's Groove.

He could seemingly play anything. But Chess was a blues label, Guy was a blues singer from the Deep South, and the Chess brothers weren't interested in the sharp-suited city stuff he played every night in the clubs, even though they heard it on their own *Folk Festival Of The Blues* LP. Recorded live in 1963 at radio DJ Big Bill Hill's Copa Cabana nightclub on the West Side, this unique and slightly odd album brought together Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Howlin' Wolf and Willie Dixon (a Sonny Boy Williamson studio track was added later, as was one of Guy's) and backed them with Guy's regular band, a ruthlessly tight crew who cut loose between numbers and sounded like they had been gigging with James Brown. Guy's guitar playing was exciting, incendiary and frequently brilliant.

It was also ahead of its time. The British invasion had not yet begun, white blues appreciation was in its infancy and though Jeff Beck and other rock guitarists would later cite it as an important influence, the album

was launched into a vacuum – not folky enough for white folk enthusiasts despite the hopeful title, not funky enough for the young black soul market, and yet still not quite right for the blues' ageing black fanbase.

Guy might have been misunderstood at Chess, but he wasn't neglected. Between 1960 and '67 he was given 14 recording sessions, resulting in some 43 sides. Illustrious musicians such as Sonny Boy Williamson, Otis Spann and Robert Nighthawk were brought in as sidemen for some of them – Junior Wells also accompanied on a few – but even the efforts of these supreme Chicago bluesmen were too often undermined by poor material, lumpen arrangements and inept post-production that buried the guitar beneath intrusive horns. On some a baritone sax ruminated in a corner of the studio like an absent-minded elephant. The jagged saxes on Watch Yourself added nothing but noise. The brass arrangement and indeed general vibe of No Lie were fine – borrowed as they were, pretty much wholesale, from Miles Davis – while the instrumentals Moanin' and Night Flight also conjured up a cool jazz groove.

Guy's vocals could display impressive range, by turns passionate and urbane, and they drew inspiration not only from BB King but also from Bobby Bland, as on I Cry And Sing The Blues. His guitar playing, sometimes stilted but seldom less than incisive, occasionally surprised with rapid-fire fretwork and shimmering vibrato chords. But there was a complete lack of vision. The Chess brothers only seemed to know what they didn't want. They were clueless.

The label's lack of direction with regard to their young Louisiana guitar virtuoso was not unusual at a time of such dramatic change. Even Chuck Berry thought the B-side of Maybellene was a surer bet for Chess, because Wee Wee Hours was a blues. The way in which artists like Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard had apparently landed from outer space already hard-wired into young America's zeitgeist was still fresh in every

record executive's mind. The recording studio was no stranger to weirdness and incomprehension, on both sides of the glass. Guy's overworked *The Treasure Untold* was odd, but not as odd as Otis Rush's strangely sinister *Violent Love*, one of Eli Toscano's more comical misjudgements over at Cobra. Specialty's Art Rupe memorably described Guitar Slim's monster hit, *The Things I Used To Do*, as "the worst piece of shit I ever heard".

Fewer than half of Buddy Guy's Chess cuts were issued as singles. Just 11 45s were released, beginning with *I Got My Eyes On You/First Time I Met The Blues* (Chess 1753) and coming to an end with *She Suits Me To A Tee/Buddy's Groove* (Chess 2067). During the same period there were 17 Chuck Berry releases, which included *No Particular Place To Go* and *You Never Can Tell*. Even Muddy Waters, whose days as a hitmaker were long past, released 16 singles during that time, though the fact that one was called *Muddy Waters Twist* suggests it wasn't just Buddy Guy's career that was afflicted by a lack of managerial direction.

Stone Crazy (Chess 1812) came closest to being a hit, entering the *Billboard* R&B chart on 24 February 1962 at No 21. With *Skippin'* as the B-side, it spent six weeks in the company of Gene Chandler, Ike & Tina Turner, James Brown and Ray Charles, peaked at No 12, and slipped out of sight at the end of March.

Stardom continued to elude the young Louisiana guitarist, but he kept busy as a respected session musician for Chess, laying down solid blues guitar for numerous artists, working unobtrusively but tellingly behind headliners that included Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson and many others. Chess producer, songwriter and A&R man Willie Dixon recruited him for the annual American Folk Blues Festival in Europe in 1965. These touring processions of blues royalty took the continent by storm. The expense of a trip to Europe meant that only top musicians got seats on the plane, and the dearth of local session talent meant they had to accompany each other. This provided some dream-ticket line-ups: Big Joe Turner backed by Otis Rush, Roosevelt Sykes and Jack Myers, with the peerless Fred Below in the driving seat, was one particularly felicitous combination.

Still in his 20s, Guy got to watch from the wings at these concerts as elder statesmen like Skip James and Booker White held the stage. He accompanied some of the blues Olympians in whose considerable shadow he had grown up as a professional musician, playing alongside artists from Howlin' Wolf and Big Walter Horton to John Lee Hooker and Big Mama Thornton. If there had been any gaps in his education at the start of the tour, he was an honours graduate by the end. He was also allowed to perform some of his own Chess material, taking the opportunity to stretch it out beyond the two-minute format. Folkier elements of the audience who

Buddy Guy – 12 essential albums

Once Chess realised people liked this new, guitar-based electric blues – long after Guy had left for Vanguard – the Chicago label released *I Was Walking Through The Woods* (Chess 409, 1970), a collection of 10 of Guy's blues singles from 1960 to 1964. A complete collection of all 43 Chess sides was released by MCA as a 2CD set, *The Complete Chess Studio Recordings*, in 1992 (Chess/MCA CHD 29337).

Two albums from this period show why, even though he wasn't producing any hits in his own right, Guy got so much session work. The Muddy Waters album *Folk Singer* (Chess 1483, 1964) is a rare unplugged taste of the quintessential Chicago bluesman, with Guy and fellow sideman Sammy Lawhorn filling in on acoustic guitars. As back-up to Junior Wells on *Hoodoo Man Blues* (Delmark DL 612, 1965) Guy plays with real feeling and consummate professionalism. On the earliest sleeves he is credited as 'Friendly Chap', because Delmark mistakenly believed he was under contract to Chess.

Folk Festival Of The Blues is mainly of interest to scholars as the earliest known live recording of Buddy Guy. Released on Chess subsidiary Argo (LP 4031, 1964) it later appeared under a variety of titles, including *Blues From Big Bill's Copa Cabana* (Chess CH 9181) and *Festival Of The Blues* on Pye (MAL 724).

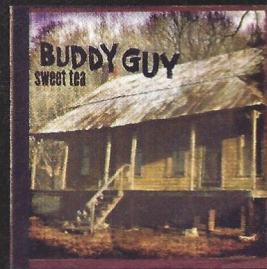
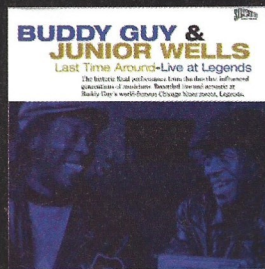
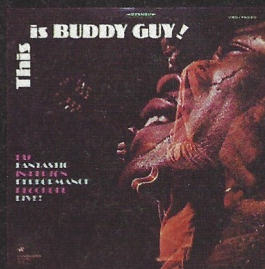
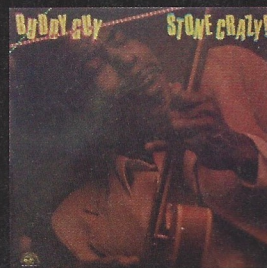
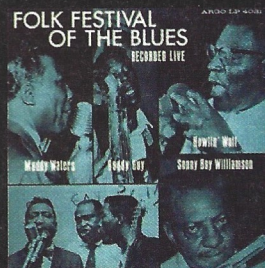
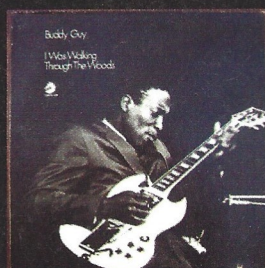
All three Vanguard albums are worth a listen (available on CD as *The Complete Vanguard Recordings* – 3 VCD 178/802), but perhaps the most interesting is *This Is Buddy Guy* (Vanguard VSD 79290, 1968). Recorded live in San Francisco with saxes, trumpets and lots of soul, this is the stuff Guy liked to play before the expectations of his fan base persuaded him to return to the true path.

From 1979, *Stone Crazy* (Alligator 4723, 1981) and its French incarnation, *The Blues Giant* (Isabel 900500) are crucial to an understanding of the artist at a critical juncture. I can't in all conscience recommend *The Dollar Done Fell* (JSP 1009) as a record, but it is an important artefact of Guy's career archaeology. Another Didier Tricard-produced album is known as *Going Back* on Isabel (900510, 1981) and with five extra tracks as *Alone And Acoustic* on Alligator (4802, 1991). It is an excellent unplugged set with Guy's longtime performing partner Junior Wells on harp and sharing the vocals.

Guy's prolific late period on the RCA-owned Silvertone and Jive labels is notable for a marked increase in recording quality, a focus on vocal polish and, in general, a toning down of the frenetic, frustrated guitar heroism of his wilderness years. With rock superstars serving as sidemen, illustrious producers in the control booth, and RCA's deep coffers to pay for studio time, if there are any disappointments among the 13 albums produced so far it is only by comparison to the others.

Apart from the laudable and largely acoustic *Blues Singer* (Silvertone 9260422, 2003), most veer towards the rock side of blues and occasionally towards the soft side of rock, but *Heavy Love* (Silvertone J2 1632, 1998) deserves a mention for its uncompromising attitude, four tracks featuring Steve Cropper, and an unexpected cover of Louis Jordan's *Saturday Night Fish Fry*.

Sweet Tea (Silvertone 9260182, 2001) is a stand-out, recorded in Oxford, Mississippi, with much doom-laden swampish echo and plenty of dangerous distortion from various vintage amplifiers that sound like they've done 10 rounds at Sun with Willie Johnson. Robert Christgau described the album as "a landmark of neo-primitivism". *Last Time Around* (Silvertone 8287653589) is an acoustic set with Junior Wells taped live in 1993 and released after the harp maestro's death in 1998. Consisting of blues standards, its repertoire reflects the shows for which the pair were famous through the 70s and 80s. But don't let that put you off.

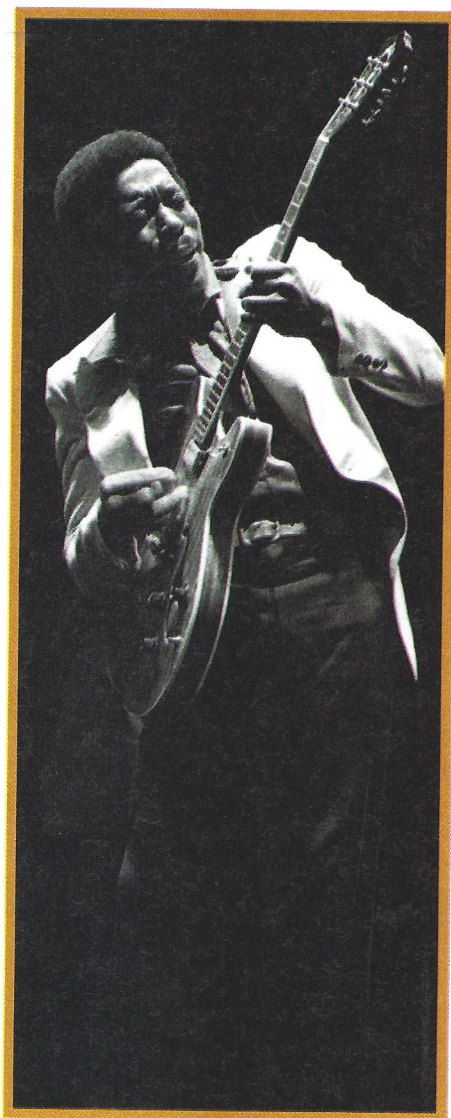


had been expecting something more like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee objected on occasion to Guy's impassioned soul singing and searing lead guitar – just as, not far away, someone in a Manchester auditorium would soon be shouting "Judas!" at Bob Dylan – but in general, European audiences warmed to the fiery young performer.

Back in the US, meanwhile, others showed clearer vision than the Chess brothers. At Delmark, Bob Koester engaged Guy and his band to back Junior Wells for the important *Hoodoo Man Blues* album, released in late 1965. Soon afterwards Samuel Charters of Vanguard arrived in town to record his *Chicago/The Blues/Today!* 3LP set, which also helped deliver the Chicago blues to a new audience now primed by the bands of the British invasion, exposed to early white blues-rock from Paul Butterfield's first album and soon to be snapping up John Mayall's "Beano" album.

While Koester engaged Guy and his band as session musicians, Samuel Charters persuaded Vanguard to record the guitarist in his own right, reasoning that a college market which was now exposed to the pyrotechnics of Eric Clapton and Mike Bloomfield might be receptive to an authentic Chicago guitar hero. Guy's first album, *A Man And The Blues* (VSD 79272) came out in 1967 and its sensitive arrangements and generous, expansive sound engineering gave the young virtuoso the time and space to explore the songs and develop his solos in a way that had always been denied to him in previous studio sessions. With its BB King covers, a couple of originals, and a beautifully underplayed version of Mercy Dee Walton's One Room Country Shack, Buddy Guy's first album was pretty much straight-up blues. For his next, however, Vanguard's confidence was high enough to release a live set, *This Is Buddy Guy!*, recorded in Berkeley, California, and providing an up-close and startling taste of Guy's performance style, with its instrumental call-and-response routines, screaming soul vocals and tight, funky arrangements from a band that boasted a five-piece horn section. There was also a definitive rendition of Guitar Slim's *The Things I Used To Do*.

That wasn't where Guy's future lay, however. In Chicago, he and Junior Wells had teamed up formally as a double act and were given a residency at Pepper's Lounge on East 43rd Street, a hundred yards from the Checkerboard Lounge he would open a few years later. As purveyors of uptempo Chicago blues to receptive white audiences, the pair of them played festivals and enjoyed TV appearances, recording opportunities, and concert dates from New York to San Francisco. Guy was selected in 1969 for a blues package promoted by the State Department to undertake a concert tour in Africa, part of a US government "hearts and minds" push. By the end of the 60s he was



almost famous. Rock musicians spoke of his technique with awe, and studied it. Live audiences and television viewers were thrilled by his raw, blues-rock virtuosity. The Rolling Stones invited Guy and Wells, plus band, to support their 1970 European tour.

While in Europe they cut an LP at Michel Magne's studio at Château Herouville, near Paris, under the leadership of piano veteran and Paris resident Memphis Slim. Released as one half of the double album *Old Times, New Times* (Barclay 920 332/333) – the other disc was piano blues, shared, along with some hokey recorded reminiscences, between Slim and Roosevelt Sykes – it was a successful set, by turns exuberant, relaxed and intense, and notable for the way in which, for the first time, the spotlight fell more on Guy than Wells. Producer Philippe Rault, like Charters, understood that his audience for these performances regarded blues as a branch of rock music. Guitar was king. Within weeks the duo were recording again, this time ripping up Tom Dowd's Criteria Studio in Miami, laying tracks for the 1972 Atlantic album *Buddy Guy And Junior Wells Sing The Blues* (Atlantic SD 33364). With contributions from Dr John, Derek, and some of the Dominos – Carl Radle and Jim Gordon plus a subdued and respectful Eric

Clapton on rhythm guitar – this LP helped to cement the Guy-Wells template that would build their live reputation over the next decade. Though both were great showmen and instrumentalists, neither was known for his writing. They had their signature songs – *The Things That I Used To Do*, *Help Me* – but in essence their act was a blues revue, soulful but not soul music, performing covers and standards for rock crowds. The irrepressible harp player did most of the singing, took the occasional solo, then stepped back to make way for the man with the guitar.

It was a winning formula, and the band's touring schedule routinely took in Europe and North America, but for the rest of the 70s Guy hardly saw the inside of a studio. The French label Black And Blue seized the opportunity to record an excellent but unadventurous live concert in 1978, engineered by David Richards, which was released as *Buddy Guy & Junior Wells Live In Montreux* (Black And Blue 33530).

Then something happened. As if he realised that he wasn't getting anywhere with his blues revue, singing other people's songs alongside his friend and bandmate, in 1979 Guy recorded two albums which redefined him as an artist. The crowds he was playing for were mostly white rock fans, and to them he had always been a guitar hero. Maybe it was time to see what that actually meant.

The live album *The Dollar Done Fell* was recorded at the Checkerboard Lounge, with Guy himself as producer, and released in 1980 on JSP. With a band that included his brother Phil on rhythm guitar, Guy launched into a killer set from the small stage of the club which combined elements of soul, blues and funk with pure, unabashed rock. Along with an obligatory *The Things I Used To Do*, it was mainly original material – songs of hurt and disappointment, some wry, some plaintive, some way too long – and though some of his singing was as uneven, Guy's instrumental work packed a powerful charge, heightened by melodramatic, off-mic vocalising over the top of the guitar. Wild variations in volume created drama and tension. Periods of near-silence clashed with flurries of extraordinary virtuosity. The band was excellent. Phil Guy's playing in particular was beautifully structured and coherent. Together the sidemen built a formidably rational edifice against which Guy's solos crashed like a storm surge, heading out into dangerous musical territory, over-bending through to the next semitone and beyond – a technique of such plain aural *wrongness* that it only underscored a raw intensity of feeling – before flooding back as an unstoppable, lashing tidal wave of sound. The guitarist played as though released, with a freedom hitherto unheard in his records.

I first visited the Checkerboard in 1979, and *The Dollar Done Fell* was faithful to how I'd imagined the club's laid-back atmosphere, with banter between the stage

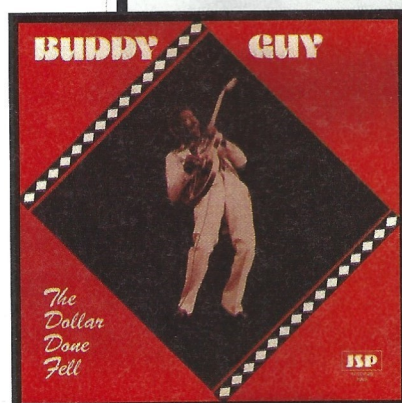
and a neighbourhood audience who talked all the way through. But while the music was frequently breathtaking, in other respects it was an indifferent record which could have benefitted from tighter direction. The sound and the mixing never overcame the acoustic limitations of the room. The singing was variable. One song just seemed to peter out through lack of interest.

Over in France later that year, however, an experienced producer in the shape of Didier Tricard got Guy and his band into the studio and recorded the album the guitarist had been trying to make, released on the French label Isabel as *The Blues Giant* and later on Alligator in Chicago as *Stone Crazy*, which the American writer and academic Carlo Rotella described as “a masterpiece” more than 20 years later.

Rotella was countering the prevailing orthodoxy which held that, by the 90s, Guy had adapted his playing in an act of “focus group musicianship” to pander to the rock crowd. The professor argued that in fact the Chicagoan had been liberated by rock to finally play the way he had always wanted to. The work of Clapton, Hendrix and his other admirers had prepared the ground, but Guy was still reluctant to let go completely: “*Stone Crazy* draws a great deal of its energy from Guy’s struggle to rein in his guitar playing just enough to sustain or at least gesture at the traditional balance of voice and guitar. You can feel the album’s quality of middleliness and transition; you can hear Guy’s duelling impulses to both establish and push past an interesting generic limit. Since he has become a guitar god, he has not always felt obliged to respect that limit... but at least he attends to compulsory figures before attempting quintuple axels.”

True, but perhaps Rotella hadn’t heard *The Dollar Done Fell*. No middleliness there, no respect, no limit – just a dangerous high-wire act, and no net. Rotella felt that *Stone Crazy* caught Guy on the cusp between blues guitar hero and rock guitar god, and it did – but only because there was a professional producer in the studio telling him to behave. Put Guy in charge, as in *The Dollar Done Fell*, and you got the kind of mad, indulgent musical mayhem which the critics, years later, started complaining about. No cusp, this, but total commitment. Far from creating this frayed, nihilistic style as a calculated response to the enthusiasm of white rock fans who had been too young to see Hendrix play live, the evidence of *The Dollar Done Fell* is that Buddy Guy first confronted his artistic demons, and started playing rock, in the safety of his own South Side club.

There followed another long fallow period for the guitarist. A few more tapes found their way to JSP in London in the 80s, but his career didn’t advance again until



“He played as though released, with a freedom hitherto unheard in his records”

he signed for Silvertone, where finally the Buddy Guy we know today was born – the Grammy-award-winning, polka-dot-guitar-playing godfather of rock, elder statesman of the blues and friend to the stars.

Under the labels of Silvertone, Jive and their parent company RCA, Guy has become a prolific recorder of albums since 1991’s *Damn Right I’ve Got The Blues* (Silvertone 14622 J). Produced by Roxy Music’s John Porter, it set the template for the guitarist’s future in the studio, with a mix of original songs such as the title track, crowd pleasers like *Mustang Sally* and *Five Long Years*, and guest appearances by rock royalty in the form of Mark Knopfler, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck. Future albums would add Carlos Santana, Billy Gibbons and Keith Richards to the guitarists’ roster while Van Morrison, Tracy Chapman and Joss

Stone have all answered the call for vocal contributions. Post Porter, producers have included David Z, who worked with Prince, and Eddie Kramer, who’s worked with everyone.

There have been a dozen more albums since then, some of them successful works of art, some successful commercial releases, and some both. At the age of 80, Buddy Guy’s career is rock solid, and he tours constantly. In a ghosted autobiography from 2012, *When I Left Home*, he remembered getting the approach from Silvertone’s Andrew Lauder in London as “a godsend”, and said of his first effort for the label: “If you listen to the album right, what you hear is a man used to wearing handcuffs flying free as a bird.”

Alan Harper is the author of *Waiting For Buddy Guy: Chicago Blues At The Crossroads*, published 2016 by the University of Illinois Press.

