

MIKE GULDIN

Tumblin'

Blue Heart Records – BHR022

Mike Guldin has been playing guitar for the better part of 45 years, having first picked it up early on at the age of 15, so it's hardly a surprise that he seems so adept at shifting his stance. Over the course of the 15 tracks that occupy his latest effort, simply titled *Tumblin'*, he flirts with a basic blues template, but varies his approach that allows each song to create a distinctive impression.

Given that Guldin tends to maintain a consistent sway and swagger, it's relatively easy to pick out his influences. Tim Hooper's barrelhouse piano playing and Kevin McKendree's B-3 organ lend a vintage feel that wouldn't sound out of place during a historical session at Muscle Shoals Studios or even within a set of Stax Records standards. Guldin's a versatile player and performer, and also strong singer, his gritty vocals allowing for an assertive and insistent delivery that finds each of these entries reflecting his intents. His band, the Tumblers, are two-time finalists at the International Blues Challenge and their pervasive presence is evident throughout—beginning with the title track, an instrumental shuffle that gives way to a riff-ready twosome, the rough and tumble *Sad and Lonely*, and a gritty version of Taj Mahal's signature song, *She Caught the Katy*. So too, the Band-like sound of *Alabama Pines* makes for a driving and dynamic encounter that's likely to find live audiences clapping along and keeping up the beat.

Guldin and his group make frequent use of brassy accompaniment as well, an additive that gives extra emphasis to the rowdy and robust designs of *Raise a Ruckus*, as well as the soulful yet sassy sound of *Sweet Thing*. It's all in keeping with a well-trod template Guldin taps into with such obvious verve and vitality. Again, that's evident in the danceable designs of *That's All She Wrote*, the rollicking *You Just Can't Lose*, the edgy start/stop pacing punctuating *House of Cards*, and the more sentimental strains of *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. Notably, Guldin penned the vast majority of these songs, and yet they all sound like standards. A cover of the well-trod classic *Key to the Highway* seems almost incidental by comparison.

Ultimately, *Tumblin'* makes a strong statement in terms of Guldin's prowess and proficiency. Just as importantly, *Tumblin'* allows for a most enjoyable encounter.

—Lee Zimmerman

PROFESSOR LOUIE AND THE CROWMATIX

Strike Up the Band

Woodstock Records – WR 67

Strike Up the Band is good-time music, and Professor Louie and the Crowmatix, along with the Woodstock Horns, lead us jauntily through some rollicking tunes. The album's production delivers a clean and crisp sound so that every note from every instrument—and the vocals—reaches us deep in our hearts. The Crowmatix are Professor Louie on keys and accordion, Miss Marie on vocals and piano, Gary Burke on drums, Frank Campbell on bass, and John Platania on guitar.

The album opens with Professor Louie's a cappella vocals—à la *Heartbreak Hotel*—that calls the band together on *A Thousand Ways to Freedom*, a rollicking, piano-driven, '60s-style tune that traverses rock and pop with ease and has us skimming along the floor to the can't-sit-still beat. The horn-driven *Work It Out* rides on a soulful Wilson Pickett *Midnight Hour* groove, while Miss Marie's sultry vocals propel the bluesy *Fall Back on Me*, which rides along Platania's snaky slide guitar. *Golden Eagle* weaves conjunto and New Orleans grooves into a celebratory song about moving on from this life to the next, while *Tick Tock* floats on a thumping and thrumming gospel-inflected vibe and delivers a romping song about a lover running out of time. Richard Manuel of the Band recorded *End of the Show*, but it was never released; Professor Louie and the Crowmatix's soaring version captures the aching sadness that comes after playing a show—or at the end of a love affair; the layers of B3 and guitars add a haunting dimension to this exquisite song. The album closes with the ethereal prayer for peace, *Flaming Ray*.

Every song on *Strike Up the Band* has a glowing, dazzling gem-like quality, each dazzling in its many facets.

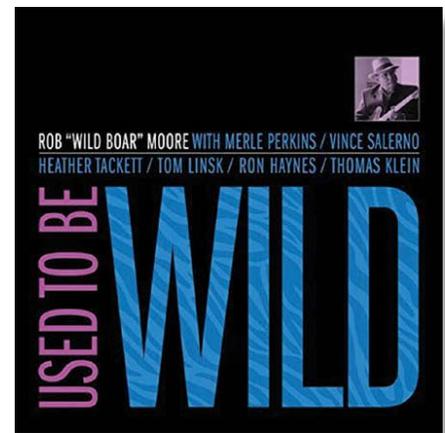
—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

ROB "WILD BOAR" MOORE

Used to Be Wild

Flood Records – FR002

By his own admission, Rob Moore has been somewhat out of touch with the musical mainstream of late. A native of Chicago, he went on hiatus in Miami Florida for approximately three



decades to teach and do occasional gigging. His first and only album, *Eye of the Storm*, was released 25 years ago, making his new sophomore set, *Used to Be Wild*, a follow-up that's long overdue. Indeed, in the music world, those are circumstances that often doom an artist to remaining well under the radar as far as any continuation of a career is concerned.

Fortunately for Moore, his refusal to be dissuaded works to his advantage. True to his nickname, he comes out of the gate with full force and ferocity. So while the new album could be considered a comeback of sorts, it sounds as fresh and vital as any initial attempt. Moore's stern, deep-throated vocals and expressive lead guitar lines consistently take center stage, especially on songs such as *Cordless Vacuum Cleaner* and *Six Feet Apart*, thanks to his relentless riffing and the solid support of a fully capable backing band. While most of the tracks come across as energized and emphatic—*There for You* and *Vegetarian Delight* being two prime examples—at other times Moore places his tongue firmly in his cheek. The title track's playful posture, combined with its half-spoken narrative, sets the tone straight away. So too, the tuneful toss-off *Medicare Baby*, the breezy strut and stroll of *You Tube Lady*, and the casual caress given *Forty-nine Years Between Kisses* show Moore isn't one to take himself too seriously, even when the idea of reclaiming the spotlight would seem to elevate his intents.

On the whole however, Moore navigates his way through nicely, especially on a song like *I Need You so Bad*, a B.B. King cover that provides the album's only non-original entry. He uses brass to best advantage, showing an ability to saunter and swing that's well in keeping with the affable attitude that's purveyed overall. Maybe this "Wild Boar" isn't the wild creature it once was, but there's plenty of bite being brandished here still.

—Lee Zimmerman