

Among Andrew's best moments is a version of "Love in Vain" that features a nifty guitar arrangement that owes more to Lonnie Johnson than to composer Robert Johnson. Andrew also offers a sweet version of "See See Rider," which draws on Mississippi John Hurt's influence. — MR



**WATERMELON SLIM
AND THE WORKERS**
No Paid Holidays
NorthernBlues 0047

The first time I saw Watermelon Slim advertised, I thought what the heck? The blues scene is flooded with up-and-comers who change their names to reflect the singers they admired. But I have to admit Bill "Watermelon Slim" Homans is the real deal, and he is one of the truly unique and successful performers in the blues today.

The whole mix of his life stories has got to be one of the most unusual I have encountered for a blues artist, and his music reflects these rich experiences. His soulful vocal/harp solo, "This Travelin' Life," tells the tale as he gives thanks for it all. His funky "Call My Job" is the story we all want to tell after a long week-end of overdoing it and wanting an excuse not to go to work, while "Dad in the Distance" is a poignant ballad of the father who can't be with his child. And who doesn't get the blues from the dentist? He drives "I've Got A Toothache" hard with the slide, buoyed by the pulse of a kick drum. This ain't Son House; this is something really different.

No Paid Holidays is a great listen. There is something for everybody; from hard-driving straight-eight blues rock, to country two-steps, to Santana-Latin and Chicago shuffles. The rhythms are diverse, and so are the tonal textures. His "Workers," Cliff Belcher on bass, Michael Newberry on drums and Ronnie "Mack" McMullen on guitars, are equally responsible for each creative arrangement. Some cuts are fat in overdrive while others are unplugged. Slim's slide playing is remarkable as he picks complex patterns under his vocals. On most cuts his harp playing is likewise in overdrive, but on a couple, "This Traveling Life" and "And When I Die," he sings and plays harp without the amplification.

In 2007 the band garnered six Blues Music Award nominations, tying the record set by B.B. King and Robert Cray! They won two awards in 2008. This band is at the top of the blues game. In time there will be players naming themselves "Watermelon." — RDG

**TOMISLAV GOLUBAN
AND LITTLE PIGEON'S FORHILL BLUES**

Mr. B
Aquarius 180

The blues are becoming a cottage industry in Croatia, it seems. First there was Miroslav Evačić, and now Goluban and his crew have made an appearance. He's a harp player, very much in the tradition of Sonny Terry or Little Walter, and he kicks things off to a fine, even virtuoso start with "T-Train Kick," where he gets to display his chops and set you up for an album of mouth harp playing. However, that's not quite what we get. There's some in there, but this is more about the songs, which at times become American blues refracted through an odd prism — Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore. So "See You Later Alligator" gets a bizarre falsetto interlude, for instance; "Jesus On The Mainline" has a Johnny Cash makeover; and "Country Party" is just, well, quite odd. It's beguiling, and there's a certain innocence to it all. But make no mistake, these guys can play the blues, and there are some unusual juxtapositions, like the trumpet on "Brag to Brag" that takes the listener by surprise, but works wonderfully well. In case you're wondering about the band name, it's a sort of translation of the name for the area where the musicians live. So yes, it's all a little warped, and it would be great to hear Goluban work out on the harp a lot more than he does, but there's definitely something going on in the Croatian Delta. — CN

PAUL REDDICK
SugarBird
NorthernBlues 0050

Paul Reddick is a Toronto-based singer, songwriter and harmonica player, steeped in the blues, whose last several albums have been among the most creative, innovative and poetic offerings of the blues genre in recent years. *SugarBird*, like its predecessors, is a true collaboration with Colin Linden, who produced the album and plays guitar on every song. Colin wrote two of the songs himself, and also co-wrote the other 10 with Paul. So all the praise I heap on this album belongs to both Paul and Colin.

Garth Hudson of The Band joins Reddick and Linden on accordion for three songs, including "Morning Bell," an infectious song about waking up to a bright new day. The album bears a dedication to Richard Bell, the great Toronto pianist who played in the latter-day version of The Band and who recently died of cancer, so I can't help but assume that the song is some sort of tribute to him. The other songs with Hudson are "Wishing Song," a love song set as the moon rises, and the beautiful "Climbing Up the Hill," which sounds like it could be a Hoagy Carmichael classic from the 1930s.

Another of the most beautiful songs is Colin's "John Lennon in New Orleans," a kind of homage to New Orleans flavored with a second line horn section. The song reminds me of the Beatles' version of blues singer Roy Lee Johnson's "Mr. Moonlight." Maybe that's the John Lennon connection.

While I said these songs are steeped in the blues, there are also folk, a bit of country and literary influences as well. This is one of those albums I liked a lot on the first listen; I found myself enjoying it even more every subsequent time I've played it. — MR

LIGHTNIN' WELLS
Shake 'Em On Down
Lignite

Raised in eastern North Carolina in the Piedmont South, Wells learned harmonica as a youngster, and taught himself guitar as he developed an academic interest in the traditional blues styles and folk music of the region. He began performing locally in the early 1970s, and has since traveled throughout the United States and Europe with his diverse and ever expanding repertoire of American roots music from bygone eras. This new CD is a solo outing that features lots of country blues, gospel material (a lonesome but uplifting version of Reverend Gary Davis' "Gonna Lay Down This World For My Lord" and two others), a few 1920s pop standards ("I'll See You In My Dreams" and "Bye Bye Blackbird") and even a foray into the hill-billy arena, blue yodel and all, with a robust rendition of Bill Carlisle's classic "Rattlesnakin' Daddy."

Throughout, Wells accompanies himself on Gibson and National guitars, Sonny Terry-styled harmonica, 5-string banjo (on the "floating verse" oriented "Banjo Sam" from 1929) and soprano ukulele — he mimics the sound of a music box on Roy Smeck's "Music Box Waltz" instrumental. Wells' unaffected, casual but emotionally taut tenor vocals work particularly well