

## Calvin Keys Electric Keys

To some, Calvin Keys is already a legend; to far too many, he's an unsung hero or, worse, an unknown.

In addition to being honored with Pat Metheny's tribute "Calvin's Keys," on the composer/guitarist's *Day Trip* album, in his 50-plus-year career Keys has toured with Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Ray Charles, and six of the heaviest heavyweights of jazz organ (Jimmy McGriff, Jack McDuff, Lonnie Liston Smith, Groove Holmes, John Patton, and Jimmy Smith), and toured and recorded with pianist Ahmad Jamal among other jazz greats.

This is the 70-year-old's first solo album in seven years and only his 10th since his '71 solo debut, *Shawn-Neeq*. The title song from that album is reprised here (sans vocal), as is "Touch" (both penned by Keys), from the 2000 album of the same name.

The emphasis here is on deep grooves, bold textures (sax, trombone, bass, and two drummers), and Keys' crystalline single-note lines, interspersed with warm octaves on his Heritage Golden Eagle archtop. It's bluesy and funky, although on the title cut Keys shows a rockier edge.

*Electric's* ensemble represents six-ninths of the Wide Hive Players, whose latest, *Turnstyle*, also features Keys. Both are highly recommended. — **Dan Forte**



## Nick Knirk Nick Pickin'

As soon as this Louisiana native finished high school, he relocated to Denton, Texas, near Dallas, where he got a degree in Jazz Studies from the University of North Texas.

He lists Django Reinhardt, Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass, Cliff Gallup, Danny Gatton, Chet Atkins, George Harrison, Dick Dale, Brian Setzer, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Robben Ford, B.B. King, Brent Mason, Johnny Hiland, Brad Paisley, Andy Timmons, and Carl Verheyen as some of his influences. In other words, his



Blackie and the Rodeo Kings: from left, Colin Linden, Stephen Fearing, and Tom Wilson.

# SOUTHERLY HEADING

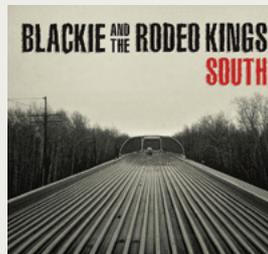
**E**ighteen years of embroidered cowboy suits, stellar alt-country songcraft, and stylish guitar work has made legends of Blackie and the Rodeo Kings. Now they're back with their eighth album, the rich and rewarding *South*.

Think of the band as the Canadian version of the Flatlanders, but don't get them confused. Like the Texas band, this trio sports three frontmen who also juggle solo careers, other bands, and sideman duties. But Blackie and the Rodeo Kings have their own unique sound, far from that of the Lone Star state: The band blends Canadian roots music with Americana, creating a more laidback, north-of-the-border vibe.

The trio includes singer-songwriters Stephen Fearing and Tom Wilson (former lead singer of Junkhouse), along with guitarist-producer Colin Linden. The fretman has also cut several killer solo albums and served as a sideman to the stars, including Bob Dylan, Lucinda Williams, Bruce

Cockburn, Emmylou Harris, and Robert Plant and Alison Krauss.

*South* owes its name to the southerly locale of Linden's Nashville studio, where the band cut the album. The process proved to be a journey for



## Blackie and the Rodeo Kings South

the band. They initially planned to record one original and one cover by each of the trio, yet the originals proved the strongest material and so the album grew from there.

The collection is mostly acoustic, a change, too, from past forays. This stripped-down sound seems to have rejuvenated the band with fresh inspirations and a return to their sources. Throughout, their tone is rich in warm, resonant tones with

plenty of Linden's slide-work. They're backed by bassist Johnny Dymond and drummer Gary Craig, creating a full-tilt alt-country band once again.

The album opens with Wilson's rollicking "North," an infectious country melody spiced with Linden's bottleneck playing. Linden's title track is autobiographical, reflecting on following his parents' footsteps in moving his family from Canada to the United States.

The uptempo "I'm Still Loving You" finds Linden unleashing country Dobro-inflected slide that drives the song with banjo-style rolls. "Reinventing The Wheel Of Love" is catchy country rock.

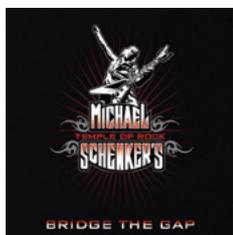
The album closes with the sole cover, "Drifting Snow" by Willie P. Bennett, the Canadian folk legend who inadvertently inspired the band's creation 18 years back.

*South* is both classic Blackie and the Rodeo Kings and at the same time, signals a new direction. Either way, it's a fine album of alt-country and great guitar work. — **Michael Dregni**

tastes are broad (and impeccable), and he has mostly “old ears” for a 37-year-old.

His CD opens with an impressive instrumental arrangement of “And Your Bird Can Sing” that could almost be mistaken for the Beatles’ backing track. The repertoire is entirely instrumental (ranging from covers of Dusty Springfield to Stevie Wonder to Elvin Bishop – mostly utilizing a modeling Fender VG Stratocaster), save the original jump blues “What Do You Want With Me,” sung by Corry Pertile with a Leslie-fied solo by Knirk.

Another original, “Gallup ’n Gatton,” lives up to its estimable title, and across 11 tunes Knirk (pronounced “kuhnirk”) strikes a deft balance of chops and restraint. He still lives in the D/FW area, where he has his own trio and gives private guitar lessons. – **DF**



## Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock

Bridge The Gap

Despite Michael Schenker's infamy as a member of the Scorpions, UFO, and MSG, he seems to have put his demons behind him. On this new album, Schenker is a clean, mean, guitar-playing machine. Continuing the fiery trajectory of 2011's *Temple Of Rock*, he reunites Scorpions bassist Francis Buchholz with current drummer Herman Rarebell.

Adding former Rainbow vocalist Doozie White on the mic, Wayne Findlay on keys and guitar, and a guest appearance by Don Dokken on “Faith,” *Bridge The Gap* is Schenker at his most fully conceptualized. Eschewing his signature notched-wah lead tone for a more contemporary sound, he displays a wider soloing palette on this group effort.

“Where The Wild Winds Blow” mixes dark gothic themes, heavy chugging, and a surprising acoustic guitar solo. Exemplified by “Horizons” and “To Live For The King,” the album leans stylistically toward Rainbow, Rising Force, and Dio. Schenker is a melodic tour de force throughout with absolutely no fat in his playing. Produced by Schenker and Michael Voss, *Bridge The Gap* is a strong record with a mighty rhythm section and a tip of the hat to Ronnie James Dio. – **OJ**



The Strypes, including guitar slinger Josh McClorey (far right).

# ROLL OVER, JACK WHITE

Here's rock and roll like it used to be – ageless, timeless, and ready to count off again.

The Strypes are a quartet from Ireland, all just 15 to 17 years old, running on pure raging-teen energy, Ray-Bans, and Clearasil. And they play wailing, howling, and strutting R&B with raw force. Yes, this is a boy band, but in age only, not inclination; it ain't NKOTBSB, Justin Bieber, or One Direction. The Strypes' music goes in both directions at once – rhythm and blues. They actually play and write it themselves, and their sound is as vibrant and powerful as if it was ricocheting out of the Cavern or Marquee clubs.

Listening to their debut U.S. EP, *Blue Collar Jane*, one thing's

clear – the inspiration of Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley, maybe the Zombies and the Monks, for sure Doctor Feelgood



## The Strypes

Blue Collar Jane

and Dave Edmunds. But, they're also fans of modern, retro-fueled rock including White Stripes and the Black Keys, and their sartorial sense is pure old-school R&B. It includes three hard-driving originals capped by a ferocious version of Nick Lowe's “Heart Of The City.” The

title track is an old-fashioned homage to a working-class girl, with requisite spelling-bee chorus. Singer Ross Farrelly's vocals are tough and wise beyond his years (of course). The song swells into an out-of-control solo pitting overdriven guitar against blues-wailing harmonica. Guitarist Josh McClorey is baby-faced and mop-topped, yet with astonishingly good vintage chops; rest assured, he knows his double-stop licks and how to use them, and makes his sound on all the right guitars – Teles, Strats, Firebirds, ES-335s.

The Strypes have a debut album in England, but we'll have to hold patient through the summer for it to arrive state-side. – **Michael Dregni**