

those years that he formed a particular bond with his partner here, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, then the drummer in Muddy's band as well as an accomplished songwriter. Six of the 13 titles on this invigorated team-up are Willie's, often co-authored with his drumming son Kenny, along with seven chestnuts from the celebrated annals of Chicago-via-Delta blues. Smith also forsakes the drum stool for the harmonica here; imagine a wiry blend of James Cotton and Sonny Boy Williamson I. Willie takes the majority of the vocals with energetically sympathetic assistance from guitarists John Primer and Little Frank Krakowski, who's been sitting in with Smith since he was a teenager and bassist Bob Stroger, a long-time Perkins sideman.

Needless to say, Perkins' keyboard work, throughout, is as rock-salt sharp and tonally tough as ever, and the pair's cover choices are atmospheric as well as deep veined—perhaps highlighted by their rock-ribbed takes of two of Sonny Boy's most notorious efforts: "Eyesight to the Blind" and the stomping table-rattler "Cut That Out." Big Bill Broonzy's great "letter blues" called "I Feel So Good" and Lil Son Jackson's desolately downbeat "Gambling Blues" are noteworthy, as is a mesmerical interpretation of Billy Flynn's philosophical "I Would Like to Have a Girl Like You." Naturally, a sturdy interpretation of Perkins' signature "Grindin' Man" is here. He also rises to the occasion remarkably on the doleful plea "Lord, Lord, Lord" as well as on an extended slice of melancholy called "Walkin' Down the Highway," that sounds for all the world like it was roaring out the open door of some late-night Mississippi juke joint. The real deal all the way around. Long live Pinetop!—**Gary von Tersch**

ROB STONE Back Around Here

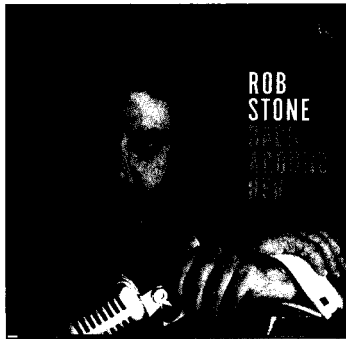
Eanwig CD-4961 www.eanwigmusic.com

With this 12-song project, Boston-born Stone's first in seven years, blues fans outside the Windy City, where he frequently appears on the Back Porch Stage at the House of Blues and other fine blues emporiums, can hear how far his talents have progressed since his C-Notes days.

For one thing, there's absolutely nothing downcast here—whether on stage or in the studio, Stone maintains a high-voltage attack with his beefy, consistently exuberant harmonica approach and tough-as-nails tonality. He owes a stylistic debt to not only Little and Big Walter but to Junior Wells and both Sonny Boys. Backing him here are his longtime C-Notes pals, guitarist Chris James and bass player Patrick Rynn, with guest shots from pianists David Maxwell and Aaron Moore, drummers Sam Lay (one of Stone's main Chicago mentors), Willie Hayes and Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, sax-

ists Rodney Brown and John Bowes, and guitarists Michael Weisman and Jeff Stone. The restless Mike Mahany adds maracas to the heady mix on the exclamatory instrumental "Dragon Killers."

Four gritty covers reveal Stone's appreciation of blues history. Rob plays stunning unamplified harp on a delightfully elemental version of Sonny Boy



Williamson's "Love You for Myself." He goes back to the early 1940s for an animated take on Leroy Carr's "Sloppy Drunk Blues," with great Maxwell piano, and nods to the late, lamented Magic Sam with a soulful rendition of his little-known tune "Give Me Time." He reinvigorates the 5 Royales doo-wop treatise "It's Hard But It's Fair," authored by their talented guitarist Lowman Pauling.

The remaining songs are all Stone/James/Rynn collaborations—particular nuggets include several noteworthy, personalized real-life sagas, with Stone's persuasively assertive voice leading the way. "Chicago All Night" is colorful. A jivey jumper about the joys of bachelorhood is titled "No Strings Attached." A down-to-earth shuffle is called "I Need To Plant A Money Tree." The atmospheric, Billy "The Kid" Emerson-veined title song and the tempestuous opener "You're No Good For Me" all help make the CD well worth the wait. —**Gary von Tersch**

THE SWAMP KINGS "Swamp Appeal"

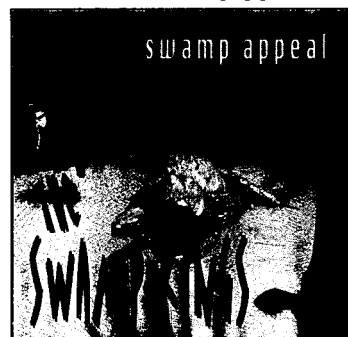
www.theswampkings.com

Just looking at this CD, you know you're in for some Big Easy good times. From the title *Swamp Appeal*, its artwork of an alligator on a leash, the songs with French titles about crawfish, gumbo, and Cajun cooking, you can almost taste what's in store with mouth watering anticipation. Surprisingly the Swamp Kings are from 2300 miles north of the Delta, based out of the Twin Cities of Minnesota where the Mississippi River originates. Their love of all things New Orleans is so strong they have made a bayou all their own. The Swamp Kings are Tom Harkness on guitar and six string washboard, Matt Page playing bass and harmonica and Connor McRae on drums and washboard. All of them slide to the front for vocals. Joining the Kings on their debut CD is Harry

Pulver Jr. adding accordion, Toby Lee Marshall on the Hammond B3 organ and producer Paul Manske filling in back-up guitar and vocals.

Starting with the roll of the snare, the rumble of the drum and rat a tat of the cymbals, the music explodes as they declare "Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler" (Let the Good Times Roll). Joining in with the band the squeeze box gets things jumping as they take you on their journey. A swampy guitar in the mold of a young James Burton glides through "Pirogue" which is a type of dugout boat, as they paddle their Susie Q around for a ride. With "Momma's Cajun Food" you can hear the rattle of those pots and pans behind the squeeze box as the guitar adds the spice for this tasty treat. Then it's off to the "Lafayette Polka" to dance your blues away.

The spellbinding tone of the Hammond organ swirls through the backwaters with the bewitching "Swamp Appeal" as he takes his best gal out for some "Bayou Time" with its tantalizing allure of a slower way of life till he's ready to do the squirm with his baby to "The Crawfish Crawl." The stinging guitar sets



up the tone for "44Y'all" as the enticing allure of all things native to New Orleans draws you in. The only cover tune on the CD is Tab Benoit and Anders Osborne's "We Make a Good Gumbo." With the gusto of the accordion and it's Cajun beat, these northern boys have found a recipe for good times. Every gumbo needs some extra spice and the young lady sung about in "Red Pepper" is titillating, with the harmonica adding that final bayou flavor.

The Swamp Kings may be based out of the Twin Cities of Minnesota, but they've been swept up in the flow of the Mississippi and have a Mardi Gras in their own mind. The energetic blending of Cajun flair, New Orleans swamp boogie and soul makes it a tasty treat for your ears. —**Roger & Margaret White** *bluetime@sbglobal.net*

BRAD VICKERS AND HIS VESTAPOLITANS "Stuck With the Blues"

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Brad Vickers and His Vestapolitans seem to be a band lost in time, as they channel music from early jazz to post war

blues and early rock'n'roll. Deriving their name from the open "vestapol" tuning style Vickers uses on his guitar, he has carved out a unique niche with his use of violin and a clarinet in his horn section and the breadth and depth of his musical landscape. As band leader, singer and guitarist Vickers is joined by Margey Peters on electric bass, fiddle, and vocals, with Dave Gross stepping in with upright bass when Margey plays fiddle. Arne Englund plays piano and guitar, Jim Davis handles saxophone and clarinet, Matt Cowan blows the baritone sax, Bill Rankin holds down the drums and Bobby Radcliff sits in on guitar for a few tunes. This versatile band of rogues takes us through the last hundred years of American music, finding sounds rarely heard today.

Beginning this musical journey at the turn of the century with the "Vestapol Rag," Brad's interpretation of early string jazz, has the twang of the guitars echoed by the reediness of clarinet. The early country swing of "Deep Elem" highlights its fiddle and clarinet duet as Vickers sings a tale of good times in the red light district. Jelly Roll Morton's "Winding Boy" features Miss Peters' vocals over piano, sax, and guitar. With this trio of tunes, the Vestapolitans travel through a period of American blues that many people may have forgotten.

Progressing into the sounds of the '30s with Tampa Red's "I'm Betting on You" the Vestapolitans play acoustic slide guitar, honky tonk piano, Over the weary harmonies of Vickers and Peters, the clarinet once more takes a solo. Margey Peters steps to the forefront with two of her own odes to the origins of the blues. She sings tales of Cow Cow Davenport and Memphis Minnie over a barrel house piano on "They Gave Us the Blues." Her fiddle leads the band as Vickers sings a depression era epic of the "Hobo Jungle."



Moving on to the mid 1940s, Vickers' impression of a New Orleans stroll, "I Want To Tell You Right Now" could have been a Dave Bartholomew out take from Fat's Domino. Brad pulls into 1950's Chicago with a pair of Jimmy Reed tunes. "Can't Stand to See You Go," featuring the piano and sax. A rousing "I'm a Love You" showcases the guitar and backup singers till the tenor sax thrusts itself up front for a solo before it's subdued by a