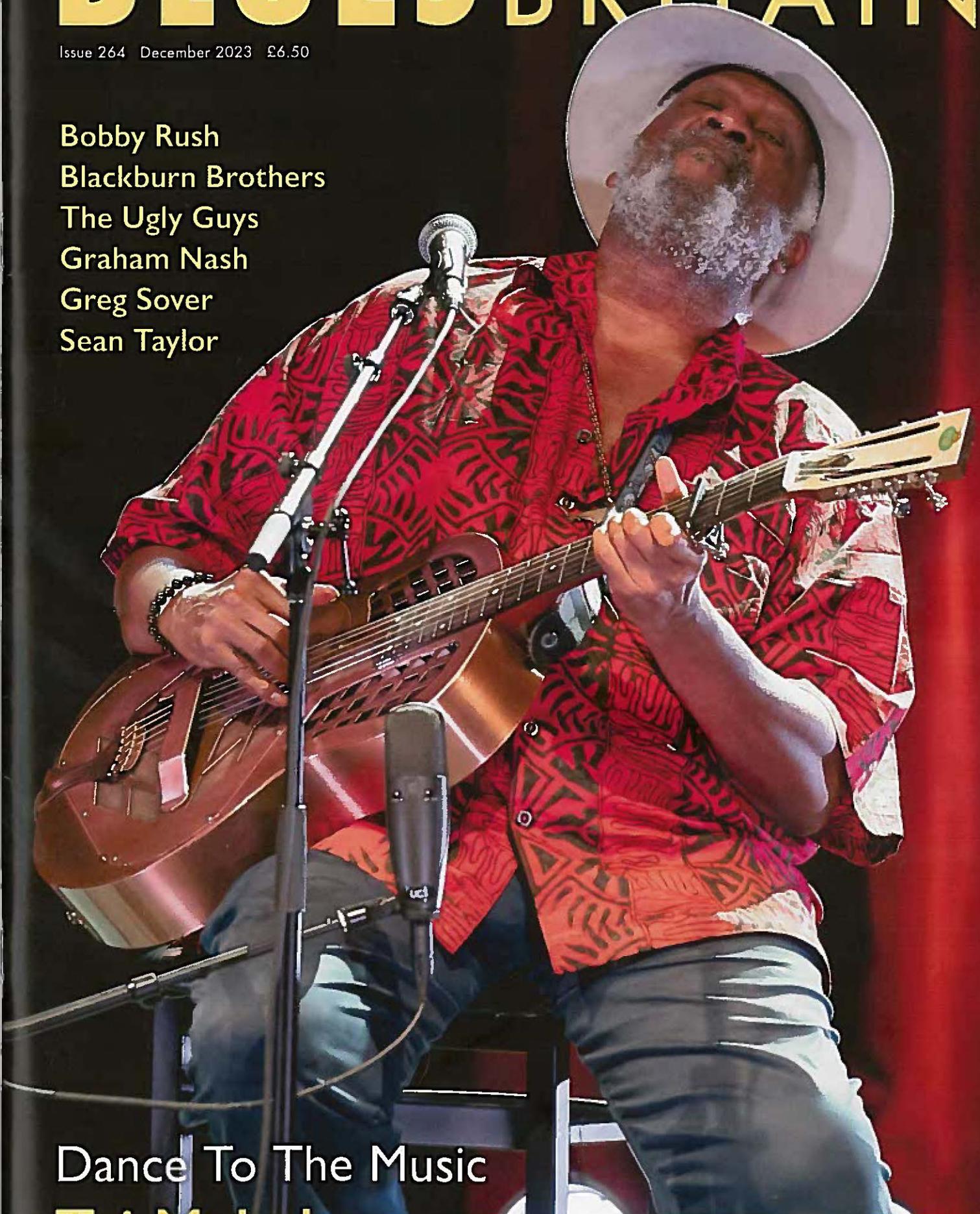


# BLUES<sup>IN</sup> BRITAIN

Issue 264 December 2023 £6.50

Bobby Rush  
Blackburn Brothers  
The Ugly Guys  
Graham Nash  
Greg Sover  
Sean Taylor



Dance To The Music



**Steve Howell: Gallery Of Echoes**

*Out Of The Past Music*

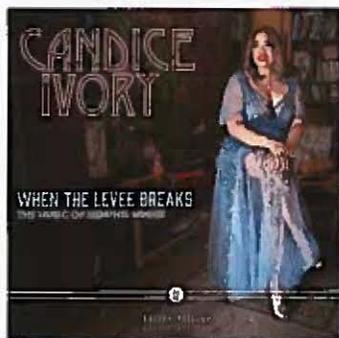
Texan Steve Howell is not only a master of finger-picking acoustic blues, he is also clearly a proud owner of the Great American Songbook. Here he explores the great versatility offered by both, as he steps away from his regular work with his band The Mighty Men creating a splendid array of cover songs, all of which exhibit a deep devotion to preserving the tradition of his chosen genre.

This is a heartfelt tribute to Howell's acoustic blues heroes, in particular Blind Lemon Jefferson and the Rev. Gary Davis. Showing abundant respect to the originals, he crafts each offering with a care and subtlety which makes the songs sound almost like his own. Blind Lemon Jefferson's 'Stocking Feet Blues' opens the set with light-touch guitar underlying contrastingly expressive vocals – he later reprises Blind Lemon, a deft touch framing 'Easy Rider Blues'. Howell has mined a bedrock of songs, some traditional with origins going back to the late 1800s and just beyond. Best known of these is the murder ballad 'All My Friends Are Gone,' more commonly called 'Delia's Gone' with memorable versions from several diverse artists like Johnny Cash and Nick Cave. Howell's reading of it is almost whispered with a perfect, aching fragility matching the deep sadness of this apparently true tale.

Also 'Trad. Arr.' are the 19<sup>th</sup> century Appalachian fiddle and

banjo standard 'Cluck Old Hen' (a deep dive into the American archive) and the delightful folk-blues 'I'm Going Away,' here co-credited to Nick Katzman. The set includes a trilogy of Rev. Gary Davis songs: the sprightly gospel of 'Sit Down On The Banks Of The River' is pure delight, deceptively gentle guitar play with a thoughtful vocal. In complete contrast, 'Sally, Where'd You Get Your Liquor From?' is spectacularly secular while 'Twelve Gates To The City' sees us firmly back on holy ground. Also particularly satisfying is Blind Willie McTell's 'Statesboro Blues': again, he ticks all the boxes, making delicate guitar phrasing sound easy, offering a faithful vocal veering between laid-back and assertive, all while paying constant respect to those who have gone before.

**John Bottomley**



**Candice Ivory: When The Levee Breaks – The Songs Of Memphis Minnie**

*Little Village*

Memphis Minnie - blues singer, "plays guitar like a man", strong, independent woman, feminist icon, songwriter, name appended to the four Led Zeppelin members claiming credit for the title track of this release, and inspiration for other female blues singers – was all these and more. "The Queen Of Avant Soul" Candice Ivory even references one of Minnie's publicity photos with her dress and stance on the cover of this fine set – she was herself raised in Memphis and is related to Memphis bluesman Will Roy

Sanders, the first man to record 'Cross Cut Saw', covered by Albert King.

This set marks fifty years since Minnie died and contains a dozen of her finest songs - but is no futile recreation. Candice pursues her own path here; there's plenty of percussion for a start, somewhere between Caribbean and West African sounds and what J.B. Lenoir called his "African hunch" rhythm in the '60s, and her vocals have plenty of the church in them, as on 'Crazy Crying Blues', where label mate DaShawn Hickman adds some sacred steel playing. I must mention co-producer/bassist/guitarist Charlie Hunter, who is also integral to the sound of this album. Note however that the stars of this wonderful set are the songs themselves and Candice's wonderful vocals. The arrangements are totally successful, highly individual and refreshingly ego-free: 'Pile Driving Blues' is perhaps the most conventional electric blues performance here, and the closing 'New Bumble Bee' recalls Taj Mahal's forays into reggae. Recommended.

**Norman Darwen**



**Kyla Brox: Live At Koniz Castle**

*Pigskin*

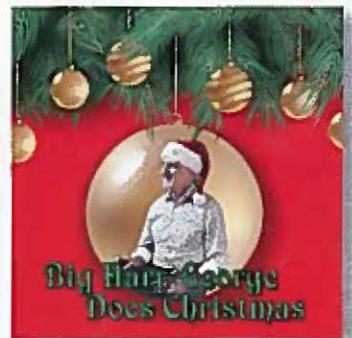
In March 2023, Kyla and her band performed in Switzerland at the Kulturhof Schloss, Koniz. The show was recorded for this, her latest album, dedicated to her father Victor Brox, the legendary British musician, recorded just

weeks after his sad passing. Joined by her excellent band of husband Danny Bromley on bass, Paul Farr on guitar and Mark Warburton on drums, Kyla is at the very peak of her form, her voice just stunning, the audience clearly loving every minute.

Her songs are every bit as special, only two covers here, including Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' and her take on Bonnie Raitt's 'I Can't Make You Love Me'. A song that expresses her love for her dad is 'Bluesman's Child' and whether she's singing a soul-searching ballad or rocking things up a bit, Kyla retains that something special in all she does. The opening 'When We're Alone', through 'Devil's Bridge', the stunning 'Pain And Glory', 'Honesty Blues', the live favourite '365', through to 'Let You Go' and 'Choose Me', everything is nigh-on perfect.

Kyla grew up in a family of music, with a father who played and sang the blues throughout his life. His daughter continues that remarkable family legacy.

**Pete Clack**



**Big Harp George: Does Christmas**

*Blues Mountain*

This isn't your usual Christmas album - all these songs are originals and although there are sleigh bells – you can hear them just before 'Reindeer On Strike' kicks in and on the greasy 'Snow Shuffle' – this set contains mainly jumping blues like 'Bad Santa' or a '50s r'n'b ballad in 'That Grinch Is Me'. There is a little bit of vintage rock