

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE

Rough News

Pointblank/Virgin, \$16.98

Harmonica wizardry, gin-soaked vocals and guitar licks mark blues survivor Charlie Musselwhite's latest, due in stores Tuesday. One of the great disciples of Chicago's Little Walter and Junior Wells, Musselwhite developed a sound and tone all his own. From an insistent Delta groove on the sun-soaked "Drifting Boy" to a churrango-driven Brazilian blues, "Feel It In Your Heart," to the starkly caustic "Rough Dried

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Woman," Musselwhite carefully decorates his inventions.

He brings these masterful abilities to a head on a trio of instrumentals. The Santo and Johnny evergreen "Sleepwalk" has a sinuously swaggering aura offset by the chromaticism of "Harlem Nocturne." The title tune, one of many originals, is a set-closing showcase. Everybody solos, including pianist Stu Blank and guitarists Fenton Robinson and Junior Watson.

Musselwhite, 53, has just begun a worldwide, six-month tour — culminating in September at the San Francisco Blues Festival. In 1966, with his assertive "Stand Back!" debut, he was the Vanguard label's swaggering answer to Elektra's Paul Butterfield. More than 30 years later, Musselwhite is still operating with the bravura of a one man band. Deep-dish blues

CD RATING GUIDE

- ★★★★★ Classic
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★ Good
- ★★ Average
- ★ Below Average

Who'da thought the blues could be so much fun? I caught the Charlie Musselwhite show at the Junkyard on Friday night and despite some very emotional harmonica playing by Charlie, I was grinning like a Cheshire cat and stompin' my feet most of the night.

The band as a whole was the star of the show; all five members (Stu Blank - keyboards; Felton Crews - bass; David Rokeach - drums; John Wedemeyer - guitar; and Charlie Musselwhite - vocals, harmonica) were skilled musicians who seemed to have a real affinity for playing together. I've rarely seen a big name star like Charlie Musselwhite step back and let the band do its thing, but he did, and this added to the show immensely. In fact, when I spoke to Charlie after the show, he told me, "There are no egos in the band; we play as a team to make good music."



The types of songs in the two-set show ranged from blues to rockabilly to a very interesting Brazilian blues style. The latter of the three really got my attention. Charlie took a moment to explain the style, and this put me in the mindset to hear something new. And new it was; I've never heard anything like it. Though the style was obviously blues, a Latin influence changed the feel of the music. It was lighter than traditional blues, but I sensed a tragic story behind the tunes.

As icing on the cake, the sound quality was outstanding. The soundman - who had to deal with repeated interruptions from a drunken, spoons playing fan - handled the variety of music and the many solos smoothly. Hats off to the men and women behind the scenes.

<http://www.theslant.com/music/articles/muss.html>

Join the chatter with JD Ashcraft

by michael
point

special to the
american-statesman

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Antone's had reached full capacity, at least as determined by the surreal standards of city fire marshals, by the time young guitar phenom **Johnny Lang** went on. He sounded pretty impressive from my distant perspective, but he'll have to wait until we're in the same place at the same time to be reviewed. I did get to see harmonica hero **Charlie Musselwhite** and it was well worth the effort. Musselwhite, backed by a sharp band featuring fleet-fingered pianist **Stu Blank**, not only blew up a storm on his harp but also did a solo segment demonstrating his guitar prowess. After opening with "Both Sides of the Fence," Musselwhite delivered a well-rounded set, complete with an intriguing example of Brazilian blues, which focused attention on his singing as much as on his legendary harmonica innovations.