



four-piece band's harmonious vocal backing and deft musicianship maximises the music's full tonal possibilities. *Forbidden Fruit* is definitely worth taking a bite.

ROBIN TROWER ROOTS AND BRANCHES

V-12 RECORDS/PLANET

When you hear guitarists like Sonny Landreth or British rock musician Robin Trower, their own uncommon sounds are instantly recognisable. Trower, who played with Procol Harum from the late '60s to the early '70s, still has that distinctive rich tone that permeated his 1974 solo release, *Bridge Of Sighs*, the album which made him famous as a power trio bandleader. The roots referred to in this new CD's title are blues classics to which Trower felt connected in heart and soul, while the branches are his own songs that pay homage to the blues genre. Trower's original material sits comfortably alongside the Big Mama Thornton favourite 'Hound Dog', BB King's signature song, 'The Thrill Is Gone', Albert King's trademark 'Born Under A Bad Sign', Willie Dixon's 'The Red Rooster', Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup's 'That's Alright Mama' and Ray Charles' 'I Believe To My Soul'. To discourage comparison with the definitive versions, each non-original song has been rearranged by Trower, whose shimmering, restrained guitar playing is articulately backed by keyboardist Luke Smith, alternate bassists Livingstone Brown and Richard Watts, drummer Chris Taggart, and on three cuts, UK harmonica wizard Paul Jones. Not renowned for his vocal talents, Trower is developing more as a lead singer. His voice sounds crisp, warm and confident singing lead on most of the songs here, the remainder rendered effortlessly by Watts.

ANDRE WILLIAMS LIFE

ALIVE NATURAL SOUND/PLANET

Andre Williams' musical career dates back to the '50s. Starting out as a shouter of greasy rhythm & blues, he's dabbled in various aspects of the music business from recording to songwriting and producing. Williams has worked with noted artists like Ike Turner and George Clinton; he's released records on Motown, Chess and a variety of independent labels, but has never achieved headline status. A second-tier performer, Williams is best known as the writer of the 1963 R&B hit for the Five Du-Tones, 'Shake A Tail Feather'. Since his resurrection a decade ago from the depths of drug and alcohol-induced despair throughout the '80s, Williams has rekindled his career, embarking on a creative and prolific

artistic phase by releasing a succession of albums that have been described as punk/blues, psychedelic soul and lo-fi R&B.

Recorded in his home town of Detroit, Michigan, with a competent local indie band, *Life* bolsters Williams' self-styled reputation as the godfather of garage blues. An over-emphasis of reverb-drenched, psychedeliattinged backing from a quartet led by producer/guitarist/multi-instrumentalist Matthew Smith - who co-wrote most of the material with Williams - does little to fortify Williams' half-spoken/half-sung, flat-sounding vocals. Case in point, check out the hard-rocking 'Shake A Tail Feather' where Williams' bass-toned voice, despite enhanced studio effects, is way out of its league - Ray Charles set a high benchmark. Something of a jive-talking Ike Turner, this senior citizen of soul might sound like he's rapidly approaching retirement, but manages to hook into some unhinged, yet gritty grooves on 'Stuck In The Middle', 'Don't Kick My Dog', and the Bo Diddley-influenced 'Beep, Beep, Beep'. The titillating 'Heels' demonstrates Williams still has a flair for the raunchy, but the unconventional waltz-timed 'Blame It On Obama' doesn't deliver on its promise.

SAVOY BROWN TRAIN TO NOWHERE

MUSIC AVENUE/PLANET

If The Rolling Stones, The Animals, Manfred Mann and The Yardbirds launched the early '60s British blues boom, Savoy Brown were at the forefront of its second wave that came in the late '60s/early '70s along with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and Fleetwood Mac. Despite a revolving door of personnel since he founded the band in 1966, guitarist Kim Simmonds has managed to keep Savoy Brown touring and recording during the intervening years, their 2012 album *Voodoo Moon* rated among the year's top blues CDs. Simmonds is one of the most mesmerising and compelling blues and boogie guitarists of his generation, often overlooked but deserving acclaim such as that afforded to Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Rory Gallagher and Mick Taylor.

Together with Simmonds' sturdy fretboard wizardry, what helped maintain the band's momentum during its flourishing years from 1969 to 1972 was a succession of lead vocalists who were among the era's most distinguished UK blues singers. Since the respective departures of Chris Youlden, Lonesome Dave Peverett and Dave Walker from the band however, there have been occasions when Savoy Brown lacked enough vocal punch to match its guitar strength. Unfortunately, this 2CD set is one such

instance. Previously released as *Raw, Live & Blue* in 2001, CD1 is a live set recorded in Denver, Colorado, in 1981, CD2 recorded in the studio the previous year. It wasn't the most artistically fruitful period for Simmonds' band, its posturing lead vocalist Ralph Morman, like several rock singers of that time, trying pathetically to emulate Robert Plant. While the studio CD consists of 11 Simmonds rock 'n' roll originals, the live one draws its material from 1969's *A Step Further* and *Blue Matter*, 1970's *Raw Sienna*, 1971's *Street Corner Talking*, and *Hellbound Train* from 1972.

PAUL GIOIA BLUE SKY

INDEPENDENT

With a background steeped in blues, jazz and gospel, Perth musician Paul Gioia has for decades been performing a unique mix of roots music from ragtime to soul in solo, duo, trio and larger band configurations, earning a solid reputation in Western Australia for his keyboard prowess on piano, organ and accordion. *Blue Sky* is his latest CD incorporating an eclectic blend of musical genres performed with passion and sensitivity. Gioia's original songs are drawn from disparate musical sources, some evoking the style of Bruce Cockburn, others never more than a stone's throw away from the blues. In the main, Gioia is accompanied by a stellar band of musicians on string bass, drums/percussion and horns that include his sons Andrew on trumpet and David on alto sax. Electric guitarist Andrew Winton adds weight to 'Heartbreaker Blues' and plays a devastating solo on the minor-key slow blues 'So Long Now'.

It's Gioia's lithe, scintillating piano though, that maintains the music's buoyancy whether played solo ('cf. Formicidae' - a piece written in memory of a departed musician friend), with brass (the New Orleans R&B influenced 'I'm On Your Side' and 'Daddy's Darlin'), or in duet with trumpet such as on the haunting jazz-tinged 'Woodlands Hymn', a piece as majestic as its inspiration - the salmon gums of Gioia's home turf. Backing vocals shared between Kris Kingwell and Chelsea Gibson are exquisite, Kingwell performing an elegant lead jazz vocal on 'From Now On' and Gibson singing duet with Gioia on the soulful 'Bridge Across A Canyon'. On the African grooves of 'Joined At The Hip' and the gospel-charged 'Sail On', Gioia's tough-toned voice is complemented by the supple harmonies of six-piece a capella group Iris. Gioia's music is as expansive as the sky, each tune following its own voice, leading the listener to lots of interesting places. **R**