

TORONZO CANNON: Leaving Mood
Delmark Records DE817 (60:17)

She Loved Me/ Chico's Song/ Come On/ I Believe/ Hard Luck/ Open Letter To Whom It May Concern/ I Can't Take Her Nowhere/ Leaving Mood/ She's Too Much/ You're A Good Woman/ Earnestine/ Do I Move You?/ Baby Girl/ Not Gonna Worry

Delmark Records really are at the cutting edge of recording new, young Chicago blues talent these days; this CD by Chicago singer, guitarist and songwriter Toronzo Cannon is absolutely terrific and all who had a hand in creating the release should be proud of themselves. Toronzo has steadily been building a considerable reputation for himself on the very competitive Chicago blues scene over the past few years, playing the myriad of blues clubs within the city and putting out some impressive CDs on his own label.

This CD finds him in stunning form. His songwriting is excellent and you should pay close attention to the lyrics after you have initially gotten past the rhythms of the songs and his tremendous guitar work. The first few bars of the opening number 'She Loved Me' had me checking the CD cover to make sure I wasn't listening to a Hound Dog Taylor, mid-tempo, raw-sounding boogie blues. This number is tough-sounding Chicago blues at its finest with equally tough-sounding lyrics. His lady has taken a sizeable prison sentence on his behalf, after she steps forward to take the rap for him shooting dead her brutal husband. His lyrical creativity shines once more on the next track 'Chico's Blues' which is a very fine tribute to the highly respected Chicago guitarist Chico Banks who sadly died at a young age of 47 in December 2008. More fine lyrics are heard on 'Open Letter To Whom It May Concern', which has some barbed messages to unnamed blues musicians on the competitive Chicago blues scene, who hustle and back stab each other for the next paying gig.

There are more cutting and intelligent lyrics heard on the grinding mid-paced blues 'Leaving Mood', which features a moody guitar piece from the man. The theme is on a manipulative relationship gone oh so wrong, and there is murder in the air on this menacing-sounding tale. It's not all serious stuff, as the humorous tale on 'I Can't Take Her Nowhere' shows. His lady likes a drink or two and when under the influence makes an embarrassing fool of herself. Listening to this stuff one is left with the impression of this being highly creative and intelligent music.

Toronzo shows off his guitar prowess on the intense 'Hard Luck', a tale of bad fortune, which also features blistering, goosebump-raising guitar work from guest Carl Weathersby. This highlights the quality of musicians Toronzo has been able to attract to this release. Roosevelt Purifoy, one of the master keyboard men from Chicago features throughout, Larry Williams is on bass, Marty Binder plays drums and Mathew Skoller guests on harmonica on three numbers. Further guest and friend of Toronzo, Mike Wheeler, who is another young hot shot guitarist and artist making waves for himself in Chicago, wrote the last track 'Not Gonna Worry' and features on this dreamy-sounding blues that has another terrific guitar solo that will gain your immediate attention. 'Earnestine' has been recorded in the past by Toronzo and was a highlight of his 2006 self-released 'My Woman' CD. This time around it's given a funkier workout and features more brilliant guitar work from Carl Weathersby. To show off this artist's versatility, he comes forth with a cracking version of the brooding Nina Simone penned 'Do I Move You?'

Without sounding like I'm going over the top with praise, this release is terrific and top heavy with superb musicianship and quality material and is worthy of any blues lover's attention. It also highlights the cream of the next generation of blues musicians starting to make their names on the Chicago blues scene. How about another 'The New Bluebloods: The New Generation Of Chicago Blues' compilation, anybody?

Mike Stephenson

