# THE EP CORNER

**Blue Nation: Wisdom For Pennies (EP)**
*Box Set Records*

This eagerly awaited EP is the first new music recorded by Blue Nation since the release of 2024's ***The Ordinary People***, an album that hugely increased both their fanbase and critical acclaim. The Birmingham trio have toured heavily since then won Emerging Artist at the 2025 UK Blues Awards and were nominated for Best Band in 2026, leaving many curious as to where they'd take their music next.

Fortunately the answer is onwards and upwards, with continuity in the muscular riffs, emotional directness and melodic swagger. But there's also development: this EP has more authority, more bite, more layers. Luke Weston's bass runs wild, perfectly complementing Neil Murdoch's guitar work, all the choruses breathe, Nick Sharman's drums rattle the foundations, and it magically bottles that wonderful live energy. Four gleaming jewels of tracks over just twelve minutes, yet satisfying more than some bands manage over lengthy albums. The upbeat 'Comfort' has lyrics that The Beatles would have been proud of, giving way to the first single 'Watch Me Fly', which has an urgency that takes the listener on quite a journey. 'Wisdom For Pennies' is a song that hits hard at first listen, with a riff that comes from the bloodline of 'Hand Me Down', the heavyweight matching the profound lyrics perfectly. 'Tired of Waiting' ends proceedings on a wistful note with a theme that many will empathise with. ***Wisdom for Pennies*** is edgy, vulnerable and honest, a perfect showing from a band who pour their heart and soul into their art.

**Liz Medhurst**

**Oli Mac and Hi Rhythm: You Got To Call Me (EP)**
*APM*

Oli Mac, aka Mississippi MacDonald, flew to Memphis, joining up with Hi Rhythm for a studio session under the ears and eyes of producer Boo Mitchell. Oli's songs were soon in the bag, a 3-trackEP, opening with 'You Got To Call Me', very much the A-side, a full-on funky blues with Mac impassioned, swaggering, slipping easily into the groove. Lovely guitar leads, a throbbing rhythm and a backwash of brass, reminiscent of Stax. I reckon I'd get 'number unrecognised' if I dialled those digits! Like all good EP's, you have to have balance, a worthy B-side, and here we have 'Sad Songs (Will Kill You Everytime)'. There's beautiful honeyed guitar as the horns breathe deeply and organ swirls underneath. 'Waiting For My Star To Shine' stays in the soul groove as deep sax puffs away and his guitar sweetly fills the air. Oli Mac has touched base alongside the Mississippi, and this is a superb little EP, "old school" insomuch as it's just three songs, I'll be looking for the 7" vinyl.

**Graham Munn**

**Climax Blues Band: Evolution (EP)**
*Own Label*

It's been fifty years since the Climax Blues Band enjoyed a massive radio hit with 'Couldn't Get It Right' and so the present incarnation of the band has released a commemorative 5-track EP to mark the occasion. This CD also sees something of a new direction musically. Vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Scott Ralph, who joined the band in 2023, gives things a much more jazz-tinged feel with a hint of polished funk and blue-eyed soul, reminiscent of Average White Band, while guitarist Dan Machin's playing is light, understated, but beautifully adept.

Ruby Turner guests on 'Couldn't Get It Right' contributing a powerful gospel backing: not a rehash or a faithful rendition, but an inventive reinterpretation and the difference between Colin Cooper's gravel voice on the original and Ralph's smooth, soul-drenched vocals in 2026 make it all the more intriguing. 'Facing My Fear' is a feel-good, slow-burning groove and 'Brand New Toy' is a stand-out track for this listener. This rock is still rolling. Here's to another fifty years.

**Robert Forsyth**

**The Blind Dog Mayer Group: From The Shadow Of The Castle (Live Studio Session EP)**
*Blues Note*

This 6-tracker is the debut set from this German blues-rock quartet. That last word is important as singer/harmonica player Florian "Blind Dog" Mayer is already well-respected in Europe for his live shows, solo recordings and appearances with other groups. With Mayer as leader, Dirk Lenz on guitar, Michael Jung on bass and drummer Marco Schmieden, this is a classic blues band line-up. The influence of ZZ Top is evident in the power chord-driven rhythm of 'Anthem Of The Lost Sock' - excellent slide guitar too. 'Call Me Blind Dog' is a fine introduction to the man, a mid-tempo number with a twisting, turning rhythm. 'Harley Rider' has a strong vocal and echoes of Will Wilde in the tough harp blowing, while the vocal on 'That's What I Saw' is a little akin to latter-day Bob Dylan, with ethereal blues harp as the track builds. 'Moonshine Gasoline' and the closing 'Shiny Curly Red Hair' are remakes of older tracks: the former, a catchy blues-boogie, was Mayer's debut single under his own name from 2020, the latter a track he sang with Stompin' Heat in 2019, is another slab of muscular blues-rock, with a touch of Alvin Lee in the guitar break.

**Norman Darwen**

**Lance And Lea: Blues For Breakfast (EP)**
*Own Label*

When LeAnna (Lea) Kaufman, a product of an Amish upbringing singing country and gospel hymns in church, crossed paths with Lance Kotara, a rock musician fresh from the grit of the Texas club scene, at a Nashville songwriters session, the duo Lance And Lea was born. The result is a sound that reflects their origins, rooted in old-school country and blues influences. Their debut album, ***There Goes My Heart*** came out in late 2018 and was aimed at the country market, whereas this 5-track EP tips its wide-brimmed hat squarely at the blues. The opening title track and 'Blues Man' are hard-rocking, full band workouts, 'Let It Burn' is a standout, the guitar and B3 duelling in style. 'True To These Roots' is an auto-biographical tale, another fine track. The arrangements and production (Evan Sieling) are, as you'd expect, top drawer and Kotara is a fine player. The vocal duet 'Salt & Pepper' lays it on a bit thick, but I'll go with it.

**Leon Blanc**

**Danny Garwood & Company: 50/Fifty (EP)**
*Own Label*

Teenage singer and guitarist Danny Garwood began playing at eight years old, drawing inspiration from Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Jeff Healey and SRV, with a little mentoring from Bob Margolin. He's gone on to work with Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Ally Venable, Buddy Guy and the UK's own Emma Wilson, among others. On this 5-track EP, he demonstrates a muscular approach to the blues, with the tough, gritty opener, and '387 Delta' about playing the blues in Clarksdale that recalls Freddy King's 'Going Down' in the guitar work. The pace slows for an impassioned version of Fenton Robinson's 'As The Years Go Passing By', a surprising choice but Garwood pulls it off. 'Up Your Sleeve' is a powerful, blues-rocking shuffle and this fine release closes with a powerhouse cover of Buddy Miles' 'Them Changes', Danny keeping the famed riff and Hendrix-inspired guitar licks - his vocal is also spot on.

**Norman Darwen**

**J.P. Reali: Grateful Blues (EP)**
*Own Label*

Do you remember, in the lyrics of 'Boys Of Summer', Don Henley spots a "Dead Head" sticker on a Cadillac? A teenage J.P. Reali had a similar experience when he clocked a Dead bumper sticker in a Long Island record store, and now, over forty years later, Newark's veteran bluesman offers up this six song EP by way of tribute to the iconic, enduring ensemble.

'Easy Wind' (from 1970's ***Workingman's Dead***) is given a bar band treatment, before 'Loose Lucy', um, loosens us up in classic Dead style, the piano turning tricks around J.P's vocal. A track occasionally played live by Dylan,1987's 'West L.A. Fadeaway' has Hunter's lyrics detailing the seamy underside of Los Angeles (with apparent references to the death of John Belushi) - Reali's guitar work here is superb. Bob Weir's 'I Need A Miracle' adopts a Texas shuffle and Reali tags a tease of 'Bertha' onto the fadeout. The dark, multi-layered 'Mr. Charlie' showcases bottleneck slide, before the band turn Jerry Garcia's 'Tennessee Jed' into something akin to Piedmont blues. You like the Dead? You'll dig this.

**Leon Blanc**