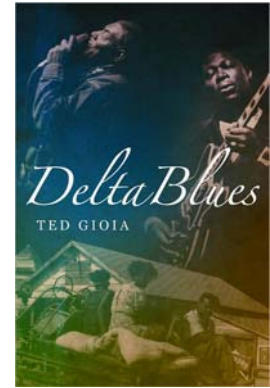


Keeping The Faith by Mark T. Gould

I've been reading, actually re-reading and, in turn, being re-mesmerized by, author Ted Gioia's monumental, indispensable blues history, "Delta Blues," a truly classical work that casts the profound eye of both devotee and scholar on the origins of this all-so-genuine American music from the soil, plantations and prisons of the deep South to its migration north and its subsequent revival to a truly deserved place as the ultimate American roots music.



As a longtime blues fan, I am engrossed, yet again for the third time through this wondrous tome, on Gioia's meticulous research and writing about the early country acoustic blues artists who paved the way for the later popularity of the music, but whom, for many, were lost in their time.

Surely, any blues fan knows the names Robert Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charley Patton, Son House, Skip James as well as other influential artists of the genre, but the glory of this book is Gioia's written history of the comparatively little-known achievements of lesser known, but, as the author offers ample evidence, equally important blues artists like Tommy Johnson, Willie Brown, Geeshie Wiley, and others, whose contributions might, without Gioia's devoted scholarship, be lost to the ages.

As such, it is bittersweet to read about all these great bluesmen and women, the famous and the not-so, for whom their names, their legacy, and, most tragically, their music, is all but an extinct footnote, so appallingly and terribly left in the past, with seemingly no one to continue its level of influence and import in the vanguard of American popular music.

That, for one, depresses me greatly.



Photo: Eric Fieldstadt

But, then, all is not forsaken. If you think rural country blues is a lost, or worse, forgotten, art, better relegated to museums and other dusty institutions, let me introduce you to bluesman/performer extraordinaire Toby Walker.

Channeling all the greats, be it House, James, Robert Johnson, whomever, and, yet, making it all sound so current, fresh, original, and just about damn perfect, Walker is the epitome of a bluesman. A great, and I mean great, acoustic guitar player; a superb, emotional singer of unquestionable depth and fortitude; and a hilarious yet righteous performer who demands attention, all of his collective greatness can be found in "Lost & Found," a recently released collection of some of his best performances at a myriad of locales over the years.

And, that may be the reason that this collection is so remarkable. Just about anything works close to perfection in Walker's hands, but the fact that these songs were never recorded for a specific commercial release at the time of their performances lends an authenticity, relaxation and a genuineness that, while typifying all of Walker's work, makes all the parts of "Lost & Found" truly a greater sum than the whole.

And what parts they are. Several of the songs, including the absolute picker's delight, "Toby's Boogie Woogie;" the hysterically metaphorical "Baseball Blues," and the right out of the ditch "Sadie Green" show the magnificent breadth and depth of Walker's playing and, perhaps

more crucially, his understanding of these blues. And, while Walker's original compositions are gems in themselves, he, much like the author Gioia, reaches back through the history of this incredible music for some breathtaking nuggets, covering Charlie Patton's "Bird Nest Bound," Booker T. Washington's "Jitterbug Swing," Willie Dixon's "Spoonful," and Big Bill Broonzy's "I Want My Hands On It."

If you're a blues fan, and you've, well, got the blues about the continued popularity, or lack thereof, of this music, check out Toby Walker, and he'll take your blues away, by playing them better than just about anyone out there today.

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These folks must agree as they have hired Toby:

FESTIVALS

Dogwood Music Festival, GA
Gathering of the Slides, NY
Long Beach Jazz and Heritage Festival, NY
Old Songs Festival, NY
Port Jefferson Maritime Festival, NY
Riverhead Blues Festival, NY
Rhythm and Blues Festival, NY
Columbus Trad. Blues Festival, OH
Musikfest, PA
Philadelphia Folk Festival, PA
Spring Gulch Festival, PA
Howlin' Wolf Tribute Concert, TN
W.C. Handy Blues Festival, TN
Summerfolk, Owen Sound, Canada
Atlin Arts & Music Festival, BC, Canada

CLUBS/CONCERT SERIES

Sounds Of The World Concert Series, CT
Roots Music Coffeehouse, CT
Amazing Things Art Center, MA
BlackRock Center for the Arts, MD
Cellar Stage, MD
Second Story Live, MD
Down East Folk Arts, NC
Acoustic Café, NJ
Hurdy Gurdy Folk Club, NJ
Minstrel Show, NJ
Outpost in the Burbs, NJ

B.B. King's, NY
The Bottom Line, NY
Boulton Center for the Arts, NY
Caffe Lena, NY
Cornell Folk Song Society, NY
Hecsher Park Concert Series, NY
Huntington Folk Music Soc. Concerts, NY
Inter-media Arts Centre, NY
Lewis Cty. Historical Society, NY
Madison Square Park Series, NY
Ontario Center for the Perf. Arts, NY
Stephen Talkhouse, NY
Towne Crier, NY
Turning Point, NY
Fur Peace Ranch, OH
Acoustic Brew, PA
Godfrey Daniels, PA
Lansdowne Folk Club, PA
Longwood Gardens, PA
Poconotes Concerts, PA
Sellersville Theatre, PA
The Peabody Hotel, Memphis, TN
Woody Hawley Concerts, WV

Europe

The Spitz - London England
The Crossroads Cafe - Antwerp Belgium
Beauvais Blues Festival - France

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