

# Reviews



**"Blues You Can Use"**  
Bobby Bland  
Malaco Records  
★★½

The recording career of Bobby "Blue" Bland is one that began in the early 1960s, when he recorded for Houston's Duke Records. Since that time, Bland has recorded some of the finest rhythm and blues of all time. His combination of blues and soul has made him one of the most popular blues singers ever.

Unfortunately, "Blues You Can Use" is not one of Bland's better recordings. Some of the songs are so heavily orchestrated with string sections that Bland begins to sound like the Perry Como of blues.

The use of stringed instruments is not a practice normally associated with blues, but Malaco Records has used them in a way that is interesting, enjoyable and gives the label's recordings a sound all their own. But here, the strings tend to dominate, rather than add to, the sound.

Ballads like "Spending My Life With You" and "Our First Blues Song" suffer from this orchestrated, "wall of sound" production. Perhaps "Our First Blues Song" could be more appropriately titled "Our First Wimpy Pop Song."

"There's No Easy Way to Say Goodbye" also suffers from the muddled production. "Let's Part as Friends" could have been a good song. The guitar part on the song is excellent but here, again, production undermines the effort.

However, "Blues You Can Use" is not without its bright spots. "24 Hours a Day" is easily the album's best song. Skillful guitar work, a strong rhythm section and upbeat horn backing by the Muscle Shoals Horns combine with Bland's soulful vocals to make a lively piece of rhythm and blues.

"I've Got a Problem" is the

record's best ballad. The song features soulful guitar and horns as Bland sings of being caught in a 3-way love affair. Also, the string section is kept more in the background. In this way, the song is undoubtedly a rhythm and blues song, but the strings add an extra touch to it.

"Restless Feelings" is a good song as well, featuring a jazzy horn section and a great flute solo by Cybil Cheesman.

These three bright spots however, make up only one-third of the record. The remainder of "Blues You Can Use" could be easily mistaken for a muddled foray into middle-of-the-road pop music.

Bland's vocals are quite exceptional, and few blues singers today can do a ballad as well as he can, but admittedly his vocals lack the strength of his early days on classic recordings like "Two Steps From the Blues" and "St. James' Infirmary." His vocals are good throughout the record, but unfortunately the heavily orchestrated production weakens what could have been a good record.

Malaco is a good record company, and Bland is a good singer, but this record is not. There are a few good songs, but for some really great

material by this talented singer, pick up a copy of "Two Steps From the Blues" or "Call On Me" and skip this effort.  
*Review by Shane Hall*

**Two Against One**  
Ken Gleason, vocals; Richard Fuegler, guitar; Debbie Quackenbush, guitar, saxophone, harmonica; Chuck Keith, bass, guitar; Alexei Wolfe, keyboards; Lane Boozer, drums  
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The Cow Hop Expansion played host Friday night to the club debut of College Station's own Two Against One. The band has only been together for a few months, and has mostly played at fraternity parties.

Despite the fact that this was its first club performance, the band put on a better-than-average show mixing original material with music ranging from the Rolling Stones to R.E.M.

The band made an impressive opening with their version of the Romantics' "What I Like About You." Gleason demonstrated good vocal ability, while the other members proved to be fairly talented musicians. A short harmonica solo by rhythm guitar player Debbie Quackenbush was especially enjoyable.

"Satisfaction" was another highlight of the band's first set, as was the Kingsmen's "Louie, Louie." Though "Louie, Louie" has been done and redone, hashed and rehashed by numerous musicians over the past two decades, Two Against One's version of this moldy oldie was energetic and entertaining.

The first set also included two R.E.M. covers. "It's the End of the World As We Know

It (And I Feel Fine)" was well-played, but "The Finest Worksong" did not seem to work as well.

The band's second set was their best. After opening with an original song that featured strong rhythm work by Keith and Boozer, Gleason launched into his best Jim Morrison as Fuegler started playing the opening chords of "Gloria." At this point, the audience seemed to be enjoying themselves as the dance floor was packed almost instantly.

Reggae found its way into the show as the band covered the Troggs' "Wild Thing." Adding reggae rhythms and a danceable beat, Two Against One's version of this garage rock classic was original but, most of all, impressive.

The band was able to keep the crowd moving the remainder of the night with a version of the Champs' "Tequila," and an especially impressive version of the Call's hit "Everywhere I Go."

The third set was the only low point of the night. Aside from an excellent cover of the Clash's "Should I Stay or Should I Go," the third set consisted mostly of songs the band had already done in the first two sets. This indicated a need to work up some more material.

But, looking on the bright side, Gleason is a talented vocalist, and all the bandmembers are talented musicians. They also give energetic performances which the audience seems to enjoy, and they seem to enjoy performing. All in all, Two Against One is good for a band that has only been together four months. The band just needs to work on their versions of some songs and add to their repertoire.

*Review by Shane Hall*

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