

## Women stake claim in rhythm 'n' blues

Cowboy Junkies, Antone's Women releases tackle female issues in rock's roots

By Rob Newberry  
The Battalion

Cowboy Junkies  
"Black Eyed Man"  
RCA

Antone's Women  
"Bringing You the Best in Blues"  
Antone's

Rock 'n' roll music has often tried to bring important issues out into the spotlight. But it isn't so often that rock focuses on women's issues. On two new releases, Cowboy Junkies' "Black Eyed Man" and Antone's Women "Bringing You the Best in Blues," some of the best female performers put women's issues back on the agenda in two of rock's greatest influences, folk and blues.

With their second album, "The Trinity Session," the Cowboy Junkies established themselves as a band that knew how to do justice to their many influences. That

album capitalized on Margo Timmins' haunting voice with covers from a diversity of artists, from Hank Williams to Lou Reed. On "The Cautious Horses," Timmins' voice was just as blue, but the collection utilized more of brother Michael's songwriting skills. Songs like "Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning" brought to life the feelings of a woman with the strength to end a sour love affair.

"Black Eyed Man" continues along the same lines, but the partnership between Michael and Margo matures beyond all expectations set by the earlier works. While Michael claims to write the songs for his sister's voice, it's amazing that his songs (he writes all the material himself) seem to capture her feelings as well. Part of that is due to Margo's skill at diving into the emotions of the song, but Michael's lyrics and melodies seem to make the performance an easier task.

"A Horse in the Country"

stands out from the other songs, as far as women's issues go, with its strict adherence to a familiar theme in women's literature - the problems women face when society makes all their choices for them. Throughout the song, Timmins tells the story of a woman who married too young, like all her friends except for Cathy ("she bought one-way subway ticket and left us all behind"). Life loses its value as the days of a life she didn't choose drag on - her only escape comes every other week, when she gets to visit her horse in the country, and experience control of her life as she rides through the countryside.

Next, Timmins questions the roles of men and women, not in society this time, but in love affairs. In "If You Were the Woman and I Was the Man," she twists romantic roles around, and after asking the title question, continues "Would I send you yellow roses, would I dare to kiss your hand?" Folk great John Prine provides the male side of the twist, with both realizing in the end that the important thing in a relationship has little to do with male and female roles, but in the ability of both to give up themselves.

The album isn't entirely devoted to women's issues, nor is the lyrical content the only good thing on the disc. Timmins' narrative style shows more depth and thought, as tunes like "Oregon Hill" and "Black Eyed Man" sound more like short stories than songs. The bluesy, folksy style is intact, with several improvements. "If You Were the Woman..." grooves along with a jazzy chord structure, ending unexpectedly in a soothing clarinet solo. On "Murder, Tonight, in the Trailer Park," Margo's voice comes across as strong as it ever has, as she wails through the chorus at the end of the song. The rhythmic acoustic guitar makes "A Horse in the Country" move, but the piano accompaniment makes the song moving (not to forget the lyrics).

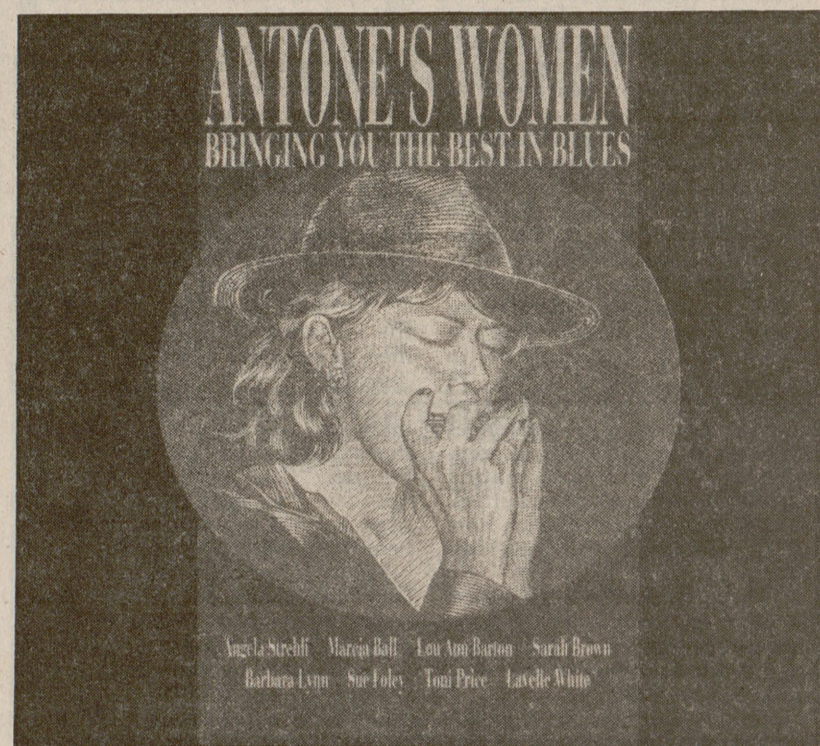
The album closes with folk-

blues master Townes Van Zandt's "To Live is To Fly" (one of his two contributions to the album). This number in a lot of ways sums up the feelings built up through Timmins' narrative realism. Many of the songs don't offer a lot of hope, but Van Zandt reminds us of the beauty in simply experiencing as much as life has to offer.

Antone's Women "Bringing You the Best in Blues" is quite a different treat. On this CD-only release, Austin's first-name-in-blues label, Antone's, collects a sampling of some of the label's finest female talent. And while the issues are a little different than the Junkies', they're still there - most of the difference can be attributed to the differences in the styles; blues often lends itself to different topics than folk.

"Dreams Come True," the 1990 collaboration of Angela Strehli, Lou Ann Barton and Marcia Ball, brought these three Texas blues women a lot of recognition, even though they all had been making great music for a while. Included on the sampler is "Something's Got Ahold On Me" from that effort, plus "Hurtback," an unreleased collaboration of Strehli, Barton and Ball with Sarah Brown. In addition, the disc samples some of the best songs off each performer's solo efforts, as well as previously unreleased material.

Included with these proven names is newcomer Sue Foley, with three songs from her upcoming release, "Young Girl Blues." "Queen Bee" rocks with some of the best distortion-laden guitar licks on the record, and "Cuban Getaway" is an instrumental jam with some nifty guitar and piano riffs set against an island melody. Her collaboration with Strehli, "But I Forgive You," pokes a little fun at women who continue to take abuse in relationships, hoping to inspire them to get tough. "You put poison in my whiskey, poison in my bread. You had the nerve to tell me, you wish that I was dead... But I forgive you, be-



Angela Strehli Marcia Ball Lou Ann Barton Sarah Brown  
Barbara Lynn Sue Foley Toni Price Lavelle White

cause I love you." The piano rhythm helps the sarcasm come across, making the whole thing kind of funny.

Also on the album is Toni Price, another young artist. One of her contributions, "Twelve Bar Blues" is another humorous number on the disc. She takes the name of her music's genre and turns it into a healing pastime - after being mistreated by her lover, she's ready to do some drinkin': "Twelve bars, twelve drinks, twelve stools where I can sit and think." Her other song, "Richest One," features nifty guitar work, credited on the back cover to David Grissom, the guitar master behind John Mellencamp's new sound (in addition to the rocking sound he gave to Joe Ely).

Traditionally, the blues draws on the rich history of black music, and Antone's didn't leave out a couple of great black women musicians. Barbara Lynn and Lavelle White have both been around for a while; Lynn's first work came out in the sixties, while White began wailing the blues in Houston in the mid '50s. Their experience shows on their two contributions; in fact, their songs come across

with more emotion and sass than any of the others. In "I'm a Good Woman," Lynn states her case concisely, and demands to be treated better by her man. With "Wrapping Up Our Love," White takes it a step further, taking a stand by leaving the man who's taking her for granted.

In a lot of ways, the Brown-Strehli-Barton-Ball number "Hurtback" sums up the sassy lessons taught by these blues women. "When you lose your first lover, you sometimes easily bruise. Find yourself waitin' on another, just to suffer the same abuse." From there, the ladies describe how they've learned to retaliate, with "a nasty little turn of tongue," or "just a scratch, a little sting."

So watch out. With these two releases, women rockers have taken a firm stance and taken a stronghold in rock music. If you want a collection of sad folk songs, passionately delivered, try the Cowboy Junkies' "Black Eyed Man." If you're looking for a collection of some of the finest blues talent, and a lot of sass from Antone's toughest women, get "Bringing You the Best in Blues."



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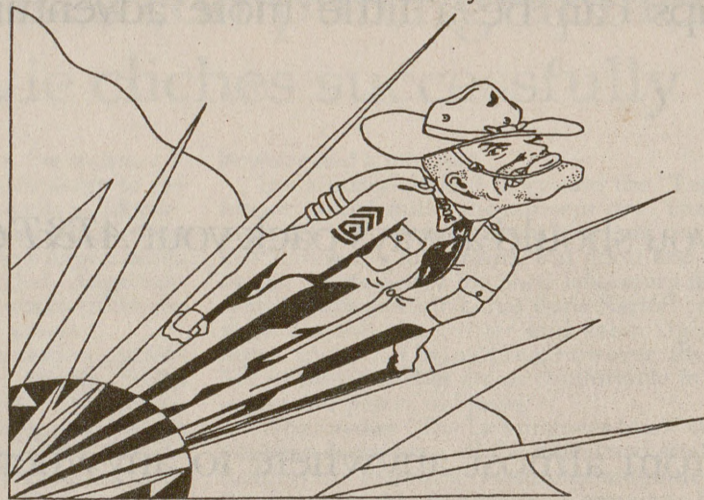
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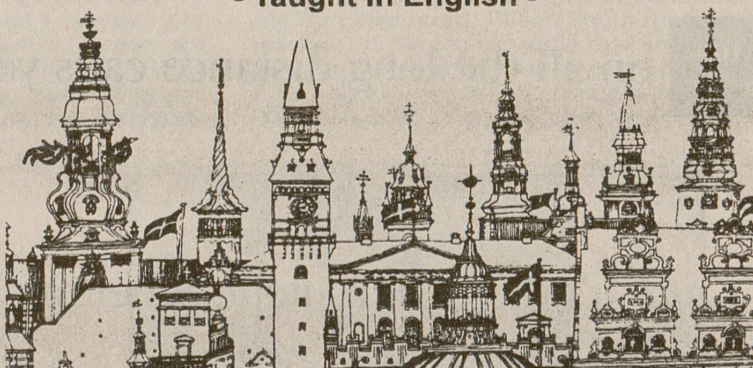


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