

BUDDY

THE ORIGINAL TEXAS MUSIC MAGAZINE
JANUARY 2013
VOLUME XXXX, NUMBER 7

Thirty years in the making

Smokin' Joe Kubek's solo CD *Let That Right Hand Go* released on Bird Records

By Tom Geddie

SMOKIN' JOE KUBEK WAS SO BUSY IN 2012 that he hopes to rest a bit during the first part of 2013 — after he takes care of a little more business.

With longtime music partner Bnois King, Kubek released an all-acoustic CD, *Close to the Bone*, on the Delta Groove label with guest artists Big Pete, Shawn Pittman, Kirk Fletcher, Randy Chortkoff, Bob Corritore, Hollywood Blue Flames keyboard man Fred Kaplan, former Red Devils guitarist Paul Size, and others.

Then Kubek finally released a project that's been almost 30 years in the making — predating the partnership with King — on Clint Birdwell's Bird Records. *Let That Right Hand Go* features older works by Kubek with Doyle Bramhall Sr., Keith Ferguson, Guthrie Kennard, Darrell Nulisch, Marc Benno, Bruce Bolin, Benita Aterberry, Lou "Laser" Bovis, Al "TNT" Braggs, Mark Hickman, and Charley Wirz.

Then Kubek went on a 20-city, 26-show taking his brand of Texas blues — louder, more guitar oriented — to, of all unexpected, perhaps, places, Turkey. Istanbul, Ankara, and other cities where, one might think, the blues are, at most, a sort of afterthought — a notion he was quick to dispel.

"It was probably the most enjoyable tour I've ever done, very well put together and mostly sold-out shows," he said. "It was amazing. First class. Everything was so plush and professional, and the crowds were so electric."

Before he left, he finished off and released *Let That Right Hand Go*, a project that sat for far too long.

The album, produced by Birdwell and Kubek, is, in a way, a Dallas history of the blues. The nine songs include classics by Chester Burnett (Howlin' Wolf), Hound Dog Taylor, Squeeze Difford, Jimmie Rodgers and Jimmy Reed, Bruce Bolin and Freddie King plus two by Bramhall and one by Kubek plus a Kubek co-write with Bolin.

The title came from what Wirz, who founded and ran Dallas music mainstay, Charley's Guitar Shop. "Let that right hand go" was a phrase Wirz often shouted when he was enthralled by a guitar player.

"We've been talking about releasing it since 1984, when we started it. Clint is responsible for getting it out. We had all this canned, and thought it would be sacrilegious to leave it sitting. So

many different cats are there and we knew it need to be out on a disc so we decided now was the time — before we get too old," he said, laughing. "Clint finally got it out. I'm proud of him for doing a good job on the mastering and packaging.

"To me, it stands up even though it's been many years ago. There's a special fire to it. It's got a mojo to it, and needed to be out."

The songs were recorded in a number of studios over the years, and each has its own feel although all of them fit together well on the album.

"If I've heard the song before,

try to play the song. Nobody can really copy anything that well. I never was good at copying anything.

I just play it the way I feel it, and everybody else on the album did the same thing. That's how it was put together from the get go. There are definitely elements in the songs we kept, but we did them the way we thought we should do them."

Bramhall's "The Other Side of Love," for example, grew out of an Albert Collins song, "Dying Flu."

"It was slow blues, and back then we wanted something a little more radio friendly since we were cutting 45s. Blues was a little harder back then to push to radio, and we wanted catchier title. We talked Doyle into breaking out one of his songs, and recutting the vocals on it."

"Tempted" has an almost gospel feel to it.

"Jon Dillon was with 92.5 KZEW back in the mid 1980s and we were kicking around some ideas," Kubek said. "He presented that idea to myself and Doyle Bramhall, and we said, hey let's try it."

The earlier 2012 release, *Close to the Bone*, is basically "unplugged," filled with mostly original songs played mostly on acoustic instruments rather than Kubek's usual Stratocaster.

With more than a dozen major album releases, the Irving-raised Kubek played guitar with Freddie King when he was a teenager.

Two of the first songs he ever recorded were "Driving Sideways" and "The Other Side of Love" back in 1985 as 45 rpm singles; both reappear on *Let That*

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vision on February 9, 1964, and watched the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show.

The screaming teenage girls impressed him, but the scream-

caught my ear. Even when I was young, the stuff I was listening to was Jeff Beck and Cream and Jimi Hendrix."

"It was the blues cuts on those albums that caught my ears. If you listen to Cream's 'Strange Brew,' it's almost verbatim to the solo of Albert King's 'Crosscut Saw.' Jeff Beck's 'I Ain't Superstitious,' it says Howling Wolf on the back cover.

And I noticed Chester Burnett on some of the Cream albums, and I found out that was Howling Wolf.

"What I started doing was growing into what they were listening to, where they were getting their stuff. There's always been something about that that grabbed my ear, I didn't know exactly what it was in the beginning, but there's always been some kind of magic about a good, driving shuffle that really turned me on — the way it felt when I heard it."

From January 20-27, he and Bnois King will be part of the already sold out *Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise* that makes its way from Fort Lauderdale to Tortola, St. Kitts, Half Moon Cay, and back again. Other guests include Taj Mahal, Elvin Bishop, Mavis Staples, Big Head Todd, Tab Benoit, Rod Piazza, Kelley Hunt, Otis Taylor, Ray Bonneville, Kenny Wayne, Debbie Davies, and more.

After the cruise, Kubek plans to take just a little time off before going back on the road — he still does as many as a couple of hundred gigs a year — in March.

He and King, who were nominated as contemporary blues band of the year in 2011, also plan to begin recording a new CD in May or so, which they hope to release before the end of 2013. ■



He was named a *Buddy Texas Tornado* guitarist in 1985: Smokin' Joe Kubek

I want to hear it different eventually," Kubek said. "We just did them the way we felt like doing them Like Hound Dog Taylor's 'She's Gone,' we kinda lifed it up. Basically, everybody that's performing, all you've got to do is

The instrumental "King's Thing" is a prime example.

"It has Freddie King's DNA on it. It's an old Magic Sam type of riff that Freddie had taken, then I took it from Freddie and rocked it."

Right Hand Go. He didn't release his first full-length album, *Steppin' Out Texas Style*, until 1991.

As a kid, Joe Kubek was one of 72 million people who sat in front of a black-and-white tele-

ing sound of the electric guitar really got to Kubek, who's known as "Smokin' Joe."

"I was attached to the sound of the electric guitar from the beginning," Kubek said recently. "It's always been something that