

Richard Townend

BLUES IN BRITAIN ARTICLE

Sept 2013

Richard Townend is a prolific, classy and gifted songwriter and is probably one of the best-kept secrets in songwriting circles. He started as a professional musician many years ago after studying guitar at Leeds College of Music under the guidance of swing master Eric Kershaw, followed by the superb jazz guitarist, Adrian Ingram. He also studied orchestration and functional harmony; there are not many gigging musicians who can say they can orchestrate!!

On leaving college he played for a variety of stars of the time including Tony Christie, Ronnie Corbett, Dana and The Platters, not exactly rock n roll, but none the less a good experience and an appreciated living wage was earned. He moved to London and continued this roll, touring with theatre shows and doing sessions as and when needed. Over-time the work became less enthralling, more humdrum and so a life change was on the cards. After many failed original band start ups and a decidedly lack of musical direction he quit being a full time musician He became 'respectable' taking on a day job. This left him the evenings free, time to enjoy his music again, not only doing this as a performer but he also organized 3 West End music venues for new original bands. He depped in bands and even played in a Police Tribute act, The Fraud Squad, I am assured he still has the Handy Strummer blonde wig in the loft. He eventually moved from London to the picturesque town of Maldon in Essex, where he laid his guitar to rest, weary from the lack of tangible progress and the effort being input never quite equalizing the enjoyment output.

Roll on 10 years and then inspiration, the newly set up jam session at the Bewicks in Maldon Essex, wetted his appetite. He got his guitars out of hock and joined the musicians on stage; the enthusiasm was re-kindled. He formed the Boss cats – a Texas blues trio - later to morph into the Mighty Boss Cats with the addition of Terry Hiscock, former successful band member of 70's band, Hunter Muskett, who just so happened to live relatively close and eagerly responded to Richards internet plea.

After odd gigs here and there and with encouragement from people who enjoyed the music, Richard had a change in mindset and so, two and half years ago, he started his mission of recording and writing again. 150 songs, 6 albums, 50 videos later he is about to release the next sol album as well as working on 1 other acoustic album projects. But what of the music?

He plays a variety of nationals, acoustics, electrics, bass, piano, banjo, trumpet and his music tiptoes through many a genre. First and foremost he is a damn fine guitar player and musician who writes great songs. It's not traditional blues but a boiling pot of many styles thrown in a mix and simmered to produce a rich serving of tasty sustenance. Ironically the new band album is called Boiling Pot and will be released Quarter 4 2013. His style is often described as JJ Cale meets Dire Straits meets Chris Rea, but that doesn't define his songs which are also lyrically astute.

His songs are strong on words, the lyrics way out pace many others in this class, it's not so much 'I woke up this morning' but more 'the reason I woke up this morning is because.....' as he challenges you to listen and reflect. He has already had 3 British Blues Kevin Thorpe original song nominations, 2 from his second solo album alone 'We Are Where We Are'. This is the album title track which could have been perceived as a weary slant on a life of unfulfilled ambition, but it's not, it's just a hook line to be absorbed to help question 'what if'.

His music can be dark, like the award nominated 'Hang An Innocent Man', a story of a Southern lynching, passionate as in 'Omagh', a song of remembrance, or poignant as in 'She's my Angel' – a song about the London Bombings or 'Shoes' a simple song embracing empathy rather than sympathy.

They can also be jovial e.g. 'She's my Best friend' about a guitar, they can also be cutting like the song 'Al' about Alan Turing - listen to the words to decipher the story of the dismissive and unforgiving establishment. He is also the chief song writer for the Mighty Boss Cats, writing 90 % of the band material on top of his solo work; he can therefore be truly certified as a writeaholic.

The band itself, The Mighty Boss Cats, has had several incarnations but the new line up for the latest album 'Boiling Pot' are as at ease doing slow acoustic swing blues (e.g. Bad Luck Blues) to the dark electric full on delta rock/blues (Candy Man), with in-between styles interspersed amongst the song offerings from Townend's stable. The band is made up of consummate musicians introducing a superb harp/keys (and songwriter himself) Phil Pawsey with Phil Wilson on Bass, Gary Matthews on percussion, Glen Buck on kit, all of who provide excellent contributions.

For the majority of the songs which he records he also produces delightful videos which provide imagery for the song giving it another artistic dimension. This is relatively unique for an independent unsigned blues artist and well worth checking out on themightybosscats you tube channel or his web site.

The 3 latest videos Candy Man, The Devil inside and Elvis Coming Home are good examples of both sides of the band from country blues to open tuned dark blues. Elvis Coming Home is particularly well worth looking at as it also shows the band sports a good sense of humour.

In summary Richard and his music has a tremendous variety to it, well played, well constructed with great lyrics and it is fun, a rising talent for sure. Check him, the videos and the Mighty Boss Cats out at www.richardtownend.com