



## Blues

Eric Bibb *Blues, Ballads & Work Songs*  
Opus 3 CD 22111

**PURELY LOVE** listening to Eric Bibb. I purely love listening to Opus 3 CDs. Any time there's a new one, any self-respecting audiophile has to listen to it. Any time there's an audio show, it is a safe bet that you will find some attentive and well-meaning scribe has brought his copy of *Jazz at the Pawnshop* or perhaps one of the Opus 3 test CDs. I tend to use a track off *Test Disc 3* where two guys are huffing and puffing like mountain gorillas into some sort of mailing tubes, improvised musical instruments for certain, and after about a minute, suddenly one of them doesn't have the lung power anymore and fluffs the note. Then they both break down

into peals of laughter. What makes the track so interesting and important to an audiophile trying to sort out speakers and other assorted items of hi-fi gear is not the music, but the wonderful sense of recorded space where those two guys are. You can hear the "toots" of the tubes bouncing off the walls, both side and back, and the two guys' voices are very accurately recorded, or so I believe.

Eric Bibb I can remember from listening to a cut from an earlier Opus 3 CD. I knew his name but not much of his music. I was standing in the Totem Loudspeaker room at a Consumer Electronics Show almost 10 years ago when the

Totem principal put on the disc. About a minute later I was crying, literally, with tears coming down my face, crying from the song about death and loss and grief and pain, all of which were strong and raw in me at that time. VB sent me the CD a couple of weeks later. I didn't dare to play it for nearly a year.

This new CD, *Blues, Ballads & Work Songs*, is better recorded and Bibb is playing better and seems like he's grown into his acoustic guitar. I can tell you from work with my Taylor acoustic that such ability and familiarity are hard won. I never got there, however much fun I had on the short trips I took. There is a song off another Bibb album,

about two previous, where the lyrics talk about the musician finding the guitar of a famous blues musician and how it makes his playing magical. I heard a similar story from friend Danny Kalb, though the details he gives are rather more creditable. Both are variations on

picking is extraordinary. There may be some rasps or buzzes from Bibb's finger pads sliding on the strings, but I didn't hear any such. All through the disc, Bibb's voice and his guitar are in good balance, neither the one nor the other too prominent. This ignores Bibb's fine

Leon Bibb, did influenced his playing of the song, as did Leadbelly's.

The best part of this album is Bibb's playing, his finger-work. It's just perfect, super accurate on which note and bending or slipping onto it, if needed, and on-the-pin-head accurate in the timing. You

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**This new CD from the great Eric Bibb is one of the very best-sounding guitar recordings I have ever heard.**

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Robert Johnson's dealing with the devil at the "Crossroads." I myself don't think that you have to sell your soul to get to play this well; I do think such talent is a gift from God, but one you need to polish and preserve and practice to keep.

Given the album's title, many of the 14 tunes will be expected, which is to say that they are "traditional" and here are arranged by Bibb. "Goin' Down The Road Feelin' Bad," "John Henry," and "Take This Hammer" are the first three cuts. Their emotional impact is about what you'd expect, but the lift they get from Eric's stellar finger-

set of notes for each song, where he usually gives information on which guitar and from whom. For example, "Goin' Down The Road Feelin' Bad" and "John Henry" were played on a parlor-size 12-string made by Dave King. He plays "Candy Man" on a new National Resophonic and tells us that the "song came to me via recordings by Mississippi John Hurt and Rev. Gary Davis." I don't know where there are better mentors or teachers for such a song. He plays "Take This Hammer" on an "early '50s 12-string that belongs to the late skiffle pioneer, Ken Colyer." He writes that the version his father,

might think that such perfection is easy, but I don't. Even if your interest is simply in guitar music, and you have thought until now that Segovia is the king, never to be uncrowned, it may well be time to reconsider who's the guitar boss, at least on acoustics.

Also, I need to give kudos where due to Jan-Eric Person, the recording engineer and mixer, and indeed the main man at Opus 3 Records, a firm which ought not be confused with Opus 3 Artists. The first is Swedish, while the second is somewhat newer with offices in Los Angeles and New York City.

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