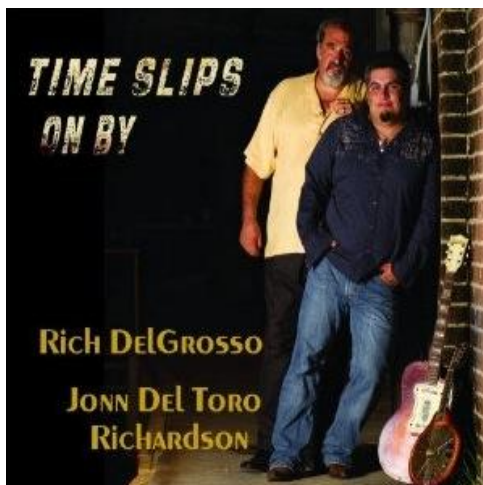




Rich DelGrosso (left) and Jonn Del Toro Richardson: Job done.

All In Good Time By David McGee



TIME SLIPS ON BY Rich Del Grosso/Jonn Del Toro Richardson Mandolin Blues

Think mandolin today and the name Chris Thile is likely the first to come to mind, maybe Mike Marshall, along with any number of gifted bluegrass pickers. Perhaps some note the instrument's gradual resurgence in classical music (see last month's Border Crossings interview with Israeli classical mandolin virtuoso Avi Avitel). Owing to the mainstream press having written off the blues as moribund, if not completely dead, it's likely only dyed-in-the-wool blues fans can tell you about the promising number of mandolinists working the turf pioneered by countless unnamed and now forgotten black string band musicians dating back to the dawn of the 20th Century, at least. Out of

this tradition came the most dominant and influential of all blues mandolinists, Yank Rachel. It's a bit of forgotten history, but as the blues scholar, mandolin authority and five-time Blues Music Award nominee Rich DelGrosso notes on his Mandolin Blues website, "In the hands of the black string band performers, the

mandolin was there to nurture the infancy of ragtime and blues.” DelGrosso’s website, which also offers online lessons, music samples, instruction books and workshop schedules, is well worth visiting.

On the other hand, you might want to experience how DelGrosso puts his passion to practice on a terrific disc he has cut with an absolute master of blues guitar, Jonn Del Toro Richardson, *Time Slips On By*. Not content to simply revisit the blues canon to put a new spin on other artists’ songs, the duo has composed 14 original numbers steeped in the southeast Texas style--six by Del Toro Richardson, seven by DelGrosso and one co-write--and beefed up their presentation with an inspired horn section (The Texas Horns), along with none other than Joel Guzman on accordion, plus Nick Connolly on keyboards, Sonny Boy Terry on harmonica and a powerhouse rhythm section of Carl Owens on drums and Ed Starkey on bass.

The resulting sound lives mostly in hard-edged Texas blues territory, but the horns add Southern soul sheen to a few selections for an interesting, even captivating, contrast to the hard charging attack of the two instrumentalists and their basic band. As the primary vocalist, Del Toro Richardson carries off his duties with an abundance of spirit and personality in his plaintive tenor, and he gets some help when DelGrosso rolls out his husky growl for a couple of leads, most notably on his lively, stomping calling card, “Mandolin Man” (“*give me eight strings and I’ll play the blues like nobody can*”), which is also, of course, an occasion for some spiky soloing on his part as well, with piano man Connolly making an impression as well with his tinkling blues runs on the 88s.

Those who love a slow, grinding blues will get their money’s worth four cuts in on Del Toro Richardson’s “Katalin,” its sensuous groove enhanced by Guzman’s atmospheric, fluttering accordion and DelGrosso supporting Del Toro Richardson’s sultry, fat-note soloing with complementary slide guitar work. With the horns



surging and the rhythm section kicking, the title track heads for Stax territory, as Del Toro Richardson divests himself of an anguished vocal lamenting post-breakup loneliness, a state of affairs he accentuates with his piercing soloing, while DelGrosso really puts the hurt on with his howling mandolin sorties. Strictly on the good-time side, “Good Rockin’ Johnny” is 3:13 of spirited, choogling instrumental work led by DelGrosso’s multi-textured mandolin discourse with Del Toro Richardson adding a brief but memorable sputtering, howling guitar solo at midpoint. If you’re in a part of the country now in the deep freeze, the laconic, easygoing blues of Del Toro Richardson’s “Summertime Is Here,” offers the warmth of

a drowsy July day in its swaying rhythm and heasygoing vocal extolling the season’s laid-back conviviality, with Guzman providing the perfect romantic backdrop with his accordion atmospheric. Such are the pleasures of *Time Slips On By*, with its solid songwriting, clever arrangements and masterful playing--a keeper of an album it is, and yet more proof of the blues’ continuing vitality.

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