

MULTIPLE BLUES MUSIC AWARD NOMINEE FIONA BOYES RELEASES BOLD, DIVERSE *BLUES WOMAN*

Fiona Boyes is a one-woman blues tent revival. Her pulpit is the stage, which she commands with the energy of an entire flock of worshippers. And her Bible is the guitar. With her acoustic and electric virtuosity and mastery of styles, she uses it as a righteous instrument to uphold the music's tradition, even as her strong, distinctive songwriting moves it forward.

And *Blues Woman*, Boyes' second album for **Yellow Dog Records**, is one mighty powerful sermon. The geographical spread of its 15 songs runs from Chicago to Texas to Mississippi's hill country and the Delta, all evocatively conjured by Boyes' and producer **Mark "Kaz" Kazanoff's** true-to-the-bone arrangements.

The native Australian's soulful, authoritative style — brilliantly displayed on *Blues Woman* — has earned Boyes unprecedented recognition. For the past three years she's received major Blues Music Awards nominations that also trumpet her diversity. She received a "Contemporary Blues Album of the Year" nod in 2007 for her Yellow Dog debut, the electric *Lucky 13*. The next year she garnered a ballot slot for "Contemporary Female Blues Artist of the Year." In 2009 she received an "Acoustic Blues Album of the Year" nomination for the trio recording *Live From Bluesville*.

It's worth noting that Boyes first arrived in America to claim yet another honor: winner of the 2003 International Blues Challenge (IBC) in Memphis, where she swept away the competition in yet another incarnation — solo acoustic performer. Representing the Melbourne Blues Society, Boyes was the first woman and the first Australian to earn the title.

Blues Woman is all about Boyes' depth as an artist and the musical odyssey she's taken since that first visit to the US. Its songs capture the striking, original talent that allows Boyes to write, sing and play anything in the blues realm with total conviction, from the crunching ode to female empowerment "Woman Ain't a Mule" that opens *Blues Woman* to "Juke Joint on Moses Lane," a solo performance on resonator guitar that displays Boyes' roiling finger style attack while evoking the good-time spirit of a funky blues club.

Boyes lives up to *Blues Woman's* title by negotiating the curves of all kind of subgenres. "Howlin' At Your Door" tackles the hypnotic grind of Mississippi hill country and "Look Out Love!" is a thumping shuffle. Chicago blues gets its due along with Texas guitar fireworks in "Got My Eye on You."

It helps to have friends like **Watermelon Slim** and **Marcia Ball**, who guest on the raucously testifying "The Barrelhouse Funeral," and nonagenarian pianist **Pinetop Perkins**, who joins Boyes' celebration of classic double entendre blues "Old Time Ways." And then there's *Blues Woman's* crack core band, which includes Kazanoff — who also produced the earlier *Lucky 13* — on sax, Antone's house guitarist **Derek O'Brien**, bassist **Ronnie James**, and **Jimi Bott**, who also plays drums for fellow Yellow Dog artist Woodbrain.

"When it came time to make *Blues Woman*, I decided to return to work with Kaz and his guys in Austin," Boyes explains. "But I wanted to make a really muscular, exciting electric guitar driven album that explored as many different regional styles as possible."

Mission accomplished. To keep the sessions hot, Boyes and her studio accomplices played each song she brought in just a few times before hitting the record button. "That kept everybody on their toes," she relates. "Me, especially."

"Coming to America and spending time where the blues began and developed, like the Delta and Chicago, really gave me a sense of place about this music," Boyes says as she explains *Blues Woman's* genesis. "But what's been really wonderful and exciting is the opportunity to be mentored by some great American players — and to record with them."

“Touring with Bob Margolin and Hubert Sumlin” — former guitarists for Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, respectively — “has been particularly inspiring; even just being around them listening to their stories and enjoying their encouragement. They’ve both had a big impact on *Blues Woman*, because they play so aggressively.”

Margolin in particular influenced Boyes to make her first recorded forays in slide guitar on three of the album’s tunes. “Got My Eye On You” specifically mirrors the stunning attack of the ex-Muddy Waters Band member.

Boyes offers further payback to her mentors in “City Born Country Gal,” where her daredevil guitar echoes both musicians. “They’ve made me want to be an edgier performer, and to explore more, and really pick up my electric guitar and dig in.”

Of course, Boyes had already developed an impressive style of playing, singing, and writing that she brought with her from Australia, where she cut two acoustic solo albums, as well as five electric albums with her band The Mojos, before winning the IBC.

How impressive? Pinetop Perkins offers this striking assessment: “I ain’t never heard a woman finger pick a guitar like that since Memphis Minnie.” Indeed, Boyes’ elegant ‘n’ gritty vocal style and powerful playing have also earned comparisons to Bonnie Raitt, Susan Tedeschi and Rory Block. And Sumlin declares, “She’s got it. I’ve played with them all, and she’s got it.”

Boyes began widening her grasp of the major forms of acoustic and electric blues with her first disc recorded on American soil. *Fiona Boyes & the Fortune Tellers Live in Atlanta* was recorded in 2004 with Margolin and Kazanoff guesting as part of her band. “It became a dream of mine during my first extended stay in the States to make an album with American musicians who I respect,” Boyes says. “And much to my surprise Bob and Kaz accepted my invitation.”

Kazanoff, a revered blues producer and arranger whose roots in the scene go back to an apprenticeship in ’60s Chicago, also encouraged Boyes to pursue her muse in the studio. So when it came time to record her Yellow Dog debut, 2006’s *Lucky 13*, he was a natural choice to captain the project.

Margolin again added his guitar and voice, and Grammy nominee Marcia Ball and Kazanoff’s Texas Horns brass section joined in. Engineer Stuart Sullivan, a veteran of recordings with Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bonnie Raitt, Willie Nelson and Marcia Ball, manned the microphones and board at Austin’s Wire Recording for both *Lucky 13* and the new *Blues Woman*.

For Boyes, *13* was a magic number. The album propelled her onto the international club and festival circuit, received extensive airplay and was nominated for “Contemporary Blues Album of the Year” in 2007.

“The reception was truly amazing,” Boyes says. “I had no idea how the album would be accepted. It was a real leap of faith for me, because I had come to America as a solo acoustic artist, and this was a real blood-and-guts electric band album with horns.”

Next came 2008’s *Live from Bluesville*, a return to acoustic music recorded at XM Satellite Radio’s Washington D.C. studio with bassist Mookie Brill and mandolinist Rich DelGrosso. The same year Boyes earned her nod for “Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year,” and won the Blues Critics’ Award for “Best Live or Compilation Album.”

All the while Boyes’ star was also glowing brighter in Australia. Her recognition there includes Australian/New Zealand Blue Star Blues awards in 2007 for “Blues Album of the Year,” “Best Female Vocalist,” and “Critics’ Choice — International Blues Album of the Year,” and 2006’s MBAS Australian Blues awards for “Blues Album of the Year” and “Female Artist of the Year” as well as a host of other honors.

But for Boyes, the best reward is total immersion in her music.

“I am very proud to be part of the blues tradition,” Boyes reflects. “And I believe that it is vital and exciting and growing, and I’m doing my best to help keep it that way.”

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