

Blind Lemon Jefferson.. Blind Blake.. Blind Boy Fuller.. Blind Willie Johnson: are all evocative names that roll off the tongue of country blues aficionados easily and often. So often, that perhaps the word 'Blind' has lost some of it's meaning in this blues context and over the years has become as much a 'blues moniker'

To this end, one of the aims of the **Radio City Blues** project, is to remind us that many 1920's/30's American country blues masters were denied the gift of sight, and instead then relied on their unique musical vision to show them a way through life. Today, we are indebted to them for the many vivid worlds of rural blues which they have handed down to us, first captured on shellac, then vinyl and now compact disc.

And so Rick will be donating some proceeds from the sales of this CD to an organization called **Wireless Fo The Blind** that helps to provide user friendly radios and other resources to the blind.

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On the first hearing of these eleven blues songs - all written by Rick - the album's overall groove brings to mind that neat motto of the influential 1970s blues indie label founded by Stefan Grossman and Eugene Denson - Kicking Mule Records: **"It's easy To Be Easy When You're Easy."** For instance, on fingerstyle guitar gems such as Transmit, Open Skies, and It's Alright, Rick perfectly revives that lilting, delicate - almost hypnotic - alternating bass rural blues rhythm that was the calling of Mississippi John Hurt and the reverend Wilkins in particular. But, as any student of country blues guitar will attest - it's actually very hard rhythmically to be that easy and yet keep your playing together, and crucially, make it swing...much in demand guitar tutor, Rick has it nailed

Returning to the radio theme of this album, the link between radio and blues goes back almost to when the music was first recorded. Local stations in the deep south launched the careers of numerous blues players. For Reverend Robert Wilkins this happened in Memphis in the late 1920's. But, it was in 1941 that the medium really began to boost the popularity of blues: that year, blues harp player and singer, Alec 'Rice' Miller, changed his name to Sonny Boy Williamson and, along with Robert 'Junior' Lockwood, hosted King Biscuit Time - initially a 15 minute show on KFFA Radio in Helena, Arkansas. The show was an instant hit which not only shifted a lot of flour for it's sponsors, but also - and at last - served to make some dough for previously unknown blues artists who were invited to guest on it. The careers of James Cotton and BB King began to get into gear thanks to **King Biscuit Time**; what's more, in the late 1940's Riley B. King went on to host and play on his own radio show in Memphis - first with KWEM and then WDIA, and soon became far more famous as BB King.

But what is Rick's own take on the 'wireless' - that long standing friend in the room corner that introduced so many of us to blues music in the pre-online - global - programme - choice era? Well, he delights in, as it were, taking a stab at DAB. Especially so on the penultimate track **AM FM** where trenchantly he nails his "traddie" colours to the mast: evidently, for Rick contentment is to be found in memories of EMI, Dansette record players and His Master's Voice. Here we have a committed BBC 'Radio4-ophile' for whom a blackberry will always be a refreshing fruit which augurs the arrival of autumn, and not a business-world networking tool and status symbol. Some deliciously creamy slide playing is to be found on this album - especially on the track **AM FM**, but also on **Open Skies** and **Blues In The Rain**.

So, having learned that Rick's friend in the room corner is made of defiantly brittle Bakelite, the tracks Transmit and **Baby's Got A Radio** taken together reveal two contrasting roles played by the radio: transmit is about radio's power to connect people - poignantly, it's about a blind man who doesn't feel lonely as long as he knows that his love interest is contactable out there via 'radio' ... and as long as he finds out her frequency. But with **Baby's Got A Radio**, familiarity with the friend in the room corner breeds contempt, and so the medium here is portrayed as an always switched-on and intrusive bringer of bad news and sad songs. **Blind Lemon Jefferson** maybe wins as the catchiest blues on this album, featuring an evergreen Jeffersonesque Texas blues riff that has shone through the decades ever since the 1920s, updated and electrified by the likes of Texas-blues rocker, Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top. In this tribute song, Rick also references the premature and mysterious passing of Blind Lemon - the first commercially successful male blues star - in snowbound Chicago in December 1929, aged in his early-to-mid thirties.

And the word tribute fittingly summarizes this album: the guitar playing is an accomplished and immaculate tribute by Rick Payne to many styles of country blues: his lyrics are always engaging - and the charitable aspect of **Radio City Blues** is a tribute to organizations that work hard to make this world a better place.

**'Jet' Martin Celmins** - June 2011 - Bradford West Yorkshire

Author of **Peter Green The Biography**  
Sleeve notes for **John Mayall and Dr John**

**RADIO CITY**  
*Blues*