

# Bluesy

## Hilary James - CD reviews

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### Folk Roots

Hilary's latest CD, her third on the Acoustics label, tackles that delightful hinterland between blues, swing and jazz.

To some it may come as a bit of a surprise to hear Hilary James sing the blues, but her naturally pure timbre proves (unexpectedly) rather seductive in this kind of repertoire. Just occasionally there's a hint of coldness, but otherwise Hilary manages to remain suitably laid back without being laid out. Relatively lightweight the material may be, but it's all done with scintillating help from Simon Mayor (guitars, mandolin, mandola and an extremely Hot-Club fiddle, Dave Mattacks (particularly inventive on Blind Blake's Fighting the Jug) and Ian Campbell (guitar par excellence, evoking Charlie Christian and beyond), among others.

Beryl Marriott's piano is also heard on two tracks, including a lazy loping jug band-style Poor Wayfaring Stranger. The opener, Jimmie Rodgers' Travelling Blues, is given a spirited and infectious western swing treatment, and is followed by a beautifully poised version of Hoagy Carmichael's Hong Kong Blues which manages to keep languid and sharp.

OK this CD won't set the world on fire, but it's more substantial than a merely pleasant diversion and survives repeated playings better than others of its ilk.

*David Kidman*

### Blues Arts Journal

Hilary James plays bass and sings in a pure, folk voice, and here she is backed by a small, acoustic based combo. She is best known as a folk singer in Britain, but on this set originally released in 1999, she presents various shades of blues, from the opening Western swing styled cover of Jimmie Rodgers 'Travellin' Blues' to Hoagy Carmichael's 'Hong Kong Blues', a couple of Memphis Minnie's ('Me And My Chauffeur' and 'One Black Rat') and Blind Blake's 'Fightin The Jug' to Louis Jordan's 'Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens'. Some excellent fiddle from multi-instrumentalist Simon Mayor enlivens an attractive and generally mellow set that is certainly different from the norm, but very, very enjoyable and eminently listenable.

*Norman Darwen*

### Rock 'n' Reel

Hilary James has always been able to deliver the goods; whether with partner-in-crime Simon Mayor or solo, her truly sublime vocals can enhance all manner of musical styles. 'Bluesy' is a sort of tribute to James's early influences from her teenage years, and she originally 'home-taped' some of the songs featured here from Brian Rust's Capital Radio show, when they were aired in 1978. Actually, the album should really be retitled - and qualified - as 'Classy And Bluesy', for this collection radiates a timeless quality and is delivered with a gilt-edged authority made doubly effective by some inspired arrangements. Classics they may be - 'Travellin' Blues', 'Poor Wayfaring Stranger', 'Fighting The Jug', 'Blues In The Night' and more, from the pens of Jimmie Rodgers, Hoagy Carmichael and Blind Blake - but in the hands of James and her team of Simon Mayor (guitars, fiddle, mandolin), Dave Mattacks (drums), Beryl Marriott (piano) and others, they're elevated into an even more delicious confection.

The crowning glory, however, is Hilary's bittersweet voice, which lends these melancholy blues a wonderfully dreamy, honey-dripping beauty. Lush.

*Steve Caseman*

### Back Street Heroes - UK Bikers Magazine

Anything with the faintest tang of blues about it gets slung over to me on the grounds that, like kittens and tramps and men from Newcastle, I will be kind to it. It's not always so, but in this case I was quite taken with this album.

Hilary James is better known as a folk singer, but her perfect, crystal clear voice suits this collection of blues covers remarkably well. Some of the songs, like Jimmy Rodgers' 'Travellin Blues' and the Louis Jordan song, 'Ain't Nobody here But Us Chickens' are given a swing air to them, while others like 'Poor Wayfaring Stranger' are played straight. Each track is perfectly poised, and if you like traditional blues, you'll like this. Guaranteed. 4/5 (PC)

### \* \* \* \* Yorkshire Post

'This is terrific.'