

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

The Portland Observer

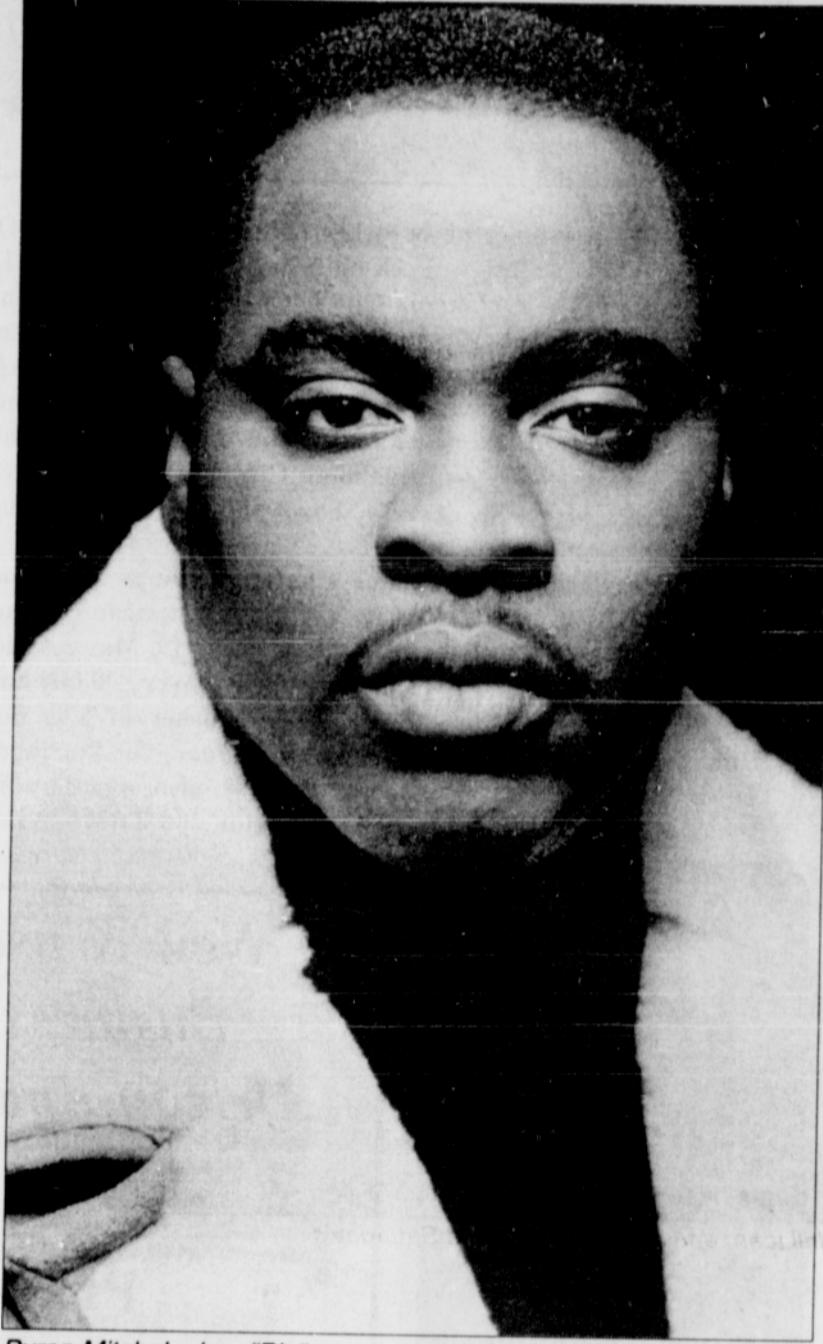
Down-Home Soulful "Blu"

Take a real 'old school' vocal approach, place it within a contemporary musical setting, add a healthy dose of basic, down-home soulfulness and what have you got? Try Out Of The Blu, the musically refreshing Motown Records debut by Los Angeles native Blu. "From start to finish, this record represents who I am, vocally, musically, creatively," says the genial singer, who co-wrote five of the ten cuts on the album. "I don't have a particular favorite track because I listen to the album as an entire package."

From the smooth groove of "My Ol' Lady," the hypnotic first single to the insistence of the upbeat jam, "Lip Service," Blu sings with the kind of out-and-out passion that is the hallmark of early vocal influences like Jeffrey Osborne, Philippe Wynne (of The Spinners), Teddy Pendergrass and Sam Cooke. You can hear Blu's heartfelt approach on tunes like "Clap Your Hands," an obvious nod to Seventies sweet soul; "Pillow Talk," a sensual standout, and the quiet storm-flavored "Can We Vibe?" And, when it comes to the kind of intensity that up tempo tunes require, Blu delivers: check the aptly-named "Groove," or funky "Easy Come, Easy Go."

For his all-important introduction to the music world, Blu worked with Dwayne Wiggins (of Tony Toni Tone), the album's executive producer, who also contributed his writing skills to seven cuts and played instruments on all but two tracks. "Dwayne was a constant source of creativity," says Blu. "He was definitely a role model for me in doing this album. He made it possible for me to see that it is possible to make it in this business and still keep your feet on the ground."

That Byron Mitchell a/k/a Blu would make the kind of album that reflects his love for real music is no surprise when considering his background. His father, Jewell Mitchell was vocal partners with the legendary Scatman Carruthers and music was a constant in the Mitchell house-



Byron Mitchell a.k.a. "Blu"

hold for as far back as Blu can remember. "As a child I was exposed to the blues of people like B.B. King, Albert King, Johnnie Taylor, and Bobby Blue Bland. In fact, one of the reasons I got my nickname Blu was because I always sang the blues as a child."

By the time he was nine, Blu was taking vocal lessons and studying opera and classical music; five years later, at age 14, he was per-

forming a twenty-song set of R&B, blues, and gospel at a local Los Angeles church event. "I sang solos in church from a very young age as well as performing in different school plays," recalls Blu. "You could say I developed the idea of wanting to be an entertainer early on in life."

The talented young singer's skills propelled him into the spotlight as a member of various L.A. choirs: he participated in all-city,

all-state and nationwide contests for the Unified School District and by the time he was 17, Blu had emerged as a city and state vocal champion. Word-of-mouth led to then-Motown A&R elective Kerry Gordy (son of owner and founder Berry) signing Blu to a development deal with the label and he began working with producer Michael Stokes.

With the sale of Motown in 1989 Blu's initial deal with the company was halted and he decided to join a local vocal group Trevous as lead singer. The group won several rounds of the popular "Big Break" TV show in 1990 and 1991 and worked on an all-star session with industry heavyweights James Ingram, Phil Perry, Carl Carlton, and Leon Haywood for a single made especially to raise funds for L.A.'s homeless. Although the group generated interest from different labels, the trio eventually split and Blu resumed his search for a solo deal in 1993.

Through manager Greg Cham, Blu was introduced to Dwayne Wiggins who had begun expanding on his success as a member of Tony Toni Tone to create production opportunities with new and developing artists. Enter Blu, who just happened to fit the bill: "Dwayne was looking for someone who could deliver his music the way he wanted so I flew to Oakland and did a 'live' audition for him."

It didn't take long for Wiggins to recognize Blu's obvious vocal artistry and he suggested the singer sing on the track he'd done for "My Ol' Lady." Once he played the cut to Motown A&R chief, Steve McKeever, Blu found himself back with the label who had originally shown interest in him five years earlier.

In addition to the tracks produced by Wiggins, Out Of The Blu includes work from Travon Potts (who had been a fellow member of Trevous) renowned remixer Dave 'HardDrive' Pensado; Atlanta-based producer C-1; and Terry-T, from Wiggins' Grass Roots Entertainment production company.

Fair Will Rock Northwest Portland's Couch Park

It all started last year with a question: Whatever happened to the good old street fairs, where neighbors gathered for a day to soak up sunshine, hear good music and sample great foods? So, in June of 1994, the concept was brought to fruition with the First Annual Summer Solstice Street Fair and Dance, which drew over 3,000 people to Northwest Portland's Couch Park and raised \$3,000 for the Inner Westside Community Development Corporation which helps locate decent and affordable housing and economic opportunities for Northwest Portland residents.

It's happening again on June 17, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., the Second Annual Summer Solstice Street Fair and Dance will again fill Couch Park (N.W. 19th & Glisan) and N.W. Hoyt Street with arts and crafts booths, informational booths from a variety of non-profit organizations, food carts, family performances, a microbrew and wine tent, and live music from some of Portland's top performers. Featured performances include the sweet, sultry sounds of the Holly Rae Band; the unique bluegrass of the Pagan Jug Band; Cal Scott's cool jazz; down

and dirty blues with Norman Sylvester; the funky feel of Rubberneck; and to top it all off, the African rhythms of Obo Addy.

The Family Stage is sponsored by the Northwest Childrens Theater & School and will feature Dr. Suess Stories, scenes from Winnie the Pooh and The Jungle Book; performances by Kids Company N.W., Arabian Daze, and Brainwaves. Also scheduled are appearances by Henry Huggins, Ramona Quimby and Ribsy; face painting, puppet making and balloons, pony rides, "Old World Folktales" as told by storyteller Kelly Hansen, OMSI Demonstrations, and Cheshire the Clown. Bring the whole family for a day of fun.

Destined to become one of Portland's most unique events the Summer solstice Street Fair and Dance will showcase what makes Portland's Northwest neighborhood such a special place. The mission of the Summer Solstice Organizing Committee is to strengthen Northwest Portland's cultural and ethnic diversity, and to promote activism and community spirit.

If you have questions or are interested in helping please call Aaron Corman at 230-1871.

IN CONCERT
JOHNNY "GUITAR" WATSON
JUNE 10 ★ 8:00 PM
 Special Guest **Roseland Theater**
 Motown Recording Artist **Blu & Vybe**
 Tickets at all Fred Meyer Fastlax and House of Sound Records
 Produced by Unforgettable Entertainment

Music Millennium
 32nd & E. Burnside 231-8926
 23rd & NW Johnson 248-0163

WORLD BEAT AT CHAMPOEG AMPHITHEATER
 28 MILES FROM SALEM OR PORTLAND • I-5 NORTH OR SOUTH TO EXIT 278 • FOLLOW SIGNS 5 MILES WEST TO CHAMPOEG PARK

SUNSPASH
 WORLD TOUR '95
 featuring
DENNIS BROWN • BUJU BANTON
WORL-A-GIRL **WAILING SOULS**
JUNIOR TUCKER **SISTER CAROL**
CHRISTAFARI **TOMMY COWAN M.C.**

SKOOL BAND
 INTERNATIONAL ARTS & CRAFTS FAIR
 BOOTH INFO (213) 255-8346

JUNE 7
 GATES AT 5PM • SHOW AT 6PM • \$17.50 ADVANCE
BIGGEST REGGAE FESTIVAL IN THE WORLD

AFRICA FETE
FEMI KUTI
BAABA MAAL
BOUKMAN EKSPERYANS
OUMO SANGARE

SUNDAY JUNE 25
 GATES OPEN 1PM • SHOW AT 2PM • \$14.50 ADVANCE

PRODUCED BY SNOWMAN INC.

TICKETS AT ALL TICKETMASTER OUTLETS OR CHARGE-BY-PHONE (503) 224-4400
 • STATE OF OREGON PARKS DEPARTMENT REQUIRES A \$3 PER VEHICLE DAY USE FEE • AMPLE PARKING
 LIMITED CAMPING SPACES AVAILABLE • FOR INFORMATION CAL678-1251 • WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE