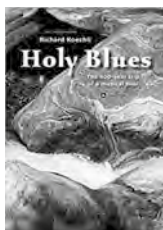


BOOKREVIEW



Holy Blues: Richard Koechli

Tredition Books

This is a huge subject to write about and Swiss musician/writer

Richard Koechli has done a superb job. His mission is to tell us "how African American Christian music influenced western cultural history and forever changed the world of song." We may not realise just how much of the music we hear today - blues, jazz, soul, R&B, folk country, rock, pop and even hip hop - is influenced by "holy blues", the music of the people. Whether we are aware of it or not, it's there and the author shows through American history how the various styles have changed over the years.

From the spirituals, songs of survival, through the Civil War, Gospel music, early black recorded music, the minstrel shows, the marketing of both blues and soul, it's all covered but in a way that's never full of over emphasis on facts and figures, but is always about the music and those who both created and performed it. In its pages some very famous and influential names leap out; Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson (who so inspired Led Zeppelin), Mahalia Jackson, Thomas A. Dorsey, The Blind Boys Of Alabama, right through to Mississippi John Hurt, Ry Cooder, B.B.King, Kelly Joe Phelps, Mavis Staples and so many others. Artists we all most likely have many recordings by.

In his early days B.B.King performed many gospel songs, as did John Hurt, with Ry Cooder's *Prodigal Son* album more recently carrying that tradition. Gospel music has inspired so much, if not most of what we hear today and has done over hundreds of years. How the author has condensed all this into his book is simply proof of his skills as a writer and, whether you're a Christian or not, it will open your eyes to just how much *Holy Blues* has touched our lives through music.

Pete Clack



Tampa Red - The Forgotten King Of The Blues

**Richard
Koechli**

Tredition Books

Tampa Red,

real name Hudson Whittaker, was born in Smithville, Georgia in 1904 and passed away in Chicago in 1981. He was one of the pioneers of precise bottleneck guitar playing, a style that earned him his billing as The Guitar Wizard. Teaming up with Thomas A. Dorsey in 1925 and sweeping the black theatre circuit, Red later joined the Hokum Jug Band before a long solo career. With many of his classic recordings still available, little is actually known about his life and music.

Richard Koechli is a Swiss born musician and a highly respected writer on American roots music, so he's certainly the right man for the job. Tampa Red should be mentioned in the same breath as Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and B. B. King: for more than twenty years, Red set the tone for the music in Chicago, the first to play a brass guitar, one of the pioneers of using the electric guitar. A true slide virtuoso, he wrote well over three hundred songs, becoming a mentor to many who later became stars in their own right. Sadly towards the end of his life, ill health came upon him and he died as "a lonely and forgotten man."

Koechli certainly brings to life the blues scene of the time; the story of this pioneer blues artist comes alive on these pages. You'll soon find yourself searching out those classic recordings to hear him. He accompanied Ma Rainey, Walter Horton and was imitated by folk like Robert Nighthawk. His songs included 'Sweet Black Angel', 'Love Her With A Feeling' and 'It Hurts Me Too.'

What makes this book so readable is the style of writing; much more a conversational style and throughout we gain a real insight into the man, his friends and his views on music. Koechli's style is like dropping in on a conversation - he's written a book that draws you nicely into a past world. For any blues fan, especially of Chicago blues, this really is a must read.

Pete Clack