

BACK IN 20 LINER NOTES

David Hinckley / Daily News music writer

www.garyusbonds.com

**For more information contact
Gary U.S. Bonds Management:
Tony DeLauro
Entity Communications, Inc.
350 Seventh Ave., Suite 500
New York, NY 10001
(212) 564-8188
Fax: (212) 293-7331
e-mail: tdelauro@msn.com**

School is in for Gary U.S. Bonds, one more time, and this time our distinguished professor of music starts his lesson with the admonition that "You Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks."

Fortunately, when it comes to singing the blues, which is what U.S. Bonds' new record is all about, new tricks aren't necessary. He was singing the blues back when Dwight Eisenhower was President, working clubs around his native Norfolk, Va., for \$15 a night and all he could eat and drink.

Those were good times. Then times got better. In 1960 he had a rock 'n' roll hit with "New Orleans," an infectious record so drenched in that city's cultural gumbo you half expected to see crawfish popping out of the grooves.

It was the early sixties and in some corners of the record and radio business there were attempts to nudge music back onto a softer, safer, "pop" track. One night after "New Orleans" had made the rounds, Gary and some of his musical cohorts held a victory celebration in the studio.

Naturally, instruments came out and sometime late on that exuberant evening Gary, the Church Street Five with Daddy G and a whole lot of friends and relatives ended up creating a song they called "Quarter To Three." Between those raw saxophones and Gary's dirt-road vocals, it was real clear the cap was not going back on this bottle.

"Quarter To Three" wasn't just a number-one hit. It became one of the defining songs of rock 'n' roll, so indelible that 15 years later it became a cornerstone of live shows for some kid named Bruce Springsteen.

For Gary the hits kept coming – including two of the all-time great-underrated party rockers, "School Is Out" and "Seven Day Weekend."

Then the British invaded, time passed and most of the rockers from Gary's time became sturdy pieces of rock 'n' roll history. But Gary kept playing on. By 1981 there was a lot of restless, high-spirited new music percolating below the surface and the charts were recycling a little too much disco and lounge pop. That Springsteen kid and some other pals like Little Steven Van Zandt put Gary together with a new old-style song, "This Little Girl," and darned if Gary didn't hit the charts all over again. This song made the radio jump alive.

Within a couple of years of "This Little Girl", rock 'n' roll had its mid- '80s golden age, just as the mid- '60s golden age came not long after "Quarter To Three." It wasn't all Gary's doing but he laid some of the important groundwork. He reassured us of the possibilities.

Now another two decades have passed, which means it must be U.S. Bonds time again. Only for this go-round he's blending new songs and the sound of the 21st century with the music he was singing before he went to New Orleans. The musical cohorts this time include a couple of old friends (Bruce and Southside) and a couple of new friends (Phoebe Snow and Dickey Betts), all who've put their stamp here.

Truth is, there has always been some blues in the music of U.S. Bonds, even when he was playing the happy up-tempo rockers with which most people still associate him.

Listening to "Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks," where Springsteen plays guitar and sings a respectful vocal behind his good friend Gary, or listening to Gary's show-stopping treatment of Delbert McClinton's "Every Time I Roll the Dice," you feel a rising sense of possibility again. There's also a little more melancholy on this record, as you'll hear with songs like "Nothing But Blue" or "Take Me Back." They don't call it blues for nothing.

But there's hope and redemption here, too. "She got a lock on the door," Gary sings. "But she gave me a key."

And always, to carry the listener through the good and the not-so-good moments, there is Gary's singing, as raw and impassioned as it's ever been, yet also beautifully delicate when that's what the song wants. One listen to "Dreams To Remember" will clearly prove this.

All in all, it's a record for the times, which has always been one of the most important things to remember about Gary U.S. Bonds.

Every time he's come along, we've needed him as much or more than he's needed us. At a point when popular music has spent perhaps a little too much time on glamour, visuals and style, we could use a good dose of the basics, and it doesn't get much more basic than what's busting loose here. When Southside Johnny Lyon blows that harp on "Fannie Mae," it's a ticket to get on board and ride with your engineer and conductor, Mr. Gary U.S. Bonds.