

# Got To Have Friends

**Mitch Woods, *Friends Along The Way* (eOne 8958; 68:55 ★★★★★)** Mitch Woods has so strong an intuitive feel for blues and boogie piano that he can record with a pack of special guests without losing his way or being overshadowed. His interactions with singers Van Morrison, Ruthie Foster and Maria Muldaur show the same clarity and outlay of commitment as pairings with singing guitarists Elvin Bishop, Joe Louis Walker, Taj Mahal and John Lee Hooker (the latter wickedly ponders the implications of “Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive”). Moreover, Woods is a strong vocalist in his own right.

Ordering info: [mitchwoods.com](http://mitchwoods.com)

**Wee Willie Walker & The Anthony Paule Soul Orchestra, *After A While* (Blue Dot 109; 58:26 ★★★★★)** Back in the storied Memphis soul 1960s, Wee Willie Walker belted out a song like nobody’s business. Today, he’s a more refined and temperate vocalist, teaming with excellent guitarist Anthony Paule’s seven-piece Soul Orchestra for a start-to-finish enjoyable album heavily weighted in favor of substantive musical drama. Indeed, Walker has a stout heart; he zooms in on the true-grit meaning of a lyric given him by perceptive, emerging songwriter Christine Vitale or brought out of the golden r&b past (Little Willie John’s “Look What You’ve Done To Me,” Mable Johns’ “Your Good Thing”).

Ordering info: [bluedotblues.com](http://bluedotblues.com)

**Stew Cutler & Friends, *Every Sunday Night* (Cogna 70070; 44:49 ★★★½)** Don’t pigeonhole Stew Cutler; the New Yorker has extensive credits in blues, jazz, soul and gospel. His guitar and vocals pulse with clear emotional intent throughout this enjoyable live-in-the-studio album, his sixth overall. Cutler is particularly effective putting his stamp on Gregg Allman’s “Not My Cross To Bear.” Trusted friends include singer Bobby Harden.

Ordering info: [stewcutler.com](http://stewcutler.com)

**Eilen Jewell, *Down Hearted Blues* (Signature 2089; 38:05 ★★★½)** Providing her first all-blues album, singer Eilen Jewell occasions special attention for how un-self-consciously she’s swept the dust off canonical songs credited to Little Walter, Big Maybelle, Bessie Smith and others. Showing her firm grasp of basic blues sensibilities, the native Idahoan moseys along in low gear or neutral with veteran guitarist Jerry Miller adding firepower when needed.

Ordering info: [signaturesounds.com](http://signaturesounds.com)

**Blind Boys Of Alabama, *Almost Home* (BBOA Records; 48:24 ★★★★★)** The twilight of the Blind Boys’ long-lasting



career is full of light. Great men Clarence Fountain and Jimmy Carter, along with three other singers and a band, stirring interpret Ruthie Foster’s “I Was Called” and 11 other songs of heaven-bound faith, in studios around the country. Simpatico producers include Steve Berlin, John Leventhal and Charles Driebe. There’s a consistency of quality, and the Boys’ extreme gratitude to the Maker never slackens.

Ordering info: [blindboys.com](http://blindboys.com)

**Ramon Goose, *Long Road To Tiznit* (Riverboat 1104; 37:01 ★★★★★)** Ramon Goose’s bursting intelligence and prowess as a singer and guitarist are matched by his gift for exploration. His latest release, recorded in London and Marrakech, charts the considerable progress he’s made over the years in uniting the blues with the melodies and grooves of North Africa. Robert Johnson’s “Come On In My Kitchen” is imaginatively updated without losing its Delta essence. Originals like “Wandering Sheikh” and the title track are invested with so much stimuli that repeated listens are required to unlock all their treasures. Among the guests are Robert Plant’s guitarist Justin Adams and British Indian singer Najma Akhtar.

Ordering info: [worldmusic.net](http://worldmusic.net)

**Kim Wilson, *Blues And Boogie, Vol. 1* (Severn 0070; 52:29 ★★★½)** Exceptional on harmonica but a limited singer, Kim Wilson shows fealty here to the Chicago blues once spun by venerated figures like Little Walter and Jimmy Rogers. Nostalgic originals and covers of classics are well-played with enthusiasm, no surprise given the talent of Wilson and pals such as guitarist Big Jon Atkinson and bassist Larry Taylor. Trouble is, a monotony of tone and a scent of embalming fluid win out. **DB**

Ordering info: [severnrecords.com](http://severnrecords.com)



## Oded Tzur *Translator’s Note*

ENJA 7773

★★★★

Urgency coexists with Zen-like calm on the darkly brilliant sophomore album by tenor saxophonist Oded Tzur. The dynamics of his fearless quartet mirror its ever-shifting storytelling intent. This album ripples and resonates.

Tzur’s enigmatically titled tunes speak to the underlying purpose of this group, as do Tzur’s literally fabulous liner notes. Whether the subject is the watery feel of “The Whale Song,” the turbulent journey of “Single Mother” or “The Three Statements Of Garab Dorje,” the Oded Tzur Quartet tells stories.

Tzur’s tunes experiment with different forms of narrative. The “Dorje” cut, which references a Tibetan Buddhist oracle, feels like a conversation, Tzur commenting on Shai Maestro’s pearly piano, Petros Klampanis’ thrumming bass and Ziv Ravitz’s feathery yet fierce drums. The songs, imbued with a profound melodicism, are dramatic and absorbing, and the interplay transcends empathy. There is nothing ragged about this ensemble.

A student of Indian classical music, Tzur is an architect of stealth, meticulously building his tunes from the ground up. At times, his very quietude seems to roar; the way he starts and ends “Single Mother” suggests a volcano on the ocean floor. An explorer of the microtonal and a player of such restraint and patience that his explosions are particularly startling, Tzur delivers a unique sound, giving his instrument pioneering dimension and depth. At times, his tenor saxophone grazes a flute’s timbre; at others, it plumbs the depths of a bass clarinet.

The one cover is John Coltrane’s “Lonnie’s Lament.” While not as schematic as the original, Tzur’s version is relatively brief, leisurely and incantatory, capping a recording of enormous emotional pull.

—Carlo Wolff

**Translator’s Note:** Single Mother; Welcome; The Whale Song; The Three Statements Of Garab Dorje; Lonnie’s Lament. (43:55)

**Personnel:** Oded Tzur, tenor saxophone; Petros Klampanis, bass; Shai Maestro, piano; Ziv Ravitz, drums.

Ordering info: [odedtzur.com](http://odedtzur.com)