

RED HOUSE RECORDS



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GUY DAVIS

SKUNKMELLO

Release date: April 4, 2006 • RHR-CD-192

"Guy Davis perseveres as one of the few contemporary African-American musicians to embrace the acoustic blues . . . the feel of his originals is timeless." *Billboard*

"Humanity shines through every note Davis plays . . . wise and wonderful storytelling." *Downbeat*

Red House Records announces the April 4, 2005 release of Guy Davis' latest album, *Skunkmello*, his eighth offering since signing with the label in 1995. The new CD is that rare album that flows with the start-to-finish cohesiveness of a classic album while at the same time covering a variety of styles – from early country blues to more modern urban sounds. Guy Davis digs deep emotionally with soulful nuance, driving energy and superb songwriting evoking the classic albums of Taj Mahal. The record follows his critically acclaimed 2004 release, *Legacy*, an album that was recognized as one of the best of the year by *Rolling Stone*, *NPR* and *Downbeat* (reader's poll).



Davis assembled a gifted cast of sidemen for *Skunkmello* including heavyweights **Mark Naftalin (Paul Butterfield Blues Band)**, **T-Bone Wolk (Saturday Night Live Band)** and **John Platania (Van Morrison Band)**. These master backers lay down a thundering foundation of sound that Davis goes to work from with his impeccable musicianship and booming vocals. The result of this collaboration is Guy's most fully realized recording to date, cementing Davis as a modern-day blues and roots music master.

Skunkmello contains 11 original songs written by Davis and 3 interpretations of classics ("Goin' Down Slow", "Po Boy," and "Maggie Campbell Blues"). Thematically, the original tracks are more personal than Guy's other recent albums – many inspired by family and close friends. The song that the title was extracted from, "Skunkmello's Dance of the Chickens", is a raucous back country tune inspired both by a "chicken dancer" Davis and his family witnessed in the '60's as well as Guy's son Martial's reaction to the tune. "Hooking Bull at The Landing" takes its name and origin from Guy's father Ossie Davis. At the dinner table, Ossie was known to let the expression fly "Hookin bull at the landing, 'won't let me by Lord, Lord, won't let me by." It refers to a hobo being pulled off the train by a railroad bull (police) and was likely a metaphor for hard luck and tough times. "Fonza Curry" is a melancholy narrative of an evil man based on stories from Guy's Uncle Willie. The album ends with a reissued and radio friendly version (or as Guy puts it, "milk 'n' cookies version") of the popular duet/debate Guy recorded with his son Martial on the merits of blues v. rap "Uncle Tom is Dead" (named a 2004 song of the year by *NPR's All Song's Considered*).

Chickens, bad men and love gone wrong: one of the heroes of the New Acoustic Blues serves up an unqualified masterpiece in this stunning CD of classic and new-school original blues. Guy will be touring heavily throughout North America through the spring and summer of 2006 in support of the new album. For more information on Guy's tour dates go to www.redhouserecords.com.

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QUOTES

“The eye and ear of a master novelist, the vocal gifts of an experienced character actor . . . impeccable craftsmanship and lyric vision”

— *Living Blues*

“ . . . remarkably evocative, revitalizing guitar, banjo and harmonica playing . . . joins peers such as Alvin Youngblood Hart, Taj Majal and Corey Harris to keep the spirit of W.C. Handy alive and well.”

— *Sing Out!*

“If the earthy power of Guy Davis doesn't grab your attention...you need to make sure you're still alive.”

— *Robert Gordon*
(Author of *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters*)

“Guy Davis and his peers are the blood transfusion acoustic blues needed to survive into the 21st century...Five Bottles for a wonderful and joyous collection from a man destined for major fame and fortune.”

— *Real Blues*

“Talent and charisma...Davis performs with authority.”

— *New York Times*

“One of a handful of young blues singers keeping the acoustic tradition vital, Guy Davis combines gravelly vocals, soulful down-home sensibilities and impressive guitar skills.”

— *Pulse*

“Davis hits all the right notes all the time. An ace on both six and 12-string acoustic guitar, Davis brings a glorious sense of melody to his understanding of the blues.”

— *Playboy*

“Davis' tough timeless vocals blow through your brain like a Mississippi dust devil, while the band adds a funky fire that'll make your soul glow”

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Guy Davis, one of the leading lights in the contemporary retro-acoustic movement, tempers his rootsy earnestness with rock 'n' roll passion and pop slickness...Davis growls the lyrics like a gristle-voiced fusion of Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and Charlie Patton.”

— *Living Blues*

“Imagine Tom Waits' voice hooked to the guitar of Robert Johnson...If you're hooked on Keb' Mo', step back—you better get yourself some Guy Davis. It's blues, great blues, the best blues.”

— *CU-Denver Advocate*

“What is remarkable about Guy Davis' picking style and easy songwriting grace is that his songs sound so deeply drenched in lost black traditions that you feel they must predate him. But no, they don't. He created them.”

— *USA Today*

“His grainy voice, masterful acoustic guitar picking, and sensibility are so entwined with genuine blues roots that they're still clogged with red clay and delta ooze.”

— *City Pages* (MPLS/St. Paul)

“Davis serves as a reminder that country blues was never meant for a sit-down audience. More than anyone else in this generation, he plays the blues to get people dancing.”

— *Acoustic Guitar*

BIOGRAPHY OF GUY DAVIS

He's got some Blind Willie McTell and some Fats Waller, some Buddy Guy and some Taj Mahal. He's got some Zora Neale Hurston and some Garrison Keillor. He's a musician, composer, actor, director and writer. But most importantly—Guy Davis is a bluesman. The blues permeate every corner of Davis' creativity. Throughout his career, he has dedicated himself to reviving the traditions of acoustic blues and bringing them to as many ears as possible through the material of the great blues masters, African American stories, and his own original songs, stories and performance pieces.

Davis' creative roots run deep. Though raised in New York, he grew up hearing accounts of life in the rural south from his parents and especially his grandparents, and they made their way into his own stories and songs. Davis taught himself the guitar (never having the patience to take formal lessons) and learned by listening to and watching other musicians. One night on a train from Boston to New York he picked up finger picking from a nine-fingered guitar player.

His influences are wide and varied. Musically, he enjoyed such great blues musicians as Blind Willie McTell (and his way of telling a story), Skip James, Mance Lipscomb, Mississippi John Hurt, Elizabeth Cotton, and Buddy Guy, among others. It was through Taj Mahal that he found his way to the old time blues. He also loved such diverse musicians as Fats Waller and Gustav Holst. Zora Neale Hurston and Garrison Keillor have influenced his writing and storytelling.

Throughout his life Davis has had overlapping interests in music and acting. Early acting roles included a part in the film *Beat Street* and on television in *One Life to Live*. Eventually Davis had the opportunity to combine music and acting on the stage. He made his Broadway debut in 1991 in the Zora Neale Hurston/Langston Hughes collaboration *Mulebone*, which featured the music of Taj Mahal. In 1993 he performed Off-Broadway as legendary blues player Robert Johnson in *Robert Johnson: Trick the Devil*. He received rave reviews and became the 1993 winner of the Blues Foundation's W.C. Handy "Keeping the Blues Alive" Award.

Looking for more ways to combine his love of blues, music, and acting, Davis created material for himself. He wrote *In Bed with the Blues: The Adventures of Fishy Waters* — an engaging and moving one-man show. The Off-Broadway debut in 1994 received critical praise from the *The New York Times* and the *The Village Voice*. Davis also performed in a theater piece with his parents, actors/writers Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, entitled *Two Hah Hahs and A Homeboy*. Of Davis' performance, one *USA Today* reviewer observed that his style and writing "sound so deeply drenched in lost black traditions that you feel that they must predate him. But no, they don't. He created them." Davis' writing projects have also included a variety of theater pieces and plays — *Mudsurfing*, an award winning collection of three short stories, *The Trial* (an anti-drug abuse one-act play that was produced Off-Broadway in 1990). Guy also arranged, performed, and co-wrote the music for an Emmy Award winning film, *To Be a Man*. In the fall of 1995, his music was used in the national PBS series, *The American Promise*.

Over time, Davis has concentrated more and more on writing and performing music. In the fall of 1995, he released his Red House Records debut *Stomp Down Rider*, an album that captured Davis in a stunning live performance. The album landed on top ten lists all over the country, including in the *Boston Globe* and *Pulse!* Davis' next album, *Call Down the Thunder*, paid tribute to the blues masters, but leaned more heavily toward his own powerful originals. The electrifying album solidified Davis' position as one of the most important blues artists of our time. It was named a top ten album of the year in *The Boston Globe*, *Pulse!* and *Request*. *Acoustic Guitar* called it one of the thirty essential CDs from a new generation of performers.

Davis' third Red House disc *You Don't Know My Mind*, exploded with passion and rhythm, displaying Davis' breadth as a composer and powerhouse performer. The *San Francisco Chronicle* gave the CD four stars, adding: "Davis' tough, timeless vocals blow through your brain like a Mississippi dust devil." Charles M. Young best summed up Davis' own take on the blues when he wrote in *Playboy*, "Davis reminds you that the blues started as dance music. This is blues made for humming along, stomping your foot, feeling righteous in the face of oppression and expressing gratitude to your baby for greasing your skillet." *You Don't Know My Mind* also received the 1999 INDIE Award for Best Acoustic Blues Album from the Association for Independent Music (AFIM), as well as being nominated for several Handy Awards.

Guy's fourth album, *Butt Naked Free*, featured performances by Levon Helm (The Band), T-Bone Wolk (Saturday Night Live), and John Platania (Van Morrison). It holds fast to the tradition of great acoustic blues of which Guy's work is a part, yet also takes the music down a brand new road. Davis is bridging the gap between the roots of the blues and the twenty-first century.

give in kind, a critic's darling and Davis' fifth release, contained mostly original material with a dash of classic songs written by such greats as "Mississippi" Fred McDowell, "Big" Bill Broonzy, Leroy Carr and "Sleepy" John Estes. Like *Butt Naked Free*, *give in kind* was skillfully produced by John Plantania (Van Morrison guitarist) and backed by a talented group of musicians, including Gary Burke, Mark Murphy, W'Ali Muhammed, Ken Whitely, Zoe B. Zack, Keith Slattery and David Helper. Guy's ruffed-up vocals and notorious guitar work sizzle throughout the album. Along with his inspired work on both six and twelve-string guitars and the banjo, Davis is a one man band – blowing soulfully on the blues harp, playing the washboard and even taking a turn on the digeradoo for the frenzied "Layla, Layla."

Handy-nominated *Chocolate to the Bone*, is a beautifully authentic, acoustic blues treasure. It contains a balanced helping of sizzling original material along with tasteful covers of traditional songs and seamless re-workings of tunes by such blues legends as Sleepy John Estes, John Lee Hooker, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Willie Dixon and Ishman Bracey.

The 2004 release *Legacy* continues Davis's ongoing mission of reuniting black America with its musical roots -- the sound and story of traditional acoustic blues. This message is hammered home on the album's first track, "Uncle Tom is Dead." The song is a spirited and good-natured musical debate between Guy and his 13-year-old son, Martial, on the relative importance of rap versus blues. Following this defense of classic blues is a skillfully crafted collection of original material along with covers and reworkings of tunes by such blues masters as John Adam Estes, Huddie Ledbetter, Nehemiah James and Lightnin' Hopkins. *Legacy* was recognized as one of the best of the year by *Rolling Stone*, *NPR* and *Downbeat* (reader's poll).

His latest offering *Skunkmello* is that rare album that flows with the start-to-finish cohesiveness of a classic album while at the same time covering a variety of styles – from early country blues to more modern urban sounds. Guy Davis digs deep emotionally with soulful nuance, driving energy and superb songwriting evoking the classic albums of Taj Mahal.

Discography

Stomp Down Rider — Red House Records — 1995

Call Down The Thunder — Red House Records — 1996

You Don't Know My Mind — Red House Records — 1998

Butt Naked Free — Red House Records — 2000

give in kind — Red House Records — 2002

Chocolate to the Bone — Red House Records — 2003

Legacy — Red House Records — 2004

Skunkmello — Red House Records — 2006