

Nora Jean Bruso – Sings The Blues (2003)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 11 January 2015 16:50 -

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01. When You Leave Don't Take Nothing 02. I'm Leaving You 03. Howlin' For My Baby 04. If That's What You Wanna' Do 05. Doin' The Shout 06. Members Only 07. Untrue Lover 08. I'd Rather Go Blind 09. Can't Shake These Blues 10. Who's Been Talking 11. It Makes Me So Mad 12. Spoonful 13. All Your Love 14. Big Boss Man 15. Killing Floor 16. He Belongs To Me

Vocalist Nora Jean Bruso has been an up-and-comer in the blues world, but go and see her perform live at a club or a festival, and you'll quickly discover she's a polished professional, a stone cold pro. Bruso, or Elnora Wallace, was born and raised in Greenwood, Mississippi, a town famous for producing a variety of blues and gospel greats. Her father was Bobby Lee Wallace, a blues singer and sharecropper; her mother was Ida Lee Wallace, a gospel singer.

In high school, Nora Jean won the West Tallahatchie High School Talent Show grand prize for singing, and she began to perform in other area schools with small groups. Realizing her opportunities for recognition and recording were limited in Mississippi, Bruso moved to Chicago in 1976 and began her professional singing career with Scottie and the Oasis. Six years later, Scottie passed away and the band broke up, but Nora Jean began singing with other West Side bands she had already developed relationships with, including Little Johnnie Christian.

By 1985, she joined Jimmie Dawkins' band and recorded her first single, "Untrue Lover" for Dawkins' own record company, the Leric Label. (Some of Dawkins' Leric sides were reissued by Delmark Records.) She also sang on Can't Shake These Blues, an anthology released by Earwig Records. In 1991, she recorded with Dawkins on his album for the British JSP label, Feel the Blues, which was later re-released in 2003 with a bonus track from Bruso.

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In 1992, she retired from the rigors of regional touring to concentrate on raising her two sons, but by 2001, she was called back into the studio by fellow Jimmie Dawkins band alumnus Billy Flynn. She provided four vocal tracks on Blues and Love, a 2002 release, and later that year, she resumed her blues career, such as it was, appearing on the main stage at the Chicago Blues Festival with Dawkins' band.

Later in 2002, she recorded her first album, Nora Jean Sings the Blues, and was awarded a "Keeping the Blues Alive" citation by the Black History Association in Chicago. In 2003, she released Sings the Blues on the Red Hurricane Records label and the album garnered critical praise from radio programmers around the U.S. and Canada. She performed again at the 2003 Chicago Blues Festival and headed to Europe that summer for a tour.

By 2004, Bruso was nominated for two W.C. Handy Awards, one for Best New Artist and one for Best Traditional Female Artist. Later that year, she signed a deal with Maryland-based Severn Records and released Going Back to Mississippi, which debuted at number five on the Living Blues magazine radio charts and climbed to number one on XM satellite radio. In June, 2004, she performed again on the main stage at the Chicago Blues Festival, with her own band, and in 2005 she made a slew of other festival performances around the U.S. and Canada, including the Cape May Jazz Festival and the Pocono Blues Festival.

During the 2000s, the Nora Jean Bruso band included Carl Weathersby on guitar, James Carter, drums, Bruce Belgin, bass and Brian Lupo, guitar. When they weren't on the road, Nora Jean was based in LaPorte, Indiana. --- Richard Skelly, Rovi

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