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BARBARA BLUE
FROM THE SHOALS
2023, Big Blue Records

Performing professionally since 1977 and winning countless awards since, including a Brass Note on the Beale Street Walk of Fame in Memphis, singer Barbara Blue checks in on this, her 13th, independent release. Produced by Jim Gaines and recorded in the Nutthouse Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama the disc includes not only Blue on vocals but Bernard "Pretty" Purdie on drums, David Hood on bass, Clayton Ivey on keyboards, Will McFarlane and Davor



Hutch on guitar, Mark Narmore on piano, Brad Guin on sax and Marc Franklin on trumpet. So, what does this large crew do with the 13 cuts collected here? Plenty! *The Shoals* celebrates the wide swath of music that has found its way out of Muscle Shoals and name drops the Swampers, Aretha and a host of others who created magic there by "turning the mud into gold". *Nutthouse Blues* is an homage to the recording studio, not a home for the mentally unstable. Instead, it's the place she finds her soul with her song. While the groove plods at a mid-tempo pace, the band uses the space to lay down a number of stinging fills and solos. *Steal Away* likewise simmers low and slow as Blue pleads for some private time with her love interest. The risqué *Slide Man* may well be that guy as he slides up and down all night long! *Severance* is a plea for a different kind of unity as Blue calls for people to bridge the gap between the issues that have severed relationships. *Tell Mama* is more fleet footed than most cuts with a wall of horns propelling Blue's sassy vocals as she promises to deliver on what her man needs. She knows, though, that even in great relationships *Nothing Lasts Forever* where her vocals float over the stinging guitars and she exclaims she wants what she needs right now because she has "one foot in the grave and the other on the gas". While most of her vocals fit nicely in the soul blues vein, she brings out a different almost guttural blues rock voice on the stately rocker *Curse of Beauty*. The final cut, *Trail of Tears*, moves away from the relationship explorations of most of the balance of the disc and focuses, instead, on the tragedy of the forced relocation of American Indians. While the subject matter is different, Blue addresses it with the same earnest passion as the rest of the disc. Blue is a powerhouse vocalist and this disc lets her talents shine.

Mark Smith
Jazz & Blues Report
Friday, January 13, 2023