

## Deak Harp - Gateway To The Blues (2010)

Written by bluesever

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01. Yea My Baby 02. Old Soul 03. Up All Night Blues 04. Riding The Rails 05. Old Dodie  
06. Moving Soon 07. Lazy River 08. Big Fat Mama 09. Gateway To The Blues 10.  
Cone-A-Phone-A-Boogie 11. Midnight Blues 12. Cattle Car Blues 13. John Henry 14. Brocton  
Straight 15. Mad Dog 20/20 Deak Harp solo performer – vocals, harmonica, guitar

Thankfully, I finally get to review an actual Blues album. So many of the "Blues" CDs that we get are not really Blues albums. Instead, they are Rock albums marketed towards an aging population of white middle-class Baby Boomers who miss the sounds of the Sixties, but can't find anything in the wasteland of commercial radio that bears resemblance in tone, texture, soul, or feel.

As expected with a name like "Deak Harp," you get a blues album featuring lead harmonica with 17 studio-recorded songs that cover three main areas. First, some songs could easily be used for harmonica instruction. Secondly, harp fans will thoroughly enjoy Deak's inspired playing. Finally, there are some great Chicago Blues numbers when joined by the band: Tom Holland – guitar, Eddie Clark – drums, and T Bone Tom on Bass.

From Central Illinois, Deak started playing harmonica at age 12. He listened to British blues until he learned about a harp master named James Cotton. Possessing all the Cotton material he could find, Deak finally met Cotton in person. At that first meeting, Deak helped Cotton by trading harmonica cases with his future mentor as James' case was damaged at the airport. It started a long-lasting friendship to this day. James asked Deak to drive for him on the east coast tours. Deak learned directly from Cotton who helped him with his tone on the harp. By February of 1992, Deak and Cotton were two of the featured harp players at a show at the Berkeley Carteret Hotel in Asbury Park, New Jersey.

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Today, Deak does guest gigs - some of which with the legendary John Primer, performs solo, and appears with the Deak Harp Blues Band all the while promoting this CD. All songs were either written or arranged by Deak Harp; "John Henry" and "Davidson County Blues" being traditional. Deak uses only Hohner Marine Band Harmonicas including a Big C 364 and a Super 64 Chromatic.

Recorded at Twist Turners House of Sound Chicago IL, and produced by Twist Turner and Deak Harp, this CD contains solo acoustic and electric harmonica. It travels through time up to the present Chicago Blues sound starting with the train "hollers" of the 1930s. For example, tracks one and two, "Riding The Rails" and "John Henry" are solo numbers heavy with a train rhythm and train sounds. The next four keep the train a-rollin,' nicely adding drums here and bass there.

Starting with the seventh track instrumental, "Old Soul," the band gets more involved in the mix with some 12 bar blues that is just wonderful. The full-band Chicago Blues shuffles continue through track 17. Most of the tracks are instrumentals including the unique patterns in the title track. ,/

Track 10, "Yeah My Baby," gives us the first listen to Deak's sharp register vocals and road-lesson lyrics. Tom Holland plays a tasty lead slide guitar bridge half way through on top of his double tracked steady rhythm guitar. More well-crafted slide is found mid way through "Brocton Straight." ,/

Other standouts include the break neck tempo on "Moving Soon," a burn-the-house-down slow blues, "Midnight Blues" with magnificent interplay between Deak's chromatic harp and Holland's electric guitar, and "Cone-A-Phone-A-Boogie" which uses a Gi Joe Communicator Helmet with a cheerleader megaphone duct-taped to it. Deak says, "I call it a Cone-A-Phone; it runs on a 9 volt battery and has got such a cool crunchy sound."

So, if you, too, are looking for some real blues content, and you just happen to love harmonica, look no further. Let this CD show you the "Gateway To The Blues." --- James "Skyy Dobro" Walker, bluzkat.com

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