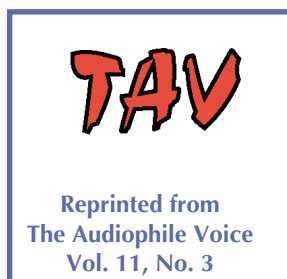


Steve Sussmann



**S**INCE WINNING the W.C. Handy Award for “Best New Artist Debut” in 2002, new releases by Otis Taylor have been highly anticipated events well beyond the blues community. A fistful of Handy nominations and awards since then has borne out that excitement, and his newest CD, *Below The Fold* shows Taylor at the top of his game.

Most comparisons of Taylor’s singing and guitar playing are to John Lee Hooker, and there is certainly an audible stylistic similarity. But Taylor uses Hooker’s “Detroit by way of Memphis and Mississippi” blues as a springboard to a sound unique in contemporary blues. To whom should we compare his mandolin playing, his harmonica, his banjo, his bass? Taylor has dubbed his style “Certified Trance Blues” and the hypnotic, percussive, waves of sound wash

over the listener, seducing us into listening to heartfelt and troubling stories of desperate people with few choices.

Taylor is one of the more political performers in the blues today, equal parts Gil Scott-Heron and Malcolm X. Earlier albums were named *When Negroes Walked The Earth*, *White African*, and *Truth is Not Fiction*. His songs on *Below The Fold* deal with prostitutes, the massacre of mine workers, civil rights, and the government’s betrayal of black soldiers.

This is an album-length listen-

## Blues

Otis Taylor *Below The Fold*  
Telarc CD 83627

ing experience, to be taken as a whole piece of work, but individual standout songs for me were “Feel the Lightning,” the album’s explosive opening number, with Taylor on vocals, Ome banjo, and slide guitar, offsetting Ben Sollee’s cello; and “Working For the Pullman Company,” with Taylor’s daughter and frequent collaborator Cassie handling vocals and bass.

With *Below The Fold*, Otis Taylor firmly establishes himself as musician worthy of “above the fold” attention.

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