

NO DEPRESSION

SURVEYING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF AMERICAN MUSIC

#60 • NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2005 • \$4.95 U.S./\$7 CAN.

DION

Bronx In Blue
(Orchard)

FROM "Teenager In Love" to Robert Johnson? It's hard to conjure a less likely career arc — that a singer who competed with the Bobbys, Frankies and Fabians within the Top 40 of the early 1960s should release the best traditional blues album of 2005. Yet it shouldn't surprise those who have followed the eclectic progression, including occasional forays into blues, of Dion DiMucci's remarkable career.

The same streetwise swagger that informed "Runaround Sue", the same supple soulfulness that redeemed the otherwise mawkish "Abraham, Martin And John", is much in evidence here. Dion strips blues standards to their essence, with only his acoustic guitar (occasionally double-tracked) and percussionist Bob Guertin as support. He pumps fresh blood into Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love", cuts a seductive groove for Willie Dixon's "Built For Comfort", and finds a common spirit in the "Honky-Tonk Blues" of Hank Williams.

He never indulges in the sort of blackface minstrel phrasing of too much blues revivalism or succumbs to period-piece purism. The rendition of "Crossroads" features a subliminal echo of Eric Clapton's arrangement with Cream, while underscoring the song's spiritual dimension. The versions of "Travelin' Riverside Blues" (another Robert Johnson song) and Howlin' Wolf's "How Many More Years" assume at least some familiarity with the liberties taken by Led Zeppelin.

Ultimately, the propulsive, percussive guitar and the languid phrasing amount to a sonic signature. It all sounds like Dion. It all sounds great.

— DON MCLEESE