

Big Harp George



Chromaticism

A premier release on Blues Mountain Records

Chromaticism presents my vision of contemporary West Coast blues, with a sense of place, humor, and a dose of jazz. I feature the "big harp:" the chromatic harmonica rarely exploited in blues. My originals reflect my own experiences and outlook. I choose covers that I can sing with conviction, by artists I admire.

Buzz

"George has mastered our musical tradition and taken it to new heights, especially in his inspiring use of the chromatic. Congrats for this fine first release and the foresight to surround himself with the best California blues players."

David Barrett

School of the Blues and Harmonica Masterclass, San Jose, CA

"Big Harp George, with his jazz-inflected chromatic attack, reminds us that cloning Little Walter isn't the only way to sound good on harp. This is 21st century West Coast blues, and it swings like hell. It's a fresh sounding, contemporary record shaped by the sounds of the great American musical heritage."

Otis Grand, London, UK

"Very nice tone and ideas from George on chromatic on this fine sounding CD with great backing by blues and jazz masters Little Charlie, Kid Andersen & Chris Burns."

Mark Hummel, Berkeley, CA

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BigHarpGeorge.com — Facebook.com/BigHarpGeorge

1 Smack Dab in the Middle 3:31

(Charles Calhoun, Screen Gems Music)

I'd never heard this standard done with harmonica, and playing some of the Basie Band horn lines on chromatic appealed to me, while the vibes preserve a jazzy feel.

2 Crazy About You Baby 4:19

(Williamson, Arc Music Group Catalog, BMG Rights Management US LLC)

The only song with diatonic harmonica. Traveling last December I heard the Ike and Tina Turner version in a Portland bar, and just had to add it.

3 Left So Soon 5:13

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George Music BMI)

My tribute to Paul deLay, the fabulous harp player, singer, and songwriter who died way too young in 2007.

4 My Baby is Now on My Mind 3:13

(Aaron Walker, BMG Sapphire Songs)

This song has a nice groove shift in the middle often employed by T-Bone Walker.

5 Chromaticism 3:32

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George Music BMI)

A jump tune featuring second position chromatic, and the genesis of this CD (and thus its title). When I first performed this song, positive audience and band reactions inspired me toward further compositions and covers featuring chromatic in different positions.

6 Hard Way 2:49

(Aaron Walker and Clarence McGrady, BMG Sapphire)

A leanly arranged rhumba with Kid Andersen's taut T-Bone style guitar lays a nice foundation for my solo.

7 Cellphone Hater 4:30

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George Music BMI)

A reminder of the privacy losses associated with developing technology. Michael nailed the mood on sax, while Rusty adds slinky, laid-back guitar.

8 Strolling Down Bliss Street 3:36

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George BMI)

An actual street in Beirut, but also a metaphor for anywhere that evokes great memories and promises more good times. Little Charlie captures the upbeat mood of the song.

9 Cocktail Hour 4:58

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George Music BMI)

Reviewing this song while enjoying a drink in Penrose, a local establishment, I thought: "These would go smoothly together!"

10 Someday 4:46

(John Green, Songs of Universal)

A tender schmaltz-free ballad.

11 Hey Jaleh! 2:55

(George Bisharat, Big Harp George BMI)

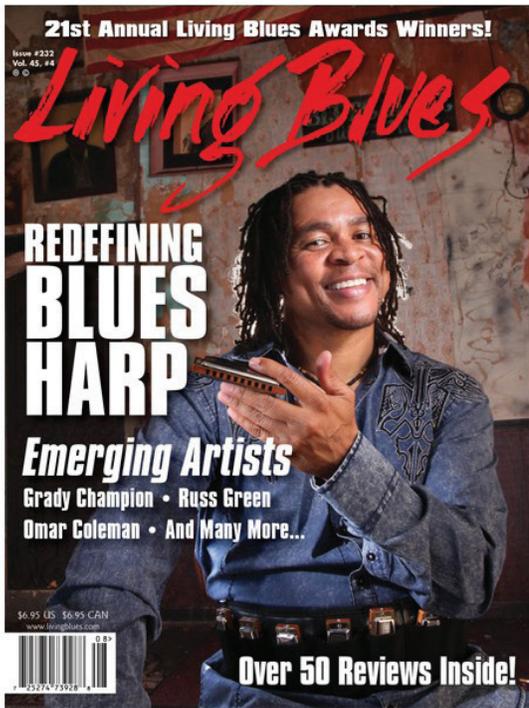
Wish I were 25 but I'm not, so this song is about the next best thing: starting a second life as an empty-nester!

12 Drum Boogie 4:07

(Roy Eldridge and Gene Krupa, Cromwell Music Inc.)

A romp for the band, especially my fantastic drummer Raja Kavar, to close out the set.





FROM LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE - AUGUST 2014 GEORGE BISHARAT

By Lee Hildebrand

"You know, George, this is professional stuff that you did. You ought to get your butt out there and make some music," harmonica blower George Bisharat recalls his old friend Otis Grand telling him after he played on one track of Guitar Brothers, Grand and Joe Louis Walker's 2001 CD for JSP Records in England.

Bisharat, who also sang and played on one song on Grand's 2006 album *Hipster Blues* on the Bliss Street label, finally got around to recording his own album this February and is in the process of putting a band together. Set for release on September 2 on his own Blues Mountain label, *Chromaticism* marks the Topeka-born musician's full-length debut, at the tender age of 59, as the hot new kid on the blues harmonica block.

Although Bisharat has been playing harmonica for over four decades, his primary focus for the past 23 years has been on his day gig as a Professor of Law at the University of California's Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. Born in the U.S. to a Palestinian father and an Irish

American mother, he also worked with the Palestinian Legislative Council to help reform the Palestinian judiciary system and has written extensively on the Middle East for the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and other publications.

Bisharat was turned on to blues at age 12 when his older brother saw the Butterfield Blues Band at a "love-in" in Los Angeles and brought home a copy of the band's *East-West*. Three years later while living in Sacramento, he took up harmonica and began trying to play the Nat Adderley-penned jazz standard *Work Song*. A high school friend later introduced him to the music of Sonny Boy Williamson II, an early favorite whose *Crazy 'Bout You Baby* he reprises on the new CD. And while attending American University of Beirut in 1973 and '74, he was a member of the Bliss Street Blues Band which also included fellow students Grand and Raja Kawar, a Jordanian drummer who flew in from his current home in Paris to record *Chromaticism* at Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studio in San Jose, California.

Through practice, sitting in with bands around the Bay Area, and studying with renowned harmonica educator Dave Barrett, Bisharat developed a remarkable command of the chromatic harmonica that draws on the earlier innovations of George Smith, William Clarke, and Paul deLay. Bisharat plays chromatic in the seldom-used second position on five tracks of the CD, frequently using octaves for a thick horn-like tone. He uses third position on three songs and first position on two others, in addition to playing diatonic harp on another.

Bisharat got the idea of playing in multiple positions from deLay, to whom he dedicated the plaintive *Left So Soon*, one of six original Bisharat songs on the 12-track disc. "The reason I love Paul deLay so much is because he clearly had a different idea of what harmonica playing was all about," Bisharat says. "His whole approach to music was so original and so creative. I don't claim to have his genius by any stretch, but I didn't record my own stuff until I felt like I had something new and different to say."

"I don't mean to rag on other musicians," the Piedmont, California, resident adds, "but harmonica has been stuck for a long time. You have a whole generation of players who are emulating Little Walter, and as great as Little Walter was, it's time to do something different."

In addition to Kawar, Bisharat is joined on *Chromaticism* by guitarists Little Charlie Baty and Rusty Zinn. Andersen plays bass throughout, guitar on two tracks, and also engineered the session. Chris Burns, who had played on *Guitar Brothers* 13 years earlier, produced the CD and doubles on piano and organ. Kent Bryson's vibraphone gives a jazzy touch to two selections, and tenor saxophonists Michael Peloquin blows on two others.

"I want to continue playing with really great musicians," Bisharat says of organizing his own band. "I'm fortunate this is not my livelihood, and I can afford to pick and choose my spots and try to sound good and advance the musical conversation in blues."