

Blues Bytes

June 2002

Bruce Conte
Bullet Proof
Severn CD 0015

Originally recorded in 2000 under the name *Rhythm Meets The Blues*, former Tower of Power guitarist **Bruce Conte** uses the material for his elegant Severn debut, *Bullet Proof*. Conte, a West Coast native, honed his skills playing the local San Francisco clubs. In the early 70s, his band landed the opener for hometown heroes, Tower of Power. Soon after, he was recruited by ToP and stayed for seven years. During that time, he released eight albums with the band. His signature licks can be found on ToP hits like "What Is Hip." After an '80s stint in Las Vegas and a brief jazz retreat in the '90s, Bruce is back on familiar ground, flexing his soul and funk-drenched skills. For this 12-song, 55-minute disc, Conte assembled an all star cast of L.A. musicians. Guest vocalists include Bobby Kimball (Toto), former ToP bandmate Lenny Williams, and Windy Barnes, whose singing is spectacular. Gavin Christopher (Rufus) and his Stevie Wonder-sounding voice (circa *Songs In The Key Of Life*) get chilling on "Too Much Cool." On the track, Conte lays out an emotionally-felt solo. It sets the mood for the song deeper than the tune's lyrics! "Nowhere To Go" is R&B driven primarily due to the adult contemporary keyboarding of Larry Williams. Super funky vocals are provided by Ellis Hall on this disco-era flashback track. Don't let the title of "Chasin' The Blues" fool you. The song is smooth jazz and features the big city nightclub sounding sax of Andre Roberson. Here, Conte's guitar more than hints at jazz fusion. Listeners will be anything but motionless during "Just Won't Act Right." Bruce plays relentlessly while Tim Scott sings feverishly on this bluesy boogie. "It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn" is a real bluestime of the slower persuasion, where Conte exercises his vocal chops. The instrumental "Snatch It Back and Hold It" is nothing like the original version. However, Hans Zermuelhen's keys are fascinating. Ed Reddick proves he is as gifted an entertainer as singer on "I Met A Girl." He elicits Conte to be as fulfilling and sexy. The song has a blues pattern and welcomed pumping/driving horns of Michael Acosta/John Fumo. On the title track, the horns are forceful. Here, Fumo drives his trumpet with the impact of a speeding bullet. "There's Room at The Top" is further loaded with driving force and brazen brass. Its as close to sounding like ToP as the CD gets. This self-produced disc is a nice, tasty break from the sometimes monotonous 12 bar blues. However, the production was evasive in capturing a full, rich sound and the pop-funk tunes will not make you emote like the blues does. The songs are average yet they bump, grind, and sure are hip. Although he is understated, Bruce Conte shows he is a disciplined and professional guitar player. His solos are slick and polished. Fans of electric guitar will crave more. Even though it is his CD, you will admire the fact that he does not showboat. It is obvious this disc was a group effort. For CDs, booking and information, contact: Severn Records Inc., PO Box 1450, Millersville, MD 21108 website: www.severnrecords.com, artist website: www.bruceconte.com