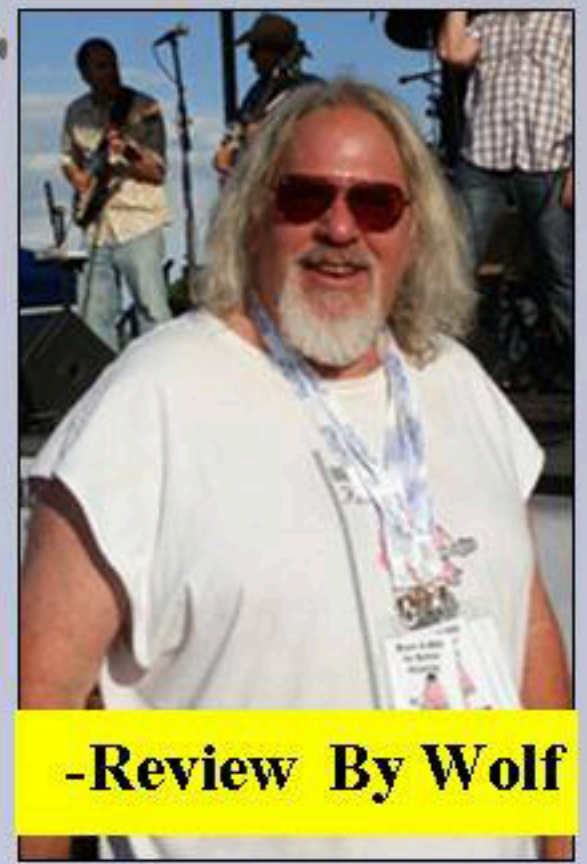


# WOLF'S TERRITORY



-Review By Wolf



## Blue Lightning '1st Strike'

Mark "Mad Dog" Friedman has been blowing a harp and singing around Colorado since forever began. Joined by guitarist/singer "Louisiana" Sam Gillis, the two have collaborated as Blue Lightning. Their debut CD, appropriately titled First Strike, is a baker's dozen plus. It's genuine, down-to-earth, old time raw, and sometimes raucous, front-porch Delta and Hill Country blues. It features a smattering of covers from the likes of RL Burnside and Robert Johnson, along with a good number of originals, penned by Friedman or Gillis. The result is a CD that's good enough to be in any serious collection.

Friedman and Gillis complement each other perfectly throughout. Their technical abilities are beyond question. Most of the tracks were recorded live, meaning the listener gets a sense of the passion and fire that these two artists bring

to their music. It's the easiest thing in the world to lean back and get lost in the blues here, which makes it a blistering success in my book.

Starting with Robert Johnson's "Come On In My Kitchen", the duo is seamlessly smooth. It's apparent that both Friedman and Gillis have a passion for their music. Friedman notes his own personal history while introducing a number of the songs. It's like a trip down memory lane. Even if you weren't there at the time, you can picture it, sense it, and feel it. Blue Lightning makes sure you feel it from every song. Be it Friedman's magical blues harp, (the best train in town), or Gillis' smooth, strong voice and crystal-clear pickin', Blue Lightning makes every strike count. From Friedman's "Harmonica Cadillac", to the Gillis-penned "Get Right Blues", to the traditional "Shortnin' Bread", there's not a single track that doesn't get the toe tapping and the listener engaged.

First Strike is, at bottom, a whole lot of fun and one that the listener will play again and again. A Cover of Mississippi Fred McDowell's "Shake It On Down" is an upbeat number where Gillis exhorts the audience to dance. That same driving beat continues with the traditional "Shortnin' Bread & Jam". It is a nice number with plenty of jam, and itself, a showcase for Friedman's magical harp. The duo slows it down with "Holding The Bag Blues". Also, the Gillis song, "Get Right Blues", is as soul-satisfying as it gets. "Pass My Hat" is a slow, mournful Friedman number, while RL Burnside's "Poor Ol' Maddie" is an upbeat, hand-clappin', toe-tappin' get off your seat and move it groove.

Friedman introduces the next song as being "sky blues" ... what Bukka White called pulling a song from out of the sky. It starts with an audience member being asked for a theme. The result is an "instant song". It really can't possibly get any better at a live venue. The Lightning Hopkins song "Mojo Hand" is a party waiting to happen. In the capable hands of Blue Lightning; it's a party worth checking out. The CD ends with another Burnside number, "Going Down South". As with the rest of the CD, it's a winner. Production is clean and the sound is perfect, from beginning to end of First Strike.

Blue Lightning isn't a "big name" band, but that's part of the beauty of their efforts. More proof, as if any is needed, that some of the shiniest jewels come from the most unexpected places. First Strike belongs in any blues collection, and deserves to be heard over and over again. Keep the blues alive with First Strike from Blue Lightning. I guarantee you're gonna love it!