

CATFOOD RECORDS SIGNS BLUESMAN JAMES ARMSTRONG & WILL RELEASE HIS FIRST NEW CD IN 11 YEARS, BLUES AT THE BORDER, IN DECEMBER WITH NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION BY CITY HALL RECORDS



EL PASO, TX – CatFood Records has announced the signing of acclaimed bluesman James Armstrong and will release his label debut CD, *Blues at the Border*, in December, with national distribution by City Hall Records. *Blues at the Border*, Armstrong's first new album in 11 years, was produced by Michael Ross, James Armstrong and Bob Trenchard, with tracks recorded at studios in New York City and Tornillo, Texas.

James Armstrong has been described by one music writer as “an artist in a world of craftsmen, harking back to a time when each bluesman had a distinctive musical voice. James shares with the legends the ability to go beyond rocking the roadhouse (though he excels at that), to telling the kind of story that the blues tells the best. He's one of a very few seasoned artists who manages to honor the sound of traditional blues, while giving it the contemporary feel that makes modern fans groove.”

*Blues at the Border* is a mix of songs, stories and styles performed by an artist whose dedication to his craft has seen him through one of the hardest times in the history of touring musicians. “Since 9-11 it's been hard for everybody: musicians, clubs and fans,” says James. “I wanted to make an album that reflected how much the world has changed.” By drawing on not only his deep blues roots but his rock, country and folk influences as well, James manages to transcend the constraints of tight musical boundaries. “The blues is evolving like every other genre,” he states. “You can be authentic and contemporary at the same time. It's all about balance!”

Armstrong and fellow producers Michael Ross and Bob Trenchard went with “*Blues at the Border*” as the title cut to illustrate James' point: the song uses grit, groove and lyrics that reflect a very 21st century frustration - border crossing. “‘*Blues at the Border*’ looks at life for musicians after 9-11,” he says. “Add to that the fact that I've been in a long distance international relationship for over eight years and it was only a matter of time before I'd write a song about the border. My girlfriend and I wrote it together over the phone!” The song has some of the best slide guitar on the album and a comic riff at the end, reminding us that James is a born entertainer. “I wanted the song to be funny, not a pity-party or giving over to despair. I've never seen the blues as sad music.”

The choice of Michael Ross as the main producer was a no-brainer. “I call Mike my guitar angel, after he covered for me on guitar when I was injured,” recalls Armstrong. “I told him he'd always play on my CDs, but this time I wanted him to produce me as well. And he really stepped up to the plate. His vast knowledge of all kinds of music helped establish the right mood in every cut, especially on the track, ‘Young Man with the Blues.’”

“Young Man with the Blues” is his most autobiographical song to date; and pays tribute to James' father, a musician himself who gave James the gift of music, a love of the road and, despite the absence of a mother, a happy childhood. About love and loss, “Young Man” is a sad but, not self-pitying song, with three distinct grooves reflecting different phases in James' life. “I needed to get the feeling right off the top and Mike made it happen with his haunting electronica intro. It's not something I would have thought of, but I'm glad he did!

“Bob Trenchard was the man who pulled this whole thing together. When he came into my life, I didn’t just get a new label - Catfood Records - I got a songwriter and a bass-player, too. Recording with his musicians at his studio in Texas added yet another flavor to the album. With Bob, I got three more songs on the album and he let me do whatever I wanted with them.” What they ended up with in “Somebody Got to Pay” (co-written by Trenchard with Sandy Carroll and Jim Gaines), “Baby Can You Hear Me” and “Long Black Car,” is a great mix of James’ gritty guitar and Trenchard’s reflective lyrics.

The new CD also gave James the opportunity to pay tribute to the man who was “like a second dad” to him: Sam “Bluzman” Taylor. “He was a born mentor and a born showman,” James remembers. “More than anything, he taught me how to be an entertainer, and the beauty of harmonies. I really wanted to have Sam’s voice on the cut, ‘Everything That’s Good To Ya,’ and planned to record him, but his health suddenly took a turn for the worse; so I insisted we sample Sam’s signature ‘Weee!!!,’ and we put it on the top of the song.” Sam died four months later.

“Devil’s Candy” is a cautionary tale about what happens when you bite off more than you can chew. “This is one song that just keeps getting better whenever I play it live,” says James. “It began with a bass line, but the slide is what really drives it.” “Nothing Left to Say” is about an ex who can’t stop talking long after the relationship has ended. “This isn’t a song about who was right or who was wrong. It’s a song about: it’s time to move on,” he says. The theme of fresh starts and being grateful for what you’ve got is reflected in “Good Man, Bad Thing” and “Brand New Man.” A friend sent James “Brand New Man.” “I heard it and immediately related to it because I believe it’s never too late start anew,” he states. “‘Good Man’ reminds us that, every once in awhile, good people do bad things. The point is to get back on track immediately and do the right thing.” On the song, “High Maintenance Woman,” James lets the funk take over. Apart from the catchy groove, “HMW” has a lot of word-play, ending in a skit with the woman getting the last word. “My girlfriend Madonna and I had a lot of fun writing that skit. When we do this live, we tailor it to the crowd. Women love it!”

James Armstrong first made a splash with the blues world when he released three albums on HighTone Records: *Sleeping with a Stranger* (1995, and re-released in 2008), *Dark Night* (1998), and *Got It Goin’ On* (2000), which was recorded after recovering from a tragic incident that threatened to end his promising career. In April, 1997, a deranged man broke into his home and nearly stabbed Armstrong to death. After many weeks in the hospital and months of rehabilitation, Armstrong had to basically re-learn how to play the guitar again, due to nerve and tendon damage to his left arm suffered in the attack. But what James gained was a deeper more nuanced sound, richer vocals and, seeing as he could only use two fingers, a mastery of the slide. He also garnered two Blues Music Award nominations for *Got It Goin’ On*.

James Armstrong tours internationally and will support the release of *Blues at the Border* with an extensive series of shows at clubs and festivals around the world.