



T-MODEL FORD

IS GONNA REMEMBER YOU SORRY FUCKERS HOW IT'S DONE

by Zeke Loftin

Phoebe Lewis and I drove laughing all the way down the long hill that leads to the rich soil of the Mississippi Delta. We were on our way to meet blues legend T-Model Ford. We didn't make the trip to hear him play. We came over to meet him. So we were both surprised when he asked us if we wanted him to get out the guitar. Then drug out his black Peavey Razer with much effort and the shuffling of many a step-grandchild. Yelling, tugging, screeching, more yelling. Then his the grandkids lugging the guitar through the house like a one legged cat. T-Model just sits there smiling.

We had just picked up Stella, his newest wife in a long line of wives, in Phoebe's Cadillac at the liquor store after a whole lot of cell phoning between Phoebe and Stella as to where that liquor store was. The conversation on one side is hilarious and I wish I'd had the forethought to snap on my tape recorder. But we finally locate the store, and sure enough, there is Stella, waving her arms at us. I get out of the front so she can climb in because the Cadillac back seats are not what they used to be, and Stella is a bit shapely for the back of this sports model. Not to mention she is wearing an wearing an Inuit-sized coat to stave off the cold. She is a pretty woman and has a sweet smile.

Anyhow, we are back at the modest frame house. They are impressed that Phoebe is who she is and we are impressed that we are sitting in front of T-Model Ford, who has a guitar string stuck in the oddest of places. The three of us come over and wrangle it into the right place, hoping not to lose an eye. Then some tuning and then that slow grinding rhythm comes *wamp-wamping* through the

house. This music has been called a lot of things, but it is cotton patch blues. A fellow named Mike Dill, who has been following the blues in the area for years said, "It's cotton patch blues," so for now, we win. One thing you do know when you hear this man playing in his house with a grandchild whooshing by now and then is this is the real fucking deal, brother. We drove down the hill where we live above the Delta to hear the shit that was going on right here. Stella is tapping her foot, and Phoebe and I both are getting shots of the man who has been photographed so often he is immune to the flash. He is playing "Big Legged Woman" and the guitar is hypnotic and the whole house is grooving like a cobra on slow-mo acid.

After a couple more songs, we start talking. Well, he is talking to me and flirting with Phoebe. This old fucker is a hound dog. He loves women and when we start talking about wives, he lets me know he has had a few. At one point he leans over and said, "I was with a white woman once"—he pauses and looks me dead in the eye—"They ain't like black women," and smiles. Now I am loving the guy, he pulls you in slow, like a big ass catfish. Having met and worked around B.B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Muddy Waters, and Koko Taylor, I have seen some of the best. B.B. King blew me away, but this guy has the voice. It is an instrument as surefire as that black guitar. They bust from the gut and you know this man has seen some shit in his days. We talk of the old days and how he got his name. The story gets so long I'll have to save it for another article. It involves some good white men he worked for in the woods hauling logs. We talk a bit and

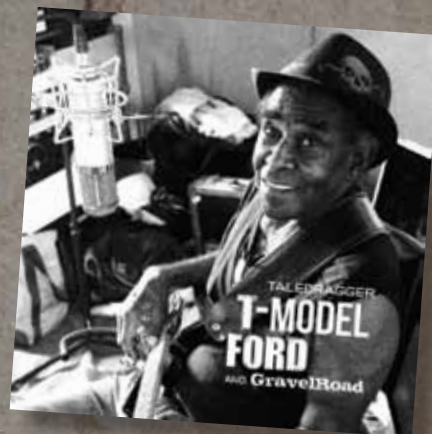


we caravan to the Walnut Street Blues Bar and Grill, where we sit and listen to the man play everything on the new album, *Taledragger* with the band GravelRoad. He beams about it. I rarely use the word “beams,” but it fits. The producers Brian Olive, Matthew Smith, and Arthur Alexander are brilliant; the former two also play in GravelRoad. No white boy jumping up to do Stevie-Ray-style riffs and fuck up the authenticity of the songs. It is a five-star CD in my book.

T-Model is not exactly sure of his age. He owns 90, but there are some contradictions floating out there. He is at minimum in his late 80s, and his half sister still alive in Tennessee says he was born in '22.

T-Model never started playing until he was 58 and was pissed off when his then wife bought him a guitar and amp as a present. His wife left him a week later, the guitar came out of the box, and what comes out of the guitar now is proof that pain produces art.

He is known for telling studio musicians, “T-Model Ford is gonna remember you sorry fuckers how it’s done.” He sure remembered me. ■



Above: the new album, *Taledragger*.
Below: with the band GravelRoad

