

## Reviews

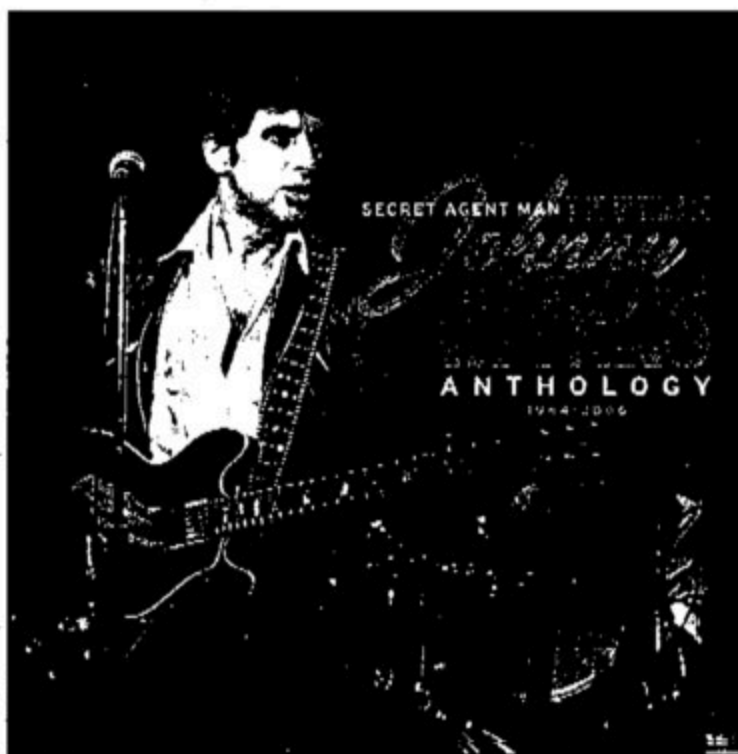
### JOHNNY RIVERS

*Secret Agent Man: The Ultimate Johnny Rivers Anthology 1964-2006*  
Shout! Factory (88663-10116) (Two CDs)

The Ultimate Johnny Rivers two-CD, 36-song collection takes its main title from Johnny Rivers' 1966 Top 10 smash that doubled as the theme to the TV series *Secret Agent*. The song "Secret Agent Man" caught the spirit of an era of 007s, men from U.N.C.L.E. and countless international spies; it didn't hurt that the explosive arrangement featured the most memorable guitar riff of the year. The single followed two years of high-energy hit songs dubbed the "a go-go" style: "Memphis," "Maybelline," "Mountain Of Love," "Midnight Special" and "Seventh Son," which lead off *Secret Agent Man* in chronological order.

Produced by the artist himself, *The Ultimate Johnny Rivers Anthology 1964-2006* takes its time frame seriously; the bluesy "Rollin' Stone" and the upbeat "Let It Rock" were recorded by Rivers in the spring of 2006 and debut here. Broken down by era, the first 14 tracks are drawn from the singer/guitarist's hit-making 1960s; seven come from the 1970s; 13 were originally released on Rivers' Soul City label between 1991-2004. Like Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney and other contemporaries, Rivers continues to perform vital music, and the inclusion of recent recordings distinguishes this compilation from its predecessors. Among the 1990s cuts, Rivers acknowledges Carl Perkins with the swinging contemporary rockabilly "Honey Don't" and "Blue Suede Blues," a Southern country-rock tribute to the influential Sun recording artist. Rivers delivers a swampy, soulful groove on "Down At The House Of Blues," and he changes pace with an intimate five-minute romance titled "Closer To You." Completely revamping "Midnight Special," he converts the rhythm, adds horns and unleashes some of his heaviest guitar licks. On his classic composition "Going Back To Big Sur," Rivers stays close to the 1968 original, giving it a slightly jazzier feel. He does a terrific folk-rock revision of "I'll Be Back," the Fab Four number from the summer of 1964 when the 22-year-old American rocker beat the odds by breaking through the heat of Beatlemania.

Of course, Rivers, like his contemporaries, is tied to



his golden era, extending from 1964-77's smooth, sensual "Swayin' To The Music (Slow Dancin')." Gathering all his best-known titles, *Anthology* compiles 14 Top 40 hits, supplemented by lesser chart-makers such as the buoyant rock 'n' roll revival "Sea Cruise," the masterfully arranged rock 'n' soul "Muddy River" and the majestic "Into The Mystic." The recordings have been remastered brilliantly, as on the breathtaking "Summer Rain," on which Hal Blaine's drums crack through like thunder.

The collection includes only one album track from the 1960s, "Positively 4th Street" from the 1968 *Realization* LP. That interpretation got an unprecedented boost from Dylan, who singled it out as his favorite in his book *Chronicles*. This points to the compilation's under-representation of album cuts and minor singles. Notably absent are three consecutive late-1960s mid-chart entries: "Look To Your Soul," "These Are Not My People" and "Right Relations," an exquisite pop masterpiece yet to be included on a major-label LP or CD. Now that, plus the promise of some fresh recordings, is good reason for Rivers and Shout! Factory to begin work on *Anthology Vol. 2* as a successor to this consummate career-spanning collection. ([www.shoutfactory.com](http://www.shoutfactory.com))

— Joseph Tortelli