

VANJA SKY

BAD PENNY

RUF RECORDS 1257

BAD PENNY—HARD WORKING WOMAN—HIT ME WITH THE BLUES—LOW DOWN AND DIRTY—ALL NIGHT—INSIDE PAIN—GIVE ME BACK MY SOUL—LOST LOVE—DO YOU WANNA?—MARRIED MAN—DON'T FORGET TO ROCK AND ROLL—CROSSROADS OF LIFE

Croatian native Vanja Sky did not even pick up a guitar until five years ago, when a live show changed her life. She's advanced so rapidly in her development, that she now joins young women such as Joanne Shaw Taylor, Erja Lyytinen, Ana Popovic, and Samantha Fish in the Ruf Records stable, having just released her sizzling debut, "Bad Penny." Part of this set was recorded in Berlin at Studio Erde, with the rest laid down at Jim Gaines' Bessie Smith Studio not far from us in West Tennessee in Stantonville. Mike Zito and Thomas Ruf produced, and Zito is on rhythm guitar throughout.

Vanja has the ebullience of wide-eyed youth working in her favor. All save one cut are her originals, and roughly half have that blues-rock swagger and attitude, while the rest show her feelings thru her lyrics.

Leading off is the scathing title cut, where a long-gone lover, just like that "Bad Penny," "turns up again," when you least expect (or want) it. Her SRV influence shows up on the roadhouse-rock of a shout-out to all the 9-to-5'ers out there and this one served as one of our favorites, as Vanja rocks out on the story of that "Hard Working Woman, doin' it day and night!" She strikes a poignant chord with, "at the end of the day, there's only Hell to pay," "You Hit Me With The Blues." Youthful lust is the theme of the uptempo "Do You Wanna be my cherry pie,?" and Vanja calls foul on every cheatin' "Married Man," who "use women just for fun." This one is set over a breathy, ethereal arrangement, perfect for her vocal skills.

Our other favorite was perhaps the set's tour-de-force. Thomas Ruf was always a supporter of the blues of the late Luther Allison, and, on this cut, Vanja, Zito, and Luther's son, Bernard Allison, combine their considerable guitar and vocal skills for a slide-drenched, boogie-fried read of one of Luther's best, "Low Down And Dirty!"

This illustrious trio will be hitting the road as the next installment of the Ruf Records Blues Caravan. Vanja Sky, with her strong debut set, "Bad Penny," also reminds us, "Don't Forget To Rock And Roll!" Until next time...Sheryl and Don Crow, The Nashville Blues Society.