

## ARTHUR 'BIG BOY' CRUDUP

### Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup Rocks

Bear Family Records – BCD 17555

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup brought his blues up from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago, where he made his earliest recordings with RCA. His thrumming and banging guitar style, and his propulsive rhythms, have often earned him the title of "Father of Rock and Roll." Although Crudup remained impoverished most of his life, his songs such as *That's All Right*, *Mean Old 'Frisco Blues*, *Rock Me Mama* and *My Baby Left Me* reached millions of listeners thanks to popular versions that Elvis Presley, Elton John and Rod Stewart recorded.

The 28 tracks on **Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup Rocks** remind us of Crudup's power as a vocalist and his pure, crisp style as a guitarist. His songs focus simply and candidly on subjects ranging from sex and love to failed love, leaving, home, loss and money woes. The selections, which include alternate takes of some songs, cover the years 1946 to 1962, when Crudup was recording for RCA and Fire. **Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup Rocks** illustrates the ways that Crudup's style of blues not only plants the roots of rock 'n' roll but also the ways that his music transcends the blues and gospel he grew up playing in the Delta. Crudup's genius lies in his ability to take one very similar tune and alter its rhythm or its words just slightly to create a different vibe. On *Dirt Road Blues*, Crudup uses the refrain from *That's All Right* as a way into his chorus, but he uses the words as a means of telling his woman that he's not going down the road feeling bad. The guitar work on *Dirt Road Blues* features a cascading lead guitar and not the single lead riffs of earlier tunes. *Mean Old Santa Fe* opens with a boogieing drum roll, and its bright chicken-picked guitar work lays the foundation for a galloping tale of loss. Crudup even inserts a musical and lyrical nod to *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* in the chorus. *Gonna Find My Baby* shimmers like a jazz tune, while *My Baby Left Me* (recorded later by *Ten Years After* as a slow blues) opens with hammering drums and a walking bass before Crudup scampers off on his guitar and vocals. *She's Got No Hair* features Robert Fulton on harmonica and moves along a rocking pace that later rock bands like Loggins and Messina would imitate.

#### Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup Rocks

introduces first-time listeners to the Crudup's musical styles and will drive them to look deeper for more of Crudup's music and to find his influences on later musicians. Devoted fans of Crudup likely own much of this music already, and only those fans seeking very complete libraries of Crudup's recordings will want this set.

—Henry L. Carrigan Jr.

## MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

### Live From the North Side of Chicago

Rock Beat Records – ROC-3386

**Live From the North Side of Chicago** is a remastered and retitled **Live at the Wise Fools Pub**, originally issued on the Quicksilver label in 1990.

Mighty Joe Young, a solid and disciplined guitarist and bandleader who'd earlier worked with Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Billy Boy Arnold and Jimmy Rogers, as well as with Tyrone Davis and Koko Taylor, became one of the first blues guitarists to have a regular and successful presence on Chicago's North Side with his tight, soulful bands. The *Wise Fools*, where he played 12 consecutive New Year's Eve shows, was for years his de facto headquarters (curious that this strong selling point was removed from the title). This 1978 recording captures the excitement of a club performance by Mighty Joe Young, whose live shows stood in complement to his recorded output, about half of which was as a sideman to others, notably Magic Sam, Tyrone Davis and Koko Taylor. Unfortunately, this CD features only six covers, sandwiched between a warm-up track and a closing instrumental, for a total of 41 minutes of music.

Young's crack unit on this set is anchored by bassist Benny Turner (brother of Freddie King and **LB** #251 cover artist) with drummer Willie "The Touch" Hayes, and interestingly includes both a pianist and an organist—respectively, Lafayette Leake and Tommy Giblin—no second guitarist and no horns, with which Young loved to work. Together, this muscular machine creates as much sound and energy as any rock band of the time, while maintaining superior grooves.

Several of Young's previous employers are acknowledged by the inclusion of Jimmy Rogers' *That's All Right*, Magic Sam's *I Can't Quit You Baby* and Tyrone Davis' *Turning Point*.

The arrangements are far more developed than those of other blues bar bands of the time, with plenty of tempo shifts and tension builders and without the self-serving soloing that was, and remains, typical of live blues performances.

Without question, the standout track is *Turning Point*, a showstopper which, performed by Young and his band, would become a highlight of the 1981 film *Thief*, starring James Caan. In this iteration, Young turns the mic over mid-song to Willie Hayes for his lower-than-low, steamy-voiced reading of the lyrics—while drumming—overall arguably the best version of this out there.

Several tracks are awkwardly and abruptly truncated on the last note, a production issue that *Rock Beat* assures me they inherited with the masters. It is unfortunate, too, that the packaging is so lax, with sloppy copyediting, lack of song credits and times and lackluster design.

The set, however, is eminently enjoyable, and is a fond and vivid reminder of Mighty Joe Young's spectacular live shows, as well as of a vibrant period in Chicago's blues club history.

—Justin O'Brien

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Cheap Old Wine and Whiskey

Koko Mojo Records – KM-CD 01

Blues songwriters have provided observations and commentary on a wide range of issues from oppressive working and living conditions to natural disasters (e.g., flood songs), prison life to male/female relationships. A 2017 Koko Mojo release finds the label examining another common blues topic—alcohol, booze, liquor. **Cheap Old Wine and Whiskey** is an excellent selection of blues and R&B songs featuring both well-known (Lightnin' Hopkins) and more obscure (The Capitols) artists. According to the label's website, **Cheap Old Wine and Whiskey** combines two previously released discs (**Too Much Booze** and **Bad Hangover**) for a total of "28 great drinkin' songs straight from the juke joint round the corner!"

On this fast-paced disc, listeners will hear various artists sing about alcohol (whiskey, wine, vodka, gin, beer) from about every conceivable perspective: celebrating the heady experience of booze and partying (*I'm a Wine Drinker*), inebriation and overindulgence (*Sloppy Drunk*), closing the bar (*Give Me*