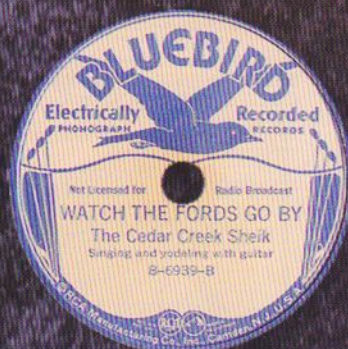


# BLUES & RHYTHM



## The Cedar Creek Sheik



## Gospel Quartets: Norfolk Jubilee Quartet

# The Ravens

★ CD *o' the* MONTH ★



DOWN HOME BLUES

**CHICAGO**

FINE BOOGIE

THE DEFINITIVE FIVE ALBUM COLLECTION  
OF DOWN HOME BLUES FROM CHICAGO, THE WINDY CITY

**The Five CD Chicago Down Home Blues - Fine Boogie is the CD of the Month. Read Chris Bentley's extensive feature review on pages 22 and 23 in this issue.**

# JUMPIN' IN CHICAGO

Chris Bentley gives the low down on a new five CD set of prime post-war Chicago blues



J.B. Hutto and His Hawks: Left to right: Johnnie Mae Dunson, Joe Custom, Earring George Mayweather, J.B. Hutto. Hutto is playing a 1950s Old Kraftsman guitar from the Kay Guitar Company of Chicago. Joe is playing an acoustic 1950s Marvel model fitted with an electric pick-up. Courtesy of Mike Rowe.

**T**hose of you who read this magazine with care and attention will remember the preview of this release in *B&R* 320 – page 22. Expertly compiled by Mike ‘Snooky’ Rowe and Pete Moody, the two old (sorry!) swingmasters have assembled a five CD box set, presented in a digipak format, along with an 88-page booklet, written by Mike, that not only places the music in its historical context, but which also contains a full discography, many wonderful photographs and four pages of colour label shots.

Of the 134 tracks by no fewer than 41 different artists, 62 were originally unissued, 21 are alternative takes and two see daylight for the first time. Collecting just the originally issued tracks presented here would cost you many thousands of dollars, so I can do no better than to quote the catchphrase of a long-deceased British comedian and say, “you lucky people!”

What’s more, there is absolutely no duplication with the four CD Boulevard Vintage set ‘Down Home Blues Classics – Chicago 1946-1954’ released in the 1990s and re-released by Secret Records in 2015.

It is not at all surprising to find that the majority of selections belong to artists once described by Mike Rowe in his book, ‘Chicago Breakdown’, as the Chess Set, although not all of their performances were cut by Len and Phil. Leading the way is the incomparable Muddy Waters with nine tracks, the first three of which are culled from his 1946 session for Columbia, supervised by Lester Melrose, but these recordings remained unissued for many years, until appearing on a Testament LP. Melrose has received a pretty damning press over the years, but it is high time that his efforts were re-evaluated. Nobody who got such individualistic acts as Tommy McClennan onto shellac should be tarnished by being loosely accused in a catch all phrase of fostering ‘the Bluebird Beat’.

Back to Muddy and I notice that the second guitar on his Columbia sides is attributed to ‘prob. Leroy Foster’, rather than to Homer Harris, who gets the credit in the standard post-war discography. Baby Face as the second guitarist is much more likely, as Homer Harris was not a musician – see *Living Blues* number twelve, page 37 – thanks Pete! I was delighted to find the rollicking ‘Last Time I Fool Around With You’ amongst the Aristocrat/Chess sides chosen for this compilation, with Johnny Jones’ piano accompaniment a stand-out. The alternative takes are not that different to the better-known released versions, although ‘All Night Long’ has more echo than the cut released as Chess 1509.

Close behind Muddy is Little Walter with eight tracks, beginning with his first two recordings for Bernard Abrams’ Ora Nelle label in 1947. Here we encounter glitch number one (there are only two in total) as ‘I Just Keep Loving Her’ precedes ‘Ora Nelle Blues’, contrary to the track listing on the box set. ‘Blue Baby’ and ‘I Want My Baby’ are from Tempo-Tone, with Sunnyland Slim’s stentorian vocals rather drowning out Walter. I’ve always liked ‘Can’t Hold Out Much Longer’, although Chess should really have named it ‘Crazy About You Baby’, which is what Walter sings. ‘Blue Midnight’ has again more echo than the version eventually released as Checker 955.

## MISSISSIPPI SAXOPHONE

Clocking in at third place is Sonny Boy Number 2 (Rice Miller). He has seven sides, of which five were originally unissued and one is an alternative take. If you want to know why the harmonica became known as ‘the Mississippi saxophone’, just bend your ears to the opening notes of Sonny Boy’s solo on ‘Work With Me!’ However, you can appreciate just why Chess didn’t release these sides when they were recorded. Sonny’s harp becomes shrill on ‘Don’t Lose Your Eye’ and Below’s drums are miked too high on ‘I Wonder Why’.

Five different acts get six tracks. Sticking with yet another Chess artist, Jimmy Rogers was there at the birth of the post-war Chicago blues and his considerable part in the success of Muddy Waters and Chess Records could benefit from some careful reassessment. His first cut, ‘Little Store Blues’ is derived from Sleepy John Estes’ ‘Liquor Store Blues’ and was recorded for Ora Nelle, the acetate being rescued by George Paulus and issued on his Barrelhouse label. The alternative version of ‘Ludella’ sounds much like a rehearsal. ‘Act Like You Love Me’ is more a showcase for Walter’s majestic harp and ‘You’re The One’ is a much looser version of the song eventually issued as Chess 1616.

The first three of Elmore’s six cuts will be familiar to those of you who bought the Blue Horizon album that he shared with John Brim. Great slide guitar from one of my favourite artists.

The last three of his tracks are from Elmore’s wonderful 1957 session for Mel London’s Chief label and are amongst the toughest blues cut in the latter part of the decade in Chicago. Mention of John Brim and Blue Horizon leads us neatly to his first two selections, ‘Life Time Baby’ being a particular favourite. ‘I Would Hate To See You Go’ features an un-credited second vocal on the chorus – presumably it’s Little Walter.

Turning away from Chess, Jimmy Reed also has six tracks. These days, Reed is a bit like Marmite – you either love him or you ignore him. Mike Rowe’s liner notes sums Jimmy up as well as anything about him that I’ve ever read, ‘...musically limited, emotionally shallow, barren of any poetry (but he) was still immensely appealing’.

The other six-hitter is the ubiquitous Sunnyland Slim. Two tracks as Delta Joe for Opera, reissued on Chance, and all four from an unissued session for Vee-Jay in 1954, with Snooky Pryor and Eddie Taylor amongst the accompanying musicians. Three great tracks, but ‘Be My Baby’ is a bit of a mess, musically speaking.

Two more Chess artists have five tracks. No introduction is necessary in the case of Howlin’ Wolf. Purists may argue that his opening track, ‘Howlin’ Wolf Boogie’, should not have appeared, as it was recorded in Memphis, but the song, a first cousin to ‘House Rockin’ Boogie’ (for that is what Wolf sings) is great. Other highlights are the tough vocal on ‘Break Of Day’ and Wolf’s treatment of John Lee Williamson’s ‘Bluebird’. Floyd Jones is less well-known, but still an important catalyst in the history of Chicago blues. His most memorable side is ‘Dark Road’, his reworking of Tommy Johnson’s pre-war classic ‘Big Road’, but his two sides with Snooky Pryor and Moody Jones aren’t far behind.

Five artists get four tracks each. Continuing the Chess theme, Baby Face Leroy Foster had one 78 disc issued on Chess, but it was first issued by Joe Brown on his JOB label. Baby Face was seriously into the booze and his last recording is the prophetic ‘Blues Is Killing Me’. ‘Late Hours At Midnight’ features a fine guitar solo by Robert Jr. Lockwood. J. B. Lenore also cut for Chess, but the sides here are from JOB and Parrot.

‘Eisenhower Blues’ was reputedly withdrawn to avoid upsetting the Washington establishment, but listening to it today, you wonder what the heck the fuss was all about. The lyrics are about poverty, but don’t point any fingers at the then President, so it is more likely that the withdrawal was a stunt staged by the owner of the record label.

Moving away from Chess, Johnny Shines (although he recorded for them) has one track from an unissued 1946 session for Columbia. ‘Tennessee Woman Blues’ is somewhat diminished by a lumpen drummer, but ‘Ramblin’’, cut for JOB and effectively a cover of Robert Johnson’s ‘Walkin’ Blues’ is a dynamite performance. ‘Evening Shuffle’ is an alternative take of the song known as ‘Evening Sun’, with a harmonica *tour-de-force* from Walter Horton. Another four-fer is Snooky Pryor, whose ‘Fine Boogie’, the title of the box set, was cut in 1952 for JOB and entitled ‘Real Fine Boogie’ when first issued on a much-

cherished Flyright album. My favourite track is 'Judgement Day', a great song. Making up the four-trackers is Billy Boy Arnold, whose first record for the Cool label is included. It falls into the 'deservedly rare' category, as Billy is saddled with completely inappropriate accompaniment. Billy's other two sides were cut for Chess, but never issued, as Len Chess didn't like Arnold's harp-playing (presumably, when compared to Little Walter!). To be fair to Len, 'Sweet On You Baby' is a touch weak, but on 'You Got To Love Me', the harp is much stronger.

Of the artists with three tracks, the best-known is Homesick James. He had three sessions for Chance Records, from which one song, 'Homesick', provided an enduring nickname for the rest of his life. On 'Whiskey Headed Woman', pianist Lazy Bill Lucas manfully covers up Homesick's erratic sense of timing. 'Late Hours At Midnight' is a different song to the one recorded by Baby Face Leroy.

### CHANCE SESSIONS

Robert Nighthawk was a great influence on the young Muddy Waters, but recorded comparatively little during the immediate post-war years. 'Down The Line' features a rather boring vocal by Nighthawk's then-companion, Ethel Mae, but 'Black Angel Blues' is a lovely slide-guitar piece and later to become a much-used song by blues artists. Big Boy Spires achieved the relative fame of two 78rpm releases, but neither sold. The three tracks here are from his Chance session, where the harp player is stated to be either John Lee Henley or P. T. Hayes. As Henley cut an almost identically titled 'Rhythm Rockin' Boogie' for JOB, perhaps he is our man. Finally, the harp-playing cab driver, Dusty Brown. His session for Parrot was much enhanced by the inclusion of pianist Henry Gray, who is heard to great effect. Despite having the Relic LP on which it first appeared, I had forgotten the storming instrumental 'Rusty Dusty', which just goes to show the value of reissues such as 'Fine Boogie'.

We are now down to the two-track men and women. James/Georgia Boy McCain reputedly came up from St. Louis to record for Mayo Williams as early as 1945. His sides show a debt to John Lee Williamson and are pleasant rather than essential. Unlike Shines and Muddy, Willie 'Long Time' Smith at least got his Columbia recordings released. He was an excellent pianist and his sides benefit from having guitarist Willie Lacey aboard, who also featured on Tampa Red's final sessions for RCA Victor. On to two particular favourites, Big Maceo Merriweather, having been cruelly dropped by RCA soon after his stroke, was picked up by Art Rupe's Specialty label and, having been paired with the then Tampa Red band, cut four sides (two included here) of wistful beauty, with Johnny Jones playing piano in the style of Maceo. Guitar Pete Franklin, who hailed from Indianapolis and played very much in the Carr/Blackwell tradition, cut only the one 78 for RCA and turns in two beautiful sides, with Tampa Red on piano. Franklin's presumed girlfriend, Mildred White, cut the other two sides at RCA's standard four track recording session; her titles are not only high quality, with Franklin switching to piano and giving us a chance to savour Tampa's slide guitar accompaniment, but are also exceedingly rare and have never before been reissued.

### IN YOUR FACE PIANO

Time to give the fans of hitherto unissued recordings a break. Grey Haired Bill (real name Willie Evans) is a biographical no-no. His two sides, which are thought to have been recorded for the Rev. Harrington's Atomic-H label, show a more than competent guitarist, paired somewhat oddly with a tenor sax player. No such biographical challenges assail us



From the B&R Archive.

with Memphis Minnie. 'Conjur Man' was cut for the Gebrüder Chess, with Little Walter on harp. However, the better side is the romping 'Kissing In The Dark', with husband Little Son Joe providing the piping lead guitar.

Another Chessman was the guitarist Blue Smitty, one time playing partner of Muddy until they fell out, who had a single release on Chess. However, Len Chess made the comparatively rare error of not issuing the wonderful 'Date Bait', a Roosevelt Sykes song, but Roosevelt never did it this way. It's carried along by in-your-face piano by the unknown Malron Jett, along with Smitty's glorious vocal, praising the girl who is "sweeter than any grape that ever grew on the vine".

More Chess artists include Muddy's pianist, Otis Spann, on an inexplicably unreleased 'I'm Leaving You', based on the old "two years ain't no sentence, three years ain't no crime" New Orleans standard. Spann is backed by the great Walter Horton, blowing some saxophonic harmonica. Eddie Boyd cut many sides for Chess, but his two here are from a 1958 session for Joe Brown. Nice but inconsequential. Henry Gray's two sides were cut for Chess in 1953, but put on the shelf. They are excellent and noteworthy for the only appearance on record of harmonica player Henry 'Pot' Strong, who was murdered by his wife not long afterwards, a great loss.

Of the non-Chess men, Johnny Williams, a long-time partner of Johnny Young, recorded for Chance in early 1953. Williams was close to fifty years old by then and perhaps his music was too traditional for the recording-buying clientele. A bum note on 'Fat Mouth' certainly didn't help! Lazy Bill Lucas was another Chance-r, with one issued 78. His sides here are from the same session, with a very modern-sounding Louis Myers (see later) on guitar. A third Chance recording artist was the slide guitarist J. B. Hutto. His music was crude, elementary, but wonderfully exciting, with the bonus of pianist Johnny Jones holding things together.



Little Walter's All Star Jukes. Left to right: Fred Below, Luther Tucker, Johnny Jones with Letha Jones, Little Walter, unidentified with unidentified lady and Robert Lockwood Jr. Circa 1955. Luther Tucker has a 1950s two pick-up H62 Harmony guitar, whilst Lockwood has a flashy, top of the range Gibson ES-295 which is only partially visible. Courtesy Mike Rowe.

## DOWN HOME BLUES CHICAGO – FINE BOOGIE

Wienerworld WNRCD5100 (Five CDs: 75:45; 76:14; 76:47; 77:58; 76:03)

CD One: GEORGIA BOY McCAIN: I Got To Check Up On My Baby; JAMES McCAIN: Good Morning Mr. Roosevelt; BLUESBOY BILL: Come On Babe; JOHNNY SHINES: Tennessee Woman Blues\*; MUDDY WATERS: Jitterbug Blues\*/ Burying Ground Blues\*/ Hard Day Blues\*/ I Can't Be Satisfied; JOHN SELLERS: Let Me Be Your Sidetrack; WILLIE 'LONG TIME' SMITH: My Buddy Dr. Clayton/ I Love You Baby Boogie; LITTLE WALTER: Ora Nelle Blues (alt)/ I Just Keep Loving Her (alt)/ Blue Baby/ I Want My Baby; JIMMY ROGERS: Little Store Blues; JOHNNY YOUNG: Money Taking Woman; JOHNNY TEMPLE: Old's 98 Blues\*; ST. LOUIS JIMMY: Florida Hurricane; SUNNYLAND SLIM (as DELTA JOE): Train Time/ Roll, Tumble & Slip; FLOYD JONES: Stockyard Blues/ Keep What You Got; ROBERT NIGHTHAWK: Down The Line\*; THE NIGHTHAWKS: She Knows How To Love A Man; BIG MACEO: One Sunday Morning/ Just Tell Me Baby

CD Two: PETE FRANKLIN: Heart Behind The Rise/ Casey Brown; MILDRED WHITE: Kind Hearted Woman/ Cutting Out On Me; MUDDY WATERS: Last Time I Fool Around With You\*/ You Gonna Need My Help\*/ Rolling Stone (alt)/ Long Distance Call/ All Night Long (alt); BABY FACE LEROY: My Head Can't Rest Anymore/ Take A Little Walk With Me; GREY HAired BILL: Gertrude (unissued)/ I'm A Hard Working Man (unissued); NIGHTHAWKS: Black Angel Blues; JIMMY ROGERS: Ludella (alt); FLOYD JONES: Dark Road/ Overseas\*/ Playhouse\*; J. B. LENORE: Let's Roll (alt); HOWLIN' WOLF: Howling Wolf Boogie; JOHNNY SHINES: Ramblin'/ Ain't Doing No Good\*; SNOOKY PRYOR: Fine Boogie\*; MEMPHIS MINNIE: Conjur Man\*; LITTLE WALTER: Juke (alt)/ Can't Hold Out Much Longer (alt)

CD Three: ELMORE JAMES: She Just Won't Do Right/ My Best Friend\*/ Whose Muddy Shoes\*; BACE FACE LEROY: Blues Is Killing Me\*/ Late Hours At Midnight\*; BLUE SMITTY: Crying/ Date Bait\*; JIMMY ROGERS: Mistreated Baby\*/ What's The Matter\*/ Act Like You Love Me (alt); HOMESICK JAMES: Whiskey Headed Woman\*/ Homesick (alt)/ Late Hours At Midnight\*; LITTLE WALTER: Blue Midnight (alt); JOHNNY WILLIAMS: Silver Haired Woman\*/ Fat Mouth\*; JIMMY REED: You Don't Have To Go; BILLY BOY ARNOLD: Hello Stranger/ I Ain't Got No Money; JOHNNY SHINES: Evening Shuffle (alt); J. B. LENORE: The Mojo (alt)/ Slow Down Woman (alt); HOWLIN' WOLF: You Gonna Wreck My Life (alt); BIG BOY SPIRES: Someday Little Darling\*/ Rhythm Rock Boogie\*; MEMPHIS MINNIE: Kissing In The Dark

CD Four: SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: Work With Me\*/ You Killing Me\*/ Don't Start Me Talkin'; JOHN BRIM: Ice Cream Man\*/ Life Time Baby\*; LAZY BILL: My Baby's Gone\*/ I Can't Sleep, I Can't Eat\*; ALBERT KING: Little Boy Blue\*/ Sweet Woman\*; SUNNYLAND SLIM: Troubles Of My Own\*/ Worried About My Baby\*; HENRY GRAY: I Declare That Ain't Right\*/ Matchbox Blues\*; J. B. HUTTO: Price Of Love\*; BIG BOY SPIRES: Tired Of Being Mistreated\*; SUNNYLAND SLIM: I Done You Wrong\*/ Be My Baby\*; LITTLE WALTER: Got To Find My Baby (alt); J. B. LENORE: Eisenhower Blues (alt); DUSTY BROWN: Yes, She's Gone/ He Don't Love You Anymore/ Rusty Dusty\*; JIMMY ROGERS: You're The One (alt); BILLY BOY ARNOLD: Sweet On You Baby\*/ You Got To Love Me\*; JIMMY REED: You Upset My Mind\*/ Come On Baby\*

CD Five: ELMORE JAMES: The Twelve Year Old Boy/ Coming Home/ It Hurts Me Too; JOHN BRIM: Go Away/ That Ain't Right; BIRMINGHAM JR.: Birmingham Late Hours/ You're Too Bad; HOWLIN' WOLF: Break Of Day\*/ Bluebird\*/ You Ought To Know\*; OTIS SPANN: I'm Leaving You\*/ I'm In Love With You Baby\*; SNOOKY PRYOR: Someone To Love Me (alt)/ Judgement Day (alt)/ You Tried To Ruin Me Baby\*; PO' JOE WILLIAMS: King's Highway\*/ Eula Mae\*; SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: Don't Lose Your Eye\*/ I Wonder Why\*/ I Know What Love Is All About\*/ The Key To Your Door\*; JIMMY REED: When You Left Me\*/ It's You Baby\*/ Do The Thing\*; JOHN BRIM: I Would Hate To See You Go/ You Got Me Where You Want Me; EDDIE BOYD: 24 Hours Of Fear/ Five Long Years

\* = Track originally not issued

(alt) = Alternative take, originally not issued



Howlin' Wolf with Sunnyland Slim. Courtesy Blues Unlimited.

To finish off the two-track men, we have Albert King's two unissued sides from his first recording session as a leader, made for Parrot Records. Lovely mellow vocals, but don't expect the guitar virtuosity of his later days at Bobbin and Stax.

Birmingham Junior is another biographical mystery. His two sides here were cut for Mayo Williams' Ebony label. 'Birmingham Late Hours' is a fine harmonica led instrumental. No introduction necessary for Big Joe (or, as credited here, Po' Joe) Williams. His two are from a 1956 session for Vee-Jay and seem quite out of place in the essentially urban Vee-Jay catalogue. Great country blues tho'!

We finish with the singleton artists. 'Blues Boy' Bill is a country blues artist, pure and simple, who made just the one 78 in 1947. His song is another version of 'Take A Little Walk With Me'. Nobody knows for sure who he was, but the liner notes state that "it has been suggested that it may be Louis Myers". Quite why eludes me! Only five to six years later, Myers was playing modern lead guitar behind Little Walter. John Sellers later became a gospel and folk singer of some repute. His side here, cut for RCA, is technically proficient, but not memorable. In contrast, Johnny Young's 'Money Taking Woman' fairly storms along and excites even the dullest palate. Johnny Temple's 'Olds '98 Blues' was cut for Ora Nelle and is from the only surviving acetate. A million miles better than his formulaic offerings pre-war for Decca. On a high end note, St. Louis Jimmy's track benefits from having Muddy at his sliding best.

I trust that by now, you have a much firmer understanding of the many highs and the miniscule number of lows of what has been described to me by a knowledgeable blues insider as "the release of the decade". One of the selling points must be the incredible sound that engineer Glenn Keiles has extracted out of what are, in some cases, rather battered acetates. A veritable 'conjur man'!

Another is the 88-page booklet written by Mike Rowe. Although (glitch number two) one paragraph in the section on J. B. Hutto is repeated twice, that is not Mike's fault. In his usual self-deprecating manner, he ascribes much of the source material for his notes to "plundering from Mike Leadbitter's sleeve notes to 'Genesis 1'". No Mike, mostly all your own work and many thanks for it, along with Pete Moody's drive and determination to see that the obscure and forgotten corners of the music that we all love is rescued from the penumbra and brought proudly out into the sunshine. Without reservation, buy it or be laughed at and pointed to in the street.

Chris Bentley reviewed 'Down Home Blues Chicago – Fine Boogie' issued by Wienerworld.

## ★ Steppin' OUT ★

### HARVEST TIME BLUES FESTIVAL

Monaghan, Ireland 1st-3rd September

For those with an open mind to blues in its many varied formats from acoustic to electric they were rewarded handsomely over the weekend. What it may have lacked in big names was more than compensated for by big performances by everyone who all brought their A game.

The acoustic room in The Market House was the setting for five different acts who played a combined total of fifteen almost sold out shows – alas I only managed to attend four, and three of those were from Doug MacLeod, yes he's that good. Doug was, as usual, in spectacular form with the audience hooked from the first few notes or indeed the first words of the stories behind each song.

His sets included several of the new songs on his latest album including the heartfelt and emotional title track 'Break The Chain', to an acerbic tribute to the establishment on 'Who's Driving This Bus', and on 'Mr Bloozeaman', well 'I'm sure we can all think of at least one who fits the bill there.