

★ CD *of the* MONTH ★



DOWN HOME BLUES: Chicago Vol 2: Sweet Home Chicago

Wienerworld WNRCD 5106 5 (5 CDs: 77:00; 75:00; 76:00; 77:00; 78:00)

CD One: JAMES CLARK: Who But You*; MEMPHIS JIMMY (JAMES CLARK): Drifting; JAMES (BEALE STREET) CLARK: Come To Me Baby/ You Can't Make The Grade; JOHNNY SHINES: Delta Pine Blues*/ Ride Mama Ride*/ Evil Hearted Woman*; HOMER HARRIS: I'm Gonna Cut Your Head*/ Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*/ Atomic Bomb Blues*/ Tomorrow Will Be Too Late (alt); WILLIE 'LONGTIME' SMITH: Due Respects To You/ No Special Rider Here/ Devilment On My Mind/ Homeless Blues*/ Homeless Blues*; BLUES BOY BILL: Little Boy Blue; MUDDY WATERS: Burying Ground Blues (alt); HERMAN RAY: Xmas Blues (test); FOREST CITY JOE: Special Delivery Man/ Shady Lane Woman/ Mean Mistreatin' Women*/ Lonesome Day Blues*; DIRTY RED: You Done Me Wrong; PETE FRANKLIN: Mr. Charley (Blues)*; BIG BILL BROONZY: Water Coast Blues

CD Two: MUDDY WATERS: Hard Days*/ Burying Ground*/ Lonesome Day*/ Stuff You Gotta Watch*; FLOYD JONES: School Days; TAMPA RED: Come On, If You Are Coming/ I'll Find My Way; JOHNNY TEMPLE: Between Midnight And Day/ Sit Right On It; JIMMY ROGERS: Hard Working Man*/ My Little Machine*/ Crying Shame*; ROBERT LOCKWOOD JNR: Glory For Man*/ Glory For Man; HOWLING WOLF: How Many More Years (alt)/ Just My Kind*; MEMPHIS MINNIE: Broken Heart (alt)/ Lake Michigan*/ Me And My Chauffeur (alt)/ In Love Again*/ What A Night*; BLUE SMITTY: Crying (alt)/ Elgin Movement*; ROCKY FULLER: Funeral Hearse At My Door*; LITTLE WALTER: Driftin' (alt)/ Off The Wall (alt)

CD Three: HONEYBOY EDWARDS: Sweet Home Chicago*/ Drop Down Mama*; HENRY GRAY: I Declare That Ain't Right* (take 4)/ Goodbye Baby*/ You Mess Me Up*; BIG BOY SPIRES: My Baby Left Me*; LITTLE WALTER: That's It*/ That's It* (edited version)/ Blues With A Feeling (alt)/ I Love You So (Oh Baby)*/ Last Night (first version); ELMORE JAMES: I See My Baby*/ Country Boogie; LAZY BILL: I Had A Dream (alt)/ She Got Me Walkin' (alt); ALBERT KING: Little Boy Blues (alt)/ Hand Me Down (Sweet Woman)/ Murder*; MORRIS PEJOE: Untilted Instrumental*/ Hurt My Feelings; HOMESICK JAMES: Lonesome Blues*/ 12th Street Station*/ Long Lonesome Days*; GUS JENKINS: Eight Ball*; MUDDY WATERS: (I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man (alt); OTIS SPANN: It Must Have Been The Devil/ Five Spot

CD Four: CHUCK BERRY: Wee Wee Hours/ No Money Down/ I've Changed*; BILLY BOY ARNOLD: I Was Fooled/ Don't Stay Out All Night/ You Got Me Wrong/ My Heart Is Crying; BO DIDDLEY: Little Girl (alt)/ I'm A Man (alt); You Don't Love Me (You Don't Care); HENRY GRAY: Watch Yourself*/ That Ain't Right*; MUDDY WATERS: This Pain*/ I Want To Be Loved

(alt); LITTLE WALTER: Little Girl*/ Temperature (first version); DUSTY BROWN: Hurry Home*; SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: Good Evening Everybody*/ Have You Ever Been In Love*/ I Don't Know*/ Like Wolf*; HERBY JOE: Smokestack Lightning/ Dreamed (Last Night); HARMONICA 'BLUES KING' HARRIS: I Need You Pretty Baby For My Own/ Blues King Mango (sic); PO JOE WILLIAMS: Goin' Back/ My Baby Left Me; CD: Five: JIMMY REED: I'm Gonna Ruin You* (first version)/ Honey, Where You Going?/ Little Rain/ Honey Where You Going (alt)/ Signals Of Love*; SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: Hurts Me So Much (take two)/ Fattening Frogs For Snakes (alt); ELMORE JAMES: Knocking On Your Door/ I Can't Hold Out/ Sun Is Shining; G. 'DAVY' CROCKETT: Look Out Mable; DUSTY BROWN: Well You Know I Love You (I Love You); FREDDIE HALL: I Love This Carrying On/ She's A Upsetter; LITTLE MAC SIMMONS; My Walking Blues/ Come Back; EDDIE BOYD: Nothing But The Blues/ Five Long Years; HOWLING WOLF: Mr. Airplane Man/ Little Baby; HOUND DOG TAYLOR: Baby's Coming Home/ Five, Take Five; HOMESICK JAMES: Can't Afford To Do It/ Set A Date; SLIM WILLIS: Running Around/ No Feeling For You

*Track originally not issued; (alt) alternate take (originally not used)

Please forgive the momentary self-indulgence, but may I begin with a snort and chuckle? Why? Well, at the time the previous Wienerworld down-home blues box set was issued last summer, some of the blues chatterati, including a few who should have known better, decided to speculate on the region where the next box-set – this one – would be based. They used the Real Blues Forum (RBF) to suggest various possibilities – Louisiana? Texas? The West Coast? – without any of them having any real idea. Now the chicken has left the coop and it is a return to the Windy City and an illustrious roster of major blues names – Muddy, Little Walter, Wolf, Sonny Boy #2, Elmore, Reed, etc. – along with a supporting cast, ranging from the merely obscure right through to the almost unknown. With mud(dy) on their faces, the RBF crew can now relax and enjoy another bumper crop of post-war down-home goodies from Chicago, the mother lode for many blues enthusiasts and collectors.

Just like 'Fine Boogie', the previous Chicago box set compilation, which I reviewed back in B&R 324, 'Sweet Home Chicago' is compiled and co-ordinated by Peter Moody, who has tried to avoid sides available elsewhere and very largely succeeded (see later), with audio restoration, engineering and mastering in the more than capable hands of Glenn Keiles. The box set, consisting of five CDs, contains in total 135 tracks by 46 different artists, of which 53 tracks were originally unissued and eighteen are alternative takes to the issued versions. All of this is presented in Jane Maguire's elegantly-designed digipak format, containing a 94-page booklet, replete with a full sessionography, many rare photographs (some previously unseen by nearly all of us), label shots and – a new twist, this – small dissertations by Keith Randall and Peter Moody on tracks by Little Walter and Jimmy Reed respectively, to accompany another major essay by the Chicago blues expert, Mike Rowe. This time around, Mike includes biographical information (where known) on those artists that did not appear on the 'Fine Boogie' box set.



Labels: Courtesy Peter Moody and Chris Bentley.



Little Walter, Elmore James and Muddy Waters. Photo courtesy the Pete Moody collection.

Now I know that one or two of you might just be harbouring the uncharitable thought that this new set represents the leftovers in the dustbin from the smorgasbord of delights that was 'Fine Boogie', but you couldn't be more wrong. Let me try to guide you through the pleasures in store for you. As previously, the lion's share of the tracks included on this box set belongs to artists recorded by Len and Phil Chess for their Chess and Checker labels. Leading the pack is Little Walter with nine tracks, all either previously unissued, or alternative takes. Of particular interest is firstly 'That's It' from July 1953, where, as Keith Randall points out in his note appended to Mike's essay, Walter switches from diatonic to chromatic harp towards the end of this instrumental, with somewhat chaotic consequences. To highlight this, the fifth (chromatic) chorus has been edited out in a follow-on track, in order to provide an aural comparison. Secondly, also included is the first and unissued version of 'Last Night', which Walter claimed was inspired by the murder of fellow Chicago harmonica player Henry 'Pot' Strong, but which was always unlikely, given Walter's known reluctance to provide any opportunity to harmonica rivals to try to usurp his position. Contrary to the sessionography, there is no harmonica present on this version of 'Last Night'.

Muddy runs Walter a close second, with eight tracks, starting with the alternative take of his 1946 version of 'Burying Ground Blues' (aka 'Sad Letter') for Columbia – also included is his 1949 stripped-down version of the same song for Aristocrat. It took Muddy quite some time to persuade Len Chess to allow him to record with his working band, but once that happened, 'Stuff You Gotta Watch' and 'Lonesome Day', both from a December 1951 session, perfectly illustrate why Muddy's perseverance would pay dividends. The alternative version of 'Hoochie Coochie' isn't too dissimilar to the issued take, although Walter's harp is a tad less saxophonic. However, I could cheerfully have forgone 'This Pain' (how true!) and 'I Want To Be Loved', which are Willie Dixon songs that fail to hit the spot. Third in the line-up of runners and riders is Sonny Boy Williamson, with seven tracks. 'Good Evening Everybody' comes from his first Chicago session, with Muddy and Otis Spann among the accompanists and featuring some fine guitar from Jody Williams. Robert Lockwood's guitar is equally fine on 'Have You Ever Been In Love' and 'Like Wolf', actually not a title, but rather an engineer's remark on a tape box, which is justified by Sonny's clever vocal impression of Chester, is another side of high quality. 'This Is My Apartment', once amusingly mis-titled as 'This Is My Department' (it's hard to imagine Rice in charge of haberdashery!) might just as well have been called 'I Need Your Love'.

A quick hop across Cottage Grove to Vee-Jay Records and Jimmy Reed, who has six selections. Both 'Little Rain' (this side is available on the Jasmine CD, 'Blue & Lonesome', issued last year) and 'Honey, Where You Going' (another odd title, which might better have been called 'She's Fine') are presented in their issued and unissued alternative forms, with a learned appendix by Peter Moody, discussing their differences. I think I prefer the unissued versions, although that cannot be said for the unissued first version of 'I'm Gonna Ruin You', which is taken at a funereal pace and drags considerably. I realise that Reed is not everybody's cup of cocoa, but he was Chicago's most successful bluesman, with in excess of twenty hits and an amazing twelve records crossing over on to the Pop charts.

Four different artists each have five tracks. Let's begin with the distaff side and Memphis Minnie, who by 1952 was in the final act of a recording career dating back to 1929. Just why Len and Phil decided to record her is lost in the mists of time, but the choice of their newly-formed Checker imprint perhaps provides a clue, in that they were anxious to bolster their Checker recording roster with a 'name' act and, even better, to re-record her early '40s hit, 'Me And My Chauffeur'. Whatever, Minnie provided her usual feisty input, aided by the addition of Little Walter on harp on three of the four tracks – two alternative takes appear here. Another two sides are from Minnie's final commercial session, for Joe Brown and JOB Records, in October 1953. They are both less interesting and less well recorded than her Checker sides.

Next up is the incomparable Elmore James and part of his wonderful January 1953 session for Chess. If you don't know 'Country Boogie', then where have you been hiding all these years? One of THE great post-war blues guitar instrumentals, with wonderful farty sax from J.T. Brown. Elmore

also has one side from his April 1957 session for Chief and two cuts from his 1960 recordings for Chess, including the superb 'The Sun Is Shining', possibly cut as a sort of rejoinder to his 'The Sky Is Crying' for Fire late the previous year. The common denominator in all this is the presence of J.T. Brown on tenor sax and the virtually nonpareil Johnny Jones on piano. As a bonus, check out a photo in the accompanying booklet – Little Walter, Elmore and Muddy together, most likely in 1953. Elmore looks cooler than a deep freeze!

Elmore's long-time sidekick, Homesick James Williamson, also has five sides, the first three emanating from his third (or was it his fourth?) and final session for Chance in August 1953, from which nothing was issued at the time. Lazy Bill Lucas is on piano to try to bring some order to Homesick's always variable timing, but Snooky Pryor on harp largely comps along. Nine years later, both sides of Homesick's 45 for Carl Jones's Colt label are included – pleasant but hardly essential listening. Finally, Henry Gray, who just like Otis Spann was destined to spend the '50s and '60s acting as an accompanist, rather than as a 'name' act. 'I Declare That Ain't Right' benefits immeasurably from the presence of the afore-mentioned Henry 'Pot' Strong, who blows some wonderful harp. Two years later, Gray cut a four-track session, all included here, including a remake of 'That Ain't Right', which suffers only by comparison to the earlier Chess version, but the highlight of the session is 'You Messed Up'. Incidentally, just how often do you get accompanists (Alfred Harris on harp; Little Hudson on guitar; James Bannister on drums) who all recorded under their own names?

There are six artists with four tracks apiece. Starting with the earliest, James 'Beale Street' Clark, aka Memphis Jimmy, who had a tragically short life, dying in his early thirties, only a scant few months after his last recordings. His sides are all piano-led blues, although strangely enough, Clark doesn't play piano on Charles Brown's old warhorse, 'Drifting', that job falling to Baby Doo Caston. Those of a nervous disposition are advised to avoid J.T. Brown's clarinet solo on 'Who But You'. His other two sides are from his 1946 Columbia session, with Muddy and Baby Face Leroy Foster on guitars; 'Come To Me Baby' was written by Columbia A&R man Art Satherley's wife, so Mike's informative sleeve notes state. Another pianist, Willie Long Time Smith, also dates from the immediate post-war years. His sides benefit considerably from having guitarist Willie Lacey aboard, whose fine jazz-influenced runs liven things up. Homer Harris was also part of the 1946 Columbia session, presumably, as Mike Rowe suggests, recommended by James Clark, with whom Harris had worked in the Chicago clubs and bars since 1944. Muddy essays some nice guitar fills on the alternative take of 'Tomorrow Will Be Too Late', but what we are hearing from Harris, Clark and Smith are the dying embers of Lester Melrose's long reign as the go-to man for Chicago blues. Electric certainly, but not really electrifying. Let's cheer up with the youthful exuberance of Billy Boy Arnold. Billy is the first to criticise his later Vee-Jay recordings, but the first two sessions, featuring as they did Henry Gray and the hugely underrated Jody Williams, were brilliant. Just check out Jody's insidious guitar at the opening of 'I Wish You Would'. Wonderful stuff!

Howling Wolf needs no introduction to the readers of this magazine. It's perhaps a misnomer to include his first two selections on a Chicago compilation, cut as they were in Memphis. The alternative take of 'How Many More Years' is somewhat hesitant, but 'Just My Kind', a variant

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NEW RELEASES

of the 'Going Back To Memphis' theme is an excellent side. The last of the four-track men is Forest City Joe Pugh, not normally regarded as a Chicago bluesman, but his tracks were cut for the Chess Brothers' Aristocrat label in Chicago at the tail end of 1949, with one J.C. (Cole?) on guitar. Joe was an out-and-out Sonny Boy #1 imitator, with the inspiration for his songs largely stemming from Leroy Carr. Four lovely country blues performances.

Let's now turn to the three track men – six of them too. Bo Diddley is rarely thought of as a bluesman, but that is really how he started out. His sides all come from his first Checker session in March 1955, with Billy Boy on harp and Otis Spann on piano. He was initially somewhat unfortunate in that 'I'm A Man' got hi-jacked within three months by Muddy, who turned it into 'Manish Boy', but for me, the standout side is 'You Don't Love Me', with rocking piano from Spann and great harp from Billy – was it really the case that Len Chess didn't like Billy's playing, or were other background influencers at work? Chuck Berry too is nowadays not thought of as a bluesman, but 'Wee Wee Hours' from his first Chess session is a blues, pure and simple. 'No Money Down', showing Chuck's wonderful facility for a great set of lyrics and, most likely, 'I've Changed', another good blues, are from Chuck's follow-up session.

Eddie Boyd was another good lyric writer; that's what first attracted the Chess Brothers to him. His three sides here date from 1960 and were recorded by Chicago drummer Jump Jackson, who then leased them to Carlo Krahmer's Esquire Records in London, who issued them as part of a four-track EP. One curiosity from the sessionography; why was Robert Lockwood relegated to playing bass guitar? Albert King has three sides from his first session in 1953 for Parrot, with both Johnny Jones and John Brim in support. Beautifully recorded, with the beginnings of what was to become one of the blues most recognisable guitar sounds. Finally, two stalwarts of the Chicago blues. Jimmy Rogers helped create the Muddy Waters sound, but until recently has been given scant credit for it. His three-track date is from 1951/2; 'Hard Working Man' has Little Walter on second guitar and drags rather uncomfortably, but 'My Little Machine', the "been burning bad gasoline" metaphor for sexual impotence, is Jimmy on top form and benefits from Walter's harp. All three sides feature Eddie Ware, the king of the endless trills, on piano and are most welcome additions to the compilation. Finally, Johnny Shines with three of the four sides he cut for Columbia in 1946. He is accompanied by a second guitarist, thought to be Big Bill Broonzy, and a somewhat rudimentary drummer. Johnny hollers lustily, but, as Mike Rowe observes, 'kept his slide in his pocket'. That is not to decry country blues of a high order, along with a nod to Robert Johnson on 'Evil-Hearted Woman Blues'.

OK, we are now down to the artists with two tracks – seventeen of them, which I will try to address in roughly chronological order. From 1947, Dirty Red (Nelson)'s only post-war session for Aladdin is much enlivened by the piano of James Clark and the guitar of Lonnie Johnson, no less.

Do I detect an uncredited bass on 'You Done Me Wrong'? From 1949, Tampa Red's two sides feature Little Johnny Jones on his first and second sessions as Tampa's indispensable right-hand man and if you want to know why Jones was rated so highly, just listen to his contribution on 'Come On, If You're Coming'. Neither of Tampa's two tracks were on the great Ace double CD released in 2015, so it's nice to have them here. From 1950, Johnny Temple's two tracks were recorded, not very well, for Miracle, as Temple's vocals are rather undercooked. Moving on to 1951, Robert Lockwood's two sides are the unissued at the time portion of his Mercury session. I prefer 'My Daily Wish', not only because it has more of Lockwood's guitar, but also for the opening line – "My daily wish is to get you off my mind". That told her! Into 1952 and two sides from Blue Smitty, both highly proficient and sounding like they were cut a decade later, but neither approaching the majesty of 'Date Bait', on the first Wienerworld Chicago box set.

1953 first gives us Honeyboy Edwards. 'Sweet Home Chicago' is the Sun version, cut in Memphis, but 'Drop Down Mama' is from a session for Chess, truncated either because Len Chess felt that Honeyboy sounded too much like Muddy, or, more likely, because Edwards was seriously marmalised. Morris Pejoe contributes a fine instrumental, but 'Hurt My Feelings' really doesn't go anywhere, despite the presence of the wonderfully-named Stanley Grim (he's not!) on sax. Late in the year, two sides from Lazy Bill Lucas – fine lyrics and the bonus of great guitar from Louis Myers. 1954 brings Otis Spann and the reputedly late-night session that brought forth his only Checker single. Great fun, sometimes descending into bare-knuckle belligerence, has been had over the years by blues aficionados, trying to identify which guitar solo is taken by B.B. King and which by Jody Williams. No matter, both sides are top-notch. From 1955, Dusty Brown has one track, 'Hurry Home', from his session for Parrot and from 1958, one side of his 45 for Bandera. Both are competent performances, but neither matches the excitement of his 'Rusty Dusty' on the first Wienerworld Chicago box set.

1956 delivers us three more artists. Herby Joe is a mystery. Nobody even knows his surname and his one record, for Joe Brown and Eli Toscano's Abco label, seeks to cash in on the then popularity of Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightning' by using the same title, although the 'song' (partly spoken) is completely different. The flip, 'Dreamed (Last Night)' has tasty guitar from Wayne Bennett. The Harmonica Blues King – real name Alfred

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Slim Willis. Photo courtesy Blues Unlimited.

Harris – is represented by his fiendishly rare single on Mayo Williams' Ebony label. 'Blues King Mango' (shouldn't that be 'mambo'?) doesn't really cut the mustard, but 'I Need You Pretty Baby' is a quality performance. Big Joe Williams rarely turned in anything other than a quality track and his two sides, cut for Vee-Jay, are almost an anachronism, being country blues in a catalogue full of electric blues and proto-soul. Sam Fowler's accompanying harp is a delight.

We now jump to 1959 and two artists who recorded for Carl Jones's C.J. label. Freddie Hall's 'Love This Carrying On' doesn't excite these jaded ears, but 'She's A Upsetter' features a double-length

guitar break from Ike Perkins and is well worth the price of admission. Little Mack Simmons' two sides are pretty well-known and as Mike Rowe notes, shows the late '50s influence of the Chicago West Side artists (Rush; Magic Sam, etc.) on the blues now coming out of the Windy City. Hound Dog Taylor's two stem from 1960 and were issued by record man Cadillac Baby on three (later four) different labels. Great rocking slide guitar music. Finally, Slim Willis from 1962, by which time the black record-buying public were turning to soul and the white college kids were only just beginning to appreciate the music, so Slim's music went unnoticed, except for 'No Feeling For You' being picked up by the British R&B label.

Just the nine singleton artists to go. A small hurrah that the other side of the ludicrously rare Blues Boy Bill 78 makes it on to the box set – lovely solo country blues, but I'm still not convinced by the Louis Myers attribution. Herman Ray's side is from a rare 1947 test. Ray is still doing his Peetie Wheatstraw shtick, but the lovely piano accompaniment sounds much more like Johnny Jones than Eddie Boyd. Guitar Pete Franklin has Tampa Red on piano for 'Mr. Charley' and Big Bill Broonzy, who is strangely out of fashion these days, performs 'Water Coast Blues', which was an influential song amongst Texas artists; Thunder Smith recorded it. Floyd Jones cut 'School Days' twice; once for Tempo Tone in the late '40s and then again for Vee-Jay in the mid-'50s. This is the earlier version, issued under Sunnyland Slim's name. Rocky Fuller, aka Louisiana Red, has Little Walter in support for 'Funeral Hearse' and before he moved out to the West Coast, Gus Jenkins recorded 'Eight Ball' for Chess with Walter Horton on harp and Willie Nix on drums. Lovely. Big Boy Spires has an unissued side from his Chance session and to round things off, break out the drapes, comb the ducktail and rock away to G 'Davy' Crockett's 'Look Out Mabel', with stomping piano work from Henry Gray and blistering guitar from Louis Myers.

That's all she wrote, folks, so huge thanks, not only to Peter and Mike, but also to Anthony Broza, Jacob Morrison-Wood, Laura Berman and the rest of the team at Wienerworld for such a musical cornucopia of delights. A five-star recommendation for a box set that should be in every Chicago blues lover's collection.

Chris Bentley

BILL DICEY: Fool In Love – The Complete Sessions

JSP 3015 (48:14)

Fool In Love/ Whoopin' And Holler' / Americana/ Sleeping With The Devil/ Too Poor To Die/ Wheeling & Dealing/ Raining In My Heart/ Lightnin' Bug/ Sail On/ Lightnin' Bug/ Sleeping With The Devil/ Wheeling & Dealing

I recall seeing Bill Dickey's gig at The Half Moon in Putney back in 1987, a fine evening of straight-ahead, no-nonsense blues, with good vocals and excellent harp playing from Bill and totally appropriate backing from his English accompanists, including guitarist Richard Studholme, who had spent a good few years in Bill's band in New York. It showed...

Whether the gig preceded or followed the London recording session for this album I no longer recall, but this album contains (I'm pretty sure) the line-up I saw that night and the repertoire consists of excellent blues and nothing but, with the exception of the rockabilly-tinged opener – I'm surprised the rockers haven't bootlegged this on a 45. Neil Slaven's original sleeve-notes for what was possibly JSP's last vinyl release, and John Stedman's update, give plenty of detail of Bill's rich musical background; he had a long association with the Spivey label, who put out one live album by him and another where he shared the credit with The Holmes Brothers, in addition to numerous tracks on compilation albums and plenty of backing work.

At the time John Stedman recorded this release, white harmonica players (many from California) were starting to come through to wider audiences, but Bill, born in 1939, was a lot older than many of them, and he had played in an otherwise all-black band in the early 1950s – I recall him telling me about how he saw Memphis Minnie playing on a segregated beach. Bill's experience shows on this album: 'Too Poor To Die' recalls his work with Louisiana Red, and 'Raining In My Heart' reminds us that Bill backed up Slim Harpo in New York.

'Lightning Bug' is very Jimmy Reed (the band hit it just right too), though there is a strong influence from John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson in Bill's playing. This is more overt in the two versions of 'Sleeping With Devil', which also show Williamson's influence on Dicey's vocals, and 'Wheeling & Dealing' is very much in Little Walter's style. 'Sail On', the closing track on the original LP release, is a real tour-de-force for Bill and Richard and may be here because it was Muddy Waters who introduced Bill to Spivey, knowing him from a time when Bill and Buddy Moss opened for him.

The final three tracks of this CD were recorded around the same time, for 'The Paul Jones Show', and as John Stedman points out, the sound is a little more forceful, with the result that these three tracks are quite different versions. Although I have noted the influences to be heard here, there is a strong sense of this as Bill's album, with his relaxed attitude coming through strongly. Bill died of cancer in 1993, and I know a couple of people who have been trying to get this album for many years; it should satisfy them, and anyone else who appreciates good blues by someone who knew just how to play and sing good blues.

Norman Darwen

JESSE FULLER: San Francisco Bay Blues – The Jesse Fuller Collection 1954-61

Acrobat ADDCD3298 (Two CDs: 72:25; 72:31)

CD One: Railroad Worksong/ Lining Up The Tracks/ John Henry/ Railroad Blues/ San Francisco Bay Blues/ Hangin' Round A Skin Game/ Leaving Memphis, Frisco Bound/ Got A Date At Half Past Eight/ Hump In My Back/ Flavor In My Cream/ Finger Twister/ Just Like A Ship On The Deep Blue Sea/ Motherless Children/ Amazing Grace/ Hark From The Tomb/ As Long As I Can Feel The Spirit/ Cincinnati Blues/ Just A Closer Walk With Thee/ Take This Hammer/ Linin' Track/ Tiger Rag

CD Two: I'm Going To Meet My Lovin' Mother/ Memphis Boogie/ Raise A Ruckus/ Bye And Bye/ Fingerbuster/ Stagleee/ 99 Years/ Hesitation Blues/ San Francisco Bay Blues/ Jesse's New Midnight Special/ Leavin' Memphis, Frisco Bound/ Take It Slow And Easy/ The Monkey And The Engineer/ New Corrine/ Guitar Blues/ Runnin' Wild/ Hey Hey/ In That Great Land/ The Way You Treat Me/ Down Home Waltz/ Beat It On Down The Line/ Buck And Wing

I can vividly remember the first time I heard Jesse Fuller. It was the early '60s and it was a BBC television programme in the black & white, steam television era. I think it was the old 'Tonight' magazine show that came on at 7pm, fronted by Cliff Michelmore, however there may be a B&R reader of a similar age as me who may be able to confirm or not. If my memory is correct Jesse sang 'San Francisco Bay Blues' and it piqued my interest in hearing more of this blues music (of course at the time I didn't know that it wasn't a blues!). And the rest is history!

Jesse Fuller was born in Jonesboro, Georgia in 1896. Growing up, he worked at numerous jobs including grazing cows, working in a barrel factory and a broom factory, quarryman, working on the railroad and for a streetcar company.

In the 1920s he lived in southern California. He worked briefly as a movie extra in 'The Thief Of Baghdad' and 'East Of Suez'. In 1929, he settled in Oakland, where he worked on the railroads for many years as a fireman, spike driver, and maintenance-of-way worker. During WWII, he worked as a shipyard welder, but when the war ended he found it increasingly difficult to secure employment. Around the early 1950s, he began to contemplate the prospect of trying to make a living as a musician.

Up to this point, Fuller had never worked as a full-time professional musician, but he was an accomplished guitar player and he had carried his guitar with him and busked for money by passing the hat. He had a good memory for songs and had a songster's repertoire of material in diverse styles, including country blues, spirituals, worksongs, ragtime, ballads, pop numbers and instrumentals.

For a while, he operated a shoe-shine stand, where he sang and danced to entertain passers-by. He began to compose songs, many of them based on his experiences on the railroads, and also redrafted older pieces, playing them in his syncopated style. When he set out to make a career as a musician, he had difficulty finding suitable musicians to work with, thus his one-man band act was born, and he started calling himself 'The Lone Cat'.

Starting locally, in clubs and bars in San Francisco and across the bay in Oakland and Berkeley, Fuller became more widely known when he performed on television in both the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Fuller's instruments included twelve-string guitar, harmonica, kazoo, high-hat cymbal and his self-constructed fottella.

As a one-man-band, Fuller wanted to supply a more substantial accompaniment than the typical high-hat cymbal or bass drum used by other street musicians. His solution was the fottella, a foot-operated percussion bass, consisting of an upright wood box, shaped like the top of a double bass, with a short neck at the top, and six piano bass strings attached to the neck and stretched down over the body. The strings were played by