

Chris Barber presents The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found

various artists
MVD Audio

Got the blues? Well, I bet you don't have all of 'em! This trio of CDs is a collection of rare tracks discovered, recorded, performed, collected and presented by big band leader Chris Barber, a British trombonist who has been credited with creating many careers and inspiring the British blues explosion that instigated a love of the blues in musicians including Eric Clapton and the Rolling Stones, to name but a couple.

The first disc features Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing with The Chris Barber Band live in Manchester, England in 1957. Tharpe's takes on gospel gets a boost from Barber's band's styling, and although this writer isn't exactly about the gospel lyrical vibe, the music certainly held my interest for the ten tracks, two which feature Barber's former wife, Otilie Patterson. Next on the disc are a set of live recordings from 1958 with blind blues harmonica blower Sonny Terry and guitarist Brownie McGhee... now this is what I'm talking about! The music in this set blurs the lines between blues, jazz and jump/swing. Fantastic!

Disc two continues the Terry and McGhee cycle with broadcast recordings (some just the duo, some with The Chris Barber Band), also recorded in 1958. It was at this point that I personally realized I was more well-steeped in the blues than I thought as I caught myself singing the lyrics to "When Things Go Wrong." Hmmmm, perhaps I should resume my singing career... Otilie Patterson is featured female vocalist here again. Following those tracks are the mighty guitarist Muddy Waters and ivory tickler Otis Spann. This is where things get more dirty and low down, beginning with the infamous "Hootchie Cootchie Man" (which, compared to the roar of Water's version on Electric Mud, is just a hint of what it is to become), the classic "Baby, Please Don't Go" and "Walkin' Through The Park" (which also has a more quick-tempered reprise with Miss Patterson. As if that weren't enough music for the disc, three songs by former Golden Gloves boxer and the epitome of New Orleans barrelhouse piano playing, Champion Jack Dupree performs (you gotta check out "Mother-In-Law Blues" -- it's a true comedy classic). Barber then introduces the inimitable saxman/

frontman/band leader/actor Louis Jordan, who is credited with being the most influential African-American musician of the 20th century performing "T'Ain't Nobody's Business (If I Do)."

The third disc continues the treasure trove of blues live in 1964 with harp man Sonny Boy Williamson (originally named Aleck "Rice" Miller, who was made to carry on the legacy of the original Sonny Boy Williamson -- no relation, by the way-- by King Biscuit Time radio show sponsor Max Moore). When Williamson does "Help Me," I immediately recognized his influence on early British blues covers by bands ranging from The Animals to The Who... incredible! And Nick Cave fans, take note: if you have Cave's "Your Funeral, My Trial," the original artist's version is here and you need to hear it. Blues shouter/singer Jimmy Witherspoon does three tracks with The Chris Barber Band live at 1964's National Jazz & Blues Festival in England, and his classic, "Times Getting Tougher Than Tough" is more than applicable today. Bles sing/guitarist/harp blower Howlin' Wolf steps up to the plate next with Hubert Sumlin, his back-up guitarist with four tracks that were recorded in 1964. Skip a couple of decades, and the disc ends with five tracks that Barber recorded with Witherspoon in Holland in 1980, including "Everyday I Have the Blues," "Taint Nobody's Business," and appropriately, the final song is "Goodbye, Goodbye, Goodbye." Throughout the discs are spatterings of Barber telling the stories behind the recordings-- it's like an historical education in the blues without having to read a textbook! To sum it up: three CDs, fifteen name musicians, sixty-eight songs, hours and hours of the blues ... Blues lovers have never had it so good!- Colleen Morgan

