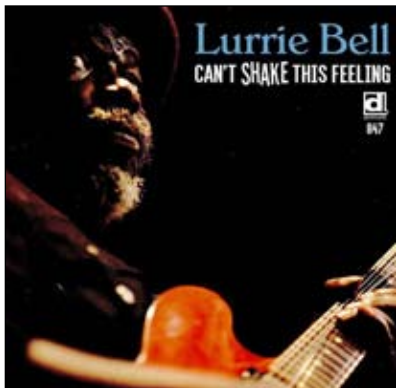


lopsided quality,” and the quartet explores the possibilities of this chord with Ellis’ tenor providing a fluid, light sound.

“Notes From the Underground” was inspired by the Cornelia Street Cafe, and employs a low-register piano/bass counter-melody that offsets Ellis’ tenor at several points as well as impresses with his own solo. Blanco notes that so many of his favorite jazz clubs are basement rooms, hence the double entendre of the title. “Song Without Words” is a pretty number where the quartet displays its lyricism with Hays displaying his nice touch here, while the swinging title track evokes some classic 70s hard bop compositions with Hayes, Ellis and the leader stretching out. Then there is a quirky blues “Last Stable Orbit,” (title is an astronomical term that denotes “last orbit possible before an object (planet, spaceship, etc) gets sucked into a black hole”) with Ellis on soprano sax with a bit of squeal in his tone. A Neal LaBute play is the source of the title for “Reasons To Be Pretty,” a slow number opening with Ellis, again on soprano sax, setting the mood before Hays takes a beautiful solo. Penn’s cymbals play, whether with brushes or sticks, merits mention here, but is expectedly superb throughout.

Blanco’s prior two albums have both garnered considerable praise. Listening to “Spirit Forward” one can understand why. There is so much to enjoy on this sparkling recording.

Ron Weinstock



LURRIE BELL
Can't Shake This Feeling
DELMARK

The Mercurial Son, Lurrie Bell has a new recording on Delmark “Cant Shake This Feeling,” finding this singular guitarist and singer backed by a first-rate band of Roosevelt Purifoy on keyboards, Matthew Skoller on harmonica, Melvin Smith on bass and Willie Hayes on drums. Produced by Dick Shurman, Lurrie wrote or co-wrote 4 of the 13 songs, and the other songs here are not ones that have been over-recorded with perhaps “Sinner’s Prayer” being the best known.

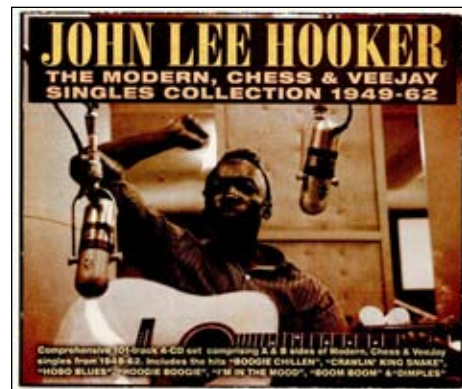
Lurrie’s unpredictability makes him such a fascinating guitarist to listen to and this is evident starting with the opening “Blues Is Trying to Keep up with Me,” which he penned as well as his solo on Eddie Boyd’s shuffle “Drifting,” with Skoller and Purifoy also soloing,

while Lurrie’s natural, slightly gritty vocals add to the appeal. There is some nice string popping on a lesser known T-Bone Walker number “I Get So Weary,” while he unplugs for “One-Eyed Woman” backed only by Skoller. Another strong original, the slow, moody “This Worrisome Feeling in My Heart,” is followed by a cover of one of Willie Dixon’s lesser songs, “Sit Down Baby.” Lurrie can not do much on a cover of Otis Rush’s Cobra recording of this song.

A brisk Little Milton cover “Hold Me Tight,” is followed by a nice interpretation of “Sinner’s Prayer,” that sounds adapted from Ray Charles and then the nice walking groove of Lurrie’s “I Can’t Shake This Feeling,” a gem that sounds like it came from Willie Dixon’s golden age with Skoller’s backing harp being strong and a typically fine Bell solo. Lurrie sings and plays his heart out on Buster Benton’s “Born With The Blues,” followed by Carey Bell’s shuffle “Do You Hear,” and Bell’s reading of Dixon’s “Hidden Charms,” and while Lurrie is among the few guitarists who can conjure up Hubert Sumlin, he lacks Howlin’ Wolf’s vocal authority, exposing this as another lesser Willie Dixon lyric.

“Can’t Shake This Feeling” closes with the reflective original (co-penned with Shurman) “Faith and Music” with just Lurrie on electric guitar. There is some exceptional music here along with a couple of lesser selections, but Lurrie Bell remains one of today’s most singular talents in the blues and this is another strong addition to his discography.

Ron Weinstock



JOHN LEE HOOKER
The Modern, Chess & Veejay Singles Collection
1949-1962
ACROBAT 4-CD BOX SET

There have been so many reissues of John Lee Hooker’s amazingly prolific recording career, especially those of his early recording career, to which this four-disc set from Acrobat is another addition. The title of this collection, “The Modern, Chess & Veejay Singles Collection 1949-1962,” fairly describes its contents. It is not an exhaustive reissue of Hooker’s early recordings, but one simply organized around those commercially issued 78s and 45s of Hooker’s music that were released on the Bihari Brothers Modern label, recordings issued on Chess, and then a good selection of

Hooker's Vee-Jay recordings ending in 1962. That date likely reflects that those recordings were not affected by European copyright law changes that extended the period for copyright of recordings for recordings issued in 1963 and after, so that they were not in the public domain in Europe.

This is one of a number of recent public domain reissues that have compiled complete A and B sides of various musical performers. In the case of performers like Eddie Boyd, who have not exactly been over-represented by reissues, this has been very valuable and hopefully made more folks aware of the artist's importance. In Hooker's case, where so much has been reissued, and whose importance is undeniable, perhaps there is less value, but one cannot dismiss having such a nice chunk of his early, pre-Endless Boogie recordings available.

The value of this release is such even if some of Hooker's most gripping recorded performances are excluded because they were issued on other labels like Specialty, King, Sensation, and other small labels, some of which might have been unavailable for copyright or contractual reasons per the liner notes from Paul Watts.

So we get to hear the original classic Hooker recordings including "Boogie Chillun," "Hobo Blues," "Crawlin' King Snake," "Drifting From Door To Door," "Women in My Life," "I'm in the Mood," "It's My Own

Fault," "Dimples," and "Boom Boom," some heard in several versions. The chronological presentation of the material allows one to hear the evolution of Hooker's recordings, including the increasing presence of small groups backing him, along with a few recordings from performances he made originally for the folk market that Vee-Jay released. Generally the sound is quite acceptable although a couple of the tracks apparently came from worn originals. It is also fascinating to listen to the early Vee-Jay recordings where the group and Hooker sometimes seemed not totally together. There is simply too much music here to go into depth about specific performances but it does provide a generous sampling of his music directed towards the commercial record buying public.

Full discographical information by Paul Watts provides a nice overview of Hooker's biography and the recordings on this which as he observes provides a substantial chunk of the recordings during the period he established his reputation and made some of his most influential recordings. If one wanted a collection of early John Lee Hooker, one could do far worse this convenient set.

Ron Weinstock

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