

Every British blues fan learns at his mother's knee of the colossal contribution that **Chris Barber** made to the development of the music in this country. In addition to myriad other contributions it was of course Barber who first brought the likes of Muddy Waters to Britain, thus preparing the ground for the British blues boom. Miraculously, a new archive series, *Lost & Found*, is releasing never-before heard recordings made on those seminal tours. For purely historical reasons these albums would be essential purchases but, thrillingly, the quality of the music also makes them essential.

Volume 1 (Classic Studio T 5067X) features 1957 performances by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the power and glory of whose singing is irresistible and whom the Barber band accompany with great verve, with Barber himself adding several impressively skilful and apposite trombone solos. Tharpe's solo version of "This Train", complete with sound effects, delights the audience.

Also on *Volume 1* are Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, from 1958, playing, on "Midnight Special", "Fox Chase" and others, with a freshness that they perhaps lost in later years.

Volume 2 (Classic Studio T 5068X) variously features tracks by, again, Sonny and Brownie (1958), Muddy Waters and Otis Spann (1958), Champion Jack Dupree (1959) and Louis Jordan (1962). Legend of course has it that the good people of Britain were shellshocked by Muddy's electric guitar playing but the album doesn't bear this out for the audience are clearly enraptured by the performance as well they might be, for the mighty power of Muddy's singing on "Hoochie Coochie Man" is astonishing and his solo on "Rolling Stone" is electrifying, to mention but two highlights.

Sonny Boy Williamson (1964), Jimmy Witherspoon (1964 and 1980) and Howlin' Wolf and Hubert Sumlin (1964) all appear on *Volume 3* (Classic Studio T 5069X). Sonny Boy's anguished-sounding harmonica playing is extraordinary on the likes of "Help Me" and "Pontiac Blues"; Jimmy Witherspoon sings commandingly and with a compelling sense of swing on a rip roaring "Times Getting Tougher Than Tough" and others; and the intensity of the Wolf's singing on, for example, "Howlin' For My Baby" is hair-raising.

Throughout the three CDs the Barber band rise to the occasion impressively (although perhaps they sound a bit too conventional accompanying Wolf) with Otilie Patterson singing exceptionally on various tracks. - *Trevor Hodgett*