

Big Road Blues



**Matchbox
Bluesmaster
Series - set 8**

**1966 - 1972
The Tradition
Continues**

MSESET8

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 8

Credits:

SDR190 Furry Lewis:

Recording/sleeve notes: Karl Gert zur Heide
Photos: David Evans (p.31) & Karl Gert zur Heide (p.32)

SDM223 Little Brother Montgomery:

Recording: Leon A Kelert
Sleeve notes and photos: Sheldon Harris & Derrick Stewart-Baxter

***SDM224 The Legacy Of Tommy Johnson and**

***SDM225 Big Road Blues:**

Recording/sleeve notes and photos: David Evans

***SDM226 Blues From The Delta:**

Recording/sleeve notes: Bill Ferris
Sleeve design: November Books Ltd (editor: Tony Russell)

SDM227 Miss Rhapsody:

Recording: Jim Chion
Sleeve Photos: Sheldon Harris and Derrick Stewart-Baxter

*** Our thanks to dust-to-digital for permission to use these recordings**

Digitising from vinyl (Discs 1, 2, 6): Norman White

Mastering from original recordings (Discs 3, 4, 5): dust-to-digital

Series Editor: Gef Lucena

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES
IS A DIVISION OF SAYDISC RECORDS
The Barton, Inglestone Common
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Matchbox Bluesmaster Series

The 42 albums that make up the iconic Matchbox Bluesmaster Series were released by Saydisc Records during the 1980s under the editorship of well known Austrian collector, Johnny Parth. With the erudite notes by Paul Oliver they established a benchmark for releases of early blues, gospel and hokum. Now, some 40 years later, these albums of a mix of little known and well known seminal performances are introducing this entertaining, influential and historically important music to a new generation, as well as to time honoured collectors and followers of black music, on 7 x 6CD sets at an affordable price.

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One album, **Big Road Blues**, has had to wait for 50 years to be released as the original album only reached test pressing stage due to the book which it was planned to be issued in conjunction with being withdrawn on the demise of the publishers.

Details of all the **Matchbox Bluesmaster Series** releases can be seen on **matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk** and on the Saydisc website **www.saydisc.com**

Gef Lucena - Series Producer

SET 8: DISC 1: FURRY LEWIS IN MEMPHIS**51:30**

Originally released on LP in 1969 as Matchbox SDR 190 – a joint production with Roots Records, Austria (Continental issue Roots SL 505)

Walter “Furry” Lewis (vocal and guitar) recorded at 247 South Fourth Street in Memphis, Tennessee on 6 September, 1968 by Karl Gert zur Heide.

1	St Louis Blues	3:23
2	Furry Lewis Blues	6:01
3	When I Lay My Burden Down	2:56
4	Kassie Jones	3:15
5	Going To Brownsville	6:07
6	Skinny Woman	4:56
7	See That My Grave Is Kept Clean	3:43
8	John Henry	3:22
9	Furry Lewis Rag	5:10
10	Careless Love	3:07
11	My Blue Heaven	1:14
12	Old Dog Blue	1:25
13	Spanish Flang Dang	2:41
14	Highway 61	3:23
15	Toast	0:30

Memphis, where the states of Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas meet – geographically and musically – catalyst and early recording centre for the surrounding country. Some of the artists who enriched the “race” catalogues were still (or again) living there in 1968: Sleepy John Estes, Memphis Minnie, Gus Cannon, Robert Wilkins, Booker White, Richard Harney, Minnie Wallace – and Furry Lewis, a name familiar from the Vocalion and Victor labels of the late ‘twenties.

Like many other residents, Furry came from Mississippi; he was born in Greenwood on 6 March, 1893 – at least he says so. *[More recent research suggests a birthdate of 1899. – TR]* The year shouldn't be taken too seriously, and some of his other recollections are not very clear. Anyway, he grew up in Greenwood, in the Delta. "When I was a kid I just wanted to play." The first instrument he had was a self-made guitar: the usual cigar box plus wire. "Arthur Petties was from Greenwood. Plenty of good musicians came through, like Gus Cannon and Funny Willie Polk. Jim Jackson travelled on a doctor show, and I run off from home with them when I was about thirteen." A few years later his family moved to Memphis, which became Furry's base for good. Early in his life he lost one of his legs, and he gave up advertising for quacks after a while. In Memphis he played at house parties, for fish fries and in the streets. "I used to go around and serenade with my guitar, but when somebody wanted a band we'd all get together." When money became scarce he began working for the city.

There was no spectacular Furry Lewis rediscovery – he was around and taken for granted. Occasional recordings and a concert now and then brightened up the pattern of his life in the 'sixties. Today few blues enthusiasts fail to look him up when coming to Memphis, and Furry is glad to show them that his music hasn't suffered through the years. He had just returned from performing at Preservation Hall in New Orleans when he dropped in at one of those drunken blues afternoons at Dewey's on Fourth and Beale. He was accompanied by Ray, a white guitarist from Nashville, and Georg, a German professor. I seized the opportunity to escape with them. It wasn't far to Furry's room where he had been living for about four decades.

Furry got hold of his guitar and sat down on his bed while I set up the little tape recorder. Apart from an unsuccessful request for "Beale Street Blues" none of us listeners (and watchers) tried to influence his choice of material and so he gave us a cross-section of his repertoire – things he liked and things he thought we would like. He played and sang for himself and us, not for the machine.

Part of his performance was visual. **John Henry**, for example, is more or

less a soundtrack of his medicine show routine, with a lot of clowning around with the guitar. On **Skinny Woman** he elbowed the fret instead of fingering it. At times he tapped his box (**Furry Lewis Rag**). **Spanish Flang Dang** is an instrumental showpiece complete with bugle calls on the treble strings. Furry's lyrics deal with World War I. Flang Dang is a corruption of the name for an old dance, Fandango. Similar pieces were recorded by Mance Lipscomb, Sam Collins and Mississippi John Hurt. Furry's **Old Dog Blue** is a demonstration of his father's banjo style.

In an old-fashioned way he is a professional entertainer. But there is also Furry Lewis the bluesman, a master of the idiom who doesn't need a strict formula to find his way through a song. W. C. Handy's sophisticated **St. Louis Blues** was built around a one-strain tune he had learned from a folk musician (**Jogo Blues**). Furry, who got his first decent guitar from Handy himself, re-developed it to a blues of archaic quality. **Furry Lewis' Blues** is a highly complex number. The standard three-line structure is given up in choruses 3, 6, 7, 8 and 11 which is reminiscent of the style from Dockery's plantation (Charley Patton, Tommy Johnson a.o.) as are the chord progressions ending each stanza. The accompaniment to chorus 4 and 10 is close to Jim Thompkins' slide guitar on **Bedside Blues**. Lewis and Thompkins might have known each other as they took part in the same recording session (Memphis, 1929). Furry claims **Going To Brownsville** although he admitted that the same melody was used by Hambone Willie Newbern (**Roll And Tumble Blues**). Newbern was from Brownsville, Tenn., according to Sleepy John Estes who picked up the tune from the older man and recorded it as **The Girl I Love She Got Long Curly Hair**, which is the same as Furry's **Going To Brownsville**. It seems likely that Estes "wrote" the lyrics as he was from Brownsville, but unlike him Furry used a guitar part similar to Newbern's. So it seems likely that both Estes and Lewis learned the song from Newbern who might have sung different sets of words to the same melody (cf. his **Shelby County Workhouse Blues** and **Hambone Willie's Dreamy-Eyed Woman Blues**). Who knows?

Highway 61 was very popular around Memphis, and Blind Lemon Jefferson's **See That My Grave Is Kept Clean** produced versions by Son

House and Lightning Hopkins, but these two “race hits” meant more to Furry. He became so involved in the first that he didn't notice our bewilderment when the tape ran out. Singing like a lonesome field hand walking behind his mule he was moved to tears. During the latter song old Furry had to force the last verses through his constricted throat.

I hope this record gives a fair impression of Furry Lewis' music – the introvert and the extrovert side. I would like to thank Dieter Lange and Dave Evans for their great help. **KGzH (1969)**

SET 8: DISC 2: HOME AGAIN - LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY

Originally released on LP in 1972 as Matchbox SDM223 **44:15**

1	Lonesome Mama Blues	3:15
2	Tremblin' Blues	4:30
3	Aggravatin' Blues (with Jan Montgomery)	4:07
4	No Special Boogie	2:15
5	Jan	3:08
6	St. Louis Blues	4:54
7	Home Again Blues	5:01
8	Dangerous Blues (with Jan Montgomery)	3:42
9	Up the Country	3:19
10	I Was So In Love With You (with Jan Montgomery)	2:29
11	History Of Little Brother	4:30
12	After You've Gone (with Jan Montgomery)	2:55

Eurreal Montgomery, known affectionately all over the civilised world as Little Brother, has been playing piano for as long as he can remember and is perhaps the last of the great barrel house men. But he is so much more than this – a pianist of amazing versatility, which is unusual (unique would be a better word, I feel), as most blues pianists stick rigidly to the structure of the blues, and

in many cases use the same two or three melodic strains. This in no way hampers them, for it is what they do with their material that matters. Little Brother Montgomery, however, is equally at home playing with a New Orleans style band (he has worked with Lee Collins, with Leonard Parker's Band, and quite recently with the Franz Jackson band), or doing solo work in some plush Chicago lounge where he would have to play everything from the latest pop song to an operatic selection. Nor does the story finish at that! He is also the composer of some delightful ballads, two of which are included on this LP. In short, of all the blues pianists, Little Brother is the hardest to classify. To what school does he belong ?

He has told me that Cooney Vaughn was a great influence on him (none of Vaughn's solo titles, made for ARC, have ever been issued, so there is no way of telling just how much of an influence he was). On this LP Brother pays a moving tribute to Cooney; **Tremblin' Blues** was Vaughn's best known composition. Here for the first time Brother sings the lyrics. What I find remarkable is his ability to sound completely authentic no matter what he plays. I remember the late Big Bill Broonzy saying that he never wanted to learn music properly: "It might destroy my feeling for the blues, and that must not happen," were his words. Bill was right for the blues are very much a way of life, and to sing and play them you have to live them. Eurreal seems to have overcome all the difficulties of being a versatile musician. Let Little Brother tell in his own words how it has always been: "Now I would like to say this about my playing. First. I only know how to play like I play, and haven't changed since I started when I was a youngster. Naturally, I have added to it, but I am not a good note reader. Nor do I pretend to be. But I am musically inclined – I can compose songs, ballads, blues, boogie woogie and rags. I've got the sense of timing of music. The way I see it, music comes from within a person. You can finish conservatory and still not play music (we have a lot of that going on today in the music business). The old saying is: 'When you don't read the notes, you are a faker'. But the way I see it, they got it backwards, because a person has to compose something before it can be written down so somebody can read it, so

I think the person who has to have music for everything he plays is the faker." From this statement it can be seen that Brother is a natural musician who learned his trade in the hard world of the working musician. This, combined with his natural talent, made him both a folk artist and something much, much more. In his blues can be heard the melodic charm of his ballads; conversely, in his ballads (or most of them) can be heard the 'call of the blues'. He can be both delicate and fierce at the drop of a hat. This can be said of no other blues man.

This new LP contains examples of his magnificent blues playing (in no way impaired by his recent serious illness) and two of his very charming ballads. **Jan** is a tribute to his devoted wife who nursed him through his troubles. Surely one of the most moving love songs to a wife, **I Was So In Love With You** is a typical Montgomery ballad, and he has, like the late Lonnie Johnson, composed many such songs. They make a good contrast to the more down to earth compositions. **No Special Boogie** is a modest title for a fine swinging piano solo recalling the days when Brother was exclusively playing the blues all over America. **Lonesome Mama** shows just how melodic a blues can be. A gentle ramble and beautifully relaxed. This is Montgomery in his home playing from the heart. **St Louis Blues** is an extremely personal interpretation of the Handy classic. Brother builds and builds until he reaches a most interesting climax. However, THE solo on this LP is the remarkable **History of little Brother** in which Eurreal conducts the listener through the musical highlights of his life, beginning with the first piece he ever learned and going on through **Vicksburg Blues, 44 Blues**, right up to the present time. Of course, one has to be familiar with Brother's work, to enjoy this to the full, but as a blues piano solo, it stands up on its own. **Home Again** has a story behind it. When Matchbox was compiling "*Little Brother Montgomery 1930-69*" (SDR 213), they came across an untitled item which I had loaned them. It was an extended piano solo which Brother had recorded for Windin' Ball, but which the company had not issued. As a bow to them, we called it **Windin' Ball Blues**. It was not until Montgomery heard the disc that he realised what we had done. **Windin' Ball** was a free improvisation based on an early Irving Berlin song, **Home Again Blues**. So

now, here it is, complete with lyrics. **Up the Country** is the famous blues Sippie Wallace features at all her concerts. It was composed by her brother George. Eurreal is no stranger to Sippie and her songs for he has accompanied her on numerous occasions. He gives a truthful rendering of this famous song.

I have kept the big surprise until the end – Jan Montgomery, who makes her debut on this LP. I have known and admired Mrs Montgomery for some years, but I never realised that she was a singer. Nor did Brother reveal the secret. I suspect that he has been waiting for the right time to produce Jan out of his musical hat. Well, the trick has worked! Jan is a singer in the Classic tradition. She has a rich contralto voice which she uses with great feeling for the music. Commencing with **Aggravatin' Blues**, a much played and sung standard, she offers a programme of blues and ballads which would be hard to equal. **Dangerous Blues** is perhaps, Jan Montgomery at her best, and her husband provides a superb accompaniment. Jan shows her ability to widen her range when she tackles a tuneful ballad by Little Brother, **I Was So In Love With You**. Finally, she revives the Turner Layton hit, **After You've Gone**. There have been so many versions of this standard that comparisons are odious. Let me just add, that Jan does not disgrace herself. We, who buy records, should thank Little Brother Montgomery for introducing his wife to us. Let's hope she will make a solo LP in the not too distant future.

DERRICK STEWART-BAXTER *(NB: the notes have not been updated from those written in 1972)*

SET 8: DISC 3: THE LEGACY OF TOMMY JOHNSON

Originally released on LP in 1972 as Matchbox SDM224

42:56

- 1 BIG ROAD BLUES – Isaac Youngblood, vocal/guitar;
Herb Quinn, mandolin
- 2 BYE AND BYE BLUES - Mager Johnson, vocal/guitar

2:22

5:37

3	MAGGIE CAMPBELL BLUES - Arzo Youngblood, vocal/guitar	2:26
4	CANNED HEAT BLUES - John Henry "Bubba" Brown, vocal/guitar	2:26
5	COOL WATER BLUES - Boogie Bill Webb, vocal/guitar	2:20
6	BIG FAT MAMA BLUES - Arzo Youngblood, vocal/guitar	2:50
7	PONY BLUES - Houston Stackhouse, vocal/guitar; Carey "Ditty" Mason, guitar	2:46
8	I BELIEVE I'LL MAKE EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT- Arzo Youngblood, vocal/guitar	4:19
9	SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT FOR SALE - Boogie Bill Webb, vocal/guitar	1:43
10	PRISON BOUND BLUES - Arzo Youngblood, vocal/guitar	2:30
11	MAGGIE CAMPBELL BLUES - Boogie Bill Webb, vocal/guitar	1:36
12	THE OLD FOLKS DOING IT AND THE LITTLE ONES TRYING – Arzo Youngblood, guitar solo	0:48
13	BIG ROAD BLUES - Babe Stovall, vocal/guitar; O. D. Jones, guitar; Dink Brister, mandolin	4:11
14	TAKE YOUR TIME - Boogie Bill Webb, vocal/guitar	1:22
15	PINE TOP BOOGIE - Roosevelt Holts, guitar solo	1:53
16	DON'T YOU LIE TO ME - Boogie Bill Webb, vocal/guitar	2:39

The songs on this album, although they are created by twelve different musicians, were all at one time part of the repertoire of Tommy Johnson, perhaps the greatest and best remembered folk blues performer the state of Mississippi has ever produced. Johnson died about a decade before he would have been "rediscovered" in the folk music revival of the 1960s, having recorded only twelve issued songs between 1928 and 1930, all of which, along with versions of three originally unissued songs, are available to the modern listener. This pitifully meagre fragment of his large and rich repertoire would be all that we would possess if it were not for songs such as the ones on this album. All were recorded in the field from friends, relatives, and fellow musicians of Johnson's as part of the research for my book **Tommy Johnson**

(London, Studio Vista, 1971). Each song was learned from Johnson in person and illustrates some aspect of his style or repertoire that had been previously unknown.

All but two of Tommy Johnson's extant recorded songs are blues, the type of music for which he was best known and which comprised the bulk of his total repertoire. The first six pieces on this album are versions of songs which he recorded in 1928. A comparison of them with his originals reveals that all but Boogie Bill Webb's **Cool Water Blues** differ substantially from Johnson's version in the lyrics. This indicates that Johnson did not usually sing his songs in person as he did on his records. Furthermore, the weight of evidence suggests that he seldom performed any one the same way on different occasions. This is borne out by alternate versions on this album by different singers of **Maggie Campbell Blues** and **Big Road Blues**, which differ as much from each other as they do from Johnson's recordings. The two versions here of **Maggie Campbell Blues** also illustrate the fact that Johnson had two different guitar parts for this song. Arzo Youngblood's is the way Johnson recorded it and performed it for listening audiences, while Boogie Bill Webb plays it as Johnson did at dances.

Johnson knew many other original or traditional folk blues which he never recorded. Among these were **I Believe I'll Make Everything All Right** and **Pony Blues**. The former, as performed by Arzo Youngblood, contains a very difficult guitar part and a lovely melody which was apparently known all along the Mississippi River valley as is witnessed in performances of it by such diverse bluesmen as Teddy Darby, Charlie Pickett, and Johnny Shines. **Pony Blues** is performed here with two electric guitars in a manner more modern than Johnson ever used, particularly in the final instrumental chorus. It was one of the first blues Johnson learned, perhaps as early as 1912, and the version here by Houston Stackhouse, recorded in 1967, illustrates its continued popularity and ability to undergo adaptation.

Johnson also learned a number of his blues from the popular phonograph records of his day, and several of his adaptations are recreated here. He was

particularly fond of adapting records with piano parts to his guitar playing, as can be heard in his **Prison Bound Blues** learned from the great Leroy Carr, **Pine Top Boogie** from the big hit by Pine Top Smith, and **Don't You Lie to Me** adapted from a 1940 hit by Tampa Red with pianist Blind John Davis. In the first two of these will be heard elements from Johnson's guitar part for **Big Road Blues**, showing how he made songs from different local and instrumental traditions over into his own style. **Don't You Lie to Me** contains traces of Johnson's **Maggie Campbell Blues** in the guitar part. Johnson also drew from the string band recordings of the Mississippi Sheiks in his **Show Me What You Got for Sale**, where the chordal guitar playing, as performed on this album by Boogie Bill Webb, parallels the usual role of that instrument in a string band. The Mississippi Sheiks were equally influenced by Johnson, incorporating the guitar part, melody, and refrain of Johnson's **Big Road Blues** into their big hit **Stop and Listen Blues**. Johnson in turn borrowed some lyrics from the Sheiks back into his song, and these lyrics show up in versions of **Big Road Blues** performed on this album by Babe Stovall and Isaac Youngblood.

Johnson was known to have performed several spirituals, but none of the musicians I recorded could ever recreate one of them in his style. Nevertheless, his ability to move listeners in this genre is attested by his brother's remark that "he'd near about make you cry playing church songs." Besides blues and spirituals though, Johnson performed a number of ragtime and dance pieces. One of these is the blues structured instrumental **The Old Folks Doing It And The Little Ones Trying**, and another is his **Take Your Time** with lyrics in a much lighter vein than most of his blues.

Tommy Johnson led a colorful life which spanned almost the entire history of the development of folk blues, in which he was one of the great creative forces. He was constantly travelling from place to place in the state of Mississippi making music. He was married four times, did occasional farm work, and drank heavily. These, at least, are the features of his life best remembered by those who knew him, and they recur frequently in his songs. **Big Road Blues**, **Bye and Bye Blues**, and **Cool Water Blues** all deal with the theme of

wanderlust. **Maggie Campbell Blues** seems to refer elliptically to his first wife, while **Big Fat Mama Blues** deals with the opposite sex at a more general level. **Show Me What You Got for Sale** celebrates homemade whiskey, while **Canned Heat Blues** deals in chilling frankness with Johnson's propensity to drink any cheap substance which contained alcohol, no matter the risk to his health. "Canned Heat" is a type of cooking fuel which must be elaborately strained and diluted before consumption. It was one of Johnson's favourite drinks and a habit he passed on to many of his friends and admirers.

To summarize his life briefly, he was born in 1896 near Terry, Mississippi, and raised around nearby Crystal Springs, one of thirteen children. He grew up doing farm work and listening to the music of his uncles and older brothers and sisters. But around 1912 wanderlust overtook him, and he ran away with an older woman for two years. During this absence from home he learned to perform the blues from musicians in the Delta region of northwestern Mississippi, and he returned playing pieces like **Pony Blues**. At the end of 1915 he married a girl from home, Maggie Bidwell (or Bedwell), and went with her and his older brother LeDell to the Delta town of Drew in 1916. Here he met and made music with the great Willie Brown and Charley Patton, whose own 1929 version of **Pony Blues** would become the first to appear on record. Johnson stayed in Drew only one year, returning occasionally in the fall to pick cotton and play music, but he formed the basis of his blues style there. After this he spent the rest of his life travelling throughout the small towns of his native state, spending longer periods at home in Crystal Springs and in the nearby city of Jackson, where opportunities to play music were plentiful. At home he helped to teach the blues to local musicians like his younger brother Mager and Houston Stackhouse and Ditty Mason, who are all heard on this album. In Jackson he played with many fine musicians like Bubba Brown. It was in Jackson that he met talent scout H. C. Speir and was enabled through him to make records in 1928 and 1930. These secured his reputation and probably helped to confirm him in his lifestyle. Sometime in the late 1920s he married Rosa Youngblood and lived with her alternately in Jackson and at her home near Tylertown in the

southern part of Mississippi. There he played blues with his wife's cousins Isaac Youngblood and Roosevelt Holts and began teaching his songs to his newly acquired young nephew Arzo Youngblood. Other local musicians like Babe Stovall and his accompanists on **Big Road Blues** learned from Johnson and adapted his songs to Tylertown's more typical string band style as their performance on this record shows. Johnson returned to Jackson with his wife and Roosevelt Holts in the early 1930s, but after about a year they went their separate ways. The youngest performer on this record is Boogie Bill Webb, a resident of New Orleans who went to Jackson in 1942 and played there with Johnson sporadically until 1951. Webb credits Johnson for being the main inspiration for his music today. Johnson began to decline somewhat in popularity during the 1940s and into the 1950s as younger musicians with newer styles pushed him gradually out of the spotlight and as years of heavy drinking and a generally hard life took their toll. In 1956 he died in his hometown of Crystal Springs of a heart attack after playing all night at a party for his niece. He was buried in an unmarked grave under a tree behind his family's church and near the ruins of the school where he received the little formal education he ever got.

If his death went unnoticed in the larger world of music, his songs are still remembered by many performers even today. At the furthest remove we have an electric blues group called Canned Heat after one of his songs and many versions of his **Big Road Blues** recorded by white musicians. The performers on this album, however, are more direct musical descendants of Tommy Johnson. But although they perpetuate his musical legacy, they are no mere imitators. All are worthy inheritors of something they prize greatly. They have made Tommy Johnson's music their own and would like to pass it on to others as Johnson himself did. In this process of tradition the performances will inevitably change and the songs become personalized. The performance of each musician on this album is unmistakably his own, however much of a debt he may admit to Tommy Johnson. These artists are confident in their ability to carry on the spirit of Johnson's music, and to do so they do not need Johnson's

reflected glory. To most of the people they regularly perform for, these are their own songs, yet to me as a researcher from outside their circle they openly acknowledged their debt to Tommy Johnson. Their respect for the man and his music shows in little things like Bill Webb's inserting of the name Tommy into his performance of **Don't You Lie to Me** or Arzo Youngblood's comment at the conclusion of one of his pieces on this album, "Now he could mess with that!"

This album illustrates the book **Tommy Johnson** by David Evans in the Blues Paperback Series, edited by Paul Oliver and produced and distributed by November Books Ltd.

The above notes were originally written in 1972. I have edited them only to correct factual errors. I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude for the help of those who accompanied me on these recording expeditions more than half a century ago: Marina Bokelman (tracks 1-5, 7, 9-14, 16) and Marc Ryan (track 15). Thanks also to my parents, Marina's parents, Linda Ryan, Pete Welding, and the Folklore and Mythology program of the University of California, Los Angeles, for their help and support.

David Evans, July, 2021

Recording locations and dates:

New Orleans, Louisiana, February 2, 1966 (track 15)

New Orleans, Louisiana, August 14, 1966 (track 13)

Tylertown, Mississippi, August 15, 1966 (track 1)

New Orleans, Louisiana, August 30, 1966 (tracks 3, 12)

Crystal Springs, Mississippi, September 5, 1966 (track 2)

New Orleans, Louisiana, September 16, 1966 (tracks 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16)

Los Angeles, California, June 9, 1967 (track 4)

Crystal Springs, Mississippi, September 3, 1967 (track 7)

New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1, 1969 (tracks 6, 8)

For further reading about Tommy Johnson and the artists and songs heard here, see the following publications by David Evans:

Tommy Johnson: London: Studio Vista, 1971.

Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Going Up the Country: Adventures in Blues Fieldwork in the 1960s (by Marina Bokelman and David Evans). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022.

“**Babe Stovall**,” in **Back Woods Blues**: ed. Simon A. Napier. Bexhill-on-Sea: Blues Unlimited, 1968, pp. 50-55.

“**Boogie Bill Webb**”: Blues Unlimited 57 (Nov. 1968), 14.

“**A Talk with Boogie Bill**”: Blues Unlimited 97 (Dec. 1972), 8-9; 98 (Jan. 1973), 18-19.

“**Roosevelt Holt’s Interview**”: Blues World 15 (July 1967), 3-6. Blues Unlimited 116 (Nov./Dec. 1975), 9-11.

“**Goin’ up the Country**”: Blues Revue 18 (July/Aug. 1995), 14-15; 19 (Sept./Oct. 1995), 14-16; 20 (Dec. 1995/Jan. 1996), 16-17. (about Roosevelt Holts)

“**The Bubba Brown Story**” Blues World 21 (Oct. 1968), 7-9.

“**Bubba Brown: Folk Poet**”: Mississippi Folklore Register 7 (1973), 15-31.

SET 8: DISC 4: BIG ROAD BLUES

Originally planned for release on LP in 1972 as Matchbox SDM225 but only the test pressing exists and no full release was made as the companion book from another publisher was never issued.

* indicates stereo	45:55
1 PICK AND SHOVEL BLUES - Mott Willis, vocal/guitar	2:06
2 SO SOON I’LL BE AT HOME - Robert Johnson, vocal/guitar	1:46
3* DRESSER DRAWER BLUES - Mott Willis, vocal/guitar	2:52
4 NO PLACE TO GO - Isaac Youngblood, vocal/guitar	1:30
5* RIVERSIDE BLUES - Mott Willis, guitar solo	2:10
6 TRAVELING MAN BLUES - Mager Johnson, vocal/guitar/kazoo	6:10
7* MAMA DO RIGHT - Willis Taylor, vocal/guitar; Mott Willis, guitar	4:17

8	MAGGIE CAMPBELL BLUES - Roosevelt Holts, vocal/guitar	2:47
9*	TRASHY GANG BLUES - Willis Taylor, vocal; Mott Willis, guitar	3:27
10	CATFISH BLUES - Cary Lee Simmons, vocal/guitar	1:32
11	BIG ROAD BLUES - Arzo Youngblood, vocal/guitar	2:08
12*	WHO IS THAT YONDER COMING DOWN THE ROAD? - Mott Willis, vocal/guitar	2:28
13	MOUSTACHE BLUES - Mager Johnson, vocal/guitar	2:46
14	IT AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MORE - Mott Willis, vocal/guitar	1:14
15	SUNDOWN BLUES - Roosevelt Holts, vocal/guitar	4:17
16*	BAD NIGHT BLUES - Mott Willis, vocal/guitar	3:21

This CD, containing field recordings that I made in Mississippi and Louisiana between 1966 and 1971, was originally intended to be released by Saydisc in 1972 as an album to illustrate the book **Big Road Blues** in the Blues Paperback Series, edited by Paul Oliver and produced and distributed by November Books Ltd. November went out of business before the book could be published, and the album was never released. I revised and expanded the unpublished book's text for my 1976 Ph. D. dissertation, which was later published with further revisions as *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). This same album was scheduled to be released by Advent Records as a companion to that book, but this time it was the record company that went out of business just as the book was about to be published! The book remains in print and contains discussion of many of the songs on this CD, listed in its pages as appearing on Advent 2815. Finally, after fifty years and back on Saydisc, this album is making its appearance for the listening and reading public. For this release I have edited and revised the notes I originally prepared in 1972.

I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude for the help of those who accompanied me on these recording expeditions more than half a century ago: Marina Bokelman (tracks 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14) and Cheryl Thurber (track 16). Thanks also to my parents, Marina's parents, Marc and Linda Ryan,

Pete Welding, the Folklore and Mythology program of the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Department of Anthropology of California State University, Fullerton, for their help and support. **David Evans, July, 2021**

The blues heard on this album are authentic folk blues recorded in the homes of musicians in the American South, virtually uninfluenced by commercially recorded blues. The latter tend to be composed in a self-conscious manner for a listening audience. Their composers and performers strive for originality, and the lyrics of the songs generally deal with some particular theme or event. Folk blues, on the other hand, are oriented more toward a "participating" audience, often at crowded noisy parties where there are many other attractions besides the music. Those who attend might be variously engaged in listening, dancing, talking, eating, drinking, and other activities. Hence, the performers at these events tend to be less self-conscious. The lyrics of a song might cover a broad range of feelings and subjects that are of general interest to the singer and audience. Often there is no logical or thematic connection between verses, yet these songs are successful in such contexts because they offer the listener a means for instant identification with the song at any point in its performance. Furthermore, the loose structure of these blues offers the performer an opportunity to shift quickly from one mood or idea to another as the surrounding context constantly shifts and members of the audience interject expressions of encouragement or commentary.

Of course, these "folk" and "commercial" blues are idealized models. In many cases the two are inextricably mixed. At the base of all commercial blues efforts lies the vast blues tradition with its folk roots. Hundreds of folk blues singers have been recorded since the record industry first paid attention to African-American blues music in 1920, and many of these singers only gradually became more self-conscious and commercial over the course of their recording careers. On the other hand, many commercial blues records achieved great popularity, with the result that they were fed back into the folk tradition to become items in the repertoires of folk blues singers.

All of the blues on this CD come from the "folk" side of the spectrum. The performers, all from rural Mississippi backgrounds, had never previously made commercial records, yet they were highly esteemed in their communities as fine bluesmen. They performed these blues for me as they had performed them since their youth. I was not in most cases able to record them at the types of parties described above, partly because I didn't happen to be present when such events took place, but also because it would have been virtually impossible to record at parties due to the constant noise, crowded conditions, and movement of the participants. But since these performers had little familiarity with other musical contexts for their blues, the pieces on this album, recorded in the quieter surroundings of family and friends, can be considered reasonably accurate examples of the kinds of blues they would perform at parties. The purpose of this record is to document the folk blues and to show the various ways in which they are composed within a tradition.

Essential to an understanding of how folk blues are learned and composed is the concept of the "local tradition." This is simply a repertoire of basic elements — lyric lines and stanzas, melodies, guitar figures and parts, and sometimes larger combinations of these elements — which are shared by a group of local blues artists and used as the building blocks of their blues performances. These elements are constantly being recombined in new ways, so that each performance of a blues in a sense represents a distinct song that is seldom performed the same way again, yet each also partially overlaps with many other performances generated within the local tradition. The artists on this record were all participants in a tradition that arose in the vicinity of Drew, Mississippi, a town in the heart of the Delta lowlands, or else they came under the influence of participants in this tradition.

The sharing and exchanging of the lyric and musical elements comprising a local tradition is demonstrated by a comparison of some of the pieces on this CD. For example, Mott Willis's **Pick and Shovel Blues** shares a guitar part and one stanza of its lyrics with Mager Johnson's Traveling Man Blues. Willis Taylor's **Mama Do Right** and Roosevelt Holts's **Maggie Campbell Blues** use variants

of this same guitar part but also share a melody with Mott Willis's **Pick and Shovel Blues** and **Who Is That Yonder Coming down the Road?** and with Isaac Youngblood's **No Place to Go**. These songs have various lyrics in common as well.

It is impossible to say exactly when or how the local blues tradition around Drew came into being, since it was built gradually from the early years of the twentieth century through the contributions of many blues performers. Most of the Black population of Drew and its surrounding countryside were renters and sharecroppers drawn from all parts of Mississippi and the South. They came to grow cotton in the rich Delta soil, and they were supplemented in the fall by an additional influx of migrant workers for the harvest. Many blues artists were among these farmers and migrants. They provided entertainment after hot days in the fields and picked up the hard earned money of their fellow workers in return for their music. It was a tough life, made even worse at Drew in particular by a long history of local racial violence. This violence caused a dispersal of many of the local musicians in the years after World War I, and the massive agricultural automation following World War II virtually put an end to the sharecropping system and caused further dispersal of the Black population of the Delta. As a result of these factors, none of the artists heard on this CD lived in or near Drew at the time of recording except Robert Johnson, who long before he recorded in 1967 had given up blues for church music. Despite these moves and changes by the artists, all of the pieces on this record are related to the Drew blues tradition.

One of the earliest bluesmen to come to this area and participate in its local tradition was the great Charley Patton, whose records made between 1929 and 1934 are well known to blues collectors as some of the finest ever made. Patton's family settled on the Dockery plantation near Drew in 1901 when he was a youngster, and he soon began performing blues locally. One of the first to come under Patton's influence was the equally great Willie Brown. Patton and Brown stayed in this general area until the late 1920s. There they and a few others formed the nucleus of the local blues fraternity. They were joined by

Tommy Johnson, who came up to Drew with his older brother around 1916 from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, about 160 miles to the South. The Johnson brothers returned home to teach the type of blues they had learned around Drew to their younger brother Mager (pronounced like Major). Mager Johnson, born in 1905, lived in Crystal Springs practically his entire life and did not meet most of the bluesmen of the Drew area, yet his blues are thoroughly in that tradition due to the initial influence of his older brothers. Tommy Johnson continued to travel all over Mississippi playing blues and spreading elements of the Drew tradition. His influence is documented on Saydisc SDM 224, *The Legacy of Tommy Johnson*, as well as by several of the tracks on this CD.

Another musician from Crystal Springs who performed around Drew was Mott Willis, who first went there in 1919 and stayed off and on into the 1930s. Although he played violin, mandolin, string bass, and trombone in addition to guitar and had performed in a traveling show before coming to Drew, he learned his blues at Drew and performed them for many years with Patton, Brown, and the others. Willis was born in 1897 and at the time of recording had settled back in Crystal Springs after a long and colorful life in music. During his earlier visits back to Crystal Springs from Drew, Mott Willis taught the blues to his nephew Willis Taylor, who joins his uncle on two blues on this CD. Taylor was born in 1904 and spent much of the 1920s and 1930s making music in the Delta, sometimes with his uncle. It is ironic, therefore, that the Drew blues style, represented here by Mott Willis, Willis Taylor, and Mager Johnson, should survive best in Crystal Springs, so far from its source.

Many other famous blues musicians got their start around Drew or learned from its most prominent bluesmen. One was Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett), who learned much of his early style and repertoire from Charley Patton. Another was Roebuck Staples, patriarch of the great Staples Singers gospel group. Robert Johnson, heard here as a gospel musician, was born in 1917 and played blues influenced by Patton and others starting in the 1930s until his religious conversion in 1955. (He is no relation to the Robert Johnson who made many fine commercial blues records in the 1930s.)

The performances on this CD exemplify several different processes in the composition of folk blues. **Pick and Shovel Blues**, **Who Is That Yonder Coming Down the Road?**, **Trashy Gang Blues**, and **Mama Do Right** are all original and spontaneous combinations of lyric, melodic, and guitar elements from the Drew tradition. These particular combinations would never occur in the same forms again. The latter two pieces were given fanciful names by Willis Taylor, which have nothing to do with their lyrics but simply came to his mind when he was asked for song titles. **Mama Do Right** is a particularly interesting piece, whose two guitar parts, played by Taylor and his uncle, remind the listener of the guitars of Charley Patton and Willie Brown on Patton's classic **Moon Going Down**. A further example of the sort of elements that can be combined freely to create original blues is Mott Willis' lovely instrumental **Riverside Blues**, which he learned from Josie Brown, Willie Brown's wife. Other folk blues are constructed around a stable "core" of a melody, guitar part, and one or more lyric stanzas. To this "core," whose lyrics generally suggest the song's title, are added further stanzas drawn freely from the singer's repertoire at the time of performance. Examples of this approach to composition and performance are Mott Willis's **Dresser Drawer Blues** and Mager Johnson's **Moustache Blues** and **Traveling Man Blues**. On the latter title Johnson sings two slightly risqué stanzas through the kazoo, thus modifying his voice and dissociating himself somewhat from the verses. This is one of the oldest uses of this widespread folk instrument, which is derived from African voice-disguising instruments. A final kind of composition, the totally original folk blues, is exemplified by Mott Willis's **Bad Night Blues**. This piece, which tells a story, is based on a real incident in the singer's life, which impressed him enough to compose a song about it. Such songs are comparatively rare among the blues artists of the Drew tradition, although Tommy Johnson's **Canned Heat Blues** and Charley Patton's **High Water Everywhere** stand out as further examples.

Lest the listener think that these musicians could perform only one kind of music, two pieces have been included on this CD that are not blues at all. Robert Johnson's **So Soon I'll Be at Home**, played in the bottleneck style, is a

spiritual that he learned as a boy from Charley Patton. Mott Willis performs **It Ain't Gonna Rain No More** the way he, Charley Patton, and Willie Brown used to play it around Drew. This type of popular song, according to Willis, was performed mainly at white dances and parties.

Finally, several songs heard here show the influence of the great Tommy Johnson on musicians who did not participate directly in the Drew tradition. Isaac Youngblood and Roosevelt Holts were Johnson's cousins and Arzo Youngblood his nephew by marriage. All three were from Tylertown, Mississippi. Most of Johnson's pieces were composed of a "core" supplemented by additional lyric stanzas, and these artists learned the songs from Johnson as "cores." Examples of two of these songs are Arzo Youngblood's **Big Road Blues** and Holts's **Maggie Campbell Blues**, the latter demonstrating the two different guitar parts that Johnson would use for this blues. Cary Lee Simmons played with Johnson for many years in Jackson, Mississippi. His **Catfish Blues**, a piece he learned from Johnson, contains guitar phrases similar to those on Willie Brown's 1930 recording of **M & O Blues**. It demonstrates again how elements within the tradition can be constantly recombined. Isaac Youngblood's **No Place to Go** is an original combination of elements learned from Johnson and put together for the first time on this recording, while Roosevelt Holts's **Sundown Blues** is constructed around a "core" which Holts himself put together from elements learned from Johnson. Its guitar part and melody are similar to those of Johnson's 1930 recording of **Lonesome Home Blues**.

The men heard on this record all participated in a folk blues tradition with Charley Patton, Willie Brown, Tommy Johnson, and Howlin' Wolf, and they deserve to be known as much as those artists who were fortunate enough to make commercial recordings at an earlier date. Several people, in fact, told me that Mager Johnson in his heyday was a better bluesman than his brother Tommy, while another stated that Mott Willis was the best of all those who played at Drew. I hope that this CD will convince listeners of the musical stature of all of these artists.

Recording locations and dates:

Tylertown, Mississippi, August 25, 1966 (track 4)
Bogalusa, Louisiana, August 28, 1966 (track 8)
New Orleans, Louisiana, August 30, 1966 (track 11)
Crystal Springs, Mississippi, September 5, 1966 (tracks 6, 13)
Skene, Mississippi, August 26, 1967 (track 2)
Jackson, Mississippi, September 4, 1967 (track 10)
Terry, Mississippi, September 7, 1967 (tracks 1, 14)
Bogalusa, Louisiana, April 2, 1969 (track 15)
Crystal Springs, Mississippi, August 31, 1970 (tracks 3, 12)
Crystal Springs, Mississippi, September 2, 1970 (tracks 5, 7, 9)
Crystal Springs, Mississippi, July 14, 1971 (track 16)

SET 8: DISC 5: BLUES FROM THE DELTA**36:36**

Originally released on LP in 1972 as Matchbox SDM 226

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | Cairo Blues (James 'Son' Thomas – vocal/guitar) | 4:26 |
| 2 | Bottle Up and Go (Lee Kizart – vocal/piano) | 2:19 |
| 3 | Big Fat Momma (Scott Dunbar – vocal/guitar) | 5:22 |
| 4 | Rootin' Ground Hog (Lovey Williams – vocal/guitar) | 2:54 |
| 5 | Rock Me Momma (James 'Son' Thomas – vocal/guitar) | 2:39 |
| 6 | Train I Ride (Lovey Williams – vocal/guitar) | 2:20 |
| 7 | It's So Cold Up North (Scott Dunbar – vocal/guitar) | 3:39 |
| 8 | Don't Want No Woman Telling Me What To Do
(Lee Kizart – vocal/piano) | 3:46 |
| 9 | Jay Bird (Scott Dunbar – vocal/speech/guitar) | 8:32 |

Since W. C. Handy's "discovery" of the blues in Tutwiler, Mississippi, the state has produced an unending stream of musicians ranging from early country blues singers like Big Bill Broonzy to the contemporary urban blues of B. B.

King. Most of the attention today is focused on the urban scene and few have bothered to inquire about what is "happening" in the state which produced blues.

BLUES FROM THE DELTA presents a survey of four outstanding singers who are still very much a part of the Mississippi blues tradition, though their styles differ radically. Each of the four perform regularly in their community. These recordings were made during the summer of 1968 and since that time only Lee Kizart has left the state, to live in Houston, Texas with his son.

SCOTT DUNBAR has lived on Lake Mary, near Woodville, since his childhood. His wife, Martha, says Scott is sixty-nine and has played guitar ever since she met him thirty-five years ago. Scott was first recorded by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. in 1954 and was featured in Ramsey's book *Been Here and Gone*. After my interview with him in 1968, Parker Dinkins recorded him in 1971 and issued selections on *Scott Dunbar From Lake Mary* (Ahura Mazda, AMS SDS I – and released outside the U.S.A. by Saydisc). None of these songs, however, were on the Ahura Mazda record. **Jay Bird** is an unusual selection, and Scott claims he wrote it himself. It is a favourite locally and always draws a strong response from his audience.

JAMES THOMAS is the best-known of the four performers, having sung at the Memphis Blues Festival in 1968. He also has appeared four times in Jackson – at Jackson State College and Tougaloo College – during the last two years, and each appearance has drawn a capacity crowd. Few people in Leland know James Thomas by his true name; instead he is known as "Cairo" because of his local fame as a singer of the **Cairo Blues**. Thomas performs regularly on weekends in "jook joints" and is always asked to sing his **Cairo Blues**.

LEE KIZART has played in Tutwiler for years and taught piano and blues guitar to both Blacks and whites. At one time he owned a cafe in Glendora which was

famous for its blues music. I met Lee at a music store in Tutwiler where he tuned and repaired pianos and gave music lessons. He recalled the days when the Delta was "in her bloom" and blues singers like Ida Cox toured its towns on a railroad car. His slow "bluesy" tune, **Don't Want No Woman Telling Me What To Do**, dates from these early days when Delta blues were at their height.

LOVEY WILLIAMS farms in the community of Morning Star near Edwards. In his presence I felt as though the blues were being torn from his flesh. His heavy voice emerged from a slight frame and filled the small room where this recording was made. Lovey's wife strongly disapproves of his blues singing and sometimes hides his guitar to prevent his playing on weekends.

These four bluesmen – Scott Dunbar, James "Cairo" Thomas, Lee Kizart and Lovey Williams – all represent vital blues traditions in their respective Mississippi communities. None of their children are continuing to sing the blues, however, and the music will probably die with their generation.

BILL FERRIS, 1972 [*Since these notes were written, James Thomas's son Pat Thomas has taken up performing his father's music.*]

All tracks recorded during the summer of 1968.

Compiled by William Ferris to accompany his book, **Blues From the Delta** (November Books, London).

SET 8: DISC 6: VIOLA WELLS: Miss Rhapsody **41:59**

Originally released in 1972 as Matchbox SDM 227

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|------|
| 1 | Down Hearted Blues (a) | 4:30 |
| 2 | How Great Thou Art (b) | 2:46 |
| 3 | See, See Rider (a) | 2:42 |

4	In the Garden (b)	4:18
5	Brown Gal (a)	4:45
6	His Eye Is On the Sparrow (b)	3:07
7	Blues in My Heart (a)	3:29
8	Power In the Blood (b)	3:46
9	I Fell For You (a)	3:41
10	Face To Face (b)	2:56
11	Old Fashioned Love (a)	5:42

Recorded April 22, 1972, in New York with with (a) Reuben Jay Cole (piano), Danny Gibson (drums), Ivan Rollé (bass), Eddie Wright (guitar), (b) Mrs Grace Gregory (piano).

It was 1940. Miss Rhapsody was running up the backstage stair, at New York's Onyx Club. The band was introducing Billie Holiday but she wasn't there. Throwing open the dressing room door, she was horrified to find Lady Day sprawled on the floor, a needle in her arm. Pulling it out, she quickly revived her and ran her down to the stage. Before singing a perfect set, Billie sighed and whispered a husky dedication "..... to Miss Rhapsody".

It was a small tribute for a woman who was always there when someone needed her. While the audience may not have fully understood the name "Miss Rhapsody" was known throughout the East Coast theatre circuit during the 30s. They knew her as a singer par excellence in most Kansas City night spots of the time. During the 40s she was a singers' singer at New York's, Apollo Theatre, Small's Paradise, Kelly's Stable, Cafe' Society, on radio, in clubs, theatres, ballrooms and cabarets in hundreds of American cities. She was one singer who really made them stop and take notice.

"The greatest blues singer in the country," said Benny Carter. Jimmy Lunceford tried to be more specific: "A cross between Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday, but Billie never had as much voice as she has and Ella will never have her personality."

But while the musicians were talking about this amazing legend, she was

out there busy recording, dancing, producing, directing, mc-ing, dj-ing, and working damn hard at what she knew best: singing.

Viola Wells was born 70 years ago [*at time of writing in 1972*] in Newark, New Jersey. She spent 14 youthful years singing in a church choir. After singing professionally during the 20s, in numerous New Jersey and Pennsylvania clubs, (where an admiring critic tabbed her stage name) she joined Banjo Bernie's Band for a long, extended tour of one-night tent shows, dances, theatres and clubs. In 1934 she began a rough three year tour with Ida Cox's TOBA road show, travelling and working with the best through the East and Mid-West circuit. She spent 14 months at Kansas City's Sunset Crystal Palace as star performer, producer and talent scout. Into the mid-40s she concentrated on the better clubs and theatres in the New York area, starring and working with jazz greats like Art Tatum, Count Basie, Claude Hopkins, Benny Carter and others. She also appeared for 14 consecutive weeks as feature performer on New York's *Sheep & Goat* radio show. In 1946 she retired to raise her family, singing regularly in her church with occasional club and concert dates.

This is Miss Rhapsody's first major recording since her 1944-45 Savoy's with Jay 'June' Cole's group, all collector's items now.

The session day was rainy, cold and damp with New York clogged by numerous protest marches. Studio overtime was ticking away when she arrived breathless, raincoat flying, feet wet and soggy, nerves dangling. Asked if she wished to dry off or sit down she brushed aside all suggestions. "Listen" she smiled, "I'm as good as I'll ever be at this moment. Let's get to it!"

With that, the veteran stripped off her coat, rushed over to check out instrument positions, tested the mike and tossed the first title over her shoulder to her long time pianist-leader, Jay Cole. She cleared her throat and was ready.

The opener was **Down Hearted Blues**. Certainly Miss Rhapsody has known blues. Rotten, crying, wrong blues. Her father, "the kindest man I ever knew, always helping someone," was stabbed and killed over a few dollars. She never knew her mother for she had died when Viola was four. But there is no

bitterness evident in her music. While she obviously knows of what she sings, she sings with kindness and humanity. And compassion.

Blues In My Heart, the beautiful Benny Carter tune, is sung from deep within. Dark shadows dart across her mind's eye. Images of hard, dirty nights on the road tours. Singing for tips in all white Southern ballrooms. Working in queer-joints. Hassles with the great Ida Cox and getting fired because her notices were better than the star's. Liquor ebbing the life out of her good friend Don Lambert, "absolutely a genius of piano, rivalling Tatum, and I worked with both." Her voice sings sad. But strong.

When she moves into Lil Armstrong's **Brown Gal**, her personal theme song for well over 35 years, she becomes a vignette of pure happiness and warmth. She is stage-center again at chic Cafe' Society, the amber light flowing gently off her soft face, her long sequined gown sparkling, her arms arcing in deliberate, slow gestures. She is once again the brown gal offering help to those who have since risen above her: the Joe Turners, the Pearl Baileys, the Walter Browns. The voice is now proud. But reflective.

Her selection of gospel hymns is exquisitely chosen, songs she sings every Sunday accompanied by Mrs. Grace Gregory, a shy, diminutive woman who is pianist, organist and financial secretary of the New Eden Baptist Church of Newark.

These are love stories in the full sense of the word, most reverent, told with a tenderness that speaks of hope and faith. More than one listener in the hushed studio was moved to hear this true believer sing to her God, simply and honestly, thanking Him in her own way for this climax to a full, meaningful life.

"I think this was one of the most beautiful sessions I ever had. I do. I really do. I felt good because I had everything good around me. There was such a warmth here, I knew everybody was in my corner and that made a difference. When you've got a certain amount of love in your heart, a power, comes from somewhere that we have no control over. Yes, my God has been good to me."

Miss Rhapsody has given us a legacy of love. **Sheldon Harris 1972**



Photos of: Mager Johnson (front cover)
 Arzo Youngblood (above left), Boogie Bill Webb (above centre)
 Roosevelt Holts (above right), Furry Lewis (below right)
All by David Evans



Eurreal "Little Brother"
 Montgomery with his
 wife, Jan (1972)



Viola Wells: Miss Rhapsody
 with unknown group
 (unknown date)



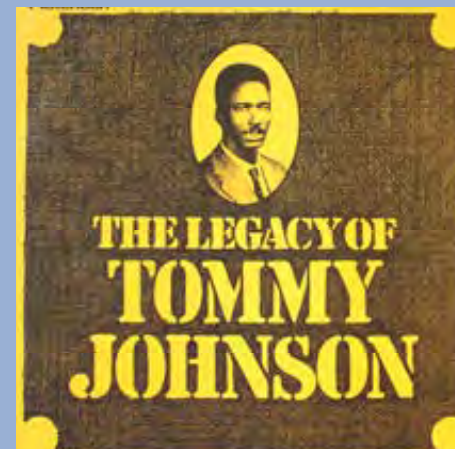
Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 8



Recorded in Memphis, Tennessee Sept 1968 by Karl Gert zur Heide



Recorded in S Drexel Ave, Chicago, Jan 30th 1972 by Leon A Kelert



Recorded in Louisiana & Mississippi, 1966-69 by David Evans



Recorded in Louisiana & Mississippi, 1966-71 by David Evans



Recorded in Mississippi, summer of 1968 by Bill Ferris



Recorded in New York April 22, 1972 by Jim Chion