

LET IT ROLL WITH MANCE LIPSCOMB

LIVING BLUES

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JIMI "PRIMETIME" SMITH

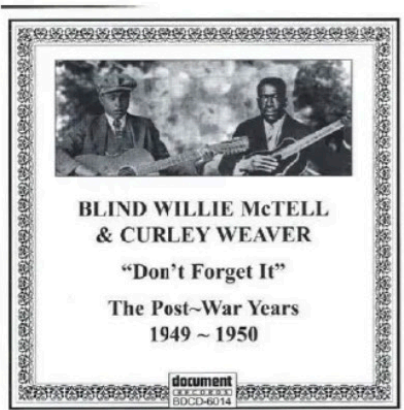
His Own Man

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McTell-Weaver sessions for Regal. You get a generous portion of 28 songs by the pair of celebrated Georgia bluesmen, by then mature and seasoned artists. Both musicians are featured on vocals and guitar—Weaver with his plaintive falsetto and dexterous slide playing, McTell with his fierce 12-string fingerpicking and slide, singing in his smooth tenor.

Weaver and McTell were duo partners since the mid-1930s, recording for Decca/Champion in Chicago in 1935. They toured in clubs and markets through Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama until the late 1930s. By 1959, Weaver and McTell were both blind as Weaver succumbed to a childhood eye illness late. McTell is today aptly celebrated as one of the paramount figures of the original blues scene, in part because of the many 20th century covers of his songs. Weaver, who emulated McTell, is recognized on almost equal footing.

Document Records built in a little puzzle for its listeners, with disparities in the song lists, which differ on the booklet's back page, on the back of the CD cover, and again on the order of songs on the CD itself. You can figure it out. To make up for it, the sound quality of this recording is far superior to the earlier 1920s–30s recordings of both musicians. David Evans states in the liner notes, written in 2007, that their voices were “worn over two decades of daily performing and travel, not always under the best conditions.” While that is true when comparing McTell's singing to his incomparable, energetic 1927–1933 recordings, it all sounds good to this reviewer. Notably, McTell's 12-string playing is as swift as ever, proving unequivocally what Bob Dylan sang in his famed tribute, *Nobody Plays the Blues like Blind Willie McTell*. Of course, anyone bothering to read this review will surely already be convinced of that. Every cut here is a joy to behold, a distinct listening pleasure.

Serious blues fans will undoubtedly find many songs to love on this collection. It would

be a hard feat to choose favorites, but the two “mama songs” are high on the list: *Talkin' to You Mama*, which showcases the two guitarists' technical prowess, with McTell singing equally powerfully, and *Savannah Mama*, again with McTell on vocals. The fun ragtime song *Trixie*, a version of the well-known *Tricks Ain't Walkin' No More*, is fat fun all the way. They shine on Weaver's *Some Rainy Day*, a song which Weaver recorded as part of the Georgia Cotton Pickers in 1930. This album is a delightful song collection, at once thrilling and thoroughly satisfying.

—Frank Matheis

IKE & TINA TURNER

The Bolic Sound Sessions

Sunset Blvd Records – CD-SBR-9582

Aside from being the titular leader of one of the most spectacular musical revues to ever take the R&B world by storm, Ike Turner was among the music's most versatile and highly esteemed producers. He built his Bolic Sound Studios in Inglewood, California, in 1970; for the following two decades, until the studio burned to the ground in a (suspicious?) fire in January of 1981, Bolic was his base of operations. At Bolic, Turner produced sides on himself, Tina, and the Ikettes—in various settings and configurations—as well as numerous other artists. This release features sessions that Turner produced on himself and Tina during Bolic's sometimes-tumultuous run, along with performances recorded live at a 1975 Ike & Tina performance at the Forest National arena in Brussels.

Some of the titles here, such as *River Deep* – *Mountain High*, *Proud Mary*, *A Fool in Love*, and *Baby – Get It On*, will be familiar to long-time fans of the pair, but the songs have been significantly reworked; Ike was never one to romanticize the past, rest on his laurels, or take nostalgia as the easy way out. In many cases, though, even hard-core aficionados will encounter things they've never heard before (or might be familiar with only from having attended Ike & Tina Turner Revue shows over the years).

A song-by-song breakdown isn't practical here (the set consists of 36 tracks over the course of two CDs); in fact, so rich is the lode of musical delights that even a representative sample of “highlights” or “personal favorites” would be a daunting prospect. At the very least, though, it needs to be pointed out that the musical palette is as wide as it is deep. From boogie-laden old-school rhythm & blues through hard-edged funk, to rocked-out abandon, with



some savory side trips into moody R&B balladry, the force of the musical tsunami that was Ike & Tina Turner in full flight permeates virtually every track here (especially those recorded live in Brussels). We hear vintage chestnuts, reborn blues and pop blues standards, R&B, soul, and rock classics (Tina just might be both the most outrageous and the most satisfying Beatles cover artist to ever approach a microphone), and, of course, timeless Ike & Tina fare like the chestnuts referenced above.

And once again it needs to be asserted: despite the many standards and well-known gems included here, this is not a “turn back the clock” excursion down memory lane but a full-frontal assault against the very idea of kneeling sentimentally at the altar of “dusties” or “oldies”—regardless of the vintage or provenance of the material, Tina grabs it like a wildcat untamed and refuses to let go until she's torn and shredded it into heretofore unimagined shapes and contours as Ike, the Ikettes, and the instrumentalists of the Revue, honed to a fine edge by Ike's relentless perfectionism, both respond to her and goad her relentlessly at every turn.

“We never, ever do nothing nice and easy,” indeed.

—David Whiteis

EDDIE BOWLES

Best of Eddie Bowles

Final Thursday Press - No #

As a youngster coming of age in Uptown New Orleans around the turn of the century, Eddie Bowles (1884-1984) joined in a succession of rough and ready “spasm” bands, where novice musicians turned battered hand-me-downs and random junk into impromptu instruments until they could acquire the real thing, in Bowles's case a guitar which he learned to play by watching and pestering the anonymous musicians

playing on the District's street corners. Soon he was playing with legitimate bands at everything from picnics in the park to balls at Tulane University, and considered himself to be a professional musician. After all, he was moving in the same circles as his contemporaries Louis Armstrong (b. 1901) and Kid Ory (b.1886), and was in fact older than either of them.


But then it all changed. Married in 1911 and unable to support his spouse playing music, in 1914 Bowles headed north seeking better work and landed in the little college town of Cedar Falls, Iowa, where they settled in and Bowles set aside his guitar for more than two decades, when he began to play for the occasional church, nursing home, or municipal function while also giving guitar lessons to local youths. However, Bowles's choice of the bucolic life very likely cost him a chance to record during the 78 r.p.m. era. Although the nascent record industry had been reluctant to explore the market for male blues guitar pickers, Okeh had taken perhaps the greatest of all New Orleans guitarists to a St. Louis studio in 1925. Lonnie Johnson (b. 1894) was only 31 at the time, ten years younger than Eddie Bowles.

Bowles's lack of recordings in the pre-war

years would have a further, retrospectively obvious, consequence that did not come home to roost for many years: because he had never made any records in the twenties, there would be nothing of his to collect in the sixties. Thus, while artists such as Son House (b.1902) and John Hurt (b. 1892), who had recorded in the twenties had become cultural icons 40 years later, Eddie Bowles was still riding the Cedar Falls nursing home circuit and shoveling coal into the furnaces at the John Deere foundry in adjacent Waterloo. Eventually he came to the attention of veteran blues scholar Art Rosenbaum who interviewed and recorded the then 92-year-old Bowles in 1976. The pump having thus been primed, more interviews followed, some of them spiced with samples of Bowles's music that provided the content of this album.

This may be a good time to introduce a few of Bowles's idiosyncrasies. First, he considered himself to be a purveyor of sentimental pop fare (a "songster") rather than a mere blues singer, proclaiming that he knew "hundreds" of songs by memory and could "play until midnight tomorrow and never play all the songs I have." Second, he considered song titles to be an artifact of the recording process

necessary for identification, and disapproved of giving titles to blues, which were not true songs at all, but only the product of informal sessions where the participants would trade verses that seldom coalesced into a finite song. Nevertheless, Rosenbaum had assigned the title *Bowles' Blues* to the performance that he had included on his Grammy-winning box set **The Art of Field Recording** (Dust-To-Digital, 2008) for best historical recording and, with its title expanded to *Eddie Bowles's Blues* now leads off the present program. Regardless of title the piece is sublime, as Bowles's acoustic guitar lays down an easy-rolling backdrop to the almost stoic vocal: "When I woke up this morning, nothing on my mind / But when I looked out my window, I could see my baby crying." Oddly, it and the other three original blues (*Everything I Do*, *I Sat Up All Night*, and *You Stayed All Night*—all titled by opening lyric) not only coalesce into organic songs, but all have a common theme of street-walking women and common verses, including one warning the wayward lover that when she gets home she will "find another jenny kicking in her stall." The 16-track playlist adds six more from the Rosenbaum session, including




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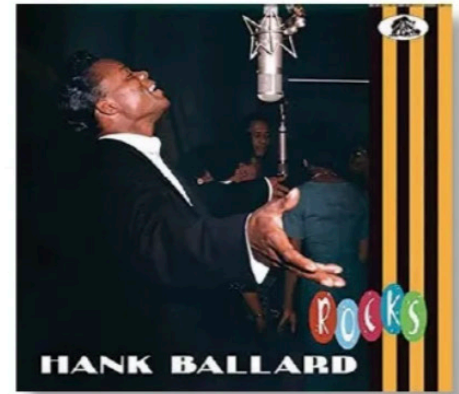
the venerable *Crawdada Song* and *Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor* along with four instrumentals in *Sorry, My Dear*, *Strolling Waltz*, *St. Louis Blues* and an up-tempo original titled *Untitled*, (with a more modern sound from the self-styled “ragtime finger-pickin’ guitarist”).

Of the nine remaining songs, eight were taped during sessions produced by Phil Nussbaum of UNI’s public radio affiliate KUNI-FM with assistance from Dr. Harry Oster, then on the faculty of the University of Iowa after winning acclaim while at Louisiana State University for his “discovery” of Robert Pete Williams and other inmates of that state’s Angola penitentiary. Of the eight, there are *I Get the Blues When it Rains* an instrumental version of *Don’t Fence Me In* and another variant of *St. Louis Blues*, while Bowles delivers the vocals on *Fishing Blues* and *I Wonder Who’s Kissing Her Now*. Nussbaum coaxed the last blues from Bowles, (with the addition of second guitar from promising acolyte Jimmy Price) on *You Stayed All Night* before the set ends on a bittersweet note with an instrumental rendition of *Memories*, one of Bowles favorites, as recorded for Cedar Falls Cable Television when Bowles was 98. Among the several noteworthy

aspects of *Memories* was the guitar itself, which has been identified as an Italian-made hollow-body EKO Model 250 “Vagabond” with reverb c. 1966, a far cry from anything Bowles could have brought with him from New Orleans all those long years ago and the most likely source of the distortion present on that song (which is somewhat similar to that made by the Leslie amp used by Buddy Guy on Junior Wells’ classic *HooDoo Man Blues* album, Delmark 1965).

Inevitably, there will be those who cannot believe that a man in his nineties can play and sing the blues. Fortunately, rebuttal to those naysayers may be easily had, as this project was made possible by the University of Northern Iowa, the Cedar Falls Community Foundation’s Saul and Joan Diamond Arts & History Fund, Humanities Iowa and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and is available a digital album on all major streaming services, and can be listened to free at: <https://eddiebowles.hearnow.com/>. Kudos are in order for Final Thursday Press’s producer (and UNI professor) Jim O’Loughlin and his team for a labor of love that succeeds in all material respects.

—Jim DeKoster



HANK BALLARD ROCKS

Bear Family - BCD 17580

Hank Ballard was born John Henry Kendrick in Detroit in 1927, but, in a reversal of the typical migration pattern, moved south to and was raised in Bessemer, Alabama, until he made his way back to Detroit when still in his teens. Looking to get involved in the Motor City’s vocal group scene, he caught on with the Royals,

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