

### Side One

**TOUGH TIMES (John Brim) 3:00**

John Brim

**ANNA LEE (Robert Nighthawk) 3:12**

Robert McCullum

**SO GLAD I FOUND YOU (Johnny Shines) 2:24**

Johnny Shines

**HAVING FUN (Memphis Slim) 2:18**

Peter Chatman

**GOIN' AWAY BABY (Jimmy Rogers) 2:41**

James A. Lane

**I DON'T KNOW (Willie Mabon) 3:06**

Willie Mabon

### Side Two

**DARK ROAD (Floyd Jones) 3:15**

Floyd Jones

**DUST MY BROOM (Elmore James) 3:00**

Elmore James

**EISENHOWER BLUES (J. B. Lenoir) 2:50**

J. B. Lenoir

**BY MYSELF (Big Bill Broonzy, Washboard Sam) 3:00**

Wm. Broonzy

**MURMUR LOW (Big Boy Spires) 2:39**

Arthur Spires

**RATTLESNAKE (John Brim) 3:05**

John Brim

### Side Three

**I SEE MY BABY (Elmore James) 3:00**

Elmore James

**KOREA BLUES (J. B. Lenoir) 2:48**

J. B. Lenoir

**YOU CAN'T LIVE LONG (Floyd Jones) 2:50**

Floyd Jones

**I CAN'T STOP (Otis Rush) 2:13**

Willie Dixon

**THIRD DEGREE (Eddie Boyd) 3:08**

Eddie Boyd

**TEN YEARS AGO (Buddy Guy) 2:35**

Buddy Guy

### Side Four

**BE CAREFUL (John Brim) 2:40**

John Brim

**JACKSON TOWN GAL (Robert Nighthawk) 2:48**

Robert McCullum

**THE WORLD'S IN A TANGLE (Jimmy Rogers) 2:50**

James A. Lane

**YOU KNOW MY LOVE (Otis Rush) 2:40**

Willie Dixon

**MY TIME AFTER A WHILE (Buddy Guy) 2:57**

Geddins & Bager

**CHICAGO BOUND (Jimmy Rogers) 2:40**

James A. Lane



Big Boy Spires

Robert Nighthawk



Memphis Slim



Floyd Jones



Johnny Shines

Willie Mabon



All compositions are published by Arc Music Corp. BMI except, *I Don't Know* by Roosevelt Music BMI; *Dust My Broom* by Globe Music BMI; and *My Time After A While* by Merry Making Music BMI

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The twenty-four recordings comprising this album were made in Chicago in the fifteen-year period 1949-64 when the modern electric blues was being shaped, perfected and disseminated. Along with the complementary music in the other albums in this series by Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley (each of whom is featured in a separate two-LP set), the performances in this collection offer the listener the opportunity of a hindsight view at the development of a musical idiom which has had profound and continuing effects upon the course of virtually all modern popular music. But this is no mere exercise in nostalgia or a dry musicological reconstruction—quite the contrary in fact: each of the performances here is a strong, exciting, viable statement by an important original contributor to one of the most significant, revolutionary and influential musics America has contributed to the world.

The revolution began inauspiciously enough in 1948 with the release of a 78-rpm single by a singer-guitarist called Muddy Waters. The song was a traditional Mississippi Delta-styled piece titled *I Can't Be Satisfied* (it may be heard, along with other memorable Waters' recordings, in Chess 2CH-60006) and on it Waters' dark, majestic singing was supported by his equally brilliant electrified slide guitar and the percussive bass of Ernest "Big" Crawford. The record was a hit, selling rapidly to black audiences in the urban North and in the South who shared Waters' southern rural upbringing. They responded immediately to his music: it had the affirming familiarity that is one of the great strengths of all traditional utterances, yet at the same time it was different. Waters' use of amplification gave his guitar playing a new, powerful, striking edge and color; it introduced to traditional music a sound its listeners found very exciting, comfortably familiar yet strangely thrilling. Over the next several years he and hundreds of other country-cum-city bluesmen all over the nation were to extend and redefine traditional southern blues into the postwar urban ensemble blues styles.

Nowhere was the activity more pronounced or the results more successful than in Chicago. Right from the start the city excelled in the quantity and the quality of its recordings in the new idioms. Chicago early had been established the most important northern focus of southern migration and from the turn of the century vast numbers of southern blacks had made their way there in the hopes of improving their lot. As a result, a large and busy professional and semi-professional music scene quickly grew to serve the needs of this segment of the city's populace, with large numbers of clubs, taverns, speak-easies and dance spots scattered through the South and West Side black ghettos. The city's pre-eminence in black popular music was further consolidated when the large record companies of the 1920s and '30s established the bulk of their activities in so-called "race" recording there, which made Chicago even more of a mecca for the southern blues musician.

As a result of the major record firms' concentration of recording activities in one city, coupled with the rise of what might be considered a bloc of reliable "studio" blues musicians who performed on by far the major portion of blues records made there, the Chicago blues recordings of the period 1935-45 tended towards a type of polished regularity that was suave and supple at best, bland and predictable at worst. Closed as this self-perpetuating studio blues scene was to new ideas, stagnation inevitably set in and the way was paved for the new synthesis of country and city that Waters and his peers set in motion right after the war.

Some idea of the basic qualities of the prewar-styled blues that was supplanted by the brash, vigorous postwar styles are given here by two performances by three musicians associated with these older styles. The blithe, exuberant • *By Myself*, by Big Bill Broonzy and Washboard Sam, (Robert Brown), and *Having Fun*, by singer-pianist Memphis Slim

(Peter Chatman), while recorded in 1955 and 1950 respectively, are much more representative of the engaging, thoroughly pleasant studio-contrived blues produced by the Chicago bluesmen of the 1930s and early '40s than they are of the blues usually associated with the postwar period. (It is a measure of the irrelevancy of Broonzy's and Memphis Slim's music to the postwar Chicago blues activities that both men—who had been brilliant and successful commercial bluesmen but, finding their musical style supplanted by ones with which they had little sympathy or competence—eventually became European expatriates and pursued careers there as self-conscious "folk" musicians.)

To serve the needs of the community in which it is rooted—that is, to live—traditional music must look to the present, not to the past, and much of the music produced by the Chicago bluesmen of the prewar and war years had become irrelevant to black audiences of the time. This was even more true of postwar black audiences, swelled as they were by southern blacks who had come North to staff the war industries. Muddy Waters and his strong, yeasty music touched their hearts and minds much more deeply and immediately. Like them, he had only lately arrived in the city from the rural South. His values, attitudes, responses and experiences, as voiced in his music, were their own and they made him, and others like him, their spokesmen.

His success and that of Detroit's John Lee Hooker (like Waters a Mississippian) paved the way for the scores of other rural-rooted urban blues singers and musicians who helped solidify and extend the postwar blues. Consolidating Muddy's success, Chess Records quickly began to record other Chicago blues musicians and from the late 1940s on a wide variety of performers passed through their doors, some to make a record or two and quickly disappear from sight, others to achieve popular acceptance and record prolifically. In the early years, before the basic ensemble style was worked out and then codified, all kinds of music and musical ensembles found their way onto record. Anything went; experimentation was the order of the day, and if this particular combination of music and musicians didn't work, why, they'd try a different one and see how it went down with the public!

They were indeed exciting times and in their quest for successful commercial records the Chess brothers, Leonard and Phil, gave us some magnificent music. After a short period of conservatism (right after Muddy's first record success, they were still feeling their way through the new postwar styles, learning what they were about), they quickly became as crucially important to the music as any of the artists they recorded, pioneering new recording techniques, introducing new sounds and textures, and responding with enthusiasm and interest to new musicians. They apparently listened to virtually anyone who requested an audition, continually made the rounds of clubs and taverns in search of new artists and sounds, felt out and responded to the desires of the people who comprised the blues audience and bought their records. And if for nothing else, they will be remembered for the sound of the records they made—records which, more than those of any other company, perfectly captured the raw, vigorous, beautiful sound of the postwar blues. They understood the music all right and, while it's true they occasionally made mistakes, they weren't afraid to take chances. This collection offers a small taste of what they did, who they recorded and how they recorded them.

With the exception of the Los Angeles-dominated West Coast style of jazz and swing oriented blues (as typified by such artists as Charles Brown, Roy Milton, Saunders King, Roy Brown, Johnny Otis and others), the postwar blues styles tended to center around earthy southern rural blues approaches. The dominant sound was that of the Mississippi-Arkansas blues, and it's no accident that most of the major



workers in the postwar blues were natives of that area: Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Elmore James, John Lee Hooker, Robert Nighthawk, Jimmy Reed, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Willie Dixon, Junior Wells, Bo Diddley, B.B. King, Otis Rush, Magic Sam and Albert King are just a few from that region who have contributed significantly to the modern blues.

Many of the earliest postwar records are simply electrically amplified versions, with accompaniments of varying sizes and degrees of success, of older rural blues or new songs based on older models (usually just new lyrics set to an old melody). In this album, for example, Big Boy Spires' 1952 recording of *Murmur Low* is simply his adaptation of Mississippi Delta singer-guitarist Tommy Johnson's *Big Fat Mama Blues*, originally recorded by Johnson in 1928 (Spires himself refers to the song as *Fat Mama Rumble*). Floyd Jones' 1951 *Dark Road*, an admitted classic of the postwar blues, is his recasting of another Johnson song *Big Road Blues* (also recorded initially in 1928); both Jones' and Johnson's performances served as the basis of Canned Heat's popular hit of a few years ago. Elmore James' 1953 *Dust My Broom* and, to a degree, *I See My Baby* as well derive almost totally from Robert Johnson, the brilliant Mississippi singer-guitarist who was killed so brutally and senselessly in 1938 and who had recorded *I Believe I'll Dust My Broom* two years earlier.

A number of the other songs included here could be traced to recordings by older bluesmen, to commonplace traditional elements or even to whole traditional songs. More important than such borrowings, however, is the larger matter of the stylistic orientation of most postwar blues. The early postwar blues represented a return to the basic precepts of rural blues. In their rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and structural elements they were country blues pure and simple and from about 1950 on this approach was subjected to a process of simplification and, to a degree, regularization as the music became more and more an ensemble music. Duos and trios gradually gave way to quartets, quintets and often larger units and as this occurred structural and metrical irregularities had to be minimized or eliminated completely if concerted playing by five or six men were to be made possible.

In this collection, for example, it is instructive to note the progression from such country-styled small group performances as Spires' *Murmur Low*, made with two guitars and rudimentary percussion; Johnny Shines' *So Glad I Found You*, on which his vocal and guitar are seconded only by Little Walter's unamplified harmonica and Big Crawford's bass; through the more supple but still country-tinged trio performances of guitarist-vocalist Robert Nighthawk, pianist Sunnyland Slim and bassist Willie Dixon on *Anna Lee* and *Jackson Town Gal*, and on to the music of the larger groups.

Intermediate steps in the move to larger ensembles are the various quartet performances here: Jimmy Rogers' *Goin' Away*, a very country blues like piece with Rogers and Muddy Waters, guitars; Little Walter, unamplified harmonica, and Crawford, bass; Floyd Jones' somber, country-based *Dark Road* and *You Can't Live Long*, with Jones and Rogers, guitars; Little Walter, harmonica (amplified on the second piece), and a drummer, possibly Elgin Evans; John Brim's *Tough Times*, another somber blues played by Brim and Eddie Taylor, guitars; Jimmy Reed, harmonica, and Grace Brim, drums; and J.B. Lenoir's rough-sounding *Korea Blues*, with Lenoir and Leroy Foster, guitars; Sunnyland Slim, piano, and Alfred Wallace, drums. By the time the groups reach quintet size or larger, practically all structural and metrical irregularities of country blues styles have disappeared, replaced by the smooth, well-oiled interaction of powerhouse rhythm sections, supple vocal and instrumental work and tight, well-focused arrangements: John Brim's *Rattlesnake* and *Be Careful*, Rogers' *The World's in A Tangle* and *Chicago Bound* (beautiful), Lenoir's *Eisenhower Blues*, Eddie Boyd's

*Third Degree* and Elmore James' *Dust My Broom* and *I See My Baby*. It is in such mature, cohesive performances as these that the Chicago ensemble blues can be said to have come of age. Experimentation done, the kinks worked out, the ensemble settled to one of two guitars, piano, bass and drums, with either harmonica or one or more horns; all the instruments but piano, drums and horns were electrically amplified.

This rapid, sustained development was made possible by the fact that Chicago supported a large blues performing activity, with plentiful work opportunities (at least in the music's early years), a considerable audience for live music, and recording outlets, chief of which was Chess Records. Moreover, since most of the postwar blues musicians hailed from the same general geographic area and shared similar backgrounds and experience, they possessed a common musical vocabulary that was to be the basic building block of postwar blues: the traditional emotion-charged blues of the southern countryside.

This musical *lingua franca* permitted a consistent, sustained development once the modern blues got under way. And on a practical, workaday level, for example, frequent personnel shifts in bands did not seriously impede the music's development, since it was relatively easy to replace departing band members with men already familiar with the music and its roots. Several performances in this album illustrate just how easily this took place: Jimmy Rogers' recording of *Goin' Away* and Johnny Shines' *So Glad I Found You*, among other performances by both, were cut with a minimum of planning or rehearsal at the end of the Muddy Waters recording session that produced the classic *Louisiana Blues*. Shines had not worked previously with the musicians who backed him on this recording. Likewise, Floyd Jones' *You Can't Live Long* was recorded at the end of another Waters session, and John Brim's *Rattlesnake* followed hard on the heels of Little Walter's *Off the Wall* and *Tell Me, Mama* session.

The proliferation and virtual dominance of the basic Chicago ensemble style received further impetus in the mid- and late-1950s with the emergence of a new generation of Chicago blues musicians. These younger performers had been weaned on the music of the Chicago veterans and had very readily assimilated its major precepts; in approaching it, however, they brought to it a number of more sophisticated influences, chief of which was the brilliant improvisational approach of guitarist B.B. King. This annealing of newer and more established elements is seen in the music of Buddy Guy (a native of Louisiana) and Otis Rush (a Mississippian), both exciting, forceful singers and equally stunning though different instrumentalists, as their performances here attest, guitar lines flashing explosively over solid, bedrock rhythm section playing and utilizing more adventurous, expanded harmonic bases.

Attention might also be directed to the several pieces in this set which address themselves to larger issues than the male-female relationships with which most blues treat. Bluesmen occasionally have commented on matters of social concern to their listeners and this aspect of the blues tradition is reflected here in John Brim's *Tough Times* and J.B. Lenoir's *Eisenhower Blues*, both of which remark trenchantly on the economic hardships resulting from the postwar recession of the early 1950s and which hit blacks particularly hard, and in Lenoir's *Korea Blues* and Jimmy Rogers' *The World's in A Tangle*, each of which deals in its own way with the Korean conflict and the concerns it fostered in the minds of black Americans at the time.

