

"Ice Man Blues" is a reprise of *"The Coldest Staff In Town"* by Whistling Bob Howe & Frankie Criggs, recorded for Decca six months earlier. Pullum handles the jaunty "point" number with skill, making one wish he had attempted more of this sort of material. **"Joe Louis Is The Man"**, one of a handful of blues dedicated to the great black boxer, has a similar 16 + 2 bar format which elicits athletic playing from Andy Boy and ends the session in higher spirits than might have been expected after all those slow numbers earlier on (see Vol. 1 [DOCD-5393]).

Six months later, in February 1936, Pullum showed up in San Antonio for what would be his final Bluebird session, rejoined by Robert Cooper and also trumpeter Chester Boone and guitarist Melvin Martin. Boone, then 30, was a Houstonian who had been playing with Eddie Vinson. He later moved to New York, where he worked in Sammy Price's Texas Blueicians and recorded with his own Jumping Jacks in 1941. He subsequently served as a sideman with Buddy Johnson and Luis Russell. Robert Cooper was next – and last – reported working in Chicago in 1946 alongside tenor saxophonist Eddie Chamblee in Marvin Cates' Earls of Rhythm. Nobody knows anything more about Melvin Martin.

"Bonus Blues" refers to the payment of World War I veterans' bonuses, an issue which prompted the Bonus March on Washington and the brutal clearing by police of the shanty-town encampment which the marchers set up near Capitol Hill – facts unmentioned in the several blues on the topic, which are characteristically upbeat at the prospect of unexpected cash. ("We're gonna have some fun

when the soldiers get their bonus," sang Red Nelson on a record made less than three weeks earlier.) Set to the melody of *"Black Gal"* and in the same key, it has an eloquent solo by Boone. **"Come On if You're Comin'"**, the fastest number Pullum recorded, is a stomp in the manner of Fats Waller. **"Hattie Green"** is a Houston standard about a famous madam who had "a meeting house", in Victoria Spivey's delicate phrase, "where all races could get together". Apparently she moved her operation at some point to Abilene. Robert Shaw and Dr. Hepcat (Lavada Dursi) also had this song. The arresting second stanza of **"Woman Trouble Blues"** is adapted from a common sacred song recorded by both black and white artists: "if I could, I surely would/Stand on the rock where Moses stood". A later stanza refers back to the original *"Black Gal"*. **"Swing Them Blues"** is an amiable romp with room for solos by all the sidemen: a pleasant and generous way for Pullum to conclude the first stage of his recording career. Almost a year to the day after that session, Pullum's sometime accompanist **ANDY BOY** recorded his only session in his own name, singing and playing piano. Boy – this appears to have been his actual surname – was from Galveston and probably much the same age as Pullum and Rob Cooper, in his late 20s or early 30s. "Andy Boy was a top kicker in Galveston," Robert Shaw remembered. "Now, he was good, he was sure good. Oh, man, he could play some of the damndest songs and the piano'd be talking just as smooth as he be talking. That's what you mean 'bout playin' the piano, play it smooth!" Victoria Spivey placed him as the "second-best member of a clique that played ... from

Galveston to Houston to Richmond to Sugarland". Boy's eight songs have a pleasing variety of tempos and accompanying patterns. "**House Raid Blues**" is his ramblunctious version of the theme that Texas singer-guitarist Little Hat Jones called "*Kentucky Blues*", a piece distantly related to "*Traveling Man*". "**Church Street Blues**" includes a product placement ("good old Gilbey's Gin") and alludes to one of the East Texas pianists' core pieces, "the Grinder". The spoken self-encouragements towards the end of "**Jive Blues**" obviously come from someone who enjoyed Pats Waller. The rough edges of Boy's voice occasionally recall Big Boy Knox (see DOCD-5232), and at times he strikes a similar note of moving understatement:

*"You can take, you can take my money,
nmm, I know that's the thing you like,
But please don't mistreat me
just because I'm black."*

"Yellow Gal Blues"

His session over, Boy stayed at the piano to accompany WALTER "COWBOY" WASHINGTON, described by Paul Oliver as "a bar-fly on the waterfront who had worked as a cospuncher ... a tough, rough-voiced singer". The harmonica-player who appears only on the first song, "**Bad Managing Blues**", is pretty rough too – maybe a waterfront buddy whom Washington owed a favour. The tune of "**Ice Pick Mama**" is distantly related to one used by the Cincinnati singer Kid Cole, for instance on his "*Niagara Fall Blues*" (1928). Washington is a singer of some power and his songs are unusually free of blues clichés. Fifteen years after his last recording, Joe Pullum, now a California resident, returned to the business

with a single on Swing Time: naturally enough, a remake of his best-known number. He was accompanied by unidentified piano, electric guitar, bass and drums. (Guido van Rijn has proposed Lloyd Glenn as a possible candidate for the piano role which seems not unreasonable.) "**My Woman – Part 1**" is basically an edited update of his original version. The issued take inserts a stanza from "*Black Gal No. 2*"; the other is closer to the original text and omits the electric guitarist. "**My Woman – Part 2**" consists of new verses written for the different time and place of the recording. Pullum can still make the high notes, but there are signs of effort.

At the same session Pullum cut two more sides, neither of them derived from earlier recordings. "**You're Alright With Me**" is a cheery 32-bar song which Pullum swings with much of his old gaiety, but the slow blues "**Alberta**" unkindly exposes the coarsening of his voice; "mind" in the last verse is a jolt for his admirers.

In a letter published in *Juke Blues 31* (Summer 1996), Chris Bentley reported (from Ray Topping) that Pullum made an audition recording for Specialty in about 1953, accompanied on piano by his one-time Houston radio partner Bob Peachey. So far as we know this was his last visit to a recording studio. *Tony Russell (July 1995)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Paul Oliver, notes to "*The Piano Blues Volume Eight: Texas Snappers 1934–1937*" (Magpie PY408) (1978).
Guido van Rijn, *Goetse Klundert & Theres Weepers, notes to Joe Pullum, "Black Gal"* (Agram Blues AB 2012) (1986).
Mark McCurrah, Victoria Spry & Chris Strachwitz, notes to Robert Shaw, "*The Ma Grinder*" (Arhoolie CD 377) (1992).