

The decline of the down-home blues in the 'forties was an indication not so much of integration into white society as of imitation of white society; this coupled with the record companies' lack of discrimination and the comparative ease of ghetto life. (This is not to imply that no worthwhile records were made during this period but only that the incredible richness of the 'thirties recordings was absent.) But if the 'forties were on the whole a lean period for blues the early 'fifties saw a startling increase in both the quantity and more important the quality of blues recording. An indication - and in sixteen tracks it is unfortunately impossible to give more than an indication - of the worth and variety of these recordings is given by this anthology of blues from Chicago.

Before and during the war the large record companies, like *Decca*, *Bluebird* and *Victor*, had the money and organisation to market their blues releases efficiently, but post-war companies were usually smaller with fewer resources. It took a big hit to give them a reputation and some measure of effective distribution; further hits were needed to sustain any breakthrough. In the search for smash hits many hundreds of new singers - many of them performers fresh from the country, playing 'old style' country blues - were released on dozens of different labels. (Many were recorded but never released so enthusiasts will probably never know what they missed.) Among the new singers were a handful who became very big names and who still play a role very close to that of the race hero for their public; others have sunk to the second rank, often playing as well as, if not better than, their superiors; still others, and they are sadly the majority, live on half-forgotten or have died, their memory sustained only by a few worn 78s, usually long since snaffled up by enthusiasts. This record is devoted to the second and third categories, making available once more records which are now so rare as to put them well outside the reach of the average collector. Hardly any of the singers here are known outside of a small circle of enthusiasts. Little Walter J (acobs), primarily because of the brilliant series of records he made as accompanist to Muddy Waters, is the only obvious exception, but one might also include Junior Wells.

It may be worth initiating some discussion as to why the blues has this new lease of life in the 'fifties and why the Northern city of Chicago should have played such a hugely important part in this revival. Whilst migration figures are not an entirely accurate index of population movement - neither giving the reasons for migration (quite obviously the well-to-do white moves for reasons widely different from those which compel a socially and economically harrassed negro) nor taking into account temporary migration - it is nonetheless interesting that inter - state migration figures show negro population movement to be both more permanent and more frequent during the period 1940-1947 (14.1% of the negro population migrated during these years and, for a number of reasons, it seems probable that most of this migration was towards the end of this period, which also, more or less, marks the beginning of the post-war renaissance). Further point is added by the fact that 90% in 1900 of the negro population lived in the Southern states and 74% in rural areas, whereas by 1960 only 60% lived in the South and just under 25% in the rural South. Of the 40% living elsewhere rural areas accounted for rather less than 2%. Over the years the American Negro has become a Northern city dweller rather than a Southern country dweller, and in the years immediately after the war the process speeded up. This seems to show one major reason for the blues' new lease of life in the early 'fifties and also why, since the mid-'fifties, there has been a comparative decline in the quality of blues recording. The Southern negro who came North - usually to industrial cities like New York, Detroit and Chicago - during and after the war was usually brought up in an environment where blues was part of daily life, fulfilling a function both as entertainment and as a psychological release, and there was a consequent demand from these migrant groups for down-home blues. The migrants had moved all over the U.S.A. in their exodus from the South and new recording companies sprang up to meet their demands, often in places where no authentic blues tradition existed. The record companies, previously deeply committed to the urban blues market which had been centred on Chicago since the late 'thirties, now found themselves

with a new audience for a type of blues which many enthusiasts had erroneously considered to be dead. The country-style blues was able to survive this transplantation just as long as the singers and audience kept their Southern roots, but they began to lose their *raison d'être* as the Southern audiences grew older and gave way to a younger, white-pop-influenced, record buying public. Young people under 25 account for almost 90% of all record sales and anything up to 99% of all pop record sales, and the younger negroes no longer felt themselves, except in rare cases, a part of the Southern tradition; on the contrary many are deeply embarrassed by the constant reminder of Southern servility.

Despite this trend which I think explains the main reasons for the post-1955 blues decline there are one or two areas which, though affected drastically enough, have not been affected so completely. Chicago, with its long blues association, is one such place. Since the earliest days blues lyrics have contained references to Chicago as a haven from the bitterness of the Deep South and for many years there has been a large working class negro population in the city. It has gathered in the large South-side ghetto, after Harlem the best known and most notorious urban coloured quarter in the U.S.A. Although the South-side has been consistently exposed to some external influence, particularly in recent years, it has established a viable social and cultural life of its own, peculiarly resilient to the bowdlerised and commercialised white culture surrounding it. To the blues enthusiast Chicago has assumed the status of a Mecca; to the negro himself it has been a retreat from a hostile society, a place where, even if he is unable to live his dreams, he is not entirely forced to live his nightmares. In the decade since these recordings were made there have been considerable social developments in the U.S.A., and the battle for integration, though far from won, has made great inroads into the racial no-man's land of Jim Crow and Crow Jim; it is perhaps significant, nevertheless, that Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslim Movement is centred on Chicago, presumably drawing on the latent fears of a 'besieged' community and the intensely 'closed' atmosphere forced on the negro community by the rooted intransigence of white racialist bigotry. Even today the blues of Chicago are peculiarly uncommercial in terms of white pop culture, and, despite obvious external influences, still highly individualistic (e.g.: Otis Rush, Buddy Guy). They have obviously been affected by the continuing 'folk' phenomenon of the negro-white feedback - illustrated most obviously in recent years by Rock 'n' Roll, derived from negro blues/r 'n' b (e.g.: Presley's recording of Arthur Crudup's *That's All Right, Mama*, and Little Junior Parker's *Mystery Train*, among others), and in its turn influencing the development of the blues, partly through the singers themselves and partly through the record companies' constant preoccupation with the fast buck. The other major factor adversely affecting the form of contemporary blues - and it usually preys on those singers whose styles are unsuitable for pop-commercialisation - is the 'Folk Circuit' which has grabbed some of the older style singers and served them up, duly emasculated, to the folknik college students.

The period represented by this record, the late 'forties to mid-'fifties, is the high point of post-war Chicago blues, containing as it does a wide spectrum of the varied styles which went into the overall Chicago sound, ranging from the primitive (Johnny Young/Johnny William(s)) to the comparatively sophisticated (Junior Wells and his Eagle Rockers).

JOHNNY YOUNG, one of the very few blues mandolinists, was born in Vicksburg, Miss., January 1, 1917 and moved to Chicago in 1940 where two years later he played with Muddy Waters and Sonny Boy Williamson No.1. After this he played in various clubs and actually gave up music for some years until 1947 when he teamed up with harpist Snooky Pryor, and guitar-playing brothers Floyd and Moody Jones, in the Maxwell Street area. Young and his guitarist cousin, JOHNNY WILLIAMS, were approached by a Mr. Bernard, owner of the *Ora-Nelle* label, and this resulted in the session re-issued here. These sides would merit re-issue for their rarity alone but Young and Williams, with singing and playing of a very high order, make wonderful music too. Young's other records on *Swingmaster* are as rare as the *Ora-Nelles* but he has accompanied other singers (e.g.: Harmonica Frank on the very fine and rare *Chess* sides, and Snooky Pryor on *Vee Jay*). Young and Williams represent the more or less undiluted country sound, as do the late OTHUM BROWN (singing like Baby Face Leroy Foster) and LITTLE WALTER J (ACOBBS), to a lesser extent: Little Walter showing on these, his first records, a certain stylistic debt to the original Sonny Boy Williamson. These sides were also recorded for the Maxwell Radio Record Co. (*Ora-Nelle*) at 831, Maxwell Street. Walter tells it in his own words:

"I made a couple of tunes for a feller had a record company right on Maxwell there but they didn't do much; didn't even pay me for them." *
We hope to remedy this state of affairs with this re-issue.

Clearly nearer the mainstream Chicago style is JOHN LEE (HENLEY) one of whose sides here is marred (or made according to taste) by the presumably unintentional addition of a choir. The choir is mercifully unobtrusive enough not to spoil the record and it adds a certain, haunting quality of its own. The general theory is that the choir was singing in the next room during the session and the walls were not thick enough! Henley has been rediscovered and is recording again although no further details are known as yet. WILLIE NIX was born in Memphis in 1923 where he established a good local reputation as the Memphis Blues Boy with a band including James Cotton and Elmore James. He also worked with well-known pianists Willie Love and Pinetop Willie Perkins in that area and is known as a guitarist and drummer. He moved to Chicago and replaced Muddy Waters at Smitty's Corner when Muddy made his first English tour in 1958. Using a combo which was clearly designed to sound as much like Muddy's band as possible, he betrays his Memphis background with his warm, almost whining, voice on two very fine tracks from *Sabre*, with interesting and imaginative lyrics. Down on his luck since then Willie was hobo-ing to California when Paul Oliver met him in Monroe, Louisiana in August 1960. His present whereabouts are unknown which is a tragedy, for here is a singer who surely deserves to benefit from the recent boom in blues recording. LITTLE WILLY FOSTER sounds more modern, his style a half-way point in the development of the post-war Chicago style: the voice harsh and intense but still with definite traces of the country; somewhere between the most rural of post-war singers and the neurotic intensity of, say, Buddy Guy. This release from *Blue Lake*, the curious *Parrot* release, and a record on *Cobra* are the only ones known by this important and neglected singer, about whom we have no biographical details. JOHNNY SHINES, with an unissued *Columbia* session and two releases on *J.O.B.* to his name, was also completely unknown until a few months ago when he was discovered working as a photographer at Sylvio's, the South-side club where Howling Wolf works! His tracks, re-issued from *J.O.B.* are possibly the most notable on the record. With Shine's hard, urgent, jerky voice and Big Walter 'Shakey' Horton's superb harmonica - *Evening Sun* is a classic harp record - these tracks are worth the price of the whole record on their own. J.B. HUTTO is yet another fine singer about whom we have no details whatsoever. But his only records, on *Chance*, prove him to be an exceptional 'mainstream' singer and the powerful vocal, guitar and original lyrics ensure him a niche in the blues history long after the host of minor and often much vaunted singers are forgotten. Undoubtedly the most sophisticated recordings here are the two very fine JUNIOR WELLS tracks, where Wells' oddly 'strangled' vocal delivery, his cutting harmonica (owing much to Little Walter), the fine bottle neck guitar and the astounding 'go' of the whole band represent the synthesis of the earlier Chicago style and the post-war country influx. Born in West Memphis, Ark., on December 9, 1932, Amos Wells Jr. began playing and singing in the streets at the age of nine. In 1945 he moved to Chicago, eventually to play with Tampa Red. The big turning point in his career, he says, came when he met Muddy Water in 1950, and over the next few years he played on and off with Muddy. His first recording date was with *States*, from which this re-issue is made, but none of his further recordings for *Shad*, *Profile*, *Chief* or *U.S.A.* came up to this quality.

Charles Radcliffe.
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Acknowledgements:

** Conversations with the Blues" Paul Oliver. Cassells 1965.

Willie Nix details from Paul Oliver.

Junior Wells details from "Blues Unlimited" No. 7. Dec. 1963

Johnny Young details from Pete Welding and the editors of "Blues Unlimited".

Cover photo of Peoria Street near Maxwell Street Market, courtesy Paul Oliver.

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SIDE A

	JOHNNY SHINES	
	Johnny Shines voc., gtr., Big Walter hca.	c.1953
U-2338	BRUTAL HEARTED WOMAN	
U-2337	EVENING SUN	
	WILLIE NIX & HIS COMBO	
	Willie Nix voc., poss. dms., poss. Snooky Pryor hca., Sunnysland Slim p., Jimmy Rogers gtr.	c.1953
C-5064	JUST CAN'T STAY	
C-5065	ALL BY YOURSELF	
	"LITTLE" WILLY FOSTER	
	Little Willy Foster voc., hca., unknown p., gtr.	c.1953
P-53222	FALLING RAIN BLUES	
P-53223	FOUR DAY JUMP (instr.)	

N.B. Jacques Desetre reports the same titles with the same master numbers on Parrot 813 as different from above.

	J B HUTTO & HIS HAWKS	
	J B Hutto voc., gtr., George ? hca., unknown bs-gtr., unknown dms. -1 omit drums add unknown wbd.	c.1953
5118	PET CREAM MAN	
5119	LOVIN' YOU -1	

SIDE B

	OTHUM BROWN	
	Othum Brown voc., gtr., Little Walter J hca.	c.1947
711A	ORA-NELLE BLUES	
	LITTLE WALTER J	
	Little Walter J voc., hca., Othum Brown gtr.	
711B	I JUST KEEP LOVING HER	
	JOHNNY WILLIAM(S)	
	Johnny William(s) voc., gtr., Johnny Young mandolin.	c.1947
712A	WORRIED MAN BLUES	
	JOHNNY YOUNG	
	Johnny Young voc., mandolin. Johnny William(s) gtr.	
712B	MONEY TAKING WOMAN	
	JOHN LEE	
	John Lee Henley voc., gtr., prob. hca., unknown bs-gtr., unknown dms.	
U-4912	KNOCKING ON LULA MAE'S DOOR	
U-4911	RYTHM ROCKIN' BOOGIE	
	JUNIOR WELLS & HIS EAGLE ROCKERS	
	Junior Wells voc., hca., Muddy Waters gtr.-1., David Miles gtr., Henry Gray p., Fred Bellow dms.	c.1953
1327	HODO MAN -1	
1330	JUNIOR'S WAIL (instr.)	