company with the most commercially viable compilation? Having been involved in several abortive reissues and re-recordings for major companies, I know how hard it is to persuade them first to initiate and then to persevere with blues releases.

So, given the many problems of preparing a Genesis box, I think these newly achieved achievements for this exemplary series of records should be emphasised at a time when the faint hearted and the Polydor squash Simon Gee’s admirable Juke Blues series and the new brouh at RCA have swept any thought of blues reissues firmly down the trumpet. In fact, along with the erratic Vintage releases in America and Genesis and the ‘Golden Decade’ series in England, the Chess/Checker catalogues must have more reissued product on the market than any other in the relatively high-quality, particularly in the case of the eight new Muddy’s, the five new Big Boy’s, the two John Brim titles that ultimate ‘Boogie’ of Little Walter’s. It is hard to understand why any of the unissued Muddy titles never saw the light of day before now. Less was a surfeit of first-rate material, or in the case of the ‘Last Time I Fooled Around With You’ and ‘Stuff You Gotta Watch’ it was a question of maintaining Muddy’s commercial identity.

Taking the records consecutively, Album One opens with Baby Face Leroy Foster’s ‘JOE’ job that was leased to Chess, a snip of commercial and Pryor’s very sensitive harmonica accompaniment. This was long thought to be a John Brim, and shows the truth of Jimmy Rogers’ statement that Pryor was the first real man in Chicago to use an amplified harmonica. Otis Spann’s indelible single follows, with his ‘strangled’ voice further obscured by some fairly harsh distortion. Jody Williams’ and Jimmy Rogers’ ‘Joe’ is a lead guitar, lead ‘Big Joe’ and a loseliers confession to make. I have never found it easy to listen to Floyd Jones’ ‘Dark Road’ and ‘Big World’, and with the two other titles from the session all in one go, I’m afraid I get something of the feeling I feel listening to the whole Walter Davis sessions – strain. The very spare, pedestal accompaniment, with Walter and Jimmy Rogers very restrained behind Jones’ sometimes dissonant, force the listener’s attention onto the lyrics. It is important to note that this is not only necessary that Floyd Jones and the prairiewrights that he represents should be included here, but for my own pleasure I shall play the other sides. I feel much the same about the Big Boy Scare records as well. (again, I have little confidence that I can include it, perhaps it has seen the light of day a little too often to make its proper and justified impact.)

This can hardly be said of the rest of Side Two of this album, since the other tracks have never been previously issued. Gus Jenkins’ ‘Eight Ball’ has only harmonica and drums to back his piano, but Walter Horton’s ‘Little Dream Doctor’ is an excellent accompaniment to Jenkins’ recording debut. The debt to Walter Davis is singularly apparent, hearing some of Jenkins’ later records. What ought to have been Henry Gray’s ‘Young Man’ is another example of the tracks that have gained immeasurable importance by being the only examples of Henry Gray’s harmonica playing. His debt to Walter is obvious, but if he had lived he would definitely have challenged Walter Davis’ ‘little dream’. Blue Smitty’s three sides make you
wonder how a band with him and Muddy together must have sounded. A distinctly urban singer and guitarist, hard to categorise, his accompanists include an excellent pianist by the name of Melton Jett, sounding like a fugitive from Looney Tunes.

Album Two is devoted to Muddy Waters, and in itself is a magnifi-
cent achievement. For me, what Mike Rowe has done here is to finally fix Muddy firmly into context with his Chicago contemporaries. For the first time we are given other facets of Muddy as a performer, which allow a fuller, more complete impression of the sort of repertoire his band must have been playing during the early '50s. Before this album I had tended to think of Muddy and then the other Chicago bluesmen; now he takes his position amongst his fellow artists, still the most charismatic figure and their leader, but no longer apart. As I've already said, the quality of the unissued material on this album is at least the equal of that issued at the time. Both 'Hard Days' and 'Burying Ground', besides having been already recorded in 1946 for Columbia in markedly different style, are excellent; the latter title was re-recorded as 'Sad Letter Blues' a year later and despite Little Walter's presence on that, it's odds-on that this first version was the best. The two titles that do much to alter our views of Muddy are 'Last Time I Fool Around With You' and 'Stuff You Gotta Watch'. Johnnie Jones' great rocking piano leads off 'Last Time', which is a reworking of Memphis Minnie's 'Black Rat Swing'. The fact that this title wasn't even mastered may indicate a reluctance on Len Chess' part to depart from Muddy's established image. The same was probably true of 'Stuff You Gotta Watch', a rocking number with its origins in '40s jump blues, complete with a chorus vocal of which Walter and Jimmy Rogers. From the same session comes a truly beautiful version of Leroy Carr's 'Lonesome Day' with Muddy and his faltettivoice, picked up from Robert Johnson and reminding us of the con-
nection between Carr and Johnson. 'Iodine In My Coffee', a distant cousin of Walter Davis' 'Ashes In My Whiskey', is reputed to have Junior Wells on harmonica, but I would reject the suggestion since the style is consistent with the other three titles from this session on which Walter's presence is firmly established. Although we are all already well aware of Muddy's original material from this period, it is these last four titles which force us to see such well-known songs as 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Just Make Love To Me' (with its spine-chilling harp solo) in an entirely new light; and the fact that Muddy recorded a fine version of 'Smokestack Lightning' some two years before Wolf provides one with food for thought. And perhaps in some small measure, that also gives you some idea of the value of this album, let alone the other three.

Which brings us neatly to Little Walter. Some controversy has recently sung the pages of Living Blues about the quality of the significant amount of unissued material that remains in the Chess vaults. Having been privileged enough to hear some twenty of these titles, I must reluctantly admit that much of it shouldn't see the light of day. In most cases the alternate takes are inferior performances, i.e. 'Last Night' sans harmonica is a desultory affair; and though Walter's instrumentals are still unequalled, a lot of the unissued ones seem to have served as studio warm-ups, routine performances that would do little to enhance his reputation. Given the responsibility, I think I would have opted for the policy of repackaging the issued material as on the Vintage albums. As it is, Mike Rowe has been very discriminating in including three extremely good instrumentals which add rather than detract from what we know of Walter's abilities. 'Boogie', from his second session, is an astonishing performance; it is truly incomprehensible that this was never issued before.

The other two boogies and 'Don't Have To Hunt No More' don't quite reach the same standard as 'Boogie', but are nonetheless excellent. Most of the other tracks should be familiar with most people, though they have previously been on import albums and are being officially released here for the first time. As they are being discussed elsewhere in this BU, it would be invidious to repeat any comments here; except that this album concentrates on the early Walter, before his inventive powers began to wane.

The final album brings us Jimmy Rogers and John Brim. Once again, in Jimmy Rogers' case, Mike has chosen his tracks well, enabling us to get a better, fuller understanding of the influences behind his music. I had never realised before this exactly how eclectic Rogers was. In him, far more than with Muddy, we see the logical development of the immediate postwar Chicago blues, brought up to date but still recognisable. In fact he represents a transitional style from the previous decade, and the nine tracks included here follow him from the lyrical melancholy of 'Today, Today Blues' to the stomping, previously unissued version of 'You're The One' recorded five years later. Once again, Little Walter plays an important part, the highest point being reached on the other three titles from the 'Money, Marbles And Chalk' session. His harmonica solo on 'Chance To Love' owes more than a little to Walter Horton, achieving a chilling intensity almost but not quite equalled on 'My Little Machine', adapted from John Lee Williamson's 'Hard Working Man', also unissued, has Walter on guitar, though the high point comes with Eddie Ware's rippling piano solo. His characteristic style is also well featured on 'World Is In A Tangle' and 'She Loves Another Man', 'Mistreated Baby' and 'What's The Matter' feature the sturdier inven-
tion of Johnnie Johnson. Bob Woodfork contributes some heavily distorted slide guitar to the latter title. It is really difficult to understand why 'You're The One' was re-recorded a year after the version heard here, since it is at least as good as the later, issued recording with fine harp from Walter and surely that's Muddy on second guitar?

John Brim's voice is not far removed from that of Jimmy Rogers, though Brim's is coarser and less capable of nuance. 'Tough Times' was originally recorded for Parrot and subsequently bought by Chess. It is still difficult to believe that it is actually Jimmy Reed playing harmonica, sounding for all the world like Snooky Pryor. 'Rattlensnake', backed by Walter's band, is 'Hound Dog' disguised; it is a singular experience to hear the scions of Chicago blues trying to emulate a Memphis style of playing. Both 'Ice Cream Man' and 'Lifet ime Baby' deserved to have been issued at the time they were recorded; the first is akin to J.B. Hutto's 'Pet Cream Man' if a little less overtly sexual, and 'Lifet ime' is a moving blues on which Brim's vocal takes on a unique sensitivity. I really can't get over 'Go Away' with great stomping drums by Grace Brim who must have had both feet on the bass drum pedal. Fantastic. 'That Ain't Right' slows the tempo down and James Dalton contributes a fine harmonica solo.

Mike informs me that the door is tentatively open for at least a fourth Genesis box should there be a sufficient response to this one. Frankly, the wealth of material both known and unknown on these four records has made it the reissue of the year, and the book-
let which features many fine photographs and the expected informa-
tive notes (with only one Rowe pun) makes an excellent adjunct to a meticulously prepared release. Finally, if you're thinking this review is getting just a little nepo-
tistic, I think it is important to stress the fact that this sort of project demands a great deal of anyone who attempts it. Mike Rowe's achievements here demand a wave of thanks which I'm sure I won't be the last to give.

Neil Slaven

Henry Gray (Georges Adkins)