

BOOTIN' 'EM ABOUT

by Keith Briggs

Python Records

38 NORTH STREET, CARSHALTON, SURREY, ENGLAND

STRICTLY LIMITED EDITION COLLECTOR ISSUES

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Sole Distributors for Python Records. Trade supplied.

After many requests this listing of Python issues has been made available. All issues are limited editions, therefore please try and order as early as possible.

For collectors wishing to obtain past releases, a list of Python stockists has been provided below, therefore lists are issued regularly giving full details of new and forthcoming albums. Send a S.A.E. or Int. reply coupons for latest information.

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| PLP-KM 1. GOING BACK TO CHICAGO | Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, Little Walter |
| PLP-KM 2. FIRST TIME I MET THE BLUES | Buddy Guy |
| PLP-KM 3. GROANING THE BLUES | Otis Rush |
| PLP-KM 4. RAISED IN MISSISSIPPI | Otis Spann, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Freddy King |
| PLP-KM 5. FREDDY KING Volume One | Eddie Taylor, Jimmy Rogers, Freddy King |
| PLP-KM 6. BLUES FROM CHICAGO Volume One | Lightnin' Slim |
| PLP-KM 7. FREDDY KING Volume Two | Muddy Waters; Jimmy Lee Robinson; Johnny Jones; Elmore James; Lazy Bill; Brown, Jr. Walls |
| PLP-KM 8. THE DOWNHOME BLUES Volume One | Walter Horton, Sunnyland Slim, Johnny Young, Eddie Boyd; St. Louis Freddy King |
| PLP-KM 9. BLUES FROM CHICAGO Volume Two | Muddy Waters |
| PLP-KM 10. SOUTHSIDE CHICAGO | Howlin' Wolf |
| PLP-KM 11. FREDDY KING Volume Three | Little Al; Baby Boy Warren; Silas Hogan; Arthur Gunter; Little Sonny; Lester; Jimmy Anderson |
| PLP-KM 12. REAL CHICAGO BLUES Volume One | Lee Walter; James Banister; Sir John Lazy Bill; L. C. McKinley; Little Hudson; Horton; Chicago Sunny Boy |
| PLP-KM 13. HOWLIN' WOLF | Frank Frost; Carter Brothers; Wild Lightnin' Hopkins |
| PLP-KM 14. THE DOWNHOME BLUES Volume Two | Billy Boy Arnold; Hound Dog Taylor; Magic Sam; James Cotton; Mighty Joe Tucker; Junior Wells; G. L. Crockett; Muddy Waters |
| PLP-KM 15. BLUES FROM CHICAGO Volume Three | Howlin' Wolf; Buddy Johnson; Lazy |
| PLP-KM 16. BLUES TODAY—SOUTHERN STYLE | |
| PLP-KM 17. BLUES TODAY—CHICAGO STYLE | |
| PLP-KM 18. REAL CHICAGO BLUES Volume Two | |
| PLP-KM 19. REAL CHICAGO BLUES Volume One | |
| PLP-KM 20. LITTLE WALTER | |
| PLP-KM 21. BLUES FROM CHICAGO | |
| PLP-KM 22. THE DOWNHOME BLUES Volume Three | |

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MONO Side One

PLP 27

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Reviewing current reissue albums which, at first glance seem to just re-hash items available elsewhere but which sell none the less, has brought two facts to my attention: one, there is a new younger audience coming up and, two, a lot of the "elsewheres" no longer exist. Often the tracks in question appeared as part of that 60's and early 70's phenomenon the Limited Edition British Bootleg. Although many of the items first presented to the public on these albums have since reappeared elsewhere many others have not, and some of the records involved are worthy of attention on their own merits as artifacts. As these records were produced for a committed audience many have survived and now appear secondhand at greatly inflated prices or feature on auction lists where they must represent either a complete mystery or a wild gamble to some of the newer punters. Under these circumstances I thought that a survey representing a sort of "buyers Guide" might be of value.

"Boots" existed in Britain in a semi-legit grey area and I don't intend to involve myself in a discussion of either the morality or the legality of producing them or of the personalities involved in the game. For that I refer you to the Dave Woods masterly essay in Sailors Delight 14. Both the emergence and the demise of these little labels was brought about by the lack of real interest in, and the dog in a manger attitude to, blues shown by the major companies whose own excursions into the field always seemed half-hearted, repetitive and short lived. The average "Boot", if there was such a thing, was usually advertised as a run of 99 copies, often mail orders were taken in advance and the records, if they made it to the shops at all, soon disappeared from the racks.

The quality of pressings, presentation, sources and selection was most variable. Some issues were knocked-out by quick-sale flim-flammers while others were labours of love produced with respect by committed fans. Some of these records have been rendered completely obsolete by later reissues while others are still sought-after items. The following hopes to answer some of the questions that a would-be purchaser might ask.

I've tried to restrict myself to British productions but it's not always easy to tell just where a record was manufactured. The list doesn't even pretend to be complete and some labels which had their origins (pun intended) in this phonographic no-man's land but are still active today have been left out altogether.

African Folk Society was one of four labels each of which issued one L.P. In this case it was A.F.S. 3428 "Down South Blues 1949-61". Tracks on this album range from the, now common (Howlin' Wolf) to the relatively obscure (Duke Paige). The sound could have been a lot better and the presentation, though jokey and deliberately mysterious indicates an attempt at quality that didn't quite come off.

Before been taken on board by CBS **Blue Horizon** did manage to issue some limited edition L.P.s and singles. Their

L.P. "Let Me Tell You About The Blues" featured tracks by individuals like Wolf and Moody Jones. Almost all if not all, are now available elsewhere. As I recall the sound was quite good, the album being dubbed from quality originals. The sleeve was plain white overprinted in black with a short note on the contents but no photos.

WHITE SLEEVES

A grand-slam effort was made by **Blues Obscurities** when they put out no less than ten albums almost simultaneously in 1971. All were in plain white sleeves rubber stamped "Blues Obscurities" with the volume number hand-written below. A sheet of notes, including a track listing was to be found inside of the sleeve. Volumes 4, 5, 6 and 10 featured fourteen tracks the rest twelve. Generally they are random selections from 78's and 45's which happened to be in the producer's collection and performers range from the well known to the totally obscure, the music from hard down home blues to neo-soul, most of it dating from the late 50's to the early 60's. A lot of these 128 tracks are now available on L.P. elsewhere but a substantial amount are not. Sound is varied though usually reasonable while the selections encompass the vaguely thematic to the downright odd. As a matter of interest "Blues for Cummins Prison" on volume 10 is the original version with the brain-wringing guitar solo, not the washed out remake available on Charly's "Music City Soul" album. Three legit L.P.s culled from these records appeared on the London label . . . and thereby hangs a tail . . .

Delta Swing came from the same stable as A.F.S. and likewise had only one issued L.P. "Chicago Blues After Midnight" featuring such stalwarts as Jimmy Reed and Eddie Taylor. **Down With The Game** managed five issues before disappearing. All are albums of random pre-war selections and all are reproduced in really superior sound, from clean originals. Quite a few of these tracks are now available elsewhere (sometimes dubbed from these very albums I suspect). Presentation was spartan – a plainly printed sleeve with a track listing stuck on the back – but not messy. A nice little set of albums. The same set-up also produced two valuable E.P.'s of gospel music under the title "God Don't Like It".

Another one-shot from the A.F.S. crew was **Floatin' Bridge** 1067 "Blues Harp Boogie" which had five numbers by Birmingham Jones and nine by Kid Thomas including three straight takes of the "The Wolf Pack". Sound and presentation as on A.F.S. A pretty tedious record.

Highway 51 and its pre-war oriented stable mate **Kokomo** really seemed to be getting into gear around 1967-70. Among their most famous offerings was an L.P. of Robert Johnson issued to compliment "King of the Delta Blues Singers" vol. 1 before CBS got round to vol. 2. It exists in two versions, the repressing featuring 18 tracks to the original's 16. Other albums on Kokomo were dedicated to Barbecue Bob and Muddy Moss. Highway 51 kicked off with "Decade of the Blues – the 50's" vol. 1, notable in its day for having more tracks on the record than on the label; Shaky Jake's "Moneymaker" appearing without a credit. Even today this is a nice L.P. Early issues on these labels were overprinted plain sleeves but later an all-purpose laminated cover was introduced sporting a photograph – the same photograph for all issues. This led to the incongruity of an album of "Georgia Blues" appearing behind a picture of Parchman Farm. The sound on these records was generally acceptable and sometimes better than that. Selection was careful and some of their productions i.e. K1005 "Chicago Sessions" would still make sense today.

The last joker from the A.F.S. was **Negro Rhythm** 107 "Goin' To Chicago" a twelve track compilation centred on the Windy City.

Post War Blues only produced five albums but they remain sought-after items to this day. They were "Chicago", "Memphis and the Delta", "Detroit", "East Coast States" and "Texas". Although just about every track on the Chicago album is now available elsewhere the other four all carry rare items otherwise unavailable on L.P. "Chicago" has a standard "bootleg" sleeve and includes a booklet, but from then on P.W.B. managed to produce laminated sleeves of professional quality each embellished with photographs and copious notes. The sound of these records is outstandingly good and all are worthy of attention.

VALID

Policy Wheel got into the game quite late and turned out standard "boots" made up of tracks unrepresented elsewhere on L.P. at the time. Although a valid operation pressings and original sources were not always up to scratch (if you'll pardon the word). Sleeves were plain with photostated stick-on titles and minimal notes.

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One of the most prolific of the bootleg labels and also the most varied in quality was **Python**. The bulk of Python's came in one colour unlined sleeves and had little to show in the way of notes. The quality of both the original material and the pressings varied from O.K. to bloody awful. Possibly the most ambitious and successful issue on Python is the first Freddie King collection which has reasonable sound and a laminated cover. At the other end of the spectrum are two albums of Gatemouth Brown and one of J. B. Lenoir that can only be described as dismal. Most Python L.P.s seem to be a cobbling together of available tracks in an attempt to make a salable package. Special mention should be made of the Muddy Waters material recorded 'live' in London . . . Don't go near 'em – even if you're wearing a fall-out suit. The sound is so dreadful that the criminally short running time comes as a blessing. Python spawned three other labels Sunnyland (see below), **The Post War Blues Collection** and **Rebel**. Whereas PWBC was just a more raggedy Python, Rebel concentrated on anti-black and racist records which were not blues at all and offended just about everybody not actually enrolled in the N.F.

Saydisc/Matchbox produced mainly pre-war reissue albums. Their cover work got to be pretty good on their later productions but the records themselves were usually somewhat noisy, and not of today's standard. Their compilations often left a lot to be desired as sixteen track L.P.s by the likes of Kokomo Arnold and Peetie Wheatstraw seemed designed to underline just how boringly repetitive these artists could be. Their two record gospel survey "Black Diamond Express To Hell" was however a successful set whose programming renders it still most useful today.

Sunflower was a label dedicated to reissuing late 30's and early 40's material. Their Memphis Minnie collection was, I believe, superceded by those on Flyright. Never having seen or heard any of these productions I can't really comment on their quality, although I've been told that it is quite good.

Not-Quite Sunflower was the label credit given by collectors to a completely anonymous issue of 75 copies titled "Blues Keep Falling". The record came in the form of a kit. No titles appeared on the actual label but stickers marked A and B were supplied so that you could mark a side once you had identified it by playing it. Apart from the D.I.Y. approach this was a tasty selection of post-war blues with above average sound quality.

Sunnyland was Python's attempt to go up market, by trying a new approach to presentation. The three L.P.s which appeared under this logo came out in white fold-out sleeves which provided a pocket to house copious notes and photographs. Their first effort "Vintage Muddy Waters" was well received at the time although its usefulness has diminished since. The last album only appeared after a long delay and was a mess that did not include all the tracks that were advertised. The sound was duff too.

Whoopie like Policy Wheel arrived late and conducted something of a mopping-up operation. Production run to laminated black and white sleeves which contained good, if random, selections of pre-war blues presented in reasonable sound.

As always any comments are more than welcome.