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EARL HOOKER &  
JUNIOR WELLS



# THE Blues COLLECTION

## PART 33 EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

### THE MUSIC EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

- |                         |                                 |                               |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 LOVE ME               | 9 CALLING ALL BLUES             | 15 ROCKIN' WITH THE KID       |
| 2 COME ON IN THIS HOUSE | 10 GALLOPING HORSES A LAZY MULE | 16 LITTLE BY LITTLE           |
| 3 TWO HEADED WOMAN      | 11 BLUES IN D NATURAL           | 17 THESE COTTON PICKIN' BLUES |
| 4 LOVEY DOVEY LOVEY ONE | 12 MESSIN' WITH THE KID         | 18 BLUE GUITAR                |
| 5 I COULD CRY           | 13 YOU SURE LOOK GOOD TO ME     | 19 I'M A STRANGER             |
| 6 CHA CHA CHA IN BLUE   | 14 UNIVERSAL ROCK               | 20 I NEED ME A CAR            |

### THE PUBLICATION

#### EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

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Earl Hooker was one of the finest exponents of blues slide guitar, while Junior Wells was equally accomplished on the harmonica. Whenever they got together the musical results were fascinating. Sadly, just as their partnership was on the verge of being placed on a permanent basis, Earl passed away at the desperately young age of 41. Junior Wells went on to forge one of the blues' most lasting duos with guitarist Buddy Guy

#### THE PSYCHEDELIC BLUESMAN

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One of the 1960s' youth movement's most colourful idols was Jimi Hendrix. He took rock music to new heights, but the basis of his guitar playing was in the blues. Many of his best-known anthems started life as blues songs

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Although steeped in its traditions, Junior Wells and Earl Hooker sought to make their mark by adding a new dimension to the blues. The results of their experiments provide fascinating listening

### PLUS

#### THE STORY OF THE BLUES (33)

Back cover

When it came to publicity, blues records were no different from those in other genres. The most effective means of selling a record to the public was through constant radio promotion. The DJs who were entrusted with this task, especially in Chicago, soon created a new branch of blues culture

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# EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS



## *Partners Sublime*

All forms of music have their unsung heroes, and the blues is no exception. Master musicians like B.B. King and Buddy Guy cite Earl Hooker as one of the finest blues guitarists to emerge from the postwar period, but during his lifetime he failed to achieve the acclaim that was his due. His early death brought a sad end to his flourishing partnership with harmonica ace Junior Wells.



## EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS



ABOVE: Earl Hooker, a mercurial character whose personal life was as quixotic as his professional schedule.

OPPOSITE: Junior Wells' exuberant stage performances helped augment his virtuosity on the harmonica.

**F**ame isn't always measured by the amount of money earned, nor is commercial success the only arbiter of ability. In the blues world, where a successful formula once established is unlikely to be changed, it's rare to find a musician who is willing to indulge his imagination beyond the music's traditional confines. Such a musician was Earl Hooker, a gifted guitarist who drew inspiration from jazz, country and popular music as well as the blues.

Until its amplification, the guitar was primarily used by blues musicians as a rhythm instrument. Melodic invention was confined to the embellishment of verse ends and 'turnarounds'. Using a bottleneck enabled a player to create a more florid accompaniment that echoed the inflections of the human voice. Since very few bluesmen received formal musical training, their instrumental ability relied as much on their manual dexterity as it did on harmonic development.

One notable exception was Lonnie Johnson, who was proficient on both violin and guitar. From his earliest recordings, Johnson displayed a dazzling technique, encompassing basic blues and the music of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.

### JAZZ ROOTS

Early pioneers of the amplified guitar, like Eddie Durham, Charlie Christian and George Barnes also came predominantly from the jazz field, although Barnes worked on blues sessions by Big Bill Broonzy and Jazz Gillum.

In the latter half of the 1940s, T-Bone Walker virtually invented the language of modern blues guitar. Chicago blues was slow to assimilate the new style,



caught between the cautious formality of Willie Lacey, the house guitarist for Bluebird sessions, and the raw fervour of Muddy Waters' amplified slide playing. A few years later, Robert Junior Lockwood transformed the sound of Chess blues sessions with a style that combined sureness of rhythm with jazz-inflected melodic phrasing.

## SOLO VIRTUOSO

As the 1950s progressed, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Freddie King and Buddy Guy adapted the techniques of T-Bone Walker and B.B. King to the strident Chicago backbeat. Their intense playing laid the foundation of the overwrought exhibitionism of today's rock guitarists. But one musician refused to be drawn down such an obvious road, and that was Earl Hooker.

Earl Zebedee Hooker was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, on 15 January 1929. Both of his parents were experienced entertainers: Earl Sr. played harmonica, violin and guitar, and mother Mary Blair had sung with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. The family moved to Chicago in 1930 and Earl grew up in the tough environment of the tenements. When he wasn't picking at the guitar, he ran with local street gangs.

Guitarist Louis Myers was one of his victims. 'They jumped us one time on 35th Street and the next time I saw Hooker he was on the street playing guitar.' Earl bought his first guitar from Sears & Roebuck and took it with him when, aged 13, he ran away and returned to Clarksdale. There he hung around Robert Nighthawk's music store, listening to the musicians who gathered around the blues master.

The principal skill he learned from Nighthawk was the use of a bottleneck. Nighthawk had been taught by Houston Stackhouse but had been influenced by Tampa Red's limpid slide phrasing. This he imparted to young Hooker, who further refined the technique by playing it in standard tuning. But alongside his growing reputation as a guitarist, he was known for his petty thieving.



Because of it, Nighthawk banished Earl from his store and the young man crossed the Mississippi to Helena, Arkansas, where he fell in with Stackhouse, Robert 'Dudlow' Taylor and James 'Peck' Curtis, the King Biscuit Boys. He stayed in the area for the next two years, appearing on KFFA's *King Biscuit Time*, taking part in the 2000th broadcast, and playing alongside Joe Willie 'Pinetop' Perkins, Lee Kizart, Boyd Gilmore and the young Ike Turner.

Thereafter, his restless temperament and a talent for larceny kept him on the move. In July 1950, he and pianist Ernest Lane and drummer Kansas City Red were sent to Vandalia State Prison for six months after some PA speakers went missing from the Palms Hotel in

Cairo, Illinois. Many of his musician friends felt that this incarceration aggravated the tuberculosis that Hooker had contracted during his teenage years. A year later, he auditioned for Chess but was prevented from recording when Big Jim Wade, a local Cairo promoter, had the band arrested for breach of contract.

## A RESTLESS TRAVELLER

Throughout the early 1950s, he returned to Chicago to recruit musicians for extended tours of the southern states. 'I don't know of anybody that roamed more than Earl Hooker,' said pianist Billy Emerson. 'Because Earl would walk off a job and go to another town and start playin' the next night.' Emerson first met Hooker in



# THE PSYCHEDELIC BLUESMAN

In the 1960s, Earl Hooker's innovative use of the wah-wah pedal closely paralleled its adoption by another guitar virtuoso, Jimi Hendrix (pictured below right, with his band the Jimi Hendrix Experience, featuring drummer Mitch Mitchell and bass guitarist Noel Redding).

*As soon as he appeared on the 1960s' hippy scene, Jimi Hendrix was a phenomenon. Yet although he was constantly improvising, he never forgot that his musical roots were firmly buried in the blues. As Tony Glover wrote in Rolling Stone, 'Hendrix plays Delta blues for sure – only the Delta may have been on Mars.'*

An idea of the crucible in which Hendrix forged his formidable technique can be gained from *Blues*, the 1994-released CD collection which draws on a treasure trove of mostly previously unissued performances.

Some of Hendrix's finest compositions were written as blues. 'Red House' is justly the most famous and there are two versions on this collection. The first is the studio version from *Are You Experienced?*; the other is from an L.A. jam session featuring Mitch Mitchell and Buddy Miles on drums and Lee Michaels on organ.

Equally renowned is 'Voodoo Chile', recorded for *Electric Ladyland*. The alternate take used here is the equal of the issued performance. As Track Records' co-founder Chris Stamp says, 'There was a connection between the blues history of the guitar and the way that Jimi was taking it into the future.' It's also evident in two versions of 'Hear My Train A Comin'.

Completing the album are superb improvisations of such blues classics as Albert King's 'Born Under a Bad Sign', Muddy Waters' 'Mannish Boy' and Elmore James' 'Bleeding Heart'.





Bradenton, Florida, where, in November 1952, Earl made his recording debut for King. The four instrumentals, one the first version of 'Blue Guitar', were later included on an album by his cousin, John Lee Hooker.

## RECORDING FEVER

The following year, he recorded twice; in April, he cut 'Sweet Black Angel' and 'On the Hook' in Miami for the Rockin' label. Three months later he was in Memphis with Pinetop Perkins and Boyd Gilmore recording a handful of songs, including another version of 'Blue Guitar', for Sun Records. None was released during his lifetime but Sam Phillips was full of praise, 'I think that Earl Hooker probably had as much potential as any of the artists I recorded at that time,' he said later.

While Otis Rush and the other 'young Turks' were changing the course of Chicago blues, Earl stayed out on the road with Kansas City Red and multi-instrumentalist Johnny 'Big Moose' Walker. When he was in town, though, his contemporaries treated him with respect. 'After I heard Earl Hooker play slide, I put that thing I used in my pocket,' said Buddy Guy, 'and I said, "I don't even want to see that no more, the way this guy plays".'

Earl spent more time in Chicago as the 1950s drew to a close, cutting a single, 'Frog Hop', for Argo and working on sessions by the Dells and Arbee Stidham. In May 1959, he recorded 'Senorita Juanita' for C.J. Records, and before the year ended he played on a session for Mel London's Profile label, backing Junior Wells, a young harmonica player who'd replaced Little Walter in Muddy Waters' band.

Wells was born Amos Blackmore in Memphis, Tennessee on 9 December




TOP RIGHT: Singer-saxophonist A.C. Reed was one of Earl Hooker's most highly esteemed sidemen.

RIGHT: Johnny 'Big Moose' Walker's lively piano playing became a prominent feature of the recordings of both Earl Hooker and Elmore James during the 1950s.



# EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

## CHRONOLOGY

| 1929                                                                                    | 1934                                                       | 1940                                                                     | 1946                                                                                                                               | 1950                                                                              | 1952                                                                                     | 1953                                                                                                           | 1957                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1959                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Earl Zebedee Hooker is born on the outskirts of Clarksdale, Mississippi, on 15 January. |                                                            | In Chicago, where his family moved in 1930, Earl begins learning guitar. |                                                                                                                                    | Earl serves six months in Vandalia State Prison for theft.                        |                                                                                          | Earl is recorded by Sam Phillips at Sun studios, Memphis. Junior makes his recording debut for States Records. |                                                                                                                                                                                         | At a session for the Profile label, Earl backs Junior. Over the next few years, their recording paths cross several times. |
|                                                                                         | Junior Wells is born in Memphis, Tennessee, on 9 December. |                                                                          | Junior and his mother settle in Chicago. Meanwhile, Earl is making music in the South, having run off from the Windy City in 1942. |  | Junior joins the Muddy Waters band. Earl makes his first recordings, for the King label. |                                                                                                                | After serving in the US Army, Junior records for Mel London's Chief label. Earl, having relocated to Chicago, is in demand as a session musician with labels such as Chess and Vee-Jay. |                                                                                                                            |



ABOVE: Junior Wells (right) onstage with Buddy Guy, the guitarist with whom he formed a partnership from the mid-1960s onwards and with whom he recorded dynamic albums such as *Southside Blues Jam* and *Hoodoo Man Blues*.

OPPOSITE: Earl with his offstage partner, wife Bertha.

1934. Raised on a farm outside Marion, Arkansas, he was playing harmonica on the streets of West Memphis, three miles distant, before his tenth birthday. There he befriended Herman 'Little Junior' Parker and both learned their craft from Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson II (Rice Miller), who were active in the area.

In 1946 he accompanied his mother to Chicago to live in the vicinity of 22nd and Prairie. Always in trouble for cutting school, running with his gang or annoying neighbours with his harmonica playing, he came to the attention of Dave and Louis Myers. The young guitarists recruited 'Junior' and the three became a unit. 'People start-

ed accepting us because we were playing much faster,' Louis said, 'our music was mostly up tempo and they called us "The Little Chicago Devils".'

### THE ACES IN THE PACK

They were 'The Three Deuces' for a while but as their popularity grew they reshuffled to 'The Three Aces'. During 1951, Muddy's drummer, Elgin Edmonds, recommended that they try out Fred Below, a drummer just returned from Army service in Germany. Schooled in jazz, Below had trouble playing the blues, 'I just couldn't dig what they were playing,' he said. Louis Myers persevered with him, though: 'Man, it didn't take Below two weeks to learn, but see, he had to get in there and create his own beat.' With their fourth Ace, the band became the hottest attraction in Chicago's clubs.

It was inevitable that Little Walter should want to work with such a vital band. He left Muddy's band when 'Juke' became a hit, to pursue a solo career; by prior arrangement with Muddy, Junior took his place. Meanwhile, Walter hooked up with the Aces. Both parties seemed satisfied with the swap and the Myers brothers, along with Elmore James, backed Junior on 'Cut That Out', his recording debut for States Records in June 1953. The follow-up, 'Hoodoo Man', became a moderate hit around Chicago and Junior's signature tune.



| 1960                                            | 1961                                                 | 1965                                                  | 1966                                                                                     | 1967                                                                | 1968                                                                                                                    | 1969                                                     | 1970                                     | 1971                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Junior's 'Little By Little' becomes an R&B hit. |                                                      | Junior begins his lengthy partnership with Buddy Guy. |                                                                                          | Earl spends eleven months in hospital, suffering from tuberculosis. |                                                                                                                         | Earl tours Europe with the American Folk Blues Festival. |                                          | <i>Southside Blues Jam</i> finds the Guy/Wells partnership at its creative peak. |
|                                                 | Earl records the slide guitar classic 'Blue Guitar'. |                                                       | <i>Hoodoo Man Blues</i> , the first album featuring Guy and Wells together, is released. |                                                                     | <i>Two Bugs and a Roach</i> shows that, despite his continuing ill-health, Earl is still capable of making great music. |                                                          | Earl Hooker dies in Chicago on 21 April. |                                                                                  |

## DOUBLE ACTS

Much of what became known as blues was music played at weekend house parties and juke joints for the diversion of hard-working families. Musicians were expected to play throughout the night for little more than what they could eat or drink. It made sense to have a partner to share such exhausting work.

Partnerships like those of Robert Johnson and Johnny Shines, Honeyboy Edwards and Big Joe Williams went unrecorded. As blues recording proliferated, piano/guitar duos became popular. The most famous were Tampa Red and Georgia Tom, with hokum records like 'It's Tight Like That', and Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell.

Some partnerships were created in the studio, like that of Jazz Gillum and Big Bill Broonzy. A lasting harmonica/guitar duo, before Earl Hooker and Junior Wells, was Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

The celebrated Memphis Minnie married her partners, and recorded with both Kansas Joe McCoy and Little Son Joe. The greatest bluesmen also found duos useful: before he became the leader of Chicago's most famous band, Muddy Waters made a series of majestic records with Little Walter.





## EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

A second session in April 1954, this time with Muddy Waters, Otis Spann and Fred Below in attendance, was recorded while Junior was AWOL from the Army. He was demobbed the following year but didn't record again until the autumn of 1957. This four-title session for Mel London's Chief label included 'Lovey Dovey Lovey One' and the instrumental 'Cha Cha Cha in Blue'. Neither of those records made much of an impression, nor did a 1959 single for the New York Shad label, coupling 'So Tired' and 'Can't Live without You Baby'.

Before the end of the year, Wells cut his first single for Profile. 'Little By

Little' is perhaps the archetypal example of what the younger Chicago artists were striving to achieve, a blues-orientated song that nevertheless had strong commercial appeal.

### JUNIOR'S ASSISTANCE

By now, Junior had a residency at Theresa's Lounge, where he worked with Buddy Guy; in December, he backed Guy on the Chess session that produced 'Let Me Love You Baby' and 'Ten Years Ago'. Meanwhile, Junior recorded 'Messin' with the Kid' for Chief, which prompted an answer record, 'Messin' with the Man', from Muddy Waters. He and Hooker were

now Mel London's leading artists. They collaborated on 'Calling All Blues', 'Universal Rock' and 'Galloping Horses a Lazy Mule', while Hooker also appeared on Lillian Offitt's 'Will My Man Be Home Tonight'.

Throughout the 1960s, Earl continued his itinerant lifestyle, using towns like Waterloo, Iowa, as a base. Louis McTizic remembers his visits, 'He might stay a couple of weeks, then you wouldn't see him for a while, and the next time you look up he's back in that damn old raggedy six-door DeSoto. Had his whole band in it and all their stuff piled up on top.' Most often, that band included Andrew 'Voice' Odom, Big Moose Walker, Little Smokey Smothers and drummer Bobby Little.

Ill-health increasingly curtailed his activities. '(He) would get sick out on the road,' Smothers said. 'He'd come back in town and they'd throw his ass

**BELOW:** George Thorogood, one of the most successful exponents of blues-rock, first became captivated by the blues in the early 1970s, after the death of Earl Hooker. However, he soon became aware of the slide guitarist's records, and has openly acknowledged the influence of Hooker's music on his style.





# Further Listening

Although he recorded on several occasions in the last year of his life, Earl Hooker is not very well represented on CD. Luckily, there are three collections that focus on some of the significant moments in his career. Junior Wells is better served: several of his best albums are on CD and his first album in more than a decade was released in 1993.

**Blue Guitar**, the first of six volumes of Sun blues recordings, contains eight tracks from Hooker's July 1953 sessions, and he is present on one song each by Pinetop Perkins and Boyd Gilmore. 'Move On Down the Line' is a rare Hooker vocal, the other seven tracks are instrumentals. His accompanists are content to leave the spotlight on their versatile leader.

The enthusiastic **Play Your Guitar Mr Hooker!** (Black Top) is made up from at least six sessions that were recorded for Cuca between 1964 and 1968. Split between instrumentals and vocal items, two are sung by Earl himself and there's one each by A.C. Reed, Muddy Waters Jr, Little Tommy and Frank Clark. Hooker liked to improvise on well-known songs, and the work of Otis Rush, Little Walter, Lowell Fulson and Elmore James is represented here.

**Two Bugs and a Roach & His First Recordings** (Arhoolie) actually combines the original album with a number of early recordings, including his 1953 version of 'Sweet Black Angel'. The 1968 recordings feature an

all-star band, including Andrew 'Voice' Odom, Carey Bell, Louis Myers and Fred Roulette. 'Wah Wah Blues' is self-explanatory, while the title track is a reference to the 'bug' that eventually killed him.

The 1965 session that produced the excellent **Hoodoo Man Blues** (Delmark) catches Wells on the cusp between bluesman and James Brown-soundalike. Backed by a trio of Buddy Guy, Jack Meyers and Bill Warren, the result is a lean celebration of the best of Chicago blues.

**On Tap** (Delmark) has a larger backing band which includes guitarists Phil Guy and Sammy Lawhorn, Big Moose Walker on keyboards and A.C. Reed on tenor sax. Wells is in good form, although some of his mannerisms may seem inappropriate for a blues album. Best of all the Delmark albums is **Southside Blues Jam**, which reunites Wells and Guy and benefits enormously from the presence of Otis Spann. The pianist was sick at the time but you'd never guess that from the typically forceful accompaniment he provides to a largely improvised session. **Drinkin' TNT 'n' Smokin' Dynamite** (Sequel) is a prime example of Wells and Guy at their live best. Backing includes longtime Hooker partner Pinetop Perkins on piano and Rolling Stone Bill Wyman on bass.

**Better off with the Blues** (Telarc) was recorded in summer 1993 and indicated that Wells was still a force to be reckoned with. Buddy Guy is on three tracks.

## THE SUN BLUES ARCHIVES VOLUME ONE: BLUE GUITAR (CD SUN 29)

The Hucklebuck/Mexicali Hip  
Shake/The Drive/ Razorback/  
Blue Guitar/Red River  
Variations/Move On Down the  
Line/Guitar Rag/Pinetop's  
Boogie Woogie (with Pinetop  
Perkins)/ I Believe I'll Settle  
Down (with Boyd Gilmore)

## PLAY YOUR GUITAR MR HOOKER! (BLACK TOP CD BT-1093)

Swear to Tell the Truth/You  
Took All My Love/All Your  
Love/Everything Gonna Be  
Alright/Frosty/The Misfit (Got to  
Keep Movin')/Earl Hooker  
Blues/Reconsider Baby/Hot and  
Heavy/She's Fine/Dynamite/  
Hello Baby/Dust My Broom

## TWO BUGS AND A ROACH & HIS FIRST RECORDINGS (ARHOOLIE CD-324)

Two Bugs and a Roach/Wah  
Wah Blues/You Don't Love  
Me/Earl Hooker Blues/Anna  
Lee/Off the Hook/Love Ain't a  
Plaything/You Don't Want Me/  
The Hook/New Sweet Black  
Angel/I'm Going Down the  
Line/Sweet Black Angel/Guitar  
Rag/Earl's Boogie Woogie

## HOODOO MAN BLUES (DELMARK DD-612)

Snatch It Back and Hold It/  
Ships on the Ocean/  
Good Morning Schoolgirl/  
Hound Dog/In the Wee Hours/  
Hey Lawdy Mama/Hoodoo Man  
Blues/Early in the Morning/  
We're Ready/You Don't Love  
Me Baby/Chitlin Con Carne/

Yonder Wall/ Hoodoo Man  
Blues (alt.)/Chitlin Con Carne  
(alt.)

## ON TAP (DELMARK DD-635)

What My Mama Told Me/So  
Long/Key to the Highway/You  
Gotta Love Her with a Feeling/  
The Train I Ride/Watch Me  
Move/Someday Baby/Junior's  
Thing/Goin' Down Slow

## SOUTHSIDE BLUES JAM (DELMARK DD-628)

Stop Breaking Down/  
I Could Have Had Religion/  
I Just Want to Make Love to  
You/ Baby, Please Lend Me  
Your Love/You Say You Love  
Me/Blues for Mayor Daley/  
I Wish I Knew What I Know  
Now/Trouble Don't Last Always

## DRINKIN' TNT 'N' SMOKIN' DYNAMITE (SEQUEL NEM CD 687)

Introduction/Ah'w Baby:  
Everything Gonna Be Alright/  
How Can One Woman Be So  
Mean/Checking on My Baby/  
When You See the Tears from  
My Eyes/Introduction/Ten Years  
Ago/Messin' with the Kid/  
Hoodoo Man Blues/My  
Younger Days

## BETTER OFF WITH THE BLUES (TELARC CD-83354)

Cry for Me Baby/Do a Little  
Something for Yourself/Oh,  
Pretty Woman/Goin' Home:  
Waitin' on Ice/Better off with  
the Blues/The Train/Today I  
Started Loving You Again/  
Honest I Do/  
Messin' with the Kid



## EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

in the hospital. Next thing I know, he knockin' at my door, ready to go again.' During this time, Hooker recorded extensively for Jim Kirchstein's Cuca label in Sauk City, Wisconsin. Three singles and an album were recorded between 1964 and 1967, along with another single for C.J. in 1965. In November 1968, Arhoolie boss Chris Strachwitz recorded Earl and his band in Chicago; the resulting album, ***Two Bugs and a Roach***, proved to the blues world that Earl Hooker was still at the height of his abilities.

The band spent the summer of 1969 gigging in California as their leader's health continued to deteriorate. 'I used to push him up hills in California,' said Big Moose Walker, 'he

just couldn't make it up. I'd get behind him and push him up there. He'd say, "Grandpaw, I sure thank ya for that". Even so, Hooker recorded no less than ten album sessions between May and September, four of them his own.

### A TRIP TO EUROPE

Immediately afterwards, Earl set off for Europe as part of the 1969 American Folk Blues Festival tour, along with Magic Sam, Juke Boy Bonner and Clifton Chenier.

Tragically, Magic Sam died within weeks of his return to the USA and Earl was hospitalised once again early in the New Year, his constitution being by then too weak to shake off a bout of double pneumonia.

The notable manager Dick Waterman visited him to propose a partnership with Junior Wells as the opening act for the 1970 Rolling Stones world tour.

Earl was too ill to contemplate work and Waterman put Wells together with Buddy Guy, creating a double act that achieved world recognition and lasted for almost two decades. Buddy Guy has since become one of the blues' brightest stars; Junior Wells continues to work on less ostentatious stages.

Earl Hooker died in hospital on the morning of 21 April 1970, aged just 41, having tried the night before to steal an ambulance to die at his mother's house. 'That guitar kept Earl Hooker alive for about ten years,' said Walker. 'When he went to the hospital, we took his guitar to him and he'd have it sitting right down there by the bed. Because he'd know that as long as he had (it) to put his hand on, he could play it. That was his life, that guitar.'

BELOW: Earl Hooker made such good records with Junior Wells that a long-term partnership would surely have been successful. Instead, after Hooker's untimely death, Wells found worldwide recognition with Buddy Guy.





# BluesNotes

## EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS

### A Listener's Guide to:

# EARL HOOKER & JUNIOR WELLS



■ Earl Hooker and Junior Wells wanted to take the blues beyond the music's traditional boundaries. Each had a solid grounding in the standard repertoire for his instrument, which was reflected in their first recordings. Hooker adapted 'Sweet Black Angel', which Robert Nighthawk had taken from Tampa Red; Junior Wells chose Sonny Boy Williamson I's 'Hoodoo Hoodoo'.

■ Both wanted to gain a wider audience by making records with popular appeal. To achieve this, they approached Mel London, who'd started Chief Records in 1957. Three years younger than Hooker, two older than Wells, London shared their vision. His backing even stretched as far as helping out with the vocals on a couple of tracks.

#### 1 LOVE ME

(London/Wells) 2'08"

Recorded in 1961 with Johnny 'Big Moose' Walker on piano, Earl Hooker on guitar and another guitarist, bass guitar and drums, this was plainly intended as a follow-up to 'Messin' with the Kid'. The previous song is even mentioned in the lyrics, sold with great spirit by Wells. The drummer delivers a rather mechanical beat which acknowledges the influence of the previous year's Chubby Checker hit, 'The Twist'.

#### 2 COME ON IN THIS HOUSE (Wells) 2'22"

This was the B-side of 'Little by Little', with Lafayette Leake on piano; Earl

Hooker and Dave Myers, guitars; Willie Dixon, bass; Eugene Lounge, drums. This was one of the few times that Wells played harmonica on these sessions, confining himself to conventional phrases at the beginning and end of the track. The imaginative interplay between the guitars shows the arrangement had been carefully thought out.

#### 3 TWO HEADED WOMAN (Wells) 2'39"

This was the first track that Wells recorded for Mel London in the early autumn of 1957, with Syl Johnson and Dave Myers on guitars, Willie Dixon and Eugene Lounge. The song itself is a minimally disguised adaptation of 'Got My Mojo Working',

the song which Muddy Waters had 'acquired' from Ann Cole while both were on the same package tour. Unlike Earl Hooker, Johnson is not a confident soloist, stringing together a series of blues clichés.

#### 4 LOVEY DOVEY LOVEY ONE (London) 2'12"

This is not to be confused with Thurston Harris's 1957 hit, 'Little Bitty Pretty One', although Syl Johnson's guitar riff uses the first part of that song's scat riff. This was typical of Mel London's opportunistic approach to songwriting. The lyrics are hardly memorable, except perhaps for 'you're a sweet little booger in the sugar, you never leave your work undone'. Johnson takes no less than

three solo choruses, in the style of another influential Chicago guitarist, Jody Williams. This track was recorded straight after 'Two Headed Woman'.

#### 5 I COULD CRY (Wells) 2'51"

Wells first recorded this song for Chief in 1957, and that version was released with 'Cha Cha Cha in Blue' on Chief 7008. This version was recorded in May 1961, with Julian Beasley and A.C. Reed on saxes; Big Moose Walker on organ; Lafayette Leake on piano; Earl Hooker on guitar; Earnest Johnson on bass and Bobby Little on drums. Unfortunately, Walker's organ dominates, completely swamping the saxes and



blundering behind Wells' less powerful vocal.

**6 CHA CHA CHA IN BLUE**  
(Wells) 2'22"

From the initial 1957 Chief session, this instrumental is accurately titled. Initially, it is a feature for Willie Dixon's fleet-fingered bass plucking, while Eugene Lounge convincingly raps his cow-bell. Wells' harmonica playing is poised and controlled, indicating that this is a rehearsed performance. Syl Johnson alternates chiming chords with an arpeggio derived from Jody Williams' playing on 'Billy's Blues', Billy Stewart's Checker debut when both were in Bo Diddley's band.

**7 YOU DON'T CARE**  
(Wells) 2'20"

This song could have sounded better if producer Mel London hadn't been in the studio adding his voice to the mix. The song is recorded to the 'Little by Little' formula, with ensemble lead vocal. The unidentified guitarist is much too prominent, Otis Spann's piano struggles to be heard and Eugene Lounge's shuffle drumming makes no impression at all. Though credited to Wells, the lyrics bear the hallmarks of Willie Dixon's wordcraft: 'You don't care how I hurt, you don't care how I feel, I've seen dogs with a much better deal.'

**8 PRISON BARS ALL AROUND ME**  
(Wells) 2'29"

Released on Profile 4013, this was the B-side of 'You Don't Care'. Otis Spann's tough two-handed piano playing and some fluent guitar phrasing raise the quality of the overall performance.

The song uses the repetitive structure of Muddy Waters' 'I Just Want to Make Love to You'; again, it's hardly surprising that the composer Willie Dixon is present. Interviewed years later, Wells asserted that this song was recorded in an army prison, although he'd left the service five years before the session.

**9 CALLING ALL BLUES**  
(Hooker/Wells) 2'32"

The first of Hooker and Wells' instrumental outings, this was released by Elmore James as the B-side of 'Knocking at Your Door'. Recorded on 5 May 1960, the backing band is A.C. Reed, tenor

sax; Tall Paul Hankins or Moose Walker on piano; Earnest Johnson, bass guitar and Bobby Little or Harold Tidwell on drums.

A slow blues with instruments drenched in reverb, Earl's slide phrases are very similar to those he used in 'Blue Guitar'. Wells' harmonica is once again very controlled; his contrapuntal figures are a device more familiar in Little Walter's work.

**10 GALLOPING HORSES A LAZY MULE**  
(Hooker/Wells) 2'34"

Although it was initially recorded on 8 August 1960, this was the first Hooker/Wells instrumental collaboration to be issued, on Chief 7016. The galloping is performed by Hooker's inimitable guitar, beginning with a rockabilly rhythm pattern, cushioned by Moose Walker's organ and the solid Johnson/Tidwell rhythm team.

Wells spends his time berating the lazy mule of the title with varying degrees of comedic success.

**11 BLUES IN D NATURAL**  
(Hooker/London) 2'15"

Cut immediately after 'Galloping Horses', this is one of Earl Hooker's most celebrated recordings. The composer credit should be 'Peter Chatman', since this is a straight workout of 'Everyday I Have the Blues', which Memphis Slim first recorded as 'Nobody Loves Me' in 1948. It's a masterful combination of finger- and slide-playing.

The clarity of each note and the smooth flow of ideas indicate why Hooker was unequalled in his field. The organ solo rumbles ominously and almost drowns Harold Tidwell's fatback snare.

**12 MESSIN' WITH THE KID**  
(London) 2'16"

Likewise, this particular song will always be associated with Junior Wells. The song skilfully draws upon a number of archetypal pop techniques, which make it sound as if it should really have been recorded in New Orleans.

Recorded on 17 October 1960, the band is Jarrett Gibson and Donald Hankins, saxes; Moose Walker, piano; Earl Hooker and Lacey Gibson, guitars; Jack Myers, bass guitar; Fred Below, drums. It's possible to trace Wells' later obsession with James Brown to the soul techniques that he uses here.

**13 YOU SURE LOOK GOOD TO ME**  
(Wells) 2'26"

This was recorded along with 'Messin' with the Kid', and was yet another attempt to reiterate the success of 'Little by Little'. This time, the pedestrian tempo makes the vocals sound rather lacklustre and gloomy. Once again, the composer credit is inaccurate; this was first recorded in December 1947 by Willie Dixon's Big Three Trio. Hooker's tasteful slide and finger riffs form a perfect backdrop. This song gained greater recognition when Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy sang it on *Folk Festival of the Blues* three years later.

**14 UNIVERSAL ROCK**  
(Hooker/Wells) 2'32"

Taken at a hectic pace, this is primarily a guitar feature with Wells' harmonica just comping rhythm. Even so, this was credited to Hooker/Wells when it was released as the B-side of 'Messin' with the Kid'. Recorded on 17 October 1960, this features the same band as is listed for track 12, with Moose Walker playing organ. He takes a muddy-sounding solo, as does Jarrett Gibson on tenor sax. The focus remains on Hooker, playing intricate pointillistic patterns over a driving rhythm section.

**15 ROCKIN' WITH THE KID**  
(London) 2'07"

This is a fairly straight instrumental run-through of the Junior Wells hit, recorded seven months after its chart stint in the autumn of 1960. The band is A.C. Reed, tenor; Jackie Brenston, baritone; Lafayette Leake, piano; Earnest Johnson, bass guitar; Bobby Little, drums. Hooker, Reed and Brenston each take a solo.

**16 LITTLE BY LITTLE**  
(Wells) 2'34"

The first of only two national hits for Junior Wells, 'Little by Little' reached Number 23 in the *Billboard* R&B charts in June 1960. The recording details are the same as for 'Come On in This House'. Vocal chores are shared between Wells, Willie Dixon and Mel London and there is little attempt to synchronise their efforts. Wells sings the title line on his own: 'Little by little I'm losing you, that I can see'. Earl Hooker's solo is brief and succinct, in keeping with pop records of that vintage.

**17 THESE COTTON PICKIN' BLUES**  
(Hooker) 2'45"

The latest recording featured here, this was cut during 1962 for Age Records. Band personnel is A.C. Reed, tenor; Moose Walker, organ; Hooker and Reggie Boyd, guitars; Earnest Johnson, bass guitar and Casey Jones, drums. The tune resembles 'Sweet Black Angel' and Hooker gives a restrained performance. Unfortunately, Moose Walker is allowed a typically florid solo on the dreaded Farfisa organ, the nemesis of many a 1960s' pop single.

**18 BLUE GUITAR**  
(Hooker) 2'44"

Walker also solos on this quintessential Hooker recording, but this time his restraint on the Hammond organ is in keeping with the track's poised atmosphere. The tune is 'Rock Me Baby' in minimal disguise, played for the most part with slide and embellished by the odd flourish of finger-style guitar. Despite being low in the mix, Lafayette Leake's piano is hyperactive and brilliant. A.C. Reed, Earnest Johnson and Bobby Little were also present at this May 1961 session.

**19 I'M A STRANGER**  
(Wells) 2'40"

The same musicians as on 'I Could Cry', minus Reed, are present on another track from the 1961 sessions. This slow blues uses the tune of 'You Sure Look Good to Me', and is strongly sung by Wells, while Earl Hooker contributes slide phrases taken from both 'Blue Guitar' and 'Blues in D Natural'. The ending is botched, so it's surprising that another take wasn't considered.

**20 I NEED ME A CAR**  
(London) 2'24"

Recorded later in 1961, the backing band consists of Moose Walker and unknown guitarists, bass guitar and drums. The opening spoken exchange falls embarrassingly flat before the most pop-orientated performance here. Wells works hard to make something happen but the backing band is too wooden to respond. For once, the producer must take the blame, having written a trenchantly second-rate song.



# THE STORY OF THE BLUES

## 33: Turning the Air Blue

*A host of DJs helped the blues grow rapidly in popularity. Some of these turntable wizards were such colourful characters that they became as famous as the musicians whose work they spun.*

There are many wonderful things about Chicago blues, but adventurous titling is seldom one of them. Look at, say, Muddy Waters' early records. 'I Can't Be Satisfied', 'Rollin' Stone', 'Sad Letter Blues', 'Louisiana Blues' – great stuff, but no surprises in the labelling department.

But what's this on the flipside of 'Louisiana Blues'? 'Evans Shuffle'? Is there a story here? A tribute to a long-dead but influential bluesman – Big Boy Evans, perhaps?

It is a tribute of a kind, but a less altruistic one. Sam Evans was a Chicago disc jockey, and in the early 1950s his show 'The Chickadee Hour' on station WGES was one of the main outlets for a blues artist or label seeking airplay.

### Tributes in time

So Muddy's was a calculated compliment. There was nothing new about that. Jazz musicians had been tipping their titular hats to DJs for years, in tunes like 'Jumpin' with Symphony Sid' (Sid Torin was a big jazz jock in Boston). Blues guitarist Pee Wee Crayton's 'Poppa Stoppa' referred to the on-air nickname of New Orleans DJ Clarence Hamman. Sax honker Big Jay McNeely dedicated 'Willie the Cool Cat' to Willie Bryant, Apollo Theatre MC and self-appointed 'Mayor of Harlem', who used to broadcast his record show from a store window on New York's 125th Street.

There were blues-friendly DJs in many strategic locations. In Los Angeles Dick 'Huggy Boy' Hugg broadcast live from Dolphin's Record Shop. San Francisco had Jumpin' George Oxford; Buffalo boasted George 'Hound Dog' Lorenz; Newark, New Jersey knew Danny 'Cat Man' Stiles. In the South there was Atlanta's Zenas

'Daddy' Sears, Memphis city's crazy Dewey Phillips, the man who first played Elvis on air, and the great Nashville-based trio of John Richbourg, Hoss Allen and Gene Nobles, whose late-night blues shows in the 1950s and 1960s created a generation of blues-conscious listeners and musicians in the South.

The thing that distinguished the Chicago DJs was that most of them – unlike the line-up in the last paragraph – were black.

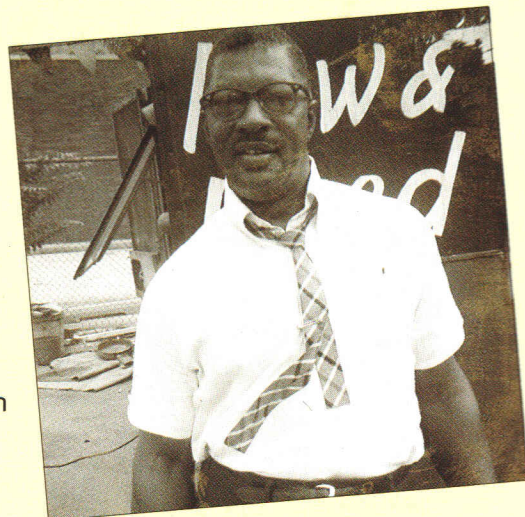
### Saturation coverage

'The South Side of Chicago was mostly a bluesy area,' said Willie Dixon. 'You'd have 20 people playing their radios on the South Side and maybe one out of 20 would be something other than blues. They weren't interested in what the Top Ten was. They were interested in blues music.'

'Big Bill Hill, Al Benson, Jack L. Cooper and later on E. Rodney Jones and Pervis Spann were deejays who would play what was considered South Side blues. All those guys were strictly bluesmen.'

Benson, on WGRS, called himself 'The Old Swingmaster' and talked in a Jamaican accent. Old radio hands remember him with respect: 'Al Benson,' said one, 'made Alan Freed [the famous rock'n'roll DJ] look like peanuts.' Cooper's show was on WHFC, which Leonard Chess bought in 1963 (for \$1 million in cash, allegedly) and renamed WVON – 'The Voice of the Negro'. One of the station's assets was the amicable rivalry of DJs Pervis Spann and E. Rodney Jones, who would devote chunks of their shows to running each other down.

Most of the Chicago DJs had more than a disc-spinning finger in the blues



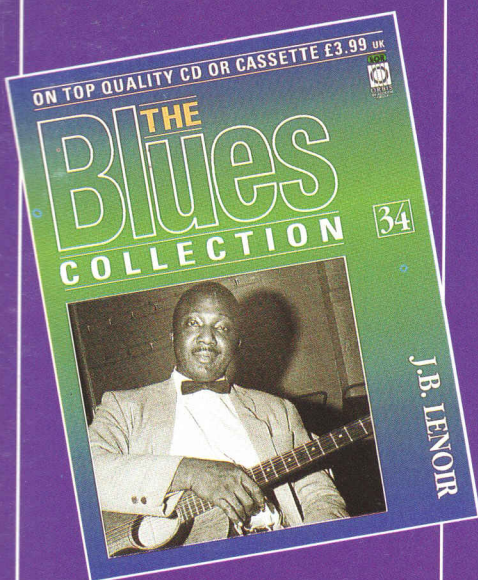
**ABOVE:** DJ Big Bill Hill helped keep fresh blues blood pumping round Chicago's arteries.

pie. Big Bill Hill started out as an MC in blues clubs like Sylvio's and the Blue Flame before breaking into radio in 1955 with a show on WOPA. He later opened his own Copacabana club on the West Side. In the 1960s Spann and Jones ran another West Side club, Father Blues. Sam Evans owned a club, too, the Ebony Lounge, as well as a couple of record stores. Benson was a major wheeler-dealer who ran a series of record labels over nearly 20 years, including Old Swingmaster, Parrot, Blue Lake, Crash and The Blues. He also had a popular TV show.

'Strictly bluesmen', Willie Dixon might call them, but these DJs adapted their taste, and their playlists, just as the public did. As downhome blues faded in popularity in the later 1950s, so it faded from the airwaves, to be replaced by the smoother, more accessible music of B.B. and Albert King, Little Milton, Little Junior Parker and Bobby Bland. When Sam Evans shuffled the discs for his show, Muddy Waters was no longer part of the deal.



COMING IN ISSUE 34



## The music of J.B. LENOIR

J.B. Lenoir matched an angelic voice with fluent, relaxed guitar playing. His smooth musical style was in contrast to the subject matter of many of his songs, which dealt with racial oppression.

## THE CD (OR CASSETTE)

features 19 tracks that combine Lenoir's wit and musical mastery.

Tracks include:

'Mama Talk to Your Daughter'; 'Eisenhower Blues'; 'Voodoo Boogie'.

## THE PUBLICATION

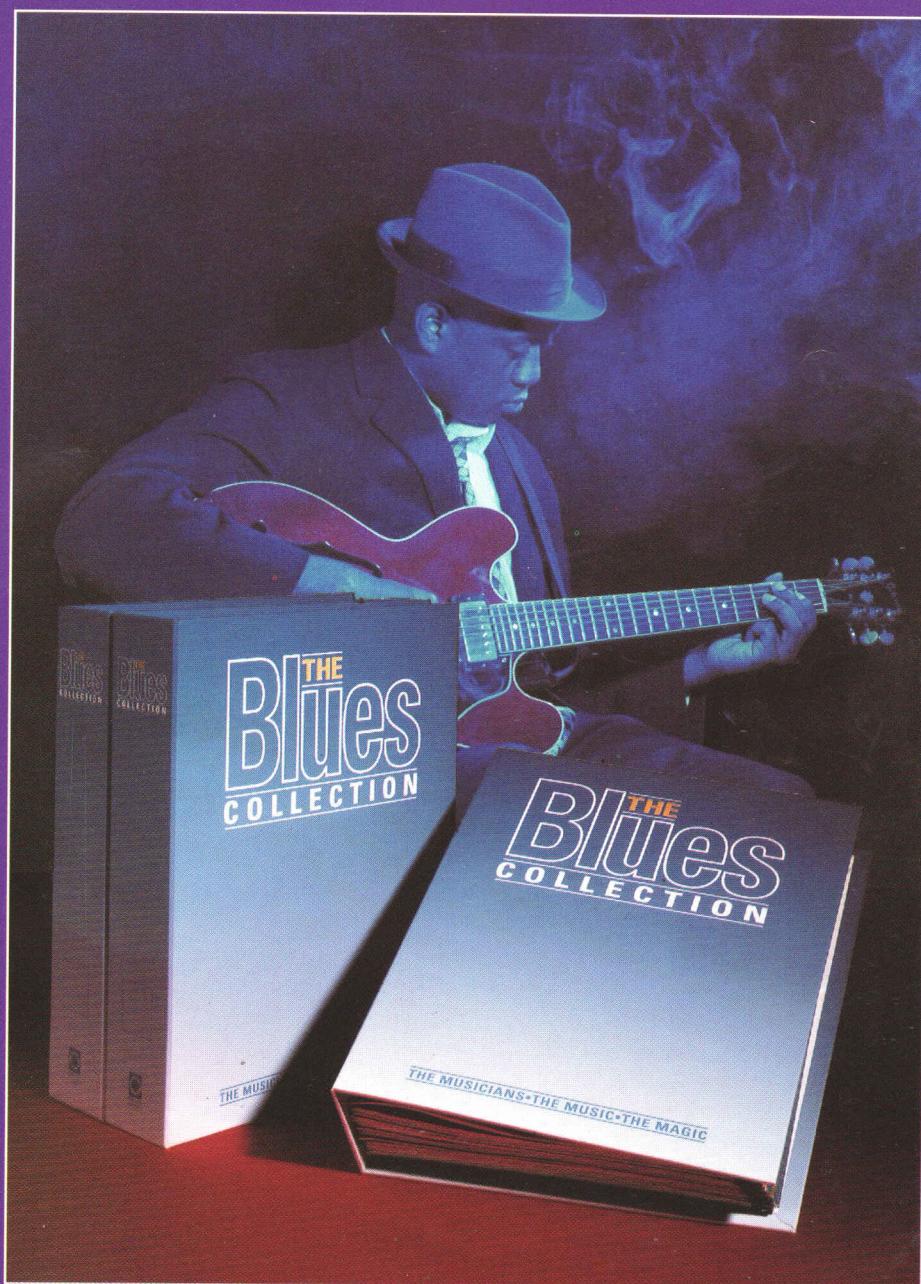
looks at the circumstances that shaped Lenoir's combative approach to both music and to life.



# THE Blues IN HARMONY

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