

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

2^xHD
FUSION

Otis SPANN

Good Morning Mr. Blues

STORYVILLE

The recordings on this album were made in 1962 in Copenhagen for the Storyville label while Spann was on tour with Muddy Waters. They represent Spann in an unusual setting for him – unaccompanied or in duet with a single supporting guitar. In this set, Spann interprets both blues standards and his own originals. Many of these originals have the aspect of spur-of-the-moment improvisations, which testifies to his mercurial gift as a pure blues story-teller. Because the clarity of both the recording and the sparseness of the accompaniment, this album constitutes one of the most valuable documents currently available of the Chicago style of blues piano playing at its best.

While Otis Spann was a wonderful singer in his own right, he was a transcendent pianist. The power of his style – the trademark rolling bass chords – the incredibly subtle rhythmic placement and the wonderful and characteristic richness of his voicings – not to mention his elaborately ornamental melodic lines and block chords – has not been equalled since his time. Because the nature of this particular recording provides such a close-up view of Otis Spann's artistry for anyone, even tempted to play the blues on piano, this album truly represents and encyclopedia Britannica or Oxford English Dictionary of Chicago blues piano playing.



More than 47 years after his death in 1970, at the age of 40, Otis Spann is still regarded as the quintessential Chicago Blues pianist. To be sure, there have been other Blues piano greats such as Sunnyland Slim, Little Brother Montgomery, Big Maceo Merriweather, and Roosevelt Sykes, each of whom influenced Spann and each of whom achieved his own honored place in the pantheon of the Blues piano tradition. Other elder statesmen such as Johnny Johnson, Pinetop Perkins and J. McShann who nobly carry on the tradition, remained active in the 1990s. Nevertheless, Spann's work as a member of the original and greatest Muddy Waters Band.

Otis Spann was born March 21st 1930, the authoritative accounts vary, but considering them all, it appears that he was born either in the small rural hamlet of Belzoni Mississippi or the state capital Jackson, Mississippi. It might be that he was born in Belzoni and lived as a child in Jackson which lies some 50 miles south of Belzoni, or that he was born and raised somewhere between the two. Nevertheless, it is clear that he grew up in the Mississippi Delta at a time when the way of life there was still in many ways more closely bound to the southern agrarian tradition of the 19th century and before then, to the modern industrial society of today. Agriculture, then as now, was the economic staple of the region. Unlike today however, strict segregation was the rule and the business of agriculture was still carried on on cotton plantations with laborers tied to the land. It has been reported in some quarters that Otis Spann worked in the cotton fields as a child with his parents. His step-father Frank Huston Spann was a minister and musician and his mother Josephine Erby who sang and played guitar was reputed to have worked with Memphis Minnie and Bessie Smith. It is also reputed that his natural father was Friday Ford, a pianist of some renown who played in the jukes around Jackson. Whether or not this



is the case, it is known that Ford taught and influenced Spann in his childhood. Moreover, while Spann may well have had occasion to work in the fields as a child, as most of his contemporaries did – because he apparently grew up in Jackson, it appears doubtful that he spent the bulk of his childhood doing so – in spite of certain accounts to the contrary.

Because both of his presumed natural parents and his step-father were musical, Spann was encouraged in his early interest in music, to learn piano from age 7. He played piano in his step-father's church in Jackson as a child and became interested in Blues, initially from his contact with Ford. Ford was Spann's first – and perhaps only - piano teacher. It is said that Ford would take the youngster on his lap and guide his fingers on the keyboard. It has been reported – perhaps apocryphally – that because Spann's mother married a churchman during Spann's childhood and therefore at the point in her life, she didn't want her son to play similar music. Spann had to wait until his parents were away from the house to practice the blues. However, that the Blues had captivated him – both from Ford's influence and from hearing records of other artists such as Big Maceo, Roosevelt Sykes, Sunnyland Slim, Champion Jack Dupree, Memphis Slim and Little Brother Montgomery is not in doubt.

At the age of 8, Spann won a blues talent contest that carried a prize of \$25.00. As a teenager, he worked around Jackson juke joints with a local band, often featuring his cousin Johnny Jones. There are some reports of his having also worked as a semi-pro football player and a boxer in Mississippi during those years and also that he attended Campbell Junior College in Jackson during the mid-forties. Jimmy Rogers, who met Spann in 1947 or 1948 in Chicago, doubts that these reports are true and attributes them to Spann's proclivity for making up stories.



"He was too little (to be a boxer or football player). He was just a guy learning how to play the blues," says Rogers.

It is said that he arrived in Chicago in 1947 working principally as a plasterer, although some reports have him in the army from 1946/51. Again, the chronology of Jimmy Rogers' experience with Spann would seem to discredit this account of army service. We do know that once Spann arrived in Chicago, he got to know Big Maceo who, by that time, had suffered a stroke that paralyzed his left side. It has been reported that Spann sometimes helped Maceo perform by playing his left hand parts. Spann met Jimmy Rogers at a tavern at 31st St and Indiana on the south side of Chicago. The tavern was a magnet for blues musicians of the day and Sunnyland Slim and John Lee Williamson (Sunny Boy Williamson 1) both of whom lived within a block of the tavern, held forth there. Because, according to Roger, Sunnyland Slim was an open sort of a person who didn't hesitate to share his connections, he was sought out by many musicians – particularly new arrivals –and he introduced many of the newcomers into the Chicago blues scene. It was in this way that Spann was introduced to Jimmy Rogers – one of the founders of the Muddy Waters Band – who, impressed by Spann's playing brought him into the band in 1948 or 1949. Spann stayed with Waters for the better part of 20 years – almost until the end of his life.

Those who were lucky enough to have heard Otis Spann play with Muddy Waters heard one of the true originals; Spann was a small, robust man who hunched over the piano, so it was difficult sometimes to make him out through the haze of smoke of the club. Waters often had him open the set with a couple of tunes, as he had done with many of the other stellar members of his band over the years – musicians like Jimmy Rogers, Little Walter, James Cotton, Big Walter Horton and Junior Wells. Of course, Spann forged out a powerful component of the Muddy Waters Band's sound. Spann's playing was as original and, in later years, as influential (in that he has literally become the accepted vernacular of the Chicago blues piano style) as Little Walter's wailing harmonica, Jimmy Rogers' soulful guitar line or Muddy's own burnished delta-imbued vocals and eerie slide guitar. Each of these men is universally acknowledged as having set the stylistic standard for the respective musical roles of their instruments in Chicago blues and indeed have influenced virtually all of the most prominent artists in blues, rhythm & blues, rock and roll and many in the pop world as well.

Muddy Waters sometimes introduced Spann from the bandstand (and elsewhere) as his brother or his half-brother. Of course, neither of these representations was true. Jimmy Rogers said "That was something Otis started and Muddy picked up on it to keep Otis going. Otis would tell you a story before he'd say good morning. That's the kind of guy he was." Those who knew Otis Spann knew him as a good-natured, friendly man; Jimmy Rogers said.

He would make friends with anybody. He was like that – especially if you had a bottle. Sometimes you'd see him wearing something on Wednesday and then you'd see him on Sunday and he'd still be wearing the same clothes. A lot of the time he didn't have a place to stay. He'd stay one or two days with a woman – promised her things, but they wouldn't be true and then she'd through him out. As soon as we'd get off work, he'd be at somebody's house. We'd scold him and try to straighten him out, but he kept to his ways. He was an excellent blues piano player though – and a nice guy.



EPILOGUE

Span died of liver cancer in Chicago in 1970. He was buried in the Burr Oak Cemetery, in Alsip, Illinois. His grave was unmarked for almost thirty years, until Steve Salter (president of the Killer Blues Headstone Project) wrote a letter to Blues Review magazine, saying "This piano great is lying in an unmarked grave. Let's do something about this deplorable situation". Blues enthusiasts from around the world sent donations to purchase a headstone. On June 6, 1999, the marker was unveiled in a private ceremony. The stone reads, "Otis played the deepest blues we ever heard - He'll play forever in our hearts"

LEGACY

In 1972, the site of the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival was named "Otis Spann Memorial Field". He was posthumously elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 1980



GOOD MORNING MR. BLUES

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|---|--|------|----|---|------|
| 1 | Good Morning Mr. Blues
O. Spann | 3:23 | 9 | Spann's Boogie
O. Spann | 2:14 |
| 2 | Love, Love, Love
O. Spann | 2:32 | 10 | Don't You Know?
O. Spann | 4:31 |
| 3 | Riverside Blues
Sonny Boy Williamson | 3:23 | 11 | Goin' Down Slow
O. Spann | 4:45 |
| 4 | Must Have Been the Devil
O. Spann | 2:54 | 12 | The Skies are Blue
O. Spann | 3:35 |
| 5 | Jelly Roll Baker
L. Johnson | 4:11 | 13 | Keep Your Hands Out of My Pocket
O. Spann | 2:52 |
| 6 | Trouble in Mind
R.M. Jones | 3:31 | 14 | Boots and Shoes
O. Spann | 3:16 |
| 7 | Worried Life Blues
O. Spann | 4:09 | | | |
| 8 | T.B. Blues
O. Spann | 4:15 | | | |

Piano: **Otis Spann** / Guitar: **Lonnie Johnson**

Originally produced by Karl Emil Knudsen

Recorded October 16, 1962 in Copenhagen, Denmark,

2xHD Mastering by René Laflamme

Album cover design: André Perry

Graphics: Sylvie Labelle

Album notes: John Koenig Aug 9, 1996

2xHD Executive Producer: André Perry



THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its propriety mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original 1/4" 15 ips CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired from the playback head directly to a Telefunken EF806 tube, using OCC silver cable. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.



The resulting signal is then transformed into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD11.2kHz using a Merging Technologies' Horus A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state of the art. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HDdac (DSD) is used as a reference digital playback converter in order to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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Pure Emotion