

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

2^xHD
FUSION

SONNY BOY
WILLIAMSON

THE
BLUES



STORYVILLE

Reappraisals of history seem to come in fifty-year cycles. In the mid-Fifties it was Late Victorianism, then Fin-de-Siècle arts, then the period surrounding World War I. The time will undoubtedly come when the mid-Sixties are scrutinized; some review has already begun, but a more in-depth appraisal probably won't be undertaken for another decade or two. At the time, some social observer will undoubtedly reflect upon the Teenage Era, a period during which adolescents came in for remorseless criticism and comment, commercial exploitation and voluntary separation. An astute observer will also note that this phenomenon was not peculiar to any one country or society, but rather to social systems and countries reflecting the gamut of lifestyles and political beliefs: Communist, Capitalist, Egalitarian, and Totalitarian. And, with the benefit of hind-sight, the seeds of a social revolution will become particularly clear. Let us hope that the contributions of elder to this social movement are also duly noted; that, for example, he acknowledges the enormous influence of veteran black performers on the music that accompanied the Great Cultural Revolution, an influence that so far has stretched to the sounds and dances of Disco, is currently surfacing in something called "New Wave" (a misnomer, if ever there was one), and will surely continue to be felt in whatever music dominates the period in which our observer takes his backward glance.



In the Sixties, aging black blues performers began to invade Europe, totally conquering the youth. It was quite extraordinary to witness the affection and enthusiasm of young Europeans for these veterans from across the sea; the generation gap that often had separated these youths from their own families simply disappeared in meetings with such men as Memphis Slim, Lonnie Johnson, Little Brother Montgomery and the man featured in this album Sonny Boy Williamson.

The popularity of Williamson is exceptional. A tall, dark-complexioned, grey-haired black man with near-Mephistophelean features, born in the Mississippi Delta region before the beginning of the Twentieth Century, he would – on this bare evidence – seem to have little in common with his youngest and most enthusiastic supporters. The key, however, is music, and whenever Sonny Boy Williamson began to play, any generational or cultural barriers that might have existed quickly crumbled. His harmonica spoke a language of our time, tortured, wailing, crying – and strangely beautiful; its effect was powerfully human and its appeal penetrated national, racial, and economic frontiers. His artistry, therefore, forged a link between himself and his newly won audiences, but Sonny Boy Williamson clearly also won them over with his personality. There was an engagingly extraverted streak in his make-up; not his whole being – which, in some respects, was oddly withdrawn – but in his bearing and dress. Amused by the comparisons made concerning his features (they conjured up the image of an elderly roué with a fastidious taste in dry wines) he played up to them by dressing with startling originality: an eccentric suit, harlequin-sque in grey and black – the sobriety of the colors making the arbitrary division of the suit in its different cloths almost logical – kid gloves, a rolled umbrella, and a derby hat. Showmanship? Of course. Unnecessary? Absolutely. If his playing had been poor, such frills would in no way have hidden the fact, and brilliant as his performances often were, Williamson's affectations could not have improved on them.

Was all this simply unwarranted superficiality? Probably, but it was essentially part of the man, and, deep down, perhaps even a part of his personal magnetism. So was his conversation. Sometimes it was difficult to get him started as he perched himself on the edge of a table, nodded his head, and watched you, with the mien and patience of a buzzard, from beneath heavily lidded eyes. However, nothing could stop him once he got going – the reminiscences flowed, merging

fact with fancy as he exhibited a remarkable talent for oral improvisation, his words becoming an extension of his music. And as he spoke, one had to admire his ability to do so without resorting to clichés; the very same quality one admired in his playing.

All this was as maddening as it was wonderful, especially to a would-be historian hoping to fill some gaps in the blues story. Sonny Boy was seldom consistent in his details: Like his blues, his stories had a main theme, but when it lent itself to embroidery, he seldom missed the opportunity to become creative. His passport gave April 7, 1909 as his date of birth, but he once told me it was December 5, 1897; it is nice to have such data correct, but when all is said and done, what really matters is the music – in this case, the subtle blues of Sonny Boy Williamson.

Listen to MOVIN' DOWN THE RIVER, an impressionistic blues composition. "I'm just cruisin'" he says in his floating, drifting improvisation. The river is the Rhine, which impressed Sonny Boy when he followed its course by train, forging through the undulating Black Forest landscape. "I been...I been...cruisin' down the River Rhine..."he sings softly, alternating his words with short bursts on the harmonica. Slowly, the beat begins to generate more of a rocking, train-like motion, and like the rattle of the points, the snapping of his fingers gives the piece a pronounced syncopation. Or take WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT, on which his firmly tapping foot establishes a solid, steady beat that allows him to take extraordinary liberties with his instrument, playing across the beat or in clipped, rapidly repeated short phrases that suddenly give place to a sustained note.

One rarely had the opportunity to hear Sonny Boy in the role of an accompanist, but this pleasure is afforded us here on SAME GIRL, an unusual item on which he and Memphis Slim (the session's estimable pianist) alternate as vocalists and accompanists. It is an amusing song which has both singers in love with the same woman. "I guess you gotta have 'em on a co-operation plan" sings Memphis Slim, taking a line from an old Bessie Smith/Clara Smith duet (MY MAN BLUES). Memphis Slim plays simple but effective piano behind Williamson on SONNY BOY's GIRLFRIENDS, imitating his short notes, but he comes to the fore on MOVIN' OUT, which has him building up strength with a steady walking bass right to the conclusion of the piece. An even more pronounced rhythm backing is provided for Sonny Boy's versatile harp on CHICAGO BOUND. This

is an aptly-titled instrumental that swings in true Chicago fashion with Memphis Slim playing a Jimmy Yancey bass figure, and guitarist Matthew Murphy giving more than a hint of Elmore James in the opening bars to his solo, then launching into one of his expert filigree passages while Bill Stepney gives that unshakable rhythmic foundation so typical of Chicago drummers. Finally, there is ON MY WAY BACK HOME, in which Sonny Boy Williamson most eloquently bids farewell to his European friends and fans.

Paul Oliver

Author of The Story of the Blues



SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON

THE BLUES

- 1 **Why Are You Crying** (b) 2:57
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 2 **Girl Friends** (d) 4:44
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 3 **Movin' Down the River Rhine** (f) 3:45
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 4 **I'm So Glad (I made it over here in time)** (a) 4:11
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 5 **Chicago Bounce** (e) 3:16
(Peter Chatman)
- 6 **Movin' Out** (a) 3:43
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 7 **Once Upon A Time** (b) 3:16
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 8 **When the Lights Went Out** (g) 4:32
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 9 **Same Girl** (d) 4:52
(Sonny Boy Williamson)
- 10 **On My Way Back Home** (c) 3:38
(Sonny Boy Williamson)

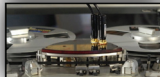
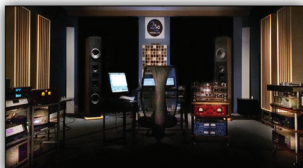
(a) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm., vo.);
Memphis Slim (p); Matt Murphy
(el-g.); Bill Stepney (dm)
(b) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm., vo.);
Matt Murphy (ac-g.)
(c) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm., vo.);
Matt Murphy (el-g.); Bill Stepney (dm)
(d) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm., vo.);
Memphis Slim (p.)
(and vocal on Same Girl)
(e) Same as (a) but instrumental
(f) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm., vo.);
(g) Sonny Boy Williamson (harm.,
foot stomping);

All recorded in Copenhagen Nov. 1,
1964 at the Ivar Rosenberg Studio
Engineer: Ivar Rosenberg
Photo: Jan Persson
Produced by Karl Emil Knudsen

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THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its proprietary 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 ¼" 15 ips CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired with OCC silver cable from the playback head direct to a Nick Doshi tube head preamplifier. 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 transferred into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD 11.2 MHz 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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