A DEFINITION OF THE BLUES:
THE NOTION OF TRAVEL WITHIN BLUES LYRICS

by

William C. Brown

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The Notion of Travel Within Blues Lyrics

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Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University South Bend, in partial fulfillment of the
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A series of eight years after high school brought me many good times, but very little in the way of personal or professional fulfillment. In fact, a rash decision in 1986 on my part to leave a job of almost eight years forced my hand into finally taking control of my life and pursuing the higher education I had always desired. In a way, I suppose I acknowledge the eight years prior to that point as a briefing into the world’s estimation of my capabilities up until that point. My father and mother saw my yearning at that time, and offered me their home and comforts. While not always an ideal arrangement, it did show me their belief in me, and for that, I am eternally grateful. For my own ability to survive during those undergraduate years, economically and mentally, I applaud how much I learned about my character; traits that continue to serve me well. I have been fortunate in the intervening years, in that overall, I have had economic and personal prosperity. For that, I acknowledge the value of my Indiana University undergraduate degree. When I began my post-graduate work, I was still in the banking profession, and for Lee, Trudy, and Jim, who authored my letters of recommendation into the Master of Liberal Studies program, I earnestly thank you. I acknowledge the worlds of literature opened to me by Drs. Harrington and Robinson, and the eye-opening worlds of chemistry and genetic engineering unfurled by Drs. Mecklenberg and Anderson. That is the beauty of a Master of Liberal Studies degree; it’s ability to expand boundaries. And Dr. Bonn remains a man whose passion and belief in my abilities touched me deeper than he may ever know. I also must acknowledge the treasured support and friendship of my classmates. For those along the way who understood my obsession with writing, and supported and told me of the depth of it, I could not have written the hundreds of pages without your encouragement. To Ivy Tech State College, I thank you and acknowledge your financial support and the professional expansion of my role bestowed because of my Master of Liberal Studies degree. Finally, for my wife, Kim, I cherish your certainty in my capabilities, and want you to know that you serve as a great motivator and example of how to leave one’s mark upon the world.
This work is dedicated to my father and mother, William R. Brown and Helen B. Brown, my wife, Kimberly A. Brown, my step-son, Andrew N. Heady, and the most honest form of American musical heritages, the blues, and the artists whose tales of the human condition so accurately reflect the gamut of emotions experienced in life.

The blues song tradition is the artistic result of a long history of suffering, beginning with a people sold into indentured servitude. These slaves and their descendants worked the fields of the deep south, picking cotton or some other crop under conditions of oppressive heat, struggling in abnormal living situations, and physically, socially, and economically isolated when they were free. Even after Reconstruction, blacks were legally and factually disenfranchised, unable to vote, to hold office, to serve on juries, to use public facilities, or to testify against whites. Throughout it all, whatever the indignity, they had to respond "yes, sir" to their employer. They also experienced the indignity of being segregated to the rear of the motor coach, a separate drinking fountain, or being forced to sit at the far end of the lunch counter. Meanwhile, many of them had to stand helplessly while wealthy white landowners methodically raped their women. Finally, as masters, many had to leave family and friends behind, lured by a promise, often false, of better conditions and work opportunities in the north. This history of personal tragedies and racial experience is unique to the people of African ancestry who originated the blues.

Thus, out of the unfathomable human conditions endured by the U.S. Negro in the 1920s came the outpouring grace, the coping mechanism, the medium by which pride, dignity, and a sense of self, identity, and racial honor were restored, and troubles, at least for awhile, were forgotten. The blues song tradition was born and matured to provide these ends, and blossomed into a legacy as full, enriching, and enduring as any American heritage. What began as a beating of drums between neighboring farms as a crude form of communication evolved into a vital mode of commentary on the black condition. The wailing, sweeping voices of despair, the sting, urgency, and pain of the slide guitar, the saxophone-like rush of the harmonica, and the raspy jubilation of the legendary "wong dang doodle" verses became the vehicles by which blacks endured their conditions. They were also the modes of celebration when life was kind enough to offer even a glimpse of satisfaction. In either case, the blues became an escape into a momentary place of equilibrium and peace which, even when the subject was sad contained an edge of joy. One commentator has remarked that "blues after all is little more than a feeling." (Garstnick, p. 41)
The blues song tradition is the artistic result of a long history of suffering, beginning with a people sold into indentured servitude. These slaves and their descendants worked the fields of the deep south, picking cotton or some other crop under conditions of oppressive heat, struggling in abysmal living situations, deprived of adequate food and clothing, and systematically beaten when their only crime was to be the property of another. Nominal freedom in the nineteenth century only meant that they fell into a sharecropping arrangement where, at year’s end, after hours of languishing toil, they still owed money back to “Mr. Charlie.” And, throughout it all, whatever the indignity, they had to respond “yasa boss” to their employer. They also experienced the indignity of being relegated to the rear of the motor coach, a separate drinking fountain, or being forced to sit at the far end of the lunch counter. Meanwhile, many of them had to stand by helplessly while wealthy white landowners methodically raped their women. Finally, en masse, many had to leave family and friends behind, lured by a promise, often false, of better conditions and work opportunities in the north. This history of personal tragedies and racial experience is unique to the people of African ancestry who originated the blues.

Thus, out of the unfathomable human conditions endured by the U.S. Negro in the 1920s came the one saving grace, the coping mechanism, the medium by which pride, dignity, and a sense of self, identity, and racial honor were restored, and troubles, at least for awhile, were forgotten. The blues song tradition was born and nurtured to provide these ends, and blossomed into a legacy as full, enriching, and endearing as any American heritage. What began as a beating of drums between neighboring farms as a crude form of communication evolved into a vital mode of commentary on the black condition. The wailing, swooping voices of despair, the sting, urgency, and pain of the slide guitar, the saxophone-like rush of the harmonica, and the raucous jubilance of the legendary “wang dang doodle” verses became the vehicles by which blacks endured their conditions. They were also the modes of celebration when life was kind enough to offer even a glimpse of satisfaction. In either case, the blues became an escape into a momentary place of equitableness and peace which, even when the subject was sad contained an edge of joy. One commentator has remarked that “blues after all is little more than a feeling.” (Guralnick, p. 41)
One of the central themes in the blues tradition is the notion of travel. Whether it was the wanderings from town to town by itinerant legendary blues figures such as the shadowy Robert Johnson, who was said to have sold his soul at the crossroads to the devil in exchange for his guitar and vocal virtuosity, or Johnny Shines, whose frequent references to “riding the blinds” spoke to the trials of appropriating the nation’s rail system for personal mobility, physical movement for economic gain is an essential element in the blues realm. The blues performer often followed the harvests, worked the lumber and turpentine camps, and generally followed the sun to keep his or her pockets filled. If capitalism involves dogged independence, perhaps this nomadic ability and mindset illustrates capitalism in its most pure form.

Additionally, the travels of the blues artist could be provoked by the loss of a love interest, and the quest to reclaim and reestablish that interest. The blues tradition is rife with the tales and woes of those who have ventured afar to reclaim and recapture affection, to bring a former lover back into the heart and household. The great harmonica and vocalist Little Walter puts that determination succinctly in a line from his Blues with a Feeling: “I’m gonna find my baby/If it takes all night and day.” Affairs of the heart seem to know no geographical boundaries in the blues tradition.

In addition, as in many other folk music traditions, the hoboing vagabond is a significant element within the blues vernacular, not only in the lyrics but also in the lifestyles of blues artists. Big Joe Williams is one of the foremost examples. His meanderings throughout the country are well represented in blues lore and in his music. Also, in his later years, a visitor to Chicago’s famed Jazz Record Mart, then located at 11 West Grand Avenue, might find Big Joe performing street musician style outside its front door. Inquiries with store personnel always revealed that he would just arrive, encamp, and play for tips, out of economic need, no doubt, but also out of loyalty at having recorded for the storeowner’s Delmark record label. And then suddenly, much like a vaporizing mist, he would again be gone, without ever having entered the establishment. Subsequent word-of-mouth reports would then put him hundreds of miles away, performing a similar role in Kansas City, Memphis, or some other destination he knew to be
friendly to the wandering blues musician. Big Joe, like many other blues artists, lived the nomadic life he sang.

Other artists sang of dislocation, both voluntary and otherwise, and usually arising from the need for money or work. Early blues works speak to following the field labor as they worked the plantation farmlands of cotton, tobacco, beans, and corn. As the harvestable crops matured, blues performing became a cyclical profession dependant upon seasonal movement. The artists literally followed the sun and celebrated its intensity. Also, as mechanization in such northern industrial centers as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and South Bend offered the promise, however veiled, of a better job with regular hours, top pay and benefits, better living conditions, and elevated social status, reflections of these promises began to arise in the blues songs of the day. In his classic version of *Cadillac Assembly Line*, Albert King sums up the attractions as well as the loss: “I’m goin’ to Detroit, Michigan little girl/ Sorry, but I can’t take you/ Gonna get me a job up north/ So I don’t have to keep sayin’ ‘yasa boss’.” The blues, therefore, has been a channel in which travel is an overriding theme, from the earliest works within the form from the 1920’s to the most contemporary of compositions. Tracing the various allusions to travel within the blues tradition can even provide evidence on the modes of travel possible for these people, allowing a determination if the music and its notion of travel mirrors the period’s latest technology (walking, train, cars and trucks, and airplanes). The most significant blues artists all touched on these themes.

All in all, Charley Patton’s position as one of the most significant and versatile figures in blues history is secure. Considered by many blues historians to be the most forceful blues recording artist of all time, due to his extroverted performing style highlighted by a powerful, shouting vocal style and slashing guitar approach, yet, he could also personify restraint itself when the subject matter of one of his songs demanded it. Patton is said to have become interested in the guitar in 1907, a time when blues entertainers were essentially anonymous in stature. By 1910, he had developed a style steeped in percussive effects, using his gargantuan, gritty voice as a rhythm instrument. Noted blues scholar Robert Palmer once noted, “He handled his voice like an instrument, his diction was often impenetrable, even to his contemporaries” (Palmer, pp. 65-66). He was an imaginative arranger, employing a driving 1-2 beat that affirmed his
preference for boisterous sound. However, he was also able to provide a subtle touch, especially when he employed the classic contrasting vocal and guitar accenting patterns he introduced.

Patton first recorded in 1929, and immediately in his recording career one can hear the notion of travel in his work. *Down the Dirt Road Blues* offers what was to become a very familiar theme in Patton’s compositions, the idea of being displaced from home, which in his case was often the plantations of the Deep South, primarily in Mississippi. Averse to strict field labor, Patton preferred the evening juke joint settings where he would too often fall prey to the hard drinking and violence they bred. As these juke joints were often on plantation property, his actions would prompt expulsion from the land, providing perfect, first-hand experience for the theme of hitting the road to find another place to live and work, albeit begrudgingly for the latter. *Down the Dirt Road Blues*, done in the key of D, with its 13 ½ bar structure, heavy foot stomping, guitar tapping, and single string descending guitar work, offers the perfect complement to Patton’s tale of having to wander afoot to survive. Although his lyrics maintain the basic belief that the rewards were always better somewhere else, when he sang, “But, Lord, I just couldn’t stay there,” even he acknowledged his travels were usually caused by himself. It was a theme Patton would return to many times, most notably in his *Goin to Move to Alabama*, where again, his actions and economic downfall have forced him to stray afar. The lines, “Have you been to Alabama/ It’ll make Georgia be all gone,” summarize this pattern. Travel, in Patton’s case, always seems forced by his own transgressions and need for economic subsistence. His work provides an early account of the notion of travel in the blues song tradition.

Over the course of five days in 1936 and 1937 in a Dallas, Texas hotel room, Robert Johnson recorded 29 of the most influential Delta blues recordings ever penned. Johnson, hailing from Hazelhurst, Mississippi, was the personification of the itinerant blues man, here today and gone tomorrow, hard drinking, hard loving, and in the end, hard dying. But he wrote some of the most impassioned, startling, and moving blues ever recorded, songs and tales brimming with vivid imagery and unsettling social and personal commentary. His blues were self-contained narratives of love-on-the-run, the promise of a better life somewhere, and commentary on life on the road. As noted American music historian Peter Guralnick
stated, "Robert Johnson sings as feelingly and with as direct an emotional thrust as can be imagined" (Guralnick, p. 38).

Of Robert's compositions that became standards within the idiom and are venerated to this day, including *Sweet Home Chicago*, *Rambling On My Mind*, and *Stop Breaking Down Blues*, there is probably no finer example of the notion of travel in the blues tradition from this period than his song *Love In Vain*. A tune that went on to be reverently covered by The Rolling Stones and other rock bands, *Love In Vain* drips with the heartbreaking despondency that tears at the soul when a loved one leaves. This composition contains simple yet meticulous imagery constructed with well-chosen words, all portraying a final farewell at a rural train station. When Johnson sang, "When the train left the station / With two lights on behind / Well, the blue light was my blues / And the red light was my mind," it was the finale of a song that treated the fading train as a symbol as one of the most abandoning feelings that can be experienced. Train travel became a closure of a relationship and the beginning of a slow fading away, much like a train disappears into the distant horizon. Johnson's enduring legacy has always been to draw one personally within his songs and allow the listener individually to comprehend the predicament, often to great effect. To this day, people continue to play out such final love scenes, and that is why *Love In Vain* is so fresh even some sixty years later.

When the country blues moved north during the great black migration out of the Deep South, especially Mississippi, the process was fostered by the availability of work in heavy industry. One particular artist brought with him a working knowledge of the blues tradition that was steeped in the search for employment and financial disharmony. To this, he added the urgency and vitality of the urban setting, and the blues was transformed in a direction never before seen or heard. McKinley Morganfield, a/k/a Muddy Waters, updated the blues to match its new urban environment, thus providing a slice of home for the disoriented masses of Mississippi Negroes heading north. In doing so, he forever altered the sound and course of blues history: "Living in the city, Muddy adapted to survive." (Palmer, p. 169)
Whereas Mississippi Delta blues had primarily been a solo acoustic composition, Muddy Waters became consumed by the pace of city life, and understood that the new feeling of living hard and fast (i.e. street smarts) demanded a change in the blues; it needed to be amplified. To be sure, this revolution was also precipitated by the need to be heard over the din of the loud metropolitan taverns, as opposed to the quieter settings back home. Muddy's bands became the training grounds of some of the finest blues aggregations ever assembled. In fact, it is widely believed that his group including Little Walter on harmonica, Jimmy Rogers on second guitar, Otis Spann on piano, and Elgin Evans on drums, along with his own lacerating guitar and declamatory vocals, was the finest combination of blues musicians ever assembled.

Travel was always a dominant theme in Muddy's music, and his use of the theme varied according to situation. One particular song typifies Muddy's passion to hit the road in order to relieve the anguished memories of a relationship gone sour. His 1954 composition, *Southbound Train*, has a curious twist to it, however. Instead of the song speaking of the escape route as a wide-open northern urban center, where one can more easily forget the sting of painful memories, here Muddy is anxious to return to his roots, the Mississippi Delta region. His goal to go back to a slower life there, and perhaps find a new love there as well. When Muddy bellows, "Aw, I'm on my way to the lowlands / Conductor, can I ride / I'm on my way to the lowlands / Oh, please Conductor, let this poor boy ride / I'm gonna keep on travelin' / 'Til I get myself satisfied," his dream seemingly can only be fulfilled through his necessary dislocation from the city and ultimate return to his roots. This objective is made possible by the train and its ability to transport him there—for a price. His pleading suggests the plight of a man perhaps without proper train fare, but desperate to travel to allay his sorrow and sate his yearnings. *Southbound Train* provides a classic case of travel in post-World War II blues.

The influence that Muddy Waters had upon a whole new generation of urban blues artists cannot be overemphasized. While each U.S. region boasted its own specific style of play and blues heroes, Chicago continued to lead the way in developing young, fresh blues talent. Nowhere in the city was this more evident than on the west side, where a trio of confident, brash guitar slingers were melding their
influences into a louder, more unrelenting wall of sound, characterized by falsetto singing matched with stinging, single string treble lead guitar work. Eli Toscano, a west side entrepreneur of suspicious credibility (indeed, he was found dead, floating in Lake Michigan over a small matter of unpaid gambling debts) had primarily formed the Cobra record label in the rear of his “variety” store to capture the work of these three young, brazen axe handlers.

Buddy Guy, Magic Sam, and Otis Rush showed the world the future of urban blues. The trio individually went on to record some of the most seminal blues ever, all for Toscano’s Cobra label. But while Magic Sam succumbed at age 32 to a heart attack, Otis Rush and Buddy Guy pushed into the 1960s with fervor, reaching new and diverse heights of blues prowess. While Guy went on to record singly, and subsequently to become much in demand as a session player with the mighty Chess record label, Rush’s recorded output after his Cobra experience became sporadic, at best. As Mike Rowe observed about Otis’ ability, “There was an agonized tension to his music...he tortures his words in his crying, sometimes falsetto voice with a frightening intensity...” (Rowe, p. 176). However, in 1969, again seemingly snatching history from thin air, Rush put on wax, for the Chess label, a blues anthem, indeed, a standard, that has weathered the ensuing 30 years.

So Many Roads drips with the painful anguish of a man who desperately and achingly pines to run from the intense personal agony he is enduring. The song, with Rush’s forcible, howling falsetto outbursts, and singularly attacking, heart-piercing guitar work, paints the mournful tale of a man whose dislocation is necessary to escape the demons of the mind, the unrelenting memories of a love gone bad, and in general the pain he has suffered in this locale, day in, day out. The song forces the listener to see the landscape from the mind of this man, from his bedroom window, as he laments that the only way to escape is to hop a train to some point undetermined. As B.B. King would sing years later, that point would be “a better world somewhere.” When Rush cries, “So many road, so many trains to ride... / I was standin’ at my window / And I heard that whistle blow / It sounded like a Streamliner / But it was the B&O,” it is suddenly understood that this man is looking toward the direction and comfort only the day’s intermittently passing luxury liner can provide. He needs this form of flight, for it is this deliverance that can deposit him at a
destination with a greater possibility for a new love interest. Rush’s vivid imagery and passionate need for relocation continue the travel motif in the blues just as it was being discovered by a whole new audience, college-aged, primarily male and white. Unfortunately, this rediscovery by young whites was only temporary, although its impact helped inspire British rock/blues groups such as The Rolling Stones, The Who, and Cream, along with groups stateside like The Butterfield Blues Band.

Disco and the 1970s nearly killed the blues. In fact, in many respects, it may have robbed the blues world of a great number of talented young black entertainers. This, however, does not mean that the blues is exclusive to blacks. Names like Charlie Musselwhite and Stevie Ray Vaughan come to mind when thinking of white blues artists who have had a long-standing impact on the music. Still, unlike rhythm and blues, which allowed its stars to have a crossover appeal to the hardcore blues fan, disco enticed many young blacks into a field where the musical styling had little to do with the heritage of one’s race. Their defection denied young black musicians of that time an interest in the blues and the opportunities to observe and learn from the elder masters of the blues. Suddenly, a whole generation of black youth, in search of bigger dollars and the expanded notoriety that disco could afford, shook the dust of the blues from their feet. Disco did not encourage much hard travelin’ on dusty roads.

Also, during this period many young blacks seemed willing to abandon the blues’ heritage in the overall black experience, finding this part of their heritage shameful and inferior. Still, the blues did not die. The statesmen of the form obviously had to rethink their performance set lists and gear themselves and their bands for the requests for disco songs that were sure to arise during their concerts. Such adaptation was not seen as a sign of selling-out among the blues’ masters, however, but as a means to an end. It was economic survival. Adding to the other ominous news, the great Chess record label folded during this time, further narrowing the market for blues artists to stay loyal to their idiom. Fortunately, small collector labels like Delmark, Alligator, Testament, and Arhoolie arose and kept some recording windows open during this period.
Most of all, the true blues performers never really forgot their roots throughout this time, and the crowds in the smoky clubs, the locals, and especially the Europeans, who enthusiastically embraced the blues during this period of disco, did not allow the music to die a slow, lethargic death. Even in this unpromising time of disco beat and jet plane travel, the notion of dislocation and travel continued to play an important role in the blues.

As the blues attempted to weather the rise of disco and the emergence of black artists such as Lionel Ritchie and Peabo Bryson, with the 1970s drawing to a close, economic conditions began to sour, and the reality of a national recession strangled the U.S. Phrases such as “corporate downsizing” and “out placement” became part of the U.S.’s professional vernacular during this time. However, while these expressions came to symbolize the managerial displacements happening in the corporate ivory towers, the less-publicized plight of the under skilled segment of the workforce caused great financial hardships also. Certainly, the recession was a genuine malady for the working poor, especially the black people who were the staunch base of blues at this time. These were people who provided the initial push of Mississippi blacks into the urban settings, and now they helped maintain the tradition. It must also be emphasized, however, that young Europeans were continuing to provide a positive environment for blues artists, providing many overseas touring opportunities and recording possibilities with foreign labels like Isabel.

Morris Holt, a/k/a Magic Slim, was based out of the 43rd Street area in Chicago. An impoverished, blighted, dangerous area on the city’s near south side, many of the blues’ clubs of lore were located there, although as one commentator has noted, “The famous clubs, Theresa’a, Sylvios’s, Jake’s Tavern, and Pepper’s, are gone now” (Merrill, p. 88). One of the clubs that survives to this day, The New Checkerboard Lounge at 423 East 43rd Street, still serves a diverse clientele within its low-ceilinged, murky, compact accommodations. During the late 1970s, “The Board” served the needs of the first generation of black urban émigrés, while also catering to young whites, including European blues mavens, in an atmosphere that allowed the blues to be accessible in its most honest form. Magic Slim, himself a Mississippi native, appealed to all these groups, speaking the blues language in terms readily comprehensible to all in attendance.
A world traveler and ambassador for the blues, Magic Slim has particularly geared his recorded output to speak to the black urban expatriate, that person who left the Deep South behind. Inherent within Slim’s repertoire is a catalog peppered with the notion of travel. From a 1979 recording of *Gravel Road*, he offers the age-old response, at least in the blues sphere, to a love gone awry, its psychological ramifications, and the need to forswear and renew. Of course, this recording was done at a time of supersonic jet aircraft, luxurious automobiles, and speeding trains. However, when Slim sings, “I done told you baby / And I ain’t gonna tell you no more / Leavin’ early in the morning / Walkin’ down that gravel road,” two ideas come to mind. First, and obviously, this perspective is understood by the older blues-buying generation. It is a reaction they can relate to. Many of them had simply and literally walked away from stiff, unforgiving oppression or wretched, hopeless love. These were themes they knew, in terms that were familiar. Second, such apparently anachronistic lyrics do affirm the plight of the more economically disadvantaged, and become an implicit commentary on the conditions of the urban poor and their inability to compete in a world becoming more and more geared toward the educated. How could they afford airfare or a nice car? As such, it is implied, and not so tongue-in-cheek, that just walking away is still the best, and perhaps only, option. Slim’s notions of travel press the concept of travel within the blues song tradition into the 1980s, a time when the music began to experience a resurgence that continues even today.

Much like the 1960s, when primarily young, white, college age Caucasian males fell under the spell of the blues, the 1980s saw the younger generation come back to the blues in large numbers. No doubt inspired by white cross-over artists like Z.Z. Top, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Eric Clapton, all of whom claimed the blues as their artistic base, young white audiences began a groundswell of adulation for the blues. Coupled with the inspirational Robert Cray, a Seattle-based black virtuoso in his early thirties who enjoyed a string of blues-tinged cross-over hits originating with his first major label release, the blues captured the ears and pocketbooks of the young white crowd again. However, this time, unlike the 1960s, both men and women comprised this contemporary listener base. Suddenly, blues became nouveau riche. Blues began to appear as the background music in television commercials, Robert Cray was seen and heard
on MTV, and large blues events like the Chicago Blues Festival attracted combined crowds numbering in
the hundreds of thousands.

Most important for the continuity of the blues tradition, young blacks began to return to the blues
as both fans and performers. The clubs began to be peppered with faces of young whites and blacks,
regardless of the venue's location. And innovative, inventive artists like Vance Kelly and Vasti Jackson
brought forth their original virginal blues interpretations for the entire world to hear. All of a sudden, the
demand for the blues was on the upswing, and both the old masters and the current crop of young bloods
reaped the rewards. And, as might be expected from such a combination, the blues music of the 1980s
held true to its origins despite its newfound popularity. After all, life's fortunes and misfortunes continued.
Love, money, and other affairs of the heart and pocketbook remained the central themes in the blues, with
the notion of travel remaining vitally important.

A 1989 recording by Lurrie Bell, a young man of noble blues heritage (his father is acclaimed
blues harmonica player Carey Bell), illustrates this thematic durability. Lurrie transfixed the blues world
with his ringing, staccato guitar style, and his beyond-his-years mournful vocal assuredness. Sadly, Lurrie
remains hemmed-in to this day by personal demons, including heroin addiction and sporadic homelessness
that allow only a glimpse into his musical prowess. And despite excellent recent releases on the Delmark
record label, if he ever breaks free of his constraints, the blues world may begin to grasp the true unlimited
boundaries of his capabilities.

In *The Train I Ride*, Lurrie's allegiance to the blues' core themes is solid. This tune propounds
the account of a man who sees a train and its physical movement as analogous to the literal flight of his
young love to parts unknown. The anguish and resignation are excruciatingly apparent, and when he sang,
"The train I ride / Sixteen coaches long / That long dark train / Carried my baby away from home," Lurrie
offered his burgeoning white audience the opportunity to savor the blues' bittersweet lure, to understand
how the music's sheer emotional simplicity can touch them too. This large mechanical travel vehicle, the
train, which the male figure in the song has always recognized as a mere conveyance for a personal
journey, turns face and becomes the anti-Christ of travel, transporting all hope somewhere into the abyss beyond the immediate locale. The idea of separation from a loved one, and their movement to parts unknown is suddenly understood as a universal phenomenon, offering the notion of travel and separation as defined in the blues song tradition to a new white listener base. Lurrie’s tale is but one from this period that kept this concept of travel alive within the blues tradition.

The 1990s found the blues as healthy as it had ever been. In reality, it grew more popular, in terms of numbers of listeners and sales, than ever before. Stimulating new releases and re-issues of classic recordings flooded the market on a weekly basis. What once would have been obscure collector labels like Delmark, Alligator, and Blind Pig suddenly found their own separate rooms and sections in chain stores like Tower Records and Musicland, both in the U.S. and abroad. Unbelievably to old blues hands, a Buddy Guy compact disc could be found at the local Wal-Mart store. Octogenarian artists such as Honeyboy Edwards, known at one time to only the most learned blues scholar as the running mate of Robert Johnson (and the man who was with him the night he died), were all of a sudden playing as many dates as their health and mobility would allow. The Chicago Blues Festival was realizing more in total attendance than the most vaunted of American institutions, the World Series, by a ratio of more than two to one.

These were glamorous times for the blues. Still, the recordings of the 1990s continued to present the vernacular as one that, at its most basic level, spoke to the core of human existence. Besides the issues that seem to transcend the decades, however, the electronic age presented a dizzying host of consumer delicacies through media outlets that offered additional personal pressures to acquire all that a consumer society allows. And for the most part, such unstinted acquisition simply wasn’t possible for the people who were subjects of the blues. Although in reality the black population was changing as rapidly as the country as a whole, the essential core of the blues experience, the poor and dispossessed, was left further and further behind. Such was the state of the blues in the 1990s. In many ways, this clash between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is the blues in one of its purest forms.
A 1995 recording by 1950s blues legend Billy Boy Arnold, however, finds a classic artist harkening back to both a familiar theme and a prosaic form of travel. In *Sunny Road*, Arnold returns with great effect to the time-tested theme of a personally chosen dislocation from a love gone bad. When he laments, "So long baby / I did all I could for you / And I'm leavin' here soon baby / I'm goin' down that sunny road," it is as though the blues is stuck in a time warp, repetitive of the earliest blues works from the 1920s. The notion of travel, in the age of Visa Gold, Avis rental cars, and Virgin Air, again hinges upon one's shoes, and the deliberate rhythmic pace and cadence of one foot in front of another. The old axiom applies here: "The more things change, the more things stay the same."

There is great reason for optimism as the blues enters a new century and millennium. More than ever, the music's fitness as a body of American melodious landscape appears stout and sturdy. David Nelson, Editor of *Living Blues* magazine, the semi-monthly standard of blues publications produced by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, spoke to the condition of the blues as it entered the year 2000. According to Nelson, "the African-American blues tradition remains resilient: with rising stars like Deborah Coleman, energetic veterans like Roy Gaines, and clever songwriters like Bob Jones on the scene, blues fans... should have much to look forward to in the new millennium" (Nelson, *Living Blues*, p. 6). True, the magazine's obituary pages continue to demonstrate the thinning of the ranks of the older generations of blues masters, but this should not necessarily be a cause for sadness. With the resurgence of the blues among the younger population, both black and white, vigorous new artists and blues interpretations will carry the tradition forward. But despite the mechanics and personalities of the music as it moves into the 21st century, one has to remember that the blues is based in the emotional element of the human condition. Survival, separation, love and sorrow and the dusty road: these are its very blood.

To that end, whether the source for sorrow is being suddenly one half of a former two, monetary or societal inequities, or the vast host of other woes that promote a feeling of melancholy, people will do as they often do in such situations: hit the road, usually by choice, whether or not that choice is forced or desired. The notion of travel will always, then, remain a central theme in the blues song tradition. In many
respects it seems to be the most enduring theme, and more than hints at being a valid definition of the music itself. While the blues is also music of great celebration when all is well, one doesn’t find much about the notion of displacement in those verses. But that is another study. Meanwhile, based on past experience, the blues will deal with many new issues in the year 2000 and beyond, including AIDS, economic downturn, global economics, and the ever-changing tastes of consumers.

Blues stories are told to assist others in similar situations cope with their present day misfortunes. That is the beauty of the blues. That is its therapeutic value. Much like a tuneful Rand McNally atlas, the blues charts a course for human persistence. Since travel is such a prominent motif in blues lyrics, it would appear that the journeys within the blues realm are not only literal, but figurative and psychological as well. Travel in blues lyrics serves to define the music’s enduring legacy.

A Select Discography: The Essential Fifty

Robert Frost once remarked that the art of the anthologist embodies the ultimate criticism: a work is either in or out. The following discography highlights those fifty blues collections deemed by the author to be essential to any blues collection. In other words, if a collector could only have a total of fifty, these are the fifty compilations an interested listener should have in their personal blues collection. Obviously, a great deal is left out in this ultimate criticism.

Obvious, too, the discography is a subjective opinion calculated to provide a broad overview of the blues. Some interested parties could accurately assert that blues saxophone players are not sufficiently represented. Still others might maintain that women blues artists are underemphasized. Additional ranks of people may state that lap guitar players are not adequately recognized. On and on these arguments could go, with the truth being that the majority of these concerns are valid.

What was attempted with the discography, then, was to produce a “working paper” that could be used by both the newcomer to the blues art form and the seasoned fan, one that would provide sufficient
insight to the artists and their music as to satisfy the demands of both camps. The discography is an attempt to span the generations of the blues, recognizing those unique backgrounds, styles, and historical contexts in which each of the artists lies. It is meant to be a broad primer into the blues that entices the reader to seek out further artists and their respective works. Though not totally comprehensive, the listing is designed to be representative and to have enough of everything to be valuable in its own right.

Because the theme of travel is so ubiquitous in blues lyrics, the discography does speak to the notion of travel within blues lyrics. In fact, a reader would be challenged to find any listing of the showcased artists and their works in which the theme of travel is not important. Of course, not all of the artists mentioned in the discography are represented in the narrative. To do so would simply be superfluous. But perhaps that is the whole point of the essay and the discography, and their unifying link. The notion of travel appears in virtually every blues artist’s lyrics, and to cite them all just for citation’s sake would be repetitive overkill. The essay and the discography are designed to be both dependent and complementary, and both parts are necessary for their full effect.

All of the collections in the discography are in print, readily available, and on CD format. An image of each collection’s respective cover art has been included, so that a search for the compilation will be easier. In short, the discography is a tool, nothing more, nothing less, but also an attempt to assemble the rich history of the blues, and the hundreds of thousands of recordings, into a succinct, selective package representative of both the variety and the themes of the form, including the travel motif. The effect of the essay and its complementary discography will have been successful if it motivates the reader to enthusiastically seek more recordings by other artists, because only then do the expansive, diverse styles within the music begin to unfold to the reader. That awareness, as it unfurls, perpetuates the blues’ survival as an art form and as a matchless piece of tapestry in the fabric of American heritage.


Otie Rush, Albert King: Otis Rush-Door To Door (MCA Records CHD-9223)
Works Cited

Billy Boy Arnold, *Eldorado Cadillac* (Alligator ALCD 4836)

Lurrie Bell, *Everybody Wants to Win* (JSP JSPCD 227)


Robert Johnson, *The Complete Recordings* (Columbia C2K 46222)

Albert King, *The Blues Masters: The Very Best of Albert King* (Rhino R2 75703)

Little Walter, *The Best of Little Walter* (MCA-Chess Records CHD-9192)

Magic Slim, *Raw Magic* (Alligator ALCD 4728)


Charley Patton, *Founder of the Delta Blues* (Yazoo 1020)


Otis Rush, *Albert King/Otis Rush-Door To Door* (MCA Records CHD-9322)
Muddy Waters, The Chess Box (MCA-Chess Records CHD3-80002)

"Father of The Delta Blues" – Charley Patton (Vernon 1926)
A collection of 23 of the most powerful blues recordings of all time, dating from 1926 to 1934. Patton was of immense significance in blues history, combining a gritty, gargantuan, earthy voice with a percussive guitar technique, and overt showmanship. He was a tremendous influence on Delta blues legend, Robert Johnson, as well as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Tommy Johnson, and Elmore James. On CD.

Song Titles
- Screamin’ And Hollerin’ The Blues
- Down The Dirt Road Blues
- Mississippi Bo Weevil Blues
- Green River Blues
- A Spoonful Blues
- Moon Going Down
- Tombstone Blues
- Rider Green Blues
- When Your Way Gets Dark
- Dry Well Blues
- High Water Everywhere Part I
- High Water Everywhere Part II
- Shake It And Break It
- Pony Blues
- Bird Nest Bound
- Some These Days I’ll Be Gone
- Beaux Rooster Blues
- 34 Blues
- High Sheriff Blues
- Stone Pony Blues
- Hammer Blues
- It Won’t Be Long
- Going To Move To Alabama
- Poor Me
"Founder Of The Delta Blues" – Charley Patton (Yazoo 1020)
A collection of 23 of the most powerful blues recordings of all time, dating from 1929 to 1934. Patton was of immense significance in blues history, combining a gritty, gargantuan, earthy voice with a percussive guitar technique, and overt showmanship. He was a tremendous influence on Delta blues legend, Robert Johnson, as well as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Tommy Johnson, and Elmore James. On CD.

Song Titles
- Screamin' And Hollerin' The Blues
- Down The Dirt Road Blues
- Mississippi Bo Weavil Blues
- Green River Blues
- A Spoonful Blues
- Moon Going Down
- Tom Rushen Blues
- Elder Green Blues
- When Your Way Gets Dark
- Dry Well Blues
- High Water Everywhere Part I
- High Water Everywhere Part II
- Shake It And Break It
- Pony Blues
- Bird Nest Bound
- Some These Days I'll Be Gone
- Banty Rooster Blues
- 34 Blues
- High Sheriff Blues
- Stone Pony Blues
- Hammer Blues
- It Won't Be Long
- Going To Move To Alabama
- Poor Me
"The Complete Recordings" – Robert Johnson (Columbia C2K 46222)
The definitive acoustic blues collection, from the most influential of all blues artists, that includes all 41 takes of Johnson’s 29 sides. Chilling vocal performances, spine-tingling slide guitar, and poetic, surreal vocal imagery are presented here in a special collector’s box set that includes a 48-page booklet with biographical essays and very rare photos. Many blues standards occupy this anthology. This is the ultimate collection of an American musical legend, whose influence touches virtually every guitar player in all genres. On two CDs.

Song Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD #1</th>
<th>CD #2</th>
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<td>Kindhearted Woman Blues (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>I Believe I’ll Dust My Broom</td>
<td>If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day</td>
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<td>Sweet Home Chicago</td>
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<td>Rambling On My Mind (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>Little Queen Of Spades (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>32-20 Blues</td>
<td>Drunken Hearted Man (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>They’re Red Hot</td>
<td>Me And The Devil Blues (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>Dead Shrimp Blues</td>
<td>Stop Breakin’ Down Blues (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>Cross Road Blues (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td>Walking Blues</td>
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<td>Last Fair Deal Gone Down</td>
<td>Love In Vain (Takes I and II)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Milkcow’s Calf Blues (Takes I and II)</td>
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“Ragtime Guitar’s Foremost Fingerpicker” – Blind Blake (Yazoo 1068)

Dating from 1926 to 1932, these 23 cuts illustrate the richness of his work. Blake employed a complex, sophisticated picking style, which allowed him to not rely on fixed accompaniments. Rather, his approach was one of rhythm, melody, and chordal structure. Elements of jazz, and even ragtime, permeate Blake’s efforts, demonstrated by his sense of phrasing. On CD.

Song Titles

- Diddie Wa Diddie
- Come On Boys Let’s Do That Messin’ Around
- Southern Flag
- Police Dog Blues
- C.C. Pil Blues
- Hard Pushing Papa
- Rope Stretching Blues
- Skeedle Loo Doo Blues
- Chump Man Blues
- Hastings Street
- Georgia Bound
- Righteous Blues
- Too Tight Blues #2
- Blind Arthur’s Breakdown
- One Time Blues
- Playing Policy Blues
- You Gonna Quit Me Blues
- Bad Feeling Blues
- Hey Hey Daddy Blues
- Black Dog Blues
- Seaboard Stomp
- Sweet Papa Low Down
- Sweet Jivin’ Mama
"In Chronological Order, Volume 1, 1927-1932" – Big Bill Broonzy (Document DOCD-5050)

Volume one of 12 total in this series, these are the earliest recordings of the man of whom it is said dedicated his life to having a good time. These sides find Big Bill alone, or in tandem with various aggregations with the likes of John Thomas, Georgia Tom Dorsey, and Steele Smith. His offerings managed to couple the rough-hewn qualities of rural blues with the more refined sounds of urban blues. Broonzy went on to acclaim in Europe late in his career, but these are the choice examples of his mastery. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- House Rent Stomp
- Big Bill Blues (20373)
- Down In The Basement Blues
- Starvation Blues (20923)
- I Can't Be Satisfied
- Grandma's Farm
- Skoodle Do Do (9601)
- Tadpole Blues
- Skoodle Do Do (16573)
- Saturday Night Rub
- Pig Meat Strut
- Papa's Getting' Hot
- Police Station Blues
- They Can't Do That
- State Street Woman
- Meanest Kind Of Blues
- I Got The Blues For My Baby
- The Banker's Blues
- How You Want It Done? (17284)
- Too Too Train Blues (18383)
- Mistreatin' Mamma (18384)
- Big Bill Blues (18385)
- Brown Skin Shuffle
- Stove Pipe Stomp
- Beedle Um Bum
- Selling That Stuff
While including the indispensable 1930 Son House sides, this disc is essential due to its offerings by haunting Delta blues influences Willie Brown, Kid Bailey, Garfield Akers, Joe Calicott, Jim Thompkins, Blind Joe Reynolds, and Rube lacy. This collection is absolutely the finest Delta blues primer. On CD.

Song Titles

Son House
- My Black Mama – Parts I & II
- Preachin’ The Blues – Parts I & II
- Dry Spell Blues – Parts I & II
  Willie Brown
- M & O Blues
- Future Blues
  Kid Bailey
- Mississippi Bottom Blues
- Rowdy Blues
  Garfield Akers
- Cottonfield Blues – Parts I & II
- Dough Roller Blues
  Joe Calicott
- Fare Thee Well Blues
- Traveling Mama Blues
  Jim Thompkins
- Bedside Blues
  Blind Joe Reynolds
- Outside Woman Blues
- Nehi Blues
- Married Man Blues
- Third Street Woman Blues
  Rube lacy
- Mississippi Jail House Groan
- Ham Hound Crave
Sixteen newly remastered cuts are presented here, fourteen from 1935, all showcasing Davis’ complicated, rhythmic, and counter-point guitar style. His coarse vocal delivery is in stark contrast to his guitar smoothness. Two sides here date from a 1949 session. Fourteen of the songs are religious in nature, with two being straight blues. That was the beauty of Rev. Davis, the ability to blur the line between the two extremes. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- I Belong To The Band – Hallelujah!
- The Great Change In Me
- The Angel’s Message To Me
- I Saw The Light
- Lord, Stand By Me
- I Am The Light
- O Lord, Search My Heart
- Have More Faith In Jesus
- You Got To Go Down
- I Am The True Vine
- Twelve Gates To The City
- You Can Go Home
- I’m Throwin’ Up My Hand
- Cross And Evil Woman Blues
- I Can’t Bear My Burden By Myself
- Meet Me At The Station
Showcasing the work of many of the blues' greatest pianists, this 14-track collection highlights cuts produced from 1927 to 1936. As the flow of manual laborers followed available work on the turpentine camps in the south, the term "barrelhousing" came to refer to a hard drinking, hard living lifestyle. Subsequently, itinerant piano players followed the migration, playing the camps' jukes hoping to cash in on the free flow of money being expended by the encampment personnel. This disc is an excellent introduction to the sophistication, and yet conversely, the power, and diversity, beginning to unfold in piano blues of this period. On CD.

**Song Titles**

- Cow Cow Davenport
  - State Street Jive
  - Little Brother Montgomery
- Charley Taylor
  - Heavy Suitcase Blues
  - Barrelhouse Welsh
- Vicksburg Blues No. 2
  - Montana Taylor
  - Dying Pickpocket Blues
  - Louise Johnson
- Indiana Avenue Stomp
  - Bob Call
  - On the Wall
  - Iabo Williams
- Thirty-One Blues
  - Lonnie Johnson
  - Polack Blues
  - Jesse James
- Sam, You're Just A Rat
  - George Noble
  - Ramrod
  - Joe Dean
  - Raymond Barrow
- Seminole Blues
  - Joe Dean
  - Walking Blues
  - Joe Ezell
- I'm So Glad That I'm Twenty-One
  - Barrelhouse Woman (Take 2)
  - Years Old Today
“In His Prime” – Furry Lewis (Yazoo 1050)

These 14 cuts, dating from 1927 and 1928, highlight Lewis’ characteristically loose-bar guitar structure, and understated vocal approach. Oftentimes, Lewis’ laid-back vocals were laced with humorous asides. In his later years, he was dubbed “The Memphis Blues Ambassador”, and actually made prime-time television and feature motion picture appearances. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Good Looking Girl Blues
- Falling Down Blues
- I Will Turn Your Money Green
- Mean Old Bedbug Blues
- Furry’s Blues
- Mistreatin’ Mamma
- Cannonball Blues
- Jellyroll
- Why Don’t You Come Home Blues
- Kassie Jones Parts I & II
- Everybody’s Blues
- Rock Island Blues
- Judge Harsh Blues
"Masters Of The Delta Blues The Friends Of Charlie Patton" – Various Artists (Yazoo 2002)
Here is the definitive introduction to the Delta blues. Twenty-three sides from the “Who’s Who” of Delta blues dating from the period between the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s comprise this collection. Rarely does a compilation capture the true essence of a particular style and feel of an art form. Such is the case with this disc. This anthology truly represents the vitality of Delta blues. On CD.

Song Titles
Kid Bailey
- Rowdy Blues
- I Am In The Heavenly Way
- On The Wall
- Walking Blues (unissued test)
- Mississippi Bottom Blues
- Promise True And Grand
- Miss Highway Blues
- Maggie Campbell Blues

Tommy Johnson
- My Black Mama Blues (part 1)
- My Black Mama Blues (part 2)
- Preachin’ The Blues (part 1)
- Preachin’ The Blues (part 2)
- Preachin’ The Blues (part 2)

Bukka White
- Big Fat Mama Blues
- I Am In The Heavenly Way
- Future Blues
- Brown Mama Blues
- Canned Heat Blues
- Promise True And Grand
- Miss Highway Blues
- Maggie Campbell Blues

Son House
- My Black Mama Blues (part 1)
- My Black Mama Blues (part 2)
- Long Way From Home
- Button Up Shoes (take 1, unissued test)
- Lonesome Home Blues (take 1, unissued test)

Bertha Lee
- Walking Blues
- Dry Spell Blues (part 1)
- Dry Spell Blues (part 2)
- Preachin’ The Blues (part 1)
- Preachin’ The Blues (part 2)

Louise Johnson
- Brown Mama Blues
- Future Blues
- On The Wall
- Walking Blues (unissued test)
- Mississippi Bottom Blues
- Promise True And Grand
- Miss Highway Blues
- Maggie Campbell Blues

Willie Brown
- Lonesome Home Blues
- Future Blues
- Button Up Shoes (take 1, unissued test)
- Lonesome Home Blues (take 1, unissued test)

Ishmon Bracey
- Brown Mama Blues
- Future Blues
- Brown Mama Blues
- Miss Highway Blues

Louise Johnson
- My Black Mama Blues (part 2)
- Long Way From Home
- Button Up Shoes (take 1, unissued test)
- Lonesome Home Blues (take 1, unissued test)

Roger Rooster Blues
- Right Of Way Blues
- Big Night Blues
"King Of The Country Blues" – Blind Lemon Jefferson (Yazoo 1069)
This first in-depth documentary of Jefferson and his music is comprised of 23 cuts, profiling his propulsive force in blues music lore. Emotive singing and symmetrical guitar phrasing abound. Jefferson is widely considered the first commercially successful recording artist, due mainly to his vast wanderings and subsequent performances. His ability to record and travel freely opened the door to recording contracts for a great many other country blues artists. His repertoire included straight blues, spirituals, labor songs, and folk tunes. On CD.

Song Titles
- That Crawlin' Baby Blues
- Bad Luck Blues
- Matchbox Blues
- Hot Dogs
- One Dime Blues
- Shuckin' Sugar
- Rabbit Foot Blues
- Corrina Blues
- See That My Grave Is Kept Clean
- Easy Rider Blues
- Broke And Hungry
- Black Horse Blues
- Lonesome House Blues
- Oil Well Blues
- He Arose From The Dead
- Beggin' Back
- Prison Cell Blues
- Rambler Blues
- Gone Dead On You Blues
- Wartime Blues
- Booger Rooger Blues
- Right Of Way Blues
- Big Night Blues
“Steppin' On The Blues” – Lonnie Johnson (Columbia CK 46221)

These 19 sides dating from 1925 to 1932 showcase Johnson's status as a blues singer and composer extraordinaire, a magnificent accompanist, and one of the most technically advanced of all blues guitarists, seeming to utilize and sophisticated, swinging style. Resourceful, original, and dynamic, Johnson was indeed one of the most influential blues artists of all time. On CD.

Song Titles
- Mr. Johnson's Blues
- Sweet Potato Blues
- Steppin' On The Blues
- I Done Told You
- Mean Old Bedbug Blues
- Toothache Blues Parts I & II
- Have To Change Keys (To Play These Blues)
- Guitar Blues
- She’s Making Whoopee In Hell Tonight
- Playing With The Strings
- No More Women Blues
- Deep Blue Sea Blues
- No More Troubles Now
- Got The Blues For Murder Only
-Untitled
- 6/88 Glide
- Racketeer's Blues
- I'm Nuts About That Gal
“Complete Recorded Works In Chronological Order – Volume 1” – Blind Boy Fuller (Document DOCD-5091)

This collection represents volume one in a series of seven, the earliest cuts of a master blues artisan who recorded 129 irreproachable titles displaying his total untouchable roster of well-developed modes of playing, including rags and straight-ahead blues. Fuller was equally adept employing intricate finger picking as well as bottleneck guitar methodologies. Fuller was also a highly skilled, confident, and subtle singer. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Baby, I Don’t Have To Worry
- I’m A Rattlesnakin’ Daddy
- I’m Climbing On Top Of The Hill
- Ain’t It A Crying Shame?
- Looking For My Woman
- Rag, Mama, Rag Parts I & II
- Baby, You Gotta Change Your Mind
- Evil Hearted Woman
- My Brownskin Sugar Plum
- Somebody’s Been Playing With That Thing
- Log Cabin Blues (*takes 1 & 2*)
- Homesick And Lonesome Blues
- Walking My Troubles Away (*takes 1 & 2*)
- Black And Tan
- Keep Away From My Woman (*takes 1 & 2*)
- Babe You Got To Do Better
- Big Bed Blues
- Truckin’ My Blues Away
- (I Got A Woman Crazy For Me) She’s Funny That Way
- Cat Man Blues (*take 1*)
Wheatstraw is found here alone and in tandem with Charlie McCoy, Charlie Jordan, and J.D. Short, whether he is displaying his vast piano or guitar skills. He made over 160 recordings during his prolific career, and these earliest sides from mid-1930 to early 1932 are among his finest. He had a swooping falsetto delivery, employing great range and affect. On CD.

Song Titles

- Tennessee Peaches Blues
- Four O' Clock In The Morning
- Don't Feel Welcome Blues
- Strange Man Blues
- School Days
- So Soon
- So Long Blues
- Mama's Advice
- Ain't It A Pity And A Shame?
- Don't Hang My Clothes On No Barb Wire Line
- C And A Blues
- Six Weeks Old Blues
- Devil's Son-In-Law
- Pete Wheatstraw
- Creeping Blues
- Ice And Snow Blues
- The Break I'm Getting' (Pretty Boy Walker, vcl)
- Hog-Love Blues (Pretty Boy Walker, vcl)
- Police Station Blues
- All Alone Blues
- Can't See Blues
- Sleepless Nights Blues
- I'm Going Missing My Blues Away
- Down South
- Beauty Paris
- Until My Love Comes
- Honey Bee Blues
The immortal Sonny Boy Williamson I (John Lee Williamson) displays his harmonica prowess here in all its innovative glory. It can be said that Williamson forever altered the perception of the harmonica, and its role in the blues, bringing it out of the shadows as an accompanying device and taking it to the ranks of a lead instrument. These early sides are fresh in their approach, and many are considered blues classics and mainstays. This first of seven volumes in the series pays homage to Williamson’s vision of the blues harmonica’s transition to a broader plane instrument. On CD.

Song Titles

- Good Morning, School Girl
- Blue Bird
- Jackson Blues
- Got The Bottle Up And Go
- Sugar Mama Blues
- Skinny Woman
- Up The Country Blues
- Worried Me Blues
- Black Gal Blues
- Collector Man Blues
- Frigidaire Blues
- Suzanna Blues
- Early In The Morning
- Project Highway
- My Little Cornelius
- Decoration Blues
- You Can Lead Me
- Moonshine
- Miss Louisa Blues
- Sunny Land
- I’m Tired Trucking My Blues Away
- Down South
- Beauty Parlor
- Until My Love Come Down
- Honey Bee Blues
This collection tenderly highlights the work of one of the greatest pre-World War II solo country blues artists. McTell was a faultless finger picker on the twelve-string guitar, with a voice that was understated and eloquent, rendering them with uniquely exacting warmth. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Broke Down Engine Blues
- Mama Tain’t Long For Day
- Georgia Rag
- Love Changing Blues
- Statesboro Blues
- Stomp Down Rider
- Savannah Mama
- Travelin’ Blues
- Drive Away Blues
- Warm It Up To Me
- Three Women Blues
- Writing Paper Blues
- Southern Can Is Mine
- Talkin’ To Myself
It is not widely known that Bukka was B.B. King's uncle, but their respective styles could not be any more diverse. While B.B. is a fluid, single-string artisan, Bukka's serrated guitar efforts would seem archaic in comparison. Besides, he often employed heavy slide guitar work in his songs. These cuts from 1937 to 1940 are a fascinating poetic and autobiographical collection, moving the blues to the realm of fine art. Lyrics are well thought out, and are heightened immeasurably by Bukka's vocal intensity. Simply, there is an amazing interplay between voice and guitar. On CD.

Song Titles
- Pinebluff, Arkansas
- Shake 'Em On Down
- Black Train Blues
- Strange Place Blues
- When Can I Change My Clothes?
- Sleepy Man Blues
- Parchman Farm Blues
- Good Gin Blues
- High Fever Blues
- District Attorney Blues
- Fixin' To Die Blues
- Aberdeen Mississippi Blues
- Bukka's Jitterbug Swing
- Special Streamline
With seven total volumes in this series, this disc is a fine introduction to the always-pleasing sounds of this strong-throated artist. With Arnett Nelson on clarinet, Big Bill Broonzy handling the guitar duties, and Black Bob holding down the piano work, cut for cut, this collection is the most satisfying of all the available volumes. Sam’s rhythmic wasboard playing augmented his always-inexhaustible songwriting capabilities. On CD.

Song Titles

- Easy Ridin’ Mama
- The Big Boat
- Black Door
- We Gonna Move
- Low Down Woman
- I Drink Good Whiskey
- Lowland Blues
- I’m On My Way Blues
- Washboard’s Barrel House Song
- Want To Woogie Some More
- Ladies’ Man
- You Got To Take It
- Beer Garden Blues
- Where Were You Last Night?
- Somebody’s Got To Go
- Gonna Be Some Walkin’ Done
- Second Story Man
- Don’t Leave Me Here
- My Woman’s A Sender
- Towboat Blues
- Mountain Blues
- Phantom Black Snake
- Yellow, Black And Brown
"I'm A Guitar King" — Tommy McLennan (Wolf WBCD-001)

This collection is a strong ingress into this hard-hitting Mississippi bluesman. The ferocity of his vocals, and his rough-and-ready, confident strummed guitar style must have really opened some eyes in the jukes, and on the street corners, of the South. Although often crudely structured, his compositions often harbored tremendous fury and emotional passion. And similarly, while often improvised, there can be no denying the lacerating chordal musings. On CD.

Song Titles
- Brown Skin Gal
- Baby, Don’t You Wanna Go?
- I’m Goin’, Don’t You Know
- She’s Just Good Huggin’ Size
- My Little Gal
- My Baby’s Doggin’ Me
- She’s A Good Looking Mama
- New Sugar Mama
- Down To Skin And Bone
- Katy Mae Blues
- Love With A Feeling
- Drop Down Mama
- Black Minnie
- Elsie Blues
- Cross Cut Saw Blues
- You Can’t Read My Mind
- Deep Blue Sea Blues
- I’m A Guitar King
- It’s A Cryin’ Pity
- Mozelle Blues
“Full Spectrum Blues” — Various Artists (Star Sounds SS3711-2)
This collection, all 65 tunes, highlighting rural, piano/boogie woogie, classical vaudeville, and urban blues, provides a little something for everybody. A very good argument could be made that this offering provides the blues novice with a thorough jumping-off point into the music, and that’s true. However, it is varied enough, and contains sufficient obscure cuts to make it of significant value to even the serious collector.
The compilers of this collection did a very good job on enhancing the sound of the older selections, and a 14 page booklet provides interesting artist biographical information. On CD.

Song Titles
Space constraints prohibit the listing of all titles. Instead, the following individual disc information conveys the artists represented on each respective CD.

CD One

CD Two

CD Three
Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox, Butterbeans & Susie, Rosa Henderson, Bertha Hill, Clara Smith, Lucille Hegamin, Sara Martin, Coot Grant & Sox Wilson, Viola McCoy, Sippie Wallace, Lizzie Miles, Victoria Spivey.

CD Four
Washboard Sam, Tampa Red, Bumble Bee Slim, Memphis Minnie, Ollie Shepard, Yas Yas Girl, Jimmie Gordon, Big Bill Broonzy, Lil Green, Big Joe Turner, Trixie Smith, Georgia White, Doctor Clayton, Harlem Hamfats, Sonny Boy Williamson, Jimmy Rushing, Billie Holiday.
Blues historian Alan Lomax recorded House, a peer of Charlie Patton, and an immense influence on Robert Johnson during 1941 and 1942 trips to Mississippi. All of House's trademark forcefulness and striking power are evident here. These cuts include Willie Brown on guitar, Fiddlin' Joe Martin on mandolin, and Leroy Williams on harmonica. On CD.

Song Titles

- Levee Camp Blues
- Government Fleet Blues
- Walking Blues
- Shetland Pony Blues
- Delta Blues
- Special Rider Blues
- Low Down Dirty Dog Blues
- Depot Blues
- American Defense
- Am I Right Or Wrong
- Walking Blues
- County Farm Blues
- The Pony Blues
- The Jinx Blues
- The Jinx Blues
"The Goldstar Session – Volume 1" – Lightning Hopkins (Arhoolie CD-330)

One of the greatest and most popular post-World War II Texas country singers, poets, and guitarists of all-time, these 24 selections date from the period of 1947 to 1950, and display Hopkins' then and there vocal improvisations, and distinctive and effectual guitar style that combined tattered rhythms and accurate, deliberate picking. On CD.

Song Titles
- Short Haired Woman
- Baby Please Don't Go
- Going Back Home (Going Back To Talk To Mama)
- Automobile Blues
- Big Mama Jump
- Loretta Blues
- Seems Funny Baby
- Thunder And Lightning Blues (Coolin' Board Blues)
- Grosebeck Blues
- Tim Moore's Farm
- Lightning Blues
- Traveler's Blues
- Goodbye Blues
- Unkind Blues
- Fast Life Woman
- Zolo Go (Zydeco)
- You Don't Know
- Treat Me Kind
- Somebody Got To Go
- Death Bells
- Mad With You
- Airplane Blues
"The King Of The Chicago Blues" — Big Maceo (Arhoolie CD 7009)
This collection spans the years 1941 to 1945, and finds the undisputed leader of the Chicago blues piano scene in his most powerful and beautiful form. Accompanied by the great Tampa Red on guitar, and sporadically elsewhere by other notable sidemen, these sides rank with the cream of the crop of recorded piano blues. This collection is a substantial study in true craftsmanship, and clearly displays his forceful, thrashing style, rooted heavily on the bass notes that rolled like thunder. On CD.

Song Titles
- Worried Life Blues
- Ramblin' Mind Blues
- County Jail Blues
- Can't You Read
- So Long Baby
- Texas Blues
- Tuff Luck Blues
- I Got The Blues
- Bye Bye Baby
- Poor Kelly Blues
- Some Sweet Day
- Anytime For You
- My Last Go Round
- Since You Been Gone
- Kidman Blues
- I'm So Worried
- Things Have Changed
- My Own Troubles
- Maceo's 32-20
- Texas Stomp
- Winter Time Blues
- Detroit Jump
- Won't Be A Fool No More
- Big Road Blues
- Chicago Breakdown
"Rock It" — Roosevelt Sykes (Wolf CD-WBJ 004)
Compiling Sykes' essential dates from the post World War II era of 1946 to 1954, these 18 selections find Sykes in various aggregations with Dave Bartholomew, Johnny Morton, and "Sax" Mallard, and their respective bands. Sykes was able to combine a layered chord arrangements and thoughtful treble work, sometimes bordering on jazz constructions. Sykes was a prolific solo artist as well, but this collection is a noble initial departure into his music. On CD.

Song Titles
- Until The Cows Come Home
- Drivin' Wheel
- Living In A Different World
- Wintertime Blues
- Stop Her Poppa
- Blues'N'Boogie
- My Baby Is Gone
- That's My Gal
- Rock It
- Candy Man Blues
- Why Should I Cry
- Green Onion Top
- Sweet Old Chicago
- You Can't Be Lucky All The Time
- Hush Oh Hush
- Crazy Fox
- Little Sam
- Anytime Is The Right Time
"Boogie Awhile" – John Lee Hooker (Krazy Kat CD 05)
These 22 remastered cuts contain scarce and unissued Hooker recordings from his early period with the JVB, Staff/Prize, and Danceland labels. Many of Hooker’s recordings demonstrate his affinity for relentless one chord rhythmic development, and ghostly shades of various tunings, sporadic flurries of jagged notes, and an overall sense of chugging cadences. His voice combines that ability to come form the bottom registers slowly, all done with a cautious, unforgettable quality.

On CD.

Song Titles
- Morning Blues
- Boogie Awhile
- Tuesday Evening
- Miss Pearl Boogie
- Good Business
- Mercy Blues
- Boogie Woogie
- I Love To Boogie
- Highway Blues
- Miss Rosie Mae (alternate take)
- Wayne County Ramblin’ Blues
- Leavin’ Chicago
- Shake Your Boogie
- Poor Slim (take 2)
- Must I Wait Till Your Man Is Gone
- Cotton Pickin’ Boogie
- Do The Boogie
- Christmas Time Blues
- Boogie Rambler
- No More Doggin’
- I’m A Boogie Man
- I Came To See You Baby
"The Chess Box" – Muddy Waters (MCA CHD3-80002)
This collection represents the pinnacle of urban blues, and vividly illustrates the transition of country blues into a tough city medium, the point where the line between performance, art form, and personal message blur. This 72-song collection includes a 32-page booklet chocked full of biographical and discography information. From his earliest sides for the Artistic label in 1947, through all the classic Chess label offerings right up until 1972, Muddy's influence on, and mastery of, the idiom shine through. Muddy's bands were always considered the proving grounds for sidemen, many of whom went on to become post-World War II blues stars in their own right. A short list would include harmonica players Little Walter, Junior Wells, James Cotton, George Smith, Walter Horton, and Mojo Buford. Great guitarists also passed through the bands, including Jimmy Rogers, Sammy Lawhorn, Pee Wee Madison, Buddy Guy, and Bob Margolin. Piano masters aplenty took their turns in Waters' great band aggregations, including Pinetop Perkins, Lovie Lee, and the great Otis Spann. Drummers include Willie Smith and Elga Evans, as well as bass players of broad talent like Willie Dixon and Calvin Smith. The chance to play with Waters was considered an honor, and his music pressed forward with an insistence, urgency, and overt sexuality that brought women to their knees and men to the height of machismo. The early 1960s British blues revival was primarily fueled by the works of a short list of post-World War II blues master, of which Muddy was the benchmark. The great British rock group, the Rolling Stones, actually took their name from one of Waters' tunes. Along with the Robert Johnson collection, this compilation would be suggested the two most important, if only two anthologies could be owned. On CD.

Song Titles
Space constraints prohibit the listing of all titles. Instead, the following individual disc information conveys the time period covered by each respective CD.

CD One
1947 to January 1954.

CD Two
April 1954 to August 1959.

CD Three
"The Chess Box" – Howlin' Wolf (MCA CHD3-9332)

He crawled, stalked, and menaced his audiences in live performance, and quite simply, was one of the most passionate blues artists to have ever lived and carried out the essence of the blues. His ferocious act, his potent harmonica playing, wrenching guitar work, and maniacal vocals, and his will to overwhelm his listening audience made him a legend. This 71-track collection includes a 32-page booklet with complete biographical and discography information. Wolf's earliest 1951 Memphis cuts are found here, and follow his recording odyssey at Chess through 1973. Wolf was a musical might, and like his chief contemporary and musical rival, Muddy Waters, his bands were the other great proving ground for a legion of fantastic blues talent. Piano players such as Detroit Junior and Henry Gray graced his stage, as did guitarists Hubert Sumlin, Jody Williams, and Willie Johnson. Today's reigning blues tenor saxophone talent Eddie Shaw owes his debt to Wolf. Drummers Earl Phillips and Sam Lay demonstrate the breadth of rhythm players who dearly fought for a place in Wolf's bands. This literal giant of over six feet three inches, all 300 pounds of him, gave to the blues world music that matched his gargantuan stature, and this collection breathes fire, passion, and honest emotion. On CD.

**Song Titles**
Space constraints prohibit the listing of all titles. Instead, the following individual disc information conveys the time period covered by each respective CD.

**CD One**
May 1951 to March 1955.

**CD Two**
March 1955 to September 1962.

**CD Three**
“The Best Of Little Walter, Volume 1” – Little Walter (MCA CHD-9192)

The 12 tracks of this collection encompass the finest that this harmonica master ever produced, employing a melodic range and wide assortment of tonal inflections in a style that virtually every blues harmonica player has since emulated. Walter not only had the ability to recreate the full, broad sounds of the saxophone, an instrument whose tones he found melodically pleasing, but he also did so utilizing modern amplification techniques that only augmented his efforts. He also possessed a voice that could be both mournful and swinging, depending on the subject matter of the tune, and a dedication to musical arrangement far ahead of many of his peers. His all too brief life (he died at age 38 as a result of injuries incurred during a street fight) gave us only a glimpse of his true genius. Whether as Muddy Waters’ band sideman or recording mate, or as a solo artist, Little Walter remains the most imitated blues harmonica player to this day. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- My Babe
- Sad Hours
- You’re So Fine
- Last Night
- Blues With A Feeling
- Can’t Hold Out Much Longer
- Juke
- Old Mean World
- Off The Wall
- You Better Watch Yourself
- Blue Light
- Tell Me Mama
“Chicago Bound” — Jimmy Rogers (MCA CHD-93000)
The 14 selections presented here allow a glimpse into the talents of the rock-solid rhythm guitar sideman of the greatest Muddy Waters band ever assembled, which at that time include Little Walter on harmonica and Elga Evans on drums. His assured, confident vocals mesh sturdily with his sparse, yet effective, lead guitar licks, showcasing Rogers’ brilliance. Simply, he didn’t overplay when others may have, and when he did solo, the notes were well chosen and conveyed succinctly the mood at hand. These releases from 1950 to 1956, with Little Walter on harmonica and Muddy Waters lending guitar support, provided the springboard for this staple of the Muddy Waters band to breakthrough as a lead blues artist in his own right. On CD.

Song Titles
- You’re The One
- Money, Marbles And Chalk
- Luedella
- Act Like You Love Me
- Back Door Friend
- Last Time
- I Used To Have A Woman
- Sloopy (sic) Drunk
- Blues Leave Me Alone
- Out On The Road
- Goin’ Away Baby
- That’s All Right
- Chicago Bound
- Walking By Myself
“T-Bone Blues” – T-Bone Walker (Atlantic 8020-2)

Recorded between 1955 and 1957, these 15 sides are velvet thunder, inventive and moving, jazz-tinged, subtle, and fiercely burning at the same time. Lyrics come to life, and the guitar dances. This is swing, pure and simple. An immense influence on countless guitarists, including modern-day practitioners such as Hollywood Fats, Junior Watson, and Duke Robillard, T-Bone's emphasis on sweet, robust chording and cascading flourishes of single notes remains the model of the point where restraint and emphatic drive blur. On CD.

Song Titles

- Papa Ain’t Salty
- Why Not
- T-Bone Shuffle
- Play On Little Girl
- Mean Old World
- T-Bone Blues
- Call It Stormy Monday
- Blues For Marili
- Shufflin’ The Blues
- Evenin’
- Two Bones And A Pick
- You Don’t Know What You’re Doing
- How Long Blues
- Blues Rock
"King Of The Slide Guitar" – Elmore James (Capricorn 9 42006-2)

This two CD set, 50 cuts in all, captures the all the frantic emotionalism of James' slide guitar and voice. There is a nerve-twisting pace to many of these cuts, yet some of the tunes wrench sheer misery and longing at every turn. The vocals cry out, and then will tenderly yearn, but in a manner that begs questions as to whether there is any more emphatic anxiety James can exhibit. His slide guitar work oftentimes echoes his vocals, utilizing the call-and-response style of early rural blues to a maximum urban benefit. Frenzied, shouting, and emotive at the same time, James carried the demonstrative qualities of the blues to new heights. On CD.

Song Titles

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<th>CD #1</th>
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<td>The Sky Is Crying</td>
<td>Got To Move</td>
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<td>Baby Please Set A Date</td>
<td>Shake Your Moneymaker</td>
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<td>Held My Baby Last Night</td>
<td>Look On Yonders Wall</td>
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<td>Dust My Broom</td>
<td>Sunnyland Train</td>
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<td>Bobby's Rock</td>
<td>Mean Mistreatin' Mama</td>
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<td>Rollin' And Tumblin'</td>
<td>Go Back Home Again</td>
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<td>Done Somebody Wrong</td>
<td>You Know You're Wrong</td>
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<td>Something Inside Me</td>
<td>You Know You Done Me Wrong</td>
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<td>I'm Worried</td>
<td>I've Got A Right To Love My Baby</td>
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<td>Fine Little Mama</td>
<td>Everyday I Have The Blues</td>
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<td>I Need You</td>
<td>Dust My Broom</td>
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<td>Early One Morning</td>
<td>It Hurts Me Too</td>
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<td>I Can't Stop Loving You</td>
<td>Talk To Me Baby</td>
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<td>Strange Angel</td>
<td>Can't Stop Lovin' My Baby</td>
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<td>She Done Moved</td>
<td>She's Got To Go</td>
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<td>My Baby's Gone</td>
<td>Hand In Hand</td>
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<td>Anna Lee</td>
<td>Pickin' The Blues</td>
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<td>(My Bleeding Heart)</td>
<td>Twelve Year Old Boy</td>
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<td>Standing At The Crossroads</td>
<td>I Believe</td>
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<td>One Way Out</td>
<td>I Gotta Go Now</td>
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<td>My Kind Of Woman</td>
<td>Up Jumped Elmore</td>
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<td>Person To Person</td>
<td>Make My Dreams Come True</td>
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<td>Find My Kind Of Woman (previously unreleased)</td>
<td>Back In Mississippi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Find My Kind Of Woman</td>
<td>Blacksnake Blues</td>
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<td>So Unkind</td>
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“The Best Of B.B. King, Volume 1” — B.B. King (Flair 2-91691)

B.B. King remains the most visible and widest known blues performer ever, due in large part to his hugely popular and remembered 1970 crossover hit “The Thrill Is Gone”. Until this song hit the charts, blues remained primarily a musical form recognized and appreciated, on a whole, by blacks and pockets of young white enthusiasts. B.B. brought the blues, via this song, into the living rooms of households all over the world. B.B.’s sound relies on highly simplistic, yet tremendously effective single-string runs. There can be a swinging quality to King’s uptempo numbers, and a mournful, tortured sense on his more serious tunes. His guitar solos, in essence, became extensions of his vocals. When one listens to B.B.’s work, it could be said that there are times when the arrangements flow so well and effortlessly, that they seem to be polished. But just when that feeling may be rearing its head on the listener, one is captured by just how meticulous and succinct the sentiment of the song is being conveyed. In short, his works are pure and simple, yet amazingly successful. King’s voice can exhibit tension on the more downbeat tunes, and wildly rejoice on the upbeat numbers. These original R.P.M., Modern, and Kent sides are some of his finest work, and date from the 1950s. There are swinging horns, strong vocals, and a delicate interplay always, lending this collection a striking vitality. One aside, “Beautician Blues” is nearly as perfect blues tune that can be fit into a two-minute format. On CD.

Song Titles
- You Upset Me Baby
- Every Day (I Have The Blues)
- 5 Long Years
- Sweet Little Angel
- Beautician Blues
- Dust My Broom
- Three O’Clock Blues
- Aint That Just Like A Woman
- I’m King
- Sweet Sixteen
- A Whole Lot Of Lovin’
- Mean Ole Frisco
- Please Accept My Love
- Going Down Slow
- Blues For Me
- You Don’t Know
- Early Every Morning
- Blues At Sunrise
- Please Love Me
In the late 1950s, a trio of hotshot guitarists emerged from Chicago’s West Side, whose ringing, urgent, soulful playing forever altered blues guitar. Along with Buddy Guy and Magic Sam, Otis Rush transformed the urban blues to a limit of emotional textures. His vocals are lamenting discourse on the human condition, and his intricate picking and throbbing chord expressions allow his music to writhe in melodic torment. This is not to say that Rush cannot rejoice, in fact, his dexterity allows him to do so quite well. But his great yeering pleas, and dark, introspective guitar solos, make his somber numbers art of the highest order. In short, Rush’s music is foreboding and electrifying, passionate and personal, and a vital link in the resurrection of the blues’ direction during the late 1950s. These recordings for the independent Cobra label bear this out. On CD.

Song Titles
- Double Trouble
- Jump Sister Bessie
- Checking On My Baby
- Sit Down
- Love That Woman
- My Baby Is A Good ‘Un
- If You Were Mine
- All Your Love
- It Takes Time
- Violent Love
- I Can’t Quit You Baby
- Little Red Rooster
- My Love Will Never Die
- Groaning The Blues
- Three Times A Fool
- She’s A Good ‘Un
- Keep On Loving Me Baby
- I Can’t Quit You Baby
- Double Trouble
- She’s A Good ‘Un
"Just Pickin" – Freddy King (Modern Blues MBXLCD-721)

These collection of 24 instrumentals, by the man nicknamed "The Texas Cannonball", originally done for the Cincinnati-based King label in the early 1960s influenced a generation of guitar players, including such modern day artists as Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Freddy's sheer physical presence was intimidating enough, but the strength and forcefulness of his guitar abilities pushed forward the heavy-handed guitar style of slightly earlier pioneers like Otis Rush and Buddy. In fact, it could be argued that King helped set the table for the fusion of styles into a new meld called blues-rock. Freddy's guitar work was scorching and hard-hitting, making him one of the originators of the in-your-face guitar practitioners, the ranks of which in rock music would swell due to his influence. On CD.

Song Titles
- Hide Away
- Butterscotch
- Sen-Sa-Shun
- Side Tracked
- The Stumble
- Wash Out
- San-Ho-Zay
- Just Pickin'
- Heads Up
- In The Open
- Out Front
- Swooshy
- Manhole
- Freeway 75
- Low Tide
- The Sad Nite Owl
- Funnybone
- Nickelplated
- King-A-Ling
- Surf Monkey
- Freddy's Midnite Dream
- Fish Fare
- Cloud Sailin'
- Remington Ride
“Mississippi Delta Blues”— Fred McDowell (Arhoolie CD 304)
Recorded in 1964 and 1965 during the peak of the blues revival, these vital cuts were recorded by Chris Strachwitz, owner of Arhoolie Records, during a field trip to Fred’s home area of Como, Mississippi. The result was to catch a throwback to the old Delta style of rough-hewn, declamatory vocals and bottleneck guitar at the peak of his powers. There is an unbelievable level of intensity and emotion captured here. His raw vocals served as an ideal counterpoint to his dynamic slide guitar efforts. Fred had an immense influence on rock groups like the Rolling Stones and individual artists such as Bonnie Raitt. On CD.

Song Titles
- Write Me A Few Lines
- Louise
- I Heard Somebody Call
- 61 Highway
- Mama Don’t Allow
- Kokomo Blues
- Fred’s Worried Life Blues
- You Gonna Be Sorry
- Shake ‘Em On Down
- My Trouble Blues
- Black Minnie
- That’s Alright
- When I Lay My Burden Down
- Ain’t Gonna Be Bad No Mo’
- Do My Baby Ever Think Of Me
- Brooks Run Into The Ocean (vocal by Eli Green)
- Bull Dog Blues (vocal by Eli Green)
- Frisco Line
- You Gotta Move
“West Side Soul” – Magic Sam (Delmark DD-615)

Again, along with Otis Rush and Buddy Guy, Sam emerged out of the west side of Chicago and helped fashion the second generation of post-World War II Chicago blues guitar into a more modern vein, with stinging solos and tough, confident lead and rhythm work. Sam’s vocals were emotive and affecting, the perfect foil to his skipping, snapping style of picking. His untimely death at age 32 stifled a very promising career, as his appearance at the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival hinted at the strong interest in, and potential crossover of, his many talents. On CD.

Song Titles

- That’s All I Need
- I Need You So Bad
- I Feel So Good (I Wanna Boogie)
- All Of Your Love
- I Don’t Want No Woman
- Sweet Home Chicago
- I Found A New Love
- Every Night And Every Day
- Lookin’ Good
- My Love Will Never Die
- Mama, Mama-Talk To Your Daughter For Me
- I Don’t Want No Woman (alternate)
Wailing, frenetic, and anxious are three words that describe Buddy's guitar histronics, and no doubt there are dozens more. When combined with his gospel-influenced voice that wrings every ounce of emotion out of a lyric, Guy has created a turbulent personal style that has influenced modern artists such as Jimi Hendrix. Paradoxically, Guy also is amazing in his ability to slow things way down, and bring the greatest degree of emotion and heartfelt sincerity from a spartan number of guitar notes and slow, sensuous, world-weary vocal inflections. These mid-1960s cuts were captured at the peak of cohesiveness with Guy's working band at the time, full of power, confidence, and dexterity. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- A Man And The Blues
- I Can't Quit The Blues
- Money (That's What I Want)
- One Room Country Shack
- Mary Had A Little Lamb
- Just Playing My Axe
- Sweet Little Angel
- Worry, Worry
- Jam On A Monday Morning
“Hoodoo Man Blues” – Junior Wells (Delmark DD-612)
Until his death just a few years ago, Junior Wells remained the elder statesman of the Chicago blues harmonica players, continuing to hold court on the local, national, and international blues scene, injecting his audiences with the same hybrid of pure Chicago blues and urban, uptown funk. Having apprenticed in the bands of Muddy Waters and The Aces, a band that included the great Myers brothers (Louis and Dave) and Fred Below, Junior committed himself throughout his career to remaining true to blues traditions, while never losing sight of the necessity to grab and hold an audience. Certainly, his longtime association with Chicago guitar legend Buddy Guy also nurtured his fervent desire to always leave the crowd wanting more. This collection is essential because it was the first blues album to record an actual working blues band, a cohesive unit built on countless one-nighters. Junior is confident and soulful in his vocal duties, and his harmonica work blisters all in its path. Whether a slow blues, a swinging up tempo number, or an instrumental, Junior demonstrates his abilities with swaggering self-assurance and poise. On CD.

Song Titles
- 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 (alternate)
- Chitlin Con Carne (alternate)
“More Real Folk Blues” – Sonny Boy Williamson II (Rice Miller) (Delmark DD-612)

When do the voice and harmonica become one? Right here in this collection, as is proven by Sonny Boy II. Having taken his name from John Lee Williamson (Sonny Boy Williamson I), the groundbreaking Chicago harmonica player and singer of the 1940s, Sonny Boy II obviously tried to cash-in on the notoriety of his earlier peer. However, there was absolutely no need for such emulation, as Sonny Boy II expertly utilized his gravelly vocal inflections and world-weary tales to present a picture of the state of the human condition that can only be described as purely accurate, given his documented tales of travel and rambling. This ability to communicate his life’s meanderings is triumphantly bolstered by his capacity to meld the voice and harmonica into one unit, utilizing each as a complement to the other, in whatever order the subject matter dictates. His orchestrations highlight the responsive echoes of each talent upon the other, and his uncanny ability to coin a phrase, create symbolism, and write poignant songs of the frailties of human being make his compositions and performances art of the highest order. On CD.

Song Titles
- Help Me
- Bye Bye Bird
- Nine Below Zero
- The Hunt
- Stop Right Now
- She’s My Baby
- The Goat
- Decoration Day
- Trying To Get Back On My Feet
- My Younger Days
- Close To Me
- Somebody Help Me
Using the word “simple” when describing the Jimmy Reed sound is, at once, both wholly accurate, and yet a grave disservice. Reed’s plodding sense of guitar phrasing, sly, lazy, “mush mouth” vocals, and basic rack harmonica playing somehow fold together to create one of the blues’ most distinctive and recognizable sounds. Reed’s catalog is full of blues standards, and it is a testament to his uncanny ability to turn a musical phrase that his influence on legions of current day blues artists exists. There is truly a paradoxical intricacy in Reed’s unadorned approach that endures to this day.

Song Titles
- High And Lonesome
- Boogie In The Dark
- You Don’t Have To Go
- Take Out Some Insurance
- Ain’t That Lovin’ You Baby
- You Got Me Dizzy
- Down In Virginia
- Honest I Do
- Found Love
- Goin’ To New York
- Baby What You Want Me To Do
- I Ain’t Got You
- Big Boss Man
- Tell The World I Do
- Bright Lights, Big City
- Aw Shucks Hush Your Mouth
- Laughin’ At The Blues
- Shame, Shame, Shame
- Baby What’s Wrong
- I’m Goin’ Upside Your Head
“Pity The Fool/The Duke Recordings, Volume 1” – Bobby Bland (MCAD2-10665)

This two CD set, all 44 songs, presents the silken vocal work of a man whose style paved the way for every blues crooner since. Tales just drip of raw passion, and Bland, whose taken nickname is “Blue”, knows how to convey the yearning, indignation, or whatever human condition is the subject of the tune in such a way as to let the listener know he understands fully what the song says uniquely to them. Bland’s sound is an assimilation of gospel, rhythm and blues, and soul, always presented with the utmost care as to the instrumental arrangement. Bland can easily shift gears between a falsetto cry and a guttural moan or growl within a blink of an eye, and it is this grasp on the nuances of the strength of the sung word that has endeared him to audiences worldwide. On CD.

Song Titles

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<td>• L.O.U. Blues</td>
<td>• Bobby’s Blues</td>
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<td>• Lovin’ Blues</td>
<td>• Loan Me A Helping Hand</td>
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<td>• No Blow No Show</td>
<td>• You Got Me (Where You Want Me)</td>
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<td>• Wise Man’s Blues</td>
<td>• Last Night</td>
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<td>• Army Blues</td>
<td>• Little Boy Blues</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It’s My Life Baby</td>
<td>• I Lost Sight Of The World (single version)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lost Lovers Blues</td>
<td>• You Did Me Wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Honey Bee</td>
<td>• I’m Not Ashamed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Time Out</td>
<td>• Wishing Well</td>
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<tr>
<td>• You Or None (alternate)</td>
<td>• Is It Real?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A Million Miles From Nowhere</td>
<td>• That’s Why</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I Woke Up Screaming</td>
<td>• Hold Me Tenderly</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I Can’t Put You Down Baby</td>
<td>• Someday</td>
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<td>• You’ve Got Bad Intentions</td>
<td>• I’ll Take Care Of You</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I Don’t Believe</td>
<td>• Cry, Cry, Cry</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I Learned My Lesson</td>
<td>• Lead Me On</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Don’t Want No Woman</td>
<td>• I’ve Been Wrong So Long</td>
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<td>• I Smell Trouble</td>
<td>• Ain’t No Big Deal On You (previously unreleased)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sometime Tomorrow</td>
<td>• I Just Want To Make Love To You (previously unreleased)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Farther up The Road</td>
<td>• Hide Away (previously unreleased)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teach Me (How To Love You)</td>
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"King Of The Blues" — Freddie King (EMI/Shelter E2 34973)

Earlier this discography touched upon Freddie King's amazing collection of mid 1960s instrumentals recorded for the Cincinnati-based King label, and their tremendous influence on countless guitarists. Here is a collection dating from 1971 and 1972 that not only showcases his amazing guitar dexterity and fury, but also his assured, forceful, and fiery vocals. King’s vocals were burning and vibrant in their approach, and the perfect foil to his striking, powerful guitar capabilities. As vital as King’s early instrumentals were in the compelling forces on a generation of musicians, when combined with his affirming vocals, and their subsequent further influence, makes his second inclusion here necessary. On CD.

**Song Titles**

**CD #1**
- Same Old Blues
- Dust My Broom
- Worried Life Blues
- Five Long Years
- Key To The Highway
- Going Down
- Living On The Highway
- Walking By Myself
- Tore Down
- Palace Of The King
- Lowdown In Lodi
- Reconsider Baby
- Big Legged Woman
- Me And My Guitar
- I’d Rather Be Blind
- Can’t Trust Your Neighbor
- You Was Wrong
- How Many More Years

**CD #2**
- Woman Across The River
- Hoochie Coochie Man
- Danger Zone
- Boogie Man
- Leave My Woman Alone
- Just A Little Bit
- Yonder Wall
- Help Me Through The Day
- I’m Ready
- Trouble In Mind
- You Don’t Have To Go
- Please Send Me Someone To Love
- Gimme Some Lovin’
- Love Her With A Feeling
- I’d Rather Be Blind
- Boogie Fuck (previously unreleased)
- It Hurts Me Too (previously unreleased)
- Something You Got (previously unreleased)
- Ain’t No Big Deal On You (previously unreleased)
- I Just Want To Make Love To You (previously unreleased)
- Hide Away (previously unreleased)
“Beware Of The Dog!” — Hound Dog Taylor & The Houserockers (Alligator ALCD 4707)

Bruce Iglauer, owner of Alligator Records, often tells the story that the reason he quit his clerk job at Chicago’s famed Jazz Record mart, was to start his own blues record label whose sole purpose was to record Hound Dog Taylor & The Houserockers. This raucous “live” set released in 1976 captures all of Hound Dog’s rough guitar and vocal stylistic virtues. He was an enthralling slide guitarist, whose style most closely mirrored Elmore James. There was a potency and roughness to Taylor’s slashing guitar work, but for all the clunker notes and intense volume, the emotive enthusiasm of his style of blues won legions of fans when he made his debut to a larger audience in the early 1970s. Noted for playing cheap guitars that further made his guitar tonal qualities suspect, this practice only enhanced the rough, insistent core that made his music seem honestly authentic. On CD.

Song Titles
- Give Me Back My Wig
- The Sun Is Shining
- Kitchen Sink Boogie
- Dust My Broom
- Comin’ Around The Mountain
- Let’s Get Funky
- Rock Me
- It’s Alright
- Freddies Boogie
"Ice Pickin" – Albert Collins (Alligator ALCD 4713)
The sting of his Fender Telecaster lives mightily on this, Collins' first Alligator Records collection, with the icy froth of Collins' style searing the listener, and tearing a hole into all that it passes by and through. Collins' guitar tone was high on the treble, eliciting a ripping quality upon the auditory senses. Collins was famous for the use of intense, stinging single note outbursts, bending the strings ever so slightly at the end of a sustain that seemed to bleed the listener of every ounce of emotion, often producing shouts of wild encouragement from audiences predicated upon aural pandemonium. Simply, his percussive guitar picking and sinewy, tamped solos produced an icy effect, leading to his signature sound that came to be known as his imprint. Collins vocal abilities were often overlooked on his earlier recordings, or absent entirely in favor of instrumentals, but he breaks out on this collection with assured, confident singing. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Honey Hush! (Talking Woman Blues)
- When The Welfare Turns Its Back On You
- Ice Pick
- Cold, Cold Feeling
- Too Tired
- Master Charge
- Conversation With Collins
- Avalanche
“Midnight Son” – Son Seals (Alligator ALCD 4708)
Seals’ second album for the Alligator Records label includes a rich use of tough, blaring horns that only serves to augment his dynamic, unrelenting, vicious urban blues guitar sound. Seals was just coming off the success of his first Alligator Records release, a collection that featured a more pared down sound, devoid of the horns found here. It was a straight-ahead blues collection, in retrospect. Seals’ vocals seem to cry out with anguish, and drip of urban inequities and tribulations, all delivered with a full-throated flare. His piercing style is immediately recognizable, his consistent output of quality work has made him a fan and critic favorite. On CD.

Song Titles
- I Believe
- No, No Baby
- Four Full Seasons Of Love
- Telephone Angel
- Don’t Bother Me
- On My Knees
- Don’t Fool With My Baby
- Strung Out Woman
- Going Back Home
This collection is a re-release of a 1976 set recorded in France. These seven songs display the passion and depth of Joe's silky, fluid, yet commanding guitar work. His poised, proud vocals always hit the mark emotionally, and there is tightness to these recordings that supremely capture Joe as he was often heard at one of his sets at the old Wise Fools Pub on Chicago's north side, a venue where he would jam with unabashed abandon. Young's work comes across as something of a paradox, as it seems to simultaneously appear subtle and weighty. Perhaps that is why so many fans and critics have found his work endearing, in that that contradiction highlights his ability to seamlessly command diverging musical dynamics and produce such an appealing whole. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Teasing The Blues
- Five Long Years
- Sweet Home Chicago
- Wisefool Express
- Takes Money
- Fool's Advice
- Need A Friend
“Too Bad Jim” – R.L. Burnside (Fat Possum FP1005) 
The history of the blues is complete with the vital link of musicians from Mississippi, both early rural and post World War II artists, who secured the region as one of the most crucial in the formation and maturation of the blues. However, as the music was refined in the urban centers, Mississippi was almost put out of mind as a continuing hotbed of talent, both younger, and still, teeming with veteran musicians steeped in the tradition of the region’s contributions to the music. People like Junior Kimbrough and Jay Owens continued to thrive there, along with R.L. Burnside, one of the surviving members of this hallowed club. R.L.’s music retains the relentless droning quality and beat that is at the core of Mississippi northern hill country blues, a form of the music not for the faint of heart. It is a form of the blues designed to provide a background in the noisy, hot, sweaty environments of the juke joints and house parties of the area, fashioned to be loud, transcendent, and edgy in its structure. These clubs are not palaces of comfort and amenities, and the songs presented tell the tales of the hard life of the southern Negro. R.L.’s guitar sound is percussive, and his vocals seep with world-weariness and desperation. On CD.

Song Titles
- Shake ‘Em On Down
- When My First Wife Left Me
- Short-Haired Woman
- Old Black Mattie
- Fireman Ring The Bell
- Peaches
- Miss Glory B
- .44 Pistol
- Death Bell Blues
- Goin’ Down South
"Long Way To Ol' Miss" – Willie Kent (Delmark DE-696)
There is not as emotive a singer today in the blues as bassist/bandleader Willie Kent. He is a throwback to a time when vocals were delivered with a passionate ferocity, ala Muddy Waters, and on this count, Kent succeeds. It is highly unusual for a bass player to be the front man in a blues assemblage, but Kent’s knack of surrounding himself with some of the finest Chicago blues talent has gained him an international, national, and local following as an act worthy on high praise. Kent’s focus and concentration has always been on band dynamics, and this type of approach allows everyone in the band to step forward and demonstrate their abilities. Kent’s bass playing is powerful and full-bodied, and when coupled with his declamatory, formidable vocals, lets him present the blues with a conviction harkening back four or five decades. It is often said that rarely is a Willie Kent performance or recording disappointing, and this collection is no exception, with confident musicianship and vocals abounding. On CD.

Song Titles
- Long Way To Ol’ Miss
- Blues In My Bedroom
- Dirty Works
- It Ain’t Right
- Ain’t Got Long To Stay
- My Friend
- Don't Know Much About Love
- Extension 309
- All My Life
- Ain’t No Love In Your Heart
- Don’t Drive Me Away
- Black Night
- What You Doin’ To Me
“Housefire” – Byther Smith (Bullseye Blues CD BB 9503)
The one-time guitar legend-in-residence at the famed Teresa’s nightclub in Chicago, Smith presents here a spellbinding mix of truly current day, personal, and fiery compositions. Contemporary lyrics, guitar patterns, and textured, varied tales on themes of money, love, individual plights, and triumphs proliferate this collection. Smith has endured to his acute desire to work a long time day job and rear his children and nurture his family life, thus avoiding the trappings of the nightlife. As such, with his considerable, uncanny ability to combine consistently strong musical phrasing with lyrics built on analogies of the highest order, Smith delivers a blues song in a way that speaks to the human condition with a fresh, intensely captivating manner. Smith’s guitar work is burning in its power, and when joined with his acidic vocal qualities, often laced with piercing shouts, renders his modern blues unmistakably unique and a model for all blues players and fans alike. On CD.

**Song Titles**
- Money Tree
- Live On And Sing The Blues
- Martha Dear
- Look All Around You
- The Man Wants Me Dead
- Knockdown
- Wait And See
- Love Me Like I Love You
- Here I Am
“Call Me” – Vance Kelly (Wolf 120.877 CD)
During a typical set of blues in one of the deep south side Chicago blues clubs, one is just as liable to hear works by soul artists like Tyrone Davis, Sam and Dave, or McKinley Mitchell. Perhaps the set of music will include the work of the silky-smooth blues styles of artist like Bobby Bland or Johnny Taylor. Then again, the night may include renderings of early contemporary blues pioneers like Junior Parker. Mix in some Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, and a good measure of original contemporary blues, and you have the ingredients of a typical Vance Kelly show. But make no mistake, Kelly is not imitator just going through the motions and making a living on the work of others. Rather, he is, at one time, respectful and reverent, but also risky and groundbreaking. He can work a crowd with a discriminating sense of its composition, hence, his necessary ability to provide what the mood dictates. His guitar work is astounding in its flexibility and mastery of a breadth of styles, yet personalized with his subtle nuances. His vocals drip with sinewy emotion, and his obvious dedication to band interaction and assimilation makes Kelly a young lion of the blues with the potential to be a torchbearer who could carry the music well into the new millennium. On CD.

Song Titles
- Doing My Own Thang
- Wall To Wall
- Hurt So Bad
- Woman In Every Town
- That’s The Way Love Is
- Somebody As Good As You
- In Of The Rainbow
- Use Me Right
- She Ain’t Good Looking
- Drivein Wheel
- Call Me
- Dog On A Chain
“911 Blues” – Johnny B. Moore (Wolf 120.873 CD)

This west side Chicago blues man came from the ranks of one of Willie Kent’s best band assemblages and has firmly established himself as a modern blues master. Moore’s guitar style owes deep debts of gratitude to Magic Sam and Muddy Waters. He is never one to overplay the instrument; rather, he relies on subtle shades of texturing and volume to present his work. Additionally, Moore is truly dedicated to making acoustic guitar work parts of both his live shows and studio work, paying homage to blues pioneers like Robert Wilkins, Lightning Hopkins, and Fred McDowell. This versatility and humility toward the roots of the blues has made Moore a favorite around the world, recognizing him as a true student of the music. His vocals are laced with a world-weary quality that makes their authenticity not open to suspicion. He learned his early vocal lessons in gospel music as a child, and his ability to reach back for the necessary emotive level allows him to be sincerely received during performance and on recording. Moore is an energetic performer who works countless club dates, and this schedule has allowed him to refine and tighten his art to a fine quality. Like Vance Kelly, Moore is a young lion of the blues with the potential to be a torchbearer who could carry the music well into the new millennium. On CD.

Song Titles

- Lookin’ Good
- Black Coffee Drinkin’ Woman
- I’m Goin’ Home To See My Baby
- Why Ya Wanna Do Me Like That
- Kiss You In The Morning
- Race Track Blues
- Why Don’t You Be My Mama
- Candy Kitchen Blues
- Kokomo Me Baby
- 911 Blues
- She’s A Mean Woman
- Mean Ol’ Frisco
- That’s No Way To Get Along