

BIG JOE TURNER: Rocks
Bear Family BCD 17215 AR (70:33)

Jump For Joy/ Well, All Right/ Flip, Flop And Fly/ Love Roller Coaster/ Honey Hush/ I Need A Girl/ Lipstick, Powder And Paint/ TV Mama/ Hide And Seek/ Adam Bit The Apple/ My Gal's A Jockey/ Feelin' Happy/ Jumpin' Tonight/ Shake, Rattle And Roll/ Boogie Woogie Country Girl/ Teen Age Letter/ Corrine, Corrina/ Midnight Cannonball/ Bump Miss Susie/ Crawdad Hole/ Morning, Noon And Night/ Rock A While/ Oke-She-Moke-She-Pop/ The Chicken And The Hawk/ Roll 'Em Pete/ Rebecca/ Around The Clock Blues, Part 1/ Around The Clock Blues, Part 2



Let me set out my stall from the start - Big Joe makes me smile, there's not much that gets a spontaneous smile on my mug these austere days, but every time I hear the big man singing 'early in the mewnin' I crack a big grin. Big Joe Turner first shouted the blues in Kansas City in the 1930s with his running mate, pianist Pete Johnson. They kick started the boogie-woogie craze that led to the post-war materialisation of r&b and in due course the insurrection that became rock'n'roll.

This latest in Bear Family's 'Rocks' series naturally concentrates on Joe's rocking sides, cherry picked from the period 1938 to 1958. So, starting at the beginning (not the order they are presented on the CD), 'Roll 'Em Pete' does what it says on the label, Pete Johnson's hell-for-leather boogie piano with Big Joe yelling out the lyrics, recorded in New York and originally issued by Vocalion (Vocalion 4607). We jump forward six years to a session for Decca in Chicago in October 1944; Joe is backed by the Pete Johnson Trio (Ernest Ashley guitar and Dallas Bartley on bass) on a rollicking version of 'Rebecca' (a song he was to revisit for Atlantic).

The great guitarist Teddy Bunn is featured on 'My Gal's A Jockey', waxed for National in Los Angeles with tenor saxist Bill Moore's rocking r&b combo (Rebecca gets a mention again!). As Big Vernon (the only time he used a nom-du-disque - Vernon is Joe's middle name) he laid down the salacious 'Around The Clock Blues, Part 1 and 2' for the short-lived Stag imprint, once more the services of Pete Johnson were called on.

1949 saw our man signed to the Houston-based Freedom label, from his first session comes the raucous 'Adam Bit The Apple', backed by a bunch of good local players including Goree Carter and Lonnie Lyons, and from the second session 'Feelin' Happy', backed by a crew that includes future Duke session stalwart Pluma Davis on trombone. Sandwiched between Joe's two Freedom sessions came a 1950 New Orleans date for Imperial, 'Jumpin' Tonight' showcases Fats Domino on piano and a slew of top notch N.O. players including Dave Bartholomew, Ernest McLean, and Herb Hardesty on a typically boisterous outing.

Everything else on this disc comes from Big Joe's Atlantic sessions 1951-1958. In 1951, while depping with Count Basie's band, Joe was headhunted by Herb Abramson and Ahmet Ertegun, who signed him to their fledgling Atlantic Records. From Joe's first session comes the rowdy 'Bump Miss Susie' with a nice chorus from an anonymous tenor player. May 1952 found Joe in New Orleans, supported by trombonist Pluma Davis's band with some top notch New Orleans session men on board, the 'bone player rasps his way behind Joe on 'Honey Hush' (with a nod to the popular television show The Lone Ranger [you don't get quality entertainment like that nowadays!]) Joe sings 'Hi-yo, Hi-yo Silver' - you young 'uns can look it up on Wikipedia!).

The same year Ertegun and Jerry Wexler cut Joe in Chicago (October 1953) and by a stroke of genius or damn good luck pacted Elmore James and his piano player Johnny Jones to provide the nucleus of the backing band. They had another stab at 'Oke-She-Moke-She-Pop' (Joe had already recorded it at his 1952 New Orleans session) however 'TV Mama' with E.J.'s patent slide riff is the real keeper. However February 1954 was to provide the big one, with a crack New York session crew (including future Modern Jazz Quartet drummer Connie Kay) 'Shake, Rattle And Roll' went to the summit of the r&b chart and made a decent showing at 22 on the

pop lists. It's fairly smutty for the period, 'get outa that bed, wash yo' face an' hands' and he comments that 'you wear those dresses, the sun comes shinin' through, I can't believe my eyes, all that mess belongs to you'. Mr. B. Haley cleaned it up somewhat and had the bigger hit unfortunately.

Unexpectedly, and approaching middle age, Joe Turner was a teen phenom. Follow ups like 'Well All Right' with thundering piano from Harry Van Walls, 'Flip Flop And Fly', the absolutely wonderful 'The Chicken And The Hawk', and 'Boogie Woogie Country Girl'. 'Corrine, Corrina' (with The Cookies who would later become Ray Charles' Raelets providing backup vocals) went to number two r&b, pretty impressive! 'Lipstick, Powder And Paint', 'Teen Age Letter', and 'Jump For Joy' (just what is that instrument heard on this cut, it's listed as Mike Chimes on harmonica, but . . .) all continued the good time feel generated by 'Shake, Rattle And Roll'.

I guess most of us will have all the material here in various forms and mediums, but as a good timey selection of Big Joe's rocking sides it can't be beaten. Go on, put a smile on your face, indulge yourself, just buy it, in fact buy two and cheer up a curmudgeon if you happen to be acquainted with one!

Phil Wight