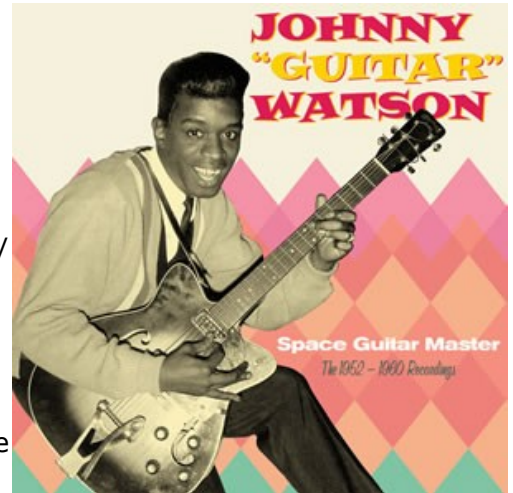


JOHNNY 'GUITAR' WATSON: Space Guitar Master – The 1952-1960 Recordings
Hoodoo Records 263397 (72:57)

Deana Baby/ Ruben/ Gangster Of Love/ Untouchable/ I Got Eyes/ Space Guitar/ Love Me Baby/ Hot Little Mama/ Too Tired/ I Love To Love You/ Johnny Guitar/ Honey/ Ain't Gonna Hush/ Looking Back/ One More Kiss/ Just Won't Treat Me Rite/ Motor Head Baby/ Oh Baby/ Someone Cares For Me/ Thinking/ Those Lonely, Lonely Nights/ No I Can't/ Gettin' Drunk/ She Moves Me/ Lonely Girl/ Give A Little/ Half Pint Of Whiskey/ What's Going On



As the title says, this PD issue from Hoodoo Records cherry picks from the period 1952-1960. The earliest cuts are 'Just Won't Treat Me Rite' (Combo 38) and 'Motor Head Baby (Combo 12) which feature Johnny as a member of Chuck Higgins' band where he was featured on vocal and piano. The most recent sides come from sessions described merely as 'recorded in Los Angeles 1959-1960'. These include 'Untouchable', the tribute to the television show 'The Untouchables', starring Robert Stack as Eliot Ness which debuted in 1959, (one of the unmissable television shows when I was a young sprog!) c/w 'Johnny Guitar' (Arvee 5016).

In between there is a slew of great sides, which are surely familiar to most readers of B&R. Johnny demoed 'Gangster Of Love' for RPM, but cut the version here the following year (Keen 4005) when Johnny again played piano. He played guitar for the first time on a session for Federal in 1954, it produced the reverb ridden, futuristic 'Space Guitar' which was destined to be very influential on a whole generation of guitar players. 'Hot Little Mama' and 'Too Tired' come from an RPM session from early 1955 and feature a who's-who of top-notch L.A. session men – Maxwell Davis, James Parr, Jim Wynn, Rene Hall, Billy Hadnott, Willard McDaniel, and Jesse Price – heavy hitters all!

Two tracks ('Ain't Gonna Hush' and 'Lonely Girl' – Modern 954) were issued by vocalist Cordelia De Milo, they feature Johnny on guitar with the Maxwell Davis Orchestra. Johnny plays some great fills on the hot rocker 'Hush', while the pace is slowed for 'Lonely Girl'. 'Thinking' is another fabulous piano-led pounder, c/w 'What's Going On' (Federal 12157); 'Those Lonely, Lonely Nights' (also from a 1955 session for RPM) is of course a cover of the Earl King number, and a brace of booze-laden songs ('Gettin' Drunk' and 'Half Pint Of Whiskey') were laid down at the same Federal session that produced 'Space Guitar'.

Some sources claim Johnny 'Guitar' Watson was the first guitarist to use reverb and feedback, true or not, his guitar playing tapped the full range of the instrument's potential. Not forgetting he was a very talented pianist and could also play sax. He was also a fertile songwriter and a soulful singer, who was in turn both uptown and lowdown.

The usual duplication concerns arise with issues on Ace, Classics, and a forthcoming release on Jasmine, but if you don't have 'em then this is a fine intro to one of the greatest r&b stars who went on to forge a career as a funk meister before dying tragically onstage in Japan at the too early age of 61.

Phil Wight