

**KING CURTIS: Trouble In Mind Plus It's Party Time
Hoodoo 263430 (75:15)**

'Trouble In Mind': Trouble In Mind/ Jivin' Time/ Nobody Wants You When You're Down And Out/ Bad, Bad Whiskey/ I Have To Worry/ Woke Up This Morning/ But That's Alright/ Ain't Nobody's Business If I Do/ Don't Deceive Me (Please Don't Go)/ Deep Fry - 'It's Party Time': Free For All/ Easy Like/ Hot Saxes/ Rockabye Baby/ I'll Wait For You/ The Party Time Twist/ Low Down/ Keep Movin'/ Yes, Baby/ (Let's Do) The Hully Gully Twist/ Slow Motion/ Fire Fly/ Something Frantic; Bonus Tracks: Jay Walk/ The Lone Prairie/ The Fly/ The Peppermint Twist



In my review of the Fantastic Voyage three CD set in B&R 276, which has caused a bit of upset in some quarters, I noted that, 'In the next decade Curtis would give conclusive evidence that much of this stuff had been strictly for the money'. And, lo, serendipitously enough, here comes a set which demonstrates exactly what I had in mind when I wrote that, a reissue of two of Curtis's Tru-Sound albums from 1961-62 (TRU15001 and TRU15008 respectively) with the original notes included in the booklet. Both have been on CD before.

'Trouble In Mind' presents Curtis as a blues singer. He is not a great original — there are echoes of Jimmy Witherspoon, Ray Charles, and especially Joe Williams of the Basie band. This is 'jazz blues', conveying its emotions by musical devices rather than overt passion, and Curtis does it with elegance and commitment. On three tracks he is joined by The Cookies (Margaret Ross, Ethel McCrea, and Dorothy Jones), who are said by the 2012 notes actually to be former Raelettes, which may explain why they are so much better than the general run of background singers of this era. They contribute much to the success of the tracks they are on, which of course are the most obviously Charles-derived in style.

The accompanying band, his regular working band, is as good as it gets in 1961. Jimmy Lewis on bass, Paul Griffin on piano, Belton Evans on drums, and Al Casey on guitar, swing relentlessly. Casey takes frequent and brilliant solos, but is not the only guitarist heard. On 'I Have To Worry', Curtis himself plays guitar. Joe Goldberg's 1961 notes tell us he had only recently taken up the instrument and that's what it sounds like. His solo is tentative and simple, but moving; a work in progress but a promising one. The solos on 'But That's Alright' and 'Ain't Nobody's Business', and the second solo on 'Jivin' Time', are credited to Mac Pierce, said to be 'a young man from New Jersey whose mother has the coatroom concession in one of the clubs Curtis has played'. All discographies are agreed this is bullshit, concealing the identity of a session guitarist named Hugh McCracken. Though the solo on 'Business' is painfully unswinging, McCracken has nonetheless been wasting his talents on most of what he has appeared on since! (Around this time he also recorded with Rusty Bryant, Jimmy Rushing, and B.B. King.) Two titles, 'Jivin' Time' and 'Deep Fry', are instrumentals. 'Deep Fry' is a classic performance. After an extended passionate solo by Curtis on his first instrument, alto saxophone, it goes into double time for solos from Griffin and Casey. Curtis is quoted as saying of this, "sounds almost like a jazz record, doesn't it." One can only savour the double bluff. After half a century, it sounds more like a jazz record than most of what was recorded as such in 1961, and is a damned fine one as well. The same could be said of the whole album without any hyperbole.

If 'It's Party Time' does not quite sustain the same level, it suffers only by comparison. Lewis is now on electric bass, of which he was an early master. He and Griffin are joined by Ernie Hayes on organ, and Ray Lucas on drums, for an ambiance inclining towards 'soul jazz meets r&b meets current dance fashions'. As the twist and hully gully were firmly in the mainstream of African-American dance styles this is no handicap. Tom Wilson's original notes are much less informative than Goldberg's. The dates given seem not to be correct. Only 'Slow Motion', 'Fire Fly', 'Something Frantic' and 'Keep Movin' are from the July 1961 session. The remainder were actually recorded on 5th January 1962, so the 1961 issue date quoted must be wrong even if claimed at the time.

The great Billy Butler is on guitar, but is rather under-utilised, except on 'Low Down'. 'Easy Like' is a guitar feature for Curtis, who has improved technically, but still sounds as if he is picking his notes carefully in contrast to Butler's easy grace in the second solo. Sam 'The Man' Taylor appears as second tenor sax on

the 1961 session and four other titles, including the aptly described 'Free For All' and 'Hot Saxes', exciting duets with the leader. Apt titles are a speciality of this album, 'Something Frantic' being, well, somewhat frantic. All four 1961 titles ratchet up the excitement with a sure and swinging touch. Curtis sings on 'Hully Gully' but the vocal is merely a bandleader's dance calls. The tenor solo is a furious rocker though.

The bonus tracks are a decidedly dubious bonus. 'Jay Walk' is represented as the Atco version of 8th July 1959 with Noble Watts but is the same 1960/61 version from Everest as on Fantastic Voyage. The novelty sax here, however trivial, is at least entertaining. Its original coupling, 'Lone Prairie', is quite as ghastly as I thought it before. The final two are extracted from a 1962 RCA album. I can hear why they have been associated with 'It's Party Time', but musically they are not in the same class, vocal features for Curtis (or possibly it's Don Covay), with perfunctory tenor solos and on 'The Fly' a continuous mechanical buzzing noise representing the eponymous insect. 'Peppermint Twist' has an inspired guitar solo, aurally by Mickey Baker, one of three guitarists present, but it's not much and overall these are at best superior 'teen beat'.

The bonuses need deter no one. The Tru-Sound albums are about as central to the notion of 'blues and rhythm' as it is possible to come and this is definitely one to get if you don't have a previous incarnation.

Howard Rye