

**AL KING & ARTHUR K ADAMS: Together – The Complete Kent and Modern Recordings
Ace CDCHD 1292 (58:58)**

AL KING: My Name Is Misery/ Ain't Givin' Up Nothin'/ Better To Be By Yourself/ It's Getting Late/ The Thrill Is Gone/ Bad Understanding*/ The World Needs Love/ Lovin' You*/ I Still Care For You*/ Get Lost/ Without A Warning/ Maybe My Last Song*: ARTHUR K ADAMS: She Drives Me Out Of My Mind/ Gimme Some Of Your Lovin'/ I Need You/ I'm Lonely For You/ Let Your Hair Down/ You Make Me Cry*/ I Need You (alt)/ (& EDNA WRIGHT) Let's Get Together**/ (& MARY) Is That You** (* = previously unissued; ** = alternate take)



This is a tale of two talented blues artists who arrived on the scene just a little too late. Well... in the case of Arthur K Adams it is, although in the case of Al King, getting to an influential label just a little too late is perhaps a more accurate description.

Vocalist and Louisianan, Al Smith, born in 1926, located to the West Coast after WWII, first to Los Angeles and then to Oakland, where from 1951 through to the early sixties he had a number of single releases on small label enterprises. It wasn't until the mid sixties however before he had anything like a hit, and after he'd changed his nom de disque to Al King, this was with 'Think Twice Before You Speak', first issued on his own Flag imprint and then leased to the New York Sahara label (initially Sahara's owner, a record distributor, wanted copies of the Flag release, but when Al couldn't afford to have them pressed, he leased the tracks). A few more Sahara releases came and went without causing any ripples and then Al re-located to the Los Angeles area, cosyng up with Maxwell Davis, who was arranging and producing many sessions for the Bihari brothers at Modern.

Davis was producing tough, contemporary blues with a soulful edge and the first King track, 'My Name Is Misery', is slap bang in that territory, top class L.A. musicians such as Big Jay McNeely add real punch to the numbers cut with this combination. And tying in the other featured artist in this set, another strong factor was the presence of Arthur Adams on guitar for these tracks. King displays a superb blues vocal, very like Jimmy McCracklin's; good enough to keep him in club work through to the early seventies. All tracks are typical examples of west coast blues of the period, when soul was just starting to creep into the mix, and the whole sound in fact is very reminiscent of the material Jimmy McCracklin was putting out in a similar period – I'd even say that a few of the 'self-composed' tunes were based heavily on Jimmy's numbers. Even the vocal group backing on 'What The World Needs' is arranged in a similar fashion to that used on many of Jimmy's recordings; but if it ain't broke, no use in fixing it! King's contribution to this set is twelve tracks, four from each of two singles on both Kent and Modern, two tracks that first appeared on a P-Vine CD and two more, previously unissued, 'Lovin' You' and 'Maybe'. As it happens 'Maybe' doesn't feature King, he was presumably intended to add a vocal, but didn't: though it does feature fine guitar again from Adams.

When Adams arrived in Los Angeles in 1964, aged 21, he had already recorded as name artist for a number of Dallas labels, he had a 1965 release on Arkad and then pacted as a lead artist for Modern in 1967, having been a well-regarded session artist around town for those three years. He only had two singles issued by Modern, but they contained strong and archetypal modern west coast blues, indeed 'She Drives Me' is almost a classic of the genre, a confident and impassioned vocal and delicious licks from Arthur's guitar produced a cut that would surely have been a hit for B.B. King if he'd cut it. The flip, 'Gimme', is a bit of dance number, though 'Let Your Hair Down' is another strong number and 'I'm Lonely' signals the soul blues sounds to come. 'She Drives Me' was even issued in the UK on Mike Vernon's Blue Horizon label, so highly was it rated by blues fans of the day (well, I bought it), but this cut is over a minute longer than that abridged issue. There are two takes of 'I Need You', an excellent, punchy soul-blues cut; one issued first on Kent CD 251 ('For Connoisseurs Only' volume two), the other

unissued until now, and 'You Make Me Cry', a minor key soul blues, not exceptional, but pleasant enough, the vocal group backing adds greatly to its effect. And then there are two other tracks, a Motown-ish 'Let's Get Together' with Edna Wright (this an alternate take of a track already issued on several Kent compilations), and with Mary (Love) on 'Is That You', Love's Tina Turner-ish vocal and Arthur's guitar and growls almost wreak havoc on a number that almost spins out of control. If nothing else, Adams appears to have been a bit of a hustler, and as the booklet states, it isn't big enough to do justice to 'What Arthur Did Next' – he apparently worked his way into a gig as a guitarist for the soundtrack of 'Bonnie & Clyde', the Beatty/Dunaway film classic and was an unofficial fifth member of the Crusaders, as well as acquiring solo record deals with Chisa, Blue Thumb and Fantasy. And then there was his sudden reappearance as a dynamic act on the blues festival circuit (his appearance at 1997's Blues Estafette still remains a vivid memory to me).

As Tony Rounce's ever-excellent notes conclude: 'both Al King and Arthur Adams deserved far greater fame than these records brought them forty-odd years ago ... and that should delight blues fans the world over'.

btw: Tony Rounce's notes deserve credit ... apparently Arthur Adams played guitar in a beefed up rhythm section on some unfinished B.B. King tracks, one of which was 'The Jungle' ... and ... it is Arthur whose profile is shown swinging in a hammock on the front cover of B.B.'s 'The Jungle' album (apparently Kent-Modern had exhausted all their King pics!). Now you know ...

Byron Foulger