

**LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE BLUES: DETROIT
Fantastic Voyage FVTD070 (Three CDs: 76:45;
73:19; 69:24)**



CD One: CALVIN FRAZIER: She's A Double Crossing Woman; SAMPSON PITTMAN: Highway 61 Blues; ROBERT RICHARD: Cadillac Woman/ Root Hog; DETROIT COUNT: Hastings Street Opera (Part 1)/ Hastings Street Opera (Part 2); WALTER MITCHELL: Stop Messin' Around/ Pet Milk Blues; SLIM PICKENS: Notoriety Woman; SYLVESTER COTTON: Sak-Relation Blues/ Ugly Woman Blues/ Stormy Weather Blues; JOE VON BATTLE: Lookin' For My Woman; JOHN LEE HOOKER: Henry's Swing Club/ Never Satisfied; JAMES TAYLOR: Little Bitty Woman; ANDREW DUNHAM: Sweet Lucy/ Hattie Mae; BABY BOY WARREN: My Special Friend Blues; JOHN BRIM: Strange Man/ Mean Man Blues; BIG MACEO: Worried Life Blues No 2/ Without You My Life Don't Mean A Thing; EDDIE KIRKLAND: That's All Right; EDDIE BURNS: Where Did You Stay Last Night

CD Two: JOHN LEE HOOKER: I'm In The Mood/ I'm A Boogie Man; EDDIE KIRKLAND: It's Time For Lovin' To Be Done/ No Shoes; ROBERT HENRY: Old Battle Ax; L.C. GREEN: 38 Pistol Blues/ Hastings Street Boogie/ Goin' Down To The River Blues; PLAYBOY FULLER: Sugar Cane Highway/ Gonna Play My Guitar; EDDIE BURNS: Hello Miss Jessie Lee/ Dealing With The Devil; SAM KELLY: Ramblin' Around Blues; BABY BOY WARREN: Sanafee (Not Welcome Anymore)/ Hello Stranger/ Chicken; JOHNNY HOWARD: Natural Man Blues/ Dark Night Blues; JOHN BRIM: Bus Driver; HENRY SMITH: Good Rockin' Mama/ Lonesome Blues; ONE STRING SAM: I Need A \$100.00/ My Baby Ooo; WASHBOARD WILLIE: Washboard Blues (Part 1); CALVIN FRAZIER: Rock House

CD Three: PAUL WILLIAMS: Thirty-Five-Thirty/ The Hucklebuck; WILD BILL MOORE: We're Gonna Rock/ Burnt Toast; T.J. FOWLER: T.J. Boogie/ Red Hot Blues/ Say Baby Say; DETROIT COUNT: Little Tillie Willie; EMMIT SLAY: Looky Ploot/ Beulah; KITTY STEVENSON: It Ain't Right; LITTLE MISS SHARECROPPER: I Want To Rock; SONNY WILSON: The Rainy Day Blues; MAURICE KING & HIS WOLVERINES: I Feel So Good/ I Want A Lavender Cadillac; THE KOOL KATS: That's The Best I Can Do For You Blues; CALVIN FRAZIER: Got Nobody To Tell My Troubles To/ Little Baby Child; HARVEY HILL: She Fool Me; ALBERTA ADAMS: Remember; JOE WEAVER & HIS BLUE NOTES: J.B. Boogie; JOHN LEE HOOKER: I Do Like I Please/ No More Doggin'; GIP (SANDMAN) ROBERTS: No One Monkey Goin' To Run My Show; LENA HALL: Five Long Years

If you had to select a pecking order of 'blues' cities what would your top five be? For me it would be 1) Chicago; 2) Memphis; 3) New Orleans; 4) Detroit; 5) Los Angeles. That's just my personal feelings however, feel free to disagree. Putting Detroit at the number four spot is not in any way disparaging what was committed to wax there, in fact the Motor City scene in the 1950s produced a hell of a lot of superior blues recordings.

There was not a thriving local recording industry, so the opportunity arose for budding record moguls to create one. Into the breach stepped Jack and Devora Brown with their Fortune imprint, who turned their attention to blues and r&b in the early 1950s. Distributor Bernard Besman recorded blues and r&b for his Sensation label, and record store proprietor Joe Von Battle established a studio in his store and recorded artists who turned up at his door looking to cut a session, and leased product to various outlets.

CD one opens with Calvin Frazier's 'She's A Double Crossing Woman', Calvin's Robert Johnson sound-alike was recorded by Alan Lomax for the Library Of Congress in Detroit in November 1938. On the same day Lomax also recorded Sampson Pittman's 'Highway 61 Blues'. In 1948 Von Battle recorded Sonny Boy Williamson inspired harp blowers Robert Richard and Walter Mitchell together, resulting in the chair and whip commotion of 'Cadillac Woman' and 'Stop Messin' Around', great!! Joe also cut 'Hastings Street Opera' by Detroit Count, a two-sided recorded guide to the best boozers and eateries on the drag, a fascinating observation of the local scene and a damn fine record. A certain John Lee Hooker who was to go on to some fame and fortune recorded several versions of 'Boogie Chillen' in 1948. One was released, titled

'Henry's Swing Club' (a tribute to the bar of the same name). James Taylor recorded 'Little Bitty Woman', but was sadly relegated to the ranks of the obscure, a pity, as this is a fine performance. Baby Boy Warren, one of the greats to come out of the Motor City cut 'My Special Friend' for Idessa Malone in 1949, Warren never made a bad record and this is no exception. Big Maceo appears on his own 'Worried Life Blues No 2' and 'Without You My Life Don't Mean A Thing', and as sideman with John and Grace Brim on their two sides. Maceo's health was failing, but he still sounds ok.

With Eddie Kirkland on guitar, Hooker opens CD two with 'I'm In The Mood', and he adds his vocal and guitar to Kirkland's own 'It's Time For Lovin' To Be Done' (issued by RPM). Playboy Fuller ('Sugar Cane Highway'/'Gonna Play My Guitar') plays Muddy style slide (and went on to establish a reputation as Louisiana Red). 'Hello Miss Jessie Lee' (a thinly disguised 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl') and 'Dealing With The Devil' by Eddie Burns was Battle product leased to Deluxe, Eddie sings and blows harp in a Sonny Boy Williamson style. Now, it's time to shine a large spotlight on the without a doubt, finest three cuts on this set. Cut by Von Battle, they are of course 'Sanafee (Not Welcome Anymore)', 'Hello Stranger', and 'Chicken' by Baby Boy Warren. Baby Boy sings and plays his chugging guitar licks, with Washboard Willie (one of the few practitioners who could make a washboard sound anything like melodic), but the real jewel in the crown is of course Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller). As Neil Slaven states in his notes (re. 'Chicken'), 'never equaled . . . chorus after chorus of harmonica playing that compares with the best of Little Walter', you won't get an argument out of me Neil! I first heard One String Sam over forty years on a bootleg LP, I was totally taken then with 'I Need A \$100' and still am. Nearly twenty years on from his LOC debut, Calvin Frazier was recorded live (with Washboard Willie) as the Super Suds Of Rhythm. Frazier had matured into an urban bluesman, a far cry from his Robert Johnson imitation of 1938.

After a plethora of blues artists on the first two discs, CD two kicks off with some r&b with 'Thirty-Five-Thirty' by Paul Williams, being a sucker for baritone saxes this side did the biz for me. Williams' 'Hucklebuck' is of course Charlie Parker's 'Now's The Time' (both Parker and Williams recorded for Herman Lubinsky's Savoy label). Tenor sax honker Wild Bill Moore's 'We're Gonna Rock' features the fine piano man T.J. Fowler, and Fowler is also featured on his own 'T.J. Boogie' and 'Red Hot Blues', showing himself to be a man with a fine command of the joanna. Todd Rhodes and his Toddlers backed guitar player and vocalist Emmitt Slay on 'Looky Ploot'. Now, I don't know what 'Looky Ploot' is but apparently his baby had the best in town! I imagine you could get a cream for it in Boots the Chemist! Recording debutante Little Miss Sharecropper became Lavern Baker; 'I Want To Rock' was laid down in Chicago though. Another first timer was Sonny Wilson who went on to become the great Jackie Wilson. Maurice Williams and the Wolverines were a capable outfit that fronted a pretty good singer named Bea Baker (yes, it's Lavern again) on 'I Want A Lavender Cadillac'. Calvin Frazier is once more impressive on 'Got Nobody To Tell My Troubles To'/'Little Baby Child' backed by a tough little combo including T.J. Fowler on piano. Harvey Hill's 'She Fool Me' is another of those perfectly formed little gems, note 78 label credit 'Music by Harvey Hill String Band'. Pianist Joe Weaver (with the great Johnny Bassett on guitar) recorded 'J.B. Boogie' for Joe Von Battle; this rocking little side was destined to be leased to De Luxe. Joe Von Battle battled on (ouch!) in the business; in 1955 he recorded Gip (Sandman) Roberts' ('No One Monkey Goin' To Run My Show') and in the following year Lena Hall's live 'Five Long Years', waxed with the Super Suds Of Rhythm. Both were destined to remain obscure. However, the times they were a changin', as Hooker's 'I Do Like I Please' and 'No More Doggin'" demonstrate, he was backed by a small combo with horns and would soon pledge to Vee-Jay. The good times on the Detroit blues scene were disappearing like snow off a dyke, but a new sound was on the horizon, courtesy of a certain Mr. B. Gordy.

With 75 tracks, big playing time and retailing for under ten pounds, this set is a sure fire winner for anyone who doesn't have too many of the cuts represented here (and I've only scratched the surface with this review). With the exception of the odd track, the sound quality is excellent throughout. A lot of the material is familiar, but there are tracks here that I have never heard before, and I'm glad I did. I enjoyed this three-disc set from can to caint, and I give it a big thumbs up.

Phil Wight