

'Blues In The Alley'

Pete Moody previews a new box set of post war blues from Miami, Atlanta and the South Eastern States



After a pair of Chicago boxes, a Detroit set and a New York/ Cincinnati set from the North Eastern states, we arrive down at the South Eastern states with a three CD set. There are 83 tracks from 29 artists, ranging from solo artists and small combos through to larger groups of blues musicians, all with their own brands of down home sounds.

In accordance with Wienerworld's policy, its anthologies try to steer clear of other competitive labels' compilations, especially with the Boulevard Classic Down Home series. This new set, *Blues In The Alley*, is really a companion set to its North Eastern set, *Tough Enough* (WNRCD 5104). It also dovetails perfectly with the Boulevard sets covering these territories – and there are some real rarities featured. Poor Jim released a pair of 78s during the early 1950s, 'Spots Boogie' / 'Brand New Woman' (on Cam) and his coupling of 'Rubber Ball' and Washboard Sam's 'She Fooled Me' (on Free). Another very uncommon find, and another solo artist is Johnny Shaw, with his 'May Shuffle' and 'Any May' from his 1960 Dade label release. Leroy Dallas and John Lee back up the solo spot artists within this collection in completing these artists recording outputs, by dovetailing in with the Boulevard sets.

There are two John Lee tracks, both originally unissued, 'Slappin' The Boogie' and the well known Big Joe Williams song, 'Baby Please Don't Go'. Leroy Dallas covers Frank Edwards' 'Sweet Man Blues' and the Walter Davis song, 'She Caught The M & O', both from his last session in 1962.

Upping to combo sounds from Florida, a pair of Apache recordings, out of Crestview, with Clifford King's double-A sided pair, 'Want To Jump With You Baby' / 'Chicken Shack Boogie', and the unknown Crook Jr. with his pair, 'Wiggle It Baby' and 'Please Believe Me Darling'. Both sets of recordings, reputedly, are both backed by the same band, The Rocking Aces.

The third of the Floridian-based combos is Eddie Hope with his Manish Boys, and a real blast of something that just seems to have come out of Chicago's South side, with their double-sided winner for Marlin Records, 'A Fool No More' and 'Lost Child'. Eddie, is the subject of a recent scoop story for *Blues & Rhythm* (see B&R 350), coming from the ace detective work of Dan Kochakian. Eddie recorded just the pair of sides for Henry Stone, a producer whose work is certainly documented within this set.

Stone produced Jimmy Wilson's amazing pair of songs here, 'Alley Blues' and 'Poor, Poor Lover', that features the gripping down home guitar sounds of Johnny Fuller. Big hitter-to-be Ray Charles also recorded some real down-home sides with Stone before he became famous with his later bigger sounding jazz-tinged style of blues. Charles' two sides here are 'Guitar Blues' and 'Why Did You Go'. Stone worked with Earl Hooker too. Hooker's lugubrious vocals on 'Sweet Angel', with his stunning guitar work, surely must have been a winner for Stone's

bank account. Stone was one of the music business producers who allowed the local down-home talent to be able to record nearer home, instead of trekking north as Leroy Dallas did, to New York, and Frank Edwards heading to Chicago for his first recording session. Within just a few short years, circumstances would start to change as the business realised that there was the possibility of money to be made out of recording black blues music in the South Eastern states.

The included full sessionography shows this swing in the recording locations column. Returning to the sounds collected, we find amongst the solo and combo players one or two artists who were recording real down home songs with bands, not too large, but here and there with an added horn or two!

Bill Reese led a band that featured an under-rated musician in vocalist Tommy Malone. Malone's downhome piano is one of the jewels amongst the recorded gems here. Two Malone recordings here under his own name with the Reese Orchestra are 'I'm Wading In Deep Water' and 'It's Been So Long Baby', whilst with Bill Reese's Rhythm Kings, he recorded 'I Gotta Find My Baby' during 1955, a song and its arrangement later picked-up and recorded by Chuck Berry in 1960. Berry claimed Little Walter wrote it, Malone claimed the song himself.

Rudy Greene used bigger sounds on his 'Florida Blues' and 'Oh Baby' too. He has brass players perfectly complementing the down home feel. Alabama-born Jerry McCain, with his double sided Rex label 45, 'She's Tough' and the instrumental 'Steady', certainly continued to give him a high reputation in the harmonica blues world. His three other recordings here, 'Middle Of The Night', 'Crazy About That Mess' and 'Fall Guy', are from earlier recordings from 1954. Another harmonica wizard, Willie Brown, with his trio of cuts, 'Do It Like That', 'Cut It Out', and 'Tell Me Why Love Don't Last', play out the final disc with some real early 1960s sharp shooting sounds, from a wonderful player – 'who was just happy playing his harp'.

Chris Bentley has penned an excellent, in-depth, 15,000-word essay. We have loads of label shots and as noted in the above text, there is a full sessionography.

That said, this collection has been put together with generous help from collectors from both sides of the Atlantic. Without their help, this collection may well have not have been such a great collection of downhome blues from the South Eastern states territories.

'Blues In The Alley – Down Home Blues, Miami – Atlanta and The South Eastern States' is the fifth down home blues box from Wienerworld Records (WNRCD 5112), due out in October 2020. Label shots (courtesy Chris Bentley) shown here are included on this new box set.

