

Chicago Blues - The Chance Era (1998)

Written by bluesever

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CD 1: 01. John Lee Hooker - Miss Lorraine (3:01) 02. John Lee Hooker - I Love To Boogie (3:10) 03. Little Walter - That's Alright (Ora Nelle Blues) (2:37) 04. Homesick James - Lonesome Old Train (2:52) 05. Homesick James - Williamson Shuffle (2:37) 06. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - About To Lose My Mind (2:29) 07. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - My Baby Left Me (2:32) 08. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - Some Day Little Darling (3:07) 09. Lazy Bill Lucas - She Got Me Walking (3:00) 10. Lazy Bill Lucas - I Had A Dream (2:55) 11. JB Hutto - Price Of Love (2:59) 12. JB Hutto - Pet Cream Man (2:26) 13. JB Hutto - Lovin' You (2:29) 14. Homesick James - Whiskey Headed Woman (2:41) 15. Homesick James - 12th Street Station (2:39) 16. Homesick James - Wartime (2:55) 17. Johnny Williams - Silver Haired Woman (2:40) 18. Johnny Williams - Fat Mouth (2:32) 19. Willie Nix - Nervous Wreck (2:28) 20. Willie Nix - No More Love (2:49) 21. Homesick James - The Woman I Love (My Home Is In Georgia) (2:40) 22. Homesick James - Dirty Rat (2:19) 23. Jimmy Eager - Baby Please Don't Throw Me Down (2:58) 24. Jimmy Eager - I Should Have Loved Her More (2:55) 25. John Lee Hooker - Graveyard Blues (3:12)

CD 2: 01. John Lee Hooker - Road Trouble (2:53) 02. John Lee Hooker - Talkin' Boogie (3:04) 03. Little Walter - I Just Keep Loving Her (2:26) 04. Homesick James - Homesick (3:04) 05. Homesick James - Williamson Boogie (2:52) 06. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - Which One Do I Love (Sometimes I Wonder) (2:50) 07. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - Rhythm Rock Boogie (2:36) 08. Arthur 'Big Boy' Spires - Tired Of Being Mistreated (2:26) 09. Willie Nix - Just Can't Stay (2:38) 10. Willie Nix - All By Myself (2:48) 11. Lazy Bill Lucas - My Baby's Gone (2:41) 12. Lazy Bill Lucas - I Can't Eat, can't Sleep (2:44) 13. JB Hutto - Combination Boogie (2:14) 14. JB Hutto - Dim Lights (2:42) 15. JB Hutto - Things Are So Slow (3:04) 16. Homesick James - Johnnie Mae (2:44) 17. Homesick James - Farmer's Blues (3:07) 18. Homesick James - Lonesome Blues (2:46) 19. Sunnyland Slim - Roll, tumble And Slip (I Cried) (3:19) 20. Sunnyland Slim - Train Time (4 O'clock Blues) (3:14) 21. Homesick James - Long Lonesome Day (2:22) 22. Homesick James - Late Hours At Midnight (2:18) 23. JB Hutto - Now She's Gone (3:12) 24. Jimmy Eager - Please Mr. Doctor (2:50) 25. John Lee Hooker - 609 Boogie (2:50)

Homesick James Williamson, J.B. Hutto, Johnny Williams, Arthur "Big Boy" Spires (vocals, guitar); Lazy Bill Lucas (vocals, piano); Willie Nix (vocals, drums); Tampa Red (vocals); Eddie Taylor, L.C. McKinley, James Williamson, Jimmy Rogers, John Lee Hooker, Johnny Shines, Leroy Foster, Louis Myers (guitar); George "Earring George" Maywether, P.T. Hayes, Little Johnny Walter, John Lee Henley, Snooky Pryor (harmonica); James Watkins, Johnny Jones, Sunnyland Slim (piano); Curtis Foster (drums, snare drum); Ted Porter (snare drum).

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The opening two or three cuts on this 50-song, 140-minute compilation sound ominously rough and ragged, and I'm not talking about the music, but the sources. But then the quality rights itself, and the rest is above-average quality early Chicago blues. Chance Records was never as big as Chess, though they shared a few artists like John Lee Hooker (as John L. Booker) and Sunnyland Slim (as "Delta Joe") in common, but it managed to get its share of worthwhile blues and R&B records out during its four years of active life. John Lee Hooker opens disc one with a pair of wildly chaotic, raw blues tracks, "Miss Lorraine" and "I Love to Boogie," that were probably recorded in the back of a local record store. A single side by Little Walter dating from 1947, originally cut for Ora Nelle Records and issued by Chance as "Ora Nelle Blues," is another primordial treasure contained on this CD, and the surface noise of these early sides can be forgiven under the circumstances. Arthur "Big Boy Spires" stood to be Chance's answer to Muddy Waters, based on "Some Day Little Darling" and "My Baby Left Me," but the big surprise on these sides is Lazy Bill Lucas, an Arkansas-born bluesman, who attacks his songs (especially "I Had a Dream") with bristling aggressiveness at the piano and the microphone, ably backed by Louis Myers in a searing set of guitar workouts. J.B. Hutto only cut six commercial sides for Chance before vanishing into the relative obscurity of club performances in Chicago, and then re-emerging on the folk-blues revival scene courtesy of Vanguard Records a decade later. The six sides here are worth their weight in gold -- loud, defiant blues that manage to be both raw in sound and smooth in execution, with a crunchy yet dexterous guitar sound and wonderfully expressive vocals -- check out "Lovin' You," maybe the best piece of blues ever cut in Chicago that didn't come from Chess. The 14 cuts by Homesick James (John Williamson Henderson) here represent more of this man's music than almost anyone has heard in 45 years -- he also appears to have been the first artist to actually record for Chance. And lo and behold, Tampa Red also shows up -- sans guitar, alas -- as Jimmy Eager, doing a trio of cuts that outclass much of the rest of his late career output; cut in 1953, they mark the tail end of Red's commercial career as a full-time bluesman, and one only wishes that he, and not Vee Jay Records alumnus L.C. McKinley, were playing the guitar on those cuts, but he was signed to Victor, and they were even less amused than companies like Chess about label-hopping by their artists. ---Bruce Eder, Rovi

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