

Lafayette Leake - Easy Blues (1978)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 12 January 2013 17:39 - Last Updated Saturday, 27 March 2021 13:59

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1. *Feel so blues* 2. *Train boogie* 3. *Short dressed woman* 4. *Fine little angel (take 2)* 5. *Fast boogie nr 2* 6. *Outskirts of town* 7. *Trouble in mind* 8. *Easy blues* 9. *Fast boogie nr 1* 10. *Fine little angel (take 1)* Lafayette Leake – vocals, piano John Littlejohn – guitar Nick Holt – bass Fred Below – drums

One of the most elusive major musical figures to come out of the Chess Records orbit, Lafayette Leake was so reticent about being in the spotlight that virtually nothing is known about his life, beyond the recordings on which he played. He was born in Winona, MS, in 1920, and he was a natural piano player, at home with a vast range of music from classical (and he had studied some classical piano) to blues. And being in Mississippi, it was the latter that constituted his bread and butter. His range and his ability to replicate the work of other players by ear, coupled with his powerful technique, made him stand out in the Chicago blues scene of the early '50s -- he became friends with Leonard "Baby Doo" Caston of the Big Three Trio, and was chosen as his successor when the latter's marital problems forced him to leave the group. And when group leader Willie Dixon became a songwriter and resident producer at Chess Records, Leake came along, playing on a lot of the sessions that Dixon produced, and a lot more besides -- his piano can be heard on the records of Chuck Berry, Howlin' Wolf, Billy Boy Arnold, Otis Rush, Junior Wells, Little Walter, Homesick James, Sonny Boy Williamson, Buddy Guy, Koko Taylor, et al.

Leake was a mainstay of the Chess operation in the studio -- he could read music and play anything that was needed, no matter how complex the suggestion, and Dixon came to rely on him. He was also a member of Chuck Berry's original touring band, put together in the wake of the latter's debut single, "Maybellene." But for all of his talent and dexterity, Leake's shyness prevented him from exploiting his talent into stardom in his own right until very late in his career. Apart from some 1960s sessions with producer E. Rodney Jones, which yielded some not easily available music, it wasn't until the 1970s that Leake was recorded leading his own band. These were done for the French Black and Blue label, and have since been reissued on CD.

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Leake remained a ubiquitous presence in the credits of numerous CD reissues, especially in rock & roll and blues. He was still playing in the 1970s, and passed away in 1990 at the age of 71. He remains one of the most enigmatic names on the Chess Records roster. ---Bruce Eder, allmusic.com

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