B.B. King - The Great B.B. King (1960)



01. Sweet Sixteen 02. (I'm Gonna) Quit My Baby 03. I Was Blind 04. What Can I Do AKA Just Sing The Blues 05. Some Day Somewhere AKA Someday Baby 06. Sneakin' Around 07. Ten Long Years AKA I Had A Woman 08. Be Careful With A Fool 09. Whole Lotta' Love AKA Whole Lot Of Lovin' 10. Days Of Old

The ninth instalment in Ace's attractively priced resuscitation and expansion of B.B. King's Crown albums, courtesy of series supervisor John Broven, showcases King's fifth LP for the budget label, originally issued in early 1960. It finds B.B. in full stride and reflects an eclecticism that displayed the breadth of B.B.'s music and talents, and represented attempts to cope with changing trends. Accordingly, the album presents the original mixture of mostly later RPM and early Kent singles anchored by the unified album version of the classic two-part single 'Sweet Sixteen' which ranks among B.B.'s most definitive and impassioned moments. It ranges through some of the signature 50s hits which were staples on ghetto jukeboxes and record players (five of the tracks charted either R&B or Pop); a couple of flip sides; and a handful of ballads and rock'n'roll flirtations, enhanced with eight mostly obscure bonus tracks.

The original LP reached back to 1952 for a Memphis alternate take of 'Some Day Somewhere' (B.B.'s rendition of Lowell Fulson's 'Midnight Showers Of Rain', also covered in Memphis by Willie Nix). But the heart of the album presented B.B. in a more fully-developed mode, at his peak of vocal range and suppleness and closer to the crystallisation of a guitar style that rapidly became established as the model for contemporary blues, framed by the nuanced, stylish arrangements of Maxwell Davis and occasionally topped off with his tenor sax solos. Plas Johnson, the New Orleans transplant who supplanted Davis as the first call R & B tenor in Los Angeles as blues was elbowed out by rock'n'roll, makes a rousing contribution similar to his solo on T-Bone Walker's 'Two Bones And A Pick' on the RPM single and bonus track 'Bim Bam'. It was an unabashed rock'n'roll outing, with lyric references to hits of the day, which B.B. disparages. Controversy almost drips from the grooves despite Plas' efforts, although the jive dancers will almost certainly lap it up.

One of B.B.'s greatest and favourite foils, pianist Lloyd Glenn, also graces several tracks, perhaps most notably on the alternate take of 'Down Now' which was in part B.B.'s lament about his Internal Revenue Service problems. The 1955 session-mate ballads 'Sneakin' Around' and 'I Was Blind' (with a vocal chorus by some Kings Men" who couldn't have got much further from 'Louie Louie') remind us how early a softer side of B.B. was evident. On more solid blues ground, it's worth noting Otis Rush's adaptation of 'Be Careful Of A Fool' into his version of 'Mean Old World' and B.B.'s sanitisation of Dr Clayton's song of homicidal intent, 'Cheating And Lying Blues', into 'Quit My Baby'. --- acerecords.co.uk

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