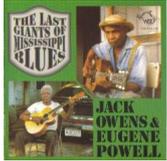


Jack Owens & Eugene Powell - The Last Giants Of Mississippi Blues (1993)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 21 March 2015 16:47 - Last Updated Wednesday, 24 February 2021 20:31

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Jack Owens (vocals, guitar) 1- *Cherry Ball* 2- *Hard Times* 3- *Devil* 4- *You Leavin'* 5- *No Lovin'* 6- *Please Give Me Your Money* Eugene Powell (vocals, guitar) 7- *44 Blues* 8- *Suitcase Full Of Troubles* 9- *Police In Mississippi* 10- *Born In Texas* 11- *Good Mornin', Little Schoolgirl* 12- *Blues In Texas* 13- *Goin' Up The Country* 14- *When I Leave Town* 15- *Mississippi River* 16- *Mean Mistreating Mama*
Jack Owens (vocals, guitar) & Bud Spires (harp)
17- *Hard Times* 18- *My Baby's Gone* 19- *Keep On Rumblin'* 20- *Cool Water* 21- *Devil*

When he died in 1997 at the age of 92, Jack Owens was perhaps the last living link to the pure Mississippi Delta acoustic blues tradition. Other bluesmen made more numerous and more famous recordings, but Owens had a unique style that showed how blues players shaped musical materials in their own personal ways. Other players from the Delta traveled far and wide, moving north to Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s to help give birth to modern electric blues, or taking their art to college campuses and folk festivals during the folk blues revival of the 1960s and beyond. But Owens remained rooted for his entire life in the place where he was born, in later life receiving a steady stream of visitors who came to hear him play and to learn what blues music was all about.

Jack Owens was born L. F. Nelson on November 17, 1904, in Bentonia, Mississippi, at the Delta's edge. Owens was raised by the family of his mother, Celia Owens, after his father left the family when Owens was five or six years old. Before his father departed, he taught Owens a few chords on the guitar. This is all Owens would keep of his father, electing to drop his father's surname of Nelson and adopt the name of Owens instead. Owens also learned to play the cane fife, an African-American instrument with historical roots stretching directly back to Africa, and he may have played the fiddle and piano at times. But it was his guitar skills that caught the attention of local musicians. By the time he was a teenager he had learned a few standard

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pieces of the music that was just beginning to be called the blues, and by 1920 he was pressed into service playing at local parties and gathering places.

Blues authorities disagree as to whether Bentonia had its own distinct style of the blues, but all would concur that it was home to a group of especially talented players. In addition to Owens and several other musicians who were poorly or not at all represented on recordings, there was Skip James, one of the genuine stars of the Delta blues style. James, who had married one of Owens' sisters, encouraged Owens' musical efforts. James told London Guardian writer Val Wilmer that he said to Owens, "Hey Jack, you done started you something, ain't you?" James and Owens shared a basic style marked by intense, death-haunted lyrics, lengthy, intricate guitar solos, individualistic guitar tunings. ---encyclopedia.com

Eugene Powell was born on December 23, 1908, in Utica, Mississippi. Most of the sources agree that he began to play the guitar at the age of eight, but The Dead Musicians Directory says that he began to play at the age of seven. The beginning of the musical Mississippi heritage for Powell was also the beginning for Charley Patton. Powell grew up Eric Tucker, SHS researcher in the Chatmon family when they moved to Bolton, Mississippi. Powell's instrumental interplay began in Hollandale with Henderson Chatmon and his sons. Powell became a sometime member and recording member of the Mississippi Sheiks. Powell played many instruments including banjo, violin, harmonica, horn, and guitar, but he played lead guitar most of the time. His guitar was a Silvertone. He inserted an aluminum resonator into it like those found on the National guitar. He also fitted a seventh string, using the twelve string model as his inspiration. His playing style stood out as one of the greatest Blues soloist of his time.

Eugene's mother ran a junk house so he grew up around music. He sometimes recorded under the name, Sonny Boy Nelson. He took the name Sonny Boy Nelson after his stepfather. He pursued his love of music throughout the delta. Eugene often worked on his guitar and modified his own to seven and nine strings. In the 1940's, he was working for the John Deere Company in Greenville, Mississippi, and playing in the Lewis Nichols band. In the 60's, he saw a decline in the popularity of his music locally and gradually quit playing publicly. Sam Chatmon encouraged him to play again.

Eugene Powell Chatmon carried him to the Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. where he was recorded by Adelphi label in 1970 and 1972. Eugene's tunes like " Street Walking

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Woman," "44 Blues," "Suitcase Full of Trouble," along with "Meet Me in the Bottoms" are forever forged in blues history. Eugene suffered some health problems but endured and continued to play. He had many tribulations, and he ended up in Arnold Avenue Nursing Home. While there, his guitar was taken from his home. In September, 1998, thanks to M.A.C.E. and his friends, Eugene was presented with a new fender 12 string guitar by Worth Long and a lifetime achievement award by Butch Ruth.

On November, 4, 1998 at 5:41 a.m., Eugene Powell died at Delta Regional Medical Center in Greenville, Mississippi. He was buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Metcalf, Mississippi. He is survived by his wife, " Mississippi Matilda," one son, five daughters, thirty-three grandchildren, sixty-one great grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren. ---
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