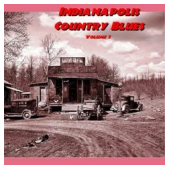
Indianapolis Country Blues Vol. 1



*01. Cold blooded murder 02. Blues and trouble 03. I'm gonna move to Kansas City 04. Sun burnt all my cotton** Brooks Berry - vocals, guitar (4) Scrapper Blackwell – guitar, piano Indianapolis, In. december 1959 *05. My man is studyin' evil 06. Bama bound 07. Can't sleep for dreaming 08. Life ain't worth living 09. Blues is a feeling 10. How long* Brooks Berry - vocals Scrapper Blackwell – guitar, piano Indianapolis, In. july 1961
11. A blues 12. Blind Lemon's blues 13. Bright street jump 14. Indiana Avenue blues 15. Kansas City 16. Matchbox blues 17. Naptown boogie
J.T. Adams – vocals, guitar Shirley Griffith - guitar Indianapolis, In. 1960

Before the war, Indianapolis had a quite strong blues scene but only two major figures, piano man Leroy Carr et ace guitarist Francis "Scrapper" Blackwell. When a local storeowner and producer, Mr Guernsey teamed the two bluesmen, he not only created a powerful duo but invented a formula (piano and guitar together) that in many ways launched what can be called "urban prewar blues".

But in the 1940's, even if the black sections were flooded with new migrants from nearby States like Kentucky who played and sang their blues, Indianapolis, lacking any recording studio, was no longer featured on the map of the blues.

It took the end of the 1950's and Art Rosenbaum, a young folk and blues fan who came to live in Indianapolis in 1947, to "rediscover" Scrapper Blackwell who was still playing his old blues style for house parties and friends. He had aggregated around him quite a handful of Country bluesmen that very fortunately Rosenbaum recorded between 1959 and 1962. But those blues records are very hard to find, most having never been reissued in any form and having sold very poorly.

In this volume 1, we found the singer Brooks Berry (born in Sturgis, Ky on march 1915). As she settled in Indianapolis with her mother, she befriended with Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell and went to see and hear them each time she could (very often cheating upon her real birthdate!). During the 40's and 50's, she was quite often singing accompanied by her friend Blackwell, whether on the guitar or the piano. But it was mainly a hobby for her for she had to make a meagre living as a housekeeper. Although reluctant, she nevertheless waxed two gripping sessions in 1959 and 1961, appeared in a few college campuses and folk clubs but gave up the blues when her friend Scrapper was tragically murdered on october 6th, 1962. We don't know what happened to her after that.

Singer and guitarist John Tyler (J.T.) Adams is another quite obscure name. Born in Morganfield, Ky on February, 17th, 1911, he learned the blues with his father who was a name in the local juke joints. J.T. came to Indianapolis in 1941, working at Chrysler's and playing the blues in the local clubs and parties. He also befriended with Blackwell but, being already an accomplished blues guitarist, he wasn't as strongly influenced by the local maestro than the others. But thanks again to Scrapper, he recorded some sides accompanied by another excellent local guitarist Shirley Griffith (1908-1974). Their two guitars intertwine each other brilliantly, giving an excellent but unfortunately only session. We don't know what happened to J.T. Adams after these recordings.

Griffith recorded two more superb LP's under his name that never resurfaced in the digital era. But you now can hear them on the first rate blog Don't ask me... All your comments and feedbacks are most welcomed. If possible, I'll try to make a volume 2 of more Indianapolis blues! ---Gérard Herzhaft, jukegh.blogspot.com

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