Chicago - The Blues Today! (CD1) [1966]



1 Help Me Wells 4:05 *2 It Hurts Me Too (When Things Go Wrong) Wells 2:44* *3 Messin' with the Kid Wells 2:21* *4 Vietcong Blues Wells 4:57* *5 All Night Long (Rock Me Baby) Wells 3:44* The Junior Wells Chicago Blues Band: Junior Wells (Harmonika , Vocals) Buddy Guy (Guitar) Jack Myers (Bass) Fred Below (Drums) *6 Going Ahead Hutto 2:03* *7 Please Help Hutto 2:53* *8 Too Much Alcohol Hutto 2:29* *9 Married Woman Blues Hutto 3:06* *10 That's the Truth Hutto 2:47*
J. B. Hutto and his Hawks: J. B. Hutto (Guitar, Vocals) Herman Hassell (Bass) Frank Kirkland (Drums)
11 Marie Spann 2:27 *12 Burning Fire Spann 3:14* *13 S.P. Blues Spann 2:51* *14 Sometimes I Wonder Spann 3:27* *15 Spann's Stomp Spann 2:19*
Otis Spann´s Southside Piano: Otis Spann (Piano, Vocals) S. P. Leary (Drums)

In early 1966, blues history was made with the issuance of a three-volume set of new recordings produced by blues historian Samuel Charters. This series was known as Chicago/The Blues/Today! and the release sent shock waves through the world of rock & roll. Every artist on the three volumes had recorded before (some, like Otis Rush and Junior Wells, had actually seen small hits on the R&B charts), but these recordings were largely their introduction to a newer -- and predominately white -- album-oriented audience. The "Today!" part of the title was no bit of hyperbole, either. This series accurately portrayed a vast cross section of the Chicago blues scene as one could hear it on any given night in the mid-'60s. Rather than record full albums (which Charters had neither the budget nor the legal resources to pull off), each artist simply came in for a union-approved session of four to six songs, with each volume featuring three different groupings. With these recordings, blues suddenly gained respectability as something much more vital and vibrant than just a poor cousin of jazz. A new market for this music began, one that exists today in full blossom. Their effect on musicians was enormous. It's fair to assume that most blues-influenced artists had all three volumes in their respective collections, and the songs on them ended up in the repertoires of everyone from Jimi Hendrix (Junior Wells' "Rock Me") to Led Zeppelin (a note-for-note copy of Otis Rush's "I Can't Quit You Baby") to Steppenwolf (Junior Wells' "Messin' with the Kid") and beyond. These recordings have stayed in print and have been reasonably good sellers over the years since

their original release, all coming out on compact disc. This new packaging puts all three volumes together, but with no bonus tracks, as no extras were recorded for these sessions.

So if one already owns these sides, what's the incentive this time around? That's easy: the sound is massively improved, with the bass that was rolled off the vinyl and original CD versions now being restored. This makes the tracks truly come alive, especially on the Otis Rush and Junior Wells sides, both fortified with some major amounts of badass bass thumping by Roger Jones and Jack Myers, respectively. One can really hear the spaciousness of the old RCA studios where this stuff was cut for the first time, and the detailing of the mix is in sharp focus throughout, although the increased bass causes some unwanted distortion on the Homesick James Williamson tracks. The other plus is the new packaging, which features a nice booklet with detailed, updated notes from Charters, a nice appreciation from Ed Ward, and absolutely eye-boggling session photos taken by Charters' wife, Ann, that alone are worth the price of the set. With the glut of blues reissues out there, it is often a coin toss regarding where best to spend your hard-earned money. Even if you still have the original vinyl or CDs, this is one of the times when it would be best to spend the dough and add this one to your collection, because blues records seldom come as important, innovative, or just plain pleasurable to listen to as this set. File under "essential." ---Cub Koda, Rovi

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