Detroit Blues Masters Vol.1 – Bobo Jenkins



01. Democrat blues 02. Bad luck and trouble Bobo Jenkins (John Pickens Jenkins) - vocals, guitar Robert Richard – harmonica Albert Washington – guitar Harry Fleming – drums Detroit, Mi. 1954 *03. Decoration day blues I & II* Bobo Jenkins – vocals, guitar, piano Detroit, Mi. 1955
04. Baby don't you want to go I 05. Baby don't you want to go II 06. Ten below zero I 07. Ten below zero II 08. Seasick and water bound
Bobo Jenkins – vocals, guitar Robert Richard – harmonica James "Rabbit" Johnson - guitar, bass Ted Walker – drums Detroit, Mi. 1957
09. Nothing but love 10. Tell me who
Bobo Jenkins – vocals, guitar Eddie Taylor - guitar Willie Johnson - guitar Earl Phillips - drums Chicago, Ill. 1959
11. You will never understand 12. Tell me where you stayed last night
Bobo Jenkins – vocals, guitar Walter Cox - piano James "Rabbit" Johnson - guitar, bass Ted Walker – drums Detroit, Mi. 1960
13. When I first left home 14. Reeling and rocking 15. Cold hearted blues 16. I love that woman 17. Solid gold 18. You will never understand n°2 19. Tryin' to get you off my mind 20. 24 years 21. I sure got to leave your town 22. Have you heard the news 23. Tell me who 24. I'm glad trouble don't last always Bobo Jenkins – vocals, guitar, organ, horns James "Rabbit" Johnson - guitar, bass, drums Detroit, Mi. 1972

Although not very well known, Bobo Jenkins has been a mainstay and a driving force of the Detroit blues scene that he has largely contributed to elaborate and establish.

John Pickens Jenkins was born in Forkland, Al. on January 7, 1916 from a family of poor sharecroppers. After his father's death while he was still a baby, Bobo has to work very early in the fields. A very brutal and insensitive uncle (his mother's brother) takes charge of the kid with

more kicks and punches than food and education. When he is eleven, Bobo runs away to Memphis where he makes a living as an odd-job boy in several places including a brothel where he hears for the first time the blues. After a stint in the army during the war, Bobo relocates himself in Detroit and finds a secure job at Chrysler's assembly line where he will stay 26 years.

He is also a faithful patron of the Hastings Street clubs, taking pictures and becoming friend with uprising bluesmen like John Lee Hooker, Eddie Kirkland or Eddie Burns. More and more enthralled with the music, Bobo buys a guitar, take some blues lessons with his friends and starts to play some numbers in the clubs.

While in his assembly line, Bobo composes Democrat blues, his first number that boasts his distrust of the winning Republicans at the 1952 Presidential contest.

" The Democrats put you on your feets and you had the nerve to vote'em out"

Impressed by this blues (that he will include later in his songbook), John Lee Hooker brings Bobo and an array of Detroit blues musicians in Chicago in 1954. A quite enthusiastic Phil Chess hurries Bobo and his band (with the excellent harp player Robert Richard) in the studio to record Democrat blues and the flip (written in a few minutes for the occasion by Bobo) Bad luck and trouble. This single is a small hit in Chicago and Detroit and will become an all-time blues classic among blues buffs all over the world.

For some time, Bobo enjoys some fame, is featured in tour packages alongside such luminaries as Illinois Jacquet, Jimmy Reed, Mahalia Jackson, Lionel Hampton, Louis Jordan. But with a large family, Bobo chooses instead of a professional musician's life the security of a steady job. He thus mostly plays in Detroit and even runs a small club where he features most of the local bluesmen, including Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller) who stayed in Detroit for awhile. But his recordings are then quite sparse and mostly for local labels like Fortune with a poor distribution outside his hometown. Anyway those records are first rate, alternating personal self-penned blues (Ten below zero) with striking versions of blues standards like Baby don't you want to go.

During the 60's, the ever creative Bobo Jenkins, builds his own studio and starts to record himself as well as most of the local bluesmen. At the end of the decade dominated by Motown, Bobo's label Big Star is almost the only one issuing blues records in Detroit!

With the help of some blues fans like the writer Sheldon Annis and Fred Reif, they persuade the city of Detroit to launch in August 1970 a Detroit Blues Festival that features all the local bluesmen, an event largely covered by the local medias as well as the Living Blues Magazine.

When retired from Chrysler, Bobo devotes himself full time to the blues. He is in and off stage of the Saginaw blues festival, Belle Isle Festival, Ann Arbor Jazz & Blues festival and even becomes a member of Detroit City's Culture Board... He also continues to record for his Big Star label, particularly three albums which are today sought-after items in which he further demonstrates his uncanny ability to compose striking autobiographical blues. Unfortunately, those LP's are a little bit marred by poor and muffled sound.

With Fred Reif's help, Bobo is also able to play in some prestigious venues like the Smithsonian Institute in 1976. In 1982, Bobo is part of the American Blues Legends' European tour but, very ill, he can't play but one gig and has to come back home in a hurry.

He dies in Detroit on August, 14, 1984 leaving an array of quite good records. We have gathered all his singles on Bobo 1 and Bobo 2 features his first (and best) Big Star LP with some tentative enhanced sound! --- Gérard Herzhaft, jukegh.blogspot.com

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