

Otis Spann □ – Nobody Knows My Troubles (1967)

Written by bluesever

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*A1 Get Your Hands Out Of My Pocket A2 Nobody Knows My Troubles A3 Sarah Street
A4 Worried Life Blues A5 You Can't Hide A6 Jack-Knife A7 What's On Your Worried
Mind? B1 Vicksburg Blues B2 Who's Out There? B3 Spann's Boogie Woogie B4 See
See Rider B5 Lovin' You B6 One-Room Country Shack B7 Mr. Jelly-Roll Baker* Bass
– Jimmy Lee Morris (tracks: A1, A3, A6, B2, B5) Drums – Robert Whitehead (tracks: B1), S.P.
Leary (tracks: A1, A3, A6, B2, B5) Guitar – Johnny Young (3) (tracks: A1, A3, A6, B2, B5)
Harmonica – James Cotton (tracks: A1, A3, A6, B2, B5) Vocals, Piano, Organ – Otis Spann

The great Otis Spann was just 40 when he passed on but what a bluesman he was. This recording, although somewhat shy in playing time for a compact disc, contains a mess of some fine piano playing (one track with organ) & singing of straight-ahead blues from Otis. Recorded in 1965 & 66 by the late Pete Welding, these sides capture Mr. Spann just before his health began to take a spiral for the worst and are well worth giving a listen to.

While Otis Spann really attained his reputation from the earlier sides as the band pianist with Muddy Waters, it was not until the mid-60's blues boom that he gained recognition from an audience outside the Chicago blues clubs and the American chitlin' circuit.

Otis is complimented here by a stock Chicago blues band for the times which means he gets able backing from Johnny Young/Johnny Shines (guitar), Jimmy Lee Morris/Lee Jackson (bass), S.P. Leary/Fred Below (drums), and Jimmy Cotton/Shakey Horton (harmonica). Eight of the titles are Otis playing and singing solo, displaying his magnificent interpretations of blues standards from some of his influences, these being Big Maceo Merriweather, Little Brother Montgomery, and Sonny Boy Williamson (Willie Miller).

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On most of the band cuts, you get James Cotton wailing away with some of the fiercest harp ever put on recording tape. One title includes the great Walter Horton, a frequent companion on many of Spann's recordings from this time period. The high quality of the music and playing on this set ranks it up closer to the superb Candid recordings that Otis Spann made with Robert Lockwood Jr. about 5 years earlier.

The single factor that prevents these sides from earning an extra star is the mediocre sound which seemed to be a trademark on most of the mid-60's Testament recordings and the CD restoration is not much improved compared to the original vinyl issues. These recordings are however, far more listenable than what was to come a few years later on those tepid overproduced sessions for Bluesway. If you are a Spann fan, you already have this one; if you're not, along with the Candid recordings, it's a good place to start.

Despite his truncated career, Otis Spann made many fine other recordings as a sideman. If you like Chicago Blues from the 50's & 60's be sure to check them out. ---Curtiss Clarke, amazon.com

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