

And This Is Free: The Life and Times of Chicago's Legendary Maxwell St. 1964 (2008)

Written by bluesever
Monday, 04 July 2016 16:46 -

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This is the legendary 50 minute DVD of life on Maxwell Street filmed in 1964 by Mike Shea using a newfangled hand-held-camera-with-portable-sound-gear. This revolutionary new equipment got him right into the heart of the matter; zooming up into the faces of gospel singers, incense hucksters and jivers, sidewalk preachers and stall-holders - and the man selling the World's Smallest Saxophone...

He captured performances from street singers like Arvella Gray wandering among the crowds slashing out notes from his National steel guitar, the Jim Brewer Group wailing out gospel and Carrie Robinson and friends stomping out some weird boogaloo dance. Then there's a great scene made during a backyard get-together where a band plug in their electric guitars and bash out the blues while the place fills with folks getting smashed. Shea even catches recording stars Johnny Young and Robert Nighthawk cranking out the blues on the side walk!

This is a film you'll watch again and again. A fascinating, historical documentary, perfectly described in its 36 page booklet as preserving "a stunning visual record of a place and time that we'll never see again". And if this isn't enough, it is followed by Shuli Eshel's 30 minute documentary "Maxwell Street-A Living Memory" which captures the essence of the Jewish influence on the street. It was the eastern European Jewish immigrants who built the street, developing it into America's largest open-air market long before Afro-Americans moved up from the Deep South.

The DVD finishes with a photo show of vintage shots of the street, rare footage of Casey Jones,

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Daddy Stovepipe, Arvella Gray, travelogues and finally, an interview on the making of "And This Is Free" with sound recordist Gordon Quinn.

The CD compliments the DVD by giving us the real tough, uninhibited sound of Maxwell Street in its heyday, featuring street singers from the 20s, fresh faced country blues singers who arrived in Chicago in the 30s and 40s, and pioneers of the new electric sound that appeared on a myriad of labels in the 50s and 60s. Some were actually recorded right there on the street.

Beautifully packaged with a juicy, fact filled booklet and facsimile Maxwell Street Market Permit to complete this terrific set - it's exactly the kind of stuff us blues connoisseurs go crazy for. Wow!

Set: JB Hutto: Pet Cream Man, Floyd Jones: Dark Road, Baby Face Leroy Trio (with Muddy/Little Walter): Rollin' And Tumblin' Parts 1&2, Snooky Prior: Cryin' Shame, Robert Nighthawk: Prowling Night Hawk, Arvella Gray: John Henry: Johnny Young: Money Talking Woman, Big John Wrencher: Maxwell Street Alley Blues, Daddy Stovepipe & Mississippi Sarah: The Spasm, Johnny Williams: Worried Man Blues, John Lee Granderson; Hard Luck John, John Henry Barbee; Against My Will, Boll Weevil: Christmas Time Blues, Papa Charlie Jackson: Maxwell Street Blues, Jimmy Rogers & Little Walter: Little Store Blues, Blind Percy And His Blind Band; Fourteenth Street Blues. ---redlick.com

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