

The Ultimate Jazz Archive Vol.57 – Roosevelt Sykes [1944-1950] [2005]



*01.Jivin' The Jive 02.Mellow Queen 03.Strange Woman 04.This Tavern Boogie
05.Anytime Is The Right Time 06.The Honeydrinker 07.Date Bait 08.Peepin' Tom 09.Sunny
Road 10.Living In A Different World 11.Flames Of Jive 12.Homesick Blues 13.I'm Her
Honeydrinker 14.Bobby Sox Blues 15.Kilroy's In Town 16.Walkin' And Drinkin' 17.High As A
Georgia Pine 18.Until The Cows Come Home 19.Southern Blues 20.My Baby Is Gone
21.Rock It 22.Drivin' Wheel*

Next time someone voices the goofball opinion that blues is simply too depressing to embrace, sit 'em down and expose 'em to a heady dose of Roosevelt Sykes. If he doesn't change their minds, nothing will. There was absolutely nothing downbeat about this roly-poly, effervescent pianist (nicknamed "Honeydrinker" for his youthful prowess around the girls), whose lengthy career spanned the pre-war and postwar eras with no interruption whatsoever. Sykes' romping boogies and hilariously risqué lyrics (his double-entendre gems included "Dirty Mother for You," "Ice Cream Freezer," and "Peeping Tom") characterize his monumental contributions to the blues idiom. He was a pioneering piano pounder responsible for the seminal pieces "44 Blues," "Driving Wheel," and "Night Time Is the Right Time."

Sykes began playing while growing up in Helena. At age 15, he hit the road, developing his rowdy barrelhouse style around the blues-fertile St. Louis area. Sykes began recording in 1929 for OKeh and was signed to four different labels the next year under four different names (he was variously billed as Dobby Bragg, Willie Kelly, and Easy Papa Johnson)! Sykes joined Decca Records in 1935, where his popularity blossomed. After relocating to Chicago, Sykes inked a pact with Bluebird in 1943 and recorded prolifically for the RCA subsidiary with his combo, the Honeydrinkers, scoring a pair of R&B hits in 1945 (covers of Cecil Gant's "I Wonder" and Joe Liggins' "The Honeydrinker"). The following year, he scored one more national chart item for the parent Victor logo, the lowdown blues "Sunny Road." He also often toured and recorded with singer St. Louis Jimmy Oden, the originator of the classic "Going Down Slow."

Written by bluesever

Monday, 22 April 2013 16:10 - Last Updated Monday, 15 September 2014 11:38

In 1951, Sykes joined Chicago's United Records, cutting more fine sides over the next couple of years. A pair of Dave Bartholomew-produced 1955 dates for Imperial in New Orleans included a rollicking version of "Sweet Home Chicago" that presaged all the covers that would surface later on. A slew of albums for Bluesville, Folkways, Crown, and Delmark kept Sykes on the shelves during the '60s (a time when European tours began to take up quite a bit of the pianist's itinerary). He settled in New Orleans during the late '60s, where he remained a local treasure until his death. Precious few pianists could boast the thundering boogie prowess of Roosevelt Sykes, and even fewer could chase away the blues with his blues as the rotund cigar-chomping 88s ace did. ---Bill Dahl, Rovi

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