

I'd Rather Go Blind

Written by bluesever
Sunday, 15 May 2016 16:10 -

I'd Rather Go Blind

By 1965 Etta James's career was clearly in decline. After a couple of years away from the business, Etta returned with a bang. She traveled to Muscle Shoals to record at FAME Recording Studios, and it was a match made in heaven. The sessions there were produced by studio owner Rick Hall and featured musical backing by the legendary Swampers. The result of the sessions was the smash hit "Tell Mama," a song co-written by Clarence Carter. "Tell Mama" was a Top 10 R&B record, and reached #23 on the pop chart. The B-side of that smash was "I'd Rather Go Blind." The B-side of the single is of such great quality that it makes that release one of the great double-sided singles of the period, rivaling the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields"- "Penny Lane" for sheer artistic moxie.

I'd Rather Go Blind

Etta James penned this Southern Blues classic during a visit to her friend Ellington "Fugi" Jordan in prison in 1967. The Detroit singer and songwriter had already outlined the song, in which he poured out his grief from being incarcerated not knowing when he would be released. He recalled to Allhiphop.com in 2006: *"I got tired of losing and being down. I was in prison and didn't know when I was going to get out. I sat in a piano room and began to write."*



Etta James - Tell Mama/I'd Rather Go Blind, single

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James and Jordan then completed the song, but for tax reasons she gave her songwriting credit to her partner at the time, Billy Foster, who was a member of the '50s Los Angeles doo-wop group The Medallions. It was a decision that she came to regret as the royalties accumulated over the years.



Etta James

Ellington Jordan was born in the Los Angeles suburb of South Central to family of seven children. Ellington's musical talent was established early on and he quickly became friends with the legendary Eddie Kendricks of The Temptations. This friendship enabled him to move to Detroit to start writing music for the famous Chess Records. Detroit was the R&B "hotbed" for new and established artists at the time. Ellington became friends and worked with such artists as Muddy Waters, Donny Hathaway, Howlin' Wolf, Etta James, and Jimi Hendrix. All of these artists influence him today.



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Ellington Jordan

It was at this time that Ellington (Fugi) was introduced to Black Merda by Eddie Kendricks. Ellington and Black Merda began collaborating with Ellington providing vocals and lyrics to the Black Merda rock n' roll music. Chess Records executives listened to their songs and immediately signed them to their label. Black Merda, with Ellington Jordan, went on to produce two albums for Chess Records and has had an underground, cult following, selling vinyl on EBay for up to \$100. Ellington Jordan (Fugi) and the original members of Black Merda have continued their relationship over the years, recently performing several engagements in the Detroit area in 2005.



Ellington Jordan

A basic soul-blues stroll rhythm and melody guide "I'd Rather Go Blind" along gently, but with a firm hand. Lyrically, the confessional stance of the lyrics takes it into the realm of some of the better gospel songs of the mid- to late 20th century. Heartbreaking and soulful, the premise of the title is affecting enough, yet the sheer poetry of the words takes it to an even higher place. James' vocal delivery is, of course, unparalleled and positively drips with emotion, giving the entire song and recording a bittersweet feeling that is undeniable.

