

Classic Blues from Smithsonian Folkways (2003)

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1 *Old Jabo* 2 *Mule-Ridin' Blues* 3 *Joggie Boogie* 4 *Black Woman* 5 *Mercury Blues*
6 *Ran the Blues Out of My Window* 7 *Leaving Blues* 8 *One Dime Blues* 9 *County Farm*
Blues 10 *Clog Dance (Stomping Blues)* 11 *Boll Weevil* 12 *Nickel's Worth of Liver* 13
Don't leave me here 14 *Jimmy Bell* 15 *Candy Man* 16 *Beer Drinking Woman* 17 *Come*
Go Home With Me 18 *Careless Love* 19 *I Asked Her If She Loved Me* 20 *Rising Sun* 21
Pony Blues 22 *Vicksburg Blues* 23 *Vastapol* 24 *Drifting Along Blues* 25 *Oh Baby, You*
Don't Have to Go 26 *Don't Lie Buddy* Personnel: Henry Townsend, Lonnie Johnson,
Brownie McGhee (vocals, guitar); Sonny Terry (vocals, harmonica); Memphis Slim (vocals,
piano); Edith North Johnson, Lester Chambers (vocals); Tommy Bankhead, Willie Chambers
(guitar); Lead Belly (12-string guitar); Blind John Davis, Champion Jack Dupree (piano);
Gene Moore, Brian Keenan (drums); Coyall McMahan (maracas).

A living and dynamic tradition, blues is forged in hard times but powerful enough to bring on the good times. Legends such as Lead Belly, Memphis Slim, Big Bill Broonzy, Elizabeth Cotten, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee, among others formed the "blues backbone" of Folkways Records. This compilation from the Smithsonian Folkways collection spans half a century and features Delta, St. Louis, Southwest, and Chicago styles performed by some of the best-known figures in blues history. From boogies to ballads, full of innuendo and irony, this classic collection is a jukebox in a jewel case. --- folkways.si.edu

Starting in the 1940s, Folkways made significant blues recordings, particularly of important artists who might not have had the easiest time getting or keeping contracts with more commercial labels, but still had something to say artistically. This 26-track compilation assembles material recorded between the 1940s and 1990s that showed up on various

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Folkways releases. Unfortunately, the liner notes don't name the exact dates of all the recordings, but certainly the substantial majority of them predate 1970. These recordings were targeted toward a somewhat scholarly folk revival audience, and some might find them a little folky and gentle. Electric instruments barely appear at all (with the notable exception of the early Chambers Brothers cut "Oh Baby, You Don't Have to Go"), and there's little that's as rough as the average prewar Delta blues track. Yet overall, it's a good compilation of many major and minor mid-20th century blues performers and styles. The bigger names include Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee (whose "Old Jabo," with drums, almost verges on Bo Diddley-styled rock & roll), Reverend Gary Davis (represented by a 1957 version of his famous "Candy Man"), Big Bill Broonzy, Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon (performing together), Lightnin' Hopkins, Leadbelly, Roosevelt Sykes, Son House, Champion Jack Dupree, Elizabeth Cotten, Lonnie Johnson, and Josh White. While acoustic guitar blues (including a field recording of K.C. Douglas' "Mercury Blues," later covered by Steve Miller) gets a fair amount of airtime, so do boogie piano, a cappella singing (Vera Hall), and some actual Delta blues (Son House, from a 1942 field recording). --- Richie Unterberger, Rovi

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