

Detroit – Post War Blues Vol. 5 (1968)

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L.C. Green b. 23 October 1921, Minter City, Mississippi, USA, d. 24 August 1985, Pontiac, Michigan, USA. Vocally and for his repertoire, L.C. Greene, whose records were issued without the final 'e' to his name, was indebted to John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson. His amplified guitar playing is clearly Mississippi Delta-derived, but probably owes something to the popularity of fellow Detroit blues singer John Lee Hooker. Greene recorded in the early 50s (often with his cousin Walter Mitchell on harmonica) for Joe Von Battle's shoestring operation, which leased a few sides to Dot Records, but he never matched the fortunes of Hooker, whom he equalled in guitar talent and power, although not in songwriting ability.

This British country and western singer/songwriter was only five years old when he started playing drums in his father's band. Showing even more initiative than drummer Jimmy Carl Black of "when do we get paid?" fame, Henry Smith the toddler supposedly was asking his old man for his salary even before his gig was over. This quite direct interest in commerce continued as Smith began his solo recording career, his 2005 debut album titled in the form of

an address to the individuals who potentially could do the most good for him, Hello DJ. Smith, moving to both guitar and piano as well as singing, leads his own group named Country Dreams. He followed up his first CD with a live set that demonstrates, at least symbolically, his success motivating crowds to dance to his music. Besides blending plenty of line dance material into the set, Smith himself is known for dancing with audience members while still performing with his trusty "head mike," kind of like Garth Brooks in a pub with fish and chips on his breath. His own songwriting contributions have so far been limited to a single track per CD, including the title cut on Hello DJ and the selfless "Your Love." Smith fills his set lists with hardcore country from writers such as Merle Haggard as well as covers of contemporary hits, agreeing with the drinkers' notion that "It's Five O'Clock Somewhere."

Sylvester Cotton b. USA. Nothing is known about Cotton except what can be gleaned from 18 tracks that he recorded in Detroit in 1948-49 for Bernie Besman's Pan American Record Company. Only three of these were issued at the time (although all have now appeared on album), and one of those was credited to John Lee Hooker when leased to Modern Records. The other two appeared, properly credited, on a Sensation label 78 rpm release. All of Cotton's recordings featured solo guitar and vocal country blues and were very basic and primitive for the period. It is apparent that he extemporized some songs in the studio, most notably the personal lyrics of 'I Tried'.

Slim Pickens b. Clyde Wilson, 14 July 1910, USA, d. 15 July 1990, USA. From 1933 onwards Wilson performed often on radio, mainly in the Indiana, Missouri and Nebraska, on show such as Ozark Jubilee. He led his Prairie Playboys, sang solo and in various groups. A frequent collaborator was singer, Floyd 'Goo-goo' Rutledge with whom Wilson performed in duo as Whistler And Flash. There were also Slim And Shorty, the Tall Timber Trio, the Buster Fellows and the Goodwill Family. The bulk of Wilson's recordings were radio transcriptions, which he continued to make into the 50s. Among instrumentalists backing Wilson were musicians such as Tommy Jackson, Grady Martin and Bud Isaacs. Wilson's repertoire included songs such as 'I'm Movin' On', 'The Atchison, Topeka And Santa Fe', 'She's The Lily Of Hillbilly Valley', 'I'll Dance At Your Wedding', 'I'll Be There (If You Ever Want Me)', 'Wedding Dolls (From Your Wedding Cake)', 'To Each His Own', 'The Great Speckled Bird', 'Man Of Galilee', 'Down The Trail', 'When It's Prayer Meetin' Time In The Hollow', 'Silver Threads Among The Gold', 'Red River Valley', 'Oh! Susanna', 'The Yellow Rose Of Texas', 'Good-Bye, Maggie', 'We Sat Beneath The Maple On The Hill', 'The Cowboy's Dream', 'Down In The Valley', 'When The Bloom Is On The Sage', 'Barbara Allen', 'The Lonesome Road' and 'Froggie Went A'Courtin'".

The denizens of Detroit's postwar blues scene never really received their due (except for John Lee Hooker, of course). Robert "Baby Boy" Warren compiled a sterling discography from 1949 to 1954 for a variety of Motor City firms without ever managing to transcend his local status along Hastings Street.

After honing his blues guitar approach in Memphis (where he was raised), Warren came to Detroit in 1942 to work for General Motors and gig on the side. The fruits of his first recording session in 1949 with pianist Charley Mills supporting him came out on several different logos: Prize, Staff, Gotham, even King's Federal subsidiary. A second date in 1950 that found him backed by pianist Boogie Woogie Red was split between Staff and Sampson; Swing Time snagged "I Got Lucky"/"Let's Renew Our Love" and pressed it for West Coast consumption.

One of his most memorable sessions took place in 1954, when wizened harpist Sonny Boy Williamson came to Detroit and backed Warren on "Sanafée" and "Chuc-A-Luck," which found their way to Nashville's Excello label. Joe Von Battle's JVB imprint unleashed Warren's "Hello Stranger" and "Baby Boy Blues" from the same date. That same year, a single for powerful Chicago deejay Al Benson's Blue Lake Records coupled "Mattie Mae" and "Santa Fe." The 1970s brought Baby Boy Warren a taste of European touring, though nothing substantial, before he passed away in 1977.

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