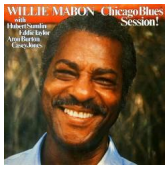
Willie Mabon – Chicago Blues Session! (1979)



A1 Little Red Rooster 4:14 A2 Lonely Blues 4:33 A3 It's A Shame 5:53 A4 Moanin' Blues 6:11 B1 Monday Woman (A Tribute To Jimmy Reed) 4:54 B2 Louise (A Tribute To Howlin' Wolf) 6:21 B3 Seventh Son (Dedicated To Willie Dixon) 3:48 B4 I'm Mad 4:16 B5 A Change Is Gonna Come 2:47 Bass – Aron Burton Drums – Casey Jones Guitar [Left Side] – Hubert Sumlin Guitar [Right Side] – Eddie Taylor Vocals, Piano, Blues Harp – Willie Mabon

Chicago Blues Session! features a session pianist Willie Mabon cut on Independence Day 1979 with guitarist Hubert Sumlin, guitarist Eddie Taylor, bassist Aron Burton and drummer Casey Jones. The album was originally released on the German L&R label, mainly because American labels were shunning the blues. That could be the only reason this album wasn't released at the time, since it's a nice, straightahead Chicago blues record. There are several Mabon originals, all of them strong and memorable, plus several Willie Dixon tracks and a Howlin' Wolf cut. That Howlin' Wolf song is one of a handful of tributes to Chicago blues legends -- the others are to Jimmy Reed and Willie Dixon -- but the true tribute is the spirit and passion the group puts into their music. That's what makes the album a worthwhile listen for serious fans of Chicago blues. ---Thom Owens, AllMusic Review

In the early 50s, Willie Mabon was at the forefront of the Chicago blues scene, with massive hit records on the Chess label. After a quiet spell, his career was revitalised in the 70s, when he discovered a new audience across the pond. Although he is not well remembered today, there was a time when Willie Mabon was a big star.

Born in rural Tennessee in 1925, Willie James Mabon was brought up in Memphis at a time when Beale Street was alive with original Blues players. When the family moved to Chicago in 1942, Willie started taking piano lessons, as he was surrounded by a different Blues environment. He added some phrases from Roosevelt Sykes and Big Maceo to his formal learning, and there were some jazz influences in there too. When he got back from service in the Marines in WWII, Willie started playing the Chicago club scene, developing a sly, insinuating vocal style. In 1949, he cut his first records for the Apollo label as 'Big Willie', but when he joined the Chess label the following year, his career really took off.

With the Chess house band behind him, Willie had Number 1 hits with 'I Don't Know' and 'I'm Mad', and 'Poison Ivy' went to Number 7. However, his original version of Willie Dixon's 'Seventh Son' did not sell well and he left Chess without having another hit. Willie joined Federal Records in 1957, and then on to smaller labels like Mad, Formal, USA and Sue in the 60s, again without cracking the charts. This didn't affect Willie's popularity in the Chicago clubs and bars, and when the American Blues Legends invited him to tour Europe, Willie discovered a new audience. With his chunky, improvising piano style, Willie proved very popular, especially in France, and like Memphis Slim he bought a house in Paris in 1972. Living and recording on both sides of the Atlantic for the rest of his career, Willie was a popular act in Europe, playing the Montreux Festival and touring widely until his untimely death in Paris in 1985.
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