

an album of blues from the West Coast



Yeah, I'm goin' back out in California
I'm gonna make out there my home
Boy, I'm almost ready now, man
And I ain't gonn' be here long

"GOIN' TO CALIFORNIA"

HERITAGE HLP 1003

Side one: LOWELL FULSON, vocal & amplified guitar; accompaniment as indicated. Recorded by Bob Geddins in Oakland, Calif. ca. 1946 to 1948.

1. SAN FRANCISCO BLUES - acc. Eldridge McCarty, p; "Big Dad", bs.
2. THREE O'CLOCK BLUES - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr.
3. I'M WILD ABOUT YOU - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr.
4. DON'T BE SO EVIL - acc. J.R. Russell, p; Arthur Robinson, bs; Asal Carson, d.
5. PRISON BOUND - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr.
6. MY BABY LEFT ME - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr.
7. DOUBLE TROUBLE - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr; "Mabel", assisting.
8. STORMING & RAINING - acc. Martin Fulson, rhythm gtr.

Side two: as indicated

1. MERCURY BOOGIE - K.C. DOUGLAS, vocal & el.-gtr; acc. Sidney Maiden, hca; Ford Chaney, gtr; Otis Cherry, d. Oakland, Calif., ca. 1948.
2. ECLIPSE OF THE SUN - SIDNEY MAIDEN, vocal & hca; acc. K.C. Douglas, el.-gtr; Ford Chaney, gtr; Otis Cherry, d. Recorded as last.
3. BEGGAR MAN BLUES - WILLIE B. HUFF, vocal; acc. "Lafayette" gtr.
4. TRAILING MY BABY - MERCY DEE WALTON, vocal & p; acc. L.C. "Good Rockin'" Robinson, steel-gtr.
5. TRAIN, TRAIN - JOHNNY FULLER, el.-gtr; acc. T. Ramer-son, d; G. Hurst, p; R. Dixon, bs; W. Robinson, hca. Last three titles recorded Oakland, Calif., ca. 1950
6. NEW WORRIED LIFE BLUES - THUNDER SMITH, vocal & p; acc. Luther "Rocky Mountain" Stoneham, gtr.
7. WATER COAST BLUES - "ROCKY MOUNTAIN", vocal & gtr; acc. Thunder Smith, p.
8. THUNDER'S BOOGIE - THUNDER SMITH, p; acc. "Rocky Mountain", gtr. Last three recorded at Quinn Studios, Houston, Texas, ca. 1946-1947.

ALL RECORDINGS MADE BY BOB GEDDINS/EDITED & SELECTED BY CHRIS A. STRACHWITZ/NOTES BY CHRIS A. STRACHWITZ/COVER BY GRAHAM RUSSELL.

An album of blues from the West Coast, featuring Lowell and Martin Fulson, K.C. Douglas, Sidney Maiden, Willie B. Huff, Mercy Dee, Johnny Fuller, Thunder Smith, Rocky Stoneham.

World War II brought about an enormous movement of rural workers from the poverty-ridden Deep South — not only to northern cities like Chicago, Detroit and Cairo but also to the West Coast, especially to the Bay Cities of San Francisco and Oakland and to the sprawling industrial complex of Los Angeles. And with this flow came the men who make the music on this LP, to take advantage of the well-paid war-time jobs and to provide the sort of music to which the migrant workers had been accustomed all their lives. For although these people were better off financially than ever before, they were confronted with many new tensions and frustrations on the West Coast; the blues were still needed, and if the records by artists like Lowell Fulson reminded them of the tough days "down home," they also represented an unhurried, relaxed, basically stable way of life, a way of life that was less concerned with the material luxuries which become necessities as one rises on the socio-economic ladder.

Lowell Fulson, born in 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was raised on an Indian reservation in that state, being a descendant of the original Americans on his father's side. His grandfather was a violinist, his father a guitarist, and it was only natural that Lowell should follow in the family tradition. His first regular job came in 1938, with Dan Wright's String Band. Lowell played second guitar in this large group, which consisted of two mandolins, three violins, two banjos and the guitars — typical of the country bands which toured Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma at that time. Similar to white string bands in composition, these were probably more blues-oriented, but unfortunately there are few recorded documents of this type of music. Lowell also worked on and off as a field hand, but one night at a house party he met "a soft-spoken, kind man with a funny tone but a powerful voice" — his name was Texas Alexander. Howlin' Wolf (better known to collectors as "Funny Paper" Smith) had just quit as Tex's guitar player and Lowell was asked to sit in. From 1939 to 1940 he and Texas travelled together, and Lowell learned many a song and phrase as well as his pattern of singing and playing from the older man. One song in particular was Penitentiary Blues, which Lowell has recorded in two-part form as River Blues and which has also been recorded by Lightnin' Hopkins and Smokey Hogg (Lowell's version may be featured on a future Heritage LP). During Lowell's service in the navy, from 1943 to 1945, he played for his fellow sailors on Guam, gaining his first experience with the more modern type of jump-blues band. After the war, Oklahoma had little to offer, so Lowell made his way to California, where he met Bob Geddins. Although

neither had had much experience in the music business, they soon discovered that Lowell's records sold like hot cakes; Bob recalls that people used to stand in line outside his shop waiting for the latest Fulson waxing on Bob's Cavatone, Big Town and Down Town labels. Although his first records were made with piano and bass accompaniment, Lowell had trouble with his timing and soon decided that the old way was the best — he sent for his brother, Martin, to accompany him on rhythm guitar. His best recordings resulted from this partnership. Martin was present at most of Lowell's recording sessions and the brothers were very close. Lowell was greatly saddened by his brother's death late in 1959.

But musical tastes changed, and so too did Lowell Fulson. He soon signed with the more widely-distributed Swing Time and Down Beat labels, and eventually became used to a band backing, to the point where today he feels unable to play by himself — as Muddy Waters stated: "Lowell's sort've cooled off lately." He is still a fine blues singer and guitarist but as he has become more and more tied up with rock-and-roll shows he has lost much of his former character and identity. When I interviewed him for these notes he was appearing at such a show at the San Jose Auditorium, backed by an atrociously bad white r&r band — teenagers who could barely hold instruments in their hands.

K.C. Douglas came originally from Jackson, Mississippi, where he played with Tommy Johnson. Since the war, he has made California his home, playing week-end gigs with his own small blues group and working days as a construction labourer. Although K.C. has recorded with just his guitar, the two sides on this LP are the best recorded examples of his band as it would have sounded in the clubs and blues joints of West Oakland, Fresno and Bakersfield. The sound of these sides is greatly enhanced by the delightful and sensitive harmonica playing of Sidney Maiden. Sidney was born in 1923, in Mansfield, Louisiana, and started playing the harp at the age of ten. He met up with K.C. in California after the war and, although he has played and recorded with various groups, is definitely at his best when teamed with K.C.

Willie B. Huff is a girl with an amazing voice who vanished just as suddenly as she appeared — to cut four sides at Geddins' studio, accompanied by Bob's "house guitarist" Lafayette.

In 1952, the Specialty label had quite a hit by a real blues artist who called himself Mercy Dee. One Room Country Shack was about as low-down a blues as you could get, yet it was on every juke-box. Dee came originally from Texas, but has spent much of his time in California's Central San Joaquin Valley. He is today reported living in Stockton. His first and best records were those made for Spire Records of Fresno,

and this side, Trailing My Baby, recorded for Bob Geddins. From these alone it is evident that Mercy Dee is an amazing song-writer and a very distinctive pianist.

From a church group in Richmond, California, came a very young Johnny Fuller, making his first spiritual records for Mr. Jaxyson, of the Jaxyson label (these, among others, are scheduled for future release on Heritage). Johnny soon turned to other types of music, including the blues, as represented on this LP. Eventually he became quite a popular rhythm-and-blues singer on the West Coast.

Although the tracks here were recorded in Houston, Texas, Thunder Smith deserves his place as one of the group of singers who has made the trek to California. He came West to record for Aladdin with Sam Hopkins (Thunder & Lightnin' was their billing) and stayed on - for a time you could hear Thunder at various joints in West Oakland or along Central Avenue in Los Angeles. Now back home in Houston, he can still be heard at the Ft. Worth Grill, often in the company of "Rocky Mountain" who, born 1913 in Walker County, Texas, has recorded under his own name for Mercury and with Thunder and Andy Thomas for Gold Star. The tracks on this LP were recorded by Bob Geddins when Bob visited Houston after the war in search of blues talent.

(Chris Strachwitz — October 8, 1960)



Above: K.C. DOUGLAS - photo by Chris Strachwitz
Front cover: LOWELL FULSON - photo by Chris Strachwitz

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