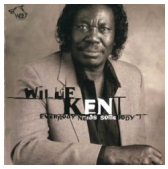
Willie Kent – Everybody Needs Somebody (1996)



01. Better Days (5:45)
02. Don't Mess With My Baby (4:20)
03. Thought I Was Lucky (3:52) play
04. My Baby's Gone (6:22)
05. One More Mile (7:20)
06. Too Hurt To Cry (3:04) play
07. Everybody Needs Somebody (7:01)
08. I Just Want A Little Bit (3:54)
09. All Your Love (6:11)
10. Chicago Bound (4:21)
11. No Love In Your Heart (4:55)
12. Since I Met You Baby (6:36)

Personnel:
Willie Kent (vocals);
Carlos Showers (vocals, guitar);
Will Davis , Jake Dawson (guitar);
Hank Ford (saxophone);
Ken Barker (piano, organ).

When he sings, Willie Kent's voice blazes out from the heart of the blues. Below the singing, you hear his bass guitar, flawless and rich. Between these two runs the music, a deep, honest blues that flowed from rural Mississippi to urban Chicago and remembers everything it learned along the way.

Willie Kent was born in 1936 in the small town of Inverness, Mississippi, just a hundred miles

south of the border with Tennessee, and the blues ran all through his childhood. His first experience singing came in church, where he went "all the time" with his mother and brother. "Blues and gospel come from the same place," he would say later in life. "They're both from the heart." But the blues always called to him. Dewitt Munson, a neighbor wending homeward late nights with a guitar in his hand and a bottle in his pocket, would stop a while at the Kent porch to rest, letting the young Willie hold his guitar while he told stories. Through radio station KFFA's famous "King Biscuit Time", Willie basked in the sounds of Arthur Crudup, Sonny Boy Williamson, and especially Robert Nighthawk. By the time he was eleven, he was regularly slipping out to the Harlem Inn on Highway 61 to hear it all live: Raymond Hill, Jackie Brenston, Howlin' Wolf, Clayton Love, Ike Turner, Little Milton.

He left home at the age of thirteen. In 1952 he arrived in Chicago, where he soon was working all day and listening to music all night. One of his co-workers was cousin to Elmore James - and Willie Kent (still underage) took to following that famous bluesman from club to club, absorbing his music. Each weekend he'd go out looking for blues, and he found it: Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, J.B. Lenoir, Johnnie Jones, Eddie "Playboy" Taylor, A.C. Reed, J.B. Hutto, and Earring George Mayweather. His love for the music led him further and further into it. He bought himself a guitar, and in 1959 through guitarist friend Willie Hudson, linked up with the band Ralph and the Red Tops, acting as driver and manager and sometimes joining them onstage to sing. He made a deal with Hudson, letting him use the new guitar in trade for lessons on how to play it. One night's show was decisive: the band's bass player arrived too drunk to play, and because the band had already spent the club's deposit, they couldn't back out of the gig; so Willie Kent made his debut as a bass player, on the spot. He never looked back.

From that point on, his credits as a musician read like a "Who's Who" of Chicago blues. After the Red Tops, he played bass with several bands around the city and stopped in often for Kansas City Red's reknowned "Blue Monday" parties. He was increasingly serious about his music and formed a group with guitarists Joe Harper and Joe Spells and singer Little Wolf. By 1961, he was playing bass behind Little Walter, and by the mid-60's was sitting in with Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Junior Parker. Toward the end of the 60's, he joined Arthur Stallworth and the Chicago Playboys as their bass player, worked briefly with Hip Linkchain, then played bass behind Jimmy Dawkins. He joined Jimmy Dawkins on his 1971 European tour, but when they returned to the States, their paths diverged: Dawkins wanted to keep touring and turned over his regular gig at Ma Bea's Lounge to Willie Kent, who wanted to stay in Chicago. For the next six years, the Ma Bea's house band was known as Sugar Bear and the Beehives, headed by Willie Kent (the Sugar Bear himself) with guitarist Willie James Lyons and drummer Robert Plunkett. In that setting, he set the tone of the club and backed up a stellar guest list including Fenton Robinson, Hubert Sumlin, Eddie Clearwater, Jimmy Johnson, Carey Bell, Buster Benton, Johnny Littlejohn, Casey Jones, Bob Fender, Mighty Joe Young, B.B. Jones, and Jerry Wells. (For a taste of the music, check out the superb 1975 recording Ghetto – Willie Kent and Willie James Lyons live at Ma Bea's.)

Willie Kent had played occasionally with Eddie Taylor's blues band during the late 70's, and in 1982 became a regular member of the band, which then included Eddie Taylor on guitar, Willie Kent on bass, Johnny B. Moore on guitar, and Larry and Tim Taylor on drums. His relationship with Eddie Taylor was both a solid friendship and a warm musical partnership (evidenced in Eddie Taylor's fine recording Bad Boy on Wolf Records). After the death of Eddie Taylor, Willie Kent devoted his energies to his own band, Willie Kent and the Gents, with Kent on bass and vocals, Tim Taylor on drums, and Jesse Williams and Johnny B. Moore on guitar. And the Gents endured. Over the years, the composition of the group shifted as musicians joined or moved on, but the music remained as clear, powerful and steady as the bass line that held it true: a pure Chicago West Side blues. By the end of his life, Willie Kent was well-known and respected in the blues world, but getting there wasn't easy. In 1989, a series of heart problems led to life-changing triple bypass surgery. As he healed, he spent time reflecting on blues music, his career, and the future. He gave up his day job and turned his full attention to music.

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