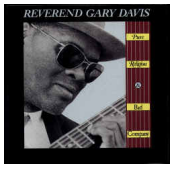
Rev. Gary Davis – Pure Religion and Bad Company (1957)



1. Pure Religion
2. Mountain Jack
3. Right Now
4. Buck Dance
5. Candy Man
6. Devil's Dream
7. Moon Goes Down
8. Cocaine Blues
9. Runnin' to the Judgement
10. Hesitation Blues
11. Bad Company
12. I Didn't Want to Join the Band
13. Evening Sun Goes Down
14. Seven Sisters
15. My Heart is Fixed
16. Time is Drawing Near
17. Crucifixion
Rev. Gary Davis - guitar, vocals

This Rev. Gary Davis release has been issued throughout the world under a bevy of names and should not be confused with the Prestige disc simply titled Pure Religion. These recordings are notable for both their sacred and secular nature. Equally as interesting is the wide range of performance styles that the Reverend incorporates throughout this long-player -- the first full-length disc to do so. Among them are the rarely displayed preachin' blues of "Bad Company," "Runnin' to the Judgement," and "Pure Religion." Notable are the spoken introductions or talkin' blues recitation techniques, as well as the more obvious and overtly religious themes. Davis took his commitment to the Lord seriously and had become an ordained minister in the summer of 1937. His vehemence and compulsion to spread the word is a blatant motif that works on several simultaneous strata. In the musical parables of "Seven Sisters" --

which should not be considered a voodoo reference -- and "Right Now," Davis recalls the fatality of not rebuking sin with lyrics like the following: "Don't 'cha put off today for tomorrow -- for tomorrow may never be. Let the Saviour bless yo' soul, right now." This collection also includes a few equally heady instrumentals -- most notably "Cocaine Blues," "Buck Dance," and "Hesitation Blues." Davis' astonishingly potent guitar playing and conversational approach have arguably never been captured more aptly on record. The direct lineage to artists such as Dave Van Ronk, Jorma Kaukonen, Stefan Grossman, and Brownie McGee becomes infinitely clear. Their versatility in technique coupled with simultaneous chord strumming and picking can be sourced right here. "Moon Goes Down" is one of the more secular pieces and originates in the slave fields as a "holler." Davis' emotionally heavy performance and dirge-like chord changes rank the tune among his most emotive recordings. Pure Religion & Bad Company was amended with two additional and otherwise previously unreleased tunes -- "Time Is Drawing Near" and "Crucifixion" -- when the title was issued on CD in 1991. Both tracks are from the same June 1957 session documented by Tiny Robinson and Fred Gerlach in New York City. ---Lindsay Planer. Rovi

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