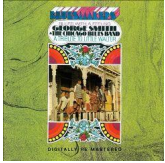


George Smith & The Chicago Blues Band - Blues with a Feeling (A Tribute to Little Walter) [2012]

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 19 March 2015 17:04 - Last Updated Saturday, 30 January 2021 09:42

George Smith & The Chicago Blues Band - Blues with a Feeling (A Tribute to Little Walter) [2012]



1 *Mellow Down Easy* 2:26 2 *Can't Hold On Much Longer* 3:03 3 *My Babe* 2:38 4 *Juke (Instrumental)* 3:12 5 *West Helena Woman* 3:35 6 *Tell Me Mama* 2:45 7 *Last Night* 4:20 8 *You Better Watch Yourself* 2:54 9 *Key To The Highway* 2:30 10 *Everything Gonna Be Alright* 2:00 11 *Too Late* 2:26 12 *Goin' Down Slow* 5:24 13 *Just A Feelin'* 3:32 14 *Love With A Feelin'* 2:45
Luther Johnson - Guitar S.P. Leary - Drums George "Harmonica" Smith - Harmonica, Vocals Lucille Spann - Vocals Otis Spann - Piano Muddy Waters - Guitar Sonny Wimberley – Bass

George "Harmonica" Smith is a curiously overlooked, albeit influential bluesman. His unique technique can be heard in the sound of acolytes such as Rod Piazza, William Clarke, and Kim Wilson of the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Although the shadow of the Chicago blues style hangs heavily over Smith's vocals and harp playing, when tempered with the years he spent traveling the south as a teen, or playing gospel music, or fronting his own band in Kansas City, Smith's unique experience would create a sound that would make him known as one of the architects of the West Coast blues style.

Sadly, Smith was sorely under-recorded during his brief lifetime, the harp wizard passing away in 1983 at the age of 59 years old. Other than a handful of singles released during the 1950s, there are a couple of early 1970s albums with the blues-rock band Bacon Fat, which also featured Piazza and guitarist Buddy Reed; a pair of well-regarded mid-70s discs with singer Big Mama Thornton; and a half dozen or so releases under his own name, from mostly European labels, and not easy to acquire except for the most diligent (and rabid) of collectors. Smith's mid-1950s tenure with the Muddy Waters Band went unrecorded, as did much of his mid-1960s return; although a 1967 session with Otis Spann resulted in *The Blues Is Where It's At* album.

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Smith was heavily influenced by the style and grace of Little Walter Jacobs – few harp players of the 1950s and early '60s wouldn't feel that influence – so it was only fitting that Smith's first album would be a tribute to the master harp player. Recorded in L.A. in October 1968 with members of Waters' band, including pianist Spann, guitarist Luther Johnson, and Muddy Waters himself, Blues With A Feeling would be released in early 1969 to near universal critical acclaim. The album featured material that was written, or recorded by Little Walter during his brief career, with the exception of "West Helena Woman," a James Cotton song that was a favorite of Smith's.

The entire recording and release of Blues With A Feeling took place only weeks after Jacobs' death, making it the ultimate tribute album, and the performances featured in the grooves were inspired, no doubt, by the relationship that many of the musicians in the studio had with the late harp player. The album kicks off with "Mellow Down Easy," a Willie Dixon composition that will be instantly familiar to any Chicago blues fan as it's long since become a blues standard. Smith's performance here display the first strains of the West Coast jump-blues style he helped create, the band jumpin'-n-jivin' behind his soulful vocals and jaunty harpwork. ---
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