

Bessie Smith - The Complete Recordings Vol. 1 (1923-1924)

Written by bluesever

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CD 1:

- 1) *Downhearted Blues*; [play](#)
- 2) *Gulf Coast Blues*;
- 3) *Aggravatin' Papa*;
- 4) *Beale Street Mama*;
- 5) *Baby Won't You Please Come Home*;
- 6) *Oh! Daddy Blues*;
- 7) *'Tain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do*; [play](#)
- 8) *Keeps On A-Rainin' (Papa, He Can't Make No Time)*;
- 9) *Mama's Got The Blues*;
- 10) *Outside Of That*;
- 11) *Bleeding Hearted Blues*;
- 12) *Lady Luck Blues*;
- 13) *Yodling Blues*;
- 14) *Midnight Blues*;
- 15) *If You Don't, I Know Who Will*;
- 16) *Nobody In Town Can Bake A Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine*;
- 17) *Jailhouse Blues*;
- 18) *St. Louis Gal*;
- 19) *Sam Jones Blues*.

CD 2:

- 1) *Graveyard Dream Blues*;
- 2) *Cemetery Blues*;
- 3) *Far Away Blues*;
- 4) *I'm Going Back To My Used To Be*;
- 5) *Whoa, Tillie, Take Your Time*;
- 6) *My Sweetie Went Away*;
- 7) *Any Woman's Blues*;
- 8) *Chicago Bound Blues*; [play](#)
- 9) *Mistreatin' Daddy*;
- 10) *Frosty Morning Blues*;
- 11) *Haunted House Blues*;
- 12) *Eavesdropper's Blues*;

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- 13) *Easy Come, Easy Go Blues*; [play](#)
- 14) *Sorrowful Blues*;
- 15) *Pinchbacks — Take 'Em Away!*;
- 16) *Rocking Chair Blues*;
- 17) *Ticket Agent, Ease Your Window Down*;
- 18) *Bo Weevil Blues*;
- 19) *Hateful Blues*.

Bessie Smith wasn't the first of the classic blues singers to record, but once she did, she became the form's dominant force, with a voice that combined clear diction, great power, and a unique capacity to convey complex emotions. Weariness gives way to resilience and sorrow to joyous triumph in Smith's performances, and there's nobility in her delivery of even the sometimes tritely comic lyrics she sang. This is the first of five two-CD sets that gather all her known recordings. The first 38 songs, from February 1923 to April 1924, are here. Smith was a presence when she first arrived in the studio: "Downhearted Blues," her first record and already a hit for its composer, Alberta Hunter, would sell nearly 800,000 copies in its first six months of release. It's a riveting performance, but there's greater substance just a couple of months later in the bending notes of "Oh Daddy Blues." There are many majestic performances here, with Smith usually accompanied by just piano, played by songwriter Clarence Williams, her working accompanist Irving Johns, or Fletcher Henderson. When her accompaniments begin to expand, Don Redman makes an appearance on clarinet, but the great band recordings with Louis Armstrong remain in the future. The liner notes, by Smith's biographer, Chris Albertson, are excellent, filled with illuminating background and details of Smith's career during her first year of fame. --Stuart Broomer

Anyone who wants to know how the blues are sung should listen to Bessie Smith. Or anyone who already knows and wants the complete recordings should get out the wallet for this "Volume 1." Bessie's the mother of them all. With a voice like a pipe organ belting out sad songs of betrayal, abuse, violence, and rough love she defined blues singing back in the '20's and '30's Nobody's ever done it better. Engineering substantially reduces the old '78 hiss. These 2 CD's and the well-written informative booklet included are well worth the price. One hopes the succeeding volumes will be as well done. ---dimitri138

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