

Bobby 'Blue' Bland – Two Steps From the Blues (2001)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Two Steps From the Blues* 2. *Cry Cry Cry* 3. *I'm Not Ashamed* 4. *Don't Cry No More*
5. *Lead Me On* 6. *I Pity the Fool* 7. *I've Just Got to Forget You* 8. *Little Boy Blue* 9. *St. James Infirmary*
10. *I'll Take Care of You* 11. *I Don't Want No Woman* 12. *I've Been Wrong So Long*
Recorded between March 12, 1956 and November 12, 1960. Personnel includes: Bobby "Blue" Bland (vocals); Wayne Bennett, Clarence Holloman (guitar); Robert Skinner, L.A. Hill (tenor saxophone); Rayfield Devers (baritone saxophone); Joe Scott, Melvin Jackson (trumpet); Pluma Davis (trombone); Connie Mack Booker, Teddy Reynolds (piano); Hamp Simmons (bass); John "Jabo" Starks, Sonny Freeman (drums)

Without a doubt, *Two Steps from the Blues* is the definitive Bobby "Blue" Bland album and one of the great records in electric blues and soul-blues. In fact, it's one of the key albums in modern blues, marking a turning point when juke joint blues were seamlessly blended with gospel and Southern soul, creating a distinctly Southern sound where all of these styles blended so thoroughly it was impossible to tell where one began and one ended. Given his Memphis background, Bobby "Blue" Bland was perfectly suited for this kind of amalgam as envisioned by producer/arranger Joe Scott, who crafted these wailing horn arrangements that sounded as impassioned as Bland's full-throated, anguished vocals. It helped, of course, that the songs were uniformly brilliant. Primarily from the pen of Deadric Malone, along with Duke head Don Robey and Scott (among others), these are the tunes that form the core of Bobby "Blue" Bland's legend and the foundation of soul-blues: "*Two Steps from the Blues*," "*I Don't Want No Woman*," "*Cry, Cry, Cry*," "*I'm Not Ashamed*," "*Lead Me On*," "*Little Boy Blue*" -- songs so good they overshadow standards like "*St. James Infirmary*." These are songs that blur the division between Ray Charles soul and Chess blues, opening the doors for numerous soul and blues sounds, from Muscle Shoals and Stax through the modern-day soul-bluesman. Since this, like many blues albums from the late '50s/early '60s, was a collection of singles, it's possible to find the key tracks, even the entire album, on the numerous Bobby "Blue" Bland collections released over the years, but this remains an excellent, essential blues album on its own terms -- one of the greatest ever released. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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