

Big Mama Thornton – Jail (live) [1975]

Written by bluesever

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01. *Little Red Rooster* [play](#) 02. *Ball 'n' Chain* 03. *Jail* 04. *Hound Dog* [play](#) 05. *Rock Me Baby* 06. *Sheriff O.E. & Me* 07. *Oh Happy Day*

Line-Up: Big Mama Thornton - Vocals Steve Wachsman - Guitar George "Harmonica" Smith - Harmonica Todd Nelson - Drums Bill Potter - Saxophone J.D. Nichols - Piano Bruce Sieverson – Bass

It's ironic that blues great Big Mama Thornton is most famous for originating songs that later became associated with other singers. Her sole R&B hit, which never made the pop charts, became Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" in most listeners' minds, just as surely as Otis Redding's "Respect" was universally credited to Aretha Franklin. It must have seemed like déjà vu when Thornton's "Ball and Chain" became known to most music lovers via Janis Joplin's version with Big Brother & the Holding Company. Nevertheless, Thornton has rarely had trouble reclaiming these and other compositions once onstage, and *Jail* vividly captures her gruff charm during a couple of mid-'70s gigs at two northwestern prisons. As a live album, *Jail* works largely because Thornton gives her musicians plenty of room to improvise, especially on six-minute versions of "Little Red Rooster" and "Ball and Chain." In her spoken introduction to "Ball and Chain," Thornton initially gives props to Janis Joplin, then reminds the audience, "I wrote this song." Having lost little of her commanding, masculine voice, Thornton becomes the talented leader of a gritty blues ensemble that features sustained jams from George "Harmonica" Smith and guitarists B. Huston and Steve Wachsman. Despite several lengthy numbers, the running time is less than 40 minutes, and there's not much between-song banter à la Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison. Listeners who are left wanting more Big Mama Thornton can invest in *The Complete Vanguard Recordings*, a triple-CD set that includes all of *Jail* and two albums from the same era: *Sassy Mama* and the previously unreleased *Big Mama Swings*. ---Vince Ripol. AMG.

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