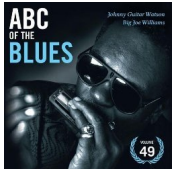


### ABC Of The Blues CD 49 – Johnny 'Guitar' Watson & Big Joe Williams (2010)



CD 49 – Johnny 'Guitar' Watson & Big Joe Williams 49-01 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Gangster of Love 49-02 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Too Tired 49-03 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Oh Baby 49-04 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Motor Head Baby 49-05 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Telephone Boogie 49-06 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – She Moves Me

[play](#)

49-07 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – One Room Country Shack 49-08 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Hot Little Mama 49-09 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – You've Been Gone Too Long 49-10 Johnny 'Guitar' Watson – Love Bandit (Gangster of Love) 49-11 Big Joe Williams – Drop Down Blues 49-12 Big Joe Williams – Wanita 49-13 Big Joe Williams – Vitamin A 49-14 Big Joe Williams – Stack of Dollars 49-15 Big Joe Williams – Wild Cow Moan 49-16 Big Joe Williams – King Biscuit Stomp 49-17 Big Joe Williams – Baby Please Don't Go

[play](#)

49-18 Big Joe Williams – Houselady Blues 49-19 Big Joe Williams – His Spirit Lives On 49-20 Big Joe Williams – She's a Married Woman

"Reinvention" could just as easily have been **Johnny "Guitar" Watson's** middle name. The multi-talented performer parlayed his stunning guitar skills into a vaunted reputation as one of the hottest blues axemen on the West Coast during the 1950s. But that admirable trait wasn't paying the bills as the 1970s rolled in. So he totally changed his image to that of a pimp-styled funkster, enjoying more popularity than ever before for his down-and-dirty R&B smashes "A Real Mother for Ya" and "Superman Lover."

Watson's roots resided within the fertile blues scene of Houston. As a teen, he played with fellow Texas future greats Albert Collins and Johnny Copeland. But he left Houston for Los Angeles when he was only 15 years old. Back then, Watson's main instrument was piano; that's what he played with Chuck Higgins' band when the saxist cut "Motorhead Baby" for Combo in 1952 (Watson also handled vocal duties).

He was listed as Young John Watson when he signed with Federal in 1953. His first sides for the King subsidiary found him still tinkling the ivories, but by 1954, when he dreamed up the absolutely astonishing instrumental "Space Guitar," the youth had switched over to guitar. "Space Guitar" ranks with the greatest achievements of its era -- Watson's blistering rapid-fire attack, done without the aid of a pick, presages futuristic effects that rock guitarists still hadn't mastered another 15 years down the line.

Watson moved over to the Bihari Brothers' RPM label in 1955 and waxed some of the toughest upbeat blues of their time frame (usually under saxist Maxwell Davis's supervision). "Hot Little Mama," "Too Tired," and "Oh Baby" scorched the strings with their blazing attack; "Someone Cares for Me" was a churchy Ray Charles-styled slow-dragger, and "Three Hours Past Midnight" cut bone-deep with its outrageous guitar work and laid-back vocal (Watson's cool phrasing as a singer was scarcely less distinctive than his playing). He scored his first hit in 1955 for RPM with a note-perfect cover of New Orleanian Earl King's two-chord swamp ballad "Those Lonely Lonely Nights."

Though he cut a demo version of the tune while at RPM, Watson's first released version of "Gangster of Love" emerged in 1957 on Keen. Singles for Class ("One Kiss"), Goth, Arvee (the rocking introduction "Johnny Guitar"), and Escort preceded a hookup with Johnny Otis at King during the early '60s. He recut "Gangster" for King, reaching a few more listeners this time, and dented the R&B charts again in 1962 with his impassioned, violin-enriched blues ballad "Cuttin' In."

Never content to remain in one stylistic bag for long, Watson landed at Chess just long enough to cut a jazz album in 1964 that placed him back behind the 88s. Along with longtime pal Larry Williams, Watson rocked England in 1965 (their dynamic repartee was captured for posterity by British Decca). Their partnership lasted stateside through several singles and an LP for OKeh; among their achievements as a duo was the first vocal hit on "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" in 1967 (predating the Buckingham's by a few months).

Little had been heard of this musical chameleon before he returned decked out in funk threads during the mid-'70s. He hit with "I Don't Want to Be a Lone Ranger" for Fantasy before putting together an incredible run at DJM Records paced by "A Real Mother for Ya" in 1977 and an updated "Gangster of Love" the next year.

After a typically clever "Strike on Computers" nicked the R&B lists in 1984, Watson again seemed to fall off the planet. But counting this remarkable performer out was always a mistake. Bow Wow, his 1994 album for Al Bell's Bellmark logo, returned him to prominence and earned a Grammy nomination for best contemporary blues album, even though its contents were pure old-school funk. Sadly, in the midst of a truly heartwarming comeback campaign, Watson passed away while touring Japan in 1996. ---Bill Dahl, allmusic.com

**Big Joe Williams** may have been the most cantankerous human being who ever walked the earth with guitar in hand. At the same time, he was an incredible blues musician: a gifted songwriter, a powerhouse vocalist, and an exceptionally idiosyncratic guitarist. Despite his deserved reputation as a fighter (documented in Michael Bloomfield's bizarre booklet *Me and Big Joe*), artists who knew him well treated him as a respected elder statesman. Even so, they may not have chosen to play with him, because -- as with other older Delta artists -- if you played with him you played by his rules.

As protégé David "Honeyboy" Edwards described him, Williams in his early Delta days was a walking musician who played work camps, jukeboxes, store porches, streets, and alleys from New Orleans to Chicago. He recorded through five decades for Vocalion, OKeh, Paramount, Bluebird, Prestige, Delmark, and many others. According to Charlie Musselwhite, he and Big Joe kicked off the blues revival in Chicago in the '60s.

When appearing at Mike Bloomfield's "blues night" at The Fickle Pickle, Williams played an electric nine-string guitar through a small ramshackle amp with a pie plate nailed to it and a beer can dangling against that. When he played, everything rattled but Big Joe himself. The total effect of this incredible apparatus produced the most buzzing, sizzling, African-sounding music one would likely ever hear.

Anyone who wants to learn Delta blues must one day come to grips with the idea that the guitar is a drum as well as a melody-producing instrument. A continuous, African-derived musical tradition emphasizing percussive techniques on stringed instruments from the banjo to the guitar can be heard in the music of Delta stalwarts Charley Patton, Fred McDowell, and Bukka White. Each employed decidedly percussive techniques, beating on his box, knocking on the neck, snapping the strings, or adding buzzing or sizzling effects to augment the instrument's percussive potential. However, Big Joe Williams, more than any other major recording artist,

## ABC Of The Blues CD49 (2010)

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embodied the concept of guitar-as-drum, bashing out an incredible series of riffs on his G-tuned nine-string for over 60 years. --- Barry Lee Pearson, allmusic.com

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