B.B. King - The Blues (1958)

A1 Why Do Things Happen To Me 2:46 A2 Ruby Lee 2:37 A3 When My Heart Beats Like A Hammer 2:54 A4 Past Day 3:16 A5 Boogie Woogie Woman 2:48 A6 Early In The Morning 2:38 B1 I Want To Get Married 3:02 B2 That Ain't The Way To Do It 2:20 B3 Troubles, Troubles, Troubles 2:58 B4 Don't You Want A Man Like Me 2:39 B5 You Know I Go For You 2:39 B6 What Can I Do 2:48

Originally released in 1958 by the budget-priced Crown label, The Blues collected a dozen sides B.B. King cut for RPM and Kent between 1951 and 1958. (RPM and Kent were owned by the Bahari Brothers who also ran Crown, which explains how one of the true prestige artists of the blues ended up on such a notoriously cheap-o label.) As was often the case with Crown's product, The Blues used a single hit tune (in this case "When My Heart Beats Like a Hammer," a Top Ten R&B chart entry in 1954) to help sell a package of lesser-known material, but thankfully the label also picked some great tunes that hardly sound like filler, even if they didn't make the charts. The material on The Blues is dominated by muscular, horn-driven performances with King's interjections of single-note riffs and powerful string bends punctuating the arrangements, and King's songwriting was already stellar, with "I Want to Get Married," "Don't You Want a Man Like Me," and "Ruby Lee" demonstrating his way with a melody and a lyrical conceit. While King's recordings gained a greater depth and emotional force as he moved into the '60s, his RPM takes were the work of a man who already had an enviable command of his instrument and a real gift as a vocalist and songwriter, and though he would get better with time, The Blues demonstrates he was already near the top of his class. ---Mark Deming, Rovi

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