B.B. King - B.B. King & Friends 80 (2005)

1 Early In The Morning Featuring – Van Morrison 4:50 2 Tired Of Your Jive Featuring – Billy F Gibbons 3:52 3 The Thrill Is Gone Featuring – Eric Clapton 5:03 4 Need Your Love So Bad Featuring – Sheryl Crow 3:57 5 Ain't Nobody Home Featuring – Daryl Hall 3:51 6 Hummingbird Featuring – John Mayer 4:41 7 All Over Again Featuring – Mark Knopfler 4:53 8 Drivin' Wheel Featuring – Glenn Frey 4:19 9 There Must Be A Better World Somewhere Featuring – Gloria Estefan 6:50 10 Never Make Your Move Too Soon Featuring – Roger Daltrey 4:59 11 Funny How Time Slips Away Featuring – Bobby Bland 4:08 12 Rock This House Featuring – Elton John 3:06 13 Early In The Morning (Alternate Take - B.B. Solo) 3:57 B.B. King – Guitar, Vocals Guy Babylon - Keyboards Bob Birch - Bass Bobby "Blue" Bland - Vocals Robbie Buchanan - Keyboards, Organ David Campbell - Conductor, String Arrangements Larry Campbell - Guitar Eric Clapton - Guitar Clem Clempson - Guitar Sheryl Crow - Vocals Roger Daltrey - Vocals Gloria Estefan - Vocals Brandon Fields - Saxophone Glenn Frey - Guitar, Vocals Billy Gibbons - Guitar, Vocals Gary Grant - Trumpet Daryl Hall - Vocals Jerry Hey - Conductor, Horn Arrangements, Trumpet Elton John - Piano, Vocals Davey Johnstone - Guitar Mark Knopfler - Guitar Russ Kunkel - Drums John Mahon - Percussion John Mayer - Guitar, Vocals Brian Mitchell - Keyboards Van Morrison - Harmonica, Vocals Nigel Olsson - Drums Dean Parks - Guitar, Guitar (Rhythm) William Frank "Bill" Reichenbach Jr. - Trombone Leland Sklar - Bass Luke Smith - Organ (Hammond) Chris Stainton - Keyboards Ian Thomas - Drums Billy Ward - Drums T-Bone Wolk - Bass

Released the week of B.B. King's 80th birthday, 80 is a star-studded duets album, the first B.B. released since 1997's Deuces Wild. It was recorded in a variety of locations in the spring of 2005 and features a variety of guest artists, ranging from the familiar (Van Morrison, Eric Clapton, Bobby Bland) to the unsurprising (Billy Gibbons, Mark Knopfler, Elton John, Sheryl Crow) to the frankly bewildering (John Mayer, Daryl Hall, Gloria Estefan). Unfortunately, the material isn't quite as wide-ranging -- in fact, it leans toward the overly familiar, with a pleasant, thoroughly bland version of "The Thrill Is Gone" with Eric Clapton sadly living up to its title. There are a couple other bum tracks -- most notably the turgid slow blues "There Must Be a Better World Somewhere," which drags on for an interminable seven minutes, or a full six

minutes longer than needed to prove that sultry blues is not Gloria Estefan's forte -- but for the most part, 80 plays better than it reads on paper. Most of it is solid, straight-ahead big band blues, firmly within B.B.'s comfort zone and sounding appropriately comfortable -- not as in boring, but warm, relaxed, and friendly, whether he's playing with old friends like Bobby Bland or with John Mayer, who acquits himself well as a guitarist, even if his voice is overwhelmed by B.B.'s towering presence. There are couple of nice little surprises along the way, such as how "Ain't Nobody Home" with Daryl Hall works up a nice soulful groove or how Sheryl Crow reveals that she's a convincing blues singer (there are also some unpleasant surprises, as on "Tired of Your Jive," an otherwise fine track that's derailed by the realization that Billy Gibbons' voice has been torn to shreds, leaving a phlegmy mess behind), but the best moments come from the old guard of the British Invasion. Roger Daltrey proves that he's singing better than ever with "Never Make Your Move Too Soon," Elton John and his house band really cook on a terrific "Rock This House," but it's Van Morrison who steals the show with "Early in the Morning," a clean but down-and-dirty version of the standard. It's the best thing here, but it's unfortunate that it kicks off the album, since it suggests that this might be a harder-hitting blues album than normal from B.B. It's not -- it's a slick, stylish, professional record, one that's actually a little more straightforward than he's been at any time since, well, Deuces Wild. Coming after some truly interesting records over the last few years, the predictability of 80 is a bit of a disappointment, but there's still a bunch of good stuff to hear, and, no matter how you look at it, for B.B. to be recording and still sounding vital at 80 is a remarkable thing even if the album that commemorates his birthday falls short of the remarkable itself. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Rovi

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