B.B. King - One Kind Favor (2008)

1 See That My Grave Is Kept Clean 2 I Get So Weary 3 Get These Blues Off Me 4 How Many More Years 5 Waiting For Your Call 6 My Love Is Down 7 The World Gone Wrong 8 Blues Before Sunrise 9 Midnight Blues 10 Backwater Blues 11 Siting On Top Of The World 12 Tomorrow Night B.B. King Guitar, Vocals Jay Bellerose - Drums, Percussion Jeffrey Clayton - Sax (Alto) Dr. John - Piano Nathan East - Bass (Acoustic) Mike Elizondo - Bass (Acoustic), Bass (Electric) Keith Fiddmont - Sax (Alto) Ernie Fields Jr. - Sax (Baritone) Alex Iles - Euphonium Jim Keltner - Drums, Percussion Neil Larsen - Hammond B3 Darrell Leonard - Trumpet Ira Nepus - Trombone Charles Owens - Sax (Tenor) Charles Owens II - Sax (Tenor) Thomas R. Peterson - Sax (Tenor) Johnny Lee Schell - Guitar Rickey Woodard - Sax (Tenor) Snooky Young - Trumpet

For One Kind Favor, King and producer T-Bone Burnett decided to go forward into the past, the artist revisiting "The B.B. King That Was," recording songs that he originally performed at the beginning of his career, or were influential on his development as a blues artist and performer.

One Kind Favor is more than just another covers album, however. Before venturing into the studio, Burnett handed King a list of some 200 songs, from which they chose the 12 tunes represented on the album. The tracklist of One Kind Favor reads like a veritable "who's who" of influential early-era blues music. From Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean" and T-Bone Walker's "Get These Blues Off Me," One Kind Favor also includes songs by Howlin' Wolf, Lonnie Johnson, John Lee Hooker, Big Bill Broonzy, and others.

To further ensure the proper atmosphere for King's performances, Burnett put together a veteran band that includes Dr. John on piano, journeyman rock drummer Jim Keltner, and even an acoustic bass player to record the songs live under studio conditions similar to those experienced by King in the early-1950s.

The proof is in the grooves, because both the sound and the feel of One Kind Favor harkens back to an earlier, and simpler blues era.

Kicking off the album with Jefferson's "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean" - One Kind Favor takes its name from a line in the song - the band delivers a syncopated rhythm behind King's low-key vocals and elegant guitar lines. Although the sound of King's version of the song varies greatly from Blind Lemon's original, the heart and soul of Jefferson's intent remains intact.

Walker's "Get These Blues Off Me" is written here as a sultry, slow-burning ember, with a muted horn section and distinctive piano notes playing off of King's torch-style solos. King's angular vocals stand in contrast to the softly-swaying background, punching through the darkness with passion and anguish. Chicago blues giant Howlin' Wolf's "How Many More Years" is probably the closest that King comes to his traditional jazz-blues sound, the song supported by an undercurrent of swinging horns and boogie piano breaks, complemented by King's fluid fretboard tones.

One of three Lonnie Johnson songs included on One Kind Favor, "My Love Is Down" benefits from Dr. John's New Orleans-flavored ivory bashing and King's uncharacteristically gruff vocals. Another of the songs from Johnson, one of King's major influences, "Tomorrow Night" closes out the album with a definite old-school vibe. Sounding like a late-night lounge-closer, accompanied by Dr. John's graceful notes and his own filigree guitarwork, King's vocals are a key or two lower, wrapping the lyrics in a rich baritone that is full of life and laughter.

Tackling a wonderfully-overlooked Mississippi Sheiks tune - remembered, no doubt, from King's days in Memphis - "The World Gone Wrong" is a bluesy romp, with razor-sharp fretwork, raucous vocals, and a stomping rhythm that drives the song somewhat astray from its 1930s string band roots. Another Sheiks' song, the standard "Sitting On Top Of The World," has been recorded by everybody from Big Bill Broonzy and Howlin' Wolf to Ray Charles and even Chet Atkins. King imagines the song as a straight-up, country blues-tinged rocker, with exceptional solos interspersed between King's deliberate reading of the lyrics.

A trip through John Lee Hooker's "Blues Before Sunrise" is afforded a touch of rolling honky-tonk piano behind King's mournful vocals, the veteran bluesman crying out the song's lyrics; in-between, King's famed guitar "Lucille" sheds a few tears itself, the road-weary

instrument taking on a life of its own, pouring emotion through the speakers. "Midnight Blues" takes on a slightly Chicago blues feel with jazzy horns accompanying one of King's best vocal performances, the Kokomo Arnold gem amped up a notch by the guitarist's imaginative fretwork.

No doubt about it, this is the kind of stuff that B.B. King has built a legend on, and One Kind Favor further cements the guitarist's legacy as one of the greatest performers that the blues has ever produced. Choice covers, stellar guitar playing, throwback production...what's not to like? One Kind Favor is a considerable late-career statement from one of the Delta's last true blues warriors. --- Reverend Keith A. Gordon, blues.about.com

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