

Raful Neal - Old Friends (1998)



1. *My Baby Left Me* 3:14 2. *Someday* 4:25 3. *I Got Over You* 3:30 4. *You Been Sweet To Me* 4:50 5. *Call Me Baby* 3:50 6. *Pride & Joy* 3:45 7. *Old Friend* 3:39 8. *Bleeding Heart* 4:29 9. *Crazy About You Baby* 3:43 10. *Change My Way of Living* 4:17 11. *Sunny Side of Love* 4:27 Shalyntra Bessie Vocals (Background) Troy Davis Drums Anthony Hardesty Guitar (Bass) Darryl Jefferson Piano (Grand) James Johnson Guitar, Guitar (Rhythm) Joe Krown Organ (Hammond) Jeannell Matta Vocals (Background) Darnell Neal Guitar (Bass) Jackie Neal Vocals (Background) Noel Neal Guitar (Acoustic) Raful Neal Harmonica, Vocals

Baton Rouge harmonica wizard Raful Neal, influenced by fellow Louisiana harp man Little Walter and the laconic swamp blues sound of Slim Harpo, might have enjoyed more mass recognition had he left the region for Chicago and other points north like many of the area's other postwar blues players did, but he chose to stay in Louisiana and raise a family (several of his children ended up musicians, including his oldest son, Kenny Neal), and he recorded rather sparingly. This set, from 1998, is typical of his output, featuring slow burning ballads like his impressive version of Ted Taylor's "Someday" and stomping shuffles like his own "Pride & Joy." A masterful, if sometimes understated, harmonica player (his take on Little Walter's "Crazy About You Baby," included here, shows him in full flight), Neal was also a fine singer, and if his songs lyrically often wandered into cliché territory, his subtle, emotional, and completely believable vocal phrasing yanked them right back out again. Seldom flashy, and working without a stable of gimmicks, Neal doesn't hit you over the head with what he does (which is probably part of the reason he isn't better known), but his steady, solid approach to his own brand of swamp blues makes this a comfortable outing that quickly grows on you. ---Steve Leggett, AllMusic Review

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