Josh White - From New York To London: Classic Recordings [CD1] (2002)

1. Nobody Knows When You're Down and Out 2. Sometime 3. John Henry 4. Back Water Blues 5. Watercress 6. Josh And Bill Blues 7. Dip His Finger In The Water 8. Frankie and Johnny 9. Jelly, Jelly 10. Green Grass Growing All Around 11. The Lass With the Delicate Air 12. Evil Hearted Man 13. I Gave My Love a Cherry 14. Lord Randall, My Son 15. Molly Malone 16. The House Of The Risin' Sun 17. Strange Fruit 18. Jim Crow 19. Good Morning Blues (Bonus Track) 20. When The Sun Goes Down (Bonus Track) Norman Burns - Drums Fitzroy Coleman - Guitar Jack Fallon - Bass J.C. Heard - Drums Chick Laval - Guitar Brownie McGhee - Guitar Steve Race - Celeste, Piano John Simmons - Bass Stargazers - Vocals Sonny Terry - Harmonica Bill White - Drums Josh White - Guitar, Primary Artist, Vocals

Josh White had a remarkable talent for self-reinvention, and his career -- which began in the 1920s and stretched essentially uninterrupted all the way into the '60s -- is an amazing story of adaptability and survival. Slick, sly, and fiercely intelligent, White became a sort of pre-Harry Belafonte black sex idol, complete with a leftist social and political agenda, during his so-called cabaret blues period in the late '40s, and when the McCarthy era led to his blacklisting, he rebounded into the folk revival period with several carefully assembled albums for Jac Holzman's Elektra label that recast him as a folk balladeer. Although some folk purists were aghast, doubting White's authenticity as a folk-blues performer (perhaps unaware of White's solid Piedmont blues background and his fine run of vintage blues 78s in the '30s), the fact remains that White was an excellent acoustic guitar player and a subtle and versatile singer who carefully selected his material, well aware of how it made him appear. This double-disc, 42-track set is drawn from White's cabaret period and features recordings he made in New York between 1944 and 1947 (disc one) and in London in 1950 and 1951 (disc two). The range of styles here is telling, as White rolls all manner of songs, from light gospel to small-combo jazz and blues, into a kind of folky high art. Among the highlights are a stark reading of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" and White's small-combo jazz take on Casey Bill Weldon's classic "I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town." Fiercely independent, and always in control of his own image in an era when black performers were seldom afforded that luxury, White helped pave the way for Belafonte, who followed the same sort of template to international stardom a mere

half-dozen years after these recordings were made. ---Steve Leggett, AllMusic Review

It has been many years since Josh White received anything like his due from either Blues or Folk music fans, but there was a time when he was the world's most famous Blues musician and one of the leading lights of the Folk scene. When the recordings that make up the first disc of this set were made, Josh was in the process of introducing the mass of Americans to the existence of acoustic Blues music, and when those on the second were made he was serving as America's Folk-Blues ambassador to Europe. The number of popular artists on both sides of the Atlantic who might never have played music, or received any attention from the public without Josh's influence is beyond counting - though such disparate figures as Harry Belafonte, who started as a Josh White imitator, and John Renbourn, who first learned guitar from a Josh White instruction book, leap to mind. ---propermusic.com

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