Bessie Smith - Bessie's Best (2009)



1. Alexander's Ragtime Band
2. Gimme A Pigfoot And A Bottle O
3. Do Your Duty
4. Cold In Hand Blues
5. A Good Man Is Hard To Find
6. Squeeze Me
7. St.Louis Blues
8. Take Me For A Buggy Ride
9. One And Two Blues
10. New Orleans Hop Scop Blues
11. Nobody's Blues But Mine
12. Send Me To The Lectric Chair
13. Careless Love Blues
14. Downhearted Blues
15. Empty Bed Blues
16. Yellow Dog Blues
17. Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out
18. Them's Graveyard Words

Bessie Smith was a rough, crude, violent woman. She was also the greatest of the classic Blues singers of the 1920s. Bessie started out as a street musician in Chattanooga. In 1912 Bessie joined a traveling show as a dancer and singer. The show featured Pa and Ma Rainey, and Smith developed a friendship with Ma. Ma Rainey was Bessie's mentor and she stayed with her show until 1915. Bessie then joined the T.O.B.A. vaudeville circuit and gradually built up her own following in the south and along the eastern seaboard. By the early 1920s she was one of the most popular Blues singers in vaudeville. In 1923 she made her recording debut on Columbia, accompanied by pianist Clarence Williams. They recorded "Gulf Coast Blues" and "Down Hearted Blues." The record sold more than 750,000 copies that same year, rivaling the

success of Blues singer Mamie Smith (no relation). Throughout the 1920s Smith recorded with many of the great Jazz musicians of that era, including Fletcher Henderson, James P. Johnson, Coleman Hawkins, Don Redman and Louis Armstrong. Her rendition of "St. Louis Blues" with Armstrong is considered by most critics to be one of finest recordings of the 1920s.

Bessie Smith was one of the biggest African-American stars of the 1920s and was popular with both Whites and African-Americans, but by 1931 the Classic Blues style of Bessie Smith was out of style and the Depression, radio, and sound movies had all damaged the record companies' ability to sell records so Columbia dropped Smith from its roster. In 1933 she recorded for the last time under the direction of John Hammond for Okeh. The session was released under the name of Bessie Smith accompanied by Buck and his Band. Despite having no record company Smith was still very popular in the South and continued to draw large crowds, although the money was not nearly as good as it had been in the 1920s. Bessie had started to style herself as a Swing musician and was on the verge of a comeback when her life was tragically cut short by an automobile accident in 1937. While driving with her lover Richard Morgan (Lionel Hampton's uncle) in Mississippi their car rear-ended a slow moving truck and rolled over crushing Smith's left arm and ribs. Smith bled to death by the time she reached the hospital. John Hammond caused quite a stir by writing an article in Downbeat magazine suggesting that Smith had bled to death because she had been taken to a White hospital and had been turned away. This proved not to be true, but the rumor persists to this day.
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