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John Lee Hooker - His Best Chess Sides (1998)



CD 1 01. Mad Man Blues 02. Hey Boogie 03. Louise 04. High Priced Woman 05. Union Station Blues 06. Ground Hog Blues 07. Leave My Wife Alone 08. Ramblin' By Myself 09. Dreamin' Blues 10. Just Me and My Telephone 11. Walkin' the Boogie (Alternate) 12. Sugar Mama 13. Please Don't Go 14. I Don't Want Your Money 15. Hey Baby 16. Bluebird CD 2

01. Walkin' the Boogie 02. Love Blues 03. Lonely Boy Boogie (a/k/a New Boogie) 04. Apologize 05. The Journey 06. Worried Life Blues 07. Down at The Landing 08. You Have Two Hearts 09. It's My Own Fault 10. Blues for Big Town 11. Women and Money 12. Big Fine Woman 13. Tell Me Baby 14. Blues for Christmas 15. Cry Baby Cry John Lee Hooker – guitar, vocals Eddie "Guitar" Burns – guitar Eddie Kirkland - guitar Lafayette Leake – piano Fred Below - drums

John Lee Hooker, as anyone with a decent-sized blues collection knows, recorded for a virtual parade of labels early in his career, including Chess, although his stays with the company were fairly brief. Hooker's best early recordings, most would agree, were issued on Modern and Vee-Jay, not Chess. Still, if the only Hooker extant consisted of his Chess sides, his greatness would be readily apparent. Approached not as a best-of but simply as one of many Hooker compilations, this 15-song disc is fine, leaning heavily on early-'50s material (the source for 11 of the songs). This is typical of his early work in its stress on his great guitar work, walking rhythms, and drumless arrangements (most of it is played solo). It's good stuff, even if much of it is derivative of things he recorded elsewhere, and the mike plainly catches him coughing on "Bluebird." The solo on "Leave My Wife Alone" is almost avant-garde in conception, a series of plucked runs up and down the scale with little relation to convention, even by blues standards. Closing the set are four much more modern-sounding cuts from the mid-'60s, the "I'm in the Mood"/"Let's Go Out Tonight" single and a couple of cuts from the Real Folk Blues LP (including his standard "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer"). --- Richie Unterberger, allmusic.com

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