

Willie Dixon - Little Red Rooster (The Blues Collection 60)

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01 - I Just Want To Make Love To You 02 - Black Angel Blues 03 - When The Lights Go Out 04 - Pain In My Heart 05 - (I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man 06 - Third Degree 07 - Walkin' The Blues 08 - You Know My Love 09 - Tollin' Bells 10 - Little Red Rooster 11 - Mellow Down Easy 12 - Weak Brain, Narrow Mind

Willie Dixon has been called “the poet laureate of the blues” and “the father of modern Chicago blues.” He was indisputably the pre-eminent blues songwriter of his era, credited with writing more than 500 songs by the end of his life. Moreover, Dixon is a towering figure in the history and creation of Chicago blues on other fronts. While on staff at Chess Records, Dixon produced, arranged and played bass on sessions for Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williamson, and others. In no small way, he served as a crucial link between the blues and rock and roll.

Born in 1915 in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Dixon began rhyming, singing and writing songs in his youth. He was exposed to a variety of music – gospel, blues, country & western – that served as the seeds for the symbiotic music he would later make in Chicago. Moving to the city in 1936, he had a brief career as a boxer and then skirmished with the U.S. Army, refusing induction on the grounds he was a conscientious objector. His early forays on the Chicago music scene included stints with the Five Breezes, the Four Jumps of Jive and the Big Three Trio, all of which made records. The Big Three Trio, in particular, are noteworthy for having brought harmony singing to the blues. Dixon really found his niche at Chess, where he was allowed to develop as a recording artist, session musician, in-house songwriter and staff musician beginning in 1951.

Some of the now-classic songs he wrote for others during his lengthy tenure at Chess include “Hoochie Coochie Man,” “I’m Ready” and “I Just Want to Make Love For You” (Muddy Waters);

“Back Door Man,” “Spoonful” and “I Ain’t Superstitious” and “Wang Dang Doodle” (Howlin’ Wolf); and “My Babe” (Little Walter). Although he didn’t write for Chuck Berry, Dixon played bass on most of his early records. For a few years in the late Fifties, he also wrote for and worked with artists on the crosstown Cobra label, including such fledgling bluesmen as Otis Rush, Buddy Guy and Magic Sam.

Dixon returned to Chess in 1959, and the Sixties saw the full flowering of his talents there. In addition to writing and producing some of his greatest works during that decade, he recorded a series of albums in a duet format with Memphis Slim on the Folkways, Verve and Battles labels. His first album, Willie’s Blues, was recorded with Memphis Slim in 1959. He appeared on more recordings with Memphis Slim before releasing his first solo album, I Am the Blues, in 1970. Albums followed from him at more regular intervals in subsequent years, culminating in the 1988 release of Hidden Charms, which won Dixon a Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Recording.

In his later years, Willie Dixon became a tireless ambassador of the blues and a vocal advocate for its practitioners, founding the Blues Heaven Foundation. The organization works to preserve the blues’ legacy and to secure copyrights and royalties for blues musicians who were exploited in the past. Speaking with the simple eloquence that was a hallmark of his songs, Dixon put it like this: “The blues are the roots and the other musics are the fruits. It’s better keeping the roots alive, because it means better fruits from now on. The blues are the roots of all American music. As long as American music survives, so will the blues.”

Willie Dixon published his autobiography, I Am the Blues, in 1989 – a year after Chess Records released Willie Dixon: The Chess Box, a two-disc set that included Dixon’s greatest songs as performed by the artists who’d made them famous – Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter, Bo Diddley, Lowell Fulson – and Dixon himself. ---rockhall.com

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