

Wynonie Harris – Good Rockin' Blues (1970)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Good Rockin' Tonight 2:45 A2 I Feel That Old Age Coming On 2:45 A3 Bloodshot Eyes 2:40 A4 Rot Gut 2:32 A5 Mr. Dollar 2:10 A6 Grandma Plays The Numbers 2:35 B1 Good Morning Judge 2:39 B2 Adam, Come Get Your Rib 2:20 B3 All She Wants To Do Is Rock 2:32 B4 Quiet Whiskey 2:26 B5 Lovin' Machine 2:25 B6 Tremblin' 2:28 Wynonie Harris - Guitar, Vocals

“Well I heard the news: There’s good rockin’ tonight! I’m gonna hold my baby as tight as I can, tonight she’ll know I’m a mighty, mighty man! Meet me in a hurry behind the barn, don’t you be afraid, I’ll do you no harm. We’re gonna rock! We’re gonna rock! Let’s rock! C’mon! Rock all our blues away!” Roy Brown wrote those words in 1947 and pitched the song to Wynonie Harris, who, at first, turned it down. Good thing Harris changed his mind, because his superior version, which came out after Brown’s original and Cecil Gant’s cover, changed his life and was a precursor for rock and roll itself.

The song — recorded for Syd Nathan’s King Records out of Cincinnati — burst out of jukeboxes across the country in 1948 with its hand claps, propulsive back beat, honking saxophone by Hal “Cornbread” Singer and sexually suggestive vocal, an intimidating leer. It topped the charts for six months.

This hard-core blues shouter enjoyed the kind of lifestyle that mirrored the rough and tumble ribald tunes Harris belted out both live and on record. Harris was a lean, mean, love machine; a hard drinker, carousing womanizer and good-looking Dapper Dan who had been dancing, singing and playing guitar and drums since the mid-1930s.

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Wynonie “Mr. Blues” Harris was born Aug. 24, 1915, in Omaha, Neb., to his unmarried, 15-year-old mother. It is believed his father was a Native American named Blue Jay. A high school dropout, Harris fathered two children to two different women before he was 18. A third child was born to him when he was 20; he married the baby’s teenage mother. By then, he had taught himself to play the drums and had formed a dance team with Velda Shannon in the bustling 1930s Omaha music scene. He’d often travel to Kansas City, Kan., where he thrilled audiences.

After moving to Los Angeles in 1940, Harris honed his vocal chops to the point where he toured the country. In Chicago, Lucky Millender recruited Harris to sing in a big band; in New York City, Harris performed at the prestigious Apollo Theater. His vocals graced the 1945 Decca recording of “Who Threw The Whiskey Down The Well.” In 1946, Harris’ sang on legendary saxophonist Illinois Jacquet’s “Wynonie’s Blues.”

Harris did all right for himself between 1944 and 1948, but it was nothing like what happened to him at the height of his notoriety from 1948 to 1952: rockin’ after midnight every night in a different club, shoutin’ and wailin’ his way into the kind of success that made him feel invincible, and, at the same time, laying the groundwork for something called rock and roll. Harris had a Cadillac, a chauffeur and a fancy home. He couldn’t have known that his hits and his career would dry up before the ’50s were over.

Enter Elvis Presley. When Presley got a hold of “Good Rockin’ Tonight” in 1954 for his second single out of Sun Records in Memphis, Tenn., all hell broke loose. Pastors started preaching against rock and roll. The music itself was demonized. As Elvis ascended, Harris clung to the hopes he could rekindle his once hotter-than-hot fortunes, but by the early 1960s, Harris couldn’t buy a hit. Still he hung on, recording decent enough material for Atco, Roulette and Chess (which never even released his masters). Those lucky enough to witness Harris’ still-rockin’ live shows in small bars in the mid-to-late ’60s saw the glimmer of greatness. But cancer got the best of Harris; he died in Los Angeles on June 14, 1969, at the age of 53. --- Mike Greenblatt, goldminemag.com

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