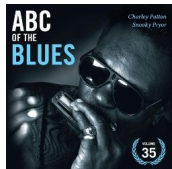


ABC of the Blues CD35 (2010)

Written by bluesever

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CD 35 – Charley Patton & Snooky Pryor 35-01 Charley Patton – High Water Everywhere Pt. 1 35-02 Charley Patton – Hang It on the Wall 35-03 Charley Patton – Prayer of Death Pt. 1 35-04 Charley Patton – Sic em Dogs On [play](#) 35-05 Charley Patton – Watch and Pray 35-06 Charley Patton – Snatch and Grab It 35-07 Charley Patton – M and O Blues 35-08 Charley Patton – Dark Road Blues 35-09 Charley Patton – Country Farm Blues 35-10 Charley Patton – Forty Four 35-11 Snooky Pryor – Snooky and Moody's Boogie [play](#) 35-12 Snooky Pryor – Telephone Blues 35-13 Snooky Pryor – Boogy Fool 35-14 Snooky Pryor – Stop the Train, Conductor 35-15 Snooky Pryor – Walking Boogie 35-16 Snooky Pryor – Uncle Sam, Don't Take My Man 35-17 Snooky Pryor – Rough Treatment 35-18 Snooky Pryor – Stockyard Blues 35-19 Snooky Pryor – Keep What You Got 35-20 Snooky Pryor – Let Me Ride Your Mule

If the Delta country blues has a convenient source point, it would probably be **Charley Patton**, its first great star. His hoarse, impassioned singing style, fluid guitar playing, and unrelenting beat made him the original king of the Delta blues. Much more than your average itinerant musician, Patton was an acknowledged celebrity and a seminal influence on musicians throughout the Delta. Rather than bumming his way from town to town, Patton would be called up to play at plantation dances, juke joints, and the like. He'd pack them in like sardines everywhere he went, and the emotional sway he held over his audiences caused him to be tossed off of more than one plantation by the ownership, simply because workers would leave crops unattended to listen to him play any time he picked up a guitar. He epitomized the image of a '20s "sport" blues singer: rakish, raffish, easy to provoke, capable of downing massive quantities of food and liquor, a woman on each arm, with a flashy, expensive-looking guitar fitted with a strap and kept in a traveling case by his side, only to be opened up when there was money or good times involved. His records -- especially his first and biggest hit, "Pony Blues" -- could be heard on phonographs throughout the South. Although he was certainly not the first Delta bluesman to record, he quickly became one of the genre's most popular. By late-'20s

Mississippi plantation standards, Charley Patton was a star, a genuine celebrity.

Although Patton was roughly five foot, five inches tall and only weighed a Spartan 135 pounds, his gravelly, high-energy singing style (even on ballads and gospel tunes it sounded this way) made him sound like a man twice his weight and half again his size. Sleepy John Estes claimed he was the loudest blues singer he ever heard and it was rumored that his voice was loud enough to carry outdoors at a dance up to 500 yards away without amplification. His vaudeville-style vocal asides -- which on record give the effect of two people talking to each other -- along with the sound of his whiskey- and cigarette-scarred voice would become major elements of the vocal style of one of his students, a young Howlin' Wolf. His guitar playing was no less impressive, fueled with a propulsive beat and a keen rhythmic sense that would later plant seeds in the boogie style of John Lee Hooker. Patton is generally regarded as one of the original architects of putting blues into a strong, syncopated rhythm, and his strident tone was achieved by tuning his guitar up a step and a half above standard pitch instead of using a capo. His compositional skills on the instrument are illustrated by his penchant for finding and utilizing several different themes as background accompaniment in a single song. His slide work -- either played in his lap like a Hawaiian guitar and fretted with a pocket knife, or in the more conventional manner with a brass pipe for a bottleneck -- was no less inspiring, finishing vocal phrases for him and influencing contemporaries like Son House and up-and-coming youngsters like Robert Johnson. He also popped his bass strings (a technique he developed some 40 years before funk bass players started doing the same thing), beat his guitar like a drum, and stomped his feet to reinforce certain beats or to create counter rhythms, all of which can be heard on various recordings. Rhythm and excitement were the bywords of his style.

The second, and equally important, part of Patton's legacy handed down to succeeding blues generations was his propensity for entertaining. One of the reasons for Charley Patton's enormous popularity in the South stems from his being a consummate barrelhouse entertainer. Most of the now-common guitar gymnastics modern audiences have come to associate with the likes of a Jimi Hendrix, in fact, originated with Patton. His ability to "entertain the peoples" and rock the house with a hell-raising ferociousness left an indelible impression on audiences and fellow bluesmen alike. His music embraced everything from blues, ballads, ragtime, to gospel. And so keen were Patton's abilities in setting mood and ambience, that he could bring a barrelhouse frolic to a complete stop by launching into an impromptu performance of nothing but religious-themed selections and still manage to hold his audience spellbound. Because he possessed the heart of a bluesman with the mindset of a vaudeville performer, hearing Patton for the first time can be a bit overwhelming; it's a lot to take in as the music, and performances can careen from emotionally intense to buffoonishly comic, sometimes within a single selection. It is all strongly rooted in '20s black dance music and even on the religious tunes in his repertoire, Patton fuels it all with a strong rhythmic pulse.

He first recorded in 1929 for the Paramount label and, within a year's time, he was not only the largest-selling blues artist but -- in a whirlwind of recording activity -- also the music's most prolific. Patton was also responsible for hooking up fellow players Willie Brown and Son House with their first chances to record. It is probably best to issue a blanket audio disclaimer of some kind when listening to Patton's total recorded legacy, some 60-odd tracks total, his final session done only a couple of months before his death in 1934. No one will ever know what Patton's Paramount masters really sounded like. When the company went out of business, the metal masters were sold off as scrap, some of it used to line chicken coops. All that's left are the original 78s -- rumored to have been made out of inferior pressing material commonly used to make bowling balls -- and all of them are scratched and heavily played, making all attempts at sound retrieval by current noise-reduction processing a tall order indeed. That said, it is still music well worth seeking out and not just for its place in history. Patton's music gives us the first flowering of the Delta blues form, before it became homogenized with turnarounds and 12-bar restrictions, and few humans went at it so aggressively.

Only recently has **Snooky Pryor** finally begun to receive full credit for the mammoth role he played in shaping the amplified Chicago blues harp sound during the postwar era. He's long claimed he was the first harpist to run his sound through a public address system around the Windy City -- and since nobody's around to refute the claim at this point, we'll have to accept it! James Edward Pryor was playing harmonica at the age of eight in Mississippi. The two Sonny Boys were influential to Pryor's emerging style, as he played around the Delta. He hit Chicago for the first time in 1940, later serving in the Army at nearby Fort Sheridan. Playing his harp through powerful Army PA systems gave Pryor the idea to acquire his own portable rig once he left the service. Armed with a primitive amp, he dazzled the folks on Maxwell Street in late 1945 with his massively amplified harp. Pryor made some groundbreaking 78s during the immediate postwar Chicago blues era. Teaming with guitarist Moody Jones, he waxed "Telephone Blues" and "Boogie" for Planet Records in 1948, encoring the next year with "Boogy Fool"/"Raisin' Sand" for JOB with Jones on bass and guitarist Baby Face Leroy Foster in support.

Pryor made more classic sides for JOB (1952-1953), Parrot (1953), and Vee-Jay ("Someone to Love Me"/"Judgment Day") in 1956, but commercial success never materialized. He wound down his blues-playing in the early '60s, finally chucking it all and moving to downstate Ullin, IL, in 1967. For a long while, Pryor's whereabouts were unknown. But the 1987 Blind Pig album Snooky, produced by guitarist Steve Freund, announced to the world that the veteran harpist was alive and well, his chops still honed. A pair of solid discs for Antone's, Too Cool to Move and In This Mess Up to My Chest, followed. Pryor stayed busy until his death in 2006.

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