

Odetta - The Best of Odetta Ballads and Blues (1994)

Written by bluesever

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1. "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" – 1:59 2. "Lowlands" – 2:41 3. "The Fox" – 1:53 4. "The Lass from the Low Cowntree" (John Jacob Niles) – 4:40 5. "Devilish Mary" – 1:57 6. "Take This Hammer" (Ledbetter) – 3:33 7. "Greensleeves" – 2:49 8. "Deep River" – 3:00 9. "Chilly Winds" – 2:43 10. "If I Had a Ribbon Bow" – 2:43 11. "Shame and Scandal" – 2:23 12. "Buked and Scorned" – 2:40 13. "Joshua" – 1:54 14. "Glory, Glory" – 2:13 15. "Been in the Pen" – 2:32 16. "Deep Blue Sea" – 3:02 17. "God's Gonna Cut You Down" – 1:51 18. "Spiritual Trilogy" – 6:05 Personnel Odetta – vocals, guitar Bill Lee – bass

The title *The Best of Odetta* sets a standard that the contents of this disc are unable to meet, even though the material is valuable. It would be difficult to assemble a true Odetta best-of, because the folksinger's recordings are extensive and have covered the labels Fantasy (1954-1955), Tradition (1956-1957), Vanguard (1959-1962 with releases continuing into 1963), Riverside (1962), RCA Victor (1962-1965), and Verve Folkways (1966-1967). But the concern here is solely the Tradition material, which consists of a total of 31 tracks that originated on two albums, *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues* (1956) and *Odetta at the Gate of Horn* (1957). *The Best of Odetta* is a truncated repackaging of this material, an 18-track disc excerpting nine selections from *Odetta at the Gate of Horn* followed by nine from *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues*. On it, an Odetta in her mid-twenties gives mesmerizing performances of traditional folk and blues standards in her trademark contralto, accompanying herself on acoustic guitar or singing a cappella. (Bill Lee plays bass on the tracks from *Odetta at the Gate of Horn*.) These are good performances, and any folk fan should have some version of the Tradition recordings. But the album's title makes a promise the music itself does not keep. (*The Best of Odetta* has been reissued under the title *The Best of Odetta: Ballads & Blues*.) --- William Ruhlmann, Rovi

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