

W.C. Handy - W.C. Handy's Memphis Blues Band (1994)

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1. *Fuzzy Wuzzy Rag* [3:13]
2. *Snakey Blues* [2:59]
3. *Ole Miss Rag* [2:47]
4. *That Jazz Dance* [2:57]
5. *The Old Town Pump* [3:05]
6. *Moonlight Blues* [3:18]
7. *Hooking Cow Blues* [3:06]
8. *Bunch O Blues* [3:22]
9. *Sweet Child* [3:03]
10. *Livery Stable Blues* [2:47]
11. *St. Louis Blues* [3:02]
12. *Yellow Dog Blues* [3:14]
13. *Muscle Shoals Blues* [2:59]
14. *She's A Mean Job Blues* [2:58]
15. *Gulf Coast Blues* [2:48]
16. *Farewell Blues* [2:48]

Despite his importance as composer and pioneer of orchestrated blues, ragtime and classic jazz, cornetist and bandleader William Christopher Handy's recordings languished in obscurity for generations until 1994 when the Memphis Archives label brought out a compilation containing 16 hitherto rare examples of his carefully arranged dance music dating from 1917-1923. Tracks one through ten were recorded for the Columbia label in September 1917 by Handy's Orchestra of Memphis, a 13-piece ensemble that included two instrumentalists destined to become busy sessionmen in Chicago during the '20s. Most instantly audible (especially on Al Morton's "Fuzzy Wuzzy Rag") is percussionist Jasper Taylor, heard here as drummer and xylophonist and later featured on sessions led by clarinetist Johnny Dodds. The other noteworthy participant was Darnell Howard, heard here on violin but best remembered as a clarinetist who sounded a bit like Jimmie Noone and who worked with King Oliver and Erskine

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Tate during the '20s. Howard also operated a violin as a member of the Earl Hines Orchestra during the '30s, and resurfaced on the West Coast years later with Kid Ory. The 1917 recordings are precious examples of syncopated dance music as it was performed before jazz became a popular trend. Tracks 11-16, recorded in 1922-1923 and issued on multiple small-time labels, are played by Handy's Memphis Blues Band, a decidedly jazzier-sounding group that is able to sink its teeth into numbers that were set to become standards in the repertoire of authentic jazz bands. This exciting sampler of Handy's early recorded works does not include four sides cut for the Lyric label in 1919, nor does it touch upon the other 12 recordings he is known to have made during the year 1923. Given the existence of ten titles Handy waxed for the Library of Congress in 1938, an all-star recording group he led in 1939, and additional material dating from the early '50s, the reissuing of W.C. Handy's recorded works has yet to attain fruition let alone completion. Fortunately, the folks at Memphis Archives established a precedent with this fascinating album of historic delights. ---arwulf arwulf, Rovi

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