

Cyndi Lauper – Memphis Blues (2010)

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01. *I m Just Your Fool (feat. Charlie Musselwhite) (3:37)*
02. *Shattered Dreams (feat. Allen Toussaint) (3:52)*
03. *Early in the Morning (feat. Allen Toussaint & B.B. King) (3:51)*
04. *Romance in the Dark (5:44)*
05. *How Blue Can You Get (feat. Jonny Lang) (5:23)*
06. *Down Don t Bother Me (feat. Charlie Musselwhite) (3:03)*
07. *Don t Cry No More (2:44)*
08. *Rollin and Tumblin (feat. Kenny Brown and Ann Peebles) (3:29)*
09. *Down So Low (3:55)*
10. *Mother Earth (feat. Allen Toussaint) (5:19)*
11. *Cross Roads (feat. Jonny Lang) (4:42)*

B.B. King – guest vocals Jonny Lang – vocals Cyndi Lauper – production, vocals Charlie Musselwhite - harmonica Ann Peebles – guest vocals Allen Toussaint – keyboards Howard Grimes – drums Leroy Hodges – bass Marc Franklin – trumpet Derrick Williams – tenor sax Kirk Smothers – baritone sax

There is no doubt that Cyndi Lauper can sing almost anything and make it not only compelling, but her own (and she has, many times, whether her albums sold or not). Arguing her gift as a vocalist is pointless. That said, her sense of direction is always a question. Thanks to her appearance on the television program *Celebrity Apprentice*, her public profile is once more part of mainstream pop culture. So of all the albums to make -- *Memphis Blues* is her eleventh -- why a blues record now? True, she gets help from some big names: Charlie Musselwhite, Allen Toussaint, B.B. King, Ann Peebles, and Jonny Lang, but in the end, she has to carry these performances herself. The set begins with Little Walter Jacobs' "Just Your Fool" featuring Musselwhite's muscular harmonica, but Lauper's vocal is thin, reedy, and doesn't carry authority in the lyric -- particularly not when juxtaposed against that harmonica. Far better is Louis Jordan's "Early in the Morning" with King and Toussaint. The interplay between the latter's rumbling, New Orleans R&B piano and the former's sparse but mean lead guitar works well with Lauper's vocal, especially with the tune's humorous lyrics. "Romance in the Dark" is one of

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three cuts Lauper and her band cut without any cameos, and it works wonderfully. Its slow, nocturnal, languidly sexy feel underscores her strengths as a singer. The uptempo, soul-drenched "Don't Cry No More" works equally well, thanks to her having to get atop a rollicking Stax-style horn section and testify. "Rollin' and Tumblin'," with Peebles, is strong and authoritative; it's a unique version even if their voices don't always meld. Her two selections with Lang are as cliched and nondescript as electric blues gets these days: a waste. There is real beauty in "Mother Earth," however, with Toussaint playing his most sympathetic, in-the-cut blues piano as a horn section matches Lauper's unique, off-kilter phrasing and winds it into the blues. In the end, while Memphis Blues does have some fine moments, the uneven ones makes it feel like a squandered opportunity at a popular comeback. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

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