

Ruth Brown - Blues on Broadway (1989)

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1. *Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out* 5:36 2. *Good Morning, Heartache* 5:57
3. *If I Can't Sell It, I'll Keep Sittin' On It* 5:22 4. *Tain't Nobody's Biz-Ness If I Do* 9:18 5. *St. Louis Blues* 9:32 6. *Am I Blue* 5:53 7. *I'm Just A Lucky So And So* 5:49 8. *I Don't Break Dance* 5:19 9. *Come Sunday* 5:26 Ruth Brown (vocals); Rodney Jones (guitar, banjo); Hank Crawford (alto saxophone); Red Holloway (tenor saxophone); Spanky Davis (trumpet); Britt Woodman (trombone); Bobby Forrester (piano, Hammond B-3 organ); Al McKibbon (acoustic bass); Grady Tate (drums).

Ruth Brown was starring on Broadway in *Black and Blue* when she recorded her second Fantasy set. The emphasis is on ancient standards (mostly from the 1920s) that predated Brown's rise as an R&B star in the '50s. Assisted by trumpeter Spanky Davis, tenorman Red Holloway, trombonist Britt Woodman, a rhythm section led by pianist/organist Bobby Forrester and (on three numbers) altoist Hank Crawford, Brown makes such songs as "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," "If I Can't Sell It, I'll Keep Sittin' on It" and "Am I Blue" sound as if they were written for her. ---Scott Yanow, Rovi

Blues singer Ruth Brown's "Blues on Broadway," (Fantasy, 1989) catches her at the peak of her 1980's comeback. She had excellent help in arranging its contents, and expert backing, from Spanky Davis, trumpet; Hank Crawford, alto sax; Red Holloway, tenor sax; Britt Woodman, trombone; Bobby Forrester, piano and organ; Rodney Jones, guitar and banjo, who arranged "I Don't Breakdance;" Al McKibbon, acoustic bass, and Grady Tate, drums. The album finds her largely in the mood for blues standards.

Brown was ably backed by these first-rate musicians, and gives strong renditions of "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," "Good Morning Heartache," "Tain't Nobody's Biz-ness if I Do," W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," "Am I Blue," and Duke Ellington's "I'm Just a Lucky So

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and So." Finally, Brown gives a characteristically sly rendition of Andy Razaf's wink-wink, nod-nod "If I Can't Sell It, I'll Keep Sittin' on It."

The Virginia -born Brown was the daughter of a dock hand who led the local church choir, and it's there she got her earliest training, but she soon showed a marked preference for more show biz-zy repertoire and venues. In the late 1940's, early 1950's, she brought her pop singing style to then-fledgling Atlantic Records, where she was redirected to blues. She had a series of 1950's hits for them, principally "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," "So Long," and "Teardrops from My Eyes." In fact, Atlantic was known for a time as "The House That Ruth Built." From 1949-1955, she was on the R & B charts for 149 weeks, with 16 hits in the top ten, and five #1s. Brown sat out the sixties, raising her family, and started coming back in the mid 70's. She then focused on pressing for musicians' rights in regard to royalties and contracts, and helped organize the Rhythm and Blues Foundation.

The album is aptly named for Broadway; there's no question that Brown was a show biz-zy performer, who did, in fact, star on the great white way during her career. She passed from us in 2006, but leaves us a filmed memento, exuberantly playing dj Motormouth Maybelle, in John Walters's original "Hairspray." A blues-loving girlfriend and I were lucky enough to once catch her live, during the 1980's, at Michael's Pub, in New York. You know what? She was very entertaining. ---Stephanie De Pue, amazon.com

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