

The Piano Blues Vol. 15 - Dallas 1927-1929 (1980)

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1. Texas Bill Day & Billiken Johnson - Elm Street Blues 2. Whistln' Alex Moore - Heart Wrecked Blues 3. Billiken Johnson & Neal Roberts - Frisco Blues 4. Texas Bill Day - Goin' Back To My Baby 5. Hattie Hudson - Doggone My Good Luck Soul 6. Billiken Johnson & Fred Adams - Sun Beam Blues 7. Whistln' Alex Moore - Blue Bloomer Blues 8. Texas Bill Day - Good Mornin' Blues 9. Whistln' Alex Moore - They May Not Be My Toes 10. Texas Bill Day & Billiken Johnson - Billiken's Weary Blues 11. Billiken Johnson & Neal Roberts - Wild Jack Blues 12. Whistln' Alex Moore - West Texas Woman 13. Bobbie Cadillac - Carbohic Acid Blues 14. Texas Bill Day - Burn The Trestle Down 15. Billiken Johnson & Neal Roberts - Interurban Blues 16. Whistln' Alex Moore - Ice Pick Blues

Bill Day – vocals, piano (1,4, 8,14) Whistln' Alex Moore – vocals, piano (2,7,9,12,16) Neal Roberts – vocals, piano (3,11,15) Willie Tyson – piano (5,6,15) Billiken Johnson – vocal effects (1,3,6,10,11,15) Hattie Hudson – vocals (5) Fred Adams – vocals (6,15) Bobbie Cadillac – vocals (13) Coley Jones – guitar (1,4,8,14) Blind Norris – guitar (7) Octave Gaspard – bass (6,15)

Dallas was the home of a number of distinctive piano players and singers they accompanied. Among them were Texas Bill Day, Neal Roberts, Willie Tyson, Whistlin' Alex Moore and singer Billiken Johnson.

Despite the brash and nosey environment the “Dallas blues piano style of Dallas is slow or medium-paced and contemplative in its nature ...Blues in the Dallas school is about Dallas; in fact no other blues schools, with the exception perhaps, of Chicago, gives us quite such a picture of the urban life which inspired it. ..These are blues that are intended to be listened to, with words that have a strange folk lyricism about them. Here the piano is used as a complementary poetic instrument, setting off the words and the mood of the blues instead of challenging it with pyrotechnic displays”.

It's not surprising that the railroad figure prominently in the blues of Dallas. Singer Billiken Johnson was obviously well acquainted with the rail lines as they figure in number of his blues. Johnson is a key figure though he did not play piano. His speciality was vocal effects, and he was considered rather a clown by his blues musician friends. On "Frisco Blues" (a reference to the St. Louis—San Francisco line) Johnson provides the train sounds over the gently rolling piano of Neal Roberts who also sings. Johnson provides the same role on "Sun Beam Blues" (also known as the "Sunshine Special" that ran on the Missouri—Pacific line to St. Louis) evocatively imitating the lonesome train whistle as the unknown Fred Adams takes the vocals. Johnson also vocalizes on "Interurban Blues" which refers to the short haul trains which brought country people into the city. On these tracks Willie Tyson plays piano. Johnson's vocal effects are also on display on "Billiken's Weary Blues" with steady piano support from Texas Bill Day who plays in a similar style as the aforementioned Neal Roberts. Johnson surfaces again on Day's lustily sung "Elm Street Blues" where the pianist sings: "Elm Street's paved in brass, Main Street's paved in gold/I've got a good girl lives on East Commerce, I wouldn't mistreat her to save nobody's soul/These Elm Street Women, Billiken, do not mean you no good/If you want to make a good woman, have to get on Haskell Avenue." The song, as Oliver says, refers "...to the respective success of the black sector of "Deep Elm", or Elm Street, which ran by Central Tracks, and the downtown business sector of Main".

Paul Olive describes Whistlin' Alex Moore as a "folk blues poet par excellence" and "one of the most poetic blues singers on record, Alex Moore had developed as a remarkable pianist in the purest boogie and blues tradition with an eccentric inventive flair both in his vocals and his playing." Moore was perhaps the last of the early Texas piano although a couple of others survived long enough to make some latter day recording. --- Jeff Harris, chicagosouthsidepiano.com

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