

Fenton Robinson – Mellow Fellow (1993)

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1 *Somebody Loan Me A Dime* 2 *The Sky Is Crying* 3 *Smokestack Lightning* 4 *Little Red Rooster* 5 *Moanin' For My Baby* 6 *Don't Start Me To Talkin'* 7 *Stormy Monday* 8 *Leave You In The Arms (Of Your Other Man)* 9 *Let Me Come On Home* 10 *The Getaway* 11 *Sideman* 12 *Give You Some Air* 13 *I'm Not Through Loving You* 14 *Mellow Fellow*
Mac Gayden - Guitar Carl Himmel - Drums Ed Killis - Harmonica Fenton Robinson - Guitar, Vocals Troy Seals - Guitar Bob Wilson - Keyboards

His Japanese fans reverently dubbed Fenton Robinson "the mellow blues genius" because of his ultra-smooth vocals and jazz-inflected guitar work. But beneath the obvious subtlety resides a spark of constant regeneration -- Robinson tirelessly strives to invent something fresh and vital whenever he's near a bandstand. The soft-spoken Mississippi native got his career going in Memphis, where he'd moved at age 16. First, Rosco Gordon used him on a 1956 session for Duke that produced "Keep on Doggin'." The next year, Fenton made his own debut as a leader for the Bihari Brothers' Meteor label with his first reading of "Tennessee Woman." His band, the Dukes, included mentor Charles McGowan on guitar. T-Bone Walker and B.B. King were Robinson's idols.

1957 also saw Fenton team up with bassist Larry Davis at the Flamingo Club in Little Rock. Bobby Bland caught the pair there and recommended them to his boss, Duke Records prexy Don Robey. Both men made waxings for Duke in 1958, Robinson playing on Davis' classic "Texas Flood" and making his own statement with "Mississippi Steamboat." Robinson cut the original version of the often-covered Peppermint Harris-penned slow blues "As the Years Go Passing By" for Duke in 1959 with New Orleans prodigy James Booker on piano. The same date also produced a terrific "Tennessee Woman" and a marvelous blues ballad, "You've Got to Pass This Way Again." Fenton moved to Chicago in 1962, playing Southside clubs with Junior Wells, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Otis Rush and laying down the swinging "Say You're Leavin'" for USA in 1966. But it was his stunning slow blues "Somebody (Loan Me a Dime)" cut in 1967 for Palos, that insured his blues immortality. Boz Scaggs liked it so much that he covered it for

his 1969 debut LP. Unfortunately, he initially also claimed he wrote the tune; much litigation followed.

John Richbourg's Sound Stage 7/Seventy 7 labels, it's safe to say, didn't really have a clue as to what Fenton Robinson's music was all about. The guitarist's 1970 Nashville waxings for the firm were mostly horrific: he wasn't even invited to play his own guitar on the majority of the horribly unsubtle rock-slanted sides. His musical mindset was growing steadily jazzier by then, not rockier.

Robinson fared a great deal better at his next substantial stop: Chicago's Alligator Records. His 1974 album *Somebody Loan Me a Dime* remains the absolute benchmark of his career, spotlighting his rich, satisfying vocals and free-spirited, understated guitar work in front of a rock-solid horn-driven band. By comparison, 1977's *I Hear Some Blues Downstairs* was a trifle disappointing despite its playful title track and a driving T-Bone tribute, "Tell Me What's the Reason." Alligator issued *Nightflight*, another challenging set, in 1984, then backed off the guitarist. His 1989 disc *Special Road*, first came out on the Dutch Black Magic logo and was reissued by Evidence Music. Robinson passed away on November 25, 1997 at the age of 62 due to complications from brain cancer. ---Bill Dahl, allmusic.com

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