

Gabriel Brown

Mean old blues 1943-1949



FLY CD 59

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| 01 I Get Evil When My Love Comes
Down | 14 Hold That Train |
| 02 You Ain't No Good | 15 Boogie Woogie Guitar |
| 03 Black Jack Blues | 16 That's Alright |
| 04 Going My Way | 17 Stick With Me |
| 05 Down In The Bottom | 18 Doing My Best |
| 06 Bad Love | 19 Good-Time Papa |
| 07 I've Got To Stop Drinkin' | 20 Baby, Boy, Baby |
| 08 Cold Love | 21 Mean Old Blues |
| 09 Not Now, I'll Tell You When | 22 You Have To Be Different |
| 10 I'm Gonna Take It Easy | 23 The Jinx Is On Me |
| 11 I've Done Stopped Gamblin' | 24 It's Time To Move |
| 12 It's Getting Soft | 25 Hold Me Baby |
| 13 Don't Worry About It | 26 Nobody Loves Like My Little
Girl |

All titles recorded in New York City

Tracks 01 to 04 recorded probably mid-1943

Tracks 05 to 08 recorded 26 August 1943

Tracks, 9, 10 and 16 recorded 13 September 1944

Tracks 11, 17, 18, 19 and 20 recorded 26 October 1944

Tracks 12 to 15 and 21 to 23 recorded 2 May 1945

Track 24 recorded 27 June 1945

Tracks 25 and 26 recorded 3 August 1949

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20 Endwell Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex TN40 1EA, England

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Handwritten signature: Gabriel Brown 12/28/44.

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IN THE 1940's, the East Coast country blues tradition was surviving under the left-wing of producers like Moe Asch and Alan Lomax.

Elsewhere change was rampant.

Many of the blues artists from Mississippi were travelling to Memphis and points North (especially Chicago) while the Texas bluesmen were emigrating to the West Coast. In their new urban environments they transformed a rural blues to one more consistent with the fast new life. Factories were metaphors for the new urban sound as were the mules and plowshares emblems of the earliest blues. Their music was quickly changing from downhome to uptown.

Certain artists like John Lee Hooker, Lightnin' Hopkins and Arthur Crudup were transforming their music in a different way, adopting the sound of the electric guitar to which they sometimes added drums, bass and piano — augmenting but not entirely transforming an acoustic backporch sound. Apart from the appreciative regional audiences that had been brought up with the sound, the late forties and early fifties were clearly signalling the end of its mass appeal. Clearly, the interest of the recording industry was elsewhere. That is, until a decade later when the new northern white audience was to embrace the old and the new with a heretofore unknown ardour.

Artists such as Gabriel Brown seem to have fallen between the cracks — never embraced by a “school” or courted by an age that understood them.

Gabriel Brown was born in 1910 in Orlando, Florida, where he attended Jones High School. He graduated to the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College but also studied medicine. Born to a poor family, he was always working jobs on the side; and, being musical, he played

Hawaiian guitar and sang with a group called the Sun to Sun Singers. He soon changed to Spanish guitar, playing mostly in the open tunings of G and D and became accomplished enough to represent the state of Florida at the St Louis National Folk Festival in 1934 where he won first prize as the outstanding singer of folk songs and as a guitarist.

The next year Brown was discovered by Zora Neale Hurston, the eminent black writer/folklorist/novelist/anthropologist who had accompanied Alan Lomax to South Georgia, where they were engaged in collecting black folk songs. Together they went into Florida where they located and recorded Gabriel Brown for the Library of Congress.

Between 1935 and 1939, Brown was connected with the Federal Arts Theater under the direction of Orson Welles. There he obtained the acting skills that he soon would apply to a few of Ms Hurston's plays.

In 1939 Gabriel Brown was singing on Cincinnati radio with Richard Huey in the "Sheep and Goats Club" programme, and played in the cast of "St Louis Woman". The latter gig probably brought him to the attention of producer/entrepreneur Joe Davis who had produced some of Huey's gospel recordings in 1943. During this period the artist was touring with USO shows, and eventually went to work for the Motor Transportation First Army Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Subsequently, he became a permanent civil service employee while performing at clubs in his home town of Asbury Park, New Jersey, gigging also at other nearby seaside resorts.

Meanwhile, in 1942 Joe Davis founded the Beacon Record Company and one year later recorded his first eight Gabriel Brown numbers at the Empire Broadcasting Studios in New York City. Although the release sequence typically did not correspond with the order in which the tracks were recorded, mid-1943 saw the recording of the following