

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PABL 010

Robert Johnson

Phonograph Blues

Pristine
XR

One hundred years ago, a boy-child was born in Mississippi – a dirt-poor, African-American who would grow up, learn to sing and play the blues, and eventually achieve worldwide renown. In the decades after his death, he has become known as the King of the Delta Blues Singers, his music expanding in influence to the point that rock stars of the greatest magnitude – the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, the Allman Brothers – all sing his praise and have recorded his songs.

That boy-child was Robert Johnson, an itinerant blues singer and guitarist who lived from 1911 to 1938. He recorded 29 songs between 1936 and '37 for the American Record Corporation, which released eleven 78rpm records on their Vocalion label during Johnson's lifetime, and one after his death.

Most of these tunes have attained canonical status, and are now considered enduring anthems of the genre: "Cross Road Blues," "Love In Vain," "Hellhound On My Trail," "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Walking Blues," "Sweet Home Chicago."

Robert Johnson Biography Robert Johnson Blues Foundation (*excerpt*)

Producer's Note

There are over twenty times more recordings of Robert Johnson than there are authenticated photographs. What began in a San Antonio hotel room exactly eighty years ago and continued in a second series of sessions in a Dallas hotel a year later was to change the face of popular music - though not until almost a quarter century later, and long after Johnson had passed away, just another almost forgotten acoustic bluesman.

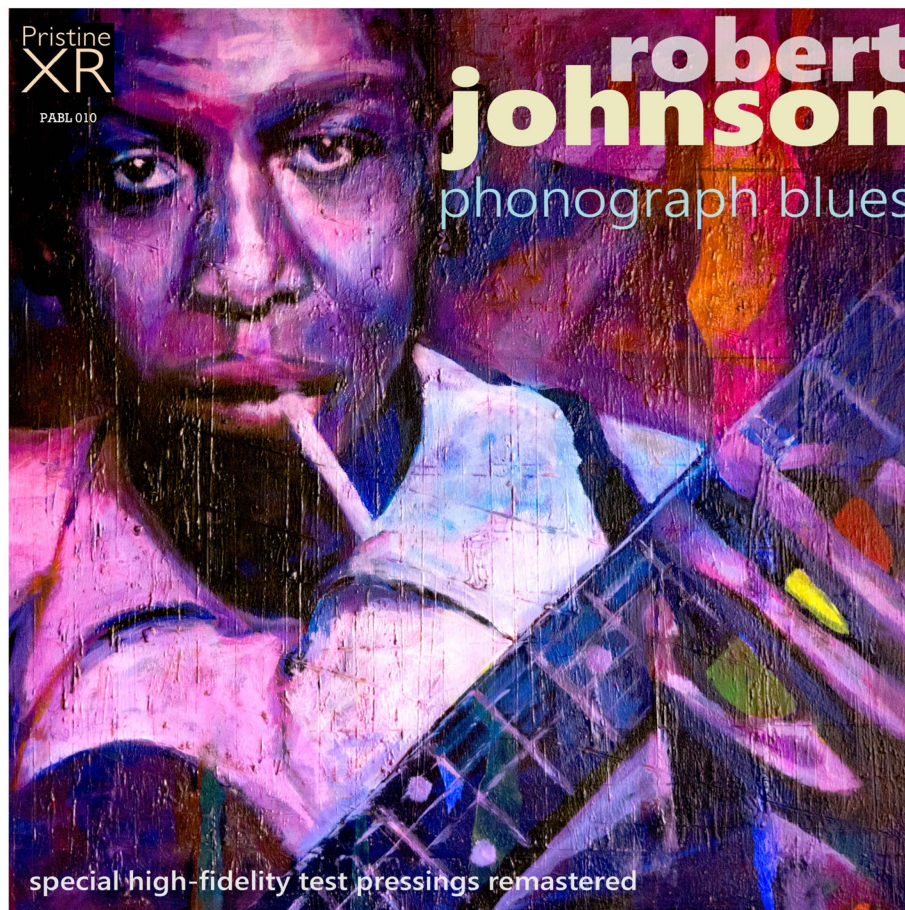
In the late 1950s plans were afoot at Columbia Records to compile an LP of Johnson's recordings, a record which was to influence a generation of musicians upon its release in 1961. In the run-up to this release a number of test recordings and pressings were made - including a handful of sides that were pressed, using already-obsolete 78rpm stamping machinery and onto ultra-quiet discs, for listening and review by producer Frank Driggs, direct from the original metal Johnson masters.

These incredibly quiet surfaces reveal a far wider tonal and dynamic range in the original Johnson recordings than anyone would expect from discs cut in the mid-1930s, where regular discs would normally run up to about 5-6kHz before petering out just where high treble harmonics should be heard. This is not the case here: with a frequency range around three times wider than expected, we find harmonics way up to 15kHz and beyond - well into the range more commonly associated with recordings made in the 1950s and 1960s.

Ten of these mint sides were preserved for decades in the collection of Tom Jacobson, who in 2006 donated much of his extensive collection to the US Library of Congress - but not until after he'd had ultra-high quality 24/96 digital transfers made of each side. These transfers he offered to me for this short album, which offers the authentic sound of Robert Johnson - thanks also to our innovative and multi-award-winning XR remastering process - as never heard before.

In informal comments via e-mail, two legendary multi-platinum-selling musicians expressed separately their amazement to us at hearing these new remastered transfers of music which had been such an enormous influence on their own careers, now sounding as if Robert Johnson is there playing in the room with them: "WOW ! Brilliant !" - "Remarkable... really...."

Andrew Rose



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SIDE ONE: 1936

1 When You Got A Good Friend (Take 2) (2:56)

Recorded 1936-11-23. Matrix Number: SA 2584-2

2 Ramblin' On My Mind (2:57)

Recorded 1936-11-23. Matrix Number: SA 2583-1

3 Phonograph Blues (2:44)

Recorded 1936-11-23. Matrix Number: SA 2587-1

4 Possession of Judgement Day (2:40)

Recorded 1936-11-27. Matrix Number: SA 2582-1

5 When You Got A Good Friend (Take 1) (2:42)

Recorded 1936-11-23. Matrix Number: SA 2584-1

Recorded at The Gunter Hotel, 205 E Houston St. San Antonio, Texas

SIDE TWO: 1937

6 I'm A Steady Rollin' Man (2:40)

Recorded 1937-06-19. Matrix Number: DAL 378-1

7 Stones In My Passway (2:32)

Recorded 1937-06-19. Matrix Number: DAL 377-2

8 Hellhound On My Trail (2:40)

Recorded 1937-06-20. Matrix Number: DAL 394-2

9 Love In Vain (2:25)

Recorded 1937-06-20. Matrix Number: DAL 402-2

10 Milkcow's Calf Blues (2:19)

Recorded 1937-06-20. Matrix Number: DAL 403-1

Recorded at 508 Park Avenue, Dallas, Texas

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork: oil painting by
Andy Smith for Pristine Audio,
based on a photograph of
Robert Johnson

Special thanks to Tom Jacobson
for original source recordings

Total duration: 26:35

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