

LP 1 SIDE ONE

1. I'M YOUR HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN (2:51)
2. BABY PLEASE DON'T GO (3:18)
3. ROLLIN' AND RUMBLIN' (PART 1) (3:00)
4. ROLLIN' AND RUMBLIN' (PART 2) (2:33)
5. GYPSY WOMAN (2:34)
6. I JUST WANT TO MAKE LOVE TO YOU (2:51)
7. YOU'RE GONNA MISS ME (WHEN I'M DEAD AND GONE) (2:38)

LP 1 SIDE TWO

1. MANNISH BOY (2:57)
2. SMOKESTACK LIGHTNIN' (3:07)
3. STANDIN' HERE TREMBLIN' (2:24)
4. JUST A DREAM (ON MY MIND) (2:33)
5. SHE'S ALL RIGHT (2:28)
6. I WANT TO BE LOVED (2:30)
7. THEY CALL ME MUDDY WATERS (3:23)

LP 2 SIDE ONE

1. GOT MY MOJO WORKING (2:53)
2. ROCK ME (3:13)
3. I'M READY (3:03)
4. DIAMONDS AT YOUR FEET (2:27)
5. MOPPER'S BLUES (2:58)
6. LOVING MAN (2:28)
7. EVIL (2:21)

LP 2 SIDE TWO

1. FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS (2:52)
2. SHE MOVES ME (2:58)
3. TROUBLE NO MORE (2:42)
4. HARD DAY BLUES (2:34)
5. ROLLIN' STONE (3:07)
6. I CAN'T BE SATISFIED (2:43)
7. TRAIN FARE HOME BLUES (2:48)

Born McKinley Morganfield in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on 4 April 1915 (some sources say 1913), Muddy Waters grew up to be the undisputed Father of post-World War II Chicago blues. He excelled as a recording artist, bandleader, songwriter and showman, and enjoyed a career long enough to inspire several generations of musicians to follow in his footsteps. He was the link between old and new blues, rural and urban, even black and white, and his role in the music's development was crucial.

The story of Muddy Waters is something of a rags to riches tale, as young McKinley experienced all the poverty of the rural South. He picked up his stage name because his grandmother, with whom he lived, "used to say I'd sneak out and play in the mud... the kids added Waters, it was a slang name and it just stuck."

He moved to Clarksdale at the age of three, and by his twenties was a hard-working, poorly paid sharecropper. Inspired by Son House and Robert Johnson, he played music at weekends for enjoyment and a bit of pocket money. But his whole life changed when, in 1941, he was recorded by Alan Lomax who was documenting blues music for the Library of Congress. A further session in 1942 when Lomax returned to the plantation helped convince Muddy to take a career in music more seriously and he headed for Chicago in 1943 determined to make a name for himself.

Big Bill Broonzy helped the young man establish a foothold on the scene, and he was soon playing acoustic guitar behind the first Sonny Boy Williamson. He adopted the electric guitar in 1944-45, thanks to a gift from his uncle, and his music took a quantum leap with Jimmy Rogers (harmonica), Claude Smith (guitar) and Eddie Boyd (piano) among his early confederates. After a false start recording for Lester Melrose and Columbia Records, Waters came to Leonard Chess' attention in 1947 when he backed pianist Sunnyland Slim on a session for Aristocrat (soon to be Chess) Records. He returned the following year to cut 'I Can't Be Satisfied', one of the numbers he'd performed for Alan Lomax. The first pressing sold out within 24 hours; Muddy Waters the recording artist was up and running.

Though the song had been delivered crudely with just bottleneck guitar and bass backing up the vocal, a line-up Chess insisted he retained for early recordings, Waters would join forces in 1950 with the likes of harmonica-player Little Walter Jacobs, guitarist Jimmy Rogers and drummer Elgin Evans, while pianist Otis Spann was added to the ranks in 1953.

Waters' trademark song was 'I Got My Mojo Working', while the likes of 'Baby Please Don't Go' (Them) and 'Mannish Boy' (Yardbirds) were grist to the mill of British blues bands. A crucial ingredient in Waters' success was Chess staff songwriter Willie Dixon. He supplied the likes of 'Hoochie Coochie Man', 'I'm Ready' and 'I Just Want To Make Love To You', supplementing Waters' own self-penned repertoire. These songs defined Chicago blues, his vocal unparalleled in its power and purpose.

Muddy Waters' visit to Europe in 1958 almost single-handedly turned Britain on to the blues. The fact he was playing an amplified guitar shocked the purists, but inspired Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies to form Blues Incorporated. And, of course, it was 'Rollin' Stone', that inspired a group of long-haired Londoners to give the blues their own special spin. He repeated the inspirational feat at Newport Folk Festival in 1960, the live album of their set released by Chess later in the year making its way into many a star-to-be's record collection. It was ironic, of course, that the main audience for the blues was now white, a fact that understandably dismayed him.

The first of six Grammy-winning albums, 'They Call Me Muddy Waters', opened up a decade of renewed success in 1971, while the following year's 'London Muddy Waters Sessions' brought many British stars flocking to record with their inspiration, Rory Gallagher, Steve Winwood and Mitch Mitchell among those present. But it was another long-time fan, American albino guitarist Johnny Winter, whose patronage would help Muddy enjoy a second coming. Albums 'Hard Again' (1977) and 'I'm Ready' (1978) were critical and commercial successes, and around this time Waters was happy to perform 'Mannish Boy' as part of the Band's 'Last Waltz' celebrations.

Muddy Waters passed away in his sleep in April 1983, having remained active on the live circuit almost to the end. Rock bands from Cream to Led Zeppelin owe a musical debt that's more than evident in their music, while many tributes have been paid. Texans ZZ Top presented Clarksdale, Mississippi's Blues Museum with a very special electric guitar made from a cypress log taken from Muddy's childhood cabin, while Free singer Paul Rodgers recorded a tribute album that was released in 1983.

Waters was posthumously awarded a Lifetime Achievement Grammy in 1992, appearing on a US 29 cent stamp two years later. By this time, inductions to the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1980 and the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame seven years later had confirmed his place as a music legend.

But the real proof is here in this handsome double LP set that contains all the tracks that won Muddy Waters legendary status. These classics remain as fresh and vital today as when they were cut. If they don't get your mojo working, check your pulse...

Steeve notes by Michael Heatley