

Blues

STEREO CD-83389

Slammin'
on the
West Side

LUTHER "GUITAR JR." JOHNSON
AND THE MAGIC ROCKERS



Slammin' on the West Side

**LUTHER
"GUITAR JR."
JOHNSON**

vocal, guitar

**AND THE
MAGIC ROCKERS**

BRIAN BISESI
rhythm guitar

DAVE TORKANOWSKY
Hammond B-3 organ,
Wurlitzer piano, acoustic piano

ERIC "Two Scoops" MOORE
Roland electric piano,

GEORGE PORTER, JR.
bass

HERMAN ERNEST
drums, percussion

"Sax" GORDON BEADLE
tenor saxophone,
baritone saxophone

DEBBIE HAMBELTON
background vocal

PRODUCED BY JOHN SNYDER

1. **A Pretty Girl (A Cadillac and Some Money)** [3:12]
2. **She's Lookin' Good** [3:56]
3. **Hey Little Girl** [5:00]
4. **I Ain't Doin' Too Bad** [4:56]
5. **It's Good To Me** [3:28]
6. **Sittin' on the Back Seat of a Greyhound Bus** [6:27]
7. **Every Woman Needs To Be Loved** [4:00]
8. **Stranded** [3:22]
9. **Early in the Morning Blues** [5:00]
10. **Another Man** [2:19]
11. **Hard Times (Have Surely Come)** [4:30]
12. **The Woman I Love** [3:49]
13. **Get Up and Go** [2:03]
14. **Why Am I Treated So Bad?** [2:58]
15. **Waiting at the Station** [5:47]
16. **Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On** [3:52]

**Total
Playing
Time**
[65:16]

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Slammin' on the West Side

"Chicago blues" is less a style than a distinct musical genre with its own hallmarks and characteristics. Countless thousands of eloquent musicians, many in the Windy City, have spoken the postwar improvisational language developed by the mighty Muddy Waters and other original instigators of amplified, urbanized Delta sounds. But today few players seem to have sharp insight into the sensuality and deep sorrow that gives meaning to this plain, economical musical form. Many unwittingly devalue Chicago blues by playing the music without personality and without emotional linkage to the African-American experience. So, thank our lucky stars for Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson and his new album titled *Slammin' on the West Side*.

Johnson is one of the most expressive Chicago bluesmen ever to tune a guitar. No exaggerating. He combines deep knowledge of tradition with the immediacy of fresh observation. He goes about his singing and guitar playing with clarity and self-searching urgency, always aware that he must lift the spirits of his listeners and get them on the dance floor. Blues is his life work, and he's been at it for more than thirty-five years, through thick and thin.

Born in Itta Bena, Mississippi, and resettled in Chicago at age sixteen, Johnson began making a name for himself around the West Side as a hot young guitarist in the early Sixties. Guitar wizard Magic Sam became his personal advisor and after a few years of paying dues in smokey blues taverns, Johnson was ready for the master, Muddy Waters. One memorable night in 1972 Johnson's friend (and Waters's bass player) Calvin Jones took him to the White Stable club so he could sit in with Chicago's premier blues band. The great man liked what he heard of Guitar Junior and signed on the awestruck thirty-three-year-old as rhythm guitarist. The next seven and a half years found Johnson and the Muddy Waters band crisscrossing North America and traveling to Japan, Australia, and Europe. In fact, Waters was so taken with Johnson's technical skills and showmanship that he let him open concerts with a mini-set of his own.

The band split from Waters in 1980 and soon Johnson made his mark as a solo performer, contributing to Alligator Records' *Living Chicago Blues* series and a Grammy-winning compilation album on the Atlantic label that featured his appearance at the Montreux (Switzerland) Jazz Festival. Based in the Greater Boston area after 1982, Johnson has kept his band, the Magic Rockers, busy on the New England, national, and international blues circuits. Now and then, Johnson's taken time out to cut records, first for Rooster Blues and more recently for Rounder's Bullseye Blues label. *Slammin' on the West Side* heralds the guitarist's new affiliation with Telarc.

On *Slammin'*, Johnson, assisted by Magic Rockers Gordon Beadle and Eric "Two Scoops" Moore and several outstanding New Orleans musicians, brings greater authority than ever before to his refinement of Chicago blues in the studio (albeit one found in Cajun country). Johnson himself says the presence of Meters bassist George Porter, Jr., Dr. John's drummer Herman Ernest, and first-call keyboardist Dave Torkanowsky lends "a little Louisiana sound" to his trademark groove. This time, too, jump-blues and funk are included on the program, not to mention country blues. The music hits us hard, engaging our emotions like the best blues is wont to do.

A Pretty Girl (A Cadillac and Some Money), a little-known song from rock'n'roll pioneer Buddy Johnson, transports us to a jumpin' black dance hall circa 1950, with Luther firing off terse guitar lines and Beadle blowing out his brains on tenor saxophone in the noble r&b tradition. Johnson combines flamboyance and thoughtfulness when singing the funky **She's Lookin' Good**, a 1967 hit for Wilson Pickett written by the undervalued soul man Roger Collins (who actually recorded it before Pickett, without commercial success). Take special note here of the syncopated ebullience unleashed by drummer Ernest. On **Hey Little Girl**, Johnson effortlessly constructs a stinging, incisive guitar statement before giving way to typically spirited commentary from Beadle. Luther conveys tense assurance when singing Bobby Bland's mid-Sixties **I Ain't Doin' Too Bad**, and he's more than happy to hip us to the around-the-clock libido of his baby on the slathered-with-greasy-funk original **It's Good To Me**. Again, as he does many times elsewhere, Johnson exhorts Beadle to manhandle his tenor.

All through the album, Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson remains confident in his ability to entertain. **Sittin' on the Back Seat of a Greyhound Bus**, a medium-slow blues penned by Boston-based blues pianist Dave Maxwell, features some of Junior's most insistent and rewarding guitar playing on the date, with Gordon Beadle and ace organist Dave Torkanowsky mulling over his my-woman's-gone plaints in their respective feature spots. Junior Parker's **Stranded** shows how well the rhythm section motors along beneath Johnson's imploring vocals, while the loping, no-nonsense **Early In the Morning Blues**, a song he wrote one dreary day in New Jersey ten or twelve years back, is riveting for the easygoing grace that infuses the leader's pained singing. Rays of optimism are provided in the latter song by Torkanowsky's acoustic piano.

Johnson says with a laugh that his pithy **Another Man** is meant to "give the guys something to think about when they're messing up on their old ladies," and he states that he wants the Magic Sam-like **Hard Times** to inspire both sexes to "try to do better" in life's everyday struggles. **Why Am I Treated So Bad?** also sounds like it belongs to the Magic Sam canon, though Johnson professes ownership of the lyrics and arrangement. **Waiting at the Station** suggests Albert King in its pulse and in both his singing and Fender storytelling; as happens so often on the album, Beadle and B-3 player

Torkanowsky provide a touch of ecstasy in their feature spots. **Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On** comes from West Coasters Jimmy and Jeanne Cheatham, but Johnson puts his singular stamp on it before giving way to the omnipresent saxophonist. And Johnson's very comfortable taking the solo acoustic route on **The Woman I Love** (a kissin' cousin of Junior Parker's "Mystery Train") and **Get Up and Go**—not unexpectedly, both are rendered with passionate authenticity.

Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson plays the blues to rid himself of the blues. It's a never-ending process that is always thrilling to observe, at festivals, in clubs, or wherever you choose to play *Slammin' on the West Side*.

— Frank-John Hadley

Hadley first heard Johnson in the early Seventies. He writes for Down Beat, Jazziz, The Boston Phoenix, Pulse!, BluesWire, and other publications. He is a Grove Press author.

Recording Information

Recorded September 19-21, 1995, and mixed September 22-24, 1995 at Dockside Studios, Maurice, Louisiana.

Production Coordinator for John Snyder Productions: Bob Basili

Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson is booked and managed by Concerted Efforts, P.O. Box 99, Newtonville, MA 02160 (617) 969-0810 — Telephone • (617) 969-6781— FAX

Special thanks to Wish and Steve Nails for creating the perfect recording environment; to Brian Bisesi for his invaluable assistance; to Dave Torkanowsky for caring about every detail; to Ronald Backer for good medicine; and to Jack Randall and Paul Kahn.

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tenor saxophone,
baritone saxophone

DEBBIE HAMBELTON
background vocal

1. A Pretty Girl (A Cadillac and Some Money) [3:12]

(Buddy Johnson) Sophisticate Music Inc. (BMI)

Solos: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar • Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone

2. She's Lookin' Good [3:56] (Roger Collins) Veytig Music (BMI)

Solos: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone • Dave Torkanowsky, Hammond B-3 organ
Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, background vocal • Herman Ernest, cabasa, shaker and tambourine

3. Hey Little Girl [5:00]

(Bobby Stevenson / Otis Blackwell) Screen Gems-EMI / Obie Music / Good Bar Music (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar

4. I Ain't Doin' Too Bad [4:56] (D. Malone) Don Music (BMI)

Solo: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone

5. It's Good To Me [3:28]

(Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solos: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone • Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar
Eric Moore, background vocal • Debbie Hambelton, background vocal

6. Sittin' on the Back Seat of a Greyhound Bus [6:27]

(Dave Maxwell) Trajet Music (BMI)

Solos: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar

Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone • Dave Torkanowsky, Hammond B-3 organ

7. Every Woman Needs To Be Loved [4:00]

(Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solos: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone • Dave Torkanowsky, Hammond B-3 organ

8. Stranded [3:22] (Daedric Malone) Duchess Music (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar

9. Early in the Morning Blues [5:00] (Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music (BMI)

Solos: Brian Bisesi, guitar • Dave Torkanowsky, acoustic piano

10. Another Man [2:19] (Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar

11. Hard Times (Have Surely Come) [4:30]

(Luther Johnson, Jr. / Sam Maggett) Foggy Day Music (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, guitar

12. The Woman I Love [3:49]

(traditional / arr. Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, acoustic guitar

13. Get Up and Go [2:03]

(traditional / arr. Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solo: Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, acoustic guitar

14. Why Am I Treated So Bad? [2:58]

(Luther Johnson, Jr.) Foggy Day Music / Markita Publishing (BMI)

Solo: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone

15. Waiting at the Station [5:47] (Unknown)

Solos: Dave Torkanowsky, Hammond B-3 organ • Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone

16. Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On [3:52]

(Jeanne Cheatham / James Cheatham) Edson Music Co. (ASCAP)

Solo: Gordon Beadle, tenor saxophone

**Total Playing
Time [65:16]**

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Blues



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