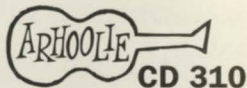


# SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON

## King Biscuit Time



1. DO IT IF YOU WANNA
2. COOL, COOL BLUES
3. COME ON BACK HOME
4. STOP CRYING
5. EYESIGHT TO THE BLIND
6. WEST MEMPHIS BLUES
7. I CROSS MY HEART
8. CRAZY ABOUT YOU BABY
9. NINE BELOW ZERO
10. MIGHTY LONG TIME
11. SHE BROUGHT LIFE BACK TO THE DEAD
12. STOP NOW BABY
13. MR. DOWNCHILD
14. SONNY BOY'S CHRISTMAS BLUES
15. PONTIAC BLUES
16. TOO CLOSE TOGETHER
17. RADIO PROGRAM (KFFA)
  - a) V-8 FORD; b) STORMY MONDAY;
  - c) RIGHT NOW; d) COME GO WITH ME
18. DUST MY BROOM – by Elmore James with Sonny Boy Williamson – harmonica

Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz

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Sonny Boy Williamson – vocals & harmonica; accompanied by:  
 #5 & 8: probably Willie Love - piano; Henry Reed - bass; unknown - guitar; Joe Dison - drums (DRC 15-2; DRC 16-2; Trumpet # 129) March 12, 1951.

#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7: Willie Love, Elmore James - guitar, Joe Willie Wilkins - guitar, Leonard Ware - bass, unknown - drums (DRC 17 - 22, ACA 2031 - 2029) August 5, 1951.

# 14 & 15: same as last (DRC 45/46, ACA 2027/2025) August 5, 1951.

#18: Elmore James - vocal & guitar; Sonny Boy Williamson - harmonica; Leonard Ware - bass (DRC 53, ACA 2026) August 5, 1951.

# 10: Cliff Givens - bass vocal/broom (DRC 88, ACA 2119) December 4, 1951.

# 9, 11, 12, 13, 16: same as last, add: Willie Love - piano, Joe Willie Wilkins - guitar (DRC 89 - 93, ACA 2117 - 2121).

# 17: Joe Willie Wilkins - guitar, Peck Curtis - drums. Recorded by Chris Strachwitz during a radio broadcast at KFFA, Helena, Arkansas in May 1965.

These are the first recordings made by Sonny Boy Williamson whose real name was Aleck Miller but who usually signed his name as Willie Williamson. He later recorded ex-



(continued inside on page 7)

# Sonny Boy Williamson

## KING BISCUIT TIME



OVER  
60  
MINUTES  
OF CLASSIC  
BLUES





## Sonny Boy Williamson

"I'm the only Sonny Boy; I'm THE Sonny Boy; there ain't no other one but me," he used to say, amusing himself with the repetition but meaning every word just the same. Blues collectors who knew the records and the reputation of John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson were skeptical. The younger man, who was born in Tennessee about 1912 and murdered in Chicago in 1948 after a decade of recording, was a very popular and greatly influential singer and harp player. What could be more likely that another singer, an embittered man perhaps, should capitalize on his fame? So went the argument, but the aging Sonny Boy persisted: it was he that had been copied, his name that had been taken but it was John Lee who was first to get on records that were commercially issued.

What was the truth? Unfortunately in his last years Sonny Boy wove a mesh of confusion about himself in a tragi-comic endeavor to establish his reputation. He needn't have bothered for his reputation as an artist was unassailed and he had sincere admirers all over the world. Yet he did bother because it meant a lot to him and in attempting any posthumous biography one has to take into account his continued striving for the recognition of his story. He would show his passport which was made out in the name of Sonny Boy Williams born in Tallahatchie, Mississippi, on April 7, 1909. Almost certainly he was older than this, and indeed had variously given 1894 and 1899 as his birth date in the past. And, there seems no doubt that his birthplace was Glendora in Tallahatchie County and not Tallahatchie

Photo at left: From left to right: Houston Stackhouse, Sonny Boy, and Peck Curtis. Photo by Chris Strachwitz



in Panola County, some forty-odd miles away.

In action Sonny Boy unfolded slowly. He did not give away all his secrets either in conversation or music. Instead, when he played, he built up the tension of his phrasing with logical development. One had to listen for quite a while as he progressed from short bursts, single notes, punctuated phrases to filigree patterns of complexity and richness. His large, calloused lips enfolded the cheap harps that he played and he seemed to mould the notes through the long fingers of his cupped hands. He would utter the words of his blues from the side of his mouth, slipping the harp between his lips as he finished a vocal phrase so that the melody was sustained on the instrument. When he sang, his voice was husky, sometimes almost guttural, at other times near a whisper. And through everything he sang and played his impeccable sense of timing pervaded.

It was through non-visual media that he made a wider name for himself after many years of playing in the Mississippi Delta, down to Texas and in Arkansas. In 1938 he was asked to perform on the **King Biscuit Show**. The show was sponsored by the Interstate Grocery Company, being broadcast every day at 12:45 PM on Station KFFA from Helena, Arkansas. The show provided him with intermittent employment for many years: he worked on it fairly regularly from 1941 through 1948 and it became known as "Sonny Boy's Cornmeal and King Biscuit Show." It seems possible that the "Sonny Boy" tag was applied for the show and his contemporaries in Arkansas knew him as Willie Williams – or Williamson. But further north in St. Louis and in Chicago his fellow blues singers insist that his name was Willie Miller — called, as a pun and perhaps as a result of the grocery association, "Rice" Miller.

In 1945 Sonny Boy met Mattie Jones and he married her three years later. They lived variously in Arkansas and Mississippi where in Little Rock and Belzoni, respectively, Sonny Boy continued to broadcast early in the 50s. Then, in 1951, three years after the death of his popular namesake in Chicago, he appeared on record. He was at his peak in the South and the records that he cut in Jackson, Mississippi, in the company of Dave Campbell or Clarence Lonnie on piano, Joe Willie Wilkins on guitar, Clifton Bivens on improvised bass and a drummer whom he recalled only as "Frock" (or "Frog") were unsurpassed in his career. Down home blues in the postwar idiom, they range from the moving *Mighty Long Time* (on which, incidentally, Sonny Boy also plays guitar) to the rocking exuberance of *Pontiac Blues*. Sonny Boy Williamson remained in the South until 1954 but his reputation was now widespread and he

was engaged for many one-night stands and tours. Some of his associates had already gone North — Elmore James and B.B. King amongst them — and in 1954 he took a group which included the pianist Willie Love to Detroit. The following year he moved North to settle with his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The late 50s were spent working in East St. Louis, Chicago and Milwaukee and then, to his delight and perhaps a little to his bewilderment, though he never acknowledged it, he was invited to appear with Horst Lippmann's American Folk Blues Festival to tour Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Great Britain. Unquestionably, he was the outstanding success of the show as the reviews of the European blues critics in various countries are evidence. In England in particular, he was both popular and very contented. When the rest of the company returned to the States,

Sonny Boy stayed on, first to tour in Poland with Memphis Slim and then to return to England to tour on his own. In the phenomenon of the English "beat" clubs which had no pretensions to blues purism or folkiness, Sonny Boy felt completely himself. The disparity of ages of the sexagenarian harp player and his teenage beat accompanists never struck him as incongruous and he was very anxious to return to England to live. British formal attire amused him and he had a two-tone harlequin suit in black and charcoal gray made at an English tailor's and with rolled umbrella, bowler (derby) hat and kid gloves indulged in the gentle humor of the more obvious incongruity of a black American blues singer dressed like a City financier.

In spite of his late fame Sonny Boy did not hit the "folk blues" circuit in the States and though he was on the 1964 European tour he returned to the clubs and juke joints

where he had spent his whole life working. When Chris Strachwitz visited him in Helena, Arkansas, in early May of 1965, he was working the joints and still playing on the King Biscuit Show as he had a quarter of a century before. Hardly anyone believed his story that he had been touring European concert halls — to his audiences in the Helena jukes he was still the hard-drinking, hard-living bluesman. They were to miss him when he died a few weeks later on May 26, 1965, and unknown to them, he is mourned by friends in half a dozen countries. In these tracks the best of Sonny Boy's music lives on.

*(Notes by Paul Oliver with some editing by Bob Alekno from notes for Arhoolie LP 2020 on which much of this material was first re-released.)*

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*(continued from back cover)*

tensively for Checker (Chess) Records of Chicago and became known in Europe and elsewhere as "Sonny Boy No. 2." Although he always insisted that he was the "original" Sonny Boy, Aleck Miller should not be confused with the very prolific and popular harmonica playing blues singer and recording artist of the 1930s and 40s, John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson.

The recordings on this CD (except #17), were originally produced by Lillian McMurry in Jackson, Miss., and issued on 78 and 45 rpm records on her Trumpet label. The masters have been purchased by Arhoolie Records who continue to pay royalties to Sonny Boy Williamson's widow.

Re-mastered from original Trumpet 78s or metal parts in 1989 by Chris Strachwitz.

Selections #1-16 composed by Sonny Boy Williamson and published by Globe Music Co. (BMI) except for #5 & #8 which are published by Robert Mellin Music Co. (BMI); #17-c composed by Willie Love and published by Globe Music Co.; #18 was arranged by Elmore James and published by Globe Music Co.

All photos © by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Wayne Pope

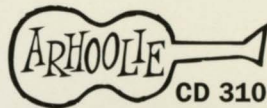
Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz





# Sonny Boy Williamson

## KING BISCUIT TIME



Over 60 Minutes of Classic **BLUES**

1. DO IT IF YOU WANNA (2:30)
2. COOL, COOL BLUES (2:46)
3. COME ON BACK HOME (2:47)
4. STOP CRYING (2:57)
5. EYESIGHT TO THE BLIND (3:04)
6. WEST MEMPHIS BLUES (2:51)
7. I CROSS MY HEART (2:44)
8. CRAZY ABOUT YOU BABY (3:01)
9. NINE BELOW ZERO (2:52)
10. MIGHTY LONG TIME (2:59)
11. SHE BROUGHT LIFE BACK TO  
THE DEAD (2:43)
12. STOP NOW BABY (2:33)
13. MR. DOWNCHILD (2:33)
14. SONNY BOY'S  
CHRISTMAS BLUES (2:39)
15. PONTIAC BLUES (2:43)
16. TOO CLOSE TOGETHER (2:37)
17. RADIO PROGRAM (KFFA) (13:13)
  - a) V-8 FORD; b) STORMY MONDAY;
  - c) RIGHT NOW; d) COME GO WITH ME
18. DUST MY BROOM – by Elmore James  
with Sonny Boy Williamson – harmonica (2:45)

Sonny Boy Williamson – vocals & harmonica with various accompanists. (*Details inside.*)

The Sonny Boy Williamson heard on this CD was one of the best, most inventive and influential harmonica playing blues singers of all time. His real name was Aleck Miller, he usually signed his name as Willie Williamson, and he insisted that he was the “original” Sonny Boy. He should not be confused with the earlier John Lee “Sonny Boy” Williamson, who was also a superb and influential harmonica playing blues singer in the 1930s and early 40s. The Sonny Boy heard here later recorded extensively for Checker (Chess) Records of Chicago and became known in Europe and elsewhere as “Sonny Boy No. 2.” These are his first commercial 78 rpm records made for the Trumpet label of Jackson, Miss., in the early 1950s. The 15-minute radio program over KFFA in Helena, Ark., was taped in May, 1965, shortly before Sonny Boy’s death. “Dust My Broom” is the classic original (by Elmore James) from Trumpet Records with Sonny Boy playing the harmonica.

Re-mastered from original Trumpet 78s in 1993 by Chris Strachwitz. Sound restoration by George Morrow (Echo Productions) using the Sonic Solutions/No-Noise system. Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz  
Cover by Wayne Pope



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5