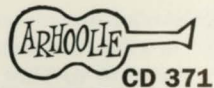


Dr. Ross

Boogie Disease



1. BOOGIE DISEASE -take 5 (2:32) (36)
2. GOING TO THE RIVER (3:28) (23)
3. GOOD THING BLUES (4:55) (25)
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17. CHICAGO BREAKDOWN -
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19. FEEL SO SAD (2:25) (10)
20. POLLY PUT YOUR KETTLE ON (3:00) (1)
21. INDUSTRIAL AVENUE BOOGIE (4:00) (22)
22. DOWNTOWN BOOGIE (2:25) (41)

Total Time - 66:16



All songs by Isaiah Ross and © Tradition Music Co- BMI

Numbers in parenthesis indicate sequence of selections contained in the six 7" inch tapes purchased from Dr. Ross in May, 1972.

Recording Data:

#5, 10, 11: Dr. Ross, vocal/harmonica; probably Wiley Gatlin, guitar. Memphis November 29, 1951 .

#6, 8, 9*, 13**, 20: Dr. Ross, vocal and vocal effects **/harmonica/possibly guitar*; Henry Hill, piano; probably Wiley Gatlin, vocal-*/gtr; probably Reubin Martin, washboard; ** omit piano & washboard. Memphis, 1952.

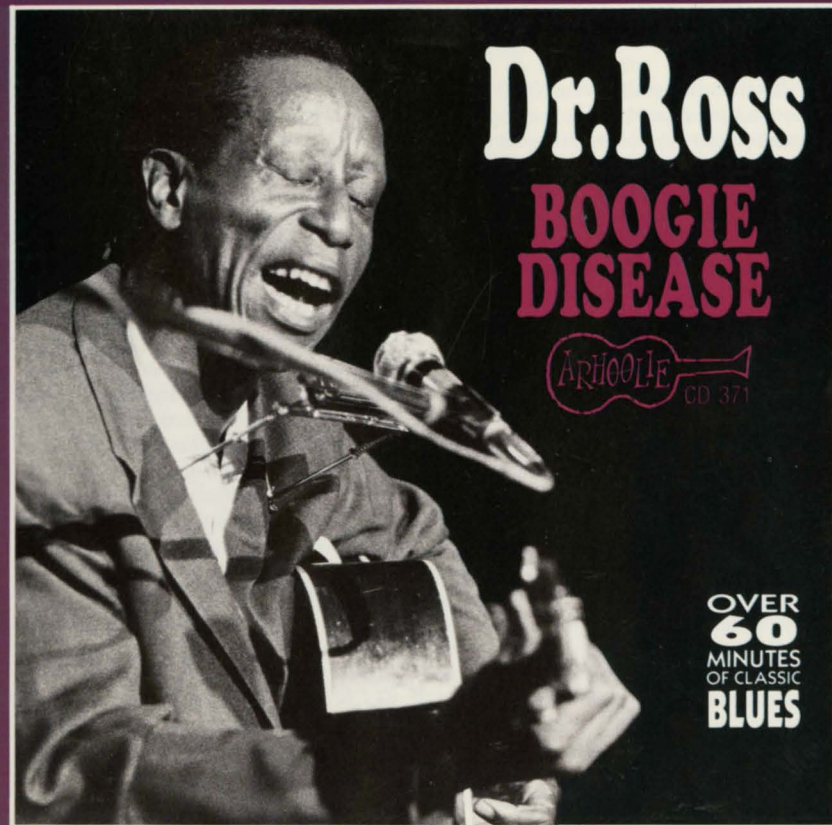
#1, 7* **, 18* **, 19, 22 **: Dr. Ross, vocal and vocal effects *harmonica/guitar*; probably Barber Parker, drums. Memphis, 1952.

#4, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17: Dr. Ross, vocal, harmonica/guitar; probably Reubin Martin, washboard. Memphis, October 3, 1953.

#2, 3*, 21: Dr. Ross, vocal/harmonica* and acoustic guitar. Memphis, 1954.

Cover photo by Jim Marshall (Taken at the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival)
Booklet photos courtesy Dr. Ross
Cover by Wayne Pope
Produced and edited by Dr. Ross and Chris Strachwitz

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Dr. Ross Boogie Disease

The mention of the name "Dr. Ross" to the uninitiated may bring to mind a television jingle for a certain variety of dog food popular in the 1950s, but to the blues aficionado the name will certainly connote a legend also launched in the 1950s, one Dr. Isaiah Ross—the one-man blues band, famous for his raucous, infectious harmonica and guitar boogie and blues style.

Isaiah "Ike" Ross was born in Tunica, Mississippi on October 21, 1925, into a large family of 11 children. His father, Jake Ross, played harmonica and it was from him that Isaiah inherited his musical abilities. John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson also greatly influenced the playing style of the young Ike Ross. He aspired to be a professional musician from the age of nine and by the late '40s, after his discharge from the armed forces, he had accomplished his goal.

For some years now, Dr. Ross has resided in the industrial city of Flint, Michigan, from which he still makes an occasional European tour or cross-country jaunt. Before he made the trek northward in the early '50s, he was making music in and around his hometown of Tunica, Mis-

sissippi. Prior to his decision to become a one-man band, Ross teamed with Willie Love to tour with Barber Parker's Silver Kings band and The King Biscuit Boys. With his own **Doc Ross and his Jump & Jive Boys**, and later as **Dr. Ross and the Interns**, he had a good country blues band which traveled the tri-state area. A number of northern Mississippi musicians worked under his leadership during that time: guitarists Wiley Gatlin, Tom "Slamhammer" Troy (or Toy), David Freeman and I. V. Irvine (who is reported by Wiley Gatlin to have played piano), pianists John "Memphis Piano Red" Williams and Henry Hill, percussionists Robert "Bro Muck" Moore and Reubin Martin and drummer Barber "Bobby" Parker, being among the most notable.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dr. Ross was featured on a number of live radio shows for stations in the area, including KFFA in Helena, Arkansas, the station famous for its King Biscuit Time; KLCN in Blytheville, Arkansas; WROX in Clarksdale, Mississippi; and WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee; where he was "Medical Director" of DJ A. C. "Mr. Blues" Williams' "The Royal Amalgam-

ated Association of Chittlin' Eaters of America, Incorporated for The Preservation of Good Country Blues." The other officers of this fictitious organization included Joe Hill Louis, Lightning Hopkins, and Muddy Waters.

It was in Memphis that he made these, his initial recordings. They are among his finest, and some pre-date his decision to become a one-man band. While Ross had been able to perfect a guitar style suitable to his needs under the able tutelage of George "G. P." Jackson, (later popularly known as "Kansas City Bo Diddley"), at the time of the first two sessions, he did not accompany his own singing and harmonica playing. Through these recordings the listener is able to witness Ross' progression toward his one-man blues band concept, made during his transition period (1951 - 1954).

Dr. Ross is left-handed and naturally plays both the guitar and the harmonica upside down and backward: that is, the guitar is played with the treble strings at the top and the harmonica with the bass end to his right.

The Music

Boogie Disease, (take 5, take 4 was issued on a 78), which opens this set, is performed without the harmonica, but is

nevertheless a sonic and lyric delight and is highlighted by some terrific echo effects on the harp and guitar. In spite of references elsewhere to a second guitarist, only one is heard: Ross, plus the accompaniment of a drummer, probably Barber "Bobby" Parker.

This session also produced the instrumental *Memphis Boogie*, (take 1) (which is an alternate take of *Juke Box Boogie* [take 2], heard here, take 3 was issued on a 78); *Feel So Sad*, (which also doesn't have harmonica), a make over of Junior Parker's *Feelin' Good*; and *Downtown Boogie*, (which favors the early recordings of John Lee Hooker, so popular at the time).

Going to the River, which has no harp, is similar to Blind Lemon Jefferson's *Wartime Blues* and includes a set of lyrics made famous in white country music by the blue yodeler Jimmie Rogers. *Good Thing Blues* is based either on Sonny Boy Williamson's *Sonny Boy's Cold Chills*, or on Hooker's version, but with new lyrics by Ross, including the unusual phrase "good things come to my remind." The last title is easily recognized as Ross' transplanted interpretation (set in Flint) of Hooker's original *Boogie Children* (set in Detroit).

Turkey Leg Woman, *Mississippi Blues* (originally titled *Cat Squirrel*), *Dr. Ross Breakdown*, *Taylor Mae*, *Texas Hop* and



Chicago Breakdown are all from Ross' first session on which he played guitar. (Again, despite discographical references to the contrary, only one guitar is audible.) The distortion in Ross' guitar amplifier lends a decided power and toughness to his sound, which is effectively enhanced by the accompaniment of Reubin Martin (probably) on washboard.

Turkey Leg Woman is melodically similar to Sonny Boy's *You're An Old Lady*, but the lyrics are original, with some very funky references to a cookin' old lady. *Mississippi Blues* was recorded by Ross several times as *Cat Squirrel*, the title under which it became a hit for Eric Clapton and Cream in the late 1960s. The guitar plays the familiar *Catfish Blues* riff, the washboard fills the role normally assumed by a drummer, and Dr. Ross plays some fine harp too.

Dr. Ross Breakdown is an alternate take of *Chicago Breakdown*, both of which are musically very similar to the nearly wordless dance tune *Texas Hop*. The lyrics contain an interesting biographical mention of the life style of the working man in Tunica together with the typically Southern expression "all y'all." *Taylor Mae*, echoes the melody of Sonny Boy Williamson's *Good Morning Little School Girl*, but with his reading of this well-

chosen potpourri of traditional lyrics, Dr. Ross makes this rendering his own.

Country Clown, *Shake a My Hand*, and *Little Soldier Boy* are from Dr. Ross' first session where he is in the company of an unidentified guitarist, probably Wiley Gatlin, with whom he was working at the time. *Country Clown*, is Lil' Son Jackson's *Bad Whiskey*, *Bad Women* and Dr. Ross' harmonica style is very much in the vein of Sonny Boy Williamson's playing. The song is uncommon among Ross' recordings and contrasts many of the other songs in this set in that he has not yet superimposed his own identity upon the piece. *Shake a My Hand* is modeled after a couple of Williamson tunes. Although they're altered somewhat, *Shake the Boogie* is the source for the lyrics while some of the harmonica phrases seem to be inspired by *Sonny Boy's Jump*. *Little Soldier Boy* relates to Ross' experiences in the Army, including references to Korea where war was still being fought at the time of this recording. As Ross served overseas in the Philippines and the Southwest Pacific from 1944, it's possible that this song is a reworking of a dance number he recalls playing early in his career, *Philippine Jump*. In any event, the guitar introduction is reminiscent of John Lee Hooker's work, the melody similar to Hooker's *Don't You Remember Me*.

My Bebob Gal, *Shake 'Em On Down*, *Down South Blues*, *Going Back Down South* and *Polly Put Your Kettle On* are all from Dr. Ross' second session and, except for possibly one tune, find him accompanied by an unidentified guitarist, probably Wiley Gatlin again. These tunes allow us to hear Dr. Ross in the company of the fine barrelhouse pianist Henry Hill (father of saxman Raymond Hill who was recently with Albert King), and probably Reubin Martin on washboard. The pool of musicians was a formidable one and the result is a rocking sound that is unlikely to grace the sterile space of a recording studio again. *My Bebob Gal* is a bit of a lightweight dance tune. A new arrangement and slightly different words set Ross' version of Bukka White's *Shake 'Em On Down* decidedly apart from the original. Ross may be the guitar player on *Down South Blues* which is not Williamson's tune of similar title, but rather an adaptation of two of his other songs. The initial verse is based on *Lacey Belle*, while the remaining verses seem to have been added from Ross' memory of an earlier piece. The harp sound on this tune is beyond description! *Going Back South* features an unknown vocalist/guitarist, who is possibly Wiley Gatlin. It was likely the last tune of the session and may have been merely a demo for the

vocalist, as the other accompanists are not heard. *Polly Put Your Kettle On* is possibly the oldest tune in this set with numerous versions extant in both black and white country music, but Ross' version is doubtlessly based on Williamson's recording of the same name which was the flip side of *Lacey Belle*!

It is easy to cite Dr. Ross' influences, but the fact that he is a musical personality in his own right should be obvious to anyone who has ever seen and heard him perform in person or read his autobiography as told to Pete Welding, in **Nothing But The Blues**. The recordings presented here are among the finest examples of boogie and barrelhouse dance music of the 1950s. (Steve La Vere and Bob Eagle - 1972, revision by Steve La Vere 1991)

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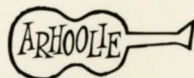
Editor's Note:

In 1964 Pete Welding and Don Kent went to Flint, Michigan to visit Dr. Ross and their meeting resulted in an excellent first LP recorded in early 1965 for Pete's Testament label (LP #2206). Later that year Dr. Ross toured Europe with the annual American Folk Blues Festival. Since then Dr. Ross has appeared at various concerts and festivals including the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. In 1972 the Dr. made two tours of Europe. Since then Dr. Ross continued to entertain audiences both in the U.S. and abroad. In 1991 he appeared in England over Easter at the Burnley National Blues Festival and the Newcastle Carnival Festival. I met Dr. Ross in 1965 while touring with the American Folk Blues Festival. Members of the group referred to Dr. Ross as the "Flying Eagle" and from time to time he would put on a most amazing eagle-like dance on the touring bus to everyone's delight. (Chris Strachwitz - 1992)



Dr. Ross

Boogie Disease



CD 371

Over 60 Minutes of Classic BLUES MUSIC

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All songs by Isiah Ross and © Tradition Music Co- BMI

Dr. Ross - vocals, harmonica and guitar.

Dr. Ross, "The Harmonica Boss," is one of the truly original personalities on the post-war Blues scene. A one-man band, playing the guitar left-handed with a harmonica on a rack around his neck, Dr. Ross produces some of the most hypnotic, John Lee Hooker-like boogie rhythms ever to come out of the Mississippi Delta. These are his first and best recordings—classics in Down Home Blues.



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