

# K.C. Douglas *Mercury Blues*

1. MERCURY BLUES (2:40)
2. MY MIND'S GOING BACK TO 1929 (5:10)
3. CATFISH BLUES (4:00)
4. HIGH WATER RISING (4:55)
5. WOKE UP THIS MORNING (4:15)
6. SOMEBODY DONE STOLE MY GAL (4:43)
7. FANNY LOU (3:05)
8. I DON'T WANT NO WOMAN TO LOVE ME (3:54)
9. MARRIED WOMAN BLUES (3:33)
10. BLACK CAT BONE (3:25)
11. GOOD LOOKING WOMEN (3:11)
12. RICHARD'S RIDE (3:08)
13. HEAR ME HOWLING (3:48)
14. I'M GONNA BUILD ME A WEB (3:55)
15. MAKE YOUR COFFEE (2:38)
16. NIGHT SHIRT BLUES (2:06)
17. CANNED HEAT (1:23)
18. YOUR CRYING WON'T MAKE ME STAY (2:44)
19. COUNTRY GIRL (3:00)
20. BLACK CAT BONE (2:30)
21. GOOD LOOKING WOMEN (3:00)
22. FANNY LOU (2:50)

## K.C. Douglas:

vocals & guitar  
with:

Richard Riggins - harmonica

Ron Thompson - guitar

Jim Marshall - drums

Produced by Chris Strachwitz  
Recorded by Chris Strachwitz  
using portable equipment  
between 1960 and 1974.

#15, 16, & 17: 1960;

#14: 1963 (studio session);  
all others: 1973 & 1974

1-5 and 18-22 were originally  
issued on Arhoolie LP 1073

**6-17 are previously unissued  
selections**

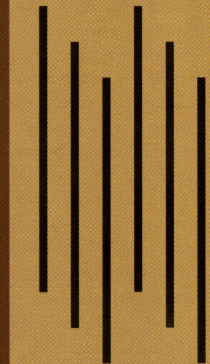
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# K.C. Douglas



Mercury  
Blues





# K.C. Douglas Mercury Blues

The career of K. C. Douglas is somewhat typical of the many blues musicians who settled in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area, the only exception being that most seemed to have originated from Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. K. C. Douglas, however, was born on November 21, 1913 in Madison County, Mississippi, "about 25 miles north of Jackson," he recalls, "right out in the country from Canton. The nearest town was a place called Sharon, that was about 4 or 5 miles from where I was born, and all it had was a post office and a general store."

His earliest musical influence was an uncle, Smith Douglas, who played the blues on the guitar, and as a child he would remember that there were Saturday night get-togethers where the local musicians would perform. Often this would entail walking 8 or 9 miles to these dances, but it was worthwhile, as the best musicians in the area would be there — people like Robert Lucky, Fadel Harrison, and John Stovall. At the same time there were

the records of Tommy Johnson; and Douglas, who was by then playing the guitar, began to learn some of the pieces of the popular Mississippi bluesman.

Tommy Johnson's recordings in the late '20s for Victor had already established him as a legend, especially his recording of "Big Road Blues," which had become part of the repertoire of every aspiring Mississippi bluesman. Hailing from Crystal Springs, Miss., south of Jackson, Johnson, like other popular Jackson bluesmen Bubba Brown and Ishman Bracey, could often be found playing in the streets in Jackson, and it was there around 1940 that K. C. Douglas encountered him.

Often on a street corner amidst a gathered crowd throwing coins, Douglas would join Johnson in playing, sometimes for as long as several hours. Johnson became familiar enough with Douglas to invite him to travel the Delta, only to have Douglas decline due to the famous bluesman's predilection for drinking. However, Douglas' encounter with Johnson left its



impression, one that was to remain long after Douglas would leave Mississippi.

Avoiding the desire of so many of his fellow Mississippians to go to Chicago, Douglas instead chose to come to California under a recruitment program established by the U.S. government to fill the work force in the naval shipyards surrounding the San Francisco Bay. He arrived in Vallejo in 1945, moved a few years later to Richmond, where he met Sidney Maiden, a harmonica player from Mansfield, La. There he also formed his first band. In 1948 he went to Bob Geddings, who had just started the Down Town label, and recorded **MERCURY BOOGIE** (re-issued on *Arhoolie* LP 2008), one of the first postwar recordings made in Oakland, and among the first made by Geddings, whose subsequent labels had more to do with shaping an Oakland blues sound than any others. The flip side of the record, **ECLIPSE OF THE SUN**, was sung by Sidney Maiden. Although **MERCURY BOOGIE** was somewhat of a hit in parts of Texas, Louisiana, and the Bay Area and was even re-pressed and more widely distributed by a Los Angeles firm,

Douglas did no more recordings for Geddings, who had by then already begun shaping his label around the sound of the postwar bands that were then being formed on the West Coast, most notably those of Lowell Fulson, Jimmy McCracklin, and Pee Wee Crayton.

Except for an unexceptional single for another Los Angeles label, it wasn't until 1955 that Douglas made his next recording, an album



entitled "K. C. Douglas, a Dead Beat Guitar and the Mississippi Blues" (Cook LP 5002), aimed however at a new "folk" audience. Taken from a home-made tape made by folklorist Sam Eskin, the material consisted of the many classic Mississippi pieces learned earlier. Some of these

reappeared later when K.C. recorded two albums for Bluesville in 1960, "K. C.'s Blues" (1023), and "Big Road Blues" (1050). The latter two were produced by Chris Strachwitz.

It was some years ago, in the dimness of a West Oakland club on a late winter Sunday afternoon, after seeing one musician and singer after another do his imitation of T-Bone Walker, or B. B. King, that K. C. Douglas provided me with a genuine blues experience. Conspicuous in a gray work shirt and trousers held up by a pair of thick suspenders, his electric guitar strapped around his shoulder at the ready, he said to the audience, "I'm gonna play some of them cotton picking blues, you know the kind I'm talking about." I remember the reaction being spontaneous before he could strike the first note of his guitar, the shouts that followed seemed a fitting response to a music that was meant to shake the blues loose. Guitar, bass, drums, harmonica, all in unison to the low down country blues that are still very familiar in a city like Oakland. Yet, it was the kind of blues that wasn't being played too much there anymore, and K. C. has long since moved his blues elsewhere to a string of surrounding cities reading like a local Greyhound bus route: Modesto, Napa, Walnut Creek, Orinda, Dublin, and Redwood City.

Today, at 61, K. C. Douglas is four years away from retiring from his job with the department of public works for the city of Berkeley, where

he has resided since 1960. Afterwards, he says, he will devote his full time to performing. Meanwhile, K. C. and his group, consisting of Richard Riggins on harmonica, Bob Smith, bass, and Jim Marshall, drums, perform every weekend in any one of the outlying East Bay cities stretching from the industrial mudflats to the agricultural basins. They play the blues, as K. C.'s business card says, "for all occasions," be it banquets, dances, or drinking establishments, but it's still the Mississippi blues, and that's what this album is, it's K. C. Douglas 2,000 miles and 29 years from home, but still, as he says, "just a country boy."

Richard Riggins was born in Tupelo, Miss., on July 1, 1921, and began experimenting with the harmonica at the age of eleven. He moved to Oakland in 1963, where he shortly began playing around various clubs. It was at the Ritz Club, in Richmond in 1968, that he met K. C. Douglas and has been with him ever since. He credits Little Walter as being his single-most influence, although he recalls Sonny Boy Williamson and Forest City Joe also as leaving some impression on his playing.

Drummer Jim Marshall is 24, and has been with the band for the past 4 years, including recording several singles with K. C. on Blues Connoisseur. Guitarist Ron Thompson, is a young, talented blues guitarist from Hayward, Ca. whose session work has included other Bay Area bluesmen.

Tom Mazzolini – 1974



### Editor's up-date:

K.C. Douglas died in Berkeley, Ca. on October 18, 1975. Like so many artists before him, K.C. Douglas gained fame only after his death and then primarily for his composition of "MERCURY BLUES". Although K.C. Douglas was widely known and respected in the Bay Area for his fine authentic Mississippi blues, most of his own compositions never achieved wide popularity – except for one! That one song was "MERCURY BOOGIE" which was recorded in the 1970s by the popular Steve Miller Band for Capitol Records and received wide distribution and sales. It was also covered by David Lindley and others but none made the whole country more aware of this

song than the fine country artist, Alan Jackson, who recorded it in 1992 as "MERCURY BLUES" and made it into a #1 Country Hit! A few years later Alan Jackson sang the song for a Ford truck TV commercial which was broadcast nationally quite frequently and hopefully sold a lot of trucks as well!



This CD brings you not only K.C. Douglas' own version of the "MERCURY BLUES" but also a lot of other songs he had written for the Arhoolie album originally issued in 1974 along with a couple of songs learned from Tommy Johnson, "CATFISH BLUES" and "CANNED HEAT."

Chris Strachwitz – 1998

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K.C. Douglas - vocals & guitar, Richard Riggins - harmonica, Ron Thompson - guitar, Jim Marshall - drums

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A Mississippian, K.C. Douglas in the 1950s became a mainstay of the Oakland/Bay Area blues scene. For over 25 years he delighted dancing ex-southerners as well as folk audiences with his band or with just his acoustic guitar. Influenced by fellow Mississippi bluesman Tommy Johnson, K.C. is perhaps best remembered as the composer of "Mercury Blues" which since his death has been covered by artists such as Steve Miller, David Lindley, and Alan Jackson who made a #1 country hit out of it!

On this CD you hear K.C. Douglas and "his Lumberjacks - music for all occasions" (as his card read) featuring harmonicist Richard Riggins on the first 14 selections. The remaining tracks present K.C. alone with an acoustic guitar, or joined only by the sympathetic harmonica of Mr. Riggins. This CD includes all eleven selections from the original Arhoolie LP (#1073) as well as 12 previously unreleased masters, almost all of which are K.C.'s own compositions.

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