

LOUISIANA BLUES

Henry Gray • Arthur "Guitar" Kelley • Silas Hogan
Moses "Whispering" Smith • Clarence Edwards



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Personnel:

1) Henry Gray—vocals & piano; Moses "Whispering" Smith—harp; Clarence Edwards—gtr; Clarence Prophet—bass; Samuel Hogan—drums; 1a) Roy Lee Sheppard replaces Clarence Edwards on guitar, and no harp.

2) Arthur "Guitar" Kelley—vocals & guitar; Moses "Whispering" Smith—harp; Gene Douzier—bass; Samuel Hogan—drums.

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4) Clarence Edwards—vocals & guitar; Samuel Hogan—drums; 4a) add Henry Gray—piano.

5) Silas Hogan—vocals & guitar; Gene Douzier—bass; Moses "Whispering" Smith—harp; Samuel Hogan—drums.

All songs © Tradition Music Co./Bug Music—BMI
Recorded in Baton Rouge, La. on April 27, 1970 at Capital City Sound Studio, Bill Triche—engineer.

Stereo master dub-down from 4 track by Bert Filrot of Jones Sound Recording Studio in Houston, Texas.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz and Terry Pattison

Cover by Wayne Pope & Dix Bruce

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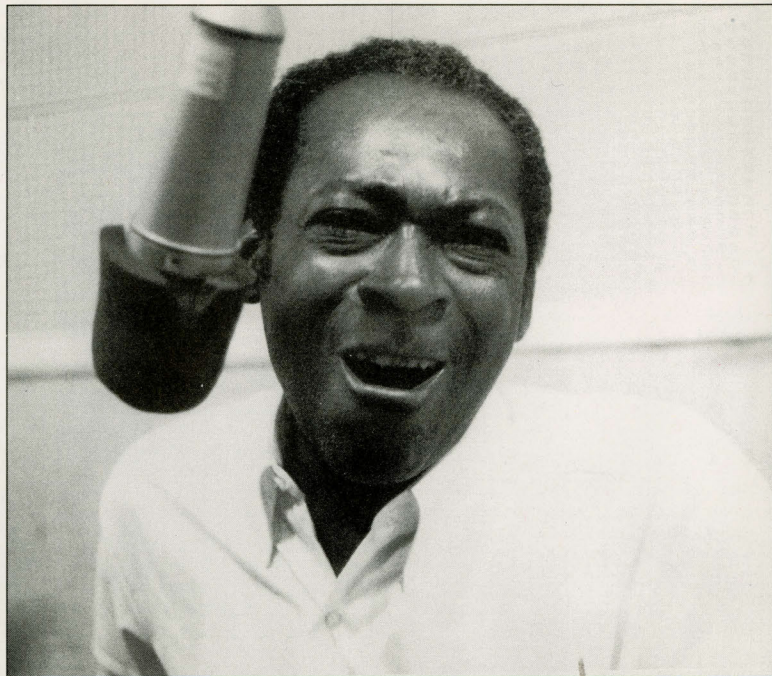
Cover Photo: left: Silas Hogan, right: Guitar Kelley

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Henry Gray

Photo © Chris Strachwitz

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Literally thousands of people daily visit Louisiana's state capital Baton Rouge. As they ride through the surrounding area, all that can be seen are marshes, swamps, and sugar cane fields. Little do the travelers realize that here within a fifty mile radius of Baton Rouge developed some of the most unique yet lesser known blues traditions.

Between the marshes and the swamps that line Highway 61 are many small farming communities such as Rosedale, Zachary, Maringouin, Port Hudson, and others where country blues have flourished since the 1920s. Some of the earliest known exponents of Baton Rouge country blues were Robert and Frank Metty and Butch Cage. Nearly all bluesmen of the area remember hearing them play but today they are unfortunately musically inactive. No commercial recordings were made in this area during the '30s and '40s but in 1959 Dr. Harry Oster started his Folklyric label and taped many regional country blues singers like Robert Pete Williams,

Hogman Maxey, Guitar Welch, Butch Cage, Willie Thomas, Smoky Babe, and many others. (Most of this material is now available on several Arhoolie CDs).

During the past twenty-five years or so a distinct tradition of city-fied country blues developed within the limits of the Baton Rouge metropolitan area. These blues singers had learned from the older country blues men, but with the establishment of the "juke joint" as the prime outlet for such African American entertainment, they began to play electric guitars and added drums so they could be heard above the din of the joints. Perhaps the originator of this tradition was Lightning Slim who was the first to use a drummer in the late 40s and he was also the first to make a commercial record. His classic "Bad Luck Blues" was released in 1954 on J.D. Miller's Feature label. After this Miller began to record other area bluesmen for the Nashville based Excello label. Artists like Slim Harpo, Lonesome

Sundown, Lazy Lester, Silas Hogan, and Whispering Smith would drive to Crowley to record for Miller and those were relatively prosperous times for low-down blues in Baton Rouge!

During the mid-sixties blues record sales dropped sharply and Miller began to lose interest. When Lightning Slim moved away in 1966 only a few continued to play straight down-home blues and most of them appear on this CD.

Pianist Henry Gray will be familiar to most blues fans as the long time member of Howlin' Wolf's band. Henry was born in Kenner, La., near New Orleans in 1925, but moved to his present home in Alsen, just north of Baton Rouge, while still a baby. He taught himself to play piano when he was eight years old, playing spirituals for the church choir. Henry moved to Chicago in 1946 and his first band was called the Red Devil Trio with Hudson Showers on guitar and James Bannister on drums. He became friends with all the other well known pianists such as Sunnyland Slim, Johnny Jones, Otis Spann, and Big Maceo. He looked on the latter as a father image as did all the other young pianists. In 1950 Henry joined Little Walter and later Jimmy Rogers and in 1952 Morris Pejo. He stayed with Pejo for four years and in 1956 began his twelve year stint with Wolf's band. All through the '50s he

was a popular session man backing up all the artists mentioned and several others such as Jimmy Reed and G.L. Crockett on their records. Henry gave up this active career in 1969 to come back to Alsen to be with his family. These are Henry's first vocal recording efforts.

This album marks Arthur "Guitar" Kelley's debut as a recording artist. Although he has been playing for over thirty years, Arthur was never given the opportunity to audition at Crowley, and so he remained obscure except to other local bluesmen. Arthur was born in 1924 in Clinton, forty miles north of Baton Rouge, but has been living in Baker since 1947. His first instrument was a twelve string guitar given to him by his older brother-in-law Arthur Gerald who also taught him the fundamentals of playing. Around 1946 he switched to electric guitar and was playing by himself until 1951 when he saw Lightning Slim playing with a drummer and soon also added one to compliment his guitar.

Silas Hogan was born in 1911 in Westover, La., just west of Baton Rouge. In 1939 he moved to Scotlandville, an African American community on the north side of Baton Rouge, and has made his home there since then. He began playing guitar at the age of seventeen, being taught and inspired by two uncles, Robert and Frank Metty (who also taught

Robert Pete Williams). Silas began to play the house party circuit with his uncles and other local bluesmen such as Henry Gaines, Butch Cage, and Willie B. Thomas. His repertoire was strictly traditional songs he had either learned from the older bluesmen or from phonograph records by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Kokomo Arnold, and Henry Thomas.

In 1958 Silas' friend, the late Slim Harpo, urged him to form his own blues band and soon helped him get an audition with J.D. Miller in Crowley. This association resulted in the release of eight singles on the Excelllo label, all of which were down-home blues of the area. Around 1965 when Miller almost stopped recording blues, Silas broke up his band and quit playing for a year, until his close friend Guitar Kelley asked him and Gene Douzier to form a blues trio and they have been playing together since then.

The harmonica player on most of Silas' records was Moses "Whispering" Smith who unlike the others on this album is not from Louisiana, being born in nearby Brookhaven, Miss., in 1932. Moses began to play harmonica in 1955 inspired by his older brother-in-law Memphis Hennison, who also taught him the basic mechanics of blues harp blowing. Moses played for a while with a band in Brookhaven

and then in 1957 moved to Baton Rouge. He joined Lightning Slim's band in 1958 and stayed with him for two years and later from 1960 to 1964 led his own combo. Then he joined Slim again and blew harp on several of his later recordings but when Lightning left for Detroit in 1966 Moses quit playing professionally.

Clarence Edwards is known to most collectors for his appearance on the Arhoolie CD "Country Negro Jam Session" (Arhoolie CD 372) and his presence on this album was quite by accident. Henry Gray had told us that he wanted to bring along a guitar playing neighbor of his to back him up. Chris Strachwitz and I were pleasantly surprised to again meet Clarence at the studio! He was born in Linsey, La., in 1933 and moved to Alsen when he was ten years old. He taught himself how to play guitar and learned from his grandmother's old records by Sonny Boy Williamson, Kokomo Arnold, and Charlie Patton. Clarence was probably influenced the most by the latter as his singing, guitar style, and use of asides are very similar to Patton's. Clarence is also very fond of Patton's pupil Howlin' Wolf.

Bass player Gene Douzier has been part of the Baton Rouge blues scene since the late 1950s. He used to be the lead guitarist for Schoolboy Cleve and Jimmy Anderson who also recorded for J.D.

Miller. Gene plays mostly drums and bass with Hogan and Kelley in their present group. Both Roy Lee Sheppard and Clarence Prophet are quite active with the younger R&B bands of the area and are currently working with harpman Raful Neal.

Silas' son Samuel Hogan, appearing on his first recording session, proved to be quite an adequate blues drummer. He also plays a mean left-handed guitar and seems to follow in his father's footsteps.

(Terry Pattison-June 1970)

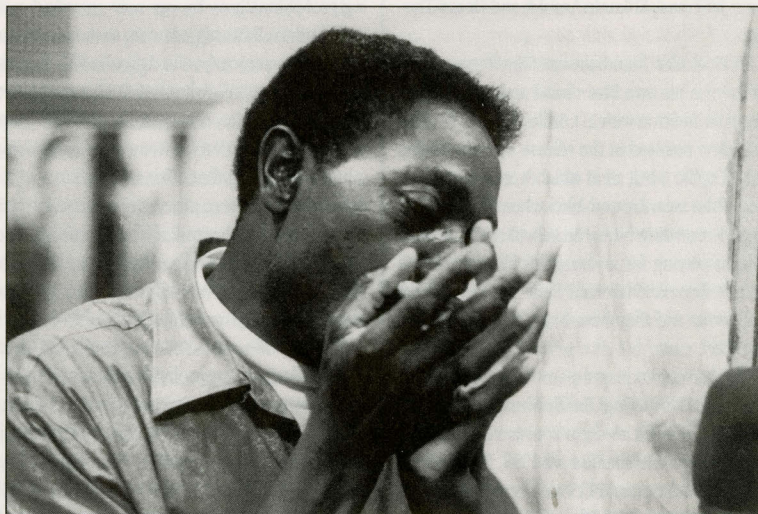
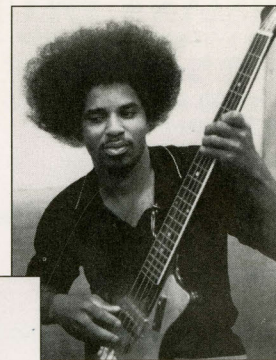


Photo © Chris Strachwitz

Moses "Whispering" Smith



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right: Guitar Kelley

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