

DAVE ALEXANDER

"The Rattler"



ARHOOLE 1067
STEREO

THE INCREDIBLE DAVE ALEXANDER

"The Rattler"

"The Rattler — that's the soul name for a train where I come from," says pianist Dave Alexander. "All the blues writers have been influenced by trains. When the sun's going down, you hear that train and it sounds real lonesome."

Dave's blues and boogie style is steeped in tradition yet is eclectic and highly modern, encompassing the barrelhouse and church sounds of his Texas youth up through the challenges of San Francisco bop cutting sessions and the harshness of Oakland's ghetto soul scene.

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on March 10, 1938, David Alexander Elam moved to Marshall, Texas, when he was about six months old. His father was a mule skinner who played piano, guitar and fiddle with friends on weekends. Dave's mother was principal of the elementary school he attended and an active church worker.

Dave had one piano lesson in his life. "It was from a broad — Ella Mae Willis. The cats drummed me out of the corps for it and I had to fight for months after." But he continued to practice. Jimmying a window at school, he would climb in at night to get at the keyboard. His mother disapproved of his playing too, but gave in under the condition he play for church.

At Pemberton High School Dave formed what he calls "a little old tick tock band." The school principal was Amos Milburn's uncle. "Amos came by school and gave a free concert one day. It was the first time I was able to watch a real pro play. 'Chicken Shack Boogie' was hot then." Floyd Dixon and Ivory Joe Hunter also came through Marshall, whetting Dave's appetite so that he was soon journeying to Longview, Kilgore, Houston and Dallas in search of other giants — Ray Charles, Lowell Fulson, T-Bone Walker, Lightnin' Hopkins, Little Richard and Gatemouth Brown.

The Navy brought Dave to California. In the drum and bugle corps he met Bobby Hebb, who later achieved fame with "Sunny." They hung out together for two years, making the San Diego bar rounds, Bobby with his spoons and ukelele and Dave on drums and piano. Bobby was an exceptional showman and taught Dave how to handle any audience.

After a brief return to Texas, Dave and his mother caught a Greyhound to Oakland in 1957. He played for awhile at the New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church but soon hit the streets where he ran into such local jazz heavies as Smiley Winters, Wakefield Taylor, Stanley Willis, and Jimmy Butler.

Bassist Butler taught Dave about chords. "My eyes began to open to the technical world of music," he says now. "I got a harmony book and stuck my head in it from sun up to sun down."

As an accomplished pianist, as well as a drummer, Dave has worked with practically every blues name on the West Coast since the late 'fifties. Big Mama Thornton, Jimmy McCracklin, the late King Solomon, Johnny Heartsman, Sugar Pie and Pee Wee, Johnny Fuller, Lowell Fulson, Lafayette Thomas, L. C. Robinson, Vernon and Jewel, Johnny Talbot, Eugene Blacknell, Eddie Foster, Charlie Musselwhite and Jimmy Witherspoon are just a few.

Dave has also done a lot of piano bar gigs, as a soloist or with a drummer. "I had to buckle down and learn to read them fake books," he says.

In 1968 Dave cut his first sides for the World Pacific album, "Oakland Blues." He played behind L. C. Robinson and Lafayette Thomas as well as doing three tracks of his own backed by Albert Collins, George Smith and Paul Lagos. Last year Dave appeared as a sideman on Robinson's lp, "Ups and Downs" (Arhoolie 1062).

Dave acted as house pianist for the Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1970 and also did the Berkeley Blues Festival that year. He has played Fillmore West, the College of Marin, San Jose State, the University of Wyoming, and benefits for the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis.

On this record Dave is supported by the solid rhythm section of the Whispering Shadows, a dynamic Bay Area soul unit that backs stars like Al Green and Bobby Womack when they come through town. Drummer Mickey Durio, 23, is the group's leader and arranger. A popular session man, he has recorded t.v. commercials as well as worked with Jesse James, Johnny Heartsman, the Whispers and the Natural Four. Bass man Larry Murdo, 24, played with the Defenders and the Magnificent Seven before joining the Whispering Shadows.

Dave's comments on the selections:

THE SKY IS CRYING — "I sat up all night listening to Freddie King's 'Texas Cannonball' and started thinking about how I saw the sky crying."

SWANEE RIVER — "That was the first tune I ever got down on piano. I first heard Albert Ammons' record on Randy's Record show over WLAC."

I NEED A LITTLE SPIRIT — "The bass line is based around Lloyd Glenn's 'Old Time Shuffle' and Ray Charles' 'Rockhouse,' although I was actually inspired to write it after hearing Ray and Aretha's 'Spirit in the Dark' on the juke box."

GOOD HOME COOKING — "I remember the old days down in Texas when I used to eat good. It's about the things I really like to eat."

THE RATTLER — "It's based on Meade Lux Lewis' 'Honky Tonk Train.'"

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW — "I had two women in mind when I wrote that tune. They were the only two broads I ever really dug. Once a cat lets them know he really digs them, they get outrageous."

TRIBUTE TO MY FATHER — "He played the first boogie woogie I ever heard. The riff I learned on my first and only piano lesson."

THIRTEEN IS MY NUMBER — "I wrote that one about my ex-old lady."

THE JUDGEMENT — "It fits the times. Everywhere you look it's funky."

(Lee Hildebrand — 1972)



THE SKY IS CRYING
SWANEE RIVER BOOGIE
I NEED A LITTLE SPIRIT
GOOD HOME COOKING
THE RATTLER

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW
LONESOME TRAIN BLUES
A TRIBUTE TO MY FATHER
13 IS MY NUMBER
THE JUDGEMENT

Dave Alexander — piano and vocals
Mickey Durio — drums
Larry Murdo — bass

Recorded at Sierra Sound Studios
Robert DeSousa — engineer, on July 31, 1972
(The Sky Is Crying & Lonesome Train Blues)
and August 1, 1972 (all other titles)
Produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover and liner photos by Ron Scherl
Cover: Wayne Pope

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