

Guitar Red

Blues Bytes on Guitar Red and Lightnin' in a Bottle

Graham Clarke, August 15, 2008

<http://www.bluenight.com/BluesBytes/wn0808.html>



If you venture down south to Decatur, GA, you might chance upon a street musician that plays in and around the square. His name is Billy Christian Walls, but he goes by **Guitar Red**. Even though he's lived a tough life (losing his family in the span of a decade, battling alcohol, drugs, and homelessness), he has used music as his means of expression and as a coping mechanism. He writes songs that mix humor and pathos in equal blends and is a fiery guitarist and passionate singer.

Backspace Records (www.backspacerecords.com) has released a collection of Red's songs. Entitled *Lightnin' In A Bottle*, the disc was recorded live with only a couple of overdubs and presents an artist playing his own idiosyncratic style of blues. While there are songs that are derivative of other blues styles ("Box Car No. 9," "Chain Gang Blues," "Three Legged Dog Blues," and the hilarious "Lips Poked Out"), Red gives these a unique polish that only he could offer.

Other songs, such as "Ain't Got Nobody But Myself" and "I Believe," have more than an autobiographical edge to them. The manic title cut features Red on clavinet, and "Out My Mind" sounds like it has roots in the Mississippi Delta. At the end of the disc, there's a three-minute snippet of Red rambling in the studio that captures his eccentric personality perfectly.

While street musicians aren't nearly as widespread as they were in the '20s and '30s, *Lightnin' In A Bottle* captures one of them in his element and gives you a glimpse into the uniqueness and originality of his style. Wonder what it was like in the days when there was one on nearly every street corner in these southern towns? However it was, I'll imagine not many of them could have held a candle to Guitar Red.