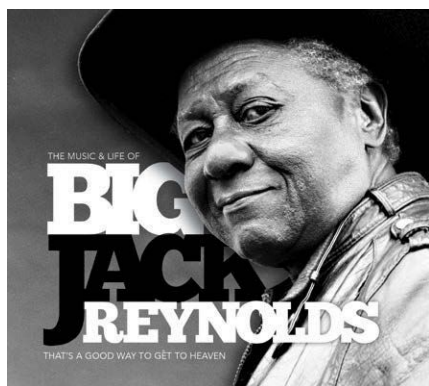


Reissues



BIG JACK REYNOLDS

That's a Good Way to Get to Heaven

Third Street Cigar Records –
TSC 106

Marshall “Big Jack” Reynolds’ birthdate (1921? 1922?) and place (Albany, Georgia? rural Arkansas? Dayton, Ohio?) of birth are in question, but in any case it seems that after serving in the army during WWII he had settled in Detroit by the mid-1950s. With his ability to play harmonica, guitar, piano, and drums, he became a fixture on the Motor City’s blues scene, and, after a session for Fortune remained in the can, had his first single issued on Mike A. Hanks’ obscure MAH imprint in 1963, followed by another date for Fortune the same year that yielded a Hi-Q 45 r.p.m. and a rather chaotic rendition of *Going Down Slow* that appeared on a Fortune LP. Disillusioned by the Detroit scene of the late ’60s, Reynolds relocated to Toledo, Ohio, where he worked steadily in that city’s blues clubs and the legendary Hines Farm Blues Club in nearby Swanton. However, he did not record again until 1987, when he shared an LP on the Blue Suit label with a couple other Glass City stalwarts, Art and Roman Griswold, backed by a local band known as the Haircuts. A 45 r.p.m. and subsequent cassette came out on Highball three years later, but Reynolds was in ill health and passed away in late 1993.

Now, more than a quarter of a century after his death, Reynolds has been immortalized through this two-disc labor of love produced by Haircut guitarist Larry Gold and local blues enthusiast John Henry. The first disc contains 20 of Reynolds’ recordings, including all 12 titles from the Highball cassette



JOHN ROCKWOOD

and three more tracks from the same sessions that were previously unissued. Most of these find Reynolds singing and playing harmonica with Gold and other Haircuts, though a three-piece horn section is added to one track and Reynolds switches to electric guitar on one solo cut and a surprisingly modern instrumental with the band. He is also heard solo on

a pair of harmonica tracks, including a previously unissued version of Muddy Waters’ *She Moves Me*, and his influences are also evident in his covers of songs from Jimmy Reed (x4), Slim Harpo, Sonny Boy Williamson II, and B.B. King. The balance of the set includes all three titles from the Fortune/Hi-Q session, the solo harmonica performance of *She Must Be*

a Millionaire from the Blue Suit LP, and one side of the MAH 45 r.p.m.—oddly, the Reed-influenced *You Won't Treat Me Right* (not to be confused with the slower *You Won't Treat Me Right* from Hi-Q) is absent.

The second disc is a DVD, consisting of an 82-minute movie directed by Glenn Burris plus a couple extras in the form of two songs performed by Reynolds and the Haircuts for a local TV show and some raw interview footage. This movie is a wonderful thing, done with professional care, featuring lots of music, dozens of photos, and interviews in which local Toledo musicians such as Gold, Johnny Newmark, and Blue Suit's John Rockwood, as well as recording artists including Eddie Shaw from Chicago and Harmonica Shah from Detroit, reminisce about the sometimes difficult and sometimes lovable Reynolds. To add a little extra touch, the accompanying booklet contains *Last Cig*, an elegy authored by Toledo poet Joel Lipman when Reynolds died.

It's especially gratifying to have such care devoted to a little-known artist who chose to pursue his craft outside the major recording centers at a time when virtually every factory town in the rust belt must have had some sort of blues scene. To quote Henry (whose cigar store houses a shrine containing Reynolds' ashes and guitar), Reynolds "was right here in Toledo, OUR bluesman." It's hard to imagine that any devotee of the postwar blues wouldn't benefit from seeing and hearing just what that meant.

—Jim DeKoster
