



CLARKSDALE DAYS

Photo: IKE TURNER
by Bill Miller.

Ike Turner's career began at the control board of Station WROX in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Born in 1932 at Clarksdale, Ike began work as a D.J. for WROX when he was sixteen years old, following the success of his bands, The Tophatters or The Kings of Rhythm. Though his musical activities with his bands were in the field of sax-led jump blues, on his own he was a fine traditional boogie pianist. His teacher and influence was Pinetop Perkins, a man who Ike first heard on KEFFA. Perkins taught him how to play the boogie, after Ike met him with Willie Miller at Moorhead, near Indianola.

From 1948 to 1949 Ike became quite well known in the Delta via his broadcasts as a D.J. or playing with Ernest Lane and Robert Nighthawk. His admiration for musicians like Amos Milburn and Louis Jordan was evident when he and Jackie Brenston cut "Rocket 88" at Memphis in 1950. By 1951 he was talent scout for Joe Bihari and had begun to record all the Delta artists he knew of. Though not a blues artist in terms of "country" music, he was directly responsible for the recording of most of the bluesmen in the Delta from 1950 to 1953. His rockin', pounding piano can be heard with telling effect on scores of these recordings. It is only by listening to Ike on the piano that we can get a sort of second-hand idea of how Pinetop Perkins must have sounded.

Ernest Lane too was probably a fine pianist, but his only record, cut by Ike, was in the "West Coast" vein. "What's Wrong Baby" was in the style that Wynonie Harris made popular, while "Little Girl, Little Girl" is rather an uninteresting song, saved by some fine T - Bone Walker - style guitar, supplied probably by Willie Kedzie from Tutweiller, then Turner's guitarist. "Now I'm prowlin' nighthawk, I prowls every day and night, And the reason I prowl so long, my baby don't treat me right."

*I have prowled so long, 'til it made my knees all sore,
But the little girl I love, she won't see me prowl no more."* (x 2)

Robert McCullum, Ramblin' Bob or Robert Lee McCoy, cousin to Charlie and Kansas Joe McCoy, was born at Helena in 1909. Nothing is known of his life until he moved to Chicago around 1937 with others from the Delta. From 1937 to 1940 he recorded under various names and backed friends on their sessions. At the time he was rather a limited guitarist and his voice was, as later, rather flat and expressionless. He was not using a slide.

During the War he returned home to Helena under the alias of Robert Nighthawk, which he took from his song "Prowlin' Nighthawk". This apparently was done to avoid some trouble he had with the law down South. In Helena he joined up with the "King Biscuit Boys" and Houston Stackhouse taught him how to use a slide. He became quite popular around Helena and Friars Point in Mississippi and used Stackhouse, Peck and Robert "Five by Five" Taylor Dudlow on dates. Around 1947/48 he moved to Clarksdale to broadcast on WROX; then in 1948 he went back to Chicago to record for Artistocrat, putting his "new sound" on wax for the first time.



Photo: ROBERT NIGHTHAWK
by Frank Scott

"I got a sweet black angel, I love the way she spread her wings."

which B.B. King later redid as "Sweet Little Angel".

Also excellent were songs like:

*"I'm gonna call you tomorrow darlin', call six three O,
And I'll get you a flash cab, will bring you right
to your daddy's door."* (x 2)

You know I love you darlin', ever since you have been my friend,

But you've been gone away and left me, and I have the blues again." (x 2)

or:

*"Goodbye darlin', oh yes I'm goin' away,
Goin' back to Jackson Town, and this time I'm gonna stay.
And that's for sure - "* (x 2)