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By Brian Arsenault

Louisiana Red

When My Mama Was Living (Labor Records)



You can kind of wrap yourself in the singing and playing on this album and absorb the core of the blues. If Red wasn't ever as big as John Lee or Muddy before passing on earlier this year, it wasn't his fault. He was that good.

Plain spoken, plain sung and all the more plaintive for that.

"Go ahead with your man," aches for the woman of another.

The harmonica work by primarily Red and Peg Leg Sam, whew. My goodness, it becomes a horn, a harp, an instrument of glory at their lips. Guitar playing throughout is alternately playful, joyful, mournful. Amplifiers not needed.

These songs were primarily recorded in the 70s when Louisiana Red had been at it for decades (born in 1932) and was at the height of his powers. Kent Cooper wrote and co-wrote a number of the songs herein and some great notes about Red.

From blues classics like "King Bee" and a truly remarkable "You Got to Move" to his own dark vision of "Cold, Cold Feeling" and the regret of "When My Mamma Was Living *I never had a hungry day. . .*" you learn again why it is called the blues.

"She'll still sneak out for more."

Life goes on, tough or not. And somehow as you listen to Louisiana Red, Peg Leg Sam, Lefty Dizz and the rest you feel better. (Tell me you're not happy when you hear Red play guitar on "Got A Girl With A Dog Won't Bark".) I don't know what that means either, but I'm thankful.

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