



Willie Dixon: Preacher of the Blues (African American Cultural Theory and Heritage)

By Mitsutoshi Inaba

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One of the greats of blues music, Willie Dixon was a recording artist whose abilities extended beyond that of bass player. A singer, songwriter, arranger, and producer, Dixon's work influenced countless artists across the music spectrum. In *Willie Dixon: Preacher of the Blues*, Mitsutoshi Inaba examines Dixon's career, from his earliest recordings with the Five Breezes through his major work with Chess Records and Cobra Records.

Focusing on Dixon's work on the Chicago blues from the 1940s to the early 1970s, this book details the development of Dixon's songwriting techniques from his early professional career to his mature period and compares the compositions he provided for different artists. This volume also explores Dixon's philosophy of songwriting and its social, historical, and cultural background. This is the first study to discuss his compositions in an African American cultural context, drawing upon interviews with his family and former band members. This volume also includes a detailed list of Dixon's session work, in which his compositions are chronologically organized.

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Editorial Review

Review

Willie Dixon's work cannot be confined to his work as a composer, arranger, producer, and bass player. Over the course of his life and through his experience, he grew as a blues spokesperson into the embodiment of the blues preacher. This exhaustive biography and analysis of Dixon's music, the most comprehensive study of Dixon's life and work available, features extensive references, many details drawn from interviews, an analysis of Dixon's composition and studio methods, and a complete discography. Inaba (who developed this book from his doctoral dissertation) tells the story of Dixon's life, from his 1915 birth in Vicksburg, Mississippi, through his childhood in an impoverished area blemished further by racism, to his adulthood in Chicago as a boxer and musician. The details of Dixon's musical works and technique are juxtaposed with the details of Dixon's life. From the Big Three Trio to Dixon's highly productive years with Chess Records to finally, his own Blues Factory studio, Inaba traces and comments on the significance of Dixon's lasting imprint on music. Recommended for musicologists and fans of the blues, as well as those with an interest in history.

(Publishers Weekly)

A Booklist Top 10 Art Book!

At long last, a thorough, satisfying exploration of Willie Dixon, thanks to Japanese-born musicologist Inaba. Dixon, Inaba says, was drove the successful growth of the post-WWII blues style born in the Mississippi Delta and developed at Chicago's Chess Records. More than merely plugging a guitar into an amplifier, Dixon shepherded this evolution by writing lyrics that welded traditional wisdom and cultural references from the rural south to urban images and experiences, and then setting them to simple, driving music. Inaba locates Dixon within African American culture, describing the environment in which he was born, delving into the complexity of his religious beliefs, and providing insight into black cultural patterns. This enables Inaba to identify nuances in Dixon's writing that elevate his songs from entertainment to poetry. Inaba also shows how Dixon ensured the successes of Muddy Waters, Koko Taylor, Howlin' Wolf, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, and other popular blues musicians by writing songs specifically tailored for each singer's personality and musical strengths. Extensively researched, Inaba's volume fully exposes Dixon as a multifaceted blues innovator and essential presence in American music. *(Booklist, Starred Review)*

Willie Dixon is one of the most important songwriters and composers of postwar Chicago Blues. Each chapter contains impressive footnotes... *Preacher of the Blues* forms a welcome addition. *(Block Magazine)*

In this impressive volume, Mitsutoshi Inaba adds to our understanding of Dixon's role with his analysis of Dixon's recognition early in life that the blues is a form of secular religion with the power to explain, advise, comfort, and heal those who wish to find salvation in this world rather than a presumed next. ... In addition to his analyses of both the words and music of Willie Dixon's best songs, Inaba provides a thorough listing and description of Dixon's recordings with all the details concerning dates, production, and other artists. The book also contains many photographs of Dixon, other Chicago blues figures, and the world he helped to create. But Inaba's most significant contribution to blues scholarship is his many interviews with Dixon's family members and others who knew him. Frequent and lengthy excerpts from the comments of these witnesses to Dixon's career both confirm Professor Inaba's thesis regarding Dixon's role as preacher and

moral philosopher and give us a view of his life from ground level. His book belongs in the library of everyone who loves the blues. (*Journal of American Folklore*)

This scholarly work provides a thoroughly enthralling examination of the life, career and legacy of blues legend Willie Dixon. Born in Mississippi and later a Chicago denizen, Dixon was a singer, songwriter, guitarist, bassist and producer. But he was also a man on a mission, dedicated to spreading the gospel of the blues. He wanted to make sure the great American genre survived and thrived. And it has... And a good chunk of the credit for that must go to Dixon. He was a key creative force at the Chess label. His songs were performed not only by fellow 50s blues greats like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter and Bo Diddley, but also by iconic 60s rock idols such as Cream, The Doors, Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, Jeff Beck and Bob Dylan. Among his timeless tunes are "My Babe," "Little Red Rooster," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "Wang Dang Doodle," "You Can't Judge A Book By The Cover" and "Hoochie Coochie Man." Dixon has had a profound and lasting impact and influence. Inaba places Dixon's work in the context of his religious beliefs and the surrounding societal and cultural issues. The book offers perceptive looks at the evolution of Dixon's songwriting. It's a very insightful, compelling analysis, a must-have for anyone interested in the blues. (*Pop Culture Classics*)

About the Author

Mitsutoshi Inaba has a PhD in musicology and ethnomusicology from the University of Oregon. He has taught courses on blues history, African American music history, and rock history.

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