

**DOCTOR ROSS: Juke Box Boogie**  
**Bear Family BCD 16939 AH (87:58)**

Doctor Ross Boogie/ Country Clown/ Come Back Baby/  
Chicago Breakdown/ The Boogie Disease/ Juke Box  
Boogie/ Cat Squirrel (Mississippi Blues)/ Shake A-My  
Hand/ Little Soldier Boy/ Shake 'Em On Down/ Polly Put  
The Kettle On/ Down South Blues/ My Be Bop Gal/ Texas  
Hop/ Deep Down In The Ground/ Turkey Bakin' Woman/  
1953 Jump/ Doctor Ross Boogie/ Downtown Boogie/ Feel  
So Sad/ Going To The River/ Good Thing Blues/  
Industrial Boogie/ Thirty-Two Twenty/ Cat Squirrel  
(Mississippi Blues)/ The Sunnyland/ Cannonball/  
Numbers Blues/ Call The Doctor/ New York Breakdown/  
I'd Rather Be A Young Woman's Baby (Than An Old Girl's  
Slave)/ Sugar Mama



Born near Tunica, Mississippi in 1925, Isaiah Ross was taught the basics of harmonica by his father, Jake Ross. He also learned a little rudimentary guitar and by his teens was good enough to form a group with pianist Willie Love and guitarist Wiley Gatlin. When Love moved out of the area, Ross and Gatlin hooked up with Reuben Martin who played washboard, and a guitarist called John Dillon, whom Ross described as 'a bit wild . . . killed a man playing 'Georgia Skin''. Ross mostly concentrated on blowing harp at this time, heavily influenced by singer/harp player John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson, who was heavily featured on local jukeboxes.

Isaiah Ross upped sticks to Helena in 1943 and played harp on radio KFFA, but his budding music career was cut short when he was inducted into the army in December of that year. Serving in the Pacific Theater, he didn't get back to Mississippi until 1947. Hooking up again with Gatlin and Martin, they added Robert 'Mook' Moore, who played string bass and also used a broom to make a percussive sound. However, the impending war in Korea caused a hiatus in his plans as he was recalled into the forces in 1950, and spent another year in uniform.

Back in Memphis, his brother had approached Sam Phillips on his behalf, and after auditioning for Phillips, Ross cut his debut session on 29th November 1951. Ross sang and blew harp, Wiley played guitar and Mook did his thing with his broom. Sam sold 'Doctor Ross Boogie'/'Country Clown' to Chess and they were issued on Chess 1504. Also cut at this session, but not issued contemporaneously was 'Cat Squirrel (Mississippi Blues)' (which got into the set list of a couple of Brit 'blues' bands), 'Shake A-My Hand', and 'Little Soldier Boy' (a theme which must have been very personal to Ross after his two spells in uniform). His next session for Phillips failed to produce any material that was deemed suitable for issue: Doctor Ross was now playing guitar and harp, Reuben Martin was rattling along on the washboard and Henry Hill played piano, 'Shake 'Em On Down' is a robust take on Bukka White's original, 'Polly Put The Kettle On' is strongly influenced by SBW, and 'Down South Blues' is a tough original. It's difficult to understand why some of this material was not issued at the time of recording.

A session, probably in the Spring of 1953, produced a further five cuts that were to remain in the can, including the swinging dance number, 'Texas Hop'; 'Deep Down In The Ground' utilises SBW's 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' riff, and '1953 Jump' is another jumping dance number. Finally Doctor Ross hit the jackpot, in October 1953, with Reuben on washboard, 'Come Back Baby' and 'Chicago Breakdown' were issued on Sun 193, and culled from a five-track session from July 1954 was 'The Boogie Disease' ('I may get better but I'll never get well . . .') and the harp feature, 'Juke Box Boogie' (issued on Sun 212). Three tracks from this session remained in the can, 'Doctor Ross Boogie', 'Downtown Boogie' and 'Feel So Sad' (based on Junior Parker's 'Feelin' Good'). Ross's guitar and harp are backed by Tom Troy on guitar and Roosevelt 'Barber' Parker on drums.

Doctor Ross decided that a move north was for him, and he took up residence in Flint, Michigan, where he was to remain for the rest of his days, gaining employment at General Motors. At his next trip to the studio he laid down four (self produced) cuts, two are here, 'Going To The River' and 'Good Thing Blues'. Ross is solo, playing guitar and rack harp. With Phillips losing interest in releasing any more sides, Doctor Ross recorded 'Industrial Boogie' and 'Thirty-Two Twenty' (again solo guitar, harp, and vocal) which he

released on his own DIR (Doctor Isaiah Ross) label. 'Industrial Avenue' mixes up elements of 'Boogie Chillen' and 'Feelin' Good' on a tour of Flint with a stroll down Industrial Avenue where the good stuff happens at a venue named the Old Beer Bottle.

Deciding to abandon label ownership, Ross signed to Devora Brown's Fortune Records in Detroit. His debut session (backed by the anonymous Orbits) produced another fine take on 'Cat Squirrel (Mississippi Blues)', and 'The Sunnyland', another adapted SBW number. The 1960s produced further sessions for Fortune and its subsidiary label H1-Q. 'Cannonball' (based on an Arthur Crudup number)/'Numbers Blues', issued on H1-Q 5027, 'Call The Doctor' (a rerun at 'Doctor Ross Boogie') and 'New York Breakdown' (a reprise of 'Chicago Breakdown'), issued on Hi-Q 5033. Interestingly the harp part on these cuts is overdubbed and there is a backing vocalist. His final Fortune release (Fortune 538) was released as by Doctor Ross The Harmonica Boss with Tony Valla & The Alamos. Doc's harp and vocals are backed by keyboards, guitar, bass, and drums. 'I'd Rather Be A Young Woman's Baby (Than An Old Girl's Slave)' is a rather unsuccessful attempt to update Ross's style, while SBW's 'Sugar Mama' is spoiled by the plodding keyboard player.

Doctor Ross went on record many fine sessions, he appeared at Ann Arbor in 1970, toured Europe on several occasions, but was seemingly happiest at home watching his beloved Detroit Tigers on the television. He died in 1993, still working at General Motors Truck & Bus in Flint.

Subtitled 'The Memphis Recordings and the Michigan Singles' most readers of B&R will be familiar with this material, and many readers I guess will have most of the sides on offer here. However, if you haven't then get your plastic out pronto and order up this fabulous set, you won't regret it! With detailed notes by Martin Hawkins, and full discography, allied to almost 88 minutes playing time over 32 tracks, this is an offer you definitely can't refuse...

**Phil Wight**