

CHICK WILLIS | Things I Used To Do



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| 1. Lou's Place | Chick Willis/Bearsongs | 5:13 |
| 2. Please Don't Go | Chick Willis/Ichiban Music Publishing Corp. | 3:49 |
| 3. Every Day Is A Good Day | Chick Willis/Bearsongs | 5:04 |
| 4. Come Back Home | Chick Willis/Rock House Records | 8:06 |
| 5. You Got The Devil In You | Chick Willis/Bearsongs | 3:26 |
| 6. The Things I Used To Do | Ed Jones/Venice Music | 3:12 |
| 7. What You Got On Me | Chick Willis/BMI | 4:28 |
| 8. One Eyed Woman | Chick Willis/Rock House Records | 5:16 |
| 9. Tin Pan Alley | Chick Willis/Ichiban Music Publishing Corp. | 4:51 |
| 10. Big Fat Woman | Chick Willis/Ichiban Music Publishing Corp. | 5:19 |
| 11. Four Wives Blues | Chick Willis/Ichiban Music Publishing Corp. | 4:52 |
| 12. Voodoo Woman | Lavelle White/Ichiban Music Publishing Corp. | 5:26 |
| 13. Doin' The Yang Thang | Tony Ashton/Bearsongs | 6:13 |

Running Time: 65.15

PRODUCED BY JIM SIMPSON

Remastered at Gospel Oak Studio,
Warwickshire in February 2018

Remastering Engineer Barry Bayliss

Recorded at Chipping Norton Recording Studio
25th and 26th August 1997

Engineer Barry Hammond

Liner Notes by Stuart Maxwell

Photography by Merlin Daleman

[www.merlindaleman.com]

Design and Artwork by Jake Parsons

Special Thanks to Yue Yang, Nick Hart,

Tim Jennings and Ron Simpson.

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CHICK WILLIS

VOCAL AND GUITAR

TONY ASHTON

PIANO AND HAMMOND ORGAN

ROGER INNISS

BASS GUITAR

STICKY WICKET

DRUMS

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BEARCD59

REAL MUSIC - PROPERLY PLAYED

The Chick Willis signature song "Stoop Down Baby", a juke box hit in 1972, dances lewdly along a line that the blues has trodden (and crossed with a mischievous twinkle) since its earliest days. Didn't make him too much money though; it was far too rude for radio. "Big Fat Woman", one of the songs featured here, tiptoes the same ribald line of delicate taste.

But then that was Chick Willis all over. If you play the blues, you surely don't play it for money. You play it because it burns in you, because it's a lot better than working for the big boss man and, most of all by far, because it's fun.

Chick worked in the blues and rhythm business from the moment he left the army in 1954. He was chauffeur, valet and singer for his cousin Chuck Willis, who was a big star on OKEH Records in the 1950s. Then he heard Guitar Slim, and he never looked back.

Chick dug into the blues just as its audience was changing. The new generation of black American fans preferred the soul and funk of James Brown, Motown and Atlantic, but the world's newly empowered and rebellious white students were finding their righteous identity through rock and roll, blues-driven rock and the blues itself.



So Chick, the Kings (B.B., Freddie and Albert), Buddy Guy and countless other guitar-toting blues players found themselves to be big stars on the college and club circuits across the US and Europe. And for many American blues artistes, the road to Europe was built by the Big Bear himself, Jim Simpson.

In all, Jim fixed four tours of the UK and Europe for Chick, but it wasn't till the last trip in 1997 that they got time to put Chick in a studio with a cooking band.

This album was recorded in two sweaty days in August 1997 at the Chipping Norton Studios run by Richard and Mike Vernon. It's a swinging celebration of the sly, soulful blues that Chick put out there for almost 60 years. The band was fresh from gigs in Birmingham, enough to knock off a few corners and tighten things up without choking them. Everyone knew what they had to do.

And what a band. Tony Ashton, on Hammond organ and piano, needs no introduction to anyone who knows their rock, blues and jazz. He never phoned anything in, always delivering on his own swaggering terms, and he knew how to drive a band. He's the perfect frame for Chick's vocals and guitar.



But the electric blues goes nowhere without the pulse and swing of the bass and the drums. Roger Inniss on bass and drummer Sticky Wicket both drew inspiration from the most flamboyant exponents of their instruments – Jaco Pastorius for Roger, and Gene Krupa for Sticky – but, unlike so many players, they know how to hold things in check when the music needs it. Chick must have thought he'd found heaven in the Cotswolds when Roger and Sticky locked in together.

Oh, and there's Chick Willis, of course. Still twinkling at 62, stinging out guitar lines that must have inspired Robert Cray, greasing out those wicked, poignant, joyous lyrics with that circuit-seasoned voice.

From the fast, infectious shuffle of "Lou's Place", we move to the plaintive blues of "Please Don't Go", then back to the upbeat funk of "Every Day Is A Good Day". Alongside the Chick originals, there are two covers: Ed Jones' classic "The Things I Used To Do", and Lavelle White's "Voodoo Woman", which gives the band a chance to stretch out and push things as far as they'll go, without ever losing that essential groove. It's all there in Chick's exuberant "Yeah!" at the end.



Here you have thirteen tracks captured in one or two takes, as live as you could possibly get outside a raucous club. And there's that hallmark Big Bear sound, which is the real sound of the band, unfiltered by studio processes, fresh and direct to your ears. Every instrument clear, the whole thing feeling like four fine musicians having a great time. Jim Simpson and Barry Bayliss are masters of the rare studio art of getting out of the way.

Chick Willis sang the blues with joy, teasing, laughing and occasionally shedding a sentimental tear. Always, he entertained. Just listen to this.

Stuart Maxwell

Robert Lee Chick Willis was born in Cabaniss, Monroe County, Georgia on September 24, 1934. His career as a singer kicked off when, in 1956, he won the talent show at The Magnolia Ballroom in Atlanta, which directly led to his first recording, “You’re Mine”, for Ebb Records, released in that same year.

Taking the stage name Chick as a salute to his famous cousin, The R&B star Chuck Willis, Chick went on the road with him until Chuck’s death in 1957. Chick learned to play from Guitar Slim, another cousin, who remained his main influence. He also worked with the King of The Slide Guitar, Elmore James. Chick stayed with Elmore through the 1960s, recording for Atco and other labels.

Going out on the road under his own name. Chick appeared in the movies ‘Petey Wheatstraw’ and ‘The Buddy Holly Story’, and had a three million-selling hit with the rather more than somewhat risqué ‘Stoop Down Baby Let Your Daddy See,’ followed by a couple more adult-themed singles in a series of recordings for Ichiban.

Touring through the UK and Europe he established an enviable reputation as a singer and guitarist who not only knew the blues but also how to entertain an audience.

Chick Willis died in Forsyth. Monroe County, Georgia, not a million miles from where he was born 79 years earlier.

Jim Simpson



