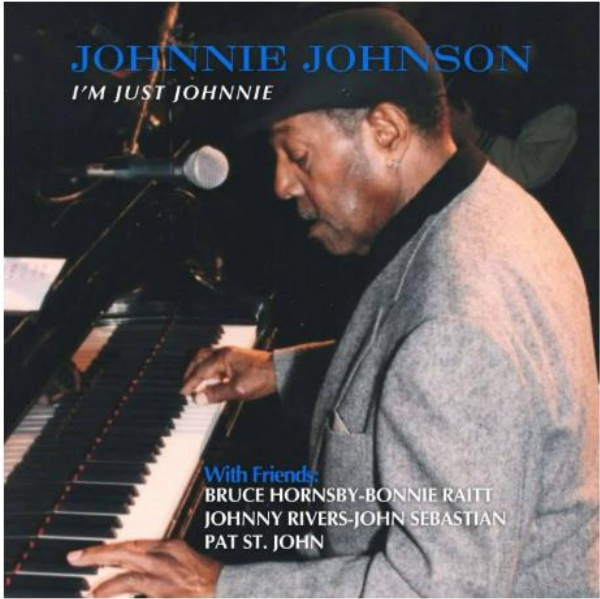


# JOHNNIE JOHNSON – I'M JUST JOHNNIE

Missouri Morning Records

♥

BLUES



MARKS NOTES	
☆☆☆☆	AVERAGE / MOYENNE
☆☆☆☆	GOOD / BON
☆☆☆☆	VERY GOOD / TRES BON
♥	GREAT / COUP DE COEUR
INDISPENSABLE	A MUST / INDISPENSABLE

Having passed away twenty years ago (on April 13, 2005), the distinguished pianist Johnnie Johnson only achieved true recognition many years after having contributed, in the shadow of his boss Chuck Berry, to the latter's rise and success. It was he who played the ivories on the original versions of the famous "Maybellene", "Roll Over Beethoven", "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man", "School Days", "Almost Grown", "Back In The USA", "Carol", "Wee We Hours", "Too Much Monkey Business", "No Particular Place To Go" and other "Johnny B. Goode" (which Berry claimed to have written in his honor, without ever crediting him with co-writing any of these titles). In fact, it took him more than thirty years to finally receive justice (at least on an artistic level, because with Daddy Chuck, royalties were always an eminently personal concept), during the filming of Taylor Hackford's film, "Hail, Hail, Rock n' Roll". Surrounded by stars such as Keith Richards, Etta James, Chuck Leavell, Joe Walsh, Linda Ronstadt, Robert Cray, Bobby Keys and Steve Jordan, Johnnie shone at his piano, thus recovering and revealing the central and historic place he deserves in the genesis of rock n' roll. Having been reduced in the mid-70s to taking a day job to support himself (as a bus driver in his good city of St. Louis), he was able to resume a late career as a professional musician, performing around the world and recording up to eight albums (including "Johnnie B. Bad" with Clapton and Richards, and "That'll Work" with the Kentucky Headhunters and Jimmy Hall), to the point of even being inducted in 2001 into the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame (in the sidemen category)... A longtime friend of local producer Gene Ackmann (not to be confused with the recently deceased actor Gene Hackman), Johnnie turned to him when, approaching his 80th birthday, he was considering a choral album with some celebrity guests. Johnson and Ackmann (also a pianist) then assigned themselves regular co-writing sessions, while the latter busily recruited contributors. The first to appear was veteran Johnny Rivers (known, besides his homage to John Lee Hooker, for his own version of "Memphis, Tennessee" in the late sixties), soon followed by John Sebastian (ex-Lovin' Spoonful), Bruce Hornsby and Bonnie Raitt. Opening with the titular shuffle-jump (where he is backed by his usual faithful rhythm section, bassist Gus Thornton and drummer Kenny Rice, both former accompanists of Albert King, as well as saxophonist Ray Vollmar and guitarist Tony T), this final

testimony of Johnnie in the studio continues with the mid-tempo blues “I Get Weary”, which he co-wrote with Gene and bassist Dickie Steltenpohl. We recognize Max Baker on guitar, as well as Paul Willett on Hammond organ and Pat Liston on backing vocals (all members of Mama's Pride, a fifty-year-old band from St. Louis), while the lead vocal is provided by another native, Charles Glenn (official singer of the "St. Louis Hockey Blues", anthem of the local hockey team that Johnnie supported). The organ-piano association (of which groups such as the Band, Procol Harum and Spooky Tooth were heralds in their time) is jubilant. Bruce Hornsby and Bonnie Raitt make their entrance on the standard "Everyday I Have The Blues" by Memphis Slim (respectively on vocals and slide guitar, which provides those magnificent choruses that established the reputation of the Miss). It is also an opportunity to measure to what extent the phalanxes of our veteran remained agile until his last breath. Signed by Johnny Rivers, the funky “Lo Down” sung by Henry Lawrence (three-time Super Bowl champion with the Oakland Raiders) allows Johnnie to confirm that he was also well versed in the Louisiana style. A full brass section then propels “Let The Good Times Roll” popularized by Louis Jordan and Ray Charles. Sung by drummer Kenny Rice (supported by seven backing vocalists), we find with pleasure the roar of Raitt’s steel bottleneck, as well as, of course, the lively piano of this eternal young man that Johnnie remained until the end. The latter takes the microphone for the unstoppable and mischievous “Three Handed Woman” (from the repertoire of the same Louis Jordan), illuminated by three superb solos from the six strings of Tony T (in the vein of T-Bone Walker), while the piano chorus proves worthy of the virtuosity of the no less regretted Charles Brown and Nat King Cole: certainly one of the major pieces of this collection! The brass persists in holding its own throughout the up-tempo “Broke The Bank”, where our Johnnie treats us to a joyful demonstration of stride, before giving way to the harmonica of John Sebastian and the guitar of Tom Maloney: we feel like we have returned to the blessed time of Eddie Vinson and the Liggins brothers! The instrumental “Blues In G” is above all a pretext to demonstrate a good part of the legacy that Johnnie perpetuated in this area: from Roosevelt Sykes to Jay McShann (via Otis Spann and Pinetop Perkins), the welcoming committee must have been crowded when he joined them in the paradise of barrelhouses. Henry Lawrence returns to duty for a cover of the standard “Stagger Lee” (which dealt with the murder committed in 1895 by a St. Louis pimp named Lee Shelton, on the person of a certain Billy Lyons), before Johnnie interprets his own “Johnny Johnson Blues”, a second composition offered by Johnny Rivers (who accompanies him on guitar, as on the previous one), to end with an instrumental variation of the famous “Saint-Louis Blues” by W.C. Handy. Different from the homonymous title composed by Louis Armstrong (and covered by Little Richard), “Heebie Jeebies” is nonetheless a second line mambo typical of New Orleans, in the vein of Professor Longhair and James Booker, through which Johnnie confirms once again his perfect immersion in this exuberant style. The instrumental “Long Gone” (from which Sonny Thompson and Lewis Simpkins made a hit in 1948) closes the show in style. This musical CD is completed by a second part bringing together several interviews (in addition to Johnnie himself, Bonnie Raitt also speaks). A beautiful posthumous tribute to one of the most humble (and nevertheless seminal) stalwarts of the blues and rock n’ roll of the origins, here is a box set that will delight any fan of these two largely inbred genres.

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