

Buddy Moss
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Eugene “Buddy” Moss has been described as the most influential of the Atlanta-based blues musicians of the pre-World War II era (Bastin 1993: 213). A series of unfortunate events, however, destroyed his early career momentum, and he never completely recovered from the bitterness that understandably ensued. Moss has usually been described as a master of Piedmont blues guitar, although he played in a number of styles.

With his broad based repertoire, he often reserved different styles to suit individual pieces. He has usually been viewed as the link between Blind Blake, the most prolific and respected of the Southeastern blues guitarists from the 1920s, and Blind Boy Fuller who ascended to that position after 1935 when Moss was charged with the murder of his wife and was sidelined while he awaited trial. He was found guilty and sent to prison in 1936. From 1933 to 1935, however, Buddy Moss was the one of the most successful of the Southeastern blues guitarists, many of whom – including Barbeque Bob, Curly Weaver, Blind Willie McTell, and Josh White – gravitated to Atlanta, the largest regional urban center.

Moss was born into a sharecropping family on January 26, 1914, in Jewel, Georgia, south of Atlanta. In 1928, he moved to Atlanta and his first sessions in 1930 saw him as a harmonica player for guitarists Robert “Barbeque Bob” Hicks and Curly Weaver in the Georgia Cotton Pickers. His next appearance on record was in January 1933, playing harmonica with the Georgia Browns, a group that featured Weaver and Fred McMullen on guitars and Ruth Willis on vocals (Eder).

Moss picked up guitar from Barbeque Bob and perhaps also from Blind Willie McTell, who Moss often accompanied. Barbeque Bob and his brother, earlier, had learned their fingerpicking ragtime-influenced “piedmont” style from Curley Weaver’s mother; Weaver himself rarely played in his mother’s style, however (Bastin 1993: 213).

Between 1933 and 1935, Moss recorded over fifty sides, mostly in New York, for the American Record Company, and according to Bruce Bastin, had “replaced Carolinian Josh White as the most influential southeastern bluesman.” On Moss’s last 1930s sessions in October 1935, White joined him in the studio for a number of duets. While White headed out for New York the following year and would soon become the toast of white folk revivalists, Moss would spend the next five years in prison. (Bastin 1993: 213).

Moss’s exemplary behavior helped him finally get paroled into the custody of James Baxter Long, the white American Record Company agent who played a major role in discovering talented Southeastern blues musicians. In 1941, Long sent Moss, along with Brownie McGhee and four other bluesmen, to New York City to record.

Misfortune continued to stalk Moss, however, as many of these recordings were never released. Diversion of shellac for the war effort led to the American Federation of Musicians announcing a recording ban in 1942. Moss went back to live and work at Long’s home near Durham and was not rediscovered until he paid his old recording accomplice Josh White an impromptu visit backstage at a concert at the Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and was persuaded to start performing again. He performed in front of college and folk revival audiences in the coming years including the

Newport Folk Festival 1969 and the John Henry Festival hosted by Ed Cabbell in Princeton, WV.

His last commercial recording was from a 1966 concert, although it was not released until much later by the Biograph label (Eder). His recording at the Celebration of Traditional Music in 1977 and 1978 found him in impeccable form and are perhaps some of his last before his 1984 death.

Like most Southeastern black musicians, Moss had a very eclectic approach to repertoire, switching smoothly between Tin Pan Alley tunes such as Cole Porter's "Miss Otis Regrets" (although he could not remember the source for this and a number of other songs); pre-blues songs such as "[Careless Love](#)" and "[St. James Infirmary](#)"; covers of slow blues such as Memphis Slim's "[Everyday I Have the Blues](#)" and Percy Mayfield's "[Please Send Me Someone to Love](#)."

Moss was also a strong songwriter and performed a number of his own compositions at the CTM including "[Chesterfield](#)" and "[Shanty Town](#)." As mentioned earlier, despite his being identified as a Piedmont blues guitarist, Moss's playing style varied according to the piece. Only on ragtime or contemporaneous Tin Pan Alley tunes such as "Chesterfield" and "Miss Otis Regrets" does Moss evidence the alternating-thumb ragtime guitar influence of Blind Blake on a guitar style that he shared with other Atlanta-based associates such as Blind Willie McTell and Blind Boy Fuller.

On most other songs he featured a more contemporary style that employed the thumb and index finger for strumming, moving chord shapes and chord fragments for accompaniment while he sang but switched to long sinuous single-note lines, sometimes punctuated by double stops, for the instrumental responsorial phrases. This style is remarkably different from the one evidenced on Moss's 1930s recordings that reveal a conscious response to the then emerging Delta blues styles; Moss also favored bottleneck playing on those recordings most of which have now been reissued by the Austrian Document label.

Berea College Special Collection and Archives holdings:

Celebration of Traditional Music recordings:

Audio:

- CTM 1977: 12 songs contained on 2 Open Reels (01 AC OR 005-059 and 072); both have reference copies on audio cassette.
- CTM 1978: 29 songs contained of 7 Open Reels (01 AC-OR-005-086, 087, 088, 092, 093, 107, and 115); all have reference copies on audio cassette.

Video:

- Nine of the songs, demonstrating a broad repertory of material and styles, from a 1978 CTM session are available on the CTM 1977/1978 VHS sampler (AC-VT-014-003).

Commercial Recordings:

- *Atlanta Blues 1933* (JEMF 106): Includes 5 songs by Moss and Curley Weaver and 1 by the Georgia Browns.

References:

Bastin, Bruce. 1979. "Buddy Moss." Liner Notes to *Atlanta Blues 1933* (JEMF 106). Los Angeles: John Edwards Memorial Foundation.

Bastin, Bruce. 1993. "Truckin' My Blues Away: East Coast Piedmont Styles." In *Nothing but the Blues: the Music and the Musicians*, edited by Lawrence Cohn, 205-231. New York: Abbeville Press.

Eder, Bruce. "Buddy Moss: Biography." <http://www.allmusic.com> accessed on Jul, 18, 2006.