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# Albert King – Born Under A Bad Sign – Stax/Speakers Corner

by Audiophile Audition / April 10, 2018 / [Jazz CD Reviews](#)

**Albert King – Born Under A Bad Sign – Stax S 723 (1967)/Speakers Corner (2018) 180-gram stereo vinyl, 34:19 \*\*\*\*1/2:**

*A wonderful analog re-mastering of vintage blues!*

(Albert King – guitar, vocals; Steve Cropper – rhythm guitar; Booker T – piano, organ; Isaac Hayes – piano; Donald “Duck” Dunn – bass; Al Jackson Jr. – drums; Wayne Jackson – trumpet; Andrew Love – tenor saxophone; Joe Arnold – baritone saxophone, flute)



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There are many blues icons. Robert Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Elmore James, B.B. King, Willie Dixon, Little Walter, and the list is extensive. Each of these American culture heroes has a unique background story and musical contribution. Among these greats is guitarist Albert King. One of Albert's unique characteristics is that he was left-handed, but played a right-handed guitar flipped upside down. He was renowned for playing the *Gibson Flying V*. His biography is also interesting because of some of the confusion about his last name (King?...Nelson?) and whether or not he was related to B'B. King. Where there is no confusion is his talent. Known as the "Velvet Bulldozer" (again ambivalent explanations for that one), his silky vocals and serious instrumental chops. He has been cited as an integral influence to guitarists like Joe Walsh, Albert Collins, Jimi Hendrix, Otis Rush, Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

King's first acclaim came as a member of Jimmy Reed's band in the 50's. In 1961, he recorded his first r & b charting single, "Don't Throw Your Love On Me So Strong". Without a follow-up success, King moved to Memphis and signed with *Stax Records*. There with studio help from Booker T and Al Jackson Jr, King refined his blues pedigree with more studio-polished production. The transition resulted in sides like "Crosscut Saw" and "As The Years Go Passing By" This led to the inevitable release of the 1967 classic, *Born Under A Bad Sign*. The album was considered a collection of "singles" recorded by King at Stax. Its impact was enormous and represented a bridge between traditional blues and modern r & b. A later album *Live Wire/Blues Power* (recorded at the Fillmore West in San Francisco) made King a legend. While the remainder of his career produced mixed results, AK became a widely respected blues icon.

Speakers Corner has re-mastered the 1967 landmark *Born Under A Bad Sign* to 180-gram audiophile vinyl. It is a genuine retrospective of 1960's era blues. The title track has an indelible, opening vamp. King's easy-



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going vocal style is somewhat different from his contemporaries. The universal narrative (...”If it wasn’t for bad luck, I wouldn’t have any luck at all...””) says it all. King’s concise guitar solo is graceful, but tough.

“Crosscut Saw” feels like an up tempo Caribbean glide with punctuated horn accents. Again, the razor-sharp electric guitar displays minimalist potency. On the r & b standard, “Kansas City”, King puts together a Chicago-blues interpretation. The syncopated chorus, jaunty bass and King’s silky voice remakes this tune into his own big band number.

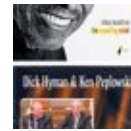
Switching to a “nastier” arrangement, “Oh Pretty Woman” is flat-out gritty blues. The instrumental middle verse has serious r & b funkiness and attitude. The arrangements are flawless and integrate the horns with precision. “Down Don’t Bother Me” has a rolling tempo and a familiar refrain (...” Been down so long...”). It employs horn counterpoint against the guitar solos. On “The Hunter” the Stax sound can be heard in the emphatic soul hooks that are incorporated into blues progressions.

Just when familiarity might be taking control of the music, there is an agile change in instrumentation. Ivory Joe Hunter’s “I Almost Lost my Mind” establishes a slower tempo and is transformed by wistful flute shadings. There is a gospel-tinged piano and the overall jazzy resonance is refreshing. Back into low-down blues, “Personal Manager” has classic first line verse repeat and languid horn riffs. But the song builds to a pounding crescendo, led by King’s visceral, distorted guitar licks. Not all of the jams are dominated by production. “Laundromat Blues” is pure roots with barrelhouse piano and displays organic authenticity. But King and the session players excel on the “Stax” arrangements. “As The Years Go Passing By” is mesmerizing with funky piano. The music “takes you away” regardless of any predisposition to blues genre. There is a nimble slow fade at the end. Oddly enough, the last cut, “The Very Thought Of You” seems out of place. The pop template suggests a vocalist like Nat “King” Cole, not Albert King.

With consistent attention to detail the vinyl re-mastering by Speakers Corner is top-notch. King’s soulful voice is captured with warmth. The various instruments are mixed evenly and are never obtrusive. The horns are understated, and the crisp tonality of King’s Gibson is prominent.

*Born Under a Bad Sign* is worthy of an analog upgrade...and this one is stellar!

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**TrackList:**

*Side 1:* Born Under A Bad Sign; Crosscut Saw; Kansas City; Oh, Pretty Woman; Down Don't Bother Me; The Hunter

*Side 2:* I Almost Lost My Mind; Personal Manager; laundromat Blues; As The Years Go Passing By; The Very Thought Of You

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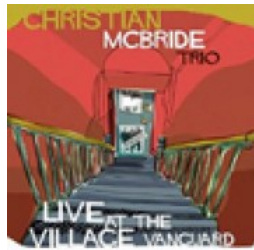
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