

Muddy Waters and his admirable blues band finished their European tour at Dublin's University College to day (Thursday) and then make their way back to the States.

'To New York', I said to Muddy Waters after his final show at the Country Club in Belsize Park, London. He looked unenthusiastic.

' We have to fly into New York," he allowed, " but shan't be there any longer than I can help. You know where I'm going to."

I knew it would be sweet home Chicago. Muddy originally from Mississippi has been a Chicagoan for two and-a-half decades. He is, as every scholar knows, one of the architects of the modern Chicago blues style and it was kind of reassuring to hear his men whacking out the pure stuff without too many adornments.

The man himself, knowing the popularity of Robert Johnson and Son House over here. included as a Muddy special a pretty "ethnic" version of " Walking Blues " in which (at the Country Club) he utilised a powerful pulled-string device to maximum effect.

When I commented on the ' performance', he expressed pleasure that the number had gone over so well. A little of Johnson and House in there. he agreed. and a little Muddy Waters.

" That pulling you liked that came from Sonny House not from Robert. And you know who else were popping the strings early on? Charley Patton and Big Joe Williams."

We talked about Johnson for a bit. " Oh yes, I hear his records are going big today," Muddy said. " Is any family living, I wonder, who gets any money from them."

We doubted it. and he went on to say he couldn't add anything to the legend, even on the unsettled question of Robert Johnson's age.

" I can't tell. I didn't know him. I heard his records and I may have seen him. People say it was Robert. I'd say that if he'd been living we would have been about the same age— up in the middle 50s.

'It's really something. isn't it? This man who's become so famous long after his death; and nobody knows too damn much about him. I have talked with quite a few guys like Junior Lockwood and this Lee Jackson who knew him but that's all I could tell you. Everybody's guessing really.

" Myself, I just now he was a hell of a guitar player. I know that. I never could equal up to him. But I liked his playing and I believe I came close to him on those first songs I made down in Mississippi for Alan Lomax. That's the onliest record on which I came close.

" I was a young man then doing this thing like we'd do at a Saturday night fish fry. Usually I'd work like that for 50 cents a night. This particular time I had some whisky and felt like playing so I just went along and made that 'Country Blues' and the other thing, I got 20 dollars for that."

In those days Muddy played mostly harmonica. " Me and my buddy, Scott Bohanna, we were a team. I blew harmonica and he was a guitar player. Yes, he was pretty good, but he never was no slide man. For that I watched Son House and James Smith."

Muddy is still walking with the aid of a crutch the result of his car crash in 1969. The accident — which happened " a year and a month and five days ago," as the bluesman

told me with precise recollection — kept him away from music quite a while, and he complains his hands are still not good.

They were all strained and swollen after the accident. They are much better now but still not right. This left hand is quite stiff. Don't pain like it used to, and I think the more I play the better it gets."

Pinetop, real name Joe Perkins, has been the band's pianist since Otis quit ("That was real said about Otis, said Muddy "When he died he was just beginning to make it on his own"). Pinetop was in the crash with Muddy, but he didn't get badly hurt.

"The driver got killed they kept me in hospital three months, and I couldn't even turn over," Muddy recalls. "I had a broken hip shattered, and couldn't do nothing for myself. I couldn't even feed my own self.

" My hip is what's keeping me back now. I have to lean on my crutch, and I work sitting down. That's the difficulty . . . I'm so used to moving my body round."

I said that of late years he had been less animated on stage, and Muddy smiled reflectively. " Yes, I used to move a lot when I was young. Oh, I was fast then, Maxie. I was all over the place."

This is the longest tour the band has made since the accident, but it has not been too hard on Muddy because he says, " they're looking out good for me." He added that he had not recorded since the accident. 'An album is probably overdue. They'd like me to do a new one and I expect I will when I get back. But I didn't hurry after the accident."

What will the next album contain? The bluesman laughed. " It won't be nothing like 'Electric Mud' — I'll tell you that. Really I was shooting for the hippies with that. It will be a blues album, probably with a lot of new song s in it.

" Of course, Chess is taken over by new people now. You know that. They keep on at me to make an LP and I tell 'em to look on the shelves. ' You'll get one there from what you got,' I said. Stuff that's never been on the streets yet. They should put that our soon. It's to be called ' They Call Me Muddy Waters.' "

Before parting we touched on the alleged blues boom, and Muddy Waters said h~ was happy for those who could at last make a living as a result of the attention now focussed on the music.

" Just one thing makes me a little mad, though. These young white kids get up and sing my stuff, and other people's stuff that I know, and next thing is they're one of the biggest groups around and making that real big money.

" Sometimes that makes me mad because we've been struggling so long, fighting for a little recognition. And some of the old guys who created that music passed away before they got any, and others have never made it to the shape that I'm in.

" Yes, I'm doing better now than ever before in my life That poverty's 'way behind and so the feeling changes. But I can still sing the old blues because I really knows it. I've a long experience. about 40 years of it behind me.

" Down through the years you're going to get a whuppin' and I got mine good. Cos those record companies will whup you to death. You believe me. I know."

**MAX JONES (From Melody Maker December 1970)**