

**BIRMINGHAM JONES An Introduction by Len Kunstadt
(Record Research, 90, May 1968, p.8)**

Muddy Waters has been associated with the brightest names in his particular hard-hitting brand of Chicago blues interpretation. In the harmonica department he boasted the talents of the late Sonny Boy Williamson and his contemporary, Little Walter, - also Junior Wells, and in recent years James Cotten has had a long stay. In mid-1966 when Cotten branched out for him self, Little George Smith came from the West Coast to fill the position. On the departure of Smith toward the end of 1966, Mojo Buford joined and traveled the route through 1967. Both Smith and Buford's artistry were captured for recorded posterity by such firms as Bluesway and Spivey.

When Muddy played the Vanguard nightery in NYC on Feb 23-24-25 he was minus a regular 'harp' player. He told me that Shakey Horton nearly made the roster for the trip to New York City (which would have really been quite a historic addition) but a last minute cancellation occurred. A month later Muddy and band consisting of Otis Spann, Sam Lawhorn, Luther Johnson, Little Sonny and S. P. Leary were again back in NYC to play engagements at New York University (March 22) and Washington Square Methodist Church (March 25 - this date just featured Otis Spann trio with Luther Johnson, vocal and guitar and S. P. Leary, drums with Otis' wife, Lucille Spann, and Muddy Waters doing guest vocals). This time Muddy brought a fascinating new name in the person of BIRMINGHAM JONES to fill the vacant harp spot.

Birmingham is a 6 foot, 180 pound gay blade who projects a big, broad, almost sly smile - with an infectious laugh when he wholeheartedly greets you. He likes to wear dark eye glasses and is an avid pipe smoker. When your reporter was chatting with the band who were visiting the Cafe Au Go Go musicians quarter- on their night off, Muddy called my attention to Birmingham who was warming up his harp with Luther supplying a guitar background. "Lenny, that's my new harp - just listen to him. Muddy was quite impressed as he was chiming in with snippets of his own biting vocals. Muddy's drummer, S. P. Leary calls Birmingham a major talent and he is not far from the truth. Birmingham Jones is a powerful addition. What about Birmingham? Where does he come from? What's his story?

In an interview Birmingham provided some salient facts about himself. He was born WRIGHT BIFMINGHAM in Saginaw, Michigan, January 9, 1937. He was the only child in a family of 7 to play music. At age 14 he was already in Chicago in school. His father, James, wanted him to be a musician - and a guitarist but Wright chose the tenor sax with Lester Young as his earliest inspiration. He played with J. B. Lenoir among others while still in his teens. In order to satisfy his father's wishes he switched over to guitar - and soon was giggling with Elmore James and J. B. & His Hawks. All during this period he also sang. He recalls his switch to harmonica. "I just slipped off and started my harp after I heard Howling Wolf who really inspired me with his great "Morning At Midnight". His move to the harp also gave him the idea of forming his own band and "Birmingham Jones and his Lover Boys" came into being. The "Jones" appellation was

given to him by the well known DJ, Big Bill Hill. The original Lover Boys were Fred Robinson, guitar, Charles Jones, bass guitar; Billy Davenport, drummer with BJ on harp and vocal. They played all over Chicago. In the vaudeville tradition he was also billed as "Birmingham Jones with His Red Underwear On" for obvious reasons. About 1956 he cut his first coupling with the same personnel for Mayo Williams' EBONY label. Titles were "Late Hours/Walking Down Madison Street" as by Birmingham Jr. and His Lover Boys. About 1963 he cut 4 sides including "I'm A Lonely Man/You Too Bad For Me" and 2 more for A&R, Al Smith and the VEE JAY label as Birmingham Jones and His Lover Boys - but his group consisted of members of Howling Wolf's combo including Hubert Sumlin ~ guitar - with added trumpet and sax.

In the early days of March 1968 BJ joined Muddy Waters and is now on the laborious travel route. His sentiment toward his new adventure is strong and he describes it thusly, "Joining Muddy is quite a change for me. I'm married and have 2 little girls in Chicago and presently I'm homesick for them. All this traveling that I have to do would be further enjoyable for me if I had them along. Muddy, Otis and the other fellows are great and it is a pleasure to be with them. This is a band that when I blow my harp I can feel that real soul and I can stand up on my feet, raise my right hand - n and be the most independent fellow in the world."

(NB: The spelling of Cotton is *sic*, throughout)