



"I'm Ready" - Muddy Waters (g, voc);

Johnny Winter, Jimmy Rogers (g); Walter Horton, Jerry Portnoy (hca);
"Pine Top" Perkins (p); Bob Margolin (b); Willie "Big Eyes" Smith
(dr) Pure Pleasure JZ-34928

Muddy Waters: I'm Ready

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For the middle album of his Johnny Winter-produced, late-'70s musical trilogy, blues giant Muddy Waters brought a new spirit to some familiar material. Starting with members of Waters' touring band — pianist Pinetop Perkins, bassist Bob Margolin, and drummer Willie "Big Eyes" Smith — Winter added underrated guitarist (and longtime Waters foil) Jimmy Rogers and extraordinary harp player Big Walter Horton to the mix. The songs recorded for "I'm Ready" offer a mix of new material and vintage hit singles like the title cut, the mid-'60s jewel "Screamin' and Cryin'", or the Willie Dixon-penned "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man". Waters and band provide these well-worn gems with a little new studio polish, but it is with the newer songs that the performers really shine. On the powerful "33 Years", Waters punctuates his tale of lost love with snaky slide guitar, assisted by Horton's wailing electric harp. "Who Do You Trust" features some of Waters' dirtiest vocals, the bluesman growling the lyrics while Winter layers his twangy slide above Horton's harp and Perkins' mournful ivories. "Rock Me" is old-school blues, Waters revisiting this classic cut for the umpteenth time as Rogers and Horton support his vocals with smoky guitar and guest player Jerry Portnoy adds some subtle but assertive electric harp to the affair. "I'm Ready" closes with the Sonny Boy Williamson chestnut

"Good Morning Little Schoolgirl", the high-spirited Waters sounding in good form as Portnoy's harp flails away in the background. Although nearing the end of his career, Waters experienced a well-deserved artistic and commercial resurgence thanks to the three albums recorded with Winter for Blue Sky. "Hard Again", "I'm Ready", and "King Bee" all bring a harder edge to Waters' classic performances, with Winter's production heavy on the guitar and lighter on the brassy Chicago blues sound unfamiliar to the rock-oriented target audience. For new listeners trying to get a feel of what the blues is all about, "I'm Ready" and its bookends are the albums to start with. Once you experience a taste of Muddy Waters, you'll be ready for more.

Recording: The Schoolhouse Studio by Dave Still

Production: Johnny Winter