

Mel Brown – The DVD: Liner Notes



I saw Mel Brown on stage with Snooky Pryor the weekend I began my "tALkIN' bLuEs" project. I am not sure if I truly appreciated what I witnessed that day but over the past few years, I have come to understand a great deal more about the blues and Mel's place in it. All one has to do is talk to a few musicians about Mel Brown and it's quite clear that he commands the kind of respect that very few musicians do.

It took almost two years for Mel Brown to agree to be interviewed by me for the "tALkIN' bLuEs" series. As far as he was concerned, his music spoke for itself and he had nothing else to add. Don't get me wrong, he wasn't rude about it - he just didn't see any point of doing it. As much as I admire Mel as a musician - especially the music he has created and the people he has played with - I admire him more for the person that he is. From where I sit, I see a man who doesn't have anything to prove to anyone. He is someone who is not dictated by anyone else's priorities. Therefore, I totally understood why he didn't want to do an interview with me. However, he never denied me the opportunity to shoot footage of him on stage or in the studio during the years 2002 - 2005. Most of that footage was shot by me with one camera. It's certainly not the most polished work but it is very much a document of what I was privileged to witness during those years.

I can't tell you why Mel finally agreed to the interview but he did. I know it's my imagination but there is something about Mel that is what I think of what the blues should be. I know I'm guilty of romanticizing the blues some times but I think that comes with being a fan of this music. It is in the way he plays and the way he talks. It's in the way that he may say "Oh yeah" after he finishes a song or the long pause between sentences which is pure drama to me. I could do exactly what he does and it just wouldn't have nearly the same effect. Not even close.

Mel Brown is a modest man who is very self-assured. He does not see anything special about the music he'd recorded and the people he'd worked with "in most cases, it was just a job to him." When I asked him what it was like playing with John Lee Hooker, he recalled a joke that John Lee Hooker told after the session but didn't mention much about the music. When I asked him if he had a favourite solo or song he's played, he paused and said, "I'll have to think about that one". I'm not even sure if he remembers his first time in the studio as being anything special. I'm not even a musician and I remember the first time I was in a studio.

It occurred to me very early on that this project would not be "The Definitive History of Mel Brown". It wasn't going to be an year-by-year analysis of his life and music - rather it became the afternoon chats with Mel, Andrew Galloway and I. The fact is that I couldn't do justice to Mel's history nor was I interested in approaching this project that way. In the end, it is another "tALkIN' bLuEs" moment which attempts to document a piece of the blues. When all is said and done, it was simply really cool to hang out with someone I respect so much and to be able to share those afternoons with you.

Needless to say, this wouldn't have been possible without Mel and Miss Angel's blessing or Andrew Galloway's involvement in the project. I thank them for that.