

Book Look

WASHITA LOVE CHILD,
THE RISE OF INDIGENOUS ROCK STAR JESSE ED DAVIS,
DOUGLAS K. MILLER. 369 PAGES,
LIVERIGHT PUBLISHING.

Before reading this splendid biography I was under the illusion that I was one of but a few longtime friends of the protagonist but that was not the case. Like fellow Oklahoman Will Roger he apparently never met a stranger. Towards the end of this tome are lists of interviews taken by the author and others that lay claim to the fact. And they were not all musicians although players made up the majority group that celebrated him the most. The initial chapters read like the usual biography detailing the various tribes involved and their movement in relocating as the western portion of our nation became so-called "civilized". There are loving portraits of Jesse's parents whom were nicknamed Mamacita and I called Chief. The former played piano while the latter handled the drums in a local two-beat band. Anyone unfamiliar with Native American culture and the "land of the redman" (Oklahoma) would do well to peruse these chapters. I remember the family had a great record collection so it's little wonder the son was drawn to music. In the fourth chapter we find our hero a history major in the town of his birth (Norman, OK) while gigging with local garage bands around the area. It was around this time he joined Big Joe Lewis, Porkchop Markham & others to back popular rockabilly singer Conway Twitty (Harold Jenkins). All this before heading west to seek recognition of his immense talents. After arriving in Lala-Land Jesse quickly established a reputation as a go-to session player in the numerous studios. There he showed his versatility on recordings from jazz pianist Ben Sidran to blues masters like Albert Collins, both B.B. & Albert King to rock & pop figures such as Bob Dylan, Jackson Browne and all the Beatles (save Paul). After hooking up with fellow Oklahomans he made his major band affiliation with Gary Gilmore and Chuck Blackwell both transplanted Okies to form the bedrock underpinning for the Taj Mahal combo eventually issuing a half-dozen titles for CBS/Sony. This period is covered extensively and thoroughly by the author and should be required reading to all music lovers. Readers no doubt will relish the next chapters that cover JED's solo albums, his onstage appearances with Rod Stewart and the Faces & probably his greatest video shots with George Harrison & crew at the Concert for Bangladesh. This period finds him at the peak of his artistic powers but far from his original roots at times. With his street cred at its highest this was probably the happiest time in his adult life. That joy was offset by what followed with bouts of deep depression. Plus work was scarce. There was the occasional Graffiti band gigs with John Trudell but nothing the stature of previous exposure. Throughout the Eighties he would make periodic returns to OKC usually ovwe Often during these visits he would look me up and we wound up going up to Tulsa to play at Jimmy Markham's Paradise Club. There was no noticeable decrease in his picking prowess to these ears. The main thing I admired about his playing was his naturalness. Eschewing gizmos & gadgets one always heard the sound of a guitar not some highly synthesized tone trying to emulate another instrument. This was true from the beginning until near the end. From cover to cover this is just a beautiful book. Get it.