



Big Mama Thornton: The Life and Music

Michael Spörke

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You ain't nothing but a "Hound Dog" ... with these words shouted into the microphone she will always be remembered: Big Mama Thornton. Who is this woman who sang the megahit "Hound Dog" before Elvis Presley and who wrote "Ball & Chain," the song that catapulted Janis Joplin to sudden fame? The story begins with her first musical attempts in the Hot Harlem Revue as a girl of 14. Then the book follows her journey into the Mecca of Texas Blues, Houston, where Big Mama Thornton met Johnny Otis, with whom she recorded her greatest success--"Hound Dog."

With the slowdown of the blues in the early sixties this book follows Big Mama Thornton's way to California, discusses her struggle to survive and celebrates her impressive musical comeback in the course of the blues revival and the hippie movement. With the end of the sixties, facing a declining interest in the old school blues, the book shows how Big Mama Thornton found her niche in clubs and festivals in the U.S. and Europe. The book then follows Big Mama Thornton through the seventies and eighties until her untimely death.

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