

Review
of
Fruteland Jackson's
Singing the Blues with Stories Vol. 1

Fruteland Jackson's *Singing the Blues with Stories Vol. 1* is a collection of three narratives about two subjects, a story and a song about the last race of Stewball, the blind, gray, farm workhorse rendered faster than two of the world's best racing thoroughbreds by a bolt of lightning; and a narrative of the blues singer, Robert Johnson, who became the best of the bluesmen of his time after engaging the devil at the crossroads, as legend would have it.

A storyteller and bluesman himself, Fruteland Jackson's pairing of his narratives of blind Stewball and ambitious Robert Johnson reveals what is deep and lasting in Jackson's art. Jackson is not merely a griot who reshapes African American cultural traditions to express the contemporary lives of the folk; he is also a shaman, one anointed by the Divine to open doors to greater truths for human kind. Both Stewball and Robert Johnson endure life-threatening encounters—the horse in the natural world by accident, the bluesman in the supernatural world by intent. Both of them become the best of the best as a result of these encounters. And both of them pay the ultimate price of their lives at the height of their triumphs.

Fruteland Jackson, our shaman, is instructing us as well as delighting us with this brilliant pairing in his *Singing the Blues with Stories Vol. 1*. With brief strokes of narrative genius he expertly crafts stories and song that portray profound lessons to be learned and express priceless wisdom to be gotten. Jackson's vocals, guitar accompaniment, and the sound effects on this album are evocative, superb, and irresistible. Jackson, the matchless creative artist, not only open doors but lifts the listener over thresholds into the realities of his narratives. Listen up! And hear ye.

Philip M. Royster, BA, MA, PhD
Professor Emeritus of English and African American Studies
Director, African-American Cultural Center, Retired
Coordinator, Faculty Institute, Retired
University of Illinois at Chicago

Celebration House II
St. Charles, IL

30 September 2011