



One of the last of the great blues shouters wailing in the big-voiced tradition of Wynonie Harris, Joe Turner, Roy Brown and Clarence Samuels, Robert "H-Bomb" Ferguson has been living up to his explosive nickname ever since he first stepped up to a microphone.

Born May 9, 1929, in Charleston, South Carolina, H-Bomb's father was strict minister who nevertheless encouraged his sons' interest in music, even going so far as to pay for piano lessons. While the future blues singer's repertoire was limited to sacred songs under his old man's roof (Ferguson once recalled that if he even so much as hit a couple of blue notes while practicing, his father would deliver the admonition, "That's the Devil's music! God's gonna strike you down!"), he'd sneak away to a friend's house where he was free to practice the boogie-woogie that he so much adored. He began guest vocalizing in nightclubs as soon as he looked old enough to get in the door and at nineteen Cat Anderson offered him a spot in his blues orchestra. Ferguson didn't have to think twice; he chucked some clothes into a paper bag, snuck out his bedroom window and threw his hat into the blues shouter racket.

In 1950 he found himself in New York City where he waxed his first sides for Larry Newton's Derby label. By the first few months of 1952, ads in the trade magazines hawked H-Bomb recordings on at least three different labels, Atlas, Prestige and Savoy. He was most prolific at Savoy, producing a smattering of classics such as "Bookie Blues," "Tortured Love," "Hot Kisses," "Slowly Goin' Crazy" and his first gold record, "Good Lovin." Savoy insisted on recording him in the style of his professed idol, Wynonie Harris, leading to Harris often referring to H-Bomb as his son during "Battle Of The Blues" shows where the two shouters pitted themselves against one another. After brief stops Sunset and Specialty, Ferguson cut "Hole In The Wall Tonight" for Decca with a seventeen piece orchestra and then vacated New York for Cincinnati, where he still resides today. There he formed the Mad Lads with guitarist Big Ed Thompson and recorded singles for local labels such as Finch, Big Bang and Arc before signing with King/ Federal at the end of the decade.

The Cincinnati recordings all featured H-Bomb's keyboard antics for the first time on wax; a style that began to be known around town as "Thelonius Monk-style blues piano." The results were some of the best records of his career, the zenith of which was the totally out-of-control "Midnight Ramblin' Tonight." His prolific recording career came to a screeching halt after he became disillusioned with the lack of royalties coming his way, but throughout the sixties he remained a popular nightclub attraction, touring with Varetta Dillard, Big Maybelle, Big Mama Thornton and his old Federal label mates, Hank Ballard and Freddy King.

Retiring from music in the early seventies, five years later H-Bomb was back on the scene, wilder than ever. Since then, he's never seen on stage without his series of crazy looking wigs. "The wigs are there to shake them out of their troubles and to reflect the mood I am in," H-Bomb recently told journalist Mick Rainsford, "If anyone in the audience is so

wound up that they can't hear me, then they can damn sure see me and if that makes them laugh, then it opens up their minds to the music, to the blues."

Ponderosa Stomp