



Pure Pleasure SHL 32096
Syl Johnson: Total Explosion
Format: 1LP 33rpm / standard sleeve

Manufacturer: Pure Pleasure
Release date: 28.06.2012

During his eight-year stint with Hi Records, Syl Johnson was in the shadows of both Al Green and Ann Peebles. His albums never flew off the shelves but he could be trusted to release two or three good singles a year. By 1975, Johnson's partnership with Hi Records started to yield even more success. As this album's predecessors had Johnson vacillating between being a romantic and a wretch, "Total Explosion" explores his unrepentant side with good results. "I Only Have Love for You" is a classic Memphis shuffle and finds Johnson all but boasting about his lack of financial savvy, as he sings, »all I got to give is me«. With all of the ill will and venom spewed on "Total Explosion", the innocent "Star Bright, Star Lite" just still doesn't ring true. Johnson comes back to his senses on "Steppin' Out". The dramatic, hard-edged track is all anger and domestic unrest as he sings, »excuse me, excuse me while I get dressed«; you get the feeling he won't be back anytime soon. The album's biggest single was Johnson's slowed-down take on Green's "Take Me To The River". Although the religious/sexual imagery is lost in the translation, Johnson does a good job with it. The best track, the brilliantly arranged "Watch What You Do to Me" has Johnson playing the role of cuckold, and as he sings »I carry my piece, everywhere I go«, it certainly made him more a menace than romantic balladeer. "Total Explosion" was Johnson's most successful album at Hi Records and was one of the best in the label's catalog.

Recording: 1973 by Willie Mitchell at Royal Recording Studios, South Lauderdale, Memphis, Tennessee
Production: Willie Mitchell "Total Explosion" - Syl Johnson (voc); Wayne Jackson (tp); Andrew Love, Lewis Collins (ts); James Mitchell (bs); Jack Hale (tb); Archie Turner & Earl Randle (p); Charlie Hodges (org,p); Leroy Hodges (b); Howard Grimes (dr);