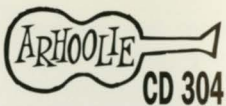


Mississippi

Fred McDowell

"You Gotta Move"



1. WRITE ME A FEW LINES
2. LOUISE
3. I HEARD SOMEBODY CALL
4. 61 HIGHWAY
5. MAMA DON'T ALLOW
6. KOKOMO BLUES
7. FRED'S WORRIED LIFE BLUES
8. YOU GONNA BE SORRY
9. SHAKE 'EM ON DOWN
10. MY TROUBLE BLUES
11. BLACK MINNIE
12. THAT'S ALRIGHT
13. WHEN I LAY MY BURDEN
DOWN
14. I AIN'T GONNA BE BAD NO MO'
15. DO MY BABY EVER THINK OF ME
16. BROOKS RUN INTO THE
OCEAN - (Eli Green)
17. BULL DOG BLUES - (Eli Green)
18. FRISCO LINE
19. YOU GOTTA MOVE

Total playing time: 64:04



Fred McDowell - vocals & guitar.

#1-15: Fred McDowell-vocals and guitar; recorded at his house near Como, Miss. February 13, 1964.

#13: sung by Annie Mae McDowell.

#16 & 17: Eli Green-vocals and guitar; Fred McDowell-lead guitar; recorded near Holly Springs, Miss. March 1965.

#18 & 19: Fred McDowell-vocals and guitar; recorded in Berkeley, Ca. July 5, 1965.

All recordings made by Chris Strachwitz.
All songs by Fred McDowell or Eli Green
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Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz.
Cover by Wayne Pope.

Also note ARH CD 424 Fred McDowell:
Good Morning Little School Girl.

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MISSISSIPPI

Fred McDowell

You Gotta Move





(Photo by John Earl)

Fred McDowell celebrating having his song "You Gotta Move" released by the Rolling Stones on their "Sticky Fingers" LP. He is seen here unzipping the fly of the jacket designed by Andy Warhol.

FRED McDOWELL – "YOU GOTTA MOVE"

The Delta was and still is cotton country, it's flat, there isn't a hill anywhere. The sky meets the cotton fields all around you—here and there you can see a shack—some deserted, others still occupied and now and then a bigger farm house. In the winter it is cold—the land is grey and brown and the sky is gloomy. In the summer the cotton is green—monotonous—row after row—the air is hot and sticky and the sun beats down unmercifully—the occasional rains don't cool off the humid air. It's desolate country—lonesome—but it's the home of African American farm hands who over the past century have given birth to the Mississippi Blues.

The Mississippi Blues, judging by the recordings which have survived from the late 1920s and early 30s of Charlie Patton, Son House, Big Joe Williams and Robert Johnson, have for the most part always had a very distinct sound. Over the years they have changed very little as evidenced by the recordings of Muddy Waters, Robert Nighthawk, Elmore James, or Fred

McDowell. The guitars may have become amplified since the 1940s but the voices are like field hollers; intense, open and powerful. Packed with emotion the voices are underscored by the guitars often played with a metal bar or bottle neck sliding along the strings. Although song texts and guitar styles are passed on from generation to generation, each important singer has developed a personal style which sets him apart from all the others.

Fred McDowell learned well from those who went before him. His style is based on perhaps one of the oldest. On the third finger of his chording hand he wore part of a bottle neck—less than an inch wide—which made it possible for him to play melody and rhythm with both hands. He fashioned these bottle necks himself from suitable bottles and worked them down until they fit his finger to perfection. Fred McDowell was one of the most remarkable persons and one of the most sensitive musicians I have had the pleasure of meeting and recording. His dedi-

cation to his music was total and serious and he never thought twice about sharing it with anyone who came to listen to him deep into the night. But he also played functional dance music at house parties or outdoor socials and in church he became the sensitive accompanist as others sang traditional hymns for the enjoyment of the congregation. The songs Fred McDowell sang were a mixture of traditional lines and texts and personal improvisations. A few were based on what Fred had heard on records or over the radio, but most came to him from other singers he encountered as a field worker toiling in various parts of the Delta.

Fred McDowell was born in the country east of Memphis, near Rossville, Tennessee, on January 12, the year was probably 1904. He died in Memphis on July 3, 1972. The year of his birth was established only in later years by some old timers who knew him as a youngster. Fred's parents died when he was very small and he moved to Mississippi where a married sister took him in. As a young man Fred moved to Memphis where for a while he worked in the Buck-Eye Feed Mill where they pro-

cessed cotton seed into oil and other products. He recalls having to stack sacks of yellow corn which were bigger than he was. Soon he heard records by Blind Lemon Jefferson and Charlie Patton. Around 1929 he returned to Mississippi to pick cotton and while employed at a work camp near Cleveland, Fred went to the local juke joint where he heard Charlie Patton who impressed him very much. The camp boss would make sure his hands were satisfied by having women, crap tables and plenty of booze available at a price to all who desired a little diversity and fun. Fred recalled a "floor walker" who would carry buckets of whiskey for the pleasure of the patrons.

There were other singers who left their impression on Fred McDowell: Sid Hemphill and Eli Green in particular—they played at the same juke and Fred learned many songs from them. He particularly recalls learning "Write Me A Few Lines" from Eli Green which is, no doubt, one of the most haunting and exciting numbers in Fred's repertoire and in this collection. When asked about the present whereabouts of Eli Green, Fred McDowell

apparently told Dick Spottswood that he'd heard the man was still around.

On my second visit in 1965 Fred and I spent a day looking for this legendary singer. We drove over to Oxford, Miss., and then up to Holly Springs. Every now and then Fred wanted me to stop so he could ask around and finally he got the word: Yes, Eli Green lived out past some road near Holly Springs. Apparently Fred knew this area well and perhaps Eli Green had lived there all along because he told me just which dirt road to take to the end. When I asked where Eli Green's cabin was Fred told me to leave the car right there and that we'd have to do a little walking to reach it. I took my little Uher tape recorder, which unfortunately was unreliable, because I could not carry the big Magnacord any distance. Fred carried his and my guitar which I kept in the car in case one was needed. We trod across fields and through brush until we suddenly came upon a small shack. A lively elderly man opened the door and invited us in and I knew at once that it was Eli Green. We had brought a little bottle along and in no time the teacher and his pupil

were fiercely engaged in an extraordinary jam session. Since Eli Green did not have a guitar, it was good we had brought an extra one. Unfortunately the power pack of my recorder ran down after about two songs and the cabin had no electricity and I had no extra batteries! So what you hear on this disc (#16 & 17) is all that remains for posterity of the remarkable artistry of Eli Green who in turn had apparently learned a good deal from Charlie Patton.

Fred McDowell moved around from farm to farm and from job to job—Hollis Springs for a while—then on to Red Bank, Mississippi. On weekends he would play for house parties but during the week it was hard work from sun up to sun down. In February of 1964 I decided to drive to Mississippi with the prime objective to meet and hopefully record Fred McDowell at length. I was knocked out by the few selections which I heard on an Atlantic LP recorded by folklorist Alan Lomax. I had never heard any sound quite like it and contacted Alan who kindly sent me Fred's address in Como, Miss. I asked at the post office where I might find the route and box number which Alan had sent to me

and was told to go north on highway 51 and then turn left on such and such farm road. When I saw the box number and pulled into the farm yard, there was Fred McDowell just getting off a tractor. I recognized him instantly from the photo on the Atlantic LP. Fred asked me to spend the night in his bedroom while he and his wife slept in the living room. We recorded the first fifteen selections on this CD that evening and I'll never forget the breakfast of white bread and molasses the next morning.

That first recording session was the beginning of a long friendship and Fred and I visited each other a lot and even traveled to Europe. While in Europe with the American Folk Blues Festival, I was able to record Fred backing Big Mama Thornton in London on her first record for Arhoolie (note Arhoolie CD 305). Later the Rolling Stones recorded Fred McDowell's version of "You Gotta Move" (the original the Stones heard is on this disc) on their "Sticky Fingers" album and in the spring of 1972 when I visited Fred for what turned out to be the last time, I handed him a check from sales of that

song. Fred had never seen that much money in his life and he was truly honored and grateful for receiving his share. But I think he was actually more delighted knowing that his music had made such an impact on a popular band who in turn saw to it that it was handed on to a huge audience, the size of which Fred could never have reached on his own. Capitol Records released an album entitled "I Don't Play No Rock N' Roll" which was widely distributed. Bonnie Raitt made appearances with Fred and recorded several of Fred's songs after his death. Dick Waterman became Fred's agent during the later years and recently along with help from Bonnie and my own Tradition Music Co., helped to erect a stone to mark Fred's grave. I hope his music and songs will live on not only in the grooves or bits of this recording but in the hearts of many who perhaps never knew him in person.

(Chris Strachwitz - 1989 & 1994)

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*Left to right: Napoleon Strickland, Annie Mae and Fred McDowell.
(Photo by Chris Strachwitz)*

Mississippi

Fred McDowell

"You Gotta Move"



Over 60 Minutes of Classic **BLUES**

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2. LOUISE
3. I HEARD SOMEBODY CALL
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Total playing time: 64:04



Fred McDowell – vocals & guitar (with
Eli Green on #16 & 17).

Recorded in Mississippi and California in 1964 &
1965 by Chris Strachwitz.

Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz

The Mississippi Delta is one of the prime birth centers of the Blues and Fred McDowell was perhaps the last of the great Delta blues masters. His wide open, emotionally charged voice rode with his eery, almost hypnotic slide guitar to render complex rhythmic and poetic masterpieces. Fred's involvement with his music was total, not just the blues but also the spirituals. The Rolling Stones recorded Fred's version of "You Gotta Move," (heard in this CD) for their *Sticky Fingers* album in the early 1970s. Fred McDowell died on July 3, 1972.

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