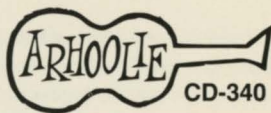


# THE HOPKINS BROTHERS

## "Lightning, Joel & John Henry"

*Over 60 Minutes of Classic Country Blues*



1. SEE ABOUT MY BROTHER JOHN HENRY (4:19) - Lightning
2. HOT BLOODED WOMAN (2:03) - John Henry
3. BLACK HANNAH (6:00) - Lightning & John Henry
4. I WANT TO GO FISHING (4:46) - John Henry
5. DOIN' LITTLE HEIFFER (4:24) - John Henry
6. HEY, BABY HEY (4:52) - John Henry
7. SADDLE UP MY GREY MARE (3:04) - John Henry
8. TELL ME, TELL ME (3:27) - John Henry
9. LITTLE GIRL (4:00) Lightning
10. I GOT A BROTHER  
IN WAXAHACHIE (3:44) - Lightning
11. MATCHBOX BLUES (2:19) - Joel
12. HOME WITH MAMA (3:14) - Joel
13. COME DOWN TO  
MY HOUSE (4:09) - Lightning
14. GROSEBECK BLUES (4:24) - Lightning & Joel
15. THE DICE GAME (1:18) - told by Lightning
16. I WALKED FROM DALLAS (3:47) - Joel
17. TWO BROTHERS PLAYING (GOING BACK TO BADEN-BADEN) (4:18) - Lightning & Joel

Total time - 65:24



Sam "Lightning" Hopkins -  
guitar and vocals  
Joel Hopkins - guitar and vocals  
John Henry Hopkins - guitar and  
vocals

Recorded with one Capps condenser  
microphone and a Magnecord tape  
recorder on Sunday Feb. 16, 1964 by  
Chris Strachwitz in Waxahachie,  
Texas, except # 11, 12, & 17 which  
were recorded in Houston, Texas  
March 17, 1965.

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Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz  
Produced by Chris Strachwitz  
Cover by Wayne Pope.

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THE  
HOPKINS

Joel,  
Lightning &  
John Henry

BROTHERS

OVER 60 MINUTES OF COUNTRY BLUES



## THE HOPKINS BROTHERS

### "SAM, JOEL & JOHN HENRY"

It was a cool but sunny Sunday morning in February, 1964, when I went over to Houston's Hadley Street to meet Lightning, his brother Joel Hopkins and their mother. Joel had come up from Dickinson, Texas the night before and Mrs. Hopkins was already sitting in Lightning's car. Joel rode with me as we followed Sam's black Dodge north on Highway 75.

After years of wondering what had become of him, word had recently reached Sam Hopkins that his oldest brother John Henry was in poor health but living in Waxahachie. In the course of numerous visits with Lightning, he had told me about John Henry, whom he considered to be the best entertainer and songster in the family, and I was curious to meet him. I had met Joel Hopkins but found his music somewhat archaic, especially in contrast to Lightning's smooth yet fierce, and to my ears perfect blues delivery. I was imagining John Henry to be another Leadbelly, an image re-enforced when I was told that he had been incarcerated in various Texas penal institutions for most of his adult life. Mack McCormick had introduced me to the world of the Texas blues and we had frequently contemplated what great but unknown singers might be out there in the fields along the Brazos bottoms or in the piney woods of central East Texas. Mrs. Frances Hopkins also wanted to see her oldest child again and after talking with Lightning about the possibility of recording all three Hopkins brothers, we decided to make a day of it.

When we reached Waxahachie, I followed Lightning's car onto the unpaved roads of the black section of town. After a few inquiries Sam found out where John Henry was supposedly staying. It was a small shack in back of a larger house and I felt a bit the intruder as the brothers and their mother greeted each other and crowded into the tiny room. John Henry had not been well and was

still very weak from a long illness. It was a very moving reunion. Lightning however, was anxious to make this recording with his brothers and asked everyone to leave the room while they sang a few numbers. As the neighbors enjoyed themselves in the yard, I attempted to tape what went on inside. I put the tape recorder on a chair outside the door since there was barely enough room for me inside as I moved the microphone from one to the other while the three brothers took turns singing. I turned the recorder on at 7 1/2 ips and let it run and only went outside to change reels from time to time. As you can hear, the result was pure country blues, much of it improvised on the spot. John Henry was obviously no Leadbelly but certainly an interesting entertainer.

John Henry Hopkins, I was told, was the best of all the Hopkins brothers when it came to playing the guitar and everyone, (including Sam), said he was even better than his "baby brother" Lightning when it came to making up songs! Although I had no luck in getting information from John Henry about his past, John Henry was obviously used to entertaining and must have been a remarkable performer in his younger days. He was apparently born February 3, 1901 and was the oldest child in the family. Joel Hopkins was born January 3, 1904, and was the most traditional performer of the three. Then followed a brother, A. B., a sister Alice and finally Sam Hopkins, born March 15, 1912. According to Joel, John Henry left home in Centerville very early and spent much of his time in various penal institutions. In 1913 Joel also left home and began a life of working at odd jobs. He started playing guitar about 1913 and in 1922 met Blind Lemon Jefferson. Joel Hopkins actually lived with the Jefferson family until 1927 and developed a guitar and vocal style very much like that of his mentor. Mack McCormick also recorded Joel Hopkins and an LP was issued on the British Heritage label and recently re-issued in Austria.

Lightning opened the session with the powerful story of his trip to Waxahachie, then John Henry instantly turned into a showman and sang the



humorous *Hot Blooded Woman Blues* and joined Sam on *Black Hannah*. John Henry did several more songs which strongly reflected his rural upbringing, some seemed intended to assure the listener of his continued virility. Lightning came back with several songs apparently made up for the occasion. I returned to Houston a year later to record more and # 11, 12, & 17 are from 1965. In the last song Lightning is singing about his just completed tour of Europe. In it he pays tribute to Mrs. Staphanie Wiesand, who had been our generous host in Baden-Baden, Germany where the American Folk Blues Festival stayed for about a week in late 1964 to make a TV film and to prepare for the concert tour. It was at the request of the organizer of the American Folk Blues Festival, Horst Lippman, that I travelled to Houston in February of that year. He asked me to meet with Lightning in the hope of persuading him to make his first appearance in Europe. Lightning was scared to death of flying but finally consented when I agreed to go along on the tour. It was an extraordinary experience for both of us.

I sensed a considerable amount of rivalry, especially between John Henry and Lightning, during this family re-union. At the end of the session when I paid the participants, Lightning pulled a rather shameful deed by demanding the money I had just given John Henry, claiming it was debt he had owed him for many years!

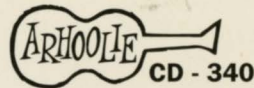
(Chris Strachwitz - rewritten 1991 editorial assistance by Dix Bruce)

Recorded in Waxahachie, Texas, 2/16/64 - except for #11, 12, & 17: Houston, Texas March 17, 1965



# The Hopkins Bros.

## LIGHTNING, JOEL & JOHN HENRY



**Over 60 Minutes of TEXAS COUNTRY BLUES**

1. SEE ABOUT MY BROTHER JOHN HENRY -  
*Lightning* (4:19)
  2. HOT BLOODED WOMAN - *John Henry* (2:03)
  3. BLACK HANNAH - *Lightning & John Henry* (6:00)
  4. I WANT TO GO FISHING - *John Henry* (4:46)
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  15. THE DICE GAME - *told by Lightning* (1:18)
  16. I WALKED FROM DALLAS - *Joel* (3:47)
  17. TWO BROTHERS PLAYING (GOING BACK  
TO BADEN-BADEN) - *Lightning & Joel* (4:18)
- Total Time - 65: 24

Sam "Lightning" Hopkins - vocals & guitar  
John Henry Hopkins - vocals & guitar  
Joel Hopkins - vocals & guitar  
Recorded in Waxahachie, Texas by  
Chris Strachwitz in 1964

This remarkable recording of improvised country blues was the result of Lightning Hopkins inviting me to join him, his mother and brother Joel, in visiting his long lost oldest brother John Henry in Waxahachie, Texas, whom Lightning considered to be the best "songster" in the family. (Chris Strachwitz)

Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz, left to right: Joel, Lightning, John Henry.  
Cover by Wayne Pope



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