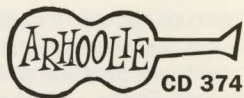


# BLACK ACE

**"I'm the Boss Card in Your Hand"**



1. I AM THE BLACK ACE (4:18)
2. BAD TIMES STOMP (3:06)
3. DRINK ON LITTLE GIRL (2:53)
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21. WHISKEY AND WOMEN (3:01)
22. CHRISTMAS TIME BLUES (2:47)
23. LOWING HEIFER (3:04)

Total Time: 69:50



## B. K. Turner "Black Ace":

vocals and National steel guitar

#4 - 12 and #14 - 17 recorded by Chris Strachwitz and Paul Oliver in Ft. Worth, Texas, August 14, 1960 at B. K. Turner's house.

#1, 2, 3, & 13 recorded by Black Ace in Fort Worth, Texas, September 10, 1960.

#18-23 recorded in Chicago, IL, February 15, 1937.

All songs by B. K. Turner, © Tradition Music Co. - BMI.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover design by Wayne Pope

Cover photo from B. K. Turner collection.

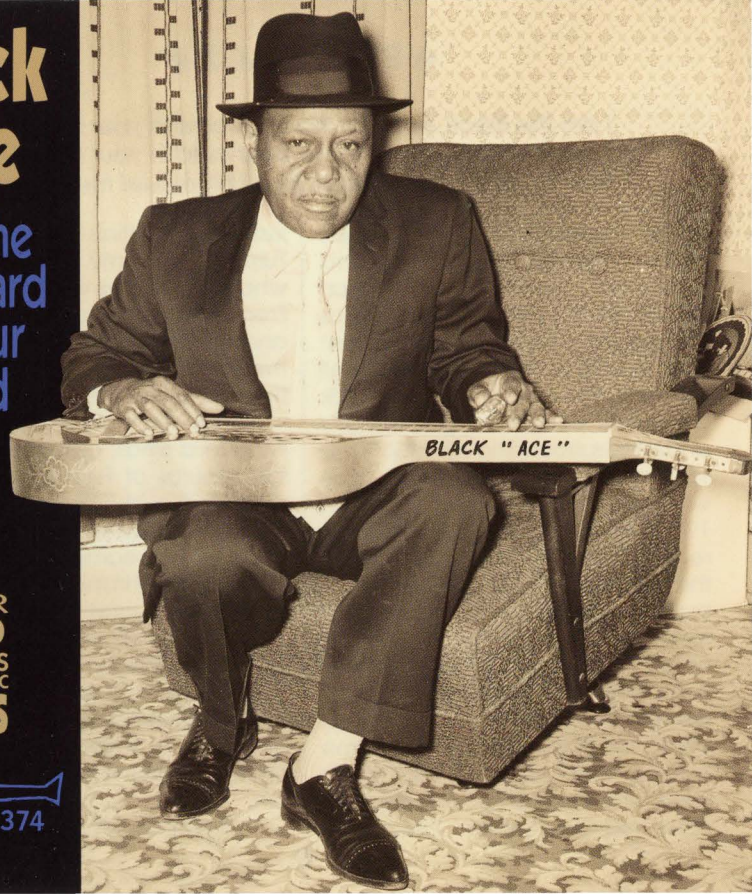
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# Black Ace

I am the  
Boss Card  
in your  
Hand

OVER  
**60**  
MINUTES  
OF CLASSIC  
**BLUES**



## ♠ BLACK ACE ♠

*I am the Black Ace, I'm the boss card in your hand,  
I am the Black Ace, I'm the boss card in your hand,  
But I'll play for you Mama, if you please let me be your man.*

These were the words that listeners to the regular blues programs broadcast in the late '30s from station KFJZ, Ft. Worth, Texas, would hear as the program was introduced. At that time the name **Black Ace** was well known in the homes of both black and white people living in the city and in the surrounding country. "They started to call me the Black Ace when I put out the *Black Ace Blues* in 1937," the singer recalled when we recorded him some 23 years later, in the summer of 1960. "When I was broadcasting they had me play that for a theme song. Folks didn't know who I was and when they commenced to announce me over the radio as the Black Ace folks just called me Black Ace. My real name is Babe Karo Lemon Turner. I don't know why they named me like that. I threw the "Lemon" away and

just used the initials of Babe Karo - B.K. Turner. Fact is my wife never knew what my full name was until just now." From then on he was known as **Ace** and when we recorded him, he had the name neatly embroidered on the fresh white linen of his shirt.

In the summer of 1960 Ace was living in a small, compact house in the suburbs of Fort Worth. He was working in a photographic studio in the city and his steel guitar, with which he had once earned his name, was gathering dust in the attic. He worked in the Don Juarez Studio "shooting movies and all kinds of pictures," watched television in the evenings at home, sat out on the porch or watched baseball on the weekends. His life was relatively comfortable and ordered, and the blues were forgotten.

In times past, his life had not always

been as secure and, like most other blues singers, Ace came from the country. He was born in 1905 in Hughes Springs, Texas, — "oh about 7 miles this side of Louisiana. I stayed at home with my daddy on the farm until I was about 30 years old." Work on the farm was hard and the profits were low; there was little time for recreation and not much money for entertainment. Ace's brother had an improvised guitar made from "a guitar neck which had some wires on" and on this crude instrument he learned to play elementary guitar styles as a child. He had a good voice and sang in church choirs. He learned a little music: "doh-re-me-fah-so-late-doh and such as that." When Babe Turner, as he was known, was about 22 years of age he bought an old guitar; not a good instrument, but one on which he could play the blues that came into his head as he worked on the farm.

It was the Depression that changed Babe Turner's way of living. His father's farm was hit by the accumulative effects of dropping

prices and rapidly diminishing markets. Soon it ceased to support the family and, as so many others had done throughout the country, the family broke up in the search for other employment. Ace made his way to Shreveport, La. and this turned out to be a fortunate and fateful decision. There he met blues singer Oscar "Buddy" Woods, then about 35 years old and in his prime. Though some five years his junior, Ace, now Buck Turner, or "B.K." and Buddy Woods became close friends. Woods played guitar, but in a different style from that which B.K. was playing at the time. Woods used a Hawaiian steel guitar laid across his knees and played with a bottle neck as he sang the blues. Though he was a taciturn and singular man known as "The Lone Wolf," he readily teamed with the young Texan, playing at joints and particularly at house parties. The house parties were as much a feature of Southern life as the more widely publicized "rent parties" of the northern cities of Chicago and New York, and an evening's playing would bring B.K.



Turner \$1.50 — more than he could earn for a day of regular work if he could have found it.

While playing with Buddy Woods he had an opportunity to watch the older man's unusual style and found that the technique suited him perfectly. He rapidly assimilated and improved upon it, buying himself a National steel-bodied Hawaiian guitar with a thick, square neck. At first he played it with a bottle neck in the traditional manner of the knife and bottleneck blues guitarists. However, he soon saw the possibilities of extending the range of the instrument by using a small medicine bottle to stop the strings at the frets. He held the bottle in his left hand and picked the strings with the fingers of his right hand with the guitar placed horizontally. He could block whole chords in Sevastapol tuning or stop individual notes by using both the sides and corners of the bottle. In this way open strings fretted by his free fingers or stopped by the tapping, gliding bottle could be played in a wide range of keys.

As he developed, he devised a number of original tunings and unusual rhythmic patterns brilliantly demonstrated on the instrumental solo *Bad Times Stomp* or on the accompaniment to *'Fore Day Creep*.

As conditions improved in the later '30s, Buck Turner found himself in great demand. He traveled throughout Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas and finally settled in Ft. Worth. Eventually a talent scout heard him play and this resulted in six sides for Decca — rare collector's items now — on which his fame among blues enthusiasts outside his home country is based. Among these were *Black Ace*, *Santa Claus Blues*, and *Lowing Heifer*, the first two were re-recorded for this collection.

From 1936 until 1941 he played intermittently on radio stations in Texas and Oklahoma. In 1938 he recorded a number of titles for Vocalion in Ft. Worth and although one was supposedly issued obscurely on Melotone under the name of Buck Turner, the others were



not released. Though wider fame eluded him through recording he was offered a small role in the film **Blood of Jesus** in which he played and sang. "After that I was doing pretty good when Uncle Sam told me to come on, let's go fight. That broke up my musical career and I quit in 1943."

Returning from the service, Ace was faced with the problem of securing new work. He tried numerous jobs - "What kind of work?" he exclaimed, "Man, I done everything!" He was married, had a son and times were tough. 1949 found him picking cotton. "We went out to try to pick some cotton, me and my wife. I think we could pick, oh, about 300 pounds — well, that kept us eating."

When the cotton-picking season was over Ace was hired as a janitor at the Ft. Worth Airport. He held this job for more than 5 years until he was laid off in 1955. That year he found himself picking cotton again and the future seemed as bleak as ever. "We didn't pick enough cotton

to keep my car. You know somethin', I'd bought me a new set of tires and they took the car away from me, tires and all. Finance company took it, I believe they call it 'security' ... well, it must have been 'security'. The car was worth \$1,200!" Out of work he walked the streets looking for a job and applied regularly at the Employment Office. "Then the man sent me to this Don Juarez Studio to work a day, two days out of every week. And the man liked my work and he gave me a regular job. So, been working there ever since."

Black Ace is one of the few exponents of the flat Hawaiian guitar blues style to have been recorded. Oscar Woods is dead, and Kokomo Arnold - whom Black Ace resembles - is also gone. These recordings of a great blues singer have the added importance that they may well be the last to be made of a style of blues which has all but vanished.

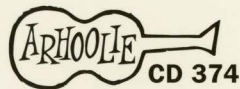
—Paul Oliver - 1961 & 1992

**B.K. Turner died on November 7, 1972**



# BLACK ACE

## "I'm the Boss Card in Your Hand"



Over 60 Minutes of Classic TEXAS BLUES

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(\*) = previously unissued.



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All songs by B. K. Turner © Tradition Music Co. (BMI)

**"B**lack Ace" (B.K. Turner) was a great  
Texas blues singer and one of the few  
exponents of the flat Hawaiian guitar blues style  
to have been recorded. This CD contains almost  
his entire recorded legacy.

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