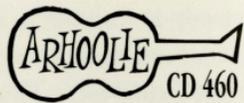


# GUITAR SLIM & JELLY BELLY

*"Carolina Blues" New York City 1944*



1. UPS AND DOWNS BLUES
2. CROOKED WIFE BLUES
3. SNOWING AND RAINING
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**ALEX SEWARD (Guitar Slim)** – vocals  
(smooth) and guitar.

**LOUIS HAYES (Jelly Belly)** – vocals  
(rough) and guitar.

Original acetates recorded in New York City - ca.  
1944.

Masters purchased by Arhoolie Records.  
Sound restoration by George Morrow & Echo  
Productions.

Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz.  
Cover by Robert Armstrong.

All songs composed by Alex Seward and/or Louis  
Hayes and © by Tradition Music Co./BMI,  
administered by Bug Music.

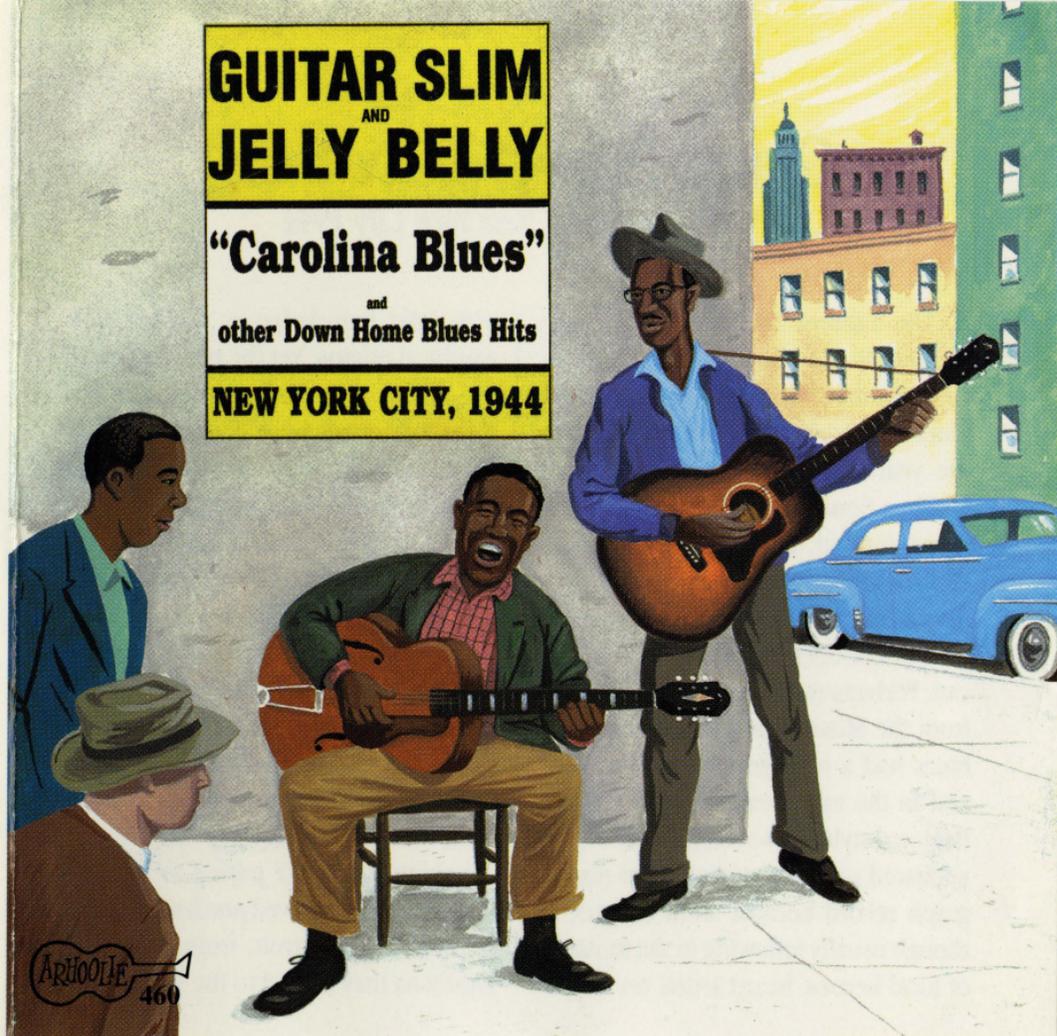
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# GUITAR SLIM AND JELLY BELLY

## "Carolina Blues"

and  
other Down Home Blues Hits

NEW YORK CITY, 1944



# GUITAR SLIM & JELLY BELLY

*"Carolina Blues" New York City 1944*

The Eastern Seaboard, even more specifically the Carolinas and Virginia, has been the source for a number of fine blues singers and especially guitarists over the years. Blind Boy Fuller, Brownie McGhee, Sonny Terry, and Rev. Gary Davis come to mind. Three of whom were either partially or completely blind—and to become a street musician was one of the few options open to a blind African American. Perhaps not so intense as the blues from the Mississippi Delta, the Carolina blues had a nice, gentle swing to them and in the early years, a lot of ragtime. Regional styles however, have slowly disappeared since the advent of the phonograph record because most singers, although usually following in the footsteps of local heroes, heard artists on records

with little knowledge as to their geographical origins. Yet the two singers on this album can still be called Carolina singers because their style is basically rural (although they lived in New York for some time) and their way of playing is closely related to that of other Carolina blues men like Blind Boy Fuller, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee.

Alex Seward (Guitar Slim) and Louis "Fat Boy" Hayes (Jelly Belly) made these recordings in New York City according to Louis Hayes, in 1944, when a large migration of rural workers to the cities took place during and following World War II, searching for better-paying jobs. From Mississippi they moved north to Chicago, St. Louis, and Detroit, from Texas and Louisiana they moved to the West Coast,

mainly to California, and from the southeastern states they moved to Baltimore and New York City. These ex-Southerners wanted to hear the down-home blues and created a large market for these low-down rural blues in contrast to their city brothers and sisters who preferred the slicker, more sophisticated jump, or big band blues. A lot of small record companies started in the late 1940s and early 50s, hoping to cash in on this demand. Several of these sides were released on several different labels under various nicknames or pseudonyms such as: Slim Seward and Fat Boy Hayes, Guitar Slim and Jelly Belly, the Backporch Boys, Blues King, and simply The Bluesboys.

In the early 1960s I was contacted by a New York firm which had apparently bought a studio along with a number of master recordings and offered to sell me these acetate masters. Since I had always liked the duo's old 78s, I agreed to purchase the masters and released 14 of them on an LP. With the extra playing time of the CD, Arhoolie now brings you fifteen additional sides which have never been issued before.

Louis Hayes is the rougher and perhaps more "country" styled of the two singers. He was born in Asheville, N.C., around 1912 and met Alex Seward (also spelled Alec) in New York in the 1940s while he was employed in the ship yards between 1944 and 1945. The two of them started working around together at house parties and made these records according to several letters from Mr. Hayes, in 1944. They made further recordings for the Apollo label and according to correspondence from Mr. Hayes, they also recorded with Sticks McGhee under the direction of Mayo Williams for the Decca label. Brownie McGhee, who knew both men, gave me Louis' address and told me that in 1960 Mr. Hayes had suffered a nervous breakdown. We sent royalties to Mr. Hayes for the modest sales of the LP. In a thank-you letter dated Feb. 21, 1984, he told me that the records had been made under a union contract, local 802, and that the man who recorded them was Mort Brown, who had a studio on Broadway above Jack Dempsey's restaurant!

He further told me that he and Alex were the owners of the True Blue label, under which logo many of these sides originally appeared as 78 rpm releases. The last letter from Louis Hayes was dated Nov.17, 1986.

Alex Seward was born one of 14 children in Newport News, Va., on March 16, 1901, and as a teenager began to play on his brother's guitar. He heard a number of old-timers and in 1922 moved to New York, where meeting and hearing Lonnie Johnson solidified his interest in music. He learned from Lonnie and followed him around. In the late 1920s he heard the records of Blind Lemon Jefferson and was very much impressed. However he did not really get inspired again until he met Sonny Terry in 1945, when the blind harmonica player was staying with Leadbelly in New York. Shortly thereafter Sonny moved to 125th Street in Harlem—just a few blocks from Seward's home—and the two became close friends. They played many a Harlem party together and Seward says he was

particularly impressed by Sonny Terry's driving and forceful rhythm. Alex also met Big Bill Broonzy in New York but he says that he learned more from Sonny Terry than from any guitar player. He recorded with Sonny Terry for Elektra (two 10" LPs) and in 1965 made an album for Prestige, produced by Pete Welding who searched him out in Harlem at the suggestion of Sonny Terry. Alex Seward died May 11, 1972.

Here are the songs and stories of two blues singers who lived and played the blues most of their lives. They are often quite personal encounters, mostly from the days when they both lived in the country, but quite a few speak of the troubles they had in the big city, but why try to describe songs that speak for themselves? These are the blues sung in a relaxed but moving style typical of the blues from the Atlantic Coastal Plains - the Carolina Blues.

*(Chris Strachwitz - 1997)*

*For further reading may I suggest: RED RIVER BLUES by Bruce Bastin (The Blues Tradition in the Southeast) - Univ. of Ill. Press.*



*Alex Stewart (Guitar Slim) left, with Sonny Terry, right.*

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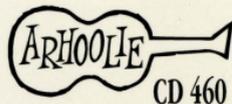
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