

Mance Lipscomb Live! at The Cabale

1. **BABY DON'T YOU LAY IT ON ME**
(2:25) (L-83)
2. **MEET ME IN THE BOTTOM** (2:30) (L-33)
3. **YOU GONNA MISS ME** (2:50) (L-40)
4. **KEEP ON TRUCKIN'** (1:55) (L-41)
5. **TROUBLE IN MIND** (R.M. Jones) (3:00) (L-27)
6. **TOM MOORE BLUES** (3:40) (L-29)
7. **MANCE'S SHORT HAired WOMAN**
(3:45) (L-45)
8. **TRA-LA-RA-LA DOODLE ALL DAY**
(2:20) (L-97)
9. **SHINE ON HARVEST MOON** (2:20) (L-63)
10. **RUN SINNER, RUN** (2:30) (L-66)
11. **KEY TO THE HIGHWAY** (W. Bronzy)(3:30)(L-98)
12. **ROCK ME MAMA** (3:45) (L-111)
13. **WONDER WHERE MY EASY RIDER
DONE GONE** (3:20) (L-115)
14. **LATE NIGHT BLUES & BOOGIE
WOOGIE** (5:40)
15. **EARLY DAYS BACK HOME** - talking (12:10)
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20. **WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN**
(2:20) (S-17)
21. **MOTHER HAD A SICK CHILD** (2:25) (S-18)

Mance Lipscomb - guitar & vocals

Recorded, produced and edited by
Chris Strachwitz.

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California in 1964.

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All performances previously unreleased (Except
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MANCE LIPSCOMB

LIVE! at The Cabale.



Texas Songster - Vol. 4



Mance Lipscomb Live! at The Cabale

Texas blues guitarist, songster, share-cropper, gentleman, and carrier of a remarkably rich rural African American heritage, Mance Lipscomb made his first appearance outside his home state of Texas in June of 1961. He performed for thousands alongside Pete Seeger and other major names of the folk music world at the Berkeley Folk Music Festival organized by Barry Olivier. Mance soon became a regular visitor to the Bay Area and was always making his main appearances at The Cabale in Berkeley. He and I would often be invited to dinners at the late Phil Huffman's home with down-home cooking by Phil's wife, Midge. Especially memorable were those incredible Thanksgiving feasts!

Prior to my getting a permanent place to live in Berkeley after leaving my teaching job in Los Gatos, Ca., Mance Lipscomb was usually invited to stay at the Huffman's house where Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry were also frequent house guests. Phil was an unforgettable enthusiast for authentic folk music, whether it be Mexican Huastecan falsetto vocal and fiddle music, "Jondo" cante Flamenco, or the country blues of Sonny Terry and Mance Lipscomb.

Rolf Cahn, a folk guitarist and co-owner of The Cabale and fellow intense folk music enthusiast, had established an early connection between the folk scenes in Cambridge and Berkeley. As a longtime close friend of Phil's, he was always at

these dinners where he would delight in showing us his carefully planned sequence of eating the various items on his plate! On several occasions Joan Baez, who had gotten her start at Cambridge's Club 47, was invited to dinner and brought along her friend, Bob Dylan. The gentle and attractive delivery of often powerful and emotional songs as well as humorous and light hearted material by Mance on top of his remarkable personality obviously impressed these young turks. In Los Angeles, The Ashgrove run by Ed Pearl was the prime venue for authentic folk music, a place where you could hear Lightning Hopkins, the Stanley Brothers, Cousin Emmy, Doc Watson, and of course Mance Lipscomb. Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder were just two of the many youngsters who would congregate there and absorb these incredible American roots traditions and hear and meet these virtuosos in person.

I have edited this collection from tapes I made at The Cabale in Berkeley (plus two from a concert in Sacramento, Ca.) with the aim of minimizing duplication of songs already available on previous CDs by Mance Lipscomb. Whenever Mance sang the song about Tom Moore, the Navasota, Texas plantation owner, he would never sing all the verses he knew because there were just too many and so he sang whatever verses came to his mind that day. The version heard here has always been one of my favorites and compliments the versions

heard on Volumes 2 & 3. The wonderful talking sequence (#15) was taped by The Cabale and was recorded just before I had set up my equipment. Lack of fidelity has never been a problem for me especially when it comes to superb performances!

Some of the blues heard on this CD are especially moving as Mance would seldom render them in this way without an audience or in the vacuum of an empty room or studio. Several items (#7 & 17) were inspired by Lightning Hopkins whom Mance had met on several occasions back home and who had just been at The Cabale or was scheduled to soon appear there. I also tried to present once again the amazingly wide ranging repertoire of Mance Lipscomb ranging from powerful topical protest ballads like "Tom Moore" to spirituals, children's songs, old pop songs, blues and boogies. It seems to me that the opening tune "Baby Don't You Lay It On Me" has strongly influenced Bob Dylan's "Baby Let Me Follow You Down."

British blues historian and aficionado, Paul Oliver has been an inspiration and guiding light in my own work ever since I began Arhoolie Records. I met Paul and his wife Valerie in Memphis, Tenn. shortly after meeting Mance Lipscomb in Texas and we all paid Mance a visit on our trip back to the West Coast. Here are Paul's original liner notes to Arhoolie LP 1026 written in 1965, just a year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act which finally ended official racial segregation in this country. The generally accepted term for African Americans or Blacks at that time was still Negro and I have left Paul's original terminology as it was appropriate then. When you listen to Mance Lipscomb talk about "Early Days Back Home" you should keep the date in mind as well: when his monologue was recorded segregation was still in force in his home town of Navasota, Texas.

Chris Strachwitz - editor July, 1999

MANCE LIPSCOMB TEXAS SONGSTER - in a Live performance

by Paul Oliver (1965)

"Just wait. We've got something for you to hear will set you back on your ears!" Exasperatingly, Mack McCormick and Chris Strachwitz would say very little else about their newfound "discovery" but their ill-suppressed excitement was assurance enough that we were soon to hear something special.

It was August, 1960. A few weeks before, Chris and Mack had been on a search for songsters and blues singers in Central Texas. A man named "Peg Leg" at the Navasota railroad depot told them that the best guitar picker around was Mance Lipscomb, an opinion that was confirmed by others in the area. Their

inquiries led them to Lipscomb's home and to the man himself as he returned from cutting grass on the State highway. Much of the music that Mance played for them that evening was recorded and issued on Arhoolie F 1001 "Mance Lipscomb Texas Sharecropper and Songster" (now available on Arhoolie CD 306); the balance of the record was taped when Mack and Chris took my wife and myself to visit him on the eleventh of the month.

We drove out from Houston west towards Sugar Land and the prison farms familiar to collectors of the famous Library of Congress penitentiary recordings made by the Lomaxes in the early 'thirties; crossed the Brazos River at Richmond and struck north through the bottom lands towards Sealy and Bellville on the west bank of the river. The Santa Fe railroad runs between the road and the river and in the flat, featureless and unlovely country the long lines of the sad telegraph poles defined the route against a gray, lowering sky. From Bellville we crossed the muddy, yellow, sluggish waters of the Brazos again and through Hempstead reached the trim town of Navasota. Crossing the tracks we drove down an un-made road to a vague and nondescript area where scattered cabins loosely indicated the edge of town. Outside one we stopped and a slender Negro man in his mid-sixties came to the door. With his aquiline features, his slightly arched nose, deeply hollowed cheeks

beneath finely drawn cheekbones he had the grave mein of an Indian, an impression heightened by the gathering of lines at the corners of his experienced eyes, those of a veteran of a Blackfoot Sun Dance. Mance welcomed us with warm dignity and showed us into his two-room home.

It was a timber frame house of indeterminate age with featherboarded walls patched here and there with roofing felt "brick veneer." The front room, in spite of the pressure on space was virtually empty of furniture except a wooden chair or two which stood on the bare floor. Years of scrubbing had worn away the softer wood of the floor planks and the hard knots stood out, polished like bosses. A thin partition divided the cabin and we were invited into the back room which served as living-room, bedroom and with the aid of a screen, stove, and a faucet, kitchen too. His wife Elenora, ample, maternal, made us welcome and smiled with pride as her husband began to run through a few phrases on Chris' Harmony guitar with the authority of a lifetime of playing and singing. In the ensuing hours the promise of Mance's reputation was brilliantly justified and as he talked of the singers he had known and the music traditions of the Negro sharecroppers of the Brazos Bottoms. His grandchildren crept in, sat on the bed and fell asleep: Mance, indestructible from years of playing at all-night country suppers delved ever deeper into his memory to play a

succession of jubilees, breakdowns, slow drags and blues, Elenora's eyes never left him, and no one heeded the procession of roaches which trooped endlessly across the walls and into the pockets of the working clothes which hung across one corner of the little room.

That was five years ago. "Oh man," sighed Mance, "I just wish you people had come along twenty years ago; I was in my prime then." Now, he explained, the young people didn't want to hear his old-time music. Now too, his voice wasn't like it was and some of those songs he hadn't sung in many years. He spoke with quiet pride of his inexhaustible fund of songs and of his ability to play in any key; and proved his claims triumphantly. He has done so ever since. In the ensuing years Mance has gone far beyond the limited horizons of Navasota to play at concerts and colleges, in Folk Festivals and coffee bar centres from coast to coast, bringing to an ever-widening audience the richness and variety of Texas Negro folk music. Many of his fellows might have been overawed by the change of circumstances, or altered by a fame which has become national and then international. But Mance Lipscomb, with his innate dignity and remarkable character has met the challenge with equanimity. The cultural shock that the contrasts of wide acceptance and total appreciation has not affected him; on the contrary, he has been able to realize his full stature as an exceptional man and an

outstanding creative talent.

Born in Brazos County on April 9th, 1895 Mance Lipscomb was the son of a fiddle-player who had been born in slavery. When he was still a child of eleven he took his father's place in supporting his mother and her children and for over forty years worked as a sharecropper on the blackland plantations. Most years he cleared little more than \$100 and during the war years he did little better, farming on rented land. After a brief spell managing a farm he moved in 1956 to Houston to work for a lumber company. An accident caused by an overturning truck injured his eyes and spine and he was forced to return to Navasota. There he took a job cutting grass on the highways with a gang of three: "I'm the boss of the whole bunch" he told us. With his workman's compensation for his injury and the first royalty check he ever received for his music he put down the deposit on a three-quarter acre plot on the Washington highway out of Navasota. There he has built for himself a more substantial home in which to care for his ailing wife and his large family of grandchildren.

Throughout his active, hard and materially unrewarding life, Mance has augmented a minimal income by playing his guitar. Not by much - a dollar or two for playing all night in a country juke joint, but sufficient to keep him continually in practice and in voice. As, in this sense, a professional musician he had

a continual interest in the music that he heard around him and drew freely on the songs, the ballads, the dance tunes and blues which constituted the popular musical entertainment of the Brazos Bottoms. He was, and is, a "songster;" in other words he did not restrict himself to a particular idiom as many blues singers have done, but coming from a generation of musicians who prided themselves on their versatility, embraced many forms of which the blues was just one. Mance's life spans the history of blues and the formative years of his musical development are well rooted in the older traditions. At this point in time it is important to realize that this seventy-year-old man is a living embodiment, and genuinely one of the last great exponents of the Southern Negro folk song forms before the blues and the mass media which popularized it, swept them aside. This of course is why his guitar-playing grandson, Frank Lipscomb emulates a popular blues idol, Jimmy Reed, for he is as much a part of his time as Mance Lipscomb is of his generation.

With this in mind it is possible to appreciate to the full the range of Mance's repertoire and to get a better perspective on the dissemination of popular music and its cross-fertilization with the folk forms. It is something of a shock to hear a Texas songster come up with a blues-intoned version of "Shine On, Harvest Moon" but this sensational

hit song, popularized by Jack Norworth and Nora Bayes in *Follies of 1908*, when Mance was a lad just beginning to maintain a family and to feel his way round the guitar, had a success which cut right across all notions of "folk" or Negro music. It does in fact give an added dimension to the recollections of the early examples in Mance's repertoire which do properly fall in such categories. When he says "Here's about the oldest number that I could recall back in the days when I was learnin' and heard people play 'Take Me Back'" (heard on Vol.1 - CD 306), we have a specific frame of reference in which to place these important yet now almost totally forgotten themes.

For the student of Negro song in its various aspects Mance Lipscomb's work is of special interest for it reveals many facets of the folk process. It is interesting to note for instance, how the song "Little Brown Jug" (heard as "Heel And Toe Polka" on Vol.3 - CD 465), which was first published nearly a century ago, has been modified to suit new circumstances. Mance's version has verses which have come from many sources with the "some folks say a preacher won't steal" theme of the minstrel show, the rural detail of the broken wagon wheel, and the in-group racism of

Monkey sittin' on a pile of straw,
He was waggin' his eye at ole grandmaw.

with its cross-reference to "You're Bound to

Look Like a Monkey When You Grow Old."

Other items are equally revealing, whether in the social implications of "Mean Boss Man" (heard as "Big Boss Man" on Vol.1 - CD 306), or the widespread influence of certain spirituals like "Nobody's Fault But Mine" and "Motherless Children" (both heard on Vol.1 - CD 306), which Mance plays in "cross-note tuning", bottleneck- style. The function as dance music of so much of his work is very evident in the echoes of buck-dances, "cuttin' the pigeon-wing" and the "buzzard lope" which are the basis of his highly rhythmic playing with its countermelodies skillfully executed. It illumines too, the dance elements in the boogie-woogie bass figures which he plays with, such consummate skill.

This serves to emphasize that Mance Lipscomb's music is first and foremost entertainment, to be enjoyed with the heart and the body, rather than to be subjected to academic analysis however much it is informative in this respect also. It is the secret of his contentment in playing to coffee-house and folk club audiences, for, an old man now, he has the infinite satisfaction of passing on his heritage to a younger generation. For those of us who have been fortunate enough to know Mance Lipscomb and to hear him in person the privilege is a rare and valued one; for all of us with whom he shares his music on record the experience of hearing him is infinitely rewarding.

Paul Oliver - 1965

Also available by Mance Lipscomb on **ARHOOLIE RECORDS**:

CD 001 MANCE LIPSCOMB
"Texas Blues Guitar"
(accompanies Mel Bay Book)

CD 398 MANCE LIPSCOMB
"You Got To Reap What You Sow"
Texas Songster Volume 2

CD 306 MANCE LIPSCOMB
"Texas Songster" Vol. 1

CD 465 MANCE LIPSCOMB
"Captain, Captain!"
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Here is his amazingly wide repertoire: ranging from powerful topical protest ballads like "Tom Moore" to spirituals, children's songs, old pop songs, blues, boogies and stories.

All Performances Previously Unreleased

(Except selections # 8 & 9 which were issued on Arhoolie LP # 1026 and # 10 on Arhoolie LP # 1033.)

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