

1. **SATAN'S BURNING HELL**
2. **BIG YELLOW MOON OVER TEXAS**
3. **TEXAS LAW AND JUSTICE**
4. **PFLUGERVILLE BOOGIE (Instrumental)**
5. **CRYING THE BLUES OVER YOU**
6. **ON A BLACKLAND FARM**
7. **AUSTIN BREAKDOWN (Instrumental)**
8. **A SOLDIER'S THOUGHTS ***
9. **NO POCKETS IN A SHROUD ***
10. **LONELY MANSION ***
11. **DEEP ELM BLUES**
12. **ROCK & ROLL BABY ***
13. **SKID ROW ***
14. **DON'T WASTE YOUR TEARS OVER ME**
15. **BLUES ON ELLEM ***
16. **AUSTIN BREAKDOWN #2 (Instrumental) ***
17. **NEVER LEFT THE LONE STAR STATE ***
18. **I'M A TRUCK DRIVIN' DADDY ***
19. **MY TENNESSEE HOME**
20. **SUN SETTING TIME IN YOUR LIFE**

*= previously unissued

All songs, except "Deep Elm Blues" are composed by Bill Neely and © by Tradition Music Co. (BMI) / administered by BUG Music Co.

BILL NEELY

vocals & guitar - with:

LARRY KIRBO

second guitar on # 4,5,&7

R. POWELL ST. JOHN

harmonica on # 11 & 19

JOHN MOYER

bass on # 11 & 19

1,3,4,5,7, & 14 were recorded by Chris Strachwitz in Austin, Texas on April 22 & 24, 1973 at Bill Neely's home. All other selections were recorded on previous occasions and supplied to Arhoolie Records by Henry Carr, Houston White and Terry Owen.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz

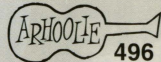
Cover photo by

Chris Strachwitz

Graphic Design by

Morgan Dodge

Thanks to Henry Carr
for bringing Bill Neely to
Arhoolie's attention!



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Bill Neely



Texas Law & Justice





Bill Neely

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Bill Neely was born near McKinley in Collin County, Texas, on September 19, 1916. His parents were sharecroppers in those flat lands just north of Dallas. Bill's father, Charlie King Neely came to Texas when he was 18 after growing up and working on tobacco plantations in Kentucky. His mother, Cary Helen Burleson, was from Nashville, Tennessee, and she sang, played guitar, organ, piano, and accordion and taught many a song to her son Bill while sitting on the porch after work. When Bill was growing up there were square dances almost every Saturday night at the Neely house

or at somebody else's place. He also heard black field workers sing blues and spirituals and learned "Take Your Burden To The Lord" by sister Rosetta Tharpe because it was the theme song of a twice daily gospel music program over a local radio station. However Bill's biggest musical influence was America's Blue Yodeler, Jimmie Rodgers whom he met in 1929. When Bill heard that Jimmie Rodgers was about to make an appearance at a local fair, he slipped off and went to town! Bill still remembered Jimmie wearing a white hat, driving a black touring car, and his show featuring

comedians, girls, and the sale of his pictures and records. The young teenager followed the star around until Jimmie finally sat him down in his tent and showed Bill how to make a C chord on the guitar!

With the Great Depression of the early 1930s and dropping prices for farm products, sharecroppers could no longer make ends meet. The Neely family moved into town but most of them continued to work on the outlying farms. For a ten hour day they would make \$1 chopping cotton. Bill quit school with the 8th grade (or "quituated" as he put it) and in 1930 went off hoping to find a way to survive and only returned to visit from time to time. "Seemed like the depression lasted

100 years to me - I got tired of it all - caught me a freight train and rode 'em for three years. I went all over the United States. I liked Colorado but almost froze to death near Amarillo one January. They had hobo camps where you could get a meal. I stayed in Tucson, Arizona, for a month and worked in the fields and in kitchens as a cook. I got tired of one place and moved on - met lots of musicians riding the rails. Went to California one time - tried three times to get in but immigration officers sent us back. Last time they made us walk back to Yuma, Arizona, which was about 80 miles - that took us about 4 or 5 days without anything to eat. Finally I got on a flat car, and there was a man and his wife - had a whole bunch of kids, eight or ten and he told me:

If you want to get into California you just get under this here wagon sheet with my kids and I'll tell 'em you belong to me - and that's how I finally got into California! I washed dishes - worked some in C.C. camps - ran a jack hammer for \$30.00 a month."

In 1939 Bill Neely joined the U.S. army and upon discharge in 1941 he was drafted right back and sent to the Philippines as an infantry soldier. In 1943 he got out and went on the road again - first to Arizona where he picked cotton for \$3 a hundred. While working in the copper mines near Lowell, Arizona, he met Bobby "Minnie Belle" Hamilton whose father had a cafe. They got married in 1948 and he quit the mines. It

was Bill's second marriage and he had had one daughter with his first wife Tommy. By this time Bill had learned carpentry and since Bobby's uncle was a builder in Austin, they moved there in 1949. The Korean War caught Bill again and he served a year in that grim war where a buddy of his got killed right next to him. "He used to wear a St. Sebastian cross around his neck while I had an old dime around mine. He wanted to trade me - so I wore that cross - never got a scratch and he got killed. I still got it here! even though I joined the Baptists when I was about 14." Upon discharge in 1951 Bill Neely bought his present house with a GI loan and went on to raise four more children. For several years they lived in Dallas where he operated a mechanical

sweeper for the city and wrote "Don't Waste Your Tears Over Me"! In the early 1960s the family returned to Austin and Bill soon became part of the local Country music clique and could be heard with his friend Frank "Shorty" Ziggler at the Split Rail, Threadgill's, parties in Oak Hill, and many other places where he met and sang with Janis Joplin, Tracy Nelson, and Mance Lipscomb, who apparently greatly influenced his unique guitar style you hear on these recordings. Bill learned some of Mance Lipscomb's songs and the two became good friends, visiting each other on several occasions. In the spring of 1974, Bill appeared at a big benefit for Mance held at Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters along with Taj Mahal as the

headliner. Bill Neely died of leukemia in Austin, Tx. on March 22, 1990.

Bill Neely had been singing and picking a little guitar since 1929 when Jimmie Rodgers showed him a few basics. It wasn't until the late 1940s that he started writing his own songs which he continued to do until his death in 1990. The songs on this, Bill's only album, (which includes a number of previously unreleased songs), are almost all his own compositions. He wrote "Rock & Roll Baby" around 1949 - before Elvis made rock history. Like most real folk artists Bill could never read or write music but once a song was formed in his head, it stayed there. When he played for an audience or

a recording microphone the songs came to him one after the other.

Perhaps the most powerful song on this album is "Texas Law and Justice" written by Ira McKee who was a brother to Bill's aunt Eulah McKee. Written in 1930 on death row at Huntsville Prison, this song is the last statement from a man who was sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. Ira's wife went all over Texas to get a petition signed in an attempt to get her husband life instead of the death sentence but

to no avail. Ira McKee was electrocuted although later proven innocent of the crime for which he paid the ultimate penalty. Although Bill has given full credit to Ira McKee for writing this song, I doubt if the world would have ever heard this dramatic plea from a poor Texan, if it hadn't been for Bill recording it for posterity. It is shameful that over 70 years later, Texas still executes more prisoners than any other state and that a poor man who can not afford a sharp lawyer, is still frequently denied justice.

Chris Strachwitz - 1974 and 2001

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