

- 1. WRITE ME A FEW OF YOUR LINES**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 2. DO MY BABY EVER THINK OF ME**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 3. LEVEE CAMP BLUES**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 4. WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN**
(PD - arr. by Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 5. MY BOTTLENECK** (story)
- 6. FRED'S WORRIED LIFE BLUES** (Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 7. KOKOMO BLUES** (Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 8. MEET ME DOWN IN FROGGY BOTTOM**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 9. GOOD MORNING LITTLE SCHOOLGIRL**
(PD - arr. by Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 10. KEEP YOUR LAMP TRIMMED AND BURNING** (PD - arr. by Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 11. SHAKE 'EM ON DOWN**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 12. GOING AWAY - WON'T BE GONE LONG**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 13. I WISH I WAS IN HEAVEN SITTING DOWN** (PD - arr. by Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 14. FRED'S RAMBLING BLUES**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
- 15. I LOOKED AT THE SUN**
(Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)

- 16. YOU GOTTA MOVE**
(Fred McDowell & Gary Davis - Tradition Music Co. & Chandos Music Co.)
- 17. MY BABY** (Walter Jacobs - Arc Music Co.)
- 18. Fred McDowell live in concert:**
Intro
A) SHAKE 'EM ON DOWN (Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)
comments
B) LOUISE (Fred McDowell - Tradition Music Co.)

Fred McDowell - vocals and guitar; with:
#3, #8, & # 17: **Mike Russo** - 2nd guitar,
John Kahn - bass, **Bob Jones** - drums
#13: additional vocals by **Annie Mae McDowell** and friends
#10: **Johnny Woods** - harmonica

Recorded by Chris Strachwitz between 1964 and 1969 in Como, MS., Berkeley, CA. & Memphis, TN. #18: recorded on June 23, 1965 at the University of California, Berkeley Folk Festival and **previously unreleased**.
All other selections drawn from Arhoolie CDs # 304, 385, 424, & 441
Tradition Music Co. is administered by BUG Music Co. - Hollywood, CA., USA.
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the best of
MISSISSIPPI

Fred McDowell

The Best Of MISSISSIPPI **Fred McDowell**

Fred McDowell was perhaps the last great Mississippi country blues singer and bottle neck slide guitarist who grew up during the early part of the last century when this haunting, regional, musical tradition was in its prime. The famous so-called “father of the blues”, W.C. Handy first encountered the eerie sounds of a Mississippi bottle neck guitarist about the time Fred McDowell was born. Unlike his predecessors and peers such as Charlie Patton, Son House, Big Joe Williams, Robert Johnson, Elmore James, Muddy Waters, etc., Fred McDowell never had the impulse to seek out the “record men” and make commercial recordings. It wasn’t until

1959 that Alan Lomax, in search for the oldest roots of African-American music, “discovered” Fred McDowell and made his first recordings during a research field trip through the South.

The music Fred McDowell played was an integral part of the culture of black field hands and their families in the wider Mississippi Delta during the first half of the 20th century when cotton was still King. Fred was born January 12 east of Memphis, TN - the year was probably 1904. His parents died when Fred was very young but an older married sister, who lived in Mississippi, took him in. He never went to school but had to go to work as soon



as he was big enough to lift sacks of yellow corn. As a young man, when he was living in Memphis, Fred would catch a bus down to Cleveland to pick cotton since a lot of hands were required during the harvest. In the late 1920s Fred once saw the legendary Charlie Patton at a "juke" near Mr. Dankin's farm. Although he remembers hearing Patton's record of the "P-Vine Blues," I doubt if he was all that impressed with the gruff style of this musician. Fred was already playing guitar but was more interested in Eli Green as his mentor and eventually learned many of his songs including "Write Me A Few Of Your Lines" (you can hear two cuts by Eli Green with Fred McDowell on Arhoolie CD 304).

During cotton picking season the land owners would try to provide all sorts of entertainment for the pickers. They ran the "juke" where the hands could gamble, drink, carouse with prostitutes and dance to the music of the best local talent. Fred vividly recalled the

"floor walkers" who carried buckets full of home-made whiskey on their arms to serve thirsty clients. All of these illegal activities were designed to keep the workers happy and content and if extra profits could be gained, so much the better! I doubt if any local sheriffs ever dared to even consider raising the question of legality even in those days of prohibition. Fred McDowell played many a juke joint himself during that era. As time went on and the popularity of the blues declined, Fred kept up his musical talents by playing spirituals and jubilees at small churches mostly backing up small congregations which usually included his wife, Annie Mae. You will hear several examples of him playing church music on this CD, alone, with Annie Mae, and with his favorite harmonica player, Johnny Woods. Besides the plantation jukes, house parties were a common weekend event and Fred was always a welcomed visitor, whether he was paid or not. During my few visits to Como, Mississippi, I was

fortunate enough to encounter an outdoors picnic where Fred McDowell alternated with the Como Fife & Drum Band. One Sunday morning he organized a little yard dance where some of his friends and neighbors made an appearance and enjoyed the lively music.

Thanks to Alan Lomax, the larger folk, jazz, and world music community which by the late 1950s was quite international in scope, was suddenly confronted with the incredible sound of Fred McDowell's music. A few selections by Fred appeared on an album released on the Atlantic label which sampled some of the amazing African-American roots music discovered by the famous folklorist during his 1959 trip through the South. I was so overcome by the incredible sound of this emotionally charged voice and ringing slide guitar, that I wrote to Mr. Lomax inquiring as to Fred McDowell's whereabouts. Alan kindly sent me Fred's address: a box number on a rural mail route in Como, Miss.

Although I was already several years into recording and producing American vernacular music of various kinds for my Arhoolie label, I had never heard anything quite like this before. On my next trip south, after a stop in Houston to record Clifton Chenier, whom I had met by hanging out with my idol, Lightning Hopkins, I drove up into Mississippi. Compared to the lively music scene in Texas, especially Houston, Mississippi was a dreary, hard scrabble world of endless cotton fields or unproductive piney woods. The local postmaster kindly pointed me in the direction of the rural route and corresponding box number which I had been given by Mr. Lomax. As soon as I pulled into the farm yard I saw the man whose face I was already familiar with from the cover of the Atlantic album. He was just getting off a tractor and was probably delighted when he saw my California license plate and realized I was not a bill collector or sheriff, but perhaps someone interested in his

music. There, suddenly, was Fred McDowell in person with a face that was totally revealing and trusting and full of fun, joy and humor. He shared a small cabin on the farm's premises with his wife, and immediately welcomed me in. I had brought along a little libation which was very welcome, especially on that cold, late February afternoon in "dry" Mississippi. I carried my Magnecord tape recorder (a great war-horse of a song catcher) into the house, plugged in my single Capps condenser microphone, and pretty soon Fred McDowell proceeded to sing me one song after the other.

Fred on the one hand seemed to be in love with his music and was ready to share it with anyone at any time, but on the other hand (as he told me on several occasions) music sometimes didn't even cross his mind and he didn't even feel like touching the guitar. Soon after his first records appeared, Fred was welcomed by a new audience - far from Mississippi - who really had no clue as

to what sort of environment and culture had nurtured him. In general he seemed happy to meet this new world of blues and folk music fans at clubs and festivals. But he was also nervous and never seemed to quite get used to being a celebrity in the spotlight. Fred was especially proud of the fact that a major pop music group like the Rolling Stones thought enough of the way he played "You Got To Move" to include their version on one of their albums. During what turned out to be my last visit with Fred in Como, I was able to hand him a check for more money than he had ever seen in his life - for royalties generated by that recording. Dick Waterman deserves a lot of credit for handling Fred's bookings and acquainting him with Bonnie Raitt, then a rising pop star. They shared shows together and she also recorded several of Fred's songs. On July 3, 1972, Fred McDowell died of cancer in Memphis.

Chris Strachwitz - 2001

Other recordings available by **FRED McDOWELL:**

ARHOOLIE CD/Cass 304: "YOU GOTTA MOVE"

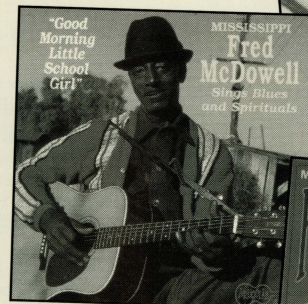
(19 tracks, recorded in 1964 & 1965, contains the hit title track, covered by the Rolling Stones.)



ARHOOLIE CD 424:

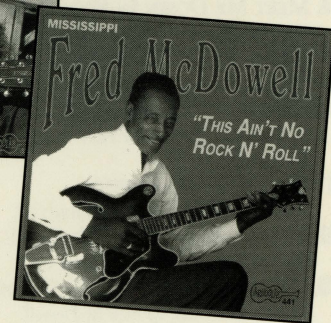
"GOOD MORNING LITTLE SCHOOL GIRL"

Blues and Spirituals
(contains 22 classic
tracks by this classic
artist. Recorded 1968
& 1969)



ARHOOLIE CD 441: "THIS AIN'T NO ROCK N' ROLL"

(18 songs, recorded in 1968 and 1969.
Here he plays the electric guitar, with some
accompaniment.)



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17. MY BABY
18. Fred McDowell live in concert:
Intro
A) SHAKE 'EM ON DOWN
comments
B) LOUISE

The emotionally charged blues and church music Fred McDowell sang & played, with his bottleneck slide guitar, were an integral part of the culture of rural African-Americans in the Mississippi Delta during the 1st half of the 20th century when cotton was still king.

Fred McDowell - vocals and guitar; with:
#3, #7, & # 16: **Mike Russo** - 2nd guitar, **John Kahn** - bass, **Bob Jones** - drums
#8 & #12: additional vocals by **Annie Mae McDowell** and friends
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File Under: BLUES

