

# GEORGE COLEMAN

## Bongo Joe



1. I WISH I COULD SING (3:10)
2. SCIENCE FICTION (5:15) (\*)
3. INNOCENT LITTLE DOGGIE (7:13)
4. COOL IT RIGHT (5:45)
5. LISTEN AT THAT BULL (3:40)
6. CRAZY WITH LOVE (2:30) (\*)
7. GREAT (Instrumental) (4:40) (\*)
8. TRANSISTOR RADIO (5:45)
9. ELOISE (6:55)
10. DOG EAT DOG (4:18)

Total time: 49:45

(\*) = Previously unreleased

All compositions by George Coleman  
are © by Tradition Music Co. (BMI)

*"I rap - but not that bullshit they're  
putting down now. I play funda-  
mental beat music."*

-George Coleman a.k.a. "Bongo Joe"  
Vocals and steel drums.

Produced by Chris Strachwitz  
Cover by Wayne Pope  
Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz  
taken of Bongo Joe at the annual New  
Orleans Heritage and Jazz Festival  
during the 1980s.

"C olemán's drum sound is unique and quite full, as if a small band were playing, with little resemblance to the Caribbean steel drum sounds one might imagine. The first tune is very honest in title, *I Wish I Could Sing*. Poor George really can't. Fortunately, we are spared his attempts at singing and listen only to his rapping, and what a satirical and social observer Bongo Joe is. In *Innocent Little Doggie* and *Dog Eat Dog* the ruthlessness and inhumanity of man to his fellow is captured by the observant eye, quick wit, and biting tongue of Mr. Coleman."

(Marshall Miller - *Broadside*)

P.S. *Innocent Little Doggie* almost became a hit in 1969 when the BBC/London aired it repeatedly.

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## George Coleman - "Bongo Joe"

"I rap - but not that bullshit they're putting down now. I play fundamental beat music."

(George Coleman aka Bongo Joe - 1991)

Folklorists have given a great deal of attention to the African roots of American Black music. Perhaps the surest measure of African influence is the use of the drum. Black music has effectively been built around this instrument and its variations. In our contemporary culture the general function of a drummer is to provide the rhythmic accompaniment for some sort of musical ensemble. But the folk music of African Americans is replete with examples of the more traditional and more expressive art of *drum beating*.

George Coleman is a drum beater who plays music on the drum, a man who uses it to send important information over long distances, the logical extension of a primitive art into modern culture. His instrument is a 55 gallon oil drum shaped with a hand ax in a curious series of dents, bulges, cuts and wrinkles. His drum sticks are made from hammer handles, the bases of quart oil cans filled with pebbles and B-B shot to provide a rattle.

George Coleman was born in Haines,

Florida November 28, 1923 on the gulf coast. His family was typical, and had no unusual interest in music. George left home at an early age to travel and work along the Gulf Coast. He generally earned his living as a dock worker or agricultural hand. He served in the Army Air Corps during the war and upon its conclusion came to Houston, Texas.

During the late forties Houston was known as "Baghdad on the Bayou" among Blacks. It offered opportunity, reasonable job security and an exciting social life dominated by the many fine musicians then active in the city. Coleman was eager to take part in this social life and brashly asked a local band leader for a job as a drummer. He was turned down when the band leader learned that George didn't have his own set of drums. George was incensed, he knew that he could do as well as the man playing the drums and he felt that his lack of equipment should not disqualify him from playing with the band. He solved the problem by getting to-

gether some tin cans, and oil drums and making his own drum set.

Houston offered little to a man who had to carry a 55 gallon Texaco Firechief oil drum between gigs so George went to Galveston. Galveston was at that time the tourist capital for Texas and a good bit of the rest of the southern part of the country. On Post Office Street, Church Street and Seawall Boulevard tourists had plenty of money and were happy to drop coins in George's pocket when he played in front of a popular tourist pier. During the off-season George would return to Houston and make what money he could playing on the streets.

It took the advent of an old folks home to drive George away from the city by the sea. It seems that the old folks needed quiet; just the thing Coleman wasn't offering. George left Galveston and headed to San Antonio where the World's Fair was in full swing. There George set up shop in the Alamo Plaza, which proved to be a gold mine as the small change flowed freely from the pockets of the tourists and the many soldiers, airmen and locals.

George Coleman's music defies description; it is rhythmic, lyrical, incisive, highly satirical and almost a precursor to

modern Rap. *Transistor Radio* is a commentary on the modern third ear and man's seeming compulsion to be surrounded at all times by sound. *Innocent Little Doggy* offers a bitter view of man's inhumanity to man and a subtle interjection of Satanic humor. *Eloise* is almost a pop R & B ballad to the all too familiar blighted love affair but is something much more due to Coleman's quick mind and ready wit. The other selections are powerful and unique to say the least. We hear a philosophy of life and experience an entertaining trip through the mind of Bongo Joe.

- Lawrence C. Skoog

(Text edited 1991 by Chris Strachwitz & Dix Bruce)

**George Coleman** - drums and vocal sounds

All songs by George Coleman and © by Tradition Music Co. - BMI. Recorded in San Antonio, Texas by Chris Strachwitz on portable equipment on 12/7, 1968

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