

1. GOD DON'T NEVER CHANGE
2. JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE
3. YOU'RE GONNA NEED THAT
PURE RELIGION
4. SAVIOR, DON'T YOU PASS ME BY
5. MOTHERLESS CHILDREN
6. OH WHAT A MORNING
7. I MUST SEE JESUS
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17. YOU GOTTA MOVE
18. I'M ON MY WAY TO THE
CANAAN LAND
19. GOOD BY
20. WHAT A MORNING

Rev. Pearly Brown - vocal & guitar

Selections # 1 - 15 recorded by Harry Oster at the studios of WIBB in Macon, Georgia in 1961 and originally issued as Folklyric LP FL-108

Selections # 16 - 20 recorded during a radio broadcast hosted by Chris Strachwitz over KPFA, Berkeley, Ca. on 9/28/1974 (accompanied by his wife, Christine Brown and members of the Dirty Butter Band including Bob Young on harmonica and Duane Cox on tub bass who brought the couple to the studios).

Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz
Cover photo by Chris Strachwitz
(at KPFA - 1974)

Other photos by Harry Oster
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for their help and devotion

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Reverend PEARLY BROWN



You're Gonna Need That Pure Religion





photo by Harry Oster

Rev. Pearly Brown

“You’re Gonna Need That Pure Religion”

Harry Oster’s original notes from 1961.

As busy shoppers pass quickly and usually indifferently by, a blind street singer wanders the downtown section of Macon, Georgia, playing his battered guitar and singing poignantly of his faith in God. He is the Reverend Pearly Brown, whose performing is a testament to the vitality of the African American folk tradition.

Rev. Brown was born out in the country not far from Macon, GA on August 18, 1915. As he says, “I was born blind so I never have seen the world. My mother died when I was quite small and my father had left her. White people raised me, sent me to a school for the blind in Macon. My grandmother taught me slavery songs

and spirituals. When I was small I always said when I got to be a big boy, I wanna get off my people and work for myself. So I learnt how to pick guitar, listening to the radio and records. I been preachin’ ever since I was fifteen years old. I play mostly in Georgia - Macon, Waycross, Albany, Americus. Two or three times in Alabama and Florida.”

Pearly Brown performs in two basic styles - the modern hill-billy religious tradition as exemplified by Roy Acuff and Eddie Arnold, and an antique one, much like that of Blind Willie Johnson, the great blind street singer, whom Pearly heard on records when he was a young child around 1922.

The occasion made a profound impression on Pearly; he says, "I decided when I got to be a big boy I was gonna sing some of his songs."

On this recording he sings several numbers which were recorded by Blind Willie Johnson, "Nobody's Fault But Mine," "Bye And Bye," "Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning," "Motherless Children," and "God Don't Ever Change." Pearly's performance of "You're Gonna Need That True Religion," closely resembles Blind Willie's style, which in turn was characteristic of many other African American street singers of an earlier generation.

The guitar is tuned to an open chord; the musician changes chords by sliding along the fingerboard a knife blade, which Blind Willie Johnson used, or a bottle neck, worn on the little finger; Pearly's equivalent is a brass ring worn on the same finger, which he says is a Chevrolet

bushing. This bottle neck approach leaves three fingers and the thumb free for alternate, or even simultaneous fretting. Also characteristic of the style is the use of the guitar not just as an accompaniment, but rather as an antiphonal, human sounding wailing voice, carrying on a dialogue with the singer. Sometimes the singer sings only part of a line and the guitar speaks the rest of it.

Whether performing in the hill-billy religious style or in the antique tradition of Blind Willie Johnson, the Reverend Pearly Brown projects intense feelings with the haunting evocativeness of a true artist.

Harry Oster - 1961



The release of this album in 1961 apparently opened a number of doors for Rev. Brown. In 1964 Bernice Reagon heard about him and invited Rev. Brown to appear at a festival in Atlanta. In 1965 he joined Ann Romain's Southern Folk Festival tour which traveled for several years in the southeast. Also in 1964 he appeared at the Newport Folk Festival and in 1966 he played at the Newport Carnegie Hall Festival in New York City where he was presented with a 12 string Gibson guitar. Rev. Brown talks a bit about this event on the radio program heard at the end of this CD. During this time, however, Rev. Brown also returned to playing in the streets of Macon. Since the late 1950s he had been hosting weekly radio broadcasts on several stations in the area. He had a 15 minute program every Thursday on Macon's WIBB where DJ Hamp Swain asked him to sing, and he also hosted a Sunday

morning program on WDEC in Americus. Among his many local fans, a very young Dickey Betts, a guitar player for the Allman Brothers Band, followed him around, fascinated by the bottle neck guitar style.

In 1971 Rev. Brown appeared from time to time at various clubs near the University of Georgia in Athens and the same year a group of students decided to help him raise the money for the front teeth he had been missing for years. "They gave me a mouthful of teeth," Brown said smiling broadly. "It cost nearly \$239. I sang up there to help raise the money. They handed me the check in June (1971) and told me to put it all in my mouth." In the process he acquired a gold capped front tooth with a star shaped outline allowing the old white tooth to shine through.

Bill Nowlin of Rounder records went to Americus in 1973 and

made a second album which featured Brown's best known song: "It's a Mean Old World to try to Live In." In 1974 Reverend Brown came to California where he appeared at the Monterey Jazz Festival and made several local club and street appearances including the radio broadcast heard on this CD. Pearly Brown enjoyed a brief revival at this time and performed at several colleges and clubs in Georgia and also opening for several touring name acts such as Bonnie Raitt, Ry Cooder, and Wet Willie. Capricorn Records even had Rev. Brown's picture taken for the cover of Wet Willie's "Keep On Smilin'" album. In 1975 Dr. John

English of the University of Georgia produced a 30 minute video documentary which is now available as Shanachie Video #1401 (which also includes footage of legendary blues singer, Big Boy Crudup).

Friends of Rev. Pearly Brown (who died in July of 1986) are organizing a campaign to have him inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. They can be reached by e-mail: friends@reverendpearlybrown.org or you can find more information about Rev. Pearly Brown by logging on the web site for NothinButDaBlues.com.

Chris Strachwitz - 2002

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Rev. Pearly Brown
vocal & guitar

1 - 15 recorded by Harry Oster in 1961 in Macon, Georgia and originally issued as Folklyric LP 108

16 - 20 recorded by Chris Strachwitz at KPFA radio in 1974, with Christine Brown, Bob Young, & Duane Cox,
Previously Unissued.



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