

LIGHTNING HOPKINS

SIDE 1 WITH HIS

BROTHERS
Joel and
John Henry



SIDE 2 WITH

BARBARA
DANE



LIGHTNING HOPKINS

WITH HIS BROTHERS JOEL and JOHN HENRY
AND WITH BARBARA DANE

SIDE A

It was a cool but sunny Sunday morning in February, 1964, when I went over to Houston's Hadley Street to get Lightning and his brother Joel. Joel had come up from Dickinson the night before and Lightning's mother was already in the car. Joel rode with me and we followed Sam's black Dodge north on Highway 75.

Some months ago word had come to Sam that his oldest brother was living in Waxahachie after years of wondering what had become of him. Mrs. Hopkins also wanted to see her oldest child and so after I had talked to Lightning about the possibility of making some recordings of all three brothers, we decided to make a day of it. When we got to Waxahachie I just followed Lightning's car onto the unpaved roads of the colored section where after a few inquiries Sam found out where John Henry was staying. It was a small hut in the back of a larger house and I felt a bit the intruder as everyone was crowding into the tiny room. John Henry had not been well and was still very weak from a long illness. Everybody soon got happy and it was a very moving reunion. However, Lightning, who was very anxious to make this recording with his brothers, asked everyone to leave the room for a while until they finished a few numbers. While the neighbors enjoyed themselves in the yard, I attempted to tape what went on inside. The tape recorder was standing in front of the door since there was barely enough room for the microphone and myself. I moved the microphone from one to the other as the three brothers took turns singing. Lightning opened with the powerful story of his making the trip up there. John Henry at once turned into a showman and sang the humorous "Hot Blooded Woman Blues" and joined Sam on "Black Hannah". Joel did the traditional Blind Lemon classic: "I walked from Dallas" and the record ends with Lightning and Joel back in Houston a year later singing about Lightning's just completed trip to Europe, paying tribute to Mrs. Stephanie Wiesand who has been a generous host to all of us in Baden-Baden every time the now annual American Folk Blues Festival arrives in town for the filming of the concert for German TV.

John Henry Hopkins, I was told, was the best of all the Hopkins brothers when it came to playing the guitar and everyone said he was even better than his "Baby brother" when it came to making up songs, and even Sam agreed! Although I had no luck in trying to get information from him about his past, John Henry was obviously used to entertaining and must have been a remarkable performer in his younger days. John Henry Hopkins was apparently born February 3, 1901 and is the oldest. Joel Hopkins, born January 3, 1904, was the second and is the most traditional performer of the three. Then followed a brother A. B. and a sister Alice, and finally Sam Hopkins, born March 15, 1912. According to Joel, John Henry left home very early and spent much of his life in various penal institutions. In 1913 Joel also left home in Centerville and worked at odd jobs most of his life. He started on guitar about 1913 and in 1922 met Blind Lemon Jefferson, actually lived with the Jefferson family until 1927, and developed a guitar and vocal style very reminiscent of Blind Lemon.

SIDE B

The other session, recorded almost a year earlier, found Lightning Hopkins on the West Coast playing at the Continental Club in Oakland, a big dance hall, and at the Cabale in Berkeley, which at that time was the best folk music club in Northern California. Lightning and Barbara Dane have known each other for a long time and during the shortlived night club venture by which Barbara had tried to bring the real blues to San Francisco's North Beach area, Lightning had been one of her star performers at "Sugar Hill". All three of us sort of had an idea that making a tape might be fun and so one Thursday afternoon I arranged for the get-together and about 40 people appeared after the word had gotten around the local "scene" the day before.

Lightning is a master of improvising verses as he goes along and almost any subject will find him with quick replies and comments. Barbara on the other hand is usually more traditionally oriented, and sticks pretty close to the established texts of songs which she has mastered and made her own. On this occasion however, although a bit reluctantly at first, she really got with the free flow of the dialogue and the result is in my opinion one of the most enjoyable musical conversations ever captured on record.

Nothing was planned in advance and although Barbara and Lightning seem to be kiddingly challenging each other at the start, they wound up with very serious thoughts. The session shows how two blues artists can really get into something. There is no other form of music where this sort of complete rapport between two singers is so difficult to achieve - and it very seldom happens, because the blues are so much an expression of the individual and seldom do two blues singers know each other well enough. At first Barbara was a bit reluctant to let me issue the material because she felt her voice was not in top form, but when I sent her the edited side she really felt enthusiastic about it, not only because it was such a great happening but also to show people that a record can be made without trying up teen takes of each song.

Some of the best music just happens. Of course each participant must be tops in his or her field, must know the idiom, and know and respect the others. In the realm of real folk music spontaneity is often lost when creative and impulsive artists are taken to a cold studio. The most interesting folk artists are not professionals - that is, they do not give each audience the same thing well performed time and time again - but rather perform according to their mood and feelings. A record offers the listener a glimpse into the life and mind of the performer and this record presents Lightning Hopkins, one of the most creative and moving blues singers of this or any other decade, in a rare, boisterous, challenging, and moving mood, making this not just another Lightning Hopkins record - but a document of two very moving meetings with every track filled with emotions and excitement.

-- CHRIS A. STRACHWITZ, 1966

**With his brothers
Joel & John Henry**

SEE ABOUT MY BROTHER
JOHN HENRY

HOT BLOODED WOMAN BLUES

BLACK HANNAH

I WALKED FROM DALLAS

GOING BACK TO BADEN-BADEN

With Barbara Dane

SOMETIMES SHE LOVES ME

YOU GOT ANOTHER MAN

I'M GOING BACK, BABY

MOTHER EARTH

JESUS WON'T YOU

COME BY HERE

Cover photos: **Chris Strachwitz**

Cover design: **Wayne Pope**

Recorded and produced by
CHRIS A. STRACHWITZ

Side 1: Recorded in Waxahachie, Texas, 2/16/64 except track 5 which was recorded in Houston, Texas, 3/17/65 with Lightning playing 12 string guitar.

Side 2: Recorded at the Cabale (now The Questing Beast) in Berkeley, Calif., 6/18/64 except track 5 which was recorded in Berkeley, Calif. 11/26/61.

For our 84 page illustrated catalog giving full details on over 400 Blues, Cajun, Zydeco, Tex-Mex, Country, Jazz, Folk, and Ethnic Lps, Cassettes, CDs, and Videos send \$2.00 to cover postage to:

ARHOOLIE CATALOG,
10341 San Pablo Ave.
El Cerrito, Ca. 94530 USA

(Catalog includes all releases on ARHOOLIE, BLUES CLASSICS, FOLKLYRIC, J.E.M.F., OLD TIMEY, RAMBLER, and WESTERN labels.)