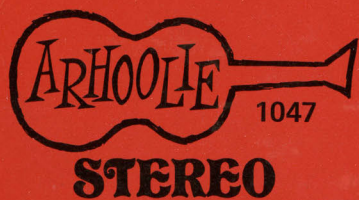


JOHN JACKSON In Europe

*John
Jackson*



In August, 1969, my wife and I and our 4 sons moved into the old Carrie Hall place in Woodville, Virginia, while we study folklore in the area and write a PhD dissertation.

For the first 25 years of his life this area was John Jackson's home. If I look to the East from our front porch I can just make out the top of the old Reid place where John was born 45 years ago. Down the road by our place — a couple of miles distant — is the one-room log cabin with dirt floor that the Jackson family moved into when John was 4 years old (The cabin now forms the center portion of Cdm. Wolf's Swiss chalet-looking house). In the hills to the West John trapped mink and dug ginseng. It is about three miles, as the crow flies, over beyond Juba (or Jobbers) Mountain to the F.T. Valley where the Jacksons lived most of the time prior to 1950, when John moved away. It was here that John worked on the Jones' farm — and here that the workers sang:

Farmer Jones and his corn — where
does it grow?
Cut two for the blackbird, two
for the crow,
Two to pull up and two to grow.

Well, time moves along and some things change — others don't. In 1860 there were 5,018 whites, 3,520 black slaves, and 312 free blacks in the County. Today there are 4,423 whites and 945 blacks. Farmer Jones' son is the Rappahannock County Clerk and John and his family now live in Fairfax, Virginia, where he digs graves and sings and plays his music. Many of the Negroes who have left the County have moved to large urban centers such as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York City, and Detroit; a number of them still retain their ties to Rappahannock County through frequent visits to relatives and friends remaining here. There are quite a few people who have moved to the Washington area to live and work, but who retain their church membership here and drive up for Sunday services and homecoming day. On the other hand, many people living here commute daily to the Washington area to work, so that there is much contact both ways.

John Jackson is one of those people who has maintained contact with, and has been influenced by, the course of events in Rappahannock County long after he left it. In January of this year John's mother — Hattie, who was a fine singer and tale teller, died and John returned to dig her grave on the hillside in Shiloh Baptist Church cemetery. Although John still has many relatives and friends living here with whom to maintain contact, his mother's death severed one of the last and strongest of his connections to Rappahannock County. As such, it represents the end of an era in John's life and, in a sense, it can be said that John does truly "live" in Fairfax now. The facts of John's birth and experiences in the first 25 years of his life spent in the County and of the continuing influences of various aspects of it for the next 20 years after he left it cannot be separated from any consideration of his music. It is precisely because of these influences and experiences that John can be said to be a "traditional" musician!

Afro-American music is the offspring of Negro African and Western European cultures. It is difficult to say just which and how many characteristics the child got from each parent and, like other children, it reflects the environment in which it grew. This is true both generally and particularly — Afro-

Cuban music differs from Afro-Virginian music just as John Jackson's music differs from that of Luke Jordan, another Virginian.

John's music is influenced by a number of factors — some common to his community and some affecting only John, or John and his family. The community had a common pool of songs passed down for generations with new additions constantly being made — by minstrel shows, Civil War Soldiers, traveling salesmen, newcomers to the community, records (cylinder, 78, and LP's), radio, and television — to name a few sources. There are some songs in John's repertoire which seem to be pretty much restricted to his family. And there are purely coincidental occurrences in John's life which have had great influence on his music. For example, the acquaintance struck up by the Jackson family with "Happy", a waterboy on a road gang in the F.T. Valley when John was about 10 years old. From Happy came open tuning and knife guitar techniques which John might have missed had Happy been sent elsewhere to serve out his time.

When John was growing up, whites and blacks alike had house parties and dances and there was some mixing though to what degree each group learned the other's songs is not clear. MacEdward Leach and Horace Beck collected songs in the area in 1947 and again in 1949 and recorded about 160 songs from 22 people — white and colored. There are several examples of Negroes singing what are normally considered to be white ballads ("Lady Margaret," "Bold Soldier," "False Hearted Mary," and others) and there are several songs which are common to both groups ("Jessie James," "John Hardy," "Bill Bailey", and a few others) but, generally, the repertoires of the two groups seem to be rather distinctive. We should point out that Leach and Beck did not stumble into any of the Jackson family or any of the 14 local musicians that John has learned songs from.

There is an additional factor involved in John's musical repertoire that we have found common to many traditional musicians. That is, there is a tendency to stop adding songs from current popular sources when the musical style changes beyond a certain point. John has learned a few songs from Elvis Presley recordings but the evolution of "rock" beyond Presley was apparently too much of a style change. Too, the Presley songs that John learned were fairly straightforward blues songs.

The essence of John Jackson's uniqueness lies NOT in the fact that he plays or in the content of his repertoire but rather in his talent and creativity. Many other musicians from this area play much of the same material but John plays it better and adds something of his own genius to it. He will say, "Now I learned that from a 78 recording of Blind Blake — course, he didn't have that little run in his — and I added a little here..." Compare the Blind Blake versions of "Early Morning Blues" and "Too Tight Rag" with John's versions on this record.

In summary then we can say that here is a talented and creative man whose pride in his work is reflected both in his music and in the square, clean sides of the graves he digs. His musical repertoire consists of songs learned from recordings of the popular singers of his time — i.e., Race and Hillbilly recording artists; songs from various other sources that were popular with his peer group; and "personal songs", learned from his family, which have meaning beyond the songs themselves.

if space allowed we could discuss other factors which are important in the making of John Jackson, the musician — as well as John Jackson, the man. For example, the repressive socio-economic system that has existed here for over a hundred years — replacing an even more repressive 200-year reign of chattel slavery — or the lack, until very recently, of an opportunity for a high school education for Negroes. All we can say in conclusion is, Here is John Jackson — he is what he is both because of these factors and in spite of them.

Chuck & Nan Perdue
Woodville, Virginia
May, 1970

THE SONGS

Side A:

1. **I Bring My Money** — John learned this song from his father who picked it up from the Grigsby boys about 1910. Eddie and Jesse Grigsby, from around Peola Mills, Va. had a small band that played for dances. They also played for the tourists at Skyland, a resort that ultimately formed the nucleus around which the Shenandoah National Park was created. John was related to the Grigsbys on his father's side.

2. **John's Ragtime** — John made this one up when he was touring Europe in October, 1969.

3. **Red River Blues** — John learned this from a 78 by Blind Boy Fuller titled "Bye Bye Baby Blues"

4. **Knife Blues** — John put this together about a year ago. John says a lot of people he knew in this area played knife style guitar, though some used a piece of soft lead bent around their little finger rather than a knife. One man who came in from Pennsylvania, Joe Casey, used a lemon drop bottle about half full of water which gave a "quivering sound". His innovation did not catch on.

5. **Trucking Little Baby** — This comes from a Blind Boy Fuller recording.

6. **Blind Blake's Rag** — John put this together based on a rag by Blind Blake.

7. **Good-Bye Booze** — John learned this from his father. A rather common tune, heard also in John Hurt's "Creole Belle".

8. **Too Tight Rag** — Learned from a 78 recording by Blind Blake.

Side B:

1. **You Ain't No Woman** — John met Bill Jackson (no relation) at the Smithsonian Festival in July, 1969, and heard him sing this song. John later remembered two verses and added one of his own. Bill Jackson can be heard on "Long Steel Rail," Testament LP 201.

2. **Early Morning Blues** — Learned from a 78 recording by Blind Blake.

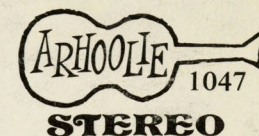
3. **Graveyard Blues** — John remembered the title of this song from a 78 recording by Jim Jackson (no relation) but made up most of this version himself.

4. **All Around the Water Tank** — From a 78 recording by Jimmie Rodgers.

5. **Don't You Want to Go Up There?** — John learned this song from his mother (Aunt Hattie Jackson). The song was printed in collections of spirituals used in church when Aunt Hattie was growing up and she, no doubt, learned it then.

6. **Just A Closer Walk With Thee** — Learned from Aunt Hattie.

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I BRING MY MONEY

JOHN'S RAGTIME

RED RIVER BLUES

KNIFE BLUES

TRUCKING LITTLE BABY

BLIND BLAKE'S RAG

GOODBYE BOOZE

TOO TIGHT

YOU AIN'T NO WOMAN

EARLY MORNING BLUES

GRAVEYARD BLUES

ALL AROUND THE WATER TANK

DON'T YOU WANT TO GO UP THERE

JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE

John Jackson — vocals and guitar

All songs composed or arranged by John Jackson

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