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FAST FOLK ABOUT THIS ISSUE

PUBLISHED BY THE FAST FOLK MUSICAL MAGAZINE INC. A NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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Special thanks to Joe Lauro for his invaluable help in compiling this issue.

Throughout the past few years, Fast Folk and The CooP before it have presented an eclectic, worthwhile assortment of essentially singer-songwriters: new songs, new faces, old songs, old faces, combined with fresh, simple, back-to-basics production. But where has Folk Music fit in? In a broad sense, owing to the domination of unelectrified instruments and underproduced performances, a stereotypical form of folk music, generally rooted in the famous, late-1950'searly 1960's folk revival, has managed to find its way on some of the past albums' tracks. As a record/publication dedicated to the no-frills presentation of new and established acoustic singer-songwriters, Fast Folk scores a 10. But as an outlet for authentic, traditional folk music and articles relating to its many forms, Fast Folk has floundered around the dismal 2 or 3 rating.

What I have attempted in this issue is a largely traditional folk music album, with blues being the folk music in focus. To satisfy the singer-songwriter crowd, I have recorded a few new, previously unrecorded blues-influenced songs by such talents as Peter Spencer and Rhythm & Romance. These artists do not actually specialize in blues material but certainly have blues influences at the core of what they usually do. You will also hear a nice dose of authentic blues by the likes of the amazing Otis Brothers, Bob Guida, Pat Conti, Eric Bibb, and Tucker Smallwood. This, to satisfy the traditionalists and to show the younger listeners that Jorma Kaukonen is not the father of country blues.

Blues music, authentic Black American folk music, has had many influences. From the complex rhythms of the ancient Africans, the field hollers, reels, and sanctified songs of the 18th and 19th century slaves, to the ragtime and jazz strains of the early 20th century, blues has been influenced by and simultaneously has shaped most styles of Black American music. I have tried, in this issue, to present not only blues material, but other forms such as gospel, swing, and ragtime, which could not exist without the bluenote phrases and, most important, the feeling, which is so essential to great blues.

Eighty-year-old Chicago barrelhouse piano master Jimmy Walker recently commented to me, "None of the young white kids today are playing real blues. They are copying what they've heard on old records and reproducing it without the one ingredient us old timers really gave to the blues--the feeling. You got to feel them blues, and Lord knows, we lived them! There's no way you can copy that feeling off of any record!"

As most of the artists on this album are under 80 and white, some may argue that this is not a genuine blues album at all. But give the tracks a listen: blues influences dominate almost every cut presented. Even Ari Eisinger's ragtime-influenced cover of the pop standard, "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," is rooted in the ragtime/blues guitar traditions of Blind Blake and Blind Boy Fuller, with bluenote phrases altering the shape of the tune's original unblueslike melody.

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As a purist I cannot accurately state that this issue of Fast Folk is a genuine blues album, but I have attempted to get as close as we have yet come to a traditional folk album. You will hear everything from swing, ragtime, gospel, and country, all the way down to your classic 16-bar moan.

You will agree, I hope, that all the artists, with their differing styles, complement each other and that there is nothing wrong with occasionally drumming up a good dose of Old Man Blues.

Joe Lauro



A CHAT WITH THE OTIS BROTHERS

by Joe La Rose and Joe Lauro

The Otis Brothers are New York City-based musicians who play an incredible repertoir of early Black American folk music-blues, gospel, rags, hollers, minstrel songs. They play their music on a wide array of instruments, which include guitar, mandolin, fiddle, accordian, bass, banjo, and an odd assortment of homemade and archaic instruments.

The Otis Brothers are single-handedly keeping a fast-dying tradition of folk music alive. Their penchant for authenticity in the creation of this music has them performing on the type of homemade and inexpensive instruments used by the impoverished Black songsters and gospel singers of the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

The Otis Brothers' approach to their music is at once personal and scrupulously idiomatic. They have internalized remarkably the subtleties of long-forgotten styles, and this is evident in their singing as well as playing. For over ten years Pat and Bob have been experimenting with their music, recording it, and digging deeply into the history, lore, stylistic complexities, and mysteries of Black folk music via their immense and ever-growing collections of 78-rpm records, tapes, early cylinder recordings, instruments, books, photographs, documents, and artifacts.

Visiting the home of Pat Conti is like entering a folk music museum. Ancient ragtime and "coon" song sheet music is nonchalantly piled on the coffee table; an original 78-rpm of "Just Beyond Jordan" by Blind Joe Taggert is on top of the bed; and the back room is absolutely crammed with hundreds of stringed instruments, from ancient Martin guitars to homemade, cigar box fiddles.

On my visit to this folklorist's dream of an apartment, where Pat lives (in Queens, New York City), I learned first-hand one of the reasons why the Otis Brothers' music is simultaneously authentic and real. The Otis Brothers are not merely copying old records, lick by lick, but genuinely feeling, relating, and conveying the homespun, rough-edged warmth of this ancient music.



The Otis Brothers: L to R, Pat Conti, Bob Guida, and Louie Kromm

A modest and warm man, Pat Conti is extremely content spending an afternoon playing old records and singing the long forgotten songs that are so much a part of him. Pat, as well, plays old-time hillbilly music with his band, Major Conti and the Canebreak Rattlers.

FF: Describe the Otis Brothers' music PC: Country music of the more primitive styles, of mostly the black traditions, based on string band recordings and recordings of blues musicians. We experiment with the kind of music that didn't make it, that probably disappeared by the turn of the century, was ignored by the record companies or by field collectors.

FF: Where does the music come from? PC: Really pretty much out of our own experience playing country blues or country music. Out of our heads arrangement-wise. But again, it's traditional music as we hear it.

FF: Have you had much contact with the older regional performers?
PC: Not so much directly. We've done a bit of recording on our own of some of the people that we've found or been led to. Mostly in Virginia.
People who have been the subject of study in say the last ten years. We have interest in the pre-blues form of music.

FF: What exactly does pre-blues music refer to?

PC: Pre-blues, the term, came about, I suppose, for lack of a better term.

Gospel music, work songs, reels, occasionally a very rare ballad--the kind of music that existed prior to the end of the First World War and, in a large sense, still exists today but escaped the commercial interests of the twenties and thirties and the printed word via Anglo-schooled researchers since they first went into the U.S. countryside.

FF: You are, of course, interested in both Black and White traditional music. Do you find a commonality in them?

PC: The most powerful and gifted country musicians of this century have one common thread--they can cite Black sources for the most exciting music. Even the most Celtic-sounding piece takes another dimension, to our ears. You see, the great Irish fidler, Packie Dolan, came to Chicago in the 1920s to make records. That doesn't make his music American. But in Colonial America, that same kind of migration, when wedded to Black music, makes it American. Bob and I racked our brains for ten years trying to find a missing link--and we came more than just close. There are dozens of them.

FF: I take it you get a great deal of your material from your own collection of old recordings. What kinds of things do you have?
PC: We have a great number of wire recordings on tape, mostly reel to reel tapes that we've accumulated over the past ten years of a lot of material that's on deposit in the Library of Congress. We have, I'd say,

a few thousand of the old 78s that we've dug out of urine-stained junk stores. More often auction lists from other collectors.

FF: Do you and Bob own this collection together?
PC: We consider it a joint effort.
My leanings in the collection are primarily the classic string band stuff--in terms of 78s. Bob's kind of absorbed my blues collection early

on and expanded on it. I guess we're co-owners. Things go back and forth so much that we really consider it one collection.

FF: You also have the old wax cylinders?

PC: Cylinders are another world of music. Bob sometimes can't take them very seiously, as they contain mostly pop music. But examine the old catalogs--there's an astounding amount of music that at least alludes to rural Black music--and a proper study of it all would take a lifetime. Robert Cogswell, of Kentucky, is one scholar who is trying to make sense of the antique recordings that preceded the classic country blues and hillbilly stuff prior to 1922. Blackface minstrelsy was a great meeting ground in the early part of this century for both White and Black performers. In fact, Bob and I have just made arrangements with a new company that's recently acquired the rights to issue brand new, two-minute wax cylinders, for people who have those machines and want something other than Arthur Fields to play on them. I imagine that's at least three or four customers.

FF: What kinds of instruments do you own?

PC: Bob has really concentrated on cheap, mail-order guitars of the twenties and thirties. It's amazing how few Martins were used by the old timers, and how often they're pictured with the older, cheap stuff. Gibsons are a step up, not as well made, but far more interesting, full of character, and not as overpriced or overrated as expensive Martins. These are the tools that only a handful of the most prominent and successful bluesmen could afford anyway--Martins are. Cheap guitars can do things that the most finely crafted instrument can't touch. That's one reason Bob and I, over the years, have owned hundreds of these instruments, as well as fiddles and banjos. It takes a lot of luck. as we both haven't had regular jobs for very long. But it takes a great deal of searching, too. Any old

instrument, if set up properly, has a job to do. We like them all, unfortunately.

FF: You also have a fondness for homemade instruments?
PC: Once in a while we're lucky to come across these folk instruments.
They're usually looked down upon by people into instruments or dealers, real connoisseurs.

FF: Why is that?

PC: I don't know. It's utterly ridiculous. Those folk things really possess the whole heart and soul of the music. They're just homemade instruments intended for homemade use. It's a shame that more people don't take them more seriously.

FF: Talking about your approach to the music, now--you're very true to the instrument and vocal styles of the original recordings. How important to you is the idea of style, if we make a distinction between style and content?

PC: Well, I think that 90 percent of the content <u>is</u> the style. Just trying to play things in the simplest terms and looking for sounds instead of incredible flights of notes. It's just the timbre or color of different instruments, of speed, altering the wacky combinations of time or just string sounds.

FF: Do you try to reproduce the sounds of the originals?



R. Crumb cover from the Otis Brothers' Flying Crow LP

FF: What are some of these instruments?

PC: The majority of things are fashioned out of cast-off materials. They can be a lard can for a banjo, or a fiddle made out of a kitchen cabinet with a coffee can for a speaker.

FF: And you play them?

PC: We try to play the music that was intended to be played on them. We use them as much as we can, though it's hard to cart around all that stuff. They're really delicate.

PC: Not as far as the Black music goes. Maybe more for the hillbilly kinds of things. But as far as the Black music goes, Bob and I really try to lean away from recreating the things that we're so used to. I feel that it can't be recreated, for obvious reasons.

FF: That comes as somewhat of a surprise. You come closer to an authentic Black sound than anyone else I've heard attempting this kind of material. PC: Our interest is really not to put something down note for note. We'd



just rather draw on a lot of things that we like and use pieces of things that make those things sound great and try to come up with something different, or something new that sounds ancient.

FF: Why have you chosen to devote your time and energies to the older styles, and not to generalize more or pick up on later things?
PC: Bob and I chose to move deeper into the old stuff because, like the instruments themselves, anything you can or can't possibly imagine, it seems, has been fashioned out of the simplest materials or groups of notes. A group of Kipsigis boys playing raft zithers sounds far more "futuristic" than anything by Karlheinz Stockhausen. The energy in

a record by Curley Weaver in 1929 can match the heaviest metal. And 'primitive' never ever meant 'devoid of complexity.'

FF: A final question. It seems unusual to find serious collectors who are also dedicated musicians. Is it that unusual?

PC: Beats me. Who are you calling a "collector" anyway? You want a knuckle sandwich?

Portions of this interview have appeared in To Be Announced folk magazine.

Note: The Otis Brothers' Flying Crow Records LP is available from Mamlish Records, 835 Carroll Street, Brooklyn, New York 11215.



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Crescent City Blues

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY

by Peter Spencer

Sometimes nothing else will do but King of the Delta Blues Singers by Robert Johnson. If I want to hear "Lucille," then B.B. King is the only place to go. Skip James is the scariest country blues singer there is, and I have a special fondness for Earl Hooker's tasty electric guitar instrumentals. Genius Sings the Blues by Ray Charles gets played a lot at our house, and when we're at my mother-in-law (Cynthia Gooding)'s, Otis Spann is the acknowledged king. But the LP that finds its way to my turntable the most often is Crescent City Blues, a 1977 reissue of 1935-36 sessions of the great pianist, Little Brother Montgomery, on RCA's Bluebird label.

Little Brother Montgomery is more than just a master of the piano. His instrumental ability alone would make him one of the giants of the thirties blues and barrelhouse music era. But added to that is his incredible facility as a songwriter. Each of the 31 songs on this two-record set is a 12-bar blues, but each has its own melody, its own setting, its own lyric concerns.

Retired now and living in Chicago, Brother says, "I bet you I can play a hundred different blues. I mean barrelhouse blues, not St. Louis Blues, Memphis Blues, or Joe Turner Blues--them are pattern blues. But I can play a hundred different barrelhouse blues and none of 'em sound the same." His 70-year career reflects a concern with blues as music, a desire that blues be more. The blues of Little Brother Montgomery, while intense and direct in the best "country blues" manner, can also reach outside the genre to any listener.

Little Brother Montgomery was born in Kentwood, Louisiana, a country town near New Orleans, on April 18, 1906. He grew up during the classic prewar period when New Orleans was alive with music. By the time the

This article would not have been possible without the interview with Little Brother Montgomery conducted by Jim O'Neal for Living Blues magazine in Chicago, August 1975.

Navy Office closed the sporting houses in Storyville in 1917, he'd heard all there was to hear. "My great uncle had a band in New Orleans, back when A.J. Piron and all of them had a band--Buddy Petit, Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Kid Oryall those people had bands. A great piano player from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who wrote "Trembling Blues," was named Cooney Vaughn, a guy named Loomis Gibson, from Kentwood; they had one back there called Papa Lord God and another one called Rip Top, Varnado Anderson, Red Cayou, Fats Pinchon, Udell Wilson, Burnell Santiago, Mean Little Dooky. Oh, they had some great piano players around there."

These itinerant "piano professors" played in the sporting houses of Storyville and in rural lumber camps, turpentine camps, cotton field juke joints. It wasn't long before Little Brother was tagging along. "I was playing professionally at 11. I played Holton, Louisiana, Ponchatoula, Hammond, Placquemine. I played by myself mostly. The only band I played with back then was Clarence Desdune out of New Orleans. We used to play around Pass Christian, Biloxi, Gulfport, Mobile.

"I had a lot of jobs around. I'd plowmules and horses and things. I rode logs on the log pond at the sawmill. Then I'd play. They'd pay me \$8 a week, room and board, \$10 a week, then \$15. I just worked myself up, to \$15 a night on weekends."

The early twenties gave birth to his first great song, "44 Blues," a standard of the blues repertoire from the thirties to the present day. Typically, the song's copyright was never firmly established, and Little Brother Montgomery never receives credit or royalties from any of the subsequent versions, from Roosevelt Sykes to Howlin' Wolf to Little Feat. "They had a long, tall guy named Friday, and the next guy was named Robert Johnson. They called him Dehlco Robert because he played at Dehlco, Louisiana, for a long time. Then Ernest Johnson--we called him Flunkey, so we was the originators of the '44 Blues.'

"Me and Flunkey taught 'em to a guy

at Sondheimer, Louisiana, He was a clothes presser. His name was Lee Green. We called him Pork Chop. And he never did learn 'em good." Lee Green and his protege, Roosevelt Sykes, were first to record the "44" theme, in 1929, more than a year before Brother made his own recording debut. When Paramount made the first Little Brother Montgomery sides in Grafton, Wisconsin, in 1930, the lyrics had to be changed. The result was "Vicksburg Blues."

"Vicksburg" is one of the great blues piano pieces of all time. It is a beautiful, nostalgic song for the woman who "lives in Vicksburg on the hill." The piano part is inverted, with the right hand keeping a steady pulse of fast triplets while the left hand adds accented poly rhythms. The effect is astonishingly different, totally backwards. The song's combination of supple movement and yearning romance made it a fair-sized hit.

"Vicksburg" and later releases on the Paramount, Melotone, and Vocalion labels helped make Little Brother's name in Chicago, where he settled in the late twenties, playing house rent parties and South Side taverns. "I come from Omaha, Nebraska--left Clarence Desdune's band over there and I came to Chicago to live because my old lady had moved to Chicago. They had a lot of great piano players around here--Irene Wiley, Ruben Walker, Hersal Thomas -- that's Sippie Wallace's baby brother, Earl 'Fatha' Hines, Fats Waller--all them kinda people. They were great musicians. Me and Blind Blake and Charlie Spand used to run around together. I met Tampa Red and Georgia Tom. I was mostly playing on my own. I played mostly house parties and chicken shacks.

This fertile period was brought to a close as the depression hit Chicago in the mid-thirties. Brother moved back to Jackson, Mississippi, and formed a dance band, which could work steadily. "We were a good dance band. We went in the name of the Collegiate Ramblers. But the real name of the band is the Southland Troubadors."

The Southland Troubadors never recorded any of the jazz/pop/dance



music they earned their living with, but in two sessions in 1935 and 1936 approximately thirty piano-blues sides were recorded for RCA Victor/Bluebird, which establish Little Brother Montgomery as the greatest blues pianist of his generation.

"Well, what happened, Eli Oberstein would come down South and bring the recording equipment. When he'd get to New Orleans he would get Walter Vincson and all of us from Jackson to come to New Orleans and record at the St. Charles Hotel. I don't know how he ever found out about me, but I guess he had heard some numbers of mine back before then. Oberstein seemed to like me. He didn't never bother me about nothing. He'd want me to do my own thing. He was a handsome little guy, you know, his clothes becomed him and everything.

"I would just make up songs about the places I'd been. 'A & V Railroad Blues'--that's the Alabama and Vicksburg across the river. It's the

V, S & P, Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific. 'Santa Fe Blues' because I rode on the Santa Fe. 'Out West Blues' was DeRidder, Cravens, Oakdale, and on out in Texas. 'Farish Street Jive,' that was a finger buster. I used to live on Farish Street in Jackson. 'Crescent City Blues' is a number I was playing when I was about 9 or 10. Loomis Gibson from Kenwood used to play that."

These records made Little Brother Montgomery a big name in the blues world. Among his followers were two youngsters from Jackson who would go on to be pillars of the post-war Chicago scene--Otis Spann and Little Johnnie Jones. But Brother was a far more versatile artist than his recordings suggest.

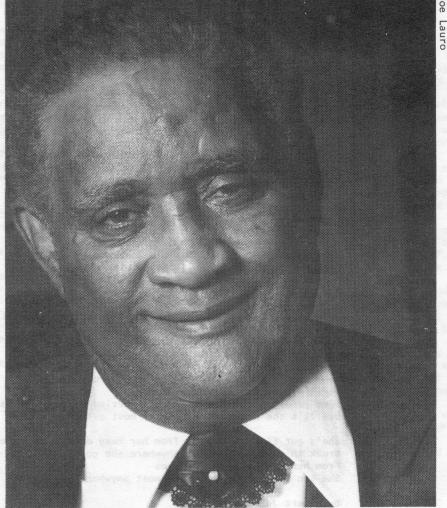
"If we could played what we wanted to play, we wouldn't be making no blues. I had a band for 10 or 12 years. I don't think I played nary a blues that I made on records at no dance. None of them dance bands played no blues--not back then. They'd do 'em out in shows and theatres and such. But at a dance they'd be dancing with each other. You had to play waltzes and foxtrots.

"But they have had us in a bracket; if you wasn't no great blues player they wasn't gonna let us record no way. In fact of the business, they didn't want you bringing no (sheet) music up in there, either. I don't think anybody ever got a chance to record what they wanted to record nohow. Especially colored people. But people like Al Jolson and Rudy Vallee, they recorded whatever they wanted to."

Brother resettled in Chicago in 1943.
"I played all downtown. I played on
Randolph Street for about six years
when all the places was down there.
I played at the Hollywood Show
Lounge, and they had the Garrick Bar,
the Prevue, the Latin Quarter, the
Brass Rail. Randolph was where all
the places was."

Little Brother Montgomery made many new fans in the sixties when he appeared at European concerts and has since played all over the world. He still lives in Chicago, and he still has strong opinions about music. The people who play music "right," he says, include Fats Waller, Art Tatum, Jay McShann, Count Basie, Tampa Red, Otis Rush, B.B. King, Blind John Davis, etc. "People don't seem to understand what 1 and Blind John and all of us be trying to say. See, I've been playing time ever since I was born. I know time. Now people that breaks time, they ain't playing nothing. They runs in opposition against the right way to play. That's what makes the younger generation don't know no better. If everybody played like they should the world would be great. But people don't like nobody that tell the truth, and then they don't like nobody that play in time too much.

"Music don't come out of no school, you know. Music come from within the person. It comes out of you. I come along with some of the greatest and worst musicians in the world. But I think music back then was prettier than it is today. But, see, we played numbers back then had more body to 'em, foundation, than they got now. I bet you I can play a hundred different blues..."



Eureal "Little Brother" Montgomery, 1980



SIDE YRCSONE

AIN'T NOBODY HOME BUT ME

Wontcha bring it on down to my house, ma
Ain't nobody home but me
I been thinkin' 'bout you all day, ma
You look so good to me
I got a pocket full of nickles and a hand full of dimes
A house full of children, ain't not one mine
Come on and bring it over here
Ain't nobody home but me
Ain't nobody home but me

You gotta walk, talk, hop, jump
Ain't nobody home but me
I been thinkin' about you all day long
You look so good to me
Now the monkey told the rooster
"I'll bet you a dime, you can't twist your tail
Like I twist mine"
Come on and bring it over here
Ain't nobody home but me

(Variations)

by Pink Anderson

1919 INFLUENZA BLUES

It was nineteen hundred and nineteen
Men and women were dying
With the stuff that the doctor called the flu
People were dying everywhere
Death was creepin' all through the air
And the groans of the rich sure was sad

Well it was God's almighty plan
He was judging this old land
North and south, east and west
It can be seen
It killed the rich, killed the poor
It's gonna kill just a little more
If you don't turn away from the shame

Down in Memphis, Tennessee
The doctor said it soon would be
In a few days influenza would be controlled
Doctor sure man he got had
Sent the doctors all home to bed
And the nurses all broke out with the same
(Repeat chorus)

Influenza is the kind of disease
Makes you weak down to your knees
Carries a fever everybody surely dreads
Packs a pain in every bone
In a few days mamma you are gone
To that hole in the ground called your grave
(Repeat chorus)

Traditional

WORRIED BLUES

Well I woke up this morning I was feeling bad I was thinking about the times I once have had Babe if you don't want me why don't you tell me so 'Cause I can get a gal most anywhere I go

Cryin' oom oom what's the matter now Cryin' oom oom baby what's the matter now I believed to my soul you don't need me anyhow

I said Mr. Judge now what may be my fine
He said eleven twenty-nine and a fifty dollar fine
I said Mr. Judge be as easy as you can
'Cause it's all I want just to save me from the penn.

Cryin' oom oom baby you just don't know Cryin' oom oom baby you just don't know Well these worried blues give me trouble everywhere I go

Well look here babe the blues is all around my bed Well look here babe the blues is all around my bed Sometimes I wonder if I'd be better off dead

Ever since my good gal had gone away
These troubles and trials been jumpin' cross my way
Cryin' oh baby what's the matter now
Cryin' oh baby what's the matter now
I believed to my soul you don't need me anyhow

Cryin' oh baby yes you just don't know Cryin' oh mama lord you just don't know These worried blues give me trouble everywhere I go

Traditional

WALKIN' BLUES

I got up this morning, feeling 'round for my shoes Know by that I got these old walkin' blues I got up this morning feeling 'round for my shoes Know by that I got these old walkin' blues

Well I feel like blowin' my old lonesome home Got up this mornin', my little Bernice was gone Well I feel like blowin' my old lonesome home Got up this mornin' my little Bernice was gone

Gonna leave here this mornin' if I have to ride the blinds Been mistreated and I don't mind dyin' Gonna leave here if I have to ride the blinds Feel mistreated and baby I don't mind dyin'

Some people tell me that the worried blues ain't bad Worst old feelin' I most ever had Some people tell me that the old worried blues ain't bad But it's the worst old feelin' I most ever had

She's got Elgin movements from her head down to her toes Break in on a dollar most anywhere she goes From her head down to her toes She can break in on a dollar most anywhere she goes

by Robert Johnson



DROP DOWN MOMMA

Drop down momma, let your daddy see You got something that's been worrying me Oh my momma don't allow to let me stay out all night long You are a young child and some woman will treat you wrong

Jack of diamonds told the little queen of spades Come on now sweetie, let's get on and misbehave My momma don't allow me to stay out all night long You are a young child and some woman will treat you wrong

One of these days. I may jump like a squirrel I'll grab a limb and swing all around the world My momma don't allow me to stay out all night long You are the young son and some woman will treat you wrong

Sweetest peaches don't grow on the tree
The sweetest honey don't come from the bee
My momma don't allow me to stay out all night long
You are the young son and some woman will treat you wrong

Drop down momma momma, let your daddy see You got something that's been worrying me My momma don't allow to let me stay out all night long You are the young son and some woman will treat you wrong

by Sleepy John Estes

SIDE YRCSTWO

HOT TIME IN OLD TOWN TONIGHT

Come along, get ready, wear your brand new gown 'Cause there's gonna be a meeting in this good, good old town When you know everybody, and they all know you And you get a rabbit's foot to keep away them hoo-doos

When you hear that the preaching has begun Then they'll know how to drive away your sin When you get religion you will want to shout and sing There'll be a hot time in old town tonight

My baby, when you hear them bells go ding-a-ling All join 'round and sweetly you must sing When the birds sound to and the chorus will all join in There'll be a hot time in old town tonight

There'll be girls for everybody in this good, good old town With Miss Gonzola Davis and Miss Godula Brown There's Miss Henrietta Beezer an' she's all dressed in red I just up and kissed her and to me then she said:

Oh please, oh please, oh do not let me fall You are mine and I love you best of all You'll be my man or I'll have no man at all There'll be a hot time in old town tonight

(Repeat chorus)

Traditional, arranged by Ari Eisinger

I LIKE YOU FINE

Every time I think I've got it figured out, Every time I think I've got it down, Every time I figure I know what it's about, Something slaps me in the face and I got to take a walk around.

There's theories abounding that it's so astounding It's in a class all its own
There's some who'll tell you it's a polished stone Shine it up or leave it alone.

I don't have much to say about love, Don't want to serve up no cliches about love, And I'm no expert in the ways of love, Except I like you fine.

The opposite gender, I can't explain. Even my own isn't easily tamed As for myself, I make no claim, Except I like you fine.

Now I know you can't have a rainbow Without the sun and the rain But we'll just watch those clouds roll by 'Cause I know that sun's gonna shine again.

So if I start comin' round and acting tough Like I could show you where to get that stuff I hope you'll see right through my bluff 'Cause I do believe I've said enough.

I don't have much to say about love Except I like you fine.

© 1984 by Rod MacDonald/Nikki Matheson



APRIL BLUES

Let me tell you people about what is worrying me Let me tell you people I've got a cash flow problem Gonna beat it on back to Tennessee

The girl that writes my taxes they call her Miss Geronimo The girl that writes my taxes they call her Miss Geronimo Says you're going to the poor farm Your booked and you've got to go

It's that social security I just can't take my rest
It's that social security I just can't take my rest
With those penalty clauses like a millstone on my chest

And I'll never see that money, not in my life and time I'll never see that money, not in my life and time Every time I think about it, it troubles my worried mind

When I think of Harry Truman it makes me awful mad He took a real good system and changed it to the bad Got no money for my parents, got no money for my boys My money goes to someone else's grandma over in East Peoria, Illinois Yes they call her Miss Geronimo (Repeat second verse)

by Peter Spencer © 1984 Weebahd Enterprises ASCAP

WHAT ARE THEY DOING IN HEAVEN TODAY

What are they doing in heaven today Where sin and sorrow have all gone away Peace abounds by the river they say What are they doing there now

I'm thinking of friends who I used to know Who lived and suffered in this world below But they've gone up to heaven and I want to know What are they doing there now (Repeat first verse)

There's some whose hearts was burdened with care But they paid their moment with fighting and terror When they come to the cross they tremble in fire What are they doing there now (Repeat first verse)

There are some who are poor and often despair They look up to heaven with tears blind and cry There are some who are heedless, in death do they cry What are they doing there now (Repeat first verse)

by Washington Phillips

MOTHERLESS CHILDREN

Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead They haven't got any place to go
Wandering 'round from door to door
Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

Your daddy will do the best he can when your mother is dead Your daddy will do the best he can when your mother is dead Your daddy will do the best he can But there's so many things your daddy can't understand Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

Some people say your sister will do when your mother is dead Some people say your sister will do when your mother is dead Some people say your sister will do Soon as she's married turn her back on you Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

Your wife or your husband will be good to you when your mother is dead Your wife or your husband will be good to you when your mother is dead Your wife or your husband will be good to you But nobody loves you like your mother do Your motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

Dig my grave with a bloody spade when I'm dead
Dig my grave with a bloody spade when I'm dead
Dig my grave with a bloody spade
Please make sure the digger gets paid
Your motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

Jesus will be a mother to you when your mother is dead Jesus will be a mother to you when your mother is dead Jesus will be a mother to you Through the trials and tribulations will he see you through Motherless children have a hard time when your mother is dead

by Blind Willie Johnson, arranged by Dave Van Ronk



the Yazoo kid NICK PERLS

by Joe Lauro

During the first golden years of the record industry, record companies were recording country blues artists. Periodic "field trips" were organized in order to save the expense of first finding the artists and then paying their ways to Chicago or New York to record them at the companies' main studios. It was more cost effective to borrow the company sedan, equip it with portable recording equipment, an engineer, and a talent scout, and head south to cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, New Orleans, or Memphis to seek out local blues talent. Some of blues' most legendary pioneers were first recorded on such excursions, making it possible for the world to forever enjoy the original sounds that they produced for the talent scouts' primitive carbon microphones.

Unfortunately, it has not been quite that simple for contemporary audiences to experience the sounds of legends like Charlie Patton, Blind Blake, or Robert Johnson. Even in their day, many records by the mentioned artists and scores of other blues players were not readily available. John Hammond Sr., legendary jazz/blues producer/ talent scout, has told me that during the late 1920s-early 1930s it was virtually impossible to buy country blues issues on the Vocalion label in New York City. Surprising, as Vocalion was one of the leaders in the "race record" field. Certainly, then, to find specific records on the smaller blues recording labels such as Paramount, Black Patti, or Gennett must have produced an often fruitless search.

If in fact it was difficult to find these recordings during their day, imagine what it must have been like to find vintage shellac by Son House, Charlie Jordan, or Frank Stokes 40 years after the last copy was sold over the general store counter.

"Between 1963 and 1968 we canvassed black neighborhoods in Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Tennessee, and the Carolinas to find many of the records that wound up being reissued on the Yazoo Records." Nick Perls, producer, historian, PR-man, distributor, and president of Yazoo Records, the leading label in today's

blues reissue field, has been on a twenty-year campaign to present audiences with the finest country blues recorded during the glorious age of preelectric instruments.

This "canvassing" of black neighborhoods has been integral to the unearthing of many a (presumed) "lost" blues recording. Perls was canvassing through Arkansas when the first copy of the Charlie Patton classic, "Circle Round the Moon," was found in the possession of an elderly black woman.

But Yazoo's material does not come from the often worn original copies found during these canvassing trips



exclusively. Yazoo draws upon the world's largest and most valuable private collections to produce its albums.

Nick goes through great pains to find the copy of a particular performance that is in the best condition, to reissue on his remarkable label. Considering the scarcity of finding even one copy of certain blues recordings, this quest for the best existing disc has certainly made Nick's job much more complicated. Although other blues reissue labels exist, Original Jazz Library in San Francisco being the most similar to Yazoo, none can match the beautiful packaging, excellent mastering, and great taste that is displayed on most every Yazoo release. Unlike Original Jazz Library, which pays much attention to vocal performances, Yazoo presents a guitar bent. "We are more interested in outstanding instrumental performances on stringed instruments (piano included), with vocal performances, as good as they may be, taking a back seat."

As the market for blues reissue albums is limited at best, Nick Perls' fine efforts are clearly a labor of love. When I read the statement in the Yazoo Records catalog that "Yazoo would rather have a thousand satisfied customers than make a thousand bucks," it does not seem merely like a promotional plug.

Since its inception in 1967, Nick Perls' Yazoo Records has made available some of the world's finest blues performances, performances that would be impossible for the noncollector to enjoy if they were not found on a Yazoo Record. Let's hear it for Nick!

Yazoo Records' catalog is available by sending a postcard to:

Yazoo Records 245 Waverly Place New York, New York 10014



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Valerie Wellington MILLION DOLLAR SECRET

by Joe Lauro

Valerie Wellington was born in Chicago a mere 24 years ago. She has only been singing blues professionally since mid-1982. Yet Valerie Wellington emerges as one of the 1980s' most gifted, natural, and full-voiced interpreters of classic blues. Absolutely the hottest new female blues singer now in Chicago, Valerie began singing at local blues clubs such as Kingston Mines and B.L.U.E.S., sitting in with the late Big Walter Thornton, Magic Slim, and Albert Collins before creating a minor sensation with her portrayal of blues shouter Gertrude "Ma" Rainey in the Kuumba Theatre production, The Little Dreamer (A Night in the Life of Bessie Smith).

The roles of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith must have come naturally to Wellington, as her range and tone is similar to those of the greatest classic blues singers of the twenties and thirties--Rainey, Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, and Lizzie Miles included.

Million Dollar Secret (Rooster Blues Record R2619) is Ms. Wellington's first album. The backing of a top-notch Chicago electric blues unit featuring Magic Slim, Johnny Little-john, and Sunnyland Slim display Wellington in an absolutely perfect setting. It would have been a delight, however, if there had been a departure from the electric full band format, save acoustic piano and tuba, for one tune to display Ms. Wellington in the

classic "blues shouter" format she seems so naturally equipped to thrill us with.

Much of Million Dollar Secret's success lies in the expert guidance of Living Blues magazine editor and Rooster Blues Records helmsman Jim O'Neal, who produced the album.
O'Neal, for those not familiar with Living Blues magazine or the Chicago blues scene in general, is a multitalented writer, editor, blues historian, record producer, and songwriter. (He cowrote "My Baby Treats Me Like a Step-Child" with Wellington) and is a driving force behind the preservation and exposure of new and old blues musicians throughout the country.

A beautifully performed and sensitively mixed LP, Million Dollar

Secret includes classic blues compositions by such legends as Bessie

Smith ("Dirty No-Good's Blues"),

Helen Humes ("Million Dollar Secret"),

Muddy Waters ("Smokestack Lightning"),

and Grant & Wilson ("Down in the

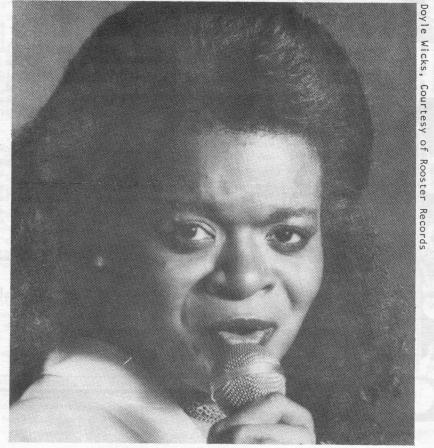
Dumps"), as well as recent compositions by Wellington: "My Baby Treats

Me Like a Step-Child" and the excellent "You Can't Have My Monkey."

Ms. Wellington handles all the material with great style and displays great versatility as she shifts moods easily with the differing rhythms and feels of the album's ten cuts. Valerie Wellington does not only sing the blues, she interprets them. Each song has a defined mood and reason, which is set to motion with the intuitive technique of a natural blues singer.

For all those who have been waiting to have their socks knocked off by a great new blues voice, Million Dollar Secret is your chance to hear someone who will not only knock your socks off, but break both your feet and put you in the hospital for a week.

Incidentally, "Down in the Dumps," the album's opening band, was ironically the last title recorded by the Empress Bessie Smith; a fine place for Bessie to have left off and an equally excellent tune for this fine new blues singer to begin her recording career with. Valerie Wellington truly is Million Dollar Secret's million dollar secret.





BAREFOOT BILL'S HARD LUCK BLUES

by Joe Lauro

Along with Nick Perls and his Yazoo Records label, Don Kent's Brooklynbased Mamlish Records Inc. represent the foremost East Coast historic blues re-issue labels. Unlike many historic re-issue labels, the Mamlish packages behind the Sluefoot Joe and Barefoot Bill pseudonyms. If this is true, then Barefoot Bill has finally been identified, and Ed Bell has found his proper place in the annals of blues history.

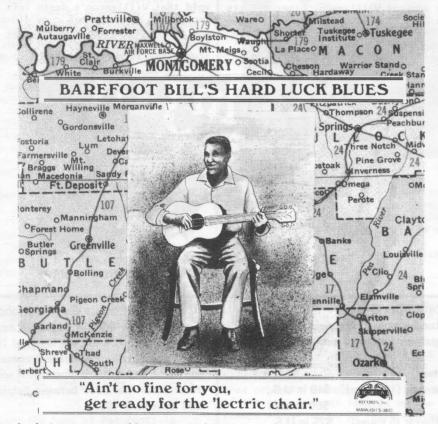
The five artists represented in this collection--Ed Bell, John Lee, Pillie

Bolling, May Armstrong, and Sonny Scott--are a representative cross section of the Alabama style of country blues players. Although all of the artists received little more than territorial acclaim, their recordings, as presented here, show a distinctive, pleasurable, though often archaic style of performing.

Each of the artists, save for vocalist May Armstrong, is a guitarist, with the most interesting work coming from Bell and Lee. The four 1951 John Lee sides, one of which is a previously unissued private acetate, reveal a 36-year-old playing in an acoustic blues style which, by the 1950s, with the advent of electric blues, was years out of style. Regardless, Lee sounds fresh and inspired and manages to establish himself as a fine, though late-born traditional blues player.

The May Armstrong side, "Nobody Can Take His Place," is by far the oddest track on the album. It is suspected that Armstrong was an Alabamian, therefore justifying her inclusion here. The track is a curious attempt at urban blues, with an open-tuned mandolin providing enough countrification to create a rather mixed up overall effect.

All in all, Barefoot Bill's Hard Luck Blues is an interesting, well recorded effort in the historical blues resisue category, which brings well deserved and long overdue attention to some fine Alabama country blues musicians.



always include astute, well-researched liner notes, as well as fine-sounding transfers from the rare, original, often scratchy 78s. Often, as in the case of this album, the liner notes will bring to light historical data that previously had been inaccurate or unknown altogether.

The latest Mamlish release, Barefoot Bill's Hard Luck Blues (Mamlish S-3812) presents 14 sides recorded by Alabamabased country blues artists (circa 1927-51). Besides releasing some fine country blues performances by relatively unknown artists, Don Kent and his associates Pat Conti, Gayle Dean Wardlow, and Bengt Olson have managed, in the liner notes, to straighten out historical data regarding the 1929-30 recordings of Ed Bell. Bell, who recorded for Paramount in 1927, Q.R.S. in 1929, and Columbia in 1929 and 1930, turns out to be the mystery man

Arkansas blues

KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

by Andrew Marcus

In 1976, Louis Guida, a photographer and folklorist with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, traveled throughout Arkansas in an attempt to experience and document as much of that state's blues scene as he could find. For eight months Guida lugged his camera and his tape deck from town to town, photographing, recording, and interviewing virtually any blues artist that he could find.

One of the results of this ambitious undertaking is an important album that Rooster Blues Records has just released entitled Keep It To Yourself;
Arkansas Blues Volume I: Solo
Performances. The album, which
features nine of the most dynamic
solo performers that Guida recorded,
attests to the fact that Arkansas
has as diverse and exciting a blues
scene as any state in the Union.

Unlike states such as Illinois and Tennessee, in which musicians tend to gravitate to large metropolitan areas, the blues scene in Arkansas remains fairly decentralized. Each of the musicians on this album has played in the same local clubs for most of their careers, unknown to all

FAST FOLK

but a few local patrons. Because gigs will pay only \$15 to \$20 a night, the majority of these blues artists are only part-time musicians who have to work in factories, garages, or restaurants to support their love of blues. But the blues is clearly more than a weekend hobby to these musicians. Even though their pay may be low and their popularity limited, the quality of their music is undeniably high.

Arkansas became famous for the blues in the 1940s and 1950s because of a radio show called King Biscuit Time. King Biscuit Time, which was the brainchild of the Interstate Grocer Company and harmonica player Sonny Boy Williamson, broadcast 15 minutes of blues every weekday throughout the Arkansas and Mississippi delta.

Dozens of musicians played on King Biscuit Time, either with Williamson when he was around, or in solo performances during the long periods when he was touring elsewhere. The program, like the Arkansas delta, became a gathering place for a changing lineup of local players as well as a stepping stone for some of the most accomplished practitioners of delta blues.

In the past 30 years, with the advent of mechanization and mass communication, the way of life of which delta blues was a part has changed considerably. Today's Arkansas blues scene is much more limited and less distinct, and reflects the social, economic, and cultural changes that have occurred since the King Biscuit era. There is no longer the flourishing tradition that existed in the 1940s and 1950s when the jukes and radio stations overflowed with modern blues legends like Williamson, Robert Nighthawk, and Howlin' Wolf, and when even local and lesser known musicians were playing six nights a week.

Despite the fact that Sonny Boy Williamson has been dead for almost two decades, in the Arkansas delta it is difficult to find anybody connected with the blues who does not remember him. Of the nine musicians on Keep It To Yourself, five--W.C. Clay, CeDell Davis, Willie Wright, Willie Moore, and Herbert Wilson--played with Williamson on King Biscuit Time. Herbert Wilson even claims that Williamson was his uncle and taught him how to sing. All five of these musicians exemplify the delta tradition, which is centered primarily in the Helena, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, and Osceola areas.

In the rolling hill country of southwestern Arkansas, where the open sounding, single-note-based, jazzrelated blues can be quite different from the denser, more chordal music of the delta, Williamson also made his presence felt. Although none of the four southwestern blues artists featured on the album played on King Biscuit Time, Trenton Cooper and Nelson Carson toured on a double bill with Williamson in the 1950s. Although they admired Williamson, other artists such as T.Bone Walker, Lightnin' Hopkins, Charlie Christian, and Earle Hines had a much more substantial impact on the music of Cooper and

Carson than Williamson did.

For most of the musicians featured on this album, Sonny Boy Williamson was an inspirational figure because he created a milieu where the blues became accessible to people who didn't frequent the clubs and taverns where local musicians played late into the night. By recording and producing unknown Arkansas blues artists, Louis Guida has filled the void that Williamson's death left. Once again somebody has come along and reminded the music world that Arkansas has a distinguished blues scene that is worth listening to.



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PAT CONTI was born 30 some odd years ago with the soul of an ex-slave. He has adopted the slowly vanishing musical styles of rural black Americans and performs this "pre-blues" music on a variety of instruments, all of which he has mastered. A resident of Queens, New York, Pat lives quietly with his mammoth collection of string instruments and enormous collection of 78-rpm records. Conti has performed white string band music with a variety of groups, including his Major Conti and the Canebreak Rattlers and can be heard at major folk and blues festivals throughout the country.

ARI EISINGER was born in Texas in 1960 but has spent the last 23 years in New York City. Nursed on the guitar blues of Blind Blake, Gary Davis, John Hurt, and Robert Johnson, Ari is one of the few performers who keeps his song repertoire entirely within the traditions of authentic country blues and ragtime. He has been active on the college and club circuit. This is his first released recording.



PAUL GEREMIA is absolutely one of this decade's masters of fingerstyle blues/ragtime music. Paul lives in Newport, Rhode Island, and frequently tours through New York City and adjoining areas.

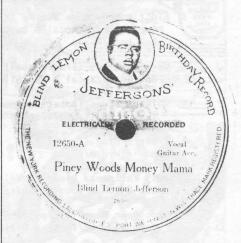
BOB GUIDA has been on the string band scene for a number of years. As an accomplished string bassist and a fine blues singer, Bob has successfully absorbed the singing styles of rural black folk singers. A resident of Queens, New York, Bob has played with Major Conti and the Canebreak Rattlers. In the blues idiom, he has often in the company of Pat Conti and Louie Kromm.



JOHN HAMMOND recorded his first album of country blues for the Vanguard label in 1962. Since that time he has recorded frequently, scored films such as Little Big Man (1971), and has emerged as one of the most electrifying performers of authentic blues. His track on this album, "Drop Down Momma," was the highlight of an incredible set performed by John at SpeakEasy's Anti-Nuclear Benefit June 20, 1984.

ROD MACDONALD, 35, is a folksinger/songwriter from Connecticut. Rod lives in Greenwich Village and tours in the South, Midwest, and New England. He has an album, No Commercial Traffic, which is available through the Up for Grabs Catalog.

THE OTIS BROTHERS, a very eccentric family of musical characters, possess a bizarre repertoire of blues, sacred, and minstrel tunes, due to the fact that Elder Otis had owned the Jivo Platter Palace (a record and sheet music store). The eldest brother, Raoul Otis (actually a half-brother and grandson of a Burmese slave girl), was born apparently in 1882. He played banjo and guitar in his teens but was formally trained as a concert bassist. Amos, the middle Otis brother (born 1900), is a one-time tuna fisherman who ran off from home as a young man. He allegedly played fiddle and banjo with several string bands throughout his late teens and claims to have made two recordings for the Gennett label in 1925. (Neither of these recordings has been found.) He was missing throughout the 1970s, but is now living near Great Jones Alley in New York City. He was once believed to have been shot to death by a "chubby little lady" identified only as "Miss Snagge." The Otis Brothers rarely perform in New York City but do have one album out on the Flying Crow label.



RHYTHM & ROMANCE:

NEIL CONATY, string bass, a native New Yorker, has been recording and performing jazz and traditional music with "Becuma" and with various jazz ensembles in the New York City area. His strong jazz background and distinctive writing style has added a lot to the basic sound of Rhythm & Romance.

(Continued on the next page)



AKIRA SATAKE, guitars, was born in Osaka, Japan. He has been performing, writing, and recording five-string banjo and jazz guitar in Japan and the U.S. He has played with Kenny Kosek, Hazel Dickens, and, recently, in the off-Broadway production of Kinfolk.

LARRY WEXER, harmonica, comes fresh from the fields of Indiana University. He has been playing and composing on mandolin and harmonica with Rhythm & Romance since his arrival in New York City. While getting his master's degree in harmonica at IU, he also spent time recording in Nashville with bands such as The Dillards and Country Gazette.

MARTY LASTER, violin, is a fine violinist from New York City. Marty has played on Broadway with The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas and more recently off-Broadway in Kinfolk. He has been teaching, arranging, composing, and doing studio work in New York City in various styles

ranging from bluegrass to jazz and classical.

NIKKI MATHESON, vocalist, was born in Toronto and now lives in New York City. Nikki comes from an eclectric background including French and Irish traditional music, bluegrass, and jazz, and draws upon these styles in her writing and singing for Rhythm & Romance.

TUCKER SMALLWOOD is a New York-based actor who has been greatly influenced by the music and spirit of Robert Johnson. Tucker has recorded an album of Johnson material, which is at present unreleased. As a busy actor, he has just completed an important role in Francis Coppola's latest film, The Cotton Club. Tucker has little time to work club dates and concerts, but he frequently sits in with blues men at local club dates.

PETER SPENCER was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1951. He and his wife live in New York City. Peter's LP, Paradise Loft, is available through the Up for Grabs catalog. DAVE VAN RONK has been a major figure in folk music since the early sixties. He tours internationally and has more than fifteen albums.

HOWIE WYETH, one of New York City's best kept secrets, generally makes his living as a session drummer. He has worked with many name performers from Bob Dylan to Jack Hardy. Not generally known for his piano playing, it was our privilege to record a sample of his piano playing for Fast Folk. An accomplished "stride style" piano player, Wyeth is up there with James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, and Willie Smith, the men he emulates.

BOB ZAIDMAN was born in Brooklyn in 1945. He has been into blues, jazz, and country music all his life. He has been a working New York area musician for over twenty years. As a staff member of The New School Guitar Study Center, Bob has been one of New York City's most active teachers of finger-style guitar.

SIDEONECREDISSIDETWO

- Ain't Nobody Home But Me (Pink Anderson)
 Paul Geremia/Vocal & Guitar
 Del Lord/Piano
- 2. Worried Blues (Traditional)
 Bob Guida/Vocal & Mandolin
- 3. Walkin' Blues (Robert Johnson)
 Tucker Smallwood/Vocal & Guitar
- 4. Viper's Drag (T. Waller) Howie Wyeth/Piano
- 1919 Influenza Blues (Traditional) Bob Zaidman/Vocal & Guitar

- Hot Time in Old Town Tonight (Traditional)
 Ari Eisinger/Vocal & Guitar
 Joe Lauro/String Bass
- I Like You Fine (MacDonald & Matheson)
 Rhythm & Romance:
 Nikki Matheson/Vocal
 Neil Conaty/String Bass
 Akira Satake/Guitars
 Larry Wexer/Harmonica
 Marty Laster/Violin
- 3. April Blues (Peter Spencer)
 Peter Spencer/Vocal, Guitar & Slide Guitar
- *4. Country Rag (Traditional)
 Otis Brothers:
 Raoul Otis/String Bass
 Amos Otis/Slide Guitar
- *5. Motherless Children (Blind Willie Johnson)
 Dave Van Ronk/Vocal & Guitar
- What Are They Doing in Heaven Today (Washington Phillips)
 Pat Conti/Vocal & Dolciola

Recording Engineers:

Joe Lauro recorded Side 1--#1 in Rhode Island, Side 1--#2, #6
and Side 2--#4, #6 at SpeakEasy in New York City.

Mark Dann recorded Side 1--#3, #4 and Side 2--#1, #2, #3, #5 at Fast
Folk Studios, Brooklyn, New York.

Jay Rosen recorded Side 2--#5 at SpeakEasy in New York City.