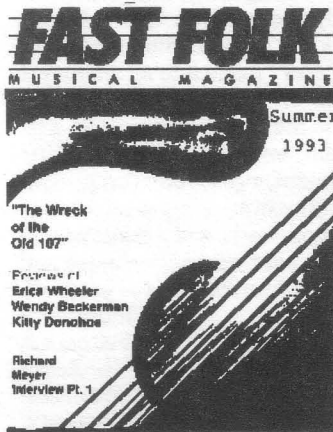
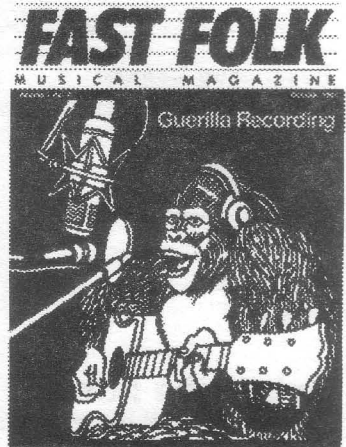
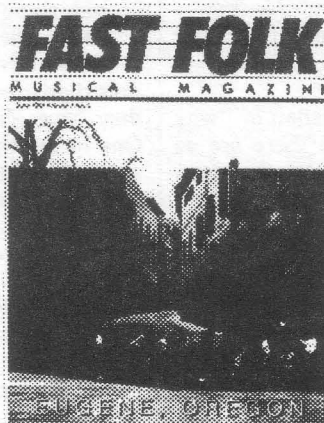
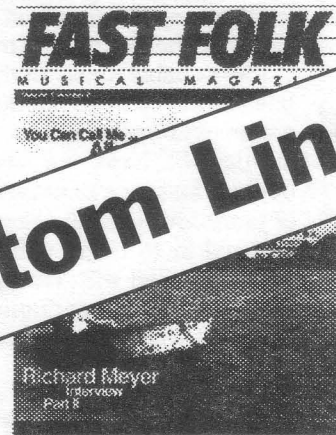
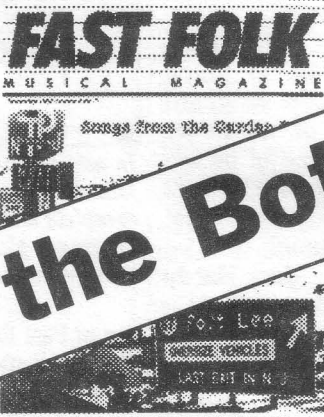
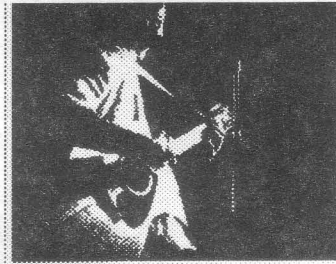
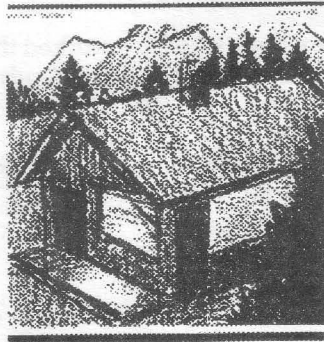


# FAST FOLK

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Volume 8, Number 2

November 1994



Live at the Bottom Line 1994

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## Optimism in the Big Apple

We have much to be thankful for. We are still moving ahead. We are still optimistic. We are very thankful for our loyal subscribers. We are determined to enlarge our subscription base. We are determined to continue bringing you new and interesting songs from New York and around the country and to resume our fast and furious publication schedule of ten issues a year. We are determined to open New York's only all-acoustic venue. We are determined.

No one said it would be easy. Attempting to do something nonprofit, something cooperative with an all-volunteer staff in the middle of perhaps the most competitive environment is somewhat of an anachronism in this day and age. The impossible takes a little longer.

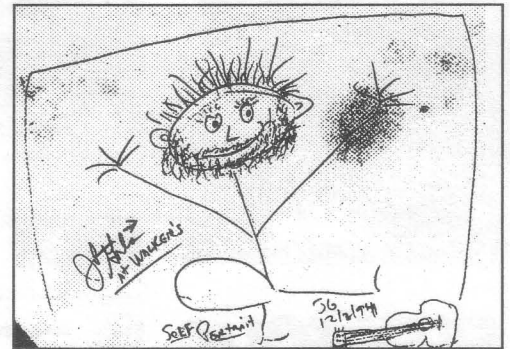
We would like to thank the people who have worked their tails off to keep this dream alive: Mike Hagen, Tim Robinson, Nich Haber, Wendy Beckerman, Richard Meyer, Denise Batura, Sue Kohn, Rich Shein, Monty Delaney as well as all the others who have given a day or two of their time to make this happen.

We would also like to thank Suzanne Vega, John Gorka, Dave Van Ronk, Frank Christian, and Lucy Kaplansky for doing benefits for us as well as the several anonymous donors who have given generously to keep us alive financially.

They say it is lonely at the top. Well, it's lonely at the bottom as well.

It's probably lonely in the middle too. We have nowhere to go but up. We have a golden opportunity to build a new artistic community. Perhaps we are not so much behind the times as we are in the vanguard of something new. Some of us never plugged in to begin with. Some of us are not concerned with labels. We are all part of a glorious and continuing tradition. If not you, who will help us to continue?

-Jack Hardy



In addition to his benefit concert December 3, John Gorka has donated this lovely self portrait, complete with bubble butt. Rendered in crayon on greasy placemat, this masterwork will forever grace the *Fast Folk Wall of Fame*.

## To the editor:

Dear *Fast Folk*,

Enclosed is my renewal at your special offer rate. I was absolutely thrilled to hear that you were giving *Fast Folk* a new burst of energy to see what it could do, especially after the rather pessimistic editorial in issue 801 (*Falling Into the Ocean*).

To address your editorial question of "why bother" with compilations when there are so many others, I respond with: Those other compilations (Christine Lavin productions, High Street samplers, The Leak, etc.) are at a different level than *Fast Folk*. *Fast Folk* is still very much a people's organization where basically anyone can get a chance at being heard. While I love the above mentioned compilations, I would sorely miss seeing *Fast Folk* filling the special niche that it does should it cease publication.

I have a folk music show on a local public radio station (KZSC, Santa Cruz, CA). In celebration of your special offer, I did about two hours of my three hour show from my collec-

tion of *Fast Folk* albums, and encouraged people to call me and get the info to subscribe. (Being non-commercial radio, I couldn't name the price, but I could indicate that it was a very good deal and have the listeners call for the price.) I did get some calls so I hope you ended up with some new subscriptions out of it.

I have one minor complaint/suggestion: It would be nice if more artists featured on *Fast Folk* didn't record a song for the magazine that they have already included on their albums. One of the thrills for me is finding that extra song or two that hasn't made it to an album yet and sometimes never does. I assume that the choice of song is in the artist's hands. If so, a little encouragement towards recording unreleased material might make your compilation that much more attractive.

Keep up the good work, and I wish you all the best success at your new coffeehouse and your drive for new subscribers.

Jeff Emery  
Felton, CA

Jeff's show, "Folk Backroads," is heard Tuesdays, noon to 3 p.m., on KZSC-FM, 88.1. Write to Jeff at P.O. Box 711, Felton, CA 95018.



## A brief lesson from Mr. Dave Van Ronk

*Wherein the dean of New York City's folk/acoustic/blues scene shares bits of history and wisdom*

By Brian Crawley

*I've been studying guitar with Dave Van Ronk intermittently for the past couple of years, depending on his active touring schedule and my static budget. Half of the lesson is in learning how to suck-er Dave into telling his stories. Before Dave hooked me up with Fast Folk, I thought perhaps I was the only student who schemed up ways to get him talking—but I've met others since, players like Eve Silber and Jeremy Wallace, who say that they did the same thing. They've faced a phenomenon I'm facing now—that towards the end of the course Dave teaches, you come up with all kinds of creative reasons to keep it from ending. You cancel lessons, you ask him to write up charts for obscure songs, you borrow tapes you know you'll eventually need to return. All these ruses are designed to extend his conversations into the indefinite future. So when Jack Hardy asked me to interview Dave recently, I recognized that the best ruse I've heard of yet had found its way to me.*

**You do a lot of performing around the folk circuit; do you consider yourself a folk singer?**

No. I still think of myself more as a jazz singer than a folk singer, because of the way I approach songs, phrasing, timbre, my choice of material too... But even when I'm singing things that have no direct connection to jazz, I'm thinking in jazz terms, you know, can we come in on the pickup here, break it up rhythmically in such and so a way.

**Between your thumb on bass, your middle fingers on melody, and your voice, you've got your own private combo going.**

The nearest analogy would be someone who plays piano and sings, actually. Blossom Dearie lives down the hall; we have a grand old time talking shop. Because while Blossom's choice of material is very different from mine—I think she's a marvelous judge of material—and certainly the end product is very different, the way she approaches a song is very similar.

**In reading the liner notes to your Folkways recordings, the ones the Smithsonian reissued, I see you moved from playing ukulele as a kid, to banjo, to guitar?**

Ukulele to guitar to banjo. I don't know if I made that clear, I probably didn't. The banjo was the result of a sort of an ideological commitment.

**To traditional jazz?**

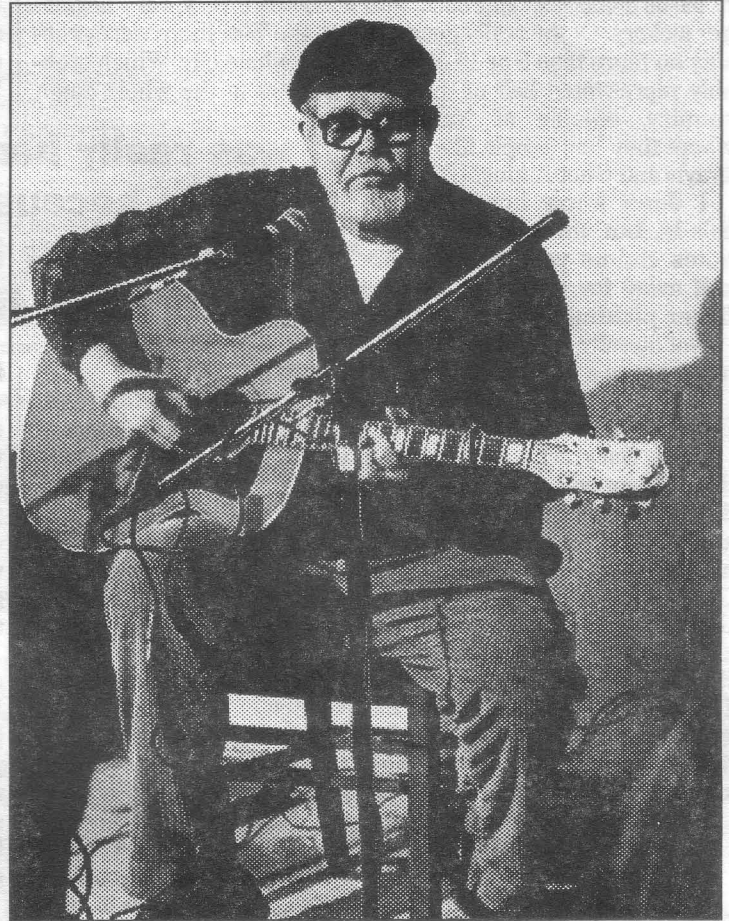
Right. You had to have a banjo and you had to have a tuba or it wasn't authentic, period. If Dizzy Gillespie's combo had had a banjo and a tuba, it would have turned me around completely.

**So when did you decide you couldn't stand the banjo?**

It took a while. Playing it night after night was the ultimate test. It's very boring, it really is. 'Four to the bar and no cheating,' as Count Basie used to say. Freddy Green on guitar with the Basie band, apparently he loved to do that. But just sitting there chopping fours drove me wild. I couldn't stand it. I wasn't all that good, anyway. As a matter of fact I was terrible.

**Had you gone pretty far with your guitar technique before you picked up the banjo?**

Nah. I started out using a flat pick on both. And my flat pick technique never got past rudimentary. I couldn't for example get a roll out of a banjo—never had anyone who was a banjo player to teach me. To this day, I don't know how it's done. But playing that damn thing was what turned me against it.



*Dave was a highlight of the first Fast Folk Cafe benefit.*

**You don't like that flat pick sound much anymore, is that right?**

I don't use it. There are some types of music that absolutely require it. If I wanted to do country stuff, I'd be in big trouble without a flat pick. Some of it you can finger pick, but other pieces just don't sound right any other way than with a flat pick. Doc Watson hardly ever finger picks any more. And for good reason. He's a great finger picker, but the flat picking is much more expressive for a lot of the songs that he does.

**When did you start finger picking?**

Oh I guess it was around '55 or so. I had heard it but I had no idea what it was. I guessed it was two people with flat picks. And I actually had been *seeing* it for a couple of years, but had never paid any attention. I used to walk through Washington Square 2 or 3 times a day almost every day, including Sundays when all the pickers would be out there, but they were playing cornball folk music, and most of them were Stalinists to boot, or so I thought. So I just paid no attention. When I'd be there on Sundays, somewhere around '55 I guess it was, I ran into a guy who was finger picking, I forget what tune, I think it was *Railroad Bill*. It really blew me away. So I started asking him questions, he showed me a little bit about how it was done, and that was Tom Paley. I ran home and got out my guitar and started to experi-



ment based on what he had showed me. It was really hard to learn in those days because there weren't any people who were teachers. You could learn how to play classical guitar, you could learn how to play what was called folk guitar, which was a kind of bastard classical approach, and there were very, very few finger pickers. Of the really good ones, in the '50s, there were probably no more than 5 or 10 of them in the whole city. Which probably represented half of the finger pickers in the whole damn country, outside of Nashville, where they had people like Merle Travis and Chet Atkins.

**I don't know how accurate this is, but another set of liner notes claims you locked yourself away for a year to get the finger picking down.**

Not literally, but I was spending many hours a day trying to work the stuff up.

**Was that at a time when you came into contact with Gary Davis?**

Yeah, Gary came along for me very shortly after the Paley thing. Gary was teaching guitar. He had a little coterie of students, including Barry Kornfeld, Stefan Grossman, who was around on that scene a little later, Ian Buchanon, and a guy named John Gibbon. And these people all played pretty much in Gary's style. Also they were friends of Gary's; Barry brought Gary down to Washington Square. Where he was really in his element, I mean he was an *al fresco* singer, he was a street singer. He really liked it. He sang in the streets for money, of course. That was his livelihood, and it wasn't much of one. But he didn't just do it for money, he really liked to do that. He was a stone ham, just loved to perform. And having a bunch of worshipful kids around him didn't do him any harm either.

**How old was he when was doing this?**

Oh, when I met him he must have been around 60. Sixty to 65.

**He didn't always live in New York, right.**

He came to New York pretty early on. He was living in New York by the late 1930s. He was from South Carolina, and for a while he was around the crowd, the blues people in Durham, North Carolina. He used to sing out in front of the tobacco factory, the cigarette factory gates. With Brownie McGhee, who was the young Turk, Blind Boy Fuller, Son Terry, Bull City Red, a whole bunch of them. And some of them, like Blind Boy Fuller, made a lot of recordings. Brownie started to record just around the time Fuller died. As a matter of fact his first record was called *Goodbye Blind Boy*, and the artist was Blind Boy Fuller Number 2. And Gary had taught a lot of guitar to Blind Boy Fuller, which sort of flowed straight through to Brownie. There are certain characteristic runs that Brownie does to this day that come from Gary, especially when Brownie plays in the key of A, then I hear Gary all over the place. But that was true of Blind Boy Fuller too.

**Were you formally taught by him?**

No, it wasn't necessary. I knew the way I wanted to go, and it wasn't exactly what Gary was doing. There were a lot of things that Gary did that were applicable to what I wanted to do, and so I stole 'em. Just being able to hear him, to watch his fingerings, was enough for me. I saw him very often. A little later I was doing the hiring at a coffee house on MacDougal Street. I used to have Gary there for weeks on end, and I'd just sit there and watch. I mean you can listen to tapes, you can listen to records, but to be able to watch was the real key.

**Did he like what you were up to?**

He only commented on what I did once, that I recall. I remember it very vividly. He was a very harsh critic, he hated most guitar players. He was extremely competitive, and sometimes he'd get downright ornery. Barry Kornfeld for example was trying to work up a little four-bar passage that Gary used to use for a turnaround on some of his pieces. And Gary wouldn't show it to him, until Barry convinced him that he wanted to play it on the banjo. *That was okay.* So Gary showed it to him and Barry learned it,

and then a few weeks later, Gary said 'play that thing on the banjo,' and Barry couldn't do it. He told Gary he was still working on it, and he went home and he had to work the thing up on banjo just to keep Gary from killing him. He said it was one of the toughest things he ever had to do. Gary liked to teach,

but he was always kind of ambivalent. He would go, 'it's done this way,' and he would play it for you over and over and over, very slowly, unconscious of the fact that as he would slow it down he would change it slightly. You would make an attempt, and he'd comment, and play it for you again. He was blind, so he couldn't see what you were doing, he had to use his ear entirely. So he couldn't correct fingerings or things like that, you really had to watch, and he was very patient. Until finally you would start to get it down, and then he would get pissed off. 'You're stealing my stuff,' he would say.

He was extremely competitive with other guitarists, especially ones that he felt might represent some threat. Blind Lemon Jefferson in some instances really plays similarly to Gary. Gary hated Lemon Jefferson with a purple passion. 'That man couldn't yell no louder if you was cuttin' his throat,' he'd say, he couldn't stand the way he sang. I don't know to this day, except professional jealousy, what his objections could have been. He hated Lightnin' Hopkins playing, and he used to do a parody of Sam's guitar playing that just dripped venom.

So coming back to me—you can understand, I did not solicit his opinions. I was playing in a club in, I forget, I think it was Detroit, and at that point I was very much in his debt as a guitarist. I was doing a lot of his songs. I only do a couple of them now. But in those days I must have had 5 or 6 of his tunes that I was doing, and some of them I was doing very similarly to his charts. I was, frankly, copying him. I got on stage and did a show that happened to have a bunch of Gary's tunes in it, and I came off and the owner said 'There's a friend of yours sitting back in back. He'd like you to come over and say hello.' I went over and it was Reverend Davis and his wife Annie. I damn near shit a brick. I remember one guitarist that he really liked was Blind Blake. And he would say of Blind Blake, 'Right sporty *gui-tar* playing.' When I came back he said to me, 'That was right sporty *gui-tar* playing.' And I thought, wow. Practically had to scrape me off the floor.

**What did his wife think of all you guys?**

Annie really liked kids, she liked young people. She was very kind and very solicitous. But she *had* to feel that we were leading him down the primrose path to the devil. Sister Davis was very, or is, I think she's still alive, very religious. And Gary was too, in his own way. I don't think Gary would have been a minister if he had had his sight. Being a religious singer was the only way he could have made a living. But that being said, he really believed. He was not a hypocrite, he was not a lukewarm Christian, he was foursquare solid for Jesus and that was that.



But he was a sinner. This is a contradiction that as an ex-Catholic I could really understand. And Gary, I won't say he sinned at every opportunity, but when an especially juicy opportunity would present itself, Gary would be as prone to go one way as the other. And I think Annie must have realized that. I mean we were always giving Gary drinks, and things like that. Gary liked his bourbon, and he couldn't hold it very well either. What she must have thought when he came staggering in the door from a night at the Gaslight or the Commons or sitting at the Kettle of Fish with a bunch of carousing young folkniks... I could only imagine what went through her head. But I'm glad I wasn't the one who had to bring him home.

**Whereabouts did he live?**

He was living in Queens by that time. He wrote a thing that Peter Paul & Mary recorded, their version of *Samson and Delilah* on their first album, which sold over a million copies. So his royalties were really hefty, and real estate prices weren't all that high in those days, so he bought a house out in Jamaica, which Annie I think still has.

**I'm curious to hear more of a story I've seen you use as a song intro—of a guy who wrote songs for Bessie Smith. Did you meet him in this same period?**

Clarence Williams. Oh earlier, that would have been around '53, '54. I used to play with a traditional jazz band, and we had 2 vocalists, one was Victoria Spivey, Queen V, and the other was a woman named Phoebe Ingram. Phoebe was a protégé of Clarence Williams. He had a little shop up in Harlem called The Harlem Thrift Shop. I don't think he ever sold anything out of it, but he had 2 pianos, and all of his old cronies would come by. He loved to play piano duets. Clarence, I don't know how he came across Phoebe, but he recognized that she had that kind of voice, that kind of Grande Dame blues chanteuse voice that Bessie Smith had. From some connection he had with the leader and the soprano sax player of the band, he introduced her into our circles, and conversely I was introduced into his. And so occasionally we would hang around his thrift shop, and Clarence would hold forth, and play his version of 'and then I wrote...' He wasn't a great pianist but he had a pretty fair hand. Learned a lot of songs—either indirectly, songs that were introduced to Phoebe by him and then brought to the band; a couple of things I actually heard him do; like to this day when I do *You've Been A Good Old Wagon*, which I think he wrote, or he claimed it, I use his tempo and not Bessie Smith's. He played it kind of up-tempo, and she recorded it very slow. I think the up-tempo version is the better one. But you can always get insights on a song whenever you hear it done by whoever wrote it. Ray Charles may have done the best version of *Georgia on My Mind*, but I think Hoagy Carmichael's reading is more informative.

**Mmm-hmm, if you plan to do it yourself.**

Yeah.

**The songs on your new album, have you heard the writers performing them?**

Yes, in almost every case. Not 100%... One of the things I'm probably gonna say in the notes is, these people aren't all close friends. But in almost every instance if I'm puzzled by some aspect of the song, I could at least in theory pick up the phone and say, 'what the hell did you mean by that,' and get some kind of an answer. Which I think really gives you an inside track on reading the material.

**You want to say more about your new album?**

Title song of the thing is *To All My Friends in Far-Flung Places*, which is a song written by a friend of mine named Jane

Voss. It is 30 songs, 2 CDs, and it has been like a 9-month-long session in the dentist's office.

**Why?**

Because we stop and we start and we stop and we start and there are these long hiatuses, there are always 2 or 3 people involved who are key. There's me and there's Sam Charters, whose record company it is, Gazell Productions. And at various times there will be this arranger and that sideman, or that kind of thing. I've had to go out on the road, Sam's had business trips, so it's really fits and starts. And if we had been able to just go in and do it, it would have taken us 5 or 6 weeks anyway, cause that's a lot of material. But the way it's falling out, it's just taking a lot longer than I had envisioned.

**Have you recorded a song of your own on the album?**

No. I've got a few things I'm holding in reserve for the next album. You always have to be thinking one album ahead.

**What's your own approach to writing lyrics?**

K.I.S.S. Keep It Simple, Stupid.

**Do musical phrases occur first to you, or verbal phrases?**

Oh God.

**Or back and forth.**

Yeah. To me, a lyric doesn't start to gel until I start to think of it musically. Once I get an idea for a song, I start to think melody and chorus. So they tend to develop, the first verse and/or chorus, I'll tend to develop words and music at the same time.

**I guess a song of yours I particularly like, *Blood Red Moon*, went through a couple major revisions, from serious to comic.**

Lyrics have a way of getting out of hand. You can't always use the word you want, because it doesn't rhyme or it doesn't scan. And this will send you off on a very slight tangent. But once you depart from your original line, it's easier to get further and further away. Because you deviate slightly, and that suggests something else. I doubt very much if anyone who ever wrote in verse walked away from the thing feeling that that was exactly what they had intended to do in the first place.

**This must have to do with what you mistrust about poetry.**

I think anyone with a skeptical bent has got to take poetry with a grain of salt. You have to realize poetry, like rhetoric, its fraternal twin, can and very often is used to promote loathsome and disgusting notions. Look at any anthology of modern poetry in English and you're liable to come up with Ezra Pound's Social Credit anti-semitic diatribe 'With usura hath no man a house of fine stone blah blah blah.' Hey, c'mon man, that's a left-wing fascist ideological statement. And I'm not saying you shouldn't read it, I'm not even saying he shouldn't have written it, I'm just saying you have to be on guard about that sort of thing. Skill in putting words together is one thing, what the words actually say is another.

**You advised me once, when writing lyrics, to stick to the words I'd find in the King James Bible.**

Probably it was one of my spiels about words of Anglo-Saxon derivation as opposed to words of Romance derivation. Generally speaking I find in poetry and especially in writing song lyrics, that if you have a choice between a word of an Anglo-Saxon root, and a word of a Romance root, go with the Anglo-Saxon. It has more impact. Our Anglo-Saxon basic vocabulary is less 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,' you might say.

**In your liner notes to *Going Back to Brooklyn*, a recording you made of a bunch of your own songs, you write that**



'the role of singer-songwriter has never much appealed to me.' What role do you see yourself occupying?

Well obviously, if I'm a singer and not a songwriter, that leaves interpreter, doesn't it? When the whole thing started back in the '60s, probably the majority of the singer-songwriters were either living in New York, or here frequently. I was listening to everybody and was around pretty much. And I noticed that there was a kind of sameness to the sets that they did; there was really an externalized internal monologue going on onstage. It was first-person singular all the time, and always that particular first-person singular. So there was a kind of monochrome quality to their sets and later to their albums. I didn't want that to happen to me. I saw singing other people's songs as a way of introducing other points of view, and I'm not just talking about the texts either.

Entirely too much attention is paid to the text among singer-songwriters. It's also a musical way of thinking that's being expressed, and also one point of view on how to express musical points of view, or what musical ideas to use. I didn't want to jump on that bandwagon; I was very critical of the whole thing from the outset. That's the story of my life, I'm a Trotskyist Brooklyn Dodger fan, I missed the boat again.

You had been around since well before the singer-songwriter thing happened.

Let's say that my first solo performances in New York were approximately 1955; of their date I can be pretty certain, of their quality I think the less said the better. And let's say that the singer-songwriter thing started happening around 1963. So I had had about 8 years knocking around the acoustic music scene when all that stuff started to go down.

Had you been writing songs all during that period?

Probably took a hand at least at writing blues; by 1958 I was already singing a few songs of my own, which I didn't advertise as such. It's kind of funny, in the first phase, the pre-Dylan phase you might say, songwriters were prone to attempt to palm their stuff off as traditional stuff. Very ironic; there have been occasions where that really backfired terribly. John Jacob Niles wrote *Venezuela*, which became a hit song, and he wrote *I Wonder As I Wander*, which is pretty much a Christmas standard now, and he palmed them off as songs he collected 'in them thar hills'—finally he did get the credit and the royalties, but it was a hell of a fight, and he had really shot himself in the foot.

At that time most of my contemporaries, my 'peer group,' we regarded ourselves as mere mouthpieces for this grand tradition. We attempted to play and sing as much like our models as we could. The whole thing is what I call, in a couple of essays I've written, the 'neo-ethnics.' That school came up in the mid-'50s, and I was very much a part of it. We put ourselves in contradistinction to the People's Artists, the People's Songs, Popular Front kinds of singers, and what I in retrospect think of as the UN school, people like Cynthia Gooding, who used to sing Spanish songs and Turkish songs and so on. A lot of Yiddish stuff and Israeli stuff was being done. You could walk over to Washington Square Park on a Sunday afternoon in the summer and you'd see 4 discernible groups. There would be the LYL people, the Youth League CP Youth, and they'd be singing *The Banks Are Made of Marble*, or *Viva La Quince Brigada*, and you'd walk a few yards and there'd be one or two people singing English ballads interspersed with French folk songs, and there was always a Zionist group, Histradute, and they would be

singing *Hey Zhankoye*, a song collected or written at a Yiddish speaking *colchoz*, a collective farm in the Soviet Union, and then there'd be people like me and Roy Berkely and so on, singing old blues and old timey music. And of course there would be blue-grassers, who like the poor are always with us.

Your approach to performing traditional music has changed, I guess.

Oh yeah, I'm not a mouthpiece for anyone but myself. The criticisms that were leveled against us—which we refuted—we smote our critics hip and thigh—our critics were right, they had us nailed. But we were also very articulate and very theoretical. A lot of had had experience in the radical movement and we were trained polemicists. We had a publication called *Caravan*, there was this ongoing debate between Roger Abrahams, who is now

down at University of Pennsylvania, he's the chairman of the folklore department there, and a guy named Roger Lass, who called it 'The Saga of the Urban Folksinger,' and 'What is the Position of the Urban

Folksinger,' and blah blah blah, and back and forth and back and forth. The funny thing is the 2 guys basically agreed, but they loved to nitpick.

What was the radical's view of blues and folk singers? Were you accepted into the fold or were you viewed with suspicion?

For one thing, you could count the number of professional folk singers on the fingers of both hands in the '50s. Most of the singers were of course amateurs, or semi-pros like myself—that is someone who couldn't make a living at it, but was determined to do it one way or the other. It never occurred to me I'd really be able to do it, because there was no popular market for it. And with the collapse of the Popular Front left after say 1949–1950, a lot of the old audience was gone. I mean Pete Seeger could sing to a group of striking electrical workers in 1939, or even in 1946 or 47, but if he had appeared before that same audience in 1952 they would have lynched him. I'm saying this to illustrate that even the small constituency the folk singers had, had pretty much evaporated by the early '50s. The witch hunt. At one point, the Army printed a pamphlet on how to spot a Communist. This was in 1952 or so. And one of the stigmata was playing the guitar and singing folk songs.

So in the mid-'50s, when I happened on the scene, my desire to be a professional folk singer was the measure of my air-headedness. Not a prayer, Jack, you know, you're kind of a nut, and the answer to that is yes, I was. And of course nobody foresaw the folk boom. Which was a pretty pathetic boom, when you get right down to it, in the '60s. But that put an awful lot of singers on the map. Otherwise we would all be working in some university department or selling shoes on 14th Street.

Pathetic in terms of not actually being that big?

No, it wasn't. I mean you look at the cashbox billboard, the top 40 charts in that period. And you'll see that although folk *albums* did very well, folk *singles* did not, as a rule. The Tarriers had one hit. Vince Martin, one hit. Kingston Trio had a bunch. Peter Paul & Mary had 4 or 5. Which may seem like a lot, but when you look at any top rock group, they have 3 or 4 a year. So it wasn't the dominant music, far, far from it, of that period.

Was there any pressure, self-imposed or otherwise, to change your style of music after Dylan crossed into rock? Did other people try and do that?



Yeah, sure. I had a rock band for a while. Although it was a pretty interesting group in a lot of ways. We managed to sneak some really innovative things into our repertory. We were fooling around with polytonality and things like that. It seemed that there was an opening for that kind of innovation at that time. And to a degree there was, but not for my group.

**When did your jug band come about?**

That was '63, early '63, and there was a little jug band boomlet around that time. Pretty much sparked by a group Jim Kweskin had up in Boston. And they put out a couple of albums for Vanguard I guess it was, and those albums did very well. And my group came about as a result of an offer from Max Gordon over at the Village Vanguard. Max happened to be up in Cambridge and he was walking by the old Club 47, at 47

Mt. Auburn Street there. And he saw this huge long line of people waiting to get in, and he observed that the act that was playing was the Jim Kweskin Jug Band and he thought, 'Aha, jug band!' and in his mind's eye he transposed that line to Seventh Avenue. So he got in touch with Robert Shelton, the critic at the New York Times, said, 'Hey Bob, do you know anybody with a jug band?' and Bob said, 'No, but I will in 15 minutes, let me get back to you.' And Bob called me and said, 'How long will it take you to get a jug band together?' and I said, 'Oh, it will take me at least 2 days.' And he said, 'I've got an offer for a jug band, if you can put one together, at the Vanguard.' The Vanguard was a big-league club. We played there opposite Clark Terry, who had a small combo. And there's no dressing room at the Vanguard, you've got to sort of huddle over in the corridor between the kitchen and the room. Clark fell in love with Sam Charter's wash-tub bass. 'My God, I haven't seen one of those in 30 years. Can you really get a tone out of it?' Boing, boing. 'Woow, yeah you can.' Boing, boing. 'Jesus, this is fun.' We had trouble getting it away from him to go on and do the show. He was a great cat.

**Should have brought him up with you.**

Scared! Much to scared. That gig I was really sick. I had a flu. I was running 102. I was living only a block and a half or so from the club so I had no excuse not to go, but boy, I don't remember anything about that gig, except for that. And also the fact that I realized there and then that I just didn't know how to front a group.

**What was it about fronting a group you didn't like?**

I was just not used to having other people on the stage with me at that point. I had come up playing with bands, but I was always sitting in the corner with my tenor banjo, or rhythm guitar, or whatever. And I had never fronted with any of the traditional jazz combos that I had played with. And getting up there and speaking in effect for 4 other people—who incidentally were behind me where I couldn't see them, which made me *very* nervous—I just didn't know how to do it. To this day when I'm doing some kind of group thing and I have to front it, I don't feel the same as when I'm solo.

**When you're up there yourself, how do you handle song intros? Do you like to keep them short?**

As a rule no. Some stories are actually more interesting than the songs themselves. There are some songs that I do where the intro is almost as long as the song. But only in the case where I really like the story. The trouble with a lot of the performers that I grew up with was their scholarship. They would get up and give this long dissertation on the song, the citation from FJ Child's

collections, Cecil Sharpe's collections, and it used to bore the piss out of me, I just couldn't stand it. Sometimes we're talking about people who were reasonably good performers. Good singers, anyway. But that kind of show, somehow or other along with your enjoyment of the song, you had to take your educational medicine. I really thought that was a big, big mistake. And it very much fell out of favor. But it was just that period where people were forced to get their material from books and collections because recordings were few and far between and very scarce. As more and more of the old stuff got reissued, the old 78s from the '20s and '30s, that kind of thing just phased out.

Seems like most of your repertory comes from somewhere else than those kinds of books.

Oh all kinds of places. Starting

out with your basic blues repertory, Leadbelly, Big Bill Broonzy, Josh White, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, that sort of thing. You know, blues classics. Which encompasses things which aren't blues, like *St. James Infirmary*, through jazz tunes, where *St. James Infirmary* actually comes in, old novelty tunes, minstrel show spin-offs like *One Meatball*. There's so many places to get songs from. Another reason why I never really became a singer-songwriter. Just what the world needs, another goddamn song.

**Where did you go to find songs? Recordings? Old performers?**

There were some of us who did that. Paul Clayton made any number of collecting trips, and he came up with 3 or 4 real beauts. There was a guy named Frank Warner who was of an older generation, and Frank collected dozens and dozens of songs that would have been lost otherwise. He collected *Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley*. Clayton collected 'Done laid around, done stayed around this old town too long'; he had to rewrite it because there wasn't much to the song as he collected it. He had to sort of fill in the gaps and round it off, but essentially it was a song that he had collected. And he also wrote the model for *Don't Think Twice*, a thing called *Who'll Buy You Ribbons When I'm Gone*—which he had based on an old minstrel song, called *Who'll Buy You Chickens When I'm Gone*, but that's another story.

**How did you decide on the canonical version of something you performed, was it just the lyrics you liked the best, or...**

No, the music and the chord changes always had a critical role for me. If I found a text that I liked but I didn't like the music, then I'd rewrite the music, and if I found music that I liked but I didn't like the text, I'd rewrite the text. I was always doing that, I still do it. There's no point in wedding good lyrics to bad music, or vice versa. Especially if you have the abilities to improve one or the other. Or as Paul Clayton used to say, 'if you can't write, rewrite, and if you can't rewrite, copyright.'

**So are your improvements invisible?**

I try to make them so. In a case like that, the writer should not obtrude. If you're writing a song out of whole cloth, that's one thing. But if you're rewriting and/or expanding something like that, you have to have a certain respect for the words and music that you're starting with.

I don't advertise the changes that I've made in songs either. And very often those things do get incorporated and I hear them back at me, but I don't care about that. They're just my contributions to the folk process.

**I was always rewriting. There's no point in wedding good lyrics to bad music. Or vice versa.**



## The Bottom Line celebrates 20 years

*And the astounding lineup of acts presented there makes it really something worth celebrating*

By Dorissa Bolinski

Since it opened two decades ago, the Bottom Line, located in the heart of Greenwich Village, has grown into a New York City legend. Over the years, its stage has supported the likes of Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, and Lou Reed, as well as a host of other artists from every musical genre. This cramped, but intimate space seems to bring out the best in an artist, which certainly accounts for the club's success.

The Bottom Line, owned by Allan Pepper and Stanley Shadowsky, reached its 20th anniversary last February and celebrated with a month-long lineup of some very special shows including the annual Fast Folk Revue. Pepper felt that the Bottom Line would prove to be an important club within the first few months of its opening because, "we were filling a need for this kind of music club in New York."

Pepper and Shadowsky are childhood friends who dreamed of owning a club together. After graduating from college, Snadowsky opened a law practice, and Pepper went on to teach sociology at Brooklyn College and Rutgers University. At the same time, Pepper remembers, "Stanley and I were always involved in music. We produced a couple of concerts and managed some talent. We also booted some New York clubs like the Village Gate, the Electric Circus, and Folk City for a long time."

Although musicians often perform acoustic or stripped down at the Bottom Line, Pepper acknowledges that the club is not a "folk club." "It's a music club — the best showcase for the best possible music that's around at a given time," he explains.

Over the years, the Bottom Line has played host to a number of famous as well as emerging acts. Pepper books the club himself and realizes the importance of giving exposure to newcomers on the music scene. Perhaps the most famous career launch credited to the Bottom Line is that of Bruce Springsteen who was featured on the covers of Newsweek and Time just after his 1975 show at the club. "As a club owner, I have to help build acts, and this club has always done that," Pepper says. "I don't always book people according to my own taste, but I base it on the quality of what they are doing."

Staying true to his philosophy of exposing new talent, Pepper decided to lend his stage to the Fast Folk Revue in the early 1980's after he was approached by editor Jack Hardy and Christine Lavin. "I had been a fan of the Fast Folk concept in promoting new artists," he states. "Jack is very talented and has had lot of vision. I'm grateful that the people at Fast Folk have involved me over the years."

The popularity of the Bottom Line has steadily grown throughout the '80's and '90's, but during the punk explosion of the late '70s, Pepper admits the club suffered some hard times. "A lot of bands didn't want to play 'sit down' clubs," he says. "As a result of that, we weren't getting a lot of hip, trendy bands of that time. But Stanley and I chose not to take out the tables even though we'd been advised to do so. We just had a certain vision and stayed true to it."

A renewed interest in songs and songwriters developed in the 1980s as many performers "unplugged" and began emphasizing their songwriting skills. With this in mind, Pepper developed the Bottom Line's "In Their Own Words" series which brings together a diverse group of songwriters who perform and talk about the writing process. The series began in May 1990 and has grown. It features artists in a group on stage with New York DJ Vin Scelsa as host. At various times, artists as diverse as Lou Reed, Syd Straw, Richard Thompson, and Mary Chapin-Carpenter have taken part.

"People love good songs, but radio isn't concerned with this," Pepper says. "I felt the public was getting short-changed because there was no outlet for songwriting."

According to Pepper, the series developed over a few years. "Several things came into play. The Bottom Line had been hosting the Fast Folk Revue, and I had always been fascinated by watching its crowds grow over the years and seeing that a lot of people have a



*The show on this issue's CD was Fast Folk's 12th annual revue.*

real interest in songs and songwriting. We usually sold out or came close to selling out the Fast Folk shows, and this interested me because these artists usually got little or no radio play," he says.

Pepper was also influenced by the "Writers in the Round" series in which four songwriters sit on stage and exchange songs at Nashville's Blue Bird Cafe. "But the thing that really helped me realize how to do the series," he recalls, "was a tour sponsored by Marlboro Cigarettes around 1990 with Lyle Lovett, Joe Ely, Guy Clark, and John Hiatt together with a moderator who threw questions at them between songs. I began to explain this concept to Vin Scelsa and tell him that I was interested in doing something similar, and he immediately said, 'Count me in.'"

"The first 'In Their Own Words' featured Fred Koller, Don Dixon, Ellen Shipley, and Mary Chapin-Carpenter. That evening, we saw the audience response, and knew we were onto something. There really is a desire to know more about songs and songwriters and to hear some of the stories about how particular songs were written."

Both men collaborate on each show, and Pepper says that Scelsa is instrumental in suggesting artists. There needs to be a chemistry on stage between the musicians which requires a lot of pre-planning. "In my mind, Vin makes the magic happen on stage," says Pepper. "He's got a wonderful ability to make people feel relaxed and comfortable about talking about themselves."

With The Bottom Line's success, Pepper and Snadowsky are considering licensing its name and opening similar clubs across the country. Currently, there is a Bottom Line in Japan which is celebrating its fifth year. Pepper and Snadowsky have recently been involved in the release of "Best of the In Their Own Words" recording on Razor and Tie Records, featuring highlights of past shows.

Naturally, Pepper is happy with the success of the Bottom Line, but he concedes that the business is not easy. "Not a night has gone by that either Stanley or myself has not been at the club," he says.

He attributes their success to the fact that he and his partner both still love their work. "We find excitement in music. We still enjoy coming to work. I think you have to love what you do and work very hard," he explains. "As long as your work is fun, it remains interesting. When it becomes boring, it's time to throw in the towel."

Obviously, Pepper and Snadowsky will not be "throwing in the towel" any time soon.

If you're coming to the New York area, be sure to check out the Bottom Line concert schedule. Each week spotlights some of the best entertainment around, and tickets are usually under \$17.50.

The Bottom Line is located at 15 West 4th Street in New York City. 212-228-6300.



## Songwriter Spotlight: David Massengill

Sharing the story behind the song "Rider on an Orphan Train," featured on this issue's CD

By Jim Campbell

David Massengill has been a mainstay on the New York City folk scene since moving from his native Bristol, Tenn., in 1976. His first album, on Flying Fish, is called *Coming Up For Air*. He has had songs recorded by artists as diverse as The Roches, Joan Baez and Chad Mitchell. The song "Rider On an Orphan Train" (on which Massengill accompanies his vocal on mountain dulcimer) is the title track for a collection he's currently shopping to independent record labels. Here's how Massengill built up this "hill country" narrative, essentially making the story his own.

### What got you going on "Rider On an Orphan Train"?

I got two letters from Don McClanahan (who lives in Missouri. He had heard "My Name Joe" on the radio (and) my name, David Massengill. Now, that was the name he was born with — he was born a Massengill and was later adopted into the McClanahan family. He wrote me on the long chance that I might know something about him and that maybe he was distantly related. He had been separated from his brother. Somehow, they were not adopted together. He had always wondered about his brother and couldn't find him. He'd been lookin' for him all his life...

So, I wrote him a letter and talked about how well my brother and I got along, and how we played football together and this sort of thing. I sympathized with him. Then, I got his third letter. He was very happy that I had taken the time out, (but) he said, "I don't think I'll ever find my brother. It's a stone wall." I read those lines—it was so sad to read those lines—and that's when I said to myself, "I think I'm gonna write his story into a song."

I started working on the song and took a lot of false turns. Sometimes, I'll do this, since a lot of my songs are stories. I'll plot it out and say, "Well, it could happen this way, or it could happen that way." I didn't write it consecutively. I wrote the verses all over the place and then put 'em to where it looked the best.

I also wanted to say his brother's name, James, (though) I didn't want to use it two verses in a row; I thought that would be too much. So, every other verse, I would use his brother's name. And that was one of the ways that helped me decide where the verses would go.

### You're creating a sense of the character being haunted by his brother's face.

Yes, absolutely! In his real life, he doesn't remember his brother, but I decided that it would be more poignant that he would remember his brother and their actual parting.

Why don't I get the letter that I wrote him where I explained why I did certain things. (Gets letter and begins reading.)

*Dear Don, I'm hoping you are well. After I received your last letter back in December, your story internalized inside me. I kept thinking about it and thinking about it and pretty soon, I was writing it down in verse form and making up a melody to go with it. It took me a couple months to complete, start to finish. I had a few verses at first, but then I adjusted the story line a bit and was able to bring in more verses.*

*I read an article ten years ago about the history of the orphan train. Right after the Civil War, there were so many orphan children in the larger cities of the Northeast that many could not be placed. Someone thought to put them on a train and send them across the country from Maine to Texas. Across the way, the children could be adopted by any willing farmer or family. Often times, brothers and sisters would be chosen separately, never to see or hear from them again. This practice of the orphan train continued all the way through the 1930's.*

*When I read that article ten years ago, I thought I might want to write about it in some way, someday. When I received your first letters, I was struck at how similar your story was to the orphan train story. Sometimes, I think fate brings a song, even more than effort or good intentions. I think it was easier for me as a writer that I didn't know all the particulars about your own adoptive case. In the song, I was thinking that one reason you were unable to find your brother, James, was that your adoptive files were*

*lost, destroyed or closed somehow. As a narrative device, I chose to have the files lost in a flood. I changed the ages of the boys to five and three so that they could remember one another; so when he dreams of reuniting, that image comes back. All the changes I've made were to help the story along. I hope you like it, since you are its main inspiration...*

*In your third letter, you wrote, "I don't think I'll ever find him. It's a stone wall." When I read those lines, the sadness of it became so real to me that it became my sadness too. That's what I mean when I say, "Your story internalized inside me."*

And I go on...

It all focuses on that couplet, "Sometimes life is a stone wall/You either climb or else you fall." I wanted to use more of his language. I searched through his letters for more, but what I was writing, the meter, wouldn't bear his way of phrasing things.

**That couplet also sums up the whole narrative in that, there's no conclusion. It's really open-ended. It isn't preaching either. Instead, the scenario's being laid out and you're being left to just feel the scenario, as opposed to being told what to feel, or how to feel.**

I'm glad you say that, because even when I do get political in some of my songs, I hope that I don't preach. I hope that I just let the story do the thing, because, even when people disagree with your politics, the story will move them. That's the way I like to do political songs, not in a politically-correct way, but in a narrative way.

**It feels like you've really let this whole story grow on you and become yours.**

Sometimes, like method actors, they'll become their character. In a way, that was probably part of what I did.

I took a novel-writing class with Reynolds Price, a very well-known Southern writer (although Southern writers hate to hear that). He was talking one day about who it is that you write for: "Don't say you write for yourself. There's some secret audience, some secret person, that you want to read your thing. Who is it for you?"

I thought immediately, "It's my younger brother, Mike!"

All our lives, we were in the same room. Even though our family was fairly well-off, we didn't have separate rooms. Mike was two years younger and I was always explaining the world to him, or this-or-that. We played football and when we were on the same side, people couldn't beat us — we worked really well together. We were very different people, but there was always a real love between us.

So, when I got this letter, I just immediately thought of Mike and how bad I'd felt if I hadn't had him to grow up with.

**Let's talk about the two next-to-last verses. Suddenly, the tone changes. The character goes into an almost happy mood — not for him, but for his brother that he'll never see again.**

Those two verses are very, very important to the song and that they come where they do, too. Of course, everybody wants a happy ending. Of course, I want Don to see his brother again. Maybe, we'll be on "Oprah Winfrey" some day. Somehow, we'll get them together. Somehow, some sort of miracle will happen. For the song, I just felt like I couldn't do that, but I felt like I could do that in his dreams. To unite him in his dreams, I thought, was a fair thing. Then, I wanted him to think about his brother and wish him well.

The melody was very important, too. As simple as it is, I'll work on the melody as long as I'll work on the lyrics, sometimes.

I found out (the melody source) from U. Utah Phillips, because we did a festival and he had written a song about the orphan train. We did a little workshop and we did 'em in tandem, one after another. He really liked my song and he kept asking me to sing it to him one more time. He said, "Yeah, that's were it is."

He said I got part of the melody from "Banks of the Ohio," an old folk song. And I said, "Great!" Because, sometimes, you hear melodies of your life and you don't know. If they come out naturally and you stole them naturally, that's the best way.



# Bios

Ed Carey is a 25-year-old singer-wongwriter from South Salem, NY. He has recorded several songs with Fast Folk. "Foolish Game" appeared in issue 705. Info: P.O. Box 280, Cross River, NY 10518.

Patrick Brayer is a singer-songwriter from Fontana, Calif. His work has been recorded by Larry Sparks, John Doe and Stuart Duncan. Patrick also hosts the Starvation Cafe Radio Archives radio show on the University of California-Riverdale's KUCR. Patrick has recorded and released nine cassettes. Contact: The Brayer Archives, 17586 Pinedale, Fontana, CA 92235, or call (909) 823-2016.

Originally from New Jersey, Wendy Beckerman has been an active part of the New York acoustic scene since she began songwriting in 1987. She has performed in the last six annual Fast Folk Revues and has recorded several songs for the magazine. In addition to touring Europe, Wendy has played many venues in the U.S. Her second album, *Marina's Owl*, was released in November. Contact: Great Divide Records, 178 W. Houston St., Suite 9, New York, NY 10014; (212) 989-7088.



Just when you think you've got him figured, Buddy Mondlock throws you another curve. He's one of the uncategorized wonders you meet in your life (if you're lucky) who grips you with his turn of a phrase and makes you laugh when you had no intention. In an age of purported gloom and doom, his is the voice of a poignant while pragmatic poet. A voice sometimes of angst but often of hope.



He has found his niche in the songwriting community of Nashville where "it's nice to be somewhere where people have a notion of what my life is like instead of people being baffled by me."

His roots, however, lie in the clubs and alleys of Chicago, hearing and later playing an emotive amalgamation of music and drawing on the influences of sognwriters such as Steve Goodman, John Prine, Rickie Lee Jones, Randy Newman, Paul Simon and Guy Clark. It was Clark who, meeting Buddy at the Kerrville Folk Festival, encouraged him to move to Nashville, which he did in 1988 when he signed with EMI Music Publishing.

In addition to peroforming solo and with his band both here and abroad, Buddy writes with the likes of Janis Ian, Garth Brooks, Alice Randall and Randy VanWarmer. He's presently working on his second album project. His songs are slices of life ranging from a skeltopn in a closet, suicide of a homeless man, the creative muse and the compulsion to express it, love found, love lost, a black girl learning she is "different" and politics.



When Camille West stopped growing at a mere five feet, she elected to become a satirical singer-songwriter because notes were the only high things she didn't need a

stepladder to reach. This vertically challenged artist chronicles life's absurdities from her home in Queensbury, N.Y., and perfoms at coffeehouses, clubs and festivals throughout the Northeast. Info: RD2, 5 Pinewood Hollow, Queensbury, NY 12804.

Catie Curtis began singing in restaurants in southern Maine when she was 15 and was a drummer in high school before she picked up her first guitar. She started writing songs during her college years at Brown University. After gaining recognition as a winner in the WGBH "Unknown Folkies" songwriters' contest, Catie released her first album, *Dandelion*, in December of 1989. In 1990, she won the Sugarbush "New Faces in Folk" contest and in 1991 was selected as a finalist in both the Great Woods songwriters' contest and the Acoustic Underground contest.



Through word of mouth, her song "Mine Fields" was selected for a Rhino Records compilation CD which also included cuts by Joan Baez and the Indigo Girls. Catie has been touring fulltime since September 1992. She released *From Years to Hours* more than two years ago and has just released *Truth From Lies*. Contact: P.O. Box 8274, Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

Dave Van Ronk has released more than 20 albums, including the recent retrospective *A Van Ronk Chrestomathy* on the Gazell label. Dave has appeared in Fast Folk on numerous occasions and apeaks at length in an interview beginning on page three of this issue.



Lisa McCormick began playing guitar at the age of 10; by 16 she was already busy entertaining local music club audiences. Following a variety of musical incarnations spanning folk, classical and rock 'n' roll, she found her voice as a songwriter, vocalist and guitarist. During the past several years, McCormick has brought her talents to venues throughout New England, both as a solo performer and with her rock trio, *Intelligent Life*.

In the summer of 1993, Lisa completed her second recording project, *Six Song Sampler*. Additiionally, she composed and performed the soundtrack for a television commercial in New York State. Othe rhighlights include working as a studio musician on a Laurie Anderson album produced by Roma Baran and acknowledgment in the 1990 *Billboard Magazine* Songwriters' Contest.

Info: RFD #1 Box 148, Putney, VT 05346; (802) 387-5452.

Jack Hardy was born in Indiana. He spent his formative years in Colorado where he was torn between opera and country-western and decided on folk as a compromise. Following the adage, "Nothing happens unless you make it happen," Jack helped to rebuild the folk scene at New York's Folk City, and founded the Song Project, the Songwriters' Exchange and the Fast Folk Musical Magazine. Jack has ten albums and six plays to his credit. His latest album, *Civil Wars*, was released last fall and is available through Great Divide Records, 178 W. Houston St., Suite 9, New York, NY 10014.





Originally from Philadelphia and living in the San Francisco Bay area since 1981, **Chuck Brodsky** was a 1992 New Folk winner at the Napa Valley (Calif.) Folk Festival. He's played the Philadelphia and Kerrville festivals and tours nationally. The song "Blow 'Em Away" came to Chuck after nine years of stressful driving jobs and perhaps one too many pucks to the head (he's a goaltender in his local hockey league). It has become a cult favorite throughout California and appeared on *Fast Folk* issue 707.

*Live from Spoon City*, his debut album, is available by mail. Contact: Chuck Brodsky, P.O. Box 9818, Berkeley, CA 94709; (415) 974-9861.



Native Vermonter **Louise Taylor** has been bringing her personal brand of contemporary folk music to New England audiences for the past five years. With the release of her 1992 CD *Looking for Rivers*, Louise caught the attention of *Fast Folk*, which reviewed the album in Issue 608.

This year found Louise performing at noteworthy folk clubs and coffeehouses throughout the Northeast. She is currently working on her next release. Louise has studied voice with the innovative Frank Baker and his colleague Michael Downes of Bennington, Vt.

Info: Blue Coyote Records, RR1 Box 1505, Newfane, VT 05345. Send \$15 for CD, \$10 for tape, plus \$2 for shipping and handling (\$1 for each additional unit.)



**Jim Allen** is a native of The Bronx who has been on the Village scene since 1988. His songs have been featured in the *Fast Folk* Revue since 1989. "Hole in the Sky" appeared in issue 707. He is currently working on a new recording. Info: 1002 Quincy Avenue, Bronx, NY 10465.

**David Massengill** is a native of Bristol, Tenn., where he once chased a bobcat and vice versa. He made his debut at Folk City in Greenwich Village, accompanying himself on dulcimer. Dave Van Ronk taught him guitar and took him on two national tours. Van Ronk notes that Massengill's songwriting bears "the signature of a master." Though Woody Guthrie is his greatest influence, his songs are compared with Dylan's, Paul Simon's, and even the B-52s'. He has opened the Newport Folk Festival and closed the 25th anniversary concert for Folk City, which aired on PBS and BBC-TV. He has also performed at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center. His songs have been recorded by The Roches and Joan Baez. His own recording of "My Name Joe" appears on the Windham Hill collection *Legacy*. Produced by Steve Addabbo, his debut album, *Coming Up for Air*, was released on Flying Fish. Contact: (212) 533-6297.



A native of East Lansing, Michigan, **Kitty Donohoe** has four albums to her credit, including the CD and cassette *As Sparks Fly Upward* as well as the recently released *Clear Water: Songs for Earthlings*, a collection of children's songs. She tours regularly in

Michigan and on the East Coast. Info: Kitty Donohoe, 915 Collingswood, Wast Lansing, MI 48823, or call (517) 351-2919.

After spending the last several years living and performing in New York, **Richard Julian** has recently been recording demos with highly regarded producer Steve Addabbo (Suzanne Vega, Shawn Colvin, Buddy Mondlock). With the support of Addabbo's management company, AGF Entertainment, Julian has formed a band to complement his live performance, and has shared bills with Freedy Johnston and The Lemonheads.

Since coming to New York in 1986 at the age of 18, Richard has been established among the upper ranks of singer-songwriters. In addition to touring Italy, Switzerland and Germany, he has performed at the Newport Folk Festival, the Bluebird Cafe in Nashville, the Iron Horse in Southampton, Mass., and has been a strong presence in the annual *Fast Folk* Revue at the Bottom Line for the last five years.



## The band:

**Jeff Berman** (upright bass) has worked as a percussionist and vibraphonist throughout the U.S. and Europe. He has played and recorded with a widely eclectic group of artists including C'est What, Loudon Wainwright III, Susan Osborn, Frank Christian, Tony Trishcka, Andy Statman, "Blue" Gene Tyranny and Peter Gordon's Love of Life Orchestra, to name just a few. His first recording as a leader, *Things She Said*, on Palmetto CD, was released in 1993.

**Mark Dann** (lead guitar) lives in Tribeca, where he builds and repairs guitars and runs a 24-track recording studio. He also currently plays bass around town with The Robert Ross Band and a Tibetan rock 'n' roll band, The Dharma Bums.

**Jeff Hardy** (drums) has recorded with many people including his brother Jack, Frank Christian, Wendy Beckerman and Steve Forbert. He has done every *Fast Folk* show and also works as a chef.



*A thousand more thanks to Fast Folk alumnae Suzanne Vega and Lucy Kaplanski, for their kind generosity and fine performances in the October benefit for the Fast Folk Cafe.*

# Lyrics

## 1. Foolish Game

(Ed Carey)

The cuts they go so deep as to pierce my heart  
And leave me wounded inside  
And the cuts that scar my memory  
They're the hardest ones to hide

*Chorus:* I've tested the waters a time or two  
Now I'd rather keep my feet on the shore  
'Cause love is just a foolish game  
That I've played somewhere before

I'll let love slip by my fingertips  
As my heart stands shattered and frail  
When I run the dust will fly from my feet  
As it covers up my trail

*Chorus*

You can run but you can't hide  
From shattered dreams that take your heart for a ride  
You get yourself together, get on the right track  
Just then you realize your heart ain't coming back

The cuts they go so deep as to pierce my heart  
And leave me wounded inside  
And the cuts that scar my memory  
They're the hardest ones to hide

*Chorus*

©1993, Ed Carey

## 2. Three Kinds of News

(Patrick Brayer)

The lord he gave me a young wife  
Only a mother and a prison can give you life  
Can give you life  
Can give you life  
What am I gonna do  
What are you gonna do  
What are we gonna do  
That's three kinds of news

Brave is brave as brave is true  
I've got three kinds of news for you  
Three kinds of news  
Three kinds of news  
What am I gonna do...

Part time flesh and full time bone  
I take you to a house that nobody owns  
Nobody owns  
Nobody owns  
What am I gonna do...

Polishing the family caprice I finally condone  
Kids smokin' crack in my childhood home  
In my childhood  
Childhood home  
What am I gonna do...

Well, a metal flake Bonneville with a trunk full of  
flowers  
Hit a black cow on the road in the wee wee hours

In the wee  
Wee wee hours  
It hit a vagrant and caught him on fire  
What if he was the Messiah  
What are we gonna do  
And what's he gonna do  
And what are you gonna do  
Ya see that's three kinds of news

©1993, Patrick Brayer

## 3. Gillianna

(Wendy Beckerman)

All the boys love Gillianna  
Gillianna understands  
Follow her across the country  
Two by sea and one by land

All the girls love Gillianna  
Gather close to touch her skin  
Hang their beads upon her body  
Gillianna Magdalene

Gillianna small and might  
Tucks her hair behind her ear  
Carries on her naked shoulder  
Two regrets and one small tear

Gillianna writes a letter  
Says I hope your heart feels better  
Let the pages fall  
They feel nothing at all

Once she mingled with magicians  
Gillianna Halloween  
Now she answers all your riddles  
In the telephone machine

Gillianna blue and cloudy  
Takes a rowboat out to sea  
Ends the day without a lover  
Two get hooked and one set free

©1992, Wendy Beckerman

## 4. Cats of the Coliseum

(Buddy Mondlock)

The cats of the Coliseum sit on the stones  
With the Coca-Cola cans and the dry pigeon bones  
Warming in the sun where centuries have slept  
They are older than the ruins they are no one's  
pets

The cats of the Coliseum are finishing a meal  
They are lazy in their grace they are quicker than  
steel  
They are innocent and wild with faces none too  
clean  
They will eat what they can catch and it will not  
disturb their dreams

On my trip to Rome I visited the Sistine Chapel  
and the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica  
Saw a lot of nuns and priests there and the Swiss  
guard too but the Pope was in Vienna  
Threw a coin in the Trevi Fountain and I cabbed it  
over to the ruins of the Agora  
Had a little trouble by the Coliseum so I spent the  
afternoon at American Express

The cats of the Coliseum pose for photographs  
They can steal the tourist heart they can make a  
tourist laugh  
Their images will wind up far away as souvenirs

Their souls will stay with them even those for so  
few years

The cats of the Coliseum run away on two legs  
Their names are Raphael, Peppino, and Olei  
They are living by their wits and they will do the  
best they can  
And my travelers checks are gone in a nine year  
old's hand

On my trip to Rome I visited the Sistine Chapel  
and the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica  
Saw a lot of paintings there and a statue by  
Michaelangelo called the Pieta  
Walked the gardens of the Villa Borghese and I  
bought a cool shirt in a store on Via Salaria  
Had a little trouble by the Coliseum so I spent the  
afternoon at American Express

The cats of the Coliseum sit on the stones  
With the Coca-Cola cans and the dry pigeon bones  
Warming in the sun where centuries have slept  
They are older than the ruins they are no one's  
pets

©1990, Buddy Mondlock

## 5. The Viennese Drinking Song

(Camille West)

Wherever we go, there's id and there's ego;  
The conflicts we never outgrow  
Anxiety's built on repression and guilt  
(Ask any good Catholic you know).  
There are feelings inside which are felt and denied  
And in trying to hide them we find  
That the ones we repress are the ones we express  
(And they tell me it's all in my mind).

*Chorus:* And we sing  
Ja, ja, ja, ja  
So many things to avoid  
Ja, ja, ja, ja  
The Gospel according to Freud

One day my kid came to me straight from his ther-  
apy  
(Used to be strictly Gestalt)  
He said "I'm not complainin', but my toilet trainin'  
Was so rough you're really at fault."  
Perhaps if I'd waited, he'd not be fixated  
I wish that I'd made it a game  
So I owe an apology, thank you psychology  
My fault the kid is insane.

*Chorus*

Our sons want to marry us  
Freud says the Oedipus complex is strong and it's  
real

These boys cause a ruckus; they all want to -  
Shall we say feel? - what they ought not to feel  
Between father and son there's a war to be won  
Over mama's affectionate glance  
Says pop to his kid, "What's this crap about id?  
Keep your impulses inside your pants."

*Chorus*

And ladies, between us, we envy the penis  
Says Freud it's our major drawback  
Thus all our neuroses and sometimes psychoses  
Begin over something we lack  
And so man's exterior makes his superior



Freud says our envy is mute  
But I must disagree, 'cause according to me  
The zucchini's a great substitute.

*Chorus, two times*

©1990, Camille West

## 6. Troubled Mind (Catie Curtis)

I've been getting down about all the runaround  
About all the pushing and the standing in line  
But like my friends say, you gotta do it anyway  
And it just gets harder when you ask why

*Chorus:* But I'm tired from all the weight  
I'm tired of being strong  
So won't you come and stay  
And let me lay down in your arms  
Down in your arms

I've been getting up early, I've been getting my  
coffee  
I've been getting in my car and driving all over  
town  
Talking to myself while I'm taking off my seat belt  
Some people don't know how to slow down

*Chorus*

I've got a troubled a troubled mind  
And you've got a heart a heart so kind  
So kind

So pack an overnight bag  
Don't worry about what you have  
'Cause if you need something you can just use  
mine  
And you don't have to promise more than you want  
to  
But if you want to see me, this would be a good  
time

*Chorus*

©1993 Catie Curtis

## 7. Losers (Dave Van Ronk)

I blew my wad playin' seven card stud  
I was playin' for money he was playin' for blood  
On the way back home Big Willy got mugged  
Now he's just another loser like me

Losers losers  
Got took for my whosis  
That shotgun crown  
And he's just another loser like me

See that kid sittin' back of the bar  
He's pickin' up a storm on a Martin guitar  
That poor kid thinks he's gonna be a star  
He's just another loser like me

Losers losers  
Some are raggars some are blues-ers  
Makin' disco sounds in a Ho-Jo lounge  
With a bunch of other losers like me

Love has busted up this cat for sure  
He's cryin' like a baby and his baby is gone

Poor fool don't know what he's cryin' for  
He's just another loser like me

Losers losers  
I can't say no to cruisers  
Well she says when to be back again  
And he's just another loser like me

There's a hobo up in heaven on the golden street  
He's panhandlin' on the edge of Adam's Eden  
He hocked his heart for some sneaky pete  
He's just another loser like me

Losers losers  
Some are dopers some are boozers  
Oh the muscatell is down in hell  
And he's just another loser like me

When God appeared to Saint John Wayne  
He told him, Duke I'ma comin' again  
Life is just a wagon train  
And I'm glad you're not a loser like me

Losers losers  
Ten gallon bruisers  
Ghengis Kahn to the Fuller brush man  
They're just a bunch of losers like me  
©1993 Dave Van Ronk

## 8. Sex and Consequences (Lisa McCormick)

Everybody who ever lived,  
With the possible exception of Jesus  
Is proof that part of the master's plan  
Was physically designed to please us  
The very fact that you are alive  
Is living proof that at least once or twice  
Your mother and father,  
Yes, Mommy and Daddy had sex

*Chorus:* Sex can be love. Sex can be a weapon  
Makes new babies. Can be the kiss of death.  
Scar you for life, be all that you live for  
Makes you act crazy  
Sex and consequences

Sex is sacred, sex is a sin  
Depending on the kind of situation you are in  
Sex is serious, sex is a game  
Sex is animal, sex is tame  
Sex is a business, sex it is free  
1-900-tell-it-to-me  
Sex sells carbeurators, sex sells beer  
Sex is missionary, sex is queer

*Chorus*

No, I don't want to talk about it, it's on every-  
body's  
mind  
We are all walking evidence of the physical kind  
Welcome to my century  
To my post-traumatic family  
To the death of spontaneity  
Read it and weep, kiss it goodbye  
Wrap it in plastic, tell your children why  
What put you in the cradle  
Can put you in the grave  
We used to make whoopie  
But now we just wave.

*Chorus*

©1993 Lisa McCormick

## 9. Dachau (Jack Hardy)

Only a stone's throw  
That close to knowing  
Over the stone wall  
So close to the town

That place you can't go  
So hard to travel  
Picked up a small stone  
Could not put it down

Take all of my money  
Take all of my clothing  
Take all of my labor  
I still do not know

I still cannot feel it  
Or make it a real thing  
How one to another  
Could ever be so

And I'm not a tailor  
And I'm not a gypsy  
Nor a professor  
With my name on my face

A freedom fighter  
A left wing conspirator  
Who traveled the boxcars  
To this lonely place

I'm just a tourist  
I take a moment  
Or maybe a relic  
Though only a stone

Like East Europeans  
Posing for photos  
In front of the ovens  
A video show

I wanted to feel it  
The final solution  
I want it to touch me  
To take me inside

I want it to hold me  
I want it to scold me  
Make me part of the blame  
Why so many died

But only foundations  
Are left of the stone walls  
Almost at closing  
With time running out

I walked in the cold rain  
Clutching the cold stone  
The gate was still open  
For us to walk out

©1994 Jack Hardy

## 10. Blow 'Em Away (Chuck Brodsky)

Every morning, I commute

A mild-mannered man in a business suit  
Now I want to get home, at the end of the day  
But there's all these other cars in the way  
I pull up behind one, I pull out my pistol  
I blow 'em away.

I'm driving my car, I want to go fast  
But there's a slow car, won't let me pass  
I flash my lights and I honk my horn  
I have to consider him warned  
I pull up behind him, I pull out my pistol  
And I blow 'em away.

*Chorus:* Jesse James behind the wheel  
It's high noon in my automobile  
You can call me crazy, you can call me sick  
But let me get where I'm going to quick

Some sonofabitch cut me off  
Three whole lanes he cut across  
He made me mad, he made me swerve  
Sonofabitch got what he deserved  
I pulled up behind him, I pulled out my pistol  
I blew 'em away.

The motorcycle is riding between  
The backed up traffic, right between the lanes  
You know to me, that's an act of war  
I saw him coming, I opened my door  
I knocked him over, I pulled out my pistol  
I blew 'em away.

*Chorus*

That little red sportscar was flying past  
He made me jealous, went so fast  
I gave him the finger, I thumbed my nose  
It took fifty miles for me to get close enough,  
I pulled up behind him and pulled out my pistol  
And blew 'em away.

That little old lady, bless her heart  
Walking her poodle across the boulevard  
It was waering a red knitted sweater  
And a red knitted hat  
Its name was Fifi, or something stupid like that  
I said, "Here, Fifi," I pulled out my pistol  
And blew it away.

*Chorus*

©1993 Chuck Brodsky

**11. Last Chance Dance**

(Louise Taylor)

Well the lesson here is  
You gotta lay down your fears  
Take another chance  
Give yourself the room to dance  
If you lighten up your step  
The less you'll feel the floor  
So move cautiously if you must  
Don't forget what you came here for  
Last chance  
Last chance dance

Well this ain't no high school parking lot  
Watching the girls on the blacktop  
Smoking your last butt  
Waiting for the bell  
Or the time you swore you did that before

And you'll never do it again  
Never's too long a time  
For an old wound to mend  
Last chance  
Last chance dance

Well there's more than meets the eye here  
More than just what for  
Or the subtle combinations  
Of moving across a beautiful dance floor  
This is it this is life  
The big whirl round  
You only get one spin here  
So stand your ground  
Last chance  
Last chance dance

© 1992, Louise Taylor

**12. Hole in the Sky**

(Jim Allen)

There's a hole in the sky  
Where the wind never blows  
Where the rain never falls  
Where nobody goes  
Won't you follow my will  
On the day that I die  
And bury me under  
A hole in the sky

So I may be removed  
From the arms of the earth  
To a region of light  
For whatever it's worth  
Won't you follow my will  
On the day that I die  
And bury me under  
A hole in the sky

When that black limousine  
Comes to carry the load  
And there's nothing to see  
On this side of the road  
Won't you follow my will  
On the day that I die  
And bury me under  
A hole in the sky

©1993 Jim Allen

**13. Rider on an Orphan Train**

(David Massengill)

Once I rode an orphan train  
And my brother did the same  
They split us up in Missouri  
James was five and I was three.

He got taken by some pair  
But for me they did not care  
We were brave and did not cry  
When they made us say goodbye

That was the last I saw of him  
Before some family took me in  
But I swore I'd run away  
And find my brother James someday

I went back when I was grown  
To see how old the Children's Home  
And I asked for to see my file  
Of when I was an orphan child

It's sad they say, there's been a flood  
File washed away in Missouri mud  
Sometimes life is a stone wall  
You either climb or else you fall

In every town on every street  
All the faces that I meet  
And I wonder could one be  
My brother James come back to me

Though I don't know where he's gone  
I have searched my whole life long  
Now I roam from town to town  
But there's no orphan lost and found

Sometimes I dream a pleasant sight  
My brother James and I unite  
Remembering in our last goodbye  
No longer brave, we start to cry

I hope he lives a life of ease  
All his days a soft warm breeze  
May he sit upon a throne  
And may he never sleep alone

Once I rode an orphan train  
And my brother did the same  
They split us up in Missouri  
James was five and I was three.

© 1993, David Massengill

**14. Dyslexia**

(Camille West)

I was only six years old  
When I learned how to read  
I got the education  
Every child is guaranteed  
We read around the classroom  
Teacher hollered, "Next!"  
I was only comfortable  
When reading Hebrew text  
I'm dyslexic and I'm mad  
D-A-M

Well I met a boy named Otto  
I loved him for his name  
Backwards and forwards  
It always looked the same  
He took me to a musical  
I gave him such a hug  
I said, "Oh thank you this is such a great  
production of  
Annie Get Your Nug"  
I'm dyslexic and I'm mad  
D-A-M

Backwards forwards sideways  
Up and down and down and out  
It's all so topsy turvy  
It makes me want to shout  
Is there anybody out there  
Who could lift this mental fog  
I may not be religious  
But I do believe in Dog

Driving down the highway  
On a dark and stormy night  
I hit the left hand signal



Of course I headed right  
A cop gave me a ticket  
What was even worse  
When I went to pull away from him  
Don't you know I threw it in reverse  
Tish happens  
D-A-M

Some folks think it's a handicap  
But I think they're wrong  
'Cause I get the backwards lyrics  
In those heavy metal songs  
Economic forecast and the logic of defense  
Even presidential speeches  
Hell, they all make sense  
I'm dyslexic  
Hot damn  
M-A-D  
I'm dyslexic  
and I'm mad  
D-A-M

© 1994, Camille West

### 15. Thin Ice

(Kitty Donohoe)

Love can be thin ice  
Dark and cold and full of treachery  
Waiting for just one mistake  
To turn that love into mockery

Time heals, time fades  
Time changes most everything  
Time can make it hard to see  
The love that once made your heart wings

*Chorus:* And when all seem lost  
Sometimes the only thing to do  
Is to hold on  
And let that old love carry you  
Let that old love carry you  
Let that old love carry you  
Back to safer ground

Love is a wooden bridge  
Built to keep us above the tracks  
When the weight becomes too much  
The smallest splinters turn to cracks

Love can be thin ice  
Dark and cold and full of treachery  
Waiting for just one false step  
To turn that love into mockery

*Chorus*

© 1993, Kitty Donohoe

### 16. Wedding Song

(Richard Julian)

Last night I dreamed we got married  
In a civil ceremony in the state of Delaware  
All our friends were there with bells on  
And holy matrimony even my lawyer was there  
You drove up on a Harley in your white wedding  
dress  
Walked down the aisle as Elvis Presley sang  
Someone I didn't know complained  
August ain't the month to have these things  
She was from your mother's side

*Chorus:* That's when I came to you  
Tried to explain to you  
Why it is I need your love  
You were crying like a cloud as I vowed  
I'd never dream of  
Ever leaving you  
Only dream that you will not be late  
When you meet me in the second smallest state

Uncle Isaac was his usual  
Directing all the strangers to the hall  
He reminded cousin Albert  
To make the turnoff where we buried Uncle Paul  
And how strange Pauly looked  
Lynin' in that coffin  
Since he hadn't done that often in his day  
Oh Albert laughed so hard he started coughin'  
Said, hey Issac,  
What's a wedding from a funeral anyway

*Chorus*

There was salmon shrimp and chicken and children  
Like the ones that would be ours  
And I think it was Issac who finally fell into the  
punch

But I'm fuzzy on that part  
'Cause the next thing I knew  
I was lost in Peru  
With the Spanish kid who used to live upstairs  
Then I knew this was a dream and it wasn't true  
But I woke up  
I woke up and you were there

That's when you came to me  
Tried to explain to me  
Why it is I need your love  
I was crying like a cloud as you vowed  
You'd never dream of  
Ever leaving me  
And I knew it could only be you  
To make these dreams that I have all come true  
© 1994, Richard Julian

### 17. Judy

(Wendy Beckerman)

Judy has come in  
And her face is yellowing  
No one tells her so  
But they say it when she goes  
So I asked her on the phone  
She was calling from the street  
Is there something I can do  
And her voice rose from beneath her feet

*Chorus:* I want to be alone  
I want to be with people  
I want to be a bird who flies south  
I want a heart of snow  
Hard enough to walk on  
A heart of snow  
Soft enough to fall in

Judy's walking home  
She's been walking every day  
Looking for her soul  
Thinking the birds carried it away  
And she doesn't want the truth  
And she doesn't want the lie

And she doesn't want the neighborhood  
To laugh above her midnight cry

I want to walk through the wall  
I want the sun up again  
I want the years to go by  
So I can see how it ends  
I want to fight off the enemy  
But I can't find where it lies  
I want to ring all the doorbells  
And run away alive

*Chorus*

I was once a child  
Who could hold my breath so long  
Judy said this  
And I thought it made her strong  
And she said she had to go  
And it took a while to do  
And I heard her daddy say  
Hold your breath and you turn blue

*Chorus*

©1994 Wendy Beckerman

### 18. Hole in the Bucket

(Catie Curtis)

I went down to the city and I found myself a job  
Working for the people who do need some helping  
out  
But then in truth I found there was so little left to  
give  
The government might save there lives  
Might not help them to live

*Chorus:*

There's a hole in the bucket and the people fall out  
There's money underground but you can't get it  
out  
When you stand at the state house, smile and say  
"Please?"  
There's a crack in the floor and the people fall  
through  
And they wind up coming back to you  
From a place it seems like they can never leave  
There's a hole in the system for people in need.

How do you tell a woman who is 82 years old  
Poor and lying in her bed and needing help at home  
That there is no more money, there is nothing you  
can do  
Just hold on for another year and we'll try to get to  
you

*Chorus*

Oh, beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves  
of grain  
America, you're beautiful but you have got to  
change  
You think of how to save your skin but you never  
mind the bones  
Have we become a country where the hearts have  
turned to stones?

©1991 Catie Curtis (ASCAP)

# Credits

Fast Folk Vol. 8, Number 2  
November, 1994  
Live at the Bottom Line 1994

**1. Foolish Game**

(Ed Carey)

Buddy Mondlock: lead vocal  
Jack, Richard: backup vocals

**2. Three Kinds of News**

(Patrick Brayer)

Jack Hardy: lead vocal  
Louise, Wendy: backup vocals

**3. Gillianna**

(Wendy Beckerman)

Wendy: lead vocal  
Louise: backup vocal

**4 Cats of the Colosseum**

(Buddy Mondlock)

Buddy: lead vocal  
Louise, Richard: backup vocals

**5. The Viennese Drinking Song**

(Camille West)

Camille: vocal

**6. Troubled Mind**

(Catie Curtis)

Catie: vocal

**7. Losers**

(Dave Van Ronk)

Dave: vocal

**8. Sex and Consequences**

(Lisa McCormick)

Wendy: lead vocal  
Louise, Catie: backup vocals

**9. Dachau**

(Jack Hardy)

Jack: lead vocal  
Wendy: backup vocal

**10. Blow 'Em Away**

(Chuck Brodsky)

Richard Julian: lead vocal  
Entire cast: backup vocals

**11. Last Chance Dance**

(Louise Taylor)

Louise: lead vocal

**12. Hole in the Sky**

(Jim Allen)

Richard Julian: lead vocal  
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**13. Rider on an Orphan Train**

(David Massengill)

David: vocal

**14. Dyslexia**

(Camille West)

Camille: vocal

**15. Thin Ice**

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Richard: vocal

**17. Judy**

(Wendy Beckerman)

Wendy: vocal

**18: Hole in the Bucket**

(Catie Curtis)

Catie: vocal  
Entire cast: backup vocals

**The band:**

Jeff Berman, upright bass  
Mark Dann, lead guitar  
Jeff Hardy: drums

**Recording engineer:**

Peter Beckerman

**Master of Ceremonies:**

Brian Crawley

**Stage Managers:** John Shore,

Lori Libutti, Ken Korreis

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and Stanley Snadowski  
for their constant support.