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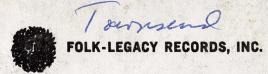
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FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC.

SHARON, CONNECTICUT



HOWIE MITCHELL

Howie Mitchell is a young, soft-spoken fellow with an inquisitive mind and an irrepressible urge to "do-it-yourself-ism". He not only chooses to make his own music, he carries the impulse a step farther and makes the instruments upon which he makes the music. Although he is a master of the guitar, the five-string banjo and the autoharp, it is the Appalachian dulcimer that fascinates him most. He first saw one of these unusual instruments at the home of Dr. Asher Treat in Dumont, New Jersey, and immediately set about making one of his own. Since then, he has made nearly fifty of these instruments and has encouraged many other folk song enthusiasts to follow his lead (and his patterns) and construct dulcimers of their own. More than that, he has studied the instrument and its potential and has found new tunings and new techniques of playing it. The result can be called, not inaccurately, the art of the "classical dulcimer".

Howie's singing is gentle and unaffected; his accompaniments are rich and imaginative. He offers what may be the most which can be asked of the "folk song revival" - a beautiful and tasteful blending of the old and the new.

Side 1:

I'm Sad and I'm Lonesome The Jealous Brothers Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes (dulcimer) Go Find My True Love Charlie The Terrier Pup Soldier's Joy (dulcimer) The Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of the Virgie, O (Child 14)

Side 2:

Kitty Alone Old Bangum The Rejected Lover Believe Me If All Those **Enduring Young Charms** (dulcimer) Henry King The River Lord Randall (Child 12)



HOWIE MITCHELL

Recorded at "Tunturi Studios"

Huntington, Vermont

Notes by Sandy Paton

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POLIC-LEGACY RECORDS, IMC.

WILDOOL COMBINECTIONS

HOWIE MITCHELL

I was born in the small college town of Lexington, Virginia, in February, 1932. My early memories are of green rolling hills with blue mountains in the distance, the fun and fascination of collecting buckeyes, jumping in big piles of leaves, catching fish and frogs for the aquarium (which soon became overcrowded and was subsequently moved to the bathtub to accommodate the addition of some tadpoles and salamanders), and the sights, sounds and sensations from my visits to the farm near Chatham, Virginia, where my father grew up to become a medical doctor. There I learned some of the really IMPORTANT things, such as how to make a whistle from a willow switch, and a pop-gun from the hollowed branch of elderberry, the unforgettable flavor and odor of food cooked in a wood stove, fresh milk and home grown vegetables, sleeping in a goose-feather bed and being awakened by roosters and chickens at that early, magic time of the morning, and the very special warmth and quiet strength of people who make their living in the country.

I was a very shy and uncommunicative person as I reached my early teens, and was full of self-doubts and an acute awareness of my shortcomings. I was constantly fearful of having someone see me make a mistake, and I am sure that this is one good reason why I did not take well to piano lessons: I preferred to simply not practice at all, thereby providing some sort of an external excuse for my lack of proficiency. I did like to sing, however, and looked forward to the times when I met with the church choir for practice or for real. I also found myself responding to the radio programs presented at that time by Burl Ives, and by a performer who called himself "The Singing Cowboy", if I remember correctly. (Jules Allen - ed.) This was perhaps my first contact with music having the flavor of the old songs. When I heard a concert in high school by a ballad singer (Earle Spicer), I began to discover that this was a type of music that I could possibly make for myself, and which contained the warmth of simplicity, integrity, and subtle humor of homespun people that I had come to respect so much.

The first instrument I picked up was the guitar, which I played by using only the top four strings. When I went to Cornell to train for electrical engineering, I continued to learn about the guitar (adding the other two strings) and spent many pleasant hours singing with friends who had

similar interests in traditional music. At a concert by Pete Seeger, I became aware of and excited by his presentation of some of the mountain styles of playing the fivestring banjo, and I eventually began to listen to some of the recordings of the traditional musicians and to experiment with that instrument. At about the same time, I heard and was very much attracted to the playing and singing of Jean Ritchie and Andrew Rowan Sommers: that was my first hearing of the plucked dulcimer of the Southern Mountains. It was soon after this that I met Dr. Asher Treat of Dumont, New Jersey, who showed and played for me the first dulcimer I had ever seen. As a direct result of that meeting, I became fascinated with an instrument that seems to make music at the slightest touch. It was only a few days later that I decided to make a dulcimer for myself, which I did with some success, and was thereby begun on an intense eight year search for a design that could somehow reach toward the optimum in my own concept of the instrument.

Soon after graduating from college, I was invited to join the Navy for twenty-one months, and managed to find the time and opportunity to construct two more dulcimers which were, as one might guess, quite a curiosity to my associates.

After my tour of active duty. I returned home for a few months, during which time I continued to make dulcimers-of all sorts of shapes and sizes, and to wrestle with my change of feeling from engineering to teaching as a possible career. I eventually joined a private college-preparatory school in Washington, D. C., called the Hawthorne School, where I have taught mathematics and science, and was immediately delighted with my choice. It was there that I made twenty-eight dulcimers (#18 through #46) and perfected my approach to the subject enough to believe it meaningful to communicate some of the tecniques of building and playing that instrument by means of a pamphlet and a recording. That work is still in the process of completion, but in the meantime, this first record should serve to introduce myself to those who are interested and to make them aware of a bit of my style and texture of playing, and of my selection and interpretation of (mostly) traditional material.

Howie Mitchell

Washington, D. C. November 1962 Side I. Band 1. I'M SAD AND I'M LONESOME

This wonderfully sad song is Howie's own variation of one sung (and published) by both Carl Sandburg and Burl Ives. The verses used here are a mixture of several songs, including "The Cuckoo" and "The Moonshiner" or "Rye Whiskey". The dulcimer accompaniment is typical of Howie's highly imaginative use of the instrument.

I'm sad and I'm lonesome,
My heart it will break;
My true love loves another,
Oh, I wisht I was dead.

I'm troubled, yes, I'm troubled, I'm troubled in my mind; If this trouble don't kill me, Oh God, I'll live a long time.

I'll build me a cabin
On the mountain so high,
Where the blackbirds won't find me
Or hear my sad cry.

I'll go to the mountains,
I'll set up a still;
I'll sell you a gallon
For a two dollo bill.

God bless them moonshiners, I wish they was mine; Their breath is as sweet as The dew on the vine.

The cuckoo she's a pretty bird, She sings as she flies; She brings us glad tidings And she tells us no lies.

I'm sad and I'm lonesome,
My heart it will break;
My true love loves another,
Oh, I wisht I was dead,

Side I, Band 2. THE JEALOUS BROTHERS

Howie learned this ballad from Dr. Asher Treat, who collected it in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1939. Other versions have been published under a number of titles; Sharp has it as "In Seaport Town", for example, and Brown published it under the title of "The Bramble Brier". (The date upon which it was obtained by Brown from Frank Proffitt is in error, however. Frank gave it to Brown in 1936, rather than 1924.) A complete list of the ballad's appearances in American tradition may be found in Laws (M 32, pp. 196, 197)

and a thorough study of the ballad by H. M. Belden may be found in PMLA 33 (1918) under the title: "Boccaccio, Hans Sachs, and The Bramble Briar." Why Professor Child chose to exclude this ballad from his collection remains a mystery to many present day folk song scholars.

They sat a-courting one fine evening,
The brothers hearing what they say,
"Oh, it's this courtship, it must be ended,
For the likes of this will never do."

They rose up early, early next morning, A game of hunting for to go, And it's this young man they both did flatter For to go and hunt along with them.

They rode all over the hills and valleys, In places where that they was known, Until they came to a lonesome valley, That's where they killed him and left him alone.

Now when the brothers had returnin', The sister asked where the servant was. "Oh, it's we lost him in a game of hunting And it's him no more can we find."

She lay acrost her bedside weeping; It came to her as in a dream That they'd taken him beyond the ragin's And there they'd killed him and left him alone.

She rose up early, early next morning; She dressed herself in rich array, Saying, "I'm going to find my own true lover Or spend the balance of my days."

She rode all over the hills and valleys, In places where that she was known, Until she came to a lonesome valley, That's where they'd killed him and left him alone.

His red rosy cheeks they had been fading, His lips were like a marble wine; Oh, she kissed him over and over, saying, "You were that darling friend of mine."

Now when the sister had returnin',
The brothers asked where the servant was;
"Oh, it's hush your tongues, you deceitful villians,
Or you both shall be hung for the sake of one."

Side I, Band 3. DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES

, This dulcimer solo indicates the direction in which Howie's experiments with his home-made instruments have .

taken him. The dulcimer used here has four strings, each of which are fretted in much the same style of playing as that used by Austrian zither players.

Side I, Band 4. GO FIND MY TRUE LOVE

Rowie learned this incongruous ditty from Mrs. Betty Hughes of Bethesda, Maryland, who, in turn, probably learned it from John Jacob Niles. The accompaniment is also in the style used by Niles on his multi-stringed dulcimer, although Howie has given it another dimension through his use of chords. The "Go find my true love" refrain is unusual in this widely reported song; more typical is the hummed refrain as sung by Jean Ritchie and published in her <u>Singing Family of the Cumberlands</u>. An almost identical version to that of the Ritchie family may be found in <u>Songs From the Green Hills of Vermont</u> as collected in West Dover, Vermont, by Edith B. Sturgis. The similarity is not surprising, since the nursery rhyme from which the song derives has been published frequently.

There was an old woman and she had a little pig,
Go find my true love,
There was an old woman and she had a little pig
And he didn't eat much 'cause he wasn't very big,
Go find my true love
In some lonesome valley.

Similarly:

Well, this little pig hit did a heap of harm, A-rootin' 'round of the old man's farm.

Well, this old woman she fed the pig on clover And he lay down and he died all over.

Well, this old woman she sobbed and she sighed And then she, too, lay down and she died.

Well, that old man he died of the grief; Now wasn't that a sad relief?

Well, this is the end of my one, two, three, The man and the woman and the little piggy.

Side I. Band 5. CHARLIE

This delightful play-party song has come a long way from the Scottish lilt describing the amorous adventures of the Young Chevalier, Charles Edward Stuart, but it has lost none of its charm. The text sung here was learned from Jean Ritchie, the tune is similar to that recorded by the New Lost City Ramblers (Folkways - FC 7064), who name Kelly Harrell as their source. Appropriately, Howie plays the dulcimer here in the traditional style of the southern mountains, in which the drone strings resemble the drones of the pipes.

Charlie's neat and Charlie's sweet And Charlie he's a dandy; Charlie he's the very one Stole my striped candy.

Chorus: Over the river to feed my sheep,
Over the river to Charlie;
Over the river to feed my sheep
And measure up my barley.

Don't want your wheat, don't want your cheatin', Neither do I want your barley; I'll take a little of the best you've got To bake a cake for Charlie.

My pretty little pink, I scarce did think That I could do without you, But when I found it weren't no use, I cared very little about you.

Charlie's neat and Charlie's sweet And Charlie he's a dandy; Charlie he's the very one Stole my striped candy.

Side I, Band 6. THE TERRIER PUP

Switching to the guitar (and using all six strings), Howie now performs a song which came to him from his own "family tradition". Howie says that hearing his mother and father sing this song and "The River" (side II, band 6) will always remain among his "earliest fond memories".

A man once owned a terrier pup, A lowdown worthless cuss, And everywhere they went together There was sure to be a fuss.

When the man was on his bunting And the dog was on his bite, Everywhere they went together There was sure to be a fight.

Now, a woman owned a big tom cat That weighed about fifteen pounds And every other dog and every other cat Would scat when he come 'round.

One day the man and the dog went out To the place where the cat did dwell; The dog he growled ferociously And went for the cat pell-mell. Well, the cat said, "Wait, me gittie you,"
And made a dive for the pup;
The struggles that the poor dog made were few,
For the cat soon finished him up.

Now, the old man he swore tremendously And went and got a big brick-bat And said he'd be hanged a century, If he didn't get that cat.

But the old woman said she'd be hanged if he did And went and got a big shotgun And peppered him in the diaphragm With bird shot number one.

Now, they carried him home on a window frame And the doctors cured him up, But he never was known to fight again, Nor to own a terrier pup.

Side I, Band 7. SOLDIER'S JOY

Here is a classic traditional fiddle tune, played in the traditional dulcimer style of the southern mountains. Howie learned the tune from George Armstrong, who learned it, in turn, from Abercrombie K. Jessup, dulcimer tuner, of Wilmette, Illinois. Not widely known in academic circles, Mr. Jessup is certainly one of this country's leading authorities on the various tunings of the plucked dulcimer. Anyone wishing to know more about Mr. Jessup's interesting work may write to him at 1535 Lake Avenue, Wilmette, Illinois.

Side I, Band 8. THE BONNIE, BONNIE BANKS OF THE VIRGIE, O

Miss Maud Karpeles, who accompanied Cecil Sharp on his three memorable collecting trips to the southern Appalachians (1916, 1917 and 1918), published this tune for the ballad Professor Child called "Babylon" in her Folk Songs from Newfoundland (1934). The text sung here, however, is apparently an adaptation, making use of the text Miss Karpeles collected and another published by Greenleaf and Mansfield in Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland (1933). It has been abbreviated by omitting the verses in which the robber murders the first two sisters and the one in which he kills himself out of remorse for his crime, Bertrand Harris Bronson has included both of the above mentioned versions of the ballad in his splendid work, The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, Vol. I (Princeton, 1959). See also, Ancient Ballads Traditionally Sung in New England, Vol. 1, by Helen Hartness Flanders (Philadelphia, 1960). Howie learned the ballad from Miss Lynn Flickinger while he was a student at Cornell. It is number 14 in Child's collection.

Three young ladies went for a walk,
Too ra lee and a loney, 0;
They met a robber on their way,
By the bonnie, bonnie banks of the Virgie, 0.

Similarly:

He took the first one by the hand And he whipped her around and he made her stand.

Will you be a robber's wife, Or will you die by my penknife?

I will not be a robber's wife; I'd rather die by your penknife.

> He took the second one by the hand And he whipped her around and he made her stand.

Will you be a robber's wife, Or will you die by my penknife?

I will not be a robber's wife; I'd rather die by your penknife.

He took the third one by the hand And he whipped her around and he made her stand,

Will you be a robber's wife, Or will you die by my penknife?

I will not be a robber's wife, Nor will I die by your penknife.

If my brothers had been here,
You would not have killed my sisters dear.

Who are your brothers, I pray you tell?
One is a robber like yourself.

Who is the other, I pray you tell?
The other is a minister.

Lord, have mercy for what I've done;
I've killed my sisters, all but one.

Side II, Band 1. KITTY ALONE

Howie learned this beautiful lullabye from Logan English. That is to say, he heard Logan sing it in a concert at Oberlin College in 1955 and remembered the first verse along with the refrain and the tune. The second verse is from "Buckeye Jim" and the rest are Howie's own variations from miscellaneous traditional verses. I have been unable to locate Logan's source (and a call to New York failed to locate Logan), so, from here on, we work with assumptions.

If the one verse that Howie remembers from Logan's singing is any indication, the song must be related to the Scottish drinking and lying song "We're A' Jolly Fu'" which has, as a refrain, the line: "We're a' blin' drunk, jolly fu'." The song came to America, where, with the loss of the Scots dialect, that line became: "You're an old blind drunkard and I'm a jolly fool" (see American Mountain Songs, 1927). The first line of the present song may be found in a version called "Johnny Fool" in Randolph's Ozark Folksongs (1949) which includes several verses closely resembling the Scottish text as sung by Ewan MacColl ("Scots Drinking Songs", Riverside, RLP 12-605). See also Hudson's Folksongs of Mississippi (1936), where the song is titled 'Old, Blind, Drunk John" and the headnote refers to a full history of this "famous lying song" given by Professor G. L. Kittredge in the Journal of American Folklore, XXXIX, p. 195. The "kitty alone" refrain, however, does not seem to appear with any of the published versions of the lying song, although Cecil Sharp found it in several versions of "The Frog in the Well" which he published in English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians (1932), one of which was obtained in Kentucky, Logan English's home state. Tow, by the way, is a kind of flax, according to Jean Ritchie. At any rate, here is the song as Howie sings it, with banjo accompaniment:

Saw a crow flying low,
 Kitty alone, Kitty alone;
Saw a crow flying low,
 Kitty alone a lie;
Saw a crow flying low
And a cat spinning tow
 Kitty alone a lie,
 Rock a ma rye ree.

Similarly:

Way up yonder above the moon, A bluebird lives in a silver spoon.

Way up yonder above the sun, The eagle flies when his work is done.

Big ol' owl in a tree, Just as sleepy as he can be.

Saw a 'possum in a log, Lookin' like a big groundhog.**

Saw a crow flying low And a cat spinning tow.

**This verse was added, spontaneously, at the time of the recording session, not merely to extend the song, but to pay homage to the world's leading authority on groundhogs, Frank Proffitt, of Reese, North Carolina.

Side II, Band 2. OLD BANGUM (BAGGUM) (Child 18)

Here, Howie turns his musical skills to the autoharp and sings a well known version of "Sir Lionel" which he learned while he was at Cornell from J. Dean Brown. The ultimate source for this particular version of the ballad seems to be that published by Dorothy Scarborough in A Song Catcher in the Southern Mountains (1937), although it closely resembles those recorded by a number of professional singers of folksongs (Richard Dyer-Bennet, Ed McCurdy, et al). At one time, this was a serious ballad, involving a giant and/or a "wild woman", as well as the murderous wild boar. It has become, as Bronson puts it, "farcical in varying degree" in recent tradition, although Herbert Halpert collected a quite complete text of a serious version from Samuel Harmon, of Maryville, Tennessee, in 1939, which may be heard on one of the records issued by the Archive of American Folksong (AAFS 57). A five verse fragment of the same version, essentially, was recorded by the present writer in September, 1962, on Beech Mountain in North Carolina. For a full study of the ballad, see Bronson's The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads.

Old Baggum, will you hunting ride?
Dillum down dillum;
Old Baggum, will you hunting ride?
Dillum down;
Old Baggum, will you hunting ride,
A sword and a pistol by your side?
Kubby kee, killy killy kum,
Kubby quo quam.

Similarly:

There is a wild boar in the wood And he eats men's bones and he drinks their blood.

Old Baggum, he took his wooden knife And he swore, by God, he'd take its life.

Old Baggum, he rode to the wild boar's den And he spied the bones of a thousand men.

Now they fought for (four?) hours in that day, Then the wild boar fled and he slunk away.

Old Baggum, did you win or lose? He swore, by God, he'd won his shoes.

Side II, Band 3. THE REJECTED LOVER

This is another song which Howie learned from Miss Lynn Flickinger. The tune is apparently that of Sharp's C version, while the text has been filled out with three verses from his B version and the "heart and hand" line in the first verse is taken from his A text. This excellent job of collating was probably Miss Flickinger's work, for Howie says he sings it just as she taught it to him while he was a student at Cornell. Laws includes this as P 10 in his American Balladry from British Broadsides (1957), but lists only those versions found in Sharp.

I once knew a pretty girl
And I loved her as my life
And I'd freely give my heart and hand
To make her my wife,
Oh, to make her my wife.

Well, she took me by the hand
And she led me to the door
And she throwed her arms around me,
Saying, "You can't come any more,
Oh, you can't come any more."

Well, I'd not been gone for six months Before she did complain And she wrote me a letter, Saying, "Do come again, Oh, do come again,"

Well, I wrote her an answer,
Just for to let her know
That no young man could venture
Where he once could not go,
Oh, he once could not go.

So, come all you true lovers,
Take a warning by me
And never place your affection
On a green growing tree,
Oh, a green growing tree.

For the leaves they will wither
And the roots they will decay
And the beauty of a fair maid
Will soon fade away,
Oh, will soon-fade away.

Side II, Band 4. BELIEVE ME, IF ALL THOSE ENDURING YOUNG CHARMS

The instrument played here is a dulcimer with two sets of strings and two finger boards. One set is tuned in the higher register and is played first on this recording, then the instrument is turned around and the strings tuned in the lower register are used for awhile. The process is repeated once more and the higher register is used for the final part of the recording. Ordinarily, Howie has a partner of the fairer sex to help him play the "twicimer", as it is affectionately called, eliminating all that instrument turning, but this recording was made without the benefit of such company. A

bit of tape splicing was employed to eliminate the pause while the instrument was turned around. Those who are familiar with the double dulcimer insist that it is the ideal "courting instrument" -- the players are required to sit facing one another, holding the instrument on their laps, which necessitates a carefully alternated knee arrangement calculated to breed familiarity. The music that results can be, as it is here, quite lovely.

Side II, Band 5. HENRY KING

This is one of Hilaire Belloc's marvelous <u>Cautionary Tales for Children</u>. The tune to which it is sung is a hymn tune, I've been told, possibly by Robert Schuman. At the time of this writing, unfortunately, I've no way to verify this fact.

The Chief Defect of Henry King Was chewing little bits of String. At last he swallowed some which tied Itself in ugly Knots inside. Physicians of the Utmost Fame Were called at once; but when they came They answered, as they took their Fees, "There is no Cure for this Disease. Henry will very soon be dead." His Parents stood about his Bed Lamenting his Untimely Death, When Henry, with his Latest Breath. Cried - "Oh, my Friends, be warned by me. That Breakfast, Dinner, Lunch and Tea Are all the Human Frame requires ..." With that the Wretched Child expires.

Side II, Band 6. THE RIVER

Occasionally, one encounters a Work of such Magnitude, a Masterpiece of such Epic Proportions, that it Defies Description. Such a work is this, which Howie learned from his Parents.

The river overflowed its banks;
The town was filled with water.
"I cannot swim!" says Mrs. Jones
In anguish to her daughter.
"Oh, you get upon the bureau, Ma;
I think that a good plan, Oh,
And I will accompany you
Upon the grand piano!"

Now, my grandfather's horse had the epizootics Way down in his thorax.

Pa stuck a gaspipe down his throat
And he filled it full of Borax.

Then Pa he got at one end
And the horse got at the other;
Oh, Pa he blew, but the horse blew, too,
And the blow almost killed Father.

A model boy, his mother's joy,
Was little Tommy Ayers,
And every night, when he went to bed,
He used to say his prayers.
At first he started meek and low
And then his voice grew louder —
"Oh, Lord, please make me pure and sweet
Like Royal Baking Powder."

Side II, Band 7. LORD RANDALL (Child 12)

Howie describes this as "part of a tune" he learned from George Armstrong. George learned it from Jean Ritchie, who got it from her uncle, Jason Ritchie, who wasn't really her uncle at all, but her father's first cousin. Howie's text, however, has a strong flavor of Scots dialect, and is probably a collation of many texts he has heard sung in the past.

Oh, where hae ye been, Lord Randall, my son?
Oh, where hae ye been, my handsome young man?
I've been to my sweetheart's;
Oh, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting and I fain would lie down.

Similarly:

What had ye for your supper? Snakes fried in butter, Mother.

What was the color of their skins? Oh, spickled and spackled, Mother.

What did ye with their bones? Oh, I give them to the hounds, Mother.

What did the hounds do then? Oh, they died in the streets, Mother.

I fear ye are poisoned. Ah, yes, I'm sick nigh to death, Mother.

What will you leave to your mother? My gold and my silver, Mother. And what'll you leave to your sweetheart,
Lord Randall, my son?
Oh, what'll you leave to your sweetheart,
My handsome young man?
The fire from yon burning kiln, Mother,
To burn her bones brown,
For she is the cause of my lying down.

Sandy Paton Huntington, Vermont January, 1963

FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC. was established in 1961 by Lee B, Raggerty, Mary W, Raggerty and Sandy Paton. Although we will, from time to time, issue records of exceptional "interpreters" of traditional music and tales (such as Howie Mitchell), our primary purpose is to make good field recordings of authentic traditional artists available to the general public. Collectors with tapes of such artists are urged to contact the company. For additional information and catalogues, write:

FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC.
HUNTINGTON, VERMONT

