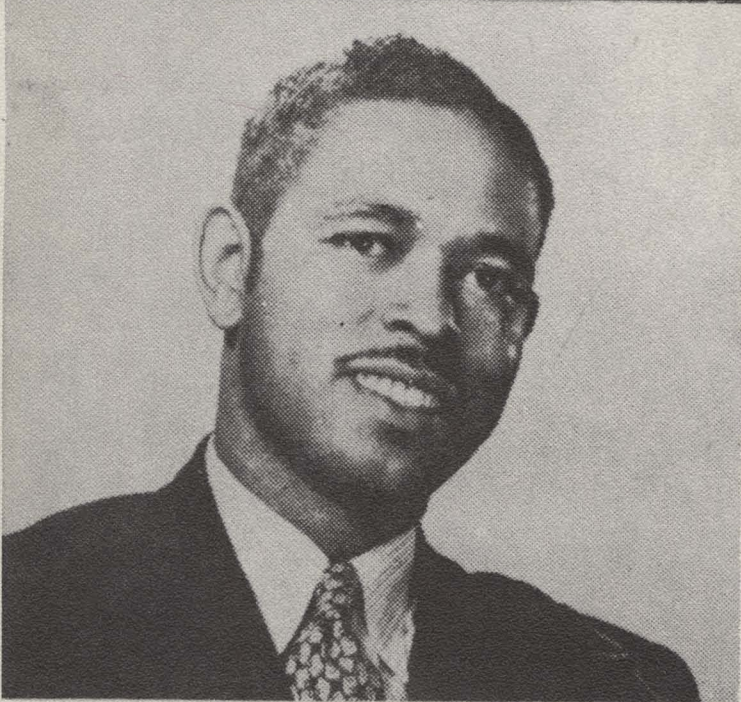


Archival Property  
Smithsonian Institution  
Office of the Assistant Secretary  
for Public Service



# GET ON BOARD

NEGRO FOLKSONGS BY THE FOLKMASTERS

SONNY TERRY, harmonica; BROWNIE MCGHEE, guitar;

COYAL McMAHAN, maracas.

THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

RISING SUN

IN HIS CARE

PREACHIN'

I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

PICK A BALE OF COTTON

A MAN IS NOTHING BUT A FOOL

MAMMA BLUES, #2

RAISE THE ROOF

FOLKWAYS RECORDS

FA 2028

FOLKWAYS FA 2028

# GET ON BOARD

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS FA 2028

GET ON BOARD

FOLKWAYS FA 2028

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FP 2028

© 1952 Folkways Records & Service Corp., 701 Seventh Ave., N.Y.C., USA



# GET ON BOARD

NEGRO FOLKSONGS BY THE FOLKMASTERS

SONNY TERRY, harmonica; BROWNIE MCGHEE, guitar;

COYAL McMAHAN, maracas.

THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

RISING SUN

IN HIS CARE

PREACHIN'

I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

PICK A BALE OF COTTON

A MAN IS NOTHING BUT A FOOL

MAMMA BLUES, #2

RAISE THE ROOF

FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP., N. Y.

INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE HOEFER

WHEN I WAS A SMALL BOY LIVING IN CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA, WE USED TO HIT HIKIE TWELVE MILES TO THE "BIG TOWN" NAMED DURHAM. ONE DAY OUR GANG HAPPENED TO BE STROLLING DOWN MAIN STREET IN FRONT OF THE DURHAM COUNTY JAIL. OUR EARS PICKED UP A PLAINTIVE MELODY EMANATING FROM AN OPEN BARRED WINDOW FOUR STORIES ABOVE THE BUSY AND NOISY STREET. THE FOURTH AND TOP STOREY OF THE MODERN CONCRETE STRUCTURE HOUSED THE IRON-FLOORED CELLS WHERE THE NEGRO PRISONERS WERE HELD UNTIL SENTENCED TO THE ROAD GANGS. THEY WERE WHILING AWAY THE TIME BY "GETTING ON BOARD" THE WINGS OF SONG.

WE BEGAN MAKING A HABIT OF STOPPING BY THE JAIL ON OUR FREQUENT TRIPS TO DURHAM AND USUALLY WERE TREATED TO AN IMPROMPTU FOLK MUSIC CONCERT. SOMETIMES A GROUP OF VOICES IN UNISON WERE SINGING SAD OR HAPPY TUNES. OTHER TIMES ONE RICH POWERFUL VOICE COULD BE HEARD SINGING A BLUES, SPIRITUAL, OR WORK SONG. THERE WERE PRISONERS WHO WELCOMED THE RELIEF FROM RESPONSIBILITY OR THE ABSENCE FROM A NAGGING MATE THAT CAME ALONG WITH A TERM ON THE ROAD GANG (CHAINS HAD BEEN OUTLAWED ON THE NORTH CAROLINA ROAD GANGS). THESE MEN WOULD STRIKE UP A HAPPY SONG. OTHERS MISSED THEIR WIVES AND FREEDOM, AND THEY WOULD EXPRESS THEMSELVES ACCORDINGLY.

THE YOUTHFUL MEMORY OF THE BEAUTY INHERENT IN THOSE FOLK SONG RENDITIONS HAS NEVER ESCAPED ME. WHILE LISTENING TO THE FOLKWAYS LP COLLECTION OF NEGRO FOLK SONGS BY THE FOLKMASTERS, THIS MEMORY HAS RETURNED DOUBLY STRONG. I DON'T REMEMBER THE NAMES OF THE SONGS WE HEARD SO LONG AGO, BUT IT COULD VERY WELL BE THAT SOME OF THE SAME TITLES THAT APPEAR IN THIS NEW SET WERE BEING SUNG BACK IN THE DURHAM JAIL. SONNY TERRY, ON THIS SET, IS FROM DURHAM, N.C.

A LITTLE BETTER THAN HALF OF THE NINE NUMBERS SELECTED FOR THE GET ON BOARD GROUP ARE "TRADITIONAL". THE OTHERS ARE ORIGINALS BY THE ARTIST PERFORMING THEM. THE THREE ARTISTS THAT MAKE UP THE FOLKMASTERS, SONNY TERRY—HARMONICA AND VOCAL, BROWNIE MC GHEE—GUITAR AND VOCAL, AND COYAL MOMAHAN—MARACAS AND VOCAL, PERFORM IN THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL PURE STYLE. AS WITH ALL FOLKWAYS RECORDS THERE IS NO ATTEMPT TO COMMERCIALIZE, GLAMORIZE OR MEDDLE IN ANY WAY WITH THE SINCERITY OF THE SONG OR OF THE ARTISTS.

THESE FOLK SONGS REFLECT A PART OF NEGRO LIFE, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTH, MUCH MORE ACCURATELY THAN THE FORMAL BLUES OF A W.O. HANDY CAN. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT THE FOLK BLUES, SPIRITUALS, WORK SONGS, ETC. WERE THE NEGRO'S MELANCHOLY SONG LONG BEFORE THE PHONOGRAPH WAS INVENTED. THESE ARE NATURAL RENDITIONS RATHER THAN ARTIFICIAL PRODUCTIONS SUCH AS THE FORMAL BLUES AND EVEN AMERICAN JAZZ HAS A CERTAIN BINDING YOKE OF BEING ENTERTAINING.

PREVIOUS FOLKWAYS LP'S (JAZZ VOL. I AND II) HAVE POINTED OUT AND ILLUSTRATED WITH RECORD EXAMPLES HOW BEHIND THE POPULAR BLUES SONGS OF TODAY LIE THE MORE SPONTANEOUS AND NAIVE SONGS OF THE COUNTRY LONG BEFORE THE BLUES WERE FORMALLY INTRODUCED TO THE PUBLIC, THE NEGRO WAS CREATING THEM BY EXPRESSING HIS GLOOMY MOODS IN SONG. THE BLUE OR MELANCHOLY TYPE OF NEGRO SONG IS AS OLD AS THE SPIRITUALS. BOTH THE MELANCHOLY TYPE OF SONG AND THE SPIRITUAL ARE REPRESENTED IN THIS GROUP.

SPIRITUALS AND BLUES SONGS ARE STILL BEING CREATED, BUT THE REAL AGE OF THE BORROW SONGS HAS GONE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE THEM WELL DOCUMENTED BECAUSE THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE OF HUMANITY HAS TAUGHT US THAT HERE ARE THE ROOTS OF ALL GREAT MUSIC. FUTURE COMPOSERS WILL TURN TO THESE FOLK SONGS FOR SOURCE MATERIAL AND INSPIRATION. MUCH CLASSICAL MUSIC IS FOLK MUSIC NOT FAR REMOVED FROM THE ORIGINAL SOURCE.

## THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS OF ALL PRISON SONGS REPORTEDLY ORIGINATING DOWN TEXAS WAY WHERE THE GOLDEN GATE LIMITED OUT OF HOUSTON AT MIDNIGHT SHINES IT'S HEADLIGHT THROUGH THE BARRED WINDOWS OF THE TEXAS STATE PRISON NEAR HUNTSVILLE. THE SONG EXPRESSES THE MELANCHOLY LONGING OF THE MAN BEHIND THOSE BARS. THE LIGHT SHINING THROUGH THE DARKNESS AND THE WHISTLE ARE SYMBOLIC OF THE FREE WORLD OUTSIDE.

SONNY TERRY, THE BLIND NORTH CAROLINA FOLK ARTIST, PLAYS HIS HARMONICA VERY EFFECTIVELY ON THIS SIDE. THE TRIO OF VOICES IN HARMONY IS A BEAUTIFUL CONTRAST TO THE HARMONICA PASSAGES. THE LATTER ALSO EMULATES A TRAIN WHISTLE REALISTICALLY. THIS SONG IS REPORTED TO BE OF WHITE ORIGIN.

## RISING SUN

THIS IS AN ORIGINAL BY BROWNIE MC GHEE OF TENNESSEE AND HE SINGS THE VOCAL ACCOMPANIED BY HIS OWN GUITAR AND SONNY'S HARMONICA. THIS IS A BLUES TUNE WITH A FAINT RESEMBLANCE TO THE ST. LOUIS BLUES IN MELODY AND LYRIC. THE TUNE IS NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH ANOTHER FOLK SONG ENTITLED HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN REFERRING TO A NEW ORLEANS SPORTING HOUSE. THIS SONG HAS TO DO WITH A BLOOD RED RIVER RUNNING TOWARDS THE RISING SUN. IT IS AN EXAMPLE OF FREE IMPROVISATION BY A COMPARATIVELY YOUNG MASTER OF THE FOLK SONG IDIOM.

## IN HIS CARE

COYAL MC MAHAN TAKES OVER VOCAL CHORES ON THIS SPIRITUAL. HE SINGS WITH A SWINGING BEAT. MC MAHAN IS A NEW ARTIST ON RECORDS AND POSSESSES A RICH WELL CONTROLLED VOICE. THIS SPIRITUAL IS A TRADITIONAL DATING BACK NO ONE KNOWS HOW FAR. THESE RELIGIOUS SONGS ARE NOT AT THEIR BEST IN SOLO VOICES OR SOLO INSTRUMENTAL FORM AS THEY ARE ESSENTIALLY CHORAL IN CHARACTER. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE HERE THAT SONNY TERRY DOES A FINE INTERPRETATION OF THE USUAL ANSWERING CHORUS AND ACCOMPANYING CHORUS WITH HIS HARMONICA ARTISTRY.

## MAMMA BLUES NO.2

HERE IS A SPRIGHTLY NOVELTY BLUES PERFORMED AND WRITTEN BY SONNY TERRY. SONNY, IS OF COURSE FEATURED BUT THE COMBINATION OF HARMONICA, GUITAR AND MARACAS MAKES A FINE "JUG" SOUND. THE RENDITION IS BOTH PLAINTIVE AND HUMOROUS WITH BROWNIE MC GHEE ADDING HOWLS AND QUESTIONS THAT TERRY ANSWERS ON THE HARMONICA. WOODY GUTHRIE ONCE WROTE OF TERRY'S HARMONICA PLAYING, "HE BLEW AND WHIPPED, BEAT, FANNED, AND PATTED HIS HARMONICA." ON THESE SIDES YOU HEAR A MAN WHO CAN DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING HE WANTS TO DO ON HIS INSTRUMENT. BESIDES TALKING HE CAN RUN THE WHOLE GAMUT OF HUMAN EMOTIONS.

## PICK A BALE OF COTTON

THIS NUMBER AND THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL ARE THE TWO MOST FAMOUS FOLK SONGS REPRESENTED IN THE SET. PICK A BALE HAS BEEN CLASSIFIED AS A WORK SONG BUT IT ALSO WAS USED FREQUENTLY DURING SLAVE TIMES AS A DANCE TUNE OR REEL. AS A WORK SONG IT HAS A JOHN HENRY TWIST IN THAT THE LYRIC SPEAKS OF PICKING A BALE OF COTTON A DAY, AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK FOR ONE PERSON. THIS VERSION OF THE SONG IS CREDITED TO THE LATE HUDDIE "LEAD BELLY" LEDBETTER AND IS MORE OF A JOYOUS DANCE INTERPRETATION THAN A WORK LAMENT. SONNY TERRY SINGS THE VERSE OVER AND OVER WITH THE OTHER TWO SINGERS FILLING IN A LOW CHANTED BACKGROUND.

## A MAN IS NOTHING BUT A FOOL

A BLUES COMPOSED BY BROWNIE MC GHEE AND SUNG HERE BY SONNY TERRY. IT IS THE USUAL MAN-WOMAN STRIFE MOTIVE WHERE SONNY LAMENTS THE FUTILITY OF DEPENDING ON A WOMAN. HE ALSO INCLUDES BLUES PHRASES ON HIS HARMONICA INTERMITTANTLY DURING THE SONG. A SORROW SONG CHARGED WITH AN IMPLICATION OF SATIRE.

## THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

### PREACHIN'

COYAL MC MAHAN PREACHES A SHORT SERMON WITH LIGHT HARMONICA ACCOMPANIMENT. IT IS AN ORIGINAL LITTLE PIECE EFFECTIVELY RENDERED IN MC MAHAN'S RICH SONOROUS VOICE AT A MEDIUM TALKING TEMPO, THIS ADDS CONTRAST AND FILLS OUT A COMPLETENESS OF SCOPE TO THE GROUP OF SELECTIONS INCLUDED IN THIS SET.

### I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

A BOUNCY SPIRITUAL DONE IN CLOSE HARMONY BY THE THREE FOLKMASTERS. THE SONG DEPICTS SPIRITUAL TRIUMPH OVER WORLDLY TEMPTATION. IT IS A SONG OF SINCERE INTENTION NOT TO DEVIATE FROM THE ROAD TO HEAVEN. PARTICULARLY NOTE THE DEEP BASS INTERPOLATIONS BY COYAL MC MAHAN THROUGHOUT THE SONG. THIS IS A GENUINE SPIRITUAL (TRADITIONAL) PERFORMED AS A CHORAL EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS FEELING.

### RAISE A ROCUS TONIGHT

ANOTHER TRADITIONAL SOMETIMES TITLED RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT AND COMES UNDER THE CLASS OF A MINSTREL TYPE HAPPY TUNE. THE VERSES OF THE TUNE ARE LEGION AND PROBABLY ORIGINATED FROM THE OLD MINSTREL SHOWS THAT USED TO BE PLAYING ALL OVER THE SOUTH. BEFORE MINSTREL DAYS IT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY AN ANTEBELLUM NEGRO HOEDOWN OR JIG TUNE. TO "RAISE A RUKUS" HAS TWO MEANINGS. (1) TO START TROUBLE (2) TO HAVE FUN. THIS CURRENT RENDITION IS MORE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE LATTER MEANING. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT ALAN LOMAX HAS STATED, "IT IS ONE OF THE FEW SECULAR SONGS THAT NEGRO MINISTERS WILL OFFICIALLY PERMIT THEIR CONGREGATIONS TO SING AT PICNICS AND CHURCH SOCIALS".

THE SIDE STARTS OFF WITH THE PHRASE "GET ON BOARD" THE TITLE OF THIS FOLK SONGFEST, AND ALSO THE NAME OF A FOLK TUNE LEAD BELLY USED TO SING. IT IS SORT OF A COME-ONE-COME-ALL FEELING THAT YOU DERIVE FROM LISTENING TO THIS BRIGHT TUNE AT THE END OF THE CONCERT. IT MAKES YOU FEEL THAT YOU CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY THE WHOLE THING OVER AGAIN RIGHT AWAY.

CHORUS: LET THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL  
SHINE THE LIGHT ON ME,  
LET THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL  
SHINE THE EVER-LOVIN' LIGHT ON ME.

YOUNDER COMES MISS ROSIE,  
HOW IN THE WORLD DO I KNOW,  
WELL, I KNOW ABOUT HER APRON  
AND THE DRESS SHE WORE. CHORUS

UMBRELLA ON HER SHOULDER,  
A PIECE OF PAPER IN HER HAND,  
WELL, SHE GOIN' TO SEE THE GOVERNOR  
JUST TO 'LEASE HER MAN. CHORUS

WHEN THEY GET UP IN THE MORNIN'  
AND THE BIG BELL RINGS,  
YOU GOIN' TO MARCH INTO THE TABLE  
SAME DOGGONE THING.

NO FORKS ON THE TABLE,  
AND NOTHIN' IN MY PAN,  
AND IF YOU SAY ANYTHING ABOUT IT  
YOU HAVE TROUBLE WITH THE MAN. CHORUS

IF YOU EVER GO TO HOUSTON  
YOU BETTER WALK RIGHT,  
WELL, YOU'D BETTER NOT SQUABBLE  
AND YOU'D BETTER NOT FIGHT.

THAT COP WILL ARREST YOU  
AN' HE SURE TAKE YOU DOWN,  
YOU CAN BET YOUR BOTTOM DOLLAR  
YOU'RE JAIL-HOUSE BOUND. CHORUS.

### I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

I SHALL NOT, I SHALL NOT BE MOVED,  
I SHALL NOT, I SHALL NOT BE MOVED;  
JUST LIKE A TREE THAT'S PLANTED BY THE  
WATER,  
I SHALL NOT BE MOVED.

I'M SANCTIFIED AND HOLY ETC.

I'M ON MY WAY TO HEAVEN ETC.

I DON'T EXPECT TO TURN BACK ETC.

## A MAN IS NOTHING BUT A FOOL

WELL, A MAN AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A FOOL,  
THINKS A WOMAN DON'T LOVE NO ONE BUT HIM;  
WELL, I SAY BEFORE I'D BE THAT WEAK,  
OOH-LORD! I'D HANG MYSELF ON A LIMB.

YES, A MAN AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A FOOL,  
TO FOLLOW THE WOMEN EVERYWHERE;  
WELL, I AIN'T SINGIN' THIS SONG 'CAUSE I  
AIN'T GOT NONE,  
OOH-WELL! I CAN GET 'EM BY THE PAIR.

MAN AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A FOOL,  
THINK HE GOT A WOMAN ALL BY HIMSELF;  
WELL, I SAY SOON'S HIS BACK IS TURNED,  
SHE'S CUTTIN' OUT WITH SOMEBODY ELSE.

WELL, A MAN AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A FOOL,  
TO GIVE ONE WOMAN ALL THE DOUGH;  
WELL, I SAY BEFORE I BE THAT WEAK,  
YES, I GRAB MY CLOTHES AND WALK ON OUT  
THE DOOR.

## RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT

COME ALONG, LITTLE CHILDREN, COME ALONG,  
WHILE THE MOON IS SHINING BRIGHT;  
GET ON BOARD, DOWN THE RIVER WE GO,  
WE'RE GONNA RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT.

AS I WAS GOIN' DOWN ACROSS A FORTY-ACRE  
FIELD,

RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT;  
BLACK SNAKE BIT ME ON MY HEEL,  
RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT.

TURN AROUND TO DO MY BEST,  
RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT;  
FELL RIGHT BACK IN A HORNET'S NEST,  
RAISE A RUKUS TONIGHT.

MY OLD AUNTIE PROMISED ME,  
WHEN SHE DIED SHE'D WILL TO ME;  
SHE LIVED SO LONG, HER HEAD GOT BALD,  
SHE GOT OUT O' THE NOTION TO DIE AT ALL.

ME AND MY BROTHER WERE GOIN' TO TOWN,  
RIDING A BILLY-GOAT AND LEADING A HOUND;  
THE HOUND BARKED, THE BILLY-GOAT JUMPED,  
THROW'D MY BROTHER A-STRADDLE A STONE.

## RISING SUN

WHICH WAY, WHICH WAY, DOES THE BLOOD RED  
RIVER RUN,  
RUNS FROM MY BACK WINDOW STRAIGHT TO THE  
RISING SUN.

I HATE TO SEE THAT RISING SUN GO DOWN,  
MAKES ME FEEL JUST LIKE I'M ON MY LAST GO-ROUND.

SUN RISE, RISE IN THE EAST, SETS UP IN THE WEST,  
WELL, IT'S HARD TO TELL WHICH ONE WILL TREAT  
YOU THE BEST.

WELL, I HEARD A MIGHTY RUMBLIN', THEN I LOOKED  
AROUND,  
WAS THE NORTHERN AND THE SOUTHERN TEARIN' THAT  
OLD DEPOT DOWN.

WELL, THE DUMPER TOLD THE LOADER BRING HIM  
THREE LOADS OF CLAY;  
BLOOD RED RIVER IS SURE GOD, RUNNIN' AWAY.

WELL, THE BLOOD RED RIVER DUMPS INTO THE GULF  
OF MEXICO;  
WELL, MY BABY'S GONE AND I DON'T KNOW WHICH  
WAY TO GO.

ROLL ON, ROLL ON, ROLL ON RIVER ROLL ON,  
LORD, IF I DON'T GET LUCKY, WRINGIN' MY HANDS  
AND CRYIN'.

## PICK A BALE OF COTTON

JUMP DOWN TURN AROUND PICK A BALE OF COTTON  
JUMP DOWN TURN AROUND PICK A BALE A DAY.

GOIN' TO GET ON YOUR KNEES  
GOIN' TO LOOK ALL AROUND.

ME AND MY BUDDY GOIN' TO PICK A BALE OF COTTON,  
ME AND MY BUDDY GOIN' TO PICK A BALE A DAY.

ME AND MY WIFE CAN PICK A BALE OF COTTON,  
ME AND MY WIFE CAN PICK A BALE A DAY.

For Additional  
Information  
About  
**FOLKWAYS  
RELEASES**  
write to



**Folkways  
Records  
and  
Service Corp.**

701 SEVENTH AVENUE,  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

LITHO IN U.S.A.





**FOLKWAYS Records.**  
AND SERVICE CORP., 701 SEVENTH AVE., N.Y.C.  
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  RPM

**GET ON BOARD**

Negro Folk Songs Sung by The Folkmaster  
Accompanying Themselves

Sonny Terry - harmonica; Brownie McGhee - guitar  
Coyal McMahan - maracas

FA 2028 A

SIDE I

Band 1. The Midnight Special

Band 2. Rising Sun  
(Vocal by Brownie McGhee)

Band 3. In His Care  
(Vocal by Coyal McMahan)

Band 4. Mamma Blues  
(Instrumental, Sonny Terry, Har.)  
(Sonny Terry)

Copyright 1951 by Folkways Records  
& Service Corp., N.Y.

**FOLKWAYS Records**

AND SERVICE CORP., 701 SEVENTH AVE., N.Y.C.  
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  RPM

**GET ON BOARD**

Negro Folk Songs Sung by The Folkmaster

Accompanying Themselves

Sonny Terry - harmonica; Brownie McGhee - guitar  
Coyal McMahan - maracas

SIDE II

FA 2028 B

- Band 1. Pick A Bale Of Cotton
- Band 2. A Man Is Nothing But A Fool  
(Vocal by Sonny Terry)
- Band 3. Preachin'  
(Coyal McMahan)
- Band 4. I Shall Not Be Moved
- Band 5. Raise A Ruckus Tonight!

Copyright 1951 by Folkways Records  
& Service Corp., N.Y.