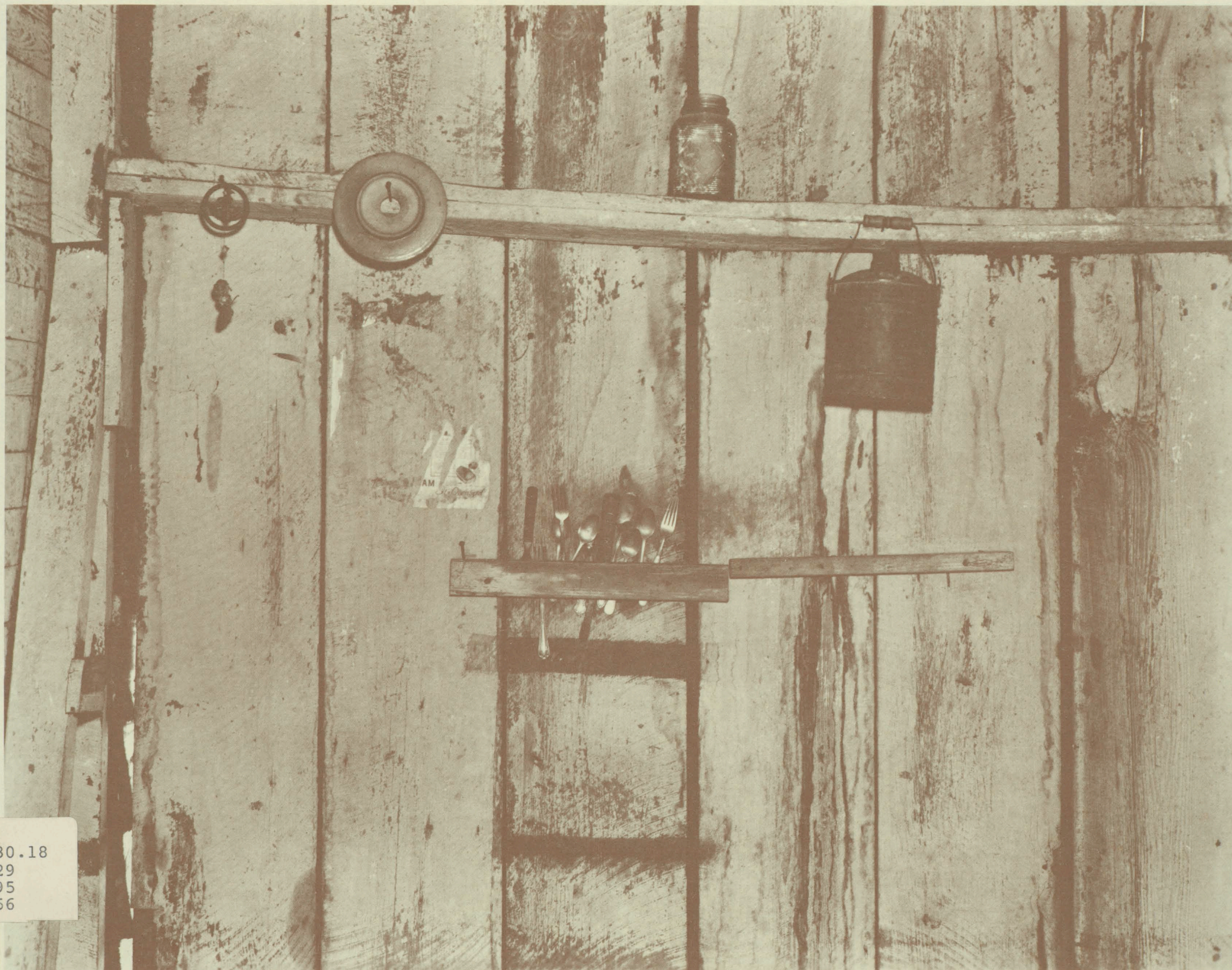


FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 32035

# Sonny Terry Harmonica & Vocal Solos

Alcoholic Blues | Women's Blues [Corrina] | Lost John | Locomotive Blue | Bad Luck Blues  
Harmonica Stomp | Shortnin' Bread | Fine and False Voice | Beautiful City



M  
1630.18  
T329  
S695  
1956

KITCHEN WALL, ALABAMA, 1936, PHOTO BY WALKER EVANS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

MUSIC LP



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 32035

[was FA 2035]

ALCOHOLIC BLUES  
WOMEN'S BLUES (CORRINA)  
LOST JOHN  
LOCOMOTIVE BLUE  
BAD LUCK BLUES  
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BEAUTIFUL CITY



Notes by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

# Sonny Terry Harmonica & Vocal Solos

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

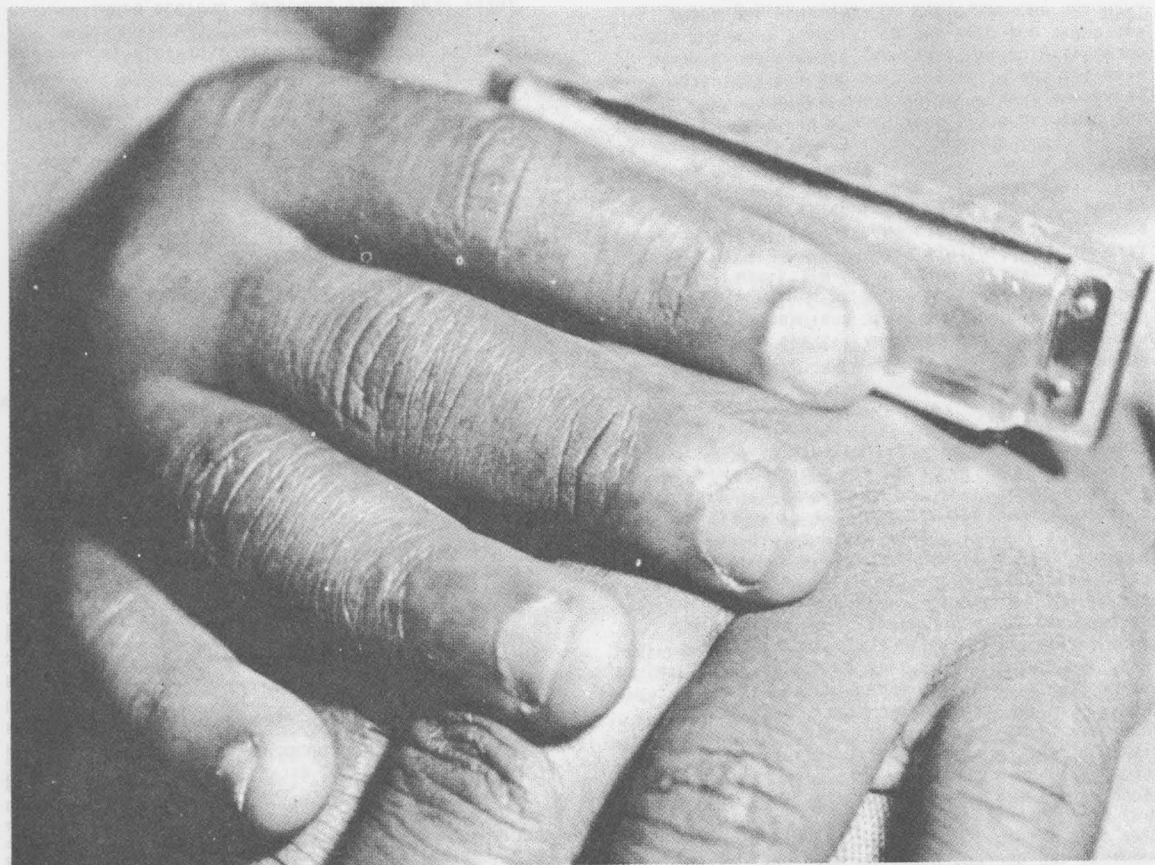
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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 32035



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FREDERIC RAMSEY, JR.

## SONNY TERRY • HARMONICA & VOCAL SOLOS

ALCOHOLIC BLUES • WOMEN'S BLUES (CORRINA) • LOST JOHN  
LOCOMOTIVE BLUE • BAD LUCK BLUES • HARMONICA STOMP  
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FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP., N. Y.

M  
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MUSIC LP

BACK THEN . . . AND NOW

A PINEY BOG, A STUBBY OLD SCRUB OAK, AND A FEW PATCHES OF DANK, DRIPPY MOSS HARDLY ADD UP TO MUCH IN ANY HISTORY OF STAGECRAFT. BUT WHEN THEY BROUGHT OUT A "PRETTY LITTLE GIRL WITH A RED DRESS ON," THE WAY IT SAYS IN THE OLD SONG, THEN MIXED IN THE SKIRLING OF A BEWITCHED HARMONICA AND A WHOOPIN' AND HOLLERIN' THAT SOUNDED LIKE A FOX CHASE HEADED FAST DOWNWIND -- THEN THE COUNTRY BEGAN TO MOVE INTO THE SCENE AND CRAWL OUT OVER THE FOOTLIGHTS. WHEN THE RED DRESS STARTED TO SWIRL, THE SCRUBBY BRUSH MOVED WITH IT; THE HARMONICA BANG OUT ITS PLAINTIVE BACKWOODS CHANT, AND BROADWAY AND THE REST OF THE JANGLING WORLD OUT THERE A FEW HUNDRED FEET TO THE LEFT, FLICKED OUT LIKE A WINDOW WHEN THE SHADE IS DRAWN.

IT WAS SO REAL YET SO UNOBTUSIVE THAT FEW PERSONS, IF ANY, LOOKED DOWN LATER AT THE SMALL TYPE ON THE "FINIAN'S RAINBOW" PROGRAM TO SEE JUST WHAT MADE IT SO GOOD. JO MIELZINER, WITH HIS NAME UP FRONT SOMEWHERE IN PRETTY BIG LETTERS, HAD DONE THE STAGE BUSINESS; IT WAS MICHAEL KIDD'S CHOREOGRAPHY, IT WAS ANITA ALVAREZ' DANCE, AND IT WAS SONNY TERRY'S WHOOP-IN', HOLLERIN', AND HARMONICA.

IT WOULD BE A LONG SHOT FROM "FINIAN'S RAINBOW" JANUARY, 1947, TO CARNEGIE HALL, DECEMBER 1938, BUT ONE OR TWO PERSONS IN THE AUDIENCE MADE IT. FOR THAT OTHER PLACE AND OTHER DATE HAD MARKED SANFORD "SONNY" TERRY'S FIRST APPEARANCE ON ANY NEW YORK STAGE. EVEN THEN, 'WAY BACK BEFORE THE SUBDUED, SWAMPY LIGHTS AND WAVY BRANCHES OF THE LATER STAGE PRODUCTION, SONNY TERRY'S MUSIC HAD SET SPINES TO TINGLING. THAT WAS AT A CONCERT TITLED "SPIRITUALS TO SWING," WHEN EVERYTHING FROM SIDNEY BECHET, MITCHELL'S CHRISTIAN SINGERS, THE BOOGIE WOOGIE TRIO OF ALBERT AMMONS, MEADE "LUX" LEWIS, AND PETE JOHNSON, TO THE ROCKING OF COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA OF THAT YEAR, HAD BEEN HEARD IN A SORT OF OMNIBUS OF SWING. IN THAT FAST, BRIGHT VEHICLE, ANYTHING AS SIMPLE AS A HARMONICA AND A ROUGH, HIGH-PITCHED SONG FROM THE COUNTRY, COULD HAVE BEEN LOST. BUT SONNY TERRY GOT HIS MESSAGE ACROSS IN A WAY THAT SEEMED ALMOST UNCANNY. THE PLAIN HARMONICA, THE CUPPED, GYRATING HAND THAT ENGINEERED THE SWELL AND FALL OF ITS REEDY SONG, AND THE MIMICRY OF HIS VOICE IN FALSETTO, HELD THE BIG MUSIC HALL SILENT. TO THAT SILENCE, SONNY TERRY GAVE THE LOW, FARAWAY WHISTLE OF THE LONESOME TRAIN, THE BAYING OF HOUNDS LOPING HARD UP AGAINST THE SCENT, AND THE DEEP-WOODS CRY OF A LOST SOUL. THE CITY PEOPLE LEARNED SOMETHING STRANGE AND NEW ABOUT THE COUNTRY, HIS COUNTRY.

THE WAY SONNY TELLS IT, NONE OF THIS MIGHT EVER HAVE HAPPENED. HE WAS BORN JUST ABOUT TWENTY MILES NORTH-NORTHEAST OF DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA. IT IS A LAND RICH IN FOLKWAYS, BUT ALSO HUSTLING AND BUSTLING WITH CORN, COTTON, AND TOBACCO. IN IT ARE CONTRASTED THE OLD WAYS, THE BELIEFS IN CONJURY AND WITCHCRAFT, AND THE NEW; RADIO, TELEVISION, GAS AND DIESEL ENGINES, THE TOBACCO-PROCESSING INDUSTRY OF DURHAM. A HIGH, MULE-DRAWN CART LOADED WITH TOBACCO LEAF DONE UP IN SHEAVES PARKS ALONGSIDE

A LOW-SLUNG TRUCK TRAILER AT THE AUCTIONS, AND A JUKE CAN TAKE TURNS WITH A SCRAPY OLD FIDDLE AT A CROSSROADS STORE ON A SATURDAY NIGHT. BUT WITH OLD OR NEW, ONE THING STAYS TRUE -- THERE MUST BE MUSIC.

SONNY'S FATHER REUBEN WAS A FREE MAN, WITH LAND AND A HOUSE OF HIS OWN. IT WAS PRETTY HILLY, IN THE PIEDMONT. HE RAISED "BACCA, WHAT YOU SMOKE, AND CORN, COTTON, CHICKEN -- 'BOUT TWENTY, TWENTY-FIVE ACRES. HE USED TO WORK TO 'T HISSELF, NOBODY TO BOTHER 'M." THERE WERE THREE BROTHERS, BESIDES SONNY -- WILLIE, RONALD, AND "ASBURY" (PRONOUNCED "AZABEY") -- AND "ONE SISTER LIVIN', TWO SISTERS DEAD."

HE DOESN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HIS MOTHER AND FATHER BEFORE HIS TIME, AND HE KNOWS NOTHING OF THEIR PARENTS, EXCEPT THAT HE USED TO HEAR HIS GRANDMOTHER TALK ABOUT THEIR LIFE AS SLAVES. SONNY LOST HIS FATHER TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO, AND HIS MOTHER EIGHT YEARS AFTER THAT. HE DOES REMEMBER, THOUGH, THE STORY OF HOW THEY MET AND WERE MARRIED. IT WAS IN THE BACK COUNTRY, NEAR GREENSBORO, GEORGIA: "I USED TO HEAR HIM TALK 'BOUT WHEN HE USED TO GO SEE MY MOTHER, AN' HER FATHER USED TO GET AT HIM, YOU KNOW, AND HE USED TO RUN. HE WOULD SLIP IN THERE. HER FATHER GET AT HIM WITH A STICK OR SOMETHING -- CHASED HIM AWAY. THERE WAS TWO GIRLS -- MY MOTHER AN' HER SISTER. WELL, HE SAY HE STOLE HER. WHEN THE OLE MAN WAS GONE ONE DAY, HE JUST WENT THERE -- TOOK OUT AND THEY SLIPPED OUT, AN' MARRIED. I THINK SHE WAS FORTTEEN, AN' HE WAS TWENTY."

THEY MOVED TO THE FARM NEAR DURHAM, AND SONNY TERRY WAS BORN OCTOBER 24, 1911. IT WAS A SIMPLE LIFE. THE ONE-STORY HOUSE HAD FOUR ROOMS, A FRONT AND BACK PORCH. THERE WAS A WELL IN THE BACKYARD. EVERYONE OLD ENOUGH TO SCRATCH DIRT OR HOLD A HOE WORKED, AND WORKED HARD -- IN THE FIELDS, OR ON THE PLACE. THEY HAD A BIG MULE, A HOG, AND A SMOKEHOUSE. EVERY YEAR, THE TERRYS LAYED AWAY FOR WINTER -- PEACHES, APPLES, PEARS. THE HAM WAS "SO GOOD, YOU COULD SMELL IT FOR 'BOUT TWO MILES." THERE WAS "FRESH CABBAGE, COLLARD GREENS, AN' SALLET." THEY ALSO MADE "HOME BREWS, AN' STUFF LIKE THAT -- AN' CIDER."

THE CORN LIQUOR CAME FROM THE WOODS. "IT WAS PRETTY CHEAP. I KNOW YOU USED TO GET A PINT FOR FIFTY CENTS -- AND YOU COULD GET A WHOLE JARFUL FOR 'BOUT HALF A DOLLAR. YEAH, WE USED TO DRINK IT WHEN WE WERE LITTLE. FATHER USED TO KEEP IT AND SIP OFF IT, THEY WOULDN'T DRINK MUCH -- BUT WE KIDS, WE USED TO SLIP IN THERE AND STEAL IT. SOMETIME HE COME HOME, CATCH US DRUNK. I'D BE SLEEPY, YOU KNOW."

THERE ARE LOTS OF HOLIDAYS IN NORTH CAROLINA, AND WHEN THEY COME, THE MENFOLK GO OFF HUNTING. THERE WERE THREE OR FOUR HOUND DOGS, AROUND THE PLACE, AND THEY JUMPED THE RABBITS. "MY FATHER STARTED ME TOTIN' A GUN, WHEN I'S 'BOUT 'LEVEN. A SHOTGUN. YOU COULD KEEP A PISTOL IN YOUR HOUSE, BUT YOU COULDN'T TOTE IT OUT. WE SHOT CROW, DUCKS, BUZZARDS, AN' EVERYTHING."

SONNY WENT TO SCHOOL AT SIX, BUT HE CAN RECOLLECT ONLY TWO THINGS ABOUT IT. "I LEARNED MY ABC'S, AND THE TEACHER WAS PRETTY MEAN. SHE LOVED TO WHUP YOU ALL THE TIME. I WAS PRETTY MEAN MYSELF, TOO -- I RUN AROUND FIGHTIN' WITH



THE BOYS. I REMEMBER, ONCE ME AN' A BOY GOT IN-TO IT. YOU KNOW, BACK THEN, YOU CARRY YOU DINNER TO SCHOOL. ONE OF THE BOYS, HE USED TO COME TO SCHOOL ALL THE TIME, HE WOULD NEVER BRING NO DINNER, AN' HE STOLE MINE AN' EAT IT UP. SO WHEN THEY COME OUT IN TIME O' RECESS, I WHUPPED HIM. THEN THE TEACHER WHUPPED ME. HE WAS TWO YEARS OLDER, BUT I WAS A LITTLE STOUTER. AN' I THINK HE OFTEN WOULDN'T EAT MUCH, AN' WAS A LITTLE WEAK."

AFTER SCHOOL, ON DAYS WHEN THERE WAS NO WORK FOR THE CHILDREN, THEY RAN OFF TO THE OTHER CABINS, AND PLAYED TILL NIGHT TIME. SONNY CLIMBED PER-SIMMON TREES, JUMPED OUT, PITCHED HORSESHOES, AND SHOT MARBLES. LATER AT NIGHT, THE YOUNG BOYS GANGED TOGETHER TO GO THROW STONES AT THE GIRLS' WINDOWS. THAT BROUGHT THEM UP AGAINST CURFEW, AND IRATE PARENTS. "YOU KNOW, AT NINE O'CLOCK IN THOSE OLD TOWNS, THEY COME THERE AN' MAKE YOU GO HOME. WE'D GO AN' KNOCK THE WINDOW LIGHTS OUT. HE'D RUN OUT, SAY HE GOT TO SHOOT US, BUT HE COULDN'T FIND, WE WERE OUT IN THE DARK SOMEWHERE. HE'D TELL OUR FAMILIES 'BOUT IT."

PROBABLY THE FIRST MUSIC SONNY TERRY EVER HEARD WAS HIS FATHER PLAYING THE HARMONICA, AND HIS MOTHER SINGING. HIS FATHER ALSO PLAYED THE GADGET NOW SOLD AS A "BRUCE HARP": "WHAT YOU HIT WITH YOUR FINGER. HE PLAYED 'SHORTNIN' BREAD, AN' CASEY JONES, AN' PIECES LIKE THAT. HE USED TO COME IN FROM WORK, PUT HIS HARP DOWN AND I'D GRAB THE THING, AN' MESS WITH IT, AN' HE HOLLER AT ME AN' I STEAL IT AN' PLAY IT AN HOUR, YOU KNOW."

BUT THE HARMONICA WAS THE INSTRUMENT SONNY REALLY LOVED. "I BEEN KINDA PLAYIN' HARMONICA EVER SINCE I UZ BIG ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT ONE WAS -- I RECKON 'BOUT FIVE, SIX YEARS. I FIRST PLAYED LIKE A KID PLAYS, COULDN'T PLAY NO TUNE. LOST JOHN, THAT'S THE FIRST ONE I LEARNIN'. I JUST LEARNED A LITTLE FROM HIM, FROM THE RESTS ON UP, JUST TUK IT UP MYSELF. HE COULD TAKE THE HARMONICA AN' HUM, IN HIS MOUTH, AN' WOULD PUT HIS HAND ON IT, AND WOULD PLAY NEAR 'BOUT LIKE I PLAY NOW, 'THOUT PUTTIN' HIS HAND ON IT. HE NEVER DIDN' USE HIS HAND ON THE HARMONICA LIKE I DID. I THINK HE JUST LEARNED IT. YOU KNOW, LITTLE PLANTATION SHOW USED TO COME THROUGH, MAYBE HE CAUGHT IT FROM SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT. HAD 'EM TENTS OUT THERE IN TH' EVENING, POSSIBLE HE HEARD MUSIC."

PERHAPS THE STORY OF "LOST JOHN" GOES BACK TO A BIBLE TALE, ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE A WEIGHTY JOB TO PROVE IT. IT IS TRUE THAT MANY BIBLE TALES HAVE WORKED THEMSELVES INTO RELIGIOUS SONG OF BOTH NEGRO AND WHITE FOLK OF THIS REGION. STORIES OF NOAH AND THE ARK, JONAH AND THE WHALE, HAVE BEEN TAKEN DOWN IN SPIRITUALS SUNG BOTH IN DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA, AND CREEDMORE, NOT FAR FROM SONNY'S BIRTHPLACE. AND JOHN, "EVIDENTLY A COMPO-SITE OF THE APOSTLE JOHN AND JOHN THE BAPTIST," CROPS UP IN "OH, WE'LL PUT JOHN ON THE ISLAND," A SONG HEARD IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA, NEAR THE DISMAL SWAMP. (NEWMAN I. WHITE, AMERICAN NEGRO FOLK SONGS, HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1928)

SONNY TERRY REMEMBERS IT THIS WAY: "THIS OLE FELLOW USED TO COME DOWN TO OUR HOUSE, TELL US 'BOUT LOST JOHN. LOST JOHN, HE .. YOU KNOW, THERE'S WORDS TO THAT . . . BUT I DON'T KNOW IT. HE USED TO COME 'ROUND, HE TALKIN' 'BOUT LOST JOHN. OH, HE WAS PRETTY OLD -- I WAS ABOUT

TWENTY-FIVE, HE WAS 'BOUT FIFTY, OR SO 'THIN', THEN. I RECKON HE'S DEAD, NOW, LONG AS THAT BEEN. OH YEAH, HE 'SC. OUT IN THE COUNTRY. HE USED TO COME OVER, GIT ME TO PLAY FOR HIM ALL THE TIME. AN' HE TELL ME THAT HE KNOW TH' ORIGIN-AL OF THAT LOST JOHN. HE SAY LOST JOHN WAS: THE REASON; THE FELLOW GOT LOST IN THE WOODS, AN' HE COULDN'T FIND HIS WAY OUT, AN' HE WANTED TO PLAY, AN' HE HAD THIS LITTLE HARMONICA PART, AN' PEOPLE HEARD HIM, AN' THEY WENT A-HOLLERIN' BACK AT HIM, 'CAUSE THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT T' TELL 'IM, AN' GOT HIM OUT OF THE WOODS. SO THEY ASKED HIM WHAT HIS NAME, SAID HIS NAME WAS LOST JOHN."

ON SUNDAYS, SONNY AND HIS FAMILY USED TO GO TO CHURCH -- TO THE "HESTER GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, OUT IN THE COUNTRY." SONNY ATTENDED SUNDAY SCHOOL, AND SANG IN THE QUARTET. "I WAS THE BASS. BROTHER, HE DONE TENOR. AN' ONE OF THE BOYS DONE BARITONE, AN' ONE THE LEAD." THEY SANG "THAT ONE I RECORDED FOR FOLKWAYS, BEAUTIFUL CITY. I NEVER SAW IT IN A BOOK. WE'D A -- JUST GO 'ROUND AND MAKE UP THAT SONG OURSELVES, YOU KNOW. LIKE WE HEAR PEOPLE SING THAT SONG, WE TAKE IT AN' PUT DIFFERENT VERSES WID IT. WE SANG MOST LIKE BASED ON SOMETHIN' MOST LIKE YOU HEAR SUNG IN CHURCH."

WHEN THE SERVICES BEGAN, THE PREACHER GOT UP. "THE PREACHER PREACHES, THE OTHERS JOIN IN. YEAH, SHOUTIN' AN' JUMPIN' OVER BENCHES AN' FALLIN', AN .... HE COULD PREACH AND THEY SING, AN' THEY HAVE A QUARTET COME UP AN' SING, LIKE WE USED TO DO. THAT'S THE REALLY RELIGIOUS SONGS. ONE THEY USED TO SING 'BOUT YOU CAN'T HIDE EVEN IF YOU TRIED, GOD GOT YOUR NUMBER HE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE AN' DEATH GOT A WARRANT FOR YOU. . . . (MY FATHER) USED TO SING CHURCH SONGS. LEMME SEE, HE SANG THAT SONG 'BOUT YOU BETTER MIND WHAT YOU TALKIN' 'BOUT . . . USED TO PLAY THAT ON THE HARMONICA TOO."

LITTLE SONNY TERRY HEARD CHURCH SONGS IN THE STREETS, TOO. IN THE DAYS WHEN HE WAS GROWING UP, BACK THEN, THERE WERE PREACHERS WHO CAME AROUND, SINGING, AND SELLING BROADSIDES: "OH, THEY WOULD BE RELIGIOUS SONGS, CHRISTIAN SONGS, LIKE THAT, CHURCH SONGS. HE HAD A SONG WHAT HE SING, 'BOUT IT'S A HAND WRITIN' ON THE WALL. 'BOUT COME HERE AN' READ IT, SEE WHAT IT SAYS, IT'S THE HAND WRITIN' ON THE WALL."

A LITTLE TO ONE SIDE, BUT NOT, AS THEY SAW IT, CONFLICTING WITH THE DEEPLY RELIGIOUS PART OF THE LIVES OF SONNY TERRY AND HIS FAMILY, WAS THE FUN. ON SATURDAY NIGHTS, REUBEN TERRY TOOK HIS HARMONICA AND WENT OUT TO PLAY FOR DANCES. "HE'D PLAY SOMETHING LIKE THE LOST JOHN, ONLY A WHOLE LOT DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY I PLAY IT. HE JUST PLAYED IT STRAIGHT -- THEY DANCE ALL NIGHT LIKE THAT. I THINK THEY DONE THIS EIGHT-HAND SET DANCE, LIKE THEY DO DOWN THERE. BE EIGHT ON THE FLOOR --- FOUR BOYS AN' FOUR GIRLS. AN' THEY CALL THE SET. HE DID HAVE A FELLOW WITH HIM, TO PLAY HIS GUITAR A LITTLE BIT." BESIDES THE "SET DANCES," SONNY TALKS OF A BUCK (HE PRONOUNCES IT BOTH "BUG" AND "BUCK") DANCE: "FELLOWS GET OUT THERE AN' DO THE BUG DANCE, YOU KNOW -- THAT'S SOMETHIN' LIKE YOU HEAR NOW, PEOPLE DO CALLED THE CHICKEN REEL -- SOMETHIN' SCALE O' THAT. I JUST LEARNED THIS 'BOUT -- 'BOUT YOU KNOW, PEOPLE DANCE, I JUS CATCH, I HEARD THE FEETS DANCE, I JUS KEEPS A FEETSIN' AROUND TILL I FIND SOMETHIN' TO FIT IN THERE. YEAH, THAT'S 'WAY BACK, THAT BUCK DANCE, THAT'S 'WAY BACK . . ."

SOMETIME BACK THEN, THE TERRY FAMILY GOT A PHONO-GRAPH: "WELL, MY BROTHER SANG BLUES. OH YEAH, THEY USED TO SANG, SAME BLUES LIKE I UV SANG, RED RIVER BLUES, BLUES LIKE THEY NAME-MAKE-UP BLUES -- OH, JUST ABOUT, YOU KNOW -- HEARIN' A RECORD OR SOME-THIN' -- WELL, IT'S DEM WHAT YOU WIND UP, AND PUT THE RECORD ON. WE PLAYED A RECORD, LIKE -- WELL, OH, BESSIE SMITH, SHE WAS MAKIN' RECORDS ALONG THEN -- WE USED TO PLAY HER RECORDS. AND MAMIE SMITH .. BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON AND BLIND BLAKE, HE USED TO PLAYING MILK COW BLUES."

BLUES, TENT SHOWS, PREACHERS, DANCE MUSIC -- YOUNG SONNY'S MUSICAL EDUCATION WAS ALMOST COMPLETE. THEN ONE DAY AS HE WAS WALKING DOWN THE STREET, SOMETHING NEW CAME ALONG. "THERE'S A FELLOW USED TO COME THROUGH THERE CALLED DEFOE BAILEY, HE USED TO PLAY THE ALCOHOLIC BLUES. OH, HE WAS A LITTLE SHORT GUY, ABOUT -- I RECKON 'BOUT -- FOUR FEET. HE COULDN'T PLAY IT ON BLUES MUCH, BUT THAT ALCOHOLIC BLUES. HE MADE A RECORD OF THAT. I DON'T KNOW WHAT COMPANY. HIS HOME WAS IN TENNESSEE, HE LIVED IN NASHVILLE. HE WAS A PRETTY OLD FELLOW, THEN . . . HE WAS 'BOUT FORTY-FIVE. HE HAD A LITTLE BOY WITH HIM -- I THINK IT WAS HIS KID. IT WAS A LITTLE ACT HE HAD, HE PLAYED A HARP, AN' THIS BOY DANCED. HE PLAYED THE HARMONICA. PUT HIS HAT DOWN, PEOPLE TH'OW HIM MONEY IN HAT. HE SAY HE WENT ALL AROUND. OH, HE USED TO PLAY THE FOX CHASE. WELL, I FIRST HEARD IT, I HEARD IT ON A FELLOW COME THROUGH PLAY-IN' IT. I FORGOT THE FELLOW'S NAME. HE USED TO COME THROUGH, PLAYIN' THE FOX CHASE, BUT HE DIDN'T PLAY IT LIKE WE PLAY IT NOW -- HARMONICA WOULDN'T BE SAYIN' NOTHIN' MUCH. MY FATHER, HE USED TO PLAY IT, TOO -- AN' I LEARNED THE BIGGEST PART F'UM HIM. AN' I USED TO KNOWED IT -- FOUND IT -- TO A MAN UP ABOVE, USED TO HAVE FOX."

FROM DEFOE BAILEY, AND HIS FATHER, BUT NOT FROM THE STRANGER, WHO "WOULDN'T BE SAYIN' NOTHIN' MUCH, "SONNY TERRY LEARNED TO ADD THAT CERTAIN SOMETHING THAT MADE HIS MUSIC -- OR MUSIC AS IT SEEMED TO HIM -- COMPLETE. "DOGS RUN THE FOX AN' I USED TO LISTEN TO THAT BARKIN' -- KETCH A WHOLE LOT OF IDEAS F'UM THAT. OH, THEY RUN FOX. THEY GET ON THE HORSES, AN' DOGS RUN 'EM.. THEY'D BET ON THE DOG, WHICH DOG WOULD CATCH THE FOX."

AND THERE WERE TRAINS. BOTH THE SEABOARD AIR LINE AND SOUTHERN RAILROAD WENT THROUGH NEAR SONNY'S HOME: "MOCKIN' THE TRAIN'S 'BOUT THE FIRST PIECE I LEARN . . . I USED TO HEAR THE FREIGHT TRAIN COMIN' BY, I USED TO BE SETTIN' DOWN SOMETIME, BY MYSELF REAL STILL AN' I'D SAY I WISH I COULD PLAY THAT. I USED TO HEAR MY FATHER DO IT, A LITTLE BIT. THE FREIGHT TRAIN CARRY CAR-BOX, THEY CARRY 'BOUT THIRTY-FIVE, FORTY . . . THEY CARRY RIGHT SMART. THE PASSENGER TRAIN, THEY CARRY 'BOUT, I RECKON, BE 'BOUT SEVEN-EIGHT. OF COSE, THOSE PASSENGER TRAINS GO A LITTLE BIT FASTER 'N FREIGHT TRAIN. BUT NEAR 'BOUT -- THEY SOUND NEAR 'BOUT LIKE, COSE YOU KNOW THE SAME MOTOR, LOCOMOTIVE BE PULLING IT. WE USED TO BE OUT IN THE FIELD WORKIN', USED TO TELL THE TIME TRAINS COMIN' 'LONG AT 'LEVEN O'CLOCK. THAT WAS UP TILL I WAS FIFTEEN."

WHEN HE WAS ELEVEN, SONNY HAD INJURED HIMSELF. "I HIT MY OWN SEF IN THE LEFT EYE, PLAYIN' WITH A PIECE O' STICK. I HITTIN' ON THE CHAIR, PIECE FLEW AT ME." HIS SIGHT WAS PERMANENTLY IMPAIRED. THEN "WHEN I'S SIXTEEN, A LITTLE BOY 'BOUT FOUR YEARS OLD HIT ME IN MY LEFT (THAT IS, REMAINING) RIGHT EYE. WE WERE PLAYIN', AN' HE JUST THREWED A LITTLE PIECE O' IRON, AN' HIT ME IN TH' EYE. I LOSED THAT

COMPLETE. I HAD TO QUIT SCHOOL, I COULDN'T SEE TO READ."

THINGS BEGAN TO CHANGE FOR SONNY. HE HAD LIKED SCHOOL, AND HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT HE COULD GO ON WITH THAT, AND WITH WORKING IN THE FIELDS, UNTIL SOMEDAY HE MIGHT HAVE A LITTLE FARM OF HIS OWN. BUT NOW THERE WAS THIS HANDICAP, AND TWO YEARS AFTER IT HAPPENED, IN 1927, TIMES BEGAN TO GET BAD. HE DID WHAT HE COULD. "AFTER I GOT HANDICAPPED, I USED TO GO TO TOWN . . . I USED TO PLAY ON THE STREETS, AND MAKE MONEY. I DIDN'T EVEN CARRY A STICK, OR NOTHIN'. ANYWHU, I DONE GO OUT, AN' STAY OUT AT NIGHT TWELVE, ONE O'CLOCK . . . AN' COME HOME. OH, JUS WALKIN' . . . STAY IN THE ROAD. THEM CUBSED ROADS! SOMETIMES TEN, 'LEVEN MILES AT NIGHT, WALKIN'. I HEAR A CAR COMIN', I GIT OUT THE-ROAD. SOMETIME I FALL IN THE DITCH, GIT UP, KEEP A-GOIN'."

SOMETIMES INSTEAD OF GOING INTO DURHAM, HE CHOSE RALEIGH. "I'D GO OVER THERE AN' PLAY, PLAY AN' COME BACK. SOMETIMES, I PLAYED FOR DANCING. CATCH THE BUS MYSELF, THEN COME ON BACK. SOMETIMES I'D TAKE A KID, OR SOME OF MY FRIEND BOYS U'D GO WITH ME . . ."

IT WAS THIS DETERMINATION TO KEEP GOING, TO MAKE MUSIC EVEN IF HE COULDN'T DO MUCH ELSE, THAT LED TO CARNEGIE HALL, AND LATER, TO THE PART IN "FINIAN'S RAINBOW". ON A DARK NIGHT THAT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MUCH DIFFERENT FROM ANY OF THE OTHER NIGHTS WHEN HE HAD SET OUT FOR HIS LONG WALK DOWN THE BACK-COUNTRY ROADS, A STRANGER HEARD HIM. WITH-OUT SONNY TERRY'S EVER KNOWING IT, WORD HAD GOT AROUND THAT HE PLAYED FINE HARMONICA. THE STRANGER, WHO WAS SCOURING THE DEEP SOUTH FOR TALENT TO ADD TO THE ROSTER OF ONE OF THE BIG PHONOGRAPH COMPAN-IES, WAS BREATHLESS WHEN HE HEARD SONNY'S STRANGE, DIFFERENT KIND OF SONG AND MUSIC. BEFORE THAT EVEN-ING WAS OVER, SONNY TERRY HAD A CONTRACT TO RECORD. A CHANCE TO APPEAR AT THE CARNEGIE HALL CONCERT CAME WITH IT.

NOW, FOURTEEN YEARS LATER, SONNY TERRY CAN POINT WITH PRIDE TO ALL THE THINGS THAT MIGHT NEVER HAVE HAPPENED: HE HAS MADE RECORDS FOR CAPITOL, DECCA, COLUMBIA, FOLKWAYS; HE'S A STAR PERFORMER AT FOLK MUSIC FESTIVALS EVERYWHERE, AND HIS TOWN HALL AP-PEARANCES IN A "BLUES AT MIDNIGHT" SERIES WERE LAUDED BY THE GENERALLY TOUGH BROADWAY PRESS; WHEN HIS "HARMONICA BREAKDOWN" WAS PLAYED OVER CLASSIC-MINDED, HIGHBROW WQXR OF NEW YORK AS PART OF A "HISTORY OF JAZZ" PREPARED BY FOLKWAYS RECORDS, THE SWITCHBOARD HUMMED INTO LIFE AS REQUESTS FOR A REPEAT POURED IN; HE HAS RECORDED THIS SAME "BREAKDOWN" FOR THE ARCHIVE OF AMERICAN FOLK MU-SIC OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, AND DANCER JANE DUDLEY HAS USED THE PIECE IN HER DANCE RECITALS. AND HIS HARMONICA AND SONG HAVE ADDED A SPECIAL QUALITY TO MORE THAN ONE STAGE SHOW.

WHEN SUMMER COMES, THEATRES AND MUSIC CIRCUSES WIRE FOR HIS SERVICES; HE APPEARS FREQUENTLY AT THE GREEK THEATRE, IN LOS ANGELES, WHENEVER THERE'S A REPRISE OF THE BRIGHT DOINGS THAT HAVE MADE "FINIAN'S RAINBOW" A STEADY ITEM ON REVIVAL-ISTS' SHOWBILLS. IT'S BEEN THIS WAY EVER SINCE THE CURTAIN FIRST ROSE ON THAT PINEY BOG, AND SONNY TERRY PLAYED AND SANG BACKSTAGE FOR AN AUDIENCE HE NEVER SAW. THAT PART OF IT, BEING BACKSTAGE AND IN THE DARK, WOULD HAVE CAUSED MANY A BROADWAY GUY OR DOLL TO TAKE A POWDER ON A CONTRACT. BUT DARKNESS WAS NOTHING NEW TO SONNY; ALL HE WANTED WAS A CHANCE TO BE HEARD.