

CLARK KESSINGER, FIDDLER

Old-Time Country Music Folkways Records FA 2336

Compiled and Notes By Ken Davidson



FOLKWAYS FA 2336

RAGTIME ANNIE
SALLY ANN JOHNSON
RED BIRD
SALT RIVER
OVER THE WAVES
POCA RIVER BLUES
CHINKY PIN
FLOP-EARED MULE
CLUCK OLD HEN
TURKEY KNOB
LEATHER BRITCHES
- BILLY IN THE LOWGROUND
DANCE ALL NIGHT
WEDNESDAY NIGHT WALTZ
SANDY RIVER
HELL AMONG THE YEARLINGS
SALLY GOODWIN
RICHMOND POLKA

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

CLARK KESSINGER, FIDDLER/OLD-TIME COUNTRY MUSIC

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FOLKWAYS FA 2336

CLARK KESSINGER, FIDDLER

Clark Kessinger is well-known among the ever-increasing number of devotees of old-time country music. That he remains one of the most precise and well-timed country fiddlers is evident on this recording, his first in 35 years. These recordings are also the first he's made featuring both banjo and guitar accompaniment. With Gene Meade, of Draper, N. C., on guitar, and Wayne Hauser, of Winston-Salem, N. C., on banjo, I find these recordings the best he's ever made.

The trio was actually first formed at the 30th Annual Old Time Fiddlers Convention at Galax, Virginia, held on August 13-14 of this year, where they placed first in the band competition out of a field of over 60 bands. Previous to this, Clark had taken first place in the fiddle contest at the Pulaski Old Fiddlers Convention, held at Pulaski, Virginia, and at the Richwood, W. Va. fiddler's convention.

Although a number of old-time music critiques (including myself) have considered Clark's musical abilities to be the result of some years of formal training, he is actually a self-taught musician. Clark states he took up the violin at the age of five and was playing at dances before the age of ten. He and his nephew, Luches Kessinger, began playing together about 1919, and by 1926 they had their own radio show over station WOBV in Charleston. In the spring of 1928, James O'Keefe, recording engineer for Brunswick (who had previously recorded Dock Boggs), recorded 14 sides of the Kessingers at Ashland, Kentucky. Clark and Luches recorded, as the 'Kessinger Brothers', over 70 instrumental sides for the Brunswick company between April, 1928, and September, 1930. All of these recordings featured solely violin and guitar, in contrast to other instrumental recordings of that period, most of which consisted of at least three instruments and often included a vocal. Their success was due almost entirely to their records, since they made infrequent personal appearances outside the Charleston area. They played fiddle tunes traditional to their own Kanawha valley region; one exception to this was 'Done Gone,' which Clark learned from an Eck Robertson recording (Victor 19372). Clark considers Robertson to be one of the best fiddlers he has heard. Their greatest success during this period was over-shadowed by the great crash, which resulted in the multiple changing of hands of the controlling stock of the corporation and the discontinuance of specialized hillbilly series on the Brunswick labels. They did, however, continue playing over radio station WCHS on the 'Old Farm Hour,' in Charleston, and, during this period, Clark made personal appearances with the Delmore brothers, San and Kirk McGee, Clayton McMichen, Arthur Smith, and other old time recording artists. In the late 30's, he and Luches appeared at the National Folk Festival in Washington, D. C. Since Luches' death, in 1943, Clark has played at dances in the Charleston area with various accompanists.



CLARK KESSINGER, FIDDLER

SIDE A

1. **RAGTIME ANNIE** - One of the most popular fiddle tunes found in this country, Ragtime Annie, or Ragged Ann, is played in many diverse ways. Usually performed in the key of D, a third additional part is sometimes played in the key of G. It is common in fiddle tune collections of more recent vintage, but appears to be absent in the earlier collections. A. C. Robertson's early Victor recording (ca. 1922, Vic. 19149) is the first occurrence of the air that I know of.

2. **SALLY ANN JOHNSON** - Known usually under the titles Sally Johnson or Katy Hill, the earliest version of this tune, to my knowledge, was recorded by A. C. Robertson (ca. 1922, Vic. 19372).

3. **RED BIRD** - This hornpipe is very similar to Uncle Jimmy Thompson's Billy Wilson, recorded in October, 1926 (Col. 15118-D).

4. **SALT RIVER** - Bill Monroe recorded this piece recently under the title Salt Creek. It is reminiscent of an old tune called Horny-knick-a-brino, both of which are probably derivative of some Irish air.

5. **OVER THE WAVES** - Composed by Juvenita Rosas, in Mexico before 1889, this waltz has been universally popular for a number of generations.

6. **POCA RIVER BLUES** - More popularly known as East Tennessee Blues, Clark learned this piece from Reese Jarvis, a local Kanawha fiddler, who recorded it originally in May, 1929 (Br. 358). Clark adds a little pizzicato in his arrangement.

7. **CHINKY PIN** - This tune, traditional as a violin and bagpipe piece in the British Isles, was recorded frequently during the 1920's and early 1930's, under various titles (e. g., Too Young To Get Married, Love Somebody, I'm My Mama's Darling Child, Big Town Fling, and My Love Is But A Lassie O).

8. **FLOP-EARED MULE** - One of America's most recorded fiddle tunes, it is performed in two keys. Ira Ford¹ states that it is a derivation of College Schottische. It was popular in earlier days as a quadrille tune.

9. **CLUCK OLD HEN** - Also known under the titles Cackling Hen or Old Hen Cackle, this is popular as a novelty piece, with the violin imitating the sound of the cackling hen. It is often performed with an accompanying vocal about the 'old hen she cackled, cackled in the lot, next time she cackled, cackled in the pot.'

SIDE B

1. **TURKEY KNOB** - Clark composed this tune, calling it after a Kanawha valley place name. This, along with Leather Britches, won the group first prize at the Galax festival.

2. - 3. **LEATHER BRITCHES - BILLY IN THE LOWGROUND** - These two complicated pieces are both quite ancient, and are to be found quite frequently in the older collections of dance tunes as well as the more recent collections.

4. **DANCE ALL NIGHT** - Also known as Give The Fiddler A Dram, or Give Me A Bottle Of I Don't Care What. It appears to be of some relation to Buffalo Gals.

5. **WEDNESDAY NIGHT WALTZ** - This was the Kessinger Brothers most popular Brunswick recording. The tune is still quite popular at country dances.

6. **SANDY RIVER** - The Big Sandy River, which flows between West Virginia and Kentucky into the Ohio, appears to be observed in fiddle tune titles more often than any other river in the country. I am not familiar with this melody.

7. **HELL AMONG THE YEARLINGS** - The earliest occurrence of this tune is found on the Kessinger Brothers recording of 1928 (Br. 235). Although quite popular in recent years, I have found no earlier printed versions of the tune.² In this recording, Clark utilizes a technique by which he brushes the strings with his forefinger, alternating this variation with the 'rough' portion of the tune, as well as a little pizzicato.

8. **SALLY GOODWIN** - One of the most well known tunes at square dances, it is often performed with interspersing vocals.

9. **RICHMOND POLKA** - This piece has been recorded under a variety of titles, and appears to be known under a great many more (e. g., Rocky Road to Dublin, Green Mountain Polka, Richmond Cotillion, Oh, Dear Mammy, Pin A Rose On Me, Oh Aunt Jenny, There's A Bug On Me).

1. Ira Ford, Traditional Music of America (New York, 1940), p. 121
2. Ibid., p. 101. (The tune cited here is a different melody).

KESSINGER BROTHERS DISCOGRAPHY

Apr. 26, 1928. Ashland, Kentucky.

AL-204-05	Chicken In The Barnyard	Br. 256 Supt. 2087
AL-206-07	Forked Deer	Br. 247 Supt. 2089
AL-208-09	Hell Among The Yearlings	Br. 235 Supt. 2090
AL-210-11	Patty On The Turnpike	Voc. 5248
AL-212-13	Devil's Dream	Br. 256
AL-214-15	Wild Horse	Voc. 5248
AL-216-17	Wednesday Night Waltz	Br. 220
AL-218-19	Goodnight Waltz	Br. 220
AL-220-21	Garfield March	Br. 238
AL-222-23	Kanawha March	Br. 238
AL-224-25	Sixteen Days In Georgia	Br. 267
AL-226-27	Girl I Left Behind Me	Br. 267
AL-228-29	Arkansas Traveler	Br. 247 Supt. 2086
AL-230-31	Turkey In The Straw	Br. 235 Supt. 2086
Early 1929.	New York City, N. Y.	
E29157	Wild Goose Chase	Br. 331 Supt. 2089
E29158	Dill Pickles Rag	Br. 315
E29-159	Tugboat	Br. 315
E29161	Johnny, Bring The Jug 'Round The Hill	Br. 331 Supt. 2090
Feb. 1929.	N. Y. C.	
E29262	Sally Johnson	Mel. 12161 Voc. 02704 Polk P9016
E29265	Portsmouth	Mel. 12161 Voc. 02704 Polk P9016
Feb. 18, 1929.	N. Y. C.	
E29269	Old Jake Gillie	Br. 323
E29270	Birdie	Br. 323
E29271	Mississippi Sawyer	Br. 309
E29272	Richmond Polka	Br. 309
E29273	Soldiers Joy	Br. 341
E29274	Chinky Fin	Br. 396
E29275	Sally Goodin	Br. 308
E29276	Sourwood Mountain	Br. 308 Aur. 22039
E29277	Long-Eared Mule	Br. 341
E29278	Done Gone	Br. 396
Aug. 13, 1929.	N. Y. C.	
E30119	Brownstown Girl	Voc. 02565
E30120	Josh And I	Voc. 02565
E30122	Boarding House Bells Are Ringing	Br. 352 Supt. 2091
E30123	Rat Cheese Under The Hill	Br. 458 Supt. 2091
1929.	N. Y. C.	
E30180	Durang's Hornpipe	Br. 364
E30181	Hot Foot	Voc. 5481 Mel. M12272 Polk P9086
E30182	Over The Waves Waltz	Br. 344 Aur. A22036

E30183	Black Hawk Waltz	Br. 344 Aur. A22038
E30184	Three Forks of Sandy	Voc. 02567
E30187	West Virginia Special	Voc. 02566
E30188	Salt River	Voc. 5481 Mel M12272 Polk P9086 Voc. 02566
E30189	Kanawha County Rag	Br. 458
E30190	Going Up Brushy Fork	Mel. M18019 Br. 580
E30191	McCloud's Reel	Br. 521
E30192	Whistling Rufus	Br. 521
E30193	Liza Jane	Br. 411
E30194	Sopping The Gravy	Br. 411
E30196	Don't Let The Deal Go Down	Br. 468
E30197	Polka Four	Br. 352
E30198	Midnight Serenade Waltz	Br. 364
E30199	Gippy Get Your Hair Cut	Voc. 02567
E30300	Rockingham	Br. 468
E30301	Little Brown Jug	Br. 580
E30302	Little Betty Brown	
October, 1930.	N. Y. C.	
E34409	Wildflower Waltz	Br. 484
E34410	Ragtime Annie	Br. 540
E34412	Chicken Reel	Br. 480
E34413	Mary Jane Waltz	Br. 484
E34414	Under The Double Eagle	Br. 592
E34415	Steamboat Bill	Br. 563
E34417	Dixie	Br. 518
E34421	Marching Through Georgia	Br. 518
E34422	Lauterbach Waltz	Br. 567
E34423	Lonesome Road Blues	Br. 540
E34424	Pop Goes The Weasel	Br. 480
E34434	Regal March	Br. 592
E34435	Mexican Waltz	Br. 567
E34476	Neapolitan Two Step	Br. 563
E34477	Everybody To The Punchin'	Br. 554
E34478	Shoo Fly	Br. 554

** Melotone — as by 'Wright Brothers'
Supertone — as by 'Birmingham Entertainers'
Aurora — as by 'Arnold Brothers'

The following four sides, as by the 'Hobbs Brothers' (Elmer and Jud), issued from Plaza masters on various dime store labels, I feel certain to be from the Kessinger Brothers first Brunswick session.

Turkey In The Straw	Oriole 1414, Jewel 5458, QRS 9003, Paramount 3224, Broadway 8165, Conqueror 7332
Devil's Dream	Jewel 5644, Broadway 8161, Conqueror 7350
Hell Among The Yearlings.	Oriole 1414, Jewel 5458, Paramount 3224, Broadway 8165, QRS 9003, Conqueror 7350
Patty On The Turnpike	Broadway 8161, Conqueror 7332
Notes & Discography	— Guthrie T. Meade

Guthrie T. Meade, now working at the Library of Congress, is responsible for this LP. It was through a tip he gave me while we were attending the National Folk Festival at Covington, Kentucky, that Clark Kessinger was located and eventually recorded "Gus", wrote the notes, tune identifications and compiled the discography.

A special thanks goes to: Lou of Disc Collector, David Freeman of COUNTY RECORDS, David L. Crisp (Collector from Australia,) and Loy Beaver collector from New York formerly of Georgia. It was through their encouragement and advise that the accompanist were included.

Ken Davidson



Other albums of traditional music available from Folk Promotions:
Vol. 1 Old Time Songs and Tunes from Clay County, W. Va.
Vol. 2 1963 — 28th Annual Galax Old Fiddlers Convention, Galax, Virginia
Vol. 3 Old Time Music from Calhoun County, W. Va.
Vol. 4 The Legend of Clark Kessinger

Cover Drawing — Pat Anderson — Charleston, W. Va.
Photo on Back of Clark, Wayne and Gene — Roger Morris, Charleston, W. Va.

Recorded by — Scooter Withrow — WRDS Radio
Album Production — Ken Davidson — Folk Promotions

COUNTRY MUSIC ON FOLKWAYS RECORDS

OLD TIME & BLUEGRASS

by John Cohen

This is to serve as an introduction to one segment of the Folkways catalog which represents something of the seeds and sources for a dynamic aspect of American folk music which has found a voice in the cities and colleges in recent years. For the most part, this is mountain music derived from the rural south.

There is now an excitement about this music throughout the colleges and cities, amongst young people who are finding a voice in this music, and who are making it their own voice.

There are a great range of approaches to this music, and a great many styles involved; yet inherent in this movement is a desire to remain close to the traditional ways of playing the music.

The movement, diverse as it is, has taken on a structure which has its heroes, artistic leaders, legendary characters, a sort of language of its own, and several senseless confusions and stereotypes applied to it.

Much of the clamor about this music has come from banjo pickers & guitar singers who have brought the music to everyone's attention by their very enthusiasm. It is their excitement about the music which has communicated first. But there is much more to be heard and understood.

These spirited musicians are often 'put down' for being merely 'ethnic imitators' by the very same people who recognize that traditional folk music is the only aesthetically complete folk music to be heard.

Although it is relatively new in its present situation, this music is part of one of the oldest American traditions. It has its roots in the music of the early settlers, and has received fresh vigor over the years from developments within American culture which have introduced new sounds and new instruments to this tradition, as well as new rhythms and harmonies to accompany the changing social functions the music has performed.

It is part of an active and progressive tradition, yet it has always maintained a terrific sense of respect and preservation for its own past. In this way elements from years ago are still considered as significant to the present day music by those who perform and live with this music.

Within old time string band music, bluegrass and just home performances, are found trances of the old ballad styles of singing, of bagpipe and fiddle sounds from the British Isles, as well as sounds of the sentimental songs from the 19th century, minstrel stage songs, early Negro blues, rhythms from jazz as well as those now found in rock-and-roll.

One significant and important aspect of the current city trend towards this music is that it has presented a way to enjoy and understand the popular music, without sentimentality and without losing the perspective of culture as a whole. It is only in the nature of this perspective that the urban interest differs from the country tradition. This can neither be praised nor lamented, nor can it be overlooked. It must be recognized, for it is the basis upon which an intelligent approach can develop to the many ideas which are being encountered in the current investigation of folk music.

The importance of academic scholarship can not be denied: neither can an excited emotional involvement. It is only when folk music becomes just a form of entertainment, in the more commercial sense of that word, that it is being abused.

That the investigation has become more like an involvement of love or art, is to the credit of the investigators. If city people have found that country music is meaningful to them, then this is a genuine enrichment of their lives.

The more one gets involved in this music, the more one realizes the character of an old tradition at work, and the astonishing directness and simplicity in the approach of the traditional artist. An understanding of the music opens up the possibilities for us all to get the most pleasure and reward from these old songs, and from the people who sing them.

In various college campuses and cities now, folk music societies and festivals are emerging which incorporate active research with song collecting, concert producing, and music playing. At one school, on the event of a New Lost City Rambler concert, the folk music society increased its membership by 100, a panel discussion was held with university faculty and visiting musicians participating, a student string-band was formed, and a local Bluegrass band of country kids was 'discovered' and incorporated into the general university folk song scene. In addition to this, a regular publication was started. At another place, serious discographical research is being done and a record of rare re-issues of early hill music was released. Concerts are being produced employing traditional artists; this is no longer a unique situation. The University of Chicago Folk Festival, the Berkeley Festival, the Friends of Old Time Music, and the Ash Grove in Los Angeles, are all pointing the way towards an intelligent enjoyment of traditional folk music.

Within the Folkways catalog is a group of recording which present the scope and nature of the various facets of this music. Folkways has been consistent in its presentation of this music as it is traditionally and authentically performed.

FA2951 (Vol. 1) - Ballads: 27 traditional ballads performed by The Carter Family, Clarence Ashley, Buell Kazee, Carolina Tar Heels, Furry Lewis, Charlie Poole with the North Carolina Ramblers, G. B. Grayson, The Masked Marvel, "Chubby" Parker, many others.

2 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay records

FA2952 (Vol. 2) Social Music: 29 selections performed by Bascom Lunsford, Blind Willie Johnson, Carter Family, Sacred Harp Singers, Bunt Stephens, A Hunt's Ramblers, The Pep-Steppers, Cincinnati Jug Band, others.

2 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay records \$11.90

FA2953 (Vol. 3) Songs: 28 selections incl. East Virginia, One Morning In May, Sugar Baby, Mountaineer's Courtship, 99 Year Blues, K.C. Moan, Fishing Blues, etc., performed by Uncle Dave Macon, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Clarence Ashley, Cannons Jug Stompers, Carter Family, John Hurt, "Dock" Boggs, Stoneman Family, many more.

2 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay records

The Anthology of American Folk Music FA 2951, FA 2952, FA 2953 This collection is a most comprehensive one, and gives an incisive look into the folk music current from 1927 to 1932 as recorded by the commercial recording companies of that time. Good representation of rural music, with many important artists represented, ed. and annotated by Harry Smith.

Vol. 1 Ballads:

Some Child Ballads, and many other old songs in the ballad tradition, sung as current and popular songs in 1927, etc.

Vol. 2 Social Music:

Dance music and religious music. Both white and Negro traditions. Many instrumental pieces.

Vol. 3 Songs:

Excellent collection of country songs and many blues.

Important artists in this collection.

Clarence Ashley,
Buell Kazee
Dick Justice
Uncle Eck Danford
Burnett & Rutherford
Conner & Young
Carolina Tar Heels

Miss. John Hurt
Furry Lewis
Jilson Setters
Eck Robertson
Uncle David Macon
Blind Lemon Jefferson
Dock Boggs

Grayson & Whitter
The Carter Family
Kelly Harrell
Frank Hutchison
Charlie Poole
Bascom Lunsford
Jim Jackson
Ernest Phipps
E.V. Stoneman
Blind Willie Johnson