

FA 2368

Roscoe Holcomb/the High Lonesome Sound

FOLKWAYS

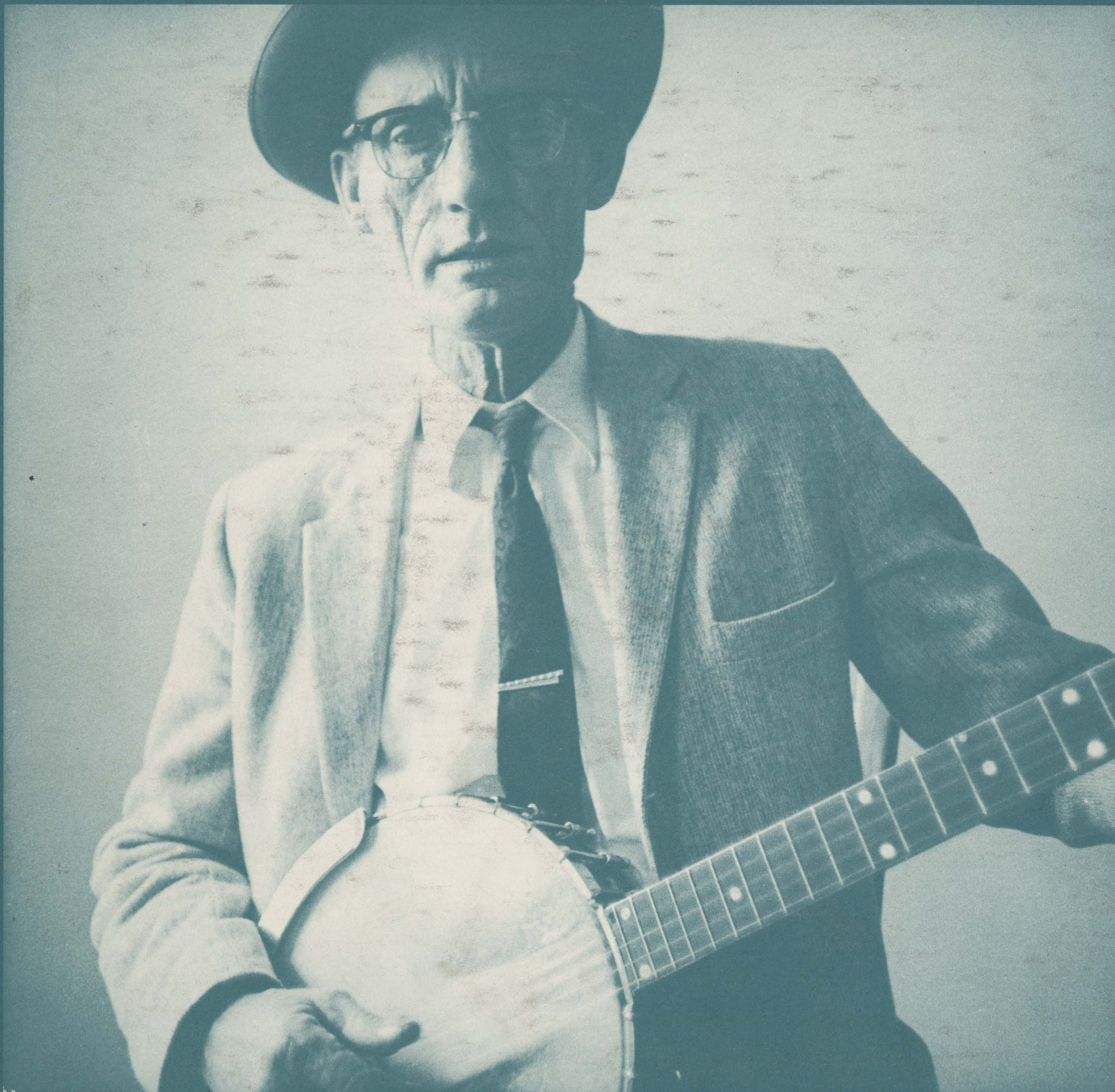


PHOTO: JOHN COHEN

Roscoe Holcomb/
the High
Lonesome
Sound

PROPERTY OF
FOLKLIFE PROGRAM
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

SWANNO MOUNTAIN
COMBS HOTEL BURNED DOWN
WANDERING BOY
HOOK AND LINE
BARBARA ALLEN BLUES
MARRIED LIFE BLUES
FAIR MISS IN THE GARDEN
OMIE WISE
WILLOW TREE
BOAT'S UP THE RIVER
IN THE PINES
FOX CHASE
CONEY ISLE
CHARLES GUITAU
FREE LITTLE BIRD
BABY LET YOUR HAIR ROLL DOWN
LITTLE BESSIE

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES IN INSIDE POCKET

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 68-522
© 1968 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.
632 Broadway, NYC, USA 10012

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2368

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FA 2368

© 1965 Folkways Records & Service Corp., 43 W. 61st St., N.Y.C., USA 10023

ROSCOE HOLCOMB/the High Lonesome Sound

Produced and edited by John Cohen

Recorded by Peter Bartok, tape editing by David Hancock • Recorded April, 1964



Photograph of Roscoe Holcomb from "The High Lonesome Sound", a film by John Cohen - 16 mm, black and white, 30 minutes. Distributed by Brandon Films - 200 West 57th Street, New York 19, New York.

INTERVIEW WITH ROSCOE BY JOHN COHEN

What are old time people?/ Far as I know, they're just old time people...they got their own ways; they're just a little different from the younger generation.

Are their houses different?/ They live different from what we do now. There wasn't any modern living back them days. Most of the old buildings were log buildings, hewn, with a broadax, notched and laid up, and they was chanked with mud, the cracks was, to keep the air out, and then papered inside - made a very warm house; and then covered with boards. Go to the hill and cut a big oak tree or chestnut, and dry the boards out and nail them on the roof. Last for years, 25 and 30 years a board roof would last.....I was raised up when there were very few coal mines and Lee boy (Lee Sexton) was raised up that same way, but we made our living mostly in farming. The old time songs was all we knew anything about. We don't like this new stuff that's out and that's the reason we don't sing it.

Do you think there's anything in rock and roll?/ Well, there's some rock and roll - that colored RNR, it's late stuff but there's some good music in it, some really good picking. That RNR that ain't nothing but a beat, that's all the rock you get out of it. Some of these old guys get the new and old mixed together and it does a lot better than the young fellers that play RNR....It started from the blues mostly and it just kept beatin in. That's mostly a colored fellers' rhythm that RNR and the blues - it all connects together. It's not music come right down to it - music the way I was raised up - it don't suit me; I know it's one reason I don't play it, because I don't like it. It ain't no music to it to me.....Well the young generation can't hardly tell the difference no how cause they never heared nothing else much but that - but since this old music started back they're beginning to learn different.

How was it when the coal came in?/ well, farming's about all there was in this country til the coal mines come in here. Man made his living on the farm. Course there was railroad work - that give a lotta people work and still they farmed, raised their own stuff to eat. One of the best livings a man ever lived when you raise all your vegetables, have 3 or 4 big hogs to kill, plenty milk and butter and your own eggs, raise your chickens and you don't have to go to the store for it, you got it. It's all pure food buddy, that's the reason the old generation was stronger and lived longer, and stronger than they are today.....I guess the coal mines have been here before my time, but not but just a few. After they got started and seen what it was, why they all worked at it then. The first ones started and they made their own push-carts and pushed it out of the mines and hauled it in a wagon to the railroad. Then they got the trucks, it kept building up. Then they got the coal machines to cut the coal and shoot it, motors to haul it with, but they first had ponies and mules to haul it and still do cause you take a lot of places that you can take the ponies and mining

mules - they'll jerk 'em to the main line before the motors can get em and the motors don't have to do so much switching in each room. But the big mines they don't use no stock at all - all machine. It's getting too much machinery - taking the work away from the people. No, I don't think they'd (the people) ever like it back like it one time was, cause the coal mine has given an awful lot of work in this country. See these old mountains is about wore out. People used to work ten hours for a dollar and a half - 15¢ an hour. You worked from the time you could see to when you couldn't hardly see. I loaded coal, set timber.

What's the pay now?/ Different prices - runs from 10 to 20 dollars a shift. These union mines pay from 18 - 27 \$ for 7 hours and 45 minutes. The truck mines pay 10 and 12 dollars a day. That's what caused all the trouble - they tried to rule these little truck mines out and take over. That's what caused all these big strikes; and the union, they tried to organize them (truck mines) and couldn't do it.....Rough times back in here a while, there's places no man went in, no man got out-even if he did get in he couldn't get out - they wouldn't let him out.

Why was it you stopped playing music for a while?/ They (Baptists) seemed to think it was wrong. I used to think it was too. I get disgusted with it yet, cause I try and try and it don't seem I'm doing good at it, and get disgusted and think sometimes I'll quit anyway. I like it and I don't like it; I love to hear it and I love to play some times but after so long a time I get burnt out with it. Long as I'm able to work and do, it ain't so bad - been used to it all my life. When I can't do nothing it worries me and you don't feel like playing anymore.

Do you make your living as a musician?/ Oh no - my living - hard labor. Construction work, coal mines. It's all hard - hard living. But I love to work whenever I'm able.

Are you not working these days?/ Ain't able. I don't know what's gonna happen. I thought I was getting better but it was just a thought. I wasn't. That's what got me worried. If I's to get a job I couldn't hold it - be more worries. Man just as soon have his brains shot out as to be in that condition, the way I feel. I don't know whether you know how I feel or not, but it's rough. It's a rough life...the lumber mill - it's where I had my back broke- two places, had a ruptured disc.

You used to speak about your hands/ I've done hard work - they were tough; now since I ain't been working they've peeled off, the tough hide's peeled off. They're as tender as a woman's hands now.

Does that effect how you play music?/ Whenever I feel good why I really love to play it, whenever I feel good...At times, and at times I can't even tune a banjo.

Why do the people around here object to the photograph of your shed on the record cover?/ The people, when you take these old things...; you see, we live in these old mountains here and we've been raised up pretty rough and a lot of them does the best they can do and they take it as if you take the worst you can find to make a picture to take back to New York to show the people. That's the way a lot of them feel about it. Course it don't matter with me.

What were the square dances like?/ I've played for square dances til the sweat drip off my elbows. I used to play for square dances a lot. Used a bunch of us get out, maybe we'd go to a party somewhere and after the party was over the moon'd be a shinin bright, you know, and we'd all start backhome and gang up in the road. Somebody'd start his old instrument, guitar or banjer or something or other, and just gang up in the middle of the road and have the awfulest square dance right out in the middle of the highway.

They don't have them anymore, do they?/ People could have real good times back then. Nobody raised no trouble or anything, and it don't matter how much you was out - why people would trust their girls out, you know, with boys and neighbors. Nowadays they won't do it.

Why is that?/ So much whiskey. People drink, people get drinking, a bunch get drunk and they wanna raise some kind of trouble. That's the reason.

What kind of churches were here?/ It used to, there wasn't nothin but the old regular Baptists and missionary Baptists. And then the holiness come in, the Presbyterians, and the freewheelin Baptists. It's different. Branches of religion started in and there's quite a few of them around now.

Is it better with more?/ Well, it suits everybody's notions. Some people don't believe in some things, some in the other. They get started, maybe an argument in the church and they just branch off - leave the church and set up one of their own - call it what they want to.

Which churches have music?/ Ever since I remember the Holiness had guitars - guitars is mostly what they used, now they use anything. Any kind a man bring in they use it. Music's all right in church - I love to hear it. The old regular Baptists, they don't believe in stringed instruments in church, no kind of music in a church. I guess a lot a people doubts the Holiness, but I think Holiness is nothing more than

livin a good clean life. You have to be holy before you can be righteous. But they have things in a church that everybody can't see, don't believe in - some don't believe in talkin in unknown tongue, some don't believe in this shoutin, jumoin up and down, dancin and so on, but that's their belief, and I can't fall out with a man because he believes something. He's gotta right to believe his beliefs as well as I've mine. Let him live his life and I'll live mine. Well, that's the way the world oughta stand, I think.

A lot of churches talk against each other../ That's what tears a lot of churches up; if you read your Bible and I read mine, they read just alike, and if you see it one way and I see it another, everybody can't write or divide the word. If you see it one way, instead of me talking against you, the thing I should do is go to you and take our Bibles - let's read together and reason - it all reads the same way. Maybe I can make you understand my way or you can make me understand your's - it all reads just alike. Instead of that, they talk about it and that colors hardness in the church. The Bible's not an argument nohow.

What's the first music you heard?/ I know the best music ever I heard, the one I thought the most of was a harp, mouth harp. I would follow it - I was just a little feller - I'd follow it a long ways to hear it played...That's the reason I think music is a gift, cause the first time I ever heard music I just really loved it. I just couldn't hardly keep away from it.

What are the blues?/ The blues - there ain't no church music, no religious to it, and no what I call square dance music in it. It's just a man who had the blues when he made them I guess.

When do you sing the blues?/ When I get blue. (laugh) Sometimes you know you feel like playing certain songs - I feel like playing an old ballad, I feel like playing some religious song, I sit down, I feel lonesome, and it just fits me plum through. Then again, I pick up the guitar - the guitar's mostly for the blues, and I get started singin some old blues, it's just according to how a man feels, to what he's got on his mind when he takes a notion to play one. That's the way I feel. It's just to satisfy me - to pass the time away. I play it, if it suits me, it's all right. I don't care if it suits anybody else or not, just so it's done me good. (laugh) I'm getting it off me, see...You can't suit everybody. I don't care how good a musician a man is - you can't suit everybody, cause everybody don't know good music, and maybe something that's good music that I would like, somebody else - it wouldn't suit them a bit. That's the difference in the people. There's as much difference in people as there is in music - that's what makes different music I guess....I love to hear good music. I'd rather hear good music than play it myself cause I don't just love to play music - at times I really despise it. I can't hardly play it; I pick up my banjo sometimes and force myself on it and can't get it in tune to suit me and I just lay it down and quit. Maybe next time I'll go back and pick it up and knock the strings right off of it. I don't know why it is - a man just ain't in the mood I guess. Me, I take spells, I can't tune my banjo hardly.

Where did you learn "Covington"?/ I don't remember where that ever I learned that song - it's an old song, too. But I'd heard it sung. Then an old guy that lived here, he knowed part of the song, and I give him a dollar and a half to write the ballad for me.

Do they ever sing about things that happen now?/ Hardly ever. I can remember a lot of things that happened way back better than I can now, I reckon because I just like the old songs... I always make the music-try to make it speak as nigh as I can of the words that I say. I try and make it speak what I do.

How long ago was there moonshining?/ That's been twenty year ago I guess, since I fooled in it. Whiskey, I used to make it, sell it, drink it - any way a man could have it that's the way I fooled with it. But I was scared for five years after I quit making it - man liable to get caught. Man got caught he went to Federal Court, then penitentiary from 1 to 5 years. Used to be you could get it just about anywhere up here - 25 to 50 cents a pint. I've sold many a pint for a quarter.

Did you water it down when you made it?/ You have to. When you make it it's high stuff, maybe 100-150 proof. You have to weaken it down before you can drink it, it'd take your breath if you didn't. Gets so high it won't hold a bead. I've taken it and put water in it, keep putting water to it til it gets down and it can hold a bead and the bead will stand half and half, under and over.

Bead?/ That's when you shake it and the bubbles come to the top. When you shake good whiskey the beads will break from the middle and hang around the edges of the jar - they'll hang about half over and half under and when it breaks off slow, one at a time, you've got good whiskey. But if it's that old sugared stuff it'll fly off like lye water.....In the old days if someone drank too much they'd take him out and lay him down somewhere and tell him to sleep it off. Sometimes if he got a little rough, well they'd take care of him. But now they've got this ordered whiskey, it

handles them differently than the straight corn moonshine does - it don't hurt you. This old red whiskey you go crazy on. It used to be if a man goed to a party he'd give his gun in at the door.....Leslie county's the worst place I ever seen for guns. I been over there, and I can see how to walk by the light of pistols. Just shooting just to be a shooting. They're rough. Everybody around here has guns in their homes but they hardly ever carry them out.

Why do the people sing about what didn't happen to them?/ They had an ear for music and they loved music but they didn't have a chance to play the music - the instruments to play on then that they have now. Most they had back them days I imagine was a fiddle and maybe a homemade banjo, or dulcimer. I learned to play on a homemade banjo. My brother-in-law made it for me. I never got a hold of a good banjo til after I was grown....I've been playin enough I guess to make ten or fifteen years. It takes a long time to make a musician for some people - me especially. I ain't never made it yet. (laugh) Some learns quicker than others - it's a gift, music is a gift I think. There are families that have been raised with music and maybe everyone in the family could play the music but one and he couldn't play a lick. Everyone in my family was a pretty good musician but one, and he can't play nary a tune, but he's a good hoe-down dancer.....The Year that I started learning to play the banjo I learned 400 tunes and could sing practically everone of them, but before I ever got into playing music I was always skinny. I never was sick or nothin - just lean, you know. Pretty hard times, there wasn't hardly no way for a man to get work so I asked God to give me something that I could do - that I could make a little money, so when ever I got a hold of this old banjo. Twelve months from the time I started playing with this old fiddler I'd learned I guess about 400 tunes and could sing practically everyone of them. That's why I say it's a gift to some people and some people can't learn it, and I believe that God give it to me and I believe it's enough - I'm going to let him take me. I ain't gonna quit...whether it's wrong or not. But I did quit for ten years, but I don't feel that it's wrong.

Why did you quit?/ Well, I thought it was wrong. We had nothing but the old regular Baptist up in this country then, and they don't believe in music in churches. They seemed to think it was wrong - made me think it was wrong and then I found out different. It's just what you make out of it - you can make harm out of about anything. ...You know music, it's spiritual. You can take just a small kid, I've noticed, that can't even sit alone, and you pull the strings on some kind of instrument - fiddle or banjo, you watch how quick it draws the attention of that kid. And he'll do his best to get a hold of that. It draws the attention of the whole human race. You never see a man pick up an instrument but what everybody is lookin, and listening at this music. It sound better to some than it does to others - some can learn it, some can't learn it, and that's why I say it's a gift.

It's more than entertainment. It means a lot to the person making the music./ It does. They take deeper interest in music than some people; they really love music and can't play it. And some can play because they take more interest in it; it goes deeper, and they've got an ear for music and it's a gift and they can learn it. I never picked up an instrument in my life that I couldn't play a little.

Are the words or music more important?/ A lot of the words it's according to the way they're built up. Some of them it's really touching, they're made from touching accidents, things that's happened, and it goes whether there's any music with it or not. And then some music is better to some people than singing is, and there ain't neither one much count that you put them both together, singing and playing both. It takes them both to make them go with me. I like to hear good singing and I like to hear good music. Singing makes your music go so much better....."Across the Rocky Mountains" - it's a touching song. It's love of the parents and the boyfriend that the girl was going with when he got killed; She wanted to go across with him and he didn't want her to go and she didn't mind - she could have seen thousands of them fell just in order to be with him. It's a love song. And your mother's love - you'll never forget her smile, I don't care if you live to be a thousand year's old, a man will always remember that. Just like the song in the old songbook: there's none more true and tender than a mother to her boy, and she never forgets him at nights, when she goes to bed she always thinks of him. Same way I was with my mother as long as she lived. I'd always think of her regardless of where I was at. I guess everybody's the same way. That's the reason I love that song, I love to sing it. I made it before she died, after she died it was a long time that I couldn't hardly sing it. It still touches me yet.

How was it you made that song?/ I was sitting there and I picked up my guitar, was what I first played it on, and I'd heard these different songs and they had verses in them that I liked; and I got started playing some of the verses, and I'd switch one verse of one song into another, and I made it to suit me. I seen that it done pretty well and I made a song of it.

Introduction

This is the third Folkways record that has featured the music of Roscoe Holcomb. The first, *Mountain Music of Kentucky*, (FA 2317) deals with the sociological, physical and geographical setting of his music. The music is heard in the context of its environment.

The second record 'The Music of Roscoe Holcomb & Wade Ward' (FA 2363) develops the idea of a folk aesthetic as another way of understanding the music in its own terms.

This record presents selected transcriptions of interviews with Roscoe; his thoughts about music, religion, work and life. These interviews were taped in 1962 as material for the film "The High Lonesome Sound" which features Roscoe as its central character, and which gives a look at the many forces in action around eastern Kentucky.

The first words are those of the interviewer (summarized) - and Roscoe's reply is presented in its entirety, exactly as he spoke his thoughts. Often the words of the interviewer only serve to trigger off a different idea from Roscoe, and some of the songs discussed are not on this record, but are included as reflecting his personal ideas on music.

During the past years, Roscoe has made infrequent appearances at folk music festivals; in California at the Berkeley festival, at UCLA, The Ash Grove and at

the Monterrey Festival. He has appeared at the University of Chicago and at the Guthrie theater in Minneapolis, he has sung at Cornell, Brandeis and CCNY, as well as appearing at the Club 47 in Cambridge and for the Friends of Old Time Music in New York. During all these trips, no attempt has been made to give him any idea that he could make a living as a folk-singer, although the large audiences have greeted him most receptively. It is my feeling that we in the city are given a rare privilege to hear and meet and know this man, but there is no call for him to change his life or his relationship to his home community on our account, and to do so would be misleading and wrong. Several people have been interested enough to visit Roscoe at home in Daisy, and it has always been a rewarding experience for any who made the trip.

With the current interest in Negro country blues, it has been good to see how well Roscoe has been received by the followers of that music. Everyone responds to the tremendous energy and intensity which he brings to his performances, although they don't always get all the word meanings. Perhaps Roscoe can be seen best as a man whose style and outlook dominates the actual meanings of the words he says, and that his presentation of music becomes the content itself.

SIDE I, Band 1: SWANNO MOUNTAIN

Voice and banjo. Roscoe learned this song from some men in a lumber camp, he thinks they were from North Carolina. North Carolina Folklore (Duke Univ Press) presents a song "Ashville Junction" which contains the verse "I'm goin back to Swannanoah Tunnel, that's my home babe, that's my home." They consider this song to be a local adaption of the John Henry complex. Swannanoa is a few miles east of Ashville, N. C. Bascom Lunsford (30 & 1 Folk Songs - Carl Fischer) presents a similar song "Swannanoa Tunnel" as a type of work song, complete with a 'uh' after every line. Melodically and thematically this song is related to "Take This Hammer", a song commonly associated with Leadbelly.

I'm going back to the Swanno Mountain
Lordy that's my home baby, that's my home.

Got sixteen brackets on my banjo
Lord it rings like silver, baby, shines like gold.

I got a letter from my woman
Lordy she's gone blind, baby, she can't see.

I'm going back to the Swanno Mountain
Lordy that's my home baby, that's my home.

I got a letter from my captain
Lordy he's in jail, baby, he's in jail.

I'm going back to the Swanno Mountain
Lordy that's my home baby, that's my home.

SIDE I, Band 2: COMBS HOTEL BURNED DOWN

Voice and banjo. Roscoe learned this from a man he knew around Hazard, Kentucky. He thinks the song was composed by Banjo Bill Cornett of Hindman, about an actual fire in Hazard. (For more about Bill Cornett see *Mountain Music of Kentucky*, Folkways FA 2317)

All on one Tuesday morning just about the hour of
nine,
There was an awful excitement when the Combs
Hotel burned down.

There was Mr. Berglar and his wife and one little
sizemore girl
These three dear loving people are gonna pardon
from this world.

There was one poor railroad man Mr. Taylor was
his name,
When he came rushing through the hall, was
brought down by the smoky flame.

It was on one Tuesday morning just about the hour
of nine,
There was an awful excitement when the Combs
Hotel burned down.

SIDE I, Band 3: WANDERING BOY

Unaccompanied voice. This song can be found in the *Old Baptist Songbook* published by Foster Ratliff, Lookout, Kentucky. It is the type of song which is sung at the Old Regular Baptist services - often it is

"lined out" (see Amazing Grace - FA 2317). In the film, "The High Lonesome Sound" Roscoe sings this song alone at home, complete with the lining out. This seems to be one of his favorite songs and he is always emotionally moved when he sings it, and he was in tears by the time he completed it before 1000 people at the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. He always sings it directly from the book. The melody is similar to "Man of Constant Sorrow". The ornamentation of the melody is typical of the older musical style of this region.

As I travel this wide world over
Friends I find wherever I roam.
But to me there's none like Mother
None like Mother dear at home.

They may treat me very kindly
Bid me welcome everywhere.
But it just only reminds me
Of a loving mother's care.

I remembered well how Mother
Used to slew the slightest pain.
With her tender words and kisses
She'd soon make me well again.

Oh God wilt thou have mercy
On my darling precious boy.
Save, protect him Lord I pray thee
Let not sin his soul destroy.

SIDE I, Band 4: HOOK & LINE

Banjo and voice. According to Roscoe and other eastern Kentucky musicians, this is the most popular banjo tune used for square dancing in that locale. It is easily down-picked on the banjo, once you get the knack, and therefore, can be played on and on during a dance. For this performance, Roscoe presents it as he has several times when playing for dances. He says when everybody is getting real tired, he breaks into the old Jimmy Rogers tune "Going to California" and the dancers get tickled, start laughing, and find new strength to dance on.

Gimme the hook and gimme the line
Gimme that gal you call mine.

Sal went a fishing on a hot summer day
----- -- over, and the fish got away.
Throw away the hook and give away the line
----- fish some time.

I'm going to California where they sleep out
every night (2)
You low down woman you sure don't treat me
right.

SIDE I, Band 5: BARBARA ALLEN BLUES

Mouth harp. Roscoe says that the first music he heard and liked was played on a mouth harp. It must be understood that his use of the word 'music' is differentiated from 'singing'. Music refers only to the use of instruments. In Eastern Kentucky, the mouth harp or harmonica, is frequently called 'french harp'. The melody played here is the common Barbara Allen ballad, the name was given by me in reference to the style in which it is done.

SIDE I, Band 6: MARRIED LIFE BLUES

Voice and banjo. This song is included here to demonstrate Roscoe's banjo playing way up the neck - and reveals the same sense of blues notes and timing which is heard in his mouth harp performances. There is an old commercial phonograph recording of this song, done with a mouth harp.

When I'm single I dress mighty proud,
Hand me down my walking shoes,
I'm going back to old Aunt Dinah
Cause I got the married life blues.

I'm coming back to old Virginny
Hand me down my walking shoes
I'm going back to old Aunt Dinah
Cause I got the married life blues.

She looked down the road and seen me a comin'
Hand me down my walking shoes,
And I thought to my soul that she'd kill herself
a-running
Cause I got the married life blues.

SIDE I, Band 7: FAIR MISS IN THE GARDEN

Voice and guitar. This story has a long and well documented background, being included in a great many folk song collections from Nova Scotia to Texas, and having related songs such as John Reiley - always with the theme of the returning lover who never reveals himself until he has found out whether his true love is really true. In some ways, this is the same theme as is found in the Odyssey when Ulysses comes home disguised. Roscoe tunes his guitar like a banjo for this song.

A pretty fair miss was working in her garden
And a neat young soldier came a riding by,
He got down and stepped up to her
Saying pretty fair miss will you fancy I?

No oh, No, you're not the man of honor
No you're not the one I'm a thinking you to be;
For the boy that I love so dearly
He's a sailing on the deep blue sea.

Perhaps he's on some ship a sailing
Or if he's on some battlefield slain.
Or if he's took some fair girl to marry
I'll love that girl for loving him.

He took his hands out of his pockets
And on each finger was a ring of gold;
When she saw them then she knew him
And she fainted at his feet right there did fall.

He picked her up all in his arms
And the kisses that he gave her was one,
two, three;
This is your true and faithful soldier
Has returned from war for to marry you.

SIDE I, Band 8: OMIE WISE

Voice and banjo. The actual murder happened in North Carolina in 1808, and the song has been collected all through the South. Although different versions accent various aspects of the story, all remain extremely close to the facts - down to the names of the murderers, the victim and the place. Roscoe's version of this song is unique in the treatment he gives the melody, by using such an unusual banjo tuning. This melody is the same he knows for "Born and Raised In Covington", and the banjo tuning was "made up" by him - in that he did not hear anyone else play this tune in this manner.

Tuning: e CGAD (play in the Key of D) (Compare 'Little Birdie' on Folkways FA 2363 'The Music of Roscoe Holcomb & Wade Ward' for the same tuning used in the key of C).

Tell me no story, tell me no lies,
Tell me the story of little Oma Wise.
I'll tell you no story and I'll tell you no lie
How she was deluded by John Lewis's lies.

She promised to meet him at the head of Adams'
branch
Some money he would bring her and other fine
things.
She flew like an eagle to the head of Adams'
branch
No money did he bring her nor other fine things.

No money, no money, my sweetheart said he,
Just hop up behind me and married we will be.
She hopped up behind him and away they did go
Down by the river where the deep water flowed.

John Lewis, John Lewis, I'm afraid of your way
I'm afraid that you will lead my poor body astray,
He beat her, he banged her, he dragged her
round and round,
He threw her in the river where he knew she
would drown.

Two boys was a fishing all on one Sunday morn,
They found little Oma's body down by the old
mill pond.
They threw the net around her, they carried her
to the bank,
They drew her from the water and laid her on the
bank.

They sent for John Lewis to come to the place,
They put her up before him that he knew her
face.

My name is John Lewis, my name I do not deny,
I murdered my own true lover and her name was
Omie Wise.

You can beat me you can bang me for I'm the
very one,
That drowned my own true lover down by the
old mill pond.

SIDE I, Band 9: WILLOW TREE

Voice and banjo. Roscoe was reminded of this song
by Dillard Chandler's performance, "Awake, Awake!"
on Folkways FA 2309. Roscoe's version is only a
fragment - and is interesting in that it combines ele-
ments from several ballads; although the impetus of
recollection was from the Awake, Awake song with
its Silver Dagger story, the theme of the little spar-
row is more like "Come All You Fair and Tender
Ladies". Interestingly, the Carter Family record
"Who's That Knocking At My Window," combines simi-
lar elements from these songs.

If I was some little swallow,
Had little wings and I could fly,
I'd light in the arms of my own true lover
And if any courting there, I'd be by.

If I were some little sparrow
Had little wings and I could fly
I would alight by the side of my own true lover,
And there I'd sit till the day I die.

I'd 'light up in some weeping willow
Weep for weeks, for months and years,
I wouldn't eat nothing but weeping willow
And what I'd drink would be my tears.

SIDE II, Band 1: BOAT'S UP THE RIVER

Voice and guitar. These verses are commonly heard
on Negro Blues recordings.

The boat's up the river and it won't come down,
Then I believe to my soul Lord that I'm
waterbound.

If the river was whiskey and I was a duck
Lord I'd dive to the bottom and I'd never come
up.

Going down to the river, take my rocking chair,
If that blues overtakes me, rock away from here.

The boat's up the river and it won't come down,
Then I believe to my soul Lord that I'm
waterbound.

I'll go down to the river, and I'll set right down,
If those blues don't leave me, jump in the river
and drown.

First Verse.

SIDE II, Band 2: IN THE PINES

Voice and guitar. This song is found in both white
and negro tradition. In some versions there is a
thread of a story line - connected with a train wreck,
as the cause for the trip to the pines. In this version,
there is no story - only a feeling. This performance
is unusual in the extremely high range of the voice -
which seems not to use any falsetto.

In the pines in the pines,
Where the sun it never shines,
And I shivered when the cold wind blows.

Little girl, little girl,
Don't lie to me,
Saying hey, where'd you stay last night.

I stayed in the pines
Where the sun don't never shine,
And I shivered when the cold wind blows.

Look up, look down,
That lonesome road
Hang down your little head and cry.

If you love me,
As I do you,
Won't you go with me or die.

SIDE II, Band 3: FOX CHASE

Mouth harp. Again, both negro and white musicians
play this tune which employs lots of hard blowing and
sucking in, to 'bend' the reeds. In this way the
slurred blues notes are attained. In an actual fox
chase, the dogs do not catch the fox. The pleasure
of the chase is in listening to the dogs on the trail,
and to identify by their barking, which hound is in
front, leading the pack. The men who own the dogs
remain in one stationary place.

SIDE II, Band 4: CONEY ISLE

Voice and guitar. This song was recorded by Frank
Hutchison in the early 30s. He probably composed
the song, basing it on negro blues material. Coney
Isle is a large amusement park near Cincinnati, and
Roscoe worked there for several years after the war,
selling hot dogs. This song was recently recorded
by Cowboy Copas of the Grand Ol Opry, and made
quite a hit as 'Alabam'.

Just out on the mountain sitting on a log,
Finger on the trigger and an eye on a hog,
I'm on my way, I'm going back to Coney Isle.

I pulled the trigger and the gun says zip,
Jumped on the hog with all of my grip,
I'm on my way, I'm going back to Coney Isle.

It's hello Sal, I know you,
The one old slipper and a run down shoe,
I'm on my way, I'm going back to Coney Isle.

Now talk about a people having a devil of a time,
Eating up the chicken and a drinking the wine,
I'm on my way, I'm going back to Coney Isle.

SIDE II, Band 5: CHARLES GUITAU

Banjo. Roscoe's Cousin Mary Jane Holcomb, also picks this tune on the banjo. She calls it 'Charles Guitar'. Neither she nor Roscoe have any idea who this Guitau man was. 'My Name Is Charles Guitau' can be heard on the Folkways Anthology (FA 2951) as sung by Kelly Harrell, and tells the story of the disappointed office seeker who assassinated President Garfield in 1881.

SIDE II, Band 6: FREE LITTLE BIRD

Voice and banjo (with fiddle by Mike Seeger, guitar accompaniment - John Cohen). This popular mountain song is part of 'Kitty Kline' - but in recent years is becoming known under the current title "Free Little Bird," without the Kitty Kline verses. It has been recorded this way by Clarence Ashley, Cousin Emmy, as well as by Land Norris years ago. This particular performance is the result of a post-concert party which was attended by Roscoe and the New Lost City Ramblers. Consequently, as Mike was in town when Roscoe recorded, we all got together once more to re-capture some of the good feeling in making music.

I'm as free a little bird as I can be
I'm as free a little bird as I can be,
Sittin on the hillside a weeping all the day,
I'm as free a little bird as I can be.

Take me home little birdie take me home (2)
Take me home little birdie for I love no other,
Take me home little bird take me home.

I can't stay here for my self (2)
I can't stay here neither nowhere else,
I can't stay here by myself.

Repeat verses one and two.

SIDE II, Band 7: BABY LET YOUR HAIR ROLL DOWN

Voice and banjo. This song is well known on commercial recordings, but seldom encountered in the folk song texts. Bascom Lunsford recorded it for Brunswick many years ago, as well as for The Library of Congress. He also printed it in his 30 & 1 Folk Songs (Carl Fischer) as I Wish I Wuz A Mole In The Ground. This version is included in North Carolina Folksongs as well.

It's baby let your hair roll down (2)
Let your hair roll down and your bangs hang
around
Oh honey let your hair roll down.

Well I don't like a railroad boss (2)
A railroad boss he'll work you like a horse,
Lord I don't like a railroad boss.

Repeat verse one.

I wish I was a mole in the ground (2)
I's a mole in the gound I'd root this mountain
down,
I wish I was a mole in the ground.

Verse one.

I wish I was a lizard in the spring (2)
If I's a lizard in the spring I'd hear my
darling sing,
I wish I was a lizard in the spring.

Verse one.

SIDE II, Band 8: LITTLE BESSIE

Voice and guitar. This song is from the Old Baptist Song Book, and seems quite well known throughout the mountains. The Stanley Brothers have recorded their version of it recently - and the words are exactly the same in the verses in common with Roscoe - for they got the words from his book. This performance was recorded at Roscoe's home in Kentucky in August, 1962 while we were filming the High Lonesome Sound at his house. It is included here in preference to his New York studio recording because the singing is stronger, and with more feeling. The actual performance here takes over 9 minutes, and is sung at full intensity. During the singing Roscoe became very involved with the song, so much so that his mood changed, and he didn't feel like singing at all for several days afterward.

Hug me closer, closer Mother
Put your arms around me tight,
For I am cold and tired dear mother
And I feel so strong tonight.

Something hurts me here dear mother
Like a stone upon my breast,
Oh I wonder, wonder mother,
Why it is I cannot rest.

All the day, while you were working
As I lay upon my bed,
I was trying to be patient
And to think of what you'd said.

How there came our blessed Jesus
Of his lambs to watch and keep,
So I wish he would come and take me
In his arms that I might sleep.

Just before the lamps were lighted
Just before the children came
While the room was very quiet
I heard someone call my name.

All at once the window opened
On a field of lambs and sheep
Some were at the brook a drinking
Some was lying fast asleep.

In a moment I was looking
On a world so bright and fair
Which was filled with little children
And they seemed so happy there.

They were singing oh, so sweetly
Sweetest songs I ever heard
They were singing sweeter, Mother
Than our little yellow bird.

But I could not see my Savior
Though I strained my eyes to see
Then I wondered if he saw me
Would he speak to such as me.

All at once the window opened
On so bright upon me smiled
Then I knew it must be Jesus
When he says come here my child.

Come up here my little Bessie
Come up here and live with me
Where little children never suffer
Suffer through eternity.