



PROGRESSIVE BLUEGRASS 1

and other instrumentals

played by **ROGER SPRUNG** on the banjo

lead guitar - "Doc" Watson
rhythm guitar - Joe Locker
mandolin - Willie Locker
bass - Ollie Phillips
drums - Bob Thomas

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2370

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played by **ROGER SPRUNG** on the banjo
with Doc Watson (lead guitar), Joe Loefer (2nd guitar),
Willie Locker (mandolin), Ollie Phillips (bass),
Bob Thomas (drum)

Band 1: THE WILDOOSE CHASE
Band 2: STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER
Band 3: SPINNING WHEEL
Band 4: BIG BANJO FROM BROADWAY
Band 5: WHISTLING RUFUS
Band 6: THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR
THE SUNRISE

Band 1: MACK THE KNIFE
Band 2: NELLIE BLY
Band 3: MALAQUENA
Band 4: SMOKEY MOKES
Band 5: GREENSLEEVES
Band 6: BYE BYE BLUES

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET



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SIDE I

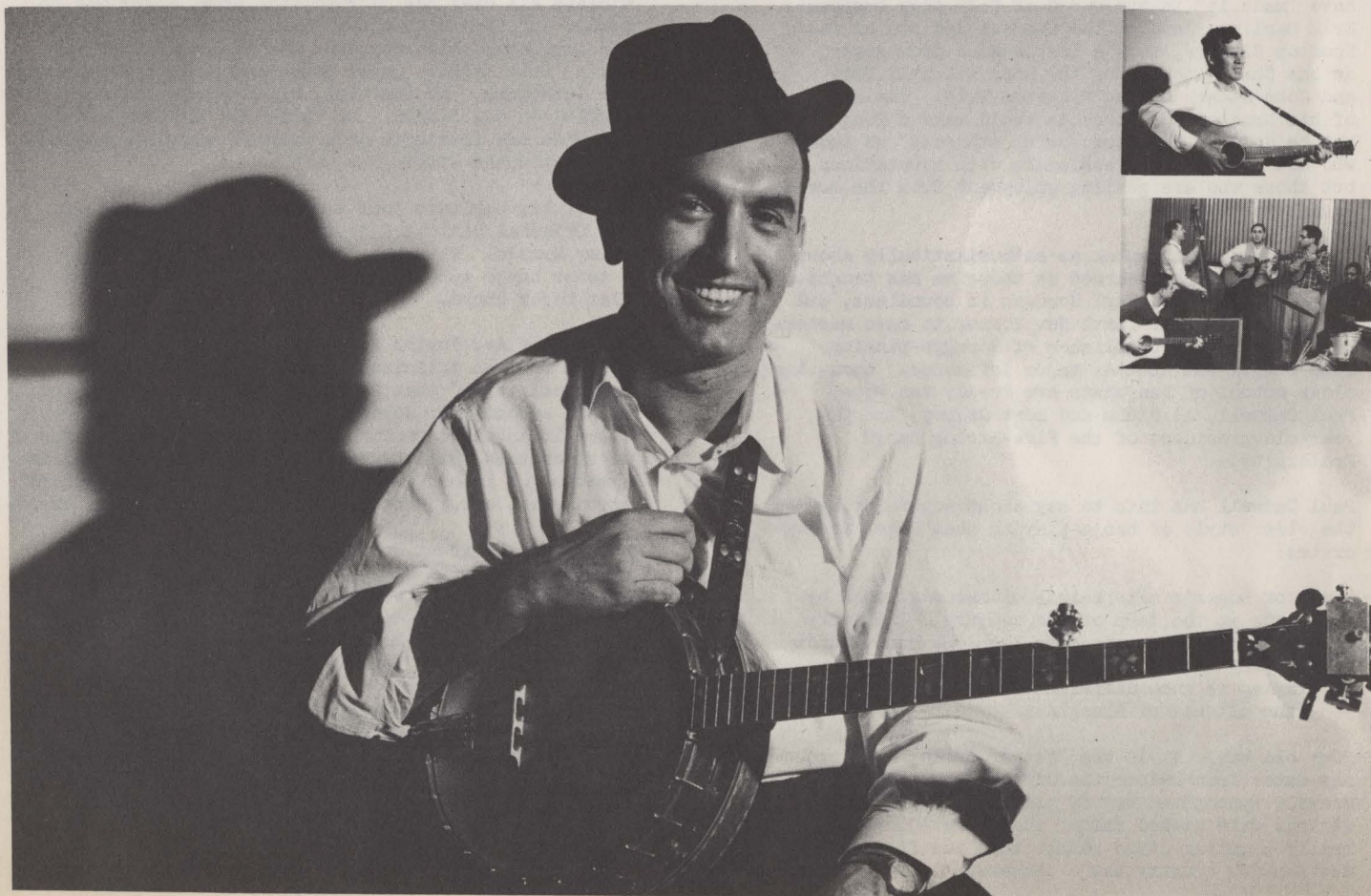
FA2370 A

SIDE II

FA2370 B

Band 1: THE WILDGOOSE CHASE
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One of the great discoveries of the city folk music revival of the late 1950's and early 1960's has been the unearthing of "the music that tells us where we've come from." Another byproduct of the revival has been the discovery and/or rediscovery of the people in the world of folk music who have brought us to where we are today.

While most of the latter have been country musicians, older people who made their impress on recordings of the 1920's and 1930's, then, somehow drifted off into other work, poverty and obscurity. But not all the key figures who have contributed to the wealth of folk music that abounds today are country folk or oldsters.

This album, at long last, will bring to the listening public the work of a seminal force in New York City, Roger Howard Sprung: Instrumentalist, teacher, showman, organizer, collector, tireless popularizer of the new, the different, and the best in folk music. To some, Roger Sprung is known as "The Father of East-Coast Bluegrass." For it was he who since 1950 has verbally and with his own infectious music-making been sowing the seeds for the tremendous popularity that Bluegrass enjoys today in the cities and on the campuses of the North, the Midwest and the Far West.

But the term "progressive Bluegrass" only begins to describe the broad world of musical values that Roger Sprung encompasses in his banjo-playing. Here are overtones of jazz, echoes of old-time dance tunes, the archaic world of the old finger-picking banjo. For the featured performer on this disk draws no thin line on folk music, but sees it as a vast canvas, incorporating a dozen different styles and approaches.

Many much more renowned students of Roger Sprung have "made it" in the world of folk show business. Erik Darling, late of The Weavers and now of The Rooftop Singers, took a few lessons from Roger, as has Chad Mitchell of the Chad Mitchell Trio and John Stuart of The Kingston Trio. The names of his hundreds of students would make a long list, but he defines his "successful students" as those who are not just professionals with reputations, but those who are getting enjoyment from the music he has led them to.

Roger Sprung will speak as enthusiastically about those from whom he learned as those he has taught. His admiration for Earl Scruggs is boundless, and he is probably the first New Yorker to have mastered the technical brilliance of Scruggs-picking. Pete Seeger was another major influence. Among the older school of banjoists are Freddy Van Epps, Paul Cadwell, Al Bluhm and Bert Gedney, the 90-year-old president of the Fire-String Banjo Fraternity.

Paul Cadwell has this to say about Roger Sprung and the older style of banjo-playing that Roger incorporates:

"Some of Roger's material is of material used by banjoists at the turn of the century. I am very pleased to see there is more than one banjo idiom in his playing and one his record. Our old way of playing is much different from the idiom and, yes, the clichés of Bluegrass style.

"Our old banjo style was "finger style," and probably dates from before the Civil War. It was a heavily syncopated way of playing, in which the strings were picked rather than plucked. It was really a guitar style rather than the flailing that was done by country banjo-players.

Mr. Cadwell, who plays one of the most breathtakingly florid banjos to be heard these days, went on to describe how the tenor or plectrum banjo became popular around the period of World War I. At that time, he recalled, gut strings were the most popular. Then followed the period of banjo resonators and wire strings to give the instrument greater volume, a more metallic sound and its particularly popular sound today with both city and bountry banjo players.

The instrument that Roger Sprung plays today is built of a combination of two Gibson banjos. The Neck portion was purchased in 1919 by Burt Gedney and the round part is from a Gibson TB6, dating from the 1920's.

To Roger Sprung, the banjo is an instrument that can, like Duz do anything. He plays it, rather than other instruments, because he feels it is a dynamic instrument, capable of much more musical effects, subtlety and nuance than other folk instruments. And to the instrument, he brings a wide variety of fingering, plucking and strumming methods.

Roger was born in Manhattan in 1930. At the age of 5 he began playing piano. There was music in his household on the upper West Side of Manhattan, and especially his grandmother was remembered, for playing piano and a miniscule ukulele. It was Roger's elder brother, George, an official at Sam Goody's record shop, who first triggered Roger's interest in folk music. George, an avid collector of folk records, brought Roger to Washington Square Park at 17, in 1947. Earlier, Roger had been a boogie-woogie fan, collecting the disks of "cripple" Clarence Lofton, Jimmy Yancey and Big Maceo, among others.

At Washington Square, the Sunday meccas for folk musicians all over the metropolitan area, Roger was to become infected with a new sound. There, the young and impressionable musician was to meet George Margolin, Pete Seeger, Oscar Brand and Ephraim Seegerman, the lutenists. At the time, Roger played guitar, doodled on the fiddle. He turned to the banjo at 18, and with the instincts of a natural musician, learned the instrument within one week.

One of his earliest jobs was with a Dixieland band, The Original Dixieland Footwarmers, who played at Jimmy Ryan's. With the Footwarmers, Rogers played a tenor banjo tuned like a 5-string with an open B-flat major chord.

At Joan of Arc Junior High School, Roger took further formal musical training. But he was one of those "ear musicians," that Woody Guthrie talks about, and by his second year Roger flunked a music course because it involved reading music. It was interesting to understand that his teaching method has evolved in a method of theory and practice, development of chord structures, etc., that is easier than reading of music.

During his frequent Washington Square visits, Roger began to play with Mike Cohen, guitarist and baritone, and Lionel Kilberg, who plays a "brownie" washtub bass. The three organized themselves into a trio known as The Shanty Boys. Here is how The Village Voice described the trio:

"The Shanty Boys, the latest craze in folk singing, are capturing the imagination and spirit of the American public. Feet stamp, hands clap, and hearts sing when the group breaks into some of the numbers they've made popular...like "Putting on the Style," "Crying Holy" or "Out After Beer."

Roger, had appeared for three years on Oscar Brand's "Folk Song Festival" on the New York Municipal radio station, WNYC, intermittently. After the formation of the group, in the 1954-55 season, The Shanty Boys were to appear frequently on the Oscar Brand show.

The Shanty Boys appeared at the Newport Folk Festival of 1960, and recorded on Elektra, MGM and the Fun label. For two years they appeared together at Thanksgiving Eve concerts in Carnegie Hall and on the Dean Martin Telethon.

Besides his teaching and playing, Roger's greatest source of pleasure in the world of music has been his frequent trips to the South. He was one of the first New Yorkers to regularly appear at Bascom Lamar Lunsford's annual Asheville, N.C., Folk Songs and Dance Festival. In his tours South he has gained a vast repertoire of country songs and instrumental styles. He has played with Hank Snow, Marvin Rainwater, Chubby Wise and other noted country musicians.

Roger's first trip to Asheville was with Harry and Jeannie West, in 1950. In the past few years, he has teamed with J. Laurel Johnson of Atlanta. For 13 consecutive years, Roger Sprung became as well known among the musicians of Asheville as with the musicians of Washington Square.

The lineaments of music surround Roger at his home, 255 West 88th Street, New York 24, N.Y. Besides his active teaching work, he is an instrument dealer, currently with a stock of some 60 guitars and banjos.

He has played advertising commercials on several television stations and networks. Besides the recordings with the Shanty Boys, he has played on the following disks:

Covetone Records (45 r.p.m.)
American Folksay Ballads and Dances, Vol. II - Stinson
America's Best-Loved American Folk Songs -- Baton
Music in The Streets - Folkways
Saturday Night and Sunday, Too -- Riverside
Here We Go Baby -- Elektra

Roger Sprung won second place in the Eastern Seaboard Banjo Contest at West Grove, Penn., in 1959. He has performed at Carnegie Hall, Carnegie Recital Hall, Circle in The Square Theater, Actor's Playhouse, Plum Point Resort, Cooper Union, Arrowhead Lodge, the University of Pennsylvania, Ward College, Club Cinema, Public School 41, The Ethical Culture Society, Brooklyn and Queens College, the Sturbridge (Mass.) and Warrenton (Va.) Folk Festivals, American Youth Hostels, the Cherry Lane Theater, the Sheridan Square Playhouse and Union, Barnard and Columbia Colleges.

Featured with Roger Sprung on this album is the noted mountain musician, Arthel (Doc) Watson on guitar. Others performing are Joe Locker, guitarist; Ken Cohen, guitarist; Willie Locker, mandolinist; Ollie Phillips, bassist, and Bob Thomas, drummer.

THE MUSIC

SIDE I

1. "The Wild Goose Chase" -- a traditional fiddle tune, which Roger learned from Byard Ray of Walnut Gap, N.C. The jaunty, lilting spirit of the melody is reinforced by the sprightly percussive sounds made by the drummer on the wood-blocks. Roger Sprung uses only one half of the Scruggs-picking style.

Byard Ray, whom Roger considers "the finest old-time fiddler in the South," was one of three fiddlers who plays "The Wild Goose Chase" at the annual country music festival in Galax, Va. None of the three played the tune in the same fashion, but the banjoist chose Byard Ray's.

2. "The Stars and Stripes Forever" is a famous composition by John Philip Sousa, who lived from 1854 until 1932. David Ewen wrote the following about the composition in "History of Popular Music" (Barnes and Noble):

"'The Stars and Stripes Forever' is surely the most celebrated march by an American. Sousa conceived it aboard the liner Teutonic while returning from a trip to Italy. During that trip the strains of a melody kept haunting him, and, when he put it down on paper after arriving in New York, it became the main theme of his most famous march. In all probability this dramatic music spoke for Sousa's own nostalgia for home and his aroused feelings in returning to his native land. In any event, it is American music to its very bone and marrow, as eloquent a patriotic utterance as has yet been written."

Roger first heard the old Sousa march played on banjo by the late Banjo Bill Bowen, of Manasquan, N.J., a friend of Paul Cadwell, who died in 1962. Bowen played the song on Nylon strings. Sprung plays the march in the keys of G and C, with a characteristic little "twist" thrown in, adding to the sweeping quality of the jubilant march that Sousa wrote.

3. "Spinning Wheel" also called "The Old Spinning Wheel in the Parlor" A lightly comic, always homey songs which Roger first played with Hank Snow in a few shows. Doc Watson sets the tempo and mood with a few chords, then the ensemble joins in and the piece ends with a series of great breaks between Doc Watson and Roger.
4. "Big Banjo from Broadway" brings in the jazz influence. It was adapted from a popular jazz recording of the mid-Nineteen Forties, "Big Noise From Winnetka" by Bobby Haggart and Ray Baduch of the Bob Crosby band. Sprung, here taking, and embellishing the original bass part, plays almost the entire song on the first and fourth string of his banjo.
5. "Whistling Rufus" -- an old vaudeville tune. According to "Variety Musical Cavalcade" by Julius Mattfeld (Prentice Hall), the work is a two-step with music by Kerry Mills. F.A. Mills held the copy right in 1899., and it was arranged as a song with words by W. Murdock Lind, also copyright 1899.
6. "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise" is a popular song beloved by jazzmen and is played by many tenor banjoists. The song was copyrighted in 1919. Words by Eugene Lockhart, the actor, and music by Ernest Seitz.

SIDE II

1. "Mack the Knife" -- the immortal melody by Kurt Weill to a jazz tempo, has been recorded by singers from Lotte Lenya to Louis Armstrong. Probably the first time that the classic from "Threepenny Opera" has been recorded by country musicians using guitar and banjo. Here the song provides a splendid vehicle for Doc Watson and Roger Sprung. Such momentum was developed in the improvisation that it was decided simply to fade out the ending. "Where do you stop?" Roger asks. "We could have gone on for hours."
2. "Nelly Bly" -- an old tune by Stephen Foster, which highlights several choruses by the mandolinist. Played in D tuning, and then the capo is slid up to F.
3. "Malaguena" -- an old Iberian favorite by Ernesto Luecona, here transformed to a show-piece for solo banjo. Sprung's playing involves many delicate runs and one-finger trills that belie his description of it as "an easy piece to play."
4. "Smoky Mokes" is believed to be the first, or one of the earliest cake-walks, dances that began with the Southern Negro. Sprung catches the strutting impudence of the cakewalks of minstrel days. The music by Abe Holzmenn was copyrighted in 1899 by Feist and Frankenthaler.
5. "Greensleeves" -- Has that indestructible old English folk song ever been taken for such a ride? After a stately, almost lugubrious introduction over the bowed bass, Doc and Roger churn up a head of improvisational steam. Frequent "twists" on the banjo are used to modulate. E minor is the principal key, with tunings in G and D. A rising crescendo sends the song out as Doc builds up improvisational intensity.
6. "Bye-Bye Blues" -- An appropriate signature tune to end the album is this old 1920's romp, on which flurries the fantastic banjo of Roger Sprung and the great guitar of Doc Watson.