

TRADITIONAL BLUES sung by Brownie McGhee Folkways Records FA 2421

VOLUME ONE

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

NOTES BY CHARLES EDWARD SMITH



MUSIC LP  
M  
1630.18  
M145  
T73  
1960  
lv.1



CHOLLY BLUES  
PINE TOP'S BLUES  
HANGMAN'S BLUES  
JELLY ROLL BAKER  
LOVING MAMA BLUES  
BACKWATER BLUES  
FOUR  
DAY  
CREEP  
BLACK SNAKE MOAN  
FREIGHT TRAIN BLUES  
LONG GONE

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

# TRADITIONAL BLUES sung by Brownie McGhee

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## TRADITIONAL BLUES

volume one

sung by

BROWNIE MCGHEE

by Charles Edward Smith

Shortly after flying into New York from the Coast early in December, 1959, Brownie McGhee rehearsed and appeared in a television show, bought extra sets of guitar strings, said good-bye to his wife and children and boarded a plane for India. In an American Folk Singers Unit under the auspices of the State Department, he and Sonny Terry made their first concert appearance there in mid-December. In the weeks that followed, Brownie's voice and guitar and Sonny's voice and harmonica were heard in Bombay, New Delhi, Katmandu (Nepal), Calcutta and Madras.

Brownie sang songs from the Tennessee hills and stanzas of traditional blues transcribed from old records and published by Joachim Ernst Berendt in Munich in 1957. When Joachim gave a copy of his book to Brownie in Dortmund, Germany, in 1958--the occasion was a stop on one of his European concert tours -- it brought back memories of the past. Brownie had heard some of these blues from his father. In some instances the same verses had been sung to different melodies than those documented by Mr. Berendt. Brownie had heard some of the blues from phonograph records, still others had become part of his growing repertoire in towns and cities of the South when -- to quote the phrase that gives the title to one of them -- he was "on the Cholly".

Brownie can sing many types of songs--he is still an entertainer, as he was when, in Tennessee, he sang everything from "jookin'" songs to spirituals--but he is at his best in singing traditional blues and playing an authentic blues guitar. Both aspects of his art reflect a style acquired over a period of many years. There is nothing flashy about him; glibness is foreign to his nature. In performance his manner is unaffected so that the emotional surge inherent in all great blues singing has a surprising impact. A further quality in his singing is that his interpretations of blues -- as must have been the case at the beginning of the blues--have an affinity to ballads and work songs which lends to them a freshness and vigour seldom found in what one might call store-bought samples.

The technique of blues is, of course, a continually creative process. It involves re-arrangement of lyrics--sometimes with only a one-word change in a stanza, often with such a radical re-arrangement as to constitute an entirely new presentation (e.g. Brownie's Careless Love, an unusually effective

use of iteration--and undoubtedly the most accurate and musically attractive Betty And Dupree on record, both in "Blues By Brownie McGhee" in Folkways FA 2030). Though Brownie does not talk of it in this way, he is always aware of the lyric and his treatment of a lyric, like that of all good blues singers, shows a sensitivity to meaning, metaphor and sound. The blues are a challenge to the singer or instrumentalist in manipulation of tone and timbre (Black Snake Moan) and sometimes tempo, as in the extraordinary treatment of Long Gone.

In an early period of this century, before the juke box, the disc jockey and jet planes, blues differed from country to city, from the hill country of Tennessee to the cotton and cane fields of the Southwest. With the oil boom, blues singers and boogie woogie piano players-- the latter known simply as blues pianists then-- followed the riggers and drillers into the oilfields of Oklahoma and Texas. Seeds of a great jazz renaissance out of Kansas City were sown by these folk artists.

From the Eastern seaboard to west of the Mississippi the nondescript roadside honky-tonks called "juke houses" or "Jook joints" nurtured an odd mixture of folk, hillbilly and popular music. In many of these places the blues, which in one way or another came to grips with reality, were dominant. Much of the South, particularly impoverished areas of town or country, had yet to be put through the meat-grinder of mass-media. Blues differed from place to place and from singer to singer, yet differences between them were less remarkable than their homogeneity.

"The Cholly" is said to have been the nickname of a railroad line. Be that as it may, "on the Cholly," as Brownie and many another singer knew it, meant being on the bum, kicked around. Long before the 1920's, when recordings helped their spread, blues traveled as fast as the voice could carry and as far as the midnight freight. Pallet On The Floor was probably employed as a blues theme as early in the mountain country to the east as it was in the barrel-houses of New Orleans. Roving singers, lead singers with work gangs and singers with tent shows such as Brownie worked with in his youth-- all helped to spread the blues and swapped lines and musical ideas like kids swap marbles - and sometimes as grudgingly.

The Cholly Blues, that Brownie presents in four-line stanzas, reflects the variety of influences that helped to shape the blues. The wailing lines with which it opens recall old hollers. The four-line stanza form and sometimes the imagery (e.g. "silver spade" and "golden chain") recall English balladry. The lines

"This here graveyard is a lonely place,  
Six feet in the ground with dirt in your face."

relates to the humorous Spider Crawl and, finally, the guitar "preaches".

Born November 30, 1914, in Knoxville, Tennessee, Brownie McGhee (Walter Brown McGhee) learned the blues from his father, George McGhee, a man who could sing verse after verse of a blues until his throat was hoarse. "He was a worker," said Brownie. "He never was a musician but all I know he taught me. His hands were like a steam shovel, all hard, but when he took the guitar in those hands, music came out."



Samuel B. Charters, in the first authoritative study of "The Country Blues" (Rinehart) describes the background of Brownie's blues in these words: "He grew up with music. His father was a fine country guitar player and singer, and his uncle, John Evans, played the fiddle. The two entertained at country parties or dances, singing blues or ballad songs, or just playing breakdowns. Brownie has called the style of playing 'jookin', a stomping, swinging kind of dance music that makes people stand out under the trees and dance until their faces shine with sweat and the party is shouting and clapping encouragement. . . There were quilting parties, old-fashioned husking parties, or just good time get-togethers, and the music was traded from white to colored so much that it's hard to tell who made up any particular song." Charters notes that in the hill country "there is little of the country Negro life that is found in the teeming 'black belt' of the cotton country to the South." And again: "Brownie was not from a part of the country where blues singing was a natural expression. . . Since blues are even more cultural than geographical this last statement has a certain dubiety which no doubt occurred to Mr. Charters. Yet its implications, insofar as they are valid, are intriguing. Blues country, in this definition--if we interpret it correctly--has, among other characteristics, a relatively large proportion of Negroes in the over-all population. Moreover, such areas as he indicates boast of strong, continuous traditions in Afro-American work songs.

Though (as in blues) various devices and techniques common to more formally organized songs are employed (e.g. call-and-response styles) the key to form in work songs is utility function. Such songs are geared rhythmically and musically to the work being done. In work songs, as Harold Courlander has observed (quoted in notes for "Folk Music, U.S.A." Folkways FE 4530), "The (West) African elements are generally discerned more clearly than in any other forms." A similar view is expressed by Ernest Borneman in The Roots Of Jazz ("Jazz" Rinehart): "They are similar to African songs in tune and intonation; rhythmically they differ only in so far as the rhythm of the work itself was different from that of African agriculture."

West African music has been a potent source of inspiration and influence on music of this hemisphere for close to three hundred years, it freed from scores and written conventions helping to preserve its intrinsic qualities. In the songs of roustabouts and levee workers and the shanties of "chequered crews" manning clippers out of Baltimore, such elements survived and were assimilated into spirituals and popular songs. Shanadore, a windlass chantey, became Shenandoah. Other examples from these sources are Swing Low (spiritual), Swanee River and Camp Town Races (popular songs)--all cited by Mr. Borneman.

"On the plantations, meanwhile," he writes in The Roots Of Jazz, "there survived the old dokpwé songs of the Dahomey, which gave rise to such varied forms as the calypso of Trinidad, the corvée songs of Haiti and the corn songs of America. In the cotton belt, such songs as Pick A Bale Of Cotton and Round The Corn, Sally, first noted in 'Slave Songs Of The United States,' preserved the African custom of bands of singers following the men as they worked in the fields, clapping their hands in rhythm to the song and inciting the workers to greater labor."

The hollers, unaccompanied snatches of song by men working alone, are a close link between work songs in general and blues. They often represent an adaptation of West African singing styles. Marshall W. Stearns ("The Story of Jazz" Oxford U. Press) came across identical melodic phrases in an Afro-Cuban piece by Chano Pozo and a holler by Lead Belly. The hollers were a natural source for blues. "Most of our blues were originals," Brownie once said; "they came from hollers." Hollers and tunes from work songs were assimilated into blues -- and this was a common practice in the South when Brownie was growing up. But the blues by then was already an established form.

Sterling A. Brown ("Jam Session" Putnam's) describes the holler as "a rudimentary blues, musically intoned, a scrap of melody sometimes with a few words added." It utilized typically African vocal devices such as sliding tonalities, falsetto and freely manipulated rhythms. Returning from field or woodlot a lone worker might announce his homecoming with just such a holler, building the wailing tones rhythmically into a song that would be identified with him. In some performances, such as Lead Belly's Go Down Old Hannah, the raw emotion and harsh timbre of the holler became great art.

Blues are also a personal, rather than a group, expression and in their genesis undoubtedly relate to the story-telling songs of West Africa as well as to ballads from the British Isles. Borneman, in the essay previously mentioned, writes with penetrating insight of these complex and slowly evolving relationships. In the same compilation ("Jazz") Paul Oliver observes that the blues, while intensely personal, are "curiously objective, often brutally realistic."

Country music in the South was never a completely isolated phenomenon. The Southern Negro Minstrels, in particular, were a link between the countryside and the music of such cities as St. Louis, Memphis, Atlanta and New Orleans. In the minstrels and later on records, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey established the blues as the most distinctive secular songs of the Negro people. The so-called "Coon shouter" of minstrels was a predecessor of the blues shouter. Though influenced by both, Ma Rainey was neither. She began to sing blues not many years after the turn of the century and in time these became the climax of each performance.

Because of jazz research more is known about early blues of New Orleans than any other city though we do know -- if only from Jelly Roll Morton's colorful memoirs and W.C. Handy's autobiography-- that they thrived in urban centers throughout the South and were related, all along the way, to the country blues. Many of the blues Brownie's father heard when he was a boy, were at that time sung and played in cities. Countless "jelly roll" blues, with their broad and lusty humor, were being bootied around the country long before Ferd Morton was billed in vaudeville (1914) as "Original New Orleans Jelly Roll". Lonnie Johnson, whose version influenced Brownie's, had three or four songs on this theme. An example of imagery that may have first appeared in work songs is the realistic, and sometimes metaphoric, reference to the bloodhounds first used to track runaway slaves and later used to recapture escapees from chain gangs. There is oftentimes grim humor in such verses. In one of several examples in Odum and Johnson's "Negro Workaday Songs" (U. of N.C. Press) the prisoner has been treed by hounds:



"Come git me, boss, come take me down,  
Anything's better 'n de chain gang houn'."

Quite possibly there is a relationship between such titles as "Bloodhound On My Track" and Robert Johnson's symbol for a malevolent destiny, "Hellhound On My Trail".

Brownie gets a twisted kick out of a twisted world, presses a note, warps it:

"Daddy aint too old to shift those gears..."

('Fo' Day Creep), changes a word here and there, using a traditional melody though not precisely that of Ida Cox, who made it famous. He knows Blind Lemon Jefferson's Black Snake Moan but sings the melody in his own way, explaining that Lemon had an unusual vocal range which he used uniquely, and adds: "I sang Lemon's tune but to my own chord progressions." Voice and guitar wail and moan and one almost begrudges it when Brownie works with other accompanying instruments in performances (except Sonny, of course)-- so close in rapport have the voice and the second voice, the guitar, become.

Brownie uses a strong, powerful, tone-in-the-wood guitar and achieves with it an unusual depth of style. His use of repeated chords and phrases is most effective. On Pine Top's Blues he employs the whanging bent tones that were equally important with chords and counter-melodies in the development of blues guitar. His single-string passages are deceptively simple in impact, lacking the blasting metallic sounds associated with so much rhythm and blues in this electronic age.

Many a blues singer has his own Good Morning Blues and when you've heard a good man (or woman) drive the blues down, how silly those little girl vocalists sound with their inane interpretation of "Yeah, yeah, yeah."! When a blues singer greets the blues he can mean it any old way, with the sun shining on his guitar strings or the clouds pouring misery down on him like rain.

"The more I hear it the more I appreciate it. I get up in the morning and I say, 'Good Morning, Blues.' My wife asks me, 'Who you talking to?'"

From the The Cholly Blues to

"I hate to hear that freight train blow whoo whoo-ooo" and, finally, Long Gone, there is an interesting variety of traditional blues in Volume I, and the same may be said of Volume II in this series. Few singers can approach Brownie in creating the style of performance that must have obtained at a time when blues form was in the process of becoming traditional. In Long Gone there are elements reminiscent of work songs, dance songs and spirituals. Brownie, in his spirited performance, welds these so that the use of call-and-response lines and the dynamic use of tempo build up to one song. Says Brownie: "I want to make music the way I know is real."

Backwater Blues, as sung by Brownie, is closer to Lonnie Johnson's than to Bessie Smith's version. All three are extremely moving interpretations of this story of the devastation of a flood, a blues that is also great folk poetry. "I'm close to Lonnie Johnson here," Brownie said. "His phrasing on guitar impressed me a lot -- his fill-ins, his passing notes to the next chord."

The traditional blues, in their rough and tumble exchange from place to place and from one singer to another, are like Bessie Smith's traveling woman:

"I'm not good-looking  
And I don't dress fine  
But I'm a traveling woman  
With a traveling mind."

#### Miscellaneous Notes - Volume I

The Cholly Blues (Traditional) Brownie got into the four-line stanza form without having planned it that way.

Pine Top's Blues (Pine Top Smith) Pine Top made his own record of this on white-label Vocalion in 1928. It was the other side of the historic Pine Top's Boogie Woogie.

Hangman's Blues (Jefferson-McGhee) employing the chord structure Lemon used, Brownie's melody is related to that of Careless Love.

Jelly Roll Baker (Lonnie Johnson) An old one in Brownie's repertoire, he adapted it from Lonnie Johnson's lewd and lusty He's A Jelly Roll Baker.

Lovin' Mama Blues (Turner-Johnson-McGhee). Based partly on chord structure of the original recorded by Joe Turner (voice) and Pete Johnson (piano). Grainsy guitar in bright boogie woogie tempo.

Backwater Blues (Smith-Johnson) "I'm close to Lonnie Johnson's version here." - Brownie McGhee.

Four Day Creep or 'Fo' Day Creep (Ida Cox) On this B-flat blues, Brownie used a traditional melody that, as he recalled it, was related to that used by Ida Cox.

Black Snake Moan (Jefferson-McGhee) Based on Lemon's tune but with Brownie's chord progressions. Blind Lemon recorded That Black Snake Moan in 1926. In the same category as Jelly Roll Baker, though its symbolism is more obvious.

Freight Train Blues (Traditional) Trixie Smith recorded her Freight Train Blues in 1924. Inspiration for the melody used by Brownie came from Elizabeth Cotton, who was nurse to the Seeger children (now grown up and singing folksongs) An example of her guitar playing is heard in "Folk Music, U.S.A." (Folkways FE 4530).

Long Gone (Handy-McGhee) Brownie was more aware of folk versions of this tune than of published versions. His singing of it has infectious warmth and vitality. Folk song enthusiasts will recall related tunes by Sonny Terry and Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly).

Co-editor of "Jazzmen" and contributor to "The Jazz Makers" Mr. Smith's most recent contribution to blues-jazz literature is the chapter, New Orleans And Traditions In Jazz, in "Jazz" (Rinehart). Among other writings that relate to this introduction to Traditional Blues are his notes for "Folk Music, U.S.A.," an album edited by Harold Courlander; "Blues By Brownie McGhee" and "The Country Blues - Big Bill Broonzy" -- all Folkways albums.

#### SIDE I, Band 1: CHOLLY BLUES

Poor boy, long ways from home (3)  
Don't mistreat me, please don't do me wrong.

Broke and hungry, ragged and dirty too, (3)  
When I clean up, can I go home with you?

Good old boy, just been treated wrong, (3)  
Freezing ground was my bed last night.

Big Bell ring, little bell fairly tone, (3)  
I'm lonely lonely boy, and a long long ways from  
home.

This here graveyard is a lonely place, (3)  
Six feet in the ground with dirt in your face.

Dig my grave (babe, honey,) with a silver  
spade (3)  
And let me down with a golden chain.

(Well I) ain't good-lookin', got no curly  
hair, (3)  
I got the ways, Mama will take me most anywhere.

(I wonder) What makes you hold your head so  
high (3)  
The way you hold it that's the way you die.

Spoken: I'm sure of it, boy.

Ain't no Preacher, Ain't no Preacher's son, (2)  
I can preach my sermon until the Preacher comes.

Spoken: Preach it boy.

#### SIDE I, Band 2: PINETOP'S BLUES

I'm going down on State Street, ) 2  
Just to buy me a gallon of booze.)  
'Cause my best gal's done left me, left me with  
these Brownie Blues.

My girl's got a heart, like a rock in the deep  
blue sea,  
Oh yeah, like a rock cast down in the sea.  
She imagines she can love everybody, Lord and  
mistreat poor ole' me.

Now I comb her hair, even manicure her fingernails  
M-m-m-m yeah, manicure her fingernails.  
Everytime I get in trouble, she let's me go to jail.

I'm gonna buy, me a graveyard of my own (2)  
I'm gonna bury that woman, if she don't let me  
alone.

I can't use no woman, (if) she can't help me to  
rob and steal (2)  
Wake up early in the morning, can't even get a  
decent meal.

Spoken: Listen to the Blues.

#### SIDE I, Band 3: HANGMAN'S BLUES

Hangman's rope is so tough and strong, (3)  
They gonna hang me boys, 'cause I've done  
something wrong.

I want to tell you jury, a simple story, (3)  
Hang me in the morning, cut me down at night.

Mean old hangman, when you tighten up that  
noose, (3)  
Lord above me, I'm trembling in my shoes.

(There's) nine more days, then my mind will  
rest, (3)  
The Judge has sentenced me to be hanged, 'til  
I'm dead.

Crowd around the courtroom (friend) time is  
going fast, (3)  
Some no good for nothing killer, is going to  
breathe his last.

(Warden (please) one more time (just) let me  
blow my breath, (3)  
And a trifling woman, thank her for creating  
my death.

#### SIDE I, Band 4: JELLY ROLL BAKER

She said "Mr. Jelly Roll Baker now-- let me be  
your slave!

Gabriel blows a trumpet--I will rise from my  
grave."

So my good ole' jelly bean, yes, my good ole'  
jelly bun,  
Well it done me so much good, m-m-m deep down  
in my soul.

She says "Can I put in a order three weeks ahead.  
Well I'm your jelly roll, done my home-cooked  
bread."

'Cause I love good ole' jelly yes, that good  
ole' jelly roll.

I found that it's good for the young, yeah--  
the sick and the old.

Little ole' lady walked up and asked me, who  
taught me how to bake jelly roll,  
I said, "Nobody miss--it's just a gift from my  
soul."

To bake a good ole' jelly roll, yes, that good  
ole' jelly roll,

She says "It's just like Maxwell House coffee,  
m-m-m does it good down in my soul."

Well, I was sentenced for murder, murder in the  
1st degree,

Judge's wife she called up said "Let that man  
Brownie McGee go free!

'Cause he's a jelly roll baker, well, he makes the  
best jelly roll in town,

He's an old man that bake jelly roll, m-m-m with  
his damper down."

Soldier in a Hospital Ward, he was shot all full  
O' holes,

Nurse walked over and left a man to die, to get  
some good ole' jelly rolls

She loved good ole' jelly, yes, that good ole' jelly  
roll.

Said "I'm gonna let that man lose his life, not to  
miss my good ole' jelly roll."

Well you know a lady walked all the way from Brooklyn  
to N.Y., that's over 100 blocks,

Lookin' for the man that bakes jelly rolls, to put  
jelly on the top,

I'm lookin' for that jelly roll baker, yes, the best  
jelly roll in town,

Lookin' for the man that bake jelly roll, m-m-m  
with his damper down.

#### SIDE I, Band 5: LOVING MAMA BLUES

If you ever love a woman, first (you) give your soul  
to the Lord above. (2)

Then give your time to the devil, give you love  
to the girl you love.

Then you try to do, things you think is right. (2)  
Then your baby's so mean, she don't seem to treat  
you right.

Then you hang your head, then you begin to cry, (2)  
Your're in love with your woman, but your woman  
ain't satisfied.

Spoken: How do you know? Won't be long.

I want to hold you baby, hold you in my arms, (2)  
I've been so lonesome, till I count the days  
you're gone.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10, and sometimes I say 11, I

want to hold you babe, hold you in my  
arms,

I've even been so lonesome, I count the days you're  
gone.



SIDE II, Band 1: BACKWATER BLUES

When it rains five days, the skies turn dark  
as night, (2)

There's trouble taking place, Lord in the lowlands  
at night.

I woke up this morning, I couldn't even get  
out my door. (2)

(Well) there's enough trouble, to make a poor boy  
wonder where he wants to go.

(Well) they rowed a little boat, about five miles  
across the pond. (2)

I packed all my things and throwed them in, and  
they rowed me along.

When it thunders and lightnin's and the winds  
begin to blow (2)

There's thousand of people, they don't have  
nowhere to go.

Then I went and stood upon that high old lonesome  
hill. (2)

(Well) Then I looked down, on the place where I  
used to live.

Back water blues done cause me (Lord, well)  
to pack my things and go. (2)

'Cause my house fell down, and I cain't live  
there no more.

Oh, oh, I can't move no more. (2)

'Cause there ain't no place for a poor boy in  
the world to go.

SIDE II, Band 2: FOUR DAY CREEP

When you lose your money, please don't lose  
your mind. (2)

When you lose your good girl please don't fool  
with mine.

I'm gonna buy me a bull dog to watch you while  
you sleep

I'm gonna buy me a bull dog to watch my woman  
while she sleeps,

Women are so doggone crooked, I'm afraid she  
might make a four day creep.

Men I'm gonna tell you this, and I ain't gonna  
tell you nothing else. (2)

Any man's a fool, think he's got one whole  
woman all by himself.

(But) if you get a good girl, boys, don't want  
her taken away from you. (2)

Well don't ever tell your man friend, what your  
good girl can do.

Lord, Lordy, Lordy, I'm getting on up (old) in  
years. (2)

But Daddy ain't too old, yes, to shift them gears.

I'm not a big fat man, but I got meat shaking on  
my bones. (2)

And everytime I shake, some foolish boy is  
gonna lose his home.

SIDE II, Band 3: BLACK SNAKE MOAN

Black snake crawling in my room (2)

Please won't somebody come get this black  
snake soon.

What in the world am I gonna do? (2)

Well, won't somebody come and get that black  
snake soon.

Black snake crawling in my room. (2)

Well, you better come here somebody Lord and  
get this black snake soon.

SIDE II, Band 4: FREIGHT TRAIN BLUES

I hate to hear, that freight train blow  
"Whoo". (2)

Everytime he blows I feel like ridin' too.

I asked the (that old) brake man, to (please)  
let me ride the blinds. (2)

He said "My good man, you know this train ain't  
mine.

That was a mean old fireman, and a cruel old  
engineer. (2)

It was a mean old train, that took my gal away  
from here.

Got those freight train blues, I'm going to need  
to cry,

Got those freight train blues, I'm too darn mean  
to cry,

I'm gonna love that woman till the day she die.

There's three trains ready, but (ain't) none  
going my way. (2)

But the sun's gonna shine, in my back door some  
day.

SIDE II, Band 5: LONG GONE

With his diamond blade (2)

Got it in his hand. (2)

Gonna hew out the logs, help us to send this land.

He's (long gone) (2)

He's (long John) (2)

He's gone (2)

Like a turkey in the corn, with his long clothes on.

He's gone, gone. (2)

He's gone, John. (2)

He's (Long John) (2)

He's long gone.

If I had a 'listen' (2)

What Rosie said. (2)

I'd a-been sleepin' (2)

In Rosie's bed. (2)

But I wouldn't listen (2)

I got to run (2)

Now I've found, I'm on the bum.

Well, he's long gone, long John, (2)

He's gone

Like a turkey in the corn, with his long clothes on, (2)

He's (gone) (2)

He's gone, John (2)

He's long gone

I got in jail, (2)

With my mouth poked out. (2)

Now I'm in the pen, and I can't get out.

Well, John made (2)

A pair of shoes

Funies' shoes I've ever seen (2)

Had (heels in the front) (2)

and (heels behind) (2)

You (couldn't tell where) (2)

He (boy was a gwine) (2)

Well, he's long gone, etc.

Good mornin' Mary (2)

How do you do? (2)

Well I crossed that river (2)

Just to see you (2)

Well, he's long gone, etc.

# 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

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  
Burnette & 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