

Folkways Records FA 2472

SI-FP-FW87-D c -02798
Sprung, Roger
Progressive Bluegrass; Vol. 3



VOL. 3

Progressive

BLUEGRASS

5 String Banjo

SPECIALTIES

Played by

ROGER SPRUNG

and his

PROGRESSIVE
BLUEGRASSERS

with

ROGER SPRUNG—five-string banjo

JODY STECHER—mandolin

"SPEEDY" SHEPARD—fiddle

IRV MANNING—bass

LENNY POGAN—rhythm guitar

SAUL BROUDY—mouth harp

DAN ISAACSON—jew's harp

RUDY GRANT—drums

featuring JON SHOLLE—lead guitar



ROGER SPRUNG Plays PROGRESSIVE BLUE GRASS

FOLKWAYS FA 2472

YES, SIR, THAT'S MY BABY	SAILORS HORNPIPE
BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM	BUCK'S STUMBLE
DEEP ELM BLUES	FORKED DEER
FISHER'S HORNPIPE	MOSCOW NIGHTS
DOWN HOME RAG	PADDY WON'T YOU DRINK SOME CIDER
TURKEY IN THE STRAW	HELLO, DOLLY
THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY	RAGTIME ANNIE
RICKETTS HORNPIPE	DESCRIPTIVE NOTES INSIDE POCKET
OL' MOLLY HARE	

PROPERTY OF
FOLKLIFE PROGRAM
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

5 STRING BANJO SPECIALTIES

Folkways Records FA 2472

Progressive **BLUEGRASS** Vol. 3



ROGER SPRUNG in competition at the Galax, Virginia Old Time Fiddler's Convention.

"IN HIS HANDS THE BANJO IS A DYNAMIC INSTRUMENT." This statement has followed Roger wherever he's gone.

THAT BANJO PICKING STYLE which is used by him so effectively, is Roger Sprung's alone. It is the sum total of all the various patterns that he has absorbed and polished over the years. Most banjoists rely on one technique for the major portion of their work and will stay within the confines of the music that shows it to its greatest advantage. Roger has managed to master the many styles and go a step further. That step is the merging and interweaving of one into another. His use of the classical arpeggio style is the most pronounced difference in this obviously different approach. He credits his ideas for this advance to his friend Paul Cadwell, who plays in the "classical" idiom exclusively.

The use of this combined approach to banjo picking opens up many vistas for Roger. He is not bound to any material which is stylized and can move easily from and to any area of music. He can pluck a piece from the Greek such as his beautiful rendition of Misirlou in an earlier album. He can delve into show music as witness "Hello, Dolly" in this album, and of course he reaches readily into the field of jazz since that was, and still is, one of his earliest loves.

If I had given the impression that this is exclusively a banjo album, then I owe the reader an apology. Roger Sprung is a great talent and his imagination strives across many fields. His technique for bringing together an aggregation of fine solo talent and making them perform like a well oiled machine precedes him to the studios. In every album of his "Progressive Bluegrass" Series, Roger has proved again and again that a vital

sound, an exciting new sound, can become more vital and more exciting with each new listening.

This past year an interesting occurrence brought Roger more fully to the eyes of the "Pop Music Market". A close friend of his, John DeRose, was to have played the banjo with the musical aggregation of the late Emil Coleman at the plush Persian Room at the Hotel Plaza in New York City. At this time the star act was literally so, in that it was the inimitable Kay Starr. John, having other commitments, suggested that Roger be his replacement.

Since the 5-string banjo has often been overlooked and underestimated by "Pop" musicians it is not surprising that Roger's virtuosity was met with astonishment and delight by all concerned. Miss Starr had a solo spot written into the act and new eyes and ears were brought to focus on this amazing "new" sound. Incidentally, this was a Persian Room first for the "Bluegrass Banjo."

Should anyone think that our hero burst full blown on the scene let me reiterate that the growth and development of Roger and his style were nurtured over the years by his love for his art.

More and more over the years he has been called upon to do commercials for accounts such as: Falstaff Beer, Hellman's Mayonnaise, L&M, Tarryton, and Winston Cigarettes, Cott Beverages, and so many more different and varied products that we dare not attempt to list them all.

But accolades can become cumbersome and one discovers a tendency to effervesce in the presence of so many of them.

Roger and I have known each other since 1951 and over this period of time, a talent which was well on its way then, has grown and developed and is still moving outward and upward. I'm thrilled by this album and am even more thrilled by the contemplation of the next one. Thanks for reading me.

Lionel Kilberg

THE TUNES

SIDE A.

1. YES, SIR, THAT'S MY BABY is an old pop standard that Roger remembers hearing in a movie, being played behind a dancing caterpillar. Roger has used the easy swing of that arrangement as a base for the relaxed, lilting performance heard here. Of particular note is the lead guitar picking of Jon Sholle, and the string ensemble finish.
2. BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM is a traditional fiddle tune that Roger, in his travels to all the important fiddle conventions, has often heard played by Uncle Charlie Higgins at Galax, and by J. Laurel Johnson at Asheville, as well as by full-time country music professionals like Tommy Jackson and Flatt & Scruggs. Roger found it necessary, in playing the melody accurately, to desert to some extent the usual

patterns of Scruggs style banjo, in favor of more rigorous single-note work; Roger is one of the very few who have successfully adapted this fiddle tune to banjo.

3. DEEP ELM BLUES goes back at least as far as a 1930's recording by The Shelton Bros; it has recently appeared on Folkways by Red Allen & Frank Wakefield. A good deal trickier melodically than most blues, it features some good blues guitar from Jody Stecher, who switches to guitar (while Sholle plays bass) for number only.
4. FISHER'S HORNPIPE is another fiddle number that is not usually played on the banjo. Roger's adaptation of the old recording by Clayton McMichen features three key changes.
5. DOWN HOME RAG is an old jazz piece that Roger remembers hearing played, in the old nylon-strung classical banjo style by a group composed of Paul Cadwell, Bill Bowen, and Fred Van Esp. In this version, Roger's banjo and Jody's mandolin join for some good close harmony, and the group offers another unusual ending.
6. TURKEY IN THE STRAW is a favorite old fiddle piece which is usually played fast enough to discourage its adaptation to banjo. Roger, however, was able to accomplish this feat, with a minimum sacrifice of speed.
7. LITTLE DRUMMER BOY is the Christmas hit of a few years back. The group starts off here by playing it straight, and then plays it in a kind of bluesy rhythm that doesn't (they hope) violate the spirit of the song.
8. RICKETTS HORNPIPE is another fiddle tune that Roger learned from a recording by Clayton McMichen; this version features some notably clean banjo work, and a good deal of subtle improvisation, which, at the beginning, conceals the melody. There is also a nice blend of banjo and fiddle at the conclusion of the tune.

SIDE B

1. OL' MOLLY HARE was learned from Byard Ray, a Walnut Gap, N.C. fiddler who has been playing it for many years. It was also recorded in the 1920s by Clayton McMichen. This arrangement features an interesting interweaving of the various instruments.
2. SAILOR'S HORNPIPE: Roger has been hearing this tune played on the four-string banjo by New York City's Arnie Feldman for many years. As played here, it features some unusual, syncopated fiddle, and some nice fiddle-and-banjo counterpoint near the end. Roger's version makes an interesting comparison with the one recorded recently by Bill Keith with Bill Monroe.

3. BUCK'S STUMBLE was originally written for dobro by the original bluegrass dobro player, Buck Graves. To achieve the slide effects of the dobro, Roger twists five of the six tuning pegs on his banjo (in addition to the four Keith pegs, Roger has installed two tuning pegs of his own design. Dobro playing is often very bluesy, and Roger's arrangement features a strong blues guitar break from Jon Sholle.
4. FORKED DEER is another favorite old fiddle tune; some of Roger's ideas for his arrangement came from a recently-reissued old record by Taylor's Kentucky Boys. The shuffle rhythm heard after Roger's second banjo solo reminds one of a prancing deer.
5. MOSCOW NIGHTS is the pop jazz-band hit of several seasons ago; Roger found it one of his most requested numbers during his engagement at The Mark Twain Room in the Empire State Building, with Stan Rubin's band. (Photographs of the group recently appeared in Look magazine.) Roger starts by evoking the melancholy atmosphere of the tune, and works subtle changes in mood and tempo, including a bluesy interlude featuring Jon Sholle's guitar.
6. PADDY WON'T YOU DRINK SOME CIDER is one of the tunes Roger liked best from the collection of discographer Loy Beaver. Roger's version derives from the Gid Tanner recording of the tune, plus a general appreciation of the mountain band style of Al Hopkins.
7. HELLO, DOLLY has swept the country as a pop song. Like "Moscow Nights", it was one of Roger's most requested numbers at the Mark Twain Room.
8. RAGTIME ANNIE finds Roger taking the original melody of a traditional fiddle tune, and syncopating it to bring out its relationship to the five-, rather than four-string banjo.

* * *

Although Roger Sprung owns twenty banjos, he makes most of his music with only two, a 1928 Gibson Hearts And Flowers model, that was owned by Bert Gedney, the honorary president of The Five-String Banjo Fraternity, and a 1930 Gibson RB-18. Roger's musical activities have carried him to all the major folk festivals and fiddle conventions, where he has won several top prizes. He has also toured as a member of The Shanty Boys, and is in frequent demand to record commercials. In addition to his many public appearances in places like The Mark Twain Room, Roger has been teaching banjo and guitar for fifteen years; he is proud of the fact that many of the students he has taught have become top professionals.

Bill Vernon

"THAT'S REAL FINE PICKIN' "

Andy Griffith

Somewhat closer to the mainstream of folk tradition, yet also not bounded by any narrow definitions is Roger Sprung, who has made a highly

estimable recording called Progressive Bluegrass and Other Instrumentals. (FA2370).

Mr. Sprung has been recorded at the top of his form, and in his whirlwind interplay with Mr. Watson achieves some fascinating flights of inspiration.

..... Roger Sprung has himself an inventive Banjo

Robert Shelton (NY Times)

One of the best banjo pluckers in the country if not in the whole wide world.

Kay Starr

Skillful Banjo Player

Bruce Gourlay (Ashville Citizen)

"Sounds awful good to me - Rog"

Woody Guthrie

plays the banjo as if he invented the instrument.

Nick Lapole (Journal Amer.)

"Roger Sprung with his crackling banjo, and his string band, are continuing to surprise us with the variety of music they can make their own - from traditional Irish fiddle tunes to Broadway show tunes. Here's to him; long may he crackle!"

Pete Seeger

Bluegrass emerged fifty years after New Orleans' hot music as mountaineers' answer to jazz. It seems to me that Roger Sprung has taken a logical and exciting step of the two traditions by tastefully adding jazz instruments to the bluegrass ensemble and giving bluegrass an exciting city swing. A new sound has emerged. Let's call it "Square-billy," in honor of Washington Square where Dr. Sprung has reigned for many a long year.

Alan Lomax

Sprung possesses the humor and ingenuity that separate the truly creative musician from the feverish technician.

Paul Nelson (The Little Sandy Review)

An amazing man with an amazing talent for music ... a flair for something different ... whose banjo speed and clarity is truly amazing ... a very gifted person.

Art Roberts (WLS Chic.)

A Delightful Banjoist

Robert Salmaggi (Herald Tribune)

In the hands of Roger Sprung, a five string banjo playing bellwether in the Northeast for a number of years, the instrument takes on virtuoso capacities. Sprung is one of the best musicians in the country and even more important, he is quite probably one of the finest all round banjo players active today.

Lawrence Cohn (Sat. Rev.)

THERE ARE THOSE WHO WILL SAY
ROGER SPRUNG IS NOT AN
OLD-TIMEY CARD SHARK

... despite the trademark evidence of his stud poker black hat, and that his progressive-rag-time-bluegrass aggregations are the Merry Marvel Marching Society of folkdom. They will tell you that amid these barren stone canyons men call New York City Roger Sprung has found the fountain of fun, that just as jazz came up the river from Storyville Sprung's madcap bluegrass fantasies hooked a cab up from Washington Square via Birdland and 42nd Street and maybe even The Arthur (one never knows: Sprung obviously has made every other musical scene in town). They will regale you with excited tales of Sprung's dizzy duet exchanges with Doc Watson when musical ideas from a hundred unlikely sources flew from the country square dance, the Broadway stage, the jukebox, and the classics -- all into a small place called Cue Studios presided over by Moe Asch, who has seen untrammelled greatness of every sort for almost too long to bear and who can no longer be unnerved by any of it, even the spectacle of the Little Drummer Boy tossing off his phony religiosity to do the buck-and-wing. They may even babble something about Sprung being the most heroic, inventive banjo-picker of his time, the most exciting instrumentalist on the revival scene, the creator of a corny, drum-powered minor musical genre of good-time ensemble string music based on . . . JUST EVERYTHING! as Baby Jane would say. Some of it may be true and all of it may be true. I don't know. I do have some ideas about Roger Sprung, though.

Some far-out cultural historians claim to be able to find predictions of recent events in obscure scribbles of the past. "They shall go forth, go forth from Geneva!" mumbles poor old Cagliostro -- and I've seen somebody leap on this coy, innocent bit of drool and interpret it as a prediction of the breakup of The League of Nations. (First Hipster: "Man, do you believe in water baptism?" Second Hipster: "Believe in it! Man, I've SEEN it!") I myself found an old poem that predicts the phenomenon of Roger Sprung in Washington Square. You probably know the line . . .

"... like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone. . ."

Sprung.

I went to Washington Square on a Sunday afternoon once. It was creative individuality and self-expression gone mad, I tell you -- right out of a

Jonas Mekas nightmare. Nevertheless, I was there in search of Roger Sprung's greatness, knowing it was part and parcel of the secret of his strength and power, so I plunged in, mentally framing the whole moiling, mucking scene and signing Hieronymus Bosch in one corner. I strolled past a bunch of guys playing songs like BYE BYE BLACKBIRD on banjos and headed for a girl sitting on her guitar case near the fountain, playing and singing and staring straight ahead with blank youthful impassion. Ah, innocence, thought I and so I stood by her so as to hear her over the roar of the greaspaint and the smell of the Square mob.

She was a cute little thing, hair long and straight and raven black to her shoulders, sandals, and singing Joan Baez in a kind of Walt Disney interpretation of Baez's voice and style. (Does Howard Johnson have ice cream?) She sang one song after another with scarcely a pause between to slide the capo around on the guitar, and I walked away shaken when I realized she was singing the songs in the same order they appeared on Baez's album. I struggled with a vivid mental image of her flipping over at the end of Side One and singing the remainder of the album standing on her head with nobody around thinking it at all strange. "WHAT IF SOMEONE PULLED OUT HER PLUG?" asked an evil voice inside my head, and the hair prickled at the base of my skull. I moved on fast.

There was a kid just standing around digging who wore a brand new pair of bibbed overhauls, still shiny-new-blue and full of paper tags, and shades. Nothing else. No shirt, shoes, or probably underwear. He had an obviously new steel hammer jammed into the loop on one leg and a new, unblemished pair of pliers peeping out of the leg pocket. (What the hell?) Was he one of these guys who were always going to hammer out freedom, or what? I walked past him thinking about those pliers and humming, "I'm gonna TWIST out love between my brothers . . ." when . . . I heard . . . the magic strains of OXTAIL RAGOUT floating from a close-packed little sub-crowd to the east of the fountain.

I pushed through -- and sure enough: there he was, looking for all the world like a hero with Mike Cohen and Lionel Kilberg on either side of him like two thieves, and I knew then, quietly and certainly, that there was room in heaven for this pilgrim, too.

Black hat. Swarthy. White-teeth grin. Handsome. Playing easy and strong and mellifluous. By God, I had come to this Magic City of the East on a pilgrimage just to hear Roger Sprung pick

OXTAIL RAGOUT . . . and there he was.

A little fellow was standing beside him holding a banjo case, a middle-aged guy about as weird looking in that scene as I felt, Bronx or Brooklyn, comfortably worn tweed suit (it was about 98 in the shade that day) and Harold Lloyd cap -- a poet? a dentist? a plumber? He stooped and opened the case and with a shy, sheepish grin swung a dazzling, gleaming, gold-plated Taj Mahal 5-stringer around his neck and stood there silently moving his fingers on the strings playing an OXTAIL RAGOUT that nobody but he could hear.

Then it happened.

Sprung looked down at him: the white teeth flashed, the stud poker hat dipped in an almost Bogey nod, and the little fellow, the little post-dentist-plumber -- I think he shouted something, but I can't recall (the excitement of the moment, the blazing August sun, the music, I don't know -- I felt faint) -- the little poet-dentist-plumber from the Bronx began to pick the next line of OXTAIL RAGOUT along with Roger Sprung.

It was beautiful beyond beauty.

I mean he couldn't play worth a damn, just straggle through the piece, but he was absolutely incandescent and he felt the music and the moment like ancient men must have felt the barbaric kiss of the moon through the groves of holy oak.

He was beautiful. "Picker, pick a song about a Lamb!" someone screamed. So he picked with merry cheer. "Picker, pick that song again!" the voice (mine?) rasped. So he picked: I wept to hear. It was too much . . .

I staggered away across the blazing sands of Washington Square dumfounded by my discovery: I had come all this way, all this tortured pilgrimage, to see the hero only to realize that the hero's eternal task is to make beauty in others, in dentists from the Bronx and beatniks in phony workmen's costume. He comes among us only to turn us on, TO PUT IN OUR PLUGS! And the beauty, the beauty is greater than the hero: the hero dies at last with no more dignity than Lionel Kilberg's Brownie Bass . . . like a dog . . . but the beauty and the power live forever somewhere among the stars.

I've never quite gotten over it. I've never gone back, either.

Don't move, Roger. Just stand there on those blazing sands, boy. I want to remember you like that forever.

Jon Pankake
June 1965

OTHER RECORDINGS BY ROGER SPRUNG
ON FOLKWAYS

FA 2370 PROGRESSIVE BLUEGRASS Volume One, played by ROGER SPRUNG with "Doc" Watson, Joe Locker, Willie Locker, Ollie Phillips, & Bob Thomas. The Wildgoose Chase; Stars & Stripes Forever; Spinning Wheel; Big Banjo from Broadway; Whistling Rufus; The World is Waiting for the Sunrise; Mack the Knife; Nellie Bly; Malacuena; Smokey Mokes; Greensleeves; Bye Bye Blues. Descriptive notes included.

FA 2371 PROGRESSIVE RAGTIME BLUEGRASS Volume Two, played by ROGER SPRUNG with Jon Sholle; Hank Miller, Larry Dunn, Jody Stecher, Gene Lowinger, Frank Benedetto II, Bob Thompson. Dill Pickle Rag; Shoot the Turkey Buzzard; Misirlou; Chinatown; Puff the Magic Dragon; Tiger Rag; Sweet Georgia Brown; Gie Gordons; Silver Rainbow; Arkansas Traveler; How High the Moon; Georgia Camp Meeting; That's A-Plenty. Descriptive notes enclosed.



ROGER SPRUNG 255 West 88th Street, New York, New York 10025