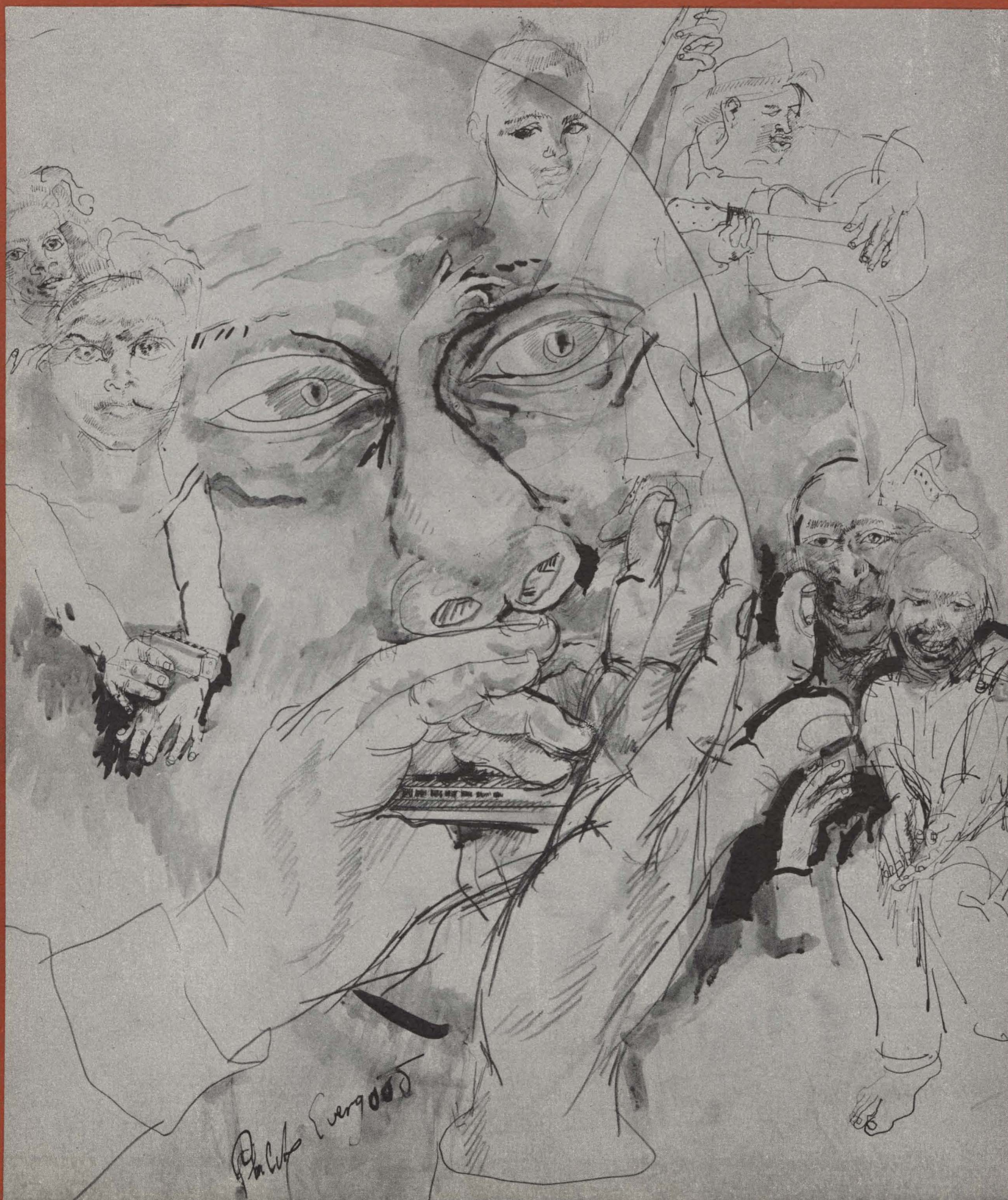


FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2691

MUSIC DOWN HOME

An Introduction to Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.

Edited by Charles Edward Smith



I. WHEN LIFE IS BIG....
 TAKE THIS HAMMER - Leadbelly
 FIELD CALL - Grace Horn Dodson
 CHILDREN'S CALL - Grace Horn Dodson
 COMPLAINT CALL - Epoch Brown
 WATER ON THE WHEEL - Annie Dodson
 RAILROAD, 1 - Rich Ameron
 MOVE MEMBERS MOVE - Rosie Hibler & Family
 II. GO PRAY YE....
 GO PRAY YE - Annie Dodson
 THE DAY IS PAST - Dorothy Melton
 PRAYER SONG - Dock Reed & Vera Hall Ward
 KING DAVID - Rich Ameron & Earthy Anne Coleman

ROCKIN' JERUSALEM - Flisk Jubilee Singers
 JUST GOT OVER AT LAST - Little Brother Montgomery
 III. WHEN LIFE IS YOUNG....
 MAMA'S GOIN' TO BUY HIM A LITTLE LAP DOG
 Vera Hall Ward
 BROTHER HAWK, BROTHER BUZZARD AND
 BROTHER RABBIT - Rich Ameron
 I'M GOIN' UP NORTH - SATISFIED
 Children of East York School
 IV. WORK SONGS
 RAILROAD, 2 - Rich Ameron
 LOST JOHN - Sonny Terry, Voice & Harmonica
 LOST JOHN - Prison Farm Work Group

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DOWN HOME: A Portrait Of A People

An Introduction to Negro Folk Music, U.S.A., Edited by Charles Edward Smith

Introduction

In the Negro South known familiarly as "Down Home" an art form, music, has been the binding fabric of cultural identity, entering into every phase of life, not merely in terms of spiritual and secular but in terms of work and play, love and loneliness, good and bad, the world of waiting and the wall of color.

What is Negro folk music? Harold Courlander (1) reminds us that "different settings, different local histories, and different social juxtapositions in the United States produced different kinds of 'Negro' music." Noting the interplay of traditions and the perpetuation of West African elements, both in vocal and instrumental music, he adds, concerning the expressions "Negro music" and "Negro folk music," that in his text (and we might insert, in this album) "it is intended to refer not to a phenomenon of race, but to a complex musical development which took place, and is taking place, within the Negro communities of the United States."

It is hardly necessary to remind the listener, in this decade, of the cultural conditions of slavery and segregation. These allowed for a limited sharing of musical heritage -- limited because outside the realm of folk music, Negro musicians and composers faced prodigious odds and still do, despite limited successes. In folk music, inter-group influence began early, moving always in both directions. Social restrictions, which tended to increase poverty and illiteracy, in some ways worked in favor of Negro folk music (since musical change relates to social change). The denial of musical literacy -- which has nothing to do with aptitude or musical sensibility -- indeed, the denial of almost any kind of literacy, for many, for a long time, provided a loose and fertile soil in which oral traditions could sustain their slow growth. (Under different environmental circumstances, in Europe, Negro composers could, and did, contribute to early classical music. (3))

Studies of pre-minstrel Negro music and white adaptations of it suggest that the proliferation of Negro folk music was such in the 18th century that it had already begun to affect the character of American music generally, at the popular level. The gift of music, one of cultural heritage, was reflected in Afro-American songs of field hands as it was in the more Anglo-American songs such as those house Negroes sang to their white charges. Under slavery, particularly in areas of British Colonial America, it was inevitable that the use of African lyrics (where such survived) would be discouraged, the adaptation of European musical practices be praised. Negro music very early took on a unique, indigenous character that not only entered into secular songs and church music of the plantations but into sea shanties and the music of frontier dances. Oftentimes what was mistaken for a crude re-organization of a song from the British Isles was in fact -- with the help of African elements -- its transformation into a Negro folk song. Musically knowledgeable listeners of the 18th century, such as Thomas Jefferson, of course recognized that the Negro people had the gift of music. What was not always understood then was that this was a matter of heritage, not heredity. It pre-supposed -- as was the fact -- a cultural setting in which, though not everyone was musically gifted, music had a special importance in everyday life.

Thus, Negro music in the United States represented a high degree of musical knowledge and sensitivity, in the context of folk developments, even before the process of acculturation had got well under way. Once it did, what emerged was not only what Mr. Courlander calls "the largest body of genuine folk music still alive in the United States," but the most mobile, the most improvisational, in response to the challenge of the environment, whether social or musical. Like the folk music of India (though the latter exhibits more sophisticated development) it can be both simple and complex -- in some aspects, for example, its approach to variation and to the melodic line is comparable to that of jazz and art music.

Negro folk music -- indeed, Negro music in general, from field hollers to rock and roll -- has always been in a rather special situation. Musical acculturation went on for centuries but at the same time, though the atoms of art might fuse and fizz, the human beings who created the music were kept apart. In 1874, after the Civil War, it was necessary -- though it failed of its purpose, in the end -- for Negroes in Southern States to petition for their rights, rights freshly underscored by the passage of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. That Negroes were capable of being educated and developing responsible leadership was more frightening to former slave-owners than any number of carpet-baggers. And though this part of history was not usually taught in schools -- North or South -- Negro citizens did, in fact, petition Congress -- as, for example, in a statement from Alabama in 1874 (that could equally apply to 1964) -- noting that "as citizens, we never have enjoyed, except partially, imperfectly, and locally, our political and civil rights in this State. Our right to vote has been denied, abridged and rendered difficult and dangerous ever since we became voters." (Aptheker: "A Documentary History" Citadel Press)

Gradually, with the help of the white North, aided and abetted by prejudice, poverty and illiteracy, segregation became a way of life. Sometimes it was called an "accommodation" and it was said -- it is still being said -- that Negroes were comfortable with it, at least in the South. Many Negroes did, in fact, adjust to it in ways that outwardly fitted the white concept of "accommodation" but it was a little like being comfortable with the weather whose malevolence was beyond one's power to control. It is in this special setting that one must think of the music of Down Home.

The South is changing rapidly, even outside the huge industrial complexes of cities. Automation has come to the one-time plantations of the Mississippi Delta -- only humans need be dispossessed. Some of them end up in the Bottoms by the levees -- not to be confused with bottomlands planted to rice and cane -- where life is as rough and unpredictable as the river -- any river at flood time. Remnants of humanity hang on to remnants of soil and when the river washes them out, they wait for the mud to settle, then move back in. In many areas of the South the land is flat and poor, scarred with erosion. You wonder how people can live there. But they do and even manage to build and furnish little slab-sided or clap-boarded churches where songs like some of those included here are sung. In some places the burning of one makes a line or two for your morning paper.

Though life is poor in the broken-up hill country which one finds in all parts of the South, there are compensations in the physical environment. Describing a part of rural Alabama where some of the songs for "Music From The South" were recorded, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., might equally have been writing -- except for local details -- of sections of the South such as a part of Tennessee near the Virginia border where Brownie McGhee lived on his uncle's farm or, further East, where Sonny Terry listened to the sharp sounds of day and the lonesome sounds of night and his harmonica became a fox, a pack of dogs, a train rumbling through the dark. Nowadays there might be a boy on a stoop in the hill country of North Carolina but the household economy would not be so closely geared to the patch of garden back of the house, or to hunting and fishing, the train would not hold the mystery it once held and the sweet and strident sounds of the harmonica would be contested by a blast of static from an old-style tube radio.

Frederic Ramsey got to rural Alabama in 1954 and could see for himself how records and radio -- the long-range artillery of the outside culture -- would soon bring change -- in some instances had begun to do so though there was still little appreciable change in the environment itself. "This is hill country," Mr. Ramsey wrote (letter) "with very small farms. Many of the buildings are log cabins. The men work the fields

with mules and hand-shaped ploughs. Chimneys are rammed mud with wooden outside frames; mules and wagon are a common mode of transportation, and everywhere there are signs of things being done by hand -- field tools, chairs, buildings... There is a hand-made pottery works nearby and old earthen jugs, pitchers and churns can be seen on porches and, with holes knocked out of them, strung up on poles for the Martins to nest in. There are rattlers and water moccasins and hundreds of frogs in the lowlands, especially near Cahaba River, where at night the batrachian serenade is intense. Poor-wills sing long and loud from the forest around every clearing. The Little Rock Baptist Church was set back in such a clearing, away from the road."

Musical heritage is not a private property of the mind, or of a people. It represents what is accessible and, of course, meaningful. Many Negro spirituals have been traced to psalms, hymns and gospel tunes. For that matter, melodies of many blues, worksongs and early jazz tunes can be traced to European sources. African elements may be slight or, having undergone a process of change, no longer be readily identifiable as such -- yet the end product will, in certain cultural circumstances, be Negro folk music. Uniqueness is what is done with heritage, regardless of source.

Courlander's introduction to "Negro Folk Music Of Alabama" also reminds us: "A number of the songs that may be heard in Negro communities are delivered in an English style of some antiquity, and appear to be completely outside the realm of what is sometimes called 'Afro-American' music. Some 'Negro music' in Louisiana is basically French in character; elsewhere it is colored by regional tradition, the phonograph and radio, as is the case with folk music anywhere."

Though survival of African elements (and songs) is much more impressive than had previously been thought, there is not, in Negro folk music of the United States, such direct and strong continuity (except in isolated instances) as exists between that of West Africa and Haiti and that of West Africa and parts of Brazil. What were preserved -- in addition to melodic material the extent of which is impossible to estimate -- were elements of musical style, including structural elements, ways of singing, ways of making instruments and way of playing them. Of the latter, the Afro-American banjo is the best known. While Irish - Scottish - and Anglo-American folk music represented both a literary and musical continuity, Negro folk music had, almost, to be born, with all the turbulence that that implies. Its traditions have, to some extent, been non-static and non-formalized and of great mobility. Broadly speaking, phases of Negro American folk music consisted of a series of magnificent improvisations.

Until recently analysis of Negro folk music has been almost entirely in terms of Western European musical traditions. Even so, the introduction of the blues scale, as in W. C. Handy's book on blues of 1926, was not readily accepted. (Neither, of course, have been new scales in concert music.) Inevitably, musicologists came to recognize that they could go a step further and recognize that this musical genre, having existed long before they wrote about it, had the right to be taken on its own terms. In an attempt to see the music from inside, various new approaches were and are being employed in notation and analysis. One that has wide acceptance is that of tonal centers -- composer John Benson Brooks has noted its relevance in relation to jazz. Several songs in this set might be cited as illustrative of this idea, for example, Lost John and King David (the latter has been described as built around the so-called "African tetra-chord"). The idea of tonal centers is implied in an explanation of 19th century white minstrel music (which owed so much to Negro music) by Hans Nathan (3) (p. 179): "The direction of the melody and the use of small intervals favor the recurrence of two or three adjacent tones... such tones, through the repetition of phrases, become the center of second section of a tune."

Noting a lack of synchronization between hand-clapping and singing of a church song, George Pullen Jackson ("White And Negro Spirituals") attributed this to an awkwardness of rhythmic usage. A subtly out-of-phase quality between beat of oars and singing voices (Georgia Sea Islands) was described by one observer as like a dragged beat. Those familiar with "Been Here And Gone" (FA 2657) may have noticed an extraordinary tension in the relationship of hand-clapping to voice in Dora Bliggen's passionate prayer, O, Lord, Have Mercy. Possibly all of these owed something to a

West African rhythmic practice that Franz Boas ("Primitive Art") called "innervation" of accent -- not a lack of synchronization but a deliberate, almost unnoticeable, separation.

There is sometimes in spiritual-singing an acceleration of tempo. (This is reflected in jazz, for instance in the piano playing of Jelly Roll Morton with sparkling bursts of sound, but always over a definite underlying tempo.) In work songs flexible tempos are employed, according to the job to be done. Rhythmic accent is important as the singer sets the pace, fits song to stroke of axe, blow of hammer, or the slash of the cane-cutter's knife. Such use of music in everyday life has West African precedents as does also the use of interpolated phrases -- the preacher's "anh hanh!", the field blues singer's "ah-hmm!". Courlander mentions the softening of syllables, as in "father" to "fathum". The way in which lyrics and music are welded into one is demonstrated by masters of the art in Huddie Ledbetter's Birmingham Jail and Furry Lewis' John Henry.

In lyrics, words that have a poetic force often gain an added potency in the ways in which they are used; Mr. Amerson's use of the word black in the beautiful field blues, Black Woman, is an example as it builds up to its climactic use toward the close, where in ten lines it occurs no less than six times. Field calls, though those remembered are usually mere wordless calls, have a kinship to calls that in slavery days employed meaningful sounds (not English words) borrowed from drums.*

Preoccupation with sound as timbre is a wide-spread Afro-American trait and a survey of usage bears out the correctness of Courlander's remarks quoted earlier, with respect to the variety of Negro folk music, according to locality and other factors. If you listen to the guitars of Huddie, Big Bill and Furry Lewis you'll notice that all three achieve unusual and interesting timbres (qualities of sound) and each does it in his own way. You could notate a blues by Broonzy but it wouldn't begin to tell you what happens to tonality, the flat tone, the harsh tone, the quaver. To ears accustomed to standardized voice production and vibrato, some Negro folk singing will seem rough and rasping though, as this album demonstrates, there is room also for lyricism and limpid tones and, in fact, many indigenous styles of singing from the wail and quaver of a country blues to the surge of notes caught in a syllable in a melismatic style of church singing.

"Unison singing" is admittedly inadequate as a description of the style in which Lost John is sung. Folk style absorbs the roughness of untrained voices as it absorbs, in a track-lining song, the sound of rails being shaken as part of the music. Tones impinge or shade into one another and all manner of sound-in-the-making (timbre) is employed by voices (as it is elsewhere by instruments).

In much American folk music as it exists today the making or re-making of tunes appears to have a special precedence, as distinguished from a more strongly structural approach, though this emphasis could hardly have been as dominant in the past -- for example, when American fiddle and banjo music was in the making and both white and black shared in the making of it. In Negro folk music and music related to it, including rock and roll and other urban music, structural elements -- inter-related and often inter-changeable -- are basic. What evolves depends upon individual or group talent. The ease of slapping something together has, of course, resulted in many monotonous blues and, before the recent, rich outpouring of spirituals took hold, in countless lugubrious petitions to heaven, technically of interest but poor musical nourishment. In these primarily urban developments social as well as musical influences were brought to bear. Finally, it may be noted that there is a relationship -- not a direct influence, to be sure -- between structure and style such as that of Lost John and riff-based jazz, the blues-inspired jazz of the Southwest that the Count Basie Orchestra brought to such high levels of performance.

Professor Sterling A. Brown (of Howard University), in his article The Blues, commented on the "alteration of folk blues which had many concerns--including hard times, peonage and jail--into the more marketable blues that concentrated on love," and noted that "Earlier folk blues were broad and frank, Chaucerian; but many of the belt-line productions were prurient and pornographic." Leveling processes

were at work musically, too, and outside of an occasional tune by Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield) or a whanging intensity on electric guitar achieved by Lightning Hopkins, juke box blues had little to offer those who wanted meat with their potatoes. Happily, men who contributed to commercial blues - (the reader is referred to Oak Publications' "Big Bill Blues" and to Samuel B. Charters' "The Country Blues," a Rinehart book.) -- were also responsible for much of the resurgence of interest in more genuine blues. The entire history of the blues indicates that the role of the listener is a far from passive one.

Haitian songs of complaint and ridicule, as well as other songs showing African influence, have counterparts in Negro folk songs of this country. Especially is this true of blues which have become a repository of much that was previously widespread and diversified throughout music of the South. A complaint call, a track-lining song, a play-party lyric, a ballad and a breakdown tune, might be borrowed for a blues. When Brownie McGhee's father made up a blues from a holler he was not imitating the genesis of blues. Both blues and holler were already there. He was making one into the other. A blues fragment could equally be used for a holler, a worksong or a breakdown. In early jazz, which was very close to folk music, blues were used as blues but also for such dances as slow drags and stomps.

Blues are indigenous, American and musically integrated. The slow process by which African forms came into contact with European, such as ballads, may never be fully clarified. The musical continuity, from the evidence in this album, would seem incontestable. A relationship of lyric form to African antecedents has been suggested and Earnest Borneman has made some interesting observations on musical distinctions between the most Afro-American spirituals and blues ("Jazz" Rinehart). Those who think there is a simple explanation of blues genesis soon find that though they are like spirituals they are also, in some respects, not like them, that they utilize ballad material but are less related to ballad form than sometimes seems the case. They had an influence on early jazz development even before the much more publicized -- but actually later -- influence of ragtime. This probably began as a slow acceleration, following Emancipation. It also seems probable that urban technology helped to "set" the form -- though there is no written proof of this. Certainly urban living in the South, with its close contacts with the country, was at least in good part responsible for this great outpouring of truly Negro secular songs -- the blues. But the blues remained in the country, too, so that those who wanted water could go to the well.

In urban living, the rise of blues followed the decline of the "coon" songs that had helped to perpetuate a minstrel-spawned stereotype of the Negro in American life -- though some quite competent Negro composers helped to write them. Nevertheless, "coon" songs were an instrument of cultural exploitation. The blues -- whatever their excesses and however they were commercialized by both Negro and white record companies -- were a direct expression of the Negro people.

Not, to be sure, all the people. "Socially considered," Professor Brown wrote (op. cit.), "...the blues tell a great deal about one segment of Negro life. It is inaccurate, however, to consider them completely revelatory of the Negro folk, or of the Negro transplanted in the cities, or of the lower classes in general. The blues represent the secular, the profane, where the spirituals and gospel songs represent the religious."

There was also the Negro middle class which had until recently, if anything, even more reluctance to accept folk music than the white middle class. Now, of course, such music has much more status -- the number of those who concede it status, in fact, exceeds those who actually listen to it -- but not so long ago it was accurate to say, as Sterling Brown did: "Most middle class Negroes, of course, have a distaste for blues. The few who are interested generally become so because of the interrelationships of blues with jazz. Some Negroes get no closer to the blues than Gershwin's 'Rhapsody In Blue'."

How different this was to be formulated in the 1960's! LeRoi Jones ("Blues People" Rinehart), commenting on resistance to cultural heritage prior to recent mass movements of Negroes to the North, comments: "Even to

the Negro in the North -- though he sometimes denied it -- 'Down Home' meant something culturally... The North was to be beaten, there was room for attack. No such room had been possible in the South, but it was still what could be called home."

Among psychological factors that deterred some Negroes from ready acceptance of heritage -- apart from misconceptions about "primitiveness" shared by people generally -- were the uses to which heritage was put. When one speaks of a stereotype, one has to concede that in any culture a stereotype, however unjust, is an exaggeration from a particular reality, though not necessarily a widespread "folk" reality. In minstrels the change from good-natured slapstick and satire (Negro folk entertainments) to hat-in-hand "blackface" (white minstrels) was often shocking -- not that such things were done -- the human family being what it is -- but how small a twist it took to turn the knife. Many minstrel men, whether Negro or white, were men of talent -- Daniel Emmett, James Bland, Stephen Foster -- men who were products of their culture and, in fact, often subject to exploitation themselves. The music of minstrels was neither black nor white -- it was a mixture of both. It was with cultural use of it (white minstrels) that things got off the track.

In this album are included men who carried on the tradition of Negro minstrels and medicine shows (e.g. Gus Cannon, Furry Lewis). This tradition, poorly documented though it is, undoubtedly went back to those known and unknown Negro entertainers whose rich and original talents inspired the first white minstrels.

Early white minstrels, based on Negro entertainments, included, among many others, the following intriguing mixture of Euro- and Afro-American instruments -- fiddles, banjos, tambourines, bones, fire tongs, jawbone, dulcimer, and even a U-shaped instrument adapted from iron clives (clevis) that were used to hitch horses to plow. (The latter was suspended like a triangle, and hit.) Fiddles were played by Negroes at frontier dances and banjos were played everywhere.

According to Hans Nathan (3) (p. 185): "On the sheet covers" -- the author is speaking of white minstrel music -- "the tunes figured as 'Negro Melody' or 'Plantation Refrain,' only from the forties (1840's) on do names of composers appear occasionally, and even then there were conflicting claims and attributions. . . . One thing is certain; the anonymity of the early minstrel tunes, and their lack of sentimentality, which set them off against the urban middle-class 'ballads' of the day, suggest that they originated, for the most part, outside the city, and, above all, in a rough, realistically-minded social stratum."

Even when there were few Negro dancers in white theatres, the influence of Negro dancing was wide-spread. (As for social dancing, inter-influence there must have begun in Colonial days.) In challenging "any other white person" (3) (p. 61), John Diamond, a professional dancer, cautiously excluded Juba, a Negro. Since there was a wager of several hundred dollars, the qualification is of more interest than the challenge. And who was Juba? "The great Boz immortalized him." So said the Illustrated London News (8/5/1848). The description of Juba by Charles Dickens is quoted by Hans Nathan (3): "Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut: snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's legs, two spring legs--all sorts of legs and no legs -- what is this to him?"

Referring to the belief that the cakewalk comes from a satirical dance put on by plantation Negroes for the edification of "white folks" in the "big house", LeRoi Jones ("Blues People") remarks, "If the cakewalk is a Negro dance caricaturing certain white customs, what is that dance when, say, a white theatre company attempts to satirize it as a Negro dance? I find the idea of white minstrels in blackface a remarkable kind of irony -- which, I suppose, is the whole point of minstrel shows."

Mr. Jones has bitten the edges of a generally indigestible nut -- musical acculturation and segregation in the same shell! Let's go into this a little further, just for the record. Harold Courlander has pointed out (1) that as old-style African forms of dancing were discouraged, those of European

ancestry were resorted to more and more, though often African characteristics were retained. "This observer," he writes (1) (p. 202) "has seen secular dances in South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria in which certain passages occurred which were virtually indistinguishable from what in this country go by the name of Cake Walk, Shuffle, and Strut." To round out the picture, in "walking for the cake" in the Negro cotillion (or quadrille), free steps were demonstrated as couples turned the corners before the judges and these were often African-inspired dance steps that survived, were modified, and came to us in the Charleston, the Lindy Hop and the "Rock and Roll" steps that were "borrowed" for the "twist" and other contemporary styles.

Though urban living, particularly in the North, tended to relegate Negro folk music to a limited cultural role, there was continuity -- continuity between church music of the South and of the North, of country blues and city blues -- and though the electric guitar might ultimately triumph over Mississippi bottle-neck -- like the steam drill over John Henry's hammer -- the same basic musical elements would survive in the music of cities. Nor was it all a matter of crude commercial blues and sappy songs -- the strong and earthy blues had a place in cities, too, in Carnegie Hall as well as at Silvio's Corner (Chicago) where Big Bill Broonzy sang for people from Down Home, and both he and Leadbelly not only found that they could sing anti-segregation songs in the North -- they found they were needed there!

There is, understandably, less and less of folk music in a folk setting as one finds it in "Negro Folk Music of Alabama," "Music From The South" or comparable sets of field recordings such as those undertaken by Alan Lomax. When the culture changes, the music changes. The pace of living affects its mortality; the closer it comes to cities the more is it susceptible to sophisticated technologies. City singers put the blues firmly between bars -- it takes a great singer, Bessie Smith, a Broonzy, to give them back their freedom. Finally, social and technological changes can take folk music out of that category entirely, as when blues phrasing is used as the basis for jazz phrasing -- blues and blue notes are woven into the pungent harmonic writing of a John Lewis, the blues line becomes the jazz line of a Miles Davis (trumpet) (e.g. *Walkin'*), or Sonny Rollins (tenor saxophone) slashes at raw tone with same blues hunger expressed in music and words by Rich Amerson ---

Lord Help Your Happy Black Time I Love You Baby.

Writers on folk music usually make a distinction between folk songs and topical songs utilizing folk material. Spirituals used as signal songs for the Underground Railroad in slavery days, in this view, represent a use of folk songs as distinguished from their creation. Most new freedom songs could be described as representing a similar development. One might think of both as social prominences that draw nourishment from folk sources as solar flares light their million-miled flames at the sun's heart.

FOLK MUSIC TODAY

Folk music, in the broad sense, is of the people, by the people and for the people and doesn't ask if a man chopped cotton or went to Harvard, or both, but only how he sings and what he sings. Outside the folk setting, which is fast becoming a thing of the past, to whom he (or she) sings will take care of itself as it did at Newport, R.I., in 1964 where (Robert Shelton, *N.Y. Times*, 7/27/64) in four nights and three days an attendance totally 70,000 paid tribute to the vitality of American folk music. So long as folk music is functional in a dynamic society definitions should be kept flexible to allow for this. Whether the lyrics treat of the familiar or the unfamiliar, an Odetta, singing with a deeply moving passion, reaches us. And no matter how many fatuous listeners there may be, listeners to whom folk music is the thing to hear this season, the important point is that even where the folk setting may be absent, folk songs and their creation still have a social, as well as musical, place in American life.

C. E. S.

* To what extent African-style drums were used for talking or signals on the mainland is unknown; there is evidence that both talking and signal drums may have at one time been used in Cuba, Haiti and other parts of the West Indies. "Talking" drums are, of course, musically notatable,

and they only occur where languages are phonetic. Those who wish to explore the relationship of talking drums to speech on the one hand and music on the other should search out the writings of Professor George Herzog on this subject.

- (1) "Negro Folk Music, U.S.A." by Harold Courlander, Columbia U. Press. The author's familiarity with American and culturally related backgrounds, particularly African and Caribbean, represents a protracted experience rather than a series of field trips. This fresh and scholarly study gives solidity and depth to the cultural concept of "Down Home." Numerous musical notations and a section of 43 songs. Transcriptions by Joan Benson Brooks and Mieczyslaw Kolinski.
- (2) "Negro Songs From Alabama," transcriptions of forty-five songs included in the Folkways sets recorded in Alabama by Harold Courlander in the albums comprising "Negro Folk Music of Alabama". Transcriptions by John Benson Brooks. Publ. w. assistance of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Mr. Courlander explains in the introduction that transcriptions reflect fashion in which songs were sung: "It is evident that the singers often 'play around' with the basic melodies, developing variations, ornamentations and effects which are pleasing to them. Word sounds frequently are altered, abbreviated or drawn out to achieve these effects. Never subjected to the discipline of written music, the singers of these songs rarely present a piece twice exactly the same way. Much depends upon the mood, the general setting, and the responsive voice or voices. It is clear that while the singers have a concept of basic structure and melodic line, both of these elements are subject to artistic, playful or emotionally meaningful alteration."
- (3) "Dan Emmett And The Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy" by Hans Nathan. U. of Okla. Press. This study is rich in research material, including illustrations. There are copious notations -- transcriptions of 19th century banjo tunes. Jazzmen will recognize many elements of technique and scalar practices. Though from white (blackface) minstrels, these tunes -- in this indirect way -- actually document Negro folk music. Why "white blackface minstrels" were referred to in Mr. Nathan's title as "Negro" I can't imagine. The most likely explanation seems to be that white minstrels were billed as "Ethiopian," etc. But there were also Negro minstrels and not only after Emancipation. The practice has been in the past for historians to discredit Negro minstrels so that the most scholarly references tended to perpetuate egregious errors.

NOTE:

This set is confined mainly to country folk music and music related to it. This is the heartland of "down home" -- even though much else belongs to it, from country brass bands such as those recorded by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. (FA 2650) to bands such as that of Erskine Hawkins (from a Teachers College outside Montgomery, Alabama) emerging from Negro colleges and universities. Once the limits of the album's contents were set, there were many possible ways of presenting the music. The way chosen -- Moe Asch and I have had such an album under discussion for a long time -- was inspired by the chapter arrangement of Harold Courlander's "Negro Folk Music, U.S.A." that enables the author to describe the music in terms of environmental relationships. But though this recorded presentation owes much to Mr. Courlander's excellent study (as well as to other books in this field) the format used for the long-play set is necessarily independent of it -- in keeping with a presentation that is primarily musical and with the environmental concept of "down home" which requires, and deserves, an emphasis of its own.

From his first exhibit, at the Dudensing Gallery (NYC) in 1927, to the impressive Evergood Retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art (NYC), 1960, Philip Evergood has created art that grows out of and relates to the life around him. He once expressed himself as wishing "to express the tempo of the contemporary American scene . . . not as illustration but from a creative and plastic aspect." When Charles Smith was doing an article about him, Philip Evergood wrote: "Tell about our visits with Bechet, back of the tailor shop . . . and when we visited Leadbelly." In his paintings and graphic work were shown in an exhibit at Gallery 63 (NYC) and at a companion gallery in Rome, Italy.

DOWN HOME: A Portrait Of A People

Background Notes

I. WHEN LIFE IS BIG....

"I ain't proud to be poor but I ain't too poor to be proud. And I'm not too poor to be rich in values. Music is in everything you see and hear. Railroad, now, that's music, isn't it? And Church, that's music, too, isn't it? And if you come right down to it, music is Church, too. Some folks, now, they won't sing no sinful songs. The way I see it, if a song is in you you got to sing it, and it's just another aspect of the Holy Spirit. When life is big music is big." - Rich Ameron, quoted in Notes, FE 4471.

SIDE I, Band 1: TAKE THIS HAMMER

Huddle Ledbetter (Leadbelly), voice and 12-string guitar: "Take This Hammer," FA 2004, rec. NYC, 1940-50, by Moses Asch. 1:35.

Prison farms, like the plantations of slavery days, sometimes allowed a certain amount of blowing off steam in the belief that it made for better workers. This feudalistic whim resulted in some open songs of protest, like this one, in addition to those songs of sly semantics so widespread in Negro music. "More than any other singer," wrote Alan Lomax (Notes) of Leadbelly, "he demonstrated to a streamlined, city-oriented world that America had living folk music -- swamp primitive, angry, freighted with great sorrow and great ecstasy." Huddle often began this song by saying something like this: "You gonna hear these hammers fall as they sing and swing. Take this hammer and give it to the man."

TAKE THIS HAMMER

Take this hammer (wow!) and carry it
to the captain (wow!) (3)
You tell him I'm gone (wow!) tell him
I'm gone. (wow!)

If he asks you, (wow!) was I runnin'
(wow!) (3)
You tell him I was flying (wow!) tell
him I was flyin'. (wow!)

If he asks you (wow!) was I laughin'
(wow!) (3)
You tell him I was cryin', (wow!) you
tell him I was cryin'. (wow!)

SIDE I, Bands 2, 3, 4

1, 2 & 1, 3 FIELD CALL, CHILDREN'S CALL
Annie Grace Horn Dodson: 1, 4 COMPLAINT CALL
Enoch Brown: "Negro Folk Music Of Alabama -
Secular" FE 4417, rec. Ala., 1950, by Harold
Courlander. 1:15, :40, :40.

Surviving field calls, though usually no more than wordless calls, are the post-slavery counterpart of earlier signal calls, some of which -- though knowledge of this was slowly blunted, like the sounds themselves -- were based on tonal aspects of West and Central African languages -- not directly but borrowed from the tonal nuance of signal drums. Calls were familiarly known as cries, whoops and hollers and were often identified locally, e.g. "Alabama holler". Complaint calls, such as the one here by Enoch Brown, were country cousins to blues. This call is more than a cousin, obviously, to Mozelle Moore's blues (V, 3,1) -- both have the same basic lyric but there are interesting differences both in lyric content and in treatment of lines. Despite the temptation, it would be speculative to say which came first.

Ohhh the times don't get no better here,
I'm goin' down the road,
I'm goin' away to leave you!
If the times don't get no better here,
I'm down the road I'm gone!
If the times don't get no better
If the times don't get no better,
Down the road I'm gone!

SIDE I, Band 5: WATER ON THE WHEEL

Annie Dodson: "Negro Folk Music Of Ala. - Game Songs, etc." FE 4474, rec. Ala., 1950, by Harold Courlander. :42.

This charming "water boy" song recalled by Mrs. Dodson from her childhood, probably originated locally and in the open air. It is out of such functional songs that art songs on this theme evolved.

Water boy, water boy!
Water boy, water boy!
Water on the wheel,
How does the sun shine
That I feel,
Little water time, hey,
Little water boy,
Little water time, hey,
Little water boy
Water on the wheel
How does the sun shine
That I feel,
Little water boy

SIDE I, Band 6: RAILROAD - 1

Rich Ameron "Negro Folk Music Of Ala. - Rich Ameron - 1" FE 4471, rec. Ala., 1950, by Harold Courlander. 1:22.

Nothing could be so surely on the borderline between Afro and Anglo-American song where so many blues were born than this work song, complete and strong in its integrity. In the hands of folk craftsman such as Rich Ameron, a song could be employed functionally -- as in accenting work rhythms -- or for entertainment, with alterations in technique to fit (see also Railroad-2 in IV, 2,6). Musical notation p. 95 (1) & p. 55 (2).

RAILROAD

I want to see my wife and children. Bim!
Oh yes I do, do, buddy buddy yes I do.
Captain Walker, where in the world did you
come from? Bim!
When did you come here, here, buddy when
did you come here?
Captain send me down a cool drink of water.
Bim!
Just to heal my side, side, buddy just to
heal my side.
Evalina, when you going to tell me what I
asked you? Bim!
I don't know, know, know, buddy buddy I
don't know.
Captain I want to go back east Colorado.
Bim!
But they don't 'llow me, me, buddy buddy
don't 'llow me.
Mattie Campbell, when you coming back
over? Bim!
Mattie Campbell, when you coming back
over? Bim!
I don't know, know, know, buddy buddy I
don't know.

SIDE I, Band 7: MOVE MEMBERS MOVE

Rosie Hibler & Family: "Negro Folk Music Of Ala. - Religious" FE 4418, rec. Ala., 1950, by Courlander. 1:52.

Playparty songs often substituted for dance music -- especially where dancing was proscribed. In some areas (e.g. Georgie Sea Islands) "shout games" were in some respects the secular counterpart of the ring-shout spirituals that got their counter-clockwise shuffle step from a West African dance. Citing this song, Mr. Courlander noted (p. 147, (1) that "various social, semi-festival gatherings, which sing and clap out spirited religious anthems, are play parties in thindisguise."

Move members move Daniel! (4)
there
Move til I get home Daniel! (4)
Got on my Little John shoes!
Got on my little John shoes Daniel! (3)
Shoes gonna rocka me home Daniel! (4)

Move members move!
 Move members move Daniel! (3)
 Who want to buy this land Daniel? (6)
 Who want to buy this land?
 Who want to buy this land Daniel?
 Move members move Daniel! (2)
 there
 Move till I get home Daniel! (2)
 Move till I get there Daniel! (2)
 Move till I get home Daniel! (4)
 Got on my little John shoes!
 Got on my little John shoes Daniel!
 Shoes gonna rocka me home Daniel! (6)

II. GO PRAY YE....

SIDE I, Band 8: GO PRAY YE

Annie Dodson: "Negro Folk Music Of Ala. - Game Songs, etc." FE 4474, rec. Ala., 1950, by Courlander. 2:28.

Often a singing style such as this quavering one called "melismatic" (many notes to a syllable) has both European and African antecedents. Worn old Isaac Watts hymnals, of words only, are treasured in some homes -- on a trip through Alabama, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., heard the expression "Singing Doctor Watts". Both music and singing style, as used here for the Watts' hymn, Go Pray Ye, were handed down from generation to generation.

Go preach
 My gospel
 Thus saith
 The Lord
 Bid the earth
 My grace
 Receive.

SIDE I, Band 9: THE DAY IS PAST

Dorothy Melton: "Music From The South - Young Songsters" FP 2657, rec. Ala., 1954, by Frederick Ramsey, Jr. 1:55.

This fragment was recorded in Mrs. Melton's grandmother's cabin -- flowered curtains at the window, kerosene lamps on a chest of drawers. The voice is that of a young woman who had no formal training but who grew up amongst old traditions of church singing. This, too, has a melismatic quaver and a depth of quality that makes it worth preserving. Dorothy Melton was described by a neighbor as a singer "with a noble voice." Another example of her singing is in FP 2657.

The day is past and gone,
 The evening shades appear;
 Oh, may we all remember well
 (Yes), The night of death draws night.
 (near in some
 hymnals)

We lay our garments by,
 Upon our beds to rest . . .

SIDE I, Band 10: PRAYER SONG

Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Religious" FE 4418, rec., Ala., 1950, by Courlander. 2:32.

This modern-day psalm -- transcribed p. 22 (1), p. 20-23 (2) -- is a moving illustration of the spontaneous interplay of voices found in Negro folk music and bequeathed to jazz. When Stan Getz (tenor sax) and a young Brazilian woman (voice) improvise to a bassa nova rhythm -- though it is in an obviously lighter mood -- they also pay tribute to tradition and remind us that musical implications of the term Afro-American can be hemispheric.

Dear and gone, Lord (2)
 All the friends I have,
 Dear and gone!

Gone to the bone yard! (2)
 All the friends I have,
 Dear and gone!

My poor mother! (3)
 Dear and gone!

Gone to the bone yard! (3)
 Oh my Lord!

Never turn back! (3)
 Oh my Lord!

My poor father! (3)
 Dear and gone!

Gone to the bone yard! (3)
 Oh my Lord!

SIDE I, Band 11: KING DAVID

Rich Amerson and Earthy Anne Coleman: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Amerson 2" FE 4472, rec., Ala., 1950, by Courlander. 4:25.

King David, with its intimate narrative style and its moral precepts, is from the same root source as the Little David that went around the world raising money for struggling Negro colleges in the last century. In the latter -- possibly because use of the diatonic scale was encouraged -- African influence was barely felt and in the usual transcriptions, often unnoticeable. Listening to this 20th century King David, the mind's ear may sense the familiar spiritual but is even more cognizant of what one musicologist called "the African tetra-chord." The form might also be described as hovering around a tonal center, though one doesn't need the technical terms to hear it -- after all, it was created without them. (Both the music and the narrative vitality of folk spirituals are discussed at length, and with copious examples, by Courlander in the chapter "Anthems and Spirituals" (1).

King David was
 Good Lord,
 That Shepherd boy,
 Good Lord,
 Didn't he kill Goliath,
 Good Lord,
 And he shout for joy.
 Good Lord,
 Well the tallest tree
 Good Lord
 In paradise,
 Good Lord,
 Them Christians call it
 Good Lord,
 Their tree of life
 Good Lord.

Little David play on your harp,
 Hallelu, hallelu,
 Little David play on your harp,
 Hallelu.
 Didn't you promise to play on your harp,
 Hallelu, hallelu,
 Didn't you promise to play on your harp,
 Hallelu.

Just watch (?) the sun,
 Good Lord,
 How steady she run.
 Good Lord,
 Don't mind, she catch you,
 Good Lord,
 With your works undone.
 Good Lord,

Little David play on your harp. . . etc.

You got a true way to find
 Good Lord,
 Mister hypocrite out.
 Good Lord,

At the first thing gwine
 Good Lord,
 To the church and shout
 Good Lord.
 You goin' to meet Mr. Hypocrite
 Good Lord,
 Comin' along the street,
 Good Lord,
 First thing he show you
 Good Lord,
 His tongue in his teeth.
 Good Lord

Little David play on your harp. . . etc.

Just as soon as you cease
 Good Lord,
 Children, from your sins,
 Good Lord,
 This-a train will start
 Good Lord,
 To take you in.
 Good Lord,
 Well way down yonder
 Good Lord,
 By Jordan Stream
 Good Lord,
 You can hear God's children
 Good Lord,
 Tryin' to be redeemed
 Good Lord,
 Ain't Jordan wide,
 Good Lord,
 Old Jordan wide,
 Good Lord,
 Well none don't cross,
 Good Lord,
 But the sanctified.
 Good Lord

Little David, play. . . etc.

Sister Mary goin' to heaven,
 Good Lord,
 On the springs (?) of the sun.
 Good Lord,
 When Mary got to heaven,
 Good Lord,
 . . . was done.
 Good Lord,
 Just talk about me,
 Good Lord,
 Just as much as you please,
 Good Lord,
 But the more you talks
 Good Lord,
 I'm goin' to bend my knees.
 Good Lord.

Little David, play. . . etc.

Ever since my soul
 Good Lord,
 Children, been set free,
 Good Lord,
 . . .
 Good Lord,
 At the root of the tree.
 Good Lord,
 Ain't Satan just like
 Good Lord,
 A snake in the grass,
 Good Lord,
 He's always walkin',
 Good Lord,
 In a Christian's path.
 Good Lord,
 Old Satan got on
 Good Lord,
 Them iron shoes.
 Good Lord,
 It's you better mind,
 Good Lord,
 Don't he step 'em on you.
 Good Lord.

Little David, play. . . etc.

That's King David, the shepherd boy.

SIDE II, Band I: ROCKIN' JERUSALEM

Fisk Jubilee Singers: "Fisk Jubilee Singers" FA 2372, rec., Tennessee, 1955, by John W. Work. 2:30.

Organized in 1871 at Fisk University (est. 1865) the Fisk Jubilee Singers inaugurated their first concert tour in Cincinnati and within months their way of interpreting spirituals won praise as "the only true native school of American music." Director of the present group, John W. Work, has been one of the ground-breakers in the scholarship of Negro American music. This presentation of what might be termed a "Rock Church" spiritual, has a proper, tender respect for the folk material and -- which surely must delight other listeners as it did this one -- introduces a fresh and spacious choral voicing.

SIDE II, Band 2: JUST GOT OVER AT LAST

Little Brother Montgomery & Group: rec. Chicago, by Rae Flerlage 2:19.

Though born in Kentwood, Louisiana, (1906), Little Brother (Eurreal Wilford) Montgomery's birthplace is sometimes erroneously given as New Orleans. "Most people went down there to birth their children," he explains. He is one of those who have helped to keep Church music from the South alive in the north--specifically, Chicago's South Side. This is, however, the first time he has recorded any. In blues jazz he is a member in good standing of the boogie-woogie pianistic fraternity. He identifies this song -- which is related to old "Jordan" -- type spirituals as well as to a new freedom song (I'm So Glad, VII-4,7) -- as "Holy and Sanctified".

III. WHEN LIFE IS YOUNG

SIDE II, Band 3: MAMA'S GOIN' TO BUY HIM A LITTLE LAP DOG

Vera Hall Ward: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Secular" FE 4417, rec., Ala., 1950, by Courlander. :47.

The universality of lullabies makes them particularly susceptible to musical acculturation. For example, one lullaby was sung, with only slight differences, in Creole in Haiti and in Louisiana. This little tune, so engagingly sung for us by Mrs. Ward, is built up, in part, of Anglo-American elements.

Mamma's goin' to buy him a little lap dog. (3)
Put 'im in his lap when she goes off,
Come up horsie, hey hey (2)
Go to sleep and don't you cry.
Mother's goin' to buy you some apple pie.
Come up horsie, hey, hey, (2)

SIDE II, Band 4: BROTHER HAWK, BROTHER BUZZARD AND BROTHER RABBIT

Rich Amerson: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Rich Amerson - 1" FE 4471, rec., Ala., 1950, by Courlander. 1:55.

Afro-American animal tales, of which this is an example, remind one of those tales of the Plains Indians in which legend is accorded the respect of everyday practicality. The Brother Rabbit tales, in particular, (and Mr. Amerson has others, in FE 4471, for example) seem not so much to point morals as to shake up the listener and hone young minds to a new alertness. Long before they were written down, such tales were in oral tradition.

BROTHER HAWK, BROTHER BUZZARD AND BROTHER RABBIT. Hawk soars in the air and sees Brother Buzzard sitting

below on the ground looking very miserable. Hawk asks him what he's waiting for, and the buzzard says he's waiting on the salvation of the Lord to feed him. Hawk derides him, says there's no use waiting on the salvation of the Lord. Tells him to watch how to get something to eat. Hawk dives after Brer Rabbit. Just as he's about to seize him, rabbit ducks into a hollow stump and the hawk breaks his neck. Seeing the dead hawk, the buzzard says, "Thank you Lord, you answered my prayers. Quick as Brother Hawk stinks a little and gets kind of seasoned I'll go down on him." And the rabbit hollers: "Come and get him, me and God will feed you."

SIDE II, Band 5: I'M GOIN' UP NORTH - SATISFIED

Children of East York School: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Secular" FE 4417, rec., Ala., 1950, Courlander. 1:20.

In a dirt-packed, back-country school yard of rural Alabama, the kids were poorly dressed but endowed with an earthy zest for song. This ring-game song comprises plain fun, pungent irony, and rather precocious double-entendre. To anyone who has heard a jazz riff, this type of responsive singing will strike a familiar chord. Here again, one is concerned with a form, in this instance, the ring game, that is widespread and both European and African. As to the lyrics, it would seem that songs like this put the younger generation hep to the North at an early age.

I'm goin' up north
Satisfied!
An' I would tell you
Satisfied!
Lord I am
Satisfied!
Some peoples up there
Satisfied!
Goin' to bring you back
Satisfied!
Ain't nothin' up there
Satisfied!
What you can do
Satisfied!
Mamma cooked a cow
Satisfied!
Have to get all the girls
Satisfied!
Their bellies full
Satisfied!
I'm goin' up north
Satisfied!
And I would tell you
Satisfied!
Lord I am
Satisfied!
Mamma cooked a bull
Satisfied!
Have to get all the boys
Satisfied!
Their bellies full
Satisfied!
I'm goin' up north
Satisfied!
And I would tell you
Satisfied!
Lord I am
Satisfied!
Some peoples up there
Satisfied!
Goin' bring you back
Satisfied!
Mamma cooked a chicken
Satisfied!
Have to get all the girls
Satisfied!
Their bellies full
Satisfied!

IV. WORK SONGS

SIDE II, Band 6: RAILROAD - 2

Rich Amerson: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Amerson - 1" FE 4471, rec., Ala., by Courlander. 1:50.

Almost anyone who's been an habitue of coffee houses or a listener to folk albums, knows what track-lining is and can probably tell you that the "rattle-dattle" sounds of bars against the track -- the shaking operation as a piece of track is lowered -- is considered part of the music. Off the job the singer fills in with onomatopoeic words to represent the metallic sounds. To anyone who has heard the actual work sounds, Rich Amerson's "rattle-dattle" artistry will be especially striking.

All right, Captain want to line track. Hoh!
Hold 'em right there! Get you six bars!

Put two bars on this side over here! All right. . . shake it east! All right, Rich Amerson call the track!

Oh, the Captain can't read, the Captain can't write,
Captain can't tell you when the track's lined right.

Mobile, Alabama. Bim!
Dattle datta datta. . . etc.
Mobile, Alabama. Bim!
Dattle datta datta. . . etc.

Oh. . . move it, give me j'int ahead, j'ine 'em back behind the j'int ahead! Set two bars in there and hold it east! Three bars, shake it west! Oh, set it down boys, call it!

Woh, eat 'em up whiskers, one-eyed shave,
Eat 'em up by the light (.....) day.
Big boy, let's line it. Bam!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.
Big boy, let's move it. Bam!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.
Big boy, shake it over. Bim!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.

Oh, j'ine ahead, j'int back, ahead of the j'int ahead! All right, set 'em down and shake 'em west! Woh, set 'em down boys!

Woh, Captain when you get your section, want to be your straw,
Git your daughter, be your son-in-law..
Big boy, line it over. Bam!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.
Big boy, for the Captain. Bam!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.
Mobile, Alabama. Bim!
Dattle dattle. . . etc.
Mobile, Alabama.
Dattle dattle. . . etc.

Let 'em line the tracks up for the Captain. That's railroad.

SIDE II, Band 7: LOST JOHN

Sonny Terry, Voice and harmonica: "Sonny Terry - Harmonica & Vocal Solos" FA 2035, rec., 1952 by Moses Asch. 3:03.

Songs have different explanations in different settings. A work song in Texas is a harmonica specialty in North Carolina. Sonny Terry first heard Lost John as a harmonica piece and had this to say about it to Frederic Ramsey, Jr. (Notes): "The fellow got lost in the woods, an' he couldn't find his way out, an' he wanted to play, an' he had this little harmonica part, an' people heard him, an' they went a-hollerin' back at him 'cause they didn't know what t'tell 'im, an' got him out

of the woods, so they asked him what his name, said his name was Lost John." Use of African-derived falsetto is widespread in Negro folk music, though with few outstanding exponents. Sonny Terry is one of the best -- his falsetto cries are adept, articulate and artistic, and blend beautifully with the harmonica.

SIDE II, Band 8: LOST JOHN

Prison Farm Work Group: "Negro Prison Camp Work Songs" FE 4475, rec. at a Texas prison farm, 1951, by Toshi and Peter Seeger, John Lomax, Jr., Chester Bower and Fred Hellerman. 4:50.

This Lost John is a story-telling work song (though recorded off the job). Singing of Lost John (an escaped prisoner? a runaway slave?) -- with "a heel in front" and "a heel behind" to confuse pursuers -- verses are piled up remorselessly, line on line, to the final -- "One day, one day, I'll be on my way." Like the children's ring game song, Lost John, which is thought to be West African in origin, this should bring a thrill of recognition to any jazz musician worth his axe (a pardonable pun, axe being current slang for instrument, in jazz). Aware of the many uses to which work songs are put, Pete Seeger (Notes) asked one of the singers why they sang them. In this instance the reply was, "Oh, it makes the work go easier."

One day, one day
I were walking along
And I heard a little boy
Didn't see no one
It was old Lost John
He said he was long gone
Like a turkey through the corn
With his long clothes on
Had a heel in front
And a heel behind
Well you couldn't hardly tell
Well you couldn't hardly tell
Whichaway he was goin'
Whichaway he was goin'
One day one day
Well, I heard him say
Be on my way
Be on my way
Fore the break of day
By the break of day
Got a heel in front
Got a heel behind
Well, you can't hardly tell
Well, you can't hardly tell
Whichaway I'm goin'
Oughta come on the river
Long time ago
You could find a dead man
Right on your row
Well, the dog man killed him
Well, the dog man killed him
'Cause the boy couldn't go
'Cause the boy couldn't go
Wake up dead man
Help me carry my row
'Cause the row's so heavy
Can't hardly make it
To the lower turn row
To the lower turn row
Oughta come on the river
Nineteen and ten
Well, the women was rolling
Just like the men
One day, one day
I were walking along
Well, I heard a little boy
Couldn't see no one
It was old Lost John
Said that he were long gone
Like a turkey through the corn
Like a turkey through the corn
With his long clothes on
With his long clothes on
Had a heel in front

Had a heel behind
Well, you couldn't hardly tell
Whichaway he was goin'
Whichaway he was goin'
Well, he was long gone
Like a turkey through the corn
Oughta come on the river
Long time ago
I don't know, partner
Say, you oughta know
You'd catch plenty trouble
Everywhere you go
Everywhere you go
One day, one day
Heard the captain say
If you boys work
Gonna treat you mighty well
If you don't go to work
Says, we may give you hell
One day, one day
I'll be on my way
And you may not never
Ever hear me say
One day, one day
I'll be on my way

V. BLUES

SIDE III, Band 1: I'M GOIN' TO PACK UP MY THINGS, AND BACK DOWN THAT SUNNY ROAD I'M GOIN'

Mozelle Moore, voice and harmonica: "Been Here And Gone" FA 2659, rec., Ala., 1954, by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. 3:07.

This blues, close to a field holler in mood and using the same melody (and based on the same lyric idea) as Enoch Brown's Complaint Call, (I-1, 4) seems to express a poignance common to many blues, the lonely thoughts of a man on a country road. There is a nice handling of lines and the harmonica part has a lonesome wailing sound. Blues lines are handled in many different ways apart from the classic 1,1,2--in this instance, to give the harmonica a major role.

This is a mean old world,
Tryin' to live in all by yourself.
I can't get the ones I'm lovin',
I've got to love somebody else' child.

I'm gonna pack up my things
And back down that sunny road I'm goin'.

You know that you would lie, little woman,
When you first laid down across my bed.

I can't get the ones I'm lovin',
That's why I'm gonna pack up my things and go,

You know you don't treat me like you used to,
That's why I'm gonna pack up my things and go (etc.)

SIDE III, Band 2: CARELESS LOVE

Brownie McGhee, voice and guitar: "Brownie McGhee Blues" FA 2030, rec., NYC, 1955, by Moses Asch. 3:14.

Listening to Brownie McGhee's fine blues voice and to what Pete Seeger has called his "classical early blues finger-picking style," the song's confused ancestry seems irrelevant. It is worth noting, however, that this is a blues born out of wedlock with a Scottish ballad -- one variant has been identified with The Lass Of Loch Royal. "Well, his blues," Mr. McGhee said of his father, speaking to this writer (Notes) of his childhood in the Tennessee hill country, "--mostly they'd be about his work, or love, or worries, his ups and downs. I very seldom heard my father sing a blues of someone else, though some old ones, like Careless Love, he could sing any night, verse after verse, without a repeater."

Love, oh, love, oh, careless love,
Love, oh, love, oh, careless love,
(ohuoh) Love, oh, love (um-umn. . .)
They call it careless love -
Don't you see what careless love has done.

(What'd it do. . .?)

Made me weep and it caused me to moan,
Careless love made me weep, careless love
has made Brownie moan,
Careless love, careless love made me
weep,
Careless love have made this old boy
moan,
Careless love made me lose my happy
home.

Please don't never drive a stranger from
your door,
Don't never drive a stranger way from
your door,
Don't never drive a stranger
Well, away, way from your door,
Well, it may be your best friend you don't
know.

(How you gonna sound?)

If I had-uh listened what my mama said,
(what would you've done?)
If I had listened what my mama said,
Well, if I had-uh listened
To what my dear old mama said,
I'd-uh been at home in mama's bed.

SIDE III, Band 3: LET ME GO HOME, WHISKEY

Snooks Eaglin, voice and guitar: "Snooks Eaglin: New Orleans Street Singer" FA 2476, rec., New Orleans, 1958, by Harry Oster. 2:50.

Kenneth S. Goldstein (Notes) tells us that though Snooks Eaglin is a New Orleans street singer, he was only twenty-two years old when Dr. Oster recorded him, that he sang in Baptist churches and in his teens joined a group of rock-and-rollers called The Flamingoes. He learned this blues from a phonograph record by Amos Milburn, a practice not uncommon among contemporary folk singers. An analysis by musicologist Mieczyslaw Kolinski reveals the use of quarter tones in this urban folk sound (e.g., on "home" and on the last syllable of "whiskey"). (For musical transcription and a discussion of possible implications, such as the concept of tonal centers, see p. 19-21 (1).

Let me go home, whiskey, let me walk out
that door,
Let me go home, whiskey, let me walk out
that door,
Well, I'm feelin' so fine but I just can't
take it no more.

SIDE III, Band 4: YOU'RE MY MAN - SLICK CHICK BLUES

Victoria Spivey, voice and piano:

An urban blues, beautifully sung, beautifully played. Though born and brought up in the blues-rich Southwest, Miss Spivey has until recently been best known for off-beat and sexy songs, with an occasional blues for flavor. (She recorded with Henry Allen, Jr., in 1929.) A woman of the big towns, singing big blues, her remarks about this one are witty and to the point: "Here is a slick chick who landed in jail. She always gave her man plenty of money. One night she was caught and taken to jail. While in jail she made friends with another girl who got out before she did. This other girl promised to look in on her 'old man' for her. The man was found with another chick." Told of this, she was determined to see her man when

she got out--meanwhile wrote him: "I'm your woman -- I'm comin' home this very day." To which Victoria Spivey adds: "She doesn't want to be out-slicked by another slick chick."

SIDE III, Band 5: I WONDER WHEN I'LL GET TO BE CALLED A MAN

Big Bill Broonzy, voice and guitar: "Big Bill Broonzy Sings Country Blues" FA 2326, rec., NYC, 1957, by Moses Asch. 2:16.

Big Bill Broonzy, had he lived to hear it, would have appreciated Jomo Kenyatta's remark, made before he became Premier of Kenya--that Africans no longer needed to be called boys. Bill had been saying this about Negroes in the United States for half a lifetime. Going overseas with the A.E.F. and, in general, getting out into the world, had shifted his emphasis--in some songs--from innuendo to direct statement. He broke ground for freedom songs with this blues-inspired number in 1928, though no one offered to record it then. He revised and recorded it much later, as the lyrics indicate. Musically, it typifies many songs by Big Bill Broonzy and other blues singers--blues in style but not in structure.

When I was born into this world
This is what happen to me
I was never called a man
An' now I'm 'round fifty-three

REFRAIN: (a)
I wonder when, I wonder when,
I wonder when will I get to be called a man;
I'd rather wait 'til I get ninety-three.

When Uncle Sam called me,
I knowed I'd be called the real McCoy,
When I got in the Army,
They just called me soldier boy.

REFRAIN: (b)
I wonder when, I wonder when,
I wonder when will I get to be called a man;
Do I have to wait 'til I get ninety-three?

When I got back from over-seas,
That night we had a ball,
Next day I met the old boss,
He said, "Boy, get you some over-hauls!" *

REFRAIN: (a)
I've worked on the _____
And worked on the levee too
Black man's a boy,
I don't care what he can do.

REFRAIN: (b)
They said I was uneducated,
My clothes was dirty and torn;
Now I've got a little education,
But I'm still a boy, right on.

REFRAIN: (b)

* over-alls

SIDE III, Band 6: MULE RIDIN', TALKING BLUES

Big Bill Broonzy, voice and guitar: "Big Bill Broonzy Story" FG 3586. From a Studs Terkel radio interview program, Chicago, 1957. 3:38.

Though Mr. Broonzy spent most of his adult life away from the South, much of his material, like his style, was drawn from his early years in Mississippi and Arkansas where a singer's repertoire encompassed a wide range of songs, music for dancing and entertainment. At two-way picnics though whites and Negroes were separated, the same music sufficed for both. This talking blues, with an appropriate role for guitar, is as country-cured as a Brother Rabbit tale.

SIDE III, Band 7: BLACK WOMAN

Rich Amerson: "Negro Folk Music of Ala. - Secular" FE 4417, rec., Ala., 1950 by Courlander. 4:50.

One of the most beautiful of all recorded blues, this is of a type that must have influenced the growth and development of blues form at an early stage. "The simplicity of conception," Harold Courlander writes, (p. 140 (1) "the humming and moaning, the occasional use of falsetto, the rhythmic 'ah hmmm' heard elsewhere in Negro preaching, and the impression that the singer is singing to himself seems to relate it to field songs that must have been commonplace in plantation days." Earthy and easy language ("biscuit roller," "wild ox moan," "hungry time") lends poetic force to this extraordinary "whoopin'" blues.

Well I said come here Black Woman,
Ah-hmm, don't you hear me cryin', Oh
Lordy!

Ah-hmm, I say run here Black Woman,
I want you to sit on Black Daddy's knee,
Lord!

M-hmm, I know your house feels
lonesome,
Ah don't you hear me whoopin', Oh
Lordy!

Don't your house feel lonesome,
When your biscuit-roller gone,
Lord help my cryin' time don't your house
feel lonesome

Mamma when your biscuit roller gone!
I say my house feel lonesome,
I know you hear me cryin' oh Baby!
Ah-hmm, ah when I looked in my kitchen

Mamma,
And I went all through my dinin' room!
Ah-hmm, when I woke up this mornin',
I found my biscuit roller done gone!
I'm goin' to Texas Mamma,
Just to hear the wild ox moan,
Lord help my cryin' time I'm goin' to
Texas

Mamma to hear the wild ox moan!
And if they moan to suit me,
I'm going to bring a wild ox home!
Ah-hmm I say I'm got to go to Texas Black
Mamma,

Ah-hmm I know I hear me cryin', oh Lordy!
Ah-hmm I'm got to go to Texas Black
Mamma,

Ah just to hear the white cow I say moan!
Ah-hmm, ah if they moan to suit me Lordy
I b'lieve I'll bring a white cow back home!
Say I feel superstitious Mamma
'Bout my hoggin' bread Lord help my
hungry time,
I feel superstitious, Baby 'bout my hoggin'
bread!

Ah-hmm, Baby I feel superstitious,
I say 'stittious Black Woman!
Ah-hmm, ah you hear me cryin',
About I done got hungry oh Lordy!
Oh Mamma I feel superstitious
About my hog Lord God its my bread.
I want you to tell me Mamma
Ah-hmm I hear me cryin' oh Mamma!
Ah-hmm I want you to tell me Black
Woman,

Oh where did you stay last night?
I love you Black Woman,
I tell the whole wide world I do,
Lord help your happy black time I love you
Baby,
And I tell the world I do!
Ah-hmm, I love you Black Woman,
I know you hear me whoopin' Black Baby!
Ah-mm, I love you Black Woman
And I'll tell your Daddy on you, Lord!

VI. INSTRUMENTAL SOUNDS

SIDE IV, Band 1: OLD JOHN BOOKER - YOU
CALL THAT GONE

5-string Banjo. Gus Cannon, voice and banjo: "Am. Skiffle Bands" FA 2610, rec., Memphis, 1956, by Samuel B. Charters. 1:38

When Gus Cannon was a boy in Mississippi -- he was born in 1883 -- Old John Booker was one of the first tunes to catch his fancy. He learned the tune and in time became an adept of the banjo part that went with it, what Charters ("The Country Blues") calls a "finger-picking, down-stroking and thumb-picking style that is similar to the older banjo frailing style." Gus took the 5-string banjo with him -- along with various other instruments--into medicine shows -- these provided minstrel-like entertainment for the doctor's pitch--into the historic Cannon's Jug Stompers and into many a recording studio. At this informal 1956 record session Mr. Cannon played old songs and this "very old banjo tune, just as he'd played them on small torchlit stages in fields and on street corners..." (Charters, Notes). This is an authentic example of the type of entertainment that went into the medicine shows and Negro minstrels--even the good-natured hokum is unforced.

SIDE IV, Band 2: JOHN HENRY

Mississippi bottle-neck guitar. Furry Lewis voice and guitar: "Furry Lewis" FS 3823, rec., Memphis, 1959, by Charters. 4:45.

This is Mississippi bottle-neck guitar with a walling voice to match it. Furry Lewis (Walter "Furry" Lewis) uses the neck of a bottle--cut off cleanly fired to smooth the edge -- that fits on the little finger of the fretting (fingering) hand -- and the guitar becomes a real whoopin' friend. This is in addition to the work of the playing hand, in this instance, the right hand. The best known exponent of this style, Robert Johnson, was also from Mississippi. Furry Lewis' superb John Henry opens with familiar lines, some of them adapted with imaginative freshness, from centuries-old British Isles balladry. He uses some stanzas that were in a version he recorded in the 1920's. This magnificent John Henry, sung by a veteran Mississippi blues singer, should be both for the singer and for Mr. Charters, who recorded it, occasion for pride. From the time of his birth -- sitting on his mother's knee--to his fateful encounter with a steam drill, his death and the incredible funeral parade of the women in his life -- the saga of John Henry is sung with sympathy and genuine folk feeling. (There are hundreds of John Henrys, classified and assorted -- more probably thousands by now, another of this writer's favorites being Rich Amerson's extended folk saga (in FE 4471)...said to have had their beginning when work was still going on in the construction of a railroad tunnel in West Virginia.)

John Henry was a little baby boy
Sittin' on his mother's knee,
Cryin' that Big Ben tunnel on the Y and E (road)
Mama, 's gonna be the death of me,
Gonna be the death of me, baby.

John Henry he hammered in the mountains one day
an' his hammer caught fire
Cryin' pick 'em up, boys, why don't you let 'em
down again,
Jus' want a little drink of water 'fore I die,
baby,
Jus' want...

John Henry told his captain one day,
A man ain't nothin' but a natural man,
Before it'll be built by your steel-drivin' gang
I will jus' die with this hammer in my hand
Die....baby, I'll die...

(Speaks, gives a chorus to the guitar)

John Henry had a little woman,
Her dress she wore was red,
Started down the track,
And she never did look back--
I'm goin' where John Henry fell dead,
Please take me where my man fell dead,
Lord, I want to go where....

When the women in the west
 Heard of John Henry's death,
 They couldn't sleep at home in the bed--
 Some were dressed in white, some were dressed
 in red,
 Said, we're all goin' where John Henry fell dead...

Baby, where did you get your pretty little shoes?
 The dress you wear so fine?
 I got my shoes from the railroad man,
 My skirt from the striker in the mine, Lord,
 My skirt from the striker in the mine.

Baby, who's gonna shoe your pretty little feet?
 Who's gonna glove your hand?
 Who's gonna kiss your rosi cheeks?
 When I'm in some old long distant land,
 When I'm in some old...

Cryin', Mama's gonna shoe my pretty little feet,
 My sister's gonna glove my hand,
 My striker, he's gonna kiss my rosi cheeks,
 When I'm in some old long distant land...

Note:

The gist of the John Henry legend is that John Henry beat the steam drill, but died doing it. Initials of railroad vary according to locale where it is sung and striker, in some versions, is "shaker" and is the boy who holds the steel -- this punches out a hole for the explosives charge-- The following stanza--not included in this version--makes the role of the "shaker" clear:

John Henry said to the shaker,
 Shaker, do you ever pray?
 'Cause if I miss this piece of steel,
 Tomorrow'll be your buryin' day, Lord, Lord,
 Tomorrow'll be your buryin' day...

SIDE IV, Band 3: TAKE YOUR FINGERS OFF IT

Gus Cannon, jug, Will Slade, harmonica & vocal,
 Charlie Burse, tenor guitar and vocal: "Amer.
 Skiffle Bands" FA 2610, rec., Memphis, 1956,
 Charters. 2:48.

"Take your fingers off it,
 Don't you dare to touch it,
 You know it don't belong to you."

Couplets embellish the theme, some raucous, some risque. Like the expensive part of a Stradivarius, the jug is a resonator. With the jug held close to the mouth, the musician makes a sort of buzzing sound and what comes out is a bass line such as you have here. Gus Cannon and his friends used all kinds of jugs, including metal ones. Charters doesn't say what type was used here but does mention, in the interests of scholarship, that at one point Gus blew straight into it!

SIDE IV, Band 4: 44 BLUES - FIDDLE

Willie Thomas, vocal and fiddle; Butch Cage, vocal and guitar: "The Folk Music of the Newport Folk Festival: 1959-60" rec., Newport, by Moses Asch. 4:08.

Willie Thomas plays a country fiddle. He plays it sitting down, the fiddle resting on his chest, his right foot stretched out and free for stomping. On another tune in this set, Mr. Thomas plays a classic blues accompaniment, rather like a trumpet part -- and exemplary all the way -- so that a choice between the two was not easy. In the end, this fast, up-tempo blues was chosen because -- though not tricky at all and a beautiful display of craftsmanship, it nevertheless features most of the tricks in the country fiddler's bag -- and there are a lot of them -- adapted to blues. In this blues of violence, the "44" motif is carried right through to the railroad train in the last stanza, that old, old symbol of loneliness and leave-taking.

SIDE IV, Band 5: SONNY'S JUMP

Featuring: Harmonica, wash-tub bass, washboard.
 Sonny Terry's Washboard Band: "Sonny Terry's Washboard Band" FA 2006, rec., NYC, 1954 by Moses Asch. 3:04

As used here, the wash-tub bass is related to the string bass in jazz (which is slapped, plucked or bowed, according to the sound wanted) and, in folk music, to the African earth-bow, the latter resembling a device (snare) for capturing small game. The washboard is, as you might guess, a substitute for the African scraper, a device made familiar to us by its adaptation in Latin-American bands -- a notched stick or gourd or a metal scraper resembling a nutmeg grater. Early jazz drummers used a variety of devices to extend the percussive range of drums, for example, the ordinary whisk broom was the predecessor of the familiar brushes. (Quality of sound, e.g. varieties of resonance, is emphasized in jazz drums, as in the altogether different area of Negro folk music. Also, unlike ordinary dance band drummers of the period, pioneering jazz drummers such as Baby Dodds and Zutty Singleton gave emphasis to a tonal spectrum.)

VII. TWO SONGS OF ALABAMA

SIDE IV, Band 6: BIRMINGHAM JAIL

Huddle Ledbetter, voice and 12-string guitar:
 "Leadbelly's Last Sessions" FP 2942A, rec., NYC, 1948, by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. 2:27

Itinerant singers such as Leadbelly and Big Joe Williams sometimes worked under the protection of political bosses -- one in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, was known as "the boss of the bottoms". When they got into trouble, as they were expected to in this rough environment, the boss supplied a lawyer who, like as not, told his "boy" to plead guilty -- just as Leadbelly reminds us in this song about Birmingham Jail (which has come into the news nationally more forcefully than Leadbelly could have anticipated). This old ballad tune has been played in a thousand jails, on a thousand harmonicas. On this occasion it is sung and played, reminiscently and for friends, by Huddle and his twelve-string guitar -- the way he heard it in a certain town, down South. He opens with the refrain, the words of which vary from one stanza to another.

Hear the wind blow, boys,
 Hear the wind blow,
 Hold you head out the window
 (and) Hear the wind blow.

Write me a letter,
 Send it by mail,
 'Dress it all over
 That Birmingham jail.

Birmingham jail, boys,
 The Birmingham jail,
 'Dress it all over
 That Birmingham jail.

High sheriff will arrest you,
 Bound you over in jail,
 Can't (get) nobody
 To go your bail.

To go your bail, boys,
 To go your bail,
 Can't get nobody
 To go your bail.

Send for your lawyer,
 Come down to your cell,
 He'll swear he can clear you
 In spite of all hell.

Spite of all hell, boys,
 Spite of all hell,
 He'll swear he can clear you
 In spite of all hell.

Get the biggest - (?) of your money,
 Come back for the rest
 Tell you to plead guilty
 For he know that is best.

He know that is best, boys,
 He know that is best,
 Tell you to plead guilty
 He know that is best.

Down in the valley,
 The valley so low,
 Put your head out the window
 And hear the wind blow.

Hear the wind blow,
 Hear the wind blow,
 Put your head out the window
 And hear the wind blow.

SIDE IV, Band 7: P.M. SO GLAD

Montgomery Gospel Trio: "We Shall Overcome"

FH 5591, rec., , 1961, by Moses Asch. 2:26

They're singing new songs in the Alabama jails, and this is one of them. Verses are credited to the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee and the song is related to the "over Jordan" example of church music recorded by Little Brother Montgomery (2,2 in Part II). The three high school girls in this trio -- Minnie Hendrick, Mary Ethel Dozier and Gladys Burnette Carter -- have sung often for the Montgomery Improvement Association and for other groups in that city brought into prominence by the bus boycott. (There are freedom songs in South Africa, as in the United States and while men in high places speak of the need for dialogues, singers, though separated by vast distances and walls of apartheid, exchange songs and ideas.)

I'm so glad I'm fighting for my
 right,
 I'm so glad I'm fighting for my
 right,
 I'm so glad I'm fighting for my
 right,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad segregation's got to go,
 I'm so glad segregation's got to go,
 I'm so glad segregation's got to go,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad integration's on its way,
 I'm so glad integration's on its way,
 I'm so glad integration's on its way,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad we're in this fight
 together,
 I'm so glad we're in this fight
 together,
 I'm so glad we're in this fight
 together,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad we're fighting to be
 free,
 I'm so glad we're fighting to be
 free,
 I'm so glad we're fighting to be
 free,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad that God is on our side,
 I'm so glad that God is on our side,
 I'm so glad that God is on our side,
 Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
 glad.

I'm so glad we're fighting to be
free,
I'm so glad we're fighting to be
free,
I'm so glad we're fighting to be
free,
Singing Glory Hallelujah, I'm so
glad.

And before I'll be a slave,

I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to the Lord and be
free.

No more heartache, no more heartache,
No more heartache after awhile;
And before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to the Lord and be free.

There'll be freedom, there'll be
freedom,
There'll be freedom after awhile;
And before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to the Lord and be free.

(Repeat first verse)

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