

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FG 3581

FIRST SONGS

RECORDED BY FREDERICK RAMSEY, JR.

MIKE HURLEY

SI-FP-FW87-D c -03937
Hurley, Mike
First Songs

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE / PHOTOGRAPH BY FEDERIC RAMSEY, JR.

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BLUE MOUNTAIN
YOU GET DOWN BY THE POOL HALL CLICKETY CLACK (SISTER SONG)
I LIKE MY WINE
NO, NO, NO, I WON'T COME (GO) DOWN NO MORE
THE TEA SONG
JUST A BUM
RAVEN ROCK (They Took Away The Diesel)
FAT MAMA
THE ANIMAL SONG (If I Could Ramble Like a Hound)
CAPTAIN KIDD
INTERSOULAR BLUES
THE WERE WOLF SONG

MIKE HURLEY

FIRST SONGS

MIKE HURLEY: First Songs.



To the thoughtful listener, these twelve songs should tell a great deal about Hurley long before anything else is known of him. Because he is a very young man -- 22 last December -- and because a young artist tends to work from where he is, I'm going to reverse the usual order of biographical procedure, and start with him now, then work back into past history.

Not long ago, Hurley came to this writer with an unusual request. He told me that he had been singing and composing songs for a number of years; that he was self-taught; that others who had heard his songs had begun to sing them, and had asked his permission to record them. He had had offers from agents, talent scouts, and free lance producers who sought to record him. He also reported that they had proposed arrangements that sewed up his output and his livelihood in a mass of percentages and deals which he couldn't begin to comprehend. He stated, further, that one of his singing friends had got himself involved in an arrangement where a recording session was scheduled and at the end of the session, he found that he owed the engineers and technicians for studio time at \$40 an hour for a 5-hour session.

Hurley had no criticism of these methods -- he accepted them, as most young folk singers do, as the going coinage of the marketplace of the current folk-song boom. But he said he couldn't work under those conditions. He said that some of his friends had been disappointed with the results of the recordings they had made under coaching and direction; that they felt their best material was being disregarded, and they were being pushed in the direction of accepting sensation-creating electronic devices -- echo chambers, the microphone shoved down the throat for vocal resonance, and other recording tricks which make for what one agent calls "the golden sound." Mike Hurley felt he couldn't deliver his best performance under high-pressure conditions of clock-watching, studio procedures.

Hurley also convinced me that he had more than an emotional or artistic problem that stood in the way of his working under commercial pressures. In the spring of 1963, he had been scheduled for a "big time" recording date. Instead, he had been admitted to Bellevue Hospital with a serious liver condition, later diagnosed as hepatitis. There were other complications: X-rays picked up early traces of tuberculosis, which, fortunately, could be arrested; he was also suffering from mononucleosis.

Like many other members of the generation born into the early 1940's (his birth date is December 20, 1941, 13 days after Pearl Harbor), Mike had been traveling too hard and too long and too young. His physical breakdown followed months of debilitating scuffling in New York's Greenwich Village, where, he confessed, he had come into contact with a gang of youngsters "with some pretty bad habits." His adventures in Greenwich Village had been preceeded by adventures on the road, when he and a friend, Robin Remailly, had hitch-hiked to New Orleans, in 1960 -- he was nineteen then. On their way down the two had been jailed in York, Alabama, "on suspicion of being suspicious," as Mike put it, because they had hobbled with a Negro guitar player living in the back country out of York. After being held and questioned, the two youths were lectured by the mayor, sheriff and parson of that town, then put on a bus to New Orleans. Arriving in New Orleans, they were jailed on "vagrancy" and "suspicion." Mike, who carries a brown spiral notebook, had it dangling from his pocket; the police thought it was a gun handle. The police added that the two appeared doubly suspicious because Remailly had been carrying a large object "resembling a sub-machine gun" wrapped in a black blanket. It was a guitar. When it was finally discovered by police that neither youth was either a dangerous assassin (they missed the real one) nor a member of a Sicilian underworld syndicate (still operating in most cities), Hurley and Remailly were released. After a number of experiences -- Hurley got a job pushing a hot tamale cart through the streets all night long; he later sang and played for a French Quarter sybarite who needed music for Pontchartrain sail-boat outing's-- Remailly and Hurley had returned to their home territory, the countryside in and around Bucks County, Pennsylvania and Hunterdon County, New Jersey.

This had not been Mike's first trip to New Orleans. At seventeen, after a summer of brooding and restlessness, he had taken off in August with \$35 in his pocket and hitched all the way to Mexico, stopping at New Orleans along the way. Thus he had set out, at seventeen, on the road that took him, eventually, to a hospital in New York City.

The years that had preceeded Hurley's jaunts and ramblings had been relatively stable. There are some indications, however, of a smoldering, vaulting imagination that prodded young Mike into a state of restlessness long before he actually began to move. The major part of the five early years of his youth (1955 to 1960, from 14 to 19 years) had been spent at a place called "The Mission Farm", an establishment of thick-walled, colonial stone buildings, meadows and woodland bordering the Lockatong Creek in rural Hunterdon County, New Jersey. The location had nearly everything to offer to a youth who could settle for an uneventful country life. Part of the haunting quality of his later musical expression may have originated here, where he composed some of his first songs. "Blue Mountain" was one of them.

Yet up until the time he was thirteen, Mike Hurley might easily have been mistaken for any well-adjusted youth of the region who was destined to go through school, dress neatly, part his hair with

precision, and grow up to run a tractor, a bank, or a Univac machine. But he was high spirited and he resisted "breaking in." Probing his past for things that led to his restlessness, Mike has recalled that when he was about six or seven, he and a young friend built a special world in which both were brave, unflinching.

"My friend believed I never cried, and I didn't believe he cried, either. We had a laugh about that, later... I can remember. I was an Indian lore fanatic -- completely. I hated this civilization, most of my life. We did our own stone carving, shaped tomahawk heads, made our own bows, arrows. I made a teepee that was thunderstorm-proof, a war bonnet that was completely authentic... We ran around in the woods all the time in loin cloths, with our tomahawks, knives, and wouldn't even use a BB gun because Indians didn't use BB guns... I looked down on music, along with a lot of other things."

But music caught up with him, at thirteen. He recalls: "when I started playing the guitar... there was one in the house. Maureen (one of 3 sisters) could play before I could. She'd picked it up from some Swarthmore students. One of them left a guitar at the house, and it was that guitar that I started playing on. Before that, though, I played a mandolin that was out of tune. At the Mission Farm, in my early teens, I would take the mandolin. It was all out of tune, always. But I would take it and go into a dark room, and sit there for about four or five hours, sometimes, just strumming this. This was an aberration, to most people. I know father and mother were sort of worried about me, doing things like this -- turning out the lights, or staying up half the night, and strumming on an out-of-tune mandolin, picking on it, too. But I heard things there, that I liked."

The conflict between Indians and music came into focus when Mike reminded himself that Indians, too, had made music: "I rationalized listening to it. I would imagine that it was a bunch of Indians dancing around a camp fire. I remember a song that went

Cindy Lou, Lou, Lou
oogh, oogh!
Cindy Lou, Lou, Lou
oogh, oogh!

....like that, you know. So I visualized Indians around the camp fire, because the song gave me a great feeling of something." From then on, he could be both Indian, and music-maker -- two roads that fed into the long one that took him away from home, school, the conventions of neat dress, the automobile that every one should have, the job that every one should get early and keep late. Curiously enough, this road also led back into his earliest childhood as well as pointing to his future; even as a small youngster, Mike recalls, he had uttered a kind of song. It had begun whenever he was aggravated, or bored -- waiting in a car for his mother to finish shopping, or when crossed. "This was a sort of steps-descending yodel. It was a chant. I would do it when I felt a certain way." He believes that this chant was

the earliest forerunner of the high-voice, yodelling passages interpolated in some of his later songs -- for example, "Tea," and "Intersoular Blues."

There was a song, too, that his brother Brian made up, and they sang together:

There's such a thing as doughnuts
In the wide, wide world
Doughnuts! Doughnuts!

* * * * *

After his discharge from Bellevue, Mike Hurley, at a little over twenty-two years of age, has begun to look around, and to wonder how it all could have happened. They gave him real help at Bellevue. "It's a very human place," he says, with no little sense of gratitude.

Six months in a hospital is a long time. It gave Mike time to think about where the road was taking him, and to plan what he might hope to do if he got off the road. In the hospital, he developed a different approach to his music -- less frenetic, more in-looking, more expressive. He now has a sense of "shaping" a song -- of sitting quietly, letting it come, working it over until he feels it's right. In the hospital, he developed a way of singing and playing, very low in volume, so as not to disturb other patients. This didn't diminish by a jot the intensity of what he had to communicate.

Now, Mike Hurley can sing at the top of his voice once more. He is hard at work making up new songs, and singing them. He has also returned to the country. This came about when his old friend Robin Remailly discovered an ancient spring house which could be rented, and lived in, for a truly small amount. One of Robin's first songs, "Euphoria," has already been recorded (Prestige, by Weber and Stampfel), and is about to be published. Together, Remailly and Hurley now spend long hours at playing, singing, writing down their music. Remailly has begun to play the violin, and it is his instrument that is heard on the rollicking, fun-poking song about interplanetary exploration that Mike has titled "Captain Kidd."

The spring house is a solid, two-room, three-storey old stone structure set in a gently falling slope of Bucks County meadow that descends to marsh grass and swampland. Water-cress grows in the stream-bed of the springs that flows out from the basement. In the swamp below, there are peepers, cricket frogs, sombre, elderly bull frogs, all great music-makers in their own way. And in the spring house, the fiddle and guitar are working overtime.

There's nothing really idyllic about all this, it's just what takes place when there is a desire to stop going and stay for a while, to sing, and to listen. But it is a long way from coffee houses, jails, cops, bumming, frantic strivings for "the golden sound," and the treasure-hunt for what Mike Hurley calls "a one-way ticket to the big time."

NOTES by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.



TWELVE SONGS BY MIKE HURLEY

FOLKWAYS record

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SIDE I, Band 1: BLUE MOUNTAIN

Yonder stands blue mountain (2x)
Yonder stands my home

Where the blueberries are bloomin' (2x)
I'm goin' to make some blueberry wine

If I ever ride again (2x)
I'm ridin' back to my blueberry glen

SIDE I, Band 2: YOU GET DOWN BY THE POOL
HALL CLICKETY-CLACK
(SISTER SONG)

You get down by the pool hall clickety-clack
You can knock those pool balls forth and back
I don't want you hangin' 'round my little sister
no more
You move along, you rollin' stone (2x)

Well, you may be suave
You got manners and grace
But if you don't watch out
I'll poke the eyes from your face

You tell me you're misunderstood
Well I understand you're no damn good
I don't want you hangin' 'round my little sister
no more
You move along - you rollin' stone

You got a lot of manners
But you're sticky like glue
It's been too long
We been supportin' you

You wrote my sister a twelve-line sonnet
There's a train leavin' here and I want you on
it.

SIDE I, Band 3: I LIKE MY WINE

I like my wine
Yes I like my wine
But the wine ate my stomach out

I fell in love
I really flipped my lid
Girl I love -- she had three kid

I don't work hard
But I don't have no money neither
Things are so mean to me

My one leg
Is shorter than the other one
That's from walkin' around and around the hills



SIDE I, Band 4: NO, NO, NO, I WON'T COME
(GO) DOWN NO MORE

No, no, no, I won't come (go) down no more
No no
I won't go

Stars are rollin' in an' out of my ears
Stars are rollin' in an' out of my ears

Well they roll
In an' out
It make me want
To jump an' shout

I want to stick around till I hear the gong of
zero (2x)
I want to be there at the gong
At the gong of zero
No no no I won't go down no more



SIDE II, Band 2: THEY TOOK AWAY THE DIESEL

I'm down in Raven Rock sittin' at the station
lookin' at the track

I don't see the diesel
You know they took the diesel off the track?
They took away the diesel?
We want them to bring it back
They said the diesel was an antique and it ran
like this . . . like that . . .

No antique runs like that.
They took the diesel off the track; they said it
ran like this. . .

The diesel was a little one car train ran from
Trenton to Easton and back again

Six am. Six p.m.

There wasn't enough people ridin' on the diesel
Bring it back.

We will ride it up and down the track
(Repeat first statement)

I don't see the diesel.

Not so many years, ago, there was a pleasant, commodious little busy-body of a one-car diesel that churned its way daily from Easton and Belvidere, at one terminus, to Trenton, at the other. This train served commuters all along the way who had good reason to go either to Philadelphia, or to New York, via connecting trains at Trenton. It rattled happily along the tracks, hitting the little community station of Raven Rock at approximately 6 in the morning (down-river run to Trenton) and returning at approximately 6 in the evening (up-river run from Trenton to Belvidere). Commuters were very fond of it, and the country it ran through. They could count small herds of deer moving in lowland thickets between its tracks, and the Delaware River; they could watch countless migratory birds in the spring and fall of each year, and observe still waterways where wild ducks and great blue herons dropped down for sanctuary. They could chat and exchange news with the conductor, who favored his travelers with an occasional song. They could move into the baggage compartment on cold mornings and gather around an old heater. But, as Mike reports, when it came time for the railroads to stop competing with whatever they were competing with, the diesel was withdrawn from service. An official reason was given out that it was "antique" -- over the many signed protests of frustrated commuters who petitioned for its continuance. Antique or no, its return would be celebrated -- perhaps by another song.

Thunder in the breeze is burnin' deep (2x)
Thunder

burns deep
keeps me up
and out of sleep

No no no I won't come down no more

SIDE I, Band 5: TEA

Turn on the tea and let it brew
I like six cups not one or two
Break out the cups and the honey too
And turn on the tea and let it brew
I don't care that she's left me
Just so long as the cupboard is full of tea
My nerves are shakin' and my heart is breakin'
That's just because of all the tea I've taken
Poor old Buddha turned into stone
That's why I drink tea alone
Buddha's made of stone and his eyes are ruby
But his thoughts and dreams are distilled in the tea
I'll drink my tea and sit and dream
I'll conjure up a leprechaun to dance upon the
steam

I'm drinkin' my tea and it's gettin' late
I thought I heard somebody pass my gate

SIDE II, Band 1: JUST A BUM

All these years that I've lived people say that
my time's been wasted
By sittin' by the fireside dreamin' all night
Making love drunk in a meadow beneath the pale
moonlight
Travelin' over land like a natural born man
Just a hobo easy come easy go don't you see
don't you know you're lovin' hobo
Just a tramp call me what you like, see me
travelin' down the pike, and singin' love
songs

Call me Rambler, I guess the time has rolled
around, my feet are up, my head is down

I'm whirlin' on, baby

Just a hobo, etc,

(Repeat second verse)

Like all of Mike Hurley's songs, "They Took the Diesel Away," is based on something that really happened. It might very well serve as theme song to all the vexed and disappointed commuters of New Jersey, who in the past few years have had to suffer from removal of one train service after another, until now there is virtually no way to get from any where in New Jersey to any where else, unless one wishes to cope with the heavy, early morning traffic of throughways, highways, turnpikes, parkways and all other conveniences of high-speed, high-risk auto travel.

SIDE II, Band 3: FAT MAMA

Little children they run by the dozen all around
her door
She cooks and she washes and she carries on
all day long
So I'll be travelin' a lonesome road
Till I get to where I've been from
When the leaves come down (I'll be travelin')
I'll be travelin' that old home road
Some times I get to worryin' 'bout my heavy load
But it ain't gonna crush me
I'll keep a jumpin' for a long, long time
Her upper leg is like a melon
I like it sittin' out where I can see

Sometimes I get to dreamin' I'm a king in a
foreign land
And the way things are seemin' she's just the
one to understand
Little children, they run by the dozen all
around her door
She cooks and she washes and she carries on
all day long

SIDE II, Band 4: THE ANIMAL SONG

If I could ramble like a hound
When he's walkin' down a rabbit trail (2x)

I'd keep my nose in the wind and believe me,
people, I'd wag my tail (2x)

If I had radar hearin'
Like the bat that flies at night
I could hear all those lightning bugs burning up
and turning down
If I only knew what the wise old owl knows
I'd hoot all night long tellin' folks about my
worldly woes

If I could wallow like the great white whale in
the sea (2x)
I'd rise and sink low and forever be free
If I could sleep long like the grizzly grizzly
bear
I'd sleep and dream of your golden hair

SIDE II, Band 5: CAPTAIN KIDD

Captain Kidd done flipped his lid
He done left it behind
Captain Kidd done flipped his lid
There ain't nothin' left but the rind
He locked himself in a rocket ship
Took an interplanetary trip

(REPEAT)

Captain Kidd got to the moon
Wavin' his sabre in the air
Captain Kidd soon left the moon
'Cause there wasn't any wine up there
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 one and ZERO
Count down captain, we'll see you no more
Captain Kidd's a hero

(Repeat 1st verse)

SIDE II, Band 6: INTERSOULAR BLUES

Oh, it seems, it seems to me you don't love
me any more
And my dreams, my dreams to me, well they're
not the same as they used to be
Once I lived all the pretty and the fair
Now my life is a great nightmare
I'm goin' to join the navy just to see the world
'Cause I ain't seen nothin' since I quit seein'
you
Some day soon but none too soon for me
I'll be just a memory



SIDE II, Band 7: WEREWOLF

O, the werewolf, o the werewolf comes steppin'
along
He don't even break the branches where he's
been gone
You can hear his long holler from 'way 'cross
the moor
That's the holler of the werewolf when he's feelin'
poor
He goes out in the evening when the bats are on
the wing
And he's killed some young maiden before the
birds sing
For the werewolf, for the werewolf have sympathy
For the werewolf he is some one just like you and
me
For the werewolf have pity not fear and not hate
For the werewolf might be some one that you've
known of late
Once I saw him in the moonlight when the bats
were a flying
All alone I saw the werewolf and the werewolf was
cryin'
Cryin' nobody knows how much I love the
maiden when I tear off her clothes
(or, nobody nobody knows of my pain)
When I see it has risen that full moon again
When I see that moon movin' through the clouds
in the sky
I get a crazy feelin' and I wonder why

O the werewolf, o the werewolf comes a steppin'
along
He don't even break the branches where he's been
gone
O the werewolf, o the werewolf comes a travelin'
along
He don't even crush the leaves where he has been
gone.



Photo by Martha Ramsey