

RECORDED LIVE BY SAMUEL CHARTERS IN SPARTONBURG, 1961-62

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3588

Pink Anderson
Carolina Medicine Show Hokum & Blues
with Baby Tate



PINK ANDERSON, 1961, PHOTO BY SAMUEL CHARTERS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3588

Pink Anderson
Carolina Medicine
Show Hokum & Blues
with Baby Tate

SIDE 1

- | | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 1. You Don't Know My Mind | 2:35 |
| 2. That's No Way To Do | 2:20 |
| 3. Weeping Willow Blues | 3:52 |
| 4. Meet Me In The Bottom | 3:24 |
| 5. I Got A Woman 'Cross Town | 1:52 |
| 6. Greasy Greens | 2:24 |

SIDE 2

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Boweevil | 3:03 |
| 2. Chicken | 1:47 |
| 3. He's In The Jailhouse Now | 4:32 |
| 4. The Titanic | 2:45 |
| 5. The Boys of Your Uncle Sam | 2:03 |
| 6. Baby Tate—See What You Done Done | 2:30 |

RETURN TO ARCHIVE

CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE PROGRAMS
AND CULTURAL STUDIES
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

PROGRAMS
STUDIES
STITUTION

© 1984 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.
632 BROADWAY, N.Y.C., 10012 N.Y., U.S.A.

Pink Anderson
Carolina Medicine
Show Hokum & Blues
with Baby Tate

RECORDED LIVE BY

SAMUEL CHARTERS IN SPARTONBURG, 1961-62

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3588

Pink Anderson

Carolina Medicine

Show Hokum & Blues

with Baby Tate

An Introduction To Pink Anderson

It's been more than twenty years since I saw Pink Anderson for the last time, but if I close my eyes I still can remember his long, lanky body looming in his shadowy doorway when he came to answer a knock, and I still can hear his deep, pleased laugh when he told me one of his old medicine show jokes. I can also still remember the coarse, stinging smell of corn liquor which always seemed to drift out of the back room of his small house. He bought it from an especially down to earth still operator and before we could drink it we had to take an old napkin and use it as a strainer to get the twigs and small pebbles out of the jug.

Pink had spent most of his life working as an itinerant bluesman, songster, and entertainer for the small medicine shows that traveled through the southern states every summer, bringing a little home grown entertainment and patent medicines of dubious value to small towns, county fairs, and general stores at a busy crossroad. They had been an unassuming, cheerful part of the southern countryside since before the turn of the century. When I met Pink, however, both he and the shows themselves had begun to slow down. Pink - born on February 12, 1900 in Lawrence, South Carolina - was in his early sixties, and a heart attack had stopped his touring. The changes in the way of life in the South had - at the same time - virtually finished off the medicine shows. The first year Pink had stayed off the shows, in the mid-1950s, the show operators tried to persuade him to give them one more season. "The first year I didn't go with a show the cars was lined up in the street with people coming to try to get me to go with them. I just told them, 'This is where I'm going to stay.'" At the same time, when we first worked together, it was in the spring,

the time of year when he was used to getting ready to go with a show, and sometimes when he'd sit out on his front porch playing his guitar I had the feeling he still was watching for one of the cars to turn down the street, coming to get him for a last summer.

I realize now that I never thought to ask Pink if he had another name. It seemed so natural to call him by that name that I never wondered if he might have been called something else. What I asked him most about were his years with the shows. "Dr." W. R. Kerr, who lived in Spartanburg - a small city in the northwest corner of South Carolina - traveled every summer with his "Indian Remedy" company, and Pink started with him when he was fourteen. The first show was in Greenville, South Carolina, a city thirty miles to the south and west of Spartanburg, and Pink still could remember his nervousness. He was supposed to sing and dance a little and he asked Kerr where he should look. Kerr told him just to look out over everybody's heads until he got used to the crowd. When Pink first began playing the guitar on the stage the only thing he knew was "Spanish" tuning, an open chord tuning, and he eventually had to relearn the guitar so he could play the medicine show songs. Pink said of Kerr, ". . . he taught me everything I know about entertaining and doing my business on the stage."

Pink, of course, played the blues, as part of his stage repertoire, but he thought of himself as an entertainer, and much of what he sang was a rich grab bag of comedy songs, country ballads, and old minstrel show tunes that had gone through so many performers' fingers that they had become a kind of folk music. Pink sang all of it with a relaxed, laid-back style, that in part came out of his own comfortable personality, and in part reflected his Carolinas musical roots. It's interesting to compare some of Pink's songs with versions done by other performers from the area. His blues, of course, derived from the recordings of Blind Boy Fuller, who was from Durham, North Carolina, which isn't that far away, but the style was so natural with Pink that he sounded completely at home in it. Gary Davis comes to mind when Pink did one of his comedy numbers, but there is no way he could have learned them from Davis's recordings. Obviously both of them learned from the same earlier sources.

Pink's life was generally uneventful. He worked for Kerr year around. When the show came back to Spartanburg for the winter, generally the week before Christmas, Pink would stay on as a handyman, looking

after the stage and props and the vehicles that Kerr stored in a warehouse. Pink usually performed alone, but for several years he traveled with an older blind singer named Simmie Dooley, who lived close by. At the end of his career he usually worked with a trio that included a one legged harmonica player named Peg Fete. Pete - whose name was Arthur Jackson - outlived Pink by several years, and was eventually recorded with one of the last surviving medicine shows working in the area.

During his long career Pink had two brushes with fame. The first was in April, 1928. This was the period when a great deal of recording was being done in the rural areas of the South for the "race" series that were being sold in the new ghettos in the northern cities, and Pink and Simmie were brought to Columbia Records' recording facilities in Atlanta. They did four songs that were released as part of the now legendary Columbia 14000 numerical series, which was devoted to black material. For whatever reason - Pink said they asked him to come back, but he wasn't interested - there were no more recordings, and his life went on as it had before.

The second encounter with the larger entertainment world was more fruitful for him. In 1950 the folk singer Paul Clayton heard him perform for a county fair and he recorded a group of his ballads and comedy songs. They were released on Riverside Records, which at that time had a strong connection with the new audience for folk songs and country blues. Like everyone else I heard the things Pink had recorded, and despite the poor fidelity, I liked the songs very much. When I began doing research for the book The Country Blues in the mid-1950s, however, I didn't think of looking up Pink; since what he had recorded was so strongly rooted in the medicine show tradition.

The book was published in 1959, and I left the United States to live in Europe for a year. When I returned I found there was a sudden excitement about recording the older country blues artists and the folklorist Kenneth S. Goldstein had been brought in by Prestige Records to help gather material for a blues series. Ken had also heard the songs Paul Clayton had recorded, and when I returned to New York he asked me if I would go look for Pink and try to do a complete documentation of his song repertoire. Pink wasn't hard to find. Ken had heard that he was in Spartanburg, and once I got to town I was quickly directed to Pink's house on South Forest, a modest street of small frame houses with older cars lining the curb and chicken coops in the bare dirt yards behind most of the buildings.

Pink and I did all the recording for his Prestige albums in the front room of his house. The only problem we had was refreshing his memory on some of the songs he hadn't been performing. Usually he would get the first line or so, then we'd strain some more of the corn whiskey, and the rest of the song would come back a verse at a time. I stayed in a motel in the neighborhood, and when we'd had enough music Pink would settle down to a game of poker with some of his friends and after I'd watched them play for a while I'd go and get myself something to eat. I had a large, heavy Ampex tape machine that went in the trunk of the old Plymouth coupe that I was driving. As always, I did the recording with the microphone held in my hand, so I could pull it back if he leaned too close, and I could move it down to the guitar for his solos. We worked steadily and did a number of versions of his songs, and some of the performances on this record come from these work tapes.

Pink was also trying to teach his young son to play the guitar and sing, and the next summer, when my wife and I were filming the sequences for the documentary The Blues, I decided to go back to Spartanburg to film one of the music lessons in Pink's back yard. After the film session Pink felt like singing so we continued to record and the rest of the songs come from these tapes. At the same time that I was working with Pink he had sent me over to find another friend named Baby Tate, who had traveled with him, and who played some of the same blues that Pink did. Baby also appeared in the film, and his song is from one of the recordings made that summer.

Not long after Pink played and sang for the film he suffered a stroke, and was no longer able to play the guitar. Although he lived for a few more years in Spartanburg he missed the excitement of the folk blues revival. His son was too young to learn much more than a few song verses from his repertoire. Pink's music died with him, and though what he sang was part of a small, out of date, half forgotten song tradition, our own musical experience is poorer without him.

Samuel Charters

LITHO. IN U.S.A. 