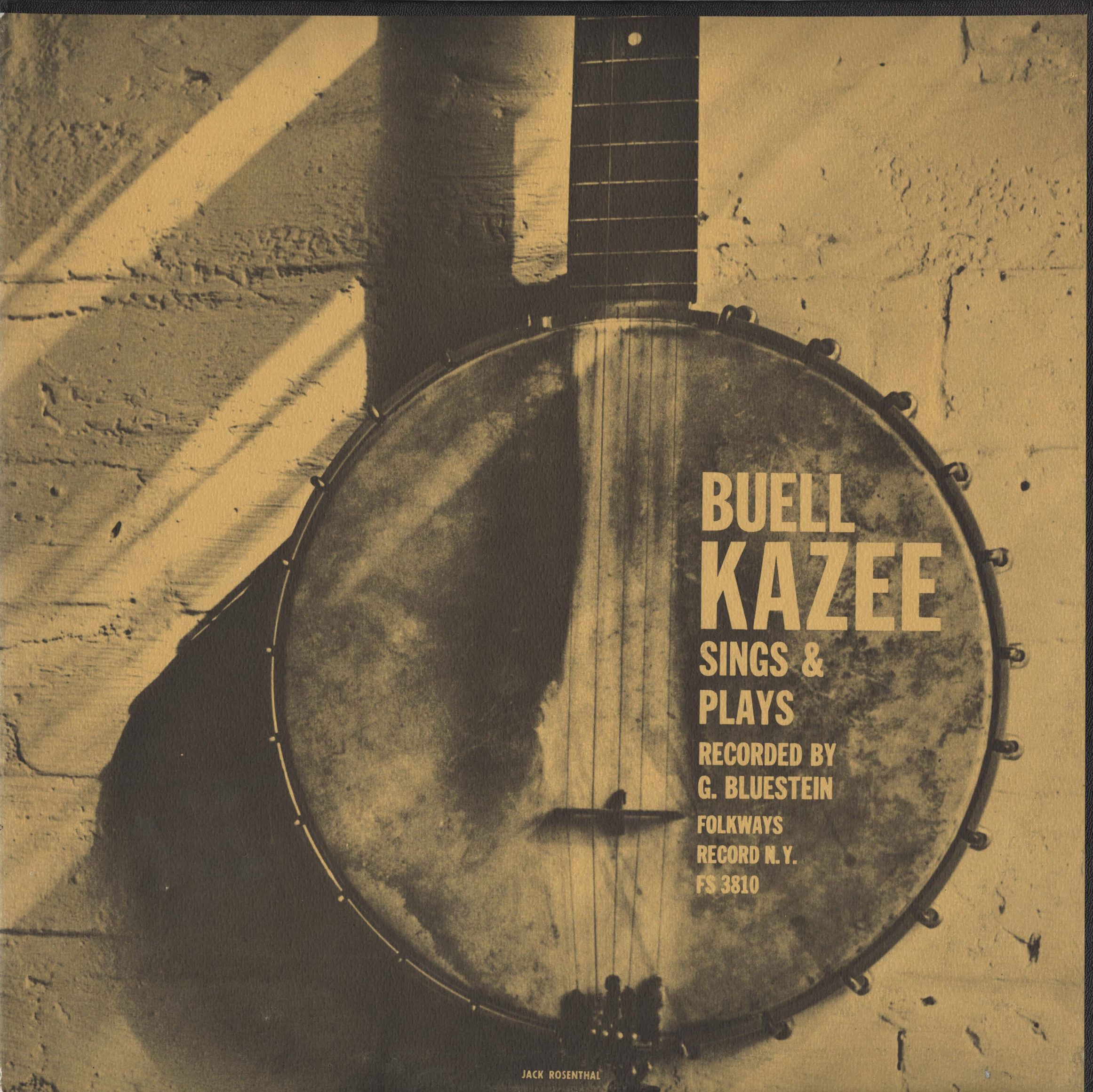

BUELL KAZEE

SINGS & PLAYS

RECORDED BY
G. BLUESTEIN

FOLKWAYS
RECORD N. Y.
FS 3810

JACK ROSENTHAL

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3810

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BUELL KAZEE SINGS & PLAYS

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East Virginia
Butcher's Boy
Dance Around My Pretty Little Miss
Wagoner's Lad
Yellow Pups (Fox Chase)
Johnny Hardy
John Henry
The Moonshiner
Darling Corey
Cumberland Gap
Cock Robin, Old Grey Mare
RELIGIOUS SONGS:
Amazing Grace, When Moses,
My Christian Friends, Bread of Heaven,
Eternity, From the White Pilgrim

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3810

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FS 3810
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BUELL H. KAZEE

I was born around the turn of the century on the head of Burton Fork in Magoffin County, Kentucky. My mother and father, Abbie Jane and J. F. Kazee, were both singers of the old type, without any training, of course. There were six of us children, four boys and two girls, and we all sang around the fireside and in the old country church and wherever informal groups gathered. Before the first world war broke up the isolation of the mountain country, there were very few popular or dance tunes sung among us. Most of our singing was religious and of traditional ballads the origin of which we never thought of asking. I later came to see that they had come down to us through our ancestry. A few people in our country had pedal organs, and the little shelf up in the middle was always full of song "ballets" written by hand. When one heard a new ballad one would ask for the singer to write the "ballet" of that song. Thus, and by hearing the songs sung, they kept going the rounds. In our home mother sang such ballads as "Barbary Allen," "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender" or "The Brown Girl." Jigs and dance tunes were kept alive by the fiddlers and banjo-pickers at the square dances or "shin digs" as we often called them. The dances at home often got mother into trouble at church. The daughters at our house were the oldest of the children, and boys came there on the least suggestion. Often the community would converge on our house as the social center for their social life. Apple cuttings, bean stringings, shuck tearings (tearing up corn shucks to make mattresses for our feather beds), bean hullings (dried beans), and other occasions, including weddings, brought much social life our way. Mother was always in the position of restraining the youthful urges and finally had to "set her foot down" on some of the hilarity which went on. Father drank in his early life, and that didn't help mother keep the religious tenor of our home at its pitch. Finally he got converted, and that leveled things off. But we always sang and had lighter music at our house.

My home was a big two-room log house, with a back porch and kitchen at the end of the porch. We burned wood in the big open fire places, and were quite warm and comfortable at all times. There is no way to explain what life and enjoyment can be in a family in such limited circumstances. We had something to eat and wear, but never needed much luxury. Winters were especially enjoyable for home life. We were crowded in the two rooms but didn't realize it. Neither did we realize that we were poor. A typical evening around the fire place would find mother walking back and forth by the spinning wheel making yarn for our socks and some other winter clothes. Father would sit over at the other side of the fire place and read a book to us. He was a wonderful reader orally though he never went further than the second grade in school. Many people could not read in those days, and father was the community reader. We children would listen as we roasted chestnuts, popped corn, or did a dozen other things to our liking. We received a lot of education there at the fireside readings. Many evenings we spent in singing or talking with visitors who frequented our home a great deal. People liked to come there. Father and Mother both were attractive to the neighbors and our house was a social center. Summer evenings found us sitting on the porch listening to the din of beetle and katydid and the chorus of frogs. We talked, sang, or danced on occasion. I got my grade education in a little log school house near the old church down on Mash Fork near the mouth of Burton. It was a mile and a quarter from our home. I was considered a leading pupil, made speeches at the last day of school often, and practiced speaking in the woods from a big rock platform overlooking the school building. We "orators" practiced speeches there about Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, etc.

At the age of five I began a musical career with the banjo. We were all visiting across the hill at Aunt Sade's (mother's sister), and there I spied an old, worn, homemade banjo. I cried for it and got it. There was a big hole in the skin which was tacked over the "hoop" with carpet tacks. Soon there was a cat missing around the place and another skin on the banjo head. I began to thrash the banjo with all fingers, then, to pick it with one finger. I learned to tune it for "The Brown Girl" and to pick that tune with the fore finger, one string at a time. I kept driving everybody mad around the place, thrashing the strings with rhythmic stroke, and one day Harris Conley was sitting by our fire listening to me. He spat into the fire, twisted his head to one side in characteristic fashion and said: "I tell ye, he's a-gonna make a banjer picker." What more did I need? As I thrashed along, week after week, the notes got clearer and chaos diminished, and before long I was entertaining the family and guest with my "banjer." I didn't know that part of the attraction was my precociousness; I thought it was my picking and singing. I realize now that that was not so good as I thought it was. Well, I played at a few dances with a fiddler, but by this time another phase of my life was developing. I was of solemn temperament, and from the day when I remember scattering sweet bread all over the section of church where mother held me in her lap, I attended church services. At the age of eight I had felt what we knew as "conviction" (a sense of being lost), and at twelve I was "converted" (had an experience of divine faith in Christ as Saviour). I immediately joined the church and was baptized. While there was no written rule against picking the banjo, it was usually associated with a rowdy crowd, and there was strong feeling in the church that banjo-picking and religion did not harmonize.

There were two kinds of Baptist churches in our community. One, the United Baptists, were inclined more to the customs of Primitive or "hardshell Baptists", no musical instrument in the church, long meter songs of many stanzas, and the style of lining the hymns, two lines at a time. They never knew that many of their tunes were lonesome love tunes of another day. They were sad and solemn, and that was necessary. In our church, Missionary Baptists - to distinguish them from the "hardshell" anti-mission element, had song books with notes in them, sang all the songs of modern day evangelistic churches. Our family sang both kinds. I know and can sing many of them today of the long meter variety.

I let up on the banjo, quit playing at any dances, though I did play at home some. My religious life became serious.

Our church meetings were Saturday and Sunday once a month, unsophisticated and serious, with remarkable results in the lives of the members. Seems that we kept the population proportionately

converted much better than today with all our busy church life.

At the age of fifteen I was hearing what we believe to be a "call to preach." At sixteen I entered a Baptist Mission School at the county seat, Salyersville, Ky., and there began to study with the ministry in view. I began preaching at seventeen and have been preaching ever since. I attended college at Georgetown, Ky., and from there began active life as a minister. I did a lot of "evangelistic singing," taught voice in a small college, also in private studio in Ashland, Ky., spent twenty-two years as pastor of the Morehead (Ky.) Baptist Church, seven years as teacher of Bible in Lexington Baptist College, Lexington, Ky. I also taught voice in the last named college. (This is a Bible school).

In college I studied voice and music generally, majored in English and a second major in Ancient Languages. During my college days, or at the beginning, I had laid the banjo down because I thought it too "hillbilly" for modern culture. As I studied Shakespeare and relative English courses I began to see that my mother was an Elizabethan type of woman, and that our house had been a good stage for Elizabethan drama and fun. Mother said "fetch" and "yon side" and other words which she did not know were Elizabethan, and I soon found that we were literature living. I picked up the banjo again, began to give programs at schools, music clubs, civic clubs, etc. until I had established quite a reputation for entertainment of this sort. I mixed into the programs colorful and (I hope) witty descriptions, but always kept the literary value in the foreground. I became what you might call popular in this field and even now have more calls than I desire or try to fill for such work. During this post-college period when I was teaching voice in Ashland, Ky., and preaching on Sundays at various places, I dropped into a very successful record store there. The proprietor was a big man in the business with close touch with Brunswick, Columbia, and Victor. He and I got to talking about records, and he discovered that I was acquainted with the field. He asked a few questions, immediately wanted to go to my studio and listen to my playing and singing with the banjo. In a matter of days I was in New York making records for Brunswick. All I knew was to sing them as I knew them. He exclaimed to the manager in New York: "Here we have it, men, like we have wanted it - the genuine article with intelligence!" (I leave others to judge that last part, but the first I declare is right). I made from 1926 to 1930 52 selections for Brunswick. Several were never released because the "crash" in 1929 finally put Brunswick out of the phonograph business. The company wanted me to go on vaudeville circuits, county and state fairs, and radio (Chicago). I never yielded to any of these because my ministry led me in the other direction. I saw that the two worlds did not harmonize, and I quit with the "crash" in 1930.

I married in 1929, have two grown sons, both married and fathers themselves. The older is in the Air Force, the younger beginning his ministry in Georgetown, Kentucky. My entire time is spent in preaching and teaching the Bible, holding meetings and Bible conferences, and pastoring a young church here in Lexington, Ky. Occasionally I give a folk-song program or appear on folk festival programs. Quite often I am visited by folk song hunters from all sections of the country, mostly from the north and east.

Notes by GENE BLUESTEIN

Two years ago at the tail end of a field trip to the Southern Appalachians, Leonard Roberts (a folklorist who teaches at a small college in the area) suggested that I stop to see Buell Kazee in Lexington, Kentucky. My response foreshadowed the comments I have received from almost everyone else to whom I have mentioned this occurrence: "Why, Buell Kazee must be dead." Ultimately Kazee may have recourse to the comment attributed to Mark Twain when his death was reported in an American newspaper while Twain was abroad. He cabled back, "The news of my death has been greatly exaggerated." Kazee, I discovered, is very much alive.

To folksong enthusiasts the name Buell Kazee is well known, for in the late twenties his banjo picking and singing was preserved on recordings. During those years several recording companies recorded and released the work of many authentic singers, and for the first time made it possible for folk song performances to reach a popular audience. Kazee recorded fifty-two sides, some of them with other singers and musicians. Most of these have become collector's items, since they represent unusually effective and sensitive treatment of folk materials by a singer and instrumentalist who epitomizes the traditions of Southern mountain music.

Shortly after his records were released, Kazee was offered vaudeville engagements, but he turned these down for several reasons, not the least of which was his determination to respond to his calling in the Baptist ministry. Despite the antagonism toward secular music by many denominations in the South, Kazee has maintained a wonderfully balanced attitude toward his secular materials. (In this album, for example, the "Kentucky Moonshiner" is treated as respectfully as the hymns and ballads.) The point is more significant than it may appear, because underlying it is a sophisticated, learned, humane approach to folk materials. When such an approach is wedded to the first-hand experiences of Kazee's youth in Magaoffin county, Kentucky, we have an extremely rare combination of authenticity plus the ability to articulate the significance of the musical tradition and styles.

The fact that Kazee is an educated man as well as a trained musician should not undercut to any extent his integrity as a folk performer. On the contrary, it seems precisely his learned qualities which have made it possible for him to retain the traditional styles of singing and playing to this day. (As a matter of fact, he sounds even better today than on the old recordings.) It is the modesty and sincerity of Reverend Kazee which has shielded him from sentimentalism and condescension. His respect for his materials and his understanding of the folk have allowed him to retain a solid foundation of instrumental skill* and an honesty of vocal interpretation.

* A NOTE FOR BANJO PICKERS: Kazee's style of playing is exclusively "thrashing" or as it is sometimes called, "frailing." Except when he is demonstrating "fancy picking" ("double thumbing"), all of his effects are obtained by downward movements of the thumb and forefinger (the thumb mainly on the fifth string, but occasionally moving down on the other strings). There is amazing facility here, especially on such tunes as "East Virginia" and "Darling Corey." This style of playing is most characteristic of the mountain banjo player and it gives the instrument its distinctive sound and rhythmic quality. Particularly at this time when "Scruggs" style seems to be replacing the older forms of picking, it is especially interesting to hear the traditional sound of the mountain banjo.

SIDE I, Band 1: EAST VIRGINIA

"East Virginia" has become a standard banjo tune, especially through the influence of Pete Seeger's sensitive interpretation (which is based on another version). Kazee plays this in a minor tuning which allows him to range freely with his left hand in a kind of pizzicato technique. (Cross reference to Kazee's Brunswick recording in your American Folk Music series.) FP 251-2-3

Oh when I leave ole East Virginny,
North Carolina I did go,
There I courted a fair young lady,
What was her name I did not know.

Her papa said that we must marry,
Her mother said it would not do.
So come here, dear, and I will tell you,
I will take you far from here.

Oh some dark night we'll take a ramble,
I will run away with you.

For I'd rather be in some dark holler,
Where the sun refuses to shine;
Than for you to be some other man's woman,
Never longer to call you mine.

SIDE I, Band 2: BUTCHER BOY

The combining of traditional English ballads into new compositions is a standard characteristic of the mountain singers. The unrequited love theme, the diction, and the objectivity of the narrator are all ballad techniques, but the racing banjo underneath is typically America. I have never heard a more lucid description of the way instruments are related to the folksong tradition. "The idea of tuning a banjo is to get as many open strings as possible"--speaks volumes about the manner in which folk musicians achieve their unique effects. The technique of tuning the instrument to an open chord (major, minor, sometimes modal) allows great mobility in picking the melody or in providing a running pattern underneath a vocal line. Many of the distinctive chordal effects, for example, are the result of picking out the tune while the banjo rings only the tonic chord, the other chords never actually being played. Most of the traditional players, in fact, never finger any chord other than the one in which the instrument is tuned at the moment. (I suspect this is behind Woody Guthrie's seemingly offhand comment that he often plays a song, on the guitar, using only one chord all the way through.) Guthrie is quoted in John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 286.

She went upstairs to make her bed,
And not one word to her mother said.
Her mother she went upstairs, too,
Says, "Daughter, dear daughter, what
troubles you?"

"Oh, mother, oh mother, I cannot tell,
That butcher boy I love so well;
He courted me my life away,
And now at home he will not stay."

Her father he came in from work,
Inquiring for his daughter, she seemed so hurt
He went upstairs and the door he broke,
And found her hanging on the rope.

He took his knife and cut her down,
And in her bosom these words he found:

"Go dig my grave both wide and deep,
Place a marble slab at my head and feet.
And over my coffin, place a snow-white dove,
To warn this world that I died for love."

SIDE I, Band 3:

"Dance Around-My Pretty Little Miss" shows up Kazee's banjo picking very well. It is interesting to note in "The Prisoner's Song" and "Madame I Have Come a'Courting" Kazee's "trained voice" showing itself. When he first recorded in New York, the men in charge of the production restrained him from using too much vibrato and encouraged him to slur his words more!

Dance around my pretty little miss,
Dance around my daisy,
Dance around my pretty little miss,
You're 'bout to run me crazy.

LITTLE MOHEE

As I was a-strolling for pleasure one day,
To view the creation and pass time away,
I sat down a-musing, myself on the grass,
And who did I spy but a fair Indian lass.

ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY

On top of old Smoky,
All covered with snow,
I lost my true lover
By courting too slow.

Oh, if I had the wings of an angel,
Over these prison bars I would fly,
I'd fly to the arms of my darling,
And there I'd be willing to die.

Madam, I have come a-courting,
Oh dear, Oh dear, Oh dear me.
Come a-courting, not a-sporting,
Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear me.

Well if that is your desire,
Fa da link dum, fa da lay,
You can sit and court the fire,
Fa da link dum, fa da lay.

I've a ring worth many a shilling,
Oh dear, oh dear, etc.
You can wear it if you're willing,
Oh dear, oh dear, etc.

I'll not have your ring or money,
Fa da link dum, etc.
Want me a man to call me honey,
Fa da link dum, etc.

SIDE I, Band 4: WAGONER'S LAD

The tune for "The Wagoner's Lad" seems to have been a particularly popular one, to judge from the number of texts it has been set to. (Cf., for example, Kazee's "Kentucky Moonshiner.") The words too are migrants, appearing in many other lyrics and love songs.

Oh hard is the fortune of all womankind,
They're always controlled, they're always confined.
Controlled by their parents until they are wise,
Then slaves to their husbands the rest of
their lives.

I am a poor girl, my fortune is sad,
I've always been courted by the wagoner's lad.
He courted me daily by night and by day,
And now he is loaded and going away.

Your parents don't like me because I am poor,
They say I'm not worthy of entering your door.
I work for my living, my money's my own,
And if they don't like me, they can leave me alone.

Your horses are hungry, go feed them some hay,
Come sit down here by me as long as you stay.
My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay,
So fare you well, darling, I'll be on my way.

SIDE I, Band 5: YELLOW PUPS (FOX CHASE)

"Yellow Pups" is a children's song Kazee remembers from his youth. In general it is similar to many of the fox, bear, and deer chases which are typical of the folk singers' interest in imitating natural sounds on the instrument (the horn, the sound of the horses, and the dogs). But this is the only one I have heard which changes the point of view to the hunted animal himself--in this case the fox. It then begins to sound like the Br'er rabbit type of Negro folktale, especially when the fox is outwitted by the rabbit who is "running excursions." "Rack," Kazee explained, is a horse's gait.

SIDE I, Band 6: JOHN HARDY

John Hardy married him a lovin' little wife,
The dress she wore was blue,
She threw her arms around Johnny's neck,
Says, Johnny I be true to you, poor boy,
Says Johnny I be true to you.

John Hardy was a-standin' in the barroom door,
So drunk he could not see,
When the police came and took him by the arm,
Says, Johnny come and go with me, poor boy,
Says, Johnny come and go with me.

John Hardy's mother came to the jail,
Says, "Johnny what have you done?"
"I've killed me a man in a poker game,
Standin' on the barrel of my gun, Lord, Lord,
Was standin' on the barrel of my gun.

The night John Hardy was to be hanged,
There came a storm of hail.
And it threw the hangman's scaffold down,
And they placed John Hardy back in jail, poor boy,
Oh they placed John Hardy back in jail.

SIDE II, Band 1: JOHN HENRY

There are numerous versions of "John Henry" in the mountains, where it is often a showpiece for fancy banjo playing. (One banjo player, for example, was proud of the fact that he could play it "two ways" --i.e., in two different tunings.) Kazee's version emphasizes the ballad qualities rather than the work song or blues effects which characterize performances by Negro singers or white singers who have been greatly influenced by Negro styles of singing.

John Henry was a steel-drivin' man,
He drove farther than any of the crew,
And every time his hammer went down
You could see that old steam drill moving through,
Lord, Lord,
You could see that old steam drill moving through.

John Henry married him a woman,
Her name was Polly Ann.
John Henry got sick in the tunnel one day,
And Polly drove steel like a man, Lord, Lord,
Polly drove steel like a man.

John Henry stepped up to his captain,
Says, "Captain, here I stand.
If I can't beat your steam-drivin' drill,
Oh, I'll die with my hammer in my hand, Lord Lord.
I'll die with my hammer in my hand."

John Henry hammered in the mountain,
Till his hammer caught on fire.
And the very last words I heard John Henry say,
Was "A cool drink of water 'fore I die, Lord, Lord,
Oh, a cool drink of water 'fore I die."

SIDE II, Band 2: MOONSHINER SONG

Songs about moonshiners often reinforce city folks' stereotypes of the backwards ways of "hillbillies," but underlying most of these recitals of alcoholic consumption and gun slinging is a clear tradition of individualism and resistance to authority which has characterized American culture since the days of the Whiskey Rebellion, in the 1790's.

I've been a moon-shiner for seven long years,
I've spent all my money for whiskey and beer.

Pretty women, pretty women, don't trouble my mind,
If whiskey don't kill me, I'll live a long time.

I'll go up some dark holler, I'll set up my still,
I'll make you one gallon for a two-dollar bill.

SIDE II, Band 3: DARLING COREY

Wake up, wake up darling Corey,
What makes you sleep so sound?
Them highway robbers are raging,
They'll burn your building down.

You see those pretty girls coming,
With curls all 'round their head,
When I see them pretty girls coming,
I wish darling Corey was dead.

SIDE II, Band 4: CUMBERLAND GAP

There are two songs that almost everyone in the mountains seems to know. If they can't play it, they can sing the words. One is the old time banjo piece, "Cripple Creek." The other is "Cumberland Gap," which is widely known as a dance tune.

Lay down boys and take a little nap,
Nine more miles into Cumberland Gap.

SIDE II, Band 5(a) COCK ROBIN

Who killed cock robin?
Who killed cock robin?
"I," said the sparrow,
"With my little bow and arrow,
And it's I who killed cock robin."

Who saw him die?
Who saw him die?
"I," said the fly,
"With my little glass eye,
And it's I who saw him die."

Who made his shroud?
Who made his shroud?
"I," said the eagle,
"With my little sewing needle,
And it's I who made his shroud."

Who made his coffin?
Who made his coffin?
"I," said the snipe,
"With my little jack-knife,
And it's I who made his coffin."

Who preached his funeral?
Who preached his funeral?
"I," said the swallow, (swaller)
"Just as loud as I could holler,
And it's I who preached his funeral."

SIDE II, Band 5(b): OLD GREY MARE

Cecil Sharp found several versions of this children's song preserved in the mountains, where this kind of whimsy seemed to flourish nicely. "The Old Gray Mare" is sometimes interpreted as a religious satire (the mare playing the role of the recalcitrant sinner), but Kazee's version strings together verses which do not emphasize this point.

Once I had an old grey mare,
Once I had an old grey mare,
Once I had an old grey mare,
She could not see and she could not hear.

Hi dum a dink dum, diddle-I-day,
Hi dum a dink dum, diddle-I-day.

Took her out in the field to plow (3)
The darned old fool said she didn't know how.
Hi dum a dink dum, etc.

I got down on my knees to pray, (3)
Scared her to death and she run away.
Hi dum a dink dum, etc.

I jumped up and follered her track, (3)
Found her in the mudhole flat on her back.
Hi dum a dink dum, etc.

SIDE II, Band 6: RELIGOUS SONG

These folk hymns represent one of the richest sources of folk music still extant in the Southern mountains. Although the ballads are almost all gone and many of the other types of song are being immersed in popular song traditions, the folk hymns are still very much alive and a part of the life of the people, especially in the smaller churches. It took a long time for collectors to become aware that these are legitimately part of the folk heritage, but even today little extended analysis of these songs exists. Kazee's descriptions of "lining out," the styles of singing, and vocal techniques is particularly informative. The term "humoring the tune" is a nice way to describe the ornamentation and phrasing of the songs.

AMAZING GRACE

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

How long, dear Saviour, oh, how long,
Have I on earth to stay?
Roll on, roll on, ye wheels of time,
And bring the joyful day.

WHEN MOSES

When Moses and the Israelites
From Egypt's land did flee,
Behind them were King Pharoh's hosts,
In front of them the sea.

In front of them the sea,
In front of them the sea,
And the God that lived in Moses' time,
Is just the same today.

MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS

My christian friends in bonds of love,
Whose hearts the sweetest union prove,
Your friendship's like a drawing band,
Yet we must take the parting hand.

Your comp'ny's sweet, your union's dear,
Your words delightful to my ear.
And when I see that we must part,
You draw like cords around my heart.

BREAD OF HEAVEN

Guide me, oh, Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land,
I am weak, but Thou are Mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful Hand.

Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more.

"The White Pilgrim" is the title song for an operetta which Kazee and a collaborator composed. It is based on the old hymns and the legend of an itinerant preacher who dressed in white robes.

ETERNITY (FROM THE WHITE PILGRIM)

Oh ye young, ye gay, ye proud,
You must die and wear the shroud,
Time will rob you of your bloom,
Death will drag you to the tomb.

Then you'll cry, "I want to be
Happy in eternity.
Eternity, eternity,
Happy in eternity.

(FROM THE WHITE PILGRIM)

I came to a spot where a white pilgrim lay,
And silently stood by the tomb.
And in a low whisper a voice seemed to say,
"How sweetly I sleep here alone."

THE HOUSE WHERE BUELL H. KAZEE WAS BORN.

LOOKING TOWARD THE HILL BEYOND WHICH "AUNT SADE" LIVED.

HERE MANY A "GOOD TIME" TOOK PLACE. HOUSE IS NOW "FIXED UP" - SISTER LIVES THERE.
10/5/57.

LITHO IN U.S.A. 159