

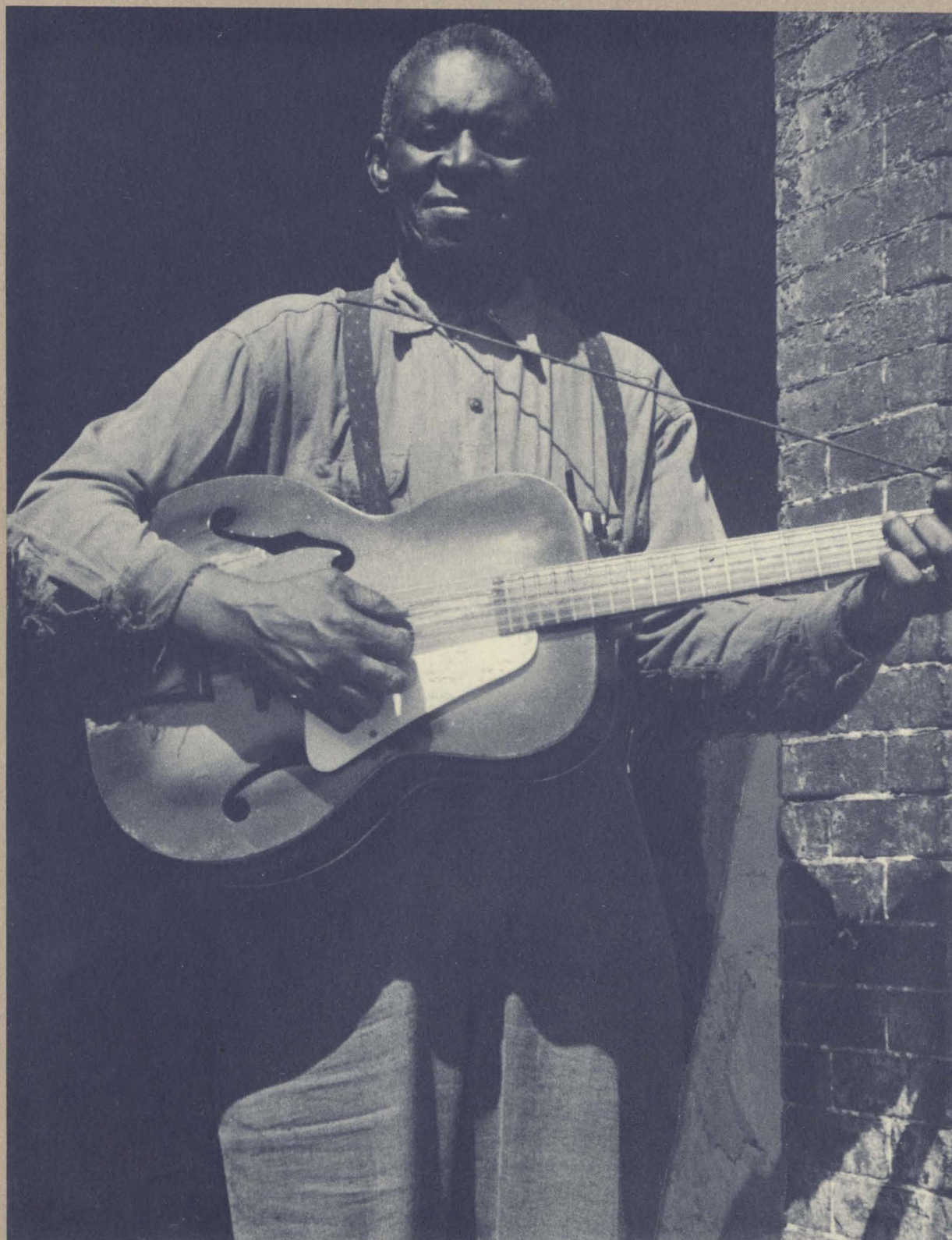
Recorded in St. Louis in May, 1961, by SAMUEL CHARTERS

VOLUME 1

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3814

The Blues in St. Louis *Daddy Hotcakes*

George "Daddy Hotcakes" Montgomery, voice and guitar
Robert Gray, harmonica
Curley Wright, washboard, on some selections



GEORGE MONTGOMERY—"DADDY HOTCAKES", PHOTO BY SAMUEL CHARTERS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3814

The Blues in St. Louis Daddy Hotcakes

SIDE ONE

Band 1. Strange Woman Blues	3:17
Band 2. The Deep Blue Sea	2:40
Band 3. Well, I've Been Down To Memphis	4:00
Band 4. Pull My Windowshade Low	2:43
Band 5. Wine Blues	3:10

SIDE TWO

Band 1. Mustard Greens	3:48
Band 2. Corrine Corrina	2:26
Band 3. Don't Sass My Grandmother	2:27
Band 4. Hawaiian Dream Blues	1:46
Band 5. I Ride My Horses Most Anywhere	3:10
Band 6. I've Got A Woman Who's Very Nice To Me.	2:56

Recorded on May 12 and May 13, 1961, with the assistance of
Ann Charters and Charles O'Brien.

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Even after more than twenty years have passed I still have a strong visual memory of the first time I met George Montgomery, a ragged, cheerful man who called himself—when he sang the blues—"Daddy Hotcakes." A St. Louis policeman named Charles O'Brien, who had spent two or three years tracking down the city's scattered, lost older generation of blues artists, had been given his name by "a fellow named Dave Mangurian." When I came into St. Louis looking for singers to record Charley suggested we try George Montgomery, who was living in a shabby apartment in one of the city's edgier ghetto neighborhoods. When we climbed up the stairs and stood in front of George's door, Charley who was a lieutenant on the vice squad, without thinking about what he was doing knocked on the battered door the same way he had knocked on hundreds of doors like it. He had a key in his hand, and he knocked half with the key and half with his fist. There was a sharp, clattering knock, then he sprang to one side, to be out of the way if something unexpected should come through the doorway. When he heard a shifting inside the room he called out "Open up in there," with a tone that could have been with the accent of any one of several races—Charley was white—but was unmistakably a policeman's. There was a silence, then

with a resignation that was as much without any special thought as Charley's precautions, George opened the door and waited for us to say something, his dark face as expressionless as the indecipherable writings on the wall of the corridor behind him.

I am also still as surprised, when I listen to what we recorded in his room over the next two or three days, at George's complete, natural spontaneity. I never have recorded anyone who was quite like him. Certainly there is a great deal of variety in the blues, but most singers develop a few ideas, usually con I am also still as surprised, when I listen to what we recorded in his room over the next two or three days, at George's complete, natural spontaneity. I never have recorded anyone who was quite like him. Certainly there is a great deal of variety in the blues, but most singers develop a few ideas, usually concerned with the difficulties between men and women, and these turn up over and over again in their blues compositions. With George, however, everything was material for the blues, and since there was so much material to select from he never bothered to select anything in particular before he started singing. Using his imagination and a store of blues phrases to help him through occasional hesitations he simply made up the songs as he went along. I had something of the same experience when I recorded Lightning Hopkins or Robert Pete Williams, but even as free as they were I still could anticipate most of what they were going to do, and usually if there was a problem with a take we could try doing the song again. With George, however, I never could be sure what was coming next.

The first day he sang for Charley and myself he did three or four quiet blues, with a melancholy feeling of morning loneliness that suited the drab day. The next day, however, when my wife and I went back with Charley to begin recording George, the mood had changed completely. He wasn't alone this time. There was a washboard player, a boy from the shoe shine stand on the corner who played harmonica, and two unemployed musicians who had dropped by to see what was going on. Instead of the restrained mood of the day before there was a mood of exhilaration and comedy as he and the washboard player shouted back and forth to each other in broad swatches of country humor. The harmonica player, who was still wearing his shoe shining apron, threw in a note whenever he felt there was an opening. After a few numbers they had lost whatever sense of organization they had started with and we decided to continue with George singing by himself. When they'd left I asked him about some of the quiet blues he'd sung before. He

looked confused. I'd written down the opening lines of two or three of them, and I read one back to him. He brightened, picked up the guitar and sang a completely different blues, building it around the theme of the opening I's given him.

The next day when we came back George was alone in his small front room. The other musicians were still there, but they'd moved out into the kitchen and they were reading magazines. This time he began with something more ordinary. He retuned the guitar to the old Spanish open tuning and did a version of "Corrine Corrina," which stayed fairly close to the song's familiar outlines. But as soon as he'd finished it he thought for a moment and said, "That makes me think about going to Hawaii." Then he immediately began something that he named—later—"Hawaiian Dream Blues." About half way through his rendition I realized that he'd gotten the idea from the guitar tuning, which was similar to the Hawaiian steel guitar style.

The rest of the afternoon continued with this completely unpredictable flow of ideas, images and responses. A question about his early travels led to "Well, I've Been Down To Memphis," and a little rhythmic figure he started on the guitar led to "I Ride My Horses Anywhere." He began singing it without any warning, and it was necessary to stop him in the middle of the second verse. In the few seconds that passed while he waited for the recording machine to be turned on the song changed key, rhythm, and the idea he'd started with. Only the horses still were left, and if it had taken me a little longer to begin recording, I was sure that the horses themselves would have disappeared down one of the uncharted trails in George's imagination. He seemed to think of a blues the way a free jazz soloist approaches an improvisation. The elements were all there in his fingers, and it was the impulse of the moment that determined how he put them together. When the result was something like "Strange Woman Blues," with its almost story-like description of a late night walk and a meeting with a prostitute, I found myself wishing that the blues could move a little more in these directions.

Much of what George had learned about the blues came from his wanderings back and forth across the South. He was born in Rehovat, Georgia, on May 15, 1894, which meant he was just two days away from his sixty-seventh birthday when I met him. He grew up on a farm, but when he was still a boy he left and worked as a hod carrier, railroad laborer and saw mill hand. He was working in Helena, Arkansas, about 1918 when he decided to come into St. Louis. As he recalled he had begun singing the blues when he was very young, and worked during the 1920s as an entertainer. For several years he traveled with the Royal American Shows as a fire eater, and for a brief time in 1937 he was on the radio in St. Louis. He was known as Papa or Daddy Hotcakes. About this time the local blues artist Charlie Jordan, who was working as a talent scout and had a rehearsal hall for the singers around town, offered to take George on one of his New York recording trips for ARC label, but there was some confusion about dates and times and George missed the trip.

In 1942, during the confusion of the early war years, he left the traveling show and scraped up a living entertaining people on the streets. On the old-fashioned streetcars that still rattled through the St. Louis streets there was room for somebody to play the guitar in the rear seat—in what was then the segregated section for "Negro" seating. He used to ride the street cars all day with a washboard player or a harmonica player, passing his hat for contributions. If he got tired of riding the street cars he could usually find a church party or a neighborhood gathering in somebody's backyard. He still sang a lot of gospel pieces, and they usually had a familiar melody and the expected verses. He confined his free creativity to the blues. In 1961 he still had a job as a watchman, but he hadn't given up playing for occasional parties.

When George listened back to some of the blues he recorded he didn't seem surprised at the richness of his material. When I asked him about it he just smiled and said, "I got remembrance of things."

Samuel Charters

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