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# **The McIntosh County Shouters**

## **Slave Shout Songs from the coast of Georgia**



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



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"Watch That Star"--The McIntosh County Shouters at the 1981 National Folk Festival, Wolf Trap Farm, Virginia.

### INTRODUCTION--THE HISTORY OF THE SHOUT

The shout is the oldest Afro-American performance tradition surviving on the North American continent. This impressive fusion of call-and-response singing, percussive rhythm, and expressive and formalized dance-like movement, affirming group cohesiveness and Christian belief, has survived in continuous practice since slavery times in the Bolden community, or as its residents call it, "Briar Patch", east of Eulonia in McIntosh County on the coast of Georgia. First noted by outside observers in 1845 and described during and after the Civil War, the shout in its pure form was concentrated in coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia and has died out in active practice excepting a tight-knit folk community centered in Briar Patch and the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church there. "The only people can shout is right here," shouter Catherine Campbell affirms. "Calvary was the stoppin' place of the shout. Everybody from everywhere came to Mt. Calvary because we kept the tradition going. We never did let it go by."

Lydia Parrish collected shout songs in McIntosh County and published them in *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (1942). The shout had also survived near her home on St. Simon's Island in Glynn County, just south of McIntosh; but her informants there

were self-conscious about performing it for her, and it was "years before I was permitted to see the Sea Island Negroes indulge in this innocent pastime." (Parrish, p. 54) Parrish encouraged the formation of the Georgia Sea Island Singers on St. Simon's who perpetuated slave-song traditions, including the shout songs, but not, however, the shout itself, or "holy dance." In 1980 Frankie and Doug Quimby of the Sea Island Singers and organizers of the Sea Island Festival, heard reports of a community in McIntosh where Watch Night, or New Year's, shouts were still held, to the beat of a broom on the wood floor. With folklorists Fred Fussell and George Mitchell the Quimby's located the shouters of Briar Patch who consented to present their treasured tradition to the public, first at the 1980 Sea Island Festival on St. Simon's, at several consecutive festivals there, and at other events such as the 1980 and 1983 Festivals of Georgia Folklife and the 1981 National Folk Festival at Wolf Trap Farm, Virginia.

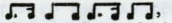
In their presentations the McIntosh County Shouters conscientiously include all the elements of the tradition. A lead singer, or "songster", usually seated, begins or "sets" a song. At his side sits a "sticker", who beats a broom handle or any other suitable

stick, on the wood floor in rhythm. Behind them a cluster of other singers, or "basers", answer the leader's lines in call-and-response fashion, keeping time with hand-clapping. Then the shouters, women dressed in the long dresses and head-rags of their grandmothers' day, move in a counter-clockwise ring, with a compelling hitching shuffle, often stooping or extending their arms in gestures pantomiming the content of the song being sung. This may look like dancing, but Deacon James Cook, the 98 year-old patriarch of the group, points out the difference: "Back in the days of my comin' on in the shout, if you cross yo' feet you were dancin', but if you solid, move on the square, you were shoutin'. But if you cross yo' feet you were turned out of the church because you were doin' somethin' for the devil... So you see those ladies didn't cross their feet, they shouted! And shouting is...praisin' God with an order of thanksgiving." (Interview, Aug. 7, 1981)

The word "shout" refers specifically to the movement and is only coincidentally the same as the English word meaning a vocal exclamation. Parrish points out that "Dr. L. D. Turner has discovered that the Arabic word *Saut* (pronounced like our word "shout", in use among the Mohamedans of West Africa, meant to run and walk around the Kaaba... I have seen the Negroes do the holy dance around the pulpit." (Parrish, p. 54, quoting Lorenzo D. Turner, "West African Survivals in the Vocabulary of Gullah", *The Leisure Hour*, London, Sept. 16, 1871.) Today, even in inland areas where the formal ring-shout has been forgotten, the term "shout" refers to a worshiper becoming overwhelmed by religious fervor and moving ecstatically to this emotion.

Another defining element of the shout tradition is that it is not a regular part of a church worship service, but takes place after the prayer meeting, or on other occasions. In earlier times the benches were pushed out of the way, and the shout proceeded in the prayer-house. In modern times churches have been modernized, the pews are fixed to the floor, and the floors carpeted. Deacon Cook speaks sadly of such "dead churches with a concrete floor." However the Mt. Calvary Congregation has built an annex with a wooden floor, to allow room for shouting and the necessary resonance of the stick. The shout is also seasonal: as Deacon Cook put it, "shoutin' ain't no easy job. The tradition of shoutin' is when it was cold weather." This meant the holiday season, though in earlier times shouting was done at other times of the

year. Vertie McKiver says that as she was growing up, they would have shouts from house to house on Christmas week, go to the church to shout on Christmas, and finally to to Mt. Calvary on New Year's, and "shout all night long." At midnight, after the prayer meeting, they would "go into the shout, and shout until the day break, and they would sing the song 'Farewell, Last Day Goin', Farewell.'" This tradition continues to this day.

There is little doubt that the basic elements of the shout were brought from West Africa by the slaves, in part via the Caribbean. Besides the term itself, the call-and-response singing, the hand-clapping to the basic "Habanera" rhythm, , the drum-like percussion of the stick, and the swaying and hitching shuffle of the shouters, all derive from African forms; the fusion of dance, song, and rhythm in fervid worship, is an African practice. Deacon Cook says that his forebears, born in slavery, told him his ancestors brought the shout off the ship from Africa in the 1700s. Lawrence McKiver affirms that the shout moves to "an African beat. But the slave," he continued, "after he got over here, they got a little bit mo'--time brings on a change--they could get holt a little bit of the Bible, that's the way they tell me, and the one that could learn to read a little bit, they could...pick out a word, and they make--that's the way they make the songs." Of course the slave adapted the English language, Christianity, and some elements of the musical traditions encountered in America, to the African-derived shout forms.

Dena Epstein cites fragmentary descriptions of the shout dating from the 1840s, and the first published use of the term "shout", in a condescending 1860 account by an Englishman, who nonetheless recognized the African origins of the practice. (Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, pp.233-34.) She further points out that the first perceptive observations of the shout came from northern participants in the Port Royal experiment during the Civil War. The coastal barrier islands, separated from the mainland by salt marshes, were important cotton and rice plantation areas, and they came under Union control early in the conflict. Northerners came into contact with freed slaves at Port Royal, South Carolina, and many were impressed with their songs, and the shout tradition. W. E. DuBois wrote that here "perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face and heart



to heart with no third witness." ("Of the Sorrow Songs" from Souls of Black Folk (1903, reprinted in Katz, p. xx) Henry George Spaulding, a Unitarian minister who visited Port Royal in 1863, wrote an article describing the shout and offering transcriptions of several shout songs. (Continental Monthly, August, 1863; reprinted in Katz, pp. 3-8) Several other accounts of the shout as performed by black school-children, freedmen, and soldiers in the 1860s are given in Epstein, (pp. 278-287) including an entry in William Francis Allen's diary describing a Christmas shout. Allen's observations were similar to another contemporary account which he quoted from the New York Nation of May 30, 1867, in his pioneer work Slave Songs of the United States (1867). "This is a ceremony which the white clergymen are inclined to discountenance, and even some of the colored elders...try sometimes to put on a face of discouragement... But the benches are pushed back to the wall when the formal meeting is over...all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter...sometimes as they shuffle they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is also sung by the dancers. But more frequently a band, composed of some of the best singers and of tired shouters, stand at the side of the room to 'base' the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees. Song and dance are alike extremely energetic, and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night." Allen comments that "it is not unlikely that this remarkable religious ceremony is a relic of some native African dance." (Allen, pp. xii-xiv)

None of these early descriptions mentions the use of drums in connection with the shout. Drums were generally prohibited by slave owners in North America, but writers for the Savannah Unit of the WPA Georgia Writers Project in the 1930s met one man who could still make African-style drums and interviewed several ex-slaves and descendants of slaves who recalled the use of drums in social and religious occasions. Wallace Quarterman, born in Liberty County in 1844, told the WPA interviewers: "Yuh needs a drum fuh shout-in'." (WPA, Drums and Shadows, 1940, p. 159.) Katie Brown of Sapelo Island in McIntosh County, the granddaughter of Margaret, daughter of Belai Mohomet, the Moslem slave driver of Sapelo planter Thomas Spaulding, told of the use to the drum in a harvest-time ring shout: "I dunno bout drums at churches. Use tuh hab um long time ago, but not now on duh ilum--hahves time wuz time fuh drums. Den dey hab big times. When hahves is, dey

hab big gadderin... Dey beat drum, rattle dry goud wid seed in um, an beat big flat tin plates. Dey shout an mood roun in succle look lak mahch goin to heabn." (WPA, p. 159) And Lawrence Baker of Darien, the county seat of McIntosh, even described a ring shout at funerals: "Wen we hab a fewnul, we all mahch roun duh grabe in a ring, we shout an pray." (WPA, p. 155)

During slavery the shout was often practiced clandestinely; the shout and the shout songs and spirituals ran counter to the orthodox worship that white missionaries like Charles Colcock Jones had sought to impose on the slaves. In Liberty County, Georgia in the 1840s, Jones found the slave songs "too African, dangerously extravagant," according to Erskine Clarke, (Wrestlin' Jacob, 1979, pp. 46-47). "And perhaps...he heard hidden within these songs both resistance to subordination and profound spiritual insights that cut through his pretensions, that his own heart could not face... At any rate, Jones rejected them all and sought to replace them with the hymns of white Protestantism. 'One great advantage,' he had told the planters, 'in teaching them good psalms and hymns, is that they are thereby induced to lay aside the extravagant and nonsensical chants, and catches and hallelujah songs of their own composing; and when they sing...they will have something profitable to sing.'"

In this century Robert W. Gordon studied the shout in South Carolina and described its forms in "The Negro Spiritual" Smythe, etc., Carolina Low Country, 1932.) He describes the "ring shout", and its variant, the "walk around"; he notes the characteristic shuffle and the stipulation that the feet not rise from the ground, but he does not mention that a group separate from the shouters were singing. "The line between shouting and dancing was strictly held. Shouting could be indulged in only while singing a spiritual. [Gordon does not, however, distinguish as others, and as the present-day shouters do, between shout songs and other spirituals.] Under no circumstances might the feet be crossed. These two rules were inflexible... It was universally agreed that shouting was dignified, that it was a worship of the Lord, that certain motions were not fitting." (Smythe, p. 201) Gordon goes on to make two other important points about the shout that still apply to the tradition of today's Georgia shouters. First, the shout was important in social as well as formally religious practice: "When work was over, shouting was a favorite form of diversion at the cabins. On holidays, celebrations, or weddings, and particularly on Watch Night, it was a regular custom." Second, "in some forms it even showed tendencies toward becoming a game. Acting out the story was not infrequent. 'Rock, Daniel,' shows a trace of this. A better example might be chosen in 'Where is Adam?' In this song the heavy sonorous call of God is answered by the high-

er pitched quicker reply of Eve, while at the proper places the shouters stoop to the ground to pick up the leaves or go through the motions of pinning them on." (Smythe, p. 201) Both of these dramatized shouts continue to be performed by the McIntosh County Shouters, though they are quick to point out that they differ from secular games, or "ring plays."

Lydia Parrish collected "Where is Adam?" in McIntosh County, and describes the proficiency of the shouters and singers there: "No leader ever sings a song twice alike, and no two ever sing exactly the same version; yet the beat, the accent, and the tune remain so stable that the leaders are unerringly followed. The words are in truth the only vehicle for carrying along the complicated rhythm. This is beaten out by the McIntosh County group in a way not approached by any other that I know. Shouters sometimes clap their hands; on St. Simon's they always call for a broom handle, which, knocked on the floor, provides an extemporaneous tom-tom." In McIntosh County, they "are are so proficient in tapping out the rhythm with their heels that they can dispense with both sticks and hand clapping. With their hands free, they are able to do things descriptive of the text which less skillful groups would not be at liberty to attempt. The shout

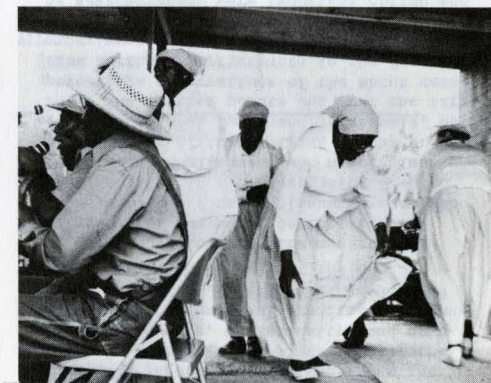
Oh Eve--where is Ad-u-m?  
Oh Eve--Adam in the garden,  
Picking up leaves.

is a good example of the combination of dancing and pantomime." (Parrish, p. 85) Parrish does not identify her McIntosh County informants; members of the present day group do not recall her although she is remembered on nearby Sapelo Island. Today's shouters of course use the stick and have a separate group of singers and providers of rhythm, as in the 1867 practice quoted by Allen; this of course leaves the shouters themselves free to engage in the vivid pantomime appreciated by Parrish.

#### THE SHOUT SONGS, AND THE ESTHETIC OF THE SHOUT

Henry Spaulding, in his article (Katz, pp. 4-8) was the first outside observer to describe a separate category of shout songs. Parrish (pp. 78-92) devotes an entire chapter of Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands to the shout songs, and recognizes that they are a separate category, though often related to other songs and spirituals. Allen relates that one of his informants referred to "sperichils", as distinguished from "runnin' sperichils" (shouts) (Allen, p. xv) Today's McIntosh County Shouters clearly distinguish between the shout songs and other spirituals, and Lawrence McKiver asserts that they are older than even

the oldest of the ante-bellum spirituals. The old spirituals, lined-out hymns, and more recent jubilee and gospel songs are used in regular worship services; the shout songs are invariably associated with the total performance of the shout, on Watch Night or other occasions.



"Eve and Adam, Pickin' Up Leaves"-- Ring-shout presentation at 1983 Sea Island Festival, St. Simon's Island.

The shout songs are almost always antiphonal, with a leader's lines being answered by the chorus of basers, sometimes joined as well by the shouters; one exception is "Walk Through the Valley in the Fields", sung in unison. The basers sing in unison, with no use of harmony; this is the case with Spaulding's and Allen's transcriptions from the 1860s, and one wonders if the harmonies in the performances of the 20th century Georgia Sea Island Singers of St. Simon's are a later addition to the tradition.

Though some of the tunes of the shout songs that have come down to today's Shouters belong to the same melodic family ("Read 'Em, John", and "Hold the Baby") or are sung to nearly the same tune ("Kneebone Bend" and "In This Field We Must Die"), the shout songs are sung to many very distinct and interesting melodies that suggest the richness of ante-bellum Afro-American music.

The content of the shout songs is surprisingly varied, ranging from vignettes of daily life in slavery ("Hold the Baby") which are entirely secular, through coded jokes on the master which have both a religious and worldly meaning ("Rock, Daniel", biblical dramatizations ("Eve and Adam") celebrations of emancipation ("Jubilee", "Read 'Em, John"); and ascending to monumental and poetic apocalyptic visions ("Time Draw in Nigh") and powerful statements of the indestructibility of the human spirit ("Lay Down, Body"). The meanings of the songs are not incidental, and singers and shouters are continuously aware of their import. The interplay of leader and chorus is not simply a musical convention, but a continuous affirmation of the leader's expressive and rhythmic skills as they serve the needs of



the group and the meaning of the song. The basers overlap the end of the leader's lines, and their energy and rhythmic solidity leaves him/her free to improvise on the melody and text. A lessening of concentration on the part of either leader or basers is understood to be more than a weakening in the performance of the song--it is a breakdown in community cohesiveness. I have heard a leader exclaim after a song: "I don't have the basers!" and her disappointment was more than musical. This function of call-and-response is a feature of West African culture. Robert Farris Thompson quotes a Yoruba refrain:

"You are rejected in the town  
Yet you continue to sing for them.  
If you learn a new song  
Who will sing the chorus?"

...The chorus, as in ancient Attic tragedy, is ...a direct expression of public sanction and opinion. Call-and-response goes to the very heart of the notion of good government, of popular response to the actions of an ideal leader." (Thompson, African Art in Motion, 1963, p. 27)

There is a large body of shout songs which today's shouters have inherited from their parents and grandparents, but not all of them are in active use in performances of the shout. Some less familiar songs require rehearsal so that all participants can achieve a high level of performance. The shout is not a spontaneous unthinking expression of feeling, but is a learned art, with esthetic principles and standards understood and articulated by singers and shouters. I have been present at rehearsals at which there is much heated discussion about just where and how the basers should come in, and just how the shout should go.

In his foreword to the 1965 edition of Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands, Bruce Jackson implies that the slave songs Parrish collected were valued through misguided nostalgia for the old era that had produced them and are of little use today: "Folklore is a dynamic thing... Though historical folklore is of historical interest and present importance (so we may better understand the present), it is nevertheless of only collateral current interest--unless our interest is sentimental only." (p. xi.) Aware of the continuing slave song tradition at that time mainly in the self-conscious and organized context of the Sea Island Singers, Jackson did not realize that blacks in nearby McIntosh County would continue to sustain a slave-song tradition for reasons of their own, far from sentimental. The shout there is taken very seriously as it is understood as a way, besides serving God, of honoring the ancestors who endured slavery. Lawrence McKiver says, "We proud of what we doin' 'cause it come from our po' parents." Deacon James Cook, born in 1881, says, "I found them [his slave-born father, Nathan Cook, and grandfather, Ishmael Nephew] doing it when I got old

enough to realize anything about the shout... In those days they were so loving of each other after the service they would would move the benches in the prayer-house and shout... We are still holding to that yesterday tradition that was taught by our fathers and mothers that brought it from our homeland in Africa. They knowed how to shout, they loved to shout--that was one of the ways they gave thanks to God... Someday we'll be shouting the harvest home."

#### A WATCH NIGHT SHOUT -- 1982

Mt. Calvary Baptist sits under great live-oak trees in the community of Bolden, or Briar-Patch, named after the nearby Briar-Patch Cemetery. The small houses of the settlement cluster around the church and are set back from state highway 99, which loops from Eulonia to Meridian where the shrimp fleet and the boat for Sapelo Island dock in an inlet in the salt marsh; dirt roads lead to other houses among the woods and fields. Most of the core group of shouters who perform the shout away from home these days live in easy walking distance of one another, as they have all their lives, and are related by blood or marriage. They attribute the survival of the tradition only in their community to their closeness and cohesiveness. After I had arranged for them to appear at the 1980 National Folk Festival, the Shouters invited me to attend and record the Watch Night shout on New Year's, 1982.

We arrived during the New Year's Eve prayer meeting in the church and heard some good preaching, and a fine performance in the modern gospel style by the church's Youth Choir. I went around to the annex, an oblong room with a low stucco ceiling and a plywood floor, with a kitchen at one end, to set up my recording equipment. As midnight approached I was alone in the room except for Andrew "Bo" Palmer, the "sticker" of the Shouters who sat with his broom stick, waiting for the shout to begin. We could hear the end of the service over a little loud speaker on the ceiling, and at midnight the pastor's voice announced that there would be food, and a shout, in the annex. An instant later people began to pour into the annex from the passageway from the church, and folks began to set out food from the kitchen, and eat and talk. Soon, above the din, came the beat of a stick on the wood floor, and the strains of "Rock, Daniel." My experience with the formal stage performances of the shout had not prepared me for the energy, intensity, and seeming disorganization of this Watch Night shout. People wore a variety of modern clothing; absent were the long old-fashioned dresses and overalls the Shouters wear at festivals. The leaders and singers did not station themselves in one place but moved in a fluid fashion around the room.

Bits of the shout were performed among people who were eating and conversing. Nobody seemed to mind the informality, and at times the singing rose to extraordinary heights: septuagenarian Rev. Nathan Palmer was persuaded to sing one song "for the New Year", and his rendition of "Time Drawin' Nigh" was one of the most soul-stirring and masterful performances of Afro-American traditional song I have experienced.

The shout did not last until daybreak that year: some of the younger people who had been trying to pick up something of the shout, lost interest and wandered off, and many of the older folk had colds and had to leave off singing around 3 A.M. Yet the persistence of this ancient and moving tradition in the 1980s, less than two miles from Interstate Highway 95, is one of the amazing survivals in American folklife.



Watch Night shout, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Briar Patch (Eulonia), January 1, 1982.

#### A CONVERSATION WITH LAWRENCE MCKIVER

Some time later Lawrence McKiver told me that the shout we had attended on Watch Night, 1981 was indeed not the ideal performance, that many people who had moved from the community and were visiting for the holidays, and others not schooled in the tradition, inhibited its proper execution. He further assured me that the stage presentations by his group at folk festivals were faithful recreations of the shouts of his youth, when standards of performance were more strictly observed.

The livelihoods of the members of the McIntosh County Shouters are linked to the coast and the sea. Most of the women work in a crab-packing plant, and Andrew Palmer and Lawrence McKiver were shrimp fishermen. McKiver lives alone in his modest house across the road from the church. He was born in 1915; his mother, Charlotte Evans, lived with him until her death at age 104, on Watch Night, 1979. He learned much of his repertoire from her. The main leader of the Shouters, he is exceptionally articulate and steeped in tradition. I give here an extended conversation which conveys a rich picture of the shout tradition and

its relationship to other aspects of his folklife heritage. When I spoke with him at his home on August 8, 1983, I recalled the Watch Night I had attended. "You said it used to be different," I began, "how the sisters used to kick people out who couldn't--"

"Folks who wouldn't do the shout properly," McKiver picked up, "and try to bop them while they goin', they would shove that one out of the ring, maybe a youngster, push him to the side...let him watch until he catch on to how it go, to keep from buckin' the ring shout, you see. 'Cause them sisters would be in them long dresses and stuff, and when they doin' that shout they want to do it perfect, and they's goin' stay in that circle, and they's gon' move directly to that shout. Every time the song change, they change. When the song say 'rock', they do a rock, if it say 'shout', they do a level shout, and that's just the way they do it. If you can't do it, well you can't participate with them. You got to move out of the way." He used the movements in "Rock, Daniel" as an example, and repeated, "If you can't keep the motion, well you're out the shout."

He described another song, "Drive, Ol' Joe", that he used to hear: "Ol' Joe, he was a slave... he was one that watch the workers, you know, if the workers didn't do good, he would tell the big boss. And they made them a song about that. After the slave [slavery] was over, Joe want to come along with 'em, but they didn't like Joe, they made a song:

Drive ol' Joe,  
Drive on, oh Lord, drive on,  
Drive 'im out the window,  
Drive on, oh Lord, drive on,  
He tried to kill us,  
Drive on--

And the song, while they're singin' the song, they had, the sisters had a hainch, like they're drivin', they don't want him around 'em, you see, they dislike him for what he done--already did..."

"And they would explain to you what the song meant?" I asked.

"What the song meant. See, I don't know how they do it, but they could just make them up a song. My mother was a great songster. And I have about five more auntie sisters sing, and I have a sister, can sing--a mockin'-bird, they would just sing them songs. That's the way I get a chance to--I would jus' hang around them, I would jus' take heed of that, and I just follered it on down through..."

McKiver told the story of "Rock, Daniel" (see below) and then spoke of his slave-born grandmother. He never saw his grandfather, who was a soldier in the "war that free" the slaves. I returned to the subject of the shout, and asked about one old sister whom he had spoken about.

"Yeah, that was Miss Fannie Ann Evans.



She was the greatest shouter I ever seen." "Fannie Ann Evans. She was right from this area?" I asked.

"She lived right over by the river, 'bout three quarter of a mile from here. She was the greatest shouter I ever seen." "Describe why she was greater than the others," I asked him.

"She was so active, you know, she had a lot of flesh, pretty good flesh on her. Aw, she was just the bes' I ever seen. If you would be able to see her, they would be singin' this song, 'goin' down heaven, easy walk, goin' down heaven, take my time,' and she could be just as level, just the same as little trouble to her. Her meats'd be shakin', but she could be--so level in time. That's how they love to do--it's just like dancin', y'know, some people dance jiggin' 'n' jiggin', others dance level. And she was the greatest shouter I ever seen in my life." He said that Fannie Ann Evans had died long ago, and he recalled another song she shouted to, "Sinner, Rock So."

While he assumed the shout originated in Africa, his mother "just talk about it related to--in slavery times. But she would tell us how it was passed down through the generations. She wasn't the establisher of it, how the parents, the foreparents tell them how they come across, how they come over here to America, it's from Africa. And they always give us the footlight, any time we have a long conversation talkin' about the black race and the white race, they would tell the ol' fun stories that my mother tell me her mother tell her. Onetime the slaves didn't have no meat, and they killed one of the ol' boss' cow, a small one, and they goin' to take all the intestin' and throw 'em in the river, let 'em float on down the river. And ol' boss come and ask 'em where ol' Jack was, the man whose name was Jack. And the little boy was out playin' in the street, an the ol' lady was inside the little old kitchen cookin', and he said, 'Where's daddy?' Little boy say, 'Daddy went to throw away the cow guts.' The old lady in the kitchen say, 'Turn around, Jack!' He [the master] say, 'What you say, boy?' He say, 'Pa goin' to Cow-gut Creek.' That's to keep the boss from knowin' that he destroyed one of his cows. We'd sit around the table, and she'd tell them. I never will forget them."

"I guess that made the hard times a little easier," I commented.

"Oh yeah, you know, eatin' dry food the biggest' part of the time, no meat... you gon' do sumpin' to revive us... The slaves, they didn't have the education, but they was slick, you can find slick people without bein' educated, now..."

I asked McKiver about the hard times in slavery he had heard about, and he responded by telling of continuity of tradition and mutual support from those times to his own day, and the part the shout played in community life.

"Oh, yeah, sometimes they get whipped.

Some of them get so they couldn't work out they tasks, they got so much--rows they have to work a day, and if they couldn't come to the specification, sometimes they get whipped. Sometimes the strong one got to go back and he's the weak one, y'know...maybe I say I don't want you to get a whippin', I don't want the boss to get mad with you...when I get done my half, I'm stronger than you, I come back and help you. That's the way they tell they would do. And even up to my mother's time--this place around here, there really a change in it, modern times brings on a change. I can remember for myself, the black owned about twelve... miles, it's the biggest black plantation in the state of Georgia--and you know how they would do? They would get in the fiel' with they hoe, and hell this one work they fiel'--they swap work--and they go to the nex' one's fiel' and work that out, and they go to the nex' one till they go around the whole plantation, and they work 'em all out. See, I help you an' you help me and keep on like that as a gang, let's get together. And while things growin'...a bunch of the ladies, they get together, they get them a scaffold just the length of a quilt...then they get them old cloths and they sew...quilts... And this one will help this one make they quilt, and the nex' one make they quilt, until they go all around like that. Then they take in the corn, take in the rice, take 'tato, put them in the cellar, we kill the hogs, stock would be back in the woods, everybody have they hog, have a mark on them--I know my hog from yours--kill up our hog, smoke 'em, put 'em in the smokehouse, and they be good, you can believe that, that ol' hickory smoke, you take a knife and cut you off a piece. And then we turn back around, get the cane... and everybody get they cane cut down, they start grindin' cane for two or three weeks befo' Christmas, and they have candy pullin' until comin' up to the week t'Christmas, to Christmas Eve, we shout the New Year in. In that shoutin', we go from house to house... and we have that coffee, them biscuits, tater pones, all different things...and that's the way this plantation used to be."

I asked McKiver what makes a good singer in the shout songs.

"If they don't follow you right," he said, "on time, not too fast, understand, just enough time for the leader to put their words in. When a song is singin', if the base don't support the shout, the leader...if the leader don't get a chance to put the word in, you, if you listenin' after, you can't understand the song." McKiver illustrated this by referring to a song he planned to lead the following day at the Sea Island Festival. The Shouters have successfully moved the shout and its performance standards from a community practice to a public display form. "We'll be singin' 'Lay Down, Body', we'll be choppin' that one, I imagine, mostly start off on that one, get the crowd off... Anything you gonna do first, to get the attention of people..."

He explained how he would sing the line "Lay down, body," and the basers would answer "Lay down a little while." He would give them the lines "tombstone movin'" and "grave is bustin'... I say," he continued, "Oh body, they say, Lay down a little while, I would say that two or three times, that's an express", you see, I would say

Oh, body,  
Lay down a little while,  
Need some restin',  
Lay down a little while,

That's put the expression in the song, see. The song go beat, beat. There don't be so many words come in, you see, 'cause I come right back to this 'body', is be the real pointin'; of the song, you see. I never goin' away too far from 'ol' body, you see, becomes strictly talkin' personally of a type--after he die, you know, goin' to die...that's the way it appeared to me. I never got anybody to directly describe the song to me, but from the singin' of the song, I was so glad to get in and shout it, and sing it with them..."

"How old were you when you started leading some songs?"

"I reckon I been about 12 years old... 'Leven or 12 years old..."

"How many songs would you get to sing when you were that young?"

"I might jus' get a chance to lead one," he recalled, "a little while. All depend on how much them great singers--they mostly make me get in the background... I had a sister who could sing anything she ever hear. I believe she kin. She would sing and me base, me and my brother both...and one of my first cousins, Harold Evans, he was a great songster, too...and we had another uncle, we called Uncle Henry, he would be a baser, and Reverend Palmer, he was a baser, and my sister, she was a clapper or a sticker, like Andrew Palmer... But after, times bring on a change, some would pass away, another one take it, and then we just keep on up through there. Then after we start singin', goin' out singin', I mos'ly do plenty the leadin', and Miss Skipper, she do a lot of leadin' and she do a lot of background. That's the way we go. I know mo' songs than any of them."

McKiver explained that they usually didn't use the term "ring shout", but simply "Shout." He added that they never "call it a buck. A tuck is a dance. I used to could cut the buck." In the shout, "they always goes around in a ring. You'll see them shuffle this way here, they go like that! You might pay attention to some of them...they'll shout some of them songs, they mos'ly go sideways...like that...shouters jump around for a while...but you'll never see one of them cross they leg. The old folk never crossed they leg. The mos' time you see them pick they feet up clear, way up from the ground, is when they singin' 'Eve and Adam'. They be movin' themselves like they pickin' leaves, you see..."



Lawrence McKiver at his home in Briar Patch, describing the shout, August, 1983.

I asked him about dances, and he said they did have dances when he was young, "and ring-plays, too." He described one, "Walk, Billy Arbor", that I have seen him and some of the women in the community do. It was a singing game, but the boys would swing the girls down the line, "you be spinnin' her... down the ring, till they get the whole thing through. Mos' like a set."

"And you were courtin' age?"

"I was in teens... See, I was fas' as a squirrel, then, I don't care what you say. I didn't feel like a guy could beat me dancin'..."

He said that there was no prohibition against dancing or ring-plays outside the church in the community. I asked him when they quit having this kind of recreation, and he said his was the last generation to do these: "The younger people, they don't have things like that. Modern times changes a lot of things." I asked whether musical instruments like guitars and fiddles were played.

"No." But he recalled a woman who "would beat the bake-pan. She could beat one! Make all the music you want with a bake pan. Get in a co'ner somewhere, and get on that bake-pan, she'd make all kind of music...all kinds of dance--that's the way we would have house-dance. Oh, she was good at it. She could sing. That's the way we have our frolic entertainment... she get to beat on that bake-pan, and she could 'stonish you..."

"What kind of songs did she sing?"

"She sang ol' bluesy songs... she get that ol' bake-pan, make a beat on it you could dance by. She could do it. She get a bucket of water, one in this han', one in this han', and first she set them bucket down--we didn't have no road in, anything like that, we have foot-logs to walk across the deep part of the pon', and I guarantee you she take a bucket of water right here on the top of her head, and she reach down and get this one, the other one, and she walk on 'cross that foot-log and carry the water on up to the settlement...and she set this bucket down, that bucket down, the she reach up on her



head, and get it, and not a bit won' come out of it. They call her hare-lip, her lip was busted, her teeth come out. But she had a gift for singing, you can believe it if you want, when she hit that church, she set it on fire. She could set a church on fire with her singing..."

#### THE RECORDINGS

These recordings were made over a period of two years, on a Pioneer RT-1050 stereo tape deck, in McIntosh and Glynn Counties, Georgia. Some strong performances were recorded at the 1983 Sea Island Festival on St. Simon's; other songs were recorded in two recording sessions in the annex of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, where the core group of Shouters assembled for the purpose of recording; one band, band eight on side two, was recorded at the Watch Night shout at Mt. Calvary in Briar Patch (Eulonia.) The different conditions at these three types of recording situations combine to give a fuller picture of the art of the present-day shouters.

The McIntosh County Shouters, who participated in this recording project, are:

Leaders: Lawrence McKiver  
Doretha Skipper

Sticker: Andrew Palmer

Basers and shouters:

Gatherine Campbell  
Odessa Young  
Thelma Ellison  
Vertie McIver  
Oneitha Ellison  
Elizabeth Temple



The McIntosh County Shouters at the 1983 Sea Island Festival, St. Simon's Island, Georgia.

In addition, Lucille Holloway and Rev. Nathan Palmer led songs, and Deacon James Cook sang a work shanty, and contributed moral support and enthusiasm for the perpetuation of the tradition.

Here, then, is the venerable shout song tradition, performed by the McIntosh County Shouters. As Lawrence McKiver said, "We gon' put it down the old road. If anyone can bring it further back, I want to see him."

SIDE I, Band 1 BLOW, GABRIEL  
Lead, Lawrence McKiver; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1983.

In this energetic shout song, the singer exhorts the Archangel Gabriel to blow his trumpet on the Day of Judgement; it is the antecedent of later spirituals on that theme. Parrish (pp. 87-88) gives a similar version she collected on St. Simon's Island. Here, the characteristic stick and clapping rhythms can be heard clearly when the singers leave off singing for a time. In the transcription of the text, below, I will give the leader's line on the left, the basers' response to the right; when the antiphonal pattern has been set, only the leader's lines, separated by a slash (/), will be given.

#### Leader:

Blow, Gabriel

#### Basers:

Judgement

#### Leader:

Blow that trumpet!

#### Basers:

Judgement bar!

Calm and easy / Tell everybody  
My God say / That they got to meet  
Oh, blow, Gabriel / Blow that trumpet  
Louder and louder / Got to wake my people  
Wherever they be / On lan' or sea  
Tell everybody / My God say  
That they got to be / Blow, Gabriel!  
Blow that trumpet / Louder an' louder  
Gon' see my mother / My father, too  
Blow, Gabriel! / Oh blow your trumpet  
Louder 'n' louder / Tell everybody  
That they got to meet / They got to meet  
Blow, Gabriel / Blow, Gabriel  
Calm and' easy / Wake my people  
Wherever they be / On lan' or sea  
Blow, Gabriel / Gon' see my mother  
An' my father, too / Oh, blow, Gabriel  
Oh, blow yo' trumpet / Blow yo' trumpet  
Blow, Gabriel! / Blow yo' trumpet  
Wake my people! / Wherever they be  
On lan' or sea / Tell them I say  
My God say / That they got to be--  
Oh, blow, Gabriel / Blow yo' trumpet  
Blow, Gabriel / Blow your trumpet  
Blow that trumpet! / Oh, blow, Gabriel  
Louder an' louder / Wake my people  
Wherever they be / On lan' or sea  
Oh blow, Gabriel / Blow your trumpet  
See my mother / An' my father, too  
Blow, Gabriel / Blow your trumpet  
Louder an' louder / Blow that trumpet  
Wake my people / Wherever they be  
On lan' or sea / Blow, Gabriel

(Similarly, until end)

SIDE I, Band 2 JUBILEE  
Lead, Lawrence McKiver; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1983.

It has long been understood that the slave songs frequently carried a double message of spiritual release, and of hope for, or rejoicing in, liberation from slavery in

this world. This song, as explained in McKiver's spoken introduction, and as expressed in such lines as "shout my children, 'cause you're free!", is a triumphant celebration of Emancipation. See Parrish (p. 89) for a similar shout song, "My Soul Rock on Jubilee."

#### Spoken:

"So I'm gon' sing one of the slave song' they like to sing, just after they come out of slave'--they sang this song, 'Jubilee in the Mornin'."

#### Leader:

Jubilee, jubilee

#### Basers:

Oh, my Lord

#### Leader:

Jubilee in the mornin'

#### Basers:

My Lord, Jubilee!

Jubilee in the evenin' / Jubilee in the mornin'

Jubilee, Jubilee / Jubilee, Jubilee

Walkin', members, walkin' / Walkin'

on your Jesus

Shout, my children, 'cause yo' free! /

My God brought you liberty

Call me a Sunday Christian / Call me

a Monday devil

Don' care what you call me / So long

Jesus love me

Jubilee, Jubilee / Jubilee, Jubilee

Walkin', members, walkin' / Walkin' on

your Jesus

Shout, my children, 'cause yo' free/

My God brought you liberty

Jubilee, Jubilee / Jubilee in the mornin'

Jubilee in the evenin' / Jubilee in the

mornin'

Call me a Sunday Christian / Call me a

Monday devil

Don' care what you call me / So long

Jesus love me

SIDE I, Band 3 SOLDIER OF THE JUBILEE  
Sung by James Cook; Briar Patch Community, Eulonia, September 5, 1981.

This is not a shout song but a work song, or shanty, that James Cook used early in the century when he worked as a stevedore in the port of Darien, stowing pine timbers that had been rafted down the Altamaha River aboard schooners from as far away as England and Germany. He says that the "shanty would give you some energy to help you move the lumber and notify the other fellow how to pull down with you." The song was sung by a leader and group, though here Cook sings both the call and response; the exhaled "hah" is characteristic of work songs. Cook recalls that at times there were as many as 27 or 28 four-masted schooners in Darien at one time. Born on May 5 1886 outside of Townsend where he still resides, Cook is a lifelong follower of the shout tradition, and he often accompanies the McIntosh County Shouters, whose

parents and grandparents were his contemporaries, to festivals, where he introduces the performance and sings his shanty. A patriotic as well as religious man, he is a self-educated student of history and speaks like a 19th century orator. He proudly represents his neighbors, white and black, in the Silver-Haired Legislature lobbying group; he is equally proud that he is still "somewhat clothed in my right mind, walkin' without a walkin' stick, and drivin' a pickup!"

1. I'm a noble soldier,  
Soldier of the Jubilee  
I'm gettin' old and crippled in my knee,  
Soldier of the Cross. Hah!

2. Too young to marry,  
Soldier of the Jubilee  
I'm gettin' old and crippled in my knee,  
Soldier of the Cross. Hah!



James Cook at the 1981 National Folk Festival at Wolf Trap Farm, Virginia.

SIDE I, Band 4 MOVE, DANIEL  
Lead, Lawrence McKiver; St. Simon's Island, August 21, 1983.

This song accompanies one of the more active shouts, cited by Gordon (Smythe, p. 200), and described above by Lawrence McKiver. The religious content of the shout songs was clear enough from the text, but hidden messages carrying protests against slavery and jokes on the master, eluded earlier white observers including Parrish, who commented about how southern blacks did not volunteer information (Parrish, p. 20.) In his foreword to the 1965 edition of her book, folklorist Bruce Jackson, criticizes Parrish's paternalistic assumption: "She doesn't realize that the slave and former slave might have been loath to offer the white southern plantation owner or manager information for the same reason a convict does not chat freely with the warden or a union organizer with the company lawyer."



(Parrish, pp. vii-viii). Times have changed, and nowadays Lawrence McKiver is not only willing but eager to share with the public the once-secret meanings of the slave songs, as are Bessie Jones, the Quimby's, and the Sea Island Singers. "Now we can spit it out," McKiver says. See Prestige LP 25001, Georgia Sea Islands, Vol. I or its reissue on New World 278, for "Daniel", sung by the Sea Island Singers, recorded by Alan Lomax in 1959.

Spoken:

I want to sing a song about "Move, Daniel." See, Daniel was a slave, and the slaves all were havin' a little party across the field one day. And the smoke-house was up there--we call it the smoke-house, the place that the ol' boss keep all his meat. And they wanted to steal some of the meat, y'know, and they send Daniel in to get a piece of meat so they could put the party on sho' enough! An' ol' boss was comin' down, through there, so the slaves goin' to sing a song to let Daniel know to get out the way. 'Cause Daniel could pick it up and put it down! Y'know, I mean that fas' run, that's what I'm talkin' about. So ol' boss thought that they was singin' a party song, but they was tellin' Daniel how to get out the way, so that ol' boss wouldn't put that whip-lash on him. So I'm goin' to sing the song--I jus' want to let you-all know why we sing the song "Move, Daniel."

Leader:

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move

Leader and basers:  
Daniel

Leader:

Move, Daniel, move  
Leader and basers:  
Daniel

Leader:

Move, Daniel, move  
Leader and basers:  
Daniel

Chorus:

Oh, Lord, pray, sinner, come,  
Oh, Lord, sinner gone to hell.

(Similarly)

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move, Daniel

Go the other way, Daniel  
Go the other way, Daniel

Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel  
Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel

Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel  
Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel

(Chorus)

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move, Daniel

Go the other way, Daniel  
Go the other way, Daniel

Sinner in the way, Lord  
Sinner in the way, Lord

(Chorus)

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move, Daniel

Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel  
Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel

Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel  
Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel

Go the other way, Daniel  
Go the other way, Daniel

Sinner in my way, Lord  
Sinner in my way, Lord

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move, Daniel

(Chorus)

Move, Daniel, move, Daniel  
Move, Daniel, move, Daniel

Do the eagle wing, Daniel  
Do the eagle wing, Daniel

Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel  
Shout, Daniel, shout, Daniel

Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel  
Rock, Daniel, rock, Daniel

(Chorus)

(Similarly, until end)

SIDE I, Band 5 PHARAOH'S HOST GOT LOST  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, September 5, 1981.

This song moves to a fine minor melody. For a version with numerous verses, see Johnson, "Didn't Old Pharaoh Get Lost", pp. 60-61.

Leader:

Moses, Moses, lay your rod  
Leader and basers:  
In that Red Sea  
Lay your rod, let the children cross,  
In that Red Sea

Chorus:

Pharaoh's host got los', los', los'  
Pharaoh's host got los', in that Red Sea  
They shout when the host got los', los',  
los',  
They shout when the host got los'  
In that Red Sea.

Leader:

Moses, Moses, lay your rod  
Leader and basers:  
In that Red Sea  
Lay your rod, let the children cross,  
In that Red Sea

Chorus:

Ol' Pharaoh's host got los', los', los'  
Pharaoh's host got los', in that Red Sea

Leader:

Oh Moses, please lay your rod  
Leader and basers:  
In that Red Sea  
Lay your rod, let the children cross  
In that Red Sea

Chorus:

Ol' Pharaoh's host got los', los', los'  
Pharaoh's host got los', los', los'  
Such a weepin' when the host got los',  
los', los'  
Such a weepin' when the host got los'  
In that Red Sea.

SIDE I, Band 6 KNEEBONE BEND

Doretha Skipper, lead; introduced by  
Lawrence McKiver; Eulonia, December 17, 1983.

Parrish was told that this song was once used for rowing, to the rhythm of the oars. Though the version she collected is similar to the one sung here, she remained innocent of the meaning of the song, disclosed by Lawrence McKiver in his eloquent introduction. (Parrish, pp. 80-84) Alan Lomax recorded this song from the Georgia Sea Island Singers in 1959 (Prestige LP 25001, reissued on New World NW 278.)

Spoken:

That's the oldest slave song that ever was sing' by black people when they first come over from Africa over here. See, the song would say, "Kneebone in the wilderness," you see, they didn't know where they was--so that you was goin' to a place you didn't know nothin' about, understand? So they would sing this song, "Kneebone in the wilderness--kneebone in the valley," they was prayin' at the time, that's why they say "kneebone bend." They was bendin' down, they was prayin', they would say, "Kneebone bend to save my soul," they was prayin', understand? That's the way my mama done tol' it to me, and aunts. I had some ol' ancestors that put out these songs, y'know.

Leader:

Kneebone, kneebone  
Basers:  
Oh, Lord, kneebone

Leader:

Kneebone, kneebone  
Basers:  
Oh, Lord, kneebone bend

Kneebone hear God call you / Kneebone hear  
God call you  
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone  
Kneebone, what's the matter? / Kneebone  
what's the matter?

Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone  
Kneebone in the wil'erness / Kneebone in  
the wil'erness

Kneebone, hear God call you / Kneebone,  
hear God call you  
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone  
Kneebone ben' to save m' soul / Kneebone  
ben' to save m' soul  
Kneebone in the valley / Kneebone in the  
valley

Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone  
Kneebone, what's the matter? / Kneebone  
what's the matter?  
Kneebone, hear God call you / Kneebone  
hear God call you  
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone  
Kneebone ben' to save m' soul / Kneebone  
ben' to save m' soul  
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone

SIDE I, Band 7 WATCH THAT STAR

Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, December  
17, 1983.

While the chorus of this song is probably of black origin, the verses are derived from the white hymn "Evening Shade", written by John Leland in 1835; the tune may also owe something to white hymnody. McKiver's verses are more vernacular than the original, with "death will soon disrobe us all of what we here possess" becoming "rob us all." A beautiful gesture, with arms stretching toward the heavens, accompanies the shout to this song.

Chorus: (sung solo)

Oh, watch that star, see how it run  
Watch that star, see how it run,  
If the star run down in the western hills,  
You oughtta watch that star, see how it run.  
(Everybody)

(Chorus, leader and group)

(Oh, members)

(Chorus, leader and group)

Solo:

Well the days is past and gone,  
The evenin' shadow care,  
Oh may we all remember well  
The night of death drawin' near.  
(Everybody)

(Chorus, leader and group)

(Oh, members)

(Chorus, leader and group)

Solo:

Well we lay our garment by,  
Upon our bed to res';  
Oh death will soon rob us all  
Of what we have possess'  
(Everybody)

(Chorus, as above, and repeat previous  
verse and chorus)



Solo:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,  
An' all this world go free?  
No, he bears the cross for everyone  
And bears the cross for me.  
(Everybody)

(Chorus, group)

SIDE I, Band 8 LAY DOWN, BODY  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; St. Simon's  
Island, August 20, 1983.

Lawrence McKiver's emotional and masterful performance of this dramatic song, is a high point in Afro-American traditional singing. His comments about how he intended to sing the song (see interview, above), given the day before this was recorded, show that this is conscious art rather than spontaneous expression. The refrain "sit down and rest a while" occurs in the later spiritual, "Sit Down, Servant"; here it serves as a foil for the dramatic imagery of "tombstone moving, grave busting, soul rising."

Leader:

Lay down, body

Basers:

Lay down a little while

Leader:

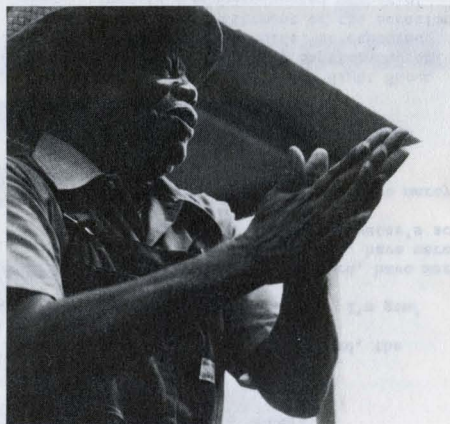
Lay down, body,

Basers:

Lay down a little while

I know you're tired / Lay down, body  
I know you're tired / Lay down, body  
You is tired / Soul need restin'  
Don't you worry / He gonna call you  
When He call / Tombstone movin'  
Grave is bustin' / Soul is risin'  
Oh, body! / This ol' body  
I know you tired / Soul need restin'  
You been tolin' / Long time  
Yo' soul need restin' / You don' worry  
My God call you / And when He call  
He will wake you / Tombstone movin'  
Grave is a-bustin' / Soul is a-risin'!  
Oh, body! / Lay down body  
I know you're tired / Soul need restin'  
Oh, body / This ol' body  
Lay down, body / Lay down, body  
Soul an' body / Need some restin'  
Oh, body / This ol' body  
My God call you / When he call  
He will wake you / Tombstone movin'  
Grave is a-bustin' / Soul be risin'!  
Oh, body! / This ol' body  
Need some restin' / Need some restin'  
You been tolin' / A long time  
I know you're tired / I know you're tired  
Oh, body / This ol' body  
Soul need restin' / This ol' body  
Oh, body! / This ol' body  
Soon one mornin' / Grave is bustin'  
Tombstone movin' / Oh, body!  
Oh, body / Lay down, body!  
Lay down, body / Oh, body  
Soul an' body / I know you tired  
You been tolin' / A long time  
I know you tired / Lay down, body

Lay down, body / Oh, body  
My God wake you / An, tombstone--  
Grave is a-bustin' / Soul is a-risin'  
Oh body / Soul an' body  
I know you're tired / Soul needs restin'  
Oh, body



Lawrence McKiver, 1983.

SIDE II, Band 1 RELIGION, SO SWEET  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; St. Simon's Island,  
August 20, 1984.

McKiver usually precedes the performance of this shout with a skit he does with the Shouters in which he assumes the high voice of a woman assembling her children to sing this song, for her birthday. See Allen, p. 13.

Leader:

Oh, that 'ligion

Basers:

So sweet

Eh, Lord

Basers:

So sweet

Leader:

Now shout the 'ligion / Now sing the 'ligion  
It made me happy / Early one mornin'  
I shout the 'ligion / I talk about the  
'ligion

I sing about the 'ligion / It made me  
happy  
Early one mornin' / I tell everybody  
About the 'ligion / Eh, Lord  
Now sing your 'ligion / Now shout your  
'ligion  
It made me happy / Early one mornin'  
I tell everybody / About the 'ligion  
I sing the 'ligion / I shout the 'ligion  
It made me happy / Early one mornin'  
I shout the 'ligion / I sing the 'ligion  
I telled everybody / About the 'ligion  
Oh, that 'ligion / Oh, that 'ligion  
Made me happy / Early one mornin'  
I rock the 'ligion / I rock the 'ligion  
I sing the 'ligion / 'Cause it made me  
happy  
Early one mornin' / I telled everybody

About the 'ligion / Oh, Lord  
Oh that 'ligion / Eh, child  
Now sing you' 'ligion / Now sing that  
'ligion  
Now shout that 'ligion / Now rock that  
'ligion  
Eh, child / Ah, child  
It made me happy / So happy  
It made me happy / I telled everybody  
About my 'ligion / I sing my 'ligion  
Now shout the 'ligion / Eh, Lord  
Oh, that 'ligion / Shout that 'ligion  
Shout that 'ligion / Shout yo' 'ligion  
Now rock the 'ligion / Now rock the 'ligion  
Now rock that 'ligion / Oh, yeah  
Made me happy / Early one mornin'  
Sing yo' ligion / Now rock the 'ligion  
Now rock that 'ligion /

SIDE II, Band 2 READ 'EM JOHN  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, December  
17, 1983.

This song shares its catch tune with the slavery-days banjo reel, "Johnny Booker." For a performance of the shout song by the Sea Island Singers, see Prestige 25001, reissued on New World 278. McKiver introduces the song, explaining that it was a celebration of Emancipation: "This song--when they was comin' out of slave", none of 'em could read, but John, he around the kitchen a little bit, and he learned to read a little. So they had a letter to tell 'em they was free, but they didn't believe it, so they ask John to read the letter, and this is the way it went:"

Leader:

John brought the letter,  
Laid it on the table,  
Take all the members read 'em oh,  
Read 'em, let me go.

Read 'em, John

Basers:

Read 'em

Leader:

Read 'em, John

Basers:

Read 'em

Leader:

Read 'em John

Basers:

Leader:

Read 'em, ol' John

Basers:

Read 'em

Leader:

Read 'em, ol' John

Basers:

Read 'em

Leader:

Read 'em, ol' John

Basers:

Read 'em, oh, read 'em, let me go!

Leader:

One by one, two by two, three by three  
and fo' by fo'

Take all the members read 'em, oh  
Read 'em, let me go!

Read 'em John (Similarly, until end)

SIDE II, Band 3 EVE AND ADAM  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, December  
17, 1983.

This is one of the liveliest shouts; see the Introduction, above, for comments on the pantomime by Robert Gordon and Lydia Parrish. Parrish further notes: "Since the version I have encountered in Glynn and Camden Counties holds to 'pinnin' leaves,' I am inclined to believe that some McIntosh shouter took an artist's license and substituted 'pickin' up" for 'pinnin' for the sake of more varied, more picturesque action." (Parrish, p. 85) In any event the present-day McIntosh shouters continue to "pick up" rather than "pin" the leaves that the first man and woman used to cover their nakedness. See also "Adam", in Befo' the War Spirituals (McIlhenny, p. 37)

Leader:

Oh Eve, where is Adam?  
Oh Eve, Adam in the garden  
Pickin' up leaves.

God called Adam

Basers:

Pickin' up leaves

Leader:

God called Adam

Basers:

Pickin' up leaves

God call y', Adam / Eve an' Adam  
Eve an' Adam / My God call you  
Why don't you answer? / Why don't you answer?  
Where is Adam? / Where is Adam?  
Eve an' Adam / Pickin', pickin'  
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you  
Why don't you answer? / Oh, Adam  
Oh, Adam / My God call you  
Pickin', pickin' / They was pickin'  
Eve an' Adam / My God call you  
My God call you / Why don't you answer?  
Hey, Adam / Oh, Adam  
My God call you / My God call you  
Why don't you answer? / Old Adam 'shamed  
Adam, you 'shamed / My God call you  
He won't answer / Eve an' Adam  
Pickin', pickin' / Pickin', pickin'  
Eve an' Adam / They was a-pickin'  
My God call you / He won't answer  
Eve an' Adam / Adam is 'shamed  
Adam is 'shamed / Pickin', pickin'  
Eve an' Adam / Pickin', pickin'

(Similarly, until end)

SIDE II, Band 4 JOHN ON THE ISLAND, I  
HEAR HIM GROAN

Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, September  
5, 1981.

McKiver's succession of vowel sounds--"Eli-ee-ay-Lord"--gives a richness to this chant-like song. Parrish gives a version titled "Eli Ah Can't Stan'", with the lines "hate that sin that made me moan" and "John's on the isle uh Pattermos." (Parrish, pp. 74-75) See also "John's on the Island on His Knees" (McIlhenny, pp. 154-55)



**Leader:**  
John on the island, I hear him groan

**Basers:**  
Eli, I can' stand

**Leader:**  
Eli-ee-ay-Lord

**Basers:**  
Eli, I can' stand

**Leader:**  
John went to heaven an' I'm so glad /  
John on the island I hear him groan /  
Eli-ee-ay-Lord /  
John on the island I hear him groan /  
John on the island I hear him groan /  
John on the island I hear him groan /  
Eli-ee-ay-Lord /  
John went to heaven an' I'm so glad /  
John went to heaven an' I'm so glad /  
Eli-ee-ay-Lord /

(Similarly, until end)

SIDE II, Band 5 HOLD THE BABY  
Doretha Skipper, lead; Eulonia, December  
17, 1983.

This is one of the few entirely secular shout songs. Lawrence McKiver says: "My mamma tol' me, the baby cryin', the man, he wanted to sleep, and his wife was tellin' him that the baby was sick, and he didn't want to be bothered, that's why he was tellin' her to hold the baby." Doretha Skipper learned to lead the shout "when I was comin' up, y'know. I used to go to Watch Night, sit around and eat donuts, drink coffee, shout all night." She remembers one Watch Night when she stayed up until 3 in the morning, learning songs from her mother. Her mother, Fannie Palmer, was 88 in 1981, and could "still sing, but she can't shout."

**Leader:**  
Hold the baby  
Hold the baby  
Hold the baby

**Basers:**  
Hold 'im  
Hold 'im  
Oh, hold 'im, mam' ba'

(Similarly)  
Oh, what's the matter? / Oh, mamma's baby /  
Oh he need some water / Oh, rock the baby /  
Oh he need some medicine / Oh he got the fever /  
Oh rock the baby / Oh he got the fever /  
Oh he needs the doctor / Oh rock the baby  
Oh mamma' baby / Oh wants some water /  
Oh he need some medicine / Oh he need the doctor  
Oh he got the fever /

SIDE II, Band 6 I WANT TO DIE LIKE  
WEEPIN' MARY  
Lucille Holloway, lead; September 5, 1981.

Lucille Holloway was born in 1910 and died in 1982. Aunt of Catherine Campbell and first cousin to Lawrence McKiver, Odessa Young, and Oneitha Ellison, she was a faithful church member and an adherent to the old-time shouting and singing tradition; this and the following recording will stand as a tribute to her memory. In 1981 she told me, "the old-time way, that's the best way. If you come up then, you would say so, too... Modern time makin' yo'

heart bleed. Modern times is the devil." Catherine Campbell said, "She could 'set' the songs." Lucille Holloway added, "I don't lead all the songs, but them what lead the songs, if they turn it loose to me, I can set it so you can shout. You can't drag a song." Here she does lead, and excellently, this moving wish to "sit side of my Jesus."

**Leader:**  
I want die like weepin' Mary

**Basers:**  
Sit 'side, side of my Jesus

**Leader:**  
I want die like weepin' Mary

**Basers:**  
Sit 'side, side of my Jesus

**Leader:**  
Sit yo' side / Sit yo' side  
Side by side / Side by side  
Anyway / Anyway  
Anyway / Anyway  
Sit yo' side / Sit yo' side  
Side by side / Side by side  
Oh, Lord / Oh, Lord  
Anyway / Anyway  
Anyway / Side by side  
Oh, Lord / Oh, Lord

SIDE II, Band 7 WADE THE WATER TO MY KNEES  
Lucille Holloway, lead; September 5, 1981.

This is the song Lucille Holloway's kin and friends most remember her for. One cannot but believe that the strength and poetry of a song like this can help a believer face life's trials and the inevitability of death.

**Leader:**  
I wade the water to my knees

**Basers:**  
I'm gon' pray, gon' pray

**Leader:**  
Wade the water to my knees

**Basers:**  
I'm gon' pray till I die

**Leader:**  
Lord, the water's so cold / Lord, the  
water's so cold  
I'm gon' sink an' never rise / I'm gon'  
sink an' never rise  
Oh, Lord, have mercy! / Oh, Lord, have mercy  
Oh, Lord, have mercy / Oh, Lord, have mercy  
Oh the water's so cold / Oh the water's so  
cold  
Oh, Lord, have mercy / Oh, Lord have mercy

SIDE II, Band 8 TIME DRAWIN' NIGH  
Rev. Nathan Palmer, lead; Eulonia, Watch  
Night, January 1, 1982.

This was recorded at the Watch Night Shout in the annex of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. Despite the background noise, it captures the intensity and excitement of the occasion. Rev. Palmer is a much-respected member of the community; he is associate pastor of the Mt. Calvary church and pastors a church on Sapelo. He is deservedly considered a "great songster," and was persuaded to sing this one song on Watch Night. Parrish gives a version of "Aye Lord, Time is Drawing Nigh",

apparently from St. Simon's, and prints another text from McIntosh County "fitted out with an entirely different set of words. None but a Negro poet could have created the imagery of the...lines..." and her McIntosh County text is close to Palmer's; she had tapped the same vein of tradition. McKiver sings a still different variant.

**Spoken comments:** Rev, you want to sing us a song? One. One. Please, one, for the New Year, one... Yeah, he'll do it, he'll do it.

**Leader:**  
Horse in the valley  
Horse in the valley  
Horse in the valley

**Basers:**  
Hey  
Hey  
Hey, Lord, time  
drawin' nigh

Oh, who's gonna ride 'im /  
Oh, look over yonder/  
Sun refused to shine /  
Oh tell me what's the matter /  
Oh, Judgement Day! /  
Oh run to the rock /  
It's no hidin' place /  
Oh, an' the rock cried out /  
I can't hide hide myself /  
Oh look over yonder /  
Oh two tall angels /  
Just standin' at the Judgement /

**Spoken comment:**  
Hey, he could do it!

SIDE II, Band 9 FAREWELL, LAST GOIN'  
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, December  
17, 1983.

In some communities, "Yonder Come Day" was the song sung at the dawn of a new year after Watch Night. It was sometimes sung in Briar Patch, but more often this was the last song of the shout. Parrish gives a related piece from St. Simon's, "Good-bye Everybody" (pp. 91-92).

**Leader:**  
This is the las'

**Basers:**  
Farewell, las' goin', farewell

**Leader:**  
This is the las'

**Basers:**  
Farewell, las' goin', farewell

**Leader:**  
Goodbye, members / Goodbye, members  
I hate to leave you / I hope to see you  
Goodbye, members / Goodbye, members  
This is the las' / This is the las'  
We had a good time / I hate to leave you  
I hope to see you / Another time  
This is the las' / Goodbye, members  
Goodbye, members / I hate to leave you  
I hope to see you / Oh, this is the las'  
Oh, this is the las' / This is the las'  
Goodbye, members / Ah, members  
Bye-bye, members / I hate to leave you  
I hope to see you / We had a good time  
We had a good time / I hate to leave you  
I hope to see you / Oh, this is the las'

This is the las' / This is the las'  
Oh, this is the las' / This is the las'  
Goodbye, members!

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Recorded, produced, and annotated by  
Art Rosenbaum

Photographs by Margo Newmark Rosenbaum

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ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4344

## **The McIntosh County Shouters**

### **Slave Shout Songs from the coast of Georgia**

The McIntosh County Shouters: Lawrence McKiver, Doretha Skipper, Andrew Palmer, Catherine Campbell, Odessa Young, Thelma Ellison, Vertie McIver, Oneitha Ellison, Elizabeth Temple; also, James Cook, Lucille Holloway, Rev. Nathan Palmer.

#### **SIDE I**

- Band 1 BLOW, GABRIEL Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 2 JUBILEE Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 3 SOLDIER OF THE JUBILEE  
Sung by James Cook  
Band 4 MOVE, DANIEL Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 5 PHARAOH'S HOST GOT LOST  
Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 6 KNEEBONE BEND Doretha Skipper, lead  
Band 7 WATCH THAT STAR  
Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 8 LAY DOWN, BODY Lawrence McKiver, lead

#### **SIDE II**

- Band 1 RELIGION, SO SWEET  
Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 2 READ 'EM JOHN Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 3 EVE AND ADAM Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 4 JOHN ON THE ISLAND, I HEAR HIM GROAN  
Lawrence McKiver, lead  
Band 5 HOLD THE BABY Doretha Skipper, lead  
Band 6 I WANT TO DIE LIKE WEEPIN' MARY  
Lucille Holloway, lead  
Band 7 WADE THE WATER TO MY KNEES  
Lucille Holloway, lead  
Band 8 TIME DRAWIN' NIGH  
Rev. Nathan Palmer, lead  
Band 9 FAREWELL, LAST GOIN'  
Lawrence McKiver, lead

Recorded, produced, and annotated by Art Rosenbaum

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Recorded, Produced and Annotated by ART ROSENBAUM

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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