

SONNY TERRY & BROWNIE MCGHEE

PREACHIN' THE BLUES



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1968
MUSIC LP

SONNY TERRY & BROWNIE MCGHEE

PREACHIN' THE BLUES

SIDE I

Band 1 —	BETTER DAY	3:00
Band 2 —	CONFUSION	3:15
Band 3 —	DARK ROAD	2:38
Band 4 —	JOHN HENRY	4:01
Band 5 —	LET ME MAKE A LITTLE MONEY	3:40
Band 6 —	OLD JABO	2:09

SIDE II

Band 1 —	I LOVE YOU, BABY	2:38
Band 2 —	GITAR HIGHWAY	2:30
Band 3 —	HEART IN SORROW	2:55
Band 4 —	PREACHIN' THE BLUES	2:30
Band 5 —	CAN'T HELP MYSELF	3:15
Band 6 —	BEST OF FRIENDS	3:05
Band 7 —	IF YOU LOSE YOUR MONEY	2:25

The Blues Jumped a Greyhound

Late in January of 1958, Sanford Terry and Walter Brown McGhee boarded a Chicago plane at New York's Idlewild Airport. One walked with a limp, because he had been born forty years before a polio vaccine had been developed. The other was without sight because of a childhood accident. Both were dressed in good, comfortable clothes. The only clue to their professional interests was that one carried what looked to be a recently acquired guitar case.

These men were the famous folksingers Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, off to a job at the "Gate of Horn," a stop on the saloon circuit that affords a bread-and-butter itinerary to folk artists. The guitar case was indeed new; in it was a fine instrument presented to Brownie at the close of his appearance in Langston Hughes' "Simply Heavenly," in which he had a speaking and singing part in the role of Gitfiddle. He told me about the guitar in a phone conversation before leaving. "It has a wonderful tone," he said. "You probably get a good tone out of a cigar box," I said, and meant it. . . .

Born October 24, 1911, Sonny spent his early years on a small farm. . . a mule, a hog, a smokehouse, and a hound-dog to jump the rabbits. His father played the harmonica and his mother sang. Sonny first played the harmonica as any small child would, without tone or technique. But he watched his father and other players—how they held the instrument (so small for the sound that emerged), how they coordinated breathing and blowing.

From such small beginnings Sonny developed his fabulous style, including the falsetto wail he'll throw in now and then, making his solo an extraordinary combination of both voice and harmonica. He achieves a closely knit, intensely rhythmic structure, often building up a chorus to a shattering climax—as when he explodes into treble on JOHN HENRY.

As with Sonny Terry, a great facet of Brownie McGhee's talent is his sense of *rapprochement*, his instinct for playing his guitar or singing in perfect relation to another instrument or voice. You might say this is fundamental to a blues guitarist who often must work by himself. The little response phrases that occur at the end of the blues lines—these he turns over to the guitar. When he works with Sonny, the seemingly effortless interweaving of voices and instruments is at times exciting, at times deeply moving. If it occasionally creates suspense, that is not to be wondered at—the musicians sometimes surprise even each other!

This new repertoire finds Brownie and Sonny in top form, and what with drums added, the new rhythm is irresistible. There is humor and good feeling in many of the tunes. In LET ME MAKE A LITTLE MONEY they thumb their noses at all ivory towers. OLD JABO echoes play-party songs and old minstrels. GITAR HIGHWAY tells of Brownie's first venture North. All in all, these songs have a more urban, more contemporary flavor than previous sets by either. And as they've moved along towards urban sophistication and modernity, they've learned to do it on their own terms, building upon the past as they give lyrics and music a more contemporary sound.

As recently as twenty years ago, and no doubt today, many good blues singers were down and out—beat to the socks, or even sockless. If they jumped a rabbit (as did the blues in an old lyric), they had it for supper. Sonny and Brownie know all about that, because they lived it. Brownie may have missed the bus on that first try (which he recalls in GITAR HIGHWAY), but back there in the 1930's the blues jumped a Greyhound—and they're still coming on, stronger than ever!

Recorded by Moses Asch

Notes by Charles Edward Smith, edited by Moses Asch

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