

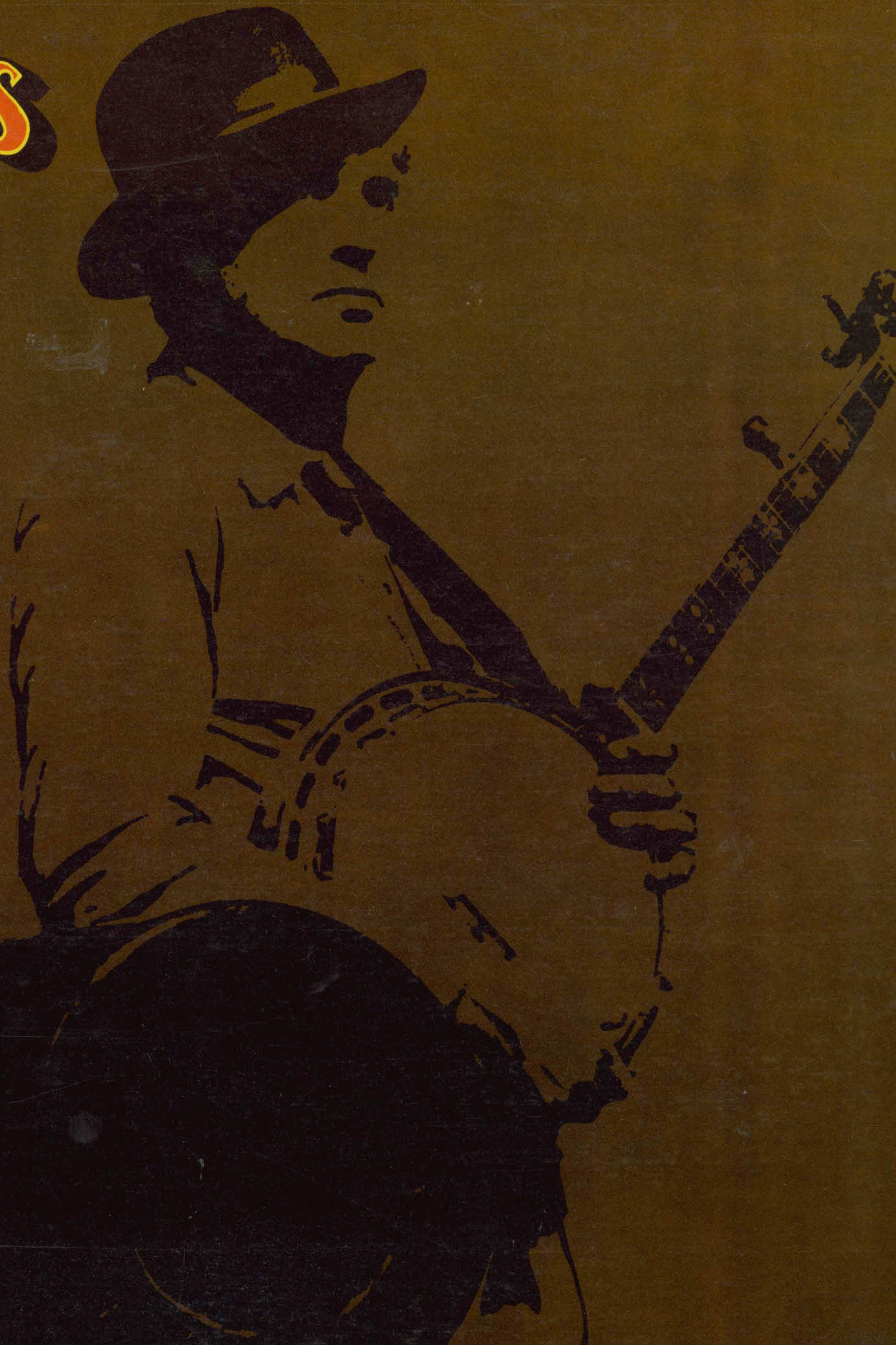
A Mixed Bag  
of Ol' Timey Music

# Bluegrass Blast

ROGER SPRUNG  
HAL WYLIE  
and the  
Progressive  
Bluegrassers

KEN KOSEK — fiddle  
RICHARD SMITH — mandolin  
ANNIE FELDMAN — 5-string banjo  
CORKY BALLARD — bass

with Clawhammer  
Tunes



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1630.18  
S773  
M686  
1974

# Bluegrass Blast

ROGER SPRUNG,

HAL WYLIE AND THE PROGRESSIVE BLUEGRASSERS

## SIDE 1

1. Comin' Round the Mountain (4:00)
  2. Cider Mill (1:15)
  3. Mountain Dew (2:52)
  4. Cousin Sally Brown (1:38)
  5. June Apple (1:45)
  6. Auld Lang Syne (4:07)
- Total Time: Approx. 15:37

## SIDE 2

1. John Hardy (2:06)
  2. Johnny Booker (1:45)
  3. Simple Gifts (3:15)
  4. Little Rabbit (2:30)
  5. Leaving of Liverpool (3:30)
  6. Fortune (1:15)
  7. Grandfather's Clock (3:35)
- Total Time: Approx. 17:56

With: Roger Sprung - banjo & autoharp, Hal Wylie - guitar,  
Ken Kosek - fiddle, Richard Smith - mandolin, Arnie Feldman - 4-string banjo,  
Corky Ballard - bass

## EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER SPRUNG BY RON NORMAN, 1974

"I was happy to be awarded World's Champion in 1970 in Union Grove, North Carolina. I've received a trophy from the convention. I happened to strike the judges right with a song called "Whiskey Before Breakfast." The contest went from 3:00 in the afternoon until night-time. As far as I'm concerned, the last thing on my mind is to win a contest, but I go on, and play. So I went on about 3:30... there were about 300 people in the audience and from what I hear, when the last person went on there were about 10,000 people. About 300 people saw me, and I won, which is very unusual. But that's playing fair... the amount of applause or the amount of people cheering is not what makes a winner, though in some contest it does. It happened to be an old-time fiddle tune, and not one that people knew, like "Dueling Banjos." So when I won, I was surprised. I went back to my van where I buy and sell instruments, and all my friends gathered in a circle around a campfire and played. We were oblivious to everything that was going on around us. People came in and out of the circle from all over. I heard that Union Grove was pretty bad that year, but we had a good time.

"This year, gas willing, I'll go to the smaller one in the same town, called "Fiddlers' Grove." I find that people are going to the smaller fiddlers' conventions because more of the oldtimers go there.

"A lot of things come up that are unexpected. I won first in banjo at Galax in '71 or '72 with "June Apple," which is on this record, but I played in 3-finger bluegrass-style. On this record it's played in clawhammer-style. I have a wall full of trophies and ribbons which I'm very proud of."

"Hal Wylie, who plays guitar, is a fine folk singer. He likes old English, Scottish and Irish ballads, and he particularly sings the songs I like. He's my right arm, and I'm very grateful to have him as a best friend.

"Ken Kosek plays fiddle with the Breakfast Special. He played with me at the Philadelphia Folk Festival. I've always liked the way he plays. He's a very polished musician, and on this album he does a superb job of playing. You take a person for granted all the time, but he's nobody to take for granted. I think he's in his early twenties. Ken isn't part of the Progressive Blue Grassers, but we were fortunate to get him for this album.

"Richard Smith is from the Princeton area. He plays a fine mandolin with us.

"Arnie Feldman is another friend of mine. He is not a professional... just a person who enjoys a 4-string plectrum banjo tuned like a tenor. It's an old Vega which he bought very cheap because the neck was cracked. He put it together with a little glue and now he's got a priceless banjo.

"Corky Ballard is not my usual bass player, but I thought his bass was more apropos for some of these pieces. He's a neighbor of mine in Newton, Connecticut, and has a rock band. It was once called Panacea, but the name changes occasionally. He's a natural musician."

"Comin' Round the Mountain is just a simple piece but I thought we'd do it up a little in bluegrass-style. Cider Mill is a song I learned from Dorothy Rorick. I learned it down at Galax, Va. A lot of people play it down there. I do it in clawhammer-style. Mountain Dew is a regular clawhammer piece that people ask me to play at cocktail lounges and festival, because people know it and they all sing the chorus, so I thought I'd put it in. Cousin Sally Brown is an old clawhammer piece. June Apple was done by Wade Ward, down in Independence, Va. Auld Lang Syne is a real showpiece that people ask me to do... twisting the pegs. I twist five Scruggs pegs out of six that I have on my banjo. You probably can hear the squeak because I didn't oil up my banjo.

"John Hardy is a piece I heard quite often. There are two ways of playing it. I first heard it from Woody Guthrie. Johnny Booker is from an old, old album by Cousin Emmy. She's a fine picker... I saw her a couple years ago and she still picks a storm. Simple Gifts is a Shaker hymn that I know people like. It's a good song and it tells a lot about what people should be... uncomplicated... although in days like today it is almost impossible. Leaving of Liverpool is an old song. Fortune is a song I learned from Martin Reade in Washington. Grandfather's Clock is another popular showpiece.

"This is not exactly a progressive bluegrass type of album. "Comin' Round the Mountain," "John Hardy," "Grandfather's Clock" are the big ones that you can call progressive as far as I'm concerned. It's a little different album, but we do many different things. We do a lot of English and Irish ballads. The Progressive Blue Grassers do everything differently. I have songs on Folkways albums from "Hello Dolly" to hornpipes and reels, from one end of the spectrum to the other. Songs that are never played or sung.

"Let's put it this way, I have to thank Moe Asch for the foresight in understanding of what I have to present to people. This is something that when I'm dead, I can leave behind. It was with Doc Watson at Folk City, many years ago, that our sound came out so good we decided to record a Folkways album together. This was the beginning of Progressive Bluegrass. "Mack the Knife," "Greensleeves," and other songs were outstanding. There is no reason you can't do all kinds of songs, instead of the hard line of Bill Monroe tunes which I can do. We expand progressively, or even retrogressively, but we expand."

"People relate "Dueling Banjos" to the film Deliverance. I didn't see the picture, but the success of "Dueling Banjos" is solely because of the film, not because people relate to banjo music. I know Eric Weissberg can do much better. That piece starts very slowly, and by the time it gets going and people are saying "he's finally picking" (people like to hear fast banjo), it's over. It's funny how people take to a piece like that which been played since 1955. Notice, in the film it is one guitar and one banjo. It was done originally by two banjos, Don Reno and Arthur "Guitar" Smith.

"Banjo playing never passes out of style. I know my Folkways royalties have gone up fifty percent. I've been teaching and playing since 1947, which is 27 years. Once you get hooked on playing banjo you stay with it. Banjo playing gets into your blood because there's a lot to it. They are selling plenty of banjos right now, but I don't know how many people are going to continue with it. People like to keep a banjo on the wall, if nothing else. It's always a good thing to play the banjo.

"People hear Bob Dylan, who is folk oriented, and know he was influenced by Woody Guthrie. And once they get to Woody Guthrie and the Carter Family songs they start singing with banjos. A long time ago my brother brought me down to Washington Square Park and I heard people playing guitars and banjos. I took up guitar first, and then banjo. Now I play practically all instruments. I teach banjo, guitar, autoharp, bass, fiddle, and I used to teach piano. The theory of the instruments is the same, but the techniques are different, of course. I teach theory. I don't know how to read music at all, and yet I'm being approached by several companies to write books. They would write down the tablature. Things are booming.

"It's not possible to make a living playing bluegrass or old-time music unless you are at the very top, or unless you teach and write books. There is a circuit of coffee houses which pay a small amount to keep you alive. I've never played in a coffee house in my life because usually it's \$5. a night, and they pass the hat. I enjoy singing. I'd rather play free at a coffee house than to pass the hat.

"I remember one time I was down in North Carolina with my friend Mike Cohen. We were out in the street playing and singing. There was a bar nearby and people came out to hear us play. So the bartender said "why don't you come into the bar and play?" We went inside to play and somebody took my hat, my homburg, which I'm noted for, and passed it around. Well, I never saw the hat or the money again. My hat is a sort of trademark with me. People don't know my name, but they say "go see the man with the homburg." I just layed my father's old homburg to rest. I got a re-conditioned one that I wear now, but it's not the same as my dad's."

"If I go to a bluegrass festival, I get paid a flat fee, but if I go to a fiddlers' convention the pressure is off, nobody gets paid. At a bluegrass festival you dress neat, you get on stage at a certain time, and you perform. There are a lot of critics. At a fiddlers' convention performers come from the mountains and play for kicks. You learn more, because there's more spontaneous playing. At a bluegrass festival there are loudspeakers blasting and you can't pick in the parking lot, which is a favorite spot at a fiddlers' convention. I meet a lot of my friends there.

"Last year was my heaviest circuit. I had a couple of unpleasant experiences with people who exploit bluegrass players. That's the only sad part of it. There's a bounced check... The interest of bluegrass magazines is not to tear down bluegrass, but they should mention these things. There is an organizer who gets a whole festival together and doesn't have the park. I traveled there and they had an injunction, with a big sign telling everybody to go somewhere else for the convention. About four hours further south, there was another sign: INJUNCTION, so I went all the way back to Connecticut that day. That's my theme song: "The Wild Goose Chase."

"Some people call me 'the father of New England bluegrass.' I've probably taught more people than anyone. Chad Mitchell, and John Stewart of the Kingston Trio have studied here. I have my own way of teaching and it's a good way - I think it's the best way."

## Some Comments About Roger Sprung

"...Roger has...an inventive banjo... (he achieves some fascinating flights of inspiration." --Robert Shelton, *New York Times*.

"...one of the best musicians in the country...one of the finest all around banjo players active today." --*Saturday Review*.

"...plays the banjo as if he invented the instrument." --*Journal American*.

"...An exciting city swing...A new sound has emerged." --Alan Lomax.

"...long may he crackle!" --Pete Seeger

"...one of my favorite oldtime banjo players." --Bill Monroe.

"...a virtuoso of the banjo...his experimentation has opened up many new possibilities for others." --Bob Beers.

"...the necessary note of genuineness and sincerity so important in this kind of music." --Bascom Lamar Lunsford.

"...Roger Sprung is different - there is really nobody to compare him with..." --*B.M.G.*, England.

"the Happiest banjo sound going..." --*Virginian-Pilot Lighthouse*.

## OTHER INSTRUMENTAL ALBUMS BY ROGER SPRUNG & THE PROGRESSIVE BLUE GRASSERS ON FOLKWAYS RECORDS

### VOL. 1: PROGRESSIVE BLUEGRASS (FA 2370)

THE WILDGOOSE CHASE • STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER • SPINNING WHEEL • BIG BANJO FROM BROADWAY • WHISTLING RUFUS • THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR THE SUNRISE • MACK THE KNIFE • NELLIE BLY • MALAGUENA • SMOKEY MOKES • GREENSLEEVES • BYE BYE BLUES

STRAIGHT BLUEGRASS PICKING MOSTLY DEALING WITH EARLY 20th CENTURY SONGS. WITH DOC WATSON

### VOL. 2: RAGTIME BLUEGRASS (FA 2371)

DILL PICKLE RAG • SHOOT THE TURKEY BUZZARD • MISIRLOU • CHINATOWN • PUFF THE MAGIC DRAGON • TIGER RAG • SWEET GEORGIA BROWN • GIE GORDONS • SILVER RAINBOW • ARKANSAS TRAVELER • HOW HIGH THE MOON • GEORGIA CAMP MEETING • THAT'A-PLenty

### VOL. 3: 5-STRING SPECIALTIES (FA 2472) (8-TRACK: #82472)

YES SIR, THAT'S MY BABY • BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM • DEEP ELM BLUES • FISHER'S HORNPIPE • DOWN HOME RAG • TURKEY IN THE STRAW • THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY • RICKETTS HORNPIPE • OL' MOLLY HARE • SAILOR'S HORNPIPE • BUCK'S STUMBLE • FORKED DEER • MOSCOW NIGHTS • PADDY WON'T YOU DRINK SOME CIDER • HELLO, DOLLY • RAGTIME ANNIE

MOUNTAIN BLUEGRASS AND HORNPIPE, PLUS A FEW ODDITIES WITH JAW HARP, HARMONICA ETC. GOOD SINGLE NOTE BANJO PLAYING.

### VOL. 4: GRASSY LICKS (FTS 31036) (8-TRACK: #831036)

GRASSY LICK • 18th CENTURY DRAWING ROOM • PADDY ON THE TURNPIKE • GREENLAND FISHERIES • WHITE WATER JIG • OLD BLACK JOE • DEVIL'S DREAM • MUSKRAT RAMBLE • CLUCK OL' HEN • JINGLE BELLS • BILL CHATHAM • BLUE BELLS OF SCOTLAND • MUDDY ROADS • MRS. BROWN'S DAUGHTER • BLACK MT. RAG • HAVA NAGILA • THE WHITE COCKAGE

EVERYTHING FROM MOZART TO MOUNTAIN MUSIC TO DIXIELAND AND OLD FAVORITES. STEREO.

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