

THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS

On The Great Divide



FSA PHOTO RUSSELL LEE

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MUSIC LP

THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS On The Great Divide



John Cohen Tracy Schwarz Mike Seeger

Photo: Chris Strachwitz

As yet, no one has made a hit with old traditional songs, but the performance of this music has reached a far greater area. While the repercussions of this expansion have left a mark on the music scene from Nashville to Los Angeles, the lively audience for this music has remained limited to small scale dances, coffee houses, at colleges and around home and at occasional festivals. It has never come close to the mass media, and the immediate area of fame has remained within the folksong revival & the counterculture. Recent years have witnessed the performance of 'traditional' songs at any folksong gathering, while the rural Fiddler Conventions and Bluegrass Festivals now share the musical stage along with the folk festivals.

In 1958 I had written in the record notes "there is a side of us all which goes about trying to make the world over in our own image. There is another side where one searches to encounter his own image in the world". With the start of the NLCR, it became possible to play traditional music in traditional styles. Prior to the NLCR one could only interpret or translate a song for urban ears. This ethno-centricity was based on the view that urban culture was the only source of higher truth.

We have seen many wonderful urban musicians go through the Old Time String Band experience on their way to rock & roll, pop, country or whatever. In retrospect, we have served as a gateway for city kids to pass through. I'm glad that this gateway opens both towards the future as well as the past.

While much of the music on this record has come from personal contact with old-time musicians rather than from recordings, our perceptions have not only been influenced by rural sources; we give particular credit to the contemporary lifestyle and musical influence of the Berkeley California musicians who have helped us to see ourselves more clearly, and indicated new ways in which this music can move on.

John Cohen - Jan. 1975

Recorded by Chris Strachwitz at the Boarding House, Sept. 1973, San Francisco, Calif.

Mixing & editing by Mike Seeger.

Final remix with Bill Shubart of Philo Records

Cover photo FSA Russell Lee

Design, & notes John Cohen & Tracy Schwarz

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SIDE A

- 1) **John Brown's Dream** - from Da Costa Waltz Southern Broadcasters
Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham - County 713
Mike - Dulcimer
Tracy - Fiddle
John - Banjo

This is one of the few tunes the NLCR have recorded twice (NLCR String Band Instrumentals FA 2492) The addition of the dulcimer allows us to dwell heavily on the drone qualities which become the central core of this intense tune.

- 2) **Old Johnny Booker Won't Do** - from Jerry Jordan, Supertone 9407
John - voice & guitar
Mike - Fiddle
Tracy - Fiddle

This song is full of nostalgia for an experience we never had: driving a mule. A contemporary counterpart might be a recitation about one's trip to the automobile service station.

- 3) **Railroading On The Great Divide** (Sara Carter)
from Pine Mountain Records PMR 208
Mike - Lead voice & autoharp
John - bass voice & lead guitar
Tracy - tenor & guitar

In the early '60s, while on a visit to the home of Sara Carter at Angels Camp, Calif. she suggested that we might sing this song which she had composed. I recall this song in the context of the clear air of the high Sierras, and the isolated life of this dignified woman who gave it to us.

- 4) **Love of Polly And Jack Monroe** from George Davis-Folkways FTS 31016
Tracy - vocal & banjo
Mike - fiddle
John - Guitar

A version of a narrative song more often called "Jackaro", here brought into the early Bluegrass style typical of groups like the Stanley Brothers. In the last verse the usual "...so well did they agree" is replaced by "...in the land of Germany", which show how real these stories are taken to be. Learned from John's field recording of George Davis, the Singing Miner, of Hazard, Ky. (Folkways FTS 31016)

- 5) **Walking Boss** (adapted by TC Ashley)
from Tom Ashley at his home (also Folkways 2359)
John - vocal & banjo (tuned GDGCD)

This song probably would not have been known but for the folksong revival. We visited Ashley at his home shortly after his first concert for the Friends Of Old Time Music in N.Y. City. He was so pleased by the reception given him by the city kids, that he started to recall old songs which had been put away. This was one of them.

- 6) **Who Killed Poor Robin** from the Archive of American Folksong (Lib. Congress) sung by Edith Harmon. Recorded near Maryville, Tenn. 1939 by Herbert Halpert
Mike - vocal, guitar & mouth harp
Tracy - fiddle
John - banjo

Although Dock Boggs was not the source for this songs, we perform it here in his style and spirit. It is through people like Dock that we have been allowed access to the actual feel of the old music. Through the direct experience of hearing the performance of something old, we have gained some sense of how to sing it ourselves.

- 7) **The Old Man At The Mill** trad. (adapted by TC Ashley) from Folkways FA 2435 and Galax Old Fiddlers Convention.
John - vocal & guitar
Tracy - fiddle
Mike - mouth harp & guitar

This is from the singing of Clint Howard - who we met as part of the Ashley band along with Fred Price, Gaither Carlton & Doc Watson. Clint recorded this song with string band accompaniment, but we later heard him perform it unaccompanied at the Galax Old Fiddlers Convention. It seemed as if he had found the courage to sing it this way, with the encouragement from his trip to the city, and all the folk-song purists he met there.

- 8) **On Our Turpentine Farm** from Pigmeat Pete & Catjuice Charlie Col 14485 (149105)
John - vocal lead & guitar
Mike - tenor harmony & mandolin
Tracy - lead guitar & vocal interjections

Here we are given the opportunity to observe some of the cruel realities of country living. I recall learning this song from a tape one afternoon in San Francisco, prior to a night-time performance at the Family Dog Ballroom, On the Great Highway, at the edge of the Western World, and at the end of the psychedelic scene, where we shared some of the cruel realities of the Haight district. We added the last verse in respect to the art schools where John has been teaching.

- 9) **Little Satchel** trad. (adapted by Fred Cockerham) from County 713
Tracy - vocal & three finger style banjo
John - claw hammer style banjo
Mike - guitar

The hard driving banjo and lonesome bluesy voice of Fred Cockerham provided the inspiration for the slight updating here from old time to Bluegrass. Although some popular "Katy Dear" themes do appear, this song is actually unique enough to be considered Fred's personal adaptation of an old ballad. Learned from the record "Down To The Cider Mill" (County 713), and Fred directly.

SIDE B

Recorded live at a performance at the Boarding House

- 1) **Dry & Dusty** from Morrisson Twin Brothers String Band Vi 40323
Tracy - fiddle (standard tuning)
Mike - fiddle (cross-tuning)
John - guitar

- 2) **If The River Was Whiskey** from Charlie Poole & the North Carolina Ramblers Col. 15545
Mike - vocal & guitar
Tracy - fiddle
John - banjo

This song must have been a small rage in the 1920's. Beside the recording by Charlie Poole, it was also recorded by Burnett & Rutherford (Hesitation Blues) and by Uncle Dave Macon (as Morning Blues). The Jim Kreskin Jug Band did their own adaptation in the '60s, and for the NLCR it is a return to one of our original preferences in the string band sound with ornamented fiddle, syncopated & arpeggio oriented three-finger banjo & rolling four finger guitar, along with folk based & zany lyrics.

- 3) **Come All You Tender Hearted** from Carter Stanley (Stanley Bros.) via personal tape made by Larry Erlich in 1956 of Stanley Bros. rec. at Bristol, Tenn., also Friends Of Old Time Music - Folkways FA 2390

Mike - lead voice & mandolin
Tracy - tenor voice & guitar

The words to this song are found in the Old Regular Baptist Song Book, and the style of singing reveals the influence of this church style on Bluegrass music. When the Stanley Bros. performed this song at the first University of Chicago Folk Festival in 1961, it was a crucial moment in the relationship between the city revival and Bluegrass music. The urban audience was profoundly moved by the actuality and sentiment expressed in the song, and this flow of emotion broke through some hostile ice towards acceptance.

- 4) **The Time's Been Swiftly Rolling By** (traditional) from Dillard Chandler (Folkways-ys 309)
Tracy - unaccompanied vocal

A beautiful and haunting version of "Hick's Farewell", purportedly written by an itinerant preacher who despaired of ever being able to return home. This song comes to us from Dillard Chandler, an excellent singer of unaccompanied songs from the ballad-rich area of Western North Carolina, via friend and legendary information source Peter Gott. The original by Dillard can be heard on "Old Love Songs and Ballads", (Folkways 2309).

- 5) **There's Coming A Time** from Roscoe Holcomb
Mike - vocal, fiddle & french harp

Roscoe Holcomb (from Daisy, Kentucky) was touring with Mike out west, and sang a fragment of this song. Months later, Mike called Roscoe and tape-recorded the exact words and melody over the phone.

- 6) **A Night At The Country Opera** freely adapted from "The One Man Melodrama" (Fiddler Joe) Okeh 40344 (s-73-255-a)

Tracy - fiddle and voices

Learned from a skit recorded by Fiddler Joe, this vaudeville spoof is as much fun to perform as it is to watch. It never comes out the same way twice, and audiences vary greatly in their reactions. A rather full sample however seems to indicate that at this point the villian has received more applause than the hero. Now more than ever we can appreciate a simple, good old honest down-to-earth cad.

- 7) **Hawkins Rag** (Ted Hawkins) from Gid Tanner & His Skillet Lickers Bb B 5435

Tracy - spoons & vocal effects
Mike - mandolin
John - guitar

Another remake of a tune we'd first recorded in 1959. The addition of the spoons has given us the freedom to clown around on stage in actions as well as words, and a spooning tune has become a basic part of every NLCR concert.

- 8) **La Valse Des Bambocheurs** (Dewey Balfa, Flat Town Music BMI) from Swallow 6011

Tracy - vocal & lead fiddle
Mike - second fiddle
John - guitar

Entitled in English "The Drunkard's Sorrow Waltz," a popular theme in Cajun music of hard times, painful love and 99 years with a wheelbarrow on a 6 inch plank. Learned principally because of an incredibly moving performance by Dewey Balfa at a University of Chicago Folk Festival. Dewey, who lives in the Basile, Louisiana area, sings it with a full band on "The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music," (Swallow 6011).

- 9) **Cotton Eyed Joe** from Carter Bros. & Son. Okeh.

John - vocal & guitar and introduction
Mike - fiddle
Tracy - fiddle

This is the fifth song that we have recorded which was learned from Carter Bros. & Son. It has become an exercise in improvisation within the limits of great consistency and madness.