

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31055 STEREO

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# WHO'S THAT KNOCKING? BLUEGRASS COUNTRY MUSIC Hazel Dickens & Alice Gerrard

With LAMAR GRIER, CHUBBY WISE and DAVID GRISMAN

RECORDED AND EDITED BY PETER SIEGEL



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PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTOS BY DAVID GAHR

MUSIC LP

# Who's That Knocking?

and other

## Bluegrass Country Music

### Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard

with Lamar Grier / Chubby Wise / David Grisman / recorded and edited by Peter Siegel

#### SIDE ONE

- |                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Walkin' In My Sleep           | (2:00) |
| 2. Can't You Hear Me Calling     | (3:12) |
| 3. Darling Nellie Across The Sea | (2:15) |
| 4. Difficult Run                 | (1:30) |
| 5. Coal Miner's Blues            | (2:40) |
| 6. Gabriel's Call                | (2:12) |
| 7. Just Another Broken Heart     | (2:40) |
| 8. Take Me Back To Tulsa         | (2:13) |

#### SIDE TWO

- |                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Who's That Knocking?         | (2:52) |
| 2. Cowboy Jim                   | (2:00) |
| 3. Long Black Veil              | (3:20) |
| 4. Lee Highway Blues            | (1:55) |
| 5. Lover's Return               | (2:45) |
| 6. Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar | (2:53) |
| 7. I Hear A Sweet Voice Calling | (3:05) |

*Recorded and Edited by Peter Siegel*

**CHUBBY WISE** born Robert Russell Wise is, of course, the "original" Bluegrass fiddler, having been an integral part of the Bill Monroe band of the mid-forties, which brought Bluegrass into existence. He has just completed ten years in Nashville as the fiddler for Hank Snow.

**LAMAR GRIER** is a prominent Washington area Scruggs-style banjo picker who has been playing banjo for the past ten years.

**DAVE GRISMAN** is the mandolin player for the New York Ramblers, the fine Bluegrass group that took first prize in the band contest at the Union Grove Fiddlers Convention in 1964.

PHOTO CREDIT: Kern County, California, Children, 1940 photo from National Archives, Washington DC.

#### HAZEL DICKENS and ALICE GERRARD

Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard are virtually the only two girl singers recording traditional country music today. Most of the female Bluegrass singers have deserted Bluegrass for the more profitable fields of modern country-western and white pop-gospel music—what has been termed the "sweeter sound of modern country music." The voices of Hazel and Alice provide a welcome contrast to this situation. To add to their uniqueness, they are duet singers, which is rare among women in the country music field.

It is interesting to note that two people of supposedly incompatible, and surely very different city-country backgrounds, became close friends and eventually got together to produce the "bluegrass sound." Although Alice's parents both loved music and played and sang very well, their music was strictly in the classical tradition, J. S. Bach being the household god. Some attempt was made to educate Alice in classical music but only resulted in a series of frustrated piano teachers. At this time, neither pop nor country music was "acceptable" to the family as legitimate musical forms. Upon her arrival at Antioch College, Alice, along with others, developed a yen for the folk music scene. For many city Bluegrass musicians, this was a first step toward the transition to Bluegrass music.

Hazel's background was one in which she heard only country music in her home; it was the only form of music used for entertainment; it was enjoyed by the whole family, and performed well by several of her brothers and sisters. Hazel's father, H. N. Dickens, was brought up in the old-time musical tradition, picked old-time banjo, and in his younger years played for square dances. With the advent of Bill Monroe, Mr. Dickens became an avid Bluegrass fan, although his picking and singing remained in the old-time tradition.

Gradually, part of the family, including Hazel and her parents, moved to Baltimore where Mr. and Mrs. Dickens continued to be active in the church, and the children found jobs. Often, country people who migrate to urban areas encounter there, a certain "snobism" toward their culture. With the desire of the country person (especially the younger generation), to assimilate into the urban culture, he often "gives up" some of the manifestations of his low culture, such as his music—it becomes a source of embarrassment rather than pride. This was true, to some extent, with the Dickens children, and until they found acceptance of themselves and their music, they didn't play or sing much—at any rate, not where anybody could hear them. Mike Seeger met the Dickens family at about this time, and his friendship with them and his encouragement of Hazel were among the factors motivating her interest in performing professionally, which she began

to do in 1954, with Mike and her brother, Arnold, who were the original members of Bobby Baker's Pike County Boys.

Mike was a key figure in bringing together many a city and country musician, and was also responsible for bringing Hazel and Alice together. Mike was thoroughly involved in the Baltimore-Washington music scene in the fifties. The beginnings of the interest of "city people" in Bluegrass music, and their respect for it as an important part of our musical culture, were due largely to Mike's great enthusiasm for it; the extent to which he publicized, played, recorded and taught it, and carried it to city people who were heretofore interested only in traditional or cultivated folk music.

One of the city people who became interested in country music through Mike Seeger, was his close friend and fellow-protagonist of Bluegrass, Jeremy Foster, who introduced Alice to this music. When Antioch College sent her to work in Washington, D. C., on her cooperative job, in 1955, Alice inevitably met Hazel through Jeremy and Mike. With the unique opportunity of learning from Hazel, Alice proved that a talented person with a real feeling for country music, could learn to sing it. (At times Alice's voice has a quality similar to that of Sarah Carter). Hazel and Alice's first appearance together, in 1962, was at the Gala Fiddler's Convention. Since then they have appeared at clubs around the Baltimore-Washington area and at the Second Fret in Philadelphia.

Although dedicated primarily to Bluegrass music and such favorite performers as Bill Monroe, The Stanley Brothers and The Osborne Brothers, their tastes are by no means limited to this music. They enjoy and feel the influence of country-western performers such as George Jones and Buck Owens, and such old-time performers as Uncle Dave Macon, J. E. Mainer, Charlie Poole and Gid Tanner. Hazel, for example, not only sings Bluegrass, but does a beautiful job with old-time primitive singing, learned naturally from early church influences and from her traditional background. She also has a strong feeling for Blues, and some day would like to sing them in addition to Bluegrass.

Although the basic ideas for their material came from recordings by other artists, their own originality is implicit in their singing style and approach to each song. Recently they have begun to write some of their own material.

There have been many albums of Bluegrass music recorded in recent years, but few are as worthwhile and meaningful as this one. This is the kind of real country music which is too seldom heard these days. We look for more and even greater things from Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard in the near future.

by Bill Vernon