

BROWNIE MCGHEE and SONNY TERRY *sing*





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The Blues Jumped A Greyhound
by Charles Edward Smith

Late in January, 1958, Sanford Terry and Walter Brown McGhee boarded a Chicago plane at New York's Idlewild airport. One of the men walked with a limp because he had been born forty years before a vaccine had been perfected for polio, and one was without sight because of a childhood accident. They were dressed in good, comfortable clothes and the only clue to their professional interests was that one of them had 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, 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 got a good tone out of a cigar box," I said, and meant it.

There are some connoisseurs of folk music—and not necessarily dilettantes—who'd like the stuff to exist in an environment of frozen immobility, like the amorous attitudes in Keats' *Ode On A Grecian Urn*. To such as these, *acculturation* is a dirty word; they would prefer the folksinger to remain in his original milieu, like a wonderfully trained racehorse who'd be faithfully clocked every dew-damp morning—but never allowed to run for the roses!

I once subscribed to the definitive theory myself, but jettisoned it when I thought it was rocking the boat. Briefly, it is the notion that a song, having gone through a process of change and refinement, is ultimately given its peak

performance and this, in an age of recordings, becomes the definitive one, in the sense that Shakespeare contributed the definitive version of the Hamlet theme. As you can see, there is some merit in this. But unlike the written word, which often achieves an irrevocable finality (sometimes to the author's regret), folk music is fluid and when it would seem to have congealed, it is a still malleable metal.

An illustration of this is the blues theme and lyric line of "219 Blues". When Bertha "Chippie" Hill first recorded it, it was the plaint of a good-time girl, a song of sadness and hope, woven of folk poetry, its melody expressed in a soaring legato line. Appropriately, she gave it the title, "Trouble In Mind". When Jelly Roll Morton recorded it, he recalled it as a much simpler melody, with a sparse boogie bass supplied by a woman he'd heard play it (who had some fingers missing from her left hand). He called it "Mamie's Blues", thinking of her, and the mood of the piece, which begins with talking over piano, is one of quiet nostalgia, to which he manages to bring forcefulness and depth, fill of which makes it one of the great blues pieces, yet utterly different from the treatment of the same melody by Bertha "Chippie" Hill.

When I heard the new interpretation of "John Henry" by Brownie and Sonny, I thought immediately of a "John Henry" I'd heard in the 1920's. Each version used slightly different stanzas but there was a similar repetition of verses at the close of each stanza. Another resemblance was that in each interpretation the harmony (as I remark of another tune in this set) rubbed the edges of discord. Then, too, as with the earlier "John Henry", this was not the *hammer* song but the full-blown melody, familiar to everyone from blues singers to Belafonte. These, then, are two of the greatest "John Henrys" I have heard, yet, close though they are in many

respects, they differ markedly in concept, and this is determined in part by the singers' choice of the innumerable lyrics and his re-weaving of them. The earlier one, by singers now forgotten, was a lament, as lonely as footsteps on a country road. The new one, even while it retains the sweet sadness that is inherent in the John Henry saga, conveys powerfully the indomitable virility of this symbolic figure. Still a third "John Henry"—of the folk versions of the song—is Rich Amerson's wonderful narrative saga, as warm and rich as the country earth, recorded by Harold Courlander for Folkways in *Negro Folk Music of Alabama* (vol. 3, FE 4471). Lead Belly knew it best as a dance tune (in Texás). But there have been literally hundreds of versions of "John Henry," which creates its lyric line out of blues and an old Elizabethan ballad, and there could no more be a definitive "John Henry" than there could be a definitive *Madonna* in classical art.

All of which takes us a bit away from the connoisseurs we were talking about, those friends of the status quo—but should reassure listeners incontinently woo'd by the inference that living high on the hog has a deleterious effect upon the vocal chords. Hardship grinds and grates; the harmonies resulting from it are often harsh. Tension, when it is a part of the living environment and not a sickness of the mind, toughens the sinew of song. But more great voices have been broken on the wheel of poverty than were ever contaminated by the uncharted casbahs of Tin Pan Alley.

Moreover, the suggestion that folksingers are as rigid and "righteous" as the "purists" amongst their followers is a pretty little absurdity, without basis in fact. Every *bona fide* folksinger I've known, and I've known a great many, has (like the rest of humanity) elements in his make-up of both the commonplace and the sublime. (Folk music is neither good nor bad, *per se*, musically or morally.) Of course, even his (or her) lapses into the vernacular of banality will often have something, usually in the way of craftsmanship, to retrieve it. But not necessarily. Folksingers, like some pioneer jazzmen, often come a cropper from trying too hard to conciliate the environment. Some earlier attempts by Brownie along these lines—I hope he doesn't mind my saying so—were a shade cornball. The difference between this and meeting the environment on one's own terms, as Brownie and Sonny now do, is remarkable indeed.

Thus, some of their recent tunes tend to the blues-pop, rather than strictly folk, category. These latter, it should be stressed, are intended merely to entertain, they are today's equivalent of junkin' music and it wouldn't be at all surprising if some of them ended up in that marvelous monstrosity, the juke

box, which took its name from juke joints. This change, in the nature of such songs as are popularly slanted, is less a deliberate attitude than it is a result of living. From the regional outlook of their earlier years, they have become adjusted to an outlook that is more national and, especially, more urban. And this process, which has enriched their singing, has been accomplished without a loss of the authentic character and the emotional veracity of their earlier, regional repertoire.

It would, of course, be idle to insist that they play and sing as they did on their first records. When you have the blues real bad a little of the crying comes into your voice or into the voice of your instrument. Only the craftsmanship of the musician raises it to the level of art. Certain of Sonny's earlier harmonica-and-voice choruses had a strident sadness that tore at the nerves, but even in these solos there was a kind of wild orderliness, a discipline of form that compelled the ear of the listener. And the same was true of Brownie's voice and guitar, that had more to offer each time he played, especially during the last few years that have witnessed the development of his craft, both in his voice, with its strong, warm tone and mobile range, and in the guitar, that he can play seven ways from Sunday.

In the part of North Carolina where Sonny was raised there is a great deal of scrubby country, often hilly, with twists and turns in the roads and stands of piney woods where in the early spring, even when there is snow on the ground, you see flocks of migrating bluebirds swooping through the tracery of green needles, hear them raising a song to spring which sometimes, finds an uncertain bass in the grunts of stray razorbacks. There is ample cover for foxes and happy hunting for hounds whose baying (and the yipping of foxes) was a challenge to all harmonica players. That and train-sounds were home-work to manipulators of the mouth-organ.

Born October 24, 1911, Sonny spent his early years on a small farm—a mule, a hog and a smokehouse, and a hound-dog to jump the rabbits. His father played harmonica and his mother sang. He first played like any small child would, without getting any tone and with no technique. But he watched his father and other players, noted how they held the instrument (ridiculously small for the volume of sound that emerged) and how they coordinated breathing and blowing. From such small beginnings Sonny developed a fabulous technique that included a falsetto wail he'd throw in now and then, making the solo the extraordinary product of both voice and harmonica. In the present set he doesn't use the falsetto (voice) at all but his technique is more fabulous than ever. He achieves a closely knit, intensely rhythmic struc-

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3. **Dark Road** 2:41
4. **John Henry** 4:02
5. **Make a Little Money** 3:44
6. **Old Jabo** 2:10
7. **If You Lose Your Money** 2:41
8. **Guitar Highway** 2:34
9. **Heart in Sorrow** 2:57
10. **Preachin' the Blues** 2:31
11. **Can't Help Myself** 3:16
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Brownie McGhee (Guitar)
Sonny Terry (Harmonica)
Accompanied on drums by Gene Moore

*Originally released in 1958 as
Folkways FA 2327.*

Digitally remastered by Dr. Toby Mountain
at Northeastern Digital Recording,
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Brownie, too, learned to play an instrument from his father, who played guitar for jukin' parties. Jukin' music . . . which took its name from an African word (by way of Gullah dialect), was distinctive in that it was based largely on blues and hollers. Thus, the basic style that Brownie learned on guitar and that determined the quality and direction of his singing as well, was that

of blues and music related to it such as hollers and, though kept separated in the singing of them, spirituals and gospel songs.

This album contains both authentic folksongs and bread-and-butter balladry. Throughout the set and regardless of subject matter there is a positive, buoyant spirit, a feeling, as in the superb version of "John Henry," of affirmation. This new repertoire finds Brownie and Sonny in top form.

Charles Edward Smith
(excerpt from the enclosed album notes)

Smithsonian Folkways Records

Folkways Records was one of the largest independent record companies of the mid-twentieth century. Founded by Moses Asch in 1947 and run as an independent company until its sale in 1987, Folkways was dedicated to making the world of sound available to the public. Nearly 2,200 titles were issued, including a great variety of American folk and traditional music, children's songs, world music, literature, poetry, stories, documentaries, language instruction and science and nature sounds.

The Smithsonian acquired Folkways in order to ensure that the sounds and the genius of the artists would continue to be available to future generations. Every title is being kept in print and new recordings are being issued. Administered by the Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs, Folkways Records is one of the ways the Office supports cultural conservation and continuity, integrity, and equity for traditional artists and cultures.

Several hundred Folkways recordings are distributed by Rounder Records. The rest are available on cassette by mail order from the Smithsonian Institution. For information and catalogs telephone 202/387-3262 or write Folkways, Office of Folklife Programs, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, U.S.A.

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Brownie, too, learned to play an instrument from his father, who played guitar for jukin' parties. Jukin' music, as I explained in the notes for *Brownie McGhee Blues* (FA 2030) is a sort of counterpart to hillbilly. They intermingled musically, even then, and are, of course, much more scrambled today as any study of popularity charts in *Billboard* and *Cash Box* shows. Jukin' music, like hillbilly in its native habitat, was part and parcel of the musical environment of the folk music of a region. It was the music in between, neither folk nor popular but having both, now and then, within its scope. Jukin' music, which took its name from an African word (by way of Gullah dialect), was distinctive in that it was based largely on blues and hollers. Thus, the basic style that Brownie learned on guitar and that determined the quality and direction of his singing as well, was that of blues and music related to it such as hollers and, though kept separated in the singing of them, spirituals and gospel songs.

The public is by now thoroughly familiar with one aspect of blues technique since this, albeit not always used in the best of taste, has gone into jazz, partly due to the impact of rock and roll. This is the tendency (that was so strong in early jazz) to exploit to the full the various timbres of which an instrument (or a voice) might be capable. In rock and roll, on tenor sax, there developed what I refer to, meaning no disrespect, as the buzz-saw sound; in jazz a comparable attention to timbre has resulted in a tonality called *funky*, a word from a riverboat blues about some bad, bad girls, sung by Buddy Boldon. But the influence that was to permeate la (like the bull weevil, just a-lookin' for a home!) was first felt in the upsurge of rock and roll. Indeed, it had never left rhythm and blues nor, for that matter, the spiritual-style that influenced rock and roll and that is still, in parts of the South, called Rock Church.

It came up first, in its present phase, through the rhythm instruments. The man on guitar began to whang it, which emphasized the percussive nature of the instrument, and at the same time kept up a strong rhythm with chords. Well, Brownie had been doing this all alone, laying down that rhythm to single-string melodies, making big phrases out of little bits of harmony and, all in all, turning out some wonderful solos. His guitar also walked and talked, the walking being comparable to the boogie bass, and probably at least as old.

As with Sonny, a great facet of Brownie's talent is his sense of *rap-prochement*, of playing his guitar or singing in relation to another instrument or voice. You might say this is fundamental to a blues guitarist who has often to work by himself. The little response phrases that occur at the end of blues lines—these he'd turn over to the guitar. One can see how this background schooled him in style so that, working with Sonny, the interweaving of voices and instruments is at times seemingly effortless, exciting and deeply moving. If it sometimes creates suspense that is not to be wondered at, since the musicians sometimes surprise each other!

Both Brownie and Sonny sang in spiritual and gospel song quartets, the latter in North Carolina, the former in Tennessee—Sonny, at the time he was working out his new, unique method of playing the harmonica, Brownie at the same time he got his callouses from the hard strong style of country guitar. Sonny was brought to New York for a Carnegie Hall concert in 1938; Brownie came north to see his mother and make a little money, and somewhere along the way they met and became friends. They became friends with other singers such as Huddie Ledbetter, Big Bill Broonzy, and Pete Seeger. They began to listen to the urban blues singers and this influence of the urban blues is represented in their new work by the addition to the rhythm of drums, played by Gene Moore. Compared to some drummers in the Rhythm and Blues field, his playing is restrained—the drums bear heavily on the beat in this area of music—and even the most effective devices, such as the apparent drag of the snares and the climactic beat that make a kind of stop-time on "Preachin' The Blues", are based on a fundamentally simple style. But always with a beat, and this strong beat works out very well with the new sounds of Brownie and Sonny.

Though they're not such plutocrats that they've only the income tax to worry about, both Brownie and Sonny are getting along pretty well these days. Economic problems are not so pressing but there remain plenty of headaches, some of them verging on migraine, as with the rest of us.

This album, then, contains both authentic folksongs and bread-and-butter balladry. Throughout the set and regardless of subject matter there is a positive, buoyant spirit, a feeling, as in the superb version of "John Henry", of affirmation. And no diminution in forcefulness of style—for example, Sonny is still the only harmonica player who can be way out and still with it. Aside from solvency, which is admittedly a wonderful state to be in, the acceptance of folksongs and blues nationally and internationally meant a great deal to those who ply the trade that was once termed, in honor of its more

impoverished practitioners, barefoot music. Wasn't it Emerson's remark that "All men live by truth and stand in the need of expression."? And expression without audience is meaningless. Brownie and Sonny play the same music for neighborhood parties, appearances at concert halls, TV and movies, or for such plays as "Finian's Rainbow" (Sonny), "Cat On A Hot Tin Roof" (Brownie and Sonny) and "Simply Heavenly" (Brownie). The same harmonica that more than once sang for its supper inspired Jane Dudley in the creation of the choreography of a modern dance. The guitar that hitch-hiked into West Virginia played the music for a documentary film narrated by Canada Lee, *The Roosevelt Story*.

This new repertoire finds Brownie and Sonny in top form and, what with drums added, the rhythm is irresistible. There is humor and good feeling in many of the tunes and they thumb their noses at all ivory towers in "Let Me Make A Little Money". "Old Jabo" echoes play-party songs and old minstrels and Guitar Highway tells of Brownie's first venture north. All in all, this has a more urban, more contemporary flavor than previous sets by either. And as they've moved along in this direction, they've learned to do it on their own terms, building upon the past as they give lyrics and music a new and more contemporary sound.

As recently as twenty years ago—and no doubt today, in some instances—many good blues singers were down and out, beat to the socks, or even sockless. If they jumped a rabbit, as the blues did 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 sings about in "Guitar Highway") but back there in the 1930's the blues jumped a Greyhound and they're still coming on, stronger than ever.

BETTER DAY

The use of a refrain is far from a novelty in blues but in this instance seems to reflect an influence from popular music. The singing style follows the statement-and-response pattern of certain spirituals. Instead of fightin' and feudin', in the old mountain tradition, harmonica and guitar indulge in some spectacular fission and fusion.

Up on the mountain,
I look down in the sea,
Thinkin' bout the woman,
The one we couldn't agree.

(chorus)

But that's all right,
I don't worry;
'Cause there will be a better day.

Oh look a-here people,
I need a break,
Good things will come
To those who wait.

But that's all right, etc.

When I had money,
I had plenty friends,
Now I don't have a dime
Like a road without an end.

But that's all right, etc.

My burden's so heavy,
I don't hardly ever see,
Seems like everybody
Down on me.

But that's all right, etc.

CONFUSION

An amusing satirical song in low-key psychology, with harmonica and guitar making a "mix" and, toward the close, one of those "way out" passages by Sonny's harmonica. In these tunes, in the vocal sections, usually Brownie leads, in the instrumental usually Sonny leads.

Sometimes she makes me blue,
Sometimes she make me glad,
Sometimes she make me happy
Sometimes she make me sad.
She keeps me worried and so lonesome,

I just can't keep from cryin',
Well, life's so confusin',
I b'lieve I'm goin' to lose my mind.

Sometimes she says she loves me,
Sometimes she says she don't,
Sometimes she says "Maybe,"
And then she says she won't.
She keeps me worried and so lonesome, etc.

She goes downtown,
She does not have a dime,
She come back home
Lookin' dressed so fine.
She keeps me worried and so lonesome, etc.

I walks in the house,
I kiss her hello,
Before I can sit down
She says, "I don't love you no more."
She keeps me worried and so lonesome, etc.

DARK ROAD

Like the best rock and roll, this tune with a rhythm and blues slant is not only first-class entertainment but, as is so often the case with Brownie and Sonny, words and music are in good taste. It is one of those "my baby left me" blues which Brownie delivers in a gently spoofing manner; as for Sonny's harmonica, it almost chortles. Sometimes Sonny blows as though he had an organ bellows behind him but

such is his control of breathing that at times he seems barely to kiss the reeds. Harmonica players will be fascinated at his dexterity and breathing technique.

Well, my baby left this morning when the clock was striking four.
Well, she left this morning when the clock was striking four.
Well, when she walked out, the blues walked in my door.

Well she's gone, she's gone, she won't be back no more,
Well she's gone, she's gone, she won't be back no more.
Well, what hurt me so bad, she's gone with Mr. So-and-So.

I looked down the road far as I could see,
Well, I looked down the road far as I could see.
Well, a man had my woman, the blues sure had poor me.

Well, I walked and I walked, my feet got soaking wet,
Well I walked and I walked, till my feet got soaking wet.
Well, I ain't got my baby and I ain't stopped walking yet.

JOHN HENRY

With this exuberant "John Henry", sung to a wallowing beat, Folkways can now (in all modesty) admit to having two of the greatest versions of this folk classic, the second being Rich Amerson's. (And of course, Folkways has other excellent versions as well.) The choice of lyrics is excellent and they are handled with a warmth and force that drives home words and lines like John Henry driving steel. Sonny does a little steel-driving of his own, in a harmonica chorus that builds up like a charge of dynamite, with the big blow in the treble. And Brownie, who seldom uses the falsetto, employs it with tremendous impact to emphasize the word cool in the sign-off line, which is repeated eight times with very slight variations, e.g.

"Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die..."

John Henry was a little-bitty boy,
Settin' on his daddy's knee;
Well, he pointed straight at a piece of steel
Said that steel's gonna be the death of me,
Well that steel's gonna be the death of me,
Well that steel's gonna be the death of me,
Well that steel's gonna be the death of me.

John Henry had a little-bitty woman,
Her name was Polly Ann.
John Henry got sick and he was lyin' in bed,
You know Polly she drove steel like a man,

You know Polly she drove steel like a man,
Well, old Polly she drove steel like a man,
Well, old Polly she drove steel like a man.

John Henry had a notion to climb up these mountains,
Cap'n said, "Johnny, that mountain's sinkin' in."
Johnny said, "Shut up, cap'n, you don't know what you said,
That ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind,
But that ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind,
That ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind,
That ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind.

Some say Johnny Henry was born in Texas,
Some say he was born in Maine,
John Henry was born down in North Carolina,
He was a steel-drivin' man, Lord, Lord,
He was a steel-drivin' man.
He was the leader of a steel-drivin' gang,
He was a steel-drivin' man.

Well, the paymaster loved to see John Henry,
Water boy loved to hear him sing,
Most of all that the paymaster loved
Was to hear John Henry's hammer ring,
Just to hear John Henry's hammer ring,
Just to hear John Henry's hammer ring,
Just to hear John Henry's hammer ring.

Let 'er ring.

Well, they carried John Henry on the mountain,
Up on the mountain so high,
Last words I heard that poor boy say,
"Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die,
Give me a cool drink of water 'fore I die."

LET ME MAKE A LITTLE MONEY

This is the tune that suggested to me that the harmonies of Brownie and Sonny are at times so blue that they rub the edges of discord. In the midst of spinning out the lyrics there occurs the spoken interpolation "Want to make a little money," and, toward the end, "Make a little money one more time." All of this is in a good humor, to a good beat.

I got a woman, sweet, loving, kind every way,
I got a woman, sweet, loving, kind every day.
Every day, yes, yes, yes, every day.

When she call me, baby, baby, baby I love you,
Oh when she call me, baby, baby, baby, I love you.
More and more, yes, yes, yes every day.

Oh take it easy, honey, till I make a little money,
Oh take it easy, honey, till I make a little money.
I'm tryin' hard, yes, yes, yes in every way.

If you can wait, and don't get tired of waiting,
Peoples is lyin', please don't b'lieve their lyin'.
I'll make you happy, yes, yes, yes and satisfied.

If you can wait, and don't get tired of waitin', etc.

Take it easy, honey, till I make a little money, etc.

OLD JABO

This tune and the lyrics are both related to various older tunes, such as "Raise A Ruckus Tonight" (included in FA 2028). It is Brownie's and Sonny's, as sung here, but probably has its roots in old minstrel tunes and song-dance tunes of slavery days. Brownie has developed a beautiful solo style and on this uses response phrases, backed by chords. Jabo has the rhythmic snap of a country dance.

Old Jabo went across that field,
Great big snake bit him on his heel.

He turned around to do his best,
Fell right back in the hornets' nest.

Up he jumped and away he ran,
Couldn't catch the fool in a aeroplane.

Old Jabo don't have no shoes,
That's why he got them running blues.

Me and Jabo were goin' to town,
Ride a gray horse and lead a hound.

The hound barked and the old horse jumped,
Told Jabo "Let's straddle a stump!"

Old Jabo he promised me,
Before he died he'd make a will for me.

Lived so long till his head got bald,
Got out of the notion of dyin' at all.

Old Jabo, fare thee well,
I know somethin' that I ain't goin' to hell.

I LOVE YOU BABY

"Baby, please don't go," says Brownie— then Sonny introduces the tune in a kind of jump tempo — like the hop tempo that's recently been revived. Brownie and Sonny have a good time and there is wonderful fun for all listeners on this bright blues-pop. Gene helps to keep things moving with a strong beat and there is a tuneful passage where Brownie walks that beautiful new guitar of his.

I love you baby, baby please don't go,
I love you baby, baby please don't go,
If you leave me baby, you know it's gonna hurt me so.

Oooh, oooh, oooh, oooh,
Oooh, oooh, oooh, oooh,
Oooh, oooh, oooh, oooh,
Oooh baby you sure look fine to me.

Well, I love you baby, goin' to tell it everywhere
Well, I love you baby, goin' to tell it everywhere.
You knock me out, baby, the way you wear your hair,

Oooh, oooh, oooh, etc.

I love you baby, goin' to tell it all over town,
I love you baby, goin' to tell it all over town,
Want the men to know she ain't no hand-me-down.

Oooh, oooh, oooh, etc.

She got great big legs on her little-bitty pretty feet,
She got great big legs on her little-bitty pretty feet.
Well, four or five whistles when she walk down the street.

She made me holler:
Oooh, oooh, oooh, oooh, etc.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR MONEY

This has a strong beat and solid lyrics. The "mix" of harmonica and guitar make wonderful listening; in these passages Brownie and Sonny seem always to be on new roads of discovery. Just as spirituals and blues influenced the creation of rock and roll, the beat of rock and roll, which is a music for dancing as well as for riff-based vocal effects, has had an impact on modern, urban blues. This is an example of both since it is based on a type of blues song that influenced rock and roll and since, in the playing of it, rock and roll seems to have influenced its rhythm.

If you lose your money,
Please don't lose your mind.
If you lose your money,
Please don't lose your mind.
If you lose your woman,
Please don't fool with mine.

Come rain, come sunshine
From the sky above.
Come rain, come sunshine
From the sky above.
If I'm cool,
I'm cool about the one I love.

You're the first one I loved,
The lost one I ever will,
You're the first one I loved,
The last one I ever will.
Well, love is something
Could get somebody killed.

I believe to my soul
My gal got a black cat bone,
Well, I believe to my soul,
My gal got a black cat bone.
Every time I leave,
I got to turn around and go back home.

GUITAR HIGHWAY

"Guitar Highway" is a mean old lone-some train blues. It is also the odyssey of Brownie's journey from Tennessee to New York, even to the Greyhound bus he missed on one trip but apparently caught on others (since he sings of it as though it were an old friend). Brownie wails the blues, with his vocal chords and the strings of his guitar. Sonny's harmonica, at one point, recalls his facility for train blues. He once said to Fred Ramsey (FA 2035), "I used to hear the train comin' by, I used to be settin' down sometime, by myself, real still, an' I'd say I wish I could play that..." In this wayfaring writer's opinion, "Guitar Highway", which is an original blues and a good one, crosses lines at some junction with the old "219 Blues" (known by several other names) and by Brownie's own "Key To The Highway".

My mama had `em, ma papa had `em,
And I got `em too.
My mama had `em, my papa had `em,
Got guitar on the highway,
Mean old lonesome train blues.

I woke up one morning `bout the crack
of day. (2)
I picked up my guitar and slowly
walked away.

I walked out on the highway, that
Greyhound bus had gone. (2)
My guitar on my shoulder, I started
walkin' home.

I beat my way into Virginia and the sun
was goin' down. (2)
I tried to get a favor, everybody turned
me down.

I caught a train out of Virginia, it was
16 coaches long. (2)
I didn't care where it was goin', I just
kept hangin' on.

Here I am, here I am,
And I'm doin' very well.
Here I am, right now,
Doin' very well.
With the guitar on the train, I'm doin'
very well.

HEART IN SORROW

There is some warm harmonizing to a
good beat and another fabulous har-
monica chorus by Sonny in which he
manipulates tone and rhythm in a man-
ner that sets him apart from all other
soloists on this instrument. Brownie is
a strong voice at the finish and employs
a wide range with ease.
My babe packed a suitcase and she
started to the train.
She's a married woman, but I love her
just the same

Don't you know that I ain't got no lovin'
baby now,
Yes, yes,
You know that I ain't got no lovin' baby
now.

Well, it's I — I ain't got no lover now,
My heart's in sorrow and the tears keep
falling down.

That slowdown fireman and that cruel
engineer,
That old dirty conductor took my baby
away from here.

Don't you know that I ain't got no lovin'
baby now, etc.

I started to write a letter and I laid the
pencil down,
My heart's got sorrow and the tears
come rolling down.

I ain't got no lovin' baby now, etc.

PREACHIN' THE BLUES

A deep, slow-rocking blues. The perfor-
mance builds up to a statement- and-
response vocal that, with the guitar
chords and the beat of the drums, is
virtually a stop-time chorus. Simple,
effective composition.

My baby leavin', won't be back no
more,
Yes she's leavin', won't be back no
more,
Well, what hurt me so bad that she go
and quit me for so-and-so.

Well, I'm beggin', beg you darlin',
Sugar, please, please don't go.
Yes I'm beggin' you darlin',
Sugar, please, please don't go.
Yes, when you walk out, darlin',
The doggone blues gonna walk in my
door.

I looked down the road far as I could
see,
Man had my woman and the blues had
me.
Why is it ain't no lovin', ain't no gettin'
along,
Everything I done she said was wrong.

"You can't sow wild oats and expect to
gather corn,
You can't take right, darling', and make
it wrong.

I told you darlin', long time ago,
You goin' to reap for what you sow.
And what you sow, goin' to make you
reap,
And what you reap, goin' to make you
weep.
Someday sweetheart.

CAN'T HELP MYSELF

Bright and up-tempo, like some of the
old shouting blues-stomps. Brownie
sings the lyrics as though they gave him
a boot and he wanted us to share it.
Sonny, in a superb chorus—as I indicat-
ed in the Introduction—plays what is
probably the only harmonica in
America that can be way out and still
with it.

Well, I love you baby, love you,
Like I can't help myself.
Well, I love you baby, love you,
Like I can't help myself.
Well, it hurts me so, babe,
You love someone else.

You want me, baby,
To be like Jesse James,
You must want me, baby,
To be like Jesse James.
Want me kill some man
Or rob some passenger train.

Well, I love you baby, love you,
I tell thee well, I do,
Well, I love you baby, love you,
I tell thee well, I do.
You must want me, baby,
To lay down and die for you.

Well, I may go north or south,
And I may go east or west.
Well, I may go north or south,
And I may go east or west.
Well, I'm goin', I'm goin',
Till I find sweet happiness.

True love, true love,
Well it don't run smooth, you know.
True love, true love,
Well it don't run smooth, you know.
Well, love in on your mind,
I don't care where you go.

Well, I'm goin', I'm goin', baby,
Cryin' won't make me stay.
Well, I'm goin', I'm goin', baby,
Cryin' won't make me stay.
Well, you're on my mind, baby,
Each and every day.

Yes, you're on my mind, baby,
Each and every day.
Well, you're on my mind, baby,
Each and every day.
Well, you're on my mind, baby,
Each and every day.

BEST OF FRIENDS

Having seen and heard Brownie, Sonny,
Huddie and others at an informal
"ruckus" in Martha Ledbetter's parlor
in downtown Manhattan when Huddie,
the great folksinger was still alive, I
had a notion of what Brownie meant by
his title. What pleases me, and will

please everyone who knew Huddie or
knew him through his singing, is that he
has gotten the feeling of what it meant
to be a friend of Huddie's, into his song.
There is even a fond backward glance at
"Irene", Huddie's theme that made the
hit parade, but when Huddie was no
longer around to enjoy the royalties.
Even the way Sonny and Brownie play
their instruments, with considerable
vivacity and drive, helps the mood.

Me and Huddie Ledbetter,
Yes we was the best of friends,
Well, me and Huddie Ledbetter,
We was the best of friends.
Well, he could pick more cotton,
Yes I mean than four or five men.

Me and Huddie Ledbetter
Never had no fallen out
Well, me and Huddie Ledbetter
Oh, never had no fallen out
Well, we were wild to the women,
Yes, and we knowed what it's all about.

The poor boy wrote a million songs,
Yes, he wrote day and night,
The poor boy wrote a million songs,
Yes, you know he wrote day and night,
Well, the song I loved to hear him sing,
Irean Goodnight.

He was known from coast to coast,
Yes he was known way 'cross the sea
Well he was known from coast to coast
Yes he was known way cross the sea
Well all the women and men over there,
Huddie Ledbetter, won't you play and
sing for me

Smithsonian Folkways Records

Folkways Records was one of the largest
independent record companies of the mid-
twentieth century. Founded by Moses Asch in
1947 and run as an independent company
until its sale in 1987, Folkways was dedicated
to making the world of sound available to the
public. Nearly 2,200 titles were issued,
including a great variety of American folk
and traditional music, children's songs, world
music, literature, poetry, stories, documenta-
ries, language instruction and science and
nature sounds.

The Smithsonian acquired Folkways in order
to ensure that the sounds and the genius of
the artists would continue to be available to
future generations. Every title is being kept in
print and new recordings are being issued.
Administered by the Smithsonian's Office of
Folklife Programs, Folkways Records is one
of the ways the Office supports cultural con-
servation and continuity, integrity, and equity
for traditional artists and cultures.

Several hundred Folkways recordings are
distributed by Rounder Records. The rest are
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Smithsonian Institution. For information and
catalogs telephone 202/387-3262 or write
Folkways, Office of Folklife Programs, 955
L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, Smithsonian
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