

SONNY TERRY

The Folkways Years, 1944-1963

13. **Lost John**

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica (Folkways 32035, July 1954).

"Lost John" is another demonstration of a harmonica player's skills. Its fragmentary text, which Terry omits in this version, usually tells of a slave or prisoner trying to escape from servitude or prison.

14. **A Man Is Nothing But A Fool**

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar; Coyol McMahon, maracas (Folkways 32028, 1955).

"A Man Is Nothing But A Fool" presents an archetypal bluesman's complaint: you can't trust a woman because she will leave you for one reason or another. Brownie's creative chordal accompaniment holds together this nicely understated performance.

15. **Poor Man**

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; J.C. Burris, bones and vocal (Folkways 2369, 1958).

This is another blues-like piece that Terry often performed with Brownie McGhee. Here it features J.C. Burris' bones as a percussion accompaniment.

16. **I've Been Your Doggie Since I Been Your Man**

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar; J.C. Burris, bones (Folkways 3821, 1958).

Echoing a common theme in African American music, Terry performs this strong blues to the accompaniment of McGhee's guitar and his nephew's percussion on the bones. Although bones have been used as a percussive device by southern Blacks since the early eighteenth century, they are very rarely heard today.

17. **Custard Pie Blues**

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; unknown performers on washboard, washtub bass, bones, frying pan, vocal refrain (Folkways 32006, 1952).

The full percussion section gives special dynamics to this song, which Sonny had been performing since at least the 1930s. The washtub alternates between a "walking bass" and one accented by a dotted rhythm, adding to its interest. The vocal refrain is probably added by one of the percussionists.

* *Previously unreleased.*

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Neil Slaven for his help with previously unpublished discographical information as well as Jeff Place and Lori Taylor, archivists of the Office of Folklife Programs, for their assistance locating unpublished material in the Folkways archive.

Credits:

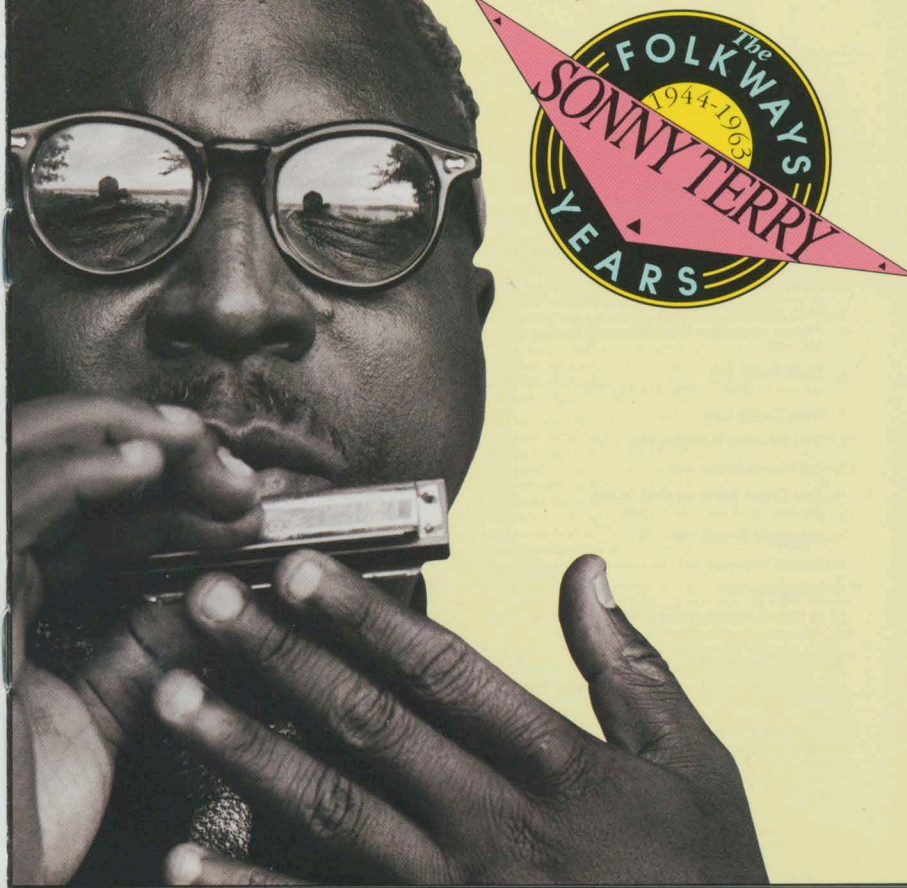
Compiled and annotated by Kip Lornell

Cover photograph by David Gahr

Cover design by Carol Hardy

Remastered by Alan Yoshida at The Mastering Lab, Hollywood, Cal.

Reissue production supervision by Anthony Seeger and Matt Walters with the assistance of Christopher Jerde



SONNY TERRY

The Folkways Years, 1944-1963

- 1 **Old Jabo** 2:10
(Brownie McGhee/Stormking, BMI)
- 2* **Going Down Slow** 2:51
(James Oden/St. Louis Music, BMI)
- 3 **Crow Jane Blues** 1:59
- 4 **Harmonica with Slaps** 2:01
- 5 **Pick A Bale of Cotton** 2:30
(Huddie Ledbetter/Alan Lomax, Folkways Music/TRO, BMI)
- 6 **Dark Road** 2:43
(Brownie McGhee/Stormking Music, Inc., BMI)
- 7 **Skip To My Lou** 1:21
- 8 **The Woman is Killing Me** 2:23
- 9 **Jail House Blues** 5:02
- 10 **Fox Chase/Right on that Shore**
(McGhee/Terry/Hollis Music Inc., BMI)
- 11 **Shortnin' Bread** 2:00
- 12* **Sweet Woman** 3:04
- 13 **Lost John** 3:07
- 14 **A Man Is Nothing but a Fool** 3:18
(Sonny Terry/Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 15 **Poor Man (But a Good Man)** 3:08
- 16 **I've Been Your Doggie Since I Been Your Man** 3:53
- 17 **Custard Pie Blues** 2:47
(Sonny Terry/Hollis Music, Inc., BMI)

* Previously unreleased



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When 31 year-old harmonica master Sonny Terry arrived in New York in 1942, he was already primed for his new musical life after working with Blind Boy Fuller, Brownie McGhee and others back in his North Carolina homeland. Beginning with his 1938 debut at the "Spirituals to Swing" Carnegie Hall concert, Sonny Terry laid the groundwork for his four decade career as a blues harmonica great. This collection captures the essence and breadth of his Folkways recordings from that era.

Descriptive notes enclosed.

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**Smithsonian
Folkways**

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings

Office of Folklife Programs

955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600

Smithsonian Institution

Washington DC 20560

Smithsonian/Folkways SF 40033

Sonny Terry The Folkways Years, 1944-1963

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Sonny Terry on Folkways Records

This anthology is a selection from among Sonny Terry's recordings that highlights his large repertory and his harmonica playing. Only a few cuts were selected from each of his original LP titles. As with the rest of the Folkways catalogue, all of Sonny Terry's Folkways titles are available on cassette by mail order from the Smithsonian Institution. They have been recorded from the master tapes onto high quality audio cassettes, which are packaged with the original LP documentation. For a complete Folkways catalogue telephone 202/287-3262, fax 202/287-3699, or write Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, Office of Folklife Programs, 955 L'Enfant Plaza Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. 20560.

Folkways albums by Sonny Terry include:

Folkways 2201 **Washboard Band Country Dance Music** (cassette)

Folkways 2327 **Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry** (reissued in 1990 as Smithsonian/Folkways SF40011, on CD, LP and cassette).

Folkways 2369 **Sonny Terry, On the Road** (cassette)

Folkways 2412 **Pete Seeger and Sonny Terry in Concert** (cassette)

Folkways 3817 **Blues with Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee** (cassette)

Folkways 3821 **Sonny Terry's New Sound** (cassette)

Folkways 32006 **Sonny Terry's Washboard Band** (cassette)

Folkways 32028 **Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Get On Board** (cassette)

Folkways 32035 **Sonny Terry, Harmonica** (cassette)

SF 40011 **Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry Sing** (a reissue of 2327 on CD, LP and cassette)

SF 40034 **Brownie McGhee The Folkways Years 1945-1959** (an anthology of Brownie McGhee recordings, some of which feature Sonny Terry as well, available on CD and cassette).

Blues on Smithsonian/Folkways Reissues

Many blues recordings by superb artists are available on audio cassette and are listed in The Whole Folkways Catalogue. Some of these have been carefully remastered, annotated, and re-issued on CD and cassette on the Smithsonian/Folkways label. These are commercially distributed to record stores and mail order houses. Among them are:

SF 40001 **Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly, Folkways, The Original Vision.**

SF 40009 **Elizabeth Cotten, Freight Train and Other North Carolina Songs and Tunes.**

SF 40010 **Leadbelly Sings Folk Songs.**

SF 40011 **Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry Sing Blues.**

SF 40019 **Lightnin' Hopkins.**

SF 40023 **Big Bill Broonzy Sings Folk Songs.**

SF 40034 **Brownie McGhee, The Folkways Years.**

SF 40035 **Reverend Gary Davis, Pure Religion and Bad Company.**

Ask for these at your local record store or order by phone from Roundup Records 1-800-443-4727.

**Sonny Terry, The Folkways Years, 1944-1963
Compiled and Annotated by Kip Lornell**

This anthology of 17 songs, selected from the eight LP albums Sonny Terry recorded for Folkways Records and from previously unreleased acetates, illustrates the remarkable variety of styles employed by this brilliant harmonica player. Sonny Terry and Folkways' founder Moses Asch enjoyed a long and richly rewarding professional association from 1944 until 1959. This selection displays all of the facets of their long-term collaboration, drawing mostly from Terry's 1950s recordings. It demonstrates Terry's ability to perform blues, religious, and folk material. Two items, "Going Down Slow" and "Sweet Woman," were found among the unissued acetate recordings housed in the Folkways Archive at the Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs and are being released here for the first time. The rest were taken from the Folkways albums listed in the discography.

The Harmonica Player's Harmonica Player

Mastering the harmonica is not a simple task. It looks so deceptively easy—you merely place it to your lips, then blow and suck. Yet when you try it yourself, you discover there is much more to playing the instrument. Then you listen more carefully to such blues players as Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter, Noah Lewis, and Sonny Terry and wonder how they do it. Eventually some of their "riffs" begin to emerge from your very own harmonica. Twenty years later you still marvel at your own naivete in thinking that within one day you could replicate Little Walter's classic solos on "Juke."

The truth is that virtuoso mouth harp players—from jazz wizard Toots Thielman to classically trained John Sebastian (father of the Lovin' Spoonful's leader)—have spent years perfecting their craft. So did Sonny Terry, who played the mouth harp for more than six decades. He always stayed with the ten-hole diatonic model, which remains essentially unchanged since its perfection in Germany in the 1830s. Rural American folk musicians have been playing the instrument since the mid-nineteenth century and during the 1920s and 1930s musicians such as Pop Stoneman and Bill Cox often used them on commercial country records.

The harmonica has been a favorite among African-American musicians because of its portability, its low cost, and its almost human sounds. In the hands and at the lips of such a master as Sonny Terry, the harmonica can produce an amazing variety of sounds. Listening to Terry as a solo artist is particularly rewarding because of his ability to manipulate this small instrument in so many ways. Most famous is his "Fox Chase", where he uncannily reproduces a cacophony of sounds that comes you from the beginning to the end of the hunt. Since the early 1950s African-American blues musicians have frequently used harmonicas as lead instruments in electrified bands.

Many of Muddy Waters' most exciting recordings included the best of the local "blowers": Little Walter, Jimmy Cotton, Big Walter Horton, and Henry Strong. Playing their instruments directly into a microphone and amplifier, these musicians approach the fluidity of jazz saxophonists. They achieve a raw, powerful, emotional sound that is charged with tremendous energy, which influenced so many rock musicians from the 1960s to the present—including ZZ Top, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, and others. Sonny Terry, too, occasionally recorded through an amplifier with results surprisingly close to his more urbane brothers. However, in keeping with Moses Asch's own aesthetics, the selections he recorded for Folkways were all acoustic.

Moses Asch, founder and head of Folkways Records from 1947 to 1987, was a key figure in shaping Sonny Terry's career once the harmonica player arrived in New York City. Before moving to New York, Terry used to play in the streets, in rough southern "joints," and for country parties. His recordings on Folkways reflect Asch's belief that he should not tamper with mature folk artists. Nor did Moses Asch feel that artists' music should be molded into new styles for the sake of popularity. In a 1971 interview with Tony Schwartz, Asch recalled that "Burl Ives... tried to be an art singer, but he couldn't let go and be a folk singer and Alan [Lomax] sweated over that poor guy. And the LP came out good, but he sang songs that he didn't know, Scottish songs and not songs from Ohio his home. This is one of the toughest things: an artist in the studio who wants to be an impresario. With Leadbelly or Woody [Guthrie], you didn't tell them anything. They knew what they wanted, you just set them in motion..."

Sonny Terry's Folkways recordings reflect Asch's attitude toward his artists. Most of the recordings are with Brownie McGhee, but Asch carefully placed Terry in other comfortably familiar settings: a country washboard band (32006 **"Sonny Terry's Washboard Band"**) or as a solo artist (32035 **"Sonny Terry, Harmonica"**). Sonny Terry's first Asch 78 rpm recording from 1944 (Asch 432 "Glory [Walk and Talk with Jesus]") benefits from the well-timed guitar work of his friend Woody Guthrie. Perhaps because he did not want to duplicate the efforts of other local companies, Asch never recorded Terry with a small electric blues band or with a full rhythm section.

Sonny Terry's Life

Born on October 24, 1911 in Greensboro, North Carolina, Sonny Terry spent much of his childhood in Shelby, near Charlotte. Like his father, Terry began playing the harmonica at an early age, playing spirituals and dance tunes. Significantly, this period pre-dated the emergence of blues in the southeastern United States. Terry recalls that "My father... used to play harmonica at them Saturday night fish fries and some such things. He didn't do no blues. I never heard blues before I was about eighteen years old. He done buck dances, reels and jigs, stuff as that you could dance to. He could play a harp with no hands, slide it along his lips" (Bastin p. 263)

This brief account only hints at the variety of Black rural music that flourished in the early twentieth century. It is now clear that the blues constituted only a part of Black folk music. Small stringbands, usually consisting of a fiddle, banjo, and guitar, played for square dances in the rural Carolinas; Terry sometimes performed with such groups. Such seemingly esoteric instruments as the accordion and jawbones

(used to provide rhythmic accompaniment) were also played in some early twentieth century African-American churches in the Middle Atlantic states as well as providing the music for secular dances and family entertainment.

Terry's experiences and repertoire reflect this mixture of secular and sacred music. His occasionally flamboyant performance style and "tricks" further reflect the showman tradition in which he grew up and made his living. Because of two accidents that left him virtually blind by 1927, Terry was forced to abandon his plans to operate a small farm. He turned instead to music as a means of primary support, as did other black musicians, such as Gussie Nesbit (South Carolina), Willie McTell (Georgia), and Lemon Jefferson (Texas).

The blindness from his injuries strongly encouraged Terry to improve his skills both as a harmonica player and as an entertainer. The death of his father, about 1925, heightened his need to be self-sufficient. Terry was already a well polished player, having played extensively with local black and white musicians for dances and country breakdowns. These Shelby-area performers were the first bluesmen he knew and Terry quickly incorporated this new style. He learned how to choose the proper harmonicas to play blues in the different keys required by the guitarists. Moreover, Terry worked on the visual tricks that so pleased crowds, especially the dramatic hand fluttering and flourishes.

Before long, Terry also began to perform on his own. He did not cease playing with other musicians for Saturday night functions, but he started working the streets during the day. Like so many other itinerant musicians in the southeastern states, Terry took to the streets in front of the factories and was particularly busy during the fall tobacco sales. He drew large crowds of interested bystanders who crowded around to see the blind harmonica player play requests of all sorts. The lure of patent medicine shows also called Terry on the road for stints during which he traversed the entire South, sometimes travelling for weeks or months at a time.

Perhaps inevitably, Sonny Terry met Blind Boy Fuller who was raised in Hamlet, a small community about seventy miles east of Shelby: "I was playin' on one side of the street and he was on the other side. So I heard that whinin' guitar over there walin', you know. And he saw me over there... By the time I found the one to tell him to bring him over, he had someone brought at me! So me and him got together, that was about 3:00. We played till about 6:00 and that way he first met me. He said 'Come to Durham, North Carolina.' Said we may get to make a record together. I'd heard his records, you know, and so by the seven or eight months I was there, I went on (to) Durham and got with him. I stayed with him about a year" (Bastin p. 265) The

year was 1937 and this chance encounter moved Terry into a new realm of semi-professionalism. It provided him with the chance to record with Fuller and eventually as a leader. His local reputation was enhanced, but Terry still played the streets, sold liquor, and occasionally worked at the local factory for the blind. Pleased with the upward change in his status, he still sought a true move towards a substantial income from music.

Sonny Terry's entry into the folk revival movement, and eventually his move out of the South, arrived with an invitation to the famous "Spirituals to Swing" concert in December, 1938. This landmark musically-integrated gala featured such popular artists as Benny Goodman, Count Basie, and Ida Cox. The legendary Mississippi Delta blues singer Robert Johnson was also supposed to attend, but had already passed away. This introduction to a large audience eager to hear rural southern music as well as jazz helped make feasible Terry's 1942 move to New York City.

Terry remained in the South a while longer, however. He continued playing in his usual venues and recording with Blind Boy Fuller. Following Fuller's death in February 1941, Terry continued to play for all types of local functions. He and Brownie McGhee became acquainted in the late 1930s and occasionally performed together. But they became full partners by accident when J.B. Long (Terry's record company contact from Burlington, North Carolina) needed someone to accompany Terry to Washington, D.C. Brownie McGhee willingly obliged as a favor to Long and an enduring partnership grew from the trip. By 1942 the duo decided it was time to leave North Carolina to join the great musical and cultural northward migration.

Throughout the 1940s and well into the 1950s the careers of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee remained closely intertwined and followed complementary paths. Perhaps more than his partner, Sonny Terry was tied into the northern urban folk movement. Terry recorded for Moses Asch as early as 1944, with back-up provided by Woody Guthrie. Aside from McGhee, his most constant musical companions in the years immediately after arriving in New York City were Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Cisco Houston, and their friends. They all played at local "hoots" (concerts featuring a variety of performers) or with other members of a loose musicians' collective that included, among others, Pete and Butch Hawes, Bess Lomax, "Sis" Cunningham, Josh White, and Earl Robinson. These performers and others often invited Terry to participate as part of musical programs that charged the public 35 cents to see entertainers as disparate as Aunt Molly Jackson, Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, Burl Ives, and Jim Garland.

These connections led Sonny to more long-term musical employment. In 1946, for instance, he landed a part in a Broadway production of **"Finian's Rainbow,"** which ran for more than 1,000 performances. Nearly ten years later both he and Brownie were part of the cast of **"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."** This job lasted for almost two years. Such opportunities provided steady employment and presented Terry's music to an audience far removed from the streets of Durham, North Carolina.

Nonetheless Sonny Terry did not entirely leave his roots behind. He continued to play in local clubs with Brownie McGhee and others. Together they explored the post-war "race records" market, recording for Savoy, Harlem, Groove, Old Town, Ember, Jackson, and a host of other regional labels. Terry's distinctive harmonica style, sounding almost anachronistic in light of the early, heavily amplified Chicago-style of Little Walter, Jr. Wells, and Big Walter Horton, also graced sessions by other New York-based bluesmen.

Moses Asch became one of Terry's staunch supporters. Asch retained a fondness for southern black folk music, as evidenced by the numerous recordings he released on Folkways by Leadbelly, Pink Anderson, Memphis Slim, and others. By the middle 1950s, Terry's audience had expanded to include a public interested in folk music outside of New York City, hungry for long playing records. Beginning in 1954 with a solo album, Terry recorded regularly for Folkways. These recordings captured all of the important aspects of Terry's repertoire, sometimes in interesting or different settings. Folkways LP 32028, for instance, brought Brownie and Sonny together with maracas player Coyol McMahan. Terry was also paired with his harmonica playing nephew, J.C. Burris, on Folkways LP 2369, which included fine examples of harmonica duets, a harmonica and bones workout, and other unusual performances rarely heard on record. Asch even released a string band session (Folkways FA 2201 "Washboard Country Band") that included Pete Seeger's banjo, William Edward Cook's washboard, Brownie's guitar, and Frank Robertson's bass. With tunes such as "Cindy," "John Henry," "Old Joe Clark," and "Cripple Creek," this 1963 recording recalls music from Terry's Shelby days.

Despite Brownie McGhee's departure for the West Coast about 1960, the duo continued working together. Sonny remained in New York City, sometimes reprising his role of solo or "guest" artist. He and Brownie were often united for performances and numerous recording sessions for Bluesville, but they were not close personal friends. The personal bickering became evident on stage and they played together less frequently in later years. Terry continued to

perform and occasionally record throughout the 1970s. In fact, he remained quite active until his death in New York City on March 12, 1986.

Selected Bibliography

- Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
- Kent Cooper. *The Harp Styles of Sonny Terry*. (New York: Oak Publications, 1975).

Selected Discography

- Alligator 4734 *"Whoopin'"* (Cass, CD, LP)
- Document 536 *"Sonny Terry 1938-55"* (LP)
- Folkways 2201 *"Washboard Band Country Dance Music"*
- Folkways 2327 *"Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry"* (reissued in 1990 as Smithsonian/Folkways SF40011, on CD, LP and cassette).
- Folkways 2369 *"Sonny Terry, On the Road"*
- Folkways 2412 *"Pete Seeger and Sonny Terry in Concert"*
- Folkways 3817 *"Blues with Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee"*
- Folkways 3821 *"Sonny Terry's New Sound"*
- Folkways 32006 *"Sonny Terry's Washboard Band"*
- Folkways 32028 *"Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Get On Board"*
- Folkways 32035 *"Sonny Terry, Harmonica"*
- Krazy Kat 807 *"Sonny Terry"* (LP)
- Savoy 1137 *"Climbin' Up"* (LP)

Note: While some of these recordings are not available, all of the Folkways titles may be ordered by mail (see separate box on page one).

About the compiler

Kip Lornell received his Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from Memphis State University. In addition to teaching at the University of Virginia and the college of William and Mary, he was for many years associated with the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College and has been a postdoctoral Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution. His publications include *Happy in the Service of the Lord* (University of Illinois 1986) and *Virginia Blues, Country and Gospel Records 1902-1943—An Annotated Discography* (University Press of Kentucky, 1989).

Selections

1. Old Jabo

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar (Folkways 2327, November 1957).

"Jabo" refers to an older, almost mythical, character in southern Black folk culture whose humorous misfortunes are described in this lively song. He is reminiscent of another southern folk hero, Lost John, though Jabo is not as clever. The song's static harmony, a single chord, is enlivened by McGhee's inventive single string guitar runs. This piece also brings to mind other early Black secular songs such as "Ain't that Skippin' and Flyin'."

2.* Going Down Slow

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar (previously unissued recording from about 1950).

This is a rather early "cover" version of James Oden's sad lament about failing health, death, and a longing for the South. The song itself is a blues standard and has been recorded scores of times. Note the delicate interplay between Terry's harmonica and his long time companion's subtle guitar, which are the perfect complement to a very understated vocal. This recording was discovered on an acetate recording disc (used before magnetic tape was invented), in the archives of the Folkways Collection at the Office of Folklife Programs.

3. Crow Jane

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar (Folkways 3817, May 7, 1959).

The title of this piece does not refer to a bird, but was an African-American colloquial term for a woman. According to Terry this was one of the first songs he learned, in the 1920s. It is an eight bar blues well known in the Piedmont section of the southwestern United States.

4. Harmonica with Slaps

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; J.C. Burris, body slaps (Folkways 2369, 1958).

This spirited performance underscores the importance of percussive effects in African-American folk music. In other instances the percussion might be supplied on a washboard, spoons, or even the jawbone of an ox or cow. This is wonderful music for cutting a "buck and wing" dance, which Sonny Terry undoubtedly did at country dances on many Saturday nights in Shelby, North Carolina. Body slaps also provide the backdrop for the children's "Hambone" game.

5. Pick A Bale of Cotton

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar; Coyal McMahan, maracas (Folkways 32028, 1955).

Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) is the source for this song, which he popularized before his death in 1949. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee shared an apartment with Leadbelly for a time in the early 1940s and adopted a number of his songs. This lively performance utilizes a call and response format that is distinguished by McMahan's deep bass voice.

6. Dark Road

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, vocal and guitar; Gene Moore, drums (Folkways 2327, 1957).

This is a blues about losing a loved one and the subsequent desire to travel. Its tone is more sorrowful than many of Sonny Terry's recordings from this period. "Dark Road" is also distinguished by the shared vocal lead and Gene Moore's subtle drumming.

7. Skip to my Lou

Sonny Terry, harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar; William Edward Cook, washboard; Pete Seeger, banjo; Frank Robertson, bass (Folkways 2201, 1963).

"Skip to my Lou," "Cindy," "Old Joe Clark," and other similar tunes are most often associated with Anglo-American folk music. But they are part of a pan-racial southern tradition that extends back to the post-Reconstruction era. This version of the well known play-party song is highlighted by an expanded ensemble that includes not only a string bass but Cook's delightful, sometimes whimsical, washboard work and Pete Seeger's banjo.

8. The Woman is Killing Me

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; unknown performers on washboard, washtub bass, bones, and frying pan (Folkways 2327, 1957).

Although Sonny Terry is the only soloist, the large percussion ensemble accompanying him adds to the unique sound of this piece.

The syncopated rhythm gives it the feel of a deep south African-American life and drum band, with Terry taking the part of the life player.

9. Jail House Blues

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Sticks McGhee, guitar (Folkways 2369, 1958).

This lament is a soulful, slow blues with lyrics about the singer's release from jail. The texture is enriched by McGhee's electric guitar and the use of two harmonicas, one of which is probably played by Terry's nephew, J.C. Burris. It is also possible, though, that Terry himself simply overdubbed the second harmonica.

10. Fox Chase/Right On That Shore

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Folkways 2412, 1959).

The first part of this medley is a truly stunning, albeit brief, performance by Sonny Terry that underscores the subtlety of his playing. His mixture of voice and harmonica makes for a masterful work. An imitation of a fox chased by hounds is a test of the harmonica player's skills, though banjo and fiddle players sometimes play this as well. "Right On That Shore" is a late nineteenth century gospel hymn that Terry probably heard back early in the century. Seeger's piercing banjo provides a sharp contrast to the usual guitar accompaniment to Terry's harmonica.

11. Shortnin' Bread

Sonny Terry, jew's harp [jaws harp]; Brownie McGhee, guitar (Folkways 3821, 1958).

Although Terry is primarily remembered as a blues player, this is one of the many children's songs that Sonny Terry knew and occasionally performed. Moses Asch encouraged his artists to explore their full repertory and Folkways is the only record company to document the extent of Terry's versatility. His performance on the instrument variously called a "jew's harp" or "jaws harp" adds another dimension to his musical breadth.

12.* Sweet Woman

Sonny Terry, vocal and harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar (previously unissued acetate recording).

This is vintage, hard-hitting Terry and McGhee performing a tough blues, as they did so often for black audiences in both the South and New York City. This selection was encountered in the Folkways Archive with "S.T. & B.M." written in thick pencil on the label of the acetate recording disc. It is possibly an alternate take to "Solo 10-004" which was probably recorded early in 1946.