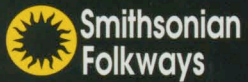




THE  
**NEW  
LOST  
CITY  
RAMBLERS**

.....  
**VOL. II**  
.....  
**1963-1973**

.....  
**OUT  
STANDING  
IN THEIR  
FIELD**  
.....



Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings  
Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies  
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**THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS**  
**VOLUME II 1963-1973**  
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- 1 John Brown's Dream 1:32
- 2 Riding on that Train 45 2:19
- 3 The Titanic 2:59
- 4 Don't Get Trouble in Your Mind 2:15
- 5 Cowboy Waltz 1:49
- 6 Shut Up in the Mines of Coal Creek 2:49
- 7 Private John Q 2:03
- 8 Old Johnny Booker Won't Do 3:01
- 9 I've Always Been a Rambler 3:16
- 10 Automobile Trip through Alabama 3:15
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the Whooping Cough 2:55
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Tracy Schwarz joined Mike Seeger and John Cohen in the New Lost City Ramblers after Tom Paley left the group in 1963. The new chemistry among these fine musicians led to 7 Folkways albums between 1963 and 1973. Intended as a companion to Volume I (SF 40036), the 27 tracks on this 72 minute anthology reflect the remarkable breadth of this trio's repertory and underscore their richly deserved place in the folk song movement.



**Smithsonian  
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*Compiled and annotated by Jon Pankake*  
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This is a compilation of songs from seven different albums issued between 1963 and 1973. Every New Lost City Ramblers album issued by Folkways Records is still available on audio cassette, with the original liner notes. These may be ordered from Folkways Cassettes, Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC 20560. Write for a free catalog, or telephone 202/287-3262, or fax 202/287-3699.

*On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

*Gone to the Country*, Folkways 2491

*Remembrance of Things to Come*,

Folkways 31035

*Radio Special #1*, Folkways EPC 603

*String Band Instrumentals*, Folkways 2492

*Modern Times*, Folkways 31027

*Rural Delivery Number One*,

Folkways 2496

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From the notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers, The Early Years, 1958-1962*  
compiled and annotated by Jon Pankake

“The New Lost City Ramblers earned a place in history for their central role in our recovery of the riches preserved on recordings of old-time music in the early years of the century. As individual performers, the members of the original trio—Mike Seeger, Tom Paley, and John Cohen—had become interested during the 1950s in performance style in American folk music. In 1958 they formed the New Lost City Ramblers, with the explicit intention of performing American folk music as it had sounded before radio, movies, and television had begun to homogenize our diverse regional folkways. They toured widely and issued nine long-playing record albums on Folkways Records in four years. Tom Paley left the group in 1962 and his place was taken by Tracy Schwartz.”

*The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume II, 1963-1973, Out Standing in Their Field*, presents a selection of the recordings made by the second trio between 1963 and their last Folkways recording in 1973. This is a companion volume to Smithsonian/Folkways 40036, *The New Lost City Ramblers, The Early Years, 1958-1962*, compiled and edited by John Pankake.

Although they no longer tour regularly, the New Lost City Ramblers do regularly come together for reunion concerts. Then their enthusiastic fans return to the concert halls to enjoy the mixture of music, humor, and lively respect for tradition that has always characterized the Ramblers' performances.

The following recordings of the New Lost City Ramblers with Mike Seeger, John Cohen, and Tom Paley are available from Folkways Cassettes: *The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways 2396; *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume II*, Folkways 2397; *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume III*, Folkways 2398; *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume IV*, Folkways 2399; *The New Lost City Ramblers, Volume V*, Folkways 2395; *Songs of the New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways 2494; *Old Timey Songs for Children*, Folkways 7064; *American Moonshine and Prohibition Songs*, Folkways 5263; *Songs from the Depression*, Folkways 5264; and two short extended-play albums now available on a single cassette: *The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways EPC 602, and *Earth is Earth*, Folkways EF 869.

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The New Lost City Ramblers: Carrying On  
an American "Folk" Tradition

In the study of old-time songs, one occasionally encounters an example which opens great vistas of cultural history. One such example is "Rhinordine," a ballad recorded in 1934 by the Gant Family of Austin, Texas, for John and Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress. The ballad describes a mountain-top encounter between a young woman and a mysterious armed man. Fearing the wrath of her parents for her forbidden wandering, she collapses into his arms as he promises to protect her. She asks his name; he tells her, "Rhinordine," as the song ends. The Gants' performance offers a much-changed American version of a British ballad more than two hundred years old, called in English texts "Reynardine." In these ancient versions, Reynardine appears to be a Green

Jon Pankake, January 1993

Man or Iron Hans, who has magical powers of seduction and who, from his castle in the deep woods, responds to the call of his name. By the time he has arrived in Texas, however, Rhinordine has become more prosaic, pleading, "I said, kind Miss, I am a bum although I'm not to blame."

We would like to know exactly how Rhinordine traveled from Sussex to Austin, at what times in his history the details of his story were changed, and who reduced him from a Green Man to a Texas bum. Such knowledge would be the stuff of a most interesting folklore study. But the details of this story are lost forever. The only thing we can be sure of is that Rhinordine's long journey from England to Texas was not conducted orally, handed down from one singer to another across generations in the way of folk ballads in cultures less literate than America's.

In 1836, a book called *The American Songster* printed "Rinordine" in a text so close to that sung by the Gant Family a hundred years later that we can be sure it is directly or indirectly the source of the Gants' version. What is most astonishing about the *Songster* is that it presents "Rinordine" not as the ancient ballad it already was, but as a "Modern and Popular Song." The *Songster* names thirty informants from whom its songs were collected, and all of those further identified were popular performers in the New York theater. Many songs in the book carry headnotes stating, "As sung with the greatest applause by Miss Clara Fisher in the musical farce of *The Invincibles* at the Park Theatre," or "As sung by Mr. Sloman, at the Baltimore Theatre, with unbounded applause."

As mind-boggling as it is, the prospect of "Rhinordine" being sung from the stage in Poe's New York may be more characteristic of many American folk song histories than one of uninterrupted generations of oral transmission. American folklorists have learned to be skeptical of the concept of "pure" folk songs uncontaminated by exposure to popular culture; indeed, the classification of texts as either meritorious orally-transmitted "pure" folk songs or unworthy "popular" songs which have appeared in print or on recordings often proves an unproductive one.

Perhaps a more valuable conception of the American "folk process" is one suggested by Norm Cohen in the notes for *Minstrels & Tunsmiths* (John Edwards Memorial Foundation LP-109, 1981). Cohen contrasts an American tradition of "domestic" perfor-

mance by amateur musicians coexisting with “public” performance by professional musicians with access to the media, with many songs moving back and forth between these two arenas of performance during their histories. Thus, “Rhinordine” appears publicly in print on eighteenth-century broadsides, perhaps based on earlier oral versions; it is then learned and sung by singers who cause it to be printed again in the nineteenth-century *Songster*, from which it is learned by the Gants or their sources; and it is returned by the Gants to public access once again via the twentieth-century aluminum recording disc of the Lomaxes. The same song has been both “folk” and “popular” at different times in its history, perhaps changed as much by professional musicians for purposes of public performance as by oral circulation among domestic musicians.

As public performers of domestic songs with histories similar to that of “Rhinordine,” the New Lost City Ramblers thus belong to a very old American tradition. They are the modern counterparts of those long-ago New York theater singers, performers who have taken old songs sung by amateur musicians in domestic settings and performed them “with unbounded applause” from the public stages of their own era, and in doing so have made the songs available to the media of their time. In addition to print, however, the Ramblers have had access to the phonograph record, the videotape, film, the television or radio broadcast, the cassette, and the compact disc. Many of the songs performed on this album—“Black Jack Daisy,” for example—have experienced just such a process of transmission as has “Rhinordine,” with the Ramblers’ performance providing

only the most recent means of returning the song from a domestic to a public setting. From the Ramblers’ performances, the songs have taken on a new life among the amateur musicians inspired by their example to sing and play old songs.

#### **The New Lost City Ramblers: 1963-1973**

The story of the relationship between the New Lost City Ramblers and their audience among the “Folk Song Revival” of the 1960s has been told in a previous collection, *The New Lost City Ramblers, The Early Years, 1958-1962* (Smithsonian/Folkways 40036, 1991).

Upon Tom Paley’s departure from the Ramblers in 1962, his place was taken in the group by Tracy Schwarz. Born in New York City but raised in New Jersey and Vermont, Tracy first heard country music on the radio at about the age of eight, and began to play the guitar at ten. During his college years in the late 1950s, he took up the fiddle in the active bluegrass scene in Washington, D.C., and continued playing during his nearly two-year military service tour in Germany. By 1962, when he joined the Ramblers,

Tracy brought to the group a mastery of smooth, early bluegrass-styled fiddling and an agile tenor voice which could handle both bluegrass harmonies and the Primitive Baptist solo style which he used in his unaccompanied ballads. His skills extended the temporal range within which the Ramblers could work both forward into the modern country music of the bluegrass era, and backward into the most archaic forms of folk song documented on folk song recordings.

The music heard on the present collection samples the best of the recordings made by the Ramblers from 1963 through 1973. Most striking are those performances which convey their mastery of very specific regional musical styles such as the manic double-fiddle Mississippi dance music of "Old Joe Bone" or the precise Virginia-North Caroli-

na "parlor" fiddling of "Old Johnny Booker Won't Do." No less impressive is the sense of constant innovation displayed during those ten years, manifest in the Ramblers' command of Cajun music, their original instrumental settings for unaccompanied songs such as "Black Jack Daisy" and "Who Killed Poor Robin?" and their continuing exploration of the African-American influences upon traditional Anglo-American string music.

Many of these performances were directly inspired by the Ramblers' association with traditional musicians they invited to share their stages during the later 1960s and the 1970s—Dock Boggs, Clarence Ashley, Elizabeth Cotten, Maybelle Carter, Dillard Chandler, Cousin Emmy, Dewey Balfa, Roscoe Holcomb, the McGee Brothers, and many more. When the final history of the

Ramblers is written, their role as interpretive intermediaries between the Folk Music Revival and traditional musicians who would otherwise have never been known to contemporary urban audiences may well overshadow their importance as performers.

By the 1970s, the restless individual creative-  
ties of Mike, John, and Tracy had become impossible to accommodate within the structure of a touring band, and family obligations of all three increasingly made a collective practice, travel, performance, and recording schedule untenable. John had established a second career as a distinguished filmmaker, work which took him not only to Kentucky and North Carolina but also several times to Peru, and he was working toward tenure as a professor of art as well. For a time in the early '70s he performed with Lynn and Jay Unger and Abby

Newton as the Putnam String County Band, playing old time and more contemporary music.

Tracy began farming near York, Pennsylvania, and toured and recorded with his wife Eloise and son Peter as Tracy's Family Band, playing a mix of old time, bluegrass, Cajun, and Tracy's original songs. Increasingly involved with playing and writing about Cajun music, Tracy traveled to Louisiana to learn the Cajun accordion and to produce in 1975 the first albums of instruction on the Cajun fiddle. Peter in 1984 received an apprenticeship grant from the NEA to study Cajun fiddle with the late Dewey Balfa, and for a time, Peter, Tracy, Dewey, and Dewey's nephew Tony Balfa performed as the Four Bachelors.

In the early 1970s, Mike and Tracy had begun performing more modern country

music as the Strange Creek Singers, with Alice Gerrard, Hazel Dickens, and Lamar Grier. Mike had continued his work as a soloist throughout the years with the Ramblers, but beginning in the 1970s he also recorded and toured Asia with Alice, taught folk music in college, produced a dazzling library of documentary recordings of old time musicians, formed an old time band called the Bent Mountain Boys with Andy Cahan and Paul Brown, produced videotapes of old time musicians and dancers, and recently has represented America at a world congress of jawharp players in Russia. Since their twentieth anniversary concert at Carnegie Hall in 1978, the Ramblers have performed together only occasionally, while continuing individually to carry on their calling of exploring, interpreting, and documenting in image, sound, print, and perfor-

mance the domestic arts of rural people who would otherwise have been denied access to the twentieth century's public—that is to say, global—media. Current plans call for a reunion tour in the summer of 1993, which will mark the New Lost City Ramblers' thirty-fifth anniversary. With the centuries of American music at their command, they will continue to surprise and astound us, performing “with unbounded applause” old-time music, learned from domestic musicians, for the public of the twenty-first century and beyond.

*Jon Pankake*  
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*  
*January 1993*

## PROGRAM NOTES

### 1. John Brown's Dream 1:31

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041  
Source: Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham, County 713  
Mike, dulcimer; Tracy, fiddle; John, banjo

While Tracy plays here in classical tuning, Tommy Jarrell played “John Brown's Dream” with his fiddle tuned to an open chord of octave pairs (AEAE), allowing him to play the melody in turn on the upper and on the lower pair of strings, and to sound prominent drone notes throughout. In their unique arrangement, the Ramblers have added Mike's dulcimer with its twin drone strings to recreate the intensity of Jarrell's performance of one of his signature tunes.

### 2. Riding on that Train 45 2:16

From: *Gone to the Country*, Folkways 2491  
Source: Wade Mainer and Zeke Morris, Bluebird 7298  
Tracy, voice and fiddle; Mike, banjo; John, guitar

Tracy's driving bowing and bluesy singing rather hauntingly resemble those of Steve Ledford, the great fiddler and singer on the original Mainer-Morris recording. That version of “Train 45” was among the first hill-billy recordings reissued for an urban audience, as part of John A. Lomax's set *Smoky Mountain Ballads* in 1941.



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### 3. The Titanic 2:56

From: *Remembrance of Things to Come*,  
Folkways 31035

Source: The Carter Family, Acme 1000  
Mike, lead voice and autoharp; Tracy, tenor  
voice and second guitar; John, bass voice  
and lead guitar

One of the more obscure performances of  
the Carter Family, who recorded this ballad  
for the small Acme label after the departure  
of Maybelle Carter for an independent  
career with her daughters, and her replace-  
ment in the original group by A.P.'s and  
Sara's guitar-playing children, Joe and  
Janette. Mike has created an autoharp lead  
such as Maybelle might well have played.  
The last two lines are stunning in their jux-  
tapposition of emotional naivete and techno-  
logical prescience.

### 4. Don't Get Trouble in Your Mind 2:17

From: *Radio Special #1*, Folkways EPC 603  
Source: Frank Blevins and His Tar Heel  
Rattlers, Columbia 15280

John, voice and banjo; Tracy, guitar;  
Mike, fiddle

Frank Blevins's string band masterpiece  
rather improbably joins desolate "white  
blues" stanzas to a sprightly dance tune, one  
that takes wings from its abrupt first-line  
shift to the subdominant. John has interpo-  
lated some stanzas from a field recording of  
the Kentucky banjo master, Rufus Crisp.

### 5. Cowboy Waltz 1:48

From: *String Band Instrumentals*,  
Folkways 2492

Source: Woody Guthrie, Folkways FP 10  
John, mandolin; Mike, fiddle; Tracy, guitar

Among the most ubiquitous of country  
recordings made in the 1920s and 1930s, the  
instrumental waltz and the religious song  
have largely been passed over by "Revival"  
musicians. The Ramblers themselves  
included in their recorded repertoire only  
one example of each. Woody Guthrie may  
have put this lovely waltz together himself  
from memories of the Oklahoma dances he  
played. It "borrows" melodic elements of  
the "Tulsa Waltz," recorded in 1929 by  
Guthrie's fellow Oklahoman Jack Cawley.

### 6. Shut Up in the Mines of Coal Creek

2:50  
From: *Modern Times*, Folkways 31027  
Source: Mrs. Elsie Lee Ward Brown, collec-  
tion of Ed Kahn.

Tracy's unaccompanied ballad singing style  
owes much to country church singing, espe-  
cially in the delicate "feathering" of the  
notes at the ends of lines. The song has  
been traced to a 1902 explosion at the  
Fraterville Mine in Tennessee in which  
nearly 200 miners died, and its text alleged-  
ly derives from letters and verse recovered  
from the mine. Mrs. Brown learned the  
song from a 1929 commercial recording by  
Kentuckian Green Bailey (as Dick Bell on  
Challenge 425). Tracy's performance returns  
the song to commercial recordings and to  
an audience far removed from but still  
touched by a long-ago tragedy.

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7. **Private John Q** 2:02

From: *Modern Times*, Folkways 31027

Source: Roger Miller, Smash MGS 27049

Mike, lead voice, lead guitar, mouth harp;

Tracy, tenor voice, banjo; John, guitar

Miller's original recording was released only about three years earlier than the Ramblers' 1968 performance, making "Private John Q" by far the newest country disc they ever worked from. Led by Mike's bluesy mouth harp, the Ramblers have imagined an instrumental setting which reveals the old-timey song hidden within Miller's modern Nashville hit, and which establishes Miller's beleaguered Private as a brother in arms to the befuddled G.I. in earlier hillbilly songs such as "That Crazy War" and "The Battleship of Maine."

8. **Old Johnny Booker Won't Do** 2:57

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

Source: Walter Smith (as Jerry Jordan),

Supertone 9407

John, voice and guitar; Mike and Tracy,

fiddle

The Virginia singer Walter Smith was one of the most interesting of the "Golden Age" artists whose long-forgotten music the Ramblers resurrected for their audiences. A professional medicine show entertainer who performed as "Old Toby," a red-wigged clown, Smith owned a repertoire of songs which, like "Old Johnny Booker," had deep roots in nineteenth-century popular culture, songs which had been performed from the minstrel and vaudeville stages by both black and white musicians, and taken up in turn by their rural audiences. On his 1929 recording session, Smith was accompanied by a crack fiddle and guitar team, Posey Rorer and Norman Woodlieff, both veterans of Charlie Poole's North Carolina Ramblers.

John, Mike, and Tracy have here one-upped Rorer's and Woodlieff's synchronized fiddle and guitar accompaniment by adding a second fiddle which takes octave flights.

9. **I've Always Been a Rambler** 3:12

From: *Rural Delivery Number One*,

Folkways 2496

Source: G. B. Grayson and Henry Whitter,

Victor 40324

Tracy, voice and fiddle; John, banjo;

Mike, guitar

The blind fiddler Gillam Bannom Grayson was one of the most melancholy and moving singers of the Golden Age of country recordings. Tracy here captures much of Grayson's lonesome magic in a song whose protagonist's depth of feeling is matched only by the Tennessee limits of his horizons ("Went on to Johnson City/Going to see this wide world o'er").

10. **Automobile Trip through Alabama** 3:15

From: *Rural Delivery Number One*,

Folkways 2496

Source: Red Henderson and Emmett

Bankston, OKeh 45283

John, voice; Mike, banjo

Surely the most bizarre side ever released on old-time recordings, this monologue depicting the comic resurrection of a Ford automobile became a favorite Ramblers performance through John's mastery of the art of deadpan. Red Henderson was a professional entertainer working out of Atlanta in the 1920s with Earl Johnson's string bands, but we have no information on what role this recitation may have played in his performances or what part he played in its composition. Whoever first imagined it displayed a thoroughly American love of and skill at depicting surreal, kinetic action of the kind that also informs the Disney Silly Symphonies cartoons, the Sut Lovingood stories, and the Krazy Kat comic strips.

11. **Who Killed Poor Robin?** 3:46

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

Source: Mrs. Edith Harmon, near Maryville, Tennessee, 1939, Library of Congress AAFS 2907 A2

Mike, voice, guitar, mouth harp; Tracy, fiddle; John, banjo

In a superb feat of “Revival” musicianship, the Ramblers have here created a beautiful, simple, and tasteful string-band setting for Mrs. Harmon’s eerie, minor-key unaccompanied ballad. The aesthetics of this performance are those of the late Norton, Virginia, master banjoist and singer Dock Boggs, whose “graveyard” music not only lives on but continues to blossom and bear anew in the creativity of the musicians who came under his spell.

12. **My Wife Died on Saturday Night** 2:15

From: *String Band Instrumentals*, Folkways 2492

Source: Dr. Humphrey Bate and His Possum Hunters, Brunswick 271

Mike, voice and mouth harp; John, banjo; Tracy, guitar

Cheap, portable, and easy to learn, the harmonica was very likely the most widely-played musical instrument in America in the first half of the twentieth century. Well-documented on pre-World War II country recordings, the instrument has fared poorly among Revivalists, who have preferred the more versatile fiddle, banjo, and guitar. Consequently, early recordings of both Anglo- and African-American masters of the mouth harp remain lesser known and seldom studied. The harmonica-led breakdowns of Dr. Humphrey Bate were featured on the earliest broadcasts of the Grand Ole Opry, and Bate’s recordings for Brunswick remain among the most exciting perfor-

mances of dance music ever recorded. The Ramblers’ tribute to Dr. Bate is an early example of Mike’s continuing interest in and developing skill on the mouth harp.

13. **Little Satchel** 2:46

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

Source: Fred Cockerham, County 713

Tracy, voice and three-finger banjo; John, clawhammer banjo; Mike, guitar

Within ten years of the NLCR’s first performances, young musicians and scholars stimulated by their example were seeking out and documenting contemporary old-time musicians such as Fred Cockerham, whose banjo-accompanied solo performance of “Little Satchel” is one of the treasures recorded during the revival. The song is Fred’s own compilation of and elaboration upon lines and images from the “Silver Dagger”/“Katy Dear” family of ballads. The Ramblers have created an entirely new setting for Tracy’s high lonesome vocal performance, combining clawhammer and finger-picked banjo in the complementary double-banjo style of early bluegrass musicians Happy Smith and Larry Richardson.

14. **Black Bottom Strut** 2:07

From: *Remembrance of Things to Come*,  
Folkways 31035

Source: Three Stripped Gears, OKeh 45553  
Mike, mandolin; John, guitar; Tracy, spoons

John Godrich and Robert Dixon in their authoritative *Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942* list the mysterious Three Stripped Gears as “more than likely” African-American musicians. The group recorded in Atlanta in October–November 1931, at the same time as did the Mississippi Sheiks, who, in 1930, had recorded mandolin rags similar to “Black Bottom Strut.” The two groups may well have shared personnel, perhaps even mandolinist Charlie McCoy. John Cohen observes that the original recording of “Black Bottom Strut” “has rhythm guitar plus a second guitar which plays very strange passages and runs. The spoons were Tracy’s addition, and several of the weird guitar parts have drifted over to the mandolin.” Tracy provides an unexpected coda by tossing the spoons onto a triangle present at the session for the Cajun pieces.

15. **The Cat’s Got the Measles, the Dog’s Got the Whooping Cough** 2:56

From: *Remembrance of Things to Come*,  
Folkways 31035

Source: Walter Smith (as Jerry Jordan),  
Supertone 9407

Mike, voice and guitar; Tracy, fiddle

Walter Smith recorded this song at the same 1929 session as “Old Johnny Booker Won’t Do,” and Rorer and Woodlieff provided the same refined and intricate fiddle and guitar accompaniment, the latter played in F fingering capoed up to G. Tony Russell has pointed out that the title sentence of “The Cat’s Got the Measles...” appears as part of the refrain of a British dance tune, but the text’s reference to the devil and the good gal and the sexual brag of taking women from the monkey men appear in many blues, indicating a mixed Anglo- and African-American origin for this song.

16. **Dear Okie** 2:12

From: *Modern Times*, Folkways 31027

Source: Doye O’Dell, Exclusive 33X

John, voice and guitar; Tracy, fiddle;  
Mike, banjo

Doye O’Dell’s Okie-California composition is the closest the Ramblers came to performing in the Western Swing idiom of country string band music influenced by big band jazz phrasing and rhythm. The lyrics depict the post-Depression Oleanna of southern California with a sly mixture of humor and irony worthy of Woody Guthrie at his wittiest.

17. **Smoketown Strut** 2:12

From: *String Band Instrumentals*,  
Folkways 2492

Source: Sylvester Weaver, OKeh 8152  
Mike, guitar

The origins of American finger-picked folk guitar are aurally untraceable, since the earliest recordings we have of folk guitarists capture masters such as the African-American Sylvester Weaver already performing in full-blown and sophisticated styles. We can conjecture that the right hand owes a debt to nineteenth-century parlor guitar and banjo picking techniques, but the unmistakable swing of “Smoketown Strut” can only have come from a mating with ragtime piano in some long-forgotten exchange of musical ideas before World War I. The title refers to the smoke-grimed industrial-tenement district in Louisville where Weaver lived. Mike’s beautiful performance here reflects his long-standing interest in the African-American origins of old-time guitar picking.

18. **The Little Girl and the Dreadful Snake**

3:26

From: *Radio Special #1*, Folkways EPO 603

Source: Bill Monroe and His Bluegrass

Boys, Decca 28878

Mike, lead voice and mandolin; Tracy, tenor voice and fiddle; John, guitar

The sentimentality and the symbolism of this song will be equally risible to urban, Freudian-educated audiences, but the dying child has a long and honorable lineage in popular and folk song, and to Southern rural audiences this song describes an all-too-real danger. Mike sings Jimmy Martin's lead and Tracy sings Bill Monroe's tenor harmony in one of the Ramblers' earliest excursions into "pure" bluegrass, lacking only the banjo and string bass of Monroe's classic band.

19. **Fishing Creek Blues** 1:58

From: *Rural Delivery Number One*,

Folkways 2496

Tracy, fiddle; John, guitar; Mike, banjo

Tracy composed this lovely and unusual fiddle tune in 1964. He recalls, "Right after viewing the opening of the World's Fair on TV, I turned the set off and took out my fiddle. Nothing I already knew matched my mood, so I started noodling around with the exact sounds I was after, and lo and behold, out came a tune." Tracy's friends vetoed his original title, "World's Fair," and so the final title honors Fishing Creek in York County, Pennsylvania. Tracy detects in his composition the influences of tunes such as "Cripple Creek," Bill Monroe's "Brown County Breakdown," and the Stanley Brothers' "Suwannee River Hoedown," but the tune is true to so many fiddle tunes that it can sound "Ozark" on one hearing and then "Texas" on another. In recent years, other fiddlers have taken up the tune and,

in the ways of tradition, it is now played by musicians who have no idea of its recent origin or of the identity of its author.

20. **'31 Depression Blues** 3:10

From: *Modern Times*, Folkways 31027

Source: Ed Sturgill and His Banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157

Mike, voice and banjo; Tracy, guitar

While most "Revival" musicians have limited their excursions into old-time music to dance tunes and instrumentals, the Ramblers have shown an unusual interest in the often bitter "hard-times" songs of coal miners and other rural industrial workers. The long shadow of former miner Dock Boggs inspires this performance, which Mike learned from a recording by its composer, Ed Sturgill of Appalachia, Virginia, who knew Dock and was influenced by his music. Sturgill issued his performance on his own record label. The tune resembles that of one of Dock's laments, "The Bright Sunny South."

21. **Black Jack Daisy** 2:30

From: *Remembrance of Things to Come*,

Folkways 31035

Source: Dillard Chandler, Old Love Songs and Ballads, Folkways FA 2309

John, voice and banjo

John enjoyed a remarkable three-way creative relationship with Dillard Chandler of Sodom, North Carolina. As a folklorist, John recorded Chandler's songs and issued them on the album *Old Love Songs and Ballads* (Folkways FA 2309, 1964); as a filmmaker, he documented Chandler's life and place in his community in his film *The End of an Old Song* (1967); as a musician, he created this banjo setting for Chandler's unaccompanied version of the British "Gypsie Laddie" ballad. The banjo is in a modal tuning, FCFBbC.

22. **Victory Rag** 2:01

From: *String Band Instrumentals*,

Folkways 2492

Source: Maybelle Carter

John, guitar; Mike, autoharp

John learned this pretty rag from Maybelle Carter when the Ramblers played the Ash Grove with her in 1963, and Mike created an autoharp accompaniment and lead with which to complement the guitar. Mrs. Carter recalled learning "Victory Rag" from a guitar player at the Old Dominion Barn Dance in Richmond, Virginia, in the 1950s. She subsequently recorded it on her album *Pickin' and Singin'* (Smash 27041). The Ramblers' recording of this tune has popularized it over the years as a standard display piece for city guitar and autoharp pickers.

23. **The Little Carpenter** 2:45

From: *Gone to the Country*, Folkways 2491

Source: Blind James Howard, Harlan, Kentucky, Library of Congress AAFS 1376 B2

Mike, voice and fiddle; John, banjo

The familiar ballad theme of the triumph of love over wealth and position receives an exceptionally tender treatment in this rare item from the songbag of Blind James Howard. Some years ago, we stumped a well-known folklorist with this song: he had never encountered anything like it and could give us no leads on sources or printed versions. The diction and the mysterious rituals of handkerchiefs and finger rings would seem to point to an Old World origin for the song. John has added a banjo accompaniment to Mike's fiddling, in the spirit of Howard's fellow Kentuckians, Dick Burnett and Leonard Rutherford.

24. **On Our Turpentine Farm** 2:48

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

Source: Pigmeat Pete and Catjuice Charlie, Columbia 14485

John, lead voice and guitar; Mike, tenor voice and mandolin; Tracy, vocal interjections and lead guitar

This performance marks the Ramblers' sole excursion into the African-American genre of "hokum blues." Popular during the 1920s, hokum set its typically rowdy or ribald stanzas within a hot, jazzy accompaniment, revealing the humorous, "good-time" shadow side of the country blues. "Pete" and "Charlie" were pseudonyms for Wesley Wilson and Harry McDaniel, whose stanzas here display what John calls "the cruel realities of country living." In the spirit of hokum, John has added the last stanza as a comment on certain artists he has known.

25. **Parlez-Nous à Boire** 3:38

From: *Remembrance of Things to Come*,

Folkways 31035

Source: Dewey Balfa, Basile, Jefferson Davis Parish, Louisiana.

Mike, voice and lead fiddle; Tracy, second fiddle; John, triangle

**26. Valse du Bambocheur 2:58**

From: *On the Great Divide*, Folkways 31041

Source: Dewey Balfa, The Balfa Brothers  
Play Traditional Cajun Music, Swallow 6011  
Tracy, voice and lead fiddle; Mike, second  
fiddle; John, guitar

In 1987 Michael Doucet of the band Beau-soleil presented Garrison Keillor with an award on behalf of the Cajun people of Louisiana in appreciation of Keillor's role in popularizing Cajun music to a national audience on his radio program "A Prairie Home Companion." In retrospect, the award could as appropriately have been given to the New Lost City Ramblers, who introduced Cajun songs and performing style not only to Keillor but to all of us who discovered the "soul music" of the "Folk Song Revival" through the Ramblers' own performances and those of Cajun musicians such as Dewey Balfa, with whom they shared their stages. "Parlez-Nous à Boire" was the first recording of a Cajun song by

"Revival" musicians. The Ramblers continued to perform Cajun music in their appearances throughout the 1970s, and Tracy began to play Cajun accordion as well as the fiddle.

**27. Old Joe Bone 1:57**

From: *Rural Delivery Number One*,

Folkways 2496

Source: Carter Brothers and Son,

OKeh 45289

John, voice and guitar; Mike and Tracy,  
fiddle

The Ramblers reserved their place in Old Time Music Heaven with their recreation of the music of this wild, obscure Mississippi band. The Carters play irresistible, driving dance music on twin fiddles tuned and played in octaves and accompanied by a guitarist who shouts out stanzas and rhythmic nonsense syllables. So exuberantly do the Carters attack their tunes, the fiddles occasionally get out of phase and the singer

becomes incoherent. The sung syllables may possibly be intended as a supplementary rhythm instrument, in the manner of Scots mouth music, or "diddling the chorus." The Ramblers customarily closed their sets with a rousing performance of a Carter Brothers and Son tune, occasions which became, says John, "an exercise in improvisation within the limits of great consistency and madness."

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