

# LUCINDA WILLIAMS



Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings  
Office of Folklife Programs  
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington DC 20560  
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## LUCINDA WILLIAMS

### Ramblin'

1. **Ramblin' On My Mind** 2:30
2. **Me and My Chauffeur** 3:12
3. **Motherless Children** 3:31
4. **Malted Milk Blues** 2:29
5. **Disgusted** 2:28
6. **Jug Band Music** 2:22
7. **Stop Breakin' Down** 3:20
8. **Drop Down Daddy** 3:23
9. **Little Darling Pal of Mine** 2:59
10. **Make Me Down a Pallet on Your Floor** 3:50
11. **Jambalaya (On the Bayou)** 3:05
12. **Great Speckled Bird** 2:55
13. **You're Gonna Need that Pure Religion** 3:07
14. **Satisfied Mind** 4:06

#### Original Credits:

Recorded at Malaco Studios, Jackson, MS, Sept. 1978

Engineered by Gerald "Wolf" Stephenson

Produced by Tom Royals

Vocal and 12-string guitar – Lucinda Williams

6-string guitar – John Grimaudo

#### Reissue Credits:

Cover Photo courtesy of Lucinda Williams

Cover design by Carol Hardy

Remastered by Malcolm Addey and Matt Walters

Reissue supervised by Matt Walters



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These first recordings of Lucinda Williams from 1978 reveal an artist with a gift for interpreting Robert Johnson, Memphis Minnie and others. She brings to these songs her already distinctive sound, one filled with melancholy yet powerfully direct.

Notes by John Morthland enclosed



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## LUCINDA WILLIAMS Ramblin'

1. **Ramblin' On My Mind** 2:30  
(Robert Johnson/King of Spades Music, BMI)
2. **Me and My Chauffeur** 3:12  
(Memphis Minnie/ARC Music Corp., BMI)
3. **Motherless Children** 3:31  
(Traditional)
4. **Malted Milk Blues** 2:29  
(Robert Johnson/King of Spades Music, BMI)
5. **Disgusted** 2:28
6. **Jug Band Music** 2:22  
(Memphis Jug Band/ARC Music Corp., BMI)
7. **Stop Breakin' Down** 3:20  
(Robert Johnson/King of Spades Music, BMI)
8. **Drop Down Daddy** 3:23
9. **Little Darling Pal of Mine** 2:59  
(A.P. Carter/APRF - Peer Southern Org., BMI)
10. **Make Me Down a Pallet on Your Floor** 3:50  
(Traditional)
11. **Jambalaya (On the Bayou)** 3:05  
(Hank Williams/Hiram/Acuff Rose, BMI)
12. **Great Speckled Bird** 2:55  
(Rev. Guy Smith/Dutchess, BMI)
13. **You're Gonna Need that Pure Religion** 3:07  
(traditional)
14. **Satisfied Mind** 4:06  
(Joe Hayes and Jack Rhodes/Trio, Fort Knox, BMI)

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Look for Lucinda Williams' second album, *Happy Woman Blues* (SF 40003). After recording *Ramblin' on My Mind*, Lucinda went back to Houston and cut a second album for Folkways that featured stylish originals, bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary.

This extraordinary album deserves its status as a singer/songwriter classic. Originally issued in 1980, it has been remastered and features updated notes.

## Lucinda Williams, Ramblin' by John Morthland

When it was first released in 1979, *Ramblin' on My Mind* could not have been more out of step. Lucinda Williams, who did indeed have ramblin' on her mind in those days, was living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, when she cut this; she had just returned there from Houston, where she was a regular on a vibrant folk scene that included Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith, and Townes Van Zandt.

A friend in New York City suggested to her on the phone that she do an album for Folkways. Another friend knew somebody at Malaco, the Jackson, Mississippi, studio (and label), then cutting the last of the classic Southern rhythm and blues records. So Lucinda went there and recorded this album in one afternoon.

At the time, her live sets included a smattering of folkish originals, some traditional material, and interpretations of songs made popular by modern folkies from Bob Dylan on down. But she felt she "couldn't do the Dylan-type stuff because Judy Collins and them had already done that. Plus there was the thing of being on

Folkways, which was so purist I didn't think they'd take other kinds of stuff." So Lucinda set out to cut an album of "purist stuff," and *Ramblin' on My Mind* was the result. Though she says she "never considered it a blues album," it's dominated by blues just the same.

Lucinda had begun singing and playing in 1965, at age twelve, when Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* was the album on every hip turntable in the Louisiana college town where she then lived. Though too young to be a part of the modern folk scene while it was still flourishing, she nonetheless followed her passion for the music back—first to *The Blues Project*, the landmark Elektra sampler of urban white bohos with the blues, and then, ultimately, to the original country blues artists such as Skip James and Bukka White. "When I heard the Delta blues I just said 'this is it'" she recalls. "I just fell in love with it." Around 1971, she began incorporating blues into her own shows.

"I'd just try songs out and if I felt comfortable singing them, if I could adapt them to suit me, I'd keep singing them. There were so many I liked but couldn't sing. I always felt like I had to identify with the song personally if it wasn't my own song but I was going to sing it. So I

always changed the genders to make it from a woman's point of view. And it helped if it was a really unknown song," she chuckles. "The more obscure it was, the better."

The bluesman who best fit that description for her was the Reverend Pearly Brown, a blind street singer and slide guitarist from Macon, Georgia, who recorded one album for Folklyric. Lucinda remembers him sounding like Mississippi Fred McDowell, only rawer. His mystique was further enhanced by the fact that Lucinda's family had once lived in Macon, though she was a child and never encountered Brown. His was the first country blues album she learned from, and the source for her versions here of "You're Gonna Need That Pure Religion," "Motherless Children," and "Great Speckled Bird" (a spiritual more commonly associated with country star Roy Acuff).

Robert Johnson wasn't that obscure in blues circles, but his tormented music and mythologically resonant life and death led her to learn the three songs here and several more. "Most of his songs had similar themes, but you could probably interpret them different ways," she says. "I just liked what he had to say, the gutsiness of the lyrics." Memphis

Minnie was virtually the only country blueswoman an interpreter like Lucinda had to identify with, while she learned Li'l Son Jackson's "Disgusted" from an album recorded live at a Louisiana prison. Mix in a couple more blues and another tune or two out of country music and—amazing grace!—you've got one of the most traditionalist albums of the late 1970s. Lucinda's blues may not have stung quite as hard as the originals, but that wasn't really what she was about, and she certainly brought her own brand of melancholy to the vocals and her own steady touch to the guitar parts.

Not that many people were listening, or would have been even if her debut hadn't come out on tiny, esoteric Folkways. The folkish singer-songwriters who had dominated pop music earlier in the decade had given way to rockier sorts like Billy Joel. Blues—black or white, country or city, purist or hybrid—was definitely in one of its periodic down-cycles. The old folk scene itself was pretty much on hold, and as for Lucinda, well, by 1979 she'd made the big move to Greenwich Village and was finding something other than what she'd bargained for.

"I had this whole romantic image of New York and the folk scene and community in

the Village," she says ruefully. "By the time I actually got there it was right after punk and people walking down the street . . . weren't real happy or romantic or anything like that. I was too late, and I didn't stay long."

Lucinda went back to Houston and cut a second album for Folkways (*Happy Woman Blues*, reissued in 1990 as Smithsonian Folkways SF 40003) that featured stylish originals bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary. For the next decade-plus she bounced back and forth between Houston and Austin. In 1984, she moved to Los Angeles, and since the 1988 release of *Lucinda Williams*, a critics' favorite and also one of the best-selling indie albums of the era, she's remained poised for Big Things.

Lucinda's most popular new songs may appear to speak a different language, but their imagery remains rooted in the South. And when you strip them down to their bare bones, you face the exact same issues—displacement, yearning, spirituality, the myriad ways men and women find to hurt each other—that you face in the blues songs of *Ramblin' on My Mind*: further proof that what this world needs most is more out-of-step people.

## Folkways and The Folk Music Revival

Moses Asch founded Folkways Records in 1947, but had been recording folk, blues, and jazz musicians since the early 1940s—among them Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, and Mary Lou Williams. Asch wanted to capture the whole world of sound through recordings, and to make available to the public the voices of those who rarely found a hearing on mass-market national media.

Folkways Records had a tremendous influence on musicians and public alike. Asch not only issued the first recordings of fledgling performers such as Lucinda Williams, Doc Watson, and Dave Van Ronk, he also reissued anthologies of out-of-print 78 rpm recordings that inspired them. In addition, Asch encouraged Sam Charters, Ralph Rinzler, Mike Seeger and many others to visit rural areas, record the best musicians, and release them to an enthusiastic audience on Folkways.

Many performers recorded their first one or two albums for Folkways, before moving on to other record companies that promised better distribution and higher royalties (whether or not they delivered them). Other performers recorded their last albums for Folkways—recordings made when their music was perhaps no



longer commercially fashionable but still possessed the musical artistry that made it popular in the first place.

Folkways provided a service to the public that no other record company has ever offered on such a large scale: Asch kept every recording he issued in print, whether it sold 5 copies or 5000 copies each year. This meant that if someone took a sudden interest in a given style or performer, every Folkways album ever issued of it was still available. People could discover and rediscover the Harry Smith Collection, and the first recordings of many important artists.

Following Asch's policy, the Smithsonian Institution is keeping all the Folkways recordings available. Contact us and we will send you a free catalogue. In addition, we are re-issuing part of the collection on a new label, Smithsonian/Folkways. Ramblin' is one of these reissues. Among the projects already completed and available on CD and cassette are:

Lucinda Williams, *Happy Woman Blues*  
(SF 40003)

Jean Ritchie and Doc Watson at Folk  
City (SF 40005)

Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry Sing  
(SF 40011)

The Doc Watson Family (SF 40012)

Pete Seeger, *Singalong at Sanders  
Theatre 1980* (SF 40027/28)

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

American Banjo Three Finger and  
Scruggs Style (SF 40037)

Mountain Music Bluegrass Style  
(SF 40038)

The Folkways Years Series: Anthologies that bring you the breadth and brilliance of Folkways artists, compiled from their various albums by knowledgeable specialists and accompanied by extensive liner notes.

Sonny Terry, *The Folkways Years*  
(SF 40033)

Brownie McGhee, *The Folkways Years*  
(SF 40034)

The New Lost City Ramblers, *The Early  
Years 1958-1962* (SF 40036)

Dave Van Ronk, *The Folkways Years  
1959-1961* (SF 40041)

For a catalogue write: Folkways  
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202/287-3262.