

# LEAD BELLY

where did you sleep last night

LEAD BELLY LEGACY VOL. 1



Smithsonian/Folkways



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Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings  
Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies  
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600  
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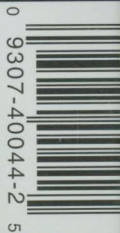
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## LEAD BELLY WHERE DID YOU SLEEP LAST NIGHT?

Forty years after his death, Lead Belly's songs and style continue to influence folk, blues, and rock artists including Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, Neil Young, William Styron, Ben Harper, Keb' Mo', and Dionne Farris. Between 1941 and 1947 Lead Belly recorded some of his best music in Moses Asch's tiny New York studio. The only surviving Asch masters of Lead Belly are now part of Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings. For the first time in almost fifty years these original acetates have been carefully remastered and newly annotated. After decades Lead Belly's legendary guitar rings and the bass thumps with the strength of John Henry's hammer.

- 1** Irene **2** Pick a Bale of Cotton **3** Good Morning Blues  
**4** Grey Goose **5** In the Pines **6** Take This Hammer  
**7** On a Monday **8** Cotton Fields **9** Bring a Little Water  
Sylvie **10** Moanin' **11** Laura **12** Duncan and Brady  
**13** Rock Island Line **14** Big Fat Woman **15** New Orleans  
(The Rising Sun Blues) **16** Chicken Crowing for Midnight  
**17** You Can't Lose Me Cholly **18** Sally Walker **19** Ha Ha  
This a Way **20** Yellow Gal **21** Green Corn **22** Let It  
Shine on Me **23** Meeting at the Building **24** In the Evening  
When the Sun Goes Down **25** Pigmeat **26** Blind Lemon  
**27** Bottle Up and Go **28** Sukey Jump **29** Old Riley  
**30** 4, 5, and 9 **31** No Good Rider **32** Shorty George  
**33** Duncan and Brady (Acapella) **34** Leaving Blues

150  
Smithsonian



## LEAD BELLY WHERE DID YOU SLEEP LAST NIGHT?

- 1 Irene (Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Ludlow, BMI)
- 2 Pick a Bale of Cotton
- 3 Good Morning Blues
- 4 Grey Goose \*
- 5 In the Pines
- 6 Take This Hammer
- 7 On a Monday
- 8 Cotton Fields
- 9 Bring a Little Water Sylvie
- 10 Moanin'
- 11 Laura
- 12 Duncan and Brady
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(J. Lomax, A. Lomax, G. Turner/TRO-Ludlow Music, Inc., BMI)
- 16 Chicken Crowing for Midnight
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(Leroy Carr & Don Raye/On Backstreet Music-MCA, Inc., ASCAP)
- 25 Pigmeat
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- 28 Sukey Jump
- 29 Old Riley
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- 32 Shorty George
- 33 Duncan and Brady (Acapella)
- 34 Leaving Blues

*All songs written or arranged by Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music, Inc., BMI, unless otherwise indicated*

## INTRODUCTION

This recording is a testament to two men, the Louisiana African-American musician and composer, Lead Belly, and a New York recording engineer and record company owner named Moses Asch. Their partnership created a lasting document of Lead Belly's wide repertoire. The songs Lead Belly recorded for Asch had a great influence on the folk music revival to come in the 1950s and 1960s and have become standards that are sung in schools and around the camp fire. Whenever possible, we have carefully transferred and reissued these recordings from the original acetate masters that came to the Smithsonian with the acquisition of the Moses and Frances Asch Collection in 1987. When the acetate no longer existed, we used the best possible source we could find for the song. After decades these recordings can again be heard the way they sounded in the early 1940's, for in the original masters you can still hear the ringing of the guitar and thumping of the bass.

Lead Belly (1888-1949) was born Huddie Ledbetter in Louisiana and during the sixty years of his life became a truly

amazing repository for all types of American folk and popular music. He had an amazing capacity for memorizing any song after hearing it once. Lead Belly spent a large portion of his adult life in prison until he was "discovered" on a Library of Congress recording trip by John Avery Lomax. Lomax arranged an early release for Lead Belly and took the singer to New York City. Lead Belly traveled with Lomax and his son Alan for a number of years until they parted ways in New York City, a long way from Lead Belly's Louisiana-Texas roots. We won't go into detail on Lead Belly's life, for much has been written before. We recommend the Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell biography, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), as a fine account.

It was at this point that Lead Belly met someone else who would prove to be instrumental in his life. Moses Asch (1905-1986) was a radio engineer in New York who had started a small record company, Asch Records, to supply local hi-fi stores with recordings of Jewish performers and cantors. Asch was a friend of Sy Rady, a Broadway producer, who introduced him to Lead Belly. Lead Belly was

unhappy about the way the Lomaxes presented him to the public. They would stress his prison background, even going so far as to dress him in convict clothes on stage. Lead Belly was a proud man who wanted more than anything to be a musician and if possible a movie star. The way Lead Belly was being portrayed also irritated Asch. "To me, Lead Belly was the most formal human being that ever existed. His clothing was always the best pressed, the best. His shoes were \$60 shoes in 1947! Where he might not have had much money to come home with, he had to have a cane. Lead Belly treated himself as a noble person, and when he recorded knowing that this was for people to understand what he stood for, he recorded exactly the same way" (Asch to Izzy Young). Asch and Lead Belly understood each other and became friends. Lead Belly's records were the first records Asch made in the folk music field and marked the beginning of a long and important career. Asch went on to document the sounds of the world in an extensive collection of sound recordings on Asch, Disc and Folkways.

Lead Belly made some of the most

important music of his career in Moe Asch's tiny studio. Asch envisioned himself as a documenter and didn't like to interfere with the music. He thought of himself as "the pen with which these artists write" (Asch to Izzy Young). Lead Belly had made a number of 78 rpm recordings for RCA Bluebird, Columbia, and Capitol, but none of them was commercially successful. Major record companies didn't know what to do with him and tried to sell him as a blues musician. Lead Belly's large repertoire included children's play party songs, blues, American folk songs, prison songs, accordion pieces, cowboy songs, and the pop songs of the day. This didn't fit the preconceived notion of a Southern black man with a guitar. It was Asch who let Lead Belly record anything he wished, and Lead Belly kept coming back to Asch's studio when his flirtations with stardom failed.

Sessions with Lead Belly would usually include Asch and his partner Marian Distler. They were informal affairs with Asch or Distler requesting songs they liked or asking for certain types of songs. The arrangement between the two men was like many of Asch's relationships with his

artists; he gave them money when they asked. Asch's business ledger lists numerous entries for "H. Ledbetter- \$20)." Asch and Lead Belly remained friends until Huddie's death from Lou Gehrig's disease in 1949.

The Asch Collection at the Smithsonian also contains many long letters from Lead Belly to Asch, which frequently started off asking for money and then would go on for pages about Lead Belly's impressions of traveling and other things he had recently experienced. These letters were often more of a personal than a business nature.

Moses Asch over the years owned Asch, Disc, Solo, Signature, and Folkways Records. Each time he opened a new record label he would release Lead Belly sides among his first titles. Unfortunately for Asch, financial difficulties caused him to lose some of his masters over the years. Some of the other glass masters simply broke with age. During World War II, Asch became partners with Herbert Harris of the Stinson Trading Company. Due to war shortages, Asch had no acetate masters to record on but had the musicians and recording equipment. Harris had the opposite problem. After the war Stinson and

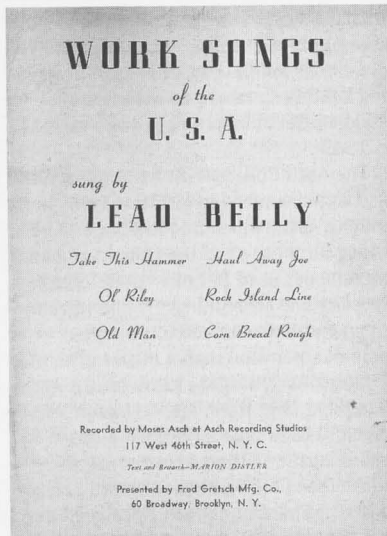
Asch split up and Harris got some of the recordings and equipment and Asch the rest. Moe immediately released alternate versions of the songs on his new Disc label. However, the recordings he no longer had kept appearing in more and more inferior versions. Although the masters that went to Herbert Harris apparently no longer exist, recordings have been released using copies of old records many generations removed from the originals. Many of these releases have some of the song titles spelled wrong on the jacket and virtually no documentation. Asch always believed in putting an informative booklet in each one of his releases. These have appeared in both authorized and apparently unauthorized releases. The original recording process has been cited as the reason for the poor sound quality on some of these releases, but actually Asch's acetates have amazingly good sound quality in their grooves fifty years later. Asch always felt that his recordings of Lead Belly were some of his most important work, and it pained him to see them treated this way.

This is the first in a series of reissues of the Lead Belly/Asch recordings. It is basi-



cally a reissue of the first two of four volumes Asch released in the early 1950s called "Leadbelly's Legacy" (Folkways 2004 and 2014), put out as a memorial to Huddie. We have taken the same songs and released the best possible rendition of each that we could find in the Moses Asch Collection. We have added a number of out-takes, unreleased and alternative versions, as a CD can hold far more music than the original 10" LPs could. We hope this series will stand as an enduring testament to the work these two men did in the early 1940s, will reinterest people in Lead Belly's work, and will show off Asch's work for what it was.

Compiler's note: Lead Belly's name has been frequently spelled Leadbelly over the years. We have spelled it Lead Belly at the request of the Ledbetter family. This is the way Lead Belly wanted it. Moses Asch spelled it that way on his earliest recordings of Lead Belly.



## NOTES ON THE SONGS

The song annotations include information on the provenance of the recording, Lead Belly's introductions, and suggestions of sources for additional information. We have attempted to provide information on the source and date of the recording where it is known. Moses Asch frequently had multiple takes of each song in his collection. Lead Belly often started his songs with an introduction, and the quotes in bold come from such song introductions he made both in the studio and on radio. Some of them sound dated by late twentieth century sensibilities, but they represent the true words of the performer.

To the extent possible we also have attempted to list other releases of the song by Asch as well as printed sources of the music for the benefit of the reader. The list of other releases often includes a number of different takes of the same song, provided for the sake of comparison. Often times some of these takes were recorded years apart. A discography at the back of the booklet lists other suggested releases of Lead Belly's music both by Asch and other companies. The music sources are referenced to the bibliography at the end of the notes.

**1 Irene** (new words and music by Ledbetter-Lomax-Lomax)

Alternate title: "Goodnight Irene"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; Sonny Terry, harmonica

(recorded possibly August 1943; from Smithsonian/Folkways 40001; copyright 1936, 1950, Ludlow Music)

This is undoubtedly Lead Belly's most famous song. According to Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, the song could be of Tin Pan Alley or minstrel show origins. Lead Belly apparently learned it from an uncle while a child and was performing it as early as 1909 (Wolfe 1992). It became Lead Belly's theme song, and he began and ended many of his radio programs with "Irene." Unfortunately for Lead Belly, he died a year before the Weavers' 1950 recording made it a nationwide hit. Lead Belly died on welfare; the fame he had so long worked for had eluded him. Many of Lead Belly's other songs were also recorded by various popular groups of the folk song revival of the 1950-1960s.

(Asch 343; Disc 734; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 2942, 7533, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40001, 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962;

Lomax 1959; Lomax 1960; Wolfe 1992.

**2 Pick a Bale of Cotton** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; The Oleander Quartet (George Boyd, Cecil Murray, Howard Scott, George Hall), vocals (recorded fall 1941; from Folkways 2004; copyright 1936, 1964, Folkways)

*"Now this is when I was around Dallas, Texas, pickin' cotton. I was pickin' a thousand pounds of cotton a day. And the way you get a thousand pounds of cotton a day, you've got to jump around to get it. You can't fool around and pick a thousand pounds of cotton a day."*

This song about cotton picking was recorded a number of times by the Lomaxes for the Library of Congress. They recorded versions at prisons in both Sugarland and Huntsville, Texas. Two of the other convicts at Sugarland with Lead Belly were James Baker ("Iron Head") and Moses Platt ("Clear Rock"), and they also recorded for the Lomaxes. It would seem that this is one of the many songs Lead Belly learned while in prison. Evidently, it is physically impossible to pick a bale of cotton in one day, so this song takes on the tone of a brag.

(Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 31019, and 31030) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1940; Lomax 1947A; Lomax 1947B; Lomax 1959; and Seeger 1961.

**3 Good Morning Blues** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; Sonny Terry, harmonica (recorded August 1943; matrix SC-263; Smithsonian acetate 1617; shellac disc; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

*"Now I tell ya about the blues. All Negroes like blues. Why? Because they was born with the blues. And now everybody have the blues. Sometimes, they don't know what it is. But when you lay down at night, turn from one side of the bed all night to the other and you can't sleep, what's the matter? Blues has got you. Or when you get up in the mornin', sit on the side of the bed, may have a mother or father, sister or brother, boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife around. You don't want no talk out of 'em. They ain't done you nothin', you ain't done them nothin'. What's the matter? Blues got you. Well, you get up and shove*

*your feet down under the table and look down in your place, may have chicken and rice, take my advice, you walk away and shake your head, you say, 'Lord have mercy. I can't eat. I can't sleep.' What's the matter. Why, the blues got you. They want to talk to you. You got to tell 'em something."*

This song was one of the songs Lead Belly recorded most frequently, and he seemed to always include it in his radio programs. He is joined by Sonny Terry (Saunders Terrell, 1911–1986), a blind harmonica player from North Carolina. Asch often used Terry to great advantage to accompany the singers he recorded in his studio. Terry also recorded for Asch both solo and with his long-time partner, Brownie McGhee. (Asch 343-1; Disc 734; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 7533 and 31019) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959; Silber 1973; and Sing Out!, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1977).

**4 Grey Goose** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded 1947, from Folkways 2004; copyright 1936, 1964 Folkways Music)  
*"Now this is a preacher. Down in my*

*home, Baptist people go to church on a Sunday. Well, they had a preacher who was supposed to be a reverend. Well, instead of the preacher going to church that Sunday, he went out and tried to kill a grey goose and the grey goose is still laughing at him. When the sisters found out the preacher had tried to kill him a grey goose, they said 'Lord, Lord, Lord.' That's where that 'Lord, Lord, Lord' come in."*

Moses Asch recorded this song at various times with different personnel. In the 1940s, Asch released what he called his "Folksay" series. On these recordings he would record whatever group of musicians happened to be in the studio that day in loose arrangements of folk songs. One such group who performed this song was made of Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie, and Cisco Houston. However, this version is solo. "Grey Goose" was also a song known to convicts. Versions of this song were recorded by the Lomaxes in three separate prisons in Texas. They recorded Iron Head in Sugarland (1933), Augustus Haggerty ("Track Horse") in Huntsville (1934), and Washington ("Lightnin'") in the Barrington State Farm (1933).

(Disc 6044; Folkways 4, 804, 2004,

2941, 7020, 31019, Smithsonian/Folkways 40001, 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Asch 1965; Botkin 1944; Lomax 1947B; Lomax 1959; Silber 1973; Sing Out!, Vol. 3, No. 11 (1953).

### 5 In the Pines

(trad. arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate titles: "Black Girl," "Where Did You Sleep Last Night"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recorded possibly summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)

This is an old folk song which is found in both Anglo and African-American traditions and is amazingly widespread. Recorded versions include ones by artists as diverse as Roscoe Holcomb, Cisco Houston, Bascom Lamar Lunsford (see Smithsonian/Folkways 40076), Bill Monroe, Pete Seeger, Ralph Stanley, Rod Stewart and John Baldry, Doc Walsh, and most recently, the rock group Nirvana.

(Folkways 14, 2014, 31019) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Sing Out! Vol. 26, No. 6 (1978).

### 6 Take This Hammer

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Spikedriver Blues"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recorded January 1942; matrix SC-101; Smithsonian acetate 1431; shellac disc; copyright Folkways Music)

*"Take this hammer. This is the way the hammers fall when they sing."*

This is a well known African-American work song. Lead Belly's exclamation after each line of the song is timed to help the railroad workers as they are lining the track. The workers, often called Gandy Dancers, would use these songs to help coordinate the tempo of their work.

(Asch 101A; Disc 735; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 31019, and 31030) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Botkin 1944; Hille 1948; Lomax 1940; Lomax 1947A; Lomax 1947B; Lomax 1959; Silber 1973.

### 7 On a Monday (by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Almost Done"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; Sonny Terry, harmonica

(recorded August 1943; matrix 258; Smithsonian acetate 133; shellac disc;

copyright Folkways Music)

*"Now this is a cross-cut saw. Boys are sawin'. Yow, Yow, Yow. The saw is walkin', the boys are talkin'. Yow, Yow, Yow. The saw sing, it swing, here's what they sing...."*

(Asch 343-3A; Disc 734; Folkways AA3, 14, 2014, 2488, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40010) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962.

### 8 Cotton Fields (by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Cotton Song"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recorded summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright 1951, Folkways Music)  
*"When I was a little baby, my mother used to tell me about how she used to take me to the field and rock me in the cradle. She was pickin' cotton for 25 cents a 100 pounds. When I got to be a boy, she was telling me all about and I got to pickin' cotton in Louisiana and I was pickin' 250 lbs. of cotton a day and I was thinkin' about what my mother told me."*

This is an autobiographical song about Lead Belly's childhood near Shreveport, Louisiana. It became a hit song for the folk group the Highwaymen in 1962.

(Folkways 14, 2014, 31046) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Sing Out! Vol. 12, No. 3 (1962).

### 9 Bring a Little Water Sylvie

(by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Sylvie"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recorded January 3, 1943; matrix number 275; Smithsonian acetate 3610; shellac disc; copyright 1936, 1964, Folkways Music)

*"July and August is hot and this man's wife—he call her Sylvie—and the only way he gets his cool water, he's got to call Sylvie to get his water down there 'cause he's burning up."*

Lead Belly's aunt was named Sylvie, and his Uncle Bob would holler at her to bring water while he was plowing. Lead Belly based this song on this memory (Lomax 1960). Asch released a series of 78s on his Disc label called Negro Folk Songs (Disc 660). Each of the six sides is arranged thematically; he used this version of "Sylvie" in a series of work songs along with "Linin' Track," "Julie Ann Johnson," and "Whoa Back Buck."

(Disc 660 [3001A]; Folkways 4, 804,

2004, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40001, 40068) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959; Lomax 1960; Silber 1973; Sing Out! Vol. 4, No. 6 (1954).

**10 Moanin'** (by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal  
(recorded January 11, 1941; Smithsonian acetate 270; aluminum based acetate disc; copyright Folkways Music)

This lovely short piece is the only example we have found in the Asch Collection of Lead Belly performing a song without words.

**11 Laura** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and button accordion  
(recorded 1947; from Folkways 2004; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

This is a "sukey jump" tune. A "sukey jump" is a name for a rural dance party. According to one interpretation, the word "sookie" or "sukey" was a slang term referring to a servant or slave (Wolfe 1992). Of the many instruments Lead Belly learned, the first was a small button accordion. He prepared a number of accordion tunes he could play at these gatherings. This is one of them.

(Folkways 4, 804, 2004, and 31019) For

music and information about the song see Lomax 1959.

**12 Duncan and Brady\*\***

(trad. arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Brady"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recording date unknown; previously unissued take; Smithsonian acetate 258; aluminum based acetate disc; copyright Folkways Music)

This song, better known as "Brady," has been found by the Library of Congress all over the United States. This is an unissued out-take from the Asch Collection. Asch released an a capella version in his "Legacy" series (see track 33 on this recording). We thought this version was quite strong, however, and deserved to be released.

For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Sandburg 1927.

**13 Rock Island Line**

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar  
(recorded February 20, 1942; matrix 103; Smithsonian acetate 783; shellac disc; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

*"The Rock Island line. These boys cuttin' with pole axes. One man's cutting right handed. He's standing on the opposite side of the other man. The other man cut left handed. He's standing the other side. And these boys gonna sing about the Rock Island line which is a mighty good road to ride. And in that road the man gonna talk to the depot agent when he's comin' out of the cut with that Rock Island line freight train coming back from Mullaine (sic) this a way. That man blows his whistle down there different than people blow whistles here. He's gonna talk to that depot agent and he's gonna tell him something. When that switch falls over the line, means for that freight train to go into the hole. Man's gonna talk to him."*

This is another of Lead Belly's best-known songs. After leaving prison, Lead Belly accompanied the Lomaxes on many of their recording trips, acting as their helper and their driver. In October 1934, the Lomaxes recorded a group of convicts singing this song at the Cummins State Farm in Gould, Arkansas. Lead Belly learned the song there (Wolfe 1992). It later became a big hit for Lonnie Donegan during the late 1950s British skiffle music craze.

(Asch 101, Asch 102B, Disc 735 (6090A); Folkways 14, 2014, 2941, 2942, 7020, 7533, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40001, 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Silber 1973; Silber 1973; Sing Out! Vol. 2, No.8, (1952); Wolfe 1992.

**14 Big Fat Woman**

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Big Fat Mama"

Lead Belly, vocal and piano

(recorded 1944; matrix SC-271; from Disc 660 78 rpm recording)

John and Alan Lomax recorded a black quartet singing this song at Bellwood Farms in Atlanta in 1936. Lead Belly was also along on that trip and Lead Belly may have learned the song from the quartet then. According to the notes for the 1950 LP release of the song by Alan Lomax, Lead Belly just sat down at the piano in Asch's studio and started pounding out this song. Asch used it on his *Negro Folk Songs* collection as part of his theme of "Bad Women." (Disc 660 [as part of a medley]; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, and 31046.) For music and information about the song see Lomax 1941.



## 15 New Orleans (The Rising Sun Blues)\*\*

(J. Lomax, A. Lomax, G. Turner/TRO-Ludlow Music, Inc., BMI)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recording date unknown; previously unissued take; Smithsonian acetate 259; aluminum based acetate disc)

This lovely unissued rendition of this folk standard was one of the treasures that turned up in the Asch Collection during this project. Lead Belly recorded it for Frederic Ramsey during his "Last Sessions," but for some reason Moses Asch never released this studio take on any of his Lead Belly releases. There are literally hundreds of recorded versions of this song. (Folkways 2942; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Seeger 1961; *Sing Out!* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1957).

The next group of songs (tracks 16-19) are examples of children's, or play party, songs. Lead Belly had quite a few of them in his repertoire. He was good with children and enjoyed singing to them. One of the first recordings released of Lead Belly by Asch was a children's collection. It caused quite a stir when it was discovered that the man singing to the children was a

convicted murderer.

Some of the songs in this series are ring games. For a good explanation of African-American children's games see the Jones and Hawes book listed in the bibliography. Lead Belly himself offers a good explanation of a typical ring game in his introduction to "Sally Walker."

## 16 Chicken Crowing for Midnight\*\*

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate titles: "Christmas Song,"

"Christmas is a Coming," "Almost Day"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recording date unknown; Smithsonian acetate 259; aluminum based acetate disc; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

*"This is a children's play song on a Christmas night when they're looking for the Santa Claus to come. When they're looking for the Santa Claus to come, well, you know children stay up all day and all night and at midnight they get out in the yard and play "Moonshine Tonight" and the chickens be crowing for midnight and the children gonna make a ring and play and here's what they sing while they play. Waiting for the Santa Claus to come."*

(Asch SC-34; Folkways 7533) For music

and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959.

## 17 You Can't Lose Me, Cholly

(by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded July 1941; matrix MA-80; Smithsonian acetate 1432; shellac disc; copyright 1936, 1964, Folkways Music)

*"You can't lose-a me Cholly is about a boy that's going places. An' they gonna see things; and the little children is all gonna follow. And here's what they sing."*

(Asch SC80; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 31030) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959; Lomax 1960.

## 18 Sally Walker

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Little Sally Walker"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded January 9, 1942; matrix SC 27; Smithsonian acetate 1430; shellac disc; copyright Folkways Music)

*"Now this is another little children's play song. They gonna play and they gonna put one inside the ring and they all gonna be going around and they all gonna sing."*

*And this one in the ring is sitting down in a chair. They gonna give this one in the chair a hankie. And when they holler 'Rise Sally rise, wipe your weeping eyes,' she's gonna rise out of the chair. And when they say 'Fly to the east, fly to the west, fly to the one you love the best,' she gonna fly and catch one that's going around the ring and catch him by the hand, gonna put him in the ring and he's gonna sit down in the chair what Sally got out of. Anyone who gets out of the chair last name's gotta be Walker. Now here's what they gonna sing while they all go round the ring."*

(Asch SC-27) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Jones 1972; Lomax 1959.

## 19 Ha Ha This a Way

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded January 9, 1942; possibly matrix SC26; Smithsonian acetate 270; aluminum based acetate disc; copyright 1936, 1959, Folkways Music)

*"This is a children's play song. Now the children when they play back in my home, they put one in the ring and they*

*all go round the ring and they sing. Now this is gonna be Ha-Ha This a Way and Ha-Ha That a Way and when the boys in the ring or a girl they say 'Ha-Ha This a Way' he has to jump that a way. When he says 'Ha Ha that a way' he has to jump that a way. And the others going round the ring they gonna sing."*

(Asch 331-3B; Folkways 14, 2014, 31030) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959; Sing Out!, Vol. 2, No. 8 (1952).

**20 Yellow Gal** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter) Alternate titles: "Yeller Gal," "Yaller Gal" Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded fall 1941, from a radio show, Smithsonian acetate 375; 16" aluminum based acetate disc; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

*"This is yellow gal...it's a famous gal. And the boys would always get to dancing and sukey jumpin' around, just singing about yellow gal."*

(Disc 660 [as part of a medley], 6044; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 2942, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71; Verve/ Folkways 3019) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959.

**21 Green Corn** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter) Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded possibly in June 1946, matrix number D674, Smithsonian acetate 276; glass disc; copyright 1936, 1964, Folkways Music)

Lead Belly recorded this song several times for Asch, sometimes alone and sometimes with the help of Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston. According to Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, Lead Belly learned this song from two of his neighbors in Louisiana as a child. It was a square dance tune most often played on the fiddle. "Green Corn" refers to brand new moonshine whiskey (Wolfe 1992).

(Disc 660 [as part of a medley]; Folkways 4, 804, 2004) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1959; Silber 1973; Sing Out!, Vol. 6 No. 4 (1956).

**22 Let It Shine on Me\*\*** (trad.)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recording date unknown; Smithsonian acetate 2711; aluminum based acetate disc)

*"Now this here's one of the first spirituals, long years ago that people, before our people was free, they sing on plantations. Now*

*Baptist people was the first denomination there was in them times. And when they'd get together to go to church at Baptist church they'd sing. And when they'd sing 'bout this song they didn't speed up their music, they'd take it slow and easy."*

This unissued take found in the Asch Collection is a spiritual Lead Belly learned while young. He includes a fragment of the song "Amazing Grace" in the middle.

**23 Meeting at the Building**

(by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded September 1, 1943; matrix 273; Smithsonian acetate 684; 14" acetate disc; copyright Folkways Music)

*"This is meetin' at the building. What it means by at the building it will soon be over, when the Baptist people get together in the church down south they just sing, they don't swing, but they rock church."*

Asch used this song as part of one of his medleys on the *Negro Folk Songs* album. One side was of spirituals and included "Meeting at the Building" with "Talking, Preaching" and "We Shall Walk through the Valley." The latter two were reissued

on Smithsonian/Folkways 40010.

(Disc 660 [3001B] as part of a medley; Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 2488, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40010) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Silber 1973.

**24 In the Evening When the Sun Goes Down\*\*** (by Leroy Carr & Don Raye/On

Backstreet Music-MCA, Inc., ASCAP)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recording date unknown; previously unissued take; Smithsonian acetate 638; aluminum based acetate disc)

*"Down in my home late in the evening you look out into the woods, trees, all the leaves of the trees, sun's going down you began to worry. You may have a girlfriend, she done left you. Then you sit down and begin to sing, and the blues has got ya."*

This is a well-known blues song written by blues pianist Leroy Carr (1905–1936). Many of the other artists who recorded for Asch also performed this song. There are versions by Bill Broonzy, Memphis Slim, and Pete Seeger, all on Folkways.

(Folkways 2942; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71)

**25 Pigmeat** (arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)  
 Alternate title: "Pigmeat Papa"  
 Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; Brownie McGhee, guitar; unknown bass player (recorded possibly summer 1947; matrix D308; Smithsonian acetate 291; shellac disc; copyright Folkways Music)  
 (Folkways 14, 2014, 2024, 31019) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962.

**26 Blind Lemon** (by Huddie Ledbetter)  
 Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded possibly summer 1947, Folkways 2014; copyright 1936, 1959, Folkways Music)  
*"Now this is about Blind Lemon. Blind Lemon and I run together for about eighteen years around Dallas, Texas, and he was a blind man and I used to lead him around. When him and I would go... we'd sit down and we'd talk to one another."*  
 Blind Lemon Jefferson (1897–1929) was a well-known blues singer from Texas who recorded frequently during the 1920s. His recordings were some of the best-selling blues in the Paramount catalog. Lead Belly knew Jefferson and traveled with him for a number of years, both playing

music and acting as his eyes. Jefferson died tragically in Chicago in 1929.  
 (Folkways 14, 2014, 31046) For music and information about the song see Lomax 1959.

### 27 Bottle Up and Go

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)  
 Alternate title: "Borrow Love and Go"  
 Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded possibly summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)  
*"Now this here is Bottle Up and Go. I don't care when you go. When you get ready to leave you just tell the people, 'I'm gonna bottle up and go.' And this means about the high-powered women, 'cause we got women that can drive airplanes, got radio women, they can do most anything a man can do. That what you mean by the high-powered women they can bottle up and go. Let's bottle up and go."*

The reference in the lyrics to this song is to the influx of women into the work force during World War II. Because many men were in the service, many women found themselves in jobs previously done mainly by men. Lead Belly explores the same theme in his "National Defense Blues" (see

*That's Why Were Marching*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40021). This recording has also been published and recorded as "Borrow Love and Go," and Lead Belly seems to use the two phrases interchangeably. Lead Belly also used the same tune to create a World War II song called "Uncle Sam Says (You Got to Bottle Up and Go)." A copy is in the Asch Collection at the Smithsonian and has never been released commercially. (Disc 660 [3003B]; Folkways 14, 2014, 2941, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962.

### 28 Sukey Jump (Win' Jammer)

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)  
 Leadbelly, vocal and button accordion (recorded possibly summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)  
 This is another example of Lead Belly playing the button accordion. For a description of sukey jumps see the notes for track 11. (Folkways 14, 2014, 31019, 31046)

### 29 Old Riley

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)  
 Alternate titles: "Hey Rattler," "Old Rattler," "In Dem Hot Summer Days"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar (recorded summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)  
*"Now this is Riley.... They had bloodhounds in them times.... The overseer in them times had a Negro named Riley. And old Riley was one of the best there was and old Riley was trying to make his way to freedom. And while Riley was goin', they couldn't catch up with him, they got the bloodhounds put on his tracks and they commenced talkin' about it."*  
 This is another one of the songs Lead Belly learned in prison. Certainly songs of escape must have been popular with the convicts. This song concerns "Old Riley," who managed to outrun the dogs and horses that chased him. The Lomaxes recorded it at Huntsville and Sugarland prisons in 1934 by Track Horse and Clear Rock respectively. They also recorded a version by a convict named Tommy Woods at the Clemens State Farm in Brazoria, Texas, in 1939. (Asch 102A; Disc 6090B [735] For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1940; Lomax 1959.

**30 4, 5, and 9** (by Huddie Ledbetter)

Alternate title: "Hollywood and Vine"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar; Sonny Terry, harmonica; Brownie McGhee, guitar; Pops Foster, bass; Willie "The Lion" Smith, piano

(recorded ca. June 1946; matrix D384; Smithsonian acetate 293; shellac disc; copyright Folkways Music)

This is an out-take from an interesting session Asch held in his studio in June 1946, bringing together Lead Belly, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, with two jazz musicians, Willie "The Lion" Smith and Pops Foster. It takes on the feel of a loose jam. Asch released four of the songs from this session as two 78s ("Diggin' My Potatoes" paired with "Defense Blues" and "Easy Rider" paired with "Pigmeat").

(Folkways 2941; Smithsonian/Folkways 40001, 40068/71; Verve/Folkways 3019) For music and information about the song see Lomax 1959.

**31 No Good Rider** (J. Lomax, A. Lomax, H. Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music, Inc., BMI)

Alternate title: "Noted Rider Blues"

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded October 1943; matrix SC-271; Smithsonian acetate 547; aluminum based acetate disc; copyright)

*"This is a blues...and the title of this number she's a 'Noted Rider.' That means the drunk woman been drinkin' all night long and aint had no sleep. She been dis-turbin' peace all round in the neighborhood."*

Asch originally planned for the first volume of his Legacy series to have this song and "Sally Walker" on it. For some reason they were left off the released product. We have restored them.

(Disc 600 [3003B])

**32 Shorty George**

(arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded ca. 1941; Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)

Shorty George was a short train that ran out of the farm in Houston bringing families of prisoners at Sugarland Prison to visit and unfortunately taking them home again, to the prisoners' regret.

(Folkways 14, 2014, 2941, 31019; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71) For

music and information about the song see Asch 1962; Lomax 1940; Lomax 1947A; Lomax 1947B; Lomax 1959; Silber 1973.

**33 Duncan and Brady** (version 2)

(trad. arr. by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal

(recorded possibly Summer 1947; from Folkways 2014; copyright Folkways Music)

(Folkways 14, 2014) See notes for track 12 for printed sources.

**34 Leaving Blues** (by Huddie Ledbetter)

Lead Belly, vocal and guitar

(recorded March 13, 1941; from Folkways 2004; copyright 1959, Folkways Music)

*"Now this is the leavin' blues. What I mean it was leavin' time. This man had lived with a woman twenty years and he was working for the T.P.S. shop. And when he come home that evenin'... his time to come home was five o'clock, she got behind the door and just as he walked to the yard gate to come in, she jumped out from behind the door and throwed up both hands. She say, 'You can't come in here no more.' He say, 'What's the mat-*

*ter?' She say, 'I don't want you.' He say, 'Can I get my clothes?' She says, 'Naw, you can't come.' He turned around and that gave him the blues."*

This song was also recorded by Lead Belly and released by Asch as an unaccompanied vocal.

(Folkways 4, 804, 2004, 2941, 2942, 31019, 31046; Smithsonian/Folkways 40068/71) For music and information about the song see Asch 1962; and Lomax 1959.



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## ARCHIVIST'S REMARKS

Magnetic audiotape technology did not exist before World War II. It first came into use for audio recording in the late 1940s. Before then, most mastering had been done directly onto discs. All the music on this project was originally recorded by Moses Asch during the 1940s on various types of discs. There were several sorts of disc technology: some machines recorded directly onto aluminum discs, others recorded onto acetate or shellac discs. The recordings here fall into the latter two categories.

Most master discs were recorded at about 78 rpm and consequently could not hold more than four minutes of music. Selections that ran longer often had to be broken up into two parts. Later on, but still before he moved to magnetic tape, Asch used 33 1/3 rpm masters to record longer pieces on disc.

Acetate discs of the type used for recording these tracks consisted of an aluminum or glass base covered with a layer of lacquer. During the war, when many of these discs were recorded, the glass base was used because metal was dedicated to military purposes. With the passage of time, the lacquer may begin to peel off the base

like old paint, so it is important that acetate discs be transferred to a more stable medium as soon as possible. Shellac discs are more stable than acetate and are more like the vinyl discs we are familiar with. They are, however, quite brittle. Here at the Smithsonian we have undertaken the slow and laborious task of transferring all 5,000 acetates in the collection. I would like to thank Lance Watsky and Pete Reiniger for their assistance in doing this work.

The appearance of magnetic tape marked a revolutionary change in recording, because uninterrupted performances could be much longer. Different sections could also be spliced together to create another recording without re-recording the entire performance. During a late recording session with Lead Belly in 1948 (re-issued as Lead Belly's Last Sessions in 1994 as Smithsonian/Folkways SF40068/69/70/71), the participants were amazed by Frederick Ramsey Jr.'s new reel-to-reel tape machine, and their comments to that effect can be heard on tape. Lead Belly asks repeatedly, "Is that thing not over yet?"

During the 1940s, Moses Asch's studio was an open house to many of the recording artists in the New York area. Most of

the acetates in this collection were recorded during this time. Asch's recording log is a fascinating list of many of the top jazz and folk music performers of the day. Visitors included Lead Belly, Burl Ives, Josh White, Sonny and Brownie, Langston Hughes, James P. Johnson, Mary Lou Williams, Coleman Hawkins, and Pete Seeger, among others. During the war there was an extreme shortage of blank acetates. This shortage kept Asch from having the luxury of numerous takes of a song during a session. For this reason many of Asch's recordings were issued with some mistakes in the performances.

As we approach the turn of the century, more and more of late twentieth-century artistic expression is stored on media or in electronic form. These carriers have a short and finite life span. It is important that we think in terms of preserving them, or there will nothing left for future generations to appreciate. These discs are already fifty years old and on borrowed time. It is imperative that these recordings be transferred to a more stable medium. The resissue of much of this material is allowing both for the preservation of these discs and the exposure to the public of numerous

treasures that have been hidden for years. We hope to continue this work and release many more such collections over the coming years.

#### Jeff Place

Archivist, Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution

For further information on acetates and their preservation:

Gilles St. Laurent, "The Preservation of Recorded Sound Materials," Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal (Fall 1992), pp. 144-156.

## OTHER SUGGESTED RECORDINGS

*Afro-American Music: A Demonstration Record* (by Dr. Willis James), Folkways 2692.

*Folk Song America: A Twentieth Century Revival*, Smithsonian Collection of Recordings RD 046.

*Folkways: A Vision Shared*, Columbia 44034 (a collection of Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie songs performed by rock and pop artists).

*Folkways: The Original Vision* (with Woody Guthrie), Smithsonian/Folkways 40001.

Lead Belly, *Alabama Bound*, RCA 9600.

Lead Belly, *Go Down Old Hannah*, Rounder 1099.

Lead Belly, *Gwine Dig a Hole and Put the Devil In*, Rounder 1045.

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The Folkways and Smithsonian/Folkways recordings can be ordered from Smithsonian/Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444, Rockville, MD 20850; 301/443-2314; 800/410/9815

Recorded by Moses Asch 1941-1946, New York City •

Reissue compiled by Jeff Place, Anthony Seeger, Matt Walters, and Pete Reiniger

Annotated by Jeff Place

Project supervised by Anthony Seeger and Amy Horowitz

Production assistance by Michael Maloney and Mary Monseur

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## **ABOUT SMITHSONIAN/ FOLKWAYS**

Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2,200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are now available on high-quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original LP liner notes.

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high-quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes, recordings to accompany published books, and a variety of other educational projects.

The Smithsonian/Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon record labels are administered by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies. They are one of the means through which the Center supports the work of traditional artists and expresses its commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

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