

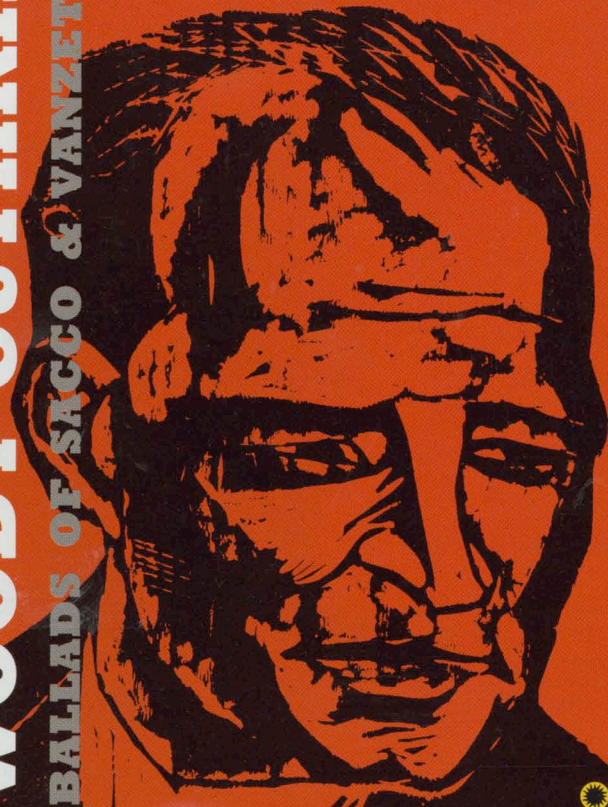


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Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings
Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC 20560
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WOODY GUTHRIE
BALLADS OF SACCO & VANZETTI



SACCO & VANZETTI

WOODY GUTHRIE **BALLADS OF SACCO & VANZETTI**

Commissioned by Moses Asch, 1945; composed and sung by Woody Guthrie 1946-47; originally issued in 1960 on Folkways FH 5485.

1. **THE FLOOD AND THE STORM**
2. **TWO GOOD MEN**
3. **I JUST WANT TO SING YOUR NAME**
4. **RED WINE**
5. **SUASSOS LANE**
6. **YOU SOULS OF BOSTON**
7. **OLD JUDGE THAYER**
8. **VANZETTI'S ROCK**
9. **VANZETTI'S LETTER**
10. **ROOT HOG AND DIE**
11. **WE WELCOME TO HEAVEN**
12. **SACCO'S LETTER TO HIS SON**
(PETE SEEGER)

Woody Guthrie was one of the twentieth century's greatest poets and songwriters, and his songs about Sacco and Vanzetti include some of his best songs. The murder trial of Sacco and Vanzetti was one of this century's most controversial. Sacco and Vanzetti's story was dramatic; their front-page trial was filled with dubious procedures; and the years of appeals and their eventual execution led to protests around the world. These songs, written and recorded nearly twenty years later, have been carefully remastered from the original acetate discs and are presented with a previously unpublished letter by Guthrie to the judge in the case.

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Words and music tracks 1-11 by Woody Guthrie (Woody Guthrie/Woody Guthrie Publications, BMI). Track 12: Words by Nicola Sacco, music by Pete Seeger (Stormking Music, Inc., BMI).



BALLADS OF SACCO & VANZETTI

Commissioned by Moses Asch - 1945, composed & sung by Woody Guthrie 1946-47, edited by Moses Asch and Irwin Silber

INTRODUCTION BY MOSES ASCH 1960

The successful conclusion of World War II in 1945 was a time for affirmation and documentation of that "American Dream" envisioned by the founders of our nation. American history as seen through the eyes of our finest creative artists has always seemed to me a vital part of our culture. Accordingly, I commissioned Woody Guthrie, the great American balladeer, to go to Boston in order to provide a document in song on the famed Sacco-Vanzetti Case. Woody, who told us about the Dust Bowl, the TVA, and the Grand Coulee Dam through his songs, was the ideal choice for a such a project. The songs on the recording, *Ballads of Sacco & Vanzetti* (Folkways FH 5485), were written by Woody Guthrie in 1946 and 1947.

Upon his return from Boston, Woody recorded these songs for me.

As I have stated in previous recordings and publications associated with Folkways Records, I believe that it is the duty and privilege of publishers of materials that reach a wide audience to make available to the general public as great a variety of points of view and opinions as possible—without censorship or the imposition of the publisher's editorial view.

My own viewpoint on the Sacco-Vanzetti Case was most influenced by my brother Nathan's book "Pay Day" and by Upton Sinclair's "Boston." Later on, Ben Shahn's series of paintings on Sacco-Vanzetti helped to deepen my understanding.[...] The wood cuts on the front, back, and title page are by Antonio Frasconi.

CURATOR'S FOREWORD

The trial of Sacco and Vanzetti has been called "the most famous and controversial case in American legal history" (Averich 1991). The trial, sentencing, repeated appeals, and eventual execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in Boston, Massachusetts, had repercussions around the world. Like the O.J. Simpson trial seventy-five years later, in the Sacco and Vanzetti trial there were accusations of prosecutor bias; witnesses gave conflicting evidence; new forensic technologies were distrusted; evidence may have been tampered with; and deep divisions in U.S. society were highlighted. Some of the parallels between the trials are astonishing: there was even a piece of clothing alleged to belong to Sacco (his hat) that didn't fit. Some things were quite different: the defendants were poor, politically radical immigrants, and they were convicted. Many books were written about the trial, its aftermath, and the mystery of who actually may have been guilty or innocent—something still debated to this day.

Courtrooms frequently reveal deep and widespread conflicts within a society. The conflicts were not hidden in the Sacco and Vanzetti case; they were spread across the front pages of newspapers everywhere and

appear throughout Woody Guthrie's songs. Sacco and Vanzetti were recent Italian immigrants and admitted anarchists. Anarchists do not believe in governments, but rather in individual freedom, and many Italian immigrant anarchists were involved in the U.S. labor movement. Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested in 1920 as suspects in a robbery in which two guards were killed. Their arrest followed upon anti-immigrant legislation passed during World War I and considerable anarchist and union organizing activity in the post-war period. Their trial was tainted by prevailing attitudes toward recent immigrants, toward labor organizers, and political radicals.

The case became an international *cause célèbre*. In spite of repeated appeals, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in the electric chair in Boston on August 23, 1927. In August 1977 they were posthumously pardoned by Governor Michael Dukakis, who cited irregularities in the trial proceedings. It was a testimony to the continued strong emotions about the case that Boston city observances planned for August 23, 1977, were canceled because of concern about public safety.

When Moses Asch issued *Sacco & Vanzetti* on Folkways Records in 1960, he

included not only the songs themselves, but photocopies of the original lyric sheets corrected by Woody Guthrie, drawings by Woody Guthrie, and a new song by Pete Seeger, who had composed a melody to a letter Sacco wrote to his son on the eve of his execution. We have added this foreword and archivist's introduction about the original project and acetate masters and the technical processes used to guarantee the best sound possible on this reissue of this classic recording.

We are reissuing this historic album for several reasons. In 1995 it is clear that the Sacco and Vanzetti case continues to be relevant today, when conflicts continue over immigration and union organizing. More importantly, this album contains some powerful songs by one of the best songwriters of the 20th century. Both Woody's daughter Nora and his son Arlo said some of their favorite songs by their father are on this album, and Woody himself referred to it in a letter as "my most important project."

Unlike some of Woody's best known songs, "This Land Is Your Land," "Hard Travellin'" and "So Long, It's Been Good To Know You," the songs of *Sacco & Vanzetti* are filled with the details of particular events. Anyone who has listened to

the names of the rivers listed in Guthrie's "Grand Coulee Dam" will recognize the way Guthrie could write poetry using names and details. Bess Lomax Hawes, who sang with Guthrie in the Almanac Singers, has said that Guthrie was fascinated by the particularities of people's lives—specific people in specific situations.

The trial of Sacco and Vanzetti continues to be a reminder of the deep distrust of immigrants that has characterized the United States at various moments in its history, of the ambiguous roles that individuals, courts, and even governments have sometimes played in trials, and of the actions of different parts of U.S. society as they mobilize around issues raised in such trials. Although the defendants have been dead nearly seventy years, Woody Guthrie's songs about the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti continue to document some of the large and enduring conflicts within this nation and demonstrate the enduring ability of songwriters to capture the essence of an event and transform it into poetry communicated with emotion.

Two versions of *Sacco & Vanzetti* were released on Folkways Records. One was a single LP in a simple sleeve with a twelve page insert. The other was a boxed set containing a larger book and a single LP.

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Because of the small size of the CD booklet, we are unable to reproduce more than sample selections. We do, however, provide the full song texts to help listeners to follow the story as Woody sings it. We have added a fiery letter Guthrie wrote one night to Judge Thayer, which was only recently found among Moses Asch's papers in the Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies archives and which has not been published before.

The songs were not recorded in any particular order, and there is evidence that Moses Asch and Irwin Silber laid out the sequence much later. We have changed the order of the songs to better present them to 1990s listeners unfamiliar with the case. The songs first present the broad background, and then move through the trial and execution to a welcome to heaven and, finally, Pete Seeger's musical setting of Sacco's letter to his son on the eve of his execution. The original album presented the songs in the following order: (1) I Just Want to Sing Your Name, (2) Red Wine, (3) You Souls of Boston, (4) Suassos Lane, (5) The Flood and the Storm, (6) Vanzetti's Rock, (7) Root Hog and Die, (8) Old Judge Thayer, (9) We Welcome to Heaven, (10) Vanzetti's Letter, (11) Two Good Men, (12) Sacco's Letter to His Son.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A complete bibliography of the Sacco and Vanzetti case would fill an entire book. The transcripts of the case are still in print, and books continue to appear about it. Here are a few of the more frequently cited ones.

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Upton Sinclair, *Boston: A Documentary Novel*. New York: Robert Bentley, Inc., 1978 [1928].

Anthony Seeger
Curator, The Folkways Collection

ARCHIVIST'S REMARKS

In archival work, we often get an intimate view of the artistic process, and this was true in the production of this recording. The Folkways files contain correspondence, snapshots, and artwork as well as recorded interviews with Moses Asch. We also had more than one take of many of the songs, and selected the best takes of each song from among those in the recording vaults.

Moses Asch commissioned Woody Guthrie to write this series of songs in 1945. They were recorded in January of 1947. Some of the original lyric sheets show that Woody was writing up until a couple of days before the recording session. Some of the songs required only one performance to record; others, like "Old Judge Thayer," (five discs, mostly incomplete performances), took many. Listening to them suggests that some of the songs were so fresh that Woody was reading them from a lyric sheet as he sang.

Woody had trouble putting this set of songs together. He read and reread pamphlets and accounts of the case but seemed to have developed a strong case of writer's block. One letter from Woody in the Moses and Frances Asch Collection reads: "I think that the best thing we can

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do is to postpone the recorded songs based on the frame up of Sacco and Vanzetti. If it means to delay them from this Christmas Holiday Season to the next Christmas Holiday Season, I suppose, it must be for the best. To delay the most important dozen songs I have ever worked on is more of a pain to me than it ever could be to you" (Guthrie to Asch, 11/4/46). Woody at one point suggested doing a collection about labor martyrs with one song about Sacco and Vanzetti and songs about Joe Hill, the Haymarket Bombing, the Everette, Washington Timber Massacre and others. Perhaps this was a way of getting out of writing the entire Sacco and Vanzetti project (Guthrie to Asch 6/2/46). To alleviate Woody's block, Moses Asch sponsored a field trip to Boston and Plymouth for Woody and Cisco Houston, and made the recording after they returned. Woody was also troubled by the limitations of 78 rpm recordings. He felt he wanted to say more than he could do in "a 4 1/2 minute plastic" (Guthrie to Asch 6/2/46). This is why Vanzetti's letter (track 9) has two parts; it would not fit on one side of a record.

Moses Asch recorded Guthrie in the Folkways studio directly onto 78 rpm acetate discs. These discs have survived to this day and are in amazingly good shape fifty years later. However, due to the sur-

face noise that remains on the acetate discs, we have mastered this recording from the reel-to-reel production master of Folkways 5485 made by Moses Asch prior to the first release in 1960. Great care was taken in the transfer and digital processing to maintain the high quality of the original recordings.

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. There were several sorts of disc technology: some machines recorded directly onto aluminum discs, others recorded onto acetate or shellac discs. Most master discs were recorded at about 78 rpm and consequently could not hold more than three or four (4 1/2, as Woody would have it) 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. 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.

It is imperative that these recordings be transferred to a more stable medium. The reissue of much of this material is allowing both for the preservation of these discs and the exposure to the public of many treasures that have been hidden for many years. Here at the Smithsonian we have undertaken the slow and laborious task of transferring all 5000 acetates in the collection to modern preservation formats. I would like to thank Lance Watsky and Pete Reiniger for their assistance in doing this work. We hope to continue it and to 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, see Gilles St. Laurent, "The Preservation of Recorded Sound Materials," *Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal*, Fall 1992, pp. 144-56.

Related recordings on Smithsonian/Folkways and Folkways Recordings, all available on CD and cassette (see information on back inside cover): Almanac Singers, *Talking Union*, Folkways 5285; Woody Guthrie, *Struggle*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40025; Woody Guthrie, Almanac Singers, Lead Belly, Cisco Houston, Josh White, and others, *That's Why We're Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40021; Will Geer, *Woody's Story: Songs and Narration*, Folkways 2930; Joe Glazer, *Songs of Joe Hill*, Folkways 2039; John Greenway, John and Aunt Molly Jackson, *Songs and Stories of Aunt Molly Jackson*, Folkways 5457; Earl Robinson, *Earl Robinson Sings*, Folkways 3545; Bernard Sanders, *Eugene V. Debs: Trade Unionist, Socialist, Revolutionary 1855-1926*, Folkways 5571; Pete Seeger, *American Industrial Ballads*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40058; Pete Seeger, *Singalong—Live at Sanders Theater*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40027/28; Pete Seeger, *Songs of Struggle and Protest, 1930-1950*, Folkways 5233; Various Artists, *Don't Mourn, Organize: Songs of Labor Songwriter Joe Hill*, Smithsonian/Folkways 40026. Daffini, Giovanna, on *Avanti Popolo! Forward People!*, Paredon 1026 (The song "Sacco E Vanzetti")

Also suggested is the song "Facing the Chair" by Andy Irvine, a contemporary ballad of Sacco and Vanzetti which can be found on the album by the Irish group Patrick Street (#2 *Patrick Street*, Green Linnet Records #1088; 43 Beaver Brook Road, Danbury, CT 06810), and *Folk Song America: A Twentieth Century Revival*, Smithsonian Collection of Recordings RD 046. *Sacco and Vanzetti* (Film Soundtrack), Omega 3015

ABOUT THE SONGS

The song texts below are taken from a songbook. Woody Guthrie sometimes changed them as he sang.

1. THE FLOOD AND THE STORM

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song provides a general background to the arrest and trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, and makes some of the same points found in books written decades later (Felix 1965; Averich 1991) about the importance of the trial in American politics and labor history.

The year now is nineteen and twenty, kind friends,/And the Great World's War we have won,/Old Kaiser Bill we have beat him once again/In the smoke of the cannon and the gun.

Old von Hindenburg and his Royal German Army/Are tramps in tatters and in rags,/Uncle Sammy has tied every nation in this world/In his long old leather money bag.

Wilson caught a ship and train into Paris,/Meeting Lloyd George and Mister Clemenceau;/They said to Mister Wilson, "We've staked off our claims,/There is nothing else for you."

"I have plowed more lands, I built bigger factories,/I stopped Hindenburg in his tracks;/You thank the Yanks by claiming

all the lands,/But you still owe your money to my bank."

"Keep sending your ships across the waters,/We will borrow all the money you can lend;/We must buy new clothes, new plows, and factories,/And we need golden dollars for to spend."

Every dollar in the world it rolled and it rolled,/And it rolled into Uncle Sammy's door;/A few they got richer, and richer, and richer,/But the poor folks kept but getting poor.

Well, the workers did fight a revolution/To chase out the gamblers from their land;/The farmers, the peasants, the workers in the city/Fought together on their five-year plans.

The soul and the spirit of the workers' revolution/Spread across every nation in this world;/From Italy to China, to Europe and to India,/And the blood of the workers it did spill.

This spirit split the winds to Boston, Massachusetts,/With Coolidge on the Governor's chair;/The troopers and soldiers and the guards and the spies/Fought the workers that brought the spirit there.

Sacco and Vanzetti had preached to the workers,/They was carried up to Old Judge Thayer;/They were charged with

the killing of the payroll guards,/And they died in the Charlestown chair.

Sacco had come from the mountains of Italy,/Had a wife and children three;/Vanzetti sold fish on the streets of North Plymouth,/Was a writer of workers' poetry. The world shook harder on the night they died/Than 'twas shaken by that Great World's War;/More millions did march for Sacco and Vanzetti/Than did march for the great War Lords.

More millions did pray, more millions they did sing,/More millions they did weep and cry/This August night in nineteen twenty-seven,/When strapped there in that chair they did die.

More millions saw the light, more walked into the fight,/And more from shore unto shore/Than ever did fight for the rich man's hire/Or dress in the warrior's uniform.

The peasants, the farmers, the towns, and the cities,/The hills and the valleys they did ring,/Hindenburg, Wilson, Harding, Hoover, Coolidge/Never heard this many voices sing.

The zig-zag lightnings, the rumbles of the thunder,/The singing of the clouds blowing by,/The flood and the storm for Sacco and Vanzetti/Caused the rich man to pull his hair and cry.

2. TWO GOOD MEN

Words and Music adapted by Woody Guthrie

This is one of the best known of Guthrie's compositions in this set. It focuses on Sacco, Vanzetti, the judge, and the prosecutors and sets the stage for the trial itself.

Chorus: Two good men a long time gone/
Two good men a long time gone/(Two good men a long time gone, oh, gone)/
Sacco, Vanzetti, a long time gone,/Left me here to sing this song.

Say, there, did you hear the news?/Sacco worked at trimming shoes;/Vanzetti was a peddling man,/Pushed his fish cart with his hands.

Sacco was born across the sea/Somewhere over in Italy;/Vanzetti was born of parents fine,/Drank the best Italian wine.

Sacco sailed the sea one day,/Landed up in Boston Bay;/Vanzetti sailed the ocean blue,/Landed up in Boston, too. (*Chorus*)
Sacco's wife three children had,/Sacco was a family man;/Vanzetti was a dreaming man,/His book was always in his hand.

Sacco earned his bread and butter/Being the factory's best shoe cutter;/Vanzetti spoke both day and night,/Told the workers how to fight. (*Chorus*)

I'll tell you if you ask me/Bout this payroll

robbery;/Two clerks was killed by the shoe factory;/On the street in South Braintree.

Judge Thayer told his friends around/He would cut the radicals down;/Anarchist bastards was the name/Judge Thayer called these two good men.

I'll tell you the prosecutors' names,/Katsmann, Adams, Williams, Kane;/The judge and lawyers strutted down,./They done more tricks than circus clowns. (*Chorus*)

Vanzetti docked here in 1908;/He slept along the dirty streets,./He told the workers, "Organize"/And on the electric chair he dies.

All you people ought to be like me,./And work like Sacco and Vanzetti;/And every day find some ways to fight/On the union side for workers' rights.

I've not got time to tell this tale,/The dicks and bulls are on my trail;/But I'll remember these two good men/That died to show me how to live.

All you people in Suassos Lane/Sing this song and sing it plain./All you folks that's coming along,/Jump in with me, and sing this song.

3. I JUST WANT TO SING YOUR NAME

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

Oh Sacco Sacco/Oh Nicola Sacco/Oh Sacco Sacco/I just want to sing your name.
Sacco Sacco Sacco Sacco Sacco, Oh Sacco/
Nicola Sacco Sacco/I just want to sing your name.

Oh Rosie Rosie/Oh Miz Rosie Sacco/Oh Rosie Rosie/I just want to sing your name.

I never did see you, see you/I never did get to meet you/I just heard your story,
story/And I just want to sing your name.

Hey hey Bart Vanzetti/Hey hey Bart Vanzetti/ You made speeches for the workers, workers/

Well, I just want to sing your name.

Hey Judge Webster Thayer/Ho ho Judge Webster Thayer/Hey hey old Judge Webster Thayer/I don't want to sing your name.

Bart Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco/Bart Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco/Come here looking for the land of freedom/I just want to sing your name.

Vanzetti sold fish around the Plymouth Harbor/Sacco was a shoe factory's best shoe-cutter/ All of my sons and all of my daughters/ They're gonna help me sing your name.

Oh Sacco Sacco/Hey Bart Vanzetti/Your

wife and kids and all your family/I just want to sing your name.

Oh Sacco, Vanzetti/Hey Sacco, Vanzetti/
Hey Nicola Sacco, Bart Vanzetti/I just want to sing your name.

Oh oh oh, ho ho ho/Yes yes yes yes yes yes/Yes yes yes yes yes yes/Well, I just want to sing your name.

4. RED WINE

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song stresses the political motivations in the arrest and prosecution of Sacco and Vanzetti and the apparently circumstantial evidence upon which they were convicted.

Oh, pour me a drink of Italian red wine,/Let me taste it and call back to mind/Once more in my thoughts, once more to my soul/This story as great, if not greater, than all.

The AP news on June 24th/Told about a patrolman named Earl J. Vaugh,/He stepped on a Main Street Trolley car/To arrest Sacco and Vanzetti there.

The article tells how Earl J. Vaugh/Is now retiring as officer of law;/This cop goes down in my history/For arresting Sacco and Vanzetti that day.

'Twas nineteen and twenty, the fifth of May,/The cop and some buddies took these

two men away/Off of the car and out and down,/Down to the jail in Brockton town.

There's been a killing and robbery/At Slater Morrill's shoe factory;/You two gents are carrying guns,./And you dodged the draft when the war did come.

Yes, oh yes, 'tis so, 'tis so,/We made for the borders of Mexico;/The rich man's war we could not fight,./So we crossed the border to keep out of sight.

You men are known as radical sons,/You must be killers, you both carry guns./I am a night watchman, my friend peddles fish,./He carries his gun when he's got lots of cash.

Oh, pour me a glass of Germany's beer,/Russia's hot vodka, strong and clear,/Oh, pour me a glass of Palestine's Hock,./Or just a moonshiner's bucket of Chock.

Now, let me think, and let me see,/How these two men were found guilty,/How a hundred and sixty witnesses did pass by,/And the ones that spoke for them was a hundred and five.

Out of the rest, about fifty just guessed,./And out of the five that were put to the test,./Only the story of one held true,./After a hundred and fifty-nine got through.

And on this one, uncertain and afraid,/She saw the carload of robbers, she said,./And one year later, she remembered his

face./After seeing this car for a second and a half.

She told of his hand, his gun, his ears,/She told of his shirt, and the cut of his hair,/She remembered his eyes, his lips, his cheeks,/And Eva Splaine's tale sent these men to the chair.

I was right here in Boston the night they died./I never seen such a sight in my life;/I thought those crowds would pull down the town,/I was hoping they'd do it and change things around.

I hoped they'd pull Judge Thayer on down/From off of his bench and chase him around;/I hoped they'd run him around the stump/And stick him with devils tails 'bout every jump.

(Repeat first stanza)

5. SUASSOS LANE

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song describes in considerable detail the people who saw Vanzetti near Suassos Lane in Plymouth on the day he was allegedly involved in the robbery and killing in Braintree, Massachusetts.

Suassos Lane is just an alley/Up here in old north Plymouth,/You saw my fish cart/Roll here in Suassos Lane.

Chorus: Goodbye my comrades,/Goodbye

my north Plymouth,/Goodbye to Boston harbor,/Goodbye to Suassos Lane.

They say I killed him,/Said I killed the payroll carrier,/Over in South Braintree,/Thirty-Five miles from Suassos Lane.
(Chorus)

My name's Lefevre Brini./On the same day, Bart Vanzetti/Brought fish to Cherry Court,/One block from Suassos Lane.
(Chorus)

My name is Joseph Rosen./I am a woolen peddler./I sold Vanzetti a roll of cloth/This day in Suassos Lane. *(Chorus)*

I'm Mrs. Alphonsine Brini./Mister Rosen and Bart Vanzetti/Showed me the cloth with big holes in it/One block from Suassos Lane. *(Chorus)*

My name is Melvin Corl./I was painting my fishing schooner./Vanzetti talked to me an hour/A mile or so from Suassos Lane.
(Chorus)

How could I be in South Braintree/Killing men in front of the factory,/When all these friends and others saw me/Cart my fish up Suassos Lane? *(Chorus)*

I tell you working people/Fight hard for higher wages,/Fight to kill black market prices;/This is why you take my life.

I tell you working people/Fight hard for cleaner houses,/Fight hard for wife and

children;/That's why you took my life.
(Chorus)

6. YOU SOULS OF BOSTON

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song presents some of the details of the case: the crime, the witnesses, the Morelli Gang's confession to the crime, the ballistics evidence, and the execution.

You souls of Boston, bow your heads,/Our two most noble sons are dead;/Sacco and Vanzetti both have died,/And drifted out with the Boston tide.

'Twas on the outskirts of this town,/Some bandits shot two pay clerks down,/On old Pearl Street in South Braintree,/They grabbed that money and rolled away.

Sacco and Vanzetti got arrested then/On a trolley car by the plainclothesmen,/Carried down to the Brockton jail/And laid away in a lonesome cell.

The folks in Plymouth town did say/Vanzetti sold fish in Suassos Lane,/His fish cart was thirty two miles away/From old Pearl Street this fatal day.

Sacco's family hugged and kissed their dad,/Said, "Take this family picture to the passport man."/He was in that office forty-odd miles away/From old Pearl Street this fatal day.

One lady by the name of Eva Splaine/Saw the robbers jump in their car and drive away./For a second and a half she seen this speeding car,/And she swore Sacco was the bandit man.

It was twenty, or thirty, or fifty more,/Said Sacco was not in that robbers' car/Judge Webster Thayer stuck by Eva Splaine,/Said Sacco was their guilty man.

Mrs. Sacco was heavy then with child./She walked to Sacco's cell and cried./The Morelli Gang just down the corridor/Signed confessions they killed those payroll guards.

"We seen Mrs. Sacco pregnant there,/We heard her cry and tear her hair,/We had to ease our guilty hearts/And admit we killed those payroll guards."

Judge Webster Thayer could not allow/The Morelli Gang's confession to stop him now./Sacco and Vanzetti are union men,/And that verdict, guilty, must come in.

The bullet expert took the stand,/Said the bullets from the bodies of the two dead men/Could not have been fired from Sacco's gun,/Nor from Vanzetti's gun have come.

It was sixty-three days this trial did last,/Then seven dark years come a crippling past,/Locked down in that mean old Charlestown Jail,/Then by an electric spark were killed.

Old Boston City was a dark old town/This summer's night in June the switch went down./The people they cried and marched and sung/In every tongue this world around.

You souls of Boston, bow your heads./Our two most noble sons are dead./Where the people's army marches now to fight./Sacco and Vanzetti will give us light.

7. OLD JUDGE THAYER

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song builds on a long tradition of using animals to represent human beings in human dramas. Here many of the same ideas presented above are put into the mouths of different animals, who in the end declare that Judge Thayer is a threat to them as well. Woody alternates the faster tempo of the chorus with the slower tempo of the verses.

Old Judge Thayer, take your shackle off of me;/Old Judge Thayer, take your shackle off of me;/Turn your key and set me free./ Old Judge Thayer, take your shackle off of me.

The monkey unlocked the court house door./The elephant oiled the hardwood floor;/In did jump the kangaroo,/In did hop the rabbits, too.

Next in come the two baboons,/Next in rolled a dusty storm,/Next in waddled the

polar bear/To keep the judge and jury warm.

Everybody knows that the mocking bird/Wrote down every word he heard,/The lawyers all were sly/With foxy nose and a foxy eye.

The 'possum used the big stiff broom./Then he polished the new spittoon;/Up did smile the crocodile,/Said, "Here comes the jury down the aisle."

The old lady Catfish asked the Trout./"What is this trial all about?"/The little baby Suckerfish up and said./"The Judge has caught him a couple of Reds."

The Rattlesnake asked the Bumble Bee./"Whose this Sacco an' Vanzetti?"/"Are they the men," said Mammy Quail./"That shot the clerks at the Slater Mill?"

The Mosquito sung out with his wings./"I was there and saw the whole blamed thing;/ I saw the robbers fire their guns,/ But I didn't see these men, neither one."

The big-eyed Owl she looked around./"They say that Sacco's cap was found/Down on Pearl Street on the ground/Where the payroll guards both got shot down."

"That cap don't fit on Sacco's head,"/A big black Crow flapped up and said./"They tried that cap on Sacco here,/And it fell down around both his ears."

The Camel asked the old Giraffe./"Did these

two fellows duck the draft/By running down below the Mexican line/To keep from fighting on the rich man's side?"

The limber Duck did rattle his bill./"All the ducks and Geese are flying still/Down toward Mexico's warm sun/To try to dodge the rich man's gun."

Up did waddle the Lucey Goose./"I think these men ought to be turned loose./But old Judge Thayer has sworn to friends/ These men will get the chair or noose."

And when the guilty verdict came/And seven years in jail they'd laid,/And when these two men there did die,/The animals met on the earth and sky.

"Oh see what fear and greed can do,/See how it killed these sons so true?/Us varmints has got to get together too./ Before Judge Thayer kills me and you."

8. VANZETTI'S ROCK

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This song describes Guthrie's experience visiting Plymouth Rock.

Chorus: I'm standing on the rock, Vanzetti,/ Standing on the rock, Vanzetti./ Standing on the rock, Vanzetti,/Where men like you have stood.

I see the tourists, Vanzetti,/Around your Plymouth's Rock;/Black glasses, sun gog-

gles, stain'd glasses,/Smokedglasses to block out the light./I see them come here as you seen them,/But I see lots more than you saw;/I see them in fast running-cars,/ You seen them in wagons and carts. (*Chorus*)

These tourists don't see you, Vanzetti,/ These salesmen and gamblers on tour./Your footprints are dim and your trail is sprung weeds./Their tourist map don't show you there./The trade union workers, Vanzetti,/ Will vacation here, and we'll tour /This Rock and this town and Plymouth around/ When their statues have souls like yours. (*Chorus*)

Your picture is painted, Vanzetti,/Your words are carved 'round the frames;/Your songs and your poems, your working folks' dreams,/Will flame with our greatest of names./Your name I will paint on my pointers,/My streets, my mountains, my shops;/ Your hopes that you hoped, dreams that you dreamed/I'll see that your works never stop. (*Chorus*)

Those talks for the workers, Vanzetti,/I'll chisel them down on the rock;/I'll tell every worker to fight like you fought./Like the Pilgrims that docked on this rock./I'll scatter your words on my waters/To the ships, to the fishes, the gulls;/I'll cast your fish cart in metals so fine,/And I'll push around this world. (*Chorus*)

9. VANZETTI'S LETTER

Words and Music by Wood Guthrie

This song is based on a letter written by Vanzetti to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts asking for clemency. Clemency was denied, and they were executed.

The year is nineteen twenty-seven, the day is the third day of May;/The town is the city called Boston, our address this dark Dedham jail;/To your Honor, the Governor Fuller, to the Council of Massachusetts State,/We, Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, do say:

Confined in your jail here at Dedham and under the sentence of death,/We pray you exercise your powers to look at the facts of our case;/We do not ask you for a pardon, for a pardon would admit of our guilt;/ Since we are both innocent workers, we have no guilt to admit.

We are both born by parents in Italy, we cannot speak English too well;/ Our friends of labor are writing these words here back of the bars of our cell;/Our friends say if we speak too plain, sir, we may turn your feelings away;/ And widen these canyons between us, but we risk our life to talk plain.

We think, sir, that each human being is in close touch with all of man's kind;/We think, sir, that each human being knows

right from the wrong in his mind./We talk to you here as a man, sir, even knowing our opinions divide;/We did not kill the guards at South Braintree, nor dream of such a terrible crime.

We call your eye to this fact, sir, we work with our hand and our brain;/These robberies, killings, were done, sir, by professional bandit men./Sacco has been a good cutter, Mrs. Sacco their money has saved;/ And I, Vanzetti, I could have saved money, but I gave it as fast as received.

I'm a dreamer, a speaker, and a writer, I fight on the working folks' side;/Sacco is Boston's fastest shoe trimmer, and he talks to the husbands and wives./We hunted your land, and we found it, hoped we'd find freedom of mind./Built up your land, this Land of the Free, this is what we came to find.

If we were those killers, Good Governor, we'd not be so dumb and so blind/To pass out our handbills and make workers' speeches here by the scene of the crime./ Those fifteen thousands of dollars the lawyers and judge say we took,/Do we, sir, dress up like two gentlemen with that much in our pocketbook?

Our names are on that long list of radicals of the Federal Government, sir,/They say that we needed watching as we peddled our literature;/Judge Thayer's mind was made

up, sir, when we walked into the court;/He called us anarchistic bastards, and said lots of other things worse.

They brought people down there to Brockton to look through the bars of our cell,/ Made us act out the motions of the killers, and still not many could tell;/Before the trial ever started, the jury foreman did say,/And he cursed, "Damn they, they ought to hang anyway."/Our fatal mistake was carrying our guns about which we had to tell lies/To keep the police from raiding the homes of workers believing like us.

A labor paper, or picture, a letter from a radical friend, /Or an old cheap gun like you keep around home would torture good women and men;/We all feared deporting, whipping, torments to make us confess/ The place where the workers are meeting, the house, your name, and address.

The officers said we feared something which they called consciousness of guilt,/We were afraid of wrecking more homes, and seeing more workers' blood spilt;/The very first questions they asked us were not about killing the clerks,/But things about our labor movement, and our trade union works.

Oh, how could our jury see clearly, when the lawyers and judges, and cops/Called

us low-type Italians, said we looked just like regular Wops;/Draft dodgers, gun packers, anarchists, these vulgar-sounding names/Blew dust in the eyes of the jurors, the crowd in the courtroom, the same.

We do not believe, sir, that torture, beatings, and killings and pains/Will lift man's eyes to the highest of views and break his bilbos and chains;/We believe you must struggle for freedom before your freedom you'll gain,/Freedom from fear, sir, and greed, sir, and your freedom to think higher things.

This fight, sir, is not a new battle, we did not make it last night,/"Twas fought by Godwin and Shelly, Pisacane, Tolstoy, and Christ;/It's bigger than atoms or sand of the deserts, or planets that roll in the sky;/Till workers get rid of their robbers, well it's worse, sir, to live than to die.

Your Excellency, we're not asking pardon, but asking to be set free/With liberty, and pride, sir, and honor, and a pardon we will not receive;/A pardon you've given to criminals who've broken the laws of our land;/We do not ask you for pardon, sir, because we are innocent men.

If you shake your head no, Dear Governor, of course our doom it is sealed;/We hold up our heads like true sons of men seven years in these cells of steel./We walk down

this corridor to death, sir, like workers
have walked before./But we'll work in our
working class struggle if we live a thou-
sand lives more.

10. ROOT HOG AND DIE

Words and Music adapted by Woody
Guthrie

*This song creates a mood of urgency to get to
Boston before the execution, although it was
written twenty years later. Massive demon-
strations were held in Boston, New York, Lon-
don, Buenos Aires, and other cities on the eve
of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution.*

Train wheels can roll me, cushions can
ride./Ships on the ocean, planes in the
skies./Storms they can come and flood-
waters rise./But I've got to get to Boston,
root hog and die

Nicola Sacco, a shoe-factory hand./Bartolo
Vanzetti, a trade union man./Judge Web-
ster Thayer swore they'll die./But I've got
to get to Boston 'fore sundown tonight.

I might walk around, and I might roll or
fly./Walking down this road shoulder, tears
in my eyes./They never done a wrong in
their lives./But Judge Webster Thayer says
they must die.

Well, some come to Boston to see all the
sights./Some come to Boston to drink and
to fight./Sacco and Vanzetti told the work-

ers, "Organize."/So Judge Webster Thayer
says they must die.

Oh, Mr. Wagon Driver, please let me ride./
That's a nice pacing team that you've got
here all right./Did you ever hear such a
thing in your life./Judge Webster Thayer
killing two men tonight.

Hey, Mr. Engineer, let me ride your train./
Throw in your coal and steam up your
steam./If I can't ride the shack, please let
me ride the blind./Got to get to Boston
'fore sundown tonight.

11. WE WELCOME TO HEAVEN

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

*This is one of the most remarkable songs in
the set. Musing on the strangeness of a world
that would condemn Sacco and Vanzetti to
death and execute them, Guthrie writes about
how systematically people are misunderstood
or mis-labeled for everything they do.*

We welcome to heaven Sacco and
Vanzetti./Two men that have won the
highest of seats./Come, let me show you
the world that you come through./It's a
funny old world, as I'm sure you'll admit.

If you wear rags on earth, you're a hobo./If
you wear satin, they call you a thief./If you
save money, they call you a miser./If you
spend money, you are on relief.

If you work hard, they say you are lowly,
/If you're a loafer, of course, you're no
good./If you stay sober, you're known as a
sissy./And if you drink liquor, it goes to
your head.

If you are fat, they will call you a glutton,
/If you stay skinny, they call you a runt./If
you laugh, they'll call you an idiot./And if
you cry, they will ask you to stop.

If you chase women, they call you a
wolver, /If you don't chase them, they call
you afraid./If you chase men, they'll call
you downtrodden./If you don't chase them,
they'll call you old maid.

If you eat your meat fried, they'll tell you
to boil it./Then if you boil it, they'll say it
should broil./If you don't eat meat, and eat
only green things./They'll ask you what's
wrong with the brain in your skull.

If you work for wages, you support the
rich capitalist./If you don't work, you're a
lumpen to them./If you play the gamble, of
course, you're a gambler./And if you don't
gamble, you never do win.

If you stay poor, nobody comes
courting./And if you get rich, you can't
find a mate./If you get married, you're
wrecking your happiness./If you stay sin-
gle, you walk to your grave.

If you die in your cradle, it's a sad misfor-

tune./If you live to old age, it's harder and
worse./If you've read the papers, you know
it is many/Who take their lives daily when
they empty their purse.

There's traders, and trappers, and shippers,
and hoppers./Sacco and Vanzetti, in Ameri-
ca's fair lands./There's hoppers and crop-
pers and robbers and dopers./And millions
of folks with just two empty hands.

You come the straight road, Sacco and
Vanzetti./You fought with the lord on his
most private ground./He hire his courts and
his babblers against you./But, I'm here to
say you went up and not down.

12. SACCO'S LETTER TO HIS SON

Words: Nicola Sacco, Music: Pete Seeger

*This song was written by Pete Seeger at the
request of Moses Asch, who gave him the letter
and asked, "Do you think you could put a tune
to this?" It was recorded directly on audio tape
in 1951 (see Pete Seeger, Where Have All the
Flowers Gone? [Bethlehem: Sing Out! Corpora-
tion, 1993, p. 92-93]). It appeared as the last
song on the original Folkways release.*

If nothing happens they will electrocute us
right after midnight./Therefore here I am,
right with you, with love and with open
heart./As I was yesterday./Don't cry, Dante,
for many, many tears have been wasted./As
your mother's tears have been already wast-

ed for seven years/And never did any good./ So son, instead of crying, be strong, be brave/So as to be able to comfort your mother.

And when you want to distract her from the discouraging soulness./You take her for a long walk in the quiet countryside./ Gathering flowers here and there./And resting under the shade of trees, beside the music of the waters./The peacefulness of nature, she will enjoy it very much./As you will surely too./But son, you must remember; don't use all yourself./But down yourself, just one step./To help the weak ones at your side.

The weaker ones, that cry for help, the persecuted and the victim./They are your friends, friends of yours and mine./They are the comrades that fight—yes, and sometimes fall./Just as your father, your father and Bartolo have fallen./Have fought and fell, yesterday, for the conquest of joy./Of freedom for all./In the struggle of life you'll find, you'll find more love./And in the struggle, you will be loved also.

POSTSCRIPT—WOODY'S LETTER TO JUDGE THAYER

Written by Woody Guthrie, 1947 (?)

This letter was found typed on two sides of a thin piece of lined paper among the papers in the Moses and Frances Asch Collection in the archives. We are publishing it for the first time here. Although in prose form, its images are as poetic as many of the song texts, and it reveals Guthrie's emotional involvement in the case as he researched it and wrote the songs. Judge Thayer's home in Worcester, Massachusetts, was bombed in September 1932. He moved to his club in Boston and died seven months later, in 1933. No suspects were arrested in the bombing, one of several reprisals after the executions.

I would like to paint you a picture with strokes of electricity, to make you see, Judge Thayer, the wrong thing that you done. It would take something faster than fire sparks to send this picture around the world, but the blood of Sacco and Vanzetti did flow around the world, and the picture was in the minds of people before that hand of your button pusher could push your electric button and take his finger away again.

I say the blood flowed, but it was not the blood that ran, because you did not

hang them, you did not shoot them, but you did torture them, you did insult and abuse them, you made comics and puppets out of them to dance and to dangle in front of your sad eye. You set their souls free with a spark of Massachusetts electricity because you were so unwise as to think that this would hold and silence their voices.

You killed Bartolomo [sic] Vanzetti, a poet and a fighter, and you killed Nicolo [sic] Sacco because he taught workers how to get together and talk about their work. The reason that you killed these two men was because you lost your spiritual connection with all men, and you did not believe that there was any such a thing as a spiritual connection between any men. You did not believe in the mental ability of the ordinary working man and woman to stand together and to meet together, to speak their problems over in a free land together.

This is a rough way to try to tell you because you are used to nicer and politer ways, ways memorized out of books, ways learned in your college buildings, and in your schools. You have taken your hide and shelter in these halls of learning for a long time, but I would not call you a man that has learned anything. You fell onto some little set form and formula, some lit-

tle pattern of action that you used over and over till you wore your mind out, and then you thought that this same calamity had happened to everybody else. You lived a quiet life, a tiptoeing life on rugs and carpets. You found some kind of dark world there in your caverns with your stagmites and you wanted to hang on to whatever little nervous nightmare that you were having. You did not want to be kicked out, nor relieved, nor have somebody else take your bench and judge people from it. You wanted to keep on stepping down your back stairways, through your varnished doors, yes. You certainly did not want any wild gang of illiterate workers busting into your court room nor into your house and telling you that you had lost your job. You somehow got scared, then to make out like you were not scared, you walked all around and shouted that you were not scared. (People knew that you were because you yelled that you were not.)

You got afraid of people all around you. You really felt afraid of every person that came close to you. You did not always say this out loud, but you know very well that you felt this way every hour of every day. You felt it even worse after dark. You did not even tell your wife nor your closest friends how scared you were. You were not

only afraid of people, but the tides and the seasons scared you and you come to be afraid of the weather. Your seasons were things of locks and keys and your sleep was a wild running nightmare, but you used all kinds of tricks to make your face look like it was not afraid of the people. You feared the working people. You feared the business people. You feared the idle classes and you feared the racketeers. The world was a puddle of manure and mud and all of the faith on this planet could not change human nature's greed.

I don't know tonight as I write this whether you are alive or dead. It has been a long time since you pulled the electric trigger on Sacco and Vanzetti, but it could be that you are still dwelling in your same body. I had rather be dead than to be a man of your cut and calibre. It would be wrong for me to wonder if you are living or dead because it is truer to say that you never was alive. I mean warm alive like most all of my loud and noisy [sic] neighbors around me here in Coney Island.

If your spirit is out of your carcass, I certainly would not blame it, for if I was a spirit I would not dwell for long in any such a body as you own. If I was a body I would not live with any such a spirit as yours. If I was a mind I would not play any sweet music inside your brain, and if I

was a soul I would not bring any very big visions into your heart. If I was the Creator I would undo you and if I was the Maker I would unmake you and take the clay and try again. I cannot curse your soul too much because you may be remolded into a union organizer. I cannot curse your clay too much because you will fertilize some nice corn and grain and drift out across some dandy pasture lands where horses nicker and the cattle graze.

You did not wish for Sacco nor Vanzetti neither one to dwell on our planet here, and so you schemed and you figured out a way to take them away. If you had been a true man wise or unwise you would have never let your drunkest and scarest nightmare cause you to do such a deed. You would have known that you would wake up ten million souls around the world to fight to enter into their union. You would have known that you were not only kicking your own pants off of the judging bench, but several hundred thousand judges and shisters [sic] of your stripe and breed. You would have known this if your mind had not been so completely blind. I cannot rile myself too much to curse you because I am not too much of a curser, and I know that you did, in one way, wake the workers of the world up, but you did it in the craziest, greediest

and most terrible way that you could. You called our attention to the fact that it was geniuses of your level who own and rule our world and make its laws, judge us good and bad, to be alive or to be dead, then, well, this was the one thing that put us on the move and tore your world down faster than ten grenades would have.

You are a big judge. You may be living and you may be dying. You may already be dead. No matter what your natural estate may be, I realize that I must speak to you polite and nice even if I hate your royal guts. And so this is why tonight I hold my criticism down to just the one single planet called the earth. If I was to let my words fly at you like I really feel I ought to, I would chase you up one universe and down the next, up one glacial age and down the next, up one history book and down the other, over several icebergs [sic] and out through several jungles. I would rail you and scale you, jail you and bail you, I would mail you and nail you and assail you and frail you. I would run you ragged and crosseyed, cockeyed and whopperjawed. I would not let one drop of your blood rest easy nor one cell of your brain miss my trimming. I think of your old age and your natural condition of a tablet of salt, and I will not try to take your coyote heart out of you because in all

of your horror and terror you have ignorantly defeated your own self and your own class. You have done the only earthly thing that could undo your entire class, and it might well be that you were created just to perform this one act and then no more. Oh, I know that you performed a lot of other lesser and smaller acts, but they just broke the ground for the deed that you did to Sacco and Vanzetti.

CREDITS

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ABOUT SMITHSONIAN/FOLKWAYS

Folkways Records was founded by Moses
Asch and Marian Distler in 1948 to docu-
ment music, spoken word, instruction, and
sounds from around the world. In the
ensuing decades, New York City-based
Folkways became one of the largest inde-
pendent record labels in the world, reach-
ing 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 gen-
erations. 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, record-
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variety of other educational projects.

The Smithsonian/Folkways, Folkways,
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which the Center supports the work of tra-
ditional artists and expresses its commit-
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Recordings at your local record store.
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