


BLACK BANJO SONGSTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA AND VIRGINIA

 Smithsonian Folkways



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BLACK BANJO SONGSTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA AND VIRGINIA

PRODUCED AND ANNOTATED BY CECE CONWAY AND SCOTT ODELL

1. **COO COO** John Snipes 1:13
2. **COO COO** Dink Roberts 2:09
3. **OLD RATTLER (Fox Chase)** John Snipes 2:44
4. **GEORGIE BUCK** Dink Roberts 1:00
5. **GEORGIA BUCK** Joe Thompson & Odell Thompson 1:34
6. **JOHN HENRY** James Roberts 0:47
7. **HIGH SHERIFF** Dink Roberts 0:37
8. **JOHN HARDY** Dink Roberts 1:03
9. **GARFIELD** Dink Roberts 1:19
10. **OLD CORN LIQUOR** Dink Roberts 1:19
11. **OLD CORN LIQUOR** Joe Thompson & Odell Thompson 1:07
12. **JOHN HENRY** Joe Thompson & Odell Thompson 2:17
13. **LOVE SOMEBODY** Joe Thompson & Tommy Thompson 2:11
14. **LONG TAIL BLUE** John Snipes 1:19
15. **AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MORE** John Snipes & Tommy Thompson 1:13
16. **GOING WHERE I'VE NEVER BEEN BEFORE** John Snipes 3:46
17. **BLACK ANNIE** Dink Roberts 2:15
18. **OLD BLUE** Dink Roberts 2:03
19. **GOING AWAY FROM HOME** John Snipes 3:52
20. **YOU DON'T KNOW MY DARLING** John Snipes 1:16
21. **JAYBIRD MARCH** Etta Baker & Cora Phillips 1:48
22. **GOING UP NORTH** John Jackson 1:47
23. **SUGAR HILL** Homer Walker 2:24
24. **MOMMA DON'T ALLOW** Irvin Cook & Leonard Bowles 1:58
25. **SHORTNIN' BREAD** Leonard Bowles 1:45
26. **SHORTNIN' BREAD** "Big Sweet" Lewis Hairston 1:55
27. **FOX CHASE** John Tyree 1:09
28. **ROUSTABOUT** Dink Roberts 1:21
29. **COOKIN' IN THE KITCHEN** John Snipes 1:49
30. **COO COO BIRD** Rufus Kasey 4:41
31. **FOX CHASE** Dink Roberts 4:18
32. **LITTLE BROWN JUG** Joe Thompson & Odell Thompson 1:27



The sounds and social history of African American banjo playing—32 superb instrumentals and vocals, recorded between 1974 and 1997. Extensively annotated with performers' life histories, tunings, lyrics, bibliography, and discography. The banjo's gourd ancestors came to the Americas with enslaved Africans, forging the link between West African *griots* and performers of 20th-century blues and string-band music. *64 minutes.*



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"Where You Been, You Roustabout?"

For the rowdy, roustabout banjo players, who caught the sound and keep the spirit

Today the banjo is heard around the world. But that has not always been so. Many are still unaware that Africans brought the gourd ancestor of the banjo with them, in their minds and sometimes in their hands, to the New World in the seventeenth century. They used the *banjar* to accompany songs and dances in Maryland by the 1740s (see Conway 1995 unless otherwise noted for quotes and specific references). Until recently we have known relatively little about what African American banjo players sounded like and what kinds of musical exchange took place between Blacks and Whites even in the nineteenth century.

The Black banjo music on this CD is as unfamiliar to most African Americans as it is to other listeners. While many of the song titles, like "John Henry" and "Little Brown Jug," are known to those interested in traditional music, their styles of performance are usually different and unexpected. Other songs, like "Old Corn Liquor" and "Black Annie," are little known outside of the Southern Black communities where they were played.

The banjo still echoes at the crossroads of West African *griots*, traveling country bluesmen, and the mountain and minstrel banjo players who once formed old-time Southern stringbands and whose descendants later created bluegrass and revival bands. The fretless, short-drone-string banjo with its "thumping," down-stroke playing style, its special tunings, and its reper-

tory of lyric banjo songs, can still be found among both Southern Whites and Blacks. These few living songsters and archival field recordings have kept the influential and intense music on this CD alive.

Recorded in the 1970s or later, these elderly, evocative musicians played and sang mostly at home for their families, and some had quit altogether even though they owned banjos. These "songsters" and "musicianers" of the Upland South were the surviving, changing strands of this vibrant but little-documented tradition; most are no longer alive. Earlier in this century they had often played for frolics and parties in people's homes, always for fun and sometimes for money—much as their ancestors had done for centuries before in Africa. Odell Thompson remembered: "There used to be a lot of banjo players then, a gob of banjo players...." The Thompsons played for tobacco curings, dances, and parties in people's homes for Blacks and Whites. "We called them frolics...eight, twelve, and sixteen hands...ring up on the floor and one call a set, run it, you know. We've done that many a night. Fun. We ought to get up a dance before long."

The music and memories of these Black banjo players enable us to reach beyond written documents to understand an important and continuous strand of African American culture—including the banjo song genre. Their rare and previously unreleased recordings provide a piece of the puzzle of African American musical history. They offer a deeper understanding of the emergence of blues, bluegrass, and country music in this century. The music also shows the cultural significance of the banjo to the working and singing of

Black rounders and roustabouts on boats, in the fields, on the railroad, in the mines, and at home.

The first written report of a banjo player in North Carolina appears in 1787 in the journal of a man who dined in Tarborough with Andrew Grier and after dinner "saw a dance of Negroes to the Banjo in his yard." Early accounts show Blacks sang lyric improvisatory songs and played for dances on a three- or four-string gourd *banjar* covered with a skin head, and strung with horsehair, hemp, or catgut. It had a short thumb-string drone and was played in a style similar to downstroking "clawhammer"—the oldest style used by both Whites and Blacks.

We know even less about musical exchange between Blacks with different traditions than between Blacks and Whites. Subtle, face-to-face musical exchanges of shanties, field hollers, group corn shucking songs, spirituals, and the instrumental call of the *banjar* and response of dancers at social gatherings persisted and flourished with the mixing of groups and the longing for home. Black banjo tradition was strongly influenced by sea shanties, rowing, and longshore and river roustabout songs. Blacks (often leased out by their Southern slave masters) sometimes worked side by side in the flourishing water transport industry with Irish and German laborers (Hugill 1961; Wheeler 1944).

During the eighteenth century, large numbers of Scots-Irish and some Irish arrived in the Southern mountains. Their fiddlers began to come into contact with the Black musical traditions of roustabouts and banjo players. The banjo and the African American "knocking-on" or "thumping" playing style began to take

hold among Whites by the 1830s. From this remarkable musical exchange between Blacks and Whites emerged the five-string banjo, the banjo song genre, the fiddle and banjo ensemble, and America's new popular entertainment—minstrelsy. Some players remained in their mountain homes, while others, like Joel Walker Sweeney (1810–1860), carried banjo music from his native Appomattox to other musicians and a wider American public through local fairs, social events, circuses, and eventually the increasingly popular black-faced minstrel shows. Minstrel banjo players credited "the inimitable and unapproachable" traditional Virginia player Sweeney with inventing the five-string, open-back banjo from a "halved-peck measure" or a "cheese box." The added fifth string was not the shortened thumb string of the drone but what we now call the fourth string and one that increases the melodic capabilities of the banjo. The best documentation of early banjo music is in minstrel instruction manuals.

Black and White banjo players together created the five-string banjo and its music. Their ability to interact with each other through song and dance allowed them to cross class and racial borders. During the Civil War this musical exchange intensified and contributed to fiddle and banjo string bands in the mountains and along the rivers (Hearn in Goodman 1949). Musical interaction remained important after the war in railroad crews, in coal camps, and in traveling circuses and medicine shows. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain describes rafts "manned with joyous and reckless crews of [lumber raftsmen—the worthy descendants of roustabouts who were] fiddling, song-singing,

whiskey-drinking, breakdown-dancing rapsallions."

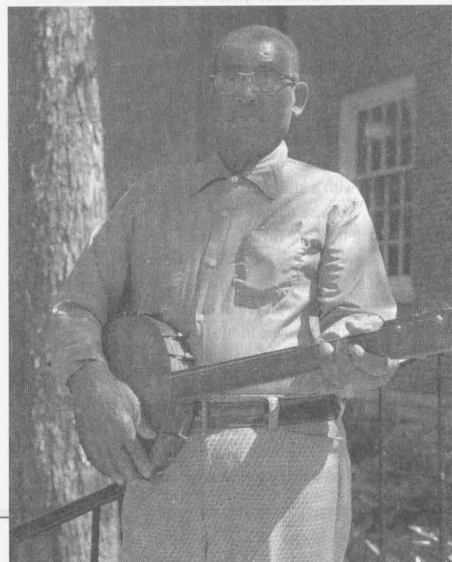
The Black banjo songsters developed a new, distinct, complex, and little-recognized genre of American music—the banjo song—a link between a *capella* field hollers and group work songs and guitar-accompanied solo blues songs. The influence of the banjo on lyric song intensified between 1850 and 1875.

Three types of banjo songs, identified by relationships between the instrumental and vocal melodies, may be heard on this CD. In Type I, the banjo primarily provides rhythmic accompaniment for the singing, with little correspondence between the banjo and vocal melodies. Players may not even share a particular melody for the banjo part of a song, as in "High Sheriff" (track 7). In Type II songs, the interlude and often the accompaniment correspond to a set vocal melody as in "Reuben," "Garfield" (track 9), and "John Hardy" (track 8). In Type III, the banjo interludes have a set and complex melody that bears little resemblance to the vocal melody—for example "Coo Coo" (tracks 2 & 3B) and "Roustabout" (track 28). Type I songs arose among African Americans and have little currency among White banjo players. Type II was popular among both groups, while Type III banjo songs reflect more complex integrations and embody various influences—especially the early melodic and rhythmic exchanges between Irish and African American players.

Black banjo playing began to decline in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the context of minstrel stereotyping, memories of slavery, urbanization, industrialization, increasingly restrictive Jim Crow laws, and other political and economic pressures, Black

singers refashioned their lyric songs into an assertive social commentary that laid the foundation for the emergence of the Blues. Black banjo players hung their banjos on the wall and began to accompany their songs on the now inexpensive and readily available mail-order guitar. There were few commercial recordings of Black banjo made in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the 1970s when Cece met the North Carolina musicians, the tradition had all but died out.

John Snipes playing his banjo, UNC, 1975. Photo by Cece Conway.



BLACK BANJO PLAYERS: PORTRAITS AND VISITS

"[I've been] dreaming about playing again."

—*Jake Stagers*

Most of these Black songsters were Piedmont tenant farmers, who sang banjo songs and played at dances for Blacks and Whites. John Snipes and Dink Roberts were almost a generation older than Joe and Odell Thompson, whose fathers moved west from Person County to buy their own farm lands. John's repertory echoed roustabout lyrics and showed the influence of playing for marathon dances; Odell's repertory was influenced by dancing and by White fiddle and banjo music. Dink's was complex and the most extensive.

Born in Orange County, **John Snipes** farmed near Dobson's Crossroads, North Carolina. As a young man, he used to cross the Haw River to "catch" music from his elderly neighbor Dave Alston. John, a substantial man with a staccato voice, also played with Alston's son, likewise named Dave. He learned other pieces along the Haw River and elsewhere in Chatham County, and from two traveling musicians. Especially influential was Will Baldwin, a tenant farmer and traveling musician, who played at dances for Blacks and for White mill workers in his hometown of Bynam. John learned the exceptional songs "Cookin' in the Kitchen" (track 29) and "Fox Chase" (track 3) when a medicine show performer, Duke Mason, came from Durham to live close by for two years. Although his playing had to be worked in around his farming, John was a marathon dance musician, especially on favorite occa-

sions like the Fourth of July. He would often play a single tune at breakneck speed for as long as an hour for sets or buck dancers. By 1970 he had quit playing, but he was so practiced a musician that he had no trouble reviving his skill. Eventually he played for local folk festivals and university programs. Several performances appeared on the album *Orange County Special*.

"Everybody plays music's got a different sound."

—*Dink Roberts*

Born in Chatham County, North Carolina, **Dink Roberts** (1894–1989) learned his early music from Blacks in Alamance County and elsewhere. When he was nine his mother died, and he went to live with his uncle George Roberts in Little Texas, a community of light-skinned African American folks like Dink. Dink's father was apparently a White banjo player. Dink's maternal Black uncle George also played banjo as well as fiddle, and later guitar, as did many of his eight children who were much older than Dink. He "caught" music from his family and at local events called "gatherings," "sets," and "frolics." As a young man Dink worked as a tenant farmer near Haw River. He played music for "eight hands around" dances and other events. He said "three nights a week for Blacks, three nights a week for Whites." Well respected for his playing, Dink "picked up" extra money from White people and once from a visiting circus troupe. In his later years Dink played mostly at home for the listening, dancing, and fun of his wife Lily, son James, grandson Mike, and visitors.

VISITING

On our first visit, Dink Roberts seemed old, wise, and mysterious, and his music jarred us. No, he wouldn't play with our fiddler. No, not even on tunes we all recognized. He enjoyed hearing our fiddler and banjo player make music together. And yes, he had known fiddlers—they were old, way old, and dead now. And the banjo players too—there had been some, but they were dead—long dead. "I tell you, I learned them old pieces lookin' at the other people play. I had the music on my mind, you know."

We visitors were used to old-time string bands with tunes played by fiddlers and banjo and guitar players. Some of Dink's tunes were fiddle melodies we recognized, but the music came out a different way. Dink also sang on all of his pieces—even fiddle tunes—and didn't seem to have names for them. Something didn't fit. Much later, we would understand that our cultural view didn't fit. Dink's tradition originated in Africa and was unfamiliar to us.

Over the years we visited these North Carolina musicians and we became friends. Each visit began with an exchange of gifts—the bringing and sharing of food and drink; then the exchange of music. As the visiting progressed, we realized Dink's music was not a sequence of individual pieces or of set performances of unalterable texts. Dink created musical visits that were spontaneous, nonstop exchanges with family, friends, and visitors.

Our visits reminded us that Black banjo songsters do much more than one thing at one time. Dink playfully and sensitively orchestrated each visit from arrival

to departure and interacted simultaneously with the listeners and the banjo. For example, after a precise and stately riff, Dink began to sing the words to the "Coo Coo" (track 2), unperturbed that his wife Lily was chatting with musician Tommy Thompson (Hollow Rock String Band; Red Clay Ramblers) across the room while I was recording. At the end of this performance he sang, "Who's gonna' do your loving when I'm gone?" And then for emphasis he spoke the gal's answer, "I don't know who's gonna' do it." Tommy's quick laughter on the recording indicates that Dink's wit was not missed.

Dink eventually played for local community events, schools, university programs, and major festivals like the 1976 Winter Folk Festival and the Festival on the Eno. The Winter Folk Festival Banjo Workshop provided a fine occasion for Dink's interactive songster banjo style. He was content when Lily jumped up to dance uninvited in the midst of his and others' performances. And when Barry Poss did not sing on a performance of "John Lover's Gone," Dink gleefully chimed in to help him out. When Tommy Jarrell held back singing on "John Henry," Dink enthusiastically started up a verse, inspiring Tommy to do some fine singing of his own verses. (For his performance style see the film *Dink: A Pre-Blues Musician*, which won best-in-the-show in the first North Carolina Film Festival, 1975.)

"Music is a gift, but you got to work it out."

—*Joe Thompson, fiddle player*

Odell Thompson, his wife Susie, and his younger

cousin **Joe Thompson** were friendly people who had grown up and lived in the country, but who worked in town. They had started playing again not long before we met, and they sometimes played together. Odell played banjo and fiddle; Joe played fiddle. Both men sang; sometimes one would take a verse, sometimes the other. A folklorist encouraged them to play together, and Joe and Odell's fiddle and banjo combination is more unusual in North Carolina than solo or doubling banjos; it suggests their deep connections with White players. Of his moaning, vigorous, short bow style, Joe has told us his daddy said that "I was always light; he couldn't half hear me. Said I would need a heavy bow.... Most White people like to hear that bow [softly] shuffle. But Black people, it don't bother them. To hear it [loud], that's what they want." The rhythmic and percussive effects and the call and response quality of voices with different timbres clearly express the African American aesthetic.

Raised along the border of Orange and Alamance counties, Joe and Odell learned their styles from their fathers and uncles, who were born in the 1880s. Odell remembers uncles who played "Tough Luck" and "Coo Coo" in special tunings that he never learned. A "troublesome" banjo player, Uncle Jacob was the best, and he spoke of his awesome contemporary—"thumping" banjo player John Wade, "a heavy banjo player.... My Uncle Jake said 'that was the only man I dread—Johnny Wade.'"

Later when both men worked in a mattress and furniture factory in Mebane, Odell took up the guitar and then electric guitar. As Joe explains, the rock n' roll

concerts and dances finished off what few old-time dances persisted after the war. In his last years, Odell began playing a Gibson Mastertone bluegrass banjo. The cousins received the Brown Hudson and the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1990 and 1991. Odell's untimely death in 1995 ended their recording and touring together, which had taken them from Mebane, to the Port Townsend Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, to the banjo gatherings in Tennessee, and to Australia.

"If I could get around some folks, and them bring back some [old tunes], it would bring some remembers back to you, you know. Some of them will eventually keep coming—old tunes."

—*Joe Thompson, 1974*

For this CD, Scott and Cece added to the North Carolina material by selecting archival recordings of Virginia players at the Blue Ridge Institute and by recording Rufus Kasey and John Jackson. These Virginia musicians help clarify and extend the historical and musical patterns found among the North Carolina performers.

Born in Bedford County, Virginia, **Rufus Kasey** (1918) grew up with a banjo-playing father, uncles, and neighbors. After folklorists Kip Lornell and Bob Winans visited Kasey in the late 1970s, Roddy Moore and Vaughan Webb arranged for Kasey to be videotaped in 1984 (track 30). As a young man he and his father played for local dances, and Kasey still plays banjo for his children, grandchildren, neighbors, and guests. When we visited him in May and October of

1997, his reminiscences and music again brought banjo history to life. His intense and lovely performance of "Coo-Coo Bird" (track 30) combines a strong and steady banjo accompaniment with a melodically flexible vocal line. His video performance moves without stopping from one tune to another, retuning and smoothly moving on to the next song to create the "litanic" effect that is typical of African American song and instrumental performance style (Merriam 1982: 453). These four elderly tradition bearers helped reveal a history to us that had been largely forgotten and lost, and helped reclaim the Black banjo tradition's contribution to American music.

TALKING BANJO

"I have to holler sometimes, when I get to playing good."—*Odell Thompson, banjo player*

The performers on this CD use two basic styles. The most common and oldest is often referred to as clawhammer style (track 3), and these players and others call it "tumming," "thumping," "knocking," "beating," "whamming," "framing," and other terms. In this style, the index finger "strikes" downward across the strings, playing one (track 7) or more (track 11) of them on each stroke. The index finger strike is followed by a downward stroke of the thumb against the fifth string. The left hand fingers often contribute additional rhythmic emphases and notes, through forceful "pull-offs," "hammer-ons," and slides on individual strings (track 27). Additional patterns may be produced by the thumb dropping further down to pick

individual notes on the fourth through second strings. Two clear examples of this style are tracks 17 and 28. A second style is sometimes used; this thumb-lead, two-finger, up-picking style is sometimes called "complementing" (Snipes). The index finger picks upward, together with or alternating with a downward pluck of the fifth string by the thumb. This style can be heard on track 20. A performer may move from style to style even in a single song (track 4), for as Dink once said of the complementing style, "it rests you."

BANJO TUNINGS

The following system, summarized from the one devised by Conway and Thompson (p. 224), divides the tunings on this CD into two groups, "Low Bass" and "High Bass," according to the interval between the third and fourth strings, and into further subgroups depending on the remaining intervals. This system, not pegged to pitch, emphasizes the folk musicians' greater concern for interval.

In the Low Bass tunings identified here as L1 and L2, the fourth string is three and one-half steps (seven frets or a fifth) below the third string. L1 tunings (tracks 14, 15, 28) all have the same interval patterns. L1 includes C tuning (gCGBD), D tuning (aDAC#E), early minstrel tuning (cFCEG), Sweeney tuning (eAEG#B), and "Roustabout" tuning (gCGBD). L2 (tracks 13, 20, 32) includes double C tuning (gCGCD), double D (aDADE), and "John Lover's Gone" tuning (aDADE).

In High Bass tunings, the fourth string is two and one-half steps (five frets or a fourth) below the third

string. H1 includes G tuning (GDGBD), A tuning (aEAC#E), etc.; H2 includes sawmill or "Coo Coo" tuning (GDGCD); H3 includes "Fox Chase" tuning (GDGAD).

Like most older White performers, the Black banjo players do not use capos or tuning forks. Instead, the musicians on this CD find a pitch that sets the fiddle and banjo in tune with each other, suits their taste, or fits the singing voice without the risk of breaking a string from too much tension. As Joe Thompson says, "Just tune the banjo's fifth string to my fiddle's second string." In the tune notes, we have given the (approximate) actual pitch to which the fifth string was tuned by these musicians.

Dink, like most of the Black banjo players on this CD, preferred downstroking in what he called "Banjo" tuning (an open tuning sometimes called G-tuning and here called H1) or in "Vastapol" tuning (e.g., C-tuning and here called L1). He also regularly used certain other tunings for only one tune—e.g., H2 on "Coo Coo" (track 2) and H3 on "Fox Chase" (track 31). Elizabeth Cotten (ca. 1895–1987), like Dink, used the same two tunings, which she called Spanish "Flang Dang" (H1) and—also like Dink—"Vastapol" (L1) tuning. On the guitar, she sometimes played three of the tunes common in black banjo repertoire—"Georgie Buck," "Old Rattler Here," "Sent for My Fiddle" (as well as "Run...Run"), but she always added that "they just don't sound right until they're on the banjo."

THUMPING AESTHETICS: WEST AFRICAN ROOTS AND SOUTHERN BRANCHES

The performances of these Black banjo songsters echo the intricate rhythms of an African American tradition vital at the turn of the 20th century, when these men were shaping their aesthetics, gathering their repertory, and inventing their playful yet determined playing style. Their improvisational, conversational approach weaves instrumental performance, vocals, and complex rhythms together with the dancing and with almost everything else going on within earshot.

To those who are accustomed to White fiddle and banjo music, the melodic range in these performances may seem limited. But these musicians are more concerned with rhythmic intricacy than with ornate melody, a direct legacy of West African musical aesthetics. According to Garry Barrow:

Two features of West African musical tradition that are most important for understanding what is "African" in the African American instrumental traditions are (1) the use of short rhythmic-melodic phrases (*ostinati*) as structural elements in improvisational performances and (2) the manifestation of distinctly African conceptions of rhythm in the internal structure of the *ostinati* themselves. In West African stringed instrument tradition, as in the African American banjo tradition (and much of the recorded corpus of early country blues guitar), musical performance is improvisationally structured by the repetition and variation of brief rhythmic phrases made up of independent but interlock-

ing timbrally-contrasted parts produced by alternating thumb and finger movements. This core aesthetic of elaborately developed rhythmic transaction is the distinctly West African wellspring from which the African captives in the Americas and their descendants created a distinctly African American musical culture (Barrow, forthcoming).

The rhythms are sometimes driving, occasionally loping, and other times seem to oscillate—centered and rocking—with syncopation arising from the interplay of two rhythmic patterns. Sometimes performers accelerate (track 27) or retard (track 30) the surging pulse of the rhythm or anticipate a beat (track 4); and syncopation is integral throughout. Strong, repeated percussive accents on the bass strings also characterize this style, particularly on songs like "Roustabout" (track 28) with its rocking bass figure knocking between the third and second strings.

Unlike much White old-time playing, the performers sing on almost every tune. They constantly attend to phrasing, pacing, and microtonal bending of sung notes so as to develop an intense, emotional performance. Listen to how Rufus Kasey varies the pitch of the last word of most phrases in his "Coo Coo Bird" (track 30), or the subtle variations in the high banjo part of Snipes's "Going Where I Never Been Before" (track 16). This is not simple music.

These song texts also reveal stylistic patterns characteristic of African American song forms. Metaphor and line, rather than plot, juxtapose and accumulate what Jackson (see Jackson in White 1965) has called "images to create a feeling." Lines are often repeated



Etta Baker with author's Fairbanks banjo, May 1985. Photo by Cece Conway.

and emphasize an emotional core. Unlike unaccompanied ballads, which emphasize a narrative plot, the Black banjo song creates an associative and interactive performance of words, brief melodies, and rhythms clustered conversationally around a lyric emotional core concerning love or danger. In times of slavery, the lyric songs were usually in the first person and the singer might call out "Goin' where I've never been before" (also the title of track 16). In some 19th-century songs the singer might also let the banjo respond

and comment for the dog "Old Rattler" (track 3), or speak directly and wryly as the escaping fox in "Fox Chase" (track 31).

The banjo songs and unique style of these musicians share features with their Southern, White neighbors recorded in the 1920s and 1930s. Black influence is especially evident in the clawhammer music of Tommy Jarrell, Fred Cockerham, and others around Low Gap, North Carolina, and along the Blue Ridge. As an example, listen to the sometimes-called "Galaxick" (tracks 2, 12, 25), where a right-hand brush across the strings is followed immediately by one or more thumb strokes on the fifth string. Often used in the high part of a tune, it is a particularly appropriate way to get the high G note on a fretless instrument while adding rhythmic accents and facilitating a turn in the melody. Here the fifth string also contributes a note otherwise requiring a finger reach up to the fifth fret.

Although the African American aesthetic and conversational performance style does not share the narrative focus of White ballad singers or the complex melodies of Celtic fiddle tunes, these traditional musicians do share common repertory as well as certain stylistic characteristics. As the titles and the lyrics indicate, these songs (like "Shortnin' Bread," "Old Corn Liquor," "Mama Don't Allow," "Old Rattler," "Roustabout," and "Coo Coo") mostly stress what matters most to many men (both Black and White) about country life: food, liquor, women, fishing, hunting, work, being on the move, and being free and independent. Dink, Rufus, and the other Black banjo songsters

inspire us to converse, to understand our multicultural musical roots, and to grow more spontaneous, interactive, and musically playful.

CONVENTIONS

Tune titles are often first lines or other quotes—perhaps because of the musician's conversational rather than set piece performance approach. We have given a common name and sometimes alternates. The tuning, a nominal pitch tuning, and the actual pitch (relative to A440hz) for the fifth string are provided. We have provided a figure for beats per minute on selected tracks. Many of these recordings are in the collection at UNC-Chapel Hill, the Blue Ridge Institute, or the Library of Congress. When possible dates and other identification numbers are provided. (The LC numbers may help with Conway tapes either at the Library of Congress Archive or the University of North Carolina).

NOTES ON THE SONGS

COO COO

Many elderly Black and White banjo players in the Southern mountains play this complex, haunting piece about the cuckoo, who lays her eggs in another bird's nest. The three performances included here suggest the range of Black folk aesthetics. These selections are examples of Type III banjo songs that intricately interweave a vocal melody with a different instrumental melody. Few pieces have so embedded themselves in the imagination and repertory of members of the old-time revival. Most performances use sawmill tuning and invoke the cuckoo's evocative warbling (or "wobbling") on the 4th day of July—a time of celebration of independence and also the date of the celebrated four-mile horse race run in 1878 between "Molly and Ten Broecks." The origins of this banjo song may reach back even further to the Irish street ballad "The Noble Skew Ball," printed in 1822.

Various African American variants of this branch of the "Coo Coo" may derive at least in part from an instrumental version of the song that was played by a blind fiddler at the Louisville track the year after the famous four-mile race that attracted 30,000. It is unclear whether Black variants of "Skewbald," known in Black tradition since at least 1868, subsequently influenced "Molly and Ten Broecks" or vice versa (Wilius 1956: 82-4)

1. COO COO

John Snipes, clawhammer fretless banjo without vocal. Sawmill tuning H2 (e.g., gDGCD) (1/31/74); actual pitch = g. 120 beats per minute. The coo coo call is F#-G and the gapped scale is 13457 (GBCDF#). The 7th is usually flattened in the coo coo call and the final phrase of the low part.

John's version is unusual in being an instrumental setting without words. It flows along at a stately pace with occasional syncopation, especially in the high part's coo coo call. This gapped scale, with its almost neutral 7th—easily accomplished on Snipes's fretless instrument—creates a haunting and distinctly African American quality to the performance.

2. COO COO

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo. Sawmill tuning H2 (2/21/74, LCIV); actual pitch = g#. 151 beats per minute. The coo coo call is F#G and the gapped scale is (7)13457 (F}GBCDF#). The 7th (F) is a passing tone in the ascending phrase at the end of the low part.

Dink "caught" this song when he was sixteen from a young man who used to come from Greensboro to play for parties in the mill town of Glen Raven (11/23/76). Dink observes that he plays the piece a little differently from Tommy Thompson, who like many revivalists follows the version set so indelibly by Tom Ashley, which uses d-g for the coo coo call and the gapped scale 13457 (G Bb C D F) (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SF 40029 track 5). Both of Dink's performances reflect ambivalence about fidelity: "I

don't know who's gonna do it [my loving]" and "I sure don't need no man."

This is a fine example of Dink at his best—playful, inventive, and attuned to the immediate audience, with spoken asides and a vocal that soars over the top of the independent Type III banjo part. He implies the beat, uses jump time, and plays around with the timing from beginning to end. He uses the third string as a drone as well as the fifth string, which is often also used for turns in the trajectory of the melody. All these traits are typical of older style banjo playing at its best. The first string provides another repeated drone. The repeated F#G F#G F#F#G F#G F# D C B G riff—starting with the fifth string against the first string—fourth fret for the coo coo call—is particularly effective, and similar combinations are often used in his playing. Snipes uses a similar F#-G sequence, more deliberately paced, in his version of "Coo Coo" (track 1).

Dink plays the opening riff E F Bb+ D C Bb D F G and then sings without banjo.

1. "Where'd you get your brand new shoes/
Clothes you wear so fine?"
Said, "I got my shoes from a railroad man/
And a dress from a man in the [mine]."
Hey... ~ ~ [banjo] ~ ~ [repeats verse 1, with
banjo]
[Spoken] What say: ~ ~ [banjo answers] ~ ~
2. Say, "Who's gonna/glove your hand?"/
Says, "Daddy's gonna glove my hand."
And, "Who's gonna kiss your red rosy cheeks?"/
And, "Mama's gonna kiss my red rosy cheeks."
And, "I sure don't need no man."

[The following are additional stanzas from an earlier performance that same day (2/21/74; LCII).

They demonstrate Dink's improvisational style and the range of his repertoire of stanzas for this song:

3. Said, "I got my shoes from a railroad man"/
And, "I got my shoes, dress from a man in the
mine." "Who's gonna kiss your red rosy cheeks?/
Mama gonna kiss my red rosy cheeks."
And, "I sure don't need no man." [Spoken:] *I ain't
talking about you girl*
4. Hey my mama told me/Says, "Boy you got more
women/Than a boy of your size."
5. Coo Coo is a mighty fine bird/And he warbles as
he flies]

(Back to the stanzas on the CD)

3. Said, "My horses [are] hungry/And, They sure
won't eat your hay." Said, "They're knobbin on the
corn/Tramplin down your hay."/And, "They sure
won't eat your hay."
4. (Repeat first verse)
5. Say, "Who's gonna do your lovin when I'm gone?"/
[Spoken:] "I don't know who's gonna do it."

The special sawmill tuning and similar elements of the banjo performances of Dink Roberts and three other North Carolina banjo performers suggest a common source—probably Black—of this variant of the tune. This variant seems closely related to the performances of Rufus Kasey (track 30) and of the amazing Josh Thomas, and may have arisen in Virginia.

3. OLD RATTLER (FOX CHASE)

John Snipes clawhammer banjo with spoken and sung vocal. "Fox Chase" H3 (e.g., gDGAD) tuning; actual pitch = g. 162 beats per minute.

John plays this tune at a galloping fast pace as the dog, Old Rattler, chases the fox everywhere including under the hogwire. This story song (like other somewhat narrative songs, like Dink's "Garfield" (track 9), "Old Blue" (track 18), and "Fox Chase" (track 31), uses a spoken chant over varied rhythmic patterns.

John praises the dog, sings "Let's see what Old Rattler says," and lets the banjo answer for Rattler. He later "throws" the banjo to imitate Rattler's leap across the river. John's dexterity on the banjo and his affection for slides on a smooth neck are apparent. John and his brother Floyd (also a banjo player) removed the frets from a store-bought banjo they once owned when they were young. When John's manufactured banjo broke about 1920, he had a White fiddler make a fretless neck for him. Later, John covered the banjo's worn fingerboard with a piece of smooth metal about five inches long attached between the peg head and the fifth string. This repair, like the fretless banjo itself, enables John to execute slides and bend notes more easily than a rough or fretted neck could.

[Spoken:] "Now I got it."

1. Old Rattler went on down on the low ground./
You know he/he sorta had to run down there to get
it.//Says, "Son you know?/Try to get the old mule in
the corn."/Let's go down there.//Says, "I believe
we can run the old fox."/After a while I went out

there an/I hear Old Rattler goin' on down the river

~ ~ [banjo] ~ ~

2. I hear I hear him/Ay Aaay...Where did he come
from?/twenty-one, twenty-two/Let me see what Old
Rattler say ~ ~ [banjo] ~ ~
3. After a while you know/goin' down the river/see
there's a high fence.//Hihi ya Go on son./Old Rattler
he/he getting sorta old/And can't get under the hog
wire.//Said, "I don't know what we're gonna
do.//Said, "He's gettin' pretty far ahead a' me."
[throws the banjo] ~ ~ [banjo] ~ ~
4. After a while he run on down there./Feets gonna'
hit the other side./Said Old Rattler/"Let's see what
he's gonna' do when he hits there..." [throws the
banjo] ~ ~ ~ [fades out as Old Rattler and the fox
disappear].

4. GEORGIE BUCK (NEVER LET A WOMAN HAVE HER WAY)

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (e.g., gDGBD); (2/21/74, LC II) actual pitch = g#.

This widely-known African American song is played by all three Piedmont players. It appears in North Carolina (in 1913) in the Frank C. Brown Collection, in the South Carolina Robert Duncan Bass Collection (from the Pee Dee country), and is part of the inactive repertoire of some elderly mountain banjo players (e.g., Tommy Jarrell). At the end of this cut Dink says that he shifts styles in this piece and occasionally picks the banjo rather than plays clawhammer because "it rests you." The call and response between the vocal and instrumental line is explicitly set up by Dink's spoken

introduction for the banjo response.

1. Georgie/Georgie Buck is dead.//
Last word he said/
"Don't let a woman have her way."
[spoken]: what y' say, banja? ~ ~[followed by
banjo break]~ ~
2. Yes, if you let a woman have her way/[spoken:]
I aint talkin' bout you, now/
She'll lead you to astray/Said, "I'm goin to the
shack/ Where the car Number Nine—/
[spoken:] What say banja? ~ ~

5. GEORGIA BUCK

Joe Thompson, fiddle, and Odell Thompson, banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (2/24/74, LC II); actual pitch = g#.

Odell's high-pitched, penetrating voice works interestingly in contrast with Joe's strong fiddle playing and full, low-ranged voice. The cousins play this as a straight ahead dance tune, and Odell uses lots of brush strokes rather than individual notes to create a percussive, accented sound.

1. Georgie Buck is dead, last word he said/"Don't
want no shortnin' in my bread." [Odell's wife Susie
knew this line as: "Don't want no children in my
bed."]
2. Caused me to weep, caused me to moan/
Caused me to leave my home.
3. Oh, it's oh me, oh my/Trouble I do see.
4. Georgie Buck is dead, last word he said/
"Don't let a woman have her way.
5. Lord, a woman have her way, go and stay all day./
Don't let a woman have her way."

6. It rattled and it popped. Old Black Annie got
shot/down by the barroom door.
7. (Repeats Stanza 3) 8.(Repeats Stanza 1)
9. (Repeats Stanza 2) ooh ee

Learned from their fathers, the Thompsons' traditional song suggests many men's view of the dangers of women—whether leading to confinement, to jealousy and death, or to robbery to impress the woman. Dink confirmed the importance of jealousy as a danger when he clarified the meaning of "Georgie Buck" by saying, "Woman's called many a man to go to the grave" and then by playing "Black Annie" (hear track 17). Thus he also clarifies the significance of the Thompsons' text: "It rattled and it popped. Black Annie got shot." Elizabeth Cotten's song "Georgia Buck" may be the only one that does not reflect the same view of women: "Last words he said/Didn't want no shortening in his bread/Shortening in his bread swimming in his head/(hum)."

6. JOHN HENRY

James Roberts, banjo instrumental. H1 tuning (2/21/74); actual pitch = g+.

This song is known to all the Black banjo players on the CD and is found in all the standard collections (e.g., see Brown B, C, and D; compare to track 12). In contrast to Dink's clawhammer or picking style, his son James plays this piece on his father's banjo in a beautifully fluid and syncopated style which combines clawhammer-like downstroking using his index finger on the first string with a two-finger Piedmont guitar-style thumb lead on the bass strings. This more modern style shifts the melody line back and forth across a reg-

ular underlying bass (and foot tapping) beat. James's father Dink was also a wonderfully competent guitar player, born into the generation that bridged the transition from pre-blues banjo to early blues guitar.

7. HIGH SHERIFF

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo. H1 tuning (2/21/74, LC III); actual pitch = g#.

This song is not widespread. Seldom seen as a friend by Black country people, the sheriff appears here as a threat. Bass reports a variant with the "Old Gray Mare" tune from Peedee country about 1891 (Bass 1931: 423). Unlike these versions or Tommy Jarrell's "Police," Dink sings the song to the tune of "Georgie Buck," and the song dwells upon the themes of the chase in the second stanza of some variants of "Georgie Buck": "Chicken on my back/Dog on my tracks/Take me to my shack" (version #9 in Bass 1931). The banjo provides rhythmic counterpoint to his singing; the text rather than the melody persists. [tuning and several bars, pause, rhythmic beginning]

Well High Sheriff and police riding after me./

What's gonna 'come of me?

Yea down the street a-coming (x3)

Monday morning.

Well what's gonna 'come of me?

Yea what's gonna 'come of me?

[spoken:] Ain't that right.

[stanza from an unrecorded performance: "Hear the water rolling (x3) one hundred miles"].

A brief repeated phrase ("down the street a comin'") appears in all of these variants to express, extend, and

emphasize the chase motif by repetition and variation. The line of lyric response to the dramatic situation provides a different emotional core for each variant of this song. Dink's version emphasizes the singer's vulnerability before the law: "What's gonna 'come of me?" Mountaint fiddler Tommy Jarrell performs this stanza with a different emotional core and a more extreme reaction: "Police come. /I didn't want to go this morning (x3)//Shot 'im in the head with my .44 this morning" (Heritage CD 038).

8. JOHN HARDY

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo. H1 tuning (2/21/74, LC III); actual pitch = g#.

Dink's banjo playing at the beginning of this piece is an abbreviated or formative variant of the well-known "John Hardy" played and sung along the North Carolina-Virginia border. His singing, except for the passage marked "refrain," deviates widely from the Round Peak version in being more improvisational and African American in its phrasing and bending of "bluesy" notes.

Put poor John back in jail. [refrain]

[banjo and vocal parallel Blue Ridge melody]//

Said I ask my captain/for my fifteen cents.//

Throw the time away.//

All I want is my .44gun.//Go out to Judge [refrain]

[banjo double times melody and with vocal is related to Blue Ridge melody]// Go out to Judgement Day.//

Yeah, old John Hardy gonna' be hung//

Steel-driving man. ~ ~ [banjo now plays refrain]~

~

Dramatic songs about named Black heroes began to emerge late in the nineteenth century as Jim Crow laws tightened and industrialization moved into the mountains. John Hardy and John Henry were both Black steel-driving men. John Hardy was executed in the coal fields of McDowell County, West Virginia, in 1894. The introduction of a named protagonist produces the intriguing use of multiple points of view—first and third person. Thus, the perspective of participant and witness occur simultaneously. In Dink's "John Hardy," the central character is threatened by the law with confinement ("jail") and death ("gonna be hung") and responds with a direct expression of feeling ("All I want is my .44 gun"). Although John Hardy is often celebrated as a rebellious "bad man" hero, Dink's song also emphasizes his identity from a time before as a free, working man. The song, with its sympathetic tone ("poor John"), is lyrically resolved in the final epithet by reference to the ongoing work that characterized Hardy's unthreatened life in freedom—"steel-driving man."

9. GARFIELD

Dink Roberts, banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (gDGBD); actual pitch = g#.

This banjo song is related to banjo performances by African American Dave Thompson (recorded c. 1963) and by Bascom Lamar Lunsford, both of whom use the "ain't dead" melody in the sung portion of their elaborate banjo song cante fables. In contrast to Lunsford, Thompson merely provides rhythmic background during the spoken sections of his performance:

Dink's singing, except for the "ain't dead" refrains, is a repeated, rhythmic, rather "hambone"-like melody. Dink's singing interacts with the simple but distinctly melodic and syncopated banjo interludes, apparently derived from the "ain't dead" portion of the vocal melody and rather atypical of Dink's playing. (See also Brown, 1952, song #249, p.572.)

Go tell my loving wife,/ "Cut him down."//

"See here Mr. Garfield, I'll take a cigar."//

Go tell my loving wife,/ "Ain't dead,/

Ain't dead,/Ain't dead; laying mighty low."//

Go tell my loving wife,/ "Ain't dead,/

ain't dead; laying mighty low."//

"Well Mr. Garfield, I'll take a cigar."//

Go back and tell my loving wife,/

"Ain't dead,/Ain't dead; laying mighty low."

Unlike Lunsford's verses, the focus of Dink's and the related Black banjo song by David Thompson is not Garfield, who was assassinated in 1881, but the man up against the law and jailed for the shooting (or cutting). The two Black banjo songs are aesthetically close and the recurrent sung refrain in both pieces is the message for the wife. However, as usual, each singer's emotional core is personalized and strikingly different. Dink sings: "Ain't dead; Laying mighty low."

10. OLD CORN LIQUOR

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (2/21/74); actual pitch = g#.

Dink's words are sung to a melody akin to a "Hambone" or auctioneer-like chant, which, adapted to the

tonality and phrasing of the song, crops up in many of Dink's performances. Here, Dink adapts his beat-anticipating "Galax-lick" brush that ends on the fifth string, to the high strain of the tune as played by the Thompsons on track 11. Three different performances of this song by Dink on the same day suggest his delight in playing around with the stanzas and the wording of this song; they illustrate the improvisation which is so typical of the Black banjo tradition. Many of these stanzas leave a line unfinished for an obvious rhyme. In an earlier performance Dink said, "I'm not gonna say what else." He filled in the rhyme with the word "hell" only after Tommy Thompson encouraged, "Oh go ahead, no one's listening." These musical and poetic techniques are repeated and varied in the Tenneva Ramblers "Tell It to me (x2)/Drink corn liquor; Let your cocalife be" and the Thompsons' track 11.

["Old corn liquor was the cause of it all" sometimes was Dink's first stanza]

1. I got drunk and fell in the wagon./Old corn liquor don't take no draggin'.
2. Yea, who's been here since I been gone./Yea—little bitty girl with the red dress on.
[stanza sung 2/21/74: 2. I got drunk and fell in the well./Old corn liquor was—/—gone to hell.]
3. I got drunk and fell in the wagon (x2)./Old corn liquor don't take no draggin'.

11. OLD CORN LIQUOR

Joe Thompson, fiddle; Odell Thompson, banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (2/24/74); actual pitch about g#.

The Thompsons' version falls into fiddle-tune struc-

ture, and Joe loves to use it to accompany a set of "Hands up eight" dance calls. Odell's words for the song are the same as those recorded in Person County about 1923 by Kate S. Russell (Brown III 43 1952: 74). The Thompson family lived and played music in Person County, when they worked as tenant farmers and earlier as slaves on the Walter Thompson plantation.

Old corn liquor/
was the cause of it all (x4). [low strain]/I got drunk and lost my hat./Old corn liquor was the cause of that. [high strain]/
[The following verses were spoken after the performance. Odell: "I got drunk and lost my hat./Old corn liquor was the cause of that." Tommy: "I got drunk and fell in a wagon./Old corn liquor got me draggin'." Odell: "I got drunk and fell in the well./Hadn't been for that I'd a..." (Laughter)]

12. JOHN HENRY

Joe Thompson, fiddle, and Odell Thompson, clawhammer banjo and vocals. H1 tuning (2/24/74); actual pitch = g#.

This piece appears as a work song, and as a Type II banjo song, is widely shared by Black and White old-time and bluegrass banjo and guitar players. In the 1870s John Henry identified the expanding threat of industrialization in the South, and the Virginia worker challenged the company system (in this song the B&O) in a race against the steam drill. John Henry died with his hammer in his hand, but his song lives on. For a starting place on the vast John Henry scholarship and on its banjo song see Conway 1995 and listen to "John

Henry"—Fred Cockerham, fiddle and vocal; Kyle Creed, clawhammer banjo (County #701).

1. When John Henry was a little bitty boy/Sittin on the side of me/Raised his eyes on the B & O road/"Gonna' be the death of me/Gonna' be the death of me/Lordy, gonna' be the death of poor me, Lord Gonna' be the death of me."
2. John Henry he said, "Shaker,/Shaker, you'd better pray. /Føre I'd let that [steam drill?] beat me down /Goin' away from here, Lord/ Goin' away from here."

13. LOVE SOMEBODY (SOLDIER'S JOY)

Joe Thompson, fiddle; Tommy Thompson, clawhammer banjo. L2 tuning; actual pitch = g#+.

Played from Quebec to Louisiana, "Soldier's Joy" is the most widely known tune in Great Britain and North America. Published in Scotland in 1779, the tune is "usually classed as a reel or country dance." In the South the tune sometimes appears with the song "I Love Somebody" (Jabbour 1971), probably as a result of Black influence.

This was one of Joe's and Tommy's early attempts to reach across their traditions and play a familiar tune together. White fiddle playing today usually repeats each part of the tune twice before moving from the A part (usually the low or the "coarse") to the B part (usually the high or "fine"). In this performance, this expectation bumps into the African American practice exemplified in Joe Thompson's playing, of repeating the low part of the tune several times, before doing two repeats of the high part. The old pattern of varied repeats effectively sets down a solid groove for musi-

cians (and dancers) and contributes to the litanic effect of the music; it was also used by some mountain White musicians such as Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham. Like Odell Thompson with his dad, they often played face to face so each could motion or touch the knee of the other player with his knee to anticipate the shift. (Etta Baker signals by raising her left hand.) In this performance, after some artfully disguised negotiations over how many repeats to take, Joe and Tommy settle into a spirited meeting of musical minds.

14. LONG TAIL BLUE

John Snipes, clawhammer banjo and vocal. L1 "Roustabout" tuning (gCGBD); actual pitch = g+.

This is an amazing survival of a song which reaches back to the street vendor "Old Corn Meal" in New Orleans in the 1830s and appears in the early Banjo Instructors. John's lines remind us that at least by the time of the earliest minstrels and roustabouts, Uncle Sam's long tail blue had replaced the redcoats in the songs sung in the period of British colonialism. His version shares much with the texts of "Zip Coon" and some simplified melodic contours with the typical lower part of "Turkey in the Straw," the tune often associated with this minstrel song.

1. Give me a long tail blue. (x2)
Wear my jacket all the week./Give me my long tail blue.//
2. [—?—] coat/ I got two [Sue?]
Wear my jacket all the week /Then my long-tail blue.

The stage character Zip Coon was a city dandy dressed

in ultra-modish clothes. If "there was one thing he could not do without, it was a blue coat with long swishing tails" (Nathan 1962: 57). Although the long tail blue coat was a symbol of the Zip Coon minstrel caricatures, roustabouts actually wore them. Many phrases in "My Long Tail Blue" (New York, ca. 1838) are similar to John's version: "Some niggers they have but one coat,/ But you see I've got two;/I wears a jacket all the week,/ And Sunday my long tail blue.//Jim Crow is courting a white gal,/And yaller folk call her Sue; I guess she back'd a nigger out/And swung my long tail blue."

15. AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MORE

John Snipes, clawhammer banjo, and Tommy Thompson, guitar. t1 "Roustabout" tuning; actual pitch = g+.

From Dave Alston, John learned his first two pieces—this song and "Long Tail Blue." They are similar but John distinguishes them, and he enjoyed performing them with a guitar player.

Late last night/the night before/I know what the jaybird knows [or: How in the world does the jaybird know?]/[banjo plays: "Ain't gonna rain no more"]/"I don't want to let you know"(x2) [or: "I come here to let you know"] (repeats 1 x 2)

Brown (1952, Vol III #430: 517-18) cites two texts from Durham, North Carolina, that John's version echoes, including B-3: "What does the blackbird say to the crow?/Tain't gon' to rain no mo'" (x3). Dink told us that there was a time when the law would get you for singing this song during severe droughts. Perhaps it was considered bad luck.

16. GOING WHERE I'VE NEVER BEEN BEFORE

John Snipes, clawhammer banjo and vocal. H1 tuning; (vocal melody scale: 1356; banjo melody scale: 1(2)3567); actual pitch = g+. 155 beats per minute.

This song is a sequence of emotional core lines about a lover moving on. Each line is repeated once, and the stanzas are improvisationally varied. The form suggests the banjo's influence on the composition of the earliest recorded blues, which repeated one line over and over. John's song lyrics have parallels with the roustabout lyrics—e.g., the Kentucky roustabout "jump-up" song, "I'm goin' down rivuh befo' long (x3)/ Ain't coming back till 'bout next fall, oh baby (x3)," and his pronunciation of "baby" seems close to some of the dialect recorded in Wheeler (1944). In the earlier context of slavery, the laments in the short song lines "Baby, baby, you're no more mine" or "I heard my darling calling me" could echo the heartbreak of lovers being sold and torn apart.

Akin to one section of Cockerham's "Lonesome Road Blues" and Wade Ward's more major-sounding "Chilly Winds," John plays at a breakneck but beautifully even and accurate dance tempo—particularly impressive on a fretless instrument. Vocal phrases ending on the third are resolved to the tonic by the banjo melody. Snipes uses the fretless fingerboard to subtly push the pitch higher on notes he wants to emphasize. The vocal melody is simple but effective, and uses a more limited scale than the complementary but more developed banjo melody.

1. Going where I've never been before./

Lord, going where I've never been before...//

["Lord" or "Baby" is added or dropped throughout the song to play with the rhythm of the syllables.]

2. Going where the cold wind don't blow. (x2)//
3. Oh oh hey hey ...//
4. Baby you can't get hold of me. (x2)//
5. Baby baby you are no more mine. (x2)//
6. Going where the climate suits my clothes (x2)//
7. Baby baby you're no more mine. (x2)//
8. I heard my darling calling me. (x2)// [Spoken:]
Let me see what that man says, and I'll quit.

17. BLACK ANNIE

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo. H1 tuning (2/21/74); actual pitch = g#.

Dink's sung melody contains elements akin to the familiar "Reuben's Train" and "John Henry." Dink learned the song "Black Annie" from his "blood brother"—Mince Phillips of Burlington—who he believed made the song. "He dead too. That joker could go. I ain't lying. I caught a lot of pieces from him. If I was young, and I'd go back home, say, 'I'm gonna play that too.' You can't have your mind on too sweet, little young, pretty girls." Phillips was 23 years old when Dink, who was 14, was catching tunes from him. With its trip to the barroom, this tragic Black banjo song is reminiscent of "Frankie and Albert," but here the woman is killed rather than the man. Dink's performance centers on the killing and the emotional core evokes the lonely pain of Black Annie's death. Listen also to Hobart Smith on Folk Legacy (FSA17).

[spoken:] Black Annie weep, Black Annie moan/

Black Annie drinking of the glass.

[sung:] 1. Well/Yeah, Black Annie went down to the barroom door./Calls for a four-gallon jug, "Hand it down, quick as you can./Don't let my man catch me here." [spoken:]

- What say, banjo?//
2. Way down, way down, way down in Egypt some time ["Egypt land" sometimes]. [spoken:]
What say, banjo?/
 3. "Hey, hand it down, quick as you can/
Don't let my man catch me here."//
 4. First shot he did make/landed in the facing of the door./What you say banjo?/
Next shot he did make/landed in the facing of the door./
Then the next shot he did make./
landed in Black Annie's side./
 5. Said, "Y' oughta been there, hear her moan./
Could not hear from cryin.'"
[spoken:] What say, banjo?/
Way behind the hill/ Poor Black Annie got killed/
Never know the death she died.//
 6. Way down,/way/Black Annie weep,
Black Annie moan, /Black Annie dead and gone.

After another performance Dink observed: "Yeah, she was real, a real person. That's right. ...Used to know where she lived. The man killed her...he cut her light out." His comment seems related to the roustabout spiritual: "Is yo' lamps gone out? (x2)/Oh, what you goin' to do in Egypt when yo' lamps gone out?"

18. OLD BLUE

Dink Roberts, two-finger, up-picking banjo. H1 or "Banjo tuning"; actual pitch = g#.

After his hard work and solemn musings on "Black Annie" that day, Dink here uses the biblical (or African) motifs for comedy. Again, the banjo accompaniment provides melodic antiphony to Dink's singing. The sung melody has many variants; Dink sings it at a much faster clip on "Fox Chase" (track 31). Here the banjo accompaniment's repetitive phrase moves from its highest note on the second, to the flatted third, to the third, sliding back through the flatted third (blues note) to the tonic.

1. Had an old dog and his name was Blue.//
2. All them pretty gals ganging around/
Didn't have a penny to go around.//
3. Me and old Blue went out on the hunt/
4. Me and old Blue went out on the hunt//
He treed a possum out on a hollow stump.//
You know from that he was a good old dog.//
5. Me and old Blue went out on another hunt./
He seen the possum out on the limb./
I grabbed that possum and put him in the sack./
I said, "Scuse me Blue till' I get back" (laugh).
[Jim Jackson sings the variant line: "Look mean Blue till I get back."]
6. Now old Blue died, I dug his grave./
Dug his grave with a silver spade./
Every link I call his name./ Go on Blue, you good dog you. (x2)//
7. Ain't treed a possum since Noah's Ark./

[spoken:] That's when I left.

A West Tennessee version ("Old Blue" [Brown 1952, #220: 252]) is similar to Dink's in plot but more elaborate. In his playful style, Dink's last line is an ironic capper reminiscent of the dry exaggeration of the tall tale. This line and overlapping motifs are also found in Jim Jackson's 1928 recording of "Old Dog Blue" (*Anthology of American Folk Music* SF40090).

19. GOING AWAY FROM HOME (TAKE CARE OF MY WIFE AND CHILD)

John Snipes, clawhammer banjo and vocal. H1 tuning; actual pitch = g (123456 vocal melody).

This song is similar in melody to the Poplin Family's "Going Round the World Baby Mine" and Lily May Ledford's and George Pegram's "Going Round the World With A Banjo Picking Girl." John enlivens the tune with a few strategically placed slides amidst extremely clean, rollicking, drop-thumb downstroking peppered with hammer-ons and pull-offs. The slides take full advantage of the fretless fingerboard, and appear often on the first and last phrase of the stanza. The song also includes lines found in "Long Tail Blue."

[spoken:] "Well I'll see if I can stack one more for you now."

1. Going away from home (x2)/Lordy me, and it's trouble I do see/Going away from home.
2. Take care of my wife and child. (x2)/I don't care where I go./Take care of my wife and child.
3. Darling (take care?) of my long tail blue. (x2)/
Work all the week, ...?/

Take care of my long tail blue.

4. Take care of my wife and child/Take care of my/Take care of my wife and child.
5. Going away from home (x2)/Lordy me, it's trouble I do see/Goin' away from home.
6. Take care of my long tail blue./ Darling...? long tail blue/Work all the week./Take care of my long tail blue./Take care my wife and child.

20. YOU DON'T KNOW MY DARLING

John Snipes, vocal and “complementing” (thumb-lead, two-finger picking) style banjo. L2 tuning; actual pitch = g+. 114 beats per minute.

This fine example of what John calls “complementing” has a different attitude—one of relaxed play. White minstrels reported learning a two-finger up-picking style from Blacks by the 1850s and it became the dominant minstrel style as the 19th century progressed. Later minstrelsy and “classical” banjo playing incorporated finger techniques from European and American guitar styles and became widely popular. By the 20th century, Black and White fingering patterns reconverged. In this selection notice the flowing melodic line and the use of arpeggiated chords which are quite different from the percussive sound of John's usual “thumping” or clawhammer style.

You don't know my darling/

You don't know my babe (x2) (fade).

21. JAYBIRD MARCH

Etta Baker on banjo and her older sister Cora Phillips on guitar. Tuning (e.g., dDF#AD); actual pitch = e. 108 beats per minute.

Etta Baker (b. 1913), raised sixteen miles from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Caldwell County, North Carolina, and now living in Morganton, is a remarkably expressive blues musician who plays guitar and electric guitar. She was honored with a National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Award in 1991. Etta, who is of African American, Irish, and Native American descent, grew up in a musical family. Etta plays a wide repertory of old folk and banjo pieces, blues, and tunes of her own creation. Here her older sister Cora Phillips, who was married to the banjo songster Thee Phillips, accompanies her on guitar. During the mid-1980s, Etta began to remember her father's tunes and put them on the banjo in her own guitar style rather than in his “framing” banjo style.

22. GOING UP NORTH

John Jackson, recorded 3/7/97, Washington, DC. H1 tuning; actual pitch = g. 126 beats per minute.

Born in 1926 and raised in Rapahannock County, Virginia, John received an NEA Heritage Award in 1986. An internationally known blues guitar player and singer, he grew up in a family of musicians who played for local dances. John learned banjo only after the family guitar his brother took to a dance got broken in a tussle.

John sometimes uses an up-picking banjo style

related to his graceful blues guitar style. But on this and the dance tune “Cindy” he uses a predominantly downstroking technique that achieves a clawhammer effect. The thumb never leaves the fifth string, and the index finger alternates between a normal clawhammer downstroke and a guitar style down-up-down brush, preceded and followed by a fifth-string thumb note.

[spoken:] “Going Up North’, I learned this from my father”:

Going up North/Pull my britches off/Dance in my long shirt tails/Lord Lord/Dance in my long shirt tails./ho ho/ho ho/Can't get no letter from home/Lord, Lord/Can't get no letter from home./Caused me to weep/Caused me to moan/Caused me to leave my happy home/Hey hey/ho ho/Can't get no letter from home Lord, Lord/Can't get no letter from home/ho ho/ho hey-hey/Can't get no letter from home/Lord Lord/Can't get no letter from home/[repeats first verse]/Hey hey/ho ho/Can't get no letter from home Lord, Lord/Can't get no letter from home.

23. SUGAR HILL (BRI TC 41)

Homer Walker, clawhammer banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (3/8/77); actual pitch = a. 126 beats per minute.

“Uncle” Homer Walker, born in 1904 in West Virginia, lived much of his life in Glen Lyn, Virginia. He learned banjo from his mother and an uncle and knew many Black and White banjo and fiddle players, including the legendary Henry Reed. Walker accompanies his resonant singing with a clear, straightforward frailling stroke. Never dropping his thumb, he uses frequent hammer-ons and pull-offs to define the melody

and provide rhythmic accents. “Sugar Hill” is one of the standard “rounder” songs of the region; listen to Tommy Jarrell's and Kyle Creed's “Sugar Hill” (Heritage CD-038).

- 1 You can plow the old grey mare./I'm gonna plow that mule there./You go home with Daisy Gilbert./She did catch a big fool, now./I'm goin' back to Sugar Hill (x3)./That's where I get my fill./ [banjo]
2. My marster had an old grey horse./I know the year he was born./It took two birds 18 years to [plant] a peck of corn./I'm goin' back to Sugar Hill.(x2)/ [banjo] I'm goin' back to Sugar Hill. (x3)/Poor boys, I'm goin' back to Sugar Hill./You wanna get your eyes [opened] up./You wanna' get your fill./You wanna' get more what ya come for./Climb old Sugar Hill.

24. MOMMA DON'T ALLOW (BRI-VC35)

Irvin Cook, banjo (two-finger up-picking) and vocal; Leonard Bowles, fiddle. Banjo tuned in H1; actual pitch = g++. 138 beats per minute.

Irvin Cook (1924) and Leonard Bowles (1919) were both born in Henry County, Virginia. Rather than a man-against-the-law song, this is a man-against-the-house-rules song; an interesting resistance in a still often woman-centered culture—whether Momma refers to mother or to a gal friend. The spirited resistance and enjoyment of freedom appears in many song lines along the Blue Ridge, including “I'll eat when I'm hungry; I'll drink when I'm dry.”

In this performance dubbed from a 1984 videotape made for the Blue Ridge Institute, Cook and Bowles

are seated facing each other, close together, and Bowles's fiddle is held firmly against his chest, below the shoulder. Cook is playing a resonator banjo, using a two-finger up-picking style in which the index finger works the upper strings with up-picks and occasional brush strokes, and the thumb is used for repeated fifth string and, for some tunes, melody notes on the bass, third and second strings. This and other performances at the same session show the two experienced musicians locked into a solid dance beat with steady foot tapping and Bowles's strong, percussive bow strokes.

1. Momma don't allow no banjo playing in here. (x2)
I don't care what momma don't allow /I'll play my banjo anyhow./Momma don't allow, etc.
2. Momma don't allow no whiskey drinking in here.(x2) I don't care what momma don't allow/ I'll drink my liquor anyhow.
3. Momma don't allow no guitar playing here. (x2)
I don't care what momma don't allow/
I'll play my guitar anyhow./Mama don't allow, etc.

25. SHORNTIN' BREAD (BRI TC 83)

Leonard Bowles, clawhammer banjo. H1 tuning (9/28/77); actual pitch = g#. 132 beats per minute.

Leonard Bowles, comfortable with banjo or fiddle, plays this standard tune in a non-drop-thumb frailing style. The melody is defined by index finger down strokes, frequent use of left hand slides on the third string, and repeated use of the thumb string for the tune's highest g. Index finger brushes provide a solid up-beat pulse for this fast-tempo dance version of a tune familiar to most Black and White players.

26. SHORNTIN' BREAD (BRI TC 83)

"Big Sweet" Lewis Harriston, banjo and vocal. H1 tuning (e.g., gDGBD) (9/28/77); actual pitch = a. 114 beats per minute.

Born in 1929 in West Virginia, "Big Sweet" Lewis Hairston was a resident of Henry County, Virginia, most of his adult life. His admiration of bluegrass is reflected in both his clear and ringing vocal style and his use of two-finger up-picking to achieve a bright and syncopated, somewhat "bluegrassy" sound. Paired here with his friend Leonard Bowles's frailing version of the same tune, the two strong performances provide a fine contrast between older and more modern performance styles.

- Banjo opens with melody
1. Put on the skillet/an' throw away the lid/
Mamma's gonna cook ["bake" in other verses] a little shortnin' bread.
 2. Talk to the skillet/talk to the lid./Talk to the girl [who] makes shortnin' bread/[banjo break]
 3. That ain't all Mamma's gonna do./
She's gonna give a little party too//
 4. (repeat 1)
 5. That ain't all she's gonna do./
She's gonna give a little honey too./ [banjo break]
 6. repeat 1/[banjo break]
 7. repeat 3/[banjo break]
 8. Talk to the skillet/Talk to the lid. [banjo break]

27. FOX CHASE (BRI TC 25)

John Tyree, banjo. H3 "Fox Chase" tuning (gDGAD)

(1/3/77); actual pitch = b (four semitones sharp). 145 beats per minute.

John Tyree was born in 1915 near Sontag, Virginia, in Franklin County. A sister played both banjo and guitar, and there were many musicians in their mother's family. He learned banjo primarily from his uncle Torrence Wade. In Mr. Tyree's words, "that's trailing—I never played too much picking..." "Fox Chase" and "Hop Along Lou" were among the first tunes he learned to play as a boy. This was recorded during a session in which Tyree was demonstrating the variety of tunings and sound effects he used. After playing "Going Down the Road" in H1, he retuned to L1 for "Hop Along Lou," and then retuned to H3 for this rhythmically surging version of "Fox Chase," then to H2 (sawmill) for "Coo Coo," back to H1 for "Sally Ann," and finally ended with a repeat of "Fox Chase," this time with and without a "balled up handkerchief" behind the head to show how the handkerchief made it "sound finer." He commented that he and his father could call dance figures and play banjo at the same time, and that the music "would sound twice as good" when played for dancers.

28. ROUSTABOUT ("BUFFALO")

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo and words. L1 "Roustabout" tuning (e.g., gCGBD); actual pitch = g#+. 138 beats per minute.

Along with "Coo Coo," this is one of the important showpiece tunes in the Black banjo repertory. The banjo is tuned to L1—so the tonal center is nominally set to C—but Dink sings the melody in G, and then

resolves each verse with a passage based on the tonal center C. Dink sets down a fast-moving, pulsing bass *ostinato* figure using repeated downstroking index finger and drop-thumb strikes on the second and third strings. He avoids the dissonant low fourth string C by dampening it or by raising it to D with his left-hand thumb during the G part of the tune. Then he prepares for the C section with a "Mt. Airy/Galax lick" passage on the fifth and first strings to begin the high part. Here he allows the low C to resonate and emphasize the shift in tonal (and emotional) key. This tuning has the same interval pattern as Joel Sweeney's tuning and was also used by the earliest minstrels. The song is likely a reminder of the older uses of this tuning that were current when Whites first learned the banjo from Blacks in the 1830s and later when the five-string banjo appeared. The song is quite different from most songs now played in L1, today's "standard C," which remains the most common tuning used by Pete Seeger and many other urban banjo players.

1. Where you been?/You—Roustabout
2. Say, when you go a-courtin'/
Yea, when you go a-fishin'/Carry a hook and line./
Yea, when you go to courtin'/Court with a willin'
mind./
3. Yea, who been here since I been gone?/
Little bitty girl with the red dress on.

Dink says that he learned this song at age 15 from his family in the Piedmont. He took it with him when he moved to Mt. Airy in Surry County to farm and to work on the railroad. The two-part structure with the

striking key change is found in other Black versions and also in Fred Cockerham's. An outstanding White banjo player, Fred grew up and lived most of his life in Low Gap not far from Mt. Airy, but did not remember any Black musicians in the area; nor is there any indication that he and Dink ever heard each other play. Some Black players, including John Tyree and Rufus Kasey, call this tune "Hop Light" or "Hop Along Lou," echoing the refrain used in some versions, including Cockerham's. To the best of Fred's memory, Mal Smith brought "Roustabout" to the area from Virginia in the first quarter of the century and called it "Long Steel Rail." The likelihood of a Virginia source is strengthened by the complex and closely related versions of Black players Rufus Kasey, Josh Thomas, and others from Virginia, many of whom were working on or near the railroads during this same period.

29. COOKING IN THE KITCHEN

John Snipes, clawhammer banjo, with the minstrel show trick of "throwing" the banjo. H1 tuning (e.g., gDGBD); actual pitch = g. 144 beats per minute.

John learned to throw the banjo and play this song and "Old Rattler" from Duke Mason.

1. I got drunk, rarin' and a-pitchin'/Lord Lord, cooking in the kitchen, Lordy Lord.//
2. I don't know. Ran away/I don't know.
Hide away.//
3. Hideo Hi Ho/Hideo—
4. Ran away. Nobody knows/out in the kitchen—
5. I got drunk, rarin' and a-pitchin'; cooking in the kitchen, Lordy Lord/

Lordy Lord, cooking in the kitchen, Lordy Lord.

6. Nobody knows. Ran away.
7. Hideo Hi Ho/Hideo Hie He
8. Ran away. I don't know.
9. Somebody drunk, rarin' and a-pitchin'./
Lord Lord cooking in the kitchen, Lordy Lord.//
10. Ran away. Nobody knows./Hey Hey (x2)//
11. Rarin' and a-pitchin' (x2)//Kitchen/
Lordy Lord/ cooking in the kitchen, Lordy Lord.//
12. I don't know.
13. Hideo
14. Ran away. Nobody know.

30. COO COO BIRD (BRI-VC42)

Rufus Kasey, vocal and clawhammer banjo, recorded in 1984, Roanoke, VA. H2 sawmill tuning. The banjo was tuned extremely high "to make it ring better"; actual pitch = b. 138-130 beats per minute. The coo coo call is F-G and the gapped scale is 1[2]3457(G[A]BCDF).

The almost hypnotic strength of this performance is due in part to the deceptively simple right-hand technique, which uses straight frailing with a few pull-offs and no drop thumb to lay down a solid and rapidly moving foundation for the singing. The extremely high pitch of the instrument contributes to the sense of controlled energy, as does Kasey's constant bending and shaping of the pitch of individual notes, particularly at the end of the short worksong-like phrases. Kasey's performance is sure and unhurried. His extended banjo solo contains subtle variations such as the occasional addition of A to the scale in the final phrase of the lower part, and a deliberate slowing of the tempo a few

bars before the end. He also sometimes drops consonants at word endings or beginnings to maintain the rhythmic flow.

1. Coo Coo Bird/[is a] flyin' bird./
She warbles [wobbles?]/as she flies. She never/
hollers coo coo/till the fourth day/of July.
2. Your name/[is] Charming Betsy./
[If you think] I don't love you/you're just a fool.
3. Young woman/young lady/walk by,/I read your
mind./Your mind /I[s] to marry/
and to leave/this [sometimes "bad luck"] town.
4. Little Willy/she's my darlin./Little Willy/she my
dear./Little Willy/she's my darlin./And I hate/to
leave her here.
5. Old Molly/she were the bay horse./Old Cory/she
were too./Old Molly /wouldn't drink no water./Old
Cory /I[s]he there.flew.
6. I'm gonna build/me a steeple/on the mountain/so
high./So I/can see/little Willy/
[As] she walk by.

31. FOX CHASE

Dink Roberts, clawhammer banjo with sung and spoken words. H3 "Fox Chase" tuning (e.g., gDGAD); actual pitch = g#. 132 beats per minute.

This instrumental showpiece with sung and spoken words about the hound Old Rattler chasing the fox is well known to Southern Black and some White banjo players. Played also by Blacks on the harmonica, the piece is an instrumental favorite of Irish fiddlers and pipers. This masterful performance includes intricately worked out banjo imitations of all the characters, and

moves from the rooster "cup cacks," sounds of the horn, bounds of the hound, galloping of the mule, strutting of the old woman, finally to the fox's fast-flowing flight in the first morning light. The saga ends with the fox's wry comment.

Old Lady was named Sue/
And the old man was named Tom.
The old fox came running/
The old rooster [was] up .../
He was gonna catch' em all, but the old rooster/
An' the old rooster was up in the tree an' he was
cackling like a ... [banjo]
Said:/She said "Tom"/"What do you want Sue?"/
"Said that cussed fox"/bout to eat up every chicken
I got."
The old rooster say cuk cack/the old rooster cup
cacking like this/ [banjo]
Said "Son"/ "What you want? What ya want Pap?"/
"I wish you's go out yonder an get your horn./
Your mammy's about to worry me to death." He's
crazy 'bout his dog/Just like./[Reminds me of
myself]
He got his horn, put it up across his shoulders/
Went down across the holler, and called up Old
Rattler/
He called up Rattler like this. [banjo] ~~
Old lady come back across the holler /
[...] strutting like this./[banjo] ~~
He said, "Son?"/"What you want Pap?"/
Said; "Go down an' catch that old mule./
Put the saddle on him."/An' he put the mule/put
the saddle on him/Old man jumped on him/

An' the boy run up across the hill./
 She went up 'n down the hill./ She was a galloping
 mule./[banjo]~~~/She [...] galloped so much. [The
 gunsight...?][banjo]~~~/ He went up on top of the
 hill./
 He was awful crazy about his dog. [Re]minded me
 of myself. Couldn't hear nothing but the birds sin-
 gin'./

Rufus Casey at home with his banjo, 1997. Photo by Scott Odell.



Said, "Pap?"/ "What you want, son?"
 "You reckon that fox caught the dog?"/He said: "Go
 away from here you cotten-eyed fool."/[banjo]~~~/
 Went down through the sheep pasture/kinda made
 a bog./Got in that sheep pasture/an' kinda made a
 log./
 After a while Old Leap struck way back down/cross
 the holler like this.[banjo]
 Here he goes. [banjo]~~~/
 Run him all day/(I mean) he run him all night.
 An' the sun was beginnin' to rise in the East next
 morning/
 Old Fox looked back in the East.
 Said, "God bless my red-eyed time./
 Done set the world on fire!"

32. LITTLE BROWN JUG

Joe Thompson, fiddle; Odell Thompson, "patting ham-
 bone"; Tommy Thompson, banjo. Probably L2 tuning;
 actual pitch = g. 126-144 beats per minute.
 (2/24/74)

Here Odell Thompson has a chance to display some
 spirited "hambone patting," backed by his cousin Joe's
 fiddle and Tommy Thompson's melodic-style clawham-
 mer banjo. The performance has a gleeful air appropri-
 ate to the subject of the tune, which was first pub-
 lished in 1849 (also see Brown 1962).

Tommy Thompson: "Do that hambone ..."

[patting hambone sounds]

Odell Thompson: "You didn't know I could do that
 did ya? General hilarity...."

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Rear card photo: Dink Roberts playing gift of Leonard banjo and son James Roberts, 1978, by Cece Conway.

Back booklet photos (clockwise from upper left): Dink Roberts, 1984, by Cece Conway; Joe and Odell Thompson, 1984, photo by Cece Conway; John Snipes, 1974, by Cece Conway; and Rufus Kasey, 1997, by Scott Odell.

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