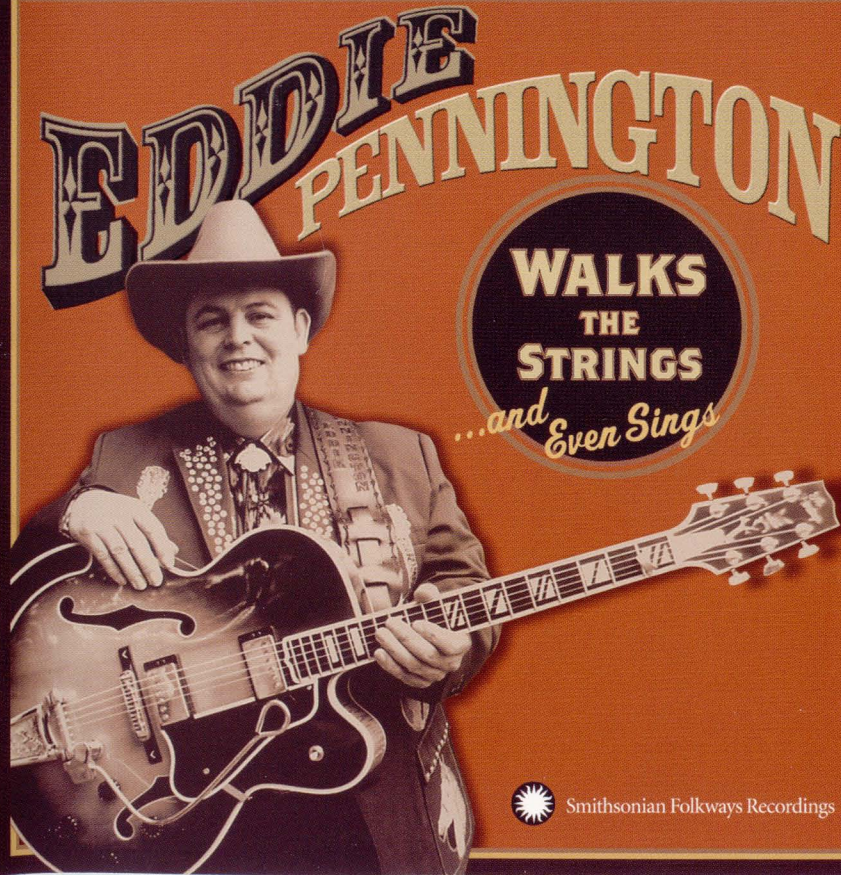


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EDDIE PENNINGTON

WALKS
THE
STRINGS

...and Even Sings

- | | | | |
|--|------|---|------|
| 1. Walking the Strings
(arr. Merle Travis/Unichappel Music Inc., BMI) | 1:52 | 10. Fertile Liza
(Larry Pennington) | 3:28 |
| 2. Mose's Blues
(Mose Rager) | 2:37 | 11. Stealing Time
(Eddie Pennington) | 2:31 |
| 3. Wabash Cannonball
(William Kent) | 1:52 | 12. Sweet Georgia Brown
(Ben Bernie-Kenneth Casey Sr.- Maceo Pinkard/Remick Music Corp., ASCAP) | 2:43 |
| 4. Information, Please
(Merle Travis-Harold Hensley-Red Murrell/Unichappel Music Inc., BMI) | 3:01 | 13. The Pig Got Up | 1:59 |
| 5. John's Smoke Turns Blue
(John M. Travis-Merle Travis/Unichappel Music Inc., BMI) | 3:54 | 14. Stone's Rag | 3:03 |
| 6. Home
(Geoffrey Clarkson-Harry Clarkson-Peter Van Steeden Jr./Geoffrey Clarkson Music-Songcastle Music, ASCAP) | 2:59 | 15. Bye, Bye Blues
(David Bennett-Chauncey Gray-Frederick L. Hamm-Bert Lown/Bourne Co., ASCAP) | 0:51 |
| 7. Nine Pound Hammer
(Merle Travis/Unichappel Music Inc., BMI) | 3:50 | 16. So Round, So Firm
(Merle Travis-Eddie Kirk-Cliffie Stone/Unichappel Music Inc., BMI) | 1:20 |
| 8. Fig Ankle Rag
(Norman Pennington) | 2:51 | 17. The Panic Is On
(Hezekiah Jenkins) | 3:27 |
| 9. Raindrops
(Uncle Collie Barnes) | 2:49 | 18. Bluebell
(Edward Madden-Theodore Morse) | 2:16 |
| | | 19. Duncan and Brady | 3:23 |
| | | 20. Over The Rainbow
(Harold Arlen-E. Y. Harburg/EMI Music Pub., ASCAP) | 2:19 |

Curator's Foreword

In 2001, the National Endowment for the Arts declared Kentucky guitar player Eddie Pennington an American national treasure when it awarded him the federal government's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts, the National Heritage Fellowship. He was recognized for his excellence in performing Kentucky thumpicking-style guitar, his significance within his art form, and his contributions to the cultural life of the United States. The previous year, he had received Kentucky's first Governor's Folk Heritage award, and in 2003, the University of Western Kentucky bestowed upon him an honorary doctoral degree. As Dr. Erika Brady, of Western Kentucky University, and Joseph Wilson, Director of the National Council for the Traditional Arts, elaborate in the notes accompanying this album, Eddie learned from those in the most direct "bloodline" of the style, has toured and organized events to share his Kentucky tradition with countless listeners, and has been a role model for other aspiring musicians. We are pleased to have his creative work as part of the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings collection.

Another special feature of this album is the engaging history of Kentucky-style thumpicking and Eddie Pennington's place in it, written by Joseph Wilson. A proud son of Trade, Tennessee, former journalist and editorialist, veteran of Nashville's music industry, and, for the past quarter century, Director of the National Council for the Traditional Arts, Wilson is also the recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship, honored for the major impact he has had on the folk and traditional arts in the United States. Acquainted firsthand with most of the important figures in Appalachian music in the latter half of the 20th century, he has a take on its history grounded in solid personal experience. We thank him for producing this recording and for gracing it with his historical perspective.

Daniel Sheehy

Introduction

Erika Brady

The first time I saw Eddie Pennington perform was in the fall of 1991, at a small festival organized by folklorist Roby Cogswell for the N.C.T.A. on the grounds of Mammoth Cave National Park. The occasion was more momentous than I realized: Eddie had played extensively in jams, local contests, and other informal events, but this was his first experience "playing out"—that is, performing in a semiprofessional setting, for an artist's fee. All I knew was that I was in the presence of an authentic master, bringing a richness, delicacy, and heart out of his instrument in a style that caused me to rethink everything I thought I knew about what a guitar can do. It was a revelation.

Since then, I've learned more about Kentucky-style thumpicking, and I've come to recognize that my reaction is not uncommon, even among musicians from the region. The respected picker Steve Rector first heard his preacher play "I Am a Pilgrim" in the style of Merle Travis and Mose Rager. He recalls, "It gripped me like a *claw*." Eddie remembers the transforming experience of first seeing Mose Rager play: "He just made the guitar come to life, and it seemed to breathe when he was playing." Musicians speak of discovering the style in language that draws on the language of conversion.

Indeed, many citizens of Muhlenberg County pay their musical legacy a reverence that draws on the forms of religion in this deeply religious region. They are blessed with a tireless community scholar in Bobby Anderson, who devotedly documents the sound through books and recordings, and keeps straight the endless "begats" of who influenced whom. They hold certain days as special, celebrating birthdays of Merle Travis, Odell Martin, and Mose Rager as opportunities for social gathering. They have their point of pilgrimage: Drakesboro, self-styled "Home of the Legends," with its guitar-themed fountain, and streets named for Kennedy Jones, Ike Everly, Mose Rager, Merle Travis, and other canonical pickers. And in Drakesboro once a year, they honor the greatest of their musical heroes and supporters with induction into the Thumb Pickers Hall of Fame at an evening of ceremony that is as carefully planned as the Grammy Awards, as rousing as a political rally, and as profoundly moving as a revival.

No one has borne more effective witness to the music than Eddie Pennington, both nationally as a musical ambassador, and locally as an advocate and supporter. In 1989, he helped organize the first "Home of the Legends" Thumb Picking Contest, now an annual event, which draws contestants from throughout the country and beyond. A co-organizer of the National Thumb Pickers Hall of Fame in 1998, Eddie has served as president of the organization since the founding. With the support of the Hall of Fame Association, the home in which Merle Travis was born was moved to the twenty-acre recreation and performance area dubbed Paradise Park in Powderly, Kentucky. The park now serves as a center for music-related events, and the home itself houses the Hall of Fame and a small museum of Travis and thumbpicking memorabilia. The Arts Council of Eddie's hometown, Princeton, in nearby Caldwell County now hosts the annual Eddie Pennington Folk Festival, and Eddie himself sponsors Pennington's Goat-Roping—a day of free-wheeling family-friendly music and fellowship that has nothing to do with roping goats.

Eddie's devotion to the music and his gift for networking continues to benefit western Kentucky: as a result of Eddie's meeting with attorney and music fan Ted Jones at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Muhlenberg County received a substantial federal grant to construct a full-scale performing-arts center adjoining Paradise Park, scheduled to be completed in 2005. The honorary doctorate presented to Eddie by Western Kentucky University in 2003 recognized his contribution to the region, not only as an admirable traditional artist, but also as a remarkably effective spokesman for that art.

Erika Brady

Programs in Folk Studies and Anthropology/Western Kentucky University

EARLY GUITAR: An Instrument of Pharaohs, Emperors, and Fops

Joe Wilson

During the 20th century, the guitar became the emulsifier of American musical culture, the common dominator between cowboy and bluesman, rocker and hillbilly, jazzman and ethnic.

It is ironic that the working-class citizens of a democracy would make the guitar a favorite instrument. The guitar is an elite instrument from antiquity, more associated with royalty and the chattering classes than with the sweat-stained who herd cattle and mine coal.

The Bolsheviks reorganizing Moscow University in 1921 forbade guitar playing, thundering that "a guitar is not a class-proletarian instrument and is, indeed, an instrument favored exclusively by bourgeois and middle classes."

History lends support to that opinion. The earliest glimmer of a guitar-like instrument is Hittite and has a flat top with sound holes, a fretted neck, and a sound box with incurving sides. Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II (1304–1237 B.C.) married a Hittite princess and erected an obelisk that depicts a guitar-shaped instrument.

Greeks and Romans adopted it, and our word *guitar* derives from the Greek *kitara*, a 7-stringed guitar-like instrument. Socrates (469–399 B.C.) performed with it, as did the mathematician and genius Pythagoras, who improved the fretboard. Nero performed with it. (The fiddle as we know it was not in use in Rome when Nero lived.)

The most elaborately decorated guitars ever made were created for Louis XIV of France, guitarist, ballet dancer, and fop *extraordinaire*. Charles II of the British restoration of the monarchy headed a guitar-playing clique at court. A few of the early American elite performed upon guitars: Benjamin Franklin; Polly and Maria, daughters of Thomas Jefferson; and even Rachel Donelson Jackson, wife of President Andrew Jackson.

American Guitar-Making and the Parlor Movement

The American industrial revolution dislodged the guitar from its elite perch and gave it to the working people of the republic. After the Civil War, American craftsmen brought to the guitar the woodworking-factory methods that had made the violin commonplace a few decades earlier.

A parlor guitar movement arose among the upper classes in Europe and the American Northeast and created a demand for guitars. A huge number of young middle-class women from throughout the nation took up guitar, their interests engaged by instructors and easy-to-learn guitar instruction manuals, the widespread distribution of sheet music, and the availability of relatively inexpensive guitars through such mass distribution as the Sears and Roebuck catalog.

Suddenly guitars were available everywhere, from Hawai'i to the Mississippi Delta. This mass movement followed hard on the heels of the blackface minstrelsy popular-music craze, the first and still the longest-lasting of popular-music movements in the history of the nation. The guitar movement offered more cultivated and nonracist options, and they were of special interest to young women. It was style with a late Victorian worldview with epic sweep, and such titles as *The Voortrekker*, *Crossing the Pampas*, and *The Curtains of Night*.

Fingerpicking and flatpicking methods were assiduously taught, as were tuning in open chords and a plethora of picking techniques, including having the thumb keep a rhythm line while the fingers pick out a melody.



Like all popular movements, it eventually faded. But American folk-guitar styles tend to be based upon instruments and techniques spread by this amazing confluence of historical events, technological development, and communication growth. These styles include Mississippi Delta and Piedmont black styles, Hawaiian slack-key and slide styles, and the flat-picking and finger-picking styles of country players.

Echoes of parlor guitar recur in all these styles. In Delta blues-style parlance, for example, an open D tuning is called "Vastapol," and an open G tuning is called "Spanish." "Vastapol" is from a sheet music item in D tuning that was published in 1880 as *The Siege of Sebastopol*, referring to an 1869 battle in the Crimean War. "Spanish" is for the G tuning used for *The Spanish Fandango*, by far the most popular item published during the parlor period.

That folk communities may keep and burnish creativity from earlier times is well known to folklorists. Yet the first collectors to write about vernacular guitar styles in the United States seemed to have little information about the recent history of the guitar, and some relied upon vivid imaginations for a considerable amount of misinformation.

The cowboy, some guessed, got his guitar from Mexican *vaqueros*. The blues, others guessed, had leapt from West Africa to the Delta in a single great and impossible bound across almost 400 years of history.

Kentucky Thumbpicking

The first descriptions of what local residents call "thumbpicking" in western Kentucky were equally misguided. Hearing the thumb keep the beat while the fingers picked out the melody, these early scribes noted a similarity to the style of such contemporary black players as Mississippi John Hurt.

Ergo, the style must have black sources, but where? There were no local black players of great skill. One informant recalled that some black men who had helped build a railroad two generations earlier had had a guitar, so anonymous "black railroad workers" were duly appointed as the first players in this style.

That black players from the Delta and western Kentucky coal miners might have had a white middle-class Aunt Minnie playing in her parlor as a common source is a concept still too outlandish for popular acceptance in a nation where symbolism and stereotype rule perception.

Yet it is clear that the influence of Aunt Minnie and multitudes of her musical sisters reached far beyond their parlors, and changed the direction of American vernacular music.

Moreover, most of the parlor-influenced players who took the thumbpicker style on a fifty-year creative ride were still around and performing when the erroneous assumptions about the source of this strand of music were being made.

The thumbpicking style developed among a handful of players in a single rural county, Muhlenberg County, in the coal-mining region of western Kentucky. A single player brought it to national attention. He was Merle Travis, a native of Muhlenberg County. He began performing on regional radio in 1937, and during World War II took his skills to Hollywood and other show-business places. He spent 45 years as a professional performer, and many guitarists still call this way of playing "Travis style."

Thousands of younger players took up the style, among them Chet Atkins, a Tennessean who became better known than Travis as a performer in the style. Atkins often turned compliments aside, pointing to Travis: "But for that man, I'd have spent my life looking at the world over the back end of a mule."

And Travis always told anyone who would listen that Muhlenberg County coal miner Mose Rager was his teacher, his friend, and his guitar hero. He also praised Ike Everly, one of Rager's picking partners.

Much of what is known about the early history of thumbpicking comes from genial Mose Rager, a brilliant and highly creative guitarist and beloved teacher of many of the finest players in the style.

Travis said he once tried to persuade Rager to fly to California for one of his recording sessions. "He was not feeling well, so I told him he would not have to play. I knew if he was sitting with me, I'd play better. He could lift you up."

Mose talked about process, and how guitar playing fitted into a miner's life. Whatever the weather or work situation, miners had to go to the company gathering place for two or three hours. If there was no work for that day, they'd pass a guitar around. Their songs and tunes had humor, and each of the more accomplished players developed show-off items.

But who were the earliest players? Who brought the original plant stock that was so refined and developed by this artistic process? Mose knew the source. He spoke with gratitude and affection of Kennedy Jones, a former miner and fine guitarist born in 1900. He and other local players had learned the rudiments from Kennedy Jones before the older miner had moved away to find more rewarding work.

Moreover, he knew where Jones had gotten his instruction. Most of it had come from his mother, Alice DeArmond Jones. Born in 1863 at nearby Dunmore, Kentucky, she had been a young woman when the parlor movement swept the nation. She had kept her guitar and the parlor methods of playing it, and she instructed her son and his friends. Mose had no doubt that the roots of the style had come to Kennedy from his mother.

Kennedy Jones had also performed informally with Arnold Schultz, an itinerant black guitarist and singer who occasionally passed through the area until his death, in 1930. Some collectors, still digging for the elusive origins of what they assumed to be a "black sound," guessed that the rudiments of the style may have been taught by Schultz.

Jones lived until his 90th year (1990) and spoke often about his mother and the origins of the style. He became visibly irritated with suggestions that he had been taught by Schultz. He said he played with the traveling musician a few times and liked him, but this was after he was grown, and had his own style.

The supposition that Schultz had invented the style puzzled Bill Monroe, a founder of bluegrass music style, who grew up occasionally playing for country dancing with Schultz. Told that some music fans assumed the style Travis had made familiar actually came from his old friend Schultz, Monroe gave an emphatic and terse response in 1986: "That's not right."

(One has to wonder if the feminine roots of this style may have misled some researchers. How could these very male coal miners and Wild Sam, the hard-drinking skirt-chasing bluesman, have been influenced by sweet Aunt Minnie, picking in her parlor? Good heavens! Is nothing sacred?)

Mose Rager said that during his teenage years if one saw a circle of men, he knew that Kennedy Jones was inside that circle. A cult of local pickers followed Jones, and Mose's friend Ike Everly (father of the Everly Brothers) is recalled as one of the most devoted members.

Mrs. Everly tells a humorous story about Ike's fascination with Kennedy Jones. Once Ike came home with a cane. Asked why, he said that Kennedy Jones had one. A few days later, he learned that Jones was using the cane because he had been hurt in the mines.

Franklin Roosevelt was a hero of the miners, but Mose recalled Ike saying that if he could be President Roosevelt or Kennedy Jones, he'd be Kennedy Jones.

The first to attempt to earn a living with the style was Kennedy Jones. He organized a group of local boys into a band to play bars in Chicago during the Depression. He recalled that the wife of one of them showed up one night before the show with a message: "Kennedy, Charlie can't play tonight," she said; "he's dead."

Jones later moved to Cincinnati, and music became a part-time activity.

Mose Rager also quit the mines. After World War II, he worked on the road with banjoist and comic singer Lewis M. (Grandpa) Jones. He worked with fiddler Curley Fox, and they toured with Grand Ole Opry pioneer Uncle Dave Macon.

But the endless travel did not please Mose, and he became in turn a barber, country storekeeper, and barbecue chef. One of his last jobs was at a giant steam plant, the one with such a voracious appetite for strip-mined coal that it inspired the caustic commentary in John Prine's song "Paradise."

Finally, asked by Chet Atkins if he was still working, Mose said, "Naw, I done throwed a rock at it."

Eddie Pennington

Mose Rager saw any kid that wanted to learn guitar as a blessing, and the brilliant kid who stayed longest and came most often was Eddie Pennington. Mose was forty years older than Eddie, but the kid inside Mose was well preserved and eager to trade licks and learn as he taught. No money ever changed hands. This was friendship, and Mose had a proverb: "You can keep it if you give it away."

Eddie Pennington is the son of a musical coal miner, and was reared at Nortonville, some twenty miles from Mose's Drakesboro home. Beginning in May 1974, a teenaged Eddie became a frequent visitor and devoted student of the Drakesboro guitar sage.

While a student at Western Kentucky State University, Eddie detoured by Mose's house going and coming from home on weekends. One semester, he had no classes on Wednesday after 9 A.M., so he visited Mose on Wednesdays for most of the day. His visits continued until Mose died, in 1986.

Eddie reveres Rager's memory, and can turn a bit misty-eyed when he speaks of his friend. The years of instruction served him well, and Rager's tunes are a favorite part of his repertoire.

But Eddie keeps more than the dazzling technique of the founders of the style. He has their sense of place, irrepressible sense of humor, and optimism. Like many of them, he is physically built for heavy lifting, but the music that emanates from his guitar is wonderfully delicate. It is as if scores of great-grandmothers have sent their intricate music to his flying hands.

Eddie is like the earlier great players in that he is making his own notable contributions to the style. They amount to a passion for tone, a sense of timing akin to that of an atomic clock, and a delightful sophistication in phrasing. His ever-present sense of humor and genial presentation have made him the most accessible and best showman among the thumbpickers.





Norman Pennington and son Eddie at the National Folk Festival, Johnstown PA 1992.

Nowadays there are thumbpicker clubs and organizations throughout the world, and Eddie and other top players often visit them. Eddie toured the nation twice as a member of the Masters of the Steel String Guitar Tour, and he has performed at the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center, and at festivals and events in every part of the United States, and in Western Europe. Yet he, like Mose, feels best at home in western Kentucky.

In 2001, the National Endowment for the Arts honored Eddie with a National Heritage Fellowship, the nation's highest honor for a traditional artist. Broad-shouldered and imposing, he took to the stage in a glitter suit and brought down the house with a question: "Can you see me okay?" The music that followed was a startling contrast, as delicate and beautifully worked out as gold filigree.

Eddie's innovations and dedication to tradition have also been honored at home. In 2003, Western Kentucky State University awarded him an honorary doctorate for his jubilant keeping of the music of his family, dear friends, and region.

The departed founders of the style are alive in his thoughts as well as in his playing, and he speaks with great respect of thumbpickers Odell Martin (and his mother, Mrs. Ellis Shanklin Martin, who played in parlor style), Bob Barber, and Paul Yandell. He's especially proud of his son, Alonzo Pennington, and feels that he is developing into the best player yet.

He had a request: "Be sure to tell everybody that the thumbpickers have a hall of fame, a list of people we owe. It has all the names you'd expect: Kennedy Jones, Mose Rager, Merle Travis, Chet Atkins, Ike Everly. And it has a lot of other names as well, and I'm proud to say that Mrs. Alice DeArmond Jones and Mrs. Ellis Shanklin Martin are among them."

Joe Wilson

Joe Wilson is director of the National Council for the Traditional Arts, and was a friend of the late Merle Travis

Track Notes

Joe Wilson

1. Walking the Strings

Eddie first heard this 1920s thumbpicker's exercise from Mose Rager. Kennedy Jones had played it earlier, and called it the "Kansas City Rag." Merle Travis recorded it.

2. Mose's Blues

Eddie heard Mose Rager playing this blues. It is not the same melody as the "Mose Rager Blues," recorded by Travis.

3. Wabash Cannonball

William Kent wrote this in 1904, basing it upon J. A. Roff's 1882 composition "The Great Rock Island Route." It had been recorded five times before a 1929 Carter Family version made it a hillbilly standard. Eddie learned it from Roy Acuff's Grand Old Opry singing, always backed with elaborate Dobro slides by Bashful Brother Oswald (Pete Kirby). Eddie is playing a fretted resophonic guitar built by F. J. "Mac"

MacCormick of Columbus, Georgia. It has an acoustic speaker like those found in a Dobro, and thus a similar tone.

4. Information, Please

This Travis composition from the 1940s shows that Merle's rural Kentucky sense of humor remained intact in Hollywood.

5. John's Smoke Turns Blue

Thumbpickers tend to have a show-off tune they have created. Coal miner John Travis composed the first tune here, "John's Smoke." But his younger brother, Merle, came visiting and modified the melody into his composition, "Blue Smoke." Eddie learned the first tune from John, who was a warm friend and teacher, and shows its adaptation by Merle with this medley.

Track Notes

Continued

6. Home

Eddie learned this pop melody from the playing of Billy Grammer, a fine guitarist and luthier reared in southern Illinois.

7. Nine Pound Hammer

East Tennessee fiddler Charlie Bowman recorded this song with Al Hopkins and the Buckle Busters in 1927. Five additional recordings were made before Texas Ruby recalled it when Merle Travis was searching for coal-mining songs for his *Folk Songs from the Hills* album in 1946. Neither Travis nor Ruby could recall many of Bowman's words, so Travis rewrote the lyrics.

8. Pig Ankle Rag

Eddie's father, Norman Pennington, played this tune on fiddle. His version seems unrelated to the standard "Pig Ankle," and Eddie says, "Daddy just couldn't get that oink in there."

9. Raindrops

This exercise is an archetype of parlor guitar style. Eddie got it from Uncle Collie Barnes, who lived in the northern portion of Christian County, Kentucky, a few miles southwest of the thumbpicker breeding ground. Born in 1888, Uncle Collie was a World War I vet who played fiddle and banjo. During a visit when Eddie was backing his fiddling, Uncle Collie used a resophonic guitar tuned in G to show off his version of "Spanish Fandango," and, retuned to C, this version of "Raindrops." Eddie is using Mac McCormick's fine resophonic guitar to recall Uncle Collie's tone.

10. Fertile Liza

Eddie's brother, Larry Pennington, composed this spoof of country gardening, birth control, and law enforcement.

11. Stealing Time

This is Eddie's composition, one of several show-off tunes he may roll out when it is time to terrorize the beginners.

12. Sweet Georgia Brown

Eddie had heard this pop song as a theme song for the Harlem Globetrotters before he discovered that it was a challenging tune and a favorite of hot guitarists.

13. The Pig Got Up

This is an item from the temperance wars of the 19th century. Eddie learned it from Mose Rager.

14. Stone's Rag

Named for Nashville old-time fiddler Oscar Stone, this fine tune was first recorded in 1928 by pioneer Grand Ole Opry performers Paul Warmack and his Gully Jumpers. Eddie got the tune from Uncle Collie Barnes, who, like Stone, played it on fiddle.

Track Notes

Continued

15. Bye, Bye Blues

Eddie heard this jazz standard first from Virginia-born guitarist Joe Maphis, but says his version is in part from Travis, and in part his own.

16. So Round, So Firm

Eddie's version is derived from the 1950s playing of Merle Travis.

17. The Panic Is On

Eddie learned this humorous song from a recording by guitarist Hezekiah Jenkins of New York City.

18. Bluebell

Madden and Monroe copyrighted this standard in 1904. It was slam-dunked into hillbilly repertoire by a 1928 recording by Al Hopkins and his Buckle Busters. Much beloved by the early thumbpickers, it was played by all and recorded by Travis, and others.

Track Notes

Continued

19. Duncan and Brady

In 1973, Missouri folklorist Barry Bergey interviewed St. Louis music historian Judge Nathan B. Young about former citizens Stackolee, Frankie and Johnny, and, of course, Duncan and Brady. A 1923 black graduate of Yale Law School, Judge Young was a painter and ragtime pianist, and had the facts. He said that on 6 October 1880, during the festivities celebrating the annual crowning of the Great Veiled Prophet, musician Harry Duncan, age 21 or 22, shot and killed Sgt. Brady, a well-liked Irish policeman, in an affray in Charley Starks' gambling hall at 11th and Delmar. After an appeal to the Supreme Court failed, Harry was executed, bringing to an end two years of memorable concerts at the St. Louis jail. "Duncan and Brady" was first recorded in 1928, as "Been on the Job Too Long," by Wilmer Watts and his Lonely Eagles. Eddie got this version from music fan Jake D. James.

20. Over The Rainbow

Among the traditions of thumbpickers is to render familiar popular songs—a device that often enables even the tone-deaf to appreciate the joyous complexity of the thumbpicker's art. Eddie heard Hal Riley play this melody, then hurried home and worked out his own version. Riley was a thumbpicker who lived in Drakesboro, near Mose Rager, and was the composer of two standards, "Hocus Pocus," and "Lights Across the Bay."

Eddie Pennington Discography

- 1993 *Fat and Sassy*, That Muhlenberg Sound
- 1993 *Thumbpicking His Heritage Travis Style*, That Muhlenberg Sound
- 1995 *Rockin' Chair Pickin'*, That Muhlenberg Sound
- 1996 *All Thumbs*, That Muhlenberg Sound
- 1999 *Atonathum*, That Muhlenberg Sound
- 2000 *Just My Style*, Bee/Nephi

For more information concerning these recordings, consult the website www.eddiepennington.com, or direct inquiry to: Patricia Wiles (publicist), 1825 Forest Acres Dr., Madisonville, KY 42431, 270-825-3988

Further Reading

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White, Roger. 1998. *The Everly Brothers: Walk Right Back*. London: Plexus.

Wolfe, Charles K. 1982. *Kentucky Country*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Thanks

Eddie's acoustic guitar was made by luthier H. G. Leach of Cedar Grove, CA. His electric is a Super Eagle built by craftsmen at Heritage Guitars in Kalamazoo, MI. The resophonic (without rattles!) was made by luthier F. J. McCormick, of Columbus, GA. These recordings were made in 1994 and 1996 in sessions produced by the National Council for the Traditional Arts, and were donated to Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

Some of the documentation of earlier recordings here is from the work of Gus Meade, Doug Meade, and Richard Spottswood, and is found in their excellent *Country Music Sources, A Bibliography of Commercial Recordings of Traditional Music*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Folklorist Roby Cogswell of the Tennessee Arts Commission brought Eddie to the attention of many of us. Folklorist Jon Lohman of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities has offered many fine suggestions. Thumbpicker historian Bobby Anderson is a fine keeper of facts about this tradition. Pete Reiniger of Smithsonian Folkways made these recordings, and has given devoted service to the completion of this recording. All have my thanks.

J. W.

Credits

Coproduced by Joe Wilson and Pete Reiniger

Annotated by Joe Wilson

Introduction by Erika Brady

Cover and photo on page 12 by Nick Spitzer; page 11 by Joe Wilson, courtesy of N.C.T.A.; inside front cover by Larry Pennington, courtesy of N.C.T.A.; inside tray by Joe Wilson, courtesy of N.C.T.A.

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About Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission emerged from the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document "people's music," spoken word, instruction, and sound from around the world. In 1987, the Smithsonian founded The Folkways Collection by acquiring more than 2,000 recordings produced by Asch, and hundreds more have been added from the Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk, Monitor, and Paredon labels. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued this tradition of supporting artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

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EDDIE PENNINGTON



... and Even Sings

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
| 1. Walking the Strings | 1:52 | 11. Stealing Time | 2:31 |
| 2. Mose's Blues | 2:37 | 12. Sweet Georgia Brown | 2:43 |
| 3. Wabash Cannonball | 1:52 | 13. The Pig Got Up | 1:59 |
| 4. Information, Please | 3:01 | 14. Stone's Rag | 3:03 |
| 5. John's Smoke Turns Blue | 3:54 | 15. Bye, Bye Blues | 2:51 |
| 6. Home | 2:59 | 16. So Round, So Firm | 1:20 |
| 7. Nine Pound Hammer | 3:50 | 17. The Panic Is On | 3:27 |
| 8. Pig Ankle Rag | 2:51 | 18. Bluebell | 2:16 |
| 9. Raindrops | 2:49 | 19. Duncan and Brady | 3:23 |
| 10. Fertile Liza | 3:28 | 20. Over The Rainbow | 2:19 |

Kentucky-born Eddie Pennington echoes the sound of his mentor Mose Rager and parallels that of Chet Atkins, a fellow disciple of the all-American Kentucky thumpicking known as Travis-style guitar, made famous by Merle Travis. In between dazzling displays of skill on favorite show-off tunes like "John's Smoke Turns Blue" and "Over the Rainbow," the Caldwell County coroner unleashes his irrepressible tongue-in-cheek humor on tracks such as "Fertile Liza," "The Pig Got Up," and "Information Please." Pennington toured nationally as a member of the "Masters of the Steel String Guitar," showcased at the Kennedy Center and the Barns of Wolf Trap, and received the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship in recognition of his extraordinary artistry.



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EDDIE PENNINGTON

WALKS THE STRINGS ... and Even Sings

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