

A sepia-toned photograph of a person walking away on a dirt road. The person is in the center, wearing a jacket and pants, and carrying a bag. The road is flanked by trees and utility poles. The overall mood is nostalgic and quiet.

CLASSIC BLUES vol. 2

FROM Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Classic Blues vol. 2 FROM Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

For over a century, the blues have continually forged new musical alliances and pushed against boundaries, reaping rich harvests from infusions of diversity, innovation, and vitality. With a spark of rock, or a nod to jazz, the blues stay true in spirit and perpetual in their ability to strike a common chord with listeners. On *Classic Blues vol. 2*, Lucinda Williams, Roscoe Holcomb, and Nora Lee King stand alongside all-time blues greats such as Lead Belly, Son House, and Lightnin' Hopkins. No matter if you prefer your blues raw, acoustic, electric, solo, or from a live band, a jukebox, or a jook joint, as the blues poet J. Otis Williams once put it, "The blues is good news. Pass it on." Extensive notes, 22 tracks, 64 minutes.

- 1. Dark Road** 2:42
BROWNIE MCGHEE AND SONNY TERRY
- 2. Step It Up and Go** 2:35
WARNER WILLIAMS
- 3. It Was Early One Morning** 2:24
LEAD BELLY
- 4. Blues—Until My Baby Comes Back Home** 2:52
NORA LEE KING AND MARY LOU WILLIAMS
- 5. That's No Way to Do** 2:22
PINK ANDERSON
- 6. Farro Street Jive** 2:16
LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY
- 7. I Ain't Gonna Cry No More (Depot Blues)** 2:55
SON HOUSE
- 8. Graveyard Blues** 2:58
ROSCOE HOLCOMB
- 9. 44 Blues** 2:41
ROOSEVELT SYKES
- 10. Big Fat Mama** 2:55
HONEYBOY EDWARDS
- 11. Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor** 3:50
LUCINDA WILLIAMS
- 12. Lieutenant Blues** 2:36
BARRELHOUSE BUCK
- 13. The Woman Is Killing Me** 2:23
SONNY TERRY AND FRIENDS
- 14. Little Drops of Water** 3:05
EDITH NORTH JOHNSON AND HENRY BROWN
- 15. When Things Go Wrong (It Hurts Me Too)** 2:58
BIG BILL BROONZY
- 16. Poor Boy a Long, Long Way From Home** 2:43
CAT-IRON
- 17. My Jack Don't Drink Water No More** 3:40
SHORTSTUFF MACON
- 18. 'Way Behind the Sun** 3:49
BARBARA DANE
- 19. Tell Me, Baby** 2:32
LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS
- 20. Just A Dream** 4:11
MEMPHIS SLIM
- 21. Jelly Jelly** 2:26
JOSH WHITE
- 22. Down in the Alley** 3:08
THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage

799 9th St., N.W., Suite 4100 Washington DC 20560-0933 • www.folkways.si.edu
SFW CD 40148 • ©2003 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings





Classic Blues vol. 2

FROM Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

SFW CD 40148

©© 2003 SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS.

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY BARRY LEE PEARSON.

- 1. Dark Road 2:42**
BROWNIE MCGHEE AND SONNY TERRY
(Walter McGhee / Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 2. Step It Up and Go 2:35**
WARNER WILLIAMS
(J. B. Long / Universal Duchess Music Corp., BMI)
- 3. It Was Early One Morning 2:24**
LEAD BELLY (Huddie Ledbetter-Alan Lomax-John Lomax Sr./
TRO-Folkways Music Publishers Inc., BMI)
- 4. Blues—Until My Baby Comes Back Home 2:52**
NORA LEE KING AND MARY LOU WILLIAMS
- 5. That's No Way To Do 2:22**
PINK ANDERSON
- 6. Farro Street Jive 2:16**
LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY
(Eurreal Montgomery / Jet Music Publishers Inc., BMI)
- 7. I Ain't Gonna Cry No More (Depot Blues) 2:55**
SON HOUSE
(Eddie J. House Jr. / Sondick Music, admin by Bug, BMI)
- 8. Graveyard Blues 2:58**
ROSCOE HOLCOMB (Ida Cox)
- 9. 44 Blues 2:41**
ROOSEVELT SYKES
(Roosevelt Sykes / Leric Music Inc., admin by Bug, BMI)
- 10. Big Fat Mama 2:55**
HONEYBOY EDWARDS (Tommy Johnson)
- 11. Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor 3:50**
LUCINDA WILLIAMS
- 12. Lieutenant Blues 2:36**
BARRELHOUSE BUCK
- 13. The Woman Is Killing Me 2:23**
SONNY TERRY AND FRIENDS
(Sonny Terry-Brownie McGhee / Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 14. Little Drops of Water 3:05**
EDITH NORTH JOHNSON & HENRY BROWN
(Edith North Johnson)
- 15. When Things Go Wrong (It Hurts Me Too) 2:58**
BIG BILL BROONZY
(Hudson Whittaker)
- 16. Poor Boy a Long, Long Way From Home 2:43**
CAT-IRON
- 17. My Jack Don't Drink Water No More 3:40**
SHORTSTUFF MACON
- 18. 'Way Behind the Sun 3:49**
BARBARA DANE
(Barbara Dane / Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 19. Tell Me, Baby 2:32**
LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS
(Sam Hopkins / Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 20. Just A Dream 4:11**
MEMPHIS SLIM
(William Lee Conley Broonzy / Universal MCA Music
Publishing, ASCAP)
- 21. Jelly Jelly 2:26**
JOSH WHITE
(Billy Eckstine-Earl Hines / Warner Bros. Inc., ASCAP)
- 22. Down in the Alley 3:08**
THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS

MANY VOICES OF THE BLUES

BARRY LEE PEARSON

W. C. Handy (1873–1958), the father of the blues, or at least the father of the blues business, wrote that he first heard blues in Tutwiler, Mississippi, in 1903, from an itinerant guitar player who played the guitar with a knife and sang about going where the Southern crosses the Dog (also known as the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Line). His recollection recalls the song “Poor Boy a Long, Long Way from Home,” included on this recording. It too is played by a Mississippi street musician in knife style, and was field recorded for Folkways Records in 1958. But it’s a very old song, dating back to about 1900. Some of its verses simply repeat a single line three times, making it what folklorists Howard Odum and Guy Johnson called a “one-verse song.” It relies on the themes of railroads and travel, and may easily have been part of the cycle of train- and travel-related blues that Handy heard. Ma Rainey (1886–1939), the so-called “mother of the blues,” said she’d first heard blues a year earlier, sung by a woman outside St. Louis. Rainey was the first African American woman to perform blues on stage, and was one of the first major stars associated with blues as a performance art. She recorded up to 1928 in a style that scholars call vaudeville blues. St. Louis blues singer Edith North Johnson made her first record in 1928, and her blues “Little Drops of Water,” included in this recording, also represents vaudeville blues, though it was recorded in St. Louis in

1961. Blues and blues culture moved back and forth from the Delta upriver to St. Louis and on to Chicago, or downriver to New Orleans. The style Handy heard and the vaudeville tradition simply represent two strains of the same tradition.

It is appropriate, based on the testimony of both the father and the mother of the blues, for 2003 to serve as the centennial year of this major African American art form. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings joins the celebration by publishing two recordings: *Classic Blues from Smithsonian Folkways Recordings* and *Classic Blues vol. 2*. Both are designed to show the role Folkways and other Moses Asch labels played in documenting the blues tradition, to showcase the treasures of the Smithsonian Folkways archival holdings, and to serve as a menu in case you wish to order more of the same (www.folkways.si.edu). But there is also a difference. The second installment is designed to highlight the diversity of the blues tradition. Drawing on the same trove of blues treasures recorded by Moses Asch and Folkways, it features well over a dozen brands of blues, including Delta blues, Piedmont blues, Texas blues, Chicago blues, St. Louis blues, New York City blues, vaudeville blues, folk-revival blues, boogie and barrelhouse blues, vocal harmony blues, white mountain blues, jazz-inflected rhythm and blues, and electric rock blues. Of course blues musicians often dismiss these categories, implying they are artificial creations generated by scholars, music industry executives, or vested interests. They are likelier to point out that it’s all blues, and this recording underscores that very contention.

Folkways founder Moses Asch began recording blues in 1941 with a Lead Belly release. In 1944, he put out his own blues compilation, simply titled *Blues*, featuring Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, Mary Lou Williams, Champion Jack Dupree, Josh White, Nora Lee King, and other artists. From

that point on, blues were a staple of the Folkways catalogue, and its roster of performers included some of the major figures in blues history. Beginning around 1950, Folkways also played a major role in reintroducing America to its musical heritage, what we often call roots music today. This was accomplished in three ways. The first was an ambitious republication program, which reissued out-of-print blues, jazz, gospel, and old-time country recordings from the 1920s and 1930s. Second, through the efforts of Frederic Ramsey Jr., Harold Courlander, Samuel Charters, and other fieldworkers, an extensive body of new field-collected recordings were issued. These ranged from collections featuring obscure traditional performers recorded in community contexts to well-known blues musicians recorded in their own homes. Third, Asch issued new recordings of tried-and-true blues giants, including Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon, Little Brother Montgomery, Big Bill Broonzy, Lead Belly, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and relative newcomers Barbara Dane, Lucinda Williams, and the Chambers Brothers. As to his philosophy of recording, Moses Asch believed in encouraging spontaneity and creativity. To run Folkways, he assembled a very broad-minded team, willing to record and release recordings by artists with little commercial potential, especially artists who had a different sound from that of the commercial mainstream.

Classic Blues vol. 2 may be more focused on presenting diversity within the blues tradition, but it is as dedicated to quality as was volume 1. The sound quality is uniformly excellent, or as good as can be. Remember, these titles were recorded in varying media and under different conditions, ranging from glass recordings and acetates to vinyl and CD, and range from studio production in 1944 to live performance fifty years later. But these differences can be positive, adding yet another level to the diversity of the blues.

Blues take on many forms and serve many uses. They are drawn from the sounds of work and play. They can be used as vehicles for complaint or seduction, for protest or dance. Whether they make you laugh or cry or laugh to keep from crying, they survived at least a hundred years because they work. And they work on multiple levels: as sound, as feeling, as a way of talking about life, as the truth, and as a ritual of healing.

Whether it's the raucous cacophony of Sonny Terry's washboard band, the exuberant licentiousness of Josh White's "Jelly Jelly," the keening high lonesome sound of Roscoe Holcomb's take on Ida Cox's "Graveyard Blues," or the sensuous dance groove of the Chambers Brothers, each of these recordings is part of a greater blues aesthetic. The CD begins with Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee complaining: "My baby left this morning when the clock was striking four." But it ends with the Chambers Brothers celebrating "The clock is striking a quarter of four. Come on now, baby, lets rock some more."

Both lines are equally central to the blues tradition. This collection presents blues from the earliest known examples to current rock blues. It serves up both the raw and the slick, yet each piece has its own personality and sound. It's strong stuff—equipment for living, and still there for the next generation. As blues poet J. Otis Williams put it, "The blues is good news. Pass it on."



THE SONGS

1. **Dark Road**

BROWNIE MCGHEE AND SONNY TERRY
Brownie McGhee, vocal and guitar; Sonny Terry, vocal and
harmonica; Gene Moore, drums

From *Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry Sing*. SFW CD 40011

Walter Brown McGhee (1915–1996) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. As a youngster, he learned guitar from watching his father, and by the 1930s was performing with a gospel quartet. In Durham, North Carolina, he met local blues hero Blind Boy Fuller and his agent, J. B. Long, who arranged for McGhee to record for Okeh in 1940 and 1941. Fuller's partner, harmonica wizard Saunders Terell (1911–1986), better known as Sonny Terry, teamed up with McGhee following Fuller's death. Both relocated to New York City in the early 1940s and became part of a folk-music community that included Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie, and others. In 1944, they began to record for Folkways. Over the years, they were the label's blues mainstay, along with Lead Belly and Big Bill Broonzy. Both were named National Heritage Fellows in 1980. "Dark Road," recorded in 1957, features vocal duet harmony. Blues sung in multipart harmony are relatively rare, limited to early black vocal quar-

tets, artists such as Willie Dixon's Big Three Combo, and current Piedmont specialists John Cephas and Phil Wiggins. Blues are usually solo-voiced and rely on the emotionally expressive qualities of a single voice and an instrumental accompaniment or response. McGhee and Terry were especially skilled at duet vocals, as this piece illustrates. Melodically, it is akin to "Corn Bread Meat and Molasses," which Zora Neale Hurston collected as "Mule on the Mountain." McGhee recorded a song titled "Four O'Clock in the Mornin'" or "Four O'Clock Blues" for Savoy in 1948.

2. **Step It Up and Go**

WARNER WILLIAMS
Warner Williams, guitar and vocal; Jay Summerour, harmonica
From *Blues Routes: Blues and Jazz, Heroes and Tricksters,
Worksongs and Street Music*. SFW CD 40118

Warner Williams (1930–) grew up in Takoma Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. A nonpareil guitarist and an engaging vocalist, he has been plying his musical wares in and around his native area for the past sixty years. He and harmonica player Jay Summerour formed the group Little Bit of Blues. Williams credits his father as his first guitar teacher. "I been knowing music all my life. Since I was four years old, I've been picking guitar. I was gifted for it, and my daddy was a music teacher. He always had an old guitar around the house, and I used to pick it up and fool with it until I learned. I could sit and watch him, and when he put it down, I'd take it and do something with it. I got kids of my own can play now. It runs in the family. My daddy was

a fiddle player, a musician. He taught me everything. He died at the age of ninety-one. He taught music all around through Maryland. He always brought us up to try to play gospel music, but we used to stick to blues, buying records and things. Mostly what he played was church music. He never did play blues. He did play then what you call hoedown music back in them days. Like he'd play for them barn dances, him and another guy. They just run around with fiddles together. One guy had a guitar, then two fiddles and a guitar, and a mandolin." Warner inherited his father's passion, and three generations of family-based music provide the context for his musicianship. Drawing on an endless repertory of blues, country, jazz, pop, gospel, rock, and even old-timey classics, he imprints each piece with his own style, the mark of a true songster. Over the course of his life, he's picked up lots of songs, and as long as it's good music, he does not discriminate among genres.

"Step It Up and Go" was recorded in concert in Vienna, Virginia, on 19 March 1994, as part of folklorist Nick Spitzer's Folk Masters Series. The song is an East Coast or Piedmont standard generally associated with Blind Boy Fuller, the region's most influential artist. According to J. B. Long, who brought Fuller in to the recording studio and allegedly cowrote the song, Long heard a musician in Memphis singing a song with the lyric "you got to touch it up and go." The Memphis Jug Band recorded a song titled "Bottle It Up and Go" in 1934, and Tommy McClennan released a similar title in 1939. Fuller recorded "Step It Up and Go" in 1940, so the songs appear related. To add to

the confusion, Sonny Terry recorded "Touch It Up and Go" in 1941, and Brownie McGhee did "Step It Up and Go No. 2" in 1941.

3. It Was Early One Morning

LEAD BELLY

From *Shout On: Lead Belly Legacy, Vol. 3*. SFW CD 40105

Huddie Ledbetter (1888–1949) was born in Louisiana. An accomplished musician who played accordion, piano, and guitar, he was best known as king of the twelve-string guitar. He was discovered in a Southern prison by the fieldworking team of John and Alan Lomax, who helped secure his release in 1934. After moving to New York, he recorded for several labels, with limited success. He first recorded for Moses Asch in 1941, and was affiliated with Folkways until his death. An American roots-music icon, he was a songster with an immense repertory and a powerful performing presence. He and Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Josh White, were among the first African American Southern musicians to interpret blues and other genres of black music for New York audiences.

This song was a staple in his repertory, first recorded as "Jail House Blues" for the BBC in 1938. This version, also known as "Jail House Bound," was recorded in October 1948.

4. Blues—Until My Baby Comes Home

NORA LEE KING AND MARY LOU WILLIAMS
Nora Lee King, vocal; Mary Lou Williams, piano

From *Mary Lou Williams: The Asch Recordings, 1944–1947*.
Folkways 2966

Nora Lee King is referred to as a gospel singer, but her various discographical entries are rhythm and blues. Although Moses Asch seemed to have had little interest in the urban blues sound of female blues singers, he had great respect for the talents of jazz legend Mary Lou Williams, and put his studio at her disposal on request. Most likely, Williams was responsible for King's presence at this makeshift session. Williams (1910–1981) was born Mary Elfrieda Winn in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A prolific composer and arranger, she worked with Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy and Duke Ellington. Before the session, she was working at Café Society, which had also booked Lead Belly and Josh White, both of whom Asch also recorded. New Orleans pianist and blues singer Champion Jack Dupree was at this 1944 New York session, when he recorded "Clog Dance (Stomping Blues)," a piece for which Nora Lee King most likely added the exuberant vocal.

Accompanied by pianist Sam Price, King had recorded in the fall of 1941 for the Decca label. The eight issued sides included "Let Me Rock You Home" and a cover of Lil Green's smash hit "Why Don't You Do Right." During 1941 and 1942, King also recorded with Pete Brown and his band, and Jimmy Smith and his Sepians, doing blues standards such as "Deep Sea Diver." In June 1941, she recorded four sides credited to Nora and Delle, songs that featured "Keep a Knocking (But You Can't Come In)" and "Army Camp Blues." None of these recordings show any hint of her alleged gospel background, but then other major artists, such as Rosetta Tharpe, were gospel artists who

occasionally crossed over.

"Until My Baby Comes Back Home" shows off King's scat skills and is pure wartime blues, underscoring the favored theme of a woman's staying true until her soldier boy returns.

5. That's No Way to Do

PINK ANDERSON

From *Pink Anderson: Carolina Medicine Show Hokum and Blues with Baby Tate*. Folkways F3588

Pinkney Anderson (1900–1974) was born in Laurens, South Carolina. After learning guitar at age ten, he ran off with a medicine show and worked that circuit for more than thirty years. With his partner, Simmie Dooley, he recorded four sides for Columbia in 1928. Rediscovered during the folk revival, he recorded again for Riverside in 1950 and Folkways and Bluesville in 1961. A songster with a wide range of blues, ballads, and comic songs, he impressed the folk-revival generation with his Piedmont finger-picking skills, which are shown off in "That's No Way to Do," a Piedmont standard that is his tribute to fellow South Carolinian Willie Walker's "South Carolina Rag," recorded for Columbia in 1930. Both Anderson and Walker worked with string bands in the Spartanburg-Greenville area. By most accounts, Walker was the best guitar picker among many fine guitarists, including Folkways artists Gary Davis and Josh White. The concluding line is usually associated with "Candy Man," included on *Classic Blues from Smithsonian Folkways Recordings*.



6. Farro Street Jive

LITTLEBROTHER MONTGOMERY
From *Farro Street Jive*. Folkways 31014

Eurreal Montgomery (1905–1985) learned piano in his father's barrelhouse in Kentwood, Louisiana. From the age of eleven, he made his way as an itinerant piano player, working jooks and lumbercamps from New Orleans to Jackson, Mississippi. In 1942, he moved to Chicago and became a major figure in the club scene. Equally at home with jazz and blues, he was a sophisticated musician with a long and productive recording career, beginning with Paramount in 1930, continuing with Bluebird in 1935 and 1936, and Delmark, Century, Atlantic, Ebony, Bluesville, and Folkways through the 1960s. "Farro Street Jive," which may more accurately be titled "Fari^{sh} Street Jive," was first recorded on 16 October 1936 at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans. A tour de force piano extravaganza, it remained a staple in Montgomery's repertory, and he recorded it numerous times.

See *Deep South Piano: The Story of Little Brother Montgomery* (Karlaertzur Heide, 1970).

7. I Ain't Gonna Cry No More (Depot Blues)

SON HOUSE
From *Son House & J. D. Short: Blues From the Mississippi Delta*.
Folkways 2467

Son House, Robert Johnson (whom House taught), and Charley Patton are the three most celebrated exponents of the Delta blues tradition and are among America's most powerful voices. Eddie James House (1902–1988) was born outside

Clarksdale, Mississippi. He became interested in blues in his early manhood, but his performing career was cut short by a stint in Parchman State Farm Prison. Upon release, he moved to Lula and began an association with Charley Patton and Willie Brown. Following Patton's death, he continued to work with Brown, serving as the inspiration to a young Robert Johnson. He moved to New York, and was rediscovered during the blues revival in 1964. Though he had lost many of his musical skills, he remained a force on the festival circuit. This recording was made by Alan Lomax in a joint Library of Congress–Fisk University project in Robinsonville, Mississippi, 17 July 1942. It begins enigmatically with what appears to be the phrase "Well after here, honey, I ain't gonna cry no more," then becomes a fairly typical railroad-took-my-woman blues—which explains the two titles.

8. Graveyard Blues

ROSCOE HOLCOMB
From *An Untamed Sense of Control*. SFW CD 40144

Roscoe Holcomb (1913–1982) was born in Daisy, near Hazard, Kentucky. A masterful though idiosyncratic guitar and banjo player, he is best known for his voice, which merges white mountain blues with Primitive Baptist hymn singing. He was first recorded in 1959, but had played for dances as a teen. An American musical icon documented by folklorist John Cohen, he displayed an intense performance style that has attracted a wide range of admirers. It is no surprise that he included blues in his repertory and recorded blues associated with Barbeque Bob, Frank

Hutchison, and others. "Graveyard Blues" comes from the Ida Cox composition "Graveyard Dream Blues," and was one of several morbid blues she composed. Bessie Smith recorded the piece for Columbia in 1923. Whether Holcomb learned it from Smith or Cox, he made it into his own expressive vehicle.

See *That High Lonesome Sound*, directed by John Cohen (Shanachie 1996).

9. 44 Blues

ROOSEVELT SYKES

From *Blues by Roosevelt The Honeyripper Sykes*. SFW CD 40051

Roosevelt Skyes (1906–1983) was born in Helena, Arkansas, but moved to St. Louis when he was three. Orphaned at age seven, he returned to Arkansas and began playing piano for a living around age 15. In the 1920s, he returned to St. Louis, where he began a prolific recording career with the Okeh label. As he put it, "I started making records in 1929, 14th of June, 1929. The first number I made was a hit, '44 Blues,' and every record I made was a star ever since." The song "44 Blues" or "The 44s," like "Vicksburg Blues," was a staple as an instrumental, and various artists besides Sykes and Lee Green are associated with it; Sykes, however, is credited with adding lyrics to it and putting out the first recording. Over the years, he recorded for dozens of labels. He may well be the foremost piano player in blues history. Certainly he was one of its brightest stars.

10. Big Fat Mama

DAVID HONEYBOY EDWARDS

From *Honeyboy Edwards: Mississippi Delta Bluesman*.

SFW CD 40132

Born in the heart of the Delta in Shaw, Sunflower County, Mississippi, 28 June 1915, David Edwards was surrounded by music. His mother, Pearl Phillips, played guitar, and his father, Henry Edwards, was an accomplished fiddler and guitarist who, at local dances, played old-time standards such as "John Henry" and "Stagolee." Following a shooting scrape at a country dance, his father quit playing dances, but taught his son the rudiments of guitar. David, or Honey, as his family called him, was more interested in blues. When the family moved to Wildwood Plantation, near Greenwood, in 1927, he had a chance to hear blues legend Tommy Johnson. Edwards recalls: "Tommy Johnson come to Wildwood in 1929. I was 14 then. They come from Crystal Springs, Mississippi. They had an old T-Model Ford. They come up picking cotton by the hundred and they had a big double house they stayed in—a great big old house, and they'd pick cotton all through the day, and at night they'd sit around and play the guitars. I used to go over there. He was playing "Canned Heat," "Big Road," and he was playing "Bye and Bye." And I used to stand around in the house right around the corner here, and every night I would listen at them play. Sounds so good to me. Drinking that white whiskey, that moonshine, I'd just sit and look at them. I said, 'I wish I could play.'"

Edwards recorded for Alan Lomax in 1942 and moved to Chicago in the late 1940s with Little Walter. In later life, he recorded extensively, and

was named a National Heritage Fellow in 2002.

"Big Fat Mama," originally recorded by Tommy Johnson as "Big Fat Mama Blues" for Victor (V38535) in Memphis in August 1928, became traditional throughout the Delta. Edwards plays in the key of E, but Johnson played in D. This version was recorded by Verna Gillis in 1979.

See *The World Don't Owe Me Nothing: The Life and Times of Delta Bluesman Honeyboy Edwards*, David Honeyboy Edwards (Chicago Review Press 1997).

11. Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Lucinda Williams, vocal and 12 string guitar; John Grimaudo,

6 string guitar

From *Ramblin*. SF CD 40042

Born in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1953, Lucinda Williams is best known today as a country artist and a singer-songwriter with a substantial following; in her early years, however, she performed country songs and blues. Her two first recordings were released on Folkways, and both were primarily blues. She began to play and sing around age 12, and by age 25, was ready to record with her friend John Grimaudo. In 1978, she went to Malaco Studio in Jackson, Mississippi, a studio associated with major soul-blues stars, such as Z. Z. Hill and Little Milton Campbell. The album she recorded there was more in a blues revival style, and was composed primarily of traditional material blues, gospel, country, and even jug-band music. A second Folkways album, *Happy Woman Blues* (SFW CD 40003), was recorded in Houston, Texas, in 1980. Since then, she has

gone on to record for Rough Trade, Chameleon, American Recordings, and Mercury.

The song "Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor" dates back to around 1900 and is one of the first songs mentioned among blues songs such as "Poor Boy a Long Ways from Home." While it is not exactly a blues song in form, it contains verses and ideas found in countless other blues. Texas songster Henry Thomas sang it as part of a medley that included "Take Me Back" and "I'm Looking for the Bully of the Town." As much a jazz standard as a blues vehicle, it has been recorded by artists as diverse as Ethel Waters, Jimmy Yancey, and Willie Brown. It was also known to be part of the repertory of Robert Johnson, who may have picked it up from Brown.

12. Lieutenant Blues

BARRELHOUSE BUCK

From *Backcountry Barrelhouse*. FKWSLP 3554

Born Thomas McFarland (1903–1962) in Alton, Illinois, a small town a few miles from St. Louis, Barrelhouse Buck played in what Sam Charters called "back country style." Several Folkways recordings resulted from Charters's efforts, including those by Henry Townsend, Edith North Johnson, and Henry Brown. Little is known of McFarland's early life, but he appears to have been a part of the St. Louis blues community, playing with Henry Townsend and Peetie Wheatstraw. He made several recordings for Paramount in Grafton, Wisconsin, in 1929, including "St. Louis Fire Blues." In 1934, he made four sides for Decca, with Peetie Wheatstraw

on guitar. In 1935, he recorded four more Decca sides, but they were unissued. He moved to Detroit, but later returned to Alton, where, in 1961, with the help of local St. Louis jazz enthusiast and member of the St. Louis police force Charles O'Brien, Charters found and recorded him at a relative's house. According to Charters, McFarland stomped his feet so hard they had to put pillows under them. Despite its primitive sound quality, McFarland's piano and vocal style are quite effective. While the song's sentiment is that of a protest song, Charters wrote that McFarland played it as a compliment to O'Brien.

13. The Woman Is Killing Me

SONNY TERRY AND FRIENDS

Sonny Terry, harmonica and vocal; unknown percussionists; unknown washtub bassist

From *Sonny Terry: The Folkways Years 1944–1963*. SFW CD 40033

Saunders Terrell (1911–1986) moved from North Carolina to New York in 1942 and became a major figure in its blues community. He usually played with guitarist Brownie McGhee, who became his partner following the death of Blind Boy Fuller, but he also made recordings on his own. He first recorded in 1944 for Moses Asch and Folkways, where he often worked with McGhee and Woody Guthrie. Little is written about *Sonny Terry's Washboard Band*, a recording that was done for Folkways (FW2006) in 1957. It is a testimony to Asch's tolerance for unusual "folk" projects and his trust in Terry's consummate musicianship. Since it depended on common household items for percussion instru-

ments, it sounds like a homemade project, and possibly family members were involved. Despite the slightly off-center washtub bass, the song is quite appealing.

14. Little Drops of Water

EDITH NORTH JOHNSON AND HENRY BROWN
Edith North Johnson, vocal; Henry Brown, piano

From *The Blues in St. Louis, Vol. 2: Henry Brown and Edith*

Johnson: Barrelhouse Piano and Classic Blues. Folkways 3815

Edith North Johnson (1903–1988) lived in St. Louis all her life, and in the 1920s was in the center of the blues business. Her husband, Jesse Johnson, ran the Deluxe Music Shop and was a scout for Okeh Records, for which he found Roosevelt Sykes and other talented performers. Edith North Johnson played piano and recorded in 1928 and 1929 for QRS, Paramount, and Okeh. Henry Brown (1906–1981) moved to St. Louis from Tennessee and began to play piano in the Deep Morgan district, working with Henry Townsend and trombone player Ike Rodgers. In 1929, he recorded ten sides with Rodgers for Brunswick and Paramount. Both artists recorded in 1929 and stopped as a result of the recording industry's major decline during the Great Depression. Johnson, as the original Folkways album title indicates, sang in the style then termed classic blues, a style associated with Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Mamie Smith, and the other vaudeville blues divas of the 1920s. Like Barrelhouse Buck, Brown is usually called a barrelhouse piano player. A barrelhouse was a cheap liquor house where whiskey was sold out of a bar-

rel, and patrons often danced. By extension, the term *barrelhouse* refers to an uninhibited style of blues or jazz and the artists who performed it at jooks, lumber camps, and urban dives. "Little Drops of Water" was composed by Johnson in the late 1920s but not recorded until 15 May 1961. It deals with the blues theme of the competition between lovers, the threat of changing partners, and the potential resolution by simply moving on. Notice the local reference to a Morgan Street man.

15. When Things Go Wrong (It Hurts Me Too)

BIG BILL BROONZY

From *Trouble In Mind*. SFW CD 40131

William Lee Conley Broonzy (1893–1958) was born in Mississippi and moved to Chicago after serving in the army during World War I. In 1927, he began a thirty-year recording career, in which he put out hundreds of sides for dozens of labels. Over the course of this career, he took many roles: playing for white dances as a youngster down South; playing downhome blues, hokum, and early Chicago blues; working the early Chicago club scene; recording rhythm and blues; starring in the blues revival; and finally serving as an ambassador of the blues overseas. Late 1930s visits to New York to appear in John Hammond's "Spirituals to Swing" concerts, and a booking in Café Society made him conspicuous in the New York blues and jazz scene. Close friendships with Alan Lomax and Studs Terkel added to his ability to work the folk revival. Moses Asch was interested in recording him and finally did so in 1956.

"When Things Go Wrong" was composed by Broonzy's close friend Tampa Red, who recorded it for Bluebird as "It Hurts Me Too" in 1940. Since then, it has become a blues classic, later associated with Elmore James, and still later with various blues rock artists.

16. Poor Boy a Long, Long Way From Home

CAT-IRON

From *Cat-Iron Sings Blues and Hymns*. Folkways 2389

William Carradine (1896–1958) was born in Louisiana but was recorded in Natchez, Mississippi, the year he died. He remains an obscure figure, though local musicians remember him as a street singer. Fieldworker Frederic Ramsey, Jr., found and recorded him and most likely translated the name *Carradine* to *Cat-Iron*. According to Ramsey, Carradine had joined a Christian church and put blues aside; however, he did record six blues as well as six sacred songs.

"Poor Boy a Long, Long Way From Home," or "Poor Boy" as it is more commonly called, is one of the earliest blues songs to become traditionally recognized. It follows the general themes of hobnobbing, trains, vagrancy, and loneliness—themes that dominated many of the earliest field-collected blues or "protoblues." Howard Odum and Guy Johnson applied the folk term "one-verse song" to the version in their collection, *The Negro and His Songs* (1925). They titled their version "Po' Boy Long Way From Home," and added that it was often sung with knife instrumental, noting that each stanza consisted of a single line repeated several times, as with the first and last verses of

this version. Clearly the song was in tradition, because Blind Willie McTell referred to it as “Poor Boy” and played a fragment knife-style in his own railroad fable, “Travelin’ Blues,” which he recorded for Columbia in 1929. Zora Neale Hurston collected and sang a version she alternately titled “Po’ Gal (Po Boy)” and “East Coast Blues.” Bukka White sang it for the Lomaxes, and other field-collected versions are recorded.

17. My Jack Don’t Drink Water No More

SHORTSTUFF MACON

From *Big Joe Williams and Shortstuff Macon: Hellbound & Heaven*
Sent. Folkways 31004

John Wesley “Shortstuff” Macon (1933–1973) was born in Crawford, Mississippi, also the home of his cousin and mentor, Big Joe Williams. The two performed together briefly in the mid-1960s, but though Williams achieved celebrity status, Macon returned to obscurity. While visiting New York in 1964, Macon recorded two albums in six days—his total recording output. The first was for Folkways; the second, for Victoria Spivey’s label. Folkways had a tolerance for unusual performers who played in relatively untutored or old-fashioned styles. Macon fit the stereotype of the natural poet singing for himself, expressing his inner feelings about his own life, work, and love. He also played and sang in an unusual style, which seemed quite archaic: he kept an insistent rhythm, but made few chord changes, using his voice in a haunting, repetitive, call-and-response fashion very uncommon to the blues. Big Joe Williams interjects some questions and com-

mentary. *Jack* means ‘mule’, as in jackass, and a mule is a hybrid between a jackass and mare. The song has an eerie, almost spiritual quality. Quite a bit like a cross between a field holler and a talking blues, it balances more common blues images with the story of a mule’s death and revival. It is another unusual variation on the typical blues structure, but it also resembles the spoken sung improvisations of Robert Pete Williams.

18. ‘Way Behind the Sun

BARBARA DANE

From *Barbara Dane Sings the Blues*. Folkways 2471

Barbara Dane (1927–) was born in Detroit, Michigan. She taught herself to play guitar in the early 1940s. Politically active, she moved to San Francisco in the late 1940s. Through the 1950s, she worked various jazz and folk venues, performing with jazz and blues artists. She recorded for Capitol and Dot and appeared at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival. Blues artists held her in high esteem as an accomplished blues vocalist. She contributed articles about blues to *Sing Out!*, and served as a role model and mentor to aspiring white women blues singers. Ever the political activist, she wrote a book, *Vietnam Songbook*, coauthored by Irwin Silber. Dane and Silber founded Paredon Records, donated to the Smithsonian Institution in 1991 and now part of the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings catalog.

19. Tell Me, Baby

LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS

From *Lightnin’ Hopkins*. SFW CD 40019

Sam Hopkins (1912–1982) was born in Centerville, Texas, and learned guitar as a youngster. In 1946, he recorded for Aladdin Records in Los Angeles, beginning one of the most prolific recording careers in blues history. Over the next twenty-three years, he recorded for dozens of labels, including Gold Star, Imperial, Arhoolie, RPM, Specialty, Mercury, Fire, Vee Jay, Jewel, and others. These included the major blues labels of the era. He recorded numerous collaborative efforts with fellow blues artists Wild Child Butler, Barbara Dane, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee. Only B. B. King and John Lee Hooker matched the scope of his recording activity. With Blind Lemon Jefferson and T. Bone Walker, he is Texas’s most influential artist. “Tell Me, Baby” is pure Lightnin’ Hopkins—which means pure Texas downhome blues. It’s a typically interactive blues, in which the singer directly addresses his lover, begging her not to go. It was recorded by fieldworker Sam Charters in 1959.

20. Just A Dream

MEMPHIS SLIM

From *Memphis Slim: The Folkways Years 1959–1973*.

SFW CD 40128

Born John Len Chatman in Memphis, Tennessee, Memphis Slim (1915–1988) learned piano at age seven and was a Beale Street regular while still in his teens. He moved to Chicago in the late 1930s and became a mainstay on the Chicago club scene, working with Big Bill Broonzy and Sonny Boy Williamson Number One. Fronting his band, the House Rockers, he was a rhythm-and-blues

star in the 1940s. He recorded for Okeh, Bluebird, and other labels before coming to Folkways in 1959. By then, he and bassist Willie Dixon were working as a duet playing folk festivals and cabarets. He eventually settled in France, where he was revered as a national treasure. “Just a Dream” was composed by his partner Big Bill Broonzy, who recorded it in 1939. The song plays up the ironic humor common to the blues, and, like many blues, contrasts a night’s dreams with the next morning’s realities.

21. Jelly Jelly

JOSH WHITE

From *Free and Equal Blues*. SFW CD 40081

Josh White (1914–1969) was born in Greenville, South Carolina. He began to record in 1932 as Pinewood Tom, recording both blues and religious songs for ARC. He moved to New York in the early 1930s and expanded his Piedmont blues and gospel repertory to broader materials suitable to a nightclub act—materials that included many political and protest songs. A consummate showman, he also appeared on stage and screen.

In 1944, he began his association with Moses Asch, for whom he recorded primarily folk and political material. “Jelly Jelly,” a risqué classic originally composed by the popular black artists Billy Eckstine and Earl Hines, who recorded it in 1940, was a popular hit in what would later be called the rhythm-and-blues market. Josh White’s version of the song comes from a glass disc typical of wartime recording, and may have been done on 25 October 1945. It sounds like an infor-

mal session, with White thrilling his audience with an enthusiastic rendering. White recorded it for Decca in 1944, and it was his biggest hit, the capstone of his onstage act. A classic sexual boast, it shows the endurance of the term “jelly roll” from the 1920s to the mid-1940s.

22. Down in the Alley

THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS

George Chambers, bass; Willie Chambers, guitar; Lester Chambers, harmonica; Joe Chambers, guitar; Brian Keenan (?), drums

From *The Original Chambers Brothers: Groovin' Time*.

Folkways 31008

Originally from Flora, Mississippi, on the edge of the Delta, the Chambers Brothers took their family blues and gospel act first to California and then, in the late 1960s, to New York, where they achieved fame as a rock act. They recorded for Columbia in 1967.

As with the first song on this recording, “Down in the Alley” features vocal harmony blues, in this case with an electric blues format. Most listeners would typecast this sound with Chicago blues, because it’s electric and came from Mississippi, but in reality it shows one of many pathways blues have taken in their coast-to-coast, around-the-world journey. This is good-time party blues, putting us down in the alley to dance away the blues.



CREDITS

Compiled and annotated by Barry Lee Pearson
Archival assistance by Jeff Place
Mastered by Pete Reiniger
Photos courtesy of Library of Congress,
Prints and Photographs Division,
FSA-OWI Collection
Cover photo by Pat Terry
22 Other photos by Marion Post Wolcott,
John Vachon and F.A. Usher, Sr.
Production supervised by Daniel Sheehy
and D. A. Sonneborn
Production managed by Mary Monseur,
Margot Nassau, and Pete Reiniger
Production assistance by Angela Allen
Photo assistance by Harold Dorwin,
Mark Gustafson, and Brian Shimkovitz
Editorial assistance by Jacob Love
Art direction and design by Open, New York

Additional Smithsonian Folkways staff:

Kisha Anderson, financial operations
Judy Barlas, manufacturing coordinator
Richard Burgess, marketing director
Lee Michael Demsey, fulfillment
Betty Derbyshire, financial operations manager
Ryan Hill, fulfillment
Sharleen Kavetski, mail-order manager
Helen Lindsay, customer service
John Passmore, fulfillment
Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist
John Smith, marketing and radio promotions
Stephanie Smith, archivist
Norman van der Sluys, audio-engineering assistant

ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the non-profit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States of America. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document "people's music," spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding. Smithsonian Folkways recordings are available at record stores. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk, Monitor, and Paredon recordings are all available through:

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS

MAIL ORDER

750 9TH STREET, NW, SUITE 4100
WASHINGTON, DC 20560-0953
PHONE: I (800) 410-9815 (ORDERS ONLY)
FAX: I (800) 853-9511 (ORDERS ONLY)

To purchase online or for further information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, go to: www.folkways.si.edu. Please send comments, questions, and catalogue requests to: FOLKWAYS@AOL.COM.



