

MEMPHIS SLIM
BOOKER T. LAURY
SPECKLED RED
JAMES P. JOHNSON
KATHERINE HANDY LEWIS
JAZZ GILLUM
MEADE LEWIS
CHAMPION JACK DUPREE
BIG CHIEF ELLIS
LEAD BELLY
SAMMY PRICE
HENRY BROWN
EDITH NORTH JOHNSON
LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY
WILLIE DIXON
HENRY TOWNSEND
VICTORIA SPIVEY
ROOSEVELT SYKES



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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SFW CD 40196

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CLASSIC PIANO BLUES

from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



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Compiled by Jeff Place and Richard James Burgess. Annotated by Jeff Place
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TRACKS

1. Memphis Slim – **DEDICATION TO PETE JOHNSON 3:12** (Peter Chatman / Memphis Slim Music, BMI)
2. Booker T. Laury – **EARLY IN THE MORNING 3:06** (Walter Roland / Munka Music, BMI)
3. Speckled Red – **HOW LONG BLUES 3:20** (Leroy Carr / Universal MCA Music Publishing, BMI)
4. James P. Johnson and Katherine Handy Lewis – **YELLOW DOG BLUES 2:56** (William C. Handy)
5. Jazz Gillum and Memphis Slim – **KEY TO THE HIGHWAY 2:54** (Bill Broonzy-Charles Segar / Songs of Universal Inc., BMI)
6. Meade "Lux" Lewis – **MEDIUM BLUES 2:51** (Meade Lewis)
7. Champion Jack Dupree – **BLACK WOLF BLUES 2:57** (Champion Jack Dupree / Alpha Music Inc., BMI)
8. Big Chief Ellis – **DICES BLUES 4:54** (Wilbert Ellis)
9. Lead Belly – **BIG FAT WOMAN 1:10** (arr. Huddie Ledbetter / TRO-Folkways Music Publishers Inc., BMI)
10. Sammy Price – **HARLEM PARLOR BLUES 2:51** (Sammy Price)
11. Henry Brown with Edith North Johnson – **LITTLE DROPS OF WATER 3:03** (Edith North Johnson)
12. Little Brother Montgomery – **PINETOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE 4:08** (Clarence Smith / Edwin H. Morris and Co., ASCAP)
13. Speckled Red – **PINETOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE 3:26** (Clarence Smith / Edwin H. Morris and Co., ASCAP)
14. Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon – **WISH ME WELL 2:10** (Peter Chatman / Memphis Slim Music, BMI)
15. Henry Townsend – **ALL MY MONEY'S GONE 2:53** (Roosevelt Sykes / Unichappell Music Inc., BMI)
16. Victoria Spivey – **YOU'RE MY MAN 4:33** (Victoria Spivey)
17. Champion Jack Dupree – **ON MY WAY TO SEE MOE ASCH 4:21** (Champion Jack Dupree)
18. Roosevelt Sykes – **SWEET OLD CHICAGO 2:56** (Roosevelt Sykes / Leric Music Inc., BMI)
19. Little Brother Montgomery – **NO SPECIAL RIDER BLUES 3:29** (Eurreal Montgomery / Arc Music Corp., BMI)
20. James P. Johnson – **HESITATION BLUES 3:05**

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Smithsonian Folkways released a collection called *Classic Bluegrass from Smithsonian Folkways* (SFW 40092). It was well received, and the label decided to go back into its vaults to craft other "Classic" releases that would be doors into a far larger world. The albums provide an introduction to many recordings on the label, and a chance to experience them perhaps again, or for the first time. If you hear a singer or musician you particularly like, explore them further.

This collection represents piano blues performances that can be found in the Smithsonian Folkways Collection at the Smithsonian. In addition, one track comes from recordings made at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. Obviously there are many great piano performances not included here, but this recording gives an overview of what's in the Smithsonian collection.

Moses Asch (1905–1986) founded Folkways in 1948 in New York. He had been involved in the record business since 1939 with his former Asch and Disc labels. In 1940, acting on a tip from Broadway producer Sy Rudy, Asch recorded blues songster Lead Belly, which was his first stab at releasing American vernacular music. During the 1940s, Asch was to release recordings by other well-known folk, blues, and jazz performers. Asch was also an engineer at WEVD radio in New York, and his studio was located in the same building as the radio station. Many of the artists appearing on WEVD programming would "coincidentally" end up recording for Asch, including many of the jazz musicians. In the early 1940s, on his Asch label, he released music by numerous piano players including Meade "Lux" Lewis, James P. Johnson, Mary Lou Williams, and Champion Jack Dupree. Among the boogie-woogie piano titles Asch published were *Blues Boogie* by Meade "Lux" Lewis; *Blues*, which included Jack Dupree; and *Jazz Moods*:

Boogie Stride (Asch 456). A quick scan of other contemporaneous releases by other labels yields such collections as *Hot Piano* on RCA, *Boogie Woogie* on Columbia (C-44), and *Barrel House Piano* (Brunswick 1008), all of which were popular with fans of "hot jazz."

Asch's beginnings with blues piano occurred during the "boogie-woogie" era, but the tradition of piano blues had a long earlier history. Blues scholar Paul Oliver feels that the blues pianists "seemed to have emerged from the ragtime and barrelhouse traditions" (Oliver 1969:76). Ragtime great Jelly Roll Morton remembered a large number of blues pianists active around New Orleans in the early years of the 20th century, many of them older than himself (Ibid).

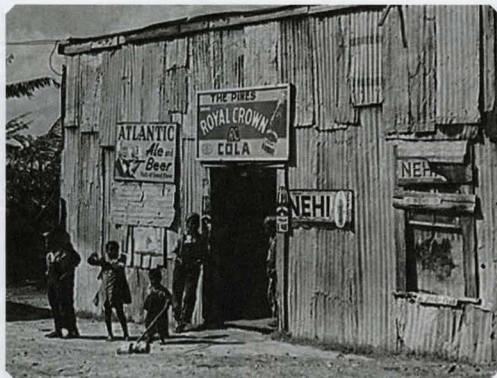
Unlike blues guitarists and harmonica players who traveled with their portable instruments, piano players needed to travel and work in certain areas where there were nightclubs, juke joints, and gambling houses. Most larger cities had an entertainment district, frequently the "red light district." Such places as Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee; Storyville in New Orleans; and Deep Ellum, in Dallas, Texas, were legendary. Morton got his start in the "sporting houses of New Orleans" in 1902 (Oliver 1969:76). Lead Belly started in the Shreveport "red light district," Fannin Street. Jazz scholar Frederic Ramsey Jr. pointed out the correlation between political corruption and jazz, the latter flourishing in "shady places of amusement" which could support it, such as dance halls, houses of prostitution, gin mills, gambling joints, and other underworld spots (Ramsey and Smith 1939:202). On the other side of the coin, city crackdowns on these



establishments were fuel for musical comment: "I don't care what Mr. Crump don't allow, I'm gonna barrelhouse anyhow."

Another outlet for blues pianists such as Little Brother Montgomery, Sunnyland Slim, Speckled Red, and others were the lumber and turpentine camps of East Texas and Louisiana. These camps were "rough places," usually with a "small juke joint" which catered to off-hour activities of the workers. Many of the important players had experience playing these camps, and there was a circuit of camps and "barrelhouse" joints that the players traveled (Ramsey and Smith 1939:79). Paul Oliver describes a "barrelhouse" joint in his book *The Story of the Blues*. "In the 'chock-houses' where a crude form of alcohol cost a matter of cents, pianists hit the keys in a rough-and-ready combination of ragtime and blues: barrelhouse, as it was called, after the rudest of joints where barrels supported a plank for the bar" (Ibid:40). It is thought that these camps were home to some great players who were never known to the outside world because record talent scouts dared not go there to investigate. Other blues pianists worked the Mississippi River towns and riverboats. There was even a railroad line which provided on-board entertainment to the migrants traveling from the Deep South to Chicago and back.

With the great migration of African Americans from the Deep South to the urban North, the pianists followed, to towns such as St. Louis, Indianapolis, Detroit, and, most importantly,



Chicago. Most of the musicians on this collection were part of this movement north. Many of the new immigrants settled into housing in the South Side of Chicago. One apartment house at 4435 Prairie in Mecca Flats was home to pianists Pinetop Smith, Albert Ammons, and Meade "Lux" Lewis. But not all of the musicians were migrants; one of the important players of the early days was Chicago-born Jimmy Yancey (1894–1951), the mentor to the three aforementioned players. Yancey worked by day as a groundskeeper for the White Sox (Ramsey and Smith 1939:186).

Examining the ages of the musicians presented here, one may note that the vast majority were born between 1903 and 1909. Paul Oliver pointed out that "the pianists born in the 1890s showed distinct ragtime influences, while the second generation, born a decade later, were exclusively blues players" (Santelli 1993:83). One tradition that benefited blues piano players was the "house rent" party, which started before Prohibition and flourished in Chicago's South Side (Ramsey and Smith 1939:183). The host would provide entertainment. The guests contributed food, drinks, and a fee. The hosts used the proceeds to pay their rent, and the event was a popular gig for the piano players.

Some of the important players over the early years of blues piano were Cow Cow Davenport, Richard Jones, Leroy Carr, Pinetop Smith, and Will Ezell. Most piano players had repertoires consisting of their own tunes and interpretations of some of the most "popular" pieces of the great players that came before them.

Pinetop Smith's "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" was released in 1928 and launched the popularity of the boogie-woogie piano style. The recording is said to have given the name to the style (Ramsey and Smith 1939:188). In addition to Smith, Jimmy Yancey, Albert Ammons, and Meade "Lux" Lewis were important boogie-woogie players. Jazz impresario and Columbia Records talent scout John Hammond went looking for Meade "Lux" Lewis, who had recorded

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the song "Honky Tonk Train Blues" for Paramount, and found Lewis through Albert Ammons. During the course of his career, Hammond was responsible for discovering artists from Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen to Stevie Ray Vaughan. In 1938, Hammond organized his "Spirituals to Swing" concert at Carnegie Hall, pairing Lewis and Ammons with Pete Johnson as the Boogie Woogie Trio. The Trio would go on to be the most popular group in the history of boogie-woogie piano, with coast-to-coast radio appearances, night club jobs, and recording dates (Ibid).

At this point Moe Asch and Asch Records entered the picture, recording Meade "Lux" Lewis, James P. Johnson, Jack Dupree, and others. Many of the acetate recordings made during this period still exist in the archive and have been reissued over the years. The peak period of Moe Asch's piano blues releases coincides with the peak period of his sales during the folk song revival of the late 1950s–early 1960s. Musicologists, folklorists, and folk music enthusiasts were actively seeking out older folk and blues musicians who were known for their earlier records. Among mainstream urban blues musicians whose sales had fallen off one could find albums by artists such as Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim, Howlin' Wolf, and others marketed as "folk blues." Memphis Slim was associated with nine Folkways albums during this period. Another Speckled Red recording was acquired from Dansk of Denmark. Champion Jack Dupree recorded a new project for Folkways that was released in 1961, and Chicago photographer Ray Flerlage brought a Memphis Slim–Jazz Gillum project and a Little Brother Montgomery album to Asch.

Folkways' biggest year by far for piano blues releases was 1961. At the same time, in May 1961, musicologist Sam Charters, who had written the first great book on blues in 1959, researched blues music in the St. Louis area, looking for artists whom he knew from earlier records. He recorded Henry Brown, Barrelhouse Buck, Henry Townsend, and Daddy Hotcakes; many of these recordings were not released until the 1980s.

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Piano has continued to be a force within blues, although not to the degree it once was; almost all of the great masters have gone. There are fewer solo piano players, but blues and boogie pianists can be found in blues and Western Swing band settings. There is also the New Orleans–based style of music of Professor Longhair, James Booker, Fats Domino, and others that still thrives in New Orleans. It is not covered in this collection as it is not represented in the Folkways catalog.

In 1987, Ralph Rinzler (1934–1994), folk musician, record producer, and talent scout for the Newport Folk Festival, then Assistant Secretary for Public Service at the Smithsonian Institution, negotiated the donation of the Folkways label to the museum, and the following year the Smithsonian Folkways record label was founded. Rinzler had been involved in earlier Folkways albums and knew the value of the collection. From its beginnings Smithsonian Folkways has set out to reissue material from its vast archives with expanded liner notes and updated sound. The Smithsonian has since acquired other smaller, like-minded record companies: Cook, Paredon, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk Musical Magazine, Monitor, Collector, and MORE. These labels comprise what is called the Smithsonian Folkways Collection, and they include folk recordings in their catalogs as well. In total, over 3,000 titles are available through the Smithsonian on compact disc. To understand the breadth of the collection we invite you to explore the Smithsonian Folkways website (www.folkways.si.edu), where you will find short audio examples of all 40,000 tracks. On the Smithsonian Global Sound website (www.smithsonianglobalsound.org) all of these tracks are available for download. In addition, all of the original liner notes can be viewed for free. If you like a track, we suggest you learn more about the recording it came from.

Jeff Place
Smithsonian Folkways
January 2008

SONGS

1. MEMPHIS SLIM DEDICATION TO PETE JOHNSON

Memphis Slim, piano; Matt Murphy, guitar
(From *If the Rabbit Had a Gun* Disc 105, 1964)

Peter Chatman (a.k.a. Memphis Slim, 1915–1988) was one of the most important 20th-century blues pianists. Of all the musicians on this collection, Memphis Slim recorded more records for Moses Asch than any other blues piano player.

Originally from Memphis and a friend of Booker T. Laury's (see track 2), he made his mark playing and living in Chicago. In 1939 he made his first recording. After a successful partnership with popular guitarist Big Bill Broonzy he began a long and important solo career. In the 1940s he began to record for Moses Asch (including an extremely unfocused session with Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, and Sonny Terry that took place during these years but was never released). Starting in the late 1950s, when more traditional forms of blues were being marketed to the "folk" audiences, Slim recorded eleven albums for Folkways. He also brought other blues projects by artists he knew to Asch. One project joined Memphis Slim with the great Chicago bassist Willie Dixon and folk music giant Pete Seeger. The archives contain over a dozen recordings of the trio made at the Village Gate in 1960. Folkways released these performances on albums by Memphis Slim and Dixon alone, Seeger alone, and all three together.

In the mid-'60s, during the height of folk music's popularity, Moses Asch began to re-use his Disc imprint to put out glossier LP productions of some of his best-selling artists. This initiative was short lived, and the records fell out of print. One project was a Memphis Slim album, which has never been released elsewhere, called *If the Rabbit Had a Gun*. When it was recorded, Slim's band included Chicago blues guitarist Matt "Guitar" Murphy. Modern audiences know Murphy as the guitarist recruited by the "Blues Brothers" in the film of the same name.

Pete Johnson (1904–1967), to whom this piece was dedicated, was one of the important boogie-woogie piano players and a member of the Boogie Woogie Trio along with Meade "Lux" Lewis and Albert Ammons. Aside from the trio, Johnson was also known for his Kansas City-based partnership with blues shouter Big Joe Turner.

2. BOOKER T. LAURY EARLY IN THE MORNING

Booker T. Laury, vocal and piano
(From *Blues Routes: Heroes and Tricksters: Blues and Jazz
Work Songs and Street Music* SFW 40118, 1999)

Booker T. Laury (1914–1995) was a Memphis, Tennessee-based player. He began playing on Beale Street in 1932 using the name "Slop Jar" (Nicholas Spitzer, notes to SFW 40118). Unlike his friends Memphis Slim and Roosevelt Sykes, Laury stayed home in Memphis and remained associated with Beale Street and its clubs, not recording until the tail end of his life. Other than his one and only release on Rounder Records, Laury can be found in a cameo appearance in the film biography of Jerry Lee Lewis, *Great Balls of Fire*. This recording comes from Nick Spitzer's "Folk Masters" radio series recorded at the Barns at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia.

3. SPECKLED RED

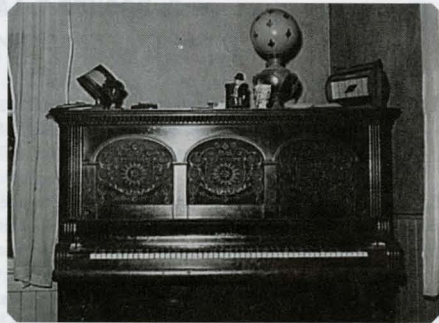
HOW LONG BLUES

Speckled Red (Rufus Perryman), vocal and piano
(From *Barrelhouse Blues of Speckled Red* FW 3555, 1961)

Rufus Perryman (Speckled Red, 1892–1973) was born in Louisiana and raised in Georgia. He was a proficient jazz and blues piano player whose first recordings in 1929 yielded the hit “The Dirty Dozens.” For many years Red was associated with Memphis, and later St. Louis. Red was a renowned and influential player who was rediscovered in the 1950s and resumed touring and recording. Speckled Red’s brother Willie Perryman (Piano Red) was also a recording artist.

Both brothers’ nicknames owe to the fact they were albino African Americans.

The 1928 hit “How Long, How Long” by pianist Leroy Carr (1905–1935) and guitarist Scrapper Blackwell marked the beginning of the popularity of piano-guitar duets on record (Titon 1977:216). Of all the early piano hits Carr’s “How Long” was one of the most frequently covered. Carr and Blackwell were two of the best-selling blues artists on records until Carr’s death at age 30 of alcoholism. Speckled Red introduces the song as by Walter Davis, but Carr’s version came first.



4. JAMES P. JOHNSON AND KATHERINE HANDY LEWIS

YELLOW DOG BLUES

James P. Johnson, piano; Katherine Handy Lewis, vocal
(From *W.C. Handy Blues Sung by His Daughter Katherine Handy Lewis in Traditional Style* FW 3540, 1958)

Katherine Handy Lewis (1902–1982) was the daughter of jazz band leader and “Father of the Blues” W.C. Handy (1873–1958). Moses Asch recorded Lewis along with piano great James P. Johnson on glass acetate discs during World War II. Because of war-related supply shortages, the acetates were made with a glass base, and they are very fragile. According to Charles Edward Smith in the liner notes to Folkways 3540, these discs were later discovered among Moses Asch’s recordings and finally released in 1958.

Katherine Handy Lewis was the ideal person to record her father’s songs; frequently she was the “first singer of these songs,” having been taught the lyrics by her mother and the style finessed by her father (Smith, notes to FW 3540). She began her career singing in church. She appeared on concert programs of her father’s music, including one at Carnegie Hall in 1928, and subsequent radio performances. She also spent her career working for Handy Brothers Music Company.

One evening in 1903, W.C. Handy was sitting at a railroad station in Tutwiler, Mississippi, when he heard an older man playing a guitar with a knife on the strings. The tone and feel stuck with him as he heard the man sing about “goin’ where the Southern cross the Dog” (Oliver 1969:26). The reference is to the spot where the Southern Railroad crosses the Yellow Dog (Yazoo Delta Railroad). This odd sound stuck in his mind and Handy started to write band pieces based on this style of music, “the blues.” Some of his compositions were “St. Louis Blues,” “Memphis Blues,” and this, “Yellow Dog Blues,” inspired by this chance encounter.

For information on James P. Johnson, see track 20.

5. MEMPHIS SLIM AND JAZZ GILLUM KEY TO THE HIGHWAY

Jazz Gillum, vocal and harmonica; Memphis Slim, piano
(From *Blues by Jazz Gillum* FW 3826, 1961)

For more information on Memphis Slim, see track 1.

This track features a collaboration between Memphis Slim and harmonica player William "Jazz" Gillum (1904–1966). Moving to Chicago in 1923, Gillum was the accompanist for a number of blues artists, especially Big Bill Broonzy and Washboard Sam. Along with Broonzy, Gillum was involved in the original recording of what is now a blues standard, "Key to the Highway." The song has been recorded by modern rock groups including Derek and the Dominoes (with Eric Clapton), The Band, and the Allman Brothers Band. Gillum was shot to death in 1966.

6. MEADE "LUX" LEWIS MEDIUM BLUES

Meade "Lux" Lewis, piano
(From *Jazz Piano Greats* FW 2852, 1974; recorded August 20, 1944, by Moses Asch)

Meade "Lux" Lewis (1905–1964) was one of the best known of the boogie-woogie pianists and, along with his friend Albert Ammons, one of the stars of the boogie-woogie craze of the late 1930s. Lewis, Ammons, and Pete Johnson were the three members of the Boogie Woogie Trio, whose act consisted of the three playing three pianos in unison. The group was featured by jazz impresario and Columbia A&R great, John Hammond, as part of his 1938 Carnegie Hall "Spirituals to Swing" concert.

In the 1920s both Lewis and Ammons were cabdrivers and lived in the same Chicago apartment building. Lewis' most famous piece from 1927 was "Honky Tonk Train Blues." His father had been a Pullman porter and he grew up near the tracks, the sounds inspiring him to write this piece (Ramsey and Smith 1939:191).

Lewis recorded for Moses Asch and his Asch label in 1944, yielding the 78 rpm album, *Blues Boogie Woogie* (Asch 352). Asch continued to work with Lewis while the Disc label was in existence, issuing *Boogie at the Philharmonic* (Disc 502) as part of his legendary "Jazz at the Philharmonic" series.

7. CHAMPION JACK DUPREE BLACK WOLF BLUES

Champion Jack Dupree, piano and vocal; Chris Lange, guitar;
Fritz Rüegg, bass; Bobby Reutwiler, washboard
(From *The Women Blues of Champion Jack Dupree*
FW 3825; recorded April 8, 1961, in Zurich)

New Orleans-born Champion Jack Dupree (1909–1992) had a long career on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Growing up an orphan in New Orleans, Dupree learned piano from some of the players in the French Quarter and began to entertain at clubs and bordellos there himself (Santelli 1993:130). Dupree also had a career as a professional boxer—hence the moniker. He recorded for Moses Asch after World War II for the Asch label and went on to record for a number of rhythm and blues labels.

Dupree was a victim of racism through much of his life and eventually abandoned the United States for Europe in the late 1950s. His parents had been killed in a fire suspected to have been set by the Ku Klux Klan (Santelli 1993:130), and he spent two years in a Japanese prisoner of

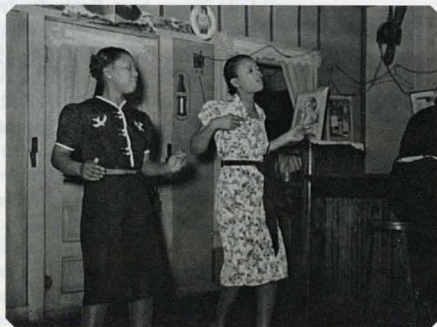
war camp during World War II, only to return to the U.S. to the same racism he had faced before. Dupree stated his feelings in an interesting, unreleased song he recorded for Moe Asch called "I'm Going to Write the Governor of Georgia." In the song the protagonist returns home to Jim Crow after having served his country proudly overseas. Dupree recorded for nearly a dozen European blues and jazz labels during the second half of his career.

8. BIG CHIEF ELLIS DICES BLUES

Big Chief Ellis, vocal and piano; "Bowling Green" John Cephas, guitar; "Harmonica" Phil Wiggins, harmonica
(previously unreleased, from The Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1996-RR-322-1977.217.07; recorded August 1976)

Originally from Alabama, Wilbert "Big Chief" Ellis (1914-1977) acquired his nickname because he was part Black Creek Indian. After spending his young adulthood traveling around, he settled in New York City and became a member of the blues scene there, frequently backing other musicians (Santelli 1993:137).

In 1972 Big Chief moved to the Washington, D.C., area, where he ran a liquor store. He could be



found playing at local festivals including the National Folk Festival in Vienna, Virginia, and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. It was at the 1976 Smithsonian festival that this recording of his crowd-pleasing, frequently requested song "Dices Blues" was recorded. At this time his band included guitarist "Bowling Green" John Cephas, and it is interesting to note that during the festival a young, 22-year-old Washington harmonica player, Phil Wiggins, sat in with the group. These would be some of the first collaborations between the long-time musical partners Cephas and Wiggins. In 1977 Ellis moved back to Alabama, where he died shortly thereafter.

9. LEAD BELLY BIG FAT WOMAN

Lead Belly, piano and vocal
(From *Where Did You Sleep Last Night* SFW 40044, 1996)

Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly) was one of the most important folk musicians of the 20th century. He was a songster in the true sense of the word, playing everything from blues, ballads, and cowboy songs to children's games and pop standards on his powerful twelve-string guitar. He had the facility of remembering the words and music of songs after one or two hearings, and he eventually amassed a truly impressive repertoire. Among his pieces, some of which he composed, some adapted, and some just covered, were "Rock Island Line," "Midnight Special," "Cotton Fields," and "Goodnight Irene." He was imprisoned in both Texas and Louisiana for a number of years and with the help of folk-song collector John Lomax was able to earn his freedom. He traveled to New York with the Lomaxes, eventually falling in with the urban New York folk revival and becoming friends with such musicians as Woody Guthrie, Josh White, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and Pete Seeger. Seeger and his group the Weavers would later hit Number One on the charts with Lead Belly's "Goodnight Irene." Lead Belly died in 1949 of Lou Gehrig's disease.

During his youth, Lead Belly used to travel from his home in Caddo Lake (against his mother's wishes) to Shreveport, Louisiana, to soak in the goings-on on Fannin Street in the "red light district." He first heard blues and the rollicking blues piano there. Blues scholar Paul Oliver has observed "that it was there he first heard the 'barrel-house' piano players whose use of heavy walking-bass" figures was the inspiration for the powerful rhythms which he employed in his songs (Oliver 1969:36).

John and Alan Lomax recorded a black quartet singing this song at Bellwood Farms in Atlanta in 1936. Lead Belly was also along on that trip, and he may have learned the song from the quartet then. According to the notes of the 1950 release of the song on Folkways, Alan Lomax stated that Lead Belly just sat down in Moe Asch's studio and started pounding out this song. Asch used this on his *Negro Folk Songs* collection as part of a theme on "bad women" (Disc 660, 1946).

10. SAMMY PRICE HARLEM PARLOR BLUES

Sammy Price, piano
(From *Blues Routes: Heroes and Tricksters: Blues and Jazz
Work Songs and Street Music* SFW 40118, 1999)

Sammy Price (1908–1992) was known as both a boogie-woogie and jazz pianist. For much of his career Price was based in New York City and played clubs and jazz on the radio. He also was a session musician for Decca Records. Price continued to perform until his death.

This recording was made as part of Nick Spitzer's "Folk Masters" radio series at the Barns at Wolf Trap. This was one of Price's last recordings and shows him in fine form.

11. HENRY BROWN WITH EDITH NORTH JOHNSON LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

Henry Brown, piano; Edith Johnson, vocal
(From *The Blues in St. Louis, Vol. 2* FW 3815, 1984; recorded
May 15, 1961, by Sam Charters and Robert Oswald)

Henry Brown (1906–1981) was one of the pianists who called the Deep Morgan section of St. Louis his home. He recorded for Brunswick and Paramount during the 1920s. Afterwards he entertained locally in St. Louis for years before making a few more recordings late in life and working as a pianist on the Mississippi riverboat *The Becky Thatcher* (Santelli 1993:64). These 1961 sessions come from the series of St. Louis blues recording projects done by Sam Charters and subsequently released by Folkways.

Edith North Johnson (1903–1988) was the vocalist on this session. She was married to Jesse Johnson, who owned the Deluxe Music Shop and was an A&R man for Okeh Records (Barry Lee Pearson, notes to SFW 40134). Edith Johnson recorded eighteen sides for Paramount Records in 1928 and 1929.



12. LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY PINETOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE

Little Brother Montgomery, piano
(From *Farro Street Jive* FW 31014, 1968)

Eurreal "Little Brother" Montgomery (1906–1985) was originally from Kentwood, Louisiana, right across the lake from New Orleans. Naturally, he was exposed to some of the great piano players there, such as Jelly Roll Morton. Starting to play in his father's "barrelhouse," in his younger years he played in the logging and turpentine camps. Like other players he moved around the South and up to Chicago, where he finally settled in 1941.

Montgomery made three records for Moses Asch, one a gospel record and two blues discs. One of the LPs was titled *Farro Street Jive* after one of his best-known songs.

"Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" has been called the first and the best of the boogie woogies. It's a piece that is in almost every boogie-woogie piano player's repertoire, and each player creates his own version. Piano players frequently competed in what were known as "cutting" contests, and they often used this piece to compete with. Its author was Clarence "Pinetop" Smith (1904–1929). After Smith arrived in Chicago in 1928, he lived in the same building as Albert Ammons and Meade "Lux" Lewis, and he influenced both. He unfortunately died young, an innocent bystander in a gun battle in a Chicago bar.



13. SPECKLED RED PINETOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE

Speckled Red (Rufus Perryman), piano and vocal
(From *Barrelhouse Blues of Speckled Red* FW 3555, 1961)

For more on Speckled Red, see track 3.

Red's version of "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" differs from Montgomery's. He includes the vocal recitation that Smith performed. Some players actually include a "musical stop" for effect when the vocalist in the song says "stop." His version is also more boisterous.

14. MEMPHIS SLIM AND WILLIE DIXON WISH ME WELL

Memphis Slim, piano and vocal; Willie Dixon, bass
(From *At the Village Gate* FW 2386, 1962)

For more information on Memphis Slim, see track 1.

Bass player Willie Dixon was one of the most important individuals in the history of the blues. He was a house producer for Chess Records in Chicago and worked with such greats as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Chuck Berry, and others. He was the writer of classics like "Hootchie Cootchie Man," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "My Babe," "I Ain't Superstitious"—and the list goes on.

This recording comes from a number of dates that Slim and Dixon played at the Village Gate nightclub in New York in 1960. They performed as a duo and with folk singer Pete Seeger.

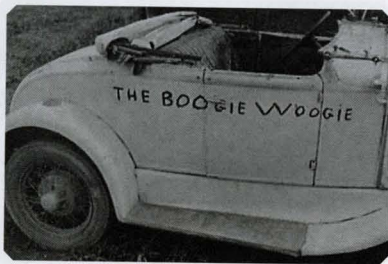
Every show over a two-week engagement was recorded and resides in the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives. Folkways ultimately released three albums from these tapes.

15. HENRY TOWNSEND
ALL MY MONEY'S GONE

Henry Townsend, piano
(From *The Blues in St. Louis, Vol. 3* FW 3816, 1984;
recorded May 17, 1961, by Sam Charters)

Henry Townsend (1909–2006) was one of the longest lived of the great piano players. Also recording as a guitarist, Townsend along with many others moved to the blues scene in St. Louis, first recording in 1929 and continuing right up to his death.

Also like many others, Townsend's recording career ceased during World War II. Sam Charters recorded this performance in 1961, but the first recording released after Townsend's rediscovery was the record *Tired of Being Mistreated* for the folk series on Prestige Records the following year. He recorded sporadically for Adelphi, Nighthawk, and Wolf Records over the next few decades. Townsend made an appearance at the 1991 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in a program honoring Robert Johnson, which yielded a Grammy-nominated Columbia album, *The Roots of Rhythm and Blues: A Tribute to the Robert Johnson Era* (Columbia 48584, 1992). Townsend was also awarded a National Heritage Fellowship in 1985 from the National Endowment for the Arts honoring him for his career in music.



16. VICTORIA SPIVEY
YOU'RE MY MAN

Victoria Spivey, piano and vocal (From *The Blues is Life* FW 3541, 1976)

Victoria Spivey (1906–1976) was one of the last of the classic female blues singers to carry on her career late in life. Unlike many of her contemporaries she was also an instrumentalist and a composer of such blues tunes as "T.B. Blues." Spivey's recording career ran from 1926 until the 1970s, taking her from Houston to St. Louis, and New York City. Like many of the players on this collection she got her start playing in saloons and brothels, in her case, in Houston.

After a hiatus in the 1950s Spivey resumed her blues career and started her own New York-based record label, Spivey Records, whose releases could be recognized by their black and white covers with cut-out letters. Spivey Records released folk and blues and was one of the first places a young Bob Dylan recorded in New York as an accompanist.

17. CHAMPION JACK DUPREE
ON MY WAY TO SEE MOE ASCH

Champion Jack Dupree, piano and vocal; Chris Lange, guitar;
Fritz Rüegg, bass; Bobby Reutwiler, washboard
(From *The Women Blues of Champion Jack Dupree*
FW 3825, 1961; recorded April 8, 1961, in Zurich)

For more information on Champion Jack Dupree, see track 7.

This funny ditty turns Tommy Johnson's "Big Road Blues" into a little improvisation on going to record for Moe Asch.

18. ROOSEVELT SYKES SWEET OLD CHICAGO

Roosevelt Sykes, piano and vocal
(From *Blues Folkways* FW 3827, 1961/ *Blues by Roosevelt "The Honeydripper" Sykes* SFW 40051, 1995; recorded 1961)

An important blues pianist from St. Louis, and later Chicago, Roosevelt "The Honeydripper" Sykes (1906–1984) recorded his Folkways session in 1961 under the supervision of the great Memphis Slim. It is thought that Memphis Slim brought the project to Moses Asch, for whom he had himself done a lot of recording (Matt Walters, notes to SFW 40051).

Sykes' first big record was his rendition of "Forty-Four Blues" in 1929 for the Okeh Records label. Sykes recorded during the 1930s for a number of labels under various names (Dobby Bragg, Willie Kelly, The Honeydripper, etc.). In later years he spent time living and playing in Chicago and, when the electric blues took over Chicago, in New Orleans (Santelli 1993:385).

19. LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY NO SPECIAL RIDER BLUES

Little Brother Montgomery, vocal and piano
(From *Farro Street Jive* FW 31014, 1968)

For more information on Montgomery, see track 12.

"No Special Rider" was the first song Little Brother recorded in September 1930 for Paramount Records and is one of the songs most associated with him.

20. JAMES P. JOHNSON HESITATION BLUES

James P. Johnson, piano and orchestra
(From *The Asch Recordings, 1939–1947*, Vol. 1: *Blues, Gospel and Jazz* FW AA1/2, 1966)

James Price Johnson (1891–1955) was one of the most eminent practitioners of "stride" piano. Stride piano evolved from ragtime and was popular in New York. Johnson also incorporated elements of blues into his performances. With a career in nightclubs and vaudeville, Johnson eventually worked as an accompanist on over 400 recordings, including those of Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and Ethel Waters.

Long associated with New York City, Johnson was one of the most important musicians to record for Moses Asch in his studios in the early 1940s. Asch recorded numerous sides of Johnson's music, including a new performance of Johnson's symphony *Yamerkaw*.



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