# THE DUST BUSTERS

with john cohen

OLD MAN BELOW

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

"There is a side of us all, which goes about trying to make the world over in our own image. There is another side—where one searches to encounter his own image in the world. In this process one examines all kinds of elements which come in his path."

—John Cohen, liner notes to *The New Lost City Ramblers*, Folkways 2396 (1958).

*J. D. Cornett plowing in East Kentucky*

# THE DUST BUSTERS

## with john cohen

## OLD MAN BELOW

**1.** The Honest Farmer *2:59*
**2.** Arkansas Traveler *3:18*
**3.** Black Jack Daisy *3:07*
**4.** Roving Gambler *3:00*
**5.** The Old Man Below *2:03*
**6.** Wimbush Rag *2:16*
**7.** Because He Loved Her So *2:38*
**8.** Barnyard Medley *2:36*
**9.** Waltz of Roses *3:20* (Prince Albert Hunt)
**10.** Cotton Pickers Drag *2:19*
**11.** Combination Rag *3:15*
**12.** A Lazy Farmer Boy *3:14*
**13.** Free Little Bird *2:58*
**14.** Arthritis Blues *3:37* (Butch Hawes)
**15.** Fort Smith Breakdown *2:48*
**16.** Johnny Booker *3:16*
**17.** Two Soldiers *3:36*
**18.** Baby, Your Time Ain't Long *4:15*
**19.** Yellow Rose of Texas *3:16* (J.K.)
**20.** Saturday Night Waltz *2:18* (Bob Larkin)

# SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR MUSIC

eli smith

I'm from Greenwich Village, the old home of New York City's folk music scene. Walker Shepard is from Virginia and Minnesota, Craig Judelman was born in South Africa and grew up in Seattle. Today we all live in New York and the Dust Busters is a New York band. We formed our band in 2008 to play old time American string band music in a way that reflected and extended the strong feeling and diversity of sounds that we had found on old commercial and field recordings from as early as the 1920s and 1930s.

Our feeling for old time music addresses questions associated with the dislocation and alienation found in a sterilized modern America. You have to ask yourself, "How do I want to fill my personal space? What objects do I want around me? How do I want to fill my time? What and where is home?" These questions concern physical objects, a shelf of records, a stack of books, a real painting, and an instrument you don't have to plug in. There's something to that, feeling that you have a place and are fulfilled culturally, physically, and neurologically on the most grass-roots level.

For the three of us in the Dust Busters, as it has been for John Cohen, playing old time music is not a passing phase or pastiche of days gone by. Instead, learning and playing the music forms an integral part of our daily lives, fulfilling a basic need not met by the commercial media industry and consumer society. We learn from antique 78 rpm records and field recordings of the old traditional masters, often transferred to digital format. We cherish opportunities to meet and are humbled by the experience of learning from our elders—the people who are closely linked to older and original sources. Soaking up as much as we can has been as important an experience for us as for any young traditional musicians trying to find a sound, a mode of expression, and a story that links us to our shared musical and cultural heritage.

In this era, our elders are a mix of revivalists who became entranced by this music in the 1950s and 60s and people from the countryside who learned the music around home. Some of the musicians who have generously shared

their time, music, and homes with us are Clyde Davenport, Joe Thompson, Alice Gerrard, and Pat Conte. Peter Stampfel has also been a great friend, teaching all three of us a great deal about music, how to be better musicians, and how to "hang!" Visiting these musicians at home, playing and learning music, soaking in ideas, and hearing their stories has been a delightful experience. All of these important ingredients make the music fulfilling, imbued with personality and a strong sense of place.

We know for certain that our feelings about the music and the path that it has set for us are not new. But we do feel that they have been regenerated in a fresh new era. For example, both John Cohen (quoted above) and Woody Guthrie's poem (below) express the difficulty of encountering oneself in today's manufactured landscape.

***Voice* by Woody Guthrie**

I don't know how far I'm going to have to go
To see my own self or to hear my own voice
I tuned in on the radio and for hours never heard it
And then I went to the moving pictures show
And never heard it there
I put handsful of coins into machines and watched records turn
But the voice there was no voice of mine
I mean it was not my voice
The words not my words that I hear in my own ears
[…]
…a fellow sat across at a table near my wall
[… ]
And somehow I had the feeling
As I heard him speak, and he spoke a long time,
And not one word was in my personal language,

And I could tell by the deep sound, by the full tone
Of his voice that he spoke my language
I suppose you may wonder just how he could speak
In a dialect that I could not savvy nor understand
And yet understand every sound that he made
I learned to do this a long time ago
Walking up and down the sideroads and the main stems
Of this land here

(Excerpted from Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal, eds., *Pastures of Plenty: A Self Portrait—Woody Guthrie* (1990).

The roots of the music we play go back to the old frontier music from when settlers were moving from early Eastern settlements west through the Cumberland Gap and along other routes into rugged mountains, the Western plains, and into the Deep South. Frontiers are often places where anything can happen in an elemental mix of populations and social forces. We find the sound of the music to be grounded in the self sufficiency of its early creators and the hard work they undertook to build their livelihoods in the remote and lonely settings in which they lived. This sound is clearly heard in the music itself, all the way into the 1920s when the first old time recordings were made. The music we play is the music of rural people: woodsmen, subsistence farmers, coal miners, sharecroppers, and enslaved people of African descent, people who worked in core extractive industries and yet were marginalized from the mainstream of American history. The music tells the story of these Americanized immigrant populations, their ways of thinking and feeling, and gives us a visceral and emotional connection to that stretch of history.

Some old time musicians from this milieu achieved fame locally or even nationally in the early days of mass media, like Uncle Dave Macon on the

Grand Old Opry or the Carter Family on XERA border radio. But how many more came and went before the days of recorded sound or written documentary records? We want to pay respect to the unrecognized, unheralded artists of the rural working people who are largely lost to history but have left their aesthetic systems. Our goals are to play the music, to preserve and extend it, and to celebrate the achievements of its creators.

Today, nearly all the old traditional master singers and instrumentalists who emerged from the original cultural setting of the music have passed away. The chain of people learning person to person, by emulation not imitation, has been broken and now is all but gone. Most people are exposed and overexposed to popular mass media in nearly every aspect of their daily lives.

So, what do we do now? Can the music be maintained and extended or will it be homogenized and taken apart piece by piece with bits and references ending up in various forms of popular music? Fortunately our generation is gaining unprecedented access to the old archival field recordings, 78 rpm records, and early cylinder recordings, which I believe are allowing many of us to learn styles authentically.

In the 1950s and 60s, the old 78 rpm records were not very old, only 30 years or so, and many of the old timers who recorded them were still very much alive and active. Since then, although most of the old timers have passed away, we've gained distance and a new perspective on the sound and meaning of the source material and the tradition itself. One hundred years ago, most Americans lived in rural areas and old time music was just "music" to those who created and practiced it. The 1920 Census revealed that for the first time more Americans were living in urban areas than rural areas; today we live in a cosmopolitan society where many cultures mix in the streets and throughout popular media. Playing old time music has become a choice, made by people from any background who are attracted to the music. On a personal level and on a cultural level, people are judiciously considering their

options and needs. Practically speaking, through a process of trial and error, they are finding out what forms of culture are most valuable and how they want to use them in their lives.

Old time music has been remarkably resilient to commercialization—for better or for worse, but mostly for the better. You can't make lots of money playing it, but as Mike Seeger once said, "You can make a living playing old time music depending on your definition of old time music and your definition of a living." The stream of old time music has run parallel—albeit with some intersections and interplay—to the more recent industries of pop culture and mass-produced, commercial music.

Old time music has a wild and straightforward strength that doesn't mince words or actions, and yet still carries intense subtlety and depth. I was emotionally attracted to that and came to recognize a fully formed, beautiful aesthetic system that was outside of anything I'd been exposed to on radio or television. That was where I first heard a voice that sounded like my voice, although I'd never heard it before.

Our approach to old time music is stylistic in that we respect the underlying aesthetic of old time string band music. A given song is less important to us than the style in which it is played—the style makes the song. Old time and blues, Cajun and zydeco, and spirituals and all the other old traditional American music from across the country are what we recognize as folk music. Those all are definite styles that were created organically by a community of people over a period of time.

The history of the modern folk music movement in New York goes back to the 1930s, with people playing traditional American music in the big city. As a kid in Greenwich Village who was interested in folk music or old time music, I always felt disconnected from what had happened there in earlier decades. Growing up, I hoped to find the elders in my "hometown" to learn from, but New York is a hectic place; a lot of them had moved away or passed on; and

there was no real venue for exchange to happen. But over the last few years Walker, Craig, and I have met some of the people connected to that sense of past and place that first inspired me to play old time music. My life has been enriched by meeting New York musicians such as John Cohen, Pat Conte, and Peter Stampfel. Today there's very little going on in Manhattan. Instead, things have moved to Brooklyn where there's an excellent group of musicians centered around an amazing place, the Jalopy Theatre and School of Music, in Red Hook. With the advent of the Jalopy Theatre, we have a place for old time musicians of many generations to mix in New York City.

We are often asked how we feel about singing our songs, because from a certain perspective they refer to a reality that has vanished and is not native to our experience. However, the words and music in these songs reveal human stories that anyone can relate to. A boll weevil has never eaten our cotton crop and we weren't on the *Titanic* when it went down. But that's good. I'm glad to hear about it in a song and not have to experience that horrifying situation, although there are plenty of analogous situations happening right now around the country and the world—just listen to the news at any time of day. This brings us back to the question of authenticity. For us, authenticity is something that feels genuine. Everyone searches for it within themselves as a process of evaluation: to look closely at yourself and where you are; to formulate and articulate your own ideas; and to ultimately find your own voice. Through music we learn a lot about ourselves and the lives of people who may be unlike ourselves in terms of geography, economy, culture, and temporal era, and that's beautiful. For us, old time music represents that type of beauty and brings a breathtaking reality to history with an emotional connection to people we might otherwise never meet. Listening to the old recordings and living those sounds is a way to have an unmediated experience with an America that is both painfully alien and a bold precursor to the world of today.

Walker Shepard, Craig Judelman, and Eli Smith

# A VIEW FROM BELOW

john cohen

Old time string bands are proliferating throughout America in the 21st century. South, North, East, and West, the sounds of fiddle, banjo, guitar, and mandolin are heard on back porches, concert halls, and many other places. This old music never goes out of date, as young musicians carry it forward. The Dust Busters is one of these bands, and its members make their present out of the past.

The Dust Busters begin with the roots of traditional American music as heard on old 78 rpm records and offer it to a new generation. They perform ballads, fiddle tunes, breakdowns, ragtimes, and blues played in string-band styles. It is called old time music because it harkens back to a past with respect and continuity for old traditions. It is also known as country music, hill-billy, traditional music, folk music. It is a living music. Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (SFW 40090) was made from reissues of old 78s, Woody Guthrie called himself "a hill-billy singer," the New Lost City Ramblers dipped their musical buckets into this same great well of music, and now the Dust Busters get their music from these sources. The Dust Busters start where the New Lost City Ramblers left off, evoking the golden age of the 1920s and 30s. On first hearing them, fellow New Lost City Rambler Tracy Schwarz commented, "When you think it's all over, suddenly the whole thing shows up again, brand new."

For years, American traditional music was defined by folklorists as non-commercial, handed down orally from generation to generation, neither written down nor composed by a known author. This now-antiquated definition (which permeated the folksong revival of the 1950s and 60s) has been left behind and the importance of early commercial recordings has been acknowledged. Many of the riches of American traditional music are available on old 78 rpm recordings made in the 1920s and 30s (also known as the Golden Age of recording). Record companies, working with an eye for selling to local audiences, recorded music from ethnic groups, immigrants to America. In the 1920s they discovered that country music and blues would also sell. The com-

panies created a vast collection of music, much of which can be heard today on reissues. In the late 1930s, the Library of Congress, John and Alan Lomax, and others started their field recording projects, documenting the music of farmers, coal miners, cowboys, and prisoners. Over the years, these commercial and field recordings have been re-interpreted, arranged, popularized, copyrighted, and commodified.

The Dust Busters have decided to return to the source, to the field recordings and old 78s, as the basis for their music. Their purpose is to get back to an ideal that they find in the music; a sense that it's handmade, with great skills to master on fiddle, banjo, and guitar, music with a down-to-earth rural quality, aspiring to something "authentic." They play a living music that has been re-interpreted by one generation after another, a revival of a revival. They have stories to tell and strange American characters to inhabit them. Their high voices evoke the sounds heard on old records, and they are young men of the same age as the musicians who recorded the old 78s. There is an ever-present belief the old songs were sung by old men. But Clarence Ashley, Dock Boggs, Charlie Poole, the Carter Family, and the rest were in their twenties when they recorded. Perhaps Uncle Dave Macon was the only old guy back then.

Is the music really old? Jeff Tweedy (of Wilco) told me he believed each artist was inventing on the old recordings. It wasn't just a repeat of the past. We talked further about how traditional old time music was part of his own background and how he, too, had learned songs from my field recordings in Virginia.

Having started with fiddle tunes, the Dust Busters' repertoire has since expanded in many directions, including creations by 19th-century back roads musicians, the early commercial 78 rpm experiments, country string bands playing rag time, country western, minstrel show remnants, black banjo styles, the blues, and the sound of early popular stars like Jimmie Rodgers, the "Singing Brakeman." The Dust Busters have opened pathways to hidden music, music that needs to be heard today. They respond to unusual and beautiful

music from the Appalachians and perform it in their own way. Old voices connect deeply with them, awakening distant memories in performances today. The Dust Busters evoke the soul heard in the music of Fiddlin' John Carson, Jimmie Rodgers, Rufus Crisp, or Gaither Carlton. Yet some of the old time musicians have an insane sound beyond reach, and that ancient American craziness remains only in the past. Although a song like "The Old Man Below" comes from an Appalachian backwoods, it could be a description of the lifestyle being pursued by the musicians and listeners who congregate around the Jalopy Theatre, in Red Hook, Brooklyn. The Dust Busters often perform there and many other old time acoustic musicians play there as well. At Jalopy, their music is a welcomed part of the flourishing art and culture scene, which has migrated from Manhattan. The music is not from Appalachia. In the midst of gentrifying New York City, Jalopy harks back to a community store where you can fix your guitar, take banjo and fiddle lessons, have a drink, and listen to great live traditional music. Invoking the "Old Man Below"—the title of this recording—may be their way of saying that I'm performing with them. I've become the old timer in their old time band: older than the three of them combined. The Dust Busters forgivingly want to hear my stories and banjo tunes.

One day Walker Shepard was visiting my place. I barely knew him then, and I was surprised when he put his banjo into an unusual tuning and started to sing a song from Roscoe Holcomb in that high lonesome voice. Here in my kitchen was a young guy, barely into his twenties, already involved in a music I had recorded forty or fifty years earlier. Was it possible that Roscoe's deep mountain sound was speaking to a new generation? Walker's interest triggered my memory: that I had old films of Roscoe out in my barn. We looked at the raw film, unseen for so many years…and saw the need to get this music out. Subsequently, I made a whole new film about Roscoe from the unreleased footage, and the Dust Busters had established a goal, a hard-to-reach ambition, to engage with this music and perform it. I saw the possibility of passing it on to a new generation.

# ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

We all met while performing in Peter Stampfel's band (as the Ether Frolic Mob), on the far side of old time music that simultaneously encompassed the far-out and the traditional. In the 1960s, Peter was part of the Holy Modal Rounders and I was with the New Lost City Ramblers. We were on opposite sides of the same coin, with Peter's wacky inventions on one side, and the traditional fiddle string band approach on the other. Now the Dust Busters have re-joined these opposites and are reconstructing the whole coin. Peter's endless creativity led to wonderful inventions, starting with a traditional tune and progressing to *wherever*. We sometimes wondered where the original song had disappeared to, and Eli, Walker, Craig, and I would play old time music and Hobart Smith banjo tunes off to the side. The three of them became the Dust Busters.

Eli Smith, Walker Shepard, and Craig Judelman are tall young men, laid back, cool, and dedicated to this music, which has overtaken their lives. They have years of college education, and, setting that aside, have found out that performing this music is what they must do. At this point, when many other college graduates are without jobs, these guys have dedicated themselves to a life in music that follows no clear path or livelihood. (JC)

**ELI SMITH**

Eli Smith contributes a high, clear voice and solid musicianship on banjo, banjo mandolin, guitar mouth harp, Jew's harp, and pump organ. A graduate of Oberlin College, he was part of a tight jug band that continued to play ragtime, blues, and early jazz after college. He has a deep knowledge of folk music and the past, not only of early hillbilly music. He knows about the Almanac Singers and the folk song movements of the 1940s and 1950s. He knows Woody Guthrie's music and his views were shaped by his experience

with Henrietta Yurchenco, a fine ethnomusicologist who worked in Mexico and also knew Guthrie, Lead Belly, Pete Seeger, and many other musicians. His computer is loaded with vast collections of old 78s, both old time and blues. He has an on-line show named "Down Home Radio," has organized and presented the Brooklyn Folk Festival and Washington Square Park Folk Festival, has played with Peter Stampfel's Ether Frolic Mob, and sustains himself giving banjo lessons. He is a passionate and cool performer and is the lynchpin of the Dust Busters. (JC)

### CRAIG JUDELMAN

Craig Judelman is the front fiddler with the Dust Busters, and brings a wealth of musical experience to his old time fiddling. His playing conjures up the great fiddlers of the past and adds a new spirit that is distinctly his own. He started the violin with Suzuki method at the age of four and has studied classical, jazz, Jewish, Irish, and Italian fiddle music both at home and in the field. Born in South Africa, he grew up in Seattle before attending Bard College in upstate New York, where he studied classical and jazz violin and composition while pursuing an interest in various forms of folk music outside the classroom. The first folk music he played, however, was his own tradition, the klezmer music he heard at bar mitzvahs and celebrations at the synagogue in Seattle. He says that, since graduating from college, he's worked hard to let go of everything he studied and just play a good old time fiddle tune.

In addition to his work with the Dust Busters, Craig performs regularly around New York City with a klezmer band and an Italian folk band. He is an active social organizer, using his music to create community and connect New Yorkers to the farmers who grow their food. Craig seeks ways to use folk music as it originally functioned, both to celebrate and to educate, and is currently developing a curriculum for teaching American history through American folk music. (JC)

## WALKER SHEPARD

Walker Shepard has absorbed and internalized old time music so that it appears to come from within him. His approach is like an artist's: intuitive, creative, and mysterious. His inspiration comes from the sounds he is drawn to, and can perform. If there is a spooky quality in his singing it is not from a historical or folkloric model. There are singular voices on old recordings that have moved him, and have become part of his singing. Like an actor getting inside a character, he absorbs their qualities and transforms them. He has been attracted to some of the most unusual and unfathomable voices of the past, including Roscoe Holcomb, Jimmie Rodgers, Gaither Carlton, Fiddlin' John Carson, and B. F. Shelton. They all serve as a springboard for his own interpretation.

As a banjo player, he's developed his own approach, which seamlessly fits with the old music, although he gets to the sounds in an original way. He's also an excellent fiddler, with a fine ear for old-style timing, and plays invigorating guitar runs as well. By introducing Craig to old time music, Walker found an echo of himself within the band. At Bard College he majored in studio art. He says he plays old time music because it is the "funnest" music he knows. He doesn't want to play anything else. (JC)

## JOHN COHEN

John Cohen was born in Sunnyside, Queens, New York, in 1932. He attended Yale University where, in 1957, he earned an MFA. In 1958 he co-founded the New Lost City Ramblers and played with that band for 50 years, making great music and disseminating the idea of performing old time music in an old time style throughout the United States and the world. John has recorded, filmed, and photographed many artists and musicians. Most famously he brought to light Roscoe Holcomb but has also worked with Cousin Emmy, Gaither Carlton, Sara and Maybelle Carter, Frank Proffitt, Banjo Bill Cornett,

Eck Robertson, Dillard Chandler, Dellie Norton, and numerous others. John has perhaps been the single greatest influence on the Dust Busters as a band. We have played with him quite regularly in concert settings, but have also had the great pleasure of visiting him at his home in Putnam County, NY. There we sit in the living room of his old farm house, listen to records, see amazing photos and works of visual art, cook a good dinner and play a whole lot of music, often into the wee hours. We have been greatly influenced by John's catalogue of recordings with the New Lost City Ramblers and his own fieldwork with so many amazing traditional artists. John is also full of corny jokes and good banjo tunes. (ES)

The name of the Dust Busters draws on deep roots in old time music, where the title "Dust" and "Busters" have appeared. In the 1920s, Al Hopkins and His Buckle Busters were the original Hill Billies. In the 1930s, dust storms drove many musicians from the Dust Bowl, and in the 1940s the Almanac Singers made an album called *Sod Buster Ballads* that was groundbreaking folk music in its time. Their name is evasively undecipherable, like "Dr. Smith's Champion Horse Hair Pullers." The Dust Busters don't want to be pinned down. Still, the old time music of the past is their reference point, a way to view the world and have fun doing it. I sometimes see this process as resembling wine and cheese tastings, where newcomers get a thrill from the unique and varied flavors. By gorging on the rich possibilities, The Dust Busters have turned old time music into a feast. (JC)

# NOTES ON THE SONGS

*The song notes below were written by various members of the band, and each is followed by the author's initials: CJ=Craig Judelman; ES=Eli Smith; JC=John Cohen; WS=Walker Shepard. We use two abbreviated instrument names as well. A "bantar" is a six-string banjo-guitar and a "manjo" is a mandolin with a small banjo head.*

## 1. THE HONEST FARMER.

WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO, VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, HARMONICA; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR. SOURCE: FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON, OKEH 40411 (1925).

The lyrics and title of this song come from the playing of Fiddlin' John Carson, but the musical arrangement and tempo is more in keeping with the Carter Family's "The Wayworn Traveler," a hymn also known as "Palms of Victory" (first published in 1900). It was also recorded by Uncle Dave Macon (as well as by the Johnson Family Singers) under the title "Deliverance Will Come." John Carson is considered to be the first country musician ever recorded. In 1923 he recorded two sides for the Okeh label in Atlanta Georgia, "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" and "The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's Going to Crow." The record sold surprisingly well considering Carson's rough and unrefined style of playing, but he soon became in demand and eventually recorded 165 titles. The first time I heard John Carson's "The Honest Farmer" was on a 78 rpm record that I purchased for the incredible price of two dollars. It was the first 78 I ever bought and I was blown away by the quality of sound. I was also blown away by the idea that an original 78 recording by the first country musician ever recorded could be purchased for pocket change. (WS)

## 2. ARKANSAS TRAVELER.

FRANK FAIRFIELD, FIDDLE; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR; ELI SMITH, JEW'S HARP. SOURCE: VARIOUS

This version of "Arkansas Traveler" comes from a session we did with Frank Fairfield and John Cohen in Berkeley, California, early one Saturday before a gig at the Freight & Salvage Coffeehouse. We tried many combinations of instruments, including Frank on bull-fiddle and cello, and ended up with the exciting, spontaneous version of "Arkansas Traveler" heard here. It features Frank on the low fiddle part, Craig on the high end, and Eli on the Jew's harp. Unfortunately we did not include any of the wonderfully corny jokes that traditionally accompanied this piece, so here are a couple:

Traveler: Say farmer, this road go to Little Rock?
Farmer: I don't know, but there's a heckuva big 'un around the bend.
Traveler: Well, does it go to Louisville?
Farmer: I've lived here 40 years and it ain't moved an inch.
Traveler: Farmer, you lived here all your life?
Farmer: Not yet! (CJ)

## 3. BLACK JACK DAISY.

JOHN COHEN, BANJO, VOCALS; WALKER SHEPARD, BANTAR; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, BANJO, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: *DILLARD CHANDLER: THE END OF AN OLD SONG*, FOLKWAYS 2418 (1975).

This song is based on Dillard Chandler's unaccompanied version of an old love song ballad ("The Gypsy Laddie," Child 200). I added the banjo part (inspired by Clarence Ashley and Ralph Stanley), and the Dust Busters threw in the rest. Dillard Chandler (from Sodom, NC) liked to wear a cowboy hat, and his version of the song has distinctive wardrobe references, such as a derby hat, high-heeled slippers, and gloves of Spanish leather, as well as a blanco horse. (JC)

## 4. ROVING GAMBLER.

ELI SMITH, BANJO, VOCALS; WALKER SHEPARD, GUITAR; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; JOHN COHEN, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: RUFUS CRISP, UNISSUED LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECORDING. VOCAL INFLUENCED BY DOUG AND JACK WALLIN, *FAMILY SONGS AND STORIES FROM THE NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS,* SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS 40013 (1995).

I have heard this song done by a number of performers, but was particularly taken with a rendition played by Rufus Crisp of Allen, Kentucky. I was lucky enough several years ago to get my hands on some unissued Library of Congress recordings of Crisp, made by Margot Mayo and Stu Jamieson at Crisp's home in 1946. Crisp was an excellent player and singer who strongly influenced banjo players in New York in the 1940s. For this song, he used a different melody than the standard one and, together with his excellent banjo part, gave it a new feeling. We made his solo piece into a band arrangement and gave it a new feeling again, one quite different from the standard more up-tempo version. (ES)

## 5. THE OLD MAN BELOW.

WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE, VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE STICKS; ELI SMITH, JEW'S HARP; JOHN COHEN, BANJO. SOURCE: GAITHER CARLTON ON *THE DOC WATSON FAMILY,* SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS 40012 (1990).

This song comes from the playing and singing of Gaither Carlton who was Doc Watson's father-in-law. The arrangement is similar to Gaither's, with the addition of the banjo, Jew's harp, and fiddle sticks. The song, as John Cohen describes in his notes, is a very interesting depiction of a man's trials during courtship. The song is related to another song, "Come All You Virginia Gals" sung by Cousin Emmy, which describes in detail what one should wear when courting. The lyrics of "The Old Man Below" are very specific in their visual description of a situation, which makes me think that the song was perhaps written by a man who had just been through this situation and wished to accurately visualize his experience. (WS)

"The Old Man Below" has strange wording, phrases that are hard to decipher, remnants of 19th-century comedy, and portrayals of frontier life. Its music and text are archaic. Charles Frazier, the author of *Cold Mountain,* called it one of the most surreal songs he ever heard. For the Dust Busters, it has a sound that resonates with audiences today. Starting as a song about courting the girls with their "hair not combed," it morphs into a battle with a girl's father, "I tangled my fingers in the old man's hair." It includes descriptions of raw flour cooked in the ashes of a fireplace ("the name that they call it is dough, boys, dough"), meat that couldn't be cut with a knife ("I sawed and sawed, and never made a mark"), as well as a list of which clothes are best to wear ("an old hunting shirt, and a hat more brim than crown"). (JC)

### 6. WIMBUSH RAG.

CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE; JOHN COHEN, MANDOLIN; ELI SMITH, GUITAR. SOURCE: THEO AND GUS CLARK, OKEH 45339 (1929).

What is a wimbush, you ask? According to Eli Smith, it is like a wishing well but less serious and with more shrubbery. This song is not really a rag—that is, a piece written in ragtime—but in the 1920s it was popular to call a modern sounding fiddle tune a rag, and this is definitely a bit modern, especially the guitar playing on the original record by Georgia duo Theo and Gus Clark, from which we take our inspiration. We added mandolin and a second fiddle to bring out the psychedelic nature of this little gem, and slowed it down a bit to let the lilt work its magic. (CJ)

### 7. BECAUSE HE LOVED HER SO.

CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE, LEAD VOCAL; WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE, HARMONY VOCAL; ELI SMITH, BANJO, BASS VOCAL; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR, BASS VOCAL. SOURCE: GEORGIA CRACKERS, OKEH UNISSUED, 1929; RELEASED ON MARIMAC 9110 (1986).

We get this song from one of the many great Georgia string bands, the Georgia Crackers. According to some sources, cattle ranchers in Georgia were called "crackers" by Floridians because they cracked their whips to get the attention of their cattle, but the term also dates to Elizabethan England, when Shakespeare used the word to refer to someone with a loose tongue—someone who "cracks" jokes. The Georgia Crackers played around Atlanta and were one of many incredible bands playing in the early 20th century. We greatly admire their swinging feel and wonderful mix of popular songs, old time fiddle tunes, and topical songs.

The Georgia Crackers consisted of the Cofer Brothers (Paul and Leon) with Ben Evans joining them on guitar. Though many of their songs seem to portray the lives of poor rural folk, they were actually the children of a mill-owning Methodist minister. However, their music reflects the social issues of the rural poor and their playing clearly reflects their contact with the African American musical tradition, much as our own music reflects the experience and aesthetic of our countrymen. Thanks to Theo and Gus Clark, the Georgia Crackers, the Georgia Yellow Hammers, and the Skillet Lickers, we feel the state of Georgia should get more respect! (CJ)

### 8. BARNYARD MEDLEY.

WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, GUITAR; JOHN COHEN, BANJO. SOURCE: HOBART SMITH, "WHAT DID THE BUZZARD SAY TO THE CROW," *IN SACRED TRUST*, SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS 40141 (2005); DOC ROBERTS AND ASA MARTIN, "RYE STRAW," GENNETT 7721 (1930); AND WALKER'S OWN VERSION OF "OLD HEN CACKLED."

As a band, we originally shied away from medleys, which seemed to imply that a single old time tune isn't interesting enough on its own. However, after hearing some great medleys on the old records (especially those of Crockett's Kentucky Mountaineers), we decided to try our hand at it. What came out is a collection of fiddle tunes with barnyard themes: our interpretation of Hobart

Smith's "What Did the Buzzard Say to the Crow," Doc Roberts and Asa Martin's "Rye Straw," and Walker Shepard's own version of "Old Hen Cackled." (CJ)

### 9. WALTZ OF ROSES.

WALKER SHEPARD, GUITAR, VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, HARMONICA; JOHN COHEN, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: PRINCE ALBERT HUNT, OREN 45375 (1929); JIMMIE RODGERS.

The first time I heard this song was from the playing of Prince Albert Hunt rather than from the better-known Jimmie Rodger's version, "Waiting for a Train." "Waltz of Roses" seems to be a unique arrangement of Hunt's own creation, taking the intro from the well-known "Cowboy Waltz," which was later recorded by Woody Guthrie on fiddle. (WS)

### 10. COTTON PICKERS DRAG.

WALKER SHEPARD, MANJO; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, GUITAR; JOHN COHEN, BANJO. SOURCE: GRINNELL GIGGERS, VICTOR 23632 (1930).

On first hearing of the Grinnell Giggers, we thought they might have been college boys from Iowa. It turns out they were from Missouri and gigging is a type of spear fishing. These guys were no mere fishermen, however, and played many amazingly beautiful and original Ozark tunes in strange keys such as this one. They play it at a slightly faster pace, which really swings, but we decided to slow it down a bit and bring out the sweet bluesiness of the melody. (CJ)

### 11. COMBINATION RAG.

WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, MANJO; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR. SOURCE: EAST TEXAS SERENADERS, COLUMBIA 15229 (1928).

A combination of what exactly? We're not quite sure, but we really like to play this song, especially since Eli wasted hours learning it on the banjo-mandolin. We got this one from the East Texas Serenaders, who had a wonderful sound that mixes the best of old time, ragtime, and cowboy/western

swing. Perhaps that's the combination. The East Texas Serenaders first recorded this great tune in 1927, and it features the superb fiddling of Huggins Williams (who studied with a couple of classical violinists, it might be noted) along with a three-stringed cello and tenor banjo. Not the usual old time string band, but hey! It's Texas. (CJ)

### 12. A LAZY FARMER BOY.

JOHN COHEN, GUITAR, VOCALS; WALKER SHEPARD, BANTAR; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, MANJO. SOURCE: BUSTER CARTER AND PRESTON YOUNG, COLUMBIA 15702D (1931).

Our version of this song comes from a recording by Buster Carter and Preston Young (with fiddle by Posey Rorer), which was re-issued by Smithsonian Folkways on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (SFW 40090). I always remember this song when I'm working in my garden, hoeing corn. (JC)

### 13. FREE LITTLE BIRD.

WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO, VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, HARMONICA; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR. SOURCE: *THE LOST RECORDINGS OF BANJO BILL CORNETT,* FRC304 (2002); DYKES MAGIC CITY TRIO, BRUNSWICK 129 (1927); CLARENCE ASHLEY AND DOC WATSON *ORIGINAL FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS OF DOC WATSON AND CLARENCE ASHLEY, 1960–1962* SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS 40029 (1994).

This classic old time song has been an American standard for many years. For this arrangement I have taken from the lyrics of Banjo Bill Cornett's "I Can't Stay Here By Myself" while maintaining the faster tempo of "Free Little Bird" that is played by string bands such as Dykes Magic City Trio. (WS)

### 14. ARTHRITIS BLUES.

ELI SMITH, GUITAR, LEAD VOCALS; WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE, HARMONY VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; JOHN COHEN, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: BUTCH HAWES ON *LONESOME VALLEY: A COLLECTION OF AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC,* FOLKWAYS 2010 (1951).

"Arthritis Blues" was written and first recorded by Butch Hawes, a member of the Almanac Singers conglomeration of folk musicians in New York City that included Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Lee Hays, Josh White, Sis Cunningham, Bess Lomax, and others. The song was recorded during a session at Moe Asch's Folkways studio in the mid-1940s. We loved the free-for-all unique sound of the original recording, and added a second fiddle to Woody Guthrie's original fiddle part. (ES)

### 15. FORT SMITH BREAKDOWN.

WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, PUMP ORGAN; JOHN COHEN, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: LUKE HIGHNIGHT AND HIS OZARK STRUTTERS, VOCALION 5339 (1928).

Although the wonderfully energetic breakdown from Luke Highnight and his Ozark Strutters doesn't feature an organ, we thought this would be a perfect opportunity to show off Eli's old-fashioned, foot-operated pump organ, an instrument heard on many Ozark recordings. Apparently the instrument was not necessarily the keyboard of choice, but at some of the recording sessions there was no piano available and so the pianists were forced to play a pump organ instead—coincidence or act of God, you decide! (CJ)

### 16. JOHNNY BOOKER (OLD JOHNNY BOOKER WOULDN'T DO).

JOHN COHEN, VOCALS, GUITAR; CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE, WALKER SHEPARD, FIDDLE; ELI SMITH, MANJO, HARMONICA. SOURCE: JERRY JORDAN, SUPERTONE (SEARS) 9407 (1929).

This is a pre-Civil War minstrel song, from the days before computerized ignitions in cars, and even before cars. This version comes from a recording by Jerry Jordan (a pseudonym for Walter Smith). The fiddler was Posey Rorer, who played with Charlie Poole. Cousin Emmy (Decca and Folkways) also recorded this song featuring five-string banjo. (JC)

## 17. TWO SOLDIERS.

CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE, VOCALS; WALKER SHEPARD, GUITAR; ELI SMITH, MANDOLIN; JOHN COHEN, BANJO. SOURCE: MUNROE GEVEDON, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS FIELD RECORDING 1556B/1557A (1937), ISSUED ON *THE MUSIC OF KENTUCKY, VOL. 2: EARLY AMERICAN RURAL CLASSICS, 1927–37,* YAZOO 2014 (1995).

We got this song from the man with the golden name, Munroe Gevedon of West Liberty, Kentucky, who was recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1937. Munroe's recording of this Civil War ballad is one of the most haunting and raw examples of music from that era. The song supposedly commemorates the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862, and the recording features Munroe on fiddle and his children accompanying on guitar and banjo and what sounds like a woodblock, an effect I mimicked by slapping my fiddle during the singing parts of the song. Munroe sings in a very plain and war-torn manner, which we have blended with the famous version of this song that Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard recorded (*Hazel & Alice*, Rounder Records 0027, 1973). We were honored to play this with Alice Gerrard at the Black Banjo Gathering in 2010 and dedicate this recording in loving memory to Hazel Dickens. (CJ)

## 18. BABY, YOUR TIME AIN'T LONG.

ELI SMITH, LEAD VOCAL, GUITAR; WALKER SHEPARD, TENOR VOCAL, FIDDLE; CRAIG JUDELMAN, BASS VOCAL, FIDDLE; JOHN COHEN, BANJO. SOURCE: AL HOPKINS AND HIS BUCKLE BUSTERS, BRUNSWICK 183 (1927).

This song was originally recorded by Al Hopkins and His Buckle Busters (from whom our band partially takes its name) and belongs to the family of songs that includes "Roll on, Buddy" and "I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground." Charlie Bowman, a fiddler for Al Hopkins, also recorded under his own name a similar version that he called "Roll on, Buddy." I've taken some floating verses that I liked from various related songs. (ES)

### 19. YELLOW ROSE OF TEXAS.

WALKER SHEPARD, BANJO, VOCALS; CRAIG JUDELMAN, PIANO; ELI SMITH, GUITAR; JOHN COHEN, BANJO; FRANK FAIRFIELD, FIDDLE. SOURCE: DA COSTA WOLTZ'S SOUTHERN BROADCASTERS, GENNETT 6143 (1927).

Every once in a while, I have the great privilege of hearing a song for the first time, not on a CD, record, or computer, but from live performers at the fabulous Jalopy Theatre. That is where I first heard "The Yellow Rose of Texas," which was played by our good friend Pat Conte and the Canebrake Rattlers, one of the best live string bands I have ever heard. For me it is a very rich feeling to get a song from a person rather than from a sound system. (WS)

### 20. SATURDAY NIGHT WALTZ.

CRAIG JUDELMAN, FIDDLE; WALKER SHEPARD, PIANO; JOHN COHEN, GUITAR; ELI SMITH, MANDOLIN. SOURCE: FIDDLIN' BOB LARKIN AND HIS MUSIC MAKERS, OKEH 45229 (1928).

A very sweet and charming waltz from another Ozark great, Fiddlin' Bob Larkin and His Music Makers, this minimalist tune really shows what a nice melody and some elegant fiddle ornamentation can do. John came up with a great old timey banjo part and Walker learned how to play the piano for our version, which reminds me of an opium-induced dream of a cowboy saloon. (CJ)

# CREDITS

Produced by Eli Smith and the Dust Busters
All tracks were engineered by Jim Bertini at Galaxy Smith Studio, Brooklyn, NY, except "Arkansas Traveler" and "Yellow Rose of Texas," which were engineered by Mark Allen-Piccolo at New, Improved Recording, Oakland, CA.
All tracks were mixed by Jim Bertini, Pete Reiniger, and Marcos Ruedas
Mastered by Pete Reiniger
Cover photo by J.L., all other photos by John Cohen
Essays by Eli Smith and John Cohen; track annotations by Eli Smith, Walker Shepard, Craig Judelman, and John Cohen

Executive producers: Daniel E. Sheehy and D. A. Sonneborn
Production manager: Mary Monseur
Editorial assistance by Greg Adams, Jim Deutsch, Anthony Seeger, and Peter Siegel
Art direction, design, and layout by Visual Dialogue (visualdialogue.com)

*Additional Smithsonian Folkways staff:* Richard James Burgess, director of marketing and sales; Betty Derbyshire, director of financial operations; Laura Dion, sales and marketing; Toby Dodds, technology director; Sue Frye, fulfillment; Henri Goodson, financial assistant; Mark Gustafson, marketing; David Horgan, online marketing specialist; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Keisha Martin, manufacturing coordinator; Margot Nassau, licensing and royalties; Jeff Place, archivist; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, sales and marketing; Stephanie Smith, archivist, Jonathan Wright, fulfillment.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**THE DUST BUSTERS WOULD LIKE TO THANK:**
John Cohen, Mike Seeger, Tracy Schwarz, and Tom Paley for paving the way individually and as the New Lost City Ramblers; Frank Fairfield for appearing with us on this record; Cece Conway and Alice Gerrard for their early support and hospitality; Clyde Davenport and Joe Thompson for their music and hospitality; and finally all of our many friends along the road who we look forward to seeing and picking and crashing with.

**WALKER SHEPARD**
I would like to thank John Cohen for being himself and sharing his endless insight and amazing musicianship, without which I would be very lost on my way somewhere. I would also like to thank him for being authentic; as he says, "I woke up this morning and pinched myself and there I was, authentic." I would also like to thank my family who I love dearly, and specifically my parents who supplied me with instruments at a young age.

**CRAIG JUDELMAN**
I would like to thank my parents, Hazel and Julian Judelman; all my many teachers along the way—especially the man who taught me most about the violin, Yuri Mikhlin; my siblings, for inspiring me to play music and encouraging me by letting me sit in on their gigs before I was ready; my wonderful students; all those who taught me tunes and gave me a place to stay when I was traveling; John Cohen for all the work he did for this music and for taking our band under his wing; Peter Stampfel for his encouragement and inspirational devotion to the music and the moment; Clyde Davenport for taking time to sit in his living room and show me how to play all my favorite Burnett and Rutherford tunes; Eli Smith for his unending work to make

this album and band happen; Walker Shepard for turning me on to old time music and teaching me so much by example; the great people at Smithsonian Folkways for making this happen; the Source and Sustainer of all; and all those who came before me and left bits of themselves in this music for us to explore and continue.

**ELI SMITH**

I would like to thank my friends and family for supporting me in trying to play and promote some old time music. In particular I would like to give my love and thanks to my parents, Michael and Debby Smith, without whom my life in music would not be possible. Thanks to Abe Mandel and Jody Stecher who were so generous with their time and energy and taught me so much. Thanks to Henrietta Yurchenco and Peter Siegel for opening my ears and my mind and being two of the first and best people I met after moving back to New York. And a special thanks to John Cohen for lending his amazing talents to this field for all of these years, for being wonderful to work with and for making this record possible!

## ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document 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, Folkways, Collector, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk, Mickey Hart Collection, Monitor, M.O.R.E., and Paredon recordings are all available through:

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings Mail Order
Washington, DC 20560-0520
Phone: (800) 410-9815 or 888-FOLKWAYS (orders only)
Fax: (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 *smithsonianfolkways@si.edu*.

Roscoe Holcomb, Daisy, Kentucky, 1959

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Washington DC 20560-0520 www.folkways.si.edu
SFW CD 40206 ℗© 2012 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings