



CLASSIC AFRICAN AMERICAN SONGSTERS

from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



Smithsonian Folkways

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from **SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS**

1. Warner Williams with Jay Summerour—**BRING IT ON DOWN TO MY HOUSE** 2:02
(Bob Wills / Unichappell Music, ASCAP)
2. Pink Anderson—**TALKING BLUES** 2:26
(Chris Bouchillon/Jaymore Music, BMI)
3. John Jackson—**NOBODY'S BUSINESS (IF I DO)** 3:15
(Porter Grainger—Everett Robbins; arr. John Jackson)
4. Little Brother Montgomery—**ALABAMA BOUND** 2:17
(Little Brother Montgomery/Jet Music Publishers, BMI)
5. Brownie McGhee—**PALLET ON THE FLOOR** 3:09
6. Bill Williams—**CHICKEN, YOU CAN'T ROOST TOO HIGH FOR ME** 3:16
(Bob Cole-J. Rosamond Johnson)
7. Lead Belly—**MY HULA LOVE** 2:16
(Edward Madden-Percy Wenrich, arr. Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music Publishers, BMI)
8. Reverend Gary Davis—**CANDY MAN** 2:32
(Gary Davis / Chandos Music, ASCAP)
9. John Cephas and Phil Wiggins—**GOING DOWN THE ROAD FEELING BAD** 3:32
10. Peg Leg Sam—**FROGGY WENT A-COURTING** 4:10
11. Mississippi John Hurt—**MONDAY MORNING BLUES** 5:52
(John Hurt/Wynwood Music Inc., BMI)

Compiled and Annotated by Barry Lee Pearson and Jeff Place
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12. Pink Anderson—**THE BOYS OF YOUR UNCLE SAM** 2:03
13. Brownie McGhee—**RAISE A RUCKUS TONIGHT** 2:49
14. Marvin Foddrell—**RENO FACTORY** 2:09 (arr. Marvin Foddrell)
15. John Jackson—**DON'T LET YOUR DEAL GO DOWN** 3:07
(arr. John Jackson / Tradition Music Co., BMI)
16. Warner Williams with Jay Summerour—**HONEYSUCKLE ROSE** 2:05
(Fats Waller-Andy Razaf / Chappell & Co., ASCAP-Razaf Music, ASCAP)
17. Big Bill Broonzy—**BILL BAILEY** 1:55
(arr. Bill Broonzy/Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
18. Bill Williams—**WHEN THE ROSES BLOOM AGAIN** 2:05
(Willie D. Cobb-Gus Edwards)
19. Peg Leg Sam—**STRAIGHTEN UP AND FLY RIGHT** 3:14
(Nat Cole-Irving Mills/EMI Mills Music Inc., ASCAP)
20. Snooks Eaglin—**CARELESS LOVE** 2:33
21. Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong—**THEY CUT DOWN THE OLD PINE TREE** 2:20
(George Brown-Willie Raskin-Edward Eliscu/Thundermountain Music,
ASCAP-Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music Publishing, BMI-LSQ Music, ASCAP)

Cover photo "True lovers of the muse" by William Henry Jackson, 1902.



Classics from the
**AFRICAN AMERICAN
SONGSTER TRADITION**

"Waiting for the Sunday boat" by William Henry Jackson, 1902.

Barry Lee Pearson

EARLY IN THE 20th CENTURY, folk song scholars and fieldworkers began to show growing interest in African American secular songs from the South. Religious songs such as spirituals had already been given a stamp of approval as legitimate folk songs despite the popular culture impact of college-affiliated touring Jubilee groups. But secular songs—ballads, ragtime, even blues—proved more difficult to legitimize partly because of their dual status as both folk and popular song. Nevertheless, professional and amateur folk song collectors collected, classified, and published them, designating their singers “songsters.”

So just what is a songster? The term originated in Europe over a thousand years ago and meant a woman who sang, or a songstress. Other usages included simply one who sings, a poet, and beginning around the 18th century, a cheap book of ballads or other popular songs. But by the early 20th century the term also acquired a more specific racial meaning, designating African American singers. It shows up in print by the end of the first decade of the 20th century in sociologist Howard Odum’s “Folksongs and Folk Poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negroes,” published in the 1911 *Journal of American Folklore*.

Odum’s connection to the term was one of discovery rather than invention. While it is unclear when the term entered black vernacular or how prevalent it was, he makes it quite clear that it derives from black speech by putting it in quotes and providing a somewhat muddled definition linking it with two other categorical terms: “musicianer” and “music physicianer.” According to Odum and his informants, the songster sang and knew a large number of songs; the musicianer played an instrument (a fiddle, banjo, or guitar); and the music physicianer did both and travelled. Odum conceded the terms were interchangeable, often referring to the same person. Much the same material was republished by the University of North Carolina Press some 14 years later, this time

with a co-author, Guy B. Johnson. While the journal's article introduced the term to a limited number of folklorists and fieldworkers, the 1925 book *The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South* firmly cemented the term in black folk song scholarship. By this date there also was more popular interest in black folk and popular song on a national level, spurred by the sale of sheet music and phonograph recordings of jazz and blues. Scholars such as John and Alan Lomax and Dorothy Scarborough continued to use the term "songster," generally in regard to singers of secular songs; but as the 20th century wore on, "music physician" fell out of usage, though "musicianer" and "songster" remained in southern speech.

While the definition of "musicianer" remained relatively constant, "songster" began to accrue a shifting set of sometimes conflicting meanings. From its earliest use describing postbellum black itinerant musicians to its contemporary use referring to black string band musicians, the songster character has been represented as a musical jailbird, vagrant, loafer, camp follower, walking jukebox, liquor house entertainer, and latter-day griot. He is both a keeper of tradition, disseminating folk materials wherever he goes, and tradition's worst enemy, contaminating local tradition with modern popular music. He is the inventor of blues and not a blues musician at all. These disparate representations—19th-century radical and 21st-century conservative—reflect the prejudices of those who portrayed him. For example, at the end of the 19th century the songster represented a type of new "Negro" in contrast to his antebellum predecessors, but by the mid-20th century his role had been pre-empted by yet another creation, the "bluesman." In this latter environment, the songster was relegated to being a repository of older musical forms thought to have passed their prime.

In retrospect these shifting portrayals make sense within their own specific time frames. However, problems arise when we lose track of the continuities of the songster

role or when we attach too much emotional baggage to the term, whether lionizing or demonizing the figure it portrays. Much of this has to do with arguments over authenticity and the artists' relationship to the songs they performed. But such concerns were not those of the songster, who cared more about whether or not audiences liked a song well enough to pay to hear it.

From our present perspective we can note several characteristics associated with the songster figure. Moreover, by relying on commentary from the songsters themselves rather than critics, we can neutralize some of the romance and prejudice associated with the term.

The first defining characteristic would be chronological and relates to the songsters' role in blues history. Fair or not, this historical bookmark approach is the most common way they are described. Songsters were black artists active from the 1870s on, before blues dominated black secular music. Those active from the 1870s to the turn of the century worked within the fiddle- and banjo-dominated string bands; while those active in the early decades of the 20th century worked more often with guitar or harmonica and were more closely connected to blues. Those who recorded generally were born before 1900 and had repertoires that spanned the 19th and 20th centuries; they included such notables as Henry Thomas (b. 1874), Richard Rabbit Brown (b. circa 1880), Papa Charlie Jackson (b. 1885), Peg Leg Howell and Frank Stokes (b. 1888), Jim Jackson (b. 1890), Charlie Patton (b. 1881), Luke Jordan (b. 1892), Blind Blake (b. circa 1890s), Furry Lewis (b. 1893), and Jessie Fuller (b. 1886).

While these artists have been described as songsters, most are better known in relation to blues. For example, Charlie Patton is considered by many to be the father of Delta blues. Others—Blind Blake, Papa Charlie Jackson, or Jim Jackson—are

known as early purveyors of blues, though their repertoires included non-blues as well. Of the artists on this compilation, five also fall into this category: Lead Belly (b. 1888), Mississippi John Hurt (b. 1883), Reverend Gary Davis (b. 1896), Big Bill Broonzy (b. 1893 or 1898), and Pink Anderson (b. 1900).

A second characteristic of the songster focuses more on genre diversity. In this usage, the term refers to someone with a large, multigeneric supply of songs that usually includes blues, but is also as likely to include string band numbers, reels, ragtime, gospel, country, and Tin Pan Alley pop. For example, John Jackson, although born in 1924, forged a significant songster repertoire from his family's recordings: "I've been discovered as a bluesman, which I don't reckon they would call me a bluesman, more of a songster than they would a bluesman, because I play other than blues." Jackson was in fact discovered as a bluesman as part of the 1960s folk revival search for southern blues artists and was later found to have a much broader and more complex skill set. At the time, however, his blues repertoire overshadowed his songster credentials. One might even suggest that his songster status cast a shadow over the authenticity of his bluesman credentials. But if, as John Jackson put it, "playing other than blues" was the only criterion for being named a songster, most blues artists would qualify.

A third factor characteristic of the songster profile, especially at the end of the 19th century, was travel. As an occupational group trying to scrape together a living, musicians needed mobility, and the ability to travel was one of the new freedoms blacks gained after the Civil War. Whether working a broader regional circuit or smaller inner-city circuit in Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, or Dallas, or even "pulling doors" in Chicago, the songster attempted to sell his musical product to whoever would pay to listen. Early references to songsters were almost obsessively focused on their rootlessness. In these descriptions one detects an ambivalence that

***Everybody in the family played music...
...before bedtime at night, everybody sat around
and sang songs. —John Jackson***

merges a condemnation of his vagrant life and lack of responsibilities with a grudging admiration for his freedom. Such ambivalence was carried on from songster to blues artist and dates back to both European and African traditions regarding musicians, minstrels, troubadours, and show people. Along with travel and diversity of repertoire, the songster is also known for the range of venues in which he plays. Entertainers by profession, they played wherever the opportunity presented itself, finding available performance spaces in cafes or coal camp dances, or creating their own spaces on street corners or store porches. Concurrent with travel and venues, the songster has also been characterized by the diversity of his audiences.

As songsters themselves tell it, other common experiences—particularly musical families and access to phonograph recordings—likewise affected their songster status.

For example, Virginian John Jackson's initial exposure to music derived from his family environment:

Everybody in the family played music: my mother, my father, aunts, uncles, my brothers and sisters. I had an aunt who played guitar and sang, my dad's sister. My father played. My mother blowed the harmonica and played the accordion. My oldest brother, Dick, he played, and my brother Jack. And I still have a brother up the country who still plays autoharp and the guitar. So what we did on the weekend and before bedtime at night, everybody sat around and sang songs.

John's father, also a songster, played for both black and white parties:

He used to do... "The Preacher and the Big Grizzly Bear," "Coming Around the Mountain Charming Mary," "I Wish I Was a Mole Rooting in the Ground,"... and I know they used to play "Leather Britches," and a song "Walk Down Ladies, Your Cakes All Gone." You know, just old mountain hoedowns; that's what they called them back then. Of course, "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane."... and then there was one song that he used to do that we loved so much about "Rooster Couldn't Roost Too High for Him" [see track 7].

Although best known as a practitioner of Piedmont blues, fellow Virginian John Cephas had a repertoire that embraced gospel, country, ragtime, ballads, pop songs, and rhythm and blues. Cephas learned much of this repertoire from older family members, particularly his grandfather and his aunt Lillian:

My grandfather started taking me around with him. He used to play guitar, and he played the piano. He used to sing "Railroad Bill" and "Careless Love." Those were a couple of his favorite songs. "Black Cat Swing," I think that was the first time I heard that. Then he used to sing a lot of songs like Blind Blake used to do. He was very good at ragtime and also religious music.

Cephas's aunt Lillian and her friend Haley Dorsey taught him popular songs and what he referred to as "torch songs"—"A Shanty in Old Shanty Town," "Why Should I Care," "When I Grow Too Old to Dream," "Darkness on the Delta," and even "Home Sweet Home." Like many other artists his recorded output features a higher number of blues than in his total repertoire but even on records there is a balance of blues, gospel, ballads, ragtime, and pop tunes.

***...white musicians called it, “hoedown.”
Blacks called it “breakdown.”***
—Howard Armstrong

Walter “Brownie” McGhee (1915–1996) drew on similar experiences in Knoxville, Tennessee. His father, Duff McGhee, played guitar, but only sang his own compositions; Brownie, however, learned from local street musicians in Knoxville and Kingsport, and toured with a gospel group in the 1930s. Like John Jackson, he also learned from phonograph recordings obtained via RFD:

You had to send in and order five records or more, and they ship them to you. They wouldn't ship one record, so when you saved up enough money together you'd get Carter Family, Jim Jackson, Leroy Carr, Bessie Smith, and Blind Lemon Jefferson.

Fellow Tennessean Howard Armstrong grew up in La Follette, immersed in a family-based musical background:

Music was in my family all my life. You know, there were four members of the family older than I was, and four younger. The older members were playing when I was just a little tot.... Anyway, when I got big enough to start learning music, then I was just exposed to a lot of different types of music, especially in Tennessee. White country, whatever, even black country they played what some of the white musicians called it, “hoedown.” Blacks called it “breakdown.” And we used to play for square dances and things, play all night long.... Then I started learning popular music. You know, I had never been exposed to many real bona fide black musicians, so to speak. I mean, when you come to playing what we call “first line music,” you know, popular songs like “Brown Eyes, Why Are You Blue?” or things like that.

Today's reigning songster, Maryland's Warner Williams, also shared a musical family background. His father played and taught a wide variety of string instruments:

...Mostly he played hymns. But when he was young he played for house hops, my daddy did. Him and another man used to fiddle through the country, where they would play dances and call them "barn dances." Then my mother, she could play accordion a little bit.

Music was passed down from sibling to sibling:

Me and my brother, we all show each other chords. My brother, he'd show me something, then I'd take it and show my little brother, and on like that.

Williams also learned blues from records his brothers brought home and, like Jackson and McGhee, from other recordings:

I played "Sunny Side of the Street," a lot of old tunes. "A Tisket, A Tasket," any old song that came out then I had it, like "Stormy Weather," Gene Autry songs, "Back in the Saddle Again," and all that. I played a lot of Ernest Tubb records. The most music that I come up with around here we called it, some people called it "hillbilly music." That's mostly what I came up with. I could play that better than I could blues.

As this brief survey suggests, latter-day artists picked up the songster repertoire through multiple sources including family, neighbors, fellow musicians, radio, and recordings.

The travelling songster or blues artist remains an American character type celebrated in literature and film as a cultural rebel who escapes the sharecropping system of the South, hoboing his way cross country with his guitar slung across his back. Even today's songsters share in this romanticized representation. But how much an artist draws from

this collective stereotype also determines whether he is thought of as a songster or bluesman. Partly the choice is a matter of self-identification—for the modern blues poet, “bluesman” works fine; for the keeper of tradition, “songster” will do. And partly it’s marketing—for example, how much of what an artist plays is blues or, more to the point, how much of what he records is blues. With several exceptions, phonograph recording executives had little use for the songster repertoire, preferring new blues recordings over out-of-date popular entertainment. They were also likely to have to pay royalties for using popular hits of the past, whereas blues compositions could be presented as new, with royalties generally going to the producer or record company. Record collectors likewise privileged blues over pop standards of the June, Spoon, and Moon variety, or songs shared in white tradition, considering them as representing a less racialized voice and thereby a less authentic form of self-expression.

Even the best-known blues artists played other than blues. Take, for example, bluesman Robert Johnson. We know from oral sources that his day-in, day-out repertoire was that of a songster: multigeneric, up-to-date, tailored to the public taste, and essentially balanced between his public’s wishes and his own competency. Fellow blues icon Muddy Waters also played old time standards and country songs in his pre-Chicago string band days, later focusing on blues when he began to record for Chess.

Today the songster, if he’s thought of at all, is still seen from a blues perspective as a type of ancestor. Except for use by a few folk song scholars and a new wave of revival musicians, the term has generally dropped out of the black vernacular. It is not found in dictionaries of African American English, nor is it mentioned in blues songs, and it is rarely found in interviews with black musicians. Maryland’s Warner Williams claims he only heard the term late in life when others called him a songster. He prefers the term “guitar man.” John Jackson also came to the term later in life and preferred to

be thought of as a bluesman. These days the term shows up in reference to aging banjo players, or “banjo songsters,” and it may remain viable within the community of scholars and musicians active in that field.

Even though the majority of African Americans dropped the terms “songster” and “musicianer” decades ago, a cadre of contemporary black musicians is reviving them as part of a broad reclamation project which reasserts the centrality and proprietorship of African American musicians in the string band tradition as a whole, as creators at the center of the tradition rather than marginalized participants. The same reclaiming holds true for other forms of turn-of-the-century folk and popular music, much of which has been passed over as politically incorrect or because it didn’t seem to gracefully coexist in a musical world centered in blues. Thus, the songster term and role may yet have political mileage, designating a re-imagined cultural role which reconnects African American musicians with their heritage.

Finally, in spite of the fact that several of the songs here have “blues” in their title and that many of the artists are better known as blues musicians, this is not a blues collection. Rather, it represents a non-blues compilation encompassing songs that preceded blues, hybrids of blues and other song forms, and a variety of genres including old-timey string band standards, ragtime, country, and Tin Pan Alley pop. Such songs have sustained black entertainers and their diverse audiences for a dozen decades. This collection is a tribute to these songs’ durability and the artists who helped spread them across America’s musical landscape.



"Piccaninnie dance down in Dixie" 1895, by Russell Brothers,
Anniston, Alabama



SONG NOTES

Barry Lee Pearson
and Jeff Place



1. WARNER WILLIAMS WITH JAY SUMMEROUR **BRING IT ON DOWN TO MY HOUSE**

Warner Williams, vocals and guitar; Jay Summerour, vocals
(from SFW 40120, 2004)

Born in Takoma Park, Maryland, in 1930, Warner Williams learned guitar from watching his father and brothers, but was largely self-taught. As a youngster he and his brothers played the streets of Maryland and Washington, D.C., in venues that ranged from storefronts to Metrobuses. His repertoire consisted of what he called “hillbilly music,” popular songs, and a few blues which he learned from family and recordings. At age 22, he won first prize on a local radio program playing Ernest Tubb’s “Walking the Floor Over You.” Graduating to picnics, house parties, and jook joints, he played wherever he could and eventually teamed up with Rockville, Maryland, harmonica player Jay Summerour, as the duo Little Bit of Blues. After retiring from music to raise a family, he returned to performing, playing festivals and recording for the Smithsonian Folkways and Patuxent labels, and in 2011 he was named a National Heritage Fellow.

This song is found in both black and white tradition, and dates back to Blind Willie and Kate McTell’s 1929 Columbia issue, “Come on ’Round to My House Mama.” Several other versions included Eddie Kelly’s Washboard Band’s “Come on ’Round to My House, Baby” (Bluebird, 1937) and Oscar Buddy Wood’s “Come on Over to My House Baby” (Vocalion, 1938). Yet another popular version was recorded by western swing kingpin Bob Wills, whose 1936 Columbia recording, “Bring It On Down to My House,” is the most likely source of Williams’s version.

Bill Tatnall, with guitar, Frederica, Georgia, 1935. Alan Lomax Lomax Collection

2. PINK ANDERSON **TALKING BLUES**

Pink Anderson, vocals and guitar (from Folkways 3588, 1984; recorded in Spartanburg, S.C., 1962)

Pinkney Anderson (1900–1974) was born in Laurens, South Carolina. A self-taught guitarist, he played the streets in Spartanburg as a youngster. Along with a guitar-playing partner, Simmie Dooley, he worked medicine shows and recorded four sides for Columbia in 1928. Rediscovered in 1950 playing at a county fair in Virginia, he recorded for folksinger Paul Clayton. These recordings were released on the Riverside label and led to further recordings on Bluesville and Folkways. Anderson worked the medicine show circuit until 1958 and had a vast repertoire of rural America’s favorite ballads, country songs, ragtime, gospel, and minstrel show pieces.

This version of “Talking Blues” stems from Chris Bouchillon’s (1893–1968) influential 1926 Columbia recording released as “Talking Blues” by the Greenville Trio (Bouchillon and his brothers Charley and Uris). The piece introduced what would become a new hybrid folk genre, blending rhythmic spoken-word vocals and a repeated three-chord melody that bore little resemblance to blues—although a more blues-like spoken-word genre had been employed by countless black musicians for years. Billed as the “Talking Comedian of the South,” Bouchillon allegedly developed his “talking style” because of his poor singing and went on to cut some 31 sides for Columbia between 1925 and 1928. Pink Anderson also recorded for Columbia the same year as Bouchillon’s final session, and because both were living in the Greenville/Spartanburg area, Anderson would have been familiar with Bouchillon’s music, if not the man himself. Later proponents of the style include Robert Lunn, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Harmonica Frank, and countless folk revival artists.

3. JOHN JACKSON

NOBODY'S BUSINESS (IF I DO)

John Jackson, vocal and guitar (from SFW 40181, 2010; recorded July 4, 1972)

Born in Woodville, Virginia, John Jackson (1924–2002) grew up in the Fort Valley, Rappahannock County, Virginia, in the hills leading up to the first ridge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He learned to play guitar and banjo from his father and other members of an extended and highly musical family. He was also inspired and taught by a convict named Happy, who worked on a local road gang. As a young man, Jackson honed his skills playing parties, until a fight in 1946 led him to give up the party circuit. In 1949 he and his wife Cora moved to Fairfax Station, Virginia, near Washington, D.C. In 1964 folklorist Chuck Perdue heard him playing and brought him to the attention of Chris Strachwitz, who recorded him extensively for his Arhoolie label. Through the 1960s and into the 1990s, Jackson recorded for Rounder and Alligator, and toured Europe and Asia. After his death, Smithsonian Folkways issued a compilation of live concert recordings, *John Jackson: Rappahannock Blues* (SFW 40181).

This song seems to have led a double life as a staple of the vaudeville blues tradition and as a black folk song. A version attributed to prolific songwriters Porter Grainger and E. Robbins was popularized by Bessie Smith, but other women—Sara Martin, Lena Wilson, Alberta Hunter, and Georgia White—also recorded it. Frank Stokes, a Memphis-based songster, also recorded “Taint Nobody’s Business If I Do” [Part 1 and 2] for Victor in 1928, five years after the Smith version. It also shows up in earlier fieldwork by Howard Odum. The Stokes recording was likely the source of the Jackson version.

4. LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY

ALABAMA BOUND

Little Brother Montgomery, vocal and piano (from Folkways LP 3, 1014, 1960)

Eurreal Montgomery (1906–1985) was born in Kentwood, Louisiana where his father ran a barrelhouse in a lumber camp in Kent, Louisiana. He picked up the piano from numerous artists who worked there, and left home at age eleven to try his hand as a professional on the wider barrelhouse circuit. Under the name “Little Brother,” he performed with a variety of groups from New Orleans to Chicago, and recorded for Paramount in 1930. After a final sojourn to Mississippi, he relocated to Chicago in 1942 and made it his home base. There he worked the club circuit playing a mix of jazz and blues as a soloist or with various groups, and remained a highly influential musician recording for Bluebird, Regal, Atlantic, Riverside, Adelphi, and Folkways.

“Alabama Bound” seems to have thrived in a variety of forms dating from minstrel tradition through ragtime, as an early precursor to blues and as a blues song in its own right. Moreover, it shares verses and melodies with other songs: “Don’t Leave Me here,” “Elder Greens in Town,” and “Railroad Blues.” Favored by songsters, it was recorded under one of the above titles by Papa Charlie Jackson, Lead Belly, Mance Lipscomb, Papa Harvey Hull, Charlie Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Henry Thomas. It was also recorded by vaudeville blues artists Trixie Smith (1925), Monette Moore, and Laura Smith (1927). It likewise bridges ragtime and jazz, and was recorded by Jelly Roll Morton who claimed he wrote it. A song titled “I’m Alabama Bound” was copyrighted by Robert Hoffinan and John J. Puderer in 1909. “Alabama Bound” is also found in white tradition with versions by the Tennessee Ramblers, the Delmore Brothers, and the Muppets.

5. BROWNIE MCGHEE

PALLET ON THE FLOOR

Brownie McGhee, vocals and guitar (from SFW 40034, 1991; recorded 1940s)

Walter Brown McGhee (1915–1996) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. Inspired by his father, Duff McGhee, he learned guitar as a young boy. In the 1930s he worked with a gospel quartet, played the streets of Kingsport and Knoxville, and hit the coal camps of West Virginia and the tobacco towns of North Carolina. He met Blind Boy Fuller in Durham, North Carolina, as well as Fuller's agent, J. B. Long. Long arranged for McGhee to record for Okeh in 1940 and 1941. In the early 1940s he moved to New York, teaming up with harmonica ace Sonny Terry and working with him into the 1970s. McGhee recorded several rhythm and blues hits for small New York labels including "Baseball Boogie Number 2," but the duo's greatest success was on the folk festival and coffee house circuit. An active member of the New York folk music scene that included Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Josh White, and Gary Davis, he first recorded for Moses Asch in 1944.

Along with "Poor Boy a Long Way from Home," "Pallet on the Floor," can be considered blues in process, illustrating the songster's pre-blues role in music history. While its 19th-century origins remain murky, "Make Me a Pallet," best described as a 16-bar proto-blues, is thematically a begging song. It has lived as a vocal and an instrumental, and has continued into the blues tradition, generating spinoffs such as "Catfish Blues." A standard of early jazz, supposedly in the repertoire of Buddy Bolden, it was recorded by such luminaries as Jelly Roll Morton, Ethel Waters, Louis Armstrong, the Memphis Jug Band, Willie Brown, and Big Bill Broonzy. W.C. Handy put out a 1916 version titled "Atlanta Blues," and Robert Johnson supposedly sang it as "Flang Me Down a Pallet on Your Floor." It was also popular during the folk revival with versions by artists such as Lucinda Williams (see *Classic Blues, Volume 2*, SFW 40143), and on the albums of some of today's popular country artists such as Gillian Welch and Josh Ritter.

6. BILL WILLIAMS

CHICKEN, YOU CAN'T ROOST TOO HIGH FOR ME

Bill Williams, vocal and guitar (from the 1971 Festival of American Folklife tape 1971-36; recorded July 1, 1971)

Bill Williams (1898–1973) was born in Richmond, Virginia. A self-taught guitarist, he left home to hobo across the country, at one time teaming up with Blind Blake in Bristol, Tennessee. Both Williams and Blake are considered songsters, and together they allegedly worked the coal camps, moving from one payday to the next. After a year they parted company, with Williams setting permanent roots down in Greenup, Kentucky, and Blake moving on to Chicago. In Greenup, he played square dances with a white fiddler and banjo player, and wondered at all the attention paid to blues, preferring what he termed “patriotic songs”—folk and pop standards. A stunning guitar player even at age 73, his repertoire stretched back to the ragtime era and included popular hits like “Chicken, You Can’t Roost Too High for Me.” One of dozens of songs employing the minstrel-based stereotype of chicken theft, this piece ultimately derives from the 1899 W. J. Simon composition, “There Is No Chicken That Can Roost Too High for Me.” Typical of the songsters’ medicine show repertoire, the song became a turn-of-the-century favorite—despite the fact that its subject matter would be deemed politically incorrect today.

Williams recorded *The Late Bill Williams Blues: Rags and Ballads* for the Blue Goose label in 1970; the album was released in 1974, after his death.

7. LEAD BELLY

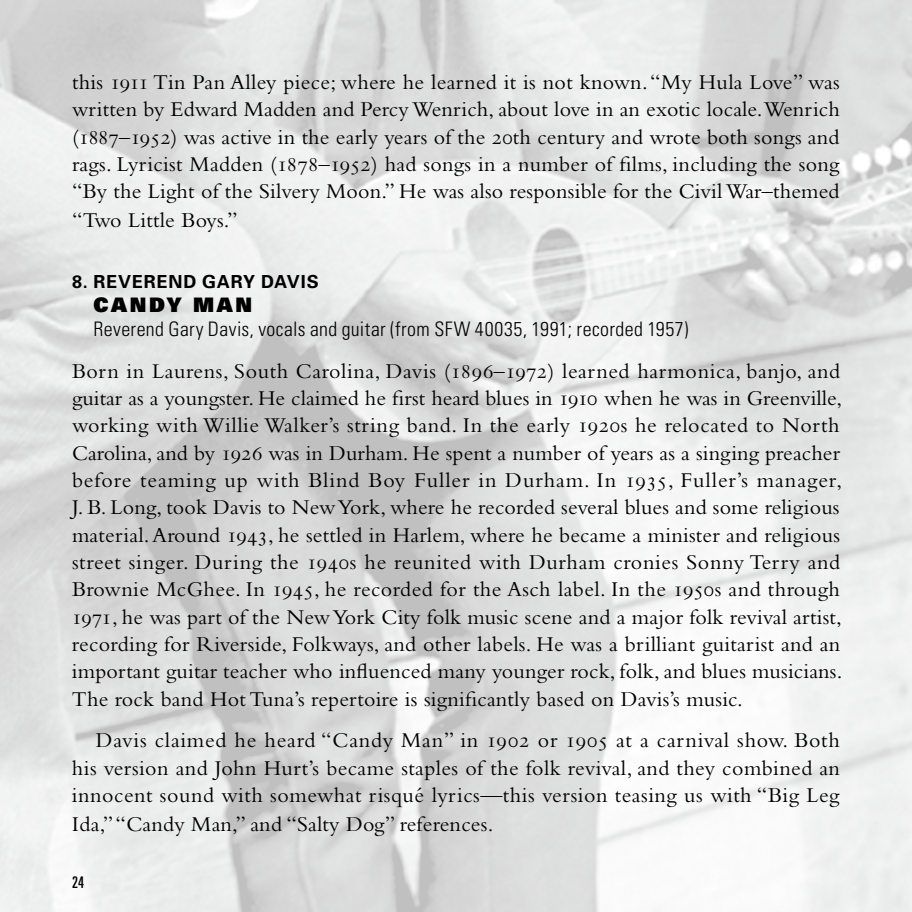
MY HULA LOVE

Lead Belly, vocals and guitar (also known as “Hawaiian Song”; from SFW 40068, 1994; recorded 1948 by Frederic Ramsey Jr.)

Huddle Ledbetter (Lead Belly) (1888–1949) was one of the 20th century’s most important repositories of traditional American song. Throughout his life, Lead Belly would hear a song, commit it to memory, and adapt it to make it his own. Lead Belly was discovered in prison by John Lomax from the Library of Congress, and much mythology exists as to the extent that a song Lead Belly wrote for the governor of Louisiana, delivered by Lomax, earned him an early release. Moving to New York, Lead Belly was introduced to northern folk song audiences, and he fell into a group of musicians that included Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Aunt Molly Jackson, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Josh White. Also operating in that same circle was Moses Asch.

The relationship between Moses Asch and Lead Belly was beneficial to both men. Other record companies had difficulty understanding how to market Lead Belly’s music, for he was more than a blues singer; his repertoire included country dances, work songs, blues, Tin Pan Alley songs, sea shanties, and cowboy songs. The variety of Lead Belly’s material, which Asch allowed and indeed encouraged him to record, meant that Asch expanded his label’s scope beyond ethnic recordings, an event that would have far-reaching consequences. Lead Belly recorded the bulk of his material for Asch.

Jazz scholar Frederic Ramsey Jr. had acquired a brand new reel-to-reel tape deck, and in 1948, he decided to use it to try to record as much of Lead Belly’s repertoire as he could. While earlier technologies made it difficult to record a song longer than four minutes, the new tape deck allowed for the inclusion of Lead Belly’s introductions and stories. On one recording occasion in Ramsey’s apartment, Lead Belly chose to sing



this 1911 Tin Pan Alley piece; where he learned it is not known. “My Hula Love” was written by Edward Madden and Percy Wenrich, about love in an exotic locale. Wenrich (1887–1952) was active in the early years of the 20th century and wrote both songs and rags. Lyricist Madden (1878–1952) had songs in a number of films, including the song “By the Light of the Silvery Moon.” He was also responsible for the Civil War–themed “Two Little Boys.”

8. REVEREND GARY DAVIS **CANDY MAN**

Reverend Gary Davis, vocals and guitar (from SFW 40035, 1991; recorded 1957)

Born in Laurens, South Carolina, Davis (1896–1972) learned harmonica, banjo, and guitar as a youngster. He claimed he first heard blues in 1910 when he was in Greenville, working with Willie Walker’s string band. In the early 1920s he relocated to North Carolina, and by 1926 was in Durham. He spent a number of years as a singing preacher before teaming up with Blind Boy Fuller in Durham. In 1935, Fuller’s manager, J. B. Long, took Davis to New York, where he recorded several blues and some religious material. Around 1943, he settled in Harlem, where he became a minister and religious street singer. During the 1940s he reunited with Durham cronies Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. In 1945, he recorded for the Asch label. In the 1950s and through 1971, he was part of the New York City folk music scene and a major folk revival artist, recording for Riverside, Folkways, and other labels. He was a brilliant guitarist and an important guitar teacher who influenced many younger rock, folk, and blues musicians. The rock band Hot Tuna’s repertoire is significantly based on Davis’s music.

Davis claimed he heard “Candy Man” in 1902 or 1905 at a carnival show. Both his version and John Hurt’s became staples of the folk revival, and they combined an innocent sound with somewhat risqué lyrics—this version teasing us with “Big Leg Ida,” “Candy Man,” and “Salty Dog” references.

9. JOHN CEPHAS AND PHIL WIGGINS

GOING DOWN THE ROAD FEELING BAD

John Cephas, vocal and guitar; Phil Wiggins, harmonica (from SFW 40179, 2008)

John Cephas (1930–2009) was born in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of Washington, D.C., and began his musical education at family and church events. His guitar inspirations were his grandfather John Dudley Cephas, his aunt Lillian Douglas, and his cousin David Talliaferro. He graduated to the house party circuit in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, but by the 1960s quit playing and went to work for the National Guard. A chance meeting with piano player Big Chief Ellis brought him out of retirement. In 1976 he met harmonica player Phil Wiggins, and the three formed the Barrelhouse Rockers and embarked on the festival circuit. After Chief's death, Cephas and Wiggins continued a 30-plus-year career as a duo.

Phil Wiggins was born in 1954 in Washington, D.C. He learned harmonica from listening to and playing with other musicians, and from recordings of Sonny Terry, Little Walter, and both Sonny Boy Williamsons. Cephas was, and Wiggins still is, an avid teacher, working at various music camps around the country. They recorded continuously for various labels including Alligator, Rounder, and Smithsonian Folkways. Cephas was named a National Heritage Fellow in 1989.

“Going Down the Road Feeling Bad” is another 16-bar proto-blues, equally popular among blacks and whites. Early versions included “Lonesome Road Blues” by Henry Whittier (Okeh, 1923) and Papa Charlie Jackson’s “I’m Going Where the Chilly Winds Don’t Blow” (Paramount, 1925). Like “Pallet on the Floor,” the first line is repeated three times rather than twice as with 12-bar blues. Other songs, “K.C. Moan,” “Careless Love,” and “Steamboat Whistle Blues,” used a similar 16-bar format, but it eventually lost ground to the more familiar 12-bar format. Cephas learned the piece very early on and practiced it to master the finger picking style he called the “Williamsburg Lope.” Later in life he invariably used the song to demonstrate the Piedmont guitar style.

10. PEG LEG SAM

FROGGY WENT A-COURTING

Arthur “Peg Leg Sam” Jackson, vocals and harmonica (from archive tape 76.101.13-CT-z-323; recorded September 1975, West Springs, S.C., by Allen Tullos)

Arthur “Peg Leg Sam” Jackson (1911–1977) was a native of Jonesville, South Carolina, just south of Spartanburg, and a veteran of many medicine shows, which were a common phenomenon in the rural South in the early 20th century. A traveling troupe would move from town to town with a spokesperson proclaiming to be a doctor selling some “magic elixir” to cure any number of ailments. The show would feature music and comedy “routines” to draw in the crowds. In this tradition, Peg Leg Sam performed harmonica tricks, including playing multiple mouth harps at once. He performed in medicine shows up until 1972 and toured the folk festival circuit in his final years. This recording comes from field interviews done in preparation for the celebration of the United States Bicentennial on the National Mall in 1976.

A song about a strange interspecies wedding dates back at least to the 16th century as a British broadside ballad. Initially, it may have been understood as political satire, but through the years in the United States it lost any political connotation. Popular in both black and white tradition, it has been recorded time and again by artists ranging from Burl Ives to Warner Williams, who called his version “Mouse on the Hill” (see SFW 40191). In a wide variety of versions the song includes various animal and insect characters and has many different refrains, but it always focuses on the wedding which, in some versions, leads to “children three.” Peg Leg Sam’s version has Freddy Frog and the nuptial party devoured by a serpent, but concludes with a formulaic ending more often tied to a folktale. The folktale quality is further underscored by Sam’s reference to the piece in terms of a lie or tall tale.

Close-up of Bill Tatnall with guitar, Frederica, Georgia, 1935

11. MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT **MONDAY MORNING BLUES**

John Hurt, vocals and guitar (from Folkways 2390, 1964;
recorded December 13, 1963)

John Hurt (1893–1966) was born in Teoc, Mississippi. He taught himself guitar and played for local dances, sometimes in a string band format; his repertoire consisted of ballads, ragtime, spirituals, folk songs, blues, popular songs, and his own compositions. White fiddler Willie Narmour, a string band partner of Hurt's, introduced him to a scout for Okeh Records. Hurt performed "Monday Morning Blues," earning him a chance to record. Okeh released seven songs—however, this piece, the very first one Hurt recorded in 1928, was not among them. In the 1950s, several songs were reissued on Harry Smith's influential *Anthology of American Folk Music*. Rediscovered at age 72, Hurt embarked on a second musical career as the darling of the folk revival, recording for Piedmont, Vanguard, and other labels. After living in Washington, D.C., for several years he returned to Mississippi, where he died.

This version of "Monday Morning Blues," issued on Folkways in 1964, takes an unusual proto-blues format, essentially repeating a half line three times and completing it in the fourth line. Thus each verse completes a single line. In several cases two such verses complete what would normally be a single blues verse. Such varied arrangements typifies proto-blues songs. The song itself verges on narrative, and the subject is similar to other folk blues dealing with the prison system in the American South.



12. PINK ANDERSON

THE BOYS OF YOUR UNCLE SAM

Pink Anderson, vocals and guitar (from Folkways 3588, 1984; recorded 1962)

For biographical information about Pink Anderson see track 2.

The epitome of the songster, Anderson played ballads, country songs, pop hits, blues, and comic songs accumulated over a lifetime spent as a professional entertainer. His hometown, Spartanburg, South Carolina, proved a fertile spawning ground for the songster tradition, producing such notables as Willie Walker, Josh White, Reverend Gary Davis, and Ted Bogan.

The song “The Boys of Your Uncle Sam,” which Anderson also recorded as “The Kaiser,” likely comes from Henry Whitter’s 1923 Okeh recording, “The Kaiser and Uncle Sam,” or the Ernest V. Stoneman cover “Uncle Sam and the Kaiser,” recorded for Okeh in 1925. Songster Anderson had several pieces in his repertoire associated with these two old time country artists, including Whitter’s “Wreck of Old 97” and Stoneman’s “The Titanic.” Knowledge of such topical pieces was a necessity for the songster.

13. BROWNIE MCGHEE

RAISE A RUCKUS TONIGHT

Brownie McGhee, vocals and guitar; Sonny Terry, vocals and harmonica;

Coyal McMahon, vocals and maracas (from SFW 40034, 1991; recorded 1940s)

For biographical information about Brownie McGhee see track 5.

Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry (1911–1986) became a duo in 1941 following the death of Blind Boy Fuller. Terry, born Saunders Terrell in Greensboro, North Carolina, learned harmonica from his father. Initially street performers in the Raleigh/Durham area, the duo relocated to New York City, where they worked for both black and white audiences as rhythm and blues musicians or as folk blues purveyors. During the folk

revival they were the quintessential Piedmont harmonica/guitar duet and were named National Heritage Fellows in 1982.

“Raise a Ruckus Tonight” dates back to the 19th century, possibly with pre-Civil War origins. It reflects minstrel show traditions but was popular with both black and white audiences. While composition credit goes to Wheeler and Wheeler (1884), the song generally consists of traditional verses found in such songs as “Hey Mourner” or “You Shall Be Free” and in various folk song collections. The initial phonograph recordings were issued by black quartets, for example the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet’s “Raise a R-U-K-U-S Tonight” (Paramount, 1923) and the Southern Quartet’s “Gonna Raise Ruckus Tonight” (Columbia, 1924). These were followed by old time string band renditions, including by the racially mixed Georgia Yellow Hammers (Victor, 1927) and Hugh

Cross and Riley Puckett (Columbia, 1928). The piece has also been recorded by Gus Cannon, Cliff Carlisle, various folk revival artists, and Hollywood stars Bette Davis and Debbie Reynolds. Needless to say, it is an all-American chestnut that began as a song of ironic complaint. McGhee could have picked it up as a children’s rhyme, from his gospel quartet days, or from his folk revival experiences. As this animated version demonstrates, it works well as a hootenanny-style sing-along, but could also be a vehicle for more topical lyrics.



14. MARVIN FODDRELL **RENO FACTORY**

Marvin Foddrell, vocals and guitar (from BRI Records 001, 1978; recorded November 17, 1977, by Kip Lornell)

Marvin Foddrell (1924–1986) was born in the town of Stuart in Patrick County in southwest Virginia. His father Posey was a local musician who played with a number of groups. Marvin and his brother Turner played locally for years but were brought to the attention of a wider audience about the time of this recording. They were featured at the National Folk Festival, the Ferrum College Festival, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. The Foddrell Brothers continued to play and can be heard together on *Appalachian Blues from Smithsonian Folkways* (SFW 40198, 2010).

This cut from Ferrum College’s Blue Ridge Institute *Virginia Traditions Series* comes from a 1977 recording. According to Kip Lornell, Marvin learned the song from his father. It appears to be connected to a series of songs shared in both black and white tradition; Lornell compares it to Tommy Jarrell’s “Riley and Spencer.” An enigmatic piece, it also echoes Peg Leg Howell’s “Rolling Mill Blues,” and closely resembles a song, “Baby What Have I Done,” field-collected in Georgia in the first decade of the 20th century.

15. JOHN JACKSON **DON’T LET YOUR DEAL GO DOWN**

John Jackson, vocals and guitar (from SFW 40181, 2010; recorded August 14, 1976)

For biographical information about John Jackson, see track 3.

The best-known version of this song is Charlie Poole’s 1925 Columbia recording, “Don’t Let the Deal Go Down Blues.” The title illustrates the tendency to call songs from black tradition “blues” whether or not they conformed to blues structure. Poole’s biographer, Kinney Rorer, places the song in black tradition as early as 1911, and it



Roger Mathews, harmonica; Willie Flowers, guitar; Booker T. Sapps, harmonica, Belle Glade, Florida, 1935. Alan Lomax Collection

bears some resemblance to other songs with gambling-related themes, including Peg Leg Howell's "Georgia Skin Game." Old time country artists Ernest V. Stoneman, Riley Puckett, and even Vernon Dalhart also recorded the song, and it later became a staple of the bluegrass genre. John, however, learned it from his father, claiming it was the first ragtime song he learned.

16. WARNER WILLIAMS WITH JAY SUMMEROUR HONEYSUCKLE ROSE

Warner Williams, vocals and guitar; Jay Summerour, vocals (from SFW 40120, 2004)

For biographical information about Warner Williams see track 1.

"Honeysuckle Rose" has been popular from the days of early jazz, through the Big Band era, to the modern day. Published in 1928, the music was by the well-known jazz pianist Fats Waller (1904–1943), whose life and songs were later profiled in the Broadway show *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Lyricist Andy Razaf (1895–1973) composed a number of other jazz standards as well, including the aforementioned "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Stompin' at the Savoy," and "In the Mood."



Gabriel Brown and Rochelle French, Eatonville, Florida, 1935.
Alan Lomax Collection

17. BIG BILL BROONZY

BILL BAILEY

Bill Broonzy, vocal and guitar (from SFW 40023, 1989; recorded 1956)

William Lee Conley “Big Bill” Broonzy (1893 or 1898–1958) was one of the most frequently recorded blues artists in the United States from the 1920s until the years following World War II, when electric country blues became popular in Broonzy’s adopted hometown of Chicago, and his music by comparison was considered old-fashioned. Switching his marketing strategy, Broonzy then found an audience among the folk music enthusiasts.

If the ability to change repertoires to suit the tastes of different audiences is a primary characteristic of the songster, William Lee Conley Broonzy was the consummate practitioner. Recent evidence suggests that he was constantly reinventing himself to suit the circumstances, even to the point of changing his name. His discography contains an incredible variety of ragtime, hokum, pre-blues, ballads, spirituals, gospel, folk, and pop songs. He played for white dances in Mississippi as a youth, and possibly took guitar lessons from songsters Papa Charlie Jackson and Blind Blake. He played blues, pop, and rhythm and blues in Chicago for black audiences, and also played for white coffeehouses and folk revival audiences in America and Europe. Yet his central position in blues history—one of the first Delta-to-Chicago blues artists to talk and write about blues and to tour worldwide as a blues representative—makes it unlikely that “songster” is the designation that will stick.

Originally titled “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home,” this song was penned by ragtime piano player and minstrel performer Hughie Cannon in 1902 and proved to be one of the era’s most enduring songs. It has been recorded by artists including Louis Armstrong, Patsy Cline, Bobby Darin, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, and Jimmy Durante.

18. BILL WILLIAMS

WHEN THE ROSES BLOOM AGAIN

Bill Williams, vocal and guitar (from the 1971 Montreal Expo; Smithsonian cassette 1993-251; recorded August 19, 1971)

For biographical information about Bill Williams see track 6.

“When the Roses Bloom Again” is a popular Tin Pan Alley song written by Willie Cobb and Gus Edwards in 1901 and published under the pseudonyms of Will Whitmore and Harry Hilliard (Meade 2002, 169). Starting with Vernon Dalhart in 1925, this song was recorded by numerous popular musicians throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Edwards (1979–1945) and lyricist Cobb (1876–1930) met during the Spanish-American War. Among Edwards’s other songs are “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” (with Edward Madden) and “I Can’t Tell Why I Love You but I Do.” The 1939 movie *The Star Maker* featured Bing Crosby in the role of Edwards.

19. PEG LEG SAM

STRAIGHTEN UP AND FLY RIGHT

Arthur “Peg Leg Sam” Jackson, vocal and harmonica (from archive tape 76.101.13-CT-z-323; recorded September 1975, West Springs, S.C., by Allen Tullos)

For biographical information on Peg Leg Sam see track 10.

“Straighten Up and Fly Right” was one of the most popular songs recorded by Nat King Cole during World War II (1943). It was also recorded by others, including Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys (another hit version) and also the Andrews Sisters. The lyrics are based on an old African American folktale.

20. SNOOKS EAGLIN **CARELESS LOVE**

Snooks Eaglin, vocal and 12-string guitar (from *Snooks Eaglin: New Orleans Street Singer*, SFW 40165, 2005)

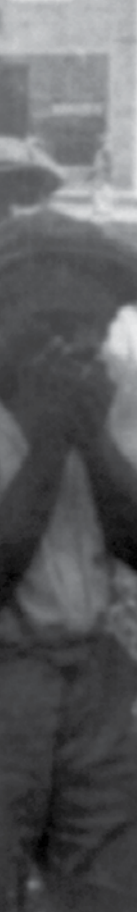
Born in 1936, Eaglin grew up in New Orleans. When he was a baby, surgery for a brain tumor left him blind. He learned to play guitar at age six, playing in church and on the street. A true prodigy, he began to work with locally based rhythm and blues groups as a teenager. Eaglin recorded with various groups and made this solo recording for Folkways in 1958. He recorded for Imperial in 1960 and Black Top in 1987. Although a sophisticated professional, his Folkways recording cast him in the light of a street-singing folk artist and was targeted to the folk revival audience.

“Careless Love” is a rare instance of a ballad that evolved into a 16-bar blues. W. C. Handy claimed authorship of a sort, and in the process coined the term “blues ballad” to describe his reworking of a traditional murder ballad into his song “Loveless Love.” Countless blues artists—Bessie Smith, Lead Belly, Blind Boy Fuller, and John Cephas—as well as many pop and country artists have recorded the piece.

21. MARTIN, BOGAN & ARMSTRONG **THEY CUT DOWN THE OLD PINE TREE**

Carl Martin, vocals and mandolin; Ted Bogan, vocals and guitar; Howard Armstrong, vocals and violin (from the 1986 Festival of American Folklife tape 1986-28; recorded July 25, 1986)

The string band Martin, Bogan & Armstrong reunited in 1970 to play the club and festival circuit, including the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. They had originally met in 1930 in Knoxville, Tennessee, then a gathering place for street musicians and string bands. Multi-instrumentalist Carl Martin (1906–1979) was born in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, but moved to Knoxville as a youngster and joined his brother



Roland's string band. Ted Bogan (1910–1990) came from Spartanburg, South Carolina, where he learned guitar from Pink Anderson and watching other street musicians. He honed his craft working medicine shows and playing on the radio before coming to Knoxville to play with Roland and Carl Martin. Howard “Louie Bluie” Armstrong (1909–2003) was born in Dayton, Tennessee, but grew up in La Follette. A multi-instrumentalist like Martin, he learned violin and mandolin from his father and brothers, and worked with family bands that included his brother Roland Armstrong. They teamed with Carl Martin to form the Tennessee Chocolate Drops. After playing throughout the region in various configurations, they eventually formed the Four Keys, composed of Carl Martin, Bogan, Armstrong, and Bill Ballinger. Travelling through Ohio, West Virginia, and Michigan, the group arrived in Chicago in 1933, where they went their separate ways. Armstrong and Bogan recorded four sides for Bluebird in 1934; Carl Martin recorded for Bluebird, Vocalion, Decca, and Champion from 1934 to 1936. They scuffled to make a living in Chicago during the Depression, but by the end of the decade had moved on to non-musical work. Martin recorded again in 1966 with the Chicago String Band before the group Martin, Bogan & Armstrong re-formed. Armstrong was the subject of Terry Zwigoff's 1985 film, *Louie Bluie*, and was named a National Heritage Fellow in 1990.

The song “They Cut Down the Old Pine Tree” was composed by George Brown (Billy Hill, 1899–1940), Willie Raskin, and Edward Eliscu (1902–1988) and first published in 1929. Billy Hill was responsible for a number of western-themed songs: “The Last Roundup,” “Wagon Wheels,” and “Empty Saddles.” He also composed “The Glory of Love.”

SOURCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

***All artists quoted in these notes are National Heritage Fellowship recipients, and the quotations are drawn from personal interviews with Barry Lee Pearson.

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Stavin' Chain playing guitar and singing the ballad "Batson,"
(unidentified fiddler), Lafayette, Louisiana, 1934. Alan Lomax Collection

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from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Compiled and Annotated by Barry Lee Pearson and Jeff Place

Classic African American Songsters ventures beyond the blues to show the true breadth of African American secular song. Drawing 21 classic tracks—including four previously unreleased—from the deep well of the Smithsonian Folkways archives, this connoisseur collection spotlights songs from ragtime, country, Tin Pan Alley, pre-blues songs, blues hybrids, and old-timey string band. Marquee-name artists Big Bill Broonzy, Brownie McGhee, Lead Belly, Peg Leg Sam, Mississippi John Hurt, John Cephas, and more set the record straight that there has long been much more to the African American secular song tradition than just the blues. 60 minutes, 40-page booklet with extensive notes and photos.

1. **Warner Williams with Jay Summerour**—BRING IT ON DOWN TO MY HOUSE 2:02
2. **Pink Anderson**—TALKING BLUES 2:26
3. **John Jackson**—NOBODY'S BUSINESS (IF I DO) 3:15
4. **Little Brother Montgomery**—ALABAMA BOUND 2:17
5. **Brownie McGhee**—PALLET ON THE FLOOR 3:09
6. **Bill Williams**—CHICKEN, YOU CAN'T ROOST TOO HIGH FOR ME 3:16
7. **Lead Belly**—MY HULA LOVE 2:16
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9. **John Cephas and Phil Wiggins**—GOING DOWN THE ROAD FEELING BAD 3:32
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20. **Snooks Eaglin**—CARELESS LOVE 2:33
21. **Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong**—THEY CUT DOWN THE OLD PINE TREE 2:20

