CLASSIC DELTA AND DEEP SOUTH BLUES

from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Smithsonian Folkways

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FROM SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

1 **C.C. RIDER** 2:34
Big Bill Broonzy

2 **WOMAN IN ELAINE, ARKANSAS** 2:23
Roosevelt Sykes
(Roosevelt Sykes/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Leric Music Inc., BMI)

3 **DEATH LETTER BLUES** 2:58
Son House
(Son House/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Sondick Music Inc., BMI)

4 **YOUR CRYING WON'T MAKE ME STAY** 2:43
K. C. Douglas and Richard Riggins
(K.C. Douglas/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

5 **COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI BLUES** 3:30
Bukka White
(Bukka White/Sony/ATV Songs LLC d/b/a Sony/ATV Melody-BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

6 **I'M GOIN' TO WALK YOUR LOG** 1:53
William "Cat Iron" Carradine
(William Carradine)

7 **WHY DID YOU GO LAST NIGHT** 3:17
Clifton Chenier
(Clifton Chenier/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

8 **I STAND AND WONDER** 3:51
Sam Chatmon
(Sam Chatmon)

9 **SLEEPING WITH THE DEVIL** 3:56
Johnny Young and Walter Horton
(Johnny Young/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

10 **SHORT STUFF'S CORINNA** 2:43
Short Stuff Macon
(arr. by Short Stuff Macon)

11 **MARRIED WOMAN BLUES** 1:57
Big Joe Williams
(Joe Williams/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

12 **UP THE COUNTRY BLUES** 2:57
Little Brother Montgomery
(L.B. Montgomery/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Flomont Music Inc., BMI)

13 **DREAM** 4:44
John Littlejohn
(John Funchess/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

14 **GOOD MORNING LITTLE SCHOOL GIRL** 3:36
Dr. (Isaiah) Ross
(John Lee Williamson)

15 **CATFISH BLUES** 3:27
David "Honeyboy" Edwards
(Robert Petway/Songs of Universal, BMI)

16 **M & O BLUES** 3:37
Memphis Slim
(Walter Davis/Peer International Corp., BMI)

17 **FORTY-FOUR** 4:14
Scott Dunbar
(Scott Dunbar)

18 **SUN GOIN' DOWN** 4:59
Son House
(Son House/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Sondick Music Inc., BMI)

19 **FRISCO LINE** 3:58
Mississippi Fred McDowell
(Fred McDowell/BMG Rights Management US LLC d/b/a BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

20 **DIGGIN' MY POTATOES** 2:58
Big Bill Broonzy
(Ernest Lawler/Universal Music Corp., ASCAP)

Doctor Ross

CLASSIC DELTA AND DEEP SOUTH BLUES

FROM SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

INTRODUCTION

Barry Lee Pearson

The geographic term “delta” generally refers to a triangular silt deposit found at the mouth of a river. When applied to the Mississippi River, the delta would be where the river empties into the Gulf of Mexico in southern Louisiana below New Orleans. But when “delta” is applied to a region in the state of Mississippi and capitalized, it refers to a floodplain stretching north to south from Memphis, Tennessee, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, and east to west from the Yazoo River and Mississippi hill country to the Mississippi River. Mississippi Delta blues would refer to the regional blues style typical of that particular area. But if we think of Mississippi Delta blues more broadly as a shared artistic tradition, then we also need to consider the diffusion of that style of blues beyond the Delta per se and even beyond the state of Mississippi.

Musicians playing accordion and washboard in front of store, near New Iberia, Louisiana, 1938.

As a shared art form, the Mississippi Delta blues tradition also extends across the river into Arkansas—running north from Helena through West Memphis, Marianna, Forest City, Hughes, and Blytheville—into Steele and Caruthersville, Missouri; on to St. Louis; then over the bridge into East St. Louis, Illinois, and eventually Chicago; and on the Tennessee side into Memphis, Brownsville, Ripley, and Jackson. This broadly constitutes the range of the Delta-based blues tradition and the orbit of the musicians who work in that regional style.

The diffusion is the result of dramatic demographic shifts such as the Great Migration, as well as the more mundane day-to-day traffic up and down the Mississippi River or along railroad or highway routes connecting the Delta to the rest of the South and the Midwest. The tradition is also spread by blues musicians who seek work wherever they can find it, regardless of geographic or state boundaries—going where people who appreciate their style of music live in sufficient numbers to constitute an audience capable of supporting them and the kind of blues they represent.

Looking to the full title of this compilation, "the Deep South," like "Delta," also has multiple meanings. Whereas in terms of geography it can indicate the farthest south, it also carries cultural and historical connotations relating to what was once called the Cotton Belt, with Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana at its core. In this sense it is also used to characterize popular representations of southern culture: stereotypes of plantation life, cotton fields, and a southern aristocracy. But "deep" can also denote the most intense or most profound, as suggested by the phrase "deep blues," the title of one of the most popular books written about Delta blues.

Some blues historians consider the Delta the likeliest origin point for blues in general or, as one collector put it, "the land where the blues began"—a contention supported by anecdotal evidence repeated so often that it has become etched in blues legendry. However, the most convincing argument for this assertion simply has to do with the sheer number of blues artists who claim the region as their birthplace. But whether blues originated in the Delta or was brought to the region from somewhere else, it flourished there.

Early in the 19th century the Delta region seemed almost too wild to tame, yet slowly the swamps were drained and the timber cleared, leaving unimaginably fertile soil

constantly replenished by the seasonal Mississippi flood waters. Once the levees were in place to control the flood, the area proved perfect for cotton cultivation. Following the Civil War, the region attracted black labor with a combination of relatively high wages and a relatively tolerant racial atmosphere. That steadily eroded, as Reconstruction ended, Jim Crow laws were enacted, and racial violence became commonplace in a sharecropping system designed to keep black workers in what has been termed a second slavery system. It was in this environment that the blues form evolved. It drew from various African American song forms including work songs, hollers, and spirituals dating back to slavery as well as from newer forms such as ballads and reels (a black idiomatic expression for fiddle- and banjo-based dance tunes). In fact "reels" was one of the more common terms for "blues" before blues were called blues—or, as Mississippi-born St. Louis-based piano player Henry Townsend put it: "Back then that word, blues, wasn't used. I never heard that word used. They called them reels back then. You'd get scolded about singing one of them ungodly songs."

Nevertheless, from the turn of the century through the first decade of the 20th century, the term "blues" slowly came into popular usage and described a new form of dance music popular among black cotton farmers, sharecroppers, and lower-class laborers who frequented the country picnics, jooks, and suppers where the music thrived. Promoted and popularized by musicians such as composer W. C. Handy and vaudeville performer "Ma" Rainey, blues entered popular culture via sheet music and stage performance. Early on it crossed over into white popular culture with divas like Sophie Tucker belting out their Tin Pan Alley versions of blues. It was also absorbed into white country music, and by the time the first blues recordings were made in 1920, it was broadly spread across America's musical landscape.

But Delta blues has its own regional storyline, later embellished and promoted by record collectors and various white blues enthusiasts. This story focuses on a golden age in the 1920s and 1930s that featured iconic artists Charley Patton, Tommy Johnson, Son House, and Robert Johnson, with a quick cut to Muddy Waters, Elmore James, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf, and B. B. King in the late 1940s and 1950s. Of these artists Patton is considered a foundational figure, though he was not born in the Delta, moving there at age ten. But Patton either developed or absorbed a blues style that he displayed at house

David Johnson

parties and jooks as early as 1915 and that attracted other Delta musicians like Willie Brown and Son House—who in turn inspired Robert Johnson. Many of the artists on this CD, including Big Joe Williams, Roosevelt Sykes, and Little Brother Montgomery, led lives similar to Robert Johnson's, working as itinerant musicians throughout the Delta, playing where and when they could draw a crowd. Big Joe Williams spoke of himself and his protégé David "Honeyboy" Edwards in this way: "He was a walking musician just like myself, all down through the Delta and all through the hills—Vicksburg, Leland...boy!... Clarksdale, all over there everywhere."

Both Williams and Edwards eventually expanded their circuit, ranging as far afield as Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Missouri, and Illinois; but their wanderings always brought them back to Mississippi, Memphis, or to Helena, Arkansas. With a single exception, the 20 featured artists on this compilation all have deep ties to Mississippi. Big Bill Broonzy and Roosevelt Sykes were born in Arkansas (although Broonzy claimed he was born in Mississippi and represented himself as a Mississippian throughout his life). Sykes was born just across the river in Phillips County. Representing the Tennessee side of the river, Fred McDowell said: "Everybody called me Mississippi Fred McDowell, but that's not my home. I was born and raised in Rossville, Tennessee, about 35 miles east of Memphis." Rossville is also about 5 miles from the Mississippi state line, and Memphis, where fellow Tennessean Memphis Slim was born, is just across the river. Little Brother Montgomery was born in Louisiana a few miles below the Mississippi state line and played throughout Mississippi in his younger days. Only Clifton Chenier from Opelousas, Louisiana, was born outside the Mississippi orbit but only 45 to 50 miles from the state line. The rest of the cast are Mississippians. Five were born in the Delta—David "Honeyboy" Edwards, Walter Horton, Son House, Dr. Ross, and Johnny Young. The others hail from across the state—"Cat Iron" and Scott Dunbar from the southwest corner, Short Stuff Macon, Richard Riggins, Bukka White, and Big Joe Williams from the northeast, and Sam Chatmon, K. C. Douglas, and Johnny Littlejohn from the middle of the state.

But just as surely as they were born in or near Mississippi, most also eventually left the state in the 1940s and 1950s during the Great Migration. Son House moved to Rochester, New York, K. C. Douglas and Richard Riggins opted for California, Dr. Ross headed for Detroit and then on to Flint, Michigan. But the greatest number—Big Bill

Broonzy, David "Honeyboy" Edwards, Walter Horton, John Littlejohn, Memphis Slim, Little Brother Montgomery, Roosevelt Sykes, Big Joe Williams, and Johnny Young—followed the Illinois Central Railroad line to Chicago.

However, the transition from Mississippi to points north was a gradual process, often circuitous and seldom an exclusively one-way trip. Many artists tested the waters in Chicago only to return south, because that's where their music was appreciated and where their records sold. Delta-born piano player Sunnyland Slim, who moved throughout the Delta, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Missouri, claimed that Chicago was a jazz town unready for Delta blues until around 1938 or 1939, and that blues artists might go there but, unless they could play jazz like Little Brother Montgomery, they couldn't stay: "They just record and go back to Memphis, like Memphis Minnie. Roosevelt go back to St. Louis or Memphis, go back to Helena. Once in a while Lonnie Johnson go to St. Louis; Bill [Broonzy], he would go to Rosedale [Mississippi]. But the South was full of it [blues]; it's always been blues down there."

We might also add that Broonzy periodically went back to his Arkansas home near Pine Bluff to farm. Honeyboy Edwards took a more seasonal approach, wintering in the South and returning north in the warmer weather. This pattern continued into the 1940s and 1950s, with major artists like Robert Nighthawk and Elmore James splitting their time between Chicago and the Delta.

Blues came to Chicago from the Delta and the Deep South, taking root only when enough black southerners had migrated there to support a basically southern tradition. Even the most iconic sounds associated with Chicago blues were created in the South and brought to Chicago fully formed. For example, people associate the style of Delta-born Jimmy Reed with the Chicago tradition, but as Delta-born guitarist Eddie Taylor—who was the real architect of the so-called Jimmy Reed sound—explained, it was basically a Mississippi Delta sound: "I learned how to play the guitar from Charley Patton and Robert Johnson, and I saw Robert Johnson in 1936 for the last time in Rosedale, Mississippi. I was living there. I came to Chicago, closest I can come is 1949. In other words I learned to play guitar in Mississippi. I started in 1933 [and] I was a professional in 1938." When asked about the difference between the Memphis sound and the Chicago sound, he replied, "Well, to me both of them sound alike," adding, "Muddy Waters still plays the same way he did down in Mississippi 20 years ago."

If you compare the recordings Muddy Waters cut for Chess in Chicago in 1947–1948 with those he made for Alan Lomax and the Fisk University team in 1942, they are basically identical, except for electricity. Muddy Waters did not participate in the Memphis transition to electric amplification, shifting to electric guitar only when he hit Chicago. But the electric slide guitar stylings of Elmore James, as illustrated in this compilation by Johnny Littlejohn, were created, electrified, and recorded in Mississippi before being brought to Chicago. All of this does not negate the development of a Chicago blues sound but simply illustrates that the initial components of that sound, including the electric band format, originated in the South.

STYLE

In Mississippi no one passed a law dictating that blues had to be 12 bars in length, employ 3 chords, or follow an AAB rhyme scheme. If there were a law on blues, it would have simply stated that you had to sing and play with feeling. Blues from the Delta and the Deep South came in all sorts of formats as long as they provided a solid beat for dancers and allowed room for call-and-response and collective participation.

In fact, the blues on this CD come in ten different formats. Some are very old like the 16-bar format favored by Big Bill Broonzy on his version of "C.C. Rider" or Cat Iron's reworking of the work song tradition in "I'm Goin' to Walk Your Log." Or they are in modern styles such as the couplet and chorus form favored by songwriters like Willie Dixon, as found here in Johnny Young's "Sleeping with the Devil" or Broonzy's "Diggin' My Potatoes." Others, for example Sam Chatmon's "I Stand and Wonder," employ an idiosyncratic verse structure; or they are riff-based, like Fred McDowell's "Frisco Line," or Honeyboy Edwards' "Catfish Blues"; or they are even free form like Short Stuff Macon's "Short Stuff's Corinna" or Scott Dunbar's "Forty-Four." On the other hand, half the songs adhere to the 12-bar, 3-chord AAB norm, showing it to be the most typical Mississippi blues verse form.

Vocally Mississippi blues can be intense, declamatory, preacherly, melismatic, and given to dramatic vocal devices including moaning and midline yodeling, which are carryovers from the field holler. For example, based on this CD alone, the more

Big Joe Williams

declamatory vocalists are found in the northern part of Mississippi—running east from the Delta as exemplified by Son House and Dr. Ross, to the hill country around Como as illustrated by Fred McDowell, to the northeast as in the case of Bukka White, Big Joe Williams, and Short Stuff Macon. But moving farther south to Jackson, Bolton, even over to Vicksburg, we encounter the much more laid-back vocal styles of Sam Chatmon, K. C. Douglas, and Johnny Young. Various factors contribute to this diversity, including the opportunities to play for white audiences and the influence of particular local artists, such as Son House in the Delta or the Mississippi Sheiks to the south.

The majority of the featured artists on this CD are guitar players, that instrument being synonymous with not only Delta blues but with blues in general. But other instruments are also represented, particularly the piano, which was the choice of Little Brother Montgomery, Roosevelt Sykes, and Memphis Slim; the harmonica—sometimes called the Mississippi saxophone—here represented by Walter Horton, Richard Riggins, and Dr. Ross; and even the accordion, which combines the effect of piano and harmonica as played by the King of Zydeco blues, Clifton Chenier.

While there is no single Mississippi guitar style, there are certain characteristics associated with Mississippi, particularly the Delta. For example, Delta guitarists ranging from Charley Patton to Robert Johnson and on to Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and John Lee Hooker often employ open tunings, favoring open-D or "Sebastopol," or open-G (commonly termed "Spanish"). Looking to the featured guitarists on this CD, at least eight and possibly nine are playing in non-standard tunings. While some artists, such as Big Joe Williams or Dr. Ross, use these tunings without a slide, most artists, such as Sam Chatmon, Son House, John Littlejohn, Fred McDowell, and Bukka White, employ metal or glass slides on their fretting hand, allowing them to slide up or down to the notes they desire. Other artists in standard tuning can achieve much the same sound by bending notes, pushing the string across the fretboard to alter the pitch. In either case, whether sliding up or down or bending the note, the end result remains the same—transcending the fret placement of the guitar, which was designed for a European scale. The close connection between voice and instrument—or "making instruments talk"—is a value found in Delta blues. As Fred McDowell put it, "I make the guitar say what I say." This can be done by using a slide guitar as a second voice, providing a harmony of sorts, or it

can take the form of using the instrumental voice to respond to or repeat the vocal line in a call-and-response fashion. In this manner singer and instrument talk back and forth, creating an interactive, polyrhythmic conversation.

Mississippi blues is also more percussive than other regional blues styles, to the point where the guitar is as much a drum as a melody instrument. String snapping, hitting the body of the guitar, or hitting the bottleneck slide against the strings, as Fred McDowell does, produces a sizzling, buzzing, snare-drum-like effect. The percussive tradition also extends to songs that are primarily riff-based, depending on short, repeated, rhythmic, melodic phrases to provide instrumental support for the vocal lead or to respond to the voice in a call-and-response fashion. There may also be less concern for changing chords, with musicians either remaining on a single chord or only implying changes, as in David "Honeyboy" Edwards' "Catfish Blues."

Stylistic variations may also depend on the musical sophistication of the artist under consideration. Compare, for example, the precision of Big Bill Broonzy or Little Brother Montgomery, both lifelong professional musicians, to the free-form approach of Short Stuff Macon or Scott Dunbar.

Finally, despite the diversity noted above, we can also trace stylistic continuities based on face-to-face interaction—mentors teaching their protégés their style, or aspirants emulating the sound of their musical heroes. On this compilation, we can trace such traditional ties between Charley Patton, Honeyboy Edwards, and Bukka White; Edwards and Big Joe Williams; or Tommy Johnson and K.C. Douglas; and Roosevelt Sykes and Memphis Slim. Though each achieves a distinctive sound, they draw from a shared tradition and from each other.

TRACK NOTES

1 C.C. RIDER

Big Bill Broonzy, guitar and vocal

(From *Big Bill Broonzy: Trouble in Mind*, SFW CD 40131)

Big Bill Broonzy (1903–1958), né Lee Bradley, was born near Altheimer, Arkansas. The son of ex-slaves, he used several names, including William Lee Conley Broonzy, and told divergent—at times conflicting—stories about his life. As a youngster he learned both fiddle and guitar and played for dances in Arkansas until 1918, when he was drafted into the Army. After serving in France, he returned to Arkansas, then moved to Chicago in 1920. In 1927 he began a recording career that would last 30 years and produce hundreds of sides for dozens of labels. In 1938 and 1939 he appeared in the "Spirituals to Swing" concert produced by John Hammond at Carnegie Hall, and was booked in Café Society. In the 1950s he gravitated toward the folk revival community, appeared on radio in Chicago and New York, and was one of the first blues artists to tour Europe. Toward the end of his life he wrote an autobiography of sorts, edited by Yannick Bruynoghe and published in 1955, titled *Big Bill Blues.* The primary spokesperson for the Mississippi and Chicago blues tradition, he gave countless interviews to journalists and folklorists including Studs Terkel, with whom he toured, and Alan Lomax. He began to record for Folkways in 1957, but earlier material from radio transcriptions was also published on Folkways. Altogether he was well loved by audiences and fellow musicians and was an excellent storyteller—even if he didn't always stick to one version of a story.

The pattern holds true for his accounts of where he learned "C.C. Rider" (or as it is alternately spelled, "See See Rider"). He claimed it derived from Gertrude "Ma" Rainey's 1924 Paramount hit, "See See Rider Blues," but he also opined it may have originated with riverboat roustabouts, as implied in his line: "My home's on the water; I don't like no land at all." Moreover, his version shares only the title verse with Rainey's composition. It's also possible the song was traditional before Rainey recorded it and may have roots in Texas. As to the spelling, "See See Rider" is the equivalent of "Look here, Rider," while "C.C." was short for "common carrier," a term used for trains and buses.

Roosevelt Sykes

2 WOMAN IN ELAINE, ARKANSAS

Roosevelt Sykes, piano and vocal

(From *Blues by Roosevelt "The Honeydripper" Sykes*, SFW CD 4005)

Roosevelt Sykes (1906–1983) was born in Elmar, Arkansas, but moved to St. Louis when he was three. Orphaned at age seven, he went to Helena, Arkansas, where he grew up on his grandfather's farm. By age 15 he was playing piano in various Arkansas and Mississippi jooks. In the late 1920s he returned to St. Louis, where Jesse and Edith Johnson heard him at their DeLuxe Music Shop; they steered him to Okeh Records, where he recorded "44 Blues" in 1929. Over the years Sykes recorded for dozens of labels, using an assortment of names and producing such classics as "Driving Wheel" in 1936 and "Night Time Is the Right Time" in 1937. He was a major player in St. Louis in the 1930s and in the Chicago band scene in the 1940s, as well as an R&B star in the 1950s and a blues revival star in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout his remarkable career he consistently returned south, touring with Memphis Minnie in the mid-1940s in a trio format, or criss-crossing the country with his own big band, The Honeydrippers, in a rented bus. In 1966 he moved to Gulfport, Mississippi, and in 1969 settled in New Orleans. The song "Woman in Elaine, Arkansas" refers to a river town not far from Elmar. An out-and-out praise song, the piece represents a blues portrait of the good woman of the song title, obviously from a male perspective.

3 DEATH LETTER BLUES

Son House, guitar and vocal

(From *Son House & J. D. Short: Blues from the Mississippi Delta,* Folkways LP 2476)

Eddie James House Jr. (1902–1988) was born in the plantation community of Riverton, north of Clarksdale, Mississippi, in the heart of the Delta. His father was a musician but quit when he joined the church. House also showed a keen interest in the church, becoming a Baptist pastor while still in his teens. Around 1928, inspired by local guitarist

Willie Wilson, he shifted his allegiance to blues, learned to play the guitar, and put the church aside. In 1928 he was jailed for shooting a man to death but was released within a year on the condition he leave Clarksdale. He settled in Lula, Mississippi, began to play with Charley Patton and Willie Brown, and with both of them attended a Paramount recording session in 1930, where he recorded three two-sided songs as well as other sides. When Patton died, he continued to work with Willie Brown and inspired young blues aspirant Robert Johnson. In 1941 folklorist Alan Lomax, in collaboration with Fisk University musicologist John Work, recorded him at Lake Cormorant. In 1942 Lomax visited him again in Robinsonville, Mississippi, where this recording took place. That same year House moved to Rochester, New York, where he worked as a Pullman porter. Rediscovered during the blues revival in 1964, he began working the festival circuit and recording for Columbia. Considered one of the seminal figures in the Delta blues tradition, he sang with a marked intensity and an almost preacherly style. In his later years he was hampered by problems with alcohol, which eventually cut short his remarkable blues comeback. "Death Letter Blues," which may have traditional antecedents, was first recorded by Ida Cox for Paramount in 1924.

4 YOUR CRYING WON'T MAKE ME STAY

K. C. Douglas, guitar and vocal; Richard Riggins, harmonica
(From *K. C. Douglas: The Country Boy,* Arhoolie LP 1073)

K. C. Douglas, né K. C. Clanton (1913–1975), was born in Sharon, Mississippi, northeast of Jackson. Influenced by his uncle, Smith Douglas, he learned to play guitar, and he picked up repertoire from his idol Tommy Johnson, whom he met on the streets of Jackson. The two worked together briefly at house parties and jooks, but Johnson's alcoholism put a damper on that relationship. Douglas moved to Vallejo, California, in 1945, forming a group called The Lumberjacks that worked the Richmond (California) area from 1947 into the 1950s. In 1948 he recorded several sides for Bob Geddins' Down Town label, including a regional hit, "Mercury Boogie." He did not record again until 1954, when he did two sides for the Rhythm label, and in 1956 he recorded an LP for the obscure Cook label—now a

part of the Smithsonian Folkways collection. He recorded for Arhoolie in 1960 and again in 1963, 1973, and 1974. He also recorded for Bluesville, Galaxy, and Specialty. "Your Crying Won't Make Me Stay" was recorded in 1974. An original composition, the song is stitched together from traditional Mississippi blues verses. Douglas is accompanied by Richard Riggins, who was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, in 1921 and learned harmonica at age 11. Riggins moved to California in 1963 and met Douglas in Richmond in 1968. Stylistically the song is more reminiscent of the Mississippi Sheiks' string band repertoire; one might even say it's close to the Piedmont harmonica guitar duet tradition.

5 COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI BLUES

Bukka White, guitar and vocal

(From *Down Home Country Blues Classics*, Arhoolie CD 101)

Booker T. Washington White (1904–1977) was born in Houston, Mississippi. His first teachers were his father, John White, an accomplished musician who played guitar, mandolin, violin, and piano, and local guitarist Luke Smith. As a teen he hitchhiked to the Delta, where he encountered Charley Patton and a slide guitar player named Jap Pullian, and was influenced by the slide style of both men. While still in his teens he hopped a freight to St. Louis, where a roadhouse proprietor informally adopted him. He also learned piano and for the next few years moved back and forth between St. Louis and Mississippi, briefly working with the Silas Green Show. In 1930 Mississippi furniture store owner and part-time RCA scout Ralph Lembo heard him and took him to Memphis. There he recorded both blues and religious songs "as sung by 'Washington White, The Singing Preacher.'" During the mid-1930s he worked various musical and non-musical jobs, including stints as a boxer and a baseball player. In Chicago he became friendly with Big Bill Broonzy, who introduced him to Chicago's primary blues A&R man, Lester Melrose. When he returned to Mississippi, he was involved in a 1937 shooting altercation, but prior to his incarceration in Parchman Farm he recorded several sides for ARC in Chicago, including his biggest hit, "Shake 'Em On Down." In prison, he recorded several songs for folklorist John Lomax in 1939. Upon his release he returned to Chicago, recording a

dozen sides for Vocalion and Okeh, but by that time his style was considered out of date. In 1942 he moved to Memphis, where he played sporadically and fostered the career of his Mississippi cousin, B. B. King. In 1963 he was "re-discovered" by John Fahey and Ed Denson and began yet another phase of his musical career, recording for Takoma, Arhoolie, Verve, Folkways, Biograph, and Blue Horizon, and also touring extensively in the United States and Europe. An exceptional percussive slide guitarist and an expressive vocalist with a hoarse, impassioned voice, his blues were deep and personal, often telling of his life experience and surroundings.

6 I'M GOIN' TO WALK YOUR LOG

William "Cat Iron" Carradine, guitar and vocal
(From *Cat Iron Sings Blues and Hymns*, Folkways 2398)

William Carradine (1898–1958) was born in Roxie, Mississippi, a few miles east of Natchez; other than this fact, his background continues to remain obscure. Jazz historian and former Folkways employee Frederick Ramsey Jr. tracked him down in Natchez in 1958. A local jazz musician steered Ramsey to Carradine's home and helped find a guitar, as Carradine, having sworn off secular music, did not have one. At first reluctant to play blues, he did several spirituals before backsliding into blues. Altogether he recorded six blues and six religious songs for Ramsey, and that was the full extent of his recording output, for he died later that year. Fellow Natchez musician Elmore Williams recalled him: "I knew him in the 1950s. I used to watch him. He didn't play professionally, played just for fun and going for those nickels and dimes playing street corners...mostly played blues. They wanted that old, used to call it gut-bucket-low-down blues." Based on the six blues songs he recorded, he had a very archaic repertoire that included early blues like "Poor Boy a Long, Long Way from Home"; semi-narrative songs like "Jimmy Bell," which Ramsey referred to as a blues ballad; and this piece, which derives from the traditional prison work song "Another Man Done Gone (From the County Farm)." Blues artists recast the song, beginning with Big Joe Williams' 1935 Bluebird side, "Baby Please Don't Go," which

inspired Muddy Waters' 1953 Chess side, initially titled "Turn Your Lamp Down Low (Baby Please Don't Go)." Later the song was picked up by British rock bands and has become a rock standard. As to the name "Cat Iron," it may have been a nickname. On the other hand, Ramsey—although a northerner, he knew and recorded Lead Belly and so was familiar with exotic musician names—may have simply misheard the southern pronunciation of Carradine.

WHY DID YOU GO LAST NIGHT

Clifton Chenier, accordion and vocal; Elmore Nixon, piano;
Bob Murphy, drums; Unknown, second vocal
(From *Bad Luck n' Trouble*, Arhoolie LP F1018)

Clifton Chenier (1925–1987) was born in Opelousas, Louisiana. As a youngster he was taught accordion by his father, musician and farm laborer Joseph Chenier. Along with his brother Cleveland Chenier, he worked with Clarence Garlow's band circa 1942. In the late 1940s he formed his own group, Hot Sizzling Band, working Louisiana and Texas on the Gulf and as far as Los Angeles, where he recorded for Specialty in 1955. In 1956 and 1957 he recorded for Chess subsidiaries Argo and Checker, continuing to work club dates in Louisiana and Texas, primarily as a rhythm and blues act. He began to record for Arhoolie in 1960 and worked the blues and folk festival circuit through the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s, recording for various labels including Alligator. His close relationship with Arhoolie ran through the 1960s into the early 1970s, and Arhoolie owner Chris Strachwitz encouraged him to record his French "Zydeco" repertoire, earning Chenier the title "King of Zydeco." "Why Did You Go Last Night" is what Strachwitz called "a straight blues," showing Chenier's talent as a blues vocalist. However, it is somewhat unusual in its use of vocal harmony; though not unheard of for the blues idiom, it is rather rare. Of all the artists on this CD Chenier has the least connection to Mississippi or the Delta, his orbit ranging from southwestern Louisiana along the Gulf Coast through East Texas, Port Arthur, Beaumont, and Houston, and, to a lesser degree, California.

Sam Chatmon

8 I STAND AND WONDER

Sam Chatmon, guitar and vocal

(From *I Have to Paint My Face: A Random Collection of Mississippi Blues*, Arhoolie LP F1005)

Sam Chatmon (1900–1983) was born in Bolton, Mississippi, into a profoundly musical and highly influential family. His father, Henderson Chatmon, was a noted local fiddle player who entertained at local dances, and his mother played guitar. Working in various groupings as they came of age, the brothers Bo, Lonnie, Willie, Ned, Lamar, Sam, Laurie, Harry, and Charlie began as a musical organization under Bo's direction in 1917, playing parties, picnics, and resorts, and relying heavily on white audiences and the square dance repertoire they learned from their father. As their popularity grew, the brothers added blues, fox-trots, and pop hits they learned mostly from Lonnie, the only sibling who could read music. Sam's first instrument was bass, which he learned to play at age six, but he later learned guitar, banjo, harmonica, and mandolin. In the mid-1920s this initial family group disbanded with Sam, Lonnie, and Bo moving to Hollandale, Mississippi, up in the Delta. In 1930 the brothers, taking the name The Mississippi Sheiks, began to record for Okeh records, scoring a hit with "Sitting on Top of the World." In 1936 Sam and Lonnie recorded for Bluebird as the Chatmon Brothers. Although Bo continued to record for Bluebird until 1940, Sam did not record again until his 1960 Arhoolie sessions. He continued to record—for Blue Goose (1966) as well as Rounder (1972), Advent (1973), and Flyright (1974)—and appeared in several video documentaries. "I Stand and Wonder" employs a very unusual verse structure. In fact, if it weren't for its traditional subject matter, one might not recognize it as blues. Perhaps it's a more archaic form or stems from Chatmon's earlier work for white audiences. Whatever the case, although he generally plays in standard tuning, this shows him working with a slide in an open tuning, with the guitar and voice almost in unison. The result is a wistful take on the trope of blaming a train for taking away a lover.

9 SLEEPING WITH THE DEVIL

Johnny Young, guitar and vocal; Walter Horton, harmonica;
Jimmy Dawkins, lead guitar; Lafayette Leake, piano;
Ernest Gatewood, bass; Lester Dorsie, drums
(From *Johnny Young and Big Walter: Chicago Blues*, Arhoolie F1037)

Johnny Young (1928–1974) was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, at the bottom of the Delta. Growing up in a musical family, he made a guitar from a cigar box when he was eight years old, so impressing his mother that she bought him a $5.00 guitar. Inspired by his uncle, Anthony Williams, an accomplished musician who played both violin and guitar at local suppers, Young began to play dances at age 12. He moved to Rolling Fork, where he learned mandolin, and was influenced by the Mississippi Sheiks. In the 1930s he worked in Memphis with Robert Nighthawk and Houston Stackhouse, and in Brownsville and Jackson, Tennessee, with "Sleepy" John Estes and John Lee Williamson. During the 1940s he followed the latter to Chicago, reuniting with Williamson and even playing with Muddy Waters for a time. Like many other transplanted southern blues artists, he played the streets of Chicago's open-air Maxwell Street Market, where he was noticed by record store owner Bernard Abrams; Abrams recorded him for his Ora Nelle label in 1947. In 1948 he recorded several sides for the Planet label, then went unrecorded until 1964, when he did several albums for Testament. The next year he recorded for Arhoolie, then again in 1967, when "Sleeping with the Devil" was cut. During the early 1970s he recorded for Blue Horizon, Storyville, ABC Bluesway, and Rounder; he worked the Chicago club circuit with the Bob Reidy Band and played the festival circuit in the United States and Europe.

Walter Horton (1917–1981) was born in Horn Lake in the Delta and began to play the harmonica when he was five years old. By the time he was in his teens he worked the streets and parks of Memphis with various artists including Big Joe Williams and David "Honeyboy" Edwards. One of the first to amplify the harmonica, he came to Chicago around 1949 but returned to Memphis, where he cut several sides for Sam Phillips from 1951 to 1953. That year he returned to Chicago and worked with Eddie Taylor and Muddy Waters. In 1955 he recorded for the Cobra label, then for Chess subsidiary

Argo. By the mid-1960s he was active on the tour circuit and continued to record for Vanguard, Testament, Arhoolie, and in 1972 for Alligator. One of the architects of modern blues harmonica, he was highly influential, and many critics consider him the greatest harmonica player ever. Of the other sidemen, at least two are Mississippians. Guitarist Jimmy Dawkins was born in Tchula in 1937, and piano player Lafayette Leake (1920–1990) in Winona. "Sleeping with the Devil" comes from Young's former partner John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson's 1940 Bluebird release, "I Been Dealing with the Devil," which was also cut by Brownie McGhee a year later as "Dealing with the Devil."

10 SHORT STUFF'S CORINNA

Short Stuff Macon, guitar and vocal

(From *Big Joe Williams & Short Stuff Macon: Hell Bound & Heaven Sent*, Folkways LP 31004)

Born John Wesley Macon (1923–1973) in Shuqualak, Mississippi, Short Stuff, or Mr. Short Stuff, grew up in the eastern Piney Woods—also home to his mentor and cousin Big Joe Williams, who was born in nearby Crawford. Macon taught himself to play guitar at age nine and played for local parties around Crawford up through the early 1960s. Teaming up with Williams, he toured briefly before returning to relative obscurity in Crawford. He visited New York in 1964 and recorded two albums in six days, the first for Folkways, the second for Spivey—his total recording output. The Folkways material was recorded live at Bard College, where he shared the stage with Williams; the two can be heard talking on the recording. Macon played in a highly percussive, riff-based style, hardly bothering to change chords, and he sang in an arresting, declamatory fashion. Overall his repertoire and style were archaic, showing both the influence of earlier field holler tradition and a more narrative talking blues. Even when working a well-known standard, he molds it into a highly personal musical statement. In his hands the traditional song serves as an outline for a remarkable dramatic performance, an idiosyncratic one-man show that stops just short of transcending blues and morphing into some new or old form of performance art. Considering that this track was recorded live onstage, it puts the notion of blues as a solo art form into question, making us realize the collective nature of blues

performance and the basic use of dialogue in blues songs. The best known version of the blues classic "Corrinne, Corrina" most likely derives from Bo Carter and Charlie McCoy's 1928 Brunswick recording (which used the above title and spelling). Frankie Jaxon cut a "Corinne" for Black Patti in 1927, and Tampa Red and Georgia Tom Dorsey did a "Corinne, Corrina" for Vocalion in 1929. It was also a jazz, country, western swing, and even Cajun standard.

11 MARRIED WOMAN BLUES

Big Joe Williams, guitar and vocal
(From *Blues 'n Trouble,* Arhoolie LP F1006)

Joe Lee Williams (1903–1982) was born in Crawford, Mississippi, in the northeastern part of the state. He learned guitar as a youngster and by the 1920s was hoboing throughout the South as an itinerant blues musician, playing for tips at stores, jooks, and suppers. His lifelong rambling took him throughout the Delta to New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, California, and overseas to Europe. He made his first recording for Bluebird in St. Louis in 1935 and continued to record for Bluebird for the next ten years. In 1942 he recorded for Columbia in Chicago, and in 1949 he cut two sides for the Bullet label; one of them was "She's a Married Woman," the probable source of this track. Around 1957 he began to take advantage of the folk revival, recording for Bob Koester's Delmar label in 1958. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he often lived in the basement of Koester's Jazz Record Mart in Chicago, sometimes with harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite, who claimed he and Joe kicked off the blues revival in Chicago. Through the 1960s and 1970s he continued to travel and recorded for various labels including Arhoolie, Delmark, Folkways, and Bluesville. This particular side was recorded in 1960 for Arhoolie in California. A passionate, declamatory vocalist, he had a distinctive guitar sound deriving from his preference for open-G or Spanish tuning and his predilection for adding three extra strings to his guitar. Moreover, he was one of the most percussive guitar players ever recorded, prone to string snapping and generally treating his guitar as a drum. "Married Woman Blues" illustrates his dramatic, percussive approach and features a typical assortment of traditional verses with only one referencing the song's title.

12 UP THE COUNTRY BLUES

Little Brother Montgomery, piano and vocal
(From *Little Brother Montgomery: Farro Street Jive*, Folkways LP 31014)

Eurreal Montgomery (1906–1985) was born in Kentwood, Louisiana. His father owned a barrelhouse at the Kent Lumber Company, and Montgomery learned piano from the visiting piano professors who drifted through. Leaving home at age 11, he made his way as an itinerant piano player, working jooks and lumber camps from New Orleans to Jackson to Chicago, returning to live in Jackson in the early 1930s. In 1942 he moved back to Chicago and became a major figure in the city's jazz and blues scene. He first recorded for Paramount in 1930, producing a two-sided hit, "Vicksburg Blues" and "No Special Rider Blues." He recorded for Bluebird in 1935 and 1936 and for various labels during the late 1940s and 1950s, coming to Folkways in the late 1960s, when this side was recorded in New York City. Based out of Chicago from the 1960s on, he toured extensively in the United States and Europe, working through the full range of folk, blues, and jazz festivals and nightclubs. A sophisticated artist, equally adept at pop songs and religious material, he also proved an invaluable resource for blues historians. "Up the Country Blues" is a classic attributed to Sippie Wallace, who first recorded it for Okeh in 1923.

13 DREAM

John Littlejohn, guitar and vocal; Monroe Jones, guitar;
Robert Pulliam and Willie Young, tenor saxophones;
Alvin Nichols, bass; Booker Sidgrave, drums
(From *John Littlejohn's Chicago Blues Stars*, Arhoolie CD 203)

John Wesley Funchess (1931–1994), aka John Littlejohn, was born in Learned, Mississippi, in the hill country just southwest of Jackson. Moving to Jackson at age six, he taught himself to play guitar when he was nine. In the 1940s he played house parties in the Delta and eventually formed his own band, which played clubs in Jackson. Leaving Mississippi in the early 1950s, he tested the club scene in Detroit, Gary, and Chicago, eventually

King and Anderson Plantation, Clarksdale, Mississippi Delta, 1940.

settling in Chicago circa 1953. In Gary he worked with John Brim and Jimmy Reed, who knew him as J. W. Through the 1960s and 1970s he was active in the Chicago club scene as a sideman working with Jimmy Rogers, Howlin' Wolf, and Bob Reidy, among others. In 1968 he recorded several sides for labels including Margaret and T-D-S, as well as an album for Arhoolie that included this version of "Dream." A year later he cut four sides for Chess, including "I Had a Dream"; in 1973 he had albums for Rounder and Bluesway, followed by a 1985 session for Rooster Records. Through the 1970s and 1980s he worked the festival and club circuit, touring in the United States and Europe. In his later years he encountered health problems and never seemed to achieve the success his talent indicated he could. But his work received critical acclaim, and he is remembered as an excellent vocalist and an exciting live performer. His song "Dream" was an original composition that showed off his guitar skills and carried on the electric slide style popularized by Elmore James.

14 GOOD MORNING LITTLE SCHOOL GIRL

Dr. (Isaiah) Ross, harmonica and vocal

(From Smithsonian Folklife Festival Tape, 1987-ct-215, recorded June 24, 1987)

Charles Isaiah Ross (1925–1999) was born in Tunica in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Inspired by his father, who played harmonica, he learned to play at age six and by his teens was playing parties and jooks, often working with the Silver Kings Band. During World War II he served with the 24th Infantry in the Pacific Theater. On returning from the service he worked with local radio WROX in Clarksdale, KFFA in Helena, and WDIA in Memphis. In 1951 he recorded "Country Clown" and "Dr. Ross Boogie" for Sam Phillips, who sent the sides to Chicago's Chess Records. He continued to record for Phillips' new Sun label, scoring a 1953 hit with "Chicago Breakdown." After a dispute with Phillips, he moved to Flint, Michigan, where he worked for General Motors and recorded several sides for Detroit labels and his own DIR label. Later in life he returned to music as a one-man band, playing harmonica, guitar, and drums, working the festival circuit, and touring Europe. "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" was originally written by John Lee (Sonny Boy) Williamson (1914–1948), who recorded it as "Good Morning, School Girl" for Bluebird in 1937. It ranks as one of the most widely recorded of all blues songs.

15 CATFISH BLUES

David "Honeyboy" Edwards, guitar and vocal

(From *Honeyboy Edwards: Mississippi Bluesman*, SFW CD 40132)

Born in the heart of the Delta in Shaw, Mississippi, David Edwards (1915–2011) grew up in a musical family in which his mother played guitar and his father played both fiddle and guitar for local dances. After he learned to play guitar from his father, a 1929 encounter with blues legend Tommy Johnson inspired him to take up the blues life. At age 17 he apprenticed himself to Big Joe Williams, and they headed to New Orleans. Growing tired of Williams' pugnacious nature, though, he set out on his own. During the 1930s he encountered Charley Patton and Robert Johnson, and he was working with Johnson in Greenwood the night Johnson was poisoned. In 1942 he recorded for the Library of Congress, but primarily he made his living as a "walking" musician. Working from Memphis to Texas with the likes of Sonny Boy Williamson, Big Walter Horton, and Little Walter Jacobs, he went to Chicago with Little Walter in 1945 but would return to the South during the winter. Finally, in the mid-1950s, after almost 30 years of rambling, he made Chicago his permanent home and worked with artists ranging from Elmore James to Magic Sam. He also recorded for several labels, meeting with little success. But during the 1960s folk revival he began to work the festival circuit. Moreover, his early association with Patton, Tommy and Robert Johnson, and others made him a key witness to the history of the Delta-to-Chicago blues continuum. He continued to record, dictated an autobiography in 1997, and was named a National Heritage Fellow in 2002. As he tells it, he learned "Catfish Blues" from his Greenwood association with Robert Petway and Tommy McClennan, local guitarists ten years his senior.

Robert Petway recorded "Catfish Blues" for Bluebird in March 1941, and Tommy McClennan recorded his version, titled "Deep Blue Sea Blues," for Bluebird as well six months later. Their recordings sold fairly well, and the song became traditional in the Delta repertoire.

Honeyboy Edwards

16 M & O BLUES

Memphis Slim, piano and vocals

(From *Memphis Slim: The Folkways Years, 1959–1973*, SFW CD 40128)

John Len Chatman (1915–1988), aka Memphis Slim, took his blues name from his birthplace. His mother died when he was two years old and he was raised by his father, a roadhouse proprietor who played both piano and guitar. Growing up in this musical environment, Slim proved to be a prodigy, learning piano at age seven, playing blues at 13, working Beale Street while still in his teens. In the late 1930s he moved to Chicago and joined the fraternity of transplanted southern blues players. There he began to work with Big Bill Broonzy. In 1940, with the help of A&R man Lester Melrose, he recorded six songs for Okeh using his father's name, Peter Chatman. Several months later, now using his nom de blues Memphis Slim, he cut seven sides for Bluebird including his first major hit, "Beer Drinking Woman." Forming his own band, The House Rockers, he continued through the 1950s to work local clubs and record for various local labels, including Mercury, United, Chess, and VJ. He first recorded for Folkways in 1959 and continued

with them off and on for 14 years, as a featured artist, in collaboration with bass player and songwriter Willie Dixon, and even as a producer. By then he was active in the folk revival, working the upscale nightclub circuit. He toured with Dixon in 1960–1961 going to Europe, and in 1962 he settled in Paris, where he became a major celebrity. He returned briefly to the United States in 1983. Five years later he died and was buried in Memphis. In his lifetime he wrote 300 songs and recorded almost 500, including his theme song, "Every Day I Have the Blues." "M & O Blues" takes its name from the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, and comes from Mississippi-born St. Louis piano player Walter Davis' 1930 Victor recording.

17 FORTY-FOUR

Scott Dunbar, guitar and vocal

(From *Music from the South*, *Vol. 5*: *Song, Play and Dance*, Folkways LP 654 and 2654)

Scott Dunbar (1910–1994) was born on the Deer Park Plantation near Woodville, Mississippi, in Wilkinson County between the Mississippi River and Lake Mary. Growing up so close to the river, he learned a skill set based on exploiting the ever-changing

local waterways. Although he worked as a field hand as a youngster, he became adept at fishing in the area and evolved into an expert professional guide. At the same time he entertained at local picnics and at his home, having learned to play guitar at age eight, and earned a reputation as a local favorite. For much of his life he played for a local lodge that catered to a white clientele, and at times he worked in a string band format. More songster than blues player, his repertoire was heavy in country and string band favorites. Nevertheless, he did learn some blues, which he said he picked up from other musicians, mainly vagrants, who passed through his relatively isolated region. Sometime between 1953 and 1954, jazz historian and Folkways fieldworker Frederick Ramsey Jr. located him at home and recorded him at a dance in Pond, Mississippi; Ramsey also featured him in *Been Here and Gone*, a volume of photographs and interviews published in 1960. In 1964 folklorist Bill Ferris interviewed and recorded Dunbar, with several sides issued on the British Matchbox label in 1972. The generally titled "44 Blues" was originally recorded by Roosevelt Sykes in 1929. Sykes' version presents a sinister scenario of a man packing a 44 caliber pistol tracking down an unfaithful lover with fire in his eye and murder in his heart. Originally a piano instrumental, it's closely tied to Little Brother Montgomery's 1930 "Vicksburg Blues." Dunbar transposed it to guitar, as have other blues players, and completely erases any sinister edge, creating a loopy, free-form semi-cante fable in which he barely seems able to contain his glee.

18 SUN GOIN' DOWN

Son House, guitar and vocal

(From *Son House and J. D. Short: Blues from the Mississippi Delta*, Folkways 2476)

For biographical information on House see notes for track 3.

This song was recorded as part of a joint venture between the Library of Congress and Fisk University to document the blues music traditions of Coahoma County, Mississippi, in 1941 and 1942. The team included John W. Work, Lewis Jones, and Samuel Adams from

Fisk, and Alan Lomax from the Library of Congress. John Work's music transcription of this piece is titled "Low Down Dirty Dog Blues," but it was retitled "Sun Goin' Down" by Folkways in their reissue. A typical blues, it balances complaint over mistreatment caused by hearsay with a threat to leave, and ends with a direct invitation to talk things over.

19 FRISCO LINE

Mississippi Fred McDowell, guitar and vocal
(From *15 Down Home Country Blues Classics*, Arhoolie CD101)

Fred McDowell (1906–1972) was born in Rossville, Tennessee, about 35 miles east of Memphis. As a youngster he was inspired by his uncle, Gene Shields, who played guitar, but he recalled learning as a teenager from two friends, Raymond Payne and Eli Green, with whom he grew up. In his earlier teens McDowell sang at country dances. Leaving Rossville at around age 21, he worked various non-musical jobs around Memphis, where he finally acquired a guitar. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s he played dances. He encountered Charley Patton at a jook joint in Cleveland, Mississippi, and in 1940 he moved to Como, Mississippi, in the northern hill country, working a cotton farm and playing local dances. In 1959 he met folklorist Alan Lomax, who recorded him at his home and released some of the material on Atlantic and Prestige International. While the recordings earned little in royalties, they brought him to the attention of folklorists and documentary record labels—including Testament and Arhoolie, for whom he recorded "Frisco Line" in Como in 1966. During the 1960s he toured America and Europe, working various folk and blues festivals with such artists as the Rolling Stones, Paul Butterfield, Elvin Bishop, and Bonnie Raitt. His 1969 recording of "I Do Not Play No Rock 'n' Roll" for Capitol Records was nominated for a Grammy. That same year he played at the Ann Arbor Blues Festival with his harmonica-playing partner, Johnny Woods. Returning to Como in 1971, he was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and he died the following year. "Frisco Line," like "Mean Old Frisco" or "Frisco Ragtime," continues the common blues train motif. His guitar is tuned to Sebastopol and is played with a bottleneck or slide.

20 DIGGIN' MY POTATOES

Big Bill Broonzy, guitar and vocal

(From *Big Bill Broonzy: Trouble in Mind*, SFW CD 40181)

For biographical information on Broonzy see track 1.

"Diggin' [or Digging] My Potatoes" (the title alternates spelling without rhyme or reason) is a double-entendre classic in a couplet and chorus format that poses a humorous complaint of suspected infidelity. While Broonzy claims credit for writing it, the full story of its composition is a bit tangled, if not incestuous. It was first recorded by Little Son Joe, aka Ernest Lawlers, on Vocalion in February 1939 as "Diggin' My Potatoes." Lawlers was accompanied by his wife, Memphis Minnie, a close friend of Broonzy's, who in fact once bested him in a guitar contest. Several months later in May 1939, Washboard Sam, aka Robert Brown, recorded it for Bluebird, this time with Broonzy as second guitar player. Brown was Broonzy's close friend and, according to Broonzy, his half-brother. In his autobiography, *Big Bill Blues*, Broonzy claimed he gave Brown a number of songs, including this piece. In any event, it must have done quite well because a year later Washboard Sam with Broonzy cut a follow-up for Bluebird, "Digging My Potatoes No. 2." Not to be left out, Broonzy's other close friend and long-time associate John Chatmon, aka Memphis Slim, using the name Peter Chatmon, cut his own "Digging My Potatoes No. 2" four days later for Vocalion. It was his first recording, and he was accompanied by none other than Washboard Sam. If all this confusion proves anything, it's that a good sexual metaphor can go a long way, particularly in an upbeat, good-time blues.

Note: All quotes come from the author's interviews; birth and death data from Bob Eagle and Eric S. LeBlanc's *Blues: A Regional Experience.*

Pawn shop and secondhand clothing store on Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee, 1939.

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CLASSIC DELTA AND DEEP SOUTH BLUES

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3 **DEATH LETTER BLUES — Son House** 2:58
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Mississippi, particularly the Delta, lays claim to being the land where the blues began. Forged in the crucible of poverty and racial oppression, blues flourished there as nowhere else, evolving into what most critics consider the deepest or most intense strain of the blues tradition. During the Great Migration, music changed consistently, adapting to its new surroundings like St. Louis and Chicago, while retaining its connection to its down home Delta roots. This collection celebrates the diversity and dissemination of the blues' most powerful and influential voices. 67 minutes, 40-page booklet with extensive notes and photos.

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