SIDE 1

Band 1. THERE'S A MAN GOING AROUND
TAKING NAMES
(Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 2. EASY RIDER
(Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 3. RED BIRD
(arr. Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 4. LINE 'EM
(Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 5. T. B. BLUES
(Victoria Spivey/Edwin H. Morris & Company,
ASCAP)

SIDE 2

Band 1. JIM CROW
(Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 2. BOURGEOIS BLUES
(Huddie Ledbetter-Alan Lomax/TRO-Folkways
Music Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 3. ARMY LIFE
(Huddie Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music
Publishers, Inc., BMI)

Band 4. HITLER SONG
(Huddie Ledbetter-Alan Lomax/TRO-Folkways
Music Publishers, Inc., BMI)
The songs Lead Belly sang were a chronicle, not only of his own life, but of all Americans who lived in his time. This writer once asked him where he got them all. “I just take ‘em an’ fix ‘em,” he replied. “But you got to keep your mind together.” He went on to explain that he took a melody from any given song, put it with words of another or of his own free rhyming, and then had the piece he wanted.

Not long after, he gave us an illustration of the process. We had been playing Bessie Smith’s record of “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out.” Lead Belly sat quietly, taking in both melody and words. By the time Bessie had got to her second chorus, Lead Belly was humming along with her. Then, as soon as the record came off the turntable, he sang it through. Every word was there, every bit of the melody. But that was just one part of the process. Two weeks later, Lead Belly came back, announced that he really “had” the song, and went through it again. This time, it sounded different—farther from Bessie’s style, and closer to Lead Belly’s own way of singing.

His method is worth noting, because a great deal of Lead Belly’s material was not “original,” if we accept the idea that to be original a work must be wholly “created” by an artist. His greatest contribution was his ability and his willingness to perform—-to take any words and melody, however hackneyed they might sound coming from other performers, and make something of this material that he “took and fixed.” His desire, as far as we can guess, was always that of the professional showman, to give his audience what it wanted. In the early years, it had been the world of the South---sombre spirituals, rough, yet poignant blues; of back searing work on the plantations and prison farms; of the relief that came on Christmas Day; and of a young prostitute who had “the TB,” yet whose only complaint was, “TB’s all right to have, if your friends didn’t treat you so low down.”

After 1934, when he was released from the Angola Prison Farm and came north, his audience as well as his life, was different. When he had been singing in the honky tonks and barrel-houses of Fannin Street, in weather gray shanties on the other side of the tracks, up and down the Red River Valley and in and out of the Black Lands of Texas, Lead Belly’s audience of negroes had understood every word of his songs. There was no need to say, as he later had to explain to white audiences, that a “Sweetback man” was a pimp TB Blues, or that Line ‘Em was a song about laying down railroad ties.

Sterling Brown has told the story of those earlier audiences in his poem about another blues singer, Ma Rainey:

“Dey comes to hear Ma Rainey from de little river settlements, From blackbottom cornrows and from lumber camps; Dey stumble in de hall, jes’ a-laughin’ an’ a-cacklin’ Cheerin’ lak roarin’ water, lak wind in river swamps.

O Ma Rainey, Sing yo’ song; Now you’s back Whah you belong, Git way inside us, Keep us strong . . .

O Ma Rainey, Li’l an’ low; Sing us ‘bout de hard luck Roun’ our do’; Sing us ‘bout de lonesome road We mus go . . .”

Here was a direct, intimate knowing and sharing between audience and performer. Lead Belly drew his songs from his people, and he, like Ma Rainey, was one of them. “An Ma lef’ de stage,” Sterling Brown tells us toward the end of his poem, “an’ followed some de folks outside.” But when Lead Belly came to sing before undergraduates at Harvard and Bryn Mawr, he couldn’t “follow the folks outside” when his “lecture” was over.

The folks, many of them, were if anything confused by his songs, and remote from their meaning. So he made brave efforts. He talked to his audiences, trying to explain as much as possible what it was all about. But the warm pulse of understanding was lacking, and Lead Belly knew it as well as any undergraduate born in New England or Michigan.

Sensitive as performer, he knew he had to find new words. Out of trial and error came the songs Jim Crow, Army Life, and Hitler Song. The Bourgeois Blues stands midway between them—it is the story of an episode in his northern life, as told by the Lomaxes: “One rainy night in Washington he and Martha were unable to find a room in any of the inexpensive negro hotels and were finally forced to spend the night in the apartment of a white friend. The next morning the white landlord made a scene about the fact that a negro spent the night in his
house. Lead Belly overheard the discussion and on his return to New York composed this blues-narrative."

There is a highly personal note of tragedy in this song; in the others Lead Belly set personal tragedies aside, and dealt with larger issues.


Sterling Brown reading his poem "Ma Rainey" is also available on Folkways Records in an album of *Negro Poets* edited by Arna Bontemps.

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**SIDE 1, Band 1: There's A Man Going Around**

**Taking Names**

There’s a man goin' round takin' names — There’s a man goin' round takin' names. — He has taken my father's name, And he's left my heart in vain. There’s a man goin' round takin' names. — He has taken my sister's name... There’s a man goin’ ‘round takin’ names, — He has taken my brother’s name... He has taken my mother's name and has left me here in vain; There’s a man goin’ ‘round takin’ names.

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**SIDE 1, Band 2: Easy Rider**

Easy Rider. See what you done done. Easy Rider. See what you done done. You made me love you

Now your man done come, — Hey, hey, hey, hey. —

If you catch me stealing please don't tell on me If you catch me stealing please don't tell on me I'm stealing back to my old times used to be, Hey, hey, hey, hey.

If I was a catfish swimming in the deep blue sea (3x) Hey, hey, hey, hey. I would set all you women diving after me (3x) Hey, hey, hey, hey.

Easy Rider, hear me calling you (3x) You're three times seven and you know what you're gonna do.
SIDE I, Band 3: Red Bird

Chorus

Red Bird soon in the morning, Red Bird soon in the morning.

Red Bird soon in the morning. Red Bird soon in the morning.


Red Bird, Red Bird soon in the morning. What's the matter with the Red Bird.

Soon in the morning, What's the matter with the Red Bird.

Soon in the morning, What's the matter with the Red Bird.

Soon in the morning. What's the matter with the Red Bird.

Soon in the morning.

Cat got the red bird soon in the morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the morning.

Hog got the red bird soon in the morning...

Red bird gonna - soon in the morning...
SIDE I, Band 4: Line 'Em

Freely

A Tempo fast

Ho boys is you right? Done got right.

All I hate a-bout lin-in' track These old bars 'bout to break my back—Ho boys can't you line 'em (lines in lock and) Ho boys can't you line 'em. See Eloise go lining track.

Moses stood on the Red Sea Shore Smotin' that water with a two-by-four. Mary and the baby lying in the shade Thinking on the money I ain't made.

If I could I surely would Stand on the rock where Moses stood.

SIDE I, Band 5: T. B. Blues

It's too late, too late, too late, too late—

It's too late, too late, too late, too late—

I'm on my way to Denver, then ma-ma must I hes-i-tate—

TB is alright to have but your friends treat you so low down
TB is alright to have but your friends treat you so low down
Don't you ask them for a favor, they'll even stop coming around.

Mmm - TB is killing me
Mmm - TB is killing me
My mama I'm like a prisoner, always wishin' I'm free
When I was on my feet, I couldn't even much walk down the street for the men all lookin' at me from my head to my feet, But it's Oh now. T. B's a killin' me—

I wish that I was buried, And in the deep blue sea.

SIDE II, Band 1: Jim Crow

Bunk Johnson told me too— This old Jim Crow is m's__ dead bad luck to___ me and you.__

I've been trav'lin' I've been trav'lin' from sho' to sho__ Ev'ry where I have been I found some old Jim Crow.__

One thing people, I want everybody to know You gonna find some Jim Crow everyplace you go. I told everybody over the radio Make your mind and get together and break up this old Jim Crow.

Down in Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia's a mighty good place to go. And get together and break up this old Jim Crow. I'm gonna tell you people something that you don't know. It's a lotta Jim Crow in a moving-picture show.

I'm gonna sing this verse - I ain't gonna sing no More, Please get together - break up this old Jim Crow.
SIDE II, Band 2: Bourgeois Blues

A

Look a here peo-ple, Lis-ten to me.

Don't try to find no home down in Wash-ington D. C. Lord it's a bour-geous town, ooh, it's a bour-geous town.

I got the Bour-geous Blues, I'm gon na spread the news all a-round

Me and Martha was standin' upstairs, I heard a white man say, "Don't want no colored up there."

Chorus

White folks in Washington, they know how;
Throw a colored man a nickel to see him box.

Chorus

Home of the brave, land of the free - I don't want to be mistreated by no bourgeous.

Chorus

Tell all the colored folks to listen to me;
Don't try to find a home in Washington D.C.

Chorus

SIDE II, Band 3: Army Life

G

The clothes that they give you, they say are might-y fine, But

me and my buddy could both fit in-to mine I don't want no more of

Ar-my life, Gee but I want to go home.

Chorus

The shoes that they give you, they say are might-y fine,
Ask for number seven boys, they will give you number nine.

Chorus

The money that they give you, they say was might-y fine,
Ask for fifty dollars and they take back forty nine.

Chorus

The hot dogs that they give you, they say are might-y fine,
One rolled off the table and it started markin' time.

Chorus

We don't want no more war, boy, and I put it on my mind;
And when you go out and register you better take your time.

Chorus

The coffee that they give you, they say it was might-y fine,
It tastes like something else and it's just like iodine.

Chorus

They food is getting higher - gettin' higher every day,
But boy, the money I'm getting it ain't enough to pay.
SIDE II, Band 4: Hitler Song

Hitler started out in nineteen hundred and thirty two.
Hitler started out in nineteen hundred and thirty two.

We're gonna tear Hitler down, We're gonna tear Hitler down some day.
We're gonna bring him to the ground, We're gonna bring him to the ground some day.

When Hitler started out he took the home from the Jew.
When Hitler started out he took the Jews from their home.
That's one thing Mr. Hitler you know you done wrong. Cho.
You ain't no iron and you ain't no solid rock.

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