The songs on this album were recorded by commercial companies and the Library of Congress in the southeastern mountains between 1925 and 1935, and show the first attempts of the hill musicians to "make a hit" with old traditional songs that had been in the mountains since pioneer days.

Until this time, the performance of this music was limited to small dances, around home, and contests held by local groups. The instruments used were mostly fiddle and banjo, and the singing of the old songs was often unaccompanied, since the guitar was a later addition. Away from the home the music tended to instrumental, for dances and contests. The musicians were rarely paid money for their effort although favors of food and drink and just a chance to "play out" were considered sufficient. Naturally the musicians wanted to please their audience be it one or 100 and they played what they thought would be well received. And each had a different idea of audience demand with an accompanying different idea in carrying it out. Their fame was limited to the immediate area in which they lived and worked, where people could see and hear them at local parties and corn-shuckings. Away from music these men were a good cross section of the population with occupations ranging from miner and moonshiner to farmer and doctor.

With the advent of automobiles, radio, disc recording, conscription and even prohibition, the communication between city and country grew tremendously during the early 20th century. The guitar, mandolin, mouth-harp autoharp, and double bass became popular in the 20's, and the mountain people developed styles of playing them that suited the old tunes and songs, as well as picking up new songs that came with the instruments. Disc recording companies discovered the commercial possibilities of country music and set up field studios in furniture stores and trailers at southern cities where musicians flocked to them to be recorded. Radio stations initiated the instantly successful barn dances with live performers, such as the Grand Ole Opry and the National Barn Dance, which had a tremendous and enthusiastic air public.

This was a period of great experimentation, when country people were learning new instrumental and vocal techniques, affected sometimes by urban or Negro music, and where there was small similarity between any two performers or groups. They were gradually hearing by way of radio and records more of what other musicians in the country were playing, which inevitably affected their style, and their fame spread so that they could earn a living by performing for an eager public in schools, theatres, and amusement parks.

From this unique time came some of the most diverse recordings of traditional American folk music.

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ABOUT THE MUSIC AND ITS TIMES

by Mike Seeger

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About Us

by John Cohen

There is a side of us all which goes about trying to make the world over in our own image.

There is another side -- where one searches to encounter his own image in the world. In this process one examines all kinds of elements which come in his path.

The three of us who sing on this record come from different backgrounds and know many separate worlds. Tom is a mathematician and has studied and taught in universities all over the East coast. Mike has worked in hospitals, the civil service, as a radio technician and has played in the bluegrass bands around Baltimore. I'm a photographer and painter and have seen something of the world from Morocco to Peru.

Yet it seems inevitable that we should have met at the songs presented on this record -- for we can recognize something of our own images here.

Mike is from a folk-musical family; Tom has been playing for about 15 years; I've had entanglements with "Greensleeves" songs, blues and backwoods ballads -- and have enjoyed the historical songs and the wandering old ballads.

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FA2396
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I've introduced these songs to others as these songs were introduced to me. To a beautiful long-haired girl I knew -- I gave my beautiful long-haired songs -- and now she sings them nicer than I ever could, for she looks like these old songs and they suit her fine. Another friend got the blues and they have become his way.

A person sings the songs as they look like him.

In the old-time music we sing on the record, we have found a place where we can bring together our separate experiences in picking and singing. We have found that many of our individual styles, arrived at independently, fit together. This is probably because we have been hearing and singing similar songs and listening to similar records -- and the same image has been in the backs of our heads all the time.

It is still another question as to where this image came from. It has something to do with an idea that Max Asch, the Louxaces and the Seegers have been presenting for a long time -- and farther back it is connected with the expression of the singing people in this country.

We call ourselves the New Lost City Ramblers. This is the kind of name used by the old bands from whom we learned our songs. There were The Fruit Jar Drinkers, The Buckle-Busters, The Skillet Lickers, The North Carolina Ramblers, The Piedmont Log Rollers and Mr. Smith's Champion Horse-Hair Pullers. In these names, they had a humorous, almost satirical, way of looking at themselves.

It is regrettable that these kinds of names have disappeared from popular use -- as is the disappearance of the spirit in which they were used. There is a straightforward vitality in this old way, which has its sophistication in its directness.

There is a tendency among city folk singers to take these old tunes and make them "more musical" with the addition of complicated chord transitions. This intrusion of Art (capital A) is done with the intent of making the music more palatable, so that the folk songs can fit in with the decor of the living room or what have you. In this becomes the death of these songs and returns us to a point which we were trying to avoid in the first place.

But despite the watering-down and smoothing off, there is something terrifically strong about folk music -- so strong, in fact, that it is able to shine through the veneer often applied upon it. The folk, somehow, can never become sufficiently smoothed off to be considered commonplace. Throughout history, the folk have been generally held in contempt by the middle class -- for reasons clearly understandable. Perhaps the vitality of the folk comes in their reaction to this contempt as well as in their reaction to the problems of everyday survival.

In the music of this record, the voice often serves as another instrument, with the function of carrying certain literal ideas with the tune. The instruments have an importance of their own, which they communicate in their own language. This music is at its best when the instruments and voices are working well together.

It is our hope that our pleasure in singing will carry to you who listen. I don't believe there is any attempt to impart an emotional message or to interpret the songs. Rather, our effort is to present these songs as well as we are able.

**ABOUT OUR SINGING STYLE**

by **Tom Paley**

Our principal reasons for playing together are a liking for the sound of old-time string bands, perhaps best exemplified by The North Carolina Ramblers and Old Tanner's Skillet Lickers, and a feeling that this sound has just about disappeared from the current folk music scene. There are many fine individual performers about and quite a number of good groups, too, but the groups have virtually all followed either the Bluegrass trend of Scruggs and Flatt and Bill Monroe or the slick, modernised, carefully arranged approach of The Weavers and The Carriers. We have no objections at all to either of these schools (Mike, for instance, is an active Bluegrass musician) but the older style seems deserving of resurrection.

This style bears about the same relation to some of the later fashions that New Orleans jazz, with its ensemble improvisation, bears to later Dixieland, which emphasizes solo breaks. In many of our numbers each instrument and voice is carrying a melodic line of sorts, resulting in a contrapuntal feeling, whereas the more modern approaches generally have the instrument (or voice) carrying a solo line with everything else filling in with rhythm and chords.

One result of this is that, though the words do not lose all their importance, the instruments do not subside completely when the voices commence. Instead, they become almost equal partners with the voice. Actually, in some numbers, usually dance tunes, the words do become secondary, being reduced to one or two verses which are injected at various times into an essentially instrumental performance. "Baby" is a case in point.

Of course, we do some numbers outside of the "string band" style. The influences of hymnsinging, jazz, Negro blues-picking and older traditional ballads can be discerned in our performances. The music on this record and the performance styles, too, give a sample of what was being done on the broad front along which folk music was coming into contact with commercial performances and the mass media. Of course, we don't touch all facets; for instance, we avoid the most commercial aspects and try to stay fairly close to genuine "folk" material. In any case, we only utilize those parts of the available music which we enjoy, our purpose not being scholarly but musical and personal. In this, too, lies one of our differences with some of the original performers of this music. To wit: we are performing what we like best, rather than tailoring the music to the available market, while many of the earlier performers adapted the music to the expected tastes of their audiences; and, as the audiences were enlarged through radio and recordings, they became even more commercial. Those who refused to adapt or who couldn't adapt successfully soon faded from the entertainment scene (with few exceptions).

Now that there is renewed interest in folk music, there may be a new audience for this music of the borderline.
The Songs

Porked Deer is a dance tune about which we know very little except that it is bouncy and was recorded several times in the late twenties and early thirties.

Mike - fiddle
Tom - guitar
John - banjo

Don't Let Your Deal Go Down shows the influence of jazz and sophisticated "popular" songs, particularly in its chord progressions.

DON'T LET YOUR DEAL GO DOWN
Well I've been all around this whole round world
I've done most everything
I've played cards with the king and the queen
The ace the deuce and the tray
Don't let your deal go down
Don't let your deal go down
Don't let your deal go down
For my last gold dollar is gone
Well I left my little girl a-crying
Standing in the door
She threw her arms around my neck
Saying honey don't you go
Where did you get your high-top shoes
And the dress that you wear so fine
I got my shoes from an engineer
And my dress from a driver in the mines

John-banjo & lead voice
Tom-guitar & tenor voice
Mike-fiddle

TRULY UNDERSTAND YOU LOVE ANOTHER MAN
I wish to the Lord I'd never been born
Or died when I was young
Before I'd seen your two brown eyes
Or heard your flattering tongue my love
Or heard your flattering tongue

CHORUS
I truly understand you love another man
And your heart shall no longer be mine
I truly understand you love another man
And your heart shall no longer be mine
Oh who's going to shoe my pretty little foot
And who's going to glove your hand
And who's going to be your own true love
When I'm in the foreign land my love
When I'm in the foreign land

CHORUS

Oh poppa's going to shoe my pretty little foot
And mamma's going to glove my hand
And you'll still be my own true love
When you're in the foreign land
When you're in the foreign land

I'll never listen to what no other woman says
Let her hair be either black or brown
But I'd rather be on the top of some hill
With the rain a-pouring down down
With the rain a-pouring down

CHORUS

John-Bass
Tom-Banjo & lead voice
Mike-Tenor

DALLAS RAG

(instrumental)

John - guitar
Tom - banjo
Mike - mandolin

Tom Cat Blues is best described as a "white folk blues," a kind of meeting ground of white folk singers with the Negro blues style. Whatever the attitude of the white singers towards Negroes as people, they seem to have been impressed by their singing and guitar-playing, for these have been strong influences in the white singers' music. This number is typical of a large portion of the recorded repertoire of Jimmy Rodgers, The Callahan Brothers, The Allen Brothers, The Carlisle Brothers and other brothers.

TOM CAT BLUES

I got an old Tom Cat,
When he steps out
All the pussy-cats in the neighborhood,
They begin to shout,
"Here comes Ring-Tail Tom, he's boss around the town,
And if you got your heat turned up you better
turn your damper down!"

Ring-Tail Tom on a fence,
The old pussy cat on the ground,
Ring-Tail Tom came off that fence,
And they went round and round.
Lord, he's quick on the trigger,
He's a natural-born crack shot,
He got a new target every night,
And he sure does practice a lot.
He makes them roust about,
He makes them, roll their eyes,
They just can't resist my Ring-Tail Tom,
No matter how hard they tries.
You better watch old Ring-Tail Tom,
He's running around the town,
He won't have no pussy cats
Come a-Tomcatting' around.

Ring-Tail Tom is the stuff,
He's always running around,
All the pussy cats in the neighborhood
Can't get old Ring-Tail down.
He's always running around,
Just can't be satisfied,
He goes out every night
With a new one by his side.

Tom - voice and Hawaiian guitar
John - guitar
RAILROADING AND GAMBLING

What your mamma done told you
Six months ago,
Keep on your hat and coat,
Be ready to go.

CHORUS:
Railroading and gambling,
Picking up chits for a madman,
Lord, Lord, Lord.

Been in the State House,
Been in that yard,
Been in the coalhouse,
Worked least of all.

(SCHORUS)

 Said that preacher,
Golly ain't it a sin,
Johnny get your britches
'Cause here comes the wind.

Out on the railroad
Down on the track.
Lost all my money, Lord,
No way to get back.

John - banjo and vocal

COLORED ARISTOCRACY

[instrumental]

Mike - fiddle
John - guitar
Tom - banjo

Sailor on the Deep Blue Sea, sometimes appearing in rather different form as "Captain, Captain, Tell Me True" and "The Piney Boy" tells of the girl left behind when her darling goes to sea; she waits for his ship only to find that he has drowned.

SAILOR ON THE DEEP BLUE SEA

It was on one summer's evening
Just about the hour of three
When my darling started to leave me
For to sail upon the deep blue sea

Oh he promised to write me a letter
He said he'd write to me
But I've not heard from my darling
Who is sailing on the deep blue sea

Oh my mother's dead and buried
My pa's forsaken me
And I have no one for to love me
But the sailor on the deep blue sea

Oh captain can you tell me
Where can my sailor be
Oh yes my little maiden
He is drowned in the deep blue sea

Farewell to friends and relations
It's the last you'll see of me
For I'm going to end my troubles
By drowning in the deep blue sea

Mike-autoharp & lead voice
John-banjo & bass voice

EAST VIRGINIA BLUES

I was born in East Virginia
North Carolina I did go
There I met the fairest maiden
Whose name and age I do not know

Her hair was dark in color
And her cheeks a rosy red
On her breast she wore a white lily
That's where I long to lay my head

Many a time we strolled together
Down beside the deep blue sea
Now in your heart you love another
In my grave I'd rather be

Papa says we cannot marry
Mama says it'll never do
If you ever learn to love me
I will run away with you

At my heart you are my darling
At my door you're welcome in
At my gate I'll always meet you
For you're the girl I long to win

I'd rather be in some dark holler
Where the sun would never shine
Then to see you with another
And to know that you'd never be mine

I don't want your greenback dollar
I don't want your watch and chain
All I want is your heart darling
Say you'll take me back again

Mike-guitar, mandolin & voices

The Battleship of Maine: This version of the song leaves little doubt as to the time and locale of the events. The recording by Charlie Poole is not nearly as specific, including only two stanzas of this version and omitting all reference to "The Battleship of Maine," substituting a refrain about gambling, rather like Furry Lewis' Stackerlee.

BATTLESHIP OF MAINE

McKinley called for volunteers
Then I got my gun
First Spaniard I saw coming
I dropped my gun and run
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

CHORUS:
At war with that great nation Spain
When I get back to Spain I want to honor my name
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

Why are you running
Are you afraid to die
The reason that I'm running
Is because I cannot fly
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

The blood was a-running
And I was running too
I give my feet good exercise
I had nothing else to do
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

(CHORUS)
When they were a-chasing me
I fell down on my knees
First thing I cast my eyes upon
Was a great big pot of peas
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

The peas they was greasy
The meat it was fat
The boys was fighting Spaniards
While I was righting that
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

(CHORUS)
What kind of shoes
Do the rough riders wear
Buttons on the side
Cost five an' a half a pair
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

What kind of shoes
Do the poor farmers wear
All broke in
Cost a dollar a pair
It was all about that Battleship of Maine

(CHORUS)
John-guitar & voice
Mike-fiddle
Tom-banjo & lead voice

DAVY

Davy, Davy, where is Davy
Down in the hen house eating up the gravy
Davy, Davy, where is Davy
Down in the hen house eating up the gravy

Davy, Davy, poor old Davy
Down in the chicken yard sick on the gravy
Davy, Davy, poor old Davy
Down in the chicken yard sick on the gravy

Mike-fiddle
Tom-banjo & voice

The Roving Gambler seems to have been a pretty popular number at one time. Some of its verses show up in songs like "Cindy." Many recordings have been made of it, but it does not have much currency at present. The Dying Gambler, which utilizes the same theme usually found in this song, tells of the death of a poor young man who wasted his life with gambling.

ROVING GAMBLER

I am a roving gambler, I've gambled all around
Any place I find a deck of cards I lay my money down

Lay my money down, lay my money down
Any place I find a deck of cards I lay my money down

I hadn't been in 'Frisco many more weeks than three
Til I fell in love with a pretty little girl, she fell in love with me

She took me to her parlor she cooled me with her fan
She whispered low in her mother's ear, I love the gambling man

Love that gambling man, love the gambling man
Whispered low in her mother's ear I love that gambling man

Oh daughter oh dear daughter how can you treat me so
To leave your dear old mother and with the gambler go

Oh mother oh dear mother you know I love you well
But the love I have for the gambling man no human tongue can tell

Human tongue can tell, human tongue can tell
The love I have for the gambling man no human tongue can tell

I've gambled out in 'Frisco, I've gambled up in Maine
Heading back to Georgia to gamble my last game

Gamble my last game, gamble my last game
Heading back to Georgia, boys to handle my last game

Mike-banjo, mouth harp, and vocal

Take A Drink On Me is more familiar as Take A Whiff On Me, which deals with cocaine instead of liquor, and this in turn ties in with several cocaine-blues songs of Negro origin, usually including the verse:

Cocaine's for horses, not for women or men,
The doctor said it'd kill you, but he didn't say when.

TAKE A DRINK ON ME

Now what did you do with the gun in your hand
You give it to a rounder and he shot a good man
Oh, Lord, honey take a drink on me

(CHORUS)
Take a drink on me, take a drink on me
All you rounders take a drink on me
Oh, Lord, honey take a drink on me

If you keep on stalling, you'll make me think
Your daddy was a monkey and your mama was an ape
Oh, Lord, honey take a drink on me

(CHORUS)

You see that gal with a hobble on
She's good looking; as sure as sure's your born
Oh, Lord, honey take a drink on me

(CHORUS)

Repeat first verse

(CHORUS)

Mike-fiddle & tenor voice
John-banjo & lead voice
Tom-guitar & bass voice
OH I'M IN LOVE WITH A BROWN-EYED BOY

But he's in love with a whiskey jug
Likes likker better than me

CHORUS:
Oh bring me back my brown-eyed boy
Oh bring him back to me
Oh bring me back my brown-eyed boy
Likes likker better than me

Last night he came to see me
Last night he smiled on me
But tonight he smiles on a whiskey jug
Likes likker better than me

(CHORUS)
Sometimes I think I'll marry him
For I love him dearer than life
But oh it's all so hard to bear
As a whiskey drinker's wife

Mike-fiddle, mandolin & lead voice
John-guitar & bass voice
Tom-tenor voice

IT'S A SHAME TO WHIP YOUR WIFE ON SUNDAY

It's a shame to whip your wife on Sunday (2)
When you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday
It's a shame to whip your wife on Sunday (2)
When you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday
It's a shame to get drunk on Sunday (2)
When you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday
Repeat first verse

Mike-fiddle, mandolin & lead voice
John-guitar & bass voice
Tom-banjo & tenor voice

Brown's Ferry Blues again shows the influence of Negro blues and jazz, but this time in a more professional minstrel-like form. This seems to be the result of the efforts to be humorous of professional entertainers with a strong folk background and also a considerable familiarity with Negro music.

BROWN'S FERRY BLUES

Hardluck poppa standing in the rain
If the world was corn he couldn't buy grain
Lord, Lord, got those Brown's Ferry blues
Hard luck poppa standin' in the snow
His knees knock together but he's rare to go
Lord, Lord, got those Brown's Ferry blues

John-guitar & lead voice
Tom-guitar & tenor voice

OLD FISH SONG

Now buddy get up and come here to your poppa
I'll tell you a story climb up in my lap
Tis better than the story of Daniel or Ruth
Although it is fishy it's every bit true

Now listen right good while I tell you this tale
How Jonah the prophet got caught by a whale
That whale caught poor Jonah and bless your dear soul
It not only caught him it swallowed him whole

Now part of the story is awfully sad
Tis about a great city that went to the bad
The Lord saw them people with such wicked ways
He says I can't stand them but forty more days

So he spoke to old Jonah then said go and try
To the wicked old city and tell them that
Give them forty days more to get humbled down
And if they don't do it I'll tear up the town

When he heard the Lord speaking old Jonah said no
I'm a true hard-shell Baptist and so I won't go
The Nineveh people are nothing to me
And them I won't give for a nickel to see

So he went down to Joppa, twas there in great haste
That he boarded a ship for a different place
The Lord looked down at him and said He
Old Jonah's a-fixing to run off on me

So he set the wind a-blowing with its squeaks and its squeals
The sea then got rowdy and kicked up its heels
Poor Jonah confessed it was caused by his sins
So the crew threw him out and the whale took him in

Well the whale said to old Jonah old feller don't fret
I'm sent here to take you in out of the wet
So he opened his mouth and poor Jonah went in
You're going to get punished right much for your sin

What a funny sight but that ever was seen
When Jonah rode off in his new submarine
The Nineveh people did not repent
For the message of warning to them was mis-sent

On a bed of green seaweed that whale tried to rest
He said now I'll sleep while my food'll digest
But he grew mighty restless and sore afraid
For he rumbled inside as the old prophet prayed

Now you see how God's letter to Nineveh lay
In a dead letter office for three nights and days
The old prophet shut in as tight as a lock
But all things will be opened as sure as you know

The third day the old fish arose from his bed
With his stomach tore up and a pain in his head
He said I must get to the air mighty quick
This filthy old sinner's a-making me sick

So he winked his big eyes and he wiggled his tail
Set out for the shore to deliver his mail
He came near the shore and he looked all around
And vomited Jonah clear out on the ground

Old Jonah thanked God for His Mercy and grace
Then turning to the whale and then he made a face
He said after three days and nights you have found
A good man old sucker you can't keep down
The old prophet stretched up with a yawn and a sigh
Set down in the sun for his clothing to dry
He thought how much better his preaching would be
Since from a whale's seminary he'd had a degree

Having rested himself and dried well in the sun
Set out for Nineveh almost in a run
He said I must hurry and try not to sin
I'm sure I don't want to be swallowed again

He arrived at the city about a week late
And he preached from the time that he entered the gate
And the whole population repented and prayed
And the great hand of justice at length it was stayed

When you disobey mummy remember this tale
When you run off from home just look out for a whale
There's varmints to get you on sea and on land
And a boy can be swallowed lots easier than a man.

Mike-fiddle and voice

CROSSED OLD JORDAN'S STREAM

Good old neighbor's gone along
Gone along, gone along
Good old neighbor's gone along
Crossed Old Jordan's stream

(Chorus)
Thank God I got religion and I do believe
And I do believe, and I do believe
Thank God I got religion and I do believe
Crossed Old Jordan's stream

Good old mother's gone along
Gone along, gone along
Good old mother's gone along
Crossed Old Jordan's stream

(Chorus)
Good old Christian's gone along
Gone along, gone along
Good old Christian's gone along
Crossed Old Jordan's stream

(Chorus)
Mike-mandolin & tenor voice
John-guitar & lead voice
Tom-Hawaiian guitar & another voice

DISCOGRAPHY

Forked Deer:
Dykes Magic City Serenaders (with calls); Charlie Bowman & his Brothers, Col. 15387; Hills Va. Mountaineers, Supertone 9710; Kessinger Bros. (Charles & Lucas), Brunswick 287; Jilson Settlers (J.W. Day) Vi 21407; Uncle "Am" Stuart Voc. 14846 (as "Forky Deer") H.L. Maxey, fiddle, Ferrus, Va., recorded by Herbert Halpert in 1939 for the Library of Congress, LC #2792a3 (as "Forky Deer")

Don't Let Your Deal Go Down:
Charlie Poole, Col. 15938; Bob Will, Col. 137739; Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs, for Col. Crying Ellen ("Black Dog Blues")
Ernest Stoneman, Folkways FW2315

I Truly Understand You Love Another Man:
Shoatkle (G.) Roark and Family, Vi. 40023 George Roark, Pineville, Ky., recorded for the Library of Congress by Mary E. Barnicle.

Dallas Rag:
Dallas String Band, Col. 14650

Tomcat Blues:
Bob Clifford (Cliff Carlisle) Vocalion

Railroading and Gambling:
Uncle Dave Macon, Bluebird 8325