The New Lost City Ramblers Vol. 3

Mike Seeger • John Cohen • Tom Paley

Recorded by Peter Bartok • Folkways Records FA 2398
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Photo by David Gahr

MIKE SEEGER ★ TOM PALEY ★ JOHN COHEN
The question has been raised - why don't folk-singers, especially the NLCR, address themselves to the present instead of to the past? What have they to say in terms of today?

What has the NLCR done with the past?

Although we learn our songs from old records, we are finding our own voices after all, and despite any attempts to duplicate the old records, we have found that we are getting to sound more like the New Lost City Ramblers than anything else.

In our wanderings through old time music we have had the advantage of current musical developments as a point of perspective on the old music. Listening to the many diverse musical sounds of the country music from the 20's and 30's - we know which ideas lasted and developed into today's music, which styles were a carry over from a still earlier period, which were new then, which died out or disappeared. From all these a clear sequence is emerging: this is the development and continuance of a line which seems to contain the traditional approach of the past as well as the present.

More and more we find certain attitudes in today's country musicians which will be considered as "folk" twenty years hence, just as some of the commercial singers of thirty years ago are considered "traditional" today.

In speaking with some contemporary country musicians, we find that these men have strong feelings about singing in the "old time" way. They are not reactionary in their desire to preserve the old way - rather, they are some of the more artistically progressive innovators of today. Their music contains some of the sounds of rock-and-roll, the honky-tonk bar music, sounds of the blues and some jazz beats too. Yet they maintain a sense and respect for the old time music. These are men like Scruggs, the Stanley Bros., and Bill Monroe, all contemporary bluegrass musicians. In a similar way, Charlie Poole's North Carolina Ramblers of 1927 to 1932 contained the sounds of ragtime, swing, hot jazz, and the blues as well as that of old Irish dance tunes, square dances and hoedowns. None of them ever presented their music as "folk" music. To them it was, and is, alive. Coming from the scholars and academicians, the terms "folk music and tradition" have also meant a death certificate - as if such titles were a guarantee that the music was finished and belonged only to history.

Now some of the songs on this record can be looked on in a historical context as well as good old time enjoyable music. The version of "Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms" which we use, came from the singing and playing of Buster Carter and Preston Young - recorded in 1927. (They apparently only made three records, and many of them were excellent. I.e. "The Lazy Farm Boy" E. Anthology) "Roll-in" was recorded in the late 30's by Charlie Monroe, and again in the late 40's by Flatt and Scruggs. Probably more people have heard the most recent bluegrass version than the two earlier versions combined, but this speaks none the less for the past. It is our hope in presenting the old version, that we have added an appreciation to the present as well as to the past.

"The Man Who Wrote The Home Sweet Home" comes from the early recording by Charlie Parker and Mack Woolbright (who also only made three recordinsg in the late 20's - including "Will The Weaver" and "The Rabbit Chase". One gets to wonder, with some feeling of regret, that these groups produced such a small amount. Perhaps in their day, these songs didn't go over well commercially. Then again, these were wandering musicians who perhaps never crossed paths again with the wandering recording companies of those days.) When we first heard the old record of the Man Who Wrote , we were struck by the resemblance in the banjo playing to Earl Scruggs' bluegrass way of picking it, particularly in the way the tune is articulated. This is quite distinct from the way other bluegrass banjo players play the tune (hear Don Reno's version for comparison) I had the opportunity to speak at length with Scruggs about this similarity. He remembers as a small boy, hearing the banjo player on the old recording in person (he is not sure if it was Parker or Woolbright) and he recalls how he was impressed by three things. 1) How well he liked the tune and how the banjo was used in this way (this style of three finger picking seems to be a direct prototype for contemporary banjo styles.) 2) He recalls that the banjo player was a blind man and - 3) How incredible it seemed that he could play way up the neck without looking at his hands. How strange it must have seemed to the banjo player to be singing a song and playing on a record with a dead man. Evidently either Parker or Woolbright had died shortly before that.

Earl Scruggs plays that tune 'just as he remembers it'. He has added quite a few tricks of his own to it, but in feeling, the two versions are very close. Mike picks the banjo here in something of a mixture of the two versions.

Now if we use this story as an archaeological time chaser, we can make direct connections between the present form and some very old styles also. This seems secondary however, to the chain of feeling which links this song to the past. Each artist plays it in the way he liked it, and that is in the "old time" way. Yet each artist brings his own ideas to the music, which makes it directed and meaningful to the present as well.

I think in the city, addressing oneself to the present has become confused with addressing oneself in new terms, and this has become mixed up with newness for its own sake. This type of argument causes people to only justify themselves in terms of historical dialectics, and leads them further from coming to grips with their own personal development and beliefs. In the city, we seem to be losing the ability of understanding newness and creativity within traditional terms.

John Cohen, Jan. 1961

In the last year or so, while the Ramblers have been travelling a great deal and performing in different parts of the country, we have become aware of an interesting phenomenon. In many places, and particularly around the colleges, small bands with musical orientation somewhat akin to ours are springing up. Many of these are without any professional intentions, but they all have a great time with the music. Old-timey string band music may be enjoyable to listen to, but it's a darn sight more fun to play, and a lot of people are discovering this. Another thing is that many of these people are seriously interested in the backsound of the music, so that it has become more than just a source of fun for them.

One of the problems faced by northern urban folk-singers who are attempting to perform the music of the rural South with verisimilitude is the question of how closely they wish to stick to their models. There is always a temptation to learn everything note for note and inflection for inflection from old recordings, but this leads down a complete blind alley from any artistic standpoint. On the other hand, if one merely learns the words and melodies and lets his own inclinations and background take over at that point, he cannot expect to achieve an authentic quality unless he is steeped in the sound he wishes to reproduce.

We have tried to get around this problem by listening to enormous amounts of old-timey music in order...
to be able to sound authentic without note for note copying. Thus we sometimes find ourselves listening repeatedly to certain passages to learn some lick on one of the instruments or a particular vocal harmony.

Closely related is the problem of regional accents. A New York accent doesn't sound right on Appalachian songs, and yet it seems that one ought not to copy the southern accent quite consciously. At least I always feel a little phoney when I put on a very obvious accent. Actually, a little bit of southern accent has rubbed off on us, and I believe that listening repeatedly to certain vocal harmony music as copying. Obviously a little bit of southern accent quite consciously. At least if our listeners glaringly out of place.

If our listeners have half as much fun with this music as we have had then our records will have served their purpose.

Tom Paley

We would like to thank the record collectors who have made their collections available to us. Special thanks to Eugene Earl from whom we got half the songs on this record. Also thanks to the many kind people around the country who have put us up and put up with us for the night as we travel.

SIDE I, Band 1: BLACK MOUNTAIN RAG

Glen Neaves and the Grayson County Boys-Folk Star 613 (2764); Tommy Jackson-Merc 6246; Curley Fox-King.

SIDE I, Band 2: I'LL ROLL IN MY SWEET BABY'S ARMS

Buster Carter and Preston Young - Col. 1960; Monroe Brothers - Eb 8-0773-By Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs and the Pegg Mountain Boys-Merc 6372 (Yb 7062-1).

Ain't going to work on the railroad,
Ain't going to work on the farm;
Lay around the shack 'til the mail train comes back,
Then I'll roll in my sweet baby's arms.

Roll in my sweet baby's arms,
Roll in my sweet baby's arms,
Lay around the shack 'til the mail train comes back,
Then I'll roll in my sweet baby's arms.

Can't see what's the matter with my own true love,
She done quit writting to me;
She must think I don't love her like I used to,
Ain't that a foolish idea.

Sometimes there's a change in the ocean;
Something there's a change in the sea;
Sometimes there's a change in my own true love;
But there's never no change in me.

Mama's a ginger-cake baker;
Sister can weave and can spin;
Dad's got an interest in that old cotton mill,
Just watch that old money roll in.

They tell me that your parents do not like me;
They have drove me away from your door;
If I had all my time to do over,
I would never go there any more.

Now where was you last Friday night,
While I was locked up in jail;
Walking the streets with another man,
Wouldn't even go my bail.

Repeat second verse

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

SIDE I, Band 3: TALKING HARD LUCK

from Arkansas Hard Luck - Lonnie Glosson, Cong. 6730; also see Born in Hard Luck - Chris Bouchillon-Col. 15191.

Ya know, I'm gonna tell you what a hard luck man I really am. Ya know I was born in hard luck. I was born in the last month in the year, the last week in the month, the last day in the week, the last hour in the day, the last minute in the hour, the last second in the minute; to tell the truth now, I like not to have got here at all. Oh I'm hard luck all right.

Ya know, I was born down there in the country on a little farm where the land's so poor that you have to put fertilizer around the telephone poles before you can talk over the wires. But it's a good place to be from anyway.

Ya know, I was born down there in the country, and I can remember the very first day when I was born, too. There's just three of us kids, we're lying there side by side on the bed, and I heard the door slam and my old man he walked in the door, he walked up to the bed an' took one look at us, he called to my Ma, she's in the kitchen makin' dinner. He says 'All right Lisa, come on in here and-' pick out the one ya want,' he says 'We'll drown the rest of them'.

Ya know, there's just seventeen of us kids, there's eight boys, seven girls and two other children.

Now I didn't have but little age on me when the old man he says 'Son, you're gonna hafta get out a here an' make your own livin' from now on,' he says, 'I'm tired of feeding you around here.' So I struck out, folks, and here's what's happened to me ever since...

Ya know, I've been bawled out an' balled up, held down and held up, bulldozed, black-jacked, walked on an' cheated, squeezed and mooched. Stood for war tax, excess profit, state, dog, and sin tax, Liberty bonds, baby bonds, and the bonds of matrimony. I been hit Crossed, Green crossed and double-crossed. I been asked to join the society for John the Baptist, the DAR Woman's corps, the Men's Stomach and Relief Corps.

I've worked like heck, and been worked like heck. I've been drunk and got others drunk. Lost all I had and part of my furniture. Because I want to go around now and spend some little part of that which I did earn and not go beg, borrow and steal, well, I've been cursed and discussed, boycotted - talked to and talked about, lied to and lied about, held up and hung up and doggone nigh murdered.

An the only reason I'm stickin' around now, folks, is to see just what in the heck is gonna happen next.

And if that ain't hard luck, then you tell me what is.

John-guitar and voice
Amid an awful struggle of commotion
The wind blew a gale from the ocean
Brave firemen struggled with devotion
But their efforts all proved in vain

(Chorus)
John-banjo
Tom -guitar and voice
Mike-fiddle

SIDE I, Band 7: WILLY, POOR BOY
Roy Harvey and Posey Rorer Col. 157½
The train was almost started
The conductor come by with his lamp.
And he whispered to me so kindly
'There's no room in here for a tramp.'

Chorus:
And it's play them Willy, poor boy,
And it's why don't you play?
For the one that I love so dearly
Has gone square back on me.

I asked her if she loved me
She said she loved me some,
Then she threw her arms all around me
Like the bees all around a gum.

(Chorus)
Sometimes I live in the country,
Sometimes I live in the town,
Sometimes I take a great notion
Jump into that river and drown.

(Chorus)
John-guitar and voice
Mike-violin

SIDE I, Band 8: RED ROCKING CHAIR
Charlie Monroe - Vi. 21-0145. Also see Sugar Babe-
"Doc" Boggs-Bruns. 118 (01), FA 253.
Ain't got no use for your red rocking chair,
I ain't got no sugar baby now,
I ain't got no honey baby now.

Who'll rock the cradle, who'll sing the song
Who'll rock the cradle when I'm gone
It's who'll rock the cradle when I'm gone
It's I'll rock the cradle, I'll sing the song.
I'll rock the cradle when you're gone
It's I'll rock the cradle when you're gone
It's all I can do, it's all I can say,
Gonna send you to your mama next payday,
Gonna send you to your mama next payday.

I ain't got no use for your red rocking chair
I ain't got no sugar baby now,
Lord I ain't got no sugar baby now.

John-guitar
Mike-violin

SIDE I, Band 9: HOLD THAT WOODPILE DOWN
Uncle Dave Macon - Voc. 5151
Saw my love the other night,
Hold the woodpile down,
Everything wrong, and nothing was right,
Hold the woodpile down,
Gave her a little kiss to make her happy,  
Hold the woodpile down,  
(she) gave me a little love lick an' in came her  
Happy,  
Hold the woodpile down.

**CHORUS:**
But I was a-traveling, traveling,  
As long as the world goes round,  
For the backyard shine on the Georgia line.  
Hold the woodpile down.

Come to town the other night, Hold etc.  
Heard a little noise, seen a little right,  
Police running and jumping all around,  
Load of moonshine done come to town.

(Chorus)

Storekeeper swallowed a nickle one day  
Run him 'most crazy, I must say,  
Now listen real good an I'll tell you what its about,  
He's a nickle in and a nickle out.

(Chorus)

Down in the packing house, stole a ham,  
Folks don't know how bad I am,  
Carried it home and I laid in on the shelf,  
Just so bad, I'm scared of myself.

(Chorus)

I love my wife, and I love my baby,  
Love my biscuits sopped in gravy,  
Carry my dice to throw my passes,  
Love them flapjacks sopped in molasses.

(Chorus)

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

**SIDE II, Band 1: THREE MEN WENT A-HUNTING**

Byrd Moore and his Hotshots, Col. 15496

Three men went a-hunting and something they did find  
They come upon a porcupine and that they left behind  
The Irishman said it was a porcupine and the  
Scotchman he said nay  
The Welshman said it was a pin cushion with the pins  
Stuck in the wrong way

Three men went a-hunting  
And something they did find  
They come upon a toad-frog  
And that they left behind  
The Irishman said it was a toad-frog  
And the Scotchman he said nay  
The Welshman said it was a jay bird  
With the feathers worn away

Three men went a-hunting  
And something they did find  
They come upon Norton  
And that they left behind  
The Irishman said it was Norton  
And the Scotchman he said nay  
The Welshman said it's the end of the world  
Let's go back the other way

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

**SIDE II, Band 2: JOHNSON BOYS**

Grant Brothers and their Music - Col. 15460; Al Hopkins and his Bucklebusters "Banjo by Charles Bowman and Jack Reedy" - Bruns. 179

Have you heard the many a story,  
Told by old and young with joy,  
About the many deeds of daring  
That was done by the Johnson boys.

**CHORUS:**
Hop up pretty girls don't be afraid (4)  
The Johnson boys were boys of honor,  
They knew how to court the maids,  
They knew how to hug and kiss them,  
Hop up pretty girls don't be afraid.

(Chorus)

They were lads of skill and courage  
And their sight was very far,  
And they joined their country's service  
In that awful civil war.

(Chorus)

They were scouts in the rebels' army  
And were known far and wide,  
When the Yankees saw them coming,  
They throw down their guns and hide.

(Chorus)

John-5-string banjo  
Tom -guitar and tenor voice  
Mike-fiddle and lead voice

**SIDE II, Band 3: HOT CORN**

Asa Martin and Ray Hobbs-Champion 45065. Also see  
Barnyard Banjo Picking - Stringbean. Cullman Records  
(Nashville, Tenn.) 8416 (CP-2366)  
Also see Leadbelly-Green Corn.

Upstairs, downstairs, out in the kitchen (3)  
Met an old cook just a-reeling and a-pitching, Yes sir.
CHORUS:
Hot corn, cold corn, bring along a dem john (3)

And when she saw her true lover coming, 
Seeing no harm had been done to him, 
She threw herself against his bosom, 
Saying, "Here is the prize that you have won."

Mike-guitar and voice

SIDE II, Band 5: THE MAN WHO WROTE HOME SWEET HOME
NEVER WAS A MARRIED MAN

Charlie Parker and Mack Woolbright - Col. 15236

Man gets up early in the morn, 
Leaves his wife in bed 
She lies there as the kids wake up and cry, get up 
And cook some bread 
Let me tell you a thing or two, 
a woman like that won't never do

CHORUS:
And the man that wrote the Home Sweet Home 
Never was a married man 
He never had no loving wife 
To greet him with a frying pan 
She'll meet you at the door when you go to come in 
And knock you down with a rolling pin 
And the man that wrote the Home Sweet Home 
Never was a married man

Man comes in at dinner time hungry and he wants to eat. 
Finds his wife piled up in the bed, 
young child, 
He gets so mad that he tears his hair, 
Says, "I can't be but one man's bride; 
A married man 
I can't be but one man's bride; 
No man on earth could her betray.

CHORUS:
And the man that wrote the Home Sweet Home 
Never was a married man 
He never had no loving wife 
To greet him with a frying pan 
She'll meet you at the door when you go to come in 
And knock you down with a rolling pin 
And the man that wrote the Home Sweet Home 
Never was a married man

Man comes in from work at night tired and he goes to bed. 
Baby lying there in the cradle screaming loud enough to wake the Lord. 
He'll sit and rock for about an hour and never a hand to help prepare. 

John-guitar and lead voice 
Mike-banjo and tenor voice

SIDE II, Band 6: SAL GOT A MEATSKIN

Clifford Brothers, Bill and Cliff (Carlisle Bros.) Panacord 25639

see: Richardson, Ethel p. 149, 15236

"When you get a good thing, save it, save it, 
When you get a good thing, save it if ya can! 
Sall got a meat-skin... to grease her frying pan.

John's got a sore leg so they say... 
Sall tuh' meat-skin to rub it ever' day!

Pappy shot the blind bull full of human natur...
Nammy fried a panful o' sop an' tater!"

According to Richardson's notes on the song "Fat pork is supposed to relieve inflammation and is commonly used in the "soves".

According to Cliff Carlisle, who sang the song, a meatskin is a maidenhead.

CHORUS:
Sal got a meatskin hid away (3) 
Gonna get a meatskin some day 
Sal got a meatskin don't you know 
Old Aunt Lisa told me so

Sal a - sailing on the sea 
Sal got a meatskin a-waiting for me

(CHORUS)
Went to see my Sally Gray
Found out Sal is gone away
Love my Sally more and more
Sal's got a meatskin don't you know

(CHORUS)

Reckon I love my Sally Gray
Reckon my Sal is gone away

(CHORUS)

Tom-guitar and lead voice
Mike-guitar and tenor voice

SIDExII, Band 8: FLY AROUND MY PRETTY LITTLE MISS

Samantha Bumpgardner - Col. 146-B (61716); Blue-eyed Girl - The Hillbillies (Fiddle: Elvis Alderman) Voc. 5017 (72); Frank Eble and his Tar Heel Rattlers - Col. 15210; Old Tanner and his Skillet Lickers - Col. 15709 (147204).

CHORUS:
Fly around my pretty little miss,
Fly around my daisy,
Fly around my pretty little miss,
You almost drive me crazy.

The higher up the cherry tree,
The riper grows the cherries
The more you hug and kiss the girls,
The sooner they will marry.

(CHORUS)

Coffee grows on white oak trees,
The river flows with brandy,
If I had my pretty little miss,
I'd feed her sugar candy.

(CHORUS)

Going to get some weevily wheat,
I'm going to get some barley,
Going to get some weevily wheat,
And bake a cake for Charlie.

(CHORUS)

Tom-banjo and lead voice
Mike-fiddle and tenor voice

SIDExII, Band 9: ROBBYE

Pope's Arkansas Mountaineers - Vi. 21209. Also see Fire on the Mountain.

CHORUS 1:
Sally in the garden sifting sand,
Sally upstairs with a hog-eyed man.

Sally in the garden sifting, sifting;
Sally in the garden sifting sand.

CHORUS 2:
Sally in the garden sifting, sifting;
Sally upstairs with a hog-eyed man.

Sally will your dog bite no, sir, no;
Daddy cut his biter off a long time ago.

Repeat chorus 1

John-banjo and second voice
Tom-guitar and first voice
Mike-fiddle
THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS

THE NEW AND EXCITING FOLK SONG GROUP WHICH HAS CHANGED THE STYLE OF CITY FOLK-SINGING

"A fabulous trio... they play and sing with great precision and a very high polish of virtuosity. Their performance takes on about 67 different nuances of satire all at once and rises to monumental stature in the process."

Alfred V. Frankenstein, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"Finely wrought musical archaeology—they have recaptured the past of the old-time string bands with considerable flavor and wit."...Robert Shelton, NEW YORK TIMES

"Vigorous entertainment and fine musicianship... their honest exuberance and appealing, direct stage manner might well give some better known groups pause... The boys were obviously having a good time and the audience could only do likewise. ........ CARAVAN

"The absolute best group now recording... the boys need only to put bow to fiddle and finger to string to put on the greatest group show in the folk field."

LITTLE SANDY REVIEW

"They present not only a facsimile but relive an experience with the added appreciation that time brings to historical events."

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

"Placing the NLCR in some sort of scholarly niche is not an easy problem. Their record serves as a constant reminder that we still know very little of the nature of oral tradition." Univ. of California.... WESTERN FOLKLORE

"More than an entertaining program of folk music... they are once again playing and singing the music of the mountaineer who farmed and worked in the coal mine."... CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

TIME, JULY 11, 1960

The New Lost City Ramblers, a trio of college men, sing a brand of hillbilly known as "Blue Grass." Born in Kentucky, the style calls for a complex string accompaniment—in this case on five-string banjo, fiddle and guitar—and a frenetically fast vocal line unreeled to a foot-slopping accompaniment.

FA2396 THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS (Vol. 1); an exciting new folk group in a remarkable re-creation of old-timey tunes, incl. Battleship of Maine, Brown's Ferry Blues, Don't Let Your Deal Go Down, others. Notes and song texts. 1 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay record..............

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FA 2399 THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS, Vol. 4; songs by Tom Paley, Mike Seeger, John Cohen: Run Mountain, Take Me Back to the Sweet Sunny South, Black Jack David, Carter Blues, The Coo Coo Bird, Molly Put 'em in the Kettle On, Have a Peach Here Tonight, Crow Black Chicken, Clancy, Billy Grimes the Rover, Frankie Silver, Stackerlee, Soldier's All I Crave, Keep The Best Man, The Miller's Will, The Story that the Crow Told Me, Songs and note texts. 1 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay record

FM5163 AMERICAN MOONSHINE AND PROHIBITION. Songs and played by THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS. Virginia Bootlegger, Kentucky Bootlegger, Bootlegger's Story, The Drunken Driver, Moonshiner, Drunkard's Hiccup, I Saw a Man at the Close of Day, Goodbye Old Boozie, Prohibition is a Failure, The Old Home Brew, I've Still Got 99 Whiskey, Seller, The Redcoat, Al Smith for President, The Intoxicated Rat, Wreck on the Highway, Down to the Stillhouse to Get a Little Cider. Notes and song texts. 1 12-inch 33-1/3 rpm longplay record...