BLUES WITH BIG BILL BROONZY · SONNY TERRY · BROWNIE McGHEE

IN A WFMT CHICAGO PRESENTATION: STUDS TERKEL INTERVIEWER
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KEYS TO THE HIGHWAY
RED RIVER BLUES
CROW JANE BLUES
WILLIE MAE
DAISY
LOUISE
SHUFFLE RAG
BLUES
BEAUTIFUL CITY
I'M GONNA TELL GOD HOW YOU TREAT ME
SINNER MAN
THE SAINTS GO MARCHIN' IN

Descriptive Notes are inside pocket

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3817
WFMT - CHICAGO - PRESENTS

THE BLUES

WITH STUDS TERKEL INTERVIEWING

big bill broonzy
sonny terry
brownie mcghee
His objective
As the session’s conferencier, don’t live it, it did of the uniqueness of each man’s life.
Brownie human beings has the blues the same experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you threw us the uniqueness of each man’s blues as a reflection breakfast It me.

Sonny authentic.

On lungs. He had a hunch that do a walked in a neighborhood that was running out. "Louise." Was it really his? Came the simple reply: "Sure I wrote it. But if a fellow do better with it, I give it to him." (Certainly there were many such beneficiaries, Memphis Slim, Jazz Gillum, Lil Green, Memphis Minnie, Sonny himself. Did not John Hammond attribute Basie’s smash hit “Every Day I Got The Blues” to Bill?)

After the introductory “Keys To The Highway”, each sang a cradle blues, the earliest he remembered. There followed women blues...women in and out of reach. Bill’s “Willie Mae.” Brownie’s “Daisy.”

I was callin’ her but she wouldn’t answer when I called...

"She was with me, that’s why”, chortled Bill. Sonny sang of “Louise”, who “made me walk from Chicago, yeah, to the Gulf of Mexico.”

Sonny implicitly questioned Bill’s authorship of that one. Bill seriously acknowledged his friend’s query. So many others had sung ‘Louise.’ Was it really his? Came the simple reply: “Sure I wrote it. But if a fellow do better with it, I give it to him.” (Certainly there were many such beneficiaries, Memphis Slim, Jazz Gillum, Lil Green, Memphis Minnie, Sonny himself. Did not John Hammond attribute Basie’s smash hit “Every Day I Got The Blues” to Bill?)

Now Bill let his guitar do the talking as Sonny and Brownie murmured appreciatively and joined in. Came the idea of improvising a blues on the spot, lyrics and all. Each of the three took a whack at a verse, singing out his own thoughts; individual differences, tribal similarities; one song, one story...

Sonny: “Well, I started walkin’, Lord, till my feet got soakin’ wet....

Bill: “I feel like a broken wagon, Lord, with a broken wheel....”

Brownie: “Well, some people thinks I’m happy, but they sure don’t know my mind....

Bill: “goodbye, baby, this is my last goodbye to you....”
Thoughts turned to spirituals. Again, Bill took the lead. "Blues is a steal from spirituals." His friends agreed. As they sang these ancestral songs, they seemed closer to one another than ever. Sonny began the sequence with "Beautiful City." He had learned it from his mother. "...twelve gates to the city, hallelujah...."

Brownie had something he wanted to say; about the subsurface meaning of so many of the spirituals. Its sub-talk aspects. "When you wanted to say something you couldn't come up and say it to the bosses or caretaker. Only way we could talk to them was through song. We couldn't walk up and tell them what we were planning. I'm gonna tell God how you treat me...they didn't mean just that. As long as it had references to God, it was okay. But it really meant...the way you treatin' me, I'll get even with you."

"I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days...."

Bill remembered one..."about ten or twelve of us used to sing this one." It was the first time I had ever heard him sing "Hush, Somebody's Callin' You." It was a most stirring spiritual, chilling and soaring at the same time. Not even the loftiest of Mahalia Jackson's old Apollos moved me as much as this. Old Testament justice, poetically inexorable, was being meted out to all the phonies who through all of mankind's two-timing history had taken all the Bill Broonzy's...."Oh, you sinners man, oh, you liar man, oh, you hypocrite, oh, you thieving men, oh, you gamblin' man...somebody's callin' you and it sound like the voice of the Lord." And by the same token, a good man was being called; no saint by a long shot. A flesh and blood man of frailties as well as strengths; rare in that he recognized devils and saints in all of us, including himself.

At 5:30 in the morning, August 15, 1958, Big Bill Broonzy died. It thundered, rained and there was lightning in Chicago that morning. Bill was just passing through one more storm.

Dr. Stanley Rigler of Billings Hospital, who attended Bill during his last days, wrote a hurried letter the following day. "Although I wasn't privileged to call him my friend, I became truly fond of him - especially during these last few months. Though his body was ravaged by disease, his mind heavy with pain, he somehow retained a spirit which made the task of those ministering to him doubly wonderful and at the same time the more awesome. I have wondered what set him apart from other sick men. I suppose it was his calm acceptance of the inevitable, his ability to rise above the unhappy moment with the faith that tomorrow must be brighter."

This session was especially satisfying to Bill in that he spent it in the company of friends.

**TEXT OF THE RECORD**

**SIDE I, Band 2:**

STUDS: Keys of the Highway. It's about 12:40 in the morning. This would be Tuesday morning, about the right time for the blues. Well, Bill, what would you say the blues is?

BIG BILL: For a fact, I'll tell you the truth, Studs, it's a natural thing that no two human beings have the blues the same way. So, to me, I think it would be a good idea to ask Brownie what he think the blues, and then Sonny Terry, and then me. I can tell you now what I think about it. Blues, is a natural fact, is something that a, a fellow lives. If you don't live it, you don't have it.

STUDS: "If you don't live it, you don't have it.." That's what Charlie Parker said about jazz. You gotta live it. Brownie, what's the blues to you?

BROWNIE: Well, the blues to me, if I live it I feel it, I sing it, and I try to play it. But, really, I've never had the blues.

STUDS: You've never had the blues?

BROWNIE: Never had them.

STUDS: You mean, you've never felt low?

BROWNIE: Well, if that's what you call the blues, I've got 'em now. (Laughs)

STUDS: Sonny Terry, what's blues to you?

SONNY: Oh, I'll tell you the truth, Studs, I'll tell you what ...I feel the blues, when I don't have no money, nothin' to eat, walkin' the street, oh, that's how the blues, I mean, anything that has to do ...

STUDS: when the blues suddenly, actually happens to you, and it comes out in a song you sing or the music you play that's pretty much the idea.

BIG BILL: Well, frankly, I think, I think that the blues is the kind of thing that you don't have to be without everything to have the blues, it's thing, because I've had as high as two and three hundred dollars in my pocket and was in a place where I couldn't get food, and couldn't get nothing to eat, it's true, because I didn't know how to ask for it. I was in a neighborhood that was in France, and the people didn't understand me, and I didn't understand them. So I couldn't tell them what I wanted, and I didn't get it. But the lacking of money ...I had the money. I just couldn't get what I wanted. That was the main thing. And the same with a lot of people in the South. -- Lot of people in Mississippi, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, in those places, they sing the blues and they feel it. But if you go down there they're livin' a darn sight better than a lot of Negro's in Chicago and New York today. They got their own homes. They live the way they want to live.
they got plenty of food, and everything. I betcha they got the money. But I drove down there in big Cadillacs, and when I rode in the thing, there was five Cadillacs parked side of mine, and they didn't come from Chicago, neither.

STUDS: So, you mean, it doesn't matter where you live or how much money you can still have the blues.

BIG BILL: Yes, because they actually singing about the actual life of them, the same as me. I learnt how to sing and play the blues from my uncle who was a slave. And till today I know from what he's told me that they really, they really did punish, they suffered, the life they had to live, and the way they had to work, and the pay that they draw. You know, cause it wouldn't enough for them to halfway live, off of their salaries. They had to just live the best they could. So therefore, that's where the blues actually come from. From those things. People singing about the conditions of life.

STUDS: Bill, you yourself originally came from a place in Mississippi...

BILL: Yeah, I was born in Scotts, Mississippi.

STUDS: ...and then Arkansas. And Brownie, you came from:

BROWNIE: Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

STUDS: Tennessee, and Sonny, you came from...

SONNY: Durham, North Carolina.

BROWNIE: But, when I said I never had the blues, the blues has always had me. They've always had me. The blues was in the cradle with me, rocking. I've never had the blues, the blues had me. My cradle would rock without anybody rockin'.

STUDS: What about that blues that rocks you? That cradle blues? The earliest one you remember.

SIDE I, Band 3: RED RIVER BLUES

BROWNIE: Well, the earliest one I remember, the first blues I ever heard, you understand, they called it. The Red River Blues, some called it, well it wasn't me... The Brownie Blues was a thing and I just heard it. When I first heard it it was called the Brownie Blues. Now we play everything behind that same riff...

BIG BILL: How come it have to be named by you and you wasn't born.

BROWNIE: Well, it wasn't me. Maybe that's where I got the name from. Which-a-way, which-a-way, does that blood red river run, which-a-way, which-a-way, does that blood red river run, Runs from my back window, straight to the rising sun.

Had the blues from my childhood, they're gonna follow me until I die, Had the blues from my childhood, they're gonna follow me till I die, I've had the blues so bad, til I couldn't do nothin' but cry.

STUDS: It's just a blues. And it had you.

BROWNIE: That's right. Blues had me.

SIDE I, Band 4: CROW JANE BLUES

STUDS: Well, Sonny. Sanders Terry.

SONNY: That's right.

STUDS: What was your cradle blues? What's the earliest one you remember?

SONNY: Well, I have three or four of them here. Oh, I can play one to let you hear, "Crow Jane Blues".

Crow Jane, Crow Jane, don't hold your head so high, You realize baby, you gonna lay down and die.

I done told you Baby, And I ain't gonna tell you no more, If I tell you again, I'm gonna bear my old forty-four.

I feel like snapping, my pistol in your face, Some lonely grave will be your resting place.

I love you Crow Jane, and I ain't gonna tell no lie, It's the day you quit me, that's the day you die.

STUDS: Crow Jane did all that. Where'd you learn to play the harmonica that way, Sonny?

SONNY: Oh, I learned. My father, he used to play the harmonica, you know. So he used to come in from work with his harmonica and all. I was a little kid, about seven, eight, nine years old.

STUDS: This was in North Carolina?

SONNY: Uh, huh. My father, you know, like I held the harmonica in my hand like that, he could hold it in his mouth and just play it.

STUDS: Without his hands?

SONNY: Without putting his hands on it.

STUDS: He'd play the harmonica without hands?

SONNY: Uh-huh.

STUDS: He just had that feeling...

SONNY: So he didn't, you know, he just done it around home. He didn't do it for..., professionally.

SIDE I, Band 5: WILLIE MAY

STUDS: Well, Bill, you just came from England. What would you say the trend is there... any particular kind of blues they like the best, that you sang in England.

BIG BILL: Well, the main thing about it is, if you, if you...if you get up and explain what you gonna play the people will sit quietly and listen to what so ever you sing. And, then they'll take it from there. And it's no country I've been in in my life that people don't have the blues. Course they have it a different way. They have it through wars, and through the different destructions and things that we don't have here. And therefore, they don't have the same way---have the blues the same way that I do. So I'm singing it the way that I have it, and therefore it never happened to them.
STUDS: Is there any particular blues that you've found is very popular there, of all the songs that you have?

BIG BILL: Well, I've, yes, I've got one that I do play over there for them they all like and they understand it because I'm singing about woman trouble, and I think every man born ever had woman trouble.

STUDS: Doesn't matter what language he speaks.

BIG BILL: I got a girl named Willie May, and she lives in the low, low lands

I got a gal named Willie May, and she lives in the low, low lands,
Lord the way I got that woman, I declare I stole her from a man.

All my life, baby you know I've had to roam,
All my life, Willie May, you know I've had to roam,
Lord, just on the count of, me breaking up one poor man's home.

Willie May, Willie May,
Willie May, don't you hear Bill calling you
Lord, if I don't get my Willie May, there's no other woman will do.

When I get to thinking about Willie May, cold chill creeps up and down my spine,
When I get to thinking about Willie May, cold chills creeps up and down my spine,
Sometimes I wish I was dead, Willie May, you know I'm afraid of dying.

I'm going to leave here, Baby and I'm going on down the line,
I'm going to leave here, Willie May, and I'm going on down the line,
You know I don't do nothing here, Willie May, but grieving and crying.
You know I don't, don't do nothing here, Willie May, but grieve and cry.

Willie May.

STUDS: Willie May. Well on the subject of women, since they've been, I guess, the basis of most of the blues, you know, so let's sort of wander around, and Brownie...

SIDE I, Band 6: DAISY

BROWNIE: Yeah, I think the first woman blues I ever did wasn't about the woman...was Daisy. I met her, and I was calling her too, but she wouldn't answer me when I called her.

BIG BILL: She was with me, that's why.

BROWNIE: I'll try to think of her now, Daisy, it's been a long time ago.

I got me, a little woman, she's every day the same,
Reason I love that woman, because Daisy is her name.

Well, you know, I love Daisy, love her with all my heart, Gonna lose my mind, thinking someday that we'll have to part.

Daisy, Daisy, don't you hear me call your name,
I ain't calling you so loud, but, I'm calling you so nice and plain.

I went to see, Daisy one morning, and her doorbell would not ring,
Started to walk in the streets, I'm calling my baby's name.

Daisy, oh Daisy, Daisy, oh Daisy.
What in the world, baby? What in the world are you trying to do?
Trying to mistreat me, Daisy, true as this boy wants to be to you.

Daisy, Daisy, Daisy, oh, Daisy,
Don't you hear me? hear me calling your name.
I ain't calling you so loud, but I'm calling you so nice and plain.

Daisy, Daisy, Daisy, oh Daisy, well I ain't gonna call you no more.
Well, the next time I call you baby, I'm gonna scream and break down that door.

STUDS: Sonny, here Big Bill and Brownie have been singing a woman's blues. Have you got one in that general category?

SIDE I, Band 7: LOUISE

SONNY: I'll tell you one I got. Bill, Bill wrote this song. Louise.

STUDS: Louise?

SONNY: Yeah. Okay.

Oh, Louise, you the sweetest girl I know,
Oh, Louise, honey you're the sweetest girl I know,
Well, you made me walk from Chicago, to the Gulf of Mexico.

Louise, you got ways, like a rolling stone,
When she leave a man, he had to grieve and moan,
Oh, Louise honey why don't you hurry home.
Well, you know I ain't had no loving, Lord since Louise been gone.

Got me a gal they call Lola, she treated me nice and kind,
I don't care what she do, Louise on my mind.
Louise ain't so good looking, and her hair is not red,
But she cook my breakfast, and brought it to the bed, I said:

Oh, Louise, honey why don't you ...... Well I ain't had no loving, Lord, since Louise been gone.

STUDS: Louise.

SONNY: Did you write it, Bill?

BILL: Well, I'll tell you the main thing about that thing, yes, I did write it, I'm the first one recorded it.

SONNY: Well, so many people claimed it, but you the, you're the headliner.

BILL: It ain't just that one only, that originally I did start, but if a fellow do better with it, I give it to him.

SIDE I, Band 8: SHUFFLE DAG (BIG BILL BROONZY)
SONNY: Now, what, uh, what is this gonna be, now?
BILL: Just a blues, just put some verses... you make it up as you go along.
BROWNIE: One more, once...
BROWNIE: Well, I looked down the road, just as far as I could see, Well, I looked down the road, just as far as I could see, Well, you know, the blues had my woman, well, that sho worry me. (Well, I was low)
Well, here I am in Chicago, and I'm doing fairly well, Here I am in Chicago, seem like I'm doing fairly well, Well, when I leave this city, ain't no one going to tell. (Well, I got it now)
Well, I started a walking, till my feet got soaking wet, I started a walking down the road, Lord till my feet got soaking wet, Well, I ain't trying little girl called Louises, Lord Sonny quit walking ahead.
Well, my mama told me, Lord, when I was a little child, Oh, my mama told me, lord when I was a child.
Well, she said Sonny Terry, you too big a devil, to be so Foolish and wild.
(Watch out, Big Bill)
BILL: I ain't gonna tell nobody, baby, but that way I feel, Yeah, I ain't gonna tell nobody, but the way I feel, Yes, I feel like a broken wagon, Lord with a broken wheel.
Sometimes I don't know, just where I'm gonna wind up at, Yes, sometimes I don't know, baby where I'm going to wind up at, Yes, I got a two dollar bill baby, and I'm wearing it right here in my hat.
You don't believe I'm singing, Big Bill, just look at the hole I'm in, If you don't believe I'm singing, Bill just look for the hole I'm in, Well, if you don't believe I love the woman I got,
Look what a dog-gone fool I've been.
Well, some people thinks I'm happy, but they shore don't know my mind, Well, you may think I'm happy, but you shore don't know my mind.
Just because you see a smile on my face, my heart could be beating on the time.
(Sonny boy,)
SONNY: Why she say she don't love me, Big Bill, you know this ain't no getting along, Why say no loving, oh, you know this ain't no getting along, Everything you can do, Big Bill, she will say you're wrong.
Well, I told you baby, ain't gonna tell you no more, I done told you, woman, Lord I ain't gonna tell you no more, Babe, you know you're gonna reap, hey, just what you sew.
BILL: Goodbye, this is my last goodbye to you, Goodbye, my baby, this is my last goodbye to you, I don't care whether you're drunk or sober little girl, Big Bill don't care what you do.
STUDS: Well, if, uh, someone listening right now to WMOT had never heard the blues before, he sure heard it now. This then is... now how did this come into being. Here, Bill just made a suggestion that you start singing Sonny, and Brownie you sing, and Bill would. Now... Now, this was not—we just got to together, met tonight—now this was a song you'd never sung before together. How do you explain this?

SIDE II, Band 2:
BILL: Well, that's one reason I spoke while ago. One subject I made while ago that anybody can that want to sing the blues sing it the way he feel. Don't try to sing like me, don't try to sing like Brownie, don't try to sing like Son Terry. That's just to show you the three of us here, because... Fact of the business, I know it was born in me. 'Course a lot of people, they pick it up. Well, I don't blame them. And I like it, to hear a fellow, and to see a fellow, know a guy that picked up something that's really worthwhile because it helps, it helps the guy like me that's trying to carry the blues in places where the people don't know anything about them. In fact of the business, there's a lot of guys that can get in places where I'll never get in. And I really like to see them do it. And just like we sit here now, we could sit here now and sing five thousand blues because only three of us here now. We knows it. See. When he sing it, when he starts it, then it come to me. And it comes to Sonny.
STUDS: And Brownie was singing it...
BILL: And Brownie start it...
STUDS: ...suddenly it came to Sonny's mind...
BILL: Yeah.
STUDS: Then it came to your mind.
BILL: And when he finish I got something already set up.
SONNY: That's right.
BILL: You know what I mean. And, uh, that's the way it goes, because you feel it. You know, from one another. Which it don't happen to all musicians, though.

SIDE II, Band 3:
BILL: You know what I think would be a good idea. It's a point that I really want to prove.
STUDS: What's that?
BILL: That, blues is a steal from spirituals. And now, I want to, if it's possible, if Brownie will do it, and Sonny will do it, I want each one of them to, to play a spiritual, any one they want to play.
(Ookay, sure)
STUDS: You mean, you want to show the connection here between the spirituals and the blues. How one came from the other.
BILL: I know the spirituals was first.
(That's right, that's right)
BROWNIE: I have to agree with you. When we get to mine, I'm going to tell you about mine.

SIDE II, Band 4: BEAUTIFUL CITY

STUDS: Well, Sonny, do you want to try one?

SONNY: Yeah, I'll do one. Beautiful City.

STUDS: It was sort of a double talk.

BROWNIE: Double talk. In the spiritual I'm Gonna Sit Down at the Welcome Table One of These Days, I'm Gonna Tell God How You Treat Me One of These Days. They didn't mean, you know, that. They was just singing that as long as it had reference to God, why nobody thought anything about it.

STUDS: But they really meant, uh, the way you're treating me.

BROWNIE: The way you're treating me, I'll get even with you one of these days. And, ah, those songs was just song that I remember, and they were talking about it, how they would talk through songs, and maybe my feeling comes out sometimes, now, when I'm creating, or writing, or dreaming, or thinking, one of those things. And that's one of my songs that I like, I'm Gonna Tell God How You Treat Me One of These Days.

STUDS: I'm a gonna tell God how you treat me, I'm gonna tell God how you treat me one of these days, hallelujah; I'm gonna tell God how you treat me, I'm gonna tell God how you treat me one of these days.

SONNY: I was a kid, bout ten or twelve years old. My mother used to sing it in the church.

STUDS: Sonny. Ah, where did you first hear that?

SONNY: The Beautiful City?

STUDS: Yeah, the spiritual.

SONNY: I was a kid, bout ten or twelve years old. My mother used to sing it in the church.

STUDS: Brownie, there's one you said you wanted to talk about.

BROWNIE: Well, I said I would talk about it. I heard so much talk about it. I didn't know what it meant, to ah, running away, and when you wanted to say something you couldn't just walk up and say it. So Bill said, to the bosses, or to the caretakers, or the keepers, and I'd always hear my people sing the songs and they'd say well, that's the easiest way we can talk to them. Is through songs. We can't just walk up and, ah, tell them we are going to leave in the morning. We couldn't leave. But fortunately, though, my great-grand parents lived to be a hundred and one and a hundred and seven. And I happened to see some of them, around that age. And ah, they say when we got ready to say anything, we didn't have to. We couldn't just walk up and tell them, ah, what we was planning, what we was thinking. When we'd sing it they would come up and listen to us. And we'd talk to them through songs.
Oh, you hypocrite, somebody's calling you,
Hypocrite, somebody's calling you,
Hypocrite, somebody's calling you,
It sounds like the voice of the Lord.

When the saints go marching in,
When the saints go marching in,
When the saints go marching in.

Oh, Lord I promised her I'd meet her,
Oh, Lord I promised her I'd meet her,
Oh, Lord I promised her I'd meet her.

Oh, you liars, somebody's calling,
Oh, you liars, somebody's calling,
Oh, you liars, somebody's calling.

SUNDAY: Oh, when they come, to blow that horn,
Oh, when they come, to blow that horn,
Oh, when they come, to blow that horn.

Oh, when the sun, refuse to shine,
Oh, when the sun, refuse to shine,
Oh, when the sun, refuse to shine.

SONNY: I'll, thank you very much, for a very

BROWNIE: I want to thank you very much, for a very

STUDS: Bill was the co-host tonight, thank you

STUDS: Bill was the co-host tonight, thank you

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