THE NEW LOST CITY RAMBLERS with
COUSIN EMMY
The New Lost City Ramblers met Cousin Emmy in person for the first time at Disneyland, California, in 1961. She was performing at Country & Western Night there along with Roger Miller (as of then, undiscovered) and other West Coast country singers. We only knew her music from a Decca album of 1947, which had been edited by Alan Lomax; and many of her songs from that album had become an accepted part of the folk song revival — although none of us knew much about Emmy. Our images were created from her clear country singing and good banjo playing in songs such as BOWLING GREEN, JOHNNY BOOKER, SINGLE GIRL, and FREE LITTLE BIRD. The impression given from the album was of a real rural country girl by way, surrounded by scenes of quilting bees and square dancers — under a little scene as Kentucky Mountain Ballads. Cousin Emmy, at Disneyland that night, was dressed in a white sequined dress, with a necklace that sparkled to the back row, high heels, and blonde hair piled on in the latest of fashion. Her delivery was like Sophie Tucker from the country, and she was introduced as the "first hillbilly star to own a Cadillac." Her music was as we knew it, but instead of coming from a farm kitchen it was coming from a spangled jukebox.

According to her songbook, Cousin Emmy was born in 1903, in a log cabin, 18 miles from any railroad, in Barren County, Kentucky. Her childhood was in the best "big-family-struggling-for-existence" tradition. She was always a show-off, as she remembers. When her ma would leave her in the tobacco patch and tell her to do one row, she'd dance and slap her legs and entertain the other seven kids. But then she'd work.

After getting a few dollars saved up, she went 135 miles to Louisville to radio station WHAS, but couldn't get anybody to listen to her; so she went on back home and prayed some more and kept right on entertaining at bean hullings and pie suppers and quilting parties, and she made her living by making personal appearances. Some days she'd drive five hundred miles and then get back just in time to make the early-morning 5:15 program. All this time she was still praying that she would get a sponsor. After five years she went to Consolidated Drugs. She was sold primarily for Consolidated Drugs, and she was sent to radio station KMOX in St. Louis. Cousin Emmy and the Kentucky Mountain Ballads, the top act in box office, fan mail, and commercial. She was chosen "Jeannie" by the Art Museum of St. Louis as the most perfect singer of mountain ballads.

Although she was famous throughout the South and Midwest, Cousin Emmy was never recorded. She recorded "RUBY, RUBY, RUBY, RUBY, DERCCA, and the album Kentucky Mountain Ballads. Yet her work and her reputation continue to be felt. We often meet country musicians who remember Cousin Emmy very vividly — hearing radio and early-morning breakfasts. She's always been most impressive; she's an unselfish person worked with others in the business to young musicians. Grandpa Jones taught him how he was inspired by the recordings of Cousin Emmy and then went on to play the five-string banjo while working at WVVA with Cousin Emmy.

Cousin Emmy appeared in a few Hollywood movies like Swing in the Saddle and Under Western Sky, and has been living in the Los Angeles area for years, raising her adopted children and entertaining at the country music clubs. The making of this album for Folkways is the product of five years of arranging and convincing Cousin Emmy to record again, to make her music available to today's young people. During the last half of this she has worked with The New Lost City Ramblers at the Ash Grove in L.A., at the Newport Folk Festival, and toured Europe. All of her old recordings have been out of print for many years (a few were available on song links in the past). More than half the material on this album is previously unreleased. It only touches the surface of her seemingly endless collection of old-time songs. As she puts it, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Cousin Emmy, in performance, is the seeming contradiction of backwoods songs and uptown delivery. The unique thing about Cousin Emmy is that she holds the old-time continuity while adapting her presentation to whatever style seems sensible and appropriate. Cousin Emmy was born in 1903, and is the last of the generation of people who grew up with the songs that are now considered part of the folk. She is now a part of the present generation of people who are making folk music. She is a part of the present generation of people who are making folk music. She has a fresh, strong, and honest voice, and an ear for the melody and harmony that are the essence of folk music. Her singing style is as fresh and honest as the music itself.

Beyond her background in rural Kentucky and her career on the radio, Cousin Emmy has maintained an abiding belief in her life on the stage. Like the most dedicated artist, she comes to life in front of the audience. She may be tired or feeling low, but the electric potential of the stage is her resurrection and expression. When she tells the audience over and over again, "You're the love of my life, you're the love of my life, picking heart," there is no hypocrisy about it. Her music is her love of life which for her is onstage.

**Side 1**

**Band 1 — OLD TIM BROOKS**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This is a showcases of a widespread song of an actual horse race which took place in Louisville, Ky., in 1878. On record one can hear the old tenor soloist sing, by Bill Monroe, also by the Stanley Bros., RUN MOLLIE RUN by Henry Thomas, TIMBROOK BILL and JR. JIM, and OLD TIM BROOKS by The Carver Boys (her cousins). All the verses are available in OLD STEWALL, SKEBBWALL, OLD KIMBELL, and AIN'T THAT SKIPPIN' FLYING by the Allen Bros.

**Band 2 — A HOME IN OLD KENTUCKY**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This is a comic song on the virtues of Kentucky. Ed Kahn reports a similar text from an old book of poems from Kentucky. No other reference is available.

**Band 3 — I'M GOING CROSS THE SEA**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This is a song with some good work by Cousin Emmy stylistically to the mountains of eastern Kentucky. Although this song is virtually unknown on record in folk song collections, it is closely related to mountain banjo tunes like SHOUT LULLY and it is banjo tuned here in GCGB, but Emmy keeps the second string tuned to E. Also included is a record of this song from Cousin Emmy (via the NLCR).

**Band 4 — PRETTY LITTLE MISS OUT IN THE GARDEN**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

Although this is one of the most popular ballads alive in tradition today, it has seldom been recorded commercially. The theory of the song was hidden in disguise, to the faithful maiden was found also in JOEL REILLY, Bill Monroe's most recent version of this story takes place in cowboy country. The Stanley Brothers recorded this song but it is banjo tuned here in GCGB, but Emmy keeps the second string tuned to E. Also included is a record of this song from Cousin Emmy (via the NLCR).

**Band 5 — LITTLE JOE**

*Arr. Southern Publishing Co. (ASCAP)*

This sentimental song fits in with a whole school of American songs of self-pity, which flourished before the turn of the century and continue in the old-time folk repertoire. It is reported in Randolph's Ozark collection and has been recorded commercially.

**Side 2**

**Band 6 — RUBY, ARE YOU MAD AT YOUR MAN?**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This is an early 1900s song, written by Cousin Emmy, which is one of the most popular and widely recorded. It is said that Cousin Emmy recorded a version of this song in GCGB, but Emmy keeps the second string tuned to E. Also included is a record of this song from Cousin Emmy (via the NLCR).

**Band 7 — DANCE ALL NIGHT WITH A BOTTLE IN YOUR HAND**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

A popular dance tune is given the full treatment as Emmy fiddles it and shouts out some dance calls. In live performances she also dances along at the same time.

**Band 8 — LOST JOHN**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This wild and lonesome mountain-harp tune has always been a favorite among folk performers. It is seldom mentioned in the folk song collections, but lives on in the tradition of performance and style, rather than as tune and text. The harp imitates the excitement of the dog chasing a fox or an escaped prisoner.

Emmy's text here covers both, Cousin Emmy plays the mouth harp.

**Band 9 — CAT'S GOT THE MEASLES**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

This is a peculiar type of blues tune, found on an old reel of both white and black sources, and finally landed a spot on WHAS. It is a remarkable tune, classified with the traditional and ethnic singers. Her kind of vigor has kept a tradition alive — and out of the hands of the purists.

**Band 10 — MOTHER'S GRAVE**

*Arr. Cousin Emmy*

A touching, sentimental song by Cousin Emmy.

**Band 11 — CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER**

*Words and Music by Cousin Emmy*

Another rare early song, unencountered in the folk song literature, and recorded a few times commercially — by the Carter Family as IF ONE WON'T ANOTHER WILL, and on an unidentified early hillbilly record, with different words. DREAD SCENES OF WINTER. Texas Gladden, from Virginia, sings it on Asch Records as DARK SCENES OF WINTER. Mike Seeger plays the auto harp.

**Band 12 — GRAVEYARD**

*Words and Music by Cousin Emmy*

In this tune by Cousin Emmy, the banjo is tuned to F#ED. This unusual sound is the mountain music equivalent of the banjo tuned from G to G#. Another version by the Carter Family on REMINISCENCE OF TRAIN 45.

**Band 13 — JOHNNY BOOKER**

*Words and Music by Cousin Emmy*

This song is probably based on an old minstrel-show tune. The last verse is also found in TEN BILL, and is also found in verse of young children.

**Band 14 — SCOT TOM KITTY PUSS**

*By permission of John Lair*

Cousin Emmy learned this song from John Lair of the Tentfly Valley Barn Dance, a country radio jamboree which has been going in Kentucky for many years. The song is an interesting mixture of the melodies of FROG WENT A-COURTIN' and THE CRAWDAD SONG. The chorus, "Bow and balance to me," SISTERS, an ancient Scottish song, is also included. The song is also included in the extensive catalog of TRAIN 45. There are also sea chantesys on both sides of the Atlantic called JOHNNY BOOKER, and on one old hillbilly record by Jerry Jordan carries some of the same verses with a different melody. Nonsense songs of this type have always been favorites with children.

**Band 15 — SHORTENING BREAD**

*Emmy plays this familiar square dance tune on the mouth harp. BANJO NOTES. Cousin Emmy keeps her Vega White Lady banjo tuned down at least three half tones, from C to A. The A notation was used as banjo standard many years ago. Drop-thump frailing is her basic technique, but she does use two-finger thumb lead on GRAVEYARD, a three-finger banjo tune for all through." DREAD SCENES OF WINTER.

Annotated by John Cohen.

Produced by The New Lost City Ramblers for Folkways Records, Recorded April 24, 1967, at Sound House in El Monte, California. Cousin Emmy, banjo, Tracy Schwarz, guitar; George Winston, bass; Mike Seeger, mandolin; John Cohen, guitar. The cover of this album is a painting of Cousin Emmy done with a matchstick, from the early songbook photo of her. Cover photograph courtesy of John Cohen.