MODERN TIMES

This album might well be subtitled “Rural Songs from an Industrial Society.”

As Charles Seeger, noted musicologist and professor at U.C.L.A., points out: “Industrialization...in a modern country...has...produced novel social conflicts, while the exploitation of the farmlands and the consolidation of the national economy have created a new class of urban workers.” The result has been a “revolution in the life of the people.”

The songs that reflect this theme so effectively were gathered in a large number of field recordings made by the New York City Ramblers. The commercial recordings from the 1920s include a greater number of social awareness and topical songs, and they reflect the style of present-day recordings. Too, they provide a wider range of subject matter, less limited to home-style music than those of the 1920s. The development might well be expected — it reflects the directions taken by the early mountain singers and the development of new styles in the 1930s.

Folk songs have always been composed to commemorate real life events, but the conversion of such a practice to a business most likely came with the financial success of the old Hillybilly recordings “Death of Wea York Da.” In this instance, the writer was commissioned to compose a story of the song, and the writer then arranged it on the spot, and both the song and the writer were paid. The folklorists might say that this is an example of the “old” song tradition.

With the exception of one song in this album: “The Little Lump of Coal,” taken from the Library of Congress archives (under the heading, “Folk Music in the Schools of a Highly Industrialized Society”). The song was recorded by the New York City Ramblers, and the writer who composed the songs was paid.

SIDE I

Band 1 — SHUT UP IN THE MINES OF COAL CREEK 2:50

On May 19, 1922, an explosion in the Fraterville Mine in Tennessee killed 180 and 200 men. After the communications from the trapped miners were found, the verses in this ballad can be traced back to one of the others. This beautiful version was collected by Ed Kahn, who also supplied the information. According to Mr. Kahn, the version was learned by Mrs. Elsie Lee Ward Brown from a commercial 78 rpm record. (This is probably the recording by Dick Bell.) It is sung here unaccompanied, as Mrs. Brown sang it, and reflects something of her style.

Tracy Schwarz, vocal

Band 2 — 3 DEPRESSION BLUES 3:10

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 3 — THAT LITTLE LUMP OF COAL 3:15

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 4 — UNION MAN 2:40

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 5 — GOT THE FARM LAND BLUES 3:08

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 6 — WE ARE UP AGAINST IT NOW 2:41

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 7 — FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN 2:45

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 8 — HENRY'S MOLD A 2:00

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 9 — TRUCK DRIVING MAN 2:42

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 10 — DOLLAR DOWN AND A DOLLAR A WEEK 1:55

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

SIDE II

Band 1 — DOLLAR DOWN AND A DOLLAR A WEEK 1:55

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 2 — BEAR OXIE 2:12

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 3 — FROM 40 TO 65 2:53

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 4 — PRIVATE JOHN Q. 2:02

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 5 — BEAVER'S LIE 3:06

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 6 — THE DEATH OF ELLINGTON 2:08

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 7 — TAKE THEM FOR A RIDE 2:50

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 8 — TIMBERWOLF BLUES 2:43

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Band 9 — BYE, BYE, BLACK SMOKE CHOO CHOO 2:44

This song was composed by the late Ed Sturgill and his banjo, Big Pine Records 677M-7157. The song is recorded on Folkways (FT 1016), the Kentucky songwriting singer George Davis.

Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo — Tracy Schwarz, guitar

Annotated by John Cohen, Mike Seeger and Tracy Schwarz. Cover design by Craig Mierop. Printed in USA.