

A man wearing a dark hat and a dark jacket stands in a rural, mountainous landscape. He is holding a light-colored acoustic guitar. Behind him is a wooden fence and a simple wooden building. The background shows a forested hillside and mountains under a hazy sky. The entire image has a greenish tint.

CLASSIC APPALACHIAN BLUES

from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



TEXACO

Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola

OLD GOLD

Chesterfield
SATI

APPALACHIAN BLUES

SFW CD 40198 ©© 2010 SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS

1. **Sticks McGhee** My Baby's Gone 3:45
(Granville McGhee)
2. **Big Chief Ellis with Cephas and Wiggins** Louise Blues 5:14 (Johnny Temple – J. Mayo Williams / Universal MCA Music Publishing, ASCAP)
3. **Doc Watson** Sitting on Top of the World 2:58 (Lonnie Chatmon – Walter Vinson, arr. Doc Watson / Hillgreen Music, BMI)
4. **John Jackson** Railroad Bill 3:34
(arr. John Jackson / Eyeball Music, BMI)
5. **Bill Williams** Don't Let Your Deal Go Down 2:15
6. **Pink Anderson** You Don't Know My Mind 2:36
7. **J.C. Burris** Blues around My Bed 2:54
(J.C. Burris)
8. **Gary Davis** Hesitation Blues 3:15
(arr. Gary Davis / Chandos Music, ASCAP)
9. **Brownie McGhee** Pawn Shop Blues 3:01
(Fulton Allen)
10. **Archie Edwards** The Road is Rough and Rocky 3:23 (Archie Edwards)
11. **Martin, Bogan and Armstrong** – Hoodoo Blues 5:13 (Carl Martin / Testament Music admin. by Bug, BMI)
12. **Lesley Riddle** Red River Blues 2:04
13. **Peg Leg Sam Jackson** Walking Cane 2:31 (James Bland)
14. **Etta Baker** One Dime Blues 3:43
(arr. Etta Baker / Lucky Guitar Music, ASCAP)
15. **Roscoe Holcomb** Mississippi Heavy Water Blues 2:13 (Robert Hicks)
16. **Josh White** Outskirts of Town 3:03
(William Weldon – Roy Jordan / Universal MCA Music Publishing, ASCAP)
17. **Baby Tate** See What You Done Done 2:32
18. **Marvin and Turner Foddrell**
I Got a Woman 2:50 (Ray Charles – Renald Richard / Unichappell Music Inc., BMI)
19. **John Tinsley** Girl Dressed in Green 1:56
(John Tinsley)
20. **E.C. Ball** Blues in the Morning 3:37
(E.C. Ball)
21. **Sticks McGhee** Wine Blues (Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-Oh-Dee) 3:43 (Granville McGhee – J. Mayo Williams / Microhits Music Corp – Universal MCA Music Publishing, ASCAP)

Compiled and annotated by
Barry Lee Pearson and Jeff Place

INTRODUCTION

Jeff Place

This recording is part of the *Classic* series released by Smithsonian Folkways to draw attention to some significant recordings from our collection. This compilation features musicians from the region known as the Southern Appalachians. It includes musicians from deep in the mountains as well as from the foothills leading up to them. We have selected many of the recordings from the collection of Folkways Records founder, Moses Asch. On this release as on other recent ones, we have also begun to delve into some fine recordings from another source, the 43 years of recordings from the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (formerly Festival of American Folklife). Both sets of materials are part of the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Institution.

Starting in 1939, Moses Asch ran his recording studio in New York City, and his first label was Asch Records. Among the blues musicians that recorded for Asch Records were Lead Belly, Champion Jack Dupree, Josh White, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee. He followed with the Disc Recordings of America label, then Folkways in 1948. This compilation draws from those recordings.

During the folk song revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s, folklorists, musicologists and music enthusiasts traveled to Appalachia to try to relocate many of the traditional musicians who had recorded during the 78-rpm era. Among these recordists

were Sam Charters, who recorded Pink Anderson and Baby Tate in South Carolina and Georgia in 1961 and 1962.

The other part of this compilation comes from recordings made at the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife from 1971–1982. These recordings have been recently digitized thanks to a preservation grant from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. This grant allowed us to hear many recordings which had not been played in years. Starting in 1967, the Festival featured wonderful traditional musicians from regions in the United States and abroad. All were recorded on open-reel audio tape. The Festival grew in size each year during the early 1970s, culminating in the massive Bicentennial celebration in 1976. That Festival lasted for twelve weeks and featured musicians from every corner of the United States.

The Festival was meant to conclude in 1976, but by popular demand a program on Virginia folk culture was presented as part of the 1977 Festival staged in October. Working with curators at the Blue Ridge Institute and the National Council for the Traditional Arts, this program included blues performers from Southwestern Virginia including both John Tinsley and the Foddrell Brothers. Later Festival recordings provided us with music from John Jackson, J.C. Burris, and Archie Edwards.

The recordings of these artists and others that appear on Folkways or Smithsonian Folkways can be accessed, sampled, and downloaded by visiting the Smithsonian Folkways website (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/>).

Jeff Place, July 2009

APPALACHIAN BLUES

Barry Lee Pearson

The Appalachian Mountains are only now beginning to be recognized as one of the primary incubators of African-American music, especially the blues tradition. Appalachian blues comes in a variety of styles—vaudeville blues, piano blues and boogie, string-band dance blues, guitar and harmonica-based down-home blues, ragtime blues, East Coast rhythm and blues, and so-called white mountain blues. Moreover, it includes such celebrated artists as Bessie Smith, Cripple Clarence Lofton, Cow Cow Davenport, Pinetop Smith, Josh White, Rev. Gary Davis, Jaybird Coleman, Luke Jordan, Dinah Washington, and James Brown. Why, with such an array of blues legends—the Empress of the blues, the Queen of the blues, and the Godfather of soul—has the region's blues tradition received so little attention?

Part of the answer lies in the sheer size of the region. The Appalachian Mountain chain cuts diagonally across the Eastern United States from New York to Mississippi, with Appalachian counties in a full thirteen states. Another factor has to do with demographics. Common wisdom held that there wasn't a sufficient black population in the mountains to sustain a viable blues tradition, in contrast with the cotton belt of the Deep South. One result of this bias was to associate the region almost exclusively with the country-music industry, which historically excluded black musical participation.

A closer look at the region and its history reveals a more complicated story. First, in regard to demographics, the black population varied significantly from Alabama

to West Virginia, and while whites may have outnumbered blacks across the region as a whole, the ratio was by no means uniform. Moreover, urban centers attracted substantial black populations, and blues thrived in Birmingham, Alabama, Spartanburg and Greenville, South Carolina, and Chattanooga, Knoxville and Kingsport, Tennessee. Finally, after the Civil War and during the expansion of roads and rail into the mountains, Southern blacks came in as workers, helping to open up Appalachia to broader cultural influences. Others were attracted by work in the coal mines of Kentucky and West Virginia. Among the workers were musicians, including professional musicians, who brought new techniques and served as musical role models. And whether they remained in the region or moved on, they left their musical signature.

Unfortunately, few of those artists had a chance to record, and they remain undocumented except in the memory of musicians who happened to have been interviewed. They recall a thriving blues tradition even though the discographical evidence appears to indicate the opposite. But the extent of recording is more a question of whether or not record companies wanted to expend the energy to seek out musicians in such relatively inaccessible environs and of what they chose to record once they got there.

A major exception to this was Victor's 1927 Bristol Sessions, commonly called the "Big Bang of country music." Two major stars, Mississippian Jimmie Rodgers and the Appalachian Virginian Carter Family, were found at this session. Although they recorded a lot of blues and other forms of black music, both were white, further reinforcing the tendency to put a white face on the genre "mountain blues." But the sessions also produced recordings by several black artists: several sides by harmonica player El Watson and the Johnson Brothers, two of which were entitled blues, "Pot Licker Blues" and "Narrow Gauge Blues." On November 2, 1928, Victor recorded two more blues sides by the duo Stephan Tarter and Harry Gay, "Brownie Blues" and "Unknown Blues." A Columbia-Okeh field trip to Johnson City, Tennessee, on October 24, 1929, produced two blues by Ellis Williams, who played harmonica on "Buttermilk

Blues” and “Smokey Blues.” Brunswick-Vocalion conducted several sessions in Knoxville, Tennessee, on August 28, 1929, recording two unissued blues by Odessa Canselor, two sides by songster Will Bennett, “Real Estate Blues” and the blues ballad “Railroad Bill,” and two songs by Leola Manning and Eugene Ballinger, “He Cares for Me” and “He Fans It.”

During an April 1930 Knoxville session, Howard Armstrong’s Tennessee Chocolate Drops, composed of Armstrong, Carl Martin, and Roland Martin, recorded two sides, “Knox County Stomp” and “Vine Street Drag” for Vocalion. Leola Manning recorded four sides, “Arcade Building Moan,” “Satan Is Busy in Knoxville,” “Laying in the Graveyard,” and “The Blues Is All Wrong.”

Gennett recorded blues in Birmingham, Alabama, during the summer of 1927, recording Jay Bird Coleman, Daddy Stovepipe, Whistling Pete, William Harris, Joe Evans, Arthur McClain, Bertha Ross, Ollis Martin, and Wiley Barner. Brunswick also visited Birmingham in 1928 but recorded no blues. Returning again almost ten years later in 1937 as ARC, they recorded various blues artists, including Peanut the Kidnapper, Charlie Campbell, Guitar Slim, and the duo Mack Rhinehart and Brownie Stubblefield.

Through the 1940s and 1950s black musicians from Appalachia followed the general African-American population in the Great Migration to the urban North. Although some recording occurred in Philadelphia and New Jersey, New York City served as the major musical magnet, much the same way Chicago drew musicians from the Delta and the Deep South. Recording opportunities in New York City included both small rhythm-and-blues labels looking for commercial hits and the Asch, Disc, and Folkways labels with a broader interest in documenting traditional music. This latter position enhanced Folkways importance during the folk revival, making it the principal label documenting Appalachian traditions and Southeastern blues.

This CD draws on these Asch and Folkways recordings dating back to the 1940s and on live recordings of Appalachian musicians made at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in the 1970s and 1980s. It features musicians from seven states: Chief Ellis from Alabama; Baby Tate of Georgia; Pink Anderson, Ted Bogan, Gary Davis, Peg Leg Sam Jackson, and Josh White all from South Carolina; Etta Baker, J.C. Burris, and Doc Watson from North Carolina; Roscoe Holcomb and Bill Williams of Kentucky; Howard Armstrong, Brownie McGhee, Stick McGhee, and Leslie Riddle from Tennessee; and Estil C. Ball, Archie Edwards, Marvin and Turner Foddrell, John Jackson, Carl Martin, and John Tinsley from Virginia. Several sidemen—John Cephas, Phil Wiggins, James Bellamy, and Tommy Armstrong—come from outside the Appalachian region. The entire group of musicians includes three harmonica players, two bass players, a piano player, a fiddler, and one mandolinist; the rest play guitar, the signature blues instrument of the region.

The guitar came to the Appalachians relatively late via mail-order catalogs and the U.S. Mail, but it quickly became the poor man's piano and a source of pride for the accomplished player. The harmonica was also inexpensive and expressive as an accompaniment for the guitar, and a harmonica/guitar duet tradition became an important part of the Appalachian story. While there was diversity in the guitar styles within the region, based both in location and generation, there was also stylistic continuity: a fairly complex finger-picking style characterized much of the region. Usually it involved the thumb and two fingers, with the thumb laying down a solid bass line and the fingers picking melody on the treble strings. Appalachian guitar was also relatively smooth and rhythmically simple, making it more accessible to white players. Furthermore, there was a strong preference for ragtime progressions, up-tempo eight-bar blues, and other upbeat music suitable for house parties or other country dancing. In general, the instrumental approach was lighter in texture and more melodic, and it employed more chord technique than the harsher, more intense Delta guitar styles.

Moreover, the antiphonal, or call-and-response patterns typical of much black music were deemphasized: increased emphasis on faster tempos left less room for the response part of call and response. This tendency to speed up is found in other regions as well, but seems more pronounced in the mountains. Finally, while there is increased emphasis on instrumental dexterity, there is less emphasis on the nuanced phrasing and tonal expressiveness found in the Delta.

Similar patterns hold for vocal styling, although once again it is important to recognize diversity within the region, with Gary Davis at one end of a spectrum and Archie Edwards or John Jackson at the other. Of course, Davis' insistent harshness may be a consequence of his long tenure as a street singer and of his religious repertoire. Nevertheless, black Appalachian vocal style is generally less intense, less emotional and preacherly, than styles from the Deep South. This may be a function of more frequent racial interaction, performing for mixed audiences or, as some scholars have suggested, less harsh living conditions coupled with closer ties between black and white communities.

The persistence of a string-band tradition shared by both blacks and whites also affected blues development. In the first place, blues did not so clearly displace earlier forms of African-American dance music in the mountains as it did in other parts of the South. Instead, blues became one of several forms of popular party music performed at country dances, and the eventual transition from fiddle and banjo music to guitar and harmonica-based blues occurred more slowly in the mountains, where set dances and square dancing were part of black rural recreation well into the 1940s.

Moreover, the banjo remained a traditional African-American instrument well after the arrival of blues, and banjo techniques and tunings influenced the way musicians learned to play the guitar. For example, Virginia-born bluesman Archie Edwards' father, Roy Edwards, played banjo and then learned guitar using open tunings derived from the banjo. Archie recalled:

My dad used to play a lot of banjo songs on his guitar because he was a banjo picker. He would play “Georgie Buck,” and “Stack O’Lee,” and “Cumberland Gap,” and an old song about the “Preacher Got Drunk and Laid His Bible Down.” He used to play all them old things, you know. He used to play “John Hardy;” he used to play that on his guitar. “John Henry”—that was his favorite piece, and “Frankie and Johnny,” all those old legendary songs. Of course, they had a different way of playing, playing in Sebastapol with a slide in open tuning. He played “That Train That Carried My Girl from Town.” That’s a slide song like “John Henry.” And blues, he could play blues for hours; just go from one song to another. He had a hell of a repertoire for country blues, and he would play them on the guitar or on the banjo. (Edwards 1986)

South Carolina’s Josh White also learned in open-E tuning, or Sebastapol, and used it all his life, but without a knife or slide. In Knoxville, Tennessee, Brownie McGee’s (1915–1996) father, Duff McGhee, also played in open tuning as did Brownie when he was first learning to play:

I started out in open tunings because he tuned that way, and he’d leave [the guitar around] sometimes. But he played with a pocket knife. First time I heard “John Henry” to really absorb it, he was playing it with a pocket knife, had it tuned in “Vastapol,” had a knife between his fingers. And he was noting it, sliding it up and down on that guitar. And that was fascinating to me. If he left it in that tune, I’d pick it up. And it just sounded good. All I do is strum across the strings, and it sounded a chord. (McGhee 1972)

Eventually, the string-band tradition fell out of favor in the African-American community, although artists like Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong and the Foddrrell family maintained the tradition up to the 1980s for home consumption and on the festival circuit. But many of the same artists who once worked in string bands continued to perform in regional variations of guitar or guitar and harmonica-dominated down-home blues.

Evidence suggests that the blues arrived in Appalachia well after it had become entrenched in the Delta. It was brought by itinerant musicians who sought work in the mines or building roads and railroads, and who entertained themselves and other workers in their leisure time. We also see professional musicians working the region, hitting the paydays at various work sites. These would include walking musicians, medicine show performers, and artists associated with minstrel or carnival shows. Most often, however, they were individual guitarists who stopped off to play the streets or a social gathering then moved on. At times musician's paths would cross, and songs and ideas might be exchanged in an impromptu jam session, and then each musician would move on to their next destination.



In town, blues players sang and played on street corners. Ted Bogan listened to two of his hometown heroes:

Probably you heard of this guy: his name is Pink Anderson. And Blind Simmie Dooley. They're from my hometown, Spartanburg, South Carolina. I used to give them nickels and dimes to hear them play. (Bogan 1986)

Brownie McGhee played on street corners not only in Tennessee but also in New York City. Luke Jordan played on the streets of Lynchburg, and Bessie Smith sang on Ninth Street in Chattanooga before she left on the minstrel show circuit. Archie Edwards spoke of Blind Lemon Jefferson songs coming into Virginia from West Virginia musicians:

Long about 1926 things started to roll pretty good in the West Virginia coal mines. That's what my Uncle did; he worked in the coal mine. That's about the time that Blind Lemon Jefferson started recording "Ain't Got No Mama Now." (Edwards 1986)

John Jackson recalled his father and his family befriending a convict who worked on a road gang and who was a great guitar player and blues singer. Jackson also spoke of other blues sources connecting the Delta to the Blue Ridge:

We used to see people from out of Mississippi, use to be up in that area working: people like Tom Terrell, he was from Mississippi, and Ron Phillips. It was where a big dog kennel and horse stable used to be, about a mile and half from where we lived. And they used to bring people from Mississippi breaking horses and, you know, kennels were for dogs and fox racing. And they used to bring these guys out of Mississippi up in there and work, and that's how we met them—the people from out of Mississippi who was blues players. (Jackson 1999)

Job hunters of various kinds came into the region bringing their blues with them. This was especially true during the Great Depression when looking for work was itself a full-time job. Birmingham piano player Chief Ellis hit the road as a hobo:

I hoboed north. The first encounter of me playing was in Roanoke, Virginia. We stopped at this restaurant to ask for food, and this lady had a piano in there. So I asked her could I play the piano. When she heard me play the piano she liked my playing. And then she kept me over there because she used to have dances on the weekends. And she kept me there playing for about three weeks. She gave me food,

a place to stay, and maybe fifty cents a night. That was a lot of money in those times. (Ellis 1977)

The Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong string band were also professional musicians who worked their way through Appalachia more or less on foot, looking for work wherever they could find it. Spartanburg guitarist, Ted Bogan, recalled the hit-or-miss composition of such traveling musical groups who went wherever they thought they could make a dollar:

So I cut out and went to Asheville, North Carolina, and met a guy there that played guitar. And we got together, and he said, "Let's go to Knoxville, Tennessee." I said, "I don't care." So we left and went to Knoxville. But he was married, and he got a message his wife was ill, and he had to go back.

So later on I met Martin, and we got together and went to Kingsport, Tennessee. And Armstrong, he was ill, he couldn't come, so we stayed in Kingsport until he got better. Then he joined us. (Bogan 1986)

After the traveling musicians, Appalachian musicians recall phonograph recordings as the second most important source of blues songs and technique. Beginning in 1920, so-called "race records" made blues available to whoever had the wherewithal to purchase a record player and, of course, a few records. At first, such innovations could be bought only in the city, but expanding road and rail systems soon made even the most isolated communities susceptible to traveling salesmen. John Jackson recalled such entrepreneurs:

They would bring a bunch of records, and some come by mail order. It was people like the Carter Family, old Jimmie Rodgers, Blind Blake, Lemon Jefferson, Frank Stokes. It was mostly black blues players from the South, and so that's how we come by so many records back then. It was just everybody whoever made a record near back to 1920s up to that time. So when I'd put a record on the record player

and listen to it, [I'd] then try to learn to play it. So that's the influences that I had when I grew up. (Jackson 1999)

Jackson also noted that people had a hard time telling if artists were black or white, especially if they played black-derived material:

You don't know what they were—white people singing them or black people—who it were. There were no pictures and no names on most of them. And I know Blind Blake. After I got grown up, you could pick one out from the others and pretty much tell who it was. But we never did know Uncle Dave Macon was a white man until way later—always thought he was black. Everybody did around there. (Jackson 1999)

Archie Edwards' family bought blues records and also those by country artists such as the Carter Family, Uncle Dave Macon, Jimmie Rodgers, and Frank Hutchison. Both Archie and his father learned Hutchison's "That Train That Carried My Girl from Town." In the 1980s, I showed Archie a picture of Hutchison and he was shocked. "I never knew he was white," he said. Over in Tennessee Brownie McGhee's family purchased records through the mail:

You could buy from the Chicago mail-order house. That's the only way you got a record. And you had to send in and order five records or more, and they ship them to you. They wouldn't ship just one record. So when you saved up enough money together you'd get Carter Family, Jim Jackson, Leroy Carr, Bessie Smith, and Blind Lemon Jefferson. So you'd get an assortment of records. And this was the thing about it. And every month, or every other month, they'd send you this circular with who's got the new releases. (McGhee 1972)

But even the catalogs made mistakes based on aural evidence. For example, Howard Armstrong's 1920 Vocalion sides "Knox County Stomp," and "Vine Street Drag" by the Tennessee Chocolate Drops was marketed as a "hillbilly record." According to McGhee,

if you bought race records they would send you a race catalog; and if you bought a country record then you would get a country catalog:

It was all black blues and then they'd send you a country and western thing if you ordered some of that, like Jimmie Rodgers. Now Jimmie Rodgers got famous down in there because all of that was black stuff he would sing. And Carter Family records—we had lots of them down there, way down in Tennessee, because they used to buy them because they did a lot of spirituals. And they [were] big sellers for them with the black people. “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” all of that. (McGhee 1972)

McGhee, Jackson, and Edwards grew up listening to blues and old-time country and learning from both. This, in part, accounts for the racially mixed repertoire and style of Appalachian blues performers. But, as Edwards, Jackson, and McGhee also noted, black listeners found the so-called country music very familiar. It was, as McGhee said, “black stuff in the first place.” However, whites’ listening to and learning from blacks, and vice versa, predated the arrival of phonograph records through much of Appalachia. A white blues tradition is by no means unique to the Appalachian region, but Appalachian blues has an interracial, or perhaps non-racial, quality. Whether one sees this as blacks playing in a white style or as whites adapting African-American style, the fact remains that there is an overlap, just as there was in the earlier string band tradition.

Overall, Appalachian blues tradition is far more integrated than Delta or Texas blues. To be sure, bands like the Mississippi Sheiks had a repertoire suitable to either black or white audiences, and some Mississippi artists like John Hurt played with white musicians—in Hurt’s case with fiddler Willie Narmour. But the blend of black and white tradition appears more prevalent in the mountains, probably due to the closer social interaction between blacks and whites in the region. Artists ranging from Howard Armstrong to Turner Fodderell make the point that despite the existence of Jim Crow, they grew up playing with white children of various ethnicities whose parents came to

work the mines or railroad camps. This created opportunities for music to cross racial boundaries. In such camps blacks and whites often lived and worked in close proximity despite segregation. The list of Appalachian musicians who played for coal camps is quite extensive. Carl Martin from Big Stone Gap, Virginia, north of Gate City, also worked the coal camps, as did his partner Howard Armstrong. Armstrong later recalled that integrated bands, whether impromptu or professional, were not uncommon in the region:

Music was one medium where blacks and whites seemed to meet on very nice ground, common ground. Even in the small towns in Tennessee and different places like that, they did integrate when it came to playing music.

Because I know, right up there in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, there was five people in this band. I think there were two blacks and three whites, and they were together. Played well together and everything else, and nobody looked askance at them. The guy was head of it, we called him Smitty. He was a piano player, Smith Carson, and he had another guy that played with him, a black guy. And they played for everything. And I've known several black musicians, you know, just like a fiddle player and banjo player would play with these whites. Maybe [there would] be two of them or three of them, or what not, but nobody paid it any mind at all. [Armstrong 1990]



Archie Edwards also noted that white neighbors would come to his father's dances:

White guys, not only one, but three or four, would come in there from time to time and ask my dad if they could stand inside the building there along the wall and watch them dance the square dance and listen to them pick the banjo. In other words, picking up on black culture. And so my dad said, "OK, if you want to." So they sat around and learned it, so later on in life they were square dancing and buck dancing and flat footing, too. (Edwards 1986)

John Jackson's father also played for both black and white dances:

He used to play for parties and stuff all around the county. He was the onliest black man I know that went up in the white areas and played for some of the parties up there, around the mountain there. Everybody knew him, and he did play for some white parties there, I do know he did. He used to play for square dances. That's what he was doing for these white fellows, playing dances and all like that. (Jackson 1999)

Blacks and whites learned from the same phonograph records. They participated in integrated musical events. They drew from a shared string-band tradition. And black professionals performed before mixed or white audiences. All of these conditions laid the groundwork for a more homogeneous, integrated black and white tradition. This is not to say that Appalachian blues is corrupted by white folksong values or that it is less "African" than other blues styles. It simply means that among the diverse forms of Appalachian blues we find a variety of blends—the result of merging African and European musical values in ways that made sense to local musicians.

THE SONGS

Barry Lee Pearson and Jeff Place

Some listeners may question whether the songs included here are all blues. I contend that the majority are blues or are considered blues by the performers. Blues has always resisted definition, whether viewed as sad songs or good-time songs designed to alleviate down-hearted feelings. Other critics prefer to characterize blues in more formal terms, such as in twelve-bar or eight-bar blues, but there are a much wider variety of blues forms and hybrids, some without chord changes or some that repeat a single line three or four times. Musicians themselves seldom refer to blues in formal terms but use a more functional approach, seeing blues as a form of poetry that talks about certain aspects of life. Appalachian musicians, however, tend to stress its use as dance music and associate it with good-time events.

Nine of these selections have the term blues in the title, indicating they are thought of as blues by someone. Another seven are generally accepted blues songs, but several are ragtime blues, rhythm and blues, rock-and-roll blues, and a few, such as “Walking Cane” or “Don’t Let the Deal Go Down” and the blues ballad “Railroad Bill” may be proto-blues, or dance songs that were current before the term blues came into common usage. At any rate, referring to such a diverse body of songs as blues—whatever one’s criteria: subject matter, dance function, or instrumental orientation—is itself characteristic of the Appalachian tradition.

1. MY BABY'S GONE

Sticks McGhee, guitar and vocal; Sonny Terry, harmonica; J.C. Burris, harmonica

(From *On the Road* Folkways 2369, 1959; recorded 1958)

Granville Henely “Sticks” or “Stick” McGhee (1917–1961) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. His father, Duff McGhee, and his brother, Walter “Brownie” McGhee, played guitar. Raised in Kingsport, Tennessee, he learned to play guitar as a hobby. After serving in the Army during World War II, he moved to New York City, reuniting with his brother and a coterie of other transplanted migrant musicians. He played the club circuit and recorded for various labels including for Folkways founder Moses Asch, scoring a major hit with his “Wine Spo De O Dee” for Atlantic, which is also included on this CD. “My Baby’s Gone” is another upbeat rock-and-roll blues reminiscent of Chuck Berry’s “You Can’t Catch Me.” But in this case, Sticks lights out from the North, through D.C. and Richmond, to return to the mountains of Tennessee.

2. LOUISE BLUES

Chief Ellis and the Barrelhouse Rockers

Wilbert Ellis, piano and vocal; John Cephas, guitar; Phil Wiggins, harmonica; James Bellamy, bass
(From the 1976 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife; tape 1996-RR-0317; recorded August 1976)

Wilbert Thirkield Ellis (1914–1977) was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and grew up immersed in an extensive blues and boogie-woogie piano tradition. He recalled artists with such exotic names as “Goat,” “Baby Face,” “Hookey Doodle,” and “Bubba Rubberdick,” but paid special attention to pianist Price, or Prince Lanier. During the Depression he hoboed up the Appalachians to Roanoke and Knoxville before moving on to New York in 1937. There he recorded for “Sitting In With” and Lenox record labels as well as accompanying the McGhee Brothers and Tarheel Slim. In the 1970s he moved to Washington, D.C., where he ran a liquor store until he moved back to Birmingham in 1977. While in Washington his group, the Barrelhouse Rockers,

included future Piedmont blues legends John Cephas and Phil Wiggins. The group was included in various regional folk festivals such as the Smithsonian Festival and the National Folk Festival in nearby Virginia.

“Louise” was a major blues hit in the 1930s, recorded by various artists including Jimmy Gordon (1934), Johnny Temple (1936), Big Bill Broonzy (1937), Washboard Sam (1940), and Sonny Terry for the Library of Congress (1938).



3. SITTING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Doc Watson, guitar and vocal

(From *Original Folkways Recordings of Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley, 1960-1962* Smithsonian Folkways 40029, 1994)

Doc Watson (b. 1923) was born in Stoney Fork Township, North Carolina (later known as Deep Gap). Arthel Watson, nicknamed “Doc” as a teenager, was surrounded by music as a child. Many of the members of his family were singers and musicians (see *The Watson Family* Smithsonian Folkways 40012). In 1960 musicologist Ralph Rinzler traveled to Virginia to record Clarence Ashley and encountered Watson for the first time. Thrilled by his discovery, he went on to manage Watson and introduce him to concert and nightclub audiences around the country. When Doc was young, his father traded a couple days of labor for an old “graphophone” and a collection of 78 rpm discs. Doc was exposed to a wide array of musical styles. (Place, notes to SFW 40012, 1990).

“Sitting on Top of the World” has become a standard in blues, bluegrass, and even rock music. Later versions of note include those by Howlin’ Wolf, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan,

the Shelton Brothers, Bob Wills, Jack White, the Grateful Dead, and Cream. A search of the All Music Guide turns up hundreds of versions. The song comes originally from the repertoire of the African-American string band, the Mississippi Sheiks, recorded in February, 1930, for the Okeh label.

4. RAILROAD BILL

John Jackson, guitar and vocal; James Jackson, guitar

(From the 1981 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1981-RR-0063, recorded 25 June, 1981)

Born in Woodville, Virginia, John Jackson (1924–2002) grew up in the Fort Valley, Rappahannock County, Virginia, which is located in the hills leading up to the first ridge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He learned to play guitar and banjo from his father and other members of a highly musical extended family. He was also inspired and taught by a convict named Happy who worked on a local road gang. As a young man, Jackson honed his skills playing parties until a fight in 1946 led him to give up the party circuit. In 1949 he and his wife, Cora, moved to Fairfax Station, Virginia, near Washington, D.C. In 1964 folklorist Chuck Perdue heard him playing and brought him to the attention of Chris Strachwitz, who recorded him extensively for his Arhoolie label. Through the 1960s–1990s, Jackson recorded for Rounder and Alligator, and toured Europe and Asia.



A self-described songster, John Jackson played blues, country songs, and ballads from both black and white tradition that he learned from 78-rpm records and from local musicians. He learned “Railroad Bill” from his father. It is a blues ballad based on the exploits of an Alabama turpentine worker named Morris Slater, who killed a local sheriff and earned his nickname stealing goods from freight trains. His legend grew as he eluded the law, killing a Sheriff McMillan in 1895. In 1897 he was ambushed at a country store and shot to death.

5. DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN

Bill “Colonel” Williams, guitar and vocal

(From the 1971 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1971-RR-0023; recorded 2 July, 1971)

Bill Williams (1898–1973) was born in Richmond, Virginia. A self-taught guitarist, he left to hobo across the country, teaming up with Blind Blake in Bristol, Tennessee, in 1921. In 1922 he moved to Greenup, Kentucky, where he spent the rest of his life. A fine guitarist and songster, he had an eclectic repertoire that included blues. He recorded several albums for Blue Goose late in his life. This version was recorded at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in 1971.

This song is well-known in the mountains and has been traditional for many years. John Jackson, for example, heard it from his father and claimed it was the first ragtime song he ever learned. Charlie Poole recorded a “Don’t Let Your Deal Go Down Blues” for Columbia in 1925. Poole’s biographer, Kinney Rorrer, places it in black tradition as early as 1911. It was widely recorded by country artists from Vernon Dalhart to Riley Puckett and later became a bluegrass standard. In more recent years, as “Deal,” it became a standard tune in live repertoire of the Grateful Dead.

6. YOU DON'T KNOW MY MIND

Pink Anderson, guitar and vocal

(From Pink Anderson *Carolina Medicine Show: Hokum and Blues with Baby Tate* Folkways Records FS 3588, 1984; recorded in Spartanburg, S.C., 1961–62)

Pinkney Anderson (1900–1974) was born in Laurens, South Carolina. A self-taught guitarist, he played the streets in Spartanburg as a youngster. Along with his partner, Simmie Dooley, he worked medicine shows and recorded four sides for Columbia in 1928. Rediscovered in the 1960s, he recorded several albums for Prestige, Riverside, and Folkways. A songster with a diverse repertoire of ballads, country songs, and even minstrel show pieces, he worked medicine shows up to the 1960s. His son, Alvin “Little Pink” Anderson is still performing. The blues verse, “You don’t know my mind; you see me laughing, I’m laughing to keep from crying,” has become emblematic of the blues tradition in general. Under various titles this song has been recorded by Merline Johnson, Clara Smith, Lonnie Johnson, and fellow Appalachian artists Mack Rhinehard and Brownie Stubblefield. The rock group Pink Floyd created their name by combining the names of Pink Anderson and Floyd Council (who was another bluesman).

7. BLUES AROUND MY BED

J.C. Burris, harmonica and vocal

(From the 1982 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1982-RR-0111; recorded 28 June, 1982)

J.C. Burris (1928–1988) was born in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. After he moved to New York City in 1939 his uncle, recording artist Sonny Terry, inspired him to learn to play harmonica. He worked with fellow Appalachian migrants Brownie and Sticks McGhee as well as his uncle in various venues and recording sessions before moving to California in 1960. He also plays bones and makes Limberjacks—wooden dolls that can be made to do percussive dance routines. “Blues Around My Bed” is a 12-bar stan-

dard composed of traditional verses describing or personifying blues. It is essentially a traditional blues about blues, similar to the familiar “Good Morning Blues.”

This recording comes from the Smithsonian Festival’s 1982 program featuring the first group of awardees of the National Heritage Fellowships. Burris was on hand to assist his uncle Sonny Terry during his award ceremony and performed his own sets as well.

8. HESITATION BLUES

Gary Davis, guitar

(From *Pure Religion and Bad Company* Smithsonian Folkways 40035, 1991; recorded 1957, also issued by 77 Records of London)

Born in Laurens, South Carolina, Gary Davis (1896–1972) learned harmonica, banjo, and guitar as a youngster. He claimed he first heard blues in 1910 when he was in Greenville, working with Willie Walker’s string band. In the early 1920s he relocated to North Carolina and by 1926 was in Durham. He spent a number of years as a singing preacher before teaming up with Blind Boy Fuller in Durham. In 1935 Fuller’s manager, J.B. Long, took Davis to New York, where he recorded several blues and some religious material. Around 1943 he relocated to Harlem, New York, for good where he became a minister and religious street singer. During the 1940s he reunited with Durham cronies Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. In 1945 he recorded for the Asch label. In the 1950s he became part of the New York City folk music scene, recording for Riverside, Folkways, Stinson, and other labels. Through 1971, he was a major folk-revival artist and brilliant guitarist. His later repertoire was that of a songster. (Barry Lee Pearson, notes to SFW 40134, 2003). He was an important guitar teacher and influenced many younger rock, folk and blues musicians. The rock band Hot Tuna’s repertoire is significantly based on Davis’ music.

“Hesitation Blues,” here performed as an instrumental, is a song in recent years strongly associated with Davis’ arrangement. It is an old melody. In 1915 Billy Smythe and Scott Middleton published it with lyrics as “Hesitation Blues.” These are the lyrics frequently performed when it is sung. W.C. Handy published a different version in 1915. The song has become widespread, having been recorded as blues, country, and western-swing music. Among those who have recorded it are Jim Jackson, Sara Martin, James P. Johnson, Lead Belly, Uncle Dave Macon, Duke Ellington, Janis Joplin, Willie Nelson, Louis Armstrong, Hot Tuna, and the Old Crow Medicine Show.

9. PAWNSHOP BLUES

Brownie McGhee guitar and vocal

(From *Brownie McGhee Blues* Folkways 2030, 1955/ *The Folkways Years, 1945-1959* Smithsonian Folkways 40034, 1991; recorded 1945; originally released on 78 rpm. as Disc 727 [6058B])

Walter “Brownie” McGhee (1915–1996) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. He learned to play guitar as a young boy, primarily influenced by his father, who played with a knife in an open tuning and made up his own blues. In the 1930s, Brownie worked with a gospel quartet; then he met Blind Boy Fuller along with Fuller’s agent, J.B. Long, in Durham, North Carolina. Long arranged for McGhee to record for Okeh in 1940 and 1941. “Pawnshop Blues” is McGhee’s version of Fuller’s “Three Ball Blues,” which he recorded for Vocalion in 1940. The “three balls” were an image that frequently appeared on pawnshop signs (Kip Lornell, notes to SFW 40034). Following Fuller’s death, McGhee recorded “The Death of Blind Boy Fuller,” and briefly took the name Blind Boy Fuller #2. According to McGhee:

I started recording for everybody, using different names—Blind Boy Fuller #2 was on Columbia. I was Henry Johnson on Decca, and Spider Sam on Atlantic, and I was Tennessee Gabriel on Circle. Then when I played piano I was Blind Boy Williams.

In the early 1940s he moved to New York and teamed up with harmonica ace Sonny Terry, working with him into the mid-1970s. They were one of the most popular blues groups recording during the 1950s and 1960s folksong revival. McGhee recorded several rhythm and blues hits including “New Baseball Boogie” for Savoy (1947) and worked with various bands. But his greatest success was with Terry on the folk and nightclub circuit. An active member of the New York folk music scene, he participated in jam sessions with Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly and Josh White, and founded a music school, Home of the Blues, in Harlem. McGhee first recorded for Moses Asch and his Asch label in 1944 and thought very highly of the label’s owner. In 1982, McGhee was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship, a lifetime-achievement honor presented by the National Endowment for the Arts.

10. THE ROAD IS ROUGH AND ROCKY

Archie Edwards, guitar and vocal

(From the 1978 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife; tape 1978-RR-0117; recorded 6 October, 1978)

Born in Union Hall, Virginia, Archie Edwards (1918–1998) learned music at home. His father, Ray Edwards, played harmonica, banjo, and guitar, and various neighbors also played guitar. As a youngster Edwards and his brothers pooled their money and sent away for a mail-order guitar with which he became good enough to play the local party circuit. He moved to New Jersey, and then joined the Army during WWII. In 1959 he opened a barbershop, the Alpha Tonsorial



Palace, in Northeast, D.C. which became a gathering place for blues musicians and, after his death, the first home of the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation. During the 1960s the onset of the folk revival and a chance meeting with his boyhood guitar hero, Mississippi John Hurt, encouraged him to begin performing again with such luminaries as Hurt, Skip James, and John Jackson. Following Hurt's death in 1966, Edwards composed this song to commemorate their friendship. His first 45rpm single in 1977 had "The Road Is Rough and Rocky" as the A-side, and he also used the title for his first album. He recorded for the L & R, Mapleshade, and Great Northern labels.

This recording comes from a Festival program on community folklife in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, which also included Flora Molton, Esther Mae Scott, and Charlie Sayles.

11. HOODOO BLUES

Carl Martin, mandolin and vocal; Ted Bogan, guitar; Howard Armstrong, violin; Tommy Armstrong, bass

(From the 1972 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife; tape 1972-RR-0053; recorded 1 July, 1972)

The string band Martin, Bogan and Armstrong reunited in 1970 to play the club and festival circuit, including the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. The trio originally met in 1930 in Knoxville, Tennessee, then a gathering place for street musicians and string bands. Multi-instrumentalist Carl Martin (1906–1979) was born in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, but moved to Knoxville as a youngster and joined his brother Roland's string band. Ted Bogan (1910–1990) came from Spartanburg, South Carolina, where he learned guitar from Pink Anderson and by watching other street musicians. He honed his craft working medicine shows and playing on the radio before coming to Knoxville to play with Roland and Carl Martin. Howard "Louie Blueie" Armstrong (1909–2003) was born in Dayton, Tennessee, but grew up in La Follette. A

multi-instrumentalist like Martin, he learned violin and mandolin from his father and brothers and worked with family bands that included his brother Roland Armstrong. They teamed with Carl Martin to form the Tennessee Chocolate Drops. After playing throughout the region in various configurations, they eventually formed the Four Keys, composed of Carl Martin, Bogan, Armstrong, and Bill Ballinger. Traveling through Ohio, West Virginia, and Michigan, the group arrived in Chicago in 1933, where they went their separate ways. Armstrong and Bogan recorded four sides for Bluebird in 1934; Carl Martin recorded for Bluebird, Vocalion, Decca, and Champion from 1934–1936. They scuffled to make a living in Chicago during the Depression, but by the end of the decade had moved on to non-musical work. Martin recorded again in 1966 with the Chicago String Band before the group Martin, Bogan and Armstrong re-formed. Armstrong was the subject of Terry Zwiggoff's 1985 film, "Louie Blue," and became a National Heritage Fellow in 1990. Martin first recorded "Hoodoo Blues" in 1966 for Testament as part of the Chicago String Band. Similarly titled songs were cut by Bessie Brown for Columbia in 1924, by Big Boy Teddy Edwards for Vocalion in 1934, and by Harry Chatmon for Bluebird in 1935. A term for magic, hoodoo generally refers in blues to love magic or to having power over one's lover.

12. RED RIVER BLUES

Lesley Riddle, guitar and vocal

(From the 1976 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1976-RR-0294; recorded 9 July, 1976)

Leslie, Lesley, or Esley Riddle (1905–1980) was born in Burnsville, North Carolina. As a youngster he learned guitar from an uncle, initially playing in an open Sebastopol tuning and using a knife for a slide. He moved to Kingsport, Tennessee, where he encountered guitarists Steve Tarter and Duff McGhee and his two sons, Brownie and Granville. He struck up a friendship and sometimes played with Brownie McGhee, but he is best known as a friend of the Carter Family, the Appalachian's most famous

country music stars. For a number of years he accompanied A.P. Carter as he collected songs throughout the mountains. Maybelle Carter learned her well-known style of guitar picking from Riddle.

“Red River Blues” is the single most common blues song in the Southeast, recorded as “Blood Red River” by Josh White, and “Bye Bye Baby” by Blind Boy Fuller.

13. WALKING CANE

Peg Leg Sam Jackson, harmonica and vocal

(From the 1976 Festival of American Folklife; tape 1976-204; recorded 3 July, 1976)

Here Peg Leg Sam uses the basic framework of the old minstrel song “Hand Me Down My Walking Cane” but interjects his own verses, many of which can be found in other traditional songs. Country singer Lyle Lovett used some of the same verses in his song “Since the Last Time.” According to Gus Meade’s massive biblio-discography on the roots of country-music songs, the song was first published by African-American minstrel composer James Bland in 1880. It was recorded by dozens of groups in the early 20th century (Meade, pp. 385–387).

Jonesville, South Carolina native, Arthur “Peg Leg Sam” Jackson (1911–1977) was a veteran of many medicine shows. Jonesville is located just south of Spartanburg. Medicine shows were common in the rural South in the early 20th century. A traveling troupe would move from town to town with a spokesperson claiming to be a doctor and selling a “magic elixir” to cure a variety of ailments. The show would feature music and comedy to draw a crowd. Most medicine show performers had stage routines, and Peg Leg Sam did harmonica tricks, including playing several mouth harps at once. He performed in medicine shows up until 1972 and toured the folk festival circuit in his final years. This recording is from the huge Smithsonian Festival staged to celebrate the United States Bicentennial.

14. ONE DIME BLUES

Etta Baker, guitar and vocal

(From *Blues Routes: Heroes and Tricksters: Blues and Jazz, Worksongs and Street Music* Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40118, 1999; recorded 1992)

Etta Baker (1913–2006) was born in Caldwell, North Carolina, moved to Chase City, Virginia in 1916 and back to North Carolina in 1923. She grew up in a profoundly musical family, literally learning from the cradle. As she recalled:

Well, I lacked two months of being three years old, and my mother and father never did have to say, “Etta, it’s time to get up.” I was awakened with my daddy on the banjo or either the guitar; so that’s all it took to get me out of the bed. And I would get up at four o’clock, four-thirty, and sit and listen to my dad. And I was such a nuisance to him until he would take time to show me the different chords on the guitar. And I would follow him around; I’d stand up between his knees and come up between him and the guitar and watch over the top. And that’s all the lessons that I ever had about my music was from my father.

Her mother played harmonica and guitar, and her sister Cora also played guitar. As a youngster, Baker also played the fiddle. The family played for frolics and house parties and other community events. In the summer of 1956 she and some of her relatives recorded several instrumental selections for Paul Clayton, Liam Clancy, and Diane Hamilton. These were released on the Tradition label as *Instrumental Music of the Southern Appalachians*, which included “One Dime Blues.” This version, however, comes from a live recording made thirty-six years later, in 1992 at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia, as part of folklorist Nick Spitzer’s Folk Masters Series. Baker originally learned the piece from her brother-in-law, Quince Phillips. Baker’s version is a guitar instrumental, representing a common Carolina tradition in which women tend to prefer playing instrumentals. Baker was named a National Heritage Fellow in 1991.

15. MISSISSIPPI HEAVY WATER BLUES

Roscoe Holcomb, guitar and vocal

(from *Close to Home* Folkways 2374, 1975/ *Untamed Sense of Control* Smithsonian Folkways 40144, 2003, recorded in Daisy, Kentucky, 1972)

Roscoe Holcomb (1911–1981) has “attained legendary status as a hard-hitting singer and banjo player although he has never been widely known” (John Cohen, notes to SFW 40104). Living most of his life around Daisy, Kentucky, Holcomb worked as a miner and at a lumber mill, where he later broke his back in an accident.

Holcomb’s music was a combination of Kentucky mountain music, church songs, and African-American blues. His sources included both living people and recordings. Known for his heartfelt singing, Holcomb performed at folk festivals in the 1960s, was the subject of John Cohen’s film *High Lonesome Sound*, and received a Grammy nomination in 1965 for the album of the same name.

“Mississippi Heavy Water Blues” comes from the repertoire of Georgia bluesman Barbecue Bob Hicks (1902–1931). The short-lived Hicks was based in Atlanta and recorded the song for Columbia in 1927. It was Hicks’ most popular record (John Cohen, notes to SFW 40144). Doc Watson remembers his cousin Willard Watson bringing the record by his house and hearing old Barbecue Bob “slapping so hard on those strings” (notes to Flying Fish 352, 1985).

16. OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN

Josh White, guitar and vocal

(From *Free and Equal Blues* Smithsonian Folkways 40081, 1998; recorded September 8, 1944; originally released on 78 rpm as Asch 348-2A)

Josh White (1914–1969) was born in Greenville, South Carolina, where as a child he served as guide for several blind blues and gospel artists. White began his own prolific

recording career in 1932 billed as “Josh White” for blues, and as “Pinewood Tom” for religious songs. He had several hits, including “Blood Red River” among songs he cut for ARC and its subsidiaries over the next eight years. White relocated to New York City in the early 1930s, and slowly dropped down-home blues in favor of a nightclub act. His open-shirted, foot-on-a-stool performance style became the model for some later African-American folk singers like Harry Belafonte. He appeared in several theatrical productions and recorded various folk and political songs through the early 1940s. In 1944 he recorded for Asch, primarily folk and protest material. White claimed he learned “Move to the Outskirts of Town” from Big Bill Broonzy. Blind Boy Fuller did it as “I’m Gonna Move to the Edge of Town.” Two other popular versions were by Casey Bill Weldon and Louis Jordan.

17. SEE WHAT YOU DONE DONE

Baby Tate, guitar and vocal

(From Pink Anderson *Carolina Medicine Show Hokum and Blues with Baby Tate* Folkways 3588, 1984; recorded in Spartanburg, S.C., 1961–62)

Charles “Baby” Tate (1916–1972) was born in Elberton, Elbert County, Georgia. He moved to Greenville, South Carolina, at age ten and befriended Blind Boy Fuller, who later became the Southeast’s most influential artist. There is a clear influence of Fuller in Tate’s guitar playing. He also worked with fellow Greenville artists Pink Anderson and Peg Leg Sam, who can also be heard on this CD. “See What You Done Done” seems to be his signature piece and was the title of his 1962 album. The song, also titled “Baby, What You Trying to Do,” combines a twelve-bar blues followed by eight-bar choruses, and shares verses with Fuller’s “Pistol Slapper Blues” and “Legs Like Georgia Hams.” Atlanta’s Buddy Moss recorded a “See What You Done Done” for ARC Records in 1935.

18. I GOT A WOMAN

Marvin Foddrell, guitar and vocal; Turner Foddrell, guitar and vocal

(From the 1977 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1977-RR-0014, recorded 7 October, 1977)

Marvin (1924–1986) and Turner Foddrell (1927–1995) were from Stuart in Patrick County in southwest Virginia. Turner operated a country store just south of Stuart (Kip Lornell, notes to BRI -003, 1980). The Foddrells played locally for years but were brought to the attention of a wider audience about the time of this recording. They were featured at the National Folk Festival, the Ferrum College Festival, and the Smithsonian. Their father, Posey, was a local musician who played with a number of groups.

“I Got a Woman” was one of Ray Charles’ biggest hits. It was a number one R&B hit in 1955. Charles was known for mixing popular rhythm and blues with gospel influences. He also performed mainstream country-and-western music. In this case he based his song on the gospel tune “Jesus Is All the World to Me.”

Many southeastern blues performers are what is called “songsters.” Entertaining local audiences with a wide range of music, songsters perform in a number of genres, especially popular songs, in addition to blues.

19. MY GIRL SHE'S DRESSED IN GREEN

John Tinsley, guitar and vocal

(From the 1977 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, tape 1977-RR-0014), recorded 7 October, 1977)

Born in Chestnut Mountain, Virginia, John Tinsley (1920–1999) learned to play the guitar as a youngster. A classmate of Archie Edwards, he too played at local house parties and harvest celebrations, and in 1951 or 1952 made a single recording with fellow

guitarist Fred Holland for the local Mutual label, “Keep Your Hands Off Her” backed with “Trouble Blues” on the flip side. He quit playing for several decades but came out of retirement in the 1970s, playing the local Ferrum College Festival and the 1977 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife program on Virginia folk culture. In his later career Tinsley played almost exclusively sacred music. The “Girl All Dressed in Green” is an original eight-bar blues typical of the region and reminiscent of Blind Boy Fuller.

20. BLUES IN THE MORNING

E.C. Ball, guitar and vocal

(From the 1976 Festival of American Folklife; festival tape 1976-CT-336 (77.111.04); recorded 8 July, 1976)

E. C. (Estil Cortez) Ball (1913–1978) was from Rugby, Virginia, a town so small that he had to go over the nearby North Carolina border to get his mail. He started playing guitar at 13 and cited Riley Puckett, Chet Atkins, Sam McGee, and Maybelle Carter as influences. In addition, he was part of a long-standing musical world in that part of the Virginia mountains where black and white musicians shared music. He recorded for Alan Lomax and the Library of Congress in 1941, and some of his recordings appeared on albums issued by the Library of Congress. For most of his career he performed strictly gospel music with his wife (1907–2000) as E.C. and Orna Ball and the Friendly Gospel Singers. The group recorded again for Lomax in the late 1950s, and their recordings were released on the County and Rounder labels. The Balls also performed locally on radio on WSKS-AM from North Carolina and WBOB-AM from Galax, Virginia. Ball was also a mentor to another Rugby resident, the fine guitarist and luthier, Wayne Henderson. Henderson became the postman in Rugby for a number of years, thus saving Ball the trip to North Carolina.

“Blues in the Morning” is an original. Ball announced at this performance that, as the others he was sharing the stage with were playing blues, even though he usually

played gospel music, he'd play a blues. He also noted that the song was from his upcoming Rounder album, *Fathers Have a Home Sweet Home* (Rounder 0072). It shows the influence of other white country musicians who also played blues, like the "Singing Brakeman" Jimmie Rodgers and Sam McGee.

21. WINE BLUES (DRINKIN' WINE SPO-DEE-O-DEE)

Sticks McGhee, guitar and vocal; J.C. Burris, harmonica and vocal; Sonny Terry, harmonica and vocal

(From *On the Road* Folkways 2369, 1959; recorded 1958)

Regarded as one of the seminal rock-and-roll records, the 1949 Atlantic version of this song rose to number two in the R&B charts and 26 on the pop charts and is reputed to have kept Atlantic Records in business. A "Spo-De-O-Dee" was recorded by Sam Theard for Vocalion in 1937 and, while it had little in common with McGhee's song, generated enough legal paranoia to give Decca's blues producer J. Mayo Smith a piece of the writing credit. And although Granville McGhee came up with "Wine Blues (Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee)," he didn't write the piece but picked it up while he was in the military stationed in Virginia, where it was a bawdy drinking song. He first recorded it in 1947 with his brother for Harlem Records. Two years later Sticks cut it again for Atlantic, this time with his brother and Chief Ellis, and the song took off, hitting the top of the charts. Although he continued to record for London, Essex, King, Savoy, and Herald, he never repeated his initial success. This version was recorded as "Wine Blues" for Folkways in 1958.

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