

1. I GOT TO FIND MY BABY 3:37  
(Doc Clayton) publ. unknown
2. LONESOME BEDROOM BLUES 3:56  
(Curtis Jones) Duchess Music/Wabash  
Music-BMI
3. PRISON BOUND 4:21  
(Leroy Carr) MCA Music-ASCAP
4. BLACK GAL 4:52  
(traditional)
5. GRIEVIN' ME 3:44  
(Tampa Red) MCA-ASCAP
6. ROCKY MOUNTAINS 3:49  
(Lightnin' Hopkins) Prestige Music-BMI
7. SIX WHITE HORSES 3:19  
(traditional)
8. SAIL ON 3:57  
(Amos Easton) MCA-ASCAP
9. MY OLD LONESOME BLUES 3:42  
(Carr) MCA-ASCAP
10. GUITAR PETE'S BLUES 7:48  
(Pete Franklin) MCA-ASCAP

PETE FRANKLIN—vocals, guitar, piano

Produced by KENNETH S. GOLDSTEIN  
and ART ROSENBAUM

Recorded in Indianapolis, IN;  
July 12, 1961.

Recording engineer—John Sheppel

Digital remastering, 1993—Phil De Lancie  
(Fantasy Studios, Berkeley)

Design—Don Schlitten

Photography—Art Rosenbaum

BLUESVILLE



OBCCD-560-2  
(BV-1068)

"A skilled trade would mean more to me than a guitar," Pete Franklin told me once. "Some of these guys think they're pretty cute, just because they can play a guitar, but singing blues and playing guitar is like molding in a foundry, except that it's less dependable." Nevertheless music has been Pete's overriding interest since he was a boy. Although he is modest about his talent, he is a colorful and ebullient personality with a great appetite for life, well-known in the gathering places and along the streets of the West Side of Indianapolis. He is a powerful and original singer, and, despite his nickname, is as proficient on the piano as on the guitar; he has a good memory for the old blues and is adept at improvising new ones. Indianapolis has long been an important blues center and the home of a distinct style; Guitar Pete is a young man steeped in the blues traditions of his home town.

The blues originated in the South but, when Southern Negroes moved North, were easily transplanted to the cities of the Mid-West. Pete was born in Indianapolis on January 16, 1927, and as he grew up he heard blues all around him. His parents, both natives of Tennessee, played piano and sang; his mother, Flossie Franklin, was a good friend of many singers, particularly Leroy Carr, who roomed at the Franklin home for the period immediately preceding his sudden death in 1935. Pete was only eight then, but he remembers clearly the hours Leroy had spent at the piano in their living room. Even after his death, Leroy's records were played constantly, so Pete absorbed his distinctive piano and vocal style. Pete cannot remember when or how he learned the piano—he "never tried" to learn, but just started playing the piano blues he heard. His father and mother each taught him one piece, but the rest he picked up himself.

When he was eleven, Pete started to play the guitar, learning by watching and listening to the guitarists who would stop by their house. Scrapper Blackwell, Leroy's equally famous partner, and particularly a man named Jesse Ellry. These musicians played a style quite different from that heard elsewhere, a sophisticated alternation of subtle single string runs and rich passages of full chords. Scrapper, a superb musician, perfected and may have originated the style (although Pete recalls that there used to be several men Scrapper's age who played that way) and was its chief exponent during the twenties and early thirties. Ellry was probably the best known guitar player in Indianapolis during the forties after Scrapper had largely dropped from public view, and Pete has

in the past fifteen years become the heir to the local style.

After finishing two years at Crispus Attucks High School, Pete decided to devote all his time to music. He played in the clubs up and down Indiana Avenue, became friendly with Champion Jack Dupree during the years when that singer lived in Indianapolis, and learned to play other sorts of music than blues, particularly the jazz guitar style of Charlie Christian. He went into the Army in 1945 and became an entertainer in a Special Service unit; after his discharge in 1947 he spent some time in San Francisco, drifted back to the Mid-West, and in 1949 went to Chicago where he cut two blues sides for Victor and met many Chicago blues singers like Jazz Gillum, Roosevelt Sykes, and Tampa Red. Pete returned to Indianapolis, and with some of his earnings from his recording work bought a Model A Ford which he painted red and emblazoned with "Guitar Pete."

Pete has spent most of the past ten years in his home town, working now and then at some job, often spending days at a time rambling the city with a battered guitar under his arm, stopping at some tavern, the home of a girl friend or of some blues singer, always ready to tear into a blues.

Much has been said about the fact that many younger Negroes, particularly in the North, have rejected the blues because they carry too strong connotations of times and conditions in the rural South that they would as soon forget. Pete says that, while many blues grew out of intense suffering in the South, the blues is simply "an ordinary Negro's way of expressing himself, happy or sad," and maintains emphatically, "the public should recognize the blues as an art, instead of looking down at it as something that comes out of the slums or the cotton fields." He feels strongly that the blues he learned in Indianapolis, especially the instrumental styles, are more artistic than the rough country blues of the South. Nevertheless the blues which Pete Franklin sings and plays today are much less "urban" in style and content than some of those recorded by jazz blues singers in the 1920's and are imbued with a profound awareness of the past. Pete would leave the cotton fields behind yet has found that the art form engendered there, the traditional blues, is still his most powerful means of personal expression.

GONNA FIND MY BABY was first recorded by "Doctor" Clayton for Bluebird in 1942. It is an aggressive sort of blues, a frank expression of desire for a woman when "cocaine and reefer won't ease my case no more." Pete likes to sing blues like this

as loudly as he can; the guitar drops out at times to allow the voice to carry a line unaccompanied, then returns in trilling single runs, then, as Pete says "shake it up," breaks into a rough rapid strumming of full chords. As with all the guitar accompaniments here, Pete has tuned the instrument considerably below pitch, as he prefers the looser feel of the strings.

LONESOME BEDROOM BLUES was originated by Curtis Jones, who recorded it for Vocalion in 1937, but Pete has completely reworked it in his own style. The piano breaks are syncopated and highly emotional.

PRISON BOUND is one of Leroy Carr's best and most introspective blues. Pete sings this lament of a man leaving his woman and happy home for prison with restraint and sensitivity. Those accustomed to the unresolved and agonized relationships between men and women that are reflected in the blues will find Leroy's simple closing lines a touching exception.

Always remember, your daddy  
has been your friend . . .

BLACK GAL was recorded in the thirties by Leroy Carr and also by Joe Pullum, from whose Bluebird record Pete's version derives. This blues has a lazy swing which contrasts with the bitter humor of the verses. The last verse, of course, is Pete's own:

I'm gonna have her, I'm gonna have her,  
everybody in Indianapolis knows,  
If I don't get that sweet woman, I'll take my  
switchblade and cut her no-good throat.

GRIEVIN' ME was originally recorded by Tampa Red. The verse in which Pete boasts of his prowess with women:

They call me Pretty Pappa from 29th Street,  
I got a style of lovin' that can't be beat  
is typical of the self-assurance found in many blues from cities of the North.

ROCKY MOUNTAINS is probably Pete's favorite blues. He often feels confined in his home town and wishes he had the means to go far away from his friends and family and make his way in a new place, so this blues has much personal significance for him.

SIX WHITE HORSES is an old blues which, according to Pete, used to be played by every piano player in the rough Pat Ward's Bottoms of Indianapolis. The traditional verse, "dig my grave with a silver spade" was sung by Pete's father. Preoccupation with death is a common theme in the blues; here the left hand on the piano suggests the rumbling wheels of a

hearse, moving down Indiana Avenue, bulled by "six white horses tacklin' back." Amos Easton, Bumble Bee Slim, who wrote SAIL ON, was one of Leroy Carr's imitators and became himself a master of the thoughtful sort of blues Leroy had popularized. Pete's guitar breaks are strongly reminiscent of Scrapper Blackwell's style. Pete here omits the title line, "sail on, little girl, sail on."

MY OLD LONESOME BLUES appeared on the reverse side of How Long How Long Blues, the first record Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell cut for Vocalion in June, 1928. Leroy's ingratiating singing style and his sensitive piano accompaniments, punctuated by Scrapper's biting guitar runs, within weeks made them the most popular blues team in the country. Pete admits gladly that his performance here is "all Leroy," and he is certainly more qualified than most to sing Leroy Carr's great blues.

GUITAR PETE'S BLUES is just that, Pete's own intense personal blues, improvised as he went along, a long, fierce, and emotional song which encompasses a formidable range of feeling. As in the Rocky Mountains, the theme is leaving home and woman for a distant place, in this case Pete's mother's old home, Nashville. It begins with images of the lonesome highway, then turns to the railroad, a frequent blues symbol of separation and great distances:

The train stands at the station,  
red and blue lights behind,  
Red stands for danger  
green for my ramblin' mind.

Baby, this old boxcar rocks me  
like a rocking chair . . .

and here the guitar reinforces the figure by imitating the rocking of the train,

But I'm gonna keep on rockin'  
til this L&N train gets me there.

This blues is very close in feeling to the old Southern Country blues; in the very last line, though, Pete suggests a rhythm and blues beat,

Good-bye sugar baby, I'll love you to the end  
as if to prove that much of the dynamism of the blues tradition can be encompassed in one song. Pete restrung his guitar for this blues, replacing the G string with a second high E string in order to achieve the unusual and compelling sound, like that of a twelve-string guitar.

Notes by Art Rosenbaum

Notes reproduced from the original album liner.