



HERITAGE HLP 1006

NOTE BY PAUL OLIVER

THE BLACK ACE

B. K. Turner and His Steel Guitar

"I am the Black Ace, I'm the boss card in your hand,
I am the Black Ace, I'm the boss card in your hand,
But I'll play for you mama, if you please let me be
your man"

These were the words that listeners to the regular blues programmes relayed from Station KFJZ out of Fort Worth in the late 'Thirties would hear as the programme was introduced. At that time the name of the Black Ace was a familiar one in both Negro and white homes in the city and the surrounding country. "They started to call me the Black Ace when I put out the Black Ace Blues in 1937" the singer recalled when we recorded him some twenty-three years later, in the summer of 1960. "When I was broadcasting they had me play that for a theme song all the time. Folks didn't know who I was and when they commenced to announce me over the radio as the Black Ace folks just called me Black Ace. But that's not my

real name. My name is Babe Karo Lemon Turner. I don't know why they named me like that. I threwed the 'Lemon' away and just used the initials of Babe Kyro - B. K. Turner. Never did use the 'Lemon' and the 'L'. Fact is, my wife never knowed what my full name was until just now." It is as "Ace" that B.K. Turner is known today and the name is neatly embroidered on the fresh white linen of his shirt.

In the summer of 1960 Ace was living in a small, compact house, in the suburbs of Fort Worth. He was working, as he still works, in a photographic studio in the city and the steel guitar with which he had once earned his name was gathering dust in the attic. Working in the Don Juarez Studio "shootin' movies and makin' all kinds of pictures", watching television in the evenings in his neat home, sitting out on the porch with its modern metal chairs or watching baseball, on the weekends, his life was relatively comfortably ordered. The blues were forgotten. But his life has not always been as secure and like most other blues singers, Ace came from the country. He was born in 1905 at "a little ole place they called Hughes Springs, Texas - oh, about seven miles this side of Louisiana. I stayed at home with my daddy on the farm down there; stayed on the farm all my life until I was about thirty years old." Work on the farm was hard and profits were low; there was little enough time for recreation and not too much money for entertainment. But his brother had an improvised guitar made from a "guitar neck which had some wires on" and on this crude instrument he learned as a child to play elementary guitar styles. He had a good voice and in his youth sang in church choirs. He learned a little music: "doh-re-me-fah-so-la-te-doh and such as that, and teach it to other young people." When Babe Turner, as he was known, became about twenty-two years of age he was able to purchase for himself an old guitar; not a good instrument, but one on which he could play the blues that came to his head when he worked on the farm.

It was the depression that changed Babe Turner's way of living, for his father's farm was hit by dropping prices and rapidly diminishing markets. Soon it ceased to support the family and as so many others had done throughout the country, the family broke up in the search for other employment. Ace made his way to Shreveport, Louisiana. It was a fortunate and fateful decision, for it was there that he met the blues singer Oscar Woods, then about thirty-five years old and in his prime. Though some five years his junior, Babe Turner - now Buck Turner, or "B. K." - and Buddy Woods became close friends. Woods played guitar, but in a different style from that in which B.K. was playing at the time. He had a steel Hawaiian guitar which he laid across his knees and picked with a bottle-neck as he sang his blues. Though a taciturn and singular man, often referred to as "The Lone Wolf", Woods readily teamed with the young Texan, and they played together at joints and particularly at house parties. The house parties were as much a feature of Southern life as the more widely publicised "rent parties" of the cities of Chicago and New York, and an evening's playing would bring B.K. Turner \$1.50 - more than he could earn for a day's regular work if indeed he could have found it.

As conditions improved in the later 'Thirties, Buck Turner found himself in greater demand. He travelled in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas and finally settled in Fort Worth. A talent scout heard him playing and this resulted in the six sides for Decca, rare collector's items now, on which his fame amongst the blues enthusiasts outside his home country depended. Amongst these were Black Ace, Lowing Heifer and Santa Claus Blues, of which two were remade for this collection. In 1936 the Kimber Brothers approached him to play on Station KFJZ and for that station and others in Texas and Oklahoma he played intermittently until 1941. During this time he made a number of titles for Vocalion in Fort Worth in 1938 but although one coupling has been reported as having been released obscurely on Melotone under the name of Buck Turner, the others were not pressed. But if a wider fame eluded him through recording he was offered a small role, playing and singing, in the film Blood of Jesus. "Then after that I was doin' pretty good when Uncle Sam told me to come on, 'Let's Go Fight.'" And that broke up the musical career and I quit then - 1943."

Returning from the services Ace was faced with the problem of securing new work. He tried numerous jobs - "What kind of work?" he exclaimed, "Man, I done everything!" He was married, had a son and times were tough. 1949 found him and his wife plucking cotton bolls in the cotton patch. "We went out to try to pick some cotton, me and my wife. I think we could pick, oh, about 300lbs. Well, that kept us eatin'."

When the cotton-picking season was over Ace secured a job as a janitor at the Fort Worth airport which he held for more than five years, until he was "laid off" in 1955. That year he found himself picking cotton again and the future seemed as bleak as ever. "We didn't pick enough cotton to keep my car - and they took the car away from me. I'd bought me a new set of tires and they took the car away from me, tires and all. Finance Company took it. I believe they call it 'Security'... well, it must have been security! The car was worth \$1200!"

Out of work, he trekked the streets looking for a job and applied regularly at the Employment Office. "Then a man sent me to this Don Juarez Studio to work there a day, two days out of every week. And the man liked my work and he give me a regular job. So I been workin' there ever since."

Working regularly at last and spending some of his earnings on his own photographic equipment, Ace had settled into a new routine of life at the age of fifty. In the evenings he sometimes whiled away a few hours with friends at a wooden, white-painted clapboard juke called "The Lucky Strike". It was indeed a lucky strike that a chance remark led to his "discovery" at his rendezvous, but when we visited him, he was reluctant to play or sing. To him the blues belonged to a past which had been riddled with changing fortunes and it seemed to him that no one would be interested in, or would recall, his old-style blues. The humming of his tunes and the repetition of lyrics that he had recorded more than twenty years before convinced him that there were people who still admired his way of playing the blues. His wife fetched the old steel guitar which had been his constant companion before the War and he

handled it a little strangely. Rather shyly and awkwardly he picked up a small glass flask and started to play. In moments the years seemed to slip away and the whining, singing notes of the blues rose above the humming of the fan in the still heat of an August night. Ten days later we returned to record a Black Ace whose abilities and whose originality as a blues singer were as great as when he first earned his name. His blues reflect his environment and his past life - from the necessity to seek work to the symbolism of the Santa Fe Line or the simple pleasures afforded by the local joints. Amongst a wide variety of blues and blues forms he includes Farther Along, a Texas spiritual that once was collected by Hally Wood at Reverend Palmer's Church in East Austin, Texas but of which this may be the first authentic recording.

Of the few exponents of the flat Hawaiian guitar blues style who have been recorded, Oscar Woods is dead, and Kokomo Arnold - whom Black Ace resembles - has long since retired with no desire to play or sing again. These recordings of a great blues singer have the added importance that they may well be the last to be made of a style of blues which has all but vanished.

PAUL OLIVER

I AM THE BLACK ACE

I am the Black Ace, I'm the boss card in your hand (twice)
But I'll play for you mama, if you please let me be your man.

Sometimes the Black Ace never comes in sight (twice)
But I'll play for you mama if you will please treat me right.

Says I lays in the deck mama, I lays close and tight,
But I'll play for you mama if you treat me right;
If you don't want me mama, I said please take me along,
Cause I'll play for you mama-hey, when the king is gone.

I'll be your winner in any game you please (twice)
If you don't want me mama, I said please just let me stay.

Says you know you don't want me mama, you won't even say,
That's all right with mama, you gonna need my help someday;
I said please mama, please don't drive me away,
Cause I'll be a good feller, woman, if you please will let me
stay.

BAD TIMES STOMP

Steel Guitar instrumental.

DRINK ON LITTLE GIRL

Drink on, drinkin' girl, drink on, (twice)
Just keep on drinkin' til you lose your happy home.

Well you drinks all the time mama, but you don't ever drink with
me (twice)
Well you do your drinkin' with your old-time used-to-be.

You know you spent all your money for Seagram "Seven Crown"
(twice)
Now if you ever gets sober mama, you will find that the deal's
gone down.

You know you don't want me baby, why don't you tell me so,
Cause when I go to drinkin' I don't want you no mo'.
So drink on, baby drink to the end,
Just keep on drinkin' until you lose your closest friend.

SANTA FE BLUES

That Santa Fe took my baby, December, Ninth, Tuesday Evening
right round six (twice)
We didn't have no trouble, just didn't have my business fixed.

I stood and looked at that train until it went around the bend
(twice)
I say, wonder will my baby ever think of me again.

Well, it blowed just like Oh, Lord it never blowed before
(twice)
I saw my baby leavin', not to come back no more.

I couldn't sleep for dreamin' bout that mean old Santa Fe
(twice)
I said it taken my baby away back to her old-time used-to-be.

When the drivin' wheels started turnin' over that ole train
said "Chu Chu"
I begin to wonder deep down in my heart, What in the world
will I do

You know I love you baby, please remember me,
Now when you learn to love me darlin'
Forget about your ole-time used-to-be.

NEW TRIFLIN' WOMAN

I want you to get up in the mornin', woman, try to find your-
self a job (twice)
And stop sittin around here tellin' me, baby bout the times
being hard.

Don't you get no taxi, mama, you must walk all over town (twice)
You must find you a job woman, babe before the sun goes down.

You don't do nothin' but sit on your B.A. and play cards (twice)
You tell me when I come home, "Baby the times sure is hard."

Now when you get you a job, mama you must work the whole day
long (twice)
Now if you don't wanna work woman, you can find you another
home.

FARTHER ALONG

Tempted and tried we often made to wonder
How could it be true all the day long,
When there are others, Livin' about us,
Never molested, though in the wrong.

Farther along we'll know all about it,
Farther along we'll understand why,
Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine
We'll understand it all bye and bye.

When we see Jesus comin' in Glory
When he has left his home in the sky,
Then we shall meet him in that bright morning,
We'll understand it all bye and bye.

Farther along etc.

When Death is coming, taking of a loved one,
It leaves our home so lonely and drear,
Then we wonder, how others prosper
Livin' so wicked, year after year.

Farther along etc.

EVIL WOMAN BLUES

Come to me baby every time I call,
Love me baby till the stars begin to fall,
I don't want no woman that stays evil all the time
If you want me to love you, you gotta treat me nice and kind.

Love me baby, hug me tight,
Love me baby till I scream all night,
I don't want no woman that stays evil all the time,
If you want my lovin' baby you gotta treat me nice and kind.

Why can't you love me, love me with a thrill,
Stop your evil ways before you get somebody killed -
I don't want no woman that stays evil all the time,
If you want my lovin' baby, you gotta treat me nice and kind.

We go out at night, have ourselves a ball,
Come back home and fight, don't make no dog-gon sense at all,
I don't want no woman that stays evil all the time,
If you want my lovin', baby you got to treat me nice and kind.

'FORE DAY CREEP

It was early this morning, I was 'bout half asleep
I heard somebody making a fore day creep,
What'st that I hear, in the morning so soon ?
Something sound mighty funny, baby in the next room.

I heard a low whisper, the door begin to cry,
It wasn't the milk man 'cause he done passed by
What'st that etc.

He don't know and he never will
The child she got ain't none of his
What'st that etc.

It ain't my business, but I know it ain't right,
But that's what happens to a man that works at night
What'st that etc.

LITTLE AUGIE

Hey, Hey people, have you ever seen my Li'l Augie ?
She keeps me brokenhearted, my heart's filled with misery.

If you ever see my Li'l Augie, people, this is the way she'll be
Broad hips and big bow legs, hair like a mermaid on the sea.

She's the only woman I ever loved, I been lovin' her for a great
long time,
I've had other women nice to me, she's the only one that ever
worried my mind.

Now you can come and kiss me Augie dear, baby listen to what I
got to say
You mistreat me cause you don't love me, now poor Ace got to go
away.

LITTLE LEG WOMAN

Looka here mama, you looks nice to me
I cain't love you baby can't you see
Cause your legs too little, yes your legs too little,
Legs too little for you to talk, baby-talk to me.

I got a big legged woman, 27 in the waist,
You ought to know that you can't take her place
Cause your legs etc.

Big legged woman she's my angel child
She looks better cryin' you do when you smile
You legs too little etc.

Already showed me you would give me a break
And you would give me everything you make
But your legs too little etc.

NO GOOD WOMAN

No good woman has caused me to lose my home and wife (twice)
And without a night change she will cause me to lose my life.

She got a line of jive people, that will make a man go wrong
(twice)
And she got a way of lovin' that will break up your happy home.

Well I felt myself sinking, I knew I was in a storm (twice)
Well I reached for my life saver, but the waves were most too
strong.

Well this goes for you boys, and you married men too (twice)
Don't let a no good woman make no fat-mouth out of you.

GOLDEN SLIPPER

Come on Mama let's truck on down
To the "Golden Slipper" and break 'em down;
Nine-Thirteen on Taylor Street
They got good whiskey and plenty pig meat
But what you gonna do when they break the "Golden Slipper" up?
You won't have nowhere to go and get drunk and truck.
The Golden Slipper Bar is the best I know
You go there once you get a woman a show
You don't want her, don't you be no clown
Drink your good whiskey and don't break down;
But what etc.

They got "Green River" whiskey and the price is right,
We ain't gonna fuss and we ain't gonna fight.
Git at a table and sit right down
Drink good whiskey but we ain't gonna clown.
But what etc.

Tell you boy just before I close
Don't spend your money use for every our dough
Always talkin' 'bout the girl you like,
Get a good woman, you got to spend your jack,
But what you gonna do when they break the "Golden Slipper" up?
You won't have nowhere to go and get drunk and truck.

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