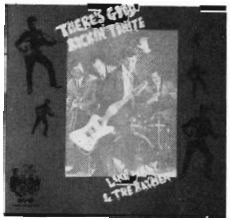
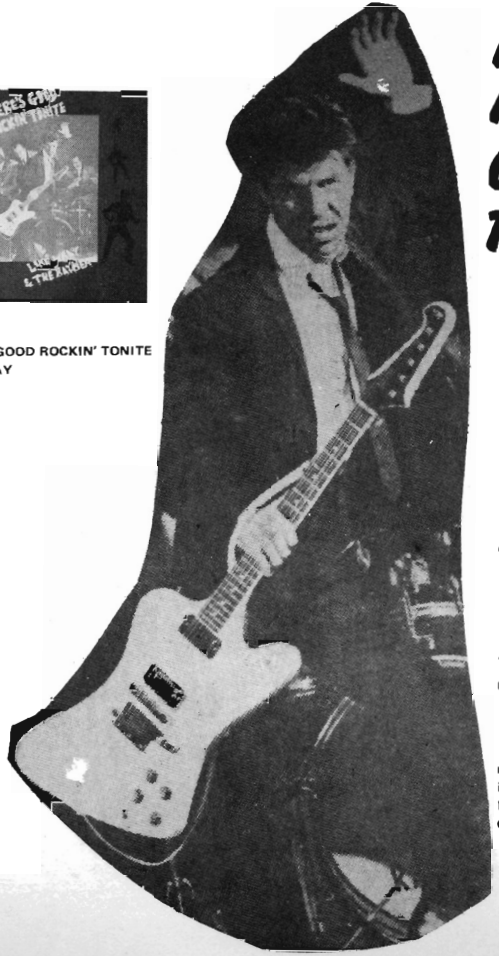
# BLUES ~LINK

No. 2 Oct/Nov'73 25p




UP002
THERE'S GOOD ROCKIN' TONITE
LINK WRAY



# IF WE HEAR ANOTHER PERSON MENTION THAT LINK WRAY IS ONLY REMEMBERED FOR ONE TRACK...

## PROTOTYPE ROCK N ROLL FROM UNION PACIFIC

"Thoughtfully and intelligently compiled with all relevant details... A definition of early punk consciousness... This is true greaser music." **Melody Maker Record of the Month September 1st.**

All Union Pacific albums, inland £2.50, overseas £2.80. We would like to advise all our customers to include a 6p registration fee. This is to ensure safe and certain delivery against loss or theft. We cannot be responsible if package is not registered.
**INLAND — Postal orders only please.**
**OVERSEAS — International money orders. If payment is made by cheque it must be payable to an English bank.**

ALL ENQUIRIES TO *RED LIGHTNIN'* 517 EASTERN AVENUE, ILFORD, ESSEX, 1G2 6LT, ENGLAND.

# BLUES ~ LINK

94, Puller Road,
Barnet,
Herts.,
EN5 4HD,
U.K.

Subscriptions £1.50 for six ( $4 sea mail, $8 air mail). Overseas International Money Orders only please or if by personal cheque please add an extra 50p to cover bank clearance charges.
Editorial staff: Mike Black, John Stiff, Frank Sidebottom and Alan Balfour.
Issue 2 — October/November 1973.
Particular thanks to Valerie Wilmer (photos) and Dave Godby (special artwork).
National Giro—32 733 4002

Cover Photo: Memphis Minnie



# editorial

In this short editorial all I have space to mention is that we now have a Giro account and overseas readers may find it easier and cheaper to subscribe this way. Apologies to Kees van Wijngaarden whose name we left off "The Dutch Blues Scene" in No. 1—red faces all round!

Those of you who are still waiting for replies to letters — bear with us as yours truly (Mike) has had a spell in hospital and it's taking time to get the backlog down. Next issue will be a bumper one for Christmas.

## CONTENTS

# Memphis Shakedown~

## The Memphis Jug Band On Record

*by Chris Smith*

Much has been written about the members of the Memphis Jug Band, notably by Bengt Olsson in *Memphis Blues* (Studio Vista 1970); surprisingly little, however has got into print about the music that the band played, beyond general outline. Whilst the importance of biographical information cannot be denied, it seems anomalous to neglect a consideration of what it is that has made the Memphis Jug Band such a compelling subject for research. For, while Cannon's Jug Stompers have perhaps the greatest musical impact on the white listener, Will Shade's band was by a long way the most recorded Jug Band.

This was probably due, to a certain extent, to the considerable talents of Shade as both an arranger of blues and an arranger of bands; the ability to keep a band together, albeit with shifting personnels, and to keep supplying fresh material, undoubtedly explains part of the attraction that his groups had for *Victor*. But the fact remains that the Memphis Jug Bands' records sold extremeley well. When the Depression hit, *Victor*, among the previously rejected material issued in the 23250 series was music by the Memphis Jug Band, and they were among the first *Bluebird* issues, which were mainly repressings at that time. The very last record to appear in the *Okeh* 8000 series was "Jug Band Quartette"/Little Green Slippers".

The Memphis Jug Band, then, was a hot property in the Race Catalogues. This article will attempt to discuss some of the qualities which made their music so popular amongst black record buyers from 1927 to 1934. The reader is warned, however, that the author has no training in musical theory, and has therefore been unable to produce an exegesis on the lines of John Fahey's work on Charley Patton; the article might be better regarded as an appreciation than an analysis, and no opinion is to be regarded as authoritative.

The Memphis Jug Band had 73 titles issued under that credit; of these, 60 were heard in the the course of research. In addition, two accompaniments to Minnie Wallace, two to Hattie Hart and four to Kaiser Clifton were issued, and those with Wallace have been heard by the author. Twelve sides were recorded in 1932, and issued under a variety of pseudonyms; of these five were available. Thus a total of 67 sides have been heard out of 93, or just over 72%. These are listed at appendix B, which also provides a diagrammatic breakdown of the instrumentation of each side.

The Memphis Jug Band first recorded on 24th Feb. 1927, in Memphis, for *Victor*, who had at last been forced to seriously enter the Race record field by the general decline in record sales at that time. So successfully did the first issues sell that from then until 1930 the band was a regular feature of *Victor's* catalogue. The personnel on these first records consisted of Will Shade (harmonica and guitar), Ben Ramey (kazoo), Will Weldon (guitar) and Charlie Polk (jug); all four sang at times. The balance of instruments was in a definite front-and-back-line division. Front line consisted of kazoo and/or harmonica, or kazoo and one guitar. Back line was one or both guitars and jug.

Shade was a fine harmonica player, and Ramey one of the best kazooists ever to record, and a song such as "Stingy Woman Blues" shows the superb interplay of sounds they could achieve, taking solos and weaving patterns around each other's playing.


l—r Charlie Burse, Ben Ramey, Will Shade, Charlie Polk, Will Weldon, Robert Burse
Milton Roby

Neither Shade not Weldon, however, was any great sensation as a guitarist, and the success of "Memphis Jug Blues" depends very much on Ramey's kazoo; despite the title, the jug is not very prominent, as indeed is true of most of the records on which Polk appears. Weldon, of course, later became a highly proficient slide guitarist (leaving Memphis circa 1928, and appearing in Chicago in 1935), but at this time he scarcely merits Oliver's description of his work with the Memphis Jug Band as 'sleek'. On the sole record issued under his real name, it was necessary to bring in Vol Stevens, whom we shall meet later, to achieve with two guitars a sound that Charley Jordan produced on his own; and listening to these two sides leads one to believe that Weldon's part in this was confined to playing second guitar!

On "Memphis Jug", we also meet an aspect of the Memphis Jug Band's music for which they evidently had a great fondness, namely harmony singing in addition to the main vocal. It has been suggested that this is a hangover from minstrel shows, or a means of keeping a group of normally solo performers together musically; whatever the reason, it was used to musical purpose. In the song under discussion the elongation of the vocal line produces a strong element of wistfulness, complementing the theme of betrayal in love perfectly.

The Memphis Jug Band, then, had visited the recording studios and proved a successful product; they were therefore shipped to Chicago to record again, in June of the same year, and produced a further four titles. Personnel was the same. On two songs, "Sometimes I Think I Love You" and "Sunshine Blues", one Shakey Walter is said by *Godrich & Dixon* to play harmonica instead of Shade. It would be nice to think

that this is Walter Horton, but as he would have been nine years old at the time, this may be doubted. In any case, at least on "Sunshine Blues", only one guitar is audible, sounding like Weldon, and the mysterious harmonica sounds uncommonly like Shade.

"Memphis Boy Blues", another 12-bar performance, is related to Furry Lewis' "Big Chief Blues" lyrically, and has an interesting vocal treatment, with Shade, Ramey and Weldon singing the lines not quite in unison. This may be the effect of alcohol, but the result is so pleasing that one would like to think it is deliberate.

Actually, the vocals on these first two sessions are not of very great importance — certainly not in lyric content. The words are traditional, and the song usually ends with an instrumental section. The words, though always well handled, do not really matter except as part of the overall sound. This is exemplified by "I'm Looking For The Bully Of The Town", the last number to be recorded at this session. This is an old song, out of the 'songster' tradition; as is well known, the jug bands made their living by catering to popular demand. It seems likely that *Victor* asked for Blues at first, that being what the record-buying public was demanding, and may then have asked if the band knew any other kind of song, to test the market.

"Looking For The Bully", in any case, has only two verses, despite being a traditional number that might be expected to have a fixed form, and the remainder of the performance is a long and brilliant kazoo showpiece.

When the Memphis Jug Band next recorded, they again travelled away from home, this time to Atlanta, in October 1927. Six titles were recorded over two days, and on this occasion the band was augmented by Vol Stevens, who played mandolin on the first three, and guitar on the other numbers; and, on the first three numbers, by Jennie Clayton, Will Shade's wife.

Stevens was a superb mandolinist, and the sound of his instrument makes a considerable difference to the overall sound of the band. Jenny Clayton, however, is to these ears at any rate something of a pain. Her voice resembles that of Estelle Yancey, but she lacks that lady's obvious emotional involvement with her material. Since she was never to record again, it may be that the record-buying public also had a low opinion of her talents. Nevertheless, her records are essential listening, if only for the wonderful mandolin playing mentioned above.

On "Bob Lee Junior Blues", Clayton completes her lyrics, and then the whole band as one man switches to a chorus of "Careless Love". Jug bands have frequently been described as hap-hazard, which in their membership they often were; but musically the Memphis Jug Band was a precision outfit. Will Shade was in firm control, both as liason with the record company and as musical ideas man. He had original ideas, and backed them up with careful rehearsal. As this song demonstrates, all the musicians knew what they were to do and when to do it before any recording was done. The Memphis Jug Band's music is frequently simple — it is almost never sloppy.

This session, indeed, produced one of their all-time masterpieces, "Kansas City Blues". With blasting harmonica, intricate kazoo and gently melancholic harmony singing, it is truly an outstanding performance. The song is, of course, the same that was to prove such a sensation when recorded by Jim Jackson, a fellow Memphisonian.

It is interesting to note that the Memphis Jug Band's version was recorded almost simultaneously with Jackson's, and if anything slightly before, and is not, therefore, a 'cover' version. Probably the song was well-known in Memphis before it became a national hit (Robert Wilkins claimed that Jackson stole it from *him*). Certainly the Memphis Jug Band's version sold well, probably with help from the fame of Jackson's recording besides its own undoubted merits; it was re-pressed on *Bluebird,* and even on the English *Regal Zonophone* label, to rub shoulders with Sid Phillips and Ambrose!

Atlanta also saw the recording of "I'll See You In The Spring When The Birds Began To Sing", a large title for a charmingly light-weight piece, which has been described as an attempt at a naive pop song. This is not really true; the song was also recorded (in two parts) by Johnny Head under the title of "Fare Thee Blues", and the tune was used by Leadbelly as the basis of a ballad on the sinking of the Titanic. Whilst the lyric has pop elements, as evinced by the title, it is undeniably a product of black culture, occupying about the same position in the musical spectrum as "Careless Love". This latter also has pop elements, but just as no pop song would ever say "Make you kill yourself, and your lover too", so the line "I'll see you in the Fall, when you have no man at all", is drawn straight from the continuum of Blues themes.

The Memphis Jug Band returned to their hometown, and henceforth all their recordings until 1932 were made in Memphis. The next occasion was in February 1928, and the sound of the band was much as before. A couple of numbers were recorded without the benefit of a kazoo; the sound on these songs is much simpler, the main weight being placed on Steven's excellent (as always) mandolin playing. This line-up serves to expose the limitations of the guitar-playing of both Shade and Weldon.

"Snitchin' Gambler Blues", with an unknown vocalist, is based on a very old melody, which may also be heard on the Beale Street Sheiks' "It's a Good Thing", but is less successful than that song; the problem seems to lie in the repetitive nature of the tune, which is utilised by Stokes and Sane to produce a rhythmic tour-de-force. but which in the hands of the jug band is repetitive, sadly dulling the overall effect.

This is not true of the rest of the session, which, whilst not adding much to our knowledge of the Memphis Jug Band's musical range, produced some fine music, thanks to the usual careful rehearsal. "Coal Oil Blues" introduces us to two interesting folk names in 'Coal-oil Johnny' and 'Papa Treetop'. These may be well-known

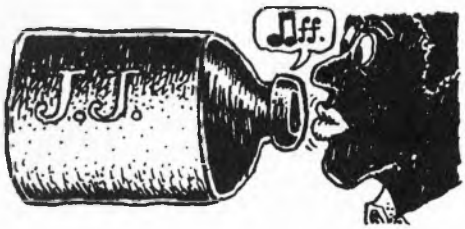
characters elsewhere in black folklore, or they may be 'makeups'. No explanation is offered in the song, and the listener is left asking, with one of the band, "What kind of man was HE?"

The band was absent from the recording studios for nine months after this session, and when they returned there were changes, both in music and personnel. Weldon had been replaced by the extrovert Alabama guitarist Charlie Burse, and Polk by the much stronger jug of Jab Jones, who also sang and doubled on piano occasionally.

As to the musical changes, it is difficult to know what weight to attach to them. The Memphis Jug Band, in common with others, played to demand, and it is difficult to believe that any one style took a preponderant place at any one time; nevertheless in the recordings which have been heard in the course of writing, a definite pattern emerges. This is set out in Appendix B., where songs which the author regards as Blues are marked with an asterisk (*); it will be evident that there are four periods, two in which mainly Blues were recorded, and two of an opposite character. There is, of course, room for argument as to what is Blues and what is not, but the general pattern still holds good.

One may conclude that there was a definite change in the material played about 1930, as we shall see when the songs after that period are discussed; and it could be argued that Burse and Jones, whose temporary replacement by Hambone Lewis comes shortly after a return to (predominantly) Blues stylings.

Nevertheless, one does not want to make too much of this — patterns are an exceedingly dull subject, both in the construction and in the reading, and a tentative conclusion is that in a generally non-directive recording environment, the Memphis Jug Band was allowed to play whatever music it chose at the time of recording. This is not to deny that the pattern is significant, merely to affirm that the author believes that this music should be enjoyed, rather than embalmed in diagrams. The pattern *is* there — perhaps other conclusions may be drawn elsewhere.




Jones played jug and sang on the first song recorded at a 1928 session: "Lindbergh Hop". This is ostensibly a celebration of Colonel Lindbergh's heroic solo flight across the Atlantic, which took place in May of the previous year, but in Jones' hands it becomes a delightful nonsense song. The 'Lindyhop' was, of course, an attempt to cash in on the aviator's fame through the medium of a dance craze. One may doubt the commercial potential remaining sixteen months after the event. Jones' treatment is such that one is reminded irresistably of Fats Waller's technique of taking popular hits and reducing them to wreckage, though without being able to compare 'straight' versions of the 'Lindyhop', this must remain an open conclusion.

"Sugar Pudding", a delightful dance tune also known as "Take Your Fingers Off it", demonstrates admirably why Polk was replaced; Jab Jones was a far stronger jug player, and his blowing contributes largely to the success of the performance. He was omitted from "A Black Woman Is Like A Black Snake", which featured an excellent vocal duet (probably between Ramey and Burse), with Shade underpinning on harmonica (*B&GR* lists him as 'unk.').

"Whitewash Station" was similar in style to "Sugar Pudding", but raises the interesting question of what, exactly, a whitewash station is. *Webster's Universal* provides no answer; one can assume that it either a limed outhouse or a church, the latter appearing more probable in the context of the song!

The next number to be recorded was "Stealin', Stealin' ", probably the most famous of the Memphis Jug Band's songs, and justifiably so. It is difficult to write about this song except in terms of continuous superlatives; all the musicians play and sing with great authority and a high degree of integration; each is completely aware both of what he is doing and of what the others are doing. The reader is urged to listen, for instance, to the way in which the final chorus comes in at exactly the right moment to end both the instrumental section and the song as a whole.

The session was completed by the recording of two waltzes. These are very similar to each other, and to the work of El Watson (on "Sweet Bunch of Daisies"); the playing is gently lyrical, and the harmonica in particular applies a very bluesy intonation to a very European melody to produce a fascinating overall effect.

The revised band, then, proved highly successful musically, but it was to be a year before they returned to the studios, in September and October 1929. Vol Stevens had left, but the other members had brought with them the female singers Hattie Hart and Minnie Wallace, violinist Milton Roby and the highly proficient guitarist Tewee Blackman, who had himself taught Will Shade the rudiments of the instrument.

On the first two numbers on which he appeared, Roby filled the harmonica role; though his part was well integrated into the performance, his tone was not very pleasant, having a wailing edge which grates on the ear when heard in conjunction with Ramey's kazoo. It is most interesting to note that Shade's musical inventiveness extended to having Roby play pizzicato violin at one point in "I Can't Stand It".

Roby next appeared as part of the group which accompanied Minnie Wallace on two songs, "Dirty Butter" and "The Old Folks Started It". Here Roby's playing is much better. Minnie Wallace sings excellently, and the band is well integrated with her exciting voice. On the first number ther is an excellent piano player, sounding very much like Jab Jones, who plays jug on the other song. So much has Roby's playing improved that it is fair to say that his performance makes the record. The instrumental star of "The Old Folks Started It" is without doubt Will Shade (harmonica), who weaves intricate patterns under Wallace's provocatively sexy vocal.

The following day two numbers (not heard by author) were recorded with Hattie Hart, and on a following session two others: "Feed Your Friend With A Long-handled Spoon", and "I Can Beat You Plenty".

On 3rd October 1929, two songs were recorded. "Taking Your Place" is, frankly, a lousy performance — the whole band sounds dispirited. Burse's guitar is halting, Ramey's kazoo also sounds uncertain and Shade's vocal can only be described at listless. The only bright spot is a short harmonica solo. "Tired Of You Driving Me", on the other hand is superbly played, and Ramey's downbeat vocal is by no means dispirited. It is strange that a band normally so consistent could produce two such greatly different performances on consecutive matrices.

By now Roby's violin had dropped out (he appeared again in 1930 on a solitary side), and Tewee Blackman had been brought in to play guitar. He played on the first side of two recordings made the next day, "Memphis Yo-Yo Blues" (with Hattie Hart, vocal), and "K.C. Moan".

Both these records are superb. On the first, Hart's sensual, moaning voice interweaves marvellously with Shade's harmonica, which takes off in the instrumental break to play a variation, rather than repeating the melody, of the verses. Blackman demonstrates his abilities at this point also, playing some fine arpeggios.

"K.C. Moan" is probably the finest record ever produced by the Memphis Jug Band. Excellent two-guitar work provides a firm foundation for long, drawn-out notes on the harmonica, over which an intricate kazoo solo is played. The vocal is handled with a strange, deliberate effect:

*I thought — I heard — that K.C. — when she blowed*

Harmony singing gives a melancholy effect:—

*She blowed like my woman's on board*

However, rather than subject the song to analysis, it should be heard for the full, spell-binding effect to be appreciated.

The final song of this session was "I Whipped My Woman With A Single Tree", a light-hearted number featuring excellent piano, said to be Charlie Nickerson but sounding very like Jab Jones, with the venerable nonsense chorus, *"Bam-bam-be-deedle-am"*. This too is a fine performance, enhanced by the piano. Blackman does not appear here, and according to *B&GR* never played again on record with the Memphis Jug Band. Aurally, however, he seems to appear on at least two other numbers, "Oh Ambulance Man" and "Caveman Blues" both made in 1930. (On the latter there is a comment from one of the band: "Listen to old Tee tryin' to get away"). Whether or not he was present, Blackman regretably appears on few records with his accomplished guitar work.

The two songs referred to were among eighteen recorded in May and June 1930. Jones was replaced on jug by Hambone Lewis, an even stronger player than Jones, and Charlie Nickerson was brought in to handle some of the vocal work. This session probably also sees the return of Vol Stevens, who may well be playing banjo on the first song recorded, and singing on a couple of numbers.

The first song was entitled "Everybody's Talking About Sadie Green", and introduces us to Charlie Nickerson. He sang mainly on dance tunes and 'hokum' numbers, for which his voice was ideally suited. This song begins with some staged crosstalk about the lady in question, then Nickerson tells the listener of her 'virtues'—

*Everything about her is tight like that*

Nickerson's voice can only be described as ingratiating — it is perfect for the frivolous songs on which he sang.

Two songs with Hattie Hart were next. Her voice was as strong as ever, duetting to great effect with Shade on the vaguely obscene "Oh Ambulance Man", with Lewis' jug commenting lewdly on the proceedings. Hart gave her finest performance in "Cocaine Habit Blues". The song is about drugs, but there is no moralising, and no regrets. The mood is summed up by:

*I love my whiskey and I love my gin,*
*But the way I love my coke is a doggone sin —*
*Hey, hey, honey take a whiff on me!*

Hart's singing is exceptional, even for her, and again the empathy between her voice and Shade's harmonica is well demonstrated.

"Jim Strainer Blues" and "Cave Man Blues" were not exceptional, the latter being another vaguely obscene song similar to "Ambulance Man". A muddy-sounding "Jim Strainer" features kazoo and jug to the fore. Textually, it is distantly related to Papa Charlie Jackson's "Coffee Pot Blues". Olsson states that this song probably refers to a 'Mister Strainer', who was a white man and an enthusiast for the band's music. However, if he were white, Shade would surely have referred to him in the song, given the social conditions obtaining, as 'Mister Strainer'; in any case, the 'Strainer' of this song is a murderer. It may be, of course, that Shade knew more about him than we do, but some doubt may be cast on Olsson's conclusion.

"It Won't Act Right" marks the first appearance of the 'scat' singing which was to


"I Whipped my Woman
with a single tree"
and
"Feed Your Friend
with a long-handled spoon"
.. sung and played by
MEMPHIS
JUG BAND
Victor Record
No. V-38578
A NEW "DEAD CAT ON THE LINE"
and "TESTIFYIN' MEETING"
Preached by REV. F. W. McGEE
Victor Record .. No. V-38579
BLUES
Clifford GIBSON
sings
"HARD-HEADED BLUES"
"LEVEE CAMP BLUES"
NO. V-38577
HOT DANCE
RECORDS JUST OUT
BY BENNIE MOTEN
JELLY ROLL MORTON
McKINNEY'S
COTTON PICKERS
BLUES
Lizzie MILES
sings
"I HATE A MAN LIKE YOU"
"DON'T TELL ME NOTHIN' 'BOUT MY MAN"
NO. V-38571
all the music you want
when you want it on
VICTOR RECORDS

(B-L archives)

be such a feature of the Memphis Jug Band's 1934 recordings. This is a song which might best be described as lunatic — Burse's vocal contortions (barking, amongst other things!) are strongly reminiscient of Cab Calloway.

The next two songs recorded featured the great Memphis Minnie, and were a remake of her big hit, "Bumble Bee Blues", and the first recording of another famous song, "Meningitis Blues". It is perhaps a measure of the Memphis Jug Band's popularity that the record was issued solely under their name, no mention being made on the label of Minnie's presence. (It is not known at the time of writing how the issues were advertised — press inserts and catalogues may have been more informative). "Bumble Bee" was a superb performance, Shade's harmonica pushing Memphis Minnie to sing the new lyrics with more attack than on the famous recording made earlier that same year. The guitar duet on the record is, it may be added, even better than the work on the hit record with her regular partner of the time, Kansas Joe McCoy.

"Meningitis Blues" was less successful. Shade's harmonica was again notably good, but despite the personal nature of the subject, Minnie sounds strangely uninvolved with the material. For all that it is a fine performance, and perhaps suffers in critical estimation from comparisons with "Bumble Bee" and other versions of "Meningitis Blues" itself.

*Blues Records*

**V-38580** **Drive Away Blues**
**Love Changing Blues**
*Singing with Guitar*
**Blind Willie McTell**

**V-38578** **I Whipped My Woman With a Single-Tree**
*with Vocal Refrain*
**Feed Your Friend With a Long-Handled Spoon**
*with Vocal Refrain*
**Memphis Jug Band**

MEMPHIS JUG BAND

"Aunt Caroline Dyer Blues" and "Stonewall Blues" both have interesting lyrics, but are not world-shaking in musical terms. The former is about a well-known 'hoodoo lady' and, if the lyrics are to be believed, a dispenser of aphrodisiacs! "Papa's Got Your Bathwater On" was the last record made with Hattie Hart, being similar to "Ambulance Man". As always when paired with Hart, Shade plays excellent harmonica but the lady herself is below her best. But, even 2nd-class Hattie Hart is better than the best of many.

The last song to be recorded at this session was "Going Back To Memphis", a delightful hymn to that city sung by Charlie Nickerson. Musically it is a surprising throwback to the very first recordings, though Burse's guitar and Nickerson's singing are more impressive than Weldon in either role. This song is also notable for one of the few genuinely witty puns in the Blues field:—

*Nickerson: 'Lord, if I just had my railroad fare! It would be tight like that!'*
*Answer: 'Git that when you get a break!'*
*Reply: 'Don't want no brake, I wants a freight!'*

In November of 1930 the band assembled to make their last recording for *Victor* — they had been in continuous demand for four years, but by this time the Great Depression was being felt, and cutbacks were made in the recording industry. After this occasion it was to be almost two years before the Memphis Jug Band again faced the microphones. It may be regarded as a gesture of defiance against hard times that from this time on, the overwhelming majority of their material was of a cheerful nature, with less hard-blues content.

The first recording was of the old medicine-show song, "He's In The Jailhouse Now". Jab Jones and Vol Stevens were back, the latter playing banjo on this number.

The song includes political comment about voting twice:

*'stead of stayin' at home, leavin' those white folks' business alone*

In contrast to this is the observation:

*If he have a political friend, judge sentence he will suspend*

This extraordinary line makes one wonder just how much 'Boss' Crump liked jug bands!

All the musicians were very much at home with each other's work on this, and all numbers from this session, which were very similar dance tunes with the exception of "Round And Round". This is a slight number, simple in conception and delightfully executed. As to the other songs, to the author they represent the work of the best group ever assembled by Will Shade. With their blasting, superbly played harmonica and kazoo, the magisterial mandolin work of Vol Stevens and Nickerson's ebullient vocals, they are the product of a band which is completely integrated musically. Yet, with all this brilliantly resolved ensemble work, there is an eruption of spontaneous joy arising from the awareness that they are a great band playing great music. One has only to listen to the shouted instructions . . . .

*"Benny, you a fool with that thing!*
*"Son, you play that thing . . . . just listen to that harp!"*
*"Wonder what is that row? Oh, it's "Move That Thing", ain't it?"*
*"Play it again — you ain't played it but once!"*

This is the peak of the Memphis Jug Band's achievement, and the musicians know it; "K.C. Moan" and "Stealin' " are masterpieces, and nearly everything else is excellent, but here are five (if not six) consecutive masterpieces. As has been mentioned, this was the last recording session for nearly two years, until 8th August 1932, when Shade, Jones, Burse and Stevens travelled to Richmond, Indiana to record for the Starr Piano Company's cheap label, *Champion.* With them they took a percussionist, Otto Gilmore, the first percussionist to appear on record as a member of a Will Shade group. The records were issued under a variety of credits, but the one which best sums up these performances is the 'Jolly Jug Band'; 'relentlessly jolly' would perhaps be nearer the mark. Those songs which have been heard in research are all well-known 'hokum' numbers, perhaps the best being, "I Got Good Taters".

Listening to these songs in succession, though, produces a somewhat numbing effect, for they are all very similar in form and execution. Gilmor's percussion, whilst

undeniably enthusiastic, is generally anarchic and alien to the disciplined music normally played by the Memphis Jug Band. The poor sound quality of these recordings also works against one's enjoyment, the outstanding one being "Come Along Little Children", sung by Burse and Jones. This is the very old minstrel number, "Raise A Rukus Tonight"; its age may be seen in the lines:

*My old mist'is promised me,*
*When she died she'd set me free*

However on this occasion generally there was a singular poverty of musical ideas.

More than two years were to pass before the next, and last, recordings. These were made in Chicago, for the soon-to-be-extinct ***Okeh*** 8000 series, which had not long previously been taken over by ***Brunswick***. The music was still chiefly 'good-time' material, but of a much higher quality than in 1932. There had been considerable line-up changes; Ramey had departed (he was not with the band on their 1932 session), and his kazoo was never again to be heard on record. Gilmore had also gone, but percussion remained a feature, now handled by Charlie Burse's brother, Robert. Jab Jones was definitely present on some titles, but Dewey Corley played an immensely powerful jug on some titles. Most important of all, Ramey's place was taken by Charlie Pierce, a violinist of truly phenominal powers, who had at one time played in W. C. Handy's Orchestra. Pierce brought a strong hillbilly sound to the band, and the emphasis was on fast harmonica and/or violin breakdowns, with the jug now definitely a front-line voice. In more than one case, the pieces were effectively fiddle-jug duets.

As Sam Charters has pointed out, the leadership of this band was basically a joint one between Burse and Shade, and the influence of Burse is surely reflected, both here and in the 1932 titles. Burse was a highly extrovert personality, as the recordings made after his rediscovery reveal, and the generally exuberant atmosphere prevailing on the ***Okeh*** sides, with their raucous laughter and 'scat' singing, is a manifestation of Burse's musical ideas rather than Shade's.

The first song recorded was one of the most lowdown Blues that the Memphis Jug Band ever recorded, "Mary Anna Cut-Off". Jab Jones sang, and produced barrelhouse piano to rank with the greatest exponents of that form. The title is something of a mystery; Jones does in fact refer to 'Mary Anna', but the 'Cut-Off' is an enigma which has not so far been explained. The song is nevertheless a classic of its kind.

"Jazzbo Stomp" and "Gator Wobble" are both harmonica tours-de-force, and are in fact very similar in tune, the former being taken at twice the speed of the latter. "Jazzbo Stomp" may give us a glimpse of the band's stage-act in the opening dialogue:

*"Hey, Jazzbo, play me that Jazzbo Stomp!"*
*"Yaassuh!"*

Whereupon Shade produces one of the finest harmonica breakdowns ever put on record.

"Gator Wobble" also features fine harmonica, underpinned by some good washboard and cowbell work by Bob Burse. The outstanding feature of this tune, next to Shade's playing, is the piano by Jones, who takes off into an excellent solo, on which Charlie Burse comments:

*Play that thing man; you know that's all my peoples all together there*

a remark which, in its recognition of both individual ability and collective empathy, sums up the qualities which make the Memphis Jug Band such satisfying listening.

The following day the band returned to the studio, this time bringing Charlie Pierce to play "Boodie Bum Bum", a song strongly reminiscient of "Boodle-De-Bum Bum" by Blind Bogus Ben Covington, from Alabama. Charlie Burse sang on this side; it is an interesting, if unsupported conjecture, that he may have had the song first-hand from his fellow Alabamian.

Burse also sang on "Take Your Fingers Off It", performed at a frantic pace and

featuring the amazingly nimble fiddle of Pierce and (probably) Dewey Corley's thunderous jug blowing. The 'scat' singing here gives Burse a chance to display some truly astonishing vocal contortions.

"She Done Sold It Out" was rather an uninteresting piece, the last to be recorded on that day, and taken somewhat in the band's 1929-30 style with the jug heavily muted, the main work being carried by the violin over simple guitar figures.

On November 8th 1934, the Memphis Jug Band made their last recordings. Appropriately the three which have been heard in research are among their best. "My


VICTOR DIVISION, RCA Victor Company, Inc., Camden, N. J. Form No. 2211—RJSA—Printed in U. S. A.

Business Ain't Right'' was an instrumental version of the old standby, ''Take Your Fingers Off It''. It is, to a large extent a duet between fiddle and jug, Charlie Burse playing some excellent mandolin in support. ''Memphis Shakedown'' and ''Rukus Juice And Chittlin' '' were similar in conception, but taken at a faster temp. The two performances are also alike in melody — above all they are both masterpieces. Pierce turns in two quite astounding performances in duet with Corley's deep-voiced Jug. Everyone on these sides is enjoying himself immensely, and the cry of *Hahaha! Ol' Memphis Shakedown!* demonstrates the pleasure that the musicians are deriving from their music.

With these delightful recordings, the story of the Memphis Jug Band on record comes to an end, fulfilling the old showbiz principle of 'leave 'em asking for more'. There was to be little more — Shade did some accompaniment work, notably in 1935 when he put together a distinguished line-up (Robert Wilkins, Kid Stormy Weather, Kid Spoons and himself) to back Minnie Wallace under the name of the Nighthawks; Charlie Burse recorded a number of sides in1939 with his Memphis Mudcats, consisting of piano, sax, bass and drums.

And that, apart from a number of songs recorded after Will and Charlie were rediscovered, and shortly before their deaths, was that. Shade and Burse remained capable musicians (*cf. Beale Street Mess Around L.P.*). Robert Burse is still alive, preserved in alcohol but not playing; surviving too is Dewey Corley (also on above L.P.) and plays kazoo and washtub bass, uninspiringly, sad to say.

As ''Whitewash Station'' says:

*You can toot your whistle, blow your horn,*
*Memphis Jug Band done been here an' gone*

. . . . . but what a legacy they left!

**APPENDIX A. Books and Records.**

1. Books and other printed material.

*The Story of The Blues.* Paul Oliver 1969
*Memphis Blues.* Bengt Olsson 1970
*Recording the Blues.* Godrich & Dixon 1970
*Blues & Gospel Records 1902-1942.* Godrich & Dixon 1969
*Notes to RF6 and OJL4 by* Samuel B. Charters

2. Records.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Roots RL 322 & 337* | ''Memphis Jug Band'' Vols 1 & 2 |
| *CC 2* | ''Memphis Jug Band'' |
| *OJL 4* | ''The Great Jug Bands'' (3 tracks) |
| *RBF RF 6* | ''Jug Bands 1923-1931'' (3 tracks) |
| *Historical HLP 36* | ''The Great Jug Bands (3 tracks) |
| *Blues Classics 2* | ''Jug, Jook & Washboard Bands'' (4 tracks) |
| *Roots 307* | ''The Memphis Area'' (3 tracks) |
| *Roots 310* | ''Missouri & Tennessee'' (1 track) |
| *Roots 311* | ''Harmonicas, Washboards, Fiddles & Jugs'' (4 tracks) |
| *Roots 323* | ''Memphis Blues Vol 1'' (2 tracks) |
| *Riverside RM8802* | ''Tub Jug Washboard Bands'' (2 tracks) |
| *Revival RVS 1004* | ''Beale Street Mess Around'' (rediscovery material) |

Thanks to Alan Balfour, Dave Godby and Wandsworth Public Library for the loan of records.

**Appendix B. Songs heard, their instrumentation and type.**

| Song | Vclm. | Vclf. | Hca. | Kaz. | Jug | Mnd. | Bjo/Gts. | Vln. | Pno. | Perc. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stingy Woman Blues+ | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Memphis Jug Blues+ | 3 | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Sunshine Blues+ | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Memphis Boy Blues+ | 3 | | | X | X | | X | | | |
| I'm Looking For The Bully Of The Town | 3 | | | X | X | | X | | | |
| I Packed My Suitcase, Started To The Train+ | X | X | | X | | X | 2 | | | |
| State Of Tennessee Blues+ | X | X | | X | | X | 2 | | | |
| Bob Lee Junior Blues+ | | X | | X | | X | 2 | | | |
| Kansas City Blues | 3 | | X | X | | | 2 | | | |
| Beale Street Mess Around+ | X | | X | X | | | 2 | | | |
| I'll See You In The Spring When The Birds Begin To Sing | X | | | X | X | | X | | | |
| Snitchin' Gambler Blues | X | | | | X | X | X | | | |
| Evergreen Money Blues+ | X | | | | X | X | 2 | | | |
| Coal Oil Blues+ | X | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Papa Long Blues+ | X | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Peaches In The Springtime+ | 2 | | | X | X | X | X | | | |
| She Stays Out All Night Long+ | X | | | X | X | X | 2 | | | |
| Lindbergh Hop | 2 | | | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Sugar Pudding | 3 | | X | X | X | X | X | | | |
| A Black Woman Is Like A Black Snake | 2 | | X | X | | | 2 | | | |
| Whitewash Station | 2 | | X | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Stealin', Stealin' | 3 | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Jug Band Waltz | | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Mississippi River Waltz | | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| I Can't Stand It+ | 2 | | | X | X | | 2 | X | | |
| What's The Matter? | 3 | | | X | X | | 2 | X | | |
| Dirty Butter+ | X | X | | | | | X | X | X | |
| The Old Folks Started It+ | | X | X | | X | | X | X | | |
| Feed Your Friend With A Long-Handled Spoon+ | X | | | X | X | | 2 | X | | |
| I Can Beat You Plenty (That Hand You Tried To Deal Me) | 2 | | X | X | X | | X | X | | |
| Taking Your Place+ | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Tired Of You Driving Me+ | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Memphis Yo Yo Blues+ | | X | X | | X | | 2 | | | |
| K.C. Moan+ | 3 | | X | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| I Whipped My Woman With A Single Tree | 3 | | | X | X | | X | | X | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Everybody's Talking About Sadie Green | X | | | X | X | X | XX | | | |
| Oh Ambulance Man+ | X | X | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Cocaine Habit Blues+ | 2 | X | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Jim Strainer Blues+ | X | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Cave Man Blues+ | X | | | | X | | 2 | X | | |
| It Won't Act Right | 3 | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Bumble Bee Blues+ | | X | X | | X | | 2 | | | |
| Meningitis Blues+ | | X | X | | X | | 2 | | | |
| Aunt Caroline Dyer Blues+ | X | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Stonewall Blues+ | X | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| Papa's Got Your Bathwater On+ | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Going Back To Memphis+ | 3 | | | X | X | | 2 | | | |
| He's In The Jailhouse Now | 2 | | X | | X | | XX | | | |
| Got A Letter From My Darlin' | 2 | | X | X | X | | X | | | |
| Round And Round | 2 | | X | X | X | X | X | | | |
| You May Leave But This Will Bring You Back | X | | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| Move That Thing | X | | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| You Got Me Rolling | 2 | | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| You Got To Have That Thing | 2 | | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Tappin' That Thing | 2 | | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Bottle It Up And Go | 2 | | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| I Got Good Taters | X | | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Come Along Little Children | 2 | | X | | X | X | X | | | X |
| Mary Anna Cut Off+ | X | | X | | | | X | | X | X |
| Jazzbo Stomp | | | X | | X | | X | | X | X |
| Gator Wobble | | | X | | | X | | | X | X |
| Boodie Bum Bum | X | | | | | | 2 | X | X | X |
| Take Your Fingers Off It | X | | | | X | | X | X | | X |
| She Done Sold It Out | X | | | | X | | 2 | X | | X |
| Memphis Shakedown | | | | | X | | 2 | X | | X |
| Rukus Juice And Chittlin' | | | | | X | | 2 | X | | X |
| My Business Ain't Right | | | | | X | X | X | X | | X |

NOTES:

A) + denotes blues tune.

B) Broken line indicates end of session; solid line indicates end of session and change of musical style.

C) No account is taken of speech, laughter or scat singing.

D) This chart is based on *Blues & Gospel Records, 1902-1942,* by R. M. W. Dixon and J. Godrich, and aural evidence in support or correction.

E) Bjo. is present only on "Sadie Green" and "He's In The Jailhouse". In both cases Gtr. is also present.

# Talkabout with Bob Groom

(A column of news, comment and discussion which first appeared in the second issue of the now defunct *78 Quarterly* and which we thought appropriate to revive for *Blues-Link*.)

Many collectors probably feel that they already have a representative selection of Leadbelly recordings in their collection and that any new LP that comes containing familiar titles is for the completist. Folks, you're wrong! A new LP on the *Playboy* label (PB 119 "Leadbelly") makes available for the first time a complete Leadbelly concert recording. Although the concert was held less than four months before his death, Leadbelly was in tremendous form and established a complete rapport with his audience. These are some of the most atmospheric concert performances I have ever heard. The concert was captured by a wire recorder but the sound is as good, or better than, that on many of Leadbelly's studio recordings. No blues collection is complete without a copy of this amazing record.

Tom Pomposello, who has a radio show on *WKCR-FM*, New York City, recently taped some fine performances by local bluesman Charles Walker playing accoustic guitar, with Larry Johnson on harp. Walker normally plays electric guitar and has his own blues band (2nd guitar, drums, piano, bass and Bill Dicey on harp) which plays regularly in New York City. Tom hopes to feature the band on *WKCR-FM*.

Champion Jack Dupree was featured in a perceptive three quarter hour documentary film shown by ITV on the evening of July 10th. Jack spoke his mind on a number of topics, with the theme of freedom and personal dignity running through much of what he said. Several club performances were included in the film, including

Arvella Grey & Blind Jim Brewer on Maxwell St. photos— Valerie Wilmer.

freedom songs, blues and boogies. One delightful episode had Fats Domino singing and playing "Blueberry Hill" with Jack sat alongside commenting and doing his Louis Armstrong imitations. Film of his home with Shirley and the children helped fill out the portrait of Jack as he is today. An excellent film.

The sleeve-notes to *Blue Goose* 2011 by Shirley Griffith consist of a fabricated interview and sardonic comments by that noted jester of blues writing, Steve Calt. In a different context Steve's 'clever' fiction might be funny, but on an LP sleeve it is highly inappropriate and does a disservice to the artist. (I wonder what Griffith himself makes of such contorted rubbish?). Many purchasers of this album will be hearing Griffith for the first time, unaware of his two fine *Bluesville* albums, and wanting to know more about the artist. All that the sleeve will reveal to them is that Steve Calt has a complex about blues, blues research and blues singers . . .

Re Cary Baker's suggestion about Arvella Gray in his article on Maxwell Street in *Blues World* 42, it occurs to me that a Maxwell Street LP (on the lines of the long deleted *Heritage* HLP 1004) might make a nice addition to the *Delmark* catalogue. Over to you Bob Koester . . .

Autumn events: European tours planned for Jimmy Rogers and a Chicago package including Homesick James, John Wrencher, Hubert Sumlin and Erwin Helfer (October) Little Joe Blue (November), New *Yazoo* releases—East Coast Vol. 2, Georgia Tom Dorsey, Hokum and a piano/guitar set. *Blue Goose* will put out second albums by Bill Williams and Sam Chatman.

Seen in a recent record sale— *$200*(!!) asked for an abscure vocal group record (The Revels', "My Lost Love" on *Atlas*). What price Son House *Paramounts* these days I wonder . . .

---

# The Rise And Fall Of The Leicester Blues Empire

The original intention was incredibly laudable, some may say pretentious. We were to be a non-profit-making organisation, providing a centre for blues fans in the areas surrounding the City of Leicester. We certainly achieved the former; constantly, and often with a vengeance (as the red figures on our bank statements will testify!). As to the second target—I think we had some fair degree in this.

I came up with the idea, after months of wanting to, but being unable to, hear blues locally, and put it to a close friend of the time. After all, others were doing it, so why not we? He was game, as were two other friends (even to the point of putting in money!). We all chipped in five shillings (big-time stuff this) to cover the initial expense of an ad in the local evening paper, and so with four optimists—three bank clerks and a sailor!—the *Leicester Blues Appreciation Society* was born. The time—October 1968.

The ad brought a small flurry of enquiries, all sounding wildly enthusiastic and encouraging, together with a letter from a guy with a jazz programme on *Radio Leicester* inviting me to guest on his next show to plug the whole scheme further. This I did. With what success I've never been sure, but suffice to say, at the end of fourteen days from the

first tentative steps, we had the mail-bag busting total of fifteen enquiries.

With this encouragement, a meeting place was found, in a room above a local coffee bar, and the first gathering fixed. For the opening night Guy (this close friend) and I had sketched out a rough outline of a programme. I forget the precise details, but after introducing ourselves, and basically setting the scene, I know we played as much blues as we could. I n retrospect that was not much. I, at the time, was the proud owner of one blues album (!!—a Howlin' Wolf import) and Guy had a couple of Mayall albums, Butterfield's ''East-West'' and a few others of like material. Real purist stuff! This immediately caused friction, as certain elements in the first night's crowd of thirty-odd were basically pre-1942 fanatics. For those of you not sufficiently into blues to understand, there is somehow a very definite demarcation line drawn at the end of 1942. To those supporting pre-this, later blues were not worth a jot, were completely lacking in any merit, and were just not respectable! Similarly, those preferring post-1942 looked on the older stuff as being too esoteric and without any value in the music of the (then) sixties. This conflict started quietly enough, but as time went on, and members got to know each other, and became more sure of their own preferences, it deepened visibly. It even reached Guy and myself, to the extent that whichever of us held stage, the meeting took a definite lean one way or the other.

I mentioned the figure of thirty-odd for our first meeting. This many not sound many, but ask anyone who has run a blues society, and you will see it is not short of the norm. Often it was less than this, so bearing in mind the cost of the room, advertising, postage, etc., you can see why we were on a shoe string.

Throughout the whole period we remained 'public' (three years). It was a lot of bloody hard work, often rewarded with tremendous frustrating apathy, but the response and rapport we got from the regulars made it all worthwhile. For our first Christmas we threw a party at a local pub. Nothing very grand—a few records, but mainly music by two local acts, one group and one solo—all peripheral members, but the place was packed out and we actually had to lock the doors! Immediately prior to this we had turned down Curtis Jones—offered to us at £15(!)—because we weren't sure whether we could cover our costs. This party showed us the potential and so we went on to book Mississippi Fred McDowell for March 1969. Again we put in a lot of hard work, but the evening was a tremendous artistic success with us financially breaking even. Whatever the cost, it was worth it to meet the great man, now, sadly, of course no longer with us. He seemed to enjoy him self, as he drank and sang through the night till 6 a.m. at the lodging we'd arranged for him (the home of one of our members).

Carried along by the buoyancy of this success, and in an attempt to keep contact with new-found supporters, we put on Duster Bennett and Ian A. Anderson two months later; at the prohibitive cost of £25 loss! Again musically very successful, with Duster and Ian winning over many previous cynics; we were victims of black blues snobbery. And so, to a pause in promotion ambitions and a return to the staple fortnightly diet of meetings above the coffee bar.

At this stage, a quick word on record companies. As many know, some only have $ signs in their eyes, whilst there are some prepared to help in return for the less obvious buck. Among the latter, *Liberty* (as it was then), *Transatlantic* and *Blue Horizon* (in early days, up to the Bennett concert) were very helpful. It was always a great fillip to be able to play new releases at meetings. I shall be eternally grateful to Ronnie Bell *(Liberty/UA),* Steve Mann *(Tranny)* and the Vernon Brothers (more especially Richard in those early days) for their help. Regretfully *BH* turned mercenary as they grew bigger; when they were small they were prepared to swop help, whereas later they just didn't want to know. Bad memories are not easy to wipe out.

But to return to events; fortunes had recovered sufficiently by early 1970 for us to consider a Big Boy Crudup show. Agreeing certain financial arrangements with the *National Blues Federation,* this was put on, to the enjoyment of all, and no cost to our pockets (no profit either). Again, over all else was the chance to meet him, this time in my flat where we spent a couple of happy hours listening to him talk and reminisce before retiring for the night.

Membership at this time had reached—?—an unknown figure. We had 150 on our books, including two in the States and two in France (a Leicester blues association?), but how many were active we never knew. Meetings were still struggling between 20 and 30 and a move to a pub room in response to requests seemed to lose more than it gained. A brief spell back at the coffee bar, and then a hall at the local polytechnic (which is where we put on Crudup). It was still a constant slog to get even this small response, at times we came near to despair, but for even the few that attended regularly, we felt it still worthwhile. We constantly invited people to make suggestions, give talks, even to request their favourite blues records, but it was virtually blank stares all round. Blues blotting paper was the usual response and it was all down to us again. At this point I would like to thank *everyone* who helped and gave encouragement, as constant apathy is hard to take. You were appreciated more than you knew.

Later in the year ('70) we booked Larry Johnson and Dave Kelly; but let Bob take the story from here.

Mississippi Fred McDowell — photo courtesy Black Lion —→

Larry Johnson was booked through the then ailing *National Blues Federation* for a 7.30 start. By 8.15 no one had arrived and so the concert was called off, money refunded, bar closed and venue shut. At around 9.10 the artists arrived, after everyone had left. With this shattering blow to the resources (there was no chance of reclaiming the various costs from the *NBF*, a solicitor had informed us that were we to take it higher we would certainly win but also certainly accrue the costs!) it was decided to suspend the regular public meetings indefinitely.

About eight of us decided to meet on alternate weeks for drinks and general keeping up with the blues world. John and I kept the account open for the furtherance of the discount trade he had started and traded under the name *LBAS*.

For some time John had been writing regular record reviews for local newspapers, as well as the occasional piece for *IT*. Gradually this became a much bigger part of the Society's time because we both began to write for more and more magazines. This situation continued until two unconnected incidents in January 1972 started the ball rolling all over again. The first occurrence was a letter to John from an unknown agency in Birmingham called *Big Bear* offering us Eddie 'Guitar' Burns for concerts. For financial reasons we were not interested at the time but were far more intrigued to know where his name was found. After much research we discovered that Jim Simpson, head of *Big Bear*, was also manager of a currently popular blues group Brewers Droop, the lead singer being one Ron Watts late of the *NBF*. The pieces of what could have been (and may still be) a new blues 'boom' were fitting together. An analysis of Jim Simpson's contribution to bringing the blues to Britain is not required here.


Almost at the same time we discovered an ad in the local paper proclaiming a blues night at a local pub. Further enquiries realised one George Toone, a middle-aged promoter from Nottingham, together with The Colin Staples Blues Band, who, apart from playing the same numbers weekly, were pretty good. We introduced ourselves and soon became an integral part of the proposed 'Midlands Blues Boom' (!?!). Part of the evening was given over to us to play records and so we notified all ex-members that the *LBAS* was operating again. Response was good initially but the giant electricity strike of the time put a stop to any real expansion and the venture soon folded.

Toone was full of great ideas for joining up midland societies, none of which ever came to fruition and another club at another pub also folded. He has not been seen in Leicester since and Colin Staples now plays solo; his band defunct.

Jim Simpson still barraged us with mail solicitations until finally we decided to give it a try. Rather than risk the fast growing resources of the *LBAS* (sales) we, along with three other committee members, formed a new company (or rather, opened a new bank account) called *Leicester Blues Promotions* with a contribution of £20 from *LBAS* and £5 from each of us. We had decided that any concerts would only be promoted with a partner so as to cut any loss. After many negotiations with local clubs and halls proved unworkable, we found an ally in the University Folk Club, through the efforts of former member and musician Pete Smith. Our first concert featured Lightnin' Slim supported by Pete's group and was a great artistic, as well as financial, success. This spurred us on

to do further promotions.

We decided that the society as such was not totally impractical. It was obvious that there was just not enough people to support local artists and weekly or fortnightly recitals. However, we agreed that promoting blues talent into Leicester should be our major forte, supported to a certain extent by the money raised from record sales and the prestige of writing for numerous magazines (this has solicited much help from record companies).

Our second affair featured Dr. Ross and was fixed at a time when students were taking finals. As such it was a financial disaster, putting our *LBP* account solidly in the RED. To help us out of this situation *Big Bear* not only gave us Lightnin' Slim but also Whispering Smith at a greatly reduced rate (due to the fact that they were playing within 25 miles at the lunchtime). This set was an even greater success than the first and just about got us solvent again. The fourth effort featured Johnny Mars. This again was an artistic triumph but financially disastrous, placing us in an even worse position than before. From it, though, was gleaned a great interview with Johnny which can be found in the fourth issue of *Black Wax Magazine.*

On June 11th 1973 we worked with the *Leicester Jazz Society* on promoting Willie Mabon which realised a joint loss of £12 which isn't that bad. It augurs well for the future and as our University contacts graduate this year we will certainly co-promote more with the jazz society.

We may not be blues philanthropists (despite our image!) but if *Barclay* don't mind we'll carry on putting the best blues singers on in Leicester until we make that elusive profit. The *Leicester Blues Society* will live on in spirit until the audience for theory—as well as practical—exists once again. In the meantime, *Leicester Blues Promotions* will carry the can.

Despite all the financial losses of the past, we have the consolation of knowing that whenever the chance arises we shall be the ones to bring the blues into Leicester.

Addresses: John Stretton, 60 Moorgate Avenue, Birstall, Leicester.
Bob Fisher, 16 Yorkshire Road, Leicester.

Johnny Mars photo courtesy *Big Bear*

Willie Mabon photo Bill Greensmith.

# Sidetrackin' with Frank Sidebottom: Some by-ways of Blues.

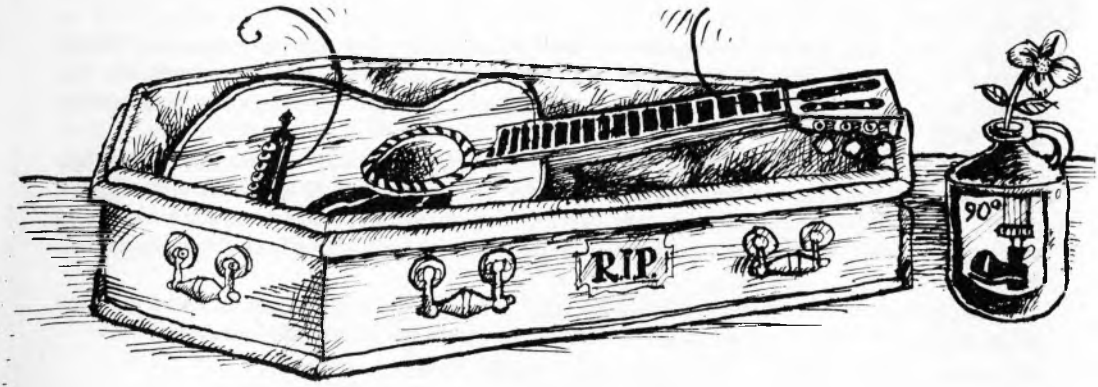
*And we're goin' to meet old Death one day (x2),*
*I'm goin' to Judgement afterwhile, I got to greet death with a smile,*
*Oh we got to meet our death one day.*

Blind Willie McTell.

Death—often regarded as a 'taboo' subject, like sex. Yet as the subject of sex is milked for all it's worth (on record that is) by the Bluesmen, the subject of death is given quite a good lyrical innings. In using examples for illustration taken from, mainly, a pre-war recorded source, we must bear in mind the latent violent atmosphere of the American South, as King Solomin Hill threatens his girl:

*Undertaken been here an' gone—I give him your height an' size*

("Whoopee Blues")




Death may have been regarded as one way out of a poverty-stricken existence, and the role of the undertaker in such songs as "Hearse Man Blues" (Memphis Slim) and "Undertaker Blues" (Buster Johnson), is brought to the fore. But Bukka White sings of a funeral scene at the cemetery and *projects* himself from the identity of the singer to that of the morbid situation of the deceased, eerily advising his mourning family:

*Mother, take my children back, before they let me down,*
*Ain't no need o' they screamin' an' cryin', on the graveyard ground*

("Fixing To Die")

Another example of 'projection into death' comes from Freddie Spruell, who describes the scene at the funeral parlour where his body lies, the cause of death having been misadventure whilst hoboing on the railroad:

*When you walk into the undertaker's, look over on your right-hand side,*
*You can ask the undertakers about me—they may tell you how I died*

("Your Good Man Is Gone")

A method of relieving the pressures of bereavement is to involve superstition and rural, ritualistic customs at the time of a death, and one song, Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave is Kept Clean", reveals many such customs; there are two white horses, in line, to draw the hearse, the church bell 'toning' (tolling) for the dead, the hammering of coffin nails, and the fantasy of a luxurious burial using a silver spade to dig the grave and a golden chain to lower the coffin. Blind Willie McTell also gave practical instructions which were to be followed at the death of the "Dyin' Gambler"

(later to become "Dyin' Crapshooter"), which included 'snatchin' the pillow' from under his head, specification of wreath arrangement, pall-bearers and epitaphs.

One aspect of dying, mentioned in essence more in Gospel and Spirituals, is the prospect of an afterlife. Secular Blues singers seem to be rather non-committal on this point, or rather diplomatic, as from the commercial viewpoint of record-sales he would have to be careful not to offend anyone with religious tendencies by singing Blues which may have denounced those religious beliefs. Singers, it is often noticed, would perform Blues under their own names and 'sanctified' music under a pseudonym. Son House, in his formidable masterpiece "My Black Mama" states his own convictions thus:

*Hey—t'aint no heaven, says it ain't no burnin' hell,*
*Says, where I'm goin' when I die—can't nobody tell.*

Where indeed? But the concept of 'ramblin' an' wanderin' has been a constant catalyst in Blues Lyrics, even after death, for Robert Johnson in particular:

*You may bury my body down by the highway side,*
*Spoken: Babe, I don't care where you bury my body when I'm dead an' gone . . .*
*You may bury my body, oooh, down by the highway side,*
*So my old evil spirit can get a Greyhound Bus and ride.*

("Me And The Devil")

The spirit of the Blues certainly lives on through the recordings of these long-gone singers; one thing is certain, the Blues will never die.

# Kokomo Arnold

**Leon Terjanian**

(This article was originally written in French. We would like to say a special thank you to Clare Jenkins for translating it).

Kokomo Arnold is high up on the list of 'Bottleneck'/'Slide' guitarists. However, despite being one of the blues giants of immense talent, not much has been written about him. In 1959 Jacques Demetre and the late Marcel Chauvard succeeded in interviewing Kokomo which later appeared in *Jazz Hot* no. 154 May 1960. It is from that interview that some of the extracts quoted in this article have been taken.

> *I am a native of Georgia. I was born on February 15th 1901 in Lovejoy, a little village south of Atlanta. Yes I was a farmer, but at the same time I used to play the guitar a bit, with my cousin John Wiggs. He gave me my musical inspiration.*

In 1919 Kokomo left his home for Buffalo, later moving on to Pittsburgh and Gary, where he worked as a labourer in the steel works. It has been surmised that Kokomo travelled a great deal between 1919 and 1929, even suggested that he crossed the Atlantic to Spain. This hypothesis being based on such a seasick journey in "Big Ship Blues" recorded in 1937. Be that as it may, we know for sure that he found his way to Chicago in 1929, which was to be his base, even though from there he moved around a lot.

In 1930 Kokomo was in Memphis to cut a disc for *Victor* using the pseudonym Gitfiddle Jim. These two sides, "Paddlin' Blues" and "Rainy Night Blues", are among the gems of recorded blues. First and foremost they are instrumental showpieces highlighting Armold's very personal skill and technique. With his guitar placed flat on his knees, his left hand plucks the strings with speed and dexterity, whilst his right slides a blade over the strings of the neck. Exaggerating the use of this primitive bottleneck for the melody line, he accompanies it with a flourish, creating an irresistable swing.

*I never wanted to make records. The first time I was dragged by force into the studio. No, I've always preferred a quiet, simple life, far removed from the vanities and tumult of this world.*

We can quickly sympathise with this sentiment when we learn that at the time of his first disc he had a lucrative little business in bootleg alcohol; the last thing he needed was publicity.

In December 1933 prohibition came to an end and the following year saw the real beginning of Kokomo's recording career and musical life. It was guitarist Joe McCoy who persuaded record producer Mayo Williams to record Kokomo once again and on September 10th 1934 four tracks were cut for *Decca* in Chicago. Two of them, "Milkcow Blues" and "Original Kokomo Blues" on *Decca* 7026, were to be one of the company's biggest sellers. These two *Decca* recordings were musically quite different from those made for *Victor* four years earlier.

"Paddlin' Blues" and "Rainy Night Blues" (available on *Yazoo* L 1012) are the work of a young **guitarist**-singer who makes much of his phenomenal instrumental technique and attaches little importance to his singing. Everything is in the overflowing vitality of the guitar playing.


By contrast, "Old Original Kokomo" and "Milkcow Blues", like the majority of his later recordings, are less aggressive. In those four years he, to a certain degree, matured becoming a **singer**-guitarist, placing as much importance on the vocal aspect as on the instrumental accompaniment. His harsh falsetto voice has a pronounced vibrato and when playing solo guitar he can be heard to give a throaty growl.

With the success of his first record for *Decca*, James 'Kokomo' Arnold became a star; at least in the eyes of his own people. At some point he met the pianist-guitarist Peetie Wheatstraw (real name William Bunch). Together they performed in Chicago and the surrounding neighbourhood, making the occasional trips to Pittsburgh where they enlivened dances. On May 22nd 1936 the duo accompanied singers Mary Johnson (ex-wife of Lonnie Johnson) and Alice Moore, on their respective records for *Decca*. All in all, Kokomo's recording career only lasted between 1934 and 1938, that is, if we don't count his Gitfiddle Jim recording in 1930. In the course of those four years, about 120 tracks were cut; 90 in Kokomo's name, the rest as partner to Peetie on his recordings. Arnold's records are all very much alike; perhaps too much so to hear them all in succession, without their becoming monotonous. As Paul Oliver has already pointed out, most of his recordings are modelled on the first "Milkcow Blues".

This being so, let's look at those which are different from the magnificent "Milkcow";- "Let Your Money Talk" (1) follows the old eight bar English ballad, which, however, isn't strictly adhered to by Kokomo. "The Twelves" (2) is a very personal version of the "Dirty Dozens" (two partners swopping insults about their families).

Vulgar though this blues may be, it is probably the best disc of Kokomo as a guitarist since his *Victor* recording. "Shake That Thing" (3) is a nice little pornographic blues, which doesn't leave much to the imagination. "Set Down Gal" (2) is a magnificent Kokomo/Wheatstraw piece about an adulterous woman; the back door man who is afraid that her husband will find out about the affair. "Big Ship Blues" (2) is an evocative blues about seasickness.

It is difficult to know for certain why Kokomo stopped recording in 1938. Some say that it was because his blues all became to sound so much alike, whilst others put it down to a disagreement between Kokomo and *Decca* over the fees and royalties he was paid. Whatever the reason, Kokomo Arnold gave up music in 1941 and sank into oblivion, that is, until 1959 when Jacques Demetre and Marcel Chauvard visited the States and located him in Chicago working in a factory. He was far from pleased at hearing the word 'blues' mentioned.

*Look, if I was still a musician I would have to worry about where I was going to play this evening. Here I'm sure of having enough to live on and I can happily forget the past. The past is over, what's the point of trying to bring it back?*

The report of this discovery appeared in *Jazz Hot* and *Jazz Journal.* Critics, impresarios, record companies once more showed interest in the bluesman. Kokomo was nobody's fool. He prefered working in the factory, going fishing and amusing the neighbourhood children. His method of maintaining this tranquility was by asking exorbitant prices from all who suggested he returned to music or question him about his past. This way, Kokomo Arnold managed to isolate himself from the blues and people soon stopped talking about him. However, he did reputedly record something for Willie Dixon (which was never released!) but not long after Kokomo died of a heart attack in Chicago on November 8th 1969. We shall never know if that one recording session for Willie Dixon was an isolated incident or whether it was that Kokomo was thinking of making a comeback.

Today, certain blues artists are favoured by the critics, for example, Robert Johnson, Elmore James, *Excello* stars, whilst others, no less talented, have been completely neglected. This is the case with Tampa Red, to name but one; it is also the case of James 'Kokomo' Arnold, to whom the specialist magazines gave the most meagre of obituaries.

What a pity that Kokomo should have refused to give interviews. Having worked with and known so many bluesmen, his reminiscences would have been most valuable. As for his own biography it is, alas, very incomplete.

What did he do between 1919 and 1930? Was it not until 1933 that he came to Chicago, having lived in Cairo, Carruthersville and Memphis? Did he revisit the south after the success of "Milkcow Blues"/"Old Original Kokomo Blues"? All these hypotheses of Bob Groom (*Blues World* 19) will remain unanswered.

It is also a pity that Kokomo Arnold didn't want to play again, though one cannot blame him for it. Perhaps he no longer had the blues and therefore felt that he had nothing more to express in song. Whatever the reasons, it is often better to remember a musician as he was at, his best, rather than as a sad relic living on his past glories.

It is difficult to define Kokomo Arnold's style. He originally came from Georgia but his music bore very little resemblance to the Georgia stylings of artists like Barbecue Bob and Blind Willie McTell. He seems to have combined the elements of a Georgia upbringing, frequent trips to Mississippi (where he was obviously exposed to the incisive energetic music of the region) and the city blues of Chicago to create his own personal style. He had no real disciples but nonetheless did in one way or another influence a number of bluesmen, the best known being Robert Johnson.

The discs which Kokomo Arnold has left us, are of varying musical quality, but to listen to the occasional 'Arnold' blues one is almost certainly assured of pure musical joy.

**RECORDS:** (1) *Blues Classics* BC-4
(2) *Matchbox* SDR-163
(3) *Collector's Classics* CC-25

---

# Memphis Minnie

Steve LaVere

Memphis Minnie laid to rest

Photo courtesy Steve LaVere

I had been there before. I was there around 6 o'clock to take the photograph shown here, so I knew about where I was. As I sat down next to Furry Lewis, I was soberly unaware that the two of us were the entire representation of the Memphis Music community. Not even Mrs. Van Hunt, who claimed to have known her so well and only lived a few blocks from the church where the services were held, was there. And of course, no record company people were there; that could have been expected . . . but it won't be forgotten. Neither will Memphis Minnie — she died on August 6th, 1973 in Memphis, Tennessee and it was an honour to be among the crowd of people who thought enough of the most popular female country blues singer of all time to attend her last rites.

The brief services were held on August 9th at 8 o'clock in the evening at the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, the Rev. J. L. Netters officiating. A small choir sang a few familiar old hymns and Rev. Netters spoke emotionally of the misery and suffering she withstood the last thirteen years of her life; and of the first sixty-four for which she will be remembered.

Minnie Douglas was born on June 3rd, 1896 in Algiers, Louisiana, the eldest of thirteen children, whose parents nicknamed her 'Kid' because she was such a frisky youngster. The family moved to Walls, Mississippi, just fifteen miles south of Memphis, when she was seven years old, and eventually to Memphis.

Her father bought her a banjo when she was still quite young and within two weeks she was playing for neighbourhood parties. By the time she was fifteen, she had purchased a guitar and was entertaining on Memphis street corners and in Handy Park. People were beginning to know who Kid Douglas was.

In the summer of 1919, a *Columbia* talent scout found her playing and singing in a Beale Street barber shop. Before long she was on her way to New York and world-wide fame as Memphis Minnie.

She recorded prolifically all through the 1930's, 1940's and sporadically in the early 1950's for over half-a-dozen companies. Her last record, cut for the small *JOB* label in Chicago in 1954 is certainly one of her best. It's always a surprise to the listener to learn that she is the lead guitar on her records, but ones surprise is always the greatest on this one. The playing is technically and rhythmically superb — the vocal flawless. The performance, in no way indicated the demise of her powers or even the end of her recording career.

She married three times — always to guitar players. Will 'Casy Bill' Weldon, a guitarist with the Memphis Jug Band (a group with which she later recorded) was her first husband. However, by the time she began recording, she had married 'Kansas Joe' McCoy and they accompanied one another on each other's recordings until the early 1930's. By the middle 1930's she had married Ernest 'Little Son Joe' Lawlers and together they recorded to the end.

Memphis Minnie came home to Memphis after Little Son Joe had suffered a heart attack in 1957. A heart condition followed the attack which left Minnie feeling no desire to travel or to leave Joe, although she continued to perform occasionally around Memphis, until she herself suffered a stroke in 1960. Mr. Lawlers died in 1961 and when her sister could no longer properly care for her, Minnie was moved to a nursing home where she remained until recently when she had her third stroke. Thereafter, she was moved back to her sister's house, where she died. Of the thirteen children, she leaves her sister and four brothers, all residents of Memphis.

Her music was, is and shall continue to be enjoyed the world over. Not surprisingly, Rev. Netters made mention of her abilities as an entertainer — both as guitarist and vocalist—and that the role of American Folk Music History would be incomplete without her name. Let us not forget that she has made a most worthy contribution to our culture. And what a funky, down-home, beautiful contribution it was.

Photo Harry Goodwin

# Ragtime in the British Museum

Roger Millington

Suppose you want to become a ragtime pianist. How do you go about it? You can always copy records, note by note. But it's a weary way to learn a tune, especially a particularly complex rag. And you may well be copying a performance which varies considerably from the original composition. If you're going to play variations, they may as well be your own.

The obvious answer is to find sheet music. If you can. Apart from the mammoth Scott Joplin collection recently published by the New York Public Library, there isn't much about.

However, one source is — of all places — the British Museum. Just go in the main entrance, through the souvenir shop, and ask for a Temporary Reader's Ticket. Then into the reading room and look for the music catalogue.

The Museum is supposed to receive copies of all music published in Britain; publishers are required by law to supply them. There is also a large selection of overseas material, chosen by the Museum on some mysterious basis of musical merit.

Once you see a likely item in the catalogue, you order it, then wait up to several hours for it to be delivered to your desk. If you like what you get, you can have it photocopied at a modest cost.

You'll be surprised at just what you can get. Even more surprised at what you can't. My most joyful moment was holding for the first time the Museum's copy of W. H. Krell's "Mississippi Rag". The first rag to be published — in Chicago in January, 1897. Krell was a white composer. Later that year the first rag by a Negro was to appear; Tom Turpin's "Harlem Rag". The Museum has this — but not the original version. Only an 1899 print, with an arrangement by the West Indian, W H Tyers. The Museum has one other of the five magnificent rags written by Turpin: "The Bowery Buck".

It is in the section devoted to the king of Ragtime, Scott Joplin, that you find some oddities. For a start, the Museum doesn't seem to have heard of him until 1905, so that many of his finest works dating from 1899 are simply ignored. In particular, they don't have an early copy of the greatest of all rags, ''Maple Leaf Rag''. Just a couple of recent 'arrangements' — and a set of 24 parts for brass band!

Still, they make up for this by featuring several rarities. ''Eugenia'' and ''Leola'' aren't listed in *They All Played Ragtime,* the definitive book by Blesh and Janis. Neither is ''Crazy Organ Rag'', published as late as 1955 . . . 38 years after Joplin's death. Also worth seeing are a set of orchestra parts for ''Gladiolus Rag'', the book for Joplin's ragtime opera, and his instruction primer *School of Ragtime.*

What happens when you turn to the other ragtime giants?

James Scott (writer of such classics as ''Climax Rag'' and ''Grace And Beauty''). Not a single item.

Joseph Lamb (the fourth of the 'Big Four' of ragtime). Nothing — except a few waltzes written before he became bitten by the ragtime bug.

Henry Lodge? Arthur Marshall? Artie Matthews? Luckey Roberts? Eubie Blake? J. Russell Robinson? Fats Waller? All were prolific composers. Yet not a single item between them.

But wait for it . . . Jelly Roll Morton?

Incredible to believe: not a single item. So someone has been naughty because plenty of Jelly compositions have been published in Brtain.

Other composers do at least get a look in.

For instance, Charles H Hunter ( who wrote ''Tickled To Death'') scrapes in with one tune.

J P Johnson romps home with two, including an intruiging piece called ''Yamekraw — A Negro Rhapsody''.

Charles L Johnson gets in with a dozen — but not his well known ''Dill Pickles''. Not all are rags but they include ''Pansy Blossoms'', ''Silver King Rag'', ''Tobasco'' and ''Pigeon Wing Rag'' . . . all tunes that have missed the recording studios. The Museum refer to him each time as 'Charles L Johnson of Kansas City', presumably to distinguish him from a Charles Lute Johnson who has an entry entitled 'Little Coon Lullaby''.

You find the expression 'Coon' offensive? Wait till you see the other Johnson in the catalogue, name of Billy. He is the proud author of such gems as:

"That Great Big Yaller Coon From Baltimore"
"I Knowed You Afore Your Hair Got Straight"
"Mr. Coon, You're All Right In Your Place"

George Botsford (writer of "12th Street Rag") is represented by "Old Crow Rag" and "In A Den". But would you believe "Dance Of The Water Nymphs"

Percy Wenrich, 'The Joplin Kid' (in honour not of Scott, but of his hometown in Missouri) has no less than 27 entires although not all are of ragtime interest. Here's hoping some pianist will dig out "The Smiler", "Noodles: A German Rag" or "Sweetmeats Rag" and put them on record.

If the above pianist has a weak stomach, I advise him to avoid such delicacies as "The Ragtime Hymn", "A Ragtime Lullaby", "The Ragtime Policeman" and "De Ragtime Brigade Is Off To War". And steer well clear of "The Ragtime Pipes Of Pan".

You never know what you'll meet when you browse through the many volumes of the catalogue. Who would have guessed that J Bodewalt Lampe, creator of such masterpieces as "Creole Belles", was also responsible for "Mighty Lak' A Rose"!

Yes, it's the unexpected that makes it so much fun. Rummaging through the G's in search of A F Gunn (he published "The Laughing Darkie" in London in 1897, I discovered that one single classical composer fills no less than 37 pages of tune titles. You've probably heard of him. He's called Józeph Gung'l.



Jelly Roll Morton (U.S. info. service)

Rev. Lonnie Farris

photo courtesy Southern Sound Records

# Reviews

**REV. CHARLIE JACKSON "Wrapped Up Tangled Up In Jesus"/"Morning Train"**
**Booker Records 434**

Why is it that on the rare occasions I'm moved to review a record, nine times out of ten it's completely obscure. I can only tell you that *Booker Records* come out of New Orleans and that Rev. Charlie hails from Baton Rouge.

"Wrapped Up" is a full-blooded gospel holler with a sparse, but tasteful, electric guitar accompaniment; something like a less gravel-voiced Blind Willie Johnson singing in work song fashion.

On the classic "Morning Train", Jackson really whips up a storm taking the song at such a frantic speed (dare I say) you'd think he's got a train to catch! Brilliant music and highly recommended, especially for those who like that 'country blues' feel to their gospel.

Don't let the fact that this 45 is unknown put you off. Go into your specialist dealer and hound him. Why should I be one of the very few to have experienced this great sound?

Alan Balfour.

**REV. LONNIE FARRIS "East Vernon Blues"** **Southern Sound SD200**

"Golden Street" / "Soldiers Of The Cross" / "A Night At The House Of Prayer" / "Walk To Thee" / "They Are Ringing Them Bells" / "In Your Kingdom" / "It's A Blessing To Call His Name" / "What Mother Can Do" / "Wondering Child Mother Is Dead" / "Peace In The Valley" / "I'm So Happy And Free" / "Walk Around" / "A Closer Walk To Thee" / "In That Clover Field".

First things first; this is in every respect a brilliant LP, which you *must* buy. All praise to Terry Waghorne for his enterprise in putting it out.

Rev. Farris is something of an oddity in these days of frantic gospel rave ups; he sings like a 1950s R & B balladeer, and plays a Hawaiian guitar in country and western vein (probably because, as he says, "I . . . got me a Hawaiian book"). He is clearly relaxed and happy, like his music.

On various of these tracks, he is assisted by Rev. Grimes, washboard (!), Rev. Keyes (tenor sax), Rev. Franklin (bass guitar and vocal), Deacon McMillan (drums), 'Starr' (tambourine) and Thelma William (vocal). Keyes is a simply superb sax man, sounding just like J. T. Brown; "Bells" is one of the finest rocking instrumentals I have ever heard. Franklin plays rock solid bass, and sings beautifully, like an *Excello* artist. The rhythm men are very good, and Miss William does an excellent imitation of Mavis Staples.

Every track is great, and I hate having to pick out particular ones, but "Bells", "Peace" and "House Of Prayer" (really "The Saints" in a different key) are all outstanding instrumentals; "Soldiers", "It's a Blessing" and "What Mother Can Do" are masterly vocal performances. Rev. Farris has the same effect as Washington Phillips—euphoria. Buy it, it's great.

Chris Smith.

**FREDDIE KING** **"Woman Across The Water"** **A&M AMLS 68919**

"Woman Across The Water"/"Hootchie Coochie Man"/"Danger Zone"/"Boogie"/"Leave My Woman Alone"/"Just A Little Bit"/"Yonder Wall"/"Help Me Through The Day"/"I'm Ready"/"Trouble In Mind"/"You Don't Have To Go".

Maybe I'm missing something, but this leaves me absolutely cold. So it's produced by Leon Russell, has him on piano, and has other rock luminaries surrounding Freddie, but with the heavy handedness evident, they are not sympathetic to his style, and have no idea of what he is trying to say. Not that I think he has any commitment with this. Judging by his phrasing, he's pretty bored by the whole thing. The significance of the cover art is completely lost on me also, and it's effect about sums up the album. I get the impression that he's been more or less forced into the studio to cut this (for contractual reasons) and told what to record. And I have never been persuaded that Russell is the genius he's supposed to be.

The arrangements generally are too 'poppy' to successfully gel with Freddie's blues approach; just straightforward grooving with nothing new attempted anywhere. The drum work is often like a sledgehammer, totally out of empathy with the mood of the songs, and on "Danger Zone" the organ is really off-putting. As well as this latter (the Percy Mayfield song), others manhandled are "Hootchie Coochie Man", "Leave My Woman Alone","Just A Little Bit", "Yonders Wall", "I'm Ready", and "Trouble In Mind". The best track is the working of Russell's own "Help Me Through The Day", but even this is spoilt by the arrangement. The idea of strings was good, but the number would have benfitted far more from a simpler approach of just these and his guitar and voice dominant, with only the merest hint of other support.

Freddie King is, at present, the best exponent of this style of guitar playing, especially as B.B. seems to have abdicated from what he is best at, and so it's a double pity that his possibilities are mangled in this unfeeling way.

Michael J.

**BOOK REVIEW** by Frank Sidebottom

**The Country Blues Songbook,** by Stefan Grossman, Hal Grossman and Stephen Calt. Oak Publications, £1.75 U.K., or $3.95 U.S.

First the good news—here is a 200+ page bumper book of your favourite country Blues lyrics with top line melody, featuring over 120 songs. A useful discography is added to provide readers with the source of the songs on L.P.; together with . . . BONUS 1—introduction by none other than Samuel Charters (still alive and well it seems), BONUS 2—a 25-page essay by Stephen Calt (of Yazoo Records sleeve-note notoreity), and BONUS 3—a musicological essay by Hal Grossman (keep it in the family?).

Now for the bad news—I quote from Stefan Grossman's preface: 'It was not an easy task to *pick* all the tunes' (my italics)—too true, Guru Grossman! Having checked 17 of the songs in this book with their duplicated versions in other Oak/Grossman books (Delta Country Blues/Country Blues Guitar/Ragtime Blues Guitarists), 14 of them differed in the key given for playing the tune, this book being the less accurate, and in 12 songs there were discrepancies in the lyric transcripts, more accurate, though still not perfect, in this book. How many more of the 120 songs give the wrong key? I haven't had time to check, but I don't think you'll ever play like the real thing by studying *this* book.

Watch out for the misleading chord sequences—students would be advised to refer to the discography and to the original recordings. The Calt essay is very heavy going for those who just want to relax with their guitars, and those who don't take their Blues *too* seriously may even find themselves rolling in hysteria at some points. BUT—when you hold this massive wad of pages and flick through, glimpsing those fascinating photos, you may well find it to be an irresistible purchase. I know—I bought one!

# OBSCURE

# LP's

The second in the series of articles looking back at some of the outstanding L.P.s which have been available in the past, and which still are reasonably accessible. (Don't forget the CONTACT section for your 'wants'.)

**THE BLUES OF OTIS SPANN Decca LK 4615**

Remember this one, issued after a 1964 London session? Showcasing the irreplaceable Otis on piano and vocal, the fluid guitar of Muddy Waters, the controlled power of drummer Willie Smith, and the veteran string-bassist Ransom Knowling, we go right back to the roots and to the sounds that many would describe as the real Chicago Blues. Here's a run-down of the titles and tempos:

"Rock Me Mama" (medium)
"I Came From Clarksdale" (Slow)
"Keep Your Hand Out Of My Pocket" (Up-tempo boogie)
"Spann's Boogie" (Fast boogie-piano solo with drums)
"Sarah Street" (Slow)
"The Blues Don't Like Nobody" (Medium, with harpsichord effect from 3rd piano pedal)
"Meet Me In The Bottom" (Medium)
"Lost Sheep In The Fold" (Slow)
"I Got A Feeling" (Medium-slow)
"Jangleboogie" (Medium, harpsichord effect and vocal)
"Natural Days" (Slow)

This record, to be found around the second-hand shops from time to time, is recognisable by the outstanding sleeve artwork, a bleached-out photo of Otis (no pun intended) and album title in large print. A reissue was indeed put out a couple of years ago but with dubbed-on boogaloo which obliterated much of the original talent. But who knows? Blues dormant Decca may even see fit to give this another go round. Any response *B-L* receives will be forwarded.

Frank Sidebottom

# Contact SECTION

THIS IS *YOUR* SECTION OF THE MAGAZINE!; AND IT IS UP TO YOU TO HELP MAKE IT WORK. Contact ads are FREE to Subscribers as long as they are 'non-commercial', if the ads are commercial or if you are not a subscriber please send along 10p in stamps (UK) or 2 IRC's (overseas). Those of you who wish to place Auction Lists in this part of the magazine please write for further details.

---

2-73:1) All information and records of Cajun artists, Magic Sam Maghett and John Lee Hooker are very welcome — every letter will be answered.
Paul Bronckers, Oranjeplein 96, 5003 Maastricht, Holland.

2-73:2) Interests in all blues, would like to meet other collectors in same area. Also interested in playing Blues guitar.
Michael Budd, 8, Harpes Road, Summertown, Oxford U.K.

2-73:3) Norbert's Wants Norbert's Wants
AFBF 64/*Amiga* LP; J.H. Louis/*Orig. Advent* ; Buford/*Folk Art*; Esther Phillips/*King* 622LP, *Lennox* — C&W LP, *Prince of Peace* LP, *Fed.* LP with Dominoes; Roy Brown/24 hits — *King* LP; + many more records by sax-rockers, R & B artists mainly Chicago—L.A.—N.O. Also any unissued tapes required. For my possible book about Johnny Otis I need many records on *Eldo, Dig, Federal, King, Aladdin, Savoy* as well as news-cuts, photos, bios and articles on any artists who worked with him. Write for a free wants list, available in Sept. after my USA trip. Oct./Nov. — giant auction.
Norbert Hess, 1 Berlin 36, Zeughofstrasse 23, West Germany.

2-73:4) Interests East Coast, All Country Blues. Working on book dealing with life and times of Rev. Gary Davis 1950-1972. Require all sorts of material . . . full credits given. Wants — *Riverside* RLP 148 Davis/Anderson, also any condition Davis 78's.
Robert Tilling, 2, Heathfield, Bagatelle, St. Saviour, Jersey, U.K.

2-73:5) Roy Bookbinder/*Adelphi, Sonet, Blue Goose* recordings. Ragtime and Country Blues artist. Two concert trips to G. B. Well known on U. S. circuit. Roy Bookbinder, 50, King Street, New York City, U.S.A.

2-73:6) 1000s of Blues wanted—1) Unissued blues on tapes (no guitar/vocal solos). 2) Boogie Woogie piano — any pianist from any period, on any speed — 78's, micro's or tapes. Also contacts with 'nobody-pianists' who play boogie woogie. Also wanted modern Chicago blues on LP.
Hans W. Ewert, 5466 Neustadt, Postfach 1126, Germany.

2;73:7) Blues LP's and 45's for sale at very resonable prices. Send Sae/IRC for list.
A. D. Farey, 77, Bristol Road, London E.7, U.K.

2;73:8) Wanted—name price—*Philips Intl.* LP 1975—Frank Frost/*Bluesville* 1057 and 1061 — Sam Hopkins/*Prestige* 343 — Sam Hopkins/*Bluesway* BL5-6029-George Smith.
Eddie Cousins, B.G.R.L., Apt. H, 4, Princes Gate West, Liverpool 8, Lancs., U.K.

2-73:9) Want to contact and meet blues fans living in Brussells — digging Louisiana and Chicago Blues of the 50's.
Guy Van Eesbeeck, 42 pl. Eugene Keym, 1170 Bruxelles, Belgium.

2-73:10) Send for my new auction list, ready September! Contact: Darryl Stolper, 950 Kagawa, Pacific Palisades, California, 90272 U.S.A.


LITHO PLAISTOW PRESS MAGAZINES LTD.

# GENESIS

## Vol 2

## (The Beginnings of Rock)

## MEMPHIS TO CHICAGO

4 Record Set with Booklet £6.50

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Blues by** | Jackie Brenston |
| Sonny Boy Williamson | Doctor Ross |
| Elmore James | Willie Nix |
| Ethel Mae | Arthur Crudup |
| Robert Nighthawk | Woodrow Adams |
| Forrest City Joe | Joe Hill Louis |
| Howlin' Wolf | Harmonica Frank |

Currently Available
**GENESIS VOL 1** 6641 047
4 Record Set with booklet, now £6.50
Melody Maker & Cream Albums of the Year 1972

CHESS


phonogram