

*There was a time that I went blind, (x2)*

*It was the darkest day that I ever saw,*

*It was the day that I went blind.*

*Nobody cares for me, (x2)*

*'Cause I lost my sight and I have to be led,*

*Nobody cares for me.*

The seven numbers by Pink Anderson feature good guitar and spirited singing. His voice has a hoarse quality which probably reflects his years of street singing and medicine shows. Anderson works his way through a variety of ballads; the ubiquitous "John Henry" with good slide accompaniment, followed by "The Wreck Of The Old 97" and "The Ship Titanic" both of which are typically preoccupied with the drama of tragedies and disasters. He tackles the humorous "I've Got Mine" and "He's In The Jailhouse Now" particularly well, the latter song owing as much to Jimmie Rodgers as to Blake. On the blues, "Everyday In The Week" he is assisted by a washboard player, Jumbo Lewis, whose exuberance alone compensates for his singular lack of ability on the instrument. All the songs recorded by this great carnival show entertainer, on this album, have been re-recorded for Prestige's Bluesville label and fortunately these three albums still turn up in second-hand sections, occasionally.

In summary, this magnificent album contains a collection of songs which cover virtually the whole spectrum of American Negro folk music and it is particularly unfortunate that there appears to be little likelihood of this record being re-issued in the near future.

#### References

1. "The Record Changer" Vol. 14 No. 8. 1956
2. Don Kent. (Sleeve notes to Biograph BLP 12034)

Rev. Gary Davis Photo by Steve Rye

## Blues Forum

A FRESH LOOK AT THE DOWN HOME BOYS by Bob Eagle.

In March/April 1927, the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana, made its first (of several) 'field' trip to Chicago. The hundred-odd sides seem to have been made primarily for issue on J. Mayo Williams' short-lived Black Patti label. Many also appeared on Gennett and other labels, usually under pseudonyms.

Among the sides recorded were some by Fapa Harvey Hull and Long 'Cleve' Reed and the 'Down Home Boys'. They are better known as 'Sunny Boy And His Pals', a Gennett pseudonym. With the possible exception of Big Boy Cleveland, singer and quill-player/guitarist, they are the only rural-sounding performers recorded in that block of matrices.

The liner to Origin OJL-2, which contained the first reissue of the band, suggested that they were from Mobile: presumably because France Blues begins:

*Have you ever took a trip, babe on the Mobile Line.*

This theory seems now to have been discarded (rather than referring to the city, the line probably deals with the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio railroad).

More recent suggestions are that they were from 'just south of Memphis'. Their sound is not particularly Mississippian, but as they seem to be from an older generation, it is hard to tell. (For example, the fifth verse of France Blues lacks the 'repeat' line, possibly an indication of a throwback to a pre-12-bar era; but they may have just forgotten it.)

France Blues is basically a 'death letter' blues. The verses recall such diverse performers as Blind Lemon, Barefoot Bill, Henry Thomas, Walter Rhodes. There is little, as with their other work, to indicate their regional origins.

Gang Of Brown Skin Women follows the girl-for-every-day-of-the-week idea. It precedes Jim Jackson's versions and is apparently the model for Cripple Clarence Lofton's 1935 variant, Hull's and Lofton's pieces both refer to an intersection of Main & Broad: giving rise to at least three interpretations. Either Hull (and Lofton?) were referring to streets they knew; or, they were repeating traditional lines originally sung about specific streets; or, the traditional lines provided fictional streets to provide sense in the context.

In the last case, searching for the intersection will lead nowhere. In the second, it will not establish the origins of the Down Home Boys. But let us assume for awhile, that Hull referred to streets he knew. There is no corner of Broad & Main in Chicago. Probably any small town could have one. The only other reference we have is to Broadway Square (again a pretty ordinary-sounding name); but if there is a town with all three, it is probably a fair size in order to have a square which does not simply bear the name of the town. (Most small towns in Tennessee and Mississippi seem to be built around a square, but in my experience these are seldom named).

The National Zip Code Directory lists those U.S. cities large enough to have more than one code, giving the codes for various streets. Checking through most of the South, the only large centres with Broad & Main in the same Zipcode seem to be: Gadsden, Alabama; Greenville, S.C.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; and Kingsport, Tenn.

Lofton was born in Kingsport, but whether his song refers to his home town or to Hull's earlier version is a moot point. There is no Broadway or Broadway Square listed in Chattanooga or Kingsport, but Gadsden has a Broadway and Greenville has Broadway Avenue. (The latter in another part of town, however.)

The melody of Gang of Brownskin Women is similar to that of Frankie And Johnny. The band also did Original Stack O'Lee Blues. Another of their songs uses the melody usually known as Sliding Delta. Don't You Leave Me Here is related both to Alabama Bound and to Baby Please Don't Go.

Don't You Leave Me Here begins with the spoken introduction: "Alright boys let's go back home" after which Hull sings the Alabama Bound chorus:

does this imply that Alabama is 'home'? The song is unusual in that it has two choruses; Alabama Bound is the first. In full, it is;  
*Alabama Bound, Alabama Bound,  
If the boat don't sink and the Stack don't drown,  
Alabama Bound.*

In this form, it is strikingly similar to the chorus of Goin' to Chattanooga by Judson Coleman (reissued with Ralph Willis on Blues Classics) as follows:  
*I'm going to Chattanooga, I'm going to Chattanooga,*

*Yes, Chattanooga, I'm going to Chattanooga,  
If the boat don't sink, the train don't turn around.* (Coleman still lives in Brooklyn N.Y. His wife confirmed that he was in fact from Chattanooga.)

The second chorus (or possibly just a verse sung twice) is:

*Don't you leave me here, don't you leave me here,  
Well I don't mind you goin', sweet lovin' babe,  
Leave a dollar for beer.*

Despite the same title, Don't Leave Me Here has no verses in common with Big Joe Williams' 1947 side for Columbia. It shares no verses with Patton's related pieces, Going To Move To Alabama and Elder Greene Blues. Rather it favours the variants which dwell on the theme of river transport: it refers to a boat, the Eve Adams, and also has a 'boats up the river' stanza. Henry Thomas' version is similar.

One of the verses (relied on to support the 'just south of Memphis' theory) ends: "well, it's 15 miles, sweet loving babe, baby to my home". A similar verse shows up in a song by Inus Moore, recorded in California in the sixties (issued on Gardin, & Bobby Moore records). Moore's origins are unknown.

Although using traditional themes, the Down Home Boys are not derivative, either stylistically or lyrically. It is for this reason more than any other that it is submitted that the references to Broad and Main and to Broadway Square have some basis in reality: that Hull knew the places. It seems likely that if tradition handed down unfamiliar names, he would substitute references which would have meaning to himself and his audience.

It is suggested, then, that the Down Home Boys hailed from north-east Alabama, probably Gadsden; thus placing them near the Tennessee River with its river transport, and close to Chattanooga.

Finally, a sideline. One 'Cleve Reed' was credited as composer of Hey Lawdy Mama, recorded by Virginian singer Miss Rhapsody for Savoy in New Jersey in 1944. Can there be any connection with Papa Harvey Hull's pal? (The song sounds suspiciously like a variation on Buddy Moss' Oh Lordy Mama, first recorded in 1934).

## HBS

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## Concert Round-up

with Chris Smith

### CHICAGO BLUES 1973 AT THE 100 CLUB, 16 OCT, 1973

October 16th saw the appearance of another of Jim Simpson's enterprising blues packages at the 100 Club, this one devoted to Chicago— so the posters said. Be that as it may, things kicked off with Johnny Mars, late of Oakland, California, and now billing himself as such. No doubt many will regard this as a quibble, since Johnny's 'main man' is Little Walter, but the two other harp men on the show really were Chicagoans— and anyway, did we really need three? Johnny is a highly proficient harmonica player and a good vocalist, and his set was well received by the audience. For me though, he only generated real enthusiasm with his last two numbers, an instrumental and his showpiece, "Rocket 88". Till then, he seemed to be simply going through the motions.



Johnny Mars Photo by Ludwig Reitz

Johnny was followed by Homesick James & Snooky Pryor. Homesick kicked off with you-know-who's "Manhattan Slide", then his beautiful version of "Tin Pan Alley"— marvellous, but I wish he'd learn a new song more often than once a decade. Last came "Crossroads" which, to quote Paul Oliver on "Broom", is "inevitable but ever satisfying". I was more impressed by Snooky's