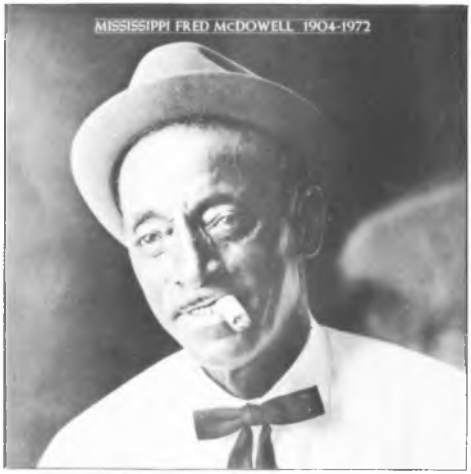
Blues-Link 4

incorporating BLUES WORLD

25p

XTRA BLUES

MISSISSIPPI FRED McDOWELL 1904-1972



XTRA 1136
(R.R.P. inc. VAT — £1.50)

Recorded in 1969 at Malaca Studios, Jackson, Mississippi.
Produced by Michael Cuscuna

WALTER 'SHAKEY' HORTON with HOT COTTAGE

XTRA 1135
(R.R.P. inc. VAT — £1.50)

Recorded in 1972 at Parklane Studios,
Edmonton, Canada.
Produced by Holger Petersen

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Blues-Link

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DUTCH AGENT: Martin van Olderen, Pretoriusstraat 96, Amsterdam-oost, Holland.
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A MESSAGE FROM BOB GROOM. . . . . .

Since its inception in March, 1965 Blues World has been one of the most respected blues publications and I very much regret having to announce its demise due to production difficulties which have forced Amon-Ra Fine Art Ltd. to cease publishing BW after 2 years. As editor of BW for all nine years of its existence, I feel a great sense of loss at the disappearance of a magazine which has for so long been a part of my life. However, I am happy to be able to report to the many BW readers who will be receiving this issue of Blues-Link that most of the main features of BW and the indefinable but recognisable spirit of the magazine will continue in Blues-Link through the writings of myself and other former BW contributors. I feel sure that in the months to come, BW readers will welcome the arrival of each issue of Blues-Link as much as they used to look forward to BW in the past.

My thanks to the Blues-Link editorial team for making this merger of interests possible and ensuring the continuation of the Blues World ethos.

editorial

My first job is to welcome all our new readers who will be receiving Blues-Link for the first time due to the merger of Blues World with Blues-Link. All the BW subscriptions have been transferred to us and you will receive copies of Blues-Link to the value of your credit with Blues World. Those of you who are subscribers to both magazines will have your subscription to Blues-Link extended by the appropriate number of issues. If you have a query relating to your subscription please send it to us, not Amon-Ra or Bob Groom, as all subscription matters are dealt with at '94'.

As Bob Groom has pointed out most of the main features of Blues World have been continued and with your support the combined magazine should be able to reach new heights in blues journalism.

Readers will be aware that for the last couple of months industry has been on a three day week and as a result we are extremely late out, however, now that normal working has been restored we will be returning to a regular publishing schedule.

A recent criticism of our review section was that some of the lp's were 'a little elderly'. I feel that this is a good opportunity to express our policy on record and book reviews. All records and books sent to us by the various companies will be reviewed, irrespective of age, as long as they are still in catalogue thus giving newer collectors a chance to see what is available. It is a sad comment on the state of the blues record industry that many of these 'elderly' records are considerably superior to today's releases that makes this policy necessary.

Things planned for the future include the ultimate post-war Gospel discography and *monthly* Blues-Link. Don't forget to keep those addresses coming in for our address listing as this is very near to completion!

the blues shouters

part 1—jimmy witherspoon

by martin cowlyn

Jimmy Witherspoon is one of the big names in hard-driving 'blues shouting' — that style of blues-singing which developed in the 1930's (and on which R and B developed) particularly in and around Kansas City, when singers were supported by large swinging jazz orchestras, and had to compete with blaring brass and crashing rhythm sections. It is hardly surprising that this rough-and-tumble style should have developed in such an area, since, at the time, Kansas City was a boisterous town crammed with night clubs and gambling saloons. People tended to be a bit 'larger than life' and supported roaring big bands rather than the more sophisticated swingers like Benny Goodman, the Dorseys, or Artie Shaw.

'Spoon was born in Gurdon, Arkansas, on August 18th, 1923; and learnt his singing with the local church choir. He was soon listening to the visiting Territory bands, greatly enjoying the singers of the time. At the age of eighteen, in 1941, Jimmy joined the Merchant Marine, serving in the Pacific for two years. This was to have an important significance on his career, for he visited Calcutta several times, and it was there — believe it or not — that he started his 'blues shouting'. Actually, during wartime, American jazz and blues-men, wearing service uniforms, could be found at all corners of the globe; and one such man, pianist/bandleader Teddy Weatherford, spent much of his war service in Calcutta, where he became the resident bandleader at the Grand Hotel, Winter Gardens. Teddy invited 'Spoon to sing with the surprisingly high quality house band whenever he wished.

Once out of the Merchant Marine, Jimmy Witherspoon was at a loose-end musically, although he felt sure he would like a musical career. He went to Vallejo, California, and was there when Jay McShann brought his successful, earthy jump band into town. Fate was on 'Spoon's side, since McShann had recently lost his 'shouter' Walter Brown, and was needing a replacement. 'Spoon filled the vacancy, and stayed with the band for the next seven years, before leaving in 1952 to go freelance. He rapidly gained all the experience and groundwork he needed, and soon became established as a top star. For the last twenty years, Jimmy Witherspoon has toured widely, increasing his reputation all the time. He has made several successful visits to Britain, and even recorded with a British rock star (see below).

The recordings available from 'Spoon's stay with Jay McShann show that he fitted perfectly into the nature of the band, and that he already had the power and vocal intonation that characterise his work. Record (1), consisting of recordings made for Supreme, Downbeat and Swingtime, has recently been re-released in Britain (Black Lion 2460 206) and is well worth having. Notice how 'Spoon sings the musical sounds as much as the lyrics, and how the McShann Band forms the ideal musical backing — driving, but never intruding. (2) is similar; whilst (4), recorded by King, shows us that Witherspoon was to the West Coast what Fats Domino was to New Orleans and the South. (5) was a less fortunate session, best avoided unless you have a strong jazz interest. Here 'Spoon teamed up with the New Orleans band of Wilbur de Paris — and though both gave excellent performances, the New Orleans style didn't quite blend with the K.C. vigour. The 1958 Los Angeles set (6) doesn't have 'Spoon at full power, and the accompanying groups don't always get the feel of the blues — nonetheless, this record is worth hearing.

'Spoon appeared at the 1959 Monterey Jazz Festival with an Allstar band — lead by pianist Earl Hines, there were Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster (tenors); Roy Eldridge (trumpet); Woody Herman (clarinet); Vernon Alley (bass) and Mel Lewis (drums). There were no rehearsals, and no programme. When asked how he thought it would go, 'Spoon was optimistic : "Don't worry — Ben and I used to do this all the time and Earl's a swinging piano player". He was right! Later on in 1959, 'Spoon appeared at the Renaissance Club, Los Angeles (8); but, despite his rapport with Ben Webster, the more serious approach of Gerry Mulligan (baritone) slightly weakened the impact of the recording.

'Spoon toured Europe in 1961, and his Olympia, Paris concert (9) has some good accompaniment,

especially from Buddy Tate (tenor) – though 'Spoon was not quite at his best. At first sight (10), with T-Bone Walker on guitar, looks interesting, but it's disappointing. Later, in Stockholm, 'Spoon tried to sound like Ray Charles (11) and failed - a surprising move, possibly forced by the record company. (12) is spoilt by poor programming with dull material, but (13) – recorded at the Bulls Head, Barnes – is excellent. Both audience and band were very receptive – and some of the best British jazzmen of the time were there, including Dick Morrisey (tenor), Harry South (piano), Phil Bates (bass), and the late Phil Seamen (drums). If you can only afford a few albums, try and get this one. (15) renews the long-standing assocaition with Ben Webster, but suffers from a gutless rhythm section. (16) contains more vintage stuff, with 'Spoon relaxed and happy, belting his way through the Roger Kellaway arrangements. Avoid (17) – Jimmy Witherspoon plus singalong material plus string orchestra. (18) and (19) jump on the then popular 'soul-organ' sound – in this case the organist is Jack McDuff, who has never sounded very convincing to me.

Of particular interest to readers is (20), with some lovely guitar from Earl Hooker, and some good blues-piano from Charles Brown. The lengthy tracks enable everyone to stretch out and give their best. (21) is a more commercially-slanted album of straight blues, pop blues and pops – all adequately performed with strong jazz backings, but it is not up to the standard of the Bluesway record. Finally, (22) is a good rock album, but with little jazz or blues content, and not much overall significance.

Few of these records are currently available, although many of them are worth tracking down. You should be able to obtain (1), (7), (8) and (20) fairly readily.

The Records

Note: This discography is not comprehensive, but is intended as a guide to the more-readily obtainable records from Jimmy Witherspoon's career.

1.	Spoon Calls Hootie (Ain't Nobody's Business)	15/10/47, 20/10/47 10/6/48	Polydor 423 241 Polydor 545 105 Black Lion 2460 206
2.	A Spoonful Of Blues	1948–1950	Ember 3369 (A) Crown CLP 5156
3.	Going to Kansas City	Gene Norman "Just Jazz" concert 1950?	(A) RCA Victor LPM 1639
4.	Back Door Blues	1952–1953	Polydor 623 256
5.	New Orleans Blues	1957. New York.	(A) Atlantic AH 1226 London LTZ–K 15150 Atlantic 590 021
6.	Singin' the Blues	May 1958 Los Angeles	Vogue LAE 12218 Fontana 688 005 ZL (a) World Pacific WP 1267
7.	Jimmy Witherspoon at Monterey	2/10/59. Monterey Jazz Festival	Vogue EPV 1269 and 1270 Ember CJS 834 (A) HiFi J421
8.	Witherspoon-Mulligan-Webster	Late 1959. Los Angeles Rennaissance Club.	Vogue LAE 12253 Ember CJS 820 (A) Victor LPM 1639 (A) HiFi R422
9.	Jimmy Witherspoon	22/4/61. Olympia, Paris.	Vogue VRL 3005 French Vogue LD 546–30
10.	Evening Blues	July, August 1963	Stateside SL 10088 Transatlantic PR 7300 (A) Prestige PR 7300
11.	Some of My Best Friends are Blues.	July 1964. Stockholm	Transatlantic PR 7356
12.	Blue Spoon	1964?	Stateside SL 10139
13.	Spoon In London	1965. London	(A) Prestige PR 7418 Transatlantic PR 7418 ?

14.	Spoon Sings And Swings	23/5/66. Bulls Head, Barnes	Fontana TL 5382
15.	Live	1966 ?	Stateside SSL 10232
16.	Blues For Easy Living	?	Transatlantic PR 7475
17.	A Blue Point Of View	1966 ?	Verve SVLP 9156
18.	Past Forty Blues/ My Baby's Quit Me	January, February 1967. New York	Verve VS 553 (single)
19.	The Blues is Now	January, February 1967. New York	Verve SVLP 9181 (A) MGV 5030
20.	Hunh	1969 ?	(A) Bluesway BLS 6040
21.	Handbags And Gladrags	19/2/70 plus June, July, August 1970. Los Angeles	Probe SPB 1031
22.	Guilty (with Eric Burdon)	1971	United Artist UAG 29251

Photo courtesy Probe Records

Mercy Dee

by Bob Groom

"Tomorrow ain't promised to no man, all your planning may be in vain (x2),
So sing today and be merry, tomorrow you may be way down in Shady Lane."
(Shady Lane Bluesville BVLP 1039)

Mercy Dee Walton died eleven years ago in Stockton, California. He was 47. December 2nd, 1962 was a sadder day for the blues world than many people realise, for Mercy Dee was one of the unheralded greats of post-war blues. Although one of his songs, One Room Country Shack, has become a blues standard, even reaching the jazz audience through its inclusion in Mose Allison's Back Country Suite, Mercy Dee's own original hit version (Specialty 458) has received little recognition from blues writers. Mercy Dee was an excellent pianist and had an outstanding voice, qualities enough for him to be highly rated in blues circles, but his real genius was in his talent as a blues lyricist. The lyrics of his 53 issued recordings testify to his inventiveness and originality and I hope to demonstrate in this article why Mercy Dee deserves to be regarded as a major blues artist and composer.

Mercy Dee was born in Waco, Texas (a sizeable city in McLennan County, 85 miles due south of Forth Worth on Highway 81, now Interstate 35) on August 13th 1915. The Brazos River runs through Waco and at an early age Walton had to start earning a living working in the Brazos Bottoms. The punishing labour in the fields was relieved by weekend house parties and picnics out in the country at which local and itinerant musicians performed. There were many fine pianists in the Waco area when Mercy Dee started playing piano in 1928, men like Son Brewster, Pinetop Shorty, Willy Woodson and Pete 'The Grey Ghost', but the one who impressed him most was Delois Maxey. Walton took much of his basic style from Maxey, whose special numbers and interpretations of popular blues were in great demand around Waco. Over the next 10 years Mercy Dee developed his music, playing Waco, Forth Worth and Dallas in the wintertime but returning to field work during harvest seasons. Around 1938 he joined the great migration of Texans to California, making a precarious living from music by entertaining fellow Southerners but having at times to resort to field work again. He played in Los Angeles, Fresno, Oakland, San Francisco, in fact everywhere that blues were in demand.

Immediately after World War 2, independent record labels recording swing music, jazz, jump blues and even country blues proliferated and the West Coast had its fair share of such operations. Mercy Dee's first recording opportunity came with the short-lived Spire label of Fresno, for which he made four issued sides in 1949. A mature artist of 34. Mercy Dee's first recorded composition was aimed squarely at the record buyers who made Cecil Gant (or Private Cecil Gant, as he was described on the label of his massive hit I Wonder) one of the biggest-selling artists of the decade. A clever, catchy piece, Baba-Du-Lay-Fever was locally popular around Los Angeles and might even have been a national hit on a bigger label with distribution.

Now my babe got G.I. Fever and I just can't cool her down
She goes Baba-du-du-lay du-du-lay du-du-lay
My babe got G.I. Fever and I just can't cool her down
Everytime she sees a brown-clad hero, she breaks right down and clowns.

The Baba-du-du-lay line serves as a chorus throughout the song. Verse two runs "Now I can dress up in my finest, she don't even look my way (2), Starts talking about a handsome sergeant, that she saw downtown that day." In the third verse he says that while the G.I. thinks the civilian men are doing fine "They don't know the trouble we're having trying to keep these broads in line." By verse four he has come to the conclusion that the only answer is to enlist:

Now I'm going down to the Draft Board, I'm goin' to fall down on my knees (x2)
I'm goin' to ask them to give me some position in this man's army, please.

On the Spire 78, both sides are given sub-titles; Baba-Du-Lay-Fever is, reasonably enough, sub-titled G.I. Fever while Lonesome Cabin Blues has the apparently superfluous sub-title Log Cabin Blues. Lonesome Cabin, a development of the Lonesome Bedroom theme originated by Curtis Jones in 1937, immediately establishes Mercy Dee as a blues interpreter par excellence:

It's lonesome in my cabin, just me and my telephone (x2)
Lord, I has no one to cling to, no one to call my own.

His rich, musical voice makes the most of lines like "Now these nights are long and gloomy, no one knocking on my door" (verse 2), imbuing them with the sense of desolation that characterizes his later One Room Country Shack hit. In almost all his recordings, the instrumental break follows the second verse and here it is a superb blues piano solo. Lonesome Cabin was much more typical of his repertoire than G.I. Fever but his grasp of musical comedy also crops up in later recordings like Rent Man and Birdbrain Baby.

Mercy Dee's second session came the following year when he made a dozen sides for Imperial, the label which Lou Chudd made into one of the biggest independents of the fifties with artists like Fats Domino and Ricky Nelson. Two of these recordings have been reissued (on Liberty's Blues Uptown anthology); both feature electric guitar and bass accompaniment.

The lyrics of Empty Life create a mood of loneliness and despair and this is enhanced by Mercy Dee's doomy singing and the atmospheric guitar work:

I live in a world of shadows, it almost drives me insane (x2)
For me life don't hold nothing but an empty hope in vain.
These days are so blank and empty, these nights are lonely and still (x2)
Maybe I'll live again, people, but I doubt if I ever will.

Danger Zone is an ominous blues with brooding, threatening lyrics that recall the mood of Blind Lemon Jefferson's Dynamite Blues:

This is my final warning, baby, my mind have reached the danger zone (x2)
Oh before I stand to see you leave me, I would rather see you dead and gone.
It make me bawl just like a baby, just to imagine you with someone else (x2)
I ought to say your life wouldn't be worth a nickel, baby please don't make me commit myself.

In the final verse he asks for "a chance to cool down" and requests "mama please try and take it slow", ending ". . .any move may prove dangerous and cause crepe to be hanging on your door."; encapsulating a knife-edge relationship. The normal instrumental break after verse 2 is missing here.

Another song from this session is the tragi-comic Birdbrain Baby (later remade for Arhoolie) in which Mercy Dee is at his most amusing in describing the failing of his woman:

I got a birdbrain baby, with a heart the size of a mustard seed (x2)
She keeps me on the zoom, trying to get her everything she need.
She thinks money's just a coupon, to be issued every day (x2)
She says if I can't stand the issue, she'll pack and be on her way.

The concluding verse illustrates the acceptance of reality which permeates Mercy Dee's songs:

Well I guess there's no use in me squawkin', wringing my hands and crying (x2)
I guess I'll always love that birdbrain baby of mine.

It was in 1953 that Mercy Dee struck gold with his first release on the Specialty label, which Art Rupe had built into a very successful operation with a roster of notable blues, R&B and gospel artists. Although not the million seller it deserved to be (the song itself has certainly exceeded this figure if other versions are included), Mercy Dee's One Room Country Shack sold several hundred thousand copies nationally and established him, temporarily, as one of the biggest names on the California R&B circuit. Its lyrics are fairly conventional when compared with many of his blues but their very directness and emptiness caused by isolation and lack of companionship is almost unequalled:

Sittin' here a thousand miles from nowhere in this one room country little shack (x2)
Lord, my only worldly possession is a raggly old eleven foot cotton sack.
I wake up every night around midnight, peoples I just can't sleep no more (x2)
Only crickets and frogs to keep me company and the howlin' wind round my door.

Following the superb piano break, he expresses his intention to "leave here early in the morning" as he will go out of his mind if he doesn't find "some kind of companion, even if she's dumb, deaf, crippled and blind".

The reverse side of the 78, My Woman Knows The Score, has been neglected but is almost equally effective with its portrayal of a failed relationship:

I got the blues so bad this morning and my woman she knows the score (x2)
Said her ways have turned so chilly and my love is dragging low.
Nothing I do don't seem to please her, nothing I say won't make her smile (x2)
When she look at me she's so chilly, I could crawl away and die.
When you pick yourself a woman, please try and take your time (x2)
You may be very unfortunate and pick a chilly old girl like mine.

The success of Specialty 458 enabled Mercy Dee to become a full-time musician and entertainer and for the next three years he toured coast to coast with package shows and bands like Big Jay McNeely's. Although his first love was always the blues, he played and enjoyed other kinds of music and was well able to cope with the demands of dance audiences and the band environment.

The lack of a follow-up hit to Shack inevitably meant that Mercy Dee's days as a national star were numbered, Specialty didn't try very hard to produce one, releasing only two more Mercy Dee records, despite having high-quality unissued material such as the track recently included on UK Specialty's City Blues album (SNTF 5015). Towards the end of 1953 they put out Rent Man Blues, a comedy number featuring a lady dubbed 'Thelma' on the label. It is a genuinely funny routine similar to such efforts as The Coldest/Hottest Stuff In Town by Howe and Griggs (Decca 7085):

(Thelma) "My goodness it's cold this morning. Three sticks of wood in the woodbox and no flour in the barrel. I done told George a hundred times 'stop trying to gamble'. (knocking) Oh my goodness, there's the rent man now, I don't know what I'm going to do". But the listener is in no doubt as to what she is going to do and soon she is making full use of her feminine wiles. After the rent man (Mercy Dee) has threatened to put her out in the street, she responds with "Don't be so cold and cruel, come on in, maybe I can change your mind." The rentman tries to take a stand, "Nothing you can say won't hardly move me, I've got to have cash on the line." but he is already lost and when Thelma presses him to "Take a peep into my bedroom, see how bad it needs repair," he capitulates "OK, you win, pretty baby. . . .yes I'm a fool, girl, use me, I don't care."

Fall Guy (the other side of Specialty 466) is solo Mercy Dee and it gives a warning to those who would steal another man's woman:

L.C. "Good Rockin'" Robinson Photo by Robert Scheu courtesy Arhoolie Records

I thought I was wise and witty baby, when I first stole you away from your man (x2)
It all turned out I was the fall guy, I only took troubles and worries off his hands.
I'm so tired of playing detective, trailing you everywhere you go (x2)
My heart's in so much misery and my feet are so doggone sore.

Shades of Blind Lemon "sneaking round corners, running up alleys too" (Pneumonia Blues)! Mercy Dee neatly puts together emotional pain and physical pain without the combination seeming at all incongruous.

The third Specialty, released in 1954, is one of Mercy Dee's most powerful blues, Dark Muddy Bottom

(later remade for Arhoolie as Walked Down So Many Turnrows). The lyrics come directly from personal experience and the bitterness in his voice reflects the years he spent toiling in the fields under the merciless Texas sun:

I walked down so many turnrows, I can see them all in my sleep (x2)
Sharecropping down here in this dark muddy bottom with nothing but hardtack and sorghums to eat.
At 4.30 I'm out in the barnyard, trying to hook up my poor beat-out raggly team (x2)
Yes my stock is dying of starvation and my boss is so doggone mean.
There's got to be a change made around here, people, I'm not jiving and that's a natural fact (x2)
I'm going to jump up on one of these old poor mules and start riding and I don't give a durn where we stop at.

The Drifter, an unissued Specialty side recently made available on lp, is a striking composition, one of Mercy Dee's most brilliant creations:

Drifting alone through fields and swamplands, with my bedroll under my arm (x2)
Small bottle of Tokay in my pocket, just to keep my poor body warm.
Anywhere the ground is solid I lay me down to rest (x2)
Then blues and demons creep in on me slowly, by daylight I'm a natural wreck.
Sun is peepin' over the mountains, time to roll my bed and go (x2)
My only prayer to sit at another table and sleep under a roof once more.

A single recording released on Rhythm 1774 in 1954 features Mercy Dee in company with L.C. Robinson, whose steel guitar playing adds considerably to the impact of Trailing my Baby, particularly in the instrumental break where he takes the lead with Mercy Dee and an unknown drummer supporting. (This title has been reissued on Heritage 1003 and Arhoolie 2008). The tension builds up through verses one and two with a statement of utter desperation and the implication that violent retribution will follow when he catches up with his erring woman:

I've looked all over the city, but my baby she can't be found (x2)
Newspapers goin' to sell for 3 and a quarter, the day I track my baby down.
She been gone 4 days and 2 hours and I'm bound to blow my stack (x2)
If I don't find her pretty soon, people, I'll be a raving maniac.

Some of the tension is released by the instrumental break and the next line carries a feeling of resignation – "Everywhere I go it's the same old story 'Sorry things turned out this way' " – but the determination returns with the concluding: "I'm on her trail like the North West Mounties, guess I'll bring her in someday" (An effective line which also concludes The Coasters' 1957 hit Searchin'). L.C. Robinson used some elements of Trailing, including the basic melody, for his great Things So Bad In California on a recent Arhoolie lp (1062).

In 1955 the Biharis recorded Mercy Dee in Los Angeles and six sides were issued on their Flair label. Two have been reissued on Kent 9012. Have You Ever is the original version of the song remade for Bluesville Have You Ever Been Out In The Country (the lyrics are identical). A superb blues in which he conjures up a vision of a Texas cottonfield under the hot sun and the exhaustion and frustration of a sensitive musician being forced to toil there endlessly against his will:

Have you ever been way out in the country, peoples during the harvest time (x2)
Picking fruit or dragging a big, fat sack of cotton and the sun beaming down your spine.
By noon I fall up under some shady tree, trying to figure what move to make (x2)
12.30 I'm right back down between two middles, trying to get my numbers straight.

The final verse is one of my favourite Mercy Dee specials; the acid positively drips:

If I ever get from around this harvest, I don't even want to see a rose bush grow (x2)
And if anybody asks me about the country, Lord have mercy on his soul.

Stubborn woman is a variant of the Birdbrain Baby theme, although only verse three is lyrically the same (mule head woman replacing bird brain baby).

I got a mule head woman and she really have got me hooked (x2)
She keeps her mind in the gutter and her hands on my pocketbook.
She only keeps me for a convenience, so stubborn she won't do a thing I say (x2)
When she's through I'll be so beat and disgusted, I'll have to give the poorhouse some pay.

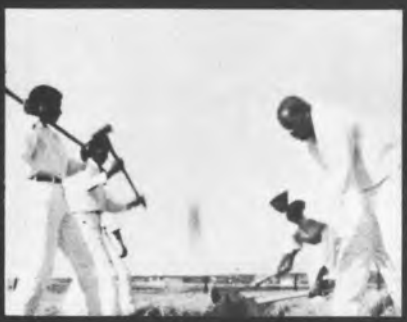
The instrumental break features a nice interplay of riffing guitar and rolling piano.

By early 1956, rock and roll had overtaken Mercy Dee and his fellow Texas bluesmen – Lightnin' Hopkins, T-Bone Walker and Smokey Hogg – and five long years were to elapse before he was approached to record again. During this time, gigs for bluesmen grew scarcer and scarcer and eventually Mercy Dee was back in the fields again, harvesting spinach and picking grapes in California instead of cotton and corn back in Texas. An all too familiar story: the middle and late fifties were lean times for all the blues artists who had achieved fame in the ten years after World War 2.

Things were at a very low ebb for Mercy Dee, who for several years had been living in Stockton, when early in 1961 he was contacted by Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records. Four sessions were held in February, March and April of that year at which he recorded many new songs and some of his greatest performances. These recordings were to form his final musical testament.

(This article will be concluded in BL5. Much of the biographical information included comes from Chris Strachwitz's notes to Arhoolie F1007 and Bluesville BVLP 1039)

BLUESING THE SCREEN



UNDER DISCUSSION:
"Dry Wood & Hot Pepper"– director Les Blank.
"Blues Under The Skin"– director Robert Manthoulis.
"Sing Sing Thanksgiving"– directors David Hoffman & Harry Wiland.
"Red, White And Bluegrass"– director Elliott Erwitt.
"Payday"– director Daryl Duke.
"Juvenile Court"– director Frederick Wiseman.

The 17th London Film Festival, held recently, included a number of films of interest – in varying degree – to bluesfans. This is a pleasing trend, and following as it does on the recent National Film Theatre "Jazz In The Movies" season, causes me to look hopefully in the direction of the mass media; our heroes aren't getting any younger, and the legacy of recordings should be supplemented as extensively as possible with film.

What of the films that were shown? Les Blank will be wellknown for his striking documentaries on Lightnin' Hopkins and Mance Lipscomb. His latest offering, "Dry Wood And Hot Pepper", deals with the life of the blacks of Louisiana – more particularly of the Cajun country – and their music, zydeco. The first part, "Dry Wood", features the older styles, as exemplified by Bois-Sec Ardoin, Canray Fontenot and their families; the second, "Hot Pepper", is devoted to Clifton Chenier and his band, playing the modern, R & B influenced music.

The music is beautiful. I am ashamed to say that I couldn't identify any of the older tunes by name, but the tough fiddle and squeezebox playing is most satisfying. Chenier plays "Comin' Home", "Rooting Ground Hog" and an extended and brilliant boogie, among other things. Similarly, there are delightful moments from the daily life of the community – the Louisiana scenery, a couple of very weird mojo women, a hilarious 'interview' with Clifton's grandma, which I won't spoil by telling you about it.

The film as a whole, though, has one serious drawback, namely the chaotic editing to which Blank has subjected his footage. There is no continuity, the music rarely relates to the pictures, and there is no commentary, other than some mannered, 'clever' subtitles. Presumably, the object is to avoid imposing a viewpoint, but the result is merely to impede communication. The "Sunday Times" critic thought this film rubbish, which anyone coming to it with no knowledge of the subject would be entitled to conclude. The music is marvellous, the material is good; the film is mediocre. Bluesfans should nevertheless see it, and make allowances for Blank's peculiar ideas of what constitutes objectivity.

"Blues Under The Skin" ("Le Blues Entre Les Dents") also has a peculiar structure. A fictional story from Harlem life (woman leaves man, woman goes back to man) is intercut with musicians playing and talking about the blues. It is really two

Photos from "Blues Under The Skin"
Above: 'Chain Gang'
Below: Furry Lewis
Courtesy: The Other Cinema

potentially good films, neither of which entirely succeeds. The fictional part is very convincingly written and acted, in 'dramatised documentary' style; unfortunately, this is allied to handheld camera and wobbly sound – or it could be just sloppy production.

The documentary sections are uneven. Mance Lipscomb and Robert Pete Williams are brilliant, but annoyingly brief, as are two work song and gospel sequences. Bukka White, too, is cut just as he gets going. Sonny and Brownie are ok, if predictable, as is BB King, who gets more time than anybody else, of course. In poignant contrast (unintentionally) to the successful BB, playing to college kids in a fancy auditorium, are Buddy and Junior in a grotty Southside club; sad to say, their performance is also grotty. Jimmy Streeter, a convict, is also the leader of a prison band, and a good trombonist and blues shouter. The best performances come from the old pro, Roosevelt Sykes, stomping like anything in an incongruously posh N.O. nightclub, and above all Furry Lewis, giving an amazing demonstration of peculiar ways to play a guitar on "When I Lay My Burden Down".

There is too much BB King, and too little of some of the other musicians, and I personally would have swapped the fictional bits, which are rarely illustrated with any lyrical appositeness, for the music that ended up on the cutting room floor. Worth a visit, if only for Europeans who mostly won't have seen Furry in action, but don't expect a masterpiece.

"Sing Sing Thanksgiving" comes in for a similar verdict. It is a record of a concert given for the inmates of Sing Sing Prison, Ossining, N.Y. on Thanksgiving Day, 1972. The performers were – guess who? – BB King, Joan Baez & Mimi Farina, The Voices of East Harlem and black comedian Jimmy Walker. There is also one Joe Williams billed, but he is neither of the famous ones, being a convict who joins the King band on soprano sax.

Sociologically, those who have listened to prison blues will get a look at what lies behind the music, and readers of "Screening The Blues" will be interested in Walker's joke about the first black President, who comes into Congress saying, "I'd now like to read you the State of the Union Message – but first, today's number..." Politically, the film makes the current mistake of thinking that you can't condemn the system without glorifying the criminal; the viewpoint is 'sloganising leftist', to which Baez contributes in her usual fashion, while The Voices give out with the ineffably meaningless statement, "Freedom is a spiritual thing – right on!" Even poor old BB tries to get on the bandwaggon, disastrously, as he tries to turn "When Somebody Loves You" into a political statement. One wonders what the gay convicts thought.

Musically, BB fans will dig his performance, though they'll most likely have seen it before in concert. Baez I loathe, but fans will know what to expect, and she's quite pretty. The Voices sing very 'commercialized' soul, but with tremendous gospel feel, so if you ignore the message and concentrate on the medium they're very good indeed. For me, though, the best was at the beginning – good old Bessie Smith singing "Sing Sing Blues" over some fascinating archive film. As a whole though, I found it difficult to get excited about this movie.

The above were the films with blues content. "Red, White & Bluegrass", though, should prove a treat for those bluesfans – and there are many – who have been led on to an interest in all America's folk musics. This twentyfive minute film was shot in North Carolina, and apart from a brief appearance by Bill Monroe, features amateur and semipro artists. The structure is loosely from old to young; from patriarchs and matriarchs to (probably) their great-grandchildren. All the music is terrific, highlights being an old lady named Buna Hicks who does "Mount Zion" to her own fiddle accompaniment; a man whose name I didn't get playing a homemade banjo; and the three Little Family children buckdancing "Old Joe Clark". The pictures are very pretty, the accents near impenetrable, and the music beautiful. There is an annoying interviewer who reminds me of Alan Lomax badgering Willie McTell, but he can be ignored.

"Payday" also deals with white music, in this case Country & Western, but is fictional, and indeed has very little actual musical content. The subject is 36 hours in the life of Maury Dann (Rip Torn – remember him?), C & W superstar and semiprofessional drinker, pill taker and sex maniac. Its value for a blueslover lies in the fact that it is also a totally convincing portrait of redneck society. You won't learn anything about the blues, and not much about Country & Western either, in directly musical terms, but I recommend it as an introduction to the South. It is also, if you're interested, a darn good movie, brilliantly acted, photographed and directed.

The last film of interest has absolutely no musical content, but as it is, possibly, the most riveting film I have ever seen, it ought to be known about. "Juvenile Court" records the day-to-day routine of the Memphis Juvenile Court, using a 'fly on the wall' technique. Anyone interested in the society from which the blues springs – especially anyone with preconceptions about the South – should see it. Frederick Wiseman is a leftwing director, but the heroes of his film are the court officials – and rightly so. Their humanity, wisdom and patience can only make one very humble – unless, like some of the audience at the LFF, one is so conditioned by cliche as to be unable to have an open mind. Others will probably find, as I did, that it is a sobering experience to see and hear Southern whites behaving in totally unexpected fashion.

The film is a 2 hours, 20 minutes distillation of 67 hours shooting; the cases range from a girl who won't wear a bra to school, to an eleven year old black girl suspected of prostitution, to a fifteen year old boy accused of attempted rape on a minor. Not much to do with the blues? Maybe not directly; but this is Memphis, "way down South where the blues was born" (if you'll excuse the cliché), and anyone seeking a better understanding of the society that produced the blues should see this film.

Chris Smith.

Talkabout with Bob Groom

Sometime ago Frank Scott commented to me on the continuing influence of Walter Davis. He had in mind Jimmy McCracklin, who performed some fine blues with only rhythm accompaniment when he made a guest appearance at the February, 1973 San Francisco Blues Festival, and Gus Jenkins. Frank points out that McCracklin's Globe singles bear a striking resemblance to Davis's records. Apparently McCracklin's piano playing is still amazingly similar to Davis's. Frank and John Harmer visited Gus Jenkins in 1972 and he played several solo pieces for them in which the resemblance to Davis was quite remarkable. Frank says "Unfortunately he is not interested in recording, except at his own leisure and with his own production. He is quite wealthy from his picture frame business and is in the rare position of being able to make music a hobby." Let's hope that they can persuade Gus to put a few solo items on record.

I think Chris Smith's suggestion in his review of Mamlish 3802 in BL3 that Muddy Water Blues and Way Back Down Home are not by Freddie Spruell is quite definitely incorrect but I agree with his assessment of the Otto Virgial tracks (see my article on Virgial in BW27).

On Sunday, October 14th 1973, BBC 2 TV showed a programme on the last sternwheeler riverboat to ply the Mississippi River, the Delta Queen. Fascinating pieces of old film included a steamboat race, accompanied by Jazz Gillum's The Race Of The Jim Lee And The Katy Adams (Folkways FS3826, Xtra 1111), as well as the 1937 flood and cotton being loaded on the river front.

Tony Travers informs me that Warren Storm's Jailhouse Blues, mentioned in Talkabout 3, is actually on Zynn 1021. Although lyrically of interest, the record is apparently musically poor so don't waste your pennies on a copy!

Checking through a file of unused Blues World material recently I came upon the drafts of a series that was to have been called Some Alabama Mysteries. No.1 concerned Eli Framer and began as follows:

"Eli Framer made one issued record for Victor in November, 1929 but this is otherwise a totally obscure figure. Because this one record is so good there has been much speculation about his origins in collector's circles. The consensus of opinion of several American collectors would seem to assign him, tentatively at least, to the Memphis group of musicians. I have listened frequently to Framer's Blues and God Didn't Make No Monkey Man (Victor 23409) in the hope of catching some place reference but such clues appear to be absent from their lyrics. However, various aspects of these performances seem to indicate an Alabama background in Framer's blues."

I then went on to detail these indications; Framer's use of the mamlish adjective, also frequently employed by the Ed Bell/Barefoot Bill/Sluefoot Joe school; his timing and 'delay' effects, also used by the aforementioned group of artists; the similarity of his tonal emphases to bluesmen like William Harris (compare Framer singing "There's a change in the ocean, change in the deep blue sea" with "There's wrecks on the ocean, wrecks on the deep blues sea" in Electric Chair Blues by Harris); his use of the bass 'slap' which Ed Bell and Barefoot Bill both use in their respective Mamlish Blues.

Slender evidence at best but, it did seem to make out a case for Alabama being Framer's home state. Confirmation of this came, unexpectedly, only a few weeks after I had written the article. I had mentioned my speculations on Framer in a letter to Nick Perls and was therefore very gratified to learn from his reply that amongst a number of addresses turned up in the Victor files was an Alabaman one for Framer. Whether this was ever followed up I don't know.

Framer's single 78 is exceptionally rare and remains unreissued. The tape copy which began circulating about ten years ago has an extraneous recording dubbed in with it. If the tape dub was doctored it was presumably to prevent reissue, although it may simply have been caused by a fault on the tape recorder used. I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has more information on Framer or his priceless country blues 78.

Letters

COLIN STAPLES And His Blues Band.
Manager:– G.F. Toone,
13 Lamcote Street,
Nottingham.

28th January 1974.

Dear Sirs,

The sketchy information provided by Bob Fisher in respect of our activities in Leicester during 1972, is, I feel, rather misleading, and I hasten to fill you and your Readers in accordingly. ("Leicester Blues Empire"– BL2).

The Colin Staples Blues Band, fronted by Colin, Nottingham's brilliant bluesman – vocals, harp and guitar, was, at the time mentioned, under my management and I had succeeded in securing a weekly residency at the Leicester Hotel concerned, expecting to build a blues following in that area and Bob came along and introduced himself on our first night. The residency was quickly terminated by the Hotel management before it had had a fair trial in the face of power cuts etc. and some months afterwards we secured a pub room in Leicester and opened Rosie's Blues Club which just never received any adequate support at all from Leicester's citizenry, or even from the nearby University.

After three months at Rosie's with expenses far outweighing returns, and not much paid work available for a band without national recognition the band did break up in the eyes of an outsider. But reorganisation of the five musicians concerned occurred almost immediately.

Bassist Steve Hurd joined with Colin, as backing and after two months rehearsals, COLIN STAPLES, Blues Artiste, became a working act from January 1973, and in addition to the periodical gigs being worked since that date in Colleges and Clubs, they held a regular Wednesday residency in Nottingham from January until November 1973. During this period various local and semi-local artistes were guested and periodical promotions involving more important artistes were undertaken. Champion Jack Dupree (twice), Victor Brox (twice), Graham Bond, Gene Connors (The Mighty Flea). Last night was held the first of a new series of a more ambitious nature, Doctor Ross being the top act of course.

The remaining three members of the C.S.B.B. quickly formed a Rock/Blues/Boogie group known as "Stone Pony", and more recently reformed again. The Colin Staples Band though, with its original line-up has however come together a number of times in its original entirety, the current position being that a suitable blues band, mainly involving original members of the C.S.B.B., can be produced at the drop of a hat if and when required.

I hope that you have every success with Blues-Link.

Yours faithfully,
G.F. Toone.

Arhoolie Production Co.,
P.O. Box 9195,
Berkeley,
Calif. 94709

Dear Blues Link,

Just a note in regard to your review of Arhoolie LP 1066 by Earl Hooker.

First of all if you had ever known this great guitarist Earl Hooker and talked with him you would have realized that he never was a Blues artist per se – he was a superb guitar player and just because blues is all the black audiences wanted, he was forced to play blues – he never was that fond of the blues – he wanted to be a guitarist – period! But he was seldom given that opportunity – since R&B music did not permit much variation from the norm. He was however quite a fine blues guitarist – but to try and put Earl into the mould of the Blues guitarist is denying him his real desires and talents – he told me many times that he was never that crazy about the Blues! Today's artists are all praised for broadening their horizons – why don't we grant this right to experience to the very few guitarists who happen to grow up in the blues mileu?

In regard to lack of liner notes: What can one say on the back of the 12th Lightning Hopkins LP? I gave you what I knew about Earl on the first LP – why should I just sling out bull shit and words??? When there is need for liner notes as there will be on the forthcoming set of LPs devoted to the music of the Texas-Mexican border region, I am even doing a booklet with them – because I have a lot to say since nothing has ever been written on the subject – but on the fifth Earl Hooker lp – what can I say except he was a superb guitarist who grew up in a limited mileu – you may add this on your jacket! He was a giant – but only received his due attention a few years prior to his death – too late really!

Let's stop putting people into bags – those who are blues people and are good at it and want to be blues men – great, enjoy them – but don't accuse great musicians of not following your idea of what they should have been!!

Best wishes and good luck with Blues-Link.

Chris Strachwitz.

P.O. Box 1029,
Canberra City,
A.C.T. 2601,
AUSTRALIA.

4 January, 1974.

Dear "Blues Link",

In view of your stated intention (in issue no. 1) to give coverage in your magazine to blues activities throughout the world perhaps you might be interested in a few words on the Australian scene.

Apart from Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, who toured Australia during the folk "boom" of

the middle sixties, Australia did not receive a tour by a blues artist until November 1972 when Buddy Guy and Junior Wells together with Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup toured for jazz promoter Kim Bonython. Since then we've had the fantastic Muddy Waters, who played to packed houses throughout the country, and also Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee again. In addition we've had recent tours by fellow Chess artists Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry, both of whom seem to have much appeal to blues collectors.

Encouraged by the apparent revival of interest in blues, the Australian Blues Society was once again brought to life by Maurice Taylor and myself (we'd been involved with ABS previously but it folded because of lack of support a couple of years ago). Assisted by Colin Mitchell (now in the US), Ian Ross, Bob Eagle (who was responsible for the original ABS several years ago) and others we've managed to form a small but steadily growing organisation of enthusiasts.

Our aims are simply to promote blues in any way that we can and to make records, books and magazines available to members at reasonable prices (all such material must be imported from either England or the US). We publish a bi-monthly newsletter. The third issue which is just out has improved format (still duplicated but with a photo cover) and we hope eventually to progress to complete magazine format.

There are still very few blues LP's released in this country (only the big names such as B.B. King, Muddy Waters and Freddy King seem to have all their LP's released here) so blues LP's are only to be found in Australian record stores which import their stocks and, even then, the selections are seldom very big or very well chosen. However, Australia has struck back with its own label, Bluesmaker Records (owned by ABS member Kevin Hall), which has just released a very fine LP by Johnny Fuller. Overseas readers of Blues-Link could probably get the LP from their regular blues specialist or direct from Bluesmaker Records, P.O. Box 88, Laverton, Victoria 3028, Australia.

We are hoping for interest in blues to grow even more during 1974. I understand that Willie Dixon's Chicago All Stars will be touring in March and that Muddy may be back towards the end of the year. There are also rumours of a tour by B.B. King. We need some overseas contacts (mainly to keep us up to date on what is happening in various parts of the world regarding tours etc.) and anyone who can help should write to me at the above address.

Regards,
Graeme Flanagan

The Johnny Fuller lp is extremely fine and a review will be in No. 5. —Ed.

OBSCURE

LP's

by Steve Rye

GOSPEL, BLUES AND STREET SONGS: Rev. Gary Davis & Pink Anderson
Riverside RLP 148
Pink Anderson, Vcl./gtr. + Jumbo Lewis, wshbd. on*,
Charlottesville, Virginia, 29.5.1950.

1. John Henry
2. Everyday In The Week*
3. The Ship Titanic
4. Greasy Greens
5. Wreck Of The Old 97
6. I've Got Mine
7. He's In The Jailhouse Now

Reverend Gary Davis, vcl./gtr. New York City, 29.1.1956

1. Blow Gabriel
2. Twelve Gates To The City
3. Samson And Delilah
4. Oh Lord, Search My Heart
5. Get Right Church
6. You Got To Go Down
7. Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning
8. There Was A Time That I Was Blind

This album, which has never been made available in Britain and is apparently even rare in the States, was originally issued as RLP 12-611 and was subsequently remastered in 1961 and re-issued under its present number. It forms part of the long deleted Riverside Jazz Archives series. The editor of this fine series of documentary albums was Kenneth S. Goldstein and it is interesting to learn how this album came about. Goldstein wanted two singers, one to represent the secular tradition and another to represent the religious tradition. The former was no problem – as Riverside had in its Archives ten or twelve numbers recorded by Pink Anderson, at a fair in Virginia back in 1950.

Goldstein had already met Gary Davis, who he had recorded for Stinson (SLP56) with Sonny Terry in 1954, so here was the obvious choice for the 'holy blues'. A session was arranged for 29th January 1956, and the results are a delight to hear. Gary was in great form, playing nine numbers (most of which were first takes and eight are issued.) All the numbers are full of the usual Davis trademarks; the dazzling guitar breaks between verses, the slurred vocal and instrumental lines and those amazing exchanges between voice and guitar. All the songs here are of exceptional interest, several of which he had recorded at his first session, for ARC, twenty odd years earlier, with almost identical arrangements. "Blow Gabriel" was not one of these and Gary never recorded it commercially again. The lyrics here are straight from Revelation, with shouted references to "Rocks a'melting, trees a'blowing, and the moon is bleeding". This is real hellfire and brimstone stuff. In contrast, "Oh Lord, Search My Heart" is a beautifully controlled, rather sedate piece, with a haunting melody, somewhat reminiscent of a Lonnie Johnson tune. "There Was A Time That I Was Blind" is rather unusual, and not related, I think, to the traditional spiritual, as has been suggested elsewhere$_2$, either melodically or lyrically. The words are very much Davis's own – not concerned in general terms with man searching after the truth, but very much with his own handicap.

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 humourous "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 Papa 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).

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

backup work than by Homesick, who has been content to roll along a successful groove for some time now; Snooky, on the other hand, is full of ideas, and though happy to do his hits like "Judgement Day" and "Boogie Twist", seemed a little annoyed with the persistent requests for them. "Judgement Day", indeed, was a highly perfunctory performance, though the other numbers were uniformly excellent, particularly those played with that machine-gun sized chromatic he sports. He has much more self-confidence than he did with the ABL, and seems less overawed by his audience. If they will let him develop his ideas, instead of indulging in mouldy figgery, we may have a worthy successor to Sonny Boy Williamson on our hands.

Next came a set by white pianist Erwin Helfer. Erwin has played with many of the great bluesmen, notably Big Joe Williams, and is unquestionably very talented. Nevertheless, his set was something of an aural museum piece– fast boogies à la Meade Lux Lewis and slow Yancey numbers. They were all very well performed– at least I think they were, since I couldn't hear too well at times thanks to a drunken coachload of daytrippers from Bexhill or some such place– but the prevailing ethos was one of loving re-creation rather than creativity. The only exception to this came when Helfer was joined at the keyboard by Bob Hall for a four-hander which was both enjoyable and original. Overall, though, a well-meaning waste of time, and a sad comment on the state of Chicago piano since Otis Spann's death.

Eddie Taylor, the man who kept Jimmy Reed going, came on to a roar of applause, which he proceeded, in a way, to justify. He did his famous "Bad Boy" and "Big Town Playboy", and vocally they were every bit as great as the originals. As a guitarist, though, something rather strange has happened. He has great ability on the instrument, and his left hand is something to watch, but he has used his talent to become a copyist of Freddy and Albert King. This became overt when he performed a note for note rendition of "Hideaway". I can't deny that his was both a musically excellent and a highly enjoyable set, but sometimes it seemed rather far from Chicago. This may be a mouldy fig attitude of the type criticised above, but one could wish Eddie had used his talent to develop an original approach– whether within the Chicago framework or not– rather than to produce imitations, however good.

Finally, the 'unknown' of the tour, Big John Wrencher, aided by an excellent white saxophonist and Taylor. Wrencher looks (I hate to say this) exactly like Alf Garnett facially! He dresses, however, like one of Enoch Powell's nightmares; camouflage jacket and trousers and dark glasses, combined with the lack of his left arm and a mean and ornery expression, make him a figure of menacing aspect. His voice can also be 'mean an' evil' when he gets into a lowdown blues– comparisons became explicit when he did "How Many More Years", though of course he doesn't have the Wolf's voice, merely a similarity of inflexion and intonation. Surprisingly for such a down-home performer, he also did a couple of excellent blues-ballads of the Bobby Bland type, though musically they retained the classic Chicago sound. As a harpist, Wrencher is obviously limited by the loss of his arm, but he has an excellent tone, and knows his own limits; within them, he is a fine musician indeed, and a capable songwriter. One hopes we will be hearing more of him, both on stage and record.

Overall, then, it was a mixed evening; Johnny Mars and Erwin Helfer were, I felt, superfluous, and Homesick James and Eddie Taylor, though professional and enjoyable, were somewhat unoriginal; Snooky and Big John, though, were both very good. Mention must also be made of the Sunflower Boogie Band's sterling work in support of the artists; they were always good, and never obtrusive. If not the best evening's blues I have ever heard, it was far from being a disappointment.

Eddie Taylor Photo courtesy Big Bear

JOHN JACKSON AT CITY OF LONDON POLYTECHNIC, 19th OCT, 1973.

John Jackson continues to insist to anyone who asks that, "I can't really play the guitar nor banjo, I just fool with 'em." His banjo having unfortunately fallen apart in its travels, the City Poly audience were denied the opportunity to judge on that score, but if John 'just fools' with the guitar, I'm Segovia.

His guitar technique is, by anyone's standards, masterly; his repertoire is extensive, and if he

draws on the songs of others— Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Blake, John Hurt and so on— rather than composing his own, one can hardly complain when they are given such fine renditions.

John kicked off with "Truckin' Little Baby", Jim Jackson's "Kansas City Blues", a short guitar/kazoo piece and an immaculate rendition of Blind Blake's "Southern Rag". After a pause to improve the pa system, he played "Goodnight Irene" in answer to a request, then a stomping "Mama Don't Allow". Fuller's "Rattlesnakin' Daddy" was followed by "Nobody's Business". This is one of John's best numbers, with a really beautiful guitar part. "Backwater Blues", a reprise of the kazoo piece, and "Shakin' That Thing" (actually "Truckin' Little Baby" in disguise) rounded off the first set.

John took a break to pursue his hobby— meeting people— while Simon Prager & Steve Rye got together for a short set. Then John returned to a great cheer, and played a second set even better than his first. There is little point in giving a long list of songs— they were all brilliantly done— but special mention must be made of "John Jackson Breakdown", "John Henry" and "Poor Boy", the last two played knifestyle, and a version of "Police Dog Blues" on which he played like Blind Blake reborn.

"Encore!" shouted everybody, and John, who had only arrived from Germany that morning, and had not eaten since breakfast, obliged. He was obliging for the seventh time when I left, constrained by London Transport. A blistering "Matchbox Blues", Crudup's "That's All Right" and "Candyman" dedicated to John Hurt, "A good friend of mine," and played exactly as Hurt did; then Jimmy Rodger's "Waiting For A Train", "One Kind Favour" and "The Saints". He was reprising "Irene" as I left.

John Jackson is a great picker and singer, a hardworking entertainer and an all-round nice guy. He genuinely does not regard himself as exceptionally talented; it is our good fortune that he is, and that his music is available to us.

John Jackson Photo by Gerben Kroese

EDDIE BURNS AND THE MIGHTY FLEA AT THE 100 CLUB, 27 NOV, 1973.

Not many people turned up to this evening of blues, which was a pity, for while neither Burns nor Gene Connors can be described as blues giants, they both purvey good music. Neither performs much original material, as one would expect from their status as sidesmen of many years' standing, but this does not detract from their talents as musicians per se.

Eddie Burns appeared first, beginning with a solo set which included his own "Treat Me Like I Treat You"; a remarkable recreation of the late Tommy McClennan's "My Little Girl"; a version of "Ain't That Lovin' You Baby", which he made interesting by playing four to the bar chords instead of single string au Jimmy Reed; and "Key To The Highway", a song I loathe, but very nicely sung and played, *exactly* like Brownie McGhee. The only really low spot was a very desultory "Bottle Up & Go", but then I hate that, too.

Brunning-Hall came on to help out with "She's In L.A.", then Eddie switched to harmonica for the remainder of his set, producing brilliant singing and playing on Sonny Boy's "Do It If You Wanna" and "No Nights By Myself", which became "Mighty Long Time" halfway through. The band also did a cruddy "Kansas City", which the audience thought was great, but it wasn't typical of the high quality music of the rest of the performance.

Eddie stepped down to great applause, and Gene "Mighty Flea" Connors stepped up to the same. He played and sang with considerably more agression than on his Big Bear record, though the goodtime quality of his music still shone through. "Let The Good Times Roll", "Nobody's Bizness" and "Shake Rattle And Roll", got everybody jumping; a tongue-in-cheek version of "Stormy Monday" followed. A request for "I Got A Woman", despite Gene's protest that he didn't know the words properly, produced some great singing and playing, and the all too short set closed with a version of "Preacher Blues", which for once didn't degenerate into a display of Flea's (admittedly remarkable) technique at the expense of coherence. A highly satisfying conclusion to a highly satisfying evening.

'Sounds of the Seventies'

From the middle fifties through to the sixties blues was an album art form with as little commercial application as Jazz or Folk. The alienated white middle class/student devotees had no way of knowing (or wanting to know) that the blues – in all its many forms – was strictly a money making venture for the producers, distributors and, above all, the artists. For example, if Billboard had published a Race chart in the thirties then, Big Bill Broonzy, John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson, Leroy Carr etc would all have been competing for the No. 1 position and racking up 'top ten' hits. It has only been during the last few years, mainly through the unexpected journalistic heights reached by the rock press, that people have once again put the blues into perspective. The blues are still selling to a Black audience today despite how things look on the surface. By concentrating on the first three years of this decade it can be seen just how the 'blues form' sells in the Black retail areas across the United States.

Billboard began its R&B chart in 1949 with 15 places, reducing to only 10 between 1950 and 1955. Between then and 1958 it went back to 15; up to 20 then reaching 30 during 1958. 30 places were maintained until 1965 when it shot up to 40, finally increasing to 50 in 1966 where it stands at present.

Even at 50 places there's an awful lot of Black product which sells very well but never gets a placing on the chart. Radio station hit parades in strong blues areas like Mississippi and Memphis feature records that frequently don't show nationally. Two of the best examples of this occurred last year when "Winehead Woman" – Willie Williams (*Supreme* 1001) topped the Chicago charts for several weeks. The fact that one of Chicago's top D.J.'s had a hand in producing the record shouldn't go unnoticed though! But the biggest R&B seller ever to go unnoticed is Chick Willis' "Stoop Down Baby (Let Your Daddy See)" (*LaVal*) which sold phenomenal quantities in Chicago and Detroit without ever receiving a single airplay due to its semi-pornographic lyric. If you think Chicago seems a relatively small sales area to get excited about, think on the fact that Marvin Gaye's recent hit "Let's Get It On" sold 250,000 copies in Chicago alone!.

When Johnny Taylor hit No 1 with "Part Time Love" in October 1963 it was the first really identifiable blues No. 1 since Jay McShann and Pricilla Bowman had "Hands Off" (*Veejay* 155) at the top for three weeks in December of 1955. Since '55 Black music has been through various stages of domination by Doo wop vocal groups, gospel influenced 'soul singers', funk and today's production technique, sweet sounding ethereal vocal groups.

Apart from B.B. King most of the big selling Blues hits since then have been more than a little influenced by other forms of Black popular music. Bobby Bland, for instance, produces records with a heavy gospel undertone and is able to appeal (outside of Black America) to audiences that may not be partial to undiluted blues as well as those whose taste is best described as purist. The fact that it still sells, however diluted, is the important thing. By concentrating on reissues and rock audience orientated albums and bypassing the good 45 material an awful lot of people are missing a lot of good music. It could be because it shows on the 'Soul' charts or is promoted as such, or maybe they just don't know about it.

Since the beginning of 1970 five 'blues' artists have dominated the 'soul' charts. Their material is quite often not strictly blues and on more than one occasion each has drifted into modern mainstream soul music. They are Little Johnny Taylor, B.B. King, Little Milton, Bobby "Blue" Bland and Albert King.

In January of '70 Bobby Bland reached No 10 with "If You've Got A Heart" (*Duke* 458) which was an example of his pop slanted soul style with the emphasis on strings. In August 1969 Bland had a hit with a revival of an old Joe Turner hit "Chains Of Love" (*Duke* 449). Turner's record is generally accepted as a blues although the song is lyrically pop constructed and Bland's use of Strings didn't detract at all from the original. At the same time as Bland's "Heart" was selling, the top blues was B.B. King's "The Thrill Is Gone" (*ABC/Bluesway* 61032) at No 3 which was causing

B.B. King Photo courtesy Probe Records

great controvesy regarding the prominent string section. It was B.B.'s rock audience together with the US and UK pop press who were getting upset about this move into 'pop' by the greatest ethnic blues singer. Nobody told them about Bland's "Chains Of Love" and more important, nobody reminded them about King's experiments with strings in the fifties for Kent records or Bland's early sixties hits like "Call On Me" (*Duke* 360).

Throughout 1970 Bland stuck to material more in keeping with the general concept of Black and White popular music, string laden ballads and quasi funk dancers. In May a double sided hit coupled a ballad "If Love Ruled The World" with an up-tempo number imbued with a particularly boring 'femme' chorus "Lover With A Reputation" (*Duke* 460). He kept on dancing to No 20 in November with "Keep On Loving Me" (*Duke* 464) and closed his recording career for 1970 without a blues hit.

B.B. King followed "The Thrill Is Gone" with a varied selection of singles which seemed contrived to keep both his audiences happy (middle aged Blacks and long haired whites). The official follow-up reached No 14 in April "So Excited" (*Bluesway* 61035). It was a frantic item with a heavy backbeat and featured a wah wah guitar duetting with 'Lucille'. In August "Hummingbird" (*ABC* 11268) reached only 25. The song written by Leon Russell, and featuring Russell on piano, was perhaps the most successful blues using white musicians and a song originally recorded by Russell which lent itself well to the form. Also on the chart in August was "Worried Life" (*Kent* 4526) an unadulterated reissue by his old label which reached No 48. November saw King's last release of 1970, "Chains And Things" (*ABC* 11280), climb to No 6; a return to the "Thrill Is Gone" formula featuring Carole King on piano and lyrics well in keeping with the King style.

Little Milton had a poor year inasmuch as label changes took his product out of his hands. The *Checker* label was dropped by GRT after their purchase of *Chess* and Milton considered the hometown background of Stax more to his liking than the faceless executives of GRT. None of his releases during '70 and '71 on *Checker* have any apparent blues feel to them. "If Walls Could Talk" (*Checker* 1226) reached No 10 in January and was a novelty number with a heavy Jimmy Reed beat. The follow-up "Baby I Love You" (*Checker* 1227) was a version of the Jimmy Holiday soul hit of the early sixties which reached No 6 in April. In July "Somebody's Changing My Sweet Baby's Mind" (*Checker* 1231) was pure pop, produced by Donnie Hathaway and reached only 22 but the flip "I'm Tired" written by Chris Youlden (née Savoy Brown) was well worth owning with great string and blues guitar à la King. His last few post-resignation *Checker* releases were good if not very bluesy, "I Play Dirty" (*Checker* 1239) reached 39 in May of '71 and had good blues lyrics but standard soul arrangements. His final release on *Checker* was an excellent version of Jimmy Cliff's "Many Rivers To Cross" but it didn't make the top fifty.

Albert King, a consistent seller on *Stax*, had only one success in 1970 "Can't You See What You're Doing To Me" (*Stax* 0069) which hit No 50 for one week in July.

Wilbert Harrison reached No 10 with "Let's Work Together" in January (*Sue* 11) a reworking of his old *Fury* release "Let's Stick Together" later covered by Canned Heat. For the first time in many years an item of social significance based on a current item was picked up for release on record and, in a very downhome blues style, Calvin Leavy's "Cummings Prison Farm" (*Blue Fox* 100) reached No 40 in May. The recording, in the best tradition of rural blues, was extremely crude and Leavy was devoid of a good voice, although the lyrics were exceptional. He hasn't been heard of since. Geator Davis' "Sweet Woman Love" (*House Of Orange* 24010) reached No 45 in December, but it sold mainly on Davis' ability to sound exactly like Bobby Bland. His follow-up in 1971, a version of "For Your Precious Love" (*House Of Orange* 2405) just missed the fifty.

The most pleasant and surprising hit of 1970 was "To Live In The Past" (*RCA* 0507) which reached No 41 in March. The singer was a man responsible for some of the finest lyrics in American music and the creator of two perrenial standards "Please Send Me Someone To Love" and "Hit The Road Jack"; Percy Mayfield. Unfortunately he never followed up his success. Just about scraping into the Blues end of the spectrum was Israel 'popper stopper' Tolbert's "Big Leg Woman (with a short short miniskirt)" (*Warren* 106). Tolbert, a blind D.J., performed the number in a lazy southern style and sang with great conviction about the fact that he loved his woman "More than a hog loves slop" and other rural niceties. If the record didn't have the best backing, the lyrics were the best of the year. It reached No 8 in October, and the almost identical following single "Shake Your Big Hips" (*Warren* 107) just missed the top 50.

If Billboard published a top 100 more blues

would emerge although not a great deal more in proportion. Among the records that sold heavily without making an appearance within the confines of the fifty positions were "Welfare Caddilac Blues" – Jerry McCain (*Royal American* 4). McCain, a well known figure in the southern blues fraternity for his records on *Excello* and *Jewel* (where he has since returned), cut this cover of a controversial C&W hit by Guy Drake early in 1970. The original deals in typical redneck style with 'niggers' who claim welfare (social security) whilst still running cars and colour tv's. McCain's version riled the poor whites and southern gentry as much as Drake's offended the blacks. Radio exposure was sparse.

Lowell Fulson has always been a consistent seller due to his uncanny ability to roll with every major inovation within Black Music. If ever an artist was able to perform a one man show à la Memphis Slim it's Fulson. "Thug" (*Jewel* 808) and "Do You Feel It" (*Jewel* 811) both quasi funk outings with Muscle Shoals backup were big southern hits. The only other name to sell well in 1970 was Jimmy Reed who also just missed with the wahwah-ed "Hard Walkin' Hannah" (*Canyon* 38) and "Crying Blind" (*Roker* 440010). There are of course several other possible items that, due to their obscurity, could well fall into the blues category but are unknown quantities to the average listener. Also, not to be totally ignored, are artists like Ann Peebles, Johnny Taylor (*Stax*), Jerry Washington (*Excello*) and Ted Taylor (*Ronn*) who fall more into the soul singers with blues influence category, racking up consistent hits and ocassionally drifting into items that have more of a 12 bar feeling. Johnny Taylor's "Stealaway" (*Stax* 0068), a No 3 hit of October 1970, is an excellent example as is Ted Taylor's "How's Your Love life Baby" (*Ronn* 52) which climbed to No 44 in August of 1971. Taylor's *Ronn* material is worth investigation, particularly from a lyric/storyline angle although the rhythm tracks are invariably tailored toward the funkier dance branch of the soul tree. The plots mainly feature adulterous wives, two timing babies, and on more than one occasion common law wives too tired from a day's debauchery to satisfy the bread winner.

This rather sad aspect of Black southern life has never been so prevalent in music as it is today. A disturbing view of life that has prompted more than one socio-blues commentator to remark on the fact that despite the great strides made in the integration of Southern blacks in recent years they still emphasise the very old piece of racist dogma that implies that they have little (wasp) morality or capability to maintain a constant relationship.

It wasn't until November of 1971 that the epitomy of that particular lyrical line was able to really make its presence felt on the chart. The year began in much the same way as 1970 had progressed, dominated by the big four. In February B.B. King was still culling tracks from "Indianola Mississippi Seeds" with "Ask Me No Questions" (*ABC* 11290) reaching No 18 and again featuring beautiful electric piano from Carole King. In March, King made 34 with "That Evil Child" (*Kent* 4542) an old previously unissued tape remixed with overdubbed strings. Very much influenced by "Thrill" but still one of his better 45's of the year. A hackneyed instrumental version of the old standby "Help The Poor" (*ABC* 11302) hit 36 in June and King closed 1971 with two cuts from "In London". These were the excellent "Ghetto

Jerry McCain Photo courtesy Polydor Records

Lowell Fulson Photo courtesy Polydor Records

Woman" (*ABC* 11310) reaching 25 in September and the relatively awful straight soul version of Howard Tate's "Ain't Nobody Home" (*ABC* 11316) which featured a particularly banal 'femme' chorus and some very clumsy brass; probably King's worst item for several years.

Albert King fared little better than he did in 1970, although his album sales were very good, with only one chart 45 "Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven" (*Stax* 0101). This song, lifted from the Don Nix (another Leon Russel expatriate) produced album "Lovejoy", made 38 in October and was the only standard sounding blues item on the set. Other cuts included a gospel item modelled on "Bridge Over Troubled Water" and a stunning version of "Honky Tonk Women". It says a lot for *Stax* Record's faith in the indigenous quality of their artists that they selected "Heaven" for single release.

Also in October Little Milton's first *Stax* item 0100 "If That Ain't A Reason" climbed to 41. It was certainly bluesier than his last few *Checker* items and featured a smattering of Milton's fine guitar work was to be merely a precurser to his successes in 1972.

During the year there were other strong selling blues items. In February Z.Z. Hill made No 17 with "Don't Let Me Pay For His Mistakes (*Hill* 222). A fine song, in typical southern tradition, depicting the demise of a man marrying a divorcee "he gave you fifteen children" etc. Hill was a soul singer of many years and had recorded for various labels with little charts success (despite his long career this was his first item on the charts). All of his old labels including *King* and *Kent* dusted off 45's and had hits; at one point Hill had five items on the lower reaches of the top fifty and just outside. None of these, including newer material on the *Mankind* label, are bluesy enough to warrant inclusion.

On reflection 1971 seems a rather poor year for blues influenced material. Bobby Bland had only one item on the lists "I'm Sorry" (*Duke* 466) reaching No 18 in August. A fine blues ballad with some good guitar work (Mel Brown?). The odd items during the year included "Drowning On Dry Land" – Junior Parker (*Capitol* 2997) which reached 48 in January. Parker was also a fairly consistent hit maker, and, in the hands of producer Sonny Lester, recorded a phenomenal amount of material which appeared on *United Artists, Minit, Groove Merchant* and *Capitol*. In 1969 he had enjoyed two hits "Ain't Goin' Be No Cuttin' Loose (*Blue Rock* 4080) reaching 48 in May and "Worried Life Blues" (*Minit* 32080) making 34 in December. At the time of his death he was in the top 3 on the Memphis charts with "Way Back Home (*Groove Merchant*) which just missed the national configuration.

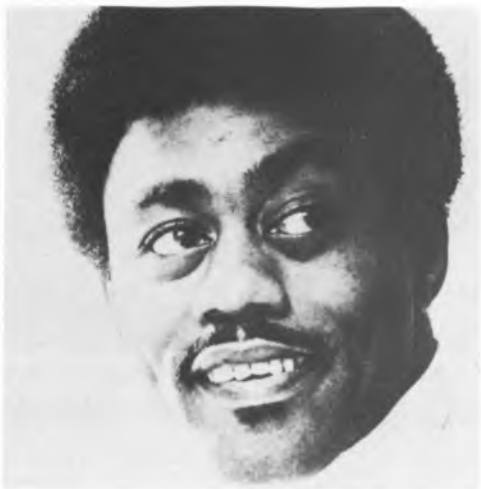
Willie Dixon, the ace Blues hustler of Chicago, formed his own label *Today* during the seventies and in predictable style his first hit was by an *infant*. Lucky Peterson fronted his own 'bluesband' and in May, Dixon hyped and hustled "1234" (*Today* 1502) to the top of the Chicago charts and to No 40 nationwide.

On 20th of November "Everybody Knows About My Good Thing" by Little Johnny Taylor (*Ronn* 55) entered the hit parade, climbed to No 9, and remained in the charts for 11 weeks. This return to fame after 8 years caused much embarrassment to both Little Johnny and the *Stax* Johnny Taylor. During the time that Little JT was enjoying success on *Galaxy* with "Part Time Love" the other JT carved a career in the South impersonating him. This lasted until Stax JT had a hit "I Had A Dream" (*Stax* 186) in 1966 at which time the career lagging Little Johnny Taylor began passing himself off as his namesake too. Currently both artists are regular chartriders and probably still perform each other's material just to confuse things even further!. The song though was the first of the Southern socio-blues to really breakout-even reaching the sixties on the pop 100. The lyrics included some fine Southern imagery which lingers long after the songs finish ". .call the plumber darlin', there must be a leak in my drain. . .".

The most notable item that just missed out on a chart placing was Roy Brown's "Love For Sale" (*Mercury* 73166). Brown originally released the item on his own label and then sold the master to *Mercury* for national shipping when it started to break. It was mainly due to his return to public view via the Johnny Otis Show that Brown returned to performing after an abortive attempt to get an album out on *ABC/Bluesway* in 1965. This eventually appeared later in the year as "Hard Times" on the reactivated *Bluesway* logo. If "Love For Sale" had nudged the chart, it would have been his first hit since "Party Doll" (*Imperial* 5247) reached No 14 in March of 1957. If Muddy Water's "Making Friends" (*Chess* 2107) had entered, it would have been his biggest since "Close To You" (*Chess* 1704) made No 9 in 1958. Bobby Blands "Shape Up Or Shut Up" (*Duke* 471) and Geator Davis's "For Your Precious Love" were the only other blues items of note to bubble under.

1972 saw little of surprise in blues 45 sales on a national level; the regulars had their regular hits.

B.B. King had a recut of "Sweet Sixteen" (*ABC*



Stax Johnny Taylor

11319) at No 48, "I Got Some Help I Don't Need" (*ABC* 11321) at No 39 and a revival of Jesse Belvin's "Guess Who" (*ABC* 11330) at No 40. Bobby Bland had his best blues outing for months in "Do What You Set Out To Do" (*Duke* 472) as high as No 10, and, later in the year, the more mainstream soul slanted "I'm Tired" (*Duke* 487) at No 38. There's a lesson for Bland there somewhere.

Little Johnny Taylor followed up the phenomenal "Good Thing" with "It's My Fault Darling" (*Ronn* 59) wherein he apologises to his wife for interrupting her adultry with the considerate remark that ". . . .it's my fault darling, for coming home early. . . .". The disc reached No 31 with help from the b-side "There Is Something On Your Mind". His next item, "Open House At My House" (*Ronn* 64), continued the theme even more explicitly as his wife consorted with the preacher and most of the house callers in town. The double sided "As Long As I Don't Have To See You"/Strange Bed With A Bad Head (*Ronn* 66), produced by soulster Bobby Patterson, closed Taylor's year without achieving chart status but heralded his move in 1973 toward mainstream soul balladry and dance items.

Albert King's highly acclaimed album "I'll Play The Blues For You" produced his two hits of the year. The title track reaching No 37 on *Stax* 0135 and "Angel of Mercy" (*Stax* 0121) just missing. Also on *Stax* was the biggest selling blues item of the year, Little Milton's "That's What Love Will Make You Do" (*Stax* 0111) which hit No 13. One of Milton's finest works it features some splendid guitar playing and highlights Milton's somewhat unique neck string plucking. The follow-up "Before the Honeymoon" (*Stax* 0124) was too similar, to make any impression despite its fine lyric ". . . .I gotta have a taste of your honey, make sure it's alright, *before* the honeymoon. . . .".

Legendary Texas guitarist Albert Collins signed with the *Tumbleweed* label and managed to make No 46 with the frantic "Get Your Business Straight" (*Tumbleweed* 1002). But the purist blues release (comparatively) just missed the chart. The late Otis Spann's UK recorded "Hungry Country Girl" (*Blue Horizon* 304) would have been his first chart item ever. The record sales generally were very strong but he failed to scrape in. Soul star Jesse James had a version of "Need Your Love So Bad" (*Zea* 30003) at No 26 which almost completes the year's offerings. The James item falls into the *Stax* Johnny Taylor/Ted Taylor category but by virtue of the song, and James' exceptionally fine voice, it cannot be ignored. The two Taylors also enjoyed several hits which lean strongly towards the modern blues form.

This year has seen some real surprises though. The Blues Mafia continued their string of hits, although less concentrated than in former years. Little Milton continued into 1973 as he had ended 1972, with a miss; "Lovin' Stick" (*Stax* 0148). A great record despite the overworked Memphis Horns. The song written by Bobby Newsome of "Jody" fame included one of *the* great chorus lines ". . . . .My neck bone connected to my backbone, my backbone connected to my hipbone, my hipbone connected to my legbone,

Otis Spann Photo by Valerie Wilmer

and somewhere inbetween is mah lovebone, yeah. . .". But his next release was a reissue of the earlier B side to *Stax* 0124. "Walking The Back Streets And Crying" which was heavily featured in the movie "Wattstax" and climbed to No 30. Even considering the fine performances on his *Stax* album "Waiting For. . ." this is his finest blues item on *Stax*. It has a classic formula, a 'lost love', much wailing and a whining guitar solo; and running at 4 mins plus is a record to be found posthaste. The rock critics, although impressed with Milton, were somewhat disturbed by his movie appearance which pinpointed the huge diamond ring on his picking finger, apparently not suitable for ethnic blues singers. . . .back to denim Milton!. His other release this year "What It Is" (*Stax* 0174) has not yet made an appearance. Bobby Bland's last release on Duke, "I Don't Want To Climb Another Mountain" (*Duke* 480) missed. In the interim, though, his contract and record label were sold to *ABC/Dunhill*. His first release "This Time I'm Gone For Good" (*Dunhill* 4369) is in the top ten Soul Charts and around 45 on the pop 100. It is an excellent blues somewhat akin to the B.B. King hit "Thrill Is Gone". This stage in Bland's career (he'll almost certainly make it to the white audience in a big way during '74) is a great example of the American record industry's reliance on good distribution.

B.B. King himself has had only one 45 this year; the Stevie Wonder song "To Know You Is To Love You" (*ABC* 11373) which reached No 18. Albert

King's only release of this year "Breaking Up Somebody's Home" (*Stax* 0147), another cut from the album "I'll Play The Blues", reached No 16 and was a soul/blues hit for Ann Peebles on *Hi*, another Memphis label. "I'll Make It Worth Your While" (*Ronn* 69) reached No 10 for Little Johnny Taylor but had little blues interest whilst his follow-up "My Special Rose" (*Ronn* 73) has yet to show. Ike And Tina Turner took the perrenial "Early One Morning" (*UA* 174) to No 17 in fine style. The years notable misses so far are "Drowning On Dry Land" – O.V. Wright (*Backbeat* 626), "Winehead Woman" – Willie Williams (*Supreme* 1001), "Ain't Nothing You Can Do" – Z.Z. Hill (*UA* 225) and "Your Heart So Cold" – Geator Davis (*Seventy seven* 130).

1973 though has proved a real surprise in the hit status of two veritable golden oldies of the fifties. Earl Gaines, whose last success was in 1966 with "The Best Of Luck To You" (*HBR* 481) returned on *Seventy Seven* 131 with a revamped soul oldie "Hymn No 5" (a hit for Mighty Hannibal in '66 on *Surefine* 021) which he took to No 25. But even more gratifying was the sudden re-emergence of the *Old Town* label who, together with its biggest star Arthur Prysock, took a version of The Dramatics "In The Rain" (*Old Town* 100) up to No 30. Prysock's first hit was "I Didn't Sleep A Wink" (*Decca* 27871) in 1952 and his last was "It's Too Late Baby" (*Old Town* 1118) in 1965.

It's not unreasonable to imagine that the people who are putting Max Bygraves, Peters and Lee etc., into the British hit parade are of similar social background to those putting Gaines and Prysock into the Soul charts and are responsible for Bland, King etc. remaining consistent for twenty years.

The only question left to ask is why aren't there more old R&B stars of the fifties or younger artists appealing to the middle aged black audience? Why don't they buy more records? Are there too many live venues (are Chicago clubs the equivalent of English working mens' clubs or not?). Are the Black retail areas too far apart, too integrated to produce a potent record buying power to register on the charts? Surely all those people who put Roy Brown, Muddy Waters, Wynonie Harris, Roy Milton and Little Walter consistently in the Race Top Ten aren't dead! Or have they progressed with the music? Are black middle-aged mums, dads and grandma's really digging Harold Melvin and The Bluenotes (some of the material on the BlueNotes "Black And Blue" album is worth checking out by more liberal blues fans, particularly "I'm Weak For You"), The O'Jay's, Marvin Gaye and James Brown? After all, asking a modern Black youth why he doesn't buy records by Muddy Waters or revel in the past glory of Ruth Brown is rather like asking English kids raised on Slade why they don't buy records by David Whitfield or appreciate Vera Lynn.

Many Blues singers can still work the Southern states and Mid West of the USA and make a living (of sorts) but only about half a dozen consistently sell records, and these are very much influenced by modern styles. Who buys them?

Bob Fisher

Sounds Write 1

This is the first of what I hope will be a regular series. The intention is to try to give a layman's glimpse at odd spots of the blues world. I shall be giving short, thumbnail sketches of artists; re-examining albums that I think deserve more than a nominal glance; and from time to time, I shall cover other items as I feel fit. It will be a personal choice, but it will in no way be highbrow. I'm an amateur blues fan in the sense that I enjoy the music rather than try and analyse it, and I shall be writing for amateurs. (Mike Leadbitter read no further!).

To open, I want to look at an album that's been around for two or three years – Down South (Roots RL313). Without reservation this is the best compilation blues album I've heard, (and I hastily acknowledge that my ears have not been totally exhaustive). It has the sub-title of Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama-Florida, which is a little unfair as many tracks are recorded in New York or Chicago, but the styles can loosely be placed within these categories.

Richard 'Rabbit' Brown opens it up, and for me he is the best artist on the album; and the song Never Let The Same Bee That Stung You is a knockout, probably my all-time favourite track. He goes through the song listing a series of mishaps that may befall any unsuspecting human, such as his woman leaving him, and then gives the very profound advice, "Never let the same bee that stung you, sting you twice." And how right he is! This is one of only five tracks recorded by him, in March 1927, early on in what I consider the best decade of blues recordings. There is surface noise, as there is on the whole album, but this in no way detracts from his brilliance, and it is sad that there is nothing more from him.

Kid Cole is my next favourite from this set. His is a much lighter music, with his voice approaching the Skip James register, but his attraction is in his style of delivery. He so obviously enjoys singing, and it's really infectious, and his accompaniment is a beautiful harmonic guitar. Regrettably the exponent is unknown, but the two combine to show just what a real force blues can be. Cole only recorded four tracks, in Chicago, June '28, and again it's criminal that such a talent should have escaped further microphones. The track between these two is even rarer, one out of only two! – at least under the name Home Wreckers.

Ed Schaffer and Oscar Woods are the perpetrators, on guitar/vocal/kazoo and guitar respectively. This is from Memphis 1930, and is nice to hear kazoo. I must admit I'm a nut for jugs and kazoo.

I don't propose to go through the rest of the album, listing and appraising all the artists, as it would probably become tedious, and detract from the basic message, that I feel so strongly about the album. But certain other tracks do warrant attention.

Tommy McClennan is well known already. In some ways, his very short recording career but great subsequent influence is very like Robert

Johnson, and his one track here is the epitome of Delta-style — an emphatic guitar beat and a broken vocal, the guitar carrying the word spaces. Johnson's own track is an alternate take to the one usually found, but still has his genius stamped all over it.

Clifford Gibson's are both fine polished blues, in direct contrast to the preceding track, smooth and assured; Barefoot Bill still manages to shine through despite the seeming thunderstorm (surface noise!) behind him; Jaybird Coleman suffers the same malady, but Save Your Money especially evidences some real haunting harp; and Blind Blake is — well, Blind Blake, with a new lyric to Sitting On Top Of The World.

A slight mystery surrounds the two Martin tracks, as although they are listed sleevewise as being his, the Godrich/Dixon 'bible' lists the cuts under Son House's name. Certainly Son is in there, but the main vocals are not his usual — there is more flexibility in speed and pitch than we normally see. It would be interesting to know just who is doing what!

The whole collection is a solid mass of classic blues performances so much so that my lady cried out from the bowels of a bath how good it sounded, and though she likes blues, she normally is not too keen on stomaching a whole album at once! It's good value lengthwise (50 minutes), and worth *all* the scratches. Who minds listening to a thunderstorm anyway?

Rabbit Brown . . . Never Let The Same Bee That Stung You
Shreveport Home Wreckers . . . Home Wreckin' Blues
Kid Cole . . . Hard Hearted Mama/Niagara Fall Blues
Robert Johnson . . . Milk Cow Calf Blues No.2
Tommy McClennan . . . Deep Blue Sea Blues
Fiddlin' Joe Martin . . . Fo' Clock Blues/Going To Fishing
Barefoot Bill . . . Big Rock Jail
Wiley Barner . . . If I Want A Good Woman
Clifford Gibson . . . Hard Hearted Woman Blues/Levee Camp Moan
Jaybird Coleman . . . Save Your Money/Man Trouble Blues
Tallahasse Tight . . . Black Snake
Blind Blake . . . Depressions Gone From Me Blues

M. John Stretton

Sidetrackin'

SAID I WASN'T GONNA TESTIFY (BUT I COULDN'T KEEP IT TO MYSELF).

This article is a belated examination and critique of some of the arguments advanced by Paul Garon in issue one of "Living Blues", in the article "Revolt & Resignation". Garon's thesis is that the Church, as seen through gospel music, has been a force of repression in black America, while the blues is a liberating force.

This latter argument is applied mainly in the field of what, I suppose, has to be called sexual politics. The sexual freedom expressed in such lines as:

"Married woman, always been my crave" (John Estes),

and also the freedom to drink and gamble without moral implications, are regarded by Garon as implicitly revolutionary. The Churches, on the other hand, are regarded as inculcating a spirit of resignation, in which liberation is a teleological concept.

I feel that this is a projection of the political situation of the 1960s and 70s upon the blues and gospel recordings to which Garon has given his attention. The blues should be seen, not as a critique of the values of American society, but as reportage on aspects of specifically *black* society within America. Garon has underestimated the separateness of the black subculture within America. While listening to the blues may produce a subversive effect upon white listeners (and indeed, given the present state of WASP culture, it is desirable that it should), this was surely not the intention of the artists. The black listener would surely recognise the lyrics of the blues singer as a description of his own situation, from which catharsis could be drawn in the knowledge that his situation was a shared one; but not as a revolutionary statement.

Thus Oliver has demonstrated that such lines as Joe McCoy's:

"Now some folks say that a preacher won't steal,
But he'll do more stealin' than I get reg'lar meals."

is the product of a 'stable boy kicked the cat' attitude, being a reworking of:

"Some folks say that a nigger won't steal".

It is a profound, if unfortunate truth, that everybody needs somebody to hate, and those at the bottom of society have turned on members of their own subgroup:

"Black womens is evil, high yallers is even worse".

The overtly political blues is a rarity; as a result left wing writers have been driven to see the blues as a revolutionary poetry. This is plainly untrue; Keil has pointed out the ritualistic, cathartic function of the blues singer, but his conclusion that this is an anti-status quo function, like Garon's, is mistaken. The blues is not an attack on white values, but a description of black values; and if black America has produced most of the important cultural gifts which America has given to the world, it is not therefore correct to conclude that the intention of black artists was therefore to attack white values in their lyrics.

What, then, of gospel music? I think it is possible to argue that the implicitly political music of black America is found in the gospel field. The hope for a better existence after death, it cannot be denied, has often inculcated a spirit of resignation; nevertheless, such lines as:

"When I take my vacation in Heaven,
What a wonderful time it will be",

contain an implicit criticism of the *present* situation of the singer, which found expression in

the civil rights movement of the 1950s. Garon, as is the fashion, decries the political expression of that time because it found a middle class leadership, and had a liberal ethos; but the historical situation would not have permitted of any other form of expression of black aspirations. The civil rights movement was a denial of white values in its desire for integration, at the time was a negation of white values and the idea that the black man was 'all right in his place'. The fact that the historical situation has changed does not justify a denial of the subversive nature of the civil rights movement, even if its politics and aims were different from those of the present day.

My main argument for the political nature of gospel music is simply that most of the political comment in black music is to be found in it (discounting the nursery rhyme politics sometimes found in soul music at present). Examples are too numerous to catalogue, but mention may be made of Willie Johnson's "When The War Was On", with the line:

President Wilson sitting on his throne, making laws for everyone,
Didn't call the black man to lay by the white"

which is followed by a guitar line to complete the verse. Presumably Johnson felt inhibited by the presence of white engineers from completing the thought. Once again the separateness of black culture is evidenced— but this time in opposition to white oppression.

My impression, from looking at titles, is that the Depression and New Deal produced more sermons than blues— the "Roosevelt blues" is an atypical phenomenon. Even Joe Stone's "It's Hard Time", moving though its statement of poverty is, turns into a traditional man-woman song with the verse:

"Don't the moon look pretty, shining through the trees?
I can see my fair brown, swear to God, but she can't see me."

Skip James produced "Hard Time Killing Floor" because the record producer asked him to; I may be reading too much into my argument when I speculate that this is a more coherent "political" blues than many because of Skip's involvement with gospel music, but the possibility is there.

Joe Stone sang that it was "hard time everywhere I go", but didn't offer anything beyond the fact; it is gospel which has always seen the possibilities of the situation of black Americans, and offered alternatives; and if death is sometimes a necessary prelude to a better life, is not this in itself an indictment of the pressures of white society? It is not legitimate to argue that the Churches have avoided political commitment because their commitment has been from a Christian viewpoint, and it is not legitimate to argue that the blues, by ignoring (by and large) white society, is thereby attacking it.

by Chris Smith.

(Ed's Note:— Chris Smith is a history graduate who specialised in Ecclesiastical History and The Church And Society In England and has taken a keen interest in the relationship between Blues and Gospel and their position within American society)

Ragtime

by Roger Millington

REVIEWS

In 1905 or 1906, John Stark — Scott Joplin's publisher — printed a book of "Fifteen Standard High Class Rags". This collection of orchestral arrangements for eleven instruments became known as The Red Back Book because of its distinctive appearance. For twenty years I've dreamed of hearing these arrangements played by first-class musicians. With the bare minimum of publicity, the European première of these orchestrations took place at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on Monday, January 7, under the direction of Alan Cohen.

What was it like? Wish I could tell you. The trains were on strike and I couldn't get any petrol. The BBC played excerpts the following night, but running true to form, didn't tell you in advance. Still, as a good alternative, you can hear the same orchestrations on the following superb LP.

"SCOTT JOPLIN' THE RED BACK BOOK conducted by Gunther Schuller. Angel S-36060 (USA). Recorded: Boston, February 1973.

I've played this LP to a number of people who had no interest in ragtime whatever; without exception, they've all raved over it. In 1972 Schuller and a group of musicians played four of these Joplin rags at a Boston music festival and the reception they received encouraged them to record this larger selection of tunes. The musicians appear all to be 'straight' musicians and are clearly playing the scores to the letter. The results are a revelation — classic ragtime as its creators wanted it to be heard. The arrangements are highly ingenious — The Rag Time Dance being perhaps the most successful. The only fly in the ointment is the rather pedestrian drumming; a lighter touch would be welcome. There have been other American recordings of arrangements from The Red Back Book — but none played with this degree of musical skill. Get it. If you only have one ragtime LP in your collection, this ought to be the one.

Incidentally, Fanfare Press in the USA are publishing a reprint of The Red Back Book.

"A REAL SLOW DRAG". Paul Beaver & Bernard Krause. Warner Bros. Records K 16237 (45 rpm).

"It's a Civil War Marching Tune" the BBC disc jockeys both agreed when they played this delightful single. It is really pathetic that in the middle of a massive Joplin revival, the BBC's disc experts can't recognize the composer credit on the record. Ah well, they were only fifty years out. "A Real Slow Drag" is the final piece of Joplin's opera "Treemonisha" and was published in 1911. It was first recorded in 1968 by Max Morath and is one of Joplin's most haunting compositions. I know nothing about Beaver & Krause, except that they wrote the score for the film 'The Final Programme'.

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William Bolcomb Photo courtesy Nonesuch Records

I have a tape of the recent première in Atlanta of Joplin's opera, and the slightly modernised version by Beaver & Krause is an improvement on the authentic version by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

Strongly recommended. The piece on the other side of the single is of no interest.

"PIANO MUSIC BY GEORGE GERSHWIN". William Bolcomb. Nonesuch H-71284.

Bolcomb is one of a small group of white pianists in the United States who are currently recording many of the lesser known rags along with the reliable favourites. Gershwin, of course is scarcely of ragtime interest, although he was heavily influenced by such ragtime players as Mike Bernard and Luckey Roberts. Of the 27 pieces on this LP, there is only one that could qualify as a rag; the delightful "Rialto Ripples", written when Gershwin was seventeen years old.

Nevertheless the LP is worth hearing, if only as a corrective to much of the abuse that Gershwin has earned from jazz critics. True, there is a sugary content to so many of Gershwin's published compositions — but only because the sheet music published after his death had a mass of superfluous 'expression' added to it. Bolcomb, as far as possible, has stuck to Gershwin's original intentions; his playing is faultless.

Because he strayed from classic rags and 12-bar blues . . . because he was a success in Hollywood . . . and because his flashy "Rhapsody in Blue" is popular with the rabble . . . Gershwin is ignored by the purists. Pity. Much of what he wrote was good by any standards. Better than 99% of today's output, anyway.

"FINGER-BUSTIN' RAGTIME". Dave Jasen. Blue Goose 3001.

Dave Jasen is the author of the major ragtime discography and has applied his considerable knowledge of ragtime to this collection of solos. Eight are of his own compositions. The other eight tunes include classics like "Maple Leaf Rag" and several lesser-known pieces. One feels churlish for criticising any pianist who works so hard, but for my taste Dave plays too fast. And his head is too often ahead of his hands — his keyboard technique just doesn't do justice to the fertility of his ideas. And ideas he has in plenty: he is one of the few pianists alive who is making a creative contribution to ragtime.

For one thing he has the courage to throw away the sheet music and apply his own rhythmic experiments to three Joplin rags. Successfully, too. His own compositions are always interesting: "American Ragtime Dance", for instance, employs a different dance rhythm for each theme. By and large, though, they are difficult tunes to memorise and hum to yourself — Dave packs too many ideas into one rag. Nevertheless, his "Dave's Rag" is comparable with many of the well-established standards and "Festival Rag", reminiscent of Joplin, is highly attractive.

While I've been harsher here about Jasen's style than I really meant to, it's only fair to add this version of "Kitten On The Keys" is the only version of this tune that I enjoy. The same goes for another Tin Pan Alley item, "Poison Ivy Rag".

Reviews

Muddy Waters Photo by Valerie Wilmer

MUDDY WATERS AT NEWPORT.
Checker 6467 306
I Got My Brand On You/I'm Your Hootchie Coochie Man/Baby, Please Don't Go/Soon Forgotten/I Wanna Put A Tiger In Your Tank/I Feel So Good/Got My Mojo Working Parts 1&2/Goodbye Newport Blues.

Recorded in 1960, these sides represent one of Muddy's early attempts to break into the 'white' market. A certain lack of rapport between artists and audience owing to feelings of uncertain expectations on both sides results in a very pleasant but rarely dynamic performance. Although Muddy's band consisting as it does of Jimmy Cotton, Otis Spann, Pat Hare, Andrew Stephens and Francis Clay play tight blues, they seem to be playing well within themselves both in terms of volume and of personal authority and expression. The audience clap politely between numbers but the spontaneous enthusiasm of a black audience, and even on rare occasions of a white one, is noticeably lacking.

Muddy's set is a mixture of greatest hits, standards, and a few recent studio recordings. The standout track is, without doubt, the Otis Spann classic "Goodbye Newport Blues" which nearly steals the whole show, though others worthy of special mention are the fine, slow "Soon Forgotten" and the driving "Tiger In Your Tank" which picks up a fair amount of steam and manages to galvanize the audience. "Got My Mojo Working" loses much of its impact on record, and I still retain fond memories of an English audience dancing in the aisles and on the seats at Digbeth Civic Hall during Muddy's tour here last year when he played some ten minutes of a dynamic mojo.

Taken as a whole this is a very competant, as opposed to exciting album. Its price £1.42 may attract potential buyers and I suggest that you at least give it a listen. As Mike Leadbitter states in his sleeve notes "...this record, more than any other, introduced Muddy to the big wide world in general, allowing him to survive...hopefully its historical significance will be appreciated and its music enjoyed".

Hugh Fleming.

LEROY CARR AND SCRAPPER BLACKWELL Naptown Blues
Yazoo L–1036
Carried Water For The Elephant/Low Down Dog Blues/Papa Wants A Cookie/Naptown Blues/Bread Baker/I Keep The Blues/Gettin' All Wet/What More Can I Do?/Longing For My Sugar/Fore Day Rider/How About Me?/Memphis Town/Hold Them Puppies/Papa Wants To Knock A Jug

This lp is the first to present a completely balanced view of Leroy Carr's recorded repertoire. Carr's finest blues – superb recordings like How Long, Midnight Hour, Prison Bound and Blues Before Sunrise – have already been reissued and are familiar to most blues collectors but amongst the total of nearly 150 sides Carr made between 1929 and 1935, when he died tragically at the age of 30, are included a number of novelty and hokum songs, as well as several straight ballads. Yazoo are to be congratulated on making available a number of these items on Naptown Blues. I can't imagine anyone taking exception to the two ballads; Sugar, which is full of blues feeling and features nice piano and guitar (Josh White and Blackwell), and a sensitive rendition of Irving Berlin's How About Me? Carried Water is a fascinating evocation, complete with animal imitations, of the time in his youth when Leroy worked as a waterboy in a circus. Cookie, a stomping comedy number on which Scrapper joins in the vocal choruses, is the first of four related pieces. Gettin' All Wet uses the Dirty Dozens piano riffs but the lyrics, although humorous, are unconnected: "the skies above are leaking" and "papa's in the rain, gettin' all wet". Scrapper again joins in the chorus, as he does on Memphis Town ("all trains going down to Memphis town"). Jug is a fast-tempo boogie with Dozens-type lyrics and a scat chorus. There are straight blues here in good measure, all excellent performances. Track 2 is based on country blues verses, "I ain't going to be your lowdown dog no more", "My home ain't here

I ain't compelled to stay" etc – and features a beautiful, restrained piano-guitar accompaniment. Naptown is a distinctive piece which makes effective use of stop-time. The lyrics – "No one knows old Naptown like I do".– are in similar vein to Tampa Red's Chicago Blues and Barbecue Bob's Atlanta Moan. Bread Baker is a tremendous up-tempo blues with great instrumental work (Carr, piano; Blackwell and White guitars) and lyrics which reflect Carr's Tennessee origins: "She got a bed in her bedroom, it shine like the morning star (x2), When it starts to rockin' it looks like a Cadillac car" and "Get your red ripe tomatoes and your T-bone steak (x2), and if you fix it like I like it, I will get you a new V–8." Keep is similar in mood to Blues Before Sunrise and almost equally brilliant. Fore Day Rider (correctly retitled in the sleeve title listing but not in the notes) is notable for a brilliant demonstration of guitar skill by Scrapper. Puppies utilizes the Corrine, Corrina tune and its basic theme; a long, intense performance. In just six years of recording, Leroy Carr established himself as one of the greatest blues artists of all time. This album attests to the timelessness of his musical art. (NB. Sleeve-note writers Calt and Stewart are in error in stating that Scrapper Blackwell was Indianapolis born. He was in fact born in Syracuse, North Carolina in 1903, of Negro-Cherokee parentage).

Bob Groom.

FRANK FROST
Jewel LPS 5013

Got My Mojo Working/My Back Scratcher/Feel Good Babe/Things You Do/Pocket Full Of Money/Ride With Your Daddy Tonight (15½ mins.)//Janie On My Mind/Never Leave Me At Home/Didn't Mean No Harm/Pretty Baby/Five Long Years (15½ mins.). Frank Frost – vocal, Rhythm guitar; Jack Johnson – lead guitar; Arthur Williams – harmonica; Chip Young – bass; Sam Carr – drums. Recorded Memphis 1966.

Frank Frost is a surprisingly obscure blues artist, with no recent recordings to his name, despite the fact that he still plays regularly, and appeared at the 1971 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. He has only taken a band into a recording studio twice, in 1963 and 1966; the latter session producing three popular but not hit singles – "My Back Scratcher", "Pocket Full Of Money", and "Things You Do".

These, together with previously unissued material from that session make up an interesting collection of hard-driving, very down-to-earth blues. The band are at their best on well-established numbers like "Got My Mojo Working" and "Five Long Years". Frost's own compositions tend to be rhythmically plodding and less-well constructed; although they include some lively harmonica from Arthur Williams throughout (but particularly on "Things You Do"). Lead guitarist Jack Johnson has few moments to demonstrate his ability; and Chip Young and Sam Carr remain rather basic in their approach.

Overall, an interesting album; but British buyers are warned that four items were released last year on Polydor 2941 001 "Harpin' On It".

Martin Cowlyn.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN
XTRA 1133.

"On The Road Again" (FLOYD JONES)/"Keep What You Got" (SNOOKY AND MOODY)//"Roll, Tumble And Slip" (DELTA JOE)/"Bad Acting Woman" (LITTLE WALTER TRIO)/"I Just Keep Loving Her" (LITTLE WALTER)/"Moonshine Blues" (LITTLE WALTER TRIO)/"Red Headed Woman" (BABY FACE LEROY TRIO)/"Ora Nelle Blues" (OTHUM BROWN, "Evening Sun"/"Brutal Hearted Woman" (JOHNNY SHINES)/"Humming Blues"/"Trouble In The Morning" (JOHN BRIM TRIO)/"Lovin' You"/"Pet Cream Man"/"Now She's Gone" (J.B. AND HIS HAWKS)/.

Transatlantic have decided to reissue at the giveaway price of £1.49 this magnificent collection of early Chicago blues, previously issued on Brad Barrett's Muskadine label. All tracks were recorded between 1947 and 1954 and therefore represent Chicago blues in its infancy. One can hear the great vitality and raw energy of an emerging blues style, unfettered by the rigours of the more formal approach and rigid structure of the later Chicago blues. All the bluesmen featured share similar Southern backgrounds and their rural roots can be identified in the new music which they were then helping to create.

Side One opens with Floyd Jones's magnificent brooding sequel to his masterpiece "Dark Road". One can hear the tightly disciplined sound of the Chicago blues as it was to develop. By contrast the second track, also by Floyd but recorded six years earlier, introduces the listener to the rural roots of Chicago blues. This track also gives one an opportunity to hear the early recorded work of Snooky Pryor, especially interesting in view of his two visits and recent release of his Caroline album in this country.

The next five tracks feature Little Walter, Muddy Waters, Leroy Foster and Othum Brown in various permutations, and are from the Parkway and Ora Nelle labels. At this time Little Walter was as proficient on guitar as he was on harmonica, and "Bad Acting Woman" and "Moonshine Blues" afford an opportunity to hear his rarely recorded guitar style. These relaxed, yet exuberant sides, with their humorous interjections from Muddy and Leroy typify the rural end of the rural-urban continuum of the developing Chicago blues style. Special mention must be made of the beautiful Ora Nelle Blues which is very similar to Jimmy Roger's "That's Alright", which it preceeded by some three years.

Side Two opens with two of Johnny Shine's superb J.O.B. sides. On these Shines is accompanied on harmonica by Walter Horton. "Evening Sun" acts as a showcase for Horton's brilliant harmonica playing, while "Brutal Hearted Woman" shows not only Horton's great skill as an accompanist but also Shines's qualities as a writer of creative lyrics and a singer of beautiful vocals.

John Brim's two sides are also from J.O.B. and with support from Sunnyland Slim on piano one can hear for the first time distinct elements of the Chicago Blues sound as it was shortly to develop. J.B. Hutto's sides are from Chance, and are considered by many to be his finest. One hears,

chrystallized for the first time, the blues style classified as Chicago. With George Mayweather on harmonica, Joe Custom on second guitar, and 'Porkchop' on washboards and assorted percussion these are definitive examples of Chicago Blues at its most creative.

The sleeve notes and packaging are worthy of the music inside. Each track has full personnel listings with dates, and the excellent descriptive sleeve notes are by Frank Scott and John Harmer of Advent records. This record is an absolute must.

Hugh Fleming.

BUCK CLAYTON & JOE TURNER "Feel So Fine!"
Black Lion BLP 30145
"Honeysuckle Rose" (a)/"I'm In A World Of Trouble" (b)/"I Can't Get Started" (a)/"Feel So Fine" (b)/"Perdido" (a)/"I Want A Little Girl" (b)/"Too Late, Too Late" (a & b).
(a—Buck Clayton, tpt; b—Joe Turner, vcl, with Zagreb Jazz Quartet).

Something of a curiosity, this record. It was made in 1965, when Buck and Joe were touring in Europe, with assistance from four Yugoslavs who have names like one of Groucho Marx's nightmares. However, they manage to demonstrate admirably the often forgotten fact that swing does not equal loudness; vibraphonist Bosko Petrovic is excellent throughout, and pianist Davor Kafjes is clearly a devoted student of Kansas City piano. The whole session has a marvellously relaxed air about it which is a tribute to the talents of the JQ.

I'm not really qualified as a jazz critic, but (to coin a phrase) while I may not know much about jazz, I know what I like. Clayton's trumpet playing is okay by me, but I can't give a technical appraisal. Let it stand that he sounds great and, if you like jazz trumpet, these tracks are well worth having.

As for Turner's numbers, there is better Joe available. That is not to put down these performances however, which are very good indeed; "Too Late, Too Late" in particular is an effortless reading of the "TB Blues" theme on the part of both Turner and Clayton.

This album is a fine example of relaxed, swinging music from all concerned. Not essential to many blues lovers, perhaps, but well worth consideration by anyone who simply likes good music.

Chris Smith.

THE GUITAR ALBUM
Polydor 2659 027
Tell The Truth — ERIC CLAPTON, DUANE ALLMAN/After Hours — ROY BUCHANAN/Tail Dragger — LINK WRAY/Marriage Madness — MICK TAYLOR//Bullfrog Blues — RORY GALLAGHER/All Along The Watchtower — JIMI HENDRIX/Unanswered Questions — HARVEY MANDEL/Let It Rain — ERIC CLAPTON//I've Made Nights By Myself — ALBERT KING/Sweet Sixteen — B.B. KING/The Stumble — FREDDIE KING/Shuggie's Chittlin Blues — SHUGGIE OTIS/ The Ox — THE WHO//Hocus Pocus — FOCUS/ Love 74 — LESLIE HARVEY/Extrapolation — JOHN McLAUGHLIN.

This was a nice idea, and top marks to whoever at Polydor thought it up. Unfortunately, there are one or two slight flaws that pull it from being a monumental release, but in something as ambitious as this it is to be expected. My biggest quibble is having to flick the gatefold sleeve back and forth to see which track follows which; and I challenge some of the choices, as although the guitarists depicted are themselves superb axmen, they sometimes are far too drowned within the concept of

the particular track.

Take the opening track. Recorded as Derek & The Dominoes, Eric's guitar is subdued, both behind the rest of the music, and in its own assuredness. The pretty flat singing doesn't help the lumbering pace; and I'm fast coming to the conclusion he hasn't really shone since he left Cream. This is not an auspicious beginning; but fortunately Roy Buchanan soon puts it all to rights. Putting him next to this track from Eric is perhaps unfair, as Roy shows just what the excitement is all about. It seems so easy coming from him, and yet he can make his guitar do everything he wishes. His two albums (2391 042 & 2391 062) are nothing short of incredible, and there is no excuse for any of you not owning both. Link Wray is better here than most of his, in fact the best I've heard him really since Rumble. He does a growling vocal on this Willie Dixon number, and with his sweeter guitar than usual, and a fine chunky feel, there is a superb early Stones quality about the track. Talking of the Stones — enter Mick Taylor. Sadly, he's largely overshadowed by John Mayall, whose track it really is, but in the short guitar break, he shows what talent there is within him. And the track itself is a fine relaxing slow blues, with tasty muted sax.

Rory Gallagher is, well...Rory Gallagher. His usual breathless self, he shoots up and down his fret board like an electrified jumping bean; but sadly, I've never been convinced he is as good as they all say. As opposed to Jimi, who really had 'style'. You may not have liked him burning his guitar on stage, but, man, the effects he wrung from his tortured instrument were just incredible. You should all know this track, and should know that it is an excellent version of the Dylan song, the guitar perfectly complementing the mystery of the lyrics. Enter John Mayall again, for another 'break-for-guitar-lads'-type track, and again Harvey Mandell, this time, is largely swallowed. The same goes for Clapton, yet again; but this does remain a very pleasant track.

Freddie King Photo courtesy Polydor Records

Side 3 is undoubtedly the star show. The three Kings of blues music, showing just what it's all about. All three have a guitar sound several thicknesses sharper than any so far (apart from Buchanan and Hendrix), and it goes to prove that real talent comes from within. All three play from the heart. with B.B. on his classic Sweet Sixteen, and Freddie really fluid on the Stumble instrumental. For my money, these three plus Buchanan should have opened one side each, putting the rest to shame, and showing so many outsiders what blues guitar really can be. Shuggie plays manfully to keep up the standard, and for himself succeeds, but he is largely submerged behind saxes and his dad's piano. The end of the cut is messy, and none too successful, but Shuggie's guitar is the salvation, and remember when this was recorded he was only 15 years old! You never thought you'd see The Who in these hallowed pages did you? Well apart from this, you probably never would have, but it is a good instrumental, full of power and drive, and gutsy guitar affront a manic drumming from Keith Moon; and several sidelong glances at Duane Eddy's Peter Gunn.

Coming down to side four is like changing altitudes, but once accustomed you can sample probably Focus's best track (their only really good one? [Unfair!— Ed.]). Using a speed and breathlessness similar to Gallagher, they have a certain class, and credit must be given to Mike Vernon for spotting them. Les Harvey was a good guitarist, and his touches have a subtle delicacy on this Stone The Crows track, but again he suffers slow drowning. And we finish the double album on love, devotion and mysticism! Personally, I reckon John McLaughlin is grossly over-rated, and this track could well have been done without. He plays modern-jazzish improvised riffs, but his phrase-picking is largely wasted.

The criticisms I have made are in the context of this album, which is to showcase the guitar, and my complaints of submersion must be read in this light. On their own, all the tracks are good, some excellent, and the whole comes in a highly attractive package, with booklet showing pocket history and 'representative discographies', and a sheet you can cut up to form cigarette cards! I simply feel a little of a cheat to call an album The Guitar Album, and then have tracks not really 'featuring' guitar, out front.

Michael J.

FOUR KINGS AND THE QUEEN
Spivey LP 1014
MEMPHIS SLIM: Everything I Do Is Wrong/ European Blues/Organ Boogie/LONNIE JOHNSON: Feelings From The Fingers/Be Care-

ful/ROOSEVELT SYKES: Sleeping All Day Blues/Bicycle Riding Mama/BIG JOE WILLIAMS: Improvisation/Drifting Blues/VICTORIA SPIVEY: A Bum Can't Do You No Good/Go Tell My Other Man/It's Dangerous.

A second volume on the lines of LP 1004 with an additional artist, Memphis Slim, who contributes two good vocal/piano blues and a rather lightweight organ instrumental. The guitar genius of the late Lonnie Johnson is better demonstrated in the accompaniment to his vocal on Be Careful than in the rather offbeat instrumental Fingers. Roosevelt is in excellent form on Sleeping and Bicycle, the latter with guitar, harmonica, flute and washboard supporting. Big Joe is his usual inimitable self. The improvisation with Bob Dylan (harmonica) and Victoria Spivey (piano) is faded out rather abruptly. Drifting, a solo item, is considerably better. Victoria herself takes the remaining three vocals, all well up to standard lyrically and with that deliberate, slightly ominous quality that characterizes many of her performances. Instrumental support is provided by drums and clarinet (Bum), Louis Metcalf's Band (Other Man) and Dylan and Big Joe (Dangerous).

Bob Groom

LOUISIANA CAJUN MUSIC VOL 5. The Early Years 1928–1938.
Old Timey 114
AMADIE, OPHY & CLEOMA BREAUX– Ma Blonde Est Partie/Vas Y Carrement/SOILEAU & ROBIN– Ma Cherie Tite Fille/Easy Rider Blues/DENNIS McGEE– Madame Young Donnez Moi Votre Jolie Blonde/BREAUX FRERES– One Step A Marie/BLIND UNCLE GASPARD & DELA LACHNEY– Baoille/ANGELA LEJUNE– Bayou Pom Pom One Step/Valse De Pointe Noire/DUDLEY & JAMES FAVOR– T'Es Petite A Ete T'Es Meon/BREAUX FRERES– Mazurka De La Louisiane/AMADE ARDOIN– La Turtape De Saroied/WALTER COQUILLE– Mayor of Bayou Pom Pom, Parts 1 & 2.

Volume 5 of Chris Strachwitz' admirable documentation of Cajun music is, in effect, a supplement to volume 1. The rarity of several items is underlined by the variable sound quality, which is nonetheless acceptable despite clanging guitars on a number of tracks.

The selling point is the inclusion of the first recording of the Cajun 'national anthem', Jolie Blonde, by A, O & C. Breaux, made in 1928. There is therefore a slight disappointment in finding that the first two tracks are good, rather than brilliant; though it must be emphasised that they *are* good. Much better are the two Breaux Freres tracks– "Mazurka" in particular really stomps along.

Of the other tracks, Leo Soileau's contributions feature fiddling to live up to his astonishing contributions to volume 3, but are marred by Robin's 'what time of day is it?' accordion playing. The vocal on "Tite Fille" is a bit of a pain, though "Easy Rider" has some nice pastiche white blues singing. Angela Lejune's vocal work is also extremely hard on the ear, and his accordion playing, with which he won a talent contest which gave him his recording chance, is not that great either.

The remaining musical tracks are all very fine, however: Dennis McGee's two-fiddle backing is extremely beautiful, and Uncle Gaspard's track is a delightful melody with an Appalachian sound.

The Favors produce some pleasant unisonsinging, sounding like distant cousins of the Mississippi Sheiks, and the celebrated black accordionist Amade Ardoin demonstrates his greatness admirably; his sense of rhythm on his instrument can only be compared with that of Rice Miller on the french harp.

Finally, Walter Coquille, a nonmusical curiosity of great documentary value; these tracks are a comic political speech, in which are discussed topics of contemporary interest, among them paved highways, natural gas ("It don't have no smell till you get the bill"), and the superior bravery of the crawfish in comparison to the eagle!

Overall, then, a good record, both from a musical and a historical viewpoint. Cajun fans will want it anyway; others should find much to enjoy, and may end up fans.

Chris Smith.

THE CHESS GOLDEN DECADE, VOLS. 1–3

VOLUME 1 – 1951/5 Checker 6445 150
RUFUS THOMAS: Ain't Gonna Be Your Dog/JACKIE BRENSTON: Juiced/HAWKETTS: Mardi Gras Mambo/LOWELL FULSOM: Reconsider Baby/MOONGLOWS: Most Of All/Sincerely/In My Diary/BLUE JAYS: White Cliffs Of Dover/LITTLE WALTER: My Babe/BO DIDDLEY: Bo Diddley/BOBBY TUGGLE: 64,000 Dollar Question/RAYS: Tippety Top/WILLIE MABON: I'm Mad/EUGENE FOX: Sinner's Dream/JAMES 'SUGARBOY' CRAWFORD: Jock-O-Mo/BOBBY CHARLES: See You Later Alligator.
VOLUME 2 – 1956 Checker 6445 151
BOBBY CHARLES: Take It Easy Greasy/CLARENCE 'FROGMAN' HENRY: Ain't Got No Home/Troubles, Troubles/PAUL GAYTEN: Music Goes Round And Round/Driving Home: Part One/FLAMINGOS: A Kiss From Your Lips/I'll Be Home/MOONGLOWS: When I'm With You/I Knew From The Start/CHUCK BERRY: Roll Over Beethoven/BOBBY CISCO: Tall Dark Handsome Man/Rock Rock/HOWLIN' WOLF: Smokestack Lightning/FOUR TOPS: All My Life/BOBBY CHARLES: I'll Turn Square For You/BO DIDDLEY: Who Do You Love.
VOLUME 3 – 1957 Checker 6445 152
JIMMY McCRACKLIN: The Walk/BOBBY CHARLES: You Can Suit Yourself/RAY STANLEY: I Can't Wait/ JOHNNY & JOE: Over The Mountains, Across The Sea/LEE ANDREWS & THE HEARTS: The Clock/Long Lonely Nights/Teardrops/NITE CAPS: Jelly Bean/LOWELL FULSOM: Rock This Morning/BOBBY DEAN: Dime Store Pony Tail/O WILLS (TV SLIM): Flatfoot Sam/MOONGLOWS: This Love/TUNE-WEAVERS: Happy Happy Birthday Baby/DREAMKINGS: M.T.Y.L.T.T./EDDIE BOYD: Oh Oh/DALE HAWKINS: Susie-Q.

What is a "Golden Decade"? Is it a collection of greatest hits? Or a 'best of . .? Or perhaps, it's a collection of previously hard-to-get and in-demand

items? Or even reissues of early, probably rotten, cuts by currently popular artists?

Phonogram have obviously decided that a "Golden Decade" should contain a hotchpotch of all these categories. The 'greatest hits' are a bit thin on the ground in these early volumes being mainly represented by Chuck and Bo, along with a few group sounds. Eugene Fox, the Hawketts and one or two others have been collectors' items for a number of years now, and in this category one might also include the unknown Bobby Tuggle and the previously-unreleased 4 Tops. Add to this recipe, some pretty mediocre material from current 'in' names such as Rufus Thomas, Eddie Bo and Bobby Charles, plus a horribly dated novelty item ("Jelly Bean"), and stir well.

Harsh criticism? Most definitely not, for we're still left with the vast bulk of the contents to constitute the final category: — 'the best of. . .'. For instance, there's six cuts by the Moonglows who were the most consistently great group of the era: if 'Sincerely' doesn't curl your Central Nervous System nothing ever will! The Dream-kings' effort (it stands for "More Than Yesterday, Less Than Tomorrow", by the way) is doo-wop at its best: a mellow lilter complete with McPhat-terish hiccoughing sob! And grab Fulsom's "Rock" — his two contributions are so opposed stylistical-ly, yet both so good, it's a bit of a mystery to me that he never made another worthwhile record.

These three are the first in a series, and the one-album-for-one-year idea, must make it a comprehensive collection, and at £1.67 each they're really essential.

Just a minute. . . . . You've probably already decided to buy from the track list alone, so why are you reading this?

Roy Stanton

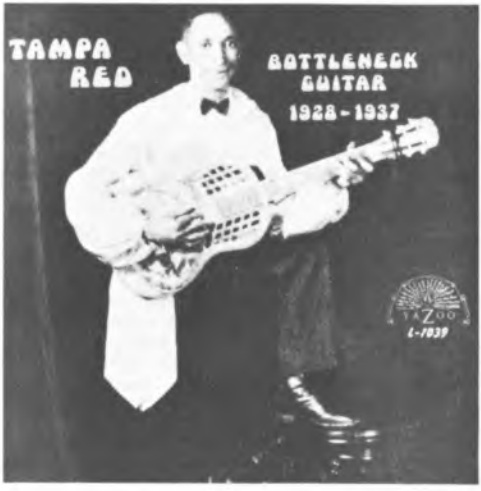
IDA COX — VOLUME ONE
FOUNTAIN FB 301

Any Woman's Blues/Bama Bound Blues/Lovin' Is The Thing I'm Wild About/Graveyard Dream Blues/Weary Way Blues/Blue Monday Blues/I Love My Man Better Than I Love Myself/Ida Cox's Lawdy, Lawdy Blues/Moanin' Groanin' Blues/Chattanooga Blues/Chicago Blues/Come Right In/I've Got The Blues For Rampart Street/Graveyard Dream Blues/Mama Doo Shee Blues/Worried Mama Blues.

Few reissue albums are as excellent as this — musically, technically and in presentation. Queen of the Blues, Ida Cox was one of the most successful of the 'twenties Classic Blue artists (and continuing to work successfully until the 1950's). She was strong and temperamental, capable of warmth and affection, yet quick to rise against anyone who displeased, or worse, tried to bask in her glory and steal the limelight. All this was reflected in her recordings — the first sixteen of which are collected here in chronological order. Spanning six months from June to December 1923, Ida variously is accompanied by Lovie Austin (piano), or with the addition of Tommie Ladnier (trumpet) and Jimmie O' Bryant (clarinet).

These recordings are amongst the finest blues performances on record; additionally, Fountain have managed to remaster so skillfully that these must surely be the freshest 1923 recordings you have ever heard. It is impossible to say which performances are outstanding — they all are; but listen to the cohesion of Ladnier and O'Bryant on the earlier "Graveyard Dream Blues" and "I've Got The Blues From Rampart Street". The second version of "Graveyard Dream" was made four months later, in October 1923, accompanied only by Lovie Austin. If you can tear yourself away from the music, you will be pleased by the informative folder sleeve, containing erudite notes by Derrick Stewart-Baxter, photographs, and full discographical data. Finally — this is only the first volume of one of the many Fountain projects, and can be obtained from Retrieval Recordings Ltd., 48 Eversley Avenue, Barnehurst, Kent, DA7 6RB.

Martin Cowlyn.



TAMPA RED AND OTHERS. Bottleneck Guitar
Yazoo L-1039

TAMPA RED— You Got To Reap What You Sow/What Is It That Tastes Like Gravy/The Duck Yas Yas Yas/No Matter How She Done It/Through Train Blues/(& HOKUM JUG BAND) Come On Mama, Do That Dance/Denver Blues/FRANKIE JAXON— It's Heated/MA RAINEY— Black Eye Blues/MADLYN DAVIS— It's Red Hot/Too Black Bad/GEORGIA TOM— If You Want Me To Love You/LIL JOHNSON— House Rent Scuffle.

Nick 'The Godfather' Perls, having rehabilitated Bo Carter to everyone's satisfaction, now sets out to do the same for Tampa Red. The format is similar to that of Yazoo's Broonzy issues (another great piece of reappraisement) — some on his own, some as accompanist to others.

Frankie Jaxon turns in two gay, if that's the word I want, performances, one with the Hokum Jug Band. Ma Rainey's talents are too well known to need any comment; in contrast to her is Madlyn Davis, an artist decidedly of the second rank, saved by her accompaniment, which is presumably why she was included. Lil Johnson, on the other hand, should be better known. Her track is a sort of

precursor to the Tampa Red/Big Maceo partnership of later years, with stomping barrelhouse piano from the great Charles Avery. Georgia Tom's number I don't find too impressive, but he always has bored me as a vocalist anyway, and the weakest of the Tampa Red 'solo' tracks are "The Duck" and "No Matter How", where Dorsey also sings.

All these accompaniments are of great merit, but it's the solo pieces that really make one sit up. "Got To Reap" is an instrumental version of Sittin' On Top Of The World, beautifully done. "Gravy" is a curiosity— no bottleneck and Fullerish vocal. As a ragtime guitarist, Tampa succeeds brilliantly, standing comparison with Blind Blake. That good!

"Through Train" was Tampa's first record, and features a tuba; it also shows us Tampa Red in embryo, and sounding a bit like Elmore James at times! "Seminole" features second guitar from Willie Bee James, and borrows a phrase from Gus Cannon's slide-banjo Poor Boy.

Above all, there is "Denver Blues". This is an instrumental reading of Bessie Smith's classic "Backwater Blues", and shows exactly where Robert Nighthawk got it from. It also shows exactly the nature of Tampa Red's genius— a perfect blend of taste and technique. A most important LP; I for one hope there's a volume 2 planned. Meanwhile get this and admire.

Chris Smith.

GENESIS VOL.2 MEMPHIS TO CHICAGO
CHESS 6641 125

For blues fans, this just has to be the release of the year — four albums, all in superb box, for only £6.50. I rated Vol. 1 as my album of the year in 1972 and have absolutely no hesitation in repeating myself for Vol. 2 in 1973. Being of such importance, it deserves to have a thorough appraisal, and I shall do my best to do it justice in the following; but out of everything, some tracks stand out like a silhouette tree on a landscape. On Vol. 1 tracks like I Can't Be Satisfied and Mean Red Spider by Muddy were worth the price of the whole set on their own; here the three by Harmonica Frank take pride of place, and Swamp Root in particular; but more of that later.

The set this time is modelled in green within the black outer box; the booklet is as excellent as before and the music is 3 hrs. of evidence, as the sub-title suggests, of the shift from the delta to the Windy City. It also evidences, just how much talent there must have been around in these incredibly few short years, (approx. '50 — '56), and what a blues utopia Chicago must have been.

For really avid blues collectors, there are many duplications in this with already available albums; especially Sonny Boy on Marble Arch, Howlin' Wolf Moanin' In The Moonlight, Joe Hill Louis on Muskadine, and others on smaller labels like Python; but for the more casual listener this is not the case. Anyway, there are more than enough previously unissued tracks to make it all worthwhile. Essential for squirrels! Here are the four albums in turn.

Album 1. Sonny Boy Williamson: Work With Me/Don't Start Me To Talking/All My Love In Vain/Good Evening Everybody/You Killing Me/Let Me Explain/I Know What Love Is All About/I Wonder Why/Your Imagination. Elmore James: Country Boogie/My Best Friend/I See My Baby/She Just Won't Do Right/Muddy Shoes.

This is Sonny Boy II of course, and those of you who have got the Down & Out Blues album will know, the tracks here are a fine showcase of his easy-paced blues; his gentle, wavering, throaty vocal; and his mid and upper-register harp soaring, whooping and echoing the vocal. His harp playing indeed is so assured, and so full of personality, that it's easy to see why he is so highly regarded, and why he has so often been copied. For my mind, his are some of the easiest blues to listen to, with a unique combination of intensity and sheer enjoyment, and cuts like Don't Start Me To Talkin', Keep It To Yourself, and The Key To Your Door have long been favourites. There are five new tracks: Work With Me, which is listed in the Bible as *Walk* With Me!; Good Evening Everybody — a fine up-tempo number, that has Freddie Below really belting the drums, and Jimmy Rogers playing some really excellent guitar, plucking style, up and down the scales. Sonny Boy's harp is just how I would like to play it — up to the tune, and round it, sometimes harmonising, sometimes on the line, but always perfect. You Killing Me, the last of the cuts from the earlier dated session, is in complete contrast, being a slow, soulful blues, with Muddy this time excelling on fine delta-style guitar. Almost enough to bring tears to your eyes. The later session has a much lighter feel, with an echoey quality that makes it sound as if it were recorded in a club. There are personnel changes,

with Robert Jr. Lockwood and Luther Tucker taking guitars, and Below this time sounds rather like he's playing a bucket! I Wonder Why (previously unissued) is very short, an intense 12-bar. Your Imagination was the next cut, and as it is the same tune and arrangement but with different lyrics, it's rather suspiciously like Sonny Boy ran out of ideas on the first one.

Elmore James Photo courtesy Polydor Records

Elmore's tracks are a disappointment. Not easily available before this, they slip discographically between Red Lightnin', Kent or Juke Blues, and CBS, Ember or UA. Somehow these others sound so much better. I am a fan of Elmore's, but here both his guitar is far too subdued, and the tenor of J.T. Brown is both too loud and too jarring. I See My Baby is the best of the bunch, being the more definitive, but the effect is immediately ruined by the out-of-balance sax on Won't Do Right. Muddy Shoes I liked, if only for the line: 'My baby wake up in the morning/she jumps like a squirrel'!!!

Album 2. Ethel Mae: Down The Line/Handsome Lover/Sugar Papa. Robert Nighthawk: Good News/Six Three O/Prison Bound. Forrest City Joe: Mean Mistreatin' Woman/Lonesome Day Blues. Howlin' Wolf: Mama Died And Left Me/I'm Not Joking/Moanin' At Midnight/How Many More Years/All Night Long/No Place To Go.

The first side is bitterly disappointing. I'd not heard Ethel Mae before, and I wish I still hadn't. Her tracks are all typical, easy paced Chicago blues of the period, but her vocals are totally uninspiring, and often grating. I don't know how many sides she cut in her career, but I wouldn't be surprised if these are the only ones! Ernest Lane (piano and later to be with Ike Turner) and Robert Nighthawk try hard to rescue, but with her they are beaten before they begin. She even stays to ruin Robert's Good News – (perhaps the good news was that she was leaving!)? Once free of her, he really lets go, and Six Three 0 is a fine track, with some really great bottleneck guitar from him, as if the shackles have suddenly been taken off. Prison Bound shines too, with star turn piano from Pinetop Perkins.

I don't like the way Forrest City Joe has his two tracks straddling the close of side 1 and the start of side 2, most disjointing. Fortunately his two are good: a fine, young, husky voice, with intricate phrasing; a crying harp; and a very good guitar support from (possibly) J.C. Cole – slow-stepping the chords. Both unavailable before, and with just the two men present, they make a nice break to the more augmented sound so far. It's strange that Joe recorded so few tracks in his life.

Mama Died And Left Me is the first really exciting track so far. Previously unissued, it is the softest, most delicate you've ever heard Wolf. You didn't know he could be delicate?– take a *long* listen! Recorded 'probably Memphis, date uncertain', it's bloody marvellous, and why on earth it wasn't released is beyond my comprehension. All the ingredients that later made him so devastating are there: the gravel voice, the harmonica, the 'woo-hoo', the guitar support: but all *so* restrained. With brief spoken intro, this and I'm Not Joking, sent shivers down my spine that I've not had since I first heard Muddy's Mean Red Spider! They go with the Harmonica Frank tracks, to be worth the £6.50 on their own!

Moanin' At Midnight is much nearer his norm, with a less delicate, but more assured approach, and strangely the track is nothing but reminiscent, apart from the vocal, of early Cream! Although only the next recorded track, How Many More Years shows another progression, and goes to prove how fast Wolf was developing at this time. Listed in the Bible as How Many More Tears(!), it is a great track, with Willie Steel sounding as though he's playing suitcase rather than drums, but it makes interesting comparison to No Place To Go, – the same song three years on. All Night Long (Boogie) is not too successful, as Wolf is not at his best at top speed, but this apart, the whole side is really excellent.

Album 3. Jackie Brenston: Rocket 88. Doctor Ross: Country Clown/Dr. Ross Boogie. Willie Nix: Truckin' Little Woman/Just One Mistake. Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup: Open Your Book/Tears In My Eyes. Woodrow Adams: Pretty Baby Blues/ She's Done Come And Gone. Joe Hill Louis: Dorothy Mae/When I Am Gone. Harmonica Frank: Swamp Root/Howlin' Tomcat/She Done Moved.

Jackie Brenston is indeed the beginning of Rock, with shades of Lloyd Price, Joe Liggins, jump blues, Bill Haley, et al; and liberal use of saxes; and it's still only March '51. Not surprisingly, not in the Bible. The Dr. Ross tracks are his first two ever, cut for Chess three years before he went to Sam Phillips at Sun. Then only 26, he now seems so much older than a mere 22 years, and the so obvious delta influenced Country Clown and Dr. Ross Boogie are so different to what he performs now. There are embryonic signs, but the highly developed sense of fun that he now has was then totally buried.

The Willie Nix numbers are enjoyable both

because of his vocals and his drumming, especially prevalent on the now well-worn Truckin', and because of the superb Walter Horton harp. At his best he is brilliant, but so often he spoils himself with mediocre performances. Here he is on top form, and he is a joy to listen to. I was always under the impression that Arthur and Percy Lee Crudup were one and the same person. Certainly the Bible too gives that impression, but in the booklet it is otherwise, with the latter credited with harp on Open Your Book. Be that as it may, the two tracks are good examples of Crudup in other than 'That's-Alright-Mama'-mood. The singing is exciting and the two tracks here make interesting comparison to the two on an early Juke Blues recorded in the same year, 1952.

Starting side 2, the Woodrow Adams tracks are diabolical! His vocals and bottleneck guitar don't fit together, and neither do they fit with the very ragged harp of Sylvester Hayes, and Joe Martin sounds as though he were clumping round the studio in enormous boots rather than playing drums! Recorded-in-a-barn sound that had me falling off my chair laughing. Result, – one unholy mess. Fortunately, Joe Hill Louis brings us back to sanity. If you've got his Muskadine album, you'll have these, but those who haven't, there are again hints of R&R, with especially a heavy electric guitar. His work on this instrument is grossly under-rated, as he shows impressive dexterity, his vocals are strong and confident, and again, Walter Horton is on a good day.

So we come to *the* track of the whole box – Swamp Root by Harmonica Frank – and he's white! With a swift, C&W folky guitar accompaniment, the pearl in the oyster is the incredible (and that is not an overstatement!) spitsinging; a gimmick song, with 'my teeth rattling like a pair of dice'! Having only just got back on my chair from Woodrow Adams, I fell off it again with this, but in amazement. IT'S FANTASTIC. Although not quite the same high, both Tomcat and She Done Moved are excellent; and enjoyable on a whole new level. Using a guitar accompaniment similar to Dennis McMillan, he is literally taking the piss out of the blues! Complete with appropriate Tomcat squeals, he is like a breath of fresh air.

Album 4. Sonny Boy Williamson: Keep It To Yourself/Please Forgive/The Key To Your Door. Howlin' Wolf: Baby How Long/Evil Is Goin' On/Forty Four/Who Will Be Next/I Have A Little Girl/Come To Me Baby/Don't Mess With My Baby/Smokestack Lightning/You Can't Be Beat/So Glad/Break Of Day.

Back to Sonny Boy, for three more of the session with Robert Jr. Lockwood, etc. All three definitive Sonny Boy, inimitable of his style.

Wolf closes the show, in tremendous fashion. Now confident in his own style and ability, the end to the four albums is like the last act in a superb show. His rocking Chicago blues transport us on a huge happy cloud, wiping away our own blues. To my mind, his best ever tracks are collected on U.S. Chess L.P. 1469; – these tracks here are largely immediately prior to that collection in date, and are only marginally behind. They evidence the constantly expanding genius.

Smokestack Lightning is of course a classic, different to his usual attack, slightly restrained, but so great in result. The Chicago house musicians – Spann, Jody Williams, Hubert Sumlin, Dixon and Earl Phillips – provide the ideal rock steady rhythm, on Forty Four especially; and then Henry Gray takes over on piano for Who Will Be Next – almost a pop tune!; and Little Girl – a great rocking tempo with excellent guitar from Williams and shouted vocal from Wolf. Of the rest, the best is undoubtedly the original flip to Smokestack, Can't Be Beat. Apart from Wolf's excellence, the two Willies – Dixon and Johnson – really surpass themselves on bass and guitar respectively. Truly great stuff.

The Booklet

In this booklet Mike Leadbitter has presented (as with Vol. 1) an excellent companion to the records; don't go looking for startling new facts, although he is always bringing his subjects up to date as he writes; merely accept the excellent pocket cameos of the music and artists herein contained.

He starts off by briefly sketching the Chess background, and then goes into the stories of Sonny Boy, Robert Nighthawk, Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, Dr. Ross/Brenston/Crudup, etc. The text is imbued with Mike's own enthusiasm for the music, his obvious affection for the artists concerned, and any little anecdotes he thinks appropriate. The whole is beautifully illustrated with many excellent and often rare photos of the artists and also of the places where they played/started/etc. Again worth the price of the box on its own.

There. If you are still with me, I hope by now I've convinced you to buy. I now wait for Vol. 3 to be Album of 1974!

Michael J.

THE EVERLASTING BLUES VERSUS OTIS SPANN

Spivey LP 1013

I'm A Bad Boy/You're Going To Miss Me When I'm Gone/Let Me Ride Your Mule/No.12 And 10 Train/You Know You Don't Love Me/Why Don't You Leave Me Alone/Where Is My Wife?/Going Back Home.

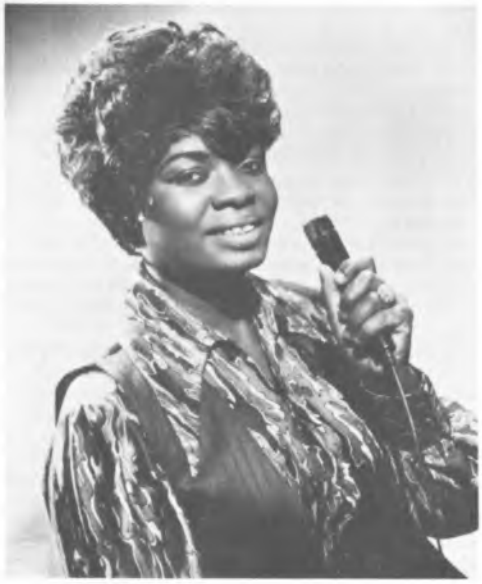
Despite the rather tasteless title, this is an enjoyable album featuring the late Otis Spann in company with Johnny Young and Luther Johnson. But don't expect to hear much of Spann's piano, poor recording balance ensures that it is often drowned out by Young's mandolin and the electric guitars of Johnson and Peter Malik, although it does come through well on the two Johnny Young vocals (Mule and Train). Luther Johnson's Muddy-influenced vocals are featured on Don't Love Me and Leave Me Alone, with S.P. Leary's thunderous drumming much in evidence. Otis puts in good vocals on Bad Boy and Miss Me (with reference to Victoria's Black Snake Blues) but the comedy sketch with Luther (Wife) is a waste of time. Victoria Spivey and Otis swop verses on Back Home, which makes an entertaining finale

Bob Groom

BLUES AVALANCHE
Chess 2CH-60015 (USA)
BO DIDDLEY: I Hear You Knockin'/You Can't Judge A Book. . ./Diddley Daddy THE ACES: Early In The Morning/Baby What Yoy Want Me To Do KOKO TAYLOR: Wang Dang Doodle/I Got What It Takes LAFAYETTE LEAKE: Wrinkles/ Swiss Boogie MUDDY WATERS: County Jail/ Trouble No More/Got My Mojo Working/Stormy Monday/She Says She Loves Me.

Blues Avalanche was recorded at the Montreaux Jazz Festival in Switzerland on 16 and 17 June, 1972. Nothing is drastically wrong with this two record set, but there is nothing that is particularly ear-shattering in the hour's listening time needed to get through the fourteen cuts. Most of it is just pretty bland. Each performer is joined by a guest and the results are mixed. The combination of Bo with Cookie Vee is nice on "Knockin'" and "Daddy", and the male-female, statement-response format is effective on the first tune. "Book" gives Bo a chance to smash his guitar strings about, although the excitement generated on Diddley's live Beach Party (Checker LP 2988) is noticeably absent. The Aces feature Fred Below on two vocals and add Lafayette Leake's piano for two good tracks. Leake takes a very good solo in the first of these. Koko Taylor is one of my all-time favourites; her voice is in top shape, yet her two selections seem to suffer from the under-production of a four-piece backup combo. Louis Myers struggles in a long version of her 1965 hit, "Wang Dang Doodle", and Muddy joins her in a great arrangement of "I Got What It Takes — Same Thing". Leake's two piano instrumentals are long, brilliant, but are marred by Willie Dixon fumbling for chromatic auxiliaries in his bass breaks. "County Jail" is quite emotional with its plodding bass line accompanying Muddy's sensitive vocal and slide guitar. I've heard better than these fair versions of "Trouble" and "Mojo" (just what we need — another "Mojo"), the second half of which is, however, enthusiastic. Muddy sings the first two choruses of "Stormy Monday" and it sounds too 'forced'. T-Bone Walker joins him on vocals for this and the last selection but both leave me cold. Very simply, Blues Avalanche is nice in spots but not an absolute necessity for one's collection.

Robert Cappuccio



Koko Taylor Photo courtesy Willie Leiser

ROOSEVELT SYKES The Country Blues Piano Ace
Yazoo L—1033
You So Dumb/No Good Woman Blues/Hard Luck Man Blues/Don't Put The Lights Out/Mr. Sykes Blues/All My Money Gone Blues/Highway 61 Blues/Kelly's Special/As True As I've Been To You/Kelly's 44 Blues/The Way I Feel Blues/Skeet And Garret/Poor Boy Blues/JAMES STUMP JOHNSON: Barrel Of Whiskey Blues

"Few blues artists have been as influential as Roosevelt Sykes" begins the sleeve-note to this collection of Sykes recordings made between 1929 and 1932 and one can but agree with this statement. Apart from a lean period in the late fifties, Sykes has recorded regularly throughout the 44 years since his first session was held in New York City, 14th June 1929 (coincidentally the same day as Charlie Patton's first recordings were being made for Paramount) and his exuberant music has been appreciated by many thousands of people, white and black, on record and in concert. Sykes is a professional entertainer and today draws on an extensive repertoire which includes many of his own numbers, some of which date back to the days when he was resident in St. Louis. In those days Roosevelt was recording for several companies and using pseudonyms like Willie Kelly and Dobby Bragg. Like Willie McTell and John Lee Hooker he frequently used the pseudonym in titles and lyrics: Kelly's Special is a bouncy instrumental with almost a cocktail piano sound, while Kelly's 44 is a version of the Delta standard first recorded by Sykes in 1929. You So Dumb features Roosevelt talking over rolling Wesley Wallace-like piano. He emphasises his slickness and success ("I'm a sheik in this town") and contrasts this with his friends ineptness ("My boyfriend's so dumb, can't catch a heifer or nothing"). A piece which impresses more each time you hear it, as does the similar Lights Out. Six numbers feature piano-guitar accompaniment: Henry Townsend plays on Hard Luck and (probably) As True, while Clifford Gibson's characteristic guitar can be heard on the superb Money Gone and Way I Feel. Harry Johnson plays on Skeet and Poor Boy. Highway 61 (already out on Riverside) is pure country blues ("If you ever go to Memphis stop by Hollywood") and absolutely compelling. Its companion piece, Mr. Sykes Blues, demonstrates his more sophisticated piano style, as does No Good Woman. James 'Stump' Johnson, a St. Louis veteran, now deceased, was also a pianist but his vocal here is accompanied by Roosevelt on piano. This is quite the best Roosevelt Sykes album on the market, and that is really saying something!

Bob Groom.

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HERMAN E. JOHNSON Louisiana Country Blues
Arhoolie 1060
I Just Keeps On Wanting You/You Don't Know My Mind/Motherless Children/Depression Blues/ She's A-Lookin' For Me/She Had Been Drinking/ I'm Growing Older/Po' Boy/Leavin' Blues/Piano Blues/Where The Mansion's Prepared For Me.

Herman E. Johnson is a singer-guitarist from Scotlandville, La., and was recorded by Dr. Harry Oster in Baton Rouge in 1961. He seems to be an amateur musician. This is all I know about the man, and comes from the sleeve notes. What, then, of his music?

Sadly, I have to say that it's not very good. Johnson plays fingerstyle, knifestyle, acoustic and amplified, and in all these his playing is laboured, uncertain, and sprinkled with a fair number of cockups. His acoustic style reminds me somewhat of the late William 'Cat Iron' Carradine, but he simply doesn't have the same degree of ability. His amplified work is better, but again not up to much.

His singing mirrors his playing in being laboured and unexciting. "I'm Growing Older" is to the tune of "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" and has some interesting lyrics. The best song is "Depression Blues", which is more personal than the others, and communicates a fair degree of emotion to the listener.

Arhoolie has put out some bravely uncommercial releases in its history, and I wish I could recommend this, if only because Mr. Johnson is now retired, and could probably use the money. Alas, I can't see this record as necessary to anybody's collection.

Chris Smith.

THE STAPLE SINGERS Be What You Are
Stax 2325 103
Be What You Are/If You're Ready (Come Go With Me)/Love Comes In All Colours/Tellin' Lies/Touch A Hand, Make A Friend/Drown Yourself//I Ain't Raisin' No Sand/Grandma's Hand/Bridges Instead Of Walls/I'm On Your Side/That's What Friends Are For/Heaven.

Before discussing the merits of the album it's worth noting that the album spans some fifty minutes.

The Staple Singers have come a long way since their Vee Jay days, depending on your opinions of established artists moving into newer (and more lucrative) pastures at the expense of original talents. In defiance of the gospel purists who think that Pop Staples has sold out, it's worth remembering that the group were never fantastically accepted by the American gospel fraternity by comparison with say The Dixie Hummingbirds or Mahalia Jackson. If they had 'sold out' they'd have really been a 'wailin' an' a crying, in the churches as a reading of Tony Heilbut's The Gospel Sound well illustrates.

Certainly there were many Americans, familiar with the Staples through their Newport and other folk festival performances who felt this way, including Bob Dylan who has professed great shock at Roebuck Staples being constantly referred to as 'Pops'. (Mr. Staples was the common title awarded to him in the early sixties). However there are now even more Americans who recognise the group as one of the finest, if not the only, exponents of mainstream R & B containing a positive social statement in nearly all their recorded material. And it is for that reason that this album should not be overlooked by those of us who have little interest in the contemporary sounds of black America.

Because of their recent run of pop/soul hits it's easy to slot the Staples into the soul singer packet, but their lyrical content really transcends such categorisation. This album has a positive 'pop' leaning, inasmuch as the Memphis Symphony Orchestra is more than ever evident and Pop's very distinctive guitar playing is played down to the point of non-existence: but the words are still there. Black pride permeates many of the songs, and in that respect they haven't strayed as far from the gospel scene of today as many might have thought. Be What You Are, Love Comes In All Colours, Bridges Instead Of Walls, the titles all speak for themselves.

Mavis Staples has one of the most powerful blues/gospel voices on record today, and if you find the intensity of the blues in the inflection as much as in the instrumentation then the lady must be for you.

Whether you can get into the Staple Singers 73 or not, it must be accepted that the production of this record is painstakingly perfect, beautifully arranged and a positive treat to listen to. Unfortunately there aren't any really great throat grabbing songs here as there were on their four previous Stax sets, no I Like The Things About Me or Your Gonna Make Me Cry. If I had to pick a Staples album for a beginner it wouldn't be this one but Staple Swingers, their best set for Stax. Protest/sociological themes are a form that the straight blues form sadly neglects to a certain extent and it's for this reason that the Staple Singers can appeal right across the age board to both black and white audiences and why this album is as valid as any Chicago blues. You won't be disappointed if you give it a try and if you need any more references don't forget that Pop Staples cut a fine version of Hooker's Tupelo on the Jammed Together album with Albert King.

Bob Fisher.

PAUL BUTTERFIELD Better Days
Bearsville (UK) K 45515
New Walkin' Blues/Please Send Me Someone To Love/Broke My Baby's Heart/Done A Lot Of Wrong Things/Baby Please Don't Go/Buried Alive In The Blues/Rule The Road/Nobody's Fault But Mine/Highway 28.

I've always considered Paul Butterfield to be perhaps the best of the young white bluesmen, and also the most interesting in that he did not seem content to just stick with a Chicago style. This was particularly apparent with his Resurrection Of Pigboy Crabshaw album on Elektra. On that album was some very refined blues which reminded me of Bobby Bland and the like.

This latest album presents Butterfield with a new band and some material which is not strictly blues (Highway 28 and Broke My Baby's Heart). Here there is more than a cursory nod to rock, it does not however interfere with the general blues feel.

Also, dare I say it, there seems to be quite a good 'jazzy' feel on some of the tracks.

The standout tracks, for me, are Mayfield's Please Send (a great song which I should imagine it would be difficult for anyone to make a poor job of), Johnson's Walkin', Wrong Things and Buried Alive. If you are not so much into country or Chicago blues that you can't get out, I would urge everyone to give this at least a listen for it is a beautifully relaxed album which shows that you don't have to bastardise the blues to make it sound 'classy'. And if you're still of the opinion that whiteys can't play the blues or feel them, give this one a go.

Otis Spann once told some friends and I that "... You don't have to be coloured to have the blues, you don't have to be poor to have the blues. Everybody has bad times, it don't matter what colour or race they are — they've got the blues." He wasn't talking about Paul Butterfield, but Butterfield surely knows what he meant.

John Stiff.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN
Adelphi 10075
On The Road Again (FURRY LEWIS)/My Wife Is Getting Old (BUKKA WHITE)/Why Don't You Come Home Blues (LEWIS)/Lela (GUS CANNON)/Oh Babe (LEWIS)/I've Got A Bird To Whistle (LEWIS)/Give Me An Old Lady (WHITE)/ Furry's Worried Blues (LEWIS)/Gibson Hill (WHITE)

A record which features five new songs by Furry Lewis, three by Bukka White and a single short piece by Gus Cannon has just got to be entertaining. And it is. All three men can still hold their own as performers, even if their average age at the time of recording (1969) was 75!

Gus's Lela (the shortest piece present) is a nonsense song: "Lela, oh Lela, won't you get up and go to bed". He strums his five-string banjo, picking out occasional bits of melody, much in his old style although, at 86, he's slowed down somewhat. But it's the voice that's interesting. If you listen to his 1927 Banjo Joe recordings his voice today hasn't changed at all; 86 year old Gus sounds just like 44 year old Banjo Joe. It's a pity that Gus was allowed only one track. We've all heard recent work by Bukka, and some have seen him on his European tours. Here we have his My Wife Is Getting Old (to the tune of Aberdeen Mississippi) which has some excellent forceful strumming, broken up with delicate bottleneck phrases. This backing develops its own pace and builds up into a driving rhythm. Bukka's voice gets better and better, in different ways. Gone is the long nasal drone, to be replaced by a deep, rich growl. He sounds as if he's been gargling with sulphuric acid! Gibson Hill, in contrast, is rather a reflective, slowish song. The words are indistinct and the growl not quite so harsh. Percussive strumming is again punctuated by very sensitive bottleneck phrases — as if a bass drum were swapping phrases with a flute. His handling of the words and song owe much to his great Strange Place Blues, though at times spoilt by the wavering sound levels. Give Me An Old Lady is set to a fast strummed guitar, without the use of a slide.

Bukka White Photo Valerie Wilmer

Furry Lewis's songs tend to be whole tapestries of familiar lines, verses and images. He must have a memory full of a vast number of blues, folk songs, medicine show routines and stories. He's a good showman and, while performing, it seems that he might remember anything, and put it into the song. On The Road Again is basically Casey Jones with jokes and anecdotes mixed in. Furry's playing is restricted to a strum — a second guitar handles the breaks and snatches of melody and just audible is a kazoo. His voice has suffered little over the years and if anything is slightly richer. Why Don't You Come Home begins with a good bottleneck figure and settles down to a gentle strum. This song too is full of familiar lines but it's his handling of the material, rather than the lyrics alone, that makes the song effective. The tongue-in-cheek Oh Babe has Furry shouting out what he's going to do next, to a noisy, clapping studio crowd. The playing is sloppy but the whole thing is amusing enough to carry it through. I've Got A Bird To Whistle, is similar to Bukka White's rambling 'sky songs', in that the lines are self-contained with each set of lyrics being unconnected with the others and could probably go on all night; indeed, this one fades out. Furry's Worried Blues has the most rudimentary instrumental work on the album, despite a nice walking bass figure in the middle. To be fair to the second guitarist it must be difficult to know what Furry will do next.

My only criticism of the record concerns the sleeve note: the instrumental line-up as given is incorrect in places. Also, the notes themselves are slightly naive: for instance, they suggest that

Robert Johnson modelled himself entirely on Robert Johnson. Still that's a very petty discussion. To hell with the sleeve-note – just listen to the record.

Graham Whiteman

HOMESICK JAMES – Ain't Sick No More
Blues Way BLS-6071 (USA)
13 Highway/12 Year Old Boy/Buddy Brown/Fayette County Blues/Little Girl/In Love/My Baby's Gone/Little And Low/Money Getter/I Ain't Doin' No Good/Sugar Mama/Woman I Love.

Of the many Homesick James albums, this rates with the Prestige (7388) Blues On The South Side LP as one of his best. Ain't Sick No More was recorded in Chicago after Homesick returned from Europe earlier this year, with the assistance of Eddie Taylor on second guitar, Dave Myers' impeccable bass playing, Snooky Pryor on harp, and Willie Smith on drums. This combination is incredibly tight, especially since songs composed by Homesick James sometimes purposely do not conform to the twelve-bar structure. The arrangements are quite inventive; Snooky can riff away, as in "Fayette County", or provide a meaty sound blowing one extended note, as in "12 Year Old Boy". Also, one should own up to the way Eddie Taylor and Dave Myers change their rhythmic lines to contrast with Homesick's solos in "Little Girl". Throughout the album Homesick's plaintive voice wails inpressively (check out his intor.ation when he sings the words "Buddy Brown" in that title song) and the listener is treated to his delicate slideguitar as well as some real good straight picking (found on "Little and Low", "Sugar Mama", and four others). All together this is an excellent set by one of the outstanding bluesmen.

Robert Cappuccio

THINGS HAVE CHANGED
Adelphi AD 1012
Recorded Sept. 1969
HENRY TOWNSEND: Cairo Blues/Christmas Blues/Tired Of Being Mistreated/ARTHUR WESTON: Uncle Sam Called Me/Highway 49/GEORGE McCOY: Things Have Changed/Train/JIMMIE BROWN: Two Trains/ETHEL McCOY: Bumble Bee/HENRY BROWN: Webster's Blues/Henry's Jive/CLARENCE JOHNSON: Baby Let Me Come Back Home.

This album is a good compilation of some of today's best 'St. Louis' artists and goes a long way to prove the area can still produce great blues.

Henry Townsend is in fine form, whether it be re-capturing the beauty of the Henry Spaulding classic "Cairo Blues", a showcase for his vibrant distinctive guitar style, or playing barrel-house 'St. Louis' piano as on "Christmas Blues". Townsend's magnificent re-working of "Tired Of Being Mistreated" owes very little to the Clifford Gibson original, and the addition of Andrew Cauthens (hca) and Mike Stewart (gtr) give it a full and modern feel.

Arthur Weston (vocals and gtr) and George Robertson (hca) turn in two good duets, much in the vein of early Big Joe Williams and Sonny Boy Williamson.

George McCoy's two contributions "Things Have Changed" and "Train" are interesting, but far from outstanding varients of "Worried Life Blues" and Little Junior Parker's "Mystery Train". McCoy's sister Ethel however, revives in great style the Memphis Minnie standard "Bumble Bee", her strong earthy voice being backed up by some nice guitar.

Jimmie Brown who plays bass tub on the George McCoy tracks also turns in a powerful solo performance on "Two Trains Running" and at times is very reminiscent of Robert Pete Williams.

Veteran Henry Brown, one of 'St. Louis' best known blues piano players is for me one of the album's highlights – even on a 'slightly' out of tune instrument. The steady simple bass work and jagged right hand sound on "Webster's Blues" is very characteristic of the 'St. Louis' style and the number is further enhanced by some superb guitar from Mike Stewart, who at times is indistinguishable from the keyboard, with his rapid single note runs. "Henry's Jive' is an updating of one of Brown's 1928 recordings, "Henry Brown's Blues".

Clarence Johnson's rocking "Baby Let Me Come Back Home" is a good rousing version of "Kokomo Blues", featuring the guitar of Henry Townsend and the harmonica of Andrew Cauthens.

Overall good sound quality, informative notes and a good addition to any collection.

Garry Bready

TERESA BREWER/COUNT BASIE The Songs Of Bessie Smith
PHILIPS 6369 422
Gulf Coast Blues/Trombone Cholly/Down Hearted Blues/Baby Won't You Please Come Home (23 mins.)/St. Louis Blues/After You've Gone/I Ain't Nobody/Gimme A Pigfoot/I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle (17 mins.).
Side One: Count Basie – piano; Freddie Green – guitar; Norman Keenan – bass; Sonny Payne – drums; J. C. Williams, Robert Plater, Johnny Board, Eric Dixon, Curtis Peagler – saxes; Frank Gaines Hooks, Henry Coker, William Hughes, Melvin Wanzo – trombones; Paul Cohen, Stephen Furtado, George Ninger, Waymon Reed, Sonny Cohn – trumpets; Teresa Brewer – vocal.
Side Two: Count Basie – piano; Sonny Cohn – trumpet; Henry Coker – trombone; Eric Dixon – tenor; Freddie Green – guitar; Norman Keenan – bass; Sonny Payne – drums; Teresa Brewer – vocal. Arranged and conducted by Thad Jones.

This is an interesting and accomplished session if judged by its own standards – not those of the title. Forget Bessie Smith – look for lively blues-tinged jazz singing and an authoritative band, and you won't be disappointed.

Teresa Brewer will be familiar as a pop singer, but has long been interested in extending her range – and now reveals herself as a bright singing personality. At times she still seems to be searching for her identity – there are frequent strains of Diana Ross and Sarah Vaughan, but this will be resolved in time. By selecting only songs associated with Bessie Smith, Teresa gives the album some cohesion, although this could well be unnecessary as she would surely have tackled a wider range of material just as ably Count Basie provides a steady, comfortable, but rather unadventurous home; al-

though from time to time there are interesting solos – from the Count himself on "Gimme A Pigfoot", Eric Dixon on "Gulf Coast Blues", and particularly from Sonny Cohen and Eric Dixon interplaying with Teresa on "After You've Gone". Incidentally, side one has the full Basie Orchestra (containing many unfamiliar names – one wonders which names will become household in the future) whilst side two has a septet and comes off more successfully. Thad Jones has arranged and conducted the music throughout. If you like plenty of jazz in your blues, you may find satisfaction here, but this combination could, and should, produce a more satisfying result given time.

Martin Cowlyn

DAVE ALEXANDER The Rattler
Arhoolie 1067
The Sky Is Crying/Swanee River Boogie/I Need a Little Spirit/Good Home Cooking/The Rattler/There Ought To Be A Law/Lonesome Train Blues/A Tribute To My Father/13 Is My Number/The Judgement

Chris Strachwitz (boss of Arhoolie) is going to hate me. The last of his albums I reviewed was the Earl Hooker in issue 3, and I wasn't over complimentary. You can see his response elsewhere in this issue. I'm sorry Chris, but I'm going to be just as disapproving with this review. It's not that I dislike your records – in fact some of your earlier ones are among my all-time favourites – rather that these last two to come to my hands haven't been that good. OK, so it's a personal view, but I feel I have to be true to my readers (despite that sounding pretentious!)

The album starts well enough - fair without being startling, but interesting - with piano figures that have interest in themselves, and an overall sound that is reminiscent of early Butterfield. Perhaps the strength inherent in the well known number helps, but done slow like it is, it is quite acceptable. But Swanee River Boogie – really! Apart from the murderous attack on this standard, I don't particularly take to Winifred Atwell sounding ivories. When were they last tuned? Unfortunately, the rest of the album has the same sound.

There are better spots along the way – the title track for instance, has a great strong left hand, and the cut shows what Dave is capable of; and Lonesome Train too is a fine work out; but the rest is all the same shade of grey. The only time I've known the name before was on the Oakland Blues album (on Liberty over here), and he was so much better then. On this new release, his piano sounds like the clubs he has played in, but the cuts are totally lacking in any atmosphere. It's sad to say, but the *vast* majority of recent recordings by blues artists, many just cut hoping to capitalise on the still largely white audience, are but pale shadows of what the real blues was all about.

Dave has an exciting history, and I've long been a champion of the piano within blues. . .I dislike too much emphasis on the guitar to the exclusion of the other instruments. . but I'm sorry, Chris, this like Dave's voice, is ordinary and uninspiring.

Michael J.

BO CARTER Twist It Babe 1931–1940
Yazoo L–1034
The Law's Gonna Step On You/Shake 'Em On Down/Rollin' Blues/Howling Tom Cat/Policy Blues/My Baby/Twist It Babe/Some Day/Double Up In A Knot/I Get The Blues/Let Me Roll Your Lemon/Pussy Cat Blues/Bo Carter Special.

Bo Carter (Chatman/Chatmon) is better known now than he was a few years ago – thanks to his previous Yazoo collection (L–1014). I don't think his critical standing is very high though, despite the eulogistic sleeve notes on this record and the fact that he was among the most extensively recorded of Mississippi singer-guitarists (he once cut 18 titles in one day). My own view of Carter is of a very competent and inventive musician who lacked song writing ability: his lyrics are often ordinary and occasionally boring. Even his 'blue' blues, while they are sometimes very effective as songs (e.g. Cigarette Blues) contain little of the involved sexual imagery to be found on other records of the period. Without discussing the 'party blues' or the blues singer as entertainer, it's obvious that both Carter the soloist and Carter the Mississippi Sheik recorded with an eye on the market (a partially white market) and an ear on what was currently selling. But you can't blame a professional musician for that.

Anyway, fourteen consecutive solos are slightly tedious; nothing makes a great aural impact. The guitar playing is intricate and crisp, with good picking on the treble strings – but, by the final track, it seemed as if he'd been using the same three accompaniments all through (I couldn't fathom the 'musicological' breakdowns on the sleeve). Some of the songs could have benefited from the addition of Walter Vincent's fiddle. There's no moody introverted stuff here. The title song (with 'unidentified' speaking the lyrics) has some excellent picking and the song form itself may be based on a dance, rather than a straight blues;. the words being variations on the one

phrase. Double Up In A Knot sounds like an interesting sexual position but Carter's playing is hesitant, as if the backing hadn't been properly worked out before recording. Listening to this track confirmed my view that Carter needed more 'leer' in his voice (Wolf and McTell leer very well) to handle bluish songs. Let Me Roll Your Lemon is his variation on the well-known theme. There's some particularly fluid bass work woven up in the melody. Some of Carter's songs include a single vocal phrase repeated throughout, with just the key words changing in each verse, as demonstrated in My Baby (which bears a strong resemblance to Dinner Blues). The introductory guitar passage is fine and Carter goes on to list all the tradesmen that his woman has her eye on (Candy man, banana man etc). In The Law Gonna. . . he's warning his girl to give up booze and gambling, while in Someday, which has falsetto whoops uncommon to most Carter songs, he tells her that she doesn't want him now, but she will in the future. On Howling Tom Cat he sounds more menacing than suppliant as he pleads with his woman not to turn him away, taking the song at a much faster pace. During the 30's Bo Carter did some radio broadcasts the value of which he tells us about in Bo Carter Special. I Get The Blues has him in a sentimental mood, singing to a pleasant, slowish tune and contains a long mellow guitar break – probably the best piece of playing on the whole album. With Rolling Blues Carter returns to a sexual theme, the lyric being a variant on his I Got A Case Of Mashing It, but the guitar picking is a little fuzzy and lacks delicacy when compared with other tracks. Shake 'Em Down is taken at a slower pace than the Bukka White model, with occasional falsetto and a short, spoken intro. Much of the essential joy is missing from this version. The two most successful songs are Pussy Cat Blues and Policy Blues. The former is an entertaining tale dealing with the loose morals of cats. It sounds as if it was based on a folk-story. (By the way, what the hell is a delayed "resolution to the 5 chord in the 5th bar with the off-beat"?? Listen hard, it's apparently present on this track and vital to your enjoyment!) Policy Blues is an unusual treatment of this topic, in that the narrator has actually won $27 playing 20, 30 and 10 (his lady's initials) but with the twist that he can't find the policy man to collect his winnings. This was recorded in 1940 and is essentially a city blues, indicative of the move away from country blues recording.

Unless you're a staunch Bo Carter fan or completist, you'll be satisfied having the much better set of material on the first Yazoo collection.

Obviously though, any addition to the series can only be a welcome one.

Graham Whiteman

Blues Bookshelf

Alan Dundes (ed): Mother Wit From The Laughing Barrel. Readings in the interpretation of Afro-American Folklore. Prentice-Hall, 1973 Paperback.

This book is a collection of essays and articles on the various aspects of Afro-American folklore, compiled from many out-of-print books and magazines ranging from 1895 to 1971. The scope and interest of the specifically blues inclusions can be judged from the list I've drawn up at the end of this review. However, there's a wealth more: most of the items provide the much needed background information on several aspects of the blues.

For example, the essays on jive talk by Dan Burley, Zora Neale Hurston and John M. Brewer; on signifying by Claudia Mitchell-Kernan and on playing the 'dozens' by John Dollard and Roger Abrahams are essential reading for those who want to complement Paul Oliver's 'Meaning' and 'Screening'.

The music aspect has been relatively ignored, but there is a useful analysis of cries and hollers by Willis Laurence James. Background information on the blues dance is covered in two separate articles one by Marshall and Jean Stearn (who wrote the fascinating Jazz Dance book), the other by Gertrude P. Kurath and Nadia Chilkovsky. A section of 'origins' together with some scattered references offer much to all interested in the 'African retentions in the blues'.

A common trait of the folklorist was once his constant search for the 'antiquities' without bringing into perspective the current day folklore. This anthology is important because it does look at the relevance of folklore in a modern setting and includes essays by Rap Brown and Eldridge Cleaver.

Editor, Alan Dundes, marries this great variety of material together with professional, competent introductions which are full of useful references to further reading. However, for a book so rich in reference material it should have been possible to a) include a bibliography and, perhaps most important of all, b) an index! This flaw apart, the book can be wholly recommended to anyone who is interested in the folklore of the Negro as well as his music.

Appendix: Specific items on blues.

1) Janheinz Jahn: Residual African elements in the blues. (From his book Muntu: An outline of the new African culture, 1961)
2) Guy B. Johnson: Double meaning in the popular Negro blues (from The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1927–28)
3) Mimi Clar Melnick: I can peep through muddy water and spy dry land; boasts in the blues (from Folklore International: Essays in traditional literature, belief and custom in honor of Wayland Debs Hand. Edited by D.K. Wilgus 1967)
4) Alan Lomax: I got the blues (from Common Ground, summer 1948). This article describes a conversation between some blues-men (old guitar player "Natchez", younger piano player "Leroy" and a harp player "Sib") during one night in 1942 somewhere in Arkansas. This conversation was recorded and part of it issued on lp as "Blues In The Mississippi Night" (Pye-Nixa NJL 8). Alan Balfour discussed this record in Blues-Link 3 (p.23/24) and made clear that it's an invaluable piece of documentation, that should be reissued.

Jan Oskam.

Contact Section

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Andy Lawson, 73 Newark Walk, Immingham, Lincs. DN40 1JE, UK.
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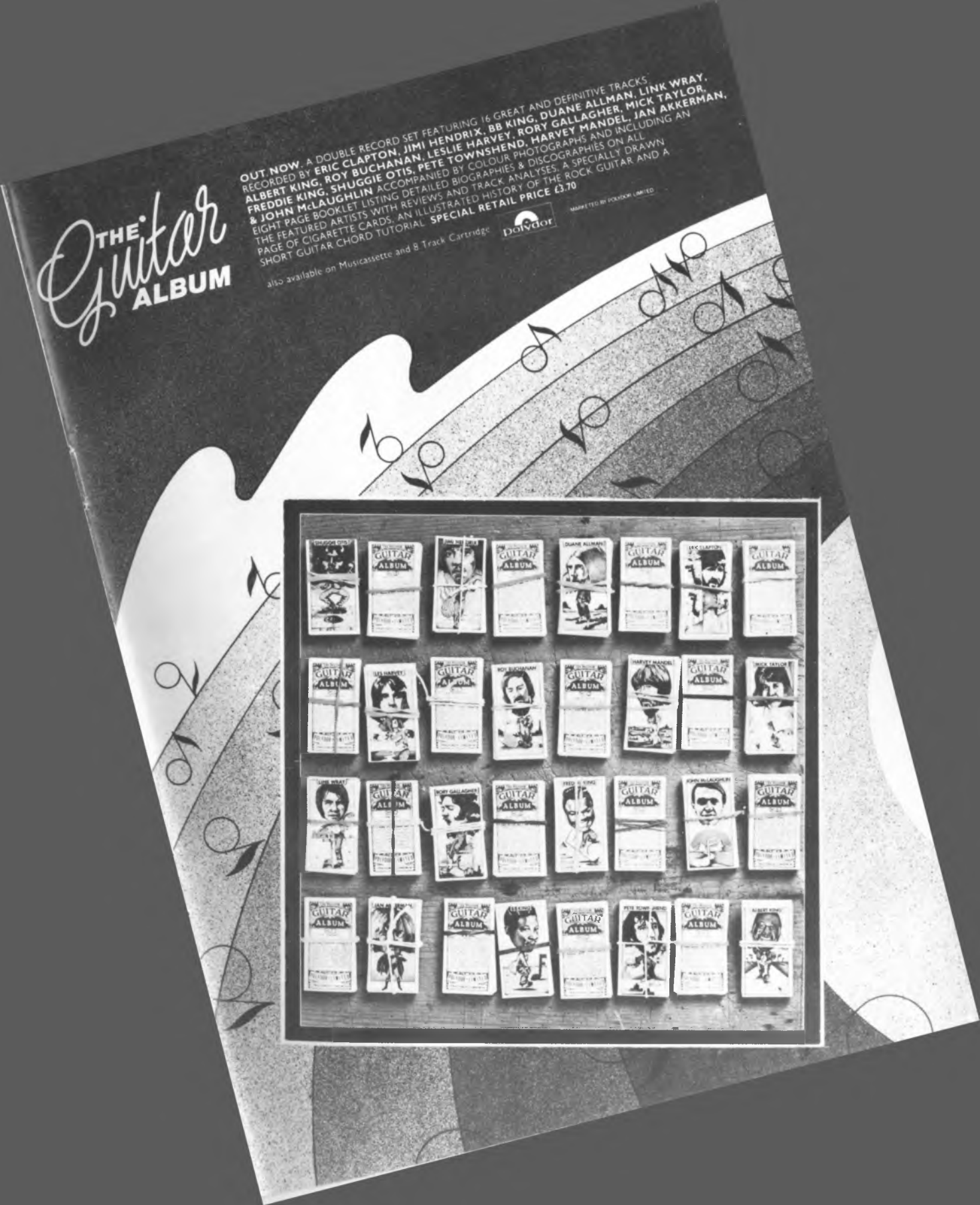
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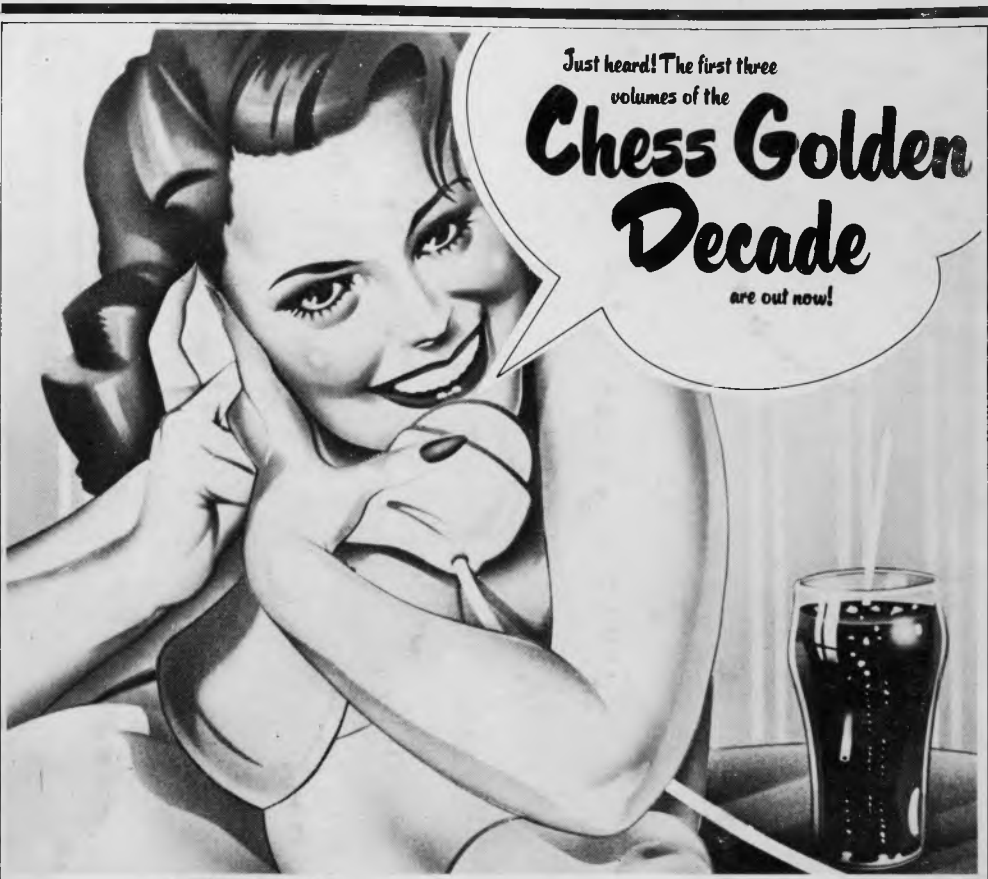

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