

Sorrow Come Pass Me Around

A SURVEY OF RURAL BLACK RELIGIOUS MUSIC



Sorrow, Come Pass Me Around

Most records of black religious music contain some form of gospel singing or congregational singing recorded at a church service. This album, though, tries to present a broader range of performance styles and contexts with the hope of showing the important role that religious music plays in the southern black communities and in the daily lives of individuals. Most of the selections on this album were not recorded in church services or from professional or semi-professional gospel singers, although these songs are often sung in such contexts. Instead, most of the recordings were made at people's homes and on various occasions when friends get together. There are many such opportunities for people to sing religious songs. Women may sing them while doing housework or in the evenings for the pleasure of their families, and men may sing them at work in the fields or elsewhere. Sometimes friends will meet on an evening or Sunday afternoon and sing their old favorites, the ones that haven't been heard at church in a good while. Even many blues singers and other secular entertainers will perform church songs for their families and more religiously inclined friends. The songs that are sung on these occasions are ones that particularly appeal to the singers and often have deep personal meaning for them. They are usually fairly old songs and may be associated with the singer's parents and grandparents. Others are more recent and may remind the singer of his conversion or attempt to lead a Christian life. All of them show the continuing and broad-based vitality of black spiritual folk music. For this album, an attempt has been made to select some of the best available examples from recent field recordings to illustrate this vitality.

The singers on this album have a variety of relationships to the church. Rev. Rubin Lacy has long been a pastor in Mississippi and California, and Chester Davis was his deacon at the time of recording. Blind Pete Burrell frequently plays guitar in churches at gospel programs. Others are simply more or less active churchgoers who enjoy singing on other occasions as well. Some, like Babe Stovall, Eddie Lee Jones, Furry Lewis, and Napoleon Strickland, are better known as singers of blues and other secular folksongs, but they can deliver wholehearted performances of religious songs too.

Most blues singers in the South today, though they rarely attend church except for funerals and baptisms, still believe in God, Jesus, and the Bible. They believe in the worth of religion but don't make a demonstration of formally practicing it. Yet, often they will perform church songs on request or for their own pleasure. Some, on the other hand, refuse to perform church songs, though this is usually motivated by respect for the church and is expressed as a desire not to "mix" blues and church music by singing the latter while drinking or at a party with dancing. Such behavior would be considered disrespectful to the church and insincere and would be more likely to draw criticism than the singing of the blues. In fact, blues singers often express an intention of becoming active churchgoers someday, and most believe they have a chance to go to heaven when they die. But in the meantime they want to have their fun, as long as it doesn't harm anyone. They may even rationalize their attitude by noting the difficulties of living a Christian life in a sinful world. Indeed, this theme is a common one in many of the spirituals, such as "Climbing High Mountains," sung here by ex-bluesman Robert Johnson. Only a majority of southern blues singers, though, believe their souls are lost to the devil, and even these might at times sing religious songs simply because they enjoy the tunes or in order to soothe their consciences.

Even the opposition of the church to the blues is not as strongly felt as is sometimes assumed. Certainly the church would disapprove of blues that suggest immoral conduct, but most of the opposition against blues singing is directed against active church members who might perform or patronize secular music. The average person who attends church irregularly usually sees little harm in the blues, and even the preachers rarely condemn the blues singers as much as they do the liars, gamblers, drinkers, adulterers, hypocrites, and backsliders. Perhaps the preachers even have a special understanding of the position of the blues singer, since the two roles display a number of functional similarities and since many preachers, like Rev. Rubin Lacy on this album, are former bluesmen themselves. Indeed, the highly personal point of view of many of the church songs is not too far from the mood of some blues. A blues feeling may also be conveyed in the instrumental accompaniment of church songs. The bottleneck guitar style heard on this album is more typical of the blues, and the fife more often plays secular music than sacred. Even some of the tunes of the church songs on this album have been used elsewhere for secular songs and dance pieces. Western church music has for centuries borrowed tunes and other ideas from secular music on the principle that the devil shouldn't have all the best music. Secular singers are only reciprocating when they perform church songs.

Like the blues, most of the spirituals use only a limited number of basic tune and stanza patterns. But unlike the typical three-line blues, the spirituals fall mostly into two-line and four-line forms. Perhaps the simplest pattern is exemplified by "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," with its incremental repetition and two-line stanzas consisting of a single line repeated to a different melodic phrase. The same tune is used in "When the Circle be Unbroken," which is also rhymed couplets for stanzas. Though each line is repeated in the old hymn "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say," the basic pattern is the ABCD quatrain common to many ballads and folksongs in the Anglo-American tradition as well as in formal poetry. "The Ship is at the Landing" and "Do Remember Me" have an AABA pattern and similar melodies, while an AABA pattern is found in "My Sun Don't Never Go Down," "I Shall Not Be Moved" (which also has incremental repetition), and "Sorrow, Come Pass Me Around" (with stanzas employing substitution for the A phrase in the first two lines). Both of these four-line patterns are extremely common in black and white spiritual traditions and have their basis in nineteenth century camp meeting singing. An interesting relative of the AABA pattern is one in which a rhymed couplet is substituted for the B line. Further variation can be obtained by dropping the first or last line or by substituting a couplet or repeated line for the first two lines. This pattern originated in the British Isles and is used for a great many folksongs in the Anglo-American and Afro-American traditions. One of its best known appearances is in the children's song "Frog Went a Courting." On this album the pattern occurs in "You Don't Know What the Lord Have Done for Me" and five other pieces. The only complex stanza patterns are in two songs which are recent professional compositions, "A Little Talk with Jesus Makes It Right" by a white hymn composer and the gospel style "You Got to Give An Account."

The lyrics on this album illustrate most of the major themes of black religious folksong, such as a longing for heaven, weariness with the world of toil and sin, God's saving grace, conversion,

resurrection, the end of the world, exhortations to sinners to repent, the temptations of the world and difficulties of living a Christian life, and the death of Mother and other loved ones. The older Bible stories of Samson and Noah and the like are heard less often in songs today, as the emphasis has moved more to a first person point of view. But many of the verses sung on this record are very old and have been passed on traditionally for many generations. The origins of most have been lost. Today the songs occur in a great number of variant forms, as new singers add and subtract musical and lyrical elements, often doing so during actual performance. Some of the songs do not appear in the earliest collections of spirituals and are quite likely of twentieth century origin, yet they may borrow certain elements of text and tune and display other stylistic traits of the older spirituals. For instance, most of the songs on this album have highly repetitious texts, sometimes proceeding incrementally by the substitution of a

single word or phrase in successive stanzas. Repetition was a characteristic of many of the older spirituals in both black and white traditions and was developed largely at camp meetings and revivals as a means of encouraging group participation in the singing. The spirit of these meetings is also reflected in the lyrics themselves and the impassioned performance style of many of these songs. The more recent songs in this style show the continuing vitality of spiritual singing among blacks.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Archive of California and Western Folklore at UCLA and the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, for the loan of tape on which some of these recordings were made. Thanks also to Bill Koon for the use of the piece by Eddie Lee Jones.

David Evans
November, 1974

SIDE ONE

Sorrow, Come Pass Me Around

EPHRAM CARTER, vocal; J. W. JONES, fife; JAMES JONES, kettle drum; FLOYD BUSSEY, bass drum. Waverly Hall, Ga., Aug. 21, 1970. Recorded by David Evans, George and Cathy Mitchell.



The title and lyrics of this piece have been changed from an old white Primitive Baptist spiritual called "When Sorrows Encompass Me 'Round." The melody is probably of Old World origin, but the lyrics here have a distinctly American camp meeting flavor. Fife and drum music has existed for several generations in this part of rural western Georgia. The Jones brothers are middle aged farmers living with their mother, while singer Ephram Carter is a friend and neighbor and Floyd Bussey a younger cousin. They play mostly for house parties and on Christmas Eve, when they go around serenading from door to door. Most of their pieces are old buck dance tunes, but they do a couple of church songs on which the

dancing stops. J. W. Jones' homemade cane fife has six fingering holes. Their music and that of Napoleon Strickland and other Mississippi fife and drum groups can be heard at greater length on Testament 2223, "Traveling Through the Jungle."

1. Well, sorrow, come pass me around.
King Jesus, our captain, died on the cross.
Well, sorrow, come . . .
2. Well, sorrow in that day.
Sorrow in that day.
King Jesus, our captain, died on the cross.
Well, sorrow, come pass . . .
3. Well, sorrow, come pass me around. [2]
[Etc. as in stanza 2.]
4. Now, King Jesus gonna bless us in that day. [Etc.]
5. There'll be trouble in that day. [Etc.]
6. Well then, sorrow, come pass me around. [Etc.]
7. Well, sorrow, come pass me around. [Etc.]
8. Sorrow, come pass . . .
There'll be trouble in that day.
King Jesus, our master, died on the cross.
Sorrow, come pass . . .
9. Sorrow, come pass . . .
Well, Satan (?) . . . [Etc.]
10. Sorrow, come pass . . .
Well, midnight coming in that day.
Well, midnight coming. Wipe your tears away. (?)
Sorrow, come pass me around.

Do Remember Me

BLIND PETE BURRELL [WILLARD ARTIS BURELL], vocal and guitar. Bogalusa, La., March 31, 1969. Recorded by David Evans.

When I recorded him in 1969, Blind Pete Burrell was in his late thirties. Some years earlier he had gone blind suddenly while watching television, he says. He plays guitar for himself and friends and sometimes at gospel programs in churches. He is a good friend of bluesman Roosevelt Holts, and when they got together for a session, each wanted to hear the other's music, this despite the fact that Holts only performs one church song and Burrell only plays two secular novelty pieces on harmonica. "Do Remember Me" is one of the most popular pieces in both white and black traditions. On some pieces Burrell simply strums chords, but most are in the lovely finger picking style heard here. His guitar is in open D tuning and is capoed.

1. Do, Lord, do, Lord, do remember me.
Oh, do, Lord, do, Lord, do remember me.
Do, Lord, do, Lord, do remember me,
Way beyond the moon.
 2. I got a home in Beauty Land that outshine the sun.
Oh, that outshine the sun.
I got a home in Beauty Land that outshine the sun.
Way beyond the moon.
- Repeat stanza 1.
Repeat stanza 2.
Repeat stanza 1.
Repeat stanza 2.
Repeat stanza 1.

The Ship is at the Landing

BABE STOVALL, vocal and guitar. New Orleans, La., Jan. 26, 1966. Recorded by David Evans and Marc Ryan.



Babe Stovall was born in 1907 and died in 1974. Almost all his songs were learned in and around his native Tylertown, Mississippi. He spent the last ten years of his life in New Orleans and became well known as a street singer there. One of his most popular routines was to play the guitar behind his head, particularly on church songs. Babe had a varied repertoire of sacred and secular folksongs, many of which were known also in white tradition. The imagery of a heaven bound vessel captained by Jesus has long been popular in American folk spiritual singing. The train has also shown popularity as an image in recent years, though the ancestor of them all is probably the chariot. Stovall knew many of these rousing church songs and performed them with great gusto for audiences everywhere. His guitar picking is in the key of C in standard tuning. Babe has an album on Verve VPM-1, "Babe Stovall," and a memorial album on Advent is planned.

1. Well, come on, come on, come on. Don't you want to go?
Well, come on, come on, come on. Don't you want to go?
Well, come on, come on, come on. Don't you want to go?
Well, yes, I want to go.
2. Well, the ship is at the landing. [Etc.]
3. Well, the ship is heavy loaded. [Etc.]
4. Well, it's loaded with bright angels. [Etc.]
5. . . . Don't you want to go?
Well, yes, I want to go.
6. Well, Jesus is the captain. [Etc.]
7. Well, He land my mother over. [Etc.]
8. Same as stanza 5.
9. Well, get your ticket ready. [Etc.]

You Don't Know What the Lord Has Done for Me

ANNIE LEE CRAWFORD, lead alto; ANNIE MAE JONES, second alto; OSCAR CRAWFORD, bass. Como, Miss., Aug. 29, 1973. Recorded by David and Cheryl Evans.



I had gotten the three singers of this piece together with some other friends to record shape-note songs from hymnbooks, but "You Don't Know What the Lord Have Done for Me" was sung spontaneously without the aid of print. The harmonizing shows the effect of more formal practices, but the singers still manage a good deal of improvisation and ornamentation. The song itself is probably of recent gospel origin, but its tune, verse form, and use of incremental repetition are from an older tradition. This piece also shows how most of these songs know no denominational restrictions. Annie Lee Crawford, the lead singer, is Sanctified, her husband Oscar Crawford is a Baptist, and Annie Mae Jones is a Methodist.

1. You don't know what the Lord have done for me.
You don't know what the Lord have done for me.
You don't know. You weren't there.
You don't know when, and you don't know where.
You don't know what the Lord have done for me.
2. You don't know how the Lord saved me. [Etc.]
3. You don't know how the Lord healed me. [Etc.]
4. Repeat stanza 1.

Talk About a Child that Do Love Jesus

REV. RUBIN LACY, vocal. Ridgecrest, Calif., Feb. 15, 1966.
Recorded by David Evans, John Fahey, and Alan Wilson.



Rev. Rubin Lacy was born in 1901 in Pelahatchie, Mississippi. In the 1920's he was a very well known blues singer in Jackson and the Delta, and in 1928 he recorded a record for the Paramount label. It was this record containing two of the very finest known examples of country blues that put me on his trail. In 1966 I located him in Ridgecrest, California, where he was a pastor of the Union Baptist Church. He had given up blues and guitar playing in the 1930's and became a preacher after receiving a calling from God. After preaching for many years in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri, he was called to California in the 1950's. He still has the rich vibrato-laden voice he displayed on his early blues record, but he uses it now to save souls. He says, "I was sitting there (in Moorhead, Miss.) playing the blues, and two big preachers walked up to me and chucked some money into my lap. They said, 'Play that again.' I played it, the blues too. And them preachers said to me, 'If I had your voice, I could move mountains.' And since then I have with that same voice pretty well moved mountains. I have convinced and converted many a man."

"Talk About a Child That Do Love Jesus" was sung by Lacy at his home on a Sunday afternoon. It is a typical soloist's piece and a favorite of Lacy's, one that has deep personal meaning and recalls his conversion and dedication to preaching despite many hardships. He says, "Sometimes the best Christian in the world have the blues quicker than a sinner do, 'cause the average sinner ain't got nothing to worry about. He do what he please, go where he please, use what he please. But a Christian is obligated to certain things and obligated not to do certain things. That sometimes cause a Christian to take the blues . . . As a whole I had more blues since I been preaching than I ever had when I was playing the blues . . . I had to sacrifice, I had to put down something to go preaching. Ain't many men put down what I put down, but I had to put down a whole lot just for preaching. And I've had a heap of blues since I been preaching." Rev. Lacy is the chief subject of Bruce Rosenberg's "The Art of the American Folk Preacher," a study of the orally composed sermon.

1. Talk about a child do love Jesus. Here is one.
Talk about a child that do love Jesus.
Talk about a child that do love the Lord.
Talk about a child do love Jesus. Here is one.
2. Talk about a child been converted. Here is one.
Talk about a child been converted. Here is one.
Talk about a child been converted.
Talk about a child do love the Lord.
Talk about a child been converted. Here is one.
3. Repeat stanza 2.

Can't No Grave Hold My Body Down

ROBERT JOHNSON, vocal and guitar. Skene, Miss., Aug. 26, 1967.
Recorded by David Evans and Marina Bokelman Shebitz.



Robert Johnson is not, of course, the same person as his namesake who recorded some of the finest blues of all time in the 1930's, but he is a former blues singer and lives in the same Mississippi Delta region that produced the other Robert Johnson and many of the other greatest bluesmen. Before Johnson joined the church around 1953, he was known as Robert Nighthawk after another famous blues singer and because of his late hours. As a child he listened to the great Charlie Patton, who used to play blues with his uncle. He was also a neighbor of Roebuck Staples. Later he knew Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters and used to play with B. B. King. He was fifty years old when I recorded him in 1967. After joining the

church he continued to play guitar but for only for religious songs. He once played with a quartet called "The Big Four" on the radio every Sunday afternoon in Greenwood. His life story is featured in George Mitchell's "Blow My Blues Away." "Can't No Grave Hold My Body Down" is one of the deepest, most moving spirituals, one likely to bring out strong feelings in the singer and listeners. Johnson's knife guitar playing in open D tuning is in a style long popular with Delta bluesmen. The second stanza is interpolated from the well known hymn by John Newton, "Amazing Grace."

1. Can't no grave, Lord, can hold my body down, my body down.
Can't no grave, Lord, can hold my body down, my body down.
When the trumpet of God shall sound,
Lord, I'll get up, Lord, and walk around.
Can't no grave, Lord, can hold my body down.
2. Amazing grace, Lord, how sweet, sweet it sound,
Lord, that saved a wretch like me.
Lord, I once was lost,
Lord, was blind, but now I see.
Can't no grave, Lord, can hold my body down, my body down.
3. Can't no grave, Lord, can hold my body down, my body down.
When the trumpet (of) God shall sound,
Lord, I'll get up, Lord, and walk around.
Can't no grave . . .

You Got to Give an Account

DOROTHY LEE, NORMA JEAN, and SHIRLEY MARIE JOHNSON, vocals; ROBERT JOHNSON, guitar. Skene, Miss., Aug. 26, 1967. Recorded by David Evans and Marina Bokelman Shebitz.

This song shows a modern gospel influence. Robert Johnson has trained all of his children to be gospel singers. When I recorded him, two older sons played instruments for a group called the "Heaven Bounds," that sang every Sunday over the radio locally. His three teenage daughters, who perform this piece, were singing in a church choir in nearby Boyle, and Johnson was teaching his youngest children to sing too. He had nine children in all, which he managed to support through a lot of hard work on a Delta plantation.

1. One day you got to give an account
Of your wicked ways.
You may think you are wrong,
But God knows . . . (?)
Do what you will, say what you please.
You got to meet the Lord and then go home.
No matter what you do or say,
You got to give an account of your sins.
2. Oh oh oh, give an account of your sins.
Give an account of your sins.
You can't hide, you can't hide,
Because the Lord walking by your side.
Time is coming. It won't be long.
You got to meet the Lord and then go home.
No matter what you do or say,
You got to give an account of your sins.
3. Repeat stanza 2.

By the Grace of My Lord, I've Come a Long Way

KATIE MAE YOUNG, vocal. Senatobia, Miss., Aug. 31, 1973.
Recorded by David and Cheryl Evans.



Katie is the daughter of Pattie Rosemon (side 2, #4). She often sings as a soloist in churches and is one of the finest such singers in the area. "By the Grace of the Lord I've Come a Long Ways" is probably a fairly recent gospel composition and is a typical soloist's piece. The ornamented singing style accentuates the highly personal nature of this song.

1. By the grace of my Lord I've come a long ways.
By the grace, yes, of the Lord I've come a long ways.
I've been traveling through the storm and rain,
God almighty holding my hand.
By the grace, oh, of the Lord I've come a long ways.
2. David said, "The Lord is my shepherd."
I'm a witness, David. He's my shepherd too,
'Cause by the grace of the Lord I've come a long ways.
I've been traveling through the storm and rain,
God almighty holding my hand.
By the grace, oh, of the Lord I've come a long way.
3. Your grace has taught me.
Your grace has brought me.
Your grace one day saved me.
It's by the grace of the Lord I've come a long ways.
He fed me when I were hungry,
And kept me company every time I got lonely.
It's by the grace, oh, of the Lord I've come a long ways.

My Sun Don't Never Go Down

EDDIE LEE JONES, vocal and guitar. Lexington, Ga., Aug., 1965.
Recorded by Bill Koon.

Eddie Lee "Mustright" Jones was born in 1929 and has lived all his life near Lexington, Georgia, an area of old plantations in the northeastern part of the state. Jones is a rough and ready singer of blues and older secular pieces, but he also knows quite a few church songs, which he often sings with his wife and friends around the house. The piece he sings here is usually known as "Where the Sun Never Goes Down," a song often performed at funerals. He plays the guitar in bottleneck style in open D tuning with the third string tuned to a neutral or "blue" third. Jones has a full album on Testament 2224, "Yonder Go That Old Black Dog."

1. My sun don't never go down, down, go down.
My sun don't never go down, go down.
My flowers are blooming forever.
My sun don't never go down.
 2. I have hard trials sometimes, sometimes.
Oh, I have hard trials sometimes, sometimes.
My flowers are blooming forever.
My sun don't never go down.
 3. Repeat stanza 1.
 4. Repeat stanza 2.
- Spoken: Thank God!

SIDE TWO

Climbing High Mountains

ROBERT JOHNSON, vocal and guitar. Skene, Miss., Aug. 26, 1967.
Recorded by David Evans and Marina Bokelman Shebitz.



"Climbing High Mountains" is one of the most powerful performances I know of in this style. To appreciate it fully, one must consider the lives of hard grueling work and poverty lived out by the many people who have sung this piece.

1. Yes, I'm climbing high mountains trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
Yes, I'm climbing high mountains trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
Lord, my home in the sky.
Lord, I'll make it there, Lord, by and by.
Yes, I'm climbing high mountains trying to make it home.
2. I been drinking tears for water trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
Lord, I'm drinking tears for water trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
Lord, my home in the sky.
Lord, I'll make it there, Lord, by and by.
Yes, I'm climbing high mountains trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
3. I been giving up the right for the wrong trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
I been giving up the right for the wrong, Lord, trying to make it home, trying to make it home.
Lord, my home, Lord, in the sky.
Lord, I'll make it there, Lord, by and by.
Yes, I'm climbing high mountains trying to make it home.

Glory, Glory Hallelujah

"Glory, Glory, Hallelujah" is quite likely the best known spiritual among blacks today. After a life of hard work and poverty, the idea of laying one's burden down must be especially attractive. The three versions of the piece heard here could not be more different in style.

CHESTER DAVIS and CONGREGATION, vocals. Ridgecrest, Calif., March 18, 1966. Recorded by David Evans, John Fahey, and Alan Wilson.

The first version is a typical church service performance. It was recorded at a district convention of the Missionary Baptist Church held at Rev. Rubin Lacy's church in Ridgecrest, California. Chester Davis, who is the lead singer, was Lacy's deacon. Lacy's voice can also be heard booming out over the others. Ridgecrest is a town in the middle of the Mojave Desert not too far away from Death Valley. Most of the black families came from the South seeking work at the nearby Naval Ordnance Station. Here and in other desert communities they formed communities around their churches, which preserved many aspects of the worship service typical of the rural South. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons Rev. Lacy would get together with the older members to sing some of the old songs like the ones heard throughout this album, but a good number of them were sung also in the regular Sunday services despite the inroads of gospel style introduced by the young people and choir members.

1. I'm going home to live with Jesus since I laid my burden down.
I'm going home to live with Jesus since I laid my burden down.
 2. Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burden down.
Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burden down.
- Spoken: Thank you, Brother Davis.

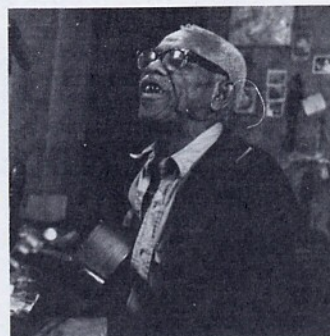
COMPTON JONES, vocal and lard bucket; GLEN FAULKNER, diddley bow; JAMES DAVIS, pot and Clorox bottle. Senatobia, Miss., Aug. 28, 1973. Recorded by David and Cheryl Evans.



Compton Jones, Glen Faulkner, and James Davis are neighbors and relatives in the country east of Senatobia, Mississippi. Jones was 47, Faulkner 31, and Davis about 13 when this piece was recorded in 1973. They often get together with friends and relatives and produce home music. The instruments here are entirely home-made or improvised. The "diddley bow" is made from a piece of broom wire stretched between two staples on a wall with two snuff bottles under it for bridges. Faulkner beats on it with a nail and slides a medicine bottle along it to vary the pitch. The playing is highly percussive. The instrument is an adaptation of an African musical bow and is probably the source of bottleneck and knife guitar playing. Faulkner plays mostly spirituals on it, but I never could get him to sing much. Compton Jones and Napoleon Strickland also play blues on this instrument, which seems to be known mainly in Mississippi. On this piece James Davis beats on an empty metal pot and plastic Clorox bottle, while Compton Jones beats on a large lard bucket. His preferred instrument is the washtub! This recording captures one of the most unusual sounds to be heard in American folk music today.

1. Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burden down.
Burden down, Lord, burden down, Lord, since I laid my burden down.
2. I'm going home to live with Jesus when I lay my burden down.
Burden down, Lord, burden down, Lord, since I laid my burden down.
3. Every round goes higher and higher since I laid my burden down.
Every round goes higher and higher since I laid my burden.
4. Burden down, Lord, burden down, Lord, since I laid my burden down.
I'm going home to live with Jesus when I lay my burden down.

FURRY LEWIS, vocal and guitar. Memphis, Tenn., March 21, 1969.
Recorded by David Evans.



Furry Lewis is best known as one of Memphis' veteran bluesmen. Born in 1893, he has outlived most of his contemporaries, but still he keeps playing and has built up a loyal following of fans in his home city who love to hear his music. Now in his later years he often thinks of those who have gone before him. After he finished this piece, he began crying because it made him think about his mother. He plays here in bottleneck style in open G tuning. On stanza 4 he frets the guitar neck with his elbow, and throughout the piece he lets the strings "sing" the words as his own voice drops out.

Spoken: I'm just carrying on a little fun, but I'm getting serious now. I'm gonna pick "Glory, Glory, When I Lay My Burden Down."

1. Glory, glory, hallelu . . . , when I lay my, my burden down.
Glory . . . hallelujah, when I . . .
2. Burden down, Lord, burden down, Lord, when I lay my, my burden down, Lord.
Burden . . .
3. What you gonna do when this world's on fire? When I . . .
What you gonna do when this world's on fire? When I . . .
4. I'm going home to live with my Jesus when I lay my, my burden down.
I'm going home to live with Jesus when I . . .
5. Burden down, Lord . . . when I lay my burden down.
Burden down, Lord, burden . . .
6. All my trials will be over when I . . .
All of my trials will be over when I . . .

Spoken: Guitar, now what I want you to do - I want you to just sing that for me, and I'm not gonna say nothing. Now how you gonna sing it? You gonna start with "Glory, glory, when I lay my burden down." Do that. [Plays] 'Glory' what?

7. I'm going home to meet my mother when I . . . my burden down.
I'm going home to meet my mother when I . . .
8. No more trials and tribulations when I lay my, my burden down.
No more trials and tribulations when I . . .

A Little Talk with Jesus Makes it Right

BLIND PETE BURRELL, vocal and guitar. Bogalusa, La., March 31, 1969. Recorded by David Evans.

This song was composed by Cleavant Derricks in 1937, though it is based on an older spiritual, a version of which is printed by James Weldon Johnson. Despite its derivation, Burrell converts it to the beautiful picking style that he uses for most pieces.

CHORUS

Have a little talk with Jesus.
Tell him all about our troubles.
Hear our faintest cry.
Answer by and by.
Oh, I feel a little prayer wheel turning,
Know the fire's burning.
Find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.

1. I once was lost in sin,
But Jesus took me in,
Turned a little light from heaven on my soul,
Then filled my soul with love,
And wrote my name above.
And just a little talk with Jesus makes it right.
Repeat Chorus.

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

PATTIE ROSEMON, vocal, with FRANK and ODIE ROSEMON. Senatobia, Miss., Aug. 31, 1973. Recorded by David and Cheryl Evans.



Pattie Rosemon is best known in her community as a maker of quilts, but when I visited her, something told me to ask her if she could sing church songs. She recorded a number of lovely old favorites, sometimes helped out by members of her family. The words of "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" were composed by Horatius Bonar, a Scottish clergyman, in the mid-nineteenth century.

They have long been popular among both black and white singers in the South. Mrs. Rosemon sings them in the old melismatic "long meter" style often called lining out, deaconing, or Dr. Watta (after Isaac Watts, an early eighteenth century English composer of many hymns). Normally a deacon or other leader sings each line followed by a slow repetition by the congregation, but here Mrs. Rosemon sings both parts. She is joined toward the end by her husband and son. This style originally arose in England and Scotland for psalm singing but was adapted to hymns in the eighteenth century and brought to America then. It is only heard in a few southern white churches today but still flourishes in many black Baptist and Methodist churches. Blacks generally sing the congregational portion more slowly than whites. Usually at least one of these old hymns is sung near the beginning of the service, and they are special favorites of the older members. Since each member has slightly different ideas about ornamenting the basic tune, a heterophonic sound is produced. When the old folks strike up one of these ancient pieces, the effect can be absolutely spine chilling.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest,
Come unto Me and rest.
Lie down, thou weary one, lie down
Lie down, thou weary one, lie down
Thy heads upon My breast (sic),
Thy head upon thy breast (sic).

I came to Jesus as I was,
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, worn and sad.
Weary, worn and sad.
I found in Him a resting place,
I found in Him a resting place,
And He have made me glad.
And He have made me glad.

When the Circle be Unbroken

BABE STOVALL, vocal and guitar. Franklinton, La., Jan. 27, 1966. Recorded by David Evans and Marc Ryan.

This song is popular in black and especially in white tradition. It is probably best known in a version by the Carter Family. The tune is the same as that of "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah" and seems to be a favorite in black tradition. It has also been used for "I Want to Live So God Can Use Me" and "New Walk Over in Zion." Babe Stovall sang it on a visit to his brother's home in Franklinton.

CHORUS

When the circle be unbroken in the sky, Lord, in the sky.
When the circle be unbroken in the sky, Lord, in the sky.

1. I was standing by my window one warm rainy day,
When that hearse come, hearse come rolling, take my dear old mother away.
Repeat chorus.
2. Undertaker, undertaker, undertaker, please drive slow.
Say, that body that You carry, Lord, I hates to see her go.
Repeat chorus.

Motherless Children

NAPOLEON STRICKLAND, vocal and fife. Como, Miss., March 25, 1969. Recorded by David Evans.



"Motherless Children" is sometimes called a "gospel blues," and indeed it contains no mention of God, Jesus, or heaven. But singers have always considered it more appropriate to a religious than a secular context. It is probably best known from Blind Willie Johnson's recording with bottleneck guitar, but the piece is actually traditional among black and occasionally white singers and is often performed by quartets. Napoleon Strickland plays fife with drums at picnics and occasionally does a church song on request. I have never heard him play this piece at a picnic, but he had obviously practiced it on the fife before recording it. Strickland's fife has five holes, but he always leaves the last one open. This song has deep personal meaning for him. Although he was forty-five years old when he recorded it, he was (and still is) living alone with his mother on the plantation where he works. He often says "She's all I got in this world."

Motherless child sure sees it hard when mother is gone, mother is gone.
They will run from door to door.
They won't have no place to go.
Motherless children sure sees it hard when mother is gone.

I Shall Not Be Moved

BLIND PETE BURRELL, vocal and guitar. Bogalusa, La., March 31, 1969. Recorded by David Evans.

This song is well known in both white and black singing. Burrell's last verse may be from Sanctified tradition. In recent years, "I Shall Not Be Moved" has been adapted to the civil rights movement.

1. I shall not, and I shall not be moved.
I shall not, oh, I shall not be moved.
Just like a tree planted by the water,
I shall not be moved.
2. Repeat stanza 1.
3. On my way to heaven, I shall not be moved. [Etc.]
4. Repeat stanza 1.
5. Jesus is my captain. I shall not be moved. [Etc.]
6. Repeat stanza 1.
7. Saints of God is marching, and I shall not be moved. [Etc.]
Spoken (Roosevelt Holts): I declare, that was sweet. That was sweet. You didn't make a fumble in there.

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