



by **Ed. Bell**

**E**VERYBODY stops—even the blind man—to look at his sugar as she passes down the avenue. You never saw a girl more beautiful, and you never heard a Blues more mean than Ed. Bell's "Mamlish Blues." He plays a guitar as he sings—plays it in a style all his own, weird and different like you never heard it played before. On the other side is the sensational "Ham Bone Blues" by Ed. Bell and his guitar. Be sure to get this record— Mamlish S-3811 from your dealer.



**[ S-3811—Mamlish Blues and Ham Bone Blues, Ed. Bell and his weird guitar. ]**

One of the minor mysteries of country blues has been the relationship concerning Ed Bell, Sluefoot Joe and Barefoot Bill. Aural evidence suggested a correlation through style and repertoire without any known facts. It was not until two field trips were made to Greenville, Alabama in 1974 and 1975 that it appeared to be certain that all three artists were the same person. Although many elderly people remembered Ed Bell and his songs, no one had ever heard of Sluefoot Joe or Barefoot Bill (who had, in "Squabbling Blues", even mentioned Greenville); not surprising as they were created for studio purposes only.

It was Pillie Bolling's cousin, living in the black section of Greenville called "Sweet Gum Bottom", who first informed me that all three were probably the same. When asked if she had ever heard of an old musician named Ed Bell, she replied: "Sure. Ed Bell made 'The Mamlish Blues' and 'The Jelly Roll Blues' and recorded with my cousin, Pillie Bolling." This was the first independent confirmation that Barefoot Bill was Ed Bell, and it was she who directed me to George Poole, who in turn sent me to Bell's older sister, Mary Smith. Pillie Bolling was later interviewed at length by Bengt Olsson in Bay Minnette, Alabama. It seemed fortuitous and extra lucky to have three independent and separate confirmations by people with their facilities still intact. Later, I was informed of a *Melody Maker* article in which Columbia researcher Dan Mahoney was quoted as stating that Barefoot Bill was Ed Bell.

Still, there were some internal contradictions to reconcile. The difference in sound between Ed Bell and Barefoot Bill has led Steve Calt to suggest that while Barefoot Bill and Sluefoot Joe are Ed Bell, the Ed Bell on Paramount was an entirely different, possibly nameless, individual. In the face of field research and circumstantial evidence, this seemed a little far-fetched.

Vocally, Sluefoot Joe and Ed Bell are identical, as a scan of the singing line of "Mamlish" and "Tooten Out" shows. The latter is merely the former done at a slower tempo. The dynamics of the singing line are nearly identical at all points, as a line-by-line listening will prove. The same dialect (accent), phrasing and emphasis are apparent. It is harder to recognize the guitar line, done in a different context, except for the connecting E riff. The vocal line of Barefoot Bill (in his songs with accompaniment in Spanish tuning) and Sluefoot Joe with Clifford Gibson in support are very close to each other, although "Mean Conductor" is not so dissimilar. Although "From Now On" has a somewhat different vocal accent than "Mamlish", "Squabbling" phrases more closely to the latter (if more subdued). The slightly more adenoidal quality of the Barefoot Bill could possibly be explained by differences in recording technique between Paramount and Columbia or by the acoustics of the studio - perhaps even the placement and quality of the microphone used.

More puzzling is the difference in the approach in repertoire and guitar playing used by Bell in his initial recordings and his later ones. The least difference occurs between Sluefoot Joe's "She's A Fool" and Barefoot Bill's "Carry It Right Back Home"; the former has a heavier right hand, but otherwise it's the same arrangement. The guitar playing between the Paramount and Columbia sides, however, seem to show a greater difference. The Paramount sides show a wider use of guitar dynamics with the right hand. In contrast, the touch on the Barefoot Bill sides is more regular, picked more evenly, with a smoother finger pressure. Baffling, too, is the difference in repertoire. The Paramount sides show four, different, unique arrangements in the key of E - all ingenious conceptions. Eight of the twelve Barefoot Bill sides are merely re-vampings of the same songs in the keys of E and open G; the other four are raggy sides in C and G. There are no precedents for such a shift, the closest comparison being Big Joe Williams' unique performances with unusual themes in 1935 and his more conventional themes and smoothed-out dynamics and timing subsequent (see *Mamlish* S-3810). Puzzling, too, is the fact that out of the seven recovered Sluefoot Joe sides, Bell plays on only two of them and one is accompanying Gibson's piano. At this time, Bell had already recorded and Gibson was a non-entity. A possibility I would like to suggest is that perhaps Harry Charles advised Bell to concentrate on his rich and powerful singing (to the end detriment of his guitar playing). For a talent scout, Gibson's slick Lonnie Johnson-type guitar approach might seem to have a more commercial appeal than a superior, but obviously country, rhythmic stylist would have. It may just simply be that the Paramount sides were an example of a truly rare inspiration.

If there is any other answer, it died with Ed Bell.

## ED. BELL

Ed Bell possesses one of the richest voices found on blues recordings; perhaps no singer besides Blind Lemon Jefferson rivals his command of dynamic contrast. But whereas Jefferson's music often seems formless, Ed Bell's Paramounts are the superbly arranged products of a performer who conceivessing and guitar-playing as a unity, and whose individual guitar phrases are pieces of a mosaic. Only a handful of blues artists display such cohesiveness, though nearly all of Bell's contemporaries (to judge from their recordings) were attempting to do so. His ability to instrumentalize his vocal accenting invites comparison to Charlie Patton, and in their beautiful integration of vocal and guitar such pieces as Mamlish and Mean Conductor Blues evoke Patton's best efforts in the same position (E).

Mamlish Blues, a humorous 12 and a half bar song capoed to G, has an unusual structure: what would ordinarily be the first two vocal phrases are rendered virtually as a single phrase, with unorthodox patterns of thirteen and nine beats per line. The last two instrumental beats of each verse provides a rhythmic link to each succeeding verse that further obscures a sense of separation between the song's individual phrases. The vocal melody has a "sweet" sound by virtue of its major third-tonic cadence and there is a close melodic and rhythmic relationship between its initial and ending phrases (as when he shouts a dominant on the second beat of each). During the first five beats of his opening phrase Bell plays a drone bass on each beat in the fashion of Texas guitarists who perform comparable working in a different position (A): the boogie treble figures it accompanies likewise evoke Texas blues. Unlike the typically rigid Texas guitarist, however, Bell scraps this pattern in order to reflect his vocal beats, doing so with particular dexterity in the last two beats of the song's repeat line, and in the treble sections of the closing vocal phrase (the third and fourth, and seventh and eighth beats, both following heavy bass notes). As opposed to most blues arrangements, which tend to conclude with a weak rhythmic pattern, Bell's accompaniment uses forceful percussion in its final phrase, with a snapped bass on the second and sixth beats contributing to its liveliness. Another noteworthy aspect of Bell's instrumentation is his unusually accented tonic riff, with its emphasis on an open sixth string (sounding the same note that preceded it) as a final note.

Mean Conductor (capoed to G) is an unrecognized blues classic that likewise features masterful integration of vocal and guitar, obscured by poor recording, but discernable in the treble sections of the first two vocal phrases. The song's distinctive melody takes an ABC form, with the second phrase beginning on the dominant. Though loosely rendered, it typically features a unique fifteen and a half bar format, created by the use of an extra measure in each phrase. Instead of singing stereotyped ten beat vocal phrases, Bell begins the last word of his phrases on the tenth beat and sustains it over the next measure; the guitar riff played as a backdrop against the vocal extension is then twice repeated. This figure contains a counter rhythm created by a clash of accent between that of the brushed treble notes and three quick bass notes (a key-note played twice, and a fifth below it) sounded simultaneously. His unusual contrast of bass and treble accenting within a single chord is reminiscent of Charley Patton's "Green River Blues" configuration, and is particularly effective because it is preceded by episodic bass work on every other beat.

Hambone Blues, a singular re-arrangement of a standard blues theme conventionally known as "East St. Louis Blues", "Crow Jane", or "Slidin' Delta", highlights Bell's vocal gifts and represents a melodic departure from its prototypes, using pentatonic intervals with a minor third added. Set in nine and a half bars, it is conceived largely in terms of the ten beat clusters that predominate in country blues arrangement: on the eleventh beat of the first vocal phrase Bell plays the V-V<sup>7</sup> change of "Crow Jane" (using a moved-up A position), while beginning the last vocal phrase on the twenty-first beat. By drawing out the initial phrase to four bars, Bell makes fuller use of his superior voice than the conventional structure of "Crow Jane" allows. Because of its slow pace the song thwarts conventional guitar accompaniment: imaginatively, Bell surmounts the difficulty by playing repeated pinches (of the third and fifth) on the beat between the second and ninth beats of the opening phrase and the second and fifth beats of the closing one. In both the last two beats of the first vocal phrase and the last

measure of the final phrase Bell's accompaniment embroiders his vocal accents.

Frisco Whistle is a loosely-phrased piece in open E tuning, capoed to G, in which a fast "pick-strum" tonic riff is probably meant to suggest freight train motion. Bell's use of three rhythmically distinctive pattern strokes gives a strange patchwork effect to his playing that contrasts with the more unified effect of his other accompaniments and suggests that he created his product by incorporating snippets of several accompaniments from various sources.

Squabblin' Blues, a 12 bar equivalent of Mamlish, is played without a capo, thus enabling the artist to reach the nineteenth fret during the break to play top string fifths. Unlike Mamlish, Bill sustains the final word of the second and third phrases for a bar. A twenty four bar extension of the fourth verse (using lyrics and a phrasing pattern found on Henry Thomas' "Texas Worried Blues") culminates in a series of hammered bass notes from the sixth to tenth beats of the punch line. From Now On is a skeletal version of Mamlish (capoed to Ab) that shows some melodic influence of Blind Lemon Jefferson in its second phrase. Tooten Out is a citified Mamlish sung in the key of F and phrased in eleven bars. The guitar part is obscured by the piano of Clifford Gibson, who accompanies in "Spanish" tuning (capoed at least six frets to Eb) on Shoutin' Baby Blues, a loosely-phrased 12 and a half bar blues. In this work and the similar House Top (in which Gibson is capoed to D), a convincing imitation of Blind Lemon Jefferson is given on the latter, Bell sometimes rushes his phrasing. Gibson's own accompaniments all but ignore the vocalist's melody lines, but rather feed off his accenting patterns.

Big Rock Jail is a crude one-chord piece in "Spanish" tuning (capoed to Bb), whose vocal phrases all resemble each other in accenting and melody. Nevertheless, it is unusual for the vocalist's augmented fourths. One More Time is cut from the same cloth but contains fleeting imitations of Clifford Gibson. She's Got A Nice Line is a duet version of "Tight Like That", played in the G position. Both She's A Fool Gal and Carry It Right Back Home are loosely-phrased "rag" style ditties played in standard C.

Stephen Calt

## MAMLISH BLUES

Folks these is my Mamlish Blues.  
I'm gonna tell you just what they mean.

You useta be my sugar but you ain't sweet no mamlish more.  
Useta be my sugar, you ain't sweet no more.  
Cause you mistreat me and you drove me from your door.

Mama, must I sell it or keep it for my mamlish self?  
Mama, must I sell it, keep it for my self.  
Mom, I done got tired of sleeping by myself.

Well, my mama didn't like me, my papa give me mamlish way.  
Mama didn't like me, papa he give me 'way.  
That's the very reason I'm a wandering child today.

Talkin 'bout your stroller but you just ought to see mamlish mine.  
Talk 'bout your stroller, just ought to see mine.  
She ain't so good lookin', but she do dress fine.

She was standin' on a corner between twenty-fifth and mamlish main.  
She stood on a corner, 'tween Twenty-fifth and Main.  
And a blind man see'd her and a dumb man called her name.

And t'ke dumb man asked her say who's your regular man could be.  
Dumb man asked her, who your man can be.  
And the blind man told her, says you sure look good to me.

## HOUSE TOP BLUES

Gonna climb on some house top, gonna roll down to the ground. (2x)  
Cause my gal done quit me and they don't 'low me in town.

I got a evil-hearted mama, just as wicked as she can be.  
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, just as wicked as she can be.  
And ain't a day pass that she don't put that thing on me.

Play that thing, Mr. Clifford. Play 'em hard, boy.  
Folks, just listen at that boy.

She got a 38-40, just as long as my right arm. (2x)  
She says she bought it especially for to keep her man at home.

I'm leavin' you, baby, leavin' you if I die.  
Oooooohhhhhhhhh, leave you if I die.  
I'm leavin', I'm leavin', and I don't mean good-bye.

#### FROM NOW ON

Mama you used to dog me, used to drive me like a cow. (2x)  
But now you can't drive me, cause you don't know how.

From now on, mama, I'll tell you just like that. (2x)  
If you hit my dog, sure gonna kick your cat.

From now on, mama, I ain't gonna have no rule. (2x)  
I'm gonna get hard-headed and act just like a doggone mule.

From now on, mama, you're gonna do what I say.  
From now on, mama, you must do what I say.  
You must understand you can't have your way.

From now on, mama, this way you got 'a doin'. (2x)  
Sugar, you better stop it, daughter, it's sure gonna be your ruin.

From now on, mama, starting from this very day. (2x)  
I'm gonna get someone who can drive my blues away.

I want to drive them off so that they won't come back no more.  
Want her to drive them off so they won't come back no more.  
From now on, mama, I said I'm gonna let you go.

#### MEAN CONDUCTOR BLUES

That same train, same engineer, (2x)  
Took my woman away, lordy, left me standin' here.

My stroller caught a passenger, I caught the mamlish blind. (2x)  
Hey, you can't quit me, ain't no need a-tryin'.

Hey, Mister Conductor, let a broke man ride your blind. (2x)  
"You better buy your ticket, know this train ain't mine."

I just want to blind it far as Hagerstown. (2x)  
When she blows for the crossing, I'm gonna ease it down.

I pray the Lord that Southern Train would wreck. (2x)  
And it kill that fireman, break that engineer's neck.

I'm sitting here looking up at the risin' sun. (2x)  
Some rain don't run, gonna be some walkin' done.

## SHE'S A FOOL

You needn't think 'cause I look green  
Ain't never been down in New Orleans.  
You's a fool, you ain't got no sense.

I went down that smokey road  
Like to brought me back on a coolin' board.

You's a fool, you's a fool. You ain't got no sense.  
You a fool; oh, look at that fool. She ain't got no sense.

You needn't think because you're black,  
I'm gonna beg you to take me back.

You needn't think because you're yella,  
You gwine get my last half-a-dollar.

See that woman all dressed in red.  
Once caused a man to lose his head.

There's a woman dressed in blue.  
You can't put up with the way she do.

See that woman all dressed in white  
Bet'cha five dollars she won't treat you right.

Oh you's a fool gal!

Run to town and hurry back.  
My buddy got a gal I really like.

You needn't think cause you look sweet.  
You can make a fool of me.

See that woman all dressed in green.  
Ain't never been to New Orleans. That 's a fool, any I ever seen.

I got a gal she ain't no fool.  
Big as a elephant, strong as a mule.

You see that woman all dressed in dark.  
Thinks she looks better than the Washington Park.

## ONE MORE TIME

I can't sleep no more, can't get her off my mind. (2x)  
I wants to see my baby, man, only one more time.

I treat her wrong, boys, she left my home. (2x)  
I just ought not to have done it, and she would not be gone.  
Aw, play that thing, boy. Play 'em a long time.

I didn't know I loved my baby 'til she packed her truck to leave(2x)  
I told her 'phone the undertaker, tell'em come and bury me please.

Gonna get a black cat bone, bring my baby home. (2x)  
Lord, and if that don't do it, gonna be one more rounder gone.

## SHE'S GOT A NICE LINE

The girl I love live on Eighteenth Street.  
She got a new line for every man she meet.  
CHORUS: Aw, she's got a nice line, she use it rough.  
Aw, she's got a nice line, she can't get enough.  
She's got a nice line, your mammy don't know her stuff.

To let her tell it, she ain't got no man  
But she hangs around Calvary just raisin' sand.  
Now, do it! Aw, shucks, now!

One day as I was ridin' along,  
I asked her how 'bout it and she walked back home. Chorus.

She don't do this, she don't do that.  
Rub your hands down her back, she acts like a cat. Chorus.  
Aw, do it, boy! boy, that's the way my gal likes it.

She ain't low and squatty, she ain't long and slim.  
The only way you'll get it have to grab your limb. Chorus.

---act right, and I don't have fun.  
The girl I love won't give me none. Chorus.

Now do it lasttime, boy. I want you do it good this time. You know how you done it  
last Saturday night down at the booger rooger. (Bolling: Good!) When my gal and your  
gal was there boy, And your gal hollared: "Do it, Mr. Pillie."

I want it right now, please tell me can I get it  
I better not catch nobody else with it. Chorus.

## TOOTEN' OUT BLUES

You used to be my sugar but you ain't sweet no mamlish more. (2x)  
You got another joker hangin' around your door.

Say, I know my baby... world and all of mamlish me.  
I know my baby thinks the world and all of me.  
Cause every time she grin, she shine her light on me.  
Play that thing, Mr. Clifford. Ed is feelin' mistreated.

Talkin' 'bout your rider but you just ought to see mamlish mine.  
You talkin' 'bout your woman, just ought to see mine.  
She's a long, tall woman and she toot way out behind.

She ain't so good lookin', she ain't got no great long mamlish HAIR.  
Ain't so good lookin', she got no great long hair.  
She ain't got nary gold teeth you can find anywhere.

But she stood on the corner between twenty-fifth and mamlish Main.  
She stood on the corner 'tween Twenty-fith and Main.  
And a blind man saw her and a dumb man called her name.

And the dumb man asked her say who's your regular man may be.  
Dumb man ask her, say, who's your regular be?  
And the blind man told her says you sure look good to me.

### HAM BONE BLUES

Jelly roll, jelly roll, jelly roll is so hard to find.  
Ain't a baker in town can bake a sweet jelly roll like mine.

I got to go to Cin cinnati just to have my ham bone boiled.  
Wimmins in Alabama Gon' let my ham bone spoil.

Well, she's mine and she's yours, and she's somebody else's, too.  
Don't you mention 'bout rollin' cause she'll play her fake on you.

That's the way, that's the way these barefooted strollers do.  
They will get your money and they'll have a man on you.

You come home at night, she got a towel on her head.  
Don't you mention 'bout rollin', don't she'll swear she's nearly dead.

Jelly roll, jelly roll will you see what you went and done.  
You done had my grandpa, now you got his youngest son.

I'm gettin' tired of working, I believe I'll slide awhile.  
I'm gettin' tired of women telling me their lies.

I wonder what made granpa, hey, love your grandma so.  
She got the same jelly roll she had forty years ago.

### BIG ROCK JAIL

Say high sheriff been here, got my girl and gone. (2x)  
I say left me lonely, yes, I'm all alone.

Oh, mister, mister, what have my baby done? (2x)  
I just want to know if she done anybody wrong.

You truck on down to that Big Rock Jail. (2x)  
And the crime was so evil, nobody will go her bail.

Now, tell me you took your gun and made her raise her hand. (2x)  
And you was wrong cause she ain't never harmed a man.

My baby in jail and I cant get no news. (2x)  
I don't get nothin' but these mean old high sheriff blues.

### FRISCO WHISTLE BLUES

Lord, I hate to hear that Frisco whistle blow.

Well, I saw the Frisco when she left the yard. (2x)  
When that train pulled off it nearly broke my heart.

There's two trains runnin', n'ary one goin' my way. (2x)  
I'm gonna leave here walkin' on this very day.

Oh, whup it, Mister Whupper. Whup it a longtime. Whup it 'til I get that Frisco train.

Well there's one thing I don't like about that railroad track. (2x)  
They'll take your rider, never bring her back.

Hollerin', where was you when the Frisco left the yard. (2x)  
I was in the corner, police had me barred.

### CARRY IT RIGHT BACK HOME

Look here, woman, you're makin' me mad.  
Come bringin' me somethin' somebody done had,  
Carry it right back home I don't want it no more.

Let me tell you what these woman will do:  
Go out and get some, bring it home to you.  
You carry it right back home. I don't want it no more.

Now you needn't think because you look cute  
I got to put up with the way that you do.  
Carry it right back home. I don't want it no more.

The woman I love she's long and tall.  
When she grab you and shake you, you're bound to fall.  
Got to carry it right back home. I don't want it no more.

Aw, play that thing, sweet Papa Barefoot Bill.

Now bring the thing down to a test.  
A long tall man you know is the best.  
Car'... back home, I don't want it no more.

A short stubby man go bumpety-bump.  
Cause he ain't got the movement in his .....

Carry it right back home. I don't want it no more.

Carry it right back home, mama, cause I don't want it 'chere.

Know what you been doin' by the way that you jaw  
Might hit you so hard might jar your great-grandpaw.  
Carry it right back home. I don't want it no more.

You needn't come here, you ain't gonna get none of mine.  
You left a man in the doorstep hollarin' and cryin'.  
Carry it right back to him. I don't want it no more.

### SHOUTING BABY BLUES

I know my baby she gonna jump and shout. (2x)  
When that train rolls up and I come walkin' out.

I wouldn't have a rooster, he won't crow 'fore day. (2x)  
And I wouldn't have a hen would cackle when she lay.

Play that thing, Mr. Clifford. You know we're a long way from home.  
Got to play it or walk back home.

I wouldn't have a cook wouldn't cook three meals a day. (2x)  
Well, I wouldn't have a woman if she couldn't do what I say.

Seventeen at the station, eighteen out on the road. (2x)  
And I'm sittin' here wonderin' will a match box hold my clothes.

When I leave this time, I leave somebody cryin'.  
Oh, hollerin' and screamin' "Where's that long tall man of mine?"

### SQUABBLIN' BLUES

My baby done quit me, talk's all over, I say town. (2x)  
And I'm too good a man for to let that talk go 'round.

Take the shoes I bought her, barefoots on the I say ground.  
Shoes I bought her, put 'er barefoots on the ground.  
And then Big Jack Frost, said sure gonna tear you down.

Now, Mister, Mister, please to spare my I mean life. (2x)  
I got four little children, I got one little bald head wife.

Now if I should die in the state of Arkan- I say - sa s.  
I should die in the state of Arkansas.  
I want you to send my body home to my mother-in-law.  
Said if she don't want it, say, give it to my maw.  
Say if my maw don't want it, say, give it to my paw.  
Say if my paw don't want it, say, give it to Ammie Lee.  
Say if Ammie don't want it, give it to my used-to-be.  
Say if she don't want it, say, cast it in the sea.  
Maybe these women in Greenville'll stop squabblin' over me.

Sayin' I won't be worried w ith these blues no I say more. (2x)  
Say it's train time now, said I reckon I better go.

If you enjoyed this record, watch for "BAREFOOT BILL'S HARD LUCK, BLUES"

MAMLISH S-3812



Ed Bell remains in the spotlight as the remaining Barefoot Bill and Pillie Bolling sides are the prime focus of the next exciting Mamlish release. PLUS: a small sampling of other Alabama musicians and singers for your enjoyment.

**BAREFOOT BILL**-Bad Boy

My Crime Blues

Sniggin' Blues

She's A Fool Gal

Barefoot Bill's Hard Luck Blues

**JOHN LEE**-Alabama Boogie

Baby Blues

**PILLIE BOLLING**-Brownskin Woman

Shake Me Like A Dog

(with Barefoot Bill) I Don't Like That

**MAY ARMSTRONG**-Nobody Can Take His Place

**SONNY SCOTT**-Red Cross Store

**JOHN LEE**-Down At the Depot

Baby Please Don't Go (unissued test)



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