

That's My Rabbit, My Dog Caught It: Traditional Southern Instrumental Styles New World NW 226

If the average listener is asked to characterize southern instrumental music, he will probably describe a modern bluegrass ensemble like those frequently encountered in the commercial media. For example, the film *Bonnie and Clyde* used a fifties bluegrass recording by Flatt and Scruggs to portray typical Oklahoma country music during the Depression. But the folk music actually to be heard in that locale at that time would have been considerably different. Although this movie's choice of music is more apt than some, the result is more or less equivalent to equating the works of Charlie Parker with those of Jelly Roll Morton. Bluegrass music, as explained in the notes to New World Records NW 225, *Hills and Home: Thirty Years of Bluegrass*, does represent an extension of older southern traditions, but only in the sense in which Charlie Parker is an extension of Jelly Roll Morton. Folk music is never completely static, and developments in a new instrumental style can occur as rapidly as the most meteoric changes in pop music. In the present record we shall concentrate on some of the older aspects of instrumental techniques in the South and how they have become amalgamated into newer forms.

Until recent times the fiddle was the unchallenged monarch of folk instruments in the South. Every locality had a fiddler, and in many cases he or she was the only instrumentalist around. A typical frontier dance consisted simply of a solo fiddler and several sets of dancers crammed into some neighbor's house for the evening. Although early settlers from Britain may have brought some of the various forms of pipes and harps, there is no evidence that these instruments survived for any length of time in the United States. The more portable fiddle was better adapted to mountain life, and early travelers' accounts consistently mention the instrument. The primary core of American fiddle music (like its vocal music) derives from British stock. Many of the most common and characteristic American tunes—"Billy in the Lowground," "Soldier's Joy," "Forked Deer," "Leather Breeches," "Molly, Put the Kettle On," and so on—can be clearly linked to British originals. On the other hand, an American performance of any of these tunes will sound almost nothing like its analogue in present-day Scotland or Ireland (fiddle music is practically moribund in England). Unfortunately, folk fiddling in Britain and the United States has undergone separate evolutions in the past two hundred years, and it is very difficult to postulate a common stylistic ancestor on the basis of our present scanty evidence. And for every traceable American fiddle tune there is another of similar vintage with no identifiable ancestry at all. Two Yankee melodies mentioned in chronicles before 1830 are "Possum Up a Gum Stump" and "Old Zip Coon." If a contemporaneous fiddler played these tunes as they are traditionally played today, many of the distinctive traits of later American popular music (such as the persistent use of the Scotch snap and syncopation) must have been present in the early fiddle music.

Although we have a number of fiddle and fife tunebooks from this period, it is dubious how well they represent the repertory of the backwoods southern fiddler. We must depend on survivals in order to reconstruct the past, and this can be quite difficult. As an example, I will describe Alva Greene and his tune "Hunky Dory" in some detail. Greene had worked as a handyman most of his life and was in his late seventies when this recording was made. His playing is a fine example of the distinctive fiddle style that once prospered in eastern Kentucky and is as archaic as any to be heard today in the South. Besides "Hunky Dory" (which he learned from his uncle, Jimmy Greene), Alva also played tunes like "Wildwood Flower" (a parlor "weepie" learned from a hillbilly record), "Whistling Rufus" (a turn-of-the-century cakewalk by Kerry Mills), "Amazing Grace" (a well-known Anglo-American hymn), "Flop-Eared Mule" (a polka of probable central-European origin), and "Under the Double Eagle" (by Wagner; learned from a hillbilly record).

And Greene's repertoire is fairly pristine by southern standards. All these tunes he attacked with a vigorous and animated "dive-and-duck" bowing style.

Dance tunes like "Hunky Dory" often begin a measure with a sharply accented stroke on the two lower strings while the remainder of the melody is articulated on the upper "counter" strings. Some fiddlers call these low accents "marker notes" because they clearly mark out the rhythm for dancing. Such tunes are certainly a heritage of the days when the fiddle was the sole accompaniment for dancing. Like most dance players everywhere, Greene held the fiddle against his chest rather than under his chin, rarely played outside first position, and had flattened his bridge to facilitate double stopping. He also employed tunings (scordatura) besides the standard G D A E ("Hunky Dory" is performed on A E A E). Such "cross tunings" are typical of older mountain fiddling but have tended to disappear as technique has become more "refined." Greene had a lively interest in history, but his judgments of his tunes' antiquity were often more colorful than reliable. "Hunky Dory" was "at least two or three hundred years old"; "Indian Squaw" dated to "the time Captain Smith was courting Pocahontas"; and "Bonaparte's Retreat" was composed by a bugler in the French Army "who didn't know how to play a charge but could play a retreat that would wake the dead."

Virtually every locality in the South has its Alva Greenes, musicians whose playing harkens back to an older generation. Each region has its own stylistic characteristics and stock of tunes, often quite at variance with the repertory of younger players in the same area. Sometimes a local tune will pop up in a surprisingly distant area: for instance, many tunes I would have characterized as belonging solely to eastern Kentucky have recently been discovered in Texas.

Such is the raw data from which the researcher has to work. We can assume that Alva Greene and his fellow Kentuckian Luther Strong are modern representatives of a major species of nineteenth-century fiddling, a style whose origins are still hidden in the undocumented history of backwoods life. There is, however, another fundamental influence on fiddle music whose development is easier to survey. Virtually every community of any size in the South (or elsewhere, for that matter) had semiprofessional violinists whose duty was to perform for dancing. Quite often they were musically literate and conversant with the important developments in popular music and even concert-hall violin technique. Such a fiddler would be expected to play not only the backwoods reels but also polkas, cotillions, schottisches, and even the new-fangled waltzes. In addition, most touring minstrel troupes regularly carried a fiddler to perform hornpipes, sand jigs, and clogs for their resident dancer. Although most of these dance forms have atrophied in the South, the cosmopolitan outlook of these musicians has lingered on. The eclectic set of tunes they were expected to master brought a uniformity in style and an emphasis on smooth technique to American fiddling. A good example of a folk fiddler who can probably be linked to such a tradition is Allen Sisson. Although Sisson was probably self-taught, his studied and somewhat formal execution suggests the spirit, if not the form, of the printed tune collections of the nineteenth century. Sisson was from Tennessee, but the greatest heritage of this musical style today can be found in the Midwest.

It is probably within the ranks of the semiprofessional musicians that the origins of the modern southern string ensemble are to be found. Although miscellaneous local combinations of fiddles, drums, and fifes were once common in many communities of the South, very few seem to have survived the turn of the century. The first important fiddle- and-banjo band was the Virginia Minstrels in 1843. The banjo had enjoyed a modest degree of popularity on the American stage for about ten or fifteen years. Primitive forms of the instrument, descended from African prototypes, were played by blacks on southern plantations, but little is known about how they sounded. In the eighteenthirties several whites, notably Joel Sweeney, standardized a five-string

banjo with a fretless neck mounted on a hide-covered hoop. To the European ear the instrument's most novel feature was the highpitched drone string played by the thumb. The steady ring of this continually struck note gives the five-string banjo much of its distinctive quality. It is fairly certain that this basic arrangement of strings and method of performance are based on a black original, although the relation between the tunes the minstrels played and antecedent plantation music is quite unclear. There is no doubt, however, that the phenomenal popularity of the banjo in the later nineteenth century is the result of the proselytizing influence of the minstrel troupes. When banjoist Billy Whitlock, fiddler Dan Emmett (composer of "Dixie"), and two partners premiered as the Virginia Minstrels, the effect was electrifying. Almost immediately similar groups, to be called "minstrel shows," sprang up across the country. Although the Appalachian Mountains have been romantically stereotyped as inaccessible enclaves of Elizabethan custom, virtually no little community was immune from a visit by a minstrel troupe or its humbler counterpart, the medicine show. If somehow the minstrels didn't bring the instrument to a community, Uncle John was certain to have imported the contraption after his last raft trip down the Kentucky and Ohio to St. Louis. The instrument proved admirably well suited to the indigenous mountain fiddle tunes. Unlike the later guitar, which wreaked considerable havoc on the American fiddler's repertoire, the banjo, with its persistent pedal point, actually helped emphasize the modal nature of the mountain fiddle music, although it was not so well suited to the fancier tunes of musicians like Allen Sisson. Accordingly, in the Appalachian South fiddle and banjo repertoires usually coalesced into a common stock, whereas elsewhere the banjo never became particularly popular.

Although the white minstrel show was responsible for the popularity of the banjo, the considerable musical interchange between blacks and whites should not be discounted. During the nineteenth century black musicians often performed for white dances, usually playing the same music as the whites. Unfortunately, most black bands of this sort had ceased to exist by the nineteen- twenties or else went unrecorded, so we have no reliable idea how these groups sounded. (An excellent black hoedown fiddler can be heard on *The Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory*; see *Discography*.) Many whites report that blacks always "had a little different whang to their playing," but the precise nature of this "whang" and its influence on white banjo and fiddle styles are difficult to assess.

After the Civil War, mail-order firms like Sears, Roebuck began selling inexpensive banjos, guitars, mandolins, and other string exotica on a wide scale. The object of these onslaughts was not the folk but the middle classes, and it became de rigueur for a young person of attainment to perform a tune or two on the guitar or mandolin. (There was a similar boom at this time in pianos and parlor organs.) Sales of sheet music were enormous, and in many communities large banjo and mandolin societies comprising hundreds of members sprang up. (A few still survive, including an orchestra of some thirty elderly citizens in San Diego.) Music of this sort has been aptly dubbed "parlor music," since it was designed for amateur performance. A charming folk survival of such an ensemble can be heard in the Walter Family selection on this record (Side Two, Band 4). Not suitable for dancing, it is intended solely for listening enjoyment.

The newly popular string instruments inevitably joined the well-entrenched fiddleand- banjo ensembles of the mountains. It is surprising that in some areas this amalgamation process took as long as it did. Whereas many bands in the deep South had guitars as early as 1880, many mountain communities did not see the instrument before World War I. In the twenties, however, when the first hillbilly records and radio shows introduced southern musicians to fiddle-banjoand- guitar bands from other areas, musical scruples were quickly laid aside and guitars were hastily added to southern string bands. Many older tunes were dropped from the repertoire. The advent of records and radio gave local musicians a wider audience to aim toward and a greater motivation

to keep a band together. In the period 1925-32, often called "the golden age of folk-music recording," the large companies manufactured enormous numbers of excellent string-band records for direct sale to southern audiences. Many of the performers were quite young, and only occasionally was an older fiddler like John Carson or Allen Sisson recorded. The sleek, flashy fiddling of young masters like the Georgians Clayton McMichen and Lowe Stokes made a powerful impression on southern fiddlers everywhere. A fine example of such a streamlined approach can be found in the selection by Dilly and His Dill Pickles (Side Two, Band 9). Although the tune and the fiddling techniques were firmly based in tradition, the enormous drive of the ensemble, propelled by the bass and the guitar, was quite novel in southern music.

Things altered during the Depression. By the forties the fiddle had tumbled from its preeminent place in American tradition. In the previous decade many vocal groups such as the Monroe Brothers and the Blue Sky Boys had eschewed the fiddle in favor of the guitar and the mandolin. Virtuoso lead techniques were being developed on the guitar, which was to quickly become the mainstay of country-and-western music. The fiddler, less in demand for social dancing, now often found a playing arena only among other fiddlers at regional fiddle conventions. Such competitions have enjoyed an enormous resurgence in recent years, but in the fifties and early sixties the folk fiddler was faced with a rapidly dwindling audience. The fivestring banjo stood in even greater danger of extinction, but in the late forties the virtuosity of Earl Scruggs inspired a small but devoted cult of students. The advent of bluegrass music forms a natural demarcation date at which to end our history of early southern string music. Although bluegrass is intimately related to what came before, it is also distinguished by not being dance oriented, unlike the more functional music of earlier days. A bluegrass musician typically places a higher value on improvisatory passages, strictly forbidden under older musicians' insistence on well-articulated melody. In a modern group each musician will take turns providing the instrumental lead, while in the traditional string band the fiddler remains undisputed king.

This capsule account has ignored many key aspects of the development of American instrumental techniques. Some of the lacunae will be filled in by the notes below, but the listener will profit enormously by consulting the Discography. Most of all, one should remember that the history of instrumental folk music in this country has not followed a single path of development but is the product of a vast number of distinct and often unexpected factors. Unfortunately, many aspects of this etiology are poorly documented, and perhaps the foregoing article may inspire some young scholar to research his or her local traditions more fully, so that the overall development of this music may be better understood.

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THE RECORDINGS

Side One

Band 1

Groundhog

Marion Reese, fife. Recorded July, 1937 in Zionville, North Carolina, by John Lomax. Library of Congress 837B2; previously unreleased.

The fife, once used extensively for dance and military music, is an unkeyed wood predecessor of the piccolo. Some older fiddlers, such as Henry Reed of Virginia, learned tunes from fifers who had served in the Civil War, but the instrument seems to have had little traditional currency in this century. Although the present example sounds rather archaic, extant primers for the fife indicate that its music was originally

more sophisticated. Authentically primitive wind instruments, such as panpipes, are occasionally found among rural blacks and may have been adopted by whites as well. Recent investigations by Tom Carter and others indicate that a developed fife tradition once thrived in North Carolina. "Groundhog" is a well-known Appalachian folk song.

Band 2

The Old Gray Horse

Obed Pickard, jew's-harp.

Recorded March 31, 1927, in Atlanta. Originally released on Columbia 15246.

The jew's-harp is a member of a family of instruments found in almost every folk culture in the world, though in the West its prestige has always remained modest. In its present form the harp consists of a flexible metal tongue mounted in a frame of rigid iron. The frame is clenched between the teeth and the vibrating tongue plucked by a finger. Pitch is determined by varying the size of the oral cavity. Since the instrument is rather quiet (except to the performer), it has rarely been used as more than a novelty in this country. A related instrument found in limited white usage in the Ozarks is the tune bow. A hunting bow is held against the cheek and caused to sound by plucking the string. The technique derives from Indian tradition. Examples can be heard on *Ozark Folk Songs*, Prestige 25006.

Obed "Dad" Pickard was leader of a Nashville family of musicians whose career extended from the early Grand Ole Opry to a fifties television show in California. The troupe specialized in parlor and novelty songs, and Dad Pickard's jew's-harp playing was a featured part of every show. Here he is playing the fiddle tune known as "The Old Gray Mare Came Tearing Out of the Wilderness." The music was first published in 1858 by J. Warner of Bryant's Minstrels, but it is likely that the tune is older, since it closely resembles a contemporary revivalist hymn. A parody figured prominently in the famous Lincoln-Douglas campaign of 1860.

Danced with a gal with a hole in her stocking,
And her heel kept a-rocking. (2)

Band 3

My Pretty Little Pink

I. D. Stamper, dulcimer.

Recorded August, 1977, in Whitesburg, Kentucky, by Jack Wright.
Previously unreleased.

The Appalachian plucked dulcimer is composed of a shallow elongated resonating box with a narrow fingerboard running most of its length. Typically it has two drone strings and one melody string. It is fretted by a small stick and struck by a flexible plectrum like a feather tip. It is apparently related to European folk zithers such as the buche, but the history of its introduction into the Appalachians is still uncertain. Along with the fiddle, it is certainly the oldest instrument in the mountains.

The dulcimer is comparatively easy to play, and its quiet tone and light, recreational nature often made it acceptable in communities where "instruments of the devil" such as the fiddle were banned. As in the present example, it is most often used to play familiar secular or religious airs rather than developed instrumental compositions, although an album by the Russell Family of Virginia (see *Discography*) displays the dulcimer in the latter context.

In the United States the term "hammered dulcimer" is often applied to a large zitherlike instrument, similar to the European cymbalom, with many courses of strings and played with two small mallets (see note for "The Flowers of Edinburgh" on 80239-2, *Brave Boys: New England Traditions in Folk Music*). It enjoys its greatest popularity in the Midwest, although it has a limited currency in the South, especially West Virginia. Both types of instrument have been the focus of strong revivalist interest in recent years.

I. D. Stamper is a fine example of the vanishing breed of traditional dulcimer players. His tune is a well-known but little-reported Appalachian folk song. The Frank Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore (7 vols. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1952-64) and Rounder 0078, *Mother Jones' Will*, contain fuller variants. Mr. Stamper has also made an album, *Red Wing*, issued by June Appal Recordings, Whitesburg, Kentucky, and is the subject of a film entitled *Sourwood Mountain Dulcimer*, which is available from June Appal Recordings.

Oh, come, little pink,
Let me tell you what I think,
Been a long time makin' up your mind.

An' you do think
You're the prettiest little pink
That ever the sunshine knows.

But I truly understand
That you love another man,
And how can your little heart be mine?

Band 4

Granny Went to Meeting with Her Old Shoes On

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Judd, banjos; Mrs. Judd, vocal.

Recorded March, 1973, in Irvine, Kentucky, by Mark Wilson. Previously unreleased.

The first minstrel banjoists, and presumably their black predecessors, played the banjo in what they called "stroke" or "thimble" style (a thimblelike pick was worn on the playing finger for volume). This style is heard here in a recording made nearly one hundred forty years after the first printed reference to stroke playing. Mountain performers generally call the style "clawhammer," "frailing," or "rapping." Using a clenched hand, the performer strikes two successive notes with the nail of his index or middle finger and rings the drone fifth string with his thumb, in a rhythm q q q. The pattern is executed quite rapidly, resulting in a characteristic "galloping" effect. A skilled performer will vary the basic rhythm by striking secondary notes with the thumb on the inner strings ("drop thumbing"), striking full chords ad libitum, picking melody notes upward on the first strings, and by many other devices. An excellent introduction to these techniques can be found in *Old-Time Mountain Banjo* (see Bibliography). Over the years each region of the South has developed quite different approaches to this fundamental style. In Virginia and North Carolina, players aim for a smooth and melodic flow of notes. (A stunning example of such a musician is Wade Ward of Galax; see Discography.) In eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, the style is often wilder and more rhythmically punctuated. The present selection, from the bluegrass region of Kentucky, is more relaxed in tempo and represents a typical "banjo tune," a simply developed melody with nonsensical words. Mr. and Mrs. Judd are conservative farmers of the old school—they still cook by a wood stove and plow with a team of mules. In spite of this they are quite prosperous, and when Mr. Judd decided he wanted to take up the banjo again after many years of hard farming, he was able to purchase the flashiest, most expensive bluegrass banjo on the market. Nevertheless, he still plays only the tunes he learned as a young boy just after the turn of the century.

Granny went to meeting with her old shoes on.
She came back with a new pair on.

Band 5

Spanish Fandango

Pete Steele, banjo.

Recorded March, 1938, in Hamilton, Ohio, by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

Library of Congress 1705B2; previously unreleased.

After the Civil War, frets were added to the minstrel banjo and a new method of playing—"guitar" or

"classical" style—was contrived in imitation of the parlor guitar. In this technique, strings were individually plucked upward by three or four fingers. This method was closer to European convention than the stroke style and better suited to the complicated hornpipes, jigs, and ballads the minstrels were expected to perform. The original boisterous free-for-all of the Virginia Minstrels was regarded as "unrefined," and by 1885 stroke players were a rarity on the professional stage (although their spiritual descendants thrived in the hills). Virtuosos such as Fred Van Eps and Vess L. Ossman eventually developed formidable techniques for the classical banjo and recorded extensively before World War I. An excellent example of a folk performer playing in a pre-Ossman guitar style is Uncle Dave Macon of Tennessee (see Discography). Changing musical tastes after the war made the classical five-string banjo obsolete in favor of the tenor plectrum banjo. In the country, however, various picking techniques survived, some based on classical models and others of indigenous mountain origin. "Spanish Fandango" is an example of the former for the piece was a commonplace of the parlor-guitar style. (It is still frequently encountered as a folk-guitar instrumental.) Pete Steele picks in a complicated two-finger style, switching smoothly from melody notes picked upward with the index finger and downward with the thumb. The instrument is tuned to a C chord (G C G C E). Although "Spanish Fandango" is occasionally played on guitar in an analogous C tuning, most banjo and guitar players set the tune in the key of G.

Pete Steele is one of the many former Kentuckians who crossed the Ohio to find employment. Unlike most of his compatriots, he kept up his banjo playing in the midst of a somewhat hostile cultural environment. Some of Steele's best recordings can be found on Library of Congress L2, Anglo-American Shanties, Lyric Songs, Dance Tunes and Spirituals.

Band 6

Run, Banjo

Justis Begley, banjo.

Recorded October, 1937, in Hazard, Kentucky, by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax. Library of Congress 1530B2; previously unreleased.

This selection demonstrates a further adaptation of fingerstyle banjo. In the manner typical of southeastern Kentucky, the melody is articulated in short bursts over a droning accompaniment. To some extent, this sound presages later developments in bluegrass banjo.

The late Justis Begley was sheriff of Hazard for many years. He was an excellent performer in both clawhammer and two-finger style, and other Begley recordings are available from the Library of Congress. "Run, Banjo" is probably his own composition.

Band 7

Pearly Dew

Lena Hughes, guitar.

Recorded c. 1969 in Concord, Arkansas (?). Originally released on Power LP-185.

The present tune is typical of the mood pieces found in nineteenth-century instructors for the parlor guitar. Several such compositions, like "Spanish Fandango" and "The Siege of Sevastopol," have survived in folk tradition. The melody is usually picked on the high strings by the index and middle fingers while the thumb adds a simple counterpoint in the bass. Much of the composition is based on "rolls" (arpeggios picked by three or four fingers in rapid succession). This style, which is practically extinct in the delicate form heard here, is related to the early blues techniques of musicians like Elizabeth Cotton or Sam McGee.

Mrs. Hughes, from Ludlow, Missouri, is also an excellent fiddler and frequently plays at fiddle contests in the area. She issued the present selection privately in the late sixties for personal sales at such conventions.

Band 8

Blues

Hobart Smith, guitar. Recorded 1942 in Saltville, Virginia, by Alan Lomax. Library of Congress 6724; previously unreleased.

This selection is a fullfledged white adaptation of a black guitar style. It is played in the key of E, whose fingering positions are particularly suited to the indefinite thirds and sevenths of the Afro- American blues scale. Although the basic picking method corresponds approximately to that of the last example, the overall effect is much less regimented than that achieved by the precisely articulated patterns of the parlor guitar. In the blues style, the ball of the right hand damps the bass strings so that the resulting sound is more rhythmic than melodic. The player is then free to concentrate on fretting the upper strings. Generally, the melody is played slightly off the beats, producing the syncopated jump heard here. This was the first guitar style many Appalachian whites heard, often from an itinerant black railroad laborer.

Hobart Smith (see also 80294-2, *The Gospel Ship: Baptist Hymns and White Spirituals from the Southern Mountains*) based his style on various black models, including the famous recording artist Blind Lemon Jefferson, whose playing the present exercise somewhat resembles. Most contemporary country- and western guitarists play in the plectrum manner mentioned under "Kimball House" (Side One, Band 12), although modern virtuosos like Merle Travis and Chet Atkins have adapted the present style to Nashville's purposes.

The late Hobart Smith, brother of the singer Texas Gladden, was a gifted performer on banjo, piano, fiddle, and guitar. His guitar arrangement of "Railroad Bill" (see *Discography*) has become a standard among younger guitarists.

Band 9

Lights in the Valley

Neriah and Kenneth Benfield, autoharps.
Recorded July 21, 1961, in Mount Ulla, North Carolina, by Michael Seeger.
Previously unreleased.

The autoharp is an automated zither in which chords are formed by pushing a damping bar against the strings. It is a survival from the later nineteenth century, when many similar musical inventions were devised. The Benfields, who are father and son, lay their harps on their laps and articulate the melody with finger picks while rapidly changing the chord bars. Some players, following Maybelle Carter of Nashville, prefer to hold the instrument against the chest. Until Mike Seeger's visit, the performers had never played autoharps together; they were so taken with the idea that they played duets for the duration of the evening. The tune belongs to a well-known revivalist hymn.

Band 10

Lost Boy Blues

Palmer McAbee, harmonica.
Recorded February 21, 1928, in Atlanta. Originally released on Victor 21352.

The harmonica was invented around 1820. It is a humble device consisting of twenty metal reeds mounted in a wooden frame. In the South, where it is called a French or mouth harp, blacks have devised an unusual approach: by playing in a key a fourth lower than the manufacturer intended and flattening or "choking" notes through constriction of the air passage, a skillful player can produce a fluid and melismatic sound totally unexpected on a rigid, pretuned instrument.

Imitative pieces have always been a particular stock-in-trade of the American instrumentalist, and various compositions imitate fox chases, chickens cackling, mules braying, geese calling, automobile gears grinding, and so forth. The most alluring subject for mimesis has been the steam locomotive; every Southern harmonica player can imitate a train. In the present example, the topic is a black convict's escape

from prison. The piece is usually called "Lost John" and is popularly sung in three or four distinct versions, including a Tin Pan Alley composition by W. C. Handy. Alan Lomax links these songs to antebellum folklore about John the Trickster Slave. "Lost John" has frequently been recorded as a harmonica solo. Alabaman Palmer McAbee, about whom little is known, here provides one of the best white versions. For a truly incredible set of variations on this theme, see Sonny Terry on Folkways FA-2035.

The harmonica is often used in a more orthodox manner to play fiddle tunes and the like. Several sterling examples of this style can be heard on the first disc of Nashville: The Early String Bands (see Discography).

Band 11

Fe Fe Ponchoux

Joseph Falcon, accordion; Cleoma Breaux, guitar.

Recorded summer, 1928, in New Orleans. Originally released on Columbia 15301.

Most Americans are acquainted only with the toothy, pearl-inlaid accordion monstrosities of the Lawrence Welk television show. However, less ornate versions of this free-reed instrument have found a welcome home in most folk cultures of European descent since it was invented in the early nineteenth century. In Scotland, Ireland, French Canada, and Mexico the accordion has partly supplanted the fiddle and other older instruments; it is strange that it never had much popularity here. Only among the Acadian people of Louisiana and Texas has the accordion become an important instrument, and it is a chief determinant of the distinctive Cajun sound.

The Cajuns, who may have obtained the instrument from Bohemian communities in Texas, use the simplest form of accordion, with a single row of buttons on the right governing reeds arranged like those of a harmonica. Although the instrument is tuned in D, players will frequently play in A or even E. The Cajun accordion has only two chord bars, D and A, and many of the harmonic oddities of Cajun music reflect the limitations of this instrument. A commercial accordion is usually tuned in "musette," with several reeds slightly out of tune to produce the shimmering beats typical of the Lawrence Welk sound. The Cajun, however, usually retunes his instrument to strict unison, producing the strident and wailing tone characteristic of his music.

Joseph Falcon was one of the first and most important Cajun artists to record. He is accompanied here by his wife Cleoma on guitar.

Band 12

Kimball House

Ezra "Ted" Hawkins, mandolin; Riley Puckett, guitar.

Recorded March 30, 1939, in San Antonio, Texas. Originally released on Bluebird 5514.

The mandolin, an eightstring member of the lute family, is a latecomer to American folk instruments, although its place in the South is now secure. Some of its initial popularity may have resulted from its ability to substitute for a fiddle. A musician can not only play a melodic lead on the mandolin but can also provide an accompaniment to his own singing, a task that is more difficult on the violin. Ted Hawkins was one of the first country virtuosos to experiment with the instrument. Modern players, following Kentuckian Bill Monroe, usually adopt a more syncopated and chordal approach, whereas Hawkins articulates a melody somewhat as a fiddler might.

Riley Puckett was one of the most influential guitar stylists on early records, and his extensive use of bass runs in accompaniment has been widely copied by most modern guitarists (although their choice of notes is usually somewhat more disciplined than Puckett's). Puckett employed an unorthodox finger-picking technique; most recent guitarists use a plectrum to achieve similar results.

Side Two.

The Fiddle in America

Band 1

The Last of Sizemore

Luther Strong, fiddle.

Recorded October, 1937, in Hazard, Kentucky, by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax Library of Congress 1537B2; previously unreleased.

I have encountered this tune only in the region around Hazard, although it is related to a number of Scots reels in A major. The piece is a "farewell tune" associated with a hanging (see also Luther Strong's "Last of Callahan" on Library of Congress L2). The fiddle is tuned to A E A E and played in the grand old Kentucky manner. Such a performance is a comparative rarity nowadays, although sixty years ago it would have represented the predominant style of the region.

Band 2

Hunky Dory

Alva Greene, fiddle; Francis Gillum, straws.

Recorded July 14, 1973, in Isomville, Kentucky, by Mark Wilson, Bill Nowlin, and Guthrie Meade. Previously unreleased.

Francis Gillum "beats the straws" for Alva Greene, hitting a rhythmic pattern on the fiddle strings with a pair of knitting needles. (This practice constitutes the origin of the word "fiddlesticks.") Gillum is beating on a separate fiddle; usually both players use a common instrument. Gillum was in his late eighties when these recordings were made; he had met Greene at a local senior-citizens' club. The word "hunkydory" means "satisfactory" or "fine" and dates from the mid-nineteenth century.

Band 3

Bigfooted Nigger

The Helton Brothers, fiddle and banjo.

Recorded 1941 in Asheville, North Carolina, by Alan Lomax, Joseph Liss, and Jerome Wiesner. Library of Congress 4806A3; previously unreleased.

The Helton Brothers were reasonably sophisticated musicians, and this duet displays a worked-out version of an older fiddle tune still found occasionally across the South. The banjo is picked in the twofinger manner. (The piece was subtitled "Virginia Reel" in the original field notes.)

Band 4

That's My Rabbit, My

Dog Caught It

The Walter Family. Draper Walter, fiddle; jug, piano, guitar, washboard. Recorded March 29, 1933, in Richmond, Indiana. Originally released on Champion 16653.

This family band, originally from Nicholasville, Kentucky, was living in Richmond, Indiana, at the time of this recording. They were related to Granny Harper, a well-known early radio personality. Although the Walters recorded a number of records for Gennett, sales were so low at this point in the Depression that only one copy of any of these records has been discovered. This ingratiating performance incorporates several "novelty" instruments—household implements adapted to musical purposes. The jug is blown across its opening, and the washboard is played with sewing thimbles on all fingers. This rare tune has also been found in West Virginia as "The Little Rose," which can be heard on Wilson Douglas (Rounder 0047).

Band 5

Rymer's Favorite

Allen Sisson, fiddle; Jacob Burckhart, piano.
Recorded spring, 1925, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Originally released on Edison 51522.

In many regions of the country, pianos and pump organs were once popular for backing fiddle music, although this practice thrives today only in the Northeast. The accompanist on this recording was probably provided by the Edison company, but the results are appropriate and fairly typical of a southern player (such as the pianist on the previous selection). Many older American fiddle tunes possess odd metrical traits, including unexpected extra beats. In "Rymer's Favorite," sections are of unequal length, making the tune very confusing to a dancer. The grace of Sisson's playing is deceptive; the piece is quite difficult. It is set in C and is related to the betterknown "Billy in the Lowground."

Allen Sisson, "the Champion Fiddler of Tennessee," was from around Ducktown, near the Georgia border. Little is known of him, but he seems to have belonged to an earlier generation than most of the fiddlers on the early records.

Band 6

Le Rille Cajun

Dennis McGee and Ernest Fruge, fiddles.
Recorded c. 1930 in New Orleans. Originally released on Brunswick 512.

This is included as an example of double fiddling and of the foreign musics that have intertwined with the British core of American music. Here Ernest Fruge plays a baritone part to Dennis McGee's lead, a procedure typical of many older fiddlers (and of Cajun music to this day). Modern fiddlers prefer to contrive a tenor part to the melody, although this often requires use of higher positions. This fine French quadrille provides an interesting glimpse of the past, since recent Cajun musicians tend to feature waltzes and two-steps rather than oldfashioned reels. The playing resembles contemporaneous French-Canadian performances, demonstrating a common French heritage that is less obvious in more recent recordings. The piece also has strong similarities with many Anglo-American tunes (the other side of the original 78 closely resembles the Scots- American "Leather Breeches"), suggesting an interesting case of cross-cultural fertilization.

Dennis McGee and the late Ernest Fruge each made many interesting 78s on their own. Well into his eighties, Dennis McGee is still playing well today, often with his partner Sady Courville (NW 245, Oh My Little Darling: Folk Song Types), and in 1972 they made an album together (see Discography).

Band 7

Lost Indian

Louis H. Propps, fiddle; guitar.
Recorded January, 1936, in Pleasanton, Texas, by John A. Lomax. Library of Congress 570A2; previously unreleased.

Modern Texas players have evolved a distinctive brand of fiddle music involving intricate variations on traditional tunes played at a moderate pace. This style has come to dominate fiddle playing in the western United States. Louis Propps is an interesting transitional figure; although his playing is not nearly as intricate as that of modern exponents of the style, its relaxed swing foreshadows later developments. His whooping is supposed to represent an Indian crying in the wilderness. "Lost Indian" is a charming ancestor of the modern favorite "Black Mountain Rag." The Ed Haley album cited in the Discography contains a virtuoso performance of this tune.

Band 8

Peacock Rag

Arthur Smith and His Dixieliners: Arthur Smith, fiddle; Alton and Rabon Delmore, guitars; bass.
Recorded 1941, unknown location. Originally released on Bluebird 8688.

Tennessean Arthur Smith was probably the best-known southern fiddler of the thirties, and his radio performances on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry reached listeners as far away as Nova Scotia. A friend of mine in Kentucky used to listen to Smith religiously every weekend at the home of a neighbor who owned a radio. Unfortunately the neighbor also had dogs and a rug, and my friend would have to endure countless flea bites every time he wanted to hear Arthur Smith. Such devotion was typical of Smith's radio audience. Many turn-of-the-century ragtime compositions such as "Dill Pickles Rag," "Whistling Rufus," and "Trombone Rag" have found their way into the country fiddler's tunebag; it is quite possible that "Peacock Rag" stems from such a source. Many tunes Smith popularized are still extensively performed by modern fiddlers.

Band 9

Bibb County Hoedown

Seven Foot Dilly and His Dill Pickles: Probably A. A. Gray, fiddle; John Dilleshaw, guitar; second fiddle, second guitar, washtub bass, banjo.

Recorded November 11, 1930, in Atlanta. Originally released on Brunswick 575.

Some of the most popular hillbilly recordings of the twenties came from a loosely associated group of musicians centered around Gid Tanner, Riley Puckett, Clayton McMichen, and Lowe Stokes (see Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers in Discography). The present band is part of this group. The rowdy, somewhat hokum performance should not disguise the fact that the level of musicianship is very high. The bass is probably made of a washtub, a piano wire, and a broom handle; use of a conventional double bass is far more standard today.

Band 10

Jig

Bill Boyd and His Cowboy Ramblers: Carroll Hubbard and Kenneth Pitts, fiddles; John "Knocky" Parker, piano; Marvin Montgomery, banjo; Bill Boyd and Curley Perrin, guitars; John Boyd, steel guitar; Jim Boyd, bass; clarinet, accordian.

Recorded April 9, 1938, in San Antonio Texas. Originally released on Bluebird 7691.

In the thirties a sophisticated version of country music that made use of jazz and popular stylings sprang up in Texas and Oklahoma and was dubbed "western swing." This style featured hot "takeoff" solos in violin, piano and the newly developed electric steel guitar in contrast to the straightforward simplicity of the traditional fiddle-dominated bands. The careful musicianship of an Allen Sisson was overrun by the extrovert influence of jazz masters like Stuff Smith and Joe Venuti. The oddly titled "Jig" performed by one of the leading western-swing ensembles of the period, demonstrates this uptown trend perfectly. The clarinetist had been hired directly from the musicians' union for the session; the fiddlers had benefited from some classical training; and the pianist was later to become a respected figure in legitimate jazz circles. Although the vogue for large groups of this nature dwindled after the way, the progressive techniques heard here have found a permanent place in the arsenal of the modern American contest fiddler, especially in the Southwest.

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- Uncle Dave Macon. RBF 51; County 521.
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- Wade Ward. Folkways 2363 and 2380.

Side One Total time 25:42

1 GROUNDHOG	1:23
Marion Reese, fife	
2 THE OLD GRAY HORSE	3:15
Obed Pickard, jew's-harp	
3 MY PRETTY LITTLE PINK	1:38
I. D. Stamper, vocal and dulcimer	

4 GRANNY WENT TO MEETING WITH HER OLD SHOES ON	0:58
Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Judd, banjos; Mrs. Judd, vocal	
5 SPANISH FANDANGO	1:32
Pete Steele, banjo	
6 RUN, BANJO	1:30
Justis Begley, banjo	
7 PEARLY DEW	2:09
Lena Hughes, guitar	
8 BLUES	2:53
Hobart Smith, guitar	
9 LIGHTS IN THE VALLEY	1:28
Neriah and Kenneth Benfield, autoharps	
10 LOST BOY BLUES	3:19
Palmer McAbee, harmonica	
11 FE FE PONCHAUX	3:20
Joseph Falcon, accordion; Cleoma Beaux, guitar	
12 KIMBALL HOUSE	2:44
Ezra "Ted" Hawkins, mandolin; Riley Puckett, guitar	
Side Two Total time 24:56	
1 THE LAST OF SIZEMORE	1:38
Luther Strong, fiddle	
2 HUNKY DORY	0:52
Alva Greene, fiddle; Francis Gillum, straws	
3 BIGFOOTED NIGGER	2:01
The Helton Brothers, fiddle and banjo	
4 THAT'S MY RABBIT, MY DOG CAUGHT IT	3:29
The Walter Family: Draper Walter, fiddle; jug, piano, guitar, washboard	
5 RYMER'S FAVORITE	3:38
Allen Sisson, fiddle; Jacob Burckhart, piano	
6 LE RILLE CAJUN	3:03
Dennis McGee and Ernest Fruge, fiddles	
7 LOST INDIAN	1:43
Louis H. Propps, fiddle; guitar	
8 PEACOCK RAG	2:36
Arthur Smith and His Dixieliners: Arthur Smith, fiddle; Alton and Rabon Delmore, guitars; bass	
9 BIBB COUNTY HOEDOWN	3:13
Seven Foot Dilly and His Dill Pickles: Probably A. A. Gray, fiddle;	

John Dilleshaw, guitar; second fiddle, second guitar, washtub bass, banjo

10 JIG 2:18

Bill Boyd and His Cowboy Ramblers: Carroll Hubbard and Kenneth Pitts, fiddles;
John "Knocky" Parker, piano; Marvin Montgomery, banjo; Bill Boyd and Curley
Perrin, guitars; John Boyd, steel guitar; Jim Boyd, bass; clarinet, accordion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to CBS Records for "The Old Gray Horse"; "Fe Fe Ponchaux"; "Le Rille Cajun"; and "Bibb County Hoedown"; to RCA Records for "Lost Boy Blues"; "Kimball House"; "Peacock Rag"; and "Jig"; and to Fantasy Records for "That's My Rabbit, My Dog Caught It."

We are grateful to the following persons for making available their material to us: Lena Hughes ("Pearly Dew"); Pete Steele ("Spanish Fandango"); Mrs. Brookie Smith ("Blues"); Mark L. Wilson ("Hunky Dory" and "Granny Went to Meeting with Her Old Shoes On"); Mike Seeger ("Lights in the Valley"); and I. D. Stamper and Jack Wright of June Appal Recordings ("My Pretty Little Pink").

We wish to thank Robert Altshuler for making his record collection available to us.

Our special thanks to Joseph Hickerson and Sam Brylawski of the Library of Congress for their invaluable help.

Program consultant: Mark Wilson

Rerecording engineer: Art Shifrin

Mastering: Lee Hulko, Sterling Sound

Cover art: George Joseph Mess. "Living Better Without."

Aquatint. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (Pennell Fund)

Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox

Library of Congress No.78-750471

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