



# New World Records

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## *Let's Get Loose: Folk and Popular Blues Styles from the Beginnings to the Early 1940s* New World NW 290

**B**lues began to be sung in the eightennineties. By the nineteen-twenties they had become the dominant folk- and popular-song form among American blacks and had exerted enormous influence on white popular and folk music. At the time of their earliest development, blues were part of an extraordinary ferment taking place in black cultural circles. By the nineties a new generation had grown to maturity, born out of slavery but still struggling to obtain the freedom and to chart the direction of their culture in America. Some of the more fortunate members of this generation graduated from the many newly established black colleges and entered professions such as the ministry, the law, business, medicine, and education. Others became skilled tradesmen—carpenters, blacksmiths, stonemasons—or catered to the needs of the black community that whites were unwilling to service, becoming barbers, undertakers, boarding house operators, and tavern keepers. Black political leaders like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Dubois began to make their community a national force. Black soldiers distinguished themselves in the Spanish-American War, helping Teddy Roosevelt win the decisive Battle of San Juan Hill. And there was a flowering of black literature and art that witnessed the emergence of such figures as the poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar and the painter Henry Ossawa Tanner.

In music, blacks at the higher social levels became accomplished composers and performers in the classical tradition. If they paid any attention to distinctively black musical forms, it was usually to the old spirituals of slavery days, but these songs were highly arranged in a Europeanized manner for concert and choir presentation. In the border states like Missouri,

Kentucky, and Maryland, and in the western states, where blacks were a fairly small minority, and where there was a certain amount of social mobility, ragtime became popular among the black working class in the cities and towns. Drawing about equally on black and white folk and popular styles, ragtime quickly spread into the cities of the North and Deep South and developed various folk offshoots. A kind of vocal ragtime developed among quartets that got together at barber shops and at social gatherings. Quartets also sang spirituals, reinjecting some of the syncopation, antiphonal style, and distinctively black approach to harmonizing that had been removed from these songs in the process of arranging them for the concert and choir.

In the cities of the Deep South, such as New Orleans, Memphis, Mobile, and Pensacola, black working-class instrumentalists, often combining with Creole musicians from families whose fortunes had slipped, produced the first stirrings of jazz, a more syncopated and improvisational style than ragtime. By World War I jazz would begin moving north and west and replacing ragtime in popularity. Jazz instrumentation and style were also incorporated into the churches of the new pentecostal denominations that were drawing many adherents in the southern cities and towns and in the rapidly growing northern ghettos. White performers and composers not only attempted to learn and adapt these styles but also created a song form that both imitated and parodied black expression, the “coon song,” which enjoyed a great vogue from the eightennineties to the nineteen-twenties. Some blacks also composed coon songs and other humorous tunes, and these were performed in revues and

vaudeville in the cities and in traveling tent and medicine shows in the southern towns.

Blues fit into this musical scene at the lowest level, and they were the last of these forms to become popularized. They were most prevalent in the rural South and among recent migrants to the cities. Blacks in the older rural communities clung to folk-song traditions or shunned the blues in favor of church music. It was the large class of uprooted rural blacks that gave sustenance to the new blues tradition. This class included the sharecroppers, renters, and hired hands who moved from one large plantation to another in search of better work and better times, the workers in the coal and iron mines and the levee and lumber camps, the railroad workers and the *hoboes* who rode tire rails, and the small-time hustlers, gamblers, prostitutes, and other underworld figures. Blues first made an impression on the composer W. C. Handy in 1903, when he heard them sung by a ragged guitar player in the railroad station of Tutwiler, Mississippi. About this same time Jelly Roll Morton was learning his first piano blues in New Orleans brothels and gambling dens. Howard W. Odum, the first folklorist to do serious field work among folk-blues singers, heard blues in Mississippi and Georgia between 1905 and 1908 and noted that many of them were performed by traveling "songsters" "musicianers," and "music physicianers." The themes of many of the blues that he collected dealt with trains, hoboing, underworld life, and most of all the exploits and problems of love. Odum noted that blues were mainly performed among groups gathered for parties in the evenings after work, at gatherings after church, at dances, by individuals sitting alone on their doorstep or by the fireside, and during courtship. He also noted that the local white people listened to these songs. The singers would often mix their blues with other types of folk songs or with popular tunes, ragtime pieces, and occasional religious tunes, depending on the season. Many blues singers had a special repertoire of popular and hillbilly songs for white audiences.

Blues are sung from a first-person point of view, but this does not necessarily mean that they are autobiographical. Most of the early folk blues used traditional lyrics drawn from a storehouse of verses that the singers could mix freely in performance or construct into more permanent compositions that they would retain in their repertoires. Sometimes they would put their own feelings and experiences into their songs, but their main criterion was that the blues "tell the truth" in a manner recognizable

to the audience. The blues singer might actually be surrounded by adoring women, but he would sing about the problems of love because he knew that some of the people in his audience had such problems. Or he might sing about being arrested and put in jail because there were bound to be listeners who had had similar experiences. By dramatizing the ups and downs of life as it was lived by the lowest and most marginal class of blacks, the blues singer helped make life seem more bearable. It was as if he took upon himself the worries and troubles of others in the community and cast them out in his songs, while the people rocked, danced, laughed, and had fun to the sound of his music. In this sense the blues singer's role paralleled that of the preacher in the more respectable lower-class black community, and many older black preachers are in fact ex-bluesmen, having made a relatively easy transition from an emotional singing style to an equally emotional sermon style.

Although early blues exhibited some influence from spirituals and group work songs, the main contributing traditions were the field holler and the ballad. Field hollers were very loosely structured unaccompanied songs sung by farm workers and other manual laborers. They often contained falsetto singing, moaning, humming, or whistling. Some had no words at all, while others might repeat a single verse over and over. Some had more developed texts. They dealt with working conditions, stubborn mules and the hot sun, and inevitably with the singer's woman. These field hollers contributed the basic vocal material to the early blues. This material was given structure and a stanza form by the ballad. By the eighteen-nineties a type of narrative folk song that has come to be known as the "blues ballad" had developed among blacks. It contains some of the loose, shifting, emotional qualities of the blues but is sung from a third-person point of view about various folk heroes of the lower-class black community. (Southern whites also sang and composed blues ballads during this period and contributed much to the development of the form.) Most of the characters in these songs were underworld figures, like Stacker Lee the gambler, Railroad Bill the train robber, and Frankie and Albert (or Johnnie), a prostitute and pimp. Many of these ballads employed a stanza form consisting of a couplet plus a one-line refrain. They were frequently accompanied by musical instruments in a harmonic pattern of the tonic chord (I) for the first line, the subdominant chord (IV) for the first part of the second line, and the dominant chord

(V) for the first part of the third line.

Blues singers borrowed this verse and accompaniment pattern and fit the vocal approach of the field holler into it. Their favorite instruments were the guitar, piano, and harmonica, which tended to replace the banjo and fiddle of older folk-music traditions. The tempo of the blues ballad was slowed as couple dances replaced set dances, and longer breaks were introduced at the ends of the vocal lines for responsorial instrumental phrases. The result was the standard twelve-measure AAB blues stanza, consisting of a vocal line repeated once and a different rhyming or assonant third line, with an instrumental response at the end of each line. The following is a typical blues stanza with the measures numbered and the harmonies of the accompaniment indicated in parentheses.

I'm going away to wear you off my mind... (Response)  
/1 (I) /2 (I) /3 (1) /4 (I)  
I'm going away to wear you off my mind... (Response)  
/5 (IV) /6 (IV) /7 (1) /8 (I)  
You keep me worried and bothered all the time... (Response)  
/9 (V) /10 (V,IV, or I) /11 (I) /12 (I)

By no means do all blues conform to this pattern. There are many two-line and four-line blues, and the three-line blues themselves often exhibit variations on this basic form. Many self-accompanied folk-blues singers, perhaps still under the influence of the looser field holler, extend their lines by repeating instrumental phrases in the response part, while others shorten the response and rush the vocal lines. Another common variation, which developed as the blues became popularized, is to crowd a rhymed couplet into the first line of the pattern illustrated above, eliminating the instrumental response; the second and third lines then become another rhymed couplet, which serves as a refrain repeated in every stanza. These and other variations on the form are illustrated in the songs on this album.

Blues did not long remain purely a folk music. Early in this century professional traveling entertainers in the South, many of them women, began to incorporate blues into their stage acts. In 1912 the first blues sheet music appeared, and very shortly the blues moved into the mainstream of white popular music as well as southern white folk music. In 1920 the first blues record by a black vocalist appeared, initiating a flood of thousands of commercial recordings that continues today. These popularizing trends took place in a historical context of increasing migration of rural southern blacks to the northern urban centers. Blues have

continued to flourish in the ghettos, mainly among people with strong and recent ties to the South. Hastened by the hit and star system of the record industry, a series of new performance styles grew up, containing elements that reminded the listener of the South but also reflecting the increasing sophistication and complexity of city life. Styles emanating from the cities had an influence on southern rural blues singers through records and through the recording artists' personal appearances, while at the same time the urban blues scene was nourished by a steady stream of new performers arriving from "down home."

The blues on this album, all from commercial recordings, illustrate the major styles in which blues were performed from the turn of the century to the outbreak of World War II. Side One contains styles already in existence at the advent of recording, including examples of early white folk and popular-blues styles. Side Two presents styles that developed or came into prominence largely after or as a result of commercial recording. Examples of the kinds of folk songs that influenced the blues are found in *Roots of the Blues* (New World Records 80252-2), while developments after World War II are illustrated in *Straighten Up and Fly Right: Rhythm and Blues, from the Close of the Swing Era to the Dawn of Rock 'n' Roll* (NW 261).

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## THE RECORDINGS

### Side One

#### Band 1

##### *Peach Tree Blues*

(Yank Rachell)

Yank Rachell, vocal and guitar; Sonny Boy Williamson, harmonica; Alfred Elkins, washtub bass; Washboard Sam, washboard. *Recorded December 11, 1941, in Chicago. Originally issued on Bluebird B-9033.*

Much of the apparent freedom in blues singing is attributable to the origin of the blues vocal in the field holler. "Peach Tree Blues" is sung in a hollering style that features descending melismatic phrases and variants of a single melodic line repeated throughout the song in a litany style. The song's theme is rural, with lyrics such as a farm worker might compose. The imagery at one level describes a work situation but at a deeper level suggests lovemaking.

The style of the holler is especially close to the vocalizing style of the savanna region of West Africa to the north of the coastal rain forest. Many slaves were taken from this area to the New World, and they have left their imprint on various forms of Afro-American music. West African characteristics also figure in Yank Rachell's guitar playing, with its insistent repeated phrases at the ends of vocal lines and its neutral third or "blue note" actually built into the tuning. The bass is made by inverting a washtub or large can and attaching a string to its bottom center. A stick is propped against the bottom rim and attached to the other end of the string. The player plucks the string, varying its tautness to change the pitch. This instrument is derived from the

"earth bow" played in many African societies. The washboard is an American adaptation of the scraping percussion instruments found in Africa, and even the harmonica is played in a style that seems to recapture the tone of African reed instruments from the savanna region. The shift between duple and triple rhythms that occurs throughout this piece also recalls the polyrhythmic basis of much African music. All these Old World characteristics have been incorporated here into the distinctly American blues song form.

James "Yank" Rachell was born in 1908 and raised on his father's farm near Brownsville, Tennessee. He learned to play mandolin, guitar, harmonica, and fiddle as a boy, and as he grew up he teamed with local musicians like guitarist Sleepy John Estes and harmonica player John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. All three made a number of popular blues records in the thirties and forties. "Peach Tree Blues" was one of the more popular of over thirty songs Rachell had recorded by the beginning of World War II. Its thematically coherent and developed text makes it a more deliberate composition than most field hollers, but it still preserves the basic musical approach of the older form. Rachell has lived in Indianapolis since 1955. He continued to play with Estes (now deceased) and in recent years has appeared at several concerts and recorded a number of albums.

Don't them peaches look mellow  
hanging way up in your tree?  
(Repeat)

I like your peaches so well, they  
have taken effect on me.

I'm gon' get my stepladder, babe,

I'm gon' climb up on your top  
limb.

I'm gon' get my stepladder, I'm  
gon' climb up on your top  
limb.

If I get a bunch of your yellow  
peaches, you know it's gon' be  
too bad, Jim,  
(Spoken) Yes, yes, yes.

Every time I start to climb your  
tree, babe, I wonder what make  
you smile. (Repeat)

You want me to climb up your  
tree ever since you was a child.

#### Band 2

##### *Brownskin Woman*

Pillie Bolling, vocal and guitar. *Recorded April 20, 1930, in Atlanta. Originally issued on Columbia 14654-D.*

Pillie Bolling is one of the many self-accompanied folk-blues singers who played in the southern small towns and rural communities in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The success of Blind Lemon Jefferson, a guitar-playing blues singer from Texas who was first recorded in 1926, led the phonograph companies to record dozens of these performers in the next few years. A few, like Jefferson, Charley Patton, and Barbecue Bob Hicks, recorded extensively, but most had only one or two brief sessions and then returned to play a local circuit or fade into obscurity. They played mostly for house parties and at juke joints in the towns or out in the country. Some played on the streets or traveled seasonally with minstrel shows and medicine shows. Bolling, one of the more obscure players, recorded only four blues. Nineteen-thirty was an inauspicious time to begin a recording

career, as the Depression had cut record sales drastically and many of the companies would soon go out of business. Evidently Bolling performed locally around Greenville, Alabama, as on two of his other recordings he was accompanied by Ed Bell ("Barefoot Bill"), another guitarist from there. Bell became a preacher and died some years ago, but Bolling was recently reported still living in Mobile.

Except for one stanza, "Brownskin Woman" is in the standard AAB form. The musical lines, however, are lengthened by stretching out the guitar phrases that respond to the singing. This tendency is characteristic of folk blues. Like Bolling, many performers were content to only approximate the twelve-bar stanza pattern, and the looseness of their approach gives their songs a spontaneous quality often lacking in more commercialized recordings. Bolling sings traditional blues verses, most of them used by countless other singers in various combinations with other traditional lines and stanzas. In the typical manner of folk blues he builds up a set of contrasts in the words of the song, in this case between his having "the finest woman" and her unwillingness to come home, and between his love for her and his desire to "ramble 'round." These thoughts are interspersed with lines about the blues themselves.

I got a brownskin woman, she's all right with me. *(Repeat)*

Got the finest woman that a man most ever seen.

Lord, I can't stay here, and my lover gone. *(Repeat)*

Sometimes I wonder; my brownskin, she won't come home.

Too old to marry, too young to settle down. *(Repeat)*

Lord, I done quit work, babe; I b'lieve I'll ramble 'round.

Lord, these my blues; I love to sing my song.

Lord, these my blues; swear I love to sing my song.

I got a brownskin woman, Lord, and she won't come home.

*(Spoken)* Lord, babe, I'm worried now; sure won't be worried long.

Lord, it's some folks say the worried blues ain't bad.

Lord, it's some people say that the worried blues ain't bad.

*(Repeat)*

Lord, the worst old feeling that a man most ever had.

Have you ever lied down with your good gal on your mind?

*(Repeat)*

I got a brownskin woman, keeps me bothered all the time.

Hear the freight train hollering, coming 'round the bend.

*(Repeat)*

You ain't had no loving since the God knows when.

### **Band 3**

#### *Violin Blues*

The Johnson Boys: T. C. Johnson, guitar; Nap Hayes, vocal and violin; Matthew Prater, mandolin.

*Recorded February 15, 1928, in Memphis. Originally issued on Okeh 8708.*

The violin and string-band traditions in black folk music go back to the nineteenth century. The fiddle and banjo were the usual nucleus of the nineteenth-century string band, a combination popularized through the blackface minstrel stage tradition

of white performers imitating and adapting black music. Black and southern white string bands incorporated the guitar and mandolin around the beginning of the twentieth century, and among blacks the banjo gradually dropped out of most string bands. Many of these groups also had a bass fiddle or a home-made one-string bass (Side One, Band 1; Side Two, Band 7). By the thirties the harmonica began replacing the fiddle in black groups. The white string-band tradition, with fiddle and banjo, continues today, but among southern blacks this style declined by the forties.

"Violin Blues" illustrates a fully developed string-band style of blues, with Nap Hayes's violin reproducing many of the inflections of the human voice as well as providing some fine double-stopping. The musicians here play in a regularized twelve-bar pattern without any spontaneous extensions such as were found in Pillie Bolling's blues (Side One, Band 2). String bands tend to keep to these formal patterns in order to coordinate their playing, and improvisation occurred only within the piece's set framework. Such groups probably played an important role in standardizing the blues form.

With a somewhat shifting personnel, groups led by T. C. Johnson recorded thirteen pieces in Memphis in 1928. Scattered references and recollections indicate that this group was known in Memphis and Vicksburg. Possibly they were one of the many bands that played in the towns along the Mississippi, on the riverboats, and in the lowland farms country of the Mississippi Delta. Groups like this often played in cities, and in Memphis and

Louisville in particular they often used a jug for a bass instrument, calling themselves jug bands rather than simply string bands. Sometimes they would play for large black picnics or for parties given by local whites. These bands were made up of more technically accomplished musicians with a large and varied repertoire and usually got higher pay than single blues artists.

"Violin Blues" is essentially a slow dance tune without a lengthy vocal part. In the last line of each stanza the musicians illustrate their versatility by playing a ragtime chord progression.

Oh, my baby don't treat me good  
no more. *(Repeat)*  
When I was sick and down, she  
drove me from her door.

I just found out why my baby  
treats me so unkind. *(Repeat)*  
When she go to bed every night,  
she tells everything what's on  
her mind.  
*(Spoken)* Violin, sing the blues  
for me.

*(Spoken)* Pick it low, boys, pick  
it low.

#### Band 4

##### *What's the Matter Now?*

Monarch Jazz Quartet of Norfolk: unaccompanied vocal quartet, personnel unknown. *Recorded October 16, 1929, in Richmond, Virginia. Originally issued on Okeh 8736.*

Like the string band, the vocal quartet used the blues and helped to regularize it. Harmony singing by vocal groups became very popular in the eighteen-nineties, when the blues were being created, and such groups remain a feature of black music today. In the early decades of this

century many of these groups sang both religious and secular material, calling themselves alternately jubilee or jazz quartets. The present group used both appellations on its five issued records. The singers truly sound like a vocal version of a small jazz band of the twenties, with interlocking parts and a variety of tonal colors. The lead role is shared among the singers rather than performed by a single voice.

Little research has been done on the early quartets—their members, their history, the places where they performed. The present group probably identified themselves as from Norfolk because of the earlier success on records of the Norfolk Jubilee/Jazz Quartet. In fact, the other group recorded a version of this song earlier in 1929. The verses are all traditional, but they probably were drawn for this composition from a number of recently popular blues records. The recurring chorus is found in Blind Lemon Jefferson's 1927 record of "Black Snake Moan," while other stanzas were heard in Victoria Spivey's 1926 "Black Snake Blues" and Bessie Smith's 1927 "Back Water Blues."

Eating and drinking all night  
long down at jubilee dance.

Oh, what is the matter now now  
now, now, boys, now, now now  
now?

Singing, oh, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now?  
Told me late last night I don't  
need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how.

Tell me, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now  
now?  
Lord, hear me singing, what is

the matter now now now, now  
now now  
Told me late last night I don't  
need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how.

And I went and stood upon  
some high old lonesome hill.  
*(Repeat)*  
And I looked down, mama,  
where I used to live.

Tell me, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now  
now?  
Lord, what is the matter now  
now now, now now now?  
Told me late last night I don't  
need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how.

Said I'd rather be a catfish, swim-  
ming in that deep blue, 'hind a  
submarine, boys, under a float-  
ing boat,  
Said I'd rather be a catfish, swim-  
ming in that deep blue sea, da  
da, dee dee dee,  
Than to stay around here treated  
like they want to do poor me,  
dee dee, dee dee dee.

Singing, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now  
now?  
Lord, what is the matter now  
now now, now now now?  
She told me late last night I don't  
need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how.

Do you see that spider crawling  
'side the wall-wall, wall-wall?  
*(Repeat)*  
He's crawling up there to get his  
ashes hauled-hauled, hauled-  
hauled.

Singing, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now  
now?  
Lord, what is the matter now  
now now, now now now?  
Told me late last night I don't

need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how.

Now my gal done quit me, and  
she talks all over town town,  
town, pretty mama.  
And my gal done quit me, the  
talk's all over town town, town  
town town.  
She'll run and tell everybody that  
she done turned me down  
down, down.

Singing, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now  
now?  
Lord, Lord, what is the matter  
now now now, now now now?  
She told me late last night I don't  
need no mama nohow-how,  
how-how, how-how, how-how.

#### Band 5

##### *Yodeling Blues*

Buck Mountain Band: probably  
Earl Edwards, vocal and guitar;  
Van Edwards, fiddle; Wade Ward,  
banjo. *Recorded October 16,  
1929, in Richmond, Virginia.  
Originally issued on Okeh  
45428, Clarion 5292-C, and  
Velvet Tone 2358-V.*

Although this piece was record-  
ed at the same session as the pre-  
ceding, no two blues could be  
more different. "Yodeling Blues"  
illustrates the complete absorp-  
tion of the blues form into the  
southern Anglo-American folk-  
music tradition. Southern whites  
undoubtedly heard blacks sing  
the blues almost from the very  
beginning, and whites them-  
selves were singing and compos-  
ing them several years before  
World War I. Black railroad work-  
ers and itinerant bands carried  
the blues up into the  
Appalachians, where there was  
only a tiny resident black popula-  
tion, so even the mountain  
whites did not remain untouched

by this musical influence.

The Buck Mountain Band, with  
its somewhat varying personnel,  
was from the mountain town of  
Galax, Virginia, in one of the  
heartlands of Anglo-American  
folk-music tradition. Many fine  
performers emerged from this  
area, and for many years the  
town has actively promoted tra-  
ditional music through an annual  
old-fiddlers' convention.

In 1915 W. C. Handy had copy-  
righted a version of this song (as  
"The Hesitating Blues"), which  
led to its great popularity, but it  
was already a traditional piece  
before Handy arranged it. The  
present singer has localized the  
piece to Galax and added new  
lyrics that make the singer  
appear to want all the women in  
his girlfriend's family. The chord  
changes in the accompaniment  
are unusual for a blues though  
not inappropriate for this song.  
They probably indicate that the  
blues were not a familiar form to  
this mountain band. In fact, blues  
were only a small part of the  
group's repertoire, which ranged  
over dance tunes, ballads, senti-  
mental songs, lyric folk songs,  
and religious pieces.

The yodeling refrain was intro-  
duced into the blues in 1927 by  
Jimmie Rodgers, a white singer  
from Mississippi, who recorded a  
number of very popular "blue  
yodels." The yodel itself is from  
German/Swiss tradition by way  
of the American popular stage or  
early popular recordings, but its  
use in the blues may have been  
suggested by the falsetto singing  
and whooping sometimes heard  
in black folk blues and field  
hollers. Blues enjoyed continued  
popularity in southern white  
music in the thirties through  
recordings by a host of blues  
yodelers in the Rodgers style and  
through jazz-influenced perfor-  
mances by western-swing bands.

In the forties and fifties blues  
formed an important part of the  
honky-tonk and rockabilly styles.  
(NW 287, *Country Music: South  
and West*, contains two perfor-  
mances by Jimmie Rodgers as  
well as examples of western  
swing and honky-tonk.)

Rather be on the mountain sit-  
ting on a log  
Than to be in Galax treated like  
a dog.  
Tell me how long have I got to  
wait?  
Can I get you now? Must I hesi-  
tate?  
(*Yodel*)  
I've got a girl; she got a sister  
too.  
If I don't get her, I know what I'll  
do.  
Tell me.

If I don't get her, don't want any  
at all.  
Not after the girl but the mother-  
in-law.  
Tell me.

These rocks in the mountain just  
as big as the sea.  
That Galax girl made a fool out  
of me.  
And tell me....

Went down to the river to jump  
in and drown.  
Seen my woman smile, and I  
couldn't go down.  
Tell me.

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#### Band 6

##### *Doggone My Good-Luck Soul*

Hattie Hudson, vocal; Willie  
Tyson, piano. *Recorded  
December 6, 1927, in Dallas.  
Originally issued on Columbia  
14279-D.*

Most of the early stage singers of blues were women. Very few of them played an instrument, but instead they were usually accompanied by a pianist or a small jazz band. Often their songs were composed by songwriters, and the singers usually included a great amount of nonblues material in their repertoires. They sang in vaudeville theaters, in cabarets, saloons, and tent shows, and at private parties. During the twenties a number achieved great fame as recording artists. Nothing is known about Hattie Hudson, and she recorded only two songs, but she is representative of the wealth of talent that could be heard during this period. Probably she sang locally in the Dallas area, and she never achieved the fame of her contemporaries based in the northern cities and recording centers. Willie Tyson is equally unknown. He contributed a number of fine accompaniments to several blues singers and recorded two piano solos that were never issued. Most pianists who accompanied women blues singers were content to play unimaginative lines at a slow tempo, letting the singer take the spotlight. Tyson's playing on this piece is unusual for its liveliness and general excellence.

"Doggone My Good-Luck Soul" is an answer to "Bad Luck Blues," recorded in October, 1926, by Blind Lemon Jefferson. His piece uses a similar melody, with the refrain "Doggone my bad-luck soul." From her spoken introduction it would appear that Hattie Hudson was trying to give the impression that she was the pianist and that she was related to Jefferson. Her attempt was foiled by Columbia, which printed Willie Tyson's name as the pianist on the record label. The

lyrics are largely traditional and were probably arranged by Hudson herself.

*(Spoken)* Oh, play that thing,  
Miss Jefferson.

The time ain't long now.

I've got a gold horseshoe, going  
to put it on my door.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, put it on my door.  
Bad luck has gone from here, it  
can't come back no more.

Oh, Lord, I just got lucky, I  
believe I'll bet and win.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, believe I'll bet and win.  
The man I've got right now, took  
him from my best friend.

Oh, mama, I can't be good; Lord, I  
believe I'll just quit trying.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, believe I'll just quit trying.  
I don't live in the country, on  
paved streets all the time.

Been with my same little sugar  
just ten long years today.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, ten long years today.  
And if he should quit loving me,  
I'll throw myself away.

Oh, poor little rabbit, you can  
hop all in my yard.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, hop all in my yard.  
I ain't going to take your feet nor  
fill your head with stars.

Oh, where's the mean for-  
tuneteller and the black cat  
that failed?

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, the black cat that failed.  
Come around to see me in the  
morning, I'm carrying keys to  
the jail.

I got three good men, but it's  
two more in my way.

Doggone my good-luck soul!  
Hey, two more in my way.  
And if this good luck don't leave  
me, I'll love myself away.

**Band 7**

## *Let's Get Loose*

(Gray)

Clara Smith, vocal; Ed Allen, cor-  
net; unknown clarinet and piano.  
*Recorded December 31, 1929,  
in New York. Originally issued  
on Columbia 14497-D.*

Most of the great jazz musicians  
of the twenties recorded some of  
their finest work as accompa-  
nists, and many jazz bands made  
frequent appearances with  
women vocalists. In 1920 the  
first blues recordings by a black  
singer, Mamie Smith, were  
accompanied by a band, and the  
style remained popular through  
the decade. The best perfor-  
mances have come to be known  
as "classic blues" among critics  
and record collectors.

Little is known about Clara  
Smith, although she was an  
immensely popular recording  
artist whose career lasted from  
1923 to 1932. She has been  
reported as having been born in  
1885 or 1895 in Spartanburg,  
South Carolina. By 1918 she was  
a star on the black theater cir-  
cuit. During her recording career  
she was billed as "the world's  
champion moaner," and she was  
a rival of such other great singers  
as Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith,  
Trixie Smith (none of them relat-  
ed), Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, Alberta  
Hunter, Bertha "Chippie" Hill,  
Victoria Spivey, and Lucille  
Hegamin. Clara Smith died in  
Detroit in 1935 while living in  
retirement. Carl Van Vechten  
described her performance style  
in a March, 1926, article in  
*Vanity Fair*:



Her voice flutters agonizingly between tones. Music critics would say that she sings off the key. What she really does, of course, is to sing quarter tones. Thus she is justifiably billed as the "World's greatest moaner."....As she comes upon the stage through folds of electric blue hangings at the back, she is wrapped in a black evening cloak bordered with white fur. She does not advance, but hesitates, turning her face in profile. The pianist is playing the characteristic strain of the Blues. Clara begins to sing. . . . Her tones become poignantly pathetic; tears roll down her cheeks. . . . Her voice dies away in a mournful wail of pain and she buries her head in the curtains.... Clara Smith's tones uncannily take on the colour of the saxophone; again of the clarinet. Her voice is powerful or melancholy, by turn. It tears the blood from one's heart.

"Let's Get Loose" is hardly a melancholy song, but it does display Smith's great vocal expressiveness while illustrating the lighter side of the blues. Like almost all her hundred and ten issued recordings, it was composed by someone else, in this case a songwriter named Gray. The lyrics, which are simply an invitation to have a good time, contain many phrases from the slang of the Roaring Twenties.

Got a feeling that I can't define,  
Like a snake was crawling up my spine.  
Had my drink of gin, so now I feel  
I can do more wiggling than an eel.  
Honey, let's get loose; oh, let's get loose.  
Come along with me,  
We will make whoopee.  
Honey, let's get loose.

When the bulldog chased the

pussycat,  
What the tomcat done was tight like that.  
Don't you tell me that my man ain't tight.  
If he ain't, a snake ain't got no bite.  
Oh, let's get loose; honey, let's get loose.  
Come along with me,...

Never walk without my walking cane.  
Want to ride, 'tain't gon' be no train.  
Met a redheaded bowlegged man today;  
Bound to get his goat when I get my pay.  
Let's get loose; oh, let's get loose.  
Come along with me,...

If I get too weak, understand,  
I can get fixed up with a monkey gland.  
At the Tinware Ball they all's on hand.  
Mister Mule walked in and showed his can  
And hollered, "Let's get loose; oh, let's get loose.  
Come along with me,  
We will make whoopee,  
And let's get loose."

#### **Band 8**

#### *Nigger Blues* (Leroy "Lasses" White)

George O'Connor, vocal; unknown trumpets, trombone, tuba, and clarinet, with simulated train noises. *Recorded July 18, 1916, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia A-2064.*

Blues sheet music was first published in 1912, and by 1914 white singers began making commercial blues recordings. Through the twenties some of the biggest names in stage enter-

tainment, like Morton Harvey, Al Bernard, Marie Cahill, Marion Harris, Dolly Kay, and Sophie Tucker, recorded blues, usually accompanied by bands playing watered-down jazz. Even so, this music was often considered radical, and the blues were an important influence on popular culture in the twenties.

"Nigger Blues" was composed in Dallas in 1912 by Leroy "Lasses" White, a blackface minstrel entertainer, and published the following year. It was probably the first twelve-bar blues to be published. Its tune and lyrics are traditional, and White's role was probably simply that of arranger. The tune is full of syncopation, though George O'Connor's delivery is a bit stiff at times, indicating perhaps some unfamiliarity with this new type of music. The vocal and instrumental lines contain both the major and minor third rather than attempting neutral thirds ("blue notes"). This remained a characteristic of popular white handling of the blues during this period. The accompanying group on this record was a typical studio band, and the simulated train noises were a common novelty effect on records. "Nigger Blues" entered the southern black and white folk repertoire and was recorded under a variety of titles.

George H. O'Connor (1874-1946) was a prominent Washington lawyer and businessman who had a second career as an entertainer. He specialized in dialect material, particularly Negro character songs. In fact, the blues that he and other white singers recorded were probably perceived by the popular audience not as a separate musical form but simply as part of the long-standing tradition of minstrel pieces, coon songs, and

vocal ragtime. Ethnic character types, including the Anglo-American rube, were common subjects of popular songs and stage entertainment for most of the nineteenth century and through the nineteen-twenties. O'Connor recorded many such pieces between 1914 and 1918. He entertained at banquets and parties in the Washington area up to the time of his death and was a favorite of nine presidents, from McKinley to Truman.

Oh, the blues ain't nothing, oh,  
the blues ain't nothing but a  
good man feeling bad.  
Oh, the blues ain't nothing but a  
good man feeling bad.  
Oh, that's a feeling that I've often  
had.

You can call the blues, you can  
call the blues any old thing you  
please.  
You can call the blues any old  
thing you please.  
But the blues ain't nothing but  
the doggone heart disease.

When a man gets blue, when a  
man gets blue, he takes a train  
and rides.  
When a man gets blue, he takes a  
train and rides.  
When a woman gets blue, she  
hangs her little head and cries.

Oh, yonder comes, oh, yonder  
comes the train coming down  
the track.  
Oh, yonder comes the train com-  
ing down the track  
To take me away, but it ain't  
gwine to bring me back.

Oh, when I die, oh, when I die,  
honey, honey, don't you wear  
no black.  
Oh, when I die, honey, don't you  
wear no black,  
'Cause if you do, my ghost will  
come sneaking back.

I'm gwine to lay my head, I'm  
gwine to lay my head down on  
some railroad line.

I'm gwine to lay my head down  
on some railroad line.

Let the Santa Fe try to pacify my  
mind.

#### Side Two Band 1

### *Dad's Ole Mule* (Charles and Effie Tyus)

Tyus and Tyus (Charles and Effie Tyus), vocals; unknown cornet and piano. *Recorded August 31, 1931, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 14638-D.*

The man-woman duet was popular on stage and in recordings in both white and black music in the early decades of the century. These teams usually played out some version of the battle of the sexes or performed other novelty pieces, often combining their singing with dancing and comedy routines. Most of their songs were ragtime vocals, which preceded the blues in mass popularity, but these acts incorporated some blues by the twenties or perhaps even earlier. Butterbeans and Susie, Grant and Wilson, and George Williams and Bessie Brown were among the more popular black duets, performing in theaters and tent shows as well as having successful recording careers.

Nothing is known about Charles and Effie Tyus, though they must have been fairly popular, as they recorded twelve issued pieces from 1924 to 1931. "Dad's Ole Mule" belongs to a class of folk songs about this obstinate creature, which was so important to the southern farmer. It is the kind of novelty piece that the man-woman teams

often recorded. Here it is given a blues arrangement. The cornet player provides some of the finest solo work ever recorded on that instrument, and one would very much like to know his identity. He uses a mute on his horn after the third stanza.

When I was a lad, dad had a  
mule.  
He was so devilish, I couldn't  
ride to school.  
He acted just like he didn't have  
no sense.  
Put a saddle on his back, he  
jumped a ten-foot fence.  
Oh, dad's old mule. (You couldn't  
put the saddle on.)  
Dad's old mule. (You couldn't  
put the saddle on.)  
He wouldn't let you put it on;  
you couldn't put the saddle on  
Dad's old mule, dad's old mule.

Dad's old mule, name was Pete.  
He had long ears and great big  
feet.  
He'd creep around like he's  
almost dead;  
Put a saddle on his back, he'd  
kick a knot on your head.  
When I was young way down  
south,  
I saw dad's mule kick his pipe  
out 'f his mouth.  
I got in his way while I was out  
at play;  
He kicked me so hard, I thought  
'twas judgment day.  
Oh, dad's old mule...

Dad's mule was so poor, he was  
thin as a rail;  
The biggest thing about him was  
his head and tail.  
If you'd put a saddle on that old  
hound,  
He'd haul off and kick his stable  
down.  
He was so old, he didn't have a  
tooth.  
That old mule was too uncouth.  
He kicked dad so hard, he turned

black and blue.  
Just the wind from his foot give  
dad the flu.  
Oh, dad's old mule....

Whenever dad wanted to have  
fun,  
He tried to ride that old son of a  
gun.  
That old mule would kick up so  
much dirt,  
All you could see was dad's old  
red shirt.  
Dad's old mule was awful mean,  
The meanest old mule I ever  
seen.  
He kicked dad so high one after-  
noon,  
I thought dad was the man in  
the moon.  
Oh, dad's old mule....

Dad loved his mule, hair and  
hide.  
He kept him forty years until he  
died.  
He lived so long till his head got  
bald.  
I thought that old devil wouldn't  
die at all.  
When dad's mule laid down and  
died,  
He made a pair of boots out of  
his old hide.  
But his old hide was so hard and  
tough,  
Dad couldn't wear his boots  
when he strut his stuff.  
Oh, dad's old mule....

Hee, haw, hee, haw, dad's old  
mule.

## Band 2

### *Keep It Clean*

Rufus and Ben Quillian: Rufus  
Quillian, vocal and piano; Ben  
Quillian, vocal; James McCrary,  
vocal and guitar. *Recorded April  
23, 1930, in Atlanta. Originally  
issued on Columbia 14560-D.*

In 1928 Tampa Red and Georgia

Tom recorded a blues called "It's  
Tight Like That," which became  
immensely popular and opened  
a flood of recordings of "hokum"  
blues songs that lasted well into  
the thirties. These pieces usually  
featured humorous and sexually  
suggestive lyrics about "it" or  
"that stuff" and were set to a live-  
ly beat provided by a combina-  
tion such as two guitars or guitar  
and piano. Most of the songs had  
refrains, often sung in two or  
three-part harmony. Hokum  
blues were essentially party  
music for dancing and good  
times. In social terms they could  
be viewed as an escape from the  
troubles that many blacks experi-  
enced during the Depression.

The brothers Rufus and Ben  
Quillian, along with James  
McCrary, were from Gainesville,  
Georgia, but they moved to  
Atlanta in the twenties. Rufus  
Quillian (1900-1946) was a  
pianist (he learned to play  
through a correspondence  
course), a songwriter, and the  
leader of a vocal group called the  
Blue Harmony Boys, which  
included Ben Quillian and James  
McCrary. The group performed  
at dances and parties and had a  
radio show for a time. Rufus  
moved to California in 1939 and  
continued his musical career  
there. He composed many  
hokum blues as well as ragtime  
pieces and even gospel songs.  
McCrary died not long after  
Rufus. Ben Quillian, born in  
1907, moved to St. Louis in 1933  
and was recently reported still  
living there. He joined the  
church long ago and sings only  
religious songs now.

Listen here, folks, what I've got  
to tell.  
You know good and doggone  
well,  
You got to keep it clean, yes,  
keep it clean.

Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

My gal's got a room, and it sure is  
nice.

I've been around there more  
than twice,  
'Cause she keeps it clean, yeah,  
she keeps it  
clean.

Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

Paint and powder may be all  
right,  
But take your bath on Saturday  
night.  
You got to keep it clean. Hot  
mama, won't you keep it clean?  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

Old Aunt Susie is old and tough,  
But still she keeps on selling that  
stuff,  
Because she keeps it clean, oh,  
yeah, she keeps it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

She's got good trade, but it's all  
worn out,  
And I'm a-gonna tell you what  
it's all about.  
You know, she keeps it clean,  
yeah, she keeps it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

We all get dirty now and then,  
But just to stay dirty is a doggone  
sin.  
Oh, won't you keep it clean, hot  
mama, won't you keep it clean?  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

I got a little gal that's just all  
right.  
I don't mind seeing her every  
night,

Because she keeps it clean, yeah,  
she keeps it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

Old Uncle Henry was a natural-  
born fool.  
He never spent a doggone day in  
school.  
But he keeps it clean, oh, yes, he  
keeps it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

When my gal works, she don't  
raise no steam.  
She's sweeter than peaches with  
lots of cream.  
Oh, yeah, she keeps it clean, oh,  
she keeps it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

You can have my silver, you can  
have my gold,  
But listen here, mama, while I get  
you told.  
You got to keep it clean, hot  
mama, got to keep it clean.  
Everybody wants it when it's  
good and clean.

### Band 3

#### *Blue Night Blues*

(Leroy Carr)

Leroy Carr, vocal and piano;  
Francis "Scrapper" Blackwell, gui-  
tar. *Recorded August 14, 1934,  
in New York. Originally issued  
on Vocalion 03233.*

While hokum blues represent-  
ed a form of escape from the  
Depression, there was another  
style that more closely reflected  
the melancholy mood of that  
period. This was the slow blues  
with guitar-and-piano accompa-  
niment, typically on a theme of  
lost love or hard times. The lyrics  
were usually original composi-  
tions containing many poetic

turns of phrase and sung in a sin-  
cere, wistful manner; the piano  
was usually played in a gently  
rolling and harmonic style cross-  
cut by biting guitar lines. The  
style was first popularized by  
Leroy Carr and Scrapper Black-  
well, who recorded over a hun-  
dred blues from 1928 to 1935.  
They had many imitators and  
admirers, among the most suc-  
cessful of whom were Bumble  
Bee Slim (Amos Easten) and Bill  
Gaither (who recorded as  
"Leroy's Buddy").

Carr was born in Nashville in  
1905 but moved to Indianapolis  
as a child. As a young man he  
learned to play the piano, ran off  
with a circus, served in the army  
in Arizona, married and had a  
daughter, did a stretch in prison  
for bootlegging, worked as a  
laborer, and made music among  
the fast-life crowd at parties and  
speakeasies in Indianapolis. His  
first record, "How Long—How  
Long Blues," propelled him and  
Blackwell to instant national  
fame, and a string of hits fol-  
lowed, many of them distin-  
guished for their fine poetry and  
interesting melodies. Carr's suc-  
cess only served to exacerbate  
his personal problems, and he  
died at the age of thirty from  
nephritis, the result of excessive  
drinking.

Blackwell was born in  
Syracuse, North Carolina, in 1903  
of partly Cherokee ancestry and,  
like Carr, also moved to India-  
napolis as a child. He learned to  
play guitar from local musicians  
but developed a tone and phras-  
ing all his own. He was also an  
accomplished pianist and singer.  
Following Carr's death Blackwell  
restricted his musical career to  
occasional local appearances at  
parties and taverns. In the late  
fifties he was rediscovered by  
Indianapolis blues enthusiasts  
and recorded a couple of LPs. He

died in a shooting scrape in 1962  
when he was perhaps on the  
verge of a successful second  
musical career in the folk-revival  
circuit.

I been sitting here blue all night,  
baby, and I'm dissatisfied.  
I been sitting here blue all night,  
and I'm dissatisfied.  
I sometimes feel like catching  
me, catching me a train and tak-  
ing a ride.

Seems like bad luck is on me, fol-  
lows me everywhere I go.  
(Repeat)  
Think I'll leave this bad luck  
town. I don't care where I go.

I can't make no money. My  
woman she just won't act right.  
I can't make no money. My  
woman just won't act right.  
Every time I see her, she wants  
to do nothing but fuss and  
fight.

I just feel dissatisfied, baby, now  
sometimes don't know what to  
do.  
I just feel dissatisfied, baby.  
Sometimes I don't know what  
to do.  
Have you ever had that same  
feeling, babe, to come over  
you?  
Well, I ain't going to worry, ain't  
gonna sit and sigh.  
Well, I ain't gonna worry, ain't  
gonna sit and sigh.  
That's all I've got to say, old  
friends. Fare you well, good-  
bye.

### Band 4

#### *House Lady Blues*

Walter Roland, vocal and piano.  
*Recorded July 19, 1933, in New  
York. Originally issued on  
Banner 32832, Melotone M-  
12762, Oriole 8257, Perfect  
0252, and Romeo 5257.*

For most of the twenties the dominant black piano styles were ragtime and stride or else a usually ponderous and unimaginative style for accompanying blues vocalists. At the end of 1928 Clarence "Pine Top" Smith recorded a number of pieces, including the famous "Pine Top's Boogie Woogie," and there soon followed a host of recordings by other singer-pianists who played in a strong two-fisted boogie-woogie or barrelhouse style. This style was nurtured in the juke joints in southern lumber and levee camps and at rent parties in the towns and cities of the South and North. Many of the players were itinerant and made only a handful of recordings, but a few, like Roosevelt Sykes and Peetie Wheatstraw (William Bunch), had successful recording careers extending through the thirties or even later. Others, like Walter Davis and Curtis Jones, combined elements of barrelhouse with the gentler approach of Leroy Carr (Side Two, Band 3) and his followers and had equally successful careers.

Little is known about Walter Roland, although he recorded over three dozen issued titles from 1933 to 1935 and was on many more records as an accompanist to Sonny Scott and Bessie Jackson (Lucille Bogan). These musicians were all from Birmingham, and it is likely that Roland remained there or played a local circuit rather than seeking greater fame through traveling. He was part of a tradition of fine piano players from that city that included Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport, Jabo Williams, and Robert McCoy. Roland was also an accomplished guitarist and played that instrument on several of his recordings. "Red Cross Blues," his first record,

made under the pseudonym of Alabama Sam, was his biggest hit and has become a blues standard. His "House Lady Blues," also a hit, nicely captures both the music and the mood of a rent party. These were usually put on just before the rent was due by the lady of the house, who sold food and drinks and sometimes charged a small admission price. She hired a pianist and usually gave him all the refreshments he wanted, although a few tried to be stingy, like the subject of Roland's song. This piece illustrates an important role of the blues singer as someone who can shape opinion in the community through praise or censure in his or her songs.

Says, it's hey, house lady, seems like you hard to hear.

Says, hey, house lady, seem like you hard to hear.

Well, if you is not got no whiskey, say, bring me just one bottle of your beer.

Says, hey, house lady, please, ma'am, don't get bad. *(Repeat)*

I just wants another little drink of that stuff what I just now had.

Says, hey, house lady, say, you sure do treat me mean. *(Repeat)*

Say, you treats me just like that I is not no human being.

Says, I been sitting here playing, mama, for the whole night long.

Says, hey, house lady, I been playing for you the whole night long.

And I says you is not even given me just one drink of corn.

#### **Band 5**

#### *I'm Cuttin' Out*

(Wilber "Joe" McCoy and Herb Morand)

Harlem Hamfats: Wilber "Joe" McCoy, vocal; Herb Morand, trumpet; Odell Rand, clarinet;

Horace Malcolm, piano; John Lindsay, string bass; Fred Flynn or Pearlis Williams, drums. *Recorded April 28, 1937, in Chicago. Originally issued on Decca 7351.*

Most jazz histories convey the impression that the classic New Orleans small jazz groups of the twenties either disappeared or were absorbed into big-band jazz during the thirties, only to be resuscitated by the "jazz revival" of the forties. Actually, traditional jazz was kept quite alive and well during the thirties by a younger generation of musicians who performed in groups like the Harlem Hamfats. But since these groups almost always featured blues vocalists, particularly male singers, they fail to fit the critics' and historians' stereotype of classic jazz and are also neglected by most blues fans and researchers because they sound too jazzy. The Hamfats did occupy a position between blues and jazz, as they consisted essentially of a Mississippi string band centered around the brothers Joe and Charlie McCoy and a New Orleans jazz section of four or five pieces. In "I'm Cuttin' Out" the jazz portion of the group is dominant, with the McCoy's presence restricted to a driving blues vocal by Joe. Groups like this can be viewed as the forerunners of the rhythm-and-blues combos that recorded in the forties and fifties with such singers as Eddie Vinson, Charles Brown, Jimmy Witherspoon, and Roy Milton.

Joe McCoy was originally from Jackson, Mississippi, where he played guitar in the twenties with other blues singers and string bands along with his brother Charlie, who was an excellent guitar and mandolin player. Joe had a long recording

career in a variety of formats. In 1929 he began recording with his wife as Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, based in Memphis and later in Chicago. They split up in 1934 after having made many fine records together featuring their distinctive two-guitar sound and good vocals by both singers. For the next couple of years Joe recorded as the "Mississippi Mudder" and "Georgia Pine Boy." He even got religion for a while and in 1935, as "Hallelujah Joe," recorded some sermons with singing. In 1936 he formed the Harlem Hamfats, and the group recorded seventy-five issued sides through 1939. McCoy was called "Hamfoot Ham" or "Hamfoot McCoy" on the labels. The group also accompanied many other blues singers, such as Johnnie Temple, Rosetta Howard, and Frankie "Half Pint" Jaxon. The band was actually based in Chicago rather than Harlem and performed blues mainly in the recording studio. According to Johnnie Temple, who often performed with the group, most of their live appearances were in taverns operated by Chicago gangsters, where they played mainly polkas and Italian music. In the early forties McCoy recorded as "Big Joe" in groups that featured him and Charlie along with string bass and washboard. Both McCoy brothers died in 1951. "I'm Cuttin' Out" is typical of the many hard-hitting and cynical blues recorded in the thirties that reflected the mood of the Depression.

Went down in the bottom trying to  
find my gal.  
I found her loving my best pal.  
She don't know, she don't know  
when she got enough,  
And I'm not going for that kind of  
stuff.

Now look here, gal. I know what it's  
all about,  
And now I am cutting out.  
You don't know, you don't know  
when you got enough,  
And I'm not going for that kind of  
stuff.

You wanted me and my buddy too.  
Listen here, woman, that will never  
do.  
You don't know, you know when  
you got enough,  
And I'm not going for that kind of  
stuff.

You's a dirty mother for you, you  
works too fast.  
Now get you another place to lay  
your yas yas yas.  
You don't know, don't know when  
you got enough,  
And I'm not going for that kind of  
stuff.

#### Band 6

### *Deep Blue Sea Blues*

(Tommy McClennan)

Tommy McClennan, vocal and  
guitar; unknown string bass.  
*Recorded September 15, 1941,  
in Chicago. Originally issued on  
Bluebird B-9005.*

The folk-blues tradition was kept alive in the thirties and early forties on records by such popular singer-guitarists as Blind Boy Fuller, Robert Johnson, Bukka White, and Tommy McClennan. Many of these artists, including McClennan, played a steel-bodied National guitar with a built-in resonator, which gave their playing greater volume than the old wood acoustic guitars. This instrument was a forerunner of the electric guitar that would be heard in blues of the forties and later.

Tommy McClennan was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi, in 1908 and by the thirties was performing blues there and around the

town of Greenwood, about fifty miles to the north. He was a real product of the Mississippi plantation system. When the white Chicago blues promoter Lester Melrose went down to Mississippi to get McClennan for his first recording session, the owner of the plantation where McClennan was working ran Melrose off. In *Big Bill Blues* the more sophisticated blues singer Big Bill Broonzy (Side Two, Band 7) recalls that McClennan didn't fit well into the Chicago social environment and tells that McClennan was driven from a party and his guitar smashed because he sang the word "nigger" in one of his songs. From 1939 to 1942 McClennan recorded forty blues, many of them hits. He sang in a rather frantic style that was uncompromisingly "country" and played a crude but driving guitar. He faded into obscurity during World War II, reportedly became an alcoholic, and died in the early sixties.

"Deep Blue Sea Blues" is a traditional Mississippi piece that was first recorded in March, 1941, by Robert Petway. McClennan and Petway were partners for many years around Greenwood and had developed such similar musical styles that many listeners took them to be brothers. Petway's recording was called "Catfish Blues," the title by which the song is best known today. Both versions were popular and influenced many postwar recordings of the piece by blues singers from Mississippi and elsewhere. The song features a highly distinctive melody with a remarkable range of two octaves.

*(Spoken)* I wants to make this one  
right now. It's the best one I got.

I'm gwine, babe, I'm gwine, and cry-  
ing won't make me stay.  
'Cause the more you cry now now,

baby, further you drive me away,  
further you drive me away, I  
mean, drive me away, further you  
drive me away.

Now I wish that I was a bullfrog  
swimming in the deep blue sea.  
Lord, I would have all these good-  
looking womens now now now  
fishing after me, fishing after, I  
mean, after, sure 'nough, after me.

Now I went to my baby's house and  
I sat down on her step.  
She said, "Walk on in now now,  
Tommy. My husband just now  
left, my husband just now, I  
mean, just now, sure 'nough, just  
now left. Oh, Lord, just now left,  
Lord, just now left."

Now ain't none of, none of my busi-  
ness, baby, but you know I know  
it ain't right.  
Stay with your kid man all day long  
and play sick on your husband at  
night, on your husband at night, I  
mean, your husband at night,  
sure 'nough, your husband at  
night. Oh, Lord, your husband at,  
oh, Lord, your husband at, oh,  
Lord, your husband at night.

*(Spoken)* Long time now!

Now Lord, oh, Lord, baby, hear me  
blow the blues.  
Darling, ain't got no bottom now  
now now in my last pair of  
shoes, in my last pair, in my last  
pair....

## **Band 7**

### *Love Me, Baby*

(John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson)

John Lee "Sonny Boy"  
Williamson, vocal and harmoni-  
ca; Big Bill Broonzy guitar; Blind  
John Davis, piano; Alfred Elkins,  
one-string bass. *Recorded July  
30, 1942, in Chicago. Originally  
issued on Bluebird 34-0713.*

This piece displays the Chicago  
blues sound popularized in the  
late forties and early fifties by

such artists as Muddy Waters,  
Howlin' Wolf, and Little Walter. In  
fact, "Love Me, Baby" sounds as if  
it could easily have been record-  
ed ten years later, the only clue to  
its earlier date being Sonny Boy  
Williamson's use of unamplified  
harmonica. The type of ensemble  
heard here became popular in  
the late thirties in southern juke  
joints and among recent migrants  
to the northern cities from the  
southern rural areas. Williamson,  
who began recording in 1937,  
represented the first generation  
to bring this style to the North,  
while most of the other popular  
postwar Chicago bluesmen came  
north during or shortly after  
World War II.

Sonny Boy Williamson was  
born in Jackson, Tennessee, in  
1921 and was only a teenager  
when he began to record. A  
speech impediment gave his  
singing a tongue-tied and hectic  
quality that proved quite popular  
and spawned many imitators. He  
was a prolific composer of mem-  
orable songs and had many hits  
that became blues standards in  
postwar years. He recorded over  
a hundred blues in a career that  
lasted until 1948. Williamson was  
probably the first widely influen-  
tial blues harmonica player, and  
his style continues to be imitated  
today. His complete mastery of  
the instrument—including a vari-  
ety of special playing tech-  
niques, such as fluttertonguing—  
is demonstrated in this record-  
ing, which was one of his hits.  
(He can also be heard on Side  
One, Band 1.) Williamson was  
murdered in 1948 at the height  
of his popularity, apparently in a  
robbery attempt, though the cir-  
cumstances remain cloudy. He  
was personally well liked in  
Chicago and the South and was  
generous with his money as well  
as in helping other musicians.

I want you to hold me in your arms,

baby. Ah, take me home with  
you.  
Love me, love me, baby, just like you  
used to do.  
I want you to love me over, baby;  
mama, love me over slow.  
I want you to love me, baby, till I  
won't want you to love no more.

I want you to take me in your car,  
baby, and ride me around all over  
town.  
Love me, love me, baby, till my love  
come down.  
I want you to love me over, baby;  
mama, love me over slow.  
But I want you to love me, baby, and  
I won't want you to love no  
more.

*(Spoken)* You got it, Big Bill. Take it  
and keep it. Listen now.

*(Spoken)* Yes! Honey, hush. Yes, you  
know. Honey, work on in now.

I want you to roll me, roll me, baby,  
like your grandfather used to roll  
his wagon wheel.  
Roll me, roll me, baby; you don't  
know how good that makes me  
feel.  
Now I want you to roll me over,  
baby; babe, I want to let you roll  
me over slow.  
I want you to roll me, baby; I won't  
want no love no more.

Well, I'm going way back down in  
Jackson, way back where I  
belong.  
Because of this wicked life I've been  
living, John, God knows, I can't  
last long.  
'Cause this woman don't love me.  
No, baby. She won't roll Sonny  
Boy over slow.  
Now she won't sit down and talk  
with me, and I won't want to  
even love no more.

## **Band 8**

### *My Buddy Blues*

(Eugene Gilmore)

The Five Breezes: Gene Gilmore,  
lead vocal; Leonard "Baby Doo"

Caston, vocal and guitar; Joseph Bell and Willie Hawthorne, vocals; Willie Dixon, one-string bass. *Recorded November 15, 1940, in Chicago. Originally issued on Bluebird B-8614.*

Black vocal groups continued to be popular through the thirties. The most successful were the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots, which featured very smooth harmonizing and a repertoire mostly of popular songs and few blues. They were a vocal counterpart to the big-band jazz popular during the period. The Five Breezes performed in a slightly rougher style with more of a blues emphasis, due mainly to the presence of instrumentalists Leonard Caston and Willie Dixon, from Natchez and Vicksburg, Mississippi, respectively. This group thus occupies a transitional place between the smoother early groups and the rhythm-and-blues groups of the fifties. They also represent a departure from the more egalitarian structure of vocal groups of the twenties (Side One, Band 4) to one containing clearly delineated lead and chorus roles.

Little is known of Gene Gilmore, but one of his other songs suggests that he may also have been from Natchez. He played piano on some of the

other Five Breezes records. Leonard "Baby Doo" Caston learned folk-blues guitar in the country outside Natchez. He settled in Chicago in the late thirties and joined the Five Breezes. Performing at local taverns, the group wore zoot-suit uniforms for an audience of young jitterbugs. As "My Buddy Blues" indicates, the prewar draft broke up the group. Caston formed a trio and learned a more sophisticated kind of music. His group played popular music overseas for the USO. In the late forties he and Willie Dixon from 'the old Five Breezes formed the Big Three Trio, which had several hit records in a popular and jazz style. Caston continued in the direction of popular music and now plays in Minneapolis cocktail lounges, having left the blues far behind. Willie Dixon, on the other hand, returned to the blues and became a session bassist, songwriter, recording director, and tour organizer in the Chicago blues scene. He is one of the most active and versatile figures in the blues today.

"My Buddy Blues" features an urbane vocal style coupled with a more down-home instrumental accompaniment. The lyrics are representative of a trend toward topical themes that developed in the thirties.

*(Spoken)* Yes, yes, yes.

I have signed my name. It won't be long before I go. *(Repeat)*

I woke up this morning, the mailman had my numbers at my door.

If you're twenty-one, buddy, I advise you not to hide, *(Repeat)*

Because when that wagon roll 'round, I declare, you've got to ride.

Uncle Sam is calling for you, and you know you got to go.

He's calling for all you jitterbugs like he never called before.

The charity's been taking care of you for a very long long time,

Now Uncle Sam is calling you, and you know what's on his mind.

Buddy, buddy, I advise you not to hide,

Because when that wagon roll 'round, I declare, you've got to ride.

If you should happen to see a smoke, mama, and it ain't no wind around, *(Repeat)*

Just tell all your friends that's the Five Breezes leaving town.



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**Side One Total time 24:38**

1	<i>PEACH TREE BLUES</i> (Yank Rachell) . . . . .	2:44
	(publ. <i>Duchess Music Corporation</i> )	
	Yank Rachell, vocal and guitar; Sonny Boy Williamson, harmonica; Alfred Elkins, washtub bass; Washboard Sam, washboard	
2	<i>BROWNSKIN WOMAN</i> . . . . .	3:19
	Pillie Bolling, vocal and guitar	
3	<i>VIOLIN BLUES</i> . . . . .	3:16
	The Johnson Boys: T. C. Johnson, guitar; Nap Hayes, vocal and violin; Matthew Prater, mandolin	
4	<i>WHAT'S THE MATTER NOW</i> . . . . .	3:12
	(publ. <i>MCA Music, A Division of MCA, Inc.</i> )	
	Monarch Jazz Quartet of Norfolk, vocals	
5	<i>YODELING BLUES</i> . . . . .	2:56
	(Publ. <i>MCA Music, A Division of MCA Inc.</i> )	
	Buck Mountain Band: probably Earl Edwards, vocal and guitar; Van Edwards, fiddle; Wade Ward, banjo	
6	<i>DOGGONE MY GOOD LUCK SOUL</i> . . . . .	3:06
	Hattie Hudson, vocal; Willie Tyson, piano	
7	<i>LET'S GET LOOSE</i> (Gray) . . . . .	2:40
	Clara Smith, vocal; Ed Allen, cornet; unknown clarinet and piano	
8	<i>NIGGER BLUES</i> (Leroy "Lasses" White) . . . . .	2:54
	George O'Connor, vocal; unknown trumpets, trombone, tuba, and clarinet, with simulated train noises	

**Side Two Total time 24:28**

- 1 *DAD'S OLE MULE* (Charles and Effie Tyus) . . . . . 3:14  
Tyus and Tyus, vocals; unknown cornet and piano
- 2 *KEEP IT CLEAN* . . . . . 3:24  
Rufus and Ben Quillian: Rufus Quillian, vocal and piano; Ben Quillian, vocal; James McCrary, vocal and guitar
- 3 *BLUE NIGHT BLUES* (Leroy Carr) . . . . . 2:53  
Leroy Carr, vocal and piano; Francis "Scrapper" Blackwell, guitar
- 4 *HOUSE LADY BLUES* . . . . . 2:53  
Walter Roland, vocal and piano
- 5 *I'M CUTTIN' OUT* (Wilber "Joe" McCoy and Herb Morand) . . . . . 2:36  
Harlem Hamfats: Wilber "Joe" McCoy, vocal; Herb Morand, trumpet; Odell Rand, clarinet; Horace Malcolm, piano; John Lindsay, string bass; Fred Flynn or Pearlis Williams, drums
- 6 *DEEP BLUE SEA BLUES* (Tommy McClennan) . . . . . 2:57  
Tommy McClennan, vocal and guitar; unknown string bass
- 7 *LOVE ME, BABY* (John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson) . . . . . 3:20  
John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, vocal and harmonica; Big Bill Broonzy, guitar; Blind John Davis, piano; Alfred Elkins, one-string bass
- 8 *MY BUDDY BLUES* (Eugene Gilmore) . . . . . 2:46  
The Five Breezes: Gene Gilmore, lead vocal; Leonard "Baby Doo" Caston, vocal and guitar; Joseph Bell and Willie Hawthorne, vocals; Willie Dixon, one-string bass

*Full discographic information for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.*

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