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EDITOR--MAX HAYMES

Flat 5,
22, Westbourne Road,
Lancaster LA1 5DB.
Tel: (0524) 843483.

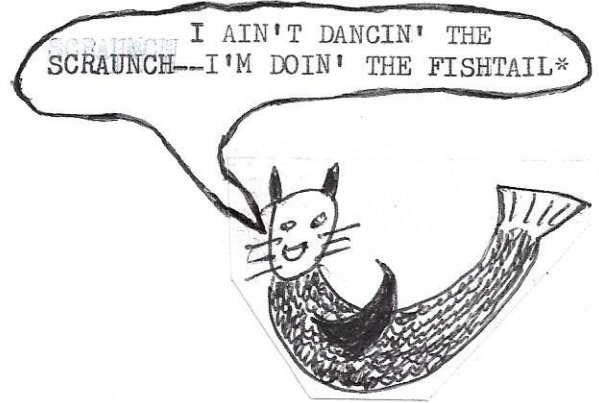
EDITORIAL

Hi there!

Well, "A.B." No.1 got a very good response (still a few copies left) which encouraged me to put out No.2! On a bum note; I seriously underpriced costs in producing the first issue and consequently have had to jack the price up. Sub. details at the end of this issue. Current subs will be honoured until they run out. New subscribers will have to pay the new rate, obviously. I'm sorry about this increase, but it was a choice of that or no further issues. Got those mean ol' runnin' things on a shoestring blues! On a happier note, I will be running the Acoustic Stage at the 4TH Burnley National Blues Festival (from 17th April-19th April inclusive, 1.00p.m.-6.00p.m.), so hope to see you all there--by the time you read this, full details of the Festival, workshops, informal sessions, etc. should be well circulated. Write for details/prices to: Burnley Mechanics. Box Office. Manchester Rd., Burnley. Lancashire BB11 1JA. Tel.(0282) 30055. Festival runs 16th April-20th.

I mentioned last time that letters are welcome provided they include an s.a.e. I should have added, 'if you want a reply'! Naturally, if you just send a letter for publication (as long as it's reasonably printable!) you don't need to send an s.a.e. Got it? Good. Then perhaps you could explain it to me.

Bum note No.2--January was a sad month for the Blues as we said goodbye to two of the last links with the recorded scene from the earlier half of the century; Champion Jack Dupree and Willie Dixon. See obits. in this issue. There ain't many left of the originals--so we should support 'em while we can. Check out David 'Honeyboy' Edwards at Burnley Blues Fest. and catch some tough Delta blues.



*The Fishtail was a popular dance in juke joints, barrelhouses, etc. in the 1920s.

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"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? BLUES"

Many of the verses of earlier blues, before World War II, threw up phrases and words which seem a little obscure, or a whole lot obscure! to British listeners. This article is a brief resume of some of their meanings; which when put into context of the appropriate blues now makes sense, or is no longer obscure.

One of the famed 12-string guitar school from the Atlanta area in Georgia known as Barbecue Bob, sang in 1930:

"You started in moochin', but your moochin's in vain,
You started into moochin', but your moochin's in vain.
Be careful with yourself, you'll get a ball an' chain." (1).

In a book on black slang, we find an entry "mooch: beg, borrow." (2). The author dates this meaning back to the 1940s and 50s. But it is obviously much earlier, as Bob's blues was recorded in 1930 and he included the word "moochin'" with the knowledge of a complete familiarity by his listeners. It seems as if the law was cracking down on street beggars in no uncertain terms; which indeed they were. Bob's last line refers to the horrendous prison/county farm system which was exploitative as it was cruel. On another of Bob's blues, he sings:

"I'm kinda worried, got somethin' on my mind,
I'm kinda worried, got somethin' on my mind.
That's why I drink my whiskey, make my sorrow ache behind."
(3).

Again, we have an entry "Behind: afterward; that which follows." (4). In other words, if he gets drunk now he postpones his grief until later; one of the main reasons so many people have taken to booze ever since it was first discovered.

Dating from the turn of the century is "Scrunch: a slow dragged out dance". (5). The meaning was always a fairly obvious reference to a dance of some

sort in "Doin' The Scraunch" by Barbecue Bob (again) and "Saturday Night Scrontch" by Frankie "Half-Pint" Jaxon. Although Jaxon pronounces it "scraunch" as well. So too does Georgia Tom and Kansas City Kitty on "Scronchin'" in 1931. Though the following lines would seem to stretch the definition quoted above!

K.C.K. (vocal)

"What are you doin' sittin' down there?"

Wigglin' around in that rockin' chair."

G.T. (spoken)

"Well, I'm Scraunchin'."

K.C.K. (spoken)

"Oh yeah!"

G.T. (spoken)

"I tell you I'm Scraunchin'!"



K.C.K. (spoken)

"I bet you can."

G.T. (vocal)

"It's a brand new dance an' it goes alright with me." (6).

Although obviously not a "brand new dance" in 1931 as Jaxon's recording had been out since 1929; the Scraunch/Scrontch seems to have been connected with Georgia. Barbecue Bob, Georgia Tom and Tampa Red (who backs Jaxon) all coming from that state.

The secondverse of "Doin' The Scraunch" has reference to another dance:

"You wiggles and wobble it, an' you move it around,
Ball the Jack an' you go to town,
An' do that Scraunch, oh you do that Scraunch.
Ah, you shake it and wiggle it, honey, when you do that Scraunch!"
(7).

The term "ball the jack" originates in U.S. railroad slang meaning "To get speed" (8). Not surprisingly, part of Paul Oliver's description includes "...vigorous revolving or twisting," (9), when discussing the dance in "Songsters & Saints".

In 1927, Julius Daniels from South Carolina, recorded 7 songs in Atlanta for the Victor record company, including a very fine "Richmond Blues" to the accompaniment of his excellent and swinging guitar:

"Stand(in) in Richmond, leanin'
on my walkin' cane,
I was stand(in) in Richmond,
leanin' on my walkin' cane.
Policeman come by, asked me what's
my name."

"Well, my name is written in the
bosom of my shirt,
Oh well my name is written in the



bosom of my shirt.
I'm a solid lover, did not have to
work."(I0).

An ex-slave, Caroline Farrow, who was born in 1857, told a Federal Writers' Project in 1937 the following detail: "In slavery when the patrollers* rode up and down the roads, once a nigger boy stole out to see his gal, all dressed up to kill. The patrollers found him at his gal's house and started to take off his coat so they could whip him; but he said, "Please don't let my gal see under my coat, 'cause I got on a bosom and no shirt"."(I1). Botkin adds a note "The custom was to wear a stiff white bosom held up around the neck when no shirt was on. This gave the appearance of a shirt."(I2). A bit like the 'dicky front' sometimes worn with evening dress in some social circles, today. Daniels, who was born in c.1902, reflects back to slavery days in his "Richmond Blues" and



possibly dates the "shirt" verse to the 1860s. A variant was to appear in Blind Boy Fuller's repertoire in the late 1930s; Fuller was also born in South Carolina. Interestingly, Caroline Farrow was from Newberry, S.C., some 90 miles south-east of Greenville in the heart of much of South Carolina's blues activity in the 1930s. Fuller probably picked up the verse from Julius Daniels' recording.

*Footnote: The patrollers were gangs of whites whose job it was to impose a strict curfew on all black citizens after dark and restrict their movements in the day. A

Another singer, Lucille Bogan, also used a phrase recalling slavery days, in her "Pawn Shop Blues" from 1923:

"When you're broke, it ain't no joke.
Uncle Jed have got all your clothes
in soak."(I3).

The term "uncle" when referring to the pawn shop proprietor, is itself a relic of slavery times. It was just about the only hint at respect shown by whites for black males, when talking to them. This was reserved for older men, generally speaking. The younger male slaves were simply "boy", or the more offensive "shine" or "nigger".

Lucille Bogan was originally from Mississippi but for most of her life was based in Birmingham, Ala. She had not yet developed the rich, throaty style of her raw and rural blues which became her trademark a few years later. The phrase "clothes in soak" was



utilized by the blues boss from Georgia, 12-string guitar supremo, Blind Willie McTell. In 1931 he incorporated Bogan's phrase into his "Broke Down Engine Blues"

"I bin shootin' craps an' gamblin',
mama, an' I done got broke;
I bin shootin' craps an' gamblin',
honey, an' I done got broke.
I done pawned my pistol, mama, an'
my best clothes in soak."(I4).

McTell thereby retaining the pawn shop link in an entirely different blues.

Another ex-slave, from North Carolina this time, one Millie Evans (b. 1849.) relates: "We had homemade tubs and didn't have no washboards. We had a block and battling stick. We put our clothes in soak, then took 'em out of soak and lay them on the block and take

the battling stick and battle the dirt out of 'em."(15).

So Blind Willie McTell is saying he had only one set of clothes when he sang "my best clothes in soak" and did not even have his pistol to rob some shop/store with. Truly he felt like a "broke down engine ain't got no driving wheel"!

One of the first rural-style blues performers to record (as opposed to vaudeville blues of countless women singers) was Papa Charlie Jackson. A biographical blank, he is thought to be from New Orleans and died in the 1930s in Chicago. His featured instrument was a six-string banjo and he included many hokum/vaudeville songs from an earlier era. One that he recorded a year or so after his debut on disc, in 1925, was "Shave 'Em Dry". This has become famous in blues circles via the uncensored version that Lucille Bogan made in 1935 with Walter Roland on piano. In Jackson's version he refers to "brogan shoes". This phrase crops up in blues by Ma Rainey and other singers from time to time.

Millie Evans, in 1937, described how "Master taught Pa to make shoes,"(16) (16). She goes on to relate how a cow's hide is tanned by soaking it with oak ashes and then soaked again with red oak bark. Once the hair "come off the hide" it was ready for tanning. "It stayed in the water till the hide turned tan, then Pa took the hide out of the red oak dye, and it was a pretty tan...Then he would get his pattern and cut and make tan shoes outer the tanned hides. We called 'em brogans."(17).

Oly slightly younger was Nicey Kinney from Athens, Ga. who said that "Marse Gerald" "never kept no shoemaker man on our place, and all our shoes was store-bought. They was just brogans with brass toes, but us felt powerful dressed up when us got 'em on, 'specially when they was new and the brass was bright and shiny."(18).

*Footnote(cont'd): slave usually carried a note from his/her master when going out on the highway or otherwise leaving their plantation. The name on the shirt was for further proof of identification and could be the slave's insurance against being lynched if the note had been lost somewhere.

Another Georgia resident, guitarist Buddy Moss, referred to his "boogiein'" shoes on "Hard Road Blues" in 1933. But this could be a sort of substitute swear word and along with words like "mamlish" will be considered in a separate article "Got The Fakin' Blues"!

Notes

- 1.Barbecue Bob.
- 2.Major C.p.82.
- 3.Barbecue Bob. "Blind Pig".
- 4.Major. Ibid.p.25.
- 5.Ibid.p.101.
- 6.Kansas City Kitty.
- 7.Barbecue Bob. "Scaunch".
- 8.Adams R.F.p.II.
- 9.Oliver P.p.38.
- 10.Julius Daniels.
- 11.Botkin B.A.p.51.
- 12.Ibid.
- 13.Lucille Bogan.
- 14.Blind Willie McTell.
- 15.Botkin. Ibid.p.64.
- 16.Ibid.p.63.
- 17.Ibid.
- 18.Ibid.p.81.



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- 1.Barbecue Bob. "We Sure Got Hard Times" B.Bob vo.gtr. 18/4/30. Atlanta,Ga.
- 2.----"---- "Blind Pig Blues". Same 13/4/28.
- 3.----"---- "Doin' The Scaunch". Same 5/12/30.
- 4.Major Clarence. "Black Slang". Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1971. Reprinted 1987.
- 5.Kansas City Kitty. "Scronchin'". K.C.K. vo.,speech; Georgia Tom vo.,pno.,speech; Tampa Red gtr. 7/1/31. Chicago,Ill.
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- 8.Julius Daniels. "Richmond Blues". J.D.vo. gtr., prob. Wilbert Andrews gtr. 24/10/27. Atlanta,Ga.
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- 10.Lucille Bogan. "The Pawn Shop Blues". L.B.vo.; Eddie Heywood pno. early June, 1923. Atlanta,Ga.
- 11.Blind Willie McTell. "Broke Down Engine Blues"

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- B.W.McTell vo.gtr. 23/10/31. Atlanta
 I2.Discographical details: "Blues & Gospel Records 1902-1943". Robert M.W. Dixon & John Godrich. Storyville. 1982. Third Ed.
 I3.All blues transcriptions & corrections/additions by Max Haymes.

OBITUARIES

Last month, "Death came steppin' in the room" for 2 more heroes of the Blues. William Thomas "Champion Jack" Dupree was one of the great blues/barrelhouse pianists from New Orleans where he was born on U.S. Independence Day, 1910. Sheldon Harris in "Blues Who's Who" (from which many of these details were taken) tells us that Jack was influenced by Leroy Carr, Blind John Davis, Peetie Wheatstraw, Brownie McGhee and the unrecorded "Drive 'Em Down". In turn, Dupree influenced Fats Domino, also from the Crescent City. Fats was my first introduction to the Blues, in 1955 which led me back to the earlier singers, including Champion Jack.

Sam Charters said "Jack is one of the great entertainers of the blues" (p.166). Having happy memories of seeing Champion Jack Dupree at Conway Hall in 1968 and at the First Burnley National Blues Festival in 1989; I can only add that he is also one of the great lyricists of the blues and at times can be a very moving singer. I would say that his 1960 version of the old Brownie McGhee number "Sportin' Life Blues" was on a par, as a blues of haunting beauty, with Leroy Carr's "Blues Before Sunrise"; and if you only need one album of barrelhouse/blues piano, then the 16 vintage (1940-41) tracks on Travelin' Man has got to be it.



Willie James Dixon, better known as Willie Dixon was some five years younger than Dupree, born in Vicksburg, Miss. in 1915. Best known for his truly awesome song-writing talents, he was also in the 1950s one of the Chess/Checker "house" musicians playing double bass (admirably replacing the late Big Crawford) behind many a side by Muddy, Howling Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson (No.2), Robert Nighthawk and r'n b cum rock 'n roll artists such as Chuck Berry. These, and many other artists all recorded his songs including "Hoochie Coochie", "Little Red Rooster" and "My Babe" (co-written with George Stone) sung by Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf and Little Walter respectively. He also co-wrote "Big Boss Man"; a big hit for Jimmy Reed in 1960 and done by countless British groups since, and Willie Dixon also wrote "You Can't Judge A Book By Its Cover" for Bb Diddley in 1962.

But Willie Dixon goes back a long way and started his recording career in 1940 as part of the Five Breezes. Playing a bass cano he accompanied the 'jive language' of Gene Gilmore and Leonard Caston. The latter ("Baby Doo") was to continue this jive-style with Dixon in 1946-52 as part of the Big Three Trio. Together with either electric guitarist Ollie Crawford or Bernardo Dennis, the trio performed some beautiful songs with unique vocal harmonies which bridged the old urban pre-war blues with the newer sounds which were to form the post-war Chicago styles. In 1951 they did "Signifying Monkey" which was a Dixon composition and was later covered by the Dave Bartholomew Band (of Fats Domino fame), Johnny Otis and many other blues/r'n b artists. Check out "The Big Three Trio" on Columbia's Roots'n Blues series on C.D. or cassette.

In 1962 he shared vocals with Memphis Slim on the traditional "Stewball" with Jump Jackson on drums. And I will always remember Willie Dixon playing acoustic guitar to his own personal blues in 1963. Thomas Callen III said he was "The blues most well known poet and songwriter".(p.157.).

Both bluesmen were professional boxers at an earlier stage of their careers and both started recording in 1940. They may both be dead but their blues just keep rollin' along. The artistry, music and feelings of Champion Jack Dupree and Willie Dixon live on through their many contributions to the blues.

(Well, better late than never, here is a review of a live performance by David Evans and support acts, written by Arthur 'Z.Z. Birmingham' Billington; himself a fine acoustic blues man).

I'll follow that one with a Hammie Nixon song...I was Hammie's partner after John Estes passed on, and we played this song all over France and the U.S.A....he was my buddy and I sure miss him too..."

I learnt this song ("Highway 51") off a preacher, the Reverend McGee...he used to play the blues with Charley Patton till he got religion..."

Tommy Johnson was long gone before I got there, but I put together this version (of "Big Road Blues") working with his two brothers and ten or twelve other people who used to play with him..."

David Evans has the sort of chat most bluesmen would give their bottleneck-finger to include in the act. Professor of Music at Memphis University, he made his reputation through fieldwork in the Deep South, doing intensive new research into the Blues tradition, and gained the Chicago Folklore Prize in 1982 for his scholarly treatise "Big Road Blues". Surely, we thought, NOT an act to set alight a venue whose previous week had included Psychastorm, Wilko Johnson, AVOID, and the Rev. Hammer; just a night for blues purists, we thought--but the place was packed. And how wrong we were.



First support was Nick Ring--probably the only person in this backwater familiar with the work of Henry Sloane*. His sparkling guitar work, unorthodox vocal style and esoteric source material set the tone for the evening; among songs by Stovepipe No.1, Luke Jordan, and Papa Harvey Hull, were Oscar Woods' "Don't Sell It, Don't Give It Away" and a strong version of Frank Stokes' "'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do". Nick finished up with an uncharacteristic but

delightful "That's Nice" by our own Stan Webb. For "Gang Of Brownskin Women" and "Bed Slat 'N All" he was joined by Ms. Carmen Piranha--she of the stirring voice and driving washboard--and your reviewer, Z.Z. Birmingham, who played the other support slot in his usual ebullient style.



David Evans is a grizzled man with a weighty presence, sparing of speech and deliberate of movement; he took his time, and made little or no concession to showmanship. But it worked; within two minutes he had the audience eating out of his hand. He opened with "Matchbox Blues"--not a song many of us would care to attempt in its original form, let alone as an opener--and showed instantly his skill at improvised fill-ins a la Jefferson; the straining high street-singer's voice was also in evidence. A thoroughly "authentic" version.

Highway 51" followed, then a stunning "Bullfrog Blues". The combination of vocal and guitar rhythms in this song seems pretty difficult to achieve; David Evan's mastery here and throughout the evening showed how years of study and sympathetic research have brought him right in tune with the timing, phrasing, feel, and ethos of the Old Blues--it's not just a question of getting the guitar licks off.

He finished his first set with a rollicking "Big Road Blues", then brought on a gash band to open the second. To wit: David Evans(vo.gtr.,kazoo); Raphael Callaghan(hca.); Nick Ring(banj., tamb.) Carmen Piranha(wbd.,trngle); Z.Z.Birmingham(jug, hca.,vo.)--the so-called "Derbyshire Jug Band" started with Gus Cannon's haunting classic "Last Chance Blues", Hammie Nixon's "Tappin' That Thing" and an Evan's original "King And Queen Blues" dedicated to his wife Maurice. The impromptu nature of the outfit and its occasional tendency towards over-enthusiasm were

*Footnote: Henry Sloane/Sloan was the unrecorded and controversial figure who allegedly first inspired the great Delta

clear to all but the set with its strutting finale "Kansas City" took the place by storm.

Next the slide came out and David Evans showed a wonderful touch on "Walk-in' Blues" and "Poor Boy Long Ways From Home", both taken at a pace almost majestic in its solemnity. His next song, "Don't Your Peaches Look Mellow" was to me the best of the evening--a melodic and deceptively simple AAB blues of 28 to 30 bars whose hypnotic riff seemed to make the lyrics hang on and on. By this stage, the man's strings (which had looked in terrible shape at the outset) were giving all sorts of tuning problems and it was also clear that ten days of lectures and a dose of good ol' British flu had taken their toll on the Evans vocal chords. This seemed only to enhance the intensity of his performance, however, and he finished strongly with rousing renderings of "Dust My Broom" and Bukka White's "Railroad Blues". ("Special Streamline"?-Ed.).

David Evans certainly did his homework on those field trips Down South; and by all accounts he continues to study and promote the Folk Blues today. (David Evans is currently attached to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi--Ed.). His playing and singing display a feeling and understanding for Traditional Blues seldom encountered in a white person. His music is truly archaic: his rock steady and unhurried delivery, his guitar sound and techniques together with his vocal phrasing, all belong to a bygone age. He made no concessions whatsoever to a crowd more used to rock and indie music; yet they cheered his music--and the blues purists were in seventh heaven.

"Women's Blues-Part 2"

Sadly, the phrase "wife-battering" is a familiar part of the English language. This indicates the frequency of this domestic violence. This type of violence was also prevalent in black U.S. working-class society in the earlier part of this century (and no doubt continues today). Black women were often the main wage earners either by working for whites, in menial jobs (see Part I), or forced into prostitution. Blacks generally, having occupied the position of slave until Emancipation (c.1863), after they were freed had no position whatever in U.S. society; as black writer Leroi Jones has pointed out in his book, "Blues People". So the woman in lower-class black society who was the sole 'breadwinner', and therefore had a "position", could inadvertently



A 1924 Columbia advert. The caption on the bottom reads: "Having a phonograph without these records is like having pork chops without gravy--Yes indeed!"

add another factor to the causes of wife-battering; by way of the partner's resentment, jealousy, and feelings of inadequacy. Yet the long-suffering wife in such a situation will often be the first to turn on any representative of the law who "interferes"; for a variety of reasons.

One blues singer who did the opposite and sought out the law, was 'Ma' Rainey in her "Hustlin' Blues". Rainey, often referred to as an influence on Bessie Smith, has taken all she is going to take from her partner, who is also her pimp who sends her out hustling for 'tricks' in all kinds of weather:

"It's rainin' out here an' tricks ain't walkin' tonight. (x2)
I'm goin' home, I know I've got to fight".

*Footnote1(cont'd): blues singer, Charlie Patton (1891-1934). (Ed.).

**Footnote2: Actually an original Yank Rachell (correct spelling) song that the mandolin/guitarist first recorded in 1941. Rachell (like Hammie Nixon) was from Tennessee and recorded there with Estes (1929-30) (Ed.).

"If you hit me tonight, let me tell you what I'm goin' to do.(x2)
I'm gonna take you to court, an' tell the Judge on you."

"I ain't made no money an' he dared me to go home.(x2)
Judge, I told him, you better leave me alone."

"He followed me up an' he grabbed me for a fight.(x2)
He said 'Oh do you know you ain't made no money tonight'."

"Ohhh! Judge, tell him I'm through.
(x2)
I'm tired of this life, that's why I brought him to you." (1).

In 1930, Hannah May took the same course with Rainey's pianist Georgia Tom, who is present here, acting as Judge and May's wrongdoing partner!

"Judge, he knocked me down this mornin', hit me this afternoon.
He knocked me down this mornin', hit me this afternoon.

If you don't do somethin' with him I'm goin' to have to kill him soon."

She sings with exasperation: "Judge, if, would hang him, I would not shed a tear."
(2).

But of course, many such cases of wife-battering never reach the courts. In a

very severe case on "Got Cut All To Pieces", Bessie Tucker relates, in one of the toughest voices of the blues, after declaring that she "got cut all to pieces about a man I love":

"Now when my man left me, I was half-dead lyin' in my door.
When my man left me, aaaah-ha, half dead lyin' in my door.

I was a-sufferin' an' groanin' 'Oh daddy, please don't go'."(3),

But another woman acts more wisely, even though she loves her man. After

confessing that "My man he mistreated me, he treats me like a dog." Alice Moore, from St. Louis, tells him:

"Bye, bye, bye, daddy, that's all I have to say.(x2)
Because I've got me a good man that will work for me both night and day!"
(4).

It's not just physical violence but mental cruelty as well.

"He gets up every mornin', an' before he goes.
Says he don't want me to put my head out of my front door.

Ref:You know that's boogan me, yes, that's boogan me.

And I'm gettin' sick and tired, the way my man is boogin' me."

Besides keeping her a virtual prisoner, Bogan describes how he refuses to clothe her or supply her with heating in the winter. If that's not enough, he plans to starve her too:

"I ain't got no flour, I ain't got no lard.

And he knows doggone well the times has done got hard.

Ref:Yes, he's boogan me, etc. (5).

Ms. Bogan's title is a play on her name and the word "buggin'".

But many of these singers took on life with men on equal terms and could be as tough and uncompromising as they were--or tougher! Edith Johnson's stanza, from a male point of view, doesn't bear thinking about!

"When I get drunk I'm evil, I don't know what to do--uh-huh,
When I get drunk I'm evil, Lord, I don't know what to do--ey-heh.
Guess I'll get my good chib, and get somethin' good from you."(6).

While Ida May Mack lays down the law to her 'wandering' lover, in no uncertain manner. Having bought a "Special" (probably a .38) "to stop my daddy's ways", she warns him:

"Now I know, daddy, I know you will behave,
Well, I know, daddy, I know you will behave.

You will behave when you sleepin' in your lonesome grave."(7).

Rosie Mae Moore, sings to Charlie McCoy's excellent guitar accompaniment, similar murderous sentiments:

"'Cos you see me staggin', daddy, don't you think I'm drunk.

Spoken:You know I ain't drunk.
'Cos you see me staggin',



The near-white looking, Bessie Tucker-1928.

'Cos you see me staggin', daddy don't
you think I'm drunk.

I've got my eye on my shotgun, the
other one is on your trunk."

Her declaration of love would make him
tremble with fear, rather than passion!

"Well, I love you Mister Charlie,
honey, God knows I do;(x2)

But the day you try to quit me,
Charlie, that's the day you die."
(8).

References(cont'd)
Chicago.

In Part 3: Women's sexuality in the Blues.



A fellow Texan and contemporary of Bessie Tucker--Ida May Mack, 1928. Two of the finest rural women blues singers on record.

(It's nice to see an 'appreciation article' on someone while they are still living-- here's one by celebrated blues writer, Annie Foster).

"An Appreciation Of Steve Phillips"

For many of us acoustic country blues fans, it was a revelation when, following the media hype surrounding the first tour of this country by Ted Hawkins, we arrived at unusual venues to be enthralled, not by the street singer extraordinaire with the old gardening glove on his left hand (with which he barred the chords of songs like "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree"), but by the bearded, quietly spoken support artist who was playing his first major tour. It was, as many of you will remember, Steve Phillips.

A male singer, Bumble Bee Slim, confirms the murderous nature of some women in his "Cold Blooded Murder No.2" and finishes his blues with these lines:

"Early one mornin', I asked you for
your keys; you took your big pistol
an' knocked me to my knees.

Early one mornin', well I asked you
for your keys;

You took your big pistol an' you
knocked me to my knees."(9).

At that time he was not known much outside the Leeds area or the few London venues where he played along with Brendan Croker from time to time. Certainly, we in the Midlands were not familiar with his work, but we were very impressed at that Ted Hawkins gig, for several reasons. Firstly, he was actually playing on stage in the 80s, music which, for perhaps fifteen years or so, had only been played rather surreptitiously at home by the rest of us. All those people who had not hung up their Levins and Hofners (for they were all quite poor in those dear old R & B and art student days!) but had continued to play country blues, jug band music and hokum during the Disco years, were overjoyed to find that, at least somebody was actually playing their music in public again!

Next time: women's sexuality in the Blues.

References

1. "Hustlin' Blues". 'Ma' Rainey. c.June, 1928.Chicago.
2. "Courthouse Blues". Hannah May. 15/9/30 New York City.
3. "Got Cut All To Pieces". Bessie Tucker. 30/8/28.Memphis.
4. "Doggin' Man Blues". Alice Moore. 25/3/37. Chicago.
5. "My Man Is Boogan Me". Lucille Bogan. 31/7/34. N.Y.
6. "Good Chib Blues". Edith Johnson. 7/9/29. Richmond,Ind.
7. "When You Lose Your Daddy". Ida May Mack. 30/8/28. Memphis.
8. "Staggering Blues". Rosie Mae Moore. 3/2/28. Memphis.
9. "Cold Blooded Murder No.2." Bumble Bee Slim. 18/7/35.

Secondly, just by talking to people at those concerts, it became clear that there were other people who had treasured extensive collections of esoteric Blues 78s and L.P.s just like the ones on the shelf at home. There was a sudden meeting and flowering of like minds. Steve Phillips was like a catalyst,

bringing together those whose only outlets in the intervening years had been not always all that enthusiastic folk clubs.

Talking to Steve during the interval, we found him to be a rather shy, taciturn man, perhaps wary of all the attention this tour was now getting, some of it for the wrong reasons. But, when he found our appreciation and enthusiasm for what he was doing was genuine, he began to relax a little and was willing to discuss some of the numbers and the different tunings he was using to play them. This was just before Burnley's



First National Blues Festival, when, much more thoroughly this time, all those closet Blues players met up with one another and found that the whole Festival scene was going to allow their music to be heard again.

After that, we tried to support Steve whenever he was within travelling distance. He always presented his music in a way which made it clear that it had been honed to the very last note, but it still had the rich, dark Phillips voice, which was so redolent of his heroes, over the immaculately accurate guitar picking and slide playing, very often on the small-bodied 12-string he had made himself, to sound like the one played by Blind Willie McTell. A beautiful instrument! Others began to recognise his talents and we were both pleased and surprised to find him featured in 'Folk Roots', which ran a long article about his blues singing, guitar building and painting expertise, illustrated with a very early photo of him when he was a lad, all dressed up in a suit and Jesse Fuller cap, in the manner of the old bluesmen's formal portrait shots.



Next, he was whisked off to London by his old mate Mark Knopfler, to become one of the leading 'Notting Hill Billies'. Standing in front of the stage at the Derby Assembly Rooms (couldn't get tickets for any nearer gig!) it was strange to see 'our Steve' getting the star treatment from the roadies, snowy white towels to dab the Phillips brow, guitars handed to him with straps in just the right position to go over his head, young lassies

receiving the new Steven Hillbilly wink, to go along with our favourite move—the 'Steve Phillips Shuffle': a wiggle of the bent left leg, rather like Jethro Tull, but with the toe just about still on the ground!



So, when we saw that he was on the bill at Redcar last year, we were interested to see if he had been changed at all by all that 'supergroup' hype now that he was back gigging solo. I went to sit on the floor at the front at the Redcar Bowl, together with an old Blues Festival friend and acoustic blues fan, Dave Hardy, to see what Steve would present in his set. The first difference we noted, (after the clean shaven chin!) was how much more confident he was on stage, so much so, that when the P.A. obviously had a fault on the line to one of his guitars, he didn't let it faze him, but quickly tailored his set list to the Style 'O' National which Bob Brozman covets so greatly.

This meant that we were treated to a whole 40/45 minutes of old acoustic Blues, some of which Steve might not have played for some time, certainly some that I hadn't heard him sing before; and how well he sang them. For the second transformation we found was that he threw his head back and sang in a full throated style which was much more like Brendan Croker's vocalising than the some times rather 'in the back of the throat' style you can hear on the first album.



He was very much in contact with his audience, smiling and joking all the time in a really relaxed way. Had he been hiding behind that beard all these years? He certainly seemed to be enjoying himself in a much more unselfconscious way, and gave us a non-stop, accurate yet authentic performance of some very varied Blues, with hardly any numbers in the sentimental country vein which is not quite so much to the taste of everyone who knows how well he can sing the Blues.

How surprised we were later to read in "Blueprint", Scott Duncan's derisory dismissal of this fine acoustic set in the words "...and Steve Phillips (was) dire. Fact." No it was NOT fact, Scott; it was your subjective opinion, and unsubstantiated opinion at that. In the opinion of two people who have listened to much country Blues, and were in a position to be able to see well, Steve gave a good show! Where's he on next?

Listen to Steve Phillips on:
The Best of Steve Phillips L.P.
on UnAmerican Activities. BRAVE 5.
Steel-Rail Blues L.P.
on UnAmerican Activities. BRAVE 9.

GIG GUIDE

Lancashire:--MAX'S BLUES CLUB. John O'Gaunt, Market St., Lancaster. (0524-65356).

Mar.4th.--PETE OAKLEY.
11th.--BIG MAN CLAYTON("MR. C.").
18th.--SAM PAYNE + HELLHOUND BLUES.
25th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

April 8th.--GYPSY BILL WILLIAMS.
22nd.--ROGER HIGGINS.
29th.--GEOFF BUTTERFIELD.

May 6th.--JAYBIRDS.
27th.--PETE OAKLEY.

THE LAMB. Preston. (0772-54478).

Mar.5th.--BIG MAN CLAYTON(MR. C.).

MOJOS NIGHT CLUB. Blackburn. (0254-672001).

Mar.28th.--JAYBIRDS.

BOTHY FOLK CLUB. Blundell Arms, Birkdale, Southport.

April 26th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

Liverpool:--THE ROYAL.

Mar.12th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.
19th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

THE DELL.

May 11th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.
21st.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

Cheshire:--LORD RODNEY. Warrington.

Mar.20th.--JAYBIRDS.

SEACOMBE FERRY BOOKING HALL. Wirral.

April 4th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

MAGAZINE FOLK CLUB. Magazine(pub), New Brighton, Wirral.

April 9th.--RAPHAEL CALLAGHAN.

Staffordshire:--THE NAG'S HEAD FOLK AND BLUES CLUB. Overseal, Nr. Burton-On-Trent.

Mar.2nd.--PETE OAKLEY.

THE TOP BELL. Barton-U-Needwood.

Mar.11th.--PETE OAKLEY.

CHEQUE MATES FOLK CLUB. The Chequers, Hopwas, Nr. Tamworth.

Mar.19th.--PETE OAKLEY.



Under the influence of a bottle of Thunderbird & some strong cigarettes, mild mannered train-spotter Fred Noggin hears for the first time the music of the legendary delta blues man Robert Johnson. That night determined to follow in the great man's footsteps, Fred Noggin went down to the cross-roads to sell his soul to Meg Richardson....



And so, Fred (sonny boy) Noggin had seen the light, and like a phoenix from the ashes rose the one who came to be known as.... "BLUESMAN"



TO BE CONTINUED.

GIG GUIDE (cont'd)

Yorkshire:--HEBDEN BRIDGE TRADES CLUB.
(lunch time).

Mar.15th.--JAYBIRDS.

BARNSLEY BLOOZE CLUB. (0226-242751).

Mar.26th.--JAYBIRDS.

PARK HOTEL. Maningham, Bradford.

Mar.27th.--JAYBIRDS.

May 15th.--JAYBIRDS.

THE OVERDRAUGHT. Halifax.

April 2nd.--JAYBIRDS.

BLIND JACKS' (folk club). Knaresborough.

April 24th.--JAYBIRDS.

Still only the tip of the gigs iceberg,
acoustic bluesers--write or phone with your

gig details from 1st. June until 31st. Aug.
Cut-off date for printing: 1st. May.



A lbum R eviews

"WALTER ROLAND (1933-35)"

Side 1: YOU GONNA NEED ME/SLAVIN' BLUES/
LAST YEAR BLUES/ C.W.A. BLUES/YOU GONNA
WANT ME/DICE'S BLUES/EVERY MORNING BLUES/
SCREW WORM/MONEY TAKER WOMAN.
Side 2: SCHOOL-BOY BLUES/TALKIN' LOW BLUES/
O.B.D. BLUES/CLUB MEETING BLUES/COLD BLOODED
MURDER/SAIL ON LITTLE GIRL NO.2/S.O.L. BLUES/
WORN OUT MAN BLUES/45 PISTOL BLUES.

(Document DLP 530)

Although this album has been around for 2 or 3 years, I thought it worth bringing to the attention of "Acoustic Blues" readers, as it contains some of the finest blues recorded in the pre-war era. Walter Roland has long been one of my favourite pianist/singers, hailing from the Birmingham area in Alabama. Apart from making some 60 sides under his own name (as well as part of the 'Jolly Two' with guitarist Sonny Scott) for the A.R.C. company, he also formed a classic partnership with Lucille Bogan for another 60-odd titles; again for A.R.C. during the same period, 1933-35.

Roland, who also played guitar with equal facility, had a fine, really laid-back, almost liquid, piano style which is instantly recognisable as his own. This is apparent even when he plays a fine version of Roosevelt Sykes/Lee Green/Little Brother Montgomery's "44 Blues" in the break on "Last Year Blues". Although he shared some of the same songs with another excellent Birmingham pianist, Jabo Williams, each had their own distinctive approach to

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blues and boogie piano. An added bonus is the amazingly fluid guitar, played possibly by a youthful Josh White on five tracks. "Every Morning" has a fine rocking tempo in barrelhouse style with hints of ragtime in the right hand. Just as laid-back are Roland's vocals; sometimes imbued with a wistful sadness. Never to more telling effect than on "Talkin' Low"; "Cold Blooded Murder" and "Sail On Little Girl". Like contemporary pianists, Walter Davis and Peetie Wheatstraw, Roland seldom relied on traditional verses in his blues. As on "Cold Blooded Murder", which Bumble Bee Slim 'covered' a few months later.

"I said give me the money, baby, an' I'll catch the train an' go;
You don't have to kill me, jus' because you don't want me no more."

Or the implied sexual references on "Screw Worm". Lucille Bogan had a couple of records which remained unissued, including this phrase; "Mr. Screw Worm In Trouble" and "Dangerous Screw Worm". Ms. Bogan is present on Roland's "You Gonna Want Me" making an unusual reference to the Blues: "Oh, beat the blood out of 'em, beat the blood out of 'em", in her encouragement to Roland's fine blues.



On "Slavin' Blues" he is worried about his wife over-spending at the local or commissary store:

"Says, I'm goin' to the commissary, tell the clerk myself.
Says, you know I'm goin' to the commissary, tell the clerk myself.
Says, you know I'm gonna holler 'Clerk, don't let my good girl have nothin' else."

While on "Worn Out Man Blues" Roland makes the frank admission he is too tired to make love after a long an arduous day's work:

"I done worked so hard, baby, 'til I ain't no good at night.(x2)
An' you know I reckon that's the reason, my good girl don't treat me right."

On the unusually titled "Club Meeting Blues" he is suspicious of his wife who is apparently involved in some sort of committee work.

"Since my wife done joined the club, I know she doin' somethin' wrong.(x2)
Because two nights a week that club meeting got to be carried on."

Although one or two tracks are a little noisy, the standard of sound is generally good and certainly acceptable. With 18 tracks, the playing time is generous and only a half-dozen or so titles have been out before. Some of these appeared on R.B.F. and some in the "Male Blues" series of E.P.s (remember them?) on the now defunct, English Jazz Collector label. The others were out on Blues Classics. I recommend this album which is not only the sole L.P. devoted to the superb artistry of Walter Roland, but also because it is of the same high standard of blues as the Robert Johnson set on C.B.S., the Charlie Patton Yazoos and "Blues Before Sunrise" on Official by Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. All of these recordings are essential in a collection of early blues and that includes the Walter Roland album.

COMING IN "ACOUSTIC BLUES" No.3. Full coverage of acoustic happenings at the Burnley & Gloucester Blues Festivals (over Easter)--- "Got The Faking Blues"--- "Women's Blues" Part 3---+ news, reviews, etc. etc.



TO BE CONTINUED....

"HOW TO CHOOZE, BLOOZE"

For blues lovers who've just 'arrived' during the last couple of years or so, the following brief list of blues L.P.s is definitely worth seeking out. Although these are vinyl issues--most are/soon will be available on cassette/C.D.--albeit with a change of content now and again. This list of course is by no means a complete one. Try Decoy or/and Red Lick Records.

1. "BIG BILL BROONZY 1935-41". Best Of Blues
-2. SHE CAUGHT THE TRAIN/THE DOZEN/DON'T
TEAR MY CLOTHES/(last 3 as "STATE STREET
BOYS")/ASH HAULER/OUT WITH THE WRONG WOMAN/
DOWN IN THE ALLEY/STUFF THEY CALL MONEY/
GOOD BOY/UNEMPLOYMENT STOMP/RIDER RIDER
BLUES/WHISKEY & GOOD TIME BLUES/MAKE MY GET
AWAY/LOOKING FOR MY BABY/MY MELLOW MAN/
KNOCKIN' MYSELF OUT(last 2 by JEAN BRADY)/
KEY TO THE HIGHWAY/WEE WEE BLUES/CONVERSATION
WITH THE BLUES.

Some fine pre-war urban-style blues--only 2 duplications.

2. "MEMPHIS MINNIE VOL.2". Blues Classics 13.
FRANKIE JEAN/NEW BUMBLE BEE/PICKING THE
BLUES/PLYMOUTH ROCK BLUES/I CALLED YOU THIS
MORNING/PREACHER'S BLUES/NEW DIRTY DOZEN/
AFTER AWHILE BLUES/LET'S GO TO TOWN/CRAZY
CRYING BLUES/WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE MILL
MILL/MEMPHIS MINNIE)JITIS BLUES/NORTH
MEMPHIS BLUES/SHE PUT ME OUTDOORS.

If you only want one example of tough rural blues by Minnie, then these 1930-31 tracks with Kansas Joe McCoy, are it.

3. "TOUGH TIMES". by BIG JOE WILLIAMS & his
9- STRING GUITAR. Arhoolie F1002. SLOPPY
DRUNK BLUES/YO YO BLUES/ PRESIDENT ROOSE-
VELT/ FORTY FOUR BLUES/ GREYSTONE BLUES/
I WANT MY CROWN(MARY WILLIAMS Vo.)/MEAN
STEPFATHER/BROTHER JAMES/SHAKE YOUR BOOGIE/
VITAMIN A BLUES/SHE LEFT ME A MULE TO RIDE/
SO GLAD.

Tough times & tough Delta blues, rec.1959-60. One of Joe's finest albums.

4. "10 YEARS IN MEMPHIS 1927-37". Yazoo L-10
02. MARRIED WOMAN BLUES/LONESOME MAN BLUES/
(George Torey)/POOR BOY(Gus Cannon)/MOANIN'
THE BLUES(ALLEN SHAW)/JAILHOUSE BLUES/FALL-
ING DOWN BLUES(Robert Wilkins)/GOIN' TO
LEAVE YOU BLUES(Big Boy Cleveland)/BILLY
LYONS & STACK O'LEE/BIG CHIEF BLUES(Furry
Lewis)/WHAT'S THE MATTER BLUES/JAZZIN' THE
BLUES(Frank Stokes)/HAPPY BLUES/DEATH BELL
BLUES(Tom Dickson)/PILE DRIVIN' BLUES(Kan-
sas Joe).

One of the best compilations of early blues--good sound too!

(TO BE CONTINUED)



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Drawings: Ditto(except p.p.1 & 14).

Letters & articles are welcome. ACOUSTIC
BLUES No.3 due 1st. June, 1992. See you
at Burnley?--maybe baby!



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