

The Slide Guitar - Bottles, Knives and Steel

Review

This CD is a hodgepodge sampling of blues records featuring mostly pre-war slide guitarists ranging from the simplicity of Barbecue Bob (who was much better-known as a pianist) and Sylvester Weaver to the sophistication of Blind Willie McTell (backing Ruth Willis on "Experience Blues") and Tampa Red.

Among the highlights are Blind Willie Johnson's wordless "Dark Was the Night" and Tampa Red's goodtime "You Can't Get That Stuff No More" and also featured are Charley Patton, Blind Boy Fuller, Leadbelly, Casey Bill Weldon, Buddy Woods, Robert Johnson, Bukka White, Sister O.M. Terrell and Son House. With the exception of two later cuts, all of the music (which includes a pair of previously unreleased selections) dates from 1927-40. An interesting if not quite essential sampler. *(by Scott Yanow/www.allmusicguide.com)*

Biographies:

track 01 - Weaver And Beasley - Bottleneck Blues

track 05 - Weaver And Beasley - St. Louis Blues

track 07 - Weaver, Sylvester - Guitar Rag

Walter Beasley



An R&B-ish player whose music sometimes crosses over into jazz, Walter Beasley's sound is a bit derivative but he is a talented musician. After briefly playing trumpet, Beasley switched to saxophone when he was nine and was soon inspired by Grover Washington, Jr. He attended Berklee College and, after graduating at age 22, became one of the

school's teachers.

In 1987, Beasley released his first self-titled album and since then has recorded two sets for Mercury and several for Shanachie (culminating with *Rendezvous* in 2002), in addition to often accompanying R&B singers. In 2005, he released his debut for Heads-Up, *For Her*. In 2006, Shanachie released *Live*, a concert club set from 1998. The studio album *Ready for Love* followed in 2007. *(by Scott Yanow/www.allmusicguide.com)*

Sylvester Weaver



Born: Jul 25, 1897 in Louisville, KY

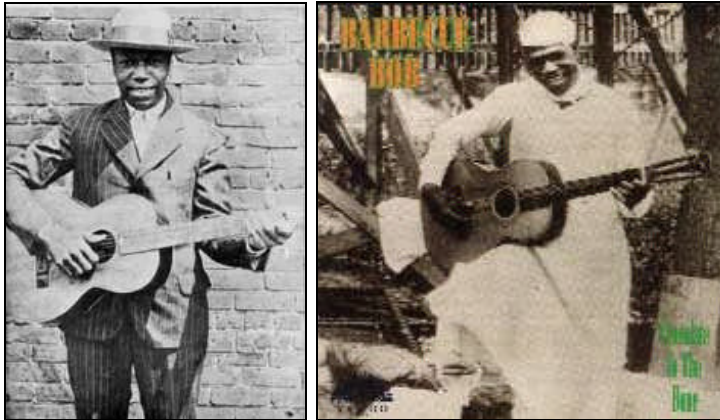
Died: Apr 4, 1960 in Louisville, KY

Sylvester Weaver was a versatile guitarist of Louisville origin who made the first solo recordings of blues guitar playing. Information is lacking on Weaver's early years, though it is not unreasonable to assume that during this time he may have had some connection to the Louisville Jug Bands led by Earl MacDonald and Clifford Hayes.

Sylvester Weaver first turns up in New York in 1923, where on October 23 of that year he accompanied vaudeville blues singer Sara Martin on two numbers, "Longing for Daddy Blues" and "I've Got to Go and Leave My Daddy Behind," for Okeh. Two weeks later, Weaver cut his first pair of solo recordings, "Guitar Blues" and "Guitar Rag" for the same concern. *(by Uncle Dave Lewis/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 02 - Barbecue Bob - (Untitled)

Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks)



Born: Robert Hicks on Sep 11, 1902 in Walnut Grove, GA
Died: Oct 21, 1931 in Lithonia, GA

Barbecue Bob was the name given by Columbia Records talent scout Don Hornsby to Atlanta blues singer Robert Hicks. Hicks is widely credited as being the singer who more than any helped to popularize Atlanta blues in its formative period. Born to a family of sharecroppers in Walnut Grove, GA, Robert Hicks and his brother, Charley "Lincoln" Hicks relocated with them to Newton County. There the Hicks brothers came in contact with Savannah "Dip" Weaver and her son, Curley Weaver.

With the Weavers, the Hicks boys learned to play guitar and sing. Another local kid, Eddie Mapp, arrived in the area around 1922 and began to play harmonica with Robert and Charley Hicks and Curley Weaver. For several years in the early to mid-'20s, this group, or some group derived from this nucleus of musicians, would play parties and dances all around Atlanta and the surrounding territory.

Robert Hicks was the first of this group to "break out"; by 1926, Hicks was working at Tidwell's Barbecue Place in the affluent Atlanta suburb of Buckhead. Hicks would cook for, serve, and sing for the patrons. Robert Hicks proved a local sensation, and somehow attracted the notice of Columbia's Don Hornsby. Hornsby made publicity photographs of Hicks in chef's whites and devised the moniker Barbecue Bob to put on Hicks' first Columbia record, "Barbecue Blues," recorded in Atlanta on March 25, 1927.

It proved a strong seller, and Hicks traveled to New York to make its follow-up, "Mississippi Heavy Water Blues," in addition to seven other titles on June 15 and 16. Lightning struck twice, and Columbia realized they had a hit artist in Barbecue Bob.

Over the next three years the Columbia remote truck stopped in Atlanta on numerous occasions primarily to make records with Hicks, and altogether he made 62 sides for Columbia. Only six of these were rejected, one title being remade and three others having since been found and issued.

Robert Hicks was joined by his brother, Charley Lincoln Hicks, on four of these sides; one pair recorded on November 9, 1927 ("It Won't Be Long Now Parts 1 & 2") was issued as by Barbecue Bob and Laughing Charley. This highly influential coupling is regarded as a classic and is one of the most frequently anthologized blues recordings from the 1920s. Robert Hicks also participated in a pseudonymous session for QRS in December, 1930 issued as by the Georgia Cotton Pickers.

This session also resulting in records being issued involving Hicks' longtime friends Curley Weaver, Eddie Mapp, and possibly a younger friend, Buddy Moss. Hicks had already completed his last session as Barbecue Bob for Columbia on the fifth of that month. Earlier that year his wife had died of pneumonia, and less than a year later Hicks himself succumbed to the same illness, brought on by about with influenza. He was only 29.

Robert Hicks played a 12-string Stella guitar on his recordings, but in person he was just as likely to play a 6-string. He also made some use of bottleneck techniques. Hicks was a consummate stylist of older material, and contributed textbook versions of such blues standards as "Poor Boy a Long Ways from Home," "Fo' day Creep," and "Goin' Up the Country."

Eric Clapton has adopted Hicks' version of "Motherless Child Blues." Hicks' influence extends to the whole of early Atlanta blues, and he is considered second, if not equal to Blind Willie McTell in this respect. (by Uncle Dave Lewis/www.allmusicguide.com)

track 03 - Johnson, Blind Willie - God Don't Never Change

track 04 - Johnson, Blind Willie - Dark Was The Night

Blind Willie Johnson



Born: 1902 in Marlin, TX

Died: 1947 in Beaumont, TX

Seminal gospel-blues artist Blind Willie Johnson is regarded as one of the greatest bottleneck slide guitarists. Yet the Texas street-corner evangelist is known as much for his powerful and fervent gruff voice as he is for his ability as a guitarist. He most often sang in a rough, bass voice (only occasionally delivering in his natural tenor) with a volume meant to be heard over the sounds of the streets.

Johnson recorded a total of 30 songs during a three-year period and many of these became classics of the gospel-blues, including "Jesus Make up My Dying Bed," "God Don't Never Change," and his most famous, "Dark Was the Night -- Cold Was the Ground."

It is generally agreed that Johnson was born in a small town just South of Waco near Temple, TX, around 1902. His mother died while he was still a baby, and his father eventually remarried. When Johnson was about seven years old, his father and stepmother fought and the stepmother threw lye water, apparently at the father, but the lye got in Willie Johnson's eyes, blinding him. As he got older, Johnson began earning money by playing his guitar, one of the few avenues left to a blind man to earn a living. Instead of a bottleneck, Johnson actually played slide with a pocketknife.

Over the years, Johnson played guitar most often in an open D tuning, picking single-note melodies, while using his slide and strumming a bass line with his thumb. He was, however, known to play in a different tuning and without the slide on a few rare occasions. Regardless of his excellent blues technique and sound, Johnson didn't want to be a bluesman, for he was a passionate believer in the Bible.

So, he began singing the gospel and interpreting Negro spirituals. He became a Baptist preacher and brought his sermons and music to the streets of the surrounding cities. While performing in Dallas, he met a woman named Angeline and the two married in 1927. Angeline added 19th century hymns to Johnson's repertoire, and the two performed around the Dallas and Waco areas.

On December 3, 1927, Columbia Records brought Blind Willie Johnson into the studio where he recorded six songs that became some of his most enduring recordings: a song about Samson and Delilah called "If I Had My Way," "Mother's Children Have a Hard Time" (often understood as "motherless children"), "It's Nobody's Fault but Mine," "Jesus Make up My Dying Bed," "I Know His Blood Can Make Me Whole," and Johnson's single most-acclaimed song, "Dark Was the Night -- Cold Was the Ground," which is about the crucifixion of Christ. But after this session, Johnson didn't return to the studio for an entire year.

The second visit (which took place on December 5, 1928) found him accompanied by his wife, Angeline, who provided backing vocals. The two recorded four songs, including "I'm Gonna Run to the City of Refuge" and "Lord, I Just Can't Keep From Cryin'."

Songs from these first two sessions were also issued on the Vocalion label. Several months later, Willie and Angeline Johnson met Elder Dave Ross and went with him to New Orleans where Blind Willie Johnson recorded ten songs for Columbia. From this December 1929 session came a few more of his best-known songs, including "God Don't Never Change," "Let Your Light Shine on Me," and "You'll Need Somebody on Your Bond."

Although Blind Willie Johnson was one of Columbia's best-selling race recording artists, he only recorded for them one more time -- in April 1930 -- after which he never heard from them again. This final session took place in Atlanta, GA (again, Johnson was accompanied by Angeline

who actually sang lead on a few numbers this time), and consisted of ten songs, including "Can't Nobody Hide From God," "John the Revelator," and the slightly altered "You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond."

These last two songs were issued on one record that was withdrawn shortly after its release. Despite the fact that Johnson did not record after 1930, he continued to perform on the Texas streets during the '30s and '40s. Unfortunately, in 1947, the

Johnsons' home burned to the ground. He caught pneumonia shortly thereafter and died in the ashes of his former home approximately one week after it was destroyed. Purportedly, Angeline Johnson went on to work as a nurse during the 1950s.

Over the years, many artists have covered the gospel songs made famous by Blind Willie Johnson, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and Ry Cooder ("Dark Was the Night" inspired Cooder's score for the movie *Paris, Texas*).

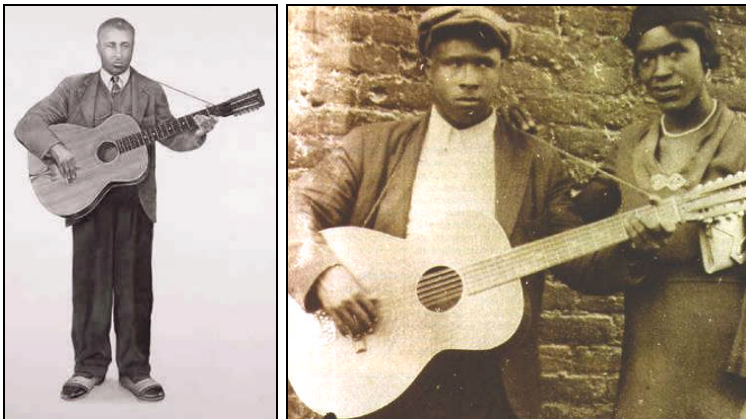
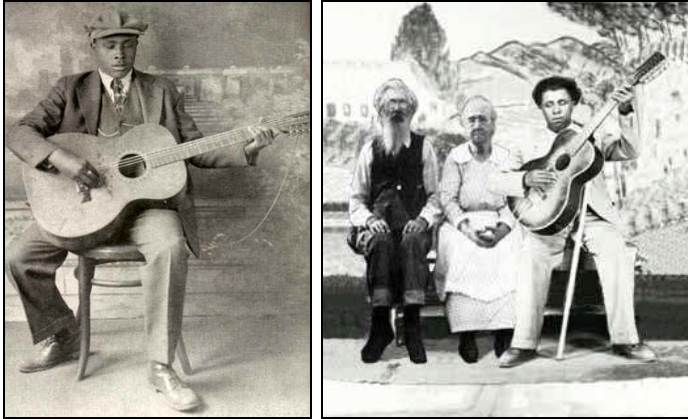
Johnson's song "If I Had My Way" was even revived as a popular hit during the 1960s when it was covered by the contemporary folk band Peter, Paul and Mary. Several excellent collections of Blind Willie Johnson's music exist, including *Dark Was the Night* (on Sony) and *Praise God, I'm Satisfied* (on Yazoo). Johnson's music also appears on many compilations of country blues and slide guitar. *(by Joslyn Layne/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 06 - Willis, Ruth And McTell, Blind Willie - Experience Blues

Ruth Mary Willis (?)

Died: Mar 5, 1962 in Atlanta, GA

Blind Willie McTell



Born: William Samuel McTell on May 5, 1901 in Thomson, GA
Died: Aug 19, 1959 in Milledgeville, GA

Willie Samuel McTell was one of the blues' greatest guitarists, and also one of the finest singers ever to work in blues. A major figure with a local following in Atlanta from the 1920s onward, he recorded dozens of sides throughout the 1930s under a multitude of names -- all the better to juggle "exclusive" relationships with many different record labels at once -- including Blind Willie, Blind Sammie, Hot Shot Willie, and Georgia Bill, as a backup musician to Ruth Mary Willis. And those may not have been all of his pseudonyms -- we don't even know what he chose to call himself, although "Blind Willie" was his preferred choice among friends.

Much of what we do know about him was learned only years after his death, from family members and acquaintances. His family name was, so far as we know, McTier or McTear, and the origins of the "McTell" name are unclear. What is clear is that he was born into a family filled with musicians -- his mother and his father both played guitar, as did one of his uncles, and he was also related to Georgia Tom Dorsey, who later became the Reverend Thomas Dorsey.

McTell was born in Thomson, Georgia, near Augusta, and raised near Statesboro. Willie was probably born blind, although early in his life he could perceive light in one eye. His blindness never became a major impediment, however, and it was said that his sense of hearing and touch were extraordinary. His first instruments were the harmonica and the accordion, but as soon as he was big enough he took up the guitar and showed immediate aptitude on the new instrument.

He played a standard six-string acoustic until the mid-'20s, and never entirely abandoned the instrument, but from the beginning of his recording career, he used a 12-string acoustic in the studio almost exclusively. Willie's technique on the 12-string instrument was unique.

Unlike virtually every other bluesman who used one, he relied not on its resonances as a rhythm instrument, but, instead, displayed a nimble, elegant slide and finger-picking style that made it sound like more than one guitar at any given moment.

He studied at a number of schools for the blind, in Georgia, New York, and Michigan, during the early '20s, and probably picked up some formal musical knowledge. He worked medicine shows, carnivals, and other outdoor venues, and was a popular attraction, owing to his sheer dexterity and a nasal singing voice that could sound either pleasant or mournful, and incorporated some of the characteristics normally associated with White hillbilly singers.

Willie's recording career began in late 1927 with two sessions for Victor records, eight sides including "Statesboro Blues." McTell's earliest sides were superb examples of storytelling in music, coupled with dazzling guitar work. All of McTell's music showed extraordinary power, some of it delightfully raucous ragtime, other examples evoking darker, lonelier sides of the blues, all of it displaying astonishingly rich guitar work.

McTell worked under a variety of names, and with a multitude of partners, including his one time wife Ruthy Kate Williams (who recorded with him under the name Ruby Glaze), and also Buddy Moss and Curley Weaver. McTell cut some of his best songs more than once in his career.

Like many bluesmen, he recorded under different names simultaneously, and was even signed to Columbia and Okeh Records, two companies that ended up merged at the end of the 1930s, at the same time under two names. His recording career never gave Willie quite as much success as he had hoped, partly due to the fact that some of his best work appeared during the depths of the Depression.

He was uniquely popular in Atlanta, where he continued to live and work throughout most of his career, and, in fact, was the only blues guitarist of any note from the city to remain active in the city until well after World War II.

Willie was well known enough that Library of Congress archivist John Lomax felt compelled to record him in 1940, although during the war, like many other acoustic country bluesmen, his recording career came to a halt. Luckily for Willie and generations of listeners after him, however, there was a brief revival of interest in acoustic country blues after World War II that brought him back into the studio. Amazingly enough, the newly founded Atlantic Records -- which was more noted for its recordings of jazz and R&B -- took an interest in Willie and cut 15 songs with him in Atlanta during 1949.

The one single released from these sessions, however, didn't sell, and most of those recordings remained unheard for more than 20 years after they were made. A year later, however, he was back in the studio, this time with his longtime partner Curley Weaver, cutting songs for the Regal label. None of these records sold especially well, however, and while Willie kept playing to anyone who would listen, the bitter realities of life had finally overtaken him, and he began drinking on a regular basis.

He was rediscovered in 1956, just in time to get one more historic session down on tape. He left music soon after, to become a pastor of a local church, and he died of a brain hemorrhage in 1959, his passing so unnoticed at the time that certain reissues in the 1970s referred to Willie as still being alive in the 1960s.

Blind Willie McTell was one of the giants of the blues, as a guitarist and as a singer and recording artist. Hardly any of his work as passed down to us on record is less than first rate, and this makes most any collection of his music worthwhile. A studious and highly skilled musician whose skills transcended the blues, he was equally adept at ragtime, spirituals, story-songs, hillbilly numbers, and popular tunes, excelling in all of these genres.

He could read and write music in braille, which gave him an edge on many of his sighted contemporaries, and was also a brilliant improviser on the guitar, as is evident from his records. Willie always gave an excellent account of himself, even in his final years of performing and recording. *(by Bruce Eder/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 08 - Tampa Red - You Can't Get That Stuff No More

Tampa Red



Born: Hudson Whittaker on Jan 8, 1904 in Smithville, GA
Died: Mar 19, 1981 in Chicago, IL

Out of the dozens of fine slide guitarists who recorded blues, only a handful -- Elmore James, Muddy Waters, and Robert Johnson, for example -- left a clear imprint on tradition by creating a recognizable and widely imitated instrumental style. Tampa Red was another influential musical model. During his heyday in the '20s and '30s, he was billed as "The Guitar Wizard," and his stunning slide work on steel National or electric guitar shows why he earned the title.

His 30-year recording career produced hundreds of sides: hokum, pop, and jive, but mostly blues (including classic compositions "Anna Lou

Blues," "Black Angel Blues," "Crying Won't Help You," "It Hurts Me Too," and "Love Her with a Feeling"). Early in Red's career, he teamed up with pianist, songwriter, and latter-day gospel composer Georgia Tom Dorsey, collaborating on double entendre classics like "Tight Like That."

Listeners who only know Tampa Red's hokum material are missing the deeper side of one of the mainstays of Chicago blues. His peers included Big Bill Broonzy, with whom he shared a special friendship. Members of Lester Melrose's musical mafia and drinking buddies, they once managed to sleep through both games of a Chicago White Sox doubleheader. Eventually alcohol caught up with Red, and he blamed his latter-day health problems on an inability to refuse a drink.

During Red's prime, his musical venues ran the gamut of blues institutions: down-home juke joints, the streets, the vaudeville theater circuit, and the Chicago club scene. Due to his polish and theater experience, he is often described as a city musician or urban artist in contrast to many of his more limited musical contemporaries.

Furthermore, his house served as the blues community's rehearsal hall and an informal booking agency. According to the testimony of Broonzy and Big Joe Williams, Red cared for other musicians by offering them a meal and a place to stay and generally easing their transition from country to city life.

Today's listener will enjoy Tampa Red's expressive vocals and perhaps be taken aback by his kazoo solos. His songwriting has stood the test of time, and any serious slide guitar student had better be familiar with Red's guitar wizardry. *(by Barry Lee Pearson/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 09 - Patton, Charlie - High Sheriff Blues

Charlie Patton



Born: 1887 in Edwards, MS

Died: Apr 28, 1934 in Indianola, MS

If the Delta country blues has a convenient source point, it would probably be Charley Patton, its first great star. His hoarse, impassioned singing style, fluid guitar playing, and unrelenting beat made him the original king of the Delta blues. Much more than your average itinerant musician, Patton was an acknowledged celebrity and a seminal influence on musicians throughout the Delta. Rather than bumming his way from town to town, Patton would be called up to play at plantation dances, juke joints, and the like.

He'd pack them in like sardines everywhere he went, and the emotional sway he held over his audiences caused him to be tossed off of more than one plantation by the ownership, simply because workers would leave crops unattended to listen to him play any time he picked up a guitar.

He epitomized the image of a '20s "sport" blues singer: rakish, raffish, easy to provoke, capable of downing massive quantities of food and liquor, a woman on each arm, with a flashy, expensive-looking guitar fitted with a strap and kept in a traveling case by his side, only to be opened up when there was money or good times involved.

His records -- especially his first and biggest hit, "Pony Blues" -- could be heard on phonographs throughout the South. Although he was certainly not the first Delta bluesman to record, he quickly became one

of the genre's most popular. By late-'20s Mississippi plantation standards, Charley Patton was a star, a genuine celebrity.

Although Patton was roughly five foot, five inches tall and only weighed a Spartan 135 pounds, his gravelly, high-energy singing style (even on ballads and gospel tunes it sounded this way) made him sound like a man twice his weight and half again his size. Sleepy John Estes claimed he was the loudest blues singer he ever heard and it was rumored that his voice was loud enough to carry outdoors at a dance up to 500 yards away without amplification.

His vaudeville-style vocal asides -- which on record give the effect of two people talking to each other -- along with the sound of his whiskey- and cigarette-scarred voice would become major elements of the vocal style of one of his students, a young Howlin' Wolf.

His guitar playing was no less impressive, fueled with a propulsive beat and a keen rhythmic sense that would later plant seeds in the boogie style of John Lee Hooker. Patton is generally regarded as one of the original architects of putting blues into a strong, syncopated rhythm, and his strident tone was achieved by tuning his guitar up a step and a half above standard pitch instead of using a capo. His compositional skills on the instrument are illustrated by his penchant for finding and utilizing several different themes as background accompaniment in a single song.

His slide work -- either played in his lap like a Hawaiian guitar and fretted with a pocket knife, or in the more conventional manner with a brass pipe for a bottleneck -- was no less inspiring, finishing vocal phrases for him and influencing contemporaries like Son House and up-and-coming youngsters like Robert Johnson.

He also popped his bass strings (a technique he developed some 40 years before funk bass players started doing the same thing), beat his guitar like a drum, and stomped his feet to reinforce certain beats or to create counter rhythms, all of which can be heard on various recordings.

Rhythm and excitement were the bywords of his style. The second, and equally important, part of Patton's legacy handed down to succeeding blues generations was his propensity for entertaining. One of the reasons for Charley Patton's enormous popularity in the South stems from his being a consummate barrelhouse entertainer.

Most of the now-common guitar gymnastics modern audiences have come to associate with the likes of a Jimi Hendrix, in fact, originated with Patton. His ability to "entertain the peoples" and rock the house with a hell-raising ferociousness left an indelible impression on audiences and fellow bluesmen alike. His music embraced everything from blues, ballads, ragtime, to gospel.

And so keen were Patton's abilities in setting mood and ambience, that he could bring a barrelhouse frolic to a complete stop by launching into an impromptu performance of nothing but religious-themed selections and still manage to hold his audience spellbound.

Because he possessed the heart of a bluesman with the mindset of a vaudeville performer, hearing Patton for the first time can be a bit overwhelming; it's a lot to take in as the music, and performances can careen from emotionally intense to buffoonishly comic, sometimes within a single selection. It is all strongly rooted in '20s black dance music and even on the religious tunes in his repertoire, Patton fuels it all with a strong rhythmic pulse.

He first recorded in 1929 for the Paramount label and, within a year's time, he was not only the largest-selling blues artist but -- in a whirlwind of recording activity -- also the music's most prolific. Patton was also responsible for hooking up fellow players Willie Brown and Son House with their first chances to record.

It is probably best to issue a blanket audio disclaimer of some kind when listening to Patton's total recorded legacy, some 60-odd tracks total, his final session done only a couple of months before his death in 1934. No one will ever know what Patton's Paramount masters really sounded like. When the company went out of business, the metal masters were sold off as scrap, some of it used to line chicken coops.

All that's left are the original 78s -- rumored to have been made out of inferior pressing material commonly used to make bowling balls -- and all of them are scratched and heavily played, making all attempts at sound retrieval by current noise-reduction processing a tall order indeed. That said, it is still music well worth seeking out and not just for its place in history. Patton's music gives us the first flowering of the Delta blues form, before it became homogenized with turnarounds and 12-bar restrictions, and few humans went at it so aggressively. *(by Cub Koda/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 10 - Fuller, Blind Boy - Homesick & Lonesome Blues

Blind Boy Fuller



Born: 1908 in Wadesboro, NC

Died: Feb 13, 1941 in Durham, NC

Unlike blues artists like Big Bill or Memphis Minnie who recorded extensively over three or four decades, Blind Boy Fuller recorded his substantial body of work over a short, six-year span. Nevertheless, he was one of the most recorded artists of his time and by far the most popular and influential Piedmont blues player of all time. Fuller could play in multiple styles: slide, ragtime, pop, and blues were all enhanced by his National steel guitar. Fuller worked with some fine sidemen, including Davis, Sonny Terry, and washboard player Bull City Red. Initially discovered and promoted by Carolina entrepreneur H. B. Long, Fuller recorded for ARC and Decca. He also served as a conduit to recording sessions, steering fellow blues musicians to the studio.

In spite of Fuller's recorded output, most of his musical life was spent as a street musician and house party favorite, and he possessed the skills to reinterpret and cover the hits of other artists as well. In this sense, he was a synthesizer of styles, parallel in many ways to Robert Johnson, his contemporary who died three years earlier. Like Johnson, Fuller lived fast and died young in 1942, only 33 years old.

Fuller was a fine, expressive vocalist and a masterful guitar player best remembered for his uptempo ragtime hits "Rag Mama Rag," "Trucking My Blues Away," and "Step It Up and Go." At the same time he was capable of deeper material, and his versions of "Lost Lover Blues" or "Mamie" are as deep as most Delta blues. Because of his popularity, he may have been overexposed on records, yet most of his songs remained

close to tradition and much of his repertoire and style is kept alive by North Carolina and Virginia artists today. (by Barry Lee Pearson/www.allmusicguide.com)

track 11 - Leadbelly - Packin' Trunk Blues

Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter)



Born: Huddie Ledbetter on Jan 20, 1888 in Mooringsport, LA
Died: Dec 6, 1949 in New York, NY

Huddie Ledbetter, known as Leadbelly, was a unique figure in the American popular music of the 20th century. Ultimately, he was best remembered for a body of songs that he discovered, adapted, or wrote, including "Goodnight, Irene," "Rock Island Line," "The Midnight Special," and "Cotton Fields."

But he was also an early example of a folksinger whose background had brought him into direct contact with the oral tradition by which folk music was handed down, a tradition that, by the early years of the century, already included elements of commercial popular music.

Because he was an African-American, he is sometimes viewed as a blues singer, but blues (a musical form he actually predated) was only one of the styles that informed his music. He was a profound influence on folk performers of the 1940s such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, who in turn influenced the folk revival and the development of rock music from the 1960s onward, which makes his induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1988, early in the hall's existence, wholly appropriate.

Huddie Ledbetter was born on the Jeter Plantation near the community of Shiloh, which is in turn near the town of Mooringsport, LA. He was the only son of a sharecropper who moved his family to nearby Harrison County, TX, when the child was about five. Ledbetter attended school from the age of eight to about 12 or 13, after which he worked full-time on the farm his father had managed to buy.

He had shown an early interest in music, learning the button accordion as a child and playing in the school band. He later added other instruments, eventually turning primarily to the guitar, having obtained his first one in 1903. By his teens, he was playing and singing for money at local dances.

At about the age of 16, he moved to Shreveport, LA, where he lived for two years supporting himself as a performer. From the ages of about 18 to 20, he traveled around Texas and Louisiana, performing and supplementing his income as a farm worker. Falling ill, he returned home, where he recovered, married, and settled down to work as a farmer.

In 1910, he and his wife moved to Dallas, TX. There, possibly around 1912, he met the young street musician Blind Lemon Jefferson, five years his junior, and the two teamed up to play around the Dallas area for the next several years. During this period, he switched from the six-string to the 12-string guitar, the instrument that became his trademark.

Ledbetter moved back to Harrison County around 1915. In June, he was arrested due to an incident the specifics of which are lost to history. Eventually, he was convicted of carrying a pistol illegally and sentenced to 30 days on a chain gang. He escaped and moved to Bowie County, TX, where he lived under the name Walter Boyd and returned to performing while also working as a sharecropper. In December 1917, he was arrested and charged with the murder of Will Stafford, the husband of one of his cousins, and with "assault to murder" another man.

He was convicted of both charges, the first carrying a sentence of five to 20 years, the second two to ten years, to be served consecutively. In prison, he gained his nickname, Leadbelly, and learned many songs from inmates. In January 1924, he sang for Texas Governor Pat Neff, including a specially written song in which he asked for a pardon. As Neff reached the end of his term as governor in January 1925, he actually did pardon Leadbelly, such that, instead of serving the minimum of seven years required by his sentences, he served six years, seven months, and eight days.

Leadbelly moved to Houston initially, then returned home before settling in Mooringsport. In January 1930, he was involved in a stabbing incident that led to his being charged with "assault with intent to murder." He was convicted, given a sentence of six to ten years, and sent to Angola Prison.

There he was a model prisoner, and due to budgetary restrictions brought on by the Depression, he was able to participate in an early release program. He applied for such release in June 1933 and was told that he would be released the following year if Governor O.K. Allen approved the petition.

Song collector John Lomax, in the employ of the Library of Congress, visited Angola in July 1933 with his son Alan Lomax, looking for folk songs to record. They were introduced to Leadbelly, whom they recorded. This initial session, which has not been released commercially, included a song Leadbelly called "Irene" that he had learned from an uncle.

Subsequent research has demonstrated that the song was not a traditional folk song, but rather in its original form was written and published in 1886 by African-American songwriter Gussie Lord Davis under the title "Irene, Good Night." But the version taught to Leadbelly by his uncle was much altered from Davis' original.

A year passed without any action being taken on Leadbelly's petition for early release. John and Alan Lomax returned to Angola in the summer of 1934, and they recorded another session with Leadbelly. A few of these recordings were released commercially by Elektra Records in 1966 in a box set called The Library of Congress Recordings and were reissued in 1991 by Rounder Records on a CD called Midnight Special. As

that title indicates, among the songs was "Midnight Special," a song Leadbelly first heard during his incarceration in Texas in the early 1920s and which he adapted.

The session also included "Governor O.K. Allen," a song Leadbelly had written to encourage the governor to sign his petition of release. The Lomaxes took a record of the song to the governor's office, though there is no evidence that he actually listened to it.

But on July 25, 1934, he signed Leadbelly's petition, commuting his sentence to three to ten years, and since Leadbelly had already served four and a half years, he was released on August 1, 1934. In later years, the state of Louisiana repeatedly denied the legend that Leadbelly had sung his way out of prison for a second time.

Upon his release, Leadbelly initially moved to Shreveport, but in the fall of 1934 he sought out John Lomax, who was living in Texas, and went to work for him, acting as his chauffeur and assistant on further trips to prisons in search of songs. At the Cummins Prison Farm in Arkansas, Leadbelly first heard a prisoner perform "Rock Island Line," a song he added to his repertoire and altered extensively.

In the winter of 1934-1935, he accompanied Lomax north, where they made a series of appearances at academic and scholarly gatherings such as the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in Philadelphia and lecture-performances at Yale and Harvard.

They attracted considerable media attention, including articles in major newspapers and appearances on radio and newsreel versions of Time Marches On. Leadbelly signed a management agreement with Lomax and was in turn signed for a series of recordings by the American Record Corporation (ARC), which issued records on a variety of low-priced labels and also owned the venerable Columbia Records label.

The ARC recordings, 40 sides, were made in January, February, and March 1935, though ARC only released two singles at the time, with a third issued the following year. Viewing Leadbelly as a blues artist, ARC emphasized that aspect of his large repertoire, but the records did not sell well in the blues market and most of the recordings remained unissued for decades.

The first extensive release of them came with the Columbia Records LP Includes Legendary Performances Never Before Released in 1970, and

more of them appeared on Columbia/Legacy's King of the 12-String Guitar in 1991. During this period, Leadbelly also made more recordings for the Library of Congress, some of which appeared on the 1966 Elektra LP and on the 1991 Rounder albums Midnight Special and Gwine Dig a Hole to Put the Devil In.

In March 1935, John Lomax, who had found Leadbelly unreliable during a northeast tour, severed his relationship with the singer, and Leadbelly returned to Louisiana. There he obtained legal representation and sought more money from Lomax, and over a period of months the two worked out a settlement that allowed Lomax to use Leadbelly's songs in his book Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly, published in 1936. In February 1936, Leadbelly moved back north, settling in New York City and attempting to build a career as a performer.

From 1937 to 1939, he made more recordings for the Library of Congress at the behest of Alan Lomax, some of which have appeared on the Elektra and Rounder albums already mentioned. He was taken up by left-wing activists who increasingly used folk music as a forum for the expression of their political beliefs, and though he himself appears to have had only a limited interest in politics in general, his fervor for civil rights, expressed in such songs as "The Bourgeois Blues," concurred with theirs. He became part of a community of urban folk musicians, including Aunt Molly Jackson, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and the team of Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee, among others.

In March 1939, Leadbelly was arrested for stabbing a man in New York. While on parole before trial, he made his second set of commercial recordings for Musicraft Records, a session arranged by Alan Lomax to help pay his legal bills.

The recordings were issued initially on a Musicraft album called Negro Sinful Tunes and have since been reissued by such labels as Stinson, Everest, and Collectables. Leadbelly was convicted of third-degree assault and served an eight-month sentence.

The singer was busy in 1940, appearing on the network radio series Folk Music of America and Back Where I Come From and launching his own weekly 15-minute program on local WNYC, a show that ran for a year. He also undertook his third set of commercial recordings in June, this time for RCA Victor and

accompanied on some tracks by the Golden Gate Quartet.

These sessions resulted in an album called *The Midnight Special and Other Southern Prison Songs*, released on RCA's Bluebird imprint. A 1964 compilation of the material on RCA was called *Midnight Special*, there was a 1989 collection called *Alabama Bound*, and in 2003, as part of its *Secret History of Rock & Roll* series, Bluebird issued *When the Sun Goes Down, Vol. 5: Take This Hammer*, a compilation containing all 26 tracks that were recorded.

In August 1940, Leadbelly also returned to recording for the Library of Congress, and some of these tracks have turned up on the previously mentioned Elektra set as well as on the Rounder albums *Gwine Dig a Hole to Put the Devil In* and *Let It Shine on Me* (1991).

In May 1941, Leadbelly recorded his first session for Asch Records, a tiny independent label run by Moses Asch. Leadbelly went on to record extensively for Asch and its successors, Disc and Folkways, this material later reissued both by Smithsonian/Folkways (from the 1990s on) and by various small labels that acquired rights to it. In 1944, he moved to the West Coast, where he remained for the better part of two years.

While there, he signed to Capitol Records and did three sessions for the label in October 1944 that resulted in a series of singles. Later, Capitol issued such compilation albums as *Classics in Jazz* (1953) and *Leadbelly: Huddie Ledbetter's Best* (1962), drawn from these sessions.

Back in New York from 1946 on, Leadbelly continued to record for Folkways, his 1948 recordings later turning up on a series of LPs called *Leadbelly's Last Sessions* and gathered together into a four-CD box set by Smithsonian/Folkways in 1994.

By 1948, he was beginning to suffer unexplained spells of numbness in his legs, and was often forced to walk with a cane and perform sitting down. In May 1949, he toured in France, but his increasing physical difficulties led to a visit to a doctor who diagnosed him as having contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, an incurable condition leading to paralysis and death.

Returning to the U.S., he was able to manage a few more performances, including ones in Texas and Oklahoma in June. (The Texas show was recorded and later released by Playboy Records under the title

Leadbelly, erroneously marketed as the singer's last concert.) But he was soon bedridden, and he died at 61 in December.

Leadbelly's fame began to increase almost immediately after his death. In 1950, his song "Irene," now called "Goodnight, Irene," was recorded by the Weavers, a folk group including Pete Seeger and other musicians acquainted with Leadbelly, and became a number one pop hit, with hit covers by such pop singers as Frank Sinatra and a number one country recording by Ernest Tubb and Red Foley.

The Weavers then adapted a Leadbelly song called "If It Wasn't for Dickey" (itself based on the Irish folk song "Drimmer's Cow") into "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," which they took into the Top 40 in 1951 and which Jimmie Rodgers covered for a Top Ten hit in 1957.

In 1956, the Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group reached the Top Ten in the U.K. and the U.S. with their recording of "Rock Island Line," taken directly from Leadbelly's version, setting off the British skiffle fad that inspired many later British rock stars, including the Beatles. (Johnny Cash scored a Top 40 country hit with his version in 1970.) "The Midnight Special" in Leadbelly's version had first reached the charts for the Tiny Grimes Quintet in 1948.

Paul Evans had a Top 40 hit with it in 1960, and Johnny Rivers also took it into the Top 40 in 1965. Leadbelly's "Cotton Fields" (aka "Old Cotton Fields at Home") was a Top 40 hit for the Highwaymen in 1961. All of these songs have become standards. When the folk revival hit in the late '50s, its practitioners frequently covered other songs associated with Leadbelly in arrangements that recalled his.

Leadbelly's own recordings, in addition to the more legitimate reissues on Rounder, Columbia/Legacy, RCA Victor, Capitol, and Smithsonian/Folkways, have turned up on a dizzying number of labels in the CD era, especially as they have come into the public domain in Europe (where copyrights extend only 50 years). Confusing as this discography may be, it is a testament to the continuing influence of Leadbelly on contemporary music. *(by William Ruhlmann/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 12 - Weldon, Casey Bill - I Beleive I'll Make A Change

Casey Bill Weldon



Born: Jul 10, 1909 in Arkansas
Died: 196? in Detroit, MI

Among the premier "Hawaiian" guitarists, Will "Casey Bill" Weldon's voicings, fluidity and tunings were creative and imaginative, as were his arrangements. He was married to Memphis Minnie in the '20s, and they made some superb recordings together in the late '20s. Weldon played in medicine shows before beginning his recording career in 1927 for Victor. There were later dates for Champion, Vocalion and Bluebird. Weldon recorded and played with The Memphis Jug Band, Charlie Burse and the Picaninny Jug Band, and the Brown Bombers of Swing. He moved to the West Coast in the '40s and purportedly recorded for several soundtracks. Weldon moved to Detroit and left the music world in the '60s. *(by Ron Wynn/www.allmusicguide.com)*

track 13 - Woods, Buddy - Don't Sell It (Don't Give It Away)

track 14 - Woods, Buddy - Muscat Hill Blues

(Oscar) Buddy Woods



Oscar "Buddy" Woods was a Louisiana street musician known as "The Lone Wolf" and a pioneer in the style of lap steel bottleneck blues slide guitar; some experts believe he may have been the primary force behind the creation of this whole genre. Woods was born in the area around Natchitoches, Louisiana, and his unknown birth date is variously listed as having been anywhere from 1892 to 1900.

About 1925 he is known to have re-settled in Shreveport, Louisiana, working as a musician and "street-rustler". It is said that Woods developed his bottleneck slide approach to playing blues guitar after

seeing a touring Hawaiian troupe of musical entertainers in the early 1920s.

Not long after arriving in Shreveport, Woods began a long association with guitarist Ed Schaffer, and together they performed as the Shreveport Home Wreckers, often appearing at The Blue Goose Grocery and Market, a notorious Shreveport establishment said to be an after hours speakeasy. Woods and Schaffer made their first two recordings as the Shreveport Home Wreckers for Victor in Memphis on May 31, 1930.

For someone whose handle was "The Lone Wolf", Woods was extraordinarily lucky in terms of the number of recording dates he was able to secure in connection with other artists. From this first session up until his last, a field recording for the Library of Congress made on October 8, 1940, Oscar "Buddy" Woods was involved in the making of no less than 35 sides.

On May 27 and 28 1931, Ed Schaffer was in Charlotte, North Carolina recording six sides headed by white country artist (and future Governor of Louisiana) Jimmie Davis along with New Orleans-based jazz guitarist Ed "Snoozer" Quinn. Nearly a year later in Dallas, Texas (on February 8, 1932) Davis made four sides with the Shreveport Home Wreckers as accompanists, and then the Home Wreckers made another pair of sides on their own, issued this time on Victor as by "Eddie and Oscar".

These sides are of key sociological importance as they are the first known Southern-made records of country blues made by a "mixed race" group. Needless to say, Victor did not go out of their way to publicise this aspect upon the initial release of these sides, which occurred during the worst year in the history of the record market. However, some old timers recalled that the association between Jimmie Davis and the Shreveport Home Wreckers didn't just end at the recording studio door- amazingly, they also toured together.

Oscar "Buddy" Woods did not record again until made a trip to New Orleans to make some solo records for Decca on March 21, 1936. One of these recordings was of Woods' signature tune, "Lone Wolf Blues", and another his first recording of "Don't Sell it- Don't Give it Away". These did so well in the race record market that Jimmie Davis took a renewed interest in the Shreveport Home Wreckers.

By the time Woods returned to record making in a session set up by Davis in San Antonio on October 30-31, 1937, the lowly two-man Home Wreckers had expanded into a six or seven piece string band called The Wampus Cats. The Wampus Cats also included a female vocalist by the name of Kitty Gray, guitarist Joe Harris and mandolinist Kid West. The Wampus Cats made an additional session in Dallas on December 4, 1938, on which Kitty Gray does not appear, but unknown trumpet and saxophone players are therein added to the mix.

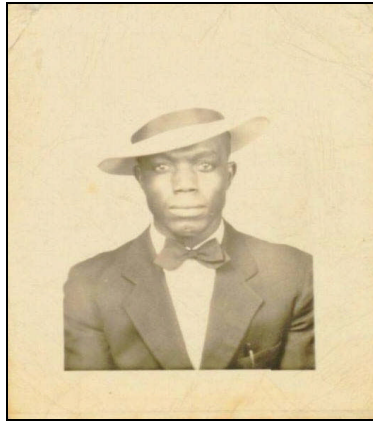
After Oscar "Buddy" Woods cut his last five selections for the Library of Congress in 1940, he disappears from public notice until his death in 1956. On the same date as Woods, Wampus Cats alumni Joe Harris and Kid West also recorded 11 pieces for the Library of Congress as a duo. As in the case of Oscar "Buddy" Woods, they were never heard from again.

Ed Schaffer is even more obscure than his compatriots, and may have died even before the San Antonio sessions with The Wampus Cats, as he is not known to have been present on that occasion. According to entries in Shreveport city directories, Oscar "Buddy" Woods stayed in the Shreveport area in his final years, playing dances and working as a street musician.

The impact of Oscar "Buddy" Woods on the development of bottleneck slide playing was crucial; one musician he took under his wing around 1930 was Texas native Babe Lemon Karo Turner, who later assumed the name Black Ace. During his lifetime, Oscar "Buddy" Woods was best known for "Lone Wolf Blues", but today the most often anthologized cut in which he was involved is The Wampus Cats' version of "Don't Sell it-Don't Give it Away". Also, bluesman Robert Johnson paid The Shreveport Home Wreckers an offhand tribute by lifting one verse practically verbatim out of their 1932 "Flying Crow Blues" and using it as the concluding verse in his own "Love in Vain." (by Uncle Dave Lewis/www.allmusicguide.com)

track 15 - Johnson, Robert - Travelling Riverside Blues

Robert Johnson



Born: May 8, 1911 in Hazlehurst, MS
Died: Aug 16, 1938 in Greenwood, MS

If the blues has a truly mythic figure, one whose story hangs over the music the way a Charlie Parker does over jazz or a Hank Williams does over country, it's Robert Johnson, certainly the most celebrated figure in the history of the blues. Of course, his legend is immensely fortified by the fact that Johnson also left behind a small legacy of recordings that are considered the emotional apex of the music itself. These recordings have not only entered the realm of blues standards ("Love in Vain," "Crossroads," "Sweet Home Chicago," "Stop Breaking Down"), but were adapted by rock & roll artists as diverse as the Rolling Stones, Steve Miller, Led Zeppelin, and Eric Clapton.

While there are historical naysayers who would be more comfortable downplaying his skills and achievements (most of whom have never made a convincing case as where the source of his apocalyptic visions emanates from), Robert Johnson remains a potent force to be reckoned with.

As a singer, a composer, and as a guitarist of considerable skills, he produced some of the genre's best music and the ultimate blues legend to deal with. Doomed, haunted, driven by demons, a tormented genius dead at an early age, all of these add up to making him a character of mythology who -- if he hadn't actually existed -- would have to be created by some biographer's overactive romantic imagination.

The legend of his life -- which by now, even folks who don't know anything about the blues can cite to you chapter and verse -- goes something like this: Robert Johnson was a young black man living on a plantation in rural Mississippi. Branded with a burning desire to become great blues musician, he was instructed to take his guitar to a crossroad near Dockery's plantation at midnight.

There he was met by a large black man (the Devil) who took the guitar from Johnson, tuned it, and handed it back to him. Within less than a year's time, in exchange for his everlasting soul, Robert Johnson became the king of the Delta blues singers, able to play, sing, and create the greatest blues anyone had ever heard.

As success came with live performances and phonograph recordings, Johnson remained tormented, constantly haunted by nightmares of hellhounds on his trail, his pain and mental anguish finding release only in the writing and performing of his music. Just as he was to be brought to Carnegie Hall to perform in John Hammond's first Spirituals to Swing concert, the news had come from Mississippi; Robert Johnson was dead, poisoned by a jealous girlfriend while playing a jook joint.

Those who were there swear he was last seen alive foaming at the mouth, crawling around on all fours, hissing and snapping at onlookers like a mad dog. His dying words (either spoken or written on a piece of scrap paper) were, "I pray that my redeemer will come and take me from my grave." He was buried in a pine box in an unmarked grave, his deal with the Devil at an end.

Of course, Johnson's influences in the real world were far more disparate than the legend suggests, no matter how many times it's been retold or embellished. As a teenage plantation worker, Johnson fooled with a harmonica a little bit, but seemingly had no major musical skills to speak of.

Every attempt to sit in with local titans of the stature of Son House, Charley Patton, Willie Brown, and others brought howls of derision from the older bluesmen. Son House: "We'd all play for the Saturday night balls, and there'd be this little boy hanging around. That was Robert Johnson.

He blew a harmonica then, and he was pretty good at that, but he wanted to play a guitar. He'd sit at our feet and play during the breaks

and such another racket you'd never heard." He married young and left Robinsonville, wandering the Delta and using Hazelhurst as base, determined to become a full-time professional musician after his first wife died during childbirth.

Johnson returned to Robinsonville a few years later and he encountered House and Willie Brown at a juke joint in Banks, MS; according to House, "When he finished all our mouths were standing open. I said, 'Well, ain't that fast! He's gone now!'" To a man, there was only one explanation as how Johnson had gotten that good, that fast; he had sold his soul to the Devil.

But Johnson's skills were acquired in a far more conventional manner, born more of a concentrated Christian work ethic than a Faustian bargain with old Scratch. He idolized the Delta recording star Lonnie Johnson -- sometimes introducing himself to newcomers as "Robert Lonnie, one of the Johnson brothers" -- and the music of Scrapper Blackwell, Skip James, and Kokomo Arnold were all inspirational elements that he drew his unique style from. His slide style certainly came from hours of watching local stars like Charley Patton and Son House, among others.

Perhaps the biggest influence, however, came from an unrecorded bluesman named Ike Zinneman. We'll never really know what Zinneman's music sounded like (we do know from various reports that he liked to practice late at night in the local graveyard, sitting on tombstones while he strummed away) or how much of his personal muse he imparted to Johnson, if any.

What is known is that after a year or so under Zinneman's tutelage, Johnson returned with an encyclopedic knowledge of his instrument, an ability to sing and play in a multiplicity of styles, and a very carefully worked-out approach to song construction, keeping his original lyrics with him in a personal digest.

As an itinerant musician, playing at country suppers as well as on the street, his audience demanded someone who could play and sing everything from blues pieces to the pop and hillbilly tunes of the day. Johnson's talents could cover all of that and more.

His most enduring contribution, the boogie bass line played on the bottom strings of the guitar (adapted from piano players), has become part-and-parcel of the sound most people associate with down-home

blues. It is a sound so very much of a part of the music's fabric that the listener cannot imagine the styles of Jimmy Reed, Elmore James, Eddie Taylor, Lightnin' Slim, Hound Dog Taylor, or a hundred lesser lights existing without that essential component part. As his playing partner Johnny Shines put it, "Some of the things that Robert did with the guitar affected the way everybody played.

He'd do rundowns and turnbacks. He'd do repeats. None of this was being done. In the early '30s, boogie on the guitar was rare, something to be heard. Because of Robert, people learned to complement themselves, carrying their own bass as their own lead with this one instrument." While his music can certainly be put in context as part of a definable tradition, what he did with it and where he took it was another matter entirely.

Although Robert Johnson never recorded near as much as Lonnie Johnson, Charley Patton, or Blind Lemon Jefferson, he certainly traveled more than all of them put together. After his first recordings came out and "Terraplane Blues" became his signature tune (a so-called "race" record selling over three or four-thousand copies back in the early to mid-'30s was considered a hit), Johnson hit the road, playing anywhere and everywhere he could.

Instilled with a seemingly unquenchable desire to experience new places and things, his wandering nature took him up and down the Delta and as far a field as St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit (where he performed over the radio on the Elder Moten Hour), places Son House and Charley Patton had only seen in the movies, if that. But the end came at a Saturday-night dance at a juke joint in Three Forks, MS, in August of 1938.

Playing with Honeyboy Edwards and Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller), Johnson was given a jug of moonshine whiskey laced with either poison or lye, presumably by the husband of a woman the singer had made advances toward.

He continued playing into the night until he was too sick to continue, then brought back to a boarding house in Greenwood, some 15 miles away. He lay sick for several days, successfully sweating the poison out of his system, but caught pneumonia as a result and died on August 16th. The legend was just beginning.

In the mid-'60s, Columbia Records released *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, the first compilation of Johnson's music and one of the earliest collections of pure country blues. Rife with liner notes full of romantic speculation, little in the way of hard information and a painting standing for a picture, this for years was the world's sole introduction to the music and the legend, doing much to promote both.

A second volume -- collecting up the other master takes and issuing a few of the alternates -- was released in the '70s, giving fans a first-hand listen to music that had been only circulated through bootleg tapes and albums or cover versions by English rock stars. Finally in 1990 -- after years of litigation -- a complete two-CD box set was released with every scrap of Johnson material known to exist plus the holy grail of the blues; the publishing of the only two known photographs of the man himself.

Columbia's parent company, Sony, was hoping that sales would maybe hit 20,000. The box set went on to sell over a million units, the first blues recordings ever to do so.

In the intervening years since the release of the box set, Johnson's name and likeness has become a cottage growth merchandising industry.

Posters, postcards, t-shirts, guitar picks, strings, straps, and polishing cloths -- all bearing either his likeness or signature (taken from his second marriage certificate) -- have become available, making him the ultimate blues commodity with his image being reproduced for profit far more than any contemporary bluesman, dead or alive. Although the man himself (and his contemporaries) could never have imagined it in a million years, the music and the legend both live on. *(by Cub*

Koda/www.allmusicguide.com)

track 16 - White, Bukka - Bukka's Jitterbug Swing

track 17 - White, Bukka - Special Stream Line

Bukka White (Booker T. Washington White)



Born: Booker T. Washington White on Nov 12, 1906 in Houston, MS
Died: Feb 26, 1977 in Memphis, TNAA

Bukka White (true name: Booker T. Washington White) was born in Houston, Mississippi (not Houston, Texas) in 1906 (not any date between 1902-1905 or 1907-1909, as is variously reported). He got his initial start in music learning fiddle tunes from his father. Guitar instruction soon followed, but White's grandmother objected to anyone playing "that Devil music" in the household; nonetheless, his father eventually bought him a guitar.

When Bukka White was 14 he spent some time with an uncle in Clarksdale, Mississippi and passed himself off as a 21-year-old, using his guitar playing as a way to attract women. Somewhere along the line, White came in contact with Delta blues legend Charley Patton, who no doubt was able to give Bukka White instruction on how to improve his skills in both areas of endeavor. In addition to music, White pursued careers in sport, playing in Negro Leagues baseball and, for a time, taking up boxing.

In 1930 Bukka White met furniture salesman Ralph Limbo, who was also a talent scout for Victor. White traveled to Memphis where he made his first recordings, singing a mixture of blues and gospel material under the name of Washington White.

Victor only saw fit to release four of the 14 songs Bukka White recorded that day. As the Depression set in, opportunity to record didn't knock again for Bukka White until 1937, when Big Bill Broonzy asked him to come to Chicago and record for Lester Melrose.

By this time, Bukka White had gotten into some trouble -- he later claimed he and a friend had been "ambushed" by a man along a highway, and White shot the man in the thigh in self defense. While awaiting trial, White jumped bail and headed for Chicago, making two sides before being apprehended and sent back to Mississippi to do a three-year stretch at Parchman Farm. While he was serving time, White's record "Shake 'Em on Down" became a hit.

Bukka White proved a model prisoner, popular with inmates and prison guards alike and earning the nickname "Barrelhouse." It was as "Washington Barrelhouse White" that White recorded two numbers for John and Alan Lomax at Parchman Farm in 1939.

After earning his release in 1940, he returned to Chicago with 12 newly minted songs to record for Lester Melrose. These became the backbone of his lifelong repertoire, and the Melrose session today is regarded as the pinnacle of Bukka White's achievements on record.

Among the songs he recorded on that occasion were "Parchman Farm Blues" (not to be confused with "Parchman Farm" written by Mose Allison and covered by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and Blue Cheer, among others), "Good Gin Blues," "Bukka's Jitterbug Swing," "Aberdeen, Mississippi Blues," and "Fixin' to Die Blues," all timeless classics of the Delta blues.

Then, Bukka disappeared -- not into the depths of some Mississippi Delta mystery, but into factory work in Memphis during World War II. Bob Dylan recorded "Fixin' to Die Blues" on his 1961 debut Columbia album, and at the time no one in the music business knew who Bukka White was -- most figured a fellow who'd written a song like "Fixin' to Die" had to be dead already.

Two California-based blues enthusiasts, John Fahey and Ed Denson, were more skeptical about this assumption, and in 1963 addressed a letter to "Bukka White (Old Blues Singer), c/o General Delivery, Aberdeen, Mississippi." By chance, one of White's relatives was working in the Post Office in Aberdeen, and forwarded the letter to White in Memphis.

Things moved quickly from the time Bukka White met up with Fahey and Denson; by the end of 1963 Bukka White was already recording on contract with Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie. White wrote a new song celebrating his good fortune entitled "1963 Isn't 1962 Blues" and swiftly

recorded three albums of material for Strachwitz which the latter entitled Sky Songs, referring to White's habit of "reaching up and pulling songs out of the sky." Nonetheless, even White knew he couldn't get away with making up all his material regularly in performance, so he also studied his 78s and relearned all the songs he'd written for Lester Melrose.

Although Bukka White was practically the same age as other survivors of the Delta and Memphis blues scenes of the 1920s and '30s, he didn't look like someone who belonged in a nursing home. White was a sharp dresser, in the prime of health, was a compelling entertainer and raconteur, and clearly enjoyed being the center of attention. He thrived on the folk festival and coffeehouse circuit of the 1960s.

By the '70s, however, Bukka White couldn't help getting a little bored with his celebrity status as an acoustic bluesman. White's tastes had grown with the times, and he would have loved to have played an electric guitar and fronted a band, as his old acquaintance Chester Burnett (aka Howlin' Wolf) and Bukka's own cousin, B. B. King, had been already doing successfully for years. But he only needed to look at what happened to his friend Bob Dylan's career for a lesson on what happens to folk blues artists who try and "go electric."

So, Bukka White stayed on the festival circuit to the end of his days, beating the hell out of his National steel guitar, and sometimes his monologues would go on a little long, and sometimes his playing was a little more willfully eccentric than at others.

Patrons would wait patiently to hear Bukka play "Parchman Farm Blues," although some of them were under the mistaken impression that they had paid their money to hear an artist who had originated a number that Eric Clapton made famous.

Blues purists will tell you that nothing Bukka White recorded after 1940 is ultimately worth listening to. This isn't accurate, nor fair. White was an incredibly compelling performer who gave up of more of himself in his work than many artists in any musical discipline.

The Sky Songs albums for Arhoolie are an eminently rewarding document of Bukka's charm and candor, particularly in the long monologue "Mixed Water." "Big Daddy," recorded in 1974 for Arnold S.

Caplin's Biograph label, likewise is a classic of its kind and should not be neglected. (by Uncle Dave Lewis/www.allmusicguide.com)

track 18 - Terrell, Sister O. M. - Swing Low, Chariot

Sister Ola Mae Terrell (Ola Mae Long)



Born: OLA MAE LONG, on August 18/1911, on Atlanta, GA.
Died: 2006

(Sister) Ola Mae Terrell shows staff and residents at Star Crest Nursing Home how she accompanied herself on guitar during her years as a gospel artist. The beginning of the trail was a white label on a record bearing only the name Sister O.M. Terrell, Columbia Records and Melody Trails Inc. It was enough to get Bruce Nemerov, audio specialist at MTSU's Center for Popular Music, curious about the woman who sang and accompanied herself on a guitar, and made several special records for Columbia.

Reference books that usually supply additional information about artists were no help. "I've done enough detective work of this type to realize that BMI and Melody Trails was a good starting place," Nemerov said. "BMI's web site didn't list Melody Trails. It was purchased, and subsequently became part of TRO."

Several phone calls led Nemerov to Judy Bell at TRO, who he said was very helpful once he introduced himself as being from the Center for Popular Music at MTSU. "They knew MTSU, and publish the Leadbelly Music. Anything I wanted was available to me."

Records indicated that the company had sent Sister Terrell royalty payments throughout the '50s and '60s. The trail led on to the former

owner of a Charleston, S.C. radio station owner, who had hired Terrell for a 15-minute gospel radio show during the 1950s. "By that time gospel was Thomas Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson. A woman playing the guitar was different," Nemerov said.

Terrell's sound was, indeed, so distinctive, that a disk was cut at the radio station and sent to Columbia Records. Columbia asked Terrell to come to Nashville to record several of her songs. Checks that had been sent to Terrell's last known address in Atlanta began returning, leaving company officials unaware of her whereabouts, and whether or not she was even still alive. "By this time, it wasn't just my curiosity, but the money," Nemerov said.

Something else that struck Nemerov as interesting was that the catalog number on the record label was in a series that was "hillbilly music" with the exception of Terrell's gospel tunes. "She was a real anomaly in a lot of ways. I wondered whether anybody had even listened to her music."

A search on the Internet led Nemerov to an Evangelist Terrell, in a town not far from Charlotte, N.C. A telephone conversation that seemed to be a dead end turned out not to be. The evangelist Nemerov was looking for was African-American, and the one he spoke to was not.

But the Evangelist Terrell he spoke to called him back a week later, saying a church member remembered hearing O.M. Terrell sing, and that she was involved with the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God. Several other phone calls led Nemerov to a nursing home in Conyers, Ga., where the staff was unaware that one of their patients had recorded records.

Sister O.M. Terrell's one session for Columbia, in Nashville in 1953, resulted in six tracks. An itinerant black evangelist singer with holiness roots, Sister Terrell came to the attention of Columbia through the efforts of Robert T. Christie and Lauren Moore, managers at radio station WPAL in Charleston, South Carolina. Terrell had come to the station, and for a period was doing a regular live radio show on Sundays at the station.

"We have an Ola Terrell here, but she doesn't sing," Nemerov was told. But she did. When Nemerov went to see her, he took a tape player and recordings of her songs, and recalls that "her eyes lit up. She hadn't heard them in a long time."

A lengthy conversation confirmed Terrell's date of birth as 1911, and that she was born to Mary Long. At an early age, Terrell began working as a domestic. She became involved with the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God and began singing about God and the Bible. She later went to Gainesville, Ga., and was there for the storm of 1936, which she wrote about in one of her songs. In 1956, Terrell moved back to Atlanta.

Having found Terrell at the nursing home, where she had been since 1998, Nemerov made some contacts in the industry, to find out whether there were any royalties due her. There were, and they had been put in escrow until the company determined whether she was alive. They have since been forwarded to Terrell.

Nemerov looks forward to his next visit to the nursing home and hopes to hear some of the music Terrell wrote but never recorded. "Maybe if her mind is on her music, I can get her to sing some of her songs."

All in all, Nemerov is pleased with the way this particular search has turned out. "Searches don't always work out. This is one of the good ones. She was just a name on a label. It seemed to me that somebody didn't try hard enough (to find out anything about her). The '50s was not so long ago." *(by Priscilla Wainwright/www.mtsu.edu)*

track 19 - Son House - Pearline

Son House (Eddie James House)



Born: Eddie James House, Jr. on Mar 21, 1902 in Riverton, MS
Died: Oct 19, 1988 in Detroit, MI

Son House's place, not only in the history of Delta blues, but in the overall history of the music, is a very high one indeed. He was a major

innovator of the Delta style, along with his playing partners Charley Patton and Willie Brown. Few listening experiences in the blues are as intense as hearing one of Son House's original 1930s recordings for the Paramount label.

Entombed in a hailstorm of surface noise and scratches, one can still be awestruck by the emotional fervor House puts into his singing and slide playing. Little wonder then that the man became more than just an influence on some white English kid with a big amp; he was the main source of inspiration to both Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson, and it doesn't get much more pivotal than that.

Even after his rediscovery in the mid-'60s, House was such a potent musical force that what would have been a normally genteel performance by any other bluesmen in a "folk" setting turned into a night in the nastiest juke joint you could imagine, scaring the daylights out of young white enthusiasts expecting something far more prosaic and comfortable.

Not out of Son House, no sir. When the man hit the downbeat on his National steel-bodied guitar and you saw his eyes disappear into the back of his head, you knew you were going to hear some blues. And when he wasn't shouting the blues, he was singing spirituals, a cappella. Right up to the end, no bluesman was torn between the sacred and the profane more than Son House.

He was born Eddie James House, Jr., on March 21, 1902, in Riverton, MS. By the age of 15, he was preaching the gospel in various Baptist churches as the family seemingly wandered from one plantation to the next. He didn't even bother picking up a guitar until he turned 25; to quote House, "I didn't like no guitar when I first heard it; oh gee, I couldn't stand a guy playin' a guitar. I didn't like none of it."

But if his ambivalence to the instrument was obvious, even more obvious was the simple fact that Son hated plantation labor even more and had developed a taste for corn whiskey. After drunkenly launching into a blues at a house frolic in Lyon, MS, one night and picking up some coin for doing it, the die seemed to be cast; Son House may have been a preacher, but he was part of the blues world now.

If the romantic notion that the blues life is said to be a life full of trouble is true, then Son found a barrel of it one night at another house

frolic in Lyon. He shot a man dead that night and was immediately sentenced to imprisonment at Parchman Farm. He ended up only serving two years of his sentence, with his parents both lobbying hard for his release, claiming self defense.

Upon his release -- after a Clarksdale judge told him never to set foot in town again -- he started a new life in the Delta as a full-time man of the blues. After hitchhiking and hoboing the rails, he made it down to Lula, MS, and ran into the most legendary character the blues had to offer at that point, the one and only Charley Patton. The two men couldn't have been less similar in disposition, stature, and in musical and performance outlook if they had purposely planned it that way.

Patton was described as a funny, loud-mouthed little guy who was a noisy, passionate showman, using every trick in the book to win over a crowd. The tall and skinny House was by nature a gloomy man with a saturnine disposition who still felt extremely guilt-ridden about playing the blues and working in juke joints.

Yet when he ripped into one, Son imbued it with so much raw feeling that the performance became the show itself, sans gimmicks. The two of them argued and bickered constantly, and the only thing these two men seemed to have in common was a penchant for imbibing whatever alcoholic potable came their way.

Though House would later refer in interviews to Patton as a "jerk" and other unprintables, it was Patton's success as a bluesman -- both live and especially on record -- that got Son's foot in the door as a recording artist.

He followed Patton up to Grafton, WI, and recorded a handful of sides for the Paramount label. These records today (selling scant few copies in their time, the few that did survived a life of huge steel needles, even bigger scratches, and generally lousy care) are some of the most highly prized collectors' items of Delta blues recordings, much tougher to find than, say, a Robert Johnson or even a Charley Patton 78.

Paramount used a pressing compound for their 78 singles that was so noisy and inferior sounding that should someone actually come across a clean copy of any of Son's original recordings, it's a pretty safe bet that

the listener would still be greeted with a blizzard of surface noise once the needle made contact with the disc.

But audio concerns aside, the absolutely demonic performances House laid down on these three two-part 78s ("My Black Mama," "Preachin' the Blues," and "Dry Spell Blues," with an unreleased test acetate of "Walkin' Blues" showing up decades later) cut through the hisses and pops like a brick through a stained glass window.

It was those recordings that led Alan Lomax to his door in 1941 to record him for the Library of Congress. Lomax was cutting acetates on a "portable" recording machine weighing over 300 pounds. Son was still playing (actually at the peak of his powers, some would say), but had backed off of it a bit since Charley Patton died in 1934.

House did some tunes solo, as Lomax asked him to do, but also cut a session backed by a rocking little string band. As the band laid down long and loose (some tracks went on for over six minutes) versions of their favorite numbers, all that was missing was the guitars being plugged in and a drummer's backbeat and you were getting a glimpse of the future of the music.

But just as House had gone a full decade without recording, this time after the Lomax recordings, he just as quickly disappeared, moving to Rochester, NY. When folk-blues researchers finally found him in 1964, he was cheerfully exclaiming that he hadn't touched a guitar in years. One of the researchers, a young guitarist named Alan Wilson (later of the blues-rock group Canned Heat) literally sat down and retaught Son House how to play like Son House.

Once the old master was up to speed, the festival and coffeehouse circuit became his oyster. He recorded again, the recordings becoming an important introduction to his music and, for some, a lot easier to take than those old Paramount 78s from a strict audio standpoint.

In 1965, he played Carnegie Hall and four years later found himself the subject of an eponymously titled film documentary, all of this another world removed from Clarksdale, MS, indeed. Everywhere he played, he was besieged by young fans, asking him about Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, and others.

For young white blues fans, these were merely exotic names from the past, heard only to them on old, highly prized recordings; for Son House

they were flesh and blood contemporaries, not just some names on a record label. Hailed as the greatest living Delta singer still actively performing, nobody dared call himself the king of the blues as long as Son House was around.

He fell into ill health by the early '70s; what was later diagnosed as both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease first affected his memory and his ability to recall songs on-stage and, later, his hands, which shook so bad he finally had to give up the guitar and eventually leave performing altogether by 1976. He lived quietly in Detroit, MI, for another 12 years, passing away on October 19, 1988. His induction into the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1980 was no less than his due. Son House was the blues. *(by Cub Koda/www.allmusicguide.com)*