

You Been A Good Old Wagon Len Spencer 1900 or 1901 A truly precious performance of an early ragtime song, by a white minstrel of a tune written by a man, Ben Harney, of indeterminate race. Wikipedia claims that Harney was white. Others, like Ed Berlin, have said he had a dark-skinned heritage (Melungeon; you could look it up, as Casey Stengel said). I trust Ed, who's a great researcher. But as I once commented, I'm willing to bet that for white audiences Harney was white, and that for black audiences he was black, especially in those racially skewed times. Eubie Blake, interestingly, remembered Harney as black. Spencer, however, as we know for certain, was white, a man who played a variety of show business roles (see Tim Brooks' book *Lost Sounds*, and his account of Spencer helping out the aging and down-on-his luck George W. Johnson, an early African American recording artist). This is a fine performance that shows the idea of what will soon become the Tin-Pan-Alley vernacular song, which itself grew out of some minstrel ideas and some stage-show ideas (two forms which, of course, intersected). What does it have to do with the blues? Well, the chord progression is adapted from just those country sources that populate the music of the pre-blues and then the blues, and Harney was among the first to really immerse himself musically, in a public and professional way, in that great sonic river.

1. **Nobody Bert Williams 5/06** In the famous words of WC Fields, Bert Williams, vaudeville great, was "the funniest man I ever saw, and the saddest." Ah, race, where is they sting? Everywhere in American life. Nobody is (or may be) Williams' not-so-subtle way of depicting himself, and everyone else of color, as ultimate outsiders in a land of dominant white images, even as those images, under the growing hegemony of African American culture, were changing radically. And now for the revelation du jour - why has no one ever noticed that the main theme of Nobody is essentially, in its harmonic outline, out of the blues' immediate pre-history? The three-line repeated opening stanza in tunes like Worried Man's Blues is replicated by form very closely in Nobody's opening lines: "I ain't never done nothin to nobody/ I ain't never done nothin to nobody no time/so until I get somethin; from somebody, sometime..."
2. **The Rain Song Afro American Folk Song Singers 3/12/14** Not the blues again but the striking work of the angry and talented African American composer Will Marion Cook, whose career was reportedly hampered by his prickly personality. In the parlance of our day (or at least my day) he was pissed off and not afraid to tell people about it, though his anger was apparently frequently misdirected toward those who might otherwise have been of help to him. The Rain Song shows what African American performers and composers were thinking about at the same time that the blues was starting to rise up into public consciousness, as they searched for a format and a form with which to encapsulate their musical ideas, to honor their own heritage at the same time that they made a living in the real world. This piece observes show-song conventions with a bit of dialect and the somewhat audibly insurgent rhythms that we might call pre-swing (or early jazz). Though they drew from related traditions, vernacular sources like the blues were largely alien to people like Cook, who had other idea about how to elevate not only the race but its cultural products.

Blame it on the Blues Victor Military Orch. 4/8/15 As above, the Victor Military Band (probably, given the years of its recordings, made up of draft dodgers). Interesting as an early song that is more "about" the blues than it is actually the blues. This was soon to become a common mode of lyric.

St. Louis Blues Prince's Band 12/18/15 The first version of W.C. Handy's "classic"? Probably. I don't find Handy as interesting as a lot of people do (see the recent bio by David Roberston) but he was certainly a significant historical figure, who was not only in the right place at the right time but was smart enough to *know* that he was in the right place at the right time. The two do not necessarily go together (ask those of us who declined the chance to buy property in New York City in the early 1980s). My biggest general problem with his music is that it has a plodding, middle-brow quality to it. For example, St. Louis Blues, which is a terrible song, melodically bland and formally vulgar, a middle-class statement of the blues. But the blues was a form that W.C. could not tame (though he did make a lot of money off of it).

3. **Death Where is thy Sting? Arthur Collins 1918** Was Arthur Collins just passing, or was he a true white minstrel man? There is a sly, knowing quality to his vocals that makes him sound significantly more self-aware than the run of minstrel singers who recorded in the first 20 years of the 20th century. Black or white, he is undoubtedly one of the best faux race singers of those

- years. And if he was not black, than he was another of the hip white men who beat Bing Crosby to the musical punch (see Al Bernard, below). And if all that sounds *blue* is *blues* (as I have been told or, really, commanded) than, yes, he is one of the truly great blues singers (personally I have my doubts about that equation but for the sake of consensus I will keep them to myself).
4. **Beale Street Blues Al Bernard 1919** Al Bernard was, IMHO, one of the great vernacular-type singer, a hip white man who was not only at it earlier but was *much* hipper than Bing Crosby (and here I am taking some issue with Gary Giddins, who has described Bing as being the first white hipster in this way). Actually, I like Crosby, but he was, from the start, a terrific singer with a low-quotient of actual hipness, more, in that sense, a middle-class wannabee than the real thing, an un-hip person's idea of a hip person. Al Bernard was the real thing, though only me and Larry Gushee seem to be aware of this. Bernard was a dedicated minstrel man with what I can only describe as a deceptively cheerful but soulful vocal personality and great vernacular skill at phrasing. His voice was perfect for the times he sang in and for the songs he sang. Even nearly a hundred years later the sound of it sends a charge through the haze of early acoustic recordings, to say nothing of the happiness I feel when I hear him as recorded electrically. Oxymoronically or not, I will call this the real minstrel blues
 - 5.
 6. **Lovin' Sam From Alabam Mamie Smith 11/6/20**
 7. **Frankie Blues Mamie Smith 2/21/21** Two songs from the lady who is rightly celebrated for starting the blues craze (her recording of Crazy Blues). She was a great singer in the vaudeville way, and so tends to be treated, in histories, as less a singer than a commercial symbol, which is unfortunate. Lovin' Sam is a minstrel pop tune which she sings with lust and conviction, Frankie Blues a pop song with blues changes, so old as to lend support to various peripheral theories that the blues came from not only a Southern direction but from song pluggers and other avocational sources.
 - 8.
 9. **Nick Lucas Teasin' the Frets 1922** Is this the first guitar blues? It beats Sylvester Weaver by about a year, and includes more than one strain of the blues form. Lucas is one of the most supple of early guitarists, a descendant of the Italian string band tradition with a significantly advanced sense of rhythm that, on the evidence of this recording, predicted, at the very least, the coming generation of jazz guitarists. (Lucas is one of those musicians who demands a much more detailed study, as there are, in his early 78s, much more than just hints that he was perhaps the first on record to begin developing a concept of true jazz guitar playing and swing).
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 11. **Aggravatin' Papa Sophie Tucker 3/23** From the Hartford lady-of-song whose parents ran a hostel for vaudevillians. In later years she became something of a self-caricature, but maybe by that time, she, as a showbiz legend, was entitled (even Jolson and Crosby sometimes slipped into that role). Here she has man trouble and I have to wonder if she has already listened to Bessie Smith, as there is a similar, feet-planted-firmly-on-the-floor sound to this. It also shows, like Bessie and in an early way, that you can swing without really swinging.

London Blues Jelly Roll Morton's Jazz Orch. 1923 Early Morton, working to organize the elements of his newly-invented jazz (yes, I accept his claim) into a system of arranged interventions. Morton was interested in the blues, most definitely, but he was, consciously or not, working to define them in a personal way, at least in relation to their place in the practice of jazz and jazz composition. Not so many flatted thirds, a more melodic and horizontal style than some contemporaries, a more self conscious rendering of the form. Smoke House blues (see CD 4) is more a typical ragtime chord progression than a blues, of course, but it *lopes* into blues territory in a way that even Blind Lemon Jefferson would appreciate.

1. **London Cafe Blues King Oliver Baby Dodds Jimmy Noone 10/15/23** Speaking of the Diaspora, King Oliver was one of those who early on recognized, as George Brunies said, that "the best thing about New Orleans is the next train out of town." Oliver's Chicago band (and, later, his sideman Louis Armstrong) shook up that city and, even more significantly, its musicians. Here Oliver is with two of New Orleans finest exponents of the slower drag of the blues, Baby Dodds and Jimmy Noone. Listen to the ensemble divide itself into soloists, yet still return handily, for the sake of musical unity (all for one, one for all.....). Though this recording, like most of Oliver's from this period, requires of the listener a little bit of aural imagination, given its technical limitations, one can still hear the band's distinct musical personality. It is of a kind which

complements Clyde Bernhardt's (a trombonist who worked with Oliver later on) wonderful portrait, in his autobiography, of the King, one which converts Oliver, instantly, from noble martyr of the lost musical continent to salty realist of the new musical century.

Rhapsody in Blue Paul Whiteman 6/10/24 (excerpt) I will refer you to my book *That Devilin' Tune* for a discussion on the relative merits of white and black musicians as well as of the Whiteman band. I *will* say that I love this band for the artful precision of its playing and for its idiomatic arrangements. Still, I have mixed feelings about this initial Gershwin foray into the meta-classical world. As Miles Davis later said of Oscar Peterson, Gershwin nearly drives the flatted third into the ground, as though the very action of repetition constitutes an authentic blues technique. I prefer Concerto in F and the Preludes, which make much more effective use of such references and which seem to forecast a much more effectively compositional use of the blue gesture.

Kiss Me Sweet Butterbeans and Susie w/King Oliver 9/24 Early stage music of the African American minstrel/vaudeville world, with King-Oliver as an add on. It is a truism that early African American love songs were almost always devoid of sentimentality and sober love pains, as these were considered the domain of the white song world. The exaggerated comedic overtones of songs like these may have to be viewed in terms of both cause and effect: they are a leftover of early black expressions of racialist signification - and they are also remnants of old-time minstrel darkie plantation-ism. So what may have been initially something of a liberationist cultural force (freeing black performers from the stuffy requirements of white "dignity") was also a means of oppression, denying black performers not only a particular kind of musical choice but insuring the retention of certain racial caricatures (shiftless stuttering lovers, unfaithful and violent). Viewed in this way, the blues was indeed a radically altering social force, restoring African American control over their own music (shades of Monk telling Mary Lou Williams, with much greater self-consciousness, and at the dawn of the bebop era, that it was about time they invented a music that could not be copied or used glibly for commercial gain).

Nobody Knows the Way I Feel This Morning Alberta Hunter 12/22/24 w/Bechet/Armstrong Hunter had a remarkable career, and though she is often reduced by the blues community to an only semi-relevant musical sideshow, she was among the first to make recordings in and around the area of what we now like to call the "classic" blues. Maybe she was not, technically, a blues singer, but, in a way, that's exactly the point. Like Ethel Waters she reflects some early explorations in African American show business, an attempt to define the woman singer's rightful professional place. On top of this she was an excellent singer, not to mention an early if inadvertent force for gay rights. Musicians were often feared by righteous folk for being libertines, and these guardians of the public morality were right if, possibly, for the wrong reasons -- early African American performers freed us musically, culturally, linguistically, and sexually.

1. **All Night Long Blues Roba Stanley and Bob Stanley 12/24** Is this the earliest white country blues on record? Some might argue that it's not really the blues because it lacks the requisite opening couplet (the repeated initial stanza). But, hey, look at the title. What else can it be? Certainly, its sexual frankness (her all-night loneliness at being left alone by her sweetheart) and the lyrical asides about different color gals, bedbugs, and night-riders puts this as one of the whiter blues that is truest to the concept.
2. **Steel String Blues Sylvester Weaver 4/25** Kentucky native Weaver was the first black guitarist to record, and the first black guitarist to record the blues. He was prolific and consistent, with modest but clean technique, and we can hear in some of his group recordings that most precious and organic of entities, the black string band. The music, especially on *Steel String Blues*, can only be described as elegiacally blues-tinted. In 1925, musicians like this stood at the end of one tradition at the same time that they stood at the beginning of another. In this way they applied the old stately melodies to the blues, and then the blues to the old stately melodies.
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4. **Edna Thomas Street Cries of New Orleans 1925** The notes to a CD reissue that includes this performance advise that the singer, though white, is begrudgingly included in the collection because black witnesses have testified to the "authenticity" of her performance, which evokes the

- early commercial street-cries of African American New Orleans. My deepest thanks to those particular authenticity police. I'm glad that she passed the test, because otherwise I would never have found this. The great clarity and wisdom of her performance truly evokes another world, where the blues still mingled, in the tonal and even thematic sense, with the utilitarian needs of black and white people impoverished by race and/or just general existence. Maybe *this* is where the soul of man (and woman) never dies, in the spiritual cry of necessity: please buy what I am selling.
- 5.
 6. **A Married Man's Blues Wade Ward 9/1/25** A good early example of what came to be known as mountain blues by a member of one of the most prominent of early country musical families. As with some other examples in this set, it is easy to hear how this form might have fed the country playing of black Southerners, with its modality and use of certain intervals like the flat third and the dominant seventh. This is no-frills music that is austere in a very modern way, and artfully focused
 - 7.
 8. **Sugar Babe Lee Morse 11/11/25** My new favorite 1920s blue-pop chanteuse. Morse's singing is the sound of personal dissembling, of a (mild) deterioration of mental health. It is like someone coming unhinged, in that Southern-Belle, whatever-happened-to-the-good-old-days, one-too-many-mint-juleps way. And it sounds real to me, whatever that may mean, but it has the feel of experience, of the kind that is both cultural and lived, even if in the imaginative abstract and/or distant past. And certainly her family, out of the South, seems to have instilled in her the false nostalgia of antebellum reminiscence and romance, accented with a whoop and a half-minstrel yodel, and sounding suspiciously like both Emmett Miller and Marion Harris.
 9. **Don't Fish in My Sea Ma Rainey w/Jimmy Blythe 12/26** Ma Rainey's voice was a thing of shaded beauty. She is a tradition in and of herself, blues and vaudeville and that ol' devil the minstrel medicine show. See Clyde Bernhard's wonderful description of a night with Ma Rainey in his autobiography; this tells us more about the early days of the blues and black entertainment than a barrel of Stanley Crouch articles. She may be the blues-world equivalent of the early Moten band: a very countrified remnant of the old world, confidently exploring compatible urban forms and sounds. It helps to have the great Chicago pianist Jimmy Blythe, her accompanist here, along for the ride.
 10. **I'll Be Rested Roosevelt Graves and His Brother 12/26** Graves and his brother, in communion with a few like-minded sidemen (including pianists Cooney Vaughan and Will Ezell) made a series of both "popular" and religious recordings. Little Brother Montgomery cited Vaughn as typical of the old back-street honky tonk pianists, and I wonder if these various Graves-led groupings are the sound of the old time after-hours, of the kind of acoustic dance music that animated the social life of rural (but not necessarily only rural) African Americans before World War II. These particular groups are like aural buckshot. The music, informal but intense, seems to project in every which way.
 11. **I Want My Life To Testify Hendersonville Double Quartet 1926** The dignity of early white gospel as it struggles to define itself, out of the "shaped note" tradition of flat intonation and into the small group organization of the new music. See Charles Wolfe on the importance of this whole gospel tradition to Southern white musical miscegenation and Elvis. And note that, harmonically, it is more of that 1-4-5 hymnal progression, something borrowed by even Charles Ives in his depiction of Americana.
 12. **Mama's Angel Child Papa Stovepipe 11/26** Another Stovepipe, or maybe the same one. Great, bounding performance, and he is all over this really old song (heard earlier in this collection as Mama's Black Baby Boy, by the Unique Quartet, from 1893, CD 1). It's interesting to hear how non-blues songs as sung by black musicians achieved their own independent life, feeding a truly alternate and parallel tradition. These singers were blue only when they needed to be.
 13. **Royal Palm Special Leecan and Cooksey 5/24/27** A mystery duo called Leecan and Cooksey, in one more of those uncanny 1920s blues/jazz world collaborations. This one is more jazz than blues, and listen closely to Cooksey's uncannily perfect (and quite advanced) guitar playing,

outlining the harmony and offering a very swinging melodic counterpoint to the rest of the group. Who were these guys? I will ask this question again. Entertainers, for certain, and musically educated.

1. **High Fever Cookie's Ginger Snaps Freddie Keppard 6/2/26** Larry Gushee has done a much better job of explaining Keppard than I ever will, so I will refer you to his notes to the Smithsonian LP issue of Keppard's work. What I *will* say is that Keppard, another New Orleansian, has that buzz-saw brass sound that seems to have been common in certain parts of that city (see, for example, Frenchy's String band, CD 8). Particularly suited to the blues, it may have something to do with the way Buddy Bolden played, though I don't think we'll ever have any definitive answer to *that* question (Wynton Marsalis has given us one musical picture of Bolden, Louis Armstrong was quoted years ago as saying he thought Miles Davis sounded like Bolden; Sam Charters told me years ago that the Bolden band had a "Mediterranean" sound, though I'm not sure exactly what he meant). If I had to guess I would say, given the supposed funky butted-ness of Bolden's playing, that it was likely closer to the sound of Keppard (and to Frenchy's trumpet player): buzzy and fuzzy and a little bit vulgar, ragged in both the figurative and literal sense, with a sense of the blues closely related to Keppard's (and King Oliver's) careful scalar wanderings close to the tonic. But that's just a guess. Really.
2. **I Want Jesus to Walk With Me Homer Quincy Smith 12/26** It's interesting that at least one liner note writer has praised this without great enthusiasm, as part of a performance tradition (African American cultivated) deserving greater recognition. Well, thanks - but even more thanks to Greil Marcus, always alert to the odd and unusual, who seems to have been the first to have recognized the power in this recording. And then it was reissued for a second time on John Fahey's Revenant label, and suddenly it was one of the eccentric classics of the literature. Which it is, churchy and hysterical and funky, in a pious way. Also of note - the man is singing "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," not TALK with me, as is usually cited.
3. **Chock House Blues Blind Lemon Jefferson 5/26** Jefferson is another of those about whom so much has been written that I feel superfluous in trying to find something substantial to add. Suffice to say that we should not forget what a truly great and pure singer he was, high and lonesome before there *was* a high and lonesome. His guitar playing is a rhythmic wonder and virtually un-reproducible (I have heard no other guitarist replicate it in any real way, though hundreds seemed to have used his style it as a base from which to launch that which Lemon seems to have virtually invented, the *blues riff*.) Others may have been thinking about it, but he did it in an inventive and consistent way with a brilliant and idiomatic technique. His influence on everyone - from Gary Davis to T. Bone Walker - is palpable.

My Soul is a Witness Arizona Dranes 6/17/26 Dranes is everywhere in early religious music yet still somehow quite mysterious, as we have no personal accounts of her life or person. She is generally acknowledged as the originator of the two-fisted quake of gospel piano, though there is no way of knowing for certain if any unrecorded contemporaries shared her innovations (and we do hear other un-credited pianists on early recordings with similar styles; though who knows, they may all be her). I particularly love hearing her with background singers who, in that church-front style of early African American religious music, seem to be trying to half sing/half scream their way to paradise. Hopefully the lord doesn't own a tuning fork.

Boneyard Shuffle The Red Heads Red Nichols M Mole A Schutt Fud Livingston 1926 Wonderfully cool(er) ensemble jazz 1926-style. Not so incidentally, a Hoagy Carmichael composition, and so a smart re-organization of blues elements along with perfectly realized, encapsulated solos. Nichols was an uncommonly smart player, Miff Mole one of the most advanced trombone players of any school, and Fud Livingston a fine colorist and inspired musical organizer.

4. **The Bumps Jeanette's Synco Jazzers w/ML Williams 1/27** Even early on Mary Lou, than married to bandleader John Williams, knew how to swing the blues. We will follow her progress in this collection, from early pre-swing to neo-stride/boogie woogie to nascent modern-ness to retro brilliance to blues-minus dissonance. Something of a jazz every-woman, she was an eye and musical witness to everything from the Kansas City blues of Ben Webster and Lester Young,

through the birth of swing and to the Monk and Bud Powell days of early bebop, and then to the post-bop experiments of the post-War years.

5. **Hanna Won't You Open the Door Sam and Kirk McGee 1927** The McGee brothers shouldn't be missed, as they epitomize the old timey country sound: fun, lightly swinging, and not really old timey at all. This was the instrumental blues as the white south began to visualize it, and Sam in particular was a pioneer of that nice ol' raggy white sound and bounce (could Doc Watson be far behind?). Hanna is a different kind of song, strangely blues-like in progression though not really blue in design and feeling. Apace Peter Muir, maybe it is a minstrel/Tin Pan Alley preview of the blues-to-come (there are theories floating around that the blues in harmonic format was as much a creation of professional/minstrel songwriters adapting public domain ideas of harmony as it was a strictly vernacular development. Film at eleven).
6. **James Alley Blues Richard Rabbit Brown 1927** See my notes to Kid Coley (CD 14) for an assessment of Rabbit Brown as well. And please note that the vaudeville/minstrel sound and style should not be equated with glibness or emotional/musical shallowness. It was just another way of thinking, through a very traditional narrative, about the things that certain American musicians (and in particular African American musicians) were thinking about in the first third of the 20th century.
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8. **Franklin Street Blues Dumaine's Jazzola Eight 3/5/27** Nice early New Orleans group, sounding like a co-op of idiomatically talented semi-pros. In this way it is a much more accurate definition of democracy than that which has been cited in recent years in the name of jazz. The truth is, in contemporary terms, the jazz group in its usual state is more akin to the Leninist idea of Democratic centralism. Dumaine's Jazzola Eight is truer to the ideal, more Moses Hess than Nikolai Lenin.
9. **Mr. Johnson Turn Me Loose South Georgia Highballers 10/5/27** Ben Harney appears several times in this collection, as performer/composer and as composer (here represented by one of his most popular songs). Although the current citation for Harney in Wikipedia asserts that he was a white man, Ed Berlin, the great ragtime historian, has done research that indicates a more complex racial background. As I once said to Ed, who seemed to agree, maybe Harney was white for white audiences and black for black audiences. Let us also not forget that Eubie Blake recalled Harney as a black man. Whatever else he was, he was an essential and early ragtime composer and performer, composing within those particular harmonic frameworks that indeed contributed to a shaping of the idea of the blues in the hearts and minds of a growing national audience. Ragtime lives, at least in the 1920s South. One more good example, in retro, of the Progressive Era intersection of professional songwriters with the vernacular world.
1. **A Good Man is Hard to Find Bix/Tram/Murray/Russell/Rolini/Venuti 10/2/27** Listen, first, to Frankie Trumbauer's astonishingly beautiful opening chorus (on C melody Saxophone), and then abandon all hope, ye racialists, that ye may have of ignoring his influence on Lester Young. This airplane mechanic is one hell of a blues man. Then hear Don Murray (clarinet) dance his way through a chorus or so, and know that you are in the presence of collective musical greatness - until Bix comes in, at which time all bets are off - this is musical heaven. Few musicians have ever, in this world, achieved perfection, and Bix, with such able support, is one of them.

Down South Blues Doc Boggs 3/10/27 There's little that I can add to a description of the virtues of Doc Boggs to that which has already been given by Mike Seeger and Greil Marcus. I can only repeat (or coin) clichés that might make it seem that this is the stuff of working class struggle, which it may be; that, however, is the least of its virtues. There is much more to Boggs than that; to paraphrase Richard Gilman, artists like Boggs do not merely reflect history but create an alternative history, taking themselves and us, in the process, along on a strange and transcendent journey. For me, at least, these things are not necessarily reflected in the particular marriage of words and music but most plainly and clearly encoded in the sound of not just the music but of the *recording* of the music. After all, can one separate, with old country blues, the medium and the message? It's like taking a cave painting out of the cave. The 78 was the

perfect vehicle for this work, which would have died of sonic over-exposure if it had originated in the age of digital and multi-track.

Black Snake Blues King Oliver 4/27/27 King Oliver, by legend, did his best work in the early recordings of the Creole Band in 1923, and those are absolutely essential to understanding his oeuvre; but don't miss the later band (pre-Victor). This group was like a return to country roots, pounding out, with its own roughneck finesse, things like Black Snake Blues (a country standard), Four or Five Times (one of my favorite of the old time tunes, and also a staple of jazz and Western Swing, it seems) and Snag It (more blues). In many ways I like this post-Creole band better than its predecessor. Though it may have been the start of Oliver's decline, there was still a lot of power left in not only his horn but in his *personality*, as a musician and, just as importantly, as a bandleader. Clyde Bernhardt's autobiography gives us the sharpest picture that we have of Oliver the man, who was unafraid, even as he clearly foresaw his own professional demise, to assert himself in the only way he knew how, with a salty racial self-awareness, a growing cynicism, and the kind of nihilistic world-view that only a man who feels himself at the complete mercy of uncontrollable forces can understand. Black Snake Blues, by the way, is obviously a reference to Blind Lemon Jefferson's "hit," a reminder that you can take a musician out of the country...

Cold Penitentiary Blues B.F. Shelton 7/29/27 Place this with the various forms of mountain blues, from that of Clarence Ashley to the Stanley Brothers. The other day I was watching a film about Shelby Adams' photographic work with dirt-poor white Appalachian families. It seemed like every person who picked up a guitar in that film sang songs like these as beautifully as anyone ever sang songs like these. Tones as old as the hills? It was real people uttering perfect little scales that rose and fell like the natural intervals of sorrow. It's enough to make you throw up your hands at the badly revisionist alt. country work that's done in the name of affectionate revivalism, suburban kids singing with bright-eyed wonder about things like poverty, death in childbirth, and prison farms (as a matter of fact I just heard one of these the other day on the radio. Reminded me of something that happened years ago, at a Civil Rights event circa 1969. A friend of mine, a very good folk guitarist, age 15, was performing, singing "I'm standing on the corner/with a dollar in my hand/looking for a woman/who's looking for a man" when a drunken woman, pretty but a bit past her prime and wearing a hot pink dress that was just a little bit too short for her age, walked up to the edge of the stage and slurred, "come back when you grow up, lollipop.") There are some places, vis a ve Skip James, that we Northern suburban white boys just cannot get to.

2. **Shaking the Blues Away Ruth Etting 1927 w/Rube Bloom, piano** Well, she's no Doris Day, though Doris Day was her, briefly, in the movie of Etting's life. These 1920s canaries (like Helen Morgan) are an acquired taste, and it's a taste I have only relatively recently acquired. Their virtues: sincerity, innocence, honesty, a certain kind of old-fashioned verity, and good rhythm, if not the kind which we necessarily associate with jazz (and it has taken me years to get past that particular issue). But it does not matter to me anymore; Etting (and Morgan) are two of a kind, sentimental without being corny, and affecting by virtue of the casual intimacy of their singing. And this particular song is of a kind I also used to dislike: songs about having the blues. It all seemed like too much self reference, a kind of ultra-middle class/slumming. Which it is. But it works, sometimes, and maybe *because* of all of that middle class baggage, because, as Barack Obama and John McCain reminded us over and over and over again in the last election, the middle class *is* important. Those with money gotta live too, and because of this they will also encounter, with some frequency, the blues, like it or not. Just ask Irving Berlin, the ragtime millionaire who wrote this song.
3. **Royal Garden Blues Bix B. and his Gang 5/10/27** We won't rehearse the old arguments about white and black jazz and the habitual neglect, by the liberal media (geez, I've been wanting to use that phrase for years) of the great white jazz players of the 1920s and 1930s. For more on that see my book, *That Devilin' Tune*. But Bix and his Gang early on defined a new set of rules for the feeling of jazz (to quote Duke Ellington) and for jazz technique, which are in abundant evidence here. Miff Mole was an unassumingly masterful jazz musician on both blues and standards, and Bix, with the golden ripple of his tone and his perfect vocalized phrasing, had a true and blue heart.

1. **A Woman Gets Tired of the Same Man All the Time Stovepipe #1 Same Jones 4/26/27**
Surely she does; ask anyone who's been married for more than 20 years. This is street/minstrel entertainment, of the kind that makes it all respectable, fun and functional, not to mention, on occasion, "meaningful." There were at least two different Stovepipes, from Davey Jones to Johnny Watson, and I have to admit that I sometimes lose track of just which is which. This Stovepipe (like the other) is the definition of old time music, of the kind for which 1920s and 1930s blues players, a generation or more remove, had little professional affinity. Not that they disliked it, at least from any hard evidence we have (and I had an interesting conversation with Larry Cohn in which he pointed out that of all the many old bluesmen he knew, *not a one* ever commented in a negative way about the old days and the old pre-blues, minstrel, styles or the musicians who performed them)
2. **Awful Fix Buddy Boy Hawkins 1927** More in what is commonly labeled the Mississippi mode. As I worked through this collection I was regularly astounded by the micro creativity of the early blues men. Did any of them think of themselves, in any self-conscious way, as artists? Were they consciously rejecting older song forms that clung to the image of their black elders like musical flypaper (coon songs and minstrel recitations)? As Bruce Bastin and others like Gerald Early have pointed out, the blues likely emerged as a counter form to minstrelsy. And though it was unlikely reflective of a clear and deliberative political choice, the increasingly personalized anti-minstrel feel of the early Delta sound was one passive aggressive (and safe) way for a black man to assert his manhood in the Jim Crow South. Harmonically proscribed, it led to amazing little song productions, 3 minute short stories of ingenious clarity and directness. Even if necessity was the mother of blues invention (and here I am referring to the now-understood rules of the recording game, the demand by producers that these musical sharecroppers produce original songs in the popular blues format) the blues was far from a lesser of two musical evils. Whether by cause or effect, the work of these countrified prophets represented a brand new way of looking at life and song, and became something of an unintended manifesto of personal liberation. And, by same cause or effect, it became a jumping-off point for increasingly complicated musical visitations: to holiness preaching, to hokum boastings, to tales of violence or personal trouble, and to double entendre references of the most daring kind. Even if, as Elijah Wald has pointed out, the blues was less popular and/or dominant in this form than we have been inclined to believe, it still represents a subculture of liberation and personal assertiveness, as in the freedom writings of Samizdat that came out of Russia during the Stalin and post-Stalin years, or the marginalized stories of marginalized Jews like Bruno Schultz, working to survive the Nazi terror.

Doan Let Satan Git You Barbour's Plantation Singers 9/6/27 Must be a minstrel remnant, and that damn melody reminds me of an old commercial jingle that I cannot quite place. Insinuating minstrel/gospel pop, not far from the sound of doowop and other street-corner harmonizing.

3. **Man Trouble Jaybird Coleman 8/3/27** There are a few good recorded examples of what has come to be termed the field holler, or just holler, which basically describes a solo performance of freely sung verses, within a relatively constrained set of musical intervals, as performed by Southern black workers of one kind or another. Those intervals are basically the blues, and hence the (correct) depiction of the field holler as a key blues antecedent. A lot of what we have in this respect was recorded in the field by Lomax. Jaybird, commercially recorded, gives us one of the finest and most heartfelt examples we have of the genre.
- 4.
5. **Deep River Forbes Randolph Kentucky Jubilee Choir 7/28** A chorus that sounds as deep and as tranquil as that river (see also Paul Robeson's version). This is the kind of spiritual that even your cracker grandma, dreaming of the good old days when darkies didn't complain, and a nickel was still worth a nickel, could love. Which doesn't mean that it's not beautiful music, but only that grammy, like much of white America, is by now fully acculturated to the sophisticated sounds of black folk.

1. **Viola Lee Blues Cannon's Jug Stompers 9/20/28**

2. **Take Me Back Frank Stokes 8/30/28** Songsters, as the old black stylists were called (or came to be called, see Paul Oliver's book, *Songsters and Saints*), if relating to an older and supposedly less dignified "minstrel" manner, never lost their ruggedly complex musical dignity. There is also no indication, per Wynton Marsalis' feelings about the old minstrel and medicine show music, that their peers considered them to have sold out to any racially degrading commercial system or to have been anything less than worthy and fellow professionals. It was all just music and entertainment to them, after all, whether it was the blues or a pop song. Stokes and Jackson, like Louis Armstrong, had too strong a sense of their own value and abilities to be bound to anyone else's image of same, anyway. Sure, many white people looked at them and thought of them, condescendingly, as quaint inferiors, but one thing we have learned about 20th century music and its witnessings is that audience response is not necessarily the equivalent of reality. Otherwise Louis Armstrong would be consigned to the dustbin of Uncle Tom-ism, and Charlie Parker would be nothing more than a drug-addled freak show. (And just to note, Cannon and the Memphis Jug Band are not only consummate pros, as essential and premier songwriters/codifiers of verse, but also among those who so aptly bottled the phrases and stanzas that had previously been floating so freely though African American tradition.)
- 3.
4. **I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say Biddleville Quintet 10/28** The early days of what came to be called hard gospel, a vocal step away from the smoother and more dynamically unified (and emotionally restrained) Jubilee style. The Biddlevilles, with their roving lead singer, were true gospel pioneers.
- 5.
6. **Touch Me Light Mama George Bullet Williams w/unknown 5/28** One of those recordings that makes you put your head down and wonder, who was he and what made him sing like this? This is more of that mysterious blues counterpoint, of two musical voices passing in the night and than coming back to get another look at each other. It is sound as much as it is substance, though of course the sound *is* the substance. Many years later critics started writing about the use of open spaces and sonorities in music, but people like Williams had it all figured out way before the institution of Avant Garde 101.
7. **Mississippi Jail House Groan Rube Lacy 1928**
8. **Sawmill Moan Rambling Thomas 2/28** Lacy, who made only a brief appearance in the blues, is highly and rightly regarded by blues historians as an important one-shot of a performer. After his few recordings he melted away into the Southern landscape, working as an itinerant preacher. As with the Rambling Thomas piece, Jail House Groan has an intense, free-floating quality. Most obviously the moan in Moan relates to those myriad of pre-blues formats involving solo singers who worked on their own, in the fields for overseers, sharecropper bosses, or in prison gangs. This is truly profound stuff, musically and spiritually. Some good revisionist history (and this goes back to what Pete Lowry was saying as long ago as the 1960s) tells us that we need to stop romanticizing the suffering of this large group and understand that the music was primarily intended, in its time, as entertainment. I will not argue with the basic wisdom of this point of view except to say that music like this is in many ways now beyond entertainment, no matter how it may have been framed and presented in its original format. Think of Charles Dickens writing serially, being paid by the page and so stretching things out a bit with blatant commercial considerations. A hundred or so years later we see and perceive the works in a completely different context, and maybe more accurately at that, as profound statements on life. Same thing, I would say, with the blues. *Musical note:* perhaps the most technically significant aspect of Mississippi Jail House Groan is in the way in which it develops melodically. As the guitar repeatedly hits only the tonic (or I) chord, vocally the singer starts making the blues changes; all the while the guitar chord never moves, even as the singer hits the implied dominant and subdominant chordal intervals of the classic blues progression. I would theorize that this (and I have heard it on other recordings) very likely represents a historical throwback, as the middle stage in the musical transition from the mono-chord sound of the field holler to the three-chord movement of the blues.

9. **I Ain't Got Nobody Emmett Miller 6/12/28** Someday someone will write something that gets at the essence of Emmett Miller, who, in the end, escaped the reach and grasp of his biographer Nick Tosches. Tosches, a colorful writer, has spent too much time working both sides of the authenticity fence (most specifically, decrying critical purism while exhibiting his own holier-than-thou musical righteousness) to get it right. Also, he is too in love with his own rhetoric to let a subject other than himself dominate. Emmett Miller, no more interesting historically in this respect than Roy Evans or Cliff Edwards, was still a good and noteworthy performer, shorn of even his Minstrel baggage. (The best of all of these singers, in my opinion, was Al Bernard, who eschewed blatant vocalized blackface - as did Evans and Edwards - and who just sang, with a panache that was way beyond sketch comedy and into the deeper realm of broad vernacular ideas of post minstrel, new-song stylization). Still, the little yodelisms, whether or not they were Miller's originally, are effective, and rubbed off on a lot of people (like Marion Harris).
- 10.

G Burns is Gonna Rise Again Johnson-Nelson-Porkchop 2/17/28 Herein nonsense is made of the old gospelly song that tell us "my bones are gonna rise again." It is a short way from here to Tampa Red's "when I take my vacation in Harlem" (see: when I Take My Vacation in Heaven). It took me a while to figure out why they were singing about a G. Burns (all I could think of was George Burns, which makes no sense at all) until I realized it is not supposed to make sense, which makes sense. A minstrel intro, too. Not the blues, once again, but parallel to it on the old tent show circuit.

1. **Every Day of the week Blues Pink Anderson/Simmie Dooley 1928** This performance is one of the best responses we can give to the blanket dismissal of the old medicine shows as being racist and racially degrading; Pink Anderson and Simmie Dooley made a life of it, at least until the form faded with the last vestiges of Jim Crow. As Larry Cohn told me, he never, among all the major bluesmen and songsters he knew personally in the post-1960s folk revival, heard any one of them say a bad word about the old tent show traveling days or the musicians who worked the circuit. Those shows were not only a force for personal liberation (and hence Gus Cannon's comments that his years of minstrel-medicine traveling were his happiest days) but also helped create a revolution in American music by helping to perpetuate the spread of African American sounds, rhythms, modes of speech, and ways of living (or, to be more precise, of looking at life). Wynton Marsalis' idea that it was all just a form of degradation was likely picked up from musicians of his father's generation (who quite correctly saw this older era as one of racial violence and subjugation) and reflects, sadly, a post-bebop attitude of musical and social superiority to those of their successors who acceded to various kinds of racist authority. The bebop generation (and afterwards) was correctly determined to throw off the mantle of Southern (and American) minstrel parody, but in the process may have inadvertently thrown out the musical baby with the white supremacist bathwater (hence the years it took to rehabilitate Louis Armstrong's musical and personal reputation). Many of those who make up that generation of jazz people, and who came of age after World War II, have never really understood that these old-time Negroes were, in their time, in the process of creating an alternative cultural reality, a new and independent history, using all the means and techniques that they could safely (and sometimes not-so-safely) appropriate. Instead of being looked down upon, and having their comments and memories discounted as simply emanating from duress and/or a lack of professional alternatives, they should be lionized for their personal and cultural courage.

I'm On My Journey Home The Denson Quartet 10/20/28 The shaped sound of shaped-note singers. No, not the blues, but related by its aesthetic strangeness to the blues, by its sense of emotional restraint (repression?), its corraling of deep religious feeling for the purpose of organized emotional expression.

2. **One Way Gal William Moore 1/28** Particularly interesting for its wistful, John Hurt-like performance method. It's easy, but not a good idea, to forget that the so-called Delta blues

aesthetic does not hold a complete hegemony over Southern black performance styles; as with a lot of American popular music, black performance practices vary, sometimes radically so. Take New Orleans where, as Pops Foster pointed out in his autobiography, powerful brass bands co-existed with a temperate string-band tradition. So, in a somewhat different way, went the blues, with hardcore shouters like Charlie Patton, sophisticated pickers like Honeyboy Edwards, and blues-whisperers like William Moore and John Hurt.

Stack O'Lee Pt. 2 Cliff Edwards 1928 From scat to Jiminy Cricket, Cliff Edwards was an early king of jive. He's not easy to categorize, as a pop singer with a strong jazz sense and a touch of the blues, which he touches here. He also personifies some aspects of the blues that are less clear in their development than historians would have us believe. There are various theories, for instance, about the close relationship of professional songwriting to the blues, especially as reflected in early minstrel-like entertainments. Was the blues first codified for minstrel shows by show composers? This theory is fed by old sheet music with early dates and by some eyewitness reports, though uncorroborated because of the lack of clear documentation of what we might label as the black music of the streets (or the sharecropping plantations, in the case of the South) in the years prior to 1924. Still, one interesting thing about the blues is how adaptable and open it was to all schools, and how strong a form it remained in its show business phase. When a writer starts telling you, with absolute certainty, about the birth of the blues, about how the blues began in the *Delta* some time around the turn of the century, close the book, because the truth is that, though we have many tantalizing hints, we don't know how the various pieces of the blues puzzle came together, how this song form coalesced, how the blues couplet came, ultimately, to be matched with the essential and very specific blues chord progression. There are older traditional songs like this one, like Frankie and Johnny, like John Henry, which were obviously adaptable; there are credible reports by Howard Odum of early blues-like music collected in the field, and there are pop tunes like A. Maggio's I Got the Blues (published in 1908, and which has a blues progression in it); and there are songs like Bill Bailey, which very nearly go there. And there are important witnessings by W.C. Handy and Ma Rainey (who spoke to Sterling Brown) of early blues heard in the field. How it all finally came together is anybody's guess, and amounts, ultimately, to a musical big-bang theory. And though like it or not it is a guess, my preferred guessers are Bruce Bastin (who devotes several chapters to the subject in *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast*) and Dick Spottswood, who has made some astute observations in published interviews.

Worried Blues Gladys Bentley 8/8/28 One of the truly great early post-modernist jazz performers, who performed numbers like this at posh East Side, New York locales, in drag. Bentley was also a fine pianist whose singing had a lot in common with some other singers in this collection, like Roy Evans and Cliff Edwards. Unashamed of their musical instincts, performers like these removed songs from their representational bearings and then made something of the material that was paradoxically irreverent yet completely respectful of the composer's original musical intentions. Blues outside the blues box.

Jungle Blues Benny Goodman's Boys 6/14/28 It may just be that great minds think alike, but I recently found a quote from my old friend, and former employee of Benny Goodman, Loren Schoenberg, to the effect that he thinks Benny played best early in his career ("his zenith as an improviser was in the late 20s and early 30s"). I agree, and though I must emphasize that I am NOT speaking for Loren, I have never been able to listen to Benny's post-Swing Era work for any length of time. It is just missing something. I am happy to say I do not feel the same way about his brilliant early work, like this cut (and a few others with him in this collection). His early improvising is filled with passion, curiosity, discovery, and a kind of musical brawn that is never merely aggressive. Ditto with a lot of the other early Chicago boys, from Bud Freeman to Frank Teschmacher, Wild Bill Davison, Mugsy Spanier, Joe Sullivan and the young Gene Krupa. To such musical stylists the blues seems to just come naturally, as a way of returning to basics while indulging in some very new ideas of musical freedom.

3. **Old Man River Bing w/Paul Whiteman 1/28** Old Man River will make several appearances in this anthology. I love Bing and I love the Whiteman band, and I don't care who knows it. It is not a guilty pleasure, as I have absolutely no guilt about it, though I sometimes wish Paul had changed his last name to something like Goldberg. Bing was a terrific and swinging

singer if not the great hepmeister he has occasionally been made out to be (see my comments on Al Bernard). Old Man River is actually almost a blues, if one breaks down its chord progression, though musically it has a somewhat different, minstrel/gospel/show intent. Jerome Kern, from some of his compositions (like Long Ago and Far Away or All the Things You Are), sometimes seems like the Whitest of men, but other times, as on this and Can't Help Lovin' That Man, he reveals another and more soulful side.

Old Time Baptism PT 2 R M Massey 1/28 If you like reality TV you will love this, which is about as close as I'll ever get, lord willing, to the real thin

4. **Sunshine Special Frenchy's String Band 12/5/28** I love this particular group, as little as they are documented; nobody seems to know who they were, and the only likely correct assumption is that they were somehow New-Orleans related (I agree, based on the trumpeter's constricted tone, a dominant trait of more than one New Orleans trumpeter, from Freddy Keppard to Natty Dominique to Mutt Carey). This is extraordinary for its canny combination of country and jazz elements.
5. **Midnight Mama Frances Hereford Jelly Roll Morton 1/21/28** One of Morton's productions, and not just another way to get around the blues. Changing rhythms, mushroom cloud chords, good solos and strong ensemble work: there's always something interesting happening. Viva Jelly Roll!
6. **A Blues Serenade Original Memphis 5 12/28/28 Signorelli** Signorelli will record this again (see CD 30), as a piano/drums duo in 1954. The Original Memphis 5 were an important early (white) jazz band and this is a very interesting early attempt to formally expand upon the blues as theme and feeling. Gershwin anyone?
7. **I Truly Understand You Love Another Man Shortbuckle Roarke and his Family 11/4/28** Listen to that voice. The blues in munchkin land? Not really, just a beautifully performed lament to a lost love. Tears inside, as Ornette said. More white people coming to grips, musically, with their sadness, and so parallel, by theme and region, to the blues.

I Found a New Baby Teschmacher/Spanier/Sullivan/Krupa 4/28 This along with Copenhagen (CD 11) gives us the young Frank Teschmacher, which is the only Teschmacher we have, as he died soon after in an auto accident. His passionate, seemingly random bursts of clarinet fire helped to set even the young Benny Goodman free, at least for the brief time that they both wandered, concurrently, the jazz streets of Chicago. A major figure and a blues original. (Note also, on Copenhagen, the fine arrangement, the beautifully executed early jazz ensemble figures, and the determinedly swinging guitar solo of Ray Biondi.)

8. **I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate Boyd Senter and his Sentipedes 3/23/28** A song generally credited to Louis Armstrong and, in the spirit of its harmonic sequence, placed here as a proto blues. This is the Muskrat Ramble layout, of Country Joe litigation fame (Joe, of Country Joe and the Fish, was sued by the Kid Ory Estate for using the Muskrat Ramble chord changes in his song Fixin' to Die, an anti-war anthem of the 1960s. He beat the case in court on a technicality, though he could probably have won it by pointing out the hundreds of tunes that were composed in the 1920s with identical chord changes). This is one of the more popular non-blues chord sequences utilized by jazz-oriented musicians in search of the ease and fraternity of the blues but in a non-blues way, and was, I would guess, common in the years before the blues became ubiquitous. It is also clearly a ragtime remnant, related as it is to harmonies we hear in the work of, among other ragtime composers, Scott Joplin and Joseph Lamb. This performance has a great spirit to it and a real raucous intimacy. Listen closely to these musicians as they respond to each other with genuinely fraternal encouragement. Senter was a circus man, and a good one.

Ham Beats All Meat Dr. Humphrey Bate and His Possum Hunters 3/3/28 This is not only musically one of my favorite performances, it is also, in my opinion, a precious glimpse at authentic (yes, you heard that word correctly) early black music, even as sung here by a white group, and references to "darkies" notwithstanding. Though I have spoken elsewhere of my fatigue with the critical idea of *signification* in African American music, this is clearly related to the idea of it, if in an indirect way. In the words of the

song, while white folks eat the beef and the lamb, their charges, hidden away in the kitchen, quietly feast on a food that is far superior, namely ham ("always good and sweet"). Bates, a real doctor, learned much of his repertoire from former slaves. Ham Beats All Meat sings of a mild form of resistance, though, given the realities of slavery, it was a form of resistance just the same. And a way of pointing out, in that signifying way, just how deluded white folks are (I remember a black student of mine saying to a friend, years ago, as we watched, in class, a film that depicted befuddled white people with trivial conflicts, "white people are so dumb." I was fascinated but not really surprised that these students were so amused and felt so superior to what seemed to them to be an alien white culture of clueless conflict, and I could not help but agree).

9. **In the Mornin' Johnson-Nelson-Porkchop 2/17/28** When we make the blues into something of a fetish and when we condemn, with an historical blanket of contempt, related minstrel forms, we miss out on a lot of vital music. Here is one such song, of obscure meaning and musically difficult to categorize (undoubtedly Paul Oliver would classify it as the work of a songster). Lyrically it is a ramble, and seems to be a summing up of the sad life of the singer, from his early fishing days to his fruitless attempts to visit his lover. It is neither melodrama nor tragedy nor maudlin reflection, but falls instead within the unique territory of African American song, with its sense of humorous detachment from the degradations of American life, and its deceptively passive acceptance of social and racial limits on opportunity. Which is what, I think, also marks it as a minstrel thing, accepting as it is of those limits with an old-school sense of philosophical reconciliation. Yes, these are old N's, as Charles Mingus might have said (look up, if you can find it, the story of his anger at what he saw as the racial acquiescence of Early Hines, Coleman, Hawkins and Roy Eldridge on the afternoon that they appeared on the same bill at the Village Gate in New York City in 1965; this kind of racial-generational schism has long existed). So were, vis a ve Marsalis and the whole Minstresly question, Gus Cannon and Pink Anderson.

Home Town Blues Roane County Ramblers 10/15/28 A blues? Once again, you decide. Goes to a 7 chord while the fiddle player trills away with the kind of open-ended freedom that must have made this a great deal of fun to play. It also sounds like the number of bar lines varies from chorus to chorus, another sign of freedom and possibly a technique to allow the dancers to go on dancing. The musicians are superbly at ease with the whole idea of this music, which is all about easy steppin'. I've heard a hundred old-time revivalist bands and not-a-one could nail this feeling. Another in a series of lost arts.

Caution Blues Earl Hines 12/9/28 Was the blues, to Hines, just another set of chord changes? Or was it a different kind of a set of chord changes with its own unique challenges, absent the zig-zag quality of more "complex" standard tunes? Consider Caution Blues; my sense is that it drew from Hines, who had more than a little bit of residual class-snobbery in his attitude toward country forms (he was heard to make disparaging remarks about his early sideman work with Clifford Hayes), and against his own better musical judgment, a very particular and liberating kind of distilled lyricism.

1. **Blue Harmony Clifford Hayes' Louisville Stompers Cal Smith Hense Grundy 5/31/28** Cal Smith is without a doubt one of the most important guitarists in the history of American music, though I would never have found him were it not for Dick Spottswood. Sure, his playing is very much of its time, but it still sounds so completely *musical*, and nothing can date his perfect balance of swing and melody. Clifford Hayes's groups were perfect backdrops for his playing, as jazz bands in spirit and jug bands in reality.

Cannon Ball Blues Frank Hutchison 7/9/29 Not the same train as the one that carried Hutchison's girl from town. More mine-country blues, deep as the last shaft, and cutting a similarly irregular trail. Hutchison was a real pioneer of this particular way of hillbilly singing, reserved, dry, yet deeply felt and intoned with the kind of feigned indifference that, per Greil Marcus (see his book *The Old Weird America*), was an early form of cool at the same timethat, at least to my way of thinking, it signified an anesthetization from the world's (and particularly the South's) big trouble

Bathe In That Beautiful Pool Doc Walsh 9/25/29 If there ever was a great musical sinner and saint, it was Doc Walsh, who walked the line between Carolina Tar Heel bawdiness and this stunning evocation of

Southern holiness spiritualism. If one wanted to present a case *against* the idea that the only thing white musicians ever did was steal things from black musicians, this is it. Gorgeous slide banjo, besides.

Operation Blues Frankie Jaxon Georgia Tom Dorset 7/22/29 There is no more hilariously lascivious blues/vaudeville figure than Half Pint Jaxon, a small man who doubled as a female impersonator. The sheer delirious enjoyment I feel at cheerful smut like Operation Blues ("what's that you've got in your hand doctor?" "It's my tool") brings me back for more, as in My Daddy Rocks Me (CD 11), with its hot and heavy breathing. Along with Georgia Tom Dorsey, his willing collaborator on these (and may God forgive him because I certainly have), he takes the double out of double entendre.

St. Louis Blues/Weary Yodelin' Blues Roy Evans 3/30/29 Despite the condescension of most critics toward ol' Roy, he remains a personal favorite, much as Gladys Bentley does. Quirky, musically non-conformist, and unafraid to combine novelty with musical inventiveness, he works his way through this medley like a domestic animal in heat, all itchy and crawly and agitated to the point of distraction. And, interestingly, despite our assumptions of complete whiteness, he was remembered by the jazz musician Garvin Bushell as a black man.

2. **Fresno Blues Johnnie and Albert Crockett 8/9/29** Guitar virtuosity 1920s style, with a loosening up of the soloist's time (and please, when describing such things do not use the term *timing*, a form of rhythmic reference used by most blues critics, which makes no sense technically or linguistically). This was new country before there *was* new country, virtuoso instrumental technique, not drummed or frailed but picked with near-jazz precision.
- 3.
4. **Just Blues Memphis Jazzers Andy Sannella Al Duffy 6/29** More early jazz/blues; one interesting thing about performances like this (and these, by the way, are white guys) is how close they sound to what we now consider to be the down-home kind of blues, in terms of solo style and even tonal expression. Where did they get it? What do these guys know that we don't? Was this the tent show/circus sound (hokum + folk), of the kind that I have recently begun to believe was as essential an early ingredient of the blues as any other? Ringling Brothers, anyone?
1. **Dallas Blues Louis Armstrong w/Luis Russell Orchestra 12/10/29** How many times in life can one describe Armstrong's playing with the word "majestic" before the word police come bashing down the door to make an arrest on the charge of Pandering to Stanley Crouch?

Copyin' Louis Jack Purvis Orch. 12/17/29 I once named my band after Purvis, by legend a gunrunner and statutory rapist who did hard time for his crimes (see Charlie Barnett's autobiography). But there's lots of gunrunners and statutory rapists in the world, and it had never before occurred to me to name a band after them; the deciding factor was the greatness of his trumpet playing, which was, maybe, to Louis' as Sonny Stitt's alto playing was to Charlie Parker: in the spirit, but with its own particular and peculiar personality. There's an account somewhere of Purvis, late in life, playing in a prison band, and showing he still had the right stuff, of technique, sound, and feeling. But we have nothing of him after the 1930s, a great loss, I say without fear of contradiction or exaggeration, to American culture. If, in their search for the real America, Obama and gang really had a sense of indigenous local culture they would not only showcase the usual jazz and country suspect, but would also extract great and creative cultural iconoclasts like Jack Purvis from the American populace and parade them in front of the cameras. These people are out there, I am sure, and many of them have, in a manner of speaking, the blues (or something equally creative) coursing through their veins.

Prayin' the Blues Jimmy Dorsey 6/13/29 What a guy - on some of Jimmy Dorsey's big band recordings from circa 1942 one can hear instantly what Charlie Parker admired in his playing, some pre-bop flurries that, in a way different from but similar to Earl Bostic, showed more facility than deep jazz feeling, but which nonetheless were musically sound and ultimately just right for the context in which they appeared. But don't get me wrong - Jimmy Dorsey had plenty of musical feeling in his playing, though it sometimes seemed to turn on and off like some musical spigot. Maybe that's the danger of having so much technique. If you've got it flaunt it, as Zero Mostel said in *The Producers*, and Jimmy Dorsey flaunts it with a great deal of panache. On this cut, from the early days of jazz's first golden era he shows that he has been

listening closely to the deeper blues and has come up, with no sense of mimicry, with his own way of doing it.

Waiting at the End of the Road Ethel Waters 7/11/29 Why is it that nobody in the deep blues world gets Ethel Waters? Well, it's not hard to understand on the surface, but every blues source I read, when it includes her at all, consigns her work to the slumming of a singer with little or no feel for the form. Wrong. She had a perfectly appropriate feel for it, but the form, for her, was changing quickly. With it was also changing (under her considerable influence) the whole sound of women's popular singing, from the gritty essentialism of a Marion Harris to the teacup grace of the Ruth Etting/Helen Morgans of the pop world. And then to Waters. She was a fine blues singer, but was on her way to something much different, to the creation of a style of vocal swing that was not inexorably tied to jazz but which combined the best of both (pop and jazz) worlds. As such, and as discouraging as it is that she is so misunderstood by the blues world, she is one of the major figures of 20th Century American popular song.

Been on the Job Too Long Wilmer Watts and The Lonely Eagles 10/29 Crime in song; Southern white gansta ragtime approaching the blues through ragtime chords.

What's the Matter Now Monarch Jazz Quartet of Norfolk 10/16/29 Listen to the barber shop in this, the vaudeville two-step of early African American quartet music. Blues with a purpose, perhaps, light entertainment with grit

2. **The Great Reaping Day Bessie Johnson 10/1/29** The kind of religious hysteria, both mild and acute, that we will hear regularly in this anthology, particularly (but not only) as it comes to the surface in 1920s recordings by representatives of the Church of God in Christ (for more on this whole phenomena, see Lynn Abbott's book on Utah Smith, *I Got Two Wings*). Is it loud and shrill so that god will hear? Consult your local theologian. Religious music is not the blues, of course, and many religious singers very specifically and firmly rejected the blues. But others, like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, knew that they were all drinking from a common musical well.

House Dance Blues Speckled Red 9/14/29 Speckled Red is one of those great in-between pianists - in between ragtime, jazz, minstrel-time, medicine show fun, and the blues. As a manic school of pianism, this group included more than a few others, like Robert Shaw (who unfortunately recorded too late to be included in this collection), Alex Moore, and even on occasion Roosevelt Sykes. There is something particularly satisfying about these players, who have just enough swing to break the monotony of the old blues basics, but are not so "sophisticated" as to turn the stuff into a musical oil slick. This is barrelhouse from the conservatory, for those students who dropped out after a few lessons

Dark Holler Blues Clarence Ashley 10/23/29 Ashley, who came back to visit during the "folk revival," is always a treat to listen to. Regardless of the musical story (and this is *East Virginia Blues* by way of *Molly Dear*) he sings like a half-blind man working his way through the dark night of the Southern white man's soul. And it *was* a dark night, of grinding poverty, Jim Crow law, and the strangely casual, garden variety terror of lynchings. I know I digress here, but I always wonder: did the Southern white man experience any guilt or fear of damnation at the sight of black bodies burnt and hung from trees? There is little if any documentation (that I know of) in the literature of the whole issue of white capitulation to the grand racial terror of those years, of both active and passive white working class acceptance of the great continuous pogrom of Southern white rule. Southern music historians, in particular, seem to run from the very question..

3. **Nothing But Blues Cleo Gibson 3/14/29** Despite confusions as to her identity (we know the name but nothing about the woman) Cleo Gibson sings with a power and presence worthy of not only Bessie Smith but a gaggle of classic blues singers. Backed by an old-style muted trumpet player here, she leaves us wondering where she learned to do this so well, and why she stopped doing it. One might think that this level of musical sophistication would lead to some local clues. Think again - this is the early world of black entertainment, after all, in which talent and obscurity were constant companions.

4.

5. **He's Tall, Dark, and Handsome Julia Lee 11/8/29** Early harbinger of what I tend to call black pop, for lack of a better term. Lee became something of a star in the 1940s and 1950s, but even way-back-when she was singing with the kind of flair and stylistic neutral-ness that opened this music up to a wide audience. It is a short step from this to Lil Green (and Peggy Lee and Ivy Anderson).
1. **Bill Was a Texas Lad J.P. Farley 7/29/29** Even cowboys get the blues, though determining the origin of a song like this is a little bit like separating the chicken and its egg. The blues, however, are all around it.

That Too Do Bennie Moten Jimmy Rushing 11/28/30 As I've noted elsewhere, this evokes Ralph Ellison's spectacularly vivid essayed memories of Rushing and the Moten band, wherein Ellison describes Rushing's voice as it sounds through the medium of the night air, with only the acoustic amplification of a megaphone to help it along. Truly something that we will never hear (or see) again.

Skinny Legs Blues Geeshie Wiley 3/30 Dick Spottswood once described Geeshie Wiley to me as "cosmic," and that may have been an understatement. What else can you say about a song in which the singer progresses from yearning physical love to informing her lover that she will cut his throat and watch him die? Now we know why certain species, emotionally detached and clinically apart, eat their young.

2. **Black Snake Moan Cobbs and Lindwood 9/29/30** When the white guys recorded blues they sometimes recorded *blues* and they sometimes recorded something that just happened to be the blues, fun and colloquial. I go back and forth on where this one falls. Either way it has that nice ol' hillbilly yearning to it.

Farm Girl Blues Carolina Tar Heels 11/19/30 The Tar Heels, with Doc Walsh and Gwenn Foster, will make appearances in various (dis)guises in this anthology. One of the most soulful and relaxed and cheerfully profane groups of the old musical South, they always seem, to me, to be saying "we don't give a damn what anybody says or does or thinks about us." This depicts the morning after.

3. **Careless Love Jimmy Tarlton 12/3/30** Part of the team of Darby and Tarlton. I like Jimmy best solo for the brittle grace of his voice, a classically Southern white man's rasp. This was blues as it came to the other race, though technically this is a pre-blues ballad, with the kind of repeated lines that were both archaic and a predictor of a new music. I also like Tarlton on a political level, re his late comment that the Southern white man's troubles were divine payback for his vicious treatment of the Southern black man. I've always felt that race, particularly as it relates to the reign of white Southern Jim Crow terror, was an issue largely unexplored by Southern hillbilly music writers. It is nice to know that at least one man down there had the humanity to actually take his raising at face value, and to look at it all through the prism of religious hellfire and earthly repentance.

Milwaukee Blues Charlie Poole 9/9/30 Poole was a low-life in the best sense of the term, and he made the blues adjust to his own pre-bluegrass musical terms. More of the white country boys who put the country as *they* knew it (think: alcohol and dreary mill jobs) right back into the blues.

4. **Preachin' the Blues pt. 1 Son House 5/28/30** You can talk all you want about your Robert Johnsons, but Preachin' the Blues may just be the Rosetta Stone of modern blues and blues-based rock and roll. The steely riffs, the counterpoint of pain and suffering as described not necessarily in word but in *sound*, all make Son House the epicenter of the new as it sits proselytizing amongst the old. Son House is the one I turn to whenever I need to be reminded of why I have spent so much time on this project. Brought back into musical circulation by the 1960s blues revival, House's singing voice was still a thing to behold, though his guitar playing, previously mostly functional but torridly percussive, seemed to search in vain for the old musical coordinates. In 1930 (and 1941-1942, see CDs 19 and 20) he was still a somewhat irrational force of nature, his voice like someone on the edge of personal disaster, his slide guitar lines simple but profound and unwieldy echos of his inner life.

5. **Baby's Got the Rickets, Mama's Got the Mobile Blues Vol Stevens 12/11/30** To be stuck in Mobile with the Mobile blues this time...the new blues with a lot of leakage from the old (and new) jug band sound. This and the next cut are the stuff that revivalists like Jim Kweskin, at least to my ears, could just never nail. I don't care how drunk you get nor how much you visualize Beale Street, this music stands for another way of life, of feeling, hearing, and seeing. Trying to capture it 30, 40, or more years later is like trying to preserve a gust of wind. A little bit related to jazz, it represents a parallel tradition, though all of it falls within the category of ingenious African American ideas of improvisation, from the invention of instruments to the communal creation (fabrication?) of sound. To these musicians the whole *way* of it seems as much a matter of *being* as it is a form of music. The recipe for it is dauntingly complex from a sociological standpoint: borrow a little shuck and jive from the minstrel and medicine show and combine it with the freer techniques of post-1920s jazz instrumentalist, and then mix, to taste, with the most straightforward of musical forms (the blues).

Don't Put Off Salvation Too Long Southland Ladies Quartette 1930 They may just be right, though the whole idea of death bed conversion tells me otherwise. More gentle ladies of the Southern Baptist gospel persuasion, though personally I will cross that river when I come to it.

The Poor Girl's Story Moonshine Kate (Rosa Lee Carson) 1930 Moonshine Kate was Fiddlin John Carson's daughter, almost prim in the face of a father who seemed, at the same time, to both challenge and celebrate provincialism. There is something, I guess, about singing for lynch mobs (which he indeed did, for those who strung up the accused Jew Leo Frank) that brings the whole concept of Southern dirt Bohemianism into sobering perspective.

Prohibition Blues The Missourians 2/17/30 Early territory band that shows its country bend as tamed, only slightly, by the organizational ideas of the new swing band sound. The blues as a reminder.

1. **Mother Called Her Child to Her Dying Bed Lil McIntock 1930** This may come out of a certain kind of Minstrel song, but it's still, to quote Valerie Wilmer, as serious as his life (and yours and mine). Lil was a great songster, who perhaps worked outside of the very specific realm of the blues, but who lived inside the things that fed it.

Future Blues Willie Brown 1930 I won't get into the blues-family arguments about whether this is the same Willie Brown as the *other* Willie Brown, because I'm not really sure who the other Willie Brown was. Still, *this* Willie Brown, an associate and accompanist of Charlie Patton (and you know which one of him I mean) had a similar, gut-pulling sound, and guitar-tugging approach to the blues. This is Deep Delta, if that means anything. And, if I am correct (and there's not a *third* Willie Brown), this guy also lived for a time with Memphis Minnie. (There has been some confusion and disagreement, particularly between Gayle Dean Wardlow and Dave Evans, over whether the Willie Brown on this session and the Willie Brown who appeared with Son House were one and the same. Personally I have no idea, as it is all I can do to figure out the difference between King Solomon Hill, Sam Collins, Sam Butler, and Bo Weavil Jackson. Not to mention the two Sonny Boy Williamsons and those Hooker cousins...)

2. **When I Take My Vacation in Heaven Mother McCollum 6/30** Tampa Red took *his* vacation in Harlem; Mother McCollum, sounding like a store-front Margaret Dumont, takes us, as she might have said, in a different direction,

My Baby Got a Yo Yo The Two Poor Boys/Evans and McClain 5/21/31 Evans and McClain, as has been written about in much blues literature, were schizoid bluesmen, a little bit hillbilly and a little bit blues and roll. Truly, they do not always sound like the same pair of guys, but maybe this was just part of their whole entertainment shtick. If they *are* as credited on various recordings, than it means they went from twang to moan faster than Joanne Woodward went from virgin to whore in Three Faces of Eve.

Please Don't Holler Mama Ben Ferguson w/Cal Smith 12/16/31 More in the grand Jug Band tradition of greased-tones and slow-foot ramble. Listen to Cal Smith, who I have included in a few places in this collection. One of the true early greats of blues guitar, finding and feeling his way along that single string.

My Bones Gonna Rise Again Dave McCarin 5/19/31 More from the gospel of minstrel, to once again paraphrase Dick Spottswood. This song is also parodied on this collection as G. Burns Gonna Rise again . It is basically pop music for the church, and damn good pop music, if you'll excuse the expression.

Get Off With Me Grant and Wilson 2/10/31 How can you not like a song from 1931 that deals with simultaneous orgasm? And who the hell ever talked about such a thing almost 80 years ago? Well, obviously the vaudeville team of Grant and Wilson, the female side of which (Wilson) also recorded some straight blues with, among others, Blind Blake and (trumpeter) Joe Smith. Even the terminology, to "get off," in the way of the truly hip from any age, sounds completely contemporary. Which goes to show that African American musicians have always been "modern." I only have to wonder: was Kinsey listening?

Midnight Blues Jimmie Davis w/Ed Schaeffer and Snoozer Quinn 5/27/31 As is well-known, the future segregationist-moralist governor of Louisiana, before he stole (or purchased) *You Are My Sunshine* and grabbed the copyright, sang and recorded sexy blues songs, occasionally accompanied by black musicians. Here he has with him the African American Ed Schaeffer as well as (white) Paul Whiteman alumnus Snoozer Quinn. Quinn, who left little in the way of recorded work, was obviously a fluid and a smart guitarist. And Davis, in the grand old Southern-massa-mistress tradition of Strom Thurmond, was obviously sneaking across the tracks (if only in his head) every chance he got.

1. **I'm Crazy 'Bout My Bozo Sam Theard 3/24/31** There's a song I've heard around, called *Wait the Whisper Song*, in the realm of contemporary hip hop. It's about the singer's penis, certainly a fascinating and always worthy subject. Still, credit where credit's due: we now find that Sam Theard sang about *his* wiener almost 80 years ago. The guy who wrote *You Stole My Wife You Rascal* here sings about wandering the neighborhood and showing the local women his "dog," which apparently they all love to look at and stroke. And every night, before he goes to bed, "I take Bozo and slap him on the head." Good dog.

My Good Gal's Gone Jimmy Rodgers w/Clifford Hayes Cal Smith 7/11/31
Let Me Be Your Sidetrack Jimmy Rodgers/Cliff Gibson 6/11/31 The father of countrified music in blues collaborations with African American musicians. These are two of Rodgers' best and most relaxed performances, a rare translation, for those days, of the spirit of live performance into recorded form. Hayes' jug band, with the pioneering guitar soloist Cal Smith, gives a perfectly sympathetic accompaniment, and guitarist Cliff Gibson brings out the somewhat caustic side of Rodgers. The result, in *Let Me Be Your Sidekick* is, interestingly, reminiscent of Bob Dylan's "All I Really Want To Do."

Wild Man Stomp Chicago Stompers Jimmy Blythe w/banjo solo 3/20/31 I think it's Ikey Robinson on the banjo, in this fairly-typical-of-its kind blues-jazz-hokum collaboration. Jimmy Blythe is truly a major, if largely forgotten, figure in early jazz, and his presence on one delightfully similar-yet-different group recording after another in this era is no accident. He can play backgrounds, he can accompany, he can swing, and he can solo ("Oh, Jimmy Blythe, he was everywhere in those days," Doc Cheatham told me about 15 years ago, after I mentioned that I had spoken to Milt Hinton, who could not recall Blyth at all. "Milt said that? Oh, I'm not surprised. He's getting old" Doc, who was in his late 80s at the time, added).

Clair & Pearley Blues Kid Coley 6/13/31 Listen to Kid Coley, with his minstrel/vaudeville rasp and whom do you hear in the future? If you answered "Bobby Short" go to the head of the class, though many, particularly of the jazz persuasion, may disagree. But this came to me like a revelation as I heard it, and it helped me to not only understand Short but to begin to enjoy his singing and playing, which lay in that stylistic no-man's land somewhere between the East River and edge of old Harlem (if there is an old Harlem). Showbiz glad-handing of tunes both black and white is well within a certain African American minstrel/medicine show tradition. It is out of the grand old style, with the kind of staged emotion that the newer blues guys of the 1920s implicitly and musically rejected. No minstrel irony for them, no emotional distancing, just a blunt fusion of instrument and voice. Kid Coley was from that old school, as was Bobby Short, and it was an old school that never really died until Bobby did.

Mistreated Blues Walter Smith and his Carolina Buddies 2/24/31 The nasal blues, in all its casual-lyric glory. Smith worked with a number of musical combinations, and is heard here performing in a fairly typical white-man blues style depicting a relationship gone sour. These things were a little less cosmically tinted than the black delta blues that preceded them, with a different kind of detachment and more of a

surface, casual sorrow. It was as though the white Southern world had erected more protective layers between themselves and that world; religion was one, song was still another (and here I will digress with the thought that for black Southerners religion was a form of both escape and immersion, while for whites it meant primarily an escape, which is further in keeping with the sharp distinction between white New World and African-derived methods of worship. Not surprisingly, songs and singing styles mirrored this distinction. African American blues singers used the music and the subjects of the songs, both religious and otherwise, to throw themselves at and into the problem, to, in a manner of speaking, baptize themselves in the realities of their own lives. Whites, more concerned from a religious standpoint with the next life, instead washed themselves symbolically in their own - and Jesus' - blood and tears. Hence the sharp differences between the white mountain and coastal-styled blues modalities, which had their own closely-trilled melisma, and black blues and religious singing, with its more elaborately staged musical dramas of sound and interval).

Sugar Foot Stomp Fletcher Henderson Orch. 4/29/31 Late early version of Henderson's seminal band, playing the blues as first defined by King Oliver (as Dippermouth Blues) and then re-learned here by a mix of musicians from the East, South, Mid West, and The Territory. One of the more decisive signs that the blues was, indeed, becoming a national language.

How You Want It Done? Big Bill Broonzy 3/29/32 Broonzy is a major figure in all of the above, a great modernist of the blues whose guitar playing follows all of the important trends, from nimble finger picking to electric leads, and sets a few new standards of his own. Always with an ear to public musical discourse, he knew enough to satisfy early folkie audience cravings for authenticity and even played, in the 1950s, with enough of a sense of the country populist to predict, in his hillbilly/blues fusion, rockabilly. Not to mention what a great singer he was, with the rich baritone of the blues crooner.

Mae West A Guy What Takes His Time 2/7/33 A few years ago I was at a music conference and a somewhat typical academic gave a long and meaningless talk on Mae West and her relationship to African American musicians. He used a clip from a film she made that included the Duke Ellington band, and which showed her smiling at the orchestra as though she were making some kind of sexual promise. And then he told of her "affair" with the boxer Jack Johnson. Well, I don't know if West slept with the Ellington band or not, but I do know that she never had an affair with Jack Johnson. And surely, in her pseudo-Southern, tongue-in-cheek posturings there were inevitable cultural intersections with the world of black people. Beyond that I would, in making any case for such influences, look more closely at her sense of rhythm, both body and musical. Not a great singer, she had a flair for the sarcastic. Here she sings a pop-blues song written by Ralph Rainger (co-writer of Easy Living and Thanks for the Memory, among other things) with clever and not-too-glib lyrics, in easy Hollywood style.

2. **Red River Blues Buddy Moss 1/16/33** In his later years suspicious and hostile (hey, what old musician isn't? Talk to me in ten years; better still, talk to me now), Buddy Moss was, in his early prime, a Piedmonter with, as they say, attitude, an insinuatingly rich voice and a fine style of guitar picking. (I say early prime because the one recording he made during the folk revival shows that he was still a major musician, his voice ripened with time, and his guitar playing still rhythmically dispersed with classic ragtime counterpoint.)

Hambone Am Sweet 4 Southern Singers 2/23/33 A fine vocal group who would have some problems, were they to hop into the time machine, push the "future" button, and find themselves suddenly in the lobby of Jazz at Lincoln Center. In their one extant publicity picture they posed and dressed as plantation pickanninies, humble and submissive looking, all mammy-fied and corn-shucked. But they sure sang nice, with a deep imaginary soul which complements their imaginary costumes.

Organ Grinder Clarence Williams/Eva Taylor 8/27/33 Listen to Ikey Robinson, one of the most advanced of early plectrum soloists. Here he shows the clear influence of Louis Armstrong in the decidedly un-blues way in which he arpeggiates his solo. This is more double entendre pop/blues, presided over by the king of copyrights, Clarence Williams, his wife Eva in vocal tow.

3. **Miss Handy Hanks Archie Lewis 3/30/33** A little left over pre-blues novelty (this is a pop song medley) from the 1930s. Lewis has a medicine show demeanor, and this sounds like a minstrel piece, proving, once again, that not all such things were racially demeaning. In terms of function and attitude this is not unlike Thelonious Monk performing Just A Gigolo or Sweet and Lovely (and note that there is not an ounce of signification in the performance, or any inkling of The Dozens; see my notes to Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen, CD 17).

St. Louis Blues Louis Armstrong 4-26-33 What more can we say about Armstrong? As I've *already* said, he was a very interesting blues player but one who also, ironically or not (given some contemporary claims), in the process of creating himself out of a blues-informed if not dominated tradition, forged a new and musically compelling distance between jazz and the blues. And in this he, in the eyes of some of the REAL traditionalists (like the iconoclast collector Joe Bussard) committed his greatest sin, by turning the old time sounds into something far-removed from their down-to-earth (and down-home) hard blues origins. Or did he? And if he did, was it necessarily a bad thing?

Throw Me in the Alley Peetie Wheatstraw w/Ike Rodgers 8/24/34 Peetie's back. This recording is just a wonder, an odd, exhilarating mixture of drunken rent party anarchy and slum jazz

Ida Red Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers w.Riley Puckett 3/29/34 Puckett was the quintessential blind guitarist. Here he and Gid turn out a de-raucoused version of an old country two-beat standard. Elsewhere I have made the argument that this two-beat feeling, with its relationship to the clave, was the early manifestation of the very beat that differentiated rock and roll from the blues. Agree or not, but note that this song helped inspire Chuck Berry to write Maybelline.

Sendin' the Vipers Mezzrow/Carter/O'Brien/WL Smith B. Freeman/M. Kaminsky 5/7/34 Sendin' Mezzrow, along with some of the new lights of swing, including Benny Carter, Bud Freeman, and Max Kaminsky. Made by a great and integrated band recording at the very beginning of the Swing Era, this performance epitomizes the new fusion of modern ideas with old-time blues gestures and seems to be an exact and nearly perfect mix of old and new. The blues was an obsession for Mezzrow, a Jew from Harlem.

1. **Hobo's Blues Wilf Carter 1/11/34** A song of the wanderer, through Depression-era hobo jungles. Like Woody Guthrie Carter saw the blues as a vision, though the social microscope, of the American condition.
2. **Hard Working Woman Johnnie Strauss w/Henry Brown violin 8/20/34** Everybody talks about the Bluebird Beat (Sam Charters' term), which refers to the somewhat formulaic series of recordings made around the blues community in Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s and which were regularly produced by Lester Melrose; no one ever seems to cite the Decca Beat, blues and neo-blues recorded for *that* label at around the same time, equally distinctive and musically significant. A canny fusion of modern blue elements with late swing musicians, at its best it retains the old-hometown (as opposed to down-home) feeling: some smooth blues, some rough blues, some jazz blues and some blues blues. We'll hear it in more than one place in this collection.

Matchbox Larry Hensley 11/25/34 An interesting approximation of the vocal instrumental effect that Blind Lemon, who wrote this, patented. Hensley is (to be redundant) something of a second hand mimic, lacking the hand-vocal coordination of Lemon. Still, he transforms this into a compelling copy that is at once individual and affecting. He also, I will say, gets more of the voicings right than any other post-Lemon guitarist I have heard.

Oh Death Charlie Patton Bertha Lee Patton 1934 Larry Cohn has said that he considers Charlie Patton to be the greatest pure blues *artist*, and who am I argue with Larry who, to coin a phrase, has forgotten more about the blues than I'll ever know (no, I am *not* implying that Larry is losing his memory)? It might be said that if one looks up the definition of Delta Blues in the dictionary one would/should find a picture of Patton - not exactly true, though Patton is worthy of such text. Wild and wooly, a surprisingly (for us Northern liberals who went to white schools) light-skinned gut bucketeer with finesse, Patton was one of the blues lights that lured not a whole generation but some key representatives, from John Fahey to Dick Spottswood to Cohn to Alan Hite, to the blues. Read a few recent revisionist books and you start to worry that these guys, in their revivalist fervor, were self-deluding activists vulgarly romanticizing a supposedly lost way of music and life - but then listen to the actual *music* and you realize, that, by god, they were *absolutely right*. This was the music of a lifetime. Hang It On The Wall is actually fun, like a dance tune as

performed in a drunken recital. Oh Death is a duet with Patton's wife Bertha Lee, and together they devise a kind of free form call and response, in Delta counterpoint.

3. Old Man River Casa Loma Orchestra 2/3/34

4. **Old Man River Tiny Bradshaw 10/3/34** The Casa Loma-ites get lukewarm reviews from many jazz critics but show, on this Jerome Kern minstrel showpiece, why the idea of nervous white swing, as differentiated from relaxed black swing, is a positive thing. And what do jazz critics know, anyway? Old Man River, which we'll hear also in this collection from a crooner with White-Man accompanist (Bing Crosby with Paul) a jive swingster (Tiny Bradshaw) and a rhythm and blues vocal group (the Ravens), is basically a blues with a bridge, sung most famously, elsewhere, by Paul Robeson as a Broadway spiritual.

Black Evil Blues Alice Moore 8/18/34 Ike Rogers, Henry Brown Ah, more of the real St. Louis blues, forget about Handy: this was a town which contained a fascinating mixture of the timid (Darby), the aggressive (Wheatstraw and Walter Davis) the sophisticated (Townsend) and the nasty (Alice Moore). Along with a stock company of sidemen like the trombonist Ike Rogers and the pianist Henry Brown, they offer an alternative to a lot of tired and weary (in the musical sense) 1930s country blues recordings.

5. **Repeal the Blues Johnny Green piano solo 2/1/34** Years ago I had a brief correspondence with Green, the composer of, among other great songs, Body and Soul and Out of Nowhere. He was cordial but perpetually defensive and pissed off in his letters, which has nothing, really, to do with this performance, unless he meant the title as some kind of anti-blues screed. I have picked this to show that, though it was rarely sure of what to do with it, Hollywood regarded the blues as some sort of emotional side show. By title the blues evoked some very specific musical gestures, though by form and content it was just another means of exposition.
6. **Moaning the Blues Memphis Minnie McCoy Kansas Joe McCoy 9/10/34** Decca blues from the natural heir to Bessie Smith, though that is only my opinion. Memphis Minnie's voice fairly rips through any material she applies it to. She is a country blues soul queen, independent and pissed off, but lonely just the same.

Miss Jackson, Tennessee Goebel Reeves 8/31/34 Another in a line of singing hoboos, and one of the great ones. In a crowded field of Yodelers, a truly individual yodel. This fairly reeks of authenticity, meaning that it sounds real, meaning that it sounds like the real thing, meaning that it sounds like the work of someone who has actually *experienced* something in both a material and non-material way (unlike, say, the band Wilco) and, most importantly, meaning that I like it.

1. **I'm Throwin' Up My Hands The Rev. Gary Davis 7/21/35** Minority opinion, perhaps: the world lost one of its greatest blues performers when Gary Davis got religion and disavowed the blues life, and in return got a gospel singer whose instrumental gifts were considerable yet unsteady. Though Davis was the idol of many folk revivalists who viewed his guitar playing as god-like, I have to admit that it has taken me some time to warm up to that side of his work. The singing, as Rosetta Tharpe discovered when she was on tour with Davis in Europe (see the book *White Bicycles*) is cross-worthy. Vocally, in each song Davis seems to lash himself to that Christian mast, to suffer gladly the unrelenting and conflicting elements of nature and evil (i.e.: The South?). But the guitar playing has always seemed to me to be a bit hesitant and even technically challenged, for all its powerful hints of plucked brilliance. But then – but then I went back to his original recordings, which included a few blues, and I almost fell over – here, in *THE BLUES*, was the coordination somehow missing in the religious playing. The *blues* had some of the most advanced guitar of its day, with picking that was both a step beyond Blind Lemon Jefferson and a creation parallel to the daringly ingenious instrumental counterpoint of Robert Johnson. The blues, forbidden territory, perhaps (though never completely abandoned) was, in its devil's advocacy, where The Reverend's true genius lay. It is almost too-ironic to contemplate.
- Rounder's Luck (Rising Sun Blues) Homer Callahan 4/11/35** More of the resident and indifferent scowl of the old Southern hillbilly singster (as opposed to the African American songster). The pleasure of music like this is its insistent informality. The singer acts as though he doesn't care all that much, yet by the end of the 3 minutes or so of music he has tacitly admitted

that there was indeed something that he was compelled to recount. Also, note that this, a pre-Dylan/Animals version of the song, is, in reality, not only about the New Orleans Woman's House of Detention (and not a whorehouse as previously reported) but is also, harmonically, a blues.

Rocks in My Bed Leroy Carr/Scrapper Blackwell 2/25/35 Carr and Blackwell were the new blues. The after hours sound of this reflected a cool serenity and deep focus that was immediately taken up as *au courant* by a generation of African Americans, who had long-since decided that the old (white) family farm had no nostalgic hold on their lives. And by the time the next generation of smoothies, from Charles Brown to Nat Cole to, briefly, Ray Charles, took hold, the music was something else, again.

Little Brother Montgomery Vicksburg Blues II 1935 Little Brother had the New Orleans touch, with the triplet blues subdivide that Professor Longhair turned into a way of musical life. Montgomery also noted, in interviews with people like Paul Oliver, that he felt restricted by record producers' requirements that he, like a lot of other black musicians, play only the blues. As we know (thanks to good revisionist work by people like Elijah Wald and Marybeth Hamilton) there was more to the typical old-time musician's musical interests than the blues, particularly as it pertained to making a living. The spirit of this collection is to try and reflect all of this; taken as a whole, Montgomery's work, along with much else in this anthology, is a window on a complicated, dangerous, and vanished world, of jukes, barrelhouses, whorehouses, and other disreputable sources of some of the most radical musical and social changes in American life of the 20th century. Little Brother was an important witness to these changes which, in cumulative fashion, amount to a mini-history of American song. That new American song, as it emerged in the first twenty years of the 20th century, might be summarized as so: take the old black songster songs, add pieces of gospel hymns, sprinkle in a minstrel phrase or two, keep an ear to the ground (particularly around Broadway) for new harmonies and melodies, pay *close* attention to this new thing called the blues, and shape and reshape it all for the new century and what was initially primarily an African American audience, but which was rapidly taking on white witnesses and performers. Barrelhouse and ragtime ideas were moving into the bars and restaurants of more mainstream locations like New York City and San Francisco, as demonstrated by both white and black ragtime pianists and singers, and as closely monitored by whites like Izzy Belin and Sophie Tucker (see Ed Berlin's work on the early neo-ragtime world of New York's pre-WW I night life and the shadowing of black performers by white performers). And don't forget about the concurrent work of people like the African American Will Marion Cook, in search of a non-compromised social and cultural respectability, all in the face of white determination to both acknowledge (through various kinds of patronage) and limit (through the maintenance of varying degrees of what amounted, both South *and* North, to a white supremacist economic status quo) black efforts and innovation. And then add, of course, the new jazz, from the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on. This was the American musical world in the transitional years of what is now called the Progressive Age. It also contained deep remnants of minstrelsy, in the medicine and tent shows that continued to employ so many African American entertainers, and which complemented the traveling theatrical circuit of African American theater performers. Learning their way musically, as well, were show composers like the Gershwins, Jerome Kern, Harold Arlen, and Irving Berlin (among hundreds of others joining the larger ranks of professional songwriting). The symbiotic relationship of all these elements does not lend itself to glib categorization or easy stylistic separation, though historians have continued, for good and understandable reasons, to divide up American music in relevant and categorical ways. The problem with this, as with seeing only the centrality of the blues in every manifestation of blues-like song, is that it denies (and turns a blind eye to) the deeper and truer history of all of American music.

Cold Winter's Day Blind Willie McTell 4/25/35 As soon as Bob Dylan names a song after you, you know you've made it as legend. As soon as Alan Lomax interviews you and asks you to play for that huge and clunky recording machine in the corner, you know you've just done a freebie (unless there's a coke machine in the hall). This recording, however, pre-dates McTell's Library of Congress session, and gives just one side of Willie, who frequently ragged things in the East Coast fashion (called Piedmont style, this refers to the lighter picked feeling of a school of guitarist who, perhaps, as has been pointed out, had more musical interaction with whites than their deep South brethren) but was also quite adept at the deep blues side of things. If Elvis, as Francis Davis has said, was his own jukebox, McTell was his own road show.

Give It To Me Daddy Hartman's Heartbreakers 6/22/36 This is a recording that, even for hillbilly days, is quite unusual in its lasciviousness. The old-time hillbilly equivalent of phone sex.

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