

MARK T SMALL ~ American Roots ~ CD Liner Notes

1. Big River - Johnny Cash

Big River is a song written and originally recorded by Johnny Cash. Released as a single by Sun Records in 1958, it went as high as #4 on the Billboard country music charts and stayed on the charts for 14 weeks.

The Song has been covered by a number of artists including; Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Delbert McClinton, The Grateful Dead, Waylon Jennings and Hank Williams Jr. I remember listening to this song on a reel to reel tape player when I was about 12 years old. I had not started play the guitar at that point. I do remember listening and rewinding to listen again and again, dozens of times in one sitting. For some reason I could not get enough of this song.

2. Mississippi Blues 2 - Willie Brown

The song Mississippi Blues is the melodic guitar portion of this song on this recording. On my instrumental CD, I included that melodic rendition, hence the #2 designation. I love this tune because it a great example of the guitar becoming a portable piano of sorts. The vocal lines on this recording are verses from other songs that I think are just a good fit for the groove.

Apparently. there were two or three Willie Browns. One that recorded Mississippi Blues with Alan Lomax (who was certainly separate from the Willie Brown who hung around with Patton and House), one that recorded M & O and Future Blues, and POSSIBLY one more who recorded Make Me A Pallet On the Floor in the 1940's.

The William Brown who recorded MISSISSIPPI BLUES was a very mysterious guy. There are no photographs. We have no birthdate. No date of death. No family history. No remembrances from fellow bluesmen. The song was recorded by Alan Lomax at Sadie Becks Plantation in Arkansas in 1949. It is wonderful and very intricate, piano like guitar playing. It has almost a Leroy Carr piano feel.

3. Soldiers Joy - Traditional

Soldier's Joy was performed by the North Carolina Hawaiians in 1929. It is a fiddle tune, classified as a reel or country dance. It is a popular in the American fiddle canon, in which it is touted as "an American classic" but traces its origin to Scottish fiddling traditions. The tune has been played in Scotland for over 200 years, and Robert Burns used it for the first song of his cantata 'The Jolly Beggars'. According to documentation at the United States Library of Congress, it is "one of the oldest and most widely distributed tunes" and is rated in the top ten most-played old time fiddle tunes. According to the Illinois Humanities Center, the tune dates as early as the 1760s. In spite of its upbeat tempo and catchy melody, the term "soldier's joy" has a much darker meaning than is portrayed by the tune. This term eventually came to refer to the combination of whiskey, beer, and morphine used by Civil War soldiers.

Melody as basis for song;

Like many pure tunes with ancient pedigree, the melody of Soldier's Joy has been used as a basis for construction of songs, which, unlike pure tunes, have lyrics. Robert Burns wrote lyrics for the tune in which a dismembered, homeless veteran sarcastically recounts his delight with battle.

Civil War era and post-bellum cultural references

According to the Illinois Humanities Council (IHC), the tune came to represent substance abuse during the Civil War. This is corroborated in concurring secondary sources.

Gimme some of that Soldier's Joy, you know what I mean'
I don't want to hurt no more my leg is turnin' green

The IHIC version is as follows:

Twenty-five cents for whiskey, twenty-five cents for beer
Twenty-five cents for morphine, get me out of here

Chorus:

I'm my momma's pride and joy (3×)
Sing you a song called the soldier's joy

4. Miss The Mississippi & You - William Halley

The song Miss the Mississippi and You was written by Bill Halley and was first recorded and released by Jimmie Rodgers in 1932. It was covered by Aurora Nealand & The Royal Roses, Jimmie Skinner, George Jones and other artists.

5. Freight Train Boogie - Rabon Delmore

The highly influential "Hillbilly" duo, The Delmore Brothers' distinctive harmonies and guitar duets are among the most memorable in early country music. You may be familiar with their 1949 HIT: Blues Stay Away From Me - it has been covered by everyone from Jean Vincent to Doc Watson to Johnny Burnett. Their "Freight Train Boogie" (recorded for the King label in 1946) is regarded by some as the first rock and roll record.

Over the course of their careers, The Delmore Brothers wrote more than one thousand songs together. Equally skilled on guitar, the brothers began recording for Columbia in 1931 and the following year appeared on WSM Grand Ole Opry.

The Delmore Brothers guitar work is somewhat of a template for Old Time and Bluegrass guitar players. My primary hero's for "flatpicking guitar" are Norman Blake and Doc Watson. I you asked Norman and Doc about their guitar influences, the Delmore Brothers would be at the top of both lists.

6. Blues Hit Big Town - John Lee Hooker

This song is one of the many songs that were written and recorded by Mr Hooker. John Lee Hooker was born in Clarksdale, MS in 1917 and as a boy he was forbidden to listen to blues – It was religious music only. Around 1923 his natural father died. His mother then married William Moore. William Moore, a blues singer who provided Hooker with his first introduction to the guitar (and whom John would later credit for his distinctive playing style). Moore also knew Charlie Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Blake. John's stepfather was his first outstanding blues influence. William Moore was also a local blues guitarist who learned in Shreveport, Louisiana to play a droning, one-chord blues that was strikingly different from the Delta blues of the time. At the age of 15, John Lee Hooker ran away from home, reportedly never seeing his mother or stepfather again. *Additional info on John Lee Hooker with Track #7 below.*

7. Back Door Friend

I learned this tune and developed my own version after hearing it performed by Johnny Winter on his 1969 self titled album. The tune may be attributed to Lightnin Hopkins, but I am not sure. During my electric / band period, Johnny was my favorite player. He is still on my Mount Rushmore and I think you might hear some of his influence on this cut and in my playing in general.

8. TWELVE STICKS - Reverend Gary Davis

Twelve Sticks is a fingerpicking rag by the Great Rev Gary Davis. Davis was around during and prior to the 60s Folk Revival and he looked at the guitar as a portable piano. He was the King of the East Coast Style of Ragtime guitar playing also called Piedmont Style. Playing only with his thumb and index finger on his right hand, he managed to play intricate bass lines, a melody, and a harmony all at the same time. While all of this is going on, he would play single note flourishes using his thumb and index finger. Truly amazing! All music today is a descendent of Ragtime. It is hard to believe that prior to Ragtime, all music had this; on the beat march characteristic. John Philip Sousa compositions are good examples of pre-Ragtime / late Romantic Period music.

9. MAD MAN BLUES - John Lee Hooker

John went from studio to studio in the 50s and recorded under different names to get around the contracts, because he could barely live on what they were paying him... He was Delta John, John Lee Cooker and Birmingham Sam And His Magic Guitar. At one time he even worked at the Ford Motor Company. Can you imagine that? John Lee Hooker on the assembly line??? The guy recorded over 60 albums and 100 singles. Mad Man Blues, Ground Hog Blues, Leave My Wife Alone, Dreamin' Blues, Hey Boogie and Union Station Blues are all solo recordings dated 1951.

10. Sweet Honey Bee - William Broonzy

One of the many tunes written by the great Big Bill Broonzy. Big Bill Broonzy (born Lee Conley Bradley, June 26, 1903 – August 14, 1958) was an American blues singer, songwriter and guitarist. His career began in the 1920s, when he played country blues to mostly African-American audiences. Through the 1930s and 1940s he successfully navigated a transition in style to a more urban blues sound popular with working-class African-American audiences. In the 1950s a return to his traditional folk-blues roots made him one of the leading figures of the emerging American folk music revival and an international star. His long and varied career marks him as one of the key figures in the development of blues music in the 20th century. Broonzy copyrighted more than 300 songs during his lifetime, including both adaptations of traditional folk songs and original blues songs. As a blues composer, he was unique in writing songs that reflected his rural-to-urban experiences.

11. Blind Mary - Turlough O'Carolan

Irish, Planxty ("very slow" air in 2/4 time, O'Neill: 4/4 time, Joyce & Valley). The tune is attributed to blind Irish harper Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738), although Donal O'Sullivan, in his definitive work on the bard, could find no incontrovertible evidence of its origin.

(Irish: *Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin*; Irish pronunciation:

O'Carolan was a blind Celtic harper, composer and singer in Ireland whose great fame is due to his gift for melodic composition. Although not a composer in the classical sense, Carolan is considered by many to be Ireland's national composer.

Carolan was born in 1670 in Nobber, County Meath, where his father was a blacksmith. The family moved from Meath to Ballyfarnon, County Roscommon in 1684. In Roscommon, his father took a job with the MacDermott Roe family of Alderford House. Mrs. MacDermott Roe gave Turlough an education, and he showed talent in poetry. After being blinded by smallpox at the age of eighteen Carolan was apprenticed by Mrs. MacDermott Roe to a good harper. At the age of twenty-one, being given a horse and a guide, he set out to travel Ireland and compose songs for patrons. For almost fifty years, Carolan journeyed from one end of Ireland to the other, composing and performing his tunes.