

MSESET5

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 5



MSE 1001 BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON (1926-29)
MSE 1002 FRANK STOKES (1927-29)
MSE 1003 BLIND BLAKE (1926-29)
MSE 1004 BIG BILL BROONZY (1927-32)
MSE 1005 MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 1 (1930)
MSE 1006 LONNIE JOHNSON VOL. 1 (1926-28)



Series Editor: Johnny Parth
Notes: Paul Oliver
Produced by: Gef Lucena
Remastering from 78s: Hans Klement, Austrophon Studios, Vienna
Digitising from vinyl: Norman White

Original recordings from the collections of
Werner Benecke, Joe Bussard, Johnny Parth, Guido van Rijn,
Bernd Kuefferle, Ernst Weber

With thanks to Mark Jones of Bristol Folk Publications for the loan of
vinyl LP copies of the original re-issue series

Sleeve Design: Bob Doling/Genny Lucena

Discographical details from Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942
by John Godrich and Robert Dixon

**Considering the extreme rarity of the original 78s, condition is
generally better than might be expected.**

**Titles marked * are from poor condition and very rare or
only known surviving copies.**

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES
IS A DIVISION OF SAYDISC RECORDS
The Barton, Inglestone Common
Badminton, S Glos, GL9 1BX, England
www.saydisc.com**

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series

The 42 albums that make up the iconic Matchbox Bluesmaster Series were released by Saydisc Records between Nov 1982 and June 1988. Most of the albums were subtitled “Complete Recordings in Chronological Order” with a few under the subtitle “The Remaining Titles” or “New to LP”. The originating 78 rpm records (many of them extremely rare) were provided by several collectors under the editorship of well known Austrian collector, Johnny Parth and were re-mastered by Hans Klement of Austrophon Studios in Vienna. Johnny Parth had already created his extensive Roots Records label which Saydisc distributed in the UK and the Matchbox Bluesmaster Series was a carefully sculpted edition of black blues roots music giving a broad spectrum of the genre.

The series documented the early days of blues, hokum and gospel music from 1926 to 1934 (1950 for two tracks) and gives an insight into the way that black music was first released on record. From a commercial standpoint, record companies such as OKEH sent out talent scouts to find black singers, many of them “singing for nickels” on street corners. The market that these RACE record companies were after was the black community and they sometimes gave these newly found performers epithets such as “Peg Leg ...”, “Blind ...”, “Bo Weavil...”, “Buddy Boy...”, “Barbecue...” or “Texas...” to give them more appeal. The music of these singers formed the backbone of later urban blues, rhythm-and-blues and, of course, rock-‘n’-roll. The songs are sometimes raw and primitive in character, but some outstanding playing and singing shines through many of the performances.

Putting this music into perspective are the very valuable notes by **Paul Oliver** who was a world authority on early blues and travelled in the US extensively to try and trace any remaining details of these sometimes obscure people. Along with the work of other field collectors and researchers, we gain a rare insight into the world of black musicians of the day by reading his notes alongside listening to the music they performed.

Paul Oliver not only wrote 10 books on the history of blues and gospel music, but was also a Professor of Architecture on which subject he wrote five seminal books. He was born in May 1927 and died in August 2017. Through his blues books and writings he opened many windows into a little researched area which is of such importance to the history of black music in America. The final 4 CDs in the series are entitled “Songsters and Saints” and were put together by Paul Oliver to illustrate his book of the same name.

The present Matchbox Bluesmaster Series has been transcribed from the 1980’s vinyl pressings by Norman White using high-end transcription techniques. The original master tapes for the vinyl releases vanished long ago. See page 31 for details of the rest of the series.

Saydisc has in its vaults many more pre-Bluesmaster blues albums which will be issued on 5 sets each of 6 CDs including rare Library Of Congress recordings as well as field recordings from the 1960s and the UK blues scene of the 1970s.

GEF LUCENA, Series Producer

MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES

SET 5: DISC 1: Original vinyl release date: April 1984 as
'The Remaining Titles'

52'11"

MSE 1001 Blind Lemon Jefferson 1926 – 29

Blind Lemon Jefferson, vcl/gtr

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Got The Blues 2471-1 | Chicago, c. March 1926 |
| 2. Long Lonesome Blues 2472- | — |
| 3. Match Box Blues 80524-B | Atlanta, Ga., Mar 14, 1927 |

Blind Lemon Jefferson & His Feet: Blind Lemon Jefferson, gtr/tap-dancing/vcl comments

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 4. Hot Dogs 4578-3 | Chicago c. Jun 1927 |
|--------------------|---------------------|

Deacon L. J. Bates: Blind Lemon Jefferson, vcl/gtr

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 5. He Arose From the Dead 4579-1 | — |
|----------------------------------|---|

Blind Lemon Jefferson, vcl/gtr

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 6. Struck Sorrow Blues 20039-2 * | Chicago, c. Sept 1927 |
| 7. Gone Dead On You Blues 20070-2 * | Chicago, c. Oct 1927 |
| 8. One Dime Blues 20075-2 * | — |
| 9. Change My Luck Blues 20387-2 | Chicago, c. Feb 1928 |
| 10. Lemon's Cannonball Theme 20401-1 | Chicago, c. Mar 1928 |
| 11. Lockstep Blues 20815-2 | Chicago, c. Aug 1928 |
| 12. Hangman's Blues 20816-2 | — |
| 13. Disgusted Blues 21110-2 * | Chicago, c. Jan 1929 |
| 14. Empty House Blues 21200-1 * | Chicago, c. Mar 1929 |
| 15. Saturday Night Spender's Blues 21201-2 | — |
| 16. Bed Springs Blues 15664 | Richmond, Ind., Sept 24, 1929 |
| 17. The Cheaters Spell 15674 * | — |

SET 5: DISC 2: Original vinyl release date: Nov 1984 as
'The Remaining Titles'
MSE 1002 Frank Stokes 1927 – 29

63'01"

Beale Street Sheiks (Stokes And Sane):

Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr; Dan Sane, gtr

1. Half Cup Of Tea 4774-2 * Chicago. c. Aug 1927

The Beale Street Sheiks: Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr; Dan Sane, gtr

2. Ain't Goin' To Do Like I Used To Do 21229-2 * Chicago, c. Mar 1929

3. Hunting Blues 21234-1 * —

4. Rockin' On The Hill Blues 21240-2 * —

5. Fillin' In The Blues – Part 1 21241-1 * —

6. Fillin' In The Blues – Part 2 21241-2 * —

Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr; Will Batts, vln

7. South Memphis Blues 55573-2 Memphis, Tenn., Sept 23, 1929

8. Bunker Hill Blues 55574-1 —

9. Right Now Blues 55584-2 Memphis, Tenn., Sept 25, 1929

10. Shiney Town Blues 55591-1 —

Frank Stokes. vcl/gtr; unknown, gtr

11. Downtown Blues 41822-1 Memphis, Tenn., Feb 1, 1928

12. Bedtime Blues 41825-1 —

13. What's The Matter Blues 41826-1 —

Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr;

14. It Won't Be Long Now 45420-1 Memphis, Tenn., Aug 27, 1928

15. I Got Mine 45422-1 —

Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr; Dan Sane, gtr

16. 'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do – Part 1 45452-1
 Memphis, Tenn., Aug 30, 1928

17. 'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do – Part 2 45453-1 —

18. Take Me Back 45454-2 —

19. How Long 45455-1 —

Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr;

20. Frank Stoke's Dream 56305-2 Memphis, Tenn., Sep 30, 1929

SET 5: DISC 3: Original vinyl release date: May 1985 as
'The Remaining Titles'
MSE 1003 Blind Blake 1926 – 29

54'34"

Blind Blake, vcl/gtr

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|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Skeedle Loo Doo Blues 3073-1 | Chicago, c. Nov 1926 |
| 2. You Gonna Quit Blues 20110-1 | Chicago, c. Oct 1927 |
| 3. Wabash Rag 20154-2 | Chicago, c. Nov 1927 |

Blind Blake, vcl/gtr; Jimmy Bertrand, xyl/speech

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 4. Doggin' Me Mama Blues 20517-2 | Chicago, c. Apr 1928 |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|

Blind Blake, vcl/gtr; Johnny Dodds, clt; Jimmy Bertrand, slide whistle/woodblocks

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 5. C. C. Pill Blues 20520-2 | — |
| 6. Hot Potatoes 20521-3 | — |

Blind Blake, vcl/gtr; Johnny Dodds, clt; Jimmy Bertrand, xyl

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 7. Southbound Rag 20522-2 | — |
|---------------------------|---|

Bertha Henderson, vcl; Blind Blake, gtr

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 8. That Lonesome Rave 20556-1 | Chicago, c. May 1928 |
| 9. Terrible Murder Blues 20557-2 | — |
| 10. Leavin' Gal Blues 20558-1 | — |

Blind Blake, vcl/gtr;

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| 11. Rumblin' And Ramblin' Boa Constrictor Blues 20565- | — |
| 12. Detroit Bound Blues 20567-2 | — |
| 13. Ramblin' Mama Blues 20872 * | Chicago, c. Sept 1928 |
| 14. New Style Of Loving 20873-2 * | — |
| 15. Back Door Slam Blues 20874-1 * | — |
| 16. Cold Hearted Mama Blues 20884-1 * | — |

Blind Blake (as 'Blind Arthur'), gtr solo

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 17. Guitar Chimes 21459-2 | Chicago, c. Oct 1929 |
| 18. Blind Arthur's Breakdown 21460-2 | — |

SET 5: DISC 4: Original vinyl release date: Sept 1985 as
'Mostly New to LP'
MSE 1004 Big Bill Broonzy 1927 – 32

47'17"

Big Bill and Thomps: Big Bill Broonzy, gtr; John Thomas, gtr/speech

1. House Rent Stomp 20159-2 Chicago, c. Nov. 1927

Big Bill Broonzy (as "Sammy Sampson"), vcl/gtr; prob. Georgia Tom Dorsey, pno

2. Tadpole Blues 9621-1 New York City, April 11, 1930

Big Bill Broonzy (as "Big Bill Johnson"), vcl/gtr; Frank Brasswell, vcl/gtr

3. Papa's Gettin' Hot 16581 Richmond, Ind., May 2, 1930

Big Bill Broonzy (as "Sammy Sampson"), vcl/gtr

4. Police Station Blues 10042-1 New York City, Sept. 16, 1930

5. They Can't Do That 10043-1 -

Bill Williams, vcl/gtr; Big Bill Broonzy, gtr/vcl on 10045

6. Mr. Conductor Man 10044-1 -

7. No Good Buddy 10045-2 -

Big Bill Broonzy (as "Sammy Sampson"), vcl/gtr; prob. Georgia Tom Dorsey, pno

8. Meanest Kind Of Blues 10053-2 New York City, Sept. 17, 1930

9. I Got The Blues For My Baby 10054-2 -

Georgia Tom and Jane Lucas, vcl duet acc. Georgia Tom Dorsey, pno; Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/gtr

10. Ain't Goin' There No More 17279-A Richmond, Ind., Nov 19, 1930

11. That's The Way She Likes It 17280 -

Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/gtr

12. Too Too Train Blues 11605-2 New York City, Mar 29, 1932

13. Shelby County Blues 11608-2 * -

14. Mistreatin' Mama Blues 11609-2 -

Big Bill and His Jug Busters: Big Bill Broonzy, gtr/vcl acc. prob. Alfred Bell, tp; prob. Roy Palmer, tb; prob. Black Bob, pno; unknown jug

15. Me And O Blues 11624-2 * New York City, Mar 30, 1932

16. Rukus Juice Blues 11632-2 New York City, Mar 31, 1932

SET 5: DISC 5: Original vinyl release date: Sept 1985 as
'Mostly New to LP'

58'37"

MSE 1005 Mississippi Sheiks 1930 (Vol. 1)

Walter Vincson (Jacobs), gtr/vcl (on tracks 1,6,7); Lonnie Chatman, vln/vcl (on tracks 1,2,3); poss. Bo Chatman (Carter), 2nd vln on track 7 only; Walter Vincson or Lonnie Chatman, vcl on tracks 2,3,5

1. Driving That Thing 403800-B Shreveport, La., Feb 17, 1930
2. Alberta Blues 403801-B —
3. Winter Time Blues 403802-B —
4. The Sheik Waltz 403803- —
5. The Jazz Fiddler 403804- —
6. Stop And Listen Blues 403806-A —
7. Lonely One In This Town 403807-B * —

Mississippi Sheiks with Bo Carter: Bo Chatman (Carter), vcl/gtr/vln (on tracks 8, 10); Sam Chatman, vcl/gtr

8. We Are Both Feeling Good Right Now 404139-B
San Antonio, Tex., June 10, 1930
9. Grinding Old Fool 404141-B —
10. Jake Leg Blues 404142-A —
11. West Jackson Blues 404144-B —

Mississippi Sheiks: Walter Vincson, vcl/speech (on track 14)/gtr; prob. Lonnie Chatman, vln; Bo Chatman (Carter), vcl on track 12/speech on track 14

12. Baby Keeps Stealin' Lovin' On Me 404147-A
San Antonio, Tex., June 12, 1930
13. River Bottom Blues 404148-B —
14. Loose Like That 404150-B —

Walter Vincson (Jacobs), gtr/vcl, acc. prob. Lonnie Chatman, vln

15. Sitting On Top of The World no. 2* 404709-A Jackson, Miss. Dec 15, 1930
16. Times Done Got Hard 404711-B —
17. Still I'm Traveling On 404713-B —
18. Church Bell Blues 404786-B Jackson, Miss., Dec 19, 1930

SET 5: DISC 6: Original vinyl release date: Feb 1986 as **53'45"**
'Mostly New to LP': MSE 1006 Lonnie Johnson (Vol. 1) 1926-28
Lonnie Johnson, vcl; acc. James Johnson, vln; De Loise Searcy, pno
 1. When I Was Lovin' Changed My Mind Blues 73936-B NY City, Jan 19, 1926
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr; James Johnson, pno
 2. Sun To Sun Blues 73937-B —
 3. Bed Of Sand 73938-B —
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/vln; James Johnson, pno
 4. Lonesome Jail Blues 73939-B —
James 'Steady Roll' Johnson, vcl/vln on track 5/bjo on track 6; Lonnie Johnson, bjo on tracks 5,6 / Kazoo on track 6; De Loise Searcy, pno
 5. No Good Blues 73940-A New York City, Jan 20, 1926
 6. Newport Blues 73941-A —
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr
 7. Love Story Blues 73942-B —
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/vln on track 8/vcl/gtr on track 9; James Johnson, pno
 8. Woman Changed My Life 9673-A St Louis, Mo., May 13, 1926
 9. Lonnie's Got the Blues 9674-A —
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr on track 10, vcl/pno on track 11; James Johnson, vln
 10. You Drove a Good Man Away 74267-A New York City, Aug 13, 1926
 11. Ball and Chain Blues 74268-A —
Lonnie Johnson, gtr solo
 12. To Do This, You Got To Know How 80075-A New York City, Aug 14, 1926
Joe Brown, vcl; acc. De Loise Searcy, pno; Lonnie Johnson, gtr
 13. Superstitious Blues 80808-A St Louis, Mo., May 1, 1927
 14. Cotton Patch Blues 80809-A —
Raymond Boyd, vcl; acc. De Loise Searcy, pno; Lonnie Johnson, gtr
 15. Blackbird Blues 80812-A —
 16. Unkind Mama 80813-A —
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr; John Erby, pno
 17. Back-Water Blues 80831-B St Louis, Mo., May 3, 1927
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr
 18. Crowing Rooster Blues 400491-A San Antonio, Tex., Mar 13, 1928

MSE 1001 BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON: 1926 – 29

In any history of the blues the name of Blind Lemon Jefferson has to be prominent. Though other blues singers, or songsters with blues in their repertoires like Papa Charlie Jackson, recorded before him, the raw and uncompromising sounds of the rural blues were first brought before a large public beyond the milieu of the singer, with the records of Blind Lemon. His stature has long been recognised, as reference to any of the earlier books on jazz will confirm. Rudi Blesh, for example, whose *Shining Trumpets* was immensely influential when it was first published in 1949, cited Blind Lemon first among the singers he discussed in two chapters on blues. He commented on the "wavering inflections and the downward wailing figures around the third and seventh notes of the scale" and on the guitar playing "full of startling dynamic changes." Lemon's style, he concluded "is archaic in the extreme."

Blind Lemon was born in a farming community in east Texas about 1897 in a featureless region of Limestone County lying south of Corsicana. He rapidly gained a local fame as a guitarist and in his teens was playing in the streets of Dallas and Fort Worth where he was joined by the celebrated songster Huddie Ledbetter. Leadbelly later recorded memories of those days, and some of Lemon's songs on *My Friend Blind Lemon* and other items for the Library of Congress and for Moses Asch, furthering Lemon's fame amongst jazz enthusiasts.

The effect of this though, has been somewhat curious: a subsequent eclipsing of Lemon Jefferson in favour of other singers that the blues fraternity can hold to itself. Thus, a reissue label like Yazoo can release sixty-odd albums of blues and include only one track of Blind Lemon Jefferson among the many hundreds of titles. A kind of "guilt by association" seems to have branded Lemon as in some way related to jazz, while his enormous popularity

and hence, large numbers of issued blues, in the three and a half years of his recording activity, has somehow worked to the disadvantage of his reputation among blues collectors. So how good was he? This collection of the "remaining titles" gives us an opportunity for reappraisal. **Got the Blues** and **Long Lonesome Blues** are the very first secular titles that Lemon put on wax, (he had made a religious coupling some months earlier). They caused a sensation, and vindicated the recommendations of a young record salesman, the pianist Sam Price, to the Paramount Company. Price, who was also responsible for getting Texas Alexander recorded, first heard Lemon singing on the streets near Central Tracks in Dallas. And it is the voice of the street singer that cuts through the poor quality of sound and surface with its high, penetrating clarity. Though **Booster Blues** and **Dry Southern Blues** were issued first they did not have quite the same impact, perhaps because the imagery of the opening line of **Got**

the Blues was so striking: "*Well the blues come to Texas, lopin' like a mule ...*". So too, was the opening line of the other side. "*walked from Dallas, I walked to Witchita Falls*" which, as a glance at the map will show, was no mean feat. The verses of these two blues are often jumbled in the memories of blues singers in Texas, who think of them as a single song. There was no confusion in Jefferson's performance: he sang with the confidence and played with the accomplishment of a man who had sung these words in one form or another many times, and he was probably often heard singing them in the street.

Stylistically, Jefferson played instrumental arpeggios for much of his accompaniments. Though the "answering voice" of the guitar to the vocal line is something of a cliché of blues writing, which is not by any means borne out by the playing of scores of blues artists, in Lemon's case it is an accurate description: he did respond to his sung lines,

sometimes playing what amounted to impressionistic versions of the words. This is particularly evident on **Match Box Blues**; listen for example, to the way in which he develops the theme of *"got a gal across town, she crochet all the time"*. You can almost see the flicking needle and the intensity of concentration of the girl who was in danger of losing her mind in the activity. **Match Box**, with its memorable line *"I'm sittin' here wonderin', will a match box hold my clothes?"* (previously used by Ma Rainey), gives us some idea of how much we have lost through the deficiencies of Paramount's recording technique. Okeh's superior sound captures Jefferson's remarkable fingering in a way that was, unfortunately, never repeated.

Mississippi guitarists like Rube Lacey are said to have found Lemon difficult to play with, and to have complained that he broke time. From the standpoint of the marked, sometimes unduly heavy, rhythmic character of some Mississippi performances this may be true. Yet

he could certainly keep time if he was so minded, even if it was with a typically individualistic flair. **Hot Dogs**, originally issued, on some copies of the record at any rate, as by *"Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Foot"*, was a fast dance reel. The tune bears a relation to **Candy Man**, but it is to a buck dance rhythm and includes suspended notes for the sideways foot slides. It is a pity that Jefferson did not make more recordings of his songster material which would have shown him in other lights. A dance-like accompaniment is employed on **One Dime Blues** which is a sixteen-bar, four-line blues. Here it is somewhat incongruously conflicting with, (or pointing up by contrast) the theme of the "broke" man. But Lemon's records do contain these surprises; **Saturday Night Spender's Blues** has a solemn accompaniment to the song of a man who goes *"cross town and play"*, though it is perhaps suited to the anxieties of *"I don't mind no men friends but I'm scared they might cramp my style."*

There are puzzling elements in Lemon's blues: on what knowledge or experience did he base **Lock Step Blues** or **Hangman's Blues**, or the fear of being shot in **Cannon Ball Moan**? Was the old, ante-bellum spiritual **He Arose From the Dead** the kind of hymn he sang outside – or even in, the country churches of Texas? Was the visit of the furniture man on **Empty House Blues** a recollection, or empathetic projection? Doubtless we'll never know for sure, but one thing that must be assured is the importance of Blind Lemon's place in the story of black music.

MSE 1002 FRANK STOKES: Frank Stokes 1927 – 29

By the turn of the century Frank Stokes was twelve years old, growing up in the ragtime years when the blues in the form that it was to be known on record had hardly taken shape. He was born on the first day of 1888 in Whitehaven, a little

railroad halt in those days, south of Memphis, Tennessee, and close to the border with Mississippi. Memphis was to be the focus of much of his life, but he had strong links with Mississippi where he was raised by one Fred Carbin in the Delta township of Tutwiler. It was the same place where, one day in 1903, the band leader and eventually composer, W. C. Handy first heard a blues being played at the depot on the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley line.

As a child Frank worked on his step-father's farm but though his first teachers are unknown it seems that he was already learning to play music. By the time he was eight years old he was entertaining at fish-fries and country suppers, which were a feature of black social life in that period. Only a few years later he was to be seen regularly visiting Memphis, and playing on the street or in local parks and public places. Though guitars had been commercially made and sold for some time, they became extremely

popular at the close of the nineteenth century, and the young Stokes was probably attracted to the new instrument, rather than to the banjo which was going out of fashion. Nevertheless, he was a child of the ragtime era and this form of music pervaded his approach. When nearly thirty years later, he recorded for Paramount and Victor, it was with a strong ragtime flavour in his markedly syncopated playing.

What kind of songs did Frank Stokes sing and play in those early years? We cannot be certain, but there are clues. Asked about the songs that were current in his own childhood: Mance Lipscomb, who was seven years younger than Stokes, replied *"About the oldest number that I could recall back in the days when I was learnin' and heard people play – **Take Me Back.**"* This was the same song that Stokes is heard playing on this collection and it is fair to assume that the song, which appears to date from the first years of the century if not before, was the kind that he first

played. Another song recorded at the same session, **How Long** is closely related and includes phrases and stanzas that are usually associated with **Take Me Back**. It was a widely known song and recorded as **Beggin' Back** by Blind Lemon Jefferson, among others.

Another song that was collected early in the century was a further theme from the same session, **'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do** which was issued as a six minute song on one record. Although a "composed" version of the song was popular in the Twenties, and was the tune chosen by Bessie Smith for her second (but unissued) recording session, it was performed in a very different way by Frank Stokes, as Bessie's successful attempt, and her third record, clearly indicates. Stokes' song is very close to the collected versions and this too, may be considered as part of his early repertoire.

As a young teenager he made his

home in Hernando, Mississippi, a remarkable centre for songsters who included Jim Jackson, Garfield Akers, Joe Calicott and Robert Wilkins, with Gus Cannon a frequent visitor. Within easy distance of Memphis, Hernando made an important link between the city and the rural regions of northern Mississippi. Owners of medicine shows came there to recruit talent and Frank Stokes, as a strong and lanky teenager, frequently toured with them. The Doc Watts show was well-known for its blackface entertainment, and Stokes and Akers joined it to perform as dancers, as well as musicians. On such shows humorous songs were much in demand, and **I Got Mine** is a typical item from them. So popular was this song on the medicine shows that it was still being recorded by another veteran of these entertainments, Pink Anderson, in the 1960s.

At the end of the First World War, Frank married Maggie Bannister and settled down to raise a family. A strong man, with powerful forearms,

he became a blacksmith and worked at this occupation for many years. He did not give up his music however, but played for parties and other functions in and around Memphis, and in the country nearby where he now lived. In 1925 the Memphis violinist Will Batts formed a small band, which included Ernest Motley on banjo and no less than three guitars, played by Jack Kelly, Dan Sane (or Sain) and Frank Stokes. It must have been quite a string band, and was popular with white country clubs. At other times Stokes played with Jack Kelly's jug groups often sharing the honours with Dan Sane who complemented him excellently. Stokes only made a few solo items – **I Got Mine** was one of them. So was **It Won't Be Long Now** and from this one can determine the elements of his style and thus trace the part played by Sane in the duets. On record, at any rate, they called themselves the Beale Street Sheiks and they obviously enjoyed their music: listen to the accelerating tempo of **Fillin' In Blues** and the

spoken exchanges between them, or the slower, swinging **Rockin' On the Hill**. Batts was sometimes rather raw as a violin player, as on **South Memphis**; more tuneful on **Right Now Blues**. The four titles on which he appears give a good impression of the kind of music the string band may have played.

By the Twenties, blues was gaining in popularity: a large proportion of these tracks are of twelve-bar blues. For the most part though, they are played as dance tunes, with frequent up-tempo rhythms. During the Depression years, when money was scarce and with three sons and a daughter to feed, Frank took to the roads, working with circuses and at county fairs. Impressively tall, prematurely bald, he was a familiar figure in jukes as far south as Clarksdale where he was still playing in the late Forties. In 1952 his wife of thirty-four years died and he was himself forced to give up playing through ill-health. He died three years later, in September 1955.

MSE 1003 BLIND BLAKE1926 – 29

"Wabash Rag is as lively as Wabash Avenue itself, where it gets its name, and Blind Blake – aided by his happy guitar – will make you play this record over and over", ran the publicity for Paramount 12597. Blind Blake was one of Paramount's best sellers, and his considerable output compared with those of Papa Charlie Jackson and Blind Lemon Jefferson. Of the three he was musically the most varied, and though each was a marked individualist, he was probably the more instrumentally accomplished. Surprisingly little is known of his background, though the *Paramount Book of Blues* stated that he came from Florida. Brian Davis, in one of the very few articles on Blake, settles for Jacksonville as his probable home town (*Storyville* 110), and this seems likely. There is plenty of evidence in his recordings of a strong Georgia connection, not least the references to, and imitations of Geechie (Gullah) accents of the Georgia Sea Islands. This and his

predilection for instrumental rags all confirm a south-east origin.

He was probably in his early thirties when he got to Chicago – the location of Wabash Avenue – and he seems to have made an impression on Mayo Williams and Aletha Dickerson, who teamed him up with other musicians, including the pianist Charlie Spand and probably Tiny Parham and Alex Robinson too. Parham was a jazz pianist, and Blind Blake was one of the very few blues musicians with whom jazzmen were prepared to work or record. Apart from Lonnie Johnson with Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, and a remarkable session on which Papa Charlie Jackson sang with Freddie Keppard there are few instances of a blues/ jazz combination comparable with Johnny Dodds and Blind Blake.

Johnny Dodds was more interested in playing with folk-inclined groups than were most of his contemporaries. He had made a dazzling reputation with his superb work in

King Olivers Creole Jazz Band, and his agile, serrated clarinet line had given an incisive quality to the recordings of Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven. In fact, his last titles with Louis, **Hotter Than That** and **Savoy Blues**, had only been made three months before. Though these were classic examples of the New Orleans/Chicago approach to jazz and instrumental blues, Dodds had recorded previously with the Louisville-based Dixieland Jug Blowers, a distinctly less sophisticated group. In 1927 he had recorded with Jimmy Blythe's Dixieland Thumpers, and only a few days before recording with Blake had made a couple of titles with Blythe's Washboard Ragamuffins. He must have been in the right frame of mind to record **C. C. Pill Blues, Hot Potatoes and Southbound Rag** with Blind Blake, the rag pieces in particular suiting his fast-flowing but jagged style of improvisation. **C. C. Pill**, incidentally, was military slang for "Cathartic compound pill", or laxative, though neither Dodds nor

Blake needed a "loosener", The third member of the trio, Jimmy Bertrand came from Mississippi but he had been working for some time with Erskine Tate's Orchestra on State Street. He was a widely respected drummer and even taught xylophone to Lionel Hampton, though it seems he was still feeling his way with the instrument when he recorded with Blake. More adventurous was his playing of the musical saw on **Hot Potatoes** – surprisingly, there are few recordings of either jazz or blues employing the saw, though its howling sounds are far from inappropriate. The four titles are of considerable interest in that they indicate ways in which blues and jazz combinations could have been developed.

Apart from his many solo recordings, Blind Blake was also a sensitive accompanist, working not only with Jackson, Spand and Gus Cannon but with Irene Scruggs, Leola B. Wilson, Ma Rainey, Elzadie Robinson, Laura Rucker, Daniel

Brown and Bertha Henderson. Some of these were fairly obscure, Bertha among them: she appears to have come from St. Louis, where she made a disc with the little-recorded but locally famous pianist Cranston Hamilton. Her voice was dark and brooding, sometimes a little uncertain in pitch, while her words were particularly morbid. Blake's own

Rumblin' and Ramblin' Boa Constrictor was also a lyrically curious blues. *"No wonder she's afraid. You'd be scared too at a Boa Constrictor the size of that one coming right toward you"* ran the Paramount publicity, *"Blind Blake and his trusty guitar do themselves proud in this unique Blues and you'll like the unusual story suggested in the words"*. The item gave Blake an opportunity to do some imitative playing on his "trusty" instrument.

Most of the remainder of the titles on this collection are blues, though in Blake's case they are seldom run-of-the-mill. On the contrary, **You Gonna Quit Me** is in an unusual, a,b,b,b

form, while others have all attractive or interesting lyrics, sung in his wistful voice, and elegant accompaniments sometimes slipping into double time. **Detroit Bound**, on which he declares that *"he is going to Detroit to get a job at Mister Ford's place"*, is one of his very best blues, and one which gave the framework to Bob Campbell's **Starvation Farm Blues** some years later. Sometimes his accompaniment surprises, as on **Back Door Slam**, which is mainly played against a stop chorus, in spite of his own words of encouragement. More characteristic is the slow swing of **Cold Hearted Mama** to the words of *"your heart is like a cold, cold, zero day"* and its sudden fragments of swift tempo playing. The last pair of titles are unusually well recorded for Paramount and they illustrate his technical mastery admirably: the delicate picking of the blues, **Guitar Chimes**, and the infectious dance time of **Blind Arthur's Breakdown**. Blind Arthur? – perhaps his name was Arthur Blake, or even, as Willie McTell asserted, Arthur Phelps.

Regrettably all we really know about him is his legacy of recordings.

MSE 1004 Big Bill Broonzy 1927–32

There are few blues singers as extensively recorded, as widely respected in his day, or as consistently good as Big Bill Broonzy – or Big Bill, as he was simply termed on his 78 rpm records. For a singer of his stature he has been curiously undervalued in the past twenty-odd years, with remarkably few of his early recordings reissued, and little in the way of published appraisal. The reason is partly that Big Bill survived to be *"the last of the blues singers"* after the death of Leadbelly, and partly that his later recordings were frequently down-rated as somehow pandering to "folknik" tastes. I believe this to be a serious misjudgement and an unwarranted discrediting of one of the most original of blues talents.

Big Bill was really of the songster generation, born just a few days before Mississippi John Hurt, on June 26th, 1893. He was raised at Scott, Mississippi, in a community too small to be marked on contemporary maps, though it was the base of the Delta and Pine Lands company which managed the large plantations of Bolivar County. His early life was spent there and across the Mississippi in Arkansas, where he used the lay-off periods to play fiddle and even to work as a youthful lay preacher. In his late twenties he moved to Chicago where he played fiddle to Papa Charlie Jackson's banjo and began to pick up the guitar. As a guitarist he was a late developer, but a fast one: **House Rent Rag**, made with John "Thomps" Thomas on second guitar showed that he had become pretty accomplished in a short space of time. It seems likely that Blind Blake was an influence upon him; this title was almost certainly made at the same session which produced Blake's **Wabash Rag** (Matchbox

Bluesmaster MSE 1003) and he used Blake's "*Set'em, set'em, set'em*" injunction on his own title. In tum, Big Bill's lazy comments appear to have influenced William Moore's spoken asides when he made his own rags, a couple of months later.

Big Bill seems not to have impressed Paramount's record men, perhaps because they had a lot of experienced talent at this time. It was a couple of years before he began to record at all regularly, his issues being released as by Sammy Sampson in the case of **Tadpole Blues**, or as Big Bill Johnson for **Papa's Gettin' Hot**. The former was a mature blues, clearly representing Bill's characteristic guitar phrasing and picking, while the other, made with Frank Brasswell, was in the hokum style which they, Georgia Tom and Tampa Red, were popularising. It seems that Broonzy had struck up with a number of singers and musicians, some of whom remaining otherwise completely unknown apart from their work in his company. One

was Bill Williams whose **Mr Conductor Man** may have been his own but which was more likely Broonzy's blues. It linked closely with **Broonzy's Police Station Blues** made at the same session, and with the exceptionally fine version which he made as by Big Bill Johnson eighteen months later. Comparison of the items is instructive for the accompaniment which Broonzy plays for Williams' blues (which is sung very much in Broonzy's style) is basically a slow walking bass. The accompaniment to **No Good Buddy** is more inventive, and was to be the foundation for Broonzy's own version of **Mr Conductor Man**, with touches of **Police Station** incorporated in it. These recordings reveal how Big Bill was working up his blues, deliberately giving them shape, rehearsing his licks and phrases and paying attention to the timing that gives such quality to his best recordings. The resolution of the exercise is evident in **Too-Too Train**, which is closely linked with **Big Bill Blues**, the backing item to **Mr Conductor Man**.

If it seems that Broonzy was making a few instrumental ideas go a long way, we have in **Shelby County** a good example of his extending and elaborating on the runs that he was working out, while on **Mistreatin' Mama** we have a splendid example of his flat-picking technique. The strong, rapidly picked notes on the bass· E' string are the first work-out of the rhythms that a quarter of a century later he would use to accompany the ballad **John Henry**. There is a vivid contrast between the singing and hollering styles of **Meanest Kind of Blues** and **I Got the Blues**, and the light-hearted hokum song **They Can't Do That**. He used the admittedly feather-weight items by Georgia Tom and Jane Lucas as occasions for brushing-up his fast-fingering and Big Bill's accomplished choruses behind the vocals are a pleasure to hear.

The last couple of titles are with his Jug Busters, and doubtless the questions concerning the personnel will continue to be debated: is there a

jug on **Long Tall Mama**, is that Alfred Bell playing trumpet, and can it be Roy Palmer on **Rukus Juice**? (I think there is a jug and I doubt that it is Palmer). But it probably doesn't really matter, it was an experiment which was more important for the fact that it brought Black Bob into the picture, a pianist whose identity even now is in question yet who made literally dozens of titles as Broonzy's accompanist. And it was a try-out for using a trumpet in a blues group which he let lie for five years, before making a great many titles with Alfred Bell or Punch Miller in 1937 and after

Here we have the secret of Big Bill's enduring success: he was, within the blues field, a true professional. He worked carefully at his guitar playing, improving and perfecting the instrumental line and the rhythmic swing which stamped both the fast items and the slow blues with his musical autograph; he tried a variety of pitches in his singing, hollered on some items, moaned on others and

laughed his way through still more. He tried out new devices and came back to them when he was ready: he remembered the songs of his youth, and the pieces of his middle years and was able to draw on them still when his audience, at last, became world wide.

MSE 1005 Mississippi Sheiks 1930 (Vol. 1)

Though we know very little about the black string bands that were active in the South in the first half of the century, our knowledge would be even more limited were it not for the records of two bands. One of these, the Dallas String Band led by Coley Jones has been the subject of a former compilation (*Matchbox MSE 208*); the other, the band known as the Mississippi Sheiks, which was much more extensively recorded, is introduced here. Unfortunately the band was never recorded at anything like its full strength, for the promoters could get the results they wanted with just two or three performers.

Nevertheless, these first titles by the group give a good impression of the range and versatility of a country string band.

It was a family band made up of the thirteen children of Eliza Jackson and her ex-slave husband, who had been married twice before, Henderson Chatmon. Raised on the Dupress and Geddes (or Gellis) plantations near Bolton, Mississippi the children encouraged each other and learned to play a number of instruments. Perhaps the best known of the boys was Armenter, known as "Bo" (Brother) who played banjo, bass fiddle, violin, clarinet and guitar. Even though he was most frequently recorded on the last instrument Brother Sam played bass viol, tenor banjo, mouth harp, mandolin and guitar and others were similarly versatile. Violins figured prominently with at least three other brothers – Lonnie, Edgar and Harry also playing the instrument while doubling on others, including, in Harry's case, piano. Most of them played some

guitar including Willie, Lamar, Laurie, Seth, Charlie and Tyson. In addition, a couple of sisters followed their mother and played guitar too. They were farmers and share-croppers and only a few became professional musicians. One of these was Lonnie, the only member of the family who could read music: he obtained sheet music from the Jackson stores and taught them the parts to play when they went out to perform for country suppers or for the white folks' dances at the spa of Cooper's Wells.

Around 1921 they were joined permanently by another local musician, Walter Vincson, whose experience included playing with Tommy Johnson and Ishman Bracey. His mother, Mary Jacobs, supplied the alternative name by which he was often known – Walter Jacobs. As far as is known only a few of the members of the Chatmon Family String Band appeared together on record under the name of the Mississippi Sheiks: Sam, Bo, Lonnie

and Waller Vincent undoubtedly, perhaps augmented by one or two others. They drew their name from the popular Icon of the day for a dashing, medium-hued black person, "Sheik", which derived from Rudolph Valentino's performance as a cocoa-dusted glamour hero in the film of that name. Valentino died in 1926 but his legend survived and so did the associations with the name.

Both Bo Chatmon and Walter Vincent (or Vinson, or Vincson) had a little recording experience behind them and one or other may have secured the first session for the Sheiks. The location, Shreveport, Louisiana, was quite a way from their home, and later that year they recorded even further afield, in San Antonio, Texas. As Bo was already contracted he changed his name to that of another, unrecorded Mississippi string band, and called himself Bo Carter. At the first session though, it was Walter Vincent who shared the vocals with Lonnie.

Appropriately, they started off with

Driving That Thing, a verse-and-chorus song based on a twelve-bar structure which followed a formula that they made very much their own. A trifle about "Old Uncle Bill", it was the first of many that used innocuous sexual metaphors with some ingenuity. They followed it with **Alberta Blues**, their working of a song that had already become a blues standard, **Corine**; it concluded with a guitar and violin coda that became a trademark of their style.

Backing **Alberta** was **Winter Time Blues**. A strong item in the three-line stanza form it betrayed the powerful influence of Bessie Smith in the tune of **Backwater Blues** and the lines borrowed from **Cold in Hand**, but also showed their skill in devising new lines and rhyme schemes.

Times Done Got Hard from their later session was based on the same source. They were not averse to picking up other singers' tunes and adapting them: **River Bottom Blues** for example, was based on Tampa Red's favourite "moan" theme, and

sung in his fashion; but **Stop and Listen Blues**, which backed **Driving That Thing**, was an immediate hit and was clearly related to Tommy Johnson's **Big Road Blues** and very probably derived from it. They would have heard Johnson in Jackson, Mississippi but their version has far more logical order in the verses, and more sense in the words used than in some later versions. Jackson was the subject of one of their blues which, like **Times Done Got Hard**, was basically on a Depression theme. And the Jackson style of blues is heard to great effect on the powerful **Church Bell Blues** with its low-down relationship of guitar and violin.

These then, are evidence of the kind of blues that they played for black jukes and functions. No less interesting are the items they played for rural dances and doubtless, for whites. **The Sheik Waltz**, with its different strains, is an excellent example of a tune which probably derived from a Charles K. Harris

composition, while **The Jazz Fiddler** revealed Lonnie Chatmon in excellent form with the challenging vocal:

*We got the fiddle, take up your bow
This is the tune all fiddlers ought to
know –
It's too bad, it's too bad
Boy, this is something you never
have seen.
A man playing jazz on a violin ...*

Other titles suggest the kind of songs they may have performed to an audience not too busy dancing to listen to the words. **We Are Feeling Good Right Now** has an introductory verse before swinging into its catchy chorus; so has **Jake Leg Blues** about the alcoholic with the "jake-limber-leg" unsteadiness that promoted the device "*if you sell him jake you'd better give him a crutch too*". Other titles include **Loose Like That** with its "*conversation*" with "*Too Tight*" which presumably derived from Henry Castle's **Charleston Contest**, the fast "*stranger here*"

blues **Still I'm Traveling On**, another of their technical metaphors, **Grinding Old Fool**, and a remake of a major success for the Sheiks, **Sitting On Top of the World**. In 1930 they cut some thirty sides of which these are representative of their best work; fortunately, there was a lot of music still to come.

MSE 1006 Lonnie Johnson Vol. 1 1926–28

There has been no blues singer to compare with Lonnie Johnson for diversity of experience and breadth of respect. As a recording artist he was one of the most popular of bluesmen, making a vast number of discs for Okeh, Columbia, Decca and Bluebird before the War, and continuing to make a large number of 78s in the post-war years for Disc and King. His importance as a blues artist is without question, not only as a singer and guitarist, but also as an influence on his contemporaries, ranging from King Solomon Hill to Robert Johnson and as an

accompanist to singers as varied as Texas Alexander and Clara Smith.

But his career embraced much more, and his great instrumental ability attracted the interest of some of the leading jazz musicians of his day. Louis Armstrong included him on some of the classic recordings of his Hot Five, including, **Savoy Blues** and **Mahogany Hall Stomp**, he sat in with King Oliver on **Jet Black Blues** by Blind Willie Dunn's Gin Bottle Four and with Don Redman on The Chocolate Dandies' version of **Star Dust** (which always remained a firm favourite song for him, in private). Even the exacting jazz composer Duke Ellington brought Lonnie Johnson into his orchestra for such titles as the famous **The Mooche** and **Misty Morning**. It's interesting to note that these remarkable recordings with leading jazz musicians, the celebrated duets with the white guitarist Eddie Lang and many live appearances on the stage and in clubs took place at the time when he was making the titles included in this collection.

How did Lonnie Johnson establish this reputation: how did both the blues world and the jazz world respond to him with such enthusiasm? There is no easy answer to these questions, Lonnie Johnson was a modest man, personable without being charismatic, confident without being arrogant. When, in later years he was forgotten, he accepted the decline in his fame and fortunes without rancour. He was soft-spoken and mild-mannered and seemed to lack the kind of thrusting personality that a career in jazz and show business would seem to require. But what he had got was talent and this was recognised by talent scouts, promoters, jazz orchestra leaders and audience alike. The Okeh company was more ambitious than most in bringing its artists to the attention of the general public and its “Cabaret and Style Show” held at the Chicago Coliseum on June 12, 1926 which featured fifteen bands including those of Louis Armstrong, Richard M. Jones and Clarence

Williams also presented Lonnie Johnson on stage. On such occasions he must have been heard by the band leaders and brought in on future records.

At this time though, Alonzo – “Lonnie” – Johnson was no longer a young musician, but a veteran of thirty seven who had been playing regularly for a quarter of a century. He was born in New Orleans on 8th February 1889 the son of a musician. One of twelve children, many of whom playing instruments, he was attracted to music himself at an early age and played in the family string band. The group worked for local functions, from weddings to serenading and in this competitive environment he learned to play not only guitar and banjo, but violin, piano and harmonium as well. In fact, although it was as a guitarist that he made his name, he was best known in his early years as a violinist, working with the well known New Orleans jazz trumpeter Punch Miller. As a young man he got employment

as a solo guitarist and sometimes as pianist or violinist in trios, working in the bordellos off Basin Street. He had a closer relationship with his brother James, known as "Steady Roll", than he had with others of his family and they worked together at the Iroquois Theatre in New Orleans and later at other locations.

About 1917 Lonnie got the opportunity to work with a stock company that travelled to Europe and in 1921 he was playing with Will Marion Cook's orchestra performing in Glasgow. The First World War delayed his return to New Orleans and when he did get back home it was to find that nearly all his family had died in the appalling epidemic of Spanish flu. He moved away from New Orleans, where anyway the closure of Storyville had reduced job opportunities, and got himself employment in Charlie Creath's famous riverboat orchestra on the Streckfus steamer St Paul. Fate Marable enticed him away to join his own band on the S.S. Capitol; he was "hot property" and much in

demand. 1925 found him working with his brother Steady Roll at Katy Red's notorious club in St. Louis and entering a blues singing contest at the Booker T. Washington Theater in the city. He won the first heat and each one for the next eight weeks eventually coming on top as the outright winner. One outcome of this was the opportunity to record for Okeh, and so, in November that year, Lonnie was featured violinist on Charlie Creath's Jazz-O-Maniac's recording of **Won't Don't Blues** and two days later on November 4, 1925 commenced his career as a solo recording blues singer there in St. Louis. The success of his first pair of titles led to sessions in New York in January the following year when he was joined by James Johnson and De Loise Searcy: some of those historic items are included on this album. James made a couple of titles under his own name which show that his voice, while not of notable merit, was adequate: even so, no further titles were issued and Lonnie was fortunately not induced to try out his kazoo playing very

often afterwards! On the other hand, both men played good blues violin, with James putting in some wailing accompaniments to his brother's vocals later in the year. James was a better blues pianist than Searcy and gives a good account of himself on **Lonnie's Got the Blues**. But the reason why Lonnie Johnson was so sought after at the time is evident in his novel themes, his poetic words and his deft, inventive guitar work. Fluent runs, sometimes in double time, add interest to an item like Joe Brown's **Superstitious Blues** but it is on **To Do This You Got to Know How** that his great instrumental skill is heard to the fullest advantage. Titled perhaps, in reply to a question, or maybe in quiet pride, it displays the freshness of his phrasing and the accomplished use of jazz chords, whilst maintaining the blues fingering and slid strings which made him so respected by the blues audiences, jazz band leaders and recording managers alike. Lonnie Johnson was now staff guitarist for Okeh, travelling

frequently between his St. Louis home and New York or as far west as San Antonio, Texas to accompany Texas Alexander. He had years of popularity before him but between 1926 and 1928 there was no name in the male blues better known than that of Lonnie Johnson.

Paul Oliver

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MSE 222 SANCTIFIED JUG BANDS (1928-30)
MSE 223 ST. LOUIS BESSIE (1927-30)
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MSE 1011 ROOSEVELT SYKES (1929- 34)
MSE 1012 MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 2 (1930-34)

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MSE 1014 THE FAMOUS HOKUM BOYS (1930-31)
MSEX 2001/2002 SONGSTERS AND SANTIS VOL. 1 (1925-31)
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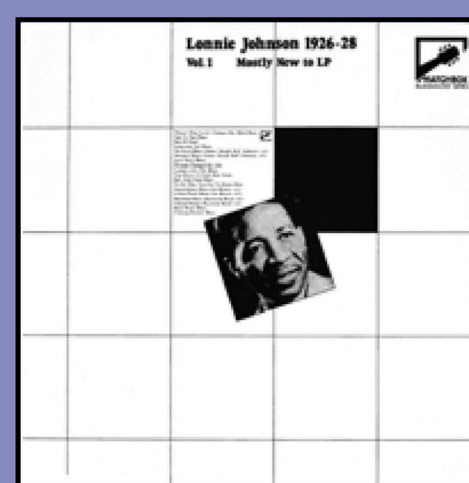
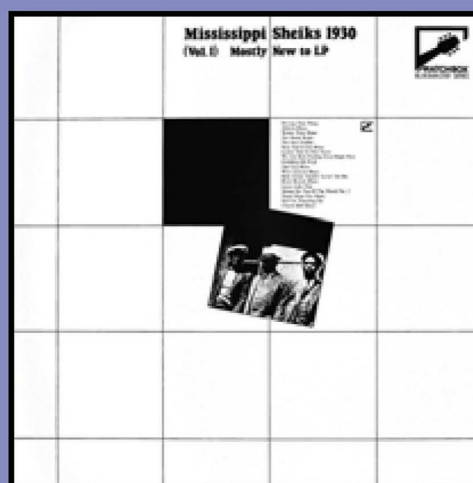




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