

MSESET6

# Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 6



PAPA CHARLIE JACKSON (1924-29)  
MEMPHIS JUG BAND (1927-34)  
BARBECUE BOB (1927-30)  
LEECAN & COOKSEY (1926-27)  
ROOSEVELT SYKES (1929-34)  
MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 2 (1930-34)



**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, Hans Maitner

**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](http://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.

*NB: These notes were written in the 1980s and are now reproduced verbatim some 40 years later which needs to be borne in mind for the occasional reference to time period (eg: “a century ago”)*

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 CD as 6 CD sets as a follow-on to the original Bluesmaster series.

**GEF LUCENA, Series Producer**

## MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES

**SET 6: DISC 1:** Original vinyl release date: April 1987 as

**'Mostly New to LP'**

**54'55"**

**MSE 1007 Papa Charlie Jackson 1924 – 29**

### ***Papa Charlie Jackson, vcl/bjo (vcl/gtr on tracks 14, 15, 16)***

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Salt Lake City Blues 1892-1   | Chicago, c. Sept 1924            |
| 2. Mama Don't Allow It (And She Ain't Gonna Have It Here) 2223-2       | Chicago, c. Aug, 1925            |
| 3. I'm Tired of Fooling Around With You 11050-1                        | Chicago, c. Jan 1926             |
| 4. The Judge Cliff Davis Blues 11104-2                                 | Chicago, c. April 1926           |
| 5. Four Eleven Forty Four 2556-1                                       | Chicago, c. April/May 1926       |
| 6. Bad Luck Woman Blues 2617-2   | Chicago, c. May/June 1926        |
| 7. Gay Cattin' 2672-   | Chicago, c. Sept 1926            |
| 8. Look Out Papa Don't Tear Your Pants 20098-2                         | Chicago, c. Oct 1927             |
| 9. Long Gone Lost John 20292-1   | Chicago, c. Jan 1928             |
| 10. I'm Looking For A Woman Who Knows<br>How To Treat Me Right 20293-2 | —                                |
| 11. Lexington Kentucky Blues 20293-2                                   | Chicago, c. Sept 1928            |
| 12. Good Doing Papa Blues 20862-2                                      | —                                |
| 13. Corn Liquor Blues 21046-1  | Chicago, c. Dec 1928             |
| 14. Hot Papa Blues No. 2 21221-1                                       | Chicago, c. March 1929           |
| 15. Tailor Made Lover 213346-1   | Chicago, c. July 1929            |
| 16. Take Me Back Blues No. 2 21337-1                                   | —                                |
| 17. 'Tain't What You Do But How<br>You Do It A-1-2: 1522               | prob. Grafton, Wis., c. Sep 1929 |
| 18. Forgotten Blues A-2-2: 1523  | —                                |

**SET 6: DISC 2:** Original vinyl release date: August 1986 as  
**'The Remaining Titles'**  
**MSE 1008 Memphis Jug Band 1927-34**

**55'52"**

**MEMPHIS JUG BAND**

***Will Shade, hca (on track 2)/gtr (on track 1)/vcl; Ben Ramey, kazoo/vcl (on track 2); Will Weldon, gtr/vcl (on track 2); Vol Stevens, bj-md (on track 1)/ gtr (on track 2); Jennie Clayton, vcl (on track 1)***

1. I Packed My Suitcase Started To the Train 40312-1  
Atlanta, Ga., Oct 19, 1927
2. Kansas City Blues 40315-1  
—

***Will Shade, vcl/gtr; Will Weldon, gtr; Vol Stevens, bj-md; Charles Polk, jug***  
3. Evergreen Money Blues 41818-2  
Memphis, Tenn., Feb 1, 1928

***Will Shade, hca (on track 4)/ vcl (on track 5); Will Weldon, gtr/vcl (on track 5); Vol Stevens, bj-md (on track 5)/gtr (on track 4); Ben Ramey, kazoo/vcl (on track 5); Charles Polk, jug; speech by members of the band***

4. Coal Oil Blues 41888-2  
Memphis, Tenn., Feb 13, 1928
5. Peaches In The Springtime 41890-2  
—

***Will Shade, hca; Ben Ramey, kazoo; Charlie Burse, gtr; Vol Stevens, gtr; Jab Jones, jug***  
6. Jug Band Waltz 47038-2  
Memphis, Tenn., Sept 15, 1928

***Will Shade, vcl/gtr; Ben Ramey, kazoo; Charlie Burse, gtr; Milton Robie, vln; Jab Jones, jug***  
7. Feed Your Friend With A Long-Handled Spoon 55598-1  
Memphis, Tenn., Sept 27, 1929

***Ben Ramey, kazoo; Jab Jones, jug; Charlie Burse, gtr; Charlie 'Bozo' Nickerson, pno; vcl trio (Will Shade, lead vcl)***

8. I Whipped My Woman With A Single-Tree 56347-2  
Memphis, Tenn., Oct 4, 1929

***Will Shade, vcl/gtr; Ben Ramey, kazoo; Charlie Burse, gtr; Hambone Lewis, jug***

9. Stonewall Blues 62542- Memphis, Tenn., May 29, 1930

***Will Shade, hca; Memphis Sheiks: Vol Stevens, bj-md; Charlie Burse, gtr/poss harmony vcl; Jab Jones, jug; Charlie 'Bozo' Nickerson, vcl***

10. He's In The Jailhouse Now 62990-2 Memphis, Tenn., Nov 21, 1930

***Carolina Peanut Boys: Will Shade, hca; Charlie Burse, gtr; poss Will Weldon, md; Ben Ramsey, harmony vcl; unknown jug; Charlie Nickerson, vcl/speech***

11. Move That Thing 64740-2 Memphis, Tenn., Nov 28, 1930

12. You Got Me Rollin' 64741-2 —

***Will Shade, hca (on track 14)/gtr (on tracks 13 & 15)/ vcl (on track 15)/ speech (on track 13); Charlie Pierce, Jab Jones, pno (on tracks 13 & 14)/ jug (on tracks 14 & 15); Charlie Burse, md (on track 13)/ gtr (on track 14 & 15)/ vcl (on tracks 13 & 15); Robert Burse, dm (on tracks 14 & 15)***

13. My Love Is Cold C-781-1 Chicago, Nov 6, 1934

14. Jazzbo Stomp C-782-2 —

15. Tear It Down, Bed Slats and All C-785-2 —

***Will Shade, hca/gtr; Charlie Pierce, vln; Jab Jones, jug/ Charlie Burse, gtr/vcl; Robert Burse, dm***

16. Fishin' In the Dark C-795-1 Chicago, Nov 7, 1934

***Will Shade, gtr/vcl; Charlie Pierce, vln; Jab Jones, jug; Charlie Burse, gtr/vcl (on track 18)/ speech or shouts; Robert Burse, dm***

17. Rukas Juice And Chittlin' C-805-1 Chicago, Nov 8, 1934

18. Jug Band Quartette C-807-1 —

**SET 6: DISC 3:** Original vinyl release date: August 1986 as  
**'The Remaining Titles'**

**51'19"**

**MSE 1009 Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks) 1927-30**

***Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), vcl/gtr***

1. When The Saints Go Marching In 144282-2 New York City, June 16, 1927
2. Jesus' Blood Can Make Me Whole 144283-3 —
3. Easy Rider Don't You Deny My Name 144284-3 —

***Barbecue Bob And Laughing Charley: Robert Hicks, vcl/gtr;  
Charlie Hicks, vcl/gtr***

4. It Won't Be Long Now – Part 1 145192-2 Atlanta, Ga., Nov 9, 1927
5. It Won't Be Long Now – Part 2 145193-2 —

***Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), vcl/gtr***

6. Goin' Up the Country 146052-2 Atlanta, Ga., April 13, 1928
7. Ease It To Me Blues 146173-2 Atlanta, Ga., April 21, 1928
8. She's Gone Blues 147306-1 Atlanta, Ga., Oct 26, 1928
9. Cold Wave Blues 147307-3 —
10. Good Time Rounder 148253-2 Atlanta, Ga., April 11, 1929
11. Red Hot Mama Papa's Going To Cool You Off 148343-2  
Atlanta, Ga., April 17, 1929
12. Trouble Done Bore Me Down 149344-1  
Atlanta, Ga., Nov 2, 1929
13. Unnamed Title 149347-1 —
14. She Moves It Just Right 149397-2 Atlanta, Ga., Nov 6, 1929
15. Yo Yo Blues No. 2 150269-2 Atlanta, Ga., April 17, 1930

***Robert & Charlie Hicks: Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), vcl/gtr/speech;  
Charlie Hicks. vcl/speech***

16. Darktown Gamblin' Part 1 (The Crap Game) 150374-1  
Atlanta, Ga., April 23, 1929



**SET 6: DISC 4:** Original vinyl release date: April 1987 as  
**'The Remaining Titles'**

**49'05"**

**MSE 1010 Bobbie Leecan & Robert Cooksey 1926 – 27**

***Bobby Leecan, gtr; Robert Cooksey, hca***

- |                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Black Cat Bone Blues 36356-1 * | New York City, Sept 27, 1926 |
| 2. Dirty Guitar Blues 36357-2     | —                            |

***Martin and Robert: Alfred Martin, gtr; Robert Cooksey, hca/vcl (on tracks 3 & 6)***

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 3. Dollar Blues E-22052                   | New York City, Sept 22, 1927 |
| 4. Maxwell And Peoria Blues E-22054/55/56 | —                            |
| 5. South Street Blues E-22057/58 *        | —                            |
| 6. Hock My Shoes E-22059 *                | —                            |

***Bobby Leecan, kazoo/gtr; Robert Cooksey, hca/ kazoo***

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| 7. Ain't She Sweet 38929-21 *            | Camden, N.J., May 24, 1927 |
| 8. Don't Let Your Head Hang Down 38930-1 | —                          |
| 9. Royal Palm Special 38931-1 *          | —                          |
| 10. Blue Harmonica 38932-1               | —                          |

***Blind Bobbie Baker: Bobby Leecan, vcl/gtr/ kazoo on track 11***

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 11. Macon Georgia Cut Out OA7533                      | New York City, c. Jun 1927 |
| 12. Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out PA 7533 | —                          |

***Dixie Jazzers Washboard Band: Tom Morris, cnt; Robert Cooksey, hca/vcl on tracks 14 & 16; Bobby Leecan, gtr; Mike Jackson, pno; Eddie Edinburgh, wbd/dm***

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 13. Memphis Shake 107617                              | New York City, July 1927 |
| 14. My Old Daddy's Got A Brand New Way To Love 107618 | —                        |
| 15. Kansas City Shuffle 107619-1                      | —                        |
| 16. Black Cat Bones 107620-1                          | —                        |

**SET 6: DISC 5:** Original vinyl release date: Feb 1988 as  
**'Mostly New to LP'**

**57'19"**

**MSE 1011 Roosevelt Sykes 1929-1934**

***Roosevelt Sykes, vcl/pno***

1. Black River Blues 403319-A Chicago, Nov 16, 1929

2. Bury That Thing 403320-A —

***Willie Kelly (Roosevelt Sykes), vcl/pno***

3. I Love You More And More 62903-2 Cincinnati, Ohio, June 12, 1930

***Easy Papa Johnson (Roosevelt Sykes), vcl/pno***

4. Cotton Seed Blues C-6474-A Chicago, Nov 3, 1930

5. Drinkin' Woman Blues C-6476-A —

***Isabel Sykes, vcl; acc Willie Kelly (Roosevelt Sykes), pno***

6. In Here With Your Heavy Stuff 76814-1 Chicago, Aug 2, 1930

7. Don't Rush Yourself 76815-1 —

***Charlie McFadden, vcl; acc Willie Kelly (Roosevelt Sykes), pno***

8. Low Down Rounders Blues 77277-1 Chicago, Dec 9, 1933

9. Last Journey Blues 77278-1 —

10. Hold It Where You Got It 77279-1 —

11. Lonesome Ghost Blues 77280-1 —

***Clarence Harris, vcl; acc Willie Kelly (Roosevelt Sykes), pno***

12. Try My Whiskey Blues 77294- Chicago, Dec 11, 1933

13. Lonesome Clock Blues 77295- —

***Carl Rafferty, vcl; acc Roosevelt Sykes, pno***

14. Mr. Carl's Blues (Carl Rafferty) 77313-1 —

***Johnnie Strauss, female vcl; acc Roosevelt Sykes, pno; unknown vln on tracks 15, 16; unknown gtr on track 16***

15. Hard Working Woman C-9319-A Chicago, Aug 20, 1934

16. St. Louis Johnnie Blues C-9320- —

17. Radio Broadcasting Blues C-9327-A —

18. Old Market Street Blues C-9328- —

**SET 6: DISC 6:** Original vinyl release date: Feb 1988 as  
**'Mostly New to LP'**

**59'26"**

**MSE 1012 Mississippi Sheiks Volume 2 1930 – 34**

***Walter Jacobs And The Carter Brothers: Walter Vinson, Bo Chatman  
(Bo Carter), gtr/poss. vcl (on track 2); Lonnie Chatman, vln***

1. Sheiks Special 404133-B San Antonio, Tex., June 10, 1930
2. Dear Little Girl 404134-B —

***Mississippi Sheiks: Walter Vincson, vcl/gtr; prob. Lonnie Chatman, vln***

3. Please Don't Wake It Up 405006-1 Atlanta, Ga., Oct 24, 1931
4. She's A Bad Girl 405010-1 —
5. Tell Me What The Cats Fight About 405011-1 —
6. Kind Treatment 4050012-1 —
7. Lazy Lazy River 405014-1 —
8. Too Long 405015-1 —
9. Bed Spring Poker 405021-2 Atlanta, Ga., Oct 25, 1931
10. When You're Sick With The Blues 405022-1 —

***Walter Vincson, vcl/gtr; prob. Lonnie Chatman, vln;  
Vincson or Chatman, vcl***

11. She's Crazy About Her Lovin' L-1548-2 Grafton, Wis., c. July 1932
12. Tell Me To Do Right L-1550-2 —

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

13. Kitty Cat Blues 152413-2 Chicago, June 20, 1933

***Bo Chatman (Bo Carter), vcl/gtr; Lonnie Chatman, vln; prob. Sam  
Chatman, 2nd gtr (Walter Vincson might be present)***

14. Show Me What You Got 152414-2 —
15. Hitting The Numbers 82600-1 San Antonio, Tex., March 26, 1934
16. It's Done Got Wet 82601-1 —
17. She's Got Something Crazy 82605-1 —
18. You'll Work Down To Me Someday 82606-1 —

## **SET 6: DISC 1: MSE 1007 Papa Charlie Jackson 1924 – 29**

*“No wonder they all fall for him! he’s just a red-hot papa, in a class all by himself, and it takes a cop or two to hold the mamas back when he struts down the avenue – ‘Papa Charlie’ Jackson sure knows how to sing this kind of blues”* ran the advert for **Hot Papa Blues No. 2** when it was issued in June 1929. By this time nearly sixty titles by Charlie Jackson had been issued and there is no doubt that he was immensely popular as an entertainer who could sing this kind of blues, but whose great importance in the history of black song lay in the breadth of his repertoire. We are immensely fortunate to have such a generous representation of the work of a songster who was born a century ago: this collection includes many of his best and most interesting titles.

Unfortunately, little definite information exists on Charlie Jackson. Paramount publicity stated that he came from New Orleans, and this seems very likely. He was certainly known to New Orleans jazzmen and on one unique session he recorded with Freddy Keppard’s

Jazz Cardinals. But his whole approach was that of an entertainer on the medicine and vaudeville shows. He played banjo, both four-string and six-string, but never apparently, the five-string model with its drone, favoured by white players. Banjos remained popular with New Orleans musicians and he doubtless learned to play the instrument in his native city. It isn’t difficult to imagine him working in a jazz band: the swing he generates on a title like **Mama Don’t Allow It**, a tune popular with New Orleans bands, would have certainly gone down well in the Longshoreman’s hall.

But as far as we can tell, Papa Charlie worked the shows, picking up songs and thinking up new ones, throughout his career. The advertisement for **Lexington Kentucky Blues** bore an illustration of him playing on the stage for a hoochy-coochy dancer, set up outside a tent – the barker drumming up a crowd. His blues *“was based on a true story”*, ran the publicity explaining that he *“went down to the great Kentucky State Fair last summer and he must have had a wonderful time. All kinds of experiences, and he sings about*

*what he did and what he saw ... as he plays a mean banjo accompaniment*". He went there, he explained in the song; *"to see Man O'War"*. Presumably, the famous race horse, which had won the Belmont Futurity in 1919 and the Freakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes in 1920, was merely on show, for it was well past its prime: the Kentucky Derby was won by Whiskery in 1927. Papa Charlie's details of Mr O'Neill on Limestone Street and others that he met are now probably unverifiable, but the narrative blues has a ballad-like quality to it.

Another blues song which invites speculation is **The Judge Cliff Davis Blues**, which bore the composer credit "Harry-Philwin" on the label. It described a court-room scene, and Charlie Jackson had run in imitating the clerk to the court as he prepared for *"Judge Cliff Davis"* to take the stand. This referred to the crack-down by Police Commissioner Clifford Davis on crime in Memphis which continued into the mid 1930s. Memphis was, in the 1920s, the *"murder capital of America"* with 113 slayings in 1924, nine out of ten of the victims being black. Cliff Davis was one of Boss Crump's protégées,

and later became Commissioner of Public Safety. For the record-buying blacks on Beale Street, and doubtless on the medicine shows that were gathering talent in Memphis, the song had considerable appeal, sharpened by the fact that over sixty black church leaders and teachers supported Davis' war on crime.

But not all buyers of Charlie Jackson's records were in Memphis, or even in the south. On one record he gave his address as 624 Maxwell Street in 1925 and it seems very likely that while he was in Chicago he played the Maxwell Street market, as did countless other songsters and blues singers before, and in the years to come. Chicago attracted blacks from the south in large numbers, and they would have responded to his version of the old Kentucky folk song **Long Gone, Lost John** with both recognition and delight at the story of the runaway who had *"heels in front, and heels behind: you couldn't tell which away Lost John's gwine"*. As I have explained in *Songsters and Saints*, it was a song which was widely known, and had been adapted and published by Chris Smith and W. C. Handy in

1920. Charlie Jackson's is indubitably the best and most complete version on record.

He seems to have had the knack of singing for his audience in a bouncy, optimistic way, which never seemed to succumb to complaints as did the blues of many of his contemporaries, but which told of scuffling and hardship with a wry, sometimes ironic humour. **Four-Eleven-Forty-Four** is a good example. It's a policy song, which tells of placing bets on the number combinations of the "gambling wheels". The combination 4-11-44 had phallic connotations and was a favourite play, known in New Orleans as the "Washerwoman's Jig". Policy helped a lot of blacks in lean times even if it fattened the purses of the racketeers. *"While they pulled the numbers out I went real white, I felt like things weren't going to work out right"* Charlie sang, but fortunately, *"the last three numbers were 4-11-44."* His listeners were reassured.

Many of his songs were comic and he seems to have perceived life with a humourist's eye. **Look Out Papa Don't Tear Your Pants** for example. He refers to the hula in the opening passage, and later plays a

fragment of the **Spanish Flang-dang** in the instrumental break. These were the days of the ascendancy of the blues however, and every songster had to include in his repertoire a good number of blues if he was to continue to hold his audience. Papa Charlie seems to have been influenced by his contemporary Blind Blake on his later blues titles: compare **Salt Lake City Blues** from 1924 with **Tailor Made Lover** of 1929. On **Hot Papa Blues** he even played guitar, at a leisurely pace but sensitively, while on **Take Me Back Blues** he played an instrumental boogie figure which uncannily anticipated Leadbelly. In his work can be traced numerous currents of black song: **Tain't What You Do But How You Do It** was a cheerful show item with the timing and phrasing of a Butterbeans and Susie song and "scat" vocalising. *"Now if you don't believe my music is good, you can ask anybody that lives in my neighbourhood"*, he bragged confidently on **Gay Cattin'**. But that was long ago. Though there was a rumour that he was still in Chicago in the late 1950s it seems that Papa Charlie Jackson died there around May 1938 leaving on record a rich

documentation of the old-time songster's "good music."

**SET 6: DISC 2: MSE 1008**  
**Memphis Jug Band (1927 – 34)**

To walk down Beale Street in Memphis today is a saddening experience. Too late, the city realised that it had a unique environment in what the local black author, George W. Lee called "the Main Street of Negro America". All around the street the slums and side roads have been torn down and levelled to a desert of weeds and rubble in the 1970s, and Beale is left like a neglected Hollywood set, shored-up, virtually unoccupied with high wire fences to keep the rare visitor away from falling masonry that drops from the crumbling cornices of the Daisy Theatre or the Monarch Saloon. A quarter of a century ago it was already in decline, but the Street was still full of people and its life was jaunty even if it lacked the colour of its heyday.

From the closing years of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War II Beale Avenue (its correct name) was the focus of black urban life, not only in Tennessee but

for Mississippi and Arkansas too. In the sultry summer days it was quiet enough but at night its reputation, which attracted so many blacks from the rural districts, was fully justified. It was notorious, violent, blatant, dangerous, compelling, and the blacks who lived there and in the immediate vicinity were proud of their capacity to ride out its more lurid events, and of the contribution they made to its culture. Will Shade related with relish, and more than a little regret for its passing, the catalogue of disputes, murders, gambling, prostitution and wide-open lawlessness which typified the Street after midnight early this century. But of course, the Street was much more than the setting for sensational happenings; it was the centre of black business in Memphis, and the base also for a number of white business operations that catered for local interests. Pawn-shops were well in evidence, barbershops, liquor stores, shoe-shines, rubbed shoulders with conventional shops and enterprises. But the main substance of black initiative in the pre-1940 period was entertainment. There were numerous bars and joints where musicians worked and

small bands played; there were three theatres in a single block, one, the Palace, being the home of Williamson's Beale Street Frolic Orchestra and renowned throughout the country. Music promoters like Yancey and Booker, Robert Henry and W. C. Handy himself, published sheet music and furnished bands for picnics, parades and political parties. Among them was Will Shade's Memphis Jug Band.

Shade was born in Memphis February 5th, 1898 and was raised by his grandmother. Annie Brimmer – to his friends he was always known as “Son Brimme” rather than by his given name. As a child he picked up the rudiments of guitar and harmonica playing by listening to, and following around a Shadowy figures like “*Hucklebones*”, “*Roundhouse*” and Tewee Blackman. Blackman in fact, does emerge from the shadows for, in later years Will Shade repaid his debt to the older man by bringing him to the recording studio: he plays guitar, and probably is one of the singers, on **I Whipped My Woman With A Single Tree**. There are numerous songsters and blues singers in Memphis who were either local or came from the

Mississippi hill country – Men like Frank Stokes, Joe Caldicott, Furry Lewis, Gus Cannon, Jim Jackson and Robert Wilkins. By the time he was 18, Shade was working with a number of them, including Furry Lewis and Gus Cannon, playing at Pee Wee's place, and other well-known joints like the Red Onion, on Beale. He lived just round the corner, in a long “shot-gun” tenement off Fourth Street. (They were called “Shot-gun” because the rooms were all in a row, and their doorways in line, so a single shot could pass through all the rooms). Gus Cannon lived nearby, and so did Charlie Burse when he arrived in Memphis from Alabama in 1928.

Furry Lewis may have led a jug band as early as 1916; though Shade has been credited with the first in Memphis this now seems unlikely. A jug band was basically a string band augmented with novelty or make-shift instruments like a washboard, musical saw or a kazoo – and the jug. Sometimes this was an earthenware vessel sometimes a kerosene can or a length of pipe, but by blowing and spitting into the orifice at differing angles a simple scale and a booming bass sound



could be obtained. One jug was all that was needed to convert a string band to a jug band. They were popular in Louisville and Buford Threlkeld – called “*Whistler*” – recorded with his Jug Band as early as 1924; Clifford Hayes' Dixieland Jug Blowers and Earl McDonald's Louisville Jug Band followed and inspired Shade to record his own group. Whereas the Louisville bands were closer to the minstrel show and had leanings to jazz, Shade's Memphis Jug Band was far more of a folk group, albeit an urban one.

Charlie Polk, or sometimes the pianist Jab Jones, played the jug; Vol Stevens played banjo or mandolin, while Ben Ramey often carried the tune on kazoo or comb-and-paper. Two, even three, guitars were often present played by “Casey Bill” Weldon, Charlie Burse and Shade himself, he also played harmonica and the combined guitars, mouth-harp and kazoo produced a haunting, relaxed sound, at its most nostalgic on **Kansas City Blues**. Blues played a part in the music of the group, as in the slow **Evergreen Money Blues** or the idle exchange between Shade and his wife, Jennie Clayton, **I Packed My Suitcase,**

**Started To The Train.** But a band which played for white functions as well as black, which performed at roadhouses and on parade wagons had to be versatile; **Jug Band Waltz** with the dance tune on harp and kazoo, the standard of the road shows **He's In The Jailhouse Now** and the abab song **Peaches In The Springtime**, illustrate facets of their repertoire. When most of the groups had lost their contracts with the Depression, Shade's Memphis Jug Band held on. The last half-dozen titles were made at sessions in 1934 with Charles Pierce's wailing fiddle, Jab Jones' stompy piano and the good-time rough-house of the Burse Brothers giving a vivid impression of the kind of music that emanated from Beale as the country began the long haul out of the depths of the recession. Jack Kelly's South Memphis Jug Band recorded over the next few years and Shade's own group still got employment though it did not record again. Times and tastes were changing for the “jug” swing era. By the 1950s Will Shade was on relief and the balmy days of Memphis and its jug bands were over.

**SET 6: DISC 3: MSE 1009**  
**Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks)**  
**1927 – 30**

**When the Saints Go Marching In**, the anthem of the New Orleans Revival, opens this collection of recordings by Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks). Today it seems a vastly over-exposed tune, though in the 1920s it was quite unfamiliar and never seemed to have been included in the collections of Spirituals and Gospel Songs published at that time. Curiously it was not a common theme among religious singers on record, and even such groups as the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet or the Birmingham Jubilee Singers, who were catholic in their tastes, ignored it. Perhaps it had already been secularised and if so that may have been the reason for its release by Robert Hicks. Among the first versions on record it was issued some six months before Blind Willie Davis's version. With the painful popularity of the tune among the tourists in New Orleans it is difficult to listen to it without some measure of prejudice against it. Yet the recording is very instructive of the way in which he approached a song,

with a sense of timing and internal rhythms emphasised by short, punctuated guitar phrases which make it significantly different, and better, than any other.

Presumably the religious coupling was testing the market and it was issued under the singer's correct name to distance the release from the more earthy items by the blues singer – a device which had already been used with Blind Lemon Jefferson and was later applied to Charley Patton, Josh White and other singers. It must be admitted that he was more comfortable and more inventive with the blues items recorded at the same session, and **Easy Rider, Don't You Deny My Name**, which has been a favourite of mine since I first started collecting blues, displays him at his effortless best. Using simple couplets which in some cases have come from children's game songs and with the title as a refrain line, he created a swinging, captivating dance theme with throbbing descending phrases on his twelve-string guitar leading into each successive chorus.

Barbecue Bob was born on September 11, 1902 at Walnut Grove, Newton County, Georgia, into

a farming family. He had a rudimentary education, a few months of school a year between seasonal work, but the most important teaching he received as far as his future was concerned was from his brother Charley, his elder by a couple of years. Charley played a twelve-string guitar and had himself been taught to play it by a woman named Savannah Weaver, known as "Dip", whose son Curley was a frequent companion to both brothers. Charley Hicks was a sombre, probably rather sardonic character with a loud and unnerving laugh. But he had a rich voice and a range of rural songs and blues which he recorded under the name of Charley Lincoln; his work is available on *Matchbox Bluesmaster MSE 212*. As they grew older they moved to Atlanta, taking up odd jobs and settling, more or less, in the satellite township of Lithonia. They both married, Robert to a woman named Claudine, according to Pete Lowry, to whom, with Bruce Bastin, we are indebted for most of the information on these singers.

At one point Robert went to southern Georgia with a medicine show, but it is possible that they both worked together in this kind of

entertainment for a few of their records are very much in the kind of "hokum" vein popular with street audiences. **It Won't Be Long Now** is an example, with its idle joking and unsubtle humour; the two men sing a blues in unison which suggests that they were well practised in this technique, but the latter part of the second "*side*" of this item finds Bob singing "*I Got the Blues for Home Sweet Home*" to an unusual tune. In the vocal exchange, with much made of the proportions of a girl friend, they make mention of the delights and otherwise of Lightnin', a run-down area which lay to the northwest of Decatur Street, bisected by Marietta, Decatur's extension. But it was by no means certain that the brothers were playing in Lightnin' any more, for Robert had secured a good job serving Barbecue at Tidwell's Barbecue Place in the affluent white suburb of Buckhead, and playing for tips.

It was Dan Hornsby, a Columbia talent scout, who found and first recorded Robert Hicks, and he may well have given him the name of "Barbecue Bob". It is clear that his first releases under this name did well and soon he became one of

Columbia's best selling folk blues artists, with the field unit recording around eight new titles every six months or so, in the Spring and the Fall. Hints of the medicine show are evident in **Red Hot Mama** in which the verses open like **Tight Like That** and conclude like a "Butts and Sue" number. **Trouble Done Pull Me Down** uses a similar couplet but a different refrain. In this and other ways he introduced considerable variety into his songs, like the falsetto wordless vocal on **Good Time Rounder** which, in one verse uses an old vaudeville joke ("*twenty after three*"). The tune for this item was his own, and the one he used most frequently for blues, such as the inexplicably unissued title included here which also has a falsetto part-chorus, on **Cold Wave Blues**, one of his more thematic items which complains of sole-less shoes and having no overcoat with the approach of winter.

This item emphasises Barbecue Bob's originality with lyrics; even on a standard theme like **She Moves It Just Right** he introduces unexpected and amusing verses; the same is true of **Yo Yo Blues No. 2** – he had made an earlier version some

six months before. It was one of the tunes special to the group of blues singers around Atlanta: as **No No Blues** it was also recorded by Willie Baker and Curley Weaver though there is no evidence as to the origins of the theme. It particularly suited Barbecue Bob's warm baritone, which was offset by the whining notes of the ring on his "pinky" finger as it stroked the top "E" string. Though his technique was basically simple with the guitar in cross-note tuning, his rhythmic dynamics and clear picking contrasted with the blue sounds of his slide playing, which produced texturally rich settings for his songs. Often his slide would linger on the strings as he finished playing a tune imparting a wistful sound and also hinting at the items to come. Vocally too he exploited his range, using scat vocals, humming choruses and growls. **Goin' Up the Country** and **Ease It To Me Blues** are two items which reveal his command over voice and instrument, with interesting lyrics and unusual tunes.

Barbecue Bob's career ended suddenly. In 1929 his mother (whom he mentioned on **Good Time Rounder**) died, and a year later he

was again bereaved with the loss of his young wife. He had just seen his 29th birthday when he fell victim to influenza; it developed into pneumonia from which he died on October 21, 1931 (the field unit from Columbia would have been about due in Atlanta). As I have outlined in the notes to *MSE 212*, his death was devastating to Charley Lincoln and a great loss to the blues. Robert Hicks was six months younger than Son House; we can only guess how he would have been playing and singing if he had survived into the “rediscovery” era of the 1960s.

**SET 6: DISC 4: MSE 1010 (1926–7)  
Bobbie Leecan & Robert Cooksey**

Way back before there were any reissues of blues on long-play records – before there were any LPs in fact – blues 78s could only be obtained by buying direct from the United States, by trading discs with other collectors, and by “junking”. Junking was dirty and laborious, involving turning over hundreds of old records in the hopes that you'd find a gem – and one did from time to time. I recall the thrill of seeing **Skip Skat Doodle-Do** by the Dixieland Jug Blowers on HMV B5398 one wet winter evening; I

have it still. On the other side was **Washboard Cut Out** by Bobbie Leecan's Need-More Band. In those days I used to give a lot of talks on blues and jazz to different clubs and societies and this record came out of the record box frequently for this purpose. Earl McDonald and Henry Clifford both played jug on the former with a magnificent fruity, resonant sound which admirably illustrated “jug bands”. while the Bobbie Leecan side was my example of a “spasm band”.

**Washboard Cut-Out** always amused me with its lively good humour and for the rather inept and dragging playing of the unknown violoncello player as he sawed his way through the solo. I reckoned that Bobbie Leecan called his group the “Need-More Band” because it needed more instruments, more players, more money and more music! In the intervening years I've learned quite a lot about the Dixieland Jug Blowers, but my knowledge of Bobbie Leecan and his band hasn't advanced much, beyond the fact that I don't call it a “spasm band” any more. If there has ever been an article on Leecan or Cooksey I must have missed it and I

can never recall seeing them mentioned in any book on jazz or blues. Yet they were quite prolifically recorded for two or three years in the boom times of the late 1920s – so what can we deduce from their records?

If Leecan and his companions were planning to put future blues writers off the scent with their titles they did a good job. For their discography is quite a gazeteer of places: Philadelphia, Macon, Memphis, Kansas City and Dallas among them. Cooksey's **Maxwell And Peoria** refers to the famous Chicago South Side intersection while **Royal Palm Special** refers to a train which came up from Atlanta, which might support a Macon, Georgia background. Some of the place references were merely versions of other musicians' successes; **Memphis Shake** had been made by the Dixieland Jug Blowers the year before while **Kansas City Shuffle** presumably derived from Bennie Moten's. On the other hand, Sloppy Henry made a **Royal Palm Special Blues** a year after Leecan and Cooksey.

What about that **Philadelphia Cut-Out** (which was never issued), is

that a clue? Very probably, for **South Street Stomp** played by Cooksey, Leecan and Martin as the South Street Trio almost certainly refers to Philadelphia's South Street which cuts across the “main stem” Broad Street, running East-West from the Schuylkill River to the Delaware. And Need-More, how does that fit in? If it were a sort of pun, as I used to think, it was of a kind that was locally familiar; Philadelphia's oldest bookshop – and novelty shop – at 607 East Market Street was the “Reedmor”! But there may be another explanation, for further west in Pennsylvania is the little settlement of Needmore in Fulton County. It's close to the West Virginia border, and in Handy County in that state there is another Needmore. There are a few others, in Indiana, Oklahoma and Kentucky so if the name had a personal significance he might have come from any of them, though Needmore Penn. is a possible location. Which leaves us with **Apaloosa Blues**, but Apaloosa, which sounds as if it ought to be a town – like Tuscaloosa – is not on the map of any State. However, it is, or was, a breed of horse that was popular for racing in Kentucky. Could

Bobbie Leecan and perhaps his friends have come from Kentucky and settled in Philadelphia? And will anyone attempt to find out?

Wherever they came from they recorded in New York and Camden, New Jersey and the trio seem to have had a few associates like the washboard player Eddie Edinborough, otherwise known as "Tap Dancing Joe" who played with the Need-More Band and the Dixie Jazzers Washboard Band. Bobbie Leecan's last appearances on record were with Edinborough on his New Orleans Wild Cats sides of 1931, and with his Washboard Band in 1932. Then there was Wesley "Kid Sox" Wilson the pianist, who was on the same dates. Leecan worked with quite a few well-known pianists of the time including Mike Jackson, Edgar Dowell, probably Phil Worde, and the celebrated Thomas "Fats" Waller, who sat in with Thomas Morris's Hot Babies for several titles in December 1931. The amiable Thomas Morris played cornet with Leecan, Cooksey, Jackson and Edinborough on the Dixie Jazzers Washboard Band, the only time as far as I know, that the old spelling of "jass" was used on a record label. Tom Morris, incidentally, later joined Father Divine. Finally I

should mention their blues accompaniments, Leecan and Cooksey playing together for Helen Baxter and Margaret Johnson, Leecan accompanying Elizabeth Smith and Lena Wilson, and Cooksey backing Viola McCoy, Sara Martin and helping out the Harmonica player El Watson.

As for their playing, they seem to have developed very individual and instantly recognisable approaches to their instruments. Bobbie – or Bobby, both were used on labels – played both banjo and guitar, but I suspect that banjo was his first instrument. Though he was a fluent guitar player he seldom played full chords and most of his work is "singlestring" picking on which he played short, sometimes rather staccato notes as if he were more used to the quick release of the banjo. He also played kazoo with gusto, if with no great subtlety, and on a few titles like **Dollar Blues** or **Hock My Shoes** sang the odd blues stanza. But his solo version of **Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out** is more surprising. Recorded two years before Bessie Smith and Pine Top Smith made their versions it has the full verses and a very different sentiment. **Macon**

**Georgia Cut-Out** is a somewhat similar tune but the style is that of a Coot Grant and Kid Sox number, suggesting a different dimension to Leecan's background. His sometime companion Alfred Martin played guitar in a very similar style, which might be simply a matter of influence, or perhaps of a shared traditional background. Robert Cooksey played harmonica with a pronounced warble, but with clear notes and a certain jazz phrasing, which fitted well with Tom Morris's modest but relaxed and hot-toned cornet. Recognition for these interesting Eastern artists who worked in the hinterland between jazz, blues and vaudeville is long overdue. Is it too much to hope that someone might do a little research on them? They might make a start in Philadelphia.

*(It is now known that Robert (Bobbie) Leecan was born and grew up in Philadelphia. In a report on a street shooting in New York in February 1926, Leecan, aged 28, and Cooksey, aged 32, are described as "wont to entertain Harlem poolroom and cabaret patrons." Cooksey, who was probably born in Tennessee, may have been the actor of that name who played "Sugarfoot" in Mae West's play 'Pleasure Man' in Brooklyn in 1928. (Tony Russell)*

## **SET 6: DISC 5:** **MSE 1011 Roosevelt Sykes** **1929-1934**

No blues singer that knew him has a bad word to say about Roosevelt Sykes. Like Big Bill Broonzy, he was much liked by his contemporaries, who admired his ability, his professionalism and his personality. In some respect he was unusual among blues singers for he had an outgoing disposition and seemed to have borne any discomforts in his life without rancour and without letting them affect his generally optimistic outlook. Possibly though, he had a life that was rather less hard than that of many blues singers, with a stable home background, and for most of his career, steady employment.

Roosevelt Sykes was born on January 31, 1906, at Elmar, Arkansas and always claimed Helena to be his home. He had relatives who farmed in the state and others in Helena, so although his father took the family to St. Louis when Roosevelt was only three, he returned there frequently. His father was a musician and did not discourage his sons from becoming musicians as well – Roosevelt's



brothers, John and Walter, both played professionally. He got his own start in Helena, working first as a “pot washer” in neighbourhood joints and working up to be a waiter. He learned to cook as well, and the combined experience stood him in good stead in later years. He listened to the blues pianists like Baby Sneed, Jesse Bell and Joe Crump and taught himself to play. Pretty soon he was playing in the joints and gambling houses himself, even though he was too young to gamble.

Splitting his time between Helena, West Helena and St Louis he came to know a great many of the blues singers and musicians in this fertile blues country. One of them was Lee Green, who taught him to play the Forty-Fours. By the time he was 23, Roosevelt was living in East St. Louis and sufficiently competent and ambitious to seek out Jesse Johnson, the owner of the De Lux Music Shop and a local entrepreneur. Through him he got his first recording date, on June 14, 1929, in New York. He seems to have been an instant success for he had two other sessions that year, including one in Chicago in November when he made two of the titles here –

**Bury That Thing**, a curious item which seems to make some obscure reference to Jesse Johnson himself, and **Black River Blues** on a more familiar flood theme.

The next session represented here was not under his name but as by Willie Kelly. On the subject of his pseudonyms he explained to me: *“I had a contract with Okeh and I did recordings for other companies under different names. One of my names when I was a kid was Dobby. They always called me Dobby, so my mother's name was Bragg so I used the name Dobby Bragg. Then I had a brother who was a half brother. His father was a Kelly and his name was Willie. Actually his name was Willie Sykes but his brother married another girl by the name of Kelly so I used the name of Willie Kelly – was my half brother's name.”* For his recordings as Willie Kelly he seems to have developed a somewhat different style, clearly related to that which he normally employed, but often with a quicker release and a rather more impressive use of dynamics. Or this may just be a mark of his continuing experimentation and progress within the blues idiom. He continued to use pseudonyms:

his next was as “Easy Papa Johnson,” a name which he may have borrowed from Jesse Johnson himself, or from his wife Edith North Johnson, with whom he sometimes worked and for whom he also recorded as accompanist. It was Edith Johnson who gave him the name of “The Honeydripper”.

Though the nickname had its erotic associations, it was apposite because of Roosevelt's general appearance. Light-skinned with a honey-hued complexion, he had a rather large head for the proportions of his body as a young man. The impression was of an engaging youth who was nonetheless a “natty dresser” in the terms of the day, with a tight check suit, striped tie, a handkerchief in breast pocket. He was proud of his straight hair, parted in the centre and swept back from his high forehead; he was fond of his cigars – and even wore spats. By the standards of St Louis' black sector around Market and Delmar, let alone by those of East St Louis where he lived, Roosevelt Sykes was already affluent and famous. Said Walter Davis, recalling those days: *“he was just one of those brainy fellers, he's just a regular feller after all. He was a*

*good friend of mine and another cause of my gettin' in the record business. Because the first time I heard him I went down to the Southern states. I had been there and told the people I knew him and nobody believed that I did.”*

Many others were to count him as a good friend and the cause of their getting on record. Because he was punctual and reliable, because he was intelligent and able, and because he knew just about everyone in the blues field between Helena and Chicago he was a popular talent scout. He tried out a number of singers, some of whom had a local fame, others who remain totally obscure. Isabel Sykes was one; she was probably his sister and he provided the accompaniment to her shrill, edgy voice. **Don't Rush Yourself** was sung to a tune related to **Kokomo Blues**. She did not record again, and neither did Clarence Harris. By contrast his voice was deep and not that of a regular blues singer. One gets the impression that he was the owner of a joint singing about the whiskey that he sold. Perhaps he had earlier worked on the riverboats; how else to explain the unusual line *“it was early*

*when she left, the hand was on seven bells”? Then there was Carl Rafferty, whose **Mr Carl's Blues** is memorable for its final verse, “I do believe, I believe I'll dust my broom ...”*

For all these Sykes played sensitive, imaginative accompaniment. But he was especially comfortable accompanying his long-standing friend Charlie “Specks” McFadden, with whom he made over a score of titles, including the four in this collection, with their interesting, sometimes poetic, lyrics. Then, in August 1934, Roosevelt arranged the most ambitious venture of his twenty-eight years, when he took a railroad car-full of St Louis blues talent to record in Chicago. Included in the riotous bunch were Barrelhouse Buck, Peetie Wheatstraw, Ike Rodgers, Henry Brown, Mary Johnson, Alice Moore, Lee Green and, new to recording, “St Louis Johnnie” Strauss. He created a headache for himself and for discographers ever since. For instance, I am certain that the first two titles by the fierce-voiced young woman, Johnnie Strauss, were accompanied by Henry Brown on piano, and I'm not sure that Sykes is

the pianist on the other two. But the session as a whole is a monument to Roosevelt's acumen, which never deserted him in the fifty years of playing and enterprise that lay ahead.

*Quotations from “Conversation with the Blues” by Paul Oliver, Cassell, London, 1965, p 107, Roosevelt Sykes; p 108, Walter Davis*

**SET 6: DISC 6:**  
**MSE 1012 Mississippi Sheiks**  
**Volume 2 1930 – 34**

In the notes to MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS Vol 1, I outlined the history of this important family string band. In spite of their rural origins and the fact that only one member of the dozen or so musicians in the family – Lonnie – could read music, the Chatmans and their associates were remarkably successful in exploiting their skills. They were quick to perceive the opportunities for advancement that commercial recording afforded, and one of the family, the highly talented Armenter “Bo” Chatman, made an effective personal career out of recording for some years after the Mississippi Sheiks had lost their

appeal to the recording companies. Another member of the band, Walter Vinson (alias Vincent, Vincson, Jacobs), also made records on his own, though he was not as talented nor as versatile as Bo. Bo Carter (Chatman) furthermore, acted as a record company agent, acting on behalf of a number of local singers from Hollandale, Mississippi where several of the family lived in the 1930s. In these respects he was not unlike Big Bill Broonzy, though he chose to remain in the South and never settled in Chicago.

As solo artist Bo Carter had about 110 titles issued on 78s; the Mississippi Sheiks, of which he was an occasional member on record, made some 80 titles. Walter Vincent cut a score on his own and some 18 more were made by Lonnie and Sam together, and brother Harry. Closely related to these singers and musicians was Charlie McCoy who joined members of the Sheiks on the recordings of the Mississippi Blacksnakes – another ten issued titles – and the Mississippi Mud Steppers, a further six. Add to these Charlie McCoy's own two dozen titles and we have a total of somewhere around 270 titles issued, quite apart

from a number that were recorded but not released. The Chatmans were a force to be reckoned with in the Mississippi music scene.

Much has been made of the fact that the Mississippi Sheiks played for white audiences. But it should be recognised that this was quite common in the South, particularly when a black band could play for square and set dances, and satisfy the demands of the younger whites to play more modern dance rhythms too. Kept apart by the fact that they were “on the stand” a reliable and musicianly black orchestra were not a threat to their white hosts. In spite of Sam Chatman's claims later in life, that they played only for whites, I somewhat doubt this. The light-skinned family undoubtedly fitted in well, but Sam himself acknowledged that they were playing a dance in Itta Bena when Ralph Lembo, the local record store owner, heard them. It has been inferred that it was a white dance that they were playing for, but it is significant that Itta Bena was (and maybe still is), one of the two wholly black towns in Mississippi. Moreover, there's an uncompromising emphasis on their

Mississippi background in their chosen band names and a strong “Race” element in their blues, dances and songs, which indicate an essentially black market for their recordings. Bearing in mind that records were made with local sales particularly in view, this suggests that much of their audience was indeed, black.

It all required a skilful balancing act, and this is what makes their repertoire fascinating. No other group gives us such an insight into the kind of music that a string band played that could make it appealing to both sides of the tracks. Take for instance, **Sheiks Special**: it probably was special, a late 19th Century waltz instrumental played in harmony for the old folks. It is followed by **Dear Little Girl**, another waltz, related perhaps to the Brennan-Ball hit of 1918, **Dear Little Boy (of mine)**. **Please Don't Wake It Up** is in one of the standard formulae that the Sheiks favoured, but it's interesting to speculate on its relationship with the many peremptory admonition songs of the “*teens of the century with titles saying Don't*” including two, by Ingraham and Whitson in 1910, and Gilbert,

Wayne and Baer in 1925, entitled **Don't Wake Me Up**. Not the same song of course, but the title must have rung a few bells in the memories of some dancers. This was not always a subconscious echo of past tunes. **Lazy Lazy River** for instance, must have been a title inspired by the immense success of Hoagy Carmichael's recording the year before of his own composition **Lazy River**, which was also much recorded by other jazz bands. In Mississippi it may only have been known as a title – and the Sheiks obliged in their own way.

Then there's the “Race” material, obviously intended for an essentially black audience, though no doubt whites enjoyed them too when performed in person. **She's a Bad Girl** is innocuous enough as a title but it turns out to be a kind of *Dozens* song; the familiar *Dozens* tune is not employed, nor are the verses “counted”, but the sentiment is much the same. Its original backing, **Tell Me What The Cats Fight About** is typical Sheiks material, which has some nice fiddle against the guitar runs. **Bed Spring Poker** appears to be a suggestive title but the theme is rather more

skilful, with the warning of “ruination” if one gambles one's chances in various beds – a hint of syphilis? There are slightly obscure references in some of the songs; **Kind Treatment** for instance. To whom is it actually addressed and what is the “kind treatment” to which Walter Vincson alludes? Is it the equivalent of the Texas “mercy man”, the white person who bails out “his” blacks when they get into minor trouble with the law? Patronising it may seem, now, but it was common practice in the first half of the century.

**When You're Sick With The Blues** is rather in the mould of Jane Lucas and Georgia Tom's **Terrible Operation Blues**: *“get a brownskin woman and let her perform an operation on you.”* There are surprises – **It's Done Got Wet** is a joyful celebration of the repeal of Prohibition the previous year, with Bo Carter singing a scat vocal and playing fine guitar runs. **She's Got Something Crazy** turns out to refer to an automobile, while **Hittin' the Numbers** is unexpectedly, a policy version of **Sittin' on Top of the World**. These titles, made in San Antonio, have Bo Chatman taking

the lead on vocal guitar. There is an excellent rapport between him and Lonnie Chatman, who really responds to the challenge, while Sam or Walter plays supporting guitar. But the tracks that probably give us the best impression of the Mississippi Sheiks performing live, are the sole coupling that was released from eight recorded for Columbia in 1933. There are definitely two guitars on these titles, with presumably, Bo Chatman providing support for Walter Vincson, and Lonnie at his best on violin.

**Kitty Cat Blues** and **Show Me What You Got** may be minor items as songs, but the spirited performance and exhilarating knitting of the instruments make them a paradigm of black country string band music – for blacks or whites. **Paul Oliver**

**Note: p28:** *Paul's description of Itta Bena as a once wholly black town is not borne out by its Wikipedia entry; and indeed, since Ralph Lembo, who was Sicilian-American, lived there (this is confirmed by multiple public records), it must have been biracial. (Tony Russell)*

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 1: MSESET1 (6 albums)**

MSE 201 COUNTRY BLUES – THE 1st GENERATION (1927)  
MSE 202 BUDDY BOY HAWKINS (1927-29)  
MSE 203 BO WEAVIL JACKSON (1926)  
MSE 204 RAGTIME BLUES GUITAR (1928-30)  
MSE 205 PEG LEG HOWELL (1928-29)  
MSE 206 TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 1 (1927-28)

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 2: MSESET2 (6 albums)**

MSE 207 SKIP JAMES: SKIP JAMES (1931)  
MSE 208 COLEY JONES & THE DALLAS STRING BAND (1927-29)  
MSE 209 GREAT HARP PLAYERS (1927-30)  
MSE 210 LEROY CARR (1928)  
MSE 211 TOMMIE BRADLEY – JAMES COLE GROUPS (1930-32)  
MSE 212 CHARLIE LINCOLN (1927-30)

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 3: MSESET3 (6 albums)**

MSE 213 MEMPHIS HARMONICA KINGS (1929-30)  
MSE 214 TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 2 (1928-29)  
MSE 215 RAMBLIN' THOMAS (1928-32)  
MSE 216 COUNTRY GIRLS (1926-29)  
MSE 217 RUFUS & BEN QUILLIAN (1929-31)  
MSE 218 DE FORD BAILEY & BERT BILBRO (1927-31)

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 4: MSESET4 (6 albums)**

MSE 219 JULIUS DANIELS – LIL McCLINTOCK (1927-30)  
MSE 220 TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 3 (1929-30)  
MSE 221 PEG LEG HOWELL (1926-27)  
MSE 222 SANCTIFIED JUG BANDS (1928-30)  
MSE 223 ST. LOUIS BESSIE (1927-30)  
MSE 224 TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 4 (1934-50)

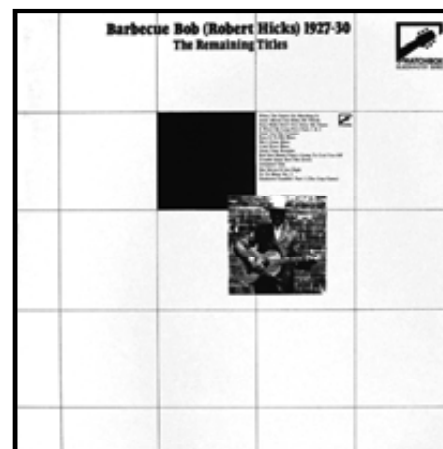
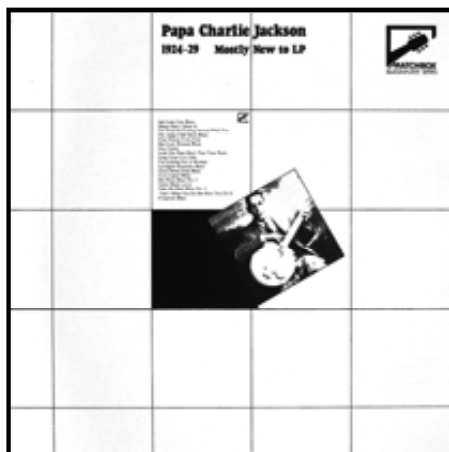
**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 5: MSESET5 (6 albums)**

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)

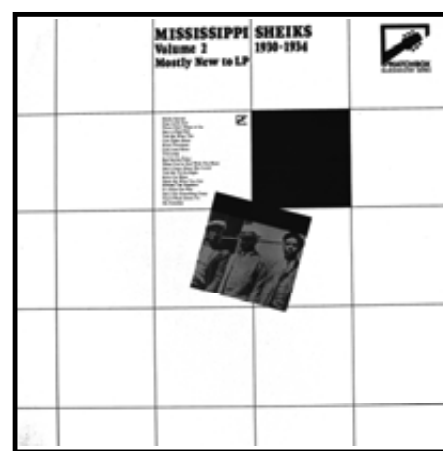
**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES: SET 7: MSESET7 (6 albums)**

MSE 1013 LONNIE JOHNSON VOL. 2 (1927-32)  
MSE 1014 THE FAMOUS HOKUM BOYS (1930-31)  
MSEX 2001/2002 SONGSTERS AND SAINTS VOL. 1 (1925-31)  
MSEX 2003/2004 SONGSTERS AND SAINTS VOL. 2 (1925-31)

# Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 6



- MSE 1007 PAPA CHARLIE JACKSON (1924-29)
- MSE 1008 MEMPHIS JUG BAND (1927-34)
- MSE 1009 BARBECUE BOB (1927-30)
- MSE 1010 LEECAN & COOKSEY (1926-27)
- MSE 1011 ROOSEVELT SYKES (1929-34)
- MSE 1012 MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 2 (1930-34)







# Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 6

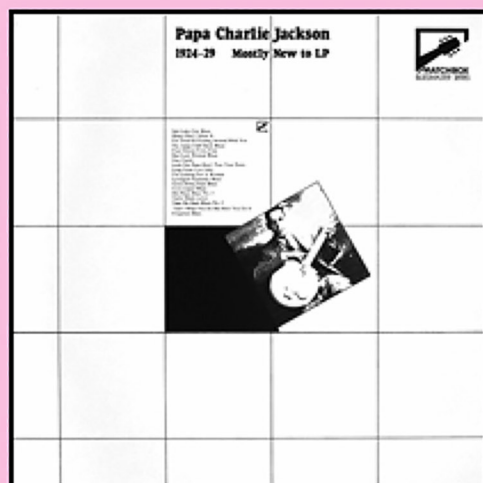


MATCHBOX Bluesmaster Series SET 6

MSESET6 - 6CD set

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- MSE 1007 PAPA CHARLIE JACKSON (1924-29)  
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MSE 1009 BARBECUE BOB (1927-30)  
MSE 1010 LEECAN & COOKSEY (1926-27)  
MSE 1011 ROOSEVELT SYKES (1929-34)  
MSE 1012 MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 2 (1930-34)

