MSESET7

MATCHBOX
BLUESMASTER SERIES

SONGSTERS & SAINTS

VOCAL TRADITIONS ON RACE RECORDS

LONNIE JOHNSON VOL. 2
THE FAMOUS HOKUM BOYS
SONGSTERS AND SAINTS

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 7

Series Editor: Johnny Parth
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Original recordings from the collections of
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Bernd Kuefferle, Ernst Weber, Hans Maitner

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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 very rare or only known surviving copies.

MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES
IS A DIVISION OF SAYDISC RECORDS
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matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series

The 42 albums that make up the iconic Matchbox Bluesmaster Series were released by Saydisc Records during the 1980s.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.

The series documented the early days of blues, hokum and gospel music from 1926 to 1934 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 the music they recorded went on to form the backbone of urban blues, rhythm-and-blues, gospel and, of course, rock-n’-roll. The songs are sometimes raw and primitive in character, but outstanding playing and singing shine 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 wrote highly influential books on the history of blues and gospel music.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: Paul’s 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”)

Gef Lucena - Series Producer

MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES

SET 7: DISC 1: Original vinyl release date: June 1988 **58'24"**

MSE 1013 Lonnie Johnson Volume Two 1927 – 32

Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr; prob. Loise Searcy, pno Chicago, Dec 17, 1927
1 Kansas City Blues – part 1 82092B
2 Kansas City Blues – part 2 82092C
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr New York City, Nov 16, 1928
3 Careless Love 401337-B
Lonnie Johnson and Jimmy Foster, vcl duet;
acc. Lonnie Johnson, gtr, unknown pno. New York City, Feb 27, 1929
4 I Want A Little Some O' That What You Got 4016701-B
Victoria Spivey and Lonnie Johnson, vcl duet, prob. Spivey, pno;
Johnson, gtr New York City, July 3, 1929
5 You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now – pt. 1 404291-B
6 You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now – pt. 2 404292-B
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr/pno on track 9 New York City, Jan 23, 193**0**
7 Death Valley Is Just Half Way To My Home 403668
8 I Got The Best Jelly Roll In Town – part 2 403671-B
9 Don't Drive Me From Your Door 403673
Lonnie Johnson, vcl/gtr
10 Low Down St. Louis Blues 404849-E (test) New York City, March 10 1931
11 Beautiful But Dumb 404946-B New York City, June 16, 1931
12 From A Wash Woman On Up 404947-B New York City, June 16, 1931
13 Not The Chump I Used To Be 404968-B New York City, August 21, 1931
14 Best Jockey In Town 404969-B New York City, August 21, 1931
15 Sleepy Water Blues 405098-A New York City, Dec 3, 1931
Lonnie Johnson (as Jimmy Jordan), vcl/gtr (pno on 18)
16 Cat You Been Messin' Around 152061-1 New York City, Jan 12, 1932
17 Men, Get Wise To Yourself 405140-A New York City, Feb 9, 1932
18 Sam, You're Just A Rat 405141-A New York City, Feb 9, 1932

<u>SET 7: DISC 2</u>: Original vinyl release date: c. August 1988 **44'52"**

MSE 1014 : The Famous Hokum Boys 1930 – 1931

Georgia Tom, vcl/pno; Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/gtr; Frank Brasswell, vcl/gtr

1. Somebody's Been Using That Thing	9585	New York, April 8, 1930
2. Black Cat Rag	9586	–
3. Nancy Jane	9597	–
4. That's The Way She Likes It	9598	–
5. You Can't Get Enough Of That Stuff	9611	–

Georgia Tom, vcl/pno; Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/1st gtr; 2nd gtr; Hannah May, vcl

6. Come On Mama	10041-1	New York, Sept 16, 1930
7. Ain't Going There No More - 1	10035-2	New York, Sept 15 1930

Georgia Tom, vcl/pno; Big Bill Broonzy, gtr; Hannah May, vcl

8. You Do It	10038-2	New York, Sept 16 1930

Georgia Tom, pno; Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/gtr; Bill Williams, vcl/gtr; Hannah May, vcl

9. That Stuff I Got	10039-2	New York, Sept 16, 1930

Georgia Tom, pno; Big Bill Broonzy, vcl/gtr; Jane Lucas, vcl

10. Pie Eating Strut	10050-1	New York, Sept 17, 1930

Kansas City Kitty, vcl; Georgia Tom, vcl/pno; 2nd pno

11. Killing Floor Blues	C-6472	Chicago, c. Nov 1, 1930

Jane Lucas, vcl; Georgia Tom, pno/vcl; Big Bill Broonzy, gtr

12. What's That I Smell	17275-B	Richmond, Nov 19, 1930

Kansas City Kitty, speech/vcl; Georgia Tom, speech/vcl/pno

13. When Can I Get It	C-6849-A	Chicago, c. Dec 17, 1930
14. That Thing's A Mess	C-6850-A	–
15. Root Man Blues	C-6877-A	Chicago, Jan 5, 1931
16. Close Made Papa	C-6878	–

SET 7: DISC 3: *MSEX 2001* Original vinyl release date: Nov 1984
Vocal Traditions on Race Records: Songsters & Saints Vol. 1a **56'44"**

Dances and Travelling Shows

Peg Leg Howell, vcl/gtr; Eddie Anthony, vcl/vln
1. Turkey Buzzard Blues 147343-2 Atlanta. Ga., 30 Oct 1928

Pink Anderson, vcl/gtr; and Simmie Dooley, vcl/gtr/kazoo
2. Gonna Tip Out Tonight 14607-1 Atlanta. Ga., 14 April 1928

James "Beans" Hambone Albert, vcl/gtr; El Morrow, gtr
3. Beans 69337-2 Charlotte, N.C., 23 May 1931

Earl McDonald's Original Louisville Jug Band: Lucien Smith, alto sax; Benny Calvin, mndln; Cal Smith, bjo; Earl McDonald, vcl/jug; vocal chorus by band
4. Under The Chicken Tree 143811-2 Atlanta. Ga., 30 March 1927

Alec Johnson, vcl; Bo Chatman, vln; Joe McCoy, mndln; unknown pno
5. Mysterious Coon 147383-2 Atlanta. Ga., 2 Nov 1928

"Big Boy" George Owens, vcl/gtr
6. The Coon Crap Game 12579 Richmond, Ind., Oct 1928

Memphis Sheiks: Will Shade, hca; Vol Stevens, bjo-mndln; Charlie Burse, gtr/2nd vcl; Jab Jones, jug; Charlie Nickerson, vcl
7. He's In The Jailhouse Now 62990-2 Memphis, Tenn., 21 Nov 1930

Charley Patton, vcl/gtr; Henry Sims, vln
8. Elder Greene Blues L38-1 Grafton, Wis., Oct 1929

Hambone Willie Newbern, vcl/gtr
9. Way Down In Arkansas 402298-B Atlanta, Ga., 13 Mar 1929

Comment, Parodies & Ballad Heroes

Lil McClintock, vcl/gtr
10. Furniture Man 15106-1,-2 Atlanta, Ga., 4 Dec 1930

Julius Daniels, vcl/gtr; acc. prob. Wilbert Andrews, gtr
11. Can't Put The Bridle On that Mule 40347-2 Atlanta, Ga., 24 Oct 1927

Hazekiah Jenkins (sic), vcl/gtr; acc. L. McLain
12. The Panic Is On 151219-2 New York City, 16 Jan 1931

Bogus Ben Covington, vcl/hca/bjo
13. I Heard The Voice Of A Pork Chop 20866-2 Chicago, c. Sept 1928

Johnson–Nelson–Porkchop: Porkchop, vcl; vcl chorus; probably different musician, gtr
14. G. Burns Is Gonna Rise Again 400259-A17 Memphis, Tenn., Feb 1928
Bo Chatman, vcl/vln; prob. Charlie McCoy, mndln; Walter Vincson, gtr
15. Good Old Turnip Greens * NOR-756 New Orleans, La.,c. Dec 1928
Two Poor Boys: Joe Evans, vcl/poss. gtr/mndln; Arthur McClain, vcl/poss. gtr/ mndln
16. John Henry Blues * 10650-3 New York City, 20 May 1931
Will Bennett, vcl/gtr
17. Railroad Bill K-127 Knoxville, Tenn., 28 Aug 1929
Kid Coley, vcl/prob. own pno; Clifford Hayes, vln
18. Clair And Pearley Blues 69429-1 Louisville, Ky., 13 Jun 1931

SET 7: DISC 4: *MSEX 2002* Original vinyl release date Nov 1984 **56'22"**
Songsters & Saints Vol. 1b: Vocal Traditions on Race Records

Baptist and Sanctified Preachers
Rev. Jim Beal, preaching with congregation
1. The Hand Of The Lord Was Upon Me (And I Went Out In The Spirit) C-4163 Chicago, 24 Aug 1929
Rev. A. W. Nix, preaching with congregation
2. After The Ball Is Over C-1019 Chicago, 29 Jun 1927
Rev. Isaiah Shelton, preaching with congregation
3. As The Eagle Stirreth In Her Nest 37984-2 New Orleans, 8 Mar 1927
Rev. J. M. Milton, preaching with congregation
4. Silk Worms And Boll Weavils 149375 Atlanta, Ga., 5 Nov 1929
Rev. R. M. Massey preaching with congregation
5. Old Time Baptism – Part 2 * 20285-3 Chicago, Jan 1928
Rev. J. E. Burch, preaching and singing with congregation; acc. tamb; bass dms; snare dms; gtr
6. Baptism By Water, And Baptism By The Holy Ghost 40339-2 Atlanta, Ga., 23 Oct 1927

Rev. E. S. (Shy) Moore, preaching and singing with congregation (seven women, four men) acc. pno; gtr; jug
7. The Solemn Warning 47087-1 Memphis, Tenn., 22 Sep 1928
Elder Curry, preaching and singing with congregation acc. Elder Charles Beck, pno; Jo Ann Williams, vcl
8. Prove All Things 404781-1 Jackson, Miss., 18 Dec 1930
Rev. Leora Ross, sermon and singing with the Church of the Living God Jubilee Singers
9. God's Mercy To Colonel Lindbergh 82067-B Chicago,14 Dec 1927

<u>Gospel Soloists and Evangelists</u>
Missionary Josephine Mills, preaching, singing; Sister Elizabeth Cooper, vcl/pno
10. You Have Lost Jesus * 13844 Richmond, Ind.,16 May 1928
Mother McCollum, vcl/poss. gtr; acc. gtr
11. When I Take My Vacation In Heaven * C-5833 Chicago, Jun 1930
Eddie Head, vcl/poss. gtr and His Family, gtr/vcl/tamb
12. Down On Me 194915-2 Atlanta, Ga., 22 Apr 1930
Washington Phillips, vcl/dulceola
13. I Am Born To Preach The Gospel 147560-2 Dallas, Texas 2 Dec 1927
Blind Roosevelt Graves, vcl/gtr; and Brother Uaroy Graves, vcl/ tamb; "Baby Jay" James, cnt; Will Ezell, pno
14. Telephone To Glory 15646 Richmond, Ind., 20 Sep 1929
The Guitar Evangelist – Edward W. Clayborn, vcl/gtr
15. Death Is Only A Dream C-739 Chicago,19 Apr 1927
Blind Willie Davis, vcl/gtr
16. Your Enemy Cannot Harm You * 21051-2 Chicago, Dec 1928
Blind Gussie Nesbit, vcl/gtr
17. Pure Religion 151012-2 Chicago,Dec 1928
William and Versey Smith: William Smith, vcl/poss. gtr; Versey Smith, vcl/poss.tamb
18. When That Great Ship Went Down * 4685 Chicago, Aug 1927

SET 7: DISC 5: *MSEX 2003* Original vinyl release date May 1985 **54'43"**
Songsters & Saints Vol. 2a: Vocal Traditions on Race Records

Medicine Show Songsters
Papa Charlie Jackson,vcl/bjo

1.	I'm Alabama Bound	2144-2	Chicago, c. May 1925
2.	Long Gone Lost John	20292-1	Chicago, c. Jan 1928

Cannon's Jug Stompers:
Gus Cannon, vcl/bjo; Hosea Woods, bjo; Noah Lewis, hca

3.	Money Never Runs Out	64746	Memphis, Tenn., 28 Nov 1930

Banjo Joe (Gus Cannon):
Gus Cannon, vcl/bjo; Blind Blake, gtr

4.	Can You Blame The Colored Man	20148-2	Chicago, c. Nov 1927

Jim Jackson, vcl/gtr

5.	Bye, Bye, Policeman	45492-2	Memphis, Tenn., 7 Sept 1928
6.	My Monday Woman Blues	41800-1	Memphis, Tenn., 30 Jan 1928
7.	Old Dog Blue	41827-1,-2	Memphis, Tenn., 2 Feb 1928

BEALE STREET SHEIKS (STOKES AND SANE)
Frank Stokes, vcl/gtr; Dan Sane, gtr

8.	Mr. Crump Don't Like It	20045-2	Chicago, c. Sep 1927
9.	Chicken You Can Roost Behind The Moon	20047-2	Chicago, c. Sep 1927

Songsters East And West
STOVEPIPE NO.1 AND DAVID CROCKETT
Sam Jones, vcl/hca/stovepipe; David Crockett, gtr

10.	A Chicken Can Waltz The Gravy Around–1	80759-B	St. Louis Mo., 26 Apr 1927
11.	A Woman Gets Tired Of The Same Man All The Time –2 *	80758-A	-

HENRY THOMAS: "RAGTIME TEXAS"
Henry Thomas, vcl/gtr/quills

12.	Old Country Stomp	C-2008	Chicago, 13 Jun 1928
13.	Bob McKinney	C-1202	Chicago, 5 Oct 1927

14. Arkansas C-1028 Chicago, 1 Jul 1927

LUKE JORDAN

Luke Jordan vcl/gtr

15. Traveling Coon * 39822-1 Charlotte, N.C., 16 Aug 1927
16. Cocaine Blues * 39821-2 -

BLIND BLAKE

Blind Arthur Blake, vcl/gtr; Gus Cannon, bjo (on 17)

17. He's In The Jailhouse Now 20147-1 Chicago, c. Nov 1927
18. West Coast Blues 2669-3 Chicago, c. Aug 1926

SET 7: DISC 6: ***MSEX 2004*** Original vinyl release date May 1985 **56'30"**
Songsters & Saints Vol. 2b: Vocal Traditions on Race Records

The Straining Preachers

Rev. J. C. Burnett, vcl; Sister Ethel Grainger, vcl;
Sister Odette Jackson, vcl

1. The Downfall Of Nebuchadnezzar 142802-1 N.Y.C., 8 Oct 1926
2. The Gambler's Doom 144776-2 N.Y.C., 21 Sep 1927

Reverend John M. Gates, vcl; acc. congregation

3. Yonder Comes My Lord With A Bible In His Hand 36479-2 Chicago, 1 Dec 1926

Reverend John M. Gates, vcl; Deacon Leon Davis,
Sisters Jordan and Norman, vcl

4. God's Wrath In The St. Louis Cyclone* 81699-B Atlanta, Ga., 6 Oct 1927

Reverend John M. Gates, vcl; acc. congregation

5. The Eagle Stirs Her Nest * 400302-B Memphis, Tenn., 23 Feb 1928

Rev. F. W. McGee

Reverend Ford Washington McGee, vcl; acc 4 vcl; tmb; pno; gtr; dms

6. The Half Ain't Never Been Told 42385-2 Chicago, 1 Jun 1928

Reverend Ford Washington McGee, vcl; acc 4 vcl; cnt; pno; gtr; str.bs

7. Jonah In the Belly Of The Whale 38650-1 Chicago, 7 Jun 1927

Reverend D. C Rice, vcl; members of congregation; Hunter, tmb; Louis Hooper, pno; mndln; triangle

8. Come And See C-2009 Chicago, 13 Jun 1928
Reverend D. C. Rice, vcl; Sisters Black and Rice, vcl; pno; dms
9. We Got The Same Kind Of Power Over Here C-6022
Chicago, 16 Jul 1930

<u>Songsters East and West: Saints of Church and Street</u>
Arizona Juanita Dranes, vcl/pno
10. It's All Right Now 9738-A Chicago, 17 Jun 1926
Arizona Dranes and Choir:
Arizona Dranes vcl/pno; unk mndln; four (?) female vcl
11. Just Look 400983-B Chicago, 3 Jul 1928
Blind Joe Taggart and Emma Taggart, vocal duet
12. I Wish My Mother Was On That Train
(no matrix no.) New York City, 8 Nov 1926
Blind Joe Taggart, vcl/gtr; Joshua White, vcl/gtr
13. There's A Hand Writing On The Wall * 20940-2 Chicago, c. Oct 1928 ***Blind Willie Johnson, vcl/gtr***
14. If I Had My Way I'd Tear That Building Down
145321-3 Dallas, Texas 3 Dec 1927
15. God Moves On the Water 149599-1 New Orleans, La., 11 Dec 1929
Blind Willie Johnson, vcl/gtr; Angeline Johnson, vcl
16. The Rain Don't Fall On Me 150310-2 Atlanta, Ga., 20 April 1930
Elders McIntorsh and Edwards
Lonnie McIntorsh, vcl/gtr; and Elder Edwards, vcl/gtr; Sister Bessie Johnson, vcl; Sister Melinda Taylor, vcl; acc tamb, clapping
17. The Latter Rain Is Fall 402162-A Chicago, 4 Dec 1928
Memphis Sanctified Singers
Bessie Johnson, Melinda Taylor, Sally Sumler vcl; Will Shade, gtr
18 He Got Better Things For You 56321-2 Memphis, Tenn., 1 Oct 1929

Disc 1: MSE 1013 Lonnie Johnson Volume Two 1927 – 32

In May 1927 Lonnie Johnson had made the last title, **Back Water Blues**, that he was to cut in St. Louis and three months later he was in the Okeh studios in New York. He was hot property for the Okeh company and they needed him close by for the frequent short sessions that had been arranged for him. St Louis, and his wife, the singer Mary Johnson, were still in his mind as titles like **St. Louis Cyclone Blues**, **Stay Out Of Walnut Street Alley** and **Tin Can Alley Blues** indicated; even in December that year he made **The St Louis Train Kept Passing By**, but Lonnie himself was passing the city by. He left his wife at her home on Biddle Street and hardly ever returned. New York was exciting and sophisticated, and there were many new opportunities opening up for him, there and in Chicago.

On the 10th of December that year he was in Chicago, sneaking a session for Gennett (when **St. Louis Train** was made) with pianist Jimmy Blythe and cloaking his identity by a chain of pseudonyms. A few days later he was brought in to record with Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five, in place of Johnny St. Cyr, contributing splendidly to the classical recordings of **I'm Not Rough**, **Hotter Than That** and **Savoy Blues**. After this illustrious company going back to recording blues must have seemed a bit tame, especially as Okeh had got him to record a two-part cover version of Jim Jackson's **Kansas City Blues**. It had just come out and was having great success even though Jackson was an unknown artist north of Memphis at this stage. Lonnie seems not to have been enthused by the assignment and the opening was lack lustre, but it gained as he warmed to the theme, introducing variants to the tune and his own new stanzas. Perhaps it was Okeh that prompted him to go on tour at this stage soon after. In February 1928 he was in Memphis on Jim Jackson's home ground, appearing, no doubt, at the Palace Theatre on Beale and carving up the local guitarists with his dazzling playing. Whilst there he recorded his outstanding solos **Playing With The Strings** and **Stompin' Em Along Slow**, but Okeh had other plans for him. He was in San Antonio three weeks later providing the sympathetic support to Texas

Alexander that the singer needed, as I've explained on *Texas Alexander Vol. 1* (MSE 206).

From then on Okeh wanted Lonnie at their studios in New York and, in fact, he did not record elsewhere for over a decade. Perhaps too he was slightly miffed by the fact that he entered a blues singing contest at Ella B. Moore's Park Theatre on Central Tracks in Dallas whilst he was in Texas. After the runaway success of his contest appearances in St. Louis in 1925 (recounted in the notes for *Lonnie Johnson Vol. 1* (MSE 1006), he could expect this one to be a walkover and he played memorably and sang well.The first prize however went to the local girl Lillian Glinn and Lonnie had to be content with second place; an unfamiliar position for him at that and any other time.

At the first session back in New York he made **Careless Love**, the kind of song that in some respects suited Lonnie well; even so, he rarely sang blues standards after that. The ideas were flowing and he was better with his own compositions and experiments like recording with Eddie Lang and dueting with Spencer Williams, or with the otherwise unknown Jimmy Foster on **I Want A Little Some O' What You Got**; a trifle in itself but with a sparkling guitar solo. He struck up a friendship with Victoria Spivey around this time, though they had first met under the watchful eye of Mary Johnson in St. Louis, with Lonnie accompanying Victoria on the St. Louis session which produced her celebrated **T-B Blues**. In New York they made many titles in 1927 and 1928, including some two-part duets which were witty and suggestive; **New Black Snake Blues**, **Toothache Blues**, **Furniture Man Blues** and the coupling on this collection, **You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now**. They swapped verses with ease and Victoria may even have been the pianist on this relaxed occasion. Lonnie's liking for this kind of song and the sophistication of his new life in New York did not impair his capacity to create good and thoughtful blues of which **Death Valley Is Just Half Way to My Home**, based on the **Lonesome Road** theme, was one of the best at this period.

It was an extraordinary time in his

career. He had appeared with Duke Ellington's Orchestra on titles like **The Mooche** and **Misty Mornin'**, taking a beautiful solo on the latter. The following year, 1929, he was on another exceptional recording by Louis Armstrong, **Mahogany Hall Stomp**, and the rare mixed session on which Hoagy Carmichael and Eddie Lang joined King Oliver for **Jet Black Blues**. He was so much in demand that he was invited to front the pit orchestra at the Stanton Theatre in Philadelphia and even had his own radio show, probably the first blues singer to do so; he broadcast over WPAP/WOV from New York, with his *Lonnie Johnson, Recording Guitarist* programme. To crown the year 1929 he was invited by Bessie Smith to go on tour with her *Midnight Steppers* show. He escorted her throughout the show and they had a casual affair, though he was too aware of Bessie's mercurial temperament to take the liaison seriously.

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 threatened to end Lonnie's career, like it did that of many another artist as the theatres began to close down and the record companies felt the pinch of the dollar crisis. Yet so popular was he that he was in the studio to record no less than ten times in 1930, five times in 1931 and five more in 1932. The sessions were interesting in many ways; for the fact that he played piano on **Don't Drive Me From Your Door** for instance. As the Depression began to bite, several of his blues took on a rather bitter tone, though this may have reflected problems in his own life. Certainly he looked back to St. Louis once more and, on the unissued **Low Down St. Louis Blues,** gave a catalogue of the violent women there that could hardly have been on a mere whim; **Beautiful But Dumb** sustains the mood. He used a more familiar song base for **From a Wash Woman On Up** than the title would suggest. Perhaps he was challenging Bo Carter, who was now beginning to make a name for himself. It seems as if he was fending off all comers: no other blues guitarist could match his solo on **Not The Chump I Used To Be**, with its flashes of Spanish brilliance. **Sleepy Water** may seem somewhat sentimental, at least in the image of' *“Aunt Jemmy waiting by the cabin door”*, though “*Aunt Jemima*” was almost certainly the “*Aunt*

Jemima" of the Quaker Oat publicity (played by Edith Wilson). An unexpected outspokenness appears in **Cat You Been Messin' Aroun'** : *"now I said it wasn't my child but you argued me down; my eyes ain't blue and my hair ain't brown ..."* **Men, Get Wise To Yourself,** with its comments on pimps and gigolos, is also a blues with a note of asperity; like **Sam, You're Just A Rat**, it is one of the many reproving blues of this period in his work addressed to a specific listener. On this, Lonnie plays piano and takes a good and inventive solo. He was at his peak but Okeh was in trouble. When the label was withdrawn Lonnie went with them, and though he recorded again five years later he never quite recaptured the flair he displayed between 1927 and 1932.

Disc 2: MSE 1014 The Famous Hokum Boys 1930 – 1931

There's probably no aspect of the blues which has received so little attention as "*Hokum*"; It's a positive embarrassment to many blues collectors, I suspect. Some might argue that Hokum isn't blues at all, but in fact most songs recorded in the genre are structurally twelve-bar blues, though they do not generally take the three-line form. The number of artists who recorded Hokum is not inconsiderable, but before discussing them we should endeavour to establish what was meant by it.

"*Hokum*" was not a new word when it was applied to an aspect of blues music; in fact it had been in use in the theatre for at least fifty years, and probably longer. A piece of "*business*" which had been more or less guaranteed to get a laugh was called hokum; so was low or coarse comedy. A performer who mugged, made grimaces, told crowd-pleasing jokes was a "*hoke-artist*". Whilst these devices were also known as hokum, conmen (confidence tricksters) too used the term extensively. Hokum for them meant the "*come-on*" of patter and deceit that attracted a crowd or encouraged a sucker to fall for their line of jive. Suave talk or blarney, and any statements that were absurd or were palpably erroneous to all but the gullible, were similarly termed hokum.

Among jazz musicians hokum was an early term for "*faking*" or improvising. A hoke chorus was a hot solo, especially one which

employed tricky fingering and flashy techniques that were bound to impress the uninitiated. Of course the term slipped into general usage to some extent, as so many theatrical and musical words have in the past.

From these usages we can deduce that "*hokum*" had associations of routine business, of pleasing the crowd, of low comedy, of skilful or deceptive performance, and, bearing in mind the users of the word, a certain knowingness is implied, a shared, in-group (theatre, gambling, confidence hoaxing) understanding of its role. There's a measure of sophisticated cleverness there too, which places the audience at a slight disadvantage.

Many of these overtones of meaning are present in the Hokum recordings, particularly the low comedy, the repeated "*business*" routines, the skilful playing of light-weight material, the deceptions that exist in the double-entendre jokes and the knowing, in-group references in the lyrics and comments. Just who first used the term in the context of black music cannot be known for sure, but it was very likely to have been Tampa Red.

It was he, I believe, who first used it on record, when he made a few titles in October and November 1928 with his Hokum Jug Band. Of course, the deceptive "trumpet", "brass bass" and percussion of kazoo, jug and washboard justified the use of the word to describe the group. Its first title was **Good Gordon Gin** but Vocalion shrewdly chose the routine number **It's Tight Like That** for the first issue under the hokum name.

Interestingly though, very soon after, in December 1928, Coley Jones with the Dallas String Band made **Hokum Blues**; the first time that the word appeared in a title, which neatly summarised its nonserious, 12-bar vocal sung in chorus. I suspect that they had hit upon it directly from theatrical use; at Ella B. Moore's Park Theatre in Dallas, perhaps. For the next couple of years (even into the late 1930s in some cases) there was a stream of records by Tampa Red's Hokum Jug Band, The Hokum Boys, the Hokum Trio, The Hokum Boys with Jane Lucas, as well as those by the Famous Hokum Boys featured on this collection.

At the core of the Hokum groups appear to have been Tampa Red (Hudson Woodbridge) and Big Bill

Broonzy, guitarists, Georgia Tom Dorsey, pianist, the vocalists Jane Lucas and Hannah May (possibly one and the same) and Kansas City Kitty (believed to be Thelma Holmes); but there were many other musicians whose records were made and issued under this banner, either with one or more of the above, or separately. They included (with a few uncertainties) pianists Aletha Dickerson, Alex Hill, Alex Robinson, Jimmie Blythe and Black Bob; guitarists Frank Brasswell, Martell Pettiford, Bill Williams, Bob Alexander, Casey Bill Weldon and Blind Blake; clarinettists Bob Robinson and Cecil Scott; jazzhorn players Carl Reid and Herman Brown; bass players Bill Johnson and Bill Settles; washboard players Jasper Taylor and Washboard Sam; and vocalists Banjo Ikey Robinson, Teddy Edwards, Frankie Jaxon and various members of the bands already listed. Among their number are many highly regarded blues and jazz musicians and one may conclude that they enjoyed the “good times” atmosphere of the Hokum band.

The Famous Hokum Boys, namely Georgia Tom and Big Bill Broonzy with either Frank Brasswell or Bill Williams, and a vocalist – Jane Lucas/Hannah May or Kansas City Kitty – were arguably the most musically accomplished of the groups. Listen for instance to **Black Cat Rag** or the “contest”, **Pie-Eating Strut**. Though these are immaculately played instrumentally – with some remarkably spontaneous comment from Jane Lucas on the latter – there are many other delights. Even on a routine song like **Somebody's Been Using That Thing** there's some stompy piano and excellent guitar work. This item follows a popular 12-bar pattern in Hokum songs, with a 4-bar couplet, followed by an 8-bar chorus on an AABA sequence. It appears again on such titles as **Nancy Jane**, **You Do It** or **That Thing's A Mess**. There are other song forms, which can be identified by some of their better-known versions, like the **Beedle-Um-Bum** type on **That Stuff I Got**; the **Tickle Britches** type on **You Can't Get Enough** or the **Ain't Gonna Rain No More** form on **Ain't Going There No More**. The popularity of these forms in Hokum helps to define its character, but there are several others that are used like, for

instance, the line and answering refrain pattern of **That's The Way She Likes It.**

Several of these items are clearly intended for dancing, none more so than **Come On Mama**. Many dances are mentioned on this track, yet they are also intended to be listened to closely; their words being full of allusions in both content and delivery. Take **What's That I Smell**, a routine comic double entendre, when Jane Lucas sings: *"pull off your shirt and your underwear, there's your pajamas hanging on the chair"* she is implying a new level of urban sophistication, and there's a hint of the tired excuse in Dorsey's pronunciation of: *"just been down on the corner with the boys."* Another item with an obvious sexual metaphor is **Killing Floor Blues**, but it takes as a point of reference the meat-packers' stockyards that bounded the South Side in the 1920s. *"My man works at the stockyard, cleanin' chittlin's upon that killin' flo' "* says Kansas City Kitty , introducing the theme, yet **Root Man**, again a song with a double meaning, plays on Southern superstition and the potion of the "root doctor". with mention of the Georgia Jimson root and the Louisiana Crooked Root giving specific references within the general metaphor.

Clearly, hokum 78s were popular; in the case of The Hokum Boys the companies recorded different artists under the same name, exploiting its evident sales appeal, but why were they so popular and what did they mean to their listeners? It seems to me very likely that hokum recordings performed a social function. They were essentially Northern and urban in character; even when the references (as in **Root Man**) were Southern and rural, they brought a new lightness and sophistication to the idiom, contrasting with the heavy emotionalism and seriousness of much Southern blues. Migrants from the South who were learning to adjust to the North may have found in the jokiness, the clever words, the skilled playing and the in-group asides of hokum a means of coming to terms with their new environment; but, apart from that of course, the Famous Hokum Boys, in particular, provided good party entertainment!

Discs 3 & 4: Songsters & Saints MSEX 2001/2: Vol. 1

In his innovatory book "Songsters &

Saints", Paul Oliver rediscovered the wealth of neglected vocal traditions issued on Race Records. When blues first reached a large audience it was through the "Race records" issued specifically for black purchasers in the 1920s. Blues as performed on the professional stage and, later, folk blues from the South have been extensively discussed by many writers. Paul Oliver shows that this emphasis has drawn attention away from the other Important vocal traditions also available on Race Records: the songs of Southern rural dances, the comic and social songs and ballads of the medicine shows and travelling entertainments, and, even more neglected, the sacred vocal traditions, from the song-sermons of the Baptist and Sanctified preachers to the gospel songs of the church congregations and of the "jack·leg" preachers and street evangelists. The 72 tracks on the four albums have been carefully selected by Paul Oliver to be representative of the subjects discussed in his book.

Recordings of black vaudeville, jazz-blues and "classic blues" singers were not marketed to a black audience until 1920, while a further four years had to pass before the first Southern folk blues appeared on disc. Yet home phonographs had been available since the beginning of the century. If blacks had been extensively recorded in the intervening years, how would we view the history of black song today? What forms of black folk song were current before the 1920s and how did they link with past traditions? How were they learned and circulated before recording and how important was blues before it was vigorously promoted by the record companies on their "Race records", issued in segregated lists? What forms of black vocal, both secular and sacred, have been diminished by the promotion of blues and largely overlooked by writers on blues in the past twenty-five years? These are questions addressed by my book "*Songsters and Saints – Vocal Traditions on Race Records*", which this collection of recordings illustrates.

Many black performers were farmers and sharecroppers, or worked in mundane occupations; they played for travelling shows when they could or were part-time preachers and evangelists. These

“songsters” and “saints” were poised between the folk and popular idioms; sometimes they were casual entertainers, sometimes they were able to earn their living through their playing, singing or preaching. Their music reflected both folk and professional techniques and repertoires and often drew from a wide variety of sources. Peg Leg Howell, for example, though he figures prominently in the history of blues, drew on work songs, street songs and dance themes, playing in the streets and at country dances. His **Turkey Buzzard Blues,** made with his fiddle-playing companion, Eddie Anthony, was not a blues but a song that was already a century old and popular in the earliest minstrel shows. Country suppers, picnics and other functions provided opportunities for large social gatherings and many songsters and “musicianers” played for them. These rural dances helped to relieve tensions, as **Gonna Tip Out Tonight** implies. With voices hardened by years of singing without amplification, Blind Simmie Dooley and Pink Anderson performed it to interweaving guitar rhythms. The song was also recorded by “Beans” Hambone and El Morrow, country musicians from North Carolina. Their **Beans** was an old song from the vaudeville stage whose bizarre imagery obviously appealed to them and on which they could elaborate.

Many songs of the ragtime era passed into the tradition, picked up from road shows or from widely distributed sheet music. Such songs of the Nineties often reflected current stereotypes of the black community in words that were offensive or condescending. Paradoxically, many of their composers were black writers, who successfully exploited the song craze while handling the themes with humour or irony. One of the most skilled was Irving Jones, whose **Under the Chicken Tree** placed the black's reputed weakness for chicken in the context of an extravagant, ludicrous dream. Played by Earl McDonald's Louisville-based jug band it was given typical road show treatment; the band frequently used ragtime and folk themes.

Literally hundreds of “Coon” songs were published at the turn of the century during a period of ever more restrictive segregation. In white songs the “Coon” was seen as a figure of ridicule; in black ones as a

cunning “trickster”, outwitting by his skill or supernatural powers. Alec Johnson's suave hero in the song of the **Mysterious Coon** would have appealed for his enigmatic and arrogant personality; the song was put over with the atmospheric mannerisms of the tent show. Originally the wry hero of **The Coon Crap Game** was the subject of fun in a white minstrel song known as **I Got Mine**, but it was swiftly appropriated by black entertainers who worked the “doctor shows”, including Pink Anderson. Here it is performed in typical style by George “Big Boy” Owens. **He's In the Jailhouse Now** was another extremely popular song of this type, with its sly observations on carpetbagger politicians and friends in influential places. Charlie Nickerson, sometime pianist with the Memphis Jug Band (for which the Memphis Sheiks is a pseudonym), sings it, bringing in familiar personalities. Jug bands played often for medicine shows and even for political events.

While some of these songs can be traced to their authors, others are part of a folk tradition which is anonymous, or which has been plundered by composers. **Elder Greene** is part of a song-cycle that includes **Don't You Leave Me Here** and **Alabama Bound**, which refers always to leaving for a new and frequently unspecified place. As much songster as he was blues singer, Charley Patton performed it in characteristically growling fashion. Another older singer, Hambone Willie Newbern from rural Tennessee, is noted for his **Roll And Tumble Blues,** but he was famed as a songster. His **Way Down In Arkansas**, sung in a rasping voice in contrast to the nostalgic words, was one of the songs that evoked images of an idealised South.

Such songs might seem escapist but there were others that were realist in content. Recorded in Georgia, Lil McClintock's **Furniture Man** made pointed comment on the recovery men who took away domestic items bought on the “instalment plan”. It was known to poor whites as well as blacks, but for the latter it was by no means easy to protest openly at injustice in the early part of the century. Song provided a vehicle for complaint as in the case of Julius Daniels' **Can't Put the Bridle On That Mule This Morning**, which employed a “n----- and the

white man" verse that had been collected as far back as the 1870s. Many old songs and stanzas were adapted as events recurred; there had been several economic "Panics" to inspire songs in the past, and **The Panic Is On** by Hezekiah Jenkins was a remodelling of an earlier theme. It described the devices used by the poor to hustle through the worst of the Depression. Conditions of poverty and hunger were reflected in many sardonic songs; one that was popular on the medicine shows was **I Heard the Voice of A Pork Chop,** a parody on **I Heard the Voice From Heaven Say**, sung here by the fake blind man "Bogus" Ben Covington. It told with black humour of the pangs of starvation, called at the time the "miss meal cramps", a phrase which provided a title for an Alec Johnson song and which is to be heard in the patter of another parody, **G. Burns Is Gonna Rise Again** by "Blue Coat" Tom Nelson and a minstrel team. Their technique dates back to the earliest days of blackface comedy.

Some of these songs were probably white in origin, or "crossed over" between the races. This may apply to the ballads too; no one knows whether the ballad of **John Henry** is of white or black origin, though its steel-driving hero is generally thought to have been black. "The Two Poor Boys", Arthur Evans and Joe McClain, had obviously played it countless times. Another ballad, **Railroad Bill**, told of a celebrated Alabama desperado of the Nineties. Often collected in the field and popular with whites, the song was only made once for a Race record, by Will Bennett of Loudon, Tennessee. Its form was close to that of blues and this is even more evident in Kid Coley's Kentucky recording of **Clair and Pearley**, a ballad in content and approach, but a blues in structure. Ballads were undoubtedly losing out to the blues by the end of the Twenties.

If blues were immensely popular the appeal of blues singers was matched and often excelled by that of the preachers, the sales of whose records frequently exceeded those of even Bessie Smith. Their remarkable evocations of black church services have been grossly neglected, though they are as important and exciting. Take Reverend Jim Beal, for instance, who was heard preaching in the streets of Chicago, having

come north from Mississippi. His **The Hand Of the Lord Was Upon Me** graphically described the *Valley of Dry Bones* into which Ezekiel walked, with stresses placed on certain syllables which emphasised the narrative. Biblical stories with colourful imagery appealed to the Baptist preachers, who often applied them to contemporary situations. On **After the Ball Is Over,** Reverend A. W. Nix from Alabama dwelled on the dance of Salome before drawing a moral that was applicable to modem life. “Straining preachers” like Reverend Nix made considerable use of vocal dynamics and hoarse exhortations, which were much admired by their congregations. These forced notes are to be heard on Reverend Isaiah Shelton's version of the favourite theme **As the Eagle Stirreth Her Nest,** which, like all Baptist sermons, had no musical accompaniment, but was alive with responses from the church members. On **Silk Worms and Boll Weevils** Reverend J.M. Milton employed a contemporary theme to point a moral. His recording concluded with a fine, traditional long-meter spiritual, but the content of his sermon was probably a response to the pressure of the Sanctified churches, whose sermons, faith and practice were challenging the Baptists. Total immersion baptism in a pool or river was an essential religious experience for those seeking admission to the Baptist church. Of several recordings of the ceremony Reverend R. M. Massey's **Old Time Baptism** is probably the most authentic, though the strain took its toll of both his voice and the record surface. For the Sanctified churches however, “Baptism by Fire and by the Holy Ghost” was considered more important, as Reverend J. E. Burch's **Baptism By Water and Baptism By the Holy Ghost**, made with a small string group, demonstrates. Members of the most popular of the Pentecostal and Sanctified churches, such as The Church of God in Christ, were permitted to indulge in “Holy Dancing” and playing music, even if they had to be mindful that many young people were on “the Hell-bound train”, as Reverend Shy Moore reminded them on **The Solemn Warning.** Appropriately, this Memphis preacher had a jug band to accompany him. Such a secular support would have been unthinkable

to Baptists and the Sanctified churches were frequently condemned; they had to “prove” their behaviour through the evidence of the Bible, as did Elder Curry in **Prove All Things** on which he was accompanied by Elder Beck on piano.

Women preachers were admissible in the Sanctified churches, like Reverend Leora Ross of the Church of the Living God. She drew a moral concerning the value of prayer in **God's Mercy To Colonel Lindbergh,** the celebrated aviator. It is hard to believe that the insipid Josie Miles became the powerful preacher Missionary Josephine Miles, whose **You Have Lost Jesus** was backed by ragtime-influenced piano. But she may have been transformed by the strength of her faith. A charming and naive conviction comes across in Mother McCollum's **When I Take My Vacation In Heaven**, its lilting melody sung to two guitars. Soloists, small groups and families frequently sang in the churches of their denominations and at the annual conventions, bringing comfort and reassurance to the members. Eddie Head had one such family group, who sang of the rewards of the next world after the rigours of life on earth, in **Down On Me.**

Not all the singers of the new gospel of good news were attached to a church; some were “jack-legs”, and preached in the streets, like Washington Phillips who accompanied himself on his home-made “dulceola”. He had *“never been to College”* but he had received the “*Call”* as he explained on **I Am Born To Preach the Gospel**. More ambivalent was the position of Blind Roosevelt Graves and his brother Uaroy, for they recorded both secular and sacred items. **Telephone To Glory** was a modem Pentecostalist song which they performed with customary rhythmic drive. Street singers like “The Guitar Evangelist” Edward W. Clayborn, would play outside the churches for small coins. Clayborn's arid voice was offset on **Death Is Only A Dream** by his deft slide guitar; the song had been published some years before. Another of his songs was **Your Enemy Cannot Harm You** but here it is sung by Blind Willie Davis from Southern Mississippi, who must have learned it either through oral transmission or from the record. Blindness caused many blacks to earn a living from their music; Blind

Gussie Nesbit from South Carolina was another sightless singer whose version of the popular gospel song **Pure Religion** was also played with a slide on the guitar strings.

With the rise of the Holiness movement in the late Nineties many collections of gospel songs, composed by both white and black writers, were published. So were “ballets” or song sheets, often in ballad form, which were sold by the singers who featured them in the streets. Several ballets were circulated on the theme of the sinking of the Titanic, and William and Versey Smith's nasal version of **When That Great Ship Went Down** was closely related to a couple of them. Recorded fifteen years after the event it described, their song underlines the persistence in the folk tradition of the songs that were current before Race records began.

Even though the records made by the songsters and saints of the Twenties were subject to the whims and preferences of talent scouts and record company representatives and, though many forms of black song were not to be found on Race records, these discs afford us virtually the only access we have to many kinds of black song as they were heard early in the century. Because they were made by black performers for black purchasers, they give us a strong indication of the vocal traditions that flourished before the individualistic blues, and the sophisticated gospel groups, claimed all the attention of the record companies.

Discs 5 & 6: **MSEX 2003/2004 Songsters & Saints Vol. 2**

In the first volume of “*Songsters and Saints*” many examples of the black song and preaching traditions that were to be heard on record in the second half of the Twenties were brought together. They were intended to illustrate the variety of performers and themes, both sacred and secular, that were current early in the century before they were largely eclipsed by the growing popularity of blues and gospel song. Some of these artists were recorded relatively extensively, Peg Leg Howell, Charley Patton, Bo Chatman, Reverend A. W. Nix, Washington Phillips and Edward W. Clayborn among them; but there were others who only made one or two records, like Beans Hambone, Big Boy George Owens, Will Bennett, Reverend Isaiah Shelton,

Reverend E. S. Moore, Eddie Head or William and Versey Smith. Their brief appearances give us some impression of the resources that were scarcely tapped by the record companies.

From the recollections of their contemporaries we know that a number of highly regarded singers and preachers were overlooked or missed by the field recording units. How they compared with those on disc we can only guess, but we are fortunate that many outstanding performers were extensively recorded. From their repertoires we can get a fuller impression of their range and versatility and by comparison we can reconstruct some of the popular songs and themes that circulated in the South a lifetime ago.

All the songsters included here were born in the nineteenth century and most had reached their teens by 1900. Oldest was Henry Thomas, born in 1874, the youngest was probably Luke Jordan, who was born nearly twenty years later, in 1892, a span of years which in itself suggests the longevity of the traditions they represented. It was customary for youngsters interested in music to start learning in childhood, so it is not surprising to find in the playing of some of these songsters the traces of old styles of black music-making. Thomas for instance, played the “quills”, sets of cane stalks or reeds clamped pan-pipe fashion, which were noted before the Civil War. He was a guitarist but the banjo was the favoured instrument among songsters before the popularisation of cheap guitars in the Nineties and both Gus Cannon (who called himself “Banjo Joe”) and Papa Charlie Jackson recorded all their considerable output playing this instrument. Cannon also performed on a “Jug” – actually a kerosene can to which he attached a kazoo – typical of the folk and home-made instruments used in poor regions of the South. Sam Jones applied the same principle to a length of stovepipe, to produce a rich and fruity bass sound, and augmented his stovepipe and guitar with a harmonica. All the other songsters played guitar, thanks to Messrs Martin, Gibson and Sears Roebuck who marketed them in large numbers at the turn of the century. Because of their age we know little about several of these singers.

Charlie Jackson, for instance,

who recorded some seventy titles, came from New Orleans; he worked on the streets, in clubs and in travelling shows and state fairs. A popular entertainer, he died in 1938 and there is not much that can be recalled of him so many years after. Blind Blake and Jim Jackson both died in the 1930s, but the longevity of Gus Cannon, who died in 1979 at the age of ninety-six, ensured that some understanding of the milieu in which such songsters lived and worked has been gained. Cannon was a farmer and later a road-sweeper; Frank Stokes worked as a blacksmith; Luke Jordan just did odd jobs. Many of the songsters worked for medicine shows, the travelling companies that drummed up crowds for the vendors of emetics and pills. Memphis was a centre for gathering talent for the “doctor shows” and it was from here that Cannon, Jim Jackson and Frank Stokes travelled south to Mississippi or toured the mid-west.

These men came from northern Mississippi or Tennessee, but songsters were widely dispersed. Henry Thomas hailed from Texas, and in fact, called himself “Ragtime Texas”, while Sam Jones lived and worked in Cincinnati, Ohio. Far to the east, Luke Jordan lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, while Blind Blake reportedly came from Jacksonville, Florida, before moving to Georgia. Later he worked his way north through Ohio, played for road gangs in Tennessee, settled in Chicago and played on at least one show – “*Happy Go Lucky*” – around 1930. This propensity for travelling, even by a man who was blind, must account in part for the wide dissemination of the songs performed by these entertainers. Meeting other songsters and swapping songs, picking up popular melodies and the coon and ragtime songs that were produced literally in millions of sheets before recordings and drawing upon the commonality of folk idioms, the songsters were the lynch-pin of black popular culture.

Always they would be called upon to play for picnics, socials, barbecues and dances. **Old Country Stomp**, on which Henry Thomas played quills, had words that were in general use much more than a century ago, as the sets were called for the reels. Some of the old dances that were published are mentioned by Jim Jackson on **Bye Bye Policeman**, while **West Coast Blues** – which

was neither west coast nor blues – by Blind Blake captures the deft ragtime playing and lazily uttered commentary of the accomplished performer at such dances. Jackson's piece was made up of a couple of songs; some songsters were adept at putting fragments together, like Henry Thomas on **Bob McKinney**, where he added ragtime songs like **Take Me Back**, **Pallet on the Floor** and **Bully of the Town** to an otherwise unrecorded ballad. **Lost John** was another ballad hero, probably apocryphal, who was the subject of one of Charlie Jackson's songs, while **I'm Alabama Bound** was from the same song cycle as Charley Patton's **Elder Greene** on *Volume 1*. Alabama, like Arkansas, was a kind of symbol of the south: Henry Thomas's **Arkansas** was a disenchanted view which contrasts with Hambone Willie Newbern's romantic (or ironic) one. The theme was often sung by whites but Thomas adds a fragment of the black song **Traveling Man**, which is sung here in full by Jim Jackson and as **Travelin' Coon** by Luke Jordan. Comparison of the words and accompaniments of these versions is instructive of the creative approach of the songsters to their material. Or compare another song popular with white country singers: **Furniture Man**, which Luke Jordan works into **Cocaine Blues** and which we have heard Lil McClintock sing.

Many songs of the ragtime era persisted to be recorded much later, like **My Money Never Runs Out** and the humorous **Can You Blame the Colored Man,** gently lampooning Booker T. Washington, both sung by Gus Cannon. One can imagine how they were performed to appeal to the crowd around the "high-pitch" medicine show. Another song of the same vintage, **Chicken You Can Roost Behind the Moon**, performed with typical impetus by Frank Stokes, can be compared with the bizarre version by Stovepipe No. 1, **A Chicken Can Waltz the Gravy Around**, while Blind Blake's **He's in the Jailhouse Now** may be set against the Memphis Jug Band version; his is a suitable East Coast interpretation. We can date Frank Stokes' **Mr Crump Don't Like It** to the mayoral campaign of 1909, while Sam Jones' **A Woman Gets Tired**, which also has a Memphis origin, was composed a little later. Together these songs and their performers

create a picture of a secular tradition that flourished for some fifty years and which continued vestigially until very recently.

Religious traditions were even longer lived, for the “straining” preaching of the black ministers of the Baptist church has its roots in ante-bellum styles and is still widely practised. **The Gambler's Doom**, as preached by Reverend Burnett, uses a form of the “deck of cards” as a morality vehicle that dates back to eighteenth century England – and was popularised by post World War 2 country singers. His is the first version on record, made a year after **The Downfall of Nebuchadnezzar**, one of the first “hits” among the recordings of preachers. Burnett came from Kansas City, later living in New York, where he was still recording in the 1940s. He made close on thirty titles in the 1920s, a respectable total, but diminished by the remarkable popularity of Reverend J. M. Gates, who, between 1926 and 1930, made over 150 titles – a quarter of all those issued by black preachers of the period. Reverend Gates preached for some thirty years in Atlanta, Georgia, his fame assured. He did not have quite the “fire and brimstone ferocity” of Burnett, but his best sermons were powerful, frequently leading into a complementary spiritual, as in **Yonder Comes My Lord With a Bible in His Hand**. He used contemporary events as lessons as, for example, the devastation of the **God's Wrath In The St Louis Cyclone in** but his inventive use of traditional imagery can be heard by comparing his lesson on **The Eagle Stirs Her Nest** with Reverend Isaiah Shelton’s on *Volume 1.*

Pentecostal and Sanctified preachers made great use of music in their services. Reverend F. W. McGee, originally from Texas but later pastor of a Church of God in Christ in Chicago, built up the tension on **The Half Ain’t Never Been Told** and the popular theme of Jonah before leading his congregation into song accompanied by a lively band. His contemporary from Alabama, Reverend D C. Rice, seldom preached at length, but the majestic **Come and See** on the theme of the opening of the Seven Seals contrasts with the excitement of the Testifying meeting on which his wife testifies, **We Got the Same Kind of Power Over Here**.

It was a Texas girl, blind pianist Arizona Juanita Dranes, who encouraged Reverend McGee to record. She played piano and sang in a high, shouting fashion which captivated congregations and swept them along with her unrestrained enthusiasm as she did on **Just Look**. Joe Taggart and Willie Johnson were also blind, but they appear to have worked more in the streets than in the churches, relying on a child or wife as guide. Blind Joe Taggart's wife joined him in singing the unaccompanied **I Wish My Mother Was On That Train**. In the Carolinas his guide was the youthful Josh White who can be heard on **There's a Hand Writing on the Wall**. Angeline Johnson guided her blind husband and joined him on some of his songs, exchanging lines and single words in a complex but natural antiphony, as on **The Rain Don't Fall On Me**. This was a popular theme among Pentecostalists and was the subject of **The Latter Rain Is Fall**, sung to the guitars of Lonnie McIntorsh and Elder Edward, street evangelists from Memphis. With handclapping and tambourine and the repetitive singing of Sister Bessie Johnson and Sister Melinda Taylor from Mississippi, this recording has the exhilaration of a ring-shout. Both women were present on **He Got Better Things For You** by the Memphis Sanctified Singers (on which Will Shade of the Memphis Jug Band played guitar), which is notable for Bessie Johnson's use of a falsetto rasp.

It seems that the songs of the evangelists were as widely distributed as those of the songsters. Several were known in "ballet" form, and Blind Willie Johnson's **God Moves On the Water** may be compared with William and Versey Smith's **When That Great Ship Went Down**. The *Titanic* disaster, it should be noted, received more sardonic treatment in the version of **Traveling Man**. **Samson and Delilah** was also published as a ballet and formed the basis for Blind Willie Johnson's **If I Had My Way**, presumably taught him from the text by Angeline. Arizona Dranes' **It's All Right Now** had been in print for many years before she recorded it though its composer may never have anticipated such a spirited interpretation of what were intended to be "dying words". If the songsters have

been unduly neglected, the "company of saints" has been more so, and in only a few instances do we have much information on them. Reverend McGee was born in 1890, D.C.Rice was two years his senior and both lived into the early 1970s. Lonnie McIntorsh was of the same age, but Arizona Dranes and Blind Willie Johnson were younger – born in Texas in 1905 and 1902 respectively. Ill with recurrent influenza, Arizona continued to play in churches into the 1930s, but of her eventual fate we know nothing. Blind Willie Johnson continued to play on the streets until his death following a fire at his home in Beaumont, Texas when he was less than 50. Both McGee and Rice became Bishops of their respective denominations, while McIntorsh and Johnson remained as sidewalk evangelists, the gulf between the preacher in the sanctified Church and the "jackleg" preacher widening over the years.

These songsters of picnics and doctor shows, these saints of store-front church and street corner, lived and played in a largely uncharted hinterland between the milieu of the folk musician and that of the professional entertainer or minister. Their songs were drawn from the shared idioms of the black workers of the 19th and early 20th centuries and from the composed unpublished songs of, largely, black writers; but they composed their own songs and sermons too and brought vocal expressiveness and instrumental inventiveness to the music they played. Their versatility, energy and receptivity to new sounds gave the thrust to the emergent blues and gospel song that were to make these the dominant forms of black music fostered by the Race record companies. Fortunately, these same companies put on record much of the traditions that represented earlier phases in black vocal traditions which they principally performed. We should no longer let our absorption with blues and gospel deflect our attention from the richness and variety of those idioms of an early era; not only because the roots of contemporary music are embedded in them, but also for their intrinsic worth, which, by the good fortune that Race recordings captured them, we are privileged to enjoy.

Paul Oliver

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 7

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