

Son House. Son House with Fiddlin' Joe Martin, Willie Brown, Leroy Williams, Alan Lomax.

14 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono.

Folklyric Records 9002. Arkhoolie Records, Box 9195, Berkeley, California 94709, 1973. \$5.98. Originally issued on Roots RSE-1.

Reviewed by Michael Taft.

The Library of Congress field recordings of the 1930s and 1940s contain much that is of interest to the blues scholar, but unfortunately only a fraction of all the recordings are readily available. Besides the LPs put out by the Library of Congress (most notably AAFS L3, L4, L8, L10, and L59), there are only a few albums available of LC field recordings of blues singers -- Blind Willie McTell's 1940 session on Melodeon MLP-7323, some of Huddie Ledbetter's recordings of the 1930s on Elektra EKL-301/2, and the 1941 and 1942 sessions of McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters) on Testament T-2210. With the appearance of this new album, the blues scholar now has easy access to the sessions of another important singer -- Son House. Although most of the recordings which House made for Alan Lomax in 1941 and 1942 have previously appeared on LPs -- AAFS L59, Yazoo (Belzona) L-1001, Folkways FA-2467 -- or on recent 78s by Herwin, House's Library of Congress output is only now truly accessible to the budding blues scholar. The Herwins are, as far as this reviewer can ascertain, out of print, and Folkways FA-2467 has been reprinted as one half of Verve/Folkways FV-9035, leaving off two of the original cuts in the process. Even for those who are lucky enough to have the above mentioned records, this album serves the purpose of bringing all the cuts onto one handy LP with complete discographical information provided. Furthermore, the cuts on the Folklyric LP are at least as clear as the same cuts on the LC, Yazoo, and Folkways albums.

The songs on this album, although all sung by one performer, are varied enough to serve as demonstrations for a lecture on the blues. Songs such as "Delta Blues" or "Special Rider Blues" are perfect examples of the AAB stanza form using the traditional formulaic structure of the genre, whereas "Am I Right Or Wrong" represents an alternate blues structure of AB plus a refrain. House's repertoire is also thematically varied with songs such as "Low Down Dirty Dog Blues" representing the relatively straightforward love lyric, "Depot Blues" making use of traditional train imagery, "Shetland Pony Blues" and "The Pony Blues" relying on equine imagery, and "County Farm Blues" (in the style and tune of "Two White Horses") about prison life. "Walking Blues" is a variant of the rather ephemeral Death Letter series of blues which can be traced back at least as early as 1917 (John A. Lomax, "Self Pity In Negro Folk-Songs." The Nation August 9, 1917:140-45) or as recently as 1966 (Richard M. Dorson, "Negro Folksongs In Michigan From the Repertoire of J. D. Suggs: Annotated Transcripts." Folklore and Folk Music Archivist IX, 1966:3-41).

Also included on the album is a non-blues composition entitled "American Defense," which is an example of the type of patriotic World War II song

that several blues singers indulged in during the 1940s; a short discussion between House and Lomax entitled "The Key Of Minor," in which House explains and demonstrates the tuning of his guitar; and an unaccompanied piece entitled "Camp Hollers." This last piece was attributed to an unidentified singer on the AAFS L59 album, and there has always been a question in my mind as to whether House is singing this or just adding comments behind the singing of Fiddlin' Joe Martin. Both Martin and House have similar voices which makes identification difficult, however it is more likely that House is doing the hollering and Martin the commenting. Although the album notes state that Willie Brown is also commenting during the holler, I don't think this is the case.

Although the album is an important, and indeed a necessary, addition to the library of the blues scholar, there are some complaints to be made. Other than the good discographical notes taken from Godrich & Dixon, there are no other liner notes at all. A small discussion by either Lomax or House on aspects of the recording sessions would have been an excellent touch, or barring that, at least reprinting Lomax's field notes (see Al Wilson, "Son House." Blues Unlimited Collector's Classics #14, October, 1966) would have been informative. Also, unfortunately, one cut from the 1942 session has been omitted from the album -- entitled "Demonstration Of Concert Guitar Tuning" -- which, if included, would have been a useful companion piece to "The Key Of Minor." Perhaps a last wish would be the inclusion of Fiddlin' Joe Martin's "Fo' Clock Blues" and "Going To Fishing" (both now available on Roots 313) and Willie Brown's "Make Me A Pallet On the Floor" (available only on the rare Herwin 92044 single), all recorded during House's 1941 session at Lake Cormorant, Mississippi. But, as any blues scholar knows who deals with reissues, beggars can't be choosers.

Lightning Hopkins "In Berkeley". Lightning Hopkins with Francis Clay and unknown bass player.

12 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo.
Arhoolie 1063. Arhoolie Records, Box 9195, Berkeley, California 94709,
1973. \$5.98.

Reviewed by Michael Taft.

Here is another album by one of the finest post-war blues lyricists and musicians. Despite Hopkins's large output of LPs in the last ten or fifteen years, he has displayed a consistently high quality of performance and a marked individuality that, to this reviewer's ear anyway, makes every album esthetically pleasing. If it is granted then that Hopkins is a fine artist, what is distinctive about this LP which would make it a candidate for a less than comprehensive library of Hopkins recordings? There are many fine pieces on the album, such as "Have You Ever Loved A Woman" and "Black And Evil," which are in the traditional blues structure, using