

The other cuts on side one feature solos on mandolin, drums, saxophone, and hurdy-gurdy(!), and a saxophone ensemble, all of which have a novelty appeal which quickly wears thin on repetition. Much the same may be said of the selections on the second side of the recording which is devoted to military band ragtime. Though the organizations represented here are first rate, the elan of ragtime is largely lost when interpreted through so much musical firepower. The little known "Bantam Step" by Larry Jentes emerges as a highly original rag in this performance by Conway's band, but most of the pieces consist of a few rudimentary and brittle syncopations superimposed on routine tonic-dominant harmonies. Even Henry Lodge's "Pastime Rag" undergoes rigor mortis when transferred to the band idiom.

The sound on the discs is what one would expect from old and well-loved, often-played recordings. The reproduction is acceptable, although occasionally marred by obtrusive surface noise, especially during some of the piano selections. The producers have sensibly decided against electronically tinkering with the output of the old discs.

A major flaw in these productions is the inadequacy of the annotation. The situation is worst in Ragtime Piano Originals. We are not given recording locations or dates, release dates, nor even a general idea of the time period spanned by the selection of discs. The notes for Ragtime Entertainment are somewhat better, recording dates being given for several, but not all, of the performances. But the recording company which issued the original record numbers are never given. Such omissions would be hard to forgive in any historical collection, but are especially so in one compiled by David Jasen who has written the definitive ragtime discography.

Reviews by Michael Taft:

Sonny Boy Williamson (Volume 3). John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. 16 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono. Blues Classics BC-24, Box 9195, Berkley, California, 94709, 1974.

Packin' Up My Blues. Stick Horse Hammond, Tommy Lee, David "Pete" McKinley, Levi Seabury, Sunny Blair, The Confiners, Drifting Slim. 16 selections, vocal and instrumental, mono. Huskadrine H-102, 1974. P.O. Box 635, Manhattan Beach, California, 90266. \$5.98.

Round Dog Taylor: Natural Boogie. Round Dog Taylor and the Houserockers: Brewer Phillips, Ted Harvey. 11 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo. Alligator 4704, 1974. P.O. Box 11741, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, Illinois. \$5.98.

Blues Classics has once again produced an album of songs by the Victor Bluebird recording artist, John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. This bluesman was an important figure in the Chicago blues scene

for about ten years from the late 1930's until his violent death in 1948. His music represents blues in a transitional state, having evolved from the style of southern country bluesmen to a more sophisticated urban style, but not yet acquiring the slickness of later postwar rhythm and blues. His style of harmonica playing is certainly reminiscent of earlier country blues harmonica and his lyrics are mostly the same traditional lines and verses found throughout the corpus of recorded blues, but the tempo and the accompaniment of his music definitely places him among the Chicago urban blues artists.

On this album can be heard some of the other urban bluesmen as accompanists to Williamson's singing and harmonica playing-- Big Bill Broonzy, Walter Davis, Robert Lee McCoy, Blind John Davis, Charlie McCoy, Washboard Sam, Big Maceo, Tampa Red, and Ransom Knowling. In fact, the accompanists to Williamson define fairly well the Chicago "circle" of bluesmen who constantly appeared on each other's recordings from the mid 1930's through the 1940's. Although not represented on this LP, Williamson also recorded with Big Joe Williams, Yank Rachell, Speckled Red, and Joshua Altheimer. One cannot study early urban blues without studying Williamson, and thus the importance of albums such as this one.

The selections vary from swinging boogie pieces like "My Little Baby" to slow-paced country-style songs like "Up the Country Blues;" lyrically non-innovative songs like "Sonny Boy's Jump" ("When my baby left me, she left me a mule to ride"), to commentaries on World War II, "I Have Got to Go" and "Win the War Blues" ("Keep the dirty Japanese from slipping in through my baby's back door"). Some of the tunes are taken from other well-known urban blues. For example, "Springtime Blues" is sung to the same basic tune as Leroy Carr's "How Long--How Long Blues" which was recorded thirteen years before. Here, Williamson is following others in using Carr's material. (Peetie Wheatstraw, a Decca artist whose singing style influenced Williamson's, used Carr's "How Long" for his "Ice and Snow Blues.") The accompaniment varies from washboard, often associated with earlier jug band music, to drums, piano, and electric guitar.

The quality of the LP is quite good, with only a little fuzziness on some of the cuts. The record notes are short, but much has already been written on Williamson elsewhere. The notes do point out that this artist should not be confused with the other, later, Sonny Boy Williamson (really Rice Miller), and good discographical information is given for all songs except "Sonny Boy's Jump" (Williamson, vocal and harmonica; Eddie Boyd, piano; Bill Sid Cox, guitar; Ransom Knowling, bass. Chicago, July 2, 1945. Bluebird 34-0744, matrix D5-AB-341). Williamson can also be heard on Blues Classics 3 and 20 and RCA/Camden International INT-1088.

The Muskadine LP helps to fill an important gap in the reissuing of blues. The 1920's and 1930's, and to a lesser extent, the 1940's have been well represented on modern reissue labels, but the small obscure blues labels of the 1950's--J.C.B., Delta, Gotham, etc.--rarely find their way onto LP albums. This record presents the work of six blues artists and one prison group, originally recorded between 1950 and 1961.

The first side of the album is entitled "In The Country" and features Stick Horse Hammond, Tommy Lee, and David "Pete" McKinley. Hammond has a deep, rough voice, and although he plays an electric guitar, his style and lyrics are traditional ("Go get my black horse; saddle my old gray mare."). His "Gamblin' Man" harkens back to Washington White's 1937 "Shake 'Em On Down," and his "Too Late Baby," like Williamson's "Springtime Blues," is patterned after Leroy Carr's 1928 "How Long--How Long Blues." Also like Williamson, Hammond uses war (perhaps the Korean War) as a theme in "Truck 'Em Down." Lee's singing style is reminiscent of other Mississippi singers in its intensity and is, if anything, even less relaxed than his predecessors'. McKinley is quite traditional and could easily pass for a singer of the 1930's. His unaccompanied vocal breaks are not unlike those of Tommy McClennan, but his guitar playing is definitely Texas and resembles the guitar of Lightning Hopkins.

The second side is entitled "In The Jook Joints" and has pieces by Levi Seabury, Sunny Blair, the prison group The Confiners, and Drifting Slim. In the liner notes, Seabury's harmonica style is likened to Williamson's, but, to this reviewer's ear, it also has the more country qualities of Noah Lewis or Robert Cooksey. Blair's style is closer to rhythm and blues or early rock and roll, while the Confiner's music would not be out of place at a 1950's sock-hop. Drifting Slim's lyrics are quite traditional and the beat and style of his music would not be unfamiliar to Big Bill, ten years earlier in Chicago.

Indeed all the artists on this album were influenced by Williamson and the Chicago "circle," but at no time do they approach the virtuosity, the togetherness, of those earlier urban bluesmen. This shows that the blues did not undergo any smooth chronological development, but, at various times, displayed various levels of both roughness and urban sophistication.

The notes by Frank Scott are quite good, and especially necessary, since the artists are rather obscure. Discographical notes could have been improved with the addition of information on the original record labels. Considering that these are reissues, the sound quality is good.

Round Dog Taylor's LP shows that not all blues artists are on reissues. Although born in Mississippi and roughly the same age as Robert Johnson, Taylor is just beginning his recording

career. Like some artists on the "Jook Joint" side of the Muskadine LP, Taylor is a blend of urban and rural styles. His use of lyrics is sparse, but when he does sing, his blues fit traditional linguistic patterns. The song "Sitting at Home Alone" was improvised in the recording studio, according to the record notes, and clearly shows Taylor's country blues roots.

However his electric guitar is played in a style quite different from the 1940's playing of Broonzy of Memphis Minnie. Although he uses a slide, the sound produced is not at all like acoustic slide guitar. Taylor utilizes the special qualities of the electric guitar to produce a never more "modern" blues sound.

The record notes are very interesting. A brief history of the career of Taylor and the recent success of the HouseRockers is given, pointing out that, until recently, these musicians were only semi-professionals. A one-line comment for each selection classifies the pieces as "uptempo shuffle," "slow slide blues" etc., and notes the influence of Elmore James, Jimmy Reed, Phil Upchurch, and Chuck Berry on the group. But of more interest yet is a list of schools, festivals, clubs, and concerts at which Taylor and the HouseRockers have appeared, complete with places and dates.

Each of these LP's brings our understanding of the inter-relationship of rural blues with urban blues a little closer.

Texas-Mexican Border Music; Una Historia de la Musica de la Frontera
Vol. 1 Folklyric 9003, \$5.98. Folklyric Records, Box 9195, Berkeley, Calif. 94709. Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz. Booklet edited and written by Chris Strachwitz. Narciso Martinez, Pedro Rocha y Lupe Martinez, El Ciego Melquiades, Lidya Mendoza, Orquesta Pajaro Azul, Banda Tipica Mazatlan, Trio San Antonio, Los Donnenos, Los Nortenos con Mariachi, Alegres de Teran, Hermanos Prado, Los Tremendos Gavilanes, Los Nortenos de Nuevo Laredo.

Reviewed by Philip Brandt George.

Until the appearance of Folklyric Records, which has produced "Down Home Music Since 1960," little attention has been paid, on records, to the history and development of the regional music of the Texas-Mexican border area. With the exception of this record, and others in this series, there are virtually no easily available recordings of this music from prior to the late 1940's. Usually considered to be the last type of Mexican regional music to evolve, Mexican and Anglo producers have virtually ignored it in recent years in its historical perspective, with the possible exception of the corrido (ballad).