

ALAN LOMAX

*"I'm sticking up for rock and roll
because even though some of it is destructive and crude,
it is essentially a creative American impulse.
It's made by young people for young people.
It's a rebellion against the Puritan ethic
which has decreed from the beginning of our society
that Americans are not allowed to have pleasure."*

— ALAN LOMAX, 1959

SONG NOTES

BY JEFFREY A. GREENBERG

ALAN LOMAX passed away on July 19, 2002 at the age of 87, leaving behind a truly unique and influential body of work. His voluminous collected writings, field recordings, films and videos, photographs and multi-media Global Jukebox project have helped the world identify, appreciate and preserve the shared sources of its creative and artistic impulses – or, as Alan would say, its “Cultural Equity”.

This compilation collects early Lomax field recordings of songs that became famous as pop, rock, R&B and jazz hits by contemporary recording artists.

One of the many artists Alan knew and recorded over the years had this to say about the influence of Alan’s work:

“There is a distinguished gentleman here who came... I want to introduce him – named Alan Lomax. I don’t know if many of you have heard of him [Audience applause]. Yes, he’s here, he’s made a trip out to see me. I used to know him years ago; I learned a lot there and Alan... Alan was one of those who unlocked the secrets of this kind of music. So if we’ve got anybody to thank, it’s Alan. Thanks, Alan.” — Bob Dylan, Wolf Trap, Vienna, Virginia, August 24, 1997.



LEADBELLY

1. JOE LEE'S ROCK

"Boy Blue" (Roland Hayes), vocal and harmonica; "Joe Lee" (Willie Jones) guitar; Darnell Walker, drums. Recorded by Alan Lomax in Hughes, Arkansas, on October 1, 1959.

In 1959, Atlantic Records underwrote a field trip by Alan Lomax through the southeastern United States to survey, sample, and record the various musical styles of the region using newly available recording technology. Over 100 of the resulting field recordings from Alan's so-called "Southern Journey" were originally released by Atlantic in 1961 on the seven-album *Southern Folk Heritage* series. An Atlantic Records 1993 box set re-release of the set, called "Sounds of the South," served as the inspiration and source material for a number of tracks on Moby's sixth album, *Play*. "Joe Lee's Rock" is prominently sampled in Moby's "Find My Baby," and serves as a good example of Moby's attempts on *Play* to highlight the human elements to be found in electronic and techno by pairing it with American roots music. Other examples from *Play* include "Honey," which features a sample of Alan's recording of "Sometimes" by Bessie Jones (track 8), and "Natural Blues," which features a sample of Alan's recording of "Trouble So Hard" by Vera Hall (track 6). After *Play*, Moby once again used a Lomax field recording for his track "Flower," a sample of the children's song "Green Sally Up," performed by Mattie Gardner. "Flower" can be heard in the soundtrack of the action film *Gone in Sixty Seconds*.

2. DO RE MI

Woody Guthrie, vocal, guitar, and harmonica. Recorded by Alan Lomax at the Department of the Interior radio facility in Washington, D.C., on March 21, 1940.

This was the last song recorded at Woody Guthrie's first recording session. He and Alan Lomax had met the previous month shortly after Woody's arrival in New York City. The recordings made at this session were conceived, though never broadcast, as a pilot radio program with Woody and Alan introducing songs as you hear them doing on this track and on "Goin' Down the Road Feelin' Bad" (track 12). The session may also have been used by Woody to help secure his first commercial recording session with RCA the following month, at which a second version of "Do Re Mi" was recorded. Other versions of "Do Re Mi" have been recorded by the Maddox Brothers and Rose, and by John Cougar Mellencamp on *Folkways: A Vision Shared — A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly* (1988). Ry Cooder interpreted the song in 1970 as a loose, electric boogie on his eponymous first album, and then again on his 1977 live album *Show Time*, this time as a Tex-Mex medley paired with the song "Viva Seguin," featuring his frequent collaborator, the Mexican accordionist, Flaco Jimenez.

3. JESUS ON THE MAINLINE

James Shorty, Viola James, and the Church congregation of the Independence Church in Tyro, Mississippi, vocals. Recorded by Alan Lomax in Tyro, Mississippi, on September 22, 1959.

Another recording originally released on Atlantic's 1961 *Southern Folk Heritage* series, this gospel song in the traditional "call-and-response" form has been recorded by Ralph Stanley, The Zion Harmonizers, and Mississippi Fred McDowell. Ry Cooder recorded a version on his 1974 album, *Paradise and Lunch*. A new version was recently recorded for T-Bone Burnett's DMZ label by the group Ollabelle, featuring Amy Helm, the daughter of drummer Levon Helm of The Band.

4. MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), vocal and guitar. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana, on July 1, 1934.

Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Leadbelly, first met the folklorist John A. Lomax and his son Alan while incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in July 1933. John A. and Alan were touring the southern United States for the Library of Congress, collecting folk songs and unwritten traditional songs and ballads utilizing recently developed recording technology. The four-month trip started in

June, 1933, and John A. and Alan traveled thousands of miles through Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Southern prisons at the time provided a rich source of work songs, spirituals, and ballads. The Lomaxes recorded hundreds of songs that year and returned in the summer of 1934 to record more. "Midnight Special" is one of Leadbelly's most popular songs. It was first recorded commercially in 1927 by Sam Collins as "Midnight Special Blues." It was while in prison that Leadbelly refined the version of the song as it has come to be known today. Creedence Clearwater Revival recorded a well-known version on its 1969 album, *Willy and the Poor Boys*. It was also used as the theme song for the weekly music television program, "Midnight Special," hosted by Wolfman Jack, which aired from 1972 to 1981. Among the many other performers who have covered the song are Dion, Fats Domino, Bob Dylan, Wilson Pickett, Lloyd Price, Harry Belafonte, The Brothers Four, Spencer Davis, Andy Griffith, the Kingston Trio, Paul McCartney, Van Morrison, and Johnny Rivers.

5. STAGOLEE

Memphis Slim, vocal and piano; John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, harmonica; Big Bill Broonzy, upright bass. Recorded by Alan Lomax in New York City on March 2, 1947.

Referred to variously as "Stagger Lee," "Stack O'Lee," "Stack-a-Lee," "Stack and Billy," "Skeeg-a-Lee," "Stack O'Dollars," and so forth, there are endless myths about the origin of this song and the

badass character who inspired its many titles.

Alan Lomax wrote:

The men who ran the river were hard guys. Memphis was their capital city, and the murder rate in Memphis has been one of the highest in the world as long as there have been comparative statistics in the field. No one can be quite certain just who the original Stagolee was, whether black or white, whether a Memphis gambler or a hard-beaded river runner. Shield McLlwaine in Memphis Down the River tells of Stack Lee, a dashing Confederate cavalryman, son of a Mississippi river captain, a skull-cracking steamboat officer, and the father of many mulatto babies; one of his Negro songs, Jim Stack Lee, was, according to McLlwaine, the bad-eyed killer about whom the rousters sang:

*Stack-o-Lee's in the bend,
Ain't doin' nothin' but killin' good men.*

Others say that the bad man was a rouster named after the famous steamboat Stack-o-Lee — others that he was a tough Memphis sport who had sold his soul to the Devil in return for a magic Stetson hat. However, the facts are less important than the legend of the Negro bully and killer who proves the virility of the group by defying all the conventions of the society which imprisons him. To a dying man who begs for mercy, Stagolee responds, "Die, damn it, and prove it!" There was only one destination for such a hero. Stagolee went down to Hell, lookin' mighty curious, The Devil says, "Here's that sport from East St.

Loui-ous."

But Stagolee felt right at home in Hell. After all, he had lived there all his life. He passed out ice-water to everybody in the place and turned the dampers down to make it more comfortable for all his ex-Memphis pals. Then he romped on to West Hell, where it was hot enough to suit him, snatched up the Devil's pitchfork and bollered:

*"Listen, Tom Devil, you an' me's gonna have some fun,
You play on your cornet, and, Black Betty, you beat the drum."*

From *North American Folk Songs*, Alan Lomax (New York: Doubleday, 1960)

One of the most familiar modern versions of this song is the 1959 Lloyd Price hit, "Stagger Lee." The Grateful Dead recorded their own version on the *Shakedown Street* album, and first performed it live on August 30, 1978 at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado, in their initial set between "Mama Tried" and "Looks Like Rain." Space doesn't permit a thorough list of the many performers who over the years have visited the well-known tale, but I located a website of one Thomas L. Morgan, dedicated to identifying and listing all the different known recorded versions of the song (over 200 at last count, they included artists as varied as Beck, Pat Boone, James Brown, Cab Calloway, Nick Cave, The Clash, Neil Diamond, Dr. John, Bob Dylan, Duke Ellington, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Bill Haley, Tim Hardin, Wilbert Harrison, Hot Tuna, the Isley Brothers, Tom Jones,

Sleepy LaBeef, Jerry Lee Lewis, Huey Lewis, Trini Lopez, Pacific Gas and Electric, Terry Melcher, Johnny Otis, Charlie Pride, The Righteous Brothers, Bobby Rydell, Doug Sahm, Neil Sedaka, Southside Johnny, Taj Mahal, Ike and Tina Turner, and the Ventures). John A. and Ruby T. Lomax recorded a performance of "Stagolee" by Lucious Curtis in 1940 in Natchez, Mississippi, which can be heard on *Deep River of Song: Mississippi Saints and Sinners* (Rounder CD 1824) in *The Alan Lomax Collection* series.

6. TROUBLE SO HARD

Vera Ward Hall, vocal.

Recorded by Alan Lomax in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on October 10, 1959.

Alan Lomax traveled throughout the southeastern United States on his 1959 "Southern Journey," documenting music found on back roads, front porches, and waterfronts and in churches, prisons, and work camps. Moby says he found this recording that Alan made of Vera Ward Hall singing in her kitchen when he picked up Atlantic's *Sounds of the South* reissue while browsing at Tower Records in New York City. It turns up as a sample in the track "Natural Blues" from his album *Play*. More songs by Vera Ward Hall can be heard on *Deep River of Song: Alabama* (Rounder CD 1829) in *The Alan Lomax Collection* series.

7. MOTHERLESS CHILDREN

Felix Dukes, vocal;

Mississippi Fred McDowell, guitar.

Recorded by Alan Lomax, in Como, Mississippi, on September 25, 1959.

Blind Willie Johnson recorded this song for Columbia Records in 1927, and his version has influenced this and many other versions. Steve Miller cut a well-received version which appears on his 1969 album *Your Saving Grace* and his 1972 *Anthology* album. Lucinda Williams and Taj Mahal also recorded versions. Eric Clapton's great 1974 comeback LP, *461 Ocean Boulevard*, opens with this track, cut live in the studio without headphones using a Pignose mini-amp, and effectively conveys Clapton's identification with the lyrics that mirror the difficult circumstances of his childhood.

8. SOMETIMES

Bessie Jones with a group of children, vocals and handclaps.

Recorded by Alan Lomax on St. Simons Island, Georgia, on October 12, 1959.

This is a game song for children from the Georgia Sea Islands.

In this ring play, an account of the doings of magical animals and the courtship feats of human beings is continually punctuated by the chorus's sardonic refrain "Sometimes." The tune,

when sung and clapped with strong rhythm, will give you an idea of how interesting only four notes can be. —Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes, *Step It Down*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

This song is prominently sampled in the track “Honey” on Moby’s album *Play*.

9. BLACK BETTY

James “Iron Head” Baker and group of prisoners, vocals.

Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax at Central State Farm in Sugarland, Texas, in December 1933.

In these lyrics, Black Betty is a woman with a blue-eyed baby whose father may be a prison guard captain. It was not uncommon for prisoners to sing such lyrics in the presence of the guards, as the guards typically assumed the prisoners’ songs were meaningless. Use of such words in speech would not have occurred, however. Black Betty was also a term used to describe the whip used on prisoners, and also the truck that transported prisoners from one farm to another. Leadbelly recorded a version of this song in 1939. This recording can be found on *Deep River Of Song: Big Brazos*, part of Rounder’s Alan Lomax Collection album series, Rounder 1826.

Oddly enough, this song received Top 20 bubblegum treatment in 1977 from an East Coast one-hit wonder group called Ram Jam, which included

guitarist Bill Bartlett, formerly of the Lemon Pipers (“Green Tambourine”), and bassist Howie Blauvelt, formerly of Billy Joel’s early group the Hassles. The magician Rick Jay also sang a bit of the song in his recent Broadway show, “Ricky Jay on the Stage”.

10. TAKE A WHIFF ON ME

Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), vocal and 12-string guitar.

Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana, on July 1, 1934.

Like the ballad of Frankie and her two-timing man, this merry and convivial chant of the “snowbirds” comes from the city. A city folk song from the red light district, from the skid rows, from the gambling bells and “dens of vice” of the turn of this century, it followed the cocaine habit into the levee camps and the country barrelhouses of the Deep South. Old-timers remember the day in New Orleans when you could buy cocaine and opium at the corner drugstore and when the men in the levee camps use to bum a “tab of cocaine” just as free and easy as they do a chew of tobacco today. That these tough guys thought of “the snow” as no more dangerous than hard liquor is evidenced in an old couplet that advises:

Why don't you be like me?

Why don't you be like me?

Quite your high tension whiskey, boy,

And let your cocaine be.

A surprising number of songs and ballads and tunes have come from the hopheads and snowbirds in the past two generations. Some of them, like “Willie the Weeper” and his sister “Minnie the Moocher” are nationally known. “Take a Whiff on Me,” with stanzas we have collected in Louisiana, Texas and New York, tops them all. It could have been made only by true snowbirds like Cocaine Lil. Of her it is sung:

She had cocaine hair on her cocaine bead.

She wore a snowbird hat and sleigh-riding clothes.

She had a cocaine dress that was poppy red.

On her coat she wore a cocaine crimson rose.

They laid her out in her cocaine clothes

In her snowbird hat with its crimson rose;

On her beadstone you'll find this refrain,

“She died as she lived, sniffing cocaine.”

From *Folk Song: USA*, John A. and Alan Lomax (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947).

The Byrds recorded a version of this song, which appears on the album *Untitled* (1970), with vocals by Clarence White. Another version, “Honey, Take a Whiff on Me,” by Blind Jesse Harris on piano accordion, recorded in Livingston, Alabama in 1937 by John A. and Ruby T. Lomax can be heard on *Deep River of Song: Alabama* (Rounder CD 1829).

11. DIDN'T LEAVE NOBODY BUT THE BABY

Sidney Lee Carter, vocal.

Recorded by Alan Lomax in Senatobia, Mississippi, on September 26, 1959.

Sidney Carter was the daughter of the fiddler and fife player, Sid Hemphill, whom Alan first recorded in 1942. This is her version of a traditional Southern lullaby. Although this recording was made during Alan’s 1959 “Southern Journey,” it remained unreleased until 1997. It first appeared on *Southern Journey Volume 3: 61 Highway Mississippi* (Rounder CD 1703, from *The Alan Lomax Collection*). T-Bone Burnett and Gillian Welch added new lyrics and arrangement to create the 2000 version of the song heard in the soundtrack to the film *O Brother Where Art Thou*. In the film, Emmylou Harris, Alison Krauss, and Gillian Welch perform the new arrangement.

12. GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD FEELING BAD

Woody Guthrie, vocal and guitar.

Recorded by Alan Lomax at the Department of the Interior radio facility in Washington, D.C., on March 22, 1940.

Woody Guthrie introduced the song this way:

First song in this section is the truth — the living truth — “I’m Goin’ Down That Road Feelin’

Bad.” Several million of us is doing that very thing — only, since the war scare, feeling worse. When I was out in California, they was shooting two of the Steinbeck pictures, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath. And they packed me off down there to the studios, I forgot the name of it, and they set me down on a carpet to the studios, in a director’s barem there, and said, “Now what we want you to do is to sing a song, just don’t even think, and without thinking, just baul off and sing the very first song that hits your mind — one that if a crowd of a hundred pure-blood Okies was to bear, ninety of ‘em would know it.”

This was the first song that popped to my mind, so without thinking, I sung it. They used the song in the picture The Grapes of Wrath, which had more thinkin’ in it than ninety-nine percent of the celluloid that we’re tangled up in the moving pictures today.

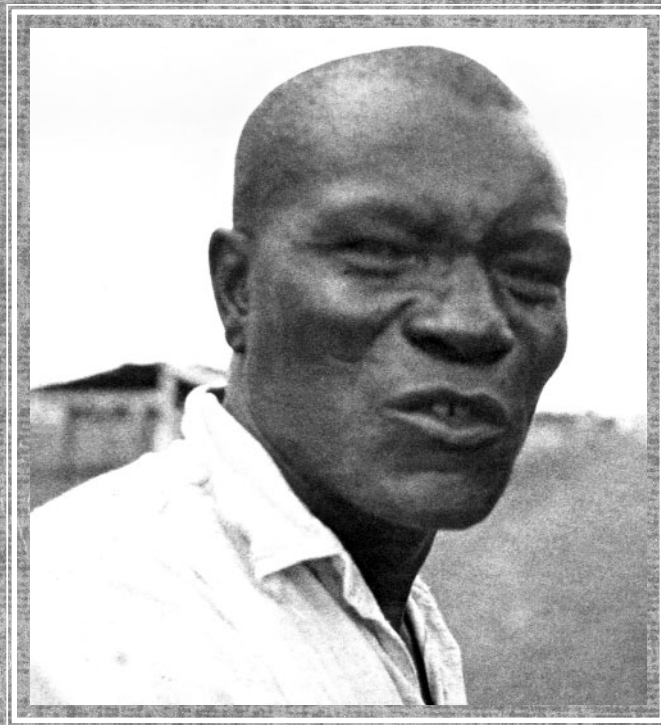
*If you’re ever down in Oklaboma, or along the 66 Highway to California, and want to get to know-ing somebody — some of the working folks — why, just sort of saunter up alongside of ‘em, or up past their gate, and hum this song — or whis-tle it. They’ll come a running out and take you into the house to try to help them scrape up something. (Dinner is in the middle of the day down in Oklaboma. We go by Grocery Saving Time — when you can get ‘em). —Woody Guthrie in *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard Hit People* by Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications 1967, republished by Bison Books, 1997).*

This song became a concert staple for the Grateful Dead, and Jerry Garcia related that he picked it up from Delaney Bramlett of Delaney and Bonnie during the Dead’s trans-Canada rock ‘n’ roll train trip in 1970. (The track appears on the 1971 Delaney & Bonnie album *Motel Shot* and the Dead’s so-called “Skull & Roses” album, the 1971 live double LP, *Grateful Dead*.) Garcia’s version with the Dead may be influenced by this cut by Woody, as well as other renditions by Bill Monroe (1960), Elizabeth Cotton (1958), and Cliff Carlisle (mid-’30s).

13. ROCK ISLAND LINE

**Kelly Pace and a group of prisoners, vocals.
Recorded by John A. Lomax at the
Cumins State Farm in Gould, Arkansas,
in October, 1934.**

At the time this song was recorded, Leadbelly was out of prison, traveling with John A. Lomax, helping elicit the kinds of songs they were looking for from potential informers. Leadbelly learned this song from Pace and his group and went on to develop his own version. The song became a hit for Lonnie Donegan, a rock and blues musician whose “skiffle” sound, an American musical style from the ‘20s incorporating an acoustic mixture of jug band, blues, folk, and country, inspired countless British musicians. Donegan, who was heavily influenced by Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, introduced skiffle music to Britain in the 1950s and inspired John Lennon, Pete Townshend, and George Harrison to take up guitar. Lennon and Harrison’s skiffle group, the Quarrymen, attracted a 15-year old Paul



JAMES "IRONHEAD" BAKER

McCartney, who introduced himself to them at a Liverpool church event. Pete Townshend of The Who started out leading a skiffle group named the Detours, with Roger Daltrey on vocals. Van Morrison started out in a Belfast skiffle group called the Sputniks. Alan Lomax also played and recorded with his own skiffle group in London in the 1950s, Alan Lomax and the Ramblers. The group consisted of Alan, Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger, Shirley Collins, John Cole, and others. He recorded a skiffle-rock EP titled *Alan Lomax Sings*, released in England in 1958 as part of the Nixa label's *Jazz Today Series*. On the EP, Alan is backed by Dave Lee's Bandits, which included John Cole of the Ramblers. In the EP liner notes, Alan writes: "I did not feel the least bit uncomfortable about singing with this modified rock-and-roll section. In fact, I enjoyed it very much . . . when I hear the so-called jazz-lovers moaning and groaning over 'that awful rock-and-roll,' I have to laugh. Rock-and-roll is just the old, low-down jump blues and the hot gospel songs."

14. JOIN THE BAND

John Davis and the Georgia Sea Island singers, vocals.
Recorded by Alan Lomax at St. Simon's Island, Georgia, on October 12, 1959.

In his liner notes to *Sounds of the South*, Alan describes this as:

[A] hauling song from the days when the big sailing schooners used to load timber at Brunswick, Georgia. The huge logs were lowered into the

bold, set moving on a line of steel rollers, accelerating until the sparks flew and finally came to a thundering stop against the bulkhead. Then the stevedores looped cables around the log and heaved it by hand into position for its journey to the mills. On a day with the thermometer at a hundred, the heat below decks was savage. Without such songs as these, the men could never have endured the heat nor kept their pulls together. Everyone (including the "rats," the shirkers) heaved together on the "banb's."

This song turned up as the opening track on the 1978 double live LP *Waiting for Columbus* by Little Feat. The recordist and mixer of that album, Warren Dewey, recounts faintly hearing the band singing this song a cappella while walking from the dressing room to the stage of the Lisner Auditorium in Washington, D.C., on the first night of a set of shows there in August 1977. He was told Little Feat performed the same song every night before taking the stage. On the last night of the DC shows, Dewey set up microphones in the stairwell off stage to capture the ritual. The album notes to *Waiting for Columbus* list the song as a traditional song arranged by the late Little Feat member, Lowell George. I asked his frequent collaborator, Van Dyke Parks, if he knew whether Lowell George had been familiar with the Lomax recording. He said he wasn't sure but wouldn't be surprised, as Lowell was "a Lomaxer," as he put it!

15. SLOOP JOHN B. (HISTE UP THE JOHN B.'S SAILS)

Cleveland Simmons group, vocals.
Recorded by Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle at Old Bight, Cat Island, Bahamas in July, 1935.

Although most would recognize this tune from the 1966 hit single by the Beach Boys that Capitol Records executives forced Brian Wilson to add to the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* album, the song is actually adapted from an old Bahamian folk tune originally called "The John B. Sails." Around 1926, John T. McCutcheon, the philosopher and Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune, learned the song with his wife, Evelyn Shaw McCutcheon, while traveling in the West Indies. (Blind Blake, a popular Bahamian entertainer in the 1950's, reported that the *The John B.* was an old sponger boat, whose crew were known for becoming "notoriously merry" when in port.) Poet Carl Sandburg picked the song up from the McCutcheons and included it in his 1927 songbook, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.) Harry Belafonte added this and other popular Caribbean folk songs to his repertoire in the mid 1950s. Lee Hays of the Weavers adopted the Sandburg version, and the Weavers' version went on to influence a 1958 version by the Kingston Trio. Beach Boy Al Jardine was a Kingston Trio fan, and besides suggesting that the Beach Boys adapt their own version of the song, he got the Beach Boys to adopt the Kingston Trio's striped shirts. The Beach Boys changed the song's lyrics, called their version

"Sloop John B," and garnered a number three hit in 1966.

This recording from Cat Island in the Bahamas may be the earliest recording of the song, and can be found on *Deep River of Song: Bahamas 1935* (Rounder CD 1822), in Rounder's *Alan Lomax Collection* album series.

16. MAN SMART, WOMAN SMARTER

Macbeth the Great (Patrick McDonald), vocal; with Gerald Clark's orchestra.
Recorded by Alan Lomax at Town Hall in New York City, on December 21, 1946.

This calypso standard was composed and first performed in Trinidad carnival tents by King Radio (also known as One Eye Norman Span). He recorded it for Decca in 1936, and Macbeth the Great recorded a version for Guild in 1945. Macbeth was the father of percussionist Ralph McDonald of Weather Report. A popular version appears on Harry Belafonte's 1956 LP *Calypso*. Other versions can be found by Joan Baez on her 1964 album *Joan Baez in San Francisco*; on the 1976 Robert Palmer album, *Some People Can Do What They Like*; the 1977 Carpenters' album, *Passage*; the 1979 Roseanne Cash album *Right or Wrong*; and the 1995 C.J. Chenier album, *Too Much Fun*. The Grateful Dead also performed it regularly in concert in the '80s and '90s with Bobby Weir on vocals but never included it on a commercially released album.

17. **UGLY WOMAN
(IF YOU WANNA BE HAPPY)**

Duke of Iron (Cecil Anderson), vocal;
with Gerald Clark's orchestra.
**Recorded by Alan Lomax at Town Hall in
New York City, on December 21, 1946.**

Another calypso standard composed by The Roaring Lion (Rafael De Leon), who recorded it for The American Recording Company on March 7, 1934. It is now better known as "If You Wanna Be Happy," from the 1963 hit version by Jimmy Soul. Later versions were cut by Bill Wyman of The Rolling Stones in 1976 for his *Stone Alone* album; Randy Meisner of The Eagles in 1982; and Kid Creole and The Coconuts in 1983 for his album entitled *Doppelganger*. (More recordings from Alan Lomax's 1946 calypso concert at Town Hall in New York City can be found on *Calypso at Midnight and Calypso After Midnight* (Rounder CDs 1840 and 1841, in *The Alan Lomax Collection*.)

18. **GALLOW'S POLE (MAMA, DID
YOU BRING ME ANY SILVER?
THE GALLIS POLE, THE MAID
FREED FROM THE GALLOW'S)**

**Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly), vocal and
12-string guitar.**
**Recorded by Alan Lomax in Havers Studio,
New York City, on November 26, 1938.**

Led Zeppelin included a version of this song on the album *Led Zeppelin III* in 1970. The band's guitarist, Jimmy Page, said, "I first heard it on an old Folkways LP by Fred Gerlach, a 12-string player who was, I believe, the first white to play the instrument. I used his version as a basis and completely changed the arrangement." Gerlach was a virtuoso 12-string guitar player in the style of Leadbelly, who played in New York City in the early 1950's with Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Big Bill Broonzy, and Gary Davis, among others. The liner notes to the Gerlach LP containing his version of Gallows Pole read: "This is based on one of Leadbelly's songs, which itself has a long history dating back hundreds of years in England. The rhythms and finger-picking styles have taken me four years to evolve. It is my favorite number, but it is so strenuous that I must perform regularly for a week before I'll attempt it." The Zeppelin version created a different sound than the band had employed on its first two albums. It includes Page's first experiments with a banjo, and also uses six- and 12-string guitars and electric guitar. They played it live only once in Copenhagen on May 3, 1971, although it was referenced in performances of other songs such as "Trampled Under

Foot" during their tours in 1975.

19. **ROSIE**

C. B. and ten prisoners with axes, vocals.
**Recorded by Alan Lomax at Parchman Farm
Penitentiary, Mississippi, in 1947.**

The Lomaxes and others recorded numerous versions of this archetypal Mississippi prison song. "Rosie" was a generic name for a woman at Parchman Farm Penitentiary and turns up in other prison songs recorded there. Nina Simone used the melody of "Rosie" for her 1965 recording of "Be My Husband." A version by Leadbelly was adapted with new words by The Animals and retitled "Inside Looking Out." It appeared as the B-side to The Animals' eighth single, the first for Decca in 1966, and was produced by Tom Wilson after the band's split from Mickie Most and EMI. Grand Funk Railroad also has had versions of "Inside Looking Out" appear on both studio and live albums. It first appeared in its studio version on the band's second album, *Grand Funk*, in 1970, and although never released as a single, it was a big FM radio hit. The song was also a concert favorite with the band's fans, and live versions can be found on *Live Album* (1970), *Caught In The Act* (1975), and *Live: The 1971 Tour*. (Hear this and more Lomax prison songs on *Prison Songs Volume 1: Murderous Home* and *Prison Songs Volume 2: Don'tcha Hear Poor Mother Calling?* on Rounder CDs 1714 and 1715 in *The Alan Lomax Collection*. A 1936 version of this song recorded by John A. Lomax at Parchman Farm Penitentiary appears on *Deep River*

of Song: Mississippi: Saints and Sinners, Rounder CD 1824 and *The Land Where The Blues Began*, Rounder CD 1861.)

20. **ALBORADA DE VIGO**

José Maria Rodriguez, panpipes.
**Recorded by Alan Lomax in Faramontes,
Orense, Galicia, Spain, on November 27, 1952.**

José Maria Rodriguez was a capador, whose specialty was castrating pigs for farmers. He used this tune to announce his arrival and availability in town. On a field trip for Columbia Records during a frigid winter in 1952 in Galicia, Spain, Alan Lomax recorded this song, which first appeared on the 1955 *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music: Spain* LP. Miles Davis and Gil Evans were apparently impressed and took this tune as inspiration for a composition called "The Panpiper" on the 1960 Miles Davis album *Sketches of Spain*. (This and more Lomax Spanish recordings are available on *World Library of Folk & Primitive Music: Spain*, on Rounder CD 1744 in *The Alan Lomax Collection* series).

21. THE HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN (RISING SUN BLUES)

Georgia Turner, vocal.
Recorded by Alan Lomax in Middlesboro, Kentucky, on September 15, 1937.
Previously unreleased

The lyrics in this version of the song differ from the better known lyrics in The Animals' 1964 hit version. The earliest commercially recorded version of this song was by Clarence "Tom" Ashley in 1932 as "Rising Sun Blues," which was followed by "Rounder's Luck" by the Callahan Brothers in 1934. Dillard Chandler called it "Sport in New Orleans," and Roscoe Holcomb recorded it as "House In New Orleans." The lyrics in Georgia Turner's version appear in Alan's 1941 book, *Our Singing Country*, and are attributed to Turner: "other stanzas" attributed to Bert Martin of Manchester, Kentucky. The song probably originated in Ireland or Britain ("rising sun" is an old British euphemism for a bordello). Alan wrote that the melody resembled an arrangement of an English ballad from the 1600's called "Matty Groves." The English folk singer Harry Cox once sang Alan an old song called "She Was a Rum One," which contained the line, "If you go to Lowestoft, and ask for the Rising Sun, there you'll find two old whores, and my old woman's one." The Animals' version, adapted from a Bob Dylan version with new lyrics and a new arrangement by Alan Price, was at the time the longest ever 45-rpm single, and so was not expected to do well. However, it went on to number one on the charts in both

England and the United States. Other performers with hit versions of the song were Frijid Pink (1970), Santa Esmerelda (1978) and Dolly Parton (1981). Andy Griffith, Jerry Garcia, and Wyclef Jean are just a few of the many other artists that have interpreted the song over the years.

22. IRENE GOODNIGHT (GOODNIGHT IRENE)

Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), vocal and 12-string guitar.
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana, on July 1, 1934.

Leadbelly learned this song from his uncle before entering prison. While there, he added verses and spoken passages to create this version. A comprehensive description of this song's history can be found in *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* by Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). The Lomaxes included this song in their book, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung By Lead Belly* (New York: MacMillan, 1936). Leadbelly recorded it at his first commercial recording session for ARC in 1935, but the company didn't release it. The Weavers recorded their well-known arrangement in 1950, the year after Leadbelly's death, and it became a hit.

The story of Leadbelly's release from prison at Angola in 1934 is often linked with this song, but perhaps mistakenly. When the Lomaxes returned to visit Leadbelly at Angola in the summer of 1934,

Leadbelly recounted to them that his prior release from jail in Texas resulted from having written a song asking for pardon from the then-governor of Texas, Pat Neff. After hearing this, the story goes, the Lomaxes agree to record Leadbelly's song for then-Louisiana governor, O. K. Allen, and take it to him in Baton Rouge to petition Leadbelly's release. One version of the story has Alan recording the song "Governor O.K. Allen" on the other side of their recording of "Goodnite Irene" from those same sessions. The Lomaxes did in fact take the record to Governor Allen in Baton Rouge in July, 1934. On July 25, 1934, Governor Allen commuted Leadbelly's sentence from ten years to three, and he was freed on August 1, 1934. But the discharge was probably routine, scheduled under the Louisiana "good time" laws, rather than a result of the Lomaxes leaving his record at Governor Allen's office. Leadbelly's prison warden, L.A. Jones, denied in writing that the Lomaxes' actions had anything to do with Leadbelly's release (according to Wolfe and Lornell's biography of Leadbelly). The circumstances are suggestive, however, and Leadbelly himself appears to have believed the story; or rather, he wished to convey to his audiences that his prowess as a composer and performer had secured his release from prison, not once, but twice, in Texas and in Louisiana.

A diverse group of artists have recorded the song over the years, including Bing Crosby, Johnny Cash, Nat King Cole, Bryan Ferry, Frank Sinatra, The Ventures, Lawrence Welk, Brian Wilson, Gene Autry, Jimi Hendrix, Doctor John, Leon Russell, Meat Puppets, Michelle Shocked, Jimmy Buffett, Ry Cooder and Jo Stafford.



WOODY GUTHRIE

ALAN LOMAX AND THE BIG STORY OF SONG

BY GIDEON D'ARCANGELO
WITH ANNA LOMAX CHAIRETAKIS
AND ELLEN HAROLD

ALAN LOMAX had an unquenchable appetite for song. He dedicated his seven-decade career in music to understanding the biggest questions about song — what is happening in the songs that move us, why the best singers make us laugh or cry or spring to action, why it is we sing. As he roamed the globe on his many song-hunting expeditions, he gathered clues from singers of all stripes — from New Orleans jazz vocalists to choruses of Genovese longshoremen; from Appalachian balladeers to Texas chain gangs; from classical Western opera divas; to Caribbean children playing ring games; and many more. Alan’s approach to the world of song was open and inclusive — the more styles he came to know, the more he enlarged his understanding of what was being communicated through song performance.

One of the remarkable things about Alan’s career was its dynamic effect on the world of popular music. As experimental musician and producer Brian Eno wrote in 1997:

*Almost any line you could draw through the whole field of popular musical culture would have [Lomax] somewhere on it — probably in several places. Without Lomax, it’s possible that there would have been no blues explosion, no R and B movement, no Beatles, no Stones and no Velvet Underground. He was the conduit, mainlining the uniqueness and richness and passion of African-American music into the fertile beginnings of Western pop music.*¹

The songs on this CD were covered by numerous pop artists and have had lasting effects on the styles and direction of pop music as a whole.

Alan Lomax is best known for his pioneering field recordings of folk music and blues. Less well known is his groundbreaking research into the evolution of performance styles, begun with musicologist and composer Victor Grauer, which led them to the San/Bushmen and the Pygmies of southern and central Africa as examples of the earliest known types of vocalizing. For Alan saw popular and traditional music as part of a single continuum of human expression — when you step back far enough, you find that they have the same ancestry. Likewise, popular song and art music belong to the same basic patterns of human behavior.

By the 1980s, Alan and his colleagues in musicology and anthropology had developed a working method for the analysis of folksong style and culture. With support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Alan and his team began a systematic study of American popular song and dance that he called “The Urban Strain: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of American Urban Performance Styles.” The study looked at the most popular songs on the American charts from the 1890s to the present in order to “establish the cultural and social roots of these songs and to establish their distinctive features, trace their origins and development, and . . . reveal the salient characteristics of the urban and American stylistic strain.”²

“Rock and roll,” wrote Alan,

*was one of the most dramatic shifts I have observed in American style, one of the many in the long-term exchange that took place between Afro- and Euro-American styles down on Tin Pan Alley. Black in origin, rock and roll became nationally popular when white singers, like Presley, took it over. Their youthful successors in the fifties and sixties at first composed repetitious, refrain-filled, short-phrased songs of the sort common in black tradition, and for a time, the longer, wordy song forms that had been characteristic of American pop song were overshadowed. When Dylan and the Beatles reintroduced long, textually complex lyric song forms, all the while retaining other traits of rock style, rock and roll began to be taken seriously by critics, and soon became widely accepted by people of all ages in cities all over the world.*³

The Urban Strain study sought to articulate how American pop song styles fit into a global framework. Alan did the listening work with Roswell Rudd, the brilliant jazz composer and trombonist who had participated in Alan’s researches on world folk song. They compared, for example, side-by-side performances of “Long Tall Sally” by both Pat Boone and Little Richard (who by bizarre coincidence were appearing on the same stage), weighing Boone’s well-enunciated, polite syncopations against Little Richard’s rhythmically complex, more playful delivery. They put their ears to songs like Bing Crosby’s rendition of “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime,” James Brown’s “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” and Led Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love.” Hundreds of pop performers — Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Eric B. and Rakim, the Temptations, the Beatles, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong (“who sings through his horn,” notes Alan), Sophie Tucker, Frank Sinatra, Hank Snow, Paul Whiteman, and others — sang into the ears of the Urban Strain researchers. Many of the artists who covered songs on this CD — Lloyd Price, the Beach Boys, Wilson Pickett, Bob Dylan, the Animals, Fats Domino, Johnny Cash, etc. — were studied by Alan and his team as they sought to understand how commercially driven styles fit into the big picture of song performance.

Lomax’s Early Career

A brief review of Lomax’s career, particularly of his relationship with communications technology, supplies some perspective. Many people know Alan for his early work in the field, where he used his great ear and tremendous endurance to seek out and record some of our best folk performers. While in his teens he began working with his father, the folklorist John A. Lomax. They were the first to record Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) in 1933 (tracks 4, 10, 18, and 22). In 1937, he recorded Georgia Turner’s seminal version of “The House of the Rising Sun” in Kentucky (track 21). He was the first to record bluesman McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters) on field trips to the Mississippi Delta in 1941 and 1942. These field recordings

and legions of others laid the foundations for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, which he was appointed to head in 1937. In 1938 at the Library he made recordings of the life story and music of jazzman Jelly Roll Morton. As host of a nationally broadcast radio series on CBS in the 1940s, he jump-started the folk music careers of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Aunt Molly Jackson, Josh White, and Burl Ives, among others. In the 1940s and '50s, he documented the life and repertoire of Alabama singer Vera Ward Hall (“Trouble So Hard,” track 6), who gave us “Another Man Done Gone,” “What Month Was Jesus Born In?” and a host of other American folk classics.

In the 1950s, Alan recorded the folk music of Ireland, Scotland, England, Spain, and Italy, much of which was broadcast on BBC Radio and Television. These recordings were also released on Columbia Records as part of a 19-LP anthology of world folk music compiled by Lomax with contributions from many other collectors and scholars. Back in the U.S. in 1959 and 1960, he returned to the American South with the goal of bringing grassroots artists into the fast-growing folksong revival. He followed these expeditions with a Caribbean field trip in 1962. These are just a few headlines from an amazingly energetic and prolific period of professional activity for Lomax.⁴

Lomax as Early Adopter of Communications Technology

“The main point of my activity,” he wrote in 1960, “was . . . to put sound technology at the disposal of the folk — to bring channels of communication to all sorts of artists and areas.” While only a teenager, Alan comprehended the power of media to support and reinforce — as well as to erode — culture. At this early juncture, he dedicated himself to creating channels through which the diverse cultures of the world could find an outlet. Decades later, he wrote in his “Appeal for Cultural Equity”:

*All cultures need their fair share of the airtime. When country folk or tribal peoples hear or view their own traditions in the big media, projected with the authority generally reserved for the output of large urban centers, and when they hear their traditions taught to their own children, something magical occurs. They see that their expressive style is as good as that of others, and, if they have equal communicational facilities, they will continue it.*⁵

Throughout his career, Alan employed the most up-to-date media technologies in the task of diversifying the cultural content of our communications network. He anticipated new developments, and, as they emerged, he had a purpose for them as conduits for the voices of the world’s diverse peoples — singing, dancing, talking, and telling us their dreams.

Alan’s alliance with technology began in 1933, when Thomas A. Edison’s widow gave Alan’s father an Edison cylinder recording machine. Prior to this, John A. Lomax and other scholars transcribed song texts using pencil and paper. In those days, folk tunes were transcribed in conventional written notation that had the effect of standardizing music. However, many of the expressive aspects of performance — for example, the dramatic changes in tone, dynamics, and tempo typical of singing in Southern black churches, or the subtle, idiosyncratic shifts in meter, tempo, and pitch employed by many white ballad and hymn singers — defied even the best attempts to capture them. With portable audio equipment it became possible for the first time to document oral traditions with complete fidelity. “For us,” Alan once remarked, “this instrument was a way of taking down tunes quickly and accurately; but to the singers themselves, the squeaky, scratchy voice that emerged from the speaking tube meant that they had made communicative contact with a bigger world than their own.”⁶

Alan used to say that the early recording systems were “portable” in name only — they weighed several hundred pounds and required the back seat of the Lomax’s Ford be removed to accommodate them. Alan first worked with aluminum disks that, while rough in sound, do not degrade over time. However, these first disks held only three to four minutes per side. At the Library of Congress he experimented with multitrack sound with Jerome Wiesner (co-founder of the MIT Media Lab, and later, President of MIT and adviser to President Kennedy), who accompanied him on some of his Southern field trips. Acetate disks, introduced in the 1940s, could hold up to fifteen minutes of sound. “Acetate was harder to engineer than aluminum,” Alan wrote in *The Land Where the Blues Began*, “because you not only had to keep the mike focused and monitor the volume, but also prevent the acetate chip from piling up under the recording needle.”⁷

Lomax used acetate to record black prison work crews at Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi in 1946, and he returned in 1947 with the first portable, paper-backed tape recorder to make a set of recordings that has achieved underground fame.⁸ Tape, with its long recording times and ease of editing, was a big breakthrough for Alan. Thankfully he avoided wire, a recording method briefly in vogue in the 1940s, in which magnetic recordings were written on spools of thin wire that were threaded through a reader for playback. For a time Columbia Records employed a crew of people just to unravel the giant balls of wire recordings that had rolled together like tumbleweed.

When vinyl 33 1/3 RPM LPs appeared, Alan realized that for the first time it was possible to sample the music of a whole country on a single disk and that the entire world’s music could be represented on a shelf full of them. In 1949, he persuaded Columbia Records to underwrite such an anthology, the first of its kind. When Alan returned to the American South in 1959, backed by Atlantic Records, he brought with him newly developed portable stereo equipment with which he was able to record prison work songs and choral performances with more depth and presence than ever before. In 1962, he lugged his big playback speakers all



DUKE OF IRON

over the Caribbean islands so that his stereo recordings could be played back on the spot for the immediate gratification of the performers.

Cantometrics: Lomax Embraces the Computer as Communications Tool

As new media tools appeared, Alan continued to embrace them early. More often than not, he'd already dreamed them up. A case in point is audiovisual computing: Alan began developing applications for interactive media platforms some 30 thirty years before they came to fruition.

In 1960, Alan realized that for the first time in history it was possible to assemble under one roof a comprehensive collection that would not only represent but analyze and decipher the performance styles of all the world's peoples. His first step was to assemble collections by other field recordists and combine them with his own, creating an unprecedented audiovisual archive of music from all over the world. To make sense of this vast assortment of songs, he and a group of colleagues from several disciplines (musicology, dance, anthropology, linguistics, and statistics), all of whom who were interested in human expressive behavior, initiated the Columbia University Cross-Cultural Study of Expressive Behavior. They developed a method of analysis they called Cantometrics, a democratically easy-to-learn coding system through which an ordinary listener with minimum preparation could create a "style profile" for a song.

Using 37 criteria of observation, the Cantometrics team analyzed over 4,000 songs — around 10 representative songs from over 400 cultures. Each song profile they made was recorded on a computer punch-card and loaded onto the Columbia mainframe. A companion study of dance, Choreometrics, produced analyses of over 1,500 dance performances. Only a computer was capable of handling this enormous data set and looking for the patterns hidden within. The team, led by programmer Norman Berkowitz, developed a powerful set of statistically driven software tools to sort, separate, and group the performance data. Their analyses resulted in the first ever taxonomy of human performance style and in a series of maps showing the dissemination of culture across the planet. These were presented to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1966) and later published in the collaborative volume, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (1968). Brian Eno refers to this work when reflecting on the latter half of Lomax's storied career:

Lomax. . . [later] turned his intelligent attentions to music from many other parts of the world, securing for them a dignity and status they had not previously been accorded. The "World Music" phenomenon arose partly from those efforts, as did his great book, Folk Song Style and Culture. I believe

*this is one of the most important books ever written about music, in my all-time top ten. It is one of the very rare attempts to put cultural criticism onto a serious, comprehensible, and rational footing, by someone who had the experience and breadth of vision to be able to do it.*⁹

The Cantometrics team also created a set of teaching tapes that make it easy to develop an understanding of world music and to create new song profiles. Alan Lomax, Victor Grauer, and Roswell Rudd were the primary song analysts on the Cantometrics project. The three educated their ears by listening to and coding thousands of songs from all corners of the globe. “Cantometrics helps you to break music down into its parts,” Roswell said recently. “You want to know how it’s put together and then you want to know where the parts came from. The Cantometrics teaching tapes are the best thing anybody can use who wants to understand world music, classical music, pop music, whatever. That teaching kit teaches you about the qualities of music — any kind of music from any culture.”

The Urban Strain Popular Song Study

After two decades of work on Cantometrics and related studies of performance style, Alan and his colleagues had created a framework for understanding traditional song performances that also made it possible to take on a question of great interest. Alan became fascinated by the tremendous grassroots creativity and excitement pouring out of pop song artists after the birth of rock and roll. He felt it was essential to bring their innovations into the Cantometric analysis of the sources and development of song. In the early '80s, then, Alan and Roswell began to look at popular song in the great cultural mixing ground of America and how it fit into a global perspective. In the Urban Strain study, pop songs were coded using an augmented version of the Cantometric coding system and compared to the world sample with the aid of a computer. The goal was to gain insight into the ever-changing trends and novel styles of a century of popular music and relate them to the ancient roots and branches of song. The result was to untangle some of the mysteries of musical influence and to show how individual creativity and innovation are solidly supported by big stylistic traditions.

The blending of African and European characteristics in American popular music has been only partially understood. Alan and his colleagues pursued a way to get below the surface of this intuitive understanding and to identify precisely what aspects of a given performance were African or European and what new elements were emerging from the union of these two strains. They were able to distinguish an on going interchange of African and European stylistic traits between black and white artists in the hits that topped the racially segregated charts, decade by decade. White popular music, wrote Alan 1982,

moved steadily in the direction of black style, if quite awkwardly at first. Notorious was the torso-

*involving dance style, a tendency that produced shock when it first appeared, but is now, a generation later, accepted as a matter of course in the urban world. Actually, a two-way cultural exchange was occurring. During this same period, black composers and choreographers were exploring the resources of both European classical forms and West African music and producing acculturated forms to match their new experiences in the urban north.*¹⁰

Elvis Presley, of course, played a critical role in the interchange of African and European performance style in America. During a session with dance analyst, Forrestine Paulay, as they studied concert footage of the star, Alan remarked,

*A way in which Elvis differs from absolutely all the other white singers who preceded him is that he never stops moving for an instant. Here he's like the black singer. . . . It's a high level of energy and dynamics that he's always giving you Here he really captures the excitement of the Southern railroad engine pounding through the night, the whiz of the automobile, the rumble of the factory, and the tremendous dynamism of American productive life. I could understand why he was so much attacked. He really made the first white bridge across, in behavioral terms, between the whites and blacks of the South — in fact, between whites and blacks in America. Before him, everybody had stood and peered at blacks. Elvis joined them as best he could, and took enormous delight in projecting emotion in the way they did, as close as he could do it.*¹¹

The fruits of the Urban Strain study have barely been harvested, but they have already yielded a wealth of intriguing insights into the characteristics and developments of American pop music. Bessie Smith, when compared with all the singers in the sample, pulls up her white torch-singing counterpart, Sophie Tucker, as most similar. The Cantometrics coding for Nat King Cole's “Mona Lisa” matches that of crooners Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra, who introduced Neapolitan style into the pop mainstream. Another performer included in the study is Fats Domino, who recorded “Stack and Billy,” a great version of “Stagolee” (track 5). In what Alan called a fantastic live performance, Fats “hammered the piano across the stage,” and on the Cantometric profile for Fats's hit, “Blueberry Hill,” he wrote: “a warm and happy New Orleans blues with a complex, multi-leveled, overlapped antiphony between voice, sax, piano, and guitar.”¹² White performers of the 1950s like Jerry Lee Lewis and Bill Haley introduced into their singing certain features of African stylings — such as short phrasing and less wordy lyrics. Bob Dylan's performance of “Blowin' in the Wind” shares similarities with Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis' “You Are My Sunshine,” such as its wordiness and European strophic ballad form. Michael Jackson emerges as one of the most deft cross over artists of all time, equally balancing African and European stylistic traits in both his singing and dancing. The Urban Strain study shows how rap performers employ the wordiness and precise enunciation long typical of urban Eurasia, forfeiting to some extent the playful vocal stance and tone typical of African performance, but not its

complex syncopation.

“What we see in this whole process,” Alan remarked in a conversation with Roswell Rudd during the Urban Strain study, “is that blacks emerge in some new playful style, and then somehow the whites take it up and put it under their stuffy European mattress — they get a part of it and learn some of the main tricks and then they do it according to the rules — [but] they haven’t found out all the rules yet.”¹³ In the early days of rock, European-American musicians created predictable patterns of syncopation (for example, always stressing the last half of the fourth beat —“four-AND”) to achieve a jury-rigged cross rhythm that lacked the layered effect and spontaneity of genuine African-American music. Rock musicians had their hands full dealing with these complex rhythms and resorted to heavily emphasizing the downbeat and screaming the vocals over the top — rather than engaging in the vocal playfulness and changeable vocal tone more characteristic of African-American song styles.

The Urban Strain study identified how new recording technologies were affecting performance styles and how European-Americans were meeting rhythmic challenges posed by African-influenced styles.

Complex orchestrations [Alan wrote] *made interesting to Euro-Americans by experiments with chord changes, for a time took the place of the sinuous, spontaneous polyrhythms of black style, which few whites could master. In fact, in order to compete with the blacks, the whites invented a new approach to recording, where each part in an orchestra was produced in an isolated booth or was actually added later, part by part, to the finished recording by an engineer. At first this was the only way that the relatively untrained young white musicians could come close to the complex rhythmic organizations easily achieved by blacks. Recording sessions stretched into weeks and months, but an unexpected result was achieved. These rock orchestrations, which seemed simple in texture because of the dominance of a powerful simple beat, rank on our scoring sheet as having a more complex orchestral organization than the European symphony. Where the symphony normally put three or four relatively independent parts together in its orchestrations, the engineers and isolation booths of the rock recording often packed five to seven independent parts into the final groove, giving it a multi-leveled texture that urban stratification seems to demand.*¹⁴

The technological experience of music was one of the main themes of the Urban Strain study. Alan was concerned about the potentially dangerous effect a mechanized, metronomic beat — a beat that doesn’t breathe like a human being — would have on the expressive possibilities available to future generations. He felt that essentially human qualities of music were at risk. The following is from a conversation between Alan and Roswell Rudd about disco, which was big at the time.

Alan: *I believe the principal difference is that the music that they are trying to imitate is genuine dance music, and in Africa that means that the orchestra is playing with the dancers . . . it’s the dancer that supplies the extra excitement So the dancer is really in command of the music — the music is background for the dancer. But in the disco stuff, the whole thing has been reversed, the music is in command of the dancers — it’s the music that rules. It is the powerful center that dominates the throng, whereas in Africa . . . the musicians would be responding to some dancers close by and actually working out the problems back and forth with them.*¹⁵

Roswell: *The problem with disco is that it is all taped. You play the music like you play a jukebox. You turn it on, you turn it up, and it goes. There’s no give and take, it’s just a one-way message from the speaker cones The interaction [between dancer and musician] is not there.*¹⁶

The trend that concerned Roswell and Alan in the 1980s is more prominent than ever today, as more music is being produced with inexorably repeating loops driven by mechanical clocks. Thankfully, there is a movement of sensitive DJs, electronic musicians, and inventors of instruments who are attempting to breathe spontaneity into technologically mediated music and to create opportunities for musical interaction. Perhaps this dehumanizing tendency inspired Moby to infuse earthy, authentic voices into his electronically manipulated sound by sampling large segments of Vera Hall’s “Trouble So Hard,” Willie Jones’ “Joe Lee’s Rock,” and Bessie Jones’ “Sometimes” (tracks 6, 1, and 8).

The title of the Urban Strain study is revealing. There is a misconception among many urbanites that they have managed to transcend the bounds of traditional culture and that they inhabit a meta-culture where free experimentation reigns. The Urban Strain study shows that American urban culture, albeit powerful, shares the world stage with others: the Yanomami, the Wolof, the Ainu, the Inuit, the San/Bushmen, to name a few. With all of our sophisticated media, we are still responding to the influences of ancient cultural traditions. Furthermore, popular culture can be described and understood in terms of these influences. “American urban traditions,” Alan wrote, “demand more and more of the communication space, crowding all the rest of man’s cultural creations off the human stage It behooves us to understand the cultural significance and the social symbolism of these pervasive modern traditions, if we wish to remain in control of our expressive future. My hope, moreover, is that through the analysis and comparison of a number of these modern urban-industrial traditions, we can arrive at a clear comprehension of the essential character of American urban style itself.”¹⁷

The Global Jukebox and Beyond

As the 1980s came to a close, Alan continued to innovate with media, now marrying the extensive Cantometrics and Urban Strain metadata set to the audiovisual world archive of song in his magnum opus, a groundbreaking interactive media project he called “The Global Jukebox: An Intelligent Museum of the World’s Expressive Behavior and Culture.” With support from many corners, including Apple Computer, the National Science Foundation, Interval Research Corporation, and Mickey Hart’s Rex Foundation, his team created a navigable knowledge base of world song and dance style. The data, codings, and software tools were ported down from Columbia University’s mainframe computer and converted to C programming language by master programmer Michael Del Rio. Now, at last, the elaborate cross-referenced data, the powerful comparative tools, and the extensive audiovisual library could be brought together on one interactive media platform.

In the early 1990s, Alan went on one of the first digital media road shows to present the Global Jukebox to large public audiences on a beige Macintosh Quadra 900 with two laser disk players, a bulky LCD projector, a low-res LCD panel, and a high-luminosity overhead projector. Reminiscent of the “portable” audio equipment he used in the 1930s, this system weighed several hundred pounds and required a van to transport it. Alan envisioned the Global Jukebox as a multimedia tool capable of housing and evaluating large amounts of audio and visual data was years ahead of the supporting digital technology that is only now becoming available.

Now that the Global Jukebox is in place as a robust prototype, it begs to be continually refreshed with emerging styles of music, so they can be included and contextualized within the framework of global style. The Global Jukebox is an open system — it gets deeper the more it contains. Future web-based versions of the Global Jukebox will allow both musicians and music fans to be able to input their songs and get feedback on how they fit into the global matrix.

This is a critical time for cultural equity — the idea that all cultural groups, however large or small, should be valued and supported and have a share of the media pie. Today, when the airwaves are increasingly used as marketing and propaganda tools by centralized pro-corporate forces, it is more important than ever to champion the local and the regional, the under-heard and under-seen. With the proliferation of relatively inexpensive media production and open distribution channels of the Internet, it is now possible time to reflect, reinforce, and celebrate myriad forms of cultural expression. Early on, Alan recognized the need for the decentralized, edge-to-edge media network that is now available to us and saw how it could be employed to maintain and support cultural diversity. If he were still with us, he would be the first to roll up his sleeves and help to make it happen.

Conclusion

Alan Lomax did more to support and invigorate the folk traditions of the world than perhaps any other individual. In 1977, he collaborated with Carl Sagan and NASA on the anthology of earth’s music that was sent into space with the Voyager, which has since departed our solar system and put folk song into the widest distribution ever. The Rounder Group and the Alan Lomax Archive are committed to cultural equity and are continuing Alan’s practice of bringing the latest advancements in technology to the task of publishing hundreds of his recordings in The Alan Lomax Collection. It would please Alan to know that this album is being released as both a CD and a Super Audio CD (SACD) — the new high-definition audio format that uses Sony’s and Philips’ Direct-Stream Digital encoding process and delivers an even more faithful image of the moment Alan Lomax first recorded the songs on this CD in the field. He brought the fine traditional songs on this album into our collective consciousness, and nothing would please him more than to know that they will be heard by new generations of listeners and will influence new generations of artists.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Brian Eno, liner notes to *The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler* (Rounder 1700 [1977]).

² Alan Lomax, “The Urban Strain: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of American Urban Performance Styles,” National Endowment for the Humanities Grant Proposal, 1982.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Alan Lomax, “Saga of a Folksong Hunter” in *Hi Fi / Stereo Review* 4 (May 1960): 5, pp. 38–46.

⁵ Alan Lomax, “Appeal for Cultural Equity” in *Journal of Communication*, Spring 1977.

⁶ Alan Lomax, “Saga of a Folksong Hunter.”

⁷ Alan Lomax, preface to *The Land Where the Blues Began* (1993) p. xi.

⁸ Alan Lomax, *Prison Songs: Historical Recordings from Parchman Farm 1947–48, Vols. 1 and 2* (Rounder Records 1714 and 1715).

⁹ Brian Eno, liner notes to *The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Alan Lomax, “The Urban Strain: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of American Urban Performance Styles,” National Endowment for the Humanities Grant Proposal, 1982.

¹¹ Alan Lomax and Forrestine Paulay, unpublished transcription from “The Urban Strain” study notes, ca. 1985.

¹² “Urban Strain” Coding Sheet #6080: Fats Domino “Blueberry Hill.”

¹³ Alan Lomax and Roswell Rudd, unpublished transcription from “The Urban Strain” study notes, January 7, 1985.

¹⁴ Alan Lomax, “The Urban Strain: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of American Urban Performance Styles,” National Endowment for the Humanities Grant Proposal, 1982.

¹⁵ Alan Lomax and Roswell Rudd, unpublished transcription from “The Urban Strain” study notes, January 7, 1985.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Alan Lomax, “The Urban Strain: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of American Urban Performance Styles,” National Endowment for the Humanities Grant Proposal, 1982.

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Photos: Courtesy of Woody Guthrie Publications and
the Lomax Archives; Photo of Alan Lomax by Shirley Collins

Tracks 1, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 14 produced under license from
Atlantic Recording Corp.

Special Thanks: Nora Guthrie, Tiny Ledbetter, Gail Ludwig,
Mark Leviton, Bill Nowlin, John Virant and Scott Billington

**This album is also available in a hybrid stereo
SUPER AUDIOCD edition**

The Alan Lomax Collection is planned to include 150 or more albums. The Collection is organized into various series, yet will also contain other unique releases as well. The Rounder Records website will always have the most up-to-date information, and the Alan Lomax Collection portion of the website can be directly accessed at: http://www.rounder.com/rounder/artists/lomax_alan/ or for more info, email: info@rounder.com

The Collection currently comprises:

The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler

Southern Journey Series

Caribbean Voyage

Classic Louisiana Recordings

Portraits Series

Prison Songs

Christmas Songs

**World Library of Folk and
Primitive Music**

Deep River of Song

Italian Treasury

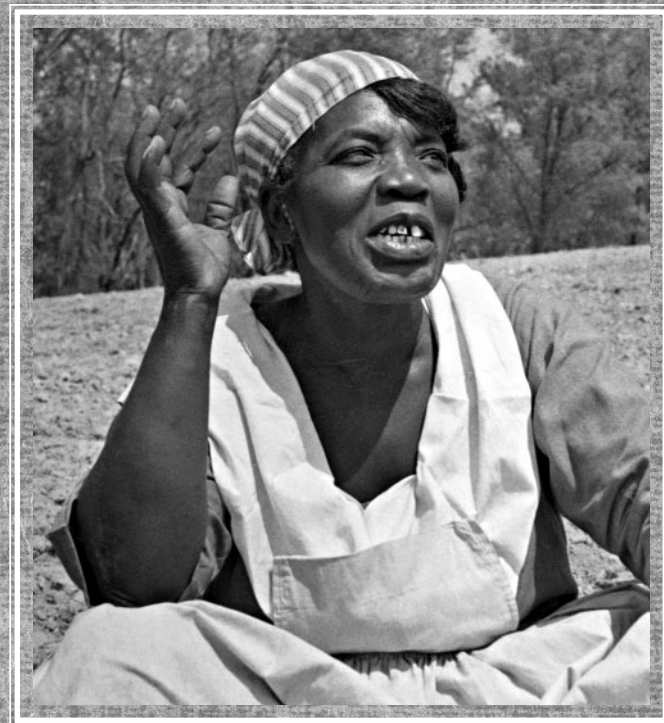
**Folk Songs of England, Ireland,
Scotland & Wales**

The Concert and Radio Series

Spanish Recordings

American Patchwork Videos

Lomax film work available through
Vestapol Videos



BESSIE JONES