

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FP 6

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# SONNY TERRY'S WASHBOARD BAND

WINE HEADED WOMAN

MY BABY IS GOIN' TO CHANGE THE LOCK

SONNY'S JUMP

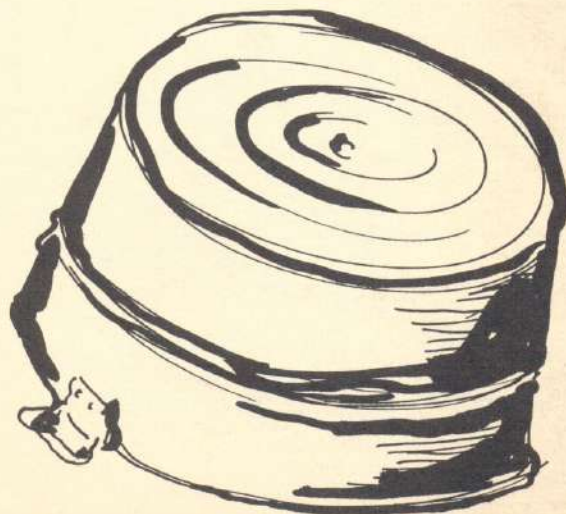
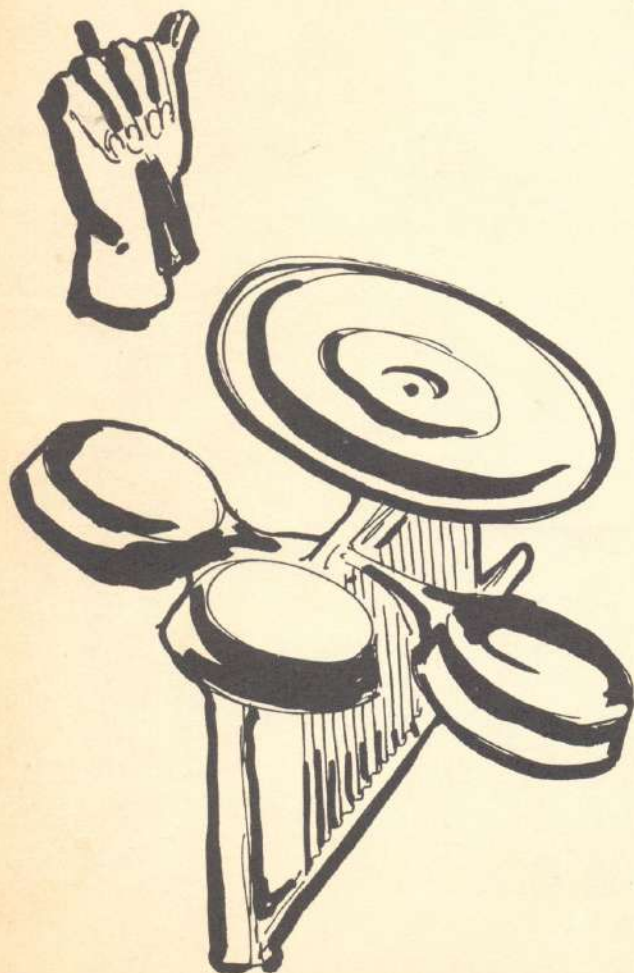
LOUISE BLUES

CUSTARD PIE

DIGGIN' MY PATATOES

WOMAN IS KILLING ME

MAN IS A CRAZY FOOL



FP 6 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP. N.Y.

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Notes On The "Washboard Band"  
by Harold Courlander

The washboard band is one of the most colorful phenomena of the American folk music scene, despite the fact that many Americans have never seen such a band in action. The typical instruments of the washboard band are the washtub, the washboard, a battery of small cymbals or frying pans, a pair of "bones," and sometimes a guitar or harmonica. Usually one of the players is a vocalist. The washboard band is to be seen in many a large American city -- New York, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis -- and in the Southern countryside as well. This orchestral combination appears to be a product of the American Negro community of the rural south. And though the southern scene has changed much in the past decade or two, the washboard band remains part of the shifting scene.

Sometimes such bands are of a sedentary nature. Its members play after work hours for their own pleasure, or at some local spot on a semi-professional basis. But the traditional washboard band is a travelling group. It has a circuit. It may appear in Mobile for a week and then disappear, to be heard of next in Birmingham, or Tuscaloosa, or Livingston, or York. The itinerant band usually holds forth on the sidewalk at night, or perhaps in a small bar with a name like "The Tin Cup." Its income is derived from small money gifts from spectators.

The itinerant washboard band carries on the old tradition of Negro minstrelsy. Throughout the South in days not long past, it was common to

see a boy leading a blind minstrel through the streets with a stick. These folk singers travelled far in the course of their lives, usually around a wide circuit that eventually brought them back to their starting point. This tradition of the blind minstrel and the boy or woman guide is a truly venerable one. Counterparts are found throughout West Africa and the West Indies today. It is possible that blindness was a traditional incentive for Africans and Americans alike to turn to music as a source of income. To many people such names as Blind Willie Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson come immediately to mind. Among the washboard bands, too, blind performers are not uncommon.

Old accounts of washboard bands make much of Negro "inventiveness" in the choice of household utensils for musical instruments. The Negro is so full of rhythm these accounts declare, that he can make music out of anything. There is both fact and fiction in such statements. The Negro has a rich musical tradition, but some Negroes, like some Whites, couldn't make music with a symphony orchestra at their disposal. And while the Negro has truly been very inventive in his use of the common materials around him, the adaptation of these devices for musical purposes was not the result of sudden inspiration. On the contrary, these "home-made" instruments were in an old tradition. They derived out of something that went before. Let's take a look at the instruments one by one:

The washboard: This instrument is scraped with a nail, a wire, the fingernail or the finger. It appears to be a handy substitute for the common west African scraper, which accompanies much west African secular music. In the West Indies this scraper took several forms -- the notched stick, the notched gourd or guiro commonly seen in Latin-American orchestras, and the metal scraper which resembles an ordinary kitchen grater. In some parts of the West Indies a burro's jawbone was used. It was played by scraping a stick across the teeth. The U.S. washboard is used in virtually the same manner as its prototypes.

The washtub: This instrument provides the bass tones for the orchestra. The tub is arranged in the following way. It is placed on the ground bottom-side-up. Through a hole in the inverted bottom a cord is attached. The other end of the cord is tied to a stiff stick, such as a broomstick. The other end of the stick is braced against the lip at the edge of the tub, so that the cord is taut in an approximately vertical position. The taut cord is plucked or thumped, and base tones are varied by pressing upward on the top end of the stick or relaxing the pressure. According to local usage, a second man may beat sticks against the side of the tub as though it were a drum. Here again we have ingenious adaptation within the mainstream of an old tradition, for the tub of the washboard band is the offspring of the African earth bow. The African device was an apparent development of the spring snare, used for capturing small game. It was constructed in the following manner: a hole was dug in the earth next to a small green sapling tree. The hole was then covered with a bark or hide membrane, which was pegged down all around. The sapling was bent down and tied by a cord, the other end of which was fastened to the sounding membrane. It was played by rubbing, plucking and tapping. And a second player sometimes beat on the drumhead with sticks. In Haiti this earth bow survived intact under the name tambour maringouin, or mosquito drum. And Haitians developed a portable model, in which a large inverted oil tin was mounted on a board. The bent green stick was also mounted in the board, and a cord ran from the upper end of the stick to the tin sounding chamber. The washtub, like its Haitian counterpart, is only a portable variant of the old earth bow. It, like the mosquito drum, is sometimes beaten on the edge with sticks. When no tub is available to produce the bass tones, the washboard band may use blowing jugs or bottles, devices that are known throughout the West Indies and probably, in some form or other, in West Africa as well.

Bones: The "bones" -- held between the fingers and clacked -- are also known in the West Indies. They provide a sharp percussion note which substitutes for the simple stick percussion that commonly is part of African music. In Haiti, sticks are beaten against a board or log to create this effect. In Cuba the claves-- hardwood sticks struck one against another-- provide a variation. Clacking sticks and bones are known in West Africa, and there is no reason to assume that they were re-invented in the United States.

Frying pans: While there is no overt connection between the frying pans and something that went before, metal percussion of this kind is old in Negro musical lore. In West Africa double and triple iron bells are struck rhythmically with an external striker as part of a musical ensemble. These bells survived in Haiti until recent years, and are still to be found in Cuba. There is good reason to believe they were known in the 19th Century in Louisiana. The bells are gone, but the metal frying pans-- carefully selected for tone -- might easily have resulted from a memory of the older instrument. Sometimes bottles are used as tapping instruments, much in the manner of metal bells.

The washboard band instruments were taken over by white musical groups a good while ago, and some twenty or more years ago it was possible to find stray recordings of both White and Negro performers in this tradition. Some of the White mountain music was infiltrated by the washtubs, washboards, and jugs and bottles.

It is also intriguing to note that modern jazz bands continue to make use of musical devices which are clearly related -- scrapers, cymbals, etc. More noteworthy is the fact that techniques have remained where the actual instrument has disappeared or been replaced. The bass fiddle, for example, usually plays the same role in the jazz band as does the tub in the washboard band, providing the rhythmic base tones. Furthermore, instead of being bowed, the bass fiddle is beaten and plucked much as though it were, in fact a washtub.

SIDE I, Band 1. THE WOMAN IS KILLIN' ME

Hooray, hooray the woman is killin' me!  
Hooray, hooray the woman is killin' me!  
If you don't believe it you wait right here  
and see!

Well, I met my baby walkin' down the avenue,  
Well, I met my baby walkin' down the avenue.  
Pretty mamma, pretty mamma, can Sonny walk  
home with you?  
She said, yes, Sonny, we'll rock that house  
tonight!  
She said, yes, Sonny, we'll rock that house  
tonight!  
You gotta give me plenty lovin', everything  
really be alright.

Hooray, hooray the woman is killin' me!  
Hooray, hooray the woman is killin' me!  
If you don't believe it you wait right here  
and see!

Baby, it's five o'clock, now what you gonna do?  
Baby, it's five o'clock, now what you gonna do?  
She said, Sonny, I don't care if it's eight o'clock,  
I leave it up to you!  
I got mad; I said, baby, I don't like this, I'm  
gonna lock the door!  
I'm gonna lock this door and throw the key away,  
I'm gonna lock this door and throw the key away!  
Baby, I ain't goin' home, I'm goin' to stay here  
all day.

Hooray, hooray etc.

SIDE I, Band 2. CUSTARD PIE BLUES

I'm goin' to tell you something, baby,  
Ain't goin' to tell you no lies,  
I want some of that custard pie.  
You gotta give me some of it,  
You gotta give me some of it,  
You gotta give me some of it  
'Fore you give it all away!

Well, I don't care if you live across the street,  
When you cut your pie,  
Please save me a piece.

I want some of it,  
I gotta have some of it,  
I gotta have some of it,  
'Fore you give it all away!

I want to tell you baby, it's understood,  
You got the best pie,  
In this neighborhood.  
I gotta have some of it, (sure you' born)  
I gotta have some of it, " " "  
Well, I want some of it,  
'Fore you give it all away!

SIDE I, Band 3. DIGGIN' MY POTATOES

Yes, you been diggin' my potatoes,  
Trampling on my vine.  
Yes, you been diggin' my potatoes,  
Trampling on my vine.  
Well, I have a special plant,  
Restin' on my mind.

Well, my vine's all green, 'tatoes painted red.  
I didn't find it true, 'till I caught you in my bed.

You know you diggin' my potatoes,  
Trampling on my vine.  
Well, I have a special plant,  
Restin' on my mind.

Well, I tipped up to the window, wished I had a gun,  
My vine wrapped all 'round him, he's goin' some.

You know you diggin' my potato  
Trampling on my vine.  
Well, I have a special plant,  
Restin' on my mind.

Well, I went out this morning, left my gate  
unlatched,  
When I come back home, I found that boy in  
my potato patch.

You know he's diggin' my potatoes,  
Trampling on my vine.  
Etc.

SIDE I, Band 4. CRAZY MAN BLUES

Yes, man ain't nothin' but a crazy fool  
To follow the women everywhere.  
Yes, man ain't nothin' but a crazy fool  
To follow the women everywhere.  
Well, I ain't singin' this song cause I ain't  
got no one,  
Lord! I can get them by the pair.

Yes, a man ain't nothin' but a stupid fool,  
To think he got a woman all by himself.  
Yes, a man ain't nothin' but a stupid fool,  
To think he got a woman all by himself.  
Well, Doc, I says soon as his back is turned  
You know she cuttin' out with somebody else.

Yes, man ain't nothin' but a crazy fool  
To give one woman all his pay.  
Yes, man ain't nothin' but a crazy fool  
To give one woman all his pay.  
Well, I says, soon as his back is turned  
Yes, you know she get out and throw it all  
away.

Etc.



SIDE II, Band 1. WINE-HEADED WOMAN

That wine-headed woman stays drunk all the time,  
That wine-headed woman stays drunk all the time.  
If she don't quit I believe she'll lose her mind.

That wine-headed woman she don't mean no good,  
That wine-headed woman she don't mean no good.  
Every time she gets drunk she tears up the  
neighborhood.

She don't love no whisky that fool don't love no rye.  
She don't love no whisky that fool don't love no rye.  
If she don't get her wine I believe that fool will  
die.

(Repeat first stanza)

Well I love my whisky, I'm crazy 'bout my gin.  
Well I love my whisky, I'm crazy about my gin.  
Baby if you don't drink what I drink I swear this  
is the end.

I say, hey baby I'm through with you.  
I say, hey baby I'm through with you.  
Well, ain't no tellin' what a wine-headed woman  
will do.

I said bye baby bye bye.  
I said bye baby bye bye.  
I said bye baby bye.

SIDE II, Band 2. MY BABY DONE CHANGED THE  
LOCK ON THAT DOOR

My baby done changed, yes she done changed the  
lock on the door.

My baby done changed, yes she done changed the  
lock on the door.

Well she said that key you got Sonny, yes, won't  
fit that lock no more.

I come home last night 'bout half past ten,  
I tried to get the key in the lock, and I couldn't  
get it in.

'Cause she done changed, well, she done changed  
the lock on the door.

Well, she said that key you got won't fit the lock  
no more.

I looked in through my window to see what I could  
see,

You know she was kissin' another man and I know  
it wasn't me.

'Cause that fool done changed, she done changed  
the lock on the door.

I called my baby up, honey what you want me to  
bring?

She whistled back low and easy, said don't bring  
a doggone thing.

Etc.

SIDE II, Band 3. SONNY'S JUMP

Instrumental only.

SIDE II, Band 4. LOUISE

Louise, Louise, yes you the sweetest girl I know.  
Louise, Louise, yes you the sweetest girl I know.  
Well she made me walk from Chicago, yes, to the  
Gulf of Mexico.

Big boat up the river on a bag of sand  
If she don't strike deep water, she'll never land.

Hey, hey, Louise why don't you hurry home.  
Well you know I ain't had no lovin' Louise,  
Whoo, Lord, since you been gone.

Louise she got a way like a rollin' stone.  
When she leave a man he has to grieve and moan.  
Hey, hey, Louise why don't you hurry home.

I believe Louise somebody been fishin' in your  
pond,  
Catchin' all the perches and groundin' up the  
bone.

Hey, hey, Louise why don't you hurry home.



PHOTOS BY MOSES ASCH

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