



*Roger Cooper*  
*Essence of Old Kentucky*



North American Traditions Series



## The Selections

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## Introduction

Roger Cooper was born on January 19, 1949 and raised in sundry parts of Lewis County, Kentucky, a beautiful region of rolling hills arrayed along the broad Ohio River. The nearest town of any size to be found in the region is Portsmouth, situated across the river in Ohio and easily reachable across several large bridges (in the old days, ferries carried traffic to and fro between the states). Although such jobs have largely now vanished, Portsmouth once offered employment in steel and shoe making and many Kentuckians crossed the river to work there, to gain a better education and to attend the big square dances held in the little communities that surrounded the town. This economic activity once supported a large community of exceptionally skilled fiddlers who knew one another

well and competed hard with one other for musical supremacy. The tunes they enjoyed tended to be elaborate in their melodic contours and appear to derive substantially from popular dance music composition of the late nineteenth century. To many Southern ears, these fiddle tunes would have sounded “northern,” although, in fact, they more accurately reflect *fin-de-siecle* mores of popular song composition. In addition, the great steamboats of the Ohio carried these musicians up into West Virginia and down to Cincinnati, so that fresh tunes from these regions were continually imported into Portsmouth.

But prototypical Appalachian hills and hollows cluster thickly in Lewis County as soon as one leaves the river and many of the simpler but evocatively

lonesome hill tunes of central-eastern Kentucky continued to be cherished by the amateur fiddlers who worked the little farms scattered through this rolling terrain. The frequent interchange between the two sides of the Ohio River gave rise to one of America's most distinguished fiddle repertoires, well exemplified by the blend of tunes to be heard on the



present record. Roger Cooper grew up at the tail end of this great regional tradition and had the great fortune to have been tutored in the music by one of its finest practitioners, the late Buddy Thomas, who passed away in 1974 at thirty-nine. Buddy was raised near Emerson, at the south edge of rural Lewis County, but eventually developed an extraordinarily deep understanding of fiddle music's potential through assimilating the abundance of inspiration that could be sampled within the wider musical community available to him. As a young man, Roger roomed with Buddy in central Ohio where Roger worked a factory job and Buddy mainly played the fiddle. There Buddy would instruct Roger in fiddle playing and attempted to communicate the complex ways in which he thought about their musical structure. Buddy also introduced Roger to many of the other great players of the region, such as Morris Allen in South Shore and Jimmy Wheeler in Portsmouth (whom we shall discuss in the

notes below). Although Roger made his living for many years playing bass in little country-western bands that worked locally and in military clubs around the country, his experiences with Buddy and his friends engendered a deep love for the old violin music that has never left him, along with a profound appreciation of the degree of skill and attention required to make their evocative contours come truly alive. Most of this grand heritage has now vanished from Lewis County and Portsmouth, having become displaced by bluegrass and other forms of modern music. Somehow these shifts have crept up on Roger gradually, leaving him to remark wistfully, "When I first started out in this fiddle business, I never dreamed it would get so lonesome--I really didn't."

This is Roger's second CD for Rounder. The notes to his earlier release, Going Back to Old Kentucky (Rounder 0380) contains a long autobiography by Roger detailing his adventures with Buddy, Morris and the rest. These memo-

ries, along with some of Buddy Thomas' own reminiscences, are available online at the website of Musical Traditions Magazine (<http://www.mustrad.org.uk>) and are highly recommended to any listener interested in understanding the circumstances of Roger's wonderful music better. Indeed, I'd heartily recommend purchasing Going Back to Old Kentucky itself, which is full of beautiful tunes of the type heard here (although that record as a whole comes across as more melancholy than the

Roger has known Robin Kessinger since the mid 'seventies, from a time when Roger worked near Robin's home in St. Albans, West Virginia. Robin is from the redoubtable Kessinger clan of St. Albans and his great uncle Clark recorded many selections of exceptional skill for the Brunswick label in the 1920's (Clark will be discussed further, under "Gippy, Get your Hair Cut"). Robin's dad, Bob Kessinger, was a great promoter of country music and formed a delightful instru-



tunes sampled here, which more adequately reveal Roger's skills as a square dance fiddler). And anyone who admires the music found here will certainly want to hear Buddy himself, on the full collection that Gus Meade and I recorded just before he died: Kitty Puss on Rounder 0032 (more of Buddy and Roger's other friends can be heard on some of the collections that I'll mention in the notes below).

mental ensemble with his boys. Although Robin restricts his contributions to firm rhythmic support here, he is justly celebrated as one of the country's finest masters of the flat-picked guitar solo and has recorded many tapes and CDs for West Virginia's Fiddletunes label. He is also greatly sought as a guitar teacher, both for his expertise and his unquenchable affability. Michael Garvin, still in his early 'twenties, comes from another musi-

cal family, the Garvins of Flatwoods, Kentucky. His grandfather, Bert, though mainly a bluegrass player, performs a number of delightful traditional numbers with J.P. Fraley on Rounder's Kentucky Old-Time Banjo collection. Although he plays a number of instruments well, Michael has been working hard at learning old Kentucky tunes such as these and represents one of the state's best hopes for keeping its wonderful folk heritage alive (a few selections will appear, along with more tunes from Bert and Michael's father, Keith, on a large collection of Kentucky music to be published on the Musical Traditions label). Recently Michael was given a Kentucky Folk Arts Fellowship to apprentice in fiddling under Roger Cooper.

Although, because of the constraints of schedule and geography, I needed to run most of the sessions for this CD independently, I am eager to acknowledge John Harrod's vital role in making the project possible, as well as the continual encouragement that Wally Wallingford and Gary Cornett have offered Roger in his music. Gary is one of Kentucky's premier violin craftsmen and has helped keep Roger well-stocked in fiddles over the years.

The tune notes to follow may seem a bit arcane, but I am attempting to sketch a story of how a traditionally based player such as Roger assembles a repertory within an era of tape recorders, television and wider access to various forms of fiddle music from around the world. Roger, in fact, greatly admires the music of Bob Wills and has become intrigued of late with classic swing fiddlers such as

Stephane Grappelli and Stuff Smith (who was born in Portsmouth, as it happens). Nonetheless, in the music heard here Roger adheres to Buddy Thomas' admonition "to keep it original," which does not necessarily entail a slavish imitation of sources, but instead the insistence that each performance should maintain a stylistic "old time" integrity at every level



*Tygart's Creek*

of detail. Although Roger may have acquired a specific tune from Portsmouth's Jimmy Wheeler or even Texas' Lewis Solomon, he invariably integrates these melodies into the more propulsive and harmonically "fatted up" style that he learned from Buddy Thomas. Fiddle music is enjoying a great revival recently across America but many of the newer players learn their tunes painstakingly on a note by note basis, often from books or slowed down on the computer, and fail to invest their performances with the complex layers of higher organizational structure that is essential to the effective performance of a regional style. But if our fiddle music abandons the drive and rich rhythmic integration that served the traditional square dance so ably, then



2. *Stonewall Jackson*. This polka, titled locally after the celebrated hero of the Confederacy, is widely loved across the entire country, displaying wide variations in its travels with respect to both title and the melodic composition of its second strain. Roger comments:

*Up in Ohio, them old guys called it "The Duck's Eyeball" and sometimes, to get a laugh, Buddy would say it was, "Stay in the Kitchen 'til the Cook Comes in."*

In the east the tune is commonly called "Richmond" or "Green Mountain Polka," while Roger's variant titles are more common to the west of Lewis County, where they reflect little jingles that fit the tune:

*Lay around the kitchen 'til the  
cook comes in  
The cook comes in, the cook comes in  
Lay around the kitchen 'til the  
cook comes in  
The poor old cook comes  
in.*

Sometimes these regional variations are so marked that fiddlers (Ed Haley, for example) will retain several versions of the piece in their repertory. Roger learned his driving version from Buddy Thomas, whose own performances can be heard on FRC 303 or Rounder 0544 (in an uncharacteristically low pitched version).

3. *Old Kentucky Blackberry Blossom*. There are a variety of fiddle tunes with this title, the most

popular of which (in the United States) was popularized (and possibly composed) by Arthur Smith in the 1930's. Within Kentucky, where Roger's tune is mainly encountered, Smith's more recent intrusion has proved a source of confusion and local fiddlers have resorted to various stratagems to keep the tunes apart (many a fine old-time tune has become lost to posterity through eclipse by some radio-disseminated johnny-come-lately). Thus Snake Chapman of Canada, Kentucky began calling the tune heard here "Garfield's Blackberry Blossom," while Santford Kelly of West Liberty conversely insisted that Smith's piece was properly entitled "Blueberry Blossom." The rationale for Snake's title traces to a bit of lore regularly associated with the tune (his versions of both tune and tale can be found in Rounder 0378). It is said that, during his celebrated campaign at Middle River, James A. Garfield was heard to



*Buddy Thomas*

whistle this tune which he had picked up from a Negro lad attached to the troops. When asked its name, Garfield allegedly spit a wad of chewing tobacco onto a nearby blackberry bush and declared, "Why, we'll just call it 'Blackberry Blossom.'" It seems likely that this tune gradually radiated from the eastern Kentucky region (until its advance was halted by the Smith melody), for Ed Morrison of Breathitt County told Jean Thomas in the 1930's that his own father had "carried the tune through the whole Civil War" and taught it to him. In fact, we happen to know that the blind fiddler Ed Haley was responsible for much of this spread, for virtually every fiddler who knew the tune told us that they had learned it from Ed Haley. This holds even for musicians as geographically separated as Sherman Lawson of Logan, West Virginia (Folkways 40097) and Dick Rutherford of Monticello, Kentucky (who recorded the piece in G major on Co 15567). A home recording of Haley's own performance can be heard on Rounder 1134.

The chief exception to this pattern is the present arrangement, which Roger learned from Buddy who seemed to have never heard of Ed Haley until we inquired about him in the early 'seventies. And the explanation seems to trace to Haley's patterns of travel, where, depending upon the season, he would take the steamboat from his home base in Ashland over to Portsmouth, or travel down to the mining country below Williamson and deep into the coal camps of West Virginia. Although Buddy learned many tunes from his friends in Portsmouth, he always lived in the high hills below Roger where Haley

seems to have rarely ventured. In contrast, another well-known blind street musician, J.W. ("Blind Bill") Day was well remembered throughout mountain Kentucky, for he was a regular visitor on court days in the region (Day and his brother Robert were chiefly responsible for spreading the extremely popular song "The Rowan County Troubles" throughout Kentucky and probably served as its author). This division of traveling territory between these two great itinerant musicians is doubly curious as Haley and Day were related by marriage and lived but a few doors apart in Ashland.

As such, Buddy's arrangement of the tune is rather different from Haley's setting (which was also played, with limited deviation, by the Portsmouth fiddlers Forrest Pick and Acie Neal). Buddy's version (which he called "The Old Kentucky Blackberry Blossom") is more driving, with almost a bluegrass flavor to it. In fact, he instructed Roger, "Now, the way to play this tune is just to take [Ralph Stanley's] 'Climch Mountain Backstep' and make everything in it minor." And Roger reports, "So I tried it that way and everything was easy. Old Buddy was a crafty little guy, wasn't he?"

In fact, melody-wise Haley's "Blackberry Blossom" is closely related to the West Virginian "Yew Piney Mountain," whereas the Stanley piece (when set in the minor) also resembles the old Kentucky "Lonesome John" to a considerable extent. Indeed, modal tunes of this class are apt to wander across each other's boundaries fairly readily.

4. *Wild Goose Chase*. One day I played Roger a cassette tape that I'd made in 1973 of Manon Campbell, an elderly fiddler from Line Fork in southwestern Kentucky. This tune, with its striking imitation of a goose's call in G string harmonics, struck Roger's fancy and he set out to develop a version himself in his own distinctive style. Although this charming tune is not especially common, variants seem to be widely disseminated, ranging from Emmett Lundy's superb Virginia recording for the Library of Congress to Eck Robertson's Texas version (as "Lost Goose"; County 202). Sometimes only the goose call is common to these tunes--Charlie Faurot recently sent me a wonderful version by Lewis Thomasson of this ilk (soon to be available on an anthology of Texan fiddling from County Records). And sometimes the melody is completely unrelated and lacks the call altogether, such as the "Wild Goose Chase" that Clyde Davenport plays. Clark Kessinger plays a wonderfully syncopated version allied to Roger's on Br 331--it is one of his finest records. Roger had heard Clark's version beforehand, but, as he reports, "it hadn't really sunk in." As it is, Roger's rollicking treatment is quite his own, falling someplace in the wide stylistic breach separating Kessinger's from Manon Campbell's. At the first available opportunity, I'll attempt to make the latter recording available (although it is, unfortunately, of less than sterling audio quality), for he was an important representative of old-fashioned southeastern Kentucky styling. As such, his music figures prominently in Jeff Titon's tune book, Old Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes.



*Abe Keibler*

5. *Headwaters of Tygart*. Roger picked up this evocative tune, wonderfully typical of the old Kentucky hill tunes, from the late Abe Keibler, whose uncle John was one of the best regarded violinists in early Portsmouth (Morris Allen, who also played the tune, was raised by the Keiblers after his own parents died). Tygart's Creek, which runs to the Ohio River east of Portsmouth, has inspired a number of beautiful fiddle tunes, including several distinct melodies called "No Corn on Tygart" (cf. Rounder 1132 and 0194). J. W. Day of Ashland (but originally from the Wolfe County highlands) recorded a melody related to Roger's as "The Nigger's Wedding" for the Library of Congress. Recently Roger has run across a local newspaper (The Kentucky Explorer, June, 1996) that reprints a traveler's report from November, 1867 that mentions a Lewis County resident who played this tune:

*[T]he only thing remaining [in Clarksburg] to remind one of former times is the cheerful face of the principle hotel keeper in the place, Lewis C. Stricklett, Esq., who still resides there. The old man relates*

*many laughable anecdotes of former times, when Clarksburg was a flourishing town. When you visit there, call on the old chap and hear him play the "Negro Wedding" on the violin-- but first have your life insured.*

From a gradual accumulation of anecdotal tidbits such as this, the large contribution that African-American dance musicians have supplied in developing the most precious parts of our noble fiddle tune heritage has become evident.



*Doug Stipe and Jim Woodward*

6. *Jim Woodward Tune.* One of the most intriguing fiddlers that John Harrod and Gus Meade visited was Jim Woodward of Jessamine County, Kentucky. Jim Woodward was one of several fiddlers who recalled unrecorded melodies learned from the great African-American fiddler Jim Booker of Camp Nelson who had recorded a few breakdowns for Gennett as Taylor's Kentucky Boys (several of his brothers, without Jim, also recorded as the Booker Orchestra). The Gennett selections, although beautifully played, provide little hint of the glorious tunes that Jim Woodward learned from Booker, all of which are quite distinctive in their lilt and

almost jazz-like in their chordal sense (how much of their unusual qualities can be attributed to Booker and how much represents Jim Woodward's personal creation is hard to say). Several sterling examples of Woodward's playing can be heard on Rounder 0377, where he is excellently accompanied in 'thirties swing style by his good friend Ray Stipe (whose uncle Doug was also a fiddler and can be seen playing to the left of Jim in the accompanying newspaper photo). Roger has been captivated by all of these numbers since he first heard them on tape (he never met Woodward himself) and three of these selections appear on the present CD.

7. *Queen of the West.* The title of this tune provides a dead giveaway to its origins--it traces to the popular One Thousand Fiddle Tunes printed by M.M. Cole in 1940, where it is credited to "Zeke Backus." This collection, in fact, represents a mere reprinting of plates from a giant tune compendium of 1882 entitled Ryan's Mammoth Collection (recently reprinted in its original form by Mel Bay). However, the Ryan collection never enjoyed the widespread distribution of Cole's, which was cheaply printed and almost uniquely available in a twentieth century time frame when many country violinists had learned to read music and were hungry for fresh repertory (see Donald MacLellan's account of Cole's importance in Nova Scotia in the notes to Rounder 7044). Oddly enough, the tune (except for a single measure and few phrasing indications) appears twice in Cole's, the second time as "Sumner's

Hornpipe.” Several of the fiddlers around Portsmouth were known to have utilized Cole’s but Roger acquired the tune through a more circuitous route. Sometime in the ‘seventies, Roger’s friend, the bluegrass musician Ronnie Eldridge, was visiting the celebrated fiddler Kenny Baker in Nashville who had a reel to reel tape of a Texas fiddler which he gave to Ronnie who then passed it along to Roger, who thereupon learned a number of tunes from the tape. Robin Kessinger subsequently adapted Roger’s version as a virtuoso guitar solo piece and it has now become somewhat of a standard amongst flatpickers as a result (Robin’s spectacular setting can be heard on Raw Fiddle on the Fiddletunes label). The “Texas fiddler” on Kenny’s tape turns out to have been the late Lewis Solomon and the noted field recorder Charlie Faurot has just released some wonderful recordings of Lewis on his Old Blue label, many of which come directly from One Thousand Fiddle Tunes (the version of “General Lee” found on Old Blue 701 can be directly compared with Roger’s own rendition on Rounder 0380). In addition, Howdy Forrester and Georgia Slim Rutland (of whom more below) were known to have played this tune frequently during their Dallas sojourn, where they socialized with the Solomon brothers and Benny Thomasson. Undoubtedly, this interchange contributed significantly to the postwar rise of the predominate style of modern contest fiddling, which was hammered out in Texas competitions of the ‘forties and ‘fifties.

Despite their rather rigid format, a hornpipe can be executed in the most

astonishing variety of manners, ranging from Roger’s and Lewis Solomon’s relatively undotted approaches to “Queen of the West” (where the melody is treated as effectively a reel) to Winston’s Fitzgerald’s sublime triplets on “Sumner’s Hornpipe” (Rodeo 2009) or the graceful rolling bow of Tommy Peoples (GTD 008). As to Cole’s collection, Roger remembers,

*Buddy once told me, “It’s a book out that’s got over a thousand tunes in it and, if you can get someone to read the music for you, you’ve got yourself a pretty good tune.”*

Indeed, Buddy once took Gus Meade and me to meet Lem Isom, a Portsmouth



fiddler who largely played tunes extracted from Cole’s (a fine example can be heard on Rounder 0544).

8. *Father Wheeler's Waltz*. Jimmy Wheeler was a skilled instrument repairman who lived in Portsmouth. He was adept on many instruments and had played rhythm guitar and bass in popular orchestras during the 'thirties.

*Jimmy was excellent on the guitar as well and he was pretty sophisticated musically for those days. One time he explained to me how you could put a diminished part into "Turkey in the Straw." Well, it works, but people would look at you if you did it and say, "What the hell was that?" But listening to Jimmy's fiddle playing was a real good lesson for me. He'd put these sneaky notes into a tune that you'd never think to use otherwise. Budd once said that Jimmy played "close notes better than anybody I ever heard," tho' I don't know exactly what he meant by that.*

Jimmy's father had been a traditional fiddler who tended a farm just outside of Portsmouth and Jimmy learned many fine tunes from him, often with no name attached such as this delightful waltz. Jimmy told Roger that, around the turn of the twentieth century, the various fiddlers in the countryside would concentrate in the city once a month to hear a pianist rattle off the latest tunes for them from

sheet music (Asa Martin once told me about similar arrangements around Irvine, Kentucky). Although we often enjoy a stereotype of the country fiddler as isolated from trends in popular music, this is not true of municipalities like Portsmouth where the violin was as happily accepted in a village orchestra as brass or woodwinds. Hence it is not surprising that Jimmy Wheeler's repertoire consisted in tunes apparently extracted from several generations of American popular dance music. To be sure, old mountain tunes like "Headwaters of Tygart" were also intermingled within the Portsmouth tune



*Portsmouth*

arsenal, but even the repertory of a back country Lewis County fiddler such as Charlie Kinney (Rounder 0376) consisted mainly in hornpipes and polkas akin to those that Jimmy Wheeler favored, although Charlie performed these in a far more rustic manner than Jimmy (many of Charlie's tunes apparently came from Dick Swearington of Concord, Kentucky, an accomplished musician of

an earlier day).

Jimmy socialized with all of the major fiddlers around Portsmouth and Buddy and Roger picked up many fine selections from him. In earlier days, he played guitar behind the violinist Forrest Pick (see Rounder 0544) on radio as “The Happiness Boys,” a show for farmers that was greatly appreciated by its devoted listeners. We were never able to hear Jimmy and Forrest together, but fortunately Jimmy made some fine recordings for the late Jeff Goehring that have been recently released on the Field Recorder’s Collective label (FRC 401). There Jimmy can be heard playing many of the tunes that Roger performs here.



#### 9. *Pond Creek Polka.*

Again, another tune from Jimmy Wheeler’s father that has come down to us without a name. Pond Creek (in Ohio; there is another near Hardy, Kentucky) is a rural spot where regular square dances were continuously maintained for nearly a hundred years. Jimmy’s dad lived in the vicinity, as did the Mershon family:

*An old man named Ishmael Mershon and his two boys. Joe Stamper said that they were the best fiddlers he ever heard; that their music was just out of this world.*

And:

*When I played country music up in Ohio, they always wanted polkas a lot. And I always liked the real polka bands quite a bit: their tunes just fit the fiddle. And down here in Kentucky, you can slip one in on them if you don’t tell them that it’s a polka.*

*Robin Kessinger*

10. *Gippy, Get your Hair Cut.* Roger learned this tune from Clark Kessinger’s classic Brunswick recording (Br 364). It comprises a particularly delightful member of one of America’s most venerable and entangled tune families, the “Betty Martin”/“Fire on the Mountain” group. In its oldest forms, it is found in fifer’s manuals of the early 1800’s (Samuel Bayard) and as a play party song (from Henry King, Sketches of Pitt County (North Carolina)):

*High Betty Martin, tip-toe, tip-toe,  
High Betty Martin, tip-toe fine;  
She couldn't get a stocking, she  
couldn't get a shoe,  
She couldn't get a husband to suit  
her mind.*

As a fiddle tune (cf. Hiram Stamper's version available at the Berea College Library website), it consists of two themes, the low part heard here, with its insistent "tip-toe," "tip-toe" rhythm, and the customary "Fire on the Mountain" melody. At some point in the nineteenth century, these two strains became detached and each

served as nuclei for a fresh family of tunes (the process is neatly illustrated by the performances of Kelly Gilbert on Rounder 0377, where two entirely new second parts have been added to each strain). Carl Sandburg reports in The American Songbag:

*In the early 1890's, in the tank towns of the corn belt, few women bobbed their hair. Often when a woman who had taken this liberty walked along Main Street on a night when there was to be a band concert, she was an object of special scrutiny. Young men would sing at her:*

*Chippy, get your hair cut, hair,  
cut*

*Chippy, get your hair cut, hair  
cut short.*

Sandburg then links this ditty to both

"High Betty Martin" and the martial "Johnny, Get your Gun" (which carries yet another convoluted melodic branch in its wake). The popular fiddle tunes "Granny, Will your Dog Bite?" and "Rye Straw" represent further forks within this family as well. A contemporary fiddler like Roger will know most of these familiar tunes, without sensing any particular



*Vanceburg*

relationship between them (which is not surprising, as their focal features have become completely distinct). By the 1920's, when "Gippy" was recorded by the Kessinger Brothers, the intended focus of its satire had shifted to flappers, as exemplified by Dutch Coleman's amusing adaptation, "Granny, Get Your Hair Cut."

Eighty-year old Stephen Tucker recorded a delightful "Chippy, Get Your Hair Cut" for Herbert Halpert of the Resettlement Administration in 1939 (almost certainly "Gippy" represents a record executive's misspelling of either "Chippy" or "Kippy"). As is often the case with Kessinger's performances, the high or "fine" part of the tune is novel and more technically demanding than more conventional second parts such as Tucker played. Kessinger seems to have never claimed

authorship of these elaborations, but we have reports of unrecorded virtuosos of a musical generation prior to Kessinger (e.g., the often praised Bob and Abe Glenn) that may have been responsible for these novel pairings. As we shall observe under “Birdie” below, there seems to have been a fashion for embedding familiar melodic strains within a matrix of syncopated elaborations.

Clark’s recording remains one of the sterling fiddle recordings of all time and Roger does an excellent job adapting the arrangement to his own style. Once upon a time Buddy had proposed a trip to visit Clark in St. Albans, having heard many tales of his exploits from Jimmy Wheeler and Morris Allen, but chickened out at the last moment. But Bob Kessinger later took Roger under his wing when Roger lived in West Virginia and kindly helped Roger experience more of

his family’s great musical heritage. As a young boy, Robin often fell asleep to uncle Clark’s music at extended house parties. In the late ‘sixties, Clark recorded a number of LPs, but these often include more hokum (especially from the guitarist) than his classically delineated 78s. Robin claims that Clark favored such accompaniments only as a necessity for winning fiddle contests, but preferred more straightforward backup when he played “serious music” for a more discerning audience. Robin also reports that his father taped many of these home sessions; let us hope that they may someday become publicly available.

11. *Martha Campbell*. This perfect fiddle tune is most strongly associated with Kentucky, where it has witnessed many recordings, but it is also known in Texas (Ace Sewell; Orville Burns). Here



*Kanawha River*

Roger mainly follows the melodic contours developed by Buddy (Rounder 0032), but, like Buddy, he has always greatly admired the driving propulsion that Bob Prater instilled within this tune (Bob can be heard playing the melody on Rounder 0376). Although Roger feels that he resembles Bob less than Buddy in matters of bowing and decoration, he credits Bob's square dance playing as a vital influence on how he approaches issues of rhythm and phrasing. Indeed, although Roger plays a lot of Jimmy Wheeler's music on this record, it was Bob's playing that primarily inspires the strong rhythmic pulse and square dance "lift" that Roger infuses into an up tempo tune such as this.

It would be deeply ungrateful to not acknowledge as well the profound influence that Doc Roberts' nonpareil performances of "Martha Campbell" on 78 will have exerted upon any fiddler who has heard them, including Roger and Buddy (who owned a battered copy of one of them). To this day, Doc remains one of the violinists that Roger admires most.

12. *Hard up Big Kanawha*. Here is an unusual melody learned from Morris Allen, who only played it on the rarest occasions. Morris in turn credited the tune to Bob Mays, a musician that the older fiddlers to whom Gus Meade and I talked in the 1970's sometimes mentioned

(*inter alia*, Alva Greene and Francis Gillum). 6/8 marches such as this (as well as the differently accentuated jigs and quadrilles) seem to have enjoyed some popularity across the entire South during the late nineteenth century, but quickly faded from the repertory subsequently (Dwight Lamb of Onawa, Iowa now knows more of them than any non-Canadian or Irishman that I know). Morris always pronounced the river's name as "Big Canoy" and it wasn't until Roger interpreted it for us that we realized that he was talking about the large waterway that runs through Robin's hometown of



*Morris and Agnus Allen*

St. Albans, West Virginia. As such, this is certainly one of the many tunes that got carried between Portsmouth and Charleston on the big paddlewheel boats that once bound these two communities together.

Morris Allen was one of Buddy's best friends and taught him some of his finest melodies. He lived in South Shore, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River from

Portsmouth where he worked in a steel mill. Roger lived just up the road from Morris and his wife Agnus for a few years in the late 'seventies.

*Old Morris didn't care what anybody thought of him and so he was liable to say anything under the sun to you. But he and Agnus were really fine people and he straightened me out on a bunch of things in my fiddle playing.*

13. *Nancy Rowland*. Roger learned this jolly version of a fine old square dance tune from Buddy, but where he picked it up is uncertain. It was recorded a number of times on 78 from scattered parts of the country (John Carson, the Skillet Lickers, The Carter Brothers and Son); it is possible that Buddy learned it from one of these (most probably, the Skillet Lickers whom Buddy greatly admired--he once tape recorded an elaborate "fiddler's contest" skit very much in their manner). On the other hand, Snake Chapman learned his fine version (Rounder 0418) from hearing Georgia Slim and Big Howdy Forrester play it on the radio. Buddy was too young to have heard those broadcasts, but possibly he heard Forrester play it at a later time. But it is a common enough tune and Buddy learned fiddle tunes from many sources, so exact origins would be hard to pinpoint.

14. *Lazy Bow Drag*. Roger learned this from Jimmy Wheeler. As such, it is reminiscent of other "northern" sounding tunes such as "Old Flannigan" (which Jimmy also knew as a "no name" melody). Another skilled fiddler from Portsmouth who often played it on the radio as "Lazy Drag" was Acie Neal (his Christian name was probably "Asa," which is usually pronounced "Acie" in the South). Acie had died before Roger was old enough to travel into Portsmouth to hear him, but Buddy often talked of playing guitar for him (and complained that



Neal didn't like him learning his tunes). There is a home recording extant of this tune and, before he begins, Acie Neal comments, "There isn't anything lazy about it, if you're a-fiddling." On this recording, which demonstrates a great level of technical skill, Neal engages in quite a bit of what Buddy used to call "hot dogging"--showy ornamentation that interferes with the tune's rhythmic flow. According to Ray Hilt's report (Ray performs another version of this tune on Rounder 0544), Neal played with fewer

affectations when Ray listened to his radio broadcasts before the war.

The fiddlers within the Portsmouth circle (which included frequent visitors such as Ed Haley and Clark Kessinger) represented a close knit bunch, but they were also quite competitive with one another, each vying to outdo the other with some yet more extended elaboration upon “Ragtime Annie.” In addition, a celebrated contest



fiddler of the late ‘thirties who styled himself as “Natchee the Indian” (his real name, Roger was told, was Lester Storer) had grown up in the hill country outside of Portsmouth. Natchee developed a set of fiddle

tricks (and fashion mannerisms!) that allowed him to vanquish many of the best fiddlers of his day (including Kessinger, Arthur Smith and Ed Haley). Roger comments:

*Old Morris Allen would say, “He couldn’t play nothing. He’d just play that contest stuff and then he’d be done: that was all he could do. But you just couldn’t beat him in a contest at all.”*

In such a milieu, it is not surprising that some measure of extraneous “hot dogging” crept into the Portsmouth music (Snake Chapman once commented that Ed Haley’s postwar home recordings were more “ragtime” than the performances he

had remembered from earlier years and Rector Hicks made a similar report to Kerry Blech).

Although Buddy could execute fiddle tricks with the best of them and certainly liked to show off, he rarely spoiled the flow of his melodies with excessive “hot dogging.” Roger has constructed his own musical aesthetic around these percepts of Buddy’s and will never

*Garrison*

compromise the propulsion of his performance to accommodate an empty “effect.” Roger conceptualizes each fiddle tune as structured within a hierarchy of nested rhythmic units, which must be carefully maintained in tight synchronization. Often in recording Roger will halt an otherwise fine performance simply because he “didn’t make the bowing come around right.” Indeed, Roger’s concern with rhythmic integration is so great that he rarely enjoys playing breakdowns within a conventional jam session setting, because he usually finds it impossible to maintain the integrity of the pulse and the logical progression of the tune’s variations

when the lead trades too rapidly between instrumentalists.

15. *Shortening Bread*. Here is an elusive tune that appears prototypical of a number of other tunes whose origins I find equally mysterious. Roger has heard the tune from two sources: a recording of Jim Woodward made by John Harrod and Gus Meade and the classic 78 by Doc Roberts (from Camp Nelson and Richmond, respectively; both locales lie in the bluegrass region, to the west of Lewis County).

*Old Woodward has a real pretty melody to his, but a different feel than Doc's and I had to move away from Woodward's towards Doc's to get it to work out for me.*

Both fiddlers seem to have learned the composition from African-American performers: from Jim Booker in Woodward's case and from Owen Walker, an unrecorded Richmond barber, in Doc's. In addition, Roger obtained a "Shortening in the Bread" from George Hawkins of Bethel, which appears to represent a more distanced relative of the setting heard here.

To complicate the picture further, out west in Nebraska the great Bob Walters learned a set close to D's which he called "Irish Cobbler" (a good version of which can be heard on Dwight Lamb's new CD, Rounder 0529). Now it is certainly possible that Uncle Bob or his source learned the tune from Doc's record (there were certainly Kessinger and Arthur Smith tunes in Bob's repertory), but I suspect not. The composition consists of a melodic core apparently based upon the

familiar folk ditty "Shortening Bread" (*"Put on the skillet/Put on the lid"*), surrounded by three elaborate supplements with a marked ragtime feel to them. Another Owen Walker piece that Doc played (but which was also performed by the Alabamian Tommy Jackson in a seemingly independent version) is "The Cat Came Back," which appears to be constructed around the rather plain chorus of the eponymous comic song (*"Oh, the cat came back the very next day/We thought he was a goner"*), again supplemented with elaborated syncopated sections. In the case of the "Birdie" heard below and the well known "Twinkle Little Star" (of which George Hawkins knew a particularly complex arrangement), we witness sentimental songs of the late nineteenth century transformed into jaunty (and rather irreverent, given their originally gloomy subject matters) cakewalks. It is my tentative deduction that we are witnessing evidence of some mode of dance music arrangement popular around the turn of the century, for which more concrete evidence may one day emerge (I possess sheet music for a ragtime setting of "Turkey in the Straw" of roughly the character hypothesized). Much of the evidence required to resolve these matters properly (the same difficulties attend to locating sources for melodies like "Pond Creek Polka") lies buried within the vast *terra incognita* supplied by the popular dance music of the second half of the nineteenth century, of which we understand relatively little. It has been firmly established (by Gus Meade's *Country Music Sources, inter alia*) that much of the material that becomes known as "folk

song” in the twentieth century originated as popular composition during this earlier epoch and we can presume that much the same holds of our “folk” instrumental music as well. But tracking down origins is even harder here, given the diffuse nature of music publishing in the nineteenth century. In addition, it is well established that song melodies have tended to lose their Victorian chromaticism as they evolve into “folk songs” and allied processes have no doubt altered our instrumental dance pieces greatly as well (as can be easily seen by comparing the published melody of “Put Me in My Little Bed” with the “Birdie” heard here). But without a lyrical link to bind them together, it becomes difficult to align a



*Buddy Thomas*

“folk” fiddle tune confidently with its popular predecessor, even when the music for both have been located and are available for inspection. I have complained elsewhere of the incautious equation of melodic stocks based upon the passing similarity of a phrase or two, for such attributions have commonly proved

wrong when the true etiologies of the tunes are uncovered.

16. *Big Indian Hornpipe*. Buddy learned this beautiful air (which is related to the book tune “Lardner’s Reel” which was also popular in Kentucky) from Morris Allen and Jimmy Wheeler (available on FRC 401). I’ve also seen a 1932 tune list belonging to Forrest Pick that mentions a “Big Engine Hornpipe.” However, the fiddlers in nearby Bath County--George Hawkins and Alfred Bailey (Rounder 0376)--knew a completely different melody by this title (although Alfred had, in fact, acquired some of his repertory from Forrest and Jimmy’s radio broadcasts). A comparison of Jimmy’s version

with Buddy’s (and Roger’s) vividly demonstrates how differently the two musicians conceived a tune: Buddy, by Roger’s account, typically dropped the “fiddle contest” accretions that Jimmy added, preferring to instead “fatten up” Jimmy’s single line melody with unisons and double stops, while adding more lonesome sliding notes and installing a complex back beat that works against the main melody line. Buddy seems to have authored the final variation himself, which he said represented an Indian’s war cry and was, no doubt, inspired by the television cartoons he loved so well. Normally, I wouldn’t like such mimetic accretions, but I’ve grown so accustomed to Buddy’s musical logic that “Big Indian Hornpipe” now seems naked without it.

17. *Dittany Tea*. This concoction, brewed from a variety of oregano, represents a traditional remedy for indigestion. Roger learned this otherwise unreported tune from Jimmy Wheeler.

18. *Pretty Little Indian*. This melody may represent an old West Virginia tune, but virtually all of its current popularity traces to the late Curly Ray Cline, who fiddled for Ralph Stanley for many years and who recorded the piece on Rebel 1506. It is to be presumed that Buddy Thomas (Roger's source) learned the tune in descent from



*Buddy and Roger*

Cline's performance. It bears certain affinities to the widely distributed "Pretty Little Widow" and may represent a recomposition of those strains.

When Cline was a young teenager, he competed in a large fiddle contest against Snake Chapman, to whom he lost on points. But Curly Ray began to bawl so loudly and his mother raised such a fuss that the judges reconvened behind the curtain and split first place between the two. Snake was so disgusted by the process that he more or less stopped going to fiddle contests, but other fiddlers spoke about the scandal for many years thereafter (John Hannah recalled the tale for Kerry Blech in 1984, for example).

19. *Golden Star Hornpipe*. The usual name of this popular hornpipe is "Silver Star Hornpipe," its luster having been upgraded by the folk process in Portsmouth. Although this tune can be found in One Thousand Fiddle Tunes, it, unlike "Queen of the West" and "Sally Growler," can be confidently placed in Portsmouth long before 1940, as Jimmy Wheeler first learned it from his dad (it was quite popular locally). Indeed, the tune is frequently performed in both French Canada and Cape Breton, as well as out in the Midwest by Bob Walters and his friends. As is commonly in the South, Roger performs the tune at a quite zippy pace with little traditional hornpipe accentuation. Indeed, he commented to me the other day, "Boy, I sure played that tune fast when we did that recording!"

20. *Flannery's Dream*. A number of mountain tunes of roughly this title have been encountered in Kentucky, ranging from cognate melodies (Alva Greene's version on Rounder 0376) to the apparently unrelated (John Salyer's on AC 003). The closest match I've heard is with Santford Kelly's version on FRC 503 (Ricky Skaggs recorded a bluegrass adaptation of Kelly's piece as "Son of Hobert" in 1972, but Roger had heard Buddy play the tune before that). Roger is unsure where Buddy picked up this version, but remembers hearing Buddy speak of Kelly who was a well-known personality at the Sorghum Festival held annually in West Liberty (on one such occasion, J.P. Fraley recalls Kelly setting forth a Rumpelstiltskin-like challenge to provide a title for this old tune). So, quite possibly,

Buddy learned the tune directly from Kelly or ran into Skaggs at some bluegrass get-together. Roger comments that, though Buddy did not drive, he covered large amounts of territory in his musical rambles and one could scarcely travel anywhere in Kentucky or Ohio where Buddy didn't seem to know somebody or other just up the road or up the next hollow.

Buddy can be heard playing this tune on FRC 303, in an uncharacteristically slow rendition, a style that I suspect represented an attempt to emulate J.P. Fraley's sedate manner for the sake of the audience present, whereas Roger's version better reflects the driving tempo and rhythmic emphasis that Buddy had employed earlier.

Indeed, I don't remember Buddy playing this piece for Gus or me (or, for that matter, "Blackberry Blossom" either), probably because he felt that he had not managed to get all of the "old time" flavor he had wanted in the piece. Indeed, through comparing notes with Roger, whose main period of learning from Buddy occurred several years before Gus and I met him, it has become fairly clear that Buddy's performances were undergoing a transition in the several years before he died, when he was attempting, in particular, to introduce more "long bowing" passages (that is, playing a long string of notes on a single bow stroke) into his playing (Roger, in contrast, attempts very little of this). Buddy had acquired some of his best tunes from his mother's



*Buddy used to play this tune all the time--he was crazy about it. He projected such a rhythm on that tune that it would really grab hold of you. And it was in the minors, too--it used to remind me of a frailing banjo type thing. But Buddy never did get it quite the way he wanted--he just kept hunting for some way he wanted it to sound.*

memories of her own father's playing and her manner of phrasing plainly formed Buddy's model for how these old-time tunes should sound. Indeed, he often remarked to me in our interviews, "I'm feel that I'm just learning how to bow out those old tunes right," even though long bow performance was not typically a hallmark of Kentucky mountain style (although it suits many of the Portsmouth

tunes better). Roger also informs us that, a few years earlier, he often needed to “pick his brain to coax some of Buddy’s good tunes like ‘Snakewinder’ out of him,” because Buddy was accustomed to favoring the popular standards that most of his audience expected to hear (the same was true of Morris Allen: when I first visited Morris by myself, I could only extract “Ragtime Annie” and such, whereas in Buddy’s company the most astonishing melodies bubbled forth, simply because Buddy knew the proper titles to request).

On a related topic, Roger sometimes objects to hearing his own playing characterized as a “Lewis County style,” for he feels that such a generic description robs Buddy’s particular musical genius of its rightful due. In the five or six years when they worked closely together, Roger witnessed at first hand Buddy’s continual efforts to elevate his fiddling to a higher plane. Often Buddy would attempt to describe in words, often to Roger’s utter incomprehension, the intangible effects he was attempting to reach:

*He would sit there for hours and hours just scratching away slowly on the fiddle with it laying down on his arm. It could almost drive you crazy, for you could hardly figure out what he was playing or what he was searching for. But then, when it came time to really play, he’d put that fiddle up under his chin and, boy, it would be beautiful. And all of that little stuff he was scratching on would still be in it, but it’d be up to tempo and beautiful.*

Getting back to “Flannery’s Dream,” Roger relates the little story that

Buddy attached to this melody:

*Two fiddlers got together to battle it out. They played all night and nary one of them could outdo the other. So they went to bed and old Flannery heard this tune in his sleep. When he got up in the morning, he started playing this tune and the other guy knew he was beat. Buddy said, “he just put on his pants and went home.”*

21. *Rough and Ready*. Another fantastic tune that has come down to us from Jim Booker via Jim Woodward. In this case, Woodward’s own performance can be heard on Rounder 0377--I hope that we will be able to issue more of Jim Woodward’s fine playing in the future. “Rough and Ready” is distinguished by its tricky, meandering structure. Roger comments,

*This is one of the most crooked tunes I ever did hear. But once you understand it, then it’s alright to play.*

22. *We’ll All Go to Heaven When the Devil Goes Blind*. In 1997 Roger took me to visit Abe Keibler in Portsmouth, cousin to Morris Allen and Roger’s source for “Headwaters of Tygart.” That evening Abe played us an old mountain tune with this evocative title and I suggested to Roger that it might be a good tune to learn. However, Abe was in his late ‘eighties and Roger had trouble making out the exact melody he intended to play (Buddy Thomas, by contrast, was a genius in being able to discern the melodic core within the most rustic performance). However, Roger had a tape of Ed Morrison’s great performance of the tune

for the Library of Congress and so he essentially plays the Morrison version here. I listened to my tape of Abe Keibler recently and he is clearly playing a simpler version of this tune, albeit only with two parts. According to Roger, the late Charlie Kinney sometimes played a tune of this title, although he may have well picked up the melody from the collector Gus Meade who commonly employed it as a demonstration piece for our informants.

Roger rightly identifies this as “one of the old Kentucky mountain tunes,” a rousing style of playing that he associates with J.W. Day, Santford Kelly and the great Emma Dickerson. Morrison (about whom little is known) lived in Breathitt County, which lies a little to the south of where these other fiddlers lived, but, as Roger comments, he has the style down perfectly. It is unclear how Morrison came to the attention of Jean Thomas in Ashland (who arranged his Library of Congress session there), although Thomas seemed to be in touch with many musical personalities around the state (Pleaz Mobley, Buell Kazee and Asa Martin all told me that she had contacted them in the ‘thirties to come to her Ashland folk festival). Kerry Blech observes that Thomas sometimes traveled the Eastern Kentucky circuit as a court stenographer and that “court days” often provided local musicians with an opportunity to meet an audience.

23. *Birdie*. As stated above, this widely disseminated fiddle tune seems to represent a humorous set of raggy variations upon the 1870’s sentimental song “Put Me

in My Little Bed” by C.A. White and Dexter Smith. Roger here plays Buddy Thomas’ version, but many other settings of the tune, often quite varied in their melodic materials, have been recorded in the region (from Jimmy Wheeler, J. P. Fraley, Forrest Pick, The Tweedy Brothers, Clark Kessinger, *inter alia*). Roger thinks that Buddy may have gotten his version from Joe Stamper, who in turn had known Buddy’s grandfather, Jimmy Richmond (Buddy had acquired some of his most beautiful melodies from his mother’s whistling of tunes that her father used to play).

In its original song form, “Put Me in my Little Bed” was recorded several times on 78 (e.g., by the Red Brush Rowdies). Stan Jackson of Washington State (but originally from Arkansas) learned it



*George Hawkins*

as “Burlie.”

24. *Paddy Bids Farewell to America.*

“Paddy’s Farewell to America” is credited to Tom Doyle in Ryan’s Mammoth Collection (= One Thousand Fiddle Tunes) which seems to represent its primary source. Roger learned this jig from George Hawkins of Bethel, Kentucky (see Rounder 0376) in the mid 1970’s; George always articulated its title as “Paddy Bids Farewell to ‘Merikee.”

*I asked George one time, “What’s that tune about?” He said, “I reckon that Paddy’s come over here and didn’t like it, so he’s getting on the boat to go back.” Oh, I liked the way George played it awfully well.*

George did not read music; he possibly picked up the tune from Tom Riley when he worked in Indiana in the late 1940’s or from what he called the “northern fiddlers” (= Ohio) he would often meet in the many fiddle contests he attended.

25. *Midnight Serenade.*

Roger learned this pretty waltz long ago from Buddy and Morris Allen, but had more or less forgotten about it until it came to mind a few years ago. Clark Kessinger played a related melody with a far more elaborate--and, to my thinking, less attractive--second part. Ed Haley also played yet another elaboration on the tune that

was inexplicably not included in the Rounder issue of his home recordings (it is a very fine performance). There are many compositions of the late nineteenth century called “Midnight Serenade” (or something similar), but I’ve not found any mate to the present strains.

26. *Trot Along, My Honey.* Roger learned this arrangement from Buddy when they lived in Ohio together: “It was one that I could play in front of him, as I don’t think he liked it too much. He had heard it from Howdy Forrester and when I asked who he was, Buddy answered, “Why, he plays with Roy Acuff on the Grand Ole Opry: he’s a real fiddler.’ When I asked, ‘How good is he?,’ Budd replied, ‘My god, son, he’s the best that ever was.’” According to Roger, Howdy Forrester,



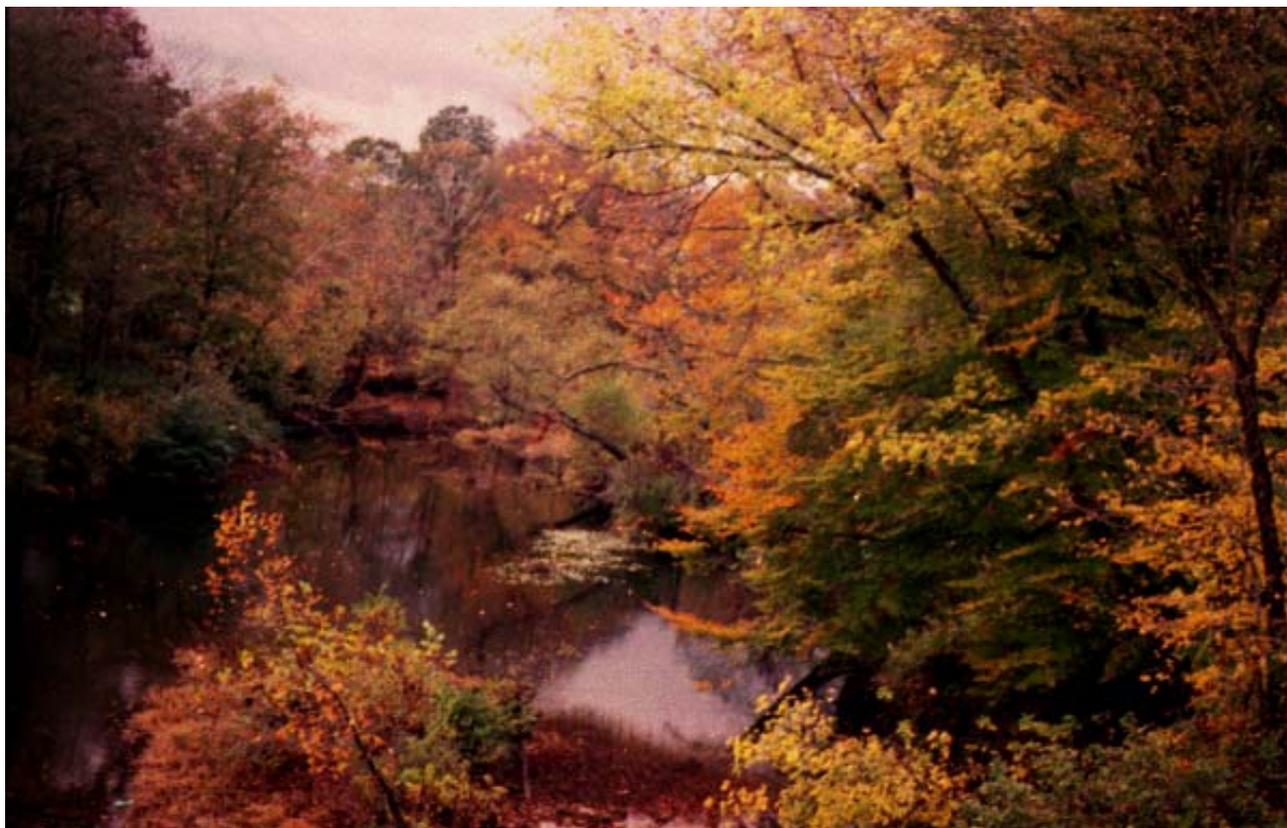
*Michael Garvin*

Kenny Baker, Clark Kessinger, Doc Roberts and Clayton McMichen and the Skillet Licker ensemble were the commercially recorded fiddlers that Buddy admired the

most. Big Howdy (as he was popularly known) performed this sprightly tune often on the Grand Ole Opry as a member of Roy Acuff's troupe and recorded it on his celebrated MGM LP, Fancy Fiddlin'

legendary status as a great technician.

Interestingly enough, showing just how small circles sometimes run in the fiddle world, Robin's father was a great friend of Rutland's (and probably played



Country Style, which is probably where Buddy learned it (Forrester later rerecorded "Trot Along" for the Stoneway label as well). According to Snake Chapman, Forrester often played this tune with Robert "Georgia Slim" Rutland when they worked radio broadcasts together in Texas in the late 1940's. Unfortunately, the group left behind only a few recordings for Mercury, largely of a country music cast, but the Forrester-Rutland fiddle duets left a lasting impression on anyone who heard them. Recently some 1950's home recordings of Georgia Slim with his wife have appeared on the Tri-Angle-Far label which fully confirm his

#### *Kinnikinnick Creek*

an intermediary role in making these recordings possible). The Kessinger family used to visit Rutland in his music shop in Valdosta, Georgia. Slim was also a talented flat-picker and Robin still plays some exceptional guitar numbers he learned from him. To tighten this circle even further, the late Curly Parker (Rounder 0544) told Gus Meade and me that Slim often visited with Ed Haley when Rutland worked in radio stations in Ironton and West Virginia before World War II.

Returning to "Trot Along" proper, Snake reported that Forrester and Rutland

often announced this number as “The Traveler,” presumably in humorous euphemism. Melodically, I’d guess that the piece traces to Forrester’s Hickman County, Tennessee heritage, from which Big Howdy acquired many unusual and charming pieces (John Hartford managed to tape a number of these shortly before Forrester’s death--I hope that they will someday become available). I also hypothesize that the melody once supported words. Its half stanza release in E minor



strikes me as supplementary, representing either a relic of minstrel show practice (where instrumental interludes were often set in the relative minor) or an addition by Rutland and Forrester themselves (Big Howdy often cobbled together parts of fiddle tunes for the sake of greater variety).

Roger finally managed to hear Fancy Fiddlin’ Country Style for himself

in the 1970’s:

*That record almost got me off track completely, because I admired Howdy’s fiddling so much, I started trying to play like that for awhile, until I finally switched back to what I’m a-doing now.*

27. *Sally Growler*. The story of this tune is virtually the same as that for “Queen of the West”: Roger learned it from the same tape of Lewis Solomon who was appar-

ently attempting to amplify his repertoire by going through One Thousand Fiddle Tunes (where it is credited to Harry Carleton). Roger comments: *Old Solomon was just cooking on that thing. It’s hard on you to play it like that, as there’s no place for a rest in it anywhere.*

Although the widespread (and deserved) popularity of the composition undoubtedly traces only to the 1940’s, it is now performed fairly commonly in Texas, Cape Breton and Ireland. Morris Allen, who hated to admit that there could be a fiddle tune he hadn’t heard before, insisted that the proper name of this was “The Queen City Hornpipe.”

28. *Putney’s Run*. Roger learned this

speedy tune from Jimmy Wheeler, although home recordings of Acie Neal are also extant. Roger isn't sure where Putney's Run is, although he imagines that lies in Ohio someplace, because "Everything over there is a 'run', while we call them 'creeks' over here." Kerry Blech observes the melody's affinities to Lonnie Seymour's "Log Chain" (FRC 403) and that Estill Adams of Washington Courthouse performed an unrelated melody as "'Putner's Run."

29. *Morgan on the Railroad.*

Yet another wonderful tune descended from Jim Booker courtesy of Jim Woodward. Almost certainly its title

refers to John Hunt Morgan, a Lexington businessman who organized a rebel militia that disabled the L & N railroad in a celebrated raid in Christmas raid of 1862. On Rounder 0377, Ed Barnes plays a lesser tune of this title, but John Harrod informs us that Barnes was probably confused and the customary name of his melody is "Muddy Creek."

30. *Soapsuds Over the Fence.* This title has been attached to many distinct tunes (quite commonly the familiar "Too Young to Marry") and is commonly mentioned as a popular tune in chronicles of pioneer life. On the Library of Congress CD

*Black Texicans* (Rounder 1862), there is an unusual song by Arthur Armstrong about "King Buzzard" that speaks of "an old mule in the corner of the fence" that may conceivably bear some lost linkage to this odd title, as well as to Dr. Humphrey Bate's equally peculiar breakdown, "Throw the Old Cow Over the Fence." Be that as it may, on his Field Recorder's



*South Shore*

Collective CD, Jimmy Wheeler mentions that he acquired this melody from a barber in Columbus, Ohio named Lake Brickey. Roger comments,

*When Jimmy would play for you, he had a routine where he'd just dash off a whole bunch of tunes quickly in a row, like he didn't care much about any of them. But he seemed to like this one a lot--I think he liked the title of it. Old Morris Allen played a tune he called "Soap in the Sinkhole," but it was really just "Billy in the Lowground."*

31. *Briarpicker Brown*. Although this sprightly reel is now quite popular within fiddling circles, those versions have all descended from Buddy's 1974 recording. Buddy learned it in turn from Morris Allen who told us that it was named for a Carter County musician of fifty years previous who "had a gnarled chin--it looked like he had been a-eating briars." Morris reported that Brown played other tunes, but that this one represented his particular favorite. When John Harrod and I recently pulled our recordings of Morris out of storage to issue his own version of "Briarpicker Brown" on Along the Ohio's Shores (Rounder 0544), we were surprised to hear that his fine part was differed from Buddy's (which Roger follows here). Both versions are quite charming and fit together well. Roger comments that he rarely heard Buddy play old Kentucky pieces like this or "Susan's Gone" much when they lived together: "I think he just learned them way back when and pretty much forgot about them, unless you'd think to coax them out of him."

Jeff Titon has observed that the low strain in "Briarpicker Brown" resembles the old English standard, "The Rose Tree."

Often when revivalists attempt a tune such as this, they omit the strong backbeats that supply it with its special character. Roger comments:

*With a good fiddler, when one thing is going on with the main melody, you will be able to hear other patterns popping along in the backbeats, like the fiddle is providing its own accompaniment. In fact, you can sometimes*

*hear those patterns better when the fiddle is just by itself, because some of those notes lie in the same range where the guitar is a-playing. And then when you look at the rhythm in the tune as a whole, you'll hear yet another pattern laid on. In a good fiddle tune, there'll be about five or six different things going on at the same time and you have to work pretty hard to make it all come out right. But I'm not so good at analyzing music, so I'll start talking myself out on a limb here. Buddy used to talk about the patterns in fiddle tunes all the time, sometimes in ways I wasn't able to completely understand at the time.*

32. *Six White Horses*. Learned from Jimmy Wheeler, whose own version can be heard on his Field Recorders Collective CD. On another CD in that series, Cecil Plum of Massillon, Ohio plays a more elaborate version of the same tune in a manner greatly influenced by Arthur Smith. I would not be surprised to learn that this song-like composition derives from Smith's popular radio broadcasts and country music tours in the 'thirties and 'forties (it is even conceivable that its title accidentally drifted over from the Clyde Moody-Bill Monroe hit of 1941). Kerry Blech reports (on the authority of the collector, the late Jeff Goehring) that Jimmy sometimes attached a bit of unrelated scatology to the tune. Jimmy was fond of roughhouse humor and had likely recalled some naughty juvenile doggeral that happened to fit the tune's metrical contours (which are roughly the same as the well-known "No More Booze on



Sunday”).

33. *Yellow Barber*. This is one of Buddy’s most celebrated tunes and Roger does a good job in capturing the exhilarating combination of drive and Kentucky lonesomeness that Buddy’s playing miraculously combined. Other excellent regional recordings of the tune can be found by Jimmy Wheeler (FCR 503) and Ed Haley (Rounder 1132). Further west this same tune (with an additional part) was played as “Arthur Berry” by George Hawkins, Tom York, Alfred Bailey and the great Dick Summers (Rounder 0194; Summers probably learned the tune either directly from George or their common musical mentor of a generation earlier, Tom Riley). Although the late John Hartford claimed that the strange title referred to an African-American barber, this was mere speculation on his part, as no traditional player I’ve met could tell me what

*Kinnikinnick*

the name properly signifies.

34. *Katy Hill*. Virtually every modern Southern fiddler can play a strong “Katy Hill” and there is no better request to make if one wants to gain a first impression of their musical aesthetic. “Katy Hill” is undoubtedly a relatively old tune with four parts (a nice old-fashioned setting by Jim Herd can be heard on Voyager 340 and two part arrangements were sometimes called “Piney Woods Gal” in old Virginia). However, the tune’s present ubiquitous format may not be much older than the late 1930’s, which is when Snake Chapman reported that he first heard it on the radio, performed by Arthur Smith and Howdy Forrester. Along its journey to universality, it fused with the originally distinct “Sally Johnson,” dropping parts along the way (as I document in the notes to Rounder

0539). This streamlined new “Katy” admirably suits the framework of the old Kentucky backwoods tunes set in G such as “Susan’s Gone” or “Headwaters of Tygart.” And so it can ably serve as a rousing vehicle to finish off this admirable collection of sterling performances.

--Mark Wilson

### Credits:

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T

he rural communities of the United States and Canada possess a rich and varied heritage of spirited forms of social music including square dance fiddling, old songs and banjo tunes. Under the general editorship of Mark Wilson of the University of Pittsburgh and drawing upon recordings made over the past thirty years, **The North American Traditions Series** seeks to introduce this music and its performers to a wider audience.