

INTRODU

The compositions in this book comprise my selection of the best of my shorter pieces. If sufficient interest is generated by the present work, I will publish two more books: 1) my redactions of Christmas carols that I have recorded, and some of my arrangements of various hymns and spirituals; 2) another book like this one with some of the longer and more difficult songs, such as "Beverly" and "Stomping Tonight On The Pennsylvania/Alabama Border."

The songs in this book have been transcribed by Stan Ayeroff. Presumably, anyone versatile on guitar, who can read music or tablature, can learn to play these songs as written, just as anyone with sufficient technical dexterity and good sight-reading habits could learn to play any other written guitar piece or exercise.

But while technique is very important, it is only part of the story. Music is a language—a language of *emotions*. The worst possible way to play these songs—and I am not only talking about my own compositions—is in metronome time at a uniform volume. Another terrible thing would be to play any composition the same way every time, or to feel that you have to play it exactly the way someone else, such as myself, played it or said to play it. A good technician must also be creative. Even if a person is not a composer, he can interpret and arrange, and these skills are as important as technique in making a performance interesting. I rely heavily on both technique and interpretation, and I think of myself as a very good composer, arranger, and plagiarist for the solo acoustic guitar.

Interpretation depends on two factors: First is the ability to dramatize one's self, to get caught up in and carried away by what one is doing, especially in conducting and guitar playing. Second is musical background. A broad spectrum of musical interest over a long period of time is ideal. The broader and longer your musical appreciation, the better; and the earlier you start, the better. I grew up listening to classical orchestral music. I later immersed myself in Southern American folk music. For some reason, the

UCTION...

best folk music came out of the South, and east of the Mississippi. Nobody really knows why.

I learned to play the guitar by listening to old 78 rpm recordings. After perfunctory attempts at Carter Family and Riley Puckett imitations and after learning that I could do neither very well, I turned to the Negro fingerpickers. I began with some songs by Sylvester Weaver that were interesting to me at the time. These compositions, which were perhaps by Weaver himself, were on both Spanish and steel guitar. But Weaver was a very slow and sloppy player. He was also unimaginative. Perhaps he was old at the time these recordings were made. Sam McGee's 78s (*only* his 78s) were a great inspiration to me because the compositions are excellent and the playing is impeccably clean and frequently hard-driving and extremely fast. Blind Blake interested me, but all I could come up with were rough, boring approximations. It took me another ten years to realize why: Blake almost always played with increasing tempo, and he also rarely played the same verse exactly the same way. Each stanza constantly changes. How can you copy something that won't stay still?

Blind Lemon Jefferson and Charley Patton also varied their tempos and stanzas, and both frequently played and sang different tunes during what was supposed to be one song.

Listen to Patton's "Pony Blues," and Blind Lemon's "Rabbitfoot Blues." A few other obscure players worth listening to also did these things, but I don't want to bore the reader with further name-dropping. *Most* of the folk music recordings of Negroes and whites are not worth listening to. But so many recordings were made that the number of good ones is quite large.

After one has mastered technique, one begins to realize that the most important things, besides a heavy stroke and phrasing, are rhythmic tricks and syncopation. So, it is important to notice that American folk music, in its own setting at the time it was done, was primarily *dance music*. Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, and my mentor, Blind Joe Death-Reynolds-Josephs, did not, like

we do now, sing and earn their living by playing for a house full of guitar aficionados, space people, pederasts, sodbusters, goat ropers, and drug addicts. Nobody gave

INTRODU

a damn about guitars. Our boys played in barrel houses, and on the dirt floors of farms, and the people danced to their music. And those entertainers, who didn't sing and play hot and make the people want to dance and drink and gamble, simply didn't survive. The dance-party element is also an integral part of the early white country string bands that played hillbilly, western swing, and Cajun (Arcadian) music. *All* the music connected with the white country tradition was heavily influenced by the dance party. The successful musicians, including religious entertainers and church choirs, were very, very syncopated.

The point is that nobody, at least nobody in his right mind, sat long hours in reverie contemplating the poetic, metaphorical, or psychological significance of a Blind Lemon Jefferson stanza, a Charley Patton guitar lick, the political thoughts of Mississippi John Hurt, the stirring of racial unrest and social consciousness in the ravings of Too-Tight Henry's atonal "Charleston Contest" [Columbia, 14374], or Boll Weevil Jackson's mad ravings on "Some Scream High Yellow" [Paramount and Vocalion], any more than anyone studied the hidden metaphysical implications of the comedy duet, Butterbeans and Susie, on their "I Wanna Hot Dog For My Roll" [Okeh, unissued], or the Christological imperfections of the famous Atlanta preacher, Rev. J. M. Gates, whose sermons had such titles as "Death Might Be Your Santa Claus" [Okeh, 8413], "Women Spend Too Much Money" [Okeh, 8606], "Tiger Flower's Last Fight" [Okeh, 8562], "Pay Your Furniture Man" [Okeh, 8606], "Kinky Hair Is No Disgrace" [Okeh, 8884], "Pay Your Policy Man" [Okeh, 8884], and "Smoking Woman In The Street" [Bluebird, B8301]. This music was thoroughly non-reflective. Nobody, at that time, thought anyone was saying or doing

anything particularly important. And yet *every* writer on black and white folk music treats it as if it had great poetic, psychological, metaphysical, sociological,

UCTION...

historical, documentary, and political significance. These writers separate the words and/or the music of a tradition from its environment, its setting, its context, and then print expensive books elucidating, and to a certain extent exemplifying, the authors' preconceptions and misconceptions regarding the social strata that they do not understand, and that they have nothing in common with. These books are then sold to other members of the authors' same (upper) social class and not to any members of the class that the book purports to be about (most of whose members are dead anyway). This is dishonest and I don't like it. I have only seen objective and interesting discussions of folk music by one author, and that is Stephen Calt, of Yazoo/Blue Goose Records. His unpublished book on Charley Patton, my favorite blues singer, is the best writing on Patton I have ever seen.

I learned to play the guitar by spending incredible amounts of time, because I was a slower learner than everybody else, practicing very simple things. The only reason I am still playing, and some others are not, is because I wouldn't give up. I remember learning the simple sequence *C, C7, F, G7*, by practicing it for *months* until I had it right and could play it perfectly. The friends who had taught me these things had mastered them in very short order. During practice sessions—I usually would sit from four to six hours, and I still do—strange things would happen, and suddenly I would have an entire song or a significant fragment. Many of my songs were written when I was seventeen and eighteen. I probably wrote half of the fast ragtime songs I play in *C* or *G* before I was twenty-one. But this is common. If you make yourself play the guitar except for breaks—cigarette, bathroom, whatever—for four to six hours, I can

guarantee that you will come out of these sessions with something new: a composition, an arrangement, a fragment. That is the way the mind works. In order to conquer boredom and chaos, you cannot avoid coming up with something new. I recommend these long sittings, rather than short sittings more often per week. I do not and never have practiced single note exercises—scales. The most advanced technical things I ever practiced were chord changes. Songs, and variations of songs at different tempos, and duple/triple variations, are what I have always practiced. I think that emphasizing the organic unity of songs, as opposed to practicing scales, will provide more fun

INTRODU

and more creativity for a guitarist—he will compose songs automatically. All original composition is automatic, seemingly inspirational. The remainder of composition is conscious arrangement and has to do mainly with the composer's formal intent: Is it long enough to sustain interest? Too long? The right tempo? Enough or too many chords? Is it in the right tuning?

Those guitarists I know who concentrate on practicing scales, as opposed to songs, are frequently better than I am technically, but either they do not write and do not want to compose new music, or they say they want to and never do. I can only assume that this is because of the way they *hear* what they are playing, the imagery, the feeling that they associate with what they practice. What can you associate with a bunch of scales played up and down in a chromatic sequence of keys except a very impersonal, unfeeling, and dry situation, emotion, or image?

When I play the guitar, even when I am practicing, I am besieged with images, memories, *deja vu* experiences, and emotions; and for every chord I play, for every tune I write, there is within me a distinct and unique image, emotion, or feeling. What made and continues to make guitar playing exciting for me, and what makes it bearable during long,

long two-set jobs, is the continual show of emotions, images, memories, etc., that comes before me internally as I continue to practice or play. For my second set, I am frequently onstage for three or four hours. I turn work into fun. I recommend nighttime for these long sessions. For some reason, the night tends to enhance our creative powers and let our imagination, including our musical imagination, run more freely. Where was I when I wrote this song? What is the name of this strange feeling I am having while I play this chord sequence or this song? Consciousness is in a constant state of flux. The stable element, then, must be the commitment to sit there with your guitar for six hours and

JECTION...

express yourself through your music. The process is cathartic, creative, and automatic, since the freer you are to choose this or that determination, the more your spirit will permeate the music in this or that composition, arrangement, or fragment.

When I play in public, I play long medleys, some as long as forty-five minutes. It is easier and more fun for me to play for forty-five minutes without stopping than to play a series of short songs interspersed with humorous or didactic remarks designed to ingratiate myself with the members of the audience. I give concerts to play the guitar.

Most beginning guitarists have trouble writing interesting melody lines. The majority of demo tapes that I receive demonstrate this. It is not enough to learn various picking patterns and then move various chords shapes up and down the neck with the left hand, and/or only play chord sequences that have no discernible melody lines. Good melodies are usually distinguished by their simplicity and by their scalar quality.

If the guitarist cannot write good melody lines, he should take a long course in classical music appreciation. I grew up on classical music and my basic format retains classical form. The material of the form imitates or extends

American folk music. If after several years you can't come up with good melody lines, concentrate on being a good arranger of previously existing compositions. It is better to be a good arranger than a bad composer.

To a thoroughly competent guitarist, sight reading, or tablature, should be merely aids. Emphasis should not so much be on *hearing* and *feeling* anything external, but on internal states or conditions. What I am advocating is the supremacy of playing by ear and of subjectivity, which is the evocation of and externalization of internal moods. Every chord (and certainly every chord progression) should evoke a particular emotion, and you must learn to hear what you play and feel that emotion.

If you sit and listen to yourself, *the creative act will happen*. You cannot make it happen, but you can put yourself in a situation where it must because human nature is constituted that way. Writers and philosophers have tried to explain precisely what it is that happens

INTRODU

during the creative act. Typically, the writer on aesthetics attempts to at least suggest that some deity takes over at the creative moment, that there is something divine about artistic creation. While I believe that nothing is more *fun* than the moment of creation—even if it is just a moment—I have never experienced anything transcendent during those times. Most writers on aesthetics are not artists or musicians.

You must take your guitar and go someplace where you are comfortable and relaxed. Don't worry about being introverted, about feeling anti-social, about not being friendly, etc. Secretly, steal away with your guitar. Don't let anyone know you've gone. Take it and go some place where you can hide from everybody. When you get there, pick up the guitar and start playing *what you feel like playing*, whatever it is. No matter what others think, be your own

person. It is healthy at times to want to be alone. If you never want to be alone, *then* you should start worrying.

HOMOSEXUAL GUITAR PLAYING

You must play until you are no longer afraid of the guitar. Many players are afraid to touch the guitar, *and they act*

REJECTION...

like it. You must create an intimate relationship with your guitar. Getting over your fear of it is much like a romantic-sexual conquest. It is no mere poetic metaphor when some songs refer to a guitar as though it were a woman.

Mastering a guitar is really very similar to conquering a woman, and when you fail to master it, like when you fail to master a woman, you have the same feelings of humiliation and violence.

When you are alone with your guitar, you must win if you are to be a man. And you can win—with any guitar. Sit there with it for six hours. No guitar can withstand the creative spirit that is in every human being.

Anyone who calls his guitar a “box” does not understand. Anyone who calls his guitar an “axe” cannot play it very well.

GUITAR ANGST

Those who fear their guitars are essentially cowardly faggots who have allowed themselves to be conquered by perverse tendencies. They are unable to sit anywhere for six hours under any circumstances. Their span of attention is short, but what is much worse is that they don't *care*. They don't even care to learn how to lengthen it. They have constituted themselves essentially as hatred, opposition—pure negativity. They are not feminine men. Homosexual guitar playing is an imitative gesture of the non-essential (i.e. temporary) characteristics of women—bitchiness, frivolity, flightiness, and super-sensitivity. These superficial characteristics are not the essence of the feminine. Look at the homosexual guitarist pick up the guitar—he is afraid to touch it. He is afraid of it. He thinks it hates him because *he* hates so much. He has constituted his spirit against—he is against life. He is a Nazi. His politics are *against* freedom. He is a totalitarian at heart, but he has no power. He must overcome this fear of the guitar. And he can. The guitar must be his secret love, narcotic, whatever image he prefers. But, he cannot forget to abuse it also, to learn to bang on it and to make a percussion instrument of it, to play hard on it, and bend it to his will.

INTRODU

Flamenco and American folk guitarists play the guitar soft and hard, quietly and loudly, fast and slow, with irregular and regular rhythm. The possibilities of your relationship with your guitar can only be made manifest by an exposition not only of all the qualities you can come up with, i.e. sweet, slow, pastoral, etc., but also by their opposites.

If in this essay I have put the emphasis on subjectivity, this

has been because I feel that the other writers and exponents of guitar playing neglect this side of it and place too much emphasis on objectivity and technique. But never let it be said that I have encouraged an irrational perspective, sung only the praises of the personal. Playing emotionally *and* well presupposes a great deal of practicing, learning, and mastering all of the technical essentials. You must broaden your musical education, and spend many, many hours over a period of years, listening to and digesting symphonies, tone poems, concerti, and chamber music, as well as the folk and/or popular music which *you* wish to play. From this perspective, and only with these prerequisites, can you let yourself go and play emotively and well, because when you have digested the music, your mind has a built-in sense of form and structure—a sense of when to stop, when to speed up, when to play quietly, triumphantly, etc. When you get to this point, you can play with self-confidence and freedom.

The typical middle-class interpreter of folk music makes his guitar sound like a metronome, without timbre changes and without percussive and loud-soft tone contrasts. He is a friendly guy. He likes everybody. He smiles a lot. He wants you to like him. He's *volk*. The hell with him. The real test when someone, at least theoretically, is playing hot or hard-driving, is this: Does his music make you want to *dance*, or not? Does it make you want to get up and move, or not?

Most of the songs in this book are modeled after short, American, folk-guitar pieces, and follow Southern American

UCTION...

styles. Thus, they are to be played with gradually increasing tempo, and the fast songs or sections should conclude at a pace that is as fast as you can play. "The Last Steam Engine Train" provides the guitarist with a choice. It affords excellent opportunity for hot playing, but if you play it as fast as you can, you will of necessity sacrifice some of the hotness. The same is true of "In Christ There Is No East Or West." "Poor Boy A Long Ways From

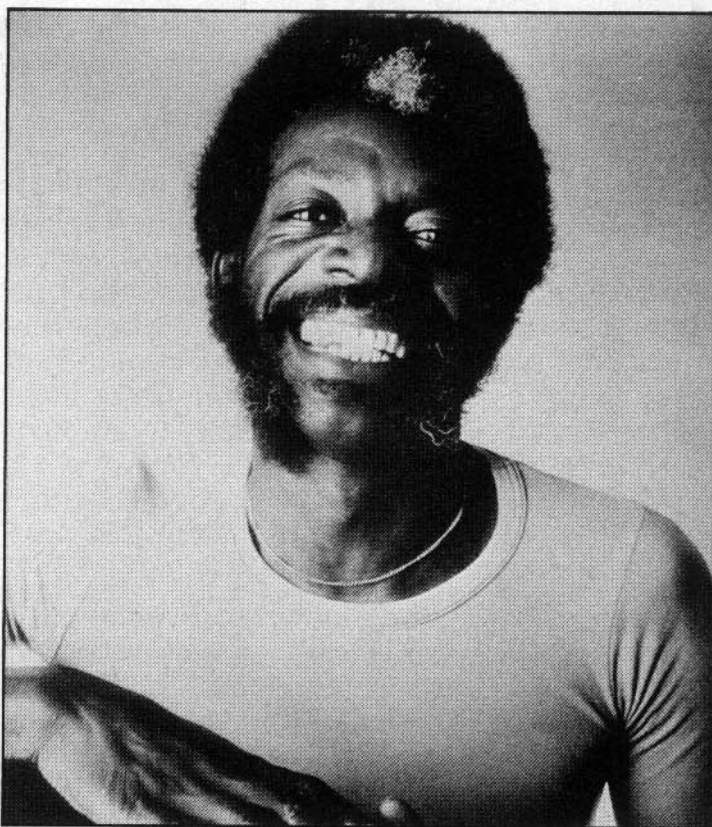
Home" can be played extremely fast, but the Negroes played it slower. After all, what's the rush? At moderate tempo it has an *eerie* quality. Excessive worship of speed also sacrifices syncopation.

In a longer song, or a song with more than one section, it sometimes sounds good to *slow down* the pulse. The 3/4 time section of "When The Spring Time Comes Again" sounds best to me if I gradually decelerate during the last few bars. I also like to decelerate during the last few bars of "Sunflower River Blues." The way I hear and play these songs, as well as "Last Steam Engine Train" and "Poor Boy A Long Ways From Home," is to evoke a reflective, *deja vu*, slightly mysterious and dreamlike mood—the way you feel in a dream when you are a kid and you find something exciting. "Some Summer Day" is very back-glancing.

In recent years, I have incorporated and plagiarized as much as I could of the solo guitar work of Bola Sete. Where previously I eschewed any classical, Spanish (except flamenco) or bossa nova influence, I now find myself working this material in wherever I can (see my article on Bola Sete, myself, and the nature of the universe, in the February '76 issue of *Guitar Player Magazine*). Unfortunately, Bola Sete refuses to travel far from San Francisco to play and is sinking into oblivion. I can hardly market his very excellent records. "On The Sunny Side Of The Ocean" lends itself gratefully to Spanish rhythms. So, too, with the "Dance Of The Inhabitants Of The Palace Of King Philip XIV Of Spain." "Spanish Dance" doesn't, and neither does "Spanish Two Step."

Many guitarists these days capitalize on phony ethnicity with their patter, their gestures, their clothes, their liquor, or with anything available. There was a time when it was fashionable for young white boys to play at being old Negro

INTRODU



Bola
Sete

blues singers. There was a time when some young Negro entertainers imitated older, retired blues singers. There was, and still is, a time when retired blues singers would sit on the northern and western stage and plug themselves (and be plugged) as the Real McCoy, the pulse of the Delta, the very essence of the South (as if ante-bellum Southern culture still existed), as if anybody in the South was even faintly interested in these relics—living blues singers. But they are all *retired* blues singers.

UCTION...

Currently, the fad has changed to another prehistoric type, which no longer exists except among a bunch of college students who want to share, exploit, and re-create what is now only a myth—the white hillbilly, the redneck, the primitive noble savage from the hills of Tennessee, or wherever, with his music. This guy is also aided and abetted by the Nashville country and western music industry, which permits some, but not many, explorations into contemporary life. Nevertheless, the overall theme is that the real essence of hillbilly, redneck, down-home-ism is still alive and well, in fact thriving more than ever before. Look at the Autoharp player from Manhattan with a Southern accent. What all of these examples have in common is the glorification of types of people that no longer exist, along with a constant implied assumption that unadulterated *volklische* life styles of bygone eras are contemporary and somewhat eternal.

This is not to say that attempts at re-creation of old guitar styles can't be an enjoyable pursuit and afford enjoyable listening, nor that archaisms may not be eclecticized, providing a more universal listening and playing experience. I can think of no more valuable musical learning and listening experience than to listen often and repeatedly over the years (even after you think you are good) to the guitar phrasing of Maybelle Carter's Spanish and Hawaiian guitar on the many, many recordings by the Carter family. It has been more than twenty-five years since I opened my uncle's gramophone and heard my first Carter Family record. I have been listening to these records for all this time and I am still learning from them, and still enjoying them greatly. Maybelle Carter's guitar style, for me, is a *definition* of classic American musical economy, syncopation, and superb phrasing. Maybelle Carter's playing had more balls than Chet Atkins, Leo Kottke, or I, will ever have. There are many people who claim to *teach* and play what they call "Carter picking," but I have not heard one of them that really understands. There is much, much more to it than learning to play melody on bass strings with the thumb and harmony accompaniment with one's index finger on treble strings. The same is true of the vocal phrasing.

For additional and more intricate examples of syncopational models, the Negro race has contributed a great deal

INTRO.....

(e.g. Blind Willie Johnson's recordings, especially those on which he does *not* play the bottleneck).

I am limiting the dropping of names to musicians who:

- 1) recorded extensively; 2) have records that are easily available at your local Koonaklastier Konfectionery;
- 3) recorded *before* any *volklische* revivalism; 4) are very good, but not obvious, and likely to be overlooked for one or more reasons; or 5) I personally like or haven't actually heard, but mention for political reasons.

I should like to conclude this introduction to guitaring by invoking the name of Maybelle Carter.

OM
SRI
MAYBELLAYNA
NAMAN
SHREEM
SHREEM
SHREEM

Deep within me, not noticed by the
 casual observer, the pederast, the sod-
 buster, the goat roper ~~~ Deep
 within me I carry the secret of this
 great and marvelous burden, I
 Am American Guitar! More than
 any of the others, I incarnate the
 spirit of America within my soul
 (Geist), unencumbered by foreigners
 and women sothagists ~~~ I Am
 American Guitar ~ It Is I ~ I
 Have Come Back For You ~ I Am
 Here ~ I Am American Guitar!

Dis Wam Me



Dis wam me at de age ob 11.

My name am _____

*Me come to get ye.----De Trufe
yes, YES, yes, YES, yes, YES, yes*

Did you know I can play?

Did you know I can sing?

Did you know I'm _____ ?

They help me. You will help me to.

LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN!

I mean it. Please wait. Satan is coming. And I. Oh yes, I will be here. Please am be ready for me. Brothers an sistuhs, wait fo' me. Ah gits heah. Listen to Me, man. I know.

---Tears my guts out!! Samson Grinde EDITOR

Pitchikawi Journal

Thus Speaks Soon to be released on recording.

Southbound Press.

The voice of a generation! Out of total chaos comes the song of an ageless child. Listener, Beware. Do you remember the grapes your grandma used to feed you after peeling them? Do you remember her funeral? The way the gravel ground beneath your soles the night she died? Yeah you saw her white hair. You remembered the things she did during her lifetime. She was cool too. She knew. He knew and He am!

The Fly (Executive Generalisation)

Conceived by Wayne Wilson.

FALLING IN THE MIDST OF TIME

It was an ambivalent, undetermined sort of day; the sun was shining and the mist was slowly falling, now up, now down. There in the midst of time, an ambivalent young man stepped irresolutely out of his unassuming young house and blinked his eyes in the soft wavering sunlight. "I feel unresolved," he said unresolvedly. "Perhaps someday I will feel resolved," he said indeterminately. "Perhaps someday I'll find Blind Joe Death again and be able to finish my thesis in ethno-musicology," he said chthonically. So saying, he wavered on in an *aufheben* sort of way toward the B & O Railroad tracks to try to discover Blind Joe Death, the old blues guitar player, and perhaps also himself.

Coming to the Chinese laundry next to the viaduct under the railway station, he entered and opened his mouth and inquired of the old boarded-up Chinaman who ran the shop: "Pardon me, have you seen an old Negro street musician by the name of Blind Joe Death?"

"Take your filthy fucking feminine component and suck out of here, *muvva*," the old Mandarin replied in his quaint sing-song Cantonese dialectic.

"Ah," said the young man a little more resolutely, "the bourgeoisie reject me."

Thus assured, he walked down the street under the viaduct, his *aufheben* quivering in the mist under the abandoned railroad station. Suddenly he stumbled over something which was more or less indeterminate because of the fog: It was an old Negro sidewalk painter who made his living painting the portraits of the downtrodden *volk* of Takoma Park on the sidewalks of that once-great city. "Pardon me," he said, his *aufheben* heaving, "have you seen an old Negro street musician by the name of Blind Joe Death?"

"I don't pay any attention to color," said the old man savagely. "I judge every man as an individual and not by any superficial standard such as race, color, or creed. Why don't you go fuck yourself with a file?"

"Ah," said the young man a little more resolutely, "the artists

reject me."

Now, yet surer of himself, he proceeded back through the viaduct toward the magic place where Carroll Avenue is majestically transubstantiated into Laurell Avenue. Stopping to inspect his *aufheben*, bruised when he tripped over the street artist, he saw a familiar form approaching from the mystic corner—Domenick Zurubian, his boyhood friend and idol! He stood stiffly waiting by the glass front of Youngblood's hardware store, not daring to hope that Domenick Zurubian would recognize him. It was as well so, since Domenick Zurubian ignored him with a vaguely hostile glance, and began to pass by.

"Wait!" he called to stop him, the words torn from his *aufheben* almost against his will. "Here is your pencil."

A light began to glow in Domenick Zurukan's oblique eyes, those fascinating angled eyes, in the form of a horizontal seven. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"Yes, yes, the fourth form in the Takoma Millinery Academy!"

"Well, damn if I can remember who you are," said Zurubian, without embarrassment. "There were a couple of ambivalent indeterminate young men in that class." Zurubian left him by the glass front of Youngblood's hardware store with a lame excuse and a smile, softly and resolutely crispering his lip.

"Yes, then. I am an ambivalent, indeterminate young man." His voice was a warm human bourgeois whisper, as he resolutely dissolved into the fog with the sound of drying wildflowers. "The wolves," he said, looking out the door before the stranger came in, "are gone now."

Resolutely he mounted the steps to the railroad tracks. There he found several old Negroes sitting on the tracks guzzling wine. "Ah," he said to himself, "if they reject me too, it does not matter. I am now resolute."

"Pardon me," he said, "have any of you seen Blind Joe Death recently?"

"Yea, verily," one of them replied, "I saw him two-three days ago meandering up towards ol' man Fahey's cypress tree and Galapagos Tortoise farm. You might find him up there. Then again you might not."

"Thank you very much," the young man replied, his *aufheben* severely pacified as he proceeded up the railroad tracks.

As he was walking a train came screeching down the tracks and ran over two or three of the Negroes. "Ah," said the young man dissolutely, "the poor downtrodden *volk* of Takoma Park. They have no place to drink their wine in peace but on the railroad tracks. Behold they are like the lilies of the field for they neither work nor travail, but they get run over by trains. Perhaps someday things will be different." Approaching a grove of cypress trees alongside the railroad tracks, which transubstantiated itself hodologically into a field of hay, where many large tortoises were grazing, the young man said to himself still resolutely: "Perhaps this is the farm of which the former citizen has spoken."

Emerging into the sun he began to cross the gentle rolling hill of new-mown hay when suddenly from out of nowhere a herd of wild dogs attacked him and tore at his clothing and his limbs. Their teeth bit into his flesh. Screaming and bleeding, he ran towards a farmhouse that he made out on a distant slope. Arriving there breathless, he ran up the steps onto the porch. Throwing open the door, he ran into the dwelling and slammed

the door shut behind him.

An old farmer who was seated in an oversized wicker basket jumped up at this and demanded of the resolute young man resolutely: "What is all this doggerel? Who do you think you are, running into my dwelling here in the midst of time?"

"Sir," he said, "I am besieged by a herd of wild dogs. They have ripped and torn my clothes and I am bleeding profusely."

"I can see that you are bleeding and that your clothes are torn, but come look out the window. There are no dogs out there, and there never have been, not on my farm. What you saw was only some pages of old newspapers blowing in the wind. Come and see," said the old farmer.

The young man turned towards the window and, looking out of it, he saw that there were, indeed, no dogs now, but only old newspapers being tossed about on the sunny slopes of new-mown hay. Strange though, they had the appearance, as they blew to and fro, of those very dogs that had just now attacked him.

"But," said the young man, "if that is true, what did attack me and what drew all this blood?"

"I do not know," said the old man. "Perhaps in your haste you tripped and fell."

"Perhaps," said the young man. "The wolves," he said, looking out the window, "are gone now." As he turned to leave, he asked the old farmer: "By the way, is this ol' man Fahey's cypress tree and Galapagos Tortoise farm?"

"Not any longer," said the old man. "I bought it from him many years ago, and it is now mine. Fahey moved to California or Caledonia or China or someplace like that."

"Well," replied the young man, "perhaps you could tell me if you have seen an old Negro street musician named Blind Joe Death."

"Blind Joe?" he replied enigmatically. "He used to work for me in the cypress groves. But he left a few days ago. Said he was going to make records for somebody or other. Didn't even know he was a musician. Funny, isn't it? Hope he does all right. He was a nice old guy."

Returning to his unassuming house, the young man, now irresolute, attempted to open the door. It wouldn't open. "Ah," he said, "perhaps it has happened again." He went to the back of his house and attempted to open a rear window. As the window gradually opened, he was besieged with sheaves of falling grist. "Ah," he said, "they have filled my dwelling with grist again while I was gone."

This was a quite common occurrence in the indeterminate young man's life, and the recurrence of it had left its mark on his *aufheben*.

"How long must I be the prey of evil grist mongers?" he sighed to himself gently as his words floated along in the evening breeze. "Once again I shall have to call the used grist store and ask them to come out and take this stuff off my hands. Tonight I shall have to sleep in the damp evening breeze. And still I have not found Blind Joe Death. I am indeed an unfulfilled, indeterminate, ambivalent young man."

Later that evening, he expired due to an advanced case of previously undetected Heisenbergian Indeterminacy. Later, and somewhat elliptically, I met myself coming through the back door. "The wolves," he said, looking out through the window before the stranger came in, "are gone now."



WALTER KAUFMAN



THE LATEST ADVENTURES OF
JOHN FAHEY & BILL BARTH, THE HARUSPEX:

**JOHN FAHEY AND BILL BARTH
 MEET EVIL DEVIL WOMAN**

OR

**JOHN FAHEY & BILL BARTH VISIT
 WACHEPRAGUE, MARYLAND**



Many years ago in the Orient while John Fahey was learning the martial art of Samurai sword fighting, Bill Barth was traveling through ancient Rustic Etrustica and there beside the waters of the Green River he met an ancient Haruspex named Tireseus, whom he befriended and who taught him the ancient divinatory art of seeing into the future by observing lightning, natural prodigies, and by viewing the entrails of sacrificial victims—Haruspicy. Later, when the advent of the downfall of the Adelphi Rolling Gristmill and the first foundation became apparent, both decided to dedicate their lives to law and order enforcement. They had been relatively successful in their endeavors until several recent foils by Evil Devil Woman.

It was in the old days before the flood during the first foundation. Civilization had been besieged for many years by Evil Devil Woman and the Evil Green Hoardes from the East. The question, which all the guardians of righteousness and justice were asking, was how long man might prevail against these bitter enemies of society. Could the demise of the first foundation be near at hand? When would the Transcendental Waterfall prophecy be fulfilled?

In his secret mountain hideout, Fahey was reading a newspaper article describing a recent robbery of a great quantity of being from a nearby bank, committed by Evil Devil Woman. "Hark," said Fahey, "those crooks can't get away with their heinous plot to steal being from the world and transpose it somewhere else. Who do they think they are anyway? Why should anyone have a monopoly on being?" Reading a little farther, Fahey jumped up and said, again addressing his faithful servant, Barth, "Karl, we've got to do something about this. Barth, twang your magic Haruspicy divining machine and see what our chances are."

"My name is Bill, damn it," said Barth.

"Oh, all right, Karl. But look here. We've got to get to work."

Barth begrudgingly turned on the secret machine and looked into the view-scope. "Boss," he said, "things don't look so bad as I thought. We'll get those crooks but good by the beard of Yahweh."

Later, standing by the Atlantic Ocean, somewhere near the ancient deserted city of Wacheprague, Fahey on his great Clydesdale horse, Kairos, said to his faithful servant, Barth, "Here they come, Barth. We got here in the midst of time."

"Yes, Boss," said Barth.

From out of the ocean slowly emerged a gigantic green brontosaurus. On its back majestically sat Evil Devil Woman and Crokodile Man and Gos-Hawk Man, and Gruff the Tragic Wagon. There, in their evility, were Elephant Woman and She Wolf and all the other Evil Densons of the Underworld.

"Great Glark," said Barth.

"Holy Gleeps," said Fahey.

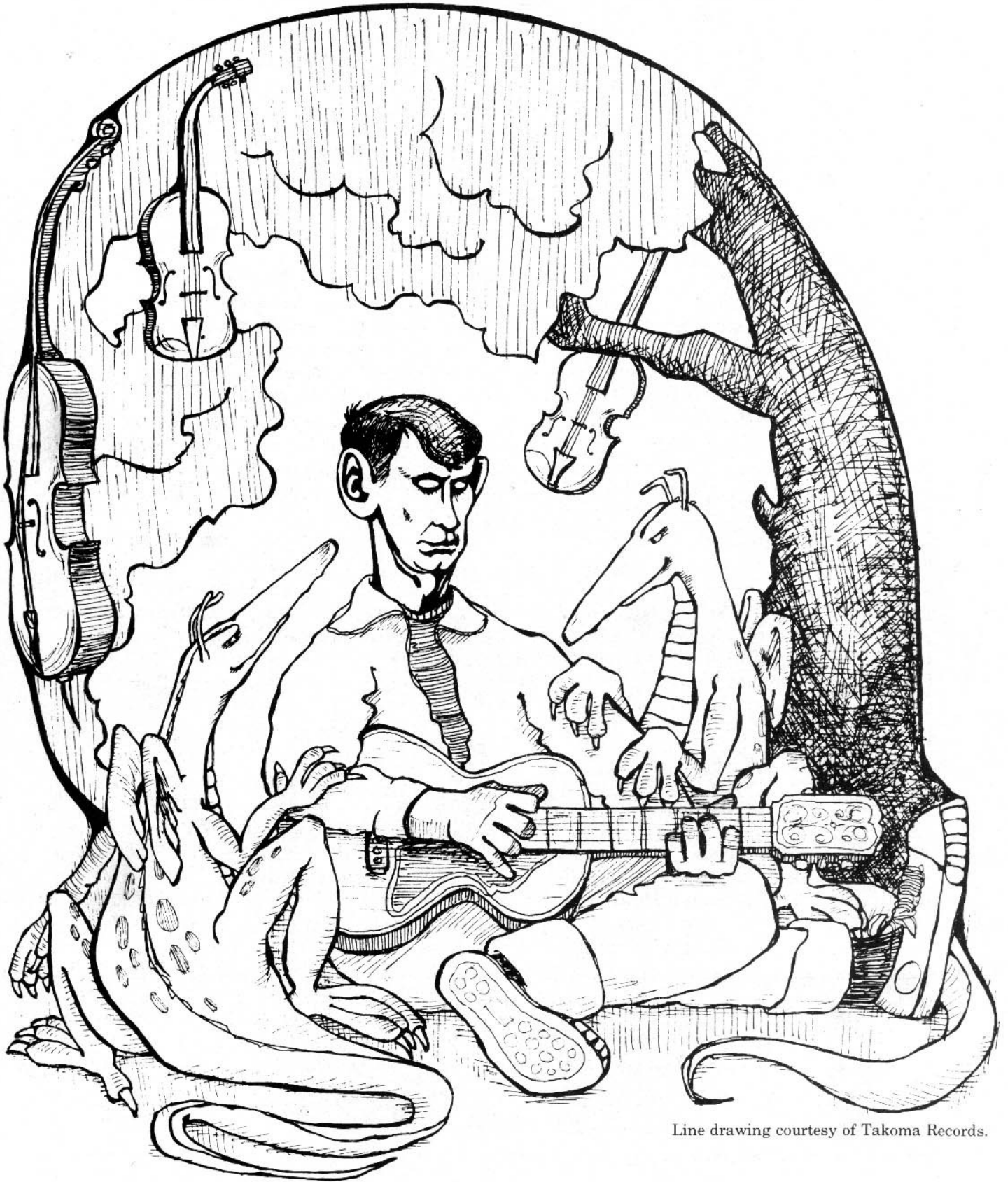
"Boss! Boss! They've got Enigmatizing Ephem-erizing Chimerizing Eglioclastical Recalcitrating Machine. Boss! Boss! What'll we do?" screamed Barth.

"Relax, Barth," said Fahey. "You don't understand big business. I'll do a number 725 kata all around 'em and that'll sure put those crooks in bitter lemon straits." At that, Fahey, with Magic Samurai Sword Zen Bong, danced fiery, magical circles all around the Evil Densons of the Underworld and Evil Green Hoardes from the East, thrice. The evil ones were soon routed. Evil Devil Woman fell into the sea, clinging to She Wolf. Enigmatizing Ephem-erizing Chimerizing Eglioclastical Recalcitrating Machine's tubes exploded. Evil Devil Woman and Crokodile Man and all the other evil ones were turned into brine.

"Zen Bong gong fong," said Zen Bong Magic Samurai Sword.

"Yes," said Fahey, "it's all over now. We've made the world safe for Kledonoman-ancy."





Line drawing courtesy of Takoma Records.

ROOTS

In the hot summer months of July and August, dust rises in the quiet streets of Takoma Park. The Sligo River becomes a chain of narrow, muddy ponds. The rural Maryland countryside becomes a veritable pot of steam as the temperature passes 110°, and the humidity is not far behind. The old Southern Negroes, who work in the cottonfields there, have a *volk* saying that expresses all this quite well: "If the temperature passes 110°, can the humidity be far behind?"

I stopped in at People's drugstore. "Has anyone seen John Fahey or Blind Joe Death, or maybe Gerhaupt Hauffman?" I asked dissolutely. "They were recording stars for Paramount thirty years ago, and I was told that somebody here might know where they are."

"No," said the old man with the white beard from behind the counter, resolutely, "they've done been here and gone. Maybe—if you go down to the first fork in the road and turn left and then when you see the big house painted all over green and turn right and left and go by the railroad tracks and stop at the ethnic-looking water tower where once many years ago Jimmie Rodgers got stranded dissolutely—maybe if you do that, you'll see Heh God, and maybe he can tell you where they are."

It was noontime, and no gentle breezes blew across the hot cottonfields, in the midst of time. There, by the water tower, I found Heh God, and I opened my mouth and asked him the same question I'd been asking people for months: "Have you seen John Fahey or Blind Joe Death or Gerhaupt Hauffman?" There, by the water tower, I found Heh God, and he opened his mouth and said, hodologically: "No, I haven't seen them lately, but probably if you go down to the next left red light and turn green and ride over the great B & O viaduct and ask at the pool hall, maybe."

This sort of thing was not new to me. I remembered the months and months I had spent the previous winter, traveling across the continent and back again in search of the mysterious and elusive Hestum-Festum Brothers—the constant disappointments, and then finally finding them, only to discover that they still hadn't learned to play or sing very well.

As I walked down Maple Avenue, the heat from the blacktop road began to get me. "Just keep going," I said to myself, imperatively, there in the midst of time. "You owe it to all the people in the 13th Century who started the whole business, to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jan Sibelius. You owe it to Heh God, and to the other downtrodden people of Takoma Park—to locate them hodologically. You owe it to all the good *volks* on the West Coast." Not very soon after this, I found them. They were sitting out in back of the Takoma Funeral Home, where Blind Joe Death had a part-time job embalming the downtrodden people of Takoma Park who had

gone on before.

As a little boy, John Fahey had sat at the feet of an old blind Negro, listening to the intensely personal blues and religious songs the old man played on his surrogate kithera.

Blind Joe never sang. He had no voice. He had been struck blind and dumb at the age of three by a local member of the NAACP for not complying with the organization's demand to learn barre chords and diminished augmented sevenths, so that he might disassociate himself from the myth of the Negro past. Here, thanks to the intensely personal stubbornness of an old man who refused to bow to the dictates of crass commercialism and political interfuge, sat John Fahey, at the feet of this old man, listening and waiting for his hands to grow big enough to play the surrogate kithera as did his mentor. For in Blind Joe Death's singing, the young white boy could discern a way in which he could express the intensely personal, bittersweet, biting, soul-stirring, *volk* poetry of the harsh, elemental, but above all, human, life of the downtrodden Takoma Park people (*volk*).

In time, Blind Joe's kithera was washed away in the great 1927 flood of the Sligo River, which many of the local *volk* recall with fear and trembling. Blind Joe, having recently acquired great wealth as a Paramount recording star, bought himself a Martin guitar, and found to his surprise that he could even better express the intensely personal, bittersweet, biting, soul-stirring, *volk* poetry of the harsh, elemental, but above all, human, life of the downtrodden Takoma Park *volk*, because this instrument had six strings instead of one.

John Fahey had made his first guitar from a baby's coffin, and led the old blind Negro through the back alleys and whorehouses of Takoma Park in return for lessons. When the Second World War broke out, John was already a musician in his own right. His career as a *volk* entertainer was briefly interrupted when he was drafted and sent to New Zealand to fight with the Allies against the Finno-Armenian invasion. After the war was over, John, a decorated war hero, returned to his home and re-established relations with Blind Joe. In 1952, only a few years before Blind Joe's bodily ascension, Melody Brennan, working in coordination with the Library of Congress (of Bessarabia), recorded the two of them and issued them on the now-rare Takoma label (for which, unfortunately, neither was paid, in the tradition of many recorded *volk* entertainers, such as Poor Boy Krennach, and Barbecue Cage). Now, thanks to those who remember, John Fahey has just finished a concert tour, and has won even more friends in his travels through this land, especially on the West Coast, singing and playing the intensely personal, urgently expressive music of the downtrodden people of Takoma Park. This record, *The Best Of John Fahey*, is for those who remember.