
THE AMERICAN FOLK, BLUES & GOSPEL FESTIVAL '69
SOUVENIR BROCHURE TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

Harold Davison
in association with
the 'Melody Maker'
presents

THE AMERICAN FOLK, BLUES & GOSPEL FESTIVAL '69

promotion direction: JACK L. HIGGINS

ALBERT KING
AND HIS BLUES BAND

The Stars of Faith
from the 'Black Nativity'

JOHN LEE HOOKER

OTIS SPANN

CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

programme notes by
BENNY GREEN

Folk, Blues and Gospel. A familiar trinity. What are they doing bracketed together? What kind of performance do they imply, and have they any business keeping such close company? The meaning of key words in jazz and popular music has become so blurred by misuse and over-familiarity in the last fifty years that it is sometimes tempting to think that the whole business might be simpler if we threw all the old terms overboard and started all over again. In the meantime we have to cut our way through the jungle of misunderstanding as best we can, and try to see the truth of our music.

The most daunting difficulty lies, of course, in that apparently simple little word 'Blues'. Most of the confusion is caused by the fact that the same word is used to express two quite independent meanings. As early as the eighteenth century the American writer Washington Irving was using 'blues' as an expression of sadness or depression, much as today's sad citizens talk of suffering from the 'deep reds'. But the Blues so far as music is concerned means something quite different, although it is true that most of the great Blues performances have expressed tears rather than laughter. In a strictly technical sense, the Blues is the simplest of all forms, twelve bars duration, with two vital chord changes occurring in the fourth and eighth bars. So far as vocal blues are concerned, once again the pattern is rigid, three lines of iambic pentameter, each one lasting for four bars, and the first one repeated. It immediately becomes clear that from both the musical and lyrical viewpoint, the intensity of a blues performance is gleaned essentially from the content rather than the form.

Because the blues is a formal and a simple equation, it was always popular with the more primitive type of artist who had never enjoyed the advantages of a formal education. A man can teach himself the technical patterns of the blues in an hour or two, even though he may easily spend the rest of his life learning how to express them effectively. The blues was the first of all the jazz forms and is the longest-lasting. To this day no other form rivals it either in frequency of use or effectiveness of result, not even the ubiquitous chord sequence of Gershwin's *'I Got Rhythm'*.

All of which brings us to Folk. In spite of the various misuses to which that particular word has been put in the post-war years, it still means exactly what it says, a music of the ordinary people, who used to be called folk before the days when Marx and Freud changed them into proles and psyches. Folk music varies from culture to culture, but the Folk that people look for in concerts of this kind is the folk music of the American negro which expresses the heartache of an oppressed people dumped into an alien world. The blues happens to be one of the forms which that folk music takes, and therefore, in the context of an American programme, the two words are indivisible.

But what of the last of our three words, Gospel? Surely there is a contradiction here? Gospel has unmistakabe ecclesiastic overtones, and was not the Blues a symbol for the naughty music played by the naughty people of naughty New Orleans fifty years ago? It so happens that the legend of Storyville is one of those maddening half-truths which always give people a totally erroneous picture of events. It is true that the Blues, and jazz generally, was to be heard almost exclusively in the red light district of New Orleans before the first World War. But this was only because nobody else would have much to do either with it or the musicians who were able to play it. And running concurrent with the secular side of the history of the Blues, ran a very different strain which found its centre in the musical expression of religious piety, especially within the chapels of the Baptist Church.

The great Gospel singers combined an instinctive feeling for the nuances of jazz, particularly the blues, with a religious fervour which changed the content of the lyrics from secular to sacred. Mahalia Jackson has told how, in her early years, when she was an amateur in the sense that her urge to sing came from her religious convictions rather than her financial ambitions, she was asked to throw in her lot with a band led by Earl Hines. Here was an example of the two strains of the blues, the sacred and the profane, touching and almost cross-pollinating. But Miss Jackson, guided by the instinct to do the best thing which seems to be built into the consciousness of the great artist, declined, and went on to become one of the major singers of the last thirty years.

Blues, then, is seen to be a form of folk music, and a form of which Gospel music constitutes a vital part. The marriage of our three words turns out surprisingly to be one of those clichés justified by the facts of the case. Listeners at tonight's concert will no doubt realise, as the evening goes on, that one of our three sub-divisions keeps spilling over into the next, and that to try sealing them off into different compartments is quite impossible. Blues, Folk and Gospel are three vantage points from which to examine the same culture, and for that reason belong in the same concert hall.

ALBERT KING

Albert King has never worked in Great Britain before, so it may be as well to acquaint the concertgoer with a few of the basic facts about him. King is the half-brother of B. B. King, and was born in Indianola, Mississippi, on April 25, 1923. Unlike so many of the musicians who tour this country, he appears to have been a late starter, and does not remember feeling very heated about music until he was eighteen years old. It was at that point in his life when, he says, 'Something about the sounds got to me. I wanted to be able to play and make the sounds I heard in my head'.

King has named a few of the early influences which stimulated him to become a player himself, and among them are Dorothy Daily, whose guitar blues King describes as his favourite kind. King also singles out Peter Wheatstraw, known in some circles as the Devil's Son-in-law, who played some of the best blues that King ever remembers hearing. But despite his admiration for these artists, King took no formal lessons, and started to teach himself to play the guitar. 'Nobody showed me what to do,' he says, and then goes on to confess, 'Everything I do is wrong. When I play the guitar, the strings are upside down. I play it left-handed. People often ask me why, but there's not really any reason for it except that I learned to play that way. I just picked up the guitar and started playing.'

The difficulty here is, of course, that it is far harder to unlearn something than it is to learn it, and even if he wanted to, King would find it impossible at this late stage to acquire a more legitimate technique. He is well aware of this. 'I really like some of the sounds I get with my guitar, so I don't want to change now. Besides, it would take me another eighteen years to get started again.'

While he was first picking up this idiosyncratic method of making music, King kept himself by driving a bulldozer during the day. It was at night that he played, at first purely for relaxation, and then gradually, for money also. Soon he began working at weekends with a local group called the 'In The Groove Band'. But he was thirty-three years old before he finally decided to throw everything else up and concentrate on guitar playing. At first times were very tough indeed. Not only was work difficult to come by, but when you got it, you had to be careful not to do the wrong thing. 'Country folk were really poor then, and you had to be real careful with the customers. They shouldn't think you were uppity.'

The break-through must have come around 1956, because it was in that year that King made his first recording. The results were unspectacular, to say the least, and it was not until nearly ten years after his recording debut, when he signed with Stax records, that he began to register wide a wide audience. His first album was called '*Born Under A Bad Sign*', and it was one of those items which although uncommercial in the sense that it was not tailored to fit any current fad, sold steadily from the day it was issued. More recently King has branched out into the business side of music by opening his own club, 'Albert King's New Harlem Club', in Osceola, Arkansas, fifty miles north of Memphis. It is here that King can be found when he is not touring, playing his guitar, a property so vital to him that he calls it by its own name, Lucy. King has said of the New Harlem, 'We can seat five hundred people in there, and serve them beer and good. I don't want a liquor licence because I've got so many young friends that want to come and see me. Some of them drive fifty or sixty miles. I'd feel very badly if they couldn't get in because they were too young to get into a liquor club, or if they had an accident on the way home. When I'm not in town, my cousin runs the club for me, but I get by there whenever I can.'

'Whenever I can' is not enough for King, who accepts the rigorous travelling itinerary without being madly in love with it. 'What I'd really like to do is to go out on the road for a month or two, and then spend a month at home in Lovejoy, Illinois. But you can't do that and be successful in business, so I aim to just lay right in there and do what I can.'

An extremely imposing man in the flesh, King stands six feet four inches and at the last count weighed 250 lbs. 'Plain Albert,' as he is known in Memphis, flashes gold teeth and a diamond stickpin, and bustles about the stage with a show of prodigious energy, waving his Gibson guitar around like a peashooter. As to the elusive art of playing the blues, King is no more able to explain the process than anyone else has been able to do before him. But he has made the following very interesting observation on Blues as a musical form—

'*The Blues is a funny thing. Some of the best musicians can't play the Blues, even if they know their instrument inside out. The Blues is something strictly from the soul, what's inside YOU, and you don't have to know nothing about what you're doing with the chords if it feels right.*'

JOHN LEE HOOKER

Today, when traditions in every area of human activity are being cast aside at such a hysterical speed, and cultural landmarks are being swept away almost before we have had enough time to digest their significance, if any, the continuing survival of a musician whose work is anachronistic and yet relevant to the present day is a very remarkable phenomenon indeed. Because Jazz music and all its offshoots from Blues to Folk have been evolving so bewilderingly fast, it seems almost beyond the realms of possibility that we should be able to savour the pure style of an original. And yet in another way it is this very speed of development which makes such a thing possible. If it is true that the entire history of this type of music can be encapsulated in the last fifty years, then it is at least reasonable to hope that there exist certain pockets of activity where artists can work in the original mould. This is really why John Lee Hooker has such a magnetic attraction, because he is at one and the same time a symbol of the fount of the blues and a highly influential contemporary performer.

Hooker was born in a small Mississippi town called Clarksdale, fifty-two years ago, and when we examine his background we find yet again that the fluent blues artist is a product of favourable heredity as well as environment. Both Hooker's father and his brother were ministers of the church, and Hooker was not the first blues artist, nor will he be the last, whose inspiration for music stemmed from a religious background. At fourteen he was singing spirituals, and two years later went to a local musician called Will Moore for guitar lessons. He stayed in Clarksdale for the next five years, playing and singing, until he made the first of his moves, to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he stayed for the next two years.

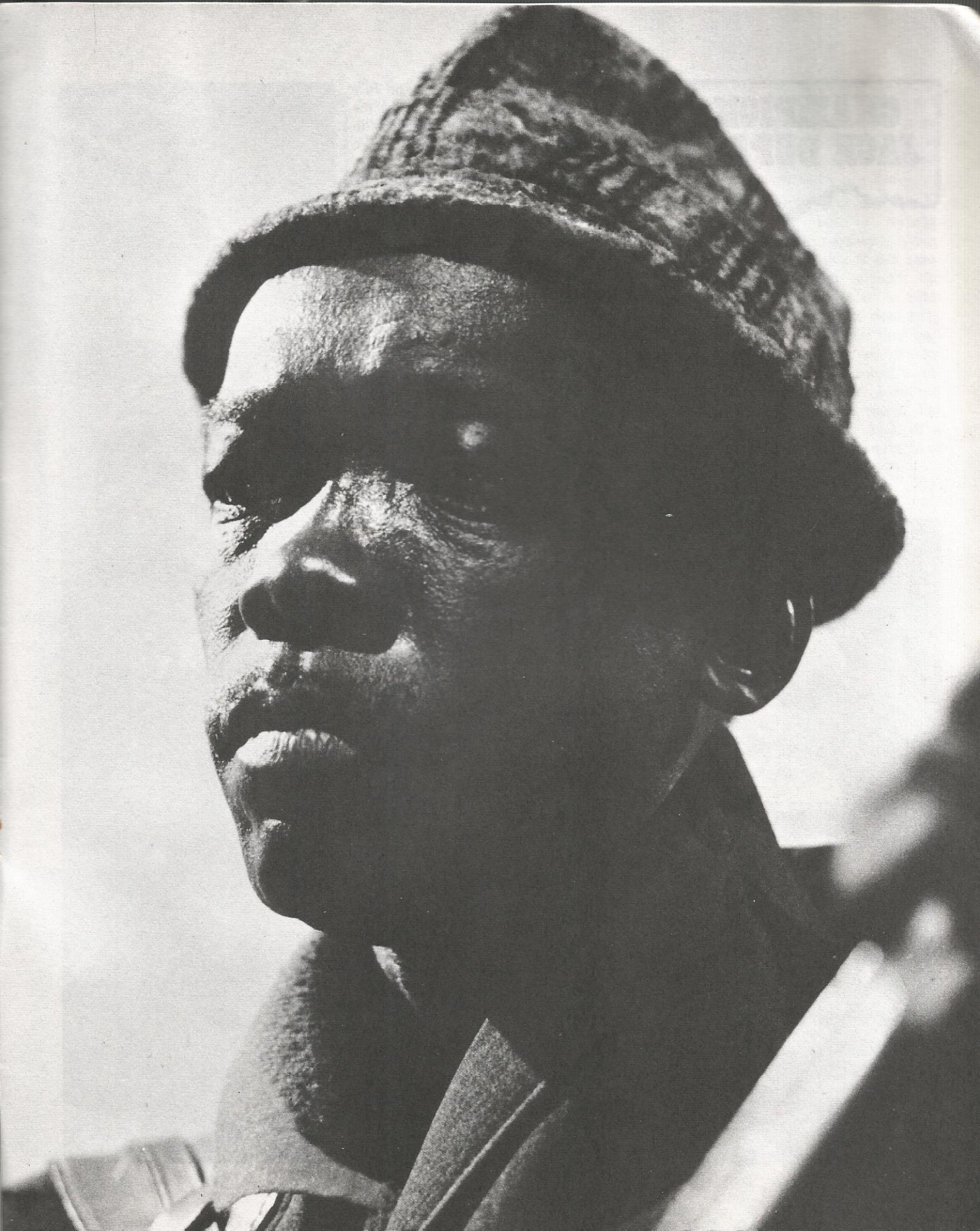
His career did not really begin to develop, however, until he made the move to Detroit in 1941, where his highly personal approach to music slowly won him a following. Very often when an artist of Hooker's background arrives at this point, his work becomes necessarily diluted by outside pressures. The prime example is, of course, Huddie Ledbetter, whose night club work in his later years showed a cynical falling away from the intensity of his best art. Hooker, however, pandered to nobody in the years of his recognition, and no doubt for this reason his advance was a slow one. It began with the appreciation of local blues connoisseurs, slowly extended to the more enlightened reviewers and critics, and only imperceptibly reached out to the public at large. Overnight success might sound more attractive, but there are advantages to the slow climb, the most important of them being that the chances of a style being corrupted are that much less. Hooker survived his own popularity without losing his art.

Hooker is vitally important today for the simple reason that when we hear him, we learn where the music came from. Unlike the anthropologist, who has to try to imagine where man came from, and is obliged to refer sadly to Missing Links, the jazz student can trace the geneology of the music virtually back to its beginnings, and the continuing existence of an artist like Hooker makes the job very much simpler. But if this were all that Hooker had to offer us, then his interest would be strictly sociological. In fact, not only is he interesting from the historical viewpoint, but he is also a vital artist in contemporary terms.

Although he is a conscious antique so far as musical evolution is concerned, he is also a highly sophisticated artist. We should not make the beginner's mistake of thinking that uncomplicated things can be produced only by the simple-minded. Hooker's music sounds simple. Try to reproduce its effects and you find out how simple it is.

Probably the most succinct statement on Hooker's significance today comes from the American jazz historian Marshall Stearns, who, in a famous appraisal, wrote: 'He is one of the few truly authentic exponents of archaic guitar style, a style which may well go back to Civil War days.' We would be wise to listen to Stearns, because he knows as much as any man about the different styles and eras of jazz. We would be even wiser to listen to Hooker.

photograph by DAVID REDFERN

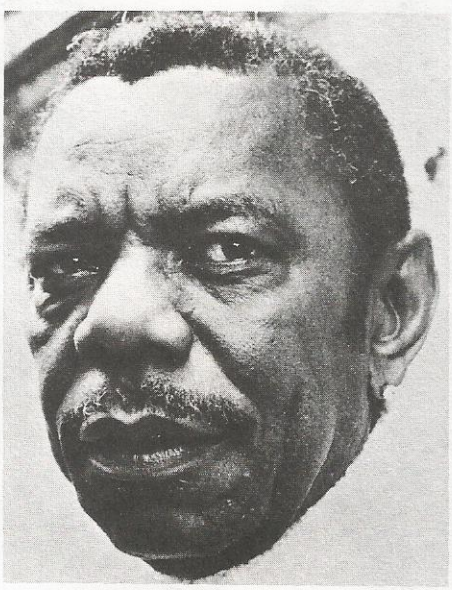


CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on July 4, 1910, Champion Jack is one of the best-loved blues artists ever to appear in this country. Indeed, so successful have his visits here been that it always comes as a surprise to realise that he has been away for any length of time. Wherever he appears, Champion Jack has the enviable gift of making friends, and it is interesting to note that whatever environment he works in, from the specialist jazz field to the more commercial club dates, people respond instantly to his performances.

Like so many children of New Orleans, Champion Jack learned his jazz fundamentals in the Storyville district, listening to the various piano players, of whom one in particular, a little-known player called 'Drive 'Em Down', was his favourite and his most dominant influence. To this day Champion Jack will sometimes play the tunes which Drive 'Em Down taught him so long ago.

It was in 1930 that he finally decided to try becoming a professional entertainer, but the Great Depression was not exactly the ideal time to enter a profession hopelessly overcrowded even at the best of times, and before long Champion Jack found that the hard economic facts of life were pushing him towards the other great love of his life, prizefighting. The statistics of his career as a lightweight are hard to come by, but perhaps the clearest impression is gleaned from Champion Jack himself, who once testified, 'I did pretty well too; only lost one fight in the eight years I was a professional'.



By 1940 he was ready to return to music, and in the very first year of his comeback he made more than twenty titles for the OKEH label. British record collectors will know that his releases here appear on BLUE HORIZON, and one of his most successful issues for that company is the album *'When You Feel The Feeling You Was Feeling'* (S.7-63206). It requires very little power of observation, when watching Champion Jack work, to see that he is not only an effective singer and pianist, but also a man with an irrepressible and highly contagious sense of humour. In his hands the blues can often become something more lighthearted than the text books suggest.

The Stars of Faith

One of the commonest complaints heard against the musical artist in the jazz field is that he, or she, has become too remote from the audience. There may be a good case to be made out for both sides in this argument, but certainly it doesn't arise at all in reference to The Stars of Faith.

On the one occasion in the past when I have seen them, their impact on their audience was so overwhelming as to be almost comical. The confrontation took place at The Maltings Concert Hall, during a televised jazz series. The Stars of Faith, totally undeterred by the inhibiting presence of the cameras, began fairly quietly, worked up to a climax and ended the evening in such a furore of enthusiasm, both on their part and the audience's, that it became difficult at times to tell which was which. A most remarkable exhibition.

The Stars of Faith were first founded as far back as 1958, and have since toured all over the world. Probably the single production with which they are most frequently associated is the Langston Hughes' work, '*Black Nativity*', but they have proved beyond question many times that they need no dramatic frame to work their effects. This will be their first tour of Great Britain, and there is no doubt that many provincial audiences seeing them for the very first time will not forget the experience in a hurry.

The ingredient which lies at the heart of their extraordinary act is fervour. Whether it is religious or musical fervour it is hard to say. Probably it is a combination of the two, but certainly the word 'Faith' in their title is no sales gimmick. In a way their act does have a gimmick, because for a while they lead the observer on, making him wonder whether The Stars of Faith might themselves be carrying a passenger. I will not spoil the fun by going into details, but will say only that the very idea of a passenger in this swinging steamroller of a group is too laughable for words.

OTIS SPANN

Spann's early life story illustrates yet again the way in which the authentic blues performer can come from a family background where the music is part of the day-to-day atmosphere. Spann, who was born on March 21, 1930, grew up with parents who both played the blues, his father on piano and his mother on guitar. It is no surprise that the atmosphere sank in, and by the time he was seven years old he was playing the piano himself. It is no surprise either to read that he started to do so with no formal training of any kind.

Spann developed the family talent for blues at an exceptionally fast pace, even for a member of the Spann family. By the time he was eight, when he had been playing for little more than a year, he took first prize at a local blues contest. His progress continued until at the age of only fourteen he became a fully fledged professional, working with a local blues band. So far the biographical pattern follows the usual lines, but in 1947 came the development which set him apart from so many other blues hopefuls. He moved to Chicago (still only seventeen years old) and joined forces with his half-brother, a fellow blues guitarist called Muddy Waters.

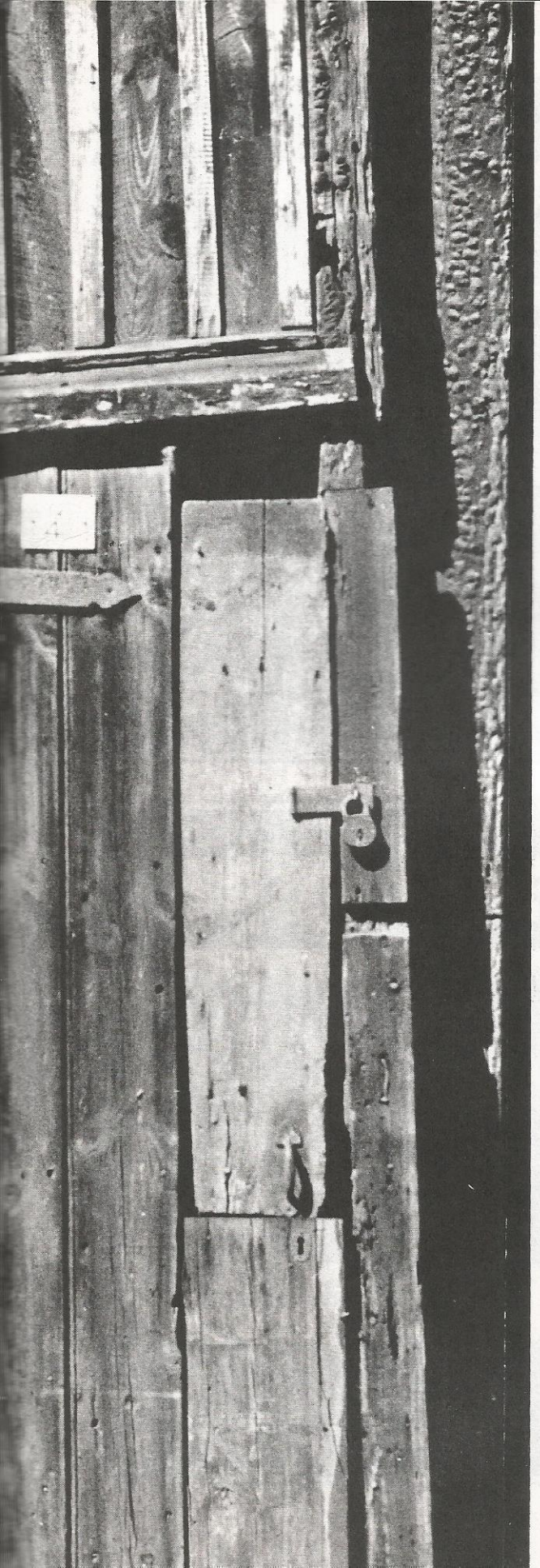
The Spann-Waters partnership proved to be one of the most enduring as well as one of the most fruitful in the entire history of the blues. To be precise, the two men stayed together for just over twenty-one years. Fans of Spann sometimes feel that he maintained this partnershop a little longer than he need have done, by which they mean, not that Waters was bad musical company, but only that Spann had arrived a long time ago at the stage of proficiency where he could have branched out as a solo attraction. This he eventually did as late as 1969.

The reader can easily deduce therefore that this tour is Spann's very first to Britain as a solo artist, even though he has been known and respected here for many years. Apart from his work with Muddy Waters, he has been associated at various points with Chuck Berry, Howling Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter. Perhaps the best way of conveying the ability he possesses is to quote a couple of testimonials. The first is from Pete Skelding, who wrote—

'I have long been of the conviction that Otis Spann is the most wholly stimulating blues pianist currently operative, an impressive and markedly individual soloist of great rhythmic strength, and by far the most responsive and sensitive of accompanying musicians in the whole modern blues idiom . . . easily the most forceful contemporary representative of the sturdy Southern piano style exemplified in the playing of such masters as Roosevelt Sykes and Big Maceo Merriweather.'

Perhaps even more impressive is this tribute from Leonard Feather, who has heard virtually every notable jazz artist in the world at one time or another—

'Spann is equally effective as a player and a blues singer, a powerful and individual stylist.'



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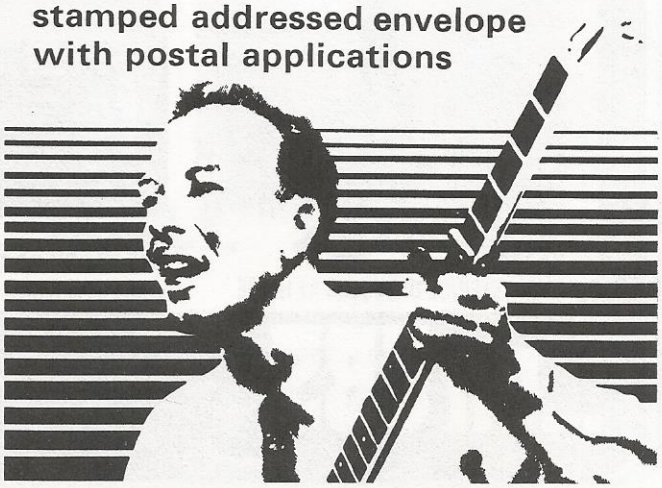

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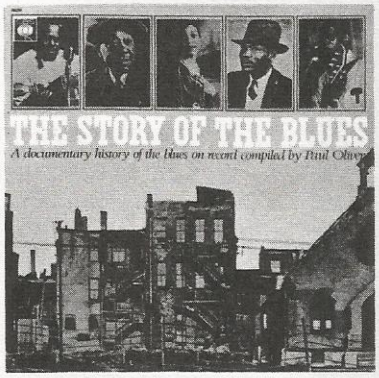

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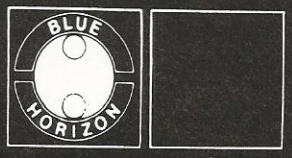

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1.
The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exit and entrance doors and such doors must at that time be open.

2.
All gangways, corridors, staircases and external passageways intended for exit shall be kept entirely free from obstruction whether permanent or temporary.

3.
Persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways or any unseated space in the Auditorium, unless standing in such space has been specially allowed by the G.L.C. or the Watch Committee, as applicable. If standing be permitted in the gangways at the sides and the rear of the seating it shall be limited to the numbers indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

4.
The safety curtain must be lowered and raised once immediately before the commencement of each performance, so as to ensure it being in proper working order.

The Management reserve the right to change the programme without notice and are not held responsible for the non-appearance of any artist.

The Management reserve the right to refuse admittance.

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THE AMERICAN
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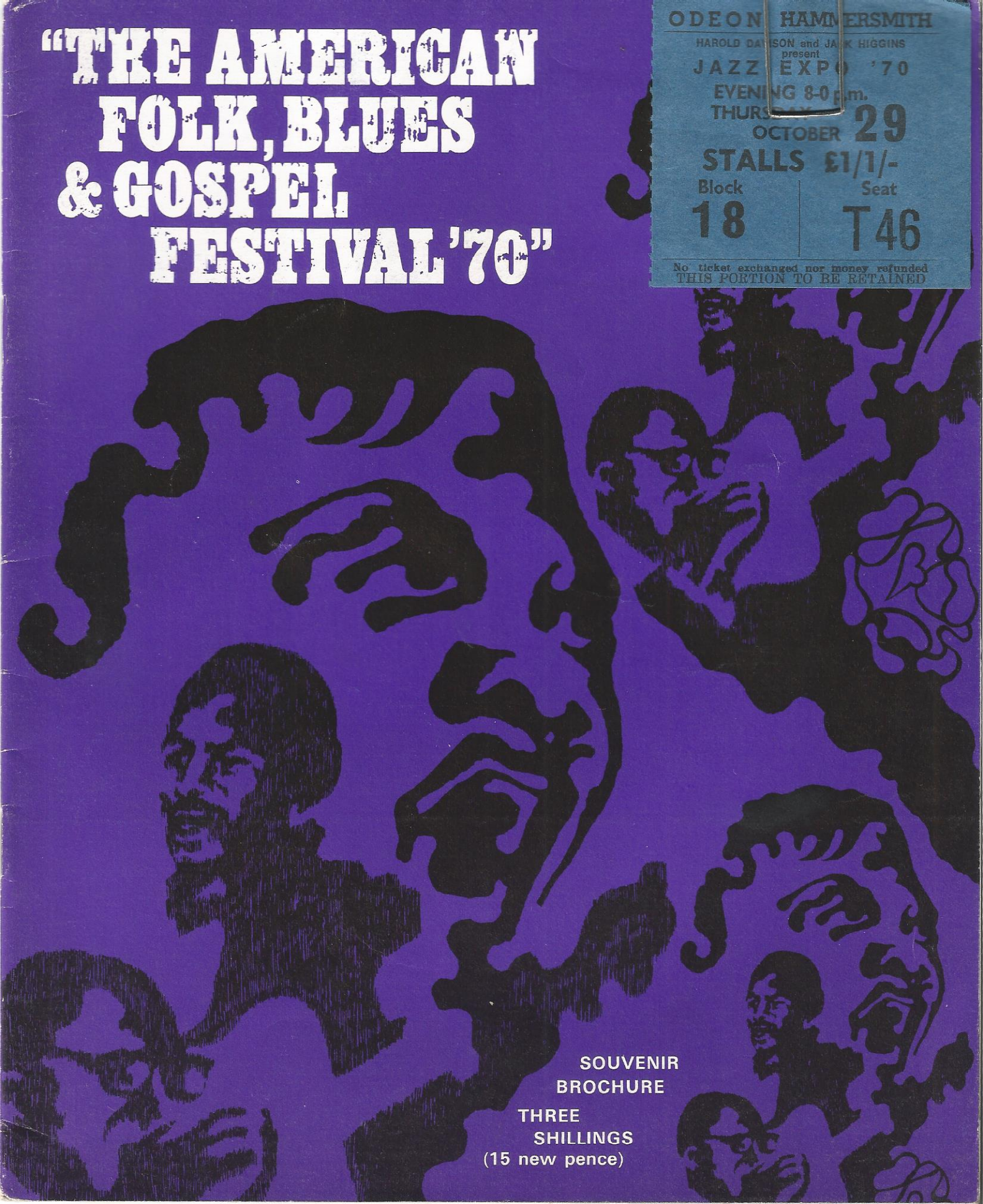
FESTIVAL '69

"THE AMERICAN FOLK, BLUES & GOSPEL FESTIVAL '70"



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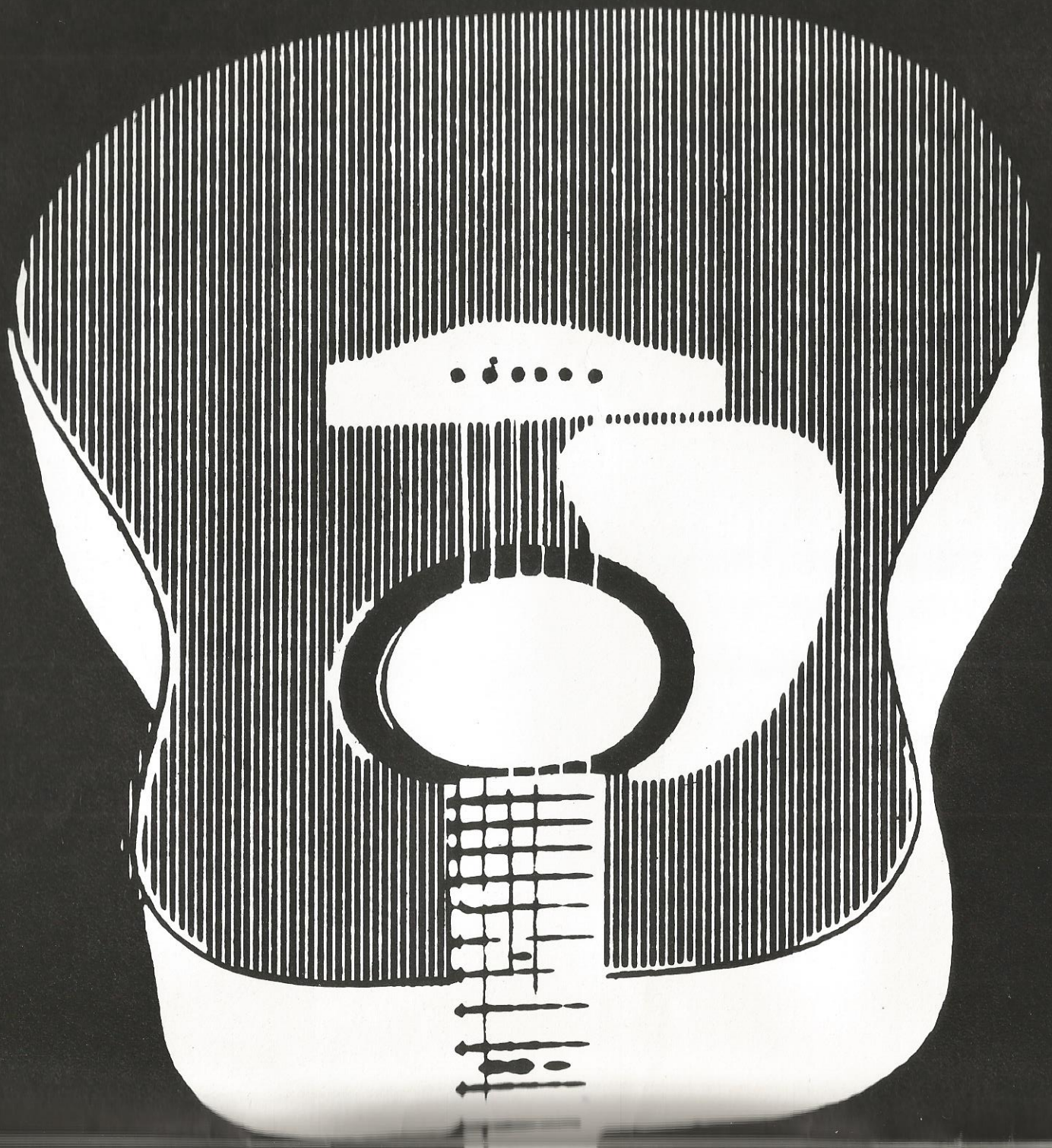


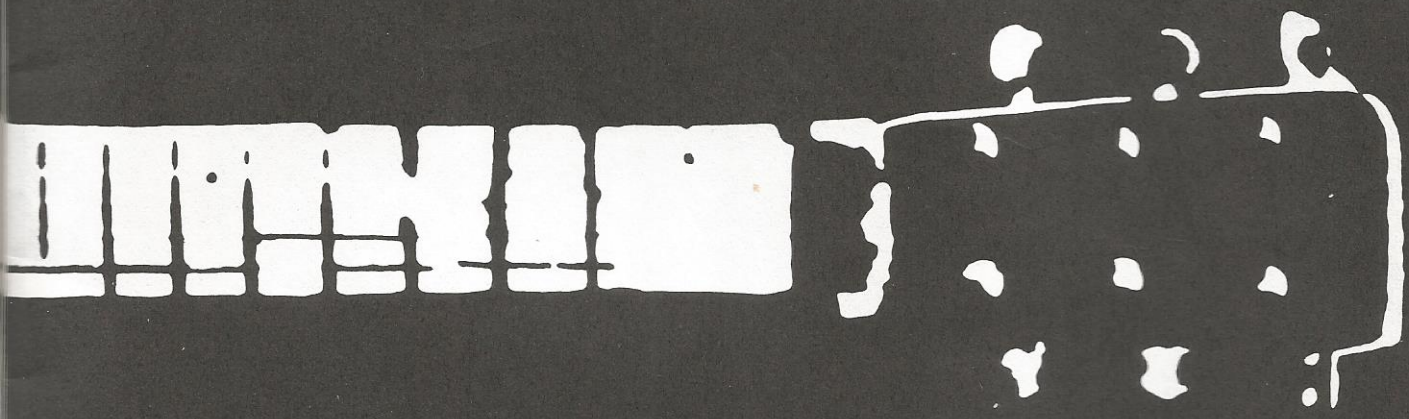
HAROLD DAVISON PRESENTS

"THE AMERICAN FOLK, BLUES & GOSPEL FESTIVAL '70"

(Produced by Harold Davison in conjunction with Lippmann and Rau)

featuring

SONNY TERRY
AND BROWNIE McGHEE
SISTER ROSETTA THARPE
BUKKA WHITE
CHAMPION JACK DUPREE



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SONNY TERRY AND BROWNIE McGHEE

programme notes by TONY RUSSELL

Three decades now, Sonny and Brownie have been together, pickin' and blowin' from one side of the world to the other . . . hootin' the blues, cryin' the blues, whoopin' the blues . . . livin' with the blues. The years sit lightly upon them; for men nearing sixty, working in a tough business, their stamina is incredible. If you think their enthusiasm, their good humour or their expertise has diminished in the slightest since you last saw them, you'll be the first person to find it so, and almost certainly the only one.

1970 marks—what? Their fifth visit to England? Or is it the sixth? Difficult to be sure, for they are now part of English blues history. Gate-openers back in the '50s, they can now enjoy the applause of audiences whom they have helped to create. Create is the word; no one, perhaps, has introduced the blues to beginners better than Sonny and Brownie. Never was instrumental brilliance so *profitably* employed, never did it speak so clearly, in so many directions, yet so modestly. One never feels that they are falling back on their skills; expertise is always the servant of expression; the fireworks are there to illuminate, not to outshine. Think of Sonny and Brownie, and one of the first words to come into your head is 'harmony'. Musically and personally, they complement each other, dovetail together like a two-piece jigsaw puzzle.

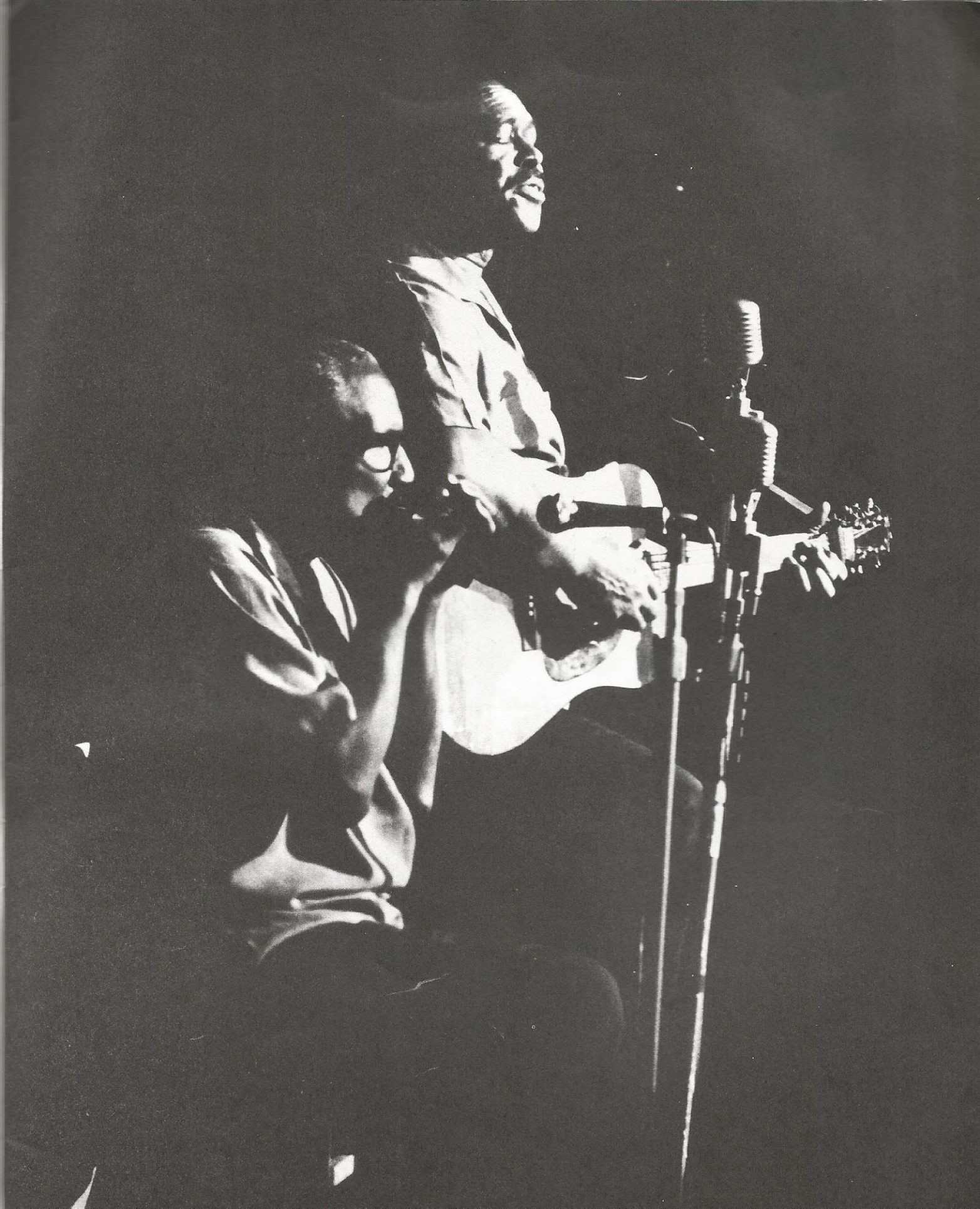
Which is surprising, in a way, because they have strong and distinct personalities. The harmony, as Paul Oliver once wrote, is one 'of contrasts. Brownie is short and stocky, Sonny is tall and heavily built; . . . whilst Brownie's voice is soft and burred, Sonny's is rough and gritty; Sonny is taciturn, withdrawn but with occasional outbursts of infectious laughter, whilst Brownie is extrovert, talkative, but given to unexpected moments of gravity'. The union of these disparate elements may be the secret of their success.

The partnership began about 1940, when Brownie was 25 and Sonny 29. Brownie had already done most of the things a black musician could do; he had toured with a carnival troupe, busked in the streets of Winston-Salem for the tobacco-factory workers, worked on medicine shows and made some records. And Sonny? He started playing harmonica young, but, at a time when young musicians might think about going on the road, in his mid-'teens, he was learning what it was like to be blind. He lost an eye at eleven, the other five years later, and all the recollections of those sixteen years seem to have been crammed into his playing. When he met Brownie, he too had recorded, on several Blind Boy Fuller sessions and by himself for a Library of Congress collector. His style was formed, virtually perfected; for thirty years he has done nothing (nothing!) but maintain an unwavering standard of excellence, a power of invention unmatched in the annals of the blues. It was fitting that he should find, for his companion, a musician as versatile as Brownie. It must have been obvious to them both, from the start, that they were exactly right for each other.

And right, both as a couple and with other musicians, they have continued to be. The 'folk revival' of the late '40s brought them in contact with Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston; with bluesmen from the South like Alec Seward and Ralph Willis; whatever the company, they did it good. Not that they were merely folk-singers for white fanciers; through the '40s and much of the '50s they poured out a stream of recordings for their own people, excellent sellers on a dozen or more labels. Their vivacious, thrusting blues were some of the most appealing music New Yorkers heard in the decade after World War II ended. Then they were claimed for a while by the folk labels; they began their globetrotting; they spread the good news where it had scarcely been heard before, and people listened with a will. Times have changed since those days when Sonny and Brownie and Leadbelly and Big Bill and Josh White waved the blues flag almost alone. We understand the blues a little better now; we can hear more records, see more artists; but that is no reason at all to forget the men who brought it all about. Times may have changed, but they have not. Here, as fresh as ever, is that incomparable threesome: Sonny, Brownie and the blues.

previous page: SONNY TERRY & BROWNIE McGHEE photograph by ALEX ALEXIOU

photograph by DAVID REDFERN



CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

Blues and Gospel Festivals of one sort or another have been taking place in England for nine years, but not until now has one of them employed the services of Champion Jack Dupree—which is odd, for he has been living in Europe for years, and presently has his home in the north of England. Not that it has been difficult to see Jack in action; he has played regularly at jazz concerts, in pubs and clubs, and on the college rag-ball circuit. Few bluesmen are better known and better loved.

Jack was born in New Orleans, in 1910, and in a sense he has never really left the city; at one of his most recent recording dates he sang a little tune in Creole patois, just one in a longish list of such things. His memories of New Orleans' language, customs and music stay green. He was taught by a local pianist known only as 'Drive 'Em Down', picking up songs like *Stackolee*, to the tune of which he set his well-known *Junker's Blues*. (The same melody, by the way, turns up in *Tee-Nah-Nah*—which Jack has also recorded—and in several Fats Domino pieces. And elsewhere, when you think about it.) Jack has commemorated his old teacher in a *Drive 'Em Down Special*, and other musicians from whom he's taken a few ideas have been remembered in recordings, too; Leroy Carr, for instance. But what you hear when Jack is at the piano stool is straight, undiluted Dupree—a huge, varied collection of blues and stories, and rolling piano work in the old, original, barrelhouse idiom.

Like many musicians, Jack Dupree ventured for a while into the fight business—hence his nickname—when musical pickings diminished in the '30s. By 1940, though, he was back at the piano, and in the following year he made his first records. After World War II he began recording in earnest, and until 1960 he averaged five or six releases a year, on many different labels. The most consistently interesting were put out by King Records, well made compositions with superb accompaniments. A lot of them exploited the bizarre device of imitation cleft-palate singing; *Tongue Tied Blues* and *Harelip Blues* were two, of course, but there were several others. They were hugely successful. In the '60s Jack did a lot of recording in Denmark; then some more in England, generally with native blues musicians, but once with his old friend Mickey Baker, whose guitar-playing had distinguished some of the King sides.

Of course, there is much more to Jack Dupree than what has been captured on records—the story-telling, for instance. He used to push a few quickies on to the old three-minute discs—'I got me one of them G.I. overcoats. What I mean is, Gee, I'm glad I got it!'—but his extended narratives have only been heard in the concert-hall or club. Perhaps he will bring some of them out this time, but even if he doesn't there will be a great deal to enjoy in the singing and playing of 'the last of the barrelhouse pianists'.

photograph by MIKE ZUCKERMAN

photograph by DAVID REDFERN

SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

There are so many blues which use the words 'rock me' that it seems somehow right for a spiritual called *Rock Me* to be heavy with blues inflections. Bluesiness, at any rate, marked Sister Rosetta Tharpe's recording of the song in 1938, and the union of 'holy' and 'unholy' sounds in that first record created a new gospel manner. She developed the approach in her succeeding release, *God Don't Like It,* with its blistering guitar solo, and her career ever since has drawn sustenance from the two traditions of sanctified music and blues singing.

Like virtually every religious singer, Sister Rosetta Tharpe first lifted her voice to heaven as a small child —in the Pentecostal Church of Cotton Plant, Arkansas, where she was born on March 20, 1915. Her mother was a celebrated singer and preacher, and under her tuition Rosetta quickly became famous on Chicago's South Side (whither the family had moved) and later in Harlem. She did not scorn the blues; indeed, she sang them in public, at the Cotton Club in 1938 with Cab Calloway, and later on records with Calloway and the Lucky Millinder band. She drew jazzmen to her for her religious performances, too, and many of her best recordings feature pianist Sam Price, who led his trio on such exhilarating numbers as *Up Above My Head* and *Didn't It Rain.* Both of these, and many others, had Rosetta singing duets with Sister Marie Knight, a younger, somewhat lighter-voiced, but no less exciting performer. Just as Blind Willie Johnson had enjoyed his greatest popularity in the Depression, the two Sisters' records were played in countless homes during the drab years after World War II.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe's bubbling musical personality is reflected in her gay clothes, wide smile and exuberant stage act. They are superficial signs of the happiness which is implicit in sanctified music—the happiness expressed by songs like *Go Tell It On The Mountain, When I Take My Vacation In Heaven* and—most of all —*Up Above My Head.* Her music is full of hope, confidence and joy; her guitar, no less than her voice, shouts and exults in tones of unwavering belief. Even the listener who does not share that belief will be caught up in the fervour of her declaration—assisted, perhaps, by the ever-present blues devices. At one time Sister Rosetta's debt to secular black music may have worried some of her hearers; but, after all, is she not doing for gospel music what Ray Charles later did for the blues?

previous page: SISTER ROSETTA THARPE
photograph by VALERIE WILMER

BUKKA WHITE

'I was over in Aberdeen . . .' As for Mississippi John Hurt, a town mentioned in a blues provided the clue for the rediscovery of Bukka White. He wasn't still in Aberdeen when John Fahey's letter reached the town; he had been living in Memphis for some years. However, the letter was forwarded; Bukka replied; and that's how he comes to be in Europe this year, on his second visit, thrilling audiences again with his steamhammer guitar-playing and those 'sky songs' which are so utterly unlike anyone else's blues.

Pasted on to the upper edge of Bukka's National is—or at any rate used to be—a piece of paper with the names of his songs. Not a large piece of paper; you might think, if you hadn't heard him, that his repertoire was small. Far from it; Bukka, in fact, composes continually, and the list can be no more than a sampler. Unlike some other old-time bluesmen, Bukka has much more to trade with than a thirty-year-old reputation. Even when he brings out the stock pieces, he has new things to say and play. Last time we saw him, in 1967, he rounded off his performances with little spoken comments; this time it may be something else. Whatever it is, it will seem right, and it will be something you will only ever hear Bukka doing. He is very much his own man.

Not that we needed his rediscovery—though of course we are glad it happened—to tell us that; the old records made it clear. The sheer authority of the Library of Congress pieces, *Po' Boy* and *Sic 'Em Dogs On,* and of the subsequent recordings for OKeh, makes for stunning listening even today, thirty years later. They were anachronistic releases on the race market of 1940—pounding country blues, shot through with the sharp cries of a steel slide, growling and gravelly. Not long out of prison, Bukka harped constantly upon themes of trouble: the loss of a friend (*Fixin' To Die*) or a relative (*Strange Place Blues*), sickness (*High Fever Blues*), deprivation of personal freedom (*Parchman Farm Blues, When Can I Change My Clothes*). Whatever a man might do (it seemed), something would 'worry his mind', hamper his movements, bring him down. The particularity of his themes only half-hides the larger implications—if you care to put it that way, the protest.

Nowadays the climate of Bukka's music is somewhat brighter, and he lets his quirky wit and ingenuity play upon different topics. But whether he brings out his new-fashioned blues, or looks back at *Poor Boy, Baby Please Don't Go* or *Shake 'Em On Down,* he will sing and play with that tough lyricism which he has made his own.

BUKKA WHITE photograph by VALERIE WILMER

WILLIE DIXON

A little while ago a song appeared on the Chicago scene, and was recorded by Sunnyland Slim and Muddy Waters. It was called *I Am The Blues*, and it was one of the best things the city had heard in years.

I'm ten thousand men in an unmaken grave,
I'm the million people in the world of slaves;
I'm the southern people that have bled and died,
But I'm the only one ain't never been satisfied . . .
I am, Lord, I really am the blues;
Well, I want the world to know that I've been mistreated and I've been misused.

I Am The Blues—latest of the many memorable compositions of Willie Dixon. To list its antecedents would take pages; Willie has written for most of the Chicago artists. Nearly all Howlin' Wolf's later material has been his—*I Ain't Superstitious, Just Like I Treat You, Tail Dragger, Three Hundred Pounds Of Joy, Built For Comfort, Spoonful* . . . Then there were *Crazy Music* and *Too Many Ways* for Buddy Guy; *I Can't Quit You Baby* and *Jump Sister Bessie* for Otis Rush; *Mellow Down Easy* and *My Babe* for Little Walter. And for Muddy Waters, Willie really rolled up his sleeves, producing *Tiger In Your Tank, The Same Thing, Hoochie Coochie Man, Just Make Love To Me* and a dozen or more others. Almost twenty titles there, but they wouldn't make a tenth of Willie's output. As far as Chicago music is concerned, he has a special right to call a song *I Am The Blues*.

Willie Dixon was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 1, 1915. His hefty build gave him the notion of a boxing career, and—like both Bukka White and Champion Jack Dupree—he became a Golden Gloves winner. But by 1940 he had forsaken the ring for the club circuit, and was playing bass in a group called The Five Breezes. His next band was The Four Jumps Of Jive; the next, The Big Three Trio. This last group was the most successful, making numerous records (the first was Willie's own *Signifying Monkey*) and dominating the novelty-blues market. When it disbanded, Willie branched out into producing and arranging, supervised countless sessions, wrote more songs, and even found time to make a hit with *Walkin' The Blues*.

In 1962 Willie came over here with the first Folk Blues Festival, a visit which he repeated in '63 and '64. Whether swapping verses with Memphis Slim, singing his speciality *Nervous*, or rocking the rhythm sections along with his bass-playing, he exuded swing. This is his first visit for some years, and no one who has enjoyed Willie's uncountable contributions to modern blues will fail to welcome him back warmly.

SHAKEY HORTON

Take Highway 51 out of Memphis, drive across the state border into Mississippi, and the first town of any size which you hit is Horn Lake. Here, fifty-two years ago, Walter 'Shakey' Horton was born. Like most blues musicians from northern Mississippi, he has his roots in Memphis. He worked there, first as a chef at the Peabody Hotel (where some of the classic country blues recording sessions were held, in 1929), then as a cab-driver. He also played with the city's best-known artists: Will Shade, Charlie Burse, Jack Kelly, Joe Hill Louis, Jimmy DeBerry and Little Buddy Doyle. When Sun Records began its momentous existence in '52, Shakey was one of the first to record; his powerhouse solo *Easy* is among the greatest harmonica features of its time. They were exciting days in Memphis; pianists, guitarists, harmonica-players and singers were creating, recreating and exchanging ideas which were soon to pass northwards into the mainstream Chicago blues tradition, and in many instances influence its development. Some of the young Memphis musicians went north quickly, and had considerable success; perhaps Shakey tarried a little too long. He went to Chicago, cut some good singles, but never quite found the success he deserved.

But some of the things he did there were tremendous. Many of Muddy Waters' records had him playing fat, saxophone-like solos; *Hoochie Coochie Man* was one. Otis Rush used him; Memphis friend Sunnyland Slim used him; and Jimmy Rogers really profited by Shakey's accompaniment, for *Walking By Myself* has an almost unbelievable solo, two choruses long, into which Shakey crams enough ideas to set up a second-rate player for life.

Shakey Horton first came to Europe in 1965, when he played very well, especially with J. B. Lenoir. (Their duet, *Slow Down*, on the Folk Blues Festival LP is magnificent.) He was back in 1968, by which time he had joined the original All Stars and recorded with Johnny Shines and Sunnyland Slim. Since then he has played regularly with the group and made guest appearances on sessions with both black and white bluesmen. His health is not always good, and sometimes he does not feel well enough to blow at full stretch, but his presence in a group is hardly ever anything but catalytic.

LAFAYETTE LEAKE

'As a child, I admired the music of Earl Hines, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong and, more recently, Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson. Among the singers I liked Billie Holiday . . .' These are remarks which you do not come across in many bluesmen's reminiscences; but Ellis 'Lafayette' Leake is no ordinary bluesman—indeed, the term doesn't cover half of his activities. One of Chicago's most respected sessionmen, he has worked for Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, The Moonglows and The Flamingos, and almost all of the spiritual groups who record for Peacock. It is said that companies deliberately suppressed his own material, in case they lost his invaluable studio services when he made himself known to the public.

Lafayette comes from Winona, Mississippi, a town on Highway 51 just east of the Delta. On his discharge from the army after World War II he studied music in Chicago under Alfred 'Red' Sims, and before long he was in Chuck Berry's road band, led by Willie Dixon. His association with Berry made him a well-known name among collectors very early on; we have waited a long time for this visit. The stirring piano work on dozens of Berry's and Bo Diddley's records established him as a near-legendary figure, but he has been playing constantly since then; more recent recording dates were with Homesick James, Billy Boy Arnold and Junior Wells. He also teaches music, and has written several excellent blues, such as *Love That Woman* for Otis Rush, *Heavy Heart Beat* for the little-known but admirable singer Jesse Fortune, and *Short Dress Woman* for Muddy Waters. One of the most experienced musicians to visit Europe for a Blues Festival, he can be relied upon for satisfying and individual contributions to any performance in which he is involved.

LEE JACKSON

Lee Jackson has been playing guitar for fifty years—he is the oldest member of the All Stars—and for much of that time his base of operations has been Chicago, where he has played the clubs and made a few recordings, usually as bass-guitarist in an accompanying group. Roosevelt Sykes and Sunnyland Slim are two artists with whom he has recorded; Slim also played piano on Lee's first single under his own name, *Fishin' In My Pond* and *I'll Just Keep Walkin'*. This was one of the early issues on Cobra, and Lee led a distinguished band, including Harold Ashby on tenor and Little Willie Foster on harmonica. An equally fine group backed him on his other single, made three years later in 1960; on tenor was J. T. Brown, at the piano Johnny Jones—both of whom, unhappily, have since died.

Lee Jackson was born in St. Louis, on September 26, 1907, and his interest in music began while he was in his 'teens. He worked for a time with a local blues singer named—apparently—Stan Kenton. It was probably after World War II that he moved to Chicago, but his career is difficult to follow in these years; no doubt the blues press will elicit the facts while he is here.

As far as we can tell, his last recording date was in 1964, when he supported—alongside Lafayette and Clifton—the steel guitarist Homesick James Williamson, for a Prestige session. (The LP-sleeve says it is Eddie Taylor on bass-guitar, but fans who attended the proceedings have sorted *that* out.) When Johnny Shines left the All Stars to make a new home in Alabama, Lee came in as guitarist. This is his first tour with the group outside the United States.

CLIFTON JAMES

Clifton James is the only member of the Chicago Blues All Stars who is Chicagoan right up from the ground—the only one, that is to say, who was born in the city. Now in his late thirties, he belongs to the generation that grew up listening to Muddy Waters' and Howlin' Wolf's early records and, in its turn, moulded the blues form according to its needs. Some of Clifton's generation have died—J.B., Magic Sam—but there are still Junior Wells and Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and Luther Allison, to carry the tradition. And still solid, experienced sidemen like Clifton to keep it swinging.

His experience goes back to Bo Diddley's early days, when he was Bo's drummer both in and out of the studio. Subsequently he worked with blues, soul and gospel singers. He has recorded with Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy and the late Sonny Boy Williamson, but also with the Spirit of Memphis and the Mighty Clouds of Joy. British fans will remember his visit with the Folk Blues Festival in 1964. The record which those artists cut in Germany has plenty of steady, sensible rhythm-setting by Clifton and Willie Dixon, backing up Sunnyland Slim, Hubert Sumlin and Howlin' Wolf. Five years later Clifton was in Germany again, and he recorded an album which had him singing the blues as well as playing them. Maybe we shall not hear this side of his talent in concert, but unquestionably his sure timekeeping will be among the striking features of the All Stars' performances. He has been with the band since its inception, and his spiritual sympathy with the group's aims is clearly expressed in an answer he once gave when someone asked him how he got the blues feeling. *'I was born in the ghetto, lived in the ghetto all my life, and I must have been born with the blues.'*

SHAKEY HORTON photograph by VALERIE WILMER

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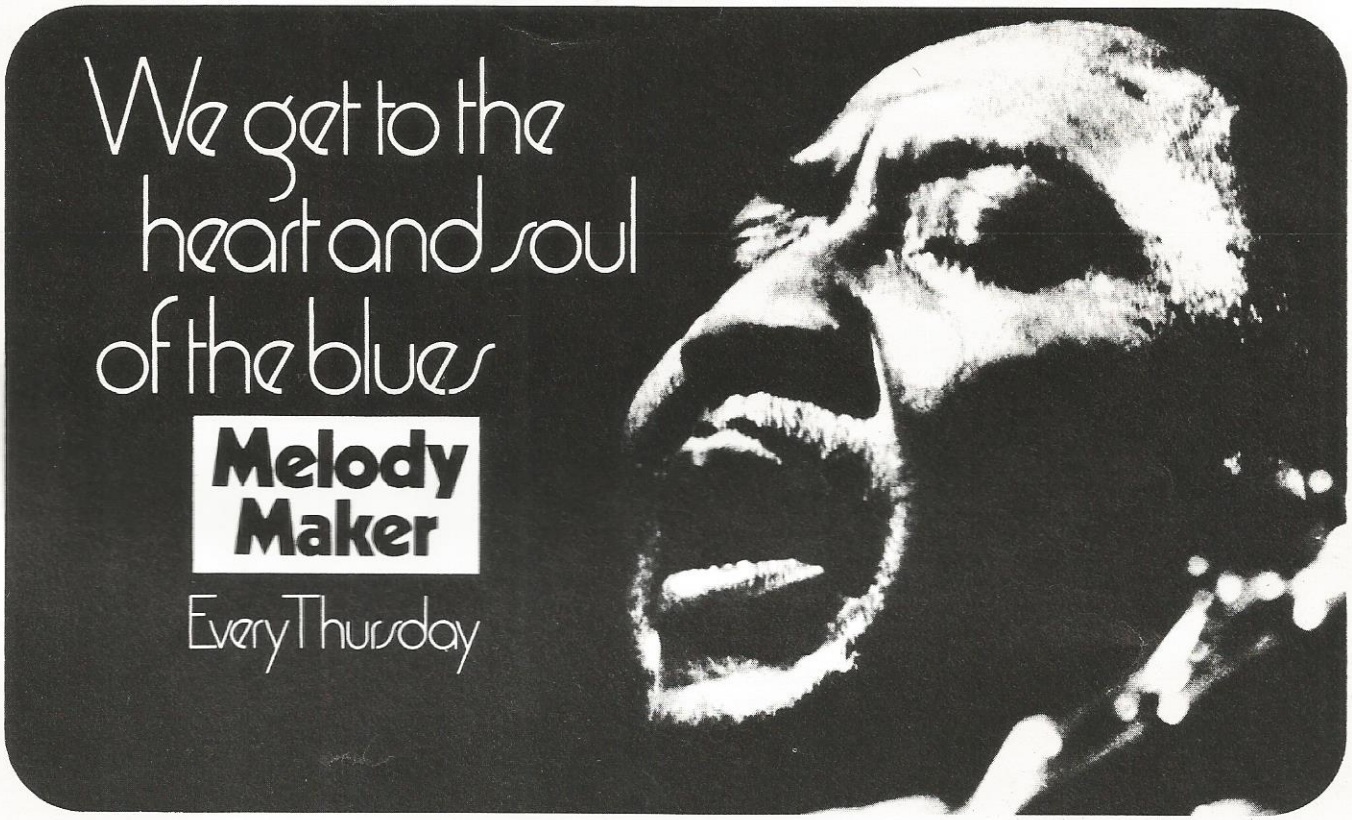

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