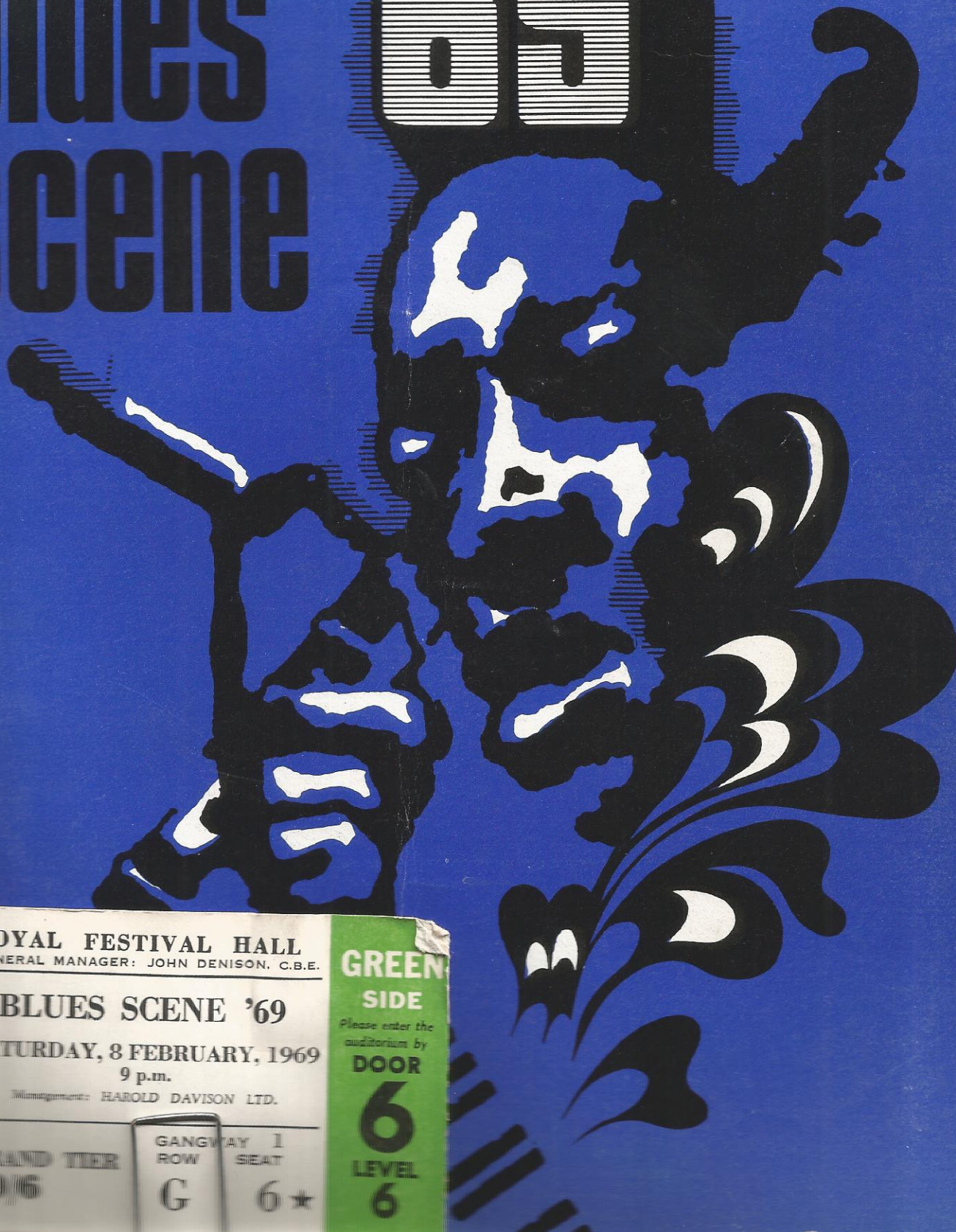


★ ★
**blues
scene**

★ ★
'69



ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
GENERAL MANAGER: JOHN DENISON, C.B.E.

BLUES SCENE '69

SATURDAY, 8 FEBRUARY, 1969
9 p.m.

Management: HAROLD DAVISON LTD.

GRAND TIER
10/6

GANGWAY 1
ROW SEAT

G

6 ★

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DOOR

**6
LEVEL
6**

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ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
GENERAL MANAGER JOHN DENISON, C.B.E.

HAROLD DAVISON presents
THE BLUES SCENE '68
SAT., 16 NOVEMBER, 1968
9 p.m.

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	ROW	SEAT
TERRACE	0	39
13/6		

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The 'MELODY MAKER'
in association with
HAROLD DAVISON
presents

★★ blues scene 69★★

featuring

JOHN LEE HOOKER

AYNSLEY DUNBAR'S RETALIATION

CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

THE GROUNDHOGS

JO ANN KELLY

programme notes by BENNY GREEN

promotion direction: JACK L. HIGGINS



JOHN LEE HOOKER

Hooker was born in Clarksdale, a small town in Mississippi, in 1917, and when we look at his environment we find influences which appear to be inevitable with artists of this kind. Both his father and his brother were ministers, and Hooker himself was not the first player, nor will he be the last, whose inspiration for music was stimulated by a religious background. He began singing spirituals when he was fourteen years old, and two years later began studying the guitar under the tutelage of Will Moore. For a while he restricted his work to the local scene, but then at 21 he moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he was destined to remain based for two years.

Then in 1941 he moved to Detroit, and very gradually the intensity and skill of his music conveyed itself, first to connoisseurs of the blues idiom, then to the more aware reviewers and journalists, and finally to the wider public he commands today. It is important to note that this slow, steady drift into the limelight was achieved without any pandering to commercial demands. The intensity of the Hooker blues idiom was not diluted with any Show Biz tricks or gimmicks. Hooker's career, in fact, is a near allegory of the Virtue Rewarded variety.

Why is he so important a figure in the chaotic popular music scene of today? The answer very simply is, because he shows us where our popular music has come from, and demonstrates that the older styles and nuances are not so antiquated as we might sometimes think. Because artists like Hooker survive and flourish, there are thankfully no Missing Links in the anthropology of jazz. We have all our links before us, and we can study concurrently the modern and the ancient without compromising our musical taste in the slightest. In fact, we should be extremely thankful for men like Hooker, who can give us such profound insights into the early condition of the Blues, and who can give us priceless hints as to how our music today came to sound the way it does.

There is, admittedly, a great deal of lip service paid to the archaic blues player-singer, who is sometimes more dreary an artist than the musicologists like to admit. There are those who have only to be told that such-and-such an artist sings in the authentic style of the 1890s, or any past period you care to name, for the sycophantic attitudes to come dancing out like reflex actions. And indeed, if Hooker had nothing better to offer us than an authentic old style ossified beyond redemption and marred by in-

different execution, we would be well justified in turning our backs on him and seeking something a little more refined.

But this is the whole point about Hooker. His actual technique is very valid indeed for us today. Although he is a conscious antique so far as musical evolution is concerned, he is also a highly sophisticated artist with his effects at his fingertips. We should not make the common error of assuming that the uncomplicated can only be produced by the simple-minded. Hooker's music only SOUNDS simple. It is when others try to reproduce his effects that the discovery is made that he is inimitable.

The American jazz historian Marshall Stearns has come closest to explaining Hooker's historical as distinct from musical significance. In a famous appraisal of Hooker's work, the perceptive Stearns once 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 probably be wise to take Stearns' docketing for granted, as he knew as much about the progressive periods of jazz as anyone in the field. But what is so fascinating about Hooker is that, preserving the style of a dead era as he does, he can still communicate so powerfully in the age of the technological lunatic asylum. He sings about people who are recognisable to us all, and no doubt points the moral that in the hundred years or so that have elapsed since his style first began to be formulated, people have basically changed very little. They still suffer the same pangs about the same problems, and at a moment in history when not a day goes by without our being informed that mankind is changing beyond recognition, there is something comforting in that.

Today, when traditions are being shed at so baffling a speed, and cultural landmarks are disappearing almost before we have time to digest their significance, the continuing survival of a musician whose work is anachronistic and yet applicable to the times is a very remarkable phenomenon indeed. Because Folk music, or Blues, or Jazz, or whatever label one prefers, has been evolving at a hysterical rate, it seems wholly improbable that we should be able to savour the style of an original. And yet it seems very possible too. After all, if forty years have seen profound changes in popular art music, then it is at least feasible that somewhere there still exist working artists whose music reflects the pure sources of later developments in the field. And that is why John Lee Hooker, and a few other men like him, have a magnetic attraction for us.



CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

Perhaps the reader is wondering what all this has to do with the kind of music Champion Jack will be giving them at this evening's concert. I think it has a great deal to do with it. Some jazz musicians, it is true, deploy such arid intellectual styles that it can fairly be said that their own personalities, if they have such a thing, has become obliterated by the technical self-consciousness. Champion Jack does not fall into this category. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to think of any other jazz musician who escapes this category more emphatically. His personality comes through in his playing, and one or two of the facets of his character which I guessed at when we met over lunch seem to me to be confirmed by what he does at the piano.

He is certainly a relaxed improviser. This is because he knows exactly what it is he wants to do, and has been doing it long enough to have confidence in his ability. There is also something about his work which matches up to the impression of geniality which I have retained of him over the years. He is, I think, a man who enjoys making his music just as he enjoyed making our acquaintance at that lunch. Notwithstanding W. C. Fields' old morsel of cynicism, 'Anyone who hates kids can't be ALL bad', Champion Jack plays like a man who might get along well with small children. He is an honest, unaffected player, untroubled by coterie wars and with too little time to bother much about the sociological significance of the improvisational art in the twentieth century, etc., etc.

He was born in New Orleans, in August 1910, and was orphaned when both his parents died in a fire. Until he was fourteen he lived in the Coloured Waifs' Home, after which he picked up the rudiments of piano playing from a local barrelhouse expert. By 1930 he was playing as a professional, doing minor gigs of no particular importance, but making a living at a time when hundreds of itinerant pianists were working across the length and breadth of America. Clubs and bars were his main venues, and possibly he might have continued in this way indefinitely had it not been for that potent factor in jazz history, the Depression.

Jobs became harder to get. There were longer and longer gaps between engagements, and in time Champion Jack saw that there was no point in chasing rainbows any longer, and that the only practical thing to do was to switch professions. And so he became a professional lightweight boxer. One of the few wisps

of conversation that I do recall from that lunch was to the effect that he 'won some and lost some'. This was the era of some of the greatest lightweights of all time, and with men in the field like Barney Ross, Lou Ambers and Tony Canzoneri, life must have been very tough for a lightweight. This incongruous episode ended one night in Indianapolis. Champion Jack went there to fight his last fight, stayed on for several years and resumed his work in music, singing and playing in the numerous clubs around the city.

In 1940 he began recording regularly for the Okeh label, producing twenty sides in his first year with the company. And then, in 1944, he finally moved to New York, since which time he has been discovered by the jazz world at large, recorded many albums and travelled all over the world, playing and singing the blues. It is not easy to write about the music of a character like Champion Jack. It is so basic that no analytical note is going to get very far. So perhaps the best way of conveying something of his style is to quote the man himself. Champion Jack once responded to a request to define himself by saying, 'I am one of the last of the barrelhouse piano players, whose blues portray the life of both the urban and southern American Negro'.

And once again from Champion Jack himself, a reflection on his material. He is a man who has performed the classic migration, beginning in New Orleans at the beginning of the century, and incidentally at the beginning of jazz also, and ending in New York half a lifetime later. He has travelled the world, played in a bewildering variety of places, been obliged to give up music for a while, and then eventually returned to it with renewed success, and has generally been subject to all the vicissitudes of fortune that the wandering minstrel must expect as part of the bargain. So there is some justification for his claim, 'My songs tell about my experiences in life, or what I saw in the lives of other people'.

I once met Champion Jack over lunch at the house of a mutual friend, and it is significant that although I cannot now remember anything of the conversation, I retain a vivid recollection of Champion Jack's physical impact. He was, and presumably still is, what people often refer to as a personality, by which they mean that his physical presence is something approaching a work of art in itself. I remember that he wore a genial smile and one ear-ring, that he was completely relaxed and charming, and that he seemed to have struck up a treaty of co-operation with our host's small children. All in all it was a pleasant interlude indeed.

THE AYNSLEY DUNBAR RETALIATION

The Retaliators number four, and they first met at the Windsor Jazz Festival. Musically their approach can be summed up in the word Blues. Although not every one of their pieces is an actual blues in the strict academic sense, the spirit of that form animates whatever they play. As their organist Victor Brox has explained, 'The only conscious thought prevailing among us is to retain absolute originality and to maintain the musical discipline necessary for playing the Blues, which at the same time enables us to reach a freedom of style. We never intend to stray too far from the Blues'.

The group's main following at present exists in the smaller clubs and among the college students, and their popularity has now been growing steadily for some time. They have said that their aim is to achieve two effects in their performances, first, the retention of the emotional simplicity and directness which all authentic blues performances must have; and second, an inter-reaction between the four members of the group which would make them more than just four people playing together. They have also summed up their effect as 'an unlimited landscape in which we can paint whatever we want'.



AYNSLEY DUNBAR
(Drums, leader)

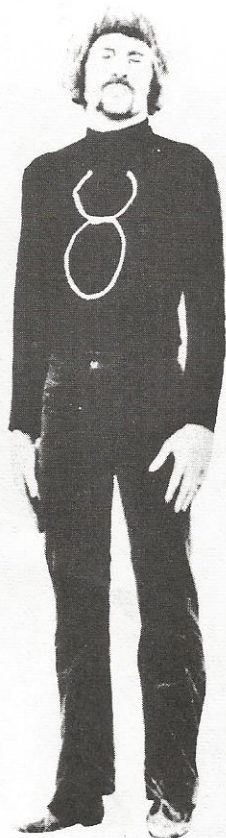
Born in Liverpool, in January 1946, Dunbar began studying music at the age of nine, when he started off with violin lessons. The entry into the music world of the Rock and Roll fever tempted him to rethink his tactics, and he decided soon enough to give up the violin and start out on the drums instead. He acquired his first proper kit when he was twelve, and by the time he was fourteen had dropped into a routine which involved five hours' practice a day in a sound-proofed room in the home of his parents. He kept up this demanding routine for two years, in some way managing not to attend school in this time. At sixteen he joined his first band, a local group which specialised in Mainstream jazz, graduating from there into other groups of all shapes, sizes and approaches to music, including at various times The Mojos and John Mayall. It is Mayall who Dunbar now names as his most important influence. After leaving Mayall for a place in a group led by Jeff Buck, Dunbar then formed his own group, the one which is appearing at this concert this evening.



JOHN MORESHEAD

(Lead guitar)

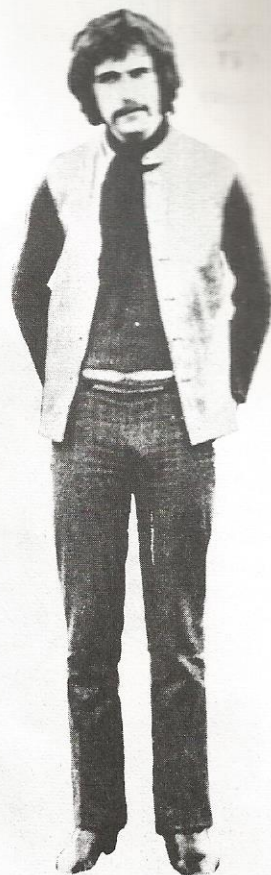
Born in Calcutta, India, in 1942, he came to Britain when the last war ended and attended Winchester College, not an establishment particularly distinguished for the production of good lead guitarists. It therefore comes as no great surprise to learn that he was expelled from that establishment in 1959. Two influences, not entirely complementary, then determined his course of action for a while, the London Stock Exchange and the guitar playing of Ricky Nelson. He took a job in the first and started trying to emulate the second. The Guitar won, and Moreshead soon left the Stock Exchange to its own devices and became a professional guitarist. His first proper engagement was with Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, but an abiding interest in the Blues eventually led him away from Kidd's style of music and into the ranks of the new Aynsley Dunbar group.



VICTOR BROX

(Vocals, organ, harmonica, pocket cornet)

Born in Ashton-under-Lyme in May 1941, Brox is the old man of the group. Like the other members of the Retaliation, he first became acquainted with the joys of making music through the violin, but he has said that although he was interested in most instruments for as long as he can remember, he had some difficulty finding one which would suit him. In the meantime he attended University and graduated in Philosophy, after which he went to Spain to study the pocket cornet. He had by this time been awarded a scholarship in America, but on his return to England got married and decided not to take up the offer. For a while he was a teacher in Manchester, formed his own blues group, joined Alexis Korner's band, and finally joined the Aynsley Dunbar group.



ALEXANDER ZIGMUNT STANISLAV DMOCHOWSKI

(Bass guitar)

Born in Jerusalem in 1945, of parents who were freed from internment by the Russians at the end of the Second World War. The outbreak of Civil War in Jerusalem soon after the Dmochowskis' arrival forced them to move again, and this time they came to live in the East End of London. When he was eleven years old, Alexander began studying the violin but, disenchanted with the possibilities of that instrument, he gave it up and concentrated instead for some time on playing tennis. Some of his friends influenced him to take up his interest in music again, and he began playing the guitar. When he was sixteen he switched to bass. His ambition is to make the bass guitar one of the most important instruments in the Blues idiom. He worked for a time with Neil Christian's Crusaders, and then was attracted to the solidly blues-based activities of the Aynsley Dunbar group.







THE GROUNDHOGS

The original Groundhog group first began to be seen working during the Rhythm-and-Blues revival of around 1964-65, appearing many times in venues in and around London as well as the provinces. At that time the group was officially billed as 'John Lee's Groundhogs', and featured Tony McPhee, who has been described as this country's finest exponent of bottle-neck guitar. It was during this period that the Groundhogs first struck up a professional acquaintance with John Lee Hooker, playing many club dates with him and becoming one of his favourite British groups.

Through their connections with Hooker, the Groundhogs were put in touch with Calvin Carter, who was at that time producer for Vee-Jay Records in Chicago. It was for Carter that the group made its first recording, an item which was issued in the United States but not in this country. But now the Rhythm-and-Blues revival was beginning to go the way of all revival movements, into the past, and the Groundhogs split up, each of its members pursuing his own way for a while. McPhee made records for many groups, the most successful of these being '*Blues Anytime*' for the Immediate album, which was recently in the United States charts.

McPhee then worked with the John Dummer Blues band, and then decided to re-form the Groundhogs. The four musicians he has chosen to work with him include Steve Rye, who had until then been part of a blues duo called 'Simon and Steve'. Rye is highly regarded by connoisseurs of harmonica playing in this country; on bass is Peter Cruickshank, one of the original Groundhogs, and a musician who has won the praise of John Lee Hooker, among others; on drums is the Bristol Blues specialist Ken Pustelnik. In addition to their instrumental work, Pete, Tony and Steve are also to be heard as vocalists in the present Groundhogs set-up.

The presence of the Groundhogs on this concert is largely due to the insistence of John Lee Hooker, who made a point of asking for them to accompany him on his current tour. It was, incidentally, a recording by Hooker of a theme called '*Groundhog Blues*' which gave the group the idea for its name. The group has also been active in the recording studios recently. There are currently three albums either issued already or scheduled for early release. The first of these is called '*Scratching The Surface*', which was

recorded within a fortnight of the group being re-formed. The second item is an anthology of country blues singers in this country today and it features Tony McPhee, vocalist Jo-Ann Kelly, Dave Kelly, at present singer-guitarist with the John Dummer band, Simon and Steve, and Andy Fernbach, a talented singer-guitarist who will be doing some recordings during 1969 for the Groundhog series. There is also an album by Big Joe Williams, the first recorded in Britain by that musician. Currently a new company called Groundhog Productions is being mounted, headed by Tony McPhee and Roy Fishers, who plan to launch several new projects and to keep the supply of new Groundhog albums coming off the production line.

JO-ANN KELLY

Born in South-east London, Jo-Ann is the sister of Dave Kelly, who is featured with the John Dummer band. She was born in 1945 and began singing the blues as recently as 1963, although in the six years since then she has won a reputation as one of the most accomplished singers on the British blues circuit. Usually she appears alone on stage, singing and accompanying herself on guitar, and her fragile appearance belies the robust power of her vocal performances. Her first recording was on the new Groundhog series LP, '*Me And The Devil*' (LBL/LBS 83190), but there seems little doubt that she will be appearing much more regularly in the catalogues now that her work is reaching a wider audience.



blues

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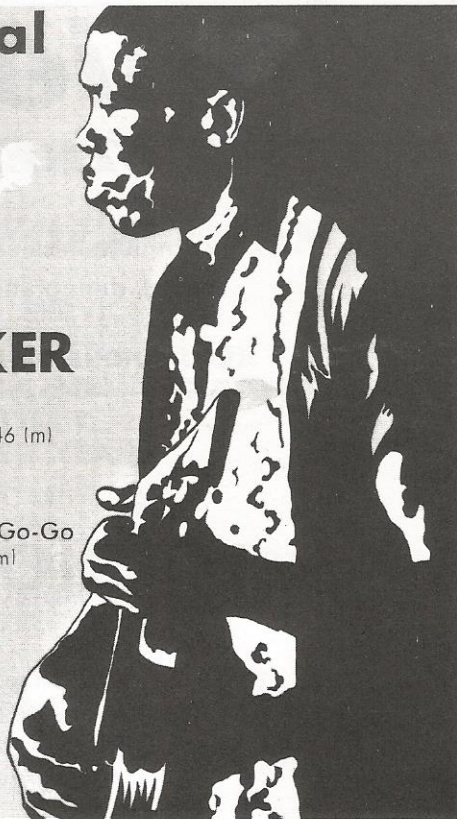
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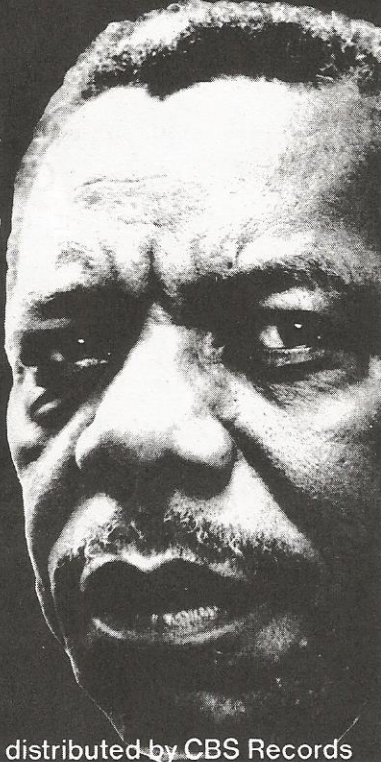
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