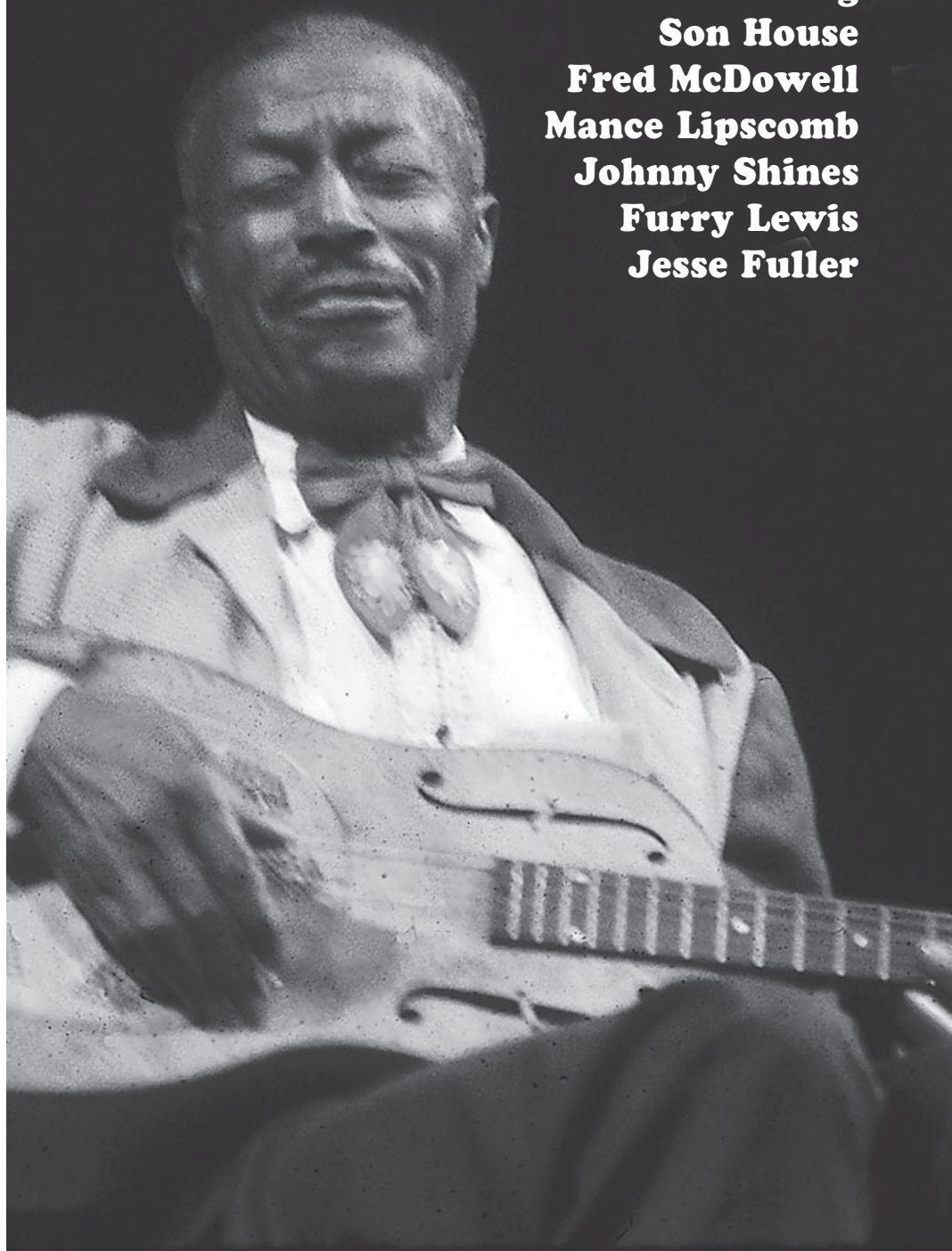


Legends of Bottleneck Blues Guitar

**featuring
Son House
Fred McDowell
Mance Lipscomb
Johnny Shines
Furry Lewis
Jesse Fuller**



LEGENDS OF BOTTLENECK BLUES GUITAR

Black bottleneck guitar styles were probably initially inspired by lap-style Hawaiian slide guitar which enjoyed immense popularity shortly after its inception in the mid-1890's. By 1903, it was already in vogue in Mississippi (and probably elsewhere) according to testimony from W. C. Handy, Gus Cannon and others. Although particularly popular in Mississippi and Louisiana, bottleneck styles could be found the length and breadth of the rural South. While there were similarities among guitarists in some locales, there was no preponderant style or approach other than the abilities and imagination of the guitarist employing a slide technique. Whether used as an embellishment, to carry the melody or mimic the vocal line, bottleneck guitar added an extra dimension to a performance when in the hands of a master. The musicians here, among the greatest exponents of slide guitar who ever lived, are ample testimony to the superb variety available in their performances.

JOHNNY SHINES was hailed as the heir to Robert Johnson upon his rediscovery in the middle 1960's. He was born in Frazier, Tennessee, in 1915. As a youth, he noted his uncle fretting guitar with a steak bone. Moving to Arkansas, he began to play guitar as a teenager. He was greatly influenced by Chester Burnett, better known as Howling Wolf, to the extent of being called

Young Wolf. In 1935 he made the acquaintance of Robert Johnson and traveled with him extensively off and on for the next two years. While with Johnson, he learned much of Johnson's bottleneck technique and evolved his own version of Walking Blues which he called Ramblin'. Shines' slide playing (using a steel tube) exhibits the same delicacy and



photo by Tom Copi

power as does Johnson's. Shines eventually settled in Chicago and made a few records in the early 1950's that established his reputation. Unable to make a living in music, he abandoned playing until coaxed by Sam Charters and others to participate in the recording project Chicago Blues Today. He resumed his career with success until a stroke impaired his playing, but still continued singing. He died in 1993, one of the few remaining cohorts of Robert Johnson.

Traditional Delta Blues (Biograph CD 121)

Chicago/The Blues/Today Vol. 3 (Vanguard VMD 7921)

Mr. Cover Shaker (Biograph CD 125)

FRED McDOWELL represents a once common Mississippi style that was rarely recorded. Employing a heavy beat, he would back his vocal with an alternating bass and use bottleneck riffs between the vocal lines; he could as easily use the bottleneck to closely follow and sometimes substitute for the vocal line. Born in Rossville, Tennessee in 1904, he learned guitar as a young man in the mid-'20's. He was particularly impressed by Mississippi musicians Duck Hill and Raymond Payne, as well



photo by Tom Copi

as the contemporary records of Blind Willie Johnson. Moving to Como, Mississippi, in the early 1940's he began to play in earnest, picking up pointers from a local musician named Eli Green, among others. A chance encounter in 1959 with Alan Lomax at a gas station where McDowell worked resulted in a number of albums at the beginning of the 1960's blues revival. He became a popular artist on the blues circuit and an early influence on Bonnie Raitt, who occasionally opened for him. He recorded extensively up until his death in 1972.

Mississippi Delta Blues (Arhoolie CD 304)

Long Way from Home (Original Blues Classics CD 535)

photo by David Gahr



JESSE FULLER was a repository of early black music from the beginning of the century when he began to play guitar. Born in Jonesboro, Georgia, in 1896, he was orphaned at an early age and on his own before his teens. He learned banjo from his sister's boyfriend and picked up tunes from roustabouts in the neighboring town of McDonough. Fuller's bottleneck efforts (played with a medicine bottle and a pocketknife)

represent aspects of black slide guitar playing extant before blues were a full-formed genre. Fuller moved to California in the 1920's and enjoyed some recognition in the late 50's and early 60's as part of the folk boom. He was the author of the popular song *San Francisco Bay Blues*. He died in 1976.

'Frisco Bound (Arhoolie CD 360)

Jesse Fuller's Favorites (Original Blues Classics CD 528)

MANCE LIPSCOMB'S

repertoire covered the spectrum of black music from the early part of the century and particularly around his home area of Navasota, Texas, where he was born in 1895. He began playing at the age of eleven with his father, who later deserted the family leaving Mance the sole support of his mother and siblings. A sharecropper most of his life, he supplemented his income by becoming a dance musician, playing Saturday night frolics for close to 50 years and learning from countless musicians who passed through his



photo by Tom Copi

area. Mance's slide performances with a pocketknife (a common accessory in the rural South) are generally limited to traditional Texas standards, such as Blind Willie Johnson's influential performances. He was not recorded until he was 65 and had an extensive career until he died in 1976.

Texas Songster (Arhoolie CD 306)
You Got to Reap What You Sow (Arhoolie CD 398)

FURRY LEWIS enjoyed a more extensive showcasing following his rediscovery than his vintage years as a recording artist. He moved to Memphis from Greenville, Mississippi, where he was born circa 1900. At about eight years of age he was attracted to guitar by the bottleneck playing of a local street musician. He learned ragtime-influenced songs and blues ballads like Kassie Jones and used bottleneck extensively on his early recordings. Although he worked in Medicine and



photo by David Cahr

Minstrel shows, he never made a living with his music, being employed as a municipal worker in Memphis. Following his rediscovery by Sam Charters in 1959, he enjoyed renewed popularity playing regional standards such as *Going to Brownsville*. He appeared on at least a dozen different albums following his rediscovery and was well known as a local personality before his death in 1981.

In His Prime 1927-29 (Yazoo CD 1050)
Complete Recorded Works 1927-1929 (Document CD 5004)

SON HOUSE, beyond being one of the greatest blues singers of all time, had a profound impact upon the development of Mississippi slide guitar. His bottleneck style inspired Robert Johnson (who worked specific House bottleneck riffs into some of his songs) and had a direct influence upon Muddy Waters (who acknowledged his debt to House and called him *The King*). Eddie “Son” House was born near Lyon, Mississippi, circa 1902 to a devout



photo by Tom Copi

Baptist family. He began preaching at the age of fifteen. He disdained the blues until he became fascinated with bottleneck playing that he saw from musicians such as Willie Wilson and Rube Lacy. The tension between a religious and secular calling haunted House all of his life. A chance encounter with delta celebrity Charlie Patton in 1930 resulted in one of the most famous blues sessions of all time, as he traveled with Patton, Louise Johnson and Willie Brown to record for Paramount Records. Through the next twenty years, he struggled with his devotion to the church and his desire to play blues, making a handful of non-commercial recordings for the Library of Congress in 1942. He was retired as a musician when found in 1964 by Nick Perls, Dick Waterman and Bill Barth and convinced to resume his career. His performances that immediately followed conveyed the awesome power, beauty and majesty of House’s best works. He died in 1988.

Masters of the Country Blues (Yazoo CD 2002)

Delta Blues/Library of Congress Recordings (Biograph CD 118)

Father Of The Delta Blues/The Complete 1965 Sessions (Legacy 48867)

Notes by Don Kent

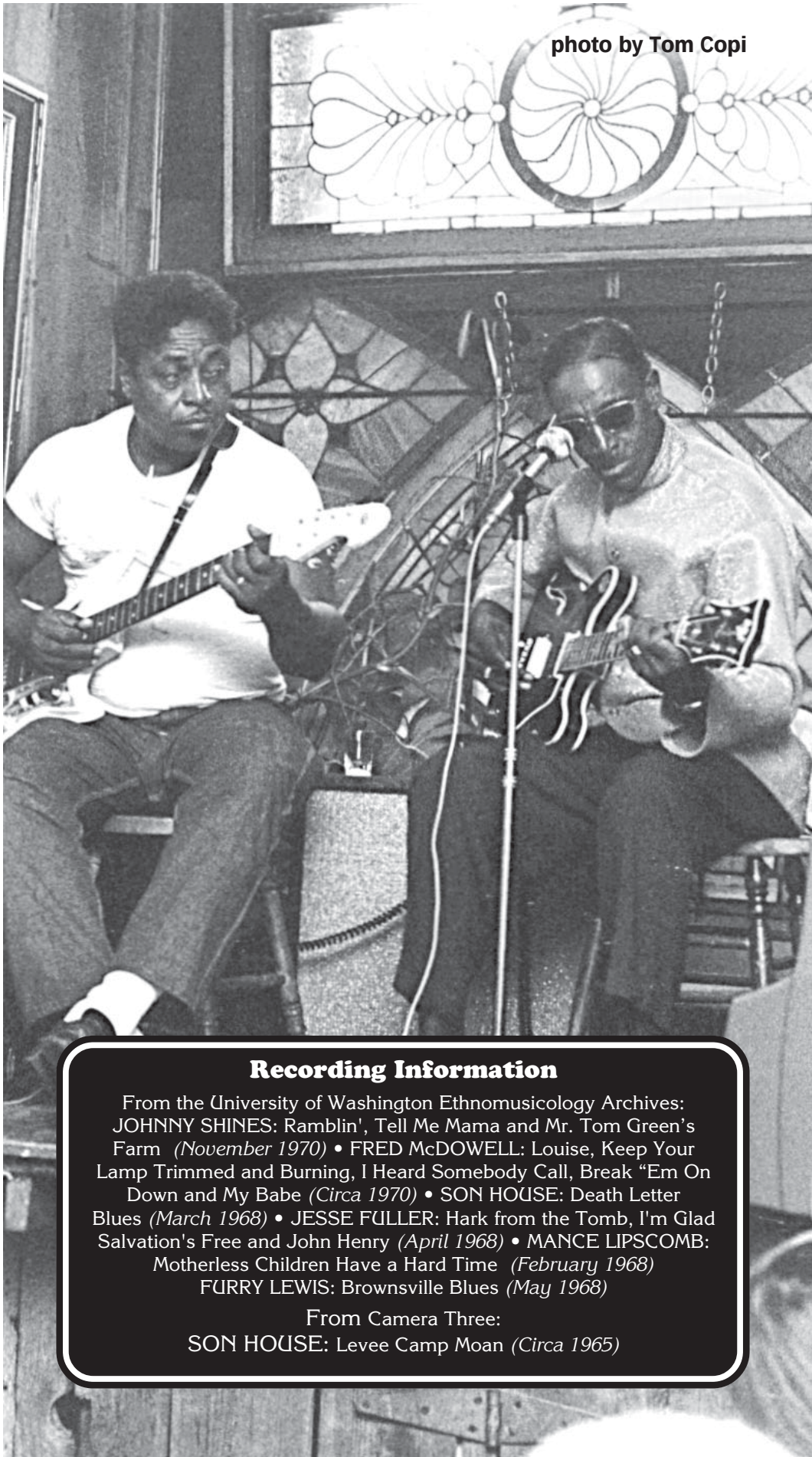


photo by Tom Copi

Recording Information

From the University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives:
JOHNNY SHINES: Ramblin', Tell Me Mama and Mr. Tom Green's
Farm (*November 1970*) • FRED McDOWELL: Louise, Keep Your
Lamp Trimmed and Burning, I Heard Somebody Call, Break "Em On
Down and My Babe (*Circa 1970*) • SON HOUSE: Death Letter
Blues (*March 1968*) • JESSE FULLER: Hark from the Tomb, I'm Glad
Salvation's Free and John Henry (*April 1968*) • MANCE LIPSCOMB:
Motherless Children Have a Hard Time (*February 1968*)
FURRY LEWIS: Brownsville Blues (*May 1968*)

From Camera Three:
SON HOUSE: Levee Camp Moan (*Circa 1965*)



LEGENDS OF BOTTLENECK BLUES GUITAR presents rare and historical recordings from 1965-1970, of some of the greatest exponents of this blues technique. Black bottleneck guitar styles were probably initially inspired by lap-style Hawaiian slide guitar which enjoyed immense popularity shortly after its inception in the mid-1890's. By 1903, it was already in vogue in Mississippi (and probably elsewhere) according to testimony from W. C. Handy, Gus Cannon and others. Although particularly popular in Mississippi and Louisiana, bottleneck styles could be found the length and breadth of the rural South. While there were similarities amongst guitarists in some locales, there was no preponderant style or approach other than the abilities and imagination of the guitarist employing a slide technique. The musicians presented in this video are amongst the greatest exponents of slide blues guitar who ever lived and are ample testimony to the superb variety available in this style.

SON HOUSE: *Death Letter Blues & Levee Camp Moan*

JOHNNY SHINES: *Ramblin', Tell Me Mama*

& Mr. Tom Green's Farm

FRED McDOWELL: *Louise, Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning, I Heard Somebody Call, Break "Em On Down & My Babe*

FURRY LEWIS: *Brownsville Blues*

MANCE LIPSCOMB: *Motherless Children Have a Hard Time*

JESSE FULLER: *John Henry, Hark from the Tomb*

& I'm Glad Salvation's Free

Running time: 58 minutes • Color and B/W
Front photo of Son House by George Pickow

Back photo of Fred McDowell and Johnny
Shines by Tom Copi

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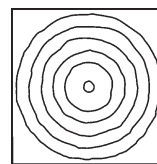
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