



Edmund Carpenter and Bess Lomax Hawes, Valley State, 1964

The Films of Bess Lomax Hawes

The earliest of these films was made in 1964 and the last in 1970. They were unique in their time and there is no way they could be made now. I'm writing this introduction forty years later, and I hope people will be watching the films forty years from now.

They were made as opportunities arose, using borrowed equipment and volunteer crews, small budgets, and a great deal of learning and experimentation in the editing room. The films concentrate on performance and by implication how the performers' aesthetics both inform and reflect societal values. The films are remarkably neutral in their presentation, striving to make a pleasing and engaging record of small moments from the vastness of American expressive traditional arts. They are neither exhaustive nor statistically representative, but survivals of a time now past.

The films were made in the Anthropology Department of San Fernando Valley State College (now California State University at Northridge) in Los Angeles. Edmund Carpenter founded the department with the intention of moving anthropology beyond the book. In addition to cultural anthropologists, physical anthropologists and linguists, his faculty hires included folklorist Bess Lomax Hawes along with artists, musicians, animators and filmmakers. Carpenter felt that the realities and insights of anthropology were often better represented in the arts than in scholarly texts and between 1957 and

1967 he led a flourishing and experimental department, well ahead of its time. It was in this context that Bess Hawes made these works. After leaving CSU-Northridge in 1976, she became the first director of the Folk and Traditional Arts program at the National Endowment for the Arts. Though she did not make other films, she has been an ardent supporter of filmmakers who present traditional artists with dignity and enthusiasm.

There were no outlets for these films. They were too specialized for theatrical or television release and not specifically geared to the educational market. They mostly languished, known only to a few aficionados. This release on DVD brings the four films together in a single package with supplementary notes written at the time.

Georgia Sea Island Singers was shot on 35mm film in 1964. The performer's voice-over comments come from interviews conducted by Alan Lomax.

Buck Dancer as shot on 16mm film in 1965.

Pizza Pizza Daddy-O was shot on 16mm film in 1967. The narration has always been controversial. As Bess Hawes explained in an interview with Sharon Sherman in 1974.

From the black point of view...from the point of view of Watts, what those kids were doing on the playground had no interest whatever and damned little importance... I wrote an overblown beginning and hired a gentleman, who happened to be, by the way, on the advisory committee of the (Black) Panthers, to narrate it in as "up-town, high-toney" a voice as he could, to in effect say, "This is an educational film. It is important. This is a dignified upper-class presentation because we think it is important. We think you should look at it." The interesting thing is that it's had that effect and it worked exactly the way I intended it to...¹

Say Old Man Can You Play the Fiddle was shot on 16mm film in December 1970 and edited in 1973. When Earl Collins played at the Berkeley Folk Festival in 1970, he was in poor health and Bess Hawes wanted to record some of his repertoire while he was still able to play well. Earl Collins had a print of the film, and screened it several times in the hospital the week before he died (1975). In 2003, additional tunes were telecined from the outtakes for this DVD. The article by folklorist Barbara LaPan Rahm who worked with Earl appeared in the program of the 1975 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. No study guide was written for this film.

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¹ Sherman, Sharon R. **Documenting Ourselves: Film Video and Culture** University of Kentucky Press 1998, pp 212-213.

THE GEORGIA SEA ISLAND SINGERS

Bess Lomax Hawes
California State University at Northridge



Peter Davis²: *Now, St. Simon's is a place with woods - river on one side, beach on the other side and woods in between -- different roads, and the old fort, and the old Spanish moss that hangs on the trees that, you know, drips down, looks like, when the wind blow, look like it blowing a blanket or something. It's just a beautiful place to live... And I think that it's one of the most wonderful places in the world...*

St. Simon's Island, Georgia, is one link in the island chain that curves along the eastern shoreline of North America from Canada to Florida, to tail off, at last, into the Bahamas and the leeward islands of the Caribbean. Each island is different from the next; each island population is special. The particular distinction of St. Simon's is that among its people has been preserved one of the oldest layers of Afro-American culture still viable within the United States. Musically speaking, that venerable life-style has been represented for the past fifty years by the Georgia Sea Island Singers, a unique local organization of black working men and women, self-dedicated to conserving and performing the proud music of their forebears.

² The spoken commentary included in this film has been transcribed verbatim. Song texts have been edited to eliminate repetition only.

In 1964, John Davis, Mabel Hillery, Bessie Jones, Henry Morrison and Emma Lee Ramsey came to California as representatives of the larger group of Singers back home on St. Simon's. They had been singing in a lot of strange coffeehouses and before many unfamiliar kinds of people, but they were still adventurous and energetic enough to be interested in the idea of making a film of some of their songs. At the time, I was teaching in the Anthropology Department of San Fernando Valley State College where an experimental ethnographic film program had been set up under the leadership of the then department chairman, Edmund Carpenter. Dr. Carpenter persuaded some friends in the professional film industry to donate their technical services and arranged for us to use a college sound stage and recording equipment. No one connected with the film besides myself had ever seen the Singers, nor, indeed, knew much about the lives they led or the distinctive tradition they represented. The Singers had not been filmed before, except within a theatrical context. When we assembled, one hot quiet Sunday afternoon, I don't think anyone had much of an idea what would happen.

A few points had been settled. The Sea Islanders wanted to concentrate on their religious repertoire; though they knew a variety of secular songs and dances, their religious material was the philosophical and emotional core of all their presentations. From the film-makers' side, Dr. Carpenter had decided not to attempt a make-shift "realistic" background, but to stage the filming against a plain black curtain. This would enable the cameramen to use angle shots impractical under documentary field conditions, and also permit dissolves and fades in later cutting, thus turning the sterile studio conditions to a positive account. But these were the only points that had really been settled in advance.

We worked all afternoon. Mrs. Jones' knees were badly swollen with arthritis and she moved with difficulty; John Davis had only recently recovered from a heart attack. The sound man, under the reasonable, though culture bound, assumption that the Singers could lip-synch their performances like Hollywood veterans, did not bother to try for proper "presence" in his microphone set-ups, and this was not discovered until half the afternoon had gone by. (When the Islanders co-operatively tried lip-synching, incidentally, they cued in on their own off-beat clap, with musically fantastical though culturally fascinating results). At last we ran out of film during their finest performance -- the great song of the New Year's watch ceremony, **Yonder Comes Day** -- and Dr. Carpenter and I stood by in frustration while Mrs. Jones, filled with the spirit, sang on and on and the camera crew packed their gear and wound up the electric cables.

Altogether, out of the Islanders' total repertoire of hundreds of religious songs, we had filmed six. Four are included in the film **Georgia Sea Island Singers**³. Edmund Carpenter and Archer Goodwin edited and cut the footage; I acted as editorial advisor; continuity and narration were added later from extracts of a taped conversation held between John Davis, his brother Peter, Bessie Jones and Alan Lomax.

Since that afternoon in 1964, John Davis has died. This film remains one of the few records in existence of that wholly remarkable human spirit.

³ Versions of this film have also been screened under the titles, **Yonder Comes Day** and **Bright Star Shining in Glory**.

MOSES

John Davis once told me that he knew seven songs about Moses, and that they covered the entire Biblical story from birth to death. I don't believe he ever recorded them all, not even in the long series of sessions he had with Alan Lomax, who recorded John's repertoire more thoroughly than anyone else. John liked to drop hints about special songs he knew; when you pressed him to sing them, he would say that he wanted to save a few "so you'll have to come back to see me". It was at John's insistence that this stately and foreboding spiritual was included in the repertoire we filmed. I had been afraid that it would be too static. When we looked at the footage later, it became clear that John's aesthetic judgment had been far more perceptive than mine; the Islanders' bodies sway together and apart like a field of reeds, just as their voices mesh and interlock in the grave cadences of this rare and ancient song.

*Moses, Moses, don't you let King Pharaoh overtake you (3x)
In some lonesome graveyard.*

*Ummm, unmun, I heard the chariot coming (3x)
In some lonesome graveyard.*

*Mother, mother, don't you let your daughter condemn you (3x)
In some lonesome graveyard.*

This is a very long song. Three verses had to be cut in the final film version; this is why the Singers' voices seem to rise between the second and third verses.



ADAM IN THE GARDEN

Peter Davis: *Adam, he hide his sin in the leaves.*

John Davis: *No he didn't.*

Peter Davis: *Well, what made him pin up leaves?*

John Davis: *He was 'shamed, You don't even much know when you're sinning now, but Adam know it, because he was a righteous man; you're born in sin. You're used to what you're doing, but Adam weren't used to that, you see...*

The Sea Islanders take the Bible very seriously. Biblical texts weave through their everyday conversations; they enjoy arguing over the interpretation of scriptural texts, and they re-enact Biblical stories in their holy dances or "shouts". The "shout" has almost disappeared now as a viable form of religious worship, but at one time it represented a workable doctrinal compromise between two variant cultural stances: European Protestantism, which held that dance was inherently sinful or worldly, and African poly-theism in which dance was an intrinsic part of all significant activities, secular and religious. "Shouting" -- an organized form of worship conducted in church -- emerged as a form of behavior acceptable to both groups

"Shouting", thus, has very strict rules, none of which have to do with vocalization; the term itself appears to stem from the Arabic word, "saut", meaning, variously, to jump or to march. In a "shout", participants proceed in a counter-clockwise circle around the church hall, while they act out the words of the accompanying song with their arms and upper bodies. Their feet, meanwhile, move in the "shout step" -- a flat-footed slide, with one foot in the lead. It is particularly important not to cross the feet or legs; such a move would be "dancing", not "shouting", and dancing in church is clearly impious.

When we came to film **Adam in the Garden**, John Davis suggested that we not include Mabel Hillery. "Mabel can't shout", he said; "now, Bessie (Jones), she can't shout either, but she can walk around just fine." Mrs. Jones had been born on the Georgia mainland and moved to St Simon's only after her marriage in the early 1920's. In some significant respects, therefore, she still remains an outlander; and thus she does not attempt the shout step here, though later -- in **Down In the Mire** -- she "walks around" like an Egyptian queen on a frieze.

Mabel Hillery -- island-born and herself a grandmother -- was the youngest and most up-to-date of the Singers. It seemed impossible to leave her out of the film (there should have been many more participants anyway), though she agreed quite cheerfully that she couldn't shout properly, pointing out "I just can't keep my heels down". So she picked up (or pinned up) leaves with the rest of the Islanders; but at the end of the song, she crossed her feet in a significant, though probably quite unconscious, kinesic statement. She had gone along with the old ways as well as she could, but now that that was over....

Oh Eve, tell me, where is Adam?

Oh, Eve!

Adam in the garden, picking up leaves...

God called Adam

picking up leaves

Adam wouldn't answer.

picking up leaves

Adam in the garden
"Oh, Adam!"
"Adam!"
"God, I'm ashamed!"

picking up leaves
picking up leaves
picking up leaves
picking up leaves

On St. Simon's, the typical accompaniment for **Adam in the Garden** is a broom-handle, held vertically and beaten on the floor like a rice-pounder -- or an Ashanti spear. John Davis was always very particular about the correct resonance of this instrument and would refuse to "beat stick" on an asphalt tile or linoleum floor. The broom handle was traditionally the only instrument used in Sea Island religious music; the Singers had accepted Mrs. Jones' mainland importation of the tambourine, but none of the native-born Islanders played it.



BUZZARD LOPE

Bessie Jones: *In those days, they put this something down on the floor and they'd dance around it like a buzzard dancing around a cow -- a dead cow or mule or something.*

Peter Davis: *Well, that's the way they feel, you see -according to how they were treated, you understand me. They said they were nothing but the old dead carrion that they would throw away in woods someplace; and then the buzzard would come around, you know, and pick off the carrion. The angel was the buzzard that come pick up the soul out of the old dead carrion...*

The "**Buzzard Lope**", one of the most remarkable items in the Sea Islanders' repertoire, is not a "shout". "Shouts" invariably involve whole congregations; the **Buzzard Lope** stands unique, the only solo dance in the Singers' religious repertoire.

Its roots are plainly African. Melville Herskovits, the pioneer investigator into Afro-American anthropology, has provided hints as to its ultimate origin among the Ashanti-Fanti peoples of the Gold Coast, among whom the vulture was a sacred messenger who bore sacrifices to the gods. During the 1930's, in Surinam, Herskovits saw "Opete" (a Twi word for Vulture) dancers among the Bush Negroes; under possession, Opete cult members go out to find dead animals for food. "Those who danced for the buzzard... went about in a circle, moving with bodies bent forward from their waists and with arms thrown back in imitation of the bird from which their spirit took its name." (Herskovits, **Rebel Destiny**, p. 330.)

On St. Simon's, this ancient African cult dance has been translated into theological terms which reflect tragic memories of slavery in the "Christian" nineteenth century. The handkerchief around which the buzzard dancer circles is the body of a slave, denied burial and thrown out in the woods like a dead animal. The Buzzard tiptoes around the body, advancing and retreating to make sure it is truly dead, and finally fulfills the ancient African role of messenger by carrying the sacrifice back to the Lord. Meanwhile the watching singers give their testimony of faith:

<i>Throw me anywhere, Lord,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Throw me anywhere, Lord,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Don't care where you throw me</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Since King Jesus own me,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Don't care how you do me</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Since King Jesus choose me,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>You may beat and bang me</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Since King Jesus saved me,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Don't care how you treat me</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Since King Jesus meet me,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Throw me anywhere, Lord,</i>	<i>in that old field</i>
<i>Throw me anywhere, Lord</i>	<i>in that old field</i>

When we began to shoot the **Buzzard Lope**, John Davis put on his suit jacket. I reminded him that he had not been wearing it in the earlier shots and suggested that he remove it. Later on, when he saw the footage, he remarked that if I had "let him" wear it, he could have made "the wings flap better". I hadn't understood that part of the

aesthetic, and John had been too courtly and kind to embarrass me publicly by pointing it out.

In his younger days, John used to pick up the handkerchief in his teeth and whirl around and around with it before finally carrying it away, but he said he was too old to do that anymore. John told me; too, that none of the younger St. Simon's Island men had wanted to learn the **Buzzard Lope**. Now that he is gone, we may never see it again, with or without the flapping wings.



DOWN IN THE MIRE

Alan Lomax: *What does it mean to go down in the mire?*

Peter Davis: *Now that means humble your heart, humble yourself to the Lord. That's the muck of sin which your heart and mind are all—you know—contaminated in. And then when God pull you out of there, you can be free and shout round.*

Bessie Jones: *That's right. And you claps your hands.*

Peter Davis: *It's—it's a holy—it's a holy dance. See, not a noise with your hands. When you sing, you sing; and when you pray, you pray; and when you dance, you dance—but when you shout, you shout!*

In **Down in the Mire**, each episode of redemption is preceded by a march around the church hall. Every participant is called by name into the center; only after he has sunk down into the abyss and been pulled back by John, looking every inch the patriarch he was, can the “holy dance”, the shout step, be used. In this final sequence, the islanders came close to re-creating the total experience of their life-accepting form of worship.

*Bright star shining in glory,
Give me Jesus in the morning...*

*Jesus been down to the mire
Honor Jesus in the mire
You must come down to the mire*

*Sister Hillery in the mire
Jesus call you to the mire
You must come down to the mire
Lower and lower in the mire
Lower and lower in the mire
Bow down! in the mire
Sister Hillery in the mire
You can rise up from the mire
When you rise up from the mire
Then you shout round in the mire*

Brother Morrison...

Sister Emma...

Everybody...

John Davis did not call Bessie Jones to the mire because of her painful knees. However, his final ringing call, “Everybody!” proved too powerful for her to resist, and she sank down and rose up free with all the rest.

DISCOGRAPHY

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DEEP SOUTH ...SACRED AND SINFUL. Southern Journey Series; Prestige International INT 25005. (Contains two songs by the Georgia Sea Island Singers.)

THE EASTERN SHORES. Southern Journey Series; Prestige International, INI 25005. (Contains one song by the Georgia Sea Island Singers.)

SOUNDS OF THE SOUTH. Southern Folk Heritage Series; Atlantic Records, 111346. Field recordings by Alan Lomax. (Contains one song by the Georgia Sea Island Singers.)

NEGRO CHURCH MUSIC. Southern Folk Heritage Series; Atlantic Records 111351. (Contains two songs by the Georgia Sea Island Singers.)

AMERICAN FOLK SONGS FOR CHILDREN. Southern Folk Heritage Series; Atlantic Records, #1350. (Contains three songs by the Georgia Sea Island Singers and Bessie Jones.)



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BUCK DANCER

Bess Lomax Hawes
*California State University
at Northridge*



This film was made in the summer of 1965 -- largely by accident. The Georgia Sea Island Singers (a semi-professional group of black musicians representing the antebellum musical culture still active on St. Simon's Island, Georgia) had come to California to teach their skills at the Idyllwild Arts Foundation, a summer campus of the University of Southern California. Along with them was Mr. Ed Young, a black gentleman from Mississippi, who blew the old-fashioned cane fife and was also an expert dancer. The summer session at Idyllwild was over and our visitors were about to start back home when a call came from a local educational film company. They were producing a film about the history of immigration to the United States and wanted the Sea Islanders to re-create the earliest possible level of the African cultural contribution.

The Sea Islanders were agreeable. At that point, Dr. Edmund Carpenter and I, representing the ethnographic film program carried on at that time at San Fernando Valley State College, asked the film-makers if they would take a few shots for us if provided the film. The matter was arranged, and we assembled one murderously hot afternoon at an abandoned ranch in the hills northwest of Los Angeles where the buildings had been used as sets for innumerable western movies.

The work went slowly. The heat was incredible and, one after another, both performers and film crew had to retreat briefly out of the blazing sun. There was no water closer than ten miles and that only a luke-warm trickle out of a gas station tap. We were buzzed continually by small planes. The Islanders, their ears less affected by the noise-pollution which had desensitized the California crew, invariably heard the planes long before the rest of us and would stop dead in the middle of an otherwise perfect "take", while the technicians cursed. "Plane coming," John Davis would announce laconically, and we would all fall silent; minutes later, it seemed, we would hear the faint buzz approaching.

So it was late in the day before the film crew got around to the shots that Dr. Carpenter and I wanted, and we had to work fast, for the daylight was fading. The three "takes" that make up the film **Buck Dancer** are, in fact, all that we were able to shoot. Fortunately, it proved possible to string them together later into a reasonably coherent

statement, but this was due more to the vitality and consistency of Ed Young's tradition than to any special foresight on our parts.

We had decided to concentrate on Ed Young, since the previous summer (cf. the film, **The Georgia Sea Island Singers**) we had filmed a part of the St. Simon's Island repertoire. Mr. Young, although then resident in Memphis, Tennessee, where he worked as a high school janitor, had been born and brought up in the hilly country of north-western Mississippi, just east of the delta bottoms. And among the farming people of those low hills has survived a musical convention that can be dated back before the American Revolution--the black fife and drum band.

The transverse-blown fife (often made of hollow reed) is an instrumental type older than Biblical times, and there is much evidence that it was known in African before the days of the slave trade. Drums, of course, have long been a west African commonplace; thus, African musicians, transported to this new country as slaves during the 17th and 18th centuries, found in the military fife and drum corps of the colonists, a familiar instrumentarium. There are many accounts of black fife and drum units during Revolutionary, as well as later Civil War, times. During the post-bellum period, these essentially military units gradually changed both focus and function, one of the more familiar outgrowths being the marching bands that still play the mourners to and from the graveyard in some sections of the southern black community.

In the corner of Mississippi that Ed Young grew up in, however, the fife and drum band served another function; it was the main attraction at local rural picnics. Since Alan Lomax first recorded Ed Young's band in 1959, other similar groups have been discovered in the general area by David Evans and others; and it is becoming clearer that the Mississippi country picnic was -- and still is, to a degree -- an institution of real stability and cultural importance. Picnics are generally held on a Saturday and attract black families from all around; even white politicians, sensing the convenience of having so large a group of voters in one place, have begun attending in recent years. There is food and visiting, but the main attraction is the band which plays, primarily for dancing, until midnight. Ed told me, "We start out in the middle of a field and the grass is sometimes up to your waist, and when we're through, it's all gone. They just dance it right on down to the ground!"

Ed Young, like many fife players, is himself an expert dancer, and in this film he does a part of the "buck dance", a southern dance of solo male virtuosity engaged in by both black and white frontiersmen. Indeed, Ed's own dance style, according to Alan Lomax and Forrestine Paulay, of the Cantometrics Research project at Columbia University, is a combination of African and European elements. The relaxed floppy arms and subtle sinuous trunk movements are African in provenience, along with the low dragging foot moves. However, the overall vertical style -- the sense of dancing in a confined space -- is a feature found most frequently in western Europe, as is the notion of floor sounding, or clogging.

Thus both the music and the dance displayed in this film can be most accurately referred to as "Afro-American" -- a new and creative development, by black artists resident in the United States, out of a combination of old world elements. What is on the screen, however, should not be regarded as an accurate picture of the cultural reality. Ed Young should have been accompanied by his brothers' drums, rather than by the Sea Islander clapping (though it should be noted that the unfamiliar combination gave

none of the participants any trouble at all, indicating that they shared a common cultural underpinning). The picnic context too, in which the fife music would more normally be heard, was impossible to create, and we didn't even try. Still, I am not sorry that we made the film. The fertile culture of this small section of the United States gets a few minutes exposure, and the artistry of that gentle whisp of a man, Ed Young, blowing his fife to the stars, is firmly demonstrated. In film-making, as in any other anthropological endeavor, you work with what's there.



DISCOGRAPHY

(With thanks to David Evans, California State University at Fullerton.)

Selections played by Ed Young and his brothers may be heard on the following LPs, recorded and edited by Alan Lomax:

SOUTHERN FOLK HERITAGE SERIES

Sounds of the South. Atlantic SD 1346

Roots of the Blues. Atlantic. SD 1348

Negro Church Music. Atlantic SD 1351

The Blues Roll On. Atlantic SD 1352

SOUTHERN JOURNEY SERIES

Georgia Sea Islands, Volume 1. Prestige International 25001

Georgia Sea Islands, Volume II. Prestige International 25002

Deep South... Sacred and Sinful. Prestige International 25005

Yazoo Delta Blues and Spirituals. Prestige International 25010

The following recordings contain examples of fife and drum music played by bands other than Ed Young's.

Mississippi Delta Blues, Vol. 1. Recorded by George Mitchell. Arhoolie 1041.

Memphis Swamp Jam. Blue Thumb BTS 6000.

Traveling Through the Jungle. Recorded by Alan Lomax and David Evans.

Testament 2223.

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FILMS

The Georgia Sea Island Singers. Produced by Edmund Carpenter, Bess Lomax
Hawes and Alan Lomax. 16 mm. b&w.

Gravel Springs Fife and Drum. Produced by William Ferris, David Evans and Judy
Feiner. 16 mm. color. Distributed by Indiana University Audio-Visual Center,
Bloomington, Indiana.

STUDY GUIDE FOR FILM **PIZZA PIZZA DADDY-0**

PREPARED BY BESS LOMAX HAWES



As studies by Brian Sutton Smith and Roger Abrahams have shown, although the singing game has almost vanished within the Anglo-American community, it is still active within the Afro-American child tradition in urban as well as rural areas of the midwest, the east and the south. Observations in Los Angeles indicate that the same pattern is in effect on the west coast; that is, black children play singing games and white children, on the whole, don't. Further, it appears that the repertoire of games played by Negro children across the country is both highly stable and highly dynamic; new games (usually re-workings or parodies of older ones) appear and disappear, but their essential structure and stylistic characteristics continue to be handed on from one generation of school children to the next.

The footage included in this film was taken in December of 1967 on the playground of a school in a Los Angeles black ghetto. The players are a dozen fourth grade girls (9 to 10 years old) whose well-developed repertoire had been earlier brought to my attention by a sympathetic teacher. They had been prepared for the experience of filming by being recorded both by the teacher and by me, and by a previous visit in which they had been "shot" with an unloaded camera to get them used to the new experience.

The actual film was taken in a playground area which had been reserved for us for the morning so as to minimize the number of spectators. We used two 16mm cameras, one in fixed position and one hand-held; sound was recorded via an overhead boom mike. The children had had the location of the mike pointed out to them and for the entire morning they centered themselves without direction under the mike with almost professional aplomb. Actually, they referred to the entire session as "the taping" and appeared to ignore the cameras, except that they tended to turn their backs on the hand held camera when it came too close.

All action in the film was undirected, for it turned out that the children needed no direction. They had come to play, and play is what they did, whether the cameras were loaded or not. Further, they played what they wanted to play, and it turned out that what they wanted to play was their own tradition of singing games. The parallel bars, sand-boxes and so on in the play yard received the scantiest of attention for the whole morning; occasionally they would settle onto the jungle gym for a few moments, but almost at once they would wheel and re-group, pushing and shouting, for just one more round of **Pizza Pizza Daddy-0**, their current favorite. For this reason, and not because of an especially sophisticated field technique on the part of the film-makers, the organization of the games shown is entirely the work of the children themselves.

Specific incidents connected with the individual games will be discussed later, but a few general observations as to the important stylistic and structural elements of this tradition might be of help.

First, this seems to be primarily a female tradition; little girls begin to learn it during their 6th or 7th year. By the time they reach puberty the tradition is abandoned, or perhaps simply transmuted into social dance. Boys of the same age-span seem invariably to know the games but do not perform them in public situations such as the school yard. In backyards or alleys, however, the games may be played by mixed groups.

The primary game form is the ring. The clapping formation in which two children face each other and clap hands is actually itself a small ring to which others can be added like a string of beads. The other principal play form consists of parallel lines of players facing each other. All action takes place inside the ring or between the parallel lines; players do not go "outside". Characteristically, there is a central figure who initiates the action, and the "plot line" of each game then consists of a series of moves which constitute one run-through of the play; this is repeated until the group is satisfied, or until everyone has had a turn at the center role. This structure guarantees that there will be no more or less time for any child to have the central power position; competition, then, in the sense of winning-losing, is absent. Though individual players may try to outdo each other in improvisational detail, there is no reward expressed in terms of game action (another turn at the central role, for example).

Stylistically the major feature is call and response; almost every phrase is echoed both in singing and movement patterns. Motor expressiveness is elaborated; musical expressiveness is not. Though the children clap, their clapping style seems to stress tactile rather than tonal values. Their hands are quite relaxed; they stroke instead of making an impact. This effect is emphasized by the degree of body empathy the children share; they move over, make room, spread out, close together, move in tandem and adjust to each other's physical presence in a thousand subtle ways. Physically speaking,

they enjoy group blend to a degree that white society only seems to achieve under the strictest imposed discipline.

It was deeply disturbing to discover that these same children are also expert street fighters. Within their own circle or between their parallel lines they demonstrated social tolerance and mutual support to a degree inconceivable to those used to supervising white children's play; apparently the high social empathy which so distinguishes their play is somehow thwarted in less formal relationships, or perhaps by the structure of "outside" institutions.

It is important to bear in mind that this tradition is a child-initiated and child-directed activity; there is a minimum of adult intervention, if indeed there is any at all. Most of these children's teachers, for example, seemed unaware of the fact that the children were playing these games, and those who were aware of it had a tendency to disapprove. Within this context, the sheer survival of these games becomes even more impressive; some of them are hundreds of years old. From the point of view of demonstrating the antiquity of this tradition, it is particularly unfortunate that technical problems prevented the inclusion in the film of one of the most wide-spread and historically interesting of their games: "Little Sally Walker". "Punchinello" and "Head and Shoulders Baby" also had to be omitted from the final version; except for these three games, however, this film represents the total repertoire of this particular group of girls.

Though considerations of space forbid any real discussion here of the problem of cultural origins, this overall tradition appears to present in almost schematic form one of the principal ways in which European and African elements have combined upon American soil. In terms of lexical content, over half these games are indisputably British, the other half being most probably indigenous to the United States. Stylistically, especially in terms of musical and kinesic elements, they seem equally clearly African, or at least Afro-American. Finally, the total tradition is at the time of this writing (1969) the exclusive cultural property of black American children.

MY BOYFRIEND GAVE ME A BOX

References: None, though I have heard that Roger Abrahams has collected it in the Caribbean. The structure is strikingly similar to many British nursery rhymes.

It is worth pointing out especially that, although this song would be musically transcribed in a 4/4 or 2/4 meter, the children are quite casually clapping in a 3/4 rhythm, a style of rhythm play which I have seen on other black playgrounds in the Los Angeles area. This is considered technically difficult by trained musicians, but apparently these children haven't learned that yet.

The child who thrusts herself into the game is one of the unofficial leaders of the play group, and this is perhaps why her aggressive behavior is so readily accepted by the other players. However, it is still notable that the children possess a traditional technique through which an outsider can so easily be absorbed into the original group. Note, also, how relaxed they are about making room for still additional players.

*My boyfriend gave me a box
A box, a box
My boyfriend gave me a box
Oh Susianna.*

*And in that box was a dress...
And on that dress was a pocket...
And on that pocket was a ring..
And on that ring was a diamond.,,
And on that diamond was a note...
And on that note it said...
It said, "I love you"...*



THIS-A-WAY VALERIE

References: Trent-Johns p. 14-17; Abrahams p. 130; Hawes-Jones (Zudie-0). I have also heard a tape of this game being played by Negro children in Austin, Texas.

The children habitually played this game all the way through: That is, until everyone, whether skilled or inexpert, had had a turn to dance down between the lines. It is also notable that the basic formation never traveled during play; occasionally, the children, while holding hands during the first verse, would side-step slightly back to their original position. This was always done spontaneously, without direction or discussion.

*This-a-way, Valerie,
Valerie, Valerie,
This-a-,gay, Valerie
All day long.*

*Oh, strut, Miss Lizzie
Lizzie, Lizzie
Strut, Miss Lizzie
All day long.*

*Oh, here come another one
Just like the other one,
Here come another one
All day long.*



WHEN I WAS A BABY

References: Gomme, Vol. II, p. 352; Newell, p. 88; Brown. Vol. I. p. 130-1. This has also been reported to me from other schools in the Los Angeles area.

This is a truly ancient game; both Newell and Gomme report it to be widespread in its occurrence as well as very old. These children did not appear to know it very well; on my first visit to the school, only five verses were sung. By the time of the filming, they had added four more, and had apparently decided to censor the actions ascribed to the "teen-age" who, in previous renditions had "drunk this" and "drunk that", with an imaginary bottle tilted to the lips.

*When I was a baby, a baby, baby
When I was a baby, this what I did.
I went um-mmm (thumb in mouth) this-a-way, um-mmm that-a-way
Um-mmm this-n way and that's what I did.*

*When I was a girl...
I went jump...*

*When I was a teen-age...
I went um-mmm...*

*When I was a mother...
I went cook...*

*When I was a teacher...
I went "Stop!"...*

*When I was a grandmother...
I went rock...*

*When I was dead...
I went lay...*

*When I was in heaven...
I went shout...*



IMBILEENIE

References: Abrahams, (1) p. 48. #135; p. 80 #227

This clapping chant appears to have hit the Los Angeles area with tremendous impact around 1964; I have some eight versions of it in my files, collected on both white and black playgrounds. The clapping patterns differ from one version to another but usually involve finger-snapping and slapping the thigh as well as the more usual formations. Note that one child finds no partner, says "That's all right" and goes to sit down; also that the group is so concerned with comfortable spacing.

Imbileenie, kissaleenie
Oo-pa papaleenie
Achie pachie liberachie (Liberace?)
I love you.
Take a peach, take a plum
Take a piece of bubble gum.
I saw you with your boyfriend
Last night
How do you know?
I peeked through the window saying
Nosey
Give me some candy
Greedy
Wash those dishes
Lazy.
I bought me a monkey
I fed him in the country
I raised him up on gingerbread.
Along came a susu
And kicked him in the booboo
And now my monkey is dead.



THIS-A-WAY BATMAN

References: Abrahams (I) p. 130; Parris, p. 106; Hawes and Jones, "Josephine"

This appears to be a kind of jazzed-up parody of **This-a-way Valerie** to which the children have added elements from other traditional rhymes. It is obviously a popular game and very much "in process"; in three different visits to the school, the children played three almost totally different versions. During the filming, this run-through of the game directly followed **Imbileenie** as it does in the cut version of the film; the child without a partner in **Imbileenie** still has none until someone remarks on that fact and voluntarily steps out, allowing "Sherry" to play.

*This-a-way Batman, Batman, Batman
This-a-way Batman all day long.
Oh, step back Robin, Robin, Robin
Step back Robin all day long.
Oh, I looked around the corner
And what did I see?
I saw a big fat man from Tennessee.
I bet you five, five dollars
I can beat that man
So I raised my dresses up
As high as I can.
Oh my mother called the doctor
And the doctor said
I got a pain in my side -- ooh, ah,
I got a pain in my side -- ooh, ah,
I got a pain in my stomach -- ooh, ah,
I got a pain in my stomach -- ooh, ah,
I got a pain in my head -- ooh, ah,
Because my baby is dead -- ooh, ah,
Rolla, rolla rolla pizza
Rolla, rolla rolla pizza
Oo chee-chee wa wa
Oo chee-chee wa wa (repeated ad lib)*

MIGHTY MIGHTY DEVIL

References: None. I believe this to be a re-working of a football cheer popular in the Los Angeles high schools a few years ago. The form of the game itself is quite unusual, suggesting a cheer leader addressing a crowd, or a teacher talking to a class.

The first child leading this game had surprised me by asking formal permission to be the leader; at no other time was my opinion or sanction sought. It then emerged during play that she did not know the lines of the rhyme in the proper order. The first child to point this out, I discovered later, was the one who had taught it to the rest of the group; she successfully leads it for the second run-through. The child wearing the grey sweater was new to the school and did not pick up the tacit signals by which the players decided to support their leader even though she was wrong. Her ill-timed remark, "That's wrong" made her the target for the group's hostility; my own feeling is that the play would have broken down anyway, since these are ceremonies rather than games and must be done correctly.

The following lyric is printed according to the second (correct) run-through of the game.

*Um mighty wa-ha,
Um-mighty wa-ha
Who do we talk about?
Who do we talk about?
The mighty mighty devil,
The mighty mighty devil
Don't you know that they go?
Don't you know that they go.
Ching, ching China,
Ching, ching China
Standing arrested
Standing arrested,
Well go, gage, go mighty devil
Go, gogo, go mighty devil, etc*



MY MOTHER DIED

References: compare: Opie #155 and 156 p. 162-]; Abrahams (1), p.86 #246

This was my personal favorite of all the games; I liked the way the voices, having quietly disposed of all representatives of the older generation and all available males, rose to a triumphant shout over the announcement that their sister is still living in a place called Tennessee, wearing short short dresses up above her knee. The children appeared to like it too, and used it as a vehicle for verbal and gestural improvisation.

*My mother died
How did she die?
She died like this
She died like this.
My father he died,
How did he die?
He died like this.
He died like this.
My brother died.
How did he die?
He died like this.
He died like this.
My sister's still living,
Where's she?
Oh, she lives in a place called Tennessee,
She wears short short dresses up above her knee.
Hands up, tsk-a tsk-a, Tennessee
Turn around, tsk-a tsk-a, Tennessee.
She never went to college,
She never went to school
And when she came back
She was an educated fool.*

The second leader in the filmed version improvises a bit:

*My mother died
How did she die?
She died like this
She died like this.
My father died.
How did he die?
He died drunk.
He died drunk.
My uncle died.
How did he die?
He died snaggletoothed.
He died snaggletoothed...*

PIZZA PIZZA DADDY-0

References: Hawes and Jones, "Pizza Pizza Mighty Moe'.

This was by all odds the current favorite during my period of visits to the playground; during the morning's filming, the children played **Pizza Pizza** four times to every once for the other games. I have seen it in other Los Angeles schools and it has been reported as a "new" game sweeping through Georgia and South Carolina. During the first run-through on the film, the "new" child is leading in the center of the circle; since she is unfamiliar with the repertoire in general, another player standing in the ring begins to call out the steps. The first line of the song varies with the name of the child in the central position; the last eight lines refer to popular social dance steps.

*Mary had a baby (Tanya, Sherry, etc.)
Pizza Pizza daddy-o How you know it?
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Cause she told me
Pizza Pizza daddy-o What's his name
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Jessie James
Pizza Pizza daddy-o What's special?
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Toilet tissue
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's jerk it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's swim it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's skate it,
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's freak it,
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's twine it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's bat it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's fan it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o Let's spin it
Pizza Pizza daddy-o.*



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Say Old Man Can You Play the Fiddle

The film was edited in 1973 and contains the following tunes. The voiceovers are from interviews with Earl Collins conducted by Babara LaPan Rahm.

Say Old Man Can You Play the Fiddle

Dry and Dusty—played in D tuning on a fiddle carved by his father out of cedar and inlaid with hearts. Tunes played on that fiddle are indicated with ?.

Sally Goodin

Bull at the Wagon

Black Mountain Rag – Uses straight, double and triple bowing.

Billy in the Low Ground

There was a lot of good music left out of the film. In particular I missed **Snowbird in the Ashbank** where Earl scratches the bow across the strings. His bow hand flutters like a bird dusting itself in the ashes when he plays that part. (Unfortunately, the camera didn't catch it.) So I went back to the out takes and assembled these 12 additional performances to include on the DVD.

Snowbird in the Ashbank ?

Stony Point

Bear Creek

Old Joe Clark—This is performed first the way Earl's father played it, and then two other version that incorporate fancy bowing.

Arkansas Traveler

Grey Eagle

Cruel Willy ?

Bonaparte's Retreat ?

Cluckin Hen ?

Sail Away Ladies

Beaumont Rag—This performance concludes with Earl slowing down the fancy bowing to show how it is done.

Snowbird in the Ashbank? -- I like it so well I put in the alternative take.





Earl Collins: Hoedown Fiddler Takes The Lead

Barbara LaPan Rahm, editor

This article originally appeared in the program book of the 1975 Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife.

He was a man of his generation of his time, and of his region, and his life story follows a classic pattern.

Earl Collins was born in Douglass County, Missouri in 1911. In 1917 his family moved to Oklahoma, where they sharecropped and Earl augmented their income by playing fiddle at square dances through the bitter early years of the depression. He married 1931 and he and his wife moved to Los Angeles, California in 1935 where Earl turned his hand to any job he could get: hod carrier, truck driver, trash hauler, machinist, welder mechanic. He retired in 1969 because of his always fragile health. For years he tried to convert his skill as a fiddler into a money-making occupation. He never made it, and in 1949, he put his fiddle away and did not play again until 1965, when his sons persuaded him to take it up again. Earl's extraordinary technique and musicianship made him a star on the old time fiddlers circuit in California, almost every weekend until his death in 1975 he played at one or another local contest or jam session. In the following, Earl tells his story in his own words, which have been excerpted from a series of taped interviews conducted by Barbara LaPan Rahm.

My grandfather fiddled, and his father fiddled. There's been fiddling through the Collins's since... I don't know how far the generation goes back. In the summertime my father always went out on the front porch and sat in a chair. I've heard people tell him "We heard you play fiddle last night, and we could tell just exactly what you was playing." And they lived two miles away. That's how far a fiddle would carry. Nice clear climate, you know.

Those springs in Missouri that come out of the hills are colder than the ice cubes you get out of that box. That water is so cold that can't walk in it: Clean pure. You know the waters so clear down there that it can be 25 feet deep, you can throw a nickel in and tell which is up, heads or tails. But it is mostly just hills and rocks. Just rolling hills just up one hill and down, up another and down. You know, Missouri is made put of rocks. I

don't care what kind of rock you want what size, you can find it. Rocks seemed to grow up out of the ground. We'd load them in the wagon and haul them off so that we could farm the land next year and next year there's the rocks back up there again. If you could find five acres that you could put a little corn on or a little wheat or something, why, you were doing pretty good. They don't farm any more down there.

When I was seven, like I said, we moved to Wynnewood Oklahoma, stayed there a year and went to Shawnee. Shawnee's an awful poor country. If it wasn't for that Tinker Air Base up there, Shawnee would fold up the sidewalks and quit. See, they just farmed Oklahoma to death. Cotton and corn, cotton and corn, cotton and corn. The first thing you knew there was no fertile ground and you couldn't make cotton or corn either. I picked cotton, hon. I would drag a sack 20 foot before I could find a boll of cotton: we'd be lucky if we got ¼ of a bale an acre. That was before Roosevelt-- '32. You know how much I got? I got one day a month-- \$2.40. And that's all the money I could make outside of this old fiddle. I'd play a square dance- play six or eight hours-- and make 50 cents. I'd give Dad every bit of it but a dime and I'd go get me a soda pop and a candy bar.

I started trying to play when I was about three or four. But I couldn't reach the fiddle you know; my arm was too short. So Dad glued up this little old cigar box fiddle and made the little cut-outs, you know. And I played that for four or five years. I guess I was about seven when I got big enough to reach, make a true note. I was making them sharp all the time. And I had a good ear and I could tell I wasn't reaching high enough: my arm wasn't long enough. See, I was a two-pound baby. Clark⁴ was telling you the other day that you could turn a teacup over my head and put me in a shoebox. That's the truth. When I was five years old I only weighed 15 pounds

Anyway, going back to this fiddle, I had a full sized bow, but I had this little bitty old fiddle. Then I started stealing my father's fiddle. He kept it under his bed. Boy, he'd spank my butt with a razor strop when he'd catch me playing his fiddle. (It didn't hurt but it popped, you know, it was double: It had the leather finish on one side and fiber on the other. They always rough it up on one side and strop it the other way.)

Mother always watched for him. She'd say, "I see Daddy coming, and you can put the fiddle up." So one day I looked up, and Dad's standing in the door. I was about seven. Oh. I was just fiddling the hell out of *Eighth of January* or something; I don't know what it was. Oh boy, sure going to get it now. He said, "You're playing pretty good: well, come on to dinner." So I was so scared and shaky I could hardly eat, but he started talking to me at the table said, "You really like the fiddle, don't you?" I said "Oh I really love that fiddle." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give it to you if you won't fool it away." And he said, "Why I been spanking you with that razor strop is to get you to play. Usually if you try to make a kid play, he won't. Just like a hog, if he thinks you want him in the pen he won't go in." And that just the way he put it to me. And that's the way I started playing the fiddle.

I used to hold my Daddy's arm while he fiddled when I was two or three years old. I just kept it loose and tried not to bother him. Oh, he had some of me awfulest bowing you ever heard, he could do licks that no one else could. "Wrassle With A Wild

⁴ Clark Collins, Earl's older brother.

Cat"-- Miss Buchanan⁵ couldn't even write it he'd make so many notes that she couldn't get them in there and she'd write it just the best she could. He had quit playing for about 25 or 30 years till that WPA project came along and he needed the money. You know, they paid those fellas, they got a check regular. Roosevelt give them a check. They just played, dances or anything that come up. And Miss Buchanan taught them every day, this whole class of about 50 or 60 of them. Each of them, she'd tell them what it was going to be and she had her little motions, you know. And each one of them would turn to that page and she'd give-- like Spade Cooley-- one, two three, and everybody'd start. And they'd all play the same thing. Over and over. She taught them to read music, see. My father was the lead of the whole bunch. I'll put him up at the top of the world. Not prejudiced because he was my father, but Clayton McMichen or Tanner or Eck Robertson, Georgia Slim—they couldn't none of them beat him. In fact, I think he had them all topped.

We could have had a family like the Carter Family. There was four girls and five boys, and every one of them musicians. The girls could have played anything they would have tried. They had guitars and sang. Dad used to sing quite a few of those old hoedowns like *Wolves A Howling* when he'd play. I remember one line:

*Don't you hear those wolves a-howlin
Howlin round my pretty darlin
Six on the hillside, seven on the holler
And they'll get her, I'll bet you a dollar...*

But Max⁶ and I is the only two that really teamed up. I set him on an apple box when he was six and showed him G chord, and he never made a bobble. He was my guitar man, and right today. I'll take him above anybody.

I stopped fiddling in 1950. I tried everything in the world. I tried every little gimmick that come along. I've been beat out of so much and cheated. Like I played the first television show that ever come to LA, in the western field—KFI. I played six weeks down there and never got one penny. Rehearsed three or four nights a week and then go down there and play thirty minutes. And a guy collected all the money and run off. And me and my brother, we was both working machine shop six days a week and playing two and three nights a week, sometimes four. We both just quit.

I give both my two boys fiddles—I've had fiddles, guitars, banjos mandolins-- and I wanted one of them, both of them actually to make a hoedown fiddler, follow in my old Dad's tracks and in my tracks. But neither one of them was interested. Too busy running around doing something else, see. But in 1965 they come in to me one afternoon when I got home from work, said, "Dad we're going to learn to play rhythm on the banjo and the guitar: I said, "Aw no you don't." They said, "Yes, we do." So that's how it come that I take the fiddle back. I got the banjo and the guitar and the fiddle out, tuned then all up and then I'd play a tune. I'd show them the chords on the banjo and then show them the chords on the guitar. Then we'd pick up all three and we'd try.

⁵ Old lady Buchanan, Marion Buchanan Thede, Director, Music Project, WPA, Potawatamie County, Oklahoma.

⁶ Max Collins, one of Earl's younger brothers.

You know, I love old jam sessions better than I do anything. Just setting around someone's house, and you play what you want to as long as you want to-- this and that. I play awhile and you play awhile, then someone else will play. Then I'll go back and I'll play some and you play some...

Sheet music looks like puppy tracks to me. Scales won't mean nothing to you in hoedowns won't mean a doggone thing. You just pick up the fiddle get a tune in your mind, and you work on that tune and you play it. You've got it in your mind and you know just exactly how it goes. That's memory. But if you go to school and they teach you notes you're not going to play hoedown, you're going to play violin. It's hard to get an old hoedown fiddler's tone. There's not too many around that has the old fiddler's tone to me. It's a touch on the strings and smooth bowing that makes a fiddler. It's the beauty that you get out of a fiddle. As long as you're in the chord, making your true notes, running your smooth bow—you're playing the fiddle...

