

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS



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1. **Penitentiary Blues** 2:45
2. **Bad Luck and Trouble** 3:40
3. **Come Go Home With Me** 3:45
4. **Trouble Stay 'Way From My Door** 4:00
5. **See That My Grave Is Kept Clean** 2:05
6. **Goin' Back To Florida** 3:10
7. **Reminiscenses of Blind Lemon** 2:10
8. **Fan It** 2:40
9. **Tell Me, Baby** 2:30
10. **She's Mine** 4:10

*Originally issued in 1959 as Folkways FS3822*

**Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins**, guitar and voice  
Recorded at 2803 Hadley Street, Houston, Texas  
January 16, 1959, by Samuel B. Charters

Cover design by Ronald Clyne  
Photograph by Samuel B. Charters  
Reissue produced by Matt Walters  
Remastered by Doug Sax and Alan Yoshida  
at The Mastering Lab, Hollywood, Ca.

**THINKING ABOUT LIGHTNING HOPKINS**

When I listen to this recording again many years later, I still have the same sense of excitement I felt that day when I sat in his shadowy room with the bottle of gin on the floor, and the sounds of other people in the house drifting though the door. Through the blues revival and on into the 1970s he went on to record many more albums, including some sessions we did together, but this one is still, for me, his most exciting musical statement. Often during those years I was asked if there was some way to describe the country blues, and the easiest way I could think of was to play this album. Whenever I think of Lightning and his music it is this sound and these blues that come back to me.

*Sam Charters*  
Mansfield Center, Conn. 1990

*(from the enclosed notes)*



**Smithsonian  
Folkways**

Smithsonian/Folkways Records  
Office of Folklife Programs  
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington DC 20560

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### THINKING ABOUT LIGHTNING HOPKINS

The first time I saw Lightning Hopkins was in Houston, and the last time I saw him - many years later - was back in Houston, and though I saw him in a lot of other places over the years Houston was the place that seemed to suit him best. It has grown now into an unwieldy, sprawling, angry city, but when Lightning first came to town from the small farming area around Centerville, where he'd grown up, Houston was quiet and easy. There was a down-at-the-heels quality about life in the section around Dowling Street where he lived, but there was also a lot of music, and it was easy to find a room, and there was always some kind of little job so he could keep going.

When I first met him he was in his late thirties, but he was already a wary, somewhat battered veteran of the blues world. He had begun his career when he was still a boy in the country - first playing at a picnic when Blind Lemon Jefferson, and then accompanying the well-known singer Texas Alexander, who didn't play himself and needed a guitar player. Lightning began recording just after the Second World War - when small record companies sprang up everywhere in the country - and he did dozens of singles for labels in places as scattered as New York and Hollywood.

For all his casualness - and certainly in these years Lightning took everything that happened as if it all were part of the everyday bluesman's life - Lightning wasn't interested in being anything else but a blues singer. He was a brilliant guitarist, and he could make up blues so easily that he could do a recording session every day of the week, so, as the styles changed in the 1950s and his records began to sound a little out of date, he didn't bother to change. He was Lightning, and he knew what he could do, and that was good enough for him.

He had almost stopped playing in the late 1950s, and it was difficult to know where to find him. A cousin was working as a cook in a restaurant in New Orleans where I ate, and he told me to look for Lightning in Houston. At first all I could find was Lightning's guitar. It was in a pawn shop on Dowling Street. The taxi drivers I asked, even Lightning's sister and his landlady were carefully vague when I asked where he was. But the word was passing, and the next morning a car pulled up beside mine at a red light, and a thin faced man wearing dark glasses rolled down the window and called out, "You looking for me?" Lightning had found me.

The blues we recorded after I got him a guitar and some gin and managed to convince him that I was serious about doing a session with him became this Folkways album. We recorded it in the shabby room he was renting, and I held the microphone in my hand so I could move it down

toward the guitar when he was playing a solo, and then move it close enough to his lips for his singing, but not too close when he started to edge up on it. The album came out just about the time that the book *The Country Blues* was published, and it was an immediate success. This was the kind of blues singer that everyone had hoped to find - someone who was a great guitarist, a warm, loose singer, and who was also in his way an unconventional rebel. Lightning became one of the most important figures in the blues revival of the 1960s.

When I listen to this recording again many years later, I still have the same sense of excitement I felt that day when I sat in his shadowy room with the bottle of gin on the floor, and the sounds of other people in the house drifting through the door. Through the blues revival and on into the 1970s he went on to record many more albums, including some sessions we did together, but this one is still, for me, his most exciting musical statement. Often during those years I was asked if there was some way to describe the country blues, the easiest way I could think of was to play this album. Whenever I think of Lightning and his music it is this sound and these blues that come back to me.

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