

Jim Smoak & the Louisiana Honeydrippers

"Bayou Bluegrass"

ARHOOLE 9032

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2. RUN, BOY, RUN
3. LIZA JANE *
4. MY LAST DOLLAR IS GONE
5. OLD DAN TUCKER
6. THE LAKES OF PONCHARTRAIN
7. RABBIT, WHERE'S YOUR MAMMY? *
8. UNDERNEATH THE WEeping WILLOW
9. CHICKEN PIE *
10. KISSIN' COUSINS (Dave Rankin)
11. WOODCHUCK IN THE DEADNIN' *
12. POOR MAN (Dave Rankin)
13. WHOAH, MULE, WHOAH *
14. GREAT BIG BILLY GOAT
15. BILL CHEATUM *
16. RAISIN' A RUCKUS TONIGHT
17. THE FISHER'S HORNPIPE *
18. EAST BOUND TRAIN
19. HOP LIGHT, LADIES *
20. SILVER DAGGER
21. MAMA DON'T ALLOW

Jim Smoak - banjo, solo vocals, & leader
Bucky Wood - fiddle
Dewey Edwards - fiddle on items marked (*)
Lum York - bass
J. C. Meyers - mandolin & vocals
V. J. Meyers - guitar & vocals

Trio tracks marked (*) include Jim Smoak, Dewey Edwards, and V.J. Meyers, only.

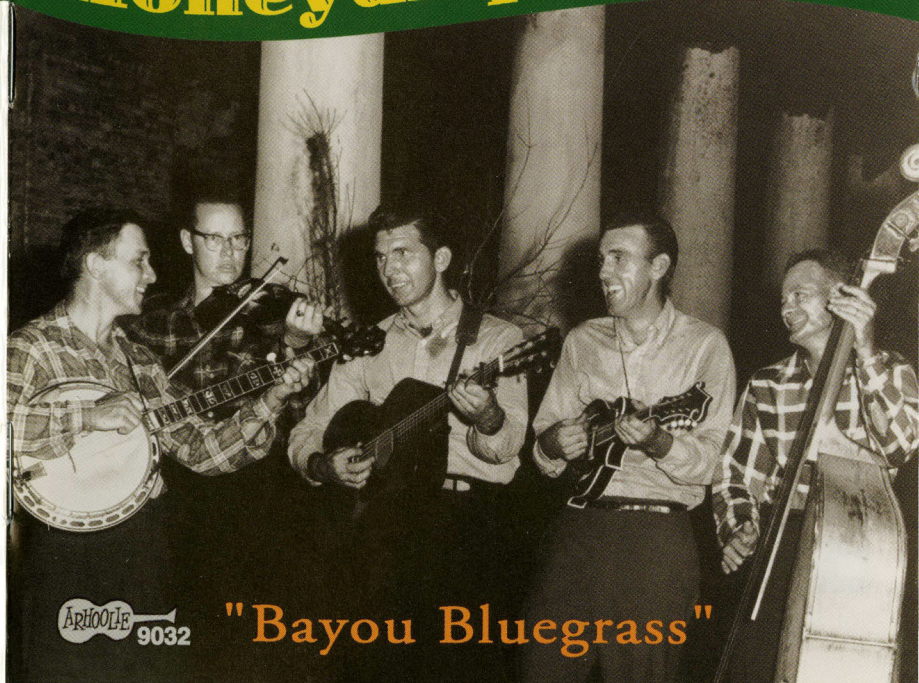
Recorded by Harry Oster in Baton Rouge, La. in 1961.

Selections #1 - 17 originally issued as Folklyric LP 122 and reissued in 1972 as Arhoolie LP 5010 by contract with James B. Smoak. **Selections # 18 - 21**, also recorded in 1961 but previously unissued.

Re-issue produced by Chris Strachwitz
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JIM SMOAK & THE LOUISIANA HONEYDRIPPERS



BAYOU BLUEGRASS

Today bluegrass music is more fashionable than ever - especially since the success of the film *Oh Brother! Where Art Thou?*, which includes Ralph Stanley's haunting solo vocal of "Oh Death." The music has traveled a long road since Bill Monroe first named his string band "The Bluegrass Boys" after his home state of Kentucky, the Bluegrass State. Jim Smoak, an outstanding banjo player, has remained one of the hidden figures in this American Roots genre, partly due to his lack of aggressive self-promotion and partly because he didn't really like the hassles of traveling and noisy club audiences. Nonetheless, Jim certainly has impeccable credentials and an impressive record of playing and recording

with the greats of Bluegrass, including Bill Monroe, Don Reno, Hylo Brown, Arthur Smith, and Jimmy Dickens. Jim has also been a successful songwriter, and the Dixie Chicks recorded his song, "This Heart of Mine," not long ago.

James B. Smoak was born in Round O, South Carolina on July 7, 1934 near a cotton gin - out in the country about 90 miles south of Columbia and 50 miles west of Charleston. When he was 18 years old, he registered for the draft and went to Nashville and on to Knoxville where he met Bill Monroe in 1952. During a recent phone conversation, Jim told me that in September of 1952 Monroe was looking for a banjo player, so Jim picked a tune for

him right there on the sidewalk! Monroe hired him on the spot. He drove, as the latest member of the Bluegrass Boys, to New Bern, North Carolina where they played for two weeks. From there they went to Nashville where they performed on the Grand Ole' Opry into 1953. However, early in 1953 Monroe had a bad car wreck that almost killed him. He had been fox hunting all night and was supposed to make a 5 AM radio broadcast - but he never made it. During Monroe's recovery the band was out of work, so Jim lined up a job with Little Jimmy Dickens. Dickens himself did not need a banjo player, but he featured an entertainer on his show who did. In 1954 Monroe was back on the

road and Jim recorded a number of tunes with him for Decca, including the classic songs "Little Georgia Rose," "Put My Little Shoes Away" and "Close By." Later in 1954 Jim left Monroe and went to Louisiana where fiddler Jack Youngblood persuaded him to join his country band, which had a regular weekly job at WAFB-TV out of Baton Rouge as well as a daily radio program. In Louisiana Jim was a novelty, playing banjo in a country band. In January 1955 Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith contacted Jim's father, hoping to convince Jim to join his band, which was riding high with good selling singles on the MGM label. Jim couldn't refuse the offer and went back to

Charlotte, N.C. to play fairly commercial music with Arthur Smith. Jim made several recordings with Smith, including "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby" featuring two banjos, tenor and 5 string. In October 1955 Jim was drafted into the US Army. Upon discharge in 1957, he was hired by Earl Scruggs who was, at that time, managing Hylo Brown. Jim spent almost three years with Hylo Brown and recorded for Capitol Records in Brown's band.

In 1960 Jim returned to Louisiana. He met Harry Oster, who was mostly interested in old folk songs and older styles of music and wanted to record Jim. For the recording Jim put together the Louisiana Honeydrippers, which included

the Meyers Brothers (J.C. on mandolin and V.J. on guitar), who remained active as a bluegrass band into the 1970s, including appearances at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. The music scene, however, was changing and in the early 1960s bluegrass music was not in great demand. In 1962 Jim Smoak moved to Alexandria in northern Louisiana and formed a "folk music" trio, The Cumberlands, with Harold Thom and his wife Betty. They recorded for Dot, Starday, and Chart Records and prospered for about ten years, working mostly out of Louisville, Kentucky. During this period he put out a live album with Byron Berline on fiddle and Mitchell Land on mandolin. Although Jim

quit the group in 1972, he recently produced a re-union record with the couple playing folk and bluegrass with him frailing on the 5 string. In the 1970s Jim also recorded an album with Ricky Skaggs and Sam Bush. From 1982 to the present Jim Smoak has been enjoying performing at the same restaurant for the past 20 years, the Old Stable in Bardstown, Kentucky with guitarist Sonny Prentice.

Harry Oster's original notes from 1961

Although the types of music usually associated with Louisiana are New Orleans jazz, Cajun dance music, old French folksongs, satirical little songs in "Gombo" French, Afro-American spirituals, blues, and

The restaurant is on a tour route and gets a steady crop of new customers who enjoy the two hour show with their buffet dinner. Stop by and visit him or drop us a line and we will forward it to Jim!

For this CD release we have added a few previously unissued tracks from the Harry Oster collection of tapes.

(Chris Strachwitz - 2002)

worksongs, the northern part of the state inherits the rich musical traditions of the British Isles and the southern mountains since it was settled principally by migrants from the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, and

Mississippi. The Anglo-Saxon traditions of Louisiana have influenced and also been influenced by the folk music of the rest of the state.

The mixture is exemplified in this record by the Louisiana Honeydrippers, led by Jim Smoak, brilliant young banjo player, who combines a rich folk background with the experience of touring with Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Hylo Brown, and playing regularly on the Grand Old Opry for three years.

The group performs either as a quintet or a trio. The former is the standard bluegrass ensemble of five-string banjo (Jim Smoak), fiddle (Bucky Wood), slap bass (Lum York),

guitar (V.J. Meyers), and mandolin (J.C. Meyers), which, except for occasional numbers of Cajun or north Louisiana origin, follows the mainstream of the Foggy Mountain Boys. The trio (maked with *), consisting of fiddle (Dewey Edwards), banjo (Jim Smoak), and guitar (V.J. Meyers), is more "old-timey" in flavor, a fusion of the repertoire and style of performance of Gid Tanner's Skillet Lickers, Jim's banjo-playing friends and relatives in Round O, South Carolina, and Dewey's father, who despite a lifetime on the edge of the French Settlement in Louisiana, looks, speaks, and fiddles as did his Anglo-Saxon Mississippi ancestors.

1.CALINDA. The Calinda was originally a wildly erotic dance brought to Louisiana by slaves from Santo Domingo and the Antilles. Banned by the authorities in 1843, it continued secretly. Descendants of the Acadians (now usually called "Cajuns") picked up the song.

2.RUN, BOY, RUN harks back to the days before the Civil War when slave owners, fearing a possible insurrection, ruled that no Negro should be off his plantation after curfew. Patrols were set up along the roads to catch any truants.

3.LIZA JANE is a lilting square dance tune Dewey learned from his father. Dewey also inherited his father's fiddle, which was

shipped up the Amite River from New Orleans fifty years ago.

4.MY LAST DOLLAR IS GONE describes a familiar situation in the life of the migrant sharecropper, moving to a new state in the vain hope that better times await him at the next farm. The style of performance suggests the ability to make a rueful joke out of a bitter misfortune.

5.OLD DAN TUCKER. Although Dan Emmett is usually thought of as the originator of this still widely popular song, he probably drew on Negro tradition for its basic elements; such borrowing was common in the earliest days of the minstrel show, but relatively rare later.

6.THE LAKES OF PONCHARTRAIN. Set on the banks of the big lake which is on the edge of New Orleans, this catchy song is widely known over the United States and even as far afield as Nova Scotia. Helen Harkness Flanders suggested that the author knew and imitated "The Little Mohea," in which the girl invites the sailor to marry her but he refuses because he has a girl in his own country. In "The Lakes of Ponchartrain" the girl refuses the stranger because she has a sailor lover at sea.

7.RABBIT, WHERE'S YOUR MAMMY is a tune Dewey learned from a record by the Skillet Lickers.

8.UNDERNEATH THE WEEPING WILLOW is a song in the sentimental nineteenth century tradition. In the late twenties the Carter Family recorded a variant much like the one on this record. In *The American Songbag* Carl Sandburg waxed rhapsodic about another variant:

"Who that has looked at the night stars from under a weeping willow tree, and failed to find here its saturated mournfulness, almost murmuring, 'Pity me, weep with me over what I had that's gone.'"

9.CHICKEN PIE is a lively evocation of a wild party in the country: Some got drunk an' some got drownded, Some got choked on chicken pie. Jim

Smoak learned the words from his grandfather, and Dewey Edwards learned the tune from his father.

10. KISSIN' COUSINS was made up by Dave Rankin, the Woody Guthrie of north Louisiana, a composer of songs in the folk idiom, who has a small farm near Monroe. "Kissin' Cousins" depicts comically the frustrations of a romantic young man in a small town in which everyone is closely related.

11. WOODCHUCK IN THE DEADNIN' is another song Dewey picked up from a record by the Skillet Lickers.

12. POOR MAN, written by Dave Rankin, was inspired by the

devastating effects of the depression of the thirties. The bitter irony is deft and powerful.

13. WHOAH, MULE, WHOAH was popular in the nineteenth century in minstrel circles. *The Ethiopian Serenader's Own Book* (1857) quotes similar verses.

14. GREAT BIG BILLY GOAT, a favorite of vaudeville and hill-billy performers, was taught to Jim Smoak by his mother. The last two stanzas of this variant have wandered in from other songs – the second to last is in the familiar idiom of the hill-billy baggy-pants comedian who thinks he is playing a trick on someone else while he is actually hurting himself.

15. BILL CHEATUM is a lively fiddle and square dance tune known in the South and the Southwest. Its magic power to pull a listener onto the dance floor is so great, one can readily understand the conviction of fundamentalist Protestants that the fiddle was the Devil's instrument.

16. RAISIN' A RUCKUS originated before the Civil War as a slave song poking fun at the white master and his mistress. It was also sung frequently in minstrel shows.

17. THE FISHER'S HORNPIPE. Although in the British Isles the hornpipe originated as a solo dance, it is used most often in New England for contra dances, in which a line of men faces one of women. In the South it appears occasionally as music for square dances. The earliest recording was probably the performance by Charles D'Almaine around 1910 on an Edison Amberol cylinder.

(Harry Oster - 1961)

Note: Duet vocal on #18 is probably by the Meyers Brothers.

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Includes 4 previously unissued tracks (†)

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