

Home Made Sugar AND A Punchon Floor



JOHN



HOWDY

HOME RECORDINGS BY HOWDY FORRESTER AND JOHN HARTFORD
OLD-TIME TUNES FROM HICKMAN COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Home Made Sugar ^{AND} A Punccheon Floor

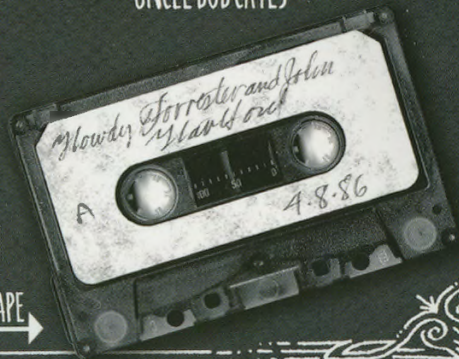
Howdy Forrester's source for many of the tunes included on this CD was his beloved Great Uncle Bob Cates (1873-1952). A hardworking lumberman, farmer, and blacksmith in rural Hickman County, Tennessee, Uncle Bob was a stout man (he could lift an anvil with one hand!) with a great sense of humor and a zest for life. He was always ready to pull the bow across the fiddle at the well-attended local square dances in his community.

Young Howdy, too small for his feet to touch the floor from the chair, started to absorb Great Uncle Bob's fiddling while the two played country dances. Bob's highly rhythmic bow technique, developed over years as a solo dance fiddler, remained a lifelong inspiration to Howdy. While he became a celebrated and influential fiddler himself, there were many of Uncle Bob's techniques Howdy never completely mastered.

Bob Cates passed away peacefully at the age of 78 in 1952. Thankfully, John Hartford had the foresight to encourage Howdy, during his final years, to sit next to the Walkman to revisit Great Uncle Bob's tunes to pass them on to a new generation of old time musicians.



UNCLE BOB CATES



THE TAPE

Home Made Sugar AND A Puncheon Floor



NOTES AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

Home Made Sugar AND A Punchon Floor

Howard Wilson "Howdy" Forrester was the quintessence of a traditional artist. His music captured both the spirit of rural experience in the agrarian Midsouth and the zeitgeist of the depression-era exodus from farm to city (he was born in Hickman County, Tennessee in 1922 and moved with his family to Nashville in the mid 1930s). Howdy was an artist of and for his times whose music sounded simultaneously antiquated and modern. His fiddling maintained the rich aesthetic values inherited from his family and community, but also incorporated influences from far afield, such as Texas contest style, Irish, Canadian, and Scottish fiddling, and classical violin (his favorite "fiddler" was Viennese virtuoso and composer Fritz Kreisler). A man of refined tastes, Howdy preferred a sip of cognac to the corn liquor of Gid Tanner or Arthur Smith.

I first met Howdy when I was twelve or thirteen, and he struck me as being somewhat cosmopolitan, particularly since I had grown up only a few miles from Howdy's birthplace, an area where the whitetail deer still outnumber the people ten to one and where the only traffic jams occur due to the occasional hay rake moving from one field to another. Even though Howdy had put down some of the most forward-thinking, creative, and technically sophisticated fiddling ever recorded, his music somehow connected with my hillbilly soul. I can smell the wood stove in the kitchen when I hear him jar down on the old numbers. His fiddling somehow manifested (and still does, through his recordings) the humanity spirituality of not only of his own "self" but also the soul of his community. Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh held

that in order for art to be universal, it must first relate to a particular place and time; only then can it reach down into the collective, archetypal psyche that resonates meaningfully with all of humankind. The best of old-time music does this, and Howdy's music represents the best of old-time music.

Fans may know Howdy's music from his classic recordings—*Fancy Fiddlin': Country Style* (1960, MGM, now available as Spring Fed Records' SFR-105) and *Big Howdy: Fiddlin' Country Style* (1963, United Artists)—which feature knuckle-busting tunes like "Rutland's Reel," "Fiddler's Waltz," "High Level Hornpipe," "Say Old Man," "Grey Eagle," "Brilliance," "Memory Waltz," "The Last Waltz," "Wild Fiddler's Rag," "Town and Country Fiddler," "Howdy in Hickman County," and "Doc Harris Hornpipe" (each a contest staple). The present home recordings from the personal library of John Hartford give us a powerful glimpse of the roots of Howdy's mature style. They are a missing link between early string band material, such as the Skillet Lickers and Arthur Smith, and the polished, technically supercharged modern contest-style fiddling of which Howdy was a primary architect. Howdy's music evolved from the tunes and style that he received from his Uncle Bob Cates, revealing along the way Howdy's work with Benny Thomasson, the inescapable influence of Arthur Smith, the time spent playing with Bill Monroe, and the study of Kreisler's recordings. When Howdy revisited these old-time tunes from his Hickman County youth with John Hartford in the 1980s, they had passed through the filter of Howdy's vast experiences and development. While these recordings are a far cry from the scratchy, rough cuts of early fiddlers such as Mazy Todd and Sid Harkreader, they are no less "authentic" for their technical prowess. Howdy simply played Middle Tennessee old-time fiddle better than anyone else, as these previously unreleased recordings make abundantly clear.

One cannot overestimate John Hartford's contributions to this remarkable collection. John used to describe himself as a "closet librarian," and his passion for fiddle music, in all its facets, was unsurpassed. This project further establishes his commitment to the fiddle and

banjo format alongside the duets he released with James "Texas Shorty" Chancellor (*Old Sport*), Gene Goforth (*Emminence Breakdown*), and me (*The Bullies Have All Gone to Rest*). John not only did the academic research and understood the historical and cultural significance of this music, but he himself was a vital, creative force from within the tradition. His banjo accompaniment made me feel as though I had died and gone to fiddle heaven. He played this music from the inside out. John was always on the quest for old-time fiddle music as it lived and breathed in the hearts and hands of previous generations. In 1986 he visited Howdy at home, bringing along his banjo, handheld cassette recorder, and 3x5 note cards (John wore a custom-tailored vest with nearly a dozen pockets to carry these cards and other materials, making of himself a walking archive). These recordings are the product of that visit. Howdy was not well at the time, and these loose, impromptu performances are far from studio-quality perfect. Artistically, however, these recordings make such perfectionism irrelevant, for it is their spirit, not their polish, which makes them great. They capture a casual moment when two brilliant musical souls came together.

I offer my personal thanks to both John and Howdy for their music and their passion.

-Jim Wood

TUNE NOTES

Dugler with a Shoofly On – After playing this tune Howdy asks John whether he's ever heard of a "shoofly tie" and reckons that the title must be a reference to this particular men's clothing accessory. A shoofly tie was actually a particular kind of knot, popular in the late nineteenth century, that was reflected also in folk quilting patterns of the era. The melody sounds very similar to "Little Girl in Hamptown."

McKinley – Also known as "McKinley's March", this tune is well-known in bluegrass circles from Bill Monroe's version; it likely pays tribute to the American president of the same name.

Home Made Sugar and a Puncheon Floor – A puncheon floor has split logs with a smoothed face. This tune captures the essence of old-time tunes that developed in the absence of chordal accompaniment with its free-wheeling melodic twists and turns that seem unfettered by the need to reconcile themselves to a chord progression.

Arthur Smith's Twinkle Little Star – "Twinkle Little Star" has been a staple of Southern string band music and contest fiddling at least since the 1920's and probably has its roots in nineteenth-century banjo repertory. Arthur Smith's version is quite idiosyncratic compared to standard practice, but the core of the tune is clearly the same.

Stump Tail Dog – Fiddle tunes in E major (as the "A" section here) are not common, and it shows the diversity of Howdy's native regional style.

Uncle John Wills's Lost Indian – "Lost Indian" may win the award for the title associated with the greatest number of completely unrelated tunes. Howdy learned this "Lost Indian," replete with the obligatory vocal Indian "whoop" and asymmetrical form, from the playing of John Wills, Bob's father.

Still on the Hill (Sells Brothers Circus Rag) – Howdy's frequently copied version of this tune from 30 Fiddlers' Greatest Hits (under the title "Still on the Hill") was recorded in 1963 but not released until 1978. Howdy learned the first part from Uncle Dave Macon and then composed the additional parts to round out the tune (as he did on several classics such as "Rutland's Reel" and "Brilliance"). Musically, it is more a polka or a march than a rag. The Sells Brothers Circus, based in Columbus, Ohio, ran intermittently from 1862 until 1895 (perhaps the most significant period in the evolution of a truly American fiddle style), and one can easily imagine that this piece had a connection to the show. An anecdotal story relates that it was the tune used to signal for a cleanup in the ring after one of the elephants had defecated.

Tumbling Creek Liza Jane – Howdy reports that the “Tumbling Creek” portion of the title was simply added to “Liza Jane” after a fiddle duel on the tune between his Uncle Bob Cates and Raymond Totty took place at a locale of that name. The ubiquitous title “Liza Jane,” like “Lost Indian,” is connected with numerous distinctly different tunes.

Ladies in the Ballroom – This is another title for the “Rattlesnake Bit the Baby” family of tunes that includes “Boston Boys” and “Take Me Back To Georgia.” Howdy pointed out that Benny Martin plays a portion of this tune to start his fiddle break on the song, “Smell Good on Sunday,” recorded with John Hartford and Lester Flatt and released on Flying Fish in 1975.

Going Across the Sea – This perennial favorite in virtually every old-time music scene was widely disseminated by a 1925 recording of Uncle Dave Macon on banjo and vocal. Howdy’s version presents a well-developed fiddle tune that fleshes out the essential melody with great color and brilliance. His treatment of simple, two-part standard tunes such as this displays his true genius in microcosm and points in the direction that he would ultimately travel with original compositions such as “Memory Waltz,” “Doc Harris Hornpipe,” “Wild Fiddler’s Rag,” and “Fiddler’s Waltz.”

Cotton Eyed Joe – This tune is as close to universal as a fiddle tune can be, and it exists in myriad forms that are more or less related. Howdy’s version diverges somewhat from the common strains associated with either Southeastern string hands, Bob Wills, or Texas dance halls. Cotton-Eyed Joe was a slave whose eyes and hair turned solid white from grief after the untimely death of his wife and son. He was only saved from utter despondency by hearing the sound of his dead son’s voice singing as he played a fiddle made from a log that was the boy’s casket.

Sugar in the Gourd – This fiddle tune/folk song bears a slight melodic resemblance to “Turkey in the Straw” and seems to have been very popular in fiddle circles around the end of the nineteenth century. Like tunes such as “Sally Ann” and “Cotton-Eyed Joe,” “Sugar in the Gourd” exists in many varieties, and the title is also shared by several other unrelated tunes.

Possum up a Gum Stump – Tunes in C major such as this and “Greenback Dollar” (which are related to families of tunes such as “Streak of Lean, Streak of Fat,” “Rattlesnake Bit the Baby,” and “Old Joe”) have always been popular with fiddlers from the area where Howdy grew up and have been part of the basic vocabulary of dance fiddlers of the region. If one could prune back the tree of Middle Tennessee old-time fiddling from as far as possible, one would find Howdy sitting on the porch of an old farm house off Pinewood Road playing this tune.

Balance All – This title obviously comes from the square dance caller's instructions for the dancers.

Paddy on the Turnpike – The various American versions of this common tune in the Mixolydian mode obviously owe their genesis to the Irish tune of the same name in the Dorian mode. Like many tunes that immigrated from Ireland and Scotland to North America, it eventually underwent a metamorphosis into something distinctly of the New World. This setting was inspired by Arthur Smith's version.

Polly Put the Kettle On – This well-worn title (as well as "Molly Put the Kettle On") refers to a plethora of American and Irish tunes, but Howdy's recording here resembles the popular old-time tunes, "Granny, Will Your Dog Bite?" and "Run, Johnny, Run."

Secesb – This Civil War era tune refers to the "secessionists" of the Confederate States of America. Howdy apparently augmented this traditional piece from his native Hickman County with some original material.

Lady of the Lake – As with many of the titles in this collection, "Lady of the Lake" is connected with numerous tunes, but Howdy's version here maintains strong associations with the early Opry. Sir Walter Scott's poem of the same name was popular in the American frontier.

Going Uptown – Howdy reports that this is basically the first part of "Ragtime Annie," with a second section composed by Oscar Stone, a well-known early Opry fiddler. "Avalon Quickstep" is somewhat similar to Stone's original section.

Bitter Creek – In the late 1940s Howdy traveled with Georgia Slim Rutland to Texas, where Howdy befriended Benny Thomasson, the godfather of Texas contest-style fiddling. Howdy most certainly returned to Tennessee with this contest favorite. Thomasson's advanced style, with its highly evolved structures and intricate variations, had an inestimable impact on Howdy's development. Howdy, in turn, was Tommy Jackson's source for his popular recording of the tune in the 1960s.

-Jim Wood

Notes on the Transcriptions

These transcriptions of each tune on the recording are not strictly what Howdy plays. Since he seldom ever played anything exactly the same way twice, employing at times subtle and at other times sharply contrasting variations, these renderings are actually an amalgam of how he plays each tune. My goal was not to create a precise account of Howdy's recorded performances, but to make these transcriptions functional for musicians who want to learn the tunes. The included double stops and slurs are simply those that seem necessary to capture the vibe of the tune. Many other open string drones, double stops, and slurs are present in the recordings but are not essential to learning the tune. I have not included chords since that is certainly an open-ended matter. Melodic variations are included for the sake of capturing the improvisational genius of Howdy's playing. His fiddling is enormously rich, spontaneous, and imaginative, and these qualities, basic to his art, must be present in the transcriptions to some degree. The best way to learn the finer points is simply to listen, listen some more, and then listen again. Absorb this material through your pores.

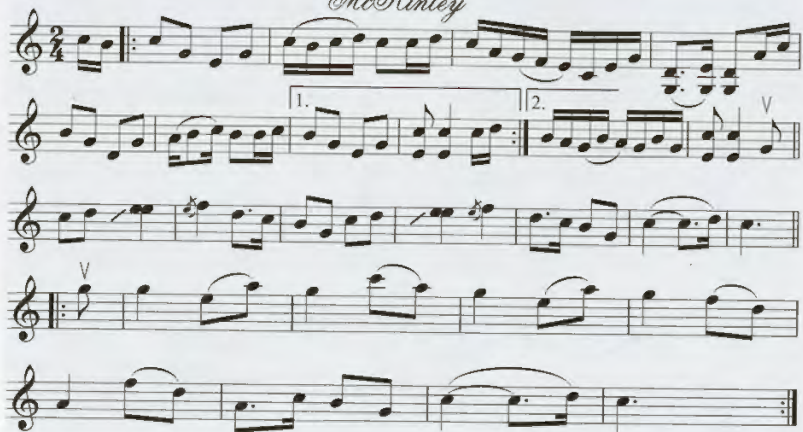
My thanks to Hillary Klug for her assistance in preparing these transcriptions.

-Jim Wood

Dugler with the Shoefly On



McKinley



Home Made Sugar and a Puncheon Floor



Arthur Smith's Twinkle Little Star



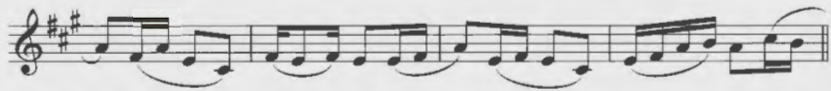
Stump Tailed Dog



Uncle John Will's Lost Indian



B



A 1



voc:

Woo...

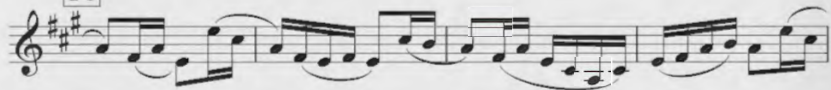


Woo...



3

B 1



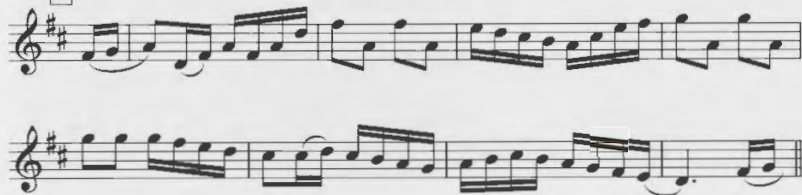
Still on the Hill (Sells Brothers Circus Rag)

Form AABBI1CCAABB1DDAA

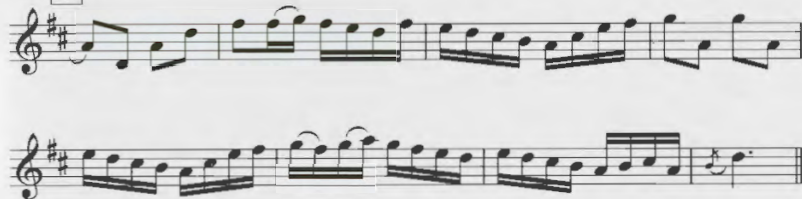
A



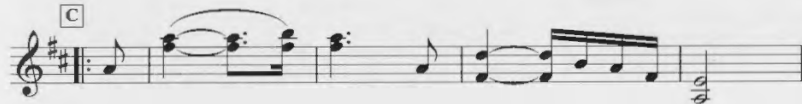
B

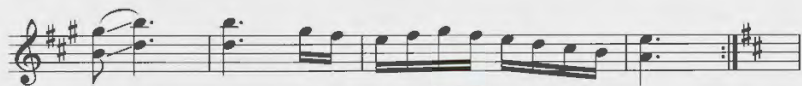


B1

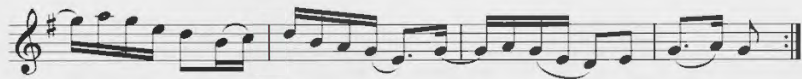


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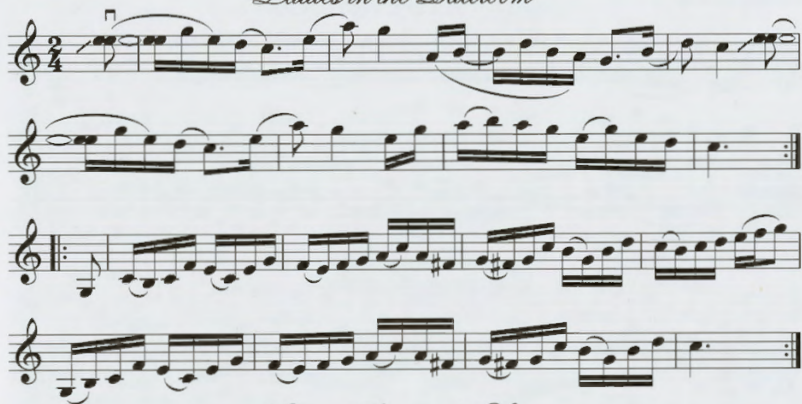




Tumbling Creek Liza Jane



Ladies in the Ballroom

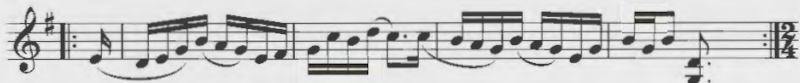
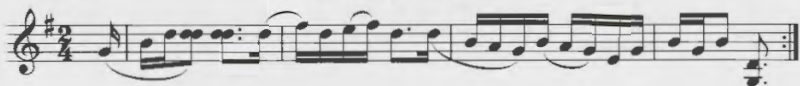


Going Across the Sea

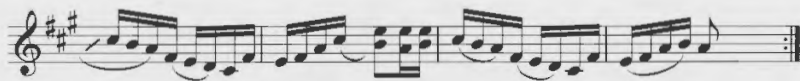
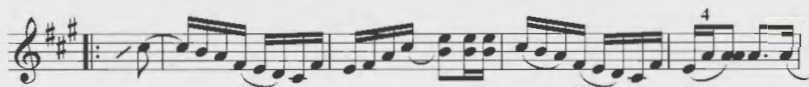
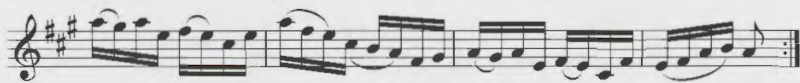
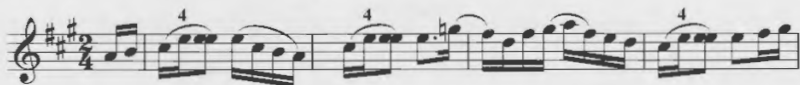


Tuning GDGD

Cotton Eyed Joe



Sugar in the Gourd



Possum Up a Gum Stump



Balance All

Form ABCB

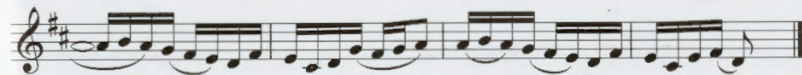
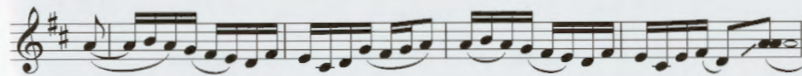
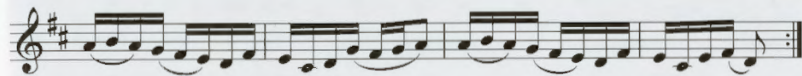
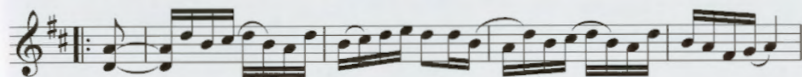
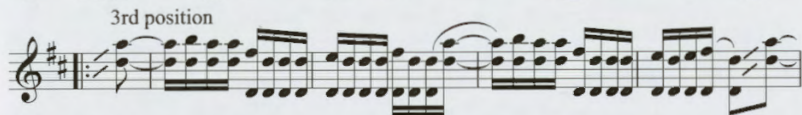
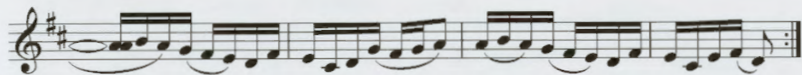
Musical score for 'Balance All' in 2/4 time. The score consists of six staves, divided into three systems of two staves each. The first system is labeled 'A' and the second system is labeled 'B'. The third system is labeled 'C'. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. The accompaniment starts with a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. The melody ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The accompaniment ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Paddy on the Turnpike



Polly Put the Kettle On





Secesh

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of six staves of music. The first five staves contain the melody, and the sixth staff contains the lyrics. The melody is characterized by eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. There are repeat signs at the end of the second and fourth staves. The fourth staff includes first and second endings, marked '1.' and '2.' respectively. The lyrics are written below the sixth staff, aligned with the notes above them.

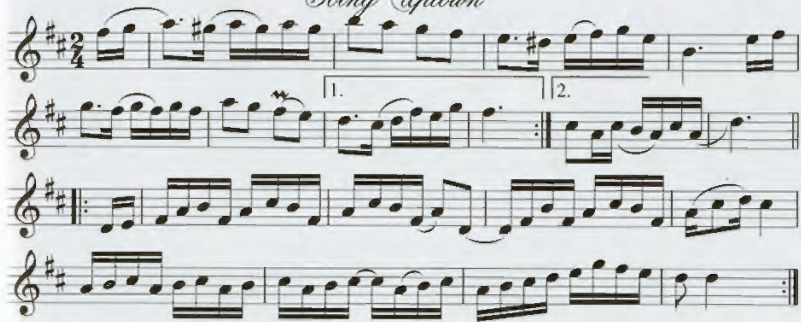
Tie my knap-sack on my back my ri - fle on my shoul - der

I'll go a - way to Shi - loh and there I'll be a sol - dier

Lady of the Lake



Going Uptown



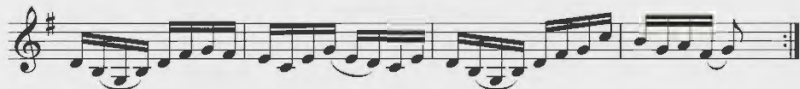
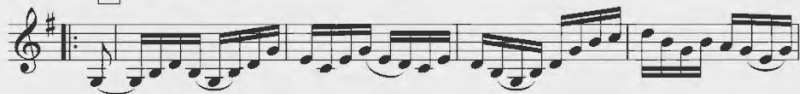
Intro

Bitter Creek

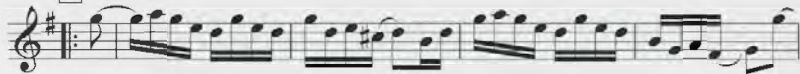
A



B

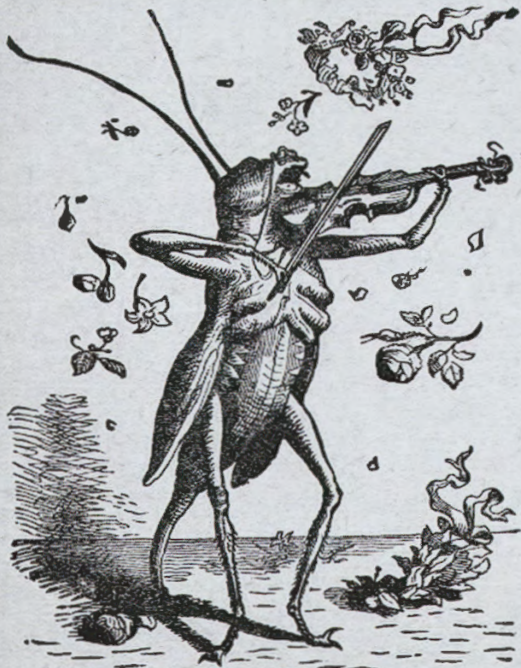


C



D.S.





J.H.

THE MUSICAL GRASSHOPPER.

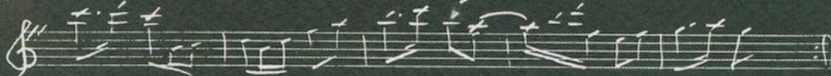
from "Howdy Do!"
from the Uncle Art

5m 3
2-5

Home o' black sugar ^{AND} a Punchin' floor



Se-cash from "Howdy Do!"



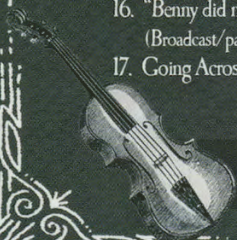
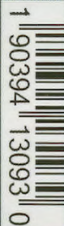
Tie my knapsack on my back my rifle on my shoulder, I'll go away to Shiloh and there I'll be

"Se-cash" is from the word "decide" as in to "decide"
from the Union.

a soldier

Home Made Sugar *AND* A Puncheon Floor

1. "Warm up" (11 sec)
2. Dugler With a Shoefly On (1.37)
3. "That must have been a tie" (15 sec)
4. McKinley (1.26)
5. Home Made Sugar and a Puncheon Floor (1.07)
6. Arthur Smith's Twinkle Little Star (1.55)
7. "I've never heard anybody play it but Arthur" (45 sec)
8. Stump Tail Dog (1.32)
9. "Well, it's different..." (20 sec)
10. Uncle John Wills's Lost Indian (1.48)
11. "You did a whoop?" (58 sec)
12. Still on the Hill (Sells Brothers Circus Rag) (2.11)
13. Tumbling Creek Liza Jane (2.04)
14. "Tell you where I first heard that one" (39 sec)
15. Ladies in the Ballroom (1.01)
16. "Benny did n't get into that part" (1.29)
(Broadcast/parental advisory)
17. Going Across the Sea (1.44)
19. Cotton Eyed Joe (1.36)
20. Sugar in the Gourd (1.39)
21. Possum up a Gum Stump (1.39)
22. Balance All (1.43)
23. Paddy on the Tumpike (1.46)
24. Polly Put the Kettle On (1.46)
25. "You ever heard Secesh?" (29 sec)
26. Secesh (2.15)
27. "Greenback Dollar... Vernon Solomon
never heard that" (26 sec)
28. Lady of the Lake (1.46)
29. "Roy talks Grandpappy
George Wilkerson" (3.26)
(Broadcast/parental advisory)
30. Going Uptown (45 sec)
31. "Even back in these days" (2.43)
(Broadcast/parental advisory)
32. Bitter Creek (51 sec)
33. "Run out of tunes" (17 sec)



The enclosed CD booklet includes transcriptions for 20
old-time tunes from the bow of Uncle Bob Cates.

SPRING FED RECORDS, CENTER FOR POPULAR MUSIC, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY SFR-CD-110

