

THE LEGEND OF BLIND JOE DEATH

AAFM = *Anthology of American Folk Music* by Harry Smith

On Doing An Evil Deed Blues

Sleeve note to 2nd edition: "Originally composed by Fahey in remorse and guilt at having committed an evil deed."

JF: "I wrote this after I broke up with a girlfriend. I felt guilty because she liked me a lot more than I liked her, and I went home and wrote this. There's a lot of [Robert Johnson](#) in this piece. Standard tuning, key of A."

The RJ referred to is probably *Kind Hearted Woman Blues* or *Me And The Devil Blues*.

St. Louis Blues

(Composer : W.C. Handy) First version released as a single by Fonotone. Handy (1873 - 1958 – he lived to hear Little Richard!) published his famous first-ever-blues song on 11 September 1914. The chorus was taken from an earlier (1913) composition called *The Jogo Blues*. Fahey's version is based to some extent on Weaver and Beasley's.

Glenn Jones in the notes to *The Legend of Blind Joe Death* states that *St Louis Blues* was – for BJDII – slightly edited from the 59 original, eliminating the song's opening verse. This is untrue; the same version was used for BJD II. Is Glenn thinking of *On Doing An Evil Deed Blues* here?

Poor Boy Long Ways From Home

(Trad) Formerly titled *Pat Sullivan Blues*. 25 years later retitled *Steve Talbot on the Keddie Wye*. Do not confuse this piece with *Poor Boy* (e.g. by Banjo Joe, see AAFM) which also use this title just because everyone else does. They are two separate songs. JF's version is close to the standard guitar piece *Vestopol*.

Elizabeth Cotten may be JF's model here. He would also have been familiar with versions by Barbecue Bob, Frank Hutchison (under the title *K C Moan*), Cat Iron and Ramblin' Thomas (under the title *Poor Boy Blues*).

Uncloudy Day

Sleeve note to 2nd edition: "Learned by Death in his youth at a primitive Baptist church in the Etruscan River Valley Delta Basin Region of Tunica County, Mississippi."

A well-known country hymn which used more than one tune. Fahey's tune is that also used by the Staple Singers and others.

John Henry

(Trad) Everybody recorded this, one of the two or three best-known American folk ballads. JF's version is from *99 Year Blues* by Julius Daniels (see AAFM). We also cite the following – Two Poor Boys (*John Henry Blues*), Baily Brothers, Furry Lewis, and Williamson Brothers and Curry (as "Gonna Die with a Hammer in my Hand"). Note: there are two John Henry songs, this one and *Nine Pound Hammer* (see *Voice of the Turtle*).

In Christ There Is No East Or West

This tune is from a hymn originally called *The Angels Changed My Name*, first published 1881 in a book commemorating a tour by The Jubilee Singers, who were a choir of former slaves and their children, based at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. The modern lyrics date

from 1908. For an account of the fascinating Fisk Singers, see “Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music” by Benjamin Filene, p27-32.mn.,dmzn

Glenn Jones [in the notes to *The Legend of Blind Joe Death*]:

“His new take of the Episcopal hymn *In Christ There Is No East or West* would become the most well-known and oft-played song on the album. (I heard the song dozens of times throughout the early '70s as background music for the scriptural musings of the pious-voiced narrator of *Thoughts for Tomorrow*, metropolitan New York's nightly televised sermonette. This low budget bromide was the last thing beamed out to bleary-eyed insomniacs before the station shut down its transmitter in the wee hours of the morning.”

The Transcendental Waterfall

JF [from notes to *The Return of the Repressed*]:

“So I fiddled with blues and ragtime and all that stuff but all the time I was secretly, behind everyone's back, composing things for the orchestra. I was trying to make the guitar sound like an orchestra because I was listening to classical music all the time too.”

A three minute version of this, JF's first tone poem, was released as a Fonotone single in 1958. The following year, on BJD I, it had doubled its length. By 1964 it peaked at nearly 11 minutes, but it was down to 6 minutes by 1967.

The release of *The Legend of Blind Joe Death* caused some controversy when Glenn Jones' wonderful notes claimed that “the recording of *The Transcendental Waterfall* used on BJD III was the one recorded for BJD II with about 4 minutes lopped off”. Fahey scholars applied their ears to their headphones and quickly decided that this was what's known as an 'error'. The 59, 64 and 67 versions are all different. *The Legend of Blind Joe Death* includes the 1964 version only, which, after all, was the right decision as there was no space on the single cd for the other versions, and the 1967 version is far easier to find.

So by the release of BJDII in 1964 Fahey is already pointing towards the vast tone poems of [Fare Forward Voyagers](#), nine years later.

Desperate Man Blues

Sleeve note to 2nd edition: “Follows roughly the theme of *John Hardy* and Sibelius' 7th Symphony.”

The incomparable Carter Family version, *John Hardy was a Desperate Little Man*, is on AAFM.

West Coast Blues

A Blind Blake tune recorded for the 1959 edition and later discarded. An outtake of the tune recorded in 1964 was added to the cd *Legend* rerelease but the 1959 version is so much more charmingly metronomic, (or may we say metrognomic). Since bootlegs of the 59 edition are readily available it's odd that the outtake was used.

The Editions of Blind Joe Death

Only interesting to the most hard-core of Faheyophiles, but nevertheless, as a comment on Glenn Jones' notes :

The 1959 edition having sold out by 1964, Fahey reissued it with some tracks rerecorded in April of that year, as is well known. But which tracks were rerecorded? The reproduced back cover of the 1964 edition shown on page 6 of the *Legend* booklet clearly states:

“This record is a limited edition second pressing. TRANSCENDENTAL WATERFALL/ON DOING AN EVIL DEED BLUES/IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST and UNCLOUDY DAY recorded in Berkeley, California in April 1964 in the studio of an anonymous benefactor.”

However the DDD says this:

Takoma C 1002, second edition (with issue numbers and printed jacket)

Transcendental waterfall

On Doing An Evil deed Blues

In Christ There is no east or West

The other selections on the second edition were taken from one of the few copies of the first edition to survive. West Coast Blues was not included because the record had a bullet hole through that track. When truth is known, there are many surprises.

Leaving aside the bullet hole jocularly, *Uncloudy Day* is not mentioned here. And a comparison shows that it was not rerecorded.

Glenn Jones' Legend notes state that the BJDII cover lists five rerecordings, and adds *Desperate Man Blues*. That's not correct, and *Desperate Man Blues* also not rerecorded. Glenn says "what of the six missing tracks from BJD I?" In fact there are three which aren't on Legend - *In Christ*, *Evil Deed* and *Waterfall*. Glenn may be thinking of those three plus *Uncloudy Day*, *Desperate Man Blues*, and *West Coast Blues*. Hard to say.