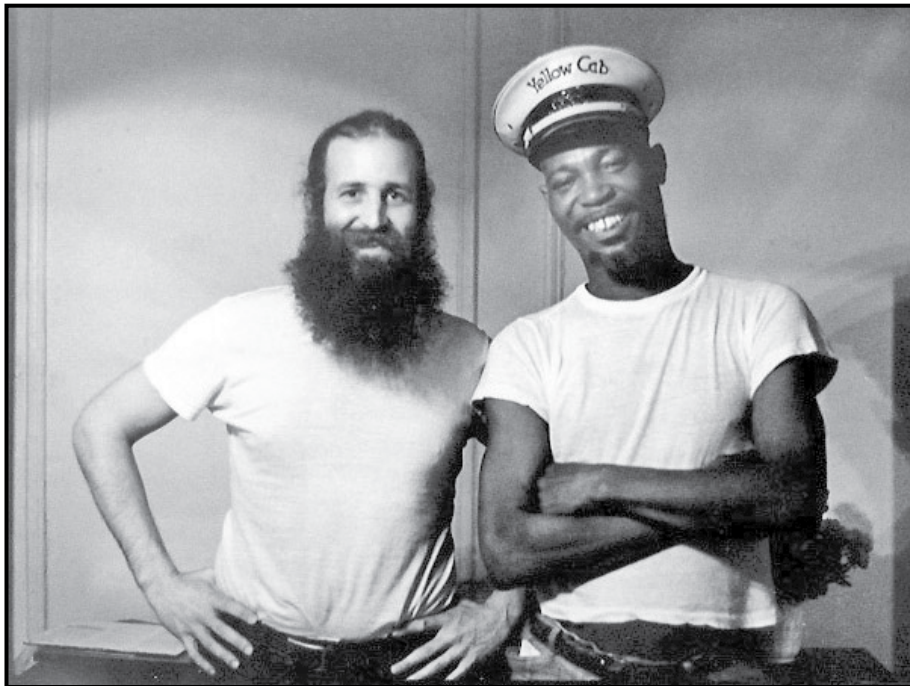


# Remembering Tarheel Slim

By Peter B. Lowry



Peter Lowry and Tarheel Slim wearing Peter's Yellow Cab cap. New York City, 1973. Photo: Val Wilmer. Not to be reproduced without permission.

**Tarheel Slim (Allen Bunn, aka Alden Bunn) was a rhythm and blues 'jack of all trades'. He recorded gospel, rhythm and blues, doo wop, hot rock'n'roll and downhome blues. In the 1940s he recorded gospel in North Carolina with the Gospel Four and the Selah Jubilee Singers and with Thurman Ruth in 1949 he formed The Jubilaters. At Apollo Records they switched to rhythm and blues as the classic vocal group The Larks. He waxed in 1952 under the name Tarheel Slim and Allen Bunn for Apollo, and for Red Robin as Tarheel Slim and Alden Bunn and he also cut rhythm and blues with the vocal group The Wheels for Premium Records. With his partner Ann Sanford he recorded as Tarheel Slim and Little Ann, (and also as The Lovers) for Aladdin's Lamp subsidiary as well as for Atco, Fire, Fury and Enjoy. He recorded classic rock'n'roll sides such as 'Wildcat Tamer' and 'No. 9 Train'. In the 1970s he recorded for Peter Lowry's Trix label. Here, in a unique article, Peter recalls his friendship with Tarheel Slim and his recordings for Trix.**

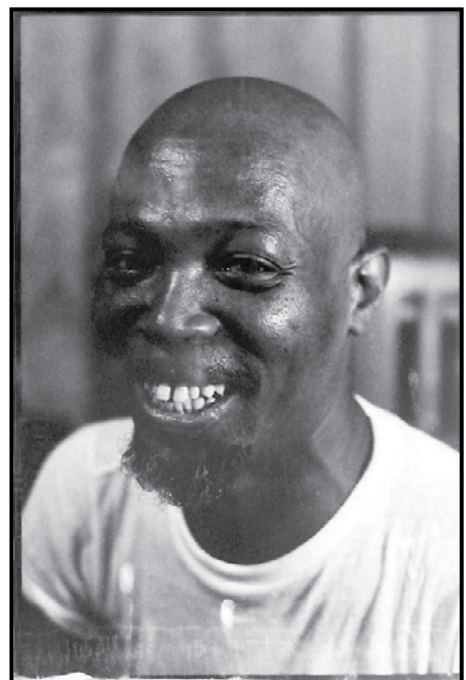
**I cannot recall how I was steered in the right direction to meet and find Allen Bunn, aka Tarheel Slim. Maybe it was Bobby Robinson who gave me a phone number, or I simply looked him up in the Bronx telephone directory. Whatever, it was the start of a serious friendship lasting from 1970 until his death in 1977. I do know that I initially went to his quite large apartment in the South Bronx, a lovely flat with beautiful parquet floors, ceiling rosettes and plaster mouldings, all from another era of gentility. He shared it with his partner (singing, and otherwise), Ann Sanford aka Little Ann with whom he recorded a number of duets as both Tarheel Slim and Little Ann and as The Lovers. I do not think that she was there the first time I went, or she stayed well in the background if she was in fact there. That area of the Bronx was somewhat dicey, but fools rush in, if with some trepidation. I wonder if the building is still standing?**

This was in the summer of 1970 – it was hot and Slim had his shirt off and a fan running at our first meeting – right after I had finished my second summer's run through the South East with Bruce Bastin. Slim was very amenable to talking about his musical career, and was still capable of playing and singing with authority (although I was not to know that until later in that autumn).

Unfortunately, I did not take the time to speak with Ann, a glaring error on my part. One of my trips there included the UK jazz and blues authority and photographer Valerie Wilmer, who was visiting me. Val wrote about me and Trix Records and then about Slim (as well as, separately, Little Sam Davis) for the UK music weekly *Melody Maker*.

After a different visit to the South Bronx, I talked with Slim on the phone a day or two later. He told me about the little neighbour boy who came up to him after I had left, saying excitedly, "Uncle Bunn, Uncle Bunn...I just saw Jesus comin' out of yo' 'partment!"

Not the last time in my life I've passed for Jewish, but that's the only time I've been taken for a messiah – in those days I looked just like the pictures from his Bible classes, though. White guy with long hair and beard – you just cannot make that sort of thing up! After our initial meeting, I spoke with Tarheel Slim on the phone a few times, visited a few more and arranged to pick

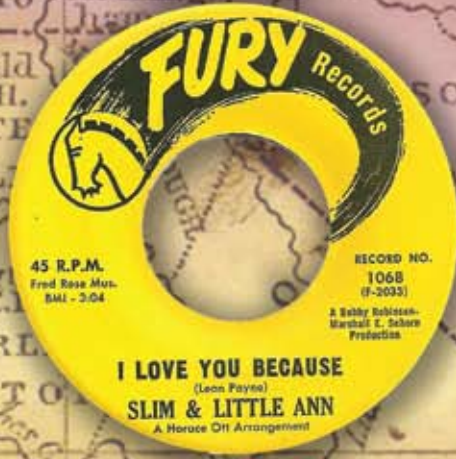


Tarheel Slim, New York City, 1973. Photo: Val Wilmer. Not to be reproduced without permission.



# TARHEEL SLIM CLASSICS

BY VICTOR PEARLIN







Tarheel Slim and Peter Lowry, New York City, 1973. Photo: Val Wilmer. Not to be reproduced without permission.

him up one afternoon to bring him to my parents' place in New Jersey to record. We had a finished basement by then, used as a playroom by my younger sisters – it was pretty good sound-wise, too.

I picked him up in the Bronx and off we drove to Montclair. Slim met my mother, who was favourably taken by him, much to my great relief. He recorded four tunes that day in late November and demonstrated his continuing ability and an interest in doing older-styled material. It was also an opportunity for my youngest sister to exercise her nascent photographic muscles, something that she also did later that year.

We went South to see both Eddie Kirkland, and Baby Tate after Christmas carrying a borrowed National from my former elementary school classmate, the now late Eric (Carl) Blackstead.

I met up with Eric by chance at Atlantic Records while working on the fabled 'Blues Originals' series of albums – he was working on the Woodstock Festival albums. Eric was left-handed, so I had to re-string it first. This was before I had obtained a National of my own!

There were two more sessions at my parents' home in January and April of 1971, producing a total of thirteen good sides. This was turning



Tarheel Slim and Little Ann. Promotional photo, courtesy Billy Vera.

into an interesting thing to do! One more solo session was done in Brooklyn early in 1972 at the house of a former student of mine, Joan Kolkow who was interested in what I was doing and whose parents were to be away for the weekend.

I trucked on down with my equipment, and also brought along Dan DelSanto and his first wife, Christine.

Tarheel Slim made his way by car and he put down four songs, one with Dan as second guitar ('Superstitious'). That was the last solo session *per se* that Slim did for me. There were to be more involved recordings a few years later at my new house in Ulster County, New York that filled out my holdings on Slim so that a fine album was possible

During those years, I also worked for Atlantic Records without getting paid – as one does in such circumstances!. But, I did get a personal letter of promise typed and signed by Ahmet Ertegun indicating that I could record Tarheel Slim and a band in one of their small studios gratis.

Ahmet remembered positively that Slim and Ann had recorded for Atco back in the day and was supportive of my efforts. I thought that a good exchange.

Slim was one of many recorded by me at the famous 1973 blues festival at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, both solo and with a rhythm section. He went over very well. It was his first time back in 'South America' since he left North Carolina with The Selah Jubilee Singers in the 1940s – he stayed with an old girl friend from his past ("the first cherry I ever had"). It was not until 1974 that we got together at my home studio in Cottekill, New York. Slim recorded a few solo pieces and also overdubbed himself playing piano, harmonica, and electric guitar over his acoustic guitar and vocal on some others. A few days later he returned, having been told by me that Big Chief Ellis was there. Chief had come to Peg Leg Bates' Country Club with his wife, Moot, on a church trip to the resort.

It rained the whole weekend and Slim became bored. Chief came over on the Saturday and recorded by himself. I called Slim to tell him of this and he volunteered to come up the next day on the bus to see and play with Chief.

They did and it was good! Each led a couple of numbers while backing the other. It had been many years since they had seen and played together, but they slotted in like it had been no time at all since their Apollo Records dates.

Tarheel Slim later came up to my place to rehearse with some musicians I knew in order to play a couple of local gigs. He was interested in getting back into music on some level or another. Driving a school bus was not so fulfilling spiritually! As a sign of the times, each musician had a cassette player and they each recorded the rehearsal to practice with and be ready with the repertoire the following weekend!

One other high point for Slim was the Philadelphia Folk Festival of 1974, I got him, Chief, and Peg Leg Sam onto the billing; they ended up playing together as a trio rather than three solo sets in the afternoon after Leon Redbone overran his set time.

And there was not much time for a scheduled panel discussion afterwards that included Edith Wilson and I. But it was good, and I trust that the festival folks still have a tape of that set as proof of what turned out to be a nice little band. He had the goods.

Sadly, Slim died in April of 1977. Throat cancer was the verdict, the bounty of cigarettes. He had the usual treatments for it, but things were too far gone to turn it around by the time he was diagnosed. I last saw him at a small folk festival in northern New Jersey that Anton Mikofsky had gotten him into. After his treatments his voice was understandably weak, but his playing strong.

I had earlier loaned him my small boom-box and a cassette of Aretha Franklin's gospel church recordings on Atlantic (among others he chose from my collection). While I managed to speak with him from time to time after that, I wasn't all that hopeful and I could not make myself go see him. And it was a phone call from Anton early one morning telling me "Tarheel passed that evening".

I did not take it well, as my company that day would attest to if asked. I hate losing friends, for they are few on the ground, in spite of today's digital lessening of the value of that word. I attended the funeral, but I was angry, deservedly so, I think. I still miss my friend. Seven years was nice, but it was still too short a time.