

# TEXAS STREET BLUES

## Discovering The Lost Tracks Of Country Jim Bledsoe

### By John M. Shaw



Country Jim Bledsoe, Imperial Records promotional photograph. From the B&R Archive.

**C**ountry Jim Bledsoe, aka 'Hot Rod Happy', has largely been a mystery to blues researchers and musicologists, a fact that is fairly strange given the relatively late date of his recordings (1949 through to 1952) and the fairly large number of tracks he recorded.

Only recently, thanks to the stellar work by blues researcher Gene Tomko, can we state that Jim Bledsoe was born on 28th May, 1930 in DeSoto Parish, Louisiana, near Mansfield, and that he died on 15th October, 1988 in Houston, Texas, where he had moved at some point after his last recording session in Shreveport, presumably in March or April of 1952.

I first became aware of Bledsoe in 2000 while doing research toward a term paper about the history of black music and the recording industry in Shreveport, Louisiana for a class I was taking with Dr. David Evans, the eminent folklorist.

Dr. Evans graciously provided me with a cassette tape that contained all released material by Country Jim, namely the two Pacemaker sides from 1949, his Imperial releases from January and April 1950 and Specialty tracks originally released on LP in 1972 on the 'Dark Muddy Bottom Blues' vinyl album, 'Country Blues' from 1974 and on CD on 'Bloodstains On The Wall', issued in the U.S.A. on Specialty (owned by Fantasy) and Ace Records in the U.K. in 1994. Fantasy Records had purchased Specialty Records in 1990.

I was intrigued by other information in Mike Leadbitter and Neil Slaven's 'Blues Discography 1943-1970' (1987 edition). Most all of Bledsoe's recordings were placed together into one list recorded in Shreveport, Louisiana and dated '1951/1952'.

A note said that one of the sessions was made on 12th March 1952, but with no indications of which tracks. More interesting were fifteen song titles listed that had never been issued in any form.

Three of them, by their titles, seemed to be gospel recordings, and of the other twelve, several had titles which referenced well-known locations in Shreveport, including 'Hollywood Blues', 'Travis Street Boogie' and 'Texas Street Blues'.

I wondered why so much material had remained unissued. I suspected that the tapes had either been lost or intentionally erased. The original discography editors may have been working from matrix logs or session files.

Even so, I made an effort to clarify some of the many questions and confusions about these sessions, particularly 12th March 1952, which apparently took place at KWKH studios after hours. Around 2003, I had contacted Billy Vera, and a few years later, Barry Hansen, both of whom had compiled Specialty reissue albums and CDs and were familiar with the Fantasy vaults.

However my primary concern was attempting to date the recordings and to identify the mysterious 'Pine Bluff Pete', who had recorded at the 13th March session – in that regard I was disappointed on both fronts. I don't recall if I asked either Billy or Barry about the unissued Country Jim Bledsoe tracks.

In 2008, as parts of my original term paper and interviews I conducted with Shreveport soul singers Eddie Giles and Reuben Bell, for the late lamented U.K. soul magazine, 'Voices From The Shadows', were incorporated by Kip Lornell and Tracey W. Laird into a book called 'Shreveport Sounds in Black and White'.

Over time, I moved on to other research projects, although I retained all my interviews and photocopied articles about Shreveport music.

Only in 2020, when it became necessary for me to choose a doctoral dissertation topic did Dr. Evans suggest that I return to the Shreveport music research I had begun twenty years before. One of the first things I did was to email Concord Records, which had acquired Fantasy Records and then later was acquired in turn by Universal, regarding the missing Country Jim Bledsoe tracks.

Dr. Evans had warned me that for-profit record labels were generally uncooperative with research and not to expect a response; he was right. But in early 2022, I decided to try again; this time instead of reaching out directly to Concord Records who now owned Specialty, I placed an inquiry on the Real Blues Forum group on Facebook, where I am a member. There is a collective wisdom amongst blues scholars, and there is strength in numbers. Perhaps someone had in fact heard the tracks and knew about them. It did not turn out to be as simple as that, but an administrator of the group had a friend that worked for Concord. She was willing to relay my request to her friend, who, amazingly responded back cordially and stated the name of someone who might know if the tracks actually were in the vault and could be accessed. Within a few days, I heard from the administrator in question that incredibly her friend felt he had found the 'lost' tracks of Country Jim Bledsoe, and would share them with me by email in a form where I could stream them but not keep them, as they are the property of Concord Records. When I was able to access the files and listen to them, they corresponded exactly with the fifteen unissued tracks in the 'Blues Discography', except that there were other stray tracks that did not appear in the book. Against all odds, these never-released recordings of an obscure country bluesman from Louisiana were not only still in the vaults, but at some point had been transferred to a digital audio tape (DAT), probably in 1994 when tracks were being considered for inclusion on 'Bloodstains On The Wall'. There is now some indication that Concord may be considering at least a download digital release of this material.

I am amazed at such a positive outcome of what I had imagined an impossible task. I suppose the moral is to never give up and to run down every lead.

#### THE LOST COUNTRY JIM BLEDSOE SPECIALTY TRACKS

Mean Little Girl  
 Jimmie's Jump  
 Lonesome Today  
 Travis Street Boogie  
 Hollywood Blues  
 Texas Street Blues  
 Going Away Baby  
 Gonna Leave Baby Take 1  
 Gonna Leave Baby Take 2  
 Last Winter Blues  
 Come Back Baby  
 Run Around  
 Jesus Said I'll Go  
 It's So Lonesome  
 Undertaker  
 I'll Be Waitin' Up There  
 Blues (sic)  
 What More Can I Do

#### COUNTRY JIM SPECIALTY TRACKS RELEASED ON ALBUM AND CD.

Dial 1110 Blues	SPS2149,
Don't Want Me Blues	SPS2149
Stormin' And Rainin'	Specialty CD 7061
Hollywood Boogie	SPS 2149,
One Thing My Baby Likes	Specialty CD 7061

SPS2149 is 'Dark Muddy Bottom Blues'  
 Specialty CD 7061 is 'Bloodstains On The Wall'

All recorded in Shreveport, Louisiana, 1951/1952 most likely at the studios of KWKH Radio.

**Ed's note: Thanks to John Shaw for his persistence and also thanks to Mary Katherine Aldin for her help. Let us hope that Concord see their way to reissuing these historic recordings in their entirety soon.**