

“WHO MAY YOUR REGULAR BE?”

Tony Burke and Norman Darwen talk to Honeyboy Edwards



Honeyboy Edwards, courtesy of Indigo Records.

This hitherto unpublished interview with Honeyboy Edwards was conducted in Honeyboy's hotel room by Norman and Tony at the Burnley Blues Festival way back in 1992. Honeyboy was on good form and was keen to talk about his life in the 1930s and 1940s and his recording opportunities during that period and the 1950s.

Honeyboy, can we go back to your very early days? When did you meet Charlie Patton?

I knew Charlie Patton when he was around, but when I first knew Charlie Patton was around '32. I was seventeen and he was around Merigold then, around Dockery's, around Drew and Cleveland. That's where he'd hang out, and Rosedale, that was his hang-out then, and '33 Charlie moved over to Holly Ridge, over there where Sherman, his uncle, was, and we was living at Itta Bena then in 1933, me and my father on a plantation there. I had an uncle at Shaw where I was born and raised at. In '34 I worked for a doctor show, a medical show, and that's when

Charlie Patton died, in '34.

I was going over to Shaw in '34, I was walking about thirty miles, I'd catch a ride, and walk, and I went down the Southern Railroad, I went to Holly Ridge, and I stopped at Holly Ridge that day, the same week Charlie died, and I stopped at the grocery store, a little grocery store beside the road there, I had a few quarters in my pocket and I bought me some boloney and pop or something, I had my guitar on my shoulder, I met some boy sitting on the porch, he said, "Did you know Charlie Patton?"

I said, "Yeah, I know Charlie" he said, "he died last week". I said, "Oh, sure enough?" He said, "See that fresh grave down beside the railroad down there?"

I said, "Yeah", he said, "That's Charlie's grave there". It had some old gum board, blacked-up hardboard, and just threw a big cross on top of the grave, it had a little old wreaths and a cross, so I went down and looked at it, and he said, "Sherman's still across the field, which was his uncle. Sherman stayed over from the store about three-quarters of a mile from the store across the field - he was the big whiskey maker, Sherman made a lot of whiskey, and I went over

Sherman's house, and he said, "Yes, we lose Charlie last week". Bertha was there then, she stayed over there and worked with Sherman.

So I played for Sherman there about a couple of weeks, I stayed around Sherman 'bout a couple of weeks and his wife, his wife named Ada, and I played for Sherman then I left and went back over to Shaw. I didn't see Sherman no more for about a year or two and then when I saw Sherman again, Sherman had moved over to Shaw where I was raised at, and I started to playing for Sherman again, so I knowed the people around. I knowed Charlie's brother, Charlie had a brother named Ed Patton, big, chunky, he was stout - Charlie was small - but Ed weighed about pretty close to two hundred, Ed weighed about 170, 180 pounds. He was born kind of mixed with mulatto Indian people, light people. Ed was a big gambler and he didn't have a half bad touch on him. Ed Patton, I knowed him too. Yeah, he was light but he was heavy, big face, kind of heavy voice. He was a hustler. He was a gambler, played coon-can, shot dice, a hell-raiser too.

Did Charlie teach you anything?

I learned a few things from Charlie, when I met him I learned a few strokes, that was around in '33, me and Joe Williams used to go by Merigold and listen at him. Charlie didn't play no whole lot in Natural, he played mostly in Vastapol and Spanish a whole lot. 'Course he could play in Natural just like Joe Williams, now Joe Williams could play guitar in Natural but the man just wouldn't play in Natural because he liked that old Crossed key, that singing key, but he could play in that key, but Joe could play in Natural too. I learned a whole lot from Joe Williams, he used the capo all the time, I never did like the capo, but I played with him so much I used the capo. Some of them numbers I made, I made them with the capo, like 'Build Myself A Cave', I used a capo, but I got away from that capo stuff. When you playing, you got to work with 'most anybody to make money with you in the blues, any blues band, sometimes you work with them, if you want to make some money, you try to work with them, so when I got like that, I had to get in Natural key - see then you can operate any way you want, you can play key of C, you can play in G, F, B-Flat, play any way you want to play - but when you playing with the capo in Vastapol and Spanish, you only got one thing, only change in your tuning is your capo, see.

When you saw Charlie Patton playing, did he play by himself or did he have other people with him?

Charlie Patton hardly ever played with anybody, he mostly played by himself. I never saw him with anybody, he only played to the country dances, Stovall's Plantation. Some guy played a fiddle with him once or twice, that I heard of, I forget his name. Simms? Son Simms, I remember him, he used to play with Charlie some but Charlie played mostly by himself, but he did play with a fiddle player some.

Did you ever meet with Louise Johnson?

Louise Johnson? I've heard of her but I never met her too much. I met Son House and Willie Brown.



I used to like to see Willie Brown play, Willie Brown had a nice style, but when him and Son House played together, they played real stuff together, but I really liked Willie Brown's playing. Willie Brown had some good chords in blues, man, good chords in key of A. That's the way I see it, he had more chords than Son House but he played a rough guitar, a rough, right down guitar, but he wasn't a helluva lonesome blues player like Willie Brown, Willie Brown played the sad blues.

Joe Williams had that nine-string guitar...

Yeah, he made that thing himself, he messed it some, put 'em all across the head of the guitar and all. I first met Joe in 1932, and I left with him in '32. I met Joe Williams in '32. My father was living on the river on Tula Plantation right on the Tallahachie Road, and Joe Williams come out there that Saturday about twelve or one o'clock from Greenwood, about three miles from Greenwood, and a woman used to give country dances they called Black Rosie. Joe Williams went over there and she hired him for that Saturday night. Joe had just come from Chicago, from recording or something back then, I think, some of his first recordings. He had a little old Gibson guitar, pearl inlay and all them down the neck, little Gibson, he had a big red handkerchief round the neck like them old country boys, cowboys, and he was playing that Saturday night, I was seventeen, I walked in there, I looked at him - 'course, I was trying to play too - he said, "What you looking at?" I said, "Only having a look" I had never heard a man playing the blues like Joe Williams then, he made a lot of chords in Spanish - it's a lot you can get out of Spanish if you know how.

Just like Robert Johnson, there's a lot of things you can get out of Vastapol and Spanish, you can make some of the same chords in Natural, you make some of the same chords but in different spots, and you have to learn them spots to go to, because it's hard playing.

So I got up there and started playing, Joe Williams said, "Can you play?" I said "A little bit", because I watched him so closely, I said "I play a little" - "Son, take my guitar, play a little". I was shy, because he was playing so much guitar that I didn't want to pick it up.

I started to fretting around, he said, "You're all right, I can learn you". I learned with that man all night 'til daylight come, daylight come, the girl paid him off, he left, he came over to my house about a mile or something like that, he made friends with my father and my sister and everything, played music for them. This was wintertime - and he asked my father, my father named Henry Edwards, he said, "Mr. Henry, can Honey go with me? I'm gonna learn him how to play". My father said, "I don't care, it's wintertime so Honey can't do nothing now on the farm. OK, he can go if he want to". So I left with Joe Williams, I got my brother-in-law a little guitar, the neck was broken on it and everything, some of the fret-board broke off it, so Joe Williams was playing in Spanish, with the capo on it real high, and he'd put me in Natural. When I met him he had all them strings on his guitar, see, when Joe left Macon, Crawford, I guess out there in

the country he was trying to think up something different from somebody else.

You know he always want to be different. So he invented the nine-string guitar and that junk, he bored holes in the top of the neck and put them all in there, have 'em close together, he had the little E and the B right together, and I used to try to play like that too. The only thing I hate about the nine-string guitar, you can't bend 'em, but he didn't bend too much, he just played straight, but I just like to bend sometimes. So that's why I quit playing the nine-string and went back to the six, where I can bend it.

Did you know Muddy Waters in Mississippi?

I first met Muddy in 1939. Joe Williams taken me to Rolling Fork to his house and when we got there that Friday evening. Muddy lived in the country, he was a farmer, Muddy just had married then, he was a country boy, he was a trapper, like traps in the woods for possums, coons, stuff like that. When we got there Muddy was out in the woods picking up his traps. I knew Howling Wolf, back then too.

See, Howling Wolf come over there 'round where this boy Bukka White, he come out around Aberdeen, pretty close to Tupelo, that's where Howling Wolf come from, Aberdeen, around West Point. He used to hang around Aberdeen and West Point. When I first knowed Wolf, in 1932, he got different names, they used to call him Buford, Bigfoot, he named his-self Howling Wolf, but his name is John D. Burnett. He had three or four different names, Chester Burnett, that's why they called him John D., Bigfoot, but his name is Chester Burnett, but he had two or three different names.

What kind of stuff did Wolf play then?

Well, Howling Wolf never was a guitar player, I'll just tell you how it was, the only thing that carried him was that big voice, and strong. He never was a guitar player, he recorded a couple of numbers with the guitar, two or three numbers, and he found out that he couldn't play the guitar so he picked up the harmonica. He found out that he couldn't master it like he wanted, he never was a guitar player because his fingers was too big, Howling Wolf's fingers was about that big (indicates).

He took his name from someone else - Funny Papa Smith. He wanted to have a big name at the time, so he named himself the Second Howling Wolf because he had that big growling voice, and he named himself the Howling Wolf. I knowed him, he never was a guitar player like I said but he could play enough to correspond to his singing what he was doing, but he never could play a lot of chords, they wasn't strong. And then he found out that he wasn't going to make that so he went on and picked up that harmonica and that's what he made a hit with, with that harp, because he had a different style with the harp from what the harp players had.

Can you tell us how your 1942 Library Of Congress



Big Joe Williams and his nine string contraption. Photo: B&R Archives

session came about?

Well, in 1942, that Saturday night I played in Jonestown, Mississippi. I was living with a woman out in the country, I was from Coahoma, Mississippi, that's 14 miles out from Clarksdale, I was living out there with her, and the woman I was living with, I was twenty-seven years old, she had a son was



Funny Papa Smith, the Original Howling Wolf. Courtesy of Yazoo Records.



Henry 'Son' Simms, left, with Muddy Waters, Clarksdale, Mississippi, 1942. Photo: John W. Work III Field Collection.



Left to right, Muddy Waters, Jerome Green, Otis Spann, Henry Strong, (harmonica - centre), Elgin Evans and Jimmy Rogers, circa 1953 or 1954, courtesy of the Bill Greensmith Collection.

the same age.

She had Jack when she was about twelve years old, so me and Jack used to run together but I'd be with his mother. At the time his mother was about thirty-eight years old then and I was living with her then, nice looking woman, tall, smooth skin, had long hair and a dimple in her jaw, big eyes, she was a good-looking black woman. So I lived with her three years, from '42 until '45. Well, I left Rosedale, Mississippi in '44, the last of '44 in the Winter, after Christmas and I didn't go back to her because I got broke.

I'd been over there, got in a big Georgia Skin game over there - got broke in a Skin Game, so I was upset, so I just walked away, and I worked with Popcorn, guitar player Jesse Robertson, he and I used to play together, I was playing before he was playing, he had learned a few years after, he was playing 'round. So he was coming over to see me that day and I called the Grocery Store and said, "I'm heading out, I'm going to Greenwood".

That was in '44, and me and him got together in Greenwood and played 'round in Greenwood at house parties and places, a lot of soldiers was over in Grenada, Mississippi, Camp McCann, the boys in the Army, they'd come over to Greenwood to see them womens in the whorehouse over there, so me and Popcorn played in the whorehouse over there.

Them soldiers'd give us pretty good tips, they'd come over to see the whores, they'd throw us dollars down and nickels and quarters, and we'd go from Greenwood back over there to the Camp too. We done that in '44, then I left, I come to Helena in '45, me and Popcorn broke up and I come to Helena in '45, and in '45 I was in Helena, Arkansas with Sonny Boy and them a while, KFFA station.

Did you broadcast over there?

Yeah, I played there a while too, me and Little Walter played there in '46. Walter had an amplifier but when I first met him, he didn't have nothing. We didn't have an amplifier, I had a National guitar, I think, a steel, and Little Walter, me and him both were raggedy, and I met him, he come to Helena once or twice, he was only about eighteen years old then, Little Walter was real young, he was a good harp-blower just like he was when he come to Chicago and he played with Muddy, he played just as good then.

He played almost like a Cajun sound blues, see, he's from Louisiana, he played the Cajun sound, that's why he had a different sound with the harmonica than most of the other harmonica players. See, he played the harmonica on the style of the Cajun accordion, but he was good to blow because he had a sound that nobody had. The harp players, we had a few in Chicago that could play pretty close to him, one boy, Willie

Anderson died about a year ago, he was pretty close to Little Walter.

Now Willie Anderson used to be his flunkey, he used to carry amplifiers around for him, everywhere he'd go, Willie Anderson was right behind, when Walter was playing harp, he'd pick up another one and try and play, so Willie Anderson was pretty close to Walter; he died a couple of years ago, he had cancer.

I knew him well, I knowed him real well, all of 'em. Another boy was good too, Good Rockin' Charles, he played in a style pretty close to him - Cotton got his own style, James Cotton used to play in old Sonny Boy's style,

Big Foot Sonny Boy, used to, but he changed over after a while, after he went and got a band, he sort of changed over.

Did you ever run into Henry Strong?

Yeah, Henry used to play harp with Muddy Waters, Little Henry. He died, Little old long-haired Henry, I knowed him. He was good, he had long hair, he died a long time ago, in a fight or something like that. He was just like Forrest City Joe, he didn't live too long, Forrest City Joe was the same way. I knowed most of them,



most all the blues players come from Arkansas, Mississippi, down through there, Louisiana, and at the time it was tough and bad. We had to go everywhere to make a living, we would run up on each other somewhere, that's why we know each other so much - Black Frank Harker, nobody know too much about him, but he was a pretty good harp player, Black Frank Harker, he was from around Arkansas.

How did you come to record for Sam Phillips at Sun Records?

Sun Records? I cut 'Sweet Home Chicago', but what happened, see, Sam Phillips released that number but he didn't put my name on, he put somebody else's name on it. I know my playing, I know my singing, I know everything I do in my song when I'm playing and I know that's my number. He recorded me and when he issued that number he put somebody else's name on there. Some company bought that from Sam Phillips and they released the song, and I've been trying to get up to see what happened to that, because they're

not supposed to do things like that without letting me know something about it.

Like Chris Strachwitz, he had that 'Build Myself A Cave' on Blues Classics, I recorded that about 1951, I recorded it in Houston, Texas for ARC Records. I recorded that for Miss Annie (Lola) McCullom, and she sold the masters to Chris Strachwitz, and he had the masters. He didn't find me 'til about 'long in the seventies in fact when he found me, then he sent me royalties. He just started from when he found me sending me royalties, but it was selling twelve or fifteen years before he found me. It's a lot of things people do to get messed around and don't get the money.

NB: Honeyboy cut 'Sweet Home Chicago' for Sun around 1952 in Memphis. The number was originally unissued, but was eventually reissued by Charly on Volume 11 of its Sun reissue 'Catalyst' series. The track was credited to pianist Albert 'Joiner' Williams. A second take of the song is listed in Blues Records.

So who was it owned the ARC label?

It was a black woman, she owned that label, Miss Annie (Lola) McCullom, she had Lightnin' Hopkins, Amos Milburn. She put Lightnin' together with Aladdin Records, and she named Sam Hopkins 'Lightnin' and she named Thunder, Thunder Smith, his name was Wilson Smith. Wilson recorded with me, 'Who May Your Lover Be?' and a couple of others.

You say that 'Build Myself A Cave' is your song, but others recorded it, didn't they?

I done it first. I learned that number 'round about '44, '45, we used to play that number around Helena, but nobody never recorded it. Me, Sonny Boy, and all, we used to play over KFFA station that 'Build Myself A Cave', that was right in the middle of the war-time. We used to play "I'm gonna build myself a cave and move right down in the ground, when I go into the Army, won't be no more Japs around". So I rushed on over to Texas and I recorded it. I call myself as I got in there and recorded it first, which I did, I remember I recorded for Miss McCullom. I done some sessions which have never been released, I don't think. This was for Bill Quinn, Gold Medal (Star). That was '51.

NB: According to Blues Unlimited 81, the record Honeyboy refers to was issued as by Mr. Honey. ARC Records, was Artists Record Company and the Mr. Honey disc was their only release and was sold only locally in Houston. The label shot of the disc appeared in BU 81 and is courtesy of Mike Rowe. Chris Bentley thinks that only 3 copies of the disc are known to exist.

Were those sides for the Gold Star label?

Yeah, I recorded in Houston, in his studio. I went there that Saturday and I heard talk about Mr. Quinn and me and my wife went there on the bus, I left Shreveport and went over there. I think I had about eight or nine cents in my pocket but I got there. Boy, musicians had a hard time then! We went out to Mr. Quinn's on a Saturday, I called him up, he told me, "Come on out", and I went in the studio on a Saturday and recorded for him - he gave me about sixty, seventy dollars, I recorded for him.

How many songs did you do?

Oh, about three or four, something like that. In Houston, I started playing in little clubs around town, making a little money, different things like that. I wouldn't stay nowhere long, and after I come back to Houston, that's when I recorded for Miss McCullom. Then I recorded for Miss McCullom after I come back to Houston. I drove in, this time I was driving, and I drove in Saturday night, we were late and I stopped in the Fifth Ward, over in the Fifth Ward in Houston and I met some people at a tavern there, I used to be with my wife and I was looking for a room, they said, "Well, we got a room". I had started playing in the club then,



Labels shots courtesy of Chris Bentley

"We got a place, we'll give y'all a place to stay".

So me and my wife went round there and stayed with them, but 'round the corner on Fifth Avenue was a big club, a tavern, it opened up there on a Sunday at twelve o'clock, so I taken a bath and changed my clothes and went over there, the guy told me, "Hey, I hear you play, I've heard about you, I want to hear you play something". So I went with the band and started to playing and people just crowded in there.

He said, "Man, you good, I like to hear you play. I'm gonna call Miss McCullom - I know she be wanting to see you". His name was Clint and he run the tavern, and I played there, after a while Miss McCullom come in, a big yellow woman, had a big ball behind her head and a big Cadillac. She said, "Yeah, you play good, I want to hook you up with Thunder Smith", so we rehearsed a while, a couple of days running and everything, and she recorded me. She made some dubs and she booked me in several places, she pressed some dubs up and I'd ride a couple of hundred miles, different little towns around, and she'd go to the clubs - I didn't have nothing out on wax then - and she'd ask the people, "You into booking bands?"; "Yes". "She said, "I'd like to book this man here, and I want to let you hear some of his stuff", so she'd just open the Seeburgs up and put in one of my dubs; "Oh, that's him? Yeah, we want him!". She done a lot of booking like that, and sometimes

she'd say, "Well, it takes a couple of hundred dollars in cash, give me a hundred and fifty now to get him and the band". So when they did pay that money down, that's the money for our expenses on the road, we were driving in a Cadillac, so when we came and do the show, then we'd get the rest of the money, the door money - so I done pretty good down through there.

So what year did you actually go to Sam Phillips?

Sam Phillips, Sun, that was in 1952, it was in October in '52 because I went over there, I was in Hughes Arkansas then about 45 miles out of Memphis, so I went over there. I had this boy called Blue, a harmonica player with me, him and his brother played together, Jesse, they were pretty good, they played all 'round Hughes, Arkansas, around there. I done this number by myself, Blue didn't play the harp on that, that's when I done that 'Sweet Home Chicago' for Sam Phillips. Boyd Gilmore also recorded that day.

Can you tell us something about Boyd Gilmore...

I used to stay with Boyd Gilmore in Drew, Mississippi, we stayed together, that was in '51. I stayed with Boyd Gilmore in '51, because me and Boyd Gilmore were playing together in '51, and a harmonica player called Dan, we played together in '51. That's where Kansas City Red come, Drew too. We played around Drew, and one night we was supposed to play at Isola, Mississippi, that's up on the Yellow Dog, Isola, Mississippi, and this boy Ike Turner was supposed to play up there too, and Ike messed the man up.

Ike didn't go, and the man called me and Boyd Gilmore to come, so Ike went over to Marks, Mississippi, over there at the Daly Wells place, a big place, and Ike got over at the Wells, somehow Sonny Boy and them got messed up and played with Ike at the Legion, Ike come down to Isola where we was and we was there. The man said, "Well, you messed me up so I got Honeyboy and Boyd Gilmore"; Ike said, "Hell, let's play". We here, there was Ike, see, Ike's from Clarksdale too, so we played that night and we just divided the little money up with Ike and Boyd, Ike went on back to Clarksdale, we went on back to Drew. I've never saw Ike but once or twice since then, him and his old lady went to California, that's where they got to be big, out there.

Did you ever run into Jackie Brenston?

Yeah, I knowed him, Jackie Brenston he had that 'Rocket 88'. And I also knowed Rosco Gordon, Joe Hill Louis, the one man band, he stayed up in Tennessee up around Cartersville or somewhere up there. Doctor Ross? No, I never did know him because we had different days when we went in

there, but I know of him. Rosco recorded there, but different days too.

Did Sam Phillips contact you, or did you go up there to try and get a record?

Well, I went there and he had a contract, he had called me and talked to me about it, and I went over and recorded for him because I was green on things. I was so anxious to do something, I'd done so much running around and had my times, some of the boys I was playing with was making pretty good ahead doing records, like Elmore James, me and him used to play together too. We used to play together at Doddville, Mississippi, that's down below Ruleville and Drew. Drew was first, and then Ruleville, and then Doddville, and Elmore James played down at Doddville, I used to play with Elmore James at Doddville, that's on 49 Highway, and we played for a guy called Grady Sharker, he's a big whiskey maker there. We played for Grady Sharker and Elmore was driving a tractor on the Peetie Plantation and when I come over there, me and Elmore hooked up and started playing together, but Elmore was staying out there then, that's before he come to Chicago.

Do you remember when this was?

It was around about '49, I believe, we played together out there. I get the years pretty close. So anyway, Elmore left and he recorded and he got to be pretty popular, he made that 'Dust My Broom', for Trumpet, yeah.



Honeyboy Edwards, Canada 1998. Photo: Paul Lanno.



Label shots from B&R Archives



Honeyboy Edwards, Canada 1998. Photo: Paul Lanno.

Did you ever get a chance to meet Mrs McMurray?

One time I was supposed to record for her, and I was supposed to record for H. C. Spier too. When I missed out on H.C. Spier, he had called me and me and Big Walter Horton went down, and Sonny Boy, we all met up together down there, he was intending to get us in the studio in Camden, New Jersey, and we got there, it was so close to holidays, Christmas, and old man H.C., he couldn't get us in there, it was about five days to Christmas when he got us there and we didn't get the chance to go in the studio because the holiday was coming right up, but we went in to Jackson to his furniture store, and we had a place to stay, it was so close that he didn't get a chance to record us.

Willie Love? He was just like most of the musicians, he dranked himself to death. He'd drink and get so drunk, he couldn't hardly play the piano, just slobbering all over the piano. Just dranked himself to death. This was in the fifties, about '50, '51, something like that.

Which company was H.C. Speir going to record you for?

I don't know right now, but I know he was sending us to Camden, New Jersey, that's where he was sending us to, so I didn't get chance to record, so me and Big Walter left and we went over to Monroe, Louisiana, we went through Vicksburg, Mississippi, then we went to Monroe and played in Monroe all that winter there. This was around '38, I believe.

Did you ever come across a guy around that time called Lonnie Holmes?

Yeah, I knowed Lonnie Holmes, he's out of Lexington, Mississippi. I didn't meet him at that time but I've met him since then, Lonnie Holmes. He played nice blues, he was a pretty good guitar player.

Mrs McMurray didn't release his recordings because she caught him recording for the Bihari brothers...

Yeah, I know the Biharis. I was supposed to record for Les Bihari too. Les come to Memphis, 'round Hollywood out there on Jackson Avenue, and he had a little office out there, and I found out that he was out there and he talked to me, we talked, so I went out there to Bihari and he was trying to get straightened out then, that was around about '50, I think.

I went out there and played at the office and everything, we talked and he was supposed to record me, but he had never got his equipment stuff in there like he wanted, and that's why I said I used to move so fast and he wasn't moving fast enough for me, so I pulled out. Lester Bihari was a nice feller, he gave me a couple of nice suits and he was going to record me, but he had never got the equipment all in the studio, so I left before he got set up, but I know him.

Just like Elvis Presley, I knowed him before, he made a record for Sam Phillips too. See, before he got to do anything, he was staying out in Hollywood out there, driving a construction truck, see, I knowed him before he made a quarter, he come from Tupelo, his family was from Tupelo, Mississippi, and I knowed him when he was working construction work. Peoples think I be lying, but I know when he used to drive a construction truck out there in Hollywood, before he made a quarter.

How did you sign up with Chess?

I was driving through, I had been to Dallas, Texas, me and my wife, and I was playing in Dallas down on Deep Ellum, and I left Dallas and I come to Shreveport. This Saturday night I was playing at Shreveport in the black neighbourhood, in the Bottom Deep Club I was playing at. I raised hell out there, peoples all ganging there and I was playing, they were buying me whiskey and everything. This boy come in there and said, "Man, what's your name?", and I told him, he said, "Man, you good". He was Jewel's stock boy, Jewel records, he was his stock boy, he said, "Man, you need to see my boss. Come down Monday morning and talk to my boss down on Texas Avenue". So I went down there Monday morning, talked to him, and at the time Jewel wasn't having nothing but gospel, Stan, he was having gospel. He said, "Well, I'm not recording blues right now but I'm gonna send you to Chess", you know, him and Chess was cousins, Chess and Stan Lewis was first cousins, so he said, "Well, I'm gonna send you to Chicago to Chess". He put me on the bus and sent me.

I had met Muddy Waters one time, I had met him in 1939 in Rolling Fork, before he left Rolling Fork, that was when Joe Williams carried me over to his house, and when I went in the studio, Big Walter, Muddy Waters, Bobo Jenkins, and Willie Nix, they was in there, so I walked in there, Chess said, "Do you know him, Muddy?" - I only had met Muddy one time, "Oh, yeah, yeah, I know him". So when I started playing, started recording, at that time I could move that slide, and every time I dropped this slide on Muddy I'd make him jump. Jimmy Rogers, he was just like a devil, he was standing up there looking, and every time I hit that slide run down on that bass and come back, Jimmy Rogers would point

at Muddy, and Muddy'd look round, I was so close to him and I was hitting hard then, and Chess knowed it. Chess knowed that I was all right, Chess wanted me, that's why that 'Drop Down Mama' is the shortest number on that album, Chess got mad and cut it off, but he give me the title.

Over in the studio Chess and Muddy got to arguin', acting like they want to want to fight about it. Muddy said, "You know I done something like that", Chess said, "The man using the slide but he ain't playing like you, man, he can't even sing like you, the man got a different voice", and they was arguing and going on, Chess got mad and cut that number off, that's the reason that's the shortest number, 'Drop Down Mama', but I got the title to the album. Muddy didn't talk to me, when Muddy started talking to me it was about six or seven years after that we met in New York, I played at the Palladium in New York, me and Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, and this boy out of Atlanta, Georgia, Eddie Kirkland, we all played in there. I was sitting up there, Muddy was losing all his hair, they was using that big process, Muddy come and looked at me, said, "Look at this sonofabitch, he's got all his hair, I'm bald!". That's the time Muddy started talking to me, when he got older, but he always been jealous of me.

NB: Honeyboy cut 'Drop Down Mama' and three other sides for Chess in 1953. All the sides went unissued, but 'Drop Down Mama' was eventually issued on the various artists album 'Drop Down Mama' on Chess 411.

Did you know Willie Nix?

Yeah, he cut on my session, he played on my session. Willie Nix played on this session, I wanted Big Walter Horton to play on this session, when I asked them could Walter
p l a y



Label shot courtesy of Twist Turner

they said, "Yeah", but at the time Walter asked Muddy, and Muddy shook his head. He wouldn't let Walter play on this session because he figured he'd make it too good, but Walter was still going to get paid for the session. I said, "What the hell! Forget about it". Me and Bobo Jenkins and Willie Nix done the session.

It sounds like Muddy had a lot of say...

Yeah, he did, Muddy was scared of me, but I realised he had been with Chess a few years and he had made Chess some money and Chess had made him some money, he didn't want nothing in the way of him, because I would have been a stumbling block, and he didn't want that, see, he had got his thing going, he wanted to keep it going. If I had jumped in there, I'd have crossed him up.

Tony Burke and Norman Darwen interviewed Honeyboy at the Friendly Inn, Burnley April 17th, 1992.