

FRONT PANEL

ORGM-2245

SKIP JAMES

THE COMPLETE 1931 SESSIONS

SIDE A

1. Devil Got My Woman
2. If You Haven't Any Hay Get On Down The Road
3. Hard Luck Child
4. Drunken Spree
5. Little Cow And Calf Is Gonna Die Blues
6. Be Ready When He Comes
7. How Long "Buck" (Leroy Carr)
8. I'm So Glad
9. Cherry Ball Blues

SIDE B

1. Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues
2. 22-20 Blues (Robert Johnson, Skip James)
3. 4 O'Clock Blues
4. Jesus Is A Mighty Good Leader (Traditional)
5. Yola My Blues Away
6. What Am I To Do Blues
7. Special Rider Blues
8. Illinois Blues
9. Cypress Grove Blues

Performed by Skip James
 Composed by Nehemiah "Skip" James except as noted
 Recorded for Paramount in Grafton, Wisconsin, February 1931

Reissue Produced by Andrew Rossiter
 Mastered at Infrasonic Mastering by Dave Gardner with Nick Townsend
 Liner notes by Larry Jaffee
 Design and layout by Jeremy Fury
 Art by Ron Bucalo (for a full line of other hand-drawn
 Blues greats, please visit americanmusicpioneers.com)

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Fed up with not reaping the fruits of his labor in 1931, Skip James packed up his guitar, dismissing the music business as a "barrel of crabs." Coaxing him earlier that year to travel from his native Mississippi to Wisconsin, a local talent scout gave James, then 28 years old, a train ticket to record for Paramount Records.

James told biographer Stephen Calt, "All I got was forty dollars" for the twenty-six songs he remembered playing at the sessions, for which he was supposed to receive deferred royalties, which never came. Paramount released eighteen of those James tracks – assembled here on vinyl – on nine, two-sided 78-rpm records. An original in good condition can fetch tens of thousands of dollars.

James went home, and within a year gave up his music dream, following his dad's professions of preaching, distilling bootleg whiskey, and other means of survival in the Deep South. More than three decades later in 1964, three blues collectors found the 62-year-old in a Mississippi hospital suffering from cancer, and they arranged for better healthcare in Washington, DC. For the next few summers, James performed at the Newport Folk Festival to adoring audiences, and he also recorded several new albums for Vanguard Records.

In 1966, the British hard rock trio Cream recorded his "I'm So Glad" (original here as side 1, track 8) for which James collected \$6,000 to \$10,000 in royalties.

James's style is what musicologists now call "country blues," which in pre-WWII times were marketed as "race records."

In the lyrics of the first Paramount track here, "Devil Got My Woman," James recalls an infidelity tale of what-comes-around-goes-around in that he stole her from his best friend, who stole her back.

While his slow acoustic guitar picking and droll vocals rank James with the best bluesmen of the era, James's adeptness as a ragtime-influenced pianist on several cuts here is a revelation, my favorite being "How Long Buck" (Side 1, track 7). The piano tunes display a joyfulness missing from most of his repertoire. It's no wonder eight of the eighteen tracks here have "Blues" in their title.

The Skip James story encompasses redemption and rediscovery. He lived long enough to see his music celebrated the last five years of his life, which ended October 3, 1969.



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