

A decade later and Blues, Gospel and Spirituals recordings of the 1920's and 30's were all but forgotten except by a minority group of collectors and enthusiasts. Interest in the music hung on by a thread and the vast majority of recordings, along with the artists that made them, had slipped into obscurity. In 1952, sensing that a thin veneer of dust had already formed over these recordings, the American Jazz enthusiast, experimental filmmaker and musicologist; Harry Smith, produced the ground breaking Anthology of American Folk Music, a series of LP box sets in three volumes Released on Folkways, the volumes studied Ballads, Social Music and Songs in the American folk idiom. Prior to its release, early blues and Spiritual recordings had only appeared on record as contemporary music aimed at the African-American market or in compilations an aside to the interest of Jazz collectors. The Anthology of American Folk Music brought blues, spirituals and gospel mw along with vintage country music into new context. Rather than being regarded the 'Cinderella' of African-American music, the genres of music featured in the Anthology were given equal status and were being identified as fundamental parts of American folk music tradition.

Smith's series of box sets, each containing two LPs and informative 28 page booklet, had a great impact on both musicians and collectors alike including Jerry Garcia, Dave Van Ronk, John Fahey and the poet Allen Ginsberg. Seven years after its release a young student by the name of Bob Dylan attending the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis was initiated by John Pankake and other members of the University's dedicated Folk Music followers into what w referred to "brotherhood of the Anthology".

At the back of the booklet, provided with the sets, Smith discreetly rounds off the text, giving an overview of the album by writing:

*'The only logical way to produce an anthology of this kind is make use of recordings themselves. Because of the nature of the Record Industry, a given amount of (original) records a issued of any one selection and re-pressings are not made until a large re-order is received from dealers The usual amount 10,000 copies however record manufacturers have be known to re-press 5,000 copies. Some of the records in this anthology had an original pressing of only 500 copies. As it does not "pay" to re-press this type of music (produced to s only to a limited audience), many of these records are "collectors" items...ironically, in 1952 the record industry tried legally "Freeze" reissues by other companies and the record company that instigated the legal action in this state, as the federal government wouldn't put through a bill to this effect, was the only English record company that sells and distributes its own products in the United States. The irony is that English Folklorists come to this country to transcribe their music as it almost non-existent in England and in this country the English language literature culture is so pronounced. Governor Dew vetoed this bill.'*

**New York Herald Tribune April 19th 1952**

It is worth adding to this that in many cases original 78s we in fact only pressed in tens rather than hundreds as some artist's popularity waned and such records were, by default, already extremely rare by the time that they had left the pressing plant!

The piece demonstrates what was then an already engrained frustration among collectors at the major record companies of the time who were quite prepared to see their recordings condemned to the basement, perhaps for ever, yet, at the same time, would not recognise the willingness of small, independent companies to take financial risks in having such productions as 'Smith's Anthology' mastered, pressed, packaged and distributed and in doing so creating a completely new market.

During the 1950's many blues albums were released on 10" and 12" vinyl but these mainly featured contemporary artists such as Joe Turner, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, T-Bone Walker and Jimmy Rushing. Something of an oddity was the release in 1953 of the album Kings of the Blues by RCA on their "X label". Sub titled Vault Originals the album featured tracks by Jim Jackson, Furry Lewis, Frank Stokes and Ishman Bracey. Such an album, totally dedicated to pre-war blues, was certainly an unusual item at the time. But it was not a reissue album. None of the tracks, originally recorded for RCA Victor during the late 1920's, had been previously issued, even as 78's.