

It was the Jazz collectors who were leading the way in reissue activity and in doing so they occasionally spotlighted blues artists as the result of working through the old catalogues of labels which were well known for having produced both Jazz and Blues recordings during the pre-war period. 1953 saw the emergence of Riverside, a company established in New York by Bill Gruer (jr) and Orrin Keepnews. The company, mainly committed to Jazz began by reissuing the best of Jazz recordings which had originally appeared mainly on the defunct Paramount label. Among the other labels that they drew were Champion, Circle, Gennet, Hot Record Society and QRS. The result was a valuable series of LPs which were also issued in the UK on the London label. The series highlighted some early blues recordings and included Paramount recordings of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ma Rainey, Charlie Spand and others. One memorable 10" LP was the anthology Backwoods Blues which featured outstanding 'country blues' recordings by King Solomon Hill, Bobby Grant, Big Bill Broonzy and Buddy Boy Hawkins. Riverside also produced a 'Classic Jazz Masters' series of 12" LPs. Each album in this series was presented in an impressive 'gate fold' sleeve which provided the listener with notes, photographs and song lyrics. Included in the series were the outstanding Blind Blake-Blues In Chicago and Georgia Tom and Friends.

The same year saw another plea to the majors, this time from the American Jazz writer and record producer Fredrick Ramsey. Choosing the sleeve notes to a volume of Jazz reissues appearing on the Folkways labels to make his point Ramsey wrote:

*"The 33 1/3 long play microgroove record had been successfully introduced and, by early 1950, was well on it's way to universal acceptance. Yet there was no indication on the part of any major record company...that the artistically valid jazz material in its archives would be reissued. The reason given most frequently for holding back was that jazz of this sort 'wasn't commercial enough'..."*

This being the case for vintage Jazz one could only assume that it was felt that vintage Blues was hardly worthy of any consideration at all. Ramsey continues:

*"Yet because a demand existed, at least among collectors and serious students, for reissues of classic Jazz performances, several small companies had already by 1950, challenged the legality of what constituted an arbitrary withholding of material. Through research into laws concerning copyright of mechanical reproductions, they had unearthed the pertinent fact that there was 'no provision in the copyright law covering a particular interpretation or rendition of a copyrighted work'. This discovery might never have been made if record companies suppressing significant renditions had not persisted in that policy, heralded a sort of wildcat era of Jazz reissues. All these and many other complications that ensued, might have been avoided had members of the still young, still arrogant record industry turned for guidance to a comparable field, that of publishing, and sought from it a reasonable solution".*

Ramsey then goes on to suggest that if the majors felt that such recordings were commercial no hopers "that is, when placed on the same counter alongside South Pacific or 'Wonderful Town' then they could, for the sake of putting a signature on a contract, license such items "to independent companies for reproduction at a small but reasonable fee". Some of what Ramsey suggested was taken up by the larger companies with respect to Jazz recordings but these were isolated cases. If nothing else his comments maintained amount of pressure on the majors whilst at the same time acted something of a rallying call to the small independents. It would not be until 1959 that the first significant, commercially produced, 'reissue album', would appear dedicating itself entirely to vintage Blues music. The impact of The Country Blues was equally significant and as wide reaching as the American Anthology.

The book The Country Blues, written by the American researcher Sam Charters was published by Rinehart in New York. The only extensive study of Blues music to have been published prior to this was Shining Trumpets-The History Of Jazz written by American writer and broadcaster Rudi Blesh. Although this book, first published Britain in 1949, went into extraordinary detail to explain the roots