ANGOLA PRISON SPIRITUALS. A survey of the major styles in which folk Negroes sing religious songs. Among the more unusual numbers in this album are three spirituals, accompanied by guitar and a woman's voice. These are traditional songs into which the singer skillfully works his own ideas, and it is this spirit that makes the recordings so exciting. FL 101

PEGGY SEEGER SINGS AND PLAYS AMERICAN FOLKSONGS FOR BALLADS. A rich selection of ballads, lyrics, play-party songs, and dances. In the enclosed booklet Peggy Seeger discusses each tune in detail. FL 104

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COUNTRY NEGRO JAM SESSIONS: BUTCH CAGE, WILLIE B. THOMAS AND OTHERS. The high points of jam sessions in the back country of five different sessions in the back country of five different sections of Louisiana, with a rich assortment of dance and song, performed with joy and excitement. FL 108

NEW ORLEANS JAZZ: BILLIE AND DE DE PIERCE. Billie sings in the tradition of Beazie Smith, and DeDe sings Creole songs, FL 109

ANGOLA PRISONERS' BLUES. The performing of three gifted old-time country blues singers, Herman Maxey, Guitar Welch, and Robert Pete Williams, recorded in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. They express the poignancy of the prison life of the caged and outlawed man. FL 101

A SAMPLER OF LOUISIANA FOLKSONGS. Field recordings of native singers in the five principal Louisiana traditions: folk, Cajun, Negro, French, and Anglo-Saxon. The record contains a ring shout, a primitive spiritual, and the French and English, ancient ballads and old songs as well as country blues. FL 102

FOLKSONGS OF THE LOUISIANA ACADIANs, recorded in Grand Mamou, a typical hamlet in the colorful bayous of the French country. The origins of the songs range all the way from the folk entertainment of sixteenth century France to the contemporary falsettos (all night dances) in which the music is a potpourri of French, Negro, and country-and-western influences. FL 103

LOUISIANA FOLKSONGS JAMALAYA. Authentic traditions performed by Harry Ochs with guitar accompaniment. FL 104

PRISON WORKSONGS recorded at Angola, Group and solo worksongs which accompany steel driving, wood chopping, cane cutting, road repairing, shoveling, and running a stamping press. A record of Afro-American music of a type frequently discussed by jazz critics and folk music historians, sung by amateur and professional folk singers, and seldom recorded. FL 105

"Material that any folklorist would give his magnetized recorder heads to own." TIME MAGAZINE

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44 DANFORTH ROAD
SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO
Folk Hunter

The prison is tucked in a barren bend of the Mississippi, looking toward the fields of Louisiana sugar cane. Inside Angola's cyclone fences are the lifers—men serving sentences for rape and murder. Periodically a lonely man in rumpled suit and bow tie moves into the prison toolroom, while a tape recorder, a six-string guitar, a twelve-string guitar and a fiddle. Around him gather the prisioners—"Guitar" Welch, "Hogman" Maxey, Robert Pete Williams—to shout out their songs.

Wonders why they electrode a man, baby;
Lord, at the one o'clock hour at night.
The current much stronger; people turn out all the light.

Angola prison, a favorite hunting ground of Folklorist Harry Oster. A scholarly teacher of English at Louisiana State University, Oster roams the streets and backyards of his adopted state to record its rich musical patrimony—French, Cajun, Negro French, Anglo-Saxon. In four years he has spaded up material that many a folklorist would give his seasoned recorder heads to own.

A Little Priming, Massachusetts-born and Harvard-educated, 36-year-old Folklorist Oster picked up a doctor's degree in English and Folk Literature at Cornell, dabbled in radio, eventually gravitated to L.S.U., because he was fascinated by the diversity of folk music in Louisiana. He follows the folk trail in a battered '53 Mercury, tracking down leads with the persistence of a questing lepidopterist. Recently he heard of a mulatto woman named Madame Sam who lived in Algiers, across the river from New Orleans, and supposedly sang a particularly unadulterated brand of old French. Sam it turned out, was not up to her billing, but she sent Oster chasing downtown to Port Sulphur, where another ancient mulatto named Alma Bartholomew produced, on request, 60 different pre-19th century French songs.

The leads are not always so fruitful. Following one tip, Oster drove to St. Martinville, where a fabulously gifted and ancient cane was supposed to live. Oster found not one, but two old women waiting for him on the front porch of a house that had a statue of the Virgin in the front yard and an oil well in the back. Neither of the old girls could sing a note. On the other hand, Oster has found that many a performer can be coaxed to sing with a little priming. In French and Cajun settlements, he tries to build his listeners' confidence by singing a few songs himself or posing some leading question about money and drink, life or death. He gets surprising answers:

Oh, when I die,
Bury me with my head under the tap
So that when a drop of that very good wine falls
I can get some good out of it.

Another Alumnus. Angola Prison remains Oster's favorite folk source, and Robert Pete Williams, 42, his favorite singer. A liter for shooting and killing a man, Williams has, in Oster's view, the "triumphous and dignified" that characterized the famed Lead Belly. But Oster has improvised his own prisoner's blues:

Some time I feel like, baby, committin' suicide...
I got the urge if I just had anything to do with it.
I'm gone down slow, somethin' wrong with me.
I've got to make a change while I'm still young.
If I don't I won't ever get old.

Singer Williams & Folklorist Oster Recording musical patrimony.

FOLK-LYRIC in Review

"After the older generation passes, there may be no one to carry on the tradition. This would be a great loss to folk music, for these songs are full of pathos and a sort of glowing inner beauty."

"Should have a wider audience."

AMERICAN FOLKLORE QUARTERLY

"An important addition to the whole of "Cajun" material previously available... Excellent background notes."

AMERICAN FOLKLORE QUARTERLY

"Prisoner's Talking Blues"... is one of the most disturbingly autobiographical statements in recorded folk music."

Robert Shefton, NEW YORK TIMES

"Williams... reveals a devotion to the style and an originality of expression that are rare. His voice... carries words well, and generates dramatic tensions."

Frederic Ramsey, Jr., SATURDAY REVIEW

"The jazz fan will be struck by the similarity of this music and that produced by the back-to-the-land modernists. It's no accident. These are the roots of Negro music—not just jazz... An invaluable addition to any serious folk or jazz collection."

DOWNBEAT

"It reveals a vigorous singing style and excellent accompaniment on a 12-string guitar."

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FL 115

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