

The Best Of Backwoods HOBO JACK

We recorded these songs in what used to be a "Model A" garage behind my house. Which may be kismet, because Jack has collected Model A Fords for years. He grew up near Washington University in St. Louis not far from where Gaslight Square blossomed in the early 60's. Gaslight was a rehabbed antique district inspired by Greenwich Village and Basin Street. A much younger Jack became a huge fan of Traditional Jazz and Folk Music being revived in the coffee houses, pubs and saloons in Gaslight. The area was damaged by a tornado - then a tornado called Rock & Roll forced the traditional music scene elsewhere. Jack headed for the country to build his Utopian Junkyard, "As Seen On TV" and put his music on the back burner.

Yes, Jack's love for music blew in on a "Mighty Wind." But, the Folkie era, considered so quaint and naive nowadays.. was a significant part of the Peace and Civil Rights Movements. "Folk" was not trite or irrelevant just because it was mostly white liberals playing it. The gradual "infiltration" of Folk songs into TV shows like Hootenanny and The Tonight Show turned Folk into "Top Ten" Popular Music for a while in the 60's. Jack never watched TV - so, his bent for anti-establishment, peacenik philosophy made protest music authentic - at least for him.

What makes Jack musically different from other Folk performers? Maybe it's the occidental dissonance that seems to subconsciously haunt his compositions. His peculiar guitar finger-picking intricacies are overlaid by gypsyesque melody lines. "American Idol" judges might consider him "pitchy" in his attempt to achieve an atmosphere of melancholy, mystery and romance. Admittedly, there's a trace of 1930's crooning in his voice, similar to Dylan's crooning attempts. This seems to be a curiously common notion for poets attempting to sing.

Hobo Jack's music is perfect for a circle of travelers around a campfire. In fact I've heard his songs played around the fire at the Hobo Music & Poetry Festival held under the Interstate bridge in Marquette Iowa. That's where he received his official hobo name, Backwoods Jack. Buzz Potter's HoboFest was where Jack's performance of songs by the great activist, U. Utah Phillips made him an instant favorite.

Some may say that he's not a real hobo because his traveling was mostly done in old okie-rigged car campers, as an itinerant worker. But, life "On The Road" for many writers and performers, was real enough.. and produced experiences to use in writing and music. Jack's persecution by coppers and bullies is also very real - and as recent as last year. Perhaps that's why these simple recordings and songs are important to us in America where our tradition of protest is an essential responsibility. The 4 previous CD recordings we made, had many cover songs by Hobo writers who inspired Jack, like Utah Phillips and Liberty Justice. (We've included one of Liberty's best songs that Jack adopted) But after a decade of writing, there is a wealth of original songs and poems to fill this "Best Of" compilation. As with Jack's literary works these pieces demonstrate his poetic nature and contempt for the status quo in America (and his die-hard romanticism). They can all be enjoyed as melodic poems by an aging artist whose perspective is nearly historic. They don't make 'em like Jack any more.

"Video" Bob Whiteside