THE OTHA TURNER FAMILY PICNIC: OCCUPYING MUSICAL AND SOCIAL
SPACE IN-BETWEEN SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING
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This thesis concerns African-American fife and drum band music, a pre-blues genre that was a fixture at summer picnics in the Mississippi hill country from the late nineteenth century through most of the twentieth century. The picnics held a unique place in African-American life, a crossroads of juke joints and churches, blues and gospel, individuality and family. Using the African-American paradigm of a Saturday night / Sunday morning people, I describe the Otha Turner Family Picnic, the last picnic to feature fife and drum band music, locating it and the music in-between the secular and sacred aspects of African-American life from both a musical and a social standpoint.
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EDITORIAL NOTE

Otha Turner, the name most associated with fife and drum band music, is spelled three different ways in the numerous books, articles, liner notes, and obituaries that chronicle his life and music. George Mitchell, one of the earliest (perhaps first) researchers to address Turner's work, used “Other” in Blow My Blues Away (1971), while David Evans (perhaps the second), used “Othar” in his 1972 article “Black Fife and Drum Music in Mississippi” (and in the liner notes to his recordings that include Turner’s music). Likewise, William Ferris used “Othar” in his 1983 book, Afro American Folk Art and Crafts (perhaps because the book includes work by Evans), while more recent scholarship tends to use “Otha” (but not exclusively; “Othar” is still used on occasion, and has probably been the most frequently used spelling over the years). The differences are not, as far as I have been able to discern, the result of interpretational variance on the part of researchers, but rather because Turner himself spelled his name different ways at different points in his life (although some sources indicate he never learned to read or write). I have decided to use “Otha” in this paper, as it is the version that appears on Turner’s CDs, his tombstone (he passed away in 2003), and the Mississippi Blues Trail marker dedicated to him.¹

Similarly, the name Napoleon Strickland can be found under four different spellings: Napoleon, Napoloean, Napolian, and Napolean. Evans, Mitchell, and Alan Lomax (1993) all prefer Napoleon (the most commonly used of the three spellings), while various other books, articles, and liner notes of LPs and CDs might use one of the other three. The musical genre itself has traveled under various names including “African American fife and drum music” and “black fife and drum corps.” I prefer “fife
and drum band music,” a term Lomax popularized and the name most commonly used (although sometimes with an ampersand). The ensembles that play the music are, of course, fife and drum bands, while I use “fife and drum corps” to indicate the military, European-American (ostensibly white) genre that contributed to the African-American, pre-blues (i.e., black) version.²

With the term “Hill Country,” I have broken new ground by using capitals. Although Lomax (1993) referred to this geographic area as “the Hills” or “Mississippi Hill country,” most other researchers have avoided capitals entirely, referring to it as the hill country. I believe that the music of this region is comparable with that of the Mississippi Delta, so if Delta is capitalized (and it always is), then Hill Country should be as well.³

My interpretations of the Otha Turner Family Picnic (sometimes called the Otha Turner Family Goat Barbecue Picnic) are based on a total of eight visits from 2007-2010.
Every year on the last weekend in August, the family of Otha Turner (1907-2003) hosts the Otha Turner Family Picnic at Turner’s former home in the Gravel Springs community of Tate County, Mississippi. It is a tradition that goes back several years, but his association with picnics started even earlier when he began performing fife and drum band music at picnics hosted by others in the Mississippi Hill Country.\(^4\) The practice of holding picnics is a very old one and not limited to the Mississippi Hill Country, or even Mississippi, and fife and drum band music was not the only form of entertainment. Wharton (1947: 269) found newspaper articles from the 1870s and 1880s that discussed African-American picnics. One account said, “They came together by hundreds or even by thousands during the summer season for picnics and barbecues,” while another referenced drums, music, food, brass bands, ball games, dancing, and “cheap whiskey.”\(^5\) Mitchell (1971) writes about a picnic in a chapter entitled “Ain’t No Picnic If You Ain’t Got No Drums” (49-57). His ethnography of an event held at L.P. Buford’s picnic grounds in Como, Mississippi includes mention of guitar and harmonica in addition to fife and drum bands. In 1972, Hay (2001: 113-155) interviewed Boose Taylor, originally from Mississippi (but living in Tennessee at the time), who in his younger days had played fife at picnics in Mississippi and Tennessee, while Barretta (2010a & 2010b) interviewed two experienced blues artists, Elmore Williams and Hezekiah Early, from Natchez, Mississippi (in the southwestern part of the state, far from the hill country), each of whom recalled seeing fife and drum band music at picnics many years ago; Early even played snare drum on occasion.

David Evans (1972: 98-102) discusses picnics in Mississippi, describing them as
“all-black affairs,” occurring during the summer, especially on holiday weekends, starting on Friday evening, resuming on Saturday and, after discontinuing on Sunday, sometimes recommencing Monday, in the case of a three-day weekend. Evans says that picnics included baseball, music and dancing, food, possibly crap games, and if an indoor facility was available, pool and dancing to a juke box. The fife and drum band music, he adds, was the “high point.” Ferris (1983: 172-180) relates Otha Turner’s description of picnics; he, too, talks about Friday nights and all day Saturday, and the fife and drum band music. Lomax (1993: 314-357), in a chapter dedicated to the Mississippi Hill Country, interviewed three fife players: Sid Hemphill (in 1942 and 1959), Ed Young (in 1959), and Napoleon Strickland (in 1978). All three were active performers at picnics, and Lomax called Strickland “the fife-playing generalissimo of the all-night picnic” (343). Lomax cites the largest picnics as happening on the big summer holidays, but notes that small picnics could occur on any weekend; he also mentions playing ball and eating barbecue as activities. Furthermore, he describes Sid Hemphill and his group performing at a picnic adding that they performed with fife, quills, snare drum, bass drum, violin, banjo, and guitar (317-26). From the brief descriptions provided by these researchers, one can conclude that African-American picnics were frequent and widespread in parts of the South, and that fife and drum band music, while not the only source of music or entertainment, generally played a large role.6

Despite its integral importance at these frequent events, the history of fife and drum band music is not well documented. Evidence is scant, but there are indications that the African Diaspora played a part in its early development. In his film The Land Where the Blues Began, Lomax filmed a transverse flute in Africa, while in his book of
the same name he writes about recording fife and drum bands in the Caribbean in the 1950s. McDaniel (1998: 90) states that Caribbean-born blacks had fife and drum music in the early nineteenth century, and David Evans (1972: 103) writes, “Fife and drum ensembles are known in Africa, especially in the Sudan region, although a more common sight is the reed oboe with two or three drums of different sizes.” These references indicate a history of black fife and drum music outside of North America.

In North America, African Americans performed fife and drum music as members of military fife and drum corps. In discussing its origins, David Evans (1995) states, “This music is an unusual blending of the British and early American tradition of military fife and drum playing with influences of African percussion, syncopation, and polyrhythms. Its performers today remember learning this music in their childhood years from men who were old then.” Alan Lomax wrote in The Land Where The Blues Began (1993), “Thomas Jefferson’s slaves formed a fife-and-drum team as their contribution to the War of Independence… one document tells of a black fife-and-drum corps playing for a Confederate regiment.” In her book, The Music of Black Americans (1997), first published in 1971, Eileen Southern indicates the use of fife and drum music by African Americans seven times. This evidence tells us that in North America, African Americans continued playing fife and drum music through the antebellum period.

After marching in step, so to speak, with military fife and drum corps music during the colonial period, the War for Independence, and the Civil War, black fife and drum music went its own direction. Evans (1972: 97) states, “That the present-day tradition among blacks in the South goes back at least to the time of Reconstruction is confirmed by older people there today who remember in their childhoods seeing old men play fifes
and drums. The black and white traditions then would seem to have diverged some one hundred years ago.” Freed from its military aesthetic, older sensibilities that had survived the Middle Passage, prospered in the Caribbean, and continued in North America, asserted themselves. While the basic instrumentation of fife and drum remained, the music changed dramatically; it was during the postbellum time frame that African-American musical traits began to supersede military musical traditions in the South, eventually making black fife and drum band music the unique art form that it is today.⁷

Although this music may have existed in many parts of the South, it has mainly been in the Mississippi Hill Country that fife and drum bands have survived. The scholars and blues aficionados who ventured into Mississippi with increasing regularity during the post-WWII era did so mainly to explore the Mississippi Delta, but, fortunately, did not entirely ignore the Mississippi Hill Country. Through a combination of audio and film recordings, oral accounts, and theory, a canon of scholarship began to emerge that, while not giving a detailed account, at least provided a general understanding of how fife and drum band music as we know it came to be.

In 1941 and 1942, Alan Lomax, the story goes, went to the Mississippi Delta to find Robert Johnson but ended up discovering Muddy Waters. It was in 1942, just outside the delta in the southwestern part of Tate County, near the city of Senatobia, that Lomax also recorded an African-American musician named Sid Hemphill. Hemphill and his fellow Mississippi Hill Country musicians introduced Lomax to fife and drum band music.⁸ Lomax returned in 1959, capturing the Young Brothers Fife and Drum Band on film, and again in 1978, this time filming a picnic, the footage becoming part of
The Land Where the Blues Began (1990). This film brought fife and drum band music to the attention of a larger audience (see Work, Jones and Adams 2005 and Szwed 2010 for more detailed descriptions on the contributions of Alan Lomax to blues scholarship).

In 1971, George Mitchell published Blow My Blues Away, a book that features interviews with several Mississippi Hill Country musicians, Otha Turner and Jessie Mae Hemphill among them. Based on field research begun in 1967, this work introduced the hill country to a blues public largely unaware of Mississippi blues outside the delta. Mitchell preceded the book with an album of the same name, first released in 1969 as an LP, and re-released as a CD in 1994. Also in 1971, David Evans, Bill Ferris, and Judy Peiser released a film entitled Gravel Springs Fife and Drum. The ten-minute piece featured the Gravel Springs Fife and Drum Band, which took its name from the Gravel Springs community of rural Tate County, an area located east of Interstate 55 between Senatobia and Como, and home to Otha Turner. The group consisted of Turner on snare drum, Turner's daughter Bernice on bass drum, and Napoleon Strickland on fife. The band is shown performing at a picnic, and six different musical selections are featured.

Again in 1971 (a banner year for hill country blues), David Evans released a compilation album of fife and drum band music entitled Traveling Through the Jungle: Fife and Drum Band Music from the Deep South. Including artists from Georgia as well as Mississippi, it was the first album to feature only fife and drum band (it was released as a CD and included nine additional tracks). In 1972, Evans published an article entitled "Black Fife and Drum Music in Mississippi," which appeared in the 1972 fall
edition of the *Mississippi Folklore Register*. After the work done by Lomax and Mitchell, this was first piece of scholarship to exclusively address the subject of fife and drum band music. And in 1978, the Library of Congress released Evans’ album entitled *Afro-American Folk Music from Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi* (and released it as a CD in 2000). The album featured many types of African-American music, including fife and drum band, and located it within the larger musical framework of the Mississippi Hill Country.⁹

We are indebted to these scholars (see Santoro 2004: 104-118 for a discussion of the folk revival movement that helped advance blues scholarship during the 1960s). Each had his own style: Alan Lomax (1993: 37) called fife and drum bands the “main find” of his career and emphasized the African retentions in the music, while George Mitchell’s work treated fife and drum bands as one piece of the Mississippi Hill Country blues puzzle.¹⁰ David Evans and William Ferris located the music within the overall African-American culture of Mississippi and the American South. No one gave a thorough treatment of its role as a pre-blues African-American musical genre, something that connected Congo Square to later African-American musical genres or that may have helped create the blues. Perhaps there isn’t enough documentation to make a solid case for the importance of fife and drum bands beyond their role at summer picnics, but some evidence is offered in this paper.

The discography lists all recordings containing fife and drum band music that have ever been commercially available, including film. This collection is the best tool available for understanding the history of fife and drum band music.
On August 29, 2009, in Como, Mississippi, a crowd of about one hundred gathered in a small area along Main Street to pay tribute to a man who had passed away six and a half years earlier. The occasion was the dedication of a new Mississippi Blues Trail marker, and the man being honored was Otha Turner, Mississippi Hill Country blues musician. The ceremony was scheduled to start at 11:00 A.M., an appropriate time considering the heat and humidity one is likely to encounter on summer days in Como, but was delayed twenty minutes due to the late arrival of the pastor who was slated to give the invocation. No one seemed to mind; it was extra time for old friends to visit, some of which, it seemed, had not seen each other for a long time. And some of them—those from out of town—might have had little else to do for several hours anyway, for this was also the weekend of the Otha Turner family picnic. They were in Como today only for the dedication and for what would be happening at the Turner house that night, in the backyard, where they would listen to his music, eat goat barbecue, and relive his memory. Most of his former acquaintances will tell you that Turner, while a strong-willed man, was not one to hurry, and at this moment, no one else was inclined to, either.

The attendees were as numerous as they were varied: Otha Turner was a man who reached people, black and white, young and old, reached them as only one who speaks with his heart can, and many had come today to honor his memory. Years ago, probably few outside of the African-American community in Tate and Panola counties knew of him, few except for interested scholars (Strachwitz 1969, Mitchell 1971, Evans...
1971, 1982, Ferris 1971, 1983, Küstner 1982) and hard-core blues aficionados, the kind who look past B.B. King and keep searching for the roots, the very beginning, the very first sound of the blues. And those who took the time to look eventually found Turner. As his reputation grew, so did his picnic, and a local affair began to attract a larger crowd, one that included people whose places of origin were from farther and farther away. And while there were probably still a few people, mostly white, in Tate and Panola counties who had not heard of him, there were also many from around the globe who had. By the time of his death in 2003 at the age of ninety-five (or ninety-four, or only ninety, depending on whom you believed), Turner had made his own recordings, appeared in films, had his music featured on the soundtrack of a major motion picture, and appeared in a Japanese television commercial (the commercial was for Wild Turkey bourbon and is listed in the discography). Whatever financial security came his way as a result of this late-in-life notoriety never showed, however, not in the house he lived in, the clothes he wore, nor the mule he drove. That just was not Turner's way and, perhaps, that is why so many had gathered to remember him on a hot Saturday morning in Como, Mississippi. An extra twenty minutes did not matter, not on this occasion. Remembering Otha Turner, giving back to a man who had given so much, was too important.

Printed programs that listed the names of the speakers were distributed to the crowd, and it was a long list. Julius Harris, a Turner family friend, was designated as the emcee and went first, calling Turner a “legend in his own time” and “a friend for thirty years.” He recalled how Turner would visit schools to play for and talk to the children. The Honorable Judy Sumner, Mayor of Como, said how honored she felt for Como to
have the marker, while Pastor Cedric Richardson of Cistern Hill Missionary Baptist Church said that Turner’s legacy still lives, that his spirit lives on in the lives of others. Harris, returning to the microphone in-between guests, added remarks about Turner’s international reach, his music, and picnics, and Mark Massey, a blues artist, said he “grew up watching Mr. Turner,” and then began singing an original song entitled “How Long.” Scott Barretta, the principal researcher and writer for the Mississippi Blues Trail, the organization responsible for erecting the marker, offered history of the trail and fife and drum band music, the genre for which Turner is famous. He mentioned other Mississippi Hill Country musicians who played fife and drum band music, such as Napoleon Strickland, the Young brothers, and the Hemphill family, while underscoring Turner’s importance in this area. At the microphone again, Harris said that even people in Scandinavian countries knew about Turner, that there should be an Otha Turner day, and that local schoolteachers should make him a part of their curricula. A local artist, Sharon McConnell, who makes life cast masks of blues artists, made one of Turner only weeks before his passing. She said that she had sensed at the time that he knew the end was near.

Ethnomusicologist David Evans of the University of Memphis, not listed in the program, was given the opportunity to speak. Turner, he said, did not have much, but did have a large and loving family, and made a large impression on others. Evans should know; of the handful of scholars who have investigated fife and drum band music over the years, he has made the most extensive contributions. Another blues artist, Jimbo Mathus, sang a Turner favorite, “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,” while accompanying himself on the guitar, and had the audience clapping along. William Ramsey, a Turner
family friend of twenty years, chronicled Turner’s life and accomplishments, among them a Smithsonian Lifetime Achievement Award, a National Heritage Fellowship Award, and appearances on Good Morning America and All Things Considered. He talked about Turner’s philosophy of life and related a story about how, as payment for a performance, Turner once asked for two chickens and two hundred pounds of food for his dog (the event organizer successfully obtained the dog food, albeit in the form of forty-five-pound bags, but the two chickens were from the grocery store, which was certainly not what Turner had in mind). Most significantly, he said that Turner deserved his marker not just for his place in Mississippi blues history but “because he was a person that brought people together.” He described how Turner went out of his way to make people, especially white people, feel welcome at his picnics. He then added that today’s crowd was a mix of black and white; I noticed that the speakers, those who knew him best, were also racially mixed.

One of Turner’s grandchildren, Bobbie Turner Mallory, gave some family history, talking at length about how her grandmother, Turner’s wife Ada, kept a low profile. She spoke of other family members who played fife and drum band music with Turner, such as Turner’s daughter Bernice Pratcher and Ada’s nephew R.L. Boyce, and of other fife and drum band musicians as if they were family, such as Napoleon Strickland (whom Turner taught), Eddie Ware, and Abe Young. “My grandfather,” Mallory said, “spent a lot of time loving people.” Another of Turner’s grandchildren, Shardé Thomas, was the highlight of the ceremony. Using her voice and an electric piano, and accompanied by a friend on guitar, she performed an original composition entitled, “OT.”

Throughout the ceremony, I was impressed by the fact that there was much more
talk of the man than the music, that even those who spoke of fife and drum band music said more about Turner’s personal character than about his musical talents. However, everyone knew that it was through the music that Otha Turner had made his reputation, so it was no surprise when the final speaker, Leigh Portwood of the Heritage Trails Program, announced “the band” would lead the crowd over to the marker (located about 100 yards away) for the unveiling. The band to which he referred was Turner’s former group, the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, now staffed by his grandchildren. The cousins, joined by R.L. Boyce, played their way down Main Street, leading the entourage of ceremony attendees, some of whom were actually in front of the band, taking pictures while walking backwards. The band was thus surrounded, and this large cluster, band members and crowd, moved forwards, backwards, and sideways to the shrill melody of the cane fife and the pounding pulsation of the drums.

Fifty feet beyond another, already-dedicated marker for Mississippi Fred McDowell, the crowd arrived at Turner’s, placed in the grassy central median of Main Street. The band, along with other Turner family members, positioned itself around the marker, and while cameras clicked, the black cover was removed, the unveiling accompanied by a round of applause. The ceremony next moved to a reception in an empty store front where guests enjoyed refreshments, purchased Otha Turner T-shirts, and photographed Shardé Thomas posing next to her grandfather’s life cast mask, the one Sharon McConnell made just before Turner’s death. Eventually, the event concluded, but only temporarily, as most of the attendees would reassemble that evening at Turner’s house for the picnic.

After the reception, I walked back across the street for a close look at the new
marker. Standing about seven feet above the ground, the two-foot square metal sign was blue with raised gold lettering and, at the top, had the Mississippi Blues Commission logo, designed to look like a 45 rpm record. Immediately underneath, in large gold lettering, was the name OTHA TURNER, followed by this inscription:

The African American fife and drum tradition in north Mississippi stretches back to the 1800s and is often noted for its similarities to African music. Its best known exponent, Otha (or Othar) Turner (c. 1908 - 2003), presided over annual fife and drum picnics and goat roasts on his property in nearby Gravel Springs, and performed at numerous festivals. His music was featured in several documentaries as well as in Martin Scorsese's film Gangs of New York.

The reverse side includes several pictures and a much lengthier inscription that details the history of fife and drum band music. Many names associated with the music are listed, including musicians Sid Hemphill, Jessie Mae Hemphill, Ed Young, Lonnie Young, Abe Young, Napoleon Strickland, Bernice Pratcher Turner, Aubrey Turner, and R.L. Boyce, and researchers Alan Lomax, George Mitchell, David Evans, and Bill Ferris. Biographical information on Otha Turner ends with talk of Shardé Thomas, and the last photo shows Turner coaching his granddaughter on fife.

The number of musicians mentioned on the marker speaks to the vibrancy of musical culture in the Mississippi Hill Country. With so many accomplished musicians, why was Turner singled out for recognition, and not just as the pre-eminent fife and drum band musician, but also as the foremost hill country musician of his generation? Sid Hemphill was recorded first, while the Young Brothers had probably the most popular group, and Napoleon Strickland, I have been told by more than one person in
the hill country, was a superior fifer. The answer to that question was written with the words spoken during the ceremony: it was Turner the person, the one who used his music to bring people together, who is recognized on the marker.

Additionally, Turner is pictured playing the guitar, while Sid Hemphill, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Napoleon Strickland are also depicted, through words or pictures, as multi-instrumentalists. This attests to the versatility of Mississippi Hill Country musicians, most of whom sang and played multiple instruments, among them guitar, harmonica, diddley bow, fife, and drum. Furthermore, the marker mentions diversity of repertoire, and this remains true today with the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band; it suggests that fife and drum band music may be an amalgamation of hill country musical styles and genres (see Nicholson 1998: 88-101 for an overview of Mississippi Hill Country fife and drum band music during the late 1990s).

During the ceremony, after Jimbo Mathus finished his performance, the bells of a local church, located only half a block away, began to peel. It was noon, and they were, apparently, programmed to sound at that time everyday. The serenading, rendered at considerable volume, continued for twenty minutes, competing with the tributes of the speakers, and stopping just before Shardé Thomas' performance. As with the delayed beginning, it did not seem to bother anyone, but instead added to the celebration. The sound of Sunday church bells on a Saturday carried another meaning, however. Of the different musical styles found in the Mississippi Hill Country, two stand out from the others: blues and gospel, the musics of Saturday night and Sunday morning. And fife and drum band music, the music of Otha Turner, incorporates influences of both (see Keil 1966: 143-163 for a discussion of the role of the bluesman).
In this paper, I discuss the Otha Turner family picnic. Once a local event of corn whiskey, goat barbecue, and fife and drum bands, it is now a small blues festival that attracts a very diverse audience. The effect of the more diverse music on the audience, and the more diverse audience on the music, is worth consideration. I also examine the concept of a Saturday night/Sunday morning people in light of the activities held at the picnic. This concept speaks to the duality of African-American life, the secular and the sacred, blues and gospel. And I examine fife and drum band music. Through its performances of a varied repertoire, it occupies a middle ground between Saturday night and Sunday morning, between a crossroads at midnight and a cross in the morning light.

In addition to theory and supporting scholarship, I include ethnography based on my field research. Insights provided by Carolyn Hulette, her grandson and guitarist Travis Hullette, and Mississippi Hill Country musician R.L. Boyce support much of that ethnography.
CHAPTER 2

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

The notion of a “Saturday night crowd and a Sunday morning people” describes a fundamental contradiction and consciousness of African-American life as retraced by a long line of authors and cultural commentators (see Bennett 1964, Gwaltney 1993, Gilroy 1993, Murray [1976] 2000, and Levine [1977] 2007). An understanding of African-American culture would be incomplete if absent an understanding of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the duality of juke joints (or blues clubs) and churches, of blues and gospel, and the history of the secular and the sacred. For although many other cultures certainly have both places for secular celebration and places for sacred worship, and recognize the marked differences between these two seemingly polar opposites, African-American culture is, perhaps, somewhat unique in embracing both, using them not so much to moralize as to define its parameters (see Szwed 1970: 219-227 and Ferris 1984: 79-89 for analyses of blues and gospel). I am writing about what Gwaltney (1993) might refer to as core black culture; historian Lerone Bennett, Jr. put it this way:

The [Negro folk] tradition, in the beginning, was not sharply separated into sacred and secular strains; and the tradition and Negro who bears that tradition cannot be understood without holding these two contradictory and yet complementary strains—sacred/secular—together in one's mind. This is, I think, the essential genius of the Negro tradition which did not and does not recognize the Platonic-Puritan dichotomies of good-bad, white-black, God-devil, body-mind. This has caused no end of misunderstanding, even among Negro mythologists who
elaborate a blues mystique as opposed, say, to a spiritual mystique. The Negro tradition, read right, recognizes no such dichotomy. The blues are the spirituals, good is bad, God is the devil and every day is Saturday. The essence of the tradition is the extra-ordinary tension between the poles of pain and joy, agony and ecstasy, good and bad, Sunday and Saturday. One can, for convenience, separate the tradition into Saturdays (blues) and Sundays (spirituals). But it is necessary to remember that the blues and the spirituals are not two different things. They are two sides of the same coin, two banks, as it were, defining the same stream (1964: 50-51).

In white-American culture Saturday and Sunday may be perceived as opposites (and it may be more perception than reality), but in African-American culture, while the two might be discussed in diametrically opposed terms, there may be a fine line between them in practice. A traditional blues-singing preacher, for example, may be frowned upon, but many of the frowners may fail to uphold the standard they espouse. That there is only a fine line between these perceived opposites can perhaps be best understood, and demonstrated, by the fact that music is an important part of both, and that the differences between blues and gospel are primarily related to context, text, and the notion about the body and movement. The music, and sociability, of Saturday and Sunday are alike in more ways than they are different.18

Saturday Night

On Saturday, September 5, 2009, the town of Como, Mississippi, former home of legendary blues artist Fred McDowell, hosted its annual Highway 51 Blues Festival. The Labor Day weekend event might easily be confused with the Highway 61 Blues
Festival, held every June in Leland, in the Mississippi Delta, but the similarities end with the name. Most delta festivals, widely advertised, are held primarily for the purpose of drawing tourists and tourism dollars. The event in Como, as with most Mississippi Hill Country blues events, was a local one.

Local, and smaller; in fact, everything in the Mississippi Hill Country—roads, farms, and blues festivals—is small when compared to its delta counterparts. The Sunflower River Blues & Gospel Festival, for example, a three-stage event held every August in Clarksdale, Mississippi (in the delta) draws thousands despite sweltering heat and humidity.¹⁹ The Como event, located in an empty field on the outskirts of town, used a single, makeshift stage, and the crowd appeared to be far smaller than the one I had witnessed in Clarksdale three weeks prior, probably two hundred at most. And while the Clarksdale festival has its own website, I could not find a mention of Como's festival anywhere on the Internet.

I did not attend the event alone. With me was Mississippi Hill Country blues guitarist Travis Hullette, a young man I met at the Otha Turner Family Picnic in 2007. I’ve spent quite a bit of field research time with Hullette since meeting him, along with his grandmother, at the Otha Turner Family Picnic four years ago. He has already made quite a reputation for himself in the hill country and is called upon frequently to perform both gospel and blues by friends, fellow musicians, and other residents of the greater Senatobia area. He had brought his guitar with the expectation of performing with R.L. Boyce, a guitarist from Como who was scheduled to appear later in the afternoon. Clarksdale’s show, held openly in its historic downtown area, is sponsor-supported and free of charge to the public,²⁰ but Como surrounds its festival area with a
fence and charges a twenty-dollar admission. We encountered the fee at the front gate, but after Hullette connected with Boyce, our money was refunded. This did not surprise me; I have learned during my time with Hullette that the Mississippi Hill Country community of musicians is small and well networked.

The temporary stage was on the far side of the festival area with the ground immediately in front reserved for dancing; not reserved in the formal sense, but reserved because no one had put his or her lawn chair in that area. There seemed to be an implicit understanding that only people on their feet were allowed to be that close. About thirty feet from the stage, the lawn chairs began, and behind them, in an area demarcated by rope, a row of pop-up tents that appeared to have been reserved for people who pay a rental fee. The tents seemed to be occupied by groups of friends, and their distance from the stage allowed the occupants to enjoy the event socially as much as musically. Being further from the stage changed adjusted the balance of sound, diminishing the volume of the music and allowing more conversation.

Like most blues festivals, the Highway 51 festival began in the afternoon, but there was another reason for the early start: unlike most blues festivals, this small-town event had no lighting, so the live music had to finish before the sunset. There were other differences: its aforementioned rural setting; it lasted only one day while most blues festivals are weekend-long; and it’s clearly black majority. In fact, as far as I could see, I was one of only two white persons in attendance.21 The fact that the crowd was predominantly black, along with its relatively small size, suggested that it was local—not because there are no white people in Como, but because blues festivals that draw from broad geographic areas are generally more ethnically diverse. At this festival there
were few young people, and none terribly old either; almost everyone appeared to be in the thirty to fifty age range. Thus, the crowd lacked diversity in terms of race and age. In contrast, the Clarksdale festival draws large numbers of both black and white listeners.

    All four of the groups I heard, including that of the headliner, Bobby Rush, had a similar composition: each was composed of a lead vocalist, accompanied by guitar, bass, and drums, along with, in some cases, a harmonica, second guitarist, or additional vocalist. The first group, with a female vocalist, bass, guitar, drums, and harmonica, performed a very diverse repertoire of songs. One piece was in twelve-bar blues form with the suggestive title, "Do the Dog," while the next, another blues chart, was in hill country style, with no chord progression and a strong emphasis on rhythm. The third piece was "Stand By Me," with its descending thirds chord progression, while the next, the early rock 'n roll chart, "Do the Twist," was another in twelve-bar blues form, although clearly no longer the blues.

    I noticed subtle differences between the Clarksdale festival (which I attended in 2007, 2008, and 2010) and this event, this example of Saturday night behavior. As compared to Clarksdale, in Como there was more of a "let it all hang out" atmosphere, as evidenced in the dancing (done both in pairs and individually), which was more sexually demonstrative what I was used to seeing at Clarksdale in a more ethnically diverse environment. The next song after "The Twist," was "Little Sally Walker," performed, once again, in twelve-bar blues form. Every time the vocalist sings, "All you want to do is ride around Sally," the crowd responds with "Ride, Sally, Ride." On a Saturday night, this traditional children's song has taken on a decidedly sexual
connotation.

R.L. Boyce’s group was next, with Travis Hullette on guitar, and the performance was a bit rough. Boyce had been drinking before his performance, demonstrating that the secular, Saturday night behavior was not limited to the audience. Another group followed Boyce’s, and their performance included a cover of the Junior Kimbrough classic, "All Night Long." Kimbrough was himself a Mississippi Hill Country blues guitarist, and was reputed to have had over twenty children. Whether true or not, it fits the prolific stereotype of the bluesman.

After the warm-up bands, the main act, Bobby Rush, took the stage. Rush is a veteran performer with a strong following, so it is mainly him that the crowd, which had steadily grown in size throughout the afternoon, had come to see. The groups thus far had been hill country bands, but Rush is not local, and it showed in the instrumentation: in addition to drums, guitar, and bass, there was a keyboard player. More obviously, he had two female vocalists singing with him who had been hired for their unusual physical dimensions as much as their vocal talents. Both women, although not obese, had large posteriors, which Rush alluded to throughout his performance.

I had never heard of Bobby Rush before this performance and was expecting to hear a more typical blues or R&B artist. Rush, however, has made his reputation by mixing music with risqué humor. As Rush began his act, the crowd flocked to the stage, but not to dance, as with the other performances. In this case, they were standing still, listening to the comedy more than the music. Instead of dancing, the audience was laughing, the music secondary to the bawdy, sexual jokes.

The performance seemed to personify Saturday night, but in an exaggerated
way. This was blues "out of the closet," with lyrics that were too explicit to be characterized as blues innuendo. The overall presentation was episodic, perhaps even somewhat vaudevillian, as the performance alternated between jokes and music. One moment, the four piece band was backing him in a selection, and the next, Rush was pulling out a pair of oversized women's underwear, joking that it belonged to one of the singers. Through it all, he was engaged with the audience, which was packed in close to the stage and hollering with delight at the evocative performance.

After Rush's set, Hullette and I packed the guitar and lawn chairs and left. The sun was setting, and Sunday morning would be here soon, but the recorded music had resumed, and would continue for some time. The blues festival was now a party hidden on the other side of the fence.

Sunday Morning

Sunday, May 17, 2009, was a beautiful day in Como, a clear, cool day that contrasted with the often hot, humid days one can encounter in Mississippi, even in the spring. By 11:00 a.m., I was standing outside of Hunter's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church with members of the Hullette family: Travis Hullette, his grandmother, Carolyn Hullette, and his aunt, Paula Yancey. Carolyn Hullette, who was born in the 1940s and has spent her whole life in Tate County, was a cousin of Napoleon Strickland and a lifelong acquaintance of Jessie Mae Hemphill, both legendary blues artists and fife and drum band musicians. On several occasions during the course of my research, I attended church with the Hullette family.

On this Sunday morning, the air was filled with the sound of mingling voices, both outside the church, where we first began to greet friends, and inside, where the
greetings continued as we moved to our seats. I sat with Carolyn in her customary place, alongside her daughter Paula, but Travis, with his guitar, sat with the band. Hunter’s Chapel has four choirs that rotate: men’s, women’s, youth, and mixed. Because this was the third Sunday of the month, it was the youth choir’s turn to perform. Perhaps "perform" is not the right word. In the musical sense, it is a performance, but when the choir sings, the youth choir or any other, it is more of an offering, and the congregation not only receives it, but also adds its own energy in the form of music and appreciation. This gift of music is then passed back and forth, filling the room. Everyone—choir, band, congregation, and pastor—performs, yet none do; it is a musical sharing in which all participate, in a multitude of ways, each fulfilling a role of equal importance. The number of choirs speaks to the sense of participation that infuses this church. If other churches have a similar structure, which seems likely, a structure in which the majority of the members belong to a choir, and in which the congregation is as active as the choir, it would help explain why music plays such an important role in Mississippi Hill Country life.

Pastor John Wilkins, son of blues artist Robert Wilkins and the pastor at Hunter’s Chapel for the past twenty years, immediately engaged the congregation by asking for "handclaps for God." With that round of applause, the service started as it usually does, with the pastor leading the first song. Pastor Wilkins is himself a blues artist, not occupying space between secular and sacred, but having one foot squarely planted in each. Not every member of the congregation is pleased about this, but Wilkins has been pastor of the church for about twenty years.

The almost constant music making during the service is impressive and might
lead one to believe that days of rehearsal are required. However, the choirs are able to prepare themselves for Sunday in just two or three hours each Wednesday evening. One reason for this might be the existence of the youth choir. By starting at a young age, church members are enculturated into a musical tradition, learning a repertoire and a performance practice that can be used for years to come. Almost every song features a soloist accompanied by repetitive choir parts, so extra effort is required by only one individual per piece, and the soloists of each choir have a month between performances. The band is the same every week, and over simple chord progressions, uses heterophony and improvisation for a polished and invigorating performance.25

After the song, there was a reading of a bible passage followed by a recitation of the Lord's Prayer that led to several spontaneous "amens" from the congregation. The band provided soft background music during the readings before the drummer kicked into a steady beat that took the choir into another selection. The soloist led, the choir responded, the band supported, and the congregation returned the musical energy through foot stomping and hand-clapping, its feet on one and three, its hands on two and four. It was a multi-layered call and response: the service began with the pastor calling to the congregation; after the first selection, the instruments called to the voices; once the singing began, the soloist called to the choir; the choir called to the congregation, and the congregation’s feet and hands called back and forth to one another. The congregation did not sing along (they were percussionists rather than vocalists), but they did shout words of encouragement, another form of vocal production, behaving as enthusiastic spectators cheering on participants, rather than as a passive audience. After it was all over, the congregation filled the room with thank
yous and words of praise for the choir and the Lord.

One of the men led the congregation in a recitation of Psalm 96, followed by more spontaneous “amens” and “hallelujahs”; it was part of a dialogue that lent a musical quality to the service even when there was no music, as we usually think of it, to be heard. Wilkins’s role seemed to be that of master of ceremonies rather than a religious leader; he facilitated a feeling of worship for the congregation, rather than dictating one to them, channeling the ever-present energy of the congregation towards worship, focusing what was already present, rather than trying to create it.

A woman made a few general announcements that transitioned into preaching, her voice growing in both volume and intensity while drawing responses from the congregation. The band followed suit, increasing its volume, and the keyboard player lent his voice to the music. The instruments were not just providing background music, but gave an emotional foundation for her message. After she finished, the band provided the coda, vamping a little before concluding.

The offering came next, and as the plates circulated through the church, the pastor sang the first half of a phrase while spontaneous “amens” and echoes of the lyrics came from the congregation—"Hallelujah! Thank you Lord Jesus! Amen! Oh, Yeah! Yes he is!" The offering selection, or perhaps the style of presenting it, seemed designed to get the congregation involved (as a blues artist, the pastor is used to this approach, singing the first half of the phrase, and answering himself with the guitar). At the conclusion of the offering, the pastor prayed, and even though the band stopped playing, the soundscape was still very much alive because the call and response with the congregation continued after every sentence. It was not a structured, word-for-word
call and response (none of them are), but a spontaneous, improvised answering of the pastor’s message. At Hunter’s Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, it seems that the music never stops.26

When the sermon began, the band rested, so the sounds were entirely vocal. It was recitative rather than aria, the pastor preaching with reinforcement from the congregation. He began with a story, and then recited Psalm 37, eliciting responses like “Work it pastor, work it,” “Yessir,” and "Yeah, Lord,” which evoked even more from the pastor. The effect was that of downbeats and upbeats, as with the stomping feet and clapping hands going back and forth, one calling to another. It continued to the point of ambiguity—which was the call and which the response? The sound grew louder over time, the heightening intonation of the pastor's voice drawing the same from the congregation, which in turn asked for more. The volume increased and the cadence of the pastor’s speech quickened, the responses creating a duet between orator and those orated to. The higher intensity was sustained until the pastor reached a climax and eased back, only to re-attack with renewed vigor. Following the lead of the pastor, whose "amens" and "hallelujahs" were always echoed, the congregation never let up, sometimes reaching a fever pitch.

Near the end of the sermon, the pastor’s voice took on even more of a musical quality. It was a subtle change, and spoke to the small differences between speech and song in this context. The pastor adjusted the constant rising and falling in the intonation in his voice so that a defined pitch was sustained for multiple syllables. Slowly, melody began to form, and the band, which had been silent since the beginning of the sermon, resumed playing. They had sensed the change in the pastor's voice, and along with the
congregation, responded to him. The pastor’s words took on an increasingly greater melodic quality until, gradually, he was singing more than preaching. Not yet playing rhythmically, the band followed suit, their "licks" becoming longer and paralleling the pastor’s melodic phrases. As the pastor’s vocalizing became rhythmic in addition to melodic, the band and the congregation responded in kind, the latter returning to hand clapping and foot stomping. The greatest variety of sound came from the congregation, which seemed, with its vocal responses, to be the leaders of the entire group, using the pastor and band as a foundation, a basso continuo on which to build their collective improvisation. It was a role reversal, and an exhibition of community music.27 As the sermon finished, the band continued for a few more moments, adding a "coda," a musical exclamation point, to the pastor’s message. The pastor, however, continued with a denouement in the form of melismatic singing that left little room for response. When the final selection ended, he said, "I might have to preach that again next time!"

It had been an uplifting spiritual experience for all.28

The music was not finished, however; the band played some slow music while a woman made a few announcements, talking about student graduations, the youth group, and how “we need to give our children something or the devil will.” Then the congregation sang "Reach Out and Touch."29 Finally, it was over, at least in the formal sense, as the sound in the chapel returned to the social activity of the congregation, which slowly filtered back outdoors.

The entire service, it seemed, was about the music, which was continuous. It was vocal, instrumental, melodic, and declamatory, but most of all, it was call and response, the pastor, band, choir, and congregation urging each other onward, the
“back-and-forthness” of the downbeats and upbeats, the hand clapping and foot stomping, driving everything. One element called to another, but which element was doing the calling, and which the responding, was often a matter of interpretation; a little “fuzzy listening” could reverse the listener’s perspective.

And it was energy. Carolyn Hulette seemed tired before the service, but at one point got so energized while dancing at her seat that her daughter Paula asked me to fan her. One member of the choir, a young woman, was overcome at about the same time and had to be supported and fanned by other choir members, who eventually took her from the room. Perhaps it is the communal nature of the gospel, but in many ways the church music is actually more charged, more energetic than the blues, the music of entertainment.

Blues vs. Gospel

On a Saturday afternoon during the summer of 2009, in an effort to learn more about the differences between the musics of the secular and the sacred, I asked Mississippi Hill Country blues guitarist R.L. Boyce, as we were seated on lawn chairs in his front yard, what the difference was between blues and gospel. "There isn't any," he said. Of course, there are differences between the two; however, from Boyce's position as guitarist, the differences are not, at least to him, significant. The chords, the scales, and the rhythms of the two genres have much in common.

In an interview with Travis Hullette I asked the same question. It was after a gospel concert during which I had noticed that one of his guitar solos sounded more like blues than gospel. He concluded that the "building blocks" of gospel and blues, the aforementioned scales, chords, and rhythms, are largely the same for both genres,
which explains R.L. Boyce's feeling that there is no difference between the two. From the perspective of the individual guitarist, there is not any difference.

That this might be so is not surprising, considering that both gospel and blues are born of the same wellspring: the church. Writing in the 1970s, Albert Murray ([1976] 2000: 27) states:

Many of the elements of blues music seem to have been derived from the downhome church revival time. But then many of the elements of blues music seem to have been derived from the downhome church in the first place. After all, such is the nature of the blues musician’s development that even when he or she did not begin as a church musician, he or she is likely to have been conditioned by church music from infancy to a far greater extent than by blues music as such.

This was certainly in evidence at Hunter’s Chapel with the performance of the youth choir, and especially in Hullette’s case. He began playing in church and still does, every single Sunday, but he has also made many inroads within the blues community.32

However, there are musical differences, and they involve musical organization. In gospel, instruments back up the vocals. Gospel music is usually performed by a group, sometimes a small one, but often a large one like a church choir, and the band, normally consisting of keyboard, guitar, bass, and drums, plays a supporting role. In blues, the guitar, often a solo instrument, is given equal status to the vocal music, taking on a vocal quality itself. I heard that in Hullette’s solo the night of the gospel concert. Most of the time (I have heard him do this numerous times in church) he backed up vocalists by engaging in a steady rhythm of strummed chords and, occasionally,
answering the singers with a more melodic figure. When he played his solo, he moved to the upper range of the instrument, gave up the chords for improvised melody, and inserted some musical inflections in the form of subtle pitch bending. This resulted in a more virtuosic, more vocal quality to his playing. He was leading, not supporting, and calling, not answering. And that is a distinguishing characteristic between blues and gospel: it is the greater role of instruments, the foregrounding of the guitarist (or other instrumentalist), the elevation of the guitar to a role equal in stature with that of the sung melody, the spoken word. When Hullette soloed that night, it made him sound “bluesy.”

Although it may be possible to explain some differences in purely musical terms, Murray ([1976] 2000: 38) seems to suggest that it’s a matter of context when he says, “There is, after all, a world of difference between the way you clap your hands and pat your feet in church and the way people snap their fingers in a ballroom, even when the rhythm, tempo, and even the beat are essentially the same.” These differences probably result from the differing expectations one has when attending a Saturday vs. a Sunday event, or the different reasons one has for attending.

For vocalist Mahalia Jackson (1966: 72), any musical differences that may (or may not) exist between gospel and blues are overshadowed by the spiritual ones:

I'll never give up my gospel songs for the blues. Blues are the songs of despair, but gospel songs are the songs of hope. When you sing them you are delivered of our burden. You have a feeling that there is a cure for what's wrong… It always gives me joy to sing gospel songs. I get to singing and I feel better right away. When you get through with the blues, you've got nothing to rest on. I tell people that the person who sings only the blues is like someone in a deep pit
yelling for help, and I’m simply not in that position.

Specific musical differences do exist, but are small in comparison to the non-musical differences, which can be thought of as the social differences.

I have, in my Mississippi field research, been exposed to several different kinds of musical events, most as a result of the time I have spent with the Hulette family. At some events, such as blues festivals and gospel concerts, the music itself is the primary reason for having the event, but more often than not, the music is part of something larger. These events are in held in places that have different names, such as church, home party, blues club, or picnic, and are as diverse as the populations, the communities, that frequent them. In fact, it is the social environments created by these communities that define the events, not the different types of music.

When the subject of the blues in Mississippi arises, the verbal discussion will almost inevitably include a mention of juke joints. These traditional Mississippi “watering holes,” known for their role in the development of the genre, have all but disappeared in the Mississippi Hill Country. Carolyn Hulette can remember the names of several: J.P. Buford's, which was located at one end of a small grocery store, adjacent to a large and often-used picnic ground near the Tate/Panola County line; Junior Kimbrough’s, which was located in Holly Springs but burned down not long after Kimbrough himself passed away; Jack Callagher's, June Davis's, and the Happy Holler, to name a few. Most, Hulette says, were located in Panola County, because Tate County became “dry” in the 1960s. Over the years, as the social climate of the hill country changed, the juke joints disappeared, replaced by blues clubs.35

Juke joints are difficult to find nowadays; I have never been to one in the
Mississippi Hill Country. Blues clubs, however, are common. Patronized by blacks and whites, locals and tourists, and a mix of social classes, they are a compromise between juke joints and more upscale establishments, hoping to simultaneously fulfill their patrons expectation of “authenticity” while also providing them enough comfort to keep them coming back. Unfortunately, they are threatened by new competition: a few years ago, casinos were licensed by the state of Mississippi to operate on the Mississippi River.36 Because a casino, as a result of gambling income, can afford to have live music without a cover charge, people have been going to casinos to hear the blues, and the clubs are having trouble staying in business.37

While juke joints, blues clubs, and casinos may be different in many ways, an evening at any of the three is an example of Saturday night behavior, with smoking, drinking, dancing, and the blues. The biggest difference between the three is the clientele, which becomes more diverse in terms of ethnicity, social class, and geographic area as one moves from juke joint to blues club to casino. The reasons for being there also change when one takes into account the presence of tourists and gamblers at casinos. In all three cases, secular, Saturday night behavior is present.

Saturday Night on a Sunday Evening: Space In-between

Another common type of social event found in the Mississippi Hill Country that uses music is the home party. Carolyn Hulette, who was born in 1943, offered me some insights based on her personal experiences of life in Tate County. During her youth, some African Americans resided in what was called “plantation living.” This was 100 years after the Civil War (and in the hill country, not the delta, with its many plantations), but on large, white-owned farms, there were small, basic homes in which
lived African Americans who worked on the farm. Because these people had little money and could not afford an evening at a juke joint, they held parties in their homes. These home parties were small, local gatherings, held in the backyard during the summer but indoors in the winter. Described by Hulette as "poor, black people celebrating on the weekend," they included a homemade alcoholic beverage known as corn whiskey or white lightning (or sometimes just "home brew"), dancing, and music, in one form or another. Most times, the music took the form of recordings played on an early, wind-up phonograph known as a Grafonola, but at other times there was live music, played on a guitar, or harmonica, or perhaps, on some occasions, a fife and drum band.

I attended a contemporary home party on the evening of January 11, 2009. It was at the home of R.L. Boyce, who lives in downtown Como, just across the railroad tracks from Main Street, where the Mississippi Blues Trail markers for Otha Turner and Fred McDowell are located. That night his driveway was filled with cars, as it often was, because home parties at Boyce's are a common occurrence. His music has made him something of a local celebrity. His front lawn is bedecked with furniture that at one time may have been inside the house, and on weekend afternoons he can often be found occupying a chair with guitar in hand, an amplifier on the ground to one side of him, and a bottle on the other. I have never seen Boyce play alone; he usually has an audience of one or more friends, but if not, there will be a protégé in attendance, a young guitarist, white or black, determined to learn from Boyce. R.L. Boyce does not give lessons in the formal sense, so the young musicians who sometimes shadow him are simply absorbing what they can, musical and otherwise.
The front door led immediately into the living room. It was a small room, perhaps twelve feet square, and was crowded by fifteen or twenty people positioned around its perimeter, either standing or seated on one of several chairs or couches. Boyce, playing an electric guitar, was seated in a chair on the far side of the room (blocking the entrance way to the kitchen) with another guitarist to his right and a harmonica player to his left. Unlike the home parties of the plantation living days, this gathering was ethnically mixed. I went that evening with Carolyn and Travis Hullette, who brought his guitar and jumped in to play when Boyce paused to give me an interview. Later in the evening, when the music picked up, people danced in the middle of the room, and a bottle (not home brew, but a commercially available brand) was passed around. A small snare drum, resting on top of a garbage can (which served to amplify the sound) was likewise passed around the room along with a pair of sticks, and some of us drummed as well. There was a homemade feel to the music, with the informality, spontaneity, dancing, drumming, and blues guitar playing combining to give a strong sense of community to the occasion. It was secular behavior, but in a familiar, family atmosphere.

After Bobby Rush’s performance at the Highway 51 Blues Festival, Travis, Carolyn, and I attended another home party, this one held outside of Como in a rural section of Panola County. The occasion for this home party was a family reunion, and the family was Boyce’s. The event was located on the other side of the Interstate, at a home on a quiet road off Highway 310. The front yard was covered with cars and there were approximately 150-200 people in attendance. It was an outdoor event, reminiscent of the summer, backyard home parties Carolyn Hulette described, and well-
organized, complete with t-shirts made specifically for the reunion that displayed the two surnames represented. It was not a racially integrated occasion (I was one of only two white faces in the crowd, with the other belonging to R.L. Boyce’s student), but it was a family event. Considering the size, and the involvement of two family names, it was an extended family reunion, and although I recognized some faces from Sunday morning services at Hunter’s Chapel, there were possibly many people who drove long distances to attend.

There was beer, soda, barbecue, and a stereo system playing music through large speakers. R.L. was already there when we arrived, and after a short time decided to play. Assisted by his young assistant and Travis Hullette (who goes almost nowhere without his guitar), the music went live. It had been a long day of playing for Boyce, whose Saturday musical adventures took him from his front yard to the festival on the west side of town to the this rural neighborhood on the other side of Interstate 55. Carolyn and I relaxed at a nearby picnic table, sipping soda and listening to Travis and R.L. Make music. Most of the attendees appeared perfectly sober, and there were clearly more cans of soda than beer to be found, but some were bucking this trend. Mainly family behavior took place at this reunion but a few enjoyed the more secular behavior.

About two or three times per month, Travis Hullette plays at home parties, but not in his own home. His reputation as a musician has spread around Senatobia, and he is invited to perform at parties held in the homes of others in the area. Some of the people who ask him to do this are his friends, and some are friends of friends, people who have heard about him by word of mouth and hire him to play in their homes for prices ranging
from $20 to $50. These home parties are not advertised, as they are not events that are open to the public, but instead are by invitation only, everyone in attendance a friend of the host. It is a sign that music, live music, is alive and well in the Mississippi Hill Country that people are willing to do this, to pay for live music, rather than fall back on mediated entertainment. It is also a sign that people sometimes prefer the music of blues clubs in their own homes, an example of taking secular music and putting it in an environment more closely related to a church.

Travis Hullette says that home parties can build a following for a band, that this kind of event is a first step towards other work. “Club gigs” can bring an artist, or band, greater attention and, as a result of cover charges, pay $200 to $300. Hullette himself has gone from performing in church, to home parties, to appearances at the Otha Turner Family Picnic and other local events. Home parties have changed over the years: beginning as one of the few sources of entertainment by people who had few options, to a choice by a musician to make his own music in his own home with friends and family, to someone invited to a home as an entertainer at a weekend social occasion. There is a consistent thread throughout, however, which is that home parties are attended by family and friends, and that when one arrives at the event, one recognizes most of the people in attendance. There is a sense of comfort, of home, in this atmosphere.

The Saturday night / Sunday morning duality is a little harder to determine with home parties. Certainly there is secular behavior present; however, the environment, that of a being at home, around, mainly, friends and family, has more in common with a sacred environment. At a home party, there is a feeling of trust, an expectation of
safety and comfort that one would probably not have at a blues club. Therefore, home parties have elements of both Saturday and Sunday.

More than Music

If the musical differences between secular and sacred are minimal, one must look elsewhere to distinguish between the two. The types of performances examined can be divided into two groups, those that align with church and those that align with clubs. In addition to the readily apparent differences between blues clubs and churches that have already been discussed, there appears to be an additional, underlying distinguishing feature. While Saturday night music, its venues, and its social interaction are focused on the individual and the expression of individuality, Sunday morning music is focused on community. In church, and I am writing this based on my attendance at Hunter’s Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, there is a feeling of community based on the shared spiritual experience. People arrive at approximately the same time, dressed in formal clothing, and all take part, either with singing in the choir, playing in the band, or moving and clapping in the congregation. Even during the sermon, there is a strong sense of community, with call and response transaction, the full engagement of everyone in the room, everyone focused on spirituality. More importantly, there is a sense of community, and a feeling of trust and commitment running throughout the congregation, throughout the service. In church, everyone gives.

The blues environment runs contrary to this. It is not a community, but an imagined community, a collection of acquaintances brought together temporarily. There is no common goal shared by the patrons in a blues club, just an individual desire to have fun. There is a feeling that people take more than they give.
An additional underlying characteristic of the difference between community and individuality is trust. Immersed in friends, family, and fellowship, people attend with the spirit of giving and sharing a spiritual experience. The blues experience, found in clubs rather than churches, does not foster these feelings of trust, of giving and community. Rather, it tends to cultivate the opposite, feelings of individuality, and taking rather than giving. It is not musical differences but social differences that define Saturday and Sunday.

Of the music and events discussed so far, blues festivals, churches, juke joints and blues clubs, casinos, and home parties, only the homes parties are not clearly either Saturday or Sunday; they occupy a middle ground between them.44 There is a sense of trust in community in such an environment, because of the familiarity of the attendees, but there is also an atmosphere of indulging oneself, of individuality, of taking, because of the blues-oriented behavior, the alcohol, the sexuality, the "Saturday nightness" of the whole thing. As Bennett suggests, Saturday and Sunday sometimes become two sides of the same coin, rather than diametrically opposed opposites. And the same can be said of picnics, summer weekend picnics in the Mississippi Hill Country, where community and individuality, permanence and temporality, giving and taking, come together.
CHAPTER 3
THE PICNIC

Ethnographers need to convince us...not merely that they themselves have truly “been there,” but...that had we been there we should have seen what they saw, felt what they felt, concluded what they concluded.

—Clifford Geertz

Finding Otha Turner’s house, if you have directions, is not difficult but on the other hand, if you are not looking for it, you are not likely to stumble across it, either. Driving east from downtown Senatobia, Route 4 takes you underneath Interstate 55, past houses and small churches until, after about four miles, you take a right and head south on Gravel Springs Road. You are now well outside the city limits of Senatobia but until turning onto this road, there was not the sense of being away, of being someplace else. You are in a rural part of Tate County known as the Gravel Springs community, a name which may not be recognized by the U.S. Post Office but which has been used by the locals for decades. The fife and drum band Otha Turner, Napoleon Strickland, and Turner’s daughter Bernice formed many years ago took the community’s name as its own.

The road is paved (although there are probably many residents who can remember when that was not the case), so perhaps it is the absence of a center stripe that gives the feeling of being in another place. The road runs straight for the most part, acting as a dividing line between farms as much as a means of transportation, and after a mile or so you arrive at the intersection with Yellow Dog Road. Drive straight through this intersection, go another half a mile, and you will arrive at another intersection, this one with a church on the northwest corner and a cemetery on the northeast. If you
continue straight through this intersection, you will soon cross the county line and pass Buford’s picnic ground, where Otha Turner once held picnics, and Hunter’s Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, where Turner once worshipped, and Cistern Hill Missionary Baptist Church, where Turner is buried. But the way to Otha’s house is to the left, on O.B. McClinton Road; his house is just up ahead, another quarter of a mile and around the bend. The first time I went to the picnic, I drove right past it. The house was easy to miss; it was an unremarkable looking place—small, square, set back from the road, with a porch extending across most of its front, and a rusty, corrugated tin roof. Particle board, painted white, covered the original siding and was also rotting, leading one to wonder as to its purpose, whether it was meant to keep things in, or out, or simply hold them together. In a sense, the house was just the front gate for Turner’s backyard, the site of the annual Otha Turner Family Picnic.

The driveway to the right of the house led to the backyard and since I had arrived early, while the sun was still up, I was able to survey the scene clearly. Located off to one side of the yard, past the end of the driveway, were two adjoining, roofed structures that would later be used for concessions; one, I was told, had been Turner’s hog pen. At the back of the yard, almost in the trees, was a barn with a rusty wagon wheel in front, but its view was obstructed by the makeshift stage installed just for the picnic. Created by adorning a flatbed trailer with a ramp, backdrop and apron, it was covered with instruments and electronic equipment. Power was supplied to the stage and the concession buildings from the main house by means of wires suspended ten or twelve feet off the ground. In the middle of all of this was a lone light post, perhaps thirty feet high, with a single, dim lamp, and unlike the other posts and wires which appeared to
have been arranged only for the weekend, this one looked to be very old, leading me to wonder if it was not first installed for a picnic many, many years ago. As the sun set, I repositioned my chair so that I could use the light for note taking.

There were many other signs of a picnic: a portable barbecue smoker used to help prepare the meat, a pair of chemical toilets, and several large, plastic garbage cans. These modern devices were, I suppose, concessions to progress, necessary for accommodating a growing crowd. So for this one weekend a year, the backyard took an altered appearance, new layered on old, the toilets, smoker, and stage superimposed against Turner’s homestead, the aging house, barn, hog pen, and wooden picnic table (whose rotted bench quickly gave way when I sat on it). Without the “new” in place, it must have been a haunting site, one that would conjure up images of decades gone by. Even with the additions, there was a sense that something unique was going to take place, that such an environment could only yield something memorable.46

The music finally began just past seven-thirty, but not with fife and drum band music; instead, a local hill country musician named Johnny Lowebowe did a “one-man band” act, using guitar, drumset, and vocals. This kind of entertainment is not typical in the Mississippi Hill Country, but neither did it seem out of place, as musicians from this area tend to be very versatile. Otha Turner, known for his fifing and singing, also played snare drum and bass drum at times during his fife and drum band career, and also some guitar. Napoleon Strickland, in addition to his fifing and singing, played guitar, harmonica, and diddley bow, while Jessie Mae Hemphill, who will be remembered mostly for her blues vocal and guitar work, played snare drum and bass drum in fife and
drum bands. Hill country field recordings made by Alan Lomax and others, going back as far as 1942 with Lomax’s recordings of Sid Hemphill, also feature quills (panpipes) and improvised percussion in the form of hand clapping and foot stomping. A one-man band at the picnic seemed strangely apropos.

Johnny Lowebowe’s set lasted for about thirty minutes. While the stage changed over to the next act, the sound of drums introduced The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, and Otha Turner’s legacy made its first appearance. Surprisingly, there was no fifer, and the reason for this was not readily apparent. However, one bass drummer and two snare drummers from the group performed, marching from the concession area to the end of the driveway and back. Even without a melody, the music energized the crowd, which followed the drummers, dancing to their music. The rhythms of Rising Star were riff-based: they were patterns of four beats that repeated (a “beat” is a pulse that members of the crowd dance to; a four beat pattern means that people generally move their feet and hands four times during the pattern). This not only gave a steady pulse but a continuous, familiar pattern that the audience seemed to find appealing, as exhibited in the secular dancing that it exhibited. Repetition includes the traits of both Saturday and Sunday, as it provides the basis not only for the rhythms one might dance to on a Saturday night but also for the call and response of Sunday morning gospel singing. The nature of repetition is inclusion; repetition invites you to join in. It says, “Come do this with us.” Repetition is not just call and response, but a call to join in, a call and response for a whole community. Repetition is familiarity; familiarity is comfort; with comfort, comes inclusion. Call to us with repetition and we will come, because you invite us to share in the experience. Repetition is very communal, very Sunday.
In the military fife and drum corps tradition (from whence fife and drum bands sprang), the underlying pulse is always a straight beat (the easiest kind of beat to which one can march), usually subdivided into four (e.g., quarter notes subdivided into four sixteenths). In Africa, much music is not based on a straight beat but a combination of two simultaneous beats, the 2:3 polyrhythm. Chernoff (1979: 42) states, “In African music there are always at least two rhythms going on” [emphasis in the original]. Furthermore, Schuller ([1968] 1986: 11), discussing the findings of A.M. Jones, says that Jones believes African rhythm to be additive rather than divisive. Schuller (ibid: 24), echoing the idea of additive rhythm while examining ragtime music, points out the combinations of twos and threes that form rhythms.

In fife and drum band music, syncopation is created by substituting groups of two and three (demarcated by accents) in place of groups of four. Richard Waterman (1948: 27) describes this transition using the term off-beat phrasing: “In the main, African percussion instruments disappeared, and with them the multiple-metered polyrhythms so characteristic of African music. The off-beat phrasing, which requires merely a dependable percussion beat as a point of departure, became attached to simple rhythmic patterns represented by European time-signatures.” In other words, instead of a simultaneous use of two and three as in African music, fife and drum band music uses consecutive groups to two and three.

Some researchers (Evans 1972, Lomax 1993) refer to the rhythms of fife and drum band music as “polyrhythmic.” In the strict sense of the word this is true, because with the bass drum and snare drum playing different, repeating patterns, there are two rhythmic lines co-existing. However, it is not the same as African polyrhythm,
where patterns of two and three are constantly, and simultaneously, present, and underlie all other rhythms. The term syncopation best describes the rhythms of fife and drum band music, and the kind of syncopation that results when the two against three African polyrhythm encounters the European rhythmic model, particularly the one used in marches of the military music tradition, which clearly is not polyrhythmic but simply privileges the beats on which the feet fall.

Accents naturally fall with the feet when marching. Placing an accent on a beat where the feet do not land creates rhythmic interest, and with it, a kind of rhythmic melody, a melody resulting from a combination of notes played on heavy beats and accented notes played on notes in-between heavy beats. In order to sound accented, a note played in-between heavy beats does not have to be accented, only as loud as the heavy beats—in other words, it only needs to be louder than it normally would be. A note played as loudly as a heavy beat, but not on a heavy beat, creates syncopation. These syncopated, melodic-rhythmic patterns, played over and over again, form the basis of fife and drum band riffs. Syncopation is created by notes at a musical crossroads, notes that occupy a space in-between. These notes create an energy, a tension, that propels the music forward as they resolve on downbeats, only to re-occupy the space in-between. Syncopation is the difference between drumming for marching and drumming for dancing. \(^{55}\)

Traditional military fife and drum corps music is not riff-based but through-composed (except that each phrase is usually repeated one time). The snare drum parts may even be said to have a melodic quality to them in that they generally parallel, rhythmically; that is, they reinforce the fife parts by playing the same or similar rhythms,
and punctuating with accents. Fife and drum band fife parts sometimes use melodies, and sometimes riffs, but the drum parts are always repetitive, riff-based parts. Each style is, of course, the most appropriate for its genre: the military style is good for marching, and the riff style is right for dancing.

The style of movement used by the fife and drum band musicians is, at times, a mix of the two. Sometimes they march, in time with the music but with a bit of a swagger, rather than traditional military bearing. At other times they move in a column, military style, fifer leading the drummers, but not necessarily in time with the music. Most often, after marching for some period of time, they stand in a small group, not moving from one point to another, but dancing to the beat of their own music. There is no marked transition from one style of movement to another; a fine line separates marching and dancing (see Arbeau [1589] 1967 for a centuries-old description of marching and dancing). At picnics, the drums provide a syncopated pulse, giving the crowd, the dancers, a musical foundation, but the dancers, in turn, give energy back to the musicians. It becomes a reciprocal arrangement, a sharing of responsibility for the perpetuation of the activity. No one plays a quarter note throughout, the basic pulse that holds dancers, drummers, and fifer together, but it is implied and suggested, danced around by drummers and dancers alike. This makes the drumming a form of dance, a rhythm, a bodily engagement of feet, rhythm, heartbeat, and pulse.

After Rising Star concluded, Ada Mae Freeman, Otha Turner’s granddaughter and the host of the picnic, welcomed the crowd and announced the raffle tickets, T-shirts, and concessions on sale. She also mentioned that Shardé Thomas was playing with her high school band but would be arriving shortly, thus explaining the lack of a fifer
during the first performance of Rising Star. As the next act, a drumset and guitar/vocal duet, began its set on stage, I noticed that the crowd had grown steadily since my arrival. The sun had set and the temperature on this warm August evening had dropped to a comfortable level, and as a consequence, Turner’s backyard had slowly filled up, over the course of two hours, from a handful of people to a couple hundred. And as the crowd grew, it took on a certain form.

The physical space of Turner’s homestead was arranged with the house on high ground. Moving from the temporary stage to the back of the house, the land sloped gently uphill, forming a natural amphitheater that provided favorable sight lines to the crowd. Attendees (it seems odd to label them picnickers when they came for the music more than the food) took positions around the stage such that social space was arranged in a series of semi-circles that began directly in front of the stage and, growing ever larger, moved uphill toward the back of the house. The occupancy of these semi-circles was based on the level of engagement the individual listener had with the music, but the position of any particular individual in this semi-ordered world of semi-circles was not fixed. Rather, it was very fluid, and when, as a result of new performers, the desire for different companions, or an increased level of inebriation, an individual felt a need for change, he only needed to move a few feet to join a new group, a new community of listeners, a new set of social circumstances. Simply put, people enjoyed the music in different ways at different times according to how they positioned themselves.

The innermost semi-circle consisted of those leaning against the stage and, in some cases, enjoying the music so much that they were driven to engage the
performers to a greater degree than might have been appropriate (even for a blues festival), the result being that other listeners (even, perhaps, those in the outer semi-circles) might have sensed an interruption in the lyrics (e.g., "my wife done left me... yeah, I'm free later," this last part delivered in a more declamatory style of vocalization) before suddenly realizing that they were no longer hearing just the blues but half of a conversation. Both performer and listener reached across the floodlights, so to speak, blurring the line between music-maker and music-consumer.

The next semi-circle was made up of dancers. It was a group that mixed easily with the first (i.e., those who were dancing one moment paused to lean on the stage the next, and vice versa), and the dancing was solo or in pairs, mixed or same gender. It was generally vigorous, high-energy dancing, so the chosen location, close to the speakers, was well suited to the activity, which was born of a desire to be fully engaged, physically, with the music, a part of the moment at hand. The dancers consumed the music as an automobile does gasoline, and the result, in both cases, was movement. Semi-circle number three was also moving, though not as vigorously. Those people were listening to the music on stage and watching the dancers, who themselves became part of the show to the more distant semi-circles. With a beer in one hand, they were individually “dancing” in place while letting the music wash over them (as the alcohol washed inside of them), enjoying the moment in their own way, a less physical way, one that allowed closer listening. That was the difference between groups two and three: group three was absorbing the music while group two had been absorbed by it. In both cases, music led to liquid-fueled movement.

The fourth semi-circle seemed indecisive. Taken as a whole, it stood and
watched, surveying the entire scene in front of it, from musicians to dancers to listeners, as if analyzing, or trying to decide what to do next. Should I stay or go, dance or only listen, observe or engage? It was a point of decision where one must eventually choose whether to step through the looking glass into this other, fully engaged world of picnic or, instead, remain outside the fishbowl, only to watch others who prefer to swim in the music. Group five had already decided. Relaxed and comfortable, its members occupied lawn chairs, their view partially blocked by the preceding groups, but it seemed not to matter to them. They preferred outsider status, clearly choosing that their experience would be only a listening one, not a dancing one, that the volume of music in the back was more than enough. There was orderliness to this semi-circle, partially due to the tidy rows they formed, and partially due to the uniformity of the chairs, all of which, based on their collapsing design, appear to have been purchased from the same Wal-Mart. This community of chair-dwellers had, apparently, a tendency toward entrainment, so when a new member arrived, he or she put his chair alongside others. It was a part of the overall feeling of cooperation that existed at the picnic, a general recognition that having the chairs in rows saved space and facilitated movement in a crowded area. And having decided to be on the outside looking in, there was safety in numbers.

Beyond the lawn chairs was the sixth and final group, the socializers. A loosely arranged community, its members were along the back of Otha’s house, at the side of the house underneath the trees, and up and down the driveway. It was not a semi-circle like the other groups but a collection of casual observers scattered about the yard. Although a few appeared to be listening intently (I considered them to be members of
the chair-dwelling community who neglected to bring chairs), most gathered in small groups where they smoked, drank, talked, and visited with friends. For them, the music was only background noise for a social gathering. They were here because everyone else was, because it only happens once a year.

On Friday evening (the picnic always occurs on a Friday and a Saturday evening during the last weekend in August), I noticed a number of young, white people who arrived late and stayed in the outer semi-circles. They were well dressed, which suggested to me that they came from one of the towns north of Senatobia, possibly Hernando or Horn Lake, towns that function as suburbs of Memphis. High School football games are played Friday nights in north central Mississippi, so making an appearance at the Otha Turner picnic was, for them, “the thing to do” after the game. Moving to one of the inner semi-circles, however, was not. Also, there was a tendency for whites to occupy the outer semi-circles in greater numbers than the inner, and similarly, a tendency for the younger crowd to stay on the outside. In both cases, perhaps they felt that either the music or social environment was not for them, and they were not comfortable moving inward, becoming more fully engaged. Resultantly, the inner two semi-circles were largely occupied by African Americans aged 30-50 years old.64

Further removed from activity were those buying and selling in the concession area. It was a congregating area where members of all semi-circles eventually came, for a goat barbecue sandwich, a beer, or a T-shirt.65 Even further out, at the end of the driveway or on the road, people waited for friends to arrive before venturing into the backyard and melting into a semi-circle.66 The picnic did not truly stop at the end of the
driveway, as there were cars parked not only on both sides of the road but also in the front yards of neighbors, who were renting their space for prices ranging from three to five dollars. That was where tailgating occurred, for those who chose to have their own parties. Very near the tailgaters physically, but clearly separated from them socially, were the local residents, Otha Turner’s former neighbors, who were either delighting in the annual spectacle, or dreading the chaos it brought to their otherwise quiet community, or simply make the best of it by selling the parking spaces. Finally, there was the world beyond, the residents of Senatobia, most (but not all) of whom knew about Otha Turner and his picnic located in the Gravel Springs community of rural Tate County, and then those from places much further away, like Japan, where a television commercial featuring Otha Turner was aired, and France, which sent a film crew that produced a movie, *Mississippi Blues*, that concluded with an Otha Turner interview. For one weekend at the end of August each year, there is a musical and social energy in Otha Turner’s backyard that reaches very far, indeed.

When the duet finished at around 9:10 P.M., Ada Mae Freeman returned to the stage and called for Shardé Thomas. Had she arrived? It was time for Rising Star’s second set. We had our answer in five minutes; The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, with one bass drummer, two snare drummers and, yes, the only active cane-fifer left in the Mississippi Hill Country, began playing, marching, and dancing through a crowd that followed the ensemble around the yard. During the picnic the band fills a unique role: while it functions as an interlude to the on-stage blues acts, it is also the main attraction for many in attendance and sets the mood for the whole crowd.67

With the fifer aboard, Rising Star was able to utilize its repertoire of songs, a
repertoire that had been handed down from Otha Turner. Turner drew from many different genres, including both secular and sacred pieces (See Ferris 1970, Charters 1975, Epstein 1977, Fisher 1990, Courlander 1991, Oakley 1997, Work 1998, and Levine 2007 for analyses of early African-American and blues music). During the Otha Turner Family Picnic, his grandchildren draw from this same repertoire. It included three old minstrel tunes, “Granny Will Your Dog Bite,” “Shortnin’ Bread,” and “Henduck”; a children’s song, “Little Sally Walker,” two blues standards, “My Babe,” by Little Walter, and the Mississippi Sheiks’ “Station Blues;” two spirituals, “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah” and “When the Saints Go Marchin’ In,” and two riff-style pieces, “Shimmy She Wobble” and “Bounce Ball.” As already mentioned, all of the drum rhythms were riff-based, but in the case of the two riff-style pieces, the melodies were also, and there were no lyrics; they are instrumental selections. “Shimmy She Wobble,” which is the name of an old dance, was a Turner favorite, but Shardé Thomas has shown a preference for “Bounce Ball.” That night, she decided to play that piece first.

Probably the best-known piece is “Station Blues” (sometimes referred to as “Sittin’ on Top of the World”), which was first released by the Mississippi Sheiks in 1930. Turner included the piece on both of his CDs, Everybody Hollerin’ Goat, and From Senegal to Senatobia, and Rising Star still performs it today; in fact, some members of the Turner family organize themselves as a rhythm & blues band and perform the piece on stage during the picnic. Many artists have covered it over the years, but Turner’s influence has resulted in at least two additional versions. The North Mississippi Allstars, a contemporary trio performed the piece, along with the drummers of Rising Star, on their live album, Hill Country Revue. Blues artist Corey Harris,
known for his musical explorations, used The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band on two tracks of his album *Mississippi to Mali*, “Station Blues,” and an instrumental piece, “Back Atcha.” Another track, recorded without fife and drum, is entitled “Mr. Turner.” Otha Turner was to perform the recording session, but when he passed away just before the scheduled date, granddaughter Shardé Thomas took his place.

“My Babe,” a 1955 hit from the rhythm & blues artist Little Walter is another example of a commercially successful piece covered by fife and drum bands. Notice that both “Station Blues” and “My Babe” were released during Turner’s lifetime—he was “tuned-in” to the music of his day and borrowed when he felt it appropriate. Turner recorded the piece for his CD *Everybody Hollerin’ Goat*, and Rising Star still performs it frequently. It is one of the most often recorded pieces in the fife and drum band repertoire, with six known recordings by either Otha Turner or Napoleon Strickland.

The music of Sunday, on the other hand, is heard through the spirituals. “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah” was a definite Turner favorite, and he used it on both of his CD releases. In fact, it was one of the first tracks Turner ever recorded, at the home of his friend Bill Ramsey, and became part of his very first release, a cassette tape that he sold at picnics in the 1990s. Rising Star still plays it, and it can be heard at gospel concerts in the Mississippi Hill Country today.

Secular and sacred music meet at a tune called “Little Sally Walker.” It is a children’s song, something heard on playgrounds, with many versions of the lyrics. The key phrase, as it is sung by Nettie Mae and Aleneda Turner on David Evans album *Afro-American Folk Music From Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi*, is “Rise Sally, rise.” However, when performed as a blues piece in the Mississippi Hill Country (and
elsewhere), it has entirely different set of lyrics and the key phrase becomes the suggestive “Ride Sally, ride” (with the audience often joining in at that moment). Turner never recorded this piece, but his colleague, Jessie Mae Hemphill, included it on her album *Dare You To Do It Again*, as an instrumental selection, and Shardé Thomas has declared it her favorite piece—rarely does she not use it in a performance.73

One of the minstrel tunes, “Granny, Do Your Dog Bite?” was included on Turner’s *Everybody Hollerin’ Goat*, and serves to underscore the diversity of the repertoire. Twentieth-century blues and R&B, a minstrel tune from the nineteenth century, a spiritual and a children’s song handed down from generation to generation comprises a veritable “hit parade” of African-American music history, the music of Saturday and Sunday, in all its variety, on display at the Otha Turner Family Picnic. Yet despite the variety, there is an ever-present element that binds them together into one genre. It is the drum parts, with their constant, riff-style playing that give fife and drum band music its identity, and that identity is best demonstrated in the aforementioned riff style pieces that Rising Star has in its repertoire. In addition to the rhythmic riffs played by the snare and bass drums on all fife and drum band pieces, these pieces consist of short melodic riffs rather then the full melodic fragments of the other selections; and instead of alternating a phrase of fife with a phrase of vocals, they are usually performed without any singing. This puts them in a category by themselves, but it is an important category—with their melodic emphasis on rhythm, they comprise the most “danceable” part of the repertoire, and the short melodic riffs, combined with the absence of vocals, remove any sense of form; one senses they could continue ad infinitum. During a long night of dancing at a picnic, they were probably the preferred music.74 “Shimmy She
“Wobble” was Turner’s signature piece; his two CDs included multiple versions of it, and it was this piece which came to the attention of Martin Scorsese and became the main them for the movie *Gangs of New York*, earning Turner fame and fortune near the end of his life. While “Bounce Ball” has become the main “riff” piece under Shardé Thomas’s leadership, she also likes to play her favorite “Little Sally Walker” in a riff style, albeit with lyrics.

Most fife and drum band pieces begin with solo fife, with the drums entering shortly thereafter. It may be only two beats or several, but the introduction by solo fife is, apparently, used to identify the piece to the drummers and to establish the tempo. Upon hearing the fife, the drums, one at a time, pick up the tempo and render the appropriate riff. Melodies can be short—perhaps eight counts, or longer, up to sixteen counts, but riff style pieces generally use melodies of only four counts. After a period of time, the fifer gives an alert to the drummers that the piece will conclude at the end of the current phrase. Otha Turner used an alert played rhythmically, and his two protégés, Napoleon Strickland and Shardé Thomas, adopted the same method. Ed Young, on the other hand, used a non-rhythmic alert with the Young Brothers Fife and Drum Band. Alerts must contrast with the music in order to get the attention of the drummers; Turner’s method achieves contrast through the repetition of the tonic and by landing on a downbeat while playing the dominant; Young’s method contrasts by being out of rhythm. Neither method is foolproof, as the recordings include times when a snare or bass drummer will continue beyond the alert for a beat or two.

When Rising Star played “Bounce Ball,” it pointed to the existence of riff-style pieces as the most obvious difference between black and white styles of fife and drum.
During the Civil War, military fifers and drummers existed in a one-to-one relationship, with one fifer and one drummer assigned to a company of one hundred men. Fife and drum bands, however, have a ratio of at least two drummers (one snare and one bass) for a single fifer, and in the case of Rising Star, normally at least two snare drummers and perhaps even two bass drummers. This gives the music a strong rhythmic flavor, so it is not surprising that riff-style pieces would be in the repertoire. While Sid Hemphill’s musical activities involved other genres of music, such as panpipes and string bands, performed for both black and white audiences, the Young Brothers have only been documented as performing fife and drum band music, and mainly for black audiences at summer picnics. This suggests that black picnickers preferred the riff-style music, at least during the time when the Young Brothers were active.\(^7\)

The drumming in fife and drum band music is always riff based, regardless of whether the melody being played by the fifer is a melodic or riff-based tune. The riffs are almost always four beats long but are not strictly repeated—variation is the rule, and keeping a “groove” is the intent. None of the drummers is playing exactly the same thing; the two snare drummers play the same basic rhythm, as do the bass drummers, but the basic rhythms of each groove are embellished to such a degree that a very heterophonic style is the result.

It is the fife part which dictates the nature of the piece, whether it is riff-style or melodic:\(^7\) a melodic piece has a fife part with a melody of eight or sixteen counts, while the fife part in a riff-style piece plays a four-count pattern. In both cases, the drums usually play a four-count pattern. More obviously, a melodic piece will also have lyrics, always sung by the fifer in the Mississippi Hill Country style. Riffs occupy a space in-
between melody and rhythm. That they do so in regard to fifing is not surprising; as already mentioned, fifing, inherently melodic, is done very rhythmically in riff-style playing, with the fife part on these pieces only four counts long and having a limited melodic content. But riff-style drumming is also in-between: it is in-between the melodic-style drumming of traditional military fife and drum corps, which uses rhythms that parallel melody, and African polyrhythm, which it has adapted into syncopation. Traditional military drumming has melodic qualities while riff-style fifing has rhythmic qualities. The melodic and rhythmic drumming, the melodic and rhythmic fifing, all come together when Mississippi fife and drum bands play riff-style pieces.80

The role of the bass drummer, in particular, speaks to the African influences in this African-American music (See Oliver 1970, Roberts 1974, Charters 1981, Lomax 1993, and Kubik 1999 for examples of scholarship that focuses on African retentions in African-American music). In traditional military fife and drum corps, the bass drummer is in a subservient role, serving primarily to keep a steady beat for marching, and secondarily to provide an occasional syncopated beat that reinforces the snare drum part. In fife and drum band music, the bass drum is the lead drum, pounding out a very syncopated rhythm that creates a polyrhythm with the snare drums. Syncopation is African-American, but using the lowest pitched drum, the most resonant drum, as the lead rather than the highest pitched drum, is an African ideal. The snare drum occupies middle ground between fife and bass drum, more rhythmic than the fife, but also more melodic than the bass drum because of the embellishments and shadings it can play.81 Furthermore, a bass drummer using two beaters (although they sometimes use only one) can make one drum sound like two by using two different kinds of beaters and
striking the head in two different places. Lonnie Young, bass drummer of the Young Brothers Fife and Drum Band, was especially good at this—recordings of the Young Brothers sound as if the group has a snare drum, tenor drum, and bass drum, rather than just a snare and a bass.

Consistent with the existence of riff-style pieces, and the emphasis on rhythm, is the fact that no harmony exists in fife and drum band music. This characteristic largely holds true in Mississippi Hill Country blues today. Yes, hill country guitarists play chords, but the twelve-bar blues form that came to define blues in the Mississippi Delta never took hold on the other side of the Choctaw Ridge. In a discussion on harmony, Kubik (1999: 106) states, “In some forms of the blues—for example, much of Robert Belfour’s and Jessie Mae Hemphill’s music—Western-style harmony is even completely ignored or referred to only in the most perfunctory manner.” It is interesting that Kubik would identify two Mississippi Hill Country blues artists, one of whom (Hemphill) was very experienced in the fife and drum band genre. Even with electric keyboards in abundant use in churches, chord progressions have never become part of hill country music. And with harmony less influential in Mississippi Hill Country blues than in other styles of blues, it stands to reason that another musical element might assume greater importance. Rhythm, driving rhythm, rhythm that sounds like a train steaming through Como and Senatobia towards Memphis and points north, is strongly felt in hill country blues. The music of the Mississippi Hill Country has been influenced by fife and drum bands and this influence, melody and rhythm without harmony, is still felt today (See also Kubik 2008 for more discussion on African influences in the blues).

After Rising Star concluded, the next act, a five-piece R&B group, began on
stage. It was an integrated band, with a white bass player, black drummer, two white
guitarists and a black guitarist. I noticed the crowd had grown larger still, and younger;
Shardé Thomas was not the only person to come to the picnic after the football game.83
Two hours ago it was still a family picnic, but now it was a mini-blues festival, a smaller
version of Clarksdale, or the equivalent size of the Como festival, but with echoes of
Otha Turner—fife and drum band music, goat barbecue, and Turner t-shirts—
throughout. Sunday had given way to Saturday.

I once had a conversation with Travis Hullette where I asked him about the many
different communities he interacts with in Tate County (Hullette 2009). The list included
immediate family, neighborhood, school, church, and so on, but one community stood
out from the rest: the community of Mississippi Hill Country musicians. While other
communities are defined by issues of kinship, religion, race, age, or simply geography,
the community of musicians cuts across those other boundaries. Hullette estimated that
there are approximately fifty musicians within a 100-mile radius in the Mississippi Hill
Country, fifty people who actively pursue paying (and sometimes non-paying) "gigs."
According to Hullette, they are "one big family" that learns from each other, that teaches
each other "licks" and techniques, which are "tossed" around. This method of
transmission, sharing of techniques by rote methods, helps to maintain a continuity of
style, a style of blues that is unique to the hill country. The style practiced in this area is
one that is often overlooked by scholars, one that forgoes the prototypical twelve-bar
format that defines the blues in the minds of many and instead places more emphasis
on rhythm. Mississippi Hill Country blues, in some ways, has more in common with
other types of hill country music (such as gospel and fife and drum band music) than it
does with the blues of the Mississippi Delta.\textsuperscript{84}

This community of musicians is certainly not closed, but is exclusive, in a sense, partly as a result of its oral methods of transmission, but also because Mississippi Hill Country musicians have largely been ignored by the recording industry. Many labels record blues artists, but few have sought out the artists in the hill country, and with limited recordings available, there are probably few artists outside of the local community of musicians who have been influenced by the hill country style.\textsuperscript{85} Hullette says that they network by phone (Travis has grown up in the age of the cell phone), and they see each other at musical events and "other people's gigs." Everyone has certain people they play with more often than others, but they mix and match freely. The community exists within different genres of music, as some of the same musicians play gospel, blues, and R&B, and also within different types of events, including the clubs, churches, home parties, and festivals.

At the Highway 51 Blues Festival, the musicians were more integrated than the crowd, underscoring the notion that this is a community within a community, a space in-between other communities found in the Mississippi Hill Country.\textsuperscript{86} Unlike the Como festival, the Otha Turner picnic has very racially integrated audience, but is the picnic a reflection of the community of musicians, or vice-versa? It leaves one to wonder what effect Turner himself might have had on the entire community known as the Mississippi Hill Country (see Kochman 1981 for discussion on relations between black and white people.

After the R&B group finished, Rising Star played (and sang, marched, and danced) around the yard, with Shardé Thomas leading the way. It is generally agreed
that Thomas is the only active cane-fifer in Mississippi today, but determining the place of the “fice,” the Mississippi cane fife, in African-American musical history is more problematic. In the late nineteenth-century, various African-American musics such as field hollers, spirituals, and work songs of the railroads, riverboats, and levees existed that may have contributed to the development of the blues. It is not widely accepted that fife and drum band music may have also contributed. Because the first recordings of the genre were not made until 1942, at a time when fife and drum band music had probably been as influenced by the blues as it may have influenced the blues, it is impossible to know exactly what fife and drum band music sounded like in the late nineteenth century. However, this pre-blues genre may actually be one of the best ways to learn about early blues because, unlike the aforementioned spirituals and work songs, fife and drum band music is primarily instrumental, and the method for constructing the fife seems to have changed little in the past 150 years. Ferris (1983: 173, 177) quotes Otha Turner as saying he was born on June 2, 1908, and that he first learned how to make a fife when he was thirteen years old from two “old drum players around here.” Exactly how old the “old drum players” were is unclear (to a thirteen year-old, it could have meant anyone over the age of forty), but Turner’s story suggests that he learned fife making from those who had been doing it since the late nineteenth century. Because granddaughter Shardé Thomas continues to make fifes the same way Turner did, it stands to reason that the fifes currently played by Thomas are constructed virtually the same way that they were in the late nineteenth century, perhaps as late as 150 years ago. Therefore, the sound of the cane fife today may be very much like it was in 1865; with vocal styles, we do not know. Many scholars have
sought to prove that African culture survived the middle passage (see Herskovits 1941). Evans (1970) and Kubik (1999) focus on African chordophones and how they might have influenced the blues. This is logical, because the guitar emerged as the principal blues instrument. However, the role of the Mississippi cane fife should not be overlooked.

Military fifes used by the American military in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were constructed according to a particular tuning standard so that fifers could play together. In Mississippi, where cane fifes are always played solo, there is no need for such a standard. From our twenty-first century perspective, it is impossible to know whether African-American fife and drum band music ever used more than one fife, but there are no recordings with more than one fifer playing at a time. Whether it was a desire for solo fifing that obviated the need for a tuning standard, or the difficulty in adhering to a tuning standard with cane that mandated the use of only one fife at a time is unknown.

Each cane fife is unique. To make one, a fifer locates a canebrake (an area of dense cane growth), usually found in wet areas near creeks and rivers, and cuts one or more stalks of cane. Because they are quite long (they can also used as fishing poles), one stalk can make several fifes. A length of cane approximately one and one half segments long is cut from the stalk, with a node, or joint, at one end. A hot poker is used to remove the node found in the middle of the cane, hollowing the piece. With a pocketknife, a notch is carved for the blowhole, and the hot poker used to finish the hole. The finger holes are similarly formed, but it is their location that concerns us most. To determine the proper placement of the holes, the fifer licks his fingertips, puts the fife
to this mouth, and places his fingers along the fife. The holes are formed where the fingers were placed. In other words, the placement of the holes, and the subsequent pitches produced by the fife, are determined not by any desire to adhere to a tuning standard, but by the size and spacing of the fifer’s fingers. It is true that other factors, such as the length and diameter of the fife, and the diameter of the holes, also affect intonation, but the point is that no attempt is made to arrive at a standard intonation for the instrument. Each Mississippi cane fife is as different as the individual who makes it.  

The scale produced by this method of construction, while not exactly the same for any two instruments, approximates a Western chromatic scale. This trait, found consistently in cane fifes, clearly distinguishes them from their diatonically tuned military counterparts. Yet another characteristic distinguishes cane fifes not only from military fifes, but also from each other: the number of holes burned into the fife varies from one cane fifer to another. Traditional military fifes were constructed with six holes and tuned to the key of Bb. Cane fifes, in addition to not being tuned to a particular standard, are made with as many holes as the maker (or fifer) chooses. Ed Young, for instance, played with a six-hole fife, but generally only fingered the first five holes, leaving the last one open; Otha Turner preferred a five-hole model, as does granddaughter Shardé Thomas; and Napoleon Strickland, who learned his fifing from Turner, started his career with a five-hole model, but like Young, preferred to leave the last hole open, and eventually used a four-hole fife. That might sound like a limiting factor, but Strickland is generally considered the most virtuosic of all the cane fifers.

An experienced cane fifer can “bend” pitches by using subtle finger and breath
techniques, producing microtones, pitches which fall in-between the notes of a western chromatic scale. Combined with the half-step nature of the tuning that is inherent with the construction of the fife, the instrument is capable of producing most any pitch.\textsuperscript{91} Along with its naturally “airy” sound, this gives the cane fife a pronounced vocal quality, a sound that resembles the human voice much more closely than its military counterpart, quite surprising considering the strong visual similarity between the two kinds of fife. Perhaps it is not so much the instrument as the instrumentalist that causes this—while military fifers, grounded in the European tradition, fought to stay “in tune,” the cane fifers, using instruments which rendered an entirely different set of pitches, went in a different direction.\textsuperscript{92}

Documentation regarding fife construction and performance practice does not exist, but what we do know indicates that Otha Turner is, possibly, only a generation or two removed from the cane fifers who first appeared in the antebellum period. It is possible, therefore, that current cane fife performance practices closely resemble the original. And those current practices, preserved through recordings made in 1942, and then from 1958 until the present, indicate a vocal quality, not only through their timbre, but in the individuality of the instrument construction, as manifested in the length and diameter of the instrument, the number and spacing of the finger holes, and the simple fact that fifers generally construct their own instruments.

The current repertoire of Mississippi Hill Country fifing indicates that the blues have influenced the genre, but it is also likely that fifing influenced the blues. Other pre-blues African-American genres—the songs of the railroad, levee, and prison—are said to have done so, but those are all vocal genres. Cane fifing has, perhaps, been
overlooked thus far as a possible influence on the blues guitar playing that emerged in
the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two distinguishing characteristics
identify blues guitar playing: pitch bending, i.e., playing pitches outside the Western
twelve-note chromatic scale on an instrument meant for that scale, and the use of the
guitar in a vocal-like manner, by virtue of using it in conjunction with the voice in call and
response fashion, rather than using it simply to accompany the voice.\textsuperscript{93} Cane fifing,
with its half-step scale and pitch inflections created through subtle airflow adjustments
and fingering, foreshadows the pitch bending of blues guitarists. Furthermore, fifers,
although not in call-and-response fashion, do alternate between vocals and fife, and the
instrument, arguably, has a vocal quality to it.\textsuperscript{94}

Kubik (1999) addresses the issue of blue notes in his book African and the Blues,
especially in chapter nine, “The Blues Tonal System,” and chapter ten, “The ‘Flatted
Fifth’.” The lowered third, fifth, and seventh notes of a Western scale, the blue notes,
seem unique to blues artists. Using Western methods of analysis, and quoting a variety
of authors, Kubik attempts to clearly define exactly what a blue note is. He engages in
a technical discussion regarding the origins of blue notes (2008). His analysis reaches
from the xylophones of Africa to present day blues artists: he addresses neutral thirds,
equiheptatonic tonal systems, says things like, “The Delta blues style especially is, in a
sense, an extension of the west-central Sudanic Islamicized style cluster,” and closely
analyzes, from a Western position, several blues transcriptions. These rather unwieldy
analyzes perhaps miss a central point, one that becomes clear when taking cane fifes
into consideration.

Most scholars cite field hollers and the songs of the levee and railroad workers as
the wellspring for the blues, overlooking the contribution of cane fifing to the
development of what we now call the blues scale. Like cane fifes, made by the fifers
themselves with no two alike, a blues scale is an individual thing, and the exact location
of a pitch along the stretch of an octave varies from person to person. Even more
important is the coming and going; it is the movement of the bent pitches that counts.
Perhaps Kubik errs when he tries to “pin down” blue notes in relation to the Western
chromatic scale, calling them lowered sevenths, flatted fifths, and neutral thirds. A blue
note is a thing that moves, just as a train moves down the tracks, or a fife and drum
band moves through a crowd of picnickers. Pitch bending, that distinctive sound of the
blues guitarist, is the music of Saturday. It is not often heard in gospel music where a
guitarist accompanies singers. On Saturday nights, the guitar becomes a vocalist and
enjoys the freedom needed to bend pitches.

Rising Star’s music was followed by yet another blues act on stage, and as the
beer continued to flow, the crowd continued to grow. Rising Star’s relationship with the
crowd has changed over the past four years that I have attended the picnic. While fife
and drum bands have always played for the enjoyment of their listeners, the way in
which the listeners enjoy them has changed. Traditionally, fife and drum bands were
the “musical support” of the picnic. Picnics started in the afternoon with baseball and
food as the primary forms of entertainment. This Sunday morning family behavior
eventually gave way to Saturday night—alcohol, gambling, and dancing—with the fife
and drum bands providing the music.

In 1958 and 1959, Alan Lomax returned to the American South, this time with
stereo equipment. In the next two years, his efforts resulted in a total of nineteen LPs,
and most of the music contained on those albums had never been recorded before. Imagine how the Georgia Sea Island singers must have felt when Lomax expressed a desire to record them, so that thousands of others might hear them. The music of the Georgia Sea Island singers was intended only for the enjoyment of the people who were doing it, not for a live audience, and certainly not for a distant one, although there may, at times, have been spectators. Similarly, the music of fife and drum bands was never intended for recording, nor for an audience. However, there were participants, those who danced to the music, along with the musicians themselves. The music was intended for these participants, and they consumed the music, using it to engage in the dancing of Saturday night.

The dynamic between fife and drum band and its participant/consumers can be expressed by using Adrienne Kaeppler’s conception of the audience. Kaeppler (2010: 185-201) uses the term “beholder” to mean “everyone who witnesses a performance.” She divides beholders into three categories (participants are excluded): “gods and ritual supplicants,” “engaged audience members,” and “spectators.” “Gods and ritual supplicants” includes witnesses who understand that what they are seeing has been passed on from previous generations, but do not necessarily understand why; they see the performance as ritual. The traditional participant/consumers of fife and drum band music would best be put into this category, even though they are participating, because they are not the musicians themselves; as consumers they are also “beholders.” “Engaged audience members” understand what they are seeing and hearing and this group “derives meaning from the performance.” It understands the performance as theater. The “spectators” are people who do not understand the system of what they
are watching. They appreciate the performance as spectacle.

When scholars and hard-core blues enthusiasts began to attend picnics, they were the first to understand the events as theater. After Lomax (1993; LPs 1960, 1961; film 1990) came George Mitchell (1971; LP 1969), Chris Strachwitz (LP 1969), Paul Oliver (1970; LP 1970), William Ferris (1978, 1983; LP 1983), Judy Peiser (film 1971), David Evans (1972; film 1971; LP 1971), Alex Küstner (LPs 1982), and others. As their scholarship grew, a larger audience came to know about Otha Turner and his picnics, and the picnic attendees began to change.

One example of scholarship leading to new interest in Otha Turner, his music, and his picnics came in the form of the North Mississippi Allstars, a trio based in Hernando, Mississippi and probably the most prolific example of hill country blues today. Two of the three members are brothers, Luther and Cody Dickinson, and sons of Jim Dickinson, the late “Rockabilly” star of the 1960s (the third member of the trio is Chris Chew). Jim Dickinson (a white man) decided to move his family to Mississippi from Memphis “so that his sons could go to school with black people” (North Mississippi Allstars 2009). Part of the reason behind this desire was seeing the performance of Otha Turner on the Mister Roger’s Neighborhood televisions program, broadcast on PBS in 1982.98 Having “discovered” Otha Turner and his music in this manner, the Dickinsons interacted with Turner, studied and learned from his music, and eventually produced two CDs for him, Everybody Hollerin’ Goat and From Senegal to Senatobia. The interaction between Turner and the North Mississippi Allstars led to greater fame for Turner, attracting a larger, and different, audience to his music (see Dickinson 2003 for information on the North Mississippi Allstars, the Dickinson family, and their
relationship with Otha Turner).

Most of Turner’s picnics until his discovery by the North Mississippi Allstars were held at L.P. Buford’s picnic grounds a couple miles south of Turner’s home and just across the county line in Panola County. Buford’s picnic grounds, because of its location in Panola County, allowed alcohol, and was large enough to accommodate huge crowds as well as baseball games. Even today, there is a baseball backstop and some makeshift concession stands.

It was later that the picnics moved to Turner’s backyard. There was probably no single reason why, but as Turner’s reputation spread beyond Tate County, as perceptions of him transformed him from simply Otha Turner, farmer and musician, to Otha Turner, elder statesman, folk hero, father figure, leading exponent of Mississippi Hill Country blues, and ultimately, a national treasure and living embodiment of the kind of non-material success that really matters in life, Turner began having picnics in his own backyard. It was a very “Sunday” thing to do, move the picnic to your own backyard, in a dry county, with his own grandchildren staffing his musical ensemble, The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, and an increasing number of picnic attendees, traveling from further and further away, so that they could meet the man, hear his music, and get his “vibe.” And Turner welcomed them all, sometimes going out of his way to make them feel at home.

Ethnomusicologist David Evans recalls that as the audience for Turner’s picnics changed, with more white people attending and people traveling greater distances to attend, the picnic itself seemed to grow out of control, as people not associated with the family worked the concessions. Turner was growing old at this point; perhaps this was
another reason the location of the picnics changed from L.P. Buford’s to his own
home. Perhaps that was a price to pay for becoming famous, for becoming a cultural
icon. Since Turner’s death, the family has reassumed control, handling concessions
and, recently, charging a two-dollar admission. Although making money from
concessions has always been the norm at hill country picnics (in many cases, probably
the impetus for having them), the admission fee signals an emphasis on making the
picnic profitable.

Another profit-making venture is the sale of t-shirts. The shirts are meant to make
money, but perhaps it is more telling to consider for whom the shirts are intended, who
the market is for this product. Decorated with the likenesses of members of Rising Star,
especially Otha Turner and Shardé Thomas (and sometimes the two together), the
shirts are, undoubtedly directed at the newer audience.

When Sherman Cooper attended picnics in the 1960s, he was one of a very few
white people to participate, and the whites were all locals. As a result of the blues
revival and the efforts of scholars, the North Mississippi Allstars, and blues enthusiasts,
the audience became increasingly white, and less local, with the result that fewer
attendees could appreciate the fife and drum band performances as ritual. Kaeppler’s
paradigm divides witnesses of performances into three events: those who know what
they see as ritual, those who understand it as theater, and those who appreciate it as
spectacle. African Americans (and a small number of whites) of the hill country who
had grown up with the picnics, who had attended these events their entire lives, knew
the picnics and their fife and drum band music as a Mississippi Hill Country ritual, while
scholars and serious blues enthusiasts, the first non-local whites on the scene, learned
to understand them as theater. The change in the composition of the audience came with growth in the other category, the more casual music/picnic lovers who could only appreciate the fife and drum band music as a kind of spectacle. They are, in a sense, musical tourists, people trying to recapture an exotic moment of the past by spending an evening in Otha Turner’s backyard. They eat the goat sandwiches, they buy the t-shirts, and, when The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band performs, they come running.

Not running to dance, however, but running to take pictures. When Rising Star performs, it is surrounded by people, and the crowd follows it up and down Otha Turner’s driveway. Those who understand the performance as ritual, as a cultural performance as much as a musical one, dance to the music. Those who understand it as theater follow the performance at a distance, and those who see only spectacle grab their cameras. And the people taking pictures outnumber those who are dancing. This simple fact, more than anything, underscores how the picnic has changed. The old practice of Mississippi Hill Country picnics, once a local ritual, has become a widely known spectacle.

Under this new set of circumstances, when Rising Star marches up and down the driveway, followed by its entourage of musical tourists, it has, in a sense, put itself on stage. Traditionally, when surrounded by a crowd of local African Americans dancing to the music, fife and drum is part of the crowd; in fact, dancing picnickers blur the line between performer and observer (beholder, in Kaeppler’s usage) as their dancing makes them participants in the ritual. The new audience, however, the musical tourists who grab cameras and tape recorders, rather than dancing and being participants, have made themselves spectators (under the Friedson definition), beholders of a spectacle
(under the Kaeppler definition), a group of people trying to be an audience in a case where none was originally intended.

Since Otha Turner’s passing, a shift has taken place at the annual Turner family picnic. Although Turner had other musicians perform at his picnic (David Evans even remembers a jukebox), the musical emphasis was on fife and drum bands. However, in recent years, the Turner family has changed the emphasis from fife and drum band music to newer forms of electrified Mississippi Hill Country blues. A large part of fife and drum band’s music appeal at picnics was its volume. It not only provided a solid and syncopated, rhythm for dancing, but did so at a loud enough volume to be a practical choice for outdoors. It was, in addition to other things, utilitarian, while an acoustic guitar was not. Today, with electricity running throughout the hill country, and microphones, amplifiers, and electric guitars in abundance, picnickers have other choices. Otha Turner never allowed the makeshift stage that the family utilizes for the variety of performances the picnic now features. What once was a picnic of barbecue, baseball, and fife and drum bands has turned into a mini-blues festival. And more recently, Rising Star itself has gone on stage.

The Turner family plays music other than fife and drum—the family can also put together an R&B ensemble, with Shardé Thomas and her mother singing and playing keyboard while cousins play bass, drums, and guitar. In this form, they have performed many times at the picnic. As a fife and drum band, though, they have just recently made a move to the stage. They have not abandoned their traditional performances at the picnic, the movements up and down the driveway, but at the picnic in 2010, for the first time, the fife and drum band went onto the makeshift trailer/stage for a
performance.

The significance of this change, the movement from the ground to the stage by The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, cannot be overstated. When moving to the stage, they change the relationship between themselves and the audience. The audience can dance, but not with them, so the participation is not the same; the ritual is transformed. There can be no beholders appreciating the event as ritual, and those who see theater have a new set of rules. There are no spectators, because the performers have decided they will entertain an audience. The crowd certainly appreciates the traditional, on-the-ground performances by Rising Star, so it must be the group’s choice to move to the stage. It is less participatory, more Western.

Recently, at a blues festival in Denton, Texas, the headliner for the evening, a guitarist named “Guitar Shorty,” left the stage during a solo to perform while moving about the audience. It was technology, a wireless system, which allowed him to do this, so while his bandmates (drums, bass, and another guitarist) continued to perform on stage, Guitar Shorty wandered through the audience, playing a solo that lasted ten to fifteen minutes. He was surrounded by a small crowd the entire time, a crowd that followed him just as the crowd at the Turner Family Picnic follows Rising Star. So as Rising Star leaves the ground to move to the stage, at least one other blues artist has done just the opposite. During his time “on the ground,” Guitar Shorty’s sound was still heard by the audience through the speakers on the stage, and his band mates kept track of him through their monitors. Perhaps someday the drummers of Rising Star will perform on stage while Shardé Thomas wanders through the audience, her sound sent through speakers via wireless technology. This allows both interaction with the
audience and amplified volume levels. Amplification of the fife would be an advantage gained from this approach, as the fife, an inherently quiet instrument, tends to be over balanced by the sound of the drums. Traditionally, that is the way it is supposed to be; they used to call fife and drum band music “beating a drum.” A change to that balance of sound would be as significant as the move from the ground to the stage.\textsuperscript{102}

It is worth considering how these two versions of Rising Star, traditional and on-stage, compare in light of John Blacking’s music for having/music for being paradigm. In \textit{How Musical is Man?} he states, “There is a difference between music that is occasional and music that enhances human consciousness, music that is simply for having and music that is for being. I submit that the former may be good craftsmanship, but that the latter is art, no matter how simple or complex it sounds, and no matter under what circumstances it is produced” (1973: 50).\textsuperscript{103} From these passages, it might be tempting to label the traditional form of fife and drum band performance, that of marching and dancing amongst the crowd, as “occasional” music.\textsuperscript{104} However, Blacking also states, “It is tempting to define the utilitarian functions of Venda music as those in which the effects of music are incidental to the impact of the social situation, and the artistic as those in which the music itself is the crucial factor of the experience,” and “…it is the process of music making that is valued as much as, and sometimes more than, the finished product” (ibid.: 50); also, “As I emphasized in the first chapter, Venda music is distinguished from non-music by the creation of a special world of time” (ibid.: 48). In light of these latter excerpts, it is doubtful that Blacking would call traditional fife and drum band music mere “craftsmanship”; after all, fife and drum band music is not incidental to the social situation, but rather, creates much of it; it might even
be said to create a “special world of time.”

The changes that have been made to the picnic by the Turner family—the addition of a stage, and the shift from emphasizing acoustic fife and drum band music to amplified, electric instruments—have resulted in a changed Saturday/Sunday balance. The loss of the “all day” picnic, replaced by a format that has the picnic not beginning until the sun is low on the horizon, removes the family activity of baseball, and shortens the time that children are likely to attend. Instead, the picnic is a blues mini-festival, attended mainly by couples and groups of young people, and although there are some children present, overall the Turner family picnic is probably less of a family event than it once was, making the atmosphere a little more Saturday, and a little less Sunday. On the other hand, there is greater racial integration now—something that started while Turner was still alive—and beer is available at the picnic. There is no longer any moonshine, or gambling, as Lomax reported seeing a couple generations ago. This newer crowd, enjoying the music more as theater and spectacle than as ritual, listens to Saturday-oriented music with a more Sunday, community-oriented mindset. Perhaps it is the racial integration, the outsiders at the picnic, or the extended-family atmosphere that Otha Turner created, a different kind of family, at the picnics in his own backyard. It is their choice to be “more Sunday.”

At around 11:00 P.M. I decided to leave for the evening; it was a two-day event, so I had the next day to continue my “field research” in the form of goat sandwiches and blues music. As I walked back to my car (with its prized parking space immediately across the street from the house), I could only guess at the size of the crowd; it seemed as if 250-300 people were packed into Otha Turner’s backyard, packed in so densely it
seemed more crowded than the festival in Clarksdale two weeks prior. Driving away from the house was slow because cars were not only parked in neighbors' yards but up and down the street. The small picnic that had turned into a blues festival now seemed like a mini-Woodstock, perhaps double the population of the Gravel Springs community for one weekend a year. Things had changed over the years; in many ways, the picnic little resembled Alan Lomax's description in The Land Where the Blues Began. However, all the most important markers of the picnic during Turners time were still present: Turner's fife and drum band, his music, in his backyard, and with goat barbecue sandwiches. The tradition of Otha Turner's picnic continues today.
Chapter 4

Conclusion

I went to the Mississippi Hill Country and the Otha Turner Family Picnic to investigate what was, for me, a new genre of music. Many have only looked at the music, some marveling at the fact that it even existed. Lomax called it his biggest find, and he and others focused on what they perceive to be the African retentions in the music. Even still, its role in influencing the blues may have been overlooked. This is understandable if only twelve bar blues are considered, but the influence of fife and drum band music on Mississippi Hill Country blues is unmistakable.

I found the music but also discovered that the picnic holds a unique place in African-American culture, a space between Saturday night and Sunday morning, between the secular and the sacred, both musically and socially, a middle ground between blues clubs and gospel churches, between a family atmosphere of church and an individual atmosphere of blues clubs. And it brings together young and old, black and white. Perhaps that is Turner’s legacy—not the fife and drum band music, but the way he turned the African-American tradition of local summer picnics into an ethnically integrated affair that draws attendees from hundreds of miles away.

It seems that while white culture treats the secular and the sacred as diametrically opposed, African-American culture embraces the two. However, while African Americans may not have chosen one over the other, the parallel paths of Saturday and Sunday may not be separate ones; they may not be, as Bennett says,” two banks of the same stream,” but rather two elements that rub against each other, and in Otha Turner’s backyard, the resulting friction creates sparks that ignite the
energy of the picnic.

With The Rising Star Fife & Drum Band the only active performers of African-American fife and drum bands, the existence of the genre remains tenuous. The strong attendance at the picnic shows no sign of diminishing (it has only grown in the four years I have attended) even though the family began charging a two-dollar admission a couple of years ago. It is a moneymaker for them and also keeps the legacy of Otha Turner alive—which creates the potential to make more money. So the Turner family is likely to continue the tradition for as long as it can. However, much of this may depend on Shardé Thomas’s future. She is a young woman who will soon be finishing at the local community college. Where will the crossroads take her? If she puts down the fife, the band may not continue. Without fife and drum band music, the picnic is just a small blues festival, Turner’s legacy fades, and perhaps the picnic along with it.

In August 2007, the first person I met at the first picnic I attended was Travis Hullette. He performed that evening, on stage in Otha Turner’s backyard, as a sideman to Reverend John Wilkins. In April 2011, Travis Hullette will play his first big “gig,” at the Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, leading a group of his own. This does not surprise me—he has slowly grown his reputation by playing in church, with R.L. Boyce, at home parties, and in groups he has started himself, but also by always having his guitar with him and playing wherever and whenever he could. During the blues festival in Clarksdale just last year, Hullette and I were on a street corner talking to Scott Barretta of Living Blues magazine. As the conversation broke and Hullette walked away, Barretta remarked to another person who happened by, “Do you know who that is? That’s Travis Hullette, the guitarist at John Wilkins’s church.” Hullette’s connection with
the music of Sunday has helped his reputation as a practitioner of the music of Saturday; his career for now, and perhaps for the foreseeable future, occupies a space in-between blues and gospel, Saturday night and Sunday morning. The Juke Joint Festival awaits.
NOTES

1 An editorial note attached to a Living Blues magazine article reads as follows: “Despite considerable research by several blues scholars, no definitive spelling of Mr. Turner’s first name has been established. Recordings made during the 1960s-1970s credit ‘Othar Turner,’ while the family has begun to use a spelling of ‘Otha Turner’ over the last two decades. To confuse things further, Mr. Turner was known to also spell his name ‘Other.’ Until further evidence supports one of the spellings, ‘Othar/Otha/Other’ is spelled however the man told you it was spelled” (Steber 2003: 131).

2 Lomax (1993) uses “African fife-and-drum dance bands” in the introduction (37); “fife-and-drum music” when referring to Ed Young’s ensemble (328); “fife-and-drum teams” when indicating current groups and also an ensemble formed by enslaved Africans working for Thomas Jefferson (333); “fife-and-drum corps” in reference to the Confederate army (333); and “fife-and-drum combos” when indicating the music in the Caribbean (333). “Fife-and-drum bands” he uses when discussing Mississippi (335); this term is also used in his film, and is the one that caught on with other researchers.

3 While the term “Mississippi Delta” is widely understood (popular legend has it that it extends from the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee to Catfish Row in Vicksburg, Mississippi), the term “Mississippi Hill Country” is open to interpretation. The map found at Mississippi’s official tourism website (http://www.visitmississippi.org/welcome/welcome_map.asp) denotes the entire northeastern part of the state as “The Hills,” while a physical map I obtained in Mississippi uses the term more broadly, indicating five different regions as being a “hills area” of one kind or another. I am using the term in the same way as the majority of
music researchers (Lomax 1993, Evans 2000): “Mississippi Hill Country” indicates only the north central part of Mississippi, especially Tate and Panola counties, which include the cities of Senatobia, Como, Sardis, and Batesville.

4 Turner continued to perform fife and drum band music when hosting his own picnics.

5 Wharton’s description also includes this quote: “At times there were white visitors, for whom special tables were set with the choicest of the food.” Even in the eighteenth century, picnics were ethnically integrated, although not to the degree that the Otha Turner Family Picnic is today.

6 The term fife and drum band is, apparently, a "Lomaxian" construction, adopted by other researchers such as George Mitchell (1971) and David Evans (1972), and now widely accepted (and widely known, as a result of the success that Otha Turner enjoyed in the later years of his life).

7 In Mississippi, the lead instrument in a fife and drum band is a transverse flute made from a type of bamboo known as cane. Older residents of the Mississippi Hill Country still call it a fice (Otha Turner often called his instrument a cane), but not Shardé Thomas, the only active practitioner of the art form, who prefers fife. It has from four to six holes, spaced at the width of the performers fingers, with the resulting pitches more closely aligned to chromatic tuning than the diatonic scale of six-hole military fifes. The other instruments in the ensemble are the snare drum and bass drum, once referred to as a kettle and a drum, respectively, but these terms seem to have disappeared from the vernacular.

8 Hemphill was a very versatile musician and played a variety of wind and string instruments, including the cane fife and the quills, another wind instrument made from
Mississippi cane. See MacLeod (1978) for a review of the use of quills and fifes in the South during the early nineteenth century.

9 While fife and drum band music began as one of many pre-blues African-American genres, it might be classified today as a micro-music. See Slobin (1993), Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West.

10 Lomax never explained why he considered fife and drum bands his “main find” but did give us a clue in the introduction of Land Where the Blues Began when he used the term “African fife-and-drum dance bands” (37). At a time when scholars were looking for connections between African-American culture and its African roots (see Herskovits 1941), Lomax must have heard in fife and drum bands the sounds of Africa and decided he had discovered the musical evidence. African-American scholars of today (musical and otherwise) are not as preoccupied with this area of investigation as they once were.

11 Barretta said that the Trail started in 2006 and that Turner’s marker is #82. Living Blues magazine reported in its February 2010 issue that the 100th marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail, in honor of Cassandra Wilson, was subsequently erected January 7, 2010 in Jackson, Mississippi. Many more markers are planned.

12 Mallory also said that Turner first used an eight-hole fife, but made his own five-hole instrument. This was the first time in my research that I came across any information indicating Turner used anything but a five-hole, and suggests that he was important not just in regard to performance but also in the development of the fife itself.

13 Under the tutelage of her grandfather, Thomas began learning to play the fife at a young age. Although other grandchildren learned to play the drums, she is the only one.
to have pursued the fife, so when Turner passed away, Thomas became the only active
“cane fifer” left in the Mississippi Hill Country (or, perhaps, anywhere).

14 See Lore (2002: 32-57) for interviews with several members of Rising Star, including
Turner, R.L. Boyce (nephew of Turner’s wife), Chip Daniels (cousin of Boyce), Bernice
Pratcher (daughter of Turner), and Andre Evans (son of Pratcher and grandson of
Turner),

15 See the appendix for the complete inscription on the reverse side of the marker.

16 The Mississippi Blues Trail is a project of the Mississippi Blues Commission. For
more information, see www.msbluestrail.org.

17 The Saturday night / Sunday morning paradigm was first introduced to me by Dr.
Eileen M. Hayes in a seminar on African-American music.

18 Bennett’s quote, published in 1964, references the spiritual as the music of Sunday,
while throughout this paper I use gospel in that role. While the spiritual was once the
music of Sunday, it was replaced by gospel, a blues-influenced version of spirituals.
are more clearly delineated in the gospel songs, which from the 1930s on displaced the
spirituals as the most important single body of black religious music."

19 The Festival’s website (www.sunflowerfest.org) cited an attendance figure of 25,000
for 2006.

20 The tourist dollars more than make up for it, but there has been some criticism of the
festival for not paying the musicians more. The city, which is trying to revive the
downtown blues area (known as “Ground Zero”), has so far abstained from charging an
admission, probably as much for the difficulty of enforcing it in such a large, open area
as for the fact that it might reduce attendance and the requisite concession and hotel tax money. However, there is a “VIP” area at the festival consisting of a sheltered area with tables, chairs, and fans that one can enter only after purchasing a VIP pass for around $250.00. This gives anyone in a charitable frame of mind a chance to contribute and be rewarded for it. Although the price may sound a little steep for a folding plastic chair, during the afternoon, if it’s near one of the fans, it might be worth it.

21 The other was Sherman Cooper, a local resident whose family has lived in Como since the antebellum period. He has attended Mississippi Hill Country picnics since the 1960s.

22 In his autobiography, W.C. Handy (1941) described his first encounter with the blues in Clarksdale in 1903. Already a bandleader, he subsequently arranged music that was influenced by what he heard that day in the Mississippi Delta. Over time, twelve-bar blues form, with its pattern of I, IV, and V chords, emerged, becoming the signature of Mississippi Delta blues, but that form never found its way next door into the hill country.

23 The annual Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival was first held in 1988. The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, led by either Otha Turner or Shardé Thomas, has performed every year. See Evans (1994) for a festival revue.

24 Some members of the family, like Travis, spell the surname “Hullette,” while others, such as his grandmother, use only one “L,” as in “Hulette.”

25 The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1999: 298) defines heterophony as: “The simultaneous statement, especially in improvised performance, of two or more different versions of what is essentially the same melody (as distinct from polyphony). It often takes the form of a melody combined with an ornamented version
of itself, the former sung and the latter played on an instrument. The technique is widely found in musics outside the tradition of Western art music.” The words “simultaneous statement” and “improvised” are very appropriate in this case. While the choir sings together, there is room for individuality, especially when it is offered in a complimentary fashion.

26 Actually, there was one time when the music did stop. It was during my only visit on the first Sunday of the month, when Holy Communion is given. During this process, all sound stopped, and the silence was deafening.

27 See Chernoff (1979: 23). Referencing the music of Africa, he states, “without participation, there is no meaning.” The same might be said about Hunter’s Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.

28 Oral discourse plays an important role in African-American culture. Gwaltney (1993: xxv) states, “Core black culture has traditionally esteemed good talk and profound dialogue. It has sustained a variety of forms of oral discourse from ‘fending and proving the art of clandestine theological exegesis practiced by slaves—to non-veracious forms, such as woofing and sounding.” Gates (1988: 180-191) discusses African-American oral narration.

29 “Reach Out and Touch (Somebody’s Hand)” was written by Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson and made popular by Diana Ross.


demarcating the sacred from the secular in African American music. ‘They call me the Texas Country Blues Preacher,’ he says, ‘because I’m equal parts straight-up Texas gospel, and equal parts straight-up Texas country blues. I tell people all the time that gospel music and blues are basically the same. It’s like one coin, one side, the heads side or the tails side. And there really ain’t that much difference—the feeling is all the same. I play gospel music the same way I play blues. I play the same way in church that I do in the bar… I always said that the blues is asking questions about life, or just expressing how you feel about what you’re going through. And gospel is like the answer to those questions. But it’s still the same feeling. I have never differentiated between playing gospel music and blues music. To me, it’s all the same stuff. And so you see on my records, I’ve always played gospel music, I’ve always played blues music, all on the same record. And I don’t change up how I play.’ ” These two short quotes speak volumes to the musical differences (or lack thereof) between Saturday and Sunday and the social differences (questions and answers) while also reminding us of Lerone Bennett’s metaphor (two sides of the same coin).

32 Sometimes musical skills learned singing or playing with a church choir are put to use playing the blues, so Sunday morning can have an effect on Saturday night.

33 At the Sunflower River Blues & Gospel Festival, it could be argued that music is used to promote tourism, and is therefore also part of something larger. The events I have seen in the Mississippi Hill Country, however, appear to draw a local crowd, so I stand by my original premise that the music is the purpose for having the event, admission fee notwithstanding.
Jones (1963: 28-29) makes the point that African music, as opposed to Western music, “was a purely functional music” [emphasis in the original]. Although the argument can be made that not all African music is functional, this trait seems to have survived the middle passage, as African-American music of the Mississippi Hill Country is also, largely, functional.

I once asked Carolyn Hulette what the difference was between a juke joint and a blues club. I had expected her to say something about ethnicity, or the social class of the patrons, or the existence of illegal beverage at juke joints, or something that clearly delineated the two. Her answer was much more succinct, even pithy: "Carl, the only difference is that the Blues clubs had bathrooms." That was it, that was the difference, as explained by someone who had, in her younger days, spent time at both. There were, of course, other differences, but just as there are no differences between blues and gospel from R.L. Boyce's perspective, Carolyn saw no difference between jukes and clubs except the existence of a porcelain convenience. I asked about the illegal beverage, and she surprised me by saying “white lightning” (also known as corn whiskey or home brew) was not openly available in juke joints. Beer was sold openly, but the home brew was sold discreetly. On another occasion, while driving the back roads of Tate County, she pointed out a home in which, decades ago, lived a man who sold home brew “for a dollar a quart.” According to Hulette, "bootleggers" engaged in the practice to feed their families, and did so out of their homes. Neither the production, possession, or consumption of corn whiskey was legal, but in those days, the "law" looked the other way and the white landowner (or "boss") was expected to keep things under control.
Carolyn Hulette makes the occasional visit to a casino, so I asked her if casinos were the juke joints of today. She agreed.

There are musical implications to this. If an artist performs at a blues club, he is part of an industry that is regulated by the government agency that handles liquor licenses. If he performs at a casino, he is also regulated, indirectly, by government agencies that oversee gambling. It remains to be seen how this will affect the music. A greater concern may be the effect of the audience on the music. Already, for many generations, going back to the earliest days of the blues, black artists have been known for accommodating the tastes of their audiences, i.e., playing differently depending on whether the audience was white or black. Casinos draw tourists, so it seems possible that the blues may become commoditized in this environment. Noted blues photographer Bill Steber posted an article on his website in 2000 stating that some Mississippi Delta blues clubs had lost 65%-70% of their business to the riverboat casinos that were legalized in 1994. Incidentally, Steber uses the terms juke joint and blues club interchangeably in his article, which is common today, but at one point in the article, when speaking of life in the Mississippi Delta, uses the phrase "country jukes and blues joints," implying that the difference between the two, at least at one time and place, was a rural/urban distinction (Steber 2009).

This familial, paternalistic, symbiotic relationship was not limited to the Mississippi Hill Country, or even Mississippi. In a recent issue of Living Blues magazine, Scott M. Bock (2009) interviewed blues artist Johnny Mars, from Laurens, South Carolina, who said, "My father, he loved being in the woods. And apparently, he made very good moonshine—bootlegging. I heard my sisters and brothers talk about it. The police
would hear about this still [he had] somewhere. They'd come and get him. They'd shoot it up [the still] and put him in jail. And the people whose property we lived on—who we worked for—would get him out of jail. After a while, he'd go back and make him another still. He was a rambler."

39 Grafonola is the brand name of a phonograph made by Columbia, similar to the Victrola made by RCA Victor.

40 Astute readers will note that this occurred a Sunday, rather than Saturday, evening. The term "Saturday night" behavior is often a literal description, but it can occur any day of the week.

41 My interview with Boyce started in the adjoining kitchen, but with the music, it proved to be far too noisy a place to conduct an interview. We went outside and as we talked I took notes on the hood of a pickup truck. Another gentleman, whom I recognized from the choir at Hunter's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, came along during the interview. I complimented him on the singing and he talked about how the devil had been in control of him before he started going to church. A few minutes later he was enjoying a beer in the living room, a good example of how Saturday night and Sunday morning behavior coexist in the Mississippi Hill Country.

42 Referring to this event as a home party, and it was by some locals, shows how the definition of the term has broadened and also suggests a desire to connect with the past, to maintain a tradition.

Murray ([1976] 2000: 38) gives a description of Saturday and Sunday that suggests some middle ground, some commonality between the two: “Unlike the revelers at the Saturday Night Function, the worshipers attending the Sunday Morning Service are very much concerned with guilt and with seeking forgiveness for their trespasses against the teachings of the Holy Scriptures…but the Saturday Night Function is a ritual of purification and affirmation nonetheless. Not all ceremonial occasions are solemn. Nor are defiance and contestation less fundamental to human well-being than are worship and propitiation.”

O.B. McClinton Road is named after a local resident who went on to fame as a country music singer, but not until he left the area.

The film *Wayne County Ramblin’* (2005), listed in the discography, contains scenes that were filmed at Turner’s house.

Ranger (1975) discusses European military musical influences on music in eastern Africa. Although probably not directly related to fife and drum band music in the Mississippi Hill Country, it addresses the sometimes-blurred distinctions between marching and dancing.

Chernoff (1979: 112), in speaking of African music, says, “The repetition of a well-chosen rhythm continually reaffirms the power of the music by locking that rhythm, and the people listening or dancing to it, into a dynamic and open structure. The rhythms in African music may relate by cutting across each other or by calling or responding to each other, but in either case, because of the conflict of African cross-rhythms, the power of the music is not only captured by repetition, it is magnified.” Also see Monson 1999 for a discussion of the importance of riffs and repetition in African-American music.
The combination (or juxtaposition) of two and three is deeply ingrained in parts of Africa. On a trip to Ghana in 2009, I was playing cards with an Ewe friend in the Volta region and took note of the fact that he dealt cards in manner different from what we use in America. He dealt around the table clockwise, but instead of dealing one card per person, he dealt in small groups of cards. At first, it simply appeared that he was saving time, as it meant he only had to go around the table twice. But then why not simply deal all cards at once? During the second week of my visit (and the third time we sat down to play cards), it finally occurred to me what I was seeing: the game he liked to play, called "Cipa," required five cards per hand; he dealt three cards to every player, and then two.

Schuller ([1968] 1986: 15-16): “The African slave’s adjustment to the white man's music consisted precisely of translating these polymetric and polyrhythmic points of emphasis into the monometric and monorythmic structure of European music. Syncopation, preceding or following the main beats, was the American negro’s only workable compromise. It left the Negro with a vestige of his love for cross-rhythms and cross-accentuation; at the same time it enabled him to carry on that tradition within the white man's musical structures.”


Wald (2010: 36) states, “...the hill country just east of the delta has a preserved a “fife and drum” tradition that sounds closer to its African roots than virtually any other music in the United States.”
Syncopation in snare drum parts was not something that began during the post-bellum era; Sexton (2007, 2008) points out that syncopation is present in the drum rudiments of the Bruce & Emmett’s *The Drummers’ and Fifers’ Guide* of 1865.

Lomax (1993: 332), while writing about the Mississippi Hill Country, suggests that polyrhythm comes from the social interaction of audience and performers: “A dancing orchestra of winds (sometimes voices) and percussion play in polyrhythm, in close, hot interaction with their dancing audience. This, I feel, is the social, the behavioral source of the multiple rhythms and of the rhythmic freedom of hot, of black music, which is constantly enriching itself from its social surround.”


At the time this incident occurred, Shardé Thomas was a senior in high school and played flute in her high school band. She has since graduated from college and attended Northwest Mississippi Community College in Senatobia.

Regis (1999) discusses the impact of funerals and second line music on physical space in New Orleans. Her article was the impetus for this section of the thesis.

See Goffman (1959: 106-40), “Regions and Region Behavior.” Goffman defines a region as “any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception” and adds, “a cocktail party typically involves several conversational subgroups which constantly shift in size and membership.” That would be an apt description of the crowd at the picnic.
When guitarist (and fife and drum band musician) R.L. Boyce of Como, Mississippi took his turn on stage, he reached into the audience and initiated contact with the crowd. This was an interesting communal action, an attempt to join performers and listeners in a single community, and a removal of a barrier that does not exist in the African roots of this music.

Goffman (1959: 128) differentiates between backstage and frontstage behavior, citing the former as informal and the latter as meant for performance. As R.L. Boyce demonstrated, the blues can blur the distinction between the two.

At one point, the crowd parted, and with the semi-circles temporarily disrupted, two dancers, one black one white, one young, one old, engaged in a kind of "dance-off" that culminated with one of the two on his belly doing the "worm."

Group one, for its part, seemed less engrossed in the music than the musicians.

There seemed to be an infinite regression at work, as each semi-circle perceived not just the activity on stage but also the preceding semi-circles as part of the performance.

Goffman (1959: 137-140) discusses the separation of audiences. There was a time in the Mississippi Hill Country—Sid Hemphill’s era, for instance—that black musicians performed one repertoire of music for white audiences and another for black (see Lomax 1993). Otha Turner’s picnic audiences were racially integrated, but the social arrangement of space at his picnics, from a racial standpoint, suggests that blacks and whites, while listening to the same music, don’t necessarily enjoy it in the same way.

Each year’s picnic has at least one new shirt featuring a likeness of Otha Turner or Shardé Thomas or the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band.
66 The 2009 picnic was the first to charge admission, which was two dollars, and collected at the end of the driveway, making that spot a logical congregation point.

67 The first time I saw Rising Star, at the blues festival in Clarksdale, it seemed somewhat out of place performing as the only ensemble of its kind at a festival where all the other acts were traditional blues or R&B. However, in Otha Turner’s back yard, Rising Star seems very much in their element while the blues acts on stage seem rather ordinary.

68 Shardé Thomas has expanded on Turner’s repertoire somewhat: I have heard her perform “Wild Thing,” her own adaptation of the popular hit. However, the vast majority of the selections she learned from her grandfather.

69 See the appendix for

70 It could be said that “Shimmy She Wobble” was “the piece that made Otha famous.” It was this selection that came to the attention of Martin Scorsese and that was used in the film *Gangs of New York*.

71 Alan Lomax recorded the Young brothers performing this piece, so it was probably Ed Young who first introduced it into the fife and drum band repertoire.

72 The Allstars also used selections from the repertoire of Rising Star on their albums *Electric Blue Watermelon*, playing “Bounce Ball” (along with The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band) and (without Rising Star) on *Do It Like We Used To Do It*, covering “Shimmy She Wobble” (entitled “Shimmy Duo”), and “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah” (entitled “Glory, Glory”); on *Tate County: Hill Country Blues*, with another version of “Shimmy She Wobble,” and with two more versions of “Shimmy She Wobble” on the album *Shimmy She Wobble*. It’s generally the Allstars’ older albums that cover fife and drum
band music; since Turner’s passing, direct references to the older genre are fewer, but the group still sounds strongly influenced by Otha Turner and his music.

73 Courlander ([1963] 1991: 157) argues that the lyrics for “Little Sally Walker” include the refrain “Ride, Sally, Ride.” He states that it “has sophisticated lyrics which give the appearance of having filtered down from an older age group.” I disagree; in listening to the David Evans recording, it seems that the performers are singing “rise,” not “ride.”

74 Evans (1972) was the first to identify this type of fife and drum band piece, saying (102): “A final group of songs is known by the generic name of “Shimmie She Wobble,” which as a popular dance of the 1920s. These pieces consist of variations on a few musical ideas, and sometimes they are given individual names if the thought strikes the musician. These names of the pieces are usually whatever phrase happens to be on the musician’s mind. Sometimes the fife player will stop and sing a bluesy vocal.”

75 This musical characteristic may be an African retention. African drumming in Ghana typically begins with the establishment of the tempo, followed by the entrance of the drums (not perfectly in unison), followed by singing, and then joined by dancers. Steven Friedson (1996, 2009), when speaking of African music, often alludes to “one part calling to another.” Furthermore, as with much African music, there is no set length to a fife and drum piece; they continue until the fifer wishes to stop.

76 See the appendix for transcriptions of the two alerts.

77 The practice of using an alert to conclude the piece may be a military retention, as military bands frequently use alerts, signaled by a drum major via his mace or baton, and musically cued by the drum section. Both the usual methods of starting pieces with solo fife and concluding them with a fife alert are constants in fife and drum; recordings
made by Alan Lomax, George Mitchell, and David Evans so evidence of these techniques in use in Mississippi and Georgia. In Mississippi, Sid Hemphill used them in the 1940s, Ed Young in the 1950s and 1960s, Otha Turner and Napoleon Strickland in the 1970s, and Shardé Thomas uses them today. In Georgia, a fife and drum band led by fifer J.W. Jones and recorded in the early 1970s did the same.

Once discovered by Alan Lomax, the Young Brothers performed frequently for white audiences at places like the folk festival in Newport, Rhode Island, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. In these instances, they were expected to play their music in the same manner as they did in Mississippi; the white festival-going audiences of the 1960s wanted nothing less. This was in contrast to Sid Hemphill’s experience, as he needed to adjust his repertoire according to his audience, which meant that he played differently for white audiences than for black. Otha Turner and his Rising Star Fife and Drum Band has had an experience similar to that of the Young Brothers in that Turner began playing at black picnics, and by the time white audiences began attending his picnics in large numbers, it was to hear his music the way he preferred to play it.

Kubik (1999: 92-93) discusses the use of “riffs,” which he defines as “short repeated melodic-rhythmic figures… as the primary building blocks for the song…” Although he does not mention fife and drum band music, he lists the names Fred McDowell, Junior Kimbrough, R.L. Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Robert Belfour as artists who use riffs. All five of these artists are from the Mississippi Hill Country, an area in which fife and drum band music flourished. “Most of these artists display a tendency either to depart from the standard 12-bar blues chord sequence, or at least circumvent it in intriguing ways,” he continues. “The local tradition seems also to be strongly influenced
by riff-based fife and drum and perhaps even banjo music. This suggests that in Mississippi it is probably essentially a continuous tradition.” Kubik (2008: 11) in discussing the music of guitarist Robert Belfour, originally from Holly Springs, Mississippi, in the hill country, states, “Robert Belfour’s music pertains to a stylistic cluster of the northern Mississippi hill country heavily relying on the concept of the “riff,” similar to the style of other older Mississippi blues artists from nearby such as the late Junior Kimbrough (who at one time was his mentor), R. L. Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and the late Fred McDowell.”

80 Lomax (1993: 315-16) describes Sid Hemphill: “He snatched up his fiddle, tuned it with a sweep or two, and began sawing away—a simple tune of two phrases, bowed so heavily the fiddle sounded almost like a drum…”

81 There is a communal aspect to the sound of the snare drum. Buzzed, or burred, timbre is an African musical trait, one that fife and drum band music retains through the use of the snare. Decorating a timbre in this manner thickens a sound, makes it sound bigger than it is, and therefore more inclusive, more communal, as it gives the illusion of more participants. Riff-style playing is itself a communal type of music making. Melodic style playing, whether in traditional fife and drum or in western art music, asks for listening; riff-style playing asks for participation. It puts us in a foot-tapping frame of mind and tells us to dance, not just to listen. Riff-style music, with its emphasis on dancing, creates a communal environment for dancing and invites everyone around to “jump in.” Simply put, melodic style playing calls for listener, riff-style playing calls for participants.
David Evans recorded a fife and drum band in Georgia that used someone other than the fifer as a vocalist, allowing polyphony. All of the recorded bands in Mississippi, Sid Hemphill, the Young Brothers, and everything involving Otha Turner (the Gravel Springs Fife and Drum Band, the Como Fife and Drum Band, and, of course, Rising Star) used the fifer as the lead vocalist, although drummers would sometimes join in as back-up vocalists. This is especially true with Rising Star now that Shardé Thomas is in charge; her cousins sing with her often, and loudly.

One young person asked why I was taking notes; I told her it was a school project, which no doubt cost me a great deal of social capital.

This is certainly no accident. Mississippi Hill Country musicians, artists such as Sid Hemphill, Jessie Mae Hemphill, Otha Turner, Napoleon Strickland, and R.L. Boyce, were known for playing multiple instruments, such as guitar, harmonica, diddley bow, and the fife, and kettle, and their musical styles were transferred from instrument, and from one genre, to the next. The music they played was not just blues, gospel, and fife and drum, but hill country blues, hill country gospel, and hill country fife and drum.

Blues artist Reverend K.M. Williams of Texas, cited in a previous footnote, is one of the few who has. In the Gachet article, he mentioned that Mississippi Hill Country musician R.L. Burnside was an influence, along with Mississippi Delta artist T-Model Ford. Furthermore, Williams is pictured with a one-string “cigar box” guitar, an instrument that is used in the hill country (although R.L. Burnside preferred the traditional six-string).

Hullette's first band was entirely black, with himself on guitar, his father Tracey Hulette on bass, Steve Toney on drums, and Greg Ayers on vocals, but that is unusual.
He has started another ensemble, a quartet called Shades of Gray that includes two black and two white musicians.

87 Lomax (1993: 344) Describes Napoleon Strickland making a fife in the late 1970s as follows: “Here we witness black magic. No micrometer, not even a ruler or a pattern, has controlled the tuning of this fife. The finger holes are simply set a comfortable and familiar distance apart, where his fingers naturally fall when he’s playing. He carefully burns out and enlarges these holes, one after another. He delicately touches the end of the cane. “When the sound come out this end, you got it made,” Napoleon opines. “Now I’m gonna burn the jintes [joints] out of the cane.” So saying, he pushes the red-hot poker up the barrel of the new fife, and as he burns through each joint of the cane, delicate notes of smoke rise in the kitchen air. Withdrawing the poker, he blows the barrel of the fife clear of smoke, shavings, and cinders. He rubs the cane to cool it off, ‘Now,” he says proudly and with his widest grin, “here’s the fice, and I’ll do it like this.”

88 The number of holes, combined with a half-step scale, results in an instrument that cannot play a full octave without the use of harmonics. Although harmonics are sometimes used, it is also true that most tunes played by cane fifes have a limited melodic range.

89 Bb is the pitch produced when all holes are covered, but the music was usually notated in the key of D. Also, while traditional military fifes are diatonic, they can play chromatically by using a variety of fingers, including half-holing. Non-traditional, ten-hole fifes are available today to help avoid the inaccuracies inherent with half-holing.

90 Sid Hemphill, the first cane fifer discovered by Alan Lomax (in 1942), was recorded playing panpipes (also known as quills) as well as fife.
91 As Otha Turner is known to have said, I make the cane do what I want it to do.

92 While six-hole, diatonically tuned military fifes can produce a chromatic scale by using half-hole fingering techniques, the same technique can produce quarter tones and microtones on a cane fife.

93 Palmer (1982: 44, 46) supports the idea of blues instruments taking on vocal qualities: “Guitar and piano accompaniments were percussive and hypnotic, and many Mississippi Delta guitarists mastered the art of fretting the instrument with a slider or bottleneck; they made the instrument “talk” in strikingly speechlike inflections… The voicelike sound of the slider was particularly novel. The slide technique was originally associated with an African instrument that has been reported from time to time in the American South, the single-stringed musical bow. One-stringed instruments played with sliders seem to have survived principally among black children, who would nail a length of broom wire to a wall and play it with a rock or pill bottle slider.”

94 Lomax (1993), in speaking of the harmonica, offers some insights which appear to support the notion that cane fifing influenced the blues, and that a characteristic of the blues is playing instruments with a vocal quality. On page 345-347, he states: “The harmonica was probably the instrument that replaced the panpipe and the fife right across the South…the harmonica became a companion because it could answer back—it could sing the melody with almost human nuance; Napoleon [Strickland] and others could make it “talk” the words or moan them…what they are playing with is not just “music,” not just notes, but heightened speech as well.”

95 Carolyn Hulette has lived in Tate County her entire life. Born in 1945, she remembers a time when rain water was collected from roof tops and stored in underground cisterns,
when meat was kept in smokehouses, and using an icebox meant making trips to the ice house for fresh ice every three or four days. In her day, it was not called fife and drum band music. “We just called it beatin’ a drum,” says Hulette. This description speaks to the perception of the music by its listeners, that the music is primarily of the drums (they do, after all, out number the fifer three or four to one), predominantly rhythmic (and loudly so), and meant for dancing (what the listeners almost exclusively did, until the late twentieth century). And this perception points to the functionality of the music, that it did not exist, was not performed, simply for its own purposes. It was played because people wanted to dance, and needed music to dance to. The musicians also danced, bobbing and weaving to their own sounds, sometimes moving about the crowd, sometimes stomping their feet into the ground, or touching their hands to the ground, or rolling on the ground with their bass drums. Whatever the physical action, the audience used the music, right then and there, for its own dancing pleasure.

96 Friedson (2009: 200n6) “Spectators, in my usage, are people who are drawn to an event that is not specifically performed with the intention of establishing an actor - observer relationship as is the case with an audience.”

97 Kaeppler divides witness of events into three categories: those who enjoy the event as ritual, those who enjoy it as theater, and those who enjoy it as spectacle.

98 Turner’s appearance on the program was a result of the efforts of a scholar, David Evans.

99 Panola County is still a “wet” county while Tate County, where Turner’s house is located, went “dry” many years ago. Having the picnics in a wet county allowed the sale of beer, but now that the Turner family holds its picnics at Turner’s house in the dry
county, they still sell beer, even though it’s technically illegal. Perhaps it’s the presence of a pair of armed security guards at every picnic, plus special permission from the county government, that allows it to continue. In one of the many obituaries written for Turner (Carlisle 2003), his life-long friend, Bill Ramsey of Nashville, Tennessee, related a story about Turner and alcoholic beverage. A local lawman, clued in to the fact that Turner made his own moonshine, went to Turner’s house to investigate. Sitting on the front porch of another, smaller structure on his property, Turner managed to convince the lawman that his house belonged to someone else, and that the smaller building was his. The moonshine, of course, was hidden in the real house, and the lawman searched the wrong structure. Carolyn Hulette remembers a time when “black folk” could get away with having a little moonshine, so long as the “boss man,” the white landowner, was able to convince the authorities that things were under control. But that was many years ago and besides, Turner had no boss man--he owned his own land. She also remembers alcohol being sold in Senatobia, the largest city in Tate County, in the 1950s, but that Tate went dry by the 1960s.

Turner’s image took on such a mystique that one has to wonder what role his ethnicity might have played. There is a stock character in film and literature known as the “magic negro,” and it’s possible that some white picnic-goers might have seen Turner in this light. He played such a character in the film *Wayne County Ramblin’*, and is listed in the credits as having played “Papa Legba.” Legba was interpreted by Christian missionaries as the African representation of the Devil. Legba in a transformed state occasionally surfaced in southern American culture.
101 The picnic grounds are located behind L.P. Buford’s grocery store, a one story, cinderblock structure that includes, at its north end, a juke joint.

102 Turino (2008: 26) makes a distinction between participatory performance and presentational performance. Although the traditional fife and drum band model is not exactly participatory performance (defined by Turino as “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions”) and the new practice of performing on stage is not entirely presentational performance (because the audience still dances), it does seem to be true that Rising Star has moved from something very participatory toward something more presentational.

103 When Blacking uses the word “occasional,” he means “for certain occasions.” as demonstrated in this quote: “Much Venda music is occasional, and its performance is a sign of the activity of social groups. Most adult Venda know what is happening merely by listening to its sounds.” (1973: 38)

104 Blacking (1973: 3-4): “More important than any arbitrary, ethnocentric divisions between Music and Ethnic Music, or between Art Music and Folk Music, are the distinctions that different cultures and social groups make between music and nonmusic” and “It will be useful to distinguish different kinds of musical communication, which might broadly be described as the utilitarian and artistic uses of music in Venda society. It is clear from the way the Venda talk about it that not all music has the same value” (Ibid.: 49).
APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTIONS
"Shimmy She Wobble"

\[ \begin{align*} \text{cane fife} & : \quad \text{main riff} \\
\text{snare drum} & : \quad \text{variation} \\
\text{bass drum} & : \quad \text{variation} \\
\end{align*} \]

Alerts

\[ \text{as played by Turner, Strickland, and Thomas} \]

\[ \text{as played by Ed Young} \]
The inscription on the reverse side of Otha Turner’s Mississippi Blues Trail marker reads as follows:

Black fife and drum Music: The fife and drum ensemble is most closely associated with military marches, but African American bands in North Mississippi have long used fifes and drums to provide entertainment at picnics and other social events. Many scholars believed that such groups formed in the wake of the Civil War, perhaps using discarded military instruments. Prior to the war, slaves were largely forbidden from playing drums out of fear that they would use the instruments for secret communication, though African Americans did serve in military units as musicians, playing fifes, drums, and trumpets. North Mississippi fife and drum music is often described as sounding "African," but is was not imported directly from Africa. Instead it appears that African American musicians infused the Euro-American military tradition with distinctly African polyrhythms, riff structures, and call-and-response patterns. Fife and drum bands have performed spirituals, minstrel songs, instrumental pieces such as "Shimmy She Wobble," and versions of blues hits including the Mississippi Sheiks' "Sitting On Top of the World" and Little Walter's "My Babe." While the black fife and drum tradition is identified with northern Mississippi, researchers have also documented the music in other areas, including southwestern Mississippi, western Tennessee, and west central Georgia.

In 1942 multi-instrumentalist Sid Hemphill and his band made the first recordings of Mississippi fife and drum music for Library of Congress folklorist Alan Lomax. His granddaughter, blues singer-guitarist Jessie Mae Hemphill, later played
drums in local fife and drums bands. Lomax also recorded fife and drum music
by brothers Ed and Lonnie Young in 1959. In the 1960s and '70s folklorists
George Mitchell, David Evans, and Bill Ferris recorded groups featuring Napolian
Strickland (c. 1919 - 2001) on fife and Otha Turner on bass drum.

Turner, born in Rankin County around 1908—various sources suggest birth
years ranging from 1903 to 1917—moved to northern Mississippi as a child
together with his mother, Betty Turner. He learned to create his own fifes by
using a heated metal rod to hollow out and bore a mouth hole and five finger
holes into a piece of bamboo cane. Turner, who spent most of his life as a
farmer, eventually became the patriarch of the regional fife and drum tradition.

He recorded as leader of the Rising Star fife and drum Band for various
American and European labels and appeared in several documentaries,
including Gravel Springs Fife and Drum, Blues Story, Lomax's Land Where the
Blues Began, and Martin Scorsese's Feel Like Going Home. Following his death
in 2003 his granddaughter and protégé Sharde Thomas inherited leadership of
his fife and drum band.

This entire inscription occupies only the left half of the reverse side of the marker;
the right side is composed of seven pictures, each accompanied by a caption. The
artists pictured include, in addition to Turner, R.L. Boyce, Abe Young, "Mississippi" Fred
McDowell, Napoleon Strickland, Bernice Turner Pratcher, Aubrey Turner, Ed Young,
Lonnie Young, and Shardé Thomas (her cousins Rodney and Andre are mentioned)
while scholars David Evans and Alan Lomax are also acknowledged. Two of the photos
are posed, while the others depict musicians performing on fife, drum, and guitar. The
last shows Turner coaching granddaughter Shardé on fife. (The photos are attributed to David Evans, Alan Lomax, and Bill Steber, courtesy of Scott Barretta, Jim O'Neal, and the University of Mississippi's Blues Archive. Credits for the writing are given to (under the term "research assistance") David Evans, George Mitchell, Bill Steber, Jay Martin, Ada Turner, Betty Turner, Bob Eagle, Eric LeBlanc, and Ed Payne. A footnote indicates that this marker is no. 82 on the Mississippi Blues Trail.


**Works Cited: Articles from Newspapers, Popular Magazines, Interviews, and Websites**


Recommended Reading: Books and Journal Articles


DISCOGRAPHY AND FILMOGRAPHY

Rather than follow the standard convention of listing entries alphabetically, I have arranged them chronologically. My reason for doing this is the result of the long and difficult process of finding the materials. Except for David Evans’ *Travelin’ Through the Jungle*, and Otha Turner’s own recordings, none of the examples listed are exclusively fife & drum band music; instead, they are compilations of blues music (or folk music, or southern music, or whatever the label), anthologies that, for various reasons, saw fit to include the music of Sid Hemphill, Ed Young, Otha Turner, Napoleon Strickland, or Shardé Thomas. Finding so many examples of fife & drum band music spread throughout the blues archive at the University of Mississippi and across the internet in a piecemeal manner was pleasantly surprising but also very confusing. Over the years, numerous recordings were issued, some in sets, beginning in 1960 with Lomax’s *Southern Journey* series of twelve LPs, which was quickly followed in 1961 by a seven LP set, also by Lomax, entitled *Southern Folk Heritage*. These recordings were re-released in the 1990s as CDs but, unfortunately, under different names and with different arrangements of tracks. Problems like this were common throughout the process of compiling this discography: releases, re-releases, the same tracks re-used on different albums, etc. When I was finally able to sort through the confusion, to untangle the whole vinyl and digital menagerie, I decided that the best way to present the material was to march through time, arranging the recordings chronologically, organized by researcher.

As a result, I present this music not so much through the experiences of the artists who performed it as through the experiences of the researchers, folklorists,
ethnomusicologists, and blues enthusiasts who compiled the recordings. While this approach smacks of colonialism, of white entrepreneurs taking from black musicians without regard to their wishes concerning the dispensation of their own work, or of ripping the music itself out of its context, away from the environment which produced it, I believe this is the best approach for the simple reason that the artists did not release their own recordings, at least not until 1996, when Otha Turner, at the urging of his friend Bill Ramsey, went into Ramsey’s basement and put half a dozen tracks on tape that led to Turner’s first recording, a cassette tape release entitled *For the Time Beyond*. We have learned about this African-American music through the eyes of white researchers because, until recently, that’s all we have had.

Alan Lomax, the first to drag recording equipment to the Mississippi Hill Country, is listed first, followed by those who, perhaps swept up in the folk music revival of the 1960s, released further collections, followed by another wave (possibly created by the blues revival movement) that incorporated fife & drum band music in a variety of ways, as the subject of research on blues documentaries, as guest artists on contemporary blues albums, and on film soundtracks. Live performances of fife and drum band music are far less frequent today than they were when Alan Lomax began recording, but we have today preserved the genre in ways he could never have imagined.

Finally, because some researchers have produced both audio and video, and some films have accompanying CDs, I have decided to combine the discography and filmography into one media-ography. Therefore, what follows is one long list containing both audio and visual formats. For albums, I have listed the relevant tracks; most are field recordings of fife & drum, but I have also included those of panpipes or vocals.
when performed by artists who also perform fife and drum band music. Explanatory
notes are included when appropriate.

Alan Lomax

DOCD-5577.
Recordings made on August 15, 1942 in Sledge, Mississippi.
tracks
24. “The Carrier Railroad” (5:57)
26. “The Devil’s Dream” (3:10)
27. “Leather Britches” (2:36)
28. “Rice Straw” (1:22)
29. “After the Ball is Over” (1:52)
30. “Soon in the Mornin’” (2:14)
Sid Hemphill vocals, fife on 24, 25, 27, 28, 30; ten-hole quills on 26; fife on 29
Lucius Smith, banjo, kazoo
Alec Askew, guitar
Will Head, bass

Document Records, DOCD-5672.
tracks
Sid Hemphill:
17. Interview (4:39)
20. Interview and “The Strayhorn Mob” (6:29)
Alec Askew:
22. Interview and Tuning of 4-Hole quills (2:47)
Sid Hemphill:
23. “So Soon I’ll Be At Home” (1:42)
For the Hemphill tracks, the personnel are listed as:
Sid Hemphill, violin & vocals
Lucius Smith, banjo
Alec Askew, guitar
Will Head, bass
For track 22, Askew is credited for speech and four-hole quills
(Recorded by Alan Lomax in 1942)
Track 15: "Devil's Dream" (3:08) This track features Sid Hemphill on ten-note quills accompanied by snare drum and bass drum.

Alan Lomax returned to Mississippi in 1958-1959 and made the first stereo field recordings. Two sets of LPs resulted from his efforts; the first was the Southern Folk Heritage Series, released by Atlantic. It consisted of seven LPs, entitled: Sounds of the South, Blue Ridge Mountain Music, Roots of the Blues, White Spirituals, American Folk Songs for Children, Negro Church Music, and The Blues Roll On. Four of these included fife & drum band music. The second set was entitled Southern Journey, consisted of 12 LPs, and was released on Prestige. The LPs were entitled: Georgia Sea Islands, vol. 1, Georgia Sea Islands, vol. 2, Ballads and Breakdowns from the Southern Mountains, Banjo Songs, Ballads and Reels from the Southern Mountains, Deep South… Sacred and Sinful, Folk Songs from the Ozarks, All Day Singing from "The Sacred Harp," The Eastern Shores, Bad Man Ballads, Yazoo Delta Blues and Spirituals, Southern White Spirituals, and Honor the Lamb: The Belleville A Cappella Choir of the Church of God and Saints in Christ. Three of these included fife & drum band music.

side 1, track 2: "Hen Duck" (3:02)
Lonnie Young, vocal and bass drum
Ed Young, cane fife
Lonnie Young, Jr. snare drum
side 2, track 6: "Come on Boys, Let's Go to the Ball" (2:02)
Sid Hemphill, quills (panpipes)
Lucius Smith, drum.

side 1, track 1: "Jim and John" (3:05)
side 1, track 7: "Chevrolet" (2:45)
side 2, track 1: "Oree" (2:37)
Lonnie Young, vocal and bass drum
Ed Young, cane fife
Lonnie Young Jr. snare drum

side 2, track 1: "On That Rock" (2:58)
Adapted and arranged by Viola James
Viola James, vocal
Lonnie Young, bass drum
Ed Young, cane fife
side 1, track 4: “Sittin’ On Top of the World” (2:41)
by Walter Jacobs & Lonnie Carter
Lonnie Young, vocal & bass drum
Ed Young, cane fife
Lonnie Young, Jr., snare drum.

This is the CD re-issue of the Southern Folk Heritage Series. The CDs are entitled:
Sounds of the South / Blue Ridge Mountain Music (includes “Hen Duck” and “Come On Boys, Let’s Go to the Ball”)
Roots of the Blues / The Blues Roll On (includes “Jim and John,” “Chevrolet,” and “Sittin’ On Top of the World”)
Negro Church Music / White Spirituals (includes “On That Rock”)
American Folk Songs for Children (includes “Oree”)
All seven fife & drum tracks are retained from the original LPs.

side A, track 1: "Before This Time Another Year"
side B, track 8: "Beaulah Land"
Ed Young, fife (along with vocalists, a drummer, and a banjo player)

Southern Journey 2: Georgia Sea Islands, Volume II. 1960. LP. Prestige 25002.
side A, track 6: "O Day"
side B, track 4: "Reg'lar, Reg'lar, Rollin' Under"
Ed Young, fife (along with vocalists, a drummer, and a banjo or guitar player)

side A, track 2: "Jim and John"
The Young Brothers Band (Ed Young, fife; Lonnie Young St. and Lonnie Young Jr., drums)
side A, track 5: "Old Devil's Dream"
Sid Hemphill (vocal and quills) and Lucius Smith (drums)

When the Southern Journey recordings were re-issued on CD in 1997, the same number of albums (twelve) was released but they were retitled and reorganized. The albums were: Voices from the American South, Ballads and Breakdowns, 61 Highway Mississippi, Brethern, We Meet Again, Bad Man Ballads, Sheep, Sheep, Ozark Frontier, Velvet Voices, Harp of a Thousand Strings, And Glory Shone Around, Honor the Lamb, and Georgia Sea Islands. Only two of these included fife & drum music. Both tracks from Southern Journey 10 were retained, but Ed Young’s performances with the Georgia Sea Island singers on the first two LPs were not. However, the CDs include two previously unreleased fife & drum tracks.
Southern Journey vol. 1, Voices from the American South: Blues, Ballads, Hymns, 
Track 3: “Walk in the Parlor”
Sid Hemphill and Lucius Smith

Southern Journey vol. 3, 61 Highway Mississippi: Delta Country Blues, Spirituals, Work 
Track 2: “Jim and John”
Young Brothers fife & drum band
Track 8: “Emmaline, Take Your Time”
Sid Hemphill and Lucius Smith
Track 11: “Devil’s Dream”
Sid Hemphill and Lucius Smith

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Lomax’s “southern journey,” Mississippi 
Records released these LPs: Wave the Ocean, Wave the Sea; Worried Now, Won’t Be 
Worried Long; I’ll Meet You On That Other Shore; I’ll Be So Glad When the Sun Goes 
Down; and I’m Gonna Live Anyhow Until I Die. Three of them contain fife & drum band 
(or panpipes) music:

side A track 3: “I Know We Got Another Building”
Ed Young, Lonnie Young, G.D. Young (previously unissued)

side A, track 8: “Ida Reed”
Ed Young, Lonnie Young, G.D. Young

side B, track 5: “The Devil’s Dream”
Sid Hemphill and Lucius Smith

Roots of the Blues. 1977. LP. New World Records NW 252.
side 1, track 6 "Jim and John" (2:10)
Ed Young, home-made fife
Lonnie Young, vocal and bass drum
side 1, track 7 "Emmaline, Take Your Time" (1:03)
Alec Askew, panpipes

Old Mother Hippletoe: Rural and Urban Children’s Songs. 1978. LP. New World 
Records.
side 1, track 6 "Jim and John" (2:10)
Ed Young, home-made fife
Lonnie Young, vocal and bass drum

This film contains footage from Delta Blues / Cajun Two-Step.

Filmed in 1978 and first broadcast in 1980, The Land Where the Blues Began was released in VHS format in 1990. The DVD followed in 2006, while a thirtieth anniversary DVD was just recently released in 2009. The film, along with all others from Lomax’s American Patchwork series, can be viewed at folkstreams.net.

The Land Where the Blues Began. 1990. VHS, color, 60 mins. Alan Lomax Archive.
With John M. Bishop and Worth W. Long
This is one of five films from Lomax's American Patchwork film series and it documents African-American music of the Mississippi Delta and Hill Country. Fife and drum band music appears early in the film, from 8:03 - 11:02, in the chapter called "Mississippi Hills," and has footage of Napoleon Strickland, Otha Turner, and others. The first portion shows Strickland making a 4-hole fife from a still-green piece of bamboo and, one minute later, segues into a fife and drum band performance with Strickland on fife (the other instrumentalists, two snares and a bass, are unknown to me). Immediately following is another band, this one with Otha Turner on fife and, it appears, Strickland on snare drum, Abe Young on snare drum, and G.D. Young on bass drum.

The Land Where the Blues Began. 2006. DVD, color, 60 mins. Association for Cultural Equity.


Track 21: "Emmaline, Take Your Time" performed by Alec Askew on ten hole quills, 1942. (1:39)
Track 22: "Jim and John," performed by the Young Brothers (Ed Young, fife; Lonnie Young, bass drum; G.D. Young, snare drum), 1959. (2:12)

Produced by Rogier Kappers.
This documentary film on the work of Alan Lomax includes a performance by the Young Brothers. It is the 1959 Lomax recording of "Jim and John" and is used as background music from 2:01 - 4:10.
Bess Lomax Hawes

*Anthology of American Music, Inc.* 1965. LP. New World Records NW 291. (Kate Rinzler and Bess Lomax Hawes)
side 2, track 1: Untitled Fife Tune with Clapping Accompaniment (1:32)
Ed Young, cane fife; Bessie Jones and Georgia Sea Islanders, clapping


George Mitchell

side A, track 1: “Oh Baby”
Napoleon Strickland and the Como Drum Band

Track 1: "Oh Baby" (2:50)
Track 2: "Como Breakdown" (3:49)
Napoleon Strickland, vocal & fife; Othar Turner, bass drum; John Tytus, snare drum

There is no fife & drum music on this recording, but I have listed it because it’s Otha Turner, this time on guitar and vocals only. It was recorded in Como, Mississippi in 1967 and is, so far as I know, the first recording of Otha Turner.

(Recorded 1969 in Waverly Hall, Georgia)
side A: “Everytime I Come Around” (3:08) and “J.W.’s Special” (1:49)
side B: “Old Hen Cackle” (3:18) and “Buck Dance” (1:23)
J.W. Jones, fife; Floyd Bussey, bass drum; James Jones, small drum

(Recorded 1967 in Como, Mississippi)
side A: “Hey Freddie” (1:53) and “Late in the Evening” (2:18)
side B: “Punky Tony” (2:32) and “Shimmy She Wa” (3:02)
Napoleon Strickland, fife

In this CD collection, both of Turner’s guitar and vocals tracks from vol. 7 are retained
on disc 1, while disc 5 contains all eight tracks by the Georgia Fife & Drum Band and Como Fife & Drum Band from vols. 34 and 35.

Chris Strachwitz

side C
track 4: "Back Water Rising" (1:50)
Napoleon Strickland, fife and vocals; Otha Turner, snare drum; Bernice Evans, bass drum
track 5 "Other's Piece" (2:20)
Turner, fife; Johnny Woods snare drum, Evans, bass drum
track 6 "Shimmy She Wobble" (2:25)
Strickland, fife; Turner, bass; Woods, snare drum

The same selections appear as tracks 1, 5, and 6 on this album, but the personnel are listed as:
Napoleon Strickland and the Como Drum Band, with John Tytus and Otha Turner.

This is a re-issue of Memphis Swamp Jam. The same fife & drum selections are used and are listed as tracks 1, 5, and 6 on volume 1.

Paul Oliver

side 1, track 4: “Oh Baby”
Napoleon Strickland, vocal, fife; John Tytus, snare drum; Other Turner, bass drum
(recorded 1968 in Como, Mississippi by George Mitchell)

David Evans

*Gravel Springs Fife and Drum*. 1971. 16mm, color, 10 mins. Bill Ferris, Judy Peiser, David Evans.
This ten-minute film from the early '70s contains a wide variety of footage shot in the Gravel Springs community of Tate County, Mississippi. Otha Turner is the featured performer in the movie, providing the narration and demonstrating the manufacture of a fife in addition to singing, playing the fife, and playing a drum. A three-person fife and drum band, consisting of Turner on snare drum, Napoleon Strickland on fife and an
unidentified bass drummer (probably Turner’s daughter Bernice) is shown performing at a summer picnic. In addition to scenes with music and dancing, the film makers give many quick glimpses of Hill Country life, such as daily chores, Strickland playing a diddley-bow and a harmonica, and unidentified people playing a horn and frame drum, all with a soundtrack of narration and fife and drum music. After only ten minutes, the viewer is given a broad look at a summer day in the Mississippi Hill Country. The film can be viewed at folkstreams.net and is available of VHS from the Center for Southern Folklore.

The credits list the following content:
"Levee Camp Blues": vocal solo by Othar Turner
"Long Train Traveling Through the Land": harmonica solo by Napoleon Strickland
"Shimmy She Wobble": fife solo by Othar Turner
"Sitting on Top of the World": Napoleon Strickland, fife; Othar Turner, bass
"My Babe": Othar Turner, bass; Napoleon Strickland, fife
"Glory Glory Halleluyah": vocal and fife solo by Othar Turner


Except for Otha Turner’s own recordings, this compilation album by David Evans is the only recording consisting primarily of fife & drum band music. The LP has nineteen tracks, divided into three collections: the first seven tracks of side A were recorded by Evans in Waverly Hall, Georgia in 1970, while tracks eight through twelve were recorded by Alan Lomax in Sledge, Mississippi in 1942. Side B has seven tracks recorded by Evans in Como and Senatobia, Mississippi in 1969 and 1970. The recordings from Georgia are by a group consisting of the following: Ephram Carter, vocal; J.W. Jones, fife; James Jones, kettle (snare) drum; and Floyd Bussey, bass drum. Sid Hemphill's band, recorded by Alan Lomax in Sledge, Mississippi in 1942 was staffed by Hemphill on fife with Alec Askew, Will Head, and Lucius Smith on drums. The recordings made by Evans in Mississippi featured Napoleon Strickland, Otha Turner, R.L. Boyce, Fred McDowell, Compton Jones, Arthur Williams, Jimmie Buford, Reid Jones.

Side A:
1. "Old Hen Cackled, Laid A Double-Egg" (1:54)
2. unknown piece (2:16)
3. "Shout, Lula with the Red Dress On" (1:53)
4. "Buck Dance" (dancing with body slaps and speech) (1:34)
5. "I Love Jesus, Yes, I Do" (2:15)
6. "Wake Up, Sal, Day Done Come, Let Me Chew Your Rosin Some" (solo fife) (1:10)
7. "Old Lady Dinah Sitting by the Fire" (1:06)
8. "Jesse James" (1:47)
9. "Come On, Boys, Let's Go to the Ball" (quills, vocals and drum) (1:29)
10. "The Death March" (1:45)
11. "Emmaline, Take Your Time" (quills and vocals) (1:41)
12. "The Sidewalks of New York" (1:58)

Side B:
1. "My Babe" (4:38)
2. "Traveling Through the Jungle" (fife and waste basket) (1:58)
3. "Sitting on Top of the World" (vocals and washtub) (2:32)
4. "Late at Midnight, Just a Little 'Fore Day" (4:05)
5. "Granny, Will Your Dog Bite" (2:47)
6. "Number Five" (whistling and washtub) (2:23)
7. "When the Saints Go Marching In" (3:47)

The CD adds nine recordings by Evans, including four tracks from Georgia at the end of side A (that become tracks 13-16 on the CD), and an additional five tracks from Mississippi at the end of side B (CD tracks 24-28):
13. "John Henry" (2:21)
14. "No Name Piece" (1:15)
15. "Sal, You Churn the Butter" (1:44)
16. "Look Out of the Way" (1:53)
24. "Sitting On Top of the World #2" (1:36)
25. "Fife and Drum Piece" (3:05)
26. "I'm So Worried" (2:55)
27. "Baseball Bat" (solo fife) (2:11)
28. "Rollin' and Tumblin' " (2:47)

side 1, track 1: "Sorrow, Come Pass Me Around"
Ephram Carter, vocal; J.W. Jones, fife; James Jones, kettle drum; Floyd Bussey, bass drum
(Recorded 1970 in Waverly Hall, Georgia)
side 2, track 6: "Motherless Children"
Napoleon Strickland, vocal and fife.
(Recorded 1969 in Como, Mississippi)

track 1: "Soft Black Jersey Cow" (4:27)
Napoleon Strickland, fife and vocals; Jimmie Buford, snare drum; R.L. Boyce, bass drum (recorded 1970, Senatobia, Mississippi)
track 2: "After the Ball is Over" (1:54)
Sid Hemphill, fife; Lucius Smith, Alec Askew, Will Head, two snare drums and a bass drum (recorded by Alan Lomax, 1942, Sledge, Mississippi)
track 3: "Old Dick Jones is Dead and Gone" (4:06)
performed by the Compton Jones family and recorded by Evans, 1971, Senatobia, Mississippi. This is not fife and drum, but is included here because Evans considers it
an imitation of fife and drum. The instruments used are vocals, whistling, washtub, a bow diddley, and beating on chairs, benches, and cans.

track 4: "The Devil's Dream" (3:10)
Sid Hemphill, vocals and 10 notes quills (panpipes); snare drum and bass drum
(recorded by Lomax, 1942, Sledge, Mississippi)
track 5: "Granny Will Your Dog Bite" (1:37)
Compton Jones, washtub and vocals. I have included this only because the tune has been used by Otha Turner. (recorded by Evans, 1970, Senatobia, Mississippi)
Track 13: "Little Sally Walker" (0:50)
Nettie Mae and Aleneda Turner, vocals and handclaps (recorded by Cheryl Thurber, 1971, Senatobia, Mississippi). This tune is another Otha Turner favorite. As with track 5, I have listed it here because it may be useful, in the course of research in fife and drum band music, to hear another version.

In 1982, Otha Turner (fife), Jessie Mae Hemphill (snare drum) and Abe Young (bass drum) were featured on the children’s program, Mister Roger's Neighborhood. I have listed it with David Evans work because he was largely responsible for arranging the appearance.

William Ferris

(See also *Gravel Springs Fife & Drum* under Evans)

*Made in Mississippi: Black Folk Art and Crafts.* 1975. VHS, color, 19 mins. William Ferris, Yale University and the Center for Southern Folklore.
This film features seven different African Americans from Mississippi engaged in a variety of crafts such as quilting, basket weaving, sculpture, etc. One is Otha Turner, shown making cane fifes. The footage is not new; it is the first ninety seconds of Gravel Springs Fife & Drum.

*Mississippi Folk Voices.* 1983. LP. Southern Culture Records #SC 1700.
(Originally “Southern Folklore 101,” this album is a reissue of a 1972 recording sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Mississippi Historical Society.)
side 1, track 1: “Somebody Knocking on my Door “
Napoleon Strickland, vocal and fife; Othar Turner, snare drum
side 1, track 2 “Baby Please Don't Go”
Napoleon Strickland, harmonica only (no vocals)
side 1, track 3: “Glory Glory Hallelujah”
Napoleon Strickland, harmonica and vocals
Axel Küstner

The *Living Country Blues USA* series was produced by Siegfried A. Christmann and Axel Küstner. It consists of thirteen LPs (an introductory album followed by twelve volumes) that were recorded in 1980 and released in 1982.

The Introduction to *Living Country Blues USA: Field Recordings from Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Virginia, etc.* 1982. 2 LPs. L+R Records.
side 4, track 2: "Tango Twist" (3:18)
Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band: Othar Turner, cane fife; Bernice Evans, Eddie Ware, and R.L. Boyce, drums
(The introductory album also includes Sam Chatmon singing "Sittin' On Top Of The World" and Lonnie Pitchford singing "My Babe" (with a one-string guitar)

side 1, track 4: "My Babe" (2:18)
Othar Turner, vocal & cane fife

side 1, track 5: "Granny Will Your Dog Bite" (2:23)
Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife And Drum Band: Othar Turner, vocal & cane fife; Bernice Evans, Eddie Ware and R.L. Boyce, drums
side 2, track 4: "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" (3:16)
same personnel
side 2, track 7: "Father, I Stretch My Hands To Thee" (2:03)
Othar Turner, vocal & cane fife

side 1, track 5 "Bouncin' Ball" (3:11)
Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife And Drum Band: Othar Turner, vocal & cane fife; Bernice Evans, Eddie Ware and R.L. Boyce, drums

side 2, track 3: "When I Lay My Burden Down" (4:05)
Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band: Othar Turner, vocal and cane fife; Bernice Evans, Eddie Ware, and R.L. Boyce, drums

A 3 CD compilation was released in 1999 that contained four of the seven fife & drum tracks. The entire set was re-released on CD in 2008:

disc 1, track 8: "My Babe" (2:18)
disc 1, track 22: "When I Lay My Burden Down" (4:02)
disc 3, track 1: "Granny, Will Your Dog Bite" (2:25)
disc 3, track 13: "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" (3:17)

The Introduction to Living Country Blues USA: Field Recordings from Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Virginia, etc. 2008. 2 CDs. CDLR 711921.

Otha Turner

"Shimmy She Wobble"
"Station Blues"
"Glory, Glory"
Performed by Otha Turner and The Rising Star Fife & Drum Band.

1. Shimmy She Wobble (4:43)
2. Station Blues (4:56)
3. Bounce Ball (3:44)
4. Shimmy She Wobble II (5:14)
5. Stripes (10:38)
6. Senegal to Senatobia (8:52)
7. Glory, Glory Hallelujah (6:54)
8. Sunu (5:02)

According to the liner notes written by Jim Dickinson, this recording was made in 1999 as a follow-up to Turner's Everybody Hollerin' Goat. The concept for the album called for combining traditional African and Mississippi Hill Country instruments, so the instruments used include cane fifes, snare drums, bass drums, bottleneck guitar, kora, djembe, djun djun, sangban, kenkeni, bells, shakers, and tambourines.

Produced by Luther Dickinson, the musicians heard on this album are Otha Turner, Morikeba Kouyate, Musa Sutton, Manu Walton, Abe Young, R.L. Boyce, Bernice T. Evans, Shardé Evans, Rodney Evans, Andre Evans, Aubrey Turner, K.K. Freeman, Luther Dickinson, and Matthew Rappaport. The liner notes point out that this is Shardé's recording debut.

1. Shimmy She Wobble (4:18)
2. Bounceball (2:12)
3. Short’nin’ / Henduck (2:49)
4. Too Slow (1:23)
5. Shimmy She Wobble (6:30)
6. Station Blues (2:10)
7. Shake ‘em (5:30)
8. My Babe (4:18)
9. Boogie (5:29)
10. How Many Mo’ Years (2:08)
11. Roll and Tumble (1:54)
12. 2-Stepping Place (1:47)
13. Granny, Do Your Dog Bite? (1:20)
14. Shimmy She Wobble (9:40)
15. Glory, Glory Hallelujah (4:08)

Otha Turner, cane fife, vocals; Bernice T. Evans, snare drum, vocals; R.L. Boyce, bass drum, snare drum, guitar, vocals; Rodney Evans, snare drum, bass drum; Andre Evans, bass drum, snare drum; Aubrey Turner, snare drum, bass drum; K.K. Freeman, snare drum; Luther Dickinson, bottleneck guitar.

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Martin Scorsese

*Feel Like Going Home.* 2003. DVD, color, 110 mins. Produced and directed by Martin Scorsese. Vulcan Productions, Inc. and Road Movies Film Produktion GmbH.

This film is the first in a series of seven about the Blues, each made by a different director, and produced by Martin Scorsese.

At the beginning, from 1:26 to 2:40, there is a performance by the Young Brothers (Ed, Lonnie, and G.D.) The film calls the piece "Oree."

At 40:41, right after the chapter on John Lee Hooker, unidentified fife and drum band music (probably the Young Brothers) accompanies still photos of a fife and drum band. The narration discusses the work of Alan Lomax while showing photos of many musicians, including Sid Hemphill and Lucious Smith. At 41:28 the scene with Othar Turner and Corey Harris begins. They perform "Glory, Glory Hallelujah" (called "Lay My Burden Down") and the interview continues until 46:36 when Shardé Thomas, granddaughter of Othar Turner, appears and, accompanied by other musicians, plays "Shimme She Wobble," one of Turner's favorites. The narration discusses links between the blues and Africa until 49:24; the next scene shows Corey Harris in Mali. Othar Turner and The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band appear again from 1:13:12 to 1:15:25 in a performance of "My Babe" with Corey Harris. The film concludes at this point.

There is an additional performance by Othar Turner and Corey Harris in the "bonus performance" section of the DVD. The piece is "Station Blues," identified as "Sittin' On Top of the World."

track 13: "Oh Baby" (2:54)
Napoleon Strickland & The Como Drum Band: Napoleon Strickland, fife; Otha Turner, bass drum; John Tytus, snare drum
(Recorded by George Mitchell in 1967)
track 14: "Lay My Burden Down" (2:27)
Otha Turner, cane fife and vocal; Corey Harris, guitar
track 20: "My Babe" (4:31)
Otha Turner & The Rising Star Fife & Drum Band

Otha Turner’s “Shimmy She Wobble” is used throughout the film; I counted seven occurrences.

Track 5: "Shimmy She Wobble" (3:37)
Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band

Jim Dickinson

track 5: “My Babe” (5:55)
Otha Turner and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band
track 12: “Jesus is on the Mainline” (5:33)
Tate County Singers featuring Otha Turner and the Afrossippi Allstars

Luther Dickinson

Tracks: “Shimmy She Wobble,” “Station Blues,” “My Babe,” and “Oh, When the Saints Go Marching In.”

North Mississippi Allstars

(Luther Dickinson, Cody Dickinson, and Chris Chew)
The Dickinson family and its music have been heavily influenced by Otha Turner and his music. Some of their albums, while not actually featuring and fife & drum band music, include tracks from Turner's repertoire, such as “Shimmy She Wobble,” “Glory,
“Glory (Hallelujah),” and “Station Blues.”

track 12: “Be So Glad” (6:10)  
This selection uses cane fife in a supporting role. Otha Turner is credited.

*Hill Country Revue*. 2004. CD. ATO Records, LLC.  
track 9: "Shimmy She Wobble/Station Blues" (9:12)  
Otha Turner's Rising Star Fife & Drum Band: R.L. Boyce, snare drum and vocal leadership; Andre Evans, bass drum; Rodney Evans, snare drum; Aubrey Turner, snare drum.

track 11: "Bounce Ball" (4:44)  
Otha Turner and the Rising Star Fife and Drums

Corey Harris

From Mississippi to Mali. 2003. CD. Rounder Records Corp.  
Track 5: "Back Atcha" (3:25)  
Corey Harris and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band  
Track 8: "Mr. Turner" (4:40)  
Corey Harris, vocal, guitar; Bobby Rush, harmonica; Sam Carr, drums.  
Track 10: "Station Blues" (2:37)  
Corey Harris and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band

Jessie Mae Hemphill

Dare You To Do It Again. 2004. CD. 219 Records #TNR1003A.  
track 1: "Fife and Drum Intro" (1:35). “Glory, Glory Hallelujah”  
track 5: "Saints Go Marching In" (4:28)  
track 6: "Little Sally Walker" (3:38)  
The liner notes credit "Sharde Turner and the Rising Star Fife & Drum Corps" (i.e., Shardé Thomas and the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band).

Remaining Selections, in Chronological Order

Flyright Fly CD #58.  
Compiled by Bengt Olsson
track 22: “Don’t the Peaches Look Mellow” (1:03)
Othar Broadnax, fife and vocal

track 23: “Sally Got a Big Leg” (2:24)
Fife & Drum Band of the United Sons & Daughters of Zion, Chapter 9 (Lum Giffin fife, John Mitchell bass drum, Mckenzie snare drum)

side 1, track 1: "Shimmy Shawhawha" (2:55)
Napoleon Strickland Fife and Drum Band
Strickland on fife with at least two drums in accompaniment; one of them no doubt is Othar Turner.

*Mississippi Blues.* 1987. VHS, color, 93 mins. MPI Home Video.
Produced by Yannick Bernard & Bertrand Tavernier, in conjunction with American director Robert Parrish; William Ferris is listed as Associate Producer.
This is a French production, with narration in French and subtitles in English. At times the dialogue is in English.
Otha Turner is interviewed at the end of the film. The location is his house in Tate County; he talks about making fifes and plays a tune.

produced by Robert Palmer
From 15:00 - 16:50, a group identified as "Jessie Mae's Fife & Drum Band" and featuring Napoleon Strickland on fife, Abe Young on snare drum, and Jessie Mae Hemphill on bass drum performs a piece called "Bouncing Ball." A closeup of Strickland's fife reveals that it is a 4-hole instrument. At the conclusion of the performance, from 16:50 - 18:10, Robert Palmer interviews Hemphill, who discusses performances and her family history with fife and drum music. The next scene is of Hemphill performing (on guitar and vocals) at Junior Kimbrough’s juke joint.

directed by Ken Mandel
Fife & drum band music is used in the soundtrack from 7:01-7:18, and the host and narrator of the program, Keith David, mentions "fife and drum corps" as a musical genre that was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Rodney Evans and Othar Turner are credited.

produced by Robert Gordon
track 15: "Glory Hallelujah" (2:48)
Othar Turner, vocals and fife; drummers are uncredited.

produced by Judah and Donovan Bauer.
track 7: "I'm Not a Man" (4:02)
track 10: "Mississippi Bolero" (3:13)
Otha Turner, fife; R.L. Boyce, drums

Oxford American and Rick Clark.
track 1: "Station Blues"
Otha Turner, fife

Saatchi and Saatchi, a Japanese company, produced a series of commercials, aired in Japan, for the Wild Turkey Whiskey Company. Malik Sayeed, the director and cinematographer for the commercials, recently posted them on his website. The commercial featuring Otha Turner is thirty seconds long, and features both dialogue and fife playing by Turner, with percussion provided by three drummers, one of whom is R.L. Boyce.
www.MalikSayeed.com

Florentine Films.
The Young Brothers are heard (but not seen) playing "Jim and John" from 8:02" to 9:04." This is at the beginning of the second chapter, entitled "Gumbo." The citation is for Roots of the Blues, Rounder

It Came From Memphis, volume 2. 2001. CD. Birdman Records.
produced by Robert Gordon
track 2: "Boogie" (4:32)
Otha Turner, vocals; R.L. Boyce, guitar & vocals; Luther Dickinson, guitar.

History of the U.S. Beat. 2002. DVD. Hudson Music LLC.
produced by Steve Smith
This DVD is the second in a two-disc set and contains a very short clip, lasting from 4:14 - 4:20, of the Young Brothers Fife and Drum Band. It appears to be Alan Lomax footage from 1966.

Track 20: Othar Turner and the Rising Star Fife & Drum Band: "Short'nin'/Henduck" (2:52)

Independent production; never distributed. Trailer and excerpts available on YouTube. Interviews with Otha Turner, Napoleon Strickland, Robert Lowery, and Robert Mitchell
www.diluviogallery.com/atallah

Produced and directed by Jay Levey
Otha Turner appears early in the film, in chapter two, from 5:38 to 8:40. Featured are Turner on fife, R.L. Boyce on snare drum, granddaughter Shardé Thomas on djembe, and two other musicians, one on snare drum and the other on bass drum. At one point, Shardé is pictured on fife. Interviews with three other blues artists are included in this segment; one is Jerry Ricks, who talks about influences of fife & drum band on the blues, another is John Jackson, who reminisces about his father making penny whistles (Turner is shown making a fife), and the third is R.L. Burnside, who remembers fife & drum music at picnics.

Turner makes a brief reappearance in chapter 11, at 1:29:35, as the film is wrapping up. The narration at this point features various blues artists talking about how the blues will never die, and Turner is shown coaching his granddaughter on playing the fife.

In addition to the film, the DVD also includes performances from ten different blues artists, including Turner and his group, the Rising Star Fife & Drum Band. The feature is the full, three minute rendition of "Shimme She Wobble" that is excerpted in the main film.

The Living Blues. 2003. TV, color, 120 minutes. Turner Broadcasting System. Features Otha Turner

You See Me Laughin’. 2003. DVD, color, 77 mins. Plain Jane Productions, Inc. This film is a documentary about the Blues musicians of the Mississippi Hill Country. From 25:50 - 26:03, during the interview with R. L. Burnside, as he talks about the days when he was a boy and went to picnics, fife and drum band music can be heard in the background. It sounds like Otha Turner singing "Glory Glory Hallelujah." Additionally, a fife can be heard in the background of the Asie Payton interview, from 43:21 - 43:29. This is not a soundtrack; there was, apparently, a fifer playing somewhere nearby while the interview was being conducted. No melody can be discerned from the melodic fragments of those eight seconds.

Super Size Me. 2004. DVD, color, 100 mins. Kathbur Pictures, Inc. and Hart Sharp Video, LLC, 2004. This film is a documentary that features the director, Morgan Spurlock, eating nothing but fast food for thirty days.

1:07-4:29 “Shimmy She Wobble”
92:27-94:39 “Station Blues”
Otha turner and the AfroSissippi All-Stars are credited.

track 2: “Shimmy She Wobble” (4:42)
track 23: “Station Blues” (4:54)
Otha Turner is credited

This is a feature-length film whose story line centers around three young people
from Michigan who travel to Mississippi. Otha Turner is cast as “Papa Legba / Eshu” and makes his first appearance in the film in the final chapter, chapter six, at one hour, nineteen minutes, and fifty-seven seconds (1:19:57) into the film (and about 37 minutes from the end). He appears (appropriately for his character) standing at a crossroads as the main characters approach in a car. Dressed as we are used to seeing him, in overalls and a ball cap, he sings, and plays the fife to, the tune “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah” (listed in the credits as “When I Lay My Burden Down”). Two minutes later, while still at the crossroads, he plays “Shimme She Wobble” (which is not listed in the credits).

During this brief scene, notable for its close-ups of Turner, there are no drums and no dialogue for Turner.

The next scene, at 1:25:18, takes place at Turner’s home. Accompanied by one of his daughters, Turner engages in some dialogue with one of the main characters. Next, Shardé Thomas (listed in the credits as “Sharde”) appears playing drums and singing a selection listed in the credits as “Fishing Simon,” a traditional piece. At 1:29:40 there is footage from inside the Turner home, while outside the home, Turner is shown directing the other two main characters to clean up the yard in preparation for a picnic, including cutting firewood and preparing a large steel pot for boiling goat meat.

At 1:32:23, the sounds of a picnic are heard in the background, with picnic footage beginning at 1:33:20. Shardé Thomas is featured again, this time playing fife, and accompanied by two snare drums and a bass drum. The piece is identified in the credits as an Otha Turner composition entitled “The Roots Are Strong,” and The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band is named as the group. The scene ends at 1:38:45 with Thomas playing an alert on her fife to end the piece.

I can identify six names from the credits as members of the extended Turner family: Otha Turner, daughters Bernice Turner and Betty Turner Freeman, who appear in scenes with the main characters, and grandchildren Shardé Thomas, Aubrey Turner, and Andre Evans, who are members of the The Rising Star Fife and Drum Band (I am unable to identify the fourth member of the group). Shardé Thomas, who graduated from high school in 2008, is very young in the film, indicating that this footage must have been shot in the year 2000, or earlier.
Passed Down Things. 2006. CD. Southern Cultures.  
track 14: "Somebody Knocking On My Door"  
Napoleon Strickland fife, vocals; Otha Turner and Bernice Evans, drums

written and directed by Craig Brewer  
chapter 6 (46:46 - 47:36) "Granny, Do Your Dog Bite?"  
Otha Turner and the Rising Star Fife & Drum Band perform  
Otha Turner's music is used only briefly (approximately 50 seconds) during a scene of physical struggle between the two lead characters. Audible are fife, snare drum, bass drum, and vocals, with Turner providing the lyrics to "Granny, Do Your Dog Bite?"

by Scott Jennison  
Features Otha Turner; not commercially available.