

The background of the entire page is an abstract, expressive artwork. It features a dense, chaotic pattern of thin, dark black lines and strokes, resembling a scribble or a complex web. Overlaid on this are broad, sweeping strokes of a vibrant orange color, creating a high-contrast, textured effect. The overall composition is dynamic and visually busy.

Talking Woody Guthrie

Jack Elliott

- 1 Talking Columbia Blues
- 2 Pretty Boy Floyd
- 3 Ludlow Massacre
- 4 Talking Miner Blues
- 5 Hard Travelling
- 6 So Long It's Been Good To Know You
- 7 Talking Dustbowl Blues
- 8 1913 Massacre
- 9 Rambling Blues
- 10 Talking Sailor Blues

Born on what he calls “a 45,000-acre ranch in the middle of Flatbush”, Rambling Jack Elliott (real name: Elliott Charles Adnopoz), the son of a Brooklyn doctor, began to tire of city ways and, at the ripe old age of nine, decided that the life of a cowboy was for him and that the name Buck Elliott would be a great improvement over Adnopoz. “Later I changed it to Jack”, he says. “I was real hung up on Gene Autry for a year. But then I met a real cowboy and found out he didn’t look like Gene Autry at all. I’ve hated Gene Autry ever since and campaigned against him for years.”

Such was the New York childhood of one of America’s finest urban folksingers (or “citybillies”, as Charles Seeger would say). After running away from home (at 14) to join a Wild West rodeo, singing folksongs in Washington Square, and flunking out of two colleges, Jack made his first contact with the great Woody Guthrie. He heard a Guthrie phonograph record and the profound effect it made on him was to change his whole life. Soon after that (Elliott was 20 at the time), he met Woody. They lived together for one year and, “packing only guitars and razors”, rambled around the country, on and off, for the next five years. Jack soon began to live the life of Woody, imitating not only his manner of speaking, his singing, his guitar-playing, but the highly personal mannerisms as well. He began to become Woody, even down to the first traces of that fateful twitch which was to sound the warning for Guthrie’s dreaded illness. When Woody was unable to travel anymore and had to be hospitalized, Jack busked across the United States alone, then went to England. In 1956, skiffle was going strong in London and Jack began to sing in local pubs and create something of a name for himself. In 1957, he sent for his buddy, Derroll Adams, a banjo-picker from Portland, Oregon, and together the two sang and made a Topic album billed as the Rambling Boys.

Jack also did a solo Topic recording called **JACK TAKES THE FLOOR** and a small 8” LP composed of six Woody Guthrie songs called **WOODY GUTHRIE’S BLUES**. Topic also recorded several single 78rpm records. Jack then toured most of Europe, sang for Princess Margaret, and enjoyed the kind of prestige in England that Pete Seeger does in America. Soon, however, he headed Stateside, and almost immediately became a sensation in the United States. Alan Lomax, our dean of folklorists, was quoted as saying: “I’d rather listen to Jack than any of the other young people”. John Greenway added to the acclaim with: “Jack Elliott has accomplished...a refinement of Guthrie’s singing and playing style, an amalgamation of Woody’s genius and his own genuine talents into a compound better than either alone”. Woody himself said, “Jack Elliott sounds more like me than I do!”

Yet, Jack rapidly changed styles after being in America for about a year. He began a transition which was to take him from the relatively serious Guthrie mode of expression into the lighthearted good-timeyness of Oakland’s Jesse Fuller and into the country-western music of Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, Rose Maddox, etc. Guthrie’s “big” songs such as **1913** and **LUDLOW MASSACRE** no longer rang as true as they once did. It seemed to us to be a transition neither for the better nor for the worse, but merely a change in style probably brought about by his growing inability to no longer be Woody Guthrie. In England, he had sung country music and the songs of Jesse Fuller, but he was still, first and foremost, the superb interpreter of the songs of Woody Guthrie. Today, in the States, this is no longer the case.

The reissue here in 12" LP form of **WOODY GUTHRIE'S BLUES** plus some of Jack's outstanding 78 rpm singles of that time constitutes, in our opinion, Jack's finest performances of Woody Guthrie material. This is not the Jack Elliott of today, true, but it is a valid Jack Elliott all the same. That Jack would never be able to repeat such performances as **TALKING SAILOR** with the same seriousness and intensity is, to us, an almost certain fact. The record-buying public can consider itself lucky to be able to own these early historic recordings of a very important American folksinger.

Paul Nelson and Jon Pankake

The Songs

TALKING COLUMBIA BLUES - The introduction to the song, spoken lovingly and wittily by Elliott in Guthrie's own voice, amply sets the stage for Woody's epic of the Northwestern river giant. The satirical implications of "atomic bedrooms" and the absurd vision of a world of plastic underline Guthrie's awareness of the shortcomings of industrial culture, and his desire to place the aspirations of the social reform of the Thirties in proper perspective.

PRETTY BOY FLOYD - Guthrie is here working in an honourable and ancient folk tradition, that of the anonymous authors of the Robin Hood canon. Poetic license is taken in interpreting the career of a popular outlaw in order to focus attention (i.e. next-to-last verse) on the verities of social injustice.

LUDLOW MASSACRE - With half a lifetime of song-writing from his personal experiences behind him, Guthrie developed a poetic empathy that allowed him in later years to write as convincingly of historical occurrences as though he had actually been a participant in them. Impelled by verbs of action and violence, this narrative describes an actual atrocity committed during the coal field strike at Ludlow, Colorado, on April 20, 1914.

TALKING MINER BLUES - Jack performs here only a fragment of Woody's epic mining song about the Centralia, Illinois tragedy. For some reason, several verses have been left out, but what remains is still very telling and powerful. As usual, Woody's superb attention to the small humanistic detail carefully sets the scene for what is to follow. The last verse about the hot air in Congress is often left out, and is really not an essential part of the song.

HARD TRAVELLING - This vividly imaginistic song is a musical vest pocket version of Guthrie's monumental autobiographical novel, *BOUND FOR GLORY*. It has become the anthem of a real American type, the hard-working, hard-living migrant labourer, and has elevated this figure to the stature of a genuine folk-hero in the eyes of the generation that has grown up with Woody's songs.

SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YOU - Like Woody's *THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND*, this song has approached the proportions of a true epic folk song, sung and known by many who do not know of Guthrie himself or that he wrote the song. Its depiction of the simple round of prairie life continuing even in the face of natural disaster and mass exodus is Guthrie at his most positive, a vision of his affirmation of the spirit of endurance of his people.

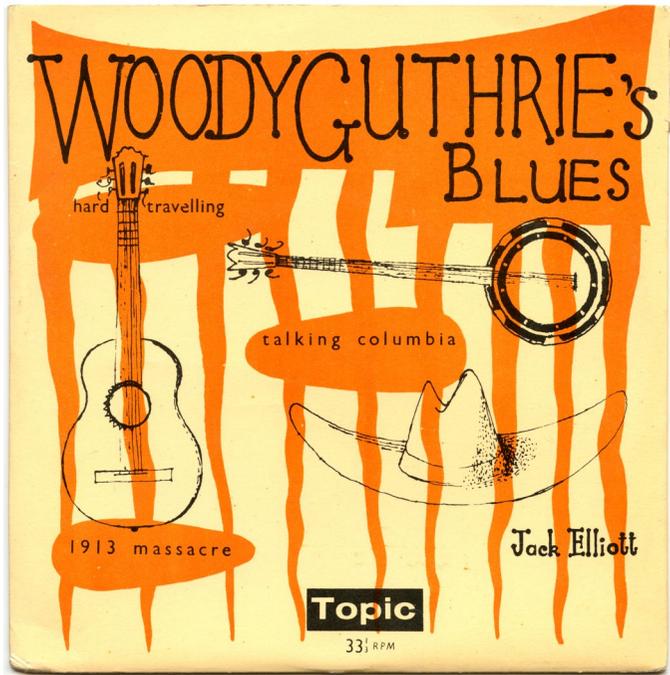
TALKING DUSTBOWL BLUES - The "taking blues" genre became national property in the 1920s and 1930s through the recordings of such masters as Chris Bouchillon and Lonnie Glosson. Guthrie recognized the inherent possibilities of the style's understated humour and potential for satirical social comment, and made it his own. Describing here a fanciful version of his own experiences in the Oklahoma Dustbowl of the Depression, Guthrie ingeniously and humorously draws a biting moral from the well-observed detail of the piece's narrative.

1913 MASSACRE - With nearly cinematic attention to point-of-view and detail, Woody here recreates another black page in American labour history, enrolling the listener as well as himself as participants in a tragedy of confusion and panic. It is a daring literary device, and its ultimate success is a tribute to the author's intuitive skill in wedding descriptive image to musical expression.

RAMBLING BLUES - A more lyric interpretation of the condition of the wandering worker-hero of *HARD TRAVELLING*, this masterpiece emphasizes the spark of sentimentality and nostalgia that often gleams behind the rough-and-ready exterior mask of the hard-bitten hobo.

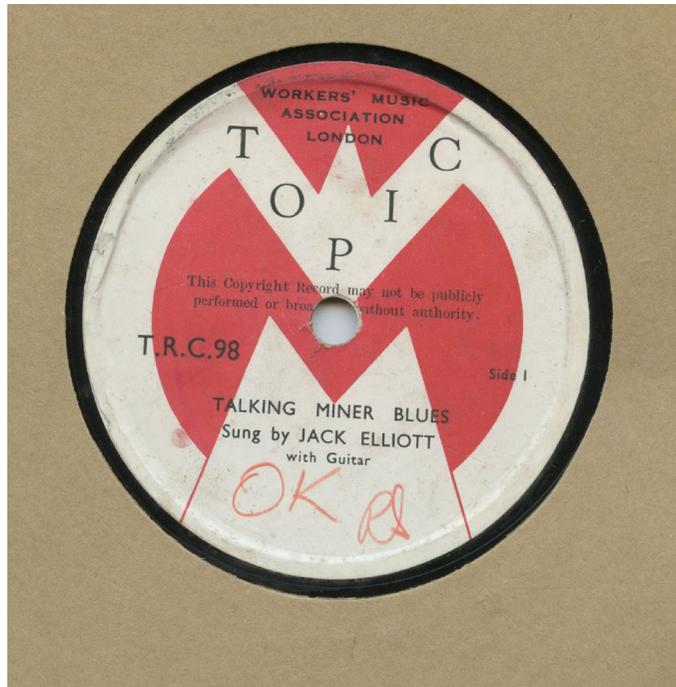
TALKING SAILOR BLUES - Guthrie's hitch in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II was crucial to his development as an artist, giving him not only an active outlet for his passionate hatred of Fascism (during the war and for some years afterwards he toted a guitar inscribed with "This Machine Kills Fascists"), but allowing him an opportunity to see much of Europe and North Africa and to affirm his conviction that the primary concern of his life, the oppression and despair of the common man, was a universal phenomenon.

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Talking
Woody Guthrie

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