

# Roll on Buddy

Jack Elliott & Derroll Adams

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ROLL ON BUDDY  
 JACK ELLIOTT & DERROLL  
 ADAMS

Rich and Rambling Boys  
 Buffalo Skinners  
 I Wish I was a Rock  
 It's Hard ain't it Hard  
 All Around the Water Tank  
 Mother's not Dead  
 East Virginia Blues  
 The Old Bachelor  
 Danville Girl  
 The State of Arkansas  
 The Death of Mr. Garfield  
 Roll on Buddy



## TSDL105

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- 1 Rich and Rambling Boys 1,2
- 2 Buffalo Skinner 1
- 3 I wish I was a Rock 2
- 4 It's Hard ain't it Hard 1
- 5 All Around the Water Tank 1
- 6 Mother's not Dead 1,2
- 7 East Virginia Blues 1,2
- 8 The Old Bachelor 2
- 9 Danville Girl 1
- 10 The State of Arkansas 1
- 11 The Death of Mr Garfield 2
- 12 Roll on Buddy 1,2

1 *Jack Elliott*

2 *Derroll Adams*

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Notes by Alexis Korner

The frequent appearances and disappearances of Jack Elliott are always producing interesting situations – both musical and personal – but none of his visits can have occasioned more interest than those which included the presence of Derroll Adams. Britain, in fact, was to become a European base for this couple of migrant American folk singers.

Commuting between concert hall and coffee bar without any feeling of discomfort, they built a small but fervent following which grew steadily with each appearance of Jack and Derroll. For this duo had not only knowledge but also humour. They felt no pang at being entertainers and artists all in one. But then, what else should they have been? More serious, more dedicated . . . I think not. This knowledge of theirs, part instinct and part learning, enabled them to entertain without diminishing the quality of their material. They amused themselves and their audiences, but they never played down to anyone.

Folksong, after all, is very strongly involved with entertainment. Its purpose, as much as any other, is to pass away long evenings without the benefit of radio, records or television. This is why the individuality of the performer must be carefully

## TSDL105

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blended with that of the material being performed. Almost, one may cite 'brilliant anonymity' as a cardinal virtue in the folk artist. It is this elusive quality – one which does not run counter to the conception of a recognisably personal performance – which distinguishes the work of Jack Elliott and Derroll Adams.

A fine example of this quality is to be found in Derroll Adams' 'Death of Mr Garfield'. The song, itself a blend of pathos, tenderness, humour and gastronomic detail, is far from being a historical murder ballad in the classic tradition. Derroll's performance of it, complete with touches of mimicry, brings out all the unusual sound of the narrative. And his banjo style, with its oriental overtones, is here at its best. It is not the speed of his banjo picking which is important, but the exceptionally personal improvisation and dynamics. These create the perfect foil for his unimpassioned singing.

Jack Elliott, on the other hand, with higher voice and more immediate expressiveness, shows to best advantage on such songs as 'Danville Girl' and 'All Around the Water Tank'. His fine guitar technique and excellent vocal control permit him to indulge in performances more baroque than those of Derroll Adams. With a much more negroid flavour to his work, Jack has always tended to use blues-based

guitar phrasing even when singing white folk material. The purists may disapprove but ordinary people have always accepted this facet of Jack's musical character. Not only have they accepted it, they have also enjoyed it.

Together, they form a team, sometimes a little ragged, but never lacking in the fire which is essential to success. Their joint travels around Europe taught them a great deal which home life could not have done and they came back to Britain, better than when they had first left it. For a short time I was privileged to work with them on mandolin. We had a ball as a trio and I learned more in a few weeks, more of the sheer pleasure of playing music, than I had done in several years of more serious attempts to progress.

Then, they vanished again. This time, however, they went in different directions. Jack Elliott headed back for the United States, Derroll Adams went to Belgium. Who knows if they will ever work together again on any regular basis? I certainly hope they will and that they will visit us again.

Alexis Korner.

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### The Songs

**RICH AND RAMBLING BOYS** This is a gay, rumbustious song, admirably suited to the folk entertainers performance. It has been performed frequently since the '20s and is notable, here, for the excellent instrumental accompaniment from Jack and Derroll.

**BUFFALO SKINNERS** A ballad in the classic mould, this tells the story of the hardships which were frequently met by the hunters of buffalo in the 1870s. Buffalo hunters were largely responsible for the Indian Wars of that period, since their wholesale slaughter of the Indians' chief meat reserves created great trouble amongst the tribes. The hunters took only skins for robes, leaving the carcasses to rot. The melody which Jack Elliott uses, is an alternative to the original. It is, in fact, very similar to that which he later uses for 'The State of Arkansas' and is based on that of Woody Guthrie.

**I WISH I WAS A ROCK** A humorous song composed, I believe, by Derroll Adams. His deadpan voice is most effective in the performance of material such as this. Once again, Derroll's beautifully relaxed banjo accompaniment is worthy of note.

**IT'S HARD, AIN'T IT HARD** One of Woody Guthrie's favourite songs, this is ideal material for Jack Elliott. The gay melody belies the basic sadness of the lyrics.

**ALL AROUND THE WATER TANK** This song, from the early '20s was a great favourite with all Jimmie Rodgers followers. Vaguely mournful, it becomes a very personal song in the hands of a performer such as Jack. The classic 'waiting for a train' theme done once more, but done very well.

**MOTHER'S NOT DEAD** Here is a real comedy number of the Grandpa Jones variety. It makes an ideal partner for Jack's other great comedy number, 'They're Burning Down the House'. Don't be worried by the fact that you cannot take this one seriously. You're not supposed to.

**EAST VIRGINIA BLUES** One of the best known mountain ballads, the long-note melody is sung over fast rhythmic accompaniment. This melody, which can be traced back to its origins in the British Isles nearly two centuries ago, has given rise to many fine songs. Of these 'Greenback Dollar', a hit in the heyday of British Skiffle, may be the best known.

**THE OLD BACHELOR** Another song which takes humour rather than melancholy as its working basis. The sardonic lyrics completely deny the lugubrious quality of the melody.

**DANVILLE GIRL** There is a group of songs of which 'Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet' is the most famous. 'Danville Girl', gay and lilting, is one of the

## TSDL105

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better known variants in this group. The 3/4 accompaniment is played with tremendous swing throughout Jack's performance and, here, one can feel the impact of the country musician/singers who played and sang for dancing as well as listening.

THE STATE OF ARKANSAS Again, a well known ballad. Here is a semi-humorous story of the difficulties besetting the early immigrant to Arkansas. The words of this song are only a slight exaggeration of known facts. This is the melody of which Jack uses a variant for his performance of the 'Buffalo Skinners'. Here it is in its proper context.

THE DEATH OF MR. GARFIELD General James Abram Garfield became President of the United States on November 2nd 1880. On July 2nd 1881 he was shot at the Chicago Railway Station by a lawyer named Charles Jules Guiteau. He did not however, die of the wounds, until September 19th of that year. This song will throw no light whatsoever on the assassination, but it will entertain and fascinate you. Hardly a classic murder ballad, it is nonetheless, a 'talking song of humour and quality'.

ROLL ON BUDDY Made famous by Bascomb Lamar Lunceford, this bragging song makes a fitting ending to an LP by Jack and Derroll. A rousing melody, it could easily have become a 'skiffle' hit.

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TSDL105

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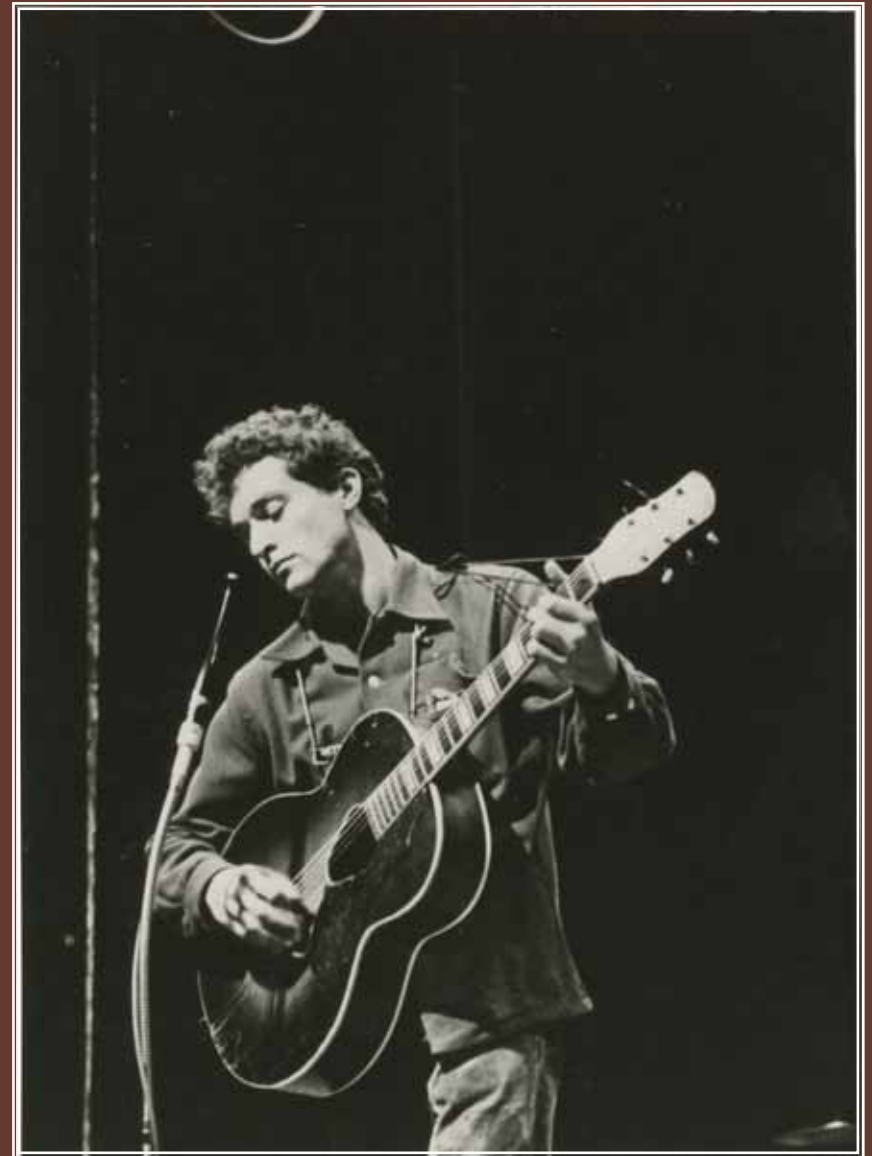
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Derroll Adams



Jack Elliott

## TSDL105

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Roll On Buddy

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