CHAPTER 3

JOHN FAHEY: BACKGROUND AND BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

"Because of Dick Spottswood and Don Owens and Bill Monroe, I became a professional guitar player and composer." John Fahey.[1]

John Fahey was born on February 28, 1939, in Takoma Park, located in Cecil County Maryland.[2] His early musical life was typical of a suburban middle class child in the United States. Both his mother and father were amateur musicians; his father played popular songs on the Irish harp and the piano, and his mother played popular and semi-classical songs on the piano. Fahey remembers that, "my father liked schmaltz, but my mother played Rachmaninoff preludes and things. I started hearing that stuff really young, right out of the womb."[3] Fahey admitted on at least one occasion to taking piano lessons himself, but did not maintain an interest, saying that the piano "didn't sound enough like a full orchestra."[4] A similar fate awaited the clarinet, an instrument he took up in junior high school in another attempt to connect with the concert music he was becoming interested in:

> I [Fahey] had been playing clarinet in a school band and was interested in orchestras and symphonic music, but I couldn't maintain an interest playing the clarinet. I've always wanted to improvise and write things more than I

[1] John Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life , Chicago: Drag City , 2000 , 265. The author is aware that this semi-autobiographical work mixes truth and fiction quite liberally and notes that the book itself is listed as fiction. For that reason great care has been taken when referencing any facts. Dick Spottswood, in interviews with the author, confirmed the parts used within this research to be more or less true.

[2] John Fahey, "John Fahey," Takoma Records press release. The three page release is anonymous, but it is presumed that Fahey is the author.

[3] Suzie Boss, "Madman of Music," Oregon Magazine December 1984, (reprint online) http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/mom.html.

[4] Ferris, "Why Fahey Wants to Kill Everybody," Rolling Stone, 24 December 1970.

wanted to play."[5]

In 1948, the same year Fahey's Cub Scout troop tap danced to "When You Wore A Tulip" at a local Presbyterian church,he had an early and profound musical experience.[6] While watching the 1940 remake of the Thief of Bagdad in a Takoma Park movie theater, he became entranced not only by the vivid Technicolor imagery and Arabian fantasy-type plot, but also by the exquisite Miklos Rozsa score. Fahey said, "What I liked about it most was the music. I got interested in music overnight."[7] This fact has been periodically retold, but it is an understated component of Fahey's early vernacular. Barry Hansen revealed in an interview that as late as the early 1960s, Fahey maintained an appreciation for the score:

> He [Fahey] was very fond of Miklos Rosza's music for the 1940 British film The Thief Of Bagdad. When it played in a revival house in our neighborhood, he borrowed the UCLA Folklore Department's brand-new Nagra portable tape machine (without permission, probably) and asked me to sneak it into the theater and record the soundtrack, which I did.[8]

This connection to concert music is very important, especially given the difficulty in making direct connections to this early aspect of Fahey's influences. Fahey mentions that the change in format by many Washington D.C. area radio stations included the broadcasting of concert music, specifically Russian Romantic composers.[9] He also noted that he had a large collection of "classical" records he bought from paper route earnings.[10] However, outside of Fahey's own admission that "classical music was what I was raised on," this is one of the only clear and traceable experiences.[11]

In addition to Fahey's affinity for concert music, an early interest in bluegrass and hillbilly music was also nurtured by family outings to New River Ranch, Rising

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[5] Michael Brooks, "John Fahey: Turtle Blues," Guitar Player, March 1972, 20.

[6] John Stropes and Peter Lang eds. eds. 20th Century Masters of Fingerstyle Guitar. (Milwaukee: Stropes Edition, 1982), 38.

[7] Ferris.

[8] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace , 17 April 2002.

[9] John Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life , 250.

[10] John Fahey Takoma press release.

[11] "Syncopated Classics from the Underground," Melody Maker, September 1969. Incomplete source.

Sun, Maryland, "an outdoor entertainment establishment where the family spent many Sundays."[12] It was here that Fahey witnessed live performances by artists such as the Stanely Brothers. These disparate influences made up the thoughts and sounds flowing through Fahey's subconscious when he purchased his first guitar, a $17 model from Sears & Roebuck.

Fahey was thirteen or fourteen when he first started playing the guitar, and it is clear that by 1954 he had begun fully exploring the possibilities of the instrument. Initially, Fahey was drawn to the guitar for the same reasons that so many other adolescent boys are:

> When I was about [13 or 14] some friends of mine started getting guitars. It was sort of the thing in the neighborhood to get a guitar and play country-western music . . . . I started playing mainly as a social thing, to pick up girls in the park.[13]

The first song Fahey claims to have leaned was Eddie Arnold's "I Really Don't Want to Know Why," most likely through a chord or songbook.[14] He also tried to play some Hank Williams selections, and "all the music he had heard in church, on the radio, and in his parents living room."[15] Unlike his friends, Fahey was not satisfied simply singing and strumming the guitar:

> As soon as I got the guitar, I started composing. These other guys would show me chords, but I wanted to compose, because I had all this classical music background. I didn't read it, but I had it in my head.[16]

He may have had the inspiration, but he lacked some of the facility, and his path to competency on the guitar was slow. Fahey wrote in 1977 that he, "Learned to play the guitar [by] spending incredible amounts of time, because I was a slower learner than everybody else, practicing very simple things. The only reason I am still

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ferris, "Why Fahey Wants to Kill Everybody,"; Mark Humphrey, "John Fahey," Acoustic Guitar, August 1980, 2; Dale Miller, "Reinventing the Steel," Acoustic Guitar, January/February 1992, 46.

[14] Brooks, 20; Edwin Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," Wire , August 1998, (reprint online) http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

[15] Miller, 46.

[16] Humphrey, "John Fahey,", 22.

playing, and some others are not, is because I wouldn't give up."[17] After his family moved to the Washington D.C. suburbs in 1954, Fahey had little else to do than hone his skills:

> My musical background and the guitar kept me from going crazy. I didn't know anyone where we moved and so I had nothing to do most of the time, except learn and practice the guitar. This was the period when I began writing songs.[18]

During one practice session in 1954, while he was stealing snatches of song ideas from the radio, Fahey was struck by another early musical epiphany. A local radio station, WARL, had switched formats, and a disc jockey named Don Owens had begun playing country music on the morning show. One morning he made an announcement, paraphrased by Fahey:

> Well, friends, this is a very old record, and it has a lot of scratches on it, and it's hard to hear but it's such a good record that I'm gonna play it anyway. Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys doing Jimmie Rodgers' 'Blue Yodel Number Seven.'"[19]

Fahey recounted the impact that this event had on his life in several interviews, and it has become a classic anecdote. In 2000, he took the time to expand on the impact of this first hearing in his own prose:

> It reached out and grabbed [me] and it has never let go. I went limp. I almost fell off the sofa. My mouth fell open. My eyes widened and expanded. I found myself hyperventilating . . . I screamed for help but nobody was around and nobody came . . . . Nothing has ever been the same since . . . . Isn't it weird how somebody like a DJ that you don't even know and have never even seen can do some apparently trivial thing- at least that's what you think at the time- and it changes your entire life for the rest of your life?[20]

When Fahey attempted to get a copy of the record, he was met with disappointment. Like so many other prewar relics, the record was out of print. Under the supposed advice of a record shop owner, he sought out a collector who might have a copy. After asking around, he met Dick Spottswood, a teenager who at the

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[17] John Fahey, introduction to The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, ed. John Lescroat (New York: Guitar Player books, 1978), 9.

[18] Anonymous, Takoma Records Press Release, date unknown.

[19] John Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life, 252.

[20] Ibid., 252-253.

time was already one of the most respected experts on country and blues 78s in the world.[21] Spottswood not only had the Bill Monroe record, but several others, and helped turn Fahey on to a whole world of music. It was through Spottswood that Fahey learned that these elusive recordings could be had by canvassing. Fahey wrote:

> Dick Spottswood [taught] me how to find old pre-WWII records. His method was to canvass old sections of the South. We would go door to door and ask whoever answered if they had any old records. Then we'd buy them. If they'd sell them. We found a lot of old records that way.[22]

Spottswood said that the canvassing trips included thrift and junk shops as well, and most excursions were unplanned and spontaneous. Fahey's strongest asset at the time was that "he was the one with the car."[23] It was through Spottswood that Fahey would discover the great fingerpickers of the 1920s and 1930s. Fahey said, "He [Spottswood] played me some Sam McGee and Frank Hutchinson and that blew my mind; they were fingerpicking, so then I had to learn to fingerpick."[24] Spottswood also knew a lot about guitar tunings and related information, and Fahey was able to pick these things up. Fahey said, "He [Spottswood] didn't play guitar but somehow he knew there were different tunings, and he even knew the names of them and how you tuned them . . . . He taught me more than anyone else did."[25]

Fahey picked up some fingerpicking technique from a Pete Seeger instruction record, but for the most part was left to his own devices.[26] This is the major difference between Fahey and collectors such as Spottswood. For Fahey, the old 78s became a source not only of inspiration, but also of technique, and the players on the discs became his teachers: "Some of the records I found, guitar picking records by [musicians] like Sylvester Weaver, weren't too complicated, so I tried to play off some of these with a basic three-finger picking style."[27] As mentioned, Sam

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[21] Miller, 46.

[22] John Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life, 265.

[23] Dick Spottswood, interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[24] "John Fahey: Of Turtles, Bluesmen, Slide Guitars, Bitter Beer and Religion," Unhinged, Incomplete source reprinted online, http://www.Hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/ofturtles2.html.

[25] Miller, 46.

[26] Ibid., 46.

[27] Brooks, 40.

McGee's early 78s were also of great importance to Fahey who said, "He [Sam McGee] was the guy I tried to copy the most, and I couldn't get it. He was so clean and fast, so good all around. I really tried hard for years to play exactly like him, and I never got very close."[28] Fahey was never very discouraged by his ill-approximations. When asked in 1972 if he could read tablature he replied: "No, I would rather just sit down and get it off the record. And if I don't get it exactly right, I don't care. I want my own interpretation anyway."[29]

Initially, Fahey wanted nothing to do with black music, collecting hillbilly and bluegrass records exclusively, leaving blues, gospel, and jazz sides for Spottswood. Fahey admitted to having to deal with personal issues regarding race, admitting that, "Where I was brought up was very prejudiced towards Negroes. I was taught to hate and fear them. I didn't like black music very much. I wouldn't even listen to it."[30] Fahey did his best to avoid black artists, though certainly some slipped by, like Sylvester Weaver. Nonetheless, during a canvassing excursion with Spottswood in 1956, Fahey found a copy of "Praise God I'm Satisfied" by the gospel street evangelist Blind Willie Johnson. What followed is another famous Fahey anecdote, and yet another major epiphany for the young guitarist. Fahey retold the story in 1998:

> Dick Spottswood and I sat in a store where they were selling up old 78s. They weren't cataloged or anything, they were just lying around. We were going through them and I was not picking up any records by Negroes for myself because all I wanted was bluegrass. I found several black records and gave them to Spottswood. Then we went over to this other collector's house and he put on the Blind Willie Johnson. I started to feel nauseated so I made him take it off, but it kept going through my head so I had to hear it again. When he played it the second time I started to cry, it was suddenly very beautiful. It was some kind of hysterical conversion experience where in fact I had liked that music all the time, but didn't want to. So, I allowed myself to like it.[31]

Fahey's newfound conversion only served to exasperate his collecting tendencies, and he began to solidify the influences that he needed to make his own music. The blues provided an emotional experience that Fahey was searching for. In

[28] Mark Humphrey, "John Fahey,", 22.
[29] Brooks, 42.
[30] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.
[31] Ibid.

a 1972 interview he said:

> I wanted to hear some music that sounded the way I felt at the time, and I couldn't produce it on the guitar. And I also couldn't find it in classical music, which I liked the most. I found it, to some extent, in hillbilly music, but the more I got into the blues, the more I wanted to hear it."[32]

Unlike Spottswood, who said in interviews with the author that the D.C. area had slim 78 offerings, Fahey thought the contrary:

> Prior to '55, Washington, D.C., was a city of Southern culture, like Richmond. So was Baltimore . . . . Canvassing in and around Washington and Baltimore, as far North as Havre de Grace and even Philadelphia, I found hundreds of hillbilly and race records."[33]

Fahey took his canvassing trips further, explaining that "before I got out of high school I was going into Virginia . . . .Gradually we worked our way south, going mostly into the Negro sections of towns. Hit a lot of Tennessee and North Carolina."[34]

Fahey made one discovery much closer to home, a copy of Charley Patton's "High Water Everywhere Parts One and Two." The record, well worn and nearly inaudible, immediately struck Fahey:

> It looked as though somebody had sanded it, you could hardly find a groove. I couldn't hear all of the guitar. I could hear a guy singing, maybe, and I heard that BOMPH! BOMPH! I thought, 'What the hell is that? It sounded to me like the guy was playing a stretched inner tube or something. So I called up Spottswood and asked him if he'd heard of Charley Patton. He said, 'Yeah, I have a few." So I went over to his place with my tape recorder, recorded all the Charley Patton records he had and became a real Patton freak.[35]

Patton would continue to preoccupy Fahey for the majority of his life and would prove a major influence, due mainly to the highly emotional content of his music. Fahey said of Patton, "There are licks that Charley Patton used to play that sound like gunshots– really hostile!"[36]

Fahey claimed to have known Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten during this period as

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[32] Brooks, 21.

[33] Eddie Dean, "In Memory of Blind Thomas of Old Takoma John Fahey: 1939-2001," Washington City Paper, Reprint online, http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/special/fahey030901.html.

[34] Brooks, 21.

[35] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

[36] Ian Penman, "The Passage of Time in Open G and Other Stories," incomplete source.

well.[37] An influential folk singer and guitar player with ties to the Seeger family, Cotten apparently unlocked the secrets of playing slide in open G. Fahey revealed that she had quite an impact on him:

> I started hearing things in open G, but I couldn't work it out. Elizabeth Cotten knew it . . . . I used to know most of Cotten's songs, speaking of her . . . . We used to take her to parties and stuff. I was influenced by her.[38]

Fahey was open to all the music he heard, and he attempted to absorb whatever he came across, saying, "There were a lot of isolated people who just made one record, and they helped me develop my style. I also got a lot of harmonic ideas from listening to classical music."[39]

Fahey graduated from high school and entered college in 1956, first attending the University of Maryland and then quickly transferring to American University.[40] He studied philosophy and religion and continued to live at home, all the while remaining immersed in the music he was collecting. Through Spottswood, he met other like-minded teens, a group Fahey referred to as the Episcopal Youth Group, and was able to form a loose sort of collective. "[The group] would meet at the local Episcopal church to discuss malaise in the Eisenhower era, and also to play and record weird ensemble music."[41] Fahey simply referred to the group by saying, "We were all trying to keep from going crazy."[42] One individual, a woman named Pat Sullivan who also played the guitar, encouraged Fahey's playing:

> I [Fahey] was a very slow learner and frequently became despondent. Pat was always a little behind me but not very far, and once and awhile she'd get ahead of me. She was the only person who understood what I was doing . . . I would never have become a good guitarist or anything in particular if it hadn't been for her.[43]

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[37] Brooks; "John Fahey: Of Turtles, Bluesmen, Slide Guitars, Bitter Beer and Religion," Unhinged, Incomplete source reprinted online, http://www.Hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/ofturtles2.html; Stephan Grossman, "Searching for Blind Joe Death: The Resurrection of John Fahey," Guitar Player , September 1996, 52.

[38] Brooks, 41.

[39] Ibid., 41.

[40] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

[41] Byron Coley, "The Persecutions and Resurrections of Blind Joe Death (revised)," http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Miller, 46.

Fahey continued to improve his guitar playing and became proficient at approximating the sounds of the old recordings. He became so adept that after becoming acquainted with Joe Bussard, the two decided to make some 78 rpm recordings of Fahey playing blues and related material, cut in Bussard's basement studio. Bussard released the recordings on his Fonotone label, and listed Fahey under the pseudonym "Blind Thomas," listing the recordings in his catalog of available selections as "authentic Negro folk music."[44] Bussard explained that "it was done as kind of a joke. John sang in this terrible harsh voice. It wasn't bad . . . the damn things sold."[45] Fahey made several recordings for Bussard starting in 1958, many of which were early versions of songs he would go on to record at later dates.

Of course, becoming an "authentic" blues singer was never Fahey's goal. During this same period, between 1956 and 1959, Fahey worked the midnight shift at Martin's Esso gas station in Langley Park, MD.[46] It was during the late night hours that Fahey really began to fuse his love of concert music with the syncopated fingerpicking styles of blues and hillbilly pickers. One night, a friend from high school came in and heard Fahey playing. She said he should make his own record, and it seemed like a good idea to him. The only problem was that Fahey's music was more than just unusual for the time. The steel-string guitar had a long way to go before it was accepted as any type of solo concert instrument, and Fahey's instrumental style was far out of the mainstream. Spottswood retells the predicament:

> He [Fahey] was not someone who was going with what was perceived as the mainstream at the time. Don't forget those were the days when rhythm and blues were all of a sudden being marketed to the white audiences called by a new name, rock 'n' roll, and John certainly wasn't interested in doing any of that. He wasn't interested in following classical guitar playing of the Andres Segovia persuasion. He wasn't learning guitar with the purpose of playing in any of the folk revival groups that weren't all that numerous in those days anyway. He wasn't learning how to play hot country electric takeoff guitar. So he wasn't doing any of those things that people made a living at on that instrument in those days.[47]

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[44] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.
[45] Miller, 47.
[46] Coley, " http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.
[47] Miller, 46-47.

This was a problem that Fahey was well aware of, and he knew that it was pointless to try and find someone interested in putting out his music. He was undeterred however, and given the ease of recording due to magnetic tape and the multitude of independent record pressing facilities that sprang up in the late fifties, Fahey decided to go at it alone. With the help of a $300 loan from an Episcopal minister, Fahey, along with Pat Sullivan (or Anthony Lea, depending on the source) manning the tape recorder, recorded an albums worth of material during Fahey's late night shifts at the service station.[48] Fahey had RCA Custom recorders print 100 copies, a small number of which were broken in shipping. Fahey had black and white covers printed; one side of the album cover was attributed to Fahey, the other was attributed to his fictitious mentor Blind Joe Death, an old bluesman from Takoma park. Not fully over his Blind Thomas prank, Fahey wanted to further challenge the myth that whites could not play the blues: "I had several friends helping me. I couldn't find the right name. So one night Greg Elbers and I were sitting in a pool hall, drinking beer and throwing names at each other, and suddenly he said, 'Blind Joe Death.'"[49] Fahey christened his label Takoma records, appropriately named after his home town.

Dale Miller wrote that Blind Joe Death was "incredibly avant-garde for 1958."[50] Fahey could do little else but sell the records out of his car and at his work, and give them away to friends, saying that "the first record took years to sell."[51] He mischievously slipped some into thrift stores and Salvation Army bins, hoping to fool someone into "rediscovering" some lost blues guitar player. But despite some fairly straight forward renditions of country and blues tunes like "St. Louis Blues" and "John Henry," along with some like-sounding originals such as "Poor Boy Long Ways from Home," some of the more extended compositions such as "Desperate Man Blues," "Suns Gonna Shine on My Backdoor Someday," and especially "The Transcendental Waterfall", a lengthy piece that mixed classical and blues themes

[48] Ibid., 47; John Fahey, Takoma press release.
[49] Miller, 47.
[50] Ibid.,47.
[51] Coley, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

with equal parts space and dissonance, were certainly too esoteric for most. Fahey tried sending a copy to the blues historian Sam Charters, who was unable to comprehend its value. Fahey:

> Even Sam Charters didn't understand. I still have a letter from 1959, where I sent Charters a copy of my first record and he wrote me back to tell me how terrible I was and how Jack Elliot and so on were much better than me. He completely misunderstood what I was trying to do. But that was okay. I understood what I was trying to do.[52]

Fahey believed the instrument he played, the steel string acoustic guitar, could stand on its own. The fact that no none else had thought of it mattered little to him. ED Denson said of Fahey:

> He was in the Vanguard . . . . He had found the beauty in the guitar accompaniment [of old-time and blues recordings] as music itself rather than background music for singing, and had developed that in new directions. That was the real genius of the Blind Joe LP.[53]

Fahey was well aware of the rarity of his attempts: "When I started out, nobody was interested in guitar solos– in taking old blues pieces and trying to recreate them. I thought there was enough in the guitar that deserved concert attention."[54] This attempt was noble enough for the time, but by combining his efforts on the guitar with his own record label, Fahey defined what an underground musician could do: create an entire market that revolved around an individuals own output, and take responsibility for releasing it.

Fahey graduated from American University in 1962 with a Bachelor of Art in philosophy and religion. After a brief stint in Hawaii as a teaching assistant in a philosophy department, a fact Fahey tried to avoid mentioning, he moved to Berkeley, California, with several other friends from the Washington D.C. area, including the now married ED Denson and Pat Sullivan. The move was an attempt to infiltrate and supersede the newly emerging folk scene. Fahey said, "[I left Washington in] 1962. The music scene was so bad that several of us decided to come out to Berkeley and take over the folk music scene . . . we made quite an

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[52] Grossman, "Searching for Blind Joe Death: The Resurrection of John Fahey," 52.

[53] John Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death, Liner Notes, 2.

[54] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 22.

impact, which was impossible in D.C."[55]

Fahey enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley in a doctoral program in philosophy. He continued to focus on his playing and composing, again enlisting the aid of Pat Sullivan, now Pat Denson:

> I had all these pieces in my head, you know, and she seemed to be able to hear them, I swear. She was more certain of me and my talent than I was. We had two guitars and were doing these incredible things and learning stuff everyday just by listening to each other. I mean we'd play for eight hours and think nothing of it, day after day.[56]

The result was Fahey's second album, Death Chants, Breakdowns, and Military Waltzes.[57] The record showed an even more synthesized voice and is evidence of Fahey's continuing progression towards a more cultivated style. Two of the tracks had been recorded in 1962 in Maryland. According to journalist Byron Coley, "The material on Death Chants bridges both coasts and connects the first two eras of Fahey's career."[58] Many of the songs illustrate a bright lyricism that came to represent Fahey's music, no matter how dark the theme. Pieces like "Sunflower River Blues," "When the Springtime Comes Again," and "Spanish Dance," are all evidence of Fahey's concentration on melody. Although most of the songs are below the five-minute mark, attempts at fusing several themes into a longer arrangement, like on "Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," provide insight into what Fahey would eventually accomplish through his composing. Also included was a booklet of fictitious prose, his first of many, highlighting the finer points of his mentor Blind Joe Death's history and their relationship. An excerpt reads: "Fahey made his first guitar from a baby's coffin and led the old blind Negro through the back alley and whorehouses of Takoma Park in return for lessons."[59]

Fahey pressed 300 copies of Death Chants. Unbeknownst to him, his friend

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[55] Grossman, 52.

[56] Miller, 47.

[57] John Fahey, Death Chants, Breakdowns and Military Waltzes, Takoma TAKCD-8908-2 (, (1963,1967) 1998, compact disc.

[58] Byron Coley, Liner notes to the reissue of Death Chants, Break Downs and Military Waltzes, 1998.

[59] Fahey, original liner notes to Death Chants, Breakdowns and Military Waltzes, 1963.

Norman Pierce operated a national record distribution company from the basement of his record store. Pierce purchased ten, then later fifty, copies of Death Chants and helped not only in to further Fahey's career, but also to promote Takoma records.[60] The record sold very well in Massachusetts, aided in part by Peter Stampfel's praise and reprinting of the liner notes in his "Boston Broadside" column. In Southern California, Barry Hansen provided equal praise in the University of California, Los Angeles' Daily Bruin*;* he also played the record on the air and between sets at a local folk venue, The Ash Grove.[61]

Another almost equally important event happened to Fahey in 1963. The folk revival of the 1960s was expanding upon the initial canvassing expeditions for 78s by actually seeking out the performers themselves. The nature of the recordings gave the illusion of a very distant past, and many assumed that the musicians themselves were long dead. In fact, many of the musicians had simply retired when new styles of music became popular and were still alive. When Mississippi John Hurt was "rediscovered" by Thomas Hoskins, a whole new world opened up. Paul Bryant wrote that:

> Earlier that year [1963] a collector, Tom Hoskins, was listening to "Avalon Blues" by Mississippi John Hurt: "Avalon's my home town, always on my mind.'" He then got in an automobile and drove there, to Avalon, Mississippi, and asked around for John Hurt. He found him, still alive, still playing, aged 71, having been forgotten for thirty years. It was so simple, and all the blues collectors went nuts.[62]

Fahey took a similar approach when he decided to seek out Booker T. "Bukka" White:

> Booker had made a record called "Aberdeen, Mississippi" in 1940, so I [Fahey]wrote a letter addressed to "Booker White, Old Blues Singer, Aberdeen, Mississippi c/o General Delivery." Booker was living in Memphis at the time, but one of his relatives worked at the Aberdeen post office, so he got in touch with Booker and Booker wrote me.[63]

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[60] Anonymous, Takoma Press Release, date unknown.

[61] Byron Coley, Liner notes to the reissue of Death Chants, Break Downs and Military Waltzes, 1998; Barry Hansen, interview with Nick Schillace, 14 June 2002.

[62] Paul Bryant, "John Fahey," Strange Things are Happening*,* 1988, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/strange.html.

[63] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 23.

The friendship that resulted between Fahey and White was very important to Fahey, and White's "rediscovery" would lead to two of the biggest "rediscoveries" of the sixties: Son House and Skip James. Takoma put out some recordings by White, but Fahey would continue to outsell him, a surprise to both Denson and Fahey, both of which assumed it would be White that would officially put Takoma on the map.[64]

Despite Fahey's success, Berkeley remained closed to him. Fahey wrote in 2000 that "Berkeley is the worst possible place in the world to meet people who will love you and appreciate you."[65] Fahey had begun to play at the folk clubs and coffee shops, but the shows were seldom, and he was unpaid. Fahey's unhappiness came from a falseness that he saw in the Berkeley crowd and the general hypocrisy of the folk revival. Fahey had experienced this music in a far different way. He had seen some of the cultural areas on his collecting junkets, and was unable to romanticize things in the way others did. He had discovered the ephemeral nature of music and would not be bothered by preconceptions made by other people. Its example had given life to his own creativity, and he was not interested in the sterile and rigid interpretations of the folk revival. His music shared a very general aesthetic to what was being called folk music, but to that it was the end. Fahey was well aware of the situation:

> I was never that much involved in the folk scene of the sixties; in fact, I didn't like most of it . . . . I don't think of myself in that bag [urban folk scene] because what folk musician ever played a twenty minute suite or symphony . . . . I use a lot of materials and techniques from hillbilly and blues music, but my overall approach is that I'm playing a concert of suites or symphonies.[66]

Fahey never subscribed to the creed of the "folkies," and their many political visions sought through banal music fell on Fahey's deaf ears. It was not that Fahey was against just causes; it was just the nature of the movement. Fahey saw things in a different light: "I remember when you'd go into a folk store, there'd always be a big sign up, 'Should Pete Seeger Go To Jail? I'd always say, 'Absolutely, because he

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[64] Miller, 47.

[65] Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life, 215.

[66] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 23.

sings such lousy music."[67]

Fahey never had a problem expressing himself, whether through music, prose, or dialogue. His attendance at concerts in Berkeley often resulted in his heckling the performers, the audience, or both. On one such occasion, considered the epitome of this behavior, Fahey lectured bluegrass artist J.E. Maynard outloud on the "aesthetic evils of tailoring his music to the marketplace."[68] The audience heckled Fahey back, and as he left, he was approached by a man. Fahey retold the story to Byron Coley:

> So everybody's saying "Shut up, Fahey. Sit down. They did a fine job." I left and I saw this ferrit-like fellow following me. He said, "Say, I don't know who you are, but you're the only one who knows what was going on today, besides me." The little guy turned out to be D.K. Wilgus, head of the folklore department at UCLA.[69]

Fahey was never successful while enrolled in the philosophy program at UC Berkeley, and since the social environment was equally counterproductive, he seized the opportunity to move south. Denson assumed control of the business end of Takoma, and Fahey began the fall of 1964 as a graduate student in folklore at UCLA, a program that was only a year old.

Fahey had a big summer in 1964 before arriving in Los Angeles. In July of that year, Fahey, along with blues aficionados Bill Barth and Henry Vestine, successfully tracked down blues guitarist Skip James in a Tunica County hospital in Mississippi. The men had a significantly tougher time finding James than Booker White, and James was equally less friendly. Working off an initial tip from White, Fahey tracked James through relatives and another lost blues singer, Isham Bracey. Fahey said, "I knew where Isham Bracey was; he lived in Jackson [Mississippi]. I went to his house and he said he knew where James had some relatives."[70] When they found James, he was less than modest. Fahey said that "he [James] was

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[67] Coley, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "John Fahey: Of Turtles, Bluesmen, Slide Guitars, Bitter Beer and Religion," Unhinged, Incomplete source reprinted online, http://www.Hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/ofturtles2.html.

condescending and a real jerk."[71]

Personalities aside, Fahey had one very specific motivation for seeking out James. Fahey had met with some frustration trying to decipher some of James' earlier recordings, due to the esoteric (at the time) tuning he used. Fahey said that "he [James] did show me what tuning he was in, which was open D minor. He also showed me basic chords and some stuff he never recorded."[72] In return, James enjoyed a second career, one of arguable height, before succumbing to cancer in 1969.

The tuning would be of great use to Fahey, who would use it to record the opening track to his third album, Dance of Death and Other Plantation Favorites,the same summer.[73] "Wine and Roses" (later remade as "Red Pony" and "The Approaching of the Disco Void") finds Fahey at his finest, and in general, the album was in all respects a major summation for Fahey and a true representation of his early development. Fahey made the standard nods to his influences, Sam McGee on "The Last Steam Engine Train," and Booker White on "Poor Boy," a White original with enough additions by Fahey to garner co-authorship. Like "Wine and Roses," the track "Dance of Death" is an almost equally impressive cut for its darkness and thematic development. It comes in at over seven minutes and is the second longest track on the album, next to "What the Sun Said," a ten minute piece of edits that for its consideration, is somewhat less developed.

The session was recorded in Silver Springs, Maryland on an East Coast tour. The sojourn was the result of the attention he was getting from the distribution and press of his first two albums. This was Fahey's first break as a performer, and arguably the start of his professional performance career. When asked when he got his first break, he told Michael Brooks, "In Boston I got an offer to play for $200 a week at the Odyssey. . . . I stayed around Boston that summer of '64 playing most of the places there."[74]

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[71] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

[72] Grossman, 54.

[73] John Fahey, Dance of Death and Other Plantation Favorites, Takoma TAKCD-8909-2, 1999 (1964), compact disc.

[74] Brooks, 20.

It was in either the summer of 1964 or during his return trip in 1965 that he met a man at Club 47 who would prove indispensable to him in the coming years, Alan "Blind Owl" Wilson:

> He [Wilson] came to see me. I had two records out at the time, so he asked me for a guitar lesson, right? So he comes over to my house and he's got books, you know, everything I'd written and transcribed and he can play everything except for a few short passages the he wanted to make sure he had right. The guy blew my mind, you know, he knew so much about music.[75]

Wilson became a much needed tutor for Fahey, who after beginning studies at UCLA, had decided to write a thesis on the bluesman that had impacted him the most: Charley Patton. At the time, many books had begun to be written on blues musicians and the blues in general. Most took a romanticized approach to the history, the same attitude that had turned Fahey away from the folk revival in general. He had strong feelings regarding this approach:

> This music was thoroughly non-reflective. Nobody at the time [the music was recorded] thought anyone was saying or doing anything particularly important. And yet every writer on black and white folk music treats it as if it had great poetic, psychological, metaphysical, sociological, historical, documentary, and political significance. These writers separate the words and/or the music of a tradition from its environment, its setting, its context, and then print expensive books elucidating, and to a certain extent exemplifying, the authors' preconceptions and misconceptions regarding the social strata that they [the musicians] do not understand, and that they have nothing in common with.[76]

Fahey's goal was to "write an empirical thesis on a blues singer or the blues [and] de-romanticize wherever it was called for."[77] The major obstacle for Fahey was that he was required to include musical transcriptions and analysis in his thesis. His lack of formal musical training, and his inability to read and write music had caught up with him. Wilson, who had wanted to leave Boston when Fahey first met him, was brought out to California by Fahey during the summer of 1965, and served as the surrogate to the written world of music that Fahey needed. Barry Hansen, who became close friends with the men during this period and who was also enrolled in

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[75] "John Fahey: Of Turtles, Bluesmen, Slide Guitars, Bitter Beer and Religion," Unhinged, Incomplete source reprinted online, http://www.Hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/ofturtles2.html.

[76] Fahey, The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, 9.

[77] Brooks, 20.

the folklore program the same time as Fahey, remembers Wilson:

> Alan was not academic at all -- he was a working-class kid and had little if any college education -- but he was fiendishly intelligent and could not only reproduce Patton's music on guitar but explain to you on many levels how it worked. I still consider Alan the most brilliant musical thinker I've ever known.[78]

In 1998 Fahey said that, "Al Wilson taught me enough about music theory to write my masters thesis on Charley Patton. He was a good teacher." Hansen said that even though Fahey probably learned a lot from his classes at UCLA, he probably learned a lot more from Wilson.[79] In return, Fahey introduced Wilson to Vestine, and the two would go on to form Canned Heat, an influential 60s blues band.[80]

Fahey found a sympathetic place at UCLA, which was one of the few academic institutions at the time that viewed folk music as a living tradition. There was still a strong dichotomy in academia between folk music collected in the field and commercially recorded folk music found on the old 78s. UCLA had developed the John Edwards Memorial Foundation which specialized in documenting commercial recordings of folk music exclusively. It served as a complement to the department that Fahey studied in, and the two were located across the hall from each other.[81] This was the type of environment that enabled Fahey to pursue his work in the manner he needed. He not only made inroads to Patton's music for himself, but he also was able to strike some blows against preconceptions held by "folkies" and the like. Fahey made the argument that the music that these musicians were playing was derived from dance music, and that the twelve-bar blues was an "intellectual construction." He said that after analyzing Patton's music, he found that his stanzas did not average out to twelve. "Patton . . . would add beats . . . six bars, thirteen, thirteen point five, almost fourteen, never twelve."[82] Fahey expanded on the idea concluding that "by the time you get white kids playing that stuff . . . We've heard it but we didn't grow up on it, so it's natural for us to intellectualize it and come out with a

[78] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 7 April 2002.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.
[81] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 14 April 2002.
[82] Penman, incomplete source.

thing called the twelve bar blues. For me that's what I constantly try and escape, that precision."[83]

Fahey's own popularity continued to grow. In time, even the Berkeley crowd warmed:

> I came down here [L.A.] and a couple of months after school started I got this big offer to play at the Jabberwock in Berkeley. I had played at the same damn place when I lived up there and nobody would come to see me. Then I went up there and the place was mobbed.[84]

In 1964 Fahey also released the second edition of Blind Joe Death, and in 1965/66 released two new albums, The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party and Other Excursions (Vol. IV) for Takoma, and The Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death, originally released on Riverboat Records out of Boston, later reissued by Takoma.[85] The two records share a culmination of various recording sessions and locales, and many of Fahey's cohorts from past and present make appearances both in the music as well as the liner notes. Sessions from the East, recorded in 1962 and 1965 were included, as well as sessions from California, held both in Los Angeles and Berkeley, between 1965 and 1966. The production and editing on Vol. IV was done by Fahey, Denson, and Hansen, with recording help from Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie records; on Transfiguration, Barry and Brian Hansen aided Fahey. Fahey recast his adventures in his trademark semi-fictitous manner in the notes to Vol. IV, and for Transfiguration he wrote an equally fanciful text involving a graduate student's attempt at recovering information on Fahey in 2010.[86]

Although the music on the two records differs significantly, the dichotomy found therein is common to Fahey's music, particularly during the mid to late 1960s. Still developing experimental and extended techniques more common to twentieth-century concert music than folk and blues, Fahey took the opportunity with Vol. IV to

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[83] Ibid., incomplete source.

[84] Brooks, 20.

[85] John Fahey, The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party and Other Excursions (Vol. IV), Takoma TAKCD-6508-2 9TAK-1008), 1997 (1966), compact disc; John Fahey, The Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death, Takoma TAKCD-6504-2 (Tak-7015), 1997 (1965/66, 1968), compact disc.

[86] See liner notes to reissues for both recordings for this and future reference.

indulge in this manner not only compositionally, but also in the studio. The title track, based on an adventure that Hansen, Fahey, and Wilson had in the fall of 1965, is a nearly twenty-minute suite of various fingerpicked themes and dissonant sonorities, spliced together by Barry Hansen under Fahey's guidance.[87] Fahey recorded the music for the second track, "Knott's Berry Farm Molly," and then flipped the reel for a backwards effect. These two tracks helped integrate Fahey into the emerging psychedelic rock movement, but his efforts owed more to Charles Ives than the Beatles. Hansen recalled that, "During the 1960s [Fahey's] favorite composer was definitely Charles Ives. He had several reel-to-reel tapes of Ives (dubbed from records) that he played often."[88] Also joining Fahey were two former Episcopal youth group members, Anthony "Flea" Lea playing organ on "Will the Circle be Unbroken" and Nancy McLean playing flute on the stark version of the folk standard "900 Miles." Both tracks were recorded in 1962 in Washington D.C. The sound of these haunting duets owe as much to the fidelity of the recordings as they do to the outside approach of the arrangements.

In the mid-1960s Fahey had also become more interested in Indian music, perhaps inspired by his studies in ethnomusicology while at UCLA, yet more likely through the influence of Alan Wilson.[89] Fahey and Wilson shared a beach cottage in Venice for a few short months, living next door to Hansen, who ended up rooming with Wilson. Hansen remembers that:

> Alan Wilson was very much interested in Indian music. He would listen to it every day when he was staying with me. I imagine he tried to get John to listen to it too. I don't remember John expressing any enthusiasm for it at the time, but that might have been how the seed was planted . . . . Alan definitely had his own veena . He bought it just before he moved in with me, and spent hours figuring out how to tune it (a major undertaking) and play it (generally while I was off at UCLA).[90]

Wilson accompanied Fahey on veena on another folk standard, "Sail Away Ladies." Wilson's lines, more "bluesy" than Indian, provided another layer to the rich

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[87] Barry Hansen, interview with Nick Schillace, 9 May 2002.
[88] Barry Hansen, Interview with Nick Schillace, 17 April 2002.
[89] Brooks, 42.
[90] Barry Hansen, interview with Nick Schillace, 17 May 2002.

experimental aesthetic that is Vol. IV.

Transfiguration by all accounts was a much more accessible record that fell more in line with Fahey's earlier recordings. The album is a plateau of sorts and not quite as developed as the first three records. But it does showcase more of Fahey's traditional folk and blues influences as well as original compositions in this idiom. Original pieces such as "Beautiful Linda Getchell" (with banjo accompaniment by L. Mayne Smith), "Orinda-Moraga" and particularly "On the Sunny Side of the Ocean" are clear examples of Fahey's control over his emerging style. George Winston, in the liner notes to the 1996 reissue, wrote on the many techniques that Fahey had developed on the guitar by this time, particularly by way of right hand picking patterns.[91] Fahey also put to use many tunings, including open D (DADF#AD), open G (DGDGBD), open D modal (DADGAD), open G drone (DGDGGD), and a favorite of Fahey's, open C (CGCGCE).[92] Fahey references bluesman Jesse Fuller, Sam McGee, Uncle Dave Macon, Stephen Foster and of course Charley Patton in either homage or by covering their compositions outright. The album also showcases Fahey's slide work on five tracks. "The Death of the Clayton Peacock" and "Hark From the Tomb" are both good examples of Fahey's developing abilities at lap style playing.

Considering Fahey's academic pursuits at the time, the assemblage of these two records is impressive, but the 1960s in general would be prolific for Fahey. He continued to canvass, in part to supplement his income, and also to aid in his studies. By the mid-1960s, however, collecting in mostly all black rural southern towns had become an entirely different endeavor. The Civil Rights Movement had drawn out many deep rooted racial tensions and brought them to the surface, and to young white collectors such as Fahey, the biggest threat came from other whites, not blacks. On more than one occasion, Fahey was jailed for collecting. "I [Fahey] got thrown in jail a couple of times in the South. White cops would often stop us if we were in

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[91] George Winston, Liner notes to Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death, 1996. See for additional references.

[92] The ordering of notes matches the ordering of the strings on the guitar low to high, sixth string to first string, or ceiling to floor in standard playing position.

black neighborhoods and ask what we were doing."[93] Fahey was not much of a protester, even though he did feel compassion for the movement. He had fully grown out of his childhood prejudices, and came to realize the reality of the world. Fahey said that:

> I kept expecting someone to get killed . . . I could feel the violence, the anger there. All these racist traditions were still enshrined in the law. I can't imagine growing up Negro in those places, being treated so horribly, and surviving without getting violent.[94]

D.K. Wilgus told Suzie Boss in 1984 that "John was the least political of all my students, the one who seemed least likely to get arrested down there."[95] Collecting may have been Fahey's way of silently protesting. By collecting in black neighborhoods, he may have helped to ease at least some tension between people, even if it was by no means his intentions. But either way, when Fahey's prophecy came true, it was the beginning of the end for his collecting trips. In 1964, three Civil Rights workers were killed in Philadelphia, Mississippi.[96]

Quite possibly, Fahey's final trek canvassing was during Christmas break in 1966, during which he was accompanied by Hansen. The tale is worth retelling because it shows how the collecting trips had changed since the 1950s, including door to door canvassing, juke box searches, and even recording musicians along the way. Hansen said that:

> The trip was planned around four appointments made in advance (two fiddlers, two jukebox places), the rest of our time in the South was spent canvassing . . . . John picked out a few towns in advance, and we stopped in others on the spur of the moment.[97]

By this time, the availability of old records was meager, and Hansen said that maybe one house in twenty had some old records. Since Fahey was researching Patton, he was looking for some of the records that he knew were out there but collectors had yet to find. They were unsuccessful by that account, but Hansen said

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[93] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 23.
[94] Boss, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/mom.html.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 17 April 2002.

that Fahey made several hundred dollars from the canvassing results.[98]

The sessions with the two fiddlers, Hubert Thomas and Virgil Willis Johnston, went well. Fahey accompanied both on guitar, doing his best to play authentically. These recordings were destined for UCLA's collection, as well as for a later album by Fahey and other Takoma releases. It is interesting to consider that the examples would not only showcase traditional talent, but also that of a young man who had learned to play in what would be considered a less "traditional" manner. When asked about the fact that the expedition included such a mixture of new and old folk examples, both commercially recorded and those documented by folklorists, Hansen replied:

> Yes, I do recognize that. Even in the day (1960s) all of us in the UCLA program talked a lot about how radio and records had become intertwined with the folk process, and how they were changing the folk process. We saw ourselves as trying to convince the rest of the academic folklore community that traditional music influenced by radio and records was not a different species from the supposedly pure traditional song that Child collected, but resistance to that in academia (though not at UCLA) — the earlier idea was that what Child collected was noble and beautiful, but commercial elements could only pollute and disfigure traditional art, and that hillbilly music in particular was worthless trash. D. K. Wilgus spent much of his career fighting against that sort of attitude.[99]

Fahey left academia behind after graduating from UCLA with a Master of Arts degree in 1967. He would take full control of Takoma that same year, which by then had turned into a larger company with national distribution. It not only housed Fahey, but had also begun releasing records by traditional musicians like White and James, as well as like minded guitar players like the late Robbie Basho, an equal but less prolific contemporary of Fahey's. While still somewhat underground, Fahey was gaining in popularity through record sales and concert appearances. Having freed himself from the burdens of school, he added several releases to his catalog before the end of the decade.

To begin anew, Fahey rerecorded his first two records in 1967, in part to offer them in stereo, but also to showcase the compositions that were included on the records under the full command of his matured technical ability. Also recorded mostly

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

in 1967, Days Have Gone By (Vol VI) attempted to further bridge the more traditional aspects of Fahey's playing and composing with the more experimental. Hansen called Vol VI "a majestic parade of Fahey's highways and byways."[100] For the most part, the compositions are entirely Fahey's, save for "My Grandfather's Clock," improvised themes from "My Shepherd Will Supply My Needs," and the hymn "We Would be Building," based off of Finland's national anthem, originally composed by Jean Sibelius, a favorite composer of Fahey's.[101]

Two of the longer pieces, "A Raga Called Pat-Parts One and Two," are extended forays that find Fahey's guitar work juxtaposed against snippets of audio bites in more early attempts at musique concrete. Environmental sounds, trains (another Fahey preoccupation), animal noises, and other odd audio signals disrupt but simultaneously underpin the sounds of Fahey's guitar. Fahey explained the underlying elements:

> Sound effects come from a Folkways record entitled "Sounds of a Tropical Rain Forest" and from another record which contains the sound of a steam engine train traveling from Jackson, Mississippi to Houston, Texas. I forget the name of the album. I borrowed both from Barry Hansen. The peculiar effects on part two are done by putting the turntable in neutral and running it backwards and forwards at variable speeds onto channel two (this was before I went stereo) when the music was already on channel one. I did this on the equipment in the Folklore and Mythology Department recording lab at UCLA while I was still going to school and working in the lab also.[102]

Fahey included "A Raga Called Pat-Parts Three and Four" on his next album The Voice of the Turtle,[103] a nightmarish album for biographical exactness. If there is a pinnacle to Fahey's ability to confuse facts, it is this recording. Hansen calls it "a culmination of Fahey's literary and auditory pranks."[104] Not only does Fahey have great fun in giving false credit to the performances, but includes an accompanying booklet, "The John Fahey Picture Album," a densely written manuscript that

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[100] Barry Hansen, Takoma Records Press Release, date unknown.

[101] Dick Spottswood, interview with Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[102] Source from The International Fahey Committee, http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/v62.html.

[103] John Fahey, The Voice of the Turtle, Takoma TAKCD-6501-2 (C-1019), 1996 (1968), compact disc.

[104] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 17 April 2002.

attempts, if that is what it can be called, to explain the contents of the recordings.

Much can be learned about Fahey's past and future by examining the record. ED Denson says that The Voice of the Turtle was particularly revealing.[105] The opening track, "Bottleneck Blues," a duet which is attributed to Fahey and Blind Joe Death, is clearly a 78 recording made by Sylvester Weaver and Walter Beasly recorded in 1927.[106] Two of the tracks, "Bill Cheatum" and "Lonesome Valley" are recordings of Fahey backing fiddlers Hubert Thomas and Virgil Willis Johnston respectively, made on the trip in 1966 with Hansen. Other Fahey cohorts appear; Nancy McLean can again be found playing flute on "Lewisdale Blues," and Fahey plays in an ensemble featuring friends and fellow UCLA students Mark Levine and L. Mayne Smith. Most likely, several of the other tracks date back to earlier Fahey sessions ranging from the Fonotone and Episcopal dates to random recording episodes. Despite speculation, the real truth of the majority of the recordings remain a mystery.[107]

The album itself begins and ends with a heavily reverberating and pulsating tone. The "Raga" installments further the earlier experiments, this time including samples of Tibetan Monks and the sounds of gongs. "The Story of Dorothy Gooch Part One" is another track that features studio trickery and sound experiment, with a detuned, echo-laden guitar figure that slowly is overtaken by a more traditional fingerpicked theme.

Despite whatever was attempted by Fahey, one overwhelming audio aesthetic is the sound of old 78s from which Fahey assembled his techniques. Due in part to the poor fidelity of some of the recordings, but likely aided by the production techniques of the newer recordings, the album fits together quite well, despite the difference in style. Fahey's original pieces and more direct quotations actually complement the Weaver/Beasley tracks and those by the old fiddlers. The

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[105] ED Denson, interview by Nick Schillace, 20 May 2002.

[106] Sylvester Weaver, Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Vol. 2, Document DOCD-5113, 1992, compact disc.

[107] The subject of the mysterious origin of The Voice of the Turtle is taken up on the John Fahey website, specifically http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/music1.html and http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/vot.html.

same works in reverse. The revealing aspect of this is that Fahey juxtaposed the living and ephemeral aspects of the tradition that he learned from, with the contemporary world he lived in. And he did it successfully.

Fahey's prolific recording activity in the late 1960s, combined with his ever increasing popularity, led to his being signed to Vanguard in 1967, for which he would release two albums, Requia and Other Compositions for Solo Guitar and The Yellow Princess.[108] As to why developed a relationship with Vanguard, Fahey said, "I signed for Vanguard because I thought the people who bought the record might say 'I wonder if he's got any more records out' and so we'd sell some more on Takoma."[109] Fahey's first release for Vanguard, Requia, was a mixed effort. Some, most notably Fahey, consider the second side's "Requiem for Molly Parts One, Two, Three and Four," extended works of collage and musique concrete, to be failures. Fahey said in 1969, "I cut an album called Requia which was horrible. It was cut in Los Angeles and put together in New York but they didn't know what they were doing."[110] The "they" Fahey refers to was Sam Charters, the same critic who originally misunderstood Fahey's initial attempts at composition back in 1958, only to come around for the production of Requia,as well as to write the liner notes to Takoma's release of Transfiguration, which were not included until the 1997 reissue.

Fahey made a habit of reflecting on his past work as inferior to whatever he was currently doing, but this 1969 sentiment was echoed by him in 1998, in a somewhat misleading comment: "That [Requia] was my first attempt at musique concrete, but it's not very good and I don't really like that one. It was a good learning experience though."[111] Of course, it was not his first attempt, and it would not be his last.

The Yellow Princess, Fahey's other Vanguard release, was more accessible and featured not only more musique concrete, but also some classic Fahey

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[108] John Fahey, Requia and Other Compositions for Solo Guitar, Vanguard, 79259-2, 1967, compact disc; John Fahey, The Yellow Princess, Vanguard VMD-79293, 1990 (1969), compact disc.

[109] C.P., "Profile: John Fahey," incomplete source, 1969, 43.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Pouncey, "Blood on the Frets," http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

compositions in comfortable arrangements, and some ensemble playing that would foreshadow some of his work in the early 1970s. Hansen said that the album features "some of the most technically accomplished playing of Fahey's career."[112] The title track is a perfect example of how Fahey had come to arrange his various ideas into a developing theme fit into a compact composition. The piece was inspired by a passage from the French composer Camille Saint-Saens' "The Yellow Princess Overture," and is a clear example of borrowed themes from the concert tradition. It also makes extensive use of Fahey's use of movable left hand fingerings, resulting in his trademark use of dissonance.

This time, Fahey enlisted Hansen's help in the editing of "The Singing Bridge of Memphis, Tennessee." Considered by Fahey a finer example of his collage work, the track features several audio snippets, including a recording of vehicles driving over a bridge in Tennessee, which Fahey had heard while canvassing for records years before, later returning to the sight to record the sound. Fahey also utilized some other musicians in the studio, rock musicians from the group Spirit, on the cuts "View (from the Top of the Riggs Road/B & O Trestle)" and "Dance of the Inhabitants of the Invisible City of Bladensburg."

Voice of the Turtle, released during the same period, was certainly on the experimental side. But Fahey, perhaps knowing full well what he was doing, released his most successful album to date on Takoma, the first installment of his holiday records, The New Possibility: John Fahey's Guitar Soli Christmas Album.[113] The album is significant musically since, for the time, holiday music, like practically any other style of music, had never been played in a heavy syncopated, acoustic-steel string blues guitar fashion. But Fahey, in a shrewd business moment, knew the potential: "I was in the back of a record store one July, and I saw all these cartons of Bing Crosby's White Christmas Album. The clerk said it always sells out. So I got the idea to do Christmas albums that would sell every year."[114]

[112] Barry Hansen, Liner notes to The Return of the Repressed: The John Fahey Anthology, Rhino R 2 71737, 1996, compact disc.

[113] John Fahey, The New Possibility., Takoma TAKCD-8912-2, 1996 (C-1020, 1968), compact disc.

[114] Boss, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/mom.html.

Fahey did not remain with Vanguard after the two albums, but his popularity continued to grow. He appeared on the 1969 television show Guitar Guitar with Laura Weber, who introduced him by saying, "[Our next guest] doesn't really fit into a mold . . . . He isn't of one, he's of many styles of playing, and mostly his own style. He makes the instrument a very personal thing, and he broadens its dimensions quite a bit."[115] In 1969 he was also solicited by the Italian film maker Michelangelo Antonioni to take part in the scoring of Antonioni's film, Zabriske Point. Fahey was reluctant at first, but could not resist the pressure coming from his new wife, Jan, nor the potential for a lucrative deal. Fahey flew to Italy to work on the music and meet with Antonioni, whose anti-American sentiment would be lost on him, recalling that "at that time I really didn't have any great interest in going anywhere that was not in the USA. I was very patriotic, and as far as I was concerned everything important is right here."[116]

Fahey agreed to work on the music, but did not care much for the film. "I [expected] to see something intellectual and avant-garde, because he has this big reputation for this kind of thing. But that isn't what he shows me . . . . No, you know what he shows me? A really terrible and long skin flick."[117] Fahey tried his best to write music for the scene, and after completion, he and Antonioni went to dinner to celebrate, only to have the evening end in a fist fight. Apparently, Fahey would not sit by and listen to Antonioni's America bashing.

Antonioni pulled the music Fahey had written while in Italy and replaced it with some by Jerry Garcia and/or Pink Floyd. Oddly enough, a bit of Fahey's music still found its way into the film, a two minute excerpt from "Dance of Death."

The decade of the 1960s was good to Fahey, but he never fully identified with the ideals of many of those who bought his music, and he never wanted to be associated exclusively with that period. In 1980, Fahey reflected on the decade:

> A lot of people think of me in terms of the 60s, but that was not my favorite period. Not by a long shot. I didn't want to go to the war, and I didn't want to work, but those attitudes go way back before the hippy thing. I couldn't see

[115] John Fahey, Guitar Guitar.

[116] John Fahey, How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life, 166.

[117] Ibid., 170.

> basing an entire ethic on drugs, V.D. and sleeping in the streets. The only good thing about the sixties is that they were closer to the twenties than the eighties are.[118]

It appeared that by 1970 Fahey was poised for major success. His thesis on Patton had been published by Studio Vista in London, and he began an extensive touring schedule that would last well into the 1980s. Hansen wrote that by this date that at least "ten percent of the people who should know his music have already heard of him."[119] Takoma was doing exceptionally well, not only through Fahey's output, but also by Leo Kottke, a guitarist who had sent a homemade demonstration tape to Takoma. Fahey knew immediately that Kottke was a major talent: "I played it [Kottke's tape] and everybody else in the room said, 'He just plays like you.' And I said, 'No, he doesn't.' It was quite different, more muscular."[120] Fahey's influence had passed thoroughly through Kottke, but Kottke possessed his own voice, albeit in a similar style. The 1969 record that Takoma released by Kottke, Six and Twelve String Guitar, remains one of the best selling records by an acoustic steel string guitar player, and is testament to the style Fahey had helped create, as well as the influence Takoma was having.[121]

Despite the opportunities that Fahey may have had, he was slow to embrace them. Peter Lang, another guitar player that Takoma put out in the early seventies, said, "Success and John did not agree. The opportunities were presented, but I don't think he really seized them." In the early 1970s Lorraine Alterman wrote, "John Fahey is one of the most creative talents that America has produced," but when she mentioned to Fahey that people consider him a living legend, he responded, "I can't help that. That's their problem."[122] This rejection of adulation was consistent with Fahey. Leo Kottke summed up an attitude Fahey wrote about as late as 2000, "John was into and is into this sort of pugnacious

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[118] Mark Humphrey, "An Existential Guitarist Packs His Bags," Reader ,15 May 1981, 5.

[119] Hansen, Takoma Records press release.

[120] Miller, 47.

[121] Leo Kottke, Six and Twelve String Guitar, Takoma, TAKCD-6503-2, 1996 (1969), compact disc.

[122] Lorraine Alterman, "Legendary Master," Melody Maker, 1973, reprint online http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/legendmaster.html.

approach to anything that includes careerism. It's not something that he was ever interested in."[123] Hansen suggests that at the time Fahey may have been trying to explore things outside of music, "It seemed he was becoming less interested in the nuts and bolts of advancing his career (which had built up some decent momentum in the late 1960s) and more interested in searching for fulfillment of some other kind."[124]

Fahey said in an interview in 1970, "I just want to make a whole bunch of money so I can pay my psychiatric bills."[125] Fahey went on to tell the interviewer that earlier in the year he had some sort of breakdown that resulted in his checking himself into a hospital in Santa Monica. It is difficult to substantiate the incident, but some aspects are telling, and foreshadowing. The origin of his breakdown led in part to his increasing dependence on alcohol, something that would take an even greater hold on him in the future. Also, Fahey's own attempts at confronting his inner demons kept him in close contact with therapy. Oddly enough, Fahey never indulged in the popular drugs of choice in the 1960s, staying away from marijuana and psychedelics. He did however find certain prescription medications and tranquilizers to his liking, and had no problem obtaining them. Hansen revealed that "in the sixties [Fahey] sought out doctors who didn't have scruples about prescribing exactly what John wanted."[126] These issues would culminate in the 1980s, but at the time they may have prevented Fahey from taking a clear path towards success, fame, and whatever else may be entitled to a person in his position.

Fahey still moved forward, and in 1971 released the album America, which continued to display Fahey's control over his mature style.[127] The original LP consisted of only half of the material originally intended for release, the rest being included on the 1998 reissue. A double record may have seemed too costly for the time, and even the title track was left out, having already been released on Death Chants. Two tracks in particular, "The Voice of the Turtle" and "Mark 1:15" are

[123] Ibid., 48.
[124] Barry Hansen, interview with Nick Schillace, 13 June 2002.
[125] Ferris, "Why Fahey Wants to Kill Everybody."
[126] Barry Hansen, interview with Nick Schillace, 18 June 2002.
[127] John Fahey, America, Takoma TAKCD-8903(C-1030), 1998(1971), compact disc.

paramount developments of Fahey's long form. Fahey himself wrote in 1972 that "out of all the songs I ever wrote, I consider only two of them 'epic' or 'classic' or in the 'great' category and they are both on this record. It's taken me more than five years to complete these."[128] Fahey, referring to the two songs previously mentioned, often reflected on his most recent recording as his best, but his consideration of these pieces should be noted in a separate context. Fahey was most assuredly referencing his own development, and that the nature of these pieces, the various thematic developments, was at a much stronger level than his previous efforts. The material was more focused, particularly on "Mark 1:15," and the voice was less traditional in sound than influence. The themes transcended the blues and folk elements, and displayed a style that fully synthesized the many origins of Fahey's influences.

Other notable accomplishments by Fahey in the 1970s were the three albums attributed to John Fahey and his Orchestra. The first two records, Rivers and Religion and After the Ball were released by Reprise Records, the result of Fahey's second courting by a major label.[129] Released in 1972 and 1973 respectively, the recordings feature Fahey backed by traditional musicians, playing compositions influenced and arranged in a manner similar to early Dixieland jazz. In 1973 Fahey said, "I've wanted to do a lot of this blues and Dixieland stuff for years, but I never had the budget to do it. It's just a whole lot of fun. I like the music."[130] In 1975 he released Old Fashioned Love on Takoma, an album of similar feel but that allotted an entire side to duets with guitarist Woody Mann, the real showcase of the record.[131]

The albums represent further experiment by Fahey, despite their traditional nature. Fahey rarely stood still musically during his career, and these records are a good example of this. But like all other attempts that Fahey made to branch out and rediscover aspects of his vernacular, whether traditional or experimental, the records

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[128] John Fahey, Takoma Form Letter, 1972, 1.

[129] John Fahey and His Orchestra, Of Rivers and Religion, Collectors' Choice CCM-212-2, 2001 (1972), compact disc; John Fahey and His Orchestra, After the Ball, Collectors' Choice CCM-213-2, 2001 (1973), compact disc.

[130] Alterman, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/legendmaster.html.

[131] John Fahey and His Orchestra, Old Fashioned Love, Takoma TAK- 7043, 1975, LP.

were not met with equal acclaim. Fahey was certainly hurt by this, saying, "I don't understand why they [the albums] got bad reviews. It's like every time I wanted to do something other than play guitar I got castigated."[132]

Fahey's other major musical work of this period, and arguably his last original work of the decade in his solo style, was Fare Forward Voyager (Soldier's Choice).[133] The 1973 album is not only significant musically, but also illustrates another aspect of Fahey's life at the time– Eastern religion. The album itself was dedicated to Fahey's guru Swami Satchidananda of "Yogaville West" in Northern California. A somewhat difficult fact to confirm, but other unsubstantiated accounts of Fahey's relationship to Hindu religion can also be found: Hansen wrote in the liner notes to The Return of the Repressed that during the 1970s Fahey "took an extended break from touring to experience life at a Hindu monastery in India;" and Mark Humphrey wrote in 1980 about Fahey being attacked by monkeys on a sacred tour of India.[134] Fahey treated the period with typical humor, "Probably the primary reason I got involved with them [Yoga Institute] was that I fell in love with Swami Satchidananda's secretary, Shanti Norris."[135]

A dedication to Shanti Norris ended up on After the Ball, and the Hindu Chant "Jaya Shiva Shankarah" appeared on Old Fashioned Love. Fahey admittedly had trouble adapting the tunings and techniques of Indian music directly to his compositions, instead being interested in form and dynamics. The piece that illustrates this best is the title track, "Fare Forward Voyagers." Coming in at almost twenty-four minutes and taking up an entire album side, it remains one of Fahey's longest single compositions, and makes use of variable tempos and dynamics in an improvised fashion that is somewhat unusual for Fahey's recorded work. Long after the album had been released, Fahey still considered it to be his greatest guitar record.[136]

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[132] Pouncey, http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

[133] John Fahey, Fare Forward Voyager (Soldier's Choice), Takoma, C-1035, 1973, LP.

[134] Hansen, Liner Notes to The Return of the Repressed, 12; Humphrey, "An Existential Guitarist Packs his Bags," 5.

[135] Coley, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

[136] http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/ffv2.html.

Fahey served on the advisory board for Guitar Player magazine for a short duration beginning in 1974, and wrote an article in 1976 that helps to explain why he gravitated toward Hindu religion, swamis, and meditation. The article, "Bola Sete, the Nature of Infinity, and John Fahey," recounts Fahey's first encounter with the Brazilian guitarist Djalma de Andrade, better known as Bola Sete, in 1972, and the impact it had on his life. Fahey said, "Few living people have had such an enormous influence on my life, my music, my soul, my religion- you name it- as Bola Sete."[137]

Fahey felt a kinship with the guitar player, and while uncomfortable with his feelings, he pursued Sete's influence. The key to Sete's control, according to his wife, was meditation. This led Fahey to follow the same path, and he "chased Swamis and yoga instructors all over the U.S. and Canada trying to learn about them and about what techniques were best for musicians."[138] Fahey eventually concluded that his own music, particularly his latest album at the time, Of Rivers and Religion, had suffered from the ill effects of his drug use. Fahey was shocked at how he had perceived himself:

> I was into a heavy drug trip . . . . Even while I was recording the last Reprise record, I thought I was playing real fast. I never noticed how slow everything was until I got straight. Then I started meditating and doing Hatha Yoga. It's probably the most important thing that ever happened to me.[139]

Fahey showed his appreciation to Sete by producing and releasing a collection of his songs on Takoma that no other company was interested in. Ocean, released as a single LP in 1975 and reissued as a double album in 1999,[140] is a highly influential guitar record, and Fahey admitted that it was the best record he ever produced.[141]

If Fahey had positioned himself for a personal resurgence, quite the contrary was to actually occur. The remainder of the 1970s were slow at best. His output was

[137] John Fahey, "Bola Sete, the Nature of Infinity, and John Fahey," Guitar Player, February1976, 10.

[138] Ibid., 40.

[139] Alterman, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/legendmaster.html.

[140] Djalma de Andrade, Ocean Memories, Samba Moon 0890524, 1999 (1975), compact disc.

[141] Unhinged, Incomplete source reprinted online, http://www.Hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/ofturtles2.html.

meager, releasing a second Christmas album in 1975, Christmas with John Fahey II, The Essential John Fahey, which consisted of previous recordings from the Vanguard catalog, Kottke/Lang/Fahey, a sampler of the three guitar players, and The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, which also had a companion release of transcriptions, along with some insightful writing by Fahey.[142] The weaker output may have been due in part to Fahey's touring schedule, but it is more likely that the personal blows he was taking had greater effects. He divorced and remarried during the decade, and despite his attempts at a more focused life, he continued to drink, and more likely than not to abuse drugs. But perhaps the greatest injury to his life was the loss of Takoma records sometime in the mid to late 1970s. Despite having been a savvy producer and shrewd Artist and Repertoire man, Fahey had no real skill at running the business end of Takoma, and was forced to sell the label to Chrysalis.

Fahey closed the decade with the album John Fahey Visits Washington D.C., released in 1979.[143] A consistent record, it is by no means a failure, but like its 1980 follow ups, Yes! Jesus Loves Me and Live in Tasmania, it finds Fahey spending a lot of time in musical places where he had already been.[144] The playing is more stylistically deliberate, but the results are somewhat less inspired. The album is for the most part reworkings of older tunes, such as "The Discovery of Sylvia Scott," formerly "Old Southern Medley," "The Grand Finale," formerly "Dalhart, Texas, 1967," an unreleased track from the America sessions, and "Melody McBad," a reworking of the unreleased track "Elder-Z-Travels."[145] As could be expected, Fahey pays tribute to his influences and inspirations, this time quoting Leo Kottke in "Ann

[142] John Fahey, Christmas with John Fahey Volume II with The New Possibility, Takoma TAKCD-8912-2, 1996 (C-1020, 1968/1975). compact disc;John Fahey, The Essential John Fahey,Vanguard VCD-55/56, 1999 (1974), compact disc; Leo Kottke, Peter Lang, John Fahey, Leo Kottke/Peter Lang/John Fahey. Takoma TAKCD-6502-2,1996 (C-1040, 1974), compact disc; John Fahey, The Best of John Fahey 1958-1977, Takoma TAKCD-1058 (C-1058, 1977), compact disc.

[143] John Fahey, John Fahey Visits Washington D.C., Takoma CDP72769, 1979, compact disc.

[144] John Fahey, John Fahey Live in Tasmania, Takoma TAK 7089, 1980; Yes! Jesus Loves Me, Takoma TAK-7085, 1980, LP.

[145] http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/dc2.html

Arbor/Death by Reputation," and Bola Sete in his version of "Guitar Lamento," a tribute that alludes to future albums.

Yes! Jesus Loves Me is a similar homage to Fahey's own past. The album consists of twenty hymns arranged for guitar, a somewhat overzealous expansion of his traditional inclusion of one or two hymns per album. The album is notable in this regard, but it also provides an opportunity to explore the religious aspect of Fahey's life. When asked about Fahey's relationship with religion, ED Denson replied:

> I never saw anything remotely approaching religious emotion in John. He had a very abstract understanding of modern theology– for all I know he agreed with it but I don't recall ever seeing it have any effect in his life– except for appearances in liner notes.[146]

There may have been a superficial relationship to religion expressed during the 1960s that Denson is referring to, but Fahey definitely had it in mind for the majority of his life. Even his flirtation with Eastern religion had to do with a longstanding interest in religious philosophy.

During the late 1970s, he had begun to talk more at length about the relationship between the old blues performers and the religious conflict that playing the blues formed for them. Fahey told Mark Humphrey in 1980:

> The project I'm most excited about is a book I'm writing about the dichotomy of sacred music and the blues, and how some of the great bluesman resolved this conflict. I think that what makes the best blues performances so anguished, so intense, is the feeling these guys had that they were serving the Devil when they knew they should be serving God. They all basically believed the same thing, in fact many of them . . . had been preachers at one time.[147]

There is no doubt that Fahey felt a connection to the blues musicians he admired, a point already addressed, and Humphrey reported that Fahey himself had spent time in a Catholic Monastery in Oklahoma, presumably in an attempt to become a a more religious person.[148] Fahey himself claimed as much, "I nearly became a minister at one stage but I'm too unstable for that."[149] The book Fahey

[146] ED Denson, interview by Nick Schillace, 19 April 2002.

[147] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 26.

[148] Humphrey, "An Existential Guitarist Packs his Bags," 5.

[149] Sean Higgins, "John Fahey: From Barrelhouse to Bible," International Musician and Recording World, September 1979, incomplete source.

mentioned, which had the tentative title Black Diamond Express to Hell, was never published.

Fahey's other 1980 release, Live In Tasmania, was his first live album. Not only that, it was the only album at the time that was recorded live in Tasmania by a national artist. This was the very reason Fahey had decided to make it. Fahey told the audience during the concert:

> I thought this would be a great place to record, Tasmania . . . my grandfather subscribed to The National Geographic magazine . . .Tasmania . . . has this terribly esoteric connotation in the states . . . . In a way I'm disappointed, there's no madmen hanging from the trees screaming.[150]

This type of a rapport with the audience had become typical for Fahey, who had largely replaced his lengthy liner notes with audience correspondence during the 1970s. The performance itself emits a high level of energy. The pieces Fahey performs are all retitled versions of older material, but one notable standout is "The Approaching of the Disco Void," formerly "Wine and Roses," which not only makes for good commentary on the music industry, but also showcases Fahey's playing at a higher and more exuberant level, a likely artifact from his encounter with Bola Sete's music.

In 1981 Fahey made a major change in his life. He and his wife Melody moved north to Oregon, ending Fahey's almost twenty-year stay in Los Angeles. The move was bittersweet for Fahey, who told Mark Humphrey, "I'm not leaving because of the crime or fear of the Big Quake . . . I'm leaving because it's so damned expensive to live here anymore."[151] They moved to Salem, the capitol of Oregon, a city that reminded Fahey of his home town of Takoma Park. Fahey''s touring schedule still kept him on the road about half of the year, and perhaps the slower pace of Salem was something that the forty-two-year old was seeking at that stage of his life. After living awhile in Oregon, Melody Fahey told Suzie Boss, "He's calmed down quite a bit. It's hard to be impulsive in Salem."[152]

After moving to Salem, Fahey recorded his last record for Takoma,

[150] John Fahey, Live In Tasmania, 1980.

[151] Humphrey, "An Existential Guitarist Packs his Bags," 5.

[152] Boss, http://www.hickorytech.net/~tlkremer/pages/mom.html.

Railroad I.[153] It was a fitting end to that particular chapter of his career. Having taken his music further away from the blues forms he had originally utilized during the 1970s, on Railroad I he revisited not only some of these influences, but another Fahey preoccupation, locomotives. Imagery of railway travel is popular for many twentieth-century American artists, and Fahey is no exception. When asked for his opinion on the matter, Barry Hansen replied:

> It goes back to our boyhood, when steam locomotives were the biggest, most awesome machines that were physically close to us, and trains were also the most common mode of long distance travel. Also, trains played a huge role in African-American life during the first half of the century, including Charley Patton's time, so that probably reinforced John's interest.[154]

Each piece on the album was accompanied by an allegory involving trains. Fahey even wrote about the train that made its way through his new hometown for "Afternoon Espee through Salem":

> I live here by the mainline. Can't get away from it. I hear it all day and all night. A great chord, but what the hell is it? Not the same as the Great Canadian (minor) Triad. One of the tunes here I learned from Bukka White who was a good friend of mine and who was also obsessed with trains.[155]

The pieces on the album do not simply revisit old themes, but make new interpretations using what at the time was Fahey's slightly less subtle attack than in earlier years, perhaps due to the years of touring, or just an assuredness from playing in his style for so long. Either way, the album boasts a production that was superior to the other albums recorded during the same period, and represents an excellent snapshot of Fahey's sound and influences, both past and present, during the early part of the decade.

In Oregon, Fahey met the guitarist Terry Robb, who helped him record and produce two complementary albums that once again showcased Fahey's continuing absorption and regeneration of styles. Let Go, recorded in 1983, can be considered Fahey's first real attempt at tackling the music of Bola Sete with concentrated effort.[156]

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[153] John Fahey, Railroad I, Shanacie 99003, 1992 (1983), compact disc.

[154] Barry Hansen, Interviewed by Nick Schillace, 20 June 2002.

[155] John Fahey, liner noted to Railroad.

[156] John Fahey, Let Go, Varrik VR 008, 1997 (1983), compact disc.

Perhaps for this reason, Terry Robb accompanies on second guitar for all but two tracks, with musicians Johnny Riggins and Ron "Dr." Manfredo contributing on two tracks as well. Only three of the tracks can be traced to Sete, but nonetheless, the care and precision that the guitarists show in the arranging and performing of the pieces exhibit clear understanding of the idiom. "Black Mommy" stands out most and maintains the same mood and complexity as Sete's recording. With additional textures and nuances, not to mention Charley Patton licks transplanted inside, Fahey once again showcases his ability to transcend homage and create images of compositions cast in his own vision.

Fahey even included a brief snippet of his trademark liner notes in the album jacket, in an attempt to play with the image that had been close to his heels since the 60s. From the liner notes:

> No folk music on this record- not even anything that sounds or suggests folk music. People think you [Fahey] play folk music . . . . And the people in the Volk Societies won't hire me [Fahey] because they say I [Fahey] *don't* play Volkmuzik . . . . It's hard to break out of a bag I never intended to be in- never thought I *was* in . . . . I'm not a Volk. I'm from the suburbs.[157]

The album also included examples of Fahey's earlier influences, but more notable is the piece "Dvorak," an arrangement of various themes from the composer's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. Fahey had originally recorded the piece for America, but this reworking with Robb on second guitar is still a fine example of Fahey's continuing relationship with concert music.

Fahey's second album with Robb, Rain Forests, Oceans, and Other Themes, released in 1985, was a similar outing, yet featured a superior recording with more solo performances by Fahey. The compositions "Melody McBad" and "Rain Forest" are true to Fahey's direction, and put together the influences that Let Go displayed separately in a clearer voice that was more Fahey than anyone else. Another composer gets treated to syncopated guitar– Igor Stravinsky. In a duet with Robb, the guitarists tackle the "Lullaby" and the "Finale" from Stravinsky's ballet The Firebird. Aided by a basic recording setup and the acoustics of Cascade Recording Studios, formerly a small church, the guitarists capture the themes with surprising

[157] John Fahey, liner notes to Let Go.

accuracy. Compositions by both Sete and his own Brazilian contemporary, Luis Bonfa, are included on the album, as well as the odd pairing of Jimi Hendrix and Furry Lewis on "May this be Love/Casey Jones."

Between 1982 and 1991, Fahey also added several additions to his holiday catalog: beginning with Christmas Guitar Vol 1, a rerecording of The New Possibility, then followed by 1983's Popular Songs for Christmas and the New Year, and 1991's The John Fahey Christmas Album.[158] In addition to these works, he also released three albums with various approaches: I Remember Blind Joe Death (1987), God Time and Casualty(1989), and Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories (1990).[159]

Each of the non-holiday albums offers something worthwhile to Fahey's output. Tinh Mahoney, who produced I Remember Blind Joe Death and who was a close friend of Fahey's, said that the record was an attempt by Fahey to get in touch with his roots.[160] Many of the pieces on the recording are traditional themes arranged by Fahey but he does not stop with the blues strains that densely cover the album. Two Sete compositions find their way onto the recording as well, along with works by George Gershwin and Elvis Presley. To consider any one influence the source of Fahey's inspiration would be foolish, and this album, as a tribute and reconnection with his roots, does well in showcasing examples of popular Americana as well as the timeless and genre-less music of Sete that have always found their way into Fahey's music.

Fahey considered his playing on God, Time and Casualty to be some of his best: "I practiced a lot to save on studio time. I don't think there's one edit on the

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[158] John Fahey, Christmas Guitar Volume I, Rounder 710 002, 1990 (1982), compact disc; John Fahey, Popular Songs For Christmas and the New Year, Rounder 710 012, 1990 (1983), compact disc; John Fahey, The John Fahey Christmas Album, Burnside 0004, 1991, compact disc.

[159] John Fahey, I Remember Blind Joe Death, Varrik, VR-028, 1987, compact disc; John Fahey, God, Time and Casualty, Shanachie SH 97006, 1989, compact disc; John Fahey, Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories, Varrik, VR- 031, 1992, compact disc.

[160] Tinh Mahoney, recorded by Nick Schillace at the memorial held for John Fahey, 3 March 2001, Salem, Oregon.

whole record."[161] It was more likely that the quality of playing was due to the amount of time Fahey had spent performing on stage up until 1989; his playing is fully matured, and he is in full command of his compositions. A final retitling of "Wine and Roses," the track "The Red Pony" is as powerful as any other performance by Fahey. The piece had by this time become a concert standard for the guitarist, and the twenty five years of maturation show in his performance. The liner notes joked(?), "Whatever he does next, we may here have the ultimate– both in terms of best and final– statement of American Primitive Guitar. An album that was thirty years in the making."[162]

The "finality" of the American Primitive statement was due to an increasing disenchantment Fahey was having with his former self: the image of a fingerpicking and reluctant "folkie" whose long and spiraled compositions no longer satisfied his inner psyche. In fact, by the late 1980s/early 1990s, Fahey had come to regard his earlier work as false and dishonest. Perhaps for this reason, Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories is a combination of older, retitled, and newly interpreted Fahey themes, along with old 1950s rock and roll classics arranged for fingerstyle guitar. The music is intriguing in much the same way his Christmas hymns and carols are, albeit a bit less so, and it is strangely evocative to hear pieces like "Blueberry Hill" and "Sea of Love" reworked into this format. He even revisited the same type of audio prank he had done with The Voice of the Turtle, by including an outtake by Al Wilson from his days with Canned Heat, "Fear and Loathing at Fourth and Butternut."[163]

But despite any lightheartedness and humor that could be found on the album, beneath it were much darker burdens that had caught up with Fahey. Even though the sound of the album was largely influenced by older ideas, some pieces show glimpses of where Fahey was headed. The tracks "In Darkest Night" and even "Fear and Loathing at Fourth and Butternut," regardless of the performer, are darker and much barer than many of the other pieces. Hints of Sete's influence are present on "In Darkest Night," and Al Wilson's ominous chromatic harmonica against a steady

[161] John Fahey, liner notes to God, Time, and Casualty.
[162] Ibid.
[163] http://www.johnfahey.com/pages/girl2.html

drone pushes “Fear and Loathing” far from fifties pop. But even more intriguing is the sound of Fahey struggling with changes that were happening both mentally and physically, and the ramifications they would have on his life, both past, present and future.

Even though he had been fairly prolific during the eighties, Fahey’s life was besieged with personal, physical, and psychological problems that had origins in his childhood and had followed him all the way to Oregon. Beginning sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s, Fahey contracted Epstein-Barr syndrome, which lasted until the mid 1980s. The illness itself was hard on Fahey, but his response to a decrease in energy was to increase his alcohol consumption. Fahey said, “I’d drink beer for the energy, and then the amount of beer I needed kept escalating. Then the virus went away, but I had become addicted to alcohol.”[164] Along with the alcoholism, Fahey was also suffering from diabetes, a likely result of a poor and excessive diet. Moreover, his marriage ended in divorce.

Fahey also entered psychotherapy during the same period, perhaps to help confront his life. The rejection of his earlier material was due in part to conclusions he reached during his therapy sessions. He felt his older material was a mask that he used to hide what his true feelings were:

> I was writing these things as an escape, as a possible way to make money. The sentiments expressed come out of a fucked up situation. I was creating for myself an imaginary, beautiful world and pretending that I lived there, but I didn’t feel beautiful. I was mad but I wasn’t aware of it. I was also very sad, afraid and lonely. By presenting this so-called beautiful facade I looked good to myself and my audience . . . .This went on for years. I always tried to put a peaceful element into the music, but it was false because I was not at peace. I didn’t know what I was doing and felt pretty phony. I didn’t understand any of this until I had psychoanalysis.[165]

Fahey’s issues derived in part from abuse he suffered as a child. The therapy helped bring these repressed memories out into the open, and the result was a reflection that for some time made Fahey react negatively to his earlier work. It may seem sensational to take up this subject, but the way in which Fahey coped early on is directly connected to his development as a musician. Fahey pinpointed his

[164] Miller, 28.

[165] Pouncey, http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

relationship with the music that had impacted him:

> The reason that I liked Charley Patton and those other Delta blues singers so much was because they were angry. Their music is ominous. Patton had a rheumatic heart and he knew that he was going to die young, which he did. In Son House you hear a lot of fear. In Skip James you hear a lot of sorrow, but also a lot of anger. When I first heard these guys I couldn't identify the emotions because I didn't acknowledge that I had them myself. I didn't learn the names of these emotions until I was under pyschoanlaysis. I played some of the records to the doctor and he said, "These guys are angry as hell."[166]

Fahey's road to recovery was slow. He lost his house in the divorce and began living in low rent motels. In 1994 his situation became so bleak that he ended up living at the Union Gospel Mission.[167] Fahey told Byron Coley, "Life has been pretty grim. I'm not used to being poor. I've never been poor in my life. Although certain aspects of it are interesting and good for one's humility, of which I don't have any, it may help me be more humble, but so far I just get mad.[168]

Fahey may have been living a life that by all accounts seemed destitute, but the experience may not have been as bad as some have reported. Accounts of Fahey pawning his guitar to pay his bills, canvassing for rare classical records to resell to dealers, and struggling to maintain a general existence was more likely due to the status of his career and his lack of interest in pursuing his music as he had in the past, something that many of his long time fans refused to relinquish. Even after he moved from the mission, he continued to live in the same motels, costing him far more than an apartment would, up to the end of his life. Dean Blackwood, a business associate of Fahey in his final years said:

> It was the same life that John led before that- always hawking stuff, shopping in Salvation Armies and thrift stores looking for rare classical LPs, he knew the market . . . . He lived in a series of welfare-motels . . . and all of them were far more expensive than weekly rent on apartments. . . . He always had this publishing income and that never went away- he was never penniless. It's just writerly license taken with that period. [He] might have been fallow creatively because he didn't know anyone interested in what he was

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[166] Ibid.

[167] Keith Moerer, "The Return of the Original Thrift- Store Junkie, Indie Noise-Guitar God, Request, October 1996, 42.

[168] Coley, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

exploring [musically].[169]

Fahey eventually overcame his alcoholism the old fashioned way, Alcoholics Anonymous. Fahey said, "I had tried to stop drinking in the past using 'willpower,' but I spent too long in scientific philosophy to do that."[170] By the early 1990s, Fahey had found himself in much the same place that the blues singers he loved had been in the 1960s. The major difference was that Fahey was not waiting around to be rediscovered in order to resurrect the same career he had before. He was more interested in stretching out and exercising his experimental tendencies, the ones that he had flirted with somewhat before, but which gave him a more proper outlet for his mental state. The pawning of his guitars did not leave him without a creative outlet, he simply turned his energy to writing prose and painting, as well as to creating tape and sound collages with a boombox in his Oregon motel room. There came a turning point for Fahey when he played one of these tapes for a local record clerk, who then introduced him to similar music.[171] This is when Fahey came to realize that there was a market for experimental music that was being created and utilized by bands such as Sonic Youth, who at the time Fahey knew little about. Fahey said, "I didn't know there was an alternative movement going . . . I was aware that there had been an experimental movement in the sixties with John Cage and his followers, but I thought they had all gone. Until then I didn't know what was going on."[172]

Around the same time that Fahey was experimenting with sound and finding a new movement to identify with, his older material was about to resurface in the form of a two disc anthology, assembled and annotated by his old friend and sometime producer, Barry Hansen. The Return of the Repressed was not simply a "best of" collection. At the time, it was the only source for many of the recordings that resided in the Fahey catalog which were out of print.

In 1996, he recorded three guitar tutorial videos in which he explained the fine points of several of his classic acoustic works, as well as a concert video of him

[169] Perfect Sound Forever, "Dean Blackwood Remembers John Fahey," http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-dean.html. Author unknown.

[170] Coley, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-byron2.html.

[171] Moerer, 40-1.

[172] Pouncey, http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

performing in his old style. He also released two 78s of acoustic pieces on the Perfect label, a project led by Dean Blackwood.[173] It was soon after meeting Blackwood that Fahey came into a small inheritance due to his father's death, and decided to give the money to Blackwood to start a new record label, Revenant. Blackwood said about Revenant, "We wanted to put out what was missing as far as what record labels were offering, the artist's vision preserved intact in its raw form."[174]

The albums released included early recordings from banjo player Dock Boggs and the Stanely Brothers, as well as more avant garde performers such as Captain Beefheart, Derek Bailey, and Ornette Coleman. In many ways, the idea of how wide ranging the term "American Primitive" can be, is manifest in the offerings by Revenant. Blackwood feels:

> This was to be the undiluted stuff that folks were likely to have in their personal archives somewhere but which was unlikely to have ever seen "legitimate" release. Shelved together, the releases were to appear more like a set of substantial books from the same publisher. Weighty tomes, [Fahey] said.[175]

By combining early pre-war acoustic with avant rock and jazz musicians, the musical aesthetic that Fahey belongs to, and very much helped create, is illustrated far beyond the output of any one person or style. Perhaps Revenant's most ambitious contribution to this aesthetic was Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues, the complete recordings of Charley Patton, that included several additional writings on the musician, as well as a reprint of Fahey's earlier book, long out of print.[176] Sadly, it was released posthumously, but it still stands as a major testament as to how far Fahey would go to ensure that the musical landscape as he sees it was thoroughly represented.

Fahey made it clear that despite any rediscovery, he would not fall into the derivative patterns of artists who find themselves on a renewed career path. He

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[173] John Fahey, Double 78s, Perfect, 14404-A,B,C,D, 1997, 78 rpm phonodiscs.

[174] Blackwood, http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-dean.html.

[175] Dean Blackwood, "In Memorium: John Fahey, 1959-2001, http://www.clicks-and-klangs.com/archive/006/faheyblackwood.htm.

[176] Charley Patton, Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues: The Worlds of Charley Patton, Revenant 212, 2001. compact disc.

released several recordings in 1997, all of which seemed to be drastic departures from his Takoma days. The Takoma records themselves had begun to be reissued by Fantasy, which had acquired the rights to Fahey's back catalog. But Fahey was set on the future. Beginning with The Mill Pond, he began mixing noise texture and guitar in new ways.[177] It served as an appetizer to the full length album that followed, The City of Refuge.[178] Put out on the Oregon label, Tim/Kerr Records, the album utilizes industrial noise with samples and distorted guitar. There were varied reactions to the album. Many of Fahey's older fans did not see the similarity between the new material and the old, and even friends and fans such as Glenn Jones, whose own group Cul De Sac ventures into similar sonic territory, had little positive criticism.[179]

The more negative reactions were likely due to Fahey's admitted distancing from his earlier work. The experimental tendencies had always been there, but even earlier attempts proved less accepted than his more traditional work. But Fahey recognized his opportunity and seized the moment to exercise both his past and present in order to make way for his future. Fahey said in 1997, "I think this is a really exciting time for music, experimental music particularly. People are a lot more open and curious than they ever have been before."[180] He even included an ode to a style of music that credits its existence to him, "On the Death and Disembowelment of the New Age." Fahey rarely spoke out too vehemently against the New Age genre, more often than not simply exhibiting bewilderment that he was considered a link to its formation. His influence is more by chance than directly musical, however, and many of the people who enjoy both New Age music and John Fahey's music are most often selective listeners. Fahey was casting off the style of music that connected him loosely to the genre, and embracing the aspect of his music that would propel him away from whatever expectations would befall an artist experiencing a second wind. Even fans of Fahey who may have rejected more

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[177] John Fahey, The Mill Pond, Little Brother, 1997, 45 rpm phonodiscs.

[178] John Fahey, The City of Refuge, Tim/Kerr, 1997, compact disc.

[179] Glenn Jones makes mention of this during his tribute at the memorial held for John Fahey on March 3, 2001, in Salem, Oregon.

[180] Matt Hanks, "Age Against the Machine," No Depression, May/June, 1997, reprinted online, http//:johnfahey.com/NoDepressionArticle.html.

banal copies of his earlier work by other musicians, anticipated a closer return to Fahey's less experimental past.

Regardless, Fahey recorded an album with Cul De Sac the same year entitled The Epiphany of Glenn Jones.[181] Glenn Jones was admittedly influenced early in his musical development by Vol. IV, and his musical career reflected it.[182] With Cul De Sac, Fahey was able to indulge even more in some of the collage textures, this time with the support of musicians comfortable with experimentation. The record makes good connections to Fahey's earlier work, in an updated, post-rock fashion. Some of the tunes derive from pre-war blues musicians, such as Tommy and Robert Johnson numbers; others are new compositions by Fahey or in collaboration with Jones. Even a fresh twist is put on "The Red Pony," appropriately retitled, "The New Red Pony." Fahey's dominance of the recording process is recounted in the liner notes by Jones, but the record belongs equally to Cul De Sac as it does to Fahey. It was Fahey's insistence on the purity in what the musicians were doing that finally put them on equal ground.[183]

Fahey recorded another album in 1997, Womblife, produced by Jim O'Rourke, whose Chicago band Gastor Del Sol would go on to tour with Fahey.[184] The album shares with Fahey's music of this period a penchant for sound experiment and an emphasis on texture. Solo guitar, as opposed to the full band sound of the Cul De Sac record, was mixed with heavy reverberation (reverb) and audio signals, combined with drones and gamelan, a timbre that had found its way into several of Fahey's albums throughout his career. The album helps fill out this experimental period; it is a sizable chunk of similar material that provides too much evidence to be passed off as anything but genuine attempts by Fahey to realize new directions.

It was also in 1997 that The Anthology of American Folk Music was reissued for the first time since 1952, to surprising success. Fahey had included the Anthology

[181] Cul De Sac, The Epiphany of Glenn Jones, Thristy Ear thi 57037-2, 1997, compact disc.

[182] Glenn Jones, liner notes to The Epiphany of Glenn Jones.

[183] Ibid.

[184] John Fahey, Womblife, Table of the Elements TOE-CD-87, 1997, compact disc.

at the top of the list of his "Selected Suggested Prejudiced Discography" in the book of transcriptions accompanying The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977.[185] Fahey was as affected as any other by this landmark collection when it first came out, inspiring musical themes as well as song and album titles that followed Fahey throughout his entire career. For the reissue, Fahey added an essay to the booklet that accompanied the set. The liner notes, a collection of several essays by different authors, won him a collective Grammy Award, stolen while he was living out of his car.[186] He wrote of Smith's genius and of his relevance to collector's such as himself:

> Had he never done anything with his life but this anthology, Harry Smith would still have borne the mark of genius across his forehead. I'd match the Anthology up against any other single compendium of important information ever assembled. Dead Sea Scrolls? Nah. I'll take the Anthology. Make no mistake: there was no 'folk' canon before Smith's work. That he had compiled such a definitive document only became apparent much later, of course. We record- collecting types, sifting through many more records than he did, eventually reached the same conclusions: these were the true goods.[187]

It is interesting to consider that a totem of the very rudiments of Fahey's music had been reissued in its unchanged form for others to experience at the same raw level that Fahey had. At the same time Fahey's own music was reaching out in new directions looking for a place to land. The music Fahey was making in the late 1990s was still definitively and unmistakably his own, but even his guitar style had changed significantly since his earlier years. No longer incorporating plastic fingerpicks, his guitar style became rawer and more bare, utilizing only the essence of what he needed to convey his music. Some who were close to Fahey feel that the change was due to a lack of facility brought on by his failing health, and that his music reflected this; Fahey simply couldn't do justice to his older work with the state of his facility, whether he wanted to or not.[188] But there was more to Fahey's experiments than simply technical limitations. It was clear that much of what he was writing and releasing was due to pent up energy and a reflection on the state of his life. Fahey had acknowledged that any time he drifted too far from the type music he played on

[185] Fahey, in The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, ed. by John John Lescroat, 167.
[186] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 10 June 2002.
[187] John Fahey, liner notes to The Anthology of American Folk Music, 8.
[188] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 13 June 2002.

his first few records, people reacted negatively. Many of those people were no longer around, and the crowd he now found himself in was much more sympathetic. With his diminishing ability to perform his old material, he really had little choice and nothing to lose by putting his experimental indulgence right out into the open.

In time, he made a logical transition to the electric guitar, utilizing not only its sustain and unaffected texture, but also through effects such as delay and reverb. In 1998, he released a live record of solo electric guitar entitled Georgia Stomps, Atlanta Struts, and Other Contemporary Dance Favorites.[189] The record did little more than showcase an all electric Fahey, although some pieces are notable for the transitional aspect of Fahey's music. The texture of the electric guitar shares an ethereal nature that Fahey had once achieved with his heavy double thumbing acoustic style. Harmonics derived through dissonance were now aided with the random harmonics of a reverb drenched guitar. Three of the tunes are nearly twenty minutes long, and may have been a bit too long to be realized well, but the drawn out nature of his playing works to great effect on "House of the Rising Sun/Nightmare" and "Juana/Guitar Lamento."

It was also during the later part of the decade that Fahey began playing with his own trio, consisting of fellow Oregon musicians Rob Scrivner on guitar and various sound generating devices and effects, and Tim Knight on lap steel, guitar, organ and bass, among other unique instruments. The music performed by the trio differs from the other music of the period;it finds Fahey blending more of his past and present together. Fahey used a more traditional guitar technique, bringing back old themes either fingerpicked or with the slide, and even read some old liner notes recounting the tale of Blind Joe Death.[190] The effects processing either takes over the sound completely, or hangs onto the music like an additional element. Additionally, the juxtaposition of found sounds and free jazz aesthetics contrast against the familiarity of Fahey's guitar and adds another dimension to this stage of Fahey's music.

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[189] John Fahey, Georgia Stomps, Atlanta Struts, and Other Contemporary Dance Favorites, Table of the Elements TOE-CD- 38, 1998.

[190] John Fahey Trio, Volume One, Jazzoo Records, no date given, compact disc.

Aside from constituting unique musical moments, the music made by the group further illustrates the growth that Fahey was undergoing. No single recording had yet to show concrete metamorphosis. This is most likely due to Fahey's need not only to be true to the music at the moment, but also to utilize the musicians he was working with either directly or through production. But taken collectively, the music made by Fahey starting in 1997 marks a new beginning to his career, and connects to the methods that date back to his youth. Due to the fact that he was experiencing new found interest in his music, as he attempted to find a new direction, those who had stayed or become interested were witness to this journey. After spending significant time being relatively unproductive, Fahey would not pass up opportunities to record and tour. Therefore, more than any other time in Fahey's life, his music during this period was a direct window into his process of self expression. The misunderstanding is that this stage of Fahey's musical career was different than his earlier style, but that is not the case. Fahey resisted a preconceived form or style, instead utilizing his vernacular to continuously evolve his cultivated style. No album or composition by Fahey is devoid of this vernacular. He simply took it and used it to branch out more and more in an attempt to cultivate his own style. Fahey never saw his music as finite.

Released in 2000, Hitomi would be Fahey's last official release before his death.[191] An all electric recording, Hitomi was the only record from this period that Fahey produced himself.[192] Nearly all the pieces are solo, with his trio joining on at least one track. Even the overdubs are kept to a minimum, instead putting Fahey's guitar more or less out front and alone. The compositions are all new, and Fahey's playing is at a comfortable and controlled place. The title track is a perfect example of how Fahey was able to take a more or less singular theme and stretch it out over an extended period and still end with a strong conclusion. Yet pieces with multiple developments such as "Hitomi Smiles," which even hints briefly at the alternating bass technique he had more or less abandoned at this point, show that many of his

[191] John Fahey, Hitomi, LivHouse, 2000, compact disc.

[192] Executive production is credited to Danny Letham, presumably since he was LivHouse records owner/operator.

techniques still could be found in the music. The effects used on the guitar are merely additions to the texture Fahey creates with his hands. Fahey's vocabulary is not simply extended, but for the first time it appears reestablished. The trademark dissonances are there, less subtle than ever, but utilized in musical ways that Fahey only hinted at prior to the recording. Echoes of his covers of 1950s pop pieces can be heard on "East Meets West," which also acknowledges Fahey's continuing relationship with Asian culture, as does the Japanese calligraphy found on the inside cover. The album closes with multiple overlays of sounds and textures. If the last two tracks are taken together, a summation of Fahey's group experiments and newfound solo technique are fittingly stationed next to each other.

The real success of Hitomi lies in the summation of many of the experiments Fahey had worked through in the years prior to its release. The album finds him clearly facing forward. Dean Blackwood made some observations as to what Fahey was after during this period, and what his music was like like shortly before his death:

> [Fahey] ended up at ease with his past. He was railing against it, and then he came to terms with it more recently and wanted to draw on all his musical influences and assert himself organically and not vent these pent-up experiments.The stuff he sent lately was to be distilled into one record and it was evidencing a new state of being more at ease with his musical history and embracing it all rather than rejecting one to benefit the other. It shows a real mastery of his craft . . . .What he continued to rail against was people who were stuck in the past.[193]

During his resurgence, Fahey was encouraged to return to writing prose by Dean Blackwood, Jim O'Rourke, and many others after circulating numerous hand written stories recounting past tales of his life, real and imagined. What resulted was the quasi-autobiographical book How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life. True to Fahey's legacy, the book is a free flowing mix of essays; some accounts have clear origins in the truth, but others more than likely take liberty with whatever facts may lie within the text. Hence the book is listed as fiction. Either way, famous anecdotes can be found between the pages, and some questions about Fahey's life are answered, while new ones are manifested.

It is a sad twist of fate that Hitomi, Fahey's most unique and inspired work of

[193] http://www.furious.com/perfect/fahey/fahey-dean.html.

his rejuvenated career, and his book of stories recounting much of his own past, would come out shortly before his death. Despite any attempts he had made to recover from his ailments and addictions, the damage was done. On February 22, 2001, John Fahey died after slipping into a coma following major bypass surgery. The Song of Solomon 2:11-12 inscribed on the inside of the program from his funeral, was the same inscription used by Fahey for the album notes to The Voice of the Turtle, and would eventually find its way onto his tombstone:

> For, lo, the winter is past,
> The rain is over and gone;
> The flowers appear on the earth;
> The time of the singing of birds is come,
> And the voice of the turtle
> Is heard in our land.

At the memorial held for Fahey shortly after his death, his ex-wife Melody, who had been at his side as he passed, said that as they talked before his surgery, he was realistic about the fact that he might not recover. She said:

> [Fahey] had made peace with many of the demons of his past, and had done away with a lot of his anger. He told me that even though he wanted to live, he was satisfied with the music that he had composed.[194]

[194] Melody Fahey, Memorial held for John Fahey in Salem, Oregon, 3 March 2001, recorded by Nick Schillace.