CHAPTER 4

THE MUSIC OF JOHN FAHEY

"What I am abdicating is subjectivity and playing by ear." John Fahey.[1]

From a Vernacular to a Cultivated Style

In order to illustrate how John Fahey serves as an example of twentieth-century American music, it is important to understand the relationship between vernacular and cultivated music, and how this defines a culture. At this point, it has been established that vernacular is defined by the exposure that an individual has to music early in life, and the cultivated music is one that is derived from the use of this vernacular as a basis for an idiosyncratic style. Taking the place of any predetermined traditional folk culture, the vernacular of the United States has more to do with the experience, rather than the style, of the music. Any resulting cultivated style will be directly related to the music that is experienced, regardless of style or genre. In the case of Fahey, this process was established primarily through recordings, mainly pre-war 78s, although to a lesser extent through movies and radio. This vernacular, in turn, was used by Fahey as a vocabulary that he applied towards his own idiosyncratic style.

It should be noted that the idea is not to uncover and expose every instance of vernacular occurrence in Fahey's music. Although tracing the many quotations of a single influence, like Sam McGee or Charley Patton, either directly or indirectly, is a valuable means of understanding Fahey's influences, this does not necessarily explain the process illustrated here. What needs to be established is how Fahey's vernacular served his composing in a technical way. Fahey made a habit of quoting

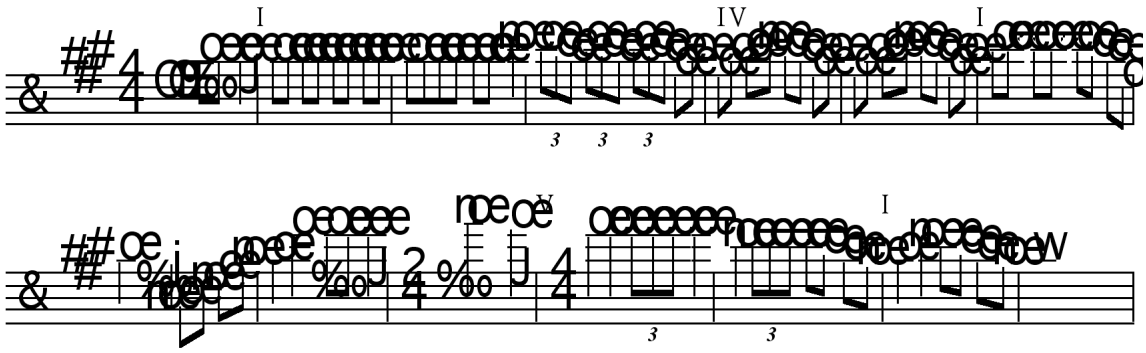
[1] John Fahey, introduction to The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, ed. John Lescroat, New York: GPI, 1978. 13.

his influences, but what is more important is the musical vocabulary that he established through these influences.

Examples of John Fahey's Vernacular

An examination of Fahey's vernacular begins with Bill Monroe's version of Jimmie Rodgers' "Blue Yodel No. 7." Below is a simplified version of the introductory solo break played by Monroe on the mandolin:

"Blue Yodel No. 7," Bill Monroe/Jimmie Rodgers.[2]



In this single break, many of the dominant features of old-time, blues, and bluegrass music can be examined. The tonality and the relationship to accidentals is fundamental, as well as the primary chords used. The most common accidentals are C-natural and G-natural, set against the I(A), IV(D) and V(E) chords– all major. These tones, the flat 3rd and flat 7th, represent what are commonly called "blue notes," and are often used to define a key trait of the blues. It is not the tones themselves, but the juxtaposition of the tones against diatonic chords that define their use in this context. The C-natural set against an A major triad in measures 4, 8 and 13 blurs the major harmony, and the G-natural in measure 8 suggests a dominant 7th sonority. When set against the IV chord, in this instance a D-major triad, the C-natural in measures 5 and 6 acts as a flat 7th and again suggests a dominant 7th sonority, this time D7. It is likely that the V chord has the addition of D, its flat 7th, by one of the other instruments; violin, guitar, or bass. This brings all primary chord sonorities to

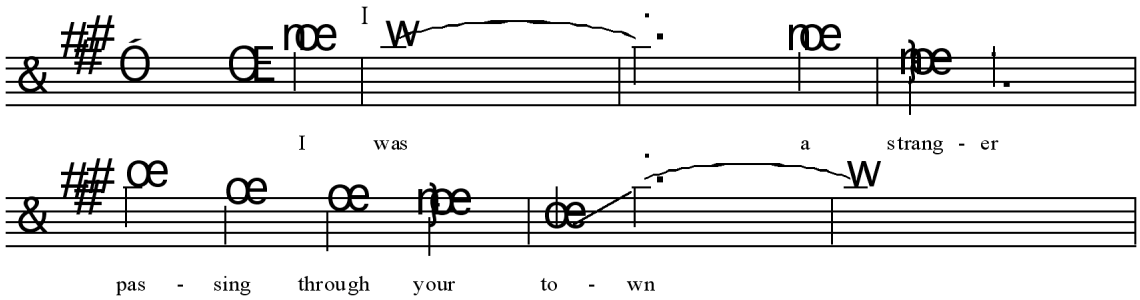
[2] Bill Monroe and the Monroe Brothers, The Essential Bill Monroe and the Monroe Brothers, RCA 67450-2, 1997 (1941), compact disc. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

dominant– I7, IV7, V7.

The eighth-note rhythm is also important, but even more so is the occurrence of triplet rhythms found in measures 4, 11, and 12. Triplet rhythms in this manner are common, but the rhythm derived from triplets, also called “swing rhythm,” in which the three eighth notes of the triplet are replaced with a quarter note followed by an eighth note, is akin to the syncopated style of the music discussed here.[3]

The melody carried by the mandolin utilizes the blue notes, but the mandolin does not have the ability to “bend,” “worry” or “slur” the notes as well as the voice, violin or guitar. This technique furthers to blur tonality by falling between major and minor tones, utilizing what has been called a neutral note, more common to non-western scales. Below is a single melody line, sung by Monroe:

“Blue Yodel Number 7,” Bill Monroe/Jimmie Rodgers.[4]



The main tones of the melody are A, C-natural, and G-natural. Again, the aforementioned blue notes. Set against an Amaj[5] sonority played by the backing musicians, the dominant color is again displayed. However, Monroe’s vocal style is less strict than his mandolin, and when singing the C-naturals marked with parenthesis in particular, he exhibits the neutral tone more than when playing the mandolin. Also note the octave slide in the second to last measure.

Fahey had been playing the guitar for a short while when he first heard the Monroe cut, but the experience eventually led him to fingerpicking styles as he

[3] Donald Grout, Masters of Instrumental Blues Guitar, New York: Oak Publications, 1967.
[4] Transcription by Nick Schillace.
[5] Abbreviations are used for chord harmony.

began collecting more and more. It was briefly mentioned that Fahey credited a Pete Seeger instruction record as a rudimentary learning tool for fingerpicking, and by emphasizing that influence, an overall understanding of how Fahey most likely got started on the guitar is achieved. Used for analysis is the record that is assumed to be the same used by Fahey, The Folksinger's Guitar Guide.[6] The record is accompanied by three booklets that follow verbatim the instruction given on the record. The second booklet explains various techniques ranging from right hand arpeggio patterns, bass runs, bass melody, slides, hammers, blues, finger and flat picks, and what Seeger calls a "stretch," but what is commonly called "bending" on the guitar. This technique was discussed in the Monroe transcription. On the guitar, this technique is achieved by plucking a string stopped on a particular fret, and then pushing up or pulling down the note "into" a note anywhere from a quarter tone to two and a half steps higher.

Presumably Fahey had already learned the basics of fingering and strumming chords from friends by the time he heard the Seeger record. Fahey did specifically credit Seeger's instruction record with getting him started fingerpicking: "I hate to admit it, but there was nobody around who played with their fingers, except Pete Seeger's instruction record. I hate to admit that I bought a record by him, but I did."[7] Fahey credits "Railroad Bill" as being the first song he learned to fingerpick.[8] The transcription in the booklet does not name the tune; however, Seeger sings it on the record.[9] The transcription taken from the Seeger booklet follows:

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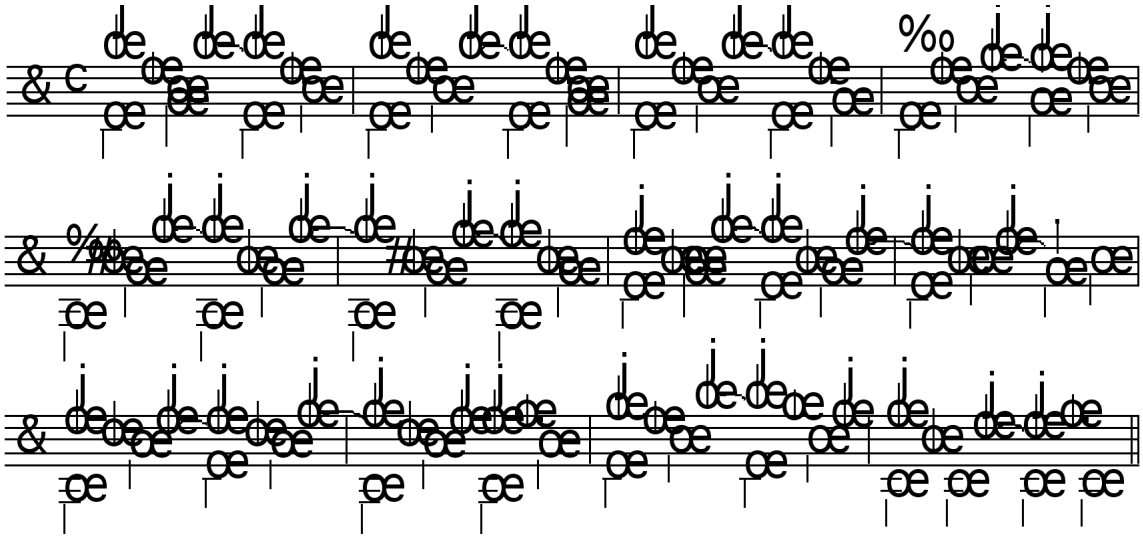
[6] Pete Seeger, A Folksinger's Guitar Guide, Folkways FI 8354, 1955, LP.

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

[8] Michael Brooks, "John Fahey: Turtle Blues," Guitar Player, March 1972 ,42.

[9] Ibid., 5. A special note for the transcriptions: It has been stated that John Fahey could not read music. Two separate details aided him while working through this material. The first is that on the guitar, shapes come to represent chords, scales, etc. more often than the understanding of individual notes that may make them up. For example, after a fingering for a chord is memorized, it is the shape, not necessarily the notes, that often represents the sonority. In this example, Fahey most likely memorized the D major shape, and then followed the strumming instructions. The second is that throughout much of the literature for the guitar, tablature accompanies pitch notation. Seeger utilized this method in his instruction manual. This is not done simply for music illiteracy, but because the guitar is often tuned to different tunings. Tablature has been omitted from these transcriptions due to space limitations, but should still be considered.

"Railroad Bill" example, Pete Seeger.[10]



The music is in two parts. The down stem notes outline the bass harmony and are played by the thumb. The up stemmed notes represent the melody. In this style of guitar one or two fingers, the index and middle, play the melody. When combined with the thumb, this is called two or three finger style. Seeger precedes the transcription with this statement, "Some folk musicians use their right middle finger, as well as index finger, for the melody notes."[11] In other words, he is not specific. However, Fahey stated in one interview, "I started out with two fingers [thumb and index], but I knew you had to use three [thumb, index, and middle] . . . I got so I could [play Railroad Bill] with three fingers."[12]

Again, through this single example, some different techniques can be illustrated. In the first measure, two separate techniques are used that apply to the entire song, as well as a significant portion of the repertoire for this style of playing. First, the bass notes alternate between the root and the third and/or fifth of the chord, as opposed to monotonic bass style as in measure 12. In conjunction with this alternating bass, the melody is displaced on the up or weaker part of the beat. The result is a compound eighth-note rhythm in which heavy syncopation, or "swing" occurs. The significance of the alternating bass is that of the many other styles of

[10] Seeger, 15.
[11] Seeger, 15.
[12] Brooks, 42.

fingerstyle guitar, the alternating bass is an idiosyncratic technique of American fingerstyle guitar that is not unilaterally shared by other styles. In this regard, it is fundamental to understanding American guitar styles since the resulting syncopation brings a uniqueness that is not found in other forms of music. A detailed history of American guitar is documented in the now out of print Twentieth-Century Masters of Fingerstyle Guitar, written by John Stropes and Peter Lang.[13]

The overall tonality is C major, utilizing the I, IV and V chords. In addition, the III7 is used, not uncommon to this style, but often thought of as outside typical "folk" harmonies of straight I, IV, and V. The fact that it is not only major, but also dominant, furthers this point. The music is arranged in twelve measures, but is not a "twelve-bar blues." However, it is assumed that this represents the basic arrangement, and that the player would make several passes through the same form, improvising or embellishing on the existing piece melodically, harmonically, or rhythmically.

Fahey worked to establish a foundation in this style via "Railroad Bill." He stated, "I must have played 'Railroad Bill' hundreds and hundreds of times, because it really did take me a year to play with my thumb and fingers."[14] By incorporating these techniques, he was able to expand his repertoire: "After I had that song [Railroad Bill] down, it wasn't so hard to go onto others."[15]

Seeger's booklet listed several chords in many keys, and it is likely that Fahey supplemented his earlier knowledge with new harmony. Seeger stated in his instruction, "Put the needle in the groove and play the record completely through. Later on you may spend a whole day mastering some fifteen-second segment." After Fahey gained his technique, that is exactly what he did.

Keeping with the old-time fingerpicking styles for the moment, another Fahey influence should be examined– Sam McGee. Fahey particularly admired McGee's early recordings: "Sam McGee's 78s (*only* his 78s) were a great inspiration to me because the compositions are excellent and the playing is impeccably clean and

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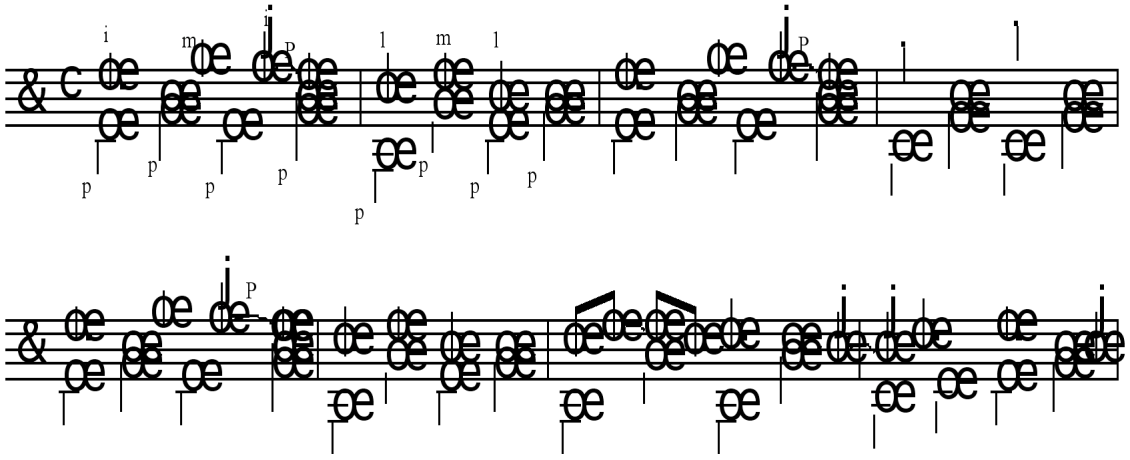
[13] John Stropes and Peter Lang, Twentieth Century Masters of Fingerstyle Guitar, Milwaukee:Stropes Editions, 1982, 6-12.

[14] Ibid., 42.

[15] Ibid., 42.

frequently hard-driving and extremely fast."[16] One of McGee's most popular pieces is "Buckdancer's Choice." Fahey recorded his own version for Bussard's Fonotone label in the late 50s/early 60s, and the tune provides more foundation for a sophisticated fingerpicking style. The piece is in C major, but sounds approximately a major third up due to the use of a capo. McGee plays at approximately 150 BPM alle breve time. He utilizes only the primary chords, C, F, and G7, and all the fingerings are based on the three common open chord shapes for the harmonies. It is arranged in three parts. The transcription below is of the first section and is based on the transcription done by Fly Brandenburg and Stephen Cicchetti in Old-Time Country Guitar of McGee's 1926 recording:

"Buckdancer's Choice,"Sam McGee.[17]



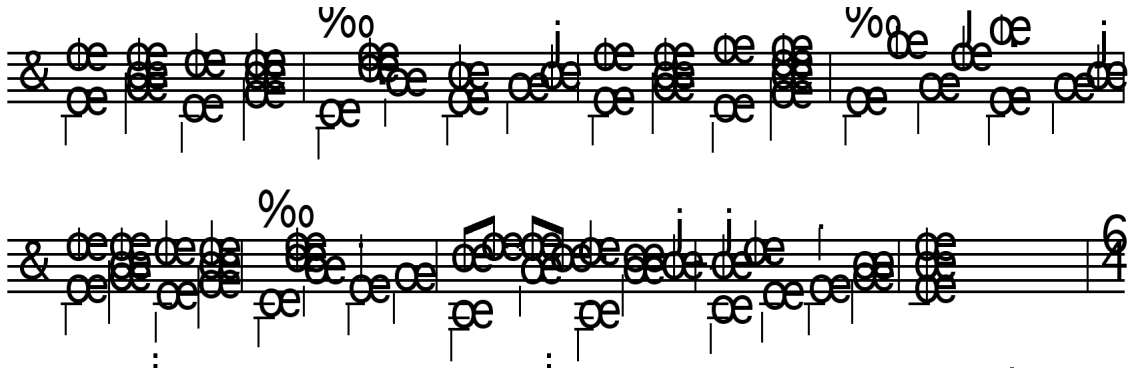
The alternating bass in this example exhibits more variation than in "Railroad Bill." Due to the speed at which McGee plays, many of the bass notes become more like strums as the thumb brushes down across the held chord. At times, the melody is plucked by the follow through of the thumb. Despite the speed and the use of strums, McGee maintains a clear melody plucked by his index and middle fingers. The first measure illustrates a possible right hand fingering (p= thumb, i-

[16] John Fahey, The Best of John Fahey 1959-1977, introduction, 7.

[17] Brandenburg and Cicchetti, 47; additional transcriptions made by Nick Schillace; Sam McGee, Complete Recorded Works 1926-1934, Document DOCD- 8036, 1998 (1926), compact disc.

index, m= middle). He makes use of pull-offs in measures 1, 3 and 5, a technique that shares an opposite motion to a hammer-on. The pull-offs are illustrated with a "P" above the slur. The first note is plucked, in this case a D, and then released downward resulting in the sounding of the C, which is already held as part of the chord. The melody makes equal use of syncopation as well as melodic movement that falls on the beat. The second section is similar to the first:

"Buckdancer's Choice," Sam McGee.[18]

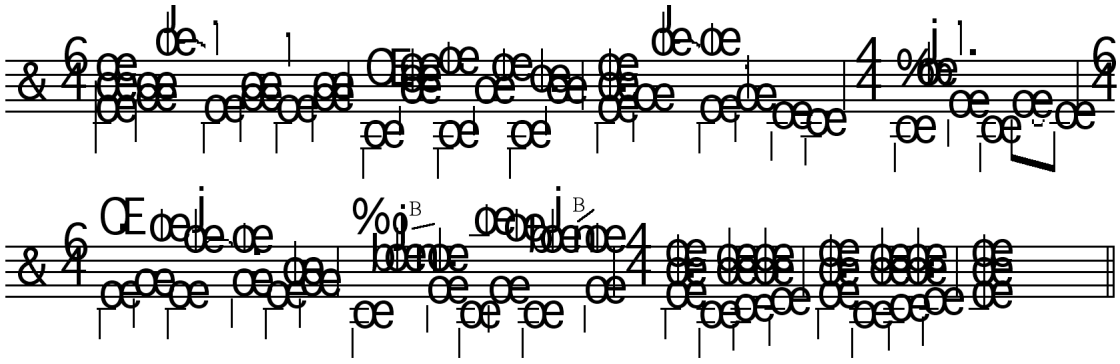


What is unique about this second section, is that the bass in the first two measures descends in a counter melody, C(E)B(D)A(F), as opposed to strictly alternating against the chords utilizing root/ or root/third movement. In order to achieve a descent of this length, a first inversion F triad is used to provide an A. The technique is repeated in measures 4 and 5.

McGee freely moves between the first two sections. Staying on the first one for several passes before ever going to the next. On the record there is a short break in which Dave Macon speaks in order to introduce McGee. McGee again with a third part of related, but slightly different, material. It has been transcribed below:

[18] Brandenburg and Cicchetti, 47; McGee.

"Buckdancer's Choice," Sam McGee.[19]



Brandenburg and Cicchetti write that the third section "illustrates [McGee's] fondness for stringing together different musical themes in the same key."[20] This is an interesting addition to McGee's approach, and one that Fahey would put to good use as well. The changing meter is different but not too unusual. The technique of adding partial and extra measures was common in both blues and old-time music. The first two parts follow a twelve bar form, and if the single beat measures were omitted at the start and finish of part three, it too would follow that form.

McGee makes particularly good use of bent notes in measure 7. Again, the flat 3rd and flat 7th are the tones bent. Both the B-flat and E-flat are set against open strings, B and E respectively, so the tones aren't actually bent into new ones, rather the two tones sound together. The B and B-flat confuse the third of the G triad, and the E-flat and E do the same against the C major triad. After introducing the third section, McGee passes through all three sections several times until he concludes.

McGee's abilities and techniques far surpass a single transcription, but it should be clear that his particular style of playing is representative of old-time guitar playing that provided for a significant portion of Fahey's vernacular. Fahey also began developing his slide guitar playing early on. He had credited Dick Spottswood with helping him discover open tunings, and he was also encouraged to pursue them after being unable to transcribe some Carter Family recordings of Hawaiian guitar.[21] Fahey said, "I don't think I had seen anyone play bottleneck

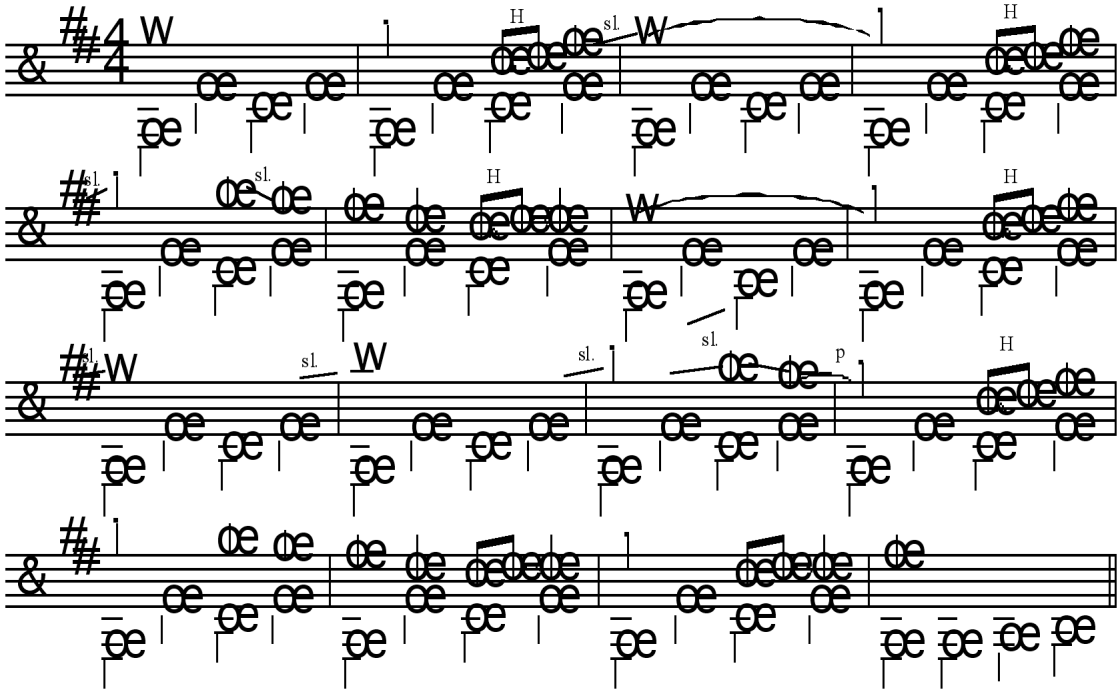
[19] Ibid.

[20] Brandenburg and Cicchetti, 46.

[21] Mark Humphrey, "John Fahey," Frets, August 1980, 23.

before I started playing it. I got the idea from Sylvester Weaver records, Frank Hutchinson, [and] the Carter Family."[22] Without a visual aid, Fahey ended up playing slide on his lap, in Hawaiian steel guitar fashion, as opposed to an upright bottleneck position. "I tried broken-off beer and wine bottle necks. I started playing in the lap and then tried playing upright, bottleneck style, and couldn't get it." He credits Sylvester Weaver's "Guitar Rag" as the tune that got him into slide playing. Tuned to open D (DADF#AD), the piece is a classic example of Vestapol slide technique.[23] Like "Buckdancer's Choice," it is in three parts. A transcription of the first section follows:

"Guitar Rag," Sylvester Weaver[24]



It has a sixteen-bar form, the pickup measure being omitted. A consistent alternating bass is plucked throughout the entire song. The notes that are marked are the only notes that are slid into. It is presumed that Weaver played lap style, and

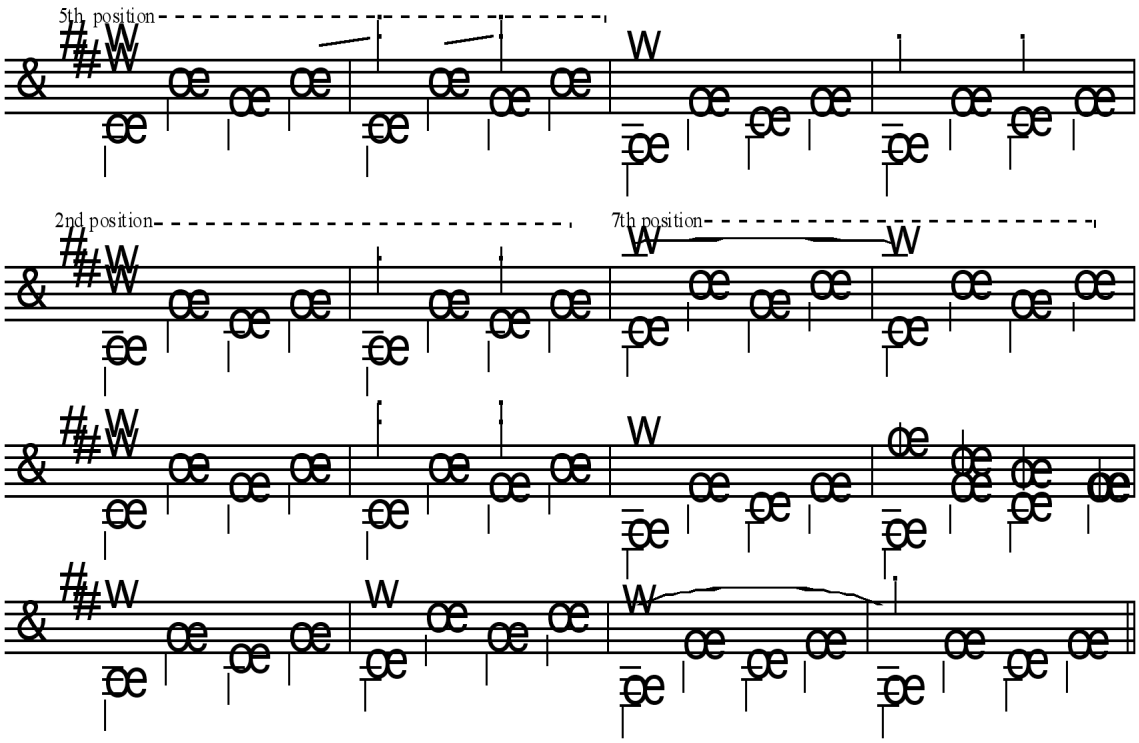
[22] Ibid., 23.

[23] Vestapol is another name for Open D tuning. It gets its name from an eighteenth-century parlor song, Vestapol. It is one of the most common alternate tunings for the guitar.

[24] Sylvester Weaver, Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order Vol One: 2 November 1923 to 31 August 31 1927, Document DOCD-5112, 1992 (1927), compact disc. Transcribed by Nick Schillace.

only the melody notes are stopped with the slide, with the exception of the F in measure 7 and the lead up in the bass in measure 16. The F in measure 7 is not marked as such, but it is an example of a neutral third, due to the nature in which the slide approaches and leaves the note. The hammer-on from A to B, first occurring in the omitted pick up measure but again throughout, is likely stopped with the slide, as is the pull off in measures 11 to 12. The example is good for a general sense of slide technique against a stagnant harmony, in this case the tonic. The bass notes do not need to be stopped, since the strings have been retuned. Therefore, the slide can move up and down the neck on the upper strings, while the bass notes continue to be plucked on the open strings. When the harmony switches, the slide technique does as well. A transcription of the second section follows:

"Guitar Rag," Sylvester Weaver[25]



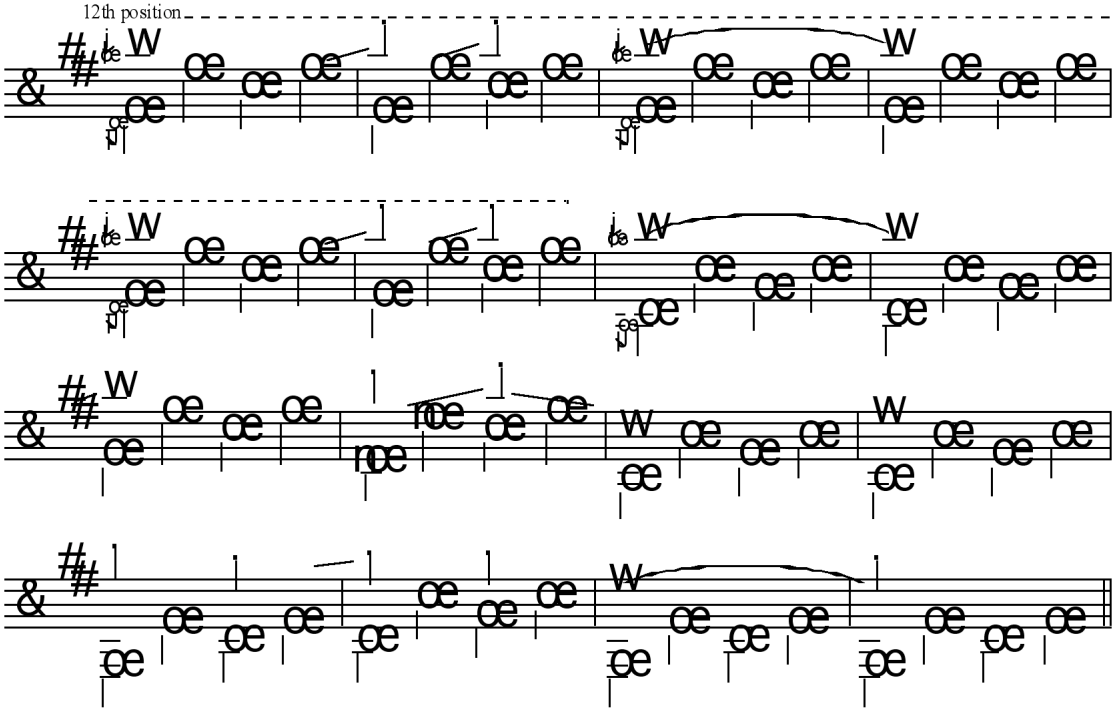
Again, the form is sixteen bars. When the harmony changes to G, the subdominant IV, the bar used for the slide is laid completely across the strings. Fifth position is noted, and this refers to the position on the neck of the guitar at the 5th fret

[25] Weaver, Volume One, Transcription by Nick Schillace.

when the bar covers all the strings. One consideration to acknowledge is that many residual notes, either from overtones or from accidentally striking strings, may ring out. If the guitar is tuned to a particular open chord, in this case D major, when the bar stops at a given position, it will have the same harmonic quality, in this case major. Therefore, in the first eight measures, the progression is V -V - I - I - II - II - V, all major harmonies. This is important to recognize because the guitar promotes the manipulation of *shapes*, and these shapes often delegate particular harmonic relationships. The stricter the tuning, the less freedom a player has, particularly when playing slide. The right hand plucks essentially the same patterns, as the bar moves up and down the neck.

In the final section, a short bridge, Weaver makes less subtle use of the slide:

"Guitar Rag," Sylvester Weaver[26]



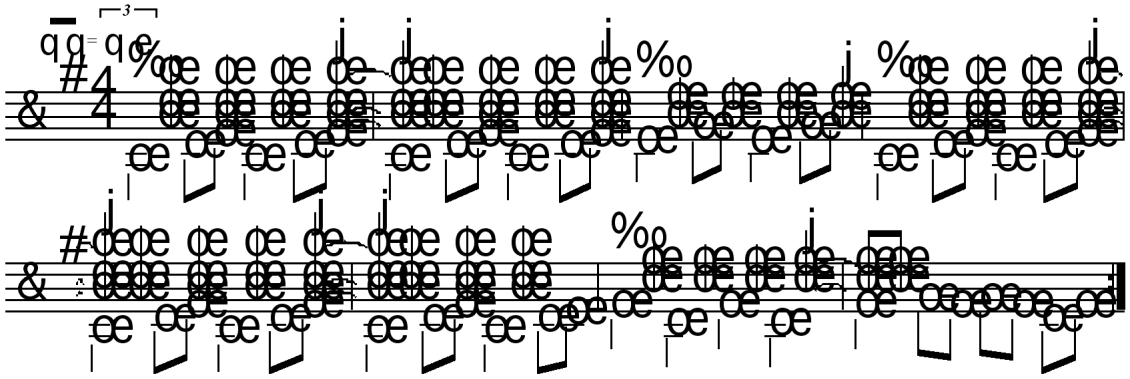
Weaver brings the slide up to 12th position, which is simply the tonic an

[26] Ibid., Transcription by Nick Schillace.

octave higher.[27] Grace notes have been used in addition to the slide markings in order to differentiate between a slide and an actual suggestion of an alternate harmony and melody. The flat 7th, C-natural, is used to approach the tonic in measures 1, 3, and 5, and the subdominant approaches the dominant in measure 7. Weaver clearly utilizes the flat 7 in measure 10, forgoing the use of a grace note.

"Guitar Rag" served as inspiration for Fahey's "Steel Guitar Rag," and it was certainly a good tune to break down the technique not only of slide playing, but also of open D. The musical examples examined so far have been related to the blues, or race, recordings of the 1920s and 1930s, but substantial differences exist between blues and other styles of the period. Fahey stayed away from what he referred to as "Negro music" and focused mainly on bluegrass and old-time musicians. The Blind Willie Johnson record he heard changed his attitude and opened a whole new world. Below is an excerpt of the guitar accompaniment from Johnson's "Praise God I'm Satisfied":

"Praise God I'm Satisfied," Blind Willie Johnson[28]



Johnson is best know for his slide playing, played mostly in open D, about which Fahey says, "You can't play like him– you can't even come close, even when you know what tuning he's in."[29] The above track is in standard tuning and played without the slide. Fahey believed that Johnson's playing without the slide was an

[27] The complete octave of the guitar is from the open strings to the twelfth fret. However, two octaves can be achieved by playing across the strings, low to high, as opposed to lengthwise.

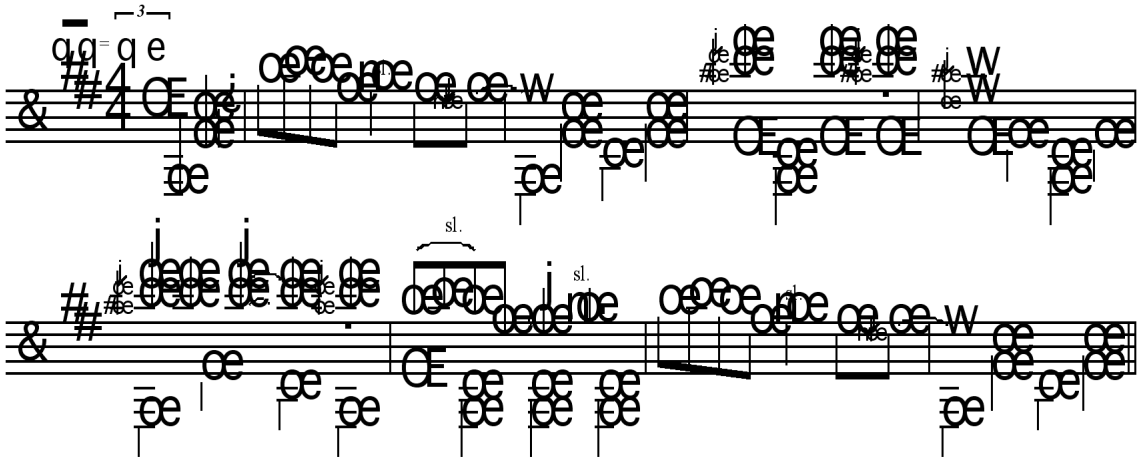
[28] Blind Willie Johnson, The Complete Blind Willie Johnson. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

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

excellent example of syncopation.[30] It is difficult to get a feel for Johnson's intricate syncopation through transcription alone, but seeing the compound eighth note rhythm illustrates the potential for syncopation. Johnson most likely used his thumb for down beats, and his index finger to brush up on the chord. His alternating bass is slightly busier than strict root/5th or root/root patterns, instead outlining the complete triad and propelling the music forward.

Even though Fahey emphasizes Johnson's non-slide playing, looking at an excerpt from a song in which he does play slide will help show an alternative to Weaver's smooth and precise playing, which translates to non-slide playing as well. The opening passage from "Nobody's Fault but Mine" follows:

"Nobody's Fault But Mine," Blind Willie Johnson[31]



The most noticeable aspect of Johnson's slide technique is that he leaves more space in the guitar arrangement, omitting a strict alternating bass accompaniment. This sparse style is more common to blues than the old-time style. Also notice the amount of approach marked by grace notes. Here, Johnson is quicker with the slide, using a technique referred to as "slashing," in which quick stabs are made with the slide. None of the stopped notes are fretted, no matter if they are slid into or not, and again, the flat third is a common note. The melody is outlined by

[30] John Fahey, Introduction to The Best of John Fahey:1959-1977, 19.

[31] Blind Willie Johnson, The Complete Blind Willie Johnson. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

the slide, and after Johnson begins singing, he alternates the melody between his voice and the guitar, and alternates vocal verses with solo breaks. There is tremendous, yet subtle, variation.

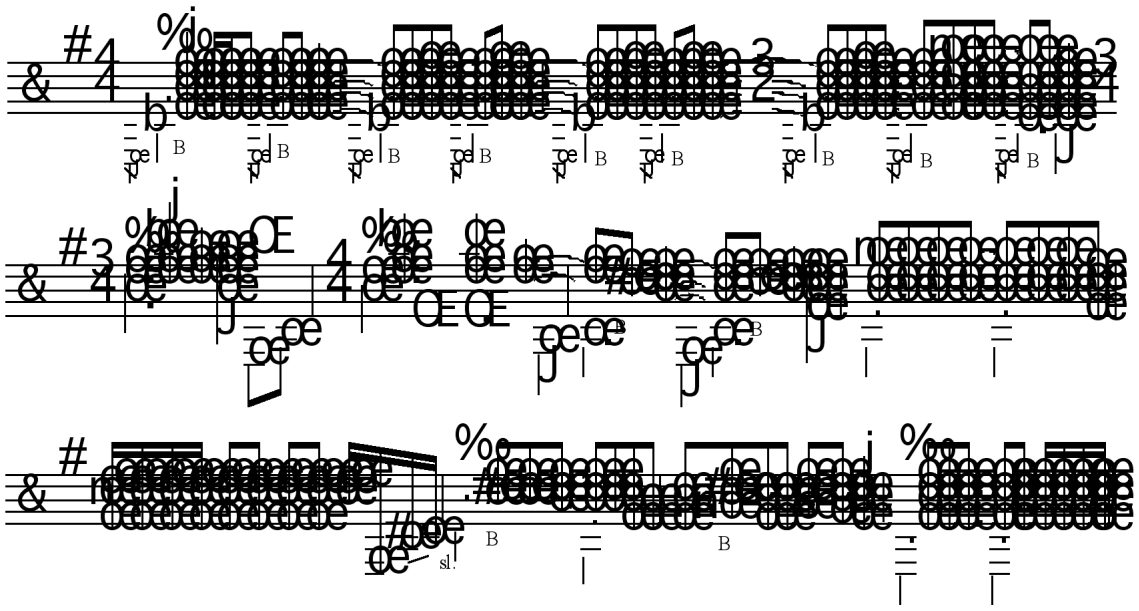
In this example, Johnson borders on a monotonic drone style of bass playing. It is not quite monotonic since he does alternate the bass, but the harmony outlined by the bass never leaves D major. Even in measures 3 and 5 where there is a suggestion of the dominant chord, the bass remains on the root and 5th of D major. It may seem less precise, but Johnson's playing is sophisticated beyond its idiosyncrasies.

Fahey was drawn inexplicably to Johnson not for his guitar playing, but for the incredible level of emotion that he conveys on the recordings. Johnson is often confused with his blues contemporaries. He was a Texas street evangelist, and though he shares rudiments with country blues guitar players, he is better described as a gospel musician. However, it was the emotional content that pulled Fahey into the race recordings, and it was the blues from the Mississippi Delta that would continue to solidify his playing.

Even though Blind Lemon Jefferson may be considered the prototype for the country blues musician, it is Charley Patton that is all but the unanimous figurehead for the stark and emotionally charged music referred to as the Delta blues, despite the more appropriate classification of him as a songster. Fahey's discovery of Patton triggered a life long obsession. He wrote in his essay to the Revenant box set of Patton's complete recorded work, "Patton's recordings have meant so much to me for so long it is almost as if he were a constant companion to me."[32] Below is an excerpt from "High Water Everywhere Part II," the first recording that Fahey uncovered of Patton's:

[32] John Fahey, "Charley Reconsidered, Thirty -Five Years on," in Charley Patton, Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues, 53.

"High Water Everywhere Part II," Charley Patton[33]



"High Water Everywhere" is an example of a piece that was too long for a single 78 side, and therefore is in two parts, one on each side of the disc. Recorded in 1929, the song is topical in content, referring to the April 1927 flood of the Mississippi River that affected Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana that "destroyed lives and properties in its wake."[34] It has been noted that one of the conclusions that Fahey drew from studying Patton's music was that he rarely played a twelve-bar blues form with strict four-beat measures. Adding and subtracting beats, Patton created a rhythmic idiosyncrasy that followed the dynamics of his performance. The changing meters, 3/2 and 3/4, illustrates this technique. Although already seen in McGee's music, Patton used changing meter to add to the emotional intensity of his voice, using the accompaniment to fuel his performance, rather than to contain it.

The accompaniment shares similarities with other blues numbers and guitarists, but according to Stefan Grossman the verse transcribed has a variation only Patton plays.[35] The guitar is in open G or Spanish tuning, a tuning that Patton

[33] Charley Patton, Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues; Transcription from Stefan Grossman, Delta Blues, New York: Oak Publications, 1988 (1968), 28-3 0. Minor corrections made to the transcription by Nick Schillace.

[34] Dick Spottswood, "Going Away to a World Unknown: Song Notes and Transcriptions," from Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues, 63.

[35] Stephan Grossman, Delta Blues, Oak Publication: New York, 1988, 28.

used on over half of his forty-six sides, and he used a capo around the third or fourth fret.[36] From a technical standpoint, Patton's music presents significant challenges for guitar players. His grace note approach to the bass in the first several measures comes from driving down hard on the guitar strings, first striking the low open D on the sixth string, continuing on to the B-flat on the fifth string. This creates an unusual syncopation that is increased by the bending of the B-flat, which pulls the note on the up of the beat. Meanwhile, Patton strikes up in sixteenth- and eighth- note patterns, furthering syncopation. The liberal use of dotted eighth, and sixteenth note rhythms throughout the piece show a sophistication not common with contemporaries of Patton. Never does Patton alternate the bass, preferring mostly half-note rhythms when separating the bass from the harmony, then strumming or picking quicker rhythms against it.

Fahey said in 1996, "I never got Charley Patton's right hand– he used a flatpick and his fingers– but I learned quite a bit from him about chords and harmony, especially dissonances."[37] Patton's use of dissonance in this example is due to his particular manipulation of the flat 3rd and flat 7th, specifically the flat 3rd, B-flat. In the first 4 bars, the tonic chord G major is assumed. It has already been illustrated that the use of the flat or neutral 3rd in this style of music is common, but Patton uses the flat third as his primary bass tone, not for accent, but falling on the strong beats 1 and 3 in the first 3 measures, and the relative beats in measure 4. Even though he accents the B-flat with the root of the chord, the clear sonority is the B-flat in the bass. Throughout the verse, the B-flat is prominent, making a clear dominant 7 out the subdominant C major, and being bent against the B natural in measures 7, 10 and 11. This liberal and pointed use of the flat/neutral 3rd changes the sound of Patton's music significantly.

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[36] Tunings on the guitar are usually classed more by interval than by actual pitch. For example, Vestapol tunings, such as open D and open E are generally considered the same since the order of intervals that make up the tunings are the same (DADF#AD and EBEG#BE). The same goes for Spanish tunings like open G and open A (DGDGBD and EAEAC#E). precise tuning and capoing are due mainly to the tone desired or the vocal range of the performers. Additionally the old recordings being discussed here rarely displayed exact tuning ranges as a result of recording technology and performance consistency.

[37] Stefan Grossman, "Searching for Blind Joe Death," Guitar Player,September 1996, 50.

Fahey's thesis on Patton involves song groupings, charts of tunings, and modal analysis. He transcribed the melody from each of Patton's sides. He charted the tunes by modes, some of his own creation, and reached the conclusion that Patton's sophistication for melody was derived from the different styles of music he performed. Fahey:

> His [Charley Patton] stuff falls into two categories: when he's singing traditional stuff, and his couple of songs which came from Tin Pan Alley or someplace. In some of his pop songs, you'll find major 7ths . . . But when he is singing his old common stuff, he'll either sing a major 6th or minor 7th, never a major seventh. He sings both minor 3rds and major 3rds, usually, so if you have minor and major 3rds and minor 7ths, you are kind of between the mixolydian and dorian modes.[38]

The significance of this analysis is that Fahey came to recognize the melodic and harmonic implications of Patton's music beyond commonly held criteria of blues as using pentatonic scale forms, blue notes, and primary chords. Despite the fact that Fahey came to analyze the music in this manner several years after he first heard it is of no consequence. In the same interview that the above quote was taken from, Fahey says that mixolydian is his favorite mode, and the first few measures of the Patton transcription show that the mode is represented clearly. In the second measure, Patton plays an E-natural in the upper part of the harmony, a major 6th. In the fourth measure, Patton plays the flat 7th as well as the major sixth, against the neutral third in the bass.

Patton's influence supersedes many others since Fahey maintained a relationship with his music at crucial stages of his life: his early formidable years of playing, his graduate work, and as the greatest single collection he ever realized as a record producer in the final productive period of his life. Patton's attraction was beyond musical notes. Like Johnson, Patton can only be experienced through sound. On "High Water Everywhere" Patton pulls, bangs, snaps, and hits the guitar in a manner that is as percussive as it is melodic. This is the emotional content, the anger as Fahey describes it, that was a significant draw for him. Regardless of any de-romanticizing that Fahey wanted to do, it is certain that he saw Patton as a genuine artist. Although the demons that Patton struggled with may not have been

[38] Brooks, 41.

political, social, or universal, they were real nonetheless. They came out clearly in his music, going straight into Fahey and never leaving.

Johnson may be best described as a gospel musician, and Patton as a songster, but Skip James' music undoubtedly belongs to the Delta blues tradition. He serves as yet another important figure in Fahey's vernacular not only for this reason, but also because of the length Fahey went to to find out specific points about James' playing. It is not the search itself, but the fact that Fahey was unable to pick out James' tunes by ear from the record. This invariably led him to the musician himself. Recordings are a crucial link in this dynamic.

James' unusual tuning, open D minor, is actually rather simple when considering its relationship to standard tuning. The guitar is tuned EADGBE, low to high, in standard tuning. Open D minor is tuned DADFAD, low to high. At first glance the tunings seem quite different, but if the D minor tuning is raised a whole step, the new tuning is EGEGBE. When compared with standard tuning, the raised tuning, now open E minor, shares with standard tuning the top three strings. The top strings are most often used for melodies and fills, and therefore all the licks known in standard tuning would be the same in any open minor tuning, regardless of whether it is tuned a whole step high or low. Another logical conclusion to draw to open D minor is that it is simply open D major, with the F-sharp lowered to F-natural. James acquired the tuning from his childhood friend and musical partner Henry Stuckey, who had apparently learned it from soldiers while serving in World War I.[39]

James used tunings other than open D minor, but the combination of open D minor with his near falsetto voice made him one of the most distinctive blues musicians. The eerie and bare quality of James' music shares with Fahey's own compositions a deliberateness that is sometimes lacking from guitar arrangements that use more complicated figures. Many themes from James' music can be found in Fahey's. Below is an excerpt from James' 1930 recording of "Devil Got My Woman," James' signature tune:

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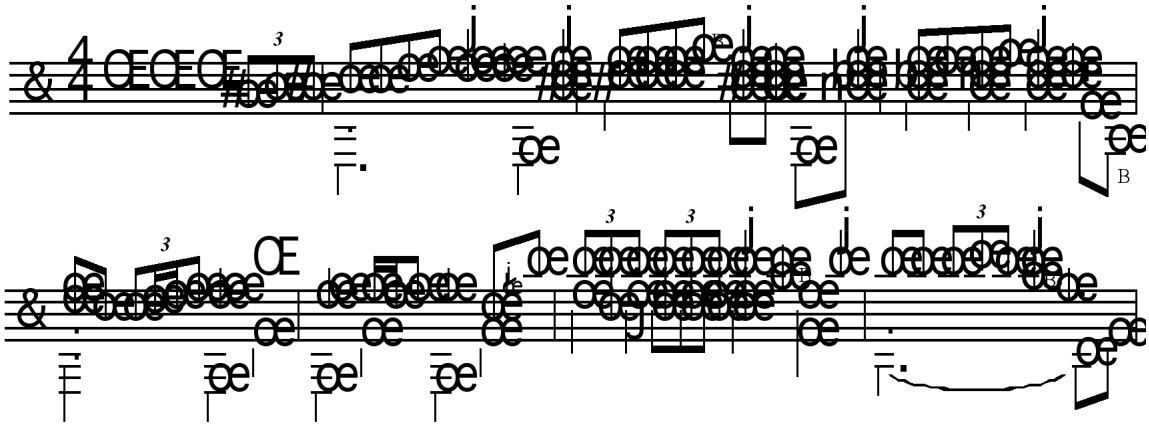
[39] Stephan Calt, liner notes to Skip James, The Complete Early Recodings: 1930, Yazoo 2009, 1994 (1930), compact disc.

"Devil Got My Woman," Skip James.[40]

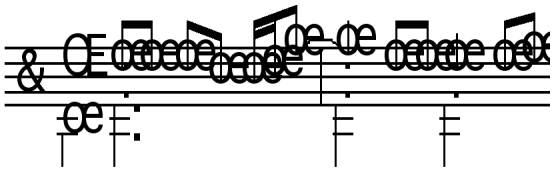


This is the opening solo break without singing. It may seem logical to put in a major key signature, but it has been left out to illustrate the ambiguity of tonality which James uses. After the initial three-note lead in, James plays a four-measure descending figure heading towards the tonic in measure 5. This figure outlines a standard blues turnaround and is based on a dominant 7th shape on the guitar. For the remaining measures James stays on the tonic while playing the bass, plucking either an alternating or quasi-alternating bass. James never plays an F-sharp outright. He manipulates both the flat 3rd and flat 7th in all eight measures, but the lack of a definitive major 3rd prevents a major tonality from sounding. When combined with the natural resonance of the guitar and the neutral thirds when bending, the overall sound yielded is closer to minor.

The first verse continues to confuse things by outlining a minor dominant in the first two measures:

[40] Skip James, The Complete Early Recordings; Transcription based on Stefan Grossman's from Delta Blues. Grossman transcribed the piece in open E minor and called it "cross-note." This same description is found in Calt's liner notes. It is uncertain which came first. What is certain is that James clearly has the guitar tuned a whole step lower, and therefore the transcription has been transposed down to suit the recording.

"Devil Got My Woman," Skip James.[41]



Even though the flat 3rd is common when used against a dominant in this style of music, it is rarely played without the major third being present in the harmony of the dominant (V) chord. In addition, it is usually bent or slurred. In the above example neither is the case. James alternates between the minor dominant figure and the neutral tonic for a total of ten measures in the verse while he sings the melody. The song consists of the ten measures sung by James, followed by guitar breaks consisting of two bars. The subdominant is never played.

Fahey and James may not have gotten along, but Fahey was drawn emotionally to James' music in the same way he had been to Patton's. Fahey said of James in 1996, "He'd had a hard life, so I can't put him down for that. The way his family treated him– they did these horrible things to him. Now we know that if you do these things to a kid, he's going to turn out badly."[42] Fahey's own abuse may not have been a conscious motive for him to seek out these recordings when he was young, but the way he felt about his life in general was. Fahey came of age at precisely the right time to fall in with this music the way he did. However, it was certainly not his only choice. The music he chose found him, and the fact that it had been preserved on records for him to go out and find enabled him to construct a custom vernacular to suit his needs. Not every suburban contemporary of Fahey's found the same solace or made the same gains from the music as he did, but it was exactly the right foundation for him to build upon. In retrospect, many other connections surfaced, revealing a connection that goes beyond superficial musical techniques.

Just like Delta blues, found primarily in the South, country blues, which is

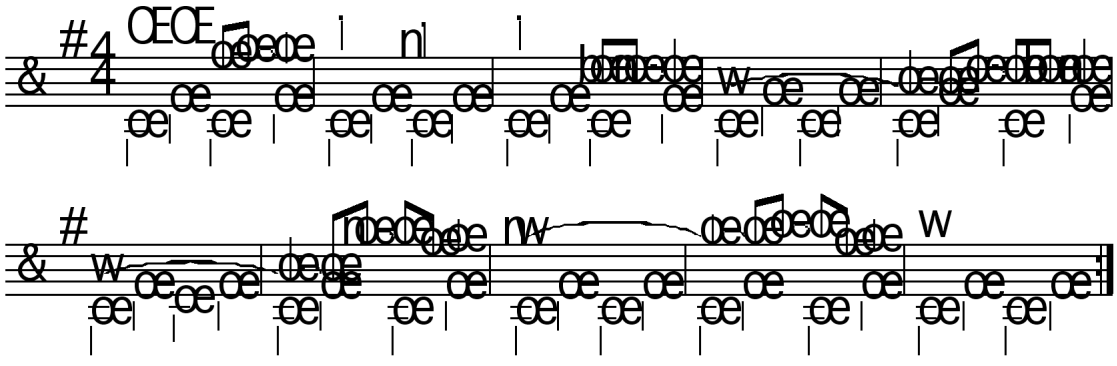
[41] Ibid

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

usually traced more towards the southeast in Virginia and North Carolina, has some distinctive qualities. The difference between Delta blues and country or Piedmont blues is that country blues relies more exclusively on the alternating bass style of the old-time guitar players like Sam McGee. Ragtime guitar also shares the more consistent alternating bass. Of course none of these styles was absolute. The players from the Mississippi Delta made regular use of alternating bass, but enough examples exist to show some stereotypical idiosyncrasies that deviate from the technique. Recordings had as much of an effect on musicians in the 1920s and 1930s as they did after World War II. Many players in different regions were proficient in several styles, but different styles still exist. It is difficult to find an overall consensus on any of the styles.

Good examples of country and ragtime guitar players are Elizabeth Cotten, Etta Baker, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, and Reverend Gary Davis. All of these players can be seen as influential on Fahey's playing to various degrees, but one important example is Mississippi John Hurt. Like Patton, he is a figurehead of the light syncopated guitar accompaniment typified by county blues musicians. Hurt made some 78 recordings for Okeh in 1928, but stayed retired for over thirty years until he began a second career in the 1960s. Below is a transcription of Hurt's song,"Spike Driver Blues:"

"Spike Driver Blue's," Mississippi John Hurt.[43]



The accompaniment is spartan and illustrates the subtle simplicity of Hurt's

[43] Harry Smith, ed., The American Anthology of Folk Music Volume Three; Transcription by Nick Schillace.

style. Not all of Hurt's guitar parts rely on a single open G chord like "Spike Driver's Blues," but even without a change in harmony, Hurt is able to offer a complete accompaniment. The difference between this style and a guitar player like McGee's style is that the melody is kept simple, and the melody is picked out against the strict bass. Rarely are the chords brushed or strummed with the thumb going down or the fingers coming up. It is kept clean and uncomplicated.

The emphasis should be on the steady alternating bass, which deviates only slightly in measures 3-5, using a major 6th and perfect 5th to counter the melody. Again, the flat 3rd against the major third is utilized in measures 3 and 5, both sounding together due to the use of an open string for the B-natural. The flat seven is used in measures 7-9.

Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Willie Johnson, and Charley Patton (as the Masked Marvel) are all artists featured on the Harry Smith Anthology. However, the final example of Fahey's guitar vernacular comes from a group that appears four times on the Anthology, more than any other single artist or group: The Carter Family. The Carter Family consisted of A.P., Sarah, and Maybelle Carter, and recorded for three decades beginning in 1927. Happy Traum wrote in 1973, "Very few singing or instrumental groups in the history of folk and country music have had the impact or the influence that The Carter Family has had on American popular music."[44] Maybelle Carter's guitar style was definitely not lost on Fahey, who said of her:

> I can think of no more valuable musical learning and listening experience than to listen often and repeatedly over the years (even after you think you are good) to the guitar phrasing of Maybelle Carter's Spanish and Hawaiian guitar on the many, many recordings by the Carter family. It has been more than twenty-five years since I opened my uncle's gramophone and heard my first Carter Family record. I have been listening to these records for all this time and I am still learning from them, and still enjoying them greatly. Maybelle Carter's guitar style, for me, is a *definition* of classical American musical economy.[45]

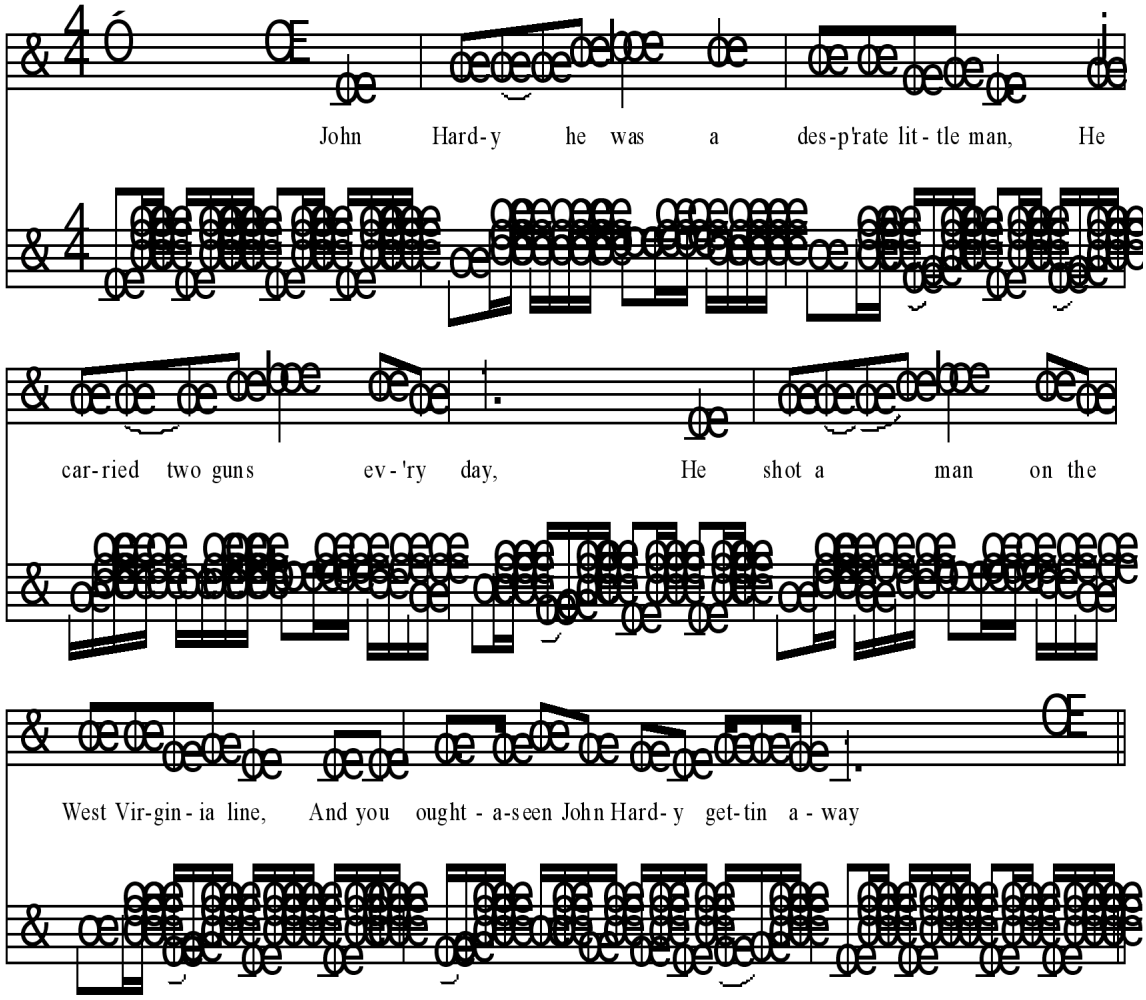
Carter's style is significantly different than the others presented here and bears including. Carter played the guitar by picking out the melody on the bass

[44] Happy Traum, Flatpick Country Guitar, New York: Oak Publications, 1973, 29.

[45] John Fahey, introduction to The Best of John Fahey: 1959-1977, 18.

strings of the guitar, while accompanying with chords by brushing up with her index finger. Her style is linked to modern flatpicking, but she utilized a fingerstyle approach, using a thumb and fingerpick. A transcription to the first verse from “John Hardy” follows:

“John Hardy,” The Carter Family.[46]



[46] Harry Smith, ed., American Anthology of Folk Music Volume One; Transcription from Traum, Flatpicking Guitar, 30-31.

The transcription is self explanatory. The melody has been given to compare with the guitar figure. The guitar transcription is not in two parts, but the melody can be followed in the low bass notes. The upper note collections that repeat, like the GCE in measure 1 represent harmonic accompaniment. The melody is always played by the thumb alone, without any harmonic embellishment and played directly with the melody note. Slight rhythmic variations occur, like the A on beat two in measure 2 or the E and D on beat four in measure 8.

It would be ridiculous to imply that all of Fahey's guitar vernacular has been thoroughly introduced. Each and every one of the artists examined so far could further be studied in greater detail, and each opens up another unique thread of musicians to be followed within their own general style. Harry Smith's Anthology alone includes over eighty-four tracks, most of which are by distinct groups and artists. Fahey's cultivated style was not completely derived from these musicians alone, and it is difficult to place the influence of concert music in context with the other aspects of Fahey's vernacular. In one regard, Fahey claimed an early and fundamental relationship with concert music, one that arguably predates his discovery of blues and old-time music. But his lack of a traditional background in concert music, one in the academic sense, makes it difficult to trace what would be considered a traditional foundation in this style. That is not to say that concert music is only a superficial influence. This research makes absolutely no attempt at substantiating the myth that an academic background is necessary for legitimacy in any style of music, concert or otherwise. On the contrary, it attempts to present an alternative to this belief, since the idea does not make significant amends to the changes in culture over time, or the challenge of defining a new culture like the United States, which is a fundamental point of this research.

The major problem is that in the tradition of concert music, musical literacy and repertoire are generally accepted as absolute prerequisites. This is because concert music is just that– music for a concert, as opposed to music for a phonograph recording. But the music Fahey took from records, the music from which he developed his technique, was largely a form of music that before the age of

copyright and folk collectors was rarely written down. Even after it became a habit to do so, the performers themselves were rarely literate in the traditional sense, revealed by Sharp's account of the bewilderment of a traditional musician when shown a transcription of a song he had just sung, replying: "Well I hardly recognize it.[47]

Also to consider is that much of this music was composed and manufactured specifically for recording. It has been shown that this fundamentally affected how it turned out. It was not until much later, when researchers started to look back, that it was clear that much of the music captured on 78s were audio "snapshots" of forms that far exceeded the limitations of disc.

However separated by these criteria, the different types of music that formed Fahey's vernacular share a fundamental similarity that transcends many of these differences; he came to them the same way, recordings, and took from them what he needed to make his own music. It is clear that Fahey's fundamental technique, that is the actual way in which he physically plays his instrument, is derived straight from blues and old-time guitar players. There is relevance in this obvious correlation, since the guitar, more than any other instrument, has a multitude of techniques that are idiosyncratic to whatever culture and style of music the instrument may be found in. Fahey did not simply play solo or fingerstyle guitar. He certainly did not play "classical" concert guitar. His playing was linked specifically to the style of playing most commonly found in the United States during the early part of the twentieth century. Also, much of his harmonic, melodic, and formal influences are derived from these same sources.

Fahey's interest in concert music runs a larger gamut. Admittedly there is more history behind this style, and the general approach is to lump all the music together. Fahey made no special allegiance to any school, composer, or period. Romantic and twentieth-century composers have been suggested, but even within that spectrum the styles and techniques are so broad and varied, particularly during the twentieth century, that no clear emphasis can be examined.

[47] Karpeles, Preface to English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians Volumes One and Two,London: Oxford, 1952, xviii.

Instead of bringing new criteria into the foreground, it would be logical to address outside influences as they relate or differ when compared to the guitar-derived influences discussed already. But this is also cloudy. Fahey said he learned a lot about harmony by listening to classical music.[48] The assumption would be that the styles of music that Fahey listened to other than concert music strictly adhered to a basic harmonic formula. It has been illustrated that, at least subtly, this is simply not the case. Nearly all the musicians use basic primary harmonies, but as is the case with Patton, melodic and modal extensions color the basic triads beyond the typical major or dominant 7 usage. In the case of James, primary major harmony is eschewed, utilizing instead not only a minor tonic, but a minor dominant as well.

Non-diatonic melody, or dissonance, is another possible addition, but again this is not exclusive to music outside of the vernacular discussed. Fahey's particular use of dissonance was best described by Peter Lang when he said, "Fahey treated dissonance as most people treat melody."[49] Fahey achieved much of his dissonant playing by taking a guitar lick or fingering learned off an old record and moving it to different positions around the neck. This approach lends itself to the guitar, an instrument that uses shapes as a fundamental technique. It also promotes the use of the ear, since by moving shapes around the fingerboard, a player can compose without considering what the ramifications might be on paper.

Most of the music examined has been based on guitar accompaniments and not solo pieces, but the melody is generally outlined as well. The predominance of not just the flat 3rd and 7th, but of the neutral 3rd, bring a non-diatonic presence into the music as well as a non-Western influence. The non-Western influence, one utilizing quarter-tones, is furthered illustrated by the use of special techniques such as bends and the use of a slide, techniques commonly found in Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, African and various other musical traditions. Special instrumental techniques are akin to developments in twentieth-century music, as well as an interest in non-Western music, specifically Eastern influences. It should also be mentioned that Fahey shared with twentieth-century concert composers an interest in

[48] Brooks, 41.

[49] Dale Miller, "Reinventing the Steel," Acoustic Guitar, January/February 1992, 48.

manipulating the studio both for sounds, as with musique concrete, as well as for production, as with Takoma and Revenant.

Another possible difference would be the vast dynamic range and tempo fluctuations in concert music afforded through a composer or conductor, and the multitude of subtle tonal shifts provided by an orchestra of instruments. Fahey said, "I play like a romantic conductor, slowing things down, speeding them up– the use of dynamics."[50] Patton's subtle shift in meter, as well as tempo and dynamic flexibility, are similar techniques. Johnson was able to create a multitude of textures with just his voice and slide guitar. Individually there may only be relative examples, but taken collectively, the amount of various techniques afforded by the musicians on the 78s is as staggering as any orchestra.

An assumption may be made that an underlying argument in this research is that all music, if distilled into basic conceptual forms, shares collective traits. There may be something to that conclusion, but when comparing the various aspects of Fahey's vernacular, there is one major difference between the pre-war 78s and concert music. Fahey made it clear that he desired to elevate the steel string guitar to concert status. It was not that he simply wanted to perform in a concert setting. He wanted the music itself to posses the long thematic development more akin to orchestras. Even though the 78s defined the length of a performance within a much shorter time frame, Fahey knew that the difference between a musical concert, and a performer who played songs for a dance all night long, were fundamentally different. Fahey said, "See, the idea of a guy sitting down in 1929– your writers on blues never write about this– the basic idea of a guy or a band in the country sitting down or standing up on a stage in front of a concert audience just never happened."[51]

Symphonies, experienced through recordings, led Fahey to understand that the two styles were different in this manner. Fahey may have come to realize that the music he was learning to play from actually exceeded the short 78 side, but at the

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

[51] Ian Penman, "The Passage of Time in Open G and Other Stories," New Musical Express, 1 September 1979, incomplete source.

time it is hard to claim he did. The basic vocabulary was set in these short recordings, but Fahey's ear told him that concert music went to a level that was longer, and due to the length, provided more opportunity for development, and therefore more introspective listening. By the time Fahey had begun listening to concert music, the LP was becoming the standard, and the longer sides provided for longer passages. However, the only way this affected the 78 recordings was that more of these were able to be assembled in a single collection, like in Harry Smith's Anthology. Longer and multi-thematic development is the key to Fahey's connection to concert music. With more development comes a more sophisticated use of non-diatonic harmony, dissonance, and thematic shifts. It is not simply the length of the compositions, something Fahey would work towards, but the overall sophistication of these developing traits. He wrote in 1977, "[A musician] must broaden [his/her] musical education, and spend many, many hours over a period of years, listening to and digesting symphonies."[52] A final quote from Fahey, taken with the information presented so far, will help make the vernacular study clear: "I grew up on classical music and my basic format retains classical form. The material of the form imitates or extends American folk music."[53]

The Music of John Fahey

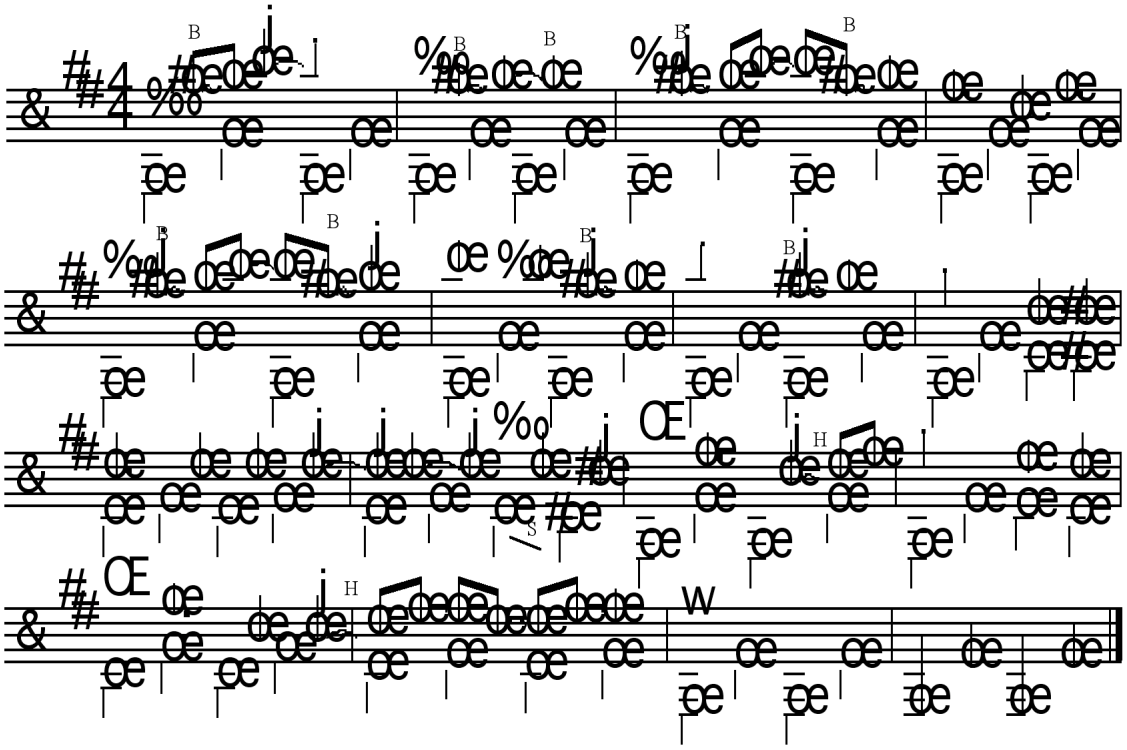
The early recodings Fahey made for Bussard are helpful for getting a glimpse of Fahey's early technique. Even though some cuts were humorous, the rudimentary style in which Fahey plays is an excellent place to start. Fahey cut over forty sides for Bussard, and although it is assumed the Fonotone sessions predated other Fahey recordings, some may have been recorded later than the Blind Joe Death record. The cuts he did as Blind Thomas are certainly some of his earliest, and illustrate his early technique well. A telling statement made by Fahey while assuming the Blind Thomas guise reveals not only how Fahey perceived the music at the time, but also most likely how others who had fallen under its spell in the early to mid 50s had, "This is Blind Thomas. I'm goin' to play a little good music– pick the guitar

[52] Fahey, Introduction to The Best of John Fahey, 1959-1977, 15.

[53] Ibid., 11-12.

with my fingers. It's good and you don't hear it anymore around here much because it's good. You don't hear much that's any good anymore."[54] Excerpts from the pieces Blind Thomas Blues No.1, No. 3, and No. 4 follow:

"Blind Thomas Blues No.1, "John Fahey.[55]



"Blind Thomas Blues No.1" is played in open D without a slide. The sixteen bars are repeated with variations throughout the cut. The melody is a popular one for Vestapol tuning and Fahey would eventually perfect this theme as "Poor Boy Long Ways from Home."[56] While performing, Fahey makes use of bends, hammer-ons, and slides. The bends use the flat 3rd exclusively; E-sharp has been used to ease reading. The alternating bass is similar to Weaver's, since the tuning is the same, and

[54] John Fahey [Blind Thomas], "Blind Thomas Blues Number 2," Fonotone 507-B, circa 1958, 78 transfer. Copies of several Fonotone recodings were provided by Barry Hansen on CD-R. The copies included the catalog numbers but the dates are unclear.

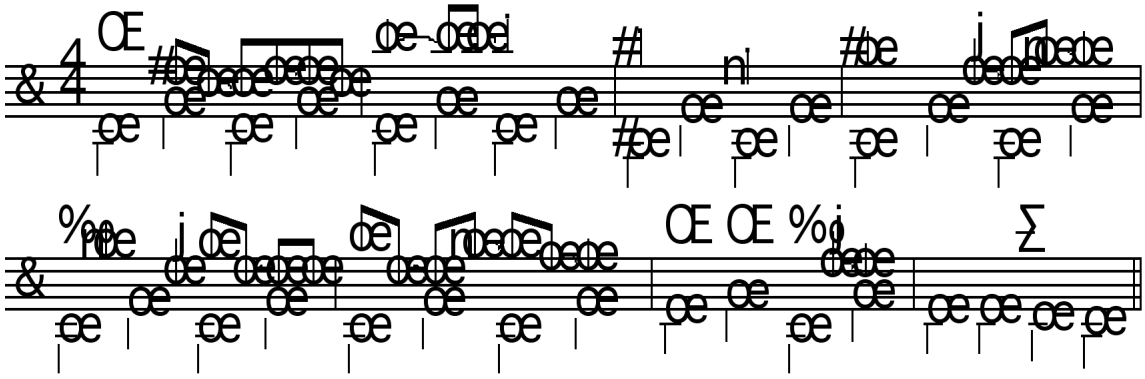
[55] John Fahey [Blind Thomas], "Blind Thomas No.1," Fonotone 507-A, circa 1958, 78 transfer. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

[56] John Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death. An astute reader may note a bit of contradiction, utilizing a piece that Fahey ended up reconstructing at a later date. This is the case, but the overall melody and structure of this piece does not owe its origins to Fahey himself, rather being somewhat of a standard.

except for the transitions on beats 3 and 4 of measures 8 and 10, it remains rock solid. Fahey uses a twelve-string guitar on this and some of the other Fonotone recordings, an instrument he rarely used afterwards. Fahey speaks throughout, referring to all those who have the blues. He ends the piece by remarking, "We're all in nothingness now."

"Blind Thomas Blues No. 3" is in standard tuning, and it is closer to old-time fingerpickers like McGee. The piece is similar to "Goin' Down the Road Feelin' Bad," and it is possible that Fahey heard Etta Baker's only recording at the time on the collection Folk Songs and Instrumentals from the Southern Appalachians.[57] Baker's playing, like that of Hurt and McGee, featured yet another idiosyncratic twist on alternating bass syncopation, and ED Denson notes that Baker's playing was a big influence on Fahey.[58] The first section is transcribed below:

"Blind Thomas Blues No.3," John Fahey [Blind Thomas][59]



The progression is VI7-VI7-II7-II7-V7-V7-I-(I) in the key of C major. The dominant 7th chord qualities at this point should be no surprise, as well as the flat 3rds and 7ths. The first inversion D7 chord in measures 3 and 4 is very common to guitar literature. The technique used to fret the D7 chord in this style is by wrapping the left hand thumb over the neck. This particularly way of playing is unacceptable in traditional "classical" guitar literature, but certain circumstances in American fingerstyle

[57] Various, Folk Songs and Instrumental Music of the Southern Mountains, Mercury 97950,1956.

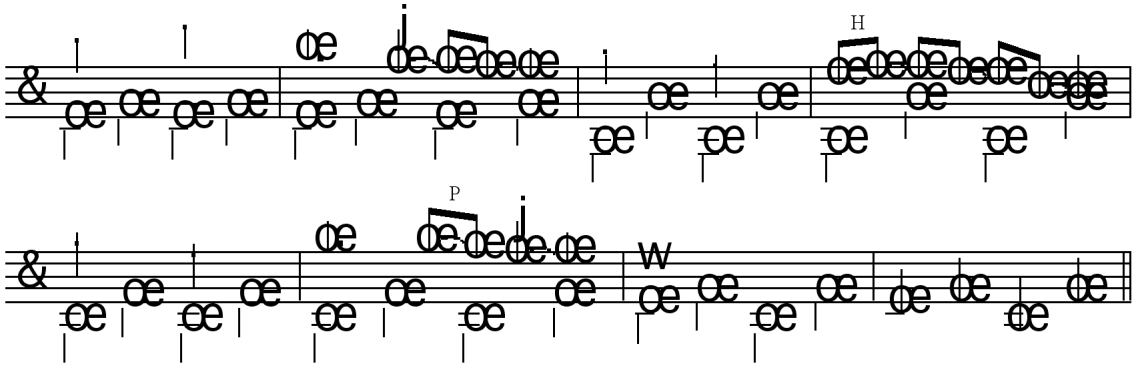
[58] Miller, 42; interview with Nick Schillace 2 April 2002.

[59] John Fahey [Blind Thomas], "Blind Thomas Blues No.3," 635-A, circa 1958, 78 transfer; Transcription by Nick Schillace.

guitar make any other option impossible. The descending bass in measure 8 is the same as the omitted pick up figure.

The second section features the same basic primary chord shapes as in "Buckdancer's Choice." The transcription follows:

"Blind Thomas Blues No. 3," John Fahey [Blind Thomas].[60]

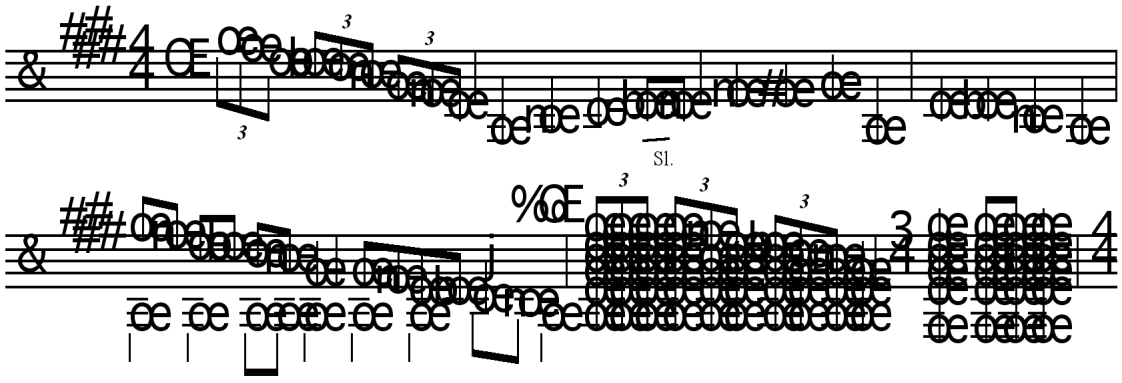


This melody is also similar to "Nobody's Business but Mine," but does not owe its origin to either exclusively. The technique of utilizing the fretting hand thumb is again illustrated in measures 3 and 4 with the F chord. In this case, a traditional use of a full bar chord would make the hammer-on from C to D difficult, and is a common melodic idea found in this style. Another technique unique to the guitar is the pull-off in measure 6 where the the F natural pulls off to the E, and the bass is struck simultaneous with the E, which is not plucked, in order to ensure a clean alternating bass and smooth melodic flow. This happens quite often in this style.

A final example from "Blind Thomas" links Fahey a little closer with blues styles that feature less alternating bass. As mentioned, Fahey covered several tunes from blues musicians and songsters, but "Blind Thomas Blues No. 4" features some passages that use some general figures, rather than direct quotations. The introductory passage follows:

[60] Ibid.

"Blind Thomas Blues No. 4," John Fahey [Blind Thomas].[61]



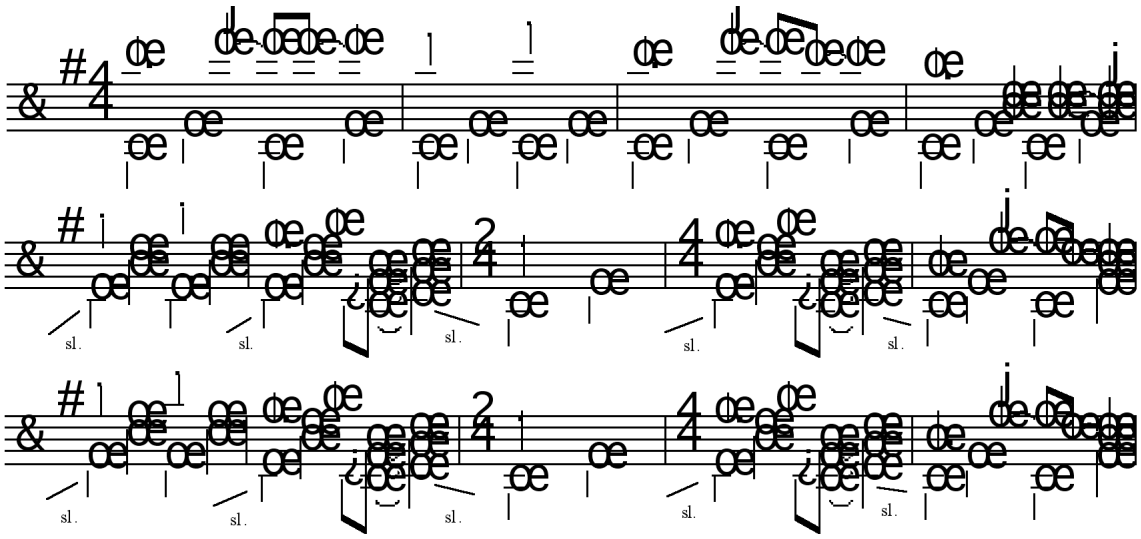
This is Thomas' "happy blues," played in the key of E major, despite the accidentals. The entire piece is a bit of a hodgepodge of blues licks and changes. Near the end Fahey does utilize a more straightforward alternating bass pattern, but the introduction is more sparse and less continuous. The descending triplet run is typical both rhythmically as well as per the style. The flat 5th (B-flat) is slightly less common than the flat 3rd (G-natural) and flat 7th (D-natural), both clearly present, but in general is not unusual, especially in an E blues. It does add a quality that is somewhat darker in nature, and Fahey's liberal use of it adds a sound that is lacking in blues that use less of the flat 5th. The chromatic lines, both ascending and descending, acknowledge an affinity for a more "outside" sound. Measures 5 and 6 are highly syncopated, in a "bouncing" style that alludes to Patton, as do the triplet chord strums in measure 7. Note the descending melodic line in the upper voice on beats 2 and 3. The triplet rhythms, single line phrases, and ambiguity due to altered tones reflect the influence of James as well.

Fahey also displayed some early slide technique on these recordings. Frank Hutchinson was another important influence on Fahey. Hutchinson played lap slide the same way Fahey eventually would. A transcription of "Weissman Blues," which utilizes the same melody and changes as Hutchinson's "Worried Blues," first

[61] John Fahey [Blind Thomas], "Blind Thomas Blues No. 4," Fonotone 635-B, circa 1958, 78 transfer Transcription by Nick Schillace.

recorded in 1926, follows:[62]

"Weissman Blues," John Fahey [Blind Thomas].[63]



The piece is in open G. Some liberties were taken with the preciseness of the transcription, due to the looseness in which Fahey plays. Like slide in open D, the position of the guitar on the neck determines the harmony. In this example, Fahey maintains primary harmony exclusively and uses repeating right hand picking patterns throughout the changes. For example, the right hand pattern used in measure 1 is the same as in measures 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 13, with slight variation in measures 6, 8, 11, 13. Fahey improvises rhythmically several times through the changes, a technique he mentions as a fundamental aspect of his playing.[64] Fahey increases and decreases the tempo, and implements less orthodox slides and fills, generating more sound out of the slide than specific notes. A special technique he uses frequently is a quick descending fill beginning at the twelfth position and continuing down the neck.

What this example illustrates best is Fahey's early attempts at deconstructing and pushing the limits of this material. "Weissman Blues" is one of several Fonotone

[62] Frank Hutchinson, Complete Recorded Works Volume One: 1926-1929, Document DOCD 8003, 1997 (1926), compact disc.

[63] John Fahey [Blind Thomas], " Weissman Blues," Fonotone 6148-A, circa 1958, CDR transfers; Transcription by Nick Schillace.

[64] Higgins, incomplete source.

pieces that Barry Hansen felt were particularly inventive. In a note accompanying the Fonotone transfers, Hansen confided that when assembling the Rhino Anthology, he wanted to include "Weissman Blues," only to be outvoted.[65] Many other of the Fonotone pieces show Fahey both mimicking, and manipulating his influences. "Paint Brush [Branch] Blues" is a slide piece in which Fahey bounces a paintbrush against the strings instead of plucking them, and "Wanda Russel Blues" seems to find Fahey utilizing a flatpick. This is quite possible given the fact that Patton used a flatpick, but no recordings other than possibly the Fonotone records feature Fahey using this technique.[66]

Fahey's playing on Blind Joe Death exhibited considerably greater control and precision than on the Fonotone recordings, even the original 1959 cuts. Some time after the original Blind Joe Death sessions, Fahey settled on a right hand technique that he would use until the mid to late 1980s. Fahey:

> I use a large size dobro thumbpick, and my fingerpicks are plastic imitation tortoiseshell . . . I pick with two fingers, index and middle. I sort of anchor my wrist on the face of the guitar. I hold the guitar steady with my left hand. I fret some with my thumb. Generally I pick fairly close to the bridge. [67]

Fahey's later pieces differ from the Fonotone examples in two regards: added length, and a defined attempt at constructing a composition. The first track, "On Doing an Evil Deed Blues," makes good use of familiar blues ideas in the style of Robert Johnson. Fahey's arrangement is an early glimpse as to how he was beginning to shape his vernacular material. The opening section follows:

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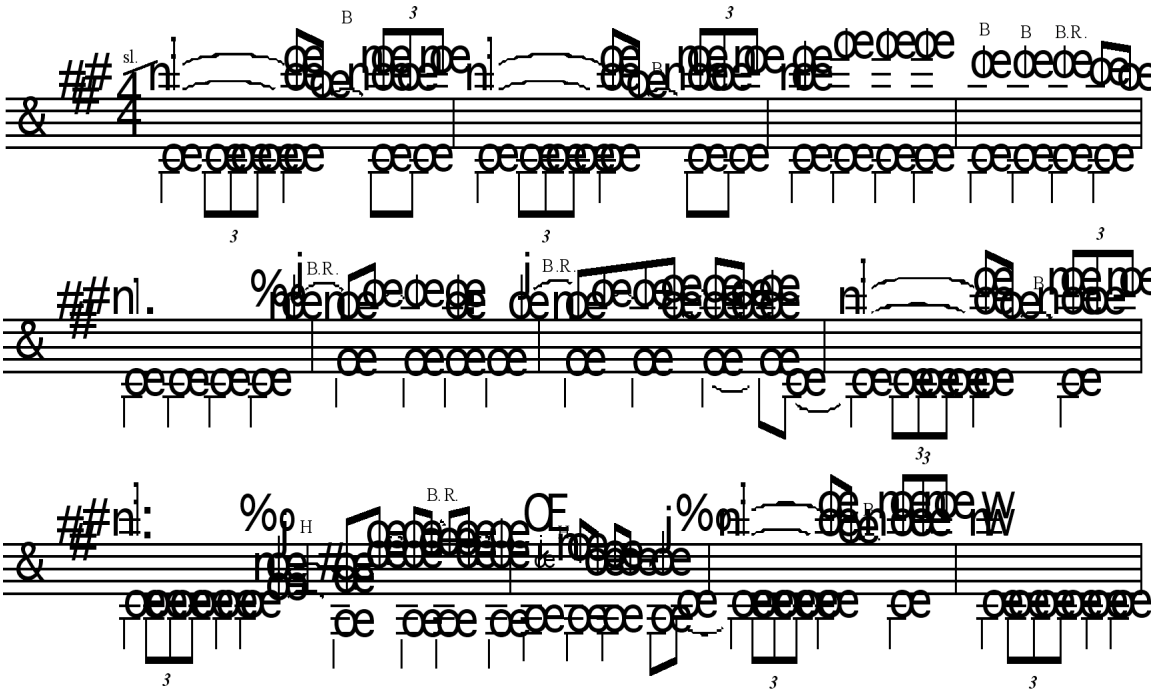
[65] Barry Hansen, note accompanying Fonotone CDR transfers.

[66] John Fahey, "Paint Brush [Branch] Blues," Fonotone 611-A, circa 1958, CDR transfer. Barry Hansen noted that Fahey told him that that he piece should have been titled "Paint Branch Blues."; "Wanda Russel's Blues," Fonotone 610-A, circa 1958, CDR transfer.

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

"On Doing an Evil Deed Blues," John Fahey.[68]



The entire piece is in standard tuning, key of A. The first section is thirteen measures long. Fahey enters by sliding into the G-natural and C-sharp, the flat 7th and major 3rd respectively. These notes are slid together every time, although only the first instance is marked as such. Fahey bends into the flat 7th from F-sharp on beats 3 and 4. This is different than what has been examined so far. The primary use of bends has emphasized the flat 3rd and flat 7th in order to blur tonality and create neutral tones. By bending the major 6th into the flat 7th, Fahey creates more melodic movement that emphasizes melody rather than neutrality, and underscores the dominant 7th harmony. The second G-natural in measure 1 is held from the bend, not fretted on a separate fret.

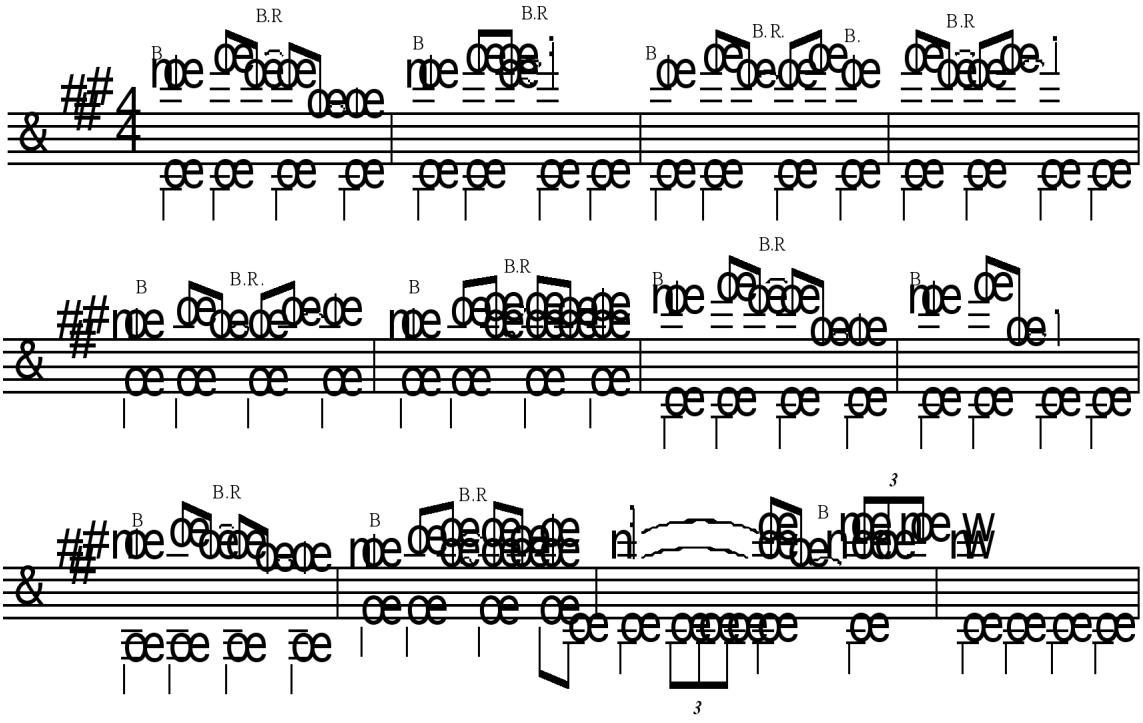
In measure 4, Fahey bends the B into C natural, again choosing to bend into the blue note rather than to bend from it. On beat 3, Fahey bends and releases the

[68]Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death, 1967 version. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

B, notated as B.R., moving from B to C-natural (neutral) to B again, then descends to G-natural, the dominant 7 of the dominant chord D. Even though Fahey bends the F-natural against the D in the bass on beat 4 of measure 5, he releases the bend and plucks the F natural against the melody notes A and B, defining the D harmony as minor. In measures 10 and 11 Fahey makes melodic use of hammer-ons and bends moving from the E7 to D7 in first inversion before returning to the A.

Fahey repeats this first section once more, the second time with slight variations, clearly maintaining the melody from the first time. He then plays a second section, this time twelve measures long and following a typical twelve-bar blues in A. It is transcribed below:

"On Doing an Evil Deed Blues," John Fahey.[69]

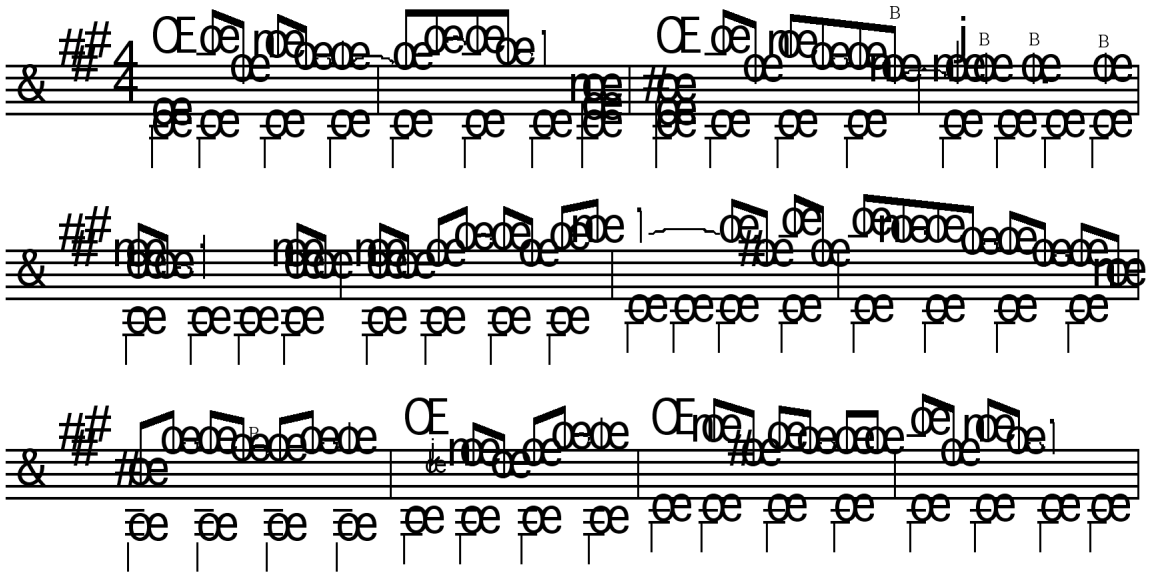


The use of the guitar is key to this passage. The notes in the melody are the same for each chord, the flat 3rd and 5th of each harmony, and they are treated to the same technique of bending. Fahey plays the two notes on the top strings of the

[69]Ibid.

guitar, moving the shape along the neck for each chord. As he changes the bass, he finds the next place on the neck to bend, utilizing the same “cell” of notes as is appropriate. Since both notes are held throughout the bend, they both sound. The flat 3rd of each chord provides much instability, bending and releasing but never fully reaching a major 3rd. After playing through one time, Fahey moves onto yet a third section, again a twelve-bar blues which uses some of the earlier material. It appears below:

“On Doing an Evil Deed Blues,” John Fahey.[70]

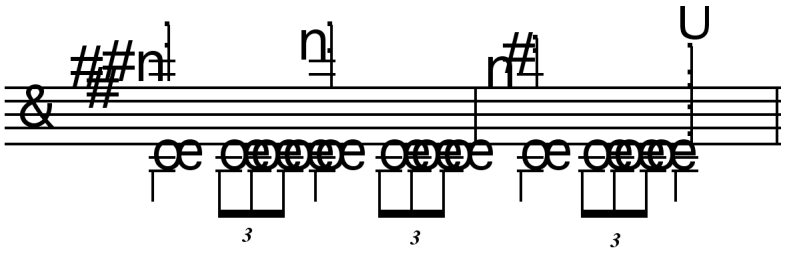


The main idea to recognize is the development of the earlier idea. The D7 and E7 phrases return from the first section, but the melody is more developed overall, and even though Fahey uses familiar licks and chord shapes, the melody in each section is distinctive, even though varied.

The complete form of the piece is AABCCB. Fahey uses the opening measure as a melodic link between the second C section and the final B. He tags the final two measures with this ending:

[70] Ibid.

"On Doing an Evil Deed Blues," John Fahey.[71]

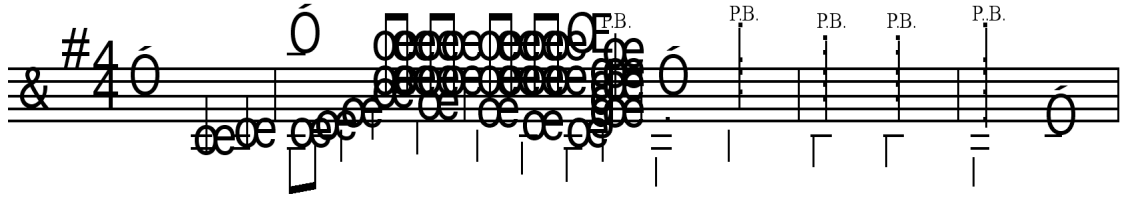


Like McGee, Fahey used similar material to form a longer piece. However, it can be argued that Fahey's sense of melody and form had less to do with variation than with developing a larger theme out of smaller ideas. Even though the primary tones used were the blue notes, Fahey used a different approach for bending notes, as well as bending and releasing the notes, in order to provide further melodic contour.

Blind Joe Death also showcased Fahey's ability to take a familiar melody outside of traditional repertoire and arrange for the guitar. On arranging, Fahey said, "It seems like once I learned to play in syncopation I put any song I was playing in through a filter, and if it worked with syncopation, I'd use it that way."[72] Throughout his career, Fahey would make good use of hymns, traditional and popular melodies, and on Blind Joe Death he performed his most popular hymn, "In Christ There is No East or West." Besides being a departure from blues themes, this piece also utilizes other fingerstyle guitar techniques not used as often in the other styles. The piece has three distinctive sections. The first section, the introduction, is transcribed below:

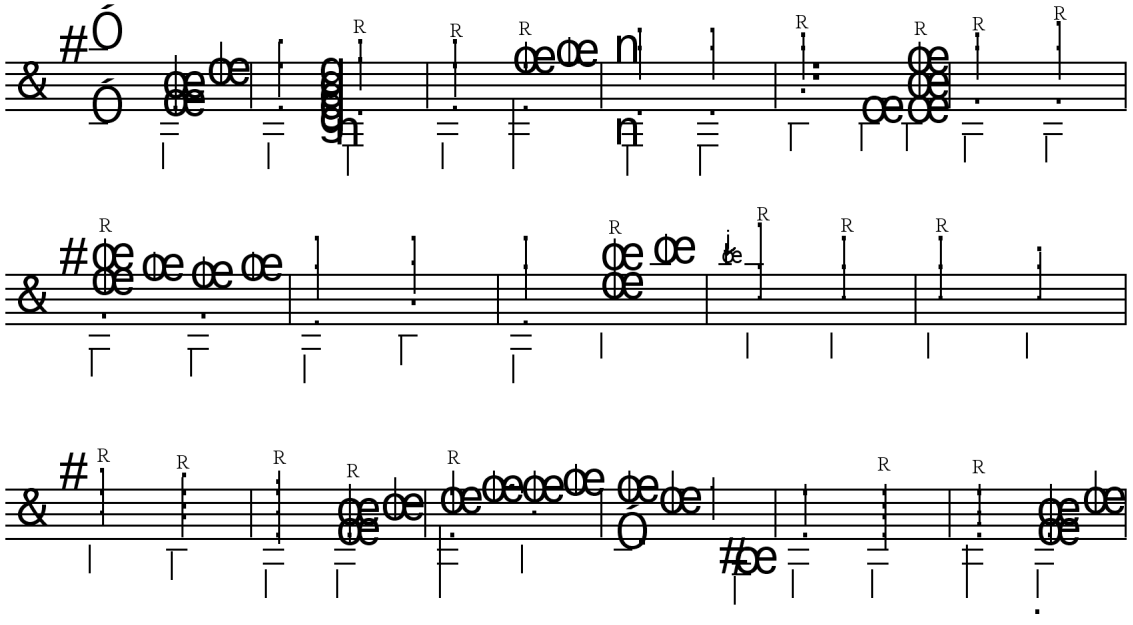
[71] Ibid.
[72] Miller, 43.

"In Christ There is No East or West," John Fahey.[73]



Fahey makes use of a bass melody, playing in Carter style on beats 3 and 4 of measure 1 and all of measure 2. The D7 on beat 4 of measure 2, marked with an articulation and P.B., designates the first instance in which Fahey makes use of a downstrum with the right hand thumb (future instances are simply marked P.B., or thumb (P) brush (B)). The introduction gives way to the second section, in which the melody of the hymn is introduced:

"In Christ There is No East or West," John Fahey.[74]



Fahey plays the harmony together with the melody. The second beat of

[73] John Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death, 1967 version. Transcription by Stan Ayeroff in The Best of John Fahey: 1959-1977, 106-111.

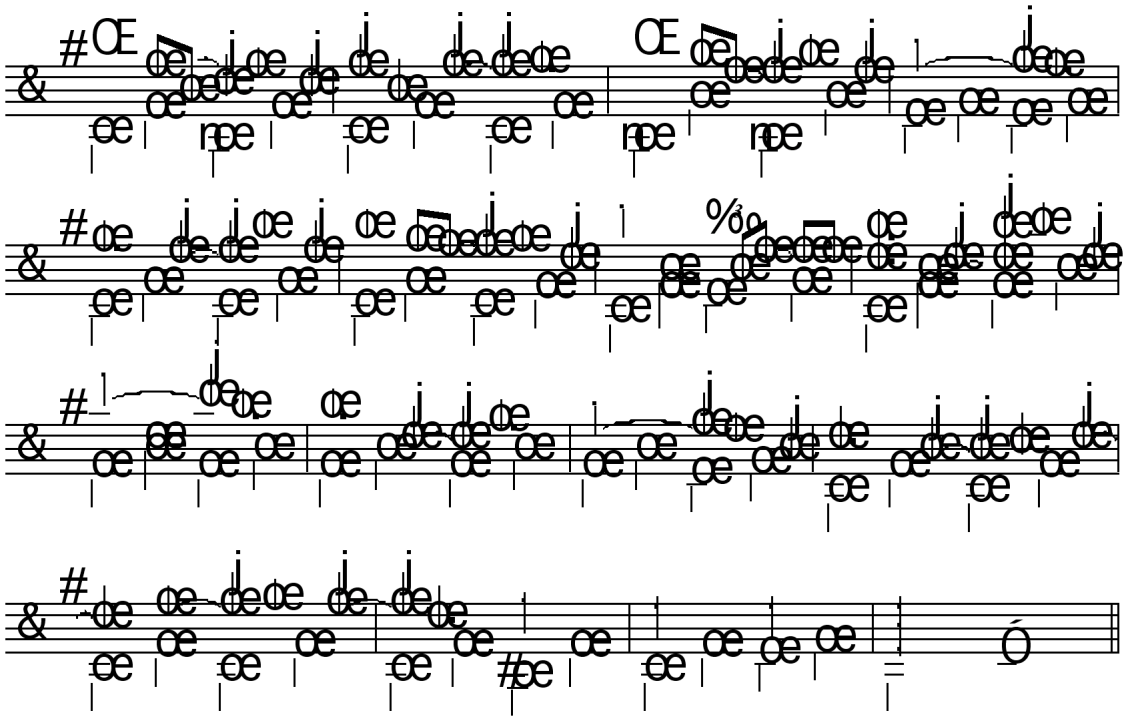
[74] Ibid.

measure 2 designates another chording technique, marked with an articulation and R, where the chord is rolled quickly with the thumb on the low strings and the index and middle on the upper two notes of the chord (future instances are simply marked R). The chords that are not marked as such are plucked with the same fingers, although they sound out together, as opposed to a quick succession. Except for the F-natural in the bass in measures 2 and 4, the melody and harmony are diatonic, omitting blue notes. It is likely that Fahey remembered this hymn from his days in church, and that he harmonized it from memory, instead of from sheet music.[75] Note the use of the subdominant in second inversion in measure 16 beat 3. This type of cadence is common to hymns, and it affords an authentic quality to Fahey's arrangement.

After Fahey plays the melody in this chordal fashion, he then goes into the third section, the last major variation. As might be expected, Fahey now treats the melody to syncopated alternating bass:

[75] In the materials sent by George Winston, several facsimiles of hymns and other tunes that Fahey recorded were included. It is presumed that these came from Fahey, but when asked, Winston had no information. Fahey most likely acquired facility at reading melodies after his graduate studies, but Fahey and Winston did not meet until 1972, over a decade after first recording the piece.

"In Christ there is No East or West," John Fahey.[76]



Other than the slight changes made to the melody due to the technique used, the syncopation and alternating bass are the most notable aspects of this section. One other right-hand technique is used as well. Similar to the rapid roll occurring on a single beat illustrated in the previous section, measure 7 illustrates a triplet roll, used often by Fahey. This is a rhythmic variation, therefore it owes its execution to the right hand. Fahey admitted to rhythmic, if not melodic, improvisation:

> I don't improvise in terms of notes and arpeggios, but I sure as hell try to improvise rhythmically. . . especially the syncopation and dynamics . . . . Once you've got the chords you need for the left hand, the important thing is rhythm– variation of tempo, syncopation, and tone changes.[77]

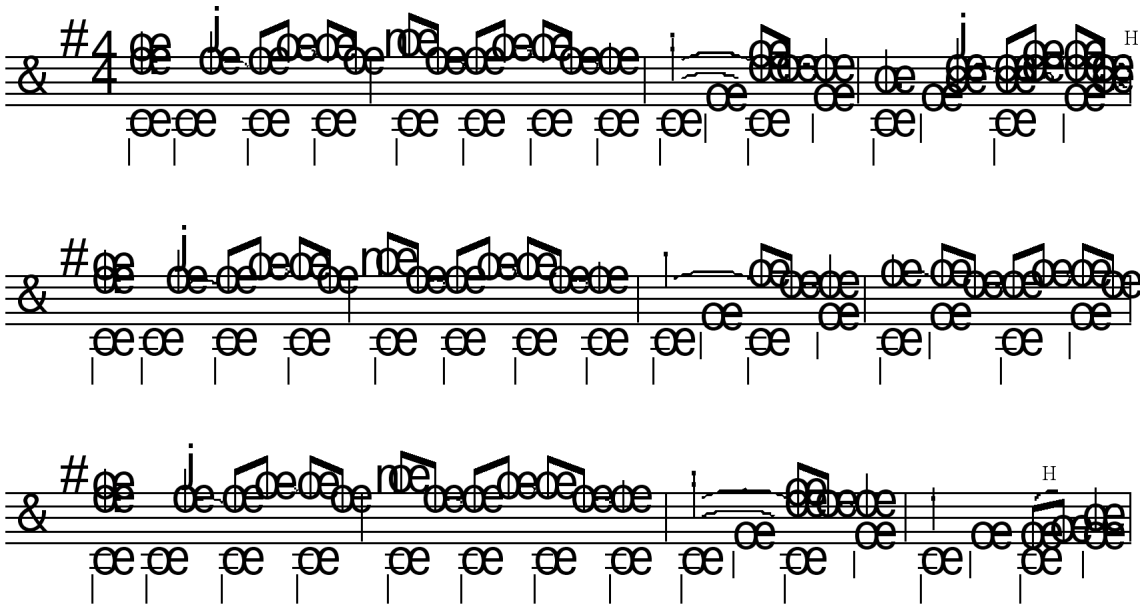
Fahey arranges the piece as such: ABBCCCBA. Each repetition of a section brings new variation, mostly in the C section in which Fahey syncopates the melody in various ways. As with "On Doing an Evil Deed Blues,"this piece illustrates Fahey's ability to work with familiar themes, using an arrangement that is clearly more a

[76] Transcription by Stan Ayeroff.
[77] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 24.

composition than simply a series of variations. Both introductions and end tags make defined bookends, furthering the sense of composition. With “In Christ there is No East or West,” Fahey also illustrates early on that he is not confined to the themes of pre-war music exclusively.

Fahey also defined his early compositional skills on Blind Joe Death. One of his more original works is “Desperate Man Blues,” a composition that even after Fahey had began to distance himself from his earlier work, he still had some affinity for.[78] Despite claims that he adapted The Carter Family’s “John Hardy” for the piece, the melody and form are purely his own. The basic form is in several parts, which Fahey repeats in its entirety a single time. Below is a transcription of the first twelve measures:

“Desperate Man Blues,” John Fahey.[79]



The piece is in the key of G. Fahey makes creative use of an altered open G tuning, similar to the high dobro G tuning, tuned GGDGBD, the low two strings are tuned in unison. Fahey knew that, in part, the potential of the guitar could be found in the exploitation of tunings: “It’s not an unlimited instrument [the guitar] but its limits are

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

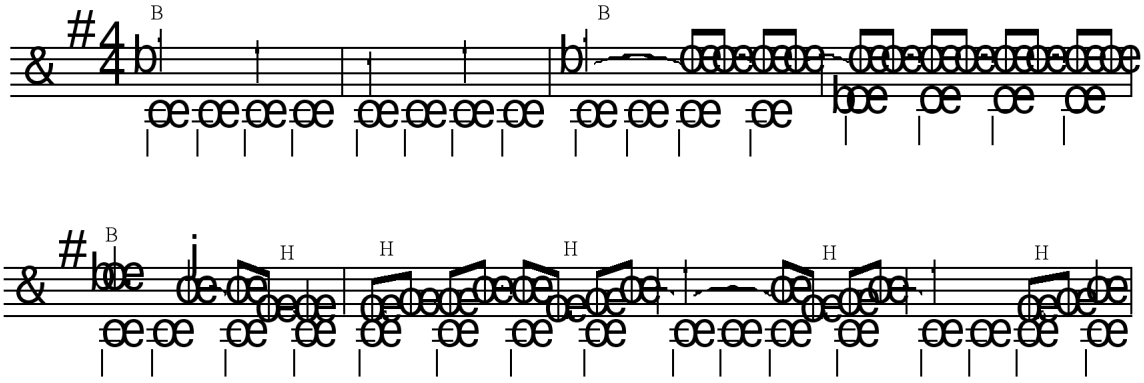
[79] John Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death, 1967 version. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

very high, especially if you get into different tunings. You can do almost anything with it."[80] At first glance, the bass looks monotonic, as if Fahey plays it on what would be the fifth string alone. It is actually an alternating bass pattern, in which Fahey alternates between the sixth and fifth strings, providing better syncopation. It could be done on a single string, but the rhythm would certainly suffer. The depth of syncopation is increased by the muting of the bass strings, called "palm muting." Fahey's technique was to rest his right hand on the lower strings at all times, employing varying amounts of muting.

He lays out the melody for this section starting on a subdominant C, using the major 6th and flat 7th as key tones. He passes through the same basic four-measure idea three times, each with separate endings. However, they have all been included to illustrate his sense of melody as well as his development for a twelve-bar, non-blues arrangement.

The next section is sixteen measures long, and again exploits the tuning:

"Desperate Man Blues," John Fahey.[81]



The eight measures shown are simply repeated to fill out the sixteen bars. The melody picks up the flat 3rd and still includes the E. In measure 4, the B-flat bass notes are achieved on consecutive strings again, 3rd fret, played by reaching over the neck of the guitar with the left hand thumb. In this measure the syncopation that Fahey achieves is strong, the B-flats playing off each other. Fahey changes the melody slightly in the last four bars and shifts the rhythm for added syncopation. This

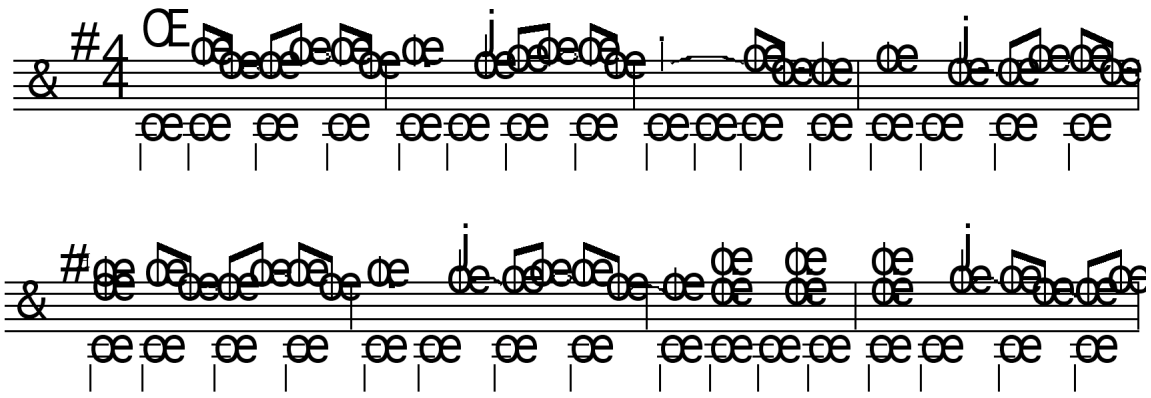
[80] Humphrey, "John Fahey," 24.

[81] Ibid.

rhythmic figure reoccurs throughout.

Fahey repeats both the first and second sections before moving onto a third:

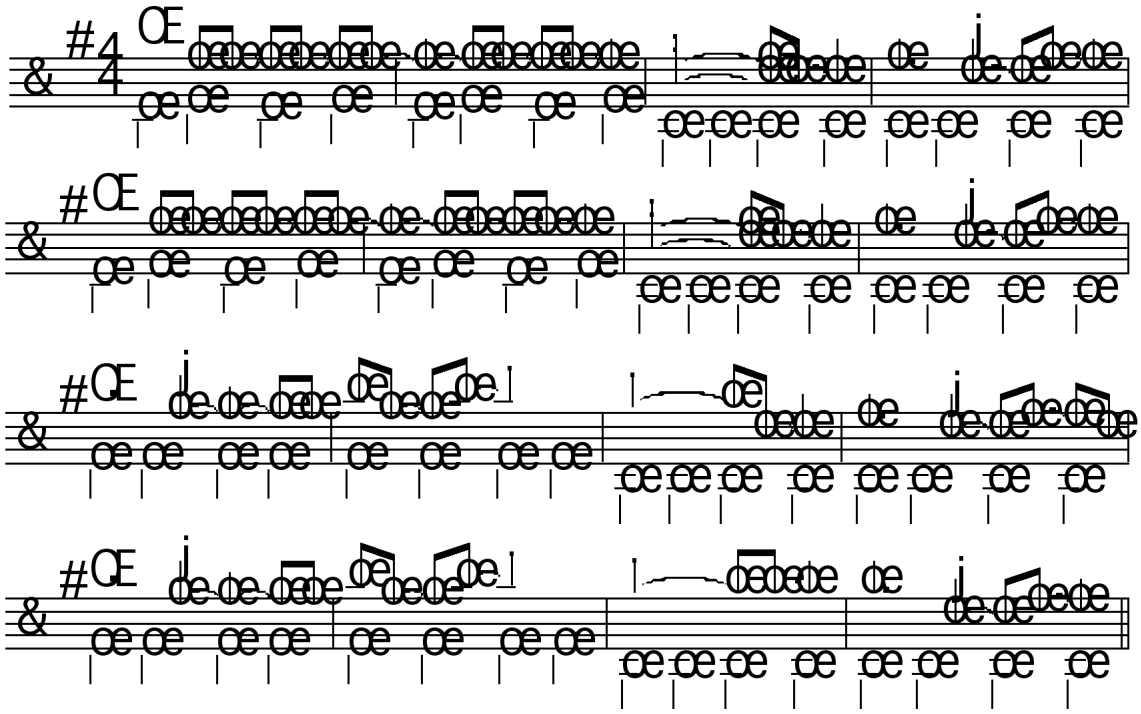
"Desperate Man Blues," John Fahey.[82]



The third section is also sixteen measures, the above transcription repeating once. This section is very similar to the first section. Fahey expands the melody, bringing the highest note up to G. This makes the section feel more like a development of the first, expanded by four measures. Like the first section, Fahey only uses the subdominant in second inversion, and the tonic. Fahey continues on to a fourth theme:

[82] Ibid.

"Desperate Man Blues," John Fahey.[83]

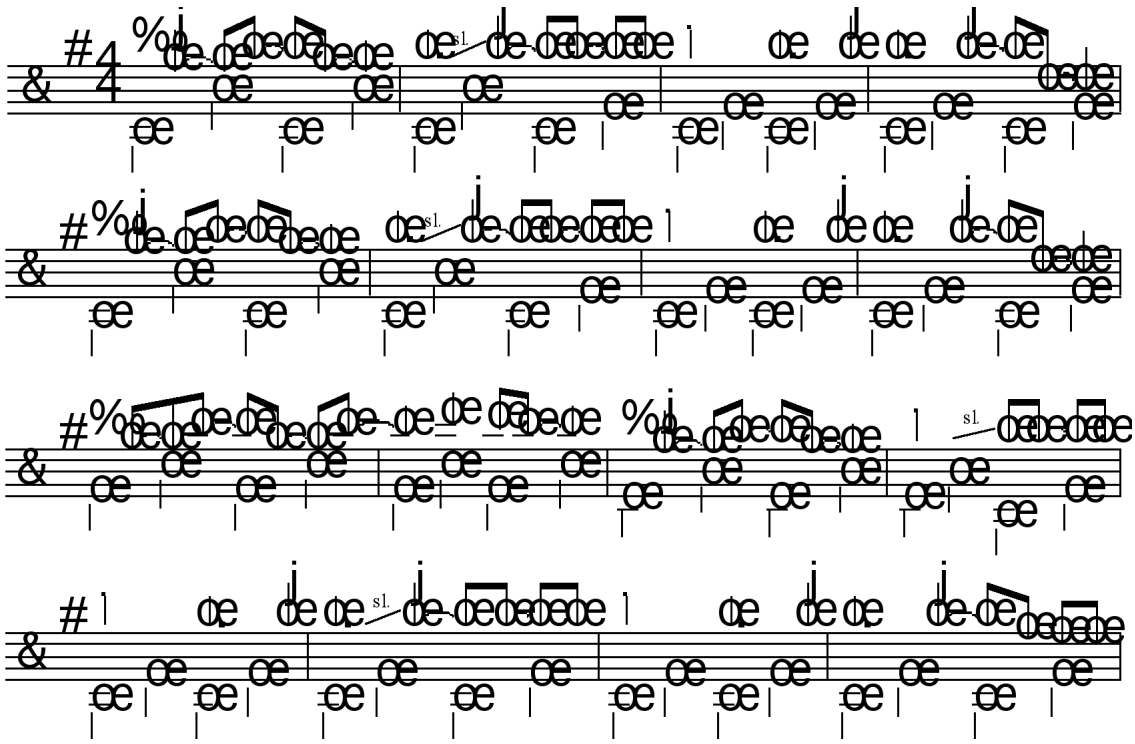


Fahey utilizes several unisons in both the melody and bass to maintain the level of syncopation. In the first two measures, the repeating D in the melody is played on adjacent strings one and two. This not only enables the syncopation to continue, but allows the notes to ring out simultaneously. The bass in the first two measures is interesting since it utilizes the interval of a second and provides more of a linear harmony. The bass in measures 9, 10, 13, and 14 is also played on adjacent strings, five and four. The harmony suggests a dominant, but with the E instead of an F-sharp, the harmony is more of a suspension. Fahey does make good on the resolution, however, concluding on the tonic in both instances. This section is a further example of Fahey's ability to expand four measures to eight, and eight to sixteen, in a manner more sophisticated than his technical vernacular.

The fourth section implies a bridge, but Fahey continues to expand the theme:

[83] Ibid.

"Desperate Man Blues," John Fahey.[84]

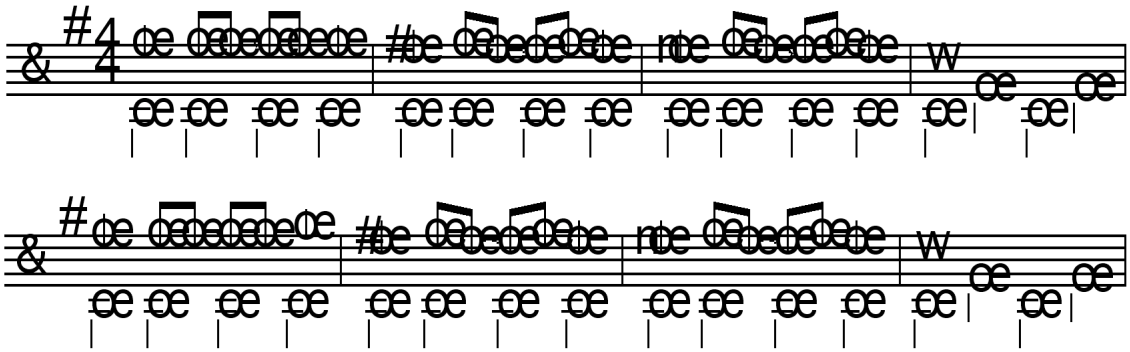


This section moves towards a climax, beginning with a G sonority. Fahey switches the bass up, moving to octaves instead of unison. In the second measure when the bass switches to root and fifth, the melody is again played on opposite strings. It should be stated again that this technique not only provides for syncopation, but the particular variation that Fahey uses. Arguably these phrases could be executed on single strings, but the facility needed would be great, and the effect still would fall short. It is likely that Fahey began with the level of syncopation in mind and fingered the guitar to compensate.

Measures 13-16 signal for the first time a descending progression clearly moving towards greater resolution. The D triad becomes a dominant 7 in measure 14, the first strong dominant sonority of the piece. It leads to the subdominant and then finally to the tonic. One last new section occurs. It appears below:

[84] Ibid.

"Desperate Man Blues," John Fahey.[85]



This short section mimics a "turnaround" that is typical in blues styles. In the final two measures in a twelve-bar blues it is common to play a series of chords, often with chromatic notes, that leads toward the tonic. It usually culminates on the dominant, which does not happen here, but the descending D-C sharp-C natural -B definitely allude to the practice.

The form described so far is ABABCDEF. Fahey plays all the way through this arrangement two full times. After completing the second pass he returns to section E, or five, which makes sense since it features the strongest resolution point in the entire piece.

"Desperate Man Blues" illustrates clear melodic development beyond a string of similar ideas. Fahey manipulates both the tuning and fingering of the guitar in order to provide the piece the proper means to unfold. Despite the majority of sixteen-bar sections, the source material does not contradict Fahey's cultivated style. Even with limited harmonic movement, and simple melodic variations, Fahey's originality and depth are revealed.

One final piece from Blind Joe Death , "Suns Gonna Shine in My Backdoor Someday," is another early example of Fahey's cultivated style. The title is from an old blues lyric, and like "Desperate Man Blues," Fahey maintained an appreciation for the piece long after others had fallen from his favor. In 1996 he said:

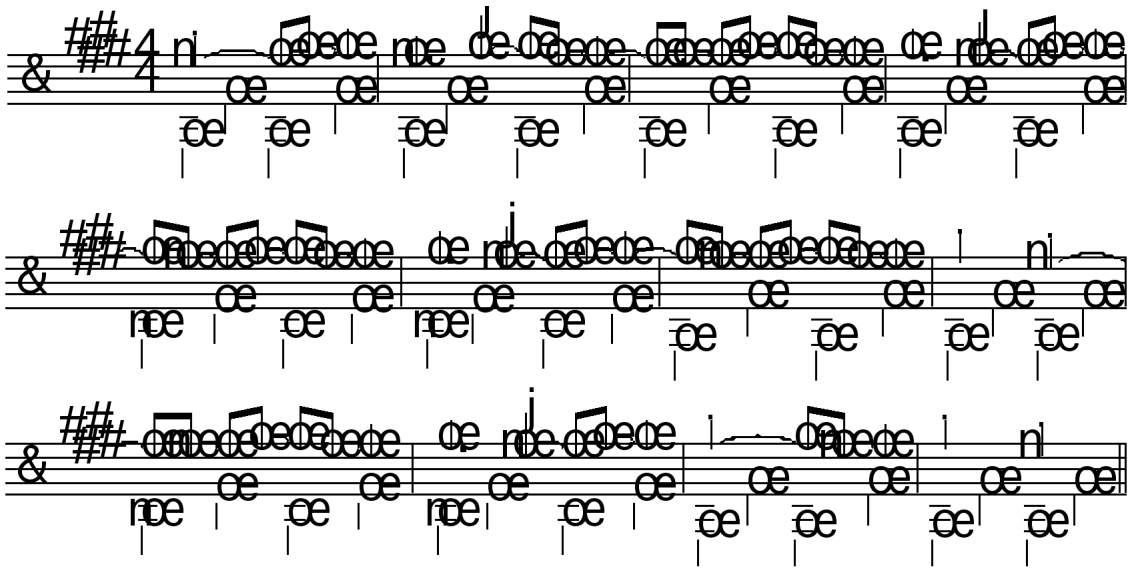
> All I have ever done with music was try and depict various emotions in an organized and coherent musical language, sometimes very dark emotions,

[85] Ibid.

> especially hate, fear, repulsion, grief, depression or feeling nothingness, etc., but also happiness, health, certain types of ecstasy, etc. I achieved this especially in the song, "Sun Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday," a piece which is bi-tonal, a la Bartok, Ives and others, but it is also played in ragtime-guitar style, a la Mississippi John Hurt and others. I wish everything I did was as good as that one. It's very fast, and dark too.[86]

The piece is arranged similarly to "Desperate Man Blues," with the basic form played once and then repeated multiple times. Transcribed below is the first section:

"Sun's Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday," John Fahey.[87]



The E7 and G move back and forth during the sixteen measures. Fahey may have considered this section to be bitonal, and an argument could be made to substantiate that notion. It may be easier to look at the two chords as being related by two other criteria. First, the G-natural is the flat 3rd, and what Fahey has done is simply expand the blue note to a complete harmony. Second, the way the chords are fingered by the left hand allow Fahey to maintain the basic chord form, and then simply add and subtract the low G-natural in the bass for the respective chords.

The next section makes a clearer departure from E major:

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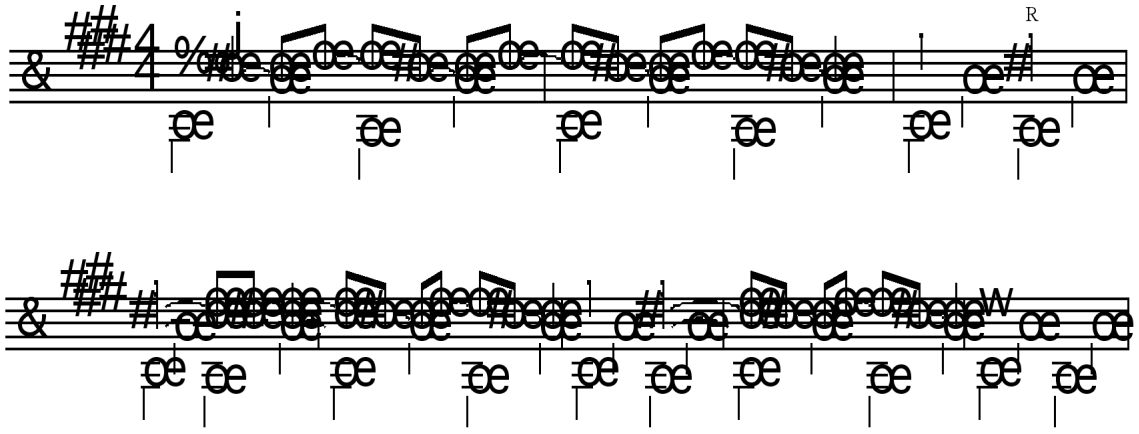
[86] Fahey, liner notes to The Legend of Blind Joe Death, 6.

[87] Fahey, The Legend of Blind Joe Death, 1967 version. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

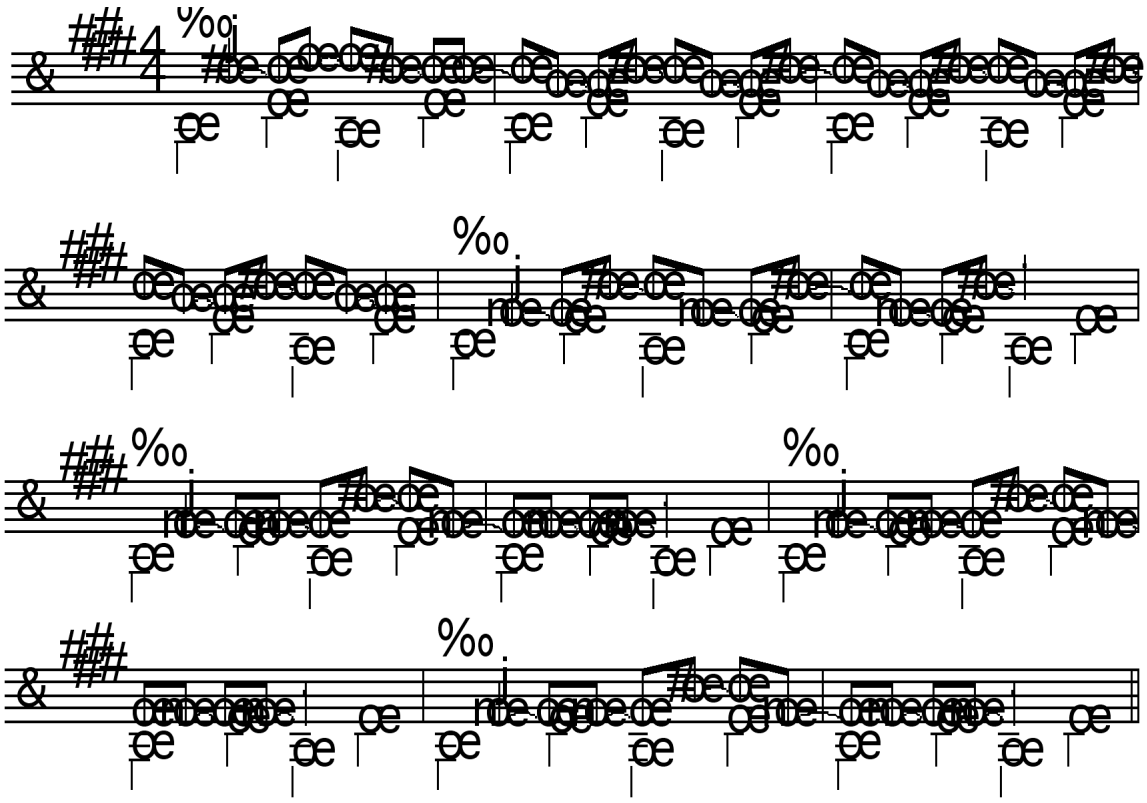
"Sun's Gonna Shine on My Back Door Someday," John Fahey.[88]



Fahey moves to F-sharp major, and remains there for eight measures. It is clear that the harmony is not borrowed from the relative minor, but is instead a defined modulation. Once again, the technique used to fret the low F-sharp is wrapping the left hand thumb over the neck of the guitar. By utilizing this technique, as opposed to a full bar chord, Fahey is able to alternate between F-sharp and E in his alternating bass pattern much more easily, which makes for a more developed bass line and provides more harmonic movement. The melody is based on the F-sharp major triad, which Fahey treats to various syncopated variations. Note the roll on beat 3 of measure 4. This second section is short, but is used to set up the next section. The transcription follows:

[88]Ibid.

"Sun's Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday," John Fahey.[89]



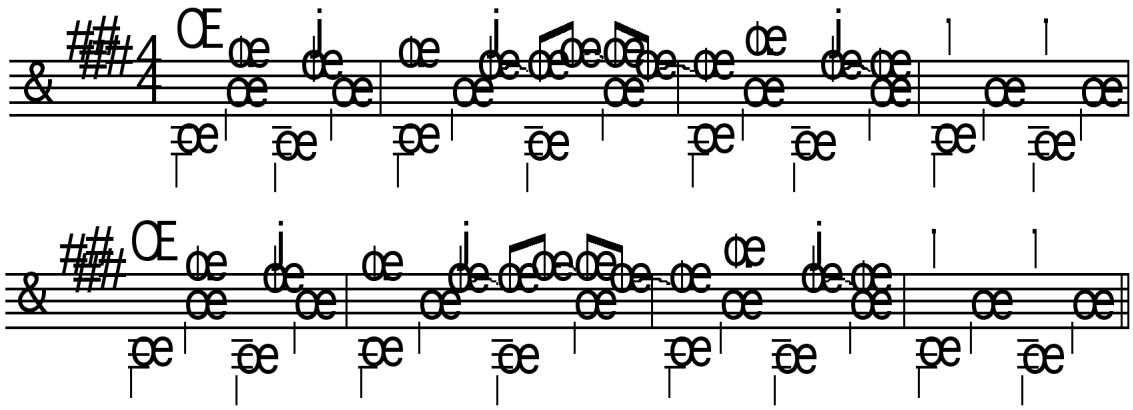
In this section, Fahey develops a dissonant theme that is distinctive to his cultivated style. The bass line holds the key to understanding this use of dissonance. In the first four measures, the bass maintains the same progression that was used in the preceding section. The right hand has shifted to the lower four stings of the guitar, picking the F-sharp as well as the A-sharp as melody notes. Beginning in measure 5, Fahey lifts the upper F-sharp from the chord position he is holding, replacing it with a D-natural. The measures that follow are approximations of the variations of syncopation between the melody and the bass, but the key pitch collections are F sharp-C sharp-D(A sharp) and E-C sharp-D(A sharp). The fundamental interval is of the second. This dissonance, what theorist Leon Dallin refers to as non-tertian harmony, does in fact connect Fahey to Bartok. Dallin analyzed Bartok's Mikrokosmos No. 107, "Melody in the Mist," as an example of non-tertian, secundal

[89] Ibid.

harmony.[90]

Fahey's technique of dissonance use is his own, however, and what is fundamental is his dwelling on the dissonant sonority as opposed to passing through it. Even though he utilizes two separate pitch collections, they act together. Fahey spins the sonorities outward, providing a sound aesthetic that is only rooted in its own use. Its direction is simply to serve the moment, not necessarily to enable further harmonic development, or to act as a model of harmonic use. This is clearly evident by the next section:

"Sun's Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday," John Fahey.[91]



Fahey returns to the F-sharp major harmony, and develops the melody further with E and G-sharp. What should be noticed is that Fahey began with an F-sharp tonality, shifted to the more dissonant sonority that shared the same bass line, and then returned to the F-sharp again. All the movement revolved around the same general F-sharp tonality, although Fahey implemented notes to create sound changes, rather than defined movement or modulation. It cannot be overstated that this is a major trait of Fahey's melodic and harmonic technique.

After the eight measures, Fahey moves to the final section of the basic form:

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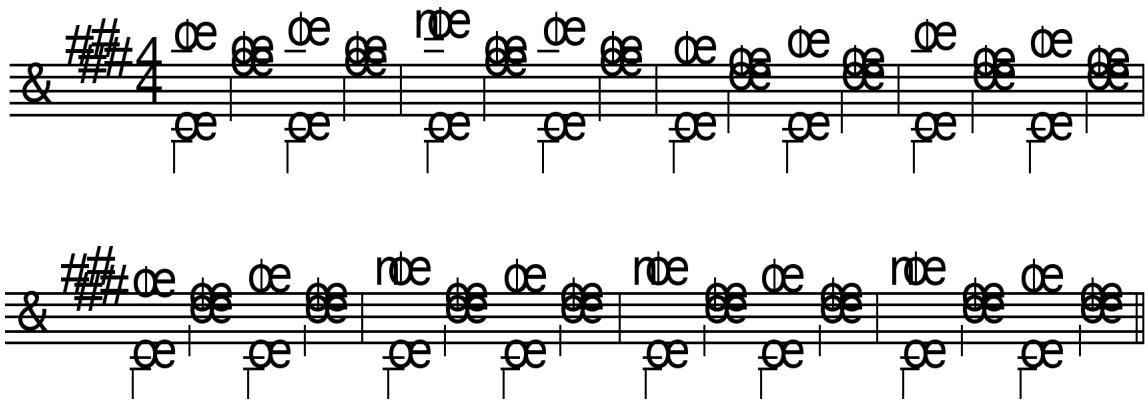
[90] Leon Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition: A Guide to the Materials of Modern Music, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1974, 95.

[91] Transcription by Nick Schillace.

"Sun's Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday," John Fahey.[92]



This entire section is based on a single shape that Fahey moves along the neck, another fundamental technique. The low A is an open string that acts as a drone. The first harmony is based on a D-major chord shape that Fahey expands to a dominant 7th as he takes the melody from A to C-natural. Fahey moves the shape down to what is essentially a B-major shape, again with the same melodic treatment which brings the harmony to a dominant 7th. Finally, the last sonority is an A major evolving to a dominant 7th, played twice as long as the others. The only chord that is slightly unusual with the A drone is the B, but it still sounds as a B-major triad. Fahey is working himself back into the opening section so he can repeat the form, therefore trying to get back to E major. If analyzed this way, the descending harmony would be bVII-V7-IV7, back to tonic. Fahey then repeats the entire form four times, returning to the E-major phrase from the first section to end the piece.

Of all the pieces analyzed so far, "Sun's Gonna Shine in My Back Door Someday" is the best example of Fahey's originality within his own style. All the pieces are working toward a complete technique, but this composition has an overall sound that is undeniably Fahey. Most importantly, each piece has illustrated Fahey's use of mulit-thematic material utilized in different ways.

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border" from Death Chants, Breakdowns, and Military Waltzes is a definitive example of Fahey's mulit-thematic development, from any stage of his career. In an interview with Mark

[92]Ibid.

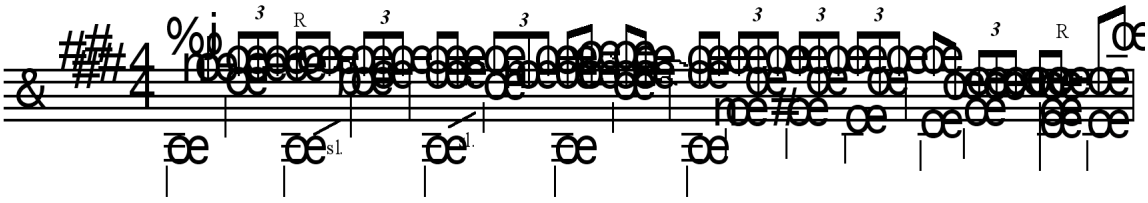
Humphrey Fahey described the source material for the piece:

> The opening chords are from the last movement of Vaughn Williams' "Sixth Symphony." It goes from there to a Skip James motif. Following that, it moves to a Gregorian Chant, "Dies Irae." It's the most scary one in the Episcopal hymn books– it's all about the Day of Judgment. Then it returns to the Vaughn Williams chords, followed by a blues run of undetermined origin, then back to Skip James, and so forth. Most of the pieces I write aren't so derivative. If you're going to steal, you've got to steal from obscure sources or you'll get caught.[93]

The references that Fahey makes are not necessarily audible in the music, except for the James' quotations. Fahey probably did find inspiration in Vaughn Williams and "Dies Irae," but as was typical with many of Fahey's "borrowings," sometimes what he took was more of an aesthetic rather than actual themes. There are clearer examples of Fahey's appropriation of concert themes, which will be examined in another transcription, but for this example, the material will be considered mainly of Fahey's origin.

The piece is transcribed primarily with an E-major key signature, however, as is the case with James' music, there is an ambiguity of major/minor tonality which is furthered by a modulation. The opening chords are transcribed below:

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[94]



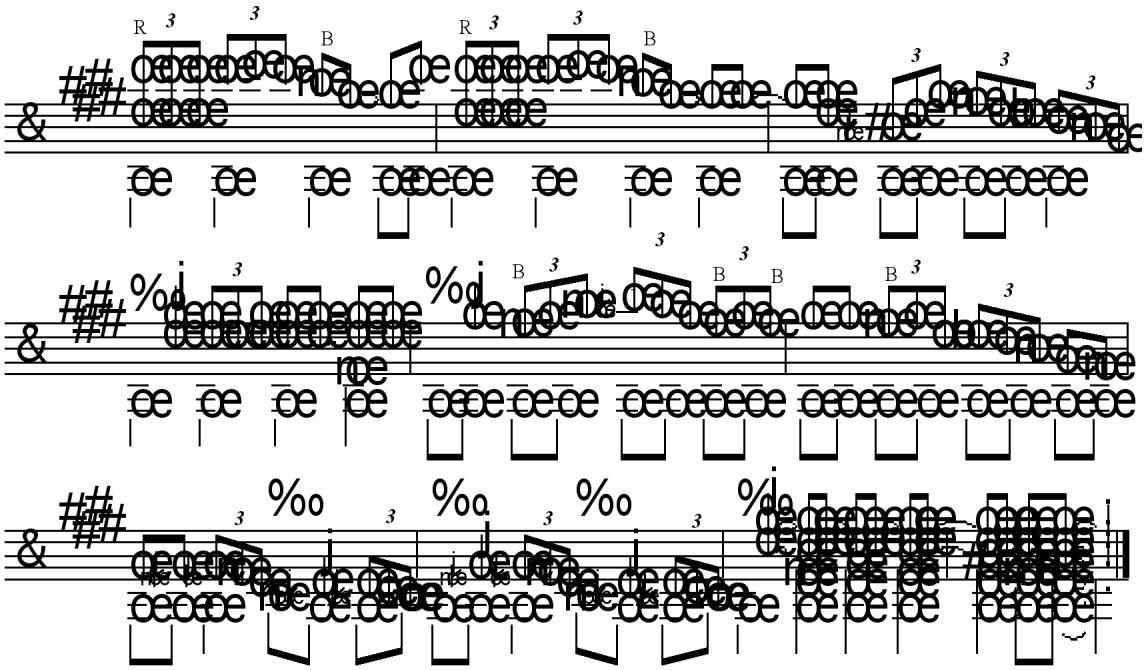
This opening phrase is based on a common blues turnaround of descending dominant 7th shapes similar to the one found in the James example. Fahey utilizes a technique of alternating the bass in which he strikes the low sixth string E on beats 1 and 3, and then plucks the third string on beats 2 and 4. This provides for more melodic movement, since the bass becomes a part of the arpeggio, and descends chromatically from B to A as the shape moves down the neck. The last two

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

[94] Fahey, Death Chants, Breakdowns, and Military Waltzes, 1967 version. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

measures complete the turnaround, descending chromatically to B7, which sets up the next section:

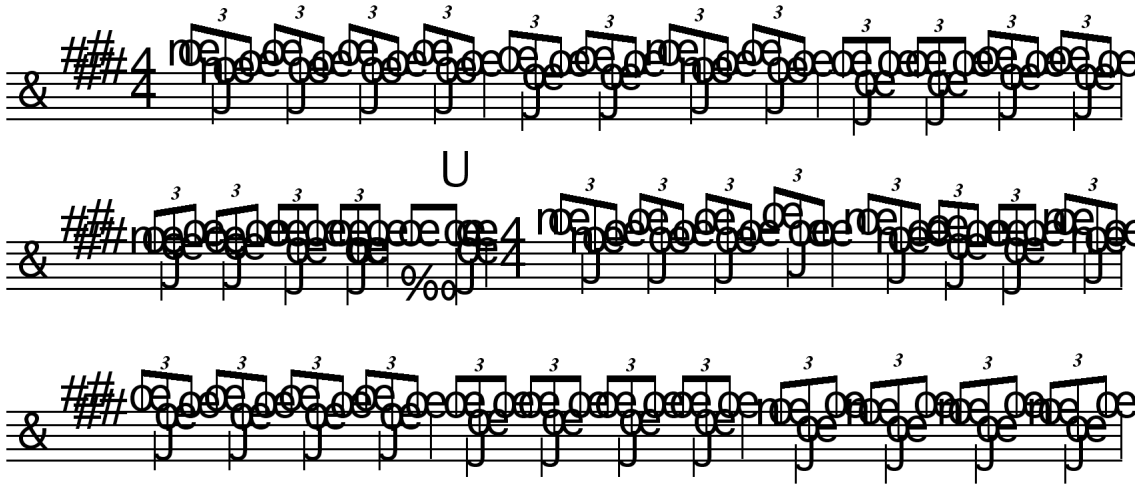
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[95]



This section has an even more direct James influence. Fahey maintains a monotonic bass, and emphasizes the flat 3rd, flat 7th, and flat 5th in his melody and fills. In the passages that juxtapose triplet eighth notes against eighth-note pairs, the last eighth-note of each grouping line up under Fahey's heavy syncopated rhythm. This section leads into the next:

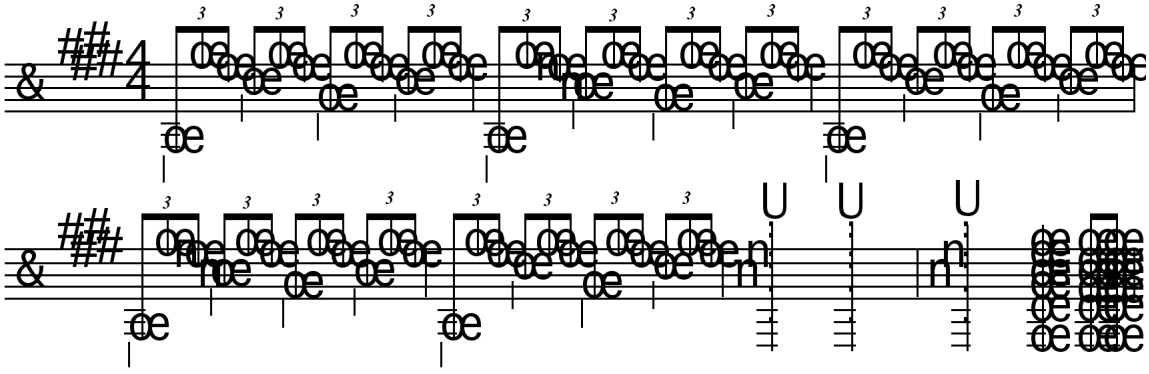
[95] Ibid.

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[96]



Fahey omits any alternating or monotonic bass in this section, although the thumb does play in the right hand pattern. Even more noteworthy is that the entire section is based on the first beat in measure 1 in both the right and left hands. The G-natural and D-natural, the flat 3rd and flat 7th, are held by the left hand. The E is the open first string and rings throughout. The right hand pattern is i-p-m. Fahey takes the initial shape, a perfect fourth, and simply moves it along the neck of the guitar introducing new sonorities as he shifts. He makes two passes with variation and then moves to the next section:

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[97]

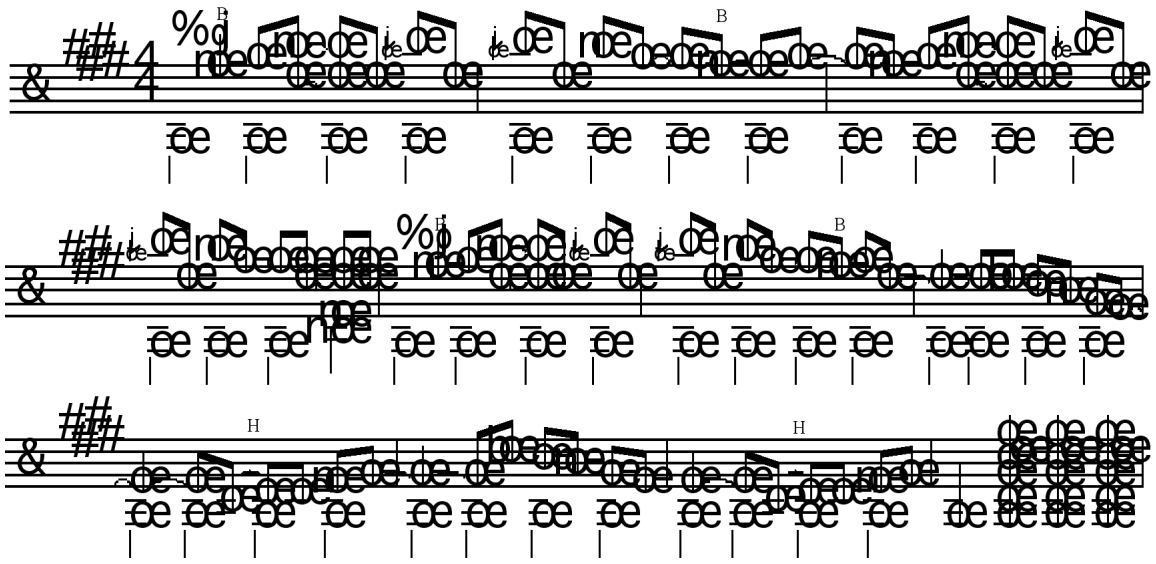


This section is made up of two new sonorities, Amaj7 and Amin7, both in

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

second inversion. Up until this section the overall tonality of the piece has been centered around E, and the introduction of the A harmonies is not completely unusual. If the neutrality of the E tonic is considered, introducing both major and minor A harmonies is fitting. Fahey still maintains the triplet rhythm, and the right hand returns to its alternation between the sixth and third string, moving to the fourth string octave instead of the sixth string on beat 3 of each measure. Fahey gradually slows the tempo and decreases the volume, strumming the Amin7 chords lightly, building the dynamic and leading into the next section:

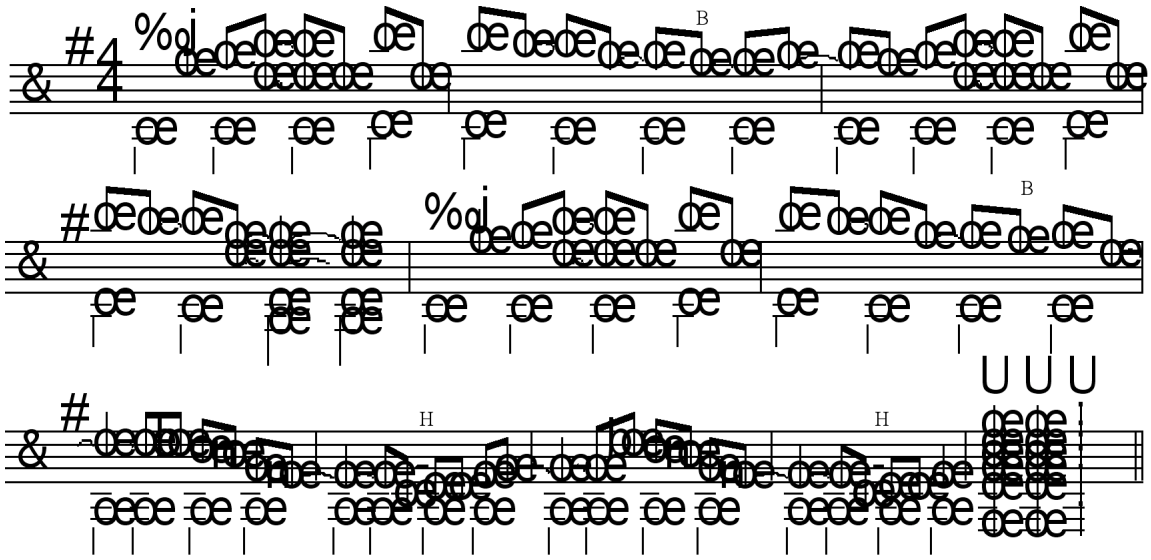
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[98]



Fahey continues to introduce new material, remaining in the E tonality. Against a monotonic bass, Fahey plays the melody in the upper voice, eventually descending to a melody on the low strings. The last measure is an A harmony with a suspension, that sets up the next section:

[98] Ibid.

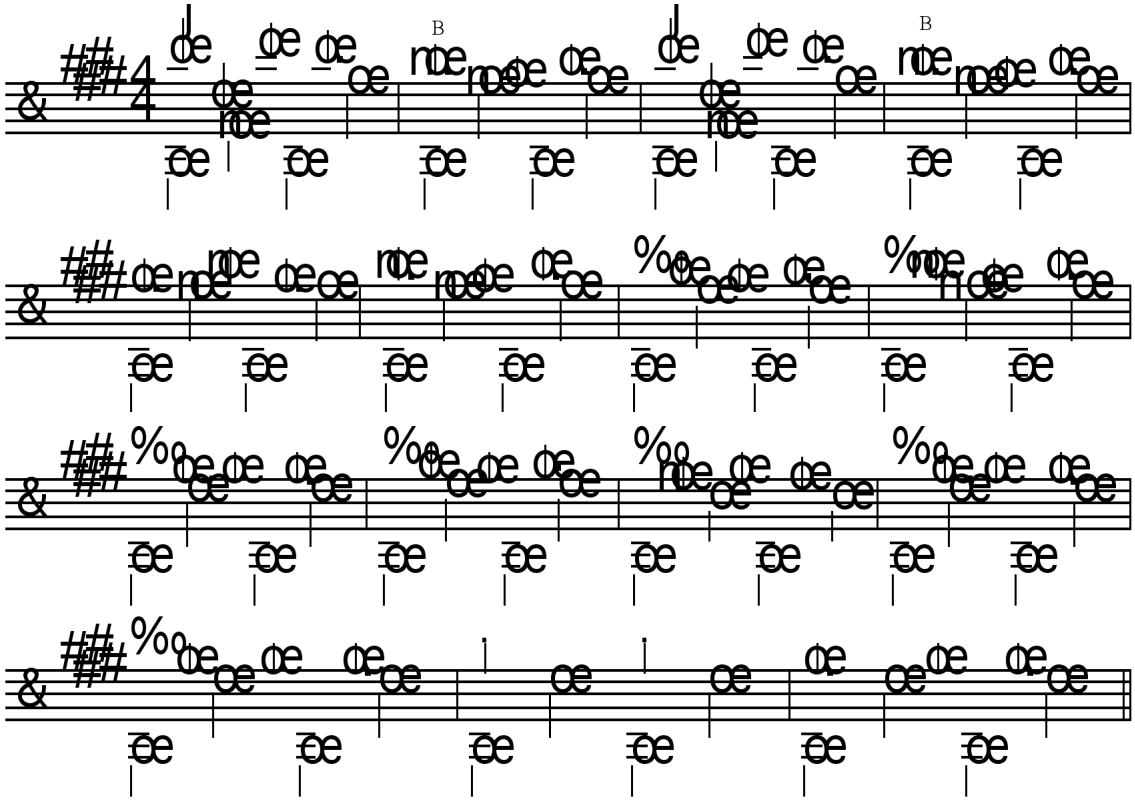
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[99]



The key signature has been changed to acknowledge the modulation to G major. Fahey essentially plays the same theme as the preceding section only this time with G in the bass. He ends the section by decreasing the dynamic level and strumming E-minor harmonies, making a clear statement about the overall tonality. Fahey then returns to some familiar source material:

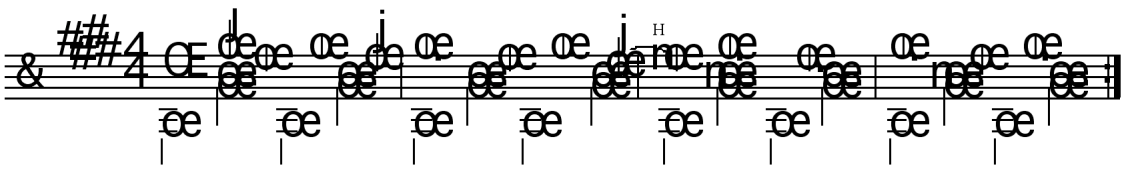
[99] Ibid.

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[100]



Fahey introduces some new material in the first four measures, but then returns to the earlier section, which featured the moving perfect fourths. This time, however, he begins to syncopate the material with an alternating bass, once again utilizing the third string on beats 2 and 4. He then moves back to the Amaj7/Amin7 harmonies:

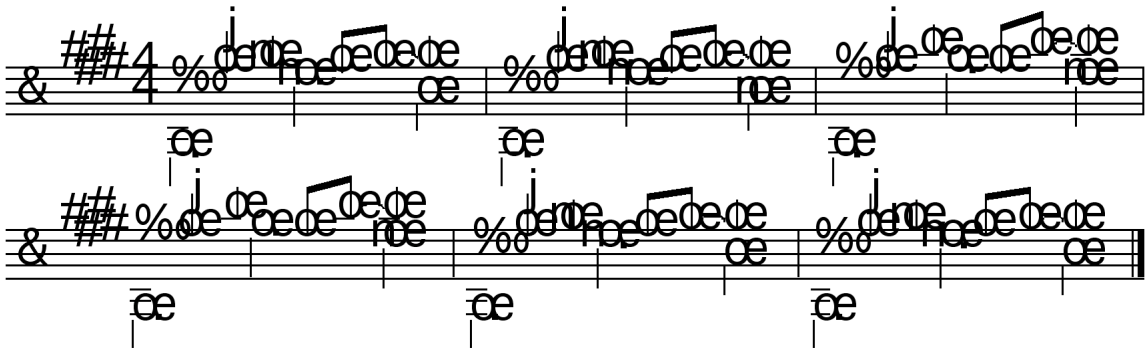
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.



[100] Ibid.

Once again Fahey syncopates the material as opposed to playing the triplet rhythm from before. He plays through the above phrase three times, gradually bringing the dynamic level and tempo lower, which leads into a climatic passage:

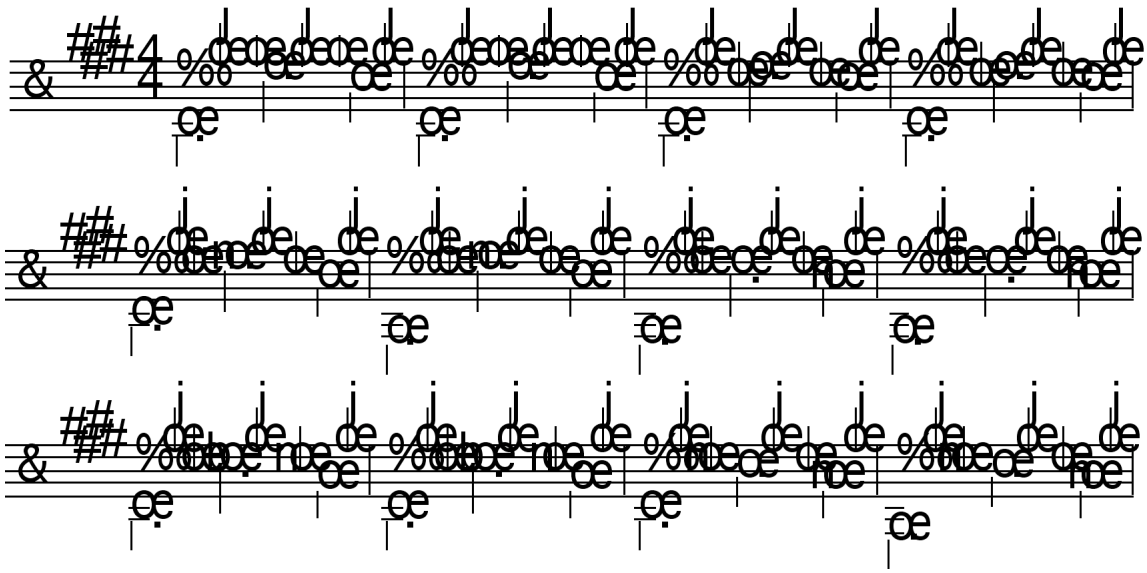
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[101]



The phrasing in this section looks awkward on paper, but on the guitar it is very straightforward. As always, the down stemmed notes are played by the thumb, but not specifically on the downbeat as may have become expected. The sonorities themselves are less important as is their origin. The shapes used for both the harmonies in measures 1 and 2 and the change in 3 and 4, are based on the same Amaj7 shape used in the previous examples. What Fahey does is move the shape up the neck, first to the fifth position, fretting the FCG# and playing the low and high E on open strings. He then shifts up to seventh position, the resulting held tones being AEC. The shared C as well as the ringing open strings fit the two chords together, and Fahey makes the section dynamically aggressive, building towards more climax. He then moves back to the Amaj7/Amin7, not transcribed here, this time changing between each other by single measures, and varying the syncopation tremendously. He then returns to the section that originally preceded the Amaj7/Amin7, eventually modulating to the same G major section again, leading to a final coda-like section:

[101] Ibid.

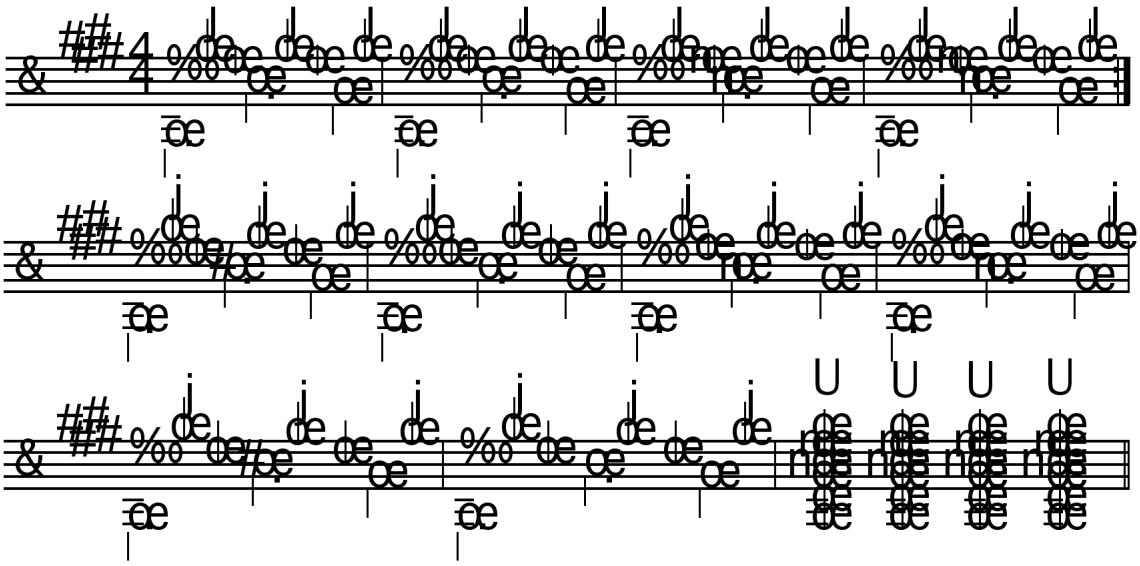
"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[102]



Fahey clearly begins in A major, although the key signature has not been changed. He plays the exact same right hand arpeggio as the climactic section in which the Amaj7 shape was shifted up to fifth and seventh position. He then proceeds to use a technique in which he begins picking an arpeggio and then changes notes inside the shape he is holding. He begins by fretting AC#E, and ringing out the open E and A strings again. He then lifts the E he is holding, changing the sonority to ABC#E. the held notes are now AC# which Fahey then moves down the neck by half step, all the while playing the same right-hand arpeggio and open strings, switching from low A to low E periodically. He ends up on the dissonant yet open sounding sonority, EFAB, which leads into the very last section:

[102] Ibid.

"Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," John Fahey.[103]



Again, the Amaj7/Amin7 harmonies are returned to. Fahey continues to play the same right hand arpeggio pattern, and the rhythm for the harmony is different because of this. He repeats the first four measures one time and then changes the chords by altering his fingering slightly. The resulting harmonies then take on more of an E tonality, becoming Emajor/add9 and Eminor/add9-b13. The Emin sonority is slowly and quietly strummed to finish.

As stated, "Stomping Tonight on the Alabama/Pennsylvania Border" is a definitive composition from Fahey's catalog. Not only does he work through various themes, but also when he returns to previous material he presents it with different rhythmic twists. Fahey composes to the strengths of the guitar in this example, and his control is undeniable. Not only does he manipulate left-hand shapes to his advantage, but he also repeats right-hand arpeggios. He plays with tonality, alluding to both E major and E minor as well as to A major and A minor throughout and up until to the very final chords. His use of tempo fluctuations and intensity go beyond single measures of time signature changing. He clearly takes the listener through a series of cerebral destinations.

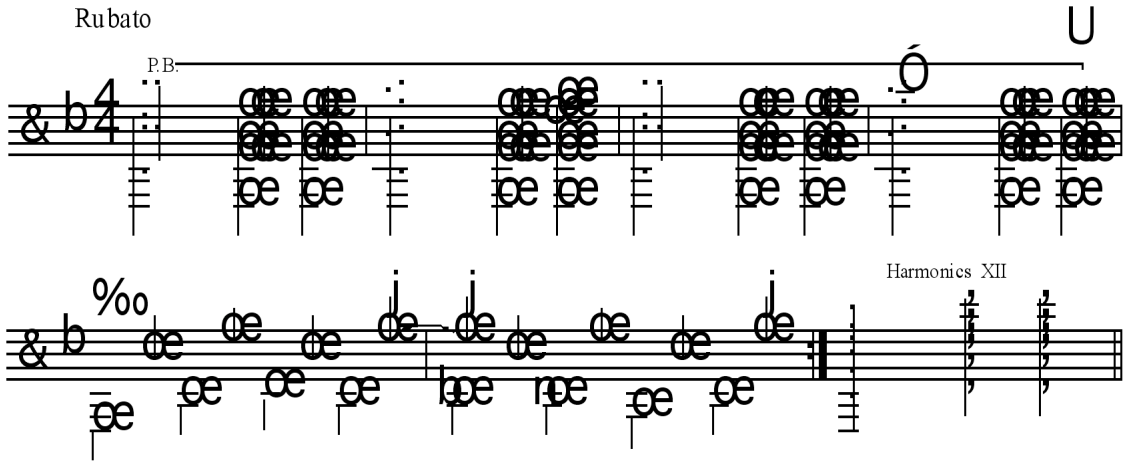
"The Red Pony" is a similar composition, yielding several themes and

[103] Ibid.

covering a broad dynamic range. It is important because it is clearly in D minor, with little ambiguity. The piece remained with Fahey for almost his entire career, recorded initially in 1964, featured on a television program in 1969, on the Live in Tasmania album in 1981, on God, Time and Casualty in 1989, with Cul de Sac in 1997, and was a concert standard for many years. Granted, many themes were revisited by Fahey throughout his career, and this one took on many name changes as it crept in and out of his music. But this piece is an important example of the emotional intensity heard in the blues that Fahey had been interpreting, yet at the same time, despite any technical similarities, it is wholly original. But perhaps most important is the way in which Fahey came to the tuning used for the piece– open D minor. The story has been told that Fahey actually sought out Skip James to ask what tuning he used, and even if there is a bit of romance to the story, it most likely contains some truth. This brought the influence of the recording out of its medium, challenging Fahey to look beyond the recording itself in order to learn what he wanted to know. The recording was the only connection that these two men would otherwise not have had, and yet it was insufficient as the only form of musical instruction.

The transcription is based on the version played by Fahey on the 1969 television program, Guitar Guitar. The opening is transcribed below:

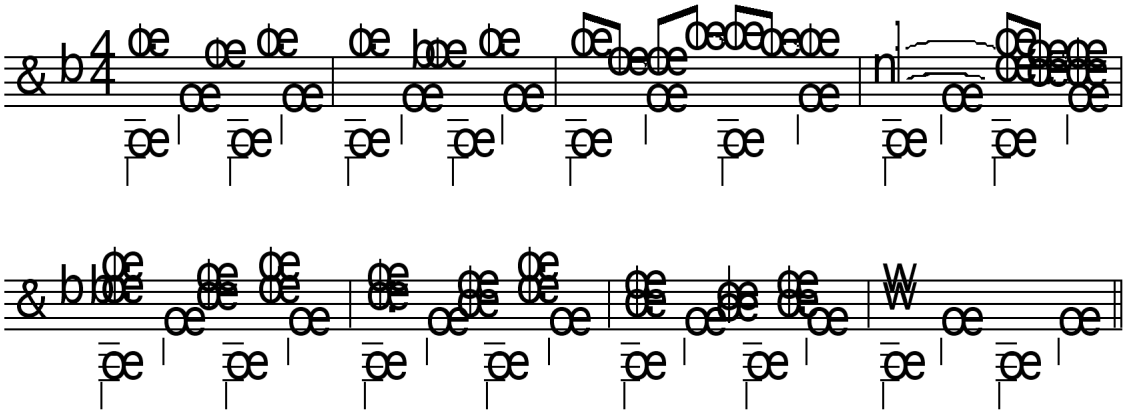
"The Red Pony," John Fahey.[104]



[104] John Fahey and Elizabeth Cotten , Rare Interviews and Performances from 1969, Produced by Laura Weber, 60 min Vestapol, 1994, videocassette.

Fahey slowly unfolds the chords by strumming them downward with his thumb. Due to the shape held by the left hand, several notes are doubled at the open strings. After holding momentarily, he plays the descending D-minor melody three times. He ends the introduction by strumming the open strings and then playing harmonics at the twelfth fret. The first main theme follows:

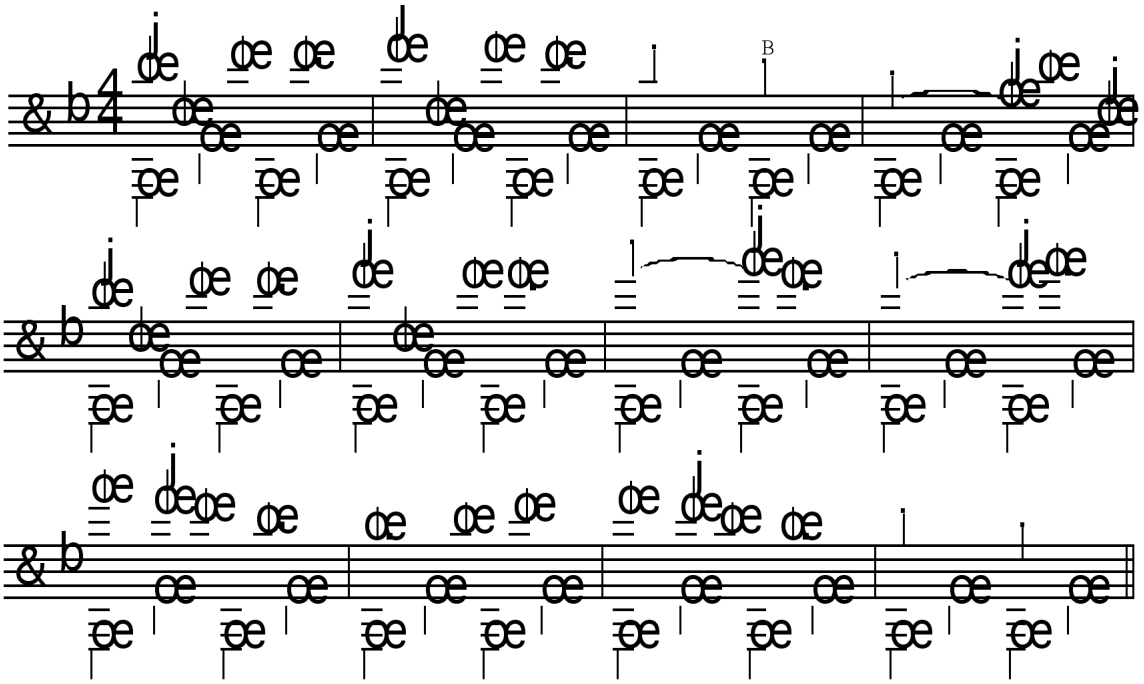
"The Red Pony," John Fahey.[105]



The eight bars feature a consistent alternating bass on D. The melody consists of descending intervals, the inner voice of which moves chromatically in the first four bars, D-Db-C-B. This example is an approximation of Fahey's use of melodic and harmonic intervals, but in the final four bars he generally plays harmonically as shown. Note the augmented fourth on beats 1 and 2 of measure 4, the dissonance of which gives way to more stable harmonies in the remaining measures, eventually resolving on a D sonority. Fahey repeats the section once before moving to the next:

[105] Ibid.

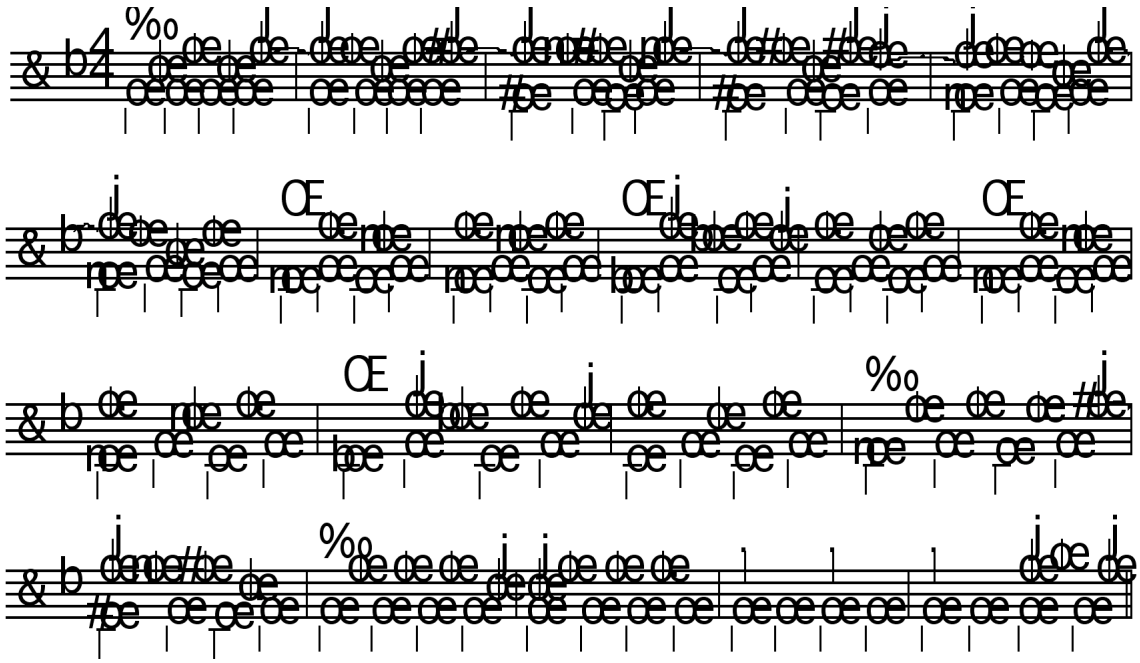
"The Red Pony," John Fahey.[106]



Fahey expands the melody in this section to twelve measures.The fundamental tones that make up the melody are D-F-A-C, or Dmin7. The only bend occurs in measure 3; all the other tones are stable and not considered neutral. D minor is clearly the tonality. Fahey plays through the passage one time He then returns to the first main theme and plays through one time leading into the bridge:

[106]Ibid.

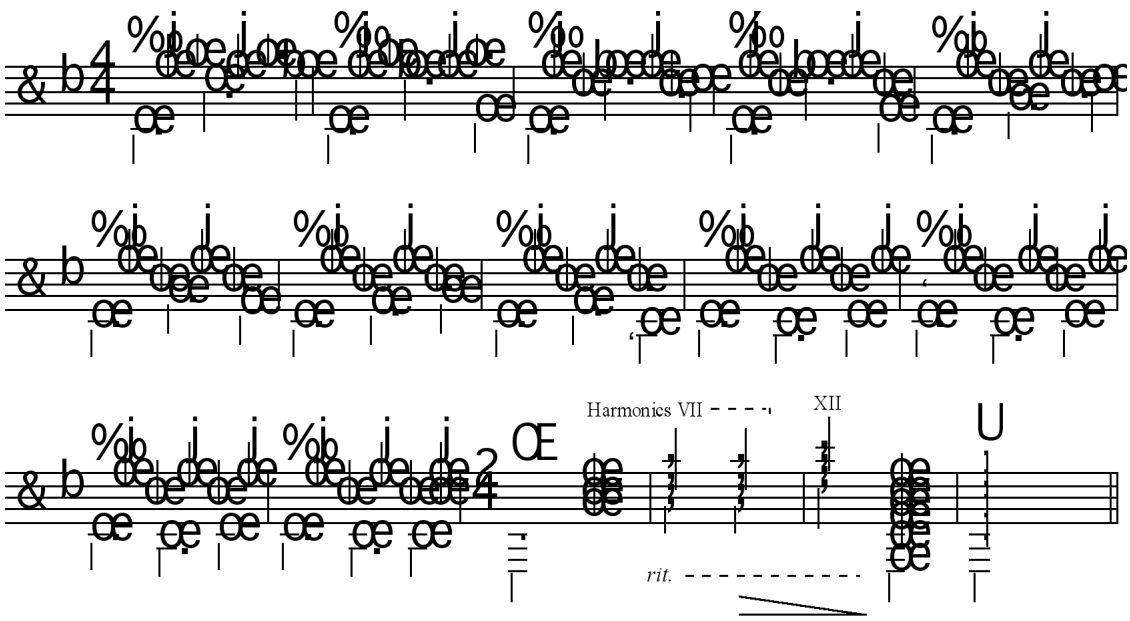
"The Red Pony," John Fahey.[107]



The bridge uses the chords which opened the piece. Fahey moves them down chromatically, and then back to where he began. Again, the syncopation is an amalgam of what Fahey uses, but what is consistent is the shifting dynamic level of the section, which builds to a peak before returning to the first main theme again (played twice) then to the second theme (played once) and then the main theme one final time on is played. This all leads Fahey to the climactic point of the piece. Fahey begins the climax by playing the descending D-minor bass melody from the introduction three times leading to a series of arpeggios played in a rather unorthodox manner:

[107] Ibid.

"The Red Pony," John Fahey.[108]



In order to play the arpeggios, Fahey reaches his left hand thumb completely over the neck of the guitar, covering all but the highest E string. He then picks out the pattern and shifts his thumb off one string every two measures. Beginning in measures 3 and 4, the top strings D and A ring out as Fahey plays the held notes. The last four measures that feature A and B-flat in the bass, Fahey is only fretting the low B-flat, the rest of the strings are ringing free. He strikes the low D and the D-minor triad in the measure of 2/4 hard, easing the dynamics as he plays harmonics at the seventh and twelfth position, finally coming to rest on the D-minor chord.

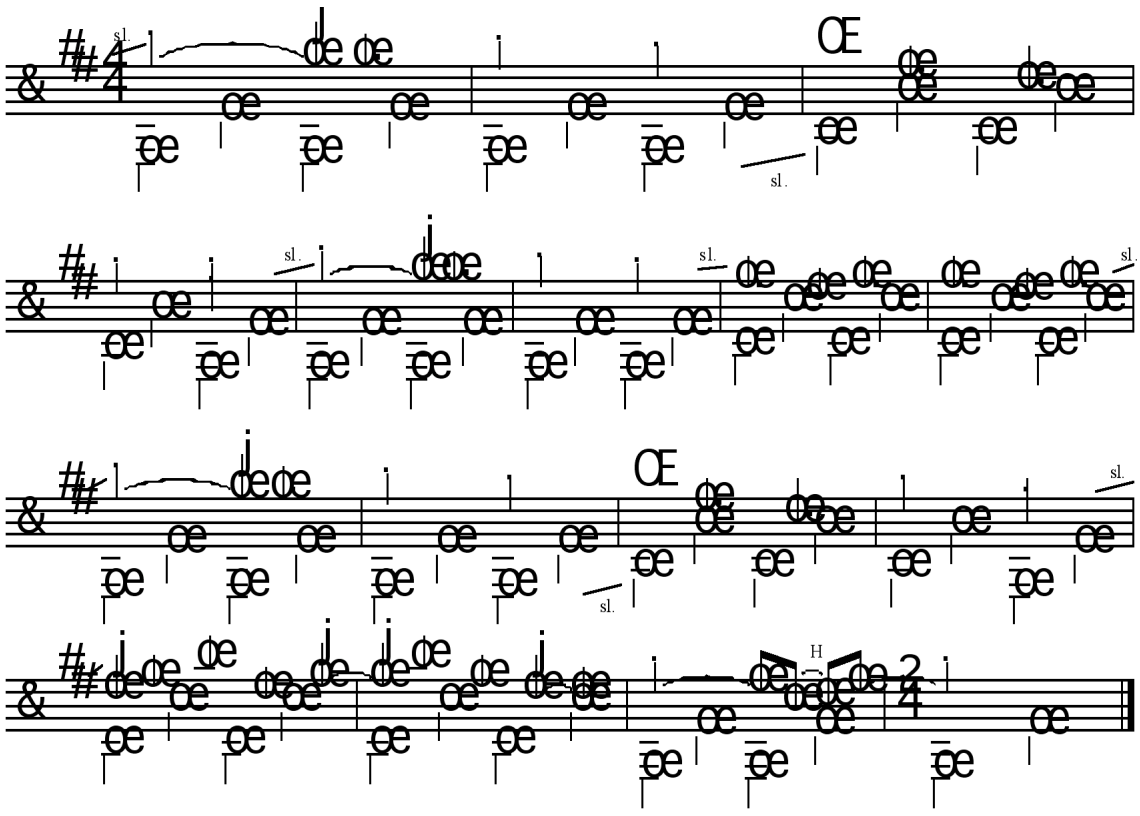
Fahey's acquisition of James' tuning enabled him to compose "The Red Pony." The piece further illustrates the multi-thematic nature of Fahey's cultivated style, while expanding the perception of how much a record can influence an individual, and in what ways. The melodic development of the piece may seem more restrained than in "Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," but this restrained nature was a large part of Fahey's cultivated style, and when absorbed, the melodic energy is no less developed.

It would be difficult to undergo any study of Fahey's cultivated style without

[108]Ibid.

examining his slide style, albeit briefly. In many ways, Fahey's slide work is an extension of his regular fingerpicking style, and he composes for each style in similar, yet idiosyncratic, ways. The opportunity can also be used to illustrate how Fahey took songs, and instead of quoting the material or covering the songs outright, he used the song as a basis for further development. The following example is of the song "Poor Boy," originally composed by Booker White. White played the piece in open G with slide. Fahey took the piece, transposed it to D, and added a bridge. When the piece was recorded, co-authorship went to both Fahey and White. The first section is transcribed below, derived from the source material. The guitar is tuned to open D major:

"Poor Boy," John Fahey and Booker White.[109]

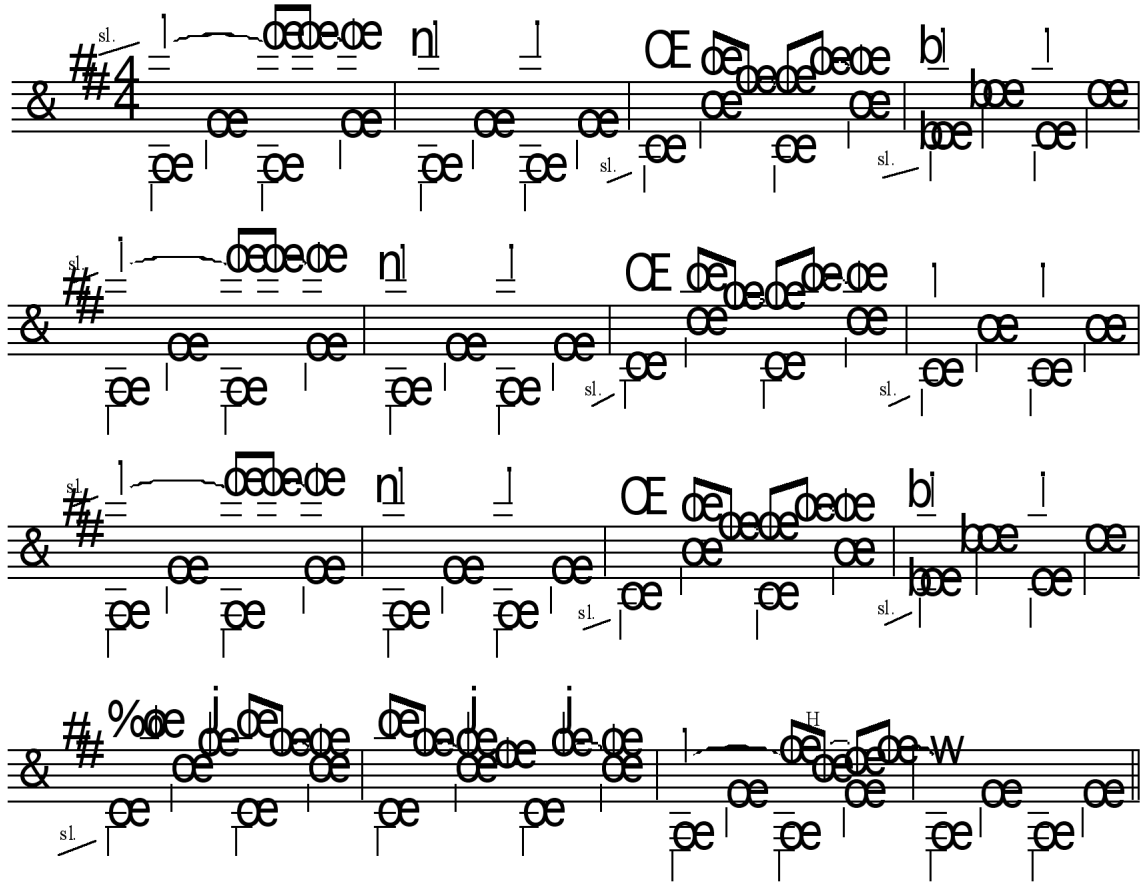


After examining the Sylvester Weaver track, this transcription should be

[109] Fahey, The Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

straightforward. The sixteen measures follow primary harmony played in positions. The tonic is open, the IV is at 5th position, and the V is at 7th position. The section composed by Fahey follows:

"Poor Boy," John Fahey and Booker White.[110]



Fahey makes interesting use of the flat 6th harmony in measures 4 and 12, and overall the section maintains a very straight forward approach to this type of slide playing. What is most important, is that when juxtaposed against White's melody, Fahey's additional melody expands the piece significantly, providing growth for the source melody. Fahey arranges the piece AABAABA.

[110] Ibid.

On the version used for this transcription, the start of the song is interrupted by the barking of a dog. This provides what may seem an unlikely segue into the next section to examine– Fahey's use of musique concrete. Barry Hansen said that Fahey was left alone at the house of a friend to record several tracks for The Transfiguration of Blind Joe Death. Only the family dog was there while Fahey was recording, whose barking, along with Fahey's hushing, created a false start for "Poor Boy." Hansen said it was his idea not to edit the barking out, and like so many of Fahey's other experimental strategies, it was the producer who ultimately assembled his tapes, usually per Fahey's instructions.

It may seem a stretch to classify the barking as musique concrete, and it was by no means highly experimental. But musique concrete is not defined rigidly:

> Its basic idea is to replace the traditional material of music with recorded sounds obtained from many different sources . . . As a rule this material is subjected to various modifications: a recorded sound may be played backwards, have its attack or resonance cut off, be reverberated in echo chambers, be varied in pitch by changing the speed of the record or playback, be modulated in various ways, etc.[111]

Fundamentally, musique concrete maintains an origin in the studio, and even though a certain element of manipulation is expected, it is not always necessary. Many of Fahey's pieces had been edited from multiple takes in order to assemble the best possible performance, hence the power of the studio. The opening track of Vol. IV is more notable for this process than what Fahey actually plays on the guitar. The studio, as part of the "Loudspeaker Revolution," not only provided for significant alterations of sound, but also allowed the very simple process of documenting sound, more or less a phenomena of the twentieth century. So, whereas the barking of a dog may not be as "sophisticated" as other tape and frequency manipulation, it should not be considered outside the power of the studio. The decision to leave it in or eliminate it had to be made after all.

Artists such as Fahey owe the very existence of their career to the studio, from start to finish. Without the records to form a vernacular base, they would be without a basic technique. Without the technology of the studio, Fahey would have

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[111] WIlli Apel, Harvard Dictionary of Music, Cambridge: Belknap, 1972, 560.

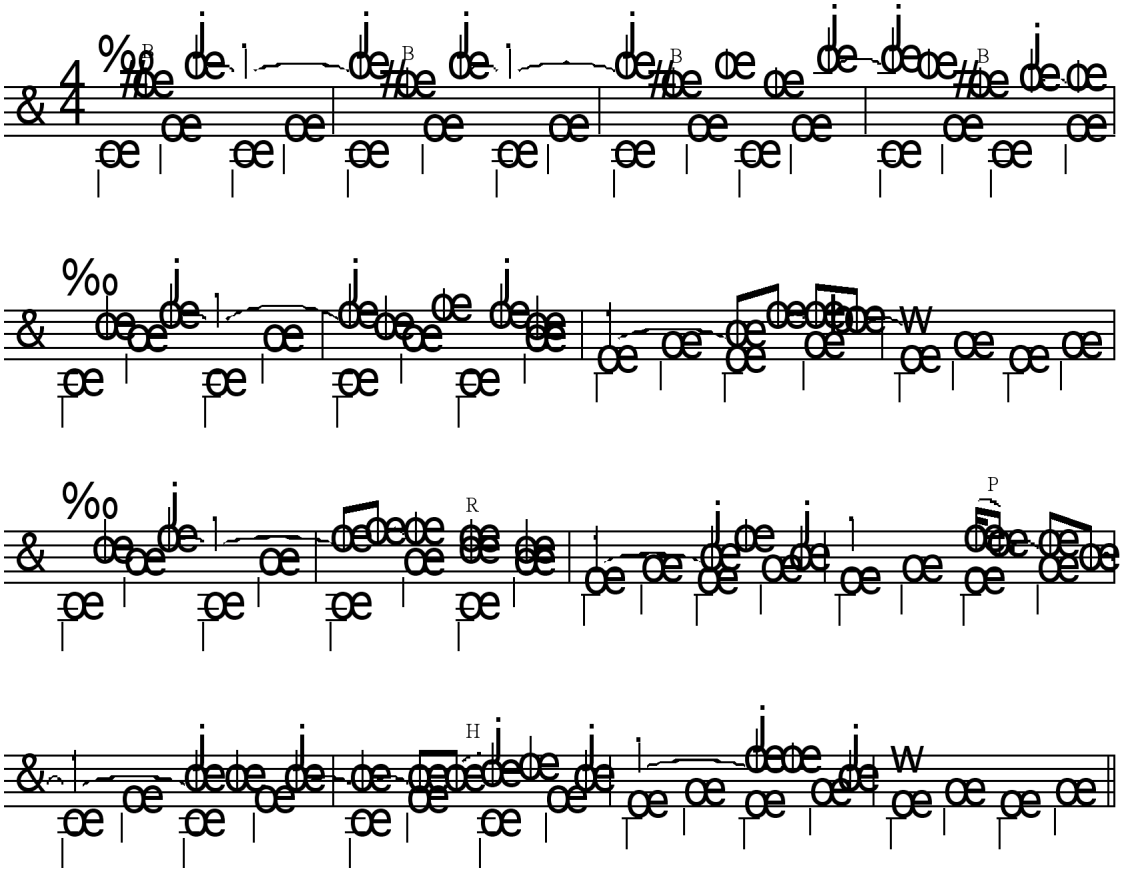
been unable to begin his career, the first several years of which were based more on his recordings than on performance. His first big break was in Boston, all the way across the country from where he lived at the time, and was due largely to a short run of only 300 LPs. It should be mentioned that musique concrete is also known for doing away with scores, and therefore live performance, and it would make sense that a recording, no matter how avant garde, could precede the performance.[112]

It is important to this study to establish recordings and the recording process in a larger sphere, and to attempt to raise the perception of how fundamentally important they have been to the development of music in the twentieth century. With that being said, it should be acknowledged that Fahey did indulge in many traditional examples of musique concrete. Since it is difficult to transcribe these examples, they will be discussed broadly, primarily through prose.

The most common technique of experimentation for Fahey was to take a more or less straightforward guitar progression, and either layer sounds on top of it, or simply manipulate the source recording. “Knott’s Berry Farm Molly” from Vol.IV is an early example of this. A transcription of the basic progression introduced by Fahey follows:

[112] Ibid., 60.

"Knott's Berry Farm Molly," John Fahey.[113]

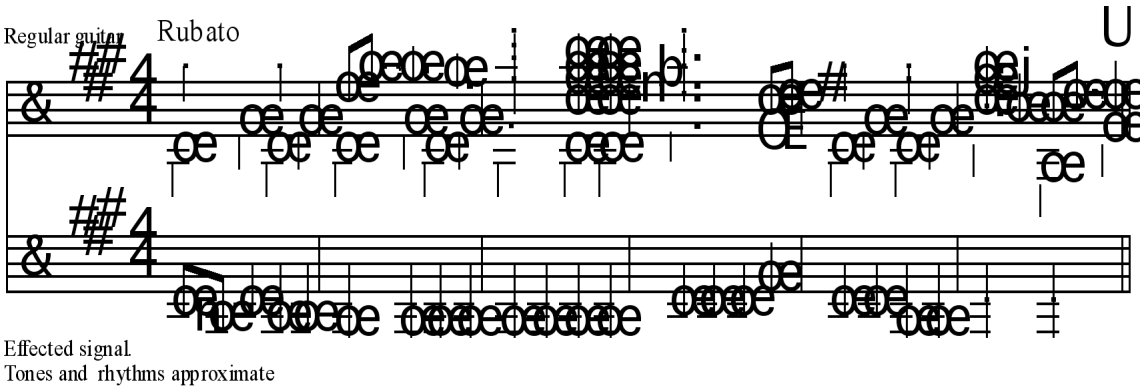


The guitar part does feature an interesting bend on the D-sharp, or sharp 5th, in measures 1-4, but otherwise follows a typical sixteen-measure blues progression. The section is played two times, after which a backwards guitar part is faded in, and the regular guitar part is left out. After approximately the same time frame, the original guitar part, played backwards, is cross faded back into the original regular part. Fahey eventually adds a new guitar part, omitted from the transcriptions, eventually returning to the backwards passage, treated to a bit more echo. Fahey then returns to the original section, with some slight variation and expansion of the theme, which closes the piece.

[113] Fahey, The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party and Other Excursions (Vol.VI). Transcription by Nick Schillace.

In “Knott’s Berry Farm,” Fahey switches between the regular and backwards parts, at other times he juxtaposes the two. On “The Story of Dorothy Gooch Part I,” Fahey introduces the piece by playing a hymn-like melody that leads to a low, heavily reverb soaked tone, perhaps from a guitar, or possibly a piano, that is joined by a more traditional sounding guitar melody on top, as the low tone is struck as a drone. An excerpt appears below; the time on the CD is approximately :53-1:23:

“The Story of Dorothy Gooch Part I,” John Fahey.[114]



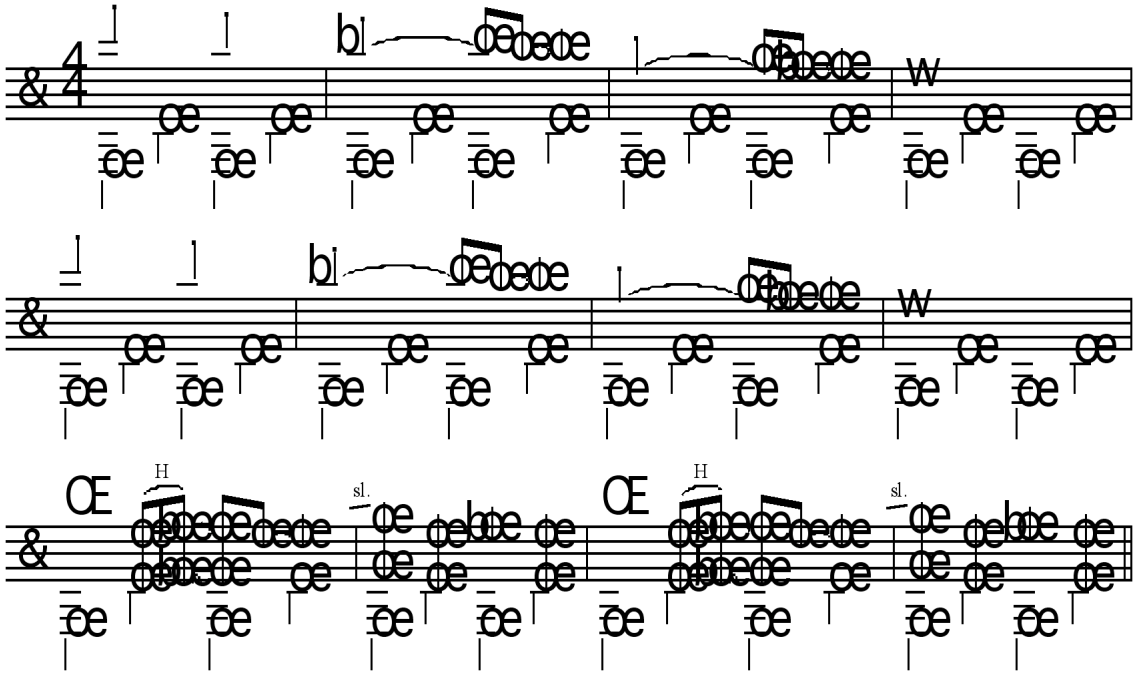
The lower voice is approximate in both notes and rhythm, but this transcription gives a general idea of the way the two parts work together. The regular guitar ends at the fermata, and the effected signal goes on and introduces a straight A-minor blues, based on an earlier piece by Fahey, “Some Summer Day.”

Fahey also worked multi-movement compositions when using musique concrete. “A Raga Called Pat Parts One-Four” and “A Requiem for Molly parts One-Four” feature extensive collage work, not simply manipulation of a sound source. Environmental sounds, train whistles, speeches, frequency and turntable manipulations, sound effects records, gamelan and gongs, Tibetan Monk chants, and even snippets from the music of Charles Ives can be lifted from both four-part works. The individual movements ranged from two and a half to nine minutes, and featured Fahey’s guitar themes mixed amongst the collages. Of the suites, the “Ragas” are more interesting, mostly since Fahey largely disassociated himself from the “Requiems.” The first two “Raga” installments were on Days Have Gone By,

[114] Fahey, The Voice of the Turtle. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

and not only feature the musique concrete, but a tuning that Fahey made his own, a variation on open C (CGCGCC). An approximation of an excerpt from the main theme is transcribed below; the time on the CD track is about 2:33- 2:50:

"A Raga Called Pat Part One," John Fahey.[115]



The piece begins with train whistles and thunderstorm sounds. The guitar is treated to heavy reverb and echo, and when this passage begins, the collage work subsides. This sets the mood for the four movements. When Fahey used C tunings, like on the tracks "Sunflower River Blues," "The Portland Cement Factory at Monolith, California," his work on Fare Forward Voyagers (Soldier's Choice), as well as the "Raga" installments, he was able to distance himself from some of the standard phrases that his vernacular had embedded in him. He still bent and utilized blue notes, but in this example, the primary pitch collection is C-Db-E-Ab-G-B. The interval most emphasized is the minor 2nd between the root and flat 2nd, and it was most likely the case that, to Fahey's ear, the sound of this interval was close to achieving the eastern type of scale sounds he heard in his head.

The other two parts of the "Ragas" are found on The Voice of the Turtle. But

[115] Fahey, Days Have Gone By. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

more important to the discussion on musique concrete is the album itself. The entire record can be considered a complex work of studio composition. Whether all the riddles behind that record become solved is irrelevant. On multiple levels, The Voice of the Turtle can illustrate the sophisticated use of the record as creative medium far beyond the manipulation of sound waves in a "music laboratory." The record includes collage type pieces discussed so far, old 78 recordings, new recordings made to approximate the sound of 78 recordings, and field recordings of Fahey and old-time fiddlers. The entire work is intended to be experienced in its entirety, and the lengthy liner notes detailing the facade are part of the experience as well. After all, the notes were included in the record sleeve along with the album, and despite the "put-on" nature of it all, they act as pseudo-performance notes to accompany the work. In many ways The Voice of the Turtle, with all the extraneous inclusions and studio techniques, and particularly the 78 examples, serves as an excellent example of the potential influence of recorded medium and what can be done with it as an art form.

The influence of blues and old-time music in Fahey's cultivated style has been illustrated primarily by technical example. The influence of concert music has been tied more to form– the multi-thematic compositional style of Fahey's music. While both effect Fahey's vocabulary, the blues and old-time material is much more prominent and more easily traced. Fahey did borrow from concert composers in the same way, utilizing themes and melodies, not simply form. "The Yellow Princess" is one such piece. The title is taken from the French composer Camille Saint-Saens' La Princess Jaune, Op. 30 (The Yellow Princess). Fahey explains the connection in the liner notes to the album of the same name:

> I once managed to copy the main theme of a passage from "The Yellow Princess Overture," by Camille Saint-Saens. This is a stabilized improvisation upon that passage. I began it in 1954 and completed it in December, 1966, Bastrop, La.[116]

The record did not come out until 1968, but Barry Hansen confirms Bastrop, Louisiana as a destination on the canvassing trip the two took during Christmas break

[116] Fahey, liner notes to The Yellow Princess.

1966.[117] If Fahey did complete the piece at this date, Hansen was probably witness to the process. Hansen discussed Fahey's composition process during that journey. Hansen:

> Lying on a bed in his underwear after dinner, guitar in lap, he'd start out by going over a traditional tune, and then let his fingers "free- associate" (his own word for it) until they formed new licks and phrases to his liking. Having got the basis of something, he'd add more and more to it until he had a composition with a beginning, middle, and end.[118]

By the time Fahey recorded the album The Yellow Princess, his control over his cultivated style had reached a definite peak. Constructing muti-thematic pieces had become natural for Fahey, and his playing had been strengthened by his numerous albums and increasing tour schedule. Hansen wrote, "The title track was the first to be recorded, and he [Fahey] nailed it on the first take."[119]

The theme from the overture does not appear until after Fahey modulates after a bridge section. However, the piece is worth examining in its full form. Due to Fahey's increased facility, it is clear by listening to the recording that he was much looser with his syncopation on "Yellow Princess" than on earlier pieces. There is more control, but his improvisational approach to rhythmic variation makes exact transcription difficult. Therefore, many of the sections have been distilled and abbreviated to fundamental elements. The introduction follows:

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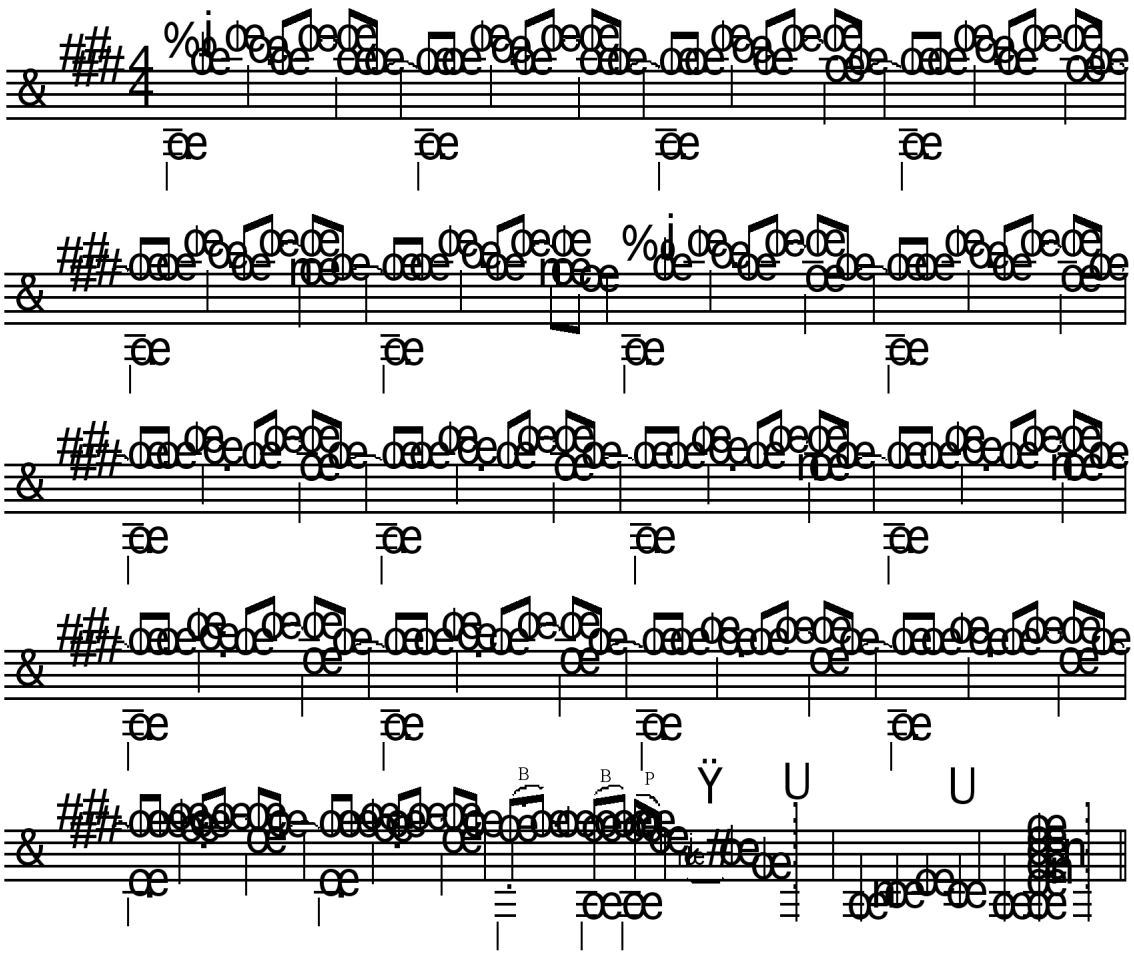
[117] Barry Hansen, interview by Nick Schillace, 6 April 2002.

[118] Hansen, liner notes to The Return of The Repressed, 9.

[119] Ibid., 20.

"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[120]

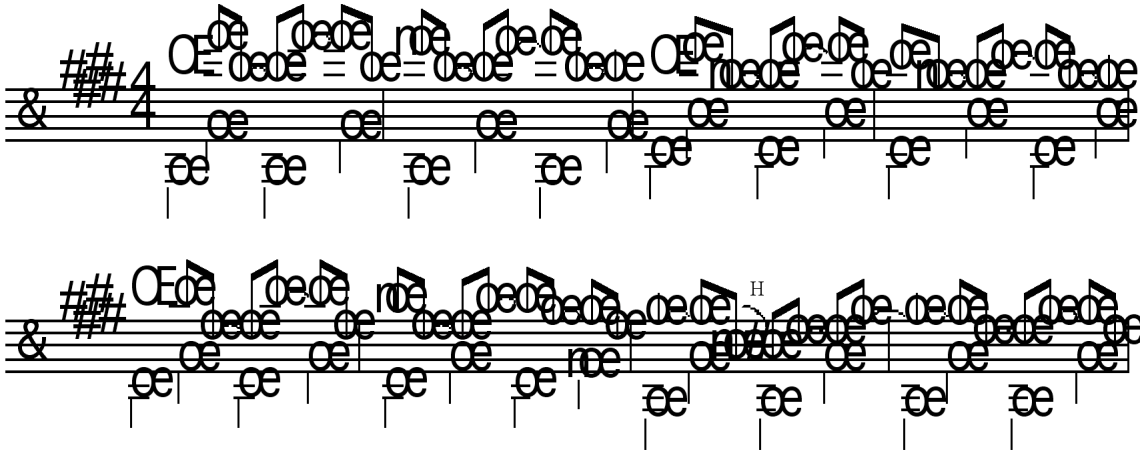


The piece is in standard tuning. The introduction is a series of three-note shapes moved down the neck, beginning in 12th position. Fahey once again makes use of a familiar rhythm and picking pattern. The inner voices of the triads switch, all on the second, third and fourth strings, and the high and low E strings are utilized throughout the passage. Each chord is played twice. The first harmony is E major. The notes held down are EG#B. The E on beat 3, down beat, is held and played

[120] Fahey, The Yellow Princess. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

by the thumb. The up beat is the open first string plucked by the fingers, as are the other Es in the measure, both low and high. The harmony remains in the same voices throughout the passage, and if followed, the outlying progression is: E- Emaj7- E7- C#min7- F#min7- D9- B7sus11-E. Admittedly there may be some other interpretations for one or two of the chords, but distilled the progression is I- VI- II- bVII- V- I, and not too unusual. Measures 19 to the end feature unison bends, where the D-sharp and E are bent together until the D-sharp sounds in unison with the E, followed by a slow run in the bass. Fahey strums some open E chords, then uses a transitional technique where he strums all the strings open (EADGBE), which leads to the first main theme:

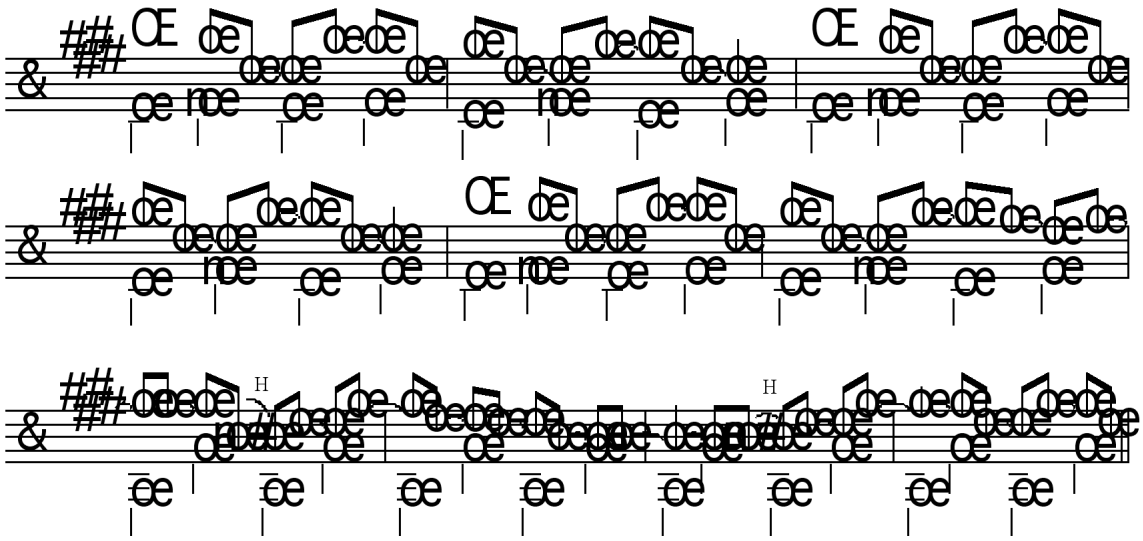
"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[121]



Fahey uses a major to dominant 7th chord shape to descend the neck. Beginning first with Emaj then followed by E7, the shapes only differing by the changing of one finger, Fahey moves to C#maj to C#7, then finally to Amaj to A7. The bass begins alternating between E and E, switching to A and G-sharp, then A and E. Fahey resolves the progression on E major in measures 7 and 8. Continuing on, Fahey then shifts between two harmonies, C#DG#B and Bmin, again shifting a held shape, then resolving on Emaj again for the remaining four measures:

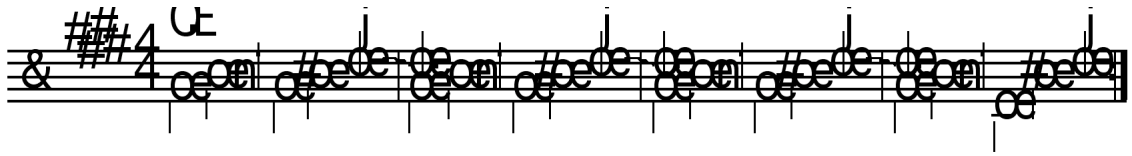
[121] Ibid.

"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[122]



Fahey then begins a transitional section, based on an Emaj triad with an added flat 3rd. The juxtaposition of the flat 3rd against the major 3rd is important given the discussion thus far. It has been transcribed below:

"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[123]

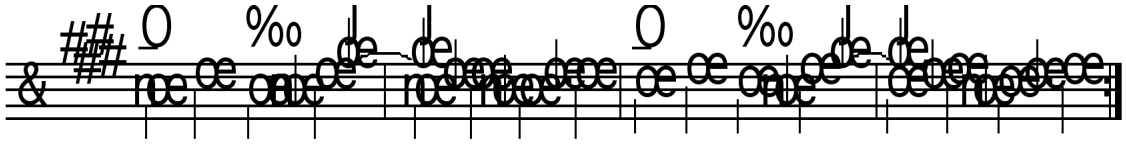


The E and G-sharp in the bass are fretted by the left hand, a major 3rd shape. The G-natural and B in the upper voice are open strings. Fahey plays through the basic idea several times before shifting the shape up, and then moving between two new harmonies, transcribed below:

[122] Ibid.

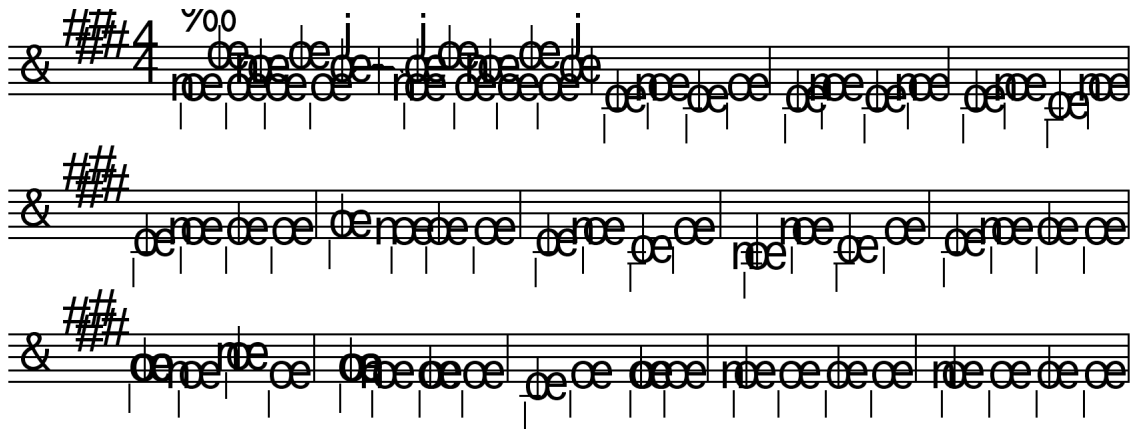
[123] Ibid.

"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[124]



Now the harmonies are Gmaj and Amaj. The Gmaj is important because this developmental section is progressing towards a modulation, which is in G major. After repeating the Gmaj and Amaj a few times, Fahey eventually works into a transitional section, the first part of which his transcribed below:

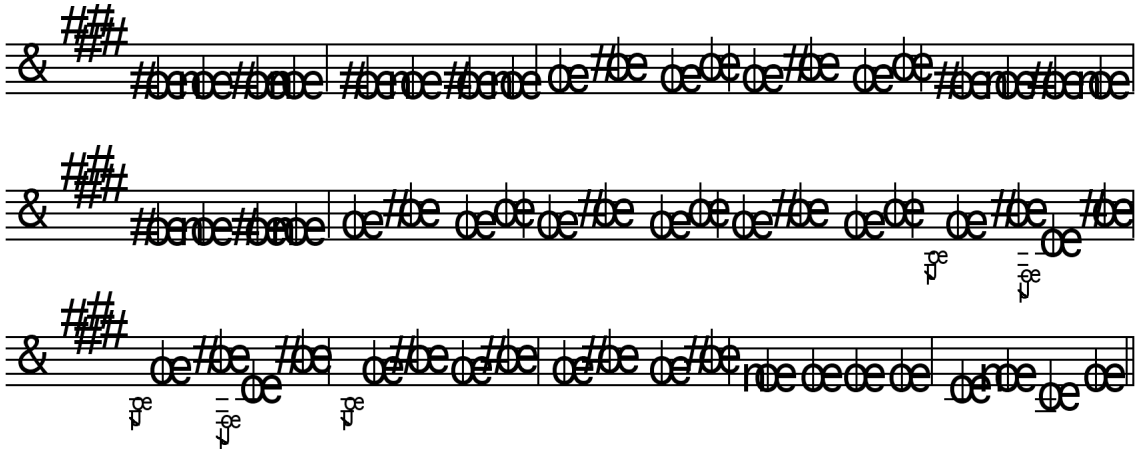
"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[125]



The above section has been simplified to make analysis easier. The upper voice in the first two measures continues throughout, but has been omitted for the sake of clarity. The primary moving voice has been double stemmed in the remaining measures to make it easier to follow. The D-natural on beats 2 and 4 is played on the open fourth string, Beats 1 and 3 are fretted.The moving voice outlines a G-major pentatonic scale (G-A-B-D-E), and Fahey ascends and descends through the scale, eventually moving back through earlier material from the transitional section, with recognizable variation:

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

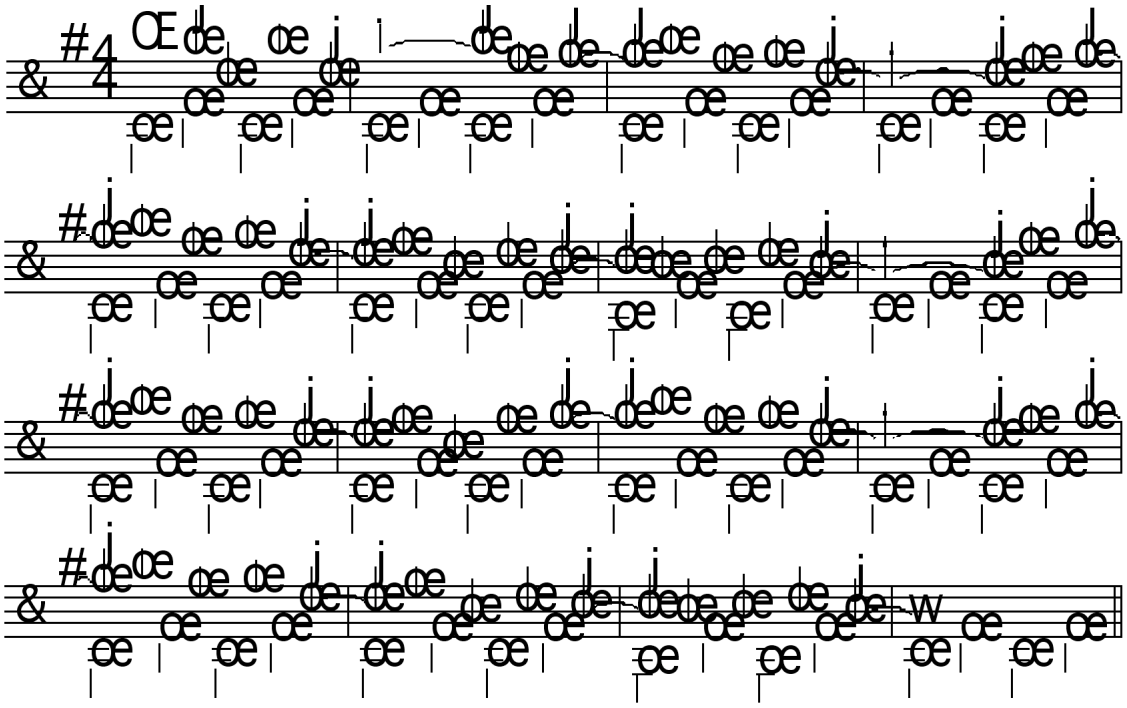
"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[126]



The upper voice is omitted here, but actually still continues. Fahey uses the dissonance between the D-natural and D-sharp to acknowledge the coming modulation, switching between it and the Emaj harmony. Beginning in measure 10, he hammers on the E and B with open strings, adding to the tension, before descending back down the neck, leading into G major and the Saint-Saens theme:

[126] Ibid.

"The Yellow Princess," John Fahey.[127]



The theme from the overture is transcribed in the upper voice. Fahey's quotation is near exact, even the original version is in G major.[128] It is interesting that both The Thief of Bagdad and The Yellow Princess feature non-western musical themes. The Yellow Princess is an operetta, originally composed in 1871.[129] The story involves a Dutchman's romantic fantasy involving Japan, and the musical themes use the pentatonic scale to mimic some of the musical sounds of Japanese music. Derivative examples of "Eastern" music are audible, and it is very possible that like the Arabic fantasy score to the Thief of Bagdad, these were the sounds that drew Fahey to the works. Fahey plays through this theme and then expands it somewhat, eventually working himself back into the the same transitional section, this time utilizing the same material to return to E major. He ends the piece by playing through the original main theme in E major before ending the piece.

Fahey's concert influences are not as easily traced as his other vernacular. In

[127] Ibid.

[128] Camille Saint-Saens, La Princess Jaune/Suite Algerienne, Chandos CHAN9837, 2000, compact disc.

[129] Ibid, liner notes, 4.

other instances he quotes Dvorak, Sibelius, Ives, and Stravinsky,[130] and he mentions several others. The significance not only lies in the clarity of the theme found in "The Yellow Princess," but its relationship to The Thief of Bagdad, and its example of Fahey's mature cultivated style. Also important is the overall context in which the material influences the entire composition. It encourages the modulation, and the material used in the modulation is based on the scale used to outline the borrowed theme. Fahey also implements the theme more into his own original work, rather than basing the entire composition on the theme itself.

The majority of Fahey's longer pieces are an average of five minutes in length. As early as his first record Fahey began experimenting with longer forms, usually themes improvised rhythmically with less defined transitions. "The Transcendental Waterfall" and "The Dance of Death" are both early attempts at extended forms, and both are worthy of study for this reason. Fahey also extended the length of many of his musique concrete pieces mainly through tape splicing and editing. "The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party" is just over nineteen minutes and has parts spliced together where Fahey was playing in different tunings, a difficult task to accomplish outside the studio. But Fahey's desire to play longer concert suites of guitar music necessitated a need to expand his pieces into longer forms. Regarding performance, Fahey said, "I play long melodies for half an hour or at least fifteen minutes because you can't really get going otherwise."[131] Bootleg tapes of Fahey concerts, lent by George Winston, reveal that Fahey would often take several pieces that shared tunings, and string them together.[132] This technique worked both for the regular as well as for the slide pieces. It was an expansion of the multi-thematic works that were shorter. Working under the same theory, Fahey could take three pieces like "Stomping Tonight on the Pennsylvania/Alabama Border," "In Christ There is No East or West," and "Beverly," and along with some other

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[130] Fahey, "Dvorak," America and Let Go; Fahey,"We Would Be Building," Days Have Gone By; Fahey, "Requiem for Molly," Requiem; Fahey and Robb, "Lullaby and Finale from the Firebird," Let Go.

[131] Higgins, incomplete source.

[132] George Winston private collection. George Winston lent twenty 60 to 120 minute cassette tapes of John Fahey concerts dating from 1972 to 1986.

borrowed themes of his own, could end up with a twenty minute piece of relative cohesion.[133]

As Fahey's control over his cultivated style grew, he was able to construct single works of substantially greater length. On the album America, released in 1971, Fahey recorded two songs that were near or over fifteen minutes in length, "Mark 1:15" and "Voice of the Turtle." These pieces essentially expanded Fahey's use of related themes; however, these works showed greater maturity than some of the earlier attempts at longer forms. In 1973, the apex of this muti-thematic long form was reached in the title track to Fare Forward Voyagers (Soldier's Choice), coming in at over twenty-three minutes. Admittedly it is not the length of the track that matters, rather the quality of the music that resides inside, but "Fare Forward Voyagers" is a valid attempt at putting multiple themes together in several variations. Fahey also returns to many of the themes in different juxtapositions providing better development than if he had simply strung together several related ideas. Dynamically the piece is also significantly varied, providing for a musical experience that is as emotional as it is extended.

It would be difficult to delve into these longer pieces sufficiently. It is assumed that the reader can understand how Fahey could develop his multi-thematic approach to even greater lengths given the examples provided so far. The relevance of these longer pieces should be understood, and therefore have been mentioned. However, discussing some later works of Fahey's will allow for a better understanding of how his cultivated style worked over time.

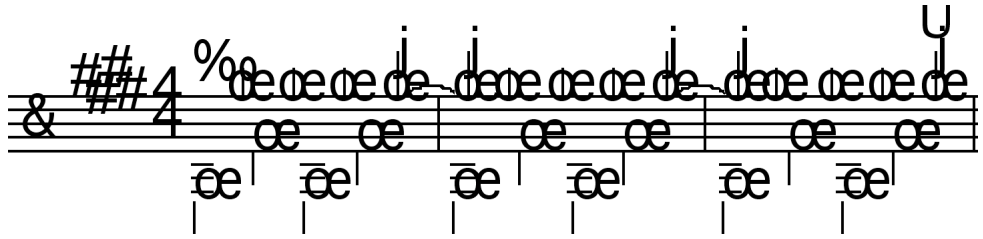
Fahey's cultivated style was established within the first decade of his career. Since he did not begin touring extensively until the mid to late 1960s, and was also preoccupied with graduate school, his creative energy fell primarily to recording. Even though he continued to record during the 1970s, his material was not significantly different than this earlier period. It was during the early 1970s that Fahey got interested in the music of Bola Sete, and during the 1980s this influence would manifest in his playing and influence the much of his output. But Fahey also grew

[133] Fahey, Concert at McCabe's in Santa Monica, California. Recorded 10 October 1974 by George Winston.

technically, aside from Sete's influence, and his mature work of the 1980s came early, on the 1983 album Railroad I. Even though Railroad consisted primarily of earlier Fahey themes, it did so no less than other albums released during the decade. More importantly, it was a marked return for Fahey to some of his earlier techniques, and therefore represents a culmination of his early cultivated work, along with the proficiency that had come from years of touring.

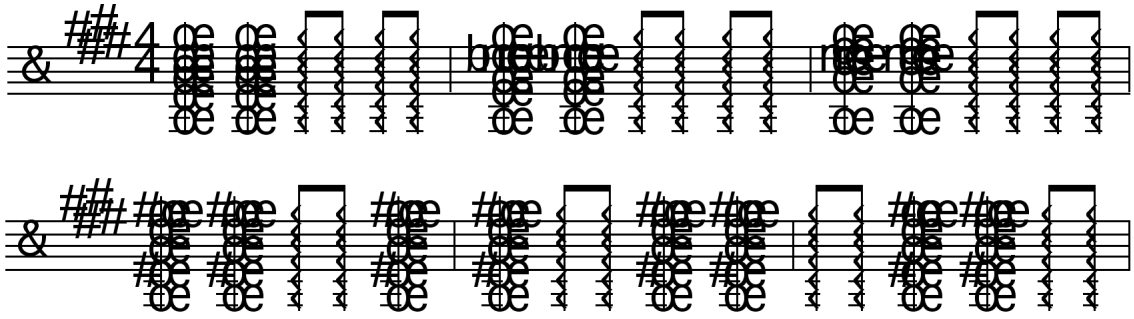
"Frisco Leaving Birmingham" is a good example of how Fahey's music had progressed during the 1970s. Fahey opens the tune with an Emaj harmony with an alternating bass:

"Frisco Leaving Birmingham," John Fahey.[134]



This eventually becomes part of a larger theme further into the piece, but initially gives way to a passage of strummed chords:

"Frisco Leaving Birmingham," John Fahey.[135]



In the first measure, the notes that are fretted by the left hand are EG#B, the low E and the high E and B are open strings. If the notes in the held voice are followed throughout the measures, the fingering can be followed up the neck,

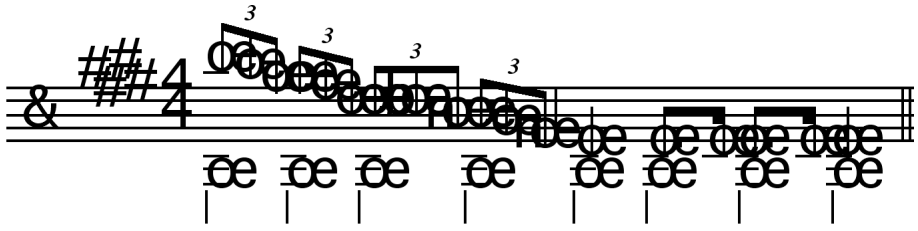
[134] Fahey, Railroad I. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

[135] Ibid.

moving through third, sixth and finally tenth position. Once again Fahey utilizes an initial shape to shift along the neck, creating various harmonies along the way. Even more important is the strumming, most likely an influence of Sete. Fahey wrote in 1977: “In recent years, I have incorporated and plagiarized as much as I could of the solo guitar work of Bola Sete. Where previously I eschewed any classical, Spanish (except flamenco) or bossa nova influence, I now find myself working this material in wherever I can.”[136] Like Fahey, Sete’s style transcends easy categorization. George Winston wrote in the liner notes to Ocean Memories, “His [Sete’s] music is a synthesis of several influences, including Brazilian folk music, bossa nova, Spanish music, classical guitar, jazz, and American folk. What evolved is a style that was uniquely his.”[137]

Fahey used various strumming techniques throughout his career, but this one, somewhat distilled in the transcription, is more deliberate and vibrant than ones used earlier. The chords designated with x are transitional strums in which the notes are not played, but the right hand strikes the muted strings. It is an audible homage to some of the strumming techniques of Sete, whose album Ocean certainly was having an affect on Fahey. The next main theme shows the influence as well:

“Frisco Leaving Birmingham,” John Fahey.[138]



The descending melody line is reminiscent of Sete’s playing, yet still maintains Fahey’s voice. The mixture of both the G and G-sharp, as well as B and B-flat, stay consistent with much of Fahey’s neutrality in tonality, and the inclusion of the C-sharp against the D-natural, the major 6th and flat 7th, are also popular melodic

[136] Fahey, introduction to The Best of John Fahey: 1959-1977, 16.

[137] George Winston, liner notes to Ocean Memories.

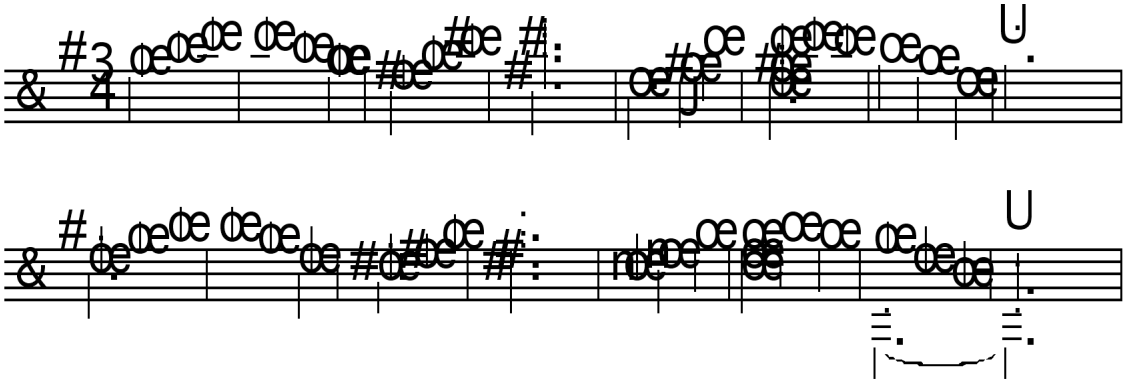
[138] Fahey, Railroad I. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

choices for Fahey. In this example the triplet rhythm, as well as the dotted eighth note and sixteenth note, are closer to the sound of the Brazilian rhythms that make up Sete's playing, instead of triplets and syncopated eighth notes of the blues rhythms that are common to Fahey.

Much of Railroad I was an attempt by Fahey to reconnect with some of the blues themes he had drifted from, and the remainder of "Frisco Leaving Birmingham" consists of variations on a twelve-bar blues. But on Fahey's next few albums, Sete's influence would continue to become integrated with his own playing. On the piece, "Melody McOcean," Fahey's multi-thematic compositional style connected with the maturity of these influences. In 1985, at a concert held at the American Music Hall, Fahey introduced a medley he was about to play: "The first half is real Brazilian . . . it's a song by Bola Sete. And the second half is a song that is pseudo-brazillian ["Melody McOcean"], a song I wrote."[139]

There are five main themes in "Melody McOcean." The introduction is transcribed below:

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[140]

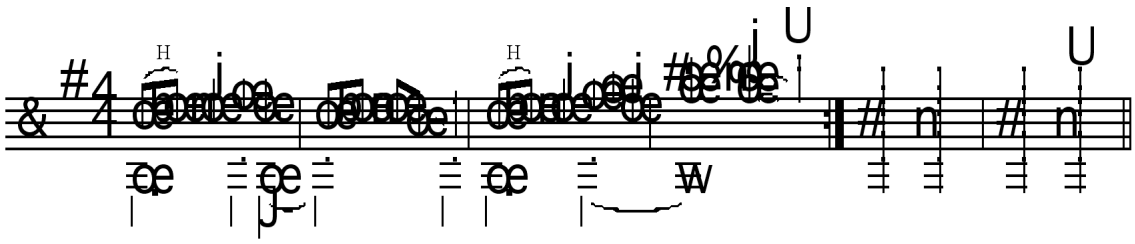


Fahey plays three-note chords on the first string. He does not simply move shapes; his harmonic movement is clearly melodically driven. The chords change every two measures. The harmony for the first eight measures is Imin-IImaj-V7-I. This progression, while not uncommon in any style of music, is most often associated with jazz, but the inversions used create a denser and more melodic

[139] Fahey, American Music Hall concert, 29 July 1985. Recorded by George Winston.
[140] Fahey, Rain Forests, Oceans, and other Themes. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

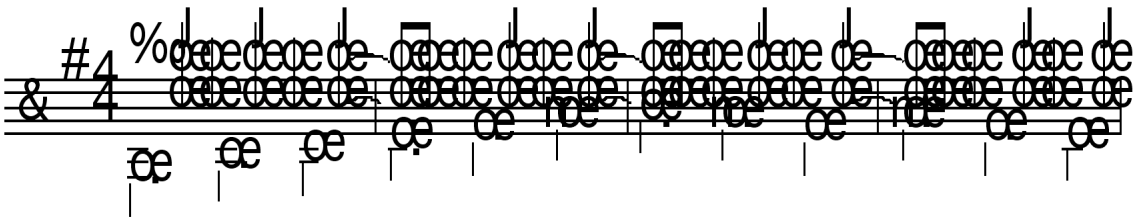
texture than simple harmony. The next eight measures repeat the harmonic progression, but the inversions have change to continue the move down the neck. The introduction gives way to the first main theme:

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[141]



The bass line uses a rhythm that is different from other examples. Fahey does not always use alternating and monotonic bass movement, but the rhythm in the first measure is a definite change. The melody exhibits more chromatic movement that is not related to shape shifting; rather Fahey is uses passing tones instead of focusing on the dissonance itself. The tonality is E minor, but Fahey switches between both G and G-sharp in measure four. After playing through a second time, Fahey begins to transition to the next theme by strumming between Emaj and Emin:

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[142]



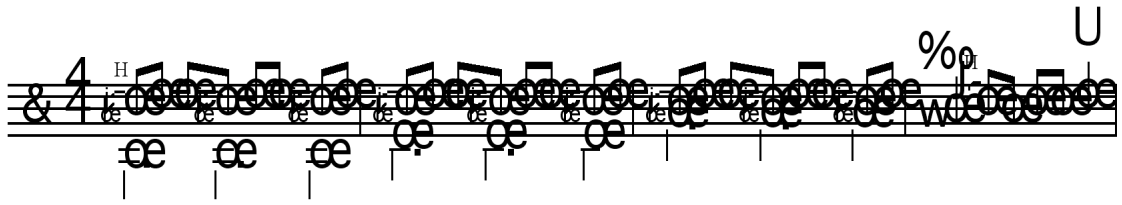
The melody for this theme is in the bass, and attention should be focused on the upper voices. The upper voice, G and B, is played in a quasi-bossa nova clave, or what Fahey calls "pseudo-brazillian." The rhythm in the upper voice, although varied throughout the piece, maintains a basic core rhythm, much like a clave in bossa nova. The result is an underlying rhythm that is felt the entire time. The bass

[141] Ibid.

[142] Fahey, Rain Forests, Oceans, and other Themes. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

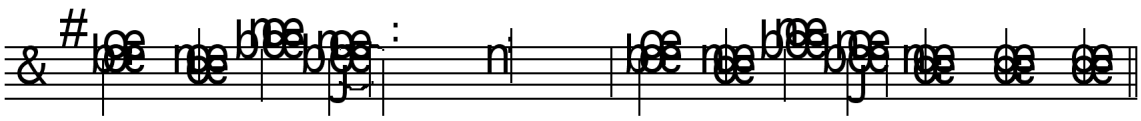
melody also plays a unique rhythm, and it is a main feature as well. The essence of what has happened to Fahey's playing is that the syncopation he emphasized so much in the past has not been altered to suit new influences. The heart of the music remains the same. After several passes through this theme, Fahey returns to the previous theme, eventually leading to a third theme:

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[143]



This section is in the key of C major, although Fahey made no defined modulation, the last chord being played was Emaj. The progression passes through the primary harmony, the melody simply repeating in the upper voice. The rhythm in the bass maintains the rhythmic motif. Fahey passes through this a second time, and then moves to a transitional section:

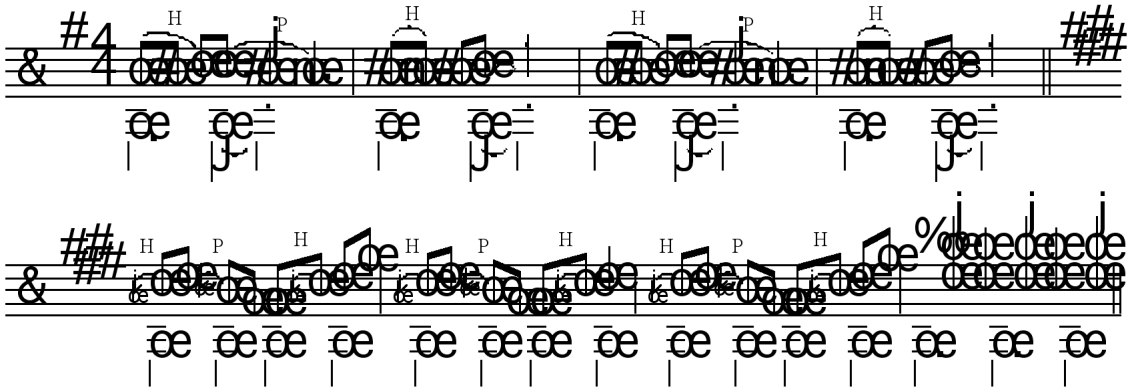
"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[144]



The use of the dissonant 3rds foreshadows Fahey's work in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The very sound is important enough, but the developing starkness in Fahey's music is becoming evident. The transition jumps out and is bare. The lack of a bass completely destroys the constant movement that has been so common to the music. Note that much of the movement comes on the up beats. Even though this transition is short, repeated once more with variation, it is important nonetheless. Fahey returns to earlier themes, before working to a second transition:

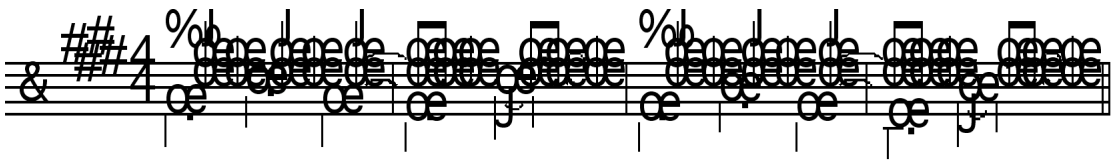
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[145]



The first four measures are the transition, a bit of a variation on an earlier theme. Fahey still avoids a steady rhythm, opting instead for a minimal two-note technique. He pulls off and hammers on the G and G-sharp, signaling the coming modulation to E major and the fourth theme, transcribed in the last four measures. The fourth theme picks up momentum and the steady monotonic bass is brought to action, until the fourth measure, when the psuedo-brazilian rhythm returns. Fahey plays through the theme twice before returning to earlier themes, finally making it to a fifth theme:

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[146]

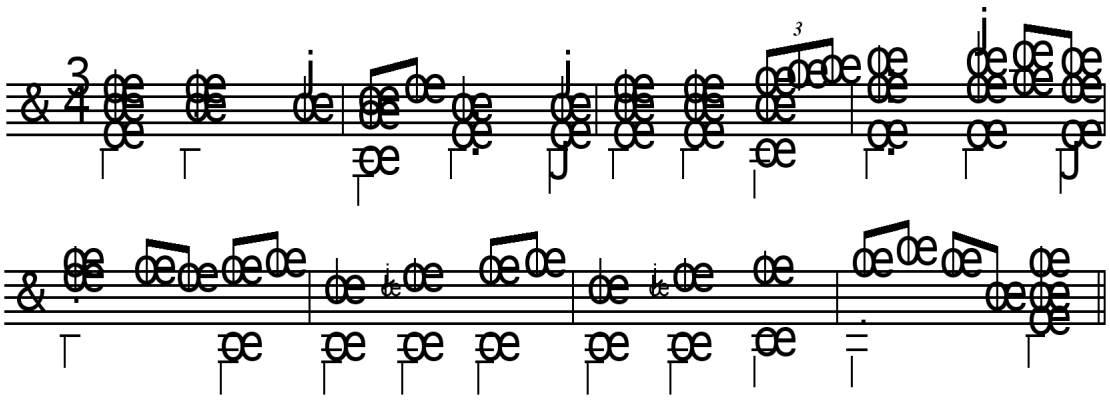


In theme five Fahey again utilizes the upper accompanying rhythm with the bass rhythm already established. The melody remains in the bass and in E major. Fahey plays through two earlier themes and then makes an unusual compositional move by integrating an unknown hymn arrangement, in the key of C major, transcribed below:

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

"Melody McOcean," John Fahey.[147]



Maybe it is not too unusual to find a hymn arrangement in any Fahey piece. One interpretation might lead to the conclusion that by inserting this passage, Fahey has made a statement about the flexibility of the contrasting styles and their ability to integrate. More likely, Fahey simply called upon the strengths of his cultivated style, and shows that as the style developed, it also maintained its core. Furthermore, the hymn was not simply tacked onto the ending, rather it was placed in such a way that Fahey was able to work his way back to a variation on the introduction, and finally to the introduction itself, bringing the piece to conclusion.

It would be unfair to say that the albums that Fahey recorded during the 1980s were unimportant. However, in the early 1990s, after Fahey had confronted his past, his music changed as well. The music that Fahey began exploring in the mid to late 1990s is an example of how a cultivated style can maintain flexibility over time. The physical and emotional aspects of Fahey's life, and the presumed effect that it had on his life has already been discussed. From a technical standpoint, it is worth reiterating that Fahey stopped using fingerpicks during the last decade of his career, and this no less affected his life. In an interview in 1997 Fahey told Stefan Grossman,

> After the Vietnam War, the company that made large-sized Dobro thumbpicks changed the dies, and I can't use this new batch that they came out with. . . I had to change my style of playing, so I went back to just using what nature gave us. I personally am glad because I like the tone of my bare fingers better, but I can't play quite as fast or noisy as I used to.[148]

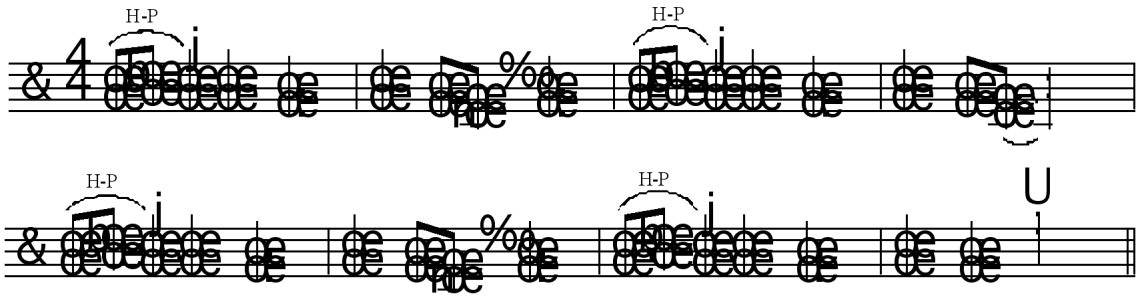
[147] Ibid.

[148] Grossman, "Searching for Blind Joe Death," 54.

The result was a stripped down Fahey. Almost completely gone were the fast right hand arpeggios that allowed him to syncopate movable shapes through musical dissonance. The music also grew darker, in part because of his life in general, but also due to this change of technique. Beginning in 1992 with the album Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories, hints of the direction Fahey was heading were audible. It would still be a few years before he would enjoy a second coming, but some of the images had already appeared. On the album, mixed in with the 1950s rock tunes, the piece, "In Darkest Night: The Objectification and Recurrent Sightings of Bizarre and Cathected Screen Memories (From Below) Along the Sligo," exhibit dark and minimal imagery that would transform Fahey's music are present.

"In Darkest Night . . ." consists of three main themes. The first theme follows:

"In Darkest Night," John Fahey.[149]

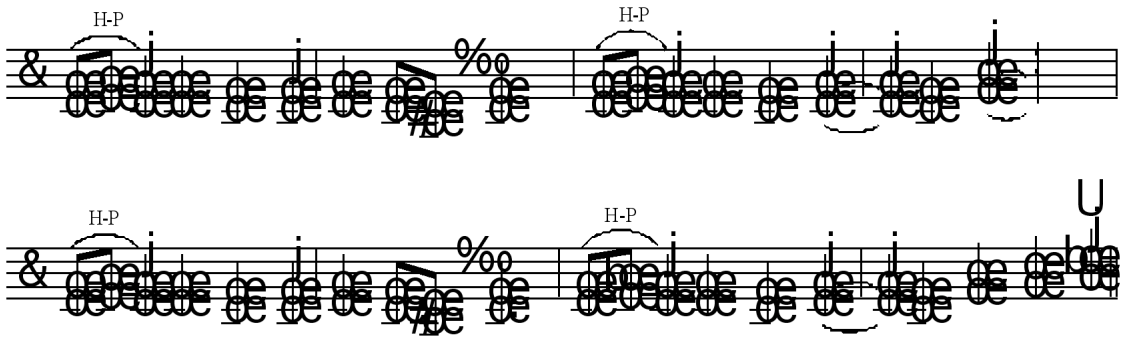


The entire theme is made up of fourths. The intervals are played as a single voice, most likely by the index and middle fingers without a bass accompaniment by the thumb. The tonality is close to E phrygian (E-F-G-A-B-C-E), a key favored by Sete, mostly for its flat 2nd. The two intervals make up the primary melodic motion as well, the reason for the B-flat. More important is the minimal approach that Fahey has used. The rhythms are more varied than transcribed here, but in general Fahey favors the upbeat, as if he is syncopating against a "ghost" accompaniment.

[149] Fahey, Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories. Transcription and arrangement by Nick Schillace. In order to distill this piece down to a form in which it could be discussed, abbreviation and consolidation has been done. The integrity of the piece still remains.

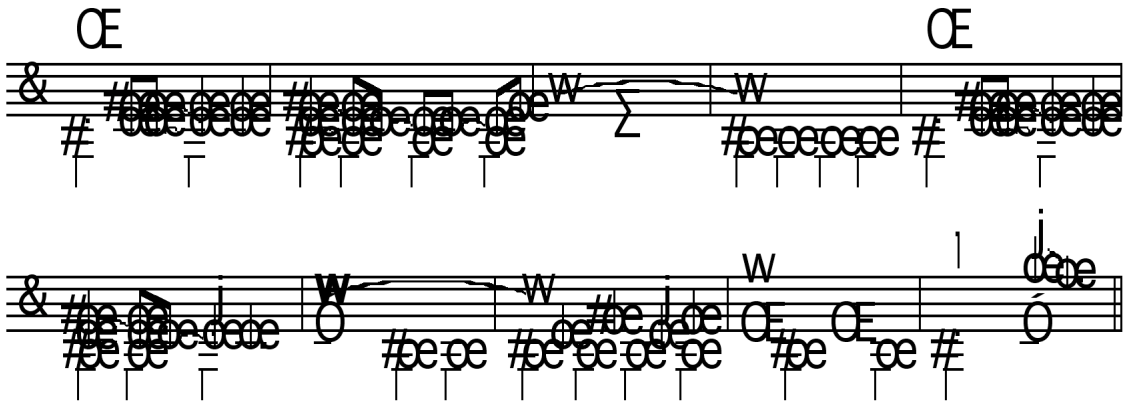
The sound of his bare fingerings adds an organic quality, and the tone is rounder and warmer. What Fahey has lost in terms of harmonics and overtones, he more than makes up for in the overall body of his tone. The second part of the first theme is similar to the first, transposed a fourth lower:

"In Darkest Night," John Fahey.[150]



The addition of the F-sharp maintains the fingerings and position that Fahey is using, and also ensures the consistency of the minor 2nd interval. Fahey plays through this theme several times before moving to the second:

"In Darkest Night," John Fahey.[151]



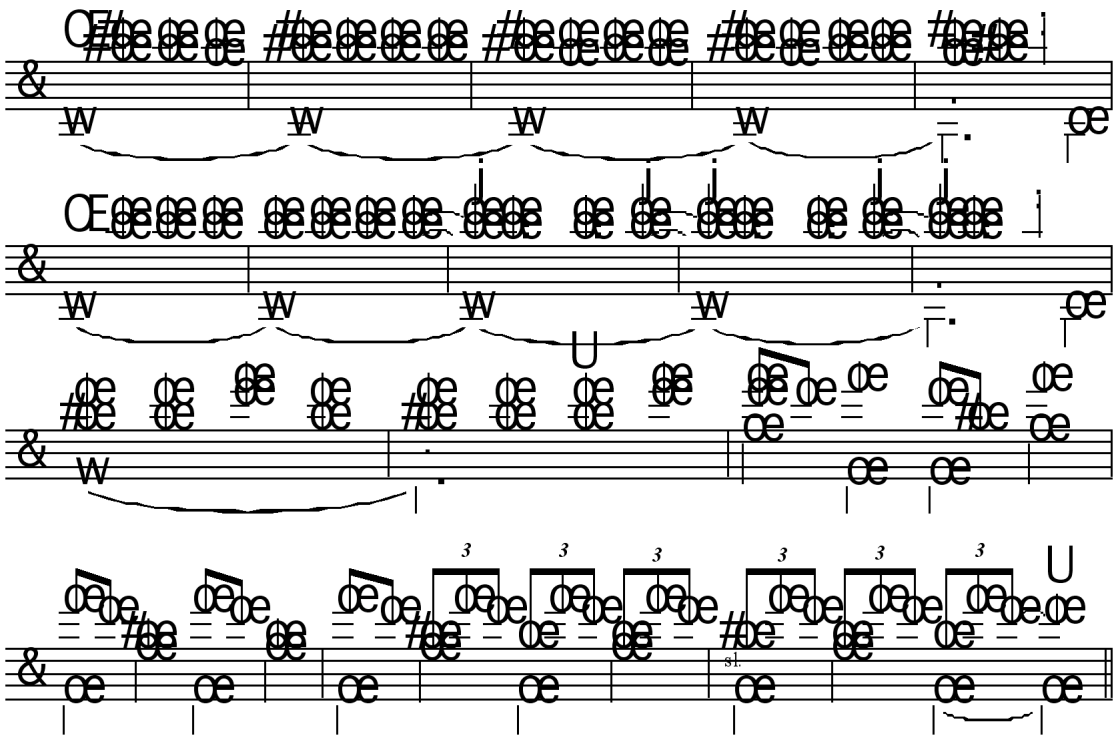
Fahey now adds a light bass accompaniment that he syncopates in various ways. The tonality has shifted and is better described as a pitch collection, F# -G-B-

[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

D-#E, since these are the notes that make up the fretted and open strings of the left-hand shape Fahey holds throughout. The particular shape provides for bitonality– B major in the bass, and E minor in the treble. The rhythmic subtlety of the bass is offset by the pointed tones that are heard in the upper voice. At the risk of overstating the issue, this brief excerpt is perhaps the best example of Fahey's distilled and cultivated style. It is not represented by any one criterion, but by a basic approach that defines elements of technique and note selection that could not be illustrated any more simply.

After moving between the first two themes a bit, Fahey comes to a third and final theme:

"In Darkest Night," John Fahey.[152]

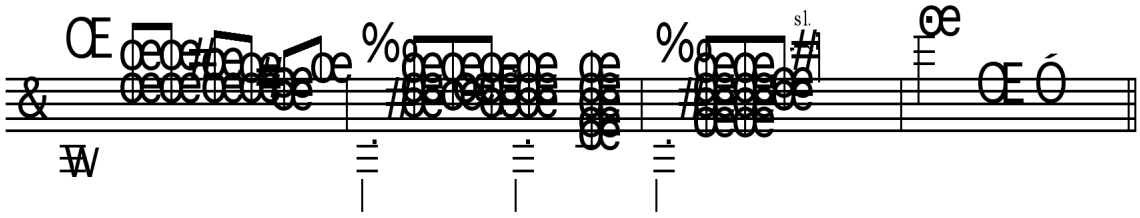


Of all the transcriptions presented in this research, this by far was the most difficult to notate. Fahey developed a looser approach to his variations, presumably

[152] Fahey, Old Girlfriends and Other Horrible Memories. Transcription and arrangement by Nick Schillace. In order to distill this piece down to a form in which it could be discussed, abbreviation and consolidation has been done. The integrity of the piece still remains.

due to an attempt at reconciling his new technique with his present desire to distance himself from his past. In this section, the theme is based on the thirds in the upper voice. Fahey moves up the neck until he reaches 12th position, at which point he plays a slow and awkward alternating bass, playing the open string D, and the octave at the twelfth fret. After cycling back through the other themes, Fahey eventually gets to a final brief passage that is more a coda than a new theme:

"In Darkest Night," John Fahey.[153]



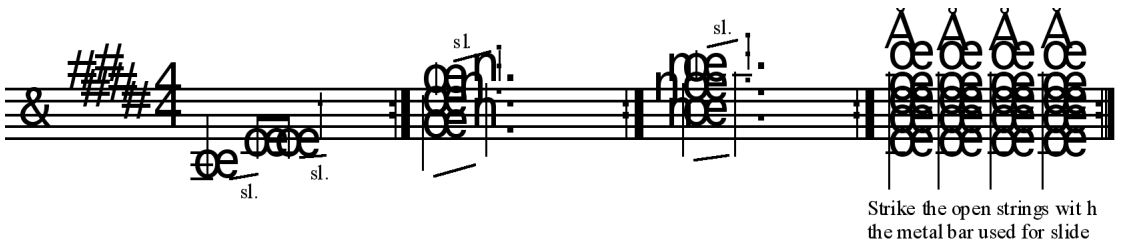
The passage is simply a blues turnaround in E, utilizing an E7 and eventually sliding up the neck to the final high E. One way to analyze this is to compare it with the use of the hymn found in "Melody McOcean." Although it is similar, since this short phrase is at the end, and would normally be found at the end of a blues progression either setting up another pass or the end, it is probably the case that Fahey used this in the same way, as a conclusion.

This style of playing became more prominent in Fahey's work in the latter part of the decade. Both The Perfect 78s and The Mill Pond showcase Fahey's developing and minimal transition, but he also began filling some of the spaces left by his simplified technique with more collage and musique concrete.The albums Womblife and The City of Refuge marked a turning point for Fahey. He began to exorcise his past by deconstructing not only his technique, but also by indulging the experimental tendencies he had always had. It is possible that Fahey realized his potential fate by getting a second chance at a music career. During the 1960s, he had seen that when a retired musician was "rediscovered;" chances were that the musician would spend the remainder of his/her career playing lukewarm versions of a past catalog. But Fahey was not only physically unable to do that, it seems he felt that his musical legacy reached beyond his earlier work. In a letter by Fahey,

[153] Ibid.

reprinted in the liner notes to The City of Refuge, he reiterated his earlier sentiment about being connected to the 1960s. Fahey wrote, “I do hope that nobody will try to make me out to be a child of the 1960s. I was playing what I play before and after the 60s. This period had very little influence on me.”[154] The track “Fanfare” is appropriately titled for an artist that needed to partially reinvent himself in order to get back on his feet. The piece is made up primarily of samples and industrial noises. “The rhythmic whir on “Fanfare” is Fahey’s own kitchen blender, and the song features samples from British art-rockers Stereolab and an Armenian composer.”[155] The guitar improvises variations on a few basic ideas. Fahey plays slide, and the guitar is either tuned to open B (spanish), or open A and capoed at the second fret. Some general themes have been transcribed below:

“Fanfare,” John Fahey.[156]



The guitar signal is distorted and overdriven. Fahey makes good use of such little material. The first excerpt is the main idea. The eighth notes are played on adjacent strings. Fahey slides up the sixth string to achieve the first B, then plays the fifth string open. The chords in the next two excerpts represent the basic harmonic movement, the Gmaj is an interesting choice, and is connected more to the Emaj than the Bmaj, although the third example shows the resolution to Bmaj by sliding from the Gmaj. The final example represents the technique of manipulating the strings with the slide itself. Fahey brings forth all sorts of screeches and howls by utilizing this approach, but since the guitar is tuned to an open chord, the underlying sonority is always consonant.

[154] Fahey, liner notes to The City of Refuge.
[155] Moerer, 97.
[156] Fahey, City of Refuge. Transcription by Nick Schillace.

Overall “Fanfare” is a mixture of guitar noise and collage layering. It might seem insufficient to only be provided with just the brief transcription, but it actually helps to recognize how Fahey was beginning to complete his transition by keeping things to a minimum. It is not clear whether or not he was playing an electric guitar or not. An acoustic guitar can be treated to any effect an electric guitar can. However, Fahey’s use of an effected signal helped to fill in the sound and it may have occurred to him that the key to coming to terms with his new style involved adopting the electric guitar. Fahey took to the electric guitar for the live Georgia Stomps, Atlanta Struts, and Other Contemporary Dance Favorites, but it was not until Hitomi, Fahey’s last official release during his lifetime, that he finally connected with his new technique and found in the electric guitar an instrument sensitive to the subtleties he now demanded.

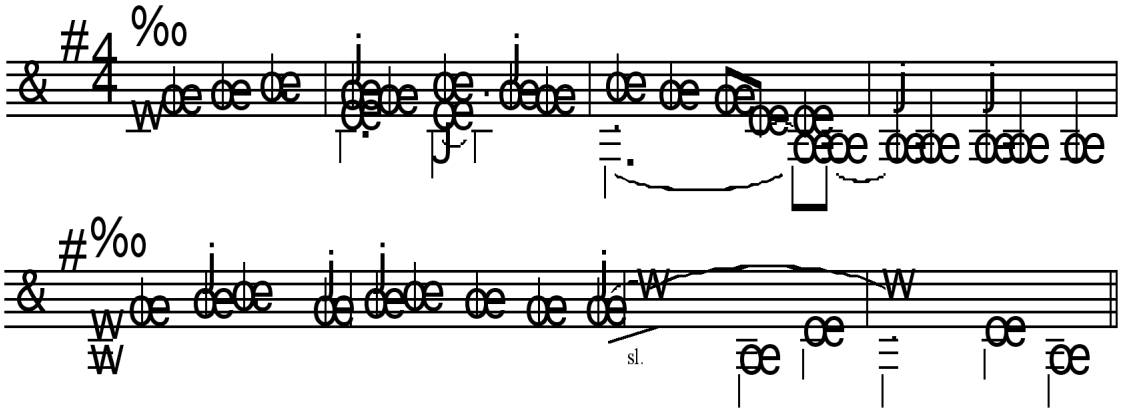
Close to the end of his life Fahey told an interviewer:

> My unconscious knows every every note on the fretboard and every chord. I’ll start playing things that I don’t know how to play, so I’ve got more into improvisation. Sometimes I make so-called mistakes, but it’s a lot more fun than playing this standard three minute song over and over.[157]

Fahey’s improvisation technique always emphasized rhythm and rhythmic variation, roughly maintaining primary themes. The title track to Hitomi is almost ten minutes long, but it consists of only one main theme, three secondary themes, an introduction and an end. “Hitomi” is an example of less a multi-thematic development than the development of singular idea into a long form. The musical vocabulary is akin to what at this point would be expected from Fahey, and the physical technique he uses is a final distilled version of only the necessary elements needed to project the music. The introduction is transcribed below:

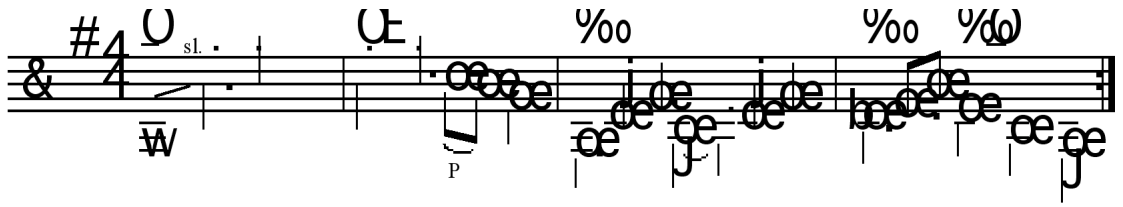
[157] Pouncey, http//johnfahey.com/Blood.html.

"Hitomi," John Fahey.[158]



Fahey plays in standard tuning, key of E minor. The basic harmonic movement in the first four measures is Cmaj to Emin, which is repeated in the following four measures. Instead of leaving the bass out or stripping the rhythm, the two parts work more in tandem, creating a more unified approach; the bass fills in when the melody is held and vice versa. The reverb and delay fill out the spaces and help sustain the notes, as well as provide for extra harmonics. The eight measures are the platform in which Fahey improvises upon for a short duration, before moving to the primary theme:

"Hitomi," John Fahey.[159]



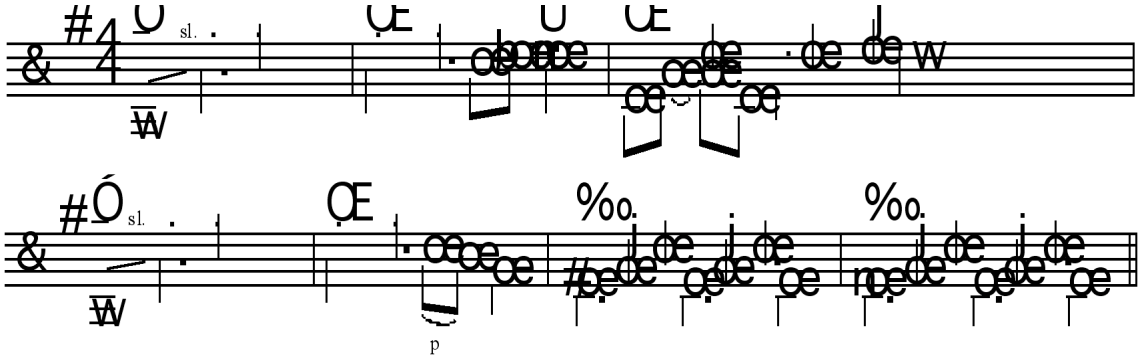
Even though four measures are transcribed, the first two are the most important. The slide to the B, and the subsequent plucking of the adjacent open B

[158] Fahey, Hitomi. Transcription and arrangement by Nick Schillace. Like "Fanfare," Fahey tunes the guitar up one half step on "Hitomi." In this example, it is likely that Fahey was used to the heavier tension that thicker strung steel string guitars provided, and by tuning the thinner electric strings up, he achieved the same "feel." Even though the guitar is tuned up to F, standard tuning is used in the notation.

[159] Fahey, Hitomi. Transcription and arrangement by Nick Schillace.

string, followed by the A to G pull off, is the most used motive. The second two measures are almost secondary to the main theme, but have been included to provide a single example for approximately eight minutes of the piece. The second two measures add the B-flat, adding the flat 5th to the Emin triad and inversions. Fahey works between both halves of the theme, sometimes combining small elements of each, but rarely adding any outside material. He eventually works through the material and comes briefly to a secondary theme, which is closely related to the first:

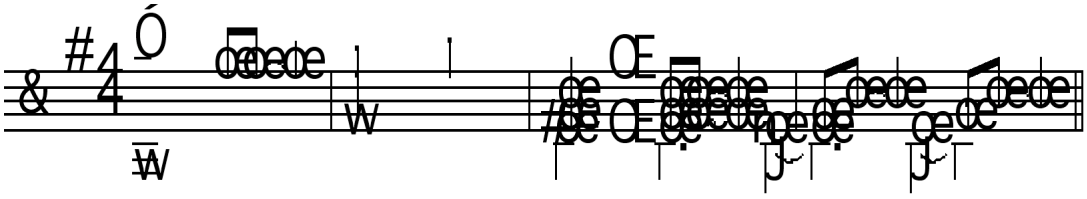
"Hitomi," John Fahey.[160]



Measures 1- 2 and 5- 6 are clearly part of the previous theme, but that plays into the way Fahey has developed the rest of it. He hasn't made a drastic change, he has simply begun shifting away from the variation on the more singular idea. This brief development, played for a much shorter duration than the main theme, begins to bring the listener out of the material and readies him/her for the conclusion. In measures 7 and 8, Fahey adds the major 6th in the bass, part of the major subdominant harmony, Amaj, which gives way to a minor subdominant, Amin. This is very important since even the dominant harmony B has been left primarily without the 3rd, and therefore the sonority has sounded very open. This introduction of clear harmony has a noticeable impact on the attention of the ear, and has an anticipatory effect. The second theme is varied considerably less, and moves towards a third and final theme:

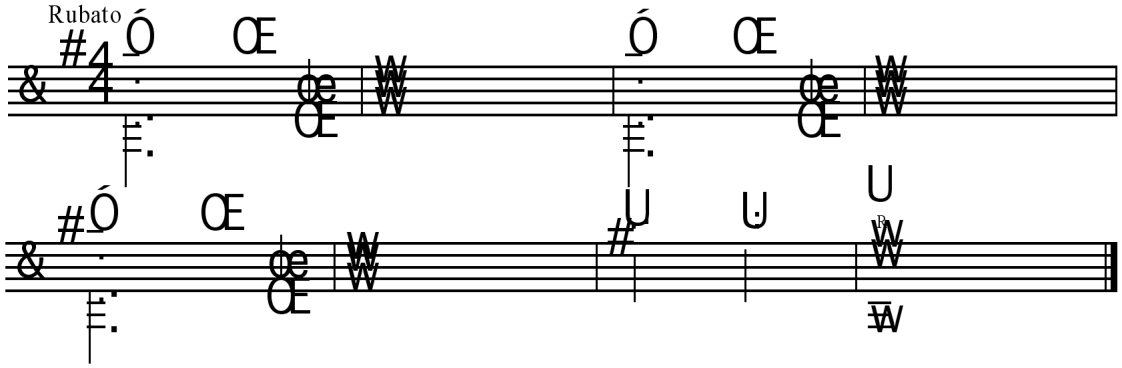
[160] Ibid.

"Hitomi," John Fahey.[161]



This theme features the most harmonic movement; Emin-G-A-Amin. There is a feeling of coming resolution in this passage, the dissonance from the flat 5th is gone, and the clear harmonic movement propels the piece, particularly after so much improvisation upon a single theme. The material is fundamentally new as well; even though some of the ideas are similar to earlier ones, the lack of the initial main theme is a noticeable difference. This theme moves quickly to the final conclusion:

"Hitomi," John Fahey.[162]



The ending fades slowly, moving between the Emin and Amin harmony. The last two bars outline a dominant to tonic resolution, the C and D-sharp can be interpreted as a partial Bb9, the D-sharp resolving to the E two beats before the C moves to B. Fahey lightly rolls the implied Emin to close.

"Hitomi" is as representative of Fahey's cultivated style as any other piece analyzed in this chapter. In some ways, it represents his style even better, since it is an example of the very rudiments of his technique. A cultivated style should have depth and roots, but it should also be flexible enough to maintain its integrity over a

[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

long period of time. Reinvention should not surpass the core style of an artist. The cultivated style found in this last example can be traced not only to the earlier examples of Fahey's music, but even further back to the examples of his vernacular. Fahey's music is the product of a self-made style, as proven through the extent to which he went to uncover the secrets that lied in the music with which he identified. The primary essence of his efforts can be found on the old recordings, made a decade before his birth and long since forgotten. Yet by the power and the archiving capabilities of recording, the music was able to be reborn in a completely different form, and therefore illustrates the real foundation of music in the United States during the twentieth century.