

DOC



In August 1970 Doc Watson spoke with Ron Stanford in Deep-Gap, North Carolina. Some of the material to appear in "The Music of Doc Watson" appears here.

"To me, *A-Rovin' On A Winter's Night* is just about one of the prettiest old-time love songs that you could hope to find anywhere. I'll never forget

the night when Ralph Rinzler and I went down to Dolly and Len Greer's house. Outside you could hear the sound of those little frogs that you hear in the spring around the edge of a stream or a swampy area, and in the distance you could hear an occasional whippoorwill. It was in this setting that Dolly sang *A-Rovin' On A Winter's Night*."

Moderately

1. A - rov - in' On A Win-ter's Night, -

And a-drink - in' good, old wine; -

Think-in' a - bout that pret-ty lit-tle girl, -

That broke this heart of mine. -

Let me think about music for a minute. My first introduction to music came from my memory of being held in my mother's arms very comfortably. I remember the feeling was very warm and the sound was like that of *The Lone Pilgrim* being harmonized by the congregation. From my very early childhood on, I can remember my mother singing. She'd sing around the house while churning butter, or while patching some of dad's overalls that he'd worn the life out of. My dad didn't play around the house too much. He was a pretty serious fellow and devoted most of his evenings to trying to see that we got enough of the word of God so that we knew the Golden Rule and the way to live morally decent lives, and that we knew some of the songs so that we could sing along when he took us to church. Both of my parents worked very hard to keep us from starving; there were eleven of us in the family, and it was right during the depression.

I used to play with everything that had a musical sound around the house. I must have been a real pest to my mother. Every Christmas, just as far back as I can remember, Santa Claus slipped a harmonica in the big old stocking that I'd get to hang up on the mantle piece. That was my first introduction to a musical instrument. I could play tunes on the harmonica pretty well, even before I could note a single tune on the banjo.

My brother Arnold played the banjo at home, and every once in a while my father would pick a few tunes. One day Dad told me, "You know, I believe you could learn to play a banjo, son. I've a good mind to make you one." That was along in the winter when he said that, and the next summer he came in with some pieces for a five-string. He made a round maple hoop, managed to find some tension hooks, and made it so that the head part looked a little like a *no'the'n* banjo, or one that was built in a factory.

I started playing the guitar a little when my first cousin left his guitar at our house for a while; also, I had learned a few chords from an old boy at school who played the guitar. I was messing with my cousin's guitar

one morning before Dad went to work, and he turned around to me after he had finished his breakfast and said, "Now, son, if you learn to play just one little tune on that by the time I get back, we'll go to town Saturday and buy you a guitar." Well, I knew I had him right there, because I knew almost enough already to play a song, and I knew that I could be singing along with my playing by the time he got back. The first song I learned on the guitar was *When The Roses Bloom In Dixieland* by the Carter Family. My dad was just as good as his word; we went to town and found me a little guitar. It was one of those ten dollar guitars—a pretty good little thing to learn on, but as hard to fret as a barbed wire fence. A few years later, when I was sixteen or seventeen, I earned enough money from cutting down some dead chestnut extract timber (used for tanning leather) to order a guitar from Sears and Roebuck.

While I learned a lot of music from my family and the people who lived near us, I also learned a great deal of music from records. Dad worked a week at the sawmill and bought a little wind-up graphophone and fifty or sixty records from my uncle, who had decided to buy a bigger one. There was everything from Jimmie Rodgers to the Carter Family, Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers, and John Hurt. When I started to play the guitar I listened especially to records of these people and others including, of course, the Delmore Brothers, and later on, Merle Travis. I knew hardly any of the recording stars personally. I did know Clarence Ashley and Garley Foster though. I never had the pleasure of meeting Jimmie Rodgers, and I'm sorry to say that I never met Uncle Dave Macon. I loved his records with all the fun and foolishness he did in his singing. I've met Maybelle and Sarah Carter since I've grown up, but back then I didn't know them. When you hear the music of a lot of those people, though, not just one or two songs but a variety of things, you realize when you meet them that you already know them through their music.

About the time I was eighteen,



the name "Doc" happened. I was doing a remote control radio show from a furniture store in Lenoire, North Carolina. The young man I worked with played the guitar and sang some, and his name was Paul Greer; they called him Paul, which was nice and short over the radio. The announcer came to me before we were on the air and said, "Your name's Arthel." He pronounced it kind of slow and said, "That's too long. What's a good short name for the radio? Let's think up a good name right here." There was a young lady there—she must have been fourteen or fifteen—and she yelled out, "Call him 'Doc' ". I never found out who she was; she was just back in the audience in the furniture store. The name "Doc" has come in very handy to me as a professional because it's easy to remember.

I play the guitar because I love it better than any other instrument that I could ever hope to learn how to play. When I play a song, be it on the guitar or banjo, I live that song, whether it is a happy song or a sad song. Music, as a whole, expresses many things to me—everything from beautiful scenery to the tragedies and joys of life. If I feel good, I play music to expend energy. Sometimes, too, if I'm under tension, and I've got a guitar and a good song on my mind, first thing I know, I'm relaxed again. Whether I'm playing just for myself or for an enthusiastic audience, I can get the same emotions I had when I found that Dad had seen to it that Santa Claus brought exactly what I wanted for Christmas. A true entertainer, I think, doesn't ever lose that feeling.

