

Lost John

Informant/Performer:
Sanders Terry
Durham, NC, 1938

Source:
Library of Congress AFS 2493 B
Collected by Alan and Bess Lomax

Score not available; recording included for listening only.

Background Information

Blind Sanders Terry, from Durham, North Carolina, has a genius for his harmonica such as the gypsies of central Europe have for their violins. He plays a cheap harmonica, but, as it lies in his cupped hands, he stops it with his fingers and produces the chromatic notes for which concert harmonica players require the large complex, chromatic instrument. His blindness just allows him to tell "light from darkness"; yet when he plays, his hands make a shadowy and intricate dance pattern before his sunken eyes.

"Lost John" is the tale of a poor old boy who got lost in the woods as he walked home from the house of his mistress. He took out his harmonica and through it called for help, moaned out his fright and terror of the deep hot night in the black river-bottom woods.

Alan Lomax, from the liner notes of *Afro-American Blues and Game Songs* (AFS L4)