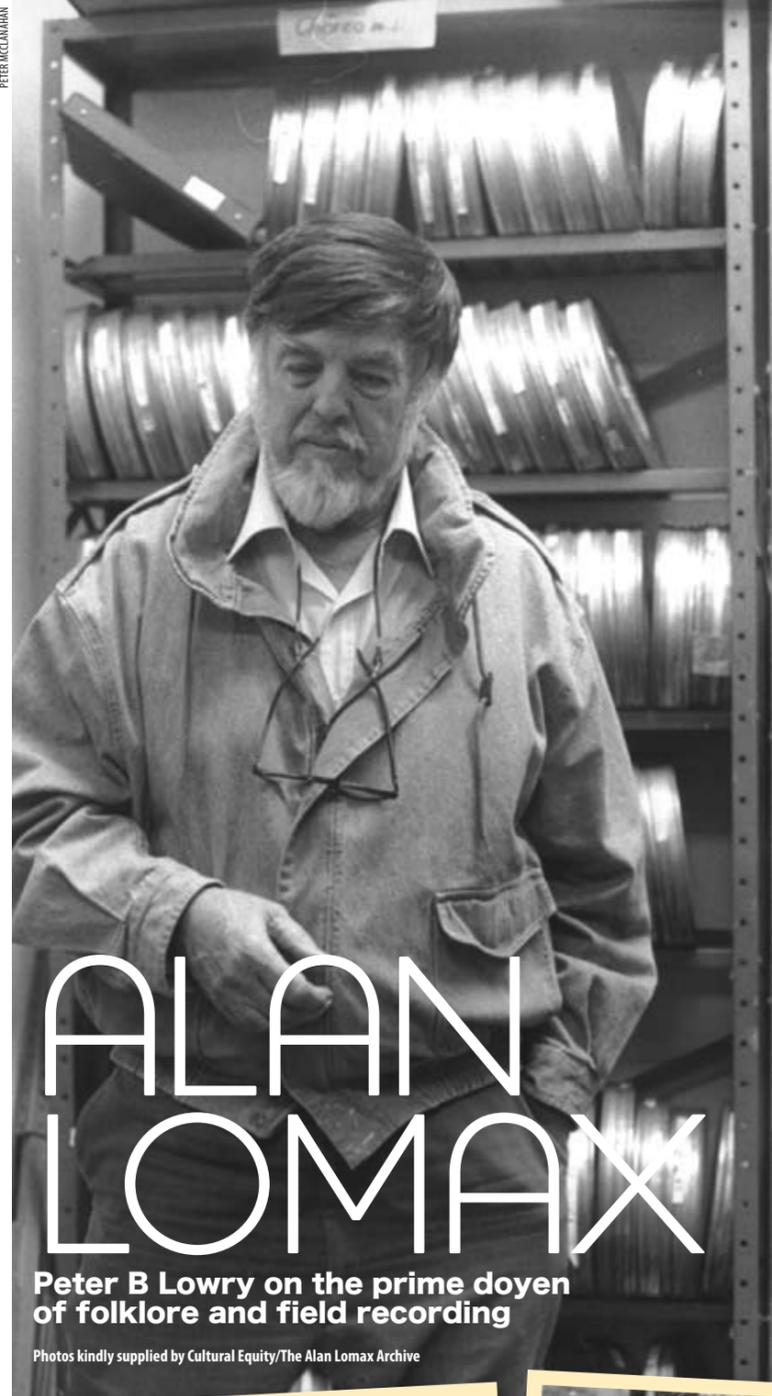


PETER MACLEAN/HAN



ALAN LOMAX

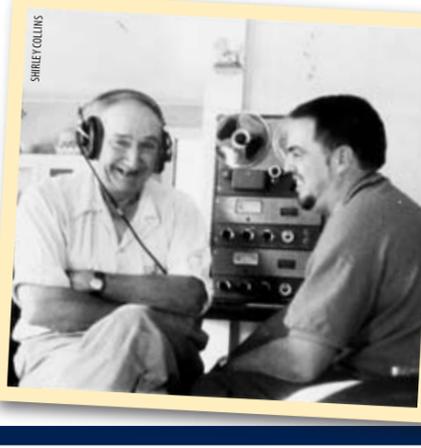
Peter B Lowry on the prime doyen of folklore and field recording

Photos kindly supplied by Cultural Equity/The Alan Lomax Archive

Below, from left to right: At the Delta Blues Festival, Greenville, Mississippi 1979; in Aragon, Spain with a Spanish local; listening to a playback with banjo player Wade Ward in Galax, Virginia, 1959; prisoners chopping wood and singing at Parchman Farm penitentiary, Mississippi 1959



BILL FERRIS



SHIRLEY COLLINS

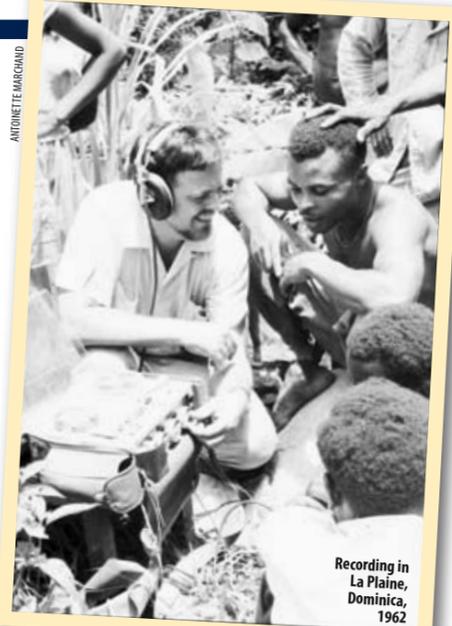


ALAN LOMAX

Alan Lomax... what a concept! The person without whom there would probably be no *Songlines*. And that is not attempted hyperbole, merely the truth. With a six decade career documenting the musics of the world's folk, the possibilities are nearly endless regarding available recorded material. Beginning his field recording in 1933 in the southern US assisting his father, he was a single-minded cultural polymath who amassed a huge collection. A behemoth, in more ways than one, Alan was later the vanguard of 40s-50s folk revivals, first in the US, then later in England, Ireland and Scotland.

How many people do you know of that are one degree of alliterative separation from Moby, Muddy Waters, and Miles Davis? Not to mention the likes of Leadbelly, Ewan MacColl, Pete Seeger, The Copper Family, Woody Guthrie, Hamish Henderson, Jelly Roll Morton, Seamus Ennis, Son House... the list goes on and on. He felt compelled to document the musics of many a world culture – nobody could do or know it all, of course, but he came as close as was humanly possible. But the proof is in the recordings that he was involved with, directly or indirectly, during his many decades of field activity.

Born January 31, 1913 in Austin, Texas, Alan's father (John A Lomax) was a university professor and later also the field recorder-director for the US Library of Congress (then) Folk Song Archive. The earliest material (including Leadbelly) was recorded by John and Alan during the early to mid-30s for the Library and helped infect him with a life-long interest in folk cultures, especially singing. Those early sessions were cut on aluminium discs on a vaguely portable disc-cutter stored in their car boot; glass-based acetate discs were used by the 40s when Alan was the youngest ever archive director. During the later McCarthy era, Alan had to depart DC, going to England and Europe for a most useful spell, during which he left his footprint in the Scottish, English and Irish folk sand – not to mention Spain and Italy.



ANTOINETTE MARCHAND

Recording in La Plaine, Dominica, 1962

He returned to the US later in the 40s, putting together LP collections of "folk and primitive music" for Columbia Records and doing some location recording with his first tape recorder. In the late 50s, the gift of a stereo machine from the Erteguns (executives of Atlantic Records) gave rise to Lomax's fabled 'Southern Journey' that has been the source for Moby's *Play* and the Tangle Eye remixes. There were occasional forays 'into the field' after that, mainly filmic, but that slowed up as he became diverted by other cultural interests.

His latter years (until his death in 2002) were spent gathering all that he had done into many broad-brush possibilities, including his concept of the 'Global Jukebox' (in advance of the internet). There had never been such a 'complete' individual before Alan and will never be another such after him – a single individual with such broad curiosity and knowledge about the musics of the world – it's just not humanly possible. While difficult to pick specific recommendations out of the literally hundreds of great CDs available, here are five points of entry and one general recommendation to avoid. After that, you're on your own... enjoy. ●

BEST...

...COMPILATIONS



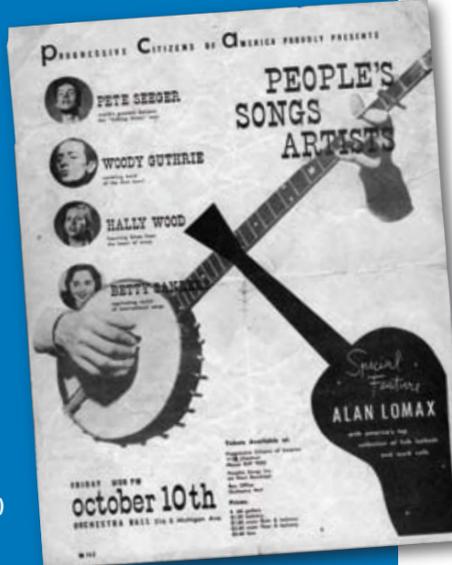
The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler (Rounder, 1997)
A single CD that is just what it says it is, from 'Southern Journey' through 'The English, Scottish & Irish Recordings' to 'The Ballad Operas' taking in Caribbean, Spanish, and Italian as well as older Library of Congress material. It will either whet or dry your appetite for more possibilities. If the former, go to www.rounder.com/series/lomax_alan/ and dive in. It's all good.



Alan Lomax: Popular Songbook (Rounder, 2003)
A single CD compilation of material 'that became famous as pop, rock, R&B and jazz hits' is how it's described. Only a slight stretch but full of fine performances of songs that may be familiar to you in some form or another: 'The House of the Rising Sun', 'Black Betty', 'Sloop John B', 'The Gallows Pole', 'Rock Island Line', 'Alborada de Vigo', 'Didn't Leave Nobody but the Baby' amongst them... just ask The Animals, The Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin, Lonnie Donegan, Miles Davis and Gil Evans, or T-Bone Burnett and Gillian Welch (not to mention the cast of *Oh, Brother, Where Art Thou!*).



Sounds of the South: A Musical Journey from the Georgia Sea Islands to the Mississippi Delta (Atlantic, 1993)
Four CDs encompassing the seven LPs released as the *Southern Folk Heritage Series* in 1961, the result of Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegum giving Alan his first stereo portable tape recorder, assisted by Shirley Collins during 1959-60.



A 1940s poster promoting an Alan Lomax appearance



Freedom: The Golden Gate Quartet & Josh White (Bridge, 2002)
Alan produced this overview of African-American music for a Library of Congress

concert in 1940. While something of a curate's egg, it's an interesting period piece nonetheless and a view of how certain people in the US viewed historical 'Negro' cultural expressions at that point in time.

Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax (1938) (Rounder, 2005)

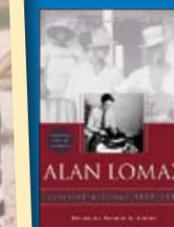
One of the most incredible packages, this is the beginnings of directly recorded oral history (ie not taken down stenographically) documenting the history of early jazz. Morton talks and plays on seven of the eight CDs, and this is a must for those interested in early jazz and American music in general. Includes Alan's book, *Mister Jelly Roll*



...AVOIDED

Anything that you can't afford (or don't like!) Additionally, while Alan loved good singing and had a whack at it himself a number of times, the best that can be said is that he was forceful and enthusiastic, if lacking in authenticity. I doubt that that sort of material will be re-released, but don't bother with it, not even if you run across an old LP at a car boot fair... some things are best left alone.

...BOOK



Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997 (Routledge, 2003)
Edited by Ronald G Cohen and reviewed in *Songlines* #23.