Mississippi Fred McDowell - The Alan Lomax Recordings (2011)

01. Shake 'em On Down (2:45) 02. Good Morning Little Schoolgirl (2:58) 03. Keep Your Lamps Trimmed And Burning (3:11) 04. Fred McDowell's Blues (4:14) play *05. Woke Up This Morning With My Mind On Jesus (3:18) 06. Drop Down Mama (2:53) 07. Going Down To The River (5:04) 08. Wished I Was In Heaven Sitting Down (2:11) 09. When The Train Comes Along (2:52) 10. When You Get Home Please Write Me A Few Of Your Lines (3:25) 11. Worried Mind Blues (3:36)*
play
12. Keep Your Lamps Trimmed And Burning (Instrumental Reprise) (0:34)
Fred McDowell – guitar, vocals.

Of the many important recordings Alan Lomax made in his trips through the American South in 1959, perhaps none of the artists he documented were as destined to make as much of an impact on the world of popular music as Mississippi Fred McDowell. It remains astounding that a rural blues performer of such talent, already in his mid-fifties when Lomax came across him, had not previously recorded before these performances were taped in September 1959. Country-blues was seldom recorded during the postwar years prior to the folk revival, however, and McDowell made the most of his opportunity to get documented on these 12 songs (one of which is a half-minute instrumental). This is excellent country-blues not much modernized from the Delta greats of the '20s and '30s, featuring McDowell's magnificently versatile guitar, which was adept at both keeping a driving rhythm and crafting keening slide lines. His vocals are rich and assured, and the cuts benefit from some sparse but creatively eerie accompaniment on comb by Fanny Davis on a few cuts, as well as second guitar by Miles Pratcher on some tracks. (Sidney Hemphill Carter and Rosalie Hill take the vocals on one number, "When the Train Comes Along," with McDowell supplying his habitually stinging guitar.) The material includes spirituals, but also get-down uptempo blues and indications that McDowell was aware of some trends beyond his home grounds, particularly on "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl." McDowell would go on to make many other records, but this is a particularly important one both in his history, and in launching the rediscovery of country-blues performers as a whole at the dawn of the '60s folk revival. --- Richie Unterberger, allmusic.com

In September 1959, Fred McDowell-- an overalls-wearing, stoop-shouldered, Panola County cotton farmer-- picked up an old acoustic guitar and wandered over to his neighbor Lonnie Young's house. Word had spread that the folklorist Alan Lomax (traveling with the English singer Shirley Collins and a 26-pound, two-track reel-to-reel tape machine) was hunting local artists to record for Atlantic Records. McDowell, who was born around 1904 in Rossville, Tennessee, had grown up imitating the still-nascent sound of the Delta blues, using an old pocketknife (and then a whittled-down bovine rib bone, and finally the squat neck of a Gibson's gin bottle) as a rudimentary slide. By the time McDowell, then 55, cornered Lomax on Young's porch, his scope (and his skill) had broadened, and the sound he made-- a mesmerizing, groove-based blues that both nodded to and defied his Delta predecessors-- instantly captivated Lomax, and eventually the world. --- pitchfork.com

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