

GRAVEL SPRINGS FIFE AND DRUM

GRAVEL SPRINGS FIFE AND DRUM focuses on the northwest Mississippi community of Gravel Springs. Othar Turner, leader of a musical group, works on his farm, makes a cane-fife, and travels to a rural picnic where he and his band play music for their friends. The unusual fife and drum music they perform closely resembles traditional West African music.

The film has been shown at the: American Folklore Society, Society for Ethnomusicology, Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Temple University Anthropological and Documentary Film Conference, Foothill Film Festival, Bellevue Film Festival, and Baltimore Film Festival.

It has received the CINE GOLDEN EAGLE CERTIFICATE, two first place awards at the Sweet Virginia Film Festival, a CHRIS BRONZE PLAQUE AWARD at the Columbus Film Festival and a film award and commission from the 1972 Sinking Creek Film Celebration.

Segments of GRAVEL SPRINGS FIFE AND DRUM were featured by newsman, Hughes Rudd, on CBS SATURDAY EVENING WITH ROGER MUDD on April 21, 1973.

"I started making a cane and blowing a cane when I was thirteen years old. I just kept a' tuning and blowing and blowing and tuning. The more I tried, the better it come to me. That's my make. Nobody trained me, and I take that from myself."

Othar Turner

"Now we can look into this little-known folk society and see the daily life of work and play narrated by folk musician, Othar Turner . . . To apply (folklorist Alan) Lomax's words to GRAVEL SPRINGS FIFE AND DRUM, "It might be the only complete and living document that hints at the glories of Negro music in the South before the days of minstrel shows."

John Greenway,
University of Colorado
AMERICAN
ANTHROPOLOGIST
April, 1973

GRAVEL SPRINGS FIFE AND DRUM

(10 Minutes, Color, 16MM)

Filmed by Bill Ferris

Recorded by David Evans

Edited by Judy Peiser

PURCHASE: \$160.00

RENTAL: 15.00

Distributed by:

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Audio Visual Center

Bloomington, Indiana 47401

For additional information:

CENTER FOR SOUTHERN FOLKLORE

3756 Mimosa Avenue

Memphis, Tennessee 38111

(901) 323-0127

The Center for Southern Folklore

by Hollis Melton

While I was at the Sinking Creek Film Celebration in Nashville last June, I met Judy Peiser and Bill Ferris, the directors of the Center for Southern Folklore, which is a partnership dedicated to producing films, phonograph records and monographs on southern folklore. Their aim is to capture on film and tape the rapidly disappearing character of Southern life. The atmosphere at Sinking Creek is relaxed and warm, and it was in this atmosphere that I got to know the two filmmaker-anthropologists.

Both Judy and Bill are from the South; Judy from Memphis, Bill from Vicksburg, Mississippi. Judy is primarily a film editor and Bill, who does the photography for their films, teaches in the American Studies and Afro-American Studies programs at Yale University. Their first film, *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum* was completed in November 1971, and provides good illustration of the purpose of the Center. It is a documentary structured around a day in the life of Othar Turner, a fife maker, fife player and farmer from Gravel Springs (a northwest Mississippi farming community). The film is like a visual poem that celebrates the man, his music and the rhythms of everyday in Gravel Springs. As Othar Turner makes a fife from a foot length piece of sugar cane by burning holes in it with a hot poker he tunes it by blowing on it, and talks about how he learned to make and play the fife. The film builds as he completes the fife and gathers with his friends to play at a picnic. Scenes of playing, singing and dancing are intercut with shots of people chopping wood, baking bread, kneading dough, churning butter, milking cows, preparing a meal. The whole community seems to be working in time to the lively music of the fife and drum, which is very close to traditional West African music. The film is a unique record of an ancient musical tradition and will be of particular interest in the areas of Black music, anthropology or American studies.

Ray Lum: Mule Trader is a portrait of a

man, born in Rocky Springs, Mississippi, June 1891. He's sold horses, mules and cattle all over the United States and in his work he's seen cars come in and horses go out. Footage of Ray Lum in his house, at auctions, in his barn, in his shop where he sells boots and saddles, shows him talking and telling stories as he remembers his early life as a trader. Sometimes he tosses out adages like "a real trader never finds anything he can't use" and "you're never broke as long as you keep trading." As an old time story teller swapping stories and goods he inspires laughter and smiles while he passes the days entertaining friends and customers. Both *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum* and *Ray Lum: Mule Trader* reflect the concern of the filmmakers to preserve and record certain southern traditions that still exist in areas that have remained isolated from the mainstream of American standardization.

At Sinking Creek in 1972, *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum* won an award which led to a grant from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health for the Center to produce a film on the Green Valley Foster Grandparents program for mentally retarded children at the Green Valley Hospital and School in Greenville. *Green Valley Grandparents*, completed in spring of 1973, is a warm sensitive study of the interrelationships among the twenty-five senior citizens working at the hospital and the children. Voiceovers of the grandparents speaking of their experiences in the program accompany images of the children and grandparents eating, playing, talking together. The grandparents got the children out of their white hospital gowns and into bright colored clothes and identified immediately with the children, who responded by speaking, singing, and playing with their new grandparents. It is a positive study of a government funded hospital program that works. Groups studying the mentally retarded, senior citizens, and government funded programs will want to use this film.

In all of their films there is a sensitive quality; the warmth and understanding which they have for their subjects shines through the craft, bringing us close to their subjects and their worlds, allowing us to increase our own understanding of these very different environments.

The Center for Southern Folklore has now received a grant from the Rockefeller

Foundation to continue their work, and Judy Peiser and Bill Ferris are working on a film about Fannie Bell Chapman, a Black gospel singer and faith healer from the Sanctified Church of Centreville, Mississippi.

FILM INFORMATION

Gravel Springs Fife and Drum
10 mins., color, \$160. *Producer:* The Center for Southern Folklore, 1971. *Distributor:* Indiana University/Audiovisual Center and The Center for Southern Folklore, 3756 Mimosa Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee 38111.

Green Valley Grandparents
10 mins., b/w, \$125. *Producer:* The Center for Southern Folklore, 1973. *Distributor:* The Center for Southern Folklore.

Ray Lum: Mule Trader
18 mins., color, \$150. *Producer:* The Center for Southern Folklore, 1972. *Distributor:* The Center for Southern Folklore.

Ms. Melton is the coordinator of the newly formed Information Center for Film and Video Resources and Services in New York City.

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