



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Transcript of interview with Jim Sudduth

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# **Transcript**

## **Preface**

### **Tape-recorded Interview with Jim Sudduth**

#### **at the Artist's Home in Fayette, Alabama**

**March 3, 1984**

**Willem Volkersz, Interviewer**

#### **Editor's Note:**

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "themselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "cause," was transcribed as "because," "fore" as "before," "yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "\_\_\_\_" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

## **Interview**

**JS: Jim Sudduth**

**WV: Willem Volkersz**

**AW: Allan Winkler**

### **[Tape 1, side B; Volkersz' No. S1-B]**

[This interview is recorded on the reverse side of the interview with Mary T. Smith. Throughout the interview, JS plays the harmonica ("harp") and sings, with Allan Winkler providing the rhythmic accompaniment.—Ed.]

JS: [Plays harmonica, then sings:]

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hey, man, I'm a polecat.

Yeah.

WV: That's great, wonderful.

JS: (laughs) You like that?

WV: Wonderful.

JS: I got another harp. . . . I had a "good time" harp. This is a train [the music—Ed.]. [Plays in imitation of a train trip.]

This old train [isn't it].

Good.

Birmingham.

Yeah. . . .

[Without pausing, goes right into singing:]

When I was a little boy, little, by mysel',

All the brand \_\_\_\_ had a little one to sell.

The rats and mice, well, the cuts hits the slice,

I had to go borrow more to buy me a wife.

The roads so muddy and the streets so narrow,

I had to bring her back in the old wheelbarrow.

The wheelbarrow broke; the wife got to crawl.

Now you got the wheelbarrow, the wife, and all.

[Harmonica chorus]

JS: Yeah. . . . Boy, I didn't know you had that in ya' [referring to AW's drumming on lids of jars on kitchen table—WV]. (laughter) He got it in there. I'm going to play another one, a little different.

[AW is also speaking, but it's not within range of the microphone—Trans.]

JS: I'm going to play "Coming 'Round the Mountain When She Comes." [Music] Ow! (laughter) Did you see him working on there? Whew! Let's see. I'm going to play "Old John Henry." I'm going to play "Old John Henry" now. [Music] (laughter) Now I want to hear that. [speaking of the tape recording—Ed.] hear that for me for a little piece of that sound. That's good, you wanta. . . .

[*Interruption in taping*]

JS: [Sings:]

Corrina, Corrina, where you been last night?

Corrina, Corrina, where you been last night?

Ain't had no love [line], you won't treat me right.

[Harmonica chorus]

Ain't had no love [line] left since you've been gone.

Ain't had no love [line] since you've been gone.

[There one more dinner.]

[Harmonica chorus, followed by "shuffle" rhythm, provided by AW with a salt shaker]

JS: Yeah. (laughs) I want to hear that song. . . . Y'all wann come back here now, next summer.

Mrs. Edith Sudduth (ES): That boy gone!

JS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [makes shuffle rhythm with mouth] Yeah, I want to hear that now. We used to have a band, me and her [JS's wife—WV] did. And we lost our little boy, you see. We had a boy we raised here. He got

drowned down in the river, you know? Been about five years ago.

ES: I didn't tell you. Sure was \_\_\_\_.

JS: [Sings:] My bonny is over the ocean.

JS: I don't know. Did you ever. . . . Let me play this. [Plays] Yeah. (laughter) Now, when you all coming back, sho' 'nuff? I wanna know.

ES: Where you all live?

AW: We live up in Kansas City.

JS: Kansas City, Missouri?

ES: Oh, Kansas City, Missouri!

JS: That's not far from here.

ES: That's my old home. (chuckles)

JS: It is? It's about 400 miles.

ES: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. My home everywhere.

JS: Now she's been. . . . She's been all over: California. . . .

ES: I'm gonna come right back, know where I live and die.

JS: That's right.

ES: Cheapest place in the world.

JS: She's used to have a railroad man, you know, you go the whole country, you know.

WV: Oh.

JS: She's used to have a railroad man. Let's see. [Sings:]

Sometimes I live in the country.

Sometimes I live in town.

Sometime I take a weird notion,

Oh, to jump in the river and drown.

Goodby, goodby, Charming

[Harmonica chorus] Yeah.

Sometimes I live in the country.

Sometimes I live in town.

Sometime I take a weird notion,

Well, jump in the river and drown.

Yeah, ah, ah, ah.

[Harmonica chorus]

JS: Yeah. Now you play them [real purty].

ES: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

JS: Yeah.

ES: When you all get on the outside, I'm going to turn my \_\_\_\_\_ down what you've seen.

JS: [unintelligible] . . . [dog].

WV: Oh. Oh.

JS: He a television dog. He been on television.

WV: Really!

AM: Yeah, I. . . .

JS: We want to do it for you get ready to go.

AM: We want to turn loose, you know.

JS: No, we're going off the air, Ethel. [referring to end of recording his songs—WV]

ES: \_\_\_\_\_ here that's a enough.

JS: I'm going turn us off. We're going off the air. I got to go to church, and they're going to be back. And how long you all going to be back? How long before you be back now?

WV: Oh, it might be another year or so.

JS: Now, they're going to be back in a year or so for sure. Then we can play some more.

WV: Right.

JS: [Sings:]

I can smoke a cigarette.

I can smoke a pipe.

I can kiss a yellow gal,

Anytime [of night].

Now off to work I go.

JS: Yeah, here I go; we're going off the air now.

[Harmonica chorus]

JS: Yeah! (laughs) Don't need \_\_\_\_\_ . Now sho' 'nuff. . . .

*[End of interview]*