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Folklore 379  
Folk musician project

Dr. Feintuch  
Dec. 5, 1983

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KENTUCKY BUILDING  
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Arthur Hatfield describes himself as a bluegrass musician. Arthur is thirty-seven years old and is currently living in Glasgow, Kentucky. Arthur was born on April 17, 1946 in Glasgow, Kentucky. Presently Arthur is single; but he has been married and is now divorced. There were no children from this marriage. Arthur attended elementary and junior high school and completed his sophomore year. He was a very good student while he was in school. Arthur was raised by a strict aunt and uncle in a rural setting where life was somewhat simple. Simple does not necessarily mean uneventful; it was simple in that everything at home was done with a purpose, almost regimental. Everyone has his own special eating utensils, special chairs, everyone went to bed at the same time, got up at the same time, and had their meals together. While his uncle was not totally against formal education, he did give Arthur the ultimatum that if he was to continue going to school he must make straight A's.

Arthur's occupational history is rather sporadic. Whatever the job, his musical inclinations always took precedence. Working with wood has always been one of his "favorite pastimes." He is very good at carving items out of wood. Much of his handiwork has an aesthetic as well as a functional value. I asked Arthur why did he not keep any of his carvings and he answered:

"I spend a lot of time a travelin' around;  
 I just like to make 'm and sell 'm or just  
 give 'm away. I can always make more."

He went on to confide that the money from these carvings often helped to keep him in "brew." He is an accomplished beer drinker. He went on to say that this "fault" has done much toward lessening his playing abilities. He helps a friend in a cabinet making business "on and off." Arthur has also given music lessons; he plays fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, and can "bang out a tune on a piano." Since traveling plays so much a part in his life, he feels

that it is somewhat impractical to spend much time with the piano. Arthur has held numerous factory jobs, all of which were much to static and stolid. I asked Arthur what were his religious convictions and he said:

"I really don't have any. I don't care much about talking about it or hearing it."

Arthur once traveled around a lot, mostly in the South and the Southeast, playing with different bluegrass bands. "I started out playing mostly the mandolin which made me happy because it was my favorite instrument. It was what I first learned to play." He said that the first time that he played for an audience he was seventeen and he was paid something like ten or fifteen dollars. I asked him what influenced him to want to play and he said:

"I remember the first time I heard Bill Monroe play on the Grand Ole Opry. They was singing "Blue Moon of Kentucky." I knew I wanted to play that kind of music. He was playin' with the Blue Grass Boys."

Arthur said his uncle played the mandolin and banjo but he (Arthur) did not care anything about it until he heard them being played on the radio. Like many people, one of the big events was to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night. Although Arthur states that he has not any real religious conviction, he does have several sacred songs he likes to play. Some of the sacred songs he plays include "Wayfaring Stranger," "Day of Decision," (which is probably my favorite), and "This World Is Not My Home," a song he first heard sung by Bill Monroe.

Most of Arthur's playing now has been in nightclubs and lounges. He said that he does not really like to play in "those kinds of places," because they (the audience) are usually drunk or drinking too much to know what they are hearing. He also said that sometimes he was "glad that they were drinking because he would not have to play them awful songs like "Almost Per-

suaded," and other honky-tonk songs, then I can play what I want." Arthur went on to say that he did not like country music all that much. He knew that most people wanted to lump bluegrass music in with country. He said that he also drinks when he plays which he feels really affects his playing. I asked who he enjoyed listening to and he said as far as enjoying and being influenced by any particular people, there were a few people he liked. He likes Doc Watson, Earl Scruggs, Bill Monroe, Ricky Skaggs and Emmylou Harris (he said as well as liking her music and voice she was nice to look at), and the Dillards. He met Bill Monroe once in North Carolina and this was, he said, one of the greatest experiences of his life.

Arthur does not listen to the radio much, almost never watches television, unless something in the way of a bluegrass band is on. He said that a couple of the programs he has watched are "Live from Wolftrap" and "Austin City Limits." Since he does not stay in one place for very long at a time, he does not maintain any kind of record collection. He has bought several records but has let people borrow them or just gives them away. (He has listened to some of my records and has enjoyed them, he really likes Phil Ochs stuff, particularly "There But For Fortune" and some of Joni Mitchell's older music.)

Arthur can sing but does not do it very much. I asked him why this was and he said:

"I like the high way of singing, but  
I can't get that high, my voice breaks."

He went on to say that he did not care that much for singing himself; he does not care to hear other people sing all that much.

Mostly Arthur now plays at family gatherings. He was married to my aunt for about four years and he has become really close to the entire family and even though he and my aunt are no longer married, he feels comfortable around everyone. He has played, very informally, when a few of us get together. Because of his very easy going personality, he gets along

quite well with audiences. I have been at a couple of events where he has played and he would play certain songs that were requested. He says that he does not like showiness or flashiness in a performer; he hates it when an audience expects him to wear a cowboy hat or wear boots. Even though he says he cannot read music, he says he "does recognize a few notes here and there." He said he learns most of his songs by just listening to records or other people playing. He knows enough about chording that he has given guitar, mandolin, and banjo lessons. He has also managed a music store.

Some of the songs in his repertoire include "Uncle Pen," "Across the Waves," "Down Yonder," "Salty Dog," and "Ol' Slew-Foot." Arthur classifies his music as bluegrass; however, when he plays a song from another category, he is quick to categorize it according to the type it is.

Arthur has made a few albums with several unknown bands, none of which ever really made any big sales; he has played at bluegrass festivals and contests where he has won first prize for fiddling. Music is an integral part of Arthur's life. It is so important to him that it was primary in the dissolving of his and my aunt's marriage. Arthur had rather play his music than hold a public job and when his job conflicted with his playing, the job went. It is very moving to see him diligently at work on an instrument. He has made banjos and fiddles. One of his favorite hobbies is to take old instruments and try to salvage them into reusable instruments.

I asked Arthur about how many hours a week he played. I was surprised when he said that if he was holding a public job and worked forty hours a week he would play twenty to thirty hours a week. He said that he never tired of playing. Arthur likes nothing better than someone's showing interest in what he plays. When I asked Arthur if he ever ran out of patience with anyone taking lessons from him and he said:

"No, because you have to realize that

not everybody's gonna learn at the same  
pace. You have to be patient with people,  
besides, they pay me."

We both laughed when he said "pay me" because we both know that  
he would gladly teach anyone whether they paid or not.

Arthur does keep a note book of favorite songs. He de-  
scribed this notebook as being a "binder that I can add pages  
to or take away from." What he does is, when he hears a song  
that he particularly likes, he writes the words to that song and,  
if possible, plays the recording over until he has the chords  
written down. He said that if he liked a song well enough to  
write it down he generally would play it like he hear it. He  
does improvise some though. He has learned a few songs from my  
grandmother also; he does this because she likes to hear songs  
that she is no longer able to play. For example, he has learned  
several ballads from her, such as "East Virginia" and "Knoxville  
Girl." Arthur's music has functioned as a performance on special  
occasion, in a working context, but his music is mostly a part of  
his everyday life. He does not have a place of his own, other  
than his aunt and uncles' house, so he stays with friends who  
are generallyl musicians also. Wherever he is he is going to  
have his music. Arthur is very unpretentious. He would feel  
just as privileged to play for friends and family as he would  
berplaying for a huge audience or for someone famous. There  
is something electrifying about hearing someone play live music.  
There have been people, Arthur told me, who said that they did  
not think they liked bluegrass music, but when they heard it  
played live at a musical event they enjoyed it thoroughly.  
Arthur says that everyone likes bluegrass a little, "they have to."  
All kinds of people have showed up at his performances when he  
traveled around.

Anytime Arthur comes for a visit he "just happens: to bring  
along a couple of instruments. My brother, who plays a little,  
my cousin, who plays a lot, and Arthur all get together and play

for hours at a time. It is interesting because I have noticed that there is a lot more talking and interaction among the family during these sessions, otherwise very little is said.

I told Arthur that I was doing this project for a class and I asked him what he thought about what I was doing. He was pleased when I told him that one of the main concerns of the course was to understand the significance of preserving all kinds of music. He feels that it is very important to keep all kinds of music "alive" by traditional methods of passing it along from person to person. He says that there are not all that many true bluegrass musicians in comparison with other types of musicians. He said that it took a lot of dedication to play well whether you played professional or not. He went on to say that he has given up a lot in life just for the privilege of playing. He said that he would not change his decision about playing-it was his life.