DIG INFINITY!

The Life & Art Of Lord Buckley

BY OLIVER TRAGER
© Dig Infinity! The Life and Art of Lord Buckley

By Oliver Trager

For Elaine and Cole
For my mother and father
For all members of the Royal Court: past, present and future

“Laughter truly is religious. It gives off vibrations from the subconscious. It swings its sounds from the subconscious. When a person is laughing he’s illuminated the full beauty of a human being. And the womanhood, when she’s happy and laughing, is OOOOOOOOOOOOH—mother magnate. Many times when you find yourself laughing you say, ‘Oh I wish John were here, he’d love this.’ You’re thinking love, you’re vibrating love. It’s a prayer.”

— Lord Buckley, 1959

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Author’s Note on Concept and Format

In that Lord Buckley’s unorthodox legacy does not lend itself to conventional biographical treatment, the parameters of the genre have been manipulated to more adequately reflect the subject’s life and work. Therefore, *Dig Infinity!* unfolds on several levels simultaneously: biography, oral history, autobiography, scrapbook, anthology, and critique.

Different typeface styles and margin sizes are employed to delineate the correct voice for each ingredient in this literary gumbo.

The traditional biographical overview and integrating commentary will appear in this 16-point Helvetica.

The oral history from the many witnesses in the book as well as Lord Buckley’s own autobiographical and philosophical musings will appear in this 16-point Times Roman. Additionally, album liner notes and previously published memories appear in this same style.

The material is arranged chronologically and thematically according to either the era in which each contributor first encountered Lord Buckley or when a specific topic arises about which they comment. *Each participant is first introduced by a brief description of their life and their connection with Buckley in this 16-point Times Roman italic.*

Imagine, if you will, an all-night bull session in the smoky atmosphere in the dressing room of a Greenwich Village jazz club. Some witnesses drop by to throw in their two cents when a salient topic arises or stay the duration, acting as a chorus to the verbal jam. Should the reader become confused as to the identity of a witness, an alphabetized “Cast of Characters” is available for quick reference at the end of the manuscript.
Lord Buckley’s carefully transcribed monologues, appearing in either full or excerpted form, are available in this 12-point Times Roman but printed within the confines of this narrower margin. This has been done both to distinguish it from the rest of the text and to enhance its sometimes difficult readability. Though Buckley’s work obviously comes off better on recording than on the printed page, those with a good eye and ear for its particular and peculiar cadences can derive an excellent notion of its inner rhythms and nuances. Just take a deep breath and blow!

The scrapbook element of this biographical collage reprints articles, reviews and obituaries drawn from the press. These indented inclusions appear in this 16-point Courier to best invoke the stylistic spirit of newsprint.

Let the Great Lord Buckley Renaissance commence!
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Let the Great Lord Buckley Renaissance commence!
Floating through some inverse abysm of time and space, your subconscious mind encounters the fantastic cast of characters from the absurdist theater of the sublime and ridiculous, the sacred and profane—a cartoon cornucopia from the mind/tongue of the human experience: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (The Gasser) leads a charge of bug-eyed Conquistadors to the Fountain of Youth, Old Ebenzer Scrooge counts his barley, Willie the Shake plays strip poker with Cleopatra while Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and the Marquis de Sade plan an escape route off Devil’s Island, Abe Lincoln and Hezikiah Jones harmonize on a few choruses of “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” Nero and Julius Caesar pitch their next B-movie to Governor Slugwell on a runaway train to Flip Manor as Commander Abba Dabba Foo rides his own railroad through Einstein’s Playground (that’s the Milky Way for all you double-square octagon heads) hoping to catch The Nazz’s last set at the Club DeLisa.

If you know something’s happening but not sure quite what, let me hip thee: It’s Lord Buckley, Jack.

Lord Who?

Lord Buckley: the white, six-and-a-half-foot-tall, ex-lumberjack cat who invoked both the manners of English aristocracy and the street language of black America.

Lord Buckley: the hemp-headed hipster who worked the dance marathons, Walkathons and tent shows of the Depression.

Lord Buckley: the picaresque pill-popping darling of Al Capone.

Lord Buckley: the stand-up comic who could celebrate Jesus Christ and the Marquis de Sade in the course of a single gig.

Lord Buckley: the jazz philosopher who jammed with Charlie Parker.
Lord Buckley: the gallivanting guru who appeared in a Marilyn Monroe flick.

Lord Buckley: the Scotch-swigging shaman who swung light years ahead of the Summer of Love.

Lord Buckley: the flim-flamming/huckster/con man/drifter/grifter who streaked a Frank Sinatra concert, started his own BeBop church and threw a life-long Mardi Gras.

Lord Buckley: America’s great neglected verbalist visionary who is about to put his whammy on you…yes, you!

Lord who?

Before Cool (B.C.) there was Lord Buckley: the original viper, the Hall of Fame Hipster, the baddest Beatnik, the first flower child, the premier rapper. Lord Buckley, best known for his “hipsemantic” retellings of Bible stories, Shakespeare soliloquies and modern poetry in the 1950s.

Lord who?

Fast-forward from his humble, turn-of-the-century roots in Tuolumne, California (a tough mining and lumber town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, where he sang the street corners busking for small change from assorted rough-necks) to the 1930s, ‘40s and beyond. His scattershot career carried him from the dance marathons and Capone’s murkiest Windy City dives to tours with Woody Herman, Gene Krupa, Ed Sullivan’s U.S.O. troupe, BeBop’s first stages, and vaudeville’s last. Somewhere along the way, Buckley (as true to the tradition of jazz royalty as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and King Oliver) had become a Lord, creating a kingdom in miniature, replete with his own peculiar sense of protocol and a lifestyle that might make even de Sade blush.

Lord who? Lord Buckley, that’s who!

Me? I first got bit by the Lord Buckley bug in the Fall of 1976—fresh from a cross-country hitchhiking and freight-train hopping adventure, chasing the ghosts of Kerouac and Cassady to Alaska and back. I was open for any- and everything.

Returning as a sophomore to Bennington College in Vermont, I fell in with a severely funky, non-matriculating crowd centered around a mercurial, middle-
aged gadfly by the name of Harold L. “Doc” Humes. You can read more about Doc in this book, but the spell he cast on an upper-middle-class, uptown nineteen-year-old trying-to-be-hippie kid was enormous. With his long silver mane and nonstop rap flowing, he resembled some pixie-dusted incarnation of Ernest Hemingway on acid.

While most of his persona was, in retrospect, an ecstatic, hyperbolic verbal plume of wildly entertaining (if sometimes a little scary) self-aggrandizement, his credentials were anything but. Novelist, inventor, Marshall Planner, *Paris Review* co-founder, cosmologist, conspiracy theorist—he certainly came on as someone who had been there, done that, flapped it, dapped it, and bapped it in spades. Naturally, he was way more interesting than anything my college professors at the time were offering at premium tuition prices.

Not only had Doc known Lord Buckley back in the day, but he was riding shotgun when the cabaret card brouhaha brought an end first to His Lordship’s last gig . . . and then his life.

One of Doc’s acolytes was a fellow by the name of Mark Miller who kind of took care of the old guy. One afternoon Mark brought an LP over to my dorm room. He was pretty mysterious about it as I recall—wouldn’t even if drop it on the turntable until we were psychically lubricated with nature’s combustible best.

The album was *The Best Of Lord Buckley* and, as I studied the psychedelic cover and read the liner notes, I had no idea what to expect when the needle finally touched down on vinyl . . . or suspect that I was about to begin bushwhacking an underground byway of the mind in search of the seven-ply source of the sound I was about to hear.

In deference to our state of mind, I think the first piece he played me was “Jonah and the Whale” which, because it treated ganja with sympathy and humor, immediately won me over—even if I wasn’t quite sure what it was I was hearing. So rhythmically encoded was the slang, so rapid-fire was the delivery, so steeped in lush, cartoonish imagery that Buckley’s word pictures seemed to float across the inner screen of my skull. Even as hip as I thought I was, the lan-
guage was a foreign one to my ears. Yet I found myself belly-laughing at the pure joy of the storyteller’s art and craft.

Next up was “The Nazz,” Lord Buckley’s hepster retelling of three miracles in the life of Jesus Christ. And like all true believers, I felt as if I had just stumbled on the Dead Sea Scrolls of the New Apocalypse.

No, I didn’t then and there forsake my sanity and all my worldly goods and chattels to follow the Buckley muse to each corner of the lower forty-eight, points upward and beyond—that wouldn’t come till much later. Rather, he became another piece of my incubating perception of the great weird world underground railroad—an irregular line that includes stops at each subterranean station of that ever-lovin’ cross and pickin’ up various and sundry passengers on its horizon-to-horizon trek: Bird & Diz, Sun Ra & Moondog, Partch & Pynchon, Coltrane & Soul Train, Dylan & The Dead, Smiths Patti & Harry, Kurosawa & Keaton, Stengel & Berra.

Over the next few years I slowly began collecting Buckley’s out-of-print LPs in used record stores, plumbing the album sleeves for any clues—more missing pieces of a puzzle wrapped within a mystery coiling inside a conspiracy and sandwiched between an enigma on a garlic bagel with a schmear.

In the summer of 1985, while pretending to do some research for my father in the reading room of the Main Branch of the New York Public Library, I hit the microfilm machines during some down time hoping to come across the few scraps of Buckley ephemera I knew must be there waiting for me. These turned out to be his New York Times obit, Albert Grossman’s Life magazine article and little bits o’ this ‘n’ that.

Devouring these morsels of information like they were long lost parts of an ancient map to El Dorado, I sat at my table in some kind of warm, ecstatic glow. The late afternoon light was pouring through those famous library windows and bathed me with a vision I have yet to shake. I saw my life’s work unfolding before me—a golden road of unlimited devotion. I knew then and there which book I was put on this here Earth to write. Definitely one of those moments when the angels blew God’s trombones like the Basie Band and beckoned with perfumed whispers: “... furthur...”
I went home that night and filled my journal page with names—names of anybody and everybody who might have anything to do with telling Lord Buckley’s story. Yes! It was going to be an oral history, at least partially. After all, since Buckley was one of those characters people tell such great stories about, why not find these people, record their tales and share them with whomever might listen. I figured there must be somebody out there who dug Lord B. as much as me. Maybe even a couple of somebodys.

But, like the hard working slacker that I was, I promptly dropped the list and my little stash from the library into a folder, which I stuck in my file cabinet and proceeded to forget.

When I got together with my wife, Elaine, about five years later, I played her some Buckley, capping off the little wax-spinning session with his “Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade.” I told her a bit about Buckley, showed her the library clips and must have seemed pretty enthusiastic because (against what now must be her better judgment) she encouraged me to pursue my idea.

It was then that I began making my first few, fitful stabs at contacting Lord Buckley’s friends and associates, most of whom seemed touched and happy that a younger person still cared. I got busy. One contact led to another and then another and then another. My trips to library became more frequent and fruitful.

At some point, I’m not sure when or where or how, I sensed that I had embarked on what Native Americans might call a “vision quest.” Like a Jew wandering in the desert of the obtuse monocultural homogeny that seems to engulf our sweet jumpin’ little green sphere as somebody’s idea of the millennium turns a page, I felt as if I was spreading Lord Buckley’s gospel, Johnny Appleseed–style, for one reason and one reason only: to help people laugh before they get killed.

You know, the Grateful Dead took their name from a cycle of folktales that essentially recast the venerable story of the Good Samaritan: a lone traveler encounters a group of people arguing over a corpse. Apparently, the deceased left a heap of debt and none of the townsfolk is flush enough to spring for even the most modest burial. After the traveler pays for the proper internment, he encoun-
ters a dangerous crisis and is saved at the last moment by someone who later reveals himself to be the spirit of the person he had buried.

In so many ways, those of us in the Buckley omniverse who have been keeping his legacy alive are participants in a living myth, giving the man a proper burial before sending his ever-lovin’ spirit into the folds of the living sky. Lord Buckley died a martyr’s death precisely at the point in mid-twentieth-century social, cultural and political history when his gifts and vision would have not only gained him the type of recognition he so richly deserved, but consequently impacted the national zeitgeist. Yet his artistic contribution and uniquely American life remain criminally neglected, relegated to something far less than footnote to a footnote to a footnote status. Until now.

For the new Princes and Princesses just arriving at the Castle doors, proceed with caution. Listen not for a traditional punch line (there are none) but for the buoyant, earthy soul of the man and his sermons. For Royal Court dignitaries and jesters returning to the Church of the Living Swing, welcome back. And for all “People Worshippers” everywhere: DIG INFINITY!
Lord Buckley
I think rhythm is the key to everything. Rhythm in attitude, rhythm in tension, rhythm in execution, rhythm in consummation. Rhythm, rhythm, rhythm—rhythm runs the whole swingin’ gig.
Vegas may have finally gotten to Buckley. By early 1959 he was spending as much time in L.A. as in Nevada, finding the time to make a very special studio date.

Moving in the substrata of the jazz universe, Buckley had always crossed paths with musicians and was more than comfortable working with many over the years, yet few of those unions were documented or preserved. His associations with the Herman and Krupa bands as well as the bop saints of Fifty-second Street are well noted. But along with the 1955 RCA sessions that included Benny Carter in a supporting ensemble role and the 1953 Light-house gig, only Buckley’s unreleased January 6, 1959, gem of a studio date with vibraphone deity Lionel Hampton remains and must be regarded as the peak of his archived musical collaborations.

While the circumstances surrounding the impetus for the date (or even its precise location) are unknown, the stellar results are not. Hampton’s light touch and obvious sensitivity to Buckley’s material provide a definitive Buckley/jazz alchemy despite the frustrating and puzzling brevity of the session. For his part, Buckley’s recognition of his company’s strengths is evidenced by the pauses he takes between his verbal runs, giving the feeling of musicians “trading fours”—that is, exchanging musical ideas in alternating four-bar segments.

“Gettysburg Address” and “Swingin’ Pied Piper” are the only two pieces known to have transpired at the session but they are exceptional
indeed—easily among the best and most unique versions of these two very different presentations. Each performer both anticipates and leads the other in what may be the perfect synthesis of jazz and “word jazz.” Additionally, an extended Hampton solo between the routines creates the type of unified, thoughtful segue Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Roland Kirk, and rock bands like the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers employed with magical majesty within the coming decade.

Another Buckley recording of “Swingin’ Pied Piper” transpired on September 25, 1958, several months before the Hampton session, when he ventured into an unknown studio to record a solo version of one of his most fully realized classic hipsemantic translations and allegorical portraits.

During the second week of February 1959 small ads began appearing in the entertainment pages of the Los Angeles newspapers advertising “An Evening With Lord Buckley” at the Ivar Theater, a run-down burlesque house that had seen better days. Honoring Lincoln’s birthday (until recently, a not uncommon day of note in the African-American community) and running from the 12th to 14th of the month, two dollars and fifty cents garnered a decent ducat for what would be a pinnacle of the fifty-two-year-old entertainer’s performance career.

The Ivar Theater, built in 1951 and once host to Hollywood’s most celebrated stars, became best known for its presentation of X-rated films and live nude dancing between 1974 and 1989. The “Night Stalker,” the notorious L.A. serial killer, is rumored to have been a frequent visitor. As a natural consequence of its activities during this period, the Ivar fell into disrepair—comfortable surroundings not being high on the priority list of the porno patrons. However, in 1989, the Inner City Cultural Center (a nonprofit Los Angeles theater company) made the bold move of purchasing this historic site and, aided by friends, set out to renovate both the physical plant and the image of a venue that de-
serves to be one of the proudest members of L.A.’s family of theaters. During the author’s 1995 site inspection, the troupe was deep in rehearsal for a Spanish-language presentation of Willie the Shake’s Antony and Cleopatra—a confluence His Lordship would have surely appreciated.

And the Ivar’s legacy was celebrated by singer-songwriter, actor, all-around latter day cool cat, and admitted Buckley connoisseur Tom Waits. While the noted cover of his breakthrough album *Small Change* (picturing the sandpaper-throated performer in the dressing room of a stripper) may or may not have been photographed backstage at the Ivar, Waits referenced the venue in a couple of songs from the 1975 collection *Nighthawks at the Diner* with lines like “. . . colder than a ticket taker’s smile at the Ivar Theatre, on a Saturday night” from the song “Emotional Weather Report” and “. . . Ivar Theatre with live burlesque, man the manager’s scrowlin’, with his feet on his desk” from “Spare Parts 1.”

**William Karl Thomas**
The Ivar Theater, located in the block south of Hollywood Boulevard and two short blocks west of Vine Street, had evolved through a glorious history as a legitimate theater, became a movie house for a brief while and, in 1959, was desperate enough to book burlesque shows in order to survive. That’s why there was a ramp extending out over the orchestra pit so Terpsichore’s step sisters could prance out and cantilever their breasts and buttocks over a slobbering audience of males. Dick “Lord” Buckley made good use of that ramp when I first saw him there early that year.

**Mel Welles**
The performances at theaters such as the Ivar weren’t exactly what I had in mind for Buckley. It was an okay compromise but it wasn’t really what I thought he needed. What he needed was tone. He needed the counterpoint of surrounding
himself with real tone: that feeling you get when the conductor shakes hands with the first violinist and the orchestra tunes up. He needed to be introduced as a man of substance and a wit of importance and that you can’t get at the Ivar Theater. The Ivar was okay for Lenny Bruce because Lenny was an out-and-out comic. Lenny could play the worst kinds of toilets and get laughs but Buckley wasn’t going for laughs. He was going for astonishment.

Nik Venet
We had originally planned for His Lordship to come out on a throne at the Ivar. But he wouldn’t just come out and sit down on one. We were to build hand cranks—and we would lower him down on to the stage. We tried to figure out how to do it but we couldn’t get the thing to work properly and we didn’t have the budget or the money to do it right. What a racket! It sounded like you were lowering a load of lumber. It never did work.

Buckley’s run at the Ivar was bankrolled by a realtor and amateur guitarist named Earl Brown. The deal Buckley drew with Brown was pretty straightforward: Brown would lend Buckley $1,400 for the sole purposes of producing the shows at the Ivar. Buckley would not be compensated but would not have to pay Brown back if the gate receipts fell short of the loan.

There are a couple of points to note here. That Buckley was not being paid for his production efforts or performing services for his involvement in the run is probably an indication that the entertainer may have been looking at the engagement as a showcase opportunity at a central and medium profile venue.

Brown made an interesting home tape with Buckley about a week or two before the gig that finds the performing artist running through takes of a handful of never-before-heard, never-again-recorded and difficult-to-classify oddities (“The Institution,” “Young Girl,” “Louise the Mouse,” “King of Robins,” “The Love Hook,” and “Circus to the Lions”) that
sound like they could have come off the pages of one of Don Marquis’ *archie and mehitabel* stories. Brown and Howard Hatmaier back up Buckley with guitars on several tracks.

Material from the first Ivar Theater concert on February 12 was released on World Pacific by producer Richard Bock and found long life after Buckley’s short run. And if the house wasn’t as packed as Buckley may have hoped, the recordings resulted in two of his finest albums: *Way Out Humor* (later retitled *Lord Buckley In Concert*) and side-A of the posthumously released *Lord Buckley: Blowing His Mind (and yours too)*. The salient pieces from these records plus a previously unreleased Ivar track, “Martin’s Horse,” also appeared on another posthumous World Pacific collection, Buckley’s Best.

The album cover art features pics of the artist as a middle aged-man at the peak of his days as Lord of Flip Manor. They stem from a shoot at which Buckley sat for two dozen photos by William Claxton, the noted jazz lensman. These shots, which display a pith-helmeted Buckley clad in a Mexican vest and mugging shamelessly for the occasion, also prominently display an imposing Victorian mansion looming like de Sade’s
party pad in the background. Contrary to common belief, the building was not Buckley’s Whitley Terrace Castle but, ironically, a building that was later known as the noted Magic Castle—a famous L.A. dinner theater where magicians perform. With Buckley on his throne and looking every bit the Trickster/King of his legend, these photos appeared on the album covers of his World Pacific platters and stand as perhaps the best visual documentation of His Lordship in his late, relaxed prime.

The influential LPs spawned from the Ivar gigs find Buckley in top form, performing peak versions of “The Nazz,” “The Gasser” and some Shakespearean gestures as well as a slew of new bits that cover his range of theatrical presentation and social concerns.

“My Own Railroad” is cut out of the same pyrotechnic vocal cloth as “The Train” and, though far less effective than its antecedent, is revelatory for its autobiographical account of the infamous drunken episode in Chicago when, during the 1940s, a soused Dick Buckley somehow managed to get his car wheels locked into the State Street trolley tracks on his way to the Club DeLisa. Backed by appropriate drum, bass and pi-
ano licks, Buckley invokes the lunacy of the evening with an excellent array of vocal mimicry and alcohol-soaked bravado.

Dick Zalud

“My Own Railroad” actually happened in Chicago. That was when they were digging up the streets in Chicago. He had this beautiful new car that he wrecked in Chicago by putting it out on the State Street trolley car tracks and driving it along the tracks without putting his hands on the wheel. The wheels fit right into the State Street trolley tracks and he didn’t touch anything until he ran it right into a big ditch.

“Subconscious Mind” describes a universal experience: the onset of a powerful sexual daydream while executing a mundane yet potentially fatal task which, in this case, means driving an automobile. Backed by his rhythm section, Buckley’s evocation of the erotic flash recalls Molly Bloom’s primal internal predawn ravings in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In this regard “Subconscious Mind” might be seen as a kind of homage to Joyce’s Molly in shorthand. New Wave choreographer Karole Armitage, by the way, presented a dancer’s interpretation of “Subconscious Mind” during her collaborations with painter David Salle in the 1980s.
Subconscious Mind

Play me some beautiful, dreamy music, dear Prince.

“Subconscious Mind,” Mi Lords, Mi Ladies.

Gentlemen, have you ever swung along a beautiful country road with a gleam of sweet life in the air, groovy with gold in your pocket, ridin’ a wild set of wheels at an easy pace?

Wheewwww!

Are you there?

Everything is smooth and cool. There’s some traffic, but not too much traffic. It’s all right, you see, because you’ve—brrrrrtttt—got everything covered. Understand?

An’ you’re drivin’ along and the feel of the sun and radio’s swingin’ a beautiful, crazy, wild tune and you’re so good you—hah!—you’re right in there tight. Can you feel it?

Yes.

And suddenly your mind—rrrrttttttttt—goes over to Hippleyville and you start thinking about a beautiful girl that you met there five years ago. Whheewwww!

And what a gasser she was . . . Ho! Hah! Take me now!!! Wheeew! Beautiful!

Have your nose rubbed in the rose garden so many times that there are still petals up there? Indeed, indeed.

And you’re thinking about how charming she was, how gracious her people were, what a ball you had, what a beautiful time, how how sweet, how gracious, how crazy, how like a home in a home in a home HOME . . . kick it was.

An’ you get t’ thinkin’ how you went out to the lake, an’ you . . . cool, man!

Yes, yes, yeeesss, yes! Yes, yes, yes. Hewheeeeww!
An’ you go many, many, many other places along that rosette of the reverie kick, an’ all of a sudden you say—Rrrttttt!—“What am I doin’—wait, I—I’s everything all right? I haven’t hit anything I don’t think, I don’t know.

“Those fenders all right?”
“Yes.”
“Good. Excellent. Well . . . better watch what I’m doing here.”
“Who do you think’s been driving while you were gone?”

Much of the Ivar Theater production evokes the buoyant, helium-saturated stream-of-consciousness sensibility found in the work of Joyce. And, like James Joyce, Buckley labored very hard on his material, obsessing over the inclusion and emphasis of each syllable. Both artists played with words, ultimately developing a language (and literary domain) that was theirs and theirs alone.

“Let It Down,” an Ivar track that may have been a holdover from his vaudeville or Walkathon days, is a “commercial kick” about a farmer urging his reluctant cow to give milk. Not a “hip” piece, “Let It Down” recalls a couple of other Buckley bits containing hints of the archetypal country bumpkin, “Governor Slugwell” and, most famously, “God’s Own Drunk.”

**Lord Buckley**
The citizen is confused. He’s tied to the machines: the washing machines, the television commercials, the time payments, the out-doing Charlie, the living better than Fred . . . the unhappiness.

“Supermarket” is unusual Lord Buckley in that it finds him poking fun at the absurdity of modern society, the titled institution in question being his symbol of a world gone wrong when the simple act of procur-
ing sustenance is a force toward the mechanization and thus dehumanization of society. Laden with subtle performance power, it is among the Buckley bits most infused with his unusual sound effects and musical cadence. The gist of the bit is that while the first supermarkets offered prices lower than those found at your friendly neighborhood grocer, the consumer, in time, paid the same and, as the routine ends, was “still pushin’ that mother cart.”

“Lions,” a vague minimalist riff, comes off as the quickest of takes on the Old Testament tale of the Great Flood, though it could just as easily be a sketch of a couple of circus roustabouts discussing the foul-smelling animals in their care. Along with Buckley’s earlier “Jonah and the Whale,” “Lions” may have inspired Bill Cosby to put his cute, sanitized spin on what easily became his most popular early hit, “Noah,” several years later.

Yet another animal sketch, “Martin’s Horse,” is a snappy Runyonesque riff involving a jockey’s (Martin) saucy effort to coax his temperamental thoroughbred (Joey), a serious long shot, across the finish line first. With its overtones of bestiality, “Martin’s Horse” can also be placed in the furtive realm of Buckley’s lewdest sexual performance endeavors breathing with
the loose Americana of William Faulkner’s *The Reivers* and moving with the hyperkinetic syncopation of Lord Buckley’s jazzier work such as “The Train”:

You know, every jockey that rides a horse, besides having certain methods to expedite the speed of the horse, also has a certain way of talking to him. And you know what they talk about? . . . LOVE. What else, right? I’m talking in the essence and beauty of the sense, of course.

So this nice little jock, this little man, got to the track early one morning and booked the favorite, Butterfly Nell. His manager got there a short time after and booked the dog, Joey. So he had to take his tight little buttocks off the favorite—*Parp!*—and put it on the dog.
Inevitably, the nag quickly falls off pace and is so far behind the pack that “no one knows whether she’s last in this race or first in the next race.” But Martin the jockey begins to plead:

Baby, man, I’ve ridden a lot of horses in my life but I’m gonna tell you somethin’—UMM this saddle—oh OHH . . . it feels so good, you’ve got such a nice rhythm, baby. It’s so beautiful BUT A LITTLE BETTER BABY, A LITTLE BETTER!

I’m gonna tell you somethin’—UMMM—I thought I’d ridden some horses before in my life but I’ll tell you this true so help me God I’ll never ride another horse but you as long as I race in the track—it’s wonderful BUT A LITTLE BETTER BABY, A LITTLE BETTER!

Ooh man! This is a great charge: How ignorant can a man be of the powers of horseflesh? I know that a jewel like you there in the stables with no name, no publicity and no nothing—you’re beautiful baby BUT A LITTLE BETTER BABY, A LITTLE BETTER!

Joey begins responding to the jockey’s seductive ministrations and overtakes the field as Buckley concludes:

Baby, I don’t care what they say. This’ll be the first time. This’ll crack every paper in the nation, baby. And I don’t care what they say—so help me God—I mean this baby: if we win this race I can see you down the aisle with me arm-in-arm. I’LL MARRY YOU! BUT A LITTLE BETTER, BABY, A LITTLE BETTER!

One would assume by the title of “Horse’s Mouth” that it is another addition to the substantial Buckley menagerie. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the piece is a short philosophical and gestured reference to Joyce Cary’s wonderful eponymous 1944 novel and the nifty 1958 film adaptation, starring Sir Alec Guiness. Cary’s wry book is a lyri-
cal and whimsical portrait of Gulley Jimson, an eccentric, William Blake–inspired London artist who, when lack of funds prevent him from purchasing canvas, seeks oddball surfaces around his city to use for his ambitious paintings—a veritable Bansky of Cary’s conjuring. Jimson, an inveterate con artist and aging lover, had just the right mix of vision and daring—constantly marching to the obtuse beat of his very own different drummer to attract the attention of Lord Buckley.

Without adapting a full-blown hipsemantic translation of Cary’s book, Buckley limits himself to a paraphrase of the story’s climax when a dying Jimson is visited by a nun. But the nun is startled to find the artist laughing.

“Mr. Jimson, at a very serious time like this, don’t you think you should laugh a little less and pray a little more?” asks the nun.

“But it’s the same thing, mother,” responds Jimson uttering his final, smiling words. No doubt Lord Buckley shared Jimson’s philosophy in such matters of the body and spirit and chose to celebrate it with this nod to
Cary’s memorable character.

“Fire Chief” is a zippy but inconsequential wig bubble about a fireman who drops a woman he’s trying to rescue. The bit is pure vaudeville and while sounding like a reject sketch for an old Milton Berle show, is an indication that Buckley’s Ivar shows were presented as a kind of career retrospective.

It seems no Lord Buckley record would be complete without some Shakespearean inclusion. However, instead of a complete flip of a famous soliloquy, Buckley sounds slow, impassioned tastes of “Hipsters, Flipsters and Finger-Poppin’ Daddies” and “To Swing or Not to Swing” for his audience after giving them Willie The Shake’s lowdown on Antony and Cleopatra:

And you remember when Marc and Cleo were swingin’ on that velvet-covered barge, understand, out there on the Nile and the mooooon was shining and all that craaaaaazy Egyptian incense was jumping and Marc and Cleo was swingin’ up a storm and in the meantime, Caesar had split to Rome like I ’splained to you before and got in that hassle and they sliced that poor cat up every which way. Well, that was Marc’s buddy cat, you see. Well, Marc was a hip cat, he knows that every fox has got its box. But the only thing that was dragging him was they were bad-rapping Caesar, you see. Marc didn’t dig that he had to put down Cleo which he didn’t want to do cause Cleo was one of them early day Elizabeth Taylor chicks, undstand what I mean? But he had to put her down and go defend his line.

As evidence of the Ivar sides’ resonance in the liturgy of the following generation of American minstrelsy, Joni Mitchell references Buckley’s tag of the Bard in her song “Talk To Me” from her 1977 album Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter when she sings, “I stole that from Willie The
Shake, you know/Neither a borrower or a lender be/Romeo, Romeo talk to me.”

Buckley’s set-up for “Hipsters, Flipsters and Finger-Poppin’ Daddies” on this version includes the phrase “Well, naturally, the Roman Senate was jumpin’ salty all over the place,” a riff that James Taylor incorporated into “Let It All Fall Down,” a song from his seminal 1974 album Walking Man.

James Taylor
I was fifteen or sixteen when I first heard Lord Buckley’s records. I was in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and someone down at the university suggested I listen to him. I had a friend down there and we got into Lord Buckley and began quoting him.

Some of his pieces were very earnest and very dark and he really departed from the humorous side of things. I got the impression that he was not only not about one-liners but that he was never out of character.

His stuff was delightful and inventive. His pieces speak from what was clearly an amazingly active imagination and mind. It was also taking on very important, meaningful stuff like Shakespeare and Christ, claiming it for a generation and expressing it in those terms. He was an interpreter and he made it fresh. I’m sorry I never saw him perform.

Lord Buckley was more like a storyteller or raconteur. He was a performance artist, too, in that he had this character that he assumed and that character was his life.

His stuff just became part of my internal dialogue after listening to it for such a long time at such an impressionable age. It was just in there. It wasn’t like a conscious thing where I was hunting to put a Lord Buckley line in a song of mine. It’s just quoted like any familiar thing would be that just fit it. It was really quite unconscious.
While the roots of Buckley’s Uncle Remus–style yarn “God’s Own Drunk” can probably be found deep in Buckley’s past, its place on high in the Buckley oeuvre is set in stone. “God’s Own Drunk,” a shaggy dog (or, in this case, a shaggy bear) story told in the homespun vernacular of a backwoods southern hayseed, is the last inclusion of an animal story (in this case a bear) in Lord Buckley’s canon and a testament to the ability of intoxicants to lift the soul to sublime stratospheric ecstasies. It also should not be lost on the non-logomaniac that the first letter of each word in the title spell out the word “God.”

Also known as “The Bear,” Buckley would sometimes casually introduce “God’s Own Drunk” as a story “in square,” demonstrating an expansive interest in all forms and styles of comedic expression. In musical terms, if one thinks of some of Buckley’s work as jazz-based, then pieces like “God’s Own Drunk” or “Let It Down” are Buckley’s nod to bluegrass.

Elaine Thomasen
Jim Buckley, Lord Buckley’s older brother, told me the story about the time when, as teenagers, he and Dick were asked to watch a still while the owner went into town. And they started sipping away and got so drunk that Jim would never drink another drop of alcohol. They just wandered all over the mountain and they saw this and they saw that but Jim said he just about died. At one point they got so drunk they imagined they saw a giant bear. I’m sure that is where the story of “God’s Own Drunk” came from because I heard it so much when I was growing up.

The story in question is fairly straightforward: the speaker, a “non-drinkin’ man,” is asked to check his brother-in-law’s moonshine-frothing
still hidden deep in the woods. When he finds it, temptation gets the better of him and he samples the goods in such quantity that he quickly becomes cosmically sloshed. One has to wonder if Lord Buckley’s psychedelic experiences sparked a memory of or identification with the story and inspired its eventual presentation in performance as there is no record of its display in concert until after his experiments with Dr. Janiger.

At the peak of his saturation he encounters a gigantic bear that he cajoles into sharing the white lightning with him. During the course of their carousel they become the best of friends before passing out. When the storyteller awakes he discovers that “the bear was gone. And you know what brothers and sisters . . . so was the still.”

**God’s Own Drunk**
I’d like to do a little creative wig bubble for you called “God’s Own Drunk.”

Said, eh, just like I say before: I, I’m a non-drinkin’ man. Never drank for some reason or other. Didn’t like it. But like I said, too, I promised to take care of my brother-in-law’s still while he went in to vote.

Went up there and it was *just where the map said it was*. And I’m a gonna tell you something—it was no little old five or ten cent still. It was laid there like a *golden mountain opal*, with a kind of honey dew cry comin’ from it.

I aren’t a drinkin’ man, like I ‘splained to you, but that big old yellow moon was a hangin’ up there, and God’s lanterns was a hangin’ in the sky, and that curiosity got the best of me, and I took a slash.

And I got a crazy, revolutionary feelin’ in my body. That yellow whiskey went down my throat like honeydew vine water. Humph, it tasted mighty good!

I felt a revolution goin’ through my body like there was great neon signs a goin’ up an’ sayin’, “There’s a Great Life a Comin’!”
Feelin’ it talkin’ to me, and I took another slash, and I got another jolt, and I took another slash, and I started to sing. I started to sing.

And that big old yellow moon a hangin’ out there and God’s sweet lanterns a hangin’ in the sky, and I’s a singin’. Never could sing a note in my life, but I’s a singin’ as fine and as pretty as you’d ever want to hear.

And I took another slash. And then I took a big full . . . That big old yellow moon a hangin’ out there. God’s lanterns a hangin’ in the sky, and suddenly I got a tremendous revolution of emotion in my body like I was fallin’ in love with everything in God’s sweet world that moved, lived, didn’t live, animate, inanimate, black, blue, green, pink, mountains, fountains.

I was in love with life, ‘cause I was **DRUNK**!!

I wasn’t fallin’ down, slippin’ slidin’ drunk. I was GOD’S OWN DRUNK! . . . A fearless man.

And that’ when I first saw the bear.

Big old Kodiak-lookin’ fella, about sixteen foot tall. I walked right on up to that bear, cause I was God’s Own Drunk and I loved everything in this world. Walked right up tight to him about four-and-a-half feet and I looked right up in his eyes and I want to tell you somethin’ brothers and sisters: my eyes was redder than his was! Hung him up.

And he’s a sniffin’, he’s a sniffin’. He’s tryin’ to smell some fear. He can’t do ‘cause I’m God’s Own Drunk and I’m a fearless man.

He expects me to do two things: flip or fly. I don’t do either. Hangs him up. I told him, I said, “Mr. Bear, I’m God’s Own Drunk and I love every hair on your twenty-seven-acre body. I’m a fearless man!”

Said, “I want you to go . . . I know you got bear friends over the hill there. Harry Bear and Tim Bear and Jelly Bear and Tony Bear and Teddy Bear and Field Bear, Hazel Bear, John Bear, Pete Bear and Rare Bear! Go over and tell all of them that I’m God’s Own Drunk to-
night and I love everything in God’s green creation. I love them like brothers. But if they give me any trouble, I’m gonna run every God-damn one of ’em off the hill!”

I moved up two feet—don’t you know he moved back three. I reached up and took the bear by the hand. I said, “Mr. Bear, we’re both beasts when it comes right down to it.”

He’s a lookin’ down at me. I said, “I want you to come with me. You’re gonna be my buddy. Buddy Bear.”

Took him right by his big, old, shaggy man-island sized paw, led him on over, sat him down by the still. Well, he’s a sniffin’. He’s a sniffin’. He knows there’s honeydew around there, some kind of honey bear honeydew of some kind. He’s a sniffin’. I know what he’s a sniffin’ at. I took a slash or two myself to taste ’er out and I filled him a bottle.

Did you ever see them bears, the silhouette of them bears at the circus, suckin’ up that sarsaparilla? Ahhh, it’s a fine lookin’ sight! And he downed another bottle. And he downed another bottle. And I put two more in him and pretty soon he started to sniff and snort. Tapped his foot. And he got up and started to do the Bear Dance. Two sniffs, three snorts, a half a turn and one grunt.

And I’m tryin’ to do it, but I couldn’t do it ‘cause it was just like a jitterbug dance: it was so simple it evaded me. But we was a dancin’ and yellin’!

And God’s sweet moon a hangin’ in the sky, and God’s sweet lanterns out there and there’s jubilation and love on that hill. And finally, my love, it up and got so strong it overwhelmed my soul, and I laid back in the sweet green hill with that big, old Buddy Bear’s paw right in mine and I went to sleep.

And I slept for four hours and dreamt me some tremulous dreams.
And when I woke up that old, yellow moon was a hangin’ in the sky, and God’s sweet lanterns is out there and my buddy the bear was a missin’.

And you know something else, brothers and sisters? . . . so was the still.

Henry Miller
The one called “God’s Own Drunk” is absolutely superb, a classic. It takes one back to the fountain of ecstasy buried in the wilds of Patagonia . . . You must have drunk from the Holy Bottle that Rabelais speaks of. I know you have drunk from many a bottle, but this one is the elixir, the eau de vie of the gods.

It is tempting to identify a piece from the Buckley canon that might serve as a signal of his growth on the heels of his psychedelic excursions, while nothing particularly obvious or explicit jumps off his later grooves, “God’s Own Drunk” does suggest at least a coy nod to the power of the experience. With the illicit moonshine standing for the drug, the stratospheric effects it has on the storyteller is as if he were seeing reality for the first time. And there are the thematic resonances with aspects of the paean he penned for Dr. Janiger — most notably a physical and spiritual merging with the heavens. The shifting curtains of the universe he ecstatically describes in his acid essay might easily be heard in “God’s sweet lanterns a-hangin’ up there in the sky” section his “God’s Own Drunk” reverie.

Hallucinations are a well documented if terribly cliche and probably not-to-the-point component of the psychedelic experience. But what is the bear who takes the stage in “God’s Own Drunk” if anything but an hallucination of Bunyonesque proportions? With his 27-acre body, apple pie-sized paw and dance moves, this friendly ursa major emerging from the gloam of the wilderness is a rival for anything conjured from the pen
of Coleridge, the palette of Blake or navel of some 1960s hippie contemplating its existence and meaning.

Might not have Lord Buckley, in the aftermath of his synapse clearing psychedelic sojourn, returned to his past and excavated new material for performance consideration and presentation?

If anything, the numerous, very late Buckley recordings, say from his command performance at Nepenthe in Big Sur in late 1958 for Henry Miller and on through Oakland dates at the Gold Nugget, interviews with Bill Butler and Studs Terkel, and Second City revelation and interview with Studs Terkel in the summer of 1960, all sound as if they are coming from one who had been to the mountaintop and returned with the Good News.

It is almost as if LSD confirmed to Lord Buckley that the path he had taken and the hip messianic mantle he had adopted were, to paraphrase it in an Aristotelean paradigm, good, beautiful and true.

Tangential to the emergence of “God’s Own Drunk” in his later repertoire as a powerful performance vehicle, several other bits figuring rural characters can be found on a number of unreleased twilight era Buckley recordings. These always brief word sketches evoke an early 20th century set and setting and feel as if they were drawn from people and scenes Buckley may have encountered in his rugged youth as borders in his family’s home and odd, varied personalities in and on central California’s pool halls, taverns, grocers, raucous streets and rugged outback.

But whether these portraits were recent inventions or well-trod vaudeville bits he intermittently dusted off and presented is difficult if not impossible to ultimately determine. It is, nonetheless, tempting to con-
sider that LSD re-opened a pathway to the rich society populating his childhood.

Though “God’s Own Drunk” may initially appear to be a minor work in Lord Buckley’s catalogue, it captured the attention of three modern minstrels. Jerry Garcia, for one, cited it as his favorite Buckley piece and Jimmy Buffett used it as a cornerstone for many of his concerts in the 1970s and early 1980s. Of equal significance, James Taylor lifted a line from it (“God’s sweet lanterns hangin’ in the sky”) and plugged it into “(I’ve Got To) Stop Thinkin’ ’Bout That,” a song from his 1991 album *New Moon Shine*:

**James Taylor**

“God’s sweet lanterns hanging in the sky” is an ecstatic line and that particular piece, “God’s Own Drunk,” that has him falling in love with that family of bear and that trans-species ecstasy, is a truly sublime thing. That sends a jolt through me to this day. The thought of him drinking that moonshine up on the hill like that is a great image. The name of my album *New Moon Shine* even fits in with that a little bit.

No one ever picks up on the Lord Buckley influence in that song but I know, for instance, that my friend Jimmy Buffett used to recite “God’s Own Drunk” in his show.

Not only did Jimmy Buffett perform the bit in concert, he released it on two albums: his 1974 LP *Living and Dying in 3/4 Time* and the live *You Had to Be There* disc in 1978. Set to the strains of a laid-back, honky-tonk groove, Buffett’s 1974 version of “God’s Own Drunk” is more than respectable. An in-studio audience has obviously needed little coaching (or coaxing) to party and they willingly oblige, helping to create an atmosphere of a turn-of-the-century roadhouse.

Buckley gained Buffett’s attention during the 1960s, an era which should have cued His Lordship’s comeback. “I been doing this particular
song for about twelve years,” Buffett told an Atlanta audience in 1978 when he performed a slightly raunchier version of “God’s Own Drunk” for his You Had to Be There album. “I learned it from two friends of mine down when I first went to New Orleans . . . I was about eighteen years old. Got down to Bourbon Street . . . It was written by the late, great Lord Richard Buckley, who I heard it off of a record one night at a friend named Bob Cook and Brent Webster’s apartment. That song intrigued me to the point where I figured, ‘Well, hell, this is really great!’ Too many people have never heard of Lord Buckley, who was an old humorist and king of the jivers. So, with much respect to Lord Richard Buckley, this is ‘God’s Own Drunk.’”

Buffett’s musical adaptations of “God’s Own Drunk” recall the country genre of “comic drunk” monologues of which Johnny Bond (“Ten Little Bottles”) reigned supreme.

In March of 1978, John Rockwell wrote in the New York Times: “Mr. Buffett emerged as a sort of folkie Southern boogier, and his cult still seems to regard ‘God’s Own Drunk’ as his theme . . .”

Buffett told Rockwell, a tad defensively, “People picked up on songs like ‘God’s Own Drunk,’ which for me was almost like filler. I don’t do that song anymore.”

And Buffett’s artifice itself was once described by Village Voice critic Geoffrey Stokes as “John Wayne meets Xavier Cugat meets Boston Blackie meets Lord Buckley at a cocktail party in Buffett’s head, and they all have a few drinks and go dancing with Carmen Miranda.”

Buffett has, in fact, continue to intermittently interject “God’s Own Drunk” as a performance vehicle over the decades and even saw fit to tag two of his vehicles, an old pick-up truck and a boat respectively, with familiar Buckley references: “God’s Own Truck” and “Euphoria II.”

The hidden gem on the crown of the Ivar collection is Buckley’s rendering of Joseph Newman’s “Black Cross” from the poet’s book It Could
Be Verse! “Black Cross” is a haunting invective against the evil of racism and a far superior companion piece to Buckley’s own “Georgia, Sweet and Kind.” Indeed, part of what makes this performance so successful is the eerie musical background accompaniment by vocalist Dorris Henderson on the old spiritual, “Koombaya.” Ms. Henderson can also be heard moaning “Rock of Ages” in the background on the Ivar release of “The Nazz.”

As Henderson recalled her involvement with the gig to Ian Anderson of fROOTS magazine in 1999, Lord and Lady Buckley were fans of folk music: “I was singing at the folk clubs like the Troubadour and the Ash Grove where they met me and invited me up to Bob DeWitt’s Topanga Canyon colony. That’s where I met Lord Buckley several times. He did a couple of concerts up there for Bob. Every Sunday they used to have folk people dropping in, and he heard me sing up there and asked me if I’d accompany him on these concerts he was doing at the Ivar Theatre.”

Later, after moving to England where she lived since the early 1960s, the Ivar Theater records caught up with her one day when visiting Collett’s, the famous book and music shop in London. “I wasn’t aware at all that people in England knew of Lord Buckley until Gill Cook
said, ‘We’ve got some Lord Buckleys in, have you heard him?’ I said, ‘Yes, I’ve met him,’ and so she played the album and I said, ‘That’s me!’”

The decidedly serious “Black Cross” was one of Lord Buckley’s favorite pieces, a disturbing portrait he often performed late in his career even though the civil rights movement was little more than a distant rumble to most whites at the time.

Lord Buckley
This is a beautiful thing by Paul Newman’s beloved grandfather, a Cleveland poet. It’s called the “Black Cross.” It could be the “Red Cross,” the “Blue Cross,” the “White Cross,” “The Pink Cross,” “The Yellow Cross,” “The Aquamarine Cross,” “The Criss Cross,” or the “Cross Cross.” But we call it the “Black Cross.”

Black Cross
There was old Hezikiah Jones of Hog Back County
Lived on a hill in a weather-beaten hovel
And all that he owned was a two-acre plot
And a bed and some books and a hoe and a shovel.

Old Hezikiah, black as the soil he was hoeing,
Worked pretty hard to make both ends meet;
Raised what he ate, with a few cents over
To buy corn liquor which he knock down neat.

And a few cents more that he put in the cupboard
Against what he called “de rainy season,”
But he never got to save more’n two, three dollars
Till he spent it for this or that reason.

The white folk around knew old Hezikiah . . .
“Harmless enough, but the way that I figger
He better lay off’n them goddamn books,
‘Cause reading ain’t no good fer an ignorant nigger.”

Reverend O’Green, of the white man’s church,
Finally got to comin’ ovah
To talk to him all about the Pearly Kingdom
An’ to save his soul for the Lawd Jehovah!

“D’ya b’lieve in the Lawd?” asked the white man’s preacher.
Old Hezikiah puckered his frosty brow,
“Well I can’t say ‘yes,’ so I ain’t going to say it,
Caze I’ve never seen de Lawd . . . nowhere . . . no how.”

“Do you believe in the Church?” asked the white man’s preacher.
Hezikiah said, “Well de Church is divided;
Ef they can’t make up their minds, Ah can’t either . . .
Ah ’m just like them . . . I ain’t decided.”

“D’ya b’lieve in Heaven?” asked the white man’s preacher,
“Where you go, if you’re good, fer your last rewa’hd?”
“Ah’m good,” said Hezikiah, “good as Ah’m able.
But Ah don’t ’spect nothin’ from Heaven OR the Lawd.”

“You don’t b’lieve in nothin’!” roared the white man’s preacher,
“Oh yes Ah does,” said old Hezikiah.
“Ah b’lieve that a man should be beholding to his neighbah widout
the hope of Heaven or de fear o’ Hell’s fire.”
“But you don’t understand,” said the white man’s preacher,
“There’s a lot of good ways for a man to be wicked!”
And they hung Hezikiah as high as a pigeon,
And the nice folks around said, “Well, he had it comin’ . . .
’Cause the the son-of-a-bitch didn’t have no religion!”

“Black Cross” is an attempt to grasp the blind hatred of the lynch mob. Buckley speaks of Hezikiah Jones, “black as the soil he was hoe-ing,” and slowly, eloquently builds up the picture of a dignified, self-educated man with noble principles, who, when accused of not believing in anything by “the white man’s preacher,” answers with the honesty that proves to be his epitaph.

**Joan Baez**

*Singer, songwriter, musical interpreter, and social activist, Joan Baez’s impact on American culture and world politics has been profound. She refers to Lord Buckley in her 1968 autobiography* Daybreak *and her son Gabe performed at the semi-annual Lord Buckley Memorial Celebrations in California in the 1990s.*

I was on a Joan of Arc mission for nonviolence and folk songs and yet the man touched me because of his social depth. “Black Cross” was so deep. I’d be laughing one minute because he was so clever and witty but then he’d flip it over and I would have to leave the room because I’d be in tears. Lord Buckley reached way deep inside.

**Ray Watkins**

*A longtime Chicago musician, Ray Watkins remembered his experiences as Lord Buckley’s Gate of Horn lighting designer in a taped 1973 conversation with Del Close and Ann Brooks, from which the following testimony was drawn.*
When I first met Lord Buckley I admired him but I didn’t like him because he seemed very remote. Originally I was supposed to play piano for him at the Gate of Horn but we couldn’t get together on the parts so he said, “Ray, just blow lights.”

And so, I began working the lights.

Then one day, he tries out this piece of material, “Black Cross.” I started hearing it and I did some rather interesting things with the lights, flashing on different colors. When the Deacon spoke in the piece I’d have red and blue coming at him from opposite angles so he would really burn. And when Hezikiah Jones himself was speaking, it would be a very soft pin spot and it would flash back and forth as he changed personalities.

That was the first time I ever really lit him and that was first time I ever really grew to like the man and love him.

Within two years of the release of “Black Cross” on Buckley’s Way Out Humor album, Bob Dylan (then a young Jewish troubadour hailing from Hibbing, Minnesota) had transformed “Black Cross” into a dramatic talking blues in perhaps the one instance where a cover version of Buckley may well surpass the work of the master.

Dylanologists all agree that Lord Buckley helped fuel the singer-songwriter’s inspiration and early aesthetic. Although the two never met, Buckley was important in Dylan’s development.

A number of people are cited as having introduced Dylan to the Buckley magic, including comedian-turned-activist clown Hugh Romney (now loved the galaxy over as Wavy Gravy) and New York stand-up shaman Steve Ben Israel who was doing some Buckley riffs in his Greenwich Village nightclub engagements. Ben Israel also remembers a great night at the Cafe Wha? when Dylan shared the stage with Fred Neil, Rev. John Hicken and Dorris Henderson, who had supplied vocal support to Buckley’s performance of “Black Cross” on the Ivar concert LP, so perhaps some connection was made then.
Another version of how Dylan may have gotten juiced on Buckley concerns the apartment he shared with Romney during the summer of 1961. When Romney brought home Buckley’s album *Way Out Humor* that included “Black Cross,” Dylan took to it immediately and studied it in the same way he had previously absorbed Woody Guthrie.

Dylan at least obliquely confirmed the Romney connection in his 2004 memoir *Chronicles: Volume One* and while not specifically citing “Black Cross” acknowledged Lord Buckley with this brief homage: “Buckley was the hipster bebop preacher who defied all labels. No sulking Beat poet, he was a raging storyteller who did riffs on all kinds of things from supermarkets to bombs and the crucifixion. He did raps on characters like Gandhi and Julius Caesar. Buckley had even organized something called the Church of the Living Swing (a jazz church). With stretched out words, Buckley had a magical way of speaking. Everybody, including me, was influenced by him in one way or another. He died about a year before I got to town so I never got to see him; heard his records though.”

Mikki Isaacson
A friend of Bob Dylan's during his Greenwich Village coffee house days, Mikki Isaacson's recollection of Dylan's fascination with Lord Buckley is drawn from Dylan: An Intimate Biography by Anthony Scaduto.

He had collected a lot of material over the years, songs and things, and he asked me to take all these scraps of paper lying in his guitar case and type them out for him. One of the things he had me do was a routine off the Lord Buckley record, the one about the hanging of a black man. Bobby was so very anxious to learn it, and for me to type it for him. He was so excited about it, kept playing it on the phonograph over and over again ‘til I was going out of my mind.

**Jim Dickson**

Albert Grossman was interested in distributing the Buckley material so we had a hot dog over it but nothing came of it. Albert had run the Gate of Horn, a club in Chicago and I would imagine had his own experience with Buckley. He, undoubtedly, was the one who would have turned Bob Dylan on to Buckley.

To me, “Black Cross” was the most powerful piece that he did. When Buckley came back to California with that particular piece of material it knocked everybody’s socks off. The civil rights movement began post-Buckley. Buckley was out there by himself defending black people and getting black people’s approval. But he made a lot of people nervous in those days.

The three extant recordings of Bob Dylan’s interpretation of “Black Cross” (sometimes titled “Hezikiah Jones” or simply “Hezikiah” in Dylan discographies and on various bootleg releases) are phenomenal, but exist as a misidentified footnote in the singer/songwriter’s own voluminous catalogue that warrants correction. The question at hand is the authorship of the piece, which has been indisputably established as Joseph S. Newman, not Richard M. “Lord” Buckley though Buckley’s interpretation no doubt had a massive baring on Dylan’s arrangement and approach to performing the poem.
Some of the confusion surrounding the piece may have inadvertently been caused by Buckley himself who, on the Ivar recording, mistakenly introduces “Black Cross” either accidentally or on purpose, as written by “Paul Newman’s beloved grandfather, a Cleveland poet.” The offhand nature of the remark would naturally lead one into falsely believing that it was a merely another one of His Lordship’s odd-ball, off-the-cuff put-ons. However, on other unreleased Buckley renditions of “Black Cross,” he correctly identifies Joe Newman in the Cleveland clan’s lineage.

Though there are only three surviving versions of Dylan performing “Black Cross,” the budding singer-songwriter reportedly performed the song regularly over a period of about a year starting in late 1961. His interpretations of it on the extant recordings are exceptional conjuring of the grizzled character of Hezikiah Jones and the bigoted deacon. Buckley was well into his fifties when he was performing it while Dylan was barely twenty, so hearing Dylan’s voice break as he narrated how they “hung Hezikiah . . . high as a pigeon” is an astonishingly dramatic moment, highlighted by the tender age of the performer.

The monologue became a Dylan perennial of the period and in a 1961 interview with Izzy Young (founder of the long-gone but fondly remembered Folklore Center in the Village), Dylan quoted whole chunks of “Black Cross” verbatim when asked about his views on religion: “Got no religion. Tried a bunch of different religions. The churches are divided, can’t make up their minds and neither can I. Never saw a God, can’t say until I see one.”

It would appear that if Dylan was adapting Woody Guthrie’s attire, mannerisms, and Okie twang at this time, he was working Lord Buckley into his neo-folkie stew as well.

The earliest known Dylan version of “Black Cross” was performed near the end of the young folky’s Carnegie Chapter Hall concert on No-
vember 4, 1961— his first major concert just eleven months after his arrival in New York City and just eight days shy of the first anniversary of His Lordship’s death. Without the benefit of knowing to what extent Buckley’s material was being performed by others, it is safe to say that Dylan’s outings of “Black Cross” may well represent the first time an artist of any note was taking even a small part of the Buckley canon to the stage.

Along with its historical importance, the Carnegie Chapter Hall “Black Cross” is notable for the fanciful, seemingly making it up on-the-fly introduction of given by Dylan in characteristic faux-Okie burr or the era as he strums a couple of minor chords: “This isn’t a song . . . it’s sort a little story . . . I first heard this from a man in Portland, Oregon . . . there’s a place they call ‘The Casino’ . . . it’s sort of a jazz place . . . I saw a man—Lord Buckley—used to work there . . . Richard Buckley but everyone called him ‘Lord’ Buckley . . . he was billed as Lord Buckley . . . he had a mustache and wore an African hat . . . he was sort of a poet . . . I learned this from him . . . Mr. Buckley’s dead now . . . he died in New York . . . he didn’t write this but I learned it from from him . . .”

The next rendition of Dylan recording “Black Cross” can be found on the last tune of an extended set recorded on December 22, 1961, on what is known among Dylanologists alternately as the “Minneapolis Hotel Tape” or the “Minnesota Hotel Tape.” Actually it was performed at the home of his friend Bonnie Beecher (who later married Wavy Gravy) and
captured for posterity by fellow musician and comrade-in-song Tony Glover. This first, somewhat weaker, take is an indication that Dylan was in the early stages of learning the piece. It is interesting to note, however, that all of the twenty-eight songs performed that night were covers, a reflection that Dylan, like his peers at the time, was mining the back eddies of the folk and blues tradition. Though it is top-heavy in its inclusion of Guthrie material, the “Minnesota Hotel Tape” features chestnuts from the likes of Rev. Gary Davis, Big Joe Williams, Brownie McGhee, and Blind Lemon Jefferson. Clearly Dylan was, at least unconsciously, lacing Buckley in this great lineage of American folk music by the inclusion of “Black Cross” into his repertoire.

By the fall of 1962, when the second Dylan version of “Black Cross” was recorded at the Gaslight Café in Greenwich Village, the young troubadour had learned his song well. The pacing and drama of the piece are perfectly nuanced, the unfolding horror of the story poignantly dark.

In this fashion, Dylan tailored “Black Cross” into one of his fingerpointing protest songs similar to two originals he performed that autumn evening, “John Brown” and “Ballad of Hollis Brown”—sympathetic compositions that focused on the violent, martyred fate of its primary characters. The songsmith was to follow these up over the next couple of years with several others in the same vein, among them: “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” “The Death of Emmett Till,” and “Percy’s Song.”

Dylan encountered Lord Buckley at a crucial point in his emerging aesthetic and personal development. It was at this time that he was in the chameleon-like process of transforming himself from Bobby Zimmerman, middle-class son of a Midwestern hardware store owner, into Dylan: the poet/prophet/waif who would change the times and music . . . and forever change with them.

A Buckley reference appeared in a Dylan poem published in the December 1963 issue of *Hootenanny*, the staunchly traditionalist song-
sters’ pamphlet. Curiously titled “Blowin’ in the Wind,” the poem post-dates that particularly famous Dylan classic and, along with mentions of Ray Charles, Julian Beck, Bertrand Russell, Marlon Brando, and Joan Baez, the fractalized bit of impressionism includes the following stanza:

“an Moondog’s beatin his drum an sayin
his lines—
L e n n y
Bruce’s talkin
an Lord Buck-
ley’s memory
still movin
an Doc Wat-
son’s walkin”

Buckley also seems to have informed some of Dylan’s later work. A close look at the atmospheric cover photograph of his 1965 album *Bringing It All Back Home* reveals another LP jacket, *The Best of Lord Buckley*, prominently displayed on the mantelpiece in the background amid the funky, but pointed, cultural detritus littering the portrait.

A couple of songs on that disc appear to show Dylan noting Buckley’s teachings. The proto-rap “Subterranean Homesick Blues” bursts with harsh, black humorous syncopation and “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream” with obtuse history.
Additionally, “Mr. Tambourine Man,” with its Pied Piper–like beckoning, contains the repetitive sound/phrase “jingle-jangle” echoing Buckley’s “Scrooge,” which includes the identical refrain. Similarly, a line from the later Dylan masterpiece “Like A Rolling Stone” (“when you got nothin’ you got nothin’ to lose”) parallels Buckley’s sentiments in “The Gasser”: “To know what it means to have nothing you must have . . . NOTHING!”

Within a year Dylan was utilizing Buckley’s method of transforming legend into a postmodern sensibility with the title track of his next, epochal album, *Highway 61 Revisited*: “Oh God said to Abraham ‘Kill me a son,’/Abe says, ‘Man, you must be puttin’ me on’”

Dylan also populated a couple of other *Highway 61* songs, “Desolation Row” and “Tombstone Blues,” with characters that either come straight out of Buckley’s lexicon or could have. Those making cameos include Cinderella, Bette Davis, Ophelia, Einstein “disguised as Robin Hood,” John the Baptist, the Commander in Chief, the King of the Philistines, Gypsy Davy, Cecil B. DeMille, Galileo, Delilah, Ma Rainey, and Beethoven.

And is it any accident that “Mr. Jones”—the man who knows something is happening but not quite what on *Highway 61*’s scathing “Ballad of a Thin Man”—shares a similar situation and the same surname as the doomed Hezikiah from “Black Cross”?

Concurrently, Dylan included the following reference in the “Electric Black Nite Crash” section of his murky novel/poem *Tarantula*: “nature has made the young West Virginia miners not want to be miners but rather get this ‘46 Chevy—no money down—take to Geneva . . . hunting for the likes of escape & Lord Buckley & Sherlock Holmes about to be his mother turning to Starhole the Biology Amazon saying ‘i dont want to be my mother!’”
And others see a Buckley-“Black Cross” connection in “Sign on the Cross,” one of the more intangibly weird songs from the intangibly weird American collaboration: *The Basement Tapes*. Recorded informally in 1967 with The Band in upstate New York, *The Basement Tapes* feature a grab bag of genuine Dylan classics, genuine folk/pop classics and genuinely inspired, off-the-wall lunacy. Built like a symphony, “Sign on the Cross” finds Dylan taking on a persona somewhere between a late-night radio preacher and an aged backwoods wise man, in a voice sounding alternately soothing and deranged.

Dylan shocked the music world in 1979 when he revealed that he was a Born-Again Christian and began performing a new, all-gospel repertoire—some of the most powerful (and unjustifiably maligned) music of his career. But, like Buckley before him, was he not merely celebrating the life and legacy of the Nazz in art and song?

In 1981, still later in Dylan’s career, came the tune “Lenny Bruce” on his under-appreciated *Shot of Love* album. Though there are again no Buckley-specific references in the song, it is reasonable to view the composition as Dylan’s identification with and homage to the idiom Lenny and His Lordship transformed. And, who knows, maybe when Dylan sang of hearing the “song of the clown who died in the alley” on “A Hard
Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” at the Gaslight that night way back in 1962, he had Lord Buckley in mind.

Perhaps more than the lyrics in many of these compositions themselves are the swirling, kaleidoscopic manner in which they flow sing-song from Dylan’s lips, defying rhyme and meter. Even the more straight-ahead rock and blues numbers have a raw angularity that reveal hidden facets with repeated listening.

To extend the idiom’s lineage into the modern era (and Buckley’s influence via Bob Dylan) are cover versions of two Dylan songs: Kurtis Blow’s 1987 rap version of “Subterranean Homesick Blues” and a 1993 hip-hop rendition of “Like a Rolling Stone” by the Mystery Tramps, featuring the first-ever authorized sampling of the singer-songwriter’s voice from the original cut in the dense but spunky high-tech mix.

Or maybe Buckley was, as some Dylanists suggest, little more than a footnote in the Bob Dylan story. Maybe Dylan, the living sponge, got hold of Buckley’s records in 1961, spent a couple of weeks absorbing them inside out and then moved on. Dylan often cannibalized people’s record collections when crashing with them—the most famous example being when he devoured Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*—and perhaps “Black Cross” was all that emerged from his binge. Maybe the Buckley album on the cover of *Bringing It All Back Home* is just an album on a shelf, where Dylan left him, resurrecting him possibly not again until the mid-1970s to draw on Buckley’s hip “Dan McGroo” for “Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts,” the epic face-on-the-barroom floor murder mystery disguised as a screenplay in song on Dylan’s monumental album *Blood on the Tracks*.

“Black Cross” had a powerful, if opposite, effect on another composer/musician of renowned sound and round. When Buckley performed the piece in New York City in the fall of 1960, bassist Charles Mingus allegedly charged the stage with a knife in an attempt to stab
His Lordship whom he incorrectly felt was glorifying a lynching. It was only the quick action and soft words of Prince Lewis Foremaster that soothed Mingus and saved Lord Buckley on that occasion.

When President Abraham Lincoln delivered “The Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863, it was only heard by a handful of people — really, only those within at most shouting distance of the gaunt, doomed leader. We are familiar with it due to its written transmission through the last century-and-a-half. Ninety-nine years after Lincoln’s hallowed oratory, Rev. Martin L. King, Jr. put forth his “I Have a Dream” speech at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial was heard with the aid of microphones and loudspeakers to the hundreds of thousands gathered on the Mall in Washington, D.C., by millions more watching on television or listening on radio, and many many millions more — perhaps billions — than that via recorded documentation in the subsequent half century since it was uttered.

Without attempting to compare these two icons of United States history and progressive thought with Lord Buckley, it is nevertheless instructive to ponder their resonant similarities. In passionately and non-ironically reinterpreting “The Gettysburg Address,” covering Joe Newman’s anti-racist meditation “Black Cross” and drawing on sentiments of love, respect and compassion in just about all of his hip classics particularly in “The Hip Gahn” and “The Nazz,” Buckley was consciously placing himself as a link in the chain of radical thinkers. Yes, though is audience was small and shifting, the bully pulpit tiny, vinyl pressings and distribution of his obscure and often hard-to-find albums next to non-existent, the message shared with Lincoln and King remains the same: utopia may be the only way out.

Though Buckley’s Ivar gig is regarded on high, it did not have the same effect on everyone. Los Angeles Times reporter Geoffrey Warren’s
review of opening night was printed in the paper’s February 13, 1959, edition.

Lord Buckley Performing at the Ivar

If the second half of “An Evening With Lord Buckley” is of the same caliber as the first, one could spend the same evening watching a program of fixed fights at a local smoker and derive approximately the same profit.

Lord Buckley is billed as an entertainer and, to a degree, this is true. If he were presented as the main attraction at a bar serving 40-cent highballs, tough popcorn and soft pretzels he would be worth the time spent in attendance. But, in a theater with a $3.25 top, this cat ain’t worth the green.

His Lordship opens with a beat version of “a real incident in the life of Mahatma Gandhi” called “The All Hip Mahatma.” This is followed by a rather tasteless “The Moronic Father and His Idiot Son.”

‘The Old Man’

One number shows some merit. It’s “The Old Man,” in which a certain amount of quality shows through. Another sketch, “The Nazz,” could easily be viewed as profane, though the Cosmo Alley set seemed to enjoy it last night.
Among other numbers are “Don’t Shoot Him, Fred. He’s a Thoroughbred,” “The Black Cross,” “The Gasser,” “15th-Century Humor” and “Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.”

Lord Buckley will be presented at the Ivar Theater again this evening and tomorrow evening.

Two extended studio pieces, “Scrooge” and the convoluted “Maharaja,” were recorded in the studio about a year after the Ivar gig used to fill out the later Blowing His Mind Ivar disc and added as bonus tracks to the 1996 reissue of Bad Rapping of the Marquis De Sade.

With “Scrooge,” Buckley takes a successful plunge into a classic with his dazzling translation of A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. All the elements of the original are present and incandescently soar through Buckley’s verbal insight: Marley’s appearance of warning, each ghostly visitation, Bob Cratchet’s mousey humbleness, Tiny Tim’s nonjudgmental selflessness, Scrooge’s parsimoniousness, spiritual transformation, and ultimate revelation. “Scrooge” is Lord
Buckley’s last hip masterpiece, standing at the pinnacle of his achievements alongside “The Nazz,” “The Gasser,” “Jonah and the Whale,” “The Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade” and a handful of others as the following excerpt from old Ebenezer’s midnight flight of fantasy demonstrates:

All of a sudden—WHAM!!—Here comes another big spook. WHOOOOOOO! He’s a wild lookin’ spook. He’s a crazy lookin’ spook. He’s a far-out spook. He’s a gaslight spook—he’s got a gaslight right on the top of his wig—VRRRRRRRRRRRR!!!—going around like one of them automatic satellites in a lighthouse. And he done gassed up the whole scene.

He say, “Come with me, I am the ghost of Christmas present.”

And Scrooge looks around and he sees the joint is loaded with apples, bananas and oranges and crecladies and apple rots and rip-a-bits and all kinds of crazy wild grapes and crazy Christmas scenes and nuts and candy.

And he say, “Come with me.”

VRRRRRRRTTTTT!!—they done took off again.

And he say, “I am the ghost of Christmas present.” He said, “I want to show you what’s going on in this world and how the people dig Christmas and how they all enjoy.”

And he took him over to a little old outcast island. There, sittin’ on a small beat-up rock was two studs chompin’ up on a can of beans singin’, “Merry Christmas with you, Merry Christmas with you, Merry Christmas to the whole world” and so on and so forth.

And he showed the people jumpin’ for joy here. And he show that the cats who ain’t got nothing got something anyway and they’re all jumpin’ for joy, singin’ “Merry Christmas” and the bells is ringin’!
And he says, “Now you get yourself straight and see how things will jump. Come with me.”

So they fly over to Cratchet’s place and there is little Tiny Tim. He’s singin’ over there in the corner diggin’ a little crazy scene on his crutch fiddlin’ around, you know what I mean. Playin’ and carryin’ on, see, and they’re all takin’ a look at this here goose. And they look down at this little goose about the size of a beat-up retarded sparrow and everybody is “Oooin’ and Ahhin’” all over this goose and they say, “When are we going to spread it?” And then Tiny Tim says, “God bless everyone even up and including old Scroogey Scrooge! God bless everyone!”

And old Scrooge got red eyes.

Vrrrrttttt—took him back again—Wheewwwwww Boom!—the whole side of the building look bomb dong.

In came a long angular spook. He looked like seventeen gas-lighter stove pipes come together with jingle jangle bells all over.

Scrooge takes a look at this cat and says, “Do I have to go with you?”

And he says, “You most certainly do because I am the Ghost of Christmas Future. Come with me!”

He says, “Where are we going?”

He says, “None of your business.”

But he takes old Scrooge and they cut off down the pike and they’re flyin’ around the moonlight shinin’ down at them.

Boom!—they are in a graveyard—wooooooo—a wild—wooooooo—crazy spooky graveyard. And old Scrooge is walkin’ around and suddenly something stepped out at him like it was stuck in front of his eyes like with some sort of electronic pitch fork. And he reads one of them billboards in the graveyard. It says: “This is Scrooge, the baddest cat that ever lived. He ain’t had nothin’, he won’t have nothin’ and he ain’t got nothing now. Period.”
Owing just as much to the cinematic adaptations of the classic Dickensian tale as to the original text, Buckley’s “Scrooge” is one of his most complete and fulfilling alchemies, culminating with perhaps his entire worldview boiled down to a final testament: “You can get with it if you want to—there’s only one way straight to the road of love!”

“Maharaja” is the story of a “cop out” with homoerotic undertones. Wisely executed with a bongo drum backing, it fails, however, in its attempt to recall the glory of “The Hip Gahn” through subcontinent-specific allegory. The high point of the piece may be in Buckley’s brief set-up in which he defines a cop out in takes-one-to-know-one style: “A cop out is the kind of a chap that you have around for awhile, sometimes for many years, that you want to KILL him . . . but you just can’t quite get to it. ‘Course every time he gaslights you he comes around with such a wonderful story that he entertains you so strongly with his story that you forgive the accident or the catastrophe or the flip or the delinquency.”

The rambling, energetic tale chronicles the plight of a double-dealer who has committed some outrageous and unforgivable sin yet manages to fast-talk his way back into the Maharaja’s good graces. It is, in its favor, one of those mad Lord Buckley raves that takes you there and back. You may not know exactly where you’ve been but feel it was somewhere
seemingly meaningful and exotic. Even subpar Buckley manages to sweep the listener away to another strata altogether.

Nik Venet
In those days World Pacific was a skeleton operation. We used to be the engineer, the assistant, the producer and the photographer’s assistant, and everything else. Sometimes Dick Bock would give me cameras. Remember I had no idea what the fuck I was doing, except that I had passion to be a producer.

Now that I look back on it it’s quite funny because I knew about as much about producing as I did fixing a car. Richard Bock had a lot of faith in me and he trusted me. And he used to actually send me out with Lord Buckley on these functions so that nobody would steal the equipment because Lord Buckley would sell the equipment.

Dick Bock would say, “His Lordship’s going to be in town for two weeks. Try to get him into the studio every night.” So what he would do is put me with Lord Buckley. World Pacific had a room that contained the equipment, all portable Ampexes, these older mono- and two-track portable tape machines. And what we would do is—the main office for the secretary and the bookkeeper—we would move the tables and desks aside and that would become the studio. That’s the way that operation was set up at that Sunset Boulevard address and I would try to drag him in every night after we made the rounds.

Now, it’s interesting the way that he was recorded. We’d go in every night and he would do an hour but get tired. Plus there wasn’t an audience.

So he would have to be pretty wired to come in to do it right after he did it at the Renaissance. It was walking distance. And he would try to put it down and we would do several things and then eventually Richard Bock would go through them and make some edits and pick what he wanted. But since we recorded Lord Buckley numerous times, there was lots of stuff that I’ve yet to see released. Now remember I wasn’t thinking about the future then, so I don’t know what happened to it. But I have a feeling it’s buried deep in the bowels of World Pacific, which is now owned by EMI/Capitol.
I’ll tell you where the pith helmet in the photos came from. Lord Buckley stole the pith helmet from the MGM prop department. I was with him that afternoon and I thought: “We’re going to go to jail.” His Lordship was so blatant about it. He went in and says, “My man!” to the guy in the prop room, the costume room. He says, “We are shooting on Stage Seventy-five hmmm harrr. And we need it.” He did this whole routine and the guy comes out with a safari outfit and a pith helmet. He takes and tries on the jacket and it fits. And he said, “I need a lid. I need a lid.” And the guy brings him the pith helmet. He puts the lid on and says, “Thank you.” And the guy says, “Well, what, you know, you’ve got to give me the production codes and everything.” And I don’t know what he wrote on the paper. He walked out of the costume and prop department at MGM with a safari jacket, a pair of jodhpurs over his arm, and a pith helmet. That’s how he got them.

I said, “By the time we get in the car, and get off this lot, we’re going to get busted at the gate and—”

But he kept saying, “Drive on.”

And as he passed the guard, he stood up in my open convertible. He tipped his hat to the guards. They saluted him and we drove off the lot. He stood up in the car and he tipped his hat. The guards saluted him and we drove off the lot and he had pinched a goddamn jacket, jodhpurs and a hat.