

Chasing the Rising Sun: The Journey of an American Song

By Ted Anthony

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Chasing the Rising Sun is the story of an American musical journey told by a prize-winning writer who traced one song in its many incarnations as it was carried across the world by some of the most famous singers of the twentieth century.

Most people know the song "House of the Rising Sun" as 1960s rock by the British Invasion group the Animals, a ballad about a place in New Orleans -- a whorehouse or a prison or gambling joint that's been the ruin of many poor girls or boys. Bob Dylan did a version and Frijid Pink cut a hard-rocking rendition. But that barely scratches the surface; few songs have traveled a journey as intricate as "House of the Rising Sun."

The rise of the song in this country and the launch of its world travels can be traced to Georgia Turner, a poor, sixteen-year-old daughter of a miner living in Middlesboro, Kentucky, in 1937 when the young folk-music collector Alan Lomax, on a trip collecting field recordings, captured her voice singing "The Rising Sun Blues." Lomax deposited the song in the Library of Congress and included it in the 1941 book *Our Singing Country*. In short order, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Lead Belly, and Josh White learned the song and each recorded it. From there it began to move to the planet's farthest corners. Today, hundreds of artists have recorded "House of the Rising Sun," and it can be heard in the most diverse of places -- Chinese karaoke bars, Gatorade ads, and as a ring tone on cell phones.

Anthony began his search in New Orleans, where he met Eric Burdon of the Animals. He traveled to the Appalachians -- to eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina -- to scour the mountains for the song's beginnings. He found Homer Callahan, who learned it in the mountains during a corn shucking; he discovered connections to Clarence "Tom" Ashley, who traveled as a performer in a 1920s medicine show. He went to Daisy, Kentucky, to visit the family of the late high-lonesome singer Roscoe Holcomb, and finally back to Bourbon Street to see if there really was a House of the Rising Sun. He interviewed scores of singers who performed the song. Through his own journey he discovered how American traditions survived and prospered -- and how a

piece of culture moves through the modern world, propelled by technology and globalization and recorded sound.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
The song "House of the Rising Sun," which became a chart-topping hit in 1964 by the Animals, has a murky history, said to have originated in Appalachia, maybe New Orleans and perhaps even England, as well as having a thriving universal afterlife among cover bands and karaoke singers. Anthony, an editor for the Associated Press, crisscrossed the globe in search of the twisted roots and many spreading branches of this lonesome ballad of unknown origins. The song's ultimate odyssey began in 1937 when folklorist Alan Lomax recorded a version by 16-year-old Georgia Turner Connolly in Middlesboro, Ky. Lomax published the lyrics as "The Rising Sun Blues" and from there it grew in popularity and was performed and recorded by many, including Bob Dylan on his first record in 1962. The story seems promising, but Anthony's narrative is an uneasy mix of memoir, dissertation-like detail (with tedious repetitions of multiple versions of lyrics), journalistic feature writing and esoteric trivia. Anthony at times unconvincingly adopts the authoritative voice of an American studies expert, and he also lacks the musical or poetic knowledge to dissect the song. This exploration will be of most value to those who share Anthony's unbridled obsession with this ubiquitous ballad. *(June)*
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From Booklist
Depending on age and background, folk-music fans associate "The House of the Rising Sun" with Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, Josh White, or Bob Dylan. Many more remember what some consider its definitive rendition, recorded by the sixties English rock band the Animals. Anthony travels to places throughout America and a few beyond its borders to uncover the song's origins for this musical detective story that is also in part straightforward music history. We meet early country-music stars Clarence Ashley and Charlie Poole, several record collectors, and renowned folk-song collector Alan Lomax, who also recorded early commercial versions of the song. Anthony even hunts down the harmonica player at the 1937 session in which 16-year-old Georgia Turner recorded the song for Lomax. Anthony's travels take him from Middlesboro, Kentucky, to Springfield, Missouri, and down to New Orleans, where the house ostensibly operated. Although Anthony's style veers from the poetic to the prosaic, the tale he tells remains fascinating, especially for enthusiasts of traditional songs, folklore, and folk music. Sawyers, June
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Review
"Ted Anthony takes us on a journey into the very soul of America -- and what a grand trip (in both senses of the word) it is. Here is a book to savor -- one not just for folk music fans, but for anyone interested even faintly in the American journey. His book long awaited, Ted Anthony has fulfilled all expectations with Chasing the Rising Sun. Tracking a single, haunting lyric from folk tradition to popular song, from Kentucky to Kansas, across country and ocean, Ted Anthony offers a journey into the soul of America."

-- Ed Cray, author of *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*

"Chasing the Rising Sun documents the lineage of one of the great songs in the English language, providing a vivid panorama of American folk music and -- perhaps most important -- a smart analysis of the modern collision between oral and commercial cultures. Ted Anthony has written a valuable and revealing book."

-- Benjamin Hedin, editor, *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader*

"Have you ever gotten a song stuck in your head? Ted Anthony shows what happens when instead of ignoring it, you follow that tune wherever it leads. From Alan Lomax to Eric Burdon, from Andy Griffith to Martin Scorsese, from Georgia Turner to John Lennon, he conjures a real sense of connection and community. C*hasing the Rising Sun* is the kind of book that will stick in your head, too."

-- Allen St. John, author of *Clapton's Guitar: Watching Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument*

"Ted Anthony tells his tale with such intensity you can think his quest isn't merely for the song but for the house itself."

-- Greil Marcus, author of *The Shape of Things to Come: Prophecy and the American Voice*

"Page by page, I was drawn into the 'Rising Sun' -- the history, the people whose lives it changed, the incredible story of its travels across this country and around the world. Readers will find this story engrossing, and true, and ongoing -- a story without an end."

-- Jean Ritchie, folksinger, songwriter, and author of *Singing Family of the Cumberlands*

"Lovingly researched background on a more-fascinating-than-you-can-ever-imagine song...the author makes a case for the song's importance with such passion and skill that many will ultimately be persuaded...rich, complex history."

-- *Kirkus*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Annie Hernandez:

Book is to be different for each and every grade. Book for children until adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important usually. The book Chasing the Rising Sun: The Journey of an American Song had been making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The guide Chasing the Rising Sun: The Journey of an American Song is not only giving you a lot more new information but also to be your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship with the book Chasing the Rising Sun: The Journey of an American Song. You never sense lose out for everything when you read some books.

Roger Cooper:

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Ryan Walker:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make anyone to understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher in which print many kinds of book. Typically the book that recommended to your account is Chasing the Rising Sun: The Journey of an American Song this book consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This book was represented just how can the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some analysis when he makes this book. This is why this book appropriate all of you.

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