

Woody Guthrie Columbia River Recordings  
by Robert Cristarella

Subject: Contents of eleven recently discovered aluminum-base lacquer discs recorded by Woody Guthrie in 1941. Comparisons of these tracks to previously released recordings from the same period were done using the 1987 Rounder CD, "Columbia River Collection" (CD-1036).

Of the eleven discs, AFC 2018/003: SR01 to AFC 2018/003: SR04 are second or possibly even a higher generation copies of other discs. Aside from the wear and high surface noise, the audio quality of these four discs is so degraded that it is also possible that the copying was done via a microphone held up to a phonograph's speaker, rather than a direct line from turntable to lathe. These four discs also exhibit audible wow of varying degrees despite the discs not being off-center. This again suggests these discs are the result of copying on non-professional equipment. The labels all list 72 RPM as the speed, but careful comparisons to the other discs in the collection place the correct speed nearer to 74 RPM.

AFC 2018/003: SR05 to SR09 are first-generation discs and feature superior sound quality, with a very lifelike presence lacking in *all* the tracks on the Rounder CD that collected the then-known existing versions of these recordings. If the discs had not been played as many times as they obviously were, the quality would be amazing. They were also recorded at 80 RPM, and while that speed was not unheard of, it is odd for the time (80 RPM was much more common in the acoustic era).

AFC 2018/003: SR10 and SR11 are second-generation copies of one side of AFC 2018/003: SR07, and both sides of AFC 2018/003: SR08, but unlike AFC 2018/003: SR01 to SR04, they seem to have been professionally done. While the drop of audio quality is apparent, the loss is nowhere near the extreme found in the first four discs in this collection. Of these four sides only one is not a copy of tracks from AFC 2018/003: SR07 and SR08. That lone unique side is a copy of a track from a still-missing disc.

Titles as listed are keyed to the titles used on the Rounder CD. If the song was listed differently on the disc labels, that is noted in the main body of the entry.

**AFC 2018/003 SR01**

Flexible aluminum base lacquer in fair shape and slightly warped. Label lists speed as 72 RPM but is incorrect. Transferred at 74 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 2.0 mil truncated conical. Heavily worn with the most damage on the right groove wall.

Side A: Grand Coulee Dam (2456813-2-1)

Side B: Roll On Columbia (2456813-2-2)

These two tracks are identical recordings to the ones found on the Rounder CD. However, they are in better quality than found on the Rounder release, despite AFC 2018/003: SR01 being heavily worn, in only fair shape, and obvious second-generation (or higher) recordings. One can hear a stylus being put into the groove on these tracks along with the sound of added surface noise from the disc being copied.

These two tracks are also more complete than the Rounder CD, which has both songs up-cut, eliminating the first seconds to the introduction to the songs as heard here, as well as longer, more complete endings than heard on the Rounder CD.

The typewritten labels on the disc also title the songs slightly differently. Side A is typed "Ballad of the Grand Coulee Dam" and Side B as "Roll On Columbia, Roll On."

### **AFC 2018/003 SR02**

Flexible aluminum base lacquer in fair shape and very warped. Label lists 72 RPM as the speed but is closer to 74 RPM. Transferred at quarter speed (18.50 RPM) due to the warpage. Side B was transferred with two different styli. Side A: stylus used in transfer: 2.5 truncated elliptical. Side B: stylus used in transfer, 1.8 truncated conical, and 2.5 truncated elliptical.

Side A: Talkin' Columbia (2456814-2-1)

Side B: Song of the Grand Coulee Dam (2456814-2-2)

Another second-generation disc dub, where one can hear the start of the original disc. Disc is very worn, along with disappointing sound quality.

More important, these two recordings are different to those found on the Rounder CD. There are lyrical differences found in both, as well as a different guitar-playing style on the "Song of the Grand Coulee Dam."

The typewritten label lists Side A as "Columbia Talking Blues." Side B is titled the same as the Rounder CD.

### **AFC 2018/003 SR03**

Flexible aluminum base lacquer in fair shape and very warped. Label lists 72 RPM as the speed but is closer to 74 RPM. Transferred at half speed (37 RPM) due to the warpage. Disc is one sided. The disc was transferred twice with two different styli types. Styli used in transfer: 1.8 truncated conical, and 2.5 mil truncated elliptical.

Side A: Jackhammer Blues (2456815-2-1)

Side B: blank

Another second-generation disc. The content is identical to the Rounder CD. Sound quality is slightly better than the Rounder version, though both are admittedly rough.

#### **AFC 2018/003 SR04**

Flexible aluminum base lacquer in fair shape and just slightly warped. The label lists 72 RPM as the speed but is incorrect. Transferred at 74 RPM. Side A was transferred twice with two different styli types: 2.5 mil truncated elliptical, 1.8 truncated conical. Side B was transferred once using a 2.5 truncated elliptical stylus.

Side A: Pastures of Plenty (2456816-2-1)  
Side B: Roll Columbia, Roll (2456816-2-2)

Second-generation (or higher) disc. Tracks are completely different to those found on the Rounder CD. "Pastures of Plenty" is an alternate take and does not have the harmonica found on the CD and "Roll Columbia, Roll" is an alternate take. Sound quality is only fair to poor, due to the poor disc-to-disc dubbing. Disc label has Side B listed as "Roll Columbia, Won't You Roll."

#### **AFC 2018/003 SR05**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer in good shape. 80 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 3.7 truncated elliptical. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: Talking Columbia (2456817-2-1)  
Side B: Columbia's Waters (2456817-2-2)

A first-generation disc with superior sound quality, despite the wear and surface noise. Side A is listed on the disc label as "Columbia Talking Blues" and Side B is called "Good Morning Mr. Captain" and both are identical to the versions on the Rounder CD. The Rounder CD features an at least second-generation recording, while AFC 2018/003: SR05 is the absolute first-generation disc. The disc the Rounder CD used was inarguably copied from this very disc.

#### **AFC 2018/003 SR06**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer in good shape. 80 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 3.7 truncated elliptical. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: Jackhammer Blues (2456818-2-1)  
Side B: Song of the Grand Coulee Dam (2456818-2-2)

Another first-generation recording with superior sound quality despite the wear and surface noise. "Jackhammer Blues" is an alternate version of the song to the one found on the Rounder CD. "Song of the Grand Coulee Dam" is the same version/recording as heard on the Rounder CD, only Rounder's version is from a second- or third-generation copy of this very disc. Typewritten label on the side calls the song "Way Up In That Northwest."

### **AFC 2018/003 SR07**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer in good shape. 80 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 3.7 truncated elliptical for Side A, 2.5 truncated elliptical for Side B. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: Pastures of Plenty (2456819-2-1)

Side B: Grand Coulee Dam (outtake) (2456819-2-2)

First-generation disc, with superior sound quality. "Pastures of Plenty" is another (third) version of the song, similar to the one on AFC 2018/003: SR04. "Grand Coulee Dam" is a genuine outtake, incomplete with a breakdown and Woody uttering a choice expletive because of it. Unlike all the other discs in this collection, this side was either never played or not played nearly as often so the sound on it is amazing. Easily the best of any of the discs, with negligible wear, low surface noise, and an immediacy that shows what good recordings these were. It makes you wish the other first-generation discs still sounded like this.

### **AFC 2018/003 SR08**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer in good shape except where noted below. 80 RPM. Side A was transferred with a 2.5 truncated elliptical stylus. For Side B, two transfers were made using two different styli: 2.5 truncated elliptical, and 2.5 truncated conical. Disc is incorrectly labeled as 78 RPM.

Side A: Roll Columbia, Roll (2456820-2-1)

Side B: Roll On, Columbia (2456820-2-2)

A first-generation disc with superior sound. "Roll Columbia Roll" on Side A has a small gouge in the lacquer coating that made a complete transfer extremely difficult, but not impossible. Title on label reads "Roll, Columbia, Won't You Roll." This is a totally different version to the one found on the Rounder CD.

"Roll On, Columbia" is an alternate take to the one found on the Rounder CD. Label reads "Roll On, Columbia, Roll On"

### **AFC 2018/003 SR09**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer in good shape. 80 RPM; 33.33 RPM. (see notes) Styli used in transfer: Side A: 2.8 truncated conical. Side B: 2.0 truncated conical. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: Grand Coulee Dam (2456821-2-1) 80 RPM

Side B: 1. Grand Coulee Dam (2456821-2-2) 80 RPM

2. unknown narration #1 (2456821-2-2) 33.33 RPM

3. unknown narration #2 (2456821-2-2) 33.33 RPM

4. unknown narration #3 (2456821-2-2) 33.33 RPM

A first generation disc with superior sound. Side A is an alternate take to the one found on the Rounder CD.

Side B features four bands, with only the first featuring Woody. It is another genuine outtake of "Grand Coulee Dam" though much shorter. It is also the only 80 RPM cut on the disc. The next three cuts are at 33.33 RPM and appear to be narration auditions of some kind. Each cut is a different voice, none of them Woody, all reading from the same script. Possibly related to the film for which the Guthrie songs were written.

Title as typed on the label is "The World Has Several Wonders."

### **AFC 2018/003 SR10**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer disc in good shape. 80 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 2.0 truncated conical. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: The Biggest Thing Man Has Ever Done (2456822-2-1)

Side B: Roll On Columbia (2456822-2-2)

This is the first of two second-generation discs within this subset of otherwise first-generation recordings. Despite being second-generation discs, they sound quite good, much better than AFC 2018/003: SR01 to SR04.

"The Biggest Thing Man Has Ever Done" is an alternate take from the version on the Rounder CD.

"Roll On Columbia" is identical to AFC 2018/003: SR08 and is a copy of that disc.

## **AFC 2018/003 SR11**

Inflexible aluminum base lacquer disc in good shape. 80 RPM. Stylus used in transfer: 2.0 truncated conical. Disc incorrectly labelled as being 78 RPM.

Side A: Pastures of Plenty (2456823-2-1)

Side B: Roll Columbia, Roll (2456823-2-2)

The second of two second-generation discs within this subset of otherwise first-generation recordings. Despite being a second-generation disc, it sounds miles better than AFC 2018/003: SR01 to SR04.

“Pastures of Plenty” is identical to the version on IDB 51728 and is a copy of that disc.

“Roll Columbia Roll” is identical to the version on IDB 51729 and is a copy of that disc.