



# Lightnin' Hopkins: His Life and Blues

*Alan Govenar*

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## **Lightnin' Hopkins: His Life and Blues** Alan Govenar

Based on scores of interviews with the artist's relatives, friends, lovers, producers, accompanists, managers, and fans, this brilliant biography reveals a man of many layers and contradictions. Following the journey of a musician who left his family's poor cotton farm at age eight carrying only a guitar, the book chronicles his life on the open road playing blues music and doing odd jobs. It debunks the myths surrounding his meetings with Blind Lemon Jefferson and Texas Alexander, his time on a chain gang, his relationships with women, and his lifelong appetite for gambling and drinking. This volume also discusses his hard-to-read personality; whether playing for black audiences in Houston's Third Ward, for white crowds at the Matrix in San Francisco, or in the concert halls of Europe, Sam Hopkins was a musician who poured out his feelings in his songs and knew how to endear himself to his audience—yet it was hard to tell if he was truly sincere, and he appeared to trust no one. Finally, this book moves beyond exploring his personal life and details his entire musical career, from his first recording session in 1946—when he was dubbed Lightnin'—to his appearance on the national charts and his rediscovery by Mack McCormick and Sam Charters in 1959, when his popularity had begun to wane and a second career emerged, playing to white audiences rather than black ones. Overall, this narrative tells the story of an important blues musician who became immensely successful by singing with a searing emotive power about his country roots and the injustices that informed the civil rights era.

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