

AUSTIN

ANTHOLOGIZED

Austin sits on his bed with his guitar. He's wearing a pair of headphones, and he's listening to the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, the fourth volume, the one that was never released by Smithsonian Folkways. The secret one that completes Harry Smith's plan.

He plucks along as he listens. He hits the wrong notes more often than the right ones, but he doesn't care too much, at this point he's just trying to play in time with the basic rhythm.

As he plays, he half-sings, half-speaks the lyrics: –I'm going where there's no Depression, to the lovely land that's free from care. I'll leave this world of toil and trouble. My home's in Heaven; I'm going there.

Darren's the one who burned him these CDs, stuck them in his hands a few weeks ago, down at the bar. –*Here's something you could listen to, maybe*, he'd said. –*If you get a chance*. –*Sure*, Austin had said.

–*Maybe*, Darren had said, –*maybe if you learn some of the songs we could get together and play again*.

The two of them were in a band once before, a free-noise combo called the Social Retards, that lived from 1998 to early 2000. They played a few shows, at places like the Bottle and the Fireside Bowl, and then Darren got involved with a nursing student, Alicia, and couldn't make it to rehearsal as often, and their drummer moved off to Portland, and that was pretty much it for the band. Austin retreated to the privacy of his bedroom, began writing involuted solo pieces for the acoustic guitar and experimenting with chance composition and low-fidelity recording techniques. And he was pretty happy.

Darren seems less happy. He got dumped by Alicia last winter, and sometime since then he bought a fiddle and began taking classes down at the Old Town School of Folk Music, learning how to play it. And then he started calling Austin a bit more often, asking to get together.

—*You know*, Darren had said. He pointed at the CDs. —*Like, we could be in a band that performs these old songs. I think that would be really cool.*

—*Yeah*, Austin had said. —*Yeah, maybe.*

He sings: —In that bright land there'll be no hunger. No orphan children crying for bread. No weeping widows toil or struggle. No shrouds, no coffins, and no dead.