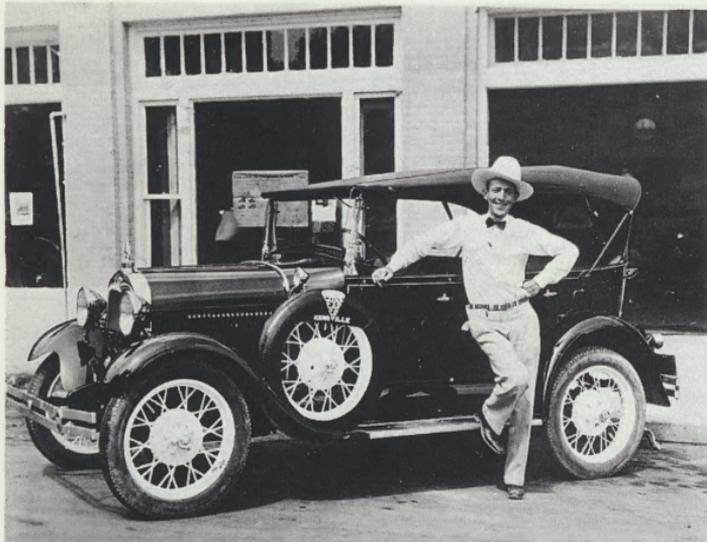


**JIMMIE
RODGERS**
1929-1930

RIDING HIGH



Jimmie Rodgers, "the father of country music" and the first performer elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame, was a folk hero in his own lifetime. He has been idolized by fans and has influenced performers from Elvis Presley to Bill Monroe and Merle Haggard ever since.

Original sessions produced by Ralph Peer.

Compilation and annotation by Nolan Porterfield.

Transfers from the original metal parts by Bernardo Cosachov.

Mastered by Jörg Siemer.

Final reissue production by Richard Weize for Bear Family Records and Rounder Records.

Licensed from RCA Records, a label of BMG Music.



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Come years ago, one of the minor curiosities among Jimmie Rodgers' fans was the title of the initial cut on this album, "Anniversary Blue Yodel (Blue Yodel No. 7)." There's no mention of any anniversary in the lyrics, yet the normal labeling procedure of the Blue Yodels was pointedly altered to stress the word. What anniversary, if any, did it commemorate? Finally, after the gentle art of discography found its way to country music, someone noticed that the recording date of "Anniversary Blue Yodel" coincided roughly with the date two years earlier when Rodgers had recorded the original "Blue Yodel" (only later famous as "T for Texas"). How Jimmie—or Victor, for that matter—expected that to register on the buying public is anyone's guess, but of course whimsy and high jinks were part of Rodgers' stock in trade.

By the time he recorded "Anniversary Blue Yodel" in late 1929, he certainly had cause for celebration. In the two years following November 1927, he had gone from obscurity as a struggling, itinerant musician (and a rather amateur one at that) to fame and considerable fortune as "America's Blue Yodeler," starring in national vaudeville, on radio and in a short-subject film for Columbia. He'd recorded more than fifty sides for Victor, the colossus of the recording industry, and was earning, by his own account, several thousand dollars weekly.

The money was good, but probably not quite that good. In December of 1929, after recording "Anniversary Blues" and seven other sides, Rodgers took to the road on his own, barnstorming with his new accompanist, young Billy Burkes, and playing scattered dates through the South. In the late spring of the following year, he joined "Colonel" W.I. Swain, a

flamboyant showman of the old school, who had concocted the idea of putting together a variety road-show, headlined by "American's Blue Yodeler," to play one-night stands in small towns across the nation. Billed as "Swain's Hollywood Follies," it never got closer to the West Coast than some whistle stop in Kansas where it was stalled out by the Dustbowl and the Depression. Only the star of the show reached Hollywood; by the time Swain folded his tent for good, Rodgers was long gone, on his way to California for an extended series of recording sessions in the film capital.

The recordings on this album, from Rodgers' last session in 1929 and the Hollywood sessions of the following summer, include some of his best, if not best known, performances. The haunting and eloquent "Mississippi River Blues," with delicate fret work by Billy Burkes, tops the list in my book, but it's followed closely by "Anniversary Blues." (A previously unreleased outtake also included here offers a less polished but somehow livelier rendition; the differences are small, but the outtake manages to give the song a fresh veneer). "Blue Yodel No. Eleven" deserves higher standing than that indicated by Victor's files; originally recorded as "Blue Yodel No. 8," it was shelved and replaced in the sequence by the dynamic "Muleskinner Blues" (Rouner 1060), then finally rushed out quickly after Rodgers' death—all of which suggests an inferiority not audible from this distance.

"Nobody Knows But Me" has little to offer lyrically, but listen to the bright guitar work from Billy Burkes and to Rodgers' enthusiastic delivery; it's another case—so common with Jimmie Rodgers—of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. A similar instance

is "A Drunkard's Child," composed by the Reverend Andy Jenkins, who was a practiced craftsman of tears and flapdoodle. A throwback to the earlier fad for maudlin tragedy in "hillbilly" music, in the hands of someone else "A Drunkard's Child" would have drowned in its own sentimentality. Rodgers faces it head-on, with the hard note of reality that was the core of his appeal. But nothing was likely to save "She Was Happy Till She Met You," another hoary chestnut that's my personal candidate for the least attractive song Rodgers recorded. The Rodgers-McWilliams "music factory" took credit for its composition—Jimmie had convinced himself in other cases that he had created songs known to exist long before—but the song was actually one of those fin de siècle horrors from the great age of melodrama and morbidity, composed by Charles Graham and Monroe Rosenfeld in 1899. It's doubtful that even Rodgers cared much for "She Was Happy Till She Met You"; Billy Burkes recalled that it caused them great difficulty during recording and required "many takes."

The Hollywood sessions, which lasted from June 30 to July 17, are distinguished by a rich variety of accompaniments, some of which produced performances that are among Rodgers' finest—notably "Blue Yodel No. 9," with Louis Armstrong, heard on Rouner 1060. Of those included here, "My Blue-Eyed Jane," with Bob Sawyer's Jazz Band, is one of the most affecting and durable (more durable in fact than the original metal surfaces, reproduced here for the sake of the fidelity of the original performance). Rousing repeats of it have been done through the years by a host of artists; Hank Snow's version is especially memorable.

Lani McIntire's Hawaiians provided backup for

four other sides, including the popular convict ballad, "Moonlight and Skies," which Rodgers once referred to as "the best selling record I ever made." (That claim is disputed by considerable evidence, but it attests to his affection for the song, written for him by Ray Hall, a lifer in the Texas penitentiary). Victor's logs do not divulge the identity of the musicians in McIntire's group, but they were probably his brothers, Dixon "Dick" McIntire (steel guitar) and Alfred McIntire (ukulele), and Danny Kuaana on string bass. Lani McIntire alone accompanied "Those Gamblers' Blues," Rodgers' eerie variation on "St. James Infirmary," and it likely wouldn't have worked so well without McIntire's accomplished musicianship. Rodgers on his own produced the rough and rowdy "Pistol Packin' Papa," an entertaining bit of bawdy which he renders with innocent good cheer.

Other titles from these sessions—"That's Why I'm Blue," "Why Should I Be Lonely," and "Take Me Back Again," for example—were mostly bland love ballads, barely up to the standards of mediocre pop songs of the day. But after all, Peer and Victor had to have some "B sides," too; everything Rodgers recorded couldn't be a hit. In the case of one such recording, "Why Did You Give Me Your Love?," Takes 1 and 2 offer new insight into Rodgers at work and the process through which many of his recordings evolved. The previously unissued Take 1 is little more than a rehearsal, with Jimmie uncertain of the lyrics and still searching for proper timing. By Take 2 he has worked out vital improvements, changing the order of various words, adding and dropping others—note especially the major revision of the third verse. Billy Burkes, who more or less wrote the music (sans credit) for "Why Did You Give Me

"You... Love?" commented later on Rodgers' difficulty in getting it recorded. "I put too many chords in it," he said, "for Jimmie's type of music."

In release, these records spanned almost the entire decade of the 1930's—indeed, several were among the first to appear in that decade, and "Take Me Back Again" (paired with "Dreaming With Tears In My Eyes") bears the dubious distinction of being the very last of his originals to be issued, in May 1938. These were among the records which helped to establish and maintain Jimmie Rodgers' popularity at the peak of his career.

—Nolan Porterfield

Read all about Jimmie Rodgers and his music in Nolan Porterfield's definitive biography, *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler*. Available from The University of Illinois Press, c/o CUP Services, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851. (Hardcover, 470 pp., discography, many illustrations; \$29.95)



ROUNDER

Also available on Rounder Records:

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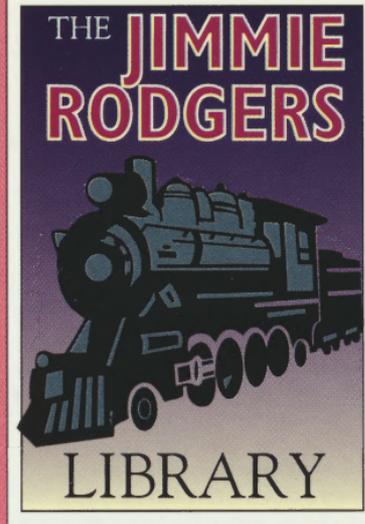
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Jimmie Rodgers: *No Hard Times, 1932 (Volume 7)*
(Rounder 1062)

Jimmie Rodgers: *Last Sessions, 1933 (Volume 8)*
(Rounder 1063)

1. **Anniversary Blue Yodel (Blue Yodel No. 7)**
(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:53
Atlanta, Georgia, November 26, 1929
mx BVE 56607-1—Vi 22488
Vocal with own guitar; Billy Burkes, guitar.
2. **Anniversary Blue Yodel (Blue Yodel No. 7)**
(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:46
Atlanta, Georgia, November 26, 1929
mx BVE 56607-?—unissued
Vocal with own guitar; Billy Burkes, guitar.
3. **That's Why I'm Blue**
(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:17
Atlanta, Georgia, November 28, 1929
mx BVE 56619-1—Vi 22421
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
4. **Mississippi River Blues**
(Rodgers) 2:34
Atlanta, Georgia, November 25, 1929
mx BVE 56594-3—Vi 23555
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
5. **Mississippi River Blues**
(Rodgers) 2:32
Atlanta, Georgia, November 25, 1929
mx BVE 56594-1—unissued
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
6. **She Was Happy Till She Met You**
(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:44
Atlanta, Georgia, November 26, 1929
mx BVE 56608-1—Vi 23681
Vocal with own guitar.
7. **Blue Yodel Number Eleven**
(Rodgers) 2:57
Atlanta, Georgia, November 27, 1929
mx BVE 56617-1—Vi 23796
Vocal with own guitar; Billy Burkes, guitar.
8. **A Drunkard's Child**
(Jenkins-Rodgers) 3:18
Atlanta, Georgia, November 28, 1929
mx BVE 56618-1—Vi 22319
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
9. **Nobody Knows But Me**
(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:38
Atlanta, Georgia, November 25, 1929
mx BVE 56595-4—Vi 23518
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
10. **Moonlight and Skies**
(Rodgers-Hall) 2:57
Hollywood, California, June 30, 1930
mx PBVE 54851-3—Vi 23574
Vocal, with Lani McIntire's Hawaiians (Lani McIntire, guitar; unknown steel guitar, ukulele, string bass).
11. **Why Did You Give Me Your Love?**
(Rodgers) 2:24
Atlanta, Georgia, November 28, 1929
mx BVE 56620-1—unissued
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.
12. **Why Did You Give Me Your Love?**
(Rodgers) 2:32
Atlanta, Georgia, November 28, 1929
mx BVE 56620-3—Bb 5892
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar.

13. **Pistol Packin' Papa**
(Rodgers-O'Neal) 2:54
Hollywood, California, July 1, 1930
mx PBVE 54852-2—Vi 22554
Vocal with own guitar.
14. **Why Should I Be Lonely**
(Rodgers-Lovell) 3:07
Hollywood, California, June 30, 1930
mx PBVE 54850-3—Vi 23609
Vocal, with Lani McIntire's Hawaiians (Lani McIntire guitar; unknown steel guitar, ukulele, string bass).
15. **Take Me Back Again**
(Rodgers-Hall) 3:07
Hollywood, California, July 2, 1930
mx PBVE 54854-3—Bb 7600
Vocal, with Lani McIntire's Hawaiians (Lani McIntire guitar; unknown steel guitar, ukulele, string bass).
16. **Those Gambler's Blues**
(arr. Rodgers) 2:49
Hollywood, California, July 5, 1930
mx PBVE 54855-1—Vi 22554
Vocal, with Lani McIntire, guitar.
17. **My Blue-Eyed Jane**
(Rodgers-White) 2:47
Hollywood, California, June 30, 1930
mx PBVE 54849-2—Vi 23549
Vocal, with Bob Sawyer's Jazz Band (Bob Sawyer, piano; unknown cornet, clarinet, banjo, tuba).



Original sessions produced by Ralph Peer.
Compilation and annotation by Nolan Porterfield.
Transfers from the original metal parts by
Bernardo Cosachov.
Mastered by Jorg Siemer.
Photographs courtesy of Nolan Porterfield.
Design by Scott Billington and Nancy Given.

Special thanks to Ray Mitchell, Robert Noble, John Stoten, George Tye and Charles K. Wolfe.
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Riding High, 1929-1930

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