

*To my Sweet Little Honey
Kathryn Rodgers. Sweetest
Love you. Jimmie Rodgers
5/31/30*

JIMMIE RODGERS

1933

LAST SESSIONS



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.



ROUNDER



11661-1063-2

◀ Jimmie Rodgers and Will Rogers

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.

1. **Blue Yodel No. 12** 3:21
2. **Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes** 2:58
3. **Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes** 2:50
4. **The Cowhand's Last Ride** 2:59
5. **I'm Free (from the Chain Gang Now)** 3:02
6. **Yodeling My Way Back Home** 2:33
7. **Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue Yodel** 3:15
8. **The Yodeling Ranger** 2:29
9. **Old Pal of My Heart** 2:59
10. **Years Ago** 2:19
11. **Somewhere Down Below the Dixon Line** 2:55
12. **Old Love Letters** 3:06
13. **Mississippi Delta Blues** 3:26

the words of Bill Malone, country music's pre-eminent historian, Jimmie Rodgers' final efforts in the recording studio constitute "one of the most heart-rending episodes in show-business history."

Rodgers' career had essentially peaked by 1932, hampered by the Depression and his steadily failing health. Through the bleak winter of 1932-1933 he booked scattered show dates around the state of Texas, playing what the trade papers called "independent vaudeville" - a euphemism for any third-run movie theatre whose manager could be persuaded to book a live act between feature films. There were ambitious plans for a spring tour with J. Doug Morgan's "tent rep" show, but that project was abandoned when Rodgers collapsed on the road and had to be hospitalized in Houston in February.

He had not recorded since the previous summer (sessions heard on Rounder 1062), and Ralph Peer, who had "discovered" him and more or less managed his career, knew that time was running out. Peer was also eager to stockpile as many recordings as he could under the terms of Rodgers' current Victor contract - which stipulated a liberal, pre-Depression advance of \$250 per side.

The money also appealed to Rodgers, whose income had steadily declined as his health deteriorated in the final stages of tuberculosis. Sick and dispirited, down but not out, he got out of bed, put on his jaunty grin, and headed for New York to record a dozen songs that would net him \$3,000 in cash. That sum, together with the proceeds from the sale of his home, the famous Blue Yodeler's Paradise in Kerrville, Texas, comprised the bulk of his estate when he died, less than two days after recording his last song.

Accompanied by a private nurse, Cora Bedell, Rodgers arrived in New York on May 14. Peer, concerned about the state of his health, put him to bed in the Taft Hotel and assigned an office employee to help Mrs. Bedell look after him. After only a day or two, Rodgers insisted he was ready to record, and, indeed, the first sessions, on Wednesday, May 17, show him in fine form, with all the old flair and heady energy. Listen to "Blue Yodel No. 12" (recorded as "Barefoot Blues"), with its bright, solid guitar work and familiar yodel, or the trademark introduction to "Cow Hand's Last Ride." Even such kitsch as "Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes" and "I'm Free from the Chain Gang Now" is redeemed by the unique fusion of instrument and voice that was Rodgers' particular genius. (Unaccountably, Victor initially issued the inferior Take 1 of "Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes," on which Rodgers flubs the guitar break after the first verse. Take 2, also heard here for comparison, was issued on LP in the 1960's.)

After two days of strenuous work in the studio, Rodgers had recorded six sides, topped off by the tragically ironic "Yodeling My Way Back Home" and "Women Make A Fool Out of Me," which Eli Oberstein, Peer's successor, retitled "Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue Yodel" when it was issued seven months after Rodgers' death. Those were only half of the numbers he'd planned to record, but the strain was beginning to tell. A casual listener might not hear the difference, but shortness of breath was altering his phrasing and forcing subtle change in the yodel. On several takes he was barely able to disguise the rasp in his voice, sometimes turning it to his advantage (as on the raw, bluesy "she's never coming home" on "Blue Yodel No. 12").

The miracle was that he was able to perform at all, with his lungs literally in shreds and constantly racked with pain, his body sedated almost into a stupor in a desperate gamble to stay alive until his work was done.

Both Peer and Oberstein somehow managed to absent themselves at this crucial time. Supervision of the sessions had been given over to Fred Maisch, a Victor underling, who grew increasingly disturbed by Rodgers' condition. Together with Bob Gilmore, Peer's assistant, Maisch tried to convince Rodgers to postpone further work in the studio, but after only one day off, he persuaded them to go ahead with a scheduled Saturday afternoon session on May 20th. When he showed up, he was so weak that he had to be given an easy chair and propped up with pillows before the microphone to record "The Yodeling Ranger" and "Old Pal of My Heart." After only two takes of each song (the second take shown in the logs may actually have been only a protection copy recorded simultaneously with Take 1 on another machine), Maisch and Gilmore vetoed the idea of continuing on Monday. Rodgers was persuaded to leave town and spend some time on Cape Cod, where he could rest and put finishing touches to the remaining material he planned to record.

Three days later he was back, urging Gilmore to arrange a session for Wednesday, May 24th. Peer's assistant reluctantly agreed, but suggested that they locate one or two musicians to accompany Rodgers and thus spare him as much exertion as possible. This led to the hiring of John Cali and Tony Colicchio, two old studio hands who had worked with hundreds of recording artists over the years, ranging from Selvin's Novelty Orchestra to the Dorsey brothers. Cali had even worked with Vernon Dalhart in his heyday and was still around

to fill in on Gene Autry's Melody Ranch radio show in the 1940's.

A cot was set up in a rehearsal hall so that Rodgers could rest from time to time, but he was characteristically impatient with any special attention. When it came time to record, he insisted on standing before the mike as if all was normal.

The first side they recorded, shortly after noon, was "Old Love Letters," which is perhaps Rodgers' best romantic ballad, hauntingly accented by John Cali's steel guitar. (The song was composed by Dwight Butcher, one of several struggling young "hillbilly" artists being groomed by Peer as a possible successor to Rodgers.)

The number which followed, "Mississippi Delta Blues," seems a fitting finale to this collection of Rodgers' work, combining as it does so many elements intrinsic to the phenomenon that was America's Blue Yodeler - slick stage-work rooted in an earthy realism, sentimentality that is nevertheless the expression of genuine emotion, the bluesy sadness that grows lighthearted in its rendering. "Mississippi Delta Blues" ranks with the best of Rodgers' work.

Almost as good is "Somewhere Down Below the Dixon Line," another lighthearted but tragically prophetic tune in which Rodgers bids goodbye to the icy Northland and anticipates the journey back to his beloved South, "where the warm, warm breezes blow."

After these three numbers were done, late in the afternoon, Cali and Colicchio were dismissed. Rodgers rested a few minutes on his cot in the rehearsal hall, then came back to the studio alone to do one more side, a rather feeble and synthetic convict ditty from Tin Pan Alley. "Years Ago" did not provide an especially distinguished end to the Blue Yodeler's recording career, but,

riately enough, he did it alone, as he'd begun, just
"me and my old guitar." Thirty-six hours later he was
dead from a massive lung hemorrhage in his New York
hotel room, far from family and friends and his beloved
Southland.

— Nolan Porterfield

Nolan Porterfield is the author of *Jimmie Rodgers: The
Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler*, available from
The University of Illinois Press, P. O. Box 4856,
Hampden Post Office, Baltimore, MD 21211 (hardcover,
470 pp., discography, many illustrations; \$29.95).



ROUNDER

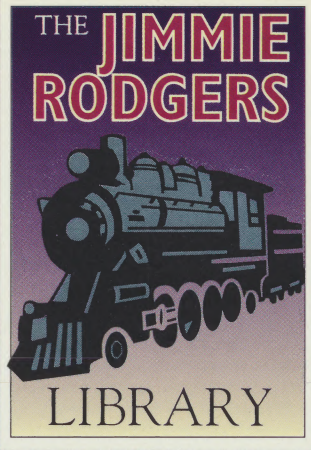
1. **Blue Yodel No. 12**
(Rodgers) 3:21
New York, New York, May 17, 1933
mx BS 76138-1/5r - Vi 24456
Vocal with own guitar.
2. **Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes**
(O'Neal-Rodgers) 2:58
New York, New York, May 17, 1933
mx BS 76139-1 - Bb B-7600
Vocal with own guitar.
3. **Dreaming with Tears in My Eyes**
(O'Neal-Rodgers) 2:50
New York, New York, May 18, 1933
mx BS 76139-2 - RCA LPM 2531
Vocal with own guitar.
4. **The Cowhand's Last Ride**
(Rodgers-Hitt) 2:59
New York, New York, May 17, 1933
mx BS 76140-1 - Vi 24456
Vocal with own guitar.
5. **I'm Free (from the Chain Gang Now)**
(Herscher-Klein) 3:02
New York, New York, May 17, 1933
mx BS 76141-1 - Vi 23830
Vocal with own guitar.
6. **Yodeling My Way Back Home**
(Rodgers) 2:33
New York, New York, May 18, 1933
mx BS 76151-1 - Bb B-7280
Vocal with own guitar.
7. **Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue Yodel**
(Rodgers) 3:15
New York, New York, May 18, 1933
mx BS 76160-1 - Bb B-5281
Vocal with own guitar.
8. **The Yodeling Ranger**
(Rodgers-Hall) 2:29
New York, New York, May 20, 1933
mx BS 76191-1 - Vi 23830
Vocal with own guitar.
9. **Old Pal of My Heart**
(Rodgers-Mason) 2:59
New York, New York, May 20, 1933
mx BS 76192-1 - Vi 23816
Vocal with own guitar.
10. **Years Ago**
(Rodgers-Herscher-Richards) 2:19
New York, New York, May 24, 1933
mx BS 76332-1 - Bb B-5281
Vocal with own guitar.
11. **Somewhere Down Below the Dixon Line**
(Rodgers-Ryan) 2:55
New York, New York, May 24, 1933
mx BS 76331-1 - Vi 23840
Vocal, with John Cali and Tony Colicchio, guitars.

12. **Old Love Letters**
(Rodgers-Herscher-Butcher) 3:06
New York, New York, May 24, 1933
mx BS 76327-1 - Vi 23840
Vocal, with John Cali, steel guitar; Tony Colicchio, guitar.
13. **Mississippi Delta Blues**
(Rodgers-Neville) 3:26
New York, New York, May 24, 1933
mx BS 76328-1 - Vi 23816
Vocal, with John Cali, banjo; Tony Colicchio, guitar.

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.
Photographs courtesy of Nolan Porterfield.
Design by Scott Billington and Nancy Given.

Special thanks to Ray Mitchell, Robert Nobley,
John Stoten, George Tye and Charles K. Wolfe.
Final reissue production by Richard Weize for
Bear Family Records and Rounder Records.

Licensed from RCA Records, a label of BMG Music.



Also available on Rounder Records:
Jimmie Rodgers: *First Sessions, 1927-1928, (Volume 1)*
(Rounder 1056)
Jimmie Rodgers: *The Early Years, 1928-1929 (Volume 2)*
(Rounder 1057)
Jimmie Rodgers: *On The Way Up, 1929 (Volume 3)*
(Rounder 1058)
Jimmie Rodgers: *Riding High, 1929-1930 (Volume 4)*
(Rounder 1059)
Jimmie Rodgers: *America's Blue Yodeler, 1930-1931*
(Volume 5) (Rounder 1060)
Jimmie Rodgers: *Down The Old Road, 1931-1932*
(Volume 6) (Rounder 1061)
Jimmie Rodgers: *No Hard Times, 1932 (Volume 7)*
(Rounder 1062)

Jimmie Rodgers
Last Sessions, 1933

1. **Blue Yodel
No. 12** 3:21
2. **Dreaming with Tears
in My Eyes** 2:58
3. **Dreaming with Tears in
My Eyes** 2:50
4. **The Cowhand's Last Ride**
2:59
5. **I'm Free (from the Chain
Gang Now)** 3:02
6. **Yodeling My Way Back
Home** 2:33
7. **Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue
Yodel** 3:17
8. **The Yodeling Ranger** 2:29
9. **Old Pal of My Heart** 2:59
10. **Years Ago** 2:19
11. **Somewhere Down Below
the Dixon Line** 2:55
12. **Old Love Letters** 3:06
13. **Mississippi Delta
Blues** 3:26

RO CD 1063 (V) :

MASTERED
BY NIMBUS



ROUNDER

ROUNDER CD 1063 (V) (A) (D)

© 1991 Rounder Records Corp.

Licensed from RCA Records, a label of BMG Music

Manufactured in USA

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO