

A soothing lullaby called Rocking the Babies to Sleep in $\frac{3}{4}$ time will end this year's old-time Tune of the Week. (Other titles are Rock All the Babies to Sleep or Rocking Our Babies to Sleep.)

The life and music of Virginia fiddler [Henry Reed](#) lives on through the legacy of [Alan Jabbour](#), founder of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. One was born in 1884 and died at the age of 84; the other in 1942, who died recently in 2017.

I first heard watching a 2018 American Folklife presentation honoring Alan's life. He learned the tune from Henry Reed's sons, Gene and James, who heard it growing up as played by their father and sung by their mother. It's a sad song, perhaps with older Irish roots, lamenting the absence of a carousing mother while the father has to care for the babies.

However, as a fiddle tune, it's a beauty and the sad lyrics are left behind. The B part is said to echo the yodeling, both of the 1924 recording of Riley Puckett, the "Bald Mountain Caruso", and the 1932 recording of Jimmie Rodgers, the yodeling cowboy. It's said that the yodel may have reflected a baby's wail for its mother. It's also said that Riley Puckett's yodeling on this song was the first such recording of its kind and may have influenced Jimmie. The melody has two parts, plus the yodel, and is the source for the 2-part old-time fiddled version that's come down to us.

Alan Jabbour was a young college student when he began recording musicians. His efforts uncovered the numerous tunes of Henry Reed and through his position in the American Folklife Center was able to archive his large collection in the Library of Congress. Fifty musicians joined Bertram Levy, Stephen Wade, Ken Perlman, and Henry Reed's family members for a memorial jam last summer. Go to 1:53 to hear Rocking the Babies to Sleep in this [tribute to Alan Jabbour at the American Folklife Center](#). I was surprised that of the several jam tunes in this tribute only two were not already on our TOTW list.

[Riley Puckett](#)

[Jimmie Rodgers](#)

[Maddox Brothers and Rose Maddox](#)

[Alan Jabbour solo](#)

[James Reed, son of Henry Reed](#)

[Lonnie Robertson, Missouri fiddler](#)

[Chip Arnold, BHO member](#) does a nice 2-finger version.

If you haven't tried this tune, you might now. It's not hard and should be one that Henry Reed fans enjoy. I dedicated a page on my website to my arrangements of Henry Reed tunes and will continue pursuing his music, which he was proud of and loved sharing: [16 Henry Reed tunes on clawhammer banjo](#).

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