

Oh Blue!

Informant/Performer:

Thelma, Beatrice & Irene Scruggs
Burnsville, MS, 1939

Source:

Library of Congress AFS 2994 B1
Collected by Herbert Halpert

♩ = 96

Had a dog and his name was _____ Blue,

Bet your life he's a round - er, too! Oh, Blue, Blue, Blue, oh Blue.

The musical notation is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a tempo marking of ♩ = 96. The time signature changes from 5/4 to 4/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some chords. The lyrics are written below the notes, with a blank line for the name of the dog.

Transcribed by Anne Laskey and Gail Needleman

2. Every night just about good dark,
Blue goes out and begins to bark.
3. Everything just in a rush,
Blue tree'd a possum up a white oak bush.
4. Possum walked out on the end of a limb.
Blue set down and talked to him.
5. Blue got sick and very sick,
Sent for the doctor to come quick.
6. Doctor come, and he come in a run.
Says, "Old Blue, your huntin' is done."
7. Blue died, and he died so hard,
Scratched them holes all round in the yard.
8. Laid him out in a shady place,
Rubbed him over with the possum's face.
9. Dug his grave with a silver spade,
Laid him down with a golden chain.
10. When I get to heaven I'll tell you what I'll do,
I'll take my horn and blow for Blue.

Background Information

Hunting dogs are highly prized by southern country people, and numerous songs express their owners' pride in and friendship for their dogs. "Oh, Blue," or "Old Blue," has been widely collected from both black and white singers but is generally thought to be of black authorship. The melodies of the collected versions are diverse. Some versions include syllables imitating a howling hound, but most exhibit a striking stability of text and paint the picture found here: the preliminary boast about a favorite dog, the possum hunt, the dog's sickness, the doctor's verdict, the dog's death, his burial, and a stanza about meeting him in heave. One variant ends:

Blue, Blue, you rascal, you,
I wish it was me instead of you.

Although the burial with a silver spade and a golden chain is borrowed from English tradition, "Oh, Blue" is an American song through and through.

According to the collector's notes, the Scruggs sisters (fifteen, sixteen, and thirteen years old respectively) sang together often, sometimes with guitar and sometimes with piano accompaniment.