

California Blues (Blue Yodel No. 4)

Words and music by Jimmie Rodgers



Tim O'Brien has been playing Jimmie Rodgers' "California Blues" for at least 20 years, dating back to his time in Red Knuckles and the Trailblazers. For the version on *Cornbread Nation*, he combines elements of Rodgers' 1929 original, Lefty Frizell's 1953 cover version, and floating verses from any number of blues standards to make the song his own. On acoustic guitar, O'Brien sets the tempo at an even clip—swinging much more than Rodgers' down-home

recording—while Kenny Vaughan plays jazz-inflected electric-guitar fills that float smoothly between 1945 and the present. It's a period piece from a time that exists only in O'Brien's imagination, embracing old and new with a rambling, exuberant sense of release.

O'Brien slides sixth shapes up and down the fretboard in the intro to elicit the signature yodel of the song. Throughout the verses, he plays root-position chords with pick and fingers. To get the feel that O'Brien achieves on the recording, play the bass notes with conviction, but don't worry about strumming exactly the same string combinations. Finally, add a touch of string damping with either or both hands to keep things bouncy.

—KENNY BERKOWITZ

Swing (♩ = ♪)

♩ = 142

Chords: E B7 E B7 E B7

1. I got the

4 4 2 2 0 0 0 0 2 5 0 0 0 0

1-2-3 4-4-4-3 2-2-2-0 1-2 0-4-5 0-3-2-0

Verse

E

E7

5 Ca-li-for-nia blues and I'm sure they're gon-na leave you here I got the

2-6. See additional lyrics.

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

2 2 0 2 2 0 0 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

A

A7

E

B7

E

10 Ca-li-for-nia blues I'm sure they're gon-na leave you here I might ride

0 0 2 2 0 2 0 2 4 2 0 2 0 2

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

14 the blinds I ain't got no rail - road fare Well I'm a

19 (hoo) Yo-de - lay-ee yo de - lay-ee-ah yo-de - lay-ee You know the

1. I got the California blues and I'm sure they're gonna

leave you here

I got the California blues, I'm sure they're gonna

leave you here

I might ride the blinds, I ain't got no railroad fare

2. Well I'm going to California where they sleep out every night

I'm going to California where they sleep out every night

You know the New York women, they don't know

how to treat me right, wahoo

Yodelayee yodelayee ah yodelayee

3. You know the water in California, it tastes just like cherry wine

Yeah the water in California, it tastes just like cherry wine

You just jump in the water and then you stay tight

all the time, wahoo

4. Now let me tell you something good gal you don't know

you don't know

Now let me tell you something good gal you don't know

I'm an easy-riding papa, I got a home wherever I go

wherever I go

5. If your house catches fire and there ain't no water 'round

If your house catches fire and there ain't no water 'round

Push my suitcase out the window and let your

fool house burn on down

6. I went to the gypsy woman down at the fortune-teller's place

Yeah I went to the woman at the fortune-teller's place

Well she read my mind and then she slapped my face, wahoo

Repeat Verse 1

Yodelayee yodelayee ah yodelayee