

## ‘Natural Bridge Blues’



SONG called *Natural Bridge Blues* met with modest success when it was launched in 1941. A bluegrass group led by a guitarist named Roy Hall, from Big Stone Gap, first recorded it when they were regulars on WDBJ radio in Roanoke. The vocal is by Glenwood Howell.

The writer is unknown, but his (or her?) lyrics read:

*Oh the Natural Bridge Blues  
Is killing me,  
I don't know what to do,  
Makes no difference where I roam,  
I feel so sad and blue.  
Every night when I lay down  
In my dreams I see,  
That old bridge standin' there  
I hear it callin' me.*



Roy Hall and the Blue Ridge Entertainers.  
That's Hall standing under the "w."

Listen [here](#) to the [Roy Hall](#) recording on YouTube.



IT'S ACTUALLY not a true blues recording because it ignores the standard

12-bar blues length (the Hall version is 16 bars) and other technical details such as binary form, tempo and cadence. As a result, the Hall *Natural Bridge Blues* has something of a Tin Pan Alley feel. That's not surprising, given the imprecise traditions by which folk music was passed around. An urban band would add

some cityfied jazz turnarounds, for instance, while a jug band would simplify a tune to three chords because that's what the musicians knew.

Here are four other "Natural Bridge" recordings similar in character to Hall's:

[Tommy Magness Band](#),  
1940s radio aircheck

### Natural Bridge Blues Concert



[Lonnie Robertson](#), from his album "Classic Fiddle Music of Missouri" (!)

[Curly Ray Cline](#), 1972

[Leslie Keith](#), 1974



THE MOST authentic?

At least [one recording](#) [closely matches the published sheet music](#): a solo, probably from 1978, by a fiddler named [Fred Cockerham](#) (1905-80), who was part of the old-time bluegrass tradition around Mount Airy, North Carolina, just south of Floyd, Virginia.

Like the sheet music, Cockerham's version has a simple, unadorned chord structure, resulting in what's likely the most faithful version available.

*Musical analysis by Jim Keefe*