

RING GAMES



Line Games and Play Party Songs of Alabama

MARY MACK • BOB A NEEDLE • WATCH THAT LADY • OLD LADY SALLY WANTS TO JUMP
LOOP DE LOO • GREEN GREEN, ROCKY ROAD • ROSIE DARLING ROSIE • I MUST SEE
BLUEBIRD BLUEBIRD • MAY GO 'ROUND THE NEEDLE • STOOPING ON THE WINDOW
CHARLIE, OVER THE OCEAN

M
1993
R582
1953

MUSIC LP

7004 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP., N. Y.

FC 7004

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BOB A NEEDLE
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Illustrated Notes are Inside Pocket

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 59-219
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701 Seventh Ave., New York City

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Song texts and Directions for Playing
by RUBY PICKENS TARTT

No folk song is ever completed. It is always in a state of transition, varying from time to time, and, even within one period, from singer to singer. Nothing could be so typical of this as these Negro children's game songs. Within one small area one may find a great number of variations upon a single song or game.

These games are found only in the rural sections of Alabama -- most frequently in the one-room school houses where the mid-morning recess play is held out-of-doors. The children's complete lack of affectation and their whole-hearted participation make the games a delight for the watcher.



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Unfortunately, many of the teachers have become too "modern" for these games. In the towns the games are hardly played at all. No attempt is made to preserve the games or to instruct the children in them. Their transmission depends upon one generation of children passing them on to the next, with the inevitable changes.

The songs and games are not entirely lost, however. While talking with a group of older Negro women in my search for a certain game, I told them that the children seemed to have forgotten how to play it. Without being asked, they gravely stepped out the motions as they had played it years ago as children.

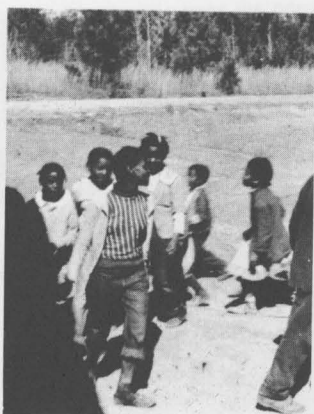
These games are largely ones of motion. Children love all sorts of action and here they participate spiritedly by clapping hands, skipping, or other movements. The inherent rhythmic sense of the children is given full outlet. None of these songs have accompaniments other than the beat of the clapping hands.

Too, children like nonsense songs, full of words which they cannot understand, or which have only a rhythmic meaning. The slurring dialect of the region often renders the words meaningless to the unacquainted listener.

As the children have never been taught the precise words, but have picked up the songs by ear from other children, real words have in many instances deteriorated into nonsense words. Different singing leaders may sing the words differently, and the other children "follow". Sometimes improvisation occurs.

Most of the games are played either in a ring or in a line. In the first, the children stand in a circle, often holding hands, and the leader is the one outside the circle performing some action. In the line game, two lines are formed, with the leader at the head of one.

A line or ring game has a formalized end to it; some action is carried through until all the children have participated. A play-party game, on the other hand, may go on indefinitely.



Several comparisons may be made between these Negro folk games and the ones played by white children for they are frequently very similar. The principal difference is that the Negro games require a more active participation by all players. Charlie Over the Ocean is basically the same as Drop the Handkerchief, but the children sing together in response to the leader and the circle moves. The Negro children almost always accompany themselves with singing and clapping to give a rhythm to their play. Most of these songs require a leader, who has an important part in the game pattern.

SIDE I, Band 1. MARY MACK. Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

Oh Mary Mack, Mack, Mack,
All dressed in black, black, black,
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons,
Up and down her back, back, back.

And I love coffee, coffee, coffee,
And I love tea, tea, tea,
And the boys love me, me, me.

I went to the river, river, river,
And I couldn't get across, 'cross, 'cross,
And I paid five dollars, dollars, dollars,
For the old grey horse, horse, horse.

And the horse wouldn't pull, pull, pull,
I swapped him for a bull, bull, bull,
And the bull wouldn't holler, holler, holler,
I swapped him for a dollar, dollar, dollar.

And the dollar wouldn't spend, spend, spend,
I put it in the grass, grass, grass,
And the grass wouldn't grow, grow, grow,
I got my hoe, hoe, hoe.

And the hoe wouldn't chop, chop, chop,
I took it to the shop, shop, shop,
And the shop made money, money, money,
Like the bees made honey, honey, honey.

See that yonder, yonder, yonder,
In the jay-bird town, town, town,
Where the women gotta work, work, work,
Till the sun goes down, down, down.

Well, I eat my meat, meat, meat,
And I gnaw my bone, bone, bone,
Well, good-bye honey, honey, honey,
I'm going on home.

Directions

The children usually stand in lines facing each other. They all sing and clap their partner's hands.

SIDE I, Band 2. BOB A NEEDLE (Bobbin Needle).
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

Well oh bob a needle,
Bob a needle,
And oh bob a needle.

Bob a needle, is arunning,
Bob a needle, ain't arunning,
Bob a needle, is arunning,
Bob a needle, ain't arunning.

And oh bob a needle,
Bob a needle,
And oh bob a needle, bob a needle,
You got bob a.

Bob a needle, is arunning,
You got bob a,
Bob a needle, is arunning.

And oh bob a needle,
Bob a needle,
And oh bob a needle, bob a needle
You got bob a.

Bob a needle, ain't arunning,
Bob a needle, is arunning,
Bob a needle, ain't arunning,
Bob a needle, is arunning.

And oh bob a needle,
Bob a needle,
And oh bob a needle, bob a needle,
You got bob a.

Directions

Bob a Needle (or Bobbin Needle) is a hiding and finding ring game. The children form a ring with one child on the inside and the leader outside. The leader walks around and places any small object, which is the needle, in the hands of one of the children in the ring. Those in the ring keep their hands behind them and pass the "needle" from one to another; the child in the center attempts to find the "needle". While he may touch all hands, he cannot look behind anyone in the ring. The "needle" is passed when the leader sings "Bob a needle is arunning" and stops on "Bob a needle, ain't arunning". When the center child thinks he has found the "needle", he says "You got bob a". If he is correct, the child holding the "needle" goes to the center and the lively game continues.

SIDE I, Band 3. WATCH THAT LADY. Recorded at
Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

I been all around my last time, last time, last time,
I been all around my last time,
Young lady, hold the key.

Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Young lady hold the key.

Been all around my last time, last time, last time,
I been all around my last time,
Young lady, hold the key.

Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Young lady hold the key.

Been all around my last time, last time, last time,
I been all around my last time,
Young lady, hold the key.

Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Just watch that lady how she hold that key,
Young lady hold the key.

Directions

This is played as a ring game with one child in the center of the circle pretending to "hold that key." All of the children sing. The one in the center makes various motions, such as combing her hair, kneeling, standing on one foot, or shaking her body, and those in the circle try to imitate her.

In this recording the children clap their hands, but on another occasion when they played this game for me they kept their hands on their hips. Their teacher said that this is the usual way. The children frequently improvise new stanzas as it suits them, as well as making new patterns of play.

SIDE I, Band 4. OLD LADY SALLY WANTS TO JUMP.
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

Old lady Sally want to jump-ty jump,
Jump-ty jump, jump-ty jump.
Old lady Sally want to jump-ty jump,
And old lady Sally want to bow.

Throw that hook in the middle of the pond,
Catch that girl with the red dress on.

Go on, gal, ain't you shame?
Shamed of what?
Wearing your dress in the latest style.

Many fishes in the brook,
Papa caught 'em with a hook.
Mama fried 'em in a pan,
Baby eat 'em like a man.

Preacher in the pulpit,
Preaching like a man,
Trying to get to Heaven on a 'lectric fan.
Do your best, papa, daddy do your best.

Directions

The children stand in two lines facing one another. They all sing. Both rows jump back and forth, each child with his feet together. On the last line, "Old Lady Sally want to bow", the lines jump forward and each child bows to the one opposite him. This is all sung and

acted out very rapidly. Ordinarily, as in the recording, the children clap their hands. In June, however, after a day of chopping cotton, jumping back and forth is quite enough.

Old Lady Sally is an old woman who is still trying to get a man. She goes "jump-ty jump" to appear young and wears a red dress in the latest style to catch one of the "many fishes in the brook." The children think that she should be ashamed of herself for not behaving as an old woman should.

The phrase "trying to get to Heaven on borrowed land" is an often heard one and is found in many Negro folk songs. These children had changed the line to "trying to get to Heaven on an electric fan."



SIDE I, Band 5. LOOP DE LOO (Loobie Loo).
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

Here we go loop de loo,
Here we go loop de loo,
Here we go loop de loo,
All on a Saturday night.

I put my right hand in,
I take my right hand out,
I give my right hand a shake, shake, shake,
And turn my body about.

Here we go loop de loo,
Here we go loop de loo,
Here we go loop de loo,
All on a Saturday night.

I put my left hand in,
I take my left hand out,
I give my left hand a shake shake shake,
And turn my body about.

(Chorus)

I put my right foot in,
I take my right foot out,
I give my right foot a shake shake shake,
And turn my body about.

(Chorus)

I put my left foot in,
I take my left foot out,
I give my left foot a shake shake shake,
And turn my body about.

(Chorus)

I put my big head in,
I take my big head out,
I give my big head a shake shake shake,
And turn my body about.

(Chorus)

I put my big self in,
I take my big self out,
I give my big self a shake shake shake,
And turn my body about.

(Chorus)

Where this song is known as Loobie Loo, these words are sung instead of Loop de loo.

Directions

The children form a circle, join hands and skip to the left as they sing the chorus. They stop as they sing "All on a Saturday night" and make appropriate gestures for each verse. For the first one all right hands are put in the circle, then drawn out, followed by three tremendous shakes. Each child turns himself about and the chorus follows.

This song has many titles. One is Loop the Loop, another is Loop the Loo. The title depends on the leader, for, although all the children sing, one will always be leading the others.

This game represents the Saturday night bath. In this section of Alabama a small tin tub, also used for washing clothes, is used for bathing. All parts of the body go in, including "my big self", when the children step in and then out of the circle on the last verse. This game is one of the old favorites.

SIDE I, Band 6. GREEN GREEN ROCKY ROAD.
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.

Green, green, rocky road,
Some lady's green, rocky road.
Tell me who you love? Rocky road.
Tell me who you love? Rocky road.

Caller: Minnie Town

Dear Miss Minnie (name of child within circle)
 your name's been called,
 Come take a seat beside the wall.
 Give her a kiss and let her go,
 She'll never sit in that chair no more.

(Another version of this song, not recorded,
 is as follows:)

Green field, rocky road,
 Move up green, rocky road.
 Some lady's green, rocky road,
 To marry me, rocky road.
 Call your true love, rocky road,
 Call him now, rocky road.
 Don't take time, rocky road,
 Yes or no, rocky road.

Directions

The children form a circle with the leader in the center. The group sings "Green, green" and the leader answers, "Rocky road," skipping around the ring. As the chorus is sung the leader is deciding which person to choose. As he picks one, the group sings the first line of the verse, naming the child selected. The leader brings his choice to the center and kisses her at the line, "Give her a kiss and let her go." The first leader takes a place in the ring and the child selected becomes the new leader, picking another child at the appropriate time. Clapping of hands throughout the song provides the rhythmic background.

Originally, a chair probably stood in the center of the ring and the chosen one sat in it. However, in this section of Alabama Green Green, Rocky Road is now played without one.

SIDE II, Band 1. ROSIE DARLING ROSIE.

Recorded at Brown's Chapel School, Livingston, Ala.

(Chorus)

Rosie, darling Rosie,
 Ha, ha, Rosie,
 Rosie, darling Rosie,
 Ha, ha, Rosie.

Way down yonder by Baltimore,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 Need no carpet on my floor,
 Ha, ha, Rosie.

Grab your partner and follow me,
 Ha, ha, Rosie.
 Let's go down by Galillee,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

Rosie, darling, Rosie,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 Rosie, darling, hurry,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 If you don't mind you gonna get left,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

Way down yonder by Baltimore,
 (etc.)

Grab your partner an' follow me,
 (etc.)

Rosie, darling, Rosie,
 Ha, ha, Rosie.
 Rosie, darling hurry,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

(Last verse, no matter how many are sung:)
 Stop right still and study yourself,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 See that fool where she got left,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

(There are many verses to Rosie Darling
 Rosie not included in this recording.
 The following verses are often sung.)

Some folks say preachers won't steal,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 But I caught two in my cornfield,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

One had a bushel and one had a peck,
 Ha, ha Rosie.
 The baby had a roasting ear 'round her neck,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

You steal my partner, you won't steal her no more,
 Ha, ha, Rosie.
 Better stay from 'round my door,
 Ha, ha Rosie.

Directions

This game is played by two concentric circles, usually formed by boys and girls facing each other, with the leader on the outside. The children in the circles clap their hands for rhythm and sing the chorus and refrain of "Ha, ha, Rosie." The leader sings the other lines and, at "Grab your partner and follow me," skips to the circles and chooses a partner of the opposite sex. The couple skips around the circles. The leader is replaced by the one whom he has chosen; he takes a place in the circles.

The song continues until all have been chosen to be leader. At the concluding verse and line of "Stop right still and study yourself, see that fool where she got left," all eyes are turned toward the child who has been left with no partner. Each child tries to be chosen early in the game to avoid the embarrassment of being the last one.



SIDE II, Band 2. I MUST SEE (Amasee).
Recorded at Brown's Chapel School Livingston, Ala.

Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Swing your partner, swing again,
I must see, I must see.
Swing your partner, swing again,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Swing your partner, swing again,
I must see, I must see.
Swing your partner, swing again,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line,
I must see, I must see.

(The lines, "Swing your partner" and
"Take your partner," are repeated from three
to five times each, with the refrain of "I must
see, I must see" after every line. This re-
peated line is actually pronounced "Amasee.")

Directions

The children face each other in two lines. The leader

sings the lines "Take your partner" and "Swing your partner"; the other children sing the refrain and clap their hands. Beginning with the head couple, each pair goes down between the rows, swinging their partners on directions sung by the leader.

This game is similar, of course, to the Virginia Reel, but the players have a more active part, since all sing the refrain, "I must see, I must see."

SIDE II, Band 3. BLUEBIRD BLUEBIRD.
Recorded at Pilgrim Church School, Livingston, Ala.

Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Oh Johnnie, what a day!

Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Oh Johnnie, what a day!

Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window,
Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Oh Johnnie, what a day!

Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Choose your partner,
Pat him on the shoulder.
Oh Johnnie, what a day!

Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window,
Bluebird, bluebird,
Fly in the window.
Oh Johnnie, what a day!

Directions

All the children except the one who plays the Bluebird form a circle with hands held high to make "windows". The bluebird flies in and out of these windows as they all sing together. As they sing "Choose your partner" the bluebird skips around the circle with the one he has chosen, returning to take his place in a "window". The one he has selected is the bluebird and the game continues until all the children have taken this part.

SIDE II, Band 4. MAY GO 'ROUND THE NEEDLE
(My Gold-Eyed Needle).
Recorded at East York School, East York, Ala.

May go 'round the needle,
Shoo shoo.
My silver thimble,
Shoo, shoo.
Hey Dolores (each child's name in turn)
Shoo shoo.
Fly way 'cross yonder,
Shoo, shoo.
And look this way,
Shoo, shoo.

This same verse is repeated over and over with a different child's name each time. The words "May go 'round the needle" appear to be a corruption of "my gold-eyed needle," as it is sometimes sung by other children. I have heard another group sing it this way:

My gold eyed needle,
Surely do;
My silver thimble,
Surely do;
Hey Sally Mae,
Surely do;
Fly way 'cross yonder,
Surely do;
An' look this way,
Surely do.

Directions

The children form two lines facing one another. The leader sings all of the song, while the others clap their hands and answer back the refrain of "Shoo shoo." When the leader calls a child's name and says "Fly way 'cross yonder and look this way," the child crosses to the opposite line and faces the one which he has left. The next child called is from the second line so that both lines stay their original size. The game continues until every child's name has been called. The children love to hear their names called out before the other players.

Still another unrecorded version of My Gold-Eyed Needle is popular:

Young speckled lady,
Surely do;
Just from the country,
Surely do;
With a gold-eyed needle,
Surely do;
And a silver thimble,
Surely do.
Oh little girl,
Surely do;
Fly way 'cross yonder,
Surely do;

You, too, little girl,
Surely do;
You fly, too,
Surely do.

Directions

Unlike the other versions of Gold-Eyed Needle, this last one is played as a ring game. The children make a circle about the leader. At the line, "oh little girl!", the leader points to one child who flies across the center, exchanging places with the one whom the leader has pointed to on the "You, too, little girl" line.



SIDE II, Band 5. STOOPING ON THE WINDOW.
Recorded at East York School, East York, Ala.

Stooping on the window,
Wind the ball!
Stooping on the window,
Wind the ball!
Stooping on the window,
Wind the ball!
Stooping on the window,
Wind the ball!
(etc.)

Let's wind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Let's wind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Let's wind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Let's wind this ball,
Again, again, again.

Unwind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Unwind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Unwind this ball,
Again, again, again,
Unwind this ball,
Again, again, again.
(etc.)

Directions

The children hold hands in a line, with the "ball" at one end and a pair at the other, their arms arched to form a "window". Led by the leader, the line goes under the arched hands. Usually the leader calls out the first line and is answered by the others with "Wind the ball" or "Again." Sometimes the children clap their hands instead of holding to one another. The leader takes the line down to the "ball" and goes around about him, "winding the ball." When all the children are tightly pressed together in a circle, the ball is unwound by the leader, who unwinds it from the center. At the end of the game the children are in a straight line.

Sometimes, instead of one arched "window", all the children hold their arms up and the leader takes them in and out down through these windows to the foot of the line and the "ball."

SIDE II, Band 6, CHARLIE OVER THE OCEAN.
Recorded at East York School, East York, Ala.

Leader - Charlie over the ocean,
Ring - Charlie over the ocean.
Leader - Charlie over the ocean,
Ring - Charlie over the ocean.
Leader - Charlie caught a blackbird,
Ring - Charlie caught a blackbird,
Leader - Might been me.
Ring - Might been me.

Leader - Charlie over the ocean,
Ring - Charlie over the ocean.
Leader - Charlie over the sea,
Ring - Charlie over the sea.
Leader - Charlie caught a black fish,
Ring - Charlie caught a black fish.
Leader - Can't catch me,
Ring - Can't catch me.

Leader - Charlie over the ocean,
Ring - Charlie over the ocean.
Leader - Charlie over the sea,
Ring - Charlie over the sea.
Leader - Charlie caught a blackbird,



Ring - Charlie caught a blackbird.
Leader - Can't catch me,
Ring - Can't catch me.
(etc.)

Directions

The children join hands in a ring and skip to their right. The leader, who is outside, skips in the opposite direction. He begins the song and the ring sings each line back to him. As the leader says "Charlie caught a blackbird" he touches one of those in the ring and begins to run around the ring. The child who was touched tries to catch him. If the leader can get around the ring to the empty place, the other child becomes the leader. If not, he remains on the outside. The song continues and all children take part as the leader.

This game is almost the same as the more familiar Drop the Handkerchief, but, all the children take part, either by their singing or by the more active part of the ring. (In Drop the Handkerchief the circle does not move.)

Another way of playing this game is for the leader to be in the center of the circle, blindfolded. On the line "Charlie caught a blackbird," the circle squats, moving about from side to side as the leader attempts to find one.



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