

Elk River Blues

Ernie Carpenter



"Elk River Blues" is an old time air or listening piece from West Virginia in G Major. The parts are played AA'.

It was composed by Braxton County, West Virginia, old-time fiddler Ernie Carpenter (1909-1997). According to the booklet accompanying Carpenter's LP, the story behind the tune is one of a difficult change in his life. He had worked most of his life for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company in Clarksburg, prior to retiring in 1972. He had planned to retire to his homeplace on the Elk River but the construction of the Sutton Dam by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Elk River during the 1950's and 1960's resulted in the flooding of his boyhood home and the surrounding area, despite the efforts of himself and neighbors to forestall the project through a lobbyist. He stayed in his Elk River homestead while the dam was being constructed, even though most of his neighbors had already left. Workmen blocked the roads in and out of the area, but Carpenter found alternate routes until they too were closed off. "I was the last person out of there", he said, "I went ahead then and tore the old place down and brought it up here. Part of it's in this house." Of the tune, he remarked: "I was sittin' here one day, an' I had the blues. I reckon as bad as anybody could, thinkin' about my old homeplace up on the Elk River. I started sawin' on the fiddle an' that's what I came up with".

The tune is unusual in that the time alternates between 2/4 and 3/4 time. Some transcriptions have it in 4/4 and 5/4 or even in a combined 9/4.

It was printed in Milliner & Koken's **Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes** (2011). They print it in 4/4 and 5/4. The version given here (in 2/4 and 3/4) is popular (and less scary than 4/4 and 5/4. It is the version used at our local jam.

It was recorded by Ernie Carpenter on **Elk River Blues** (1994), Reed Island Rounders on **Goin' Home** (2002) and Pine Tree Stringband on **Country Mountain Favorites** (2003).