

## Ida Red

Musical score for "Ida Red" in G major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff starts with a boxed 'A' above the first measure. The second staff has a boxed '1.' above the final measure. The third staff has a boxed 'B' above the second measure and a boxed '2.' above the first measure. Chord symbols (A, E7, D) are placed above the notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

### *Floating verses sung to Ida Red:*

Down the road, down the road;  
Can't get a letter from down the road.

Down the road, across the creek,  
Can't get a letter but once a week.

Ida Red and Ida Blue,  
I got stuck on Ida too.

Ida Red, she lives in town,  
She weighs three hundred and forty pounds.

Ida Red, she won't do right,  
She won't do nothing but quarell and fight.

Down the road a mile and half,  
My little honey looks back and laughs.

Down the road and across the creek,  
Can't get a letter but once a week.

Ida Red, she's a darned old fool,  
Tried to put a saddle on a hump-back mule.

---

"Ida Red", also known as "Idy Red" is an American reel in 2/4 or cut time in A Major (Kuntz, Milliner/Koken, Phillips) or G Major (Krassen, Milliner/Koken, Titon). It is played in AEae or standard fiddle tuning. The parts are played AB, AAB or AABB (Krassen). Some players like to reverse the parts and play BA or BBAA.

"Ida Red" is a melody widespread throughout the South and Mid-West, in both purely instrumental versions and versions with words. The words are usually a casual collection of floater verses to amuse the band while the dancers complete their figures. For that reason, I have included it in the **Tunes** section instead of the **Songs** section.

The character 'Ida Red' is the subject of a somber song in Alan Lomax's collection *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934), in a section of 'Negro Bad Men', collected from an informant at a Texas prison farm. However, it has no relation to the "Ida Red" of the various fiddle tune couplets whose gender is feminine or androgynous and often comic. Jeff Titon (2001) believes the lyrics suggest an African-American or minstrel origin, but no direct antecedents have surfaced to date.

The "Ida Red" tunes as a group vary widely in their melodic content even within geographic regions, although nearly all versions retain the distinctive cadence, with the majority played in 'A' major, often 'cross-tuned' (i.e.: AEae fiddle tuning).

It was recorded for the Library of Congress by musicologist/folklorist Vance Randolph from Ozarks Mountains fiddlers in the early 1940's. Riley Puckett's (north Georgia) version of the tune, released in 1926, became the second best-selling country music record for the year.

The banjo tablature is from John Letscher.

It was printed in **The Devil's Box, vol. 9, no. 1** (1975), Kaufman's **Beginning Old Time Fiddle** (1977), Krassen's **Appalachian Fiddle** (1973), Kuntz's **Ragged but Right** (1987), Milliner & Koken's **Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes** (2011) (five versions), Phillips' **Traditional American Fiddle Tunes, vol. 1** (1994) (two versions), Thede's **The Fiddle Book** (1967) and Titon's **Old Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes** (2001).

It was recorded by Dykes Magic City Trio (1927), Tommy Jarrell on **Rainbow Sign** (1986), Clayton McMichen on **McMichen: The Traditional Years** (1977), Double Decker String Band on **Giddyap Napoleon**, Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers (1934), Tweedy Brothers (1928), Jim Bowles on **Railroading Through the Rocky Mountains** (1994), Ernest V. Stoneman on **Ernest Stoneman and the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers** (1978), Ed Haley on **Forked Deer** (1997), Pete Seeger on **American Favorite Ballads: Songs and Tunes, Vol. 5** (1962), The Red Mules on **The Marimac Anthology: Deep in Old-Time Music**, Fiddlin' Powers & Family (1924) and The Hoover Uprights on **Known by their Reputation** (2005).