

John Henry

Odetta

John Henry was a little baby,
Sittin' on his momma's knee,
Said, "The Big Bend Tunnel on the C & O Road
Is gonna be the death of me, Lord,
Be the death of me."

When John Henry was a little baby,
Sittin' on his poppa's knee,
He took a hammer, a little piece of steel,
Said, "Hammer's gonna be the death of me, Lord, Lord
Hammer's gonna be the death of me."

John Henry had a little woman,
Her name was Mary Magdalene.
Every day she would sing for John Henry
Just to hear his hammer when it swing, Lord,
Just to hear his hammer when it swing.

And now the captain he says to John Henry,
"I'm gonna bring that steam drill round,
I'm gonna bring that steam drill out on the job,
"I'm gonna whop that steel on down."

John Henry said to his captain,
"I know a man ain't nothin' but a man,
But before I'll let your steam drill beat me down,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand, Lord,
I'll die with my hammer in my hand.

John Henry said to his shaker,
"Shaker, why don't you sing?
And now I'm throwin' forty pounds from my hip on down,
Listen to the cold steel ring, Lawdy, Lawdy,
Listen to the cold steel ring."

John Henry said to his captain,
"Looky yonder what I see--
Steam drill broke, your hole done choke,
You can't drive steel like me, Lord,
You can't drive steel like me."

John Henry a-workin' on the mountain,
Hammer was a-strikin' fire,
But he worked so hard it broke his poor heart,
He laid down his hammer and he died, Lawdy,
He lad down his hammer and he died.

Now momma's gonna shoe my pretty little feet,
Poppy gonna glove my hand,
Sister gonna kiss my red, ruby lips,
I don't need no man, Lawdy, Lawdy,
Not after my steel-drivin' man, Lawdy, Lawdy,
Not after my steel-drivin' man.