

Step It Down

Mixer – couples scattered around room

In Bessie Jones book For the Ancestors, Biographical Memories, collected and edited by John Stewart (Univ. of Illinois Press 1983, p. 45-46), Bessie says these games were a way for slaves to talk to the white man. Since slaves in Virginia, like her grandfather, made the bricks for the roads in Williamsburg, they were saying, 'you not paying me nothing, ... but someday maybe you'll remember me'. They sang 'to get the pressure off their minds'; they clapped and danced to feel good, as they put the bricks down with their feet, stepping them down. We learned this from New Hampshire caller Mary DesRosier.

with a light swing

The musical score consists of six staves of music in a single system. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The music is written in a simple, rhythmic style with quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined to indicate stepping. The lyrics are: 'Way down yon-der in the brick yard; re-mem-ber me.' (first two staves), 'step it step it step it down, re-mem-ber me; Oh' (third and fourth staves), and 'swing your love and turn a-round, re-mem-ber me; Oh' (fifth and sixth staves). The final note of the sixth staff is a whole note with a double bar line.

Way down yon-der in the brick yard; re-mem-ber me.

Way down yon-der in the brick yard; re-mem-ber me. Oh

step it step it step it down, re-mem-ber me; Oh

step it step it step it down, re-mem-ber me. Oh

swing your love and turn a-round, re-mem-ber me; Oh

swing your love and turn a-round, re-mem-ber me.

Way down yonder in the brickyard, remember me...

All walk individually and randomly around the room singing.

Oh step it, step it, step it down, remember me...

Face a partner and step right foot in front of left and back, then step left foot in front of right and back, with arms swinging in time. The stepping in front corresponds with the underlined words, as you alternate right and left feet.

Swing your love and turn around, remember me...

Two hand turn your partner. Repeat the dance, looking for a new partner.

Notes: This version is a great mixer for all ages at a community dance. Bessie Jones (See p. 4, paragraph 2) named her collection of African American singing games *Step It Down*, after a slightly different version of the game.