THE BLUES
The development of the blues

Three types of slave songs contributed to the development of the blues:
- FIELD HOLLERS
- WORK SONGS
- RELIGIOUS SONGS (hymns, spirituals, ring dances etc.)
**FIELD HOLLER**
- sung by solitary workers in the fields.

**Recording: Louisiana Prisoner/Senegalese Peanut Farmer**
- **a. Louisiana prisoner picking cotton; song of freedom** (1930’s-40’s)
- **b. Peanut Farmer In Senegal**
- similarities in declamatory style, melismatic, similar direction of melodic lines, melancholy mood
- rhythmically loose, syncopation in both lines, syllable and pitch manipulation
- mixture of major and minor tonalities
- use of vocal inflections (humming etc.), dynamics follow
- downward direction of pitch

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**THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES**
THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

WORK SONGS
- sung by a group of workers, usually with a tool of labor such as a pick, ax, hammer, shovel.

Recording: James Carter and the Prisoners –Po Lazarus (Mississippi State Pen, 1959)
- usually a lead singer present
- tools fall on weak beats (syncopation)
- vocal inflections, use of pick-up
- use of simple vocal harmony
- intense, passionate performance; spontaneous in nature
- sliding, or liquid vocal quality
RELIGIOUS SONGS
- provided a positive look at life after slavery; hope for the heavenly rewards. The form of the blues came from religious hymns sung by the slaves.

Recording: Georgia Sea Island Singers - The Buzzard Lope (N)
- spiritual dance with African origins based on the practice of leaving a body in the field to be consumed by buzzards. “King Jesus” will protect the slaves
- call and response song, Bessie Jones provides the call and is answered by seven men.
- cyclic structure
- body percussion (hand claps, foot stomps)
- polyrhythm
- improvisation within the call and response
THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

THE BLUES

Blues is considered the mother language of American music.

FORM

- **A**: statement of problem, feeling, situation, etc.
- **A**: repeat of the above, sometimes with additional words
- **B**: response to the A statement (solution, moral message, etc.)

(the first and second bar of each line is typically a call by the singer with an instrumental response in the third and fourth bars)
THE BLUES FORM

- BLUES FORM – A – A – B (typically 12-bars)
- Lyric form:

  A1: statement of problem, feeling, situation, etc. 4-bars

  A2: repeat of the above, sometimes with additional words, 4-bars

  B: response to the A statement (solution, moral message, conclusion, etc.) 4-bars
THE BLUES FORM (LYRIC FORM)

Joe Turner - Love Is Like A Faucet (Los Angeles, 1978)

A1 - My gal don't love me, treat me awful mean,

A2 - My gal don't love me, treat me awful mean,

B - She’s the meanest woman, Lord, that I ever seen
# THE BLUES FORM (HARMONIC FORM)

**Joe Turner - Love Is Like A Faucet (Los Angeles, 1978)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Chords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 (4 bars)</td>
<td>1 / / /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(C / / /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 (4 bars)</td>
<td>4 / / /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(F / / /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (4 bars)</td>
<td>5 / / /</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|           | (G / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C / G / |)
COUNTRY BLUES (folk blues, rural blues)

The blues appeared some time after the Civil War.

- regional styles (Mississippi Delta, Texas)
- migrated throughout the south via traveling blues men (itinerant)
- predominately male
- usually voice and guitar
- call and response between voice and instrument
- guitar utilizes bends, vibrato etc. in effort to imitate human voice
- varying phrase lengths, suggests 12 bar form, but is elastic
- AAB form

all the elements of field hollers, work songs and spirituals are present
THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES


A1 - I got to keep movin', Blues fallin' down like hail,
A2 - I got to keep movin', Blues fallin' down like hail,
B - I can't keep no money with a hellhound on my trail.

- A – A – B form
- each phrase has a different length due to the variations in the lyrics
- sliding, “liquid” vocal style; use of scoops, smears and bent notes, or blue notes
- voice & guitar call & response: the guitar is sometimes used as an extension of the vocal line
- local, folk lyrics: use of Southern slang
**Urban Blues** (Vaudeville or Classic Blues)

- formalized 12 bar phrasing, a necessity of larger groups
- trained musicians meant the addition of intros etc.
- more refined and sophisticated than country blues
- women were more popular than men, sex appeal, women's suffrage represented oppression, record labels saw the advantage
- Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Mamie Smith were leaders
- very popular on 1920's-30's radio, race labels created to promote the music
BESSIE SMITH (1894-1937) "The Empress of the Blues"

- major figure in the 1920's
- Bessie was a world-renowned performer, well known as a vaudeville star
- transcended the "race" label market, was contracted to Columbia Records for whom she sold more records than any of their other performers in the 1920's
- she studied opera singing and had strong technical skills, hitting notes dead center, using vibrato etc.
- powerful vocal style; Bessie Smith was a nationally-known vaudeville star who toured the country performing the blues in large theaters without amplification
RECORDING: Bessie Smith - *Reckless Blues* (1925, New York) (N)

**featured musicians:**
- Louis Armstrong – cornet
- Fred Longshaw – reed organ

- 12-bar A – A – B blues form begins after the 4 bar introduction by cornet and organ
- use of vibrato; clear enunciation of words; full of vocal tone (nearly the opposite of Robert Johnson)
- blues notes are evident throughout, although they are sung with less of the sliding, or “liquid” sound of country blues
- cornetist, Louis Armstrong answers her vocal lies with his own improvisations (call and response)
- Smith’s sense of phrasing and style had an important influence on the development of Louis Armstrong and later vocalists like Billie Holiday
# The Roots of the Blues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Country Blues</th>
<th>Urban Blues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lyric Themes</strong></td>
<td>Local events, people, love, death, freedom</td>
<td>Universal themes, urban life, relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song Structures</strong></td>
<td>A-A-B; 3 unequal phrases</td>
<td>A-A-B; 3 4-bar phrases (12-bar blues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal Style</strong></td>
<td>Raw, vocal effects such as bent notes, scoops, smears</td>
<td>Refined, full sound, vibrato, some effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accompaniment</strong></td>
<td>Folk style, self-accompaniment on guitar or banjo</td>
<td>Ensemble, lead vocal with band</td>
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During the late 1930s and the 1940s, millions of people had migrated from the rural South in search of employment in defense-related industries.

This migrant population greatly expanded the target audience for southern-derived music.

“Race music” and “hillbilly music” underwent a series of name changes.

In 1949, *Billboard* began using the terms “rhythm & blues” and “country and western.”
RHYTHM & BLUES

- Described music performed almost exclusively by black artists for sale to African American audiences
- A loose cluster of styles rooted in southern folk traditions:
  - Swing-influenced “jump bands”
  - Tin Pan Alley–style love songs performed by crooners
  - Various styles of urban blues
  - Gospel-influenced vocal harmony groups
JUMP BLUES

- The first commercially successful category of R&B
- During the war, the leaders of some big bands were forced to downsize.
- Specialized in hard-swinging, boogie-woogie–based party music, spiced with humorous lyrics and wild stage performances
LOUIS JORDAN (1908–75)

- Led the most famous jump band, The Tympany Five
- Began making recordings for Decca Records in 1939
- The first jump band musician to appeal to a mass audience
- Flamboyant style and humorous lyrics
- His ensemble setup—two trumpets, two saxophones, bass, piano, and drums—became the standard for R&B.
LISTENING: “CHOO CHOO CH’ BOOGIE” (1946)

- Louis Jordan’s biggest hit
- Released in 1946 by Decca Records
- Topped the R&B charts for an amazing eighteen weeks, reached Number Seven on *Billboard*’s pop hit list, and sold over two million copies
- Exemplifies key elements of the jump blues style of R&B
- Cowritten by Milt Gabler, Jordan’s producer, and two country and western musicians who worked at a radio station in New York City
LISTENING: “CHOO CHOO CH’ BOOGIE” (1946)

- The title of the song draws a parallel between the motion of a train and the rocking rhythm of boogie-woogie music.
- Boogie woogie provided an important link between R&B and country music during the postwar period.
LISTENING: “CHOO CHOO CH’ BOOGIE” (1946)

- Series of verses in twelve-bar blues form, alternated with an eight-bar chorus
- Opens with a twelve-bar instrumental introduction
  - A trumpet and two saxophones imitate the sound of a train whistle.
- The rhythm section establishes a medium-tempo boogie-woogie rhythm—a “shuffle”
- Twelve-bar verse and eight-bar chorus, both sung by Jordan
- Twelve-bar boogie-woogie piano solo
- Twenty-bar saxophone solo instead of a piano solo