

THE BLUES

THE ROOTS OF 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.)

THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

■ 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



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



THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

■ 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)



A1 (4 bars) - 1 / / / | 4 / / / | 1 / / / | 1 / / / |
(C / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C / / / |)

A2 (4 bars) - 4 / / / | 4 / / / | 1 / / / | 1 / / / |
(F / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C / / / |)

B (4 bars) - 5 / / / | 4 / / / | 1 / / / | 1 / 5 / |
(G / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C / G / |)

THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

- 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

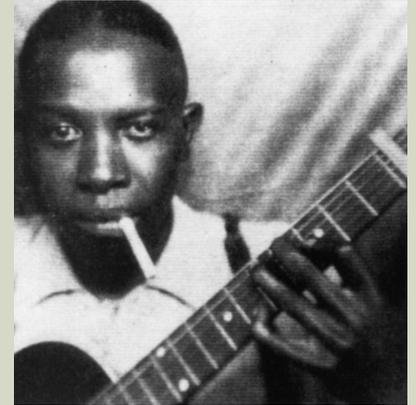
THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

- **RECORDING:** Robert Johnson - *Hellhound On My Trail*(1937 Dallas)

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

THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

- **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



THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES

- **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



THE ROOTS OF THE BLUES



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

	COUNTRY BLUES	URBAN BLUES
LYRIC THEMES	Local events, people, love death, freedom	Universal themes, urban life, relationships
SONG STRUCTURES	A-A-B; 3 unequal phrases	A-A-B; 3 4-bar phrases (12-bar blues)
VOCAL STYLE	Raw, vocal effects such as bent notes, scoops, smears	Refined, full sound, vibrato, some effects
ACCOMPANIMENT	Folk style, self-accompaniment on guitar or banjo	Ensemble, lead vocal with band

SOUTHERN MUSIC IN THE POSTWAR ERA

- 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