


1  **The Blues**
Unit 05
Notes

2  **Introduction**


- The blues are the basis for many of the most widely recognized American music forms, including Jazz, Rock 'n' Roll, R&B, and Hip-Hop.
- Many of the first recordings of rock 'n' roll, such as Bill Haley and the Comets' *Shake Rattle and Roll*, the Crew Cuts' *Sh-Boom* and Elvis Presley's *You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog*, were covers of blues songs recorded previously by black artists.
- Most of the musicians in the big British groups, including members of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, Them, the Yardbirds, Cream, and Led Zeppelin began their musical careers performing blues and several of their biggest hits were their versions of traditional blues songs.

3  **Introduction**


- The early music of the San Francisco acid rock groups such as Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and Country Joe and the Fish were heavily amplified versions of the blues.
- It is this blues tradition, from its origins in the field hollers, spirituals, and work songs of African-American slaves, to its pervasive influence on twentieth-century rock 'n' roll, that is the subject of this unit.

4  **Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues**

- Origin of the Term "The Blues"
 - "The blues" refers both to a melancholy emotional state and to a specific type of music.
 - The blues as a distinct musical form appears to have developed after the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, growing out of a fusion of several musical influences, most notably African-American work songs, spirituals, and field hollers.

5  **Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues**

- Country or Rural Blues
 - These terms refer to the style of blues that arose in the earliest phase of blues development, beginning after the Civil War and continuing into the first quarter of the twentieth century.
 - Country blues are more directly the result of personal expression, and are therefore sung solo.

6  **Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues**

- Country or Rural Blues
 - The singer sometimes introduces and ends his performance with spoken words, and in the singing uses a great variety of vocal techniques, for example rough, growling tones contrasted with high falsetto. Country blues are accompanied by acoustic guitar which is sometimes played using items such as a knife, tube, or bottleneck as a barre.
 - Examples of musicians singing in the country blues style include Charlie Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Son House.
 - *Black Snake Moan* – Blind Lemon Jefferson (ca. 1920s)

7  **Overview of the Music Tradition**

of the Blues

- City or Classic Blues
 - These terms refer to the style of blues singing which came into existence during the 1920s and which dominated to the mid-1930s. They are a by-product of the great migration of blacks out of the rural South into the cities, and were initially used as a form of entertainment in the minstrel and vaudeville shows.
 - In this style, two or more instruments accompany the blues singer and the emphasis moves from unaccompanied guitar to piano.

8 Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues

- City or Classic Blues
 - In order to coordinate the efforts of the ensemble of musicians, these blues use the standardized twelve-bar form and harmonic progression.
 - Female singers dominate this style, and examples of musicians singing in the classic blues style include Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Edith Johnson.
 - *Weepin' Woman Blues* – Ma Rainey (1927)

9 Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues


- Piano Blues
 - Piano blues use the twelve-bar formal and harmonic pattern of classic blues but adds characteristics idiomatic to the piano.
 - For example, to achieve the “blue notes” on the piano, pianists “crush” or “press” the keys (striking two or more keys not quite simultaneously).
 - Examples of blues pianists include Eurreal “Little Brother” Montgomery, Roosevelt Sykes, and “Georgia” or “Barrelhouse” Tom Dorsey.
 - *It's Right Here For You* – Tom Dorsey (ca. 1920s)

10 Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues

- Urban, Modern, or Contemporary Blues
 - These terms refer to the style of blues singing that developed following the influence of jazz and the rise of the nightclub, in which entertainment served as a backdrop to conversation and drinking.
 - Examples of musicians singing in the contemporary blues style include Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker, and B.B. King and, more recently, The Kinsey Report and Vasti Jackson.
 - *Road Runner* – Bo Diddly (ca. 1950s)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUKUt8CtSOI>
 - Bo Jackson & Bo Diddly Nike Commercial
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjpSH8qJ7c4>

11 Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues

- Rhythm and Blues (R&B)
 - This term refers to the transformation in the late 1940s and 1950s of the earlier blues forms into music that was primarily used for dancing. This form of blues served as the foundation for the development of rock ‘n’ roll.
 - In the accompaniment, various patterns that had developed out of blues piano were used and the rhythmic structure emphasized the offbeat stress on the “weak beats” (two and four in a quadruple meter) that characterized contemporary jazz.

12  **Overview of the Music Tradition of the Blues**

- Rhythm and Blues (R&B)
 - Examples of early musicians singing in the rhythm and blues style are John Lee Hooker, Chuck Berry, “Little Richard” Peniman, and Fats Domino.
 - It was covers of rhythm and blues recordings by white artists that launched rock ‘n’ roll.
 - *Roll Over Beethoven & Johnny B. Goode* – Chuck Berry (ca. 1960s)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WRV645JemA>
 - *Keep A Knockin’* – Little Richard (1957)

13  **The Structural Characteristics of the Blues**

- Rhythm, Melody, and Harmony
 - The blues is generally characterized by a steady, even, and percussive rhythm in the accompanying instrument(s) with a fluid rhythmic melody above.
 - The meter is most frequently quadruple.
 - Blues melodies usually have an underlying call-and-response structure: within each four-measure phrase, the sung melody typically takes up only two measures, leaving the remaining two for an improvised answer in the accompaniment.
 - The melodies emphasize the notes in the chords that proved the harmony, but they also incorporate notes that are micro-tonally lower. These notes are typically the third, seventh, and sometimes fifth of the scale.

14  **The Structural Characteristics of the Blues**

- Rhythm, Melody, and Harmony
 - In the early stages of the blues, singers used whichever chords they wished to provide accompaniment. Later blues use a very regular harmonic progression derived from a key’s “primary chords.”
 - Primary chords are the chords built upon the first, fourth, and fifth tones of the scale. In music theory, roman numerals are used to identify the chord’s ordinal position in the scale, such that the chord built on the fifth tone of the scale is referred to as the “V” chord.
 - In blues chords, an additional note that is an interval of a seventh away from the fundamental base note of the chord is also used, indicated by adding an Arabic number 7 on top, such as “V⁷.”

15  **The Structural Characteristics of the Blues**

- Rhythm, Melody, and Harmony
 - The chords are also given names. Using all these identification systems, the primary chords of any key with their added seventh tone are identified as the tonic (I⁷), subdominant (IV⁷), and dominant (V⁷).
 - Although there can be slight variations, the following is the most common form of the standard twelve-bar blues harmonic progression that underlies the majority of blues.

16  **The Structural Characteristics of the Blues**

- The Standard 12-Bar Blues Progression

I ⁷	I ⁷	I ⁷	I ⁷
IV ⁷	IV ⁷	I ⁷	I ⁷

Response

Line 3 (B)

I begged the Lord for mercy,
if you please

21  **Origins of the Blues to 1900**


- 1800-1900
 - Although some scholars theorize that the blues existed before the Civil War, the preponderance of current evidence suggests that the blues as a distinct musical style developed after the Civil War when the southern slaves were freed.

22  **Origins of the Blues to 1900**

- The Merging of European and African Traditions
 - The blues developed through the songsters from the cross influences of African-American hollers, work songs, and spirituals and the European popular songs and ballads.
 - Essentially, the African traditions contributed the tonal characteristics, free rhythm, call-and-response style, and sense of personal expression and the European traditions contributed the structured the regularity and harmonic characteristics.
 - The earliest documented blues reflect these various links of slave musical traditions and European ballads.

23  **Origins of the Blues to 1900**

- The “Birth” of the Blues
 - The precise time when these various traditions fused into what we now call country, rural, or archaic blues has been a subject of considerable scholarly debate and will probably remain obscure for two main reasons...
 - There is no written documentation of these early blues.
 - The fusion probably occurred before the result was actually called “the blues.”

24  **Origins of the Blues to 1900**

- The “Birth” of the Blues
 - Since many of the sharecropping farms were located in a region known as the Mississippi Delta, (and some of the most important early blues musicians such as Charlie Patton and Son House came from this area), this location has been designated as the area that gave birth to the blues.
 - However, very close in time (if not simultaneously), blues were being sung all over the South, including in Texas with Blind Lemon Jefferson and Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter).
 - *The Bourgeois Blues* – Leadbelly (1938)

25  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- There were three main influences that helped spread the blues and fostered its transition from the country/rural blues to the classic city blues...
 - Urban Migration
 - Medicine, Circus, and Minstrel Shows
 - The Published Blues of W.C. Handy

26  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- Urban Migration
 - Country singers brought the blues with them to the cities, putting out their hat or tin cup, singing along places such as the railroad tracks, and encouraging passersby to contribute nickels and dimes.
 - To the multitudes of people who had left their farms looking for a better life in the city, these singers recalled for them their earlier lives and sang about their current predicament

in language and a style they understood.

27  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- Medicine, Circus, and Minstrel Shows
 - Throughout the South, a frequent site in vacant lots was the medicine show. Traveling by wagon, a “typical Southern gentleman doctor” would set up a rough stage and introduce various performers to provide entertainment and help attract a crowd.
 - These performances might include dancers, a jug band, or a songster or blues singer.
 - When enough people had gathered, “The Doctor” would produce a bottle of miracle tonic, show its effectiveness by trying it out on one of the performers, and then start trying to sell bottles of medicine.
 - *Say, Say, Say* – Paul McCartney & Michael Jackson (1983)
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLEhh_XpJ-0

28  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- Medicine, Circus, and Minstrel Shows
 - Several blues singers and songsters spent their active performing years working these shows, including Jim Jackson, Walter “Furry” Lewis, Tommy Johnson, and Robert Wilkins.
 - Additionally, many blues singers made their performance debuts through sideshows to the “second” companies of the big circuses.

29  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- Medicine, Circus, and Minstrel Shows
 - The American minstrel show had already crystallized as a form of popular entertainment in the early 1840s. These shows used white comedians with faces blackened by burned cork in a series of songs and skits portraying black characters in a sentimental and patronizing manner.

30  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- Medicine, Circus, and Minstrel Shows
 - Most of the “Classic” blues singers, including Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith, began their performing careers with circus or minstrel shows.
 - They had heard the country/rural blues when they were growing up and modified them to appeal to audiences by using a pianist and a backup band as accompanists.
 - Rather than moving around all of the time, these shows eventually became stationary. As early as 1907, a small number of southern theaters for blacks were founded, culminating in the Theatre Owner’s Booking Agency (T.O.B.A.) established in 1909.
 - T.O.B.A. coordinated performances at approximately forty theaters in places such as New Orleans, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago.

31  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**

- The Composed and Published Blues of W.C. Handy
 - William Christopher Handy (1873-1958) was the son of a minister and born in Florence, Alabama. He had had organ lessons as a boy, played cornet with the local brass band, and sang in neighborhood quartets.
 - He went on to have a varied career in music, teaching school, and working as an itinerant musician.
 - In 1903, Handy heard the blues for the first time.

32  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**


- The Composed and Published Blues of W.C. Handy
 - In 1907, W.C. Handy established a music publishing company and in 1909, wrote and

published his first blues composition. The song, *Mr. Crump*, was written for Edward H. Crump, who was a mayoral candidate running on the reform ticket. Handy wrote the song as a campaign song, writing in a style that he hoped would appeal to other blacks. It was an instant success, and in 1912, Handy rewrote it as a piano piece, renaming it as *The Memphis Blues*.


– *The Memphis Blues* – Louis Armstrong (1909)

33  **Spread of the Blues from 1900-1920**


- The Composed and Published Blues of W.C. Handy
 - In 1914, he wrote the *St. Louis Blues*, in 1915 *Joe Turner Blues*, and in 1925, he published *The Blues: An Anthology*.
 - Although Handy's blues were significantly different from what would be later called the blues, he did initiate a whole industry of commercial, composed, and published blues.

34  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**


- The First Recordings of the Blues
 - It was not the rural/country blues of the songsters and early blues singers but, rather, the urbanized blues sung by the mostly female blues singers coming out of the circus/minstrel show traditions that were first recorded.

35  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- The First Recordings of the Blues
 - In 1920, the African-American composer Perry Bradford persuaded the General Phonograph Company to use the black singers Mamie Smith, instead of the popular white entertainer Sophie Tucker, to record his song "Crazy Blues." This recording, released in August 1920, sold phenomenally, and it brought this popularized form of the composed blues to a much wider audience.
 - Smith's recording set the pattern for a series of recordings by similar "Classic" blues singers, including Edith Wilson, Sara Martin, Clara Smith, Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith.
 - It was in these blues that the text typically based on AAB form and the standard succession of harmonies was crystallized.


36  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Blues on the Harmonica and the Piano
 - Although the blues singers and guitarists have received the most attention, there also developed during this time important traditions of blues harmonica players and blues pianists.
 - DeFord Bailey from Nashville, Tennessee; George "Bullet" Williams, from Selma, Alabama; and Burl "Jaybird" Coleman, from Gainesville, Alabama, were some of the early accomplished harmonica players.
 - *Coffee Grinder Blues* – Jaybird Coleman (ca. 1930)


37  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Blues on the Harmonica and the Piano
 - Two important centers for piano blues were Chicago and Detroit, both of which had become target locations in the great migration of southern blacks to the North. The population shifts in Detroit illustrate...


- In 1910, there were 5,471 African-American residents.
- By 1918, that number had grown to over 35,000.
- By 1926, there were 80,000, most of whom had migrated from the South.

38  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**


- Blues on the Harmonica and the Piano
 - Similar trends occurred in Gary, Indiana, St. Louis, Louisville, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Cleveland, Ohio.
 - The numerous nightclubs and theatres that had been established all over these cities gave performance venues to professional blues and jazz singers.

39  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**


- Boogie-Woogie and Barrelhouse Blues
 - Boogie-woogie was a term coined by one of the early blues pianists, Pine Top Smith, in his piece *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie* (recorded 1928).
 - *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie* – Pine Top Smith (1928)
 - This style was favored by blues pianists playing in the city bars and for rent parties, and is characterized by a fast tempo, and percussive, forceful, repetitive left-hand figure. Characteristic early recordings of boogie-woogie blues pianists include Charles Avery's *Dearborn Street Breakdown* (1929) and Romeo Nelson's *Head Rag Hop* (1929).

40  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Boogie-Woogie and Barrelhouse Blues
 - But although a great number of blues pianists had moved to the north, there also was another large group that played in the “barrelhouse jukes” of the levee, mining, turpentine, and sawmill camps on the southeast circuit. These pianists contributed to the development of a blues piano style called “Barrelhouse Blues”.
 - Barrelhouse blues were characterized by a regular quadruple meter with the left-hand playing a pattern called “stomping,” similar to ragtime. Sometimes this was varied by using a steady “walking bass” of broken or spread octaves moving through the blues harmonic progression.


41  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Boogie-Woogie and Barrelhouse Blues
 - The bass lines provided a strong rhythmic and harmonic foundation, and over them the right hand would play a highly syncopated melody.
 - Characteristic early recordings include *Barrel House Man* (1927) by Will Ezel and *The Dirty Dozen* (1929) by Speckled Red.
 - *The Dirty Dozen* – Speckled Red (1929)


42  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Ensemble Blues
 - In addition to working solo, blues pianists often teamed up with other musicians. Sometimes, these ensembles would be purely instrumental and sometimes they would play with other instrumentalists to provide accompaniment to singers.

– Many of these blues pianists went on to influence the development of other styles.

43  **The 1920s and Initial Expansion of Blues Style**

- Ensemble Blues
 - Through a combination of live entertainment and numerous recordings, the blues in a variety of formats had become a popular and well-known musical style by the end of the 1920s. But when the stock market crashed in 1929, most blues recording stopped, and even the most famous classic blues artists such as Ma Rainey had difficulty sustaining their careers.
 - For the most part, it was the jazz-blues singers who were able to survive the Depression.

44  **The 1930s and the Development of Urban Blues**

- In the early part of the decade, the most popular blues artists were the piano and guitar duo Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. They made their first recording in 1928, but stopped along with so many other musicians at the onset of the Depression.
- When money started flowing back, they were among the first to resume recording, with a classic version of *Midnight Hour Blues* issued in 1932.
 - *Midnight Hour Blues* - Leroy Carr & Scrapper Blackwell (1932)

45  **The 1940s and Four Important Bluesmen**

- Toward the end of the decade, there was a resurgence of interest in the rural style of blues and a new generation of blues singers from Mississippi, most famously...
 - Muddy Waters
 - *Rollin' Stone* (1950)
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_vsvX2qiLM
 - Little Walter
 - *My Babe* (1955)
 - Howlin' Wolf
 - *Smokestack Lightning* (1956)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1FK620bS7A>
 - T-Bone Walker
 - *Stormy Monday* (1947)

46  **Further Research**

- Movie: *Cadillac Records*
 - Rated: R (Intended for mature audiences)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1309MEQ4b30>

47  **Important Developments in the 1950s**

- Rhythm & Blues
 - Ever since the blues were first recorded in the 1920s, a few large companies such as Okeh and Columbia controlled the recordings. The recordings were segregated, and classified and marketed as “race” records.
 - After World War II, resistance to this segregated recording tradition laid the foundation for the development of the term “rhythm and blues.”
 - Although this term was free of racial connotations, the musical style was still aimed at segregated black audiences.

48  **Important Developments in the 1950s**

- Rhythm & Blues
 - This term was used to categorize a broad variety of musical styles, including not only the works of older artists such as Howlin' Wolf and T-Bone Walker but also the new, younger artists such as Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley.
 - Rhythm and blues used the harmonic scheme and the traditional formal pattern of the blues with its 12 bars divided into three four-bar phrases.
 - Accompanying the solo singer was an instrumental ensemble.

49 **Important Developments in the 1950s**

- Rhythm & Blues
 - The singers sang in the throaty and hoarse style of the blues singers and there was considerable use of ornamentation.
 - Additionally, although the instruments maintained a steady quadruple beat, the singers would use a more flexible approach, often singing slightly ahead of or slightly behind the beat. And although traditional blues had been sung to a slow tempo, the new rhythm and blues used a faster tempo with a heavy downbeat.

50 **The 1960s and British Blues**

- Building on the 1950s success and on the growing number of European blues fans, the decade of the 1960s witnessed a great resurgence of interest in the blues.

51 **The 1960s and British Blues**

- British Blues Imported to America
 - By the mid-1960s, the blues had completed its transatlantic cycle by returning to the United States through these blues-based English groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, Cream, Fleetwood Mac, and Jimi Hendrix (an American brought back to the United States as an imported act).
 - In their interviews, members of the groups openly avowed their debt to the African-American blues artists that they were emulating, and they also brought attention to these blues artists through the songwriters' credits on their albums.

52 **The 1960s and British Blues**

- British Blues Imported to America
 - American groups, particularly those coming out of the San Francisco acid rock scene such as The Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin with Big Brother and the Holding Company, continued the tradition by creating their highly amplified versions of both traditional blues and rhythm & blues.
 - As a result, there were more blues records in the pop music charts and on pop radio in the 1960s than in any decade before or since.

53 **The 1960s and British Blues**

- British Blues Imported to America
 - Through this process, thousands of European and American rock fans were exposed to both authentic blues and rhythm and blues and the new version of the blues as created by British and American rock 'n' roll groups.
 - By the end of the decade, the blues were an acknowledged and respected distinct musical tradition, a fact that was reflected in both the growing literature and research on the blues and in the 1969 three-day Michigan Ann Arbor Blues Festival, generally regarded as the first major national all-blues festival.

54 **The 1970s to the Present**

- American interest in the blues has continued to flourish. Following the 1969 Ann Arbor

Blues Festival, a series of pure blues festivals were established in cities across the country, attracting larger and larger audiences.

- The largest blues festival in the United States, the Chicago Blues Festival, drew seven hundred thousand people in 1990.

55  **Conclusion**

- As the new millennium begins, it appears that the blues may be enjoying more mainstream popularity than at any other time in their history.
- There is every reason to believe that the blues will continue to thrive.
- It may be in new forms and styles, but it will still be “the blues,” forever building on the musical legacy left by African-Americans in the South more than a century ago.

56  **Assignments**

- List five different types of Blues music.

- List five artists in the Blues music genre.

- List five albums in the Blues music genre.

- Do a listening report in MLA format of no more than ONE PAGE of any song in the Blues music genre.
 - Listening Report Example on the Music History portion of the Huron Bands Website.

- PAPER SUBMISSION OR E-MAIL DUE BY 3:00 P.M. THE DAY OF THE UNIT 05 TEST.
 - matthew.herr@huronbands.com
 - Microsoft Word Documents (.doc / .docx) and Portable Document Formats (.pdf) only.