



**HISTORY OF THE BLUES IN  
THREE PARTS**

**PART 1 – CIVIL WAR TO 1920s**

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# Introduction/Things to know

- Please silence all cell phones
- Refer to the email from ORICL for guidance on Inclement Weather and other ORICL policies.
- Participation is encouraged – sing with us, ask questions, be respectful of others
- Doug and Rob have been a part of the Knoxville Music Scene for over 20 years. We are both teachers. Rob teaches Guitar, Ukulele and Beginning Bass, Doug teaches Harmonica
- The Smoky Mountain Blues Society has been supporting local music on and off for over 20 years, first as the Knoxville Blues Society and now as the Smoky Mountain Blues Society
- This History of the Blues will be in three parts – Civil War to 1920s, 1920s through 1960s, 1960s to present day
- We will sing in this course..... starting now

# Field Hollers/Work Songs

- The staple of Work Songs, used to this day is “Call and Response”
- “Every Day -> Every Day I Have the Blues, that we just sang, is an example
- Swing Low Sweet Chariot is another example
- Not unique to blues, Call and Response is used in many styles of music

Spirituals

Gospel

Hymns

Rhythm & Blues

Rock ‘n Roll

Just to name a few

Used by vocals and instruments

# Field Hollers/Work Songs 2

- Field Hollers are also known as Work Songs
- Sung by slaves in the United States; after emancipation by forced laborers to accompany and pace work. Field Hollers helped pass the time and helped pace the movements of repetitive manual labor
- Also used to communicate (Follow the Drinking Gourd) and to vent feelings
- A line was sung by a leader, then all joined in an answer or a short chorus. This was repeated to pace the work – such as rowing a boat, picking cotton, etc.
- You hear this same idea in blues to this day

# Follow the Drinking Gourd

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Verse 1

When the sun goes back and the first quail calls

Follow the drinking gourd

The old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom

Follow the drinking gourd

[Chorus]

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd

For the old man is a-waitin' to carry you to freedom

Follow the drinking gourd

[Verse 2]

Now the riverbed makes a mighty fine road

Dead trees to show you the way

And it's left foot, peg foot, traveling on

Follow the drinking gourd

[Verse 3]

The river ends between two hills

Follow the drinking gourd

There's another river on the other side

Follow the drinking gourd

# Brief Intro to Rhythm and Chords

- Rhythm is the 'beat' of a song, tempo is the speed of the Rhythm. In bands, the drums and bass are commonly referred to as the 'Rhythm Section'
- Chords support the melodies of songs. Most modern Blues songs use chords rooted in the first, fourth and fifth notes of the Major or Minor Scale
- Most Blues, Pop, Bluegrass, Country styles are either in 3/4, 12/8, 4/4 time
- Demo time signatures – everybody clap!
- Amazing Grace is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time
- Thrill is Gone is in 4/4 time
- Sky is Crying is in 12/8 time
- Try figuring time signatures of songs you like to have fun and help develop your musical ear
- Polyrhythms – common in African Music are two rhythms played simultaneously. Let's try clapping this with 3 and 4 beat rhythms. Half the class on each.

# Origin of the term Blues

- According to the Encyclopedia Britannica the English Phrase “Blue Devils” referred to the hallucinations brought on by severe alcohol withdrawal. This was later shortened to “Blues” to describe states of depression, and later adapted as the “name for melancholic songs that the musical genre encapsulates”
- Origins of the blues are not documented well, but it is generally accepted that the blues originated after the Civil War by formerly enslaved African Americans working on plantations in the South
- Most plantation owners did not allow for music in the workplace, only at home and in the Church with one significant exception
- Plantation owners in the Louisiana owners did allow music which led to the development of Jazz in the New Orleans area which continues to be popular to this day.
- Early on, Blues was often referred to as “Race Music”

# W.C. Handy 1873 - 1958

- Referred to himself as the “Father of the Blues”
- He is credited with introducing the flat third and seventh notes we discussed earlier – these came to be known as “Blue Notes” and are still referred to this way.
- He is credited with introducing what we now know as “I-IV-V” blues in 1912 with the publication of “Memphis Blues”, which itself was credited as inspiration for the “Foxtrot” dance as created by Vernon and Irene Caste, a New York Dance Team
- Hit songs include Memphis Blues, St. Louis Blues, Beale Street Blues, Loveless Love
- W.C. Handy’s autobiography, “Father of the Blues” was published in 1941
- While Handy is credited with introducing 12 bar blues, the song “I got the Blues” published by A. Maggio in 1908 is a 12 bar blues song that predates Memphis Blues

# Early Blues Music

- Before the advent of the phonograph, music was published. This is how the music was distributed. W.C. Handy made most of his living as a publisher
- Tin Pan Alley, originating in the 1880s in New York City, was the dominant location for sheet music publishers through the years. It was strong through the 1950.
- W.C. Handy moved his publishing company to Tin Pan Alley in 1917. He published the songs of multiple artists
- Early Blues Artists included Lead Belly, Ma Rainey, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mamie Smith, W.C. Handy, Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters and others
- Early Blues Recordings – Crazy Blues by Mamie Smith is considered by many to be the first blues song recorded (1920) which sold over a million records. “Memphis Blues” is the earliest hit record with the word “Blues” in the title. It was released in 1914. “I Got the Blues” was a ragtime song published in 1908.