HISTORY OF THE BLUES IN TWO PARTS

PART 1 OF 2

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Introduction

- **Welcome all!** **Please silence cell phones during class**
- Participation is encouraged – sing with us, ask questions, be respectful of others
- Doug and Rob have been part of the Knoxville Music Scene for over 20 years. We are both teachers. Rob teaches Guitar, Ukulele and Beginning Bass, Doug teaches Harmonica. Business cards are available at the podium. We have been giving Blues History presentations for approx. twenty years
- The Smoky Mountain Blues Society has been supporting local music for over 20 years, first as the Knoxville Blues Society and now as the Smoky Mountain Blues Society – www.smokymountainblues.org
- This History of the Blues will be in two parts – Early Days through mid 20th Century, Mid 20th Century to present day. The presentations along with links to suggested listenng are available at www.blueseducation.com
- **We will sing in this course..... starting now**

Field Hollers/Work Songs

- Field Hollers are also known as Work Songs
- Sung by slaves during 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 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 countless blues songs to this day –
  - I got my Mojo Working is an example….. Let us sing!
- The staple of Work Songs, used to this day, is “Call and Response”
- Call and Response can also be verses sung by a soloist, and a chorus that repeats itself and is sung by all as in “I Got My Mojo Working”, that we just sang, is an example

Field Hollers/Work Songs 2

- Swing Low Sweet Chariot is another example
- Not unique to blues, Call and Response is used in many styles of music

  Spirituals – Swing Low Sweet Chariot

  Rhythm & Blues Mustang Sally

  Rock ‘n Rolll - My Generation
- Just to name a few
- Used by vocals and instruments in all genres of music
- Listen for it when you are listening to music
- Demonstration – Doug and Rob will converse with the guitar and harmonica

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 with enslaved African Americans working on plantations in the South
- Most plantation owners did not allow drumming in the workplace
- Drumming was only allowed at home and in the Church with one significant exception - Louisiana
- Plantation owners in the Louisiana owners did allow drumming which led to the development of Jazz in the New Orleans area. A style that helps define the area to this day
- Early on, Blues was often referred to as “Race Music” This term lasted into the mid 20th Century.

Brief Intro to Rhythm and Chords

- Rhythm is the ‘beat’ of a song, tempo is the speed of the Rhythm.
- Most Blues, Pop, Country and other Western Music styles are either in 3/4, 4/4, or 12/8 time
- Amazing Grace is in 3/4 time – three beats to as measure
- Thrill is Gone is in 4/4 time – four beats to a measure
- Sky is Crying, and many slow blues songs are in 12/8 time - four beats to a measure divided in groups of three beats called triplets
- The shuffle rhythm is the most prevalent rhythm in blues – technically using the first and third pulse of a triplet – “Long-short Long-short Long-short Long-short, etc.
- Types of shuffles include – Fast Shuffle, Train Shuffle, Flat Tire Shuffle, Jump Blues
- Other popular rhythms include straight eighths, straight quarters, Bossa Nova
    - **Demonstration of time signatures – everybody clap!**
- Try figuring out time signatures of songs you like for fun and to help develop your musical ear
- Check out playlists at Blueseducation.com. Playlist 3 includes original and “modern” interpretations of songs such as I Gotta Move and Where Did You Sleep Last Night

Early Blues Music

- Before the advent of the phonograph, music was published. This is how the music was distributed. W.C. Handy, who referred to himself as the “Father of the Blues”, 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 1950s.
- W.C. Handy moved 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.

The Great Migration

- Also known as the Great Northern Migration or the Black Migration
- Typically thought of as starting in the 1910s and continuing through the 1970s
- Coming out of the 19th Century the South was heavily segregated,. Opportunity was severely limited due to Jim Crow laws and the history of slave ownership.
- The migration was enabled by the expansion of, and access to, the railroads. Other forms of expansion included the steamboat and the automobile to a far lesser degree..
- 6 million African Americans moved from the rural South to the Northeast, Midwest and West expanding their blues and their history during this period – 1910s though the 1970s.
- Music is always evolving. “The one constant in life is change”. Blues is no different. Blues styles evolved as blues artists and enthusiasts moved to different cities with different cultures. This continues to this day, and will continue in the future.

John and Alan Lomax

- John Lomax, Sr. documented a variety of musical genres. In association with the Library of Congress, he began traversing the South with a portable recording machine in 1933, recording local music and musicians with his son, Alan, and his wife, Ruby
- They recorded Lead Belly in prison in 1933. In 1934 they returned with better equipment and recorded hundreds of songs. When Lead Belly was released from prison, he became a driver and assistant to John Lomax for a short time. Signature songs include “Midnight Special” and “Goodnight Irene”
- Alan Lomax is credited with the early recording, and promoting of, Robert Johnson, Lead Belly, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Muddy Waters, He also recorded folk artists in America and Europe.
- Recordings, Photos, and detailed history is available at https://www.loc.gov/collections/lomax/
- Recordings are the predominant way of making music available for public consumption. The first recordings were made on wax cylinders developed in the 1890s. What are some of the ways you listen to music currently?