

### **Blues Project Reports**

Throughout Black History Month (February), we will be taking a look at a type of music called the Blues. The story of the blues *is* the story of black America. By listening and studying this music we will be able to discover, and more importantly feel, the plight of African-Americans. This year, we will focus on the Legacy of the Blues as our unit theme. Someone's "legacy" is what a person has left for future to generations, so we will be taking special interest in how the blues has contributed to our culture and influenced our music today.

Each day to begin class, we will be learning a little bit about this important and influential style of music. We will learn about where the blues came from, the culture that surrounds the blues, and the legacy of the blues has left us. For 40 points, your job is to write a one-page report on the following topics relating to the blues. These reports should be typed, double-spaced, using 1 inch margins, and 12 point, Times New Roman font. **A bibliography in MLA format must be included** (remember to refer to your assignment notebook or the Purdue OWL website on how to format your sources, and Wikipedia should not be cited). Each student will be assigned a different topic and due date. On the day your report is due, you will read it aloud at the beginning of class. **For an additional 20 points of extra credit (maximum), you may also bring in an original full-color drawing/painting/sculpture relating to your report as a visual aid.** You will be penalized 10 points for each day your report is late.

I will pick the best of these reports to be read at the Blues Project final concert on March 10th, in front of hundreds of people. If your report is chosen to be read or displayed at the concert finale, you will receive 20 bonus points. With that in mind, please keep them approximately one page in length and include any interesting facts that you feel an audience would enjoy hearing. Please use your own words, and if you want to quote an outside source, you must cite the source appropriately in your report.

## **Songs of Slaves - Field Hollers, Work Songs and Spirituals**

*Van Morrison - "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"*

The music that is known as the blues was born from the songs slaves used to sing while working in the fields throughout the American south. Work songs, Field Hollers, and spirituals all helped to form the emotional, musical, and rhythmic DNA of the blues. They often were sung in call and response style, with a solid sense of rhythm, and with many vocal embellishments. Tell us more about these early slave songs, especially how and why they were sung,

## **Sharecropping and the Delta Blues**

*Big Bill Broonzy - "When Will I Get to be Called a Man?"*

After legal slavery ended, most African American still lived under a form of economic slavery called sharecropping. Economically, they were often still tied to southern planters, and socially, they still faced racism and legal prejudice in what were known as Jim Crow laws. Tell us about how the share cropping system worked, and why most workers felt like it was little to no improvement over slavery. Also, address Jim Crow laws, how they got their name, and how they affected African Americans.

## **The Great Migration**

*Muddy Waters - "Baby Please Don't Go"*

Between 1910-1930 several million Americans made their way from the hard life and poor wages of the South up north to Chicago to try and make a better life for themselves. When they came they carried with them their music, ideas, possessions, and superstition. This brought their culture and their blues to new audiences and ushered in a new era in music. Tell us more about this phenomenon. Why did it happen? What did southerners hear about these northern cities that made them sound so appealing? Did these southerners find what they were looking for?

## **Blues to Rock and Roll**

*Elvis - "That's All Right, Mama" (Arthur Crudup)*

In 1954, a southern white boy from Memphis named Elvis Presley released first single, "That's Alright, Mama." Some scholars claim this is the first Rock and Roll song ever. Is it? The song itself was originally written and recorded by bluesman Arthur Crudup seven years earlier. Furthermore, by the time Elvis came along there were already a plethora of rhythm and blues artists playing songs that sound a lot like what eventually was coined Rock and Roll in the early 50s. Where did Rock and roll come from? What is the relationship of blues to rock and roll?

## **WC Handy – The Father of the Blues**

*Chuck Berry - "St. Louis Blues" (WC Handy)*

W.C. Handy is known as the “Father of the Blues” because he introduced the blues to worldwide audiences. Handy took the music from the fields of the American south and refined it, transcribed it, and made it palatable for the masses. Handy published St. Louis Blues in 1914, and soon everyone in America knew the song. It standardized our modern blues format and became a worldwide sensation. Tell us more about the “Father of the Blues,” how he first heard this music, and the affect his biggest hit, “St. Louis Blues,” had on the world.

## **British Blues Revival - Rolling Stones**

*Rolling Stones - "Little Red Rooster" (Dixon/Wolf)*

In the early 1960s, the blues experienced a revival across the Atlantic Ocean in England. New British rock bands like the Yardbirds, the Animals, and the Zombies began listening to and performing songs from early American bluesmen like Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. The most successful of these bands were the Rolling Stones, and one of their earliest singles was an old Howlin Wolf song called “Little Red Rooster.” It raced up the British charts, becoming the first and only blues song to go to #1 in the UK. They actually traveled all the way to Chicago to record in the legendary Chess recording studio, home to so many of their blues idols. Explain this British awakening to the blues. Be sure to address the Rolling Stones specifically - how the blues was important to them and how they respect they paid the bluesmen who came before.

## **Blind Lemon Jefferson**

*Beatles - Matchbox (Blind Lemon Jefferson)*

In the 1960s a large number of British rockers fell in love with the blues. Bands like Fleetwood Mac, the Rolling Stones, Cream, the Animals, and others idolized these early blues men, covering their songs, providing them royalties, and offering them a level of respect, oddly enough, not given to them back in the states. As early as 1962, a band called the Beatles was playing around Liverpool, England and began working an old blues song called “Matchbox Blues” into their act. Tell us about the history of this song, and about the artist that originally performed it, Blind Lemon Jefferson.

## **Clapton and Skip James**

*Cream - "I'm So Glad" (Skip James)*

In 1966, a British super group called Cream (which included an amazing guitarist named Eric Clapton) recorded an old blues song called “I’m so Glad” and because of the immense popularity of the band and their success, the royalties from the recording was able to help to support Skip James, the man who originally wrote the song. Tell us the details of this story, and about the respect and reverence that Eric Clapton and other English performers have for these original bluesmen like Skip James.

## **Jimi Hendrix – Psychedelic Bluesman**

*Jimi Hendrix - "Killing Floor" (Wolf)*

Thanks to the bands like the Rolling Stones, the Animals, Cream and others, the blues experienced a revival in the 1960s. Jimi Hendrix had been playing in blues clubs throughout the south as a sideman, but when Chas Chandler (bassist for the Animals) heard Jimi Hendrix for the first time he knew that England was the place that would truly appreciate this psychedelic bluesman. And he was right. After he made it big in the UK, he returned to America to reintroduce himself to his home country at the Monterey Pop Festival, and fittingly enough, he chose this old Howlin' Wolf song to be his opening number. Explain what the blues meant to Jimi Hendrix, how it influenced his playing, and how he influenced American popular music.

## **Blind Willie McTell and the Piedmont**

*Allman Brothers - "Statesboro Blues" (Blind Willie McTell)*

The Piedmont region of the United States developed a slightly different brand of blues. While certainly influenced by sounds from the Mississippi Delta, piedmont musicians developed in the shadow of the Appalachians and mixed with other white performers to create a more intricate style of guitar playing, similar to that of what we might call folk or country music today.

Bluesmen from this region, especially Blind Willie McTell, have influence countless rock artists, like the Allman Brothers Band, who covered McTell's "Statesboro Blues" in 1971. The Allman Brothers formed in Georgia, the home of McTell, and were one of very few integrated bands, especially in the American south. Tell us about the Piedmont region, blind Willie McTell, and how the Allman Brothers helped to carry on the blues legacy.

## **King Records**

*Aerosmith - "Train Kept a Rollin'" (Tiny Bradshaw)*

In the 1940's a unique record label was formed in Cincinnati, one that integrated white country artists and black R&B acts. Syd Nathan's King Records was possibly the first integrated record label in the US, and certainly one of the most important labels in creating Rock and Roll. Tell us the story of King Records, what it meant to black artists, and how it helped to integrate popular music.

## **Robert Johnson**

*Led Zeppelin - "Traveling Riverside Blues" (Robert Johnson)*

Maybe the most important bluesman of all time was Robert Johnson. The legend is that he sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads. Tell us about this legend. Is there any truth to it? What evidence is there to support it? What were the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death? Maybe the most important thing about Robert Johnson, however, is how his legacy has helped to build the foundation for modern blues and rock. What makes Robert Johnson so special, influential, and relevant today?

## **The Legacy of Texas Blues**

*Stevie Ray Vaughan w/ Albert King - "Call it Stormy Monday" (T-Bone Walker)*

In the 1980's a white guitarist from Texas reawakened the world to blues music. Stevie Ray Vaughan came from a long line of Texas bluesmen. Trace SRV's musical roots back through T-Bone Walker to Blind Lemon Jefferson. How was the blues important to Stevie's development and how has he shown respect to those bluesmen who had gone before?

## **BB King**

*U2 w/ BB King - "When Love Comes to Town"*

First known as the "Pepticon Boy," Riley B. King got his start singing jingles on the radio. Tell me how this world famous bluesman came from humble beginnings in Mississippi Fields to international recognition. He is now known as the Ambassador of the Blues and plays to sold out crowds around the world on most nights of the year. What makes the man and his music so special?

## **Rap is modern Blues**

*NAS - "Bridging the Gap" (sampling of Muddy Waters)*

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the blues provided a means of self-expression for black America, and now Rap and Hip Hop provide that same outlet for African-Americans to express their situation. Rapper Chuck D once said, "Rap music is like CNN for black people." How did rap music come about? How are blues and rap related? What aspects of rap music are directly linked to the blues legacy?

## **Lead Belly**

*Nirvana - "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" (Leadbelly)*

The story of Huddie Ledbetter, his stints in jail, his larger-than-life personality and performances are all stuff of blues legend. Tell me about Lead Belly (as he was called) and his amazing knack for getting in trouble and getting out of it. Lead Belly is important to the legacy of the Blues in part because he brought the southern blues to New York and other northern cities for the first time, played concerts in Europe, and helped to begin the love affair that the British had with the blues for generations. How did Lead Belly carry on the blues legacy, preserving and passing on the legacy of the blues, while also leaving an important legacy of his own?

## **Documenting the Blues**

*Moby - "Trouble No More" (Vera Hall)*

The 90's saw the emergence of electronica and techno in the mainstream music scene and one of the leading artists in this genre was Moby. His 1999 Grammy-nominated album, *Play*, utilized many old gospel and blues samples from the field recordings of John and Alan Lomax. The Lomaxes were instrumental in preserving many of the most authentic recordings of early African-American music. Tell us about their story and why they felt this music is important to document and study.

## **The Boll Weevil**

*White Stripes - "Boll Weevil Blues" (Leadbelly)*

In the early 20th century an unwelcomed visitor invaded the American South. It was a small insect called the Boll Weevil. It fed on cotton, and by the 1920's had completely devastated the southern cotton industry. Tell us about the Boll Weevil infestation, how it affected southern black farmers, and how it influenced the spread of the blues in the US.

## **The Great Mississippi River Flood and Bessie Smith**

*Kenny Wayne Shepherd - "Backwater Blues" (Bessie Smith)*

In 1927, the American south experienced the greatest natural disaster in US history, the Great Mississippi River Flood. What happened along the Mississippi in 1927 and how it affected African Americans in the south. While the events inspired many songs, possibly the most famous was by Bessie Smith. Bessie was the first superstar of the blues, and is responsible for some of the earliest recorded blues. On radio and on screen, she introduced millions of Americans to the blues and spread this music throughout the country. Tell us about her life and importance to black history.

## **Spirituals and Gospel**

*Johnny Lang - "I Believe"*

Before there was the blues, there were spirituals. African Slaves were brought to this country and encouraged to convert to Christianity. The slaves found a lot to like about this new religion, and as more and more converted, it became a centerpiece of the African-American culture. Masters would often allow slaves time to worship and sing, and while the singing styles were the product of their African roots, the songs themselves celebrated their new faith and mixed in some European influences. Tell me about these spirituals, what they sounded like, how they developed, and their importance and influence.

## **Sum it Up – Legacy of the Blues**

*Buddy Guy - "Who's Gonna Wear Those Shoes"*

Sum it up. After experiencing the Blues Project this month, what can you take away from this experience? What have we learned? Why is the Blues important to history? What do you think is the Legacy of the Blues?