

Week 3 Musical Examples

1. Blind Blake- *Blind Arthur's Breakdown*-No blues artist was as influential, sold as many records, and remains so cloaked in mystery as Blind Blake. Likely born in the early 1890's, Arthur Blake was from Jacksonville, Florida, according to *The Paramount Book of the Blues*. However, a Paramount record ad in the *Chicago Defender* said he was from Tampa, and some researchers have speculated that Blake may have been from, or spent considerable time in, the South Georgia Sea Islands, given his ease with the Geechee dialect on *Southern Rag*.

From: *Ragtime Guitar's Foremost Fingerpicker* Yazoo Records

2. Blind Boy Fuller-*Keep On Truckin*-was one of the most recorded artists of his time and by far the most popular and influential Piedmont blues player of all time. Fuller could play in multiple styles: slide, ragtime, pop, and blues were all enhanced by his National steel guitar.

From: *Truckin' My Blues Away* Yazoo Records

3. Reverend Gary Davis-*Say No To The Devil*-In his prime of life, which is to say the late '20s, the Reverend Gary Davis was one of the two most renowned practitioners of the East Coast school of ragtime guitar; 35 years later, despite two decades spent playing on the streets of Harlem in New York, he was still one of the giants in his field, playing before thousands of people at a time, and an inspiration to dozens of modern guitarist/singers including Bob Dylan, Taj Mahal, and Donovan; and Jorma Kaukonen, David Bromberg, and Ry Cooder, who studied with Davis.

From: *Say No To The Devil*- Bluesville/Original Blues Classics

4. Blind Willie McTell-*Broke Down Engine*- Willie Samuel McTell was one of the blues' greatest guitarists, and also one of the finest singers ever to work in blues. A major figure with a local following in Atlanta from the 1920s onward, he recorded dozens of sides throughout the 1930s under a multitude of names — all the better to juggle "exclusive" relationships with many different record labels at once — including Blind Willie, Blind Sammie, Hot Shot Willie, and Georgia Bill, as a backup musician to Ruth Mary Willis.

From: *The Early Years: 1927-33* Yazoo Records

5. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee-*Trouble in Mind*- The joyous whoop that Sonny Terry naturally emitted between raucous harp blasts was as distinctive a signature sound as can possibly be imagined. Only a handful of blues harmonica players wielded as much of a lasting influence on the genre as did the

sightless Terry (Buster Brown, for one, copied the whoop and all), who recorded some fine urban blues as a bandleader in addition to serving as guitarist Brownie McGhee's longtime duet partner. Started with Piedmont pioneer Blind Boy Fuller, first recording with the guitarist in 1937 for Vocalion.

Walter Brown McGhee grew up in Kingsport, TN. He contracted polio at the age of four, which left him with a serious limp and plenty of time away from school to practice the guitar chords that he'd learned from his father, Duff McGhee.

Together, McGhee and Terry worked for decades in an acoustic folk-blues bag, singing ancient ditties like "John Henry" and "Pick a Bale of Cotton" for appreciative audiences worldwide. But McGhee was capable of a great deal more. Throughout the immediate postwar era, he cut electric blues and R&B on the New York scene, even enjoying a huge R&B hit in 1948 with "My Fault" for Savoy (Hal "Cornbread" Singer handled tenor sax duties on the 78).

From: *Absolutely Best* Fuel 2000

6. Cannon's Jug Stompers-*Money Never Runs Out*- Gus Cannon was the best known of all the jugband musicians and a seminal figure on the Memphis blues scene. His recollections have also provided us with much of our knowledge of the earliest days of the blues in the Mississippi Delta. Cannon led his Jug Stompers on banjo and jug in a historic series of dates for the Victor label in 1928-1930. The ensemble usually included a second banjoist or guitarist, one of whom often doubled on kazoo, and the legendary Noah Lewis on harmonica. The jug-band style enjoyed a revival during the folk boom of the '50s and '60s, resulting in an ultra-rare Gus Cannon album on Stax, of all labels, after his "Walk Right In" became the nation's best-selling record for the Rooftop Singers in 1963.

From: *The Best Of Cannon's Jug Stompers* Yazoo Records

7. Memphis Jug Band-*She Stays Out All Night*- One of the definitive jug bands of the '20s and early '30s, this seminal group was comprised of Will Shade, Will Weldon, Hattie Hart, Charlie Polk, Walter Horton, and others, in various configurations.

Guitarist/harpist Will Shade formed the Memphis Jug Band in the Beale Street section of Memphis in the mid-'20s. A few years after their formation, Shade signed a contract with Victor Records in 1927. Over the next seven years, Shade and the Memphis Jug Band recorded nearly 60 songs for the record label. During this time, a number of musicians passed through the group, including Big Walter Horton, Furry Lewis, and Casey Bill Weldon. Throughout all of the various lineup incarnations, Shade provided direction for the group. The Memphis Jug Band played a freewheeling mixture of blues, ragtime, vaudeville, folk, and jazz, which was all delivered with good-time humor. That loose spirit kept the

group and its records popular throughout the early '30s.

From: *Memphis Jug Band* Yazoo Records

8. Furry Lewis-*Mistreatin' Mama*- Furry Lewis was the only blues singer of the 1920s to achieve major media attention in the 1960s and '70s. One of the most recorded of Memphis-based guitarists of the late '20s, Lewis's subsequent fame 40 years later was based largely on the strength of those early sides. One of the very best blues storytellers, and an extremely nimble-fingered guitarist right into his seventies, he was equally adept at blues and ragtime, and made the most out of an understated, rather than an overtly flamboyant style.

From: *In His Prime 1927-1928* Yazoo Records

9. Memphis Minnie-*Frisco Town*- Tracking down the ultimate woman blues guitar hero is problematic because woman blues singers seldom recorded as guitar players and woman guitar players (such as Rosetta Tharpe and Sister O.M. Terrell) were seldom recorded playing blues. Excluding contemporary artists, the most notable exception to this pattern was Memphis Minnie. The most popular and prolific blueswoman outside the vaudeville tradition, she earned the respect of critics, the support of record-buying fans, and the unqualified praise of the blues artists she worked with throughout her long career. Despite her Southern roots and popularity, she was as much a Chicago blues artist as anyone in her day. Big Bill Broonzy recalls her beating both him and Tampa Red in a guitar contest and claims she was the best woman guitarist he had ever heard.

From: *Before The Blues Volume 3* Yazoo Records

10. Blind Lemon Jefferson-*That Black Snake Moan*- Country blues guitarist and vocalist Blind Lemon Jefferson is indisputably one of the main figures in country blues. He was of the highest in many regards, being one of the founders of Texas blues (along with Texas Alexander), one of the most influential country bluesmen of all time, one of the most popular bluesmen of the 1920s, and the first truly commercially successful male blues performer. Up until Jefferson's achievements, the only real successful blues recordings were by women performers, including Bessie Smith and Ida Cox, who usually sang songs written by others and accompanied by a band. With Jefferson came a blues artist who was solo, self-accompanied, and performing a great deal of original material in addition to the more familiar repertoire of folk standards and shouts. These originals include his most well-known songs: "Matchbox Blues," "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," and "Black Snake Moan."

From: *Blind Lemon Jefferson* Fantasy / Milestone

11. Blind Willie Johnson-*Nobody's Fault But Mine*- Seminal gospel-blues artist Blind Willie Johnson is regarded as one of the greatest bottleneck slide guitarists. Yet the Texas street-corner evangelist is known as much for his powerful and fervent gruff voice as he is for his ability as a guitarist. He most often sang in a rough, bass voice (only occasionally delivering in his natural tenor) with a volume meant to be heard over the sounds of the streets. Johnson recorded a total of 30 songs during a three-year period and many of these became classics of the gospel-blues, including "Jesus Make up My Dying Bed," "God Don't Never Change," and his most famous, "Dark Was the Night — Cold Was the Ground."

From: *Praise God I'm Satisfied* Yahoo Records

12. Lightnin' Hopkins-*Blues In The Bottle*- Sam Hopkins was a Texas country bluesman of the highest caliber whose career began in the 1920s and stretched all the way into the 1980s. Along the way, Hopkins watched the genre change remarkably, but he never appreciably altered his mournful Lone Star sound, which translated onto both acoustic and electric guitar. Hopkins' nimble dexterity made intricate boogie riffs seem easy, and his fascinating penchant for improvising lyrics to fit whatever situation might arise made him a beloved blues troubadour.

Hopkins' brothers John Henry and Joel were also talented bluesmen, but it was Sam who became a star. In 1920, he met the legendary Blind Lemon Jefferson at a social function, and even got a chance to play with him. Later, Hopkins served as Jefferson's guide. In his teens, Hopkins began working with another pre-war great, singer Texas Alexander, who was his cousin. A mid-'30s stretch in Houston's County Prison Farm for the young guitarist interrupted their partnership for a time, but when he was freed, Hopkins hooked back up with the older bluesman.

From: *The Complete Prestige Bluesville Recordings (Disc 2)* Fantasy / Prestige

13. Texas Alexander-*Levee Camp Blues*- A primal, stirring blues voice, Alexander was well known in the Brazos River bottomlands when he started recording in 1927. From bluesmen like Lightnin' Hopkins and Lowell Fulson comes a verbal image of this big-voiced master of blues song craft standing on a wagon bed at a country fair or picnic. His vibrant tenor, one step away from a field holler, rang out over the revelry as he improvised verse after verse.

His early records for Okeh are notable not only for the personal originality of his songs, but for the musical motifs against which they are set. Unable to play himself, Alexander used a variety of accompanists. On disc these range from the brilliant guitar work of Little Hat Jones, Lonnie Johnson and Eddie Lang to the string band blues of the Mississippi Sheiks and the full on jazz of King Oliver's New Orleans band.

From: *Before The Blues Volume 3* Yazoo Records