

Week 3 Early Blues Continued, Musical Styles and Geography

I. Piedmont Blues (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/socult/music/piedmnt.htm> , <http://www.io.com/~tbone1/blues/ECblz/what.html> ,

- A. Musically, Piedmont Blues describes the shared style of musicians from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia as well as others from as far afield as Florida, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.
- B. Piedmont usually displayed greater instrumental virtuosity, if less passion, than their Mississippi cousins.
- C. Piedmont refers to a wide assortment of aesthetic values, performance techniques, and shared repertoire rooted in common geographical, historical, and sociological circumstances.
- D. Is thought to have developed about ten or fifteen years after blues in Mississippi and Texas.
- E. Bruce Bastin, in his fantastic book *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast speculates* that the string band tradition may have been stronger in the Southeast, hindering the development and/or popularization of the blue, or that the older music still suited the recreational needs of the listener.
- F. When blues was recorded in the twenties, the Piedmont blues had had less time to evolve before the style was formalized on commercial recordings than other folk blues forms did. This is likely why pre-blues forms are more common on records and (one presumes) in artists' repertoires from the Southeast

G. From the eastern South musicians like Josh White, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee went to New York, where they figured in the folk-music revival.

H. Guitar style employs a complex fingerpicking method in which a regular, alternating-thumb bass pattern supports a melody on treble strings, thought to be an adaptation of African-American banjo playing: the thumb plays rhythm on the bass strings and two, three, or even four fingers pick the others, though a slide is often used. (this style does not readily lend itself to amplification and could be a reason why few Piedmont artists recorded on electric guitar with any regularity; and could be why the Piedmont blues never moved North to spawn a new style; Chicago blues came from the Delta, West Coast blues came from Texas, but no parallel New York blues ever really developed.

I. The repertoires of most Piedmont bluesmen have a definite songster quality. This is nothing unique to the East Coast, of course. About half of Charlie Patton's records are non-blues; Johnny Shines has said that Robert Johnson could and did play anything from country music to polkas; Texan Mance Lipscomb was more songster than bluesman; etc etc etc.

Important Musicians

1. Blind Blake
2. Blind Boy Fuller
3. Revered Blind Gary Davis, and
4. Blind Willie McTell

II. Memphis Blues (http://www.cr.nps.gov/delta/blues/schools/memphis_school.htm)

A. In the 1890s Beale Street became the center of fashionable nightlife among blacks in Memphis.

B. Vaudeville theaters such as the Lincoln opened on and behind Beale Street, drawing crowds to the attractions.

C. During the 1920s, due to Memphis's large, relatively affluent black population, the great classic blues singers - including Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and local legend Alberta Hunter - frequently played Beale Street.

D. These visiting stars introduced the songs of Tin Pan Alley to the Deep South and in turn learned regional favorites.

E. Prior to the onset of the Great Depression between 1927 and 1930, Memphis was visited by field units (Victor, Okeh, Vocalion, Columbia, Paramount, and many others) of northern recording companies scouted regional talent in an attempt to develop new stars.

F. The field units realized a greater profit from self-accompanied musicians than from female singers backed by expensive musicians' union orchestras.

G. Memphis was the hub of the Midsouth, and advertisements in local papers, on radio, and by word-of-mouth among musicians drew performers trying to get record deals to recording sessions in public venues like the Peabody Hotel and the Memphis Auditorium.

H. Twenty years would pass before blues musicians could record in a permanent studio in Memphis. Sun Studio at 706 Union Avenue was built by Memphis sound engineer Sam Phillips, whose Sun Records label became home to B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Ike Turner, and many other blues artists who would become famous during the 1950s and 1960s.

I. Important artists.

1. Cannon's Jug Stompers
2. W.C. Handy
3. Memphis Jug Band
4. Memphis Minnie

III. Texas blues

A. A geographical sub-genre earmarked by a more relaxed, swinging feel than other styles of blues, Texas Blues encompasses a number of style variations and has a long, distinguished history.

B. Its earliest incarnation occurred in the mid 1920s, featuring acoustic guitar work rich in filigree patterns, almost an extension of the vocals rather than merely a strict accompaniment to it.

C. This version of Texas blues embraced both the songster and country-blues traditions, with its lyrics relying less on affairs of the heart than in other forms.

D. The next stage of development in the region's sound came after World War II, bringing forth a fully electric style that featured jazzy, single-string soloing over predominantly horn-driven backing.

E. The style stays current with a raft of regional performers primarily working in a small combo context.

F. Important Artists

1. Blind Lemon Jefferson
2. Texas Alexander

3. Blind Willie Johnson
4. Lightnin' Hopkins