

BLUES

Washington Irving – credited with using the term “the blues” in 1807

- blues not always “old person on guitar” singing about work
- songs with “blues” in the title may or may not be a blues or blues form
- can be slow or fast, subject matter may be happy, sad
- vocal inflections often imitated by instrumentalists

Form – originally sung in unison

- later developed AAB form; often 12 measures or 12 BAR BLUES

Lyrics – typically poetic rhythm (for example, iambic pentameter)

- instruments fill-in gaps at ends of phrases
- emotional (not necessarily work songs, as these are functional)

W.C. Handy – called “Father of the Blues”

- wrote “Memphis Blues” (played by Europe’s Hellfighters) and “St. Louis Blues”
- made money from composing/publishing

BLUE NOTES

- notes flatted when compared with Western harmony
- book says flat fifth, but ALSO FLAT THIRD AND SEVENTH
- How to Achieve Instrumentally: piano plays two notes; horn bends w/lip; string pull or slide

MALE BLUES SINGERS – typically rural style

- Robert Johnson, Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly), Blind Lemon Jefferson
- important later vocalists: Joe Turner, Jimmy Rushing, Joe Williams, Jimmy Witherspoon

Blues migrated to Chicago? Maybe. Recorded there...for sure.

FEMALE BLUES SINGERS – typically urban style

Their work became the meeting ground between blues and jazz at the time.

- race records (Black Swan) – FLETCHER HENDERSON
- Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith – vaudeville singers (define vaudeville)

Ma Rainey – 1886, Columbus, GA; worked circuses and theater circuit

- interviewed: learned blues in 1902 in MO; mentions 12 bar format

Bessie Smith – no relation to Mamie Smith

- Born in TN; multi-thematic vaudeville songs; came into contact with jazz musicians around 1912
- said to have the dynamic range of an opera singer; control; exquisite phrasing
- CD TRACK 4 – Empty Bed Blues
- first recording in 1923; starred in *St. Louis Blues* (1929) short film

Ethel Waters

- not a shouter like Bessie; smoother; one writer notes she was influenced by horns and church singing
- sang with Goodman, Dorsey bros., and appeared on Broadway and in feature films
- nominated for Academy Award for supporting role in *Pinky* (1949)