

BARBARA DANE

SINGS THE BLUES with 6 & 12 string guitar FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2471



BARBARA DANE

SINGS THE BLUES WITH SIX AND TWELVE-STRING GUITAR

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 164-1530
©1964 FOLKWAYS RECORDS AND SERVICE CORP.
43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., U.S.A. 10023

You Don't Know Me
I Just Want To Make Love To You
Come Back, Baby
Stranger's Blues
Victim To the Blues
Way Behind The Sun

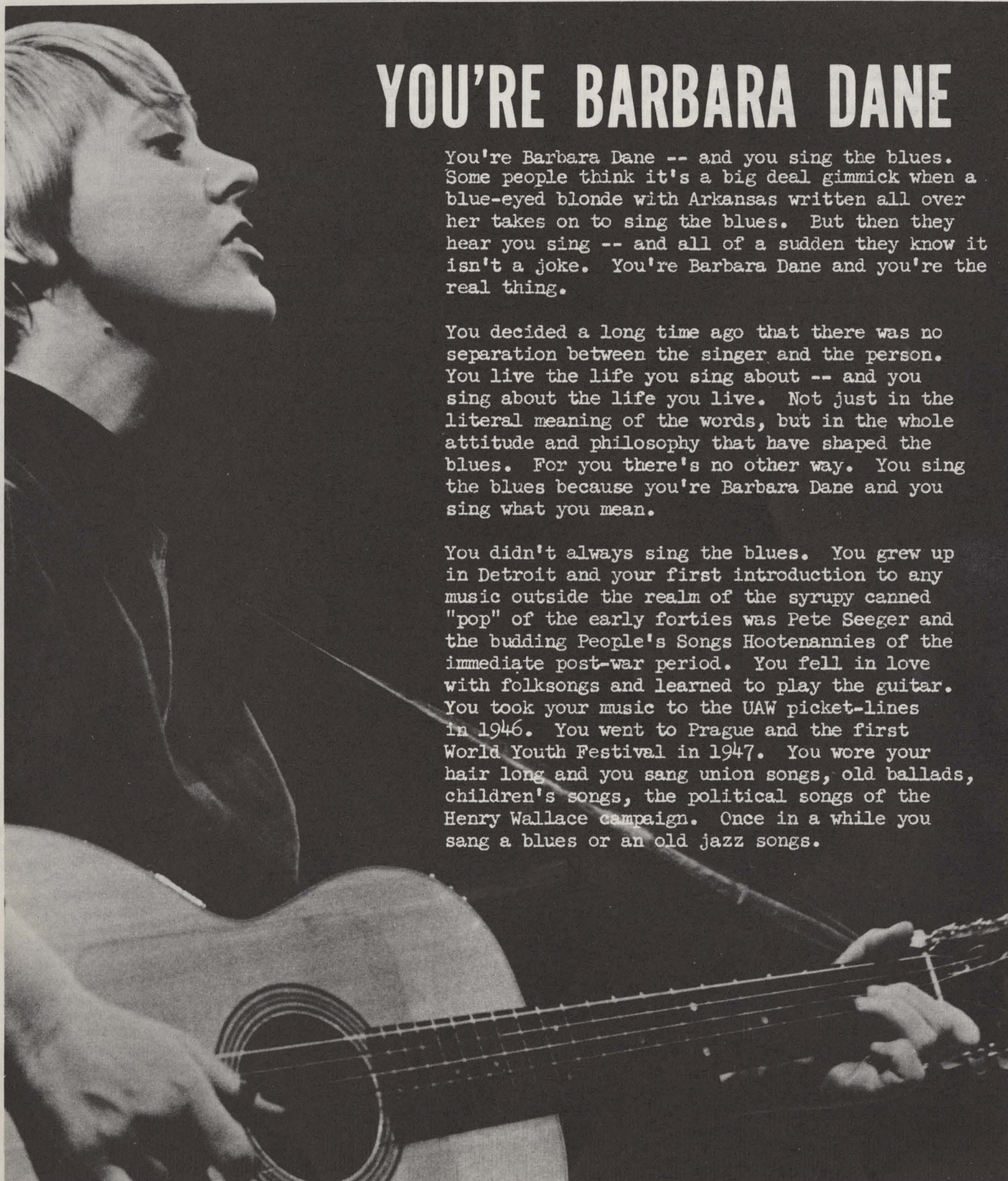
Special Delivery Blues
It Hurts Me, Too
Come On In (There Ain't Nobody Here But Me)
Hard, Oh Lord
Working People's Blues
Dink's Blues

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

PROPERTY OF
FOLKLIFE PROJECT
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM MARSHALL

BARBARA DANE

SINGS THE BLUES



YOU'RE BARBARA DANE

You're Barbara Dane -- and you sing the blues. Some people think it's a big deal gimmick when a blue-eyed blonde with Arkansas written all over her takes on to sing the blues. But then they hear you sing -- and all of a sudden they know it isn't a joke. You're Barbara Dane and you're the real thing.

You decided a long time ago that there was no separation between the singer and the person. You live the life you sing about -- and you sing about the life you live. Not just in the literal meaning of the words, but in the whole attitude and philosophy that have shaped the blues. For you there's no other way. You sing the blues because you're Barbara Dane and you sing what you mean.

You didn't always sing the blues. You grew up in Detroit and your first introduction to any music outside the realm of the syrupy canned "pop" of the early forties was Pete Seeger and the budding People's Songs Hootenannies of the immediate post-war period. You fell in love with folksongs and learned to play the guitar. You took your music to the UAW picket-lines in 1946. You went to Prague and the first World Youth Festival in 1947. You wore your hair long and you sang union songs, old ballads, children's songs, the political songs of the Henry Wallace campaign. Once in a while you sang a blues or an old jazz songs.

But you didn't really take to singing the blues until 1955. You were in Berkeley, California, by then and you started singing with some of the Dixieland groups around. Dick Oxtot. Turk Murphy. The great Pops Foster happened to hear you one night and gave you the encouraging words you needed. "You ought to just go ahead and sing those blues," he told you. "Nobody's doing them any better!" And that was the truth. What Pops heard, a hundred other great jazz musicians have heard and said. Now they all know you. Louis. Basie. Art Hodes. Earl Hines. In jazzmen's bars across the continent, in South Side blues joints, in all the places where the real musicians gather and exchange the stories, lies and folklore of the trade, they know you.

You're Barbara Dane and you're a legend in your own time. You had your own club in San Francisco and it became a landmark of the Bay area. When you walk into Preservation Hall in New Orleans, the jazzmen know who you are and ask you to sing on the hallowed stage. Backstage at the Ash Grove in Hollywood, the folk music place in which you played such a central role, a young fan came up to you and exclaimed: "My God! You're Barbara Dane. I thought you were dead and you're not even old!"

Over the years, that knowledgeable world of people who really care came to know you and your work. You never became the big commercial "success" that could have been yours if you were willing to play the game in the usual manner of the "star" system. But there are tens of thousands who know your worth. Like the astute critic for The Chicago Tribune who heard you sing and called you "a primitive, a hipster, an old style shouter attuned to today's microphones. She sounds like old times, she sounds like tonight, she sounds like good times coming."

We've seen you on our television screens with Steve Allen and Louis Armstrong, on "Checkmate" and Alfred Hitchcock, on Playboy's Penthouse and Stars of Jazz, and the Westinghouse folk spectaculars. We've listened to the record albums you made on small, obscure labels like Barbary Coast and with the full treatment by Capitol Records. We saw you in concerts on tour with Jack Teagarden and Mort Sahl and Bob Newhart and on your own. We heard you as a disc jockey and interviewer on KPFA in San Francisco and saw you in dozens of clubs and coffee houses in New York, Denver, Seattle, Los Angeles, and points between. We saw you at your fabulous best at Chicago's Gate of Horn and we saw you take over The Gaslight on MacDougall Street one "Hootenanny" night and hold the stage with a startling performance that made the dim-lit cellar come alive.

We heard you sing at the first Newport Folk Festival in 1959 where you gave a performance in the drizzly rain from that giant stage that will live a long time in the memories of those who were there. And if you did it once, you did it a hundred times, coming on with that direct, intensely personal quality which is at the core of the blues -- enveloping it all in a genuine mastery of technique and phrasing, and delivering the message in that strong, gutsy style that has turned on a thousand audiences. And always, it was because you had something to say, for you're Barbara Dane, and you believe that if it's not worth saying, it's not worth singing.

Where does it come from? Who gave you that inner right to sing the blues? Some of it you answered yourself in a letter to the editor of SING OUT! magazine:

"I sure didn't realize I was a "champion" of women's blues. How did I get that way, girls, so you can try it, too? The first time an agent says "take off your coat and turn around...okay, you'll be fine," start walking, and keep on until you find your real self under the hairspray and face goo or whatever your personal so-called feminine hang-up is.

Then, go to work as a soda jerk, drug clerk, dress saleslady, file clerk; work on a radio factory assembly line; sell magazines door-to-door during one recession and baby-feeding tables door-to-door during another; do some sitting-in, picket line singing, leaflet passing, door-knocking at election times; mother three kids and a husband or two; become a dishwasher, floor-mopper, grocery toter, washerwoman, house painter, cockroach killer, story-reader, dream dreamer, love lover, not just one, but all or similar experiences...then, go on the road and spend a few hundred lonesome nights singing for the rent money while missing the babies like hell...If you have a little time while waiting for the bus or pushing your car, think about a song or sing it...over the dishwasher is a great place.

Not as exciting as taking dope and letting pimps beat you up, but it sure will teach you what it means to be alive, to value life above anything and rage like a tiger to keep it...to spend it with care instead of trading it for a new car or a fur coat...to treasure the moments that are real between human beings without counting the cost or trying to bargain, because there's no price on that beauty. The only thing we have, really, is our time alive, and I don't think they've printed enough money to buy mine. How about yours?"

That's part of it, but it's more than that, too. You have come to know and love and be completely at home with the idiom of the blues -- the music and the people who make the music. You can (and do) sing with Memphis Slim, with Little Brother Montgomery, with Bukka White, with Lightning Hopkins. But not only musically. You relate to them as people. For these are your friends and soul-mates. Mama Yancey. Lonnie Johnson. Brownie McGhee. Sonny Terry. Between you and them are bonds beyond music.

Your identification with the music and life of the Negro in America is not a matter of chance. You sense, somehow, that in this music and in the emerging movement for full and complete equal rights lies America's best hope. You know, with a deep-burning inner knowledge, that the Negro is America's conscience and that the great traditions of America are being kept alive precisely by our country's most oppressed citizens. And because of that, some of America's greatest music is in the blues, the spirituals, the work songs, the jazz which is incontrovertibly tied up with the life and circumstance of the Negro people in America. For you, it's not enough to sing the music. You are still a picket-line walker and singer, a rally performer, a benefit-giver. And in the summer of 1964, you took your guitar to Mississippi and sang in small hamlets and backwoods churches where the Civil Rights workers were conducting one of the great inspiring human rights struggles of our time.

You're Barbara Dane and the blues means all this to you. The wonder is that you can absorb the style and form of a background not your own, invest in it the basic human content which is at the heart of the blues and is in the lives of us all, and produce an experience for the listener which moves us beyond the moment of communication into that realm where truth must be faced.

You live your life that way. You sing your songs that way. You're a total person and a total woman. You're one of a kind. You're Barbara Dane. If there were more of you around, this world would be a better place to live in.

- Irwin Silber

SIDE I, Band 1: YOU DON'T KNOW ME

Words, Music by
Barbara Dane
© 1964 Stormking Music Inc.

You don't know me, you don't know me,
You don't know my mind, hey hey, papa
You don't know me, you don't know my mind.
When you see me laughin',
I may be laughin' just to keep from cryin'.

You don't know me, you don't know me,
You don't know my way.
When I say get out of here,
Maybe that's just the time to stay.

You don't know me, you don't know me,
You don't know my name.
When I say I'm comin',
I may be leaving just the same!

You don't know me, you don't know me,
You don't know my way,
When I say come tomorrow,
Maybe I mean today!

You don't know me, you don't know me,
And you never will.
If you bother me, you know,
You gonna get somebody killed.

You don't know me, you don't know me,
Don't care if you do,
I can do what I want to,
And never make a fool of you!

You don't know me, you don't know me,
Don't know me at all,
When I say take it easy,
Maybe that's not the time to stall.

You don't know me, you don't know me,
You don't know my mind.
When you see me laughin',
I may be laughin' just to keep from cryin'.

SIDE I, Band 2: I JUST WANT TO MAKE LOVE TO YOU

Words and music by Willie Dixon
new words and arrangement by Barbara Dane

I don't want you to be my slave,
I don't want you to work all day,
I don't want you to be true,
I just want to make love to you!

I don't want you to wash my clothes,
I don't want you to keep a home,
I don't want your money too,
I just want to make love to you!

I can tell by the way that you walk that walk,
Know by the way that you talk that talk,
Look in your eyes and see that you can give!
So I can love you daddy til you want to live!

I don't want you to make my bread,
I don't want you to make my bed,
I don't even want you 'cause I'm sad and blue,
I just want to make love to you,
Love to you, etc.

SIDE I, Band 3: COME BACK BABY

Words and music various traditional sources
arranged by Barbara Dane
© 1964 Stormking Music, Inc.

Oh come back baby, please don't go,
Oh how I love you, you won't ever know..
Come back daddy, let's talk it over one more time.

It doesn't matter, daddy, who was wrong,
You know that you've been gone too long,
So come back baby, let's talk it over one more time.

I tried to write a letter, laid that pencil down,
My heart struck sorrow, tears come rollin' down,
Come back daddy, let's talk it over one more time.

If I could holler like a mountain jack,
You know I'd run on the mountain, call my daddy back,
Oh come back baby, let's talk it over one more time.

I tried so hard not to call your name,
But you've got that sweet way of lovin', nearly
drives me insane,
So come back daddy, let's talk it over one more time.

It doesn't matter, who was wrong,
Yes you know, you've been gone too long,
Come back baby, let's talk it over one more time.

I know you daddy, you're big and fat,
But you're a real fine daddy when it comes to that,
Come back baby, lets talk it over one more time.

Come back baby baby, please don't go,
How I love you, you won't ever know,
Come back baby, lets talk it over one more time.

SIDE I, Band 4: STRANGER'S BLUES

Words and music by "Tampa Red" Hudson Whittaker

Well I'm a stranger here, just blowed in your
town, (2)
Just because I'm a stranger, everybody wants
to run me 'round.

I'm a stranger here, please don't drive me
away, (2)
'Cause I might turn out to be your very best
friend someday.

Well I wonder does my good man know I'm here?(2)
Well if he does, you know, he just don't seem
to care.

I'm gonna write my mama, send me my railroad
fare. (2)
And if it don't come soon, you know I don't mind
walking there...

Well I'm goin' back home, if I wear out all my
shoes, (2)
'Cause when I get there, I won't have to have
them old stranger's blues.

Well I'm a stranger here, stranger everywhere..(2)
Well I would go home, but you know, honey, I'm
a stranger there.

SIDE I, Band 5: VICTIM TO THE BLUES

Words by Ma Rainey
Music by Barbara Dane
© 1964 Stormking Music Inc.

My man left this morning,
Just about half past four, (2)
Left a note on my pillow,
Said he couldn't use me no more.

I grabbed my pillow,
Turned over in my bed,
And I cried about my daddy,
'Til my cheeks turned cherry red.

Oh it was awful hard to take it,
It was such a bitter pill, oh yeah, (2)
If the blues don't kill me,
That man and mean treatment will.

Well I'm too sad to worry,
Too mean to cry,
Too slow to hurry,
Too good to lie!
That man done left me,
Dissatisfied...
And I'm too well to stay here
And I'm too sick to die!
Folks think I'm crazy,
I'm just a victim to the blues.

SIDE I, Band 6: 'WAY BEHIND THE SUN

Words, Music by
Barbara Dane
© Stormking Music Inc.

Well I'm goin' back, baby now,
Way behind the sun.
Well I'm goin' back, baby,
Way behind the sun.
Gonna find some honey and I
Just might bring you some.

Gonna find me one of them
Sweet, good lookin' men, (2)
Show you high powered women just the
Way to treat your man.

Well I'm leavin', daddy, now
Don't you want to go? (2)
Cause I'm leavin' trouble and I
Ain't comin' back no more.

Gonna find me one of those
Rough and ready men, (2)
Who can roll me 'round and then
Come right back again...

If I was a catfish,
Swimmin' in your sea, (2)
I'd have all you good men
Divin' deep for me.

Tell my old time rider,
Don't come back no more, (2)
'Cause I got another daddy and he's
Waitin' in my back door!

Well I'm leavin', daddy, now
Don't you want to go? (2)
Cause I'm leavin' all this trouble and I
Ain't comin' back no more!

Well I'm goin' back, baby, now
Way behind the sun...(2)
Gonna find some honey, and I
Just might bring you some...
Just might bring you some...
Just might bring you some!

SIDE II, Band 1: SPECIAL DELIVERY BLUES

Original record by Sippie Wallace & Hersel
Thomas
New words and music by Barbara Dane
© 1964 Stormking Music Inc.

My man packed his trunk, said "I'm goin' away",
He packed his trunk and said "I'm goin' away"...
But I will write you a special delivery some
old day.

Well I'm leavin' you baby, and it almost
breaks my heart,
Leavin' you baby, almost breaks my heart...
But remember sometime, even the best of friends
must part!

Well I ran to the window, watch the train passin'
by...(2)
I got the blues so bad, that I thought I would
die.

I said "Oh hey, hey, Mr. mailman, did you bring
me any news?" (2)
Well if you didn't, that'll give me Special
Delivery Blues.

He said "I'll write to you, baby, soon as I
have the time" (2)
Well I have not heard you, I guess he just
couldn't spare the dime....
(couldn't spare the dime)

SIDE II, Band 2: IT HURTS ME TOO

Words and music by "Tampa Red" Hudson Whittaker
arranged B.D.

I love you baby, ain't gonna lie,
Without you daddy, I can't be satisfied,
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well you know it hurts me too.

So run here, baby, put your hand in mine,
I got something to tell you, that's been
worryin' my mind,
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well it hurts me too!

Oh yes, now when you go home, and can't get
along,
Come back to me, where I live that's your
home...

When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well it hurts me too.

I love you daddy, well you know it's true,
Nothing in this whole world too good for you...
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Oh you know it hurts me too.

Oh yeah, one thing you gotta understand,
I never want to be your boss, you just gotta be
my man!
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well you know it hurts me too!

When you go home, and can't get along,
Come back to me, daddy, where I live that's your
home.
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well it hurts me too.

One thing daddy, well you gotta understand,
Don't want to be your boss, just you be my man!
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well it hurts me too!

Oh run here, daddy, put your hand in mine,
I got something to tell you that's been worryin'
my mind,
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well now, it hurts me too!

I love you baby, now I ain't gonna lie.
Without you, daddy, I can't be satisfied.
When things go wrong, so wrong with you,
Well it hurts me too...
You know it hurts me too...
Yes it hurts me too.

SIDE II, Band 3: COME ON IN
(THERE AIN'T NOBODY
HERE BUT ME!)

by Thomas A. "Georgia Tom" Dorsey

Come on in, there ain't nobody here but me, (2)
Set right down, let's have some fun,
My man's gone out on his all night run...
Come on in, there ain't nobody here but me!

Take some of this, take some of that,
Take anything in the doggone flat!

I'll fry some meat, I'll cook some bread,
If you get sleepy, there's a great big bed...

Take this liquor, drink this wine,
Let's get drunk and have one good time!

Take off your shirt, hang it on the chair,
Take off your socks and give your feet some air,

I'm drunk and disorderly, and I don't care,
And if you want to you can pull off your
underwear!

(Come on in now, what you standin' out there
for you fool, come on in!)

SIDE II, Band 4: HARD OH LORD

Original by Ida Cox, additional words and
arrangement by Barbara Dane.
© 1964 Stormking Music Inc.

Well it's hard, it's hard, it's hard, oh Lord,
When you love, and you can't be loved...

Oh well it's hard, yes it's hard, it's hard,
oh Lord,
When you love, well, and you can't be loved.

Now when I came in to this old world,
I did not come here to stay,
I did not bring a thing into this old world,
And nothing I will take away.

I look down, look down, that old lonesome road,
Just as far, as I could see...
I did not find someone, to tell my troubles to,
And no one stand for me.

Oh well, the birds in the air, the fish in the
sea,
They are just as free as me,
But they must have a mother, a sister, or a
brother,
Or a lover just for company.

You know, one of these old mornings,
And it won't be long,
That old wagon's gonna rool up to your door,
And it will carry you to some old buryin' ground,
And it won't bring you back no more.

Oh well it's hard, it's hard,
It's hard, oh Lord,
When you love, and can't be loved...
Oh well it's hard, it's hard,
It's hard, oh Lord,
When you love, and can't be loved.

SIDE II, Band 5: WORKING PEOPLE'S BLUES

Words and music by Kenny Whitson
© 1964 Stormking Music Inc.

Working people get the blues,
From morn 'til late at night. (2)
It's a cold hearted feeling
When there ain't no end in sight.

Forty long hours a week,
Fifty long weeks a year (2)
Such a big piece of life,
Makes me wonder what I'm doing here!

I try to hope for the future,
See what tomorrow brings. (2)
When I know in my heart,
It's gonna be the same old thing.

Take your capitol gains,
Let me deduct the blues (2)
I'll have more money comin' back
Than a high rollin' daddy can use.

New York and Montana,
Texas to Tennessee, (2)



THE MEANING OF THE BLUES

by barbara dane

The blues is as old as man.

Every people has had some way of expressing their inner thoughts, and if they did not call it blues or use the same form that we now call blues, they nonetheless had some direct means of self-expression.

Even the word blues is much older than most of us realize.

We tend to think of it as something that has risen in the last 50 years, like the word jazz. But the old superstitions talk about the blue devils, the bad spirits that come over you when you are feeling low. And the word no doubt has lingered since those times.

The music we call jazz is based on blues, as a means of expression. Jazz could never have come into being without the blues, and it will never exist without the blues.

All art, of course, has been devoted to self-expression. But there is a significant difference between art that is produced by virtuosos and art that is produced by the people. And this is where the blues take us into the area of folk music.

Folk music today is becoming more and more organized and commercialized. Like jazz, it will eventually find itself separated into two segments, a virtuoso's art and a people's art. This process of partition is already under way.

In order to commercialize folk music, performers such as Bud and Travis, Odetta, Harry Belafonte, and indeed almost all the people singing it in night clubs today, have had to become virtuosos in the folk music idiom.

I do not refer to technical virtuosity of the kind that J. J. Johnson or Oscar Peterson or Dizzy Gillespie exhibit in jazz, but to virtuosity in the sense of essentializing what

you have to say. The commercial virtuoso, if we may coin a phrase, has been forced not only to essentialize and perfect and synthesize, but to take into consideration the demands of today's consumers.

And the person consuming music now expects it to be labelled and packaged and categorized as neatly as any other product. In other words, if he walks into a club to hear traditional jazz, which he calls "Dixieland", he expects to hear a certain kind of sound. Of course the sound can never be the same from one band to the next or even one night to the next, not if the music is occurring in its natural state. It will be the same only to the degree that the band is attempting to curry public favor.

This kind of listener expects to hear the Dukes of Dixieland. He is uninterested in George Lewis. He wants what his mind has been preconditioned to accept.

The sad thing about it is that if he had learned how to expose the inner receptacles of his brain, he could receive George Lewis just as easily as the Dukes of Dixieland, and without worrying whether the musician is blowing sharp or flat or thin or fat. He would be able to get a communication direct from one mind to another.

Anyone can be moved by the grace with which a completely free child will dance.

But the blues is not just a folk music. It is a specific kind of folk music, even in its origins.

I have always seen the blues in terms of a form—or rather, several forms. The classic blues occurs in eight or 12 or 16-bar forms. Twelve, of course, is the most widely used.

The form and the content are very closely related. When I think of a 12-bar blues, I think of a certain kind of blues. Of necessity being an eclectic performer—in other words, I'm very much aware of all the means of communication and hear all kinds of music—I have been influenced in my feelings by my own experience and development.

And when I think about 12-bar blues, I think mostly in terms of people who play guitars, all the way from the early country pickers—Sleepy John Estes, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Huddy (Leadbelly) Ledbetter, and so on—up to Brownie McGhee and others who are still active today.

I believe that the greatest concentration of classic 12-bar blues today is to be found on the South Side of Chicago. Not having travelled through the South, I cannot talk about what is going on there. But it seems to be a pattern that everyone who becomes reasonably proficient, and has ambition of any sort, finds his way up to Chicago.

That's why the South Side is such a teeming reservoir of 12-bar blues. There you are likely to come across such persons as Tampa Red, Memphis Slim, Little Brother Montgomery, Mama Yancey, Washboard Sam, Roosevelt Sykes, Muddy Waters, Georgia White, Blind John Davis, Sunny Land Slim, Jazz Gillum, and Kokomo Arnold. And, until he died a year or so ago, it was still possible to hear Big Bill Broonzy.

All of these of course are people of professional proficiency. But you will also find on the South Side a great deal of what we can call unschooled people's blues. You will hear it in the subway or at bus stops or in empty lots. The tradition remains very strong.

When the individual is singing blues only for release, for self-expression, he faces no particular problem. But as soon as he reaches a certain level of proficiency, he runs into trouble. As soon as he wants to concentrate completely on music, to spend all his available time at it in order further to increase his proficiency, he is forced to find ways to make the music feed him.

And now he faces entirely different creative problems. Suddenly he has to consider the consumer's as well as his own wishes, and think about the employer and what the

employer thinks his public wants. This is where the corruption of the music often begins.

It is inevitable that the performers of blues hear popular songs. And they find out what sells. So, occasionally, you will find them inserting bridges into the music, making not 32-bar tunes out of them, but tunes that at least have a 32-bar feeling and a Tin Pan Alley construction.

These changes are not always for the better. There is nothing in music quite like the classic 12-bar blues.

For this is possibly the most flexible music in existence. The beauty of it is that there is no absolute definition of what you have to do. With its fixed form and chord structure, everybody can fall in and play without any prearrangement beyond knowing the key and the tempo.

It gives you the security and discipline to permit you to express yourself completely. The ground rules are static, and from there on you can wail.

For example, I have no set melody for most of the 12-bar blues that I do. I may do a different melody every night. If I start on *Good Morning Blues*, I do not think: How did I do this last night, or how does the melody go? I think: How am I going to say it tonight? How do I feel? The discovery of a new way to bend the melody and make the words more meaningful is, to me, the most exciting experience in music.

Blues is the most functional form for today—as it has been for the last 50 years. That is the reason it has endured.

The blues—using it as a convenient all-inclusive term, now that we have discussed what it is—could be said to be made up of two heritages that have been happily combined in the United States: the whole body of thought-out Western European music—with all that that implies about chord structures and melodic lines and the organization of material—and the rhythms and the particular scales that came to us from Africa.

The blues was invented by the American Negro. Let's put that out in front. No one else could have put together this peculiar combination of ingredients. From the beginning, the purpose of it was to get something off your chest that you could not say in any other way. It still serves that function today.

One of the most meaningful things I sing is:

Everybody here is having a jolly time

But you won't ever know what is on my troubling mind.

This has a deep personal meaning for me, though few members of the audience pick up on it. Sometimes you are standing up there and becoming annoyed because half the people aren't listening, or are being facetious in their acceptance. When you sing that verse right out, you feel as if you've done yourself a favor. If some of them get it, okay. And if they don't, it has still been a tremendous release for you as a performer.

The blues ain't nothin' but a good gal feelin' bad.

That is another line I find very helpful. And still another satisfying verse is:

I'm goin' to the river and sit down on a log;

If I can't be your woman, I ain't gonna be your dog.

And that is the way the blues is: saying what you really feel in circumstances in which you could never ordinarily express yourself honestly.

This is one of the important ways in which the blues differs from the body of our American popular music, which is largely an expression of weakness. Our pop music is produced by individuals who have taken the job of writing songs strictly as a gig, who sit in an office somewhere writing what they think will appeal to the people. It is an ersatz music, on the whole.

But the blues almost always involves an expression of pride and courage, rather than a masochistic sobbing about your melancholy fate. Somewhere in every good blues, you will discover that the singer of the tale has not given up, that he is not about to cut his wrists, but will instead find a way out of the problem, and assert himself, and come out on top.

In telling of a broken love affair, blues will rarely express an abject, humiliating plea for reacceptance. The dignity that is essential to personal equilibrium and even sanity is always there.

Not that such lyrics never occur in popular music. *Some Day Sweetheart* and *Who's Sorry Now* also express this bitter pride. They are honest lyrics. But such songs are the exceptions in the mass of our popular music. The majority are depressingly false. The most dreadful lyric I can think of is, "The girl that I marry will have to be as soft and pink as a nursery . . . 'stead of flittin', I'll be sittin' next to her and she'll purr like a kitten. A doll I can carry the girl that I marry must be." Imagine that! He doesn't want a woman, he wants a doll he can carry.

With so many people going into marriage with false ideas imbued by our popular music, our magazine fiction, and the movies, it is little wonder that the divorce rate in our society is so high.

An important question at this time is: how much could American popular music at this juncture—now that the payola scandal has disrupted the pattern of commercialism—benefit from the blues? How much could it learn from the honest and essentially healthy attitudes expressed by the blues? How much is our popular music likely to be influenced by the great tradition of the blues?

Actually, an infusion of blues into our popular music started some years ago, when rhythm-and-blues began to come into prominence. Even with the horrible pall of bad performances and bad tunes that we have been living under, there have been glimpses of songs with meaning.

Now that the bad performances and over-exaggerated beat and shoddy presentation are on their way out, there is, I think, reason to be cautiously hopeful that the real thing will follow in the wake of rock and roll. We may hear not only more of the real blues but more blues-influenced popular music.

The material is there. Unfortunately, a great deal of good material has been damaged. I have seen it go through the a&r machinery and come out trash time and again.

Brownie McGhee, who in a sense "invented" rock and roll, is a man of deep integrity. When they first started pushing that sort of music on radio, they played a lot of Brownie McGhee. From time to time, Brownie would go into the studios to accompany other people. And the a&r people would say, "Well now, Brownie, how are we going to get you rich and famous?"

So Brownie would present them with a few tunes.

And then they would say, "Okay, we'll take these and have one of our men work them over a little and fix them up."

Brownie's answer invariably would be, "This music that I wrote is my life. It's all I have. And you're not going to take it away from me by spoiling it."

And that's why Brownie McGhee is still scuffling.

For the blues is, and must be, an honest music. It is filled with realism, and if there is anger, there is also a solution to the anger, and a justification of the individual.

That, incidentally, is one of the characteristics that distinguishes the blues from spirituals. I have talked to Brownie about this, and he feels as I do: the blues expresses a faith in the individual; spirituals express a faith in the group, in

each other, and in God.

I like to think of it this way: the blues is cheaper than psychiatry and just as effective.

Despite the widespread public acceptance of blues today, the period of classic blues is already history.

Yet it is one of the ironies that it was during its classic period that blues became heavily corrupted.

The classic blues period, when women blues singers were really making it, could be dated from the first decade of the century, when Ma Rainey was first working, until the death of Bessie Smith in 1937. The performers were mostly stage or vaudeville singers, as opposed to folk and country blues singers.

Their work had a completely different quality from the people who were casually making the music up for their own amazement. For the first time, professional song-writers began *composing* blues, and giving them to the singers. Some of the material was good. Some of it was pretty rank.

If you go back to see what Bessie Smith was actually singing, you find that a great deal of the lyric content had nothing to do with the blues, even when it was in a blues form. A song such as *Kitchen Man* is merely a group of salacious couplets and double entendres. The music was being corrupted, both in its form and content, for sensational effects—which is precisely what today's rock and roll singers have been doing. I am afraid that Bessie Smith was guilty of accepting this a great deal of the time.

One could never criticize her fantastic voice, or what was apparently one of the most magnetic stage personalities in the history of this country. And it is certain that she was under commercial pressures. Neither the business people nor the public were interested in honest blues (which often dealt with historical figures and events such as floods and train wrecks). They wanted only those having to do with sex.

This is one reason that on this day, many people associate the idea of *blue*—in the sense of lurid or off-color—with blues. And it is small wonder, really. So much salacious material was recorded that it had the better chance of survival.

As a result, even today, I get requests for Bessie Smith's suggestive songs more than any others. Perhaps the most requested is *Gimme a Pig Foot*, which I flatly refuse to sing, because its lyrics are an insulting stereotype of Negro life—like *Catfish Row* in its worst connotations. *Empty Bed Blues* is perhaps the second most requested of her songs. And I won't do that one either: three-quarters of the lyric is, for me, unacceptable.

Ma Rainey is by far my favorite of the classic blues period. To be sure, she did not have the fine, horn-like instrument that Bessie had. Hers was a much rougher voice, and it had obviously been subject to hard use when she toured, shouting from stages and in tents, with poor acoustics and without electronic assistance. But all that I have been able to find of hers indicates that she had a more melodically inventive style than Bessie ever developed, and she did not corrupt the music the way the later singers did. Listen, if you can, to her *Oh Papa* for a fine example of her work and of stage blues singing of that great period.

How do you go about singing blues? What are the specific techniques? I am always being asked these questions. I can only answer them in a personal way.

I started to sing because I wanted to be a mirror to reflect my life—not for the sake of telling people what I am all about, but to tell them what *they* are all about. I came into singing blues in public for money for obvious reasons of economic necessity. I thought at first that it would automa-

tically cause me to become corrupted. But I find that because the commercial world throws you in contact with a very brutal and direct and rapid living, you are able to talk about more things.

People who saw me eight or nine years ago, when I had long golden hair and little flat shoes and full skirts—the typical girl folk singer with the pretty soft guitar and little soft Anglo-Saxon songs—are constantly asking, "How did you change your sound? Because let's face it, it was kind of dull. Pretty, but dull. How do you get a meaty and meaningful sound?"

A sound evolves. For me, it evolved—slowly but surely—with finding out what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it, and thinking, How do I want to sound to *get this message across*? And the human voice being subject to no control but your thoughts, eventually it comes out. If you think hard enough about it, in time it starts to come out in somewhat the manner you had hoped for—assuming of course that you have certain emotional and perceptive powers to begin with.

I find people pointing out more and more that I use a rising tone, going from one note to another without slurring or leaping. The reason I do it, now that I think about it, is that I want to achieve a feeling that the idea is emerging, like a swimmer coming up from the bottom of the water, and hitting the top, and then staying at a level. I try to do it with as much swell in dynamics as I can manage, and then once I hit the note, I try to expand the dynamics.

This is entirely for the purpose of giving graphic expression to the feeling that the idea is *rising*. You have to struggle with a thought that's worth having. And it is the same with a note. You have to birth it every time, make it open like a flower.

These are the things that are in my mind when I do it, and I think that a great many of the effects achieved by singers come from thought process, rather than from technique for its own sake. That is how I would differentiate between a gimmick and a meaningful device.

The reason I wanted to be a singer, and remain one in spite of all the obstacles and the trouble you have to put up with and the bothering with business and other things that have no connection whatever with the art of music, is that. I want to move people—up, down, sideways, or any which way—because I feel that everything in our American society leads us to sit back and watch the world go by with a smug belief that we have the best, we do the best, we are the best, and we always will be. And this is such a dangerous attitude. It is worse than that: it is stupid. How can you call it anything but stupid to sit back and believe that you don't have to participate in things, or think about things, that everything will be taken care of by some great white father?

And so I feel that if I can alter anyone's bad attitudes—how they feel about minority groups, how they feel toward their wives or their husbands or their children—then my work has importance. In any human relationships, there are always static bad attitudes that people carry around in their pockets like dirty handkerchiefs.

And if I can shake those attitudes even a little, and make people understand that expressing love and experiencing love are what life is all about, then I have helped progress along a little. And if they go away feeling even in the tiniest way a little more open, a little more willing to give of themselves—so that they can express love to their wives, to their husbands, to their boss, to their neighbors, to their community—then I have done something important.

And that makes all the rest of the scuffle possible to stand. If I couldn't sit down and let this run through my head once in a while, I really wouldn't be able to stand it. Because for the money, it ain't worth it.