THE RURAL BLUES

A Study of the Vocal and Instrumental Resources

Compiled and Annotated by Samuel B. Charters

Cover design by Ronald Clyne

RBF Records, New York, RF 202

Will Shade: *I Can't Stand it*
Hambone Willie Newburn:
Shelby County Work House Blues
Robert Johnson: *From Four Until Late*
Furry Lewis: *You Can Leave, Baby*
Sleepy John Estes: *Sloppy Drunk Blues*
L'il Son Jackson: *Roberta Blues*
Lightnin' Hopkins: *Bad Luck and Trouble*
Blind Boy Fuller: *Thousand Woman Blues*
Arthur Crudup: *If I Get Lucky*
Charlie Pickett: *Down the Highway*
Kokomo Arnold: *Milk Cow Blues*
Blind Willie Johnson:
Take Your Burden to the Lord
Tommy McClennan: *New Highway 51*
Lightnin' Hopkins: *Penitentiary Blues*
Blind Willie McTell: *Mama T'aint Long Fo' Day*
Charlie Burse: *Take Your Fingers Off It*
Charlie Lincoln:
My Wife Drive Me From My Door
Peg Leg Howell: *Skin Game Blues*
Lightnin' Hopkins: *Come Go Home with Me*
Lightnin' Hopkins: *Goin' Back to Florida*
Robert Johnson: *Standing at the Crossroads*
Lightnin' Hopkins: *One Kind Favor*
Furry Lewis: *John Henry*
Blind Willie Johnson: *Nobody's Fault But Mine*
Furry Lewis: *Warm Up*
Bukka White: *Bukka's Jitterbug Swing*
Furry Lewis: *Casey Jones*
Peg Leg Howell: *Coal Man Blues*
John Hurt: *Frankie*
Blind Willie McTell: *Southern Can Mama*
Papa Charlie Jackson: *Airy Man Blues*
Skip James:
Little Cow and Calf is Gonna Die Blues
Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell:
New How Long Blues
Bert Bilbro: *Mohana Blues*
Sonny Terry and Oh Red: *Harmonica Stomp*
(with Blind Boy Fuller)
Frank Stokes: *Shiney Town Blues*
Virgil Perkins: *Trouble in Mind*
Arthur Crudup: *Mean Old Frisco*
Brownie McGhee: *Sporting Life Blues*
Virgil Perkins: *Solo*
Charlie Burse: *Tippin' Round*
Ham Gravy: *Mama Don't 'Low It*
Moochie Reeves: *Key to the Highway*

RALPH RINZLER

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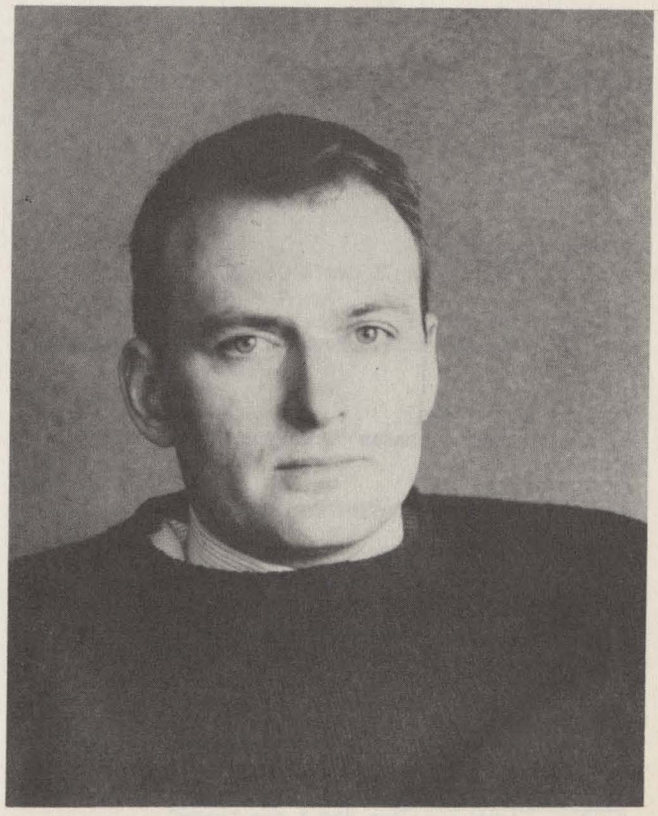

Compiled and Annotated by Samuel B. Charters

THE RURAL BLUES

A STUDY OF THE VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL RESOURCES

This material is intended as a study of the musical resources of the rural blues. It is not often recognised that Afro-American music is marked by considerable variation within its various styles and that a style like the blues is a unique musical idiom. It is hoped that this study will clarify these idiomatic characteristics.

The rural blues is a highly personal, expressive idiom, and its vocal and instrumental resources have been shaped by the effort to intensify this personal quality. It is this that has given the rural blues its distinctiveness. The use of a vocal growl, a sudden falsetto, irregular rhythms, or a complex accompaniment is an expression of this effort to communicate personal emotion. A great blues artist brings to his singing a consciousness of this idiom and its styles. This study is concerned with the rural blues as a distinctive expression and with the musical characteristics that give it this distinctiveness.

(The material is in part from uniussued material in the author's collection, in part from material on the author's Folkways releases, and in part from early blues recordings.)

VOLUME ONE

SIDE ONE

VOCAL STYLES

COARSE VOCAL TONE
Band 1. Will Shade "I Can't Stand It"

DEEPER CHEST TONES
Band 2. Hambone Willie Newburn "Shelby County Work House Blues"

CLEARER HEAD TONES
Band 3. Robert Johnson "From Four Until Late"

SIMPLE RHYTHM
Band 4. Furry Lewis "You Can Leave, Baby"

COMPLEX REGULAR RHYTHM
Band 5. Sleepy John Estes "Sloppy Drunk Blues"

IRREGULAR PHRASE LENGTH, REGULAR RHYTHM
Band 6. L'il Son Jackson "Roberta Blues"

Band 7. Lightnin' Hopkins "Bad Luck and Trouble"

Band 8. Blind Boy Fuller "Thousand Woman Blues"

EXTENDED VOCAL CHANT
Band 9. Arthur Crudup "If I Get Lucky"

FREELY RHYTHMIC CHANT
Band 10. Charlie Pickett "Down the Highway"

SIDE TWO

VOCAL ORNAMENTATION

Band 1. Falsetto
Kokomo Arnold "Milk Cow Blues"

Band 2. False Bass
Blind Willie Johnson "Take Your Burden to the Lord"

Band 3. Growl
Tommy McClennan "New Highway 51"

Band 4. Hum
Lightnin' Hopkins "Penitentiary Blues"

Band 5. Blind Willie McTell "Mama T'aint Long Fo' Day"

Band 6. Laugh
Charlie Burse "Take Your Fingers Off It"

Band 7. Spoken Interjection
Charlie Lincoln "My Wife Drove Me From My Door"

Band 8. Peg Leg Howell "Skin Game Blues"

Band 9. Lightnin' Hopkins "Come Go Home With Me"

Band 10. RECITATIVE VERSES
Lightnin' Hopkins "Goin Back to Florida"

Band 11. Mixed Style
Robert Johnson "Standing at the Crossroads"

VOLUME TWO

INSTRUMENTAL

SIDE THREE

GUITAR AS MELODIC VOICE

Band 1. Picked
Lightnin' Hopkins "One Kind Favor"

Band 2. Pocket Knife
Furry Lewis "John Henry"

Band 3. Blind Willie Johnson "Nobody's Fault But Mine"

Band 4. Bottle Neck
Furry Lewis - Warm Up

GUITAR AS COMPLEX RHYTHMIC ACCOMPANIMENT

Band 5. Bukka White "Bukka's Jitterbug Swing"

Band 6. Furry Lewis "Casey Jones"

Band 7. Peg Leg Howell "Coal Man Blues"

Band 8. John Hurt "Frankie"

OTHER INSTRUMENTS

Band 9. 12 String Guitar
Blind Willie McTell "Southern Can Mama"

Band 10. Banjo
Papa Charlie Jackson "Airy Man Blues"

Band 11. Piano
Skip James "Little Cow and Calf is Gonna Die Blues"

Band 12. Piano and Guitar
Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell "New How Long How Long Blues"

SIDE FOUR

ADDED MELODIC INSTRUMENTS

Band 1. Harmonica
Bert Bilbro "Mohana Blues"

Band 2. Sonny Terry & Oh Red "Harmonica Stomp" (with Blind Boy Fuller)

Band 3. Violin
Frank Stokes "Shiney Town Blues"

Band 4. Kazoo
Virgil Perkins "Trouble in Mind"

ADDED RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS

Band 5. Bass - Plucked Arthur Crudup "Mean Old Frisco"

Band 6. Bass - Bowed
Brownie McGhee "Sporting Life Blues"

Band 7. Washboard
Virgil Perkins - Solo

LARGER ACCOMPANIMENT GROUPS

Band 8. Charlie Burse (Jug) "Tippin' Round"

Band 9. Ham Gravy "Mama Don't Low It"

Band 10. Moochie Reeves (tub) "Key to the Highway"

"WHERE THE SOUTHERN CROSS' THE YELLOW DOG"

The intersection of the old Southern Railroad and the Yazoo Delta Railroad, Moorehead, Mississippi.

Photo by S. B. Charters.

JAMES ALLEY, NEW ORLEANS, 1959

Photo by S. B. Charters

THE RURAL BLUES

A MUSICAL STUDY

Samuel B. Charters

One of the most significant developments in the understanding of the music of the Negro in America has been the increased awareness, in recent years, of the variety and range of this musical expression. Within the Negro sub-culture there has developed an integral body of music with marked stylistic similarities, but with a considerable range of emotional and musical styles, from the sacred singing of the surge song to the instrumental improvisation of jazz. Within the Negro group probably the greatest emphasis is placed on the sacred vocal music, and the non-Negro enthusiast has tended to over-emphasize jazz, but there is a growing interest in other areas of this musical idiom. The rural blues is one of the most vital of these other forms.

The blues, as a distinctive musical form, is probably less than fifty years old, but the musical material and attitudes of the blues was in a large part developed from the work song material that was an integral part of the lives of the slaves of the ante-bellum South, and of the "freedmen" of the Reconstruction. An English traveler to a Georgia plantation in the winter of 1839 noted a doleful chant sung over and over again by a slave who had just been sold from the relatively easy labor area of Virginia to the brutal misery of the Georgia rice plantations.

"Oh my massa told me, there's no grass in Georgia." [1]

This is probably the earliest blues to be described. The work song, the gang song, and the field holler continued to develop the musical phrases and rude poetry of the first blues, and collector working in eastern Alabama in the early 1900's heard phrases that were at the heart of the early blues.

"If de blues was whiskey
I'd stay drunk all de time."

"I got de blues
But I'm too damn mean to cry." [2]

With the publication of the first blues songs in 1912, the first of them Hart Wand's "Dallas Blues", published in March, 1912, in Oklahoma City, this rich background of material began to take on rough harmonic and melodic characteristics. The first recordings of blues material with a strong Negroid emphasis were done in New York City in late 1919 by a Cincinnati-born colored singer named Mamie Smith, and her popularity led to a widespread imitation and exploitation of her blues songs by a number of other women singers. This music quickly became a standardised musical style, using, with rather monotonous regularity, a twelve bar verse form with the first two lines of the verse repeated, and the third completing the idea of the first two and rhyming at the final word. The rhyme scheme was a simple A-A-B. The melodic material became nearly as standardised, with a harmonic scheme of tonic for the first line, ending with the tonic 7th, subdominant to tonic for the second line, two measures of each, and dominant 7th to tonic in the final line. The accompaniment was usually played by a pianist who accompanied a great number of singers and, again, there was a sameness to the accompaniments, despite the occasional use of one or more additional instruments in the accompaniment group. The characteristic four bar melodic phrase reached a resolution at the first beat of the third measure; then, while the singer held the final tone for an additional two or three beats, the accompanying instruments played what were called during this period, "paragraphical phrases",[3] unrelated melodic material freely improvised to fill the interval before the start of the next vocal phrase. There were thousands of these blues, the early "city" blues, recorded and their popularity left a deep impression on the more varied forms of the blues being developed in the rural South.

A record company in Chicago, the Paramount Record Company, did a large mail order business with the southern rural market in this period, and the company sensed the commercial possibilities of recordings by blues singers who were performing in the rural styles. In 1924 the first country blues recording, "Lawdy Lawdy Blues" and "Airy Man Blues" by Papa Charlie Jackson, was released on Paramount 12219. The first recordings of the Texas blues singer, Blind Lemon Jefferson, released by Paramount in 1925, and the first recordings of the St. Louis singer, Lonnie Johnson, released on OKeh the same year, were very successful, and the rural blues styles have been a distinctive and vital part of the music of the Negro in America since this early period.

Despite the influence of the first city blues recordings, the rural blues represent such a wide range of musical expression that it would be misleading to discuss the idiom in anything other than the broadest terms. The music was such a personal expression of the singers themselves that a stylistic generalization describing one man successfully would be almost completely innacurate in describing another. It is even difficult to develop generalizations based on singing styles in different areas of the South without having to make embarrassing ommisions of very successful singers. To speak of a "Texas style", for example, would mean including singers as diverse as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, "Ragtime Texas", "Texas" Alexander, and Lightnin' Hopkins. It is possible to make some broad generalisations on instrumental and vocal styles within a few areas in the South, but it is important to remember that individual singers will have styles that vary considerably from these general descriptions.

Despite these variations, however, there is an artistic unity to the rural blues that make it a distinctive musical style. It is a unity that is best described by considering the emotions and attitudes that have shaped the music. The blues developed as an expression of deeply personal emotions; disappointment, jealousy, anger, desire; strongly aggressive emotions, and it is the effort to express these emotions that has given the music its uniqueness. In its purest form the rural blues is sung by a man, accompanying himself on a guitar. There have been a number of successful singers using more elaborate accompaniment groups, but the accompaniment style was colored by the musical elements of the guitar styles to such an extent that the guitar remains the dominant instrument in the development of the music. Because the blues was an attempt to express emotion there are few blues which develop a narrated incident. Instead of a connected narrative the usual blues is a series of related verses developing a single emotional attitude. And since there is usually no effort to develop a narrative there is no emphasis on clarity of enunciation. A ballad style, such as that developed by the white musical culture in the southern mountain areas, is an excellent example of the emphasis on vocal clarity, with a sameness of tone, a distinctive nasal quality, and a repetitiveness in melodic patterns, all emphasized to make the narrative clearly audible. The Negro blues singer, on the other hand, is trying to express emotion, and an entire range of vocal expression is used, from the harsh growl, or the sudden outcry, to the most starkly unornamented declamation.

The guitar, as well as the voice, is used to develop this intense expressiveness, and the accompaniments often develop extended melodic patterns or complex rhythmic variations. This, too, is in marked contrast to the accompaniments of a ballad style, which are intended to be unobtrusive and are usually little more than a simple reiteration of the harmonies. The Negro blues guitarist developed the accompaniment style to a high point of virtuosity and the greatest singers used the guitar accompaniment as an integral part of their musical style. In the accompaniments

it is often easier to associate a singer with a particular area than it is with a vocal style. In the Negro rural community nearly everyone sings, but a technical skill, such as a guitar accompaniment style, has to be learned from other guitarists, and it is possible to hear these influences in the playing of many blues singers. The use of melodic extension and an irregularly free rhythm is to an extent a characteristic of the guitar styles of the Texas singers; the use of a rapid ostinato in the bass strings with melodic figures played on the upper strings, often with a bottle neck on the little finger, is to an extent a characteristic of musicians from the Mississippi delta area; and Georgia singers often use an irregularly rhythmed series of chords during the vocal phrase and highly ornamented melodic phrases of irregular length to mark the "paragraphical phrase." These are, however, only the most tentative of generalisations.

There are, too, certain stylistic characteristics which make the rural blues distinctive from other Negro vocal styles. The melisma, the extension of a syllable over several musical tones, is almost never used by the blues singers. It is a technique developing out of the religious surge singing and its use is considered to be the characteristic style of a distinctive type of religious singer. The use of portmanti, the sliding tone marking the end of a word or short phrase, on the other hand, is closely associated with the blues style, and the dropping of the tone, usually to one of indefinite pitch marking a phrase ending, is very characteristic of the style. The spoken interjection and the recitative verse are usually distinctive to the blues, as is the entire range of guitar accompaniment styles. But within these broad limitations the artistic problem of the blues singer is the expression of personal emotion, and it is this expression that shapes his music.

The vocal tone most used by the blues singer is a heavy one, with a marked emphasis on the heavier tones developed in the throat, the so-called "chest tones" of the European musical vocabulary. The vocal tone of the first example (Side I, Band 1.), Will Shade, a Memphis singer, shows the typical rough expressive qualities of this tone. The example by "Hambone" Willie Newburn (I,2.) shows the more resonant quality of a voice using more marked throat and chest tones, and the example by Robert Johnson (I,3.), a Mississippi singer, shows the more brilliant quality in a tone using the so-called "head tones". Johnson's voice is an excellent example of the usual range within the blues melodic phrase.

There is considerably more variation within the vocal rhythms. Furry Lewis's "You Can Leave, Baby" (I,4.) shows the rhythmic style at is most simple, with the accents within the phrase falling regularly at the bar and the rhythmic pulse closely related to the simple accompaniment. The contrast between this example and Will Shade's singing (I,1.) even though both of them are Memphis musicians, should make clear the difficulties of making generalisations based on a style within a particular area. The singing of Sleepy John Estes, also recorded in Memphis, further emphasises this difficulty. His "Sloppy Drunk Blues" (I,5.) uses an accompaniment in 8/4 meter against a vocal line in a very free 4/4 meter. Estes had been a caller on a track lining crew for many years and it is probably the free rhythms of the vocal chant which influenced his rhythmic style. The use of the 8/4 meter in accompaniment seems to be limited to Estes, but it was very successful. The mandolin, played by Yank Rachel, adds a further distinctiveness to the performance. The pianist is "Jab" Jones, and the limited guitarist is Estes himself, who never seemed to be very concerned with developing much facility on the instrument.

The next three examples are intended to show the extension of the more regular rhythmic styles into a more freely rhythmic expression. Each of them has a regular beat, but each develops a little further an irregularity in phrase length. L'il Son Jackson's "Roberta Blues" (I,6.) is irregular in the accompaniment patterns within the paragraphical phrase, Lightnin' Hopkin's "Bad Luck and Trouble" (I,7.) extends both the vocal phrase and the melodic phrase, and Blind Boy Fuller's "Thousand Woman Blues" (I,8.) is a brilliant extension of a single melodic phrase into an entire verse of the blues. With its shouted quality and unusual metrical pattern the blues sounds as though it had been developed by Fuller from an older field cry. His accompaniment is particularly successful in its imitation of the vocal line, to emphasise the "shout", and its sudden resolution into a characteristic accompaniment phrase at the end of the line.

Arthur Crudup's "If I Get Lucky" (I,9.) is a subtle rephrasing of a shouted blues melody which, despite the strong beat in the bass, closely approaches a field cry in its emphasis on a chanted metrical unit less closely tied to a regular beat, as were the examples by L'il Son Jackson, Hopkins, and Fuller. In Charlie Pickett's "Down the Highway" (I, 10.) the singing has become almost completely free, with an accompaniment that very successfully emphasises this melodic expressiveness. Pickett uses a distinctive guitar phrase to conclude the vocal phrase which gives an excellent balance to his performance. The singing is closely related to the field cry. The contrast between "Down the Highway" and "You Can Leave Baby" shows clearly the wide range of rhythmic expression within the rural blues.

One of the most exciting of the characteristics of the rural blues has been the use of extensive vocal ornamentation. In their effort to express and communicate emotion the rural blues singers often seem to find their musical material lacking in intensity and drama, and use colorful vocal ornaments to more completely express their mood. Nearly all of these ornaments are difficult to use, and their popularity show clearly the high degree of sophistication that the rural blues often achieves. Kokomo Arnold's "Molk Cow Blues" (II, 1.) uses a startling falsetto jump at a point of emotional stress that is very successful, as is the harsh false bass used by Blind Willie Johnson on "Take Your Burden To The Lord" (II,2.) Johnson, despite the sound of his voice on this recording, was a young men, about twenty-seven, when he recorded this example. He could sing in both falsetto and false bass, and often used these effects as a sharp tonal contrast to his natural voice, which was very clear and expressive. The heavy false tone is produced at the back of the throat and is very difficult to control in pitch. Tommy McClennan's "New Highway 51" (II,3.) uses the growl, a harsh tone similar to a false bass, to coarson and roughen the effect of McClennan's emotional singing. The growl is a widely used ornament in every type of Negro vocal music and is very effective in the singing of a rough performer like McClennan.

The hummed tones are also widely used in Negro vocal music and have always been popular with the rural blues singers. The first recording of this music, Papa Charlie Jackson's "Lawdy Lawdy Blues", uses a hummed chorus near the end of the performance. The "Penitentiary Blues" of Lightnin' Hopkins (II,4.) uses the hum as an expressive introduction to the verse, and Blind Willie McTell's "Mama T'aint Long Fo' Day" (II,5.) uses the hum for an entire chorus. It is a very effective vocal ornament used in either way. The laugh, often in the same rhythm as the accompaniment, seems to have come from the minstrel and vaudeville stage and was very popular in the first years of popularity of the blues recordings. Chrlie Burse's laugh, "Take Your Fingers Off It" (II,6.), was one of the effects that characterised the recordings of the Memphis Jug Band in the late Twenties.

A number of singers used the short spoken interjection to extend their emotional mood and Charlie Lincoln's "My Wife Drive Me From My Door" (II,7.) is an example of this short sentence, which attracts attention by the sudden change in vocal rhythm. It was often used, as in this example, to add a slight narration to the blues and seems to have particularly associated with Georgia singers. Lincoln and Peg Leg Howell, both recording in Atlanta, used this device with considerable effect. Howell's "Skin Game Blues" (II,8.) is an interesting example

of the spoken interjection used to add color to his performance. He catches some of the drama of the skin game, a gambling game popular in the Georgia Turpentine camps, with a few phrases that might be overheard as the dealer works the cards around the table. Younger blues singers have used spoken material in one of two ways. One is the kind of half spoken, half sung blues narrating events of almost any nature, as in Lightnin' Hopkins "Come Go Home With Me" (II,9.) an extended comic performance about himself trying to impress a girl at a dance. The other is a kind of "recitative" verse, usually rhymed narrative material finishing with a sung phrase. Hopkins, one of the best of the Texas singers, is particularly skillful with these verses, and his "Goin' Back To Florida" (II,10.) is an excellent example of this device. As in this example the verse is usually half sung, half chanted in a rhymed four line pattern. The four lines are done in a kind of stop time, following a sharp chord in tonic harmony in the guitar, and usually replace the first four measures of a twelve bar blues chorus. The progression, again as in this example, is usually to a subdominant harmony.

It is important to remember that even though examples of this or that type of ornamentation or spoken interjection may be singled out in the blues of a particular singer these musical resources are part of the vocabulary of every major blues singer. Robert Johnson's superb "Standing at the Crossroads" (II,11.) is a brilliant demonstration of an entire range of vocal, rhythmic, and accompaniment devices used to develop and communicate the intense emotion of his performance.

A description of blues accompaniments has to be prefaced by some description of the harmonic material of the rural blues. In part the singer uses the guitar as a rhythmic instrument, and as a melodic instrument, but it is of equal importance in its role as an harmonic instrument. Using European harmonic concepts the blues is either very simple or very complex, depending on the emphasis placed on the enharmonic material used by nearly every singer, If the enharmonic melodic material is interpreted as a chromatic alteration of a simple tonic harmony then the blues harmonies are very simple, using little more than a tonic - subdominant - dominant relationship. If, however, this enharmonic material is interpreted as a definite modulation in key then the blues harmonies become discouragingly complex. Often blues are described as in a minor key or even in a particular mode. Dorian mode is a favorite. Despite the popularity of these descriptions they are not very accurate. The European musical vocabulary cannot adequately describe the Afro-American musical idiom. The blues is perhaps most successfully described as a complex harmonic form with elements that suggest both the European major and minor scales but with a use of implied progression and considerable equivocation at the third and seventh tones of the scale. Since a singer's harmonic patterns are as individual as his vocal style it is almost meaningless to suggest that any particular harmonic style is typical of the rural blues.

The use of the guitar is colored by this rather ambiguous harmonic concept. If the instrument is tuned to the standard ascending pattern, E - A-D-G-B-E', it is usually played in the key of E. In part this is because of the open E strings at the top and bottom of the E chord, making it relatively easy to play melodic material on the higher E, but it is in part due to the sound of the tonic E chord, E-B-E-G#-B-E. The interval of the fifth, E-B, is emphasized, and the major third, G#, is less distinct than in tonic chords for the keys of C and G, two other simple keys for the instrument. Since the interval of the fifth is stressed in much of the music of the American Negro, with the third used with considerable variation in pitch, the key of E is particularly successful in blues accompaniments. It should be stressed that this is not a key of E in a European sense. Very few rural guitar players ever tune their instruments to standard pitch; so in relation to standard pitch they may be as much as half an octave in either direction from concert E.

Many singers developed their own tunings, and there is considerable variation in accompaniments played with these tunings, but one of the most successful accompaniment styles developed around tunings in which the strings were tuned to play an open chord, often A or E. This meant the left hand was free to play considerable melodic material; since the open strings, played with the right hand, outlined the tonic harmony. The well known "Sebastopal" or "Spanish" tunings were in this style The difficulty in playing in this style was that it was very difficult to play either subdominant or dominant harmonies. Many singers worked out partial chord patterns and used these, but often the singer simply emphasized the progression in his singing by using a similar melodic line in the guitar and usually succeeded in developing considerable musical excitement with the resulting dissonance. The technical problems created by the open tunings have considerably complicated the harmonic structure of much rural blues singing.

The harmonic relationships in the blues are demonstrated in every example in this study so there has been no attempt to include specific examples. Furry Lewis's "You Can Leave Baby" (I,4.) is an excellent example of a clearly defined harmonic structure and Charlie Pickett's "Down the Highway" (I,10.) shows a harmonic structure of considerable complexity. The other examples fall somewhere within this broad range.

One of the most exciting characteristics of the blues guitar style is the use of the instrument to play extended melodic passages, either as a solo or in close relationship with the voice. The contrast in tone between the heavy blues voice and the biting guitar is very effective. Lightnin' Hopkin's "One Kind Favor" (III,1.) uses the guitar in unison with the voice, then in a solo variation of the same melody. Hopkin's is an excellent guitarist and sustains a high level of dramatic excitement with the guitar solo. He is playing the guitar in the standard E tuning and without finger picks, but his exceptionally supple technique enables him to play a melodic line of great expressiveness. An even more flexible melodic line can be obtained when the guitar is tuned to an open tuning and the singer is using either something held in the left hand or a bottle neck on the little finger to slide along the strings. It is a complex technique combining the older flat picking styles with the "Hawaiian" style introduced into the United States about the time of the first World War. In his "John Henry" (III,2.) Furry Lewis uses a pocket knife held between the third and fourth fingers of his left hand, sliding it on the top two strings, and frets the lower strings with the first two fingers. The solo passages are more or less set between verses. Blind Willie Johnson's "Nobody's Fault But Mine" (III,3.) develops a much more dramatic interplay between the voice and guitar, using the same technical device of the pocket knife. The guitar begins a phrase only to have the voice finish it, the voice drops a phrase, leaving it for the guitar, the two voices join in a near unison, all of it in a moving development of the tonal contrast between the singer's voice and the guitar. Johnson was one of the greatest rural singers of the Twenties and "Nobody's Fault But Mine" was one of his successful records. The warm-up by Furry Lewis (III,4.), using a glass bottle neck on his little finger, shows the similarity in tone and technique between something like the knife, held in the hand, and in the bottle neck on the little finger.

Not only did guitar accompaniments reach a high stage of development in the use of melodic material, but many singers used the guitar for strongly rhythmic accompaniments of considerable complexity. These rhythmic patterns, usually unvarying finger pickings, closely resembled the European ostinato and were played without break through the harmonic progressions in the verse. There were so many of these pickings, all of them highly personal, that it is, as in harmonic patterns and vocal styles, almost meaningless to try to describe a specific style as typical. Bukka White's "Jitterbug Swing" (III,5.) and Furry Lewis's "Casey Jones" (III,6.) show two of these styles used as a complex background to a

more or less extended vocal line. Peg Leg Howell's "Coal Man Blues" (III,7.) and John Hurt's "Frankie" (III,8.) use styles in which the melody is outlined in the upper notes of the rhythmic pattern. Both singers have subtly altered the melodic line in the voice until it more closely follows the more limited melodic line of the guitar.

Although the six-string guitar has always been the most popular accompaniment instrument for the rural blues other instruments have often been used and often highly individual blues styles have resulted from their use. The twelve-string guitar, or mandolin-guitar as it is sometimes called because it is a heavier double strung instrument, was used by several singers and the Georgia singer "Blind Willie McTell was particularly skilled with it. On the "Southern Can Mama" (III,9.) a six-string guitar is accompanying the lead on the twelve-string. Two very popular artists in the concert folk idiom, "Leadbelly" and Jessie Fuller, were also very successful with the twelve-string; so much so that the instrument is often identified with "Leadbelly." The banjo had been popular with the southern Negro for much of the 19th Century, but it had considerably declined in favor by the time the first blues recordings were made. Not only was it exasperating to use; since the skin head was very sensitive to weather conditions, but it did not sustain a tone sufficiently to be very effective at a slower tempo. Papa Charlie Jackson's "Airy Man Blues" (III,10.), the first recording of a rural blues to reach a commercial market, shows very clearly the limitations of the banjo in blues accompaniments, despite the melodic charm of Jackson's performance.

One of the difficult instruments to classify in the blues accompaniment styles is the piano. Early boogie woogie styles developed in much the same environment as the rural blues and the two musical style are very closely related. When the record companies began using larger accompaniment groups for their blues recordings the boogie pianists were almost immediately brought into the studios, and by the late Thirties the guitar had almost been eclipsed by the heavier sound of the piano. It was not until the guitar could be electrically amplified that the older balance was restored. Despite this close relationship both styles have remained highly individual, and the musical elements of boogie-woogie should not be confused with the rural blues. Skip James seems to have been the only musician to develop a piano style that is clearly within the rural blues idiom. His "Little Cow And Calf Is Gonna Die Blues" (III,11.) is a highly individual and extremely successful performance. James also recorded accompanying himself on the guitar and he seemed to play either instrument with the same facility. He was one of the most exciting and one of the least known singers of the Twenties.

No description of blues accompaniments is complete without the famed piano-guitar duets of Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. Their recordings sold widely and were very influential. They were so sensitive to each other's playing that the highly developed interplay between the emotionalism of Scrapper's guitar style and the thoughtful restraint of Leroy's piano style seemed to be almost a single musical statement. The "New How Long How Long Blues" (III,12.) is one of six recordings they made of this most successful of Leroy's compositions.

The southern Negro musician, especially in rural areas, is always in demand for local dances and parties and blues singers are especially popular. The jobs, however, are long and hard, often from early in the evening to the next dawn, and even a strong singer can't keep it up all night. Lemon Jefferson was well known around central Texas for his ability to sing and play all night for the outdoor suppers that were given every weekend, but even Lemon often brought a second musician along to help him through the long hours. Usually a singer brought a small instrumental group with him for these jobs and instruments like the harmonica or the washboard became closely identified with the rural blues. A local style of this instrumental music was popular around Memphis in the late Twenties and the "skiffle" music of these Memphis musicians was a very distinctive development of the blues style. Of the numerous melodic instruments added to these small groups the most popular has always been the harmonica. A skilled player can duplicate the vocal tone of the Negro blues singer with considerable success and the greatest blues harmonica players soon became almost vocal in their tone and technique. Bert Bilbro's "Mohana Blues" (IV,1.) shows the instrument as an unaccompanied melodic voice, and the "Harmonica Stomp" (IV,2.), with Sonny Terry on harmonica, "Oh Red" on washboard, and Blind Boy Fuller on guitar, shows it as a leading voice in a small instrumental ensemble. There were two versions of this piece recorded at the same session. Terry and Oh Red usually accompanied the vocal blues of Blind Boy Fuller, but did occasional solo recordings and the first version of the piece was the duet by Terry and Oh Red that was included in the first volume of the Folkways Anthology of Jazz. This second version has Fuller on guitar and the technical brilliance of his playing seemed to challenge the other two to an even more excited performance.

The violin was still used in many rural areas and there were several recordings using a violin as a second melodic voice behind the singer. On Frank Stokes' "Shiney Town Blues" (IV,3.) the violinist is Will Bast. The mandolin was also used widely and the "Sloppy Drunk Blues" of Sleepy John Estes (I,5.) is an excellent example of the instrument in a blues accompaniment. The kazoo, usually just a piece of pipe with a small hole near one end covered with a paper diaphram, was often used by singers who either didn't have a "rack" to hold a harmonica near their mouth while they were playing or who weren't able to play a harmonica. Since the tone is produced by humming into it the kazoo is one of the most simple musical instruments and it was very popular with young blues enthusiasts. In this "Trouble In Mind" (IV,4.) Virgil Perkins is playing kazoo and washboard and the twelve-string guitar is played by Sam Charters. The string bass was not used extensively in rural areas because of its expense and the difficulty of carrying it around. Homemade one-string instruments were used, and the jug was popular around Memphis, but it was not until the commercial exploitation of the music in the Thirties that the string bass became part of the blues instrumental group. It was very effective with the guitar and a number of very successful recordings were made with accompaniment by these two instruments. On Arthur Crudup's "Mean Old Frisco" (IV,5.) the bass player plucks the instrument and on Brownie McGhee's "Sporting Life Blues" (IV,6.) the musician bows the instrument, one of the few examples of the bowed bass in a blues accompaniment.

Next to the bass the washboard has been the most widely used rhythm instrument in the rural blues. Virgil Perkin's unnacompanied performance (IV,7.) shows the tonal variety the instrument is capable of, and the "Harmonica Stomp" (IV,2.) shows the instrument in its more usual role of an unobtrusive addition to the blues group. Perkins has mounted his washboard on a rough stand so that he can play it from both sides at once and a number of pans and metal lids have been nailed to the frame. Using thimbles on his fingers he plays on the metallic washboard, the board's frame, and the pieces of metal nailed to it with considerable enthusiasm.

It is important to emphasize that these instruments are used very casually in the blues and that groups are often liable to completely change their instrumentation before a dance is over. In Charlie Burse's "Tippin' Round" (IV,8.) the instrumentation includes the tenor guitar that Charlie is playing, the six-string guitar of Will Shade, and Gus Cannon's jug. Cannot does not "play" the jug in the strict sense of the word. A jug player simply makes a buzzing sound with his mouth and holds the jug close to his mouth to resonate the sound. The "Mama Don't 'Low It" of "Ham Gravy", (IV,9.) includes Robert Brown on washboard and vocal, Bill Broonzy, guitar; and Bob Coll, piano. The performance is similar to hundreds turned out by a small group of blues musicians working in the Chicago recording

studios in the Thirties. Robert Brown usually recorded under the name "Washboard Sam", but the "Mama Don't 'Low It" was recorded in violation of a contract he had with another company; so he used the different name. The "Key To The Highway" by Moochie Reeves (IV,10.) uses two guitars and a "bass" made out of a washtub, a piece of clothesline, and a broom stick. Moochie Reeves and Ollie Crenshaw play the guitars, and Tyler Jackson plays the washtub bass. The recording was done in a backyard in Mobile, Alabama, late in the afternoon, with dozens of neighbors dancing to the music away from the microphone and the children keeping carefully quiet so they could sit behind the musicians' chairs while they were playing. It captures much of the easy going style of these small instrumental groups playing the rural blues.

The rural blues idiom is musically very rich, and coupled with the imagery and imagination of much of the blues lyrics it seemed by the mid-Thirties the blues was to develop into a musical form of conscious artistic power and creativity. As this study has tried to show the blues had developed into a complex musical style of great expressiveness. Since then there has been only a hesitant effort to realise the full potential of the blues and at present there are only a handful of singers with the creative ability to use the blues in an expression of personal emotion. To some extent the nature of the blues audience tends to limit the music. It is an immature, unstable audience, and a singer finds that he has to exaggerate his style to remain popular. Over the last thirty years blues singers have been forced to play louder and louder, to overemphasize the rhythm, and to use heavily stylized vocal tricks to catch the attention of this restless audience. As a result the modern blues is considerably less musical, generally, than the blues of twenty or thirty years ago. In rural areas the singers performed for an audience of neighbors or for people from nearby communities and there was considerable attention paid to the musicality of his performance. Usually the rural singers did not have large repertoires, but their music was highly developed and distinctly individual.

The Negro audience has had a serious emotional problem with the blues. It is a musical style closely identified with the rural South, and there is an understandable lack of enthusiasm among urban Negroes for any reminder of southern racial attitudes. The blues audience stays young and immature because the older Negro audience turns away from the blues. This is not to say that there is not a continued interest in the blues among the urban audience, but the interest changes, and the sophisticated styles of singers who use the mannerisms of popular white vocalists are considerably more popular with the older audience. As a result there is not a large Negro audience for the singer who continues to develop his style to a high degree of subtlety. He finds himself pushed aside by younger singers who can identify themselves with the young audience. The rural blues, in its personal creativity and colorful expressiveness, is almost an art music, rather than a popular music, and it is unfortunate that its audience has been a limited one.

Since the second World War a number of older blues singers have been performing as concert artists for an intellectual white audience that has usually confused the style with American folk music. The result has been the development of a rather pretentious "folk blues" style that borrows heavily from the mannerisms of popular night club entertainment. The enthusiasm has, however, helped the style return to some of its pre-war popularity. Perhaps with this new interest will come a new awareness in the Negro audience of the richness and creative expressiveness of the rural blues.

The example by Will Shade and Charlie Burse were recorded by S. B. Charters in Memphis, Tennessee, in December, 1956. Side I, Band 1 is from unissued material in the author's collection. Other material from this session was issued on Folkways Record FA2610, "American Skiffle Bands."

The examples by Furry Lewis were recorded by S. B. Charters in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 24, 1959 and October 3, 1959. (III,2.) and (III,6.) are from the first recording session, when Furry used a pocket knife; (I,4.) and (III,4.) are from the second session, showing the use of a bottle neck. All these examples are from unissued material in the author's collection.

Lightnin' Hopkins was recorded by S. B. Charters in Houston, Texas, on February 4, 1959. (III,1.) is from unissued material in the author's collection. The other examples are issued on Folkways Record 3469, "Lightnin' Hopkins."

The examples by Virgil Perkins were recorded by S. B. Charters in Houston, Texas, in November, 1955. This material, and the example by Moochie Reeves, recorded by S. B. Charters in Mobile, Alabama, in July, 1954, is previously unissued and from the author's collection; as is all other material in this study. The booklet How To Play and Sing The Blues Like The Phonograph Artists is the property of Record Research Magazine and grateful acknowledgement is made to the magazine's two editors, Len Kunstadt and Robert Colton, for its use. A further acknowledgement is made to S. B. Charters III, Mary Paccetti, and Frederic Ramsey Jr. for their assistance in the preparation of the material in this set.

1. Samuel B. Charters, The Country Blues, New York: Rinehart and Company, 1959. Page 23

2. Ibid. Page 30.

3. Bob Ricketts and Porter Grainger, How To Play and Sing The Blues Like The Phonograph Artists, New York: 1924.

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THE RURAL BLUES

Edited by SAMUEL B. CHARTERS

SIDE I RF-202A

33⅓ RPM

RBF

Band 1: I CAN'T STAND IT (Will Shade)
Band 2: SHELBY COUNTY WORK HOUSE BLUES (Hambone Willie Newburn)
Band 3: FROM FOUR UNTIL LATE (Robert Johnson)
Band 4: YOU CAN LEAVE, BABY (Furry Lewis)
Band 5: SLOPPY DRUNK BLUES (Sleepy John Estes)
Band 6: ROBERTA BLUES (L'il Son Jackson)
Band 7: BAD LUCK AND TROUBLE (Lightnin' Hopkins)
Band 8: THOUSAND WOMAN BLUES (Blind Boy Fuller)
Band 9: IF I GET LUCKY (Arthur Crudup)
Band 10: DOWN THE HIGHWAY (Charlie Pickett)

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THE RURAL BLUES

Edited by SAMUEL B. CHARTERS

Band 1: MILK COW BLUES (Kokomo Blues)
Band 2: TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD (Blind Willie Johnson)
Band 3: NEW HIGHWAY 51 (Tommy McClennan)

SIDE 2
33⅓ RPM

RF-202B

RBF

Band 4: PENITENTIARY BLUES (Lightnin' Hopkins)
Band 5: MAMA T'AIN'T LONG FO' DAY (Blind Willie McTell)
Band 6: TAKE YOUR FINGERS OFF IT (Charlie Burse)
Band 7: MY WIFE DROVE ME FROM MY DOOR (Charlie Lincoln)
Band 8: SKIN GAME BLUES (Peg Leg Howell)
Band 9: COME GO HOME WITH ME (Lightnin' Hopkins)
Band 10: GOIN' BACK TO FLORIDA (Lightnin' Hopkins)
Band 11: STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS (Robert Johnson)

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THE RURAL BLUES

Edited by SAMUEL B. CHARTERS

Band 1: ONE KIND FAVOR (Lightnin' Hopkins)
Band 2: JOHN HENRY (Furry Lewis)
Band 3: NOBODY'S FAULT BUT MINE (Blind Willie Johnson)

SIDE 3 RF-202C
33⅓ RPM

RBF

Band 4: WARM UP (Furry Lewis)
Band 5: BUKKA'S JITTERBUG SWING (Bukka White)
Band 6: CASEY JONES (Furry Lewis)
Band 7: COAL MAN BLUES (Peg Leg Howell)
Band 8: FRANKIE (John Hurt)
Band 9: SOUTHERN CAN MAMA (Blind Willie McTell)
Band 10: AIRY MAN BLUES (Papa Charlie Jackson)
Band 11: LITTLE COW AND CALF IS GONNA DIE BLUES (Skip James)
Band 12: NEW HOW LONG HOW LONG BLUES (LeRoy Carr & Scrapper Blackwell)

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SIDE 4
33⅓ RPM
RF-202D

THE RURAL BLUES

Edited by SAMUEL B. CHARTERS

Band 1: MOHANA BLUES (Bert Bilbro)
Band 2: HARMONICA STOMP (Sonny Terry & Oh Red with Blind Boy Fuller)

RBF

Band 3: SHINEY TOWN BLUES (Frank Stokes)
Band 4: TROUBLE IN MIND (Virgil Perkins)
Band 5: MEAN OLD FRISCO (Arthur Crudup)
Band 6: SPORTING LIFE BLUES (Brownie McGhee)
Band 7: SOLO (Virgil Perkins)
Band 8: TIPPIN' ROUND (Charlie Burse)
Band 9: MAMA DON'T 'LOW IT (Ham Gravy)
Band 10: KEY TO THE HIGHWAY (Moochie Reeves)