

“Nothin’ but the Blues” at The Sheldon Concert Hall Handbook for Teachers

WELCOME

We look forward to welcoming you and your students for the presentation of “Nothin’ but the Blues” at The Sheldon Concert Hall. We hope that the perfect acoustics and intimacy of the hall will make this an important and memorable experience.

ARRIVAL AND PARKING

We urge you to arrive at The Sheldon Concert Hall between 9:30 and 9:45 a.m., before the 10 a.m. start of “Nothin’ but the Blues.” This will allow you to be seated in time for the performance and will allow a little extra time in case you encounter traffic on the way. Seating will be on a first come-first serve basis as schools arrive. To accommodate school schedules, we will start promptly at 10 a.m.

The Sheldon is located at 3648 Washington Boulevard, just around the corner from the Fox Theatre. A map is enclosed. Parking for school buses will be available on Washington near The Sheldon. Please enter by the steps leading up to the concert hall front door. If you have a disabled student, please call The Sheldon (314-533-9900) to make arrangement to use our new street level entrance and elevator to the concert hall.

CONCERT MANNERS

Please coach your students on good concert manners before coming to The Sheldon Concert Hall. Good audiences love to listen to music and they love to show their appreciation with applause, usually at the end of an entire piece and occasionally after a good solo by one of the musicians. Urge your students to take in and enjoy the great music being performed.

Food and drink are prohibited in The Sheldon Concert Hall.

Any device (telephone, alarm watch or toy) that makes noise is a distraction for both the musicians on stage and your fellow audience members and should not be brought into the hall.

Restrooms are located on the lower level reached by stairs on the east side of the concert hall lobby. Please encourage students to use restrooms at school or to use Sheldon restrooms before the concert begins. If a student does need to use the restroom during the performance, the best time to get up is between musical numbers.

ART GALLERIES

The Sheldon now has art galleries in the Emerson Galleries building that adjoins the Concert Hall. The five galleries are the Bellwether Gallery of St. Louis Artists, Gallery of Jazz History, Gallery of Photography, Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture and the AT&T Gallery of Children’s Art. You are invited to call The Sheldon and add a 20 or 30 minute visit to the galleries when you bring your students to “Nothin’ but the Blues.”

DEFINITIONS

The Blues

In essence, the blues are songs that have the feeling of “the blues,” a sadness and melancholy that that a singer or instrumentalist expresses in their music. There are “blue notes,” usually lowered 3rd and 7th notes in the scale; and there are blues music forms like the 12-bar blues that have a particular chord progression; but the feeling is what defines the blues. The blues have been defined in many different ways – by the musicians themselves, by researchers who study the blues, and by publishers, record labels and music distributors hoping to sell the music to the public.

Blue Notes

Blues musicians “bend” notes, dipping below the usual note in the scale to express more emotion in their music. The usual notes that are lowered are the 3rd and 7th note of the scale, but a singer or player can bend any note.

12-Bar Blues

A very common form of the blues is the “12-bar blues” that has 12 measures or bars. Usually, a line of text is sung two times, with a different third line that rhymes with the previous line. In the key of C, the chord progression would be:

C	C or F	C	C
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	C or G

Work songs and field hollers

Workers, to coordinate their efforts and to keep their spirits up in the face of hard physical labor, sing work songs or field hollers. African-American slaves sang work songs as they ploughed and harvested the land of the South, cut down trees and split the logs, worked the mules along muddy rivers and hoisted cotton bales onto Mississippi steamboats. Work songs have been sung by sailors and other workers for centuries.

Spirituals

Spiritual or religious songs were sung by slaves, many of whom converted to Christianity. Their Negro spirituals were a unique blend of African religious elements with European elements, and they were primarily expressions of religious faith, but also contained strong elements of protest against the bondage of slavery, comparing the slaves' condition with that of the Jewish people in bondage in Egypt. Some believe that spirituals contained coded messages on how to avoid capture, as in “Wade in the Water” where the admonition to leave dry land and “wade in the water” would be a way to through off pursuing bloodhounds. Other spirituals may contain references to the Underground Railroad.

Rhythm & Blues

Also known simply as R&B, Rhythm and Blues is a name given to a wide range of music created by and sold to African Americans beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It has been used to describe everything from electric blues, gospel, soul and funk. Louis Jordan, Little Richard, Ruth Brown, Fats Domino and Bo Diddley were some of the early stars, followed by Sam Cooke and Chubby Checker.

Rock and Roll

Rhythm and Blues, along with elements of country music and gospel music, evolved into early Rock and Roll. Classic rock of the 1950s was usually played by two electric guitars, one lead and one rhythm, bass and drums, and the rhythm is essentially a boogie woogie blues rhythm with a strong back beat, usually provided by the snare drum. Early rock often has a 12-bar blues chord progression. "Rocket 88" by Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats, "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley, "That's All Right (Mama)" by Elvis Presley, and "Shake, Rattle & Roll" by Big Joe Turner are some of the early examples.

Important Blues Regions and Cities:

The Mississippi Delta

The Mississippi Delta is a remarkably flat and fertile region of northwest Mississippi, between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers, not to be confused with the Mississippi River Delta 300 miles to the south. Delta blues is one of the earliest blues styles with prominent use of guitar, often with a bottleneck slide, and harmonica. Early recordings were done on field trips by recording company talent scouts. Some of the prominent Delta blues musicians were Robert Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, Big Joe Williams and Muddy Waters.

The Piedmont Region

A plateau region in the eastern portion of the United States, the Piedmont Region includes parts of Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia, stretching from Atlanta, Georgia to Richmond, Virginia. Piedmont blues was influenced by ragtime, country and popular songs, sometimes employing the Cakewalk or Slow Drag. Guitarists often used a fingerpicking style comparable to piano ragtime or stride piano. Some of the prominent Piedmont blues musicians were Blind Blake, Peg Leg Howell, Rev. Gary Davis, Josh White, with current players Cephas & Wiggins, Keb Mo and Doc Watson.

Memphis

Memphis, Tennessee on the Mississippi River is known for Beale Street, an entertainment area that showcased many early blues artists. In addition to guitar blues, Memphis was home to jug bands that often included harmonicas, banjos and guitars, mandolins, homemade instruments, and a blown jug to provide the bass. Frank Stokes, W.C. Handy, Sleepy John Estes, Furry Lewis, Howlin' Wolf, Memphis Minnie and Ida Cox were important early musicians, and B.B. King is a star today known for many classic electric blues.

St. Louis

St. Louis, Missouri, at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, was home to ragtime pianists Tom Turpin and the “King of Ragtime” Scott Joplin, so it’s not surprising that St. Louis blues was often more piano-based and closely related to ragtime. Many top blues artists have made St. Louis their home – Peetie Wheatstraw, Irene Scruggs, Speckled Red, Albert King, Lonnie Johnson, Victoria Spivey, Roosevelt Sykes, Alice Moore, Walter Davis, Big Joe Williams, Henry Townsend, Oliver Sain and Johnnie Johnson.

Chicago

Located on Lake Michigan, Chicago, Illinois, became known for a style of blues in which acoustic guitar and harmonica were replaced by an electric guitar and amplified harmonica, in addition to amplified bass guitar, drums, piano and sometimes saxophone. Important Chicago blues players include Willie Dixon, Elmore James, Big Walter Horton, Bo Diddley, Buddy Guy, Charlie Musselwhite and Paul Butterfield. Several record labels promoted the blues, including Chess Records, Alligator Records, and Demark Records, originally Delmar Records in St. Louis, created by Bob Koester who moved the company to Chicago.

Famous Early Blues Musicians

Mississippi John Hurt – Born and raised in Mississippi, John Smith Hurt earned his living as a farm hand and played music for dances. He sang in a loud whisper and recorded for Okeh Records who added “Mississippi” to his name to help sell the record. He was rediscovered at age 70 and played at the Newport Folk Festival, appeared on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, toured at colleges and concert halls, and made three albums for Vanguard Records.

Robert Johnson – Among the most famous of the Delta blues musicians, known for his singing, songwriting and extraordinary guitar skills. “Come On In My Kitchen” is one of his tunes. He has been called “the most important blues singer who ever lived.” There is a legend that he met the devil who took his guitar, tuned it, played a few tunes on it, and returned it to Robert Johnson, thus giving him mastery over the instrument. His music influenced Muddy Waters, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton.

T-Bone Walker – Texas-born musician who was one of the pioneers of the electric guitar. His electric guitar solos were among the first heard on modern blues recordings. He learned his craft in the street-strolling string bands of Dallas, and he was a friend of Blind Lemon Jefferson and would guide Jefferson around town for his gigs. One of his early hits was “Call It Stormy Monday (But Tuesday Is Just As Bad).”

Blind Lemon Jefferson – Called the “Father of Texas Blues,” Blind Lemon Jefferson was born to sharecropper parents and was blind from birth. He had a high-pitched voice and he made enough money from his Paramount and Okeh recordings to buy a car and hire a chauffeur. He mentored T-Bone Walker, and blues star B.B. King says that Jefferson’s singing and guitar playing were a strong influence for him.

Ma Rainey – One of the earliest American blues singers, Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett Rainey, better known as Ma Rainey, was billed as “The Mother of the Blues.” She was born in Georgia and joined a vaudeville troupe as a young girl. After hearing a girl in a small Missouri town sing a sad song in 1902, she started performing in that style and claimed that she was the one who named it “the blues.” She recorded songs like “C.C. Rider,” “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” and “Bo Weevil Blues.”

Bessie Smith – A native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Bessie Smith was called the “Empress of the Blues.” She was raised in poverty and ran away as a teenager to join a traveling show as a dancer. She was in the same show as Ma Rainey before touring on her own and recording the blues. Her biggest hits were “Downhearted Blues” and “Back Water Blues,” and she also recorded with Louis Armstrong on “Cold in Hand Blues” and “I Ain’t Gonna Play No Second Fiddle.”

Leadbelly – Huddie William Ledbetter, known as Leadbelly or Lead Belly, was known for his clear and forceful singing and his virtuosity on the twelve-string guitar. He called himself “King of the 12-String Guitar.” He could also play piano, mandolin, harmonica, violin, concertina and accordion. He was convicted of murder and pardoned and released after writing a song appealing to the Governor for his freedom. His vast songbook included “Midnight Special,” “Cotton Fields” and “Goodnight Irene.” He influenced many blues and folk musicians, including Pete Seeger.

W.C. Handy – Known as the “Father of the Blues,” W.C. Handy was a prolific songwriter, perhaps best known for “St. Louis Blues.” He relates a story from 1903 that while waiting for a train in Tutwiler in the Mississippi Delta: “A lean loose-jointed Negro had commenced plucking a guitar beside me while I slept...As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars...The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard.” Handy also wrote “Memphis Blues,” “Yellow Dog Blues” and “Beale Street Blues.”

MUSICAL SELECTIONS IN “Nothin’ but the Blues”

African chant

“Sea Lion Woman” – field holler

“Daniel in the Lion’s Den” – spiritual

“Wade in the Water” – spiritual

“Monday Morning Blues” – blues made famous by Mississippi John Hurt

“Engine Room” – blues about trains written by Charlie Pfeffer

“Rock Island Line” – famous train song by Leadbelly

“Come in My Kitchen” – song by the great bluesman Robert Johnson

“Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out” – blues made famous by Bessie Smith

“St. Louis Blues” – most famous blues song ever, written by W.C. Handy

“Johnny Be Good” – rock and roll hit for St. Louis’ own Chuck Berry, guitarist and singer who worked many years with St. Louis piano player Johnnie Johnson

“Proud Mary” – R&B hit made famous by Tina Turner who grew up in St. Louis as Anna Mae Bullock and became an R&B and rock and roll star

THE MUSICIANS

Charlie Pfeffer

A performing musician for more than 30 years, Charlie Pfeffer plays a variety of styles – including folk, swing and blues. He has toured throughout the United States and in Europe, been on the roster of Young Audiences-Springboard to Learning since 1978, and for the last eleven years has been a member of Sheldon education programs.

Coco Soul

The granddaughter of a jazz musician who played with Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, Coco Soul has performed at the St. Louis Jazz Festival, Jazz at the Bistro, The Pageant and Blueberry Hill. She has won 2nd place in the Midwest Grammy Competition, and she has appeared in several productions of the St. Louis Black Rep and is the founder of Café Soul.

Matthew Von Doran

Guitarist Matthew Von Doran has played professionally for over 20 years, touring the U.S. with rock, jazz and fusion groups such as the Don Miller Big Band and New Trio of Doom. While with the Miller Big Band, the group served as the house band for television shows such as *The Nanny* and *Seinfeld*. Born in Germany, Von Doran was raised in Washington, D.C. and Canada before his family settled in Los Angeles. He now pursues jazz music full time as the leader of the Matthew Von Doran Trio.

Activities for Your Students:

Locate Important Blues Regions and Cities on a Map (Geography, Social Studies)

On a map of the United States find the following:

The Mississippi Delta

The Piedmont Region

Memphis, Tennessee

St. Louis, Missouri

Chicago, Illinois

Write Your Own 12-Bar Blues (Writing, Math Skills)

Have individual students suggest an idea from everyday life for a blues song, work as a group to pick one idea and to write the first line of the song. Brainstorm for a rhyming last line. Then, using the 12-bar blues chord progression below, have a guitarist or pianist play the chord progression and have several students try making up a simple melody to go with the chords.

To get you thinking, here's an example of one idea:

C	C	C	C7
I woke up this morning, couldn't find my homework anywhere.			
F	F	C	C
I woke up this morning, couldn't find my homework anywhere.			
G	F	C	C
I really did that homework, the trouble I'm in is so unfair.			
C	C	C	C7
I think my dog ate my homework, he's looking guilty and not so well.			
F	F	C	C
I think my dog ate my homework, he's looking guilty and not so well.			
G	F	C	C
If my teacher saw that sick dog, she'd know it's the truth I tell.			
C	C	C	C7
So I'm doing that same old homework, doing it for a second time.			
F	F	C	C
So I'm doing that same old homework, doing it for a second time.			
G	F	C	C
I know I've learned my lesson, I'm paying for my dog's crime.			

Write your own words to a 12-bar blues, either just one verse or tell a little story from your life – maybe based on a problem or something hard. The blues are a way of cheering you up, making fun of something, or telling a story. Is there a guitarist or pianist in your class? Ask them to play the chords in a 12-bar blues while you sing your lyrics. Make up the tune to match your words.

Identify Famous Blues Musicians (History, Social Studies, Music)

Draw a line connecting a musician's name with a description:

Robert Johnson	Formerly Huddie Leadbetter, "King of the Twelve-String Guitar"
Mississippi John Hurt	"Empress of the Blues"
Ma Rainey	"Father of Texas Blues"
Blind Lemon Jefferson	Pioneer on the electric guitar
W.C. Handy	"Mother of the Blues"
T-Bone Walker	Called "the most famous blues singer who ever lived"
Leadbelly	Rediscovered at age 70
Bessie Smith	"Father of the Blues" and composer of "St. Louis Blues"

Circle the Notes in This C Scale That Are Most Often “Bent” in a Blues Song? (Music)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	D	E	F	G	A	B

Name Some Current Blues Greats Still Performing Today (Current Events, Music)

Google “blues” and artists such as B.B. King, Etta James, Eric Clapton, Keb Mo, etc.

Match songs and musicians (History, Social Studies, Music):

Draw a line connecting each song with a musician:

“St. Louis Blues”	Famous train song by Leadbelly
“Come in My Kitchen”	Song by Mississippi John Hurt
“Johnny Be Good”	R&B hit for Tina Turner
“Rock Island Line”	Rock and roll hit for Chuck Berry
“Proud Mary”	Blues sung by Bessie Smith
“Monday Morning Blues”	Famous blues song by W.C. Handy
“Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out”	Blues made famous by Robert Johnson

Blues Art Projects

Art Project #1 – Drawing or Painting

Choose a blues song to play while the class listens.

Create a drawing using only blue-hued crayons. More advanced students can mix their own varying blues hues from watercolor or acrylic paint boxes.

Art Project #2 – Drawing

Choose a blues song to play while the class listens.

In black and white ink, marker or ballpoint pen, create a “zine” or comic illustrating the lyrics of the song.

Art Project #3 - Image, Text and Photography

Choose a blues song to play while the class listens.

Create a collage of cut-out words and images from magazines and newspapers and your own photographs that is inspired by blues music.

Resources:

www.pbs.org/theblues

Martin Scorsese presents The Blues, A Musical Journey – a companion book to the PBS series, edited by Peter Guralnick, Robert Santelli, Holly George-Warren and Christopher John Farley. Published by Amistad, An Imprint of Harper-Collins Publishers.

Devil at the Confluence: The Pre-War Blues Music of St. Louis, Missouri by Kevin Belford. Contact The Sheldon for information on the publication date.