

YONDER COME THE BLUES:

By Jim Hornby

"A singer in a Louisiana prison declared: Whenever you sing the blues just right, why you feel like a million when you may not have a dime . . . That's the best part of my life, is blues."

—Harold Courlander
Negro Folk Music, USA.

Glancing at this article, you may not be particularly intrigued by the title, thinking perhaps that the blues is a dead issue and quite irrelevant to the amphetamine sounds of the "psychedelic" generation. There are various good reasons why the students at Canadian colleges are not, for the most part, brought up in a blues environment. Some of these will be indicated later on. Essentially, the story of the blues is the story of the American Negro around the turn of the century, but is of course completely valid as experience in all its geographical and chronological variations.

The Blues is a feeling. It is despair and triumph at the same time, and it is therefore significant that its musical expression originated with the Negro sharecroppers of the Mississippi Delta. These men led incredibly tortured lives — owning little or nothing, living only for the pleasures of women and drink, and often on the run or in prisons or hospitals. Robert Johnson, probably the greatest blues figures of all time, was murdered in 1938 at the age of 21. Johnson, Son House, Huddie (Leadbelly) Ledbetter and countless unknown others shaped the tradition handed down to them into an art form which expressed their lives in a natural and honest way.

The change that brought this basically individual country style into a city blues band framework was the migration of Delta Negroes (especially after World War II) to Chicago, where they had a slight chance to make a living. This brought the singers into a new atmosphere, causing a different style of blues with new figureheads. This "Chicago" style was, and has been, dominated by McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters), with Howlin' Wolf, Jimmy Reed and Elmore James as lesser, but still important, artists. Arriving from the Delta he began cutting records with an acoustic bass accompaniment. This freed him to experiment with bottleneck guitar, a style he had picked up from some of the greats of the Delta. In playing bottleneck guitar a bottleneck — or any hollow cylindrical object — is worn on a finger of the left hand. Fretting in this manner gives a characteristic whine as the player slides from note to note. Now sometimes called "slide" guitar, it is still widely used by bluesmen, from Chicago oldtimer John Lee Hooker to modern white figures John Hammond and Canned Heat's Al Wilson. This freedom to experiment outside the straight rhythmic pattern was the beginning of electrical lead guitar.

With instrumentalists of the calibre of the late Little Walter on harp, guitarist Pat Hare, and pianist Otis Spann, Muddy has been the most important figure on the Chicago scene since 1950, although his most recent recordings tend to be disappointing. The tradition has been taken up by guitarists Buddy Guy, Freddy King and Otis Rush, and harp men Junior Wells and James Cotton, all of whom have good vocal styles. Old-time solo mavericks like Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hookers are still prominent. Besides individual recordings like Wells' "Hoodoo Man Blues" on Delmark, and "Howlin' Wolf" on Chess, Vanguard's series "Chicago—The Blues Today" is the best chance to hear this scene.

Today's Negro audience, has in the main, deserted the blues from the glossier, more forward-looking sound of rhythm blues. The one man responsible for this switch is B. B. King, a great blues figure who abandoned the gravel voicings of the older bluesmen for an almost gospel sound. His other main influences have been to emphasize horns on his recordings, and his guitar style, which is the foundation of white blues lead guitarists (Bloomfield, Clapton, Green, Vestine, et al). Albert King is his most noted disciple.

While the black audience drifts away from the blues, the white audience gets closer to it. Possibly this is because the American black is finally finding some reason for optimism, or at least a desire to forget the painful history of his race as experienced in the blues. On the other hand, the white population can afford to be self-indulgent regarding suffering, and intolerant of the superficiality of much of his "popular" and "folk" music. Whatever the reason, white per-

formers are taking over the blues in many fields. Important Delta singers and instrumentalists include John Hammond, Eric Von Schmidt, Dave Van Ronk, and the team of Koerner, Ray and Glover. These artists, and several others with the exception of Hammond, are all found on a fine album on Elektra called "The Blues Project"; Bob Dylan is heard playing piano as a sideman under the nom de blues of Bob Landy. John Hammond's "Country Blues" on Vanguard is also noteworthy. In the bang bag big names include the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, (originally a part of the Chicago scene), Canned Heat, and Mike Bloomfield, possibly the greatest guitarist in blues today.

In England there is a hard core of good blues musicians, at the fountainhead of which is John Mayall. Mayall, who sings and plays guitar, harp and keyboard instruments, has had several editions of his group, the Blues Breakers, maintaining a uniform high quality throughout. Musicians who have played with Mayall include guitarists Eric Clapton, who played with the Yardbirds & Cream; Peter Green, who formed Fleetwood Mac; bassist Jack Bruce who played with Cream; and drummer Aynsley Dunbar, who formed his own group, the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation. Mayall's Albums, on London, include "The Blues Alone" (a solo album), and "A Hard Road", "Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton", "Crusade", and his latest, "Bare Wires".

The Blues song is notable for its many variations, ("Rollin' and Tumblin'" has at least a dozen traceable descendants), for its colorful and explicit use of sexual imagery, and for its characteristic flattened thirds and sevenths. Although I have somewhat arbitrarily classified certain elements of the blues, distinctions within the blues are not always easy to make.

The blues is not an outstanding part of our musical tradition although it has greatly influenced all music. This stems from a general willingness on the public to accept only the pre-chewed and banal, and regard music and song as something to go on unobtrusively in the background. Consequently several college generations, which had never heard of Robert Johnson, considered the Kingston Trio as the epitome of "folk music"!

A good preliminary to the blues would be Paul Oliver's "Conversation with the Blues", a series of interviews with "undiluted" blues singers, which includes eighty photographs of the singers and their environments. The quotation from bluesman Pickens is taken from this book.

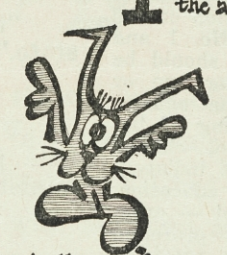
"The only way anyone can ever play blues—he's got to have them . . . Blues don't derive from a person's makin up his mind: 'I'm gonna sing the blues', He's got to have a feelin', he's got to have somethin' within so he can bring it out . . . Blues ain't nothing but a good man feelin' bad . . . No man in good spirit, no man in good heart can sing the blues, neither play them. But nach'al blues come directly from a person's heart: what he's experienced in life, what he's been through . . . That's when you start to sing the blues — when you've got the blues."

—Edwin Buster Pickens

encore!

Lapinette

the advertising burrab. by Tompkins




Lapinette, illustrating her short hop technique.

One day our lapinary friend was busy making a short hop across campus when she espied a truck transporting copious quantities of carrot cupcakes.

but such culinary consummations call for capital.


and capital, kiddies, means like Sanks.



Lapinette, demonstrating her desire for carrotic cupcakeitude.


funny we should mention that.

now lappy was short of cash. this isn't surprising, because we would be hard put to advertise this way if she weren't.



little lappy, showing a propensity for pecuniosity and velocity simultaneously.

So she romped over to the Campus Bank, which was nearby, natch, and garnered a few pfennigs therefrom.



the drawback...

and she still had time to catch the cupcake vendor and blow the lot before he was out of sight.

so we have a happy lappy.

but one problem.

at this rate we'll soon have the fattest rabbit in town.

why not hop over?

bank of montreal

campus bank

a capital place.

CHIPPIN'S

Welcome

All Students

to

St. Dunstan's University

For the 1968-69 Term

MINIMUM DISCOUNT

OF 10%

on Presentation of

Student Cards

Charlottetown's Newest

Men's and Ladies Clothing

and Footwear Store

CHIPPIN'S

150 GT. GEORGE ST.

TELEPHONE 894-5193