



THE MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER PRESENTS



A STUDY GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of

I JUST STOPPED BY TO SEE THE MAN

If you would like to schedule a classroom workshop, or if we can help in any other way, please contact:

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SYNOPSIS

"I believe playin' the blues cost me everything that was good in my life. And now, I don't have nothing'. 'Cept two things: my daughter and The Lord. And I ain't singin' no blues again for fear I lose them."

- Jesse

I JUST STOPPED BY TO SEE THE MAN is the story of Jesse Davidson, a 75 year old blues singer, who lives with his daughter, Della. Jesse is thought to have died in a car accident over 14 years ago and Della is on the run from the FBI. They live peacefully in the Mississippi Delta until Karl, an English rock star who has become successful by doing covers of Jesse's blues songs, comes barging into their home. He tries to convince Jesse to come back from the grave and perform again. However, Della strongly believes that this is a bad idea. Will Jesse continue his life in seclusion or will he be tempted to take the stage once again?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Jeffreys was born in London and first attracted critical attention with his play *Like Dolls or Angels* (1977), which won Jeffreys the *Sunday Times* Playwriting Award at the National Student Drama Festival. He helped to set up the touring company, Pocket Theatre Cumbria. The play *Carmen 1936* won him an Edinburgh Festival Fringe First in 1984 and ran at the Tricycle Theatre in London. Jeffreys' comedy *Valued Friends* played two sell-out runs at Hampstead Theatre in 1989 and 1990 and won him the *Evening Standard* and Critics' Circle awards for Most Promising Playwright. He has adapted several stories including Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew* for the Royal Shakespeare Company and Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* for the Pocket Theatre. In 1994, *The Libertine*, Jeffreys' raunchy play about the Earl of Rochester, was staged at the Royal Court Theatre, the Stepwolf in Chicago and was recently turned into a film starring Johnny Depp.



RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

The Blues. 2008. Lewis and Clark College. 5 February 2009.

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"A Brief History of the Blues." The Blue Highway. 2006. 3 February 2009.

<<http://thebluehighway.com/history.html>>.

Davis, Francis. *The History of the Blues: The Roots, The Music, The People*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003.

"The History of Blues Music." About.com. 13 May 2008. 3 February 2009.

<<http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/bluesmusic/a/bluesmusic.htm>>.



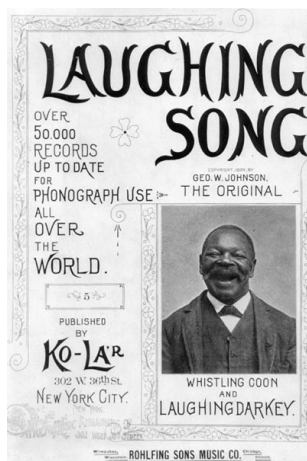
THE DELTA BLUES

Following the Civil War, the blues arose as a new musical form. It was originally called “the folk blues” and its roots grew deep in work songs and spirituals of plantation slaves and combines free-form lyrical patterns with expressive vocalization. While work songs and spirituals were born from a yearning for freedom and unity among the people, the blues also fulfilled a need for self-expression. Freed slaves were being integrated into a society that was heavily segregated and also placed a high value on individuality. As a result, blues songs often reflect the individual’s ability to overcome hard luck and adversity.

Many claim that the early blues were patterned after English ballads using 12 bars with a harmonic progression. Many of the melodies are set to a steady beat and are often repeated vocally or echoed by the guitar mimicking the call and response of work songs. This later evolved into the AAB form commonly used today. Lyrics were intensely personal and often dealt with the pain of betrayal, abandonment and unreturned love. These lyrics were usually rhythmically irregular and usually followed speech patterns with little rhyming. Blues musicians often use the “blue scale”. This is when notes are sung or played or at a lower pitch than those of the major scale, producing an expressive, melancholy sound.

The AAB Format consists of an introductory line, which is repeated once, and a concluding line. For example:

I'm going to leave baby, ain't going to say goodbye. I'm going to leave baby, ain't going to say goodbye. But I'll write you and tell you the reason why.

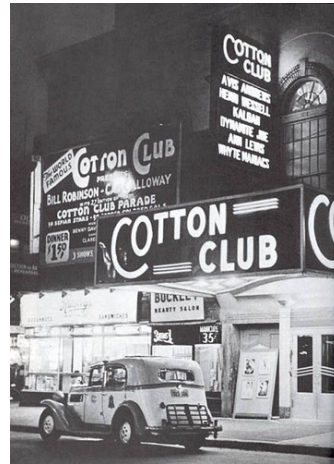


The use of the word “blue” to describe a feeling of depression or melancholia dates back as far as the Elizabethan Era in the 16th century. The term “the blues” was coined by Washington Irving, an American writer, in 1807. While the first recording of the blues was in 1895 by George Johnson (*Laughing Song*), the musical style was considered official in 1912, with the first written song by Hart Wands (*Dallas Blues*). The success of *Dallas Blues*, along with the release of *Memphis Blues* and *St. Louis Blues*, by W.C. Handy, thoroughly popularized the blues. In 1920, Mamie Smith’s recordings of *Crazy Blues* and *It’s Right Here for You* sold



75,000 copies within their first month of release and opened the doors for other blues artists. Companies were eager to take advantage of the new “race record” market, so-called because the albums were purchased almost exclusively by black consumers. Artists such as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey and Blind Lemon Jefferson made names for themselves during the 1920s boom.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the blues spread to the north as blacks started to move to cities like Detroit and Chicago. The urban blues were born, combining aspects of many regional styles into a more sophisticated, polished sound. This was often achieved by using an amplified guitar. Many artists also sang their songs backed by the bass, drums, piano and harmonica. In the early 1960s, the blues were discovered by young, white American and European musicians. These bands, such as the Rolling Stones, Paul Butterfield Blues Band and Cream, brought the blues to young, white audiences. Over time the blues became a major influence on jazz, rock and roll, rockabilly, folk and country music. Many artists such as Eric Clapton and B.B. King use the blues as a keystone in their music.



The Cotton Club was a famous night club in New York City that operated in the 1920s. The club featured many of the greatest entertainers of the era, such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Bessie Smith, Cab Calloway and Ella Fitzgerald.

ACTIVITY: Write your own blues song using the AAB format. Your song can be as long or short as you like, but you must be able to justify your artistic choices. Share your song with a small group and discuss the way you came up with your lyrics.

ACTIVITY: Many blues artists sang about struggles they went through in their own lives. Do some research about what was going on when blues became a big hit in the early 20th century. What events do you think influenced the artists? Share your ideas with your classmates.

DISCUSSION: Do you think that the blues have influenced singers and bands today? What connections do you see between the blues and rock? The blues and rap? The blues and country? Why do you think artists today use the blues as an influence? Discuss these questions with your classmates.



TYPES OF BLUES MUSIC

Blues music is a well-rounded art form with various types of blues branching off of the original Delta blues. The blues have prospered over the years and continue to grow and change.

CHICAGO BLUES was developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It amplifies the Delta Blues by putting it into a small-band context. Adding drums, bass, piano and sometimes the saxophone to the basic string band and harmonica aggregation, the genre created the now standard blues band lineup. The form is flexible to accommodate singers, guitarists, pianists and harmonica players as the featured performer in front of the standard instrumentation.

COUNTRY BLUES is a catch-all term that defines the first high point of guitar-driven blues which embraces solo, duo and string band performers. The term also provides a general heading for all the multiple regional styles and variations of the form. While early Piano Blues and Classic Female Blues often fall into this genre, Country-Blues is primarily a genre filled with acoustic guitarists, embracing a multiplicity of techniques from elaborate finger picking to slide playing.

MODERN ELECTRIC BLUES is an eclectic mixture embracing both the old and the new. Some forms of it copies the older styles of urban blues-primarily offshoots of the electric Chicago band style-right down to playing the music itself on vintage instruments and amplifiers from the period being replicated. It is the most forward looking of all blues styles, embracing rock beats and enlivening the form with funk rhythms and chord progressions that expand beyond the standard three that usually comprises most blues forms.

TEXAS BLUES encompasses a number of style variations. Its earliest life occurred in the mid 1920s, featuring rich acoustic guitar work as an extension of the vocals rather than a strict accompaniment to it. It embraces both the songster and country-blues traditions, with its lyrics relying less on affairs of the heart than in other forms. It brings forth a fully electric style that features jazzy, single-string soloing over predominantly horn-driven backing.

ACTIVITY: Research other types of blues music. Do you see any of these types of blues in the music that you listen to today? What musicians have taken the original Delta Blues and transformed it to their own type of music? Share your findings with your classmates.



BLUES ARTISTS



W.C. Handy (1873 - 1958) is widely recognized as the "Father of the Blues" due to his steadfast and pioneering efforts to document, write and publish blues music and his life-long support of the genre. Although much of his musical taste leaned toward a more polished sound, Handy was among the first to recognize the value of the blues as an important American legacy. Handy was an accomplished bandleader and songwriter who performed throughout the South before continuing his career in New York. He came across the Delta blues in the late 1890s, and his composition *Memphis Blues*, published in 1912, was the first to include "blues" in the title. A Memphis park was named after Handy in recognition of his contribution to blues and the Blues Foundation recognizes the genre's achievements annually with the prestigious W.C. Handy award.

Ma Rainey (1886 - 1939) is commonly known as the "Mother of the Blues" because of her significant influence on the many female blues singers who succeeded her. She began performing in minstrel and vaudeville shows around the age of 14 and is widely considered to be one of the first female singers to perform blues in that setting. She was an important link between the rough vocals of country blues and the more polished sound of classic urban blues. In addition to Rainey's vocal prowess, she was also a talented songwriter. After more than two decades of performing, Rainey began to record in 1923, and she left behind a prolific legacy that includes many classics.



Blind Lemon Jefferson (1897 - 1929) was a groundbreaking artist on many levels and is the undisputed father of Texas blues. His innovative guitar style featured a flair for arpeggios (playing each note of a chord separately rather than in unison), unconventional use of bass notes and unusual phrasing as well as jazz-inspired improvisation. Even early in his career Jefferson's remarkable talent was evident. He built a fan base playing on the streets of Dallas and was able to provide for his family on those earnings. He recorded close to 100 songs within only four years. As a talented songwriter he shifted the common practice of blues vocalists primarily performing songs written by others.



THROUGH THE YEARS



Eric Clapton's (1945) talent has graced some of the best bands in rock and blues history: the Yardbirds, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Cream and Blind Faith. He is a rock and blues star in his own right, maintaining a reputation for decades as one of Great Britain's finest guitarists. Clapton has moved between rock, blues and pop throughout his career, but his major influences include Muddy Waters, B.B. King and Robert Johnson, and his renditions of blues classics are among his best-known recordings. He is a master of painfully expressive guitar work, matched by his emotional vocal delivery. Although much of his work is outstanding, he is probably best known for the album *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, which is commonly considered to be a masterpiece.

B.B. King's (1925) career has spanned five decades and taken him from the clubs of Memphis to the finest concert halls in the world. He's known for his enduring and successful efforts and deserves much of the credit for the genre's mainstream popularity and recognition. Early in his career King worked as a Memphis disc jockey. His sound has always been more polished, probably due to his wide variety of influences, which include jazz, gospel and pop. King's highly influential style features "single string" guitar solos that are so well-integrated with his commanding vocals that it's sometimes hard to tell the two apart. He also "bends" the strings, which continues the sound in a way that enhances the music's emotion. King continues to record and perform as powerfully as ever.



Shemekia Copeland (1979) began appearing on stage with her father, Texas bluesman Johnny Copeland, as a child and as a teenager she toured with him as his opening act, stunning audiences with a confident stage presence which seemed to belie her youth. Her vocal prowess matches her charisma as a performer. At the age of 19, Copeland released her debut album, inspiring comparisons to blues legends Etta James and Koko Taylor. By 2002 Copeland had released two more albums to critical acclaim, and won three of the blues' prestigious W.C. Handy awards. She has worked with Ruth Brown, one of her original influences, as well as Dr. John and others.





VISITING THE REP

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. There will be a staircase on your left and the Stiemke Theater is next to the staircase.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

For more information on our education programs and our productions, please visit our website at www.milwaukeerep.com

PROGRAMS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM:

The Helen Bader Foundation	Dorothy Inbusch Foundation, Inc
The Einhorn Family Foundation	Johnson Controls
The Harley Davidson Foundation	The Milwaukee Arts Board
The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation	MPS Partnership for the Arts

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"The theatre is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental.

It's so much like life." Arthur Miller

Our lives are greatly enhanced with theater. Studying and viewing it teaches us about other cultures and times, collaboration, work ethic and imagination. We become more aware of the world around us with these concepts, and in addition to this, more alert to and responsive of human nature. With this improved understanding of what theater can provide for us we are able to gain a better appreciation not only for theater, but for life as well.

The Rep Milwaukee

THEATER ♦ TRAINING AT ITS BEST