

## The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music

From Robert Johnson to Aretha Franklin, Mahalia Jackson to John Lee Hooker, blues and gospel artists figure heavily in the mythology of twentieth-century culture. The styles in which they sang have proved hugely influential to generations of popular singers, from the wholesale adoptions of singers like Robert Cray or James Brown, to the subtler vocal appropriations of Mariah Carey. Their own music, and how it operates, is not, however, always seen as valid in its own right.

This book offers an overview of both these genres, which worked together to provide an expression of twentieth-century black U.S. experience. Their histories are unfolded and questioned; representative songs and lyrical imagery are analyzed; perspectives are offered from the standpoint of the voice, the guitar, the piano, and also that of the working musician. The book concludes with a discussion of the impact the genres have had on mainstream musical culture.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

BLUES AND  
GOSPEL MUSIC

.....

EDITED BY  
Allan Moore



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## Contributors

**Matt Backer** was born in New Orleans and has lived in Mexico City, Brussels, Caracas, New York, and Leamington Spa. He studied at the Berklee College of Music and the University of Warwick, but threw it all away in order to become a freelance guitarist. Artists he has worked with include Emmylou Harris, Joe Cocker, Steve Earle, Aimee Mann, Julian Lennon, and Alan Partridge. He also composes music for film and television and his eagerly awaited solo debut *Is That All* is available on Warmfuzz Records.

He woke up this morning and had the blues.

Born and raised in San Francisco, **Graeme M. Boone** received his A.B. in Music from the University of California at Berkeley (1976); a Premier prix in music history from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, Paris (1979); and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Music from Harvard University (1987). He recently co-edited a collection of analytical essays on rock music (*Understanding Rock*, Oxford University Press, 1997), and wrote a monograph on the relationship between musical and verbal rhythm in fifteenth-century song (*Patterns in Play*, University of Nebraska Press, 1999). A documentary history of jazz is in preparation (*Readings in Jazz History*, Norton).

**Don Cusic** is the author of twelve books, including *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music*. He is currently Professor of Music Business at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.

**David Evans** received his M.A. (1967) and Ph.D. (1976) degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles, in Folklore and Mythology. He is currently Professor of Music at the University of Memphis. Evans has been a researcher of blues music since the 1960s. His *Tommy Johnson* (1971) and *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (1982) are based on his field research in Mississippi and other southern states. Evans has written many articles, chapters, and record album notes, and has produced many albums of field and studio recordings of blues.

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**Barb Jungr** is a singer, performer, and writer. Her CDs on Linn Records have included new translations of the works of Brel and Ferre and a forthcoming

collection of the songs of Bob Dylan, *Every Grain Of Sand*. Her interests and singing styles include contemporary European cabaret, chansons, gospel, blues, r&b, traditional and soul. Born in Rochdale she received her Master of Music at Goldsmiths College, London, in 1996. She won the Perrier Award in 1987 for the show *Brown Blues*, received a Gulbenkian Award to study physical theatre techniques in the early 1990s and is currently touring, singing and leading workshops internationally.

Professor of Popular Music at the University of Surrey, **Allan F. Moore** heads the Department of Music there. He is a composer and author of *Rock: The Primary Text* (a revised edition of which was recently published by Ashgate) and a study of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*, in addition to many articles on popular music and modernism. On the editorial board of *Popular Music*, he also reviews occasionally for B.B.C. Radio 4.

**Jeff Todd Titon** is the author of numerous articles and books on blues including *Early Downhome Blues* (2nd edition, University of North Carolina Press, 1995) and *Downhome Blues Lyrics* (2nd edition, University of Illinois Press, 1990). From 1990 to 1995 he was editor of *Ethnomusicology*, the Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology. A guitarist, he played with the Lazy Bill Lucas Blues Band and performed at the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. In 1971 he joined the faculty of Tufts University, where he taught in the departments of English and music. Since 1986 he has been Professor of Music and Director of the Ph.D. program in ethnomusicology at Brown University.

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**Guido van Rijn** is a teacher of English at Kennemer Lyceum in Overveen, The Netherlands. In 1970 he co-founded The Netherlands Blues and Boogie Organization, whose work culminated in the annual Utrecht Blues Estafette. He has published many articles in specialist magazines like *Blues Unlimited*, *Blues & Rhythm* and *Living Blues*, and has produced seventeen LPs and CDs for his own Agram label. His Ph.D. dissertation from Leiden University was revised as the award-winning *Roosevelt's Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on FDR* (1997). A sequel entitled *The Truman and Eisenhower Blues* will be published in 2002.

**Adrian York** works in music education, as a media composer and as a performer. He lectures at the University of Westminster and the Guildhall School of Music, works as syllabus director for Rockschool, the popular music examination board, and directs the Jazz FM Jazzworks school workshops. Recent T.V. commissions include theme and incidental music for broadcasters including

the B.B.C., I.T.V. and Channels 4 and 5. He has worked as a performer and musical director for many of the top names in popular music and jazz and at the moment is musical director of the Jazz FM Quintet. He writes regularly for *Music Teacher* magazine, contributed to the recent national curriculum syllabus in music and has his own series of popular piano arrangements (The Style File) published by Chester.

## Chronology

The 130-odd entries in the chronology which follows highlight some of the factors which, by common agreement, have fashioned the blues and gospel into what we know today. It consists of the release dates of recordings whose style or wider impact is notable, of events which have helped shape both the genres and the lives of African Americans, and of the first appearance of, particularly, key styles. For this latter reason, more recent entries are limited. The emphasis must be very much on the period 1920–70, when these genres were most active. The beginning of the period is marked by the advent of recording; its end by the genres' diminution as a vital cultural force.

- 1619** disembarkation of first (20) Africans on American soil
- 1641** slavery first made legal, in Massachusetts
- 1698** first edition of *Bay Psalm Book* with melodies
- 1739** Isaac Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* published in the U.S.A.  
(original English publication 1707)
- 1780** institution of first African American church in Savannah, Georgia
- 1800** establishment of the revival spiritual – sacred words to folk  
melodies – with the Kentucky Revival
- 1801** Richard Allen publishes the widely used *Collection of Spiritual Songs  
and Hymns*
- 1862** first recorded reference to “the blues” in the diary of Charlotte Forten
- 1867** first publication of *Slave Songs of the United States*
- 1871** first tour by Fisk Jubilee Singers  
first of the Moody-Sankey revival meetings
- 1883** repeal of 1875 Civil Rights Act, enabling segregationist practices
- 1896** U.S. Supreme Court approves Southern States' segregation laws
- 1897** first published ragtime: Tom Turpin's “Harlem Rag”
- 1903** Victor Talking Machine Records make recordings of camp meeting  
shouts – first recorded black music
- 1908** first published sheet music using the name “blues,” Antonio  
Maggio's “I Got the Blues”
- 1909** U.S. Copyright Act commodifies the popular song
- 1910** start of mass northward migration by African Americans  
formation of the mixed-race N.A.A.C.P.
- 1913** foundation of the first black-owned music publishing house, that of  
Harry Pace & W. C. Handy
- 1916** Homer Rodeheaver founds gospel recording label

- 1917** first appearance of recorded jazz, by Original Dixieland Jazz Band  
“slack key” guitar craze sweeps U.S.A. – origins of bottleneck technique
- 1920** first recordings of vocal blues by a black singer, Mamie Smith’s  
“What is This Thing Called Love” and “Crazy Blues”  
women enfranchised in the U.S.A.
- 1921** first U.S. radio broadcast of church service  
W. C. Handy sets up Black Swan Records, first black-owned recording company
- 1923** establishment of “race records” as identifying genre  
earliest field recording sessions (those of Okeh Records)  
Bessie Smith records Sara Martin’s “Mama’s Got the Blues,” first in a line of moving performances  
earliest appearance of boogie piano bass line, Clay Custer’s “The Rocks”
- 1924** first recording of a rural blues – Ed Andrews’ “Barrel House Blues”
- 1925** regular use made of electrical recording (using microphones)  
Charles Davenport records “Cow Cow Blues”
- 1926** Blind Lemon Jefferson begins recording, to unprecedented success  
key recordings of Arizona Dranes, defining gospel piano style  
first recording of solo guitar gospel – Blind Joe Taggart
- 1927** talking pictures mark beginning of a decline in record industry  
Meade Lux Lewis records “Honky Tonk Train Blues”  
J. M. Gates’ recorded sermons vastly outsell Bessie Smith recordings  
Blind Willie Johnson records “Dark was the Night, Cold was the Ground”
- 1928** Thomas Dorsey & Tampa Red record “Tight Like That,” marking the “hokum” craze  
Pine Top Smith records “Pine Top’s Boogie Woogie”  
first recordings by Leroy Carr & Scrapper Blackwell
- 1929** first emergence of “boogie-woogie” as genre term  
Charley Patton (already in his forties) has his first recording session
- 1932** low point of blues recordings, by nos.  
Thomas Dorsey & Sallie Martin establish the Gospel Singer’s convention, Chicago
- 1933** repeal of Prohibition – beginning of fall in sales of gospel recordings  
Leadbelly “discovered” by Alan Lomax
- 1935** revival of boogie-woogie piano begins, leading eventually to jump blues
- 1936** key recordings of Robert Johnson  
first recordings of Harlem Hamfats (origin of jump blues)  
first recordings by Golden Gate Quartet

- 1937** Sonny Boy Williamson introduces harmonica to the blues line-up
- 1938** John Hammond's Carnegie Hall "Spirituals to Swing" Concerts, bringing boogie-woogie to public attention  
Bill Broonzy uses electric guitar, adding drums in 1942  
Big Joe Turner records "Roll 'em, Pete," moving from Basie-style big band to "shout" blues
- 1939** introduction to gospel of the Hammond organ/piano combination
- 1940** T-Bone Walker begins recording  
this decade sees peak of African American migration from the South
- 1941** first regular broadcasting slot, of Rice Miller & Robert Lockwood Jr. on K.F.F.A., Arkansas
- 1942** formation of Apollo Records, largely recording black gospel artists  
beginning of two-year American Federation of Musicians' ban on commercial recording  
*Billboard* sets up "race" chart, the "Harlem Hit Parade"
- 1943** beginning of increase in no. of blues recordings (peaking in 1947)
- 1945** formation of Specialty, with a similar roster to Apollo  
Cecil Gant records "I Wonder," crossing over to the white market
- 1946** Roy Milton records "R. M. Blues," one of the first black recordings to exceed a million sales  
Louis Jordan's "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" does likewise, attracting attention nationwide
- 1947** Frankie Laine records "That's my Desire," attempting to combine "black" and "white" elements  
formation of Atlantic Records, key blues label aimed at mixed audiences  
formation of Chess Records, vital in the development of rhythm'n'blues
- 1948** John Lee Hooker records "Boogie Chillun"  
Radio W.D.I.A. in Memphis begins broadcasting only black music  
Muddy Waters records "I Can't Be Satisfied," defining new r&b style
- 1949** end of "race" as genre category  
*Billboard* adopts term "rhythm'n'blues"  
B. B. King begins recording  
Big Jay McNeely's "Deacon's Hop" combines gospel with hard r&b
- 1950** formation of Word Records, largest gospel label
- 1951** Jackie Brenston & Ike Turner record "Rocket 88," frequently cited as the originary r&b record  
Bill Broonzy tours U.K.
- 1952** Mahalia Jackson sings in London, becomes known outside gospel circles

- 1953** Ray Charles crosses over from gospel with “I Gotta Woman”  
The Orioles record “Crying in the Chapel,” combining r&b with gospel, and scoring in both the pop and r&b charts
- 1954** Bill Haley records “Shake, Rattle & Roll”  
The Chords record “Sh-Boom,” initiating the doo-wop style  
beginning of major decline in no. of blues recordings (bottoming out in 1963)  
segregated schooling declared illegal in U.S. by Supreme Court order
- 1955** popularity for the blues markedly on the wane, coincident with the growing push for African American rights  
Little Richard records “Tutti Frutti,” identifying “rock’n’roll” with manner of performance  
Chuck Berry records “Maybellene,” demonstrating importance to rock’n’roll of teenage concerns
- 1956** (gospel) recording debut of Aretha Franklin  
Elvis Presley records “Hound Dog”  
Lonnie Donegan records “Rock Island Line”  
Fats Domino’s “Blueberry Hill” initiates a highly successful market for r&b/rock’n’roll/country crossover
- 1957** Sam Cooke records “You Send Me,” turning his back on gospel  
Norman Mailer’s essay “The White Negro” reinforces white Romantic view of African American lifestyle
- 1958** Chris Barber brings Muddy Waters to perform in London
- 1959** formation of Stax Records  
formation of Tamla Motown
- 1960** Elvis Presley records “His Hand in Mine,” helping to define contemporary white gospel genre
- 1961** Freddie King records “Hideaway,” launching ground for the U.K. blues movement
- 1962** Bobby Bland records key hit “Stormy Monday”
- 1963** black political protest in U.S.A. marked by march on Washington  
*Billboard* closes its r&b charts because they were duplicating the content of the pop charts
- 1964** Civil Rights Act bans all forms of segregation
- 1965** James Brown records “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag”  
riots in Watts district of Los Angeles
- 1966** coining of “Black Power” as a political slogan
- 1967** birth of The Jesus Movement in San Francisco
- 1968** Mahalia Jackson sings at Martin Luther King’s funeral  
James Cleveland’s first Gospel Workshop of America

- National Association of Television & Radio Announcers convention explodes along racial lines over the question of crossover  
B. B. King plays Fillmore West to a white, not a black, audience
- 1969** Edwin Hawkins Singers release “Oh Happy Day,” re-popularizing gospel  
Gospel-singer Roberta Martin’s funeral in Chicago attracts huge crowds
- 1970** Washington Blues Festival produced by African Americans, for them
- 1971** Marvin Gaye releases *What’s Going On*
- 1972** Aretha Franklin’s *Amazing Grace* crosses over strongly to the pop charts
- 1973** Stevie Wonder releases *Inner Visions*
- 1977** CBS’s integrated marketing policy marks low-point in income for the majority of African American artists
- 1983** formation of the London Community Gospel Choir, premier such U.K. institution
- 1984** Prince (*Purple Rain*) and Michael Jackson (*Thriller* – 1982) appear to question their racial characteristics in their music
- 1985** Stevie Ray Vaughan releases *Texas Flood*, marking a resurgence of white performer interest in “authentic” blues styling
- 1987** *Billboard* introduces a “Hot Crossover” chart
- 1989** John Lee Hooker releases *The Healer*, achieving mainstream success
- 1998** R. L. Burnside releases *Come On In*, bringing hip-hop scratching and electronica to a raw blues style
- 1999** Taj Mahal, one of the most-recorded blues singers, releases *Kulanjan* with Mali musicians, marking yet another crucial stylistic crossover
- 2001** by the turn of the century, as an indication of the genre’s continuing popularity, there are at least twenty-eight major annual blues and blues-related festivals



## Preface

Some time probably in 1971, in a run-down cinema in a tiny town on the coast of middle England, a singer/guitarist then unknown to me flew for ten minutes over the simplest harmonic structure. To someone then coming to grips with the harmonies of early modernism, this performance by Ten Years After on the film of the *Woodstock* festival was a revelation, perhaps analogous in impact to the effect of people like B. B. King on a young Eric Clapton a decade earlier. There was a crucial difference, however. Having undertaken a metaphorical journey back to discovering where such performances came from, I was interested not in trying to re-create and relive that atmosphere as the British blues movement was, but in understanding it as something I could never fully partake in. It is for this reason that, as a scholar of popular music, I have undertaken to put together this volume. The twin roles of fan and scholar of popular music are now common currency, even if the necessary tensions are irresolvable, even in theory. Those tensions are, in their way, manifested in this collection. Although all the contributors to this volume are both fans and scholars, some participate in the musical practices they describe, while others (myself, for instance) only observe. We thus form a microcosm of the involvement of our readership for, while the public taste for consuming both blues and gospel is more stabilized now that it was twenty or thirty years ago, a sizeable number of people still perform the music, and are themselves involved in critical admiration of music produced up to eighty years ago.

The scope of the Cambridge Companions is large indeed, covering genres, oeuvres, repertoires shown to have had an undeniable effect on music-making in the industrialized West. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the series should contain a volume devoted to genres of music originating with a disenfranchised slave culture in small pockets of what is now the United States of America, genres which have posed a perennial challenge to the music of established culture. That challenge must remain as a sub-text. Those genres, of blues and gospel, are the subject of this volume and, because they are not always deemed worthy of the depth of attention they receive here, it is valuable, briefly, to ponder the apparent differences between these genres, their developments, and those of the European concert hall and opera house where such depth of attention goes unremarked.

For many years after its appearance in the early years of the previous century, the blues was a largely improvised music. With the exception of some moments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, improvisation

has never really been a defining feature of the music of the classical tradition, which now in any case depends on reproducing, with various degrees of fidelity, the instructions of a usually absent (because dead) composer. Individual blues and gospel numbers did not have distinct identities – singers modified a received model in the process of performance. Items in both the classical and popular traditions, however, depend for their commercial viability on their identity, on being able to ascertain that one is listening to *this* piece or song or performance as opposed to *that*. Gospel songs, while opportunities for the display of abilities, were used as mediation between groups of oppressed individuals and a concrete, substantial, God. Classical music, to the extent that it has a “spiritual” dimension, moves only in an abstract, unfocused realm. Finally, the blues and gospel were recognized as indispensable to the very cultural survival of their users. Both classical and popular music, except insofar as they provide the opportunity for gainful employment, seem, by comparison, luxuries. There are, of course, similarities too. All the music discussed above depends now, to a greater or lesser extent, on recordings, which reduces each to the status of a reproducible product. It all, too, contributes greatly to the imaginative lives of those who spend time with it. It is the differences, however, which dominate, differences which for some years have encouraged proponents to argue for the inherent, or at least ethical, superiority of one or other tradition. No such assumption is made in this collection, except insofar as blues and gospel are seen as legitimate means of expression in their own right, requiring no defense from the practices of other musics.

It is worth pointing out here that the content of individual chapters is not rigidly delimited: singers, songs, events, are referred to in more than one place; after all, each contributor is observing the same material, from his or her own vantage point. Certain areas of possible enquiry have had to be omitted for various reasons, not least because there is a lot of research which remains to be done. And in any case, comprehensive coverage is naturally impossible – in a volume of limited size, even more so. It is my intention, however, that this Companion provides both enough answers, and subsequent questions, to enable you to deepen whatever understanding you have of those most pervasive of twentieth-century genres, blues and gospel music.