

History of the Blues

The Blues really started when African people were taken to America to work as slaves on plantation fields. The slaves would sing songs of their despair and suffering to make the time pass more quickly. Their music was a mixture of the rhythms and tunes that the slaves brought over from Africa with the music of the European settlers.



Any slaves that were musical were encouraged to play the violin and sometimes the slaves who could play music were given more freedom than the other slaves. The music would be used for picnicking, parties or dancing. Even though the African people were treated badly they tried to make the best of their situation. Even when slavery was banned in 1865 they faced poverty and homelessness. The Blues music is about the black peoples struggle to survive and their efforts to win back their freedom.

The Development of the Blues

One of the many things that influenced Blues was the black people's religion. Their church services were lively and many different instruments were often played. Black people music fascinated the whites who began copying their styles of singing and dancing. These were called *minstrel shows* and are still popular today.

Another way that black music was spread was through **medicine shows**. These were put on by travelling medicine salesmen to attract likely customers, and were a good opportunity for black musicians to perform.

Blues continued to develop over time and has influenced many other styles of music. The 12 bar blues is one of the simplest ways of constructing a song and was used in *Jazz, Country and Western* and *Rock and Roll* Music. Many Blues artists continue to perform and write blues music today, for e.g. B. B. King.

Questions

1. Why did the African slaves sing Blues songs?
2. What was their music a mixture of?
3. Which instruments were the slaves allowed to play?
4. Were they treated any better? If so, how and why?
5. When was slavery abolished and why was the situation not really any better for black people?
6. What were the church services like in which the Blues was heard?
7. Do you think medicine shows were a good thing or a bad thing?
8. What type of music has the blues influenced?