RHYTHM & BLUES

Rhythm & blues was an offspring of the blues, built on the musical language, 12-bar formal structure and emotional directness of the blues, though it was a rather rambunctious child. While the blues remained a relatively constant and self-contained musical form, rhythm & blues pulled from a variety of sources—blues, boogie-woogie, jazz, swing, gospel, pop—and changed with the times and trends.[i] The term "Rhythm & Blues" replaced the offensive "Race Records" label in *Billboard* magazine in 1949, the same year that "Country & Western" was substituted for "Hillbilly." (The two styles and audiences were originally lumped together in a "Western & Race" category, reflecting the view of black and southern white audiences as fringe elements outside of the mainstream represented by the "Popular" charts.) Like "race records," rhythm & blues was really just a catchall term that covered everything from Ink Spots ballads to Joe Turner shouts and meant little more than "black music aimed at a black audience," and even that definition was rendered inadequate when white teenagers discovered R&B and claimed it as "rock & roll."

As the name implies, rhythm & blues was propelled by stronger and faster rhythms made for the dance floor. The rollicking beat and bass lines of rhythm & blues came largely from piano boogie-woogie and big band swing music, which also spawned R&B's jazz-based instrumentation and band arrangements, while the vocal styles and emotional expression of R&B mixed blues urgency with pop's polish and gospel stylings. The livelier dance rhythms were complemented by upbeat and often sexual and humorous lyrics that appealed to a younger audience of urban blacks who were starting to view traditional blues as an uncomfortable reminder of times best forgotten. Rhythm & blues rolled right over the self-torment of the blues, just as rockabilly jettisoned the guilt that always accompanied the good times in country music. The rise of rhythm & blues in the years after World War II reflected the high spirits and the new feeling of optimism with which black Americans looked to the future and to a rightful place in a nation that had just won a war in the name of freedom and justice. The actual changes proved to be painfully slow in coming, but the music itself ended up playing a major role in bringing them about.

Boogie-woogie

A landmark pair of concerts, called "Spirituals to Swing," were presented in Carnegie Hall in 1938 and 1939. The concerts showcased all styles of black music and were an important watershed point for black music in America. The wide-ranging lineup included Big Bill Broonzy (a substitute for Robert Johnson, who died before he could be reached with an invitation to perform), gospel singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the blues-based swing of the Kansas City Six (featuring Count Basie and Lester Young), blues shouter Joe Turner, boogie pianists Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis, and many others. The pianists caused the biggest sensation: their rollicking rhythms ignited a craze for boogie-woogie music that, like the ragtime and blues fads before it, was spread from cafe society to the masses via records and sheet music, and was soon adapted by popular white entertainers (the Andrews Sisters' "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" was one of the more obvious examples).

Bro writes so lazily. BORING.

The origins of boogie-woogie are obscure as those of the blues, though the music seems to have originated in the saloons surrounding the lumber and turpentine camps in Texas and Louisiana in the early part of the century. Boogie-woogie found its urban base in Chicago, where the music was first recorded and where it was in constant demand for bars and "rent parties," which raised money for both the pianist and the landlord. Boogie-woogie was essentially a piano version of the 12-bar blues, derived from blues guitar styles, church piano styles and the ragtime and barrelhouse jazz styles of the New Orleans pianists. While shaped by the influence of the blues, boogie-woogie placed its emphasis on the dance beat and *rhythm*, rather than on the lyrics and personal expression, and on a good-times party mood that was a sharp contrast to the inward melancholy of the blues. (The term "boogie" came to be used by guitarists as well, to describe a particularly rhythmic style, and was eventually used to refer to dancing and partying in general.) The boogie-woogie players mixed the musical outlines of the 12-bar blues with pounding dance rhythms, driving left-hand bass patterns and fancy right-hand flourishes that were as idiomatic on the piano as bent strings and slide styles were on the guitar. And while it took a talent like Robert Johnson's to evoke an entire band with a single guitar, any enthusiastic piano player could smack keys, pound pedals and hammer out a constant "eight-to-the-bar" boogie bass to keep the dancers moving and the spirits high.

The term "boogie-woogie" was first used on record in 1928 by Clarence "Pine Top" Smith, who recorded "Pine Top's Boogie Woogie" in the form of a party song and dance lesson, just a few months before he was killedin a bar fight. Other early boogie innovators included Cow Cow Davenport, Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis and **Jimmy Yancey**, the "Father of Boogie-woogie" who crystallized boogie style in the 1920's but did not make any recordings of his own until 1939. In a welcome acknowledgment of the formative influence of boogie-woogie, Jimmy Yancey joined Jimmie Rodgers and Robert Johnson as the first three inductees into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's "Early Influences" category. That influence is heard most clearly, of course, in the manic boogie of rock & roll piano, as exemplified by Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, but it is also heard in rock's boogie-derived rhythms and bass lines and in the chugging rhythm and riffing lead styles that formed the essentials of rock & roll guitar as defined by Chuck Berry. (Berry adapted much of his guitar style from a piano playing bandleader, and called his own playing "boogie-woogie" until "rock & roll" became an operative term.)

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[i] In this sense, one could distinguish between the blues as a "folk" music and R&B as a "popular" music, though those types of distinctions remain vague at best.