Music of the Common Tongue

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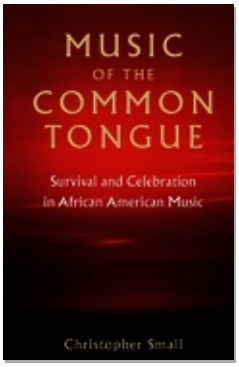

Chapter 7

RITUALS FOR SURVIVAL II: THE SHEER POWER OF SONG

It has been said that if gospel is the present-day paradigm of Afro-American religious musicking, so blues is of secular. It would be more true to say that blues and gospel are twin modern aspects of that ritual of survival which is the musical act, and that they have not only interpenetrated but also proved an inexhaustible source of inspiration to several generations of musicians both black and white. Further, while we have seen that there is a good deal of quite secular enjoyment in the performance of both spirituals and gospel music, so in blues, and indeed in other 'secular' performance as well, there is a strong element of what can only be called the religious, even if it is not obvious to the casual observer.

But in any case blues is a comparative newcomer to the scene, and its dominance is even more recent. It is hard to say just when the modern form took shape; certainly it could not have been before the last years of the nineteenth century, and even until well into the present one it represented only one of many ways of musicking in which black American musicians and their audiences engaged. Even in the days of slavery there had been a wide variety of musical activity; central to the musical culture may have been the hymns and spirituals, but religious emotions did not prevent the majority of the slaves from engaging in other kinds of musicking as well. Work songs, play songs, songs of love and of parting, songs of commentary on events, of abuse and satire, were mostly spontaneously composed and often lasted only as long as the occasion of their singing — 'as varied', says Levine, 'as narrow, as fleeting, as life itself'.[1] Many contemporary commentators

remarked on the slaves' ability to make a song about an occasion, not only to celebrate or to lament but also to tell their masters or other white hearers of their needs and desires, to hint or to beseech.

The words of many of these songs have come down to us through the notations of interested auditors, but the melodies can only be imagined. As with improvised musicking in general, probably little was made up from scratch, the performance evolving through the manipulation of scraps of common-stock material whose provenance would itself be various: long memories of African song, minstrel tunes, hymn tunes, dance tunes, popular songs of the time, all transformed and unified by the singers' synthesising power. Not all of the songs thus made were transient; if it were enjoyed, a song would continue to be sung for as long as it suited the expressive purposes of the singers, but since those purposes themselves were mostly transient, secular songs tended not to last as long as the spirituals, built as the latter were around more abiding concerns. There were exceptions; one ex-slave remembered what she called 'one of the saddest songs we sung en durin' slavery days . . . It always did make me cry:

> Mammy, is Ol' Mass gwin'er sell us tomorrow?
> Yes my chile.
> Whar he gwin'er sell us?
> Way down South in Georgia'.[2]

It was not all song. Instrumental music was also plentiful. There were instruments that had been brought, either physically or in the slaves' minds, from Africa, like the balafo, which Richard Lygon saw the slave Macow building, and the panpipes ('quills'), the musical bow and the banjo as well as other kinds of stringed instruments, but there were also European fiddles, horns, clarinets and guitars which masters often gave to certain slaves and even had them instructed in for performance. These were played mostly for dancing, both for the masters' enjoyment — quadrilles, reels and waltzes, as well as the grand marches that were an important element of any dance occasion — and for the slaves' own dancing. Under those circumstances it was only to be expected that a good deal of traffic in dance tunes and dance styles would take place,

especially as the slaves enjoyed parodying the whites' dances (the whites, it seems, tended to think their mockery was a feeble attempt at imitation and laughed indulgently).

We might imagine that a slave musician would feel a certain satisfaction in seeing his masters dancing to his tunes — and perhaps as the evening wore on and inhibitions wore off he might introduce more African-sounding strains to make the dance go with a greater swing. There are indeed hints from contemporary sources that this did occur, and was tacitly approved by the gentry; a dance known as the Congo was popular in polite society in Richmond, Virginia in colonial times, although it is doubtful whether it was quite the same as the famous Dance in Place Congo in New Orleans that was known by that name. It is clear that a complex process of interaction was going on, with the white dances and their music passing into the slaves' culture and becoming Africanized as they did so, while the black elements became part of the white culture, all unacknowledged or else safely distanced by the minstrelizing process.

The minstrel show itself was a medium through which black ways of musicking and dancing passed back and forth between the two groups. To take only one example, the song and dance of the old crippled Louisville stablehand that Thomas Rice observed and 'borrowed' would have been in its original form an improvisation; taken and used in the minstrel show it became fixed in both words and music (seen in print it appears an extraordinarily banal tune, but doubtless the manner of performance counted for much) and became famous with its nonsense verses, such as

> I'm a rorer on de fiddle
> And down in old Virginny
> Dey say I play de skientific
> Like massa Pagganninny

and its chorus of

> Weel about and turn about and do jus so,
> Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow

which was taken up by blacks and, according to Levine, was to

be heard as late as 1915 in North Carolina as

> Fust upon yo' heel-top, den upon yo' toe
> Ev'ry time I turn about I jump Jim Crow.[3]

This was doubtless only one of dozens of variants which might have been heard across the country from black singers and dancers. Similarly, fiddle tunes and jigs such as *Old Zip Coon* and *Old Dan Tucker,* some of them quite likely Irish or Scottish in original provenance, passed back and forth, the only differences being in manner of performance.

How many of the slave musicians were able to read music is unclear (mention of playing 'by note' is virtually non-existent) but from the seventeenth century onwards, for example in the London collections of Playford and of Thompson, there were plenty of printed sources of dance music available which could satisfy the needs of the colonial society. Many of the black musicians were highly accomplished and were quite probably able to read from those collections as well as from others which from the late eighteenth century onwards were printed in America. How these skills were acquired is something of a mystery. There are hints that some slaves were apprenticed out by their masters for training, and there was a fraternity of music and dancing masters who travelled between the great houses of the south, spending a few days here, a few there, teaching music to the sons and daughters of the family; as in Europe, a smattering of musical skill enhanced the marriageability of a daughter, even if, as was commonly the case, she were to abandon it completely once the objective was achieved. Slavemasters would sometimes arrange to have house servants who showed signs of talent instructed at the same time, and in the towns of the south, music was one of a number of artisan skills in which masters hired out their slaves for profit.

We shall see other examples of encounters with the European literate tradition in Chapter 9; here we need note only that black musicians have always been perfectly at home with literate music, however much they have continued to treasure their oral and improvisatory skills.

Emancipation, while it did not alter the basic social role

played by black musicians, did make substantial changes, among which were the mobility that it made possible and the necessity it imposed upon black people of making a living in a generally hostile society; for musicians, the latter was balanced by the fact that they, like other craftsmen and artisans, were able to be self-employed and to retain whatever money they made. The status of professional musicians was flexible, according to their economic and other circumstances; those who could not, or did not want to, make a living on the farm would take to the town or city streets, or move into the circle of those, often itinerant, musicians who played in the bars and juke joints that sprang up to cater for the social and entertainment needs of the newly freed slaves. On the whole, too, it was black musicians who were preferred by whites for their dance music.

These musicians were — had to be — remarkably versatile; the more kinds of social occasion for which they could make music, clearly the better living they would make. They coined terms for themselves which stuck; a skilled instrumentalist was a 'musicianer', while a singer and songmaker was a 'songster'. Most frequently, of course, they were both, and the terms seem to have alluded not so much to what they could do as to what their speciality was. They were in fact all-round entertainers, not only providing music but also calling the steps for quadrilles and square dances both black and white, telling jokes and making patter, even bringing news and gossip to often remote communities. It would not be stretching things too far to compare their role to that of the griots of West Africa. Paul Oliver says,

> 'Songsters were entertainers, providing music for every kind of social occasion in the decades before phonographs and radio. They were receptive to a wide variety of songs and music; priding themselves on their range, versatility and capacity to pick up a tune, they played not only for the black communities but for whites too, when the opportunities arose. Whatever else the songster had to provide in the way of entertainment, he was always expected to sing and play for dances. This over-riding function bound many forms of black secular song together. Social songs, comic songs, the blues and ballads, minstrel tunes and popular

> ditties all had this in common, and whether it set the time for spirited lindy-hopping or for low-down slow-dragging across a puncheon floor, the music of black secular song could always be made to serve this purpose. It was the regular beat that provided the pulse for the dance and the cross-rhythms of vocal and instrumental that inspired the shuffles, shimmies, hip-shakes and shoulder rolls.'[4]

The closeness of living of blacks and whites in the south, and the understandable overlap in sense of identity which we have already noted, made for much musical interaction, without selfconsciousness or apparent feeling of being infiltrated, between the two groups, which were in so many ways kept apart by the vicious system of racial discrimination. To the black musicianer, of course, everything was grist to his mill, as Oliver makes clear; what was taken by higher-class white culture, on the other hand, was much more selected and, in general, only what could be rendered innocuous. As Roger Abrahams says: 'Negro cultural vitality throughout the American experience, has provided for whites motives of both fascination and dread, a fund of stylized activity on which to draw — and to draw back from. Thus, there have been certain song and dance forms which have been listened to, appreciated and imitated, while there have been other musical expressions regarded by a great majority of whites as too primal, too earthy, to imitate'.[5] Among the latter has been, until comparatively recently, the blues, for while, as we have seen, blues passed easily across the colour line at the lower end of the social spectrum, it became part of the culture of whites generally only by virtue of initially quite conscious acts of rebellion by white musicians against the values of European and Euro-American music.

Even for black musicians blues has never formed the whole of their repertoire. Jeff Todd Titon tells us that the history of two musicians, Carl Martin and Ted Bogan, who

> 'grew up just outside Knoxville, Tennessee, learning the old-fashioned, East Coast string band style, and then decided to improve, is typical of many downhome musicians who migrated to the cities. Wanting a full-time career in music, they rightly observed that the more

> versatile they became the more work they would get. At first they travelled through the region, even venturing into Ohio and Michigan, playing for picnics, dances, Rotary Club suppers and the like, for white as well as black audiences. After they learned to read music and acquired "fake books" which contained lyrics, melodies and guitar chords to current popular songs, they could play practically any request. Martin proudly explained, "If you asked me a request today and I didn't know it I'd go get the sheet music tomorrow and learn it so I wouldn't be caught the next time". After 1933 they made their home in Chicago and learned the songs of various ethnic groups — Polish, Italian, German — so they could play at weddings and parties'.[6]

The appearance of specialization by blues musicians is largely a result of record company policies. As Titon says elsewhere, musicians 'did not record their whole repertoires, as a rule, because company officials did not want them to. As late as the early 1940s, when Brownie McGhee asked to record some of the hillbilly songs he regularly performed, he was told that it was not "his kind of music" . . . Record companies wanted blues, for blues sold. If they needed hillbilly music, they might as well turn to hillbillies.'

In its original sense, the word 'blues' refers to feelings of unaccountable and pervasive depression, and in this sense it is of quite old English usage. That such depression should have been common among black Americans in the period after the failure of the great hopes engendered by Emancipation is scarcely surprising, and the first thing we have to understand about the blues as a style of musicking is that it is not just 'about' the blues as a state of mind but, rather, it is a performance which, in articulating and examining that state of mind, enables those taking part in the performance to overcome, or at least to alleviate it. As James Cone has said:

> 'Like the spirituals, the blues affirms the somebodiness of black people, and they preserve the worth of black humanity through ritual and drama. The blues is the transformation of black life through the sheer power of song. They symbolize the solidarity, the attitudes and the identity of the black community and thus create the

> emotional forms of reference for endurance and for artistic appreciation. In this sense, the blues are that stoic feeling that recognizes the painfulness of the present but refuses to surrender to its historical contradictions'.[8]

The blues, then, represents the continuation of that resistance of black people to spiritual annihilation which was at the centre of all their artistic activity from the first days of slavery.

The second thing that we must understand is that the blues consists essentially of performance, or, to be more exact, a style of performance. I have emphasised throughout this book the necessity, if we are to understand the nature of music, of looking at the performance act rather than at the music object; nowhere is this necessity more obvious than when considering the blues. And, further, as the word 'style' implies, blues consists of a disciplined performance, far more than its apparently spontaneous nature reveals to the casual observer. Albert Murray says: 'One of its most distinctive features . . . is its unique combination of spontaneity, improvisation and control. Sensual abandon is, like over indulgence in alcohol and drugs, only another kind of disintegration. Blues-idiom dance movement, being always a matter of elegance, is necessarily a matter of getting oneself together.'[9] For blues performance, like all Afro-American musicking, is intimately bound up with dance; the conventional image of the aged sharecropper sitting on his front porch bent over a guitar and singing about his woes represents the exception rather than the rule.

The blues style of performance, which pervades almost the whole of the Afro-American tradition as a colour, an emotional tinge, has also given rise to a poetic and musical form, which is to say a definitive way of organizing a performance, of simplicity, clarity and seemingly infinite adaptability. It is essentially an oral form, often improvised and passed on by ear, and thus much of its early history is obscure or lost; by the time the first recordings were made, in 1920, the 'classic' form had already become crystallized. But even today, older and less formally-organized kinds of blues performance persist, especially in the rural south, and most especially in that area of Mississippi State between the Yazoo

and Mississippi Rivers that is known as the Delta. Let us start, however, by examining the classic form, as it has been sung, played and danced to since the early years of this century in the black ghettos of American cities, and by professional performers across the United States and, later, the world.

The verses sung by the blues performer consist of a succession of rhyming couplets, with the first line repeated, making three lines to a stanza. Each of these stanzas stands independently, not as part of a narrative sequence as in a ballad; indeed, it is rare for a blues performance to tell a story. Rather, it develops a theme in a rambling and allusive way, which may have to do with the singer's poverty, disease, imprisonment, loneliness, lover's infidelity, even bedbugs or the boll weevil (twin entomological associates of black poverty). Other common topics are sexual invitation, sexual satisfaction or the lack of it, often expressed in cunning *doubles-entendres,* or in so direct a manner as to call forth frequent accusations of obscenity. All these and similar topics arise directly from the experience of black Americans during those years of hope, betrayal and oppression that followed Emancipation (there are blues dealing directly with that subject too, but, not unnaturally, they were never sung before whites and so went unrecorded and unheard outside the black communities). Simply reading the poetry of the blues transcribed, in the absence of performance, often gives the impression that the artist was more or less destitute, had no stable family life and had to keep on the move, could count on the help and fidelity of no-one, had no faith in the consolations of religion, and was at the mercy of the slightest breeze of fate (which might however, from time to time blow the artist raunchy episodes of sexuality). But although the verses concern themselves with bad times and depression (many of them even apostrophize the depressed feelings themselves, sometimes as 'Mr Blues'), the tone is anything but depressing, and certainly lacks anything resembling self-pity or sentimentality; instead they are pervaded with a tough-minded, if fatalistic, will to survive and a wry, often self-mocking, humour which is often illuminated by striking images, metaphors and flashes of wit.

The form in which the blues performance is cast relates to

the orality and the improvised nature of the art; the repeated first line can give the singer time to think of a punch-line, while the absence of narrative thread gives a freedom to the improvising artist, allowing him or her not only to insert lines and even whole stanzas from any number of sources but also to shape the performance, in the time-honoured African and Afro-American way, as the social situation develops between singer and listeners. For this reason, too, we find a good deal of common-stock material which can be drawn on by all singers, making the art accessible to all; the greatly gifted artist can invent new material, still drawing on the common stock and thus remaining in touch with his listeners' expectations, while the less endowed can permutate existing material to make something that embodies his or her feelings.

When printed on the page the verses often seem to make nonsense of scansion, but this is a consequence of writing them down; the singer uses considerable rhythmic ingenuity to make them fit into the number of beats available, without even appearing to consider consciously the 'correct' number of syllables. And of course the ability to make an apparently 'wrong' move in an improvisation come out right, confounding in a witty or dramatic way the expectations of listeners, is a persistent feature of improvised art which black musicians from country blues singers to sophisticated professionals like Charlie Parker have never failed to exploit.

In discussing the musical framework in which the blues performer operates, we are obliged to use musical terminology derived from the European literate tradition which never was part of the thinking of those among whom the style originated. Further, the performer feels those procedures, not as a fixed framework in which he has to work, but rather as a support around which the creative act can take place; he does not feel obliged to observe more than approximately the number of bars and the precise chord sequence. These, however, are *our* difficulties, not *his*, and I mention them here only to remind us of the need for caution in any description of the way in which that artistic process known as the blues operates.

The classic blues performance allies each stanza to twelve bars (four to each of the three lines) of music, each sung line occupying the first two bars of each four, with a reply from the

accompanying instrument filling up the remainder. The harmonic scheme which underpins and propels the melody is simple, being based on the three primary triads of European classical harmony, with one harmonic cycle (tonic — subdominant — tonic — dominant — tonic) to a stanza and unvarying from stanza to stanza, almost banal in its simplicity.

Much, most of it speculative without much hard evidence to go on, has been written about the survival in the blues of elements of African music. There does not seem to be much in the way of specific techniques to which one can point; rather, it is a matter, as I suggested earlier, of attitudes towards the act of performance. I shall discuss later the performer's relation to the listeners, which is close and intimate, but we can note here that the relationship between the performer and his instrument is also interesting. The instrument is too much like a second voice to allow us to call it merely accompaniment; this second voice seems to work in a way which reminds us more of African call-and-response procedures than of European concepts of melody and accompaniment, while the way the instrument imitates the vocal sounds suggests a concept of polyphony which may have descended from West African techniqes.

On the other hand, it is obvious that the harmonic scheme within which the blues musician plays is wholly European in origin; African musicians simply do not think in this way. The European ear can, it is true, hear quite clearly what we might call a harmonic progression of triads when Shona musicians of Zimbabwe play the *mbira dzavadzimu*, and, as in blues, the progressions are cyclic — but any attempt to discover an historical connection between Zimbabwe and modern black America would seem merely foolish. The use of harmonic progressions in blues differs from that in European classical music in the way the simple cycle of chords repeats itself endlessly for as long as the performance lasts, without variation, change of key, or any of that sense of rising to a climax and resolution to which we are accustomed in harmonic music. An essential element in harmonic music is surprise, which creates drama, the unexpected chord which is shown to be in a logical or syntactical relationship with those preceding it. But in blues performance, since what we expect

to happen, harmonically speaking, always does happen, it is clear that blues harmony is lacking in all those features which makes harmonic music harmonically interesting. The interest of blues lies elsewhere than in the harmony; for the musician who is playing and singing blues, harmony is only a kind of underpinning for what really interests him, which is the melodic and rhythmic invention, as well as the inflections of vocal and instrumental sounds.

This conclusion accords with our knowledge that most early musicians who played and sang blues, the musicianers and songsters of whom I wrote earlier, were in the formal sense unschooled, having picked up their vocal, instrumental and improvisatory skills (which were often considerable) where they could, mostly from other musicians whom they would imitate before striking out on their own to the limits of their own skills and inventiveness. They would certainly not have had in their minds the harmonic terminology of classical music, let alone the harmonic scheme which is often set out diagrammatically in books on blues; those are after-the-fact rationalizations by schooled musicians and of use only to them. Many of the old musicians in fact got by perfectly well by simply strumming one chord on a guitar which had been tuned, as likely as not, not in the 'regular' manner but to a major or minor triad or seventh chord. How and when the particular sequence of chords which all of us know so well, even if we cannot put a name to them, came to crystallize is not clear, since they were already in use when the first recordings were made, but it probably derives from the harmonies of hymn tunes; in any case, one can only marvel at the satisfying simplicity and clarity which has kept it alive for perhaps close on a century and looks like continuing to do so for the foreseeable future.

Apart from its origins, then, the harmony of the blues performance is simple and unproblematic. The complexity and the mystery emerge only when we consider it in relation to the melody against which it is played. While the harmony is tonal, the melody is modal, which is to say it is not based simply on either the major or the minor diatonic scale of classical practice (here we are again using terminology that would have been alien to those who sang and played). While

the harmony is conceived in relation to the diatonic major scale the singer sings certain notes of that scale, notably the third and seventh degrees, slightly flat — according to the criteria of classical music, which have no claim to absolute validity. The degree of flatting is not always such that the tones coincide with those of the minor scale; while the seventh degree approximates to the minor seventh, the third is unstable and hovers between the major and minor third (on fixed-pitch instruments such as the piano the major and minor thirds played together sometimes do duty for it). How this should have come about is something on which opinions differ, and need not concern us here, though it must have had something to do with the encounter between European and African concepts of melody. The important thing from our point of view is not only that there is a clash between tonal harmony and modal melody, but also that the distinction between major and minor modes is lost. This distinction, which has such significant dramatic function in classical music, where major equals bright, relaxed and happy while minor equals tense, clouded and sad, does not apply to the ambiguous emotional atmosphere of blues. In addition, the use of flatted, or 'blue' thirds in melody against major thirds in harmony favours the formation of chords of the seventh, which very early, and certainly by the time of the first blues recordings, were functioning as consonances in their own right, so that it was even possible to end a performance with a dominant-seventh chord built on the tonic (the old 'good-evening-friends' formula, for example). This emphasis on seventh chords rather than triads was an important factor in the development of harmony in blues, and, later, jazz, while the clash between major and blue thirds and sevenths accustomed the ears of musicians and their listeners to sharper dissonances, all of which were used cheerfully as if they were consonances. It is the tension between melody and harmony which is the source of much of the musical energy of both blues and jazz.

So much for theory. The important point to be grasped is that harmony in Afro-American music serves both a different and a lesser role than in European classical music, and its derivatives. The differences from classical procedures are two-

fold: first, the musician does his thinking on his feet rather than in his study (his performance is a series of exciting and daring *acts* rather than an exciting and daring *thing*) and, secondly, he tends, as we have seen, not to adopt any musical means which will commit him to proceed in a preordained way regardless of the effect on the listeners or on the event for which they have come together. Hence, the large-scale harmonic planning which is a principal glory of the European classical tradition is only an impediment to the improvising musician.

Blues is primarily a vocal art; the human voice is always paramount and the paradigm of blues sound is vocal, even when it is transferred to instruments. It is usually solo vocal, accompanied in its early stages by a single instrument, usually a guitar or piano played by the singer, or else by a small instrumental group. The blues singer is usually far less restricted in terms of pitch inflection than a classical singer, feeling free to approach a tone from above or below, to tail off in pitch towards the end of a note, to use any number of different kinds of vibrato, as well as falsetto, grunts, yodels, yells, complex colourings of tone, and abrupt shifts of register, which are featured prominently instead of being smoothed over as with the classical singer. The blues singer has all these ways of singing in common with the gospel singer; the difference between them lies in the relative lack of emotional involvement which the blues singer projects by comparison with the gospel singer. It is only in more recent years that some of the vocal techniques of gospel singers have also become part of the armoury of blues singers. Blues musicians cultivate an individual sound, so that even if they play or sing only a single phrase, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith or Charlie Parker are instantly recognizable. This is not because of primitive or unsophisticated technique, since all of these were highly cultured virtuosi, well in command of what they were doing, but because of a stylistic feature to be found throughout the Afro-American tradition; it is the paradoxical consequence of the musician having been steeped in the idiom, which is the musical expression of the community, to which his or her primary loyalty is given. 'Unlike that of his western contem-

poraries,' as Charles Keil has said, 'his [the bluesman's] first obligation is to his public rather than to a private muse.'[10]

Not only individual but also regional differences between singers have been noted. In the south of the United States, for example, three separate regional styles, each with its own manner of voice production, guitar playing and harmonic development, have been defined by scholars; collectively those styles, which probably originated in rural areas, later being picked up by songsters and musicianers, are known as country, or downhome, blues. They must have been carried around the south by those musicianers and songsters, who were frequently wanderers, often blind (music was one of the few occupations in which a blind black man could earn a living), who crisscrossed their areas, singing, playing and moving on. The impression one gets is of men who stand slightly aside from the community, articulating and putting into order communal feelings, themselves forming a fraternity of travellers, who might fall in with one another, travel together for a while, then go their separate ways, but always listening to, learning from and influencing one another. Some of them might join with travelling medicine shows, or the tent vaudeville shows that crossed and recrossed the south on their circuits, performing not only blues but also popular songs, ballads and anything else that might please an audience, but giving a blues colouring to other material as well.

It was through these songsters that the blues entered a second phase of its existence, as female singers in the travelling shows, whose basic repertory consisted of popular songs, and whose business it was to project an image of glamour and elegance, heard the blues and took them into their repertory. The most famous of these were Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey and Bessie Smith, but there were many others, often of great distinction, and their blues singing was infused with the techniques of the popular singer and with some of the fizz and synthetic sparkle of showbiz. With a few exceptions, among whom was the magnificent Minnie Douglas McCoy ('Memphis Minnie'), of whom it was said that she sang and played guitar like a man, they relied for accompaniment and support on the show's band. This had two results; first that the blues form became fixed in the three-line, twelve-bar form so familiar

today, which gave a firm basis for group improvisation, and secondly, that many of the instrumentalists, who were later to become well known as jazz performers, absorbed into their blood the techniques and the spirit of the blues. It was in 1920, in New York, that Mamie Smith made the first recordings of black music by a black artist, and the success of her recordings encouraged further records, so that it was these 'classic' female blues singers who, through their records and through their appearances on the theatre circuits, were the first to impinge on the awareness of a wider public. Their art mostly did not survive the depression years; by the late 1930s most of the theatres in which they sang were closed and the circuits disbanded.

Billie Holiday is not generally remembered as a blues singer, despite the catchphrase 'Lady sings the blues', but in New York in late 1956 she did record on video a performance that shows her to have been possibly the last of the great classic blues singers. Surrounded by some of the finest jazz players of the time, including Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and Gerry Mulligan, she sings her own blues *Fine and Mellow* in a way which demonstrates not only her mastery of the idiom and the total authority of one who has lived what she sings about, but also the power that a blues performance has to draw those taking part (we are told the performance was recorded unrehearsed) into an intimate and loving relationship. Indeed, such is the obvious mutual affection and respect between the performers, audible in every note and visible in every gesture, that one might feel an intruder were it not that the performers themselves, through their very act of performance, invite us to enter the society they have created. There is, in particular, no trace in this performance of the tragic and self-destructive figure of popular representation; we see only a woman in perfect and effortless command of herself, who is maturing into physical beauty and vocal powers beyond anything in her earlier life; one wonders to what extent the forces which were to destroy her less than three years later were inside her, as we have been led to believe, and to what extent they were in the environment she was forced to inhabit. In any case, we have, preserved in that grainy monochrome video, a performance which explores,

affirms and celebrates, subtly, comprehensively and with authority, a society which is held together by mutual love and respect, heartbreaking and heartening in its human fragility and strength.

The third phase of the blues originated in the mass migration of black people to the north in the years after 1915, when the first world war cut off the flow of immigrants from Europe and at the same time created an enormous demand for labour in the factories of the northern cities. The black populations of cities like Chicago, Detroit, Gary, Cincinnati and Cleveland, as well as New York, increased anything up to five- and even seven-fold between 1910 and 1925. The immigrants from the south were crowded into tenements and shacks in the worst parts of those cities, often without proper sanitation or other civic services, while the bitter cold of the northern winters contrasted brutally with the milder climate of the south, even if the racial climate was less extreme (less extreme, but by no means mild or even temperate, for the forms of racism of the north, where contacts between the races were less frequent than in the south, led to the creation of a ghetto mentality on both sides of the racial divide). Nevertheless, although confined to ghettos, able to obtain only the more insecure or menial forms of employment, subject from time to time to devastating outbreaks of racial violence, blacks organized tirelessly and fought for the improvement of their conditions against a political system that was stacked against them and which manipulated shamelessly the ethnic tensions of the big cities. They still felt that on the whole they were better off than in the south; money, at least until the Great Crash of 1929, was more plentiful and it was possible to maintain a measure of dignity and independence. But it was not easy, and the sense of identity and community was fragile; there can be no doubt that the churches played an important part in keeping disintegration at bay by providing a focus for that identity, but more secular forms of coming-together, often strongly disapproved by the churches, were no less functional.

One of the principal forms of community entertainment was the rent party, in which each guest paid a small admittance fee and either brought his or her own liquor or bought it from

the host (the passing in 1920 of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution made the liquor trade more rather than less profitable). The money went to paying rent, as well as to paying the indispensable musician, usually a pianist, whose music was not just for listening to but for dancing; the pianists, themselves often immigrants from the south, had early learnt how to adapt the blues sequences to their instrument, with heavy walking or rolling basses and endless variations in the right hand. It was Pine Top Smith who is said to have first coined the term 'boogie-woogie' for this style (we should note that he used it as a verb, to refer to a way of dancing to the music) and it was his record *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie* that sparked off the craze for this style. Other pianists followed; among those who became famous in the style were his friends Albert Ammons and Meade 'Lux' Lewis (Pine Top himself had the misfortune to be caught in the crossfire of a gangsters' shootout in the club where he was playing and was killed). The piano was also used for a quieter, more introspective blues, made famous most of all by Leroy Carr, who worked with the guitarist Scrapper Blackwell, in a memorable duo that was a powerful influence on the urban blues of the 1930s. They all sang, of course, as well as played.

The rapid expansion of the black populations of the large cities, and their accession to a modest degree of prosperity, brought with it the opening of hundreds of night spots — clubs, theatres and dance halls — where people went to dance and to consume bootleg liquor. The criminalization of the act of drinking alcoholic liquor seem to have brought together people from various social classes, linked together, no doubt, by the fact that there were all breaking the law; as the jazzman Mezz Mezzrow wrote later: 'It struck me funny how the top and bottom crusts in society were always getting together during the Prohibition era.'[11] This state of affairs in turn meant that opportunities for employment for musicians both black and white were enlarged in order to satisfy the demand for more and more dance music. The white socialites and gangsters danced to the music of the big white bands into whose performances traces of jazz were creeping, or to the black jazz bands, in whose repertoires blues featured to various degrees, but for those blacks who could afford a night

out, it was blues clubs. The small blues bands expanded into larger combinations, always with their shouting singers (they had to shout, in those days before amplification, just to make themselves heard). This variety of urban blues had the rawness, the harshness that one might expect in the harsh urban environment which the musicians and their audiences inhabited. They sang and played in a way not unlike country blues singers of the south, not surprisingly since many of them had come from there, either directly or via the cities of Atlanta, St Louis or Kansas City. The instrumental sound might have had a greater sophistication, but the singers remained, as they had always been, rough and earthy. More and more, in playing for dancers who were out for a good time, they placed a heavier emphasis on noisy and exhilarating reed and brass sections and on rhythm sections able to pound out a heavy and emphatic dancing beat.

It was this generation of black musicians, too, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, who learned the potential of the amplified guitar, first developed as a way of making the small-voiced instrument function more effectively in a noisy environment; they soon realized that when you apply amplification what you get is not just a louder guitar but an altogether different kind of instrument, with a hugely lengthened decay time, making it to all intents and purposes another horn, but with a sharp and percussive onset sound. Likewise, they played the horns themselves, notably the saxophones, with an increased, even crude, intensity never heard before.

The occasional black blues artist did find wider fame; Louis Jordan with his Tympany Five attained massive popular successes in the mid-1940s with their crisp, infectious rhythms and lyrics whose 'black' content made no concessions to white tastes. I still remember from my teens the impact made by *Caldonia* and *Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby*. Neither I nor my contemporaries had the slightest idea of the provenance of all that vigour, excitement and sheer fun, but we loved it, and tried to dance to it in ways for which our staid Saturday-afternoon classes in foxtrot and quickstep had been no preparation. We could not have known, either, that what was making us dance was the first breath of a gale which would

overturn the bland world of adult dance music in which we had grown up. Similarly, T-Bone Walker perfected a dazzling guitar style and an exuberant stage act to match, which was to be influential on the next generation of musicians, notably Bo Diddley and, unexpectedly, Elvis Presley. Along with a number of southerners, notably Professor Longhair, Amos Milburn and Roy Milton, these musicians were bringing into being a style of musicking that still today has lost little of its power to stir the blood and the feet, some of the most exhilarating and unabashedly *physical* musicking ever to have been played, or heard, in the west.

It was still blues, or intimately blues-based, quintessentially a music made by black Americans, which began, in the early 1950s, to 'cross over' into the musical consciousness of large numbers of white Americans. For reasons into which I shall go later, the record companies which at that time began to exploit it for the wider, mainly white, 'crossover' market rechristened it rhythm-and-blues, a not inappropriate name, perhaps, but one which was meant to neutralize the significance of its origins in the black community. I shall consider the career of rhythm-and-blues later. Let us stop for a moment now to consider the meaning of this way of musicking called the blues, keeping in mind always that musical meaning resides in the act of performance and in the kinds of relationship that are established among the participants by that act.

Common to all blues performances, whether by labourers or sharecroppers in the rural south gathered over cans of beer and exchanging comments and stories between songs, or by highly professional artists like Bessie Smith, B.B. King or Muddy Waters singing to a paying audience in a club or theatre, is the cultivation of a close and personal relationship with the listeners, who, by their audible and visible responses help to shape the course of the performance. Here, for instance, is an account by Michael Haralambos of the start of a performance by Albert King in a large black blues club in Chicago in 1968: '"We're here until three," shouts Albert after the opening number, an up-tempo instrumental. "We're with you," shout back several members of the audience. Albert peers from the brightly-lit stage. "There's some missing," he says. "We're all here," shout back two or

three people from one table. "Yeah," shout back several others, reinforcing this response. Albert begins by setting the tone of the evening, the mutual support and empathy of performer and audience enmeshed in the ritual of a modern urban blues performance.'[12]

Albert King, like other professional blues singers, is not a poor man, nor does he make any attempt to project an image of poverty — quite the reverse, with his expensive suits, his excellent backing band and his confident, even a touch arrogant, stage demeanour. This is not new; the classic blues singers of the twenties projected images of style and glamour (Bessie Smith was not dubbed 'The Empress of the Blues' for nothing) even when they sang of bedbugs and of faithless lovers. Nor is the audience there in order to take part in a lament for their lot; they are there for a good night out, to dance and enjoy themselves. As with all participants in all musical performances, that enjoyment comes from the affirmation and celebration of an identity, and from the feeling of having that identity reinforced by those in whose company one is experiencing the performance. Unlike the symphony concert, in which the separateness of the individual's identity is reinforced by his or her isolation from all the others in the hall, the blues performance emphasises the communal basis of that identity. It is a realistic ritual; the singer sings about the realities of black people's experience, about the possibility of the disintegration and destruction of the individual and of the community, and does not attempt to dodge the issues, but the style of the performance tells the audience that he is not just playing the blues, but playing *with* the blues. The audience, for their part, do not just sit and listen; their shouts of encouragement and affirmation, and, above all, their dancing, all serve to reinforce the experience. 'The blues-idiom dancer,' says Albert Murray, 'like the solo instrumentalist, turns disjunctures into continuities. He is not disconcerted by intrusions, lapses, shifts in rhythm, intensifications of tempo for instance, but is inspired by them to higher and richer levels of improvisation . . . But then, impromptu heroism such as is required only of the most agile of storybook protagonists, is precisely what the blues idiom has evolved to condition Negroes to as *normal procedure*! Nor is

any other attitude towards experience more appropriate to the ever-shifting circumstances of all Americans or more consistent with the predicament of man in the contemporary world at large. Indeed, the blues idiom represents a major American innovation of universal significance and potential . . . It is the product of a sensibility that is completely compatible with the *human* imperatives of modern times and modern life.'[13] A grand claim, but one that is justified by the way in which blues has been at the heart of the outward movement of Afro-American music across the whole world. The least that can be said is that it speaks to the experience not only of black Americans; after all, 'We are all,' as the hero's black lover tells him in a novel I once read, 'somebody's nigger.'

The singer's role, then, is deceptive; in identifying and exploring disintegration and other potentially destructive aspects of black American life he or she is performing an integrative function, drawing on the common experience in a ritual which brings the community closer together. Even the familiarity of so much of the verbal and musical material, drawn as it is from a common stock, is a part of that common experience and has its function in the ritual. And if we remember that the blues arose in a period of intense repression, even terrorism, by means of which black Americans were consigned, it must have seemed permanently, to the lowest ranks of American society, then we can see that the basic function of the ritual has not changed so very much from slavery days, when it was necessary to know that 'suffering was not too much to bear if there were brothers and sisters to go down into the valley with you.' The singer's role takes on many of the attributes of the priest's; as Charles Keil said: 'Bluesmen and preachers both provide models and orientations; both give public expression to privately held emotions, both promote catharsis; both increase feelings of solidarity, boost morale and strengthen the consensus.'[14]

The sense of identity is built not only into the performer-audience relationship, or even into the performer's stage demeanour, but into the very relationships between the sounds he or she makes — the way in which he or she goes about the making of music — in other words, the musical techniques themselves. The description I have given of the

blues form and technique makes it clear that there is a tension between the harmony, which is built on bits and pieces of common European harmonic practice reinterpreted to serve the improvising performer's needs, and the melody. But there are more subtle ambiguities as well; the constantly changing pitch of a note, which is itself rarely arrived at directly but in a roundabout fashion, from above or below; the constant inflection of tone colour; the play that is made around the rock-steady beat, the singer being now in front of it, now behind it, now seeming to lose it, only to regain it with often breathtakingly casual virtuosity — all these devices are in antithesis to the European tradition's need for clarity, clearly audible order and precision. I shall have more to say later on the significance of blues harmony, but here we note that all these techniques of performance point to a relationship with the dominant white culture that is not only ambivalent but even slightly derisive.

It is at this point that we can see the connection between blues and gospel singing, which lies not so much in the musical techniques (though, as we have seen, there is a good deal of overlap) as in its ritual function. That similarity of function was not always recognized in the black churches, in many of which the blues was regarded, quite simply, as the Devil's music, while the bars, juke joints and clubs where it was played, sung and danced to were denounced as places of folly, lust and damnation. It was this disapproval of the irreverent secularity and frank sensuality of the blues that made acceptance difficult for those early gospel singers who borrowed much in their performance style from blues singers.

There is in the blues very little hint of genuine rebellion against the social conditions under which black Americans had to live in the early part of the present century; it has been suggested that, by helping to make the unbearable bearable it contributed to their continuing oppression, or at least to their acquiescence in that oppression. That has always seemed to me an insensitive and unimaginative suggestion, which takes no account of the real hopelessness of any form of overt rebellion in those years. What was needed, no less perhaps than in the days of slavery, was a tool for preserving the integrity of the self and of the community, and in that, it

seems, blues was and, despite changes, remains effective. For despite the often lugubrious character of the poetry, whose dry humour can often escape the casual listener, a blues performance is at bottom a joyous and life-enhancing experience. Albert Murray asserts that 'the spirit of the blues moves in the opposite direction from ashes and sackcloth, self-pity, self-hatred or suicide. As a matter of fact, the dirtiest, meanest and most low-down blues are not only not depressing, they function like an instantaneous aphrodisiac!'[15]

The blues has never existed in isolation from other aspects of Afro-American musicking; its sound, its melodic mode, its tone colours, its attitude to pitch and to rhythms provide an emotional feeling, a nuance, which suffuses the whole musical culture and unites such varied musicians as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, the Count Basie Orchestra, not to mention Elvis Presley, The Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen. We should note, however, that, while its influence has been all-persuasive, it has been part of the main stream of American vernacular culture only marginally and briefly. From its origins it has been the musicking of an underdog minority in American society, and the majority of white Americans — and Europeans for that matter — up to about 1940 and even later would most probably have been scarcely aware of its existence. It circulated mostly on records on the so-called 'race' labels which were obtainable only with difficulty by those who lived outside the black ghettos, and was tied too closely to the experience of an oppressed and patient people to be easily assimilated at that time by those who were outside that experience. It was only through those elements of blues that were subsumed into jazz that blues became available in a way that related to the experience of the white American — and European — majority.

The role of the blues performer as seer, preacher and ritual representative of the people has not only survived the changes that have taken place since the 1940s, with the growth of the black civil rights movement and the changing attitudes of black Americans, but seems even to have been enhanced. Black Americans' interest in the traditional blues has declined sharply; as Big Bill Broonzy, one of the old-time bluesmen, is reported to have said, 'Young people have forgotten how to

cry the blues — now they talk and get lawyers.'[16] Interestingly enough, it is white audiences, on the club-and-college circuit in the United States and more generally in Europe, that provide a living for the dwindling band of survivors. In 1969, Paul Oliver was able to write that 'by the mid-sixties, incredibly, European blues enthusiasts had heard more blues singers in person than most of their American counterparts had done.'[17] Why white audiences in Europe and America should have so embraced the blues at a time when interest in it among black Americans was fading is a matter for speculation, but it probably has to do with a more general questioning of received European values and an admiration which is partly genuine, partly condescending, for black culture. But it had unexpected consequences, when young British musicians in the late 1950s started playing blues on their own account.

The style that was christened rhythm-and-blues, which is in essence a speeded-up, highly danceable form of band blues, was one outcome of these changes; another was that many artists around 1960 began wedding the techniques of the gospel singer to those of the blues singer to create a style that spoke more directly to the new aspirations of black Americans. The term 'soul', which emerged in the mid-1960s, was in itself a sign of the confidence of black people in their own culture (not new, but newly exposed for all to see), since it signifies those qualities of warmth, communality and emotional honesty which black people believe themselves to possess, not without reason, to the envy of whites. The three major performers who can be said to have shaped soul music were Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and James Brown, all three of them graduates of church choirs, who wedded the techniques and often the forms of blues to those of the gospel singer and preacher, with cries, shouts and sobs, as well as the use of gospel-style backing vocal groups, and the call-and-response practices of gospel singers.

It was Ray Charles who, in 1954, took a gospel song, *My Jesus Is All The World To Me* and gave it new lyrics as *I Got a Woman*. Other singers followed suit, including those whose 'defection' from gospel I discussed earlier. But the suggestion that I made at that point may now be more clearly understood: that the distinction between the two modes of self-identification is not

very great, and need not represent in any sense a betrayal of the purposes of gospel music. Michael Haralambos, for example, tells us that James Brown 'misses few opportunities to tell his fans that he knows what it's like to be black and poor "This is one cat that knows the meaning of misery. I've been up and I've been down and I know what DOWN is — it's bad," he writes in his column in *Soul*, a bi-weekly tabloid. James Brown personifies the belief that, like the blues singer, the soul singer has experienced what he is singing about. The experience of poverty and hardship and of being black is seen as an essential apprenticeship for the soul singer, and, conversely, this experience is seen to be reflected in the music itself.'[18] Brown's songs, with titles like *Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud* and *Get on the Good Foot* emphasise conventional morality and positive thinking in a secular parallel to much gospel song. Aretha Franklin also did much to shape the development of soul, singing more about personal relationships than Brown, but still emphasising moral and emotional strength and honesty. As we noted earlier, she has never quite left gospel singing, and would seem to see little conflict between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' aspects of her singing.

'By the late 1970s,' writes Robert W. Stephens, 'soul had become a catch-all term to describe all black popular music. Social conditions and the political astuteness of the black community during the 1960s had begun to effect economic change. It manifested itself in better living conditions for some, better education for others, and better job opportunities for still a few more.'[19] These changes meant, for black Americans, a movement towards the main stream of American economic life and, in particular, the adoption of many of the aspirations and ways of thinking of the majority society — a situation that has involved loss as well as gain. The tension between the aspiration towards a greater share in the economic cake and the desire, perhaps even the need, to retain an identity has resulted in sharp dichotomies within black society in the United States, taking their most extreme form in the disagreement between those who would assimilate completely into majority America and those who advocate completely separate development. To the outside observer, neither of these courses would seem to be a practical

possibility, even if either were desirable. It is a cruel dilemma; the price of full assimilation into affluent America, even if the white majority would permit such a thing, would be a denial of five centuries of black history and of the ordeal and the achievements of generations such as have been suggested in this book, as well as acquiescence in an industrial philosophy to which black American culture has been, and remains antipathetic (white British have no reason to feel superior to white Americans in this, since such a dilemma is so far not even on offer to most black British). Perhaps the only real option open to both black Americans and black British is to hang on as the whole ramshackle structure of industrial society shakes itself to pieces — a situation in which their hard-won survival skills (of which music and dance are important components) would give them a distinct advantage.

The social changes, and the developing identity of black people over the last thirty years or so, have been closely mirrored in the changing musical rituals by means of which that identity has been explored and celebrated. We have to remember, once again, that black society is no more monolithic than is white; for many, the hard-won economic and social gains of the last thirty years have been largely reversed under the Reagan administration, and in any case there are still places in the United States, the Delta Region of Mississippi State for example, where many blacks have hardly felt any effect of the changes in the first place; they might well be singing the blues recorded half a century ago by Lonnie Johnson:

> People ravin' 'bout hard times, I don't know why they should,
> If some people was like me, they didn't have no money
> when times was good.[20]

Nonetheless, there can be few black Americans, whatever their present economic position, who have not felt the invigorating wind of protest that began with isolated acts like that of Mrs Rosa Parks on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus in 1955, and grew through the sit-ins and the freedom marches of the early 1960s, the Washington march of 1963 and the black power movement, to the point where today a large number of black people hold municipal, state and even

federal office. Or of the spectacular success of black-owned record companies such as Motown of Detroit and Stax of Memphis, in which black artists have been for the first time allowed both the freedom and the resources to develop their own style of performance, or of black artists who since the 1950s have attained to superstar wealth and fame. How much has really changed, especially in terms of real economic power, which is what always counts in the long run, is a matter for debate, and the brutality with which many gains have been reversed in recent years shows the fragility of black social advances; but what is probably irreversible is the refusal of black Americans to acquiesce in their being defined by others in accordance with other people's norms, and the positive assertion of the validity of their own self-definition, which is to say their own culture. But that the fight for self-definition is by no means yet won, can be seen from the history of soul music since the 1960s.

Michael Haralambos, writing in the early 1970s, details the development of soul music in parallel with that of the civil rights movement

> 'the scattered soul records from 1954 to 1960 correspond to the black struggle in those years which was intermittent and sporadic and never reached the proportions of a mass movement. The convergence of style towards soul music from 1960 to 1964 corresponds with the protest movements of the early 60s when the civil rights struggle became a mass movement. The establishment of soul music as the dominant style of black musical expression in the mid-60s correlates with the rise and development of the Black Power Movement.'[21]

Haralambos points to the use of gospel song in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, when Mahalia Jackson, for example, sang to the 1963 Washington marchers, while demonstrators, marchers and sitters-in sang gospel songs and spirituals to affirm their defiance and to celebrate their new-found political determination. This was of course in accordance with the considerable role played by the black churches in the civil rights movement, but it suggests also a narrowing of the gap between the sacred and the secular which was an

essential element in the more general affirmation of black identity. It is on this note that Haralambos ends his book:

> 'In soul music the antithesis of the styles of life that blues and gospel traditionally represented is denied. The divisions in black society that blues and gospel formerly symbolized have in music been eliminated. Reflected in soul music is the spirit and ideal, if not the reality, of black unity.'[22]

It is an attractive idea, that a soul performance brings into existence while it lasts a society in which those dissensions which have divided black people in the United States from one another have been brought to an end, and perhaps at the time when Haralambos's book was published, in the early 1970s, it might have seemed possible that a performance by James Brown or Aretha Franklin might bring about, for a moment, in a spirit of unanimity, an affirmation and a celebration of themselves in which both the sacred and the secular aspects of life were reconciled and harmonized. But even then there was musical dissension; as we have seen, the move from gospel to soul by many singers, not least by Aretha herself, was seen in some of the churches as a defection. Even the Staple Singers' 1965 soul album *Freedom Highway*, celebrating the march from Selma to Montgomery and 'dedicated to all the freedom marchers' was not universally approved.

But a more potent disruptive force that brought pressure on this unity and harmony was the crossover success of black music in general, and soul in particular, which occurred around the beginning of the 1970s. This in turn led to a greater emphasis on money values and to all the other hazards to which vernacular musicians, especially successful ones, are subject. As Robert Stephens says, 'Together, high technology and minimal black-executive input have had a deleterious effect on the continued development of soul. What was once a tradition defined by blacks and recorded on many independent labels is now directly affected by the taste of larger audiences, cost-benefit analysis and increasing dominance by the larger record companies.'[23] It is ironic that this success was due in no small measure to the efforts of Motown and Stax records, the former having launched such major stars as Diana Ross and the Supremes, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Martha and

the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye and the young Stevie Wonder, the later Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Booker T and the MGs, as well as, latterly, Lionel Ritchie and the Jacksons.

Commercialism is of course one of the facts of life with which any professional musician has to live and make his or her own accommodation, and there is no reason why the musicking that takes place in a commercial environment should be poor in either concept or execution; those musicians whose names I have listed are artists of considerable achievement, to say the least, and their musicking has contributed in no small way to the self-definition of contemporary people, white no less than black. But whatever moment of synthesis there might have been, as Haralambos suggests, in the early 1970s passed quickly; the sensibility of contemporary soul music is secular — or, at least, as much so as any black music can be. As Stephens says: 'It is evident that the soul tradition conceived and developed in the 1960s no longer exists. Rather, other styles have emerged which reflect the reinterpretation of the black music aesthetic and which offer instrumental and vocal diversity. In its earliest form, soul spoke to more than purely musical ends. When examined in the context of its cultural parameters, early soul reveals the themes of unity, ethnic consciousness, self-acceptance and awareness. From this philosophical model evolved a secular tradition rooted in past practices, but modified to fit current conditions. The aesthetic governing the essence, evolution and legacy of soul was culture-specific; it celebrated blackness defined on its own terms.'[24]

Among other developments from soul are disco, which might be described as soul without soul, in which the performing musicians are reduced to the status of puppets manipulated by the producer — a mechanical music for a dehumanized age, though still, like the age itself perhaps, not without its excitements. And the way in which young black disc jockeys have taken disco and re-humanized it is the remarkable story of rap, which will have to wait for a later chapter.

But underlying all these developments remains the blues, still present, if not as a form then as a nuance, an emotional tinge, an instrumental and vocal colour and an approach to

performance. Nor has the form itself by any means disappeared; it may no longer be a central medium for the affirmation of black Americans' identity (though there is a new generation of black musicians, such as Son Seals and the brilliant Taj Mahal, who continue to speak through it), but the older generation of musicians such as B.B. King and Bobby Bland still perform to sizeable audiences, these days as much white as black. And still today, any jazz musician worth his salt can play a mean blues. But, more importantly, it is blues that is the basis for the explosion of popular music since the early 1950s; not only rock'n'roll (rhythm-and-blues under yet another name) but the whole of what is known as rock is founded upon it. The line which runs from the musicianers and songsters to The Police, The Clash, David Bowie, and even Duran Duran and Boy George, may not always be clear but it is there, and strong.

NOTES

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23. STEPHENS, Robert W.: *op. cit.*, p 38.
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