

W.C. Handy – Yellow Dog Blues

Written by bluesever

Friday, 17 June 2011 08:39 - Last Updated Wednesday, 17 July 2013 12:18

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1. *A Bunch o blues* 9-24-1917 2. *Farewell blues* 5-1923 3. *Fuzzy wuzzy rag* 9-21-1917
4. *Gulf coast blues* 5-1923 5. *Hooking cow blues* 9-24-1917 6. *Livery stable blues* 9-25-1917
7. *Loveless love* 12-26-1939 8. *Memphis blues* 6-4-1923 [play](#) 9. *Moonlight blues* 9-22-1917
10. *Muscle shoals blues* 3-1922 11. *Ole Miss rag* 9-22-1917 12. *She's a mean job blues*
3-1922 13. *Snaky blues* 9-22-1917 14. *St. Louis blues* 1-1922 15. *Sweet child (introducing
"Pallet on the floor")* 9-25-1917 16. *That jazz dance (The Jazz dance everybody is crazy 'bout)*
9-22-1917 17. *The old town pump* 9-22-1917 18. *Yellow dog blues* 1-1922
[play](#)

William Christopher Handy (November 16, 1873 – March 28, 1958) was a blues composer and musician. He was widely known as the "Father of the Blues".

Handy remains among the most influential of American songwriters. Though he was one of many musicians who played the distinctively American form of music known as the blues, he is credited with giving it its contemporary form. While Handy was not the first to publish music in the blues form, he took the blues from a not very well-known regional music style to one of the dominant forces in American music.

An important factor in his musical development and in music history, was his enthusiasm for the distinctive style of uniquely American music, then often considered inferior to European classical music. He was soon disheartened to discover that American music was often cast aside by the college and instead it emphasized foreign music considered to be "classical". Handy felt he was underpaid and felt he could make more money touring with a minstrel group.

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In 1903 while waiting for a train in Tutwiler, in the Mississippi Delta, Handy had the following experience. "A lean loose-jointed Negro had commenced plunking a guitar beside me while I slept... As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars....The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard."

Partway through the evening, while playing a dance in Cleveland, Mississippi (circa 1905), Handy was given a note that asked for "our native music". After playing an old-time Southern melody, Handy was asked if he would object if a local colored band played a few numbers. Three young men with a battered guitar, mandolin, and a worn out bass took the stage. (In recounting the same story to Dorthy Scarborough circa 1925, Handy remembered a banjo, guitar, and fiddle.) "They struck up one of those over and over strains that seem to have no beginning and certainly no ending at all. The strumming attained a disturbing monotony, but on and on it went, a kind of stuff associated with cane rows and levee camps. Thump-thump-thump went their feet on the floor. It was not really annoying or unpleasant. Perhaps "haunting" is the better word."

Handy also noted square dancing by Negroes in Mississippi with "one of their own calling the figures, and crooning all of his calls in the key of G." He would later recall this experience when deciding on the key for "St Louis Blues". "It was the memory of that old gent who called figures for the Kentucky breakdown-the one who everlastingly pitched his tones in the key of G and moaned the calls like a presiding elder preaching at a revival meeting. Ah, there was my key – I'd do the song in G."

The 1912 publication of his "Memphis Blues" sheet music introduced his style of 12-bar blues to many households and was credited as the inspiration for the invention of the foxtrot dance step by Vernon and Irene Castle, a New York-based dance team. Some consider it to be the first blues song. He sold the rights to the song for US\$100. By 1914, when Handy was at the age of 40, his musical style was asserted, his popularity increased significantly, and he composed prolifically.

Regarding the "three-chord basic harmonic structure" of the blues, Handy wrote that the "(tonic, subdominant, dominant seventh) was that already used by Negro roustabouts, honky-tonk piano players, wanderers and others of the underprivileged but undaunted class".

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Another detail was noted: "In the folk blues the singer fills up occasional gaps with words like 'Oh, lawdy' or 'Oh, baby' and the like. This meant that in writing a melody to be sung in the blues manner one would have to provide gaps or waits."

While in New York City, Handy wrote: "I was under the impression that these Negro musicians would jump at the chance to patronize one of their own publishers. They didn't... The Negro musicians simply played the hits of the day...They followed the parade. Many white bands and orchestra leaders, on the other hand, were on the alert for novelties. They were therefore the ones most ready to introduce our numbers." But, "Negro vaudeville artists...wanted songs that would not conflict with white acts on the bill. The result was that these performers became our most effective pluggers."

Bessie Smith's January 14, 1925, Columbia Records recording of "St. Louis Blues" with Louis Armstrong is considered by many to be one of the finest recordings of the 1920s. In 1926 Handy authored and edited a work entitled *Blues: An Anthology—Complete Words and Music of 53 Great Songs*. It is probably the first work that attempted to record, analyze and describe the blues as an integral part of the U.S. South and the history of the United States.

The genre of the blues was a hallmark of American society and culture in the 1920s and 1930s. So great was its influence, and so much was it recognized as Handy's hallmark, that author F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in his novel *The Great Gatsby* that "All night the saxophones wailed the hopeless comment of the "Beale Street Blues" while a hundred pairs of golden and silver slippers shuffled the shining dust. At the gray tea hour there were always rooms that throbbed incessantly with this low, sweet fever, while fresh faces drifted here and there like rose petals blown by the sad horns around the floor."

In 1955 Handy suffered a stroke, following which he began to use a wheelchair. Over 800 people attended his 84th birthday party at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. On March 28, 1958 he died of bronchial pneumonia at Sydenham Hospital in New York City.[29] Over 25,000 people attended his funeral in Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church. Over 150,000 people gathered in the streets near the church to pay their respects. He was buried in the Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, New York. --- CaptainCrawl

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[back](#)