

A woman's view of the blues...

By Nancy Grace Whelan

love is the every only god
---e.e.cummings

Men and women seek each other in reality and art. There is an incessant desire to bridge the gap of their differences, to become one. Country blues are the essence of this yearning. Sometimes the depth of feeling is hidden by flippancy or even vulgarity, but it is always there.

Lulu Jackson, in "Careless Love", does not attempt to hide the sad resignation which is the embodiment of her style. While most female country blues singers are accompanied by male guitar players, Lulu Jackson gives evidence of self-accompaniment with a hesitant guitar which, at times, slips away from her voice.

Lottie Kimbrough, known also as "The Kansas City Butterball", had a voice as smooth, strong, rich and powerful as her 260 lbs. would suggest. Her voice never loses its resonant quality, even when humming. In Rolling Log Blues it often supplies the bottom note of the major I V VII I chords employed in the guitar accompaniment by one of the Pruitt twins. Based on the key of A flat, the guitar cuts abruptly on the last two degrees of the dominant seventh chord (e flat-flat).

In "Wayward Girl Blues", Kimbrough is joined by Winston Holmes, owner of the Merritt Record Company in Kansas City. Her "Going Away Blues" taunts and warns a lover that "you'll never see poor Lottie smile, 'cause I ain't got nobody to really comfort me..." If that doesn't get results, she insists she will leave by train.

"I Hate That Train Called The M & O", sings Lucille Bogan, " 'cause it took my baby away and he ain't comin' back no more..." Rather than accuse her lover of running away, she blames the train. She won't admit that he left her; she wants to believe that he was taken away. The emotion is synthesized into a familiar blues sound by the use of major scale with flatted seventh.

When reality becomes too hard to accept, a woman, like a child, may make her own logic. Sometimes she blames an inanimate object for the inattention of her lover; sometimes she asks a question that requires a dishonest answer. In "Dead Drunk Blues", Lillian Miller tells Papa Charlie Hill, "I'm gonna get drunk, Daddy, just one more time", hoping to arouse his protective instinct toward her. It seems a question rather than a statement. She repeats the statement, but Papa Charlie fails to respond properly: "Stay drunk, I don't care". With rejected defiance, Lillian adds, " 'cause when I'm drunk, nothing don't worry my mind".

On the only two sides ever recorded by Nellie Florence, we hear this note progression repeated many times:



In "Jacksonville Blues", this phrase is used as an ostinato for the 12-string guitar and acquires a repetitive oriental character. This is an example of the use of an altered scale or gapped system in blues.

Rosie Mae Moore bursts into "Stranger Blues" with a voice like lemon without sugar. In a Mississippi accent, strangely reminiscent of English cockney, she insists that "...if I find my man, gonna nail him to the wall!". Too many failures may have turned her into an 'angry young woman'.

Each country girl has her own style, but from all emerge one common idea: a woman's strength is her willingness to take a lesser role because she knows that she is inherently stronger. It is obvious to her; she doesn't care to prove it. She can stand behind a man and wait. A man seeks a particular kind of woman to love; a woman can love any man who is needful of her. Men and women seek the same end, but by different means, in blues and in life.



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Dead Drunk Blues

I'm dead drunk this morning, daddy,
behave yourself.

You know I was drunk
When I lay down cross your bed.

You knew I was drunk
When I lay down cross your bed.

All the whiskey I drank
gone right to my head.

Oh, give me Houston,
that's the place I crave.

Oh, give me Houston,
that's the place I crave.

Spoken: Oh, play it, Papa Charlie Hill.
So, when I'm dry

I can get whiskey some place.

Whiskey, whiskey is some folks downfall.

Spoken: Don't put that washin out,
Ain't none a my downfall.

Whiskey, whiskey is some folks downfall,
But if I don't get whiskey,

ain't no use at all.

Spoken: You ain't by yourself neither.

When I was in Houston,

Drunk most every day,

When I was in Houston,

Drunk most every day,

I drank so much whiskey,

I thought I'd pass away.

Have you ever been drunk,

An' slept in all your clothes?

Spoken: No, sir, I ain't never been that drunk,
no, sir.

Have you ever been drunk,

An' slept in all your clothes?

When you wake up,

feel like you out a doors.

I'm gonna get drunk, daddy,

just one more time.

Spoken: Go ahead and get drunk,
and stay drunk.

I'm gonna get drunk, daddy,
just one more time.

Spoken: Stay drunk, I don't care.

'Cause when I'm drunk,

Nothin don't worry my mind.

our thanx are due

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and

ROBERT TRAVIS For His Faithful
Transcription of Lyrics.

the country girls

PERSONNEL

WATCH FOR

MOTHERLESS CHILD BLUES

My mother told me just before
she died,
My mother told me just before
she died,
My mother told me just before
she died,
My mother told me just before
she died,
Oh, daughter, daughter, please
don't be like me,
Oh, daughter, daughter, please
don't be like me--
To fall in love
with every man you see.
But I did not listen
to what my mother said,
But I did not listen
to what my mother said,
But I did not listen
to what my mother said.
That's the reason why
I'm sittin here
in (Hattiesburg).
Baby, now she's dead,
She's six feet underground.
Baby, now she's dead,
She's six feet underground.
Baby, now she's dead,
She's six feet underground.
I'm mama's child,
and I am death chair bound.
Remember the day, baby,
You drove me from your door?
Remember the day, baby,
You drove me from your door?
Remember the day, baby,
You drove me from your door?
Go way from here, woman,
And don't come here no more.
I walked away,
And I wrang my hands and cried.
I walked away,
And I wrang my hands and cried.
I walked away,
And I wrang my hands and cried.
Didn't have no blues,
And I couldn't be satisfied.

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ORIGIN

LUCILLE BOGAN: Recorded Chicago, July 31, 1934. Accompanied by unknown guitar. Lived in Alabama. Real name Bertha Ross? Bessie Jackson? Recorded elsewhere under both.

Pearl Dickson: Rec'd Dallas, Dec. 12, '27. Acc. by "Pet and Can", 2 guitars. Probably from Tex.

Nellie Florence: Both titles rec'd Atlanta Arp. 21, '28. Acc'd by 12-string guitar, probably Barbecue Bob. Nellie thought to be from Georgia.

Mae Glover: Rec'd Richmond, Ind., July 29, '29. Acc. 12-string guitar, prob. Joe Byrd.

Lulu Jackson: Rec'd Chi., June, '28. Made several sides other than this but none known to have survived.

Lottie Kimbrough: Going Away Blues Rec'd Rich. Aug. 16, '28, other 3, Richmond, Aug. 15, '28. Winston Holmes vcl. and bird whistle. L.K. a K.C. headliner in '20s. Rec'd earlier under maiden: Lottie Beamon. Married singer Sylvester Kimbrough in late 1920s.

Lillian Miller: Rec'd Richmond, May 4, 1928. Guitar and vocal comments by Papa Charlie Hill. Believed by Paul Oliver to be from Texas.

Memphis Minnie: Where is my good man, rec'd NYC, Feb. 3, '32; Can't I Do It For You, Memphis, Jan., '30. Both sides 2 guitars by Minnie and her then husband "kansas Joe" McCoy. Joe is other singer on Can't. MM born 24 June, 1900. Still living in South; unable to play or sing, due to paralysis of left side.

Rosie Mae Moore: Rec'd Memphis, Feb. 3, '28. Guit Accompaniment probably Ishman Bracey (See OJL-2) and Charlie McCoy on Mandolin. Most likely from Mississippi.

Elvie Thomas: Rec'd Grafton, Wisc. circa April, 1930. Guitar possibly John Byrd. This is only solo record Elvie made. Please excuse the condition. There is no other copy of this pressing available. We felt it was worth preserving.

Geeshie Wiley: Rec'd Grafton, Wisc., April, 1930. The second voice could be Elvie Thomas with whom Geeshie is known to have recorded at other times. Guitar John or Joe Byrd?

OJL-7: COUNTRY BLUES ENCORES, 16 MORE selections by the BLUESMEN on Really! The Country Blues.

OJL-8: CHARLIE PATTON With Henry Sims and Bertha Lee. 16 tracks--ALL NEW--featuring Patton's singing and playing. Both LPs Ready Spring 1964.

Jacksonville Blues

Let me be your (wiggler),
until your (wobbler) comes.
Let me be your wiggler,
until your wobbler comes.
If she can stay with 'em,
She got to wobbler some.
Womens cryin' danger,
but I ain't risen my hand.
Womens cryin' danger,
but I ain't risen my hand.
I got a way of lovin'
They just can't understand.
Men, they call me oven,
They say that I'm red hot.
Men, they call me oven,
They say that I'm red hot.
They say I got somethin'
the other gals ain't got.
I can strut my puddy,
spread my grease with ease
I can strut my puddy,
spread my grease with ease
Cause I know my onions,
that's why I always please.
Wild about my coffee,
But crazy bout my China tea.
Wild about my coffee,
But crazy bout my China tea.
But the sugar daddy's
sweet enough for me.
They call me oven
Cause I'm red hot.
They call me oven
Cause I'm red hot.
They say I got something
The other gals ain't got.
One's gone to the city,
The other's up on the hill,
But the man I love
'S way down in Jacksonville.