

## IN 299 BLUES AND CHICAGO

DePaul University, School for New Learning

Welcome to “Blues and Chicago”! The blues are B.B. King and Bessie Smith. The blues are a feeling, a form, and a rich history that has influenced music from jazz to pop to the Rolling Stones. This independent study course studies the blues with particular attention to Chicago’s role in the music.

Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, and Buddy Guy are among the figures included, along with CDs, readings, videos, and visits to both a blues museum and a live blues performance!

Competencies: A1D, A1H.

“Blues” can mean many things. For one thing, it is a feeling. Everyone has heard the expression “Having the blues.” You can go the Art Institute of Chicago at Michigan Avenue and Adams St. and see Pablo Picasso’s famous painting “The Old Guitarist.”

This is from Picasso’s “Blue Period,” and it eloquently depicts a person who is truly “down and out.”

But when people feel bad and sing or play the blues, they often feel good! This is one of the many fine things about the blues.

The blues is also a style of singing. During this course, you will find out what that style is. And the classic blues is a musical form. Here is that form in a song by Gertrude “Ma” Rainey:

“If your house catches fire, and there ain’t no water around,  
“If your house catches fire and there ain’t no water around,  
“Throw your trunk out the window, and let that shack burn  
down.”

Look at that song again. There are three lines. Notice how the first line is repeated, and then the third line is different? That’s a classic blues form. You do not have to be able to read music to appreciate the blues, and to get a lot out of it.

To participate in this course, remember to have fun! When you have fun, you relax and learn more. The first thing is to get a notebook in which you feel comfortable writing and keeping notes. This will be your course journal. With your work in this journal you will demonstrate your learning and your mastery of your competencies.

LEARNING TOOLS:

A VIDEO: Get “Blues Masters—An Essential History of the Blues.” It is on two videos. Call the libraries to see if it is in. The Sulzer branch of the Chicago Public Library at Lincoln near Montrose has it. Phone (312) 744-7616. You can buy it by calling 1-800-843-3670.

Another video: Borrow from a library—or you can buy—“Marsalis on Music.” It is a 3-part series. The one of the three that you should look at for this course is the one called “Listening for Cues.” In one section of this, Wynton Marsalis briefly gives an excellent lecture-demonstration of blues form. Please look at this part several times. There is nothing like it.

The book: Please call Joe, the instructor, at (773) 728-0357 for updated information about the book.

For each chapter of the book, jot down a note or two in your course journal. Just something that you found interesting or would like to remember. BE sure to take notes on these names: King Cotton Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, and Muddy Waters. Listen to the CD that goes with the book.

Look over the suggested reading and suggested listening section, too. Get any good ideas that you’d like to look into in the future?

A Required CD: Get “A Chicago Blues Tour—You Personal Guide to the Windy City Blues Scene.” This CD has recordings by some of the best Chicago blues people of the past and present, including Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, and Carl Weathersby. It also has a guided tour and map of some of the best clubs for the blues in Chicago, plus one in Palatine and one in Berwyn. Take notes.

Another CD (Optional): Get “Sweet Home, Chicago.” It was recorded by a Chicago label, Delmark Records, and includes such Chicago blues people as Magic Sam and such songs as “Blues for the West Side.” You can get it at the Jazz Record Mart in downtown Chicago at Wabash and Illinois Streets. You should check out this place for their unique and huge collection of records, videos, tapes, etc. on jazz and blues.

Blues Radio: Check with the instructor for updated information about blues radio.

A Blues Museum: Wille Dixon’s Blues Heaven is located at 2120 S. Michigan Avenue. It is the site of the former Chess Records, where many of the most influential blues records were recorded. The Rolling Stones visited this place, and mentioned the address on one of their recordings. Visit the museum during the course, and include some notes on it in your course journal. What did you see and hear?

A Live Performance: Choose one of the clubs on the “Chicago Blues Tour” CD. Especially recommended are Blues Chicago, B.L.U.E.S., Buddy Guy’s Legends, and Kingston Mines. Talk to the instructor about these and others. Call them up, find out who’s playing, schedule a trip, ask someone you know if you want, and write up what you see and hear. And enjoy!

Call the instructor when you are ready to turn your course journal in. It should have notes on all of the above, for your future reference and pleasure.

**COMPETENCIES:** A1D: Can analyze writers' or artists' interpretations of human experience.

A1H: Can explain the function of folk arts in the transmission of culture and values.

Please read your competencies carefully. Discuss them with the instructor to make sure you understand them, and understand how to write your course journal in such a manner as to demonstrate your understanding and your mastery of the competencies.

We will adhere to the University's academic integrity policy, and seek always Vincentian values.

**EVIDENCE SUBMITTED:** A course journal with all your notes and your writings on the above: 1. The videos, 2. The book with CD, 3. The "Blues Tour" CD, 4. A blues radio listening session, 5. A visit to the Blues Museum, and 6. A live Chicago blues performance at one of the clubs. In addition, any and all articles you've read, newspaper reviews of blues performances, etc. **Criteria:** Your journal should be written and presented in such a manner as to demonstrate your mastery of each of your competencies. Again, please discuss each competence, and how to master it, with the instructor.

**How to sign up:** Just call—please do not e-mail—the instructor, Joe, at (773) 728-0357.

**Faculty:** Joe Cunniff is a longtime arts educator. He has written on music in Chicago for many years, has long led tours to blues venues, and is a voting member of the Downbeat International Critic's Poll. To reach Joe, call (773) 728-0357.