

## ABSTRACT

The Blending of African-American and European Aesthetics  
in the Guitar Performance of British Blues from 1965 to 1967

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British blues guitarists emerging in the mid-1960s incorporated a musical vocabulary which borrowed heavily from recordings of the modern blues' African-American, postwar originators. Crucial differences in the way the British interpreted this material in their own recorded performances are reflective of deeply embedded aesthetics unique to their European musical heritage and cultural experience. Through the detailed analysis of transcribed performances by British guitarists in comparison to performances by the African-American guitarists they sought to emulate, the syntactical elements of these differences are observable. Using this comparative methodology, this study gathers evidence of the blending of European and African-American aesthetics in sample British blues guitar performances from 1965 to 1967. Placing this musical evidence into context amid the cultural and ideological currents affecting Great Britain during the mid-1960s offers insight to the societal and philosophical forces shaping this influential strand of blues development.

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The Blending of African-American and European Aesthetics  
in the Guitar Performance of British Blues from 1965 to 1967

by

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A Thesis

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	vi
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	iv
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
The Goals and Methodology of the Study	
Transcribing Blues Guitar Performance: An Exposition of the Notational Format, Techniques, and Related Issues of Nomenclature . . . . .	12
2. THE FUNCTION OF FORM IN THE BLUES AESTHETIC . . . . .	25
3. EXPRESSIVE AUTHENTICITY IN BRITISH BLUES GUITAR PERFORMANCE: THE CROSS-CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF THE BLUES AESTHETIC . . . . .	51
4. THE ROLE OF ROMANTIC IDEALISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH BLUES GUITAR PERFORMANCE . . . . .	94
Works Cited . . . . .	146
Discography . . . . .	149

## FIGURES

### Example

1. Dual Notation Format . . . . .	13
2. Dual Format Representation of Standard Tuning . . . . .	14
3. Dual Format Showing E4 Placements . . . . .	14
4. String Bend Notation . . . . .	19
5. Bend and Release, Finger Vibrato, Blues “Lick”. . . . .	21
6. Slides, Hammer-on, Pull-off, Trill, “Turnaround” Phrase . . . . .	22
7. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush First Verse Melody and Lyric . . . . .	33
8. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush Verse Melody with Dominant Seventh Harmonies Substituted . . . . .	35
9. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush Verse Melody with Expressive Features Notated . . . . .	39
10. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush Overlay Comparing Vocal Melody and Guitar Introduction . . . . .	43
11. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush Original Guitar Introduction . . . . .	82
12. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Bluesbreakers Guitar Introduction Performed by Eric Clapton . . . . .	83
13. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush Otis Rush’s Original Guitar Solo . . . . .	89
14. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Bluesbreakers Eric Clapton’s Guitar Solo . . . . .	91

15. “The Supernatural” – Bluesbreakers / “Help the Poor” – B.B. King Overlay Comparing Peter Green’s Guitar Performance with B.B. King’s Vocal Melody and Lyric . . . . .	100
16. “The Supernatural” – Bluesbreakers Structural Features of Peter Green’s Guitar Performance . . . . .	104
17. “I’m Your Witch Doctor” – Bluesbreakers Eric Clapton’s Guitar Solo . . . . .	105
18. “Oh, Pretty Woman” – Bluesbreakers / A. King Overlay Comparing the First Chorus of Mick Taylor’s Solo with Albert King’s Original Guitar Solo. . . . .	108
19. “Oh, Pretty Woman” – Bluesbreakers Overlay Comparing the First and Second Choruses of Mick Taylor’s Guitar Solo . . . . .	117
20. “Someday, After Awhile (You’ll Be Sorry)” – Bluesbreakers / F. King Overlay Comparing Peter Green’s Guitar Introduction with Freddie King’s Original Guitar Introduction . . . . .	122
21. “Hey, Lawdy Mama” – J. Wells / “Strange Brew” – Cream Overlay Comparing Junior Wells’s Harmonica Performance with the Eric Clapton’s Guitar Introduction . . . . .	131
22. “Strange Brew” – Cream Eric Clapton’s Quotation of Albert King’s Turnaround Lick from “Oh, Pretty Woman” . . . . .	133
23. “Strange Brew” – Cream Eric Clapton’s Guitar Solo . . . . .	135
24. “Sunshine of Your Love” – Cream Eric Clapton’s Guitar Solo . . . . .	140

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Philippians 4:13

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

It is the central aim of this study to examine specific musical performances that are representative of a relatively small group of young, British-born guitarists during the years from 1965 to 1967. These temporal boundaries define an era in which the primary musical vocabulary used by these English players was derived directly from American developments in blues guitar performance that had started to appear in the late 1940s due to the urbanization, and subsequent electrification, of a previously existing rural blues tradition. It is the central contention of this thesis that the English players and performances submitted as evidence here reveal a level of stylistic assimilation and technical command that transcends mere mimicry of the American urban and country-blues idiom. By the latter half of the 1960s, these young Britons, all in their early to middle twenties, had achieved a high level of personal expression through what was essentially a common, learned vocabulary. This study seeks to identify the musical elements of that expression that differ significantly from the primary American source material. Furthermore, it seeks to quantify a definable portion of these differentiating elements as the conscious result of a European-based aesthetic distinct from that associated with the music's African-American roots.

The primary methodology employed in establishing evidence for this study is musicological: that is, it centers on the detailed analysis of specific music examples. The comparative study of multiple examples is used to establish patterns as well as to expose

differences in detail between performances. In most cases, this technique involves side by side comparisons of an English blues performance to the American performance which research identifies as the primary source material for the former. In some instances, different English performances by the same musician are compared to show how that particular musician evolved a unique stylistic approach or musical idea. Still other comparisons between different English players highlight the cycle of influence that developed within the close circle of British-born blues guitarists featured here. The substance of the music examples used in this study consists primarily of the guitar work of a subject musician, either English or American, as transcribed from a recorded performance. The transcriptions themselves are my own work and are the result of careful listening to the recordings cited. As a guitarist with thirty years experience, I have made every effort to provide accurate and objective examples.

These transcriptions depict solely the specific guitar parts under discussion and do not provide context in terms of the overall ensemble performances present on the recordings. The importance of this context to the total musical effect of a given example cannot be overstated. In addition to the lack of contextual perspective, there are many elements of blues performance that simply defy Western musical notation. The classical idea of the “score” in the frame of this study is represented by the recorded performance. The transcriptions provide an effective objectification of a specific part for musicological discussion. The whole fabric of the music of which a featured guitar part is only one of several separate elements, however, can only be experienced by consulting the full score, i.e., listening to the recording. For this reason I have limited the recordings cited in this

study to those easily obtainable by the reader. A complete discography of all recordings featured herein is provided.

This method of studying and comparing transcribed performances, in what Charles Keil has termed a “syntactic” approach, deals primarily with observing “the inner correspondences, the regularized combination of sounds that are distinctive of a particular style.”<sup>1</sup> Keil points out: “Any musical style may be considered a cultural subsystem or pattern in isolation, to be analyzed independently of any other considerations.”<sup>2</sup>

“Continuities in the style having been established,” he adds, “the style may be compared and contrasted with other cultural patterns.”<sup>3</sup> More recently Allan F. Moore has adopted the term “syntactical” to replace Leonard B. Meyer’s term “absolutist,” which describes the idea that “musical meaning lies exclusively within the context of the work itself, in the perception of the relationships set forth within the musical work of art.”<sup>4</sup> Meyer’s self-contained “absolutist” mode of conveying meaning in music is balanced by his “referentialist” mode, which asserts that “in addition to these abstract, intellectual meanings, music also communicates meanings which in some way refer to the extramusical world of concepts, actions, emotional states and character.”<sup>5</sup> Just as Keil’s concept of “syntactic” method focuses on purely musical patterns yet evokes the wider spectrum of culture, Moore observes that Meyer’s definition of the “referentialist” mode

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 206.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>4</sup> Meyer qtd. in Allan F. Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

contains that of the “absolutist.” In reserving the term “syntactical” to “make exclusive reference to details of musical syntax within any particular style,” Moore subsequently suggests dividing Meyer’s “referentialist” mode into its distinct components. Moore uses the term “analogue” to refer to “that portion of Meyer’s ‘referentialist’ mode which deals with extramusical things and through which musical structures are seen as analogous to other cultural structures.”<sup>6</sup> “Both ‘syntactical’ and ‘analogue’ meanings are concerned with relationships, whether these are relationships between sound-events within the music, or analogous patterns between these relationships and ‘concepts, actions, emotional states and character’ outside the music.”<sup>7</sup> The term “holistic,” which Moore chooses to refer to the larger compass of Meyer’s former “referential” mode, is one that “admits the relevance, but the necessary incompleteness, of both ‘syntactical’ and ‘analogue’ modes of understanding. “The two concepts,” Moore continues, “are so intertwined as to make any distinction between them impossible during the listening process. Thus, we are in the realm of ‘holistic’ meaning at the moment of experience.”<sup>8</sup>

Building on the above-made assertion that the aural experience of a recorded blues performance is methodologically analogous to the classical concept of examining the score, it is clear by Moore’s argument that the present study can only be effective through a “holistic” approach. A great percentage of scholarly blues research is focused almost exclusively on African-American cultural issues surrounding expressive and artistic innovation, with little direct reference to the musical product beyond generalized

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<sup>6</sup> Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

aspects of form and transcriptions of the lyrical texts. To quote Robert Switzer, however, the “point is far too often overlooked in much of the literature on the blues: what matters is not ‘texts’ and not ‘artifacts,’ but lived (and originally, ‘live’) performative events.”<sup>9</sup>

The present study applies a primary methodology that first examines performative elements found in the musical syntax as they relate to the guitar and then, where appropriate, seeks to pair these elements aesthetically with their cultural analogues.

Defining a syntactic model for a distinctly British style of blues guitar playing which emerged during the mid-1960s is a goal of this study. Much of the musical evidence highlighted in the course of this argument will likely be perceived as subtle. To ears unaccustomed to the aesthetics of blues guitar performance, and are unfamiliar with the techniques involved, the problem will be one of reference to the mechanical aspects of the instrument itself, along with its related technology. Techniques and technology do play important and necessary parts in the following discussions.

This is, however, not a treatise on guitar technique. The syntactical fingerprints of British blues guitar are musical traces and can be referenced as such without undue stress on technical matters that only an experienced guitarist would fully understand. The various technical and notational elements of the transcriptions presented here that do exceed the compass of standard music notation are explained in part two of this chapter.

As mentioned above, the symbiotic relationship of blues music to black American culture has been a central focus of much research and writing. It makes an interesting precursor to the Trans-Atlantic frame of the present study, however, to note that many of the earliest writers to mount respectfully serious and scholarly discourses on American

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Switzer, “Signifying the Blues,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 21, The Lyrical Phenomenon (2001): 27.

blues in the 1950s were white English devotees such as Max Jones, Albert McCarthy, Iain Laing, and Paul Oliver.<sup>10</sup> Because of the music's unique status as a modern popular form with deep folk roots, musical meaning in the blues is inextricably entwined with any culture in which it thrives. Clearly, it found a particularly strong sympathetic resonance at some level of modern British culture beginning shortly after the Second World War, when recordings of classic blues by American artists became increasingly more available. By the early 1960s, teen-aged, working-class musicians such as Eric Clapton, Peter Green, and Mick Taylor were increasingly obsessed with the more recent strains of electric blues guitar coming from American urban centers such as Chicago and Memphis. The cultural references and identifications of this new generation were unique to their own time and place, worlds away from the harsh realities faced by the music's American creators. The historical context of this particular generation of English youth against the larger panorama of American blues' influence and its ascent to popularity in Britain will be addressed in Chapter Three. Current theories involving the relationship between the context of the British blues boom and that of American blues culture will also be addressed. It is, however, the differences between these two cultures that are of special interest here. Establishing musical evidence of these differences amid the ruling aesthetic priorities of effective blues performance is central to the argument for a uniquely British style of blues guitar playing. Identifying cultural outlooks that are distinctly white European and which demonstrate this influence aesthetically at the level of artistic expression will provide useful and necessary context for this argument.

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<sup>10</sup> Roberta Freund Schwartz, "Preaching the Gospel of the Blues: Blues Evangelists in Britain," in *Cross the Water Blues: African American Music in Europe*, edited by Neil A. Wynn (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 163.

Andrew Blake has effectively described one such strand of large-scale ideological thread bounding the unique cultural context of British blues musicians in the mid-1960s.

Working outside the cultural, ethnic, political and legal constraints which had made the blues and r'n'b in the USA, but inside the cultural constraints defining musical value in Britain, guitarists working in British blues bands like the Graham Bond Organization, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the Alex Korner band and the Yardbirds abstracted and reified the virtuosity and romanticised the position of the musician. They saw themselves through the eyes of a culture dominated by the idea of the Romantic Artist as inspired, as a shamanistic commentator separate from the common herd, rather than, say, the dance-band leader as a servant of popular entertainment.<sup>11</sup>

This preoccupation with Romantic idealism carried with it the image of the artist as a tragic and tortured soul, alone in the world, haunted by demons, destined to a fate of suffering and self-destruction in proportion to his natural genius. A figure such as Robert Johnson, the Mississippi-born bluesman active in the 1930s whose relatively small but superb recorded output was reissued by Columbia Records under the title *King of the Delta Blues Singers* in 1961, fit this idealized image in a way that was irresistible to such Romantic sensibilities. Violently and mysteriously slain at age 26 and shrouded in a demonic folk mythology that was largely drawn from the dark autobiographic content of his songs, Johnson filled the ideological shoes of Keats or Mozart for blues lovers like Clapton, Green and others. Elijah Wald explains:

When Robert Johnson became a mythic, god-like figure, it was part of the European religion of art, not any African-American spiritual tradition. He is not famed in black folklore for selling his soul. He is famed in white folklore as an archetype of the sensitive artist cut down in his prime. White blues fans elevated him to the pantheon, and it is the pantheon of the nineteenth-century Romantic movement.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Blake, *The Land Without Music: Music, Culture, and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 104-105.

<sup>12</sup> Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 263.

Lieghton Grist has pointed out that this “tendency toward the romanticization of the music and its exponents” does much to underscore the cultural differences between American bluesmen and their English disciples. Grist, however, marks this trend as representative of “certain deficiencies implicit to the British embrace of the blues.”<sup>13</sup> This viewpoint rightly holds that the British, in a sense, “got it wrong” when it came to understanding certain aspects of blues music and the culture from which it emerged. As Grist points out, many of the romanticized illusions held by British musicians in reference to their heroes were “often exploded upon contact with actual American blues performers.”<sup>14</sup> In the context of the present study, however, what others argue as “deficiencies” may be counted instead as catalysts to certain progressive changes in the performance of the music. European Romanticism, with its emphasis on instrumental virtuosity, its imperative on creative originality, and its deification of the individual artist melded with the musical matter of the blues in 1960s England to create a prototypical figure of the guitar hero. This figure, in turn, has its nineteenth-century Romantic parallel in the macabre image of Pagannini.<sup>15</sup> The British perception, however naïve and misguided, of the blues as a pure and unadulterated state of music, ineffable, born of improvisation and innate personal expression, dovetailed neatly with a Romantic thirst for the natural and the authentic in an increasingly artificial culture. Robert Johnson

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<sup>13</sup> Lieghton Grist, “The Blues is the Truth: The Blues, Modernity, and the British Blues Boom,” in Wynn, ed., 210.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Blake, *The Land Without Music*, 35.

“was the man who acted, for Clapton and for others, as the archetype of the country bluesman – poor, illiterate, full of anguish, naturally talented, and dead.”<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, as important as Robert Johnson became ideologically to the British blues boom, the complexity of his playing style proved impenetrable for its guitarists. The reality of the lone traveling musician carried with it the necessity of an instrumental approach that was completely self-contained, that is, capable of portraying the entire fabric of a song in a solo context. As much as Eric Clapton may have been able to identify personally with the “raw pain” he heard expressed in songs such as “Hellhound on My Trail,” he could not begin to fathom what Johnson was doing with the guitar. In his autobiography, Clapton recalls being undeterred.

I tried to copy Johnson, but his style of simultaneously playing a disjointed bass line on the low strings, rhythm on the middle strings, and lead on the treble strings while singing at the same time was impossible to even imagine. I put his album to one side for a while and began listening again to other players, trying to form a style. I knew I could never reach the standards of the original guys, but I thought that if I kept trying, something would evolve. It was just a question of time and faith. I began to play things that I heard on the record, but add my own touches. I would take the bits that I could copy from a combination of the electric blues players I liked, like John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, and Chuck Berry, and the acoustic players like Big Bill Broonzy, and amalgamate them into one, trying to find a phraseology that would encompass all these different artists. It was an extremely ambitious undertaking, but I was convinced I was on the right track, and that eventually it would come.<sup>17</sup>

Clapton’s description of a highly subjective, self-conscious and taste-driven process to assembling a blues guitar “style” has obvious implications for the present study. There is the methodological ground for a plurality in the resultant style that is not

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<sup>16</sup> Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 40.

found in the work of any one of the sources mentioned. Wald has likened this aspect to post-Romantic trends in the formal training of classical musicians.

As with the classical world's note-perfect conservatory students, the recreators of the blues had some virtues that the older, more natural musicians did not. Since they were learning the music as outsiders, rather than working in their personal musical language, a single performer could present a dramatically varied range of styles. . . . The new electric guitar heroes were similarly virtuosic, able to fire off solos in the styles of such disparate players as B.B. King, Albert King, and Freddie King – something that none of the Kings would have bothered to attempt.<sup>18</sup>

In an endnote, Wald further defines his use of the phrase “more natural musicians.”

I do not mean to suggest that a “natural” musician need not work as hard, or as carefully, as one who is recreating a foreign style, or that the result is less professional or less of a performance. What I mean by a “natural” style is one that is similar to and inextricable from the artist's style of conversation and behavior offstage.<sup>19</sup>

Wald's distinction is an important one, for within it lay the source of significant ideological tension between Romantic imperatives demanding originality and reliance on an inner muse and the wholesale appropriation of an essentially exotic musical lexicon with which to fulfill those notions. The ideology of blues expression has much in common with the modernist concept of immediacy in art.<sup>20</sup> As the country blues was adapted to a city environment in the late 1940s and 1950s, it lost much of its rural essence and former mythological thematic substance and became more about the day-to-day struggles of being black in urban America.<sup>21</sup> At first, these newer, more modern themes provided a certain amount of perceived common ground for the working-class English

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<sup>18</sup> Wald, *Escaping the Delta*, 254.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>20</sup> Grist, “The Blues is the Truth,” 204.

<sup>21</sup> Jon Michael Spencer, “The Diminishing Rural Residue of Folklore in City and Urban Blues, Chicago 1915-1950,” *Black Music Research Journal* 12/1 (Spring 1992): 25.

youths that drove the British blues boom. As these players, however, began to benefit financially and receive celebrity treatment for playing American blues, the crisis pitting ideals of blues authenticity versus their own realities grew in proportion to increasing social status. Much of the syntactical evidence presented by way of the examples in the latter chapters of this study can be viewed as the musical byproduct of the individual “working out” of this problem by certain British performers of blues guitar between 1965 and 1967. Clapton’s allusion to adding “my own touches” in the statement above suggests a foreshadowing of this process beginning consciously during at least the intermediate stages of his self-education on the guitar.

The crucial resonance between Romantic and blues ideologies lies in the concept that music should be an expression of deep personal concern. It is a central argument of this thesis that the English guitarists featured here were psychologically immersed in awareness of this ideological overlap and that this sense became particularly acute during the period under study. In response, they eagerly and self-consciously engaged in an artistic struggle to establish their own identities and portray their own experience even as they borrowed from, and paid almost constant homage to, their American blues idols. This argument inherently implies the introduction of musical matter born of a purely European aesthetic, or at least a postwar British cultural emphasis. How this material was blended with the reigning African-American blues aesthetic within the selected British blues guitar performances as transcribed herein is the central question I seek to answer.

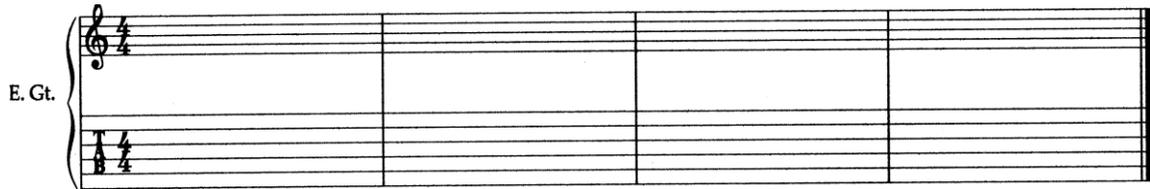
*Transcribing Blues Guitar Performance: An Exposition of the Notational Format, Techniques, and Related Issues of Nomenclature*

This supplemental essay contains a detailed explanation of notational functions and related issues of nomenclature as they pertain to the transcriptions contained herein. In the context of this exposition I will describe the physical techniques behind, and the aural effects of, the stylistic idiosyncrasies that are elemental to the type of blues guitar performances that form the central content of this study. The problems encountered in effectively notating this music often serve to underscore the unique qualities of blues guitar performance and its governing aesthetics. With this in mind, I will use the following discussion to introduce readers of this thesis who have little or no guitar background to a few of the more pervasive techniques and terminologies that define postwar electric blues guitar performance. A brief, condensed preview of this material will help to prevent potentially distracting technical discourse from cluttering the text of the material that is to follow.

The vagaries encountered when trying to effectively represent the subtle inflections of blues expression in standard music notation can be somewhat tempered when transcribing guitar performance by also utilizing the more graphic system of tablature, as part of a two-part presentation. This approach places the traditional five-line music staff on top as part of a dual-format system in which the lower “stave” provides a tablature representation that runs in a precise, parallel fashion to the standard notation (Example 1).

Modern guitar tablature has roots dating back to the lute tablatures of the sixteenth century and is an example of what Willi Apel has termed “griffschrift” or

Example 1. Dual notational format utilizing a standard treble cleff staff positioned above parallel running tablature stave.



‘finger notation.’<sup>22</sup> In this type of notation, the reader is “referred immediately to the technical devices” of the instrument being notated.<sup>23</sup> This capability is invaluable in the context of the present study since so many of the expressive techniques used in modern blues guitar performance depend on various physical manipulations of the strings as applied at the point of fretting-hand finger contact. The six lines of the tablature stave in Example 1 form a graphic representation of the standard layout of a six-string guitar. The top line of the tablature represents the first string, that which is closest to the floor when the guitar is strung in its standard fashion and held in playing position. This is also the highest sounding string in terms of its open pitch. The bottom line of the tablature represents the sixth or lowest sounding string. All tablature examples used in this study are notated in standard tuning unless otherwise specified. Beginning from the first string and preceding downward to the sixth this tuning reads E4, B3, G3, D3, A2, and E2. Example 2 shows how standard tuning looks in both notational formats. The zeros placed on each line of the tablature indicate “open” or unfretted pitches sounded on each respective string.

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<sup>22</sup> Willi Apel, *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900 –1600* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Example 2. Dual format representation of standard tuning. The notated pitches, when played on guitar, will sound one octave lower than written.

E. Gt.

1st string 2nd string 3rd string 4th string 5th string 6th string

Example 3, for comparison, shows six different fret board locations for the same pitch.

Example 3. Dual format showing various possible fret locations for the note E4 on each respective string.

E. Gt.

1st string 2nd string 3rd string 4th string 5th string 6th string

In Example 3 the numbers in the tablature indicate fret locations for the pitch E4 on each individual string of a twenty-four-fret instrument, for example: a five placed on the second line from the top indicates the note sounded at the fifth fret on the second string, the nine on the third line indicates the same pitch sounded at the ninth fret of the third string, etc. Even in the more common case of a 21- or 22-fret fret instrument such as those used by the majority of the players featured in this study, Example 3 still allows four different fret locations for the pitch E4 in addition to the open first string. When this information is combined with the fact that each fretted E4 has four possible fingerings - index, middle, ring or pinky - the net result is 16 different fingering possibilities for the same pitch. Because so much blues guitar vocabulary is based in patterns that “lie well”

on the instrument geographically, the ability to more clearly map these patterns in the course of transcription is useful for comparative analysis. In this format, the tablature can more graphically depict the fret board logistics of the music while the standard notation supplies the actual pitches, pitch durations and precise rhythmic placement of each note. Most importantly, the dual format allows for a separate set of specialized notational symbols to be applied to the music while preserving the clarity and universality of the standard musical text. These graphically descriptive, tablature-based symbols will prove particularly useful for indicating, as well as differentiating between, the many specific expressive guitar techniques available to the blues performer as they appear in the transcriptions which follow.

The evolving sonic characteristics of the guitar at its various stages of development throughout the twentieth century have played a long-running and important role in shaping the sound of the blues. Samuel Charters has suggested that the use of the modern European-style guitar may have contributed to the slowing down of tempos in blues performance during the early 1900s by allowing musicians to sustain sounds and phrase melodies in a way that was previously impossible on the banjo and its African forerunner, the *halam*.<sup>24</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, the combination of its accompanimental utility as a chord-producing instrument, with its single-note capability of providing a melodic foil to the singer's voice in blues performance, made the guitar an ideal vehicle for instrumental expression as the music evolved. Nonetheless, the point bears emphasis that, although the guitar's sonic capabilities helped to guide and shape the

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Charters, *The Roots of the Blues: An African Search* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), 122.

development of blues music, techniques used to play the instrument were also radically reinvented through the stylistic demands of blues musicians. Amiri Baraka explains:

The primitive blues was still very much a vocal music; the singers relied on the unpredictability and mobility of the human voice for their imaginative catalysts. . . . When primitive or country blues did begin to be influenced by instruments, it was the guitar that had the most effect on the singers. And when the great masses of Negroes were just beginning to learn the instrument, the relatively simple chords of the country blues were probably what they learned. Conceivably, this also brought about another change: blues, a vocal music, was made to conform to an instrument's range. But, of course, the blues widened the range of the instrument, too. Blues guitar was not the same as classical or "legitimate" guitar: the strings had to make vocal sounds, to imitate the human voice and its eerie cacophonies.<sup>25</sup>

For early country blues artists like Charlie Patton, Son House, and Robert Johnson, the principal way in which an acoustic guitar could be made to "sing" was through the use of slide or "bottleneck" technique. This approach usually entails the wearing of either a length of metal pipe or a carefully smoothed, broken piece of glass bottle over one finger of the fretting hand. When pressed against the strings and moved up or down the guitar's neck in a direction parallel to the length of the string, the slide allows the player to produce and sustain pitches and then vary them in a manner completely free of the instrument's conventional, half-step, fretted scale.

Although slide-guitar technique has remained closely associated with blues guitar performance into the twenty-first century, the majority of postwar electric players have relied heavily on quite a different set of processes to achieve the blues vocal aesthetic on their instrument. With the arrival of the 1950s, and thanks to developments made possible by innovative musicians, inventors, and businessmen such as Les Paul, Theodore McCarty and Leo Fender, the design and mass production of fully solid-bodied

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<sup>25</sup> Leroi Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963), 69-70.

instruments which could be plugged into increasingly powerful, vacuum tube-driven amplifiers meant the electric guitar became virtually a new instrument, fully apart from its acoustic version. Notes could be sustained for longer durations and the increased volume and tonal range allowed a new instrumental idiom to emerge among blues guitarists: an idiom that featured a subtlety of nuance that could still be projected over a full rhythm section. String-bending became the primary technique by which many postwar blues guitarists made their instruments sing.

B.B. King, one of the earliest exponents of this style, whose masterful string bending is the benchmark by which all other players' techniques are often measured, cites the pitch-altering figurations of earlier slide-guitar artists as a primary influence. When asked if he actually invented the "fingerstyle, perpendicular-to-neck" technique of note bending and vibrato, B.B. King answered with characteristic modesty.

Let's put it this way: I won't say I invented it, but they weren't doing it before I started. I will say that I'm still trying. Bukka White and quite a few other people used bottle-necks. As I said, I got stupid fingers. They won't work. If I get something like that in my hand and try to use it. They won't work. So my ears told me that when I trilled my hand, I'd get a sound similar to the sound they were getting with a bottleneck. . . . But also it's more like a violin or a voice; you just gliss up to it.<sup>26</sup>

Although urban-based, acoustic players such as Lonnie Johnson and Johnny St. Cyr had utilized fretted string bends and vibrato on recordings beginning in the late 1920s, it was usually only to produce a relatively slight effect. Nineteen forties electric blues guitar pioneer T-Bone Walker who, along with Lonnie Johnson was a primary influence on B.B. King, was perhaps the earliest widely heard guitarist to feature full step bends as an integral part of his style. A contemporary and friend of seminal electric jazz

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<sup>26</sup> B.B. King qtd. in *Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarist*, edited by Jas Obrecht (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 321.

guitarist Charlie Christian, Walker drew much of his inspiration from horn players and was among the first to utilize a plain steel third or *G* string in place of the usual wound *G* to increase flexibility and better facilitate string bending. His hollow-bodied instrument featured an amplified sound that was quite improved in terms of sustain characteristics and markedly different in tone from an acoustic guitar. Most importantly, it afforded Walker the volume needed to perform as part of a large, horn-driven band and still be heard.<sup>27</sup> With early electric guitarists and singers like Walker and Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, the image of the lone bluesman accompanying himself on acoustic guitar gave way to that of the front man backed by a full ensemble, free to belt out impassioned vocalizations interspersed with fills and solos on the instrument while the band provided relentless rhythmic drive and harmonic backdrop. Guitarists/vocalists such as B.B. and Albert King represented a certain percentage of the subsequent generation of African-American bluesmen for whom rhythm playing was a secondary function at best and whose featured single-note excursions were direct extensions of their vocal approach in terms of phrasing and in the application of expressive technical devices on their instruments.

String-bending entails the relatively simple mechanical concept of firmly fretting a note in the conventional manner and then either pushing up or pulling down in a motion perpendicular to the string length while maintaining fret contact. Tension in that string thus is increased and this increase in tension affects a relative rise in pitch. The physics of sound production on an acoustic instrument generally demand heavier-gauged strings. The increased mass and tension of the larger diameter of string enables a more efficient

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<sup>27</sup> Jas Obrecht, ed., *Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 21.

transference of energy to the guitar's top or sound board, the increased vibration of which projects greater volume and a more robust quality of tone. It also makes the strings difficult to physically bend far enough to effect pitch modulation much beyond the microtonal to half-step range. On electric instruments, however, string vibrations are converted to electrical impulses by an electro-magnetic pickup in close proximity to the string. These impulses are then amplified and reshaped in terms of tonal quality electronically before being converted back to physical sound waves by a vibrating speaker cone. Since volume and tone projection no longer completely depend on the efficiency of sound emanating from the instrument itself, lighter-gauged and thus more flexible strings may be used.

Example 4 shows a series of two-note bend figures as they appear in the dual-format system. Items (a.) through (h.) depict a 'D' natural fretted on the third string at

Example 4. Samples of various two-note string bends as they appear in the dual-notation format.

the seventh fret and bent upwards to intervals ranging from a microtonal quarter-step to two full steps above the fretted pitch. The sweeping arrow symbol in the tablature is specifically indicative of a bend. The intervallic boundary of the bend is labeled at the arrow's apex. In each case, only the first note is picked while the second pitch is produced by sustaining the string's vibration as the bend is applied. The second number

shown in the tablature indicates the fretted equivalent of the bent pitch. Quarter-step inflections are rounded down to the nearest half-step in both notations.

Items (b.) through (h.) of Example 4 each assign relative rhythmic values to the boundary pitches of each bend. In many cases, however, a bend may occur simultaneously to the initial pick attack or may even be applied *before* the string is struck. In such instances, a grace-note figure is utilized to represent the fretted note and the arrow symbol assumes a vertical trajectory. This type of bend is seen in different contexts in items (i.), (j.) and (k.) respectively. Item (i.) shows a simple, unadorned “pre-bent” figuration. In item (j.) the pre-bent “E” natural on the third string is simultaneously combined with an unbent, fretted “E” natural on the second string to create a device called a “unison bend.” This “unison,” however, is usually purposely realized in performance as somewhat out of tune in a manner that highlights the slight dissonance and creates a unique sonic effect. Item (k.) begins on the same “pre-bent” “E” natural featured in item (i.) but is then bent a half-step further to “F” natural on the second eighth-note after the initial attack. This type of combination is called a “compound bend,” an approach that highlights the multi-pitch potential of string bending technique. Finally, item (l.) represents one of *the* primary devices of the postwar style; a whole step bend with finger vibrato applied to the bent pitch.

Finger vibrato, as applied in blues guitar performance, differs significantly from the type of vibrato used by string players or that used by classically trained guitarists. In these latter traditions the vibrato effect is achieved by oscillating the hand in a motion parallel to the string length. Blues vibrato, however, is a manifestation of string-bending technique in which the pressure is applied perpendicularly to the string length. In

Example 5 below, item (a.) shows a typical bend and release figure in which the “D” natural is struck, bent up one-half step to “E” flat and then promptly returned to its original pitch; a three-note figure emerges from one picking hand articulation. If this same bend and release figure is applied in a similar manner, quickly, repeatedly and with a regular rhythmic pulse, such as that shown in item (b.), then the mechanical basis of blues guitar finger vibrato is achieved. Of course, as a primary expressive device, the precise interval and speed of this pitch fluctuation will vary greatly from player to player and performance to performance. Finger vibrato is one of those elements of a blues guitar solo by which a player may most eloquently and succinctly add his or her own “sonic signature” to a note. Item (c.) reduces the complexity of this technique into a single articulation notated with a wavy line extending for the duration of the affected note.

Example 5. The bend and release figure, the mechanical and notational manifestations of finger vibrato and the combination of these techniques into a typical blues “lick.”

The image displays four musical examples labeled a, b, c, and d, each consisting of a standard musical staff and a guitar tablature staff below it.   
 Item (a) shows a single note on the 7th fret of the 6th string, which is bent up half a step (indicated by a 1/2) and then released back to the original pitch.   
 Item (b) shows a series of eight repeated bends, each marked with a 1/2, creating a rhythmic pulse.   
 Item (c) shows a single note on the 7th fret with a wavy line above it representing vibrato.   
 Item (d) shows a sequence of notes: a full bend (marked 'Full') on the 9th fret, followed by a note on the 7th fret with a 1/4 vibrato mark, and another note on the 5th fret. The chord symbol 'A7' is positioned above the staff. The tablature for (d) shows fret numbers 7, 9, 7, 5, and 7.

As a culmination of techniques discussed so far, item (d.) of Example 5 shows how string-bending and vibrato may be combined into a typical blues guitar phrase or “lick,” as such motifs are often labeled. The complimentary aspects of the two components within the dual-notation format are clear. Neither the standard notation nor the tablature alone can depict the musical content as fully as the combination of both.

The addition of the “A7” chord symbol above the system in item (d.) further completes the notational representation of the music by providing a sense of the general harmonic context over which the melodic phrase is executed. This basic nomenclature is admittedly a gross oversimplification of what is really the harmonic sum of an often complex interweaving of bass lines, rhythm guitar or keyboard accompaniment, counter melodies, repeating background “riffs” and percussion patterns that together make up a typical postwar blues ensemble texture. As previously stated, this music must be heard to be properly assimilated and understood. The key component under examination here, however, the featured guitar performance, may be adequately contextualized harmonically using this notational “shorthand” approach.

In addition to string-bending and vibrato, there are a few common fretting hand techniques that should also be mentioned before proceeding to the main text of this thesis. Like the string bend, these techniques appear in the standard notation rather generically as “slurred” or legato connections between distinct pitches. They differ significantly, however, in their execution and effect. These basic articulations are shown in items (a.) through (d.) of Example 6. Items (a.) and (b.) are fretted slides in which

Example 6. Common, fretting-hand slur techniques; the slide, the hammer-on, the pull-off and the trill – along with a sample, two-bar “turnaround” phrase incorporating elements of all of the techniques discussed in this chapter.

The image shows a musical score for guitar, divided into six measures labeled a through f. The notation includes a treble clef and a bass clef. Measure a shows a fretted slide from the 7th to the 9th fret. Measure b shows a fretted slide from the 9th to the 7th fret. Measure c shows a hammer-on (H) from the 7th to the 9th fret. Measure d shows a pull-off (P) from the 9th to the 7th fret. Measure e shows a trill (tr.) between the 7th and 9th frets. Measure f shows a two-bar turnaround phrase incorporating all techniques: a slide from 8 to 10, a pull-off from 10 to 8, a hammer-on from 8 to 5, a pull-off from 5 to 8, a hammer-on from 5 to 7, a slide from 7 to 5, and a trill between 5 and 7. Chord symbols A7 and E7 are placed above the staff in measures d and f respectively.

only the first note is struck while the second note is sounded by quickly sliding the finger tip up or down the string, maintaining constant pressure in order to ensure that the string's vibration is sustained when the second pitch is reached. Item (c.) depicts a common slur device termed a "hammer-on" in which the second note is sounded by the fretting-hand finger being brought down against the fret board with enough speed and force to clearly sound the pitch. Again, only the first note of the two-note slur is articulated with the picking hand. Item (d.) shows the effective reversal of the hammer-on technique, a device called a "pull-off." This technique must begin with both notes fretted. Once the first note is picked, the finger fretting that note is lifted with a slight downward "tugging" motion so that the remaining, lower pitch is clearly sounded. When the hammer-on and pull-off techniques are repeatedly combined in quick succession, a legato trill between the two pitches is achieved, as shown in item (e.). The wide, wavy line here marks the duration of the trill.

Item (f.) of Example 6 combines elements of all of the techniques and devices discussed in this exposition in a single, two-bar "turnaround" phrase. The "turnaround" in blues terminology refers to a "lick" or harmonic progression occurring at the end of a song form which provides a sense of culmination to the preceding chorus while simultaneously propelling the performer and listener to the beginning of the next. The unique role of form in the blues is a central focus of the following chapter. This example, however, is a fitting one on which to end this discussion of the many technical devices available to the postwar blues guitarist. It is significant to recognize that roughly half of the pitches notated in item (f.) are articulated by the fretting hand alone. This understanding places a special emphasis on those notes that *are* struck by the picking

hand. Virtually every note is approached with some sort of expressive nuance or articulation that differentiates it from the one before or after.

Mere paper and ink can never truly convey the aesthetic power of music. This is arguably truer of the blues than of some other genres. With each of the featured transcriptions that follow, I have done my best to better illuminate the *sounds* heard by the reader by providing as accurate a notational representation as is practical for the in-depth syntactical analysis of the performances discussed herein.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Function of Form in the Blues Aesthetic

It is a central argument of this thesis that British blues guitarists in the mid-1960s were in a unique position to absorb the essential elements of blues expression in much the same way a second language can be learned. Although it is possible to achieve expertise in comprehension and communication, there is always a process of translation at work. If the foreign and native tongues contain similar structural elements and vocabulary based in some shared root of origin, the new language will be more readily grasped and form a relational foundation on which to build a unique fluency. The musical language that is the blues is a byproduct of the mixing of African-born aesthetics and British song traditions on the geographical and ethnic edges of American civilization. British players seized on and excelled in using those elements of blues expression that had their point of origin in European music. If distinctive differences in British blues performance are to be recognized as evidence of such translational reinforcements, the first step must be to identify what elements of the blues draw most heavily on European lineage and which are the essential African-American components within the traditional blues aesthetic.

The formal elements of most blues songs, while uniquely representative of the genre, are relatively simple and unremarkable by European classical standards. Many of the examples used in this study share the same basic twelve-bar form. Peter Van Der Merwe offers a succinct and insightful explanation of this form and its significance to the overall development of the blues.

Most definitions of the twelve-bar blues include the harmonic formula that usually goes with it: tonic (four bars), subdominant (two bars), tonic (two bars), dominant (two bars), tonic (two bars). (Sometimes the last four bars are given as one bar dominant, one bar subdominant, two bars tonic.) . . . It should be pointed out here that this harmonic formula is strictly optional. The basic logic of the twelve-bar blues is independent of harmony. Not only are there twelve-bar tunes with no harmony at all; there are also many harmonic schemes different from this standard one. In any case this harmonic formula is a comparatively late development, and seems to have played no part in the early history of the blues. The essential features of that history are the blues mode and the three-part form, evolving separately in Africa and Britain, and finally coming together in the United States in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Van Der Merwe implies that the foundational aspects of blues aesthetics exist independently of, and without necessary reference to, either the standard twelve-bar harmonic scheme or any other, for that matter. The isolation of mode and form from harmonic progression is, in itself, contrary to a key Western principle of nineteenth-century musical aesthetics. This principle was clearly defined by Eduard Hanslick, writing in 1854. Hanslick stated that: "The independent, aesthetically not further reducible unit of musical thought in every composition is the theme. The ultimate determinations that one ascribes to music as such must always be manifest in the theme, the musical microcosm."<sup>2</sup> The concept of a theme in Western tonal music can scarcely be defined apart from the process of that theme's development and theme development can hardly occur without the element of harmonic progression. The emphasis on goal-oriented harmonic progression and the coinciding linear development of theme are the traditional cornerstones of Western compositional strategy. Together they comprise the central focus of much musicological and theoretical discussion and are considered at the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style: The Antecedents of Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 129-130.

<sup>2</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, translated and edited by Geoffry Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 80.

heart of the holistic aesthetic experience for the listener. The distinct aspects of form and content, by this view, become inseparable at the “microcosmic” level of musical theme, i.e, form as content. Even the most expressive elements of musical matter, when presented in a manner “without allowing an autonomous tonal configuration to come distinctly to the fore,” lack compelling content and are thus devoid of aesthetic potential.<sup>3</sup> This understanding of the essential and indivisible nature of the combined matrices of theme and harmonic progression is squarely at odds with the notion that the blues essentials of mode and form may effectively function independently of harmonic, and thus developmental, concern.

Of course, blues musicians are not the only ones who have rebelled against this understanding. Hanslick himself was reacting against a distinction between form and content that was widely made in nineteenth-century writings about music. Perhaps most applicable to the context of blues discussion in this regard are the ideas expressed by Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, who wrote in 1835:

The limitations and boundaries within which music must operate are largely predetermined by the nature of sound itself; this does not relate as closely to the content of what is being expressed as in other arts. There is accordingly a great deal of room for freedom in the subjective manipulation of these materials.<sup>4</sup>

Building upon this observation, Hegel wrote:

The sounds of “Ahs” and “Ohs” that function as interjections, cries of pain, sobs, and laughter, are the most direct and vital nonartistic expression of the emotions and the states of soul. . . . Natural interjections of the kind, though, are not music, for unlike the sounds of speech they are of course not articulate, conscious symbols of imaginative concepts. They thus express no predetermined content under the guise of a universal concept, but they give expression through sound of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>4</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, “The Aesthetics: Music and the Other Arts,” in *German Essays on Music*, edited by Jost Hermand and Michael Gilbert (New York: Continuum, 1994), 72.

a mood and emotion that the sound itself directly symbolizes. Expressions of this kind afford the heart relief. Nonetheless, such relief is not aesthetic relief.<sup>5</sup>

Hegel's idea of "content" was one suffused with the presence of rhetorically definable subject matter. This understanding led Hegel to argue that instrumental music was less artistically substantive than vocal music, the plastic, or the literary arts. Nonetheless, for Hegel, as with Hanslick, the key to music's aesthetic power still lay in the organization of sound into "specific tonal relationships," and it was by means of these relationships that music might communicate emotion to the listener.<sup>6</sup> This much in general may also be said of the blues, which, although possessing a unique kind of tonality apart from the European classical tradition, is most certainly a kind of "tonal" music. Hegel's view, however, that this expression might draw its inspiration and material source from something so primal and instinctual as various inarticulate vocalizations manifesting from the emotional state of the human soul has particular resonance with the core blues aesthetic.

Thus music may well originate in interjections, but only when the interjections are properly shaped does it become music. In this sense music must artistically refine its raw material to a greater degree than painting or poetry do before that material can be used to express some spiritual content. . . . Musical notes in themselves may differ enormously in type and quality, and may divide into or combine in the most varied kinds of compatible, essentially contrasting, related, or unrelated patterns. These contrasts and combinations, and the different ways in which they move and change, the way they are presented, progress, and conflict, resolve and dissolve into nothing, reflect to a greater or lesser degree the inner nature both of a particular content and of the emotions that are absorbed. Hence tonal relationships of a specific kind are now understood and given shape, expressing in a conventionalized code what is latent in the depths of the spirit as specific content.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Against the context of this statement by Hegel, the unique aesthetics that govern blues expression can be said to reside in the particular way in which the raw material of sound is refined and given musical shape. It is significant to recognize that the varieties of note relationships described by Hegel are deemed most prevalent when some element of improvisation is present within the performance itself.

In improvisation, freedom from restraint is an end in itself; the artist can, among other things, demonstrate his freedom to weave well-known melodies and passages into his extempore creation, he can display them in new lights, revealing their detail, he can lead to new ones, and progress even further from his starting point, diversifying his materials ever more and more.<sup>8</sup>

Hanslick places the concept of musical theme at the very center of the creative process, likening its importance to that of the “principle character in a novel.” The theme is placed by the composer “into different situations and surroundings, in varying occurrences and moods – these and all the rest, no matter how sharply contrasted, are thought and shaped in reference to it.”<sup>9</sup> Hegel, on the other hand, frames the conscious restatement of a theme as simply “an act of self-realization on the artist’s part, i.e., a discovery of the fact that *he* is the artist, having the power to proceed as his fancy takes him.”<sup>10</sup> The European idea of musical theme as a complete and self-contained musical entity has its closest analogue in instrumental blues performance with the aforementioned blues “lick” or phrase (see Example 5, item d.).

The Romantic idea that the effective deployment of such a motif in the course of an improvised or semi-improvised performance could carry the cultural currency of being an act of self-validating artistic power was a central factor driving British musicians’

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>9</sup> Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel, “The Aesthetics,” 71.

interests in playing African-American blues. It was in the artistic refining process of such musical material that a new European aesthetic would find its way into British blues guitar performance in the latter half of the 1960s.

This process was, however, far removed from the process that originated postwar blues guitar expression. The “raw materials” mined by British artists were essentially pre-formed motifs that had slowly emerged over time and distance from the cotton fields to the industrial cities of the United States during the first half of the twentieth century by means of a unique and powerful, culturally-driven refinement process. The resulting idiom assimilated by English blues devotees from Clapton to Keith Richards was a lexicon already musically and aesthetically formed by its African-American originators. To fully understand the significance of a British appropriation of musical motifs founded in African-American blues guitar expression, the syntactical root of this expression and its relation to the European concept of musical form must be more fully examined.

The inseparable symbiosis of form and content argued by Hanslick was a “peculiarity” inherent to instrumental music alone among the arts.<sup>11</sup> This idea represents a marked distinction from the analogous joining of form and mode as applied to blues. The three-part form inherent to twelve-bar blues songs is closely aligned with the line structure of the text. The opening lyric stanza of Otis Rush’s “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” offers a prime example of this relationship in a modern blues performance. Rush’s 1958 release on Eli Toscano’s short-lived Cobra Records is a particularly progressive, yet relatively early, example of the so-called Chicago “West-Side” sound. This was a hard-driving, ensemble-based, electric blues style developed in the mid-1950s

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<sup>11</sup> Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 80.

by young players who had been born and raised in the South before coming to the city. Rush was the first guitarist and vocalist to garner commercial success out of a luminary group that also included Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, Freddie King, Joe Young, Luther Allison, and Jimmy Dawkins.<sup>12</sup> All were in their twenties and had been heavily influenced by Muddy Waters's Chicago-based transference of the Southern, country-blues style into an urban, combo-based format beginning in the late 1940s. They had absorbed the rural blues in their youth yet, in addition to Waters, were also inspired by contemporary elements of country music, early rock and roll, rhythm and blues, soul and jazz. One result of this mix of influences was the rise of the electric guitar as a primary instrument through which traditional elements of blues vocal expression were signified and expanded upon in purely musical terms. "All Your Love (I Miss Loving)," an original composition by Rush, mixed Latin and swing elements in a way that only jazz composers had done previously, yet was typical of the new Chicago sound in its spotlighting of the electric guitar as a solo lead voice. The song's basic form and the phrase structure of its lyrics, however, are firmly rooted in the classic blues tradition.

All the love, I miss loving, all the kiss, I miss kissing,  
All the love, I miss loving, all the kiss, I miss kissing,  
Before I met you baby, I didn't know what I was missing.

The AAa rhyme scheme, the insistent repetition of the first two lines, each line's two-part phrasing and strong medial caesura, together with the "summing up" of context and rhetorical meaning provided by the third line all exemplify the standard three-part structure of the typical blues verse. Stripped of its musical notes and rhythms the verse, while communicating the timeless themes of unrequited passion and lost love in a

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<sup>12</sup> Jas Obrecht, ed., *Rollin' and Tumblin' : The Postwar Blues Guitarists* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 223.

characteristic vernacular and with romantic irony, has little of the visceral aesthetic impact associated with the blues and is relatively unremarkable by Western literary standards. This is not to say that these particular blues lyrics or those of any other blues are without aesthetic merit. There is often deep meaning in the textual aspect of blues expression. Like the music that frames it, however, the blues text as poetry must be understood on its own terms. As Stephen E. Henderson has so eloquently written:

Not only must one study the history and the sociology of the blues, one must consider the blues as part of a “universe” of Black poetry/art/culture, that has its own characteristic expression, its own function, its own dynamics, its own centers of gravity. Unless this is done, any study of the poetry is likely to be essentially superficial and condescending.<sup>13</sup>

The extent to which the melodic, articulative, and rhythmic aspects of postwar blues guitar playing are text related is of primary concern to the present study. I seek only to point out here that the text of a blues performance, separated from its musical context, holds merely a fraction of the song’s full aesthetic potential. I believe that this much may be said to be true of any song lyric, from the simplest nursery rhyme to the greatest opera libretto.

Placed in the context of the twelve-bar form and joined with its basic rhythmic and melodic aspects, the three-line couplet becomes a musical statement (Example 7). Although still missing much of its expressive nuance, the verse now fulfills at least the more generic expectations for a twelve-bar blues song. These include the dispersion of each line of text into a two-part, four-measure phrase, a slightly syncopated effect created by having each phrase begin either on the second beat of its respective measure or on the weak half of the downbeat and the prevalent use of the minor pentatonic mode centered on tonic throughout.

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen E. Henderson, “The Blues as Black Poetry,” *Callaloo* no. 16 (October 1982): 25.

Example 7. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)”- first verse lyric with melody.  
*(The Essential Otis Rush The Classic Cobra Recordings, 1956-1958, track time 0:23 - 0:45)*

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 128. The score is divided into three systems of five measures each. Chord symbols are placed above the staff: F#min for measures 1-5, Bmin for measures 6-10, and F#min for measures 11-15. The lyrics are: "All the love, I miss lo-ving, All the kiss, I miss kis-sing, All the love, I miss lo-ving, All the kiss, I miss kis-sing, Be-fore I met you ba-by, I did - n't know what I was mis - sing."

Although these basic textual, rhythmic and melodic aspects alone are enough to identify “All Your Love” as a blues song, their aesthetic impact is significantly heightened against the backdrop created by the rhythm section accompaniment. The minor harmonies implied by the bass, piano and guitar as represented by the chord symbols give the repetitive melodic phrasing a sense of movement. This is one of the prime aesthetic functions of the twelve-bar chord sequence. The melody itself does not develop in the Western sense but instead gains the effect of development against the shifting harmonic backdrop. What is particularly notable in this process is the observance that Western rules of resolution in the melody, including the fundamental precept that melodic content and contour should clearly reflect the harmonic accompaniment, do not apply in a strict sense. This structural independence of melody and harmony is clearly seen in the fifth and sixth measures where the melody continues to enforce tonic against the minor subdominant. As Van Der Merwe has pointed out, it is

the reinforcement and subsequent reconciliation of tension between the elements of phrase and form that give the twelve-bar blues its feeling of completeness.

The satisfying quality of this scheme springs from two things. One is the strength and simplicity of the harmonies considered in themselves; first the swing to the subdominant, then the swing to the dominant, then back to the tonic. The other is that this harmonic scheme is at-odds with the ternary phrasing, the first swing, to the subdominant, ending in the middle of the second section.<sup>14</sup>

The uniquely independent nature of the interplay between melody and harmony in the blues aesthetic can be underscored through the hypothetical staging of a musical experiment. As mentioned above, the harmonies supplied by the rhythm section during the verse sections of “All Your Love” are minor in quality. In this particular case, the minor key harmonic backing of “All Your Love” actually allows a greater level of consonance with the minor quality of the melodic mode. Hypothetically speaking, however, Rush’s melody could be retained unchanged against a harmonic backdrop of major quality or dominant seventh harmonies based on the same root movement (Example 8).

A phraseology that stresses the clash of flatted thirds against major-quality harmonies such as those resulting in measures one, three, seven, and nine of Example 8 is wholly consistent with blues performance. While these clashes represent harsh, unresolved dissonance by Western-theory standards and would be considered severe aesthetic anomalies to classical senses, these same dissonances are considered to be consistent with, and consonant within, the creative aesthetic parameters and listener expectations of a blues performance. The hypothetical shift from minor to major qualities in the harmonic context of “All Your Love,” while clearly altering the overall

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<sup>14</sup> Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style*, 219.

tone of the performance, does not weaken the melodic phrasing at all; on the contrary, the increased sense of at-oddness that results only serves to intensify the aesthetic effect.

Example 8. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” showing first verse melody with dominant seventh harmonies substituted. Asterisks (\*) mark flatted thirds against major chord qualities.

Pt.  $\text{♩} = 128$  0:23 **F#7**  
 All the love, I miss lo-ving, All the kiss, I miss kis-sing, All the love, I miss  
 5 **B7** **F#7** **C#7**  
 lo- loving, All the kiss, I miss kis-sing, Be-fore I met you ba-by,  
 10 **B7** **F#7**  
 I did - n't know what I was mis - sing.

Such common occurrences of flatted thirds against major harmonies are, of course, prime examples of the famously termed “blue notes” that musicologists, ethnomusicologists and folklorists often point to as being among the most important defining features of blues and blues influenced music, the other prime instances traditionally being the flatted seventh, fifth, and sixth. In each case, the label refers not only to a note flatted within the chromatic scale but to one that may exist outside of equal temperament on a microtonal level. Van Der Merwe writes:

Like the blues in general, the blue notes can mean many things. One quality that they all have in common, however, is that they are flatter than one would expect, classically speaking. But this flatness may take several forms. On one hand, it may be a microtonal affair of a quarter-tone or so. Here one may speak of *neutral* intervals, neither major nor minor. On the other hand, the flattening may be a full semitone – as it must be, of course, on keyboard instruments. It may involve a glide, either upward or downward. Again, this may be a microtonal, almost

imperceptible affair, or it may be a slur between notes a semitone apart, so that there is actually not one blue note, but two. A blue note may even be marked by a microtonal shake of a kind common in Oriental music.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to recognize that such sounds are characteristic of many types of music from across the world. Not the least notable example of these is the folk music of the British Isles. The fact, however, that such sounds have been labeled by Western music theorists and scholars with a term that is also synonymous with a distinct musical form is telling. There is no such thing as a “sonata note” in music scholarship. One cannot, however, adequately describe the blues form without citing blues phraseology, and discussions of blues melody cannot exclude reference to the blue note. It is a concept that is at once the label of a single musical entity *and* the generic signifier of a broader musical aesthetic sonically embodied in that entity. The blues mode is inclusive of these microtonal variations to the extent that any note in a given performance may be altered for expressive purpose.

The close yet skewed relationship between text, melodic phrasing, mode and harmonic movement in the twelve-bar form is further emphasized in Example 8. At the end of each two-bar phrase of text in Example 7, the final syllable falls on the second half of the beat and comes to rest on a third or fifth against the minor harmony. These weakened resolutions to primary color tones within the chords, along with the subsequent rests, provide a type of musical comma that parallels the phrasing and punctuation of the text. This effect is heightened when the dominant seventh harmonies are substituted in Example 8. In this harmonic context, the melodic cadences of the first, second, fourth and fifth phrases (mm. 1, 3, 7 and 9 respectively) also coincide with a “blue third.” This

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 119.

repeated, unresolved emphasis on pitches squarely at odds with their harmonic environment serves to intensify the unsettled longing expressed by each phrase in the text. The only real resolution, in the Western sense, occurs in bar eleven on the final syllable of the verse lyric, where melody and harmony converge on tonic by way of the dominant. The coalescence of aspects that, to this point in the verse, have been aesthetically “rubbing” against one another, adds significant musical weight to the “summing up” of context and to the emotional release achieved by the resolution of the verse’s rhetorical meaning in the final phrase. This is as effective a musical “period” as tonal music can convey. The feeling of completeness, of undeniable tension and its satisfying release, notably achieved within the course of what is, by classical standards, so brief a form, is a prime reason for the popularity of the twelve-bar blues as a song form across a number of popular music genres and the vast diversity of composers, musicians, and listeners who help define, develop and support those genres.

The stark, aesthetic simplicity of the textual, melodic, and harmonic components taken separately is exponentially compounded by their complex interplay within the twelve-bar form. Another prominent matrix that contributes to this complexity is syncopation. Rush’s vocal phrasing on “All Your Love” provides a characteristically subtle yet unmistakable example of rhythmic at-oddness in a modern blues performance. The Latin-tinged, samba-like style of the rhythm section that accompanies the verse sections of the recording is one of the more progressive features of this performance. This approach combines the distinctive clave rhythmic accents with a straight eighth-note concept that is clearly articulated in the drums and piano. The eighth-note presentation in Rush’s vocal phrasing, however, sounds slightly lopsided. The forward thrust of the

resulting rhythmic tension, so palpable on the recorded performance, is virtually undetectable, i.e., unwritable, on paper. The subtle eighth-note lilt of Rush's vocal, too subtle to be accurately depicted as a dotted-eighth or even a triplet-based figure, is instead contained within the notoriously vague verbal expression, "swing."

The aural reality of this rhythmic mode can be more satisfactorily rendered in notation when it is symbolically joined with some indication of subtle variances of pitch inflection. If there is one essential symbiosis at the heart of the blues aesthetic, it is the inseparable joining of pitch modulation and rhythmic syncopation within the single occurrence of what I will call a "note event." This term will refer to a single articulation that moves quickly and smoothly through a finitely variable range of tonality. The duration and the outer pitch boundaries of such an articulation may be roughly notated using conventional means.

Example 9 uses grace notes, slur markings, and both sixteenth- and thirty-second-note rhythm figures to depict the subtle bends, scoops, and pitch inflections that are clearly noticeable in Rush's vocal performance. Each grace note and ornamental figure is a notational approximation of a single note event that contains both interior pitch content and rhythmic complexity that cannot be precisely notated. In each instance, there is more than simply a legato connection of two distinct pitches taking place; there is every pitch in between. In most cases the pitch boundaries set out by the notation can only approximate the actual pitch centricities of the performance. In other cases the pitch variance is so slight that it defies notation altogether. For example, the "A" naturals on the second syllable of the word "kissing" (mm. 3 and 7) are actually sung somewhere between the notated pitch and an "A" sharp. The argument that such variances are

Example 9. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” first verse lyric and melody with notational rendering of expressive features – bends, scoops, and slurs.

The musical score is written for a tenor saxophone (Pt.) in 4/4 time with a tempo of 128 bpm. It features three lines of music with the following lyrics and chord changes:

- Line 1 (Measures 1-4):** Lyrics: "All the love, I miss lo - ving, All the kiss, I miss kis - sing,". Chord changes: **F#min** (measures 1-4).
- Line 2 (Measures 5-8):** Lyrics: "All the love, I miss lo - ving, All the kiss, I miss kis - sing,". Chord changes: **Bmin** (measures 5-6), **F#min** (measures 7-8).
- Line 3 (Measures 9-12):** Lyrics: "Be - fore I met you ba - by, I did - n't know what I was mis - sing." Chord changes: **C#min** (measures 9-10), **Bmin** (measures 11-12), **F#min** (measures 13-14).

mistakes or indicative of some limitation in vocal technique is countered by the consistent way in which Rush treats the parallel phrases throughout the second verse. In listening to the entire performance one senses that Rush, the consummate professional, is in confident control of his voice and means every note he sings. Just as subtle variations in pitch were once an integral part of Western music performance before the popular advent of equal temperament, so are these expressive modulations essential to the art of effective blues performance.

Although their internal complexity is virtually impossible to notate precisely, the way in which these multi-pitch, single-note events are inextricably tied to the effect of syncopation can be clearly demonstrated in Example 9. In almost every instance these events begin on an accented downbeat, with the subsequent modulation then occurring after the initial attack. In each case where such an event is followed by another syllabic articulation on the weak half of the beat, that weak-beat articulation is approached legato and without accent. It is the regular juxtaposition of accented complexity and smooth,

unaccented resolution that creates the perceived lilt in Rush's eighth-note delivery. In the few instances where the downbeat is not treated with a noticeable "bent-note" attack, the resulting effect is that of smoothly articulated straight-eighth notes.

This effect is made possible by the changes in vocal timbre and microtonal inflections that flow naturally from Rush's enunciation of the text. I use the term "naturally" in the same sense inferred by Wald in Chapter One. The modulatory gestures with which Rush attacks almost every word of lyric text are musical projections of an accent that is not "put on" but rather reflects a style of articulation that is consistent with particularly emotive conversation. The combination of rising and falling tones in his voice melds easily with the accented rhythms of the melodic phrasing to create music with a heightened sense of syncopation that is reflective of natural African-American speech patterns.<sup>16</sup> This point has obvious significant consequences for British blues vocalists, far less so for instrumentalists.

The countless ways in which timbre, attack, decay, and the matrices of pitch modulation and syncopation may be combined by the human voice in the performance of a single note event embody the wellspring of the core blues aesthetic. It is this great range of creative possibilities set within a formal context that not only intensifies the essential at-oddness but also provides satisfying resolution that gives the twelve-bar blues, or any formal variation thereof, the ability to sound fresh and new, song after song, chorus after chorus. The essence of blues expression, that which contains the essential components of the blues mode and syncopation, can thus be manifested in the sound of a single note event. This is "the independent, aesthetically not further reducible unit of

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<sup>16</sup> Jane Duran and Earl Stewart, "Toward an Aesthetic of Black Musical Expression," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 31/ 1 (Spring 1997): 84.

musical thought,” the “musical microcosm” of blues in performance – a note literally at-odds with itself.

Instrumental expressions of this aesthetic have the added freedom of being untethered from the need to phonetically enunciate a certain word or rhythmically phrase and give musical meaning to a specific text. With this freedom, however, come certain limitations depending on the instrument used. The harmonica has enjoyed its long career as a primary instrument of blues expression only partially due to its economic accessibility and ultimate portability. It is a favorite choice of blues singers precisely because its playing technique is so closely tied to the physical mechanisms of producing vocal sound. The fluid combinations of hard or soft consonants with long and short vowel sounds can be combined with pitch bends, shakes, and vibrato to produce an instrumental expression that is truly a direct extension of the human voice. All wind-driven instruments, such as saxophone or trumpet, share some portion of this quality. The piano, at the other end of the spectrum of pitch-producing instruments, must rely entirely on skilled finger manipulations to trigger hammers striking strings. Its pitches are fixed and its articulations percussive and uniform in terms of timbre. The piano does, however, offer the significant advantage of being equally adept at producing both single-note melody and rhythmically driven harmonic textures separately or in combination. This flexibility is something that the harmonica, or “blues harp” as it is sometimes called, can only approximate in a relatively limited sense and with the primary disadvantage that the singer-player must stop singing in order to interject instrumentally and stop playing in order to sing.

In between these two extremes is the guitar. It shares much of the piano's practical flexibility in terms of harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic capabilities on a reduced, and thus more portable, scale. Its technique, however, places the player's hands in direct contact with the strings. In this respect, the guitar offers a range of articulations and pitch inflections that can be used to model those of the human voice. A blues guitarist using this approach does not necessarily seek to mimic the sound of the voice as such, or even duplicate a vocal melody, but rather strives to signify the emotive power of the blues voice through the utilization of technical devices and tonal characteristics that are idiosyncratic to the instrument itself. Rush's guitar introduction to "All Your Love (I Miss Loving)," as shown in Example 10, offers a prime opportunity to compare his guitar and vocal phrasing in a situation where the guitar line is clearly crafted to model a vocal melody and idiomatically signify its expression.

The two-part, call and response phrase structure of the first two lines of text is well-defined by Rush's guitar over the first eight measures of Example 10. The "call" portion of each line (mm. 1-2 and mm. 5-6) is, however, significantly altered from the parallel vocal phrase. Rush's guitar line begins with an aggressively accented, two-note stab, followed by a quick series of bent and slurred pitches on beat three that blend together as a single articulation before falling to tonic on beat four. This short phrase is an example of a blues "lick" that is idiomatic to the guitar. Chuck Berry's soloing style, for instance, was based largely on rhythmically varied, successive repetitions of this same musical idea. A similar motive was a staple of electric blues guitar pioneer T-Bone Walker's repertoire in the 1930s. Here, Rush puts his own stamp on a well-worn move by articulating the initial "double stop" stab with a quick upward "rip" or fretting hand

Example 10. “All Your Love” (I Miss Loving)” – Comparison of first eight bars of first verse vocal melody (0:23 – 0:37) and first eight bars of guitar introduction modeled on vocal phrasing (0:00 – 0:14).

0:23  $\text{♩} = 126$  **F#min**

Vc. All the love, I miss lo - ving,

E. Gt. 0:00

3

All the kiss, I miss kis - sing,

H

5 **Bmin**

All the love, I miss lo - ving,

Full P

7 **F#min**

All the kiss, I miss kis - sing,

H Full P

slide up the neck of the guitar. This move is expressive of the half-sung, half-shouted vocal articulation of the word “all” in the lyric phrase “All the love, I miss loving.” The two firmly plucked notes a fourth apart come out of Rush’s amplifier with a level of harmonic distortion and sonic weight much greater than that which is possible with a single note. This jarring tone combines with the violent upward glissando to create an explosive sonic effect that has little to do with the articulation of any one particular pitch. Thus the opening guitar articulation of the recording effectively presages the harsh emotive aesthetic of the verse vocal melody’s initial attack.

Rush’s guitar communicates the frustration and urgency of the lyric not by mimicking the melody but by twisting it and sonically intensifying the rhetorical contrast expressed in the phrase “All the love, I miss loving.” This is accomplished by contrasting the percussive “rip” on beat two with the melodic legato phrasing of the bent and slurred note figure on beats three and four. The half beat of silence in between the two moves adds emphasis to the attack on beat three which corresponds to the vocal accent on the word “love.” The “A” natural notated on beat one of measure two is actually bent nearly a quarter-step sharp. This is a prime example of a “neutral” third interval, which is sounding somewhere between major and minor qualities. The corresponding place in the second phrase (E. Gt., mm 6, beat 1) is articulated with a quickly hammered slur to the subdominant, punctuated with wide, fast vibrato. Both moves capture the unresolved tension expressed in the lyric “loving,” while clearly articulating the downbeat accent of the vocal attack. In the corresponding responsorial phrase that models the lyric “All the kiss, I miss kissing” (Ex. 10, mm.3-4 and 7-8) Rush’s guitar line sticks close to the sung melody in terms of notes but gains special

emphasis through the superimposition of a pronounced triplet-based eighth-note syncopation against the straight eighth-note feel of the rhythm section. The subtle lilt of Rush's vocal phrasing receives an almost caricature-like rhythmic treatment in his guitar line at measures three and seven of Example 10. Rush's guitar phrasing most closely mirrors his vocal on the downbeat of measure eight. Here again, however, a brief but well-defined pause on the second half of beat four adds dramatic flair to the stinging attack and rhythmically rushed articulation of the slurred figure representing the word "kissing."

When these same techniques are deployed in a blues guitar solo that is conceived independently of a lyric melody, such specific textual references vanish and phrasing possibilities multiply. What remains constant, however, is the core aesthetic. A single note event is all that is needed to facilitate the practice of two key philosophical approaches to a performance that has deep roots in African and African-American culture – individual stylization and improvisation. B.B King, in his book *Blues Guitar Method*, equates instrumental technique with vocal expression and describes the development of individual style as being an indispensable part of the training process.

To me it's more like the human voice. It's like a person singing. It seems to say more and you can feel it. It makes the sound sort of stimulating. . . . I think in terms of not just playing a note but making sure that every note I play means something. You need to take time with these notes. If you just play notes and not put anything into it you'll never have a distinctive style. You need to put yourself into what you are doing. It will set you apart from the person just playing the guitar. In other words, make music.<sup>17</sup>

The elevated stature accorded to those players having an unmistakable trademark sound and the currency this ideal, as carried among Post-World War II electric guitarists,

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<sup>17</sup> King qtd. in Hans Weisethaunet, "Is There such a Thing as a 'Blue Note'?", *Popular Music* 20, no. 1 (Jan. 2001): 101.

regardless of generation, ethnicity and background, cannot be overestimated. A guitarist's skill and relative importance to the living tradition of postwar blues is often summarized by the perceived ability of that player to instantly establish his identity through his instrument, not by playing a signature theme or melody but by executing a simple, single-note gesture. In blues culture, the more concise, sonically potent and recognizable the self-signifying power of this gesture, the more celebrated and revered the player among his peers and other experienced listeners. Hans Weisenthal explains:

The aesthetics of blues phrasing involves an idea of "personifying" each and every note. The master of blues performance may make his personal mark on each note – with a bend or vibrato – in such a way that the skilled / socialized listener only needs to hear one single note in order to recognize and feel the presence of the sound of a B.B. King as being distinct from Albert King, Albert Collins, Buddy Guy, or players like Peter Green, Eric Clapton or Jimi Hendrix. This contrasts with the idea of "musemes" as the smallest item of "music" – sometimes defined as a minimum of three notes, sometimes more "flexibly."<sup>18</sup>

The equation of performance mastery with the production of a recognizable, "personalized" sound rather than sheer technical virtuosity or melodic invention is a criterion that underscores fundamental differences in the way instrumental facility is valued within the aesthetics of blues performance. In summing up this radical break from European standards of vocal and instrumental prowess, Switzer writes: "It is 'music as such' that is being emancipated here – not in its formal arrangement, but in its most elemental, and so most powerful, being – its materiality, as sound, as tone."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Switzer, "Signifying the Blues," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 21, The Lyrical Phenomenon (2001): 51.

This shift in aesthetic emphasis does not mean that form cannot play an important role in the projection of individual style. In many cases fluidity of form within the course of a given performance *is* stylization. Charles Ford, in his detailed metrical analysis of Robert Johnson's 29 recordings from 1936-37, found that thirteen of them could be described as "irregular twelve-bar blues."<sup>20</sup>

Robert Johnson's loose approach to meter is comparable with other blues musicians of the Delta at this time. . . . Charlie Patton's irregularities usually take the form of 5- to 7-beat bars at the end of each 4-bar period, closing each before proceeding to the next. . . . Skip James sometimes performed with no concern for hypermeter, meter or even beat, whilst Son House, Robert Johnson and others controlled their irregularities with a remarkable sense of design.<sup>21</sup>

The bending and stretching of meter was not exclusive to Robert Johnson's time and place. Mississippi-born John Lee Hooker, who made his professional career in Detroit, and Sam "Lightning" Hopkins from around Houston are but two notable examples of American bluesmen in the 1950s and 60s who typically bent formal expectations to their own expressive purpose as part of their individual styles. Blind Lemon Jefferson of Dallas, the first blues recording "star" of the 1920s to feature a regional style of guitar-driven, self-accompanied performance, created almost exclusively in twelve-bar form yet "did not hesitate to expand or contract a bar if he happened to be in the mood."<sup>22</sup>

Although there is no hard evidence in the form of field recordings that predate the classic blues boom of the 1920s and 30s, it is likely that the twelve-bar blues gathered uniformity as a concession to commercial demands.<sup>23</sup> Guitarists such as Lonnie Johnson and Leroy

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Ford, "Robert Johnson's Rhythms," *Popular Music* 17/ 1 (January 1998): 90.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Carr, both Chicago-based contemporaries of Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, Skip James, and Son House, always adhered to a strict rendering of twelve-bar form, “mainly because they spent most of their time playing in ensembles.”<sup>24</sup>

Whether it is freely altered in the interest of expressivity or rigidly enforced either out of logistical necessity or to meet commercial expectations, form is an integral part of blues performance, albeit in a way quite different from Western tradition. Form, in the blues tradition, is circular. The end of a twelve-bar blues, or of any of its variants, leads back to the beginning. Repeating form is a common feature of both African and European folk music but the circle figure itself signifies a philosophical ideology that has particular resonance in African culture. Evidence that this resonance has survived in African-American culture can be found in the tradition of the ring shout. The ring shout was a type of “holy dance” in which “the circling about in a circle is the prime essential.”<sup>25</sup> Eyewitness accounts of this African-based ritual on American soil date from 1845.

From contemporaneous descriptions of the shout we learn that the participants stood in a ring and began to walk around it in a shuffle, with the feet keeping in contact with or close proximity to the floor, and that there were “jerking,” “hitching” motions, particularly in the shoulders. These movements were usually accompanied by a spiritual, sung by lead singers, “based” by others in the group (probably with some kind of responsorial device and by hand-clapping and knee-slapping). The “thud” of the basic rhythm was continuous, without pause or hesitation. And the singing that took place in the shout made use of interjections of various kinds, elisions, blue-notes, call-and-response devices, with the sound of feet against the floor serving as an accompanying device.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ford, “Robert Johnson’s Rhythms,” 71.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Winslow Gordon qtd. in Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, edited by Gena Dangel Caponi (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 136.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

The ring shout played an important cultural role as a conservatory of African musical elements as well as being a proving ground for the development of African-American extensions of these elements, the basis of African-American music.<sup>27</sup> It also provides a useful analogy for the role of form in the blues. The familiar, circular form of the twelve-bar blues is a tradition that is internalized by the blues performer as well as the experienced listener. The image of the lead singer taking his or her place at the center of the ring and improvising embellishments on an appropriate melody in a response tuned to the occasion is a striking visual analog for the role of the instrumental soloist in a modern electric blues ensemble. Form in the blues is the relentless “sound of feet against the floor” that provides context and accompaniment over which stylized expression is projected. It is also the vessel by which African-American musical aesthetics were transported into the twentieth century.

The use of improvisation within a traditional form as a means of placing an individual trademark on a performance is an essential African-based component in the blues. Gena Caponi writes: “The African aesthetic constantly pressures one to innovate within a traditional structure so that each musical event blends history and the contemporary approach of the musicians performing at the time.”<sup>28</sup> “Stylization,” Caponi adds, “occurs when one man or woman appropriates the tradition through a particular improvisational device and exceptional skill in that technique.”<sup>29</sup> Improvising idiomatically within the blues form is a relational act. Individual variation must respect

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>28</sup> Gena Caponi, ed., *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the integrity of the tradition to be effective aesthetically. It must also communicate a personal perspective on that tradition in order to have relevance in the moment.

Albert Murray writes:

As is also the case with the best of the so-called unaltered found objects on exhibition in some of the better avant-garde art galleries, the invention of creative process lies not in the originality of the phrase as such, but in the way it is used in a frame of reference.<sup>30</sup>

Further building on this analogy, Murray continues:

That musicians whose sense of incantation and percussion was conditioned by the blues idiom in the first place are likely to handle its peculiarities with greater ease and assurance than outsiders of comparable or even superior conventional skill should surprise no one. But that does not mean, as is so often implied, if not stated outright, that their expression is less a matter of artifice, but rather that they have had more practice with the technical peculiarities involved and have also in the normal course of things acquired what is tantamount to a more refined sensitivity to the inherent nuance.<sup>31</sup>

For postwar African-American blues guitarists performing in their native musical language, the greatest aesthetic weight was attached to the essential elements of mode and syncopation as the “inherent nuances” of personal stylization. The resulting lexicon of instrumental expression was attainable by British players through an aural immersion in recorded examples of these performances. In the course of internalizing the syntactical aspects of the core blues aesthetic, however, certain priorities of expressive emphasis were shifted onto those formal elements of the blues that have particular resonance with European sensibilities. Evidence of this shift is presented in the following chapters.

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<sup>30</sup> Albert Murray, “Playing the Blues,” in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, edited by Gena Dagel Caponi (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 98.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Expressive Authenticity in British Blues Guitar Performance: The Cross-Cultural Relevance of the Blues Aesthetic

This chapter will contextualize musicological evidence of the aforementioned shift in expressive emphasis in British blues guitar performance within a culturally focused understanding of the authenticity question. This understanding of authenticity has its roots in African and African-American performance practices constituting the core blues aesthetic as outlined in the previous chapter. These are the essential elements of personal stylization and the creative manifestation of such style in performance through the improvisational application of expressive devices as descriptive musical content set within a formal backdrop guided by tradition. They are values culturally embedded in African-American blues performance. It is a musical syntax rife with analogues to the collective African-American experience; the forced dispersion from Africa, the struggle to retain identity amidst the dehumanizing effects of slavery, the need to reinvent that identity following emancipation, the fight to overcome Jim Crow and – in the wake of Jim Crow’s hard won Constitutional demise – the resistance to residual prejudices and civic oppressions that still echo (it is hoped with ever-fading whispers) to the present.

For some, the depth and uniquely reflective nature of this connection is all the proof that is necessary in order to grant sole proprietorship of authentic blues expression to African-American musicians.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, however, from the historical evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Christopher Taylor, “...So Black and Blue, Response to Rudinow,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53/3 (Summer 1995): 314.

presented by music scholars as diverse in their perspectives and methodologies as Amiri Baraka<sup>2</sup> and Peter Van Der Merwe<sup>3</sup> that the blues would not be the blues as we know it without the musical and cultural influence of European-Americans as well. The first West-Africans brought to the New World in 1619 carried with them a wealth of culture that was arguably more ancient and varied than that of their European supervisors; however, they did not arrive singing the blues. Baraka has pointed out that purely African music traditions, especially those associated with work, likely began to change rapidly with the first generation of American-born slaves.<sup>4</sup> The forced acculturation to European dominance occurred most quickly and thoroughly on the frontier of America, where poor white slave owners lived and worked in close proximity with their slaves, sharing a nearer experience than anywhere else in the New World.<sup>5</sup> Although it is inarguable that African and African-American influences have been by far the most crucial to the development of the blues, English-speaking settlers, particularly the Scots-Irish, provided most of the European influence across the backcountry of America from the early 1700s through the first half of the nineteenth century. It is not surprising then to find that many early blues tunes, songs such as “Frankie and Johnny” and “One Kind Favour,” among others, can be traced to song families rooted in Celtic, Scottish, and English folk-ballad traditions.<sup>6</sup> This cross-cultural connection was a fact not lost on

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<sup>2</sup> Leroi Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963), 131.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style: The Antecedents of Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style*, 185-186.

England's earliest blues enthusiasts. The generation of British blues guitarists who emerged in the mid 1960s grew up amid a strong English infatuation with American folk-blues and the culture that had produced it.

The early stages of what became Britain's fascination with American "roots" music can be traced to the 1940s. Beginning in 1942, the influx of United States servicemen and women to the island nation began a fresh process of Americanization at various levels of British culture. Not the least of these was the music that provided a diversion from the strains and tension of war.<sup>7</sup> England became home to a particularly strong popular resurgence of traditional jazz and Dixieland. Supporters of the "trad jazz" movement began playing records by African-American folk-blues artists such as Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly), Josh White, and "Big" Bill Broonzy on the BBC during World War II.<sup>8</sup> For English fans, musicians and critics who held that the only authentic jazz was that which had come directly out of New Orleans, these performers were of a generation only slightly removed from that of seminal jazz figures such as Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver.<sup>9</sup>

If a singular moment in history can be attached to the beginning of the British blues boom, then Saturday, September 22, 1951 is arguably that date. It marks the evening of Broonzy's English premier at Kingsway Hall as a guest of the London Jazz Club. Posters heralding the concert "by the famous American singer" billed it as a

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<sup>7</sup> Ralph Willett, "Hot Swing and the Dissolute Life: Youth, Style and Popular Music in Europe 1939-49," *Popular Music* 8/2 (May 1989): 161.

<sup>8</sup> Jas Obrecht, "Transatlantic Blues," *Guitar Player Magazine* 32/3 (March 1998): 67.

<sup>9</sup> Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 237.

“recital” of “blues, folk songs and ballads.”<sup>10</sup> Max Jones later recalled the performance in a 1958 article in *Melody Maker*.

He (Broonzy) found there an audience receptive to the best songs in his extensive repertoire and to his finest feats of guitarmanhood, an audience that regarded him as a combination of creative artist and living legend. . . . The voice was a shade less powerful than I had guessed it to be from American records. But it possessed all the strength and virility it needed for the toughest blues; and Bill displayed flexibility, inventiveness and all expressive range far beyond anything I expected. Other surprises were the immense sound and swing of his guitar playing, the dexterity revealed in solos, the richness of the accompaniment, and the wonderful relationship between vocal and instrumental parts. . . . In Britain he played a significant part in building up a relatively large audience for blues and folk-song.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of Broonzy’s first visit on future movers and shakers in the British blues scene has been underscored by John Mayall, the English bandleader whose Bluesbreakers combo became a proving ground in the later 1960s for guitarists Eric Clapton, Peter Green, and Mick Taylor.

Big Bill Broonzy was a very important figure in British music consciousness. When he came over and toured England – I think it was in 1951 – I didn’t even know about his band stuff, the early configurations from his Chicago days. That’s because he had so many solo singles, 78s, that were recorded in Europe. These were the records I had access to in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s. He was a great guitar player. His songs were a major source of material. I tried to play ‘em all. Very original subject matter.<sup>12</sup>

Mayall’s claim to have had access to European-made recordings of Broonzy prior to Big Bill’s British debut is an obvious lapse of memory. Broonzy’s discography indicates that he made his first recordings on European soil in Paris on September 20,

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<sup>10</sup> qtd. from original poster depicted in Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1969), 163.

<sup>11</sup> Max Jones qtd. in William Broonzy, *Big Bill Blues: William Broonzy’s Story as told to Yannick Bruynoghe* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>12</sup> John Mayall qtd. in Gregory Isola, “John Mayall: The Birth of British Blues Guitar,” *Guitar Player Magazine* 29/8 (August 1995): 111.

1951, only days before his first London appearance. By 1956, however, over a hundred sides had been released in Europe. These were recorded in Paris, London, Baarn, and Copenhagen.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the earlier “Chicago days,” ensemble-based performances referred to by Mayall, these European recordings were indeed mostly solo performances and, as such, featured a healthy dose of Broonzy’s acoustic guitar. Undoubtedly, among these records were those studied by Clapton during his formative, pre-electric days as a 16-year-old student at Kingston School of Art.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most important aspects fueling the British reaction to African-American artists such as Lead Belly, Josh White, and Big Bill Broonzy during the 1950s was the repertoire that was transmitted directly to English musicians. White and Broonzy were both received with special fascination when they included English folk ballads in their performances. Although he never set foot on English soil, many of the songs popularized by Lead Belly’s recordings had roots in the British ballad tradition that had been an integral part of the music that developed in America alongside African-American influence for over three hundred years. This re-importation of a song tradition in which the British had their own historical and cultural stake had its most visible manifestation in the skiffle craze that swept England in the latter half of the 1950s.

The term “skiffle” as it came to be applied by English trad-jazzers in the mid-1950s signified Great Britain’s answer to America’s popular folk revival. The word itself seems to have had its origins in places like Chicago during the early decades of the 1900s. The massive influx of southern-born African-Americans to northern and mid-

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<sup>13</sup> Broonzy, *Big Bill Blues*, 163-170.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 29.

western cities was met with the continued deep entrenchment of segregation during the first half of the twentieth century to feed the growth of large urban slums. It was in these overcrowded, squalid conditions that tenants found a way to use music to help one another by organizing rent, or “skiffle,” parties. This connotation of “skiffle” with a homemade, working-class brand of music that lent voice to the struggle of the socially downtrodden in the face of urban oppression resonated deeply with the leftist idealism of the ironically upper-middle-class British trad-jazz revivalists who introduced the term to England in the early 1950s.<sup>15</sup> What began, however, as ad hoc, “jug band” interludes staged as filler between jazz sets at British clubs became a mainstream pop phenomenon when Lead Belly’s “Rock Island Line,” as recorded by The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group, reached number seventeen on the British singles charts in January of 1956 and then remained on the charts for a full six months.

The peak years of the skiffle craze during the latter half of the 1950s paralleled those of American rock and roll in England. The explosion of English “beat” music in the early 1960s and the resulting development of a distinctly British pop sound came as a direct synthesis of American rock and roll and English skiffle. One need only listen to Donegan’s rendition of “Frankie and Johnny” and imagine the addition of electric instruments and third-based vocal harmonies to understand the genesis of Liverpool’s Quarry Men and their evolution into the Beatles. In terms of skiffle’s significance for the British blues guitarists of the mid 1960s, however, two important points may be made. The first of these has to do with the almost instantaneous rise in both the popularity and accessibility of the guitar for English youths approaching their teens circa 1956-57.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

During this brief period, literally thousands of English youths were inspired to take up the guitar and learn their first chords. So suddenly did the instrument's popularity spike in 1957 that Ben Davis, managing director of one of Britain's largest wholesale and retail firms, commented:

The demand is so great that no country in the world can hope to keep up with it. Since last September it has increased more than 10 times. At Christmas people were walking around Charing Cross Road with bunches of notes in their hands looking for guitars. At the moment I have 20,000 on order and wish I could get more. I estimate that this year over 250,000 will be imported into this country, compared with about 6,000 in 1950.<sup>16</sup>

Eric Clapton later recounted his grandparents having purchased his first guitar from a music store near his school. According to Clapton, the store went from featuring accordions to guitars virtually overnight as the skiffle craze took hold. Like so many others of his generation, the objective of his first attempts at playing was a folk tune, in Clapton's case "Scarlett Ribbons," a song made popular by Harry Belafonte but given a more bluesy treatment by Josh White.<sup>17</sup> Other schoolboy skiffers who would eventually make their marks as British-born, blues-influenced, electric guitarists include Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page, Ritchie Blackmore with Deep Purple, Robin Trower, and Pink Floyd's David Gilmour.<sup>18</sup> As George Harrison later explained, part of skiffle's great appeal to young players was its do-it-yourself instrumental ethos and technical simplicity.

Lonnie Donegan set all them kids on the road (sic). Everybody was in a skiffle group. Some gave up, but the ones who didn't give up became all those bands out of the early '60s. Lonnie was into, like, Lonnie Johnson and Lead Belly – those kinds of tunes. But he did it in this sort of very accessible way for kids. Because all you needed was an acoustic guitar, a washboard with thimbles for percussion,

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<sup>16</sup> Ben Davis qtd. in Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story* (London: Robson Books, 1997), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Clapton, *Autobiography*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002* (London: Ashgate, 2003), 77.

and a tea chest – you know, a box that they used to ship tea in from India – and you just put a broom handle on it and a bit of string, and you had a bass. We all just got started on that. You only needed two chords.<sup>19</sup>

When compared to the levels of specialized skill and variety found in postwar blues expression, the amateurish and repetitive banality of English skiffle obscures a second crucial point of relevance to the present thesis. It is a point based not in musical substance, but rather in aesthetic precedence. For the first time, British performers were playing and singing American, folk-based, blues material in a decisively British manner that placed their performances distinctly apart from the original models. They did so in a way that resonated strongly with British pop consciousness while largely ignoring parochial notions of folk authenticity. Even if the differences were not wholly intentional, skiffle's significance for English popular culture throughout the 1960s and well into the '70s was sealed. In the words of Michael Brocken: "Intertextuality had dawned."<sup>20</sup>

Intertextuality presupposes the existence of texts. Arguments ascribing authenticity in the performance of European classical music have, in some scholarly discourse, been conceived mostly in terms of fidelity to the work, i.e., the musical text. This particular view and a possible consideration for its analogue in blues performance have been suggested by Joel Rudinow.

In the literature of musical aesthetics the authenticity question has been focused largely on the relation between performances and "the work" – or, because the work is conceived as a composition, between performances and what the composer intended – and the criteria for authenticity have been understood in terms of accuracy or conformity with performance specifications which constitute the work. As applied to blues performances the authenticity question must be

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<sup>19</sup> Obrecht, "Transatlantic Blues," 71.

<sup>20</sup> Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 78.

focused somewhat differently, for although we may speak of blues “compositions,” what we thereby refer to consists of no more typically than a simple chord progression shared by many other such “compositions,” with no definite key signature, no particular prescribed instrumentation, and a lyrical text which itself is open to ad lib interruption, interpretation, and elaboration in performance. As a musical genre, the blues is characterized by what we may call “compositional minimalism” and a complimentary emphasis on expressive elements. The question of the authenticity of a given blues performance is thus one of stylistic and expressive authenticity, and our question becomes, “Is white blues ‘acceptably enough derived’ from the original sources of the blues to be stylistically authentic and authentically expressive within the style?”<sup>21</sup>

The validity of an overly “text centric” criterion for authenticity in classical performance has become increasingly called to question against the background of the late-twentieth-century authenticity movement. Richard Taruskin writes:

We seem to have paid a heavy price indeed for the literacy that sets Western musical culture so much apart and makes its past available in the first place, if the text must be so venerated. Is the text only an exacting responsibility? And if so, to what or whom is the responsibility due? Can the text not be an opportunity – for the exercise of imagination, the communication of delight, even the sharing of emotion? Or does that necessarily violate it in some way? Can there be no reconciliation between the two authenticities, that is, the authenticity of the object performed and the authenticity of the subject performing? And is a musical performance to be regarded as an “object” at all?<sup>22</sup>

Conflicting arguments put aside, I wish to focus on the particular resonances between Taruskin’s questions and Rudinow’s blues assessment as they may be applied to the already-established notion that a recorded blues performance is a kind of musical text.

Because the criteria for authenticity in blues performance are centered in loose descriptive elements such as style and expression, rather than faithful conformity to prescriptive composition, a greater emphasis on interpretive variance is essential. The improvisational aspect of the blues aesthetic suggests that the musical content of an

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<sup>21</sup> Joel Rudinow, “Race, Ethnicity, Expressive Authenticity: Can White People Play the Blues?” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52/1, *The Philosophy of Music* (Winter 1994): 129.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Taruskin, “The Authenticity Movement Can Become a Positivist Purgatory, Literalistic and Dehumanizing,” *Early Music* 12/1 (February 1984): 6.

“acceptably derived” British blues guitar performance must comprise an effective reordering or evolving of techniques and motifs that are stylistically definitive of the idiom. The expressive aspect of the blues aesthetic dictates that the artistic intentions that drive this process should, in some demonstrable way, reflect a point of view unique to the British performer.

It is a central contention of this thesis that certain English guitarists did achieve an authoritative and specialized level of mastery over both stylistic and expressive aspects of the blues idiom. In reference to the former aspect, the process necessary to such mastery involved a deeply subjective, aural immersion in source text materials, i.e., the available recordings of postwar, African-American blues. “My method of learning was pretty basic,” Clapton remembers; “I’d play along with the record I wanted to imitate, and when I thought I’d mastered something, I’d record it on the Grundig (a brand of portable tape recorder) and play it back. If it sounded like the record, then I was satisfied.”<sup>23</sup>

Clapton’s dedicated approach established a reasonably efficient constructive process for gaining technique, repertoire and motivic vocabulary. He even allowed for a measure of objectivity by placing himself as the listener, comparing his own taped performance with the original source recording. But how did this process then translate to the aforementioned individual expression and its essential aesthetic marker, personalized style?

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<sup>23</sup> Clapton, *Authenticity*, 29-30.

The aesthetic impact of a blues performance is first and foremost dependent on what Albert Murray has called the “mastery of a very specific technology of stylization.”<sup>24</sup>

Such is the stuff of which blues musicianship is made. It is not a matter of having the blues and giving direct personal release to the raw emotion brought on by suffering. It is a matter of mastering the elements of craft required by the idiom. It is a matter of idiomatic orientation and of the refinement of auditory sensibility in terms of idiomatic nuance. It is a far greater matter of convention, and hence tradition, than of impulse.<sup>25</sup>

Murray’s definition of what constitutes blues musicianship suggests that the key to achieving an effective blues performance is rooted in the player’s relationship to the musical tradition itself or, to be more specific, to the source material from which said player gains an understanding of, and through practice internalizes, “the elements of craft required by the idiom.” From the relative depth of this understanding and the required conditioning of physical aspects related to instrumental fluency a player draws a proportional degree of technical authority in terms of performance.

Technical authority in musical performance, however, does not alone translate as expressive authenticity. As Richard Taruskin has so aptly stated:

Authenticity stems from conviction. Conviction in turn stems as much from belief as it does knowledge. Our beliefs – naïve or sophisticated, to be sure, depending on the state of our knowledge – are what alone can give us the sense of assurance and of style possessed by those fortunate enough to have behind them an unbroken tradition of performance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Albert Murray, “Playing the Blues,” in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, edited by Gena Dagal Caponi (Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Taruskin, “On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance,” *The Journal of Musicology* 1/3 (July 1982): 344.

Taruskin's comments are firmly applicable to the performance practice of "folk and pop music, where," as Taruskin observed, "there is a tacit, wholly internalized, integrated and implicit identification of the performer's habits with the demands of the music performed."<sup>27</sup> In fact, the utter dependence by British blues guitarists on unchanging, recorded "texts" for learning versus the largely oral, living tradition handed down to African-American musicians makes Taruskin's insights especially relevant to the present thesis. The historical identity of the blues as an ongoing African-American racial project bestows on the music its emancipatory power and a unique experiential relevance. It is in the hands and mind of the performer, however, that an "authenticity of conviction" must finally be realized. In this sense, then, it is completely defensible to state that a British-born musician could not possibly produce an absolutely authentic African-American blues performance because a British-born musician could not possibly have an authentic knowledge of African-American experience. On the contrary, if any degree of authenticity is to be communicated in British blues guitar performance it must stem from the performer's strong beliefs, however "naïve or sophisticated," in the intrinsic cultural currency of the blues as it resonated within an uniquely English, postwar experience. The modernistic tendencies of blues expression, as can be identified at any point along the music's historical curve in America, provide fertile ground for arguments positing its cross-cultural relevance as a folk-popular hybrid in 1960s England.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the role of form in the blues is one based in the assurance of tradition. Against this backdrop, the musical content plays out as an ever-evolving commentary on the present. The way in which "the contingencies of modernity are expressed through and mitigated by formal elements that call forth long-

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<sup>27</sup> Taruskin, "The Authenticity Movement," 10.

standingness and stability” has obvious relevance to the tenuous realities of African-American experience in the century following abolition and preceding the civil rights movement.<sup>28</sup> Leighton Grist has suggested that this foundational aspect of the blues also found particular resonance amidst the “circumstances produced by the post–World War II domestic settlement in the United Kingdom.”

Informed by the radical policies of the 1945 Labour government, the period saw, among other things, the establishment of a modern welfare state, and most notably the National Health Service, greater educational opportunity, slum clearance and improved housing, the nationalization of services and of heavy industry, and, in part related to the last, increased worker strength and confidence. During the 1950s there was in addition the spread of available and affordable consumer durables and other products. But if it was a time of expanding possibility, it was similarly one of increasing bureaucratization and rationalization. There were also the uncertainties generated by change, and the residual limitations of a class-dominated society. It was, in short, a period redolent of the contradictions of modernity: hence, perhaps, the appeal of a music that expressed and mediated the same.<sup>29</sup>

The implications of class-consciousness among English youths reaching their mid-teens at the dawn of the 1960s bear some consideration here. As mentioned above, exponents of the preceding generation, that group which had seized upon the more traditional strains of American jazz to help mediate “the contradictions of modernity,” were at least of middle-class status. British trad-jazz enjoyed a mainstream social acceptance that was wholly inherited by its inadvertent, popular folk-blues offspring, skiffle. The sweater and sport jacket-wearing crowds that filled English trad-jazz clubs in the late-1940s and early-1950s were put off by working-class subjects who preferred the

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<sup>28</sup> Leighton Grist, “The Blues is the Truth: The Blues, Modernity, and the British Blues Boom,” in *Cross the Water Blues: African American Music in Europe*, edited by Neil A. Wynn (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 208.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

more modern styles of swing, boogie-woogie, and bebop.<sup>30</sup> These styles carried with them a more socially subversive connotation not unlike that subsequently bestowed on American rock and roll in the late 1950s. As far as the British “establishment” was concerned, rock and roll, even that purveyed by white Americans like Bill Haley and Elvis, was a dark force that threatened to undermine the wholesome image of British youths as embodied in the relatively inert innocence of skiffle. As Brocken has pointed out, the late-1950s advent of popular BBC TV music programs such as *Six-Five Special*, while allowing British teenagers the opportunity to see their own favored brands of popular music performed on the small screen for perhaps the first time, somewhat tacitly propagandized this view.

Welcome as it was, *Six-Five Special* is often viewed as being gutsier than it really was. In truth, it was a rather bourgeois hotchpotch and featured skiffle primarily to the exclusion of rock ‘n’ roll. This accurately reflected the class divide that much skiffle-related activity represented. Skiffle was welcome at the BBC and with the Left, in youth clubs and coffee bars because it was politically correct, safe and jolly – unlike rock ‘n’ roll, which was accused by some as being “jungle” music. In fact, it was not only the public-school boys at the BBC and the quasi-Marxist bourgeoisie that found skiffle to their tastes. As Ian Whitcomb suggests, even the Church of England sanctioned it. The Reverend Brian Bird (a C. of E. vicar, no less) penned the first “serious” book about the genre – *Skiffle* – in 1958.<sup>31</sup>

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the generation that would have the most active bearing on the later, more instrumentally progressive phase of the British blues boom were mostly working-class kids. Their initiation to the guitar may have been first facilitated by the wildly popular but terminally brief explosion of skiffle. Exposure to the more raucous, electrified incarnations of the blues, however, followed from a rebellious interest in American rock and roll, especially in its raw and unadulterated state

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<sup>30</sup> Willett, “Hot Swing and the Dissolute Life,” 162.

<sup>31</sup> Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 74.

as African-American rhythm and blues. In the years surrounding 1960, an “underground,” urban-blues scene began to take shape among young British aspirants. Clapton recalled the primary importance of listening parties and record shops to this process.

It was exciting to find that there existed this fellowship of like-minded souls, and this is one of the things that determined my future path toward becoming a musician. I started to meet people who knew about Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, and they had older friends, record collectors who would hold club nights, which is where I was first introduced to John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, and Little Walter. These guys would get together in one of their houses and spend the whole evening listening to one album, like *The Best of Muddy Waters*, and then have excited discussions about what they’d heard. (We) would often go up to London to visit record stores. . . . If you were lucky, you’d meet a working musician in one of these stores, and if you told them that you liked Muddy Waters, they might say, “Well, then you’ve got to listen to Lightning Hopkins,” and you’d be off in a new direction.<sup>32</sup>

The sudden generational demarcation of postwar electric blues in England can perhaps be summed up best by comparing respective audience reactions to concert appearances there by Muddy Waters in 1958 and 1962. The earlier appearance, as a guest of trad-jazz figurehead Chris Barber, debuted Waters to an audience whose only previous live experience with African-American blues performers had been solo acoustic artists like Broonzy, Josh White or the popular harmonica and guitar duo of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. Waters had begun electrifying his slide-based brand of Mississippi-bred, country-blues guitar as early as the mid-1940s – a necessary adaptation in order to be heard over the noise and bustle of clubs on Chicago’s heavily populated south and west sides. When he opened up with his usual Chicago material on the unsuspecting crowd of English jazz revivalist and skiffle lovers, however, the fallout was

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<sup>32</sup> Clapton, *Autobiography*, 35.

immediate and decisive. Robert Palmer related Waters's recollections of the tour and its critical reception:

SCREAMING GUITAR AND HOWLING PIANO is the way Muddy remembers the next morning's newspaper headlines. "I had opened that amplifier up, boy, and there was these headlines in all the papers (sic). Chris Barber, he say, 'You play good, but don't play your amplifier so loud. Play it lower. 'Cause, see, I'd been playin' here in Chicago with all these people who turned theirs up.'" Paul Oliver noted wryly in *Jazz Monthly*, "When Muddy Waters came to England, his rocking blues and electric guitar was meat that proved too strong for many stomachs," but the tour turned out well after Muddy toned down a bit. He was more than willing to be accommodating. "Now I know that the people in England like soft guitar and the old blues," he told *Melody Maker*'s Max Jones shortly before he left to return to Chicago. "Next time I come I'll learn some old songs first."<sup>33</sup>

Waters's comment to Max Jones underscores just how unconcerned African-American, urban bluesmen were with trying to recreate the past. In particular it brings to the surface an aesthetic phenomenon peculiar to folk-revivalists on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1950s and '60s, one that Peter Narváez has labeled the "myth of acousticity."

This myth pits the supposedly superior, authentic, "natural" sound of the traditional wooden guitar, as perceived by sensory media (ears and eyes), against the inferior amplified sounds of guitars employing electronic magnetic pick-ups, sound processors, and amplifiers. In part, the "tonal-purity-of-the-acoustic-guitar" argument may be understood as a legacy of cultural hierarchy, a well-worn High Culture aesthetic for instruments used in the performance of cultivated art music. . . . In addition, however, the myth of acousticity, which was embraced during the folk boom, attaches ideological significations to the acoustic guitar, making it a democratic vehicle vis-à-vis the sonic authoritarianism of electric instruments.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Muddy Waters and Paul Oliver qtd. in Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 257-258

<sup>34</sup> Peter Narváez, "Blues Guitarist and the Myth of Acousticity," in *Guitar Cultures*, ed. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 29.

Lead Belly, Josh White, Brownie Maghee and Sonny Terry had first encountered attentive white audiences while playing and singing for the folk music sector of the Popular Front; a left-wing coalition that was centered in New York City during the late-1930s and early-1940s.<sup>35</sup> This association effectively schooled these performers in the expectations of a leftist-leaning, white, upper-middle-class audience. They were fully prepared to appeal to a similarly well-heeled class of British traditionalists in the 1950s as acoustic troubadours. For Waters and his legion of Chicago followers, however, if the acoustic guitar signified anything at all it was the harsh rural life they had left behind in the fields of Mississippi. Similarly, the shift to electric instrumentation involved no ethical or ideological dilemma. It was simply a matter of adapting and evolving a style of performing the blues that was at once suited to, and reflective of, the modern urban environment in which they created.

By the time Muddy Waters returned to England in 1962, he was surprised to find an audience that had adapted and evolved an intense appreciation for *his* way of playing the blues. Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, two former jazz revivalists who had been among those to witness Waters's electric revelation in 1958, had begun to actively champion the harder-edged, urban-blues then trickling into England via vinyl. These discs included a particularly influential Chess Records release chronicling Waters's triumphal performance at the 1960 Newport Jazz Festival backed by his full Chicago ensemble. Korner and Davies, both as partners and individually, were responsible for starting several seminal groups and nightclub ventures in early-1960s London that, in turn, opened the door for a still younger generation of blues enthusiasts to network and gain playing experience. Among these teens were future members of several English-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

bred, American R&B-influenced bands, including the Rolling Stones, Yardbirds, and Animals. When Waters finally returned to Britain, acoustic guitar in hand and with a repertoire of “old songs” prepared especially for English tastes, it was this younger, mostly working-class audience who showed up ready to hear his electric music. “The first thing they wanted to know,” recalled Waters, laughing, “was why I didn’t bring an amplifier. Those boys were playing louder than we ever played.”<sup>36</sup>

For Waters and his Chicago contemporaries, the historical significance of their contributions to the postwar style was facilitated by electric instruments. The real weight of their influence, however, is vested in the rough, rural sonic aesthetic they brought back to the urban blues tradition. Performers like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf possessed coarse, powerful voices in comparison to the crooners of the classic blues era. Their shouting was aesthetically complimented by instrumental backing of equal intensity. They had not been the first in Chicago to feature electric guitars as part of blues performance, but they certainly pushed the new technology to further limits than had their predecessors. Steve Wakesman explains:

The use of musical effects like feedback and distortion would have to wait until the second half of the 1950s to gain any sort of currency among Chicago musicians. Even in the earlier phase of the city’s blues scene, though, the phase during which the electric blues sound first crystallized in the bands of Muddy Waters and the Four Aces (Otis Rush’s early group), musicians used amplification with considerable attention to the kinds of sounds being produced, striving to capitalize upon the novelty of electronic effects while maintaining some feel of the older blues styles.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Waters qtd. in Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 259.

<sup>37</sup> Steve Wakesman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 121.

It was not only Chicago bluesmen who were embracing and exploiting new technologies. Memphis, most notably, was a hotbed of postwar electric blues creativity. B.B. King, another Mississippi-born guitarist and singer to garner widespread recognition in the early 1950s, could not have achieved his singular style “without this technical assistance.”<sup>38</sup> King combined his country-blues roots with a strongly gospel-tinged presentation as well as more eclectic influences like the seminal jazz guitar playing of the French Gypsy, Django Reinhardt. Keil has identified King’s early experience working at a Memphis radio station as a key factor informing his groundbreaking approach to electric blues guitar performance.

During his disc-jockey years, when he was developing his performing habits as a sideline, B.B. was in a position to hear almost every blues and non-blues record released between 1947 and 1950 and to select from these recordings the type of music that his radio listeners wished to hear. This intensive and extensive exposure to a broad variety of musical styles must have had a considerable effect on the formation of his own style and repertoire.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that the most influential exponents of African-American, postwar, urban-blues expression were also the most resourceful.

The absence of noticeable traces of the aforementioned ideological baggage attached to the use of electric instruments by African-American, urban-bluesmen in the 1940s and 1950s was thoroughly in keeping with the modernist aspects of blues expression. In England, however, the use of electric instruments in attempted recreations of this music had added social meaning. It marked a pronounced shift away from what Keil famously termed the “moldy-fig mentality,” an attitude popularized by British writers like Samuel Charters and Oliver who were closely affiliated with the trad-jazz

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 68.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

revival.<sup>40</sup> It was this politically-charged idealization and historical stereotypification of the lone, itinerant, *acoustic* country-bluesman that had fueled the negative critical response to Waters's 1958 performance. For the subsequent generation of British blues followers, the whole-hearted embracing of electric postwar blues expression was instead predicated in a definite modernist appeal, albeit one grounded in the realities and unique sociological contradictions of postwar England, however. It also facilitated the mediation of a longing on the part of mostly working-class youths and a few middle-classers alike to break free of the puritanical expectations placed on them by the previous generation, that which had fought and survived to build a new society out of the rubble of World War II. It was the cathartic emotional intensity of modern electric blues that offered a means for these class-bound kids to tear through the cultural "veil" of traditional English reserve.<sup>41</sup> As early rock journalist Greg Shaw once wrote:

It could even be conjectured that the strength of the material tended to bring out reservoirs of raunch that British teenagers had been led to believe they couldn't possess. So they threw themselves into the music with utter abandon, and if they couldn't be truly deranged, they could at least be energetic.<sup>42</sup>

Although the societal rebellion symbolized in the embrace of harder-edged forms of African-American music by British youths in the mid-1960s lends significant context to the music that emerged, it is the way in which the release of such pent-up frustrations and energies fueled the convictive authenticity of British rhythm and blues performance during this era that is of particular relevance to the present study.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>41</sup> Nick Bromell, "'The Blues and the Veil': The Cultural Work of Musical Form in Blues and '60s Rock," *American Music* 18/2 (Summer 2000): 208.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Shaw qtd. in Michael Bane, *White Boy Singin' the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 153.

David Hatch and Stephen Millward have identified tempo acceleration as “a common error among British bands covering black American material,” citing the Rolling Stones’ version of the 1954 Muddy Waters hit “I Just Want to Make Love to You” as recorded on the Stones’ 1964 debut album, *England’s Newest Hitmakers*.<sup>43</sup> Waters’s recording of the song unwinds at a slow, relentlessly-driving quarter-note tempo of 80 bpm, giving the performance what Millward and Hatch describe as its “strength and threatening undertone.”<sup>44</sup> The Rolling Stones’ version more than triples this tempo by utilizing a double time feel that places the quarter-note pulse at 254 bpm. A difference of night and day, certainly – but is this really just an error? Chuck Berry also recorded “I Just Want to Make Love to You” after Waters. His version clocks in at quarter-notes equaling 117 bpm and features a somewhat more relaxed take on the same churning, honky-tonk guitar rhythm that drove his greatest hits. Etta James’s 1961 version of the song, as released both on her debut album and as the B-side to her chart-topping single “At Last,” is somewhat closer to the Waters recording in terms of its arrangement. Its quarter-note pulse is, however, still significantly faster at 102 bpm and the performance features a prominent string section providing a textural “sweetening” effect similar to that heard on “At Last” and several others of James’s recordings from this period. Were Berry and James erroneous for taking liberties with Waters’s original tempo and arrangement?

If we were to gauge the relative “authenticity” of each of the recordings mentioned above based on which performance most closely realizes the composer’s

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<sup>43</sup> David Hatch and Stephen Millward, *From Blues to Rock: An Analytical History of Pop Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 101.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

intentions then Waters's 1954 original might top the list simply because the song's writer, Willie Dixon, was also the bassist on the recording. By this measure, then, even Berry's and James's versions, because of their relative deviations from the "text," must be judged as falling short of being fully authentic and the Rolling Stones' version is a farce at best. But this is wrong. Waters, Berry and James were all label mates at Chicago's Chess Records. Each recorded the same Willie Dixon song there within just a few years of one another. The different versions of the same material came as a result of each artist performing the song in a manner that capitalized on his or her respective strengths. Each displayed an authenticity of conviction that was fully realized through individual performances as bold manifestations of artistic identity, the defining characteristics of which were developed and refined over time by experience.

For the young Rolling Stones, the energy focused in their runaway performance of "I Just Want to Make Love to You" carries with it some of the light-hearted exuberance and repetitive simplicity that characterized English skiffle. This much may be reasonably attributed, in part, to the uncalculated surfacing of an aesthetic rooted in earlier, formative musical experiences shared by the band's members. The electric guitar riff and harmonica fills that drive the performance, however, are clearly revved-up interpretations of the piano and harmonica figures heard in Waters's original arrangement. The careening, almost-out-of-control aspect of the Rolling Stones' version, especially prominent as the track nears its fade-out ending, is in thorough keeping with the "rave-up" style of ensemble performance that was popular among British rhythm and blues groups at the time. This was a way of generating improvisational excitement by means of an over-the-top instrumental approach that emphasized sustained dynamic

intensity over virtuosic dexterity. Had the 1964 Rolling Stones tried to simply replicate the subtleties of Waters and company, it is doubtful that they could have pulled it off. Instead they adapted the song to a performance approach that capitalized on their particular strengths as a young, relatively inexperienced, but youthfully energetic group of rebellious English musicians. The true venom of their rebellion in this case, as far as the British establishment was concerned, came through the appropriation of Dixon's lyrics – poetry which dismissed, and even satirized, domestic ideals of commitment and other accepted societal models of male and female interrelation in favor of desire for the carnal act of just “making love.” This is a theme that the Rolling Stones, perhaps more than any other popular group to emerge during this period, would come to embody for the growing counter-cultural movement in the mid-1960s.

In an article addressing the influence of the blues' deeply embedded “outcast” point of view and its often heavily coded sexual references on the young Rolling Stones, John M. Hellman, Jr. described the socially estranging effects of a class-driven, inter-generational friction contemporaneously brewing in England.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s alienation was fast becoming a trait not only of the blatantly oppressed black man but also of the more subtly repressed white youth. This new alienation from traditional white middle-class standards of sexual repression, status seeking, and goal-oriented labor,” Hellman observed, “found a ready-made expression in the music and language of the black blues.”<sup>45</sup>

Although not a blues per se, the Rolling Stones' 1965 original hit “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction,” with its heavily fuzz-laden guitar motif, barely-coded sexual lyric references and overt message of frustration, disdain and distrust for English society's established norms of behavioral expectation represented a popular manifesto of the

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<sup>45</sup> John M. Hellmann, Jr, “‘I'm a Monkey': The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 86/342 (October – December, 1973): 368.

technological, psychological, and sociological currents moving in the mid-1960s London-based rhythm and blues scene.

The commercial success of the Rolling Stones around this time had a definite, though somewhat indirect, consequence for more instrumentally-progressive developments in British blues guitar performance to emerge in 1965. The band had seen their local popularity skyrocket while playing an extended engagement at the CrawDaddy, a London club owned by Russian-born entrepreneur Giorgio Gomelsky. It was during this residency that Andrew Loog Oldham, then a public relations man for Brian Epstein, signed the Rolling Stones to a management contract that, in turn, helped launch the band's lucrative recording and touring career. Gomelsky's replacement at the CrawDaddy was another young British rhythm and blues group, the Yardbirds, whom he immediately began grooming for similar success after of losing out on his opportunity with the Rolling Stones to Oldham. Part of this process included replacing the group's original guitarist with then 19-year-old Eric Clapton, whose skills and repertoire by this time had progressed to include the string-bending, electric blues style of Texas-born singer and guitarist Freddie King. As the Beatles and Rolling Stones began to have unprecedented success, Gomelsky applied more pressure on the Yardbirds to find a number one hit. This led the group to record Graham Gouldman's "For Your Love" in February of 1965: a move that clashed with Clapton's growing distaste for pop commercialism and prompted his immediate departure from the band.,

Clapton would not remain inactive for long. By early April he was appearing on the English club circuit with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Mayall, twelve years Clapton's senior, had moved to London from Manchester in 1963 at the urging of Alexis

Korner. Korner, along with Cyril Davies, had founded *the* seminal British rhythm and blues band, Blues Incorporated, in early 1962. Mayall's group played a mix of his own blues compositions and covers of American blues. By his own recollection it was the Freddie King influence in Clapton's playing that drove Mayall to solicit the out-of-work guitarist immediately upon learning of his departure from the Yardbirds.

At the end of our first year the rhythm section had really solidified. But I'd heard only one guitarist in England who could really play the blues, and that was Eric. At the end of his tenure with the Yardbirds, I heard the B-side of their hit single, "For Your Love." It was an instrumental thing called "Got to Hurry," which was almost totally in the Freddie King pocket. Freddie was one of my true idols at that time, and Eric was playing in his style. . . . All I can tell you is what his playing did to me. I didn't analyze it – I just know that it gave me chills. There was something there that cut right through to me. To have such mastery and feel at that age is pretty remarkable. It's scary, actually. Probably six months prior, I'd heard Eric live with the Yardbirds, and he wasn't that impressive. But his improvements were quick indeed. It's as if he did all his rough work with the Roosters (Clapton's first band), made great strides with the Yardbirds for about a year, and then joined the Bluesbreakers. Once he was in the right environment, he accelerated even more.<sup>46</sup>

For Clapton, walking into an already tight and functioning band unit dedicated to playing blues was a perfect fit. In an interview given only weeks after joining Mayall, Clapton expounded on his newfound musical freedom and revealed something of both his sense of self-awareness and purist's mindset at the time.

With John Mayall I can play how I like. I'm a very passive person but I can make chords on a guitar sound vicious and violent. When I do, it is all the bad things I've seen coming out. Sometimes I don't play for days, but when I pick up the guitar a stream of feelings pour through it. If I hadn't left the Yardbirds I wouldn't have been able to play real blues much longer because I was destroying myself. I don't expect I'll be a great success. I'm not that sort of bloke. I never expect good things to happen to me. . . . But if I don't make it big as a musician and I end up very poor, money-wise, it won't really mean I've failed. Not within myself. You have to do what you think is right, don't you? And for me to face

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<sup>46</sup> John Mayall qtd. in Isola, "John Mayall," 110.

myself I have to play what I believe is pure and sincere and uncorrupted music. That is why I had to leave the Yardbirds.<sup>47</sup>

Clapton's attitude in 1965, as expressed in this particular interview, brings the present discussion back to Taruskin's description of an "authenticity of conviction" based in *belief*. In retrospect, Clapton later attributed his unswerving dedication to "pure blues" and the accompanying sense of "real contempt for pop music in general" as probable manifestations of his "intellectual phase."<sup>48</sup> He cited, as other indicators of this phase, his interests in foreign films, in translations of the French poet Baudelaire, and in "the American underground writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg."<sup>49</sup> All of this points toward a clear desire on Clapton's part to identify himself with a romantically idealized image of the "outsider." While this observation dovetails neatly with the aforementioned, large-scale forces of social alienation at work within Clapton's generation, it also has special significance for Clapton as an individual, given the unique circumstances of his childhood.

Clapton had been raised by his maternal grandparents, whom he believed to be his true parents for much of his pre-adolescence. His mother had given birth to him while just a teenager herself and left him in the charge of her parents before Clapton was two. His birth-father, a Canadian pilot briefly stationed in Ripley, Surrey during 1944, was a non-entity in Clapton's life. The stigma of illegitimacy was especially acute amidst the confines of such a small, working-class village and his family did their best to protect him. Not surprisingly, though, fear and confusion were Clapton's emotional

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<sup>47</sup> Clapton interview from the June 17, 1965 issue of *Rave Magazine*, qtd. in Christopher Hjort, *Strange Brew: Eric Clapton and the British Blues Boom, 1965-1970* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>48</sup> Clapton, *Autobiography*, 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*

responses as he gradually pieced together the truth. Withdrawal became his coping mechanism as he became something of an outsider among his own people. “There seemed to be some definite choices made within my family regarding how to deal with my circumstances,” he later recalled, “and I was not made privy to any of them.”<sup>50</sup>

Clapton’s early attitude toward blues expression as something intently private and thus above the perceived trivialities of commercialism, as well as the sense of self-empowerment that he gained through the act of playing blues guitar, were both shaped by his childhood experience. He later recalled reading in the sleeve notes to *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, Columbia Records’ 1961 reissue of Robert Johnson’s recordings from the ‘30s, that Johnson had recorded “facing into the corner of the room because he was so shy. Having been paralyzed with shyness as a child,” continued Clapton, “I immediately identified with this.”<sup>51</sup> Johnson’s music soon found resonance with Clapton on an equally personal level.

At first the music almost repelled me, it was so intense, and this man made no attempt to sugarcoat what he was trying to say, or play. It was hard-core, more than anything I had ever heard. After a few listenings I realized that, on some level, I had found the master, and that following this man’s example would be my life’s work. I was totally spellbound by the beauty and eloquence of songs like “Kindhearted Woman,” while the raw pain expressed in “Hellhound on My Trail” seemed to echo things I had always felt.<sup>52</sup>

Significant residue of Keil’s “moldy fig” mentality is revealed in Clapton’s romanticization of a figure like Robert Johnson. This is true especially in the sense of exclusivity that came with the knowledge of such an obscure, yet powerful, artist. Clapton’s consciousness of Johnson as an historical fount-head to whom the modern

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

strains of urban-blues, R&B and rock and roll could all be traced had a legitimizing effect for his own pursuit of blues expression. Knowing and appreciating Johnson's music meant knowledge and appreciation of the deeper blues tradition. But rather than adopting the prevailing "bell-jar" view toward Johnson as an isolated historical figure, Clapton chose to align his own identity with a supra-historical image of the African-American bluesman as ultimately exemplified by the folk-mythology surrounding Robert Johnson. The essence of the Robert Johnson myth is that he attained his musical powers literally overnight as part of a Faustian parlay for his soul; a tale, however fanciful, that neatly dispensed with any need to try and understand the historical Johnson as an evolving musician who genuinely struggled to fold his influences, talents and artistic vision into music with contemporary commercial viability. In the 1960s, this mythology, accompanied by a virtual vacuum of biographical facts and the absence of even one known photograph of the man, melded with the intensity of his best recordings to project onto Johnson the image of a supernaturally gifted creative artist; the mysterious originator of an instant canon of idyllic blues.<sup>53</sup>

Clapton himself took on a measure of this same mystique among British blues club audiences during his time with Mayall. In the weeks following his exit from the Yardbirds, the guitarist had entered a period of intensive practice. He continued this regimen after joining the Bluesbreakers, his efforts bolstered by access to Mayall's extensive record collection.<sup>54</sup> Clapton, given free reign by Mayall to improvise as much as he wanted, displayed an emerging level of technical command and strength of

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<sup>53</sup> Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta*, 248.

<sup>54</sup> Clapton, *Autobiography*, 58.

conviction which soon placed his guitar solos as the high points of the Bluesbreakers' performances. For young audiences whose only prior indicators had been Clapton's relatively constricted soloing on a handful of Yardbirds recordings, the growing artistic freedom and intensity communicated in his playing while with Mayall did indeed seem to surface overnight. In 1965, many in Clapton's English audiences had not yet heard the original sounds made by modern, African-American urban-bluesmen like Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, or even Freddie King. The level of Clapton's perceived preeminence as an instrumental genius during this period is aptly illustrated by the famous "Clapton is God" graffiti that appeared first on the wall of Islington underground station and then sprang up all over London. Clapton later recalled: "The fact is, of course, that through my playing people were being exposed to a kind of music that was new to them, and I was getting all the credit for it, as if I had invented the blues."<sup>55</sup> At the time, however, the street-level accolades significantly bolstered Clapton's confidence and served as personal vindication for his highly-publicized decision to consciously avoid commercial pop success by leaving the Yardbirds.<sup>56</sup>

The effect of all this on Clapton's sense of self-assurance and his belief in the blues aesthetic as a powerful mode of both accessing inward emotion and communicating that emotion outwardly to his listeners is placed in evidence by comments made in a March, 1966 interview with Nick Jones of *Melody Maker*.

I'm not interested in guitar, sound, technique, but in people and what you can do to them via music. I'm very conceited and I think I have a power – and my guitar is a medium for expressing that power. I don't need people to say how good I am, I've worked it out by myself. It's nothing to do with technique and rehearsing,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 65.

it's to do with the person behind that guitar who is trying to find an outlet. My guitar is a medium through which I can make contact to myself. It's very, very lonely. This is blues. Expression.<sup>57</sup>

The Romantic ethos through which Clapton was filtering his personal understanding of blues guitar performance is laid bare. Clapton's comments also offer insight into an acutely 1960s, post-modernist artistic stance by placing self-conscious emphasis on an innate internal reservoir or "power" instead of on the details of outward expression as made possible by the external means of technique and technology. The enabling benefits wrought by hours upon hours spent copying records, practicing, and playing gig after gig are nowhere mentioned.

In this, Clapton effectively claims his blues as uniquely *his*. They are, paradoxically, the product of a tradition that Clapton centers firmly within himself. This position he takes even while boldly acknowledging that he represents "what is going on in Chicago at the moment" as best as he can, given the difficulty of getting "all the records imported."<sup>58</sup> For the not-quite-yet-twenty-one-year-old Eric Clapton in early March of 1966, modern blues *is* self-expression. His beliefs take up where his knowledge ends. As writer Nick Jones commented in an editorial tag to the above-quoted interview: "He seems to have achieved some sort of insight into himself, his music, and the music around him. One can only conclude there is a bit more to playing good blues guitar than just knowing your string bending."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Clapton interview from the March 26, 1966 issue of *Melody Maker Magazine*, qtd. in Hjort, 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite his denying any interest in “guitar, sound, (or) technique,” Clapton’s reference to his guitar as a “medium” is indicative of an instrumentally focused conception informing his blues playing that has deep roots in European musical tradition. In terms offered by Baraka to define this predominantly Western manner of conceiving the relationship between artist and medium, Clapton thereby “insists he is playing an instrument, that it is an artifact separate from himself.” This is in contrast to the African or African-American artist who admits no such separation between himself and the agent “chosen as his means of self-expression.”<sup>60</sup> A comparison of Clapton’s guitar introduction to the May, 1966 Bluesbreakers recording of Otis Rush’s “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” and Rush’s original performance offers clear evidence of this fundamental shift in philosophy. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rush’s guitar line (shown, for comparative purposes, in its entirety in Example 11 below) is rife with instrumental significations of his own vocal approach as performed in the lyric verse of the song.

One interesting aspect of Rush’s performance not addressed in the previous chapter’s discussion is the way in which he concludes, or more appropriately, chooses *not* to conclude his vocal signifying guitar introduction. In measure ten of Example 11, Rush allows the call phrase initiating the final four bars to pause momentarily over the minor dominant before blending stealthily back into the rhythm section texture with the percussive-sounding, muted line that begins on beat four. By leaving the final phrase unresolved in this way, Rush subtly underscores the circular aspect of the twelve-bar form. In terms of the vocal signifying content of the intro, Rush’s strategy leaves the listener hanging in anticipation of the phrase’s satisfying completion. This has the

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<sup>60</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, 30.

aesthetic effect of drawing anticipatory attention toward the renewal of the form, which begins with the vocal pickups to the first lyric verse (track time 0:23). In a rhetorical sense, Rush offers his listener an engaging preview of what is yet to come without giving away the ending, so to speak.

Example 11. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – original guitar introduction as performed by Otis Rush; recorded circa 1958 in Chicago. (*The Essential Otis Rush*, track time 0:00 – 0:24)

The musical score for the original guitar introduction of "All Your Love (I Miss Loving)" by Otis Rush is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is in F# minor and features a melodic line with triplets and a bass line with a "Full" pickup and a "P" (palm mute) effect. The second system (measures 5-8) transitions to B minor and then back to F# minor, with a "Full" pickup and "P" effect in the final measure. The third system (measures 9-12) transitions to C# minor and then back to B minor, with a "P.M." (palm mute) effect in the first measure. The score includes various guitar techniques such as triplets, bends, and palm muting.

Clapton’s unique rendering of Rush’s guitar introduction as recorded in early May of 1966 for the album titled *Blues Breakers John Mayall with Eric Clapton*, is shown in Example 12. In terms of the Bluesbreakers’ ensemble arrangement, the most noticeable distinguishing aspects are the changes in key, tempo and rhythmic feel. The

former is likely an accommodation made for Mayall’s vocal style and range. The latter two elements are, however, interconnected and have important implications for Clapton’s

Example 12. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – guitar introduction as performed by Eric Clapton; recorded with John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers, May, 1966 in London. (*Blues Breakers John Mayall with Eric Clapton*, track time 0:00 – 0:28)

The musical score is written for electric guitar (E. Gt.) in 4/4 time with a tempo of 108. It is divided into four systems of measures. The first system (measures 1-4) is labeled 'Amin' and shows a repeating guitar figure with fret numbers 5, 7, 9, 7, 5, 7 and dynamic markings 'Full' and 'P'. The second system (measures 5-8) is labeled 'Dmin' and 'Amin'. The third system (measures 9-12) is labeled 'Emin' and 'Dmin'. The fourth system (measures 13-14) shows the final chords. The score includes a treble clef, a bass clef, and various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

lead line. In place of the faster, livelier, and looser samba-like feel of the original, the interlocking patterns laid down by drummer Hughie Flint and bassist John McVie combine with Clapton’s repeating rhythm guitar figure to create a more uniform and relaxed texture, subtly supported by Mayall’s Hammond electric organ pads. The

resulting feel captures the Latin reference of the original but in a slower, more insistent, habanera-like manner. The polyrhythmic superimposition of triplet-based articulations that generate so much foreground tension in Rush's guitar line is conspicuously absent from Clapton's version. His performance unfolds rhythmically in lock step with the straight-eighth-note concept articulated by his ensemble backing. Even more conspicuous, however, is Clapton's utter dismissal of the vocal signifiers that direct Rush's every nuance in the original introduction.

Instead of modeling his introduction on the song's verse vocal melody, Clapton chooses to appropriate only the distinctive "call" figure that begins the first two phrases of Rush's original (Ex. 11, mm.1 and 5). The way in which Clapton deploys Rush's lick is consistent with more European-styled practices concerning the treatment of an instrumental theme. The measured consistency with which this motif is restated throughout Clapton's introduction confirms a more pre-composed, Western-based instrumental aesthetic governing its construction (Ex. 12, mm. 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9). The first four statements of this contrast-laden, melodically active theme are subsequently balanced by weak-beat resolutions to the respective roots of the prevailing harmonies (Ex. 12, mm. 2, 4, 6 and 8). In each case the resolving pitch is sustained for at least four beats and expressively treated with wide, pulsating finger vibrato. There are no extended rests or "holes" through which elements of the ensemble texture may emerge to the foreground. Such gaps are crucial to the back and forth, conversational interplay between Rush's lead guitar and the repeated saxophone line that serves as the respondent "base" in the original introduction. Clapton approaches his intro chorus, however, more as a concert-master violinist might – milking expression throughout the entirety of each of the

sustained pitch durations and pausing only briefly between phrases to prepare the next articulation. The ensemble texture is only fully glimpsed through the transparency of each held note. Clapton's guitar dominates the foreground.

The composed, form-conscious air of Clapton's instrumental conception is further reinforced by the four measure phrase that concludes his intro (Ex. 12, mm.10-13). Here, Clapton employs the common African-American expressive strategy of phrasing *around* the beat. The full-step bend up to the root of the minor dominant (beats 1 and 2 of mm.9) is subsequently released in staccato, microtonal increments stepping down to the subdominant in measure eleven. Each articulation of the release is carefully placed slightly behind the beat. Clapton then effectively contrasts this move by pressing ahead of the beat with the quick bend, release and pull-off figure over beats three and four of measure eleven before subtly anticipating measure twelve's resolution to tonic. The untreated whole-note that fills measure twelve is itself a rarity in blues guitar expression. This anomaly is formally mitigated by the accented double-stop stab on the downbeat of measure thirteen: a move which, in this analysis, may be understood as a final restatement of the borrowed theme's most distinctive feature inversely treated with a downward glissando. Compared with Rush's open-ended original, Clapton's arrangement is a clearly-defined, closed form.

Emphasis on the more fluid expressive devices affecting note length in Clapton's introduction, as opposed to the more percussive focus on subtle rhythmic variances of note placement in Rush's playing, is likewise reflective of a deeply-rooted European aesthetic priority. Van Der Merwe has explained the inverse aesthetic importance placed

on expressive variables affecting a note's attack versus its decay properties in the vast majority of African musical traditions.

...what matters is the *position* of the note – to be more precise, of the beginning of the note – and not, as in European music, its *length*. Hence the importance attached in African music to precise articulation, and in particular to percussive effects. As has so often been remarked, most African instruments have a percussive quality, whether they are actually struck or not. Flutes, horns, plucked instruments, bowed instruments – all are made to produce that characteristically African kick at the beginning of each note. It is important to observe that this percussive delivery does not necessarily imply loudness. Indeed, African musicians often take special delight in producing percussive effects at a very low volume. But perhaps the word “percussive” is a little misleading, especially with its European connotations of aggression. The important thing is the crisp and precise articulation of the note: and if it then rapidly dies away this does not matter, for it has served its purpose in the rhythmic scheme of things.<sup>61</sup>

Although Van Der Merwe's observations specifically reference African musicians, instruments and performance practice, there is much to glean as being potentially relevant to the present thesis. The African versus European dichotomy of note-position versus note-length can itself fuel the argument that expressive contrast is what drives African-American blues performance even at its most fundamental aesthetic level: that of tone. By these terms, the hard, transient attack and relatively quick decay of Rush's guitar tone perfectly accentuates his percussive style of articulation and vocal-signifying sense of phrasing. By comparison, Clapton's tone is warmer, more compressed. Notes seem to sustain and even “bloom” sonically as they are held for longer durations: a quality of sound response particularly suited to his own muse.

Clapton realized the crucial importance of these tonal qualities for his developing style and fought resolutely to buck established norms of recording studio etiquette in order to commit his tone to tape. To achieve his sonic signature, Clapton combined two articles of technology in a way never before used. These material components were a

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<sup>61</sup> Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style*, 39.

Gibson Les Paul reissue guitar equipped with powerful double-coil pickups and an English-made, 45-watt Marshall amplifier housed in combination with two twelve-inch speakers. Clapton insisted on recording at full stage volume and with ambient microphone placement in order to capture his sound as he was accustomed to hearing it. In a 1998 interview with Paul Trynka Clapton recalled how emotions stirred by his battle of resolve with the studio's recording engineer fueled the focused intensity of his playing at the session.

I remember when they set up in the studio – this has been told before, I know, but it's very real in my mind. When they tried to set up the recording, I wouldn't let them put the microphone anywhere near my amplifier. . . . I intuitively knew it wasn't going to sound good miked close. Yet I stood my ground and that comes out in the playing. Because when you got to carry yourself like that (sic) – as a kid especially – and bully up to officialdom and engineers and people who are acknowledged experts in their field, then you pick up the guitar and it all comes through that. And thank God I was working on a technique that could help me to carry it. It was anger and conviction.<sup>62</sup>

Implications for the present discussion are clear. The heat that characterizes Clapton's playing on the Bluesbreakers album is not something that surfaced haphazardly in the context of some informal, relaxed, blues jam setting. Rather it was the product of confident self-determination multiplied by almost a full year of constant technical and stylistic refinement in tough, unforgiving club environments. The potentially intimidating pressures and sterilizing restrictions of the recording studio could have frustrated Clapton. Instead, they became catalysts pushing him to muster every ounce of personal conviction and then to channel that conviction through the performance in progress. Clapton's confident belief in the depth of substance comprising his own musical identity is tantamount to "the sense of assurance and of style" that, Taruskin has argued, is the *only* way by which a performer can overcome the absence of an innately

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<sup>62</sup> Clapton interview qtd. in Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 48.

temporal “unbroken tradition of performance” to achieve authenticity. Perhaps the focusing aspect of Clapton’s anger acted as a kind of surrogate source of inspirational angst in the absence of any real knowledge of true African-American experience. This much is purely conjecture.

What is more demonstrable is the level of instrumental proficiency to which Clapton had risen by such a young age. Clapton’s technical command of the postwar blues idiom near the end of his tenure with Mayall’s band was most visibly manifest in the masterful control he exhibited over his improvisational flights. His break on the Bluesbreakers’ version of “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” offers an opportunity to compare the European-bred idiosyncrasies of Clapton’s solo style with those of Otis Rush, one of the true masters of what was “going on in Chicago at the moment.”

Rush’s solo from “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” is shown in Example 13 below. The change to a 12/8 swing feel that accompanies Rush’s improvised solo is signaled by his repeating triplet figure at measure two. Rush’s solo is saturated with the type of “around-the-beat” syncopation that Clapton only touched upon in the conclusion to his introduction on the Bluesbreakers recording. The percussive snap of Rush’s picking hand attack is most clearly noticeable in relief to the legato bends, pull-offs, and sliding techniques that shape the rhythmically tumbling melodic descent crossing measure eight and spilling over into measure nine. A left-handed guitarist, Rush played with his strings reversed so that the low “E” string was nearest the floor. His high string bends were necessarily accomplished by pulling downward instead of pushing up in the “normal” fashion. The preponderance of full-step bends throughout Example 13 suggests that this approach had a pronounced formative impact on his style. As a guitarist, I can

attest to the fact that it is somewhat easier and more natural feeling to bend strings by pulling downward in this manner. The deft chromaticism and repetition with which Rush

Example 13. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving)” – Otis Rush’s guitar solo. (*The Essential Rush*, track time 1:28 – 1:55)

E. Gt.

$\text{♩} = 126$

**F#min**  
1:28

**F#7**

**B7**

**C#7**

**F#7**

4

8

11

14

approaches the final bend to dominant (Ex. 13, mm.13-14) once again calls attention to the unresolved, circular aspect of form in African-American blues. Notice also the elasticity with which form is treated as the entire ensemble intuitively stretches the final bar to accommodate Rush's delayed vocal entry.

In comparison to the vivid contrasts in articulation, syncopation and relative phrase length that characterize Rush's playing, Clapton's solo, as shown in Example 14 below, exhibits far more regularity in terms of its developmental pacing. Clapton's construction can be neatly summarized as a series of two-bar phrases. The aggressive, down-beat attacks that permeate the solo are firmly established in measure one by the three heavily accented pick-ups to the 12/8 meter change. The rests separating measure two's opening gesture from the bent figure that slightly anticipates the first beat of measure three is a clear reference to Rush's original.

From this point forward, however, obvious similarities between the two solos end. Clapton builds each successive phrase upon the previous material with a sense of balance and flow that is poetic in a genuinely European sense. As the harmonic progression approaches its turn to the dominant in measure ten, Clapton reconfigures the powerful simplicity of his measure one rhythmic "theme" in preparation for the pivotal chord change (Ex. 14 mm.9). The sudden jump in register at measure eleven conveys added urgency to the dramatic sense of emotional climax and its sure resolution as communicated in the last three measures. The dense melodic activity of the final phrase in relation to all those leading up to it is wholly consistent with European, classical-style formal aesthetics that typically place a melody's "centre of gravity" towards the end.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Van Der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style*, 141.

Example 14. “All Your Love (I Miss Loving) – Eric Clapton’s guitar solo.  
*(Blues Breakers John Mayall with Eric Clapton, track time 1:47 – 2:12)*

In comparison, Rush focuses his most kinetically active material at the beginning and middle portions of his solo. In Example 13 the final four measures demonstrate a gradual “tapering off” in both melodic activity and emotional intensity. This is reflective

of a distinctly African aesthetic concept of melodic shape that is closely related to the ever-repeating, circular function of musical form in that tradition.<sup>64</sup>

The musical vocabulary by which Clapton was communicating his personal expression at this early stage of what has become a long and distinguished career was, in my view, more than just “superficially similar to the work of the Chicago blues stylists,” as has been suggested by Hatch and Millward. Nor can it be so simply summarized as an exaggeration and distorting of “their phrasing and tone.” It is within the very aspects that separate Clapton’s performance from those of his heroes that the clear beginnings of a unique and authentic blues guitar style were being formed. I do agree that Clapton’s playing on the whole of *Blues Breakers John Mayall with Eric Clapton* represented a cohesive musical statement that made “use of all the knowledge and energy he possessed to produce as intense an effect as possible.”<sup>65</sup> Instrumental intensity achieved through technique alone, i.e., expression communicated through an energy that draws solely upon what an artist “knows” in both the cognitive and physical sense, can be dazzling and yet, somehow, empty. By this I mean it can lack a depth of aesthetic “realness” that comes from a different place altogether. In this chapter I have tried to locate the core values of modern blues expression as being bound by tradition to the post-modern artistic mindset by virtue of its Romantic sensitivities and its emphasis on a performance practice utterly dependent on individual stylistic interpretation. The unique “contradictions of modernity,” alongside the more generationally focused issues described above, are evidence of a societal context in which African-American blues expression found an

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hatch and Millward, *From Blues to Rock*, 104.

equally unique resonance for young British musicians with no real “knowledge” of the African-American experience. This was, however, only an atmosphere. Its nurturing characteristics were only as real as the artifacts it produced.

In this sense, Clapton’s breakthrough in 1965 and early-1966 represented a truly distinguished contribution to the whole of blues tradition. The quantifiable presence of “new” European aesthetic contributions in Clapton’s blues playing is, for whatever it is worth, evidence of a conviction based in belief. Beliefs have elasticity more supple than knowledge. Clapton had single-handedly established a modern tradition of British blues guitar at a level where none had previously existed. Others would follow in their own way. Like a fresh limb springing from an old trunk, the image of the whole tree had been forever altered. The following chapter will examine other exponents and further European facets of this new branch of blues development.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Role of Romantic Idealism in the Development of British Blues Guitar Performance

The guitar performance style of Eric Clapton as it emerged in 1965 and early 1966 has been identified in the previous chapter's conclusions as a harbinger of further British blues development throughout the latter half of the decade. Clapton's place in this thesis is predicated on his unprecedented physical mastery over the "technology of stylization" specific to the postwar electric blues guitar idiom. This unique mastery was driven by a set of beliefs and values established through his unique perspective on African-American blues performance as a white, working-class individual coming of age at a specific time and place in British history. It should be emphasized, however, that Clapton's achievement, by its very nature, cannot be properly categorized as a mastery of African-American blues guitar performance. Steven G. Smith has offered, in more general terms, an apt summarization of this reality.

Membership in blues culture has quite different meanings for differently situated people. A teenage, middle-class white boy's pain in being unable, for the moment, to get together with his girlfriend is a far cry from the pain Robert Johnson means when he sings, "The sun going down, boy, dark gonna catch me here" ("Crossroad Blues"). Yet both experiences are poignantly symbolized in blues, for pain is pain, whatever be its causes or implications. By absolutising the predicament of felt oppression, blues has cut loose from its historical situation and become amazingly democratic. The idiom is held in common while the interpretations of experience that attach to it remain diverse and incommensurable. My blues is not your blues. But what we have in common in blues, our imperiled yet acceptable embodiment, does offer a platform for all our dealings with each other. Doing blues or resonating together with the knowledge of everyday fleshly failure brings forgiveness into the inside of our life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven G. Smith, "Blues and Our Mind-Body Problem," *Popular Music* 11/1 (January 1992): 51.

The individual nature of blues expression might seemingly complicate classification of broad stylistic movements by time and place, yet this is precisely what has been done historically. The rural blues of the Mississippi River Delta region in the early decades of the twentieth century is understood as relative to, yet distinct from, urban blues practice in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s. Chicago blues of this era is, in turn, recognized as stylistically distinct from contemporary developments in Texas or the southeastern United States. All of these regional blues communities respected tradition in their adherence to the essential aspects of the blues aesthetic, yet each demonstrated quantifiable differences in musical dialect and performance practice. The most obvious reason for this is the unique interweaving of influence among individual subjects practicing, performing, and even competing with one another within a regionally isolated cultural space and across the temporal axis of a generation or two.

With modern improvements in the technologies and industries enabling the recording of music and its commercial dissemination, the process of homogenization in formerly distinct regional styles of blues performance became increasingly inevitable, fast and thorough in the second half of the twentieth century. The British blues boom of the 1960s stands at a unique historical intersection of these latter twentieth-century global currents of commerce and communication and the more traditional criteria of regional stylistic categorization which are dependent on the relative isolation of a community of musicians and their audiences.

This blues community was fertile ground for the resurgence of nineteenth-century European Romanticism, the subjective idealism of which significantly affected the blues guitar performances produced. In support of this thesis, the present chapter will attempt

to quantify evidence in the performances of several British blues guitarists contemporaneously operating during 1966 and 1967 as being distinct in the details of their individuality yet wholly coherent as artifacts of a regionally and temporally identifiable stylistic movement, i.e., British blues guitar in the latter half of the 1960s.

By mid-July of 1966, and only days before the public release of *Blues Breakers John Mayall With Eric Clapton*, Clapton had already left Mayall's band to pursue his collaboration with drummer Ginger Baker and bassist Jack Bruce and form Cream.

Baker and Bruce were considered within English blues and R&B circles among the best on their respective instruments. Both brought influences and technical capabilities that drew from the more uninhibited improvisational aesthetic of modern jazz. Bruce had, in addition, studied both cello and composition under scholarship at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music before moving to London in 1962. The initial musical possibilities suggested by such talented and diverse company seemed to have a humbling effect on Clapton. In the course of an interview with Kevin Swift for the August, 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental* magazine, the guitarist's earlier claims to mastery over the contemporary Chicago-based, African-American electric blues guitar idiom were significantly re-evaluated, and he showed a growing sense of his unique place in the British blues scene.

It's all very encouraging, but I'm not sure that people are interpreting the whole thing properly. I am not a great guitarist; it's just that I enjoy the style of guitar I play. It's rare, if not unique, in Britain. The acclaim put a great weight on my shoulders and I feel a great deal of responsibility to the audience because I'm supposed to be the greatest. I am expected to play better all the time, and this is hard. . . . I wouldn't pretend for one moment that [my guitar style] is a complete

statement of the scene in Chicago, because I must, naturally, be exposed to the outside influence of English guitarists.<sup>2</sup>

There is much that can be taken from Clapton's statements as especially pertinent to the present thesis, not the least of which is the reference to his fellow English guitarists as "outside," yet "naturally" inescapable, influences. As an English guitarist trying to sustain some level of performative authenticity through an essentially foreign idiom, Clapton is seemingly showing signs of awareness as to the hopelessness, even counter-productivity, inherent to his struggle. This growing realization of his own limitations actually opened the way for an expansion of the postwar blues guitar idiom into musical forms more reflective of his natural artistic environment. The forces defining this environment were what Blake referred to as "the cultural constraints defining musical value in Britain" in the mid-1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Expectations of the young, white, English-born "audience" to which Clapton referred as the source of his musicianship-related anxieties had little to do with expectations of African-American blues authenticity in a purely stylistic sense. As discussed in the previous chapter, few in Clapton's audiences had experienced enough immersion in the African-American source materials to make an educated assessment of Clapton's performances (or those of any other British blues guitarist) in these terms. They were instead, as Blake observed, "the eyes of a culture dominated by the idea of the Romantic Artist."<sup>4</sup> The pressures articulated by Clapton to "play better all the time" were

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<sup>2</sup> Clapton interview from the August, 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental Magazine*, qtd. in Christopher Hjort, *Strange Brew: Eric Clapton and the British Blues Boom, 1965-1970* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), 55-56.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Blake, *The Land Without Music: Music, Culture, and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 105.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

exerted by idealistic imperatives on artistic originality alongside a specific model of the instrumental virtuoso central to European Romanticism. As the decade progressed, these pressures were multiplied through critically comparative competition with a number of English guitarists (and one very significant American) that rose to challenge the public notion of Clapton's instrumental authority. One of these British musicians was Clapton's immediate replacement in Mayall's band, Peter Green.

Born Peter Greenbaum on October 29, 1946 in Bethnal Green, London, Peter Green came from a relatively poor, Jewish, working-class background. After leaving school, he found work as a butcher's apprentice and began moonlighting, first as a bassist, then as a guitarist, in several successive blues-based bands working in many of the same clubs as Mayall's Bluesbreakers. He had witnessed Clapton's progress from the Yardbirds onward and had even filled in temporarily for Clapton in late-October of 1965 while the guitarist was on leave from the Bluesbreakers. Peter Green rejoined Mayall's band on a more permanent basis near the end of June, 1966. Green, in an October 1966 interview with Kevin Swift of *Beat Instrumental*, voiced the immediate crisis of discomfort he experienced while performing in Clapton's shadow with the Bluesbreakers.

I just wish people would stop comparing me to Eric. I'd just like them to accept me as Pete Green, not "Clapton's Replacement." I've felt terribly conscious of this on stage. I can feel them listening for special phrases. They want to see how I compare to Eric. It makes my job tougher, because, lately, I've been really trying hard all the time. Sometimes I try too hard and overplay. If I make a mistake when I'm doing this I'm spoiled for the rest of the evening.<sup>5</sup>

Green's self consciousness in performing material previously done by Clapton is confirmed by the eye-witness account of guitarist Steve Hackett, a Mayall follower who would later help found the seminal English progressive rock ensemble, Genesis.

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<sup>5</sup> Green interview from the December, 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental Magazine*, qtd. in Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 76.

The first time I heard [Peter Green] was at Eel Pie Island playing lead guitar with John Mayall, and he had stepped into Clapton's shoes, which he actually found very difficult, as I found out later. To my friends and I he seemed as good as Clapton. . . . I thought Peter Green was a tremendously good guitarist when he was playing with [Mayall]. But when they went into a song they'd done with Clapton like "I'm Your Witch Doctor," it was obvious to note Peter's discomfort.<sup>6</sup>

Green faced quite a different challenge than had Clapton during the latter's tenure with Mayall. Whereas Clapton had sought to establish a unique musical identity through what he perceived at the time to be an authentic mode of African-American blues expression, Green was battling to establish his own style against the new standard of British blues guitar performance as set by Clapton's groundbreaking work with Mayall. Green's struggle could not have been made any easier by the fact that *Blues Breakers John Mayall With Eric Clapton* was peaking at number six on both the *Record Mirror's* and *Melody Maker's* LP charts in September, 1966 just as rumors and reviews of early Cream performances in London were feeding public anticipation of a first record release from Clapton's new "supergroup." The pressure to make a unique musical statement of his own weighed heavy on Green as he entered the studio with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in October, 1966 to record what would become the album *A Hard Road*. Mayall was especially generous and enabling to this process by allowing Green to record two of his own compositions for inclusion on the record. One of these, an instrumental titled "The Supernatural," featured Green's guitar in a reverb-drenched production that made exceptionally musical use of electronic feedback as part of what would become something of a signature performance.

The sixteen-bar form and D minor chord sequence of "The Supernatural" were largely taken from B.B King's "Help the Poor," a song featured as the closing track on

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<sup>6</sup> Hackett qtd. in *Ibid.*, 68.

King’s widely influential 1964 concert recording, *Live at the Regal*. Example 15 is an overlay of the first chorus of Green’s guitar performance on “The Supernatural” (shown in the top staff and tablature) in a parallel comparison to the first chorus vocal melody and lyric of King’s “Help the Poor” (shown in the lower staff). Green’s “The

Example 15. The first chorus of Peter Green’s guitar instrumental “The Supernatural,” as recorded with John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers, is shown on the top staff and tablature for electric guitar. (*A Hard Road*, track time 0:00-0:40) B.B. King’s first vocal chorus to “Help the Poor” is notated on the lower staff for comparative analysis. (*Live at the Regal*, track time 0:08-0:40)

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The top section, labeled 'E. Gt.', shows the guitar instrumental 'The Supernatural' starting at 0:00. It features a tempo of 101 and a key signature of one flat. The guitar part includes a 'feedback sustain' section and is accompanied by a tablature. The bottom section, labeled 'V.', shows the vocal performance of 'Help the Poor' starting at 0:08. The lyrics are: 'Help the poor, won't you help poor me. Have a heart for me baby, listen to my plea. I need you so much, I need your care. Need all th''. The score includes guitar accompaniment for the vocal lines, with chord changes (Dmin, C, Bb, Dmin, Amin) and performance instructions like 'Full' and 'p'.

11 **Gmin** **Dmin**

Full Full H P P H

13 15 13 10 10 12 12 14 12 10 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 12

**Gmin** **Dmin**

lov - ing, ba - by, you can spare. Help the poor, oh,

14 **Amin** **Dmin** **Amin**

P H P P H

13 8 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 8 10 8 10 8 10 12

**Amin** **Dmin**

ba - by, won't you help poor me.

Supernatural,” at a quarter-note value equaling 101 bpm, is significantly slower in tempo than “Help the Poor,” which is performed at 120 bpm. Nevertheless, Green also appropriates much of the relaxed, samba-styled accompaniment texture of King’s performance. The single, vibrato-inflected, high “F” natural that sustains through the first four measures of the form in “The Supernatural” is made possible by a feedback “loop” generated between Green’s guitar and amplifier. The relationship of this held pitch in Green’s composition to King’s vocal melody is formally marked by the flat VII and flat VI chord changes with which Green amends the original “Help the Poor” harmonic sequence in measure three of “The Supernatural.” This added chord progression corresponds to the ending of King’s opening phrase, “won’t you help poor me.” Green allows a breath of rest after the long downward glissando in measure five before resuming his melody, seemingly in mid-phrase, at measure six. Here, Green’s

guitar line assumes almost a full measure of formal displacement against King's vocal line while simultaneously mirroring the lyric phrase "listen to my plea" in its basic rhythmic structure and upward resolution to the "A" natural on the weak half of beat one, measure seven.

The thematic character of Green's performance is most notable in the two phrases that begin on the first downbeats of measures nine and eleven over the tonic and minor subdominant chords respectively. The shared rhythmic content of these phrases is offset by the almost symmetrical contrasts of range in their respective beginnings and endings. The dramatic effect of Green's emphatic staccato articulations captures the desperate quality of King's vocal: "I need you so much, I need your care. Need all th' loving, baby, you can spare." The rhetorical relationship and rhyming pattern of these two lyric phrases as sung by King are communicated in Green's guitar melody without resorting to melodic mimicry. In short, certain qualities reflective of the type of blues vocal significations examined in chapter one are present in these two phrases as played by Green. There is also, however, strong evidence of a more European aesthetic governing Green's construction.

The most obvious structural element pointing to a more European compositional approach at work in the opening chorus of "The Supernatural" is the way in which Green begins his most active and extended melodies squarely on the first beat of measures six, nine, eleven and fourteen. This goes decidedly against the grain of traditional African-American blues practice that generally avoids beginning such phrases "on the one," as is clearly demonstrated in the context of this particular form by B.B. King's vocal phrasing in "Help the Poor." Certain aspects of melodic content in the first chorus of "The

Supernatural,” in addition to its aforementioned thematic character, are suggestive as well. Green follows his “pleading” theme with the distinctive, sixteenth-note, legato figure beginning on beat four of measure twelve and again on beat one of measure fourteen. The quick, perfect fourth pull-off that introduces this figure each time is a uniquely instrumental feature that would be especially awkward in the context of a sung blues melody, as would, for that matter, the long-sustaining opening gesture of “The Supernatural.” The way in which this figure, however, is stated once and then restated before being extended to its resolution on beat one of measure fifteen again suggests a clear parallel to the phrasing and rhetorical content of King’s lyric. The fact that much of the melodic content and contour present in King’s final vocal phrase (beginning on the pickup to measure fourteen) is mirrored in the extended portion of Green’s restatement (beginning on the ‘and’ of beat two in measure fourteen) further supports the observation that Green’s guitar phrasing in the first chorus of “The Supernatural” is being “drawn” by a consciousness of King’s song.

A more comprehensive developmental strategy emerges when Green’s performance is examined in its entirety. The coordinating elements of this approach are outlined in Example 16. The overall form of “The Supernatural” includes four complete choruses of the sixteen-bar progression followed by a five-measure coda. Each successive chorus begins on a feedback-sustained gesture of equal duration to the first. The combined intervallic relation of these opening pitches forms an ascending D minor seventh arpeggio beginning on the minor third above tonic and culminating on a high “D” natural, as shown in Example 16, items (a) through (d). It is significant to note that this structure builds up to the highest fretted pitch available to Green on his twenty-two fret,

Example 16. (a) – (e). Structural features contained in Peter Green’s “The Supernatural.” Items (a) through (d) depict the opening sustained pitches that begin each successive chorus. Item (e) depicts the closing guitar cadenza which ends the Coda. (A *Hard Road*, track times for each feature are shown)

The image shows a musical score for an electric guitar (E. Gt.) in 4/4 time. The score is divided into five sections labeled (a) through (e). Above the staff, time markers are provided: 0:01 (8va), 0:40, 1:19, 1:57, and 2:43. Section (a) is labeled '1st ch.' and shows a sustained pitch on the 13th fret. Section (b) is labeled '2nd ch.' and shows a sustained pitch on the 17th fret. Section (c) is labeled '3rd ch.' and shows a sustained pitch on the 20th fret. Section (d) is labeled '4th ch.' and shows a sustained pitch on the 22nd fret. Section (e) is labeled 'Coda (guitar cadenza played over a held 'A' bass)' and shows a complex melodic line with various fret numbers (13, 15, 13, 10, 10, 12, 14, 12, 10, 12, 12, 10, 12, 10) and a final chord on the 5th fret. The score also includes a 'feedback' section at the end, marked with a 'Dmin/A' chord and a 'let ring' instruction.

Les Paul Standard model guitar, as shown in item (d). Green is consciously pushing the sonic limits of his equipment to achieve the “otherworldly” effect suggested by the music’s title. He does this while maintaining a carefully controlled sense of structural development over the formal aspects of his performance.

The overall thematic character of Green’s performance even permeates his final melodic gesture. Item (e) of Example 16 demonstrates this feature of the cadenza that fills the final two measures of the coda section. Here, the five-note figure beginning with the bend on beat one is subsequently repeated in a cascading sequence beginning on the second sixteenth-note of beat two. Both figures are rhythmically condensed references to the opening five notes of the afore-mentioned “pleading” theme from the first chorus (Ex. 15, mm. 9 and 11 respectively). The sudden, unaccompanied resolution to the tonic chord over a dominant bass in measure two of item (e) is itself overtaken by a swell of controlled harmonic feedback reinforcing the root and minor third as the chord is held – a final, eerie reference to the most distinguishing sonic feature of “The Supernatural.”

As far as Green’s struggle to emerge from Clapton’s shadow, the use of electronic feedback, along with artificial reverb and echo effects to create a sense of spatial

“otherworldliness” to his guitar tone, was certainly not without precedent in British blues guitar performance. Mayall’s original song “I’m Your Witch Doctor,” mentioned above by Hackett as a particular source of discomfort for Green in an early performance with the Bluesbreakers, featured Clapton using a similar effect, albeit to a somewhat different end. Example 17 depicts the passage in question, taken from the first single recorded by Mayall’s group to feature Clapton. “I’m Your Witch Doctor” was released

Example 17. Eric Clapton’s guitar solo from “I’m Your Witch Doctor” as recorded by John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers. (*British Blues Breakers*, track time 1:01-1:17)

The musical score for Example 17 consists of two systems. The first system is labeled 'E. Gt.' and is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 120 bpm. It features a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line includes fret numbers (10, 12, 10) and dynamic markings like 'Full' and 'P'. A 'feedback sustain' section is indicated with a wavy line. The score ends with a double bar line and a measure number '8'.

by Immediate Records in October, 1965, a full year before Green’s “The Supernatural” was recorded. Evidence suggests that Clapton’s solo break on “I’m Your Witch Doctor” represents the first time controlled electric guitar feedback had been recorded in a British studio.<sup>7</sup> By comparison, Green’s use of the effect on “The Supernatural” is more musically integrated with its context than is Clapton’s in “I’m Your Witch Doctor.” The eight-bars shown in Example 17 are framed within the song as an almost programmatic episode, like a howling banshee spirit let loose by Mayall’s “witch doctor.” It is,

<sup>7</sup> Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 23.

perhaps, telling that both songs' titles appeal to a supernatural premise. The musical subjugation of feedback, an acoustic phenomenon previously deemed the unpredictable (and usually undesirable) consequence of too much volume, can be interpreted as being representative of the electric guitarists' emerging image as a subject with special access to, and control over, an invisible plane of transcendent spiritual energy.

Contemporary critical reviews of the album *A Hard Road* made the inevitable comparisons of Green to Clapton but, for the most part, characterized Green's performance as a significant and unique statement of British blues guitar. *Melody Maker* described the new Bluesbreakers album as a "milestone in the group's existence," adding that "Green is quickly moving into pastures of his very own" and that it was "fast becoming pointless to play these two guitarists off against each other."<sup>8</sup> *Disc* also acknowledged Green's plight, saying: "New lead guitarist Peter Green had a tough job, but he proves to be a talent here. This is the best of British rhythm and blues – raw, driving, honest and good."<sup>9</sup> Far more specific in its praise of Green's performance is a review of the album's 1969 re-release in the United States. Mike Saunders of *Rolling Stone* wrote: "Actually, Peter Green stands out just as much as Mayall on this album, as he is such a clear contrast to Eric Clapton on [*Blues Breakers*]. Here, Green makes impeccable use of great phrasing above anything else; his style comes out in many places as very relaxed as opposed to Clapton's strong attack, a real contrast to Clapton's savage

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<sup>8</sup> qtd. in Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

franticness.”<sup>10</sup> *A Hard Road* entered *Record Mirror*’s Top LPs chart at Number 20 on March 18, 1967 and just cracked the Top 10 before dropping out on May 27.<sup>11</sup>

By June of 1967, Peter Green, having built up a considerable personal following, had grown restless under Mayall’s yoke and left the Bluesbreakers to begin forming Fleetwood Mac. Mayall immediately placed an ad in the June 10<sup>th</sup> issue of *Melody Maker* reading: “John Mayall requires lead guitarist to match the brilliant blues standards set by Eric Clapton and Peter Green. (B.B. King, Otis Rush style).”<sup>12</sup> Answering the ad, and subsequently winning the job through audition, was eighteen-year-old guitarist Mick Taylor. On July 12, 1967, less than a month after Taylor’s first live appearances with the Bluesbreakers, the group was back in the studio recording *Crusade*. The album was completed in a single day, a testament to the efficiency with which Mayall ran his band, as well as to the quality and professionalism of the musicians involved.

Among the more than half-dozen blues covers recorded for *Crusade*, Albert King’s “Oh, Pretty Woman” features Taylor in a particularly reverent and energetic performance. The song was taken from King’s influential release, *Born Under a Bad Sign*, an album which itself had come out only months earlier in 1967. Example 18 below is a parallel rendering of King’s original guitar solo (lower staff and tablature) and the first chorus of Taylor’s solo (top staff and tablature). King’s solo has been transposed down one half-step from its original key of G minor to F# minor to better facilitate comparative analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> qtd. from facsimile of original ad in the June 10, 1967 issue of *Melody Maker Magazine*, as shown in Hjort, 115.

Example 18. Overlay of Mick Taylor's and Albert King's respective guitar solos on King's "Oh, Pretty Woman." The top staff and tablature shows the first chorus of Taylor's solo as recorded with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. (*Crusade*, track time 1:23-1:54). The lower staff and tablature shows King's original solo. (*Born Under a Bad Sign*, track time 1:13-1:44). King's solo is shown transposed down one half-step to F# minor from its original key of G minor. The tablature for King's solo reflects King's altered open tuning which reads C2, B2, E3, G3, B3 and E4 from the low sixth string to the high first string respectively.

The musical score is organized into two systems. The first system contains two staves for electric guitar (E. Gt.). The top staff is for Mick Taylor's solo, starting at 1:23, in the key of F# minor. The bottom staff is for Albert King's solo, starting at 1:13, also in F# minor, with the instruction "N.C. (F# Bass)". Both staves include standard musical notation and guitar tablature. The second system continues the solos, with the top staff for Taylor's solo and the bottom staff for King's solo. The top staff in the second system is marked with a "4" and a "Bmin7" chord symbol. The bottom staff in the second system is marked with a "B7" chord symbol. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and articulation marks, as well as guitar-specific notations like "Full" and "1/4" in the tablature.



In assessing the relative influence of Albert King's performance on the album *Born Under a Bad Sign*, music critic Robert Palmer wrote, "Its impact was as inescapable among blues players as John Coltrane's influence was in jazz."<sup>13</sup> Palmer's statement underscores the relative simplicity of blues aesthetics in comparison to the much more technically elaborate jazz since King's highly individualistic style was anything but complex in its conception. Like Otis Rush, Albert King was a left-handed guitarist who played on right-handed guitars without reversing the strings. Session guitarist Steve Cropper, who played rhythm on many of King's Stax label recordings, recalled that King tuned his guitar to an open E minor chord with a low "C" natural on the bottom.<sup>14</sup> The idiosyncrasies of King's approach were largely a result of his inability to copy the more articulatively varied, conventional styles of players like T-Bone Walker. Instead, he developed the technique of string-bending and mastered the "note event" to such a high degree that he rarely needed more than a few fretted notes from which to coax endless, subtle variations and build masterfully paced, single-note solos. American guitarist and blues scholar Michael Bloomfield summed up the relevance of the resulting style to the core blues aesthetic:

He was a huge, immense man, and his hands would just dwarf his Flying V guitar. He played with his thumb, and he played horizontally – across the fingerboard, as opposed to vertically. And he approached lead playing more vocally than any guitar player I ever heard in my life; he plays exactly like a singer. As a matter of fact, his guitar playing has almost more of a vocal range than his voice does – which is unusual, because if you look at B.B. or Freddie King or Buddy Guy, their singing is almost equal to their guitar playing. They sing real high falsetto notes, then drop down into the mid-register. Albert just sings in one sort of

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<sup>13</sup> Palmer qtd. in Jas Obrecht, ed., *Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 350.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

mellifluous but monotonous register, with a crooner's vibrato, almost like a lounge singer, but his guitar playing is just as vocal as possible.<sup>15</sup>

Several of King's pet phrases have become standard to the vocabulary of the idiom. He remains simultaneously one of the most often imitated and inimitable guitarists of the postwar era.

The reasons Albert King's style has proven so seductive are clearly demonstrated in his solo on "Oh, Pretty Woman." King's phrasing, as shown in Example 18 (lower staff), is straightforward and uncluttered. The more complex syncopations that obscure downbeats and cross bar lines in transcriptions of other African-American postwar guitarists are conspicuously absent in King's performance. Instead, the types of blurred, interior syncopations that occur within the temporal boundaries of single, bent-note events create the rhythmic tension and release necessary to the forward momentum of a compelling blues melody. The interior rhythmic contents of King's articulations create this movement without suggesting the tried and true formula encapsulated in "swing." If anything can be said in this regard it is that many of King's lines, even most of them, thrive in a rhythmic mode that is decidedly "anti-swing."

Let us examine, for instance, the phrase beginning on the downbeat of two in measure four. The rhythmic energy and movement is focused at the front edge of each downbeat articulation across beats two, three, and four. The melodic resolution that accompanies the second sixteenth-note articulation in each case is countered by this rhythmic tension in a way that saves true release for the downbeat "stinger" that ends the phrase (beat one, mm.5). Even in measures eleven and twelve, where King's repeated bends adhere to an even-eighth-note rhythmic framework, motion is gathered in the first

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<sup>15</sup> Bloomfield qtd. in *Ibid.*, 350.

half of each beat due to the movement of the pitch itself. The “winding up” of tension that this phrase achieves is further enhanced by the microtonal increments of upward melodic motion that King subtly builds into each successive event.

King’s “Oh, Pretty Woman” solo also demonstrates those aspects of his playing that make his style so difficult for more conventionally conditioned players to fully realize. With the exception of the turnaround phrases that begin and end his construction (Ex. 18, lower staff, mm. 1-2 and 13-14 respectively), melodic motion throughout the solo occurs within a relatively restricted range. Almost all of the note content in King’s solo is grounded in only two fretted note positions. These are the “F#” as found at the second fret on the high “E” string and the “A” natural at the fifth fret on the same string. Each phrase is built on some variation of the higher note being bent upward (which, in King’s case, required that he actually pull the string downward, toward the floor) combined with frequent statements of the lower tonic pitch, the latter being usually treated with a heavy vibrato. The bends on beats one and two of measure four attest to the extreme nature of King’s bending technique. Here, the grace note indications show the actual fretted note while the pitches indicated on the downbeats are the actual starting pitches of the bends themselves. In other words, King attacks these two events with the string already pre-bent and then bends it further to get the upper “C” natural of each bend. One unique possibility of this approach is demonstrated in the bend and subsequent long release in measures six and seven. What registers to the ears as an ascending full-step bend on beat two of measure six is audibly released downward a major third to the unarticulated “A” natural on the “and” of beat one in measure seven.

This is an effect that is unattainable using the usual approach of bending up from a fixed fretted position. King does it so fluently as to obscure the move's novelty.

Albert King's guitar performance, by means of the unconventionality of this highly economical technical approach, was able to attain almost endless subtle variation of expression within a fixed range of possibilities, much like the ideal blues voice. It was his ability to direct the subtle nuances of repeated bent-note figures in juxtaposition with a bare minimum of contrasting elements that gave his playing the simple unity and variety that is so appealing to the listener steeped in appreciation for the core blues aesthetic.

King's performance, however, was deceptive in its simplicity. It required a level of conditioned control and response in one specific technique and, because this technique was deployed in such an individual and original manner, made King's style a kind of expressive ideal in instrumental blues performance, i.e., the ability to say more with less and do so in a way that was instantly identifiable.

Mick Taylor's solo on the Bluesbreakers' recording of "Oh, Pretty Woman" serves to highlight some of the intrinsic difficulties that British players faced in trying to assimilate the more unconventional, yet core aesthetic-related aspects of African-American blues guitar performance as exemplified in the individual style of someone like Albert King. Taylor's process in dealing with these difficulties, in turn, sheds light on a few of the more prevalent tendencies among British blues guitarists during the late 1960s.

Taylor's first solo chorus, as shown in Example 18 (top staff), follows the phrasing of Albert King's lead break in fairly close fashion. Nevertheless, Taylor takes a pronounced additive approach in elaborating on King's solo by filling in most of the

holes in the original with his own commentary. Whereas King's more vocally paced solo leaves significant room to "breathe" between each two-bar phrase, Taylor's first chorus solo takes no rests of comparable significance. This observation points toward a larger trend among British guitarists, especially those who were not in the habit of singing at this time – those such as Taylor, or even Clapton and Green during their early days with Mayall. The core vocal aesthetic was so culturally ingrained in African-American blues artists that most were indeed singers, even if, as in the case of Albert King or Jimi Hendrix, they had far more expressive range and ability as guitarists. Their guitar playing was an extension of their vocal habits, even if it represented a greatly expanded version thereof. English blues guitarists, on the other hand, were more concerned with capturing an air of authentic reference to the instrumental idiom of the blues exclusively and thus often placed far less emphasis than their African-American idols on those aspects of phrasing that owed so heavily to maintaining vocal signification. The result was a tendency on the part of British blues guitarists to construct solos that, while utilizing motifs that were lifted from African-American blues guitarists steeped in the vocal tradition, featured these materials arranged in such a way as to suggest a far more instrumentally based conception.

Although Taylor had quite obviously copied King's performance to use as a template for his first solo chorus, his realization of *the work*, i.e., King's solo material, is noticeably more abstracted from blues vocal considerations than the original. Taylor's gestures throughout, while effectively tracing the formal lines of content set out by King's solo, are less subtle in their articulative variance and more uniform in timbre. Where Taylor quotes the original in several places he also greatly exaggerates this

material and, in so doing, significantly alters its aesthetic effect. One of the more glaring examples of this is in his quotation of the repeated bent-note figures at measures eleven and twelve (Ex. 18, top staff). King's original phrase (lower staff) bounces along the downbeat pattern of these two measures with a light legato touch that creates the effect of stylized weeping. By comparison, Taylor's interpretation breaks the flow of the line with a noticeable rest before each bend. This places emphasis on each gesture as a separate event, a sense that Taylor multiplies by raising the top note of each bend in half-step increments up to a sweeping, perfect fourth interval in measure twelve. The result, in relation to King's phrase, is one of caricature that, although sonically striking, is almost comical in its aesthetic effect. Certainly Taylor's interpretation goes well beyond what would be considered a reasonable signification of blues vocal practices.

Some of this may be attributed to the fact that Taylor is attempting to copy a player of unconventional means by using conventional fingerings and technique. Instead of utilizing King's "vertical" approach of playing up and down a single string, Taylor voices King's solo up high on the neck and takes advantage of a more logistically efficient, pentatonic "box" pattern on the middle two strings. The perfect fourth bends in measure twelve would have been very difficult to achieve if Taylor had voiced them on the first string as King did. In the average set of light-gauged electric guitar strings the first string generally has greater tension than the third. I can find no evidence that Taylor would have had the opportunity to actually see Albert King play live or on film before mid-July of 1967 and so he would have had no real clue as to the details of King's technique. The re-voicing of King's bent-note motifs on the more pliable third string up higher on the neck was likely a result of what Taylor could only visualize as the most

logical place for these phrases to be located on the instrument. In this particular position of the pentatonic scale, the fourth above the tonic is placed in an ideal place for bending and we have already seen similar motifs used extensively by Otis Rush, Eric Clapton and Peter Green. The primary significance of Taylor's choice of position versus that of King is that it opens up a range of notes situated above the bent note on the upper two strings which are in easy reach of the fretting hand in this position. This choice, although the result of a simple misinterpretation on Taylor's part, gives Taylor a ready platform from which to launch his second solo chorus, which explodes the concision of King's original with a start-to-finish display of instrumental dexterity. Example 19 below is an overlay showing Taylor's first and second solo choruses (upper and lower staves and tablatures respectively) in a parallel format for comparison.

The additive process is magnified in the second chorus to create a construction that builds on Taylor's already expanded, first-chorus reworking of King's original material. Taylor begins the second chorus with the same motif that appeared in the first (pick-ups and mm.1, both staves). This is essentially a more sustained version of Albert King's brief opening motif (Ex. 18, mm. 2-3, lower staff). Taylor then follows this with a second phrase (Ex.19, mm. 2-3, lower staff) that, while still referencing King's original phrasing, represents an even more expanded take on Taylor's own, first chorus version of this lick (Ex. 19, mm. 2-3, top staff). The addition of a pedal-tone, high "E" natural to the bent-note figure in measure three brings out an added dimension of harmonic distortion in Taylor's tone.

In echoing his own first chorus opening and intensifying it with this added sonic weight, Taylor sets up an expectation for the listener that this chorus is, in effect, an

Example 19. Overlay showing the first and second choruses (upper and lower staff) of Mick Taylor's solo on "Oh, Pretty Woman." (*Crusade*, track times shown)

The image displays a musical score for an electric guitar solo, divided into two systems. Each system contains two staves: a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for the bass line. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 107$ .

**System 1:**

- 1st Chorus (1:23):** The treble staff begins with a  $\text{F}\sharp\text{min}7$  chord. The bass line features a sequence of notes: 13, 16, 14, 16, 18, 16, 16, 18, 16, 18, 16, 18, 16, 14, 16, 16, 14. Dynamics include "Full" and a  $1/4$  note.
- 2nd Chorus (1:54):** The treble staff continues with  $\text{F}\sharp\text{min}7$ . The bass line notes are: 16, 14, 16, 18, 17, 16, 18, 17, 16, 18, 17, 16, 18, 16, 14, 16, 16. Dynamics include "Full" and wavy lines.

**System 2:**

- 4:** The treble staff features a  $\text{Bmin}7$  chord. The bass line notes are: 16, 18, 16, 14, 16, 16, 14. Dynamics include "Full" and a  $1/4$  note.
- 6:** The treble staff has a  $\text{Bmin}7$  chord. The bass line notes are: 16, 14, 14, 17, 19, 14, 17, 14, 16, 18, 14, 17, 19, 17, 14, 17, 14, 16, 18, 14, 17, 16, 18, 14. Dynamics include "Full" and wavy lines.

**System 3:**

- 6:** The treble staff includes triplets (3) and a  $\text{F}\sharp\text{min}7$  chord. The bass line notes are: 16, 14, 16, 18, 16, 14, 16. Dynamics include "Full".
- 6:** The treble staff continues with triplets (3). The bass line notes are: 17, 16, 18, 14, 17, 16, 18, 14, 17, 16, 18, 14, 17, 16, 18, 14, 14. Dynamics include "Full".

7 **F#min7**

Full

1/4

14 16 16 18 16 14 16 14 16 14 16 14 16

**F#min7**

Full

1/4

17 19 14 17 14 16 18 14 14 17 14 16 14 14 16 14 16 18 14 14

9 **C#min7** **F#min**

Full

1 1/4

2

2 1/2

2 1/2

2 1/2

H

18 16 18 16 18 16 20 16 21 16 21 16 21 18 14 16 14

**C#min7** **F#min** fdbk.

Full

Full

Full

1/4

17 19 17 14 17 14 16 18 14 14 17 19 14 17 14 16 18 14 14 17 14 14 14 16 14 16 28

12

Full

elaboration of previously stated material from the first chorus. This previous material, in turn, would be interpreted by a listener familiar with Albert King's "Oh, Pretty Woman" solo as itself a clear elaboration of the original. With the barrage of sixteenth-notes that begins in measure four and scarcely lets up until the final sustained-note gesture in measures eleven and twelve (lower staff), clear reference to the first chorus material is all but obscured. Beneath this busy surface, however, there are elements of syntax in Taylor's second chorus that, while significantly reinforcing the idea of a more instrumentally-based aesthetic at work in Taylor's playing, also support the observation that Taylor's second chorus is, in fact, representative of a further, more intense stage of elaboration on King's solo.

King's original solo makes key use of the principles of repetition and variation in his stark phrasing. As a key part of King's vocally driven process, the use of space or extended rests between phrases is a prime component contributing to the overall aesthetic effect. King's own vocal interjections, as heard at 1:18 and 1:23 of the track, only call greater attention to the already conversational pacing of his solo. Taylor's first solo chorus, in turn, elaborates on King's phrasing and content in an additive manner that places noticeably less importance on the use of space and focuses instead on expanding the borrowed pitch material. This construction, however, still relies substantially on the use of repeating motifs with an even greater emphasis placed on melodic extension and variation within these motifs.

Taylor's second solo chorus follows the expansive pattern established by the first but adds to the process a dense kinetic element. This feature begins in measure four of Example 19 where the long bend and release from the first chorus (upper staff), itself an

almost verbatim quote of King's original phrase (Ex. 18, mm.6, lower staff), is replaced with a flurry of sixteenth-notes and quick, full-step bends utilizing the upper strings of the scale position (Ex. 19, mm.4, lower staff). The repeating "three against four" sixteenth-note figure that fills beats three and four of measure five and the whole of measure six is a tension-building device deployed over the change to the sub-dominant that is purely instrumental in its conception. The guiding principles of repetition and variation, however, still hold sway. The variation in this case is concentrated in the way the bent-note accent is continuously shuffled around against the downbeat. The point of release for this repeating motif coincides with the return to tonic in measure seven. Here, the material of the second chorus represents an elaborative mirroring of Taylor's own first chorus extension of King's original phrase (compare Ex. 19, mm.7-8 to Ex. 18, mm. 8-9). The symmetry of the respective endings of these two phrases (Ex. 19, mm.7-8) reinforces the observation that Taylor's second chorus can, in fact, be understood as an elaborative variance on the first. The final phrase of Taylor's second chorus (Ex. 19, mm.9-10, lower staff), however, is not so much an elaboration of the first (upper staff) as it is a condensed reconfiguration of materials already offered in measure four through eight of the second (lower staff). Utilizing a summary approach not unlike that previously observed in the final cadenza to Green's "The Supernatural," Taylor's final phrase encapsulates various motifs from the second chorus before settling on a sustained-note resolution reinforced by ghostly feedback (mm.11-12).

The observation that much British blues guitar performance in the mid-to-late 1960s was driven by constructive considerations more attuned with instrumentally based concerns does not preclude a tendency toward certain aspects of vocal aesthetics. A

fundamental difference in the way British players pursued a singing quality in their playing is found in differentiating the type of vocal significations that they sought to communicate. The blues vocal aesthetic has been characterized as a proclivity for harsh, strident tones that emphasize note-placement over note-length, a heavy reliance on bent pitches, blue notes and other extra-chromatic sounds, a melodic syntax that often runs counter to Western rules governing form and resolution, and the use of highly syncopated modes of rhythm. British players, in keeping with a more Western-based aesthetic of song, were drawn by a lyricism that reflected more of their home product in terms of melody, rhythm and resolution. This type of melodic aesthetic is inherently tied to formal outlines and harmonic progression in a manner more consistent with European aesthetics.

Peter Green's guitar introduction to the Bluesbreakers' recording of Freddie King's song "Someday, After Awhile (You'll Be Sorry)," offers an opportunity to observe the application of Western-based lyricism in a British blues guitar performance that is still grounded firmly in references to its African-American model. "Someday, After Awhile (You'll Be Sorry)" is a slow blues featuring a cyclic, four-bar turnaround which also serves as an introduction to the first vocal chorus. The song provides a perfect setting for Green's form conscious, lyrical style. Example 20 below is an overlay showing Green's introduction in a parallel comparison with Freddie King's original guitar performance.

Freddie King's original solo, as shown on the lower staff and tablature, displays all the afore-mentioned characteristics of the blues vocal aesthetic distilled in his guitar performance. His tone has a brightness that accentuates the transient quality of his

picking attack – a quality enhanced by King’s unconventional use of a banjo-style, metal finger pick on his picking-hand index finger. King employs a variety of bent-note figurations and microtonal, blue-note gestures throughout his solo. Also prevalent are the types of “around the beat” syncopations previously mentioned as a key aspect of African-American blues expression. Most pertinent to the present discussion, however, is the way

Example 20. Overlay showing Peter Green’s guitar introduction (upper staff) to “Someday, After Awhile (You’ll Be Sorry)” (*A Hard Road*, track time 0:00-0:20) in comparison with Freddie King’s original performance (lower staff). (*Hide Away The Best of Freddie King*, 0:00-0:18)

The image displays a musical score overlay comparing two guitar introductions. It is organized into two systems, each with a guitar staff (treble clef) and a bass staff (bass clef).  
**System 1 (Measures 1-2):**  
 - **Staff 1 (P. Green):** Treble clef, 12/8 time signature. Chords: F7, D7. Includes an 8va marking. Bass staff shows fingering: 13, 16, 13, 15, 17, 15, 13, 15. Performance notes: "Full", "Full".  
 - **Staff 2 (F. King):** Treble clef, 12/8 time signature. Chords: F7, D7. Includes a triplet (3) and a pick (P) marking. Bass staff shows fingering: 13, 16, 18, 13, 16, 18, 15, 15, 15, 17, 15, 13, 15, 13, 15, 13, 15. Performance notes: "Full", "Full", "P".  
 - **Tempo:** ♩ = 51.

**System 2 (Measures 3-4):**  
 - **Staff 1 (P. Green):** Treble clef, 12/8 time signature. Chords: G7, C7. Includes an 8va marking. Bass staff shows fingering: 9, 10, 8, 11, 9, 10, 10, 8, 10, 6, 10, 8, 10. Performance notes: "H", "H", "H".  
 - **Staff 2 (F. King):** Treble clef, 12/8 time signature. Chords: G7, C7. Includes an 8va marking. Bass staff shows fingering: 16, 18, 16, 18, 16, 13, 16, 17, 13, 16. Performance notes: "Full", "Full", "1/4", "1/2", "1/4".

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 3 and 4. Measure 3 is marked with a '3' and contains two measures of music. The first measure has an F7 chord, and the second has a Bb7 chord. The second system also covers measures 3 and 4. Measure 3 has an F7 chord, and measure 4 has F7, C7, and F7 chords. The score includes treble and bass clefs, melodic lines with slurs and accents, and bass line with fingerings and dynamics like 'Full', 'P', and 'H'.

in which King's melody has the quality of rubbing against the harmonic strictures of the form. Clear-cut, sustained points of resolution are largely avoided until the final two measures.

Green's performance is, by comparison, rife with sustained resolutions to chord tones at the ends of several phrases. Notable in this regard are the accented and sustained resolutions to the respective chord roots on beat three of measure one, beat three of measure two, the second eighth-note of beat one in measure three, the second eighth-note of beat two in measure four, and finally, the downbeat of one in measure five. Throughout the four bar sequence, Green's line exhibits close sympathetic relationship

between its melodic content and the form as dictated by the cyclic nature of the chord progression. Green's rhythms display little of the "around-the-beat" syncopation so prevalent in King's solo. Western aesthetics give shape to the overall construction.

Green's consciousness of King's original solo is, however, clearly evidenced by the descending run he plays against the subdominant over beat three and the first half of beat four in measure three (top staff). This specific material is borrowed practically verbatim from King's solo line beginning against tonic on beat two of the parallel measure (lower staff). King's run spills across the third downbeat of the measure with its turn to the subdominant and momentarily comes to rest on a weak-beat resolution to the fifth of the dominant before articulating the ninth with a microtonal bend as a set up to the tonic resolution in measure four. Green takes the same melodic phrase and emphasizes its relation to the subdominant by attacking it with an accented double stop on the downbeat of the chord change and extending it with quick fourth leaps at the second half of beat four. The hammered resolution to the "sweet"-sounding major third on the downbeat of tonic in measure four is colored with Green's characteristic, fast and tight vibrato. This gesture quickly ratchets down the tension created by the flurry of notes that precedes it and gives the whole phrase a goal-oriented melodic shape. The way in which this juxtaposition of kinetic tension and singing resolution play out in clear reference to the form and harmonic progression lends Green's phrase its intense lyricism. That Green incorporates this aesthetic, while still maintaining a close relevance to the raw melodic materials of King's performance, distills the essence of what is meant in the context of the present thesis when it is suggested that a successful blending of European and African-American aesthetics has been achieved in a British blues guitar performance.

The blending of European influence became a more self-conscious act on the part of British blues guitarists in the latter part of the 1960s. This trend is given voice in a statement made by Eric Clapton in an interview with *Melody Maker*'s Nick Jones, published in October of 1966.

My whole musical outlook has changed. I listen to the same sounds but with a different ear. . . . I'm no longer trying to play anything but like a white man. The time is overdue when people should try to play like they are and what color they are. I don't believe I've ever played so well in my life.<sup>16</sup>

Clapton's statement suggests the degree to which he had evolved the relationship of his own artistic consciousness to the African-American source materials from which he continued to draw inspiration. Particularly telling in this regard is his reference to progressive changes in the way he was hearing the music. Clapton implies that he is now processing the blues through "different" ears and is thus finding fresh perspectives by more consciously reconstructing the music according to his own experience. This view bears close resemblance to the kind of subjective idealism that fueled the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century. Mark Evan Bonds has identified the central point of this aesthetic approach and the interpretive license it offers the listening subject.

The idealist aesthetic assumes that anyone contemplating a work of art can and must mentally reconstruct that work before it can exercise a significant emotional effect. As an aesthetic based on the philosophical premise of a free and absolute self, idealism accommodates multiple and widely differing interpretations of a given work of music.<sup>17</sup>

Here then is an aesthetic framework that would allow English guitarists to invent their own unique artistic identities using these "found" materials. The developmental arc

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<sup>16</sup> Clapton interview from the October, 1966 issue of *Melody Maker Magazine*, qtd. in Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2/3(Summer – Autumn 1997): 394.

toward achieving a personalized style began with self-conscious reflection upon hearing the material they sought to assimilate. Simply put, they *reconstructed* the blues differently in their frame of reference and thus *interpreted* the music differently in performance. It is logical to assume that this idealistic process would become more accessible and successful as the individual subject gained greater mastery over the “technology of stylization” needed to function with adequate creative latitude in the idiom. The point bears emphasis that British musicians at this time, while still heavily dependent on recordings for their source materials, were also beginning to get a taste of the “real deal” in the performances of fiery young black musicians visiting England for the first time in 1965 and 1966. Whereas many of their predecessors had been obliged to project a performance style and image that had appealed to the more conservative English expectations of the late 1950s and early 1960s (recall Muddy Waters’s first two visits in 1958 and 1962 as described in the previous chapter), these young artists were more than eager to pull out all the stops as it were and give performances that went well beyond just playing the music.

One of these young artists, Chicago guitarist Buddy Guy, had left a deep impression on Clapton when he saw Guy perform with a bass and drum trio at the *Marquee* in early 1965. Clapton later remarked on Guy’s physically flamboyant performing style and “huge, powerful sound.”<sup>18</sup> Clapton cited this experience as being particularly influential on his initial vision for Cream.

Having had in my mind the ideal of Buddy Guy, who had managed to make the sound of a trio seem so full, I realized that was because of him and that, lacking his virtuosity and confidence, I wasn’t going to be able to carry off what he did.

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 73.

This would mean that the balance of power would rest much more with Jack and Ginger than it did with me.<sup>19</sup>

The new creative environment pitting his own ideals against those of Bruce and Baker, two equally strong musical personalities with broad eclectic tastes beyond traditional blues, was one important catalyst forming Clapton's new focus. A second, but even more thorough, force shaping this fundamental shift in perspective was the arrival in England of Jimi Hendrix.

It is perhaps most telling that Clapton's above-quoted statement in the October 8, 1966 issue of *Melody Maker* should come barely a week after his first exposure to Hendrix. The American guitarist sat in with Cream at their October 1<sup>st</sup> performance at Regent Street Polytechnic in London. Clapton later recalled Hendrix showing little regard for usual jam session protocol and absolutely no restraint in the overt physicality of his performance.

When jamming with another band for the first time, most musicians will try to hold back, but Jimi just went for it. He played guitar with his teeth, behind his head, lying on the floor, doing the splits, the whole business. It was amazing, and it was musically great, too, not just pyrotechnics. Even though I had already seen Buddy Guy and knew that a lot of black players could do this kind of stuff, it's still pretty amazing when you're standing right next to it. The audience was completely gobsmacked by what they saw and heard, too. I remember thinking that here was a force to be reckoned with. It scared me, because he was clearly going to be a huge star, and just as we were finding our speed, here was the real thing.<sup>20</sup>

Although Guy had been among the first to bring the intensely exaggerated physical showmanship and sonic power of modern African-American blues guitar performance to England, it was Hendrix who consciously aimed this "over-the-top" style of black performance at the white English pop music establishment. For Hendrix to accomplish

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 80.

this, however, he had to make a leap that Guy had not. Hendrix had come to England at the invitation of former Animals bassist and British blues insider Chas Chandler. Upon arrival, Hendrix, with Chandler's help, promptly began building an act that utilized white, blues-oriented, English musicians as rhythm section support. During this process, Hendrix also immersed himself fully in the social circles of the English pop music aristocracy. The important influence of the London music scene on Hendrix's emerging style in 1966 and 1967 is beyond the scope of the present study. It is, however, pertinent to note that Hendrix's success in England, playing to and with British musicians who "got it," also created grounds for a heightened sense of justification among players like Clapton, Green and Taylor. If Hendrix, as the perceived embodiment of black performance ideals, could so thoroughly cross over to a white British audience and assimilate a significant identification with that scene, then a white British performer could also assimilate a degree of African-American musical heritage on his own terms and be equally relevant and valid. Such is the elasticity of acceptance in popular forms when the aesthetics of cultural purism are jettisoned in favor of a more inclusive philosophical approach, i.e., Romantic idealism.

Assuming that other British blues guitarists such as Peter Green and Mick Taylor would have been feeling similar pressures as those felt by Clapton to "play like they are and what color they are," it is crucial to the present discussion to identify a performance aesthetic that would allow this more ethnically biased, individualistic ethos to emerge while still operating in the essentially foreign idiom of African-American postwar blues expression. It is in this regard that the application of certain philosophical premises central to the way in which Romantic ideology views the relationship between the roles

of the composer or originator and that of the second-party performer or interpreter are, again, particularly useful. Whatever other effects the arrival of Hendrix had on English popular music and vice-versa, it is clear that the questions of race and propriety were brought home with a vengeance in regard to white British musicians playing black American music.

It is important to note that Clapton's claim that he was "no longer trying to play anything but like a white man" did not serve to suggest that he was no longer playing blues. It is my contention that Clapton and others like him, meaning those British guitarists who had been most dedicated in their obsession with maintaining blues authenticity, actually moved closer to a more complete and authentically modernistic representation of blues tradition by more consciously embracing their ethnicity. By adapting the blues form and electric guitar idiom to themes resonant with their own experience and contemporaneous cultural contexts, artists like Peter Green with Fleetwood Mac, Eric Clapton with Cream, and even Mick Taylor as part of the continually evolving Bluesbreakers imbued their blues with a cultural currency more potent than that generated by performances in which they were just trying to create convincing tributes to their African-American blues heroes. A prime artifact of this process at work in 1967 is Cream's "Strange Brew," as recorded for their album *Disraeli Gears*.

"Strange Brew" began as another Chicago blues cover. Cream had been performing "Hey Lawdy Mama" as part of their live set since the early days of the band. The song was culled from an influential 1965 release by Junior Wells' Chicago Blues Band with Buddy Guy, titled *Hoodoo Man Blues*. The original version with Guy on

guitar captures in the studio the exuberant, loose, spontaneous energy of the Wells band as one might have heard them in a Chicago nightclub around that time. An outtake from Cream's first day of recording at Atlantic Records' Manhattan studio on April 3, 1967 has Clapton, Baker and Bruce performing "Hey Lawdy Mama" with Clapton on vocals in an arrangement that sticks fairly close to the Wells version in terms of its tempo and shuffling feel. Later that same day a second version of the song was recorded in which the tempo is significantly slower and that features the rhythm guitar track, bass line and drum set pattern in a rhythmically funkier, interlocking groove. The tempo and straight eighth-note concept of this version are not unlike that heard on Albert King's "Oh, Pretty Woman," although more specific similarities between the two performances are faint. Also present at these Atlantic sessions was bassist, vocalist, and producer Felix Pappalardi, a New York musician with classical training. Pappalardi took a copy of this second version of "Hey Lawdy Mama" home with him after the session and, working together with his wife Gail Collins, wrote a new melody and lyrics. According to Ginger Baker, Cream's first single release from *Disraeli Gears* came together as the result of a community effort the following day.

"Strange Brew" started as a completely different song, "Hey Lawdy Mama." Then we changed the tempo with the backing track. In the end the backing track became "Brain Stew," changed eventually after three hours to "Strange Brew." Not just by us – we had all the engineers chipping in with suggestions.<sup>21</sup>

The single most recognizable feature to survive the metamorphosis from Wells's "Hey Lawdy Mama" to Cream's "Strange Brew" is contained in the overdubbed lead guitar line that serves as the introduction to the latter. Clapton models this melody on the first statement of Wells's harmonica figure at track time 0:07 in the original. Example 21

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<sup>21</sup> Baker qtd. in Hjort, *Strange Brew*, 104.

below depicts a parallel overlay of Wells’s line in comparison with Clapton’s guitar adaptations of this line for the introduction to “Strange Brew.” The top staff of Example

Example 21. Overlay showing Junior Wells’s opening harmonica phrase from his recording of “Hey Lawdy Mama” on the upper staff. (*Hoodoo Man Blues*, track time 0:07-0:15) The middle and lower staves depict the first and second respective phrases of Eric Clapton’s lead guitar introduction to “Strange Brew.” (*Disraeli Gears*, track times for each phrase as shown)

Example 21. Musical score showing a parallel overlay of Junior Wells's opening harmonica phrase and Eric Clapton's guitar phrases. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It includes a tempo marking of 107 bpm and chord symbols A7 and D7. The Wells part is on a single staff. The Clapton parts are on two systems, each with a guitar staff and a bass staff. The first system shows Clapton's first phrase (0:01-0:07) and the second system shows his second phrase (0:11-0:15).

21 shows Wells's harmonica line while the middle and lower staves and tablatures are an overlay representation of the first and second statements of Clapton's use of this "theme." Clapton's lines are a prime example of the level of mastery Clapton had achieved over the myriad articulations idiomatic to postwar blues guitar. Every single note in Clapton's phrasing is treated with some expressive device. Elements of Clapton's construction that echo British blues guitar tendencies already discussed include the additive approach that Clapton takes in filling out the sparse outline of Wells's original harmonica phrase.

Also notable is the emphasis on repetition of the main rhythmic elements of the phrase but with slight variations in accent placement and melodic contour coloring the second statement. Clapton's warm, sustaining, voice-like tone, in the context of the way in which the material is interwoven around the harmonic accents and contrapuntal fabric of the ensemble texture, communicates a level of European-bred lyricism that contradicts the hard-driving, blues vocal signification of Wells's harmonica. This lyrical aesthetic is reinforced by the way in which the third phrase of the three-line blues structure supplants the lead guitar at 0:19 with the title hook of the chorus's vocal lyric, "Strange Brew, girl what's inside of you?" The Wells phrase that Clapton seizes on for his introduction to "Strange Brew" is only stated the one time in the original "Hey Lawdy Mama;" this underscores the loose, improvisational impetus behind the original lick. As with his rearranged introduction to Otis Rush's "All Your Love (I Miss Loving)," Clapton appropriates a fleeting, momentary idea from Wells's performance and refashions it into a clearly etched melodic theme or hook of central importance to the song's form.

Clapton closes the intro chorus of "Strange Brew" with an exact quotation of Albert King's opening turnaround phrase from his solo to "Oh, Pretty Woman" (see Ex.

18, mm. 1-2, lower staff). Clapton’s transposition of King’s lick is shown in Example 22 below. By referencing King in such an overt manner in the context of an “original” composition, Clapton’s performance raises an important question as to the precise nature of his claim to be “no longer trying to play anything but like a white man.” It is clear from the content of his “Strange Brew” introduction that he is still relying almost exclusively on materials gleaned from African-American postwar blues guitar tradition, even as he demonstrates his mastery over these materials by arranging and performing them with a touch and stylistic flair that was fast becoming his own. In this context, such a bold and unmasked reference to one of the most instantly recognizable guitarists of the afore-mentioned tradition points to the philosophical manifestation of a performance-based extension of Romantic idealism as it pertains to subjectivity.

Example 22. Clapton’s transposed quotation of Albert King’s turnaround phrase from “Oh, Pretty Woman” as played in Cream’s “Strange Brew.” (*Disraeli Gears*, track time shown)

One important consequence of the idealistic philosophy fueling early Romanticism as described by Bonds is that it breathed life into the notion that “music reflected an ideal world of the spirit, and that this separate world, however remote, could be made at least partially accessible through the vehicle of art.”<sup>22</sup> The relevant feature of this philosophy for the present discussion is that by understanding music as a tangible

<sup>22</sup> Bonds, “Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music,” 420.

formulation of what is essentially intangible, the door is opened to a view of all musical matter as content in a universal stream, a stream into which any sufficiently skilled and sensitive artist may dip his bucket. The Romantic thesis assigning music its universal transcendence is what made blues expression available to a subjective appropriation by artists working outside of the African-American experience. It was this European-born ideology that allowed the blues to be “cut loose from its historical (and racial) situation” in the United States and become both relevant to, and reflective of, modern experience on a global scale. This comprehension was crucial to the development of British blues.

In this view, a reinterpretation of the previously existing material is the artist’s chief imperative as he enters the role of performer. This concept bears more than a passing resemblance to the relational role of the blues performer. The act of “doing” blues is the act of mediating the past and present in the moment of performance. African and African-American ancestral ideologies imbue the act of blues performance with a sense of communal relevance that goes beyond the community of the present and is inclusive of all members of past communities. Romantic ideology imparts a similar reverence to performance as both a culminating of the past and its fresh realization in the present as made possible by the subjectivity and skill of the performer. The overlap is such that British blues performers operating in a culture embedded with the Romantic did not have so far to go to assume a blues “tradition” of their own construct.

Clapton’s solo on “Strange Brew” offers an opportunity to pursue this line of reasoning even further. The Albert King turnaround lick that ended Clapton’s guitar introduction now leads to a statement of King’s “Oh, Pretty Woman” solo in its entirety. Clapton’s use of King’s material is shown in Example 23. Whereas young Mick Taylor’s

Example 23. Eric Clapton's solo from "Strange Brew." (*Disraeli Gears*, track time 1:18-1:48)

The image displays a musical score for an electric guitar solo, labeled "E. Gt." on the left. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 107. The score is divided into four systems, each containing two staves (treble and bass clef).  
 - **System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Chord A7 is indicated above the first measure. The tempo marking "♩ = 107" is present. The bass staff shows fret numbers: 7, 9, 5, 5, 7, 5, 7, 7, 14, 13, 15, 20, 14, 15, 17, 15, 17, 13, 13, 14. Dynamic markings include "Full" and "1/4".  
 - **System 2 (Measures 5-8):** Chord D7 9 is indicated above the fifth measure. The bass staff shows fret numbers: 13, 15, 17, 15, 15, 13, 14, 14, 13, 2, 6, 9, 8, 10, 8, 7, 5, 7. Dynamic markings include "Full", "1/4", and "P".  
 - **System 3 (Measures 9-11):** Chords A7 and E7 #9 are indicated above the ninth and tenth measures respectively. The bass staff shows fret numbers: 7, 5, 6, 8, 17, 14, 13, 15, 13, 15, 13, 15, 13, 15. Dynamic markings include "H", "1/4", "Full", and "1 1/4".  
 - **System 4 (Measures 12-14):** Chords D7 #9 and A7 are indicated above the twelfth and thirteenth measures respectively. The bass staff shows fret numbers: 13, 15, 13, 15, 13, 15, 13, 14, 14, (14), 9, 5, 8, 5, 7, 5, 7, 7. Dynamic markings include "1 1/4", "Full", "1/4", "P", and "1/4".

handling of King's "Oh, Pretty Woman" could be described as a case of relative inexperience, youthful flash and energetic exuberance taking precedence over capturing the subtleties of King's solo, Clapton uses the material to demonstrate a mature level of taste, restraint and control. Clapton captures much of the understated grace of King's phrasing and lets each extended rest breathe with anticipation of the next phrase. It is

perhaps of no small consequence that Clapton had, at this stage of his career, become quite comfortable with his singing voice as his pacing and articulations effectively capture the blues vocal aesthetic while still displaying the lyrical melodicism that marks so much British blues guitar performance from this era. Clapton follows the form and melody of King's solo closely, yet still manages to project his own identity. The one point where he deviates from King's phrasing is in measures eight and nine. Here, the material extends an idea stated in the second phrase of the introduction (Ex. 21, mm.3-4, lower staff). The repeated bent-note figure at measures eleven and twelve of Example 23 demonstrates once again the deft use of subtle, behind-the-beat syncopations that, by this point, had become a hallmark of Clapton's mature style.

On one level, the recitation of King's solo in the context of an original composition is obviously meant as Clapton's tribute to a player for whom he felt great personal respect and to whom he believed more widespread appreciation was due. On another, deeper level, however, the solo enabled Clapton to experience, as a projection of his own artistic psyche, the emotional release that drew him to King's playing in the first place. For Clapton, as for many British guitarists who followed in his wake, to play an Albert, B.B., or Freddie King lick in the context of their own musical discourse was to deliver the material that they most revered. The surrounding musical content, that part of their expression that connected this bit of borrowed material with that bit, contained their own creative impetus. This is how the home aesthetic permeated the music.

In short, the balance of European blend is struck through the way in which the assimilated material is fragmented, reconstructed, arranged, and executed in performance. The materials, however, that give the performance its essential relation to the beloved

tradition, at least from the foreign performer's perspective, are those taken directly from the tradition. For Clapton to successfully project his own guitar identity through Albert King's solo without significantly changing or adding to its syntactical structure, under these terms, accessed a high level of artistic gratification.

Mary Hunter has identified this type of intensely personal, subjective identification with the objective source as central to the early Romantic conception of the performer. Hunter writes that "the romantic sense of the 'genius of performance' involves the performer's psycho-spiritual capacity to transform himself into another. But not just any other: this capacity creates a miraculous merging of his own self with that of the composer to represent a new subjectivity."<sup>23</sup> The experiential chasm between two subjects of such vastly different cultures, such as Clapton and King, could be momentarily bridged through the realization of a skilled, reverent and honest performance on the part of the former. As Hunter further explains:

The second characteristic feature of early and proto-romantic discourse about performance is evident in the fact that the demand for this type of self-transformation on the part of the performer sets performer and composer in an oppositional relationship but also suggests a remarkable identification between the two poles of opposition. Indeed the simultaneous establishment and collapse of this dualistic relation is a metonym for the broader discourse of performance in early Romantic aesthetic thought. . . . Performance as a concept tends to inhabit a field of dialectical oppositions: composer and performer, performer and listener, the I and not-I of performer and music, the materiality of technique versus the ineffability of expression, the emptiness of mere virtuosity versus the moral high ground of true music making, among others. But equally striking is the way performance was conceived, both explicitly and implicitly, as a resolution, or occasion for the collapse, of those oppositions.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Hunter, "'To Play as If from the Soul of the Composer': The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58/2 (Summer 2005): 370.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

Hunter writes that the act of performance in Romantic ideology is an act that unites the “originator and vessel, in an apparently single creative act” and that this process was itself conceived “as a kind of simulacrum of Romantic subjectivity.”<sup>25</sup> I suggest that a similar, if not wholly related, ideology lies at the heart of the British blues guitar performances featured in this study.

In an interview published in December of 1966, Clapton stated:

I can see pop music gaining far more classical content in the near future and becoming much more artistic, because it’s development (sic). Music can only go on – and it’s about time that pop music became accepted as a serious art form, which it will do. I know a fair amount about classical music, but there is so much to know, it takes a lifetime. But it’s the keystone to all music.<sup>26</sup>

Assuming the obvious, that is, that Clapton included the African-American blues as an essential part of his understanding of “all music,” Clapton’s statement regarding the inevitable acceptance of popular music as “a serious art form” by virtue of its gaining of “classical content” suggests a conscious move to absorb the substance of the blues more fully into a Western philosophy of artistic expression.

As an object for concluding analysis I can find no more appropriate summary example in support of this move than Clapton’s celebrated lead break in Cream’s original studio recording of “Sunshine of Your Love” from *Disraeli Gears*. Unlike the previous examples presented in this study, “Sunshine of Your Love” has no clear source of derivation by which to directly connect it to a specific, pre-existing African-American blues performance. It is, however, a blues that readily exhibits the blending of African-American and European aesthetics in both its construction and performance. Clapton’s

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 372-373.

<sup>26</sup> Clapton interview from December 24, 1966 edition of *Record Mirror Magazine*, qtd. in Hjort, 83.

solo is an essential component to a work that has enjoyed pop status as “part of the shared culture of the world in which it has sounded” for more than forty years.<sup>27</sup> Wolfe, Miller, and O’Donnell have indentified the strong blues element of “Sunshine of Your Love” as a key component to its continued relevance.<sup>28</sup> Middleton observed that Cream’s evolving work with the blues seemed “to stress their connections with Old World traditions, while remembering and bringing into relationship with these the legacy of the post-Renaissance West.”<sup>29</sup> Clapton’s solo in “Sunshine of Your Love,” as shown in Example 24, epitomizes this view while providing a virtual compendium of the syntactical elements of British blues guitar performance identified in previous examples.

Form plays an indispensable role in shaping the musical sense of Clapton’s construction. “Sunshine of Your Love” features an expanded, twenty-four bar blues form. The extended harmonic space allows Clapton to build and develop his phrases, one upon the last, at a relaxed pace over the first sixteen bars. The final eight bars deviate from the usual dominant to tonic, end phrase formulation and instead feature an insistent, two-bar, V – bVII – IV progression that repeats three times before culminating with a two-bar crescendo on the dominant. This effectively closes the form without providing any sort of turnaround gesture. The entire track actually fades out on an indefinite extending of this closing crescendo (track time 3:53-4:10), a move that rather obliquely calls attention to the circular aspect by denying it final closure yet, perhaps even more subtly, emphasizes the dynamic linear aspect of this particular form.

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<sup>27</sup> Arnold S. Wolfe, Chuck Miller, and Heather O’Donnell, “On the Enduring Popularity of Cream’s ‘Sunshine of Your Love’: Sonic Synecdoche of the ‘Psychedelic 60s’,” *Popular Music* 18/2 (May 1999): 259.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Middleton, *Pop Music and the Blues: A Study of the Relationship and its Significance* (London: Gollancz, 1972), 248.

Example 24. Eric Clapton's guitar solo on "Sunshine of Your Love," as recorded by Cream. (*Disraeli Gears*, track time 2:00-2:54)

E. Gt.

$\text{♩} = 116$   
2:00

**D**

3/4 3/4 Full Full 1/2 P 3/4

12 14 12 14 12 14 10 12 12 14 12 9 10 9 7 9 7 9 10

5

**G**

1/2 1/2 1/2 H P 1 3/4 1 3/4 1 3/4 1 1/4 Full

7 7 9 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 7 9 7 10 13 10 13 10 13 10 12 10 12 10 12

10

**D**

Full 3/4 H H 1/2 H Full Full Full

9 11 9 7 9 10 7 9 7 9 7 9 10 9 7 9 11 10 12 9 11 7 9 7 9 7

14

11 13 12 10 11 12 10 12 12 10 11 12 10 1/2 Full Full

12 14 12 10 11 12 10 12 12 10 11 12 10 11 10 12 14 13 12 14 12 10

18

**C G A C G**

Full Full Full P H H H H H

12 12 14 13 12 10 12 14 10 10 12 14 12 10 12 9 11 12 12 10 10 10 10 10 10 12 10 12 10 12

21 A C G A

24 D

Clapton takes full advantage of all this by saving his most progressively additive, urgent phrasing for the final eight-bar section. This is a similar, end-focused strategy to that previously observed in Clapton’s solo on “All Your Love (I Miss Loving).” Here it is rendered all the more effective by the extended build up. The descending melodic contour of measure nineteen is mirrored by the dramatic, hammered double stop ascent in measure twenty. The final four measures (mm. 21-24) impart a frenzy of kinetic tension that go well beyond signification of the blues vocal aesthetic. Far from the type of repetitive display of motion observed in Taylor’s second chorus to “Oh, Pretty Woman,” however, Clapton’s lines maintain a strong sense of lyricism even while the intensity continues to grow to the very last. There is no gradual unwinding here. The final resolution to tonic (mm. 25, beat one) comes suddenly and emphatically.

Clapton’s opening phrase (mm. 1-3) famously quotes Rodgers and Harts’ “Blue Moon.” This appropriation, given its context, represents a different expressive strategy than that, for instance, exemplified by Clapton’s quoting of Albert King’s solo in “Strange Brew.” Clapton’s play on Richard Rodgers is not so much an attempt to identify himself with the Juilliard-trained, American composer as it is the brilliant,

circumspectually relevant deployment of a typically African-American style of troping that Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. has termed “Musical Signifyin(g).”

Musical Signifyin(g) is not the same, simply, as the borrowing and restating of pre-existing material, or the reworking of pre-existing material. While it is all of these, what makes it different from simply borrowing, varying, or reworking is its transformation of such material by using it rhetorically or figuratively – through troping, in other words – by trifling with, teasing, or censuring it in some way. Signifyin(g) is also a way of demonstrating respect for, goading, or poking fun at a musical style, process, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone- or word-play, the illusions of speech or narration, and other troping mechanisms. . . . Signifyin(g) shows, among other things, either reverence or irreverence toward previously stated musical statements and values.<sup>30</sup>

The figurative irony of signifyin(g) on “Blue Moon” in the context of a song longing for the “Sunshine of Your Love” suggests the above-mentioned qualities of humor, parody, and indirection; a kind of musical play on words. In light of Clapton’s previous statements regarding the impending artistic value of pop music and its growing reflection of classical forms, it is an inspired product of his personal dedication to achieving that very ideal while still maintaining his reach for a more personally authentic blues expression.

The way in which Clapton transforms the phrase in the context of his solo musically embodies the absorption of the core blues aesthetic into a pre-existing melody fully realized in Western syntactical terms. Clapton does not significantly distort the rhythmic or general melodic content of the original as to leave no doubt for the listener that this is indeed the opening phrase of “Blue Moon.” The very first two bends, however, display a piquant, almost b5 quality. The precise place in the phrase where the original lyric “blue moon” occurs has Clapton embedding the material with the

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, edited by Gena Dagel Caponi (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 141.

microtonal shadings of the quintessential “blue note.” Even the finger vibrato applied in measure one has an unstable, slightly off-center quality to it. This move is aesthetically emphasized in the listener’s memory by the rhythmic dragging of the quarter-note triplets in measure two followed by the more precise intonation and sweeter vibrato that characterize the bent “A” natural on the downbeat of measure three. With this one phrase, Clapton achieves a concise, meaningful and coherent synthesis of the African-American blues and Western aesthetic traditions.

Clapton continues this balancing act over the next thirteen measures (mm. 4-16) as he develops the material through the use of recurring motives. A few of the more notable examples of this strategy include the double stop bend on beat four of measure four, followed by a syncopated, rhythmic turning of this original downbeat motive across the latter half of measure six and the first beat of measure seven. The ascending sixteenth-note legato figure that leads to this measure six development is itself recast rhythmically, beginning on beat two of measure eleven and again across the bar line to measure twelve. The slightly over-bent quarter-note articulations in measure eight and on the downbeat of measure nine represent a microtonally inflected descent to the subdominant that is a clear nod to Albert King’s influence. Likewise, Clapton displays his debt to Freddie King with the quick, articulated, whole-step slides in measure fourteen, a move that also makes varied appearances in each measure of the final four-bar flurry (mm. 21-24). The two, upper-range staccato stabs in measure sixteen anticipate the unbridled energy of the last eight-bars while the sustained, whole-step bend on the downbeat of measure seventeen represents one last nod to materials from the opening theme before Clapton shifts into high gear for the final stretch of the form.

As has been a point of repeated emphasis, the British players featured here held their African-American influences in high esteem. I have chosen to focus on Eric Clapton, Peter Green, and Mick Taylor because they, more than many of their contemporaries, were consciously focused on the blues as their chief mode of musical expression. They saw their developing careers not as opportunities to “cash in” on the almost universal relevance of the blues, but rather as a chance to cast a long overdue spotlight on the artists that they themselves looked to as the originators of a music that gave their lives meaning. I do not mean to paint them as benevolent musical philanthropists insofar as to infer that they harbored no thoughts of personal gain and ambition. On the contrary, playing the blues was, in a real sense, its own reward. It offered them a sense of power and a perceived sense of relation with an “other” centered society that far outstripped what they saw as the banalities of their own by virtue of the blues’ embrace of fiercely emotive expression.

It was through the lens of European Romanticism, however, that they glimpsed shadows of their own longings reflected in the grit of African-American blues expression. It is interesting to note that the blues itself does not usually romanticize its subject matter. Instead, it was the *idea* of the blues as a mediator between the embattled vestiges of body and soul that appealed to young Britons trapped in a culture where the physical and the spiritual had become largely subjugated to the moral and the intellectual. By doing blues, these young Romantics could collapse the tensions, dualities and distances between the perceived shallowness of their own culture and the perceived depths of a culture that had created the blues out of much struggle and suffering and had overcome with dignity and vitality. They could merge their selves with the selves of their heroes. In the act of doing

blues they found themselves part of a higher subjectivity that was perhaps even greater than the sum of its parts. At least that is how they were widely perceived within their own culture.

That the music these young Brits created bore the syntactical fingerprints of their own aesthetic sensibilities is evidence that they ultimately achieved what they set out to do. That was to establish their musical identities through blues expression and take part in a living tradition on terms relevant to their own experience. A culturally ingrained sense of European Romantic ideology was a chief factor facilitating this process.

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