Introduction

In many ways, my journey towards this thesis topic began with my brother's music collection. Throughout my teens he would introduce me to a wide range of local and international acts, many of which were influenced by African-American blues artists. This influence is evident in both their construction of sound and the old songs that they rerecorded. From there I began tracing musical influences from song credits and interview excerpts—a path often travelled by musicians and fans alike—that would eventually lead me to an appreciation of blues music. The penultimate step towards this topic came in the form of my honours thesis—a creative project that involved rerecording several tracks from the catalogue of an early Australian country music artist, one of which was titled "Blue Mountain Blues".[1] From there I turned to blues music in Australia. Initially conceived as a history of "Australian blues", it became apparent that this proposed sub-genre struggled to unify and explain the disparate musical styles contained therein. Although each artist was clearly addressing the musical characteristics and influences I had come to recognise as "blues music", it all sounded different. In the meantime, I developed a keen interest in a fellow colleague's thesis topic that addressed the role of "covers" within the Australian music industry (Giuffre, 2005).

My epiphany—and catalyst for the current thesis topic—eventually presented itself while viewing a live performance from Peter Green Splinter Group. The concert was split into two courses: an acoustic entrée featuring several Robert Johnson "covers"; and, an electric main with side dishes of early Fleetwood Mac material—the band Green had help found many years ago. As I sat there listening, I began to wonder why I was always coming across contemporary musicians performing "covers" of old blues songs and making a point of drawing attention to their "original" African-American author—especially when that author was Robert Johnson. For some time I had noticed this recurring tendency to construct,

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address and enforce a canon of blues artists and repertoire, as well as an overwhelming need to replicate blues as a strictly acoustic form replete with finger-picking and slide guitar. I had also become aware of a difference in approach. Some musicians strived to imitate the sound and image of early African-American bluesmen and their songs while others seemed determined to perform blues in their own "new" way interpolated with a wide range of musical influences. What I want to examine in this thesis is why contemporary artists continue to perform and record these songs, what purpose(s) this process serves, as well as which songs and African-American blues artists are the most significant.

Discourses concerning canon construction and practices of reinterpretation in blues music are as relevant today as they were some 40 or 50 years ago when white writers, fans and musicians first took interest in the genre *en masse* during the blues revival of the late 1950s and 1960s. Though writers such as Charles Keil (1966) and David Evans (1976; 1982a) touch on the topic area, these issues bear increasing significance for an emergent school of revisionist researchers within contemporary blues discourse. This has been demonstrated in recent studies examining blues "cover" songs, the construction of blues canons, and perceptions of early blues culture.[2] All of these writers, however, are American and, subsequently, their studies deal primarily—if not exclusively—with the situation in the United States.

This presents several gaps in the current research. The first is that blues literature neglects to address the topics of canonisation and reinterpretation within internationally disseminated contexts. Accordingly, part of my task is to extend the blues discourse to a contemporary Australian context. Another primary objective is to contribute to the recent revisionist discourse on blues through analyses and discussions that incorporate local (Australian) subject matter. More specifically, it will identify Australian artists who regularly engage with the blues genre, examine their recorded reinterpretations of old blues texts, and

consider their role as agents of the blues canon. Many of these aspects of contemporary blues performance are on display in the recent compilation *The dig Australian Blues Project* (Various, 2005a). This recording was conducted as part of The ABC Blues Festival—a three-month Australian celebration of blues music that followed and incorporated the promotional projects that came out of the US Year of the Blues initiative in 2003. Likewise, in addition to the countless blues festivals that are held every year around the country, other recent events such as the 2005 Sydney Festival concerts[3] and the Vanguard's annual Robert Johnson Tribute Night highlight the contemporary significance of blues music to Australian culture along with its attendant issues of canonisation and reinterpretation. Despite this obvious interest, local coverage of the genre remains drastically limited—if not non-existent—within both academic discourse and local mass media (i.e. radio, television, print).

Though largely concerned with Australia and its development of blues music culture, this thesis is by no means limited to a historical overview of blues music in Australia. Another key objective of this thesis is to address spaces within the current revisionist scholarship that apply to the blues idiom on a universal level. For instance, Marybeth Hamilton (2001; 2007), John Dougan (2001; 2003), Elijah Wald (2004), and Howell Evans (2004) each discuss the actions that have contributed to the construction of the blues canon. Though all four acknowledge the significance of commercial recorded sources, none conduct a thorough evaluation of the musician's role as a canonising agent. Similarly, Thomas Schneider (2001) addresses the history of reinterpreting previously recorded blues songs without ever referring to how these musicians and recordings both reinforce and disseminate a canon of African-American blues artists as well as a repertoire of "blues standards". David Evans (1982a), on the other hand, performs an in-depth analysis of reinterpretive practices in blues but limits his study to African-American performers and, thus, omits a large proportion of musicians involved with the genre. Furthermore, his subsequent list of interpretive

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processes is insufficient and does not allow for other creative possibilities as demonstrated by contemporary Australian performers. What these studies have in common is that none of the writers investigate in detail how canonising agents contribute to the common perceptions, representations and constructions of "the bluesman", and how these, in turn, shape audiences' understandings of blues music. Additionally, none effectively combine the topic of canonisation with discussion pertaining to the ingrained practices of reinterpretation in blues music. Considering the incredibly intertwined nature of these two fields of blues research, it is particularly significant that these subjects are being addressed simultaneously for the first time in this thesis.

Following the methodology, the first chapter conducts a survey of the literature on blues music with a predominant focus on issues of canonisation and historically established practices of reinterpretation.

Chapter two investigates the process that creates and lionises the image of the African-American bluesman. This begins with an assessment of how recordings have contributed to defining "blues" and is followed by a discussion of the pervasive and iconic image of "the bluesman"—specifically, how it is reinforced by the canonising process and how it is passively received and accepted by audiences on a grand scale. This chapter then identifies the playing styles, equipment, songs and artists that represent what is commonly understood as the blues canon. Subsequently, chapter two concludes by analysing the manner in which musicians, as agents of the canon, reinforce its pertinence.

Chapter three examines the canonising role of musicians through the act of performing and recording reinterpretations of old blues songs, which are often referred to as "standards". In doing so, this chapter commences with a broad examination of reinterpretive practices in popular music and addresses the need to develop both a new terminology and methodology for discussing and measuring musical creativity. Discussion then deals with the

issues of canonisation and reinterpretation directly in relation to Australia's blues music culture via an analysis of the recent compilation of blues reinterpretations, *The dig Australian Blues Project* (Various, 2005a).

Chapter four continues to study Australian performers and the Australian context by introducing a brief historical overview of blues music in Australia. Preceded by a consideration of the international revivals that contributed to the genre's dissemination, this overview begins with the emergence of the country's first consciously-dedicated blues bands in the 1960s and continues through to the present climate. Moreover, the chapter concludes by reflecting upon the parallels between Australia, the United States and other areas of dissemination, the allure and uptake of blues music among Australians, as well as the associations between this foreign musical idiom and local youth counterculture.

The following three chapters (five, six and seven) are case studies, each one examining a contemporary Australian artist that regularly engages with the blues genre in their recorded output. These chapters each include a biography, followed by discussion of their specific approach to blues music and an analysis of five blues "covers" from their recorded catalogue. These musical texts are discussed in regards to their recorded history, the African-American blues artists who performed, recorded and/or are associated with each track, and how the contemporary Australian artist in question has gone about making changes to that text. Each case study then concludes by assessing the significance of canonisation and reinterpretation to the Australian artist and defining what is distinct about their specific approach to blues.

The thesis concludes by reflecting on the findings it has contributed to the field of contemporary blues research. It also confirms the futile nature of attempts to frame local engagements with the blues genre with phrases like "Australian blues". Though such efforts to categorise a sound within a national context promote the existence and development of

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Australian approaches to blues, they ignore the reality that their collective styles are too disparate and varied to be unified under a homogenous national banner.

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[1] These songs were written and performed by Canadian ex-patriot Smilin' Billy Blinkhorn (a.k.a. William James Blinkhorn).

[2] See Hamilton (1999; 2001; 2006; 2007), Dougan (2001; 2003; 2006), Schneider (2001), Howell Evans (2004), and Wald (2004).

[3] Held in both The Domain and Parramatta Park, the theme of these concerts was the influence of blues on jazz. Performers included Jeff Lang, Bob Brozman, The Backsliders, Renée Geyer, Vince Jones and James Morrison.

Methodology

Critical musicology, as defined by an online journal of the same name,[1] is a form of musicology that involves the theoretical critique of previous musicological traditions and applies aspects of Critical Theory as practiced within other humanities disciplines to music. Derek Scott (2003: 4-5) discusses critical musicology not as a confined discipline or autonomous field of academic inquiry, but as an intertextual field that encompasses a broad range of discourses in order to explain music, its contexts, and the way it functions within them:

> *A model ready to engage with, rather than marginalize, issues of class, generation, gender, and ethnicity in music and to address matters such as production reception, and subject position, while questioning notions of genius, canons, universality, aesthetic autonomy, and textual immanence.* (ibid: 5)

Among a list of specific interests, David Beard and Kenneth Gloag (2005: 4-5) add that critical musicology is concerned with a shift to performer- and listener-centred inquiry and finding a synthesised approach between audio analysis and a consideration of social meaning. Drawing on the ideas in these approaches to the academic field of popular music studies, this thesis derives its methodological approaches from a number of disciplines including ethnomusicology, history, sociology, politics, media studies and cultural studies. As a result, its methodology strives to work between established traditions and new approaches.

In its description and analysis of a specific musical culture in Australia from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, this thesis turns to the work of social historian Peter Burke for its definition of culture. Though it can often be a vague term, here it is viewed as "a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied" (Burke, 1978: i). Further to this definition, as argued by Lawrence Levine, this system is understood as a dynamic, living, creative part of group life:

Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change… but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation. The question… is not one of survivals but of transformations. (Levine, 1977: 5)

Correspondingly, this thesis avoids acknowledging limiting phrases like "blues-based" that indicate more purist positions as such terms imply that blues music is a static commodity and not something that is discursive and relational.

The structure of this thesis is not a chronological study of events that made blues music popular in Australia and, therefore, is not presented as a strict chronological narrative in the mould of studies such as Francis Davis' *The History of the Blues* (1995). Although a chronologic narrative is occasionally employed to assist with recounting a historical flow of events, this project is instead a thematic discussion concerned with the development and articulation of an important cultural form. Like Peter Guralnick's approach in *Feel Like Going Home* (1971: 8), this thesis demonstrates a kind of historical progression by combining abbreviated histories and theoretical discussions with case studies—each of which focuses on artists who represent different facets and eras of blues music in Australia. This occurs within a larger framework of analysing and critiquing established practices of canonisation and reinterpretation in blues culture.

In aligning itself with the current school of blues revisionism (Dougan, 2001, 2003; Hamilton, 2001, 2007; Evans, H., 2004; Wald, 2004), this thesis evaluates discourses of earlier music literature while simultaneously drawing on the many recent studies that deliver a fresh, alternative perspective on long-standing issues within blues and other music scholarship. This is demonstrated in the literature survey (chapter one) through discussions about what constitutes as blues music, how understandings of its history have been shaped,

consequences of its global dissemination, and the underlying practices of variation that continue to endure in contemporary representations of the genre.

Although many revisionist studies note the predominance afforded to male performers in blues culture (Ward, 1998: 10-1), none commit to a lengthy analysis of "the bluesman" as an acceptable discursive construct. This study fills that void in chapter two by addressing the dominant perceptions of this stereotype in both writing and visual media, examining how these impressions have been formed and are perpetuated, as well as discussing the mythical nature of these perceptions. Some key issues here are the role that recordings have played in helping put forward an easily accessible and conventional representation of the blues canon as well as how musicians function as creators, keepers and disseminators of that canon. Not only does this canon concern both popular blues artists and songs (a.k.a. "standards"), but it also encompasses particular brands and models of musical equipment, as well as certain "regionalised" guitar playing styles.

In terms of identifying the merit of an artist's inclusion in the canon, this thesis draws on three main bodies of work that recognise the worthiness of such performers—one an analysis of blues reinterpretations (Schneider, 2001: 123-391), one a discography (Russell, et al., 2006), and, the other a non-profit organisation (The Blues Foundation website). Despite their different purposes, they form a consensus that provides suitable reasoning for each inclusion and effectively verifies the historical relevance of specific artists to the blues genre. In a similar fashion, chapter two also utilises a number of sources to identify a body of blues songs that are commonly considered to be "blues standards". In addition to Schneider and The Blues Foundation, this section also draws on two lists: one in a history (Southern, 1971: 509), the other in an encyclopaedia (Herzhaft, 1992: 435-78). Again, despite the differing agenda of each source, collective agreement is reached on a range of blues songs that fit the

profile of a "standard"—that is, a piece (or some portion of one) that has been re-used and re-performed by several other artists over time.

While many revisionist studies in blues scholarship also look at examples of reinterpreting blues songs, the topic itself is rarely discussed as a whole and never in tandem with issues of canonisation. Additionally, discourse on reinterpretive practices within the wider musicological literature reveals a distinct deficiency in the language used to describe the varying approaches to subsequent performances of an "original" musical text. Terms such as "copy", "remake" and "standard" are often employed and accepted as sufficient words to describe these practices, but are very rarely explained or analysed in detail alongside the different modes of reinterpretation. An exception to this statement is Elizabeth Giuffre's (2005) study, which discusses the varied ways in which artists use pre-existing material in order to create new products and identifies "covers" as a type of "versioning". Here "versioning" refers to artistic works which recontextualise existing material by incorporating an assortment of intertextual techniques. In relation to popular music, Giuffre defines "versioning" as a catchall term for the creative practices that serve to evoke a musical past—including "sampling", "remixing" and "covering" (ibid: 8).

Borrowing from the nascent terminology developed in Giuffre (ibid: 6-57), chapter three begins with an explanation of the different types of reinterpretive practices that occur in blues and other contemporary popular musics. In some early cases, variation of a previous recording was encouraged and institutionalised by record companies hopeful of profiting from a proven hit. However, by and large, it was nothing less than a reflex for these early recording industry performers to reinterpret any of their favourite songs as part of their recording session repertoire. Accordingly, this section examines the blues artist's penchant for appropriation and individualisation in order to illustrate that this particular genre is centred on the concept of "fidelity to improvisation" and not "fidelity to the score".[2] This

chapter then examines existing definitions of these reinterpretive practices by way of discussing the concept of "standards"—those musical texts that are frequently reinterpreted in subsequent recordings by various performers. This discussion also highlights the inadequacies in existing descriptions such as "cover" through the use of examples in which certain reinterpretive practices are effectively not taken into account. From here, this chapter reassesses the terminology currently attached to "versioning" practices in popular music and constructs a new glossary of terms that more aptly describes the creative processes applied by musicians to pre-existing material.

Drawing on David Evans' attempt to categorise the reinterpretive practices of African-American blues musicians in composition and improvised performance (1982a: 117-31),[3] this thesis then works at developing a new broad methodology. This methodology is one that is capable of not only dealing with the flexible and erratic nature of reinterpretive practices as those employed in blues music, but it is also suitable for use in discussing reinterpretation across all musical genres. Once formalised, this methodology is to be utilised for musical analyses in subsequent chapters of this thesis. This is immediately demonstrated in the latter part of chapter three through an examination of *The dig Australian Blues Project* (Various, 2005a) as a case study. Billed as a collection of Australian interpretations of the blues canon, this section provides a track-by-track analysis of this recorded compilation (and its associated online bonus tracks) which incorporates the methodology employed by Schneider (2001: 123). Whereas Schneider's study compared blues and rock manifestations of the same song from the Billboard charts, the musical comparison conducted here is specifically between the recording featured on *The dig Australian Blues Project* and the performer's recording that served as its inspiration (elsewhere referred to as the "model").[4] Brief chronological profiles are provided for each track, including the recorded reinterpretations released by the original performer, the songwriter, other musicians

associated with the song, and other previously recorded manifestations.[5] In addition to these features established by Schneider, this analysis discusses each piece's status as a potential "blues standard" and provides a brief assessment addressing the degree of change between the model recording and the Australian reinterpretation under discussion.

Regarding the analyses carried out in this thesis, three qualifying statements must be made. The first is that such musical comparisons do not contain any classical music terminology or notation diagrams (i.e. stave notation). One good reason for this is that such an approach would be contrary to the way most musicians learn and play blues music. Unlike orchestral musicians who almost always perform with sheet music, blues is a genre which developed from people listening to and mimicking the sounds of others—whether in person or via recordings—and then interpolating those ideas with their own idiosyncratic style. This practice still continues today, though sometimes with additional help provided from guitar tablature featured both on the internet and in published magazines. Although sheet music for blues songs does exist, blues musicians do not use such items when performing nor do they utilise the language associated with these resources. Accordingly, this thesis makes use of chord charts and contemporary musicological terminology to describe and analyse blues music as this approach is more appropriate to the way this genre is learnt, understood and experience by both performers and audiences alike.

A second analytical element of this thesis is the numerous resources that have been utilised in the process of identifying previously recorded manifestations of a song (or portions of that song). In addition to drawing on Schneider (2001) and the established blues discographies (Leadbitter and Slaven, 1987; Leadbitter, et al., 1994; Dixon, et al., 1997), this study has used several online-based resources. This includes Arnold Rypens' website *The Originals*,[6] an ongoing project which developed from his book of the same name (Rypens, 1996). Here entries for individual songs provide details of the songwriter, original performer,

original release date, information pertaining to subsequent manifestations (i.e. performer, date, change of title, etc.), along with supplementary information associated with the track's history. Another valuable internet resource is the *Web Concordance of Michael Taft's Pre-war Blues Lyrics*.[7] Due to the highly-mobile nature of certain phrases and rhyming couplets in blues recordings—especially early blues—this online version of Michael Taft's dictionary of blues lyrics (1984) makes new insight possible when tracing the occurrence of certain stanzas (and sometimes groups of stanzas) both prior to and after specific recordings. The final internet databases worth mentioning here, perhaps surprisingly, are the shopping networks of *Amazon.com*[8] and Apple's *iTunes*, where users can access recordings of a particular song title and confirm their status as a reinterpretation of a given blues track via the relative search functions.

The third qualifying statement involves the exclusion of all non-recorded live performances of blues reinterpretations from this analysis. This approach is largely employed for the sake of convenience. Unlike live performance, "a recording is a frozen performance that can always be repeated" (Santino, 1982: 25). Thus the tenacity of this medium not only provides evidence of a given performance; it also functions as a type of audible score that may be repeatedly accessed for learning purposes. Consequently, recorded performances allow for detailed musicological analysis to occur between differing recordings of the same songs. Therefore, this thesis will only be examining and referring to recorded covers. This is limited to recordings that have been broadcast over radio and/or released as singles, album tracks, B-sides, DVD tracks, downloadable internet files and/or bonus material.[9]

Chapter four is concerned with extending the history of blues music to an Australian context. First and foremost, this thesis recognises the need to contextualise its analytical discussion by providing some level of descriptive background regarding the blues performers

from Australia, their music and their surrounding environment (Urban and Evdokimov, 2004: xiv). Providing a brief historical overview of blues music in Australia, this section—like other studies—strives to mention only the key points and figures (Masterson and Gillard, 1998: 12; Wald, 2004: xxvi). Ending in the present decade, this summary begins in the 1960s with the emergence of Australia's first consciously-dedicated blues bands as a reaction to the blues revival occurring across Europe (particularly the United Kingdom) and the United States of America. Due to an almost parallel situation having occurred in Russia, this particular section draws much of its methodology form Michael Urban's and Andrei Evdokimov's *Russia Gets the Blues* (2004).

Further to the framework of chapter four, blues music is viewed here as an African-American cultural idiom that has undergone the cultural transmission process. Cultural transmission is defined here as the flow of new information across both material and symbolic borders, one that results in making some difference to the receiving society and thereby generating cultural change. These changes are enacted through the people who participate in the new cultural idiom by learning about the music and making decisions about what to listen to and/or play. However, whereas Urban and Evdokimov are keen to represent cultural change and the formation of a "foreign-domestic hybrid" with the phrase "Russian blues", this thesis is more cautious about employing "Australian blues" in a similar fashion. There are two main reasons for this stance. One is because the term itself it not widely recognised among those performers whose audiences consistently label them as "Australian blues"; the other, because this proposed sub-genre is overly-ambitious in its attempts to describe such a disparate collection of artistic styles under a single homogenous banner (ibid: viii-x).

Following the brief historical overview, chapter four discusses the allure of this African-American musical culture that was born from a racist, post-slavery environment and

its appeal to white Australian musicians and audiences. This section considers some reasons for the adoption of blues music in disseminated contexts including romanticism, the promise of catharsis, potential parallels with the United States, and disillusionment with other popular musics. Romanticism is of particular significance as it presents an avenue whereby a performer in a disseminated context such as Australia can assert their difference from more mainstream musical cultures. This method of positioning oneself against the surrounding society is simultaneously achieved through identification with another (African-American) past as well as with a non-mainstream musical genre. Although it is tempting to refer to this artistic approach as escapism, to do so would ignore the commonplace practices embodied by the typical blues persona: to endure and overcome one's immediate troubles by playing back one's experiences through song; and to retain hope, despite any basis for optimism (ibid: ix-x, xiv).

Another aspect to this chapter's discussion of Romanticism is contained within the "the tyranny of distance" concept, which argues that Australia's development has been significantly impacted by its distance from other countries (Blainey, 1966: viii-x).[10] The distance of time and place from America's Deep South in the 1920s is one of the most critical factors fuelling interest in the romantic bluesman figure and his music to contemporary Australian audiences. Most of the artists who fit the established criteria of the African-American bluesman archetype have passed away. They leave behind a collection of sounds and images that are inevitably interpreted as a time capsule, transporting present-day audiences to an era and a location far beyond their current environment. Consequently, some contemporary interpreters of the genre seek to reproduce and reinforce elements of the constructed bluesman archetype—by way of mimicry and parody—in order to fulfil preconceived expectations attached to blues music.

The "tyranny of distance", however, is also instrumental in creating the reverse situation. In *Playing Ad Lib*, John Whiteoak refers to the 1960s as "the decade that brought to Melbourne (and elsewhere) an orgiastic, but unsustainable, expansion of musical and social freedoms" (1999: xiii). Indeed, such freedoms were present in the early Australian engagements with blues music at this time, which concurrently drew inspiration from a range of other transplanted musical cultures (e.g. soul, psychedelia, rock-and-roll, etc.). Whiteoak's description of the 1960s serves to validate the chronological scope of this project as the increasing social, political and artistic upheaval that characterised this decade appears to be the catalyst for the arrival of blues music as a new genre in Australia and the emergence of Australia's first consciously dedicated blues artists. Accordingly, this thesis argues that genuine interest in blues music as an individual genre did not adequately develop in Australia until the 1960s.

Whiteoak's description of the Australian history of ragtime (another African-American musical innovation) is also applicable to the history of blues in Australia in that it too is largely concerned with the "importation, consumption, reproduction and synthesis" of music and performance behaviour models from white American and British musicians. However, the significant difference that emerges between Australian ragtime and Australian blues is the complex cultural negotiation between Anglo-Celtic-Australian popular culture and African-American blues culture. This resulted in an overwhelming preoccupation with and genuine recognition of its African-American origins, artists and musical texts. In most cases, these developments took place in isolation "from direct interaction with the mainstream of European, American and African-American creative thought and activity", predominantly via imported sound recordings. This is a very important factor in the process of recontextualising recorded music through reiterations and reinterpretations in disseminated contexts as the "tyranny of distance" regularly encourages performers to "explore,

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experiment, synthesise, improvise" according to their own rules. Although Whiteoak offers some interesting insights on this topic in arguing that this process of recontextualisation contributes to the resultant difference in sound that often occurs between a musical culture in its country of origin and that same musical culture in some globally disseminated form, he wrongly labels it as *de*contextualising and imitative. As argued throughout this thesis, such an approach mistakenly regards music as a static phenomenon and is contradictory to the discursive and relational nature of musical development (ibid: xiii-xiv, 112).

Following chapter four, the remainder of the thesis is dedicated to an examination of how blues music has affected Australian artists since the 1960s via a series of case studies. Chapters five, six and seven each identify a specific Australian performer or group associated with blues music and investigate the ways in which these artists have been influenced by African-American blues artists and engaged with the blues genre and its musical conventions. This is accomplished through a combination of ethnographic research—interviews and biographies—with musicological analyses of recordings. Consequently, each of these case studies begins with a summary of the artists' biography and recorded output. This is then followed by an assessment of their involvement with blues music in Australia, their ideas and opinions about the genre, as well as their feelings toward the term "Australian blues".

Prior to a final summary, each case study chapter also conducts a musicological analysis of five reinterpretations of blues songs selected from the recorded catalogue of the Australian artist in question. In this analysis, each of the five tracks from the Australian artist in question is discussed alongside other previously-recorded manifestations of the same blues song that are relevant to the song's history. In particular, specific attention is paid to those manifestations of the song (and, where possible, those African-American performers) that have been cited as the origin or model by the Australian performer along with any other manifestations that have influenced their reinterpretation. As with *The dig Australian Blues*

Project case study in chapter three, the degree of change between these differing recordings of the same piece is discussed, compared and measured using the methodological tools cultivated in chapter three. Where possible, the selection of tracks included in these analyses has been chosen with the intention of incorporating a variety of influences (different artists, styles, eras, etc.) and approaches to the act of reinterpretation. Similarly, the collection of artists featured in these case studies has been tactically chosen for five main reasons. These cover their prominence among the Australian blues community, their differing approaches to the genre, the different eras they represent, their current and continued musical activity, and their reinterpretations of tracks previously recorded by African-American blues musicians. As a result, the subjects of these case studies are: Chain, an electric blues and rock-and-roll band, who originally came to prominence in the late-1960s and early-1970s; the Backsliders, an acoustic blues band, who built their reputation in the late-1980s and early-1990s; and, Jeff Lang, a slide guitar player who has given impetus to the "blues and roots" music scene of the late-1990s and early-2000s.

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[1] *Critical Musicology: A transdisciplinary online journal* (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/info/critmus/).

[2] Here a "score" may either refer to published sheet music or a recorded audio performance.

[3] This also includes Robert Springer's (2006: 167-8) subsequent attempt to employ this methodology in his own analysis.

[4] The two original compositions from *The dig Australian Blues Project*—'Sweet Little Hoochie' by TZU and 'Wackadoo Blues' by Alison Wedding—do not form part of this analysis. This distinction is employed for two reasons: 1) both compositions are not strictly based on a previously-recorded blues song. Although it must be noted that TZU's recording does feature a sample from a Johnny Shines track, this sample is used sparingly throughout the recording and is thus only a minor element. Meanwhile, the Wedding track is simply a twelve-bar blues dominated by a scat-singing vocal and delivered by a jazz accompaniment; 2) neither composition draws any significant influence from at least one African-American blues artist.

[5] These recordings will be identified in the format: "Recording artist's name (Year first recorded/released)".

[6] *The Originals©: Arnold Rypens' official The Originals Update & Info Site* (http://www.originals.be).

[7] *Web Concordance of Michael Taft's Pre-war Blues Lyrics* (http://www.dylan61.se/taft.htm).

[8] *Amazon.com* (http://www.amazon.com).

[9] This only includes live material when an artist has released or a media avenue has broadcast a recording of a live performance (e.g. concert, radio/television spot, in-store appearance, etc.).

[10] Though originally concerned with the history of Australia's growth, transport and relations with other countries, the "tyranny of distance" phrase in now applied in a much broader and more general sense (Elder, 2005: 242).

PART I:

CANONISATION AND

REINTERPRETIVE PRACTICES

<u>Chapter One: Literature review and definitions of blues music</u>

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature associated with blues music, concepts of the canon, and acts of reinterpretation. Of particular interest here is the emergent school of revisionist researchers within contemporary blues discourse who, in their recent studies, have investigated perceptions of early blues culture (Hamilton, 2001, 2007; Wald 2004), the construction of blues canons (Dougan, 2001, 2003, 2006; Evans, H., 2004), and blues "cover" songs (Schneider, 2001). In reviewing such literature, this thesis aims to establish its working framework of blues music through the discussion of historical debates associated with this genre. It also aims to identify those invested in the creation and maintenance of the blues canon, and to assemble a blues-specific set of established and institutionalised reinterpretive practices.

What is blues music?

As Richard Ripani notes (2004: 3), it is conceptually impossible to reach a consensus when attempting to define musical genres simply because these individual terms can mean many different things to many different people. This is because there is no real method of deciding which genre a given piece of music belongs to; there are only different shades of taste and opinion (Groom, 1971: 109). Charles Keil (1966: 51, 70-1) shares the view that generic definitions of musical genres such as blues are "extremely difficult to formulate with any precision" because there are as many different styles of blues as there are songs and singers. Likewise, from a musician's standpoint, Willie Dixon expresses the belief that, "everybody's blues aren't exactly the same. And everybody don't express it the same way. They express it according to the type of raising and… surroundings".[1] So what is "blues music" anyway?

One thing that is apparent from these descriptions is that blues music is recognised as a highly individualistic form. However, more to the point is that musical taxonomies—such as titles given to musical genres—are primarily developed and used as marketing devices. Though they may also function as useful conventions for differentiating styles and genres from one another, attempts to define the boundaries of musical genres may prove to be confusing or misleading. For many, to perform "a blues" simply means to play a piece that relies solely on the twelve-bar blues form, regardless of whether it is performed by a ragtime orchestra, jazz band, jug band, pop group, rock group or blues artist (Murray, 1976: 87-90; Johnson, B., 2000: xv; Davis, F., 1995: 154; Wald, 2004: 3-4). Interestingly, this notion of blues is simultaneously limiting and loose: here "blues" is seen only as a type of chord progression, yet it can be played by any performer of any genre or style.

This raises another concern regarding genre titles—while they may help identify and promote a particular type of music and its history, they also serve to endorse the notion of genres as static entities. In contrast, music-cultures are by no means isolated entities—they thrive on diversity and hybridity as they respond to artistic, economic and interpretive pressures (Johnson, B., 2000: 183; Titon, 2002: 206-7).[2] The sounds associated with a specific genre, therefore, evolve over time by incorporating ideas and influences from other musics. Accordingly, Paul Oliver (1968: 210-1) argues that although blues performers may make regular use of the twelve-bar blues form, they are by no means limited to that singular approach as they regularly draw upon other influences too. Rather than highlighting the fluidic nature of this process, the music industry generally responds to such change in music by increasing the musical taxonomy available to audiences. Thus blues became rock-and-roll, and then back to the amalgam of blues-rock. Blues also morphed into soul and, later, funk. Meanwhile, rock-and-roll sprouted punk rock which has since spawned emo. While this process of renaming or creating new genre titles accommodates for changes in society

and the perception of specific words (Ripani, 2004: 9), it also stifles the musical possibilities that may occur within any given genre. Nevertheless, the practice of compartmentalising music into prescribed categories is a contentious yet necessary venture.

Though functional generic definitions of musical genres are difficult to formulate, it is essential that this thesis outlines the framework in which it will be working by clearly articulating the traits and tendencies commonly associated with blues music. However, in doing so, this thesis does not intend to construct a list of instructions that will consequently produce an acceptable piece of blues music. This is because song-producing systems, such as that created by Jeff Titon (1977: 137-70), do not account for changes that inevitably occur as the music evolves over time. Additionally, though blues may be identified as a musical genre on its own, it is problematic to regard blues music as a coherent system or culture (Weisethaunet, 2001: 115). Instead this thesis focuses on identifying a shared body of elements and musical characteristics from which blues pieces may be created. This discussion is divided into three areas: the twelve-bar blues, lyrics and tonality.

Twelve-bar blues

As suggested by its title, the twelve-bar blues is a musical form of approximately twelve bars duration with 4/4 and 12/8 the being most common time signatures.[3] Sometimes extra bars or fractions of a bar are added to (or even subtracted from) the end of a line in order to facilitate a given artist's needs for expression, hence its approximate nature. Duration is just one of many areas in which deliberate and controlled variation occurs within blues music—others include lyrics, rhythm (e.g. syncopation), and tonality (e.g. pitch and timbre) (Titon, 1977: 150; Whiteoak, 1999: 210-1). In many cases, these manipulations occur through another key characteristic of blues, improvisation.

While it is not possible to know exactly how the twelve-bar blues developed, writers speculate that the it may either be the result of established formal agreements between musicians accustomed to improvised music, of professional entertainers like W.C. Handy standardising an otherwise flexible form, or of attempts to apply limitations to improvisation (Davis, F., 1995: 154; Weissman, 2005: 23-4). Folklorist John Jacob Niles (as cited in Levine, 1977: 197) even speculates that this reflex to improvise may have developed as a reaction to the notion of servitude to a standardised form as a kind of "mental slavery", one that African-American musicians would have avoided enduring. Whatever the case, for approximately 100 years musicians have used the twelve-bar blues as a musical framework in all manner of genres.

The twelve-bar blues is a strophic[4] form which is characteristically split into three lines. These lines tend to follow a standard chord progression involving the tonic (I), subdominant (IV) and dominant-seventh (V^7) degrees of the key in which a given piece is being played (see Figure 1.1).[5] These chords often incorporate passing notes[6] (such as sevenths) and sometimes certain chords in the progression are removed, added or replaced (Bufe, 1994: 54-6; Kelly, 1999-2004: np; Weissman, 2005: 43).[7] Some examples include the removal of the subdominant from the third line, addition of the dominant in the twelfth bar (see Figure 1.1),[8] or replacement of the tonic with the subdominant in the second bar.

In a sung stanza (or verse), the vocal melody tends to occupy approximately the first half of each line which is then followed by (or overlapped with) either a sung, spoken, or instrumental answer that occupies approximately the second half of these lines. This approach to melody typically divides the stanza into six parts of overlapping vocal calls and instrumental responses, and is thus commonly referred to as the "call-and-response" approach. Here song, speech and music integrate together and complement one another. Meanwhile, instrumental breaks also take the form of a typical twelve-bar stanza but with

Figure 1.1: A standard twelve-bar blues strophe in its simplest form

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)

 I   I   I   I I^7

| /   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / | **[A]**

Woke up this morning…Lord I've got the thesis blues…   I said I…

| ←   CALL   → | ←   RESPONSE   → |←CALL→

(5)   (6)   (7)   (8)

IV   IV   I   I

| /   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / | **[A]**

woke up this morning babe… and had the thesis blues…   Well I was…

←   CALL   → | ←   RESPONSE   → | ← CALL →

(9)   (10)   (11)   (12)

V^7 IV   I   I (V^7)

| /   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / |/   /   /   / | **[B]**

dreaming about graduation… now that I've paid my dues
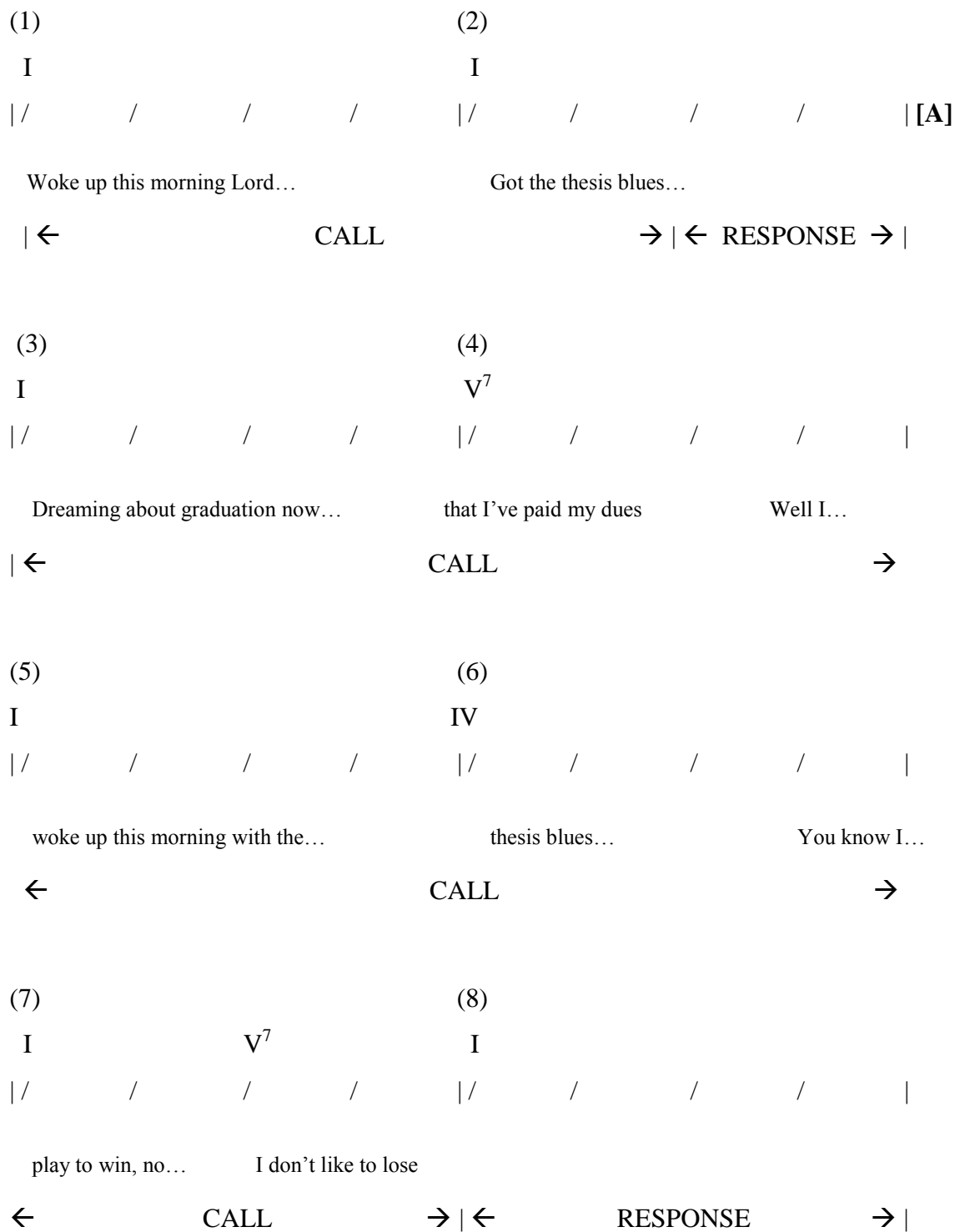
←   CALL   → | ←   RESPONSE   → |

additional complexity in the accompaniment. This can be true for both solo performers and groups. Though not mentioned in blues literature, call-and-response melodies may also be achieved during instrumental breaks both in a group (e.g. different soloists taking turns at playing a passage) or in a solo situation. In the latter instance, a solo guitarist might achieve this effect by varying dynamics such as the timbre (e.g. playing a "call" melody with fretted fingers and its "response" melody—most likely a different one—with a bottleneck slide,[9] the pitch (e.g. two bars low, two bars high), or the density of notes (e.g. two bars low density, two bars high density) (Keil, 1966: 51-2; Titon, 1977: 142-3; Gray, 2000: 39).

The lyrical content of this twelve-bar, three-line strophic structure is usually formatted into an AAB pattern. In one instance, this applies to the rhyming scheme at the end of each line whereby a rhyming couplet[10] is typically produced (see Figure 1.1). This AAB pattern may also apply to the combined sentence structure. Here the first line (**A**) represents an initial statement, the second line (**A**) follows as a repetition of the first line—sometimes with slight variations—and the third line (**B**) resolves the thought that was presented and repeated in the first two lines. The slight variations that occur in the second line usually entail the employment of vocal "tags" which may punctuate the line at its beginning, middle or end.[11] When these tags appear in the caesura (middle), they replace the breath pause that regularly occurs in the middle of each vocal line. Some examples of these phrases include "yeah", "well", "now", "babe", "Lord", and 'I said' (as shown in Figure 1.1). These are interchangeable and often serve to break the monotony of verbal repetition within the first two lines (Barnie, 1978: 47; 1999: 203-4).

Given the approximate nature of the twelve-bar blues, it is evident that blues music has no fixed length and that the term "blues" actually applies to songs with many different forms. Though it is the most common, there are also many variations of the twelve-bar blues form (see Figure 1.2). The duration of the form is commonly manipulated to eight, sixteen,

<u>Figure 1.2: An alternative eight-bar blues variant</u>[12]

(1)   (2)

I   I

| /   /   /   / | /   /   /   /   **| [A]**

  Woke up this morning Lord…   Got the thesis blues…

| ←   CALL   → | ← RESPONSE → |

(3)   (4)

I V^7

| /   /   /   / | /   /   /   / |

  Dreaming about graduation now…   that I've paid my dues   Well I…

| ←   CALL   →

(5)   (6)

I   IV

| /   /   /   / | /   /   /   / |

  woke up this morning with the…   thesis blues…   You know I…

←   CALL   →

(7)   (8)

I V^7 I

| /   /   /   / | /   /   /   / |

  play to win, no…   I don't like to lose

←   CALL   → | ←   RESPONSE   → |

twenty-four or thirty-two bars, as well as irregular numbers of bars—ten, eleven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, twenty and twenty-two. While still acting as call-and-response strophic forms, these variants may comprise differing numbers of lines (usually more) and follow a different ending rhyme scheme.[13] And while the chords may follow a different progression in these variations, the integrity of the "three change" notion prevalent in the twelve-bar form is maintained. The three change notion—that is, use of the first, fourth and fifth degrees—is also maintained in another variation of the twelve-bar blues. Known as the "minor" blues, the key intervals (i.e. I, IV and V) remain the same while the major and dominant chords are replaced by minor chords (Titon, 1977: 142-3; Bufe, 1994: 55).

Blues music will often utilise the three-change, twelve-bar, AAB form or some variation of it. Even with the relative standardisation of this musical form, blues is a highly individual music that invites varied repetition and myriad modifications—especially through improvisation. This individualism is also evidenced in its lyrics.

Lyrics

In blues music, lyrics are sung in English and often incorporate colloquialisms specifically from African-American culture.[14] Even in Russia, where performers and audiences rarely speak or understand the language, lyrics are almost exclusively sung in English. Typically lyrics in blues music are arranged into separate stanzas, where each stanza corresponds with one full cycle of its given chord progression. These stanzas generally consist of different words each time the music is repeated. In many cases, the lyrics are spontaneous as blues music places emphasis on both individual expression and improvisation.[15] This ability to *ad lib* lyrically is significantly aided by a shared body of phrases and images common to blues music, which are frequently recombined with new material as well as other common stock phrases in different contexts. This shared body of

material is commonly referred to as a "storehouse" or "mental reservoir" of traditional lines and verses—traditional in the sense that they denote a balance between individual and collective expression.[16] Prominent examples include "woke up this morning", "I'm going away", "I can't be satisfied", and "ride the blinds" (Ferris, 1978: 61-5; Titon, 1977: 141; Bluestein, 1994: 22; Evans, D., 2001a: 638; Urban and Evdokimov, 2004: x; DeSalvo, 2006: xii-xviii).[17]

There are, therefore, extensive possibilities available to the singer and, as such, a story or theme may either be sustained for the duration of the song[18] or vary from one stanza to the next. Where variation of the story or theme occurs, it is usually the result of improvisation and the employment of blues storehouse lines. Due to the extensive use of storehouse lines in both recorded and non-recorded blues performances, it is difficult locating the origin of a particular phrase, line or stanza (Titon, 1977: 39; Evans, D., 1982a: 152). Another result of this widespread usage is that some phrases may appear to be more fresh and innovative while others such as "got the blues" are labelled clichés. Even so, the employment of common stock phrases can serve to give songs a feel that is simultaneously communal and individual. This aspect of blues music has been discussed by Lawrence Levine (1977: 29, 205), who argues that blues songs are rarely completely formalised, wholly spontaneous or totally new creations. They are instead products of "communal re-creation", a process in which older songs are reinterpreted and recontextualised. In other words, many blues songs are pieced together by combining pre-existing portions of old songs with portions of new musical or lyrical material, making them at once a communal and individual form. Three such consequences of this process are identical or slightly varied stanzas appearing in numerous songs by numerous performers, identical or slightly varied accompaniments accommodating different combinations of lyrics, as well as the same song appearing in different repertoires in varied forms.[19]

Regarding narrative, most blues lyrics are delivered from a first-person viewpoint. This approach is not to be strictly understood as literal autobiographical expressions of the performer as blues lyrics contain an "I" that acts as a character—a persona generated by the singer as a creative device that may represent an exaggerated or dramatised self. Although blues lyrics can be extremely frank and almost exclusively concerned with the self, it is important to understand the individualism inherent in blues lyrics as also being representative of a group or shared experience. As argued by John Szwed (as cited in Levine, 1977: 234-5), while religious music is directed collectively to God, blues music is generally directed individually to the collective, with both musics performing cathartic functions. Experiences told through a blues song are just as likely to have been lived through by someone other than the author or performer as blues lyrics function both as individual expressions and as vehicles for conveying and sharing experiences common to the larger community, often providing relief and release.

Keeping in mind that blues music places an emphasis upon creative individualism and personal differentiation, it is very difficult to attempt to formulate and employ functional definitions of the blues genre. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to apply fixed criteria to a phenomenon that is so diverse. Writers such as David Evans, however, have attempted to impose such limited taxonomies by providing definitions of blues that are distinctly restrictive. Though Evans (2001a: 641) concludes that blues lyrics may often incorporate exaggeration or boasting as well as the use of humour (usually through satire, irony and double entendre), he is also restrictive when he labels blues lyrics as nonsentimental, realistic (not idealistic) and serious (not light or frivolous). Evans' argument implies that blues music represents a secular lived reality where a realistic/idealistic dichotomy ties directly into a 'blues versus religious music' mentality. However, despite the fact that the content of blues lyrics is indeed "highly secular", it is by no means *absolutely* secular.

Though many have approached this aspect of blues lyrics in a manner similar to Evans (Garon, 1975: 148; Bane, 1982: 39; Neal, 1989: 109; Cone, 1999: 231-2; Gruver, 1999: 225), it is important to note that many "blues" artists have partaken in both blues and spirituals/gospel music,[20] blurring the boundary between "God's music" and "the Devil's music". Scholars like Levine (1977: 170, 202) historicise this tradition of blurring,[21] claiming that such an approach was unique to slaves as the boundaries between the religious and the secular was often unclear. 'Blurring' was practiced by a significant number of African-American male performers who were recorded in the US during the 1920s and 1930s, including Barbecue Bob, Georgia Tom, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mississippi John Hurt, Leadbelly, Walter 'Furry' Lewis, Blind Willie McTell and Charley Patton. Such performers, often referred to as songsters, were known for their diverse repertoires that included old dance tunes, work songs, hollers, minstrel and medicine show numbers, ballads, ragtime numbers, coon and bully songs, reels, Cajun tunes, cowboy songs, children's songs, blues, religious songs as well as their own versions of the popular tunes of the day. Historically, therefore, African-American music was not bound by fixed geographic or stylistic boundaries.

In the documentary *The Soul of a Man* (2003), Wim Wenders examines the tension that exists between the sacred and the secular by exploring the music and lives of three of his favourite blues artists: Nehemiah "Skip" James, Blind Willie Johnson and J. B. Lenoir. In an interview, Wenders states that even though a lot of musicians felt they had to leave "the Devil's music" (blues) behind in order to play "God's music" (spirituals/gospel), other musicians travelled easily between the two traditions. Despite these perceived differences, Wenders argues that it is all "the same music".[22] However, though both musics formed out of the same social/musical fabric and share some common characteristics—as either tradition

likely to have influenced the other to some extent—blues and African-American religious musics are generally different enough so as not to be perceived as being "the same music".

Regarding lyrics, blues music is often recognised as being of a highly secular nature and is considered to have an existentialist quality in that it espouses a philosophy whereby individuals make themselves what they are and are responsible only to themselves. In other words, blues lyrics regularly focus on the self in the here and now, with emphasis being placed on self-reliance, self-sufficiency and an independence of spirit. Likewise, meaningful gratification in blues is largely sought through a historical reality as opposed to a religious one. It must therefore be noted that for many African-Americans, spiritual qualities such as evil or the Devil were also real embodied experiences, localised in the immediate and therefore immanent (Levine, 1977: 37). Such spiritual prescience leads writers such as James Cone (1999: 241-9) and Teresa Reed (2003: 60-5) to argue that blues music is therefore not to be aligned with atheism as many examples show performers coming to grips with their beliefs in a tense, ever-changing and uncertain post-Reconstruction environment. In contrast, Paul Garon (1975: 148) sees blues as being uncompromisingly atheistic. He argues that blues music is the glorification of everything religion condemns and the denunciation of everything religion stands for; it holds out for "paradise now" and has no interest in the afterlife.

However, rather than siding with one or the other of these characterisations, the blues genre can best be seen as flexible and evolving. It has also been observed that despite the conflicting worldviews that may have initially existed between the musical traditions of blues and religious musics, both have consistently preached the same advice: "treat people right" (Titon, 1977: 29; Reed, 2003: 114). Furthermore, though blues music may have been perceived as a threat to religion and religious music in the past by providing channels of relief that had been largely the province of religion, blues is neither absolutely sacred nor absolutely secular. A more accurate definition is that blues music blends both sacred and

secular worldviews (and their associated imagery) into one discursive art form (Levine, 1977: 237). So, in returning to Evans' standpoint (2001a: 641), it becomes apparent that lyrics in blues music do not abide by binaries such as "realism versus idealism". Consequently, other dyadic distinctions (i.e. nonsentimental/sentimental, serious/frivolous, etc.) are considered to be equally invalid. This is not to say, however, that blues lyrics are never nonsentimental and serious, just that they are not *always* nonsentimental and serious.

Thematically, just about every aspect of life has been approached and discussed within the blues tradition since it was formed approximately one hundred years ago. Its birth was largely the result of a heavily oppressive attitude towards African-American descendants and their socio-economic plight during post-slavery years. Therefore it is not surprising that within the field of blues lyrics one often encounters a general desire to leave and find better times. Additionally, although some blues songs express satisfaction while others are resolved happily, most lyrics concentrate upon trouble. Titon (1977: 182) explains that when a singer expresses they have "the blues"—just as one can have a disease—this metaphor represents a "complex of emotions" that usually serves as a foundation on which the persona lays their specific difficulties and injustices. Although it would be foolish not to acknowledge the presence of despair and hopelessness in blues music, both Murray (1976: 57-76) and Levine (1977: 256) argue that this definition has been overemphasised and has distorted the image of the genre. While spirituals and blues songs have both been referred to as "sorrow songs", these feelings are rarely pervasive or permanent in either genre as they are frequently surpassed by feelings of affirmation (Levine, 1977: 39).

Often this "complex of emotions" (Titon, 1977: 182) known as "the blues" stems from matters pertaining to a romantic or sexual relationship, whether it is the celebration of a happy alliance, the desire to be treated better, or the regret of a lost lover. Furthermore, depictions of love in blues seldom resemble the ethereal, ideal relationship regularly

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portrayed in other popular songs. Rather love is often represented as a fragile and ambivalent dalliance between imperfect beings (ibid: 276). It should then come as no surprise that most of the double entendres in blues music are of a sexual nature, emphasising the physical as well as emotional aspects of love.[23] Cone accounts for the omnipresence of this theme by connecting it to the post-slavery oppressive environment that originally nurtured blues music:

> *In a world where a people possess little that is their own, human relationships are placed at a high premium. The love between men and women becomes immediate and real. Black people live in that kind of world; and they express the pain of separation and loneliness.* (Cone, 1999: 243)

While general discomfort is expressed in a large proportion of the blues genre, the function of the persona is to transform such complaints into affirmation. Those who sing and play blues music generally feel the need to give expression to their emotions in combination with a desire to rid themselves of "the blues" as a state of mind, addressing their words half to themselves and half to the audience. As part of conveying this process, writers and performers of blues songs frequently demonstrate a clever and creative ability with language, particularly through the use of humour and narrative devices such as metaphors, similes, irony, exaggeration and double entendres. In doing so, the persona is shown to be a rugged individual—one who accepts the necessity for struggle yet rejects being a victim; one who is able to triumph over trouble through the employment of epigrammitcal expressions and produce a song that is symbolic of their success.

Another theme that emerges from blues lyrics is that of protest or social commentary. Though not a particularly prominent theme throughout recordings of blues music from the 1920s to the 1940s,[24] it is possible that the idea of protest (social or racial) may have been expressed and referenced covertly through the overall theme of mistreatment. Here the mistreater may represent either a lover or a boss, with the latter often symbolised as the Devil. This argument is consistent with blues music's historic roots in slave music and work

songs whereby inhumanity was expressed indirectly so that targets of such protest were sure to misunderstand the intended meaning.[25] Over time, along with changes in human rights, these covert forms of protest have given way to more overt forms with blues artists such as J. B. Lenoir choosing to address social, racial and political concerns within their lyrics in a direct manner.[26] Even though most blues lyrics appear to deal primarily with matters pertaining to sexual relationships, the flexibility and evolutionary nature of this tradition has served to accommodate themes of protest and social commentary. So now blues music may be seen as a vehicle for these concerns as much as it is a vehicle for the expression of other personal frustrations (Oliver, 1960: 114-5, 269-70, 1969: 104, Guralnick, 1971: 39; Levine, 1977: 40, 160, 267; Titon, 1977: 266; Charters, 1999: 352-8; Davis, A., 1999: 483-4; Weissman, 2005: 105-6).

Tonality

The tonal character of blues music is another important issue addressed in blues literature. The general consensus is that blues tonality was heavily influenced by the field holler tradition. Performed solo and without any instrumental accompaniment, field hollers were characterized by great melodic, timbral, and rhythmic freedom and a forceful delivery. They were sung largely within the context of the African-American slave working in the cotton fields on plantations in the Deep South.[27] This mode of musical performance was present for some time prior to the formation of the blues genre. It incorporates vocal techniques that now appear in spirituals, gospel and blues music including melisma,[28] falsetto, repetition of words and phrases, the call-and-response pattern, and the interjection of exclamatory phrases and sounds. Blues artists eventually emulated the tonal character of the field hollers, both vocally and instrumentally. These sounds are achievable on Western instruments—the most commonly used being guitar (acoustic and resonator), harmonica and

piano—but only via the use of special techniques or implements[29] to "bend" the notes (Jones, 1963: 69-70; Keil, 1966: 27; Oliver, 1969: 27, 85; Levine, 1977: 223-4; Evans, D., 2001a: 639-42; 2001b: 23).

Much has been written about these bent notes and their modal structures, which are most commonly referred to as "blue notes" and "blues scales" respectively.[30] Though these concepts appear frequently in blues music, the term "blue note" is believed to have originated from scholars' attempts to describe properties of blues music strictly in relation to Western concepts. Thus blue notes are regularly perceived as a microtonal lowering of the pitches that occur at the third, seventh and, to a lesser extent, fifth[31] degrees of a Western major scale. While many theorists perpetuate this terminology that views these notes as "deviations" or "inflections" of standard pitches from the European diatonic scale, other writers argue differently. Phil Virden and Trevor Wishart (1977: 166-9) and Gerhard Kubik (1999: 123) both contend that blue notes have no reality as separate pitch unit concepts and should therefore "be understood as part of a fundamentally different conception of correct intonation", not the result of an African-American inability to accommodate Western diatonic skills. Similarly, while acknowledging the concepts of microtonality, attack and timbre variation as essentials to blues expression, Hans Weisethaunet (2001: 100-1, 111-3) also argues that the blue note concept is fundamentally flawed. In its place, he proposes a concept of "blue harmony", an approach that accounts for the flexible execution of notes, bends, slides and phrases in the texture of blues performance.[32]

Despite the fixed Western tuning system in which an octave is divided into twelve chromatic tones, blues musicians regularly employ techniques that help them to obtain notes in between these divisions. In the case of the guitar, these twelve divisions are encoded by frets, and so-called "blue" tones can be produced from its strings either through bending, shaking (vibrato) or the application of a sliding implement. This concept of blue notes spills

over into the related concept of "blues scales", whereby the standard blues scale discussed in blues literature is either pentatonic or hexatonic, consistently absorbing the third and seventh degree blue notes and occasionally absorbing the flatted fifth (i.e. $1-\flat 3-4-\flat\mathbf{5}-5-\flat 7$).

Though Kubik (1999: 135-44) goes to great lengths to propose the African origins of this standard blues scale and Ernest Borneman (1959: 82) suggests that the concept was initially a conscious construction by African Americans, David Evans (1982a: 24; 2001a: 642) argues more plausibly that there is no single scale for all blues music. Although much of the genre may be pentatonic or hexatonic, many blues pieces appear to make use of "scales" that employ upwards of six notes. Consequently, while Joe Dineen and Mark Bridges (1997: 6) propose a heptatonic scale that absorbs the major third, Gunther Schuller (1968: 45) and Jeff Titon (2002: 182) offer a nine-note and a ten-note scale respectively—the latter only excluding the flatted second and flatted sixth intervals. Blues music, however, is not strictly governed by the concept of scales. Just as the language littered throughout the lyrics of a typical blues piece will play on the meaning of words, the modality employed in this genre of music consistently plays on diatonic harmony. In this sense, blues aims to be non-diatonic music (Finkelstein, 1948: np). As a result, the concept of a single blues scale is unfounded while the term "blues scale" continues to operate as a convenient designation for scales that differ from standardised Western major or minor scales, usually through the inclusion of flatted or blue notes (Evans, D., 2001a: 642).

Another problem with the blues scale concept is that while it may provide a convenient listing of the pitches used in a given piece (or pieces) of music—like all other scales—it gives no indication as to how these pitches are used within the piece (Titon, 1977: 152). On the contrary, Weisethaunet's "blue harmony" concept (2001: 104-12) details how a "bluesy" sound may be achieved and maintained through the application of several different scales or modes on an interchanging basis. He identifies the Dorian scale[33] as being of

particular importance as it coincides with the pentatonic blues scale—otherwise known as pentatonic minor (Denyer, 1982: 113)—at all the key points (see Figure 1.3). It also produces a "bluesy" sound over the first and fourth degree chords—both of which are present in the standard "three change" blues structure. Furthermore, since the texture of "blue harmony" rarely stays in one scale or modality for very long, he concludes that the idea of one all-encompassing blues scale is not feasible as blues performance is more about stylised tonality and less about imposing scales (Weisethaunet, 2001: 104-12).

Finally, in regards to tonality, the literature suggests that blues music is rooted in the concept of a tonal centre (Kubik, 1999: 121; Weisethaunet, 2001: 105, 111). As shown in Figure 1.3, where the tonal centre or fundamental "bourdon"[34] tone is represented by the integers 1 and 8, this is the one note that remains constant throughout the interplay of "blue harmony".

Figure 1.3: Comparing modes with the pentatonic blues scale

If the intervals of the major scale (Ionian mode) are represented by the integers 1-8, then:

Mode	Name								
1	Ionian (major)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Blues (pentatonic)	1		♭3	4	5		♭7	8
2	Dorian	1	2	♭3	4	5	6	♭7	8
3	Phrygian	1	♭2	♭3	4	5	♭6	♭7	8
4	Lydian	1	2	3	♯4	5	6	7	8
5	Mixolydian	1	2	3	4	5	6	♭7	8
6	Aeolian (minor)	1	2	♭3	4	5	♭6	♭7	8
7	Locrian	1	♭2	♭3	4	♭5	♭6	♭7	8

The problem with defining blues music is that while any scholar can create lists of traits and tendencies common a particular genre,[35] such lists may then be interpreted as a set of fixed rules for producing such songs. Inevitably, these lists may prove to be too loose or too tight and will consequently become less relevant as the genre evolves and incorporates new ideas and influences from other musics. Music-cultures are not isolated entities—they respond to artistic, economic and interpretive pressures. Music thrives on diversity and hybridity, not rules (Small, 1987: 13-4; Davis, F., 1995: 5; Johnson, B., 2000: 183; Titon, 2002: 206-7). Subsequently, blues should be thought of as a term of identification for musics that have some degree of association with a twelve-bar harmonic progression, common stock phrases, epigrammatical expressions and blues tonality. Although definitions help to identify and promote a particular type of music and its history, they also serve to endorse the notion of static genres, confining the musical possibilities that may occur. As Bob Groom argues (1971: 109), there are no real determinants of what is or is not blues music; there are only different shades of taste and opinion. Likewise, so long as a piece conforms in terms of content and tone to the expectations of the blues audience, it can and will be recognised as blues music (Jarrett, 1999: 198).

The formation of blues music

Blues music has its origins in the musics of African-American descendents of slaves brought to the United States between 1526 and 1859. Though the importation of slaves from Africa was made illegal after 1808, this practice continued up to the US Civil War (1861-1865) (Oliver, 1969: 9; Kubik, 1999: 47; Tracy, 1999: 1; Weissman, 2005: 6). While it is accepted that most slaves were shipped from West African ports, the US slave population came from a variety of cultures and regions across the north, western and central areas of the African continent. Upon their arrival, slaves were concentrated on the farms and cotton

plantations of the Deep South. Many aspects of their African cultures were soon suppressed. Slaves were pressured to abandon their religions, despite initially being denied access to the local Christian religion. This event itself helps to account for the highly secular and existentialist lyrics in most of the early African-American musical traditions (Levine, 1977: 53; Cone, 1999: 240; Gruver, 1999: 224).

Despite the inhumanity and brutality directed towards them, these African slaves displayed a remarkable capacity for survival under deplorable conditions. Drums and horns were also banned in Mississippi as these instruments could be used for codes and communication purposes—as they had in Africa—and it was feared that they would be employed to incite insurrection (Blesh, 1946: 35; Oliver, 1969: 9-10; Bane, 1982: 26; Garofalo, 2002: 137). Given they had been stripped of their instruments, it is of particular significance that singing was still allowed. Singing presented the slaves with an avenue in which they could express themselves. Moreover, they could do so without the fear of retaliation: if need be, slaves would fill their songs with hidden meanings to mask information from their masters. Another outcome of this suppressive act was the creation of strictly vocal musics that would eventually play a vital role in the formation of blues music: field hollers and work songs (Oliver, 1969: 9-10; Bane, 1982: 26-7; Neal, 1999: 425).[36]

The Civil War (1861-1865) was an important turning point in the history of slavery in the United States. This resulted in the Emancipation, which consequently saw the release of all the African-American slaves in the country. Although this was a positive step, the slaves were released into an environment that was not much better than slavery. While this newfound freedom gave these African Americans the capacity to travel around the country and make sexual choices to an extent that was entirely unfamiliar to older generations,[37] it was counterbalanced by the fact that as ex-slaves they were uneducated (Borneman, 1959: 76; Charters, 1959: 27; Oliver, 1960: 50; Davis, A., 1998: 4; Reed, 2003: 40-1). The African

American was still the worker and the white American landlord was still the boss. However, Jeff Titon (1977: 6) stresses that even though this plantation system practically remained the same up until the Great Depression of 1929, it is important to emphasise how much ex-slaves' attitudes towards that system's hold over their lives changed. One dramatic improvement for the ex-slaves and their descendents in the twentieth century was that black tenant families could move frequently from one farm to the next, looking for better living conditions, and hoping to save money so that they could one day own their land. In the years following Emancipation though, things proved to be difficult for African Americans. In 1876, the Northern occupation troupes who had been positioned in the South to enforce the civil rights of the African Americans were removed from the region by the new Republican President, Rutherford B. Hayes. This spelled disaster all over again for the African-American population as freedoms were curtailed, and numerous cross burnings and lynches—many of which were organised by the Ku Klux Klan—were enacted upon helpless, unarmed and completely disorganised "freedmen" (Charters, 1959: 28; Haralambos, 1975: 50-1; Woods, 1998: 117; Weissman, 2005: 2, 17).

By the end of the nineteenth century, segregation laws had been passed by the Supreme Court in fourteen states and a new system of slavery—presented under the guise of share-cropping peonage—was instituted. Concurrently, African-American vocal traditions were being influenced by instruments and new musical forms started to surface. Some authors (Jones, 1963: 64-5; Oliver, 1969: 15; Kubik, 1999: 28-9; Evans, D., 2001b: 14) suggest this was a result of increasing individualism in American society, disruption of communities after the Civil War, and the fierce struggle for economic security. Among this wave of African-American innovations around the turn of the century were ragtime, reels/reals,[38] jazz, gospel, barbershop-style vocal harmony and blues.[39] Given the context in which the blues genre developed, it is evident that the intensely personal and existential

qualities that characterise blues lyrics are directly linked to the post-slavery environment and the emancipation of the individual personality who had previously been held in check by slavery (Evans, D., 1982a: 41; 2001a: 637; Neal, 1989: 112-3; Wald, 2004: 10, 282).

David Evans (2001a: 637-8) argues that the new music being produced by African Americans during this historical period became more introspective, self-absorbed, serious and worldly. Although white Americans viewed all blacks as an undifferentiated social caste, this new music challenged these stereotypes. And while the term "blues" may have been used to describe a mood or feeling as early as the sixteenth century, it was still not a common expression in the United States until the nineteenth century (Charters, 1959: 34). Consequently, it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that the term "blues" began to be applied to a new type of song emerging from African-American communities in the Deep South. As such, blues music is largely recognised as having formed in the Deep South between 1890 and 1910.[40] This time period coincides with the first generation of African-Americans born outside of slavery. It is believed that this group of individuals played an extremely important part in the composition, development, dissemination, and widespread popularisation of blues. Additionally, blues music was essentially a male phenomenon during this period (Davis, A., 1999: 475; Abbott and Seroff, as cited in Kubik, 1999: 104; Tracy, 1999: 3; Evans, D., 2001a : 637).

Several authors believe the African traditions that have influenced blues music the most stem from the geographical location labelled "the west central Sudanic belt" or "the West African savannah hinterland" (Oliver, as cited in Kubik, 1999: 63-4; Tracy, 1999: 1).[41] This does not mean that the majority of slaves came from this region, instead it implies that musical characteristics from this specific region prevailed in blues music while characteristics that originated from other African traditions withered away (Kubik, 1999: 203). This has consequently led some people to contend that blues music is an African tradition. In Martin

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Scorsese's documentary *Feel Like Going Home* (2003), Malian musician Ali Farke Toure argues that there is no such thing as African Americans—rather there are Africans *in* America. Despite being aware of the fact that the African-American ex-slaves combined ideas from their traditions with those from Western traditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Toure is adamant that the genre known as "blues music" remains an African commodity:[42]

> *The first time I heard John Lee Hooker, I heard his music but I said, "I don't understand this, where did they come up with this culture?" This is something that belongs to us.* (Toure, in Scorsese, 2003)

However, one issue with any African birthplace hypothesis is that it neglects the processes and interplay of reinterpretation, adaptation, modification, and innovation that operate within cultural and ethnographic transplants and contact (Kubik, 1999: 49). In addition, it has also been argued that no counterpart to the blues has been located in any specific African ethnic group or musical genre (Evans, D., 2001a: 639). This line of thought is reinforced by Samuel Charters (1981: 127) who concludes that blues was essentially a new kind of music that developed with the new lives in the American South. Cultural contact and transplants therefore played a vital role in the establishment of blues music.[43]

In contrast to the African birthplace approach, others see blues music as a distinctly American phenomenon (Middleton, 1972: 57; Guinle, as cited in Bane, 1982: 27).[44] In his documentary *Piano Blues* (2003), Clint Eastwood states "I've always felt that jazz and blues were a true American art form. Maybe the only real original American art form that we have". An important argument against this stance is that the majority of the literature recognises that the origin of blues music must be contextualised within the suffering of black people endured at the hands of white racism and hate (Cone, 1999: 240). Likewise, Kubik (1999: 201) concludes that the problem with the "purely American" approach is blues music

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expressed the particular and local concerns of individuals within a certain context and environment. Steven Tracy agrees with such denunciations of the African birthplace and purely American hypotheses and concludes the following:

> *African-American. What we are talking about here begins here. Not just African—blues music did not originate or develop on African soil. Not just American—before the colonial North American slave trade began in 1526, there was no music like the blues on these shores either. African-American.* (Tracy, 1999: 1)

Like Derek Scott's characterisation of jazz, blues music was "a fusion of black and white practices, a cross-fertilization of European and African musics that took place on a third continent, North America" (Scott, 2003: 201). Levine (1977: 135) also takes a syncretic approach, arguing that the historic context of African Americans, their physical location, cultural contexts and contacts, and unique experiences all blended to create a dynamic new culture and hence new cultural expressions.

Therefore, blues music is an African-American tradition that developed under very specific social conditions faced by African descendants in the United States (Borneman, 1959: 75; Murray, 1976: 63-5; Rudinow, 1994: 130-1; Evans, D., 1999: 68; Kubik, 1999: 197; Titon, 2002: 169, 196; Evans, H., 2004: 39, 93; Ripani, 2004: 1-2; Taft, 2006: 1). While the work songs and field hollers provided continuity with the traditions of Africa, blues music essentially from the interaction between African Americans of diverse cultural backgrounds in the United States (Oliver, 1969: 19; Kubik, 1999: 4, 202). In addition, Michael Gray (2000: 35) argues that since Emancipation, the influence of white and black folk musics on each other has been substantial. This musical and cultural clash of Western (European/US American) and non-Western (African) values and musics also played a significant role in the formation of blues music and blues culture (Borneman, 1959: 77; Kubik, 1999: 104; Evans, D., 2001b: 11-2).

Many parallels can be drawn between the musical worlds of blues and African traditions. This is particularly evident in the case of ancient musical traditions from the west central Sudanic belt. Kubik (1999: 63-4, 128) states that, like blues, music originating from this region is also characterised by the predominance of pentatonic tuning patterns, a relatively simple motional structure, the use of subtle off-beat accents, bourdon tones and a melismatic vocal style. He also contends that the variations of African-American vernacular English exercised in blues lyrics have been influenced by this region, arguing that this form of English has incorporated tonal, phonetic and grammatical structural elements from a range of African languages—some of which were used in the west central Sudanic belt. As the African-speaking slaves progressively learned English, they projected these characteristics upon the new language and, in doing so, gradually modified the English language (ibid: 26).[45] In regards to the three-line, AAB-patterned strophic form of the twelve-bar blues, it is generally accepted in the literature that this is not an innovation of Western origin (Jones, 1963: 69). Despite this attitude, Kubik (1999: 42-6) appears to be the only scholar so far who has actually been able to produce an example of a similar form in Africa, minus the use of Western chords. Found in Nigeria in 1960, this example of a three-line, AAB-patterned strophic form is comparable to the structure of the twelve-bar blues on many levels—it features a bipartite division of the vocal statements with a caesura between them, and the vocal statements end at the midpoint of each line.

The west central Sudanic belt also played an important role in relation to the "New World" instruments that African-Americans used prior to, and as part of, the blues tradition. Several interesting parallels can be drawn between the musical instruments previously utilised in west central Sudanic traditions and those that were eventually used in the United States.[46] Once again, Kubik (ibid: 11, 63-4) contends that techniques inherited from the playing of one-stringed fiddles (e.g., *goge*, *goje*, *riti*, etc.) common in the west-central

Sudanic belt would ultimately have been transferred to an instrument such as the violin. Likewise, skills from the long-necked lutes (e.g., *xalam*, *garaya*, etc.) of the same locality would have transferred over to the five-string banjo (Charters, 1981: 59-60; Kubik, 1999: 63-4, 100).[47] While these Western instruments did not come to be so much associated with blues as they did minstrelsy, string band musics and bluegrass,[48] they may have served as a musical outlet until other (more favourable) instruments became available. In particular, the banjo could be perceived of as a stepping-stone to the guitar, which arrived in the rural Deep South towards the end of the nineteenth century (Oliver, 1969: 27; Evans, D., 2001b: 11-2).[49]

The popularity of the guitar among African-American musicians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries greatly influenced blues music and the guitar continues to be the dominant instrument in both the sound and imagery of blues music. As early as the 1890s, guitars were made in factories and could be purchased at a reasonable price from a merchant or a catalogue. The guitar—especially the resonator guitars that first became popular amongst blues musicians in the late 1920s and 1930s—offered greater harmonic versatility and a richer sound than the banjo could produce with its short, staccato notes. For African-American musicians, the guitar was not only an exciting innovation, but it also offered prestige because it was new and carried very little cultural baggage (Oliver, 1959: 88; 1969: 27; 1984b: 33; Evans, D., 2001b: 13, 20). Furthermore, African-American musicians also found innovative approaches to making music with the guitar.

Pocket knives, bottlenecks, and other smooth devices were slid on top of the strings of the guitar to produce whining, vocal-like sounds and obtain degrees of pitch between the common Western semitone divisions of the fingerboard (Oster, 1969a: 20; Titon, 1977: 42).[50] Even W.C. Handy's "blues epiphany"—one of the earliest dateable references to the existence and origins of blues music cited by many authors—makes mention of this practice. Around 1903, Handy came across an African-American male at a railroad station in Tutwiler,

Mississippi, who was playing a guitar using a knife to slide along the strings. He recounts: "The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard" (Handy, 1941: 74).

Blues slide guitar is most often played in the standard upright position with the face of the guitar parallel to the body. Only a few of the early blues performers were known to regularly play slide guitar in the lap style (i.e. flat on their knees) commonly associated with Hawaiian guitarists who used solid steel bars as sliding implements, the most well-known being Oscar "Buddy" Woods (a.k.a. The Lone Wolf), The Black Ace (a.k.a. Babe Kyro/Karo Lemon Turner or B.K. Turner)[51] and James "Kokomo" Arnold (Groom, 1971: 36, 49-50; Davis, F., 1995: 116, 146-7).[52] In reference to Blind Willie Johnson—who played guitar in the standard upright position—Charters (incorrectly) identifies his technique as the "Hawaiian style" that had been introduced into the US by the Hawaiian troupes who toured the country before the First World War (1959: 163-4). Some follow this same line of thought by making the distinction that the Hawaiian guitar style crossed over into blues music (Handy, 1941: 74; Wolfe and Lornell, 1992: 91; Junker, 1998: 389; Evans, H., 2004: 91). Others, however, point to an earlier devised African tradition.

Although the Hawaiian steel guitar tradition developed around 1885 (Junker 1998: 389), David Evans (2001b: 23) argues it did not begin to make a major impact on mainland American popular music until around 1914—approximately eleven years after W.C. Handy came across the anonymous African-American musician playing a knife song in Tutwiler, Mississippi. Wald (2004: 281-2), on the other hand, argues the notion that African-American musicians were conservatives rather than willing innovators is both "patronizing and inaccurate". While the slide guitar style present in blues music may have been influenced by the "Hawaiian style" to some extent during the twentieth century,[53] others believe that blues slide guitar developed as a parallel tradition independent of the "Hawaiian style".

Furthermore, these writers argue that blues slide guitar is based more so on the remembrance and development of musical bows and other one-stringed instruments of African background (Titon, 1977: 40; Palmer, 1981: 46; Barlow, 1989: 31; Kubik, 1999: 16-9; Evans, D., 2001b: 23). Often referred to as the "diddley bo", "bo diddley", "jitterbug", "unitar", or "one-stringed guitar", this soloist's instrument could either be mounted on the wall of a house or on a length of board and would be played with some sort of sliding implement.[54]

Another one-stringed instrument of African background that may have survived in the Deep South is the "earth bow" or "ground-bow". This instrument consisted of a bow being plucked over a hole in the ground, which had a membrane of skin to act as a resonator. In the New World this idea appears to have been manifested in the "washtub bass"—an inverted washtub with a broom-handle and string. Similar models include the "streamline bass",[55] the "one-string bull-fiddle"[56] and the "gutbucket" (Keil, 1966: 69-70, 218; Oliver, 1969: 51-54, 2006: 50; Kubik, 1999: 167-9).[57] While the "washtub bass" or its variations may not have played such an important part in early blues music, it was, however, vital to the instrumentation of the string, jug and washboard groups that often incorporated blues songs into their repertoires (Keil, 1966: 218; Oliver, 1969: 52-5). Being that these groups were primarily dance bands, their repertoires also included country "breakdowns", waltzes and square dances.

Along with the guitar, the harmonica arrived in the Deep South as part of a wave of consumer goods that included other musical instruments such as the piano, the pump organ, horns and drums. The harmonica appealed to many African Americans because it was small, inexpensive, durable, portable and easier to play than instruments such as the violin. It was also a versatile instrument. Harmonica players often used their instruments to mimic the sounds of moving trains, fox chases and baby cries, as well as other instruments like the concertina, clarinet and cornet. It is not surprising then that just as the guitar superseded the

banjo, so too did the harmonica usurp the violin's place in blues music (Jones, 1963: 69; Oliver, 1969: 48; 1984a: 33-4; Hoffman, 1999: 263-4; Evans, D., 2001b: 13).[58]

In addition to being influenced by African musical traditions and instruments, blues music was also shaped by other traditions and instruments at the turn of the twentieth century. At this point in time, blues music was primarily a guitar-based tradition whereas ragtime was heavily associated with the piano. Although the piano was to become more prominent in later representations of blues music, in the 1890s it acted merely as an influence. With alternation between a bass note and chord being a fundamental left-hand technique in ragtime piano, David Evans (2001b: 21-2) cites this practice as the source of the alternating bass patterns that emerged as part of the blues guitar style.[59] He also cites the mandolin (with its strong ties to string band music) as being largely responsible for introducing the tremolo technique to blues guitar (2001b: 21). While this idea was achieved on the mandolin with a plectrum, some guitarists managed to reproduce the same effect via rapid movement of a finger or the thumb.[60]

The different styles of blues music

Given the highly personal and individualistic nature of blues music, Kubik (1999: 125) argues that it is not a unitary or homogenous tradition. Likewise, Oliver (1960: 7) acknowledges that while the arbitrary classification of blues music forces groups of performers into categories that do not adequately represent their respective musical styles, these loose classifications are justified insomuch as they are often useful in identifying different types of artists and songs. Though it is recognised that there are many different styles and derivatives of blues music in existence, there is a common thread that runs through all of them; the employment of a blues rhetoric or "blues feel" (Wald, 2004: 5). Although this rhetoric may be noticeable to varying extents between one style and the next, the

intentional use of a "blues" approach is still evident—whether it is present in the vocal style, guitar techniques, lyrics, tonality or something else.

The literature attempts to come to terms with the obvious variations between divergent strains of blues music through the labelling process. As such, these selective groupings of artists and songs are seen as *sub-styles* of the same overall *style*—blues music. The problem with this approach is that authors have different ideas regarding the boundaries of these selective groupings. Furthermore, rather than perpetuate the vocabulary of preceding theorists, some writers also choose to form their own terminology. As a result, subjectively-defined divergent strains of blues music are repeatedly coupled with disorderly sets of divergent terminology.

The following identifies the three most commonly discussed and easily identifiable strands of the blues tradition in the twentieth century as well as several other forms that have derived influence from this music. Though this thesis acknowledges that there are numerous other blues forms such as blues-rock and north Mississippi hill country blues, these will be discussed elsewhere.

Downhome blues

> *In the south of the United States… three separate regional styles, each with its own manner of voice production, guitar playing and harmonic development, have been defined by scholars; collectively those styles, which probably originated in rural areas, later being picked up by songsters and musicianers, are known as country, or downhome, blues.* (Small, 1987: 205)

This sub-style of blues developed in the Deep South around the turn of the twentieth century and was largely performed by male musicians who sang and accompanied themselves, usually on acoustic guitars. It also included self-accompanied pianists, guitar duos, harmonica and guitar duos, as well as piano and guitar duos. This sub-style was

usually performed in three principal contexts: singing for the satisfaction and enjoyment of themselves, their family, friends, prison inmates, or patrons at a bar; singing in the streets for tips or charity if the singer was blind or disabled, and; singing for social functions such as picnics, barbecues, and dances. Most entertainers of this sub-style were non-professional, sometimes itinerant, musicians and while some had backgrounds in carnivals, minstrel shows and medicine shows, many were farmers or drifting labourers. Additionally, many were not solely players of blues music and often their repertoires incorporated songs from a wide variety of musical traditions in order to keep their audiences happy and to get paid. Social functions featuring performers of blues regularly took place at night-time parties on the weekends in converted barns and warehouses as well as in "juke joints".[61] Possibly related to this—as many singers were accustomed to competing against everyone else's noise without amplification—the vocal timbre of this blues sub-style was often deep, harsh and loud. Furthermore, it was also characterised by a high degree of lyrical and musical improvisation (Keil, 1966: 57-8; Levine, 1977: 194-5, 202; Titon, 1977: xvi-xvii; Wolfe and Lornell, 1992: 14, 88-9; Davis, F., 1995: 250; Tracy, 1999: 4; Evans, D., 2001a: 644-5; Weissman, 2005: 77).

It is generally accepted that this blues sub-style was recorded and commercially released for the first time in 1926 by Blind Lemon Jefferson (Evans, D., 2001a: 644-5). Although it was not the first representation of blues music to be recorded and sold to an audience in the form of a phonograph disc, it is this manifestation of blues that essentially defines the genre musically and iconographically (Dougan, 2001: 15), and is largely recognised as the initial source of the blues rhetoric. Consequently, it is a widely-held belief that any subsequent form of blues musical expression is derivative and influenced by the downhome strain to some extent. Wald (2004: 12-3, 282), however, disputes this approach and argues instead that it was the professional tunesmiths who recorded *classic* blues

numbers that influenced the itinerant musicians who would later record *downhome* blues. Likewise, Hazel Carby (1998: 474) argues that primary source of dissemination for blues music by 1928 was phonograph records and radio.[62] Though this was only two years after male downhome blues performers began recording on a mass scale, it was a significant eight years after female classic blues performers had begun to spread their music via phonograph records and radio.

Most writers use the adjective "country" to describe this particular sub-style of blues music. This can be attributed to Charters' work *The Country Blues* (1959), which was one of the first publications to discuss downhome blues. As a result, it is likely the terminology used here was perpetuated because there was little other terminology to employ. Some writers, however, have managed to coin their own terms for this sub-style. Virden and Wishart (1977: 162), Barlow (1989), Springer (1995), Kubik (1999) and Rothenbuhler (2007: 78) all use the term *rural* instead. Despite the fact that both "country" and "rural" appear to refer to the same general concept in regards to a location, the former is particularly problematic primarily because it is also used to describe a popular, predominantly white American tradition (i.e., country music and/or country and western). Furthermore, both adjectives become troublesome in their explicit reference to a physical place. While this specific manifestation of blues music was originally concocted in a rural environment, it was also regularly performed in towns and cities by people who grew up living in towns and cities. Titon (1977: xv-xvi) acknowledges this predicament and employs the term "downhome" in order to refer to an idea or "spirit"—a physical space evoked by a style of music. Therefore, the word "blues" indicates both a musical style and a particular feeling while the juxtaposed "downhome" locates the feeling as a physical space in the mental landscape of black Americans. Even so, the fact remains that the phrase "country blues" is persistently maintained throughout the majority of blues literature.[63]

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Other adjectives used for this same sub-style of blues music include "folk", "acoustic", "native",[64] "traditional", "original",[65] archaic and pre-classic.[66] "Folk" has typically been used in relation to the late 1950s and 1960s folk revival (Keil, 1966: 220-4; Springer, 1995: 57), however some writers have employed this term in place of the more widely-used "country" blues (Oliver, 1959: 91, 1960: 5; Levine, 1977: 222; Evans, D., 1982a: 2, 2001a: 644-5; Tracy, 1999: 4; Weissman, 2005: 44-81).[67] The folk revival was essentially precipitated by the reactions of prominent British musicians and audiences to what had become a dormant African-American tradition. Peter Narváez (2001: 32) explains that record companies and festival promoters advanced the concept of "folk" blues in order to frame blues music as a kind of folksong with roots in a rural-based tradition, thereby lending it an aura of greater authenticity.[68] During the folk revival,[69] authenticity was also transmitted via the intentional use of acoustic guitars. Narváez (2001: 29-31) calls this "the myth of acousticity", arguing that it is perceived that the "natural" sound of the wooden guitar is superior to the processed amplified sounds of guitars using electronic magnetic pick-ups and amplifiers (ibid: 29).[70] While some have also applied the phrase "acoustic" blues to describe this same sub-style (Pearson, 1992: 226; Goertzen and Larkey, 2000: 675) , this label has since become associated with a Canadian movement that is more concerned with the accurate presentation of acoustic guitar sounds than it is with symbolic ideology (Narváez 2001: 39).

Classic blues

"Classic" blues is a sub-style that developed in the early twentieth century. It was published and performed by professional performers, cabaret singers and vaudeville entertainers. Classic blues involved highly-stylised popular songs and instrumental pieces composed in the style of ragtime but with elements of the blues rhetoric included (e.g., the

twelve-bar blues form) (Tracy, 1999: 4; Evans, D., 2001a: 644; Weissman, 2005: 29-30). W.C. Handy, an African-American bandleader from Memphis, was among the first to formally compose and publish such songs and incorporate the word "blues" in the title with his piece 'Memphis Blues'.[71] Although most writers believe these tunes were, to some extent, influenced by (what I choose to refer to as) the downhome blues idiom, Titon (1977: xvii) argues they were more influenced by genteel white American standards and labels classic blues as "popular music, not folk music"—although these terms are, in themselves, problematic.[72] Similarly, Charters (1959: 34) contends that classic blues is blues in name only and Andre Millard (1995: 101) deems it "commercial jazz". Daphne Harrison (1988: 56), however, considers this a trivial debate as she argues that the most important factor is that the audience for these recordings accepted and endorsed them as blues music.

Eventually this sub-style became predominantly associated with the female African-American singers who popularised it during their vaudeville and musical show performances of the 1910s and 1920s; of particular significance are Mamie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith. These women rarely accompanied themselves with a musical instrument and were usually supported by a pianist or a small group of jazz musicians, all of whom were music hall professionals.[73] The female singers' repertoires included blues hits, adaptations of folk material, as well as their own compositions (Evans, D., 2001a: 644). In contrast to the men of downhome blues, their vocals were regularly marked by a clear voice, precise diction and a mild timbre (Titon, 1977: xvii, 47).

Mamie Smith was the first to record this blues type in 1920 with the song 'Crazy Blues', which is widely believed to be the first representation of a blues sub-style on record. Francis Davis (1995: 29) argues though that this song is "more accurately" a synthesis of elements from both blues music and black vaudeville. After becoming a hit, it was this song that opened up the area of "race records" for a segregated African-American market

(Charters, 1959: 46).[74] With its strong ties to show business, this tradition blossomed throughout the 1920s and then progressively died out during the Depression as many of its performance contexts were shut down (Oliver, 1969: 120; Small, 1987: 206; Evans, D., 2001a: 645). Consequently, many writers have employed the adjective "vaudeville" to describe this blues sub-style as it relates to the context within which this music was commonly performed (Titon, 1977: xv-xviii; Harrison, 1988: 56-7; Barlow, 1989: 95; Springer, 1995: 141; Tracy, 1999: 4; Evans, D., 2001a: 644). Most writers, however, have perpetuated the phrase "classic blues" in reference to this same music, a term apparently coined by Blesh (1946: 109-11, 123-41). It is likely that this designation was originally employed as a result of the perceived sophistication that many attached to this blues sub-style. Just as writers like W.C. Handy (1941: 137-151) believe they had refined African-American folk music by composing polished up versions of downhome blues, so too did vocalists like Mamie Smith feel their singing style was more artistic and sophisticated (Charters, 1959: 46; Titon, 1977: 199). Levine (1977: 225), however, is particularly critical of the "classic" label, deeming it deceptive since it "was hardly blues as millions of Negroes knew it".

Charters (1959: 46) and Oster (1969a: 18) appear to be among the few writers who denounce both "classic" and "vaudeville" as suitable terms, choosing instead to label this particular sub-style as "city" blues.[75] Being Charters makes this distinction in his book *The Country Blues*, it is highly probable that this designation developed directly out of a perceived country/city dichotomy between the two aforementioned sub-styles. While not suggesting any new phrases of his own, Oliver (2006: 60-2) calls for a revision of the name applied to this music. Considering that the range of material recorded by these "classic" artists incorporated material from minstrel and medicine show singing, "folk", vaudeville, popular music and blues, such a demand is long overdue.

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Electric blues

Blues sub-styles that made use of electrified instruments began to surface after the Depression, as many African-Americans migrated from the Deep South to northern cities such as Chicago and Detroit in the late 1930s and 1940s.[76] Electric blues was dominated by male performers who held weekday jobs and characterised by a "shouting" vocal timbre. With its louder volume and new timbres, the electric guitar was integral to these new forms so that performers could be heard within the busy city nightclubs. Similarly, pianos and harmonicas started to be played regularly through a microphone and an amplifier (Oliver, 1969: 6, 154-5; Bane, 1982: 93; Evans, D., 2001a: 647). The electric bass and drums were also vital as blues music adapted to a new environment. Muddy Waters (a.k.a. McKinley Morganfield) and Howlin' Wolf (a.k.a. Chester Burnett) were among those who first pioneered electric blues during the 1940s and early 1950s. Waters was significantly influenced by the downhome blues sub-style as he had previously recorded songs of this type prior to migrating north from Mississippi.

While Blesh (1946) coined the phrase "postclassic" blues to distinguish this third sub-style, his terminology was not perpetuated. Instead several writers call this sub-style "rhythm-and-blues" (Charters, 1959: 236; Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 97). Michael Bane (1982: 92-4) also adopted "rhythm-and-blues", despite a passing reference to "electrified" blues. Many other writers, however, add confusion to the phrase "rhythm-and-blues" by suggesting that it is more effectively utilised as a substitute label for "race records". Here it is intended to refer to black (secular) popular music recorded by, and mostly marketed to, African Americans from the 1940s onwards.[77] Though Oliver (1959: 100) argues that this title encompasses a broad variety of African-American musics, he concludes that for blues music the emphasis shifted to small bands that supported aggressive "blues shouters".

Charles Keil (1966: 220), on the other hand, argues that "rhythm-and-blues" means "any artist who reaches a wide, predominantly Negro audience using a relatively unadorned blues sound". Furthermore, instead of perpetuating Charters' terminology, Keil (ibid: 218) and Richard Middleton (1972: 88-90) refer to the electric blues sub-style as a type of "city" blues—the same phrase Charters (1959: 46) and Oster (1969a: 18) utilise to describe the classic blues style. To make matters even more confusing, Keil coins the term "urban" blues and applies it to a similarly electrified strain of blues music that employed saxophones instead of harmonicas. Although such divisions between blues sub-styles appear obvious to Keil and are outlined in meticulous detail in his appendices (1966: 217-24), other writers have used the phrase "urban" blues to refer to different type of blues music—the same strain Charters, Bane, and Eyerman and Jamison referred to as "rhythm-and-blues" (Southern, 1971: 505; Davis, F., 1995: 8, 14, 160; Springer, 1995: 163; Hoffman, 1999: 268; Kenney, 1999: 133-4; Kubik, 1999: 165, 174; Tracy, 1999: 6).[78] While there were also specific scenes within this strain such as those in Chicago and Detroit, it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to this sub-style as "electric" blues as the use of amplified instruments was the one thing they all had in common.

Soul, rock-and-roll and zydeco

Another type of music addressed by blues literature is that commonly known as "soul" and is regularly described as "a synthesis of jazz, blues, and gospel forms" (Keil, 1966: 32). Often characterised by jazz-style orchestration and melismatic, gospel-influenced vocals, this music emerged during the 1950s and was especially popular in the 1960s. While most writers contend that soul music has developed as a unique style of African-American music, David Evans (2001a: 647) links soul to blues music by utilising the phrase "soul blues". Though Evans' definition of "soul blues" is essentially another phrase used to denote

soul music, his inclusion of B.B. King as a pioneer of this style contradicts Keil (1966: 219) who prefers to classify King as a performer of "urban" blues. Additionally, Jim O'Neal (1993: 369-71) argues that while some observers have made definite distinctions between blues and soul, others have viewed soul as a natural extension of the blues idiom. Rock-and-roll, however, is more widely accepted as a separate musical form and not a blues sub-style, despite the common understanding that it represents a combination of rhythm-and-blues and country elements (Oliver, 1969: 159; Groom, 1971: 22; Davis, F., 1995: 209; Garofalo, 2002: 125; Weissman, 2005: 98).[79] Similarly, though zydeco—a musical style created by the French Creoles of southwest Louisiana—has adopted some characteristics of blues music, it is usually perceived as a separate musical style (Oliver, 1969: 161; Weissman, 2005: 141).

Although Keil's categories may appear thorough, he admits to areas of overlap in his subjective definitions of genres and sub-styles:

> *In fact all these "categories" are imprecise, relative, and connotative. The label "rock and roll" may designate one group or class of singers for one informant, and the next person may restrict or expand the term to include a much different set of performers.* (Keil, 1966: 158-9)

While such distinctions are often easily audible, Titon (1977: xv) contends that they are not always reliable. Interestingly, some artists such as John Lee Hooker can be accounted for in several different genres and/or sub-styles, whereas others such as Blind Willie Johnson and Lonnie Johnson are viewed as having blurred the recognised boundaries beyond the point of being able to fit into any category (Charters, 1959: 155-64; Keil, 1966: 101-2, 143-5, 223; Levine, 1977: 179; Titon, 1977: 51; Weissman, 2005: 74).[80] Though writers such as Gene Bluestein (1994: 2, 89) view blues music as the foundation of almost all popular, commercial and jazz developments, Francis Davis (1995: 57) argues instead that "the blues has a large extended family and bears a strong resemblance to many of its relatives". Therefore, functional generic definitions of musical genres are often difficult to formulate and it is

imperative that the process of defining blues music remains open and flexible. Though this thesis acknowledges the similarities between blues music and genres such as soul, rock-and-roll and zydeco, each of these will be treated as separate genres due to the fact that they are not linguistically designated as blues sub-styles.[81]

The global dissemination of blues music

After the Depression, the popularity of blues music waned. However, during the 1960s, blues music experienced a revival and was disseminated to a wider, whiter audience. Concentrated in the United States and Western Europe (primarily the United Kingdom), the blues revival was a combined enterprise of the folk revival and the British blues-rock boom. Following World War II, many African Americans saw blues music as a reminder of slavery days and consequently lost interest in supporting the genre.[82] About a decade later, large numbers of white Europeans and white Americans started to take an interest in blues music and its history. This included historical research of blues music, recording blues music, the sponsorship of concerts and tours, and participation in the performance of the music itself (Evans, D., 2001a: 648). Many of the older blues artists and styles of the genre were thus revisited during the folk revival as the demand for blues music grew among an expanding global audience. Additionally, though white interpretations of blues had been occurring since the 1920s in the country and hillbilly music of white Americans (Groom, 1971: 98; Wolfe, 1993: 236-40), white interest in blues music did not peak until the 1960s. This was made possible largely by the invention of electronic mass media—the phonograph record, radio, television, audiocassettes (and later compact discs). Many approached their new found interest in blues music with a naivety often failing to acknowledge the very modern and very widespread means of dissemination that had enabled them to purse this interest (Rice, 2000: 227-8).

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The use of the word "folk" in the context of the folk revival was heavily endowed with ideological baggage and connotations of authenticity as the genre's commercial roots were downplayed (Evans, H., 2004: 2-3). With many popular music idioms developing from folk sources, Oliver (1990: 10) explains the common belief that popular genres should retain contact with their folk origins, which, real or presumed, represent the authentic elements of the music. As such, much of the new interest in African-American blues music generated by whites in this revival period could be put down to blues music being marketed as a type of "roots rock" that was able to fulfil the deficiency that was felt to exist in the mainstream music of the 1960s (Keil, 1966: 49; Frith, 2000: 306). Robert Cantwell (1996: 54-5) argues that this "invention of the folk" provided a sense of security in a changing world that allowed the dominant culture to define itself as a minority. However, this mindset neglects to take into account that folk music is often encumbered with popular and commercial aspects, thereby rendering it in a way that is not as "pure" as it is regularly perceived (Tracy, 1999: 128). Even as early as 1926, Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson (1926: 22-3) remarked on the fluidity of the boundaries between what they termed "folk blues" (that which was unmediated or commercialised) and "formalised blues" (that which was composed and/or recorded). Years later, the spread of commercial recordings was largely responsible for the dissemination of blues music to Britain and other countries. The questionable nature of its purity is further illustrated in Michael Bane's deconstruction of the term "folk":

> *Folk music—that is, the music of shared aspirations, beliefs, and desires by one particular group of people—requires isolation in which to germinate and grow. For all intents and purposes, that isolation no longer exists. We are a society shaped by our mass media, and there doesn't seem to be a medium that isn't* mass. (Bane, 1982: 68-9)

Authors such as Richard Dorson (as cited in Bluestein, 1994: 84) classify folk traditions as generic. He claims they are in fact synthesised products, designed to appeal

because of their "authenticity", but are still artificial and tailored for mass edification. Bluestein (1994:77) takes a less polemical approach, arguing instead that folk music is usually the result of the syncretism between traditional materials and popular commercial materials. Despite the problematic nature of the term "folk", it is still applied in varying degrees to blues music. Blues music, however, cannot and should not be classed as folk music. Firstly, one must acknowledge the commercial developments that took place in the twentieth century: the blues pieces arranged, scored and published by W.C. Handy in the 1910s; the first commercial recordings in the 1920s; and, the commercial success of the genre from 1910 to 1937. Blues is a form of popular music and the mass-mediated publications and recordings that have distributed this music should not be revered as folklore (Murray, 1976: 70; Davis, F., 1995: 257; Evans, H., 2004: 3-4). Furthermore, as Howell Evans argues, blues music did not develop in cultural isolation, but rather at a cultural crossroads:

> *To call the blues "folklore" lowers it to the level of the "subject" of an anthropological study. Folklore suggests the activities of a primitive people who carry on their quaint traditions because they have for one reason or another been cut off from the modern world. Bluesmen were modern artists who were very much in the world.* (Evans, H., 2004: 3-4)

African Americans, newly emancipated, developed blues music in a specific historic, physical and ethnographic space. Blues music emerged as a music of contact and exchange when the introduction of new instruments such as the guitar met with innovation and development. It was not an isolated music, but rather developed as a new cultural form in the context of cultural, political and ethnographic exchange.

Voicing his own contempt for the term "folk", in response to folk song curators who insisted that a true folk song had to be of unknown authorship and transmitted orally, "Big" Bill Broonzy (a.k.a. William Lee Conley) once said, "I guess all songs is folk songs. I never heard no horse sing 'em" (Keil, 1966: 36-7; Levine, 1977: 202-3). Broonzy, however, was

among a number of artists who tactically remodelled and adapted their playing styles specifically so that they would fit-in with the pre-conceived notions of folk music as defined by the various organisers of the folk movement (Charters, 1959: 179-80; Keil, 1966: 100-1, 223-4; Jackson, 1993: 80; Wald, 2004: 227-8). This group of artists also included Brownie McGhee, Sonny Terry, Josh White, John Lee Hooker and Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins (see endnote 68). With the increased opportunities that the revival presented such artists—reaching a wider audience, guaranteed work, fame, etc.—many conformed to the stereotyped pre-1960s blues that was expected of them and capitalised accordingly (Titon, 1993: 234; Daley, 2003: 163-6). For this reason Oliver (1969: 162-6) argued that the folk revival was less about the history of blues music and more about the white recognition of it.

Similarly, Steven Tracy (1999: 504) identifies folk movement impresarios as "well-meaning starry-eyed romantics" who were "occasionally misguided, insensitive, and even selfish as they helped usher in an era of unprecedented white appreciation of the blues". At the same time, however, he also admits there were others involved in the folk revival that drew upon blues music for inspiration and celebrated it wholeheartedly. With specific reference to Paul Butterfield and Michael Bloomfield, Michael Bane explains how white American blues musicians were able to simultaneously play blues music and win the acceptance of their African-American peers. In addition to being talented and entertaining, Bane (1982: 183, 194) contends that these white American blues performers wanted to express the universal qualities of the genre minus any ambition to expropriate the music. Rather than use the music purely for their own gain, these white musicians preached respect and admiration for their African-American counterparts; their teachers. Bloomfield even operated a club that allowed him to seek out and promote African-American blues musicians, and pay them to keep playing there (ibid: 189).

In a similar fashion, the 1959 release of Charters' *The Country Blues* intended to spark interest in the fading genre[83] as well as open up "the consciousness of the white American to a fuller comprehension of the possibility for new expression and self-understanding through an involvement with the black culture" (Charters, 1959: xiii). He wanted to alter the way white Americans related with African Americans and thereby help improve racial relations. Guilty of having used a Romantic perspective himself, Charters admitted to just as much in the 1975 edition of the same book:

> *So* The Country Blues *was two things. It was a romanticization of certain aspects of black life in an effort to force the white society to reconsider some of its racial attitudes… What I was doing wasn't academic, and it wasn't scholarly, but it was effective.* (ibid: xi-xii)

Though the revival of blues music had a lot to do with the folk revival, blues music was revived and embraced by several separate-but-related international movements in the 1960s. Mike Daley (2003: 163) proposes that the revival of blues in Western Europe coincided with Britain's "outgrowth of the trad jazz movement"—a style of music that attempted to reproduce Chicago and New Orleans jazz styles of the 1920s. This is where the British blues-rock boom began to take shape. On this topic, Bane (1982: 153-4) suggests that the blues-influenced rock music that developed from that point onwards was neatly split into two schools around 1962—the "light-weight", "good-time", "pop" music spear-headed by the Beatles, and the "pure" blues of the Rolling Stones and John Mayall. This split was symbolised further when artists who aligned themselves with the latter school eventually began referring to themselves as "blues" groups in order to differentiate themselves from "pop" groups as well as to define the music they were playing (ibid: 159).

In regards to the music produced by the Beatles and the like, Oliver (1969: 166) identifies that most of these bands had backgrounds in skiffle music. After labelling it a "British version of American folk music"—much like jug band music—Dick Weissman

(2005: 113) cites Lonnie Donegan's (a.k.a. Tony Donegan) 1956 reinterpretation of Leadbelly's 'Rock Island Line' as the catalyst for the skiffle genre. While Groom (1971: 17) depicts it as a "peculiar hybrid of folk song and beat music", in Mike Figgis' documentary *Red, White & Blues* (2003), skiffle is described as a "do-it-yourself take on folk music" where "would-be folkies were putting a new spin on traditional tunes". Despite some artists' attempts to produce faultless imitations of original recordings, the "do-it-yourself" reinterpretation dictum of skiffle continued on into the blues-influenced genres that transpired in Britain. The idea of reinterpretation as opposed to faultless imitation can also be traced back to the United States in the 1920s. As soon as blues records became available for purchase during this decade, anyone—black or white—who had access to a phonograph and an instrument could listen to the songs and attempt to figure out how they were played. While many admired the complex accompaniments and imitated them to the best of their ability, Titon (1977: 43) states that often performers would learn the words and tune while working out their own accompaniment in their own personal style.[84] Though many writers prefer to view it as a "pure" folk form, the role of recordings in post-1920 representations of blues music is too significant to ignore.

Using Blind Lemon Jefferson's recording of 'Sunshine Special' as an example, Titon raises an interesting point regarding how some early performers of the downhome blues sub-style reinterpreted their own songs. Here he shows how Jefferson also used the same tune and accompaniment in 'Lock Step Blues' and several other titles, concluding that this common practice indicates how singers thought of new songs as new texts which could be reinterpreted by fitting them into old tunes" (Titon, 1977: 111).[85] Conversely, the practices employed by blues artists in many of the genre's revived and disseminated contexts (including within the US) appear to suggest that these musicians thought of *old* songs as *old* texts that could be fitted to *new* tunes and accompaniments. In other words, some early

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downhome blues performers viewed new lyrics as the marker of a new song whereas many revivalists used old lyrics to reference an old song to which they had now furnished with a new tune or accompaniment. Tracy (1999: 383) notes that this is one of many ways in which the resources of blues music have continually inspired artists outside the original African-American movement. However, the literature differs on the issue of whether blues-influenced music produced by non-African-Americans can share the "blues" moniker.

Much of this debate has centred on the question: Can whites play/sing the blues? (Garon, 1975: 49; Bane, 1982: 159; Rudinow, 1994: 127, 134).[86] Implying that they could not, Leadbelly (a.k.a. Huddie Ledbetter) begins a recording of 'Good Morning Blues' by saying: "Never has a white man had the blues, 'cause nothin' to worry about". Garon though, has a different approach:

> *Only the very specific sociological, cultural, economic, psychological, and political forces faced by working class African Americans – forces permeated with racism – produced the blues.* Nothing else did! … *Indeed, while anyone can play or sing the blues…* Only the complex web of racist oppression suffered by blacks at the hands of whites produced the blues, regardless of the many types of suffering with which the blues deals in the manifest content of its songs (emphasis in original). (Garon, as cited in Titon, 1977: 274-5)[87]

Though he concedes that anyone can play or sing blues music, Garon's opinion (1975: 47-8) is that "white blues"—removed as they are from the unique historical contexts that initially produced blues—appear weak, trivial, spineless and without substance. For writers such as Garon who question the authenticity of white artists, white blues performances are a continuation of commercialised racist musical traditions like minstrelsy. Furthermore, the appropriation of blues music by white artists (or, for that matter, any non-African-American artists) is interpreted by some as changing the original meaning and purpose of the genre (Tracy, 1999: 506-7). However, this only raises the question that if the context has since changed, should the meaning and purpose not evolve also?[88] Martin Scorsese, executive

director of the PBS documentary series *The Blues*, believes it should. In response to the question of whether or not he thinks blues is an evolving music, Scorsese replies:

> *I think for young people to understand where the music comes from… because they're interested in it… they take it and they make it their own—they keep it alive, keep it modern. If you don't, it's just sort of cannibalising culture, and it's like disposable; it doesn't mean anything anymore; becomes decadent.* (Scorsese, 2003)

Other writers also acknowledge that art such as blues music is porous, fluid and available to everyone—it does not construct restrictive boundaries (Tracy, 1999: 507; von Schmidt and Rooney, 1999: 536-7). Despite the fact that blues music developed out of specific social and historical circumstances, writers like Paul Oliver (1990: 6) and Bob Vorel (as cited in Titon, 1977: 275) contend that talent is not racially predestined and performers should only be appreciated and evaluated on the basis of musical merit. Music exists at a cultural level. It is communicative and functions as a process of articulation and response. Therefore, music exists not in individuals but between individuals. It is relational and unrestrained, not static and autonomous. Once music is made, it goes out to be interpreted and cannot be taken back. Much like radio waves heading out into space; they do not cease to exist even though they have long since passed.[89]

As was evidenced by many white British blues revivalists in the 1960s, musical technique can be learned and disseminated cross-culturally and cross-generationally (Tracy, 1999: 507). To this, Weisethaunet adds:

> *…rather than seeing white players doing and recording blues as a 'rip-off', I think the fact that blues style and discourse have remained for such a long period is because blues has come to be an effective means of artistic expression of individuality and identity in music performance, a stylisation that cannot simply be put aside as 'nostalgia', 'authenticity' or 'roots' megalomania (although all those elements may be part of the experience).* (Weisethaunet, 2001: 113)

Consequently, the notion that white artists (or, for that matter, any non-African-American artists) are unable to participate in the production of blues music—an African-American innovation—appears to be as racist and exclusionary as the segregation laws that afflicted the Deep South during the genre's formation. However, there is more to the argument, for even though blues has indeed become a music of all races and ethnicities as a consequence of its international dissemination, Peter Narváez's claim (1993: 253) that many people can relate to the African-American experience it expresses is tenuous at best.

Throughout his article on race, ethnicity, expressive authenticity, Joel Rudinow (1994) admirably attempts to impartially examine both the negative and affirmative sides of the debate. Although it is important not to simply dismiss African-American concerns about white cultural imperialism as "racist", one must also acknowledge that the experiences of most contemporary African Americans are every bit as distant from slavery and sharecropping as that of any would-be white blues musician. Instead of basing one's ability to perform blues music solely on racial background—be they white or black—Rudinow (ibid: 133-5) concludes that the best values for identifying a blues performer are the degree of their mastery of the idiom, and an understanding of their indebtedness to sources of inspiration and technique. Inevitably though, the debate concerning authenticity within blues music often divides into two branches: the purists versus the progressives (Tracy, 1999: 507). Although portions of the literature choose to view blues music solely as an African-American form of expression, there are also those who treat it as a culturally mobile and constantly evolving form to which reinterpretation is vital (Standish, 1959: 28; Groom, 1971: 109; Dawe and Bennett, 2001: 2; Dicaire, 2002: 1). Rudinow (1994: 136) agrees and argues that blues music remains alive today because it continues to evolve, music continues to be produced from it, and countless people continue to celebrate such evolutionary developments. For Keil (1966: 60) blues music always has been a "migratory music" and the distribution of blues music via

mass media has opened it to a much wider range of possibilities. Subsequently, during the course of the twentieth century, blues music disseminated around the world and influenced the musics of numerous countries.

Timothy Rice (2000: 227) suggests that if the term "world music" is to be understood as a musical process of fusion and hybridity, then such a process has been going on for centuries in Europe. World music may be characterised by the desire to embrace cross-category and international music fusions. From this definition it can be argued that blues music is a type of world music. Furthermore, considering how "world music" is applied as a marketing category for the Western music business, it is implied that "world music" is primarily disseminated through mass media outlets—the same means through which blues music arrived in Western Europe some time in the mid-twentieth century. In the second-half of the twentieth-century, urbanisation and the dissemination of popular and elite culture via mass media and education seriously threatened traditional patterns of village life and music (ibid: 228). This threat provided the catalyst that inspired many musicians to revive traditional practices by combining them with new musical ideas, thereby beginning the late 1950s and 1960s folk music revival of Western Europe. In turn, these new forms of expression, originally conceived to preserve endangered styles, were distributed through the mass media throughout Western Europe and other parts of the world.

While blues music was clearly embraced by artists and audiences in Britain, the popular musics of numerous other European communities have also created responses to the genre's influence (Groom, 1971: 104-5; Goertzen and Larkey, 2000: 674-5; Dicaire, 2002; Titon, 2002: 196). During the 1960s, blues music was disseminated to most of these countries via reissued recordings of 1920s and 1930s blues artists and coverage of the American Folk Blues Festival tour of Europe, which featured many of the same artists (Groom, 1971: 42-5, 79). Additionally, blues music disseminated to other areas of the globe

and has since attained an international stature. As is demonstrated by numerous publications, the influence of blues music has spread not just to other parts of Europe but also to Russia, Japan, South Africa, parts of Central America, the Caribbean and Australia (Fernandez, 1998: 690; Millington, 1998: 819; O'Brien-Rothe, 1998: 733; Kubik, 1999: 160; Dicaire, 2002: 4, 199-200; Urban and Evdokimov, 2004: viii-x; Weissman, 2005: 142). Today there are numerous concerts, magazines, independent record companies devoted to blues music, blues festivals, blues clubs and blues societies around the world that are continually promoting and publicising blues music. Some blues festivals branch out to include a variety of musical styles and, conversely, many blues performers can be seen regularly at jazz, rock and folk festivals.

In recognition of the genre's lasting impact on music and cultural history both in America and around the world, and in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of W.C. Handy's encounter at Tutwiler, Mississippi, the United States Congress proclaimed 2003 to be "The Year of the Blues".[90] This event was celebrated nationwide through a collection of interrelated blues events, radio and television broadcasts, festivals and education initiatives.[91] In the years that immediately followed, this US celebration of blues music also initiated (at least in part) festivities of a similar nature Australia such as the 2005 Sydney Festival jazz concerts and *The dig Australian Blues Project*. Of particular interest to this thesis is the effect that such events, recordings and discourses have on establishing, maintaining and disseminating canons of blues music. While latter chapters focus more on the role of reinterpretive (or "versioning") practices as a means of ongoing contribution to the blues canon and its surrounding awareness, chapter two discusses the construction of canons specifically in relation to the dominant recording artists, recorded songs, musical equipment and playing styles associated with blues music.

[1] As heard in Charles Burnett's documentary *Warming by the Devil's Fire* (2003), one of the seven documentaries made for the "Martin Scorsese presents The Blues" series.

[2] See Lawrence Levine (1977: 185-6) regarding how gospel music was revitalised and kept alive by incorporating secular influences (i.e. ragtime, blues and jazz) into its stylistic framework.

[3] Though often notated as being in 4/4, many blues tunes utilise the 12/8 time signature, which produces a distinctive "shuffle" sound. Here the eighth notes are played like triplets whereby—on a beat with two eighth notes—the first eighth note is held for twice as long as the second (Bufe, 1994: 55-6).

[4] A strophe is a repeated musical section. Recorded blues songs share strophic form with most forms of Western folk and popular music (Titon, 1977: 141).

[5] Dominant-seventh chords (V^7) are favoured at the fifth degree—as opposed to a major or a major-seventh chord—because of their more "bluesy" sound. This is achieved here through the naturally occurring flattened seventh. Refer to the section on tonality for further discussion.

[6] Edward R. Winn defines passing notes as, "Any note not a member of the chord or chords employed in a given measure" (Winn, 1942: 1012).

[7] It is also worth mentioning that there are instances where this harmony has been merely suggested or alluded to and not actually achieved. This insinuation is usually accomplished through playing a particular note at a particular time in the absence of chords (see Evans, D., 1982a: 54-5).

[8] This variation is one of many "turnarounds". Also commonly used in other forms, turnarounds are cadence formulas that often occur in the final two bars of the twelve-bar blues form (Bufe, 1994: 56; Evans, H., 2004: 11).

[9] This is basically the neck of a glass bottle, cut off and smoothed down so that it can comfortably fit onto the guitarist's finger. A piece of metal tubing, pocket knife, bone or another cylindrical material can serve the same function, though different materials will produce different timbres.

[10] John Barnie alternatively refers to this rhyming couplet as a "mono-rhymed triplet" (Barnie, 1978: 458). Michael Taft considers this characteristic to be the essence of blues music (as cited in Gray, 2000: 373)

[11] Though John Barnie calls them as "tags", other writers refer to them as "filler phrases" (Keil, 1966: 51-2; Titon, 1977: 177), "spoken asides" (Southern, 1971: 336), or exclamatory phrases (Williams, S.A., 1999: 447).

[12] Ralph Denyer (1982: 77) gives a different example of an 8-bar blues: I (bar 1), V (bar 2), I (bar 3), IV (bar 4), I (bar 5), V (bar 6), I (½ bar 7), IV (½ bar 7), I (½ bar 8), V (½ bar 8).

[13] Other blues patterns and rhyming schemes include AA, AB, AAA, ABB, ABC, AAAA, AAAB, ABAB, ABCA, AABC, AAAAB, and ABAAB. Many of these variations are supplied by Howard W. Odum (as cited in Evans, D., 1982a: 35). Titon cites another common variation on the twelve-bar blues structure and its rhyming scheme—that of the quatrain-refrain stanza. Here, the first line of the typical three-line stanza (bars 1-4) is replaced with a quatrain (four lines rhymed ABCB). Lines two and three (bars 5-12) then follow as usual, this time producing a rhyming couplet that forms a refrain (Titon, 2002: 185).

[14] For more on African-American slang, see Robert S. Gold (1964), Joseph E. Holloway and Winifred K. Vass (1993), Clarence Major (1994) and Debra DeSalvo (2006).

[15] Sterling Brown once referred to these key characteristics as "incongruities" and "annoying changes of mood" (as cited in Evans, D., 1988: 40).

[16] Research conducted by Michael Taft (1977, 1983, 1984, 2005, 2006) on blues lyric formulas and concordances demonstrates this creative process in practice.

[17] See Michael Gray (2000: 277-8) for a list of records that use "ride the blinds" prior to Robert Johnson's recording of *Walking Blues*. Also, see Lawrence Levine (1977: 229-30) for more examples of common stock phrases.

[18] John Barnie (1978: 459) identifies such examples as "set-pieces" or memorised song units.

[19] See A. L. Lloyd's "How a Folk Song May Arise" (Usher and Page-Harpa, 1977: 33) for relevant discussion on this creative process.

[20] Spirituals are not to be conflated with gospel music, which according to Lawrence Levine (1977: 174-6) formed and displaced the significance of spirituals to the African-American community during the 1930s. While God has been an immediate and intimate living presence in both, Levine points out that gospel songs were reliant on "pure faith", dominated by depictions of Jesus as a benevolent spirit rather than a warrior, focussed on a future in heaven, and prioritised a relationship with God that was one of total dependence. Other stylistic markers that Levine employs are that gospel music was created, marketed, performed and sold by professionals (as opposed to being "disseminated a folk fashion") and that spirituals were predominantly performed by an entire congregation whereas gospel music was typically performed by only a small portion of a congregation (namely a solo singer backed by a choir) (ibid: 186-7).

[21] Examples of blurring include sacred singers adopting blues instrumentation (e.g. Blind Willie Johnson) as well as blues performers adopting the expressive devices and hymns of sacred singers. Many blues artists—including Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charley Patton, Memphis Minnie and Blind Boy Fuller—adopted

pseudonyms for their sacred recordings, suspecting that religious record buyers would object to sacred material if they knew it was performed by blues singers. However, Teresa Reed (2003: 10, 96, 118-9) suspects that listeners would have been well aware of the singers' identities and, instead, the pseudonyms functioned more as a demonstration of allegiance to the Lord—even if it was only for the duration of the recording. Pseudonyms were also adopted for brevity and designed to endear the artist to the average listener (O'Neal and van Singel, 2002: 24-5).

[22] Wim Wenders makes this statement in an interview from his documentary *The Soul of a Man* (2003), one of the seven documentaries made for the "Martin Scorsese presents The Blues" series.

[23] According to Paul Oliver (1960: 98), because of this, the term "blue" became synonymous with "pornographic". Examples of these double-entendres can be found throughout Guy B. Johnson's article "Double Meaning in the Popular Negro Blues" (1999) and Oliver's chapter on "The Blue Blues" (1968: 164-261).

[24] Jeff Titon (1977: 187) and Lawrence Levine (1977: 267-8) each go into further detail, proposing suggestions as to why this may have occurred.

[25] See Joel Rudinow (1994: 133-4) for additional discussion on covert communication and cryptic language in blues music.

[26] J. B. Lenoir was an active blues artist during the 1960s until his death in 1968. Some examples of Lenoir's songs involving protest and social commentary include *Eisenhower Blues*, *Korea Blues*, *Vietnam Blues*, *Down in Mississippi* and *Alabama*. Francis Davis (1995: 14) also mentions Floyd Jones' *Ain't Times Hard* and John Brim's *Tough Times* as blues songs that included overt protest.

[27] David Evans (2001a: 639) briefly defines this rural area of the United States as "stretching from the interior of Georgia to eastern Texas".

[28] This can be defined as the singing of a single syllable over several notes, often incorporating wavering melodic decoration that involves sliding between notes and serves to heighten the vocal power of that chosen syllable (Evans, D., 1982a: 23).

[29] This is achievable on the guitar via finger bends or the application of a sliding implement. On harmonica, 'bent' notes may be achieved by employing certain inhaling techniques with the mouth. Meanwhile, pianists may try to replicate these sounds with trills on the notes either side of the elusive "blue note". Additionally, Ernest Borneman (1959: 82) argues that the guitar is the ideal instrument for blues because of its ability to achieve vocal sounds, affordability, portability, and because performers could simultaneously sing and play the guitar with ease.

[30] Other names and phrases used to cite this phenomenon include "blue areas", "out-of-tune", "pitch complexes", "tonal areas", and "worrying" (Middleton, 1972: 35-7; Titon, 1977: 297; Evans, D., 1982a: 24; Kubik, 1999: 24).

[31] While often labelled a blue note, this pitch discrepancy, which coincides with the notion of a microtonally lowered fifth, is also referred to as a separate concept—the "flatted fifth" (Kubik, 1999: 121, 146-51).

[32] See Christopher Small (1987: 201-4) for more on harmony and melody in blues music.

[33] The Dorian scale (in relation to the major (or Ionian) scale intervals): $1-2-\flat3-4-5-6-\flat7-8$ (1). In other words, it is the major scale played one octave through starting from the second position.

[34] A "bourdon" refers to any continuous bass or basic tone that forms a keynote and sometimes represents the fundamental (tonic) (Kubik, 1999: 110-1, 128). In some blues songs, particularly those written and/or performed by artists from the north Mississippi hill country, this reference tone acts as a drone and remains the same throughout without any notion of change between different degrees of a scale—this is in contrast to the twelve-bar blues form (Middleton, 1972: 37; Weissman, 2005: 24).

[35] For example, see Harry Oster (1969a: 22-3) and Gerhard Kubik (1999: 85-92).

[36] Field hollers have also been referred to as arhoolies (sometimes spelt arwhoolies), whoops, loud-mouthing, field cries or field blues (Oakley, 1976: 35; Evans, D., 1982a; Springer, 1995: 14). As for work songs, many use the grunt of a man pushing a heavy weight or the blow of a hammer against a stone to provide the metrical precision and rhythmical impetus behind the singer (Jones, 1963: 67). In addition to enabling groups to work in harmony, Lawrence Levine (1977: 213-4) believes that this singing provided relief to workers by underlining the fact that the individual worker's problems were shared and understood as a group, giving them the strength to transcend and escape the difficulties of the present.

[37] Prior to Emancipation, "strong and well-developed" slaves were kept on plantations for the purpose of procreating children who were likely to be effective workers or sellable. They were bred like livestock: if slaves had not made their own unions, their plantation owner told them whom they were to mate with. Love was not a factor in such relationships (Oliver, 1960: 49-50, 95-6).

[38] According to blues artist Henry Townsend (as cited in Barlow, 1989: 326), early blues texts were initially referred to as "reals" or "true songs" because they were seen as real representations of the truth.

[39] In addition to field hollers, work songs and spirituals, Francis Davis (1995: 23-4) stipulates that Anglo-Scottish ballads also influenced blues music around this time.

[40] Rudi Blesh (1946: 5, 108) appears to be one of the few to vary on this, suggesting that it came to being around 1870 instead.

[41] This area is marked as "the region from Mali across northern Ghana and northern Nigeria into northern and central Cameroon" (Kubik, 1999: 69-70).

[42] This is also a persistent theme in Ali Farke Toure's recorded output as he has released albums under the names *African Blues* (Shanachie, 1990) and *The Source* (World Circuit, 1992).

[43] It is worth noting here that records of blues and soul music as well as tours of blues artists to the towns of the west central Sudan have both served to exert *some* influence upon the area since the 1970s. While the extent of this influence can be difficult to ascertain, Kubik believes that Toure's position is a reaction to researchers' suggestions that the "roots" of blues music (and other African-American styles) were in the west central Sudanic belt. Artists from the region then consciously used this ideology as a marketing strategy to further their careers in Western countries—particularly Europe and the United States. Toure has been creating a personal synthesis of blues and local African traditions since hearing John Lee Hooker in the 1960s, and while Kubik testified that no mention of "roots" had been made in one of Toure's 1977 LPs, this attitude soon changed once the ideology became current in Paris and the Western-educated circles of Timbuktu. Kubik added to this that while some of Toure's music has been comparable to blues music, his personal synthesis has not served as a convincing confirmation of pre-twentieth-century historical connections (Kubik, 1999: 187-94). Furthermore, Francis Davis (1995: 33-4) viewed this ideological approach as African performers betraying the influence of blues music, for although the resonance of Hooker's music in Toure's is seen as evidence of Africa's influence on blues music, it is really the other way around.

[44] Even though he acknowledges the roles of both African and European elements, Rudi Blesh (1946: vii, 5-7) feels that jazz is also "a purely American phenomenon". However, he contradicts himself here on two occasions: first, by stating that "it might be more accurate to define it [jazz] as an African art form which, arising in this country, utilized and transformed much European material"; second, by stating that criticism on jazz had to take into account an African perspective, European art influence and the American environment.

[45] See Ernest Borneman (1959: 77-9) for more discussion on tonal languages in Africa. For more on representations of African-American language and exoticising African-American speech, see "A note on black dialect" in Lawrence Levine (1977: xv-xvi).

[46] Western instruments such as the harmonica and guitar did not come into common use until after slavery, with the possession and mastery of such instruments by African Americans occurring much later (Jones, 1963: 69).

[47] In Virginia and the Carolinas the west central Sudanic plucked lutes mutated during the eighteenth century to become early forms of the banjo (Kubik, 1999: 100).

[48] Samuel Charters (1981: 60-1) is quick to point out the irony surrounding how the African-derived banjo eventually came to be associated more with white musicians in the southern United States. "The instrument had been adopted by whites as part of their impersonations of blacks in the minstrel shows, and in the rural areas whites had learned much of the early banjo techniques… from their black neighbors". Due to its use in this context, Gene Bluestein (1994: 157-8) suggests it is likely that many African Americans kept on playing banjo, just not in public.

[49] Gene Bluestein (1994: 124, 158) maintains that many African-American bottle-neck blues musicians developed their finger-picking styles and familiarity with open tunings from having played the banjo in their formative years.

[50] This method of guitar playing frequently made use of open tunings, the most popular being "Spanish" (open G—low to high: D-G-D-G-B-D) and "Sebastopol" (open D—low to high: D-A-D-F#-A-D) (Evans, D. 2001b: 20-1).

[51] See Charters (1967: 83) and Oliver (1965: 52) for pictures of Turner playing in lap style.

[52] Other lap-style blues guitarists include Williams "Casey Bill" Weldon, Sonny Rhodes, Freddie Roulette, Hop Wilson, Leadbelly, Eddie Schaffer, Louis Charles "L.C." Robinson (a.k.a. Good Rockin' Robinson), and Booker T. Washington "Bukka" White. For more information see Brozman, Dopyera et al. (1998: 156-7), Charters (1967: 210), Oliver (1984a: 91), Herzhaft (1992: 325-6) and Wolfe and Lornell (1992: 91).

[53] It is worth noting here that both traditions regularly made use of the same open G tuning (low to high: D-G-D-G-B-D), but each referred to it by a different name. For blues it was "Spanish", for Hawaiian it was "Taro Patch".

[54] William Ferris (1978: 37) adds that this instrument was also known as a "one-strand on the wall". In *Worlds of Music*, Jeff Titon (2002: 187-92) includes several pages worth of instructions on how to make and play a "one-stringed diddly-bow", including directions on how to make your own bottleneck slide.

[55] The name that Will Shade gave to his bass made from a garbage can.

[56] The name that John Wesley Work gave to Tom Carroll's bass-like instrument. Carroll was a member of the Nashville Washboard Band.

[57] Terms like "gutbucket", "lowdown", "dirty" and "down in the alley" were also used as a derogatory or pejorative terms to describe the way in which some African Africans felt that blues music only served as a reminder of "slavery days" (Keil, 1966: 100; Haralambos, 1975: 20).

[58] Lawrence Hoffman (1999: 263-4) also mentions that the harmonica provided a modern and convenient substitute for the quills—an instrument that was made of three bound pieces of cane.

[59] The influential relationship between the piano and the guitar continued well into the twentieth century as the walking bass lines of the piano-based "boogie woogie" genre were consumed by the blues guitar styles of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Roosevelt Graves, Leadbelly, and Robert Johnson (Evans, D., 2001b: 21-2).

[60] Though not included here, David Evans (1982a: 25) mentions that some blues accompaniments also featured reed and brass instruments.

[61] These usually represented small, crudely-constructed buildings that would open up for dances on Friday and Saturday nights. Juke joints provided a setting where members of the community could listen to music, drink, dance, gamble, and make love. This setting was also replicated in private houses, with the meagre furniture pushed back to the walls and a big fire outside (Oliver, 1960: 147, 1984b: 41; Titon, 1977: 9; Evans, D., 2001b: 25). This is where jukeboxes got their name from. Georgia Tom (a.k.a. Thomas Andrew Dorsey) believes that blues music developed its bad reputation through its close association with juke joints and the violence that occurred within them (O'Neal and van Singel, 2002: 3).

[62] Christopher Small (1987: 266-7) adds that the published sheet music of W.C. Handy and his contemporaries functioned in a similar manner.

[63] Eileen Southern (1971: 374) is one of a few writers who use the "downhome blues" label.

[64] See Marshall W. Stearns' accompanying notes to the Library of Congress recording *Negro Blues and Hollers* (AFS L-59).

[65] As quoted from Blind Willie McTell (Barlow, 1989: 95).

[66] These final two adjectives are from Rudi Blesh (1946: 110-1, 114-22).

[67] In his introduction, Paul Oliver (1960: 5) applies the adjectives folk, country, southern and rural interchangeably.

[68] Joel Rudinow (1994: 129) defines authenticity as a "kind of credibility that comes from having the appropriate relationship to an original source". As in the cases of Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins and John Lee Hooker, this process of making blues conform to notions of "folk" sometimes involved convincing the musicians to switch from the electric guitar back to the acoustic guitar (Titon, 1977: 211). Jeff Titon (1993: 231) suggests that this may have occurred because their electric music with small bands "must have sounded too much like rock and roll". See A. L. Lloyd's "How a Folk Song May Arise" (Usher and Page-Harpa, 1977: 33) for relevant discussion on how the blues genre was adopted by the folk movement.

[69] Referring to this era, Jeff Titon (1993: 221) appropriately defines folk songs as "meaningful lyrics set to simple melodies with simple accompaniment on acoustic instruments".

[70] Ernest Borneman (1959: 77) identifies this approach as nonsense: "There is no such thing as purity in folk music".

[71] Prior to 1912, when 'Memphis Blues' was published, Derek Scott (2003: 182) points to evidence of at least two published compositions that exhibit some blues features—James Chapman's "One o' Them Things?" (1904) and A Maggio's "I Got the Blues" (1908).

[72] Francis Davis (1995: 57-8) uses the phrase "titular blues" to describe this perspective, stating that while these songs utilised blues tonality and form, and alluded to blues as a mood or inclination, many saw them as pop songs in comparison to the work of artists such as Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters.

[73] It is important to note that, despite their common roots, after the 1930s, jazz and blues developed separately in terms of performance medium and class association. Teresa Reed (2003: 27) states that while jazz was considered highbrow, primarily instrumental, and crossover, blues was considered lowbrow, primarily vocal and declared black.

[74] Some writers hint at just how segregated the record industry of the 1920s was by stating that record companies offered distinctively different catalogues to those in different locales (North and South) and those of different ethnicities (Jewish, Italians, Irish, Cajuns, white Southerners, rural blacks) (Bluestein, 1994: 106, 162; Davis, F., 1995: 140).

[75] In contrast, Daphne Harrison (1988: 11) used both city blues and vaudeville blues to describe different stylistic branches of women's blues. Meanwhile, Blind Willie McTell (in Barlow, 1989: 95) is said to have referred to this sub-style as "jazz blues".

[76] Other cities include New York, Los Angeles and Gary (Indiana) (Dicaire, 2002: 2).

[77] See Paul Oliver (1959: 100; 1969: 159; 1984a: 11), Harry Oster (1969a: 21), Christopher Small (1987: 372, 385), Nelson George (1989: 26), William Barlow (1989: 334), Andre Millard (1995: 227-8), William Kenney

(1999: 110), Reebee Garofalo (2002: 125), Teresa Reed (2003: 27-8), Richard Ripani (2004: 3-10) and Dick Weissman (2005: 86). Nelson George (1989: 26) makes the interesting point that, "In 1949, when *Billboard* changed the name of its black pop music chart from "race" to "rhythm & blues," it wasn't setting a trend, but responding to a phrase and a feeling the independent labels had already made part of the vocabulary".

[78] Ernest Borneman (1959: 89) is slightly more confusing in using "urban" blues to refer to the female *vaudeville* blues singers. Being that Charters' *The Country Blues* was published in the same year, it is likely that writers had not yet reached a common understanding of the terminology used to differentiate between the different blues styles. Years later, what Charters (2000: 76) had once referred to as "rhythm-and-blues" he now deemed "urban" blues.

[79] Other critics are a bit more cynical of the rock-and-roll tag, dubbing it simply as "a popularized form of rhythm & blues" (as cited in Garofalo, 2002: 126) or a phrase created "to camouflage its black roots" (George, 1989: x). Meanwhile, John Wells (1983: 23) goes into more detail with his definition of rock-and-roll, stating that it "was really a born hybrid of country and western, gospel, Tin Pan Alley and blues music".

[80] Unlike other writers, Dick Weissman (2005: 77) creates the category "Holy blues" specifically for Blind Willie Johnson and the Reverend Gary Davis. Here he defines "Holy blues" as "songs with religious lyrics that are in a blues format". Elsewhere, Francis Davis (1995: 30) refers to Johnson as one of many "guitar evangelists". One might also include Washington Phillips alongside these artists.

[81] Rather than viewing them as separate musical categories, Christopher Small (1987: 5) takes the opposite approach—one he describes as a "persistently anarchistic resistance to classification of both musicians and their music"—whereby he discusses these musical styles as "constantly shifting and interacting facets" of a larger tradition. His main point here is that "underlying all these developments remains the blues, still present, if not as a form then as a nuance, an emotional tinge, an instrumental and vocal colour and an approach to performance" (ibid: 220-1).

[82] See Samuel Charters (1959: 270), Paul Oliver (1959: 103; 1960: xxiv), Tony Standish (1959: 25), Charles Keil (1966: 100), Lawrence Levine (1977: 217), and David Evans (1982a: 86). Similarly, religious, educated, and upwardly-striving and intergrationalist middle-class African-Americans of the early-to-mid-twentieth century wanted to distance themselves from identification with blues music, which carried the negative distinction "nigger music" (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 80-1).

[83] Tony Standish (1959: 24-8) makes a similar attempt in *Just Jazz 3*.

[84] Martin Williams (1980: 43-4) provides one such example that demonstrates how integral recordings have long been to the dissemination of artists, repertoire and musical ideas in the blues idiom.

[85] This is similar to the way in which the twelve-bar blues chord progression has been applied to many songs, except here the infinite modification usually occurs through the lyrics.

[86] Interestingly, Jackie Washington raises the similarly trivial question: Do blacks have to play or sing the blues? – "I know a lot of people figure because I'm black that I have to sing the blues. What do you do when you're born in Canada and you never been near the delta? Only the Delta Theatre" (Usher and Page-Harpa, 1977: 113).

[87] Also printed in Francis Davis (1995: 238-9).

[88] See Carlo Rotella's conversation (2002: 102) with an African-American cab driver who argues to him that artists like Aerosmith, Steve Miller and Foghat are also part of the blues genre.

[89] See Figure 1-5 (Elements of a musical performance) in Jeff Titon and Mark Slobin (2002: 16).

[90] See http://www.yearoftheblues.org/officialProclamation.asp for a copy of the official proclamation.

[91] These celebrations include the *Lightning in a Bottle* concert (2005), the thirteen-part Public Radio International series *The Blues: The Radio Series* (2003), and the seven-part PBS documentary series *Martin Scorsese presents the Blues* (2003).

Chapter Two: Constructing blues canons

Looking back on the past century of recorded audio music, it is important to analyse just how audiences have come to receive this music in the forms it is received. Physically, these forms have included piano rolls, phonograph records, audio cassettes, video cassettes, compact discs, mini discs, digital video displays, computer files and mobile phone ring tones. This chapter questions and analyses the process that transforms these compositions from mere ideas in songwriters' heads into commodities and consumer possessions. Some key points to this discussion include the examination of the parties involved in the process and, most importantly, how the presentation and reception of the music is affected by this process.

Before a recorded composition gets into the possession of a consumer, there are often several levels of invested players—or "gatekeepers"—whose job it is to pass judgements on and make decisions regarding its presentation and commercial viability. I use the term "often" here to denote exceptions that the internet has provided. By removing most—if not all—of the middlemen, websites now allow an artist to sell (or provide free of charge) pieces of recorded music direct to the consumer. Otherwise, a chain of gatekeepers will typically begin with talent scouts, media and record company executives, producers, artist managers, promotional bodies,[1] and critics. Following this collection of music industry representatives, the next step sees the product or recorded artefact reach consumers (i.e. fans, appreciation societies, record collectors and discographers), scholars (i.e. folklorists, historians and musicologists) and musicians. When combined, this group of mediating influences serves to dictate, construct, define and constitute individual musical genres and their subsequent canons. This occurs through the organisation and justification of a limited set of selections from the numerous selections available, with the resulting canon representing the "essence" of the tradition and serving as a standard to measure future performances against (Dougan, 2006: 44-5).

Though the term "canon" has been widely applied throughout religious discourse, it is a relatively flexible expression used to convey a high level of aesthetic value that represents the enduring qualities of a given subject. In Western popular music, it refers to a selection of sources "most worthy of preservation and propagation" and can denote "a body of musical works and composers accredited with a high level of value and greatness" (Beard and Gloag, 2005: 32-3).[2] Parallels can be drawn here with museums in that canons portray a carefully selected past. Thus the blues canon packages a particular representation of the music and its culture—for the most part, as a static object of some bygone era—and subsequently serves as a vehicle for its own timelessness (Morgan, 1992: 203; King, 2006: 237-9). Consequently, audiences have become dependent on canons for articulating the essence of a given musical genre. The canonisation process, however, is not as straightforward and celebratory as it originally appears, for canons have an additional effect of rejecting many performers while simultaneously exalting a privileged few (Cohn and Dempster, 1992: 156).

While canons offer a very definitive and authoritative representation of a concept, they are also a "frequently contested form of discourse" in which competing groups constantly battle to construct and present a particular understanding of the past (Zelizer, as cited in King, 2006: 240). Though many agents act in the interests of maintaining the canon, there are also those who seek to challenge the status quo. As Philip Bohlman (1992: 200) suggests, not all invested parties are concerned with the same canon, nor do they approach the canonisation process in the same manner. In some respects, it is possible to envisage a number of canons operating simultaneously. However, it is typical that one of these clearly dominates over the others. For instance, such alternative blues canons to the central one discussed in this thesis are offered by John Dougan (2003: 2-5) and Dan Auerbach (2006: 24-5).

As to who qualifies as agents of canonisation, Joseph Kerman (1983: 122) argues that

historians and critics are the parties best placed to establish or clarify canons of old music. Though it is true that historians and critics play a significant role in the establishment, preservation and circulation of musical canons, the role of several other parties in this process—especially the performers—should not be discounted. While Dougan's (2001: 6) analysis of the blues canon emphases the role of critics, scholars and record collectors, his approach is in contrast to Kerman as Dougan also acknowledges the role of music industry representatives, consumers, independent entrepreneurs and musicians, as all of these parties are devoted to the promotion and perpetuation of blues music. Likewise, Bohlman (1992: 205-6) mentions musicologists, historians, institutions (universities and conservatories, record companies, music publishers), musicians, business people, and journal/dictionary/encyclopedia editors. While Kerman is admittedly more concerned about the history and ontology of canons, this thesis is more concerned about the philosophy and politics of canon-formation—how are canons constructed, what essential qualities deem someone or something canon worthy, why do canons materialise, and on whose authority?

Like all canons, the blues canon is a strategy for exclusion. Separating "pure" or "real" blues from other varieties, it is a closed and authoritative assembly of "classic" artists, songs, styles and equipment that collectively define what is and is not blues. In achieving this, the blues canon also marginalizes, downplays and discriminates against the many other, lesser-known performers, songs, styles and equipment that have contributed to the formation of the genre. In this regard, canons act as sources of cultural power that ascribe law and order to music. Here their composite inclusions assume a sense of authority and are seen to exemplify certain qualities and values apparently absent in non-canonical subjects (Bohlman, 1992: 201; Tomlinson, 1992: 76; Beard and Gloag, 2005: 33).

Awareness of the canonisation process in popular music has become such an important matter that the *Popular Music* journal recently dedicated an entire issue (v25n1,

2006) to this very topic. In recent years, canonisation in the blues genre has become a much-debated topic among a small group of writers including Paul Oliver (2001; 2006), Mike Daley (1999; 2003), John Dougan (2001; 2003; 2006), Howell Evans (2004), Elijah Wald (2004) and Marybeth Hamilton (2001; 2007). These conference papers, articles, books and theses have all contributed to a revisionist discourse that has been consistently critical of the canonisation process and how it has shaped the "history" of blues music.

As Joseph Kerman (1983: 107, 120) and Philip Bohlman (1992: 200) acknowledge, it is difficult to discuss the notion of the canon without also talking about history, as the two are closely bound. In the previous chapter of this thesis, I attempted to answer the question "what is blues music?" through a survey of the literature. Howell Evans (2004: 4) identifies this reflex to define as a widely established practice when it comes to almost any discourse on blues history, albeit one that is not without its drawbacks:

> *Among the false impressions created by an attempt to cobble together a working definition is the idea that "the blues" are attached to a certain performer or group of performances, recorded or lost, real or imagined. To think of the blues as having a literal or denotative meaning separate from its connotative meaning, or trying to delimit the parameters of performance that can be considered authentic blues may be an exercise in futility. Yet in order to talk about… the blues, it is necessary to refer to something outside of the world of signifiers… And to do that may be possible, if not definitive in the usual sense. In fact it would be possible to compile a list of recordings (the most direct means we have of accessing early blues performances) that most scholars and enthusiasts would agree are seminal works of blues performance.* (ibid: 6)

Any attempt to define the parameters of a musical tradition by a selection of its representative artists will inevitably elevate the status of those artists in comparison to other, less celebrated artists residing within the same tradition—often, the resultant canonisation will exclude the latter artists altogether.[3] Evans, himself, is guilty of this in his "partial and completely provisional list of the most commonly accepted blues singers from the Pre-War Era" (ibid), all of whom are African Americans that performed extensively between 1910 and 1937, and

were promoted on commercial recordings.

While this thesis makes no attempts to re-historicize blues artists, the end of this chapter includes a similar list of artists who appear to form the foundation of the blues canon—not as an act of definition, but as an act of critique. From this list of performers, those African-American blues artists who have had the greatest impact on a select group of Australian performers of blues music—namely the three case studies in this thesis (Chain, the Backsliders and Jeff Lang)—are discussed in further detail. In addition to establishing influence, one of the main aims of this critique is to identify a common thread that runs through this group of canonised performers; one that might explain the attraction towards this particular collection of artists among Australian musicians. Further to listing a select group of African-American blues artists, this chapter will examine and discuss both the act of constituting of the blues genre and the canonisation of a limited collection of songs, playing styles and musical equipment often associated with these core artists. The opening analysis of this chapter sets up the discussion on canon formation by assessing the audience's reliance on recordings for definitional clarity. This is followed by an examination of the common perceptions and stereotypes of blues musicians that have come to be embodied within the discursive construct of the "bluesman".

Negotiating blues via recordings

The reason why most listeners do not immediately recognise the names Henry Sloan, James McCoy, Henry Stuckey and Ike Zinermon[4] and associate them with blues music is because they were never recorded. However, despite this lack of memorialisation, these four artists were significant influences on four of the most celebrated African-American blues recording artists of all time: Charley Patton, Son House, Skip James and Robert Johnson respectively. It is also worth noting that while each of these four recorded artists were also

live performers, among the contemporary audience they are best known for—and, in most cases, only known for—their recordings. This illustrates the extent to which contemporary understandings of early blues music are conditioned by available recordings and, subsequently, the incredible significance placed upon early twentieth-century phonograph discs (Oliver, 1969: 6; Cowley and Oliver, 1996: 12).

Historically, recorded performers represented only a small percentage of the musicians who were active at any time in a particular music—so for every Charley Patton who was recorded, there are numerous Henry Sloans playing blues music at local bars, dances, parties, and street corners (Wald, 2004: 261). However, due to the proliferation of recordings and access to those recordings allowed by advancements in technology, this is not so much the case today. Regardless of which era a recorded performer belongs to though, it is important to acknowledge how the mere act of being a recorded performer does not necessarily grant that person or group the prestige of also being among "the most active, innovative or even representative performers" (Small, 1987: 380). Such mantles are just as likely to be held by any of the countless performers who are not recorded and/or not promoted. Although an unrecorded performer may not gain the same level of fame afforded to those who are recorded, this kind of diminished exposure is not necessarily due to diminished talent on the performer's behalf. As Paul Oliver notes (1960: 8, 26, 1969: 96-7, 1984a: 51-5), there were many factors that contributed to a performer's appearance on record in the first half of the twentieth century. These included geographical vicinity when recording engineers arrived, attendance on the recording date(s), a performer's level of interest in being recorded, conflicts with touring engagements, protectiveness of one's material, appeal among the session supervisors, and reluctance to perform for a recording machine.

Despite blues having its *origins* in an oral folk music tradition, the reality is that the

majority of people (if not all) who ever experienced it in this manner are now deceased. But blues lives on—not as an oral folk music tradition, but as a mass-distributed, mass-mediated multicultural form. Mass communication through recordings—and, subsequently, through radio, cinema, television and the internet—has extended the transmission range of blues music and disseminated its culture across the globe (Oliver, 1968: 9). While one may lay undue emphasis on the recorded performers, recordings have long been the primary medium and means of dissemination for representations of blues performance, albeit a kind of "secondary representation" (Evans, H., 2004: 2).

Blues records only began to emerge in 1920 as a result of the competition between record companies to keep up-to-date with the latest tastes in popular music, leading the smaller independent labels to promote newly recorded musics such as jazz and blues. Though the larger companies were more concerned with securing exclusive contracts with well-known vaudeville and classical performers, Millard (1995: 74) contends that the survival of the independents was staked on "recording of new types of music and exploiting new audiences for recorded sound". However, the newfound popularity of blues records also meant that other musics of that era were excluded and marginalised. As Dougan (2001: 29, 41-2) argues, beyond the two main genres of vernacular music in the 1920s—African-American blues and white American hillbilly—other documented idioms such as African-American fiddle and banjo music were ignored into extinction by the record companies because of their antithesis to prevailing stereotypes.

Early blues recordings from the 1920s and 1930s are now "generations removed from a time when musical entertainment was predominantly live and when playing instruments in the home and in community gathering places was common" (Rothenbuhler, 2007: 70). Consequently, the act of recording this music has resulted in a forced marriage of sorts whereby the limitations of recording mediums—beginning with the phonograph—have

altered the music's structure and sound. Hence, what was originally an expressive and improvisational form unconstrained by the technical considerations of recording studios was then imposed with a three-to-four-minute time limit (Small, 1987: 380; Millard, 1995: 101-2; Evans, H., 2004: 42). This technical parameter demanded that, in order to be recorded, most blues songs would have to be edited. As a result, many songs had their length cut short, tempo adjusted, repeats deleted and/or sections excised altogether (Reynolds, 1980: 29). While these effects undoubtedly contributed to changes in blues music historically, it must be remembered that recordings are objects to be bought, sold, collected, imitated and enjoyed (ibid: 33). Recordings made blues accessible to audiences first locally, then nationally and internationally. Initially, this allowed many early African-American performers in areas with little to no interaction with blues to learn the form by listening to 78rpm shellac records.[5] Later, the same process would occur across the world, with records providing the means to convey an American music that could not be heard live (Millard, 1995: 249-52; Dougan, 2006: 59).

In addition to playing an important role in the dissemination and survival of blues music, recordings have also proved to be the means to shape music via their wide diffusion and the impact canonised performers have exerted on other musicians as an extension of this learning process. Furthermore, the very nature of recordings as items that can be collected and organised have allowed for the cultivation of an aesthetic and the construction of a blues canon, particularly among collectors, critics and scholars. Thus, beginning in the 1920s with the 78rpm shellac blues record, and moving through the twentieth century on to audio cassettes, video cassettes, compact discs, digital video displays, computer files and mobile phone ring tones, blues music—for better or for worse—is a construct and product of the music industry. Just as recordings themselves are constructed artefacts of musical performances, so too is blues a constructed genre of a selection of recordings, and its

resultant canon a constructed essence of that genre (Bohlman, 1992: 202; Millard, 1995: 102, 251-2; Dougan, 2001: 292, 2006: 59; Rothenbuhler, 2007: 70).

While many invested parties take the stance of defining blues music as the work of an exclusive canonised minority, there are many reasons why canons should be challenged and critiqued—one being that the recording process could be more neutral than it has become (Reynolds, 1980: 34). Accordingly, this chapter scrutinises the interests of those who play a significant role in constructing, maintaining and spreading the canon. Being that recordings are now the main means by which items of popular music are spread, it is important that the influence of music industry representatives be analysed in depth. As David Evans (1982a: 5-6) explains, only certain items of music—not necessarily those that would be most appreciated by the potential audience—are accepted into the mass media by the record companies that manufacture and distribute recordings. Though these canonising agents are still heavily reliant on the musical taste and opinion of its audience for financial profit, record companies still wield significant power in shaping and controlling that musical taste and opinion.

In many respects, audiences routinely take canons at face value and accept the validity of these institutions that are determined by others without question. This places a great deal of trust in the judgements and expertise of people who may not necessarily be qualified to execute such decisions—that is, assuming that any one individual can be suitably qualified. Indeed, many canonising agents, for whatever reason, may just be repeating and blindly perpetuating the omnipresent selections and preferences of others before them and not actually assessing for themselves the body of material available for inclusion (Bohlman, 1992: 204-5). Furthermore, the significance of such pre-determined inclusions may have been misrepresented, Romanticised or bestowed with more credit than was due. Meanwhile, other material may have been subject to various prejudices and subsequently excluded from

the canon. In such cases, these exclusions may have been mistakenly or intentionally overlooked, misunderstood, unfairly critiqued or unappreciated.

Even with recordings providing the necessary means with which to canonise these artists (Kerman, 1983: 118-9), it is important to acknowledge that not all recorded artists reside in the canon. There is a long list of recorded blues performers, some of whom, like Big Bad Smitty (a.k.a. John H. Smith)—an African-American performer from Mississippi— are relatively unknown to majority of blues music listeners. This is because the recorded object can only provide any given artist with a platform from which they can promote themselves to the public via mass media; the rest is dependent on the cultural gatekeepers and the public's reception of that artist. Thus, just as unrecorded (and, therefore, unknown) performers such as Sloan, McCoy, Stuckey and Zinermon continue to remain obscure, it is likely that less prevalent recorded artists like Big Bad Smitty (and, therefore, relatively unknown performers) will remain excluded from the blues canon—likely, but not certain. This degree of uncertainty stems from the possibility that any given canon may develop and change over time, as was demonstrated by the numerous careers that were revived in the 1960s, decades after these artists were originally recorded. In the case of Robert Johnson, the overwhelming interest in his music and subsequent canonisation occurred several decades after his death and was only made possible by the preservation of his material in a recorded format.

The reality is that the construction of a canon (or canons) is not a democratic process as not everyone has an equal say in whom or what gets celebrated or "included". Control of the content of popular music is a negotiated interplay between performers who are willing to record music, the recording industry who offer the commodity for sale, and the audience who exercise their choice of either buying or not buying the limited material on offer (Small, 1987: 379; Dougan, 2001: 132). The opinions of one person are not always going to

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necessarily match the opinions of another, and it is essential that in situations like these informed and ongoing discussion takes place. Continued research and debate are the keys to successful discourses on canons, not perpetuated blind faith.

The bluesman

This section explores one of the ideas projected by the aforementioned canonising agents and their resultant canon—that of "the bluesman". The bluesman has occupied a central space in the musical genre of blues, one that reveals more about those who perceive "him" than it does about the existence of the bluesman himself. So much is this the case, that the persona of the bluesman possesses a mythical quality, one that also shapes perceptions of blues music.

In all forms of visual media, a dominant perception of the bluesman prevails. First and foremost, he is masculine and of African-American descent. Preferably born in the Deep South sometime between 1880 and 1940, he is either old, or dead. He often bears a triple-barrel name, sometimes represented in the form of initials (e.g. J.B. Lenoir, B.B. King, R.L. Burnside). This name is occasionally the same as that on his birth certificate, but more commonly it is obtained from a nickname, a geographical location or some other performance pseudonym—especially if he suffers from an ailment such as blindness. The bluesman's attire is almost strictly brimmed hat, suit and tie. He is a self-taught amateur, primitive and uneducated. He is a stoic individual, a poor and lonesome itinerant musician, carrying his acoustic guitar everywhere he goes. The bluesman is heterosexual, promiscuous, and prone to alcoholism. Like an outlaw, he is mean, untrustworthy, mysterious, and potentially violent. Finally, he only ever plays the blues.

This dominant perception is also supported in the written word. Numerous authors are critical of earlier blues writers for their focus on gender, race, old age, obscurity, cotton

farming, guitar playing, destitution, disability, lack of education, alcoholism, physical abuse, primitivism, the occult, mysticism, atheism and sexual promiscuity as contributing factors to the bluesman stereotype (Keil, 1966: 34-5; Davis, F., 1995: 84; Titon, 2002: 174; Evans, H., 2004: 33-4, 75, 95-6; Wald, 2004: 256; King, 2006: 237). However, contrary to these popular Romanticised conceptions, blues music is not always concerned with such themes. What the dominant perception of the bluesman represents is a particular vision and articulation of a musical genre and its culture—one that is static and grounded in the past. This dominant perception constitutes a blues myth of negative rhetorical narratives and visual tropes directed towards African-American musicians who performed blues music. Adding to this myth further is that most of these musicians from the early twentieth-century now labelled "bluesmen" had vast repertoires which included blues as well as many other genres. Far from being cut off from the currents of modern life, these musicians were proficient in a number of other styles (e.g. ragtime, spirituals, cowboy songs, cajun music, etc.) by listening avidly and attentively to radio and phonograph records (Evans, H., 56-7, 98; Wald, 2004: 96-101, 249). Though this repertoire was shared by African-Americans and white Americans, it became segregated due to record company policies that restricted and mythologised racist practices. In essence, blues was for African-Americans and hillbilly (or country) for whites. So while blues music began with talented musicians it also began with institutionalised racism from the white recording industry's construction of the bluesman "as a sign of Otherness" (Witek, 1988: 192).

The dominant perception of the bluesman shifts slightly here as we see him from another perspective—that of his cultural and political constraints. It was not the African-American bluesman who was responsible for the recording of blues and only blues, rather it was the early recording industry that was responsible for inventing the concept of the African-American bluesman (Dougan, 2001: 29; Evans, H., 2004: 56; Wald, 2004: 54-6).

Mythologising blues music has removed these constraints from our vision and distorted our perception. Even so, many aspects of the myth are strengthened by some aspects of the canonised artists. Prominent names like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, Blind Willie McTell, Mississippi John Hurt, Sonny Boy Williamson, Mississippi Fred McDowell and John Lee Hooker all reinforce facets of the stereotype. Consequently, this caricature appears everywhere in articles, books, paintings, and movies. However, though it may prove a convincing characterisation, many scholars have recently produced research that seeks to revise the way we think about blues-related matters. Elijah Wald (2004: 7) insists that "Our present-day idea of blues has largely been determined by people who had little if anything to do with the culture that produced the music". Similarly, Howell Evans (2004: 53) examines the various ways in which writing about blues music has altered our perceptions. He states:

> *writing about the blues becomes a secondary system of representation that produces meaning in the first. This secondary system functions as myth. Blues critics have both created and relied on this secondary system of representation, this blues myth, to derive meaning from the blues. This myth of the blues consists of everything that has been said or written about the blues, including histories, documentaries, biographies, ethnographies and scholarship. Some of this blues writing has taken on a mythic quality… and some has quite literally taken the form of myth…* (Evans, H., 2004: 43-4)

To paraphrase Roland Barthes (1957: 109), a myth is that which is spoken and communicated; it is a process of signification and shared perception, often one that goes without saying. What the shared perception of the bluesman reinforces is the myth of a poor, heterosexual, masculine, secular, promiscuous, African-American.

By observing cartoons that rely on antithesis for humour, one can observe just how prevalent the stereotype of the bluesman has become. In Figure 2.1, M.K. Brown uses the bluesman stereotype in order to caricature the modern housewife. This is done by using a primly-dressed, plain, asexual and conservative-looking woman to sing a tune about waking up in the morning to find a strange man in her bed. Rather than bragging about her sexual
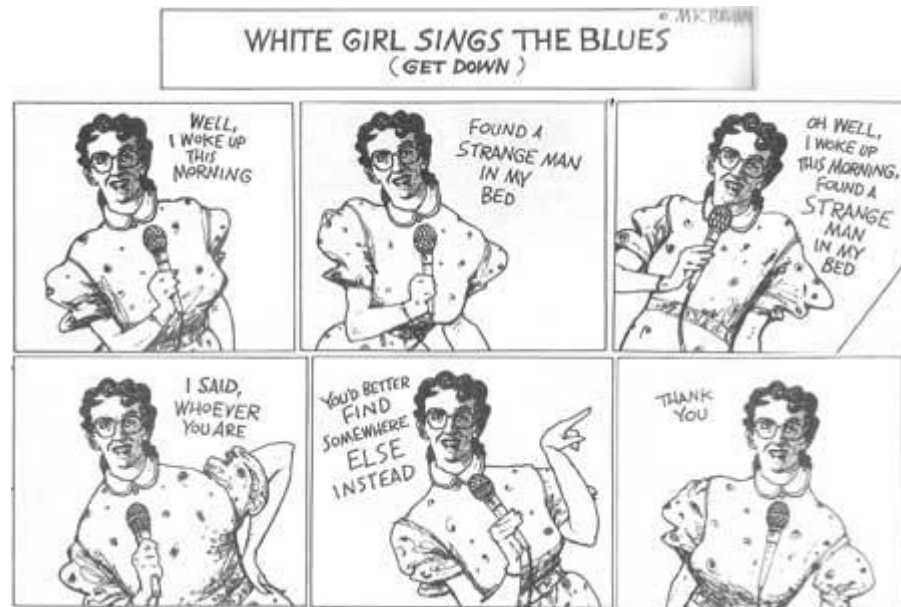
Figure 2.1 "White Girl Sings the Blues", by M.K. Brown, in *National Lampoon's Truly Sick, Tasteless, and Twisted Cartoons*, New York: Contemporary Books, 2002, pp.126-128.

prowess, she instead tells the offending male to "find somewhere else instead" and then courteously thanks her audience. This works because of its opposition to the known bluesman stereotype of the sexually adventurous, loose-living, black male.

Seizing on the gender aspect of this myth, it is worth noting that prior to the 1960s blues revival and the literature it spawned—both organised and written by middle-class white men—African-American female blues singers dominated the genre. Since then though, they have virtually disappeared—subjugated to the role of temptress within the subject matter:

> *In the male blues tradition, women were paradoxically depicted as both the primary source of disorder and grief in the black man's world and as indispensable to his happiness and self-esteem. Women in the blues were sirens: irresistible yet lethal, they were to be loved, but more importantly, to be tamed and controlled.* (Ward, 1998: 72)

Correspondingly, the phrase "blueswoman" is used so infrequently that it carries little, if any, currency. Women are seen to have so little effect on blues music that one writer claims the term "bluesman" is supposedly shorthand for all blues-makers, male or female (Benston, 1975: 174). This gendering of the genre reveals much about perceived values placed onto

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masculinity and femininity. In blues, it is implied that the nomadic male minstrel who sings and accompanies songs of his own creation is much more intriguing than the glamorously-dressed woman with a backing band. It is in this manner that the twentieth-century writings of white Americans like Samuel Charters, Pete Welding and Alan Lomax have contributed to constructing our perceptions of blues music. Although blues stemmed from African-American culture, attention from middle-class whites had clearly surpassed that of blacks by the 1960s. In turn, rather than discussing the efforts of women like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey—singers who were typically backed by male instrumentalists and had songs written for them—this new school of "blues scholars" instead chose to focus their attentions elsewhere. Namely, they became transfixed with the self-accompanied, singer-songwriter, male guitarists who, as rural artists, were thought to be closest to their perception of the "roots" of the blues. In other words, these bluesmen somehow came to symbolise the origins of the music (Keil, 1966: 34-5; Siems, 1991: 141; Hamilton, 2001: 31-4; King, 2006: 236).

Often referred to as "folk" artists, the bluesman's individualistic mode of creativity and performance is constructed as "pure" and more "authentic" than the "commercial" stage shows of the blueswomen (Ward, 1998: 10-1). In reality though, "folk" musicians and professional stage musicians were influenced by each other's performances and recordings in an interchangeable manner that was quite complex (Oliver, 1984a: 49; Small, 1987: 266-7; Carby, 1998: 474; Evans, H., 2004: 46; Wald, 2004: 12-3, 282). Hence the perceived authenticity attached to bluesmen reveals less about blues music and more about those perceiving it. By widening the lens through which we perceive blues music, we can see that a blues performer may also be a woman and often subject to social and political constraints such as segregation.

Much of this mythology has been perpetuated with the help of modern cinema, including movies and documentaries like *Crossroads* (Hill, 1986), *Deep Blues* (Mugge,

1991), *The Search for Robert Johnson* (Hunt and Moore, 1992), *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (Coen, 2000) and *Warming by the Devil's Fire* (Burnett, 2003). It has also been propagated by the screenplay *Love In Vain* (Greenberg, 1983) as well as a recent episode of the television drama *Supernatural* titled "Crossroad Blues" (Boyum, 2007). Such examples tell the story of the bluesman selling his soul to the Devil in exchange for "masterful musical abilities on the guitar" (Copeland and Goering, 2003: 437-8). This legend descends from a 500 year-old German folktale about a character named Faust and has appeared in other musical compositions such as The Eagles' *Hotel California* (1976) and the Charlie Daniels Band's *The Devil Went Down to Georgia* (1983). Though this story should be understood metaphorically rather than literally, many believe it takes place at the stroke of midnight at some non-descript rural crossroads (see Evans, D., 1971: 22-3; Davis, S., 1985: 5; Davis, F., 1995: 105-6).

This notorious crossroads myth has been attached to blues music ever since musicians from the 1920s and 1930s began mentioning the dark Lord in their recordings.[6] Even prior to that, blues had the stigma of being known as "the Devil's music", particularly by religious African-Americans. In the blues revival of the late 1950s and 1960s countless white Americans and Europeans—both musicians and writers alike—embraced blues music for its perceived "real and human values" (Cantwell, 1996: 22). Ironically, it was these same people that became fascinated by blues mythology, propagating the blues-Devil association further through their Romanticised responses in interviews, books, journal articles, etc. This association has since crossed over into other musical forms that stem from blues such as rock and metal, as can be seen in the film clips and artwork of bands like comic duo Tenacious D. That these ideas became attached to blues music were in no way helped by the young violent deaths of several bluesmen nor by perpetuations of the "crossroads story as truth" as told by old bluesmen like Son House in the 1960s (Welding, 1966: 76; 1991: 141; Titon, 2002: 201).

According to Bennett Siems (1991: 141), "such stories draw heavily on themes and character traits which have existed for centuries in African American narrative tradition". One bluesman worth mentioning here is Peetie Wheatstraw (a.k.a. William Bunch), who mythologised himself with nicknames like "The Devil's Son-In-Law" and "High Sheriff From Hell". This strategic use of controversy is interpreted by Paul Garon (1971: 92) as a type of promotion, whereby a literal association with the Devil acts as "a protest against the drab role that the black man was supposed to fill". Tracy (1988: 56), on the other hand, argues that this association was more of an intentional effort to deride religious attitudes toward blues music. In any case, the place of the Devil in blues music reflects a particular time and place where creative expression was clouded by external factors.

Examining the need for such an image, it is clear that the bluesman cuts a far more heroic figure as a young itinerant musician paving his own way to hell than as that of a young man constrained by racist conventions and ideologies. Over time, the male artists whose personas have corresponded with the tragic bluesman profile or have been associated with the provocative crossroads myth have since been validated by the global audience, perhaps receiving more attention than is their due. Robert Leroy Johnson (1911-1938) is the best example of this process.[7] Though researchers are aware of very little information pertaining to his life, enough is known to cast him as a tragic figure: well-documented musical ability; neatly delimited body of work; wandering life; Faustian legend; and, early/violent/obscure death (Guralnick, 1971: 54; Witek, 1988: 192; Dougan, 2001: 110; Wald, 2004: 263). Even the simplest details like his birth date, cause of death and gravesite are open to dispute (Charters, 1973: 5; Davis, S., 1985:6-9; Schroeder, 2004: 19; Buncombe, 2006: np).[8] One writer even speculates that the pitch of some of Johnson's recordings is too high to be practically performed on a standard guitar. Here John Gibbens (2001: 83-6) raises legitimate questions about the accuracy of the pitch and, subsequently, the tempo conveyed by

Johnson's recordings.

Revisionists agree that the mystery surrounding Johnson only strengthens his grip on our imagination as many people prefer to accept the story of a fictional character as opposed to the human blues artist (Pearson, 1992: 221-3; Davis, F., 1995: 133; Copeland and Goering, 2003: 437). Due to the absence of facts pertaining to his life, many writers drew on mythical and anecdotal accounts from other bluesmen to describe Johnson (Komara, in Wardlow, 1998: x). Despite the mystery, there is a massive amount of discourse dedicated to Johnson in journal articles,[9] books,[10] theses,[11] and more. With much of this attention focusing on song titles alluding to pacts with the Devil, Robert Johnson is easily the most Romanticised, mythologised and famous of the pre-World War II downhome blues guitarists and was recently granted a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award in 2006. He was also an inaugural inductee for both the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame (1980) and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1986). Furthermore, Gibson guitars currently manufacture two guitars resembling the model held by the bluesman in one of two existing photographs of Johnson.[12] Meanwhile, the guitar from the photograph—owned and played by Johnson himself—is purportedly available for sale (see Buncombe, 2006).[13]

Demonstrating his extensive influence, a small collection of Australian musicians influenced by Johnson recently paid tribute to his 29-song legacy over two consecutive nights at The Vanguard in Sydney.[14] Johnson, himself, was inspired by the likes of Leroy Carr, Son House, Skip James and Lonnie Johnson, and functioned as an influence on other noted bluesmen David "Honeyboy" Edwards, Elmore James, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Johnny Shines, Muddy Waters—to name but a few. This attention is reinforced by the sheer adoration from contemporary performers like Eric Clapton, John Hammond Jr. and Keith Richards who endorse his influence, reinterpret his songs, and credit him with inventing rock-and-roll (Pearson, 1992: 224; Tracy, 1999: 504). Though he was—without question—a highly

talented musician capable of playing more than just blues,[15] Johnson's status as "King of the Delta Blues" did not occur until his recordings were reissued to a blues revival audience in 1961, 1966, and again in 1990. While he has had an immeasurable impact on rock performers since the 1960s, Johnson was considered relatively insignificant by the blues audience during his brief recording career in the late 1930s and the two decades that followed. Only eleven of Johnson's songs were released during his lifetime, with *Terraplane Blues*—his most popular recording from the 1930s—selling only 4000 copies (Millard, 1995: 251; Copeland and Goering, 2003: 437). As Ian Whitcomb (1985: 58) and Barry Lee Pearson (1992: 223) argue, Johnson's notoriety (as opposed to his skills) has obscured the presence of artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson and Leroy Carr who had a more immediate influence on nascent blues artists. It is thus important to question what has contributed to Robert Johnson's overwhelming popularity.

In addition to the boundless promotion from contemporary performers and record companies, several writers argue that Johnson's appeal stems from his unique detailed approach to the compositional process—one that was unusual for downhome blues recordings in the 1930s. Unlike his contemporaries, Johnson appears to have crafted his songs to the limitations of the three-minute 78 rpm phonograph record (Pearson, 1992: 220; Wald, 2004: 132). Eric Rothenbuhler (2007: 65-7) contends that audiences of recorded music culture from the 1960s onwards identify Johnson's recordings as sounding "polished" and "qualitatively superior" when compared to those of his contemporaries. Consequently, Robert Johnson is believed to represent the transition from spontaneous country-dance performers limited to local influences, to commercially crafted professionals whose repertoire and compositional technique were influenced by phonograph records (Pearson, 1992: 220, 223; Evans, H., 2004: 23). Bluestein (1994: 139-40) identifies such transitional artists as "poplorists", as they combine elements from both traditional and popular sources into their

compositional style. However, what these theories ignore is the fact that some of Johnson's tracks were openly derivative of previous recordings by musicians such as Kokomo Arnold, Leroy Carr, Son House, Skip James, and Lonnie Johnson. Interestingly, Rothenbuhler's line of reasoning reveals cultural values concerning sound and music, which, when coupled with the absence of information about Johnson's life, contribute to his allure and posthumous success. Thus, from humble beginnings struggling against the popular music standards of the 1930s, Johnson becomes an unfulfilled genius ahead of his time; a perceived icon of contemporary music, more so than that of his day.

However, there is also the argument that the obscurity, mystery, misinformation and misconceptions surrounding Johnson's life are the key factors contributing to his allure, especially among the white blues audience (Pearson, 1992: 121-3; Wald, 2004: 188, 221, 274-5). Neglected for years by African-American music lovers, Johnson's music laid dormant only to be resurrected later by a group of writers and musicians who "helped usher in an era of unprecedented white appreciation of the blues" (Tracy, 1999: 504). Just as the marginalisation and segregation of the genre fulfilled a white desire to control the blues discourse in the 1920s, elevating Johnson to the status of unrecognised genius through posthumous revisionism satisfies the same need. Both situations imagine the bluesman as primitive other while elevating white cultural sensitivities, limiting both blues music and blues musicians to a homogenous stereotype. This interpretation, however, is often ignored as it spoils the romance and its commercial possibilities (Wardlow, 1998: 201). Accordingly, this homogenous perception has been propagated by a large number of performers who have built themselves blues personas that self-consciously mimic this image (Wald, 2004: 8). One such example is an African-American performer known as Rocky Lawrence whose entire performance persona—including vocal tone and repertoire—is based on the myth of Robert Johnson. In contemporary Australian music, the best example of bluesman mimicry is a

performer known as C.W. Stoneking.

Gaining reputation recently through tours and his participation in *The dig Australian Blues Project* (Various, 2005a), Stoneking embodies the perpetuated Romanticised image of an early rural blues guitarist. Born and raised in Australia to Californian parents, he borders on blackface minstrelsy (sans blackface) and approximates an African-American accent he describes as sounding "like a Deep South pirate" (Lobley, 2007: np). As demonstrated by his latest album *King Hokum* (2007), both his sound and appearance are clearly modelled off the very perception discussed above. An excerpt from his website reads:

> *He wears a ragged black suit and a preachin' hat, makes tunes about singing dodo birds, hollers like a 1920's tent show blues shouter, plays guitar like a demon, and mutters to himself onstage. The legendary king of hokum blues, C.W. Stoneking, is a true entertainer who relies on musicianship, stagecraft, and performance to invoke the spirit of 1920's Southern blues in his original hokum style.* (C.W. Stoneking MySpace website)

Here Stoneking self-consciously mimics the bluesman image through references to the early blues era (e.g. hokum), wardrobe, repertoire, guitar playing style, and the use of a vintage resonator guitar in order to appear "authentic". Some interview excerpts even reveal his attempts to live the bluesman lifestyle—living in a farmhouse, working as a handyman and spending all of his money on alcohol (Dawson, 2004: np; Sydney Morning Herald website). Furthermore, Stoneking unquestionably accepts the talented-but-uneducated perception of the bluesman and all the political baggage it carries.

In addition to demonstrating the continued Romanticisation by white blues aficionados, Stoneking is one of many musicians who present a preoccupation with impersonating the bluesman better than the bluesman himself. Manifested in different ways by different musicians, these "mimics'" take great pride is sounding like African Americans. Matthew "Dutch" Tilders provides another Australian example of this tendency as his website proudly boasts:

In 1976, having only heard Dutch, B.B. King assumed that he was black. Brownie [McGhee] *and Dutch became best mates simply because Browney* [sic] *believed that the Dutchman was a genuine bluesman, regardless of his racial origins.* (Dutch Tilders website)

Tilders subsequently named one of his albums *I'm a Bluesman* (1998). He takes great satisfaction in recounting these comments from famous African-American bluesmen as they are intended to validate the authenticity of his craft and elicit the response, "he's so good, he might as well be black!" Without entering into the tendentious "can whites sing the blues" debate of years past, it is important to acknowledge that blues remains an African-American musical innovation. However, the best values for identifying an authentic blues performer should concern the degree of their mastery of the idiom and the level of regard they afford to their sources of inspiration and technique—not race or sex (Rudinow, 1994: 135). By unquestionably accepting the canonised image of the bluesman we simultaneously unquestionably accept the other possibilities that have been excluded from memory by this image.

The search for validation as a legitimate bluesman seems to be manifest in a "tyranny of distance" (Blainey, 1966: viii-x). Though originally concerned with the history of Australia's growth, transport and relations with other countries, the "tyranny of distance" phrase is now applied in a much broader and more general sense (Elder, 2005: 242). For example, in an interview conducted for this thesis, Australian performer Jeff Lang employed the term to describe the intertwined processes of canonisation and composition:

As much as it's a very romantic notion that I had of the American South in the 1930s, it wasn't a bed of roses for a black guy in Mississippi back then either... They call it "the tyranny of distance", in Australia you're so far from the time and place that much of my favourite music was made in and you romanticise it a bit. You're looking through records and you get it slightly wrong, and then it's influence mixes in with all the other things that you're listening to. You get it wrong in one sense, but you get it right as well because it becomes a true expression of who you are when the various musical style mix with each other.—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006)

From the traces of blues music recorded in the early twentieth-century and photographs of early bluesmen, our culture has constructed an image—a perceived essence or distillation—that puts a face to a name. The distance of time and place that exists from the 1920s Deep South is the very factor that gives life to the Romanticised bluesman figure. Virtually all of the musicians who fit its criteria are now dead, and, in order to fulfil the preconceived expectations of our culture, many contemporary performers seek to reproduce elements of the constructed archetype. Following on from Lang's sentiments, Wald (2004: 255) contends that modern day "recreators" like Stoneking who consciously rely on blues stereotypes and preconceptions from another time and place are contradicting the very achievement they are trying to attain. This is because contemporary performers of blues who make artistic decisions based on imitations of canonised blues artists from another time and place—artists who relied on their ability to create and innovate—are inadvertently placing themselves at odds with the ethos of the bluesmen they seek to emulate.

As hinted at by Lang, this Romanticism masks the fact that the 1920s Deep South was ruled by racial oppression, racial violence, misogyny, and a post-slavery environment in which the dynamics remained seemingly unchanged. Despite demonstrating this level of awareness, the perception of the bluesman still persists for Lang as his attempts to define blues music reveal:

> *I immediately think of the originally recorded guys. I think blues music and I immediately picture Son House, Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson, Skip James. Then there's the sort of gospel side of it with* [Mississippi] *Fred McDowell, Blind Willie Johnson, Reverend Gary Davis, and the raggy* [ragtime] *sort of guys like Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Bo Carter, Blind Willie McTell as well as Mississippi John Hurt and Blind Lemon Jefferson... Robert Pete Williams... And then maybe also the early Memphis and Chicago stuff like early Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters... Little Walter. There's obviously more to it than just those, but that's what I picture in my head when I think of blues music.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006)

Lang confirms the common expectation by listing eighteen African-American bluesmen, all

of whom are now dead. Most, if not all, were born in the Deep South in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; seventeen played guitar; twelve bore nicknames; eight bore triple-barrel names; and, six were blind. Finally, each one participated in the blues genre, at least to some extent, with all eighteen musicians continually appearing in discographies and encyclopedias such as *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings* (Russell, et al., 2006).

Although Lang does not consider himself a "blues artist", it is important to acknowledge that blues singers do not have to fit the bill of the bluesman stereotype. As much as he admits to sounding nothing like Howlin' Wolf (pc, February, 2006), "to expect that he should is to hold to a caricatured, constricted view of what the blues singer ought to do for us" (Gray, 2000: 518). A similar response is also elicited from Mia Dyson, an Australian female musician influenced by blues music. Significantly, Dyson prefers to shun the "blues artist" tag due to reasons that are completely external to the music she plays. These factors include the geography of her hometown (a beachside resort town, not a rural farm), her choice of tipple (tea over whiskey), and her diverse repertoire (she also plays folk and country) (Dyson, 2005). What is, perhaps, most significant about this list is that Dyson does not mention her gender as a mitigating factor—though she may well be incorporating it into her thinking. Nonetheless, it is evident that the perception of the bluesman stereotype is so pervasive in contemporary popular music culture that even a female musician, one who proudly enjoys playing and composing blues music, is reluctant to challenge the established archetype. Instead Dyson is resigned to perpetuating the dominant mythology of the quintessential blues musician by accepting the significance of numerous extra-musical qualities that bear little, if any, significance on her ability to play and engage with the blues genre.

Evidently, the perception of the bluesman is one that wields great power. Furthermore, these manufactured memories about the rambling womaniser, the troublesome

troubadour, and the pact with the Devil satisfy the majority of the blues audience and are tropes in which many are happy to share and perpetuate. Whether the attraction occurs as a result of the Romanticised narrative, a desire to live such a "carefree" life, or from some kind of resonance with the persona projected through song, this is the bluesman many have come to expect. This particular characterisation of blues music has achieved centrality over other perspectives which have been marginalised or excluded altogether (as cited in Hamilton, 2001: 22). Thus the blues canon that continues to be disseminated is full of heterosexual male performers from both past and present. Even if they are not strictly solo performers, they are most certainly known for their individual prowess, asserting their own identity through writing their own songs, characteristic vocals and/or impressive instrumental solos. This safely ensures that the perception of the early twentieth-century bluesman and his music are set to remain the same for quite some time.

The blues canon

> *Between 1960 and the present over a hundred books on blues and related fields have been published. In these references to jazz are seldom made, and then only in the context of instrumental accompaniment to blues singers. Similarly, folk songs and folk traditions, both sacred and secular, are only lightly acknowledged, playing a subordinate role to what is now seen as the dominant music, namely blues. In this process representatives of the blues in jazz histories or folk song are relegated to minor positions: Leadbelly is hardly mentioned; boogie woogie and hot piano is virtually ignored; the "classic" blues are classic no more and recognized only as jazz singers or performers on the vaudeville stage. Values as expressed by the folklorists and jazz writers have been reversed and blues criticism has developed its own measures of quality. Charley Patton and Tommy Johnson, unmentioned in any jazz book, have been considered among the "greatest" blues singers…* (Oliver, 1984a: 5)

Oliver's stance here neatly summarises the current situation of the blues canon: prime significance attached to self-accompanied guitarists and the Mississippi Delta area; little concern for similar and related traditions; and, exclusion of female performers. The analysis below identifies and confirms these elements of the blues canon in greater detail through the

discussion of its key playing styles, idealised equipment, "standard" repertoire, and most celebrated artists. Regarding the latter, these lionised performers will be listed and presented in groups that reflect the period of time in which they were most recently active as recording artists. In many cases, their induction into the white-authored blues canon occurred long after death. This section will also discuss the idea of multiple, competing blues canons. Lastly, though it is common knowledge that there are many blues performers whose main instrument was either harmonica or piano, this section of the thesis focuses solely on guitarists as these performers are the most revered within the blues canon.

Playing styles

Recorded performers of downhome blues from the 1920s and 1930s are often divided into three broadly generalised stylistic (and geographical) groups: Texas, Mississippi Delta, and Piedmont (Southern, 1971: 376). Using these categorisations, each "school" is supposed to reflect certain qualities in the music. While there is an element of truth to these constructed boundaries, there are also many exceptions. What these categories do not take into account is the existence of non-blues material in a given performer's repertoire. Furthermore, these three categories exclude other blues-related musical trends that were present at the time, including the jug and string bands or the work of lap steel guitarists.

Texas blues is associated with single-string guitar melodies and relaxed, high-pitched vocals, as demonstrated in the work of Blind Lemon Jefferson and Texas Alexander (Oliver, 1968: 14; 1969: 46). Other performers from this region, however, may possess one trait and not the other, as exemplified by the rough, raspy vocals of Blind Willie Johnson and dexterous finger work of Leadbelly. Meanwhile, blues musicians from the south-east Piedmont region—encompassing Georgia and the Carolinas—many of whom were blind, play a twelve-string acoustic guitar in a finger-picked ragtime style (i.e. Blind Willie

McTell). It is the recording artists from the Mississippi Delta, though, that receive the most attention and recognition. As Dick Waterman argues:

> *When people from Australia or Japan or Italy say, 'Oh, I love the blues,' they're not talking about Southwest blues styles, the Georgia twelve-string players, ragtime Piedmont styles, or whatever… It's the Delta blues. If you say, 'Who do you like?' they'll name Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf, Son House.*—Dick Waterman (as cited in Davis, F., 1995: 29)

Musicians from the Mississippi Delta category are regularly characterised by a strong rhythm, raspy vocals, narrow melodic range, bottleneck guitar and speech patterns within the vocals (Oliver, 1968: 14). They are also more prone to projected Romanticism and association with the notorious crossroads myth—particularly Robert Johnson (see Young, 1991: 80-1). Many of the Delta's most famous exponents hail from the one specific area and thus follow a lineage known as the Drew tradition (Evans, D., 1982a: 8). Beginning with Charley Patton, this tradition also includes Tommy Johnson, Willie Brown, Son House, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf—the majority of whom reside in the blues canon.

Identifying divergent blues styles after WWII becomes more difficult with a wider range of proposed categories (see Keil, 1966: 217-24). It is clear, however, that the style of blues music pioneered in Chicago is the most canonised of the post-war styles. This is largely due to the fact that artists like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf all migrated north from Mississippi and brought their "Delta" influences with them (Haralambos, 1975: 26-7; Davis, S., 1985: 7). One essential difference to these newer forms, however, was an increase in instrument volume so that the musicians could be heard within the busy city nightclubs (Bane, 1982: 93). Consequently, these musicians tended to perform in bands with electric guitars, electric bass guitar, piano, harmonica (often amplified) and drums (Oliver, 1969: 154-5).

Equipment

In mid-2006, *Total Guitar* magazine published a "blues special" featuring profiles of blues "legends", guitar tablature and tutorials, a list of "10 blues albums you must own", and an alternative blues canon as proposed by Dan Auerbach (2006), the guitarist of blues-rock duo The Black Keys. This edition also included a feature called "Mojo Makers"—a selection of classic blues guitar makes and models (electrics, acoustics, and resonators[16]) along with some recommended amplifiers. This approach is also mirrored in the liner notes to the Jeff Lang-Bob Brozman collaboration *Rolling Through This World* (2002). While the *Total Guitar* perspective on blues equipment is more electric and blues-rock oriented, Peter Narváez (2001: 29-32) explores the acoustic side of the genre. As discussed by Brian Ward, it is this depiction of blues—justifiably or not—that is regularly considered more authentic:

> *Some aficionados were even horrified when Muddy Waters, in reality the quintessential electric Chicago bluesman, dared to plug in his guitar—a potent symbol of commercial and artistic sell-out among recalcitrant white blues fans, as well as among the folk purists who were distressed when Bob Dylan went electric. Waters was expected to pretend he still lived in backwoods Mississippi, patiently awaiting the arrival of power lines.* (Ward, 1998: 240)

This sentiment is also echoed by Dai Thomas (2004: np), whose list of blues singers matches performers with the precise make and model of the instruments they once played (e.g. guitars, banjos, mandolins, etc.). Although the article includes artists who are predominantly associated with electric instruments such as Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Muddy Waters and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, discussion is strictly limited to acoustic and acoustic-based instruments.

Without imposing similar boundaries, the general consensus is that there are a number of guitar makes and models favoured by blues performers. Regarding acoustic guitars (including resonators), blues players tend to favour the dreadnought shape as opposed to the single cutaway. According to Thomas' list, the three most popular brands of wooden acoustics for early African-American blues guitarists were Gibson, Martin and Stella, while

the National and Dobro are the most popular resonator brands by far. As demonstrated by *Total Guitar* though, the range of electric guitars adopted by blues musicians is much wider. Without being too definitive, it is safe to say that the two most frequently used brands of electric guitars in blues are Fender and Gibson, with their most popular models being the Stratocaster and the Les Paul Standard respectively. Other electric guitars in regular usage for blues are usually adopted for their association with one specific blues artist such as the Fender Telecaster (Muddy Waters) and the Gibson ES-355 (B.B. King). On a similar note, the tendency of blues performers to adopt a guitar with more than six strings is one that is typically connected with a particular artist. This is particularly relevant for acoustic guitars of the twelve-string variety, which are often incorporated for their established connections with Leadbelly as well as Piedmont blues guitarists such as Blind Willie McTell.[17]

Finally, despite the increasing propensity of contemporary blues performers to play guitar in the lap style with a slide or steel bar of some sort, the overwhelming majority of blues guitar is still performed upright. Furthermore, this modern tendency is in no way connected to the early African-American blues artists best known for this mode of performance (e.g. Black Ace, Kokomo Arnold, Casey Bill Weldon and Buddy Woods), largely because none of these musicians reside in the blues canon. Likewise, very few, if any, of the songs performed or written by these artists are currently considered to be "standards"—and when they are, it is usually by way of association with a different artist. For instance, Arnold's 'Old Original Kokomo Blues' is more widely known in other incarnations such as Mississippi Fred McDowell's 'Kokomo' and Robert Johnson's 'Sweet Home Chicago'.[18] The source of the rising prevalence of lap style guitar in contemporary blues styles is instead a small number of lap players who are primarily associated with other forms of popular music. Specifically, this group consists of David Lindley (Jackson Browne's band), David Gilmour (Pink Floyd), Ben Harper and, perhaps, to a lesser extent,

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Harry Manx. Additionally, while the early African-American lap-style blues guitarists chiefly used resonator guitars when performing in this manner, the range of stringed equipment used by the aforementioned contemporary musicians for lap playing incorporates electric lap steels, Hawaiian guitars, modified and custom-made acoustic and electric guitars, and the Mohan Veena.[19] As a result, there are no canonised artists, songs, playing styles or equipment in blues music directly linked to lap-style guitar.

Blues standards

Though the following chapter discusses the process of canonising blues song material to the status of "blues standards" in greater detail, this section briefly introduces the concept of the "blues standard". Bohlman defines such "classic" songs as timeless works that often achieve their canonical status through acts of revivalism, reframing and reinterpretation (Bohlman, 1992: 202-3). As well as providing models for compositional practice within a given musical idiom or "rules of imitation", these canonic works function as a rite of passage through which one can measure their skills against a pre-established standard—hence the name (Morgan, 1992: 44).

Many blues tracks became standards very early on—prior to the advent of recording—through traditional modes of composition in which songs were passed around, adopted and adapted by each new performer. In such cases, the fact that we attribute certain songs to a particular artist often means they were the first performer to record a version (Herzhaft, 1992: 435). Recording also aided the transmission process, allowing songs to be heard and reinterpreted at a faster rate by more people in different geographical areas. This applied not only to so-called "blues" artists, but to performers from other genres who had also developed an interest in blues music including hillbilly (or country), folk, and rock-and-roll. Though some songs have become standards via sheer ubiquity, others are primarily known by

virtue of their association with a particular performer—whether they were popular during the time of their recording career or not. This may, however, eventually lead to ubiquity through repeated acts of reinterpretation.

In contemporary culture, these oft-repeated, frequently-versioned texts appear across a range of media and, among other purposes, function as an opportunity for performers to pay tribute to an important influence or inspiration. Currently available lists of blues standards vary in size from 13 to 300 titles (Southern, 1971: 509; Herzhaft, 1992: 435-78; Schneider, 2001: 122-392; Blues Foundation website). Despite this significant variation, altogether these lists have four song titles in common: 'Call It Stormy Monday' (T-Bone Walker), 'How Long How Long Blues' (Leroy Carr), 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom' (Robert Johnson), 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man' (Muddy Waters). As blues standards go, these four songs alone exhibit three key properties: notoriety as popular blues songs among the blues audience; numerous recorded reinterpretations of each track by successive artists, and; an association with a musician who resides in the blues canon.

Blues artists

The following is a critique of the common perception of the blues canon and not an attempt to reinforce the canon itself. This representation of the blues canon of artists is conditioned by several factors, the main concerns being that these performers recorded blues songs and that they are regularly recognised by the community of canonising agents mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Recognition from canonising agents may be demonstrated in countless number of ways including the appearance of blues artists' names in blues-related articles, books, compilation albums, concerts, festivals, discographies, encyclopedias, documentaries, reissued records and so on. Among this list of quintessential artists, more space is given to those musicians who have had the greatest impact on the three

Australian case studies in this thesis (i.e. Chain, the Backsliders and Jeff Lang). Although Robert Johnson features in this list, his profile has already been addressed in this chapter in relation to the bluesman stereotype and is therefore not detailed again below.

Although the male-dominated nature of the canon has been noted, female artists are mentioned throughout this analysis as a matter of demonstrating their exclusion. On the other hand, this critique primarily discusses African-American performers who achieved fame prior to or during the late 1950s and 1960s blues revival. As an innovation of African-American culture, African-American musicians are intrinsically linked to the history of the blues genre as well as its canon. On the whole, keepers of the blues canon appear reluctant to induct more recent performers of blues music into its sanctum, especially white performers. This is evidenced by the only recent induction of artists like Stevie Ray Vaughan (2000) and Paul Butterfield (2006) into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame.

Pre-scholarship artists

This group of performers is limited to those who were part of the initial blues recording boom in the 1920s and 1930s, but died prior to the 1960s blues revival. The first to record blues songs in this era were female singers, beginning in 1920 with the likes of Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters and Ida Cox. However, it is the stream of male performers who began to record from 1927 that attract the majority of attention. These include Blind Lemon Jefferson, Arthur "Blind" Blake, Leroy Carr, Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson, The Mississippi Sheiks,[20] Charley Patton, and Peetie Wheatstraw (a.k.a. William Bunch). In comparing these nine artists to the bluesman stereotype, five are solo guitarists, four are known through pseudonyms,[21] three are blind, one was a pianist within a duo, and one was a string band.

Despite Charley Patton's reputation as the originator of Mississippi Delta blues, Blind

Willie Johnson and Robert Johnson—unrelated—are the most significant of these performers to this study in terms of influence and recorded reinterpretations. Hailed as a significant "guitar evangelist", Blind Willie Johnson's (1897–1945) material is an amalgamation of religious and blues musical influences. Here the religious element is most evident in his song titles and lyrical content, while the blues element encompasses his vocal timbre and bottleneck guitar technique. Despite not being strictly of the blues idiom, his inclusion in blues encyclopedias and histories indicates his significance to the genre (Schneider, 2001: 257). Additionally, though Blind Willie Johnson has not yet been inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame as a performer, his recording of 'Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground' was inducted in 1999. As mentioned in the *Soul of a Man* documentary (Wenders, 2003), this particular track was sent into space in 1977 on the Voyager spacecraft's Golden Record. As with many of the early downhome blues guitarists, biographical information is scarce and written accounts differ on details such as his birth date, cause of blindness, gravesite, and which of his two wives is the backing vocalist in his recordings (Dixon, et al., 1997: 482; Charters, 2005: 24-9; Crumb, et al., 2006: 28; Russell, et al., 2006: 331). Adding to this mystery, there is only one known photograph of Blind Willie Johnson in existence. The only solid information pertains to his 30 issued recordings.

Much like his unrelated namesake Robert, Blind Willie Johnson's music is revered more today than during his recording career and lifetime. It inspires a wealth of Australian musicians including Phil Manning, Dom Turner, Jeff Lang, Dave Hole and Hat Fitz. Johnson also exerts considerable influence over many other twentieth-century African-American blues artists including Blind Willie McTell, Robert Pete Williams, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Mance Lipscomb, Son House, Johnny Shines, and Big Joe Williams. Some of the more famous recording artists who have reinterpreted Blind Willie Johnson's songs include Bob Dylan, Ry Cooder, Eric Clapton, John Hammond Jr., Led Zeppelin, The Steve Miller Band,

Ben Harper, and The White Stripes.

Pre-revival artists

The pre-revival category comprises a variety of musicians. First, there are those who were recorded in the 1920s and 1930s, and continued recording after this period. Others began recording after the initial Depression era blues boom, but died prior to the revival. Finally, some pre-revival artists even continued recording during the revival, but were not among the most popular artists on offer. The canonised performers of this era include Blind Willie McTell, Lonnie Johnson, Big Bill Broonzy, Josh White, and Leadbelly (a.k.a. Huddie Ledbetter). Upon comparison with the bluesman stereotype, all five of these musicians performed as solo guitarists (at some point), three used a performance pseudonym, and one was blind. The majority were also part of the folk revival movement in Europe during the 1940s and/or 1950s. A notable omission from this group is Memphis Minnie (a.k.a. Lizzie Douglas), one of the few female blues performers who was also an adept guitarist.

Despite Gray labelling him "the last unrecognised superstar of the blues" (2000: 517), "Blind" Willie Samuel McTell (1901–1959) is the most significant of these artists to this study. Though he had a wide repertoire that included blues, ragtime, gospel, pop and country material, this Georgia-based twelve-string guitarist is frequently classified within the school of Piedmont blues. As well as playing solo, he recorded with Curley Weaver, Buddy Moss, Ruth Day and his wife Kate. Known best for songs like 'Statesboro Blues' and 'Broke Down Engine', McTell also has a blues festival named after him, held annually in his birth place, Thomson, Georgia. Dispute exists, however, over some of his biographical details including his birth date and his birth name.[22] Adding to the confusion surrounding his name, McTell recorded under a number of pseudonyms as a way to get around exclusive recording contracts. Adopting a new persona for each talent scout, these include Blind Sammie

(Columbia), Georgia Bill (OKeh), Red Hot Willie Glaze (Bluebird), Blind Willie (Vocalion), Barrelhouse Sammy–the country boy (Atlantic), and Pig 'n' Whistle Red (Regal) (Charters, 1959: 93; Gray, 2000: 520, 523; Crumb, et al., 2006: 74; Russell, et al., 2006: 448; BluesNet website; Find A Grave website).

The music of Blind Willie McTell has been versioned by a great number of popular musicians including Bob Dylan, Taj Mahal, The Allman Brothers Band, Ralph McTell,[23] and The White Stripes. Dylan even wrote a song about him, aptly titled 'Blind Willie McTell'. Furthermore, McTell was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1981 (its second year). While his significance in the Australian context is not as pervasive as that of the United States, McTell is a strong influence on The Backsliders—particularly for guitarist Dom Turner.

Revivalist artists

This category refers to a group of blues performers who lived long enough to participate in and benefit from the blues revival of the late 1950s and 1960s. Most had recorded prior to this period, and many recorded again during and after the revival as a result of their "rediscovery". In contrast, some old blues performers who had never been recorded were subsequently recording for the first time. Many of these artists renewed their careers with tours in North America, Europe, and even Australia. Despite their exclusion from the canon, many female blues performers were active during this period including "Sugar Pie" DeSanto, Helen Humes, Victoria Spivey, Cora "Koko" Taylor, Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, and Beulah "Sippie" Wallace. Meanwhile, the sizeable canon of male performers includes Reverend Gary Davis, Bo Diddley (a.k.a. Ellas McDaniel), Willie Dixon, Sleepy John Estes, Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, John Lee Hooker, Eddie "Son" House, Howlin' Wolf (a.k.a. Chester Burnett), Mississippi John Hurt, Elmore James, Nehemiah "Skip" James,

Mississippi Fred McDowell, Walter "Brownie" McGhee, Muddy Waters (a.k.a. McKinley Morganfield), Sonny Terry (a.k.a. Saunders Teddell), Booker "Bukka" White, and Sonny Boy Williamson II (a.k.a. Aleck Ford). Among the seventeen named, comparisons to the bluesman stereotype show that fourteen of the aforementioned musicians played guitar, twelve performed under pseudonyms, three were blind, three played harmonica, two were in a duo together, and one played piano.

The three most pertinent revivalist artists to this study are Skip James, Mississippi Fred McDowell and Muddy Waters. Nehemiah Curtis James (1902–1969) was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi and grew up on a plantation near Bentonia, Mississippi. Unlike most artists from the Mississippi Delta region, James sang with a high falsetto in addition to playing both piano and guitar. Furthermore, his guitar style incorporated at least one open tuning in a minor key and he never used a bottleneck slide. As mentioned in the documentary *Soul of a Man* (Wenders, 2003), James was involved with gambling and bootlegging. After recording 17 tracks for Paramount Records in 1931—some blues, some spirituals—he became a religious minister and faded into obscurity. During this period, he was a formative influence on other African-American blues artists like Joe McCoy, Johnny Temple and Robert Johnson. Contributing to his posthumous success, the films *Ghost World* and *O Brother Where Art Thou?* feature James' songs 'Devil Got My Woman' and 'Hard Time Killing Floor Blues'[24] respectively (Crumb et al., 2006: 42; Russell et al., 2006: 308-9). He was also inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1992. In addition to influencing Australian musicians such as Dom Turner and Jeff Lang, James' music has also been reinterpreted by the likes of Cream, Bonnie Raitt, Bob Brozman, Peter Green, Beck, Buddy Guy, and Rory Block.

Mississippi Fred McDowell (1904–1972) was born in Rossville, Tennessee, however he eventually settled in northern Mississippi—thus earning his nickname. Like James,

McDowell's style has little to do with the Delta brand of blues. Often referred to as "north Mississippi hill country blues", this branch of the blues genre is characterised by bottleneck guitar and singular bass drones. Similar to Mance Lipscomb and Robert Pete Williams, McDowell was recorded for the first time by Alan Lomax in 1959 as a result of the revival. He too recorded a mixture of sacred and secular material. Many of McDowell's recordings were reinterpretations of songs from previous performers including 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' (Sonny Boy Williamson), 'Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning' (Blind Willie Johnson), 'Kokomo' (Scrapper Blackwell/Kokomo Arnold), 'Shake 'Em On Down' (Bukka White), '61 Highway' (Roosevelt Sykes) and 'You Got to Move' (Two Gospel Keys). A formative influence on R.L. Burnside, McDowell's music has also appealed to The Rolling Stones, Bonnie Raitt, Aerosmith, Dom Turner and Jeff Lang. McDowell was also inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1991 (Blues Foundation website).

Muddy Waters (1915–1983) was born McKinley Morganfield, earning his nickname as a child from his grandmother. Raised in the Mississippi Delta region, his playing is grounded in the downhome styles of Son House and Robert Johnson. He was initially recorded on acoustic guitar by Alan Lomax in 1941. Two years later, Waters moved to Chicago where he formed a strong relationship with bassist/songwriter Willie Dixon and became famous for pioneering the electric blues band sound. Many of his supporting musicians progressed into solo careers after serving an apprenticeship with Waters' band: guitarists Jimmy Rogers, Chuck Berry, Buddy Guy and Bob Margolin; harmonica players Little Walter, James Cotton and Junior Wells; pianists Otis Spann and Pinetop Perkins; and drummer Willie "Big Eyes" Smith. Some of his best known recordings include 'Got My Mojo Working', 'I Can't Be Satisfied', 'I Just Want to Make Love to You', 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man', 'Mannish Boy', 'Rollin' and Tumblin'' and 'Rollin' Stone'—the last of which contributed to the titles of a magazine, a widely popular rock song, and an English

band. In addition to influencing Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones, Waters' also inspired the likes of Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield, Eric Clapton, Johnny Winter, and Australian blues band, Chain. Muddy Waters was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1980 (its inaugural year), the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987 (its second year), and received the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award in 1992 (Welding, 1991: 130-57; Russell et al., 2006: 479-84; Blues Foundation website; Grammys website; Rock and Roll Hall of Fame website).

Fat Possum artists: Chaos and primitivism

Another point critical to this discussion is the existence of alternate or numerous blues canons. This is best exemplified by the highly provocative and controversial blues record company Fat Possum. In a deliberate attempt to conjure an aesthetically displeasing image, the name is indicative of how founder Matthew Johnson manages and promotes the company and its artists. Describing himself as a conman and failed hustler, Johnson has apparently received death threats on numerous occasions with the label in a near permanent state of bankruptcy. This sense of anarchy is also consistent with the lives of his blues artists—all of whom are elderly African-American guitarists that share a background of sharecropping, illiteracy, poverty, alcoholism, abuse, prison time, familial instability, violence, poor health and general misfortune. This list of musicians includes R.L. Burnside, Junior Kimbrough, Robert Belfour, CeDell Davis, James "T-Model" Ford, and Paul "Wine" Jones.

As portrayed by Jay McInerney (2002: np)—writer and occasional investor in Fat Possum—Johnson has three key intentions. These are to record the last of the "dirty blues" musicians before they all die, to market their music as the new cool (i.e. "Not The Same Old Blues Crap") by aligning the destitute with punk rock aesthetics, and to sell it to a young audience. Additionally, Dougan (2003: 2-3) identifies the key elements of the Fat Possum

aesthetic as chaos, primitivism, and a desire to aggravate blues purists—all of which work to establish a "counter canon" of blues authenticity. This alternative canon, and its stark contrast to mainstream blues, is reinforced on several levels. First, the blues artists recorded by Fat Possum Records are unrecognised by important music industry bodies (i.e. The Blues Foundation Hall of Fame, The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, The Recording Academy), and recent initiatives (i.e. *Year of The Blues* website, the Documentary *Lightning in a Bottle* (Fuqua, 2005), and *The ABC Blues Festival* website). In an effort to combat this opposition, Fat Possum releases its own promotional media including *Darker Blues* (Johnson, M., 2002) and *You See Me Laughin'* (Johnson, M., 2003). The label also relies on successful "alternative" recording artists like the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Bono, Iggy Pop, and The Black Keys for additional credibility as blues artists of worthy note. Advancing the profile of this "counter canon" even further is the widespread use of songs written and/or performed by Fat Possum artists in the movie *Black Snake Moan* (2006).[25]

Contemporary artists

This final group comprises the blues artists that began playing after the initial recording boom of the 1920s and 1930s and are fortunate enough to still be alive and playing. Canonised performers include George "Buddy" Guy, B.B. King (a.k.a. Riley "Blues Boy" King), and Taj Mahal (a.k.a. Henry Sainte Claire Fredricks). Coincidentally, each of these performers is a male guitarist who is known by a pseudonym, thus demonstrating the level of expectation carried by contemporary blues audiences as to the key attributes that constitute a blues performer. Other blues musicians born in the first half of the twentieth century who are still alive at the time of writing include James Cotton, David "Honeyboy" Edwards, Robert Lockwood Jr., Joe "Pinetop" Perkins and "Homesick" James Williamson (a.k.a. John William Henderson). Ready to follow in their stead are a newer breed of African-American

blues artists including Robert Cray, Ben Harper, Corey Harris, Chris Thomas King, and Keb'
Mo' (a.k.a. Kevin Moore)—all of whom conform to aspects of the bluesman stereotype to
varying degrees.

Musicians and the canon

Though Dougan (2001: 115) makes brief mention of how musicians canonise and
carry on the blues tradition, the majority of his doctoral thesis focuses on how a blues
discourse has emerged through talent scouts, record company executives, record collectors,
criticism and scholarship. The focus of this thesis, however, is the opposite. Since the
beginning of the race record industry in 1920, particular artists, songs, playing styles and
pieces of musical equipment associated with blues music have been promoted, perpetuated
and canonised by other popular musicians who are either aligned with, interested in or
influenced by the blues tradition to some extent. These contemporary artists achieve this
outcome in a number of ways: through reinterpreting particular songs (some of which are
regularly considered to be "blues standards"); mentioning or alluding to a particular artist,
song, lyric or place within another song (typically a new composition); adopting, imitating or
interpolating certain vocal, instrumental or recording techniques, and; adopting a specific
brand, make or model of instrument. Contemporary musicians will always be influenced by
the artists, songs, playing styles and equipment that came before them. Subsequently, these
aspects of blues music are canonised as the result of their perceived quality from or influence
on other popular musicians, who are usually canonised themselves. To paraphrase Kerman
(1983: 108), as long as blues music continues to be internalised by musicians via a long and
rewarding process of attending to it, absorbing it, imitating it, learning it, and repeating it, the
cycle will continue and the genre will persist. While aspects of the blues canon are discussed
above, the remaining chapters of this thesis are dedicated to the canonising role of musicians.

More specifically, the continued codification, maintenance and dissemination of a blues canon as carried out by contemporary artists. This thread will be elaborated on further in the subsequent chapters specifically in relation to Australian musicians have who have adopted and contributed to the genre.

[1] Examples of these include The Blues Foundation Hall of Fame and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

[2] In this thesis, this discussion is also broadened to include playing styles and equipment utilised in the blues genre.

[3] This problematic-but-necessary situation is also acknowledged in *The New Blackwell Guide to Recorded Blues* (Cowley, 1996: 2-5).

[4] See Schroeder (2004: 167) for confirmation on Zinermon's spelling as this name is often spelt differently.

[5] See Samuel Charters (1959: 171).

[6] Examples include "Done Sold My Soul to the Devil" by Clara Smith (1924)—later versioned by Casey Bill Weldon (1937)—and "Devil Got My Woman" by Skip James (1931).

[7] Although he is not known by a pseudonym, Johnson did assume numerous surnames as he travelled including Spencer, Dodds, Moore, James, Barstow, Dusty, Saunders, Saxton and Sax.

[8] According to the Find A Grave website, Robert Johnson's actual burial place is at Little Zion Cemetery, while two other cenotaphs exist in separate nearby locations.

[9] See John Cowley (1981), Barry Lee Pearson (1992), Matt Copeland and Chris Goering (2003) and Eric Rothenbuhler (2007).

[10] See Samuel Charters (1967: 87-99), Peter Guralnick (1989), Al Young (1991), Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch (2003), Francis Davis (1995: 124-33), Patricia Schroeder (2004), Elijah Wald (2004), Eric Rothenbuhler (2005) and Dick Weissman (2005: 54-71).

[11] See Margaret McGeachy (1999) and Steven Aisenpresser (2004).

[12] These two guitars are the "Blues King" and the Robert Johnson signature model. Manufactured posthumously, it is likely that the autograph on these guitars has been lifted from one of the few existing documents bearing Robert Johnson's signature (e.g. marriage certificates).

[13] The vendor's website: http://www.rjguitar.com

[14] These concerts took place on March 14 and 15, 2007 and featured performers such as Dom Turner (the Backsliders), Jeff Lang, Matt Walker and Hat Fitz.

[15] According to Johnny Shines—like many of the early bluesmen—Johnson was a songster, able to play hillbilly, ragtime, pop tunes, waltzes and polkas, as well as other blues styles (Young, 1991: 82).

[16] The following passage from Howell Evans (2004: 87) aptly describes this type of guitar in detail: "Poised halfway between acoustic and electric technologies, the resonator employs a speaker cone to amplify the vibrations of a string stretched over a saddle, producing a ringing tone that is noticeably louder than the sound

from a vibrating guitar top alone. The sound is tinnier, less warm, admittedly, but when further amplified by being plucked with metal picks, attacked with metal slides, has the volume and harshness needed to cut through the usual crowd noise at a small gathering where the sound of drinking, laughing, and conversation can easily drown out the sound of a traditional acoustic guitar."

[17] A more obscure example of this point is the adoption (or perhaps, more appropriately, the creation) of a nine-string guitar as championed by Big Joe Williams. Matthew "Dutch" Tilders, an Australian performer of blues music, admits to having made a nine-string guitar for this reason (Parkhill, 2000).

[18] For more on this discussion in relation to Kokomo Arnold, see the headings 'Dust My Blues' and 'Kokomo' in chapters five and six respectively.

[19] Of those listed, only Harry Manx plays the Mohan Veena. Developed by Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, this musical instrument is a 20-string modified archtop guitar that incorporates three melody strings, five drone strings and twelve sympathetic strings (MohanVeena.com).

[20] The Mississippi Sheiks are one of the many jug/string bands of this era whose repertoires consisted of blues and other popular styles of music. Others include Whistler & His Jug Band, Cannon's Jug Stompers, and Memphis Jug Band.

[21] This does not include The Mississippi Sheiks.

[22] According to his gravestone he was born Willie Samuel McTier, sometimes spelt McTear. The man who financed this gravestone, David Fulmer, also directed a biographical documentary about McTell titled *Blind Willie's Blues*—see Michael Gray (2000: 438).

[23] Born Ralph May, he adopted McTell as his stage name as a tribute to Blind Willie McTell.

[24] In *O Brother*, this track is reinterpreted and performed by actor-musician Chris Thomas King who plays the role of Tommy Johnson in the film.

[25] These performers include the Black Keys, Kenny Brown, R.L. Burnside, Paul "Wine" Jones, Junior Kimbrough, and the Heartless Bastards.

Chapter Three: Reinterpretive practices

Blues will always be there. Of all the other music in the world, watch it – it'll tail out and change. But you'll always be able to hear twelve-bar blues. Always. It's the backbone of American music…—Rufus Thomas (as cited in Whitcomb, 1985: 54)

One need only look as far as the twelve-bar blues form to recognise the significance of notions like reinterpretation and improvisation to the blues genre. Despite the relative simplicity and strict nature of its twelve-bar, three-line, tri-chordal structure, the twelve-bar blues form invites varied repetition and boundless modifications. The way in which popular music of the last century has embraced and adapted the form is, alone, a convincing testament to its flexibility.[1] There is, however, a distinct pattern of performance consistent among the majority of blues music and its participating artists. Rather than treating recordings as a type of fixed aural score or primary text, whereby performances or "readings" function as "successively imperfect representations" (Kerman, 1983: 113), most artists who rerecord blues material do so in a manner that expresses their personality and creative needs. Specifically, blues music tends not to rely on musical replication or fidelity to a score. Rather, it is consistently characterised by compositional minimalism with an emphasis on stylisation: musical alteration, embellishment and creation in performance (Murray, 1973: 83; Rudinow, 1994: 129; Crouch, 1998: 159; Whiteoak, 1999: xi). This extends from the improvisatory practices established and maintained by early African-American downhome blues musicians and African-American electric blues musicians. Consequently, it may be deduced that blues music is characterised more by fidelity to individual experimentation—a conclusion Courlander (1960: 7) appears to come to in stating that African-American folk musics were much more flexible than the written score could reflect. Of the pioneering and popular African-American blues artists, those who have been deemed "keepers of the flame", innovative and crucial to the history and development of blues are then canonised. This

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occurs through a communal public relations process that involves authors of blues literature, discographers, filmmakers, record collectors, blues musicians, blues appreciation societies, promoters and, of course, the audience.

Of particular concern to this thesis is the manner in which African-American blues artists are recognised and commemorated by contemporary blues musicians. As a sign of respect to these canonised African-American blues artists, musicians who have followed in their stead are frequently characterised by a reflex to promote the significance of their favourite African-American blues singers, songwriters and instrumentalists—especially those who were original authors of a particular work or set of works. A large part of this reflex is to perform the songs of your mentor(s) in your own style (i.e. reinterpretation). In other words, as a way of referencing a given piece or set of pieces, contemporary artists tend to use ideas (e.g. lyrics, etc.) from one or more previously recorded blues songs—or one or more "versions" of a particular song—and furnish it with new material (e.g. arrangement, etc.) so as to demonstrate its value in the present. In cases where the arrangement is altered, these recordings are often loosely based on a previous manifestation of the piece in question. To summarise, this process serves three purposes: 1) it reflects the tastes, style and creative ability of the interpreting musician while, 2) simultaneously commemorating the canonised artist, their material and/or the blues genre, as well as 3) inviting the audience to research and/or re-examine the original from a new perspective.

Though the notion of reinterpretation became most fashionable during the 1960s blues revival, this practice has been tied to blues music since the 1920s and forms an integral part of the blues aesthetic. For as soon as blues records became available for purchase, any person of any race who had access to a phonograph and an instrument could listen to the songs and attempt to figure out how they were played. Recordings of any genre have always exhibited and circulated an archive of phrases, verses, rhyming couplets, melodies, riffs and

idiosyncratic artistic flourishes—and many early performers of blues music were instantly aware of the recording's capacity to provide compositional motivation.[2] In order to expand their repertoire, blues performers would frequently "cut-and-paste" archived elements of pre-existing recordings and—rather than directly quote or imitate—use them in a manner that reflected their own needs and tastes. Referred to throughout this thesis as "reinterpretation", this intertextual practice goes by many other names in the literature, ranging from positive to negative to ambiguous. These include terms like adaptation, adopting, alchemising, appropriating, assimilating, blending, borrowing, changing, combining, ingenuity, interpolation, plagiarism, recomposing, refashioning, re-focussing, reproduction, re-shaping, revising, reworking, transformation, updating, useful selection, and even stealing (Odum and Johnson, 1926: 25-7; Courlander, 1960: 8; Southern, 1971: 377, 509; Ferris, 1978: 51-3, 57-8; Small, 1987: 296-7; Bluestein, 1994: 139-40; Millard, 1995: 251; Gray, 2000: 191, 347, 374; Dougan, 2001: 143; Reed, 2003: 40; Evans, H., 2004: 61-2, 81).

In light of such ideological terminology, it is interesting to see that this "cut-and-paste" practice was actively endorsed on a regular basis by record producers who struggled to balance the desire for "original" material versus the successes remodelling proven hits.[3] It was in this manner that producers happily settled for performers amalgamating one or two verses of their own composition with pre-existing couplets and verses—sometimes under the guise of a new title, sometimes not (Southern, 1971: 509; Ferris, 1978: 70-1; Springer, 1995: 62; Wald, 2004: 132). Due to the extensive use and variation of certain common stock lines in recordings (e.g. rock me baby, rock me mama, etc.), it is virtually impossible to locate the origin of a particular phrase, line, or stanza (Titon, 1977: 39). More often than not, blues songs such as 'Rock Me Baby'[4] are products of a self-referential communal network where they have been pieced together by combining pre-existing material from older songs with portions of new musical or lyrical material. This process allows for older songs to be

constantly re-created into essentially new entities, giving them a fairly traditional but never wholly static feel (Levine, 1977: 29, 205).

David Evans (1982a: 154-5)—and, subsequently, William Barlow (1989: 47)—referred to this reinterpretive practice as the "core" approach whereby a group of elements remained fixed and formed a stable unit. Each new manifestation of a "blues core" was either improvised in part or—as was often the case for those recording or hoping to be singled out by talent scouts—a carefully-rehearsed set piece, pre-prepared to adhere to the time constraints of the recorded medium. These "units" are frequently characterised by utilising the common combination of the opening stanza, an instrumental part and vocal melody. This core is given a name—as represented by the song title—and is used as a "jumping-off point" for adding new material. In turn, the employment of a blues core may produce additional variations that may later become the bases of other recorded blues and further perpetuate this process of reinterpretation (Odum and Johnson, 1926: 25). Although such a method does not essentially produce new material from scratch, its alignment of recognisable elements "shocks us with the familiar" and lends new meaning to what was previously considered old (Pete Welding, as cited in Gray, 2000: 374). As such, reinterpretive acts of this nature provide an accessible avenue into the world of songwriting—a path that many performers of blues, both past and present, have repeatedly taken and drawn upon for inspiration. A subsequent effect of this approach is that it also encourages the development of one's own musical idiosyncrasies:

> *He* [Tampa Red] *said that it was good to copy him but, "When you make records, take some from me and some from everybody else to make it your own way, so you'll be Colin like I'm Tampa".*—Colin Linden (as cited in Usher and Page-Harpa, 1977: 24)

For example, when Blind Lemon Jefferson surfaced as the first blues recording artist, Henry Stuckey confirms that he and Skip James "studied" some of Jefferson's records so that

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they would be able to play the songs better (as cited in Guralnick, 1971: 118). Though many admired and imitated the accompaniments, Titon (1977: 43) states that "it was easier just to learn the words and the tune while working out a suitable accompaniment in one's habitual style".[5] As such, recording technology not only served to preserve blues and other musical cultures for larger audiences—it also disseminated, educated and influenced the musical literacy of generations worth of keen self-taught musicians who would, in turn, strive to get their own songs onto record (Millard, 1995: 12; Dougan, 2001: 20; Evans, H., 2004: 84). Recordings have long been integral to the dissemination of artists, repertoire and musical ideas in the blues genre. Though many writers prefer to view it as a "pure" folk form, the role of recordings in post-1920 representations of blues music is too significant to ignore. Take, for instance, how the music of Robert Johnson came to influence that of Muddy Waters:

> *I consider myself to be what you might call a mixture of all three. I had part of my own, part of Son House, and a little part of Robert Johnson. Robert? No, I seen him at a distance a couple of times, but I never actually seen him to play. I regret that very much, because I liked his style. I thought he was real great from his records. Beautiful.* —Muddy Waters (as cited in Guralnick, 1971: 67)

It was also common practice for many early downhome blues performers to reinterpret their own songs by recycling an existing tune and/or accompaniment. For instance, Blind Lemon Jefferson used the same tune and accompaniment in 'Sunshine Special', 'Lock Step Blues' and several other titles, with extensive modification occurring through changes to the lyrics. Additionally, recorded tunes, accompaniments, riffs and melodies would quickly reach the status of "common property" as one performer after another adapted their own combinations of lines and verses—both old and new—to some of their favourite pre-existing musical materials. From this Titon (1977: 111) deduced that "singers thought of new songs as new texts which could be fitted to old tunes and accompaniments". Similarly, the resources of blues music have continually inspired artists outside the original African-

American movement to keep the music alive and relevant through reinterpretation and creative engagement with its songs so that they appear to be essentially new compositions. Though the influence of records continues to remain strong in the contemporary environment of blues recordings, Springer and Titon mistakenly insist that contemporary engagements with the blues genre have lost the reinterpretive ethic of eras past:

> *The guitar solo now dominates and, in this respect, B.B. King's single-string vibrato and glissando technique has become the stylistic yardstick since the mid-fifties and today more than ever. Personalization has given way to imitation and improvisation has been replaced by rigid arrangements. The majority of the elements which had given the blues its originality have thus disappeared…* (Springer, 1995: 190)

> *singers seldom change lyrics when learning other people's songs and, like rock bands trying to "cover" hit records, they copy the instruments, too. In short, most blues singers today think a blues song should have a fixed, not variable text.* (Titon 2002: 184)

While there is some truth to Springer's views regarding the extensive incorporation of guitar solos not present in previous manifestations of many reinterpreted blues pieces, accusations of imitation/copying or fixed/rigid arrangements are largely unfounded in Australian reinterpretations of blues music. On the contrary, this thesis demonstrates that—more often than not—contemporary reinterpretive engagements with previously-recorded blues material predominantly occurs by affixing varying portions of the "original" lyrics from *old* songs to what are largely *new* tunes and accompaniments (Oliver, 1968: 16; Ferris, 1978: 53; Tracy, 1999: 383).

In many cases, these older recorded songs are also referred to as "standards" due to the ubiquitous nature in which musicians from either the same or different genres have routinely rerecorded materials—partly or completely—originally imparted within these specific song texts. In this respect, "standards" are both a product and canonising agent of recorded music culture—simultaneously operating as audio templates through which individual creativity may be negotiated and demonstrating the effectiveness of audio

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recordings to function as a modern score. As part of a general discussion about reinterpretive practices (or "covering") in popular music, this chapter draws on the related concept of the "standard" to demonstrate the need for a new terminology and methodology for discourses on rerecording and recontextualising musical material in contemporary and creative ways. This chapter then develops a methodology for analysing and measuring the creativity inherent in the varied range of reinterpretive practices utilised in both popular and blues musics. In addition to its usage in the later (case study) chapters of this thesis, this new methodology is also applied in the latter portion of this chapter to assess the manner in which contemporary Australian musicians—both blues and non-blues performers alike—reinterpret previously-recorded blues songs in the recent compilation, *The dig Australian Blues Project*. This will demonstrate and ensure the practicality of this new measuring instrument for the genre of music being studied and assessed.

"Standards" and "reinterpreting" terminology

It could be assumed that recording promotes the idea of musical pieces as sustained static entities—and like a snapshot from a camera, it could appear that recordings become frozen moments in time. However, despite the singularity and definitive nature portrayed by any individual recording, once these texts enter into the world they continue to reverberate, and may, subsequently, inspire others to reorganise these sounds. As such, recordings are more versatile and interpretive than they are frozen as these "moments" can be repeated and reinterpreted ad infinitum. Even in instances where recordings whose initial incarnation remains unchallenged and without subsequent reinterpretations, this does not necessarily reflect the composer's wishes for finality, singularity and authority. Rather, it may simply reflect the absence of opportunities to rethink and re-engage with a text or the presence of other creative pursuits that appear more enticing than revisiting a particular previously-

recorded piece. Consequently, recordings tend to function less as a frozen moment and more as a type of audible score from which analysis and reinterpretation is achieved. Furthermore, just as a photograph can be viewed from different angles or positions, a recording will be heard and interpreted from different perspectives (Kerman, 1983: 110, 119).

Examining the different ways in which a song may continue to live on once it has been introduced to the public, Santino (1982: 25) identifies and compiles a list of four key processes: 1) a song may enter into oral tradition (to varying degrees of exposure and duration); 2) an original recording "may continue to be pressed, bought, sold and listened to"; 3) a song may continue to be recorded and sung by successive generations of performers, "with greater and lesser degrees of *reinterpretation* and change" (author's emphasis), and; 4) a song "may be *reinterpreted* in other musical genres" (author's emphasis).[6] Prior to the advent of recording, the transmission of songs would have occurred primarily via oral tradition or sheet music. The main difference between recordings and sheet music as modes of transmitting songs is that while both are able to log melodies and harmonies, recordings can communicate other musical qualities—such as timbre, tone and rhythmic individuality— that sheet music cannot express (Winkler, 1997: 188; Frith, et al., 2001: 31). Oral tradition, however, is another matter altogether as it is often difficult to ascertain which elements are from the original, what practices constitute as reinterpretation, and what form of reinterpretation is taking place (Giuffre, 2005: 15). Music today though is predominantly preserved aurally, and is therefore able to geographically disseminate at a much faster rate as well as influence the future of musical culture time and again through listening and/or reinterpretive practices.

Further to Santino's statements is his incorporation of the terms "reinterpretation" and "reinterpreted" in a context where most writers—excluding David Evans (1982a: 263) and Thomas Schneider (2001: 1)—prefer to use variations of the expressions "cover" and

"version". Though "cover" and "version" are widely-accepted currency in discourses on musical creativity, the assumed agreed meaning and usage of these terms are simultaneously vague and limited. Subsequently, this thesis argues that terms as significant as these need to be better explained and revised as inappropriate employment of these phrases can create unnecessary confusion in situations where "reinterpretation" is much more suitable and relevant.

On a similar note, the term "standard" is often heard and used in and around the music industry in circumstances where its meaning is assumed and not explained. Though commonly associated with jazz and blues, the notion of the "standard" is applicable to all manner of genres in cases where a piece of music is considered to be timeless in some respect. These songs are employed and reiterated on numerous occasions, through multiple avenues, to meet various ends. These include rerecordings from a wide range of artists, some of which are also utilised in—and, therefore, commonly associated with—films and television shows. So from humble beginnings, a song may subsequently develop a life of its own as it is recorded by myriad artists, progressively accrues cultural capital, and subjected to the themes and associations created and disseminated by audiences.

For instance, the Screamin' Jay Hawkins track 'I Put a Spell On You', though originally conceived as a rhythm and blues love ballad, inevitably came to be perceived as something of a Halloween anthem. Here much of the song's popularity has been gained through the dark themes regularly associated with the word "spell" as many of the track's reiterations tend to draw on themes of horror, mystery and suspense.[7] As such, it is regularly utilised in Halloween compilations and films that make some reference to evil or the occult either through witches (e.g. *Hocus Pocus*), ghosts (e.g. *Just Like Heaven*) or murder (e.g. *Lost Highway*). There are also numerous examples that draw on the song's association with jazz. This relationship was initiated by Nina Simone when she became the first artist to follow

Hawkins' recording with her own reinterpretation of the track (1965)—almost a decade after Hawkins' release (1956). As was the case with her recording of 'House of the Rising Sun', Simone's take on 'I Put a Spell On You' also preceded a wave of rerecordings that followed from British beat bands. This spawned an additional lineage of influence in that while some of the song's rerecordings are clearly inspired by and derivative of Hawkins' "spooky" release (e.g. Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Crazy World of Arthur Brown, etc.), others owe an obvious debt to Simone's recording instead (e.g. Bill Wyman, Jools Holland, Queen Latifah, Natalie Douglas, Kim Nalley, etc.) (The Originals website; IMDB.com). Having said this though, there are also several rerecordings in which the performer is submitting to neither influence in an obvious manner, if at all—choosing instead to reinvent the track in a different light. Some rerecordings even cross over into other genres such as shock rock (Marilyn Manson, 1995), dance (Sonique, 2000), and Latin rock fusion (Buddy Guy, 2005). It is, therefore, important to look at how terms like "cover", "version" and "standard" apply to these situations that frequently occur in recorded music culture and identify what these terms mean, where they come from, and any differences between them.

At a conference in 1977, Roger Reynolds (1980: 33) remarked that the contemporary recorded music culture was predominantly directed towards releasing and conveying only a singular representation of any recorded piece. Indeed, in the past some songwriters and/or performers would only release one recorded version of any given song and that would be "the" version, but Reynolds' comment overlooks many long-established practices of recorded music culture. Songs are continually introduced and reintroduced to the wider public via numerous channels. Once this happens, a song enters into an ongoing cycle where it can be recorded (legally or illegally), replayed, remembered (or partially-remembered), reproduced and reinterpreted. Sometimes a performer will even reinterpret their own songs, often through a different approach to the arrangement (e.g. acoustic or "unplugged"). Popular

music is therefore not static, but communicative in that it functions as a process of articulation and response. Just as it is performed in a social context (audience), so too is it learned and understood in a social context—through acts of listening, observing, analysing, emulating, comparing, practicing and responding (Swanwick, 1994: 151-5). Like a conversation, popular music exists at a cultural level; not in individuals, but between individuals. So once music is made, it goes out to be interpreted and can never be taken back.[8]

An inevitable part of this process is that any given person will favour a specific song at some point in time. Such a piece might trigger memories of a particular person, place or life experience; it might instil an emotional connection with the lyrics, or; it may simply possess one to sing along out loud. Listeners are also regularly captivated by a certain genre or performer that for some reason strikes a chord with one's musical tastes. In a recent interview regarding her debut album of Tom Waits reinterpretations, *Anywhere I Lay My Head* (2008), actress Scarlett Johansson spoke in a curious manner about her fondness for "the gravel-voiced singer-songwriter" and the opportunity to make this album:

> *Originally I thought that I would do an album of standards and I wanted to include a Tom Waits song. I see Tom Waits as being kind of a composer of modern standards and so it seemed appropriate that I could interpret his songs… they're so cinematic and kind of open-ended so I felt like it would be something that I could be inspired by.* (as cited in Ryzik, 2007: S10-11)

Tellingly, Johansson's use of the word "standards" is coupled with an overwhelming compulsion to interpret several tracks from the back catalogue of an individual canonised artist as a consequence of admiration and inspiration. This relationship between standards, enjoyment and influence is also confirmed in blues music. Here contemporary musicians are frequently compelled to recognise and commemorate canonised African-American blues musicians through their rerecording of existing material, which thereby demonstrates the

song's value in the present and reinforces the existing canon discourse once more (Giuffre, 2005: 31-2). Furthermore, Dave Brubeck's (2002: 185) definition of standards as indefinitely re-adaptable pieces—governed only by the imagination and improvisational skills of individual performers—is equally fitting as a definition for the twelve-bar blues form.

Though theoretically standards do not necessarily entail myriad subsequent reinterpretations, a song typically becomes a standard by way of first becoming a reinterpretation. Michael Coyle (2002: 134) also argues this point in stating that "covers"—like standards—represent an opportunity for artists to signify difference through *how* the song is performed rather than through *what* is being performed. Indeed, standards do tend to achieve their canonic status primarily through acts of revivalism, reframing and reinterpretation. As the numbers of reinterpretations accumulate, the recontextualisation of a song (or some portion of it) is repeated by various performers in various ways. Along the way, many reinterpreters will use a particular recorded manifestation as a *standard* against which to measure their creative skills—hence the name.

Through this reiterative process, standards amass an increasing amount of popularity and cultural capital to a point where knowledge and enjoyment of their existence is widespread. Using this definition, it is clear how the term "standard" may be applied to all manner of song, artists and/or musical genres. Though George Plasketes (2005: 143-4) identifies the traditional meaning of standards as a canon from the pre-rock era that was largely defined by the show tunes of Cole Porter and the like, he too concedes that such strict usage of the term "standard" has slackened—much in the same way that the "cover" was severed from its initial coinage. Unlike the "cover" though, which still has negative connotations, the term "standard" is still appropriate despite its evolved meaning (Gold, 1964: 249; Bohlman, 1992: 202-3; Crawford and Magee, 1992: v; Morgan, 1992: 44; Brubeck, 2002: 185; Garofalo, 2002: 140).

During the 1950s, "covers" originated as an exploitative practice in which major record labels (with white recording artists) would intentionally "hijack a hit" by releasing their more "palatable" recordings of songs that were originally performed by African-American artists on smaller, independent labels (Coyle, 2002: 134-6). This often occurred within the expected chart life of the original and, in doing so, increased the likelihood that white recordings of these tracks would outsell and thereby *cover* any chance of success the earlier black recordings may have otherwise had. Another result of this intentional and exploitative practice was the creation of the "crossover" cover, whereby a song would *cross over* into a different audience and/or genre (Ennis, 1992: 204).[9] As such, the problem with using the term "cover" today is that the practice from which it is derived is a significantly outdated form of reinterpretation, both in terms of musical creativity and motivation. Although reinterpretation as a mode of artistic performance has continued to thrive since the 1950s, it has been guided by a wide variety of motivations. This is reflected in academic discourse with writers now associating the term "cover" with paying tribute to an important influence, [10] experimenting or improvising within a familiar template, using a proven hit, adapting to an acoustic arrangement, and even interaction with ironic or non-influential material. Despite the term's negative connotations, writers tend to refer to "covers" as an opportunity to signify difference and make a familiar song contemporary. Consequently, it is important that the terminology employed in these situations be revised (Plasketes, 1992: 10, 2005: 150, 157; Brackett, 1994: 777; Davis, F., 1995: 76; Millard, 1995: 234-5; Brubeck, 2002: 185; Griffiths, 2002: 52; Bailey, 2003: 141-2; Cusic, 2005: 171; Giuffre, 2005: 3-4, 50-6).

In her own dissection of "covers", Elizabeth Giuffre (2005: 8-10) identifies and defines the act of covering as one of three "versioning" practices in which existing material is recontextualised in recorded music culture—the other two being remixing and sampling.

Here a "remix" can be understood as the alteration of an existing recording via the application of a range of mixing techniques in the post-production process (e.g. manipulation of tempo, editing structure, changing the rhythm, etc.). Sampling is best described as another studio production technique, but it differs from remixing in that it typically utilises and repeats a small portion (or "sample") of an existing recording in order to create a new recording. Now an integral part of hip-hop music, this form of reinterpretation regularly incorporates numerous samples from numerous different recordings into the one new piece as an act of artistic expression. In addition, it often relies upon audiences to recognise the origins of such samples in order to appreciate how the new recording has been drawn together and created. Interestingly, these aspects of sampling exhibit parallels with copious examples of blues music in which recognisable bits and pieces of one or more recordings—though not technologically acquired—have been joined together in one new recording (Straw, 1997: 6-7; Théberge, 1999: 219).[11]

Unlike "remixes" and "sampling" though, existing attempts to define "covers" present significant gaps in recorded music practices. For example, Giuffre (2005: 14, 23) articulates them as a form of versioning "in which the defining melody, lyrics and chords of a song are rerecorded by an artist not responsible for the original". Additionally, Reebee Garofalo (2002: 128) describes "covers" as "a copy of an original recording performed by another artist in a style thought to be more appropriate for the mainstream market". These definitions, however, neglect to account for instances where the performer who initially recorded a particular song delivers subsequent renditions, recordings directed at non-mainstream markets and instances where one element of a track is reproduced (e.g. lyrics) while others are altered (e.g. melody).

Therefore I propose a similar (but reworked) three-category model to that of Giuffre in which the term "cover" is replaced with "re-play" and "versioning" is rebranded as

"reinterpretation". I choose to employ these two "re" words over other potential terms partly for their lack of established usage in musicological discourse and partly for the absence of any negative connotations implied by their usage in comparison with similar words like recycle, regurgitate, repeat, replicate and revise. In doing so, the use of re-play will eliminate direct ties to reinterpretive practices of the 1950s. Furthermore, it is also better equipped to describe the wider variety of approaches through which performers seek to *re-play* a previously constructed piece of music. Using some degree of a song's recognisable core elements (e.g. lyrics, melody, rhythm, etc.), a re-play is delivered in a manner that may range anywhere between outright imitation and liberal modification.   Such possibilities are encompassed within David Evans' list of thirteen reinterpretive processes regularly utilised by blues performers, which are as follows:

1. *Outright imitation*
2. *Shortening the record by omitting stanzas or instrumental choruses*
3. *Repetition of stanzas or instrumental choruses*
4. *Changing the instrumental accompaniment*
5. *Concatenation of two or more records or parts of records*
6. *Personalizing the lyrics*
7. *Localizing the lyrics*
8. *Modernizing the accompaniment and/or lyrics*
9. *Using the record as a jumping-off point and adding new material*
10. *Using the record as a frame and filling it with new material*
11. *Lifting lyrics from a record and setting them in a new blues*
12. *Recombining stanzas from two or more records*
13. *Garbling lines from a record*

(see Evans, D., 1982a: 117-31)[12]

Likewise, just as "re-play" is more suitable than "cover", "reinterpretation" provides a more flexible and coherent model for discussing the varying degrees of change between different manifestations of a given piece. Here it may be used to account for practices that writers are either unaware of or neglect to acknowledge—as in the cases of Garofalo and Giuffre. It is also a more reasonable parent term for the recontextualising practices of

recorded music culture as one can safely say that a piece of music incorporating either one or many small samples from other tracks is indeed a *reinterpretation* of those earlier materials, but not necessarily a *version* of them. Thus, musical works that utilise samples, remix existing songs, or re-play previously-recorded pieces—as well as those that incorporate some combination of these three approaches—are all reinterpretive acts. Using this new terminology, recordings that employ these creative techniques are said to be reinterpretations of either one or more preceding musical works that may or may not be performed by the person or group who initially authored said material.

Though some may argue that it is just as necessary to rebrand "standards" as it is "covers", contemporary usage of the term "standards" continues to imply both the use of recordings as a *standard* to measure one's creative skills against as well as the reiteration of a particular track as *standard* practice in recorded music culture. In the last decade alone, countless blues songs have been reinterpreted by a variety of performers including those in the early stages of their recording career, those in the latter stages of their recording career and those for whom music is just one of many public commitments. So when someone like Scarlett Johansson begins her recording career with an album consisting entirely of Tom Waits standards—whether as a tribute or as an opportunity to boost one's career with a familiar song—the audience's expectations of both the performer and their engagement with standards in such a circumstance are equally met. In this manner, standards can thus be seen not only as a recognisable product of recorded music culture but also as a pre-existing template or modern score that is ready and willing to be reinterpreted. Even so, while recorded audio behaves as the modern score from which music is heard and learned, fidelity to that score is typically neither desired nor required.

Like a traditional classical musical score, the role of the modern score is to present a collection of musical material that may be interpreted as instructions. However, as Michael

Krausz (1993a: 75) argues, both are characteristically incomplete in that neither can fully articulate all pertinent aspects of an interpretation: a traditional score has visual but no audio; a record, audio but no visual. Consequently, most interpreters are compelled to fill in the gaps of the equation by internalising their understanding of a piece's core musical ideas and recasting this vision—including any alternative developments—into a (reinterpreted) performance. When this occurs time and again with the one piece, a standard is the inevitable outcome as standards are reinterpretations that have direct and established associations to a history of performances, a reputation and/or a specific genre or theme. As such, reinterpretations and, subsequently, standards are highly mobile and highly flexible products of recorded music culture—the medium for the modern musical score (Urmson, 1993: 161; Millard, 1995: 12; Young and Matheson, 2000: 128; Hollerbach, 2004: 163).

A reinterpretive methodology

> *The world changes, and music changes with it, and some things are lost and others gained, and the past may repeat itself, but always in new ways.* (Wald, 2004: 264)

As Albert Murray (1973: 71-3) suggests, experimentation and change in musical genres are vital to their continued strength and growth. This regularly occurs through the act of reinterpretation as every individual musician states his or her difference through their own idiosyncrasies, preferences and influences that affect their particular approach to music. As such, reinterpretation can be seen as one way through which the livelihood of a genre can be maintained. Murray elaborates that the obvious differences that occur and develop from such experimentation should then be seen as extensions and refinements, not fundamental changes, as diversity and hybridity are the norms of music in social practice—not the exception. In other words, musical genres are based on a continuing creativity; they should be viewed as living entities that are permanently in a state of flux and constantly undergoing new

developments. They are not isolated entities—they respond to artistic, economic and interpretive pressures (Johnson, B., 2000: 183; Titon, 2002: 206-7; Guralnick, 2003: np).

While the historical lineages of musical genres are subjective and loosely traced, it is important to acknowledge that they *can* be traced. The reason why this may often prove to be difficult is that music is not static by nature. In fact, while it may appear rather paradoxical, it is essential for popular musical genres to evolve and avoid stasis in order to maintain a sustained interest from contemporary audiences as well as to preserve the culture and history of the artists, musicians and songs associated with the genre. Therefore, the objective of artistic expression, whether in the case of the individual or of an entire aesthetic school, genre or movement, is to develop a device with which to render the subtleties of contemporary sensibility (Murray, 1973: 75). This is usually achieved by way of embracing new ideas, combinations, instruments and/or developments in musical technology. In relation to blues music, Guralnick once said:

> *I certainly prize history, and in the end this is probably the music that moves me the most. But I don't want to stop moving foward* [sic] *either. If you stop moving forward, the past has no meaning.* (Guralnick, 2003: np)

Not only does context help to account for why blues from the 1920s sounds markedly different from, yet similar to, blues today, but it also contributes one explanation as to why people are still interested in blues music—because contemporary artists are continually reinterpreting blues songs, lyrics and arrangements in new ways for contemporary audiences.

So, in response to Thomas Schneider's (2001: 120-1) quest for a methodological barometer, this section proposes to construct a means by which one may successfully analyse and measure the activity that takes place within a recorded reinterpretation. Rather than focus on the intents and aims of individual reinterpreters, this methodology primarily seeks to investigate the outcomes in the form of the resultant changes inherent between two or more

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related recordings. As in the case of Robert Springer (2006: 167), this thesis also draws on David Evans' (1982a: 130-1) categories of reinterpretive alteration, but in a newly-modified format. Despite being developed out of analytical blues discourse, this list serves well as a model for analysis as it is equally applicable to other genres and able to account for instances where several items are used in combination within the one piece of music. However, Evans' model is missing some key creative techniques, lacks specific terminology and does not address certain possibilities afforded through recent technological advancements. In readjusting Evans' instrument, this methodology accounts for more appropriate language (e.g. direct/outright, recording/record, passages/choruses), unmentioned techniques (e.g. re-ordering of musical structure, adding solo passages) and unmentioned technological possibilities (e.g. sound effects, spatial positioning). In turn, the list of reinterpretive categories utilised in this measuring instrument are as follows:

1. Direct imitation
2. Changing the musical structure
    (a) through omitting stanzas, instrumental passages or solo passages
    (b) through repetition of stanzas, instrumental passages or solo passages
    (c) through re-ordering of stanzas, instrumental passages or solos passages
3. Changing the instrumental accompaniment
    (a) through instrumentation
    (b) through rhythm and/or tempo
    (c) through timbre and/or tonality
    (d) through assisted and/or unassisted sound effects
    (e) through dynamics of tension, climax and/or release
    (f) through spatial positioning
4. Concatenation of two or more recordings or parts of recordings
5. Changing the lyrical content
    (a) through narrative voice and/or personalising/de-personalising people's names
    (b) through localising/de-localising place names
    (c) through contemporising/de-contemporising language
    (d) through garbling and/or readjusting words
    (e) through combination with stanzas from one or more recordings
    (f) through removal of words and replacement with instrumental content
6. Using a recording as a jumping-off point
    (a) and adding new stanzas
    (b) and adding new instrumental passages
    (c) and adding new solo passages
7. Using a recording as a frame for mixing and matching musical material

(a) through setting lyrics from a recording to a new/different accompaniment and/or melody
(b) through setting an accompaniment from a recording to new/different lyrics and/or melody
(c) through setting a melody from a recording to new/different lyrics and/or accompaniment

The secondary goal of this methodology is to simultaneously provide sufficient background to the musical texts under examination so as to ensure that any data relevant to the development demonstrated between the recordings in question is mentioned and used to inform any analytical discussion. Here the thesis draws on Schneider's (2001: iv-v) analysis of blues cover songs in revealing numerous significant traits connected to each song including any titles associated with the lyrics and/or accompaniment, the performer cited as the original recording artist and/or model for reinterpretation, recording dates,[13] the historical lineage of the song and/or musical materials utilised within it, as well as a musical comparison between the reinterpretation as its source of inspiration (when known).

Case Study: The dig Australian blues project

> *Covers are often employed as artistic and commercial strategies for navigating the popular music industry. Utilised by artists, record labels or other media, covers function as audience prompts, directing attention to products that may otherwise be lost in the sheer volume of available material… alternative methods of broadcast and production have… allowed for innovation and wider exposure for Australian music.* (Giuffre, 2005: 58)

In Winter 2005 (June–August), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) hosted a variety of multimedia events solely dedicated to the promotion of blues music. "The ABC Blues Festival", as it was titled, broadcasted interviews with blues musicians, the seven-part documentary series *Martin Scorsese presents The Blues*, the thirteen-part radio series *The Blues*, exclusive audio and video recordings, concerts, polls and forums. These were distributed across their network of television (ABC TV), radio (Radio National, Triple J and

numerous regional stations) and internet (The ABC Blues Festival, dig Radio)[14] sources. The festival also encompassed a recording project—*The dig Australian Blues Project*—whereby various Australian artists performed a song of their choosing, resulting in seventeen creative engagements with the blues genre.[15] Four of the tracks were collaborations and all but two of the recordings were reinterpretations.[16] Released as a combined CD and DVD package with additional internet downloads available, the ABC promoted the collection of exclusive recordings as an assortment of Australian interpretations of the blues canon—this in spite of the fact that none of the tracks selected for this project feature in Blues Foundation Hall of Fame list. Though approximately half of the participating artists could easily be considered outside of the contemporary blues scene in Australia, each track delivers a different take on the genre. This is clearly the aim of the project. As Brian Wise states (see liner notes to Various, 2005a), in his specially commissioned essay, "Getting a different take on the blues is what this project is all about. It is also what will keep the blues alive".

The project highlights a commonplace practice—that is, the process of furnishing old blues lyrics and/or melodies (or some portion of them) with new instrumental accompaniments in order to make the music more relevant to a given artist, audience or context. It also illustrates an approach that emphasises creative engagement with the blues genre while simultaneously celebrating and paying respect to those innovators who wrote and performed these reinterpreted songs, most of whom are of African-American descent (e.g. Big Bill Broonzy, Blind Willie Johnson, Leadbelly, Memphis Slim, Robert Johnson). This is significant as it assists in establishing a framework for contemporary blues performance in Australia, one that is ascribed to by at least part of Australia's blues community. One early Australian example of this practice is Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs' rendition of 'Rock Me Baby',[17] a track that coincidentally appears on *The dig Australian Blues Project* (DABP) and is reinterpreted by Mia Dyson.

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The purpose of this case study is to examine how these contemporary Australian artists have approached and creatively engaged with their respective blues text. Here the degree of reinterpretation will be scrutinised with respect to the original recording unless the artist has otherwise stated that their performance was modelled on another recording of the same song. These recordings accompany this thesis in compact disc format in Appendices A and B. Differences in tempo, timbre, structure, instrumental accompaniment, lyrics, tonality and melody will be assessed in order to ascertain each artist's slant on playing blues. Of particular concern is whether or not emphasis is placed on experimentation, transformation or imitation. Where relevant, original authors will be briefly discussed and other recorded reinterpretations mentioned. This analysis is, however, not concerned with the two original songs that form part of this project—each belonging to a separate genre (i.e. hip hop and jazz)—as neither relies substantially on at least one recorded blues piece to allow for significant comparative study to occur. On a similar note, two of the fifteen reinterpretations featured as part of the DABP are not included in this analysis due to insufficient information. Firstly, Hat Fitz's recording of the Leadbelly track 'Easy Rider'—included in the project as an exclusive internet download—is spliced together with interview excerpts, making it too difficult for a full and detailed analysis to occur. Finally, inability to access a full-length copy of the original recording for 'Are You Glad to be in America?' by James Blood Ulmer has forced the exclusion of this track from the following analysis.[18]

'Rock Me Baby'

Thomas Schneider's (2001: 246-7, 393) doctoral thesis, *Blues Cover Songs*, identified this song as one of the most reinterpreted and best-selling blues songs in the US during the latter-half of the twentieth century. Gérard Herzhaft (1992: 467-8) included it among his list of three hundred blues standards and *Classic Rock* magazine mentioned it as one of the "Top

100 Blues Anthems" (Obrecht, et al., 2006: 64). This is probably due to the extensive reworking that this song has consistently received from both blues and blues-influenced rock musicians alike—particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the more prominent of these artists who have performed and recorded reinterpretations of 'Rock Me Baby' include B.B. King (1962), The Animals (1966), Lightnin' Hopkins (1967), Ike & Tina Turner (1969), Fleetwood Mac (1969), Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs (1969), Jimi Hendrix (1970), Big Mama Thornton (1970), Slim Harpo (1970),[19] Johnny Winter (1973), The Rolling Stones, Angus Young and Malcolm Young (2002), and Eric Clapton (2004).[20]

There are also recorded reinterpretations under several others titles. Big Joe Turner recorded core elements of 'Rock Me Baby' blues core as 'Rock Me Mama' (1941), which was popularised soon after by Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup (1944).[21] Coincidentally, Crudup later recorded another very similar song under the title 'Love Me Mama' (1951).[22] Tommy McClennan recorded the song as 'Roll Me Baby' (1942),[23] while other alternate titles include 'Rockin' and Rollin'' (1950) by Melvin "Lil Son" Jackson[24] and 'Rock My Plimsoul' (1968) by The Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart. Another branch of variation uses the latter portion of the opening line "Rock me baby, rock me all night long", as demonstrated by Muddy Waters (1951) and Junior Wells (1966) with 'All Night Long'.[25] Demonstrating the degree to which successive reinterpretations of the same blues core may change in name and content, Waters recorded another two reinterpretations ten years apart—the first as 'Rock Me' (1956)[26] and the second as 'Rock Me Baby' (Leadbitter et al., 1994: 292). Likewise, Homesick James Williamson has recorded the 'Rock Me Baby' core on three separate occasions, each one producing a different result and title (i.e. 'Rock Me', 'Rock Me Baby', and 'Rockin' and Rollin'').

Though DABP cites Big Bill Broonzy as the original author, Schneider (2001: 246) makes no mention of Broonzy ever having performed the song, nor does he cite any original

author. In fact, Broonzy never released the title 'Rock Me Baby'. However, his recording of 'Rockin' Chair Blues' (1940) it is likely to be the piece that DABP is referencing as the original manifestation of this track as it predates all of the aforementioned titles.[27] According to Broonzy:

> *All my numbers are ones I wrote out myself except for a few, like Shake 'Em On Down, which is Bukka White's number, and My Gal Is Gone, which was written by Tampa Red*."—William "Big Bill" Broonzy (1946: 11-2)

Broonzy claims that he wrote 'Rock Me Baby' and that the studio would not release the recording initially because it was "too suggestive". 'Rockin' Chair Blues', which he recorded with Memphis Slim, was apparently the same song rerecorded some time later. According to Dixon et al. (1997: 68) though, this 1940 recording was released by the Jazz Society label as 'Rock Me Baby Blues'.

Rather than focusing on locating original composers, Schneider's thesis (2001: 20, 246) is more concerned with the earliest recording that introduced each given song to a larger audience and/or strongly influenced subsequent blues or pop reinterpretations. Like Arnold Rypens (1996: 313; The Originals website), Schneider identified Lil Son Jackson as being the first artist to record the song (as 'Rockin' and Rollin'') in 1950 but did not name any writer or performing artist as the clear originator of the piece—thus indicating what might be considered "traditional" authorship, a phrase often in such a situation. What Schneider missed though was that Jackson's recording also drew on lyrics from 'Rollin' Mama Blues' (1932) by Blind Willie McTell and Ruby Glaze,[28] as well as from 'Roll Me Mamma' (1939) by Curtis Jones—both of which were twelve-bar blues pieces revolving around the same phrase.[29] So while it is likely that songs like McTell's 'Rollin' Mama Blues' (1932), Jones' 'Roll Me Mama' (1939), Broonzy's 'Rockin' Chair Blues' (1940), Turner's 'Rock Me Mama' (1941), McClennan's 'Roll Me Baby' (1942), Jackson's 'Rockin' and Rollin'' (1950),

and Waters' 'All Night Long' (1951) have all contributed to the song most commonly known as 'Rock Me Baby', the first to record it under this exact title was actually Lillian "Lil" Green.[30] In spite of this fact, the author of 'Rock Me Baby' has most regularly been cited as either Broonzy, Crudup or B.B. King (or sometimes even a combination of these). [31]

Of the aforementioned recorded reinterpretations, most—if not all—feature a core with variations on the following lyric stanza: "Rock me baby, rock me all night long/I want you to rock me like my back ain't got no bone." Several recordings appear to have been modelled on B.B. King's version, identifiable by the similar lyrics and the distinctive guitar riff.[32] Even though Dyson's recording bears the same name, her re-play is starkly different as she states basing it on a recording from Ike & Tina Turner (Dyson, 2005). Here the Turners' reinterpretation features the same riff as Jackson's 'Rockin' and Rollin'', though it appears to have generated its own set of lyrics.[33] Having said that, despite modelling off the Turners' recording, Dyson still does not adhere to their representation in its entirety.

Although the instrumentation remains the same—guitar, bass and drums—with the tune centred on the same guitar riff, Dyson performs the piece at a slightly faster tempo and builds up the recording to two points of climax and release. Compared to the Turners whose recording exhibits no rise-and-fall in volume, Dyson constructs an initial climax that peaks and release at the end of her guitar solo and enters the final stanza with a rise in both vocal and instrumental volume that falls back down just prior to the turnaround ending. The other main differences between the versions occur in timbre, lyrics and structure. While Dyson's vocals reproduce Tina Turner's melody, they are delivered significantly softer until the final verse. The first two lyric stanzas remain the same, however, Dyson removes the third stanza and replaces it with an instrumental passage, which—when combined with the guitar solo that follows it—lasts for two full cycles of the twelve-bar progression. The remaining major change occurs in the second last stanza whereby Dyson garbles the line "roll me over slow"

to "roll me oh so slow". With a total of eight reinterpretive measurements in total, Dyson has clearly arranged the song to suit her style of performance and exploit her own talents but without significantly transforming the song as heard from the Turners' recording. So while she has experimented with tempo, timbre, lyrics and structure, the majority of the piece— particularly the instrumental accompaniment—remains largely unchanged in comparison to the referenced model.

'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time'

The lineage of this particular song is difficult to trace as many subsequent reinterpretations of the original have altered the title. Recorded as 'Mother's Children Have a Hard Time' by Texas street musician Blind Willie Johnson in 1927, some successive attempts to cover the song appear to have corrected an apparent typing error in the label detail of the original. This has resulted in variations under the titles: 'Motherless Child', 'Motherless Child When Mother Is Gone', 'Motherless Children', 'Motherless Children Has/Have a Hard Time', 'Mother's Dead', 'Mother's Gone' and 'Motherless Willie Johnson'. Upon closer inspection, Arnold Rypens (The Originals website) traces the history of this song back to a hymn first published in 1899 as 'Motherless Child'.[34] Popular among street musicians, it was later recorded as 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child' by Edward H. Boatner (1919) and appears on the compilation *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1891-1922* (Various, 2005b). Prior to Johnson's version,[35] it was also recorded by Paul Robeson (1926), who Rypens claims single-handedly popularised the song.

Interestingly enough, this track reveals another issue over the authorship DABP cites. Even though the Jeff Lang interview posted on the DABP website (Lang, 2005a) clearly features music from Blind Willie Johnson in the background (e.g. 'The Soul of a Man', 'Dark Was the Night…') and thus alludes to his authorship, the CD packaging clearly and

incorrectly credits Blind Willie <u>McTell</u> with writing 'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time'.[36] Though McTell—a fellow blues guitarist—did record a reinterpretation of this track in 1949, this occurred long after Johnson's death and was done so as a tribute to his similarly-named friend (Gray, 2000: 521). Furthermore, the two Blind Willies were very different performers: Johnson was known for his distinctive raspy vocals and slide guitar; McTell's vocals were more understated and his instrumentation was usually a finger-picked twelve-string guitar, which was typical of most 'Piedmont' blues guitarists.

While Schneider (2001: 258) only mentions Eric Clapton's chart-topping version from 1974, 'Motherless Children…' has also been reinterpreted by a wide variety of artists and more frequently since 1990.[37] A significant number of these reinterpretations are by blues artists with slide guitar proficiency as Johnson is often touted by contemporary performers as one of the best of the early bottleneck blues guitarists (Bogdanov, et al., 2003: 284).[38] However, while his guitar abilities were certainly in the vein of blues, Johnson was more predominantly a gospel artist and his recorded catalogue was full of Christian references: 'Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed', 'Praise God I'm Satisfied', 'Bye and Bye I'm Goin' to See the King', 'God Moves on the Water', 'I Know His Blood Can Make Me Whole', 'God Don't Never Change', 'Jesus Is Coming Soon'. Though not strictly of the blues idiom, his inclusion in blues encyclopedias and histories indicates his significance to the genre.

Keeping with the trend, Jeff Lang reinterprets 'Motherless Children…' on a six-string amplified-acoustic lap steel guitar, complete with sound effects.[39] This is one of the main changes as Johnson was known to have played acoustically in the upright slide guitar style, either with a bottleneck or a knife. Lang has also expanded the instrumental accompaniment in a clear attempt to creatively engage with the song via instrumentation. This is further illustrated by Lang's adherence to the original lyrics—minus one garble (i.e. "try" instead of

"start")—as well as an extended instrumental section that creates a climax and release midway during the track. Combined with the new rhythmic backing of tom-toms and bass drum, the extended section features harmonica and lap steel solos, a harmonica-lap steel duet, and an additional chord change. Apart from the expanded instrumental section, the removal of the final lyric stanza and the repetition of the song's final line, Lang also adheres to both the melody and structure in Johnson's recording. Other changes to the song include a faster tempo and Lang's soft vocal timbre. Similar to Dyson, Lang tallies ten measurements of reinterpretation in an example where emphasis has been placed on largely reproducing the original lyrics while adapting the instrumental accompaniment into a style more reflective of his own material and individual skills. This represents a re-play in that, although Lang has significantly expanded upon the instrumental accompaniment and transformed the piece into a band song, core elements such as the title, melody, lyrics and order of stanzas remain recognisable and predominantly unaltered.

'Lonely Avenue'

Made famous by Ray Charles in 1956, this song was written by Doc Pomus (a.k.a. Jerome Felder) and appears to borrow both its melody and slow shuffle beat from vocal gospel group The Pilgrim Travelers and their early 1950s recording 'How Jesus Died' (Rypens, 1996: 160). Though Pomus started out as a performer, he became better known as a songwriter. In the 1950s, he teamed up with pianist Mort Shuman and the pair wrote songs for the likes of Elvis Presley, with some of their strongest hits including 'Save the Last Dance for Me', 'Little Sister' and 'Viva Las Vegas'. Later in his career, he wrote numerous songs for B.B. King with Dr. John (a.k.a. Mac Rebennack).

Some of the more familiar artists who have preformed their own reinterpretations of 'Lonely Avenue' include Magic Sam (1957) as 'All Your Love', Booker T. and the M.G.s

(1962), the Everly Brothers (1965), Lee Dorsey (1970), Big Walter 'Shakey' Horton (1973), Jerry Garcia and Merl Saunders (1973), The Animals (1977), Van Morrison (1993), Los Lobos (1995)[40] and Taj Mahal (1996). Although this track is based on a standard twelve-bar blues progression, most of the artists who have covered the tune since Charles' initial recording have been outside the realm of blues music. This may have a lot to do with Charles' usual categorisation as a soul rather than blues performer (Schneider, 2001: 176). It is also highly plausible that blues artists and audiences are not as attracted to the strains of a pianist as they are to a guitarist—one need only look at the songs included in this project to see that 'Lonely Avenue' is one of the few tunes that was not credited to a guitarist. Additionally, the late Jackie Orszaczky, the artist responsible for this project's reinterpretation of the track, is also not of the blues genre and would be better described as funk or jazz-fusion.

Orszaczky's instrumental accompaniment and spatial positioning for this tune slightly expands upon that in Charles' recording (piano, lead and backing vocals, saxophone, bass and drums). Not only does he add piccolo bass (with sound effects) and trombone while removing the piano, but his vocal timbre is noticeably deeper and smoother than that of Charles. Orszaczky also creates a wider spatial effect by placing his backing vocalists in the far left and far right positions of the recording area. Furthermore, in constructing a new scheme of climax and release at numerous points in this reinterpretation, Orszaczky tactically splits the piece into three sections:

1. A mid-tempo, full band arrangement that provides a different accompaniment and melody to that of the original
2. A slowed-down shuffle with a stripped-back arrangement that repeats the final two stanzas, and
3. An elongated ending with emphasis placed on piccolo bass, vocals and backing vocals

Of these three sections, Charles' recording closely resembles the second for several reasons: the 12/8 shuffle time signature; similar tempo; similar melody; and, the similarly stripped-back arrangement (piano, lead and backing vocals, saxophone, bass and drums). This illustrates Orszaczky's intention not only to reference earlier versions of 'Lonely Avenue' that he is familiar with—such as those by Lee Dorsey and Dr. John—but to also demonstrate the flexibility of the blues form:

> *Various people* [recorded 'Lonely Avenue'] *you know, and various people recorded in a different rhythmic setting. Actually that was one of the ideas why we picked that song because it actually goes through a couple of different grooves, a couple of different changes. At one stage it's kind of funky, and then the next stage it goes into the blues shuffle feel, and at the end we sort of go to church with a big 'hallelujah' chorus to take it home. What I'm saying is that jazz bigots say "blues only can be played one way", but blues can be played in so many ways…*—Jackie Orszaczky (2005)

In this way, he draws inspiration from several previous manifestations of 'Lonely Avenue' to significantly transform the song and record ten reinterpretive measures. Consequently, while Orszaczky does not employ direct audio from Charles' recording, this reinterpretation appears to simultaneously draw on each of the three reinterpretive streams: it functions like sampling in its briefly repeated usage of Charles' blues shuffle; like a remix in its significant alteration of tempo, rhythm and structure, and; like a re-play in its attempt to deliver some degree of the song's recognisable core elements (e.g. instrumentation).

'Red Cross Store'

This track is the first of three songs from this project credited to Leadbelly (a.k.a. Huddie Ledbetter). Despite being frequently depicted as a folk singer, his repertoire was vast and incorporated old dance tunes, work songs, hollers, ballads, ragtime numbers, reels, Cajun tunes, cowboy songs, children's songs, blues and religious songs (Levine, 1977: 194-5, 202; Wolfe and Lornell, 1992: 14, 88-9; Davis, F., 1995: 38, 41; Schneider, 2001: 284; Weissman,

2005: 18). Originally written and recorded by Alabama Sam (a.k.a. Walter Roland) as 'Red Cross Blues' (1933), Leadbelly recorded his reinterpretation in 1935 as 'Red Cross Store Blues' (The Originals website). Though it has not been as widely reinterpreted as several other tracks included in this compilation, there are a few well-known blues performers who have recorded the track including Lucille Bogan (1933), Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee (1940), Sonny Boy Williamson I (1940) as 'Welfare Store Blues', Mississippi Fred McDowell (1962), and Eric Burdon (2006).[41]

While neither of the two Leadbelly songs discussed here is a typical twelve-bar blues, each one has its own set of blues tendencies. 'Red Cross Store Blues' comprises a repeated variant of the twelve-bar blues (usually thirteen bars)—four bars IV, four bars I, approximately two bars of V, approximately three bars of I. In registering ten reinterpretive measures, Miller's recording is markedly different from the original with the most notable aspects being the tempo, instrumentation and change in tonality. Although the placement of the instrumental passage is the same and only the final stanza of the lyrics is omitted, the third stanza presents the garbled line "All mixing it up" and the last line of the song is repeated twice. Additionally, the song has been significantly slowed down and stretched out to create a greater sense of space within the recording, allowing Miller the freedom to expand upon and experiment with the instrumental accompaniment. Here Miller replaces Leadbelly's intense vocals and twelve-string guitar with her own reverberated vocals, "reso-lectric" guitar (with bottleneck slide),[42] pedal steel,[43] bass, drums and harp.[44] Although the instrumental accompaniment is quite sparse initially with guitar featuring prominently in the first half of the song, Miller subtly creates climax and release throughout the song—both vocally and instrumentally. This is particularly evident midway through each stanza as the volume builds around her exclamation, "I told her No!" The effect is also produced during the track's extended instrumental section, which, despite the absence of any solo passages,

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introduces new sounds to the spatiality of the recording. Like Lang's recording, Miller's re-titled 'Red Cross Store' engages primarily with changes to the instrumental accompaniment, introducing a new chord change in the process. Further to the accompaniment alterations is the switch in tonality from a major to a minor key. This combination of changes is so significant that Miller effectively produces a re-play in which the old lyrics (as heard in Leadbelly's recording) are set to a new and different instrumental accompaniment.

'Cottonfields'

Although the initial recording date of this second Leadbelly composition appears to be in dispute—resting somewhere between 1933 and 1941—the original title of this eight-bar blues is identified as 'The Cotton Song' (Wolfe and Lornell, 1992: 259; Rypens 1996: 81; The Originals website). This track was especially popular among folk and country musicians in the 1960s and has undergone numerous title changes in its many reinterpretations including 'In Them Old Cottonfields Back Home', 'Old Cotton Fields at Home', 'The Cotton Picker's Song', 'L'enfant dors', 'Cotton Fields' and 'Cottonfields'.[45] Originally played by Leadbelly as a solo piece on acoustic twelve-string guitar, this reinterpretation sees Aboriginal-Australian country singer Jimmy Little make extensive changes to the song through fourteen different reinterpretive measures—most of which concern instrumental accompaniment.

In combining with a backing band, Little delivers a decelerated re-play much in the style of a Chicago rhythm and blues band—vocals, amplified harmonica, tremolo electric guitar, piano, bass and drums.[46] In contrast to Leadbelly's high-pitched, nasally vocals, Little provides a much deeper, lower-pitched delivery while simultaneously enacting subtle changes upon the melody. Meanwhile, other elements of the instrumental accompaniment make use of spatial positioning, most evidently the far right placement of the harmonica.

Moreover, this reinterpretation constructs a scene of climax and release. Although this rising effect is also present in Leadbelly's original in that the tempo gains pace throughout the piece, Little builds to a crescendo by inserting a key change towards the end of his recording. In addition to altering the accompaniment, Little inserts two new solo passages midway through the song in a "tag-team" style whereby the first and second halves of the progression are occupied by the harmonica and guitar respectively—a tactic regularly employed in the country music genre.

The remaining changes are confined to the lyrics, the most noticeable of which concern the musical structure. Here Little omits two of the chorus stanzas (i.e. "Oh when them cotton bolls get rotten…")—one at the beginning of the song, the other at the end—and exchanges the order of the last chorus stanza with the last verse stanza (i.e. "Way out west…"). Further alterations are present in a garbled third line, the switch to first person narrative in the last stanza, the replacement of the location mentioned in the last stanza as well as the repetition of the song's final line.

'Mother Earth'

Written and recorded by pianist Memphis Slim (a.k.a. John Peter Chatman) in 1951, this twelve-bar blues has been reinterpreted numerous times including performances by Lightnin' Hopkins and Barbara Dane (1964), Eric Burdon and War (1970), Heart (1978) as 'Mother Earth Blues', Johnny Winter (1988), Dave Alvin (1994), Chris Whitley (1994), Little Milton (1999) and Tab Benoit (1999). Slim was based in Chicago during the 1940s and 1950s, before relocating to Paris after a European tour with Willie Dixon in 1960. He continued to record and play to European audiences during that the decades that followed, until his death in 1988 (Schneider, 2001: 309).

For this project, Geoff Achison abandons a full band accompaniment like that present in Slim's recording (vocals, piano, guitar, bass and drums). In doing so, he reapplies the lyrics from the piano-based 'Mother Earth' over to a solo arrangement of acoustic guitar and vocals. Not only is this a departure from Achison performing with his electric blues band, the Souldiggers, but it is also a reversal of the usual practice for blues reinterpretations in which contemporary musicians adapt self-accompanied songs from early African-American blues artists into contemporary band formats. In fact, while the rest of the DABP recordings are characterised by a "full" sound, Achison's take on 'Mother Earth' is the only reinterpretation to have stripped back the original instrumental accompaniment from a band arrangement to just guitar and vocals.

Although both of the instruments used here are treated with ample reverberation, Achison also makes use of some manual sound effects such as a raspy, tremolo vocal delivery. This is additionally demonstrated during the newly-implemented guitar solo—complete with hammers, bends, finger-picking, guitar slaps and intentional variations of volume—which creates a sense of climax and release not present in the original. Further to Achison's tally of nine reinterpretive techniques are his re-ordering of the second and third stanzas, repetition of the song's final line as well as numerous readjustments and garbled lyrics throughout. These include the opening line of the song, the beginning of each refrain (i.e. "But no matter" instead of "Don't care") as well as several word changes in the quatrain of the final stanzas.

'Spoonful'

Originally recorded by Howlin' Wolf (1960), 'Spoonful' was written by Willie Dixon who later recorded his own version with an all-star band of Chicago bluesmen on *I Am the Blues* (1970).[47] Yet another of Herzhaft's blues standards (1992: 471-2), some of the other recorded reinterpretations from this genre include Etta James and Harvey Fuqua (1961), Paul

Butterfield Blues Band (1965), Canned Heat (1966), John Hammond Jr. (1967), Bo Diddley (1967), Ten Years After (1967), Cream (1968), Climax Blues Band (1971), Koko Taylor (1978), Salty Dog (1990), Kate Meehan (1999), Chris Whitley (2000), James Blood Ulmer (2001), Willie King and the Liberators (2003) and Harry Manx (2003). Though it differs from Charley Patton's 'Spoonful Blues' (1929), both songs repeatedly employ the same instrumental device whereby the two-syllable "spoonful" lyric is regularly substituted by a two-note riff (Schneider, 2001: 236). Musically, the reference tone remains the same throughout the piece without any notion of change between different degrees of a scale. While such a progression is not typical of most blues songs, the concept is certainly not alien to the genre.

Based on the Howlin' Wolf recording, this reinterpretation is the result of a collaboration between the independent rock group Machine Translations and blues performer C.W. Stoneking on vocals. In registering only seven reinterpretive engagements with the musical text, many facets of the original recording (e.g. tempo, lyrics, tonality, riffs and melody) are largely present and unchanged, with the main differences occurring in instrumental accompaniment. While Stoneking's readjustments to the lyrical lines throughout are minor, his vocal approximation of a southern-United States African-American is a stark contrast to Wolf's deep, rough and raspy vocal delivery. Interestingly, the instrumentation adopted by Machine Translations appears similar to the original on paper as both recordings feature core elements of a typical Chicago blues band (vocals, piano, guitar and drums). However, Machine Translations opt for a double guitar arrangement instead of guitar and bass. The exclusion of bass from both blues and blues-rock has become an accepted concept in recent times as demonstrated by the popularity of guitar-oriented groups like The Black Keys and The White Stripes, to name a few. Nevertheless, this approach has been championed by groups such as The Backsliders and The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

(now Blues Explosion) since the early 1990s. While it is likely that Walker's band draws some influence from these types of bands on this track, his focus appears to on altering the feel of the song, partly to suit his own style:

> *I tend to sort of mix it up with a bit of Latin stuff… and it comes out all different, which I think for me is the point—to take it and run with it rather than get too fixated with trying to repeat it. Because… especially playing guitar… there's just so many clichés you can fall into, so you've got to try and avoid that stuff.*—J. Walker (2005)

The main differences in the guitars are the three guitar solos, repeated use of the tremolo bar and the double-time strumming that occurs over the climactic sections where "spoonful" is repeated. Another difference is that the piano in this version plays a more rhythmic role as it is used mainly to emphasize the beat and the two-note "spoonful" riffs. Finally, whereas the drums in the original maintain a straight-four beat for the entirety of the tune, this version breaks from the beat to further emphasize the "spoonful" riffs and inserts pauses prior to the section containing these riffs.

'Ragged and Dirty'

C.W. Stoneking's second contribution to this project—one of four online-only videos available from the official website[48]—is a self-accompanied reinterpretation of 'Ragged and Dirty' on finger-picked resonator guitar. Like 'Rock Me Baby', the authorship of this track constitutes an interesting road of research. Reinterpretations of 'Ragged and Dirty' usually open with some variation of the line, "I'm broke and hungry, ragged and dirty too". This phrase can be traced back to Blind Lemon Jefferson's 1926 recording of 'Broke and Hungry', which is the title Herzhaft (1992: 441) uses in listing it as one of his blues standards. Joshua "Peg Leg" Howell was the first to reinterpret the tune on record as 'Broke and Hungry Blues' (1929). Later that year, it was recorded by Estes along with James 'Yank' Rachell and Jab Jones—who comprised the Three J's Jug Band—and released as 'Broken-Hearted, Ragged

and Dirty Too'.[49] Though Stoneking acknowledges awareness of this reinterpretation by Sleepy John Estes from the 1920s, he insists his re-play is learned from a 1940s recording of an unnamed fellow that archivist Alan Lomax captured "in some shack" (Stoneking 2005). In actual fact, the reinterpretation Stoneking refers to was recorded in 1942 and is a self-accompanied performance by William Brown[50] on resonator guitar. Coincidentally, Brown's track is also the first manifestation of this core to be titled 'Ragged and Dirty'. When Bob Dylan reinterpreted the track under the same title on *World Gone Wrong* (1993), he also referenced Brown's manifestation while simultaneously labelling it a traditional song with words and music by Bob Dylan. These liner notes, however, are significantly misleading as Dylan's near-identical and chronological reproduction of the structure as well as all of the stanzas suggests something more along the lines of direct imitation.[51]

Despite reinforcing the association of two African-American blues musicians who previously performed this song (Estes and Brown) and not claiming any authorship on his own behalf, Stoneking's reinterpretation—like Dylan's—makes very few changes. Here Stoneking commits to direct imitation himself as he adopts the instrumental accompaniment, tempo, vocal and instrumental timbre, spatial positioning, melody, opening instrumental passage and solo passage from Brown's reinterpretation. In doing so, he produces a tally of only three reinterpretive processes, with the main differences occurring in lyrics and structure. The first instance of this is the exchange in order of Brown's second and third stanzas—the result of which is identical to Estes' recording. Coincidentally, Stoneking also omits the following (forth) stanza from Brown's reinterpretation and jumps ahead to the fifth stanza instead. He then maintains the structural placement of Brown's solo passage and finishes with Brown's sixth and final stanza. This suggests a number of possible outcomes in regards to Stoneking's creative execution of the piece, intentional or otherwise.

While Stoneking claims emphasis on Brown's recording, the stanzaic arrangement for the first three strophes more closely resembles that of Estes. Furthermore, the removal of the stanza that followed in Brown's track—as well as the subsequent skip ahead to the fifth stanza—may potentially represent poor recall and a struggle to return to the ordering inherent in the supposed "model" recording. Granted that Stoneking is aware of both of these previous reinterpretations, it is indeed possible that he is actually referencing ideas exhibited within both recordings—albeit not in a conscious manner. On the other hand, the ordering employed here may also be an accident or even an unintentional coincidence, with the minimal changes representing an active and creative engagement with the core materials of the song. It is, however, certain that Stoneking's reinterpretation of this track—like his entire performance persona (as analysed in the previous chapter)—focuses significantly on imitation.

'Preaching Blues'

This track is the first of two songs in this project credited to Robert Johnson, the most famous of the pre-World War II downhome blues guitarists. Recorded under the title 'Preaching Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)', Johnson borrowed both its main riff and title from Son House's 'Preaching the Blues' recorded in 1930 (Rypens, 1996: 299; Wald, 2004: 161-3). As is the case with almost all of Johnson's entire recorded catalogue, 'Preaching Blues'—as it is widely known—has been reinterpreted by numerous artists including Fleetwood Mac (sometime between 1967 and 1971), John Hammond Jr. (1978), Jeff Buckley (sometime between 1993 and 1997), Peter Green Splinter Group (2000), Hat Fitz (2003) and Rory Block (2006). Johnson's self-accompanied track is an up-tempo recording which begins with a finger-picked descending melody (or turnaround), but switches to bottleneck guitar for the

remainder of the piece. It also features several stops (usually at the tenth bar) and numerous spoken interjections.

Modelled on Johnson's recording, this is not the first time The Backsliders have reinterpreted 'Preaching Blues' as two other recordings of this track feature on their albums *Preaching Blues* (1988) and *Hellhound* (1991)—each of which features a different line-up.[52] The main differences, however, between this latest Backsliders reinterpretation and Johnson's recording are in instrumental accompaniment, lyrical content and musical structure. Unlike any other track in the project, this song opens with a low-fidelity sample of a man saying, "This'd be the ah Preachin' Blues." This feel is extended when the other instruments join in at an increased tempo on the main riff, as the amplified (and distorted) resonator guitar and shaker are also mixed at low fidelity. The amplified harmonica then joins the mix continuing the low fidelity sound further, while the guitar and percussion lose their "lo-fi" effect and drop further back in the mix in terms of their spatial positioning.

As singer Dominic Turner enters the mix, his clearly-enunciated mid-range vocals starkly contrast Johnson's delivery—one that varies from low-pitched mumbles to a raspy and often high-pitched wail. Turner experiments with the lyrics as he only uses three stanzas from the five in the original—not in their original order—repeating one of the stanzas as the fourth verse and removing all of Johnson's spoken interjections. Much of the lyrical content is also changed as many lines are garbled or readjusted throughout the piece, such as switching from Johnson's "low-down shaking chill" to "low-down poor stinking gyp". These changes additionally include two situations where the names of characters are added or changed (i.e. from "worried blues" to "Mister Blues", and from "poor Bob" to "Mister Poor Boy").

The Backsliders also commit to constructing a consistent ebb and flow of climax and release throughout this reinterpretation. This begins as soon as the percussion enters the

piece with hi-hat and tambourine with the shaker, which, after the second verse, is replaced by a double-time kick-and-snare beat that is maintained for the remaining majority of the song. From this point on, the only three times when the drum beat drops out or changes are during the stops that occasionally occur at the tenth bar, just prior to and during the guitar solo, and right at the end where drummer Rob Hirst switches to a semi-quaver tom and bass drum beat for the final eight bars—all of which are instances that contribute to establishing tension within the track. Speaking of the guitar solo, this "jumping-off point", along with the two instrumental passages either side of it, is a new addition to the song since Johnson's recording.[53]

Although the lyrics and instrumental accompaniment are altered to a degree, the overriding melody remains the same. Collectively, the fifteen reinterpretive methods applied to this song—the highest tally for the entire project—draw upon the ideas associated with sampling, remixing (e.g. manipulation of tempo, editing structure, changing the rhythm, etc.) and re-playing for creative engagement with a previously recorded text. Tellingly, the Backsliders' specific ability to reinterpret blues songs has been a conscious aim since their inception and honed over the last 20 years:

> *the aim in the beginning was really to take songs that hadn't really been treated in Australia by bands, and give them our own treatment. So we were more or less arranging songs…*—Dominic Turner (2005)

'Drunken Hearted Man Blues'

Performed by string quartet FourPlay, this track is an instrumental recording—the only one in this project—of what appears to be the least-reinterpreted song from Robert Johnson's entire recorded catalogue. The only other reinterpretation located during this study is by Peter Green Splinter Group, who appears to also be the only artist to have recorded reinterpretations of Johnson's entire catalogue.[54] Originally titled 'Drunken Hearted Man',

Johnson recorded the piece on June 20, 1937, directly after another song titled 'Malted Milk'. Though David Evans (1982a: 257) suggested that he might have learned the guitar arrangement from Willie Brown, there is more evidence suggesting that the music for both these tracks was copied off Lonnie Johnson's 'Life Saver Blues' recorded ten years earlier (Rypens, 1996: 225; The Originals website). In addition to musical material, both of Robert's songs attempt to mimic Lonnie's vocal timbre and discuss the pros and cons of alcohol. Of Robert's two tracks, only 'Malted Milk' was selected for release. Lyrics aside, because the two tracks were very similar Wald (2004: 175) suggests that 'Malted Milk' was released in favour of 'Drunken Hearted Man' because its title—referring to an alcoholic beverage—had novelty value. I would also suggest that 'Malted Milk' was released because it was the first of the two tracks to be recorded and it is likely that the record company officials viewed the second recording as a duplicate. Likewise, musicians have been much more prone to reinterpreting of 'Malted Milk', including those recorded by Eric Clapton (1992), Lucinda Williams (1992), C.W. Stoneking (1999), Peter Green Splinter Group (2000) and John Hammond Jr. (2000).

Though there are no words or vocals in FourPlay's reinterpretation, a bowed viola mimics the slurred vocal melody. This is quite clearly modelled on 'Drunken Hearted Man', and not 'Malted Milk', as the number of notes in each line closely imitates the number of syllables present in Johnson's lyrics.[55] Just as Johnson's recording begins with a descending line on guitar, so too does this reinterpretation but with a substantially different instrumental timbre. In this instance though, it is plucked simultaneously on violin, viola and cello, whose positions are spread throughout the recording space. By splitting the guitar part up into three different instruments, FourPlay thicken out the texture of the accompaniment and allow themselves more room in which to create melodic responses. In addition, the viola call that occupies each stanza ceases halfway through the line and is followed by a response from

members of the backing trio—most of which are modelled on the response melodies Johnson employs. In these response melodies, Johnson adds an extra two beats to the end of a bar on two separate occasions. Similarly, FourPlay add an extra beat to the end of a bar on two separate occasions, but in completely different places.[56]

There are two other main changes to this reinterpretation, one being the pauses inserted between each stanza that provides tension throughout the song's progress. The group's eighth and final reinterpretive measure is the addition of two stanza-length solo passages where Johnson otherwise closes the piece with an additional instrumental line. Here violinist Lara Goodridge launches into a plucked violin solo much like a blues lead guitarist—complete with bends and syncopated melodies. Meanwhile, the remaining trio plucks and strums the chord tones underneath, with the second half of the solo featuring a walking bass line on the cello. The piece then concludes with Goodridge soloing over the top of a flurry of strumming from the rest of the group.

'Garbage Man'

This twelve-bar blues that has been recorded by several blues artists including Muddy Waters (1972), J.B. Hutto (either 1976 or 1977) and Tab Benoit (1997). Though the DABP compilation credits the song to a Willie Hammond, the Zydecats' recording is actually a reinterpretation of the Muddy Waters composition 'Where's My Woman Been' (Hughes, pc, March, 2006). Initially recorded by Waters in 1949, singer/guitarist Kent Hughes learned the song from the compilation album *The Blues: "A real summit meeting"* (Various, 1973) recorded live at the Newport Folk Festival. Though the song has been reinterpreted several times, all successive reinterpretations mentioned above appear under the title 'Garbage Man'. Performed in a slow 12/8 'shuffle' time signature, the feel of this recording is very characteristic of most slow twelve-bar blues pieces and is the only one featured in this project.

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The first noticeable reinterpretive method employed here is the direct imitation of the introductory guitar solo, though it is performed with a slightly different timbre. Where Waters' piece begins with electric bottleneck guitar, the Zydecats' guitarist plays the same melody on the same instrument but slides between the notes by using his fingers and not a bottleneck slide. Secondly, the instrumentation for this track is slightly different to the standard Chicago blues line-up employed by Waters (i.e. vocals, electric guitars, harmonica, piano, bass and drums). Instead, the Zydecats replace the harmonica and lead guitar with tenor saxophone and electric lap steel respectively, in addition to inserting an organ into the instrumental accompaniment. However, while the solo passage is subsequently split into two and bestowed with new instrumentation as well as melodic content—the first carried out on lap steel, the second on piano and organ—the duration and structural placement of these solo passages remains the same. Likewise, though these solo passages have the same overall effect on the dramatic tension as established in the original recording, it is the drumming that accompanies these solos—as well as that which punctuates the beginning and end of each stanza—that provides the real shift in climax and release. This tension is also further effected by the pause in instrumental accompaniment directly before the turnaround at the end of the song—an element that is also absent in Waters' recording.

Finally, although the usage and ordering of stanzas between these two recordings remains the same, much of the lyrical content is slightly garbled or readjusted in the reinterpretive process. Even with the direct imitation of Waters' vocal affectations such as "so's" (a variation of "so"), the first line in the second stanza alters the ending rhyme by placing the two half-lines in reverse order—a change that is corrected in the line that immediately follows. However, despite the attempts to mimic Waters' vocal affectations, Kent Hughes' vocal timbre does not closely resemble that of his predecessor in that it has a much dryer quality and a tone that is not as deep. Furthermore, while this re-play comes

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close to providing an accurate representation of the model recording, it still manages to distance itself from sounding like a complete imitation by registering changes across six of the reinterpretive measures.

'Got Love If You Want It'

This track is another example of a blues song that has been reinterpreted numerous times since its original recording. Written and recorded in 1957 by guitarist and harmonica player Slim Harpo (a.k.a. James Moore), it has subsequently been reinterpreted by several well-known performers such as the Yardbirds (1964), the High Numbers (a.k.a. the Who) as 'I'm the Face' (1964), the Kinks (1964), Johnny Winter (1969) and John Hammond Jr. (1971). According to Schneider (2001: 222), Harpo pioneered the Louisiana "swamp blues" sound associated with Excello Records in the 1950s and 1960s, and was a significant influence on the Rolling Stones. 'Got Love If You Want It' is based on a twelve-bar blues progression, however Harpo extends the last line of each stanza by two bars.[57] This is so he can repeat the second half of the last line of vocals. The instrumental accompaniment for Harpo's original recording of the song is quite simple as the respective parts for electric guitar, bass and percussion all repeat a fourteen-bar cycle of chords, riffs and rhythms from start to finish. Additionally, Harpo only plays the amplified harmonica twice—once to open the track, once as an instrumental break—each time playing a fourteen-bar melody that closely resembles that of the vocals in each stanza. His vocals are particularly nasally and, combined with the large amount of reverberation applied to them, are often difficult to decipher. This appears to have affected the lyrics in several reinterpretations of the song, including the one in this project.

Formerly the lead singer for the late 1970s/early 1980s Australian rock band, The Sports, Stephen Cummings is now a performer with a solo career. Similar to the original, this

reinterpretation is based on a fourteen-bar variant of the twelve-bar blues form.[58] However, Cummings often extends this to a sixteen-bar variant whereby he adds an extra four bars to the third line of the form—most likely to allow for breath between lyric stanzas. Although the tempo remains virtually the same, the main differences that occur between the recordings by Harpo and Cummings are in instrumental accompaniment, musical structure, garbled lines and instrumental/solo passages. Despite both pieces beginning with an instrumental passage, Cummings' changes to the actual instrumentation used are readily obvious. Where Harpo employs electric guitar, bass, percussion and, occasionally, amplified harmonica, Cummings upgrades to a distorted electric guitar while adding piano and drums. Though Harpo's accompaniment is simple and repetitive, Cummings' reinterpretation also adds more complexity in that the instruments regularly change roles as well as spatial positions throughout the piece. For instance, the melody in the opening instrumental passage is now delivered in a vamped manner by distorted electric guitar. Following the entry of Cummings' vocals into the mix, the guitar switches to playing chords. This reinterpretation of the song is also ordered differently with the removal of an instrumental passage and the addition of two new solo passages. Apart from the opening instrumental passage, Harpo's recording features only one other (after the third lyric stanza) whereas Cummings' includes passages for a piano solo (after the second lyric stanza) and a guitar solo (after the fourth lyric stanza)—both of which contribute to the shifting tension of climax and release within the song.

In terms of vocal timbre, though both recordings utilise a similar reverberation effect, Cummings' vocals contrast Harpo's distinct nasal twang in that they are shouted out and enunciated reasonably clearly. This, however, demonstrates Cummings' own difficulties with deciphering Harpo's lyrics as he has changed the words. The two most noticeable occasions are when he replaces "That's all they spying" with "That's all this time", and "Better than I do myself" with "And it's to myself". As well as improving the clarity of the

vocals, this recording is mixed significantly better than the original where the guitar sounds muffled or out of tune. Finally, Cummings also extends the song after the final lyric stanza by repeating the lines "Got love if you want it" and "We can rock on a while", bringing his total of reinterpretive practices to eleven.

'You Got to Move'

The final reinterpretation to be discussed here is 'You Got to Move'. Credited to Fred McDowell,[59] this song has its origins in the gospel tradition and was originally recorded by Two Gospel Keys as 'You've Got To Move (When the Lord Gets Ready)' (1946). This particular recording shows that the song was originally performed in the same eight-bar blues progression as many of its successive reinterpretations—the majority of which go by the titles 'You Got To Move' or 'You Gotta Move'—including recordings from Five Blind Boys of Alabama (1953), Rolling Stones (1971), Townes Van Zandt (1996), Corey Harris (1997), R.L. Burnside (1997), the Backsliders (2002), Cassandra Wilson (2002), CeDell Davis (2003), Aerosmith (2004) and Louisiana Red (2005).[60]

Though McDowell's rendition was self-accompanied on bottleneck guitar, the reinterpretation on this project is a full-band collaboration between Ash Grunwald and Joe Camilleri's Bakelite Radio.[61] Despite this expansion of the sound, the track appears to be grounded by some aspects of McDowell's musical structure and instrumental accompaniment. One aspect maintained from the original is the length of the progression. While McDowell's recording is based on an implied eight-bar blues progression, he regularly cuts it short to fit seven bars—as does this reinterpretation.[62] Although the tempo of this reinterpretation is considerably slower and creates a very sparse instrumental accompaniment, this sense of space is also complemented through the sparing application of the rhythm instruments: guitar (chords), piano, bass and drums. Meanwhile the remaining instruments—vocals, backing

vocals and guitar (riff)—are all dedicated to producing the same melody. This is similar to the arrangement in McDowell's recording where, although there were no rhythm instruments per se, his vocals and bottleneck guitar were dedicated primarily to producing the melody.

One of the other eleven areas in which this contemporary reinterpretation differs includes the opening instrumental passage. Here two guitars play the same riff but in a slightly different manner and employing different instrumental timbres: Grunwald's resonator guitar makes use of bottleneck slide while the electric guitar frets the same notes. Piano and double bass appear in the track soon afterwards, but are positioned lower in the mix of the recorded space—an option not afforded to McDowell in his rendition. The guitars continue playing the main riff in the same vein as the progression is repeated until the instrumental passage where Grunwald plays an octave higher and both guitarists slightly alter the melody in the sixth bar. During this same section, Camilleri and the backing vocalists replace the lyrical content with 'ah' noises to produce the main melody.[63] Afterwards, release is created as all other vocalists drop out of the mix and Grunwald proceeds to sing his stanza. At this time, Grunwald further changes the tempo by switching to playing chords in a 12/8 time signature—without the slide—while the second guitar solos over the top.

This reinterpretation also simplifies the structure by omitting some of McDowell's repetitions of both the first stanza and the instrumental passages. The three different lyric stanzas present in McDowell's recording are still included here, but with a slight variation on the refrain. Though Grunwald maintains the original phrasing in his lone verse, the rest of the song sees Camilleri alter it to, "When the Lord comes, get ready, you've got to move". Furthermore, while Grunwald sings with his usual loud and wavering delivery, Camilleri's vocal is reductively imitative in that it is characterised by a harsh and over-enunciated African-American affectation.

<u>Analytical results</u>

After analysing the above thirteen reinterpretations, the most common category of change enacted through recorded reinterpretations in *The dig Australian Blues Project* is changes to the instrumental accompaniment. In fact, C.W. Stoneking's performance of 'Ragged and Dirty' is the only track here that does not at all engage with any of the possibilities offered in this category. Interestingly, this indicates that Stoneking's specific (imitative) approach to reinterpretation—especially that towards blues music—differs significantly from the rest of the Australian artists participating in this recording project. Additionally, more detailed analysis between the usage of individual categories and sub-categories of the methodology established in this chapter reveals that four of the five most utilised reinterpretive practices are directly related to changes in the instrumental accompaniment:

> 3. (c) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through timbre and/or tonality
> 3. (e) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through spatial positioning
> 3. (a) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through instrumentation
> 3. (d) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through assisted and/or unassisted sound effects
> 5. (d) Changing the lyrical content through garbling and/or readjusting words

This outcome is even more pronounced when reviewing the top eight results, six of which involve creative engagement with the instrumental accompaniment—five from the "changing the instrumental accompaniment" category and another that specifies the addition of "new solo passages".

Regarding the second-most commonly utilised category—"changing the musical structure"—some interesting conclusions may be drawn upon splitting the results into blues and non-blues performers. The most significant detail that emerges from this is the increased willingness to omit lyric stanzas among those who regularly perform blues music in their repertoire. When combined with the high incidence of garbling and/or readjustment of lyrical

content from blues musicians in this recording project, it may be deduced that the majority of blues performers in Australia are not as concerned as non-blues performers about reproducing the lyrics exactly as they appear in the original. Similar results are also produced in the third-ranked reinterpretive category—"using a recording as a jumping-off point"—whereby blues performers are also much more likely to add new instrumental and/or solo passages. Further to these results which reflect that blues artists are more prone to making manual adjustments (unassisted by technology), it is the non-performers who are more likely to effectively exploit modern studio techniques such spatial positioning. This is not to say, however, that blues musicians are anti-technology as they do frequently incorporate amplified and studio-assisted sound effects in their recorded reinterpretations.

Though it is obvious that performers do not think in terms of 23 reinterpretive categories or premeditate the number of these measures that they intend to employ in any given reinterpretation, the results gleaned from the methodology employed here are more concerned with calculating the degree to which change has been enacted on differing manifestations of songs that share common core materials. In this analysis, the full range of creative engagement varies from close imitation (three measures) to liberal modification (15 measures), with the average number of reinterpretive practices employed contemporary Australian artists tallying nine measures. If there is one striking conclusion to be made from this case study, it is that musicians of all generic persuasions are largely aware of and open to the creative possibilities afforded by reinterpretation. However, the degree to which this occurs will inevitably vary depending upon the individual musician(s) involved, how they choose to contemporise "old" music as well as how they choose to differentiate themselves through their own idiosyncrasies, preferences and influences that affect their particular approach to the music.

Consequently, recordings of songs are not as static as they may first appear, for as soon as they enter into our cultural atmosphere we relinquish complete and absolute control over who will hear these recordings, how they are received and what will become of them once they are remixed, sampled or re-played. Therefore, individual musical texts as well as musical genres should be viewed as entities that are permanently in a state of flux as they constantly negotiate and renegotiate their capacity to undergo new developments (Guralnick, 2003: np). This process of development is essential to maintaining a sustained interest from contemporary audiences, as well as to preserving the culture and history of the artists, musicians and songs associated with a particular genre. *The dig Australian Blues Project* has tried to achieve this by encouraging contemporary Australian artists to reinterpret blues songs in new ways for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, it has also highlighted several commonplace interpretive practices that serve to make blues music more relevant to a given artist, audience and/or context.

Finally, this recording project has also illustrated an approach that emphasises creative engagement with the blues genre while simultaneously celebrating and paying respect to the African-American writers and performers of those songs. As such, the act of reinterpreting blues songs is a vital part of the creative process of composing within and associating one's self with the blues tradition and its canon. This is significant as it assists in establishing a framework for contemporary blues performance in Australia, one that is ascribed to by at least part of Australia's blues community.

[1] Just some of the countless examples of original popular music compositions using the twelve-bar blues progression include: 'Rock Around The Clock' (Bill Haley); 'Rockin' Robin' (Bobby Day); 'In the Summertime' (Mungo Jerry); 'Hot Love' (T-Rex); 'Mustang Sally' (Bonny 'Mack' Rice); 'Riders on the Storm' (The Doors); 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go' (The Clash); 'Don't Bring Me Down' (The Animals); 'Let's Stick Together' (Wilbert Harrison, but popularised by Bryan Ferry); 'Stuck in the Middle With You' (Stealers Wheel); 'I Want to Break Free' (Queen); 'Cover Me' (Bruce Springsteen); 'When Love Comes to Town' (U2); 'Wild One' (Iggy Pop); 'Give Me One Reason' (Tracy Chapman), and; 'Red Right Hand' (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds).

[2] This manner in which singers used the same phrases in different contexts is clearly demonstrated through the work Michael Taft (2006: 5) has done on compiling a concordance of blues lyrics from pre-World War II recordings.

[3] One commentator though, Robert Springer (2006: 176), challenges this stance and suggests that some small independent labels may have been unaware that compositions similar to those offered by their performers already existed in the recorded marketplace.

[4] For discussion of this particular song or "blues core", please refer to "Case study: The dig Australian Blues Project" further below in this chapter.

[5] See Martin Williams (1980: 43-4) for one such example.

[6] This last (fourth) point is also made by Reebee Garofalo (2002: 140): "Just as an artist need not be limited to a single performance style, so pieces of music do not automatically have a genre; they can be performed in many idioms."

[7] One exception to this pattern is when the television show *The Simpsons* punned the song title 'I Put a Spell On You' by featuring Hawkins' recording in a 2003 episode about a spelling bee (TV.com).

[8] See Figure 1-5 (Elements of a musical performance) in Titon and Slobin (2002: 16).

[9] This differs from the covering practices of the 1920s where songs that received several recorded treatments were usually performed in the same style or genre as the original (Schneider, 2001: 83).

[10] This is often represented in concept albums where there is a consistent theme present in all of the songs. Tribute albums for blues artists exist for Bobby 'Blue' Bland, Big Bill Broonzy, Paul Butterfield, Eric Clapton, Willie Dixon, John Lee Hooker, Mississippi John Hurt, Elmore James, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson, Junior Kimbrough, B.B. King, Leadbelly, J.B. Lenoir, Magic Sam, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Charley Patton, Doc Pomus, Slim Harpo, T-Bone Walker, Hound Dog Taylor, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Muddy Waters, Josh White, Joe Williams, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Howlin' Wolf, and many others. Tribute albums for the blues genre include Aerosmith's *Honkin' on Bobo*, Eric Clapton's *From the Cradle*, and Fleetwood Mac's *Tribute to the Blues*. There are also 'blues tribute' albums for the likes of The Beatles, Jimmy Buffett, The Doors, Bob Dylan, The Eagles, The Grateful Dead, Lynyrd Skynyrd and The Rolling Stones. These albums largely consist of crossover covers and feature reinterpretations of a particular artist's repertoire from contemporary blues artists.

[11] As discussed in Marc Levin's documentary *Godfathers and Sons* (2003), this is said to illustrate the common thread that runs through these two African-American musical traditions.

[12] Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson (1926: 25) and Christopher Small (1987: 296-7) also allude to some of these reinterpretive practices, with the latter stating these acts may be either premeditated or unintentional.

[13] When one performer has reinterpreted a given song on more than one occasion, only the first instance will be mentioned unless any subsequent recordings of the track are either collaborations with another performer or referred to under a new title.

[14] The ABC Blues Festival website: http://www.abc.net.au/dig/blues/default.htm

[15] All tracks were recorded completely live with the exception of those performed by Mia Dyson, Lisa Miller, TZU, and the Bakelite Radio/Ash Grunwald collaboration, which included overdubs (Pitt, pc, May, 2006).

[16] There are two other points of interest with this project. The first is that *The dig Australian Blues Project* includes three artists (Mia Dyson, Jeff Lang and FourPlay) from the Paul Kelly tribute, *Stories of Me* (Various, 2003a), and four artists (Jeff Lang, Chris Wilson, Stephen Cummings and Joe Camilleri) from the Bob Dylan tribute, *The Woodstock Sessions* (Various, 2000a)—both of which were Australian compilations. The second is that it also features at least three ABC employees: Jeff Lang, who is currently signed to the ABC Roots record label; Ash Grunwald who presents his weekly radio program *Roots 'N All* on Triple J; and, Lucky Oceans (from the Zydecats), who presents his daily radio program *The Planet* on Radio National.

[17] The Aztecs first recorded 'Rock Me Baby' as a single in late 1969 and it became a regular feature of their live shows (Thorpe, 1994).

[18] Reinterpreted here by Dave Graney and the Lurid Yellow Mist, the very appearance of this particular track in a "blues project" is an interesting one as Ulmer is not an artist whose back catalogue is clearly and heavily aligned with blues. He even goes unmentioned in *The Big Book of Blues* (Santelli, 1993) or the most recent edition of the *All Music Guide to the Blues* (Bogdanov, et al., 2003)—two resources which are both reasonably

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inclusive of artists who have some association with blues music. One might consider Ulmer to be more aligned with funk or free jazz. It was not until the 1990s that Ulmer's music took an obvious turn towards blues for it was during this decade that he released four albums with "blues" titles—*Blues Preacher* (1994), *Black & Blues* (1995a), *Blues Allnight* (1995b) and *Forbidden Blues* (1998). This trend continues in the 2000s with albums including *Blue Blood* (2001), *Memphis Blood: The Sun Sessions* (2003a) and *No Escape From the Blues: The Electric Lady Sessions* (2003b)—the last two featuring Living Color guitarist Vernon Reid. Ulmer and Reid also collaborate with Eagle Eye Cherry on a reinterpretation of J.B. Lenoir's 'Down in Mississippi' as part of *The Soul of a Man* soundtrack (Various, 2003b), which coincidentally is another project comprising numerous contemporary reinterpretations of older blues songs. Additionally, though 'Are You Glad to be in America?' does not sound remotely like blues, it is worth noting that Ulmer delivers his own reinterpretation of this track on *No Escape From the Blues*—this time in a stripped-back solo context, featuring only vocals and guitar. It remains, however, that Dave Graney's reinterpretation is clearly modelled on the original.

[19] It is worth mentioning here that prior to his 1970 recording of 'Rock Me Baby', Slim Harpo first recorded this blues core as 'Buzz Me Babe' (1959). Though the lyrics are completely different, the vocal melody and the main guitar riff are very similar.

[20] Others include Lillian 'Lil' Green (1947-51), Otis Redding (1965), Savoy Brown (1967), James Cotton (1967), Blue Cheer (1968), Jefferson Airplane (1969), Box Tops (1969), Siren (1969), Lee Michaels (1971), Moses 'Whispering' Smith (1971), Luther Allison (1973), Michael Bloomfield, John Hammond Jr. and Dr. John (1973), Isaac Hayes (1973), Robin Trower (1975), Walter Rossi (1976), Magic Slim (1977), Etta James (1980), Mahogany Rush (1980), Hot Tuna (1985), Johnny Copeland (1988), Guido Toffoletti's Blues Society (1988), LaVern Baker (1992), Gwen 'Sugar Mama' Avery (1993), Trudy Lynn (1996), Homesick James Williamson (1997), Rockin' Dopsie Jr. and the Zydeco Twisters (1998), Pinetop Perkins and Hubert Sumlin (1998), Clifton Chenier (2000), Ronnie Earl and Friends (2001), and Wake Roscoe (2001).

[21] Other versions titled 'Rock Me Mama' included John Lee Hooker (1952), Snooks Eaglin (1958), "Hogman" Matthew Maxey (1959), Big Joe Williams (1964), Lightnin' Hopkins (1965), John Hammond Jr. (1967), The Chambers Brothers (1968), Buddy Guy, Junior Wells and Junior Mance (1970), Johnny Shines (1975), and James "Son" Thomas (1980). Other related titles with slight variations in spelling include Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee's 'Rock Me Momma' (1946) and Memphis Slim's 'Rock Me, Momma' (1961).

[22] 'Love Me Mama' was subsequently reinterpreted by Lightning Slim (1965), 'Boogie' Bill Webb (1968), Luther Allison (1969), and Louisiana Red (1982).

[23] Other 'Roll Me Baby' versions include Sam Brothers 5 (1979), Sonny Terry, Johnny Winter, Willie Dixon and Styve Homnick (1990) and Hezekiah and the Houserockers (1999). According to David Evans (1982b), Hezekiah Early's reinterpretation credits Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup as the author.

[24] Henry Qualls (1994) and Homesick James Williamson (1998) also produced versions under the 'Rockin' and Rollin'' title—see Arnold Rypens (1996: 313; The Originals website) who incorrectly identified Jackson's piece as the original.

[25] Similarly, Mance Lipscomb recorded 'Rock Me All Night Long' (1960).

[26] The 'Rock Me' title was subsequently reinterpreted by Magic Sam (1966), Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated (1966), Homesick James & Snooky Pryor (1980) and Jimmy Rogers (1994).

[27] This track can be found on Broonzy's *Complete Recorded Works, Volume 11 (1940-1942)* (1992). Additionally, Broonzy also recorded another twelve-bar blues with similar lyrics in 1945 titled 'Just Rocking' (Bogdanov, et al., 2003: 70). Interestingly, the stanza in Broonzy's 'Rockin' Chair Blues' that featured the words "rocking chair" appeared to originate either from Blind Lemon Jefferson's 'Got the Blues' (1926) or another song titled 'Trouble in Mind'. Written by Richard M. Jones, 'Trouble in Mind' was first recorded by Thelma La Vizzo (with Jones on piano) in 1924 (Oster, 1969a: 434) and next by Bertha 'Chippie' Hill (with Louis Armstrong) in 1926. This is significant in that both songs—'Trouble in Mind' and 'Rockin' Chair Blues'—featured in Broonzy's repertoire. 'Rockin' Chair Blues' also drew on the lyrics of an earlier Broonzy composition, 'How You Want It Done' (1932): 'Why don't you tell me loving mama, how you want your rolling done/Lord I'll give you satisfaction, now if it's all night long' (Schneider, 2001: 227-9; Taft, 2005: 82).

[28] On this recording McTell is billed as Hot Shot Willie. Additionally, numerous authors suspect that Ruby Glaze is actually Kate McTell (a.k.a. Ruthy Kate Williams)—Blind Willie McTell's wife (Dixon, et al., 1997: 591; Taft, 2005: 213).

[29] Similarly, the end-rhyme formula 'all night long', which is usually preceded by two syllables, also features in Ma Rainey's 'Those All Night Long Blues' (1923), Bessie Smith's 'J.C. Holmes Blues' (1925), Sippie Wallace's 'Bedroom Blues' (1926), Ivy Smith's 'Sad and Blue' (1927), Lonnie Johnson's 'Blue Ghost Blues' (1927) and 'Baby Please Don't Leave Home No More' (1929), Bob Robinson's 'Selling That Stuff' (1928), Will Shade's 'She Stays Out All Night Long' (1928), Victoria Spivey's 'Telephoning the Blues' (1929), Lil Johnson's 'You'll Never Miss Your Jelly Till Your Jelly Rollers Gone' (1929), Charley Patton's 'Hammer Blues' (1929), Louise Johnson's 'All Night Long Blues' (1930), Charley Jordan's 'Hunkie Tunkie Blues'

(1930), Leroy Carr's 'Four Day Rider' (1930), and Memphis Minnie's 'I Don't Want that Junk Outa You' (1931) (Taft, 2005: 99, 307-10, 315-6, 347-8, 436-7, 473-4, 489, 502-3, 511, 524, 543, 560-1, 628-9).

[30] Interestingly, Big Bill Broonzy toured as Lil Green's guitarist in 1941—after he had already recorded and released *Rockin' Chair Blues*. Consequently, whether or not Broonzy's claim to the authorship of 'Rock Me Baby' is true, it is likely that Green learned the song from Broonzy and simply changed the title when she recorded it.

[31] It is worth noting here that Johnny Winter's reinterpretation from *Still Alive and Well* (1973) credits both Broonzy and Crudup as the authors of 'Rock Me Baby'.

[32] This includes reinterpretations by Etta James (Various, 2000b) and Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs (Thorpe, 1994).

[33] Coincidentally, the Turners also recorded a track under the title 'Rockin' and Rollin'' that is in no way related to Jackson's composition of the same name.

[34] http://www.originals.be/eng/main.cfm?c=t_upd_show&id=4269

[35] Helping to account for Johnson's recording, Bogdanov et al (2003: 284) suggest that it was Johnson's second wife, Angeline, who added nineteenth century hymns to his repertoire. However, this is contentious as Dixon et al. (1997: 482) suggest that it was Johnson's first wife, Willie B. Richardson, who is featured on his recordings.

[36] See *The dig Australian Blues Project* – Jeff Lang's Rhythm and Blues: http://www.abc.net.au/dig/stories/s1410200.htm

[37] 'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time' has been reinterpreted by The Carter Family (1929), Josh White (1933), Dixie Hummingbirds (1939), Selah Jubilee Singers (1942), Blind Willie McTell (1949), Robert Pete Williams (1951), Jesse Fuller (1955-62), Odetta (1956), Felix Dukes and Mississippi Fred McDowell (1960), Mance Lipscomb (1961), Herman E. Johnson (1961), John Hammond Jr. (1964), Son House (1965), Steve Miller Band (1969), Joe South (1970), Taj Mahal (1973), Johnny Shines (1975), Big Joe Williams (1978), Lucinda Williams (1979), Sam Mitchell (1991), Big Sugar (1992), Robert Lucas (1993), Tim and Mollie O'Brien (1993), Henry Qualls (1994), Kelly Joe Phelps (1994), Elmo Williams and Hezekiah Early (1997), T-Model Ford (2000), Guy Davis (2000), Catfish Keith (2001), Sister Shirley Sydnor and Eric Trauner (2001), Alvin "Youngblood" Hart (2002), John Renbourn (2002), The White Stripes (2002) in 'When I Hear My Name', Jessie Mae Hemphill and Friends (2004), Brian Ritchie (2004), and Hat Fitz (2006). See Rypens (1996: 260; The Originals website).

[38] It is worth noting here that two of Johnson's other recordings—'Nobody's Fault But Mine' and 'Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground'—have also been reinterpreted numerous times since the 1920s by aspiring slide guitarists including Ben Harper, Ry Cooder and Dave Hole.

[39] It is also worth mentioning here that Lang's reinterpretations in several other recording projects have been performed on acoustic lap steel: Bob Dylan's 'Call Letter Blues' and 'Changing of the Guard' (the latter with Chris Whitley), Tom Waits' 'Jesus Gonna Be Here' (with Hat Fitz), Blind Willie Johnson's 'If I Had My Way' (with Hat Fitz), Paul Kelly's 'Blues for Skip', and the Rolling Stones' 'Sweet Virginia'.

[40] The Los Lobos rendition is from *Till the Night is Gone: A Tribute to Doc Pomus* (Various, 1995).

[41] Other known recorded versions include Sonny Scott (1933), Pete Harris (1934), Frank "Springback" James (1936), Washboard Trio (1941), John Koerner, Dave Ray and Tony Glover (1964), "Boogie" Bill Webb (1989), Ron Hacker and the Hacksaws (2003) as both 'Red Cross Store' and 'Welfare Store', and Philadelphia Jerry Ricks (2000).

[42] A "reso-lectric" is the name commonly given to an electric guitar that has a resonator cone on its body—thus it sounds just like an amplified resonator guitar.

[43] This is incorrectly credited in the DABP packaging as a lap steel. Though both are played with steel bars—or slides—lap steel guitars usually have six strings and are played upon one's lap, whereas pedal steels regularly have at least twice as many strings, incorporate numerous pedals, and stand up on four legs (much like a table).

[44] This is not to be confused with the harmonica, also known as a blues harp.

[45] 'Cottonfields' has been reinterpreted by the likes of Chas McDevitt (1957), Harry Belafonte (1959), The Highwaymen (1961), Bill Monroe (1962), Rose Maddox (1962), New Christy Minstrels (1962), Petula Clark (1962), Johnny Cash (between 1959 and 1962), Ace Cannon (1963), Bill Haley and the Comets (1963), Odetta (1963), The Seekers (1964), The Beach Boys (1966), Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969), Elton John (1969), The Beatles (1969), Elvis Presley (1970), Swinging Blue Jeans (1974), Mary Hopkin and Sundance (in the early 1980s), Satan's Cheerleaders (1994) and Buckwheat Zydeco (1994).

[46] Interestingly, this is in contrast to Little's previous reinterpretations of 'Cottonfields' where he performed it as an up-tempo dance tune.

[47] The line-up included Dixon (bass), 'Shakey' Jake Harris (harmonica), Sunnyland Slim (a.k.a. Albert Luandrew, piano), Johnny Shines (guitar) and Clifton James (drums).

[48] The other three videos referred to here are for the tracks 'Got Love If You Want It', 'You Got to Move' and 'Easy Rider'.

[49] Though Estes (guitar, vocals), Rachell (mandolin) and Jones (piano) all feature on the recording, Dixon et al (1997: 247) credit the recording to John Estes and not the Three J's Jug Band. See Barlow (1989: 223) for more.

[50] This is a different William Brown from the "Willie Brown" alluded to by Robert Johnson in his song, 'Cross Roads Blues'.

[51] Some other reinterpretations of 'Ragged and Dirty' include those recorded by Walter Davis (1930), Sonny Boy Williamson I (1941) as 'Broken Hearted Blues', B.B. King (1960), Stefan Grossman (1966), Junior Wells, James Cotton, Carey Bell and Billy Branch (1990), Alvin "Youngblood" Hart (2002) and Ron Hacker and the Hacksaws (2003).

[52] In 1986, The Backsliders were Dominic Turner (vocals, guitar), Rex Hill (harmonica) and Peter Burgess (percussion, drums). When Hill left (late 1980s), Jim Conway took over as harmonica player up until early 2006. This is currently a rotating spot that has been filled by Ian Collard (Collard Greens and Gravy) and Broderick Smith (Adderley Smith Blues Band). When Burgess left the group (2000), former Midnight Oil drummer Rob Hirst took the spot in 2001. This leaves Turner as the sole remaining original member of the group.

[53] It is also worth noting here that the Backslider's reinterpretation for this project is a minute-and-a-half longer than Johnson's recording.

[54] See *Me & the Devil* Box Set (2001) for all 29 songs, or consult the albums *The Robert Johnson Songbook* (1998) and *Hot Foot Powder* (2000) for 27 of the 29 recordings.

[55] For convenience sake, the instrumentation is often discussed here in terms of a solo bowed viola and a trio of plucked instruments.

[56] Johnson's additions are in the second line of the first stanza and the first line of the third stanza. FourPlay's additions are in the first lines of the second and fourth stanzas.

[57] The exception to this rule is the ending, where Harpo simply repeats the line continuously as the recording fades out.

[58] To hear the Stephen Cummings reinterpretation, refer to *The ABC Blues Festival* website (http://www.abc.net.au/dig/stories/s1394053.htm).

[59] Though from Tennessee, he is otherwise known as Mississippi Fred McDowell.

[60] Interestingly the melody employed by McDowell in his recordings of the track from 1964 and 1969 is near identical to that in numerous early downhome blues. These include Tampa Red's 'You Got to Reap What You Sow' (1929) and 'Things 'Bout Coming My Way' (1931), The Mississippi Sheiks' 'Sittin' On Top of the World' (1930), Memphis Minnie's 'You Dirty Mistreater' (1930), Big Bill Broonzy's 'Worrying You Off My Mind' (1932), Charley Patton's 'Some Summer Day' (1934), Jimmy Oden's 'Six Feet in the Ground' (1934) and Robert Johnson's 'Come On In My Kitchen' (1936)—all of which are also based on eight-bar blues progressions. It is also worth noting that 'Sitting On Top of the World' and 'Come On In My Kitchen' have also been reinterpreted a large number of times. '*Come On…*' was also inducted in the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1989.

[61] To hear the Ash Grunwald and Joe Camilleri's Bakelite Radio reinterpretation, refer to *The ABC Blues Festival* website (http://www.abc.net.au/dig/stories/s1401489.htm).

[62] The chord progression is "implied" in the vocal and guitar melodies because McDowell does not change play chords, nor does he change the bourdon tone he picks on the lower guitar strings.

[63] It is both possible and likely that this idea was inspired by the Backsliders' reinterpretation from their album *Hanoi* (2002).

Chapter Four: Blues music in Australia

> *The blues has continued for almost a century, despite sixty years of predictions of its impending demise. Cultures and music-cultures ebb and flow, diminish and strengthen. Some die, but the blues continues dynamic and emergent; the current interest in blues has resulted in a surge of new reissues, new blues artists… and surely will result in new writing about it. Already the new revival is underway, attempting another interpretation.* (Titon, 1993: 236)

It is now the case that, in contemporary Australia, there is indeed a thriving culture of blues music that is supported and maintained by the collection of Australian performers and the culture of fans, disc jockeys, writers, pub and club owners, and festival organisers. However, though there is a wealth of resources available concerning the history of blues music in the United States—where the genre was initially formed—there is a distinct lack of literature specifically addressing the dissemination of blues music around the world. Consequently, literature detailing the existence of blues music in Australia and the culture by which it is supported is limited. Despite this insubstantial reality, what the few early writings around the beginning of the 1920s addressing blues music (along with practices of "blueing" popular music) do indicate is a growing awareness of jazz and blues as African-American innovations as well as a general lack of understanding about the basic concepts associated with blues music (Shefte, 1925: i; Winn, 1925: 2, 26; Whiteoak, 1999: 210, 217-8).[1]

In *Playing Ad Lib*, John Whiteoak (1999: xi) examines musics in Australia "that drew vitality and character from musical alteration, embellishment and creation in performance," as opposed to those more concerned with musical replication or fidelity to the score. Blues music fits this description as it is typically characterised by an emphasis on individual expression and "compositional minimalism" (Rudinow, 1994: 129).[2] While parallels can be drawn between jazz and blues, and their interactions with Australian culture, the growing significance of blues in this

country has been slower to develop. As stated by Robert Eagle (as cited in Munro, 2000: np), though their histories are comparable, the progress and development of blues music is about a generation behind jazz in terms of social acceptance. Accordingly, while Whiteoak places emphasis on African-American inflected musics, little space is dedicated to blues music in Australia. This is largely due to the common cultural perception of blues being a part of established jazz practices and not as a distinct genre or separate set of performance practices—often the two terms are used interchangeably. Additionally, as Whiteoak demonstrates with Australian jazz, it is difficult to argue that Australian blues has its own Australian pre-history. This is due to the fact that the most notable characteristics of the genre—blues tonality and form, improvisation, rhythmic vamping and call-and-response patterns—are intrinsically African-American and can be related to earlier African-American musical forms such as spirituals, work-songs and field hollers (Borneman, 1959: 76, 90-1; Morgenstern, 1959: 10; Standish, 1959: 23; Levine, 1977: 293; Whiteoak, 1999: 83; Dougan, 2001: 123).

Blues music is an African-American tradition that developed under very specific social conditions faced by African descendants of diverse cultural backgrounds in the United States. The musical and cultural clash of Western (US American) and non-Western (African) values that resulted from these conditions is central to the formation of blues music and blues culture. As is the case with American jazz, style development in American blues focused on the individuality and ingenuity of African-American musicians. Likewise, the development of blues music in Australia has often relied on these African-American artists for its inspiration. In Australia, references to blues music or any of its related concepts prior to the 1920s are scarce. Judging by Whiteoak's (1999: xvi-xix) criteria, even if people had been aware of blues music around this time it would have been deemed an "anonymous genre"—unorthodox, "irrational" and lowbrow

entertainment likely to be ignored by musical literature and reviews.[3] However, by 1919 there was an increasing awareness among Australian musicians (particularly early jazz) regarding attention-getting "novelty" harmonic devices or effects known as "blues effects" or "blueing" (Borneman, 1959: 75; Oliver, 1969: 19; Garon, as cited in Titon, 1977: 274-5; Rudinow, 1994: 130-1; Evans, D., 1999: 68, 2001b: 11-2; Kubik, 1999: 4, 104, 197-202; Titon, 2002: 196; Whiteoak, 1999: 83, 2003: 86).

Although many of the earliest jazz recordings used blues characteristics or had "blues" in their titles,[4] Whiteoak (1999: 209-11; 2003: 86) posits that the Australian public was not significantly interested in blues as a musical style until 1924 when it was featured as the accompaniment to a new dance step known as "the Blues". By this time, Australian musicians were conscious of what was most palatable to white Australian musical taste and competent with the latest and most fashionable methods of "jazzing" popular music, specifically pitch alteration methods associated with "novelty blues"[5]. By the mid-1920s, the term "blues" had been circulated along with several sheet music instruction booklets—most of which were for piano.[6] Few Australian vocalists recorded blues music in the 1920s as Australian musicians were more influenced by blues in the Tin Pan Alley style or American jazz recordings by white artists. While the performances of American ragtime singers in the 1910s were a synthesis of perceived African-American performance characteristics and popular stage performance craft blended for current white taste, the African-American contribution to this synthesis was of no particular interest to the Australian public. However, despite the hostility and racism directed towards an African-American band that toured in 1928—Sonny Clay's Colored Idea—appreciation of African-American performers gradually developed in Australia during the 1930s, by which time basic blues tonality and form had been established as a standard vehicle for jazz improvisation.

Blues tonality was also integral to the highest level of "hot" rhythm improvisation in jazz during the 1930s, but operated under the guise of "swing"—a term that had long been associated with good rhythmic style in both popular and art musics. Perhaps reflecting white Australia's attitude towards African-American performers, this highest level was also referred to as "nigger style" and was associated with Duke Ellington's style of jazz. Accordingly, Ellington's style owed much to the blues genre as it was characterised by call-and-response patterns, complex off-beat phrasing and extensive timbral contrasts (Bisset, 1979: 43-6; Whiteoak, 1999: 156, 218, 222-3, 2003: 86).

By the end of the 1930s, Australian audiences had developed a keen interest in both country music and jazz but had seemingly bypassed blues music altogether. As Clinton Walker (2000: 51) argues, even though blues was recognised as being integral to jazz, it remained a ghettoised "race" music in both Australia and the US until well after World War II. Jazz, however, did not suffer the same fate, as it became the dominant pop form of the 1930s via white swing big bands. The profile of blues music in Australia was boosted in the 1940s with the emergence of the traditional-jazz movement, which promoted interest in the African-American origins of jazz music. It was also furthered by the presence of African-American World War II servicemen in the "Deep North" of the continent who brought with them popular musics of the 1930s and 1940s, including big-band music, boogie-woogie,[7] children's music, jitterbug, marches, national anthems, swing, Tin Pan Alley music, jazz and blues. This environment made interaction between black Australians and black Americans possible and helped to establish some performative engagement with jazz and blues among indigenous Australians (Lindstrom and White, 1998: 25; Walker, 2000: 52, 53-6; Whiteoak, 2003: 86).

Though, on the whole, Aboriginals have identified more with country music than blues,[8] Walker suggests that:

> *if black Australia has a great popular music tradition alternative to country (prior to the emergence of outback settlement bands in the eighties), it is the jazz/blues/soul diva from the Deep North…* (Walker, 2000: 52)

While there are many parallels to be drawn between the experiences of African Americans and Aboriginal Australians – displacement, loss, sorrow, racism, etc.—blues music only took root among the latter insofar as it served to inform the jazz stylings of the likes of Georgia Lee (a.k.a. Dulcie Pitt), Heather Pitt, Wilma Reading, Candy Devine, Heathermae Reading, George Assang and Johnny Nicol. Of particular interest is Georgia Lee, who performed with numerous jazz bands in the mid-to-late 1940s and recorded several classic blues pieces with Graeme Bell in 1949.[9] After spending time in Ceylon and London during the 1950s, and supporting Nat "King" Cole on his 1958 Australian tour, she recorded *Georgia Lee Sings the Blues Down Under* for Crest Records in 1962—another offering of classic blues with a traditional jazz line-up. Though she exited the limelight soon afterwards, virtually ending her musical career, this recording is recognised as a significant moment for both Aboriginal Australians and Australian women (ibid: 52-60).[10]

Illustrating its vast influence in popular music, blues titles also appeared in the repertoires of several Australian hillbilly/country artists of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. These included Buddy Williams' 'Dear old Aussie blues' and 'Murrumbidgee Blues', New Zealander expatriate Tex Morton's 'Fanny Bay Blues' and Canadian expatriate Smilin' Billy Blinkhorn's 'Blue Mountain Blues' (Watson, 1976: 141, 153). This indicates that Australians were well aware of the "three change" twelve-bar blues arrangement by the late 1940s, even if their knowledge of

the form had come to them from secondary sources such as North American hillbilly/country stars like Jimmie Rodgers.[11] Rodgers' characteristic "blue yodel" is evidence of his incorporation of blues influences and representative of the fact that the country and blues musical traditions of the United States have a history of closely interacting with one another—the eventual combination of which is manifested in the creation of rock-and-roll (Watson, 1976: 141, 153; Wolfe, 1993: 236).

The emergence of rock-and-roll in the 1950s had an immeasurable impact on popular music of the Western world, with artists like Bill Haley and the Comets, Charles Edward "Chuck" Berry, "Little" Richard Penniman, Antoine "Fats" Domino and Elvis Presley capitalising on its popularity. Although countless rock-and-roll songs were centred on the twelve-bar blues form and characterised by a loud and rough vocal delivery, Australian musicians and audiences were still essentially unaware of blues music and its African-American practitioners. Though they may not have known it, local vocalists who were performing in the rock-and-roll style of those mentioned above were attempting to reproduce the ferocity of the African-American blues artists of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s—albeit indirectly.

While all of these events are important to discussing the development of blues music in Australia, there are various factors that prevented "hot" style improvisation—and, consequently, blues music—from becoming the new model for up-to-date Australian dance music in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Walker (2000: 51) notes that not much blues music reached Australia because record companies believed there was no market for it. According to Ross Laird (1999: 158), Australia was still relatively unaffected by direct contact with American culture in the mid-1920s, suggesting perhaps that British culture was more influential at this time. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression effectively destroyed the Australian recording industry to the point

where the newly amalgamated EMI was the only record company still active in the country. During this period, opposition to musical spontaneity and self-expression surfaced from numerous areas of the music industry and Western popular musical taste shifted towards a "sweet" vocally-oriented style that was clearly antithetical to the spontaneity of "hot" jazz (Laird, 1999: 313; Whiteoak, 1999: 218-20).

As Warren Hall (2003: 87) asserts, it was not until the 1960s that numerous young musicians in Australia sought to investigate "the roots of the blues" as a result of being influenced by the popularity of both British and American artists who were reinterpreting blues music around that time. Hence this thesis argues that it was not until the so-called "blues revival" of the 1960s—instigated by movements in the US and UK—that blues music started to emerge as a distinct genre and set of performance practices in Australia. These events appear to have catalysed the appearance of Australia's first blues-based artists including Matthew "Dutch" Tilders, the Adderley Smith Blues Band, Bay City Union, the Foreday Riders and Chain. Consequently, this chapter will attempt to ascertain the importance of blues music to Australian culture from the 1960s onwards, focussing specifically on blues as a predominantly "vocal-and-guitar" music and the interpretation of blues music as a foreign cultural product.

First encounters

Regarding folk music revivals, Neil Rosenberg identifies two common positions that writers tend to adopt:

> *Some, stressing the social elite point of view, argue that revivals are commercial middle-class intrusions that fall outside the definition of folk music proper. Others, holding to the social consensus point of view, respond that folk music is not and has never been the pure stream that the social elitists' argument implies.* (Rosenberg, 1993: 20)

In *The History of the Blues*, Francis Davis (1995: 226) defines blues revivals as spurts of interest in blues music on the part of record-buying and concert-going whites—they are not necessarily about a stylistic revitalisation of the genre, nor about African-American audiences re-engaging with the genre. Many have agreed with this perspective, citing that these revivals are less about history and more about the white appreciation of blues (Oliver, 1969: 162-3, 166; Groom, 1971: 6, 46; O'Neal, 1993: 368; Pearson, 1992: 218; Titon, 1993: 223-5; Tracy, 1999: 504). Therefore, it should be understood that although these active periods are widely referred to as "revivals", they are really revivals as contextualised by a specific portion of the music-loving community.

As Francis Davis (1995: 13) suggests, these "revivals" tend to occur every ten to twenty years and often at the end of a decade. Though he proposes four distinct revivals of the blues genre in total (i.e. late 1930s/early 1940s, late 1950s/1960s, late 1980s/early 1990s, and now, the late 1990s/ 2000s), this thesis is more concerned with the activity that transpired in the Australian music scene around the late 1960s and 1970s as well as the adoption and development of the genre that continues to occur through local musicians in their recordings and performances for Australian audiences. The blues revival of the 1960s ignited white interest in the genre on an international scale. Blues music experienced a resurgence of popularity in the US and became popular for the first time in Western Europe. The dissemination of blues music to Australia and the corresponding explosion of interest in the genre also took place in the 1960s. This was largely the result of two movements: the US folk revival and the British blues-rock boom.

The blues revival

> *The blues and jazz records made in the 1920s and 1930s formed a cultural archive of recorded sound that was a treasure trove for young musicians in the years after World War II, and not just those in the United States but the youth of the industrialized world.* (Millard, 1995: 12)

In the 1960s, the same decade in which desegregation and the civil rights movement changed African-American social and economic conditions (Davis, F., 1995: 13; Titon, 2002: 169), blues music was embraced by several separate-but-related international movements. These were referred to collectively as the blues revival. According to Dick Weissman (2005: 100), the first of these separate movements, the US folk revival, began in the late 1940s and blossomed in the late 1950s. Though concerned with many musical idioms—including folk, old-time, bluegrass and jug band music—this movement eventually helped renew interest in blues music's acoustic-based performers and focus attention on their long-forgotten, non-existent and/or newly acquired musical careers. Consequently, numerous African-American blues artists who were recorded in the 1920s and 1930s were sought out and encouraged to play their music to sizeable crowds around the world, which in many cases also led to new recordings (Oliver, 1969: 166; Titon, 1993: 225).[12] In other cases, some artists who had never recorded were seized upon and urged into the recording studio[13] while other artists adapted their playing styles in order to ride the wave of the latest trend.[14]

Either way, the blues revival tended to favour singers who were also instrumentalists—generally the downhome bluesmen who were singer-guitarists. Very few female blues performers, particularly those of the classic sub-style, were given due attention during the 1960s, perhaps with the exception of Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten, Etta James, Victoria Spivey, Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton and Cora "Koko" Taylor.[15] There are a few factors that may have

contributed to this situation. Firstly, it must be considered that only a small percentage of active blues performers benefited from the 1960s blues revival to the extent where they enjoyed a steady degree of work. Jim O'Neal (1993: 367) divides these artists into two groups: the older performers who had made "legendary" recordings from the first half of the century and those who were recording new albums for the new, predominantly white market. Paul Oliver (1959: 96) notes that very few African-American females recorded downhome blues during the 1920s and 1930s for two reasons: they seldom sang for casual employment as entertainers, and, when compared to African-American men, were more likely to avoid involvement with blues music due to their religious beliefs. Another factor was that the blues revival was primarily concerned with guitarists, especially those who had inspired the blues-rock boom in Britain.[16] Although some piano and harmonica players were involved, they were clearly outnumbered by their guitar-playing counterparts; more specifically those who played in the standard upright position as— even with some new recordings from The Black Ace—none of the blues lap steel guitarists joined the blues revival concert circuit (Groom, 1971: 50).

Though there were some women who dabbled in the blues genre and accompanied themselves on the guitar (i.e. Etta Baker, Elizabeth Cotten and Memphis Minnie), none of them were particularly influential on the British movement. In regards to the female classic blues singers, Francis Davis (1995: 80) proposes that this group of women was largely ignored because the very qualities that endeared them to black audiences of the 1920s—glamorous wardrobes, practiced stagecraft, show business style, their mastery of jazz, vaudeville and blues—were the same traits that deterred folklorists' interests. Davis is also particularly critical of this emphasis on guitar, especially towards white blues and blues-rock "imitator" guitarists whom he identifies as being responsible for installing the concept of excessively long solos and casting aside the

call-and-response interplay between voice and instrument established by the early African-American blues musicians (ibid: 226).

Finally, one must not neglect to mention the sexism that exists within the music world. While some female blues performers were recognised outside the blues revival by fans of cabaret singing and early jazz, Weissman (2005: 42) suggests that because most of the fans were male they were more inclined to search for and promote the male performers. As the bearers of masculinity, it is suggested that these artists were more suited to the rowdy, rugged and itinerant lifestyle commonly associated with blues musicians—or more specifically "bluesmen"—whereas women were (and, in some cases, still are) expected to stay at home or adopt a more "appropriate" career (e.g. nursing). For instance, the line-up and presentation for most of the festivals that toured Europe were typically formatted in such a way that priority was given to male-oriented bands and male solo performers, leaving only one space for a female singer (Groom, 1971: 79).[17] Although this thesis acknowledges the absurdity of the idea that one sex is naturally predisposed to supremacy over the other, it is a sad fact that a great deal of history—not just that of blues music—is plagued by sexist attitudes towards women. Even though Francis Davis (1995: 84) agrees that the typical blues fan is male and more concerned with technical prowess on the guitar, he suggests that this oversight of female blues performers has more to do with an often-popularised, romantic image of blues than it does sexism.[18] Consequently, the image of early blues that modern culture tends to perpetuate is:

> *that of a man in overalls holding a guitar within shouting distance of a cotton plantation, not the confusing image of a woman in sequins fronting an entourage of jazz musicians under a tent or a proscenium arch.* (ibid)[19]

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Despite the obvious inequality between the sexes, Weissman (2005: 103) lists the "discovery" of these African-American blues artists as the first of the three primary elements that fuelled the 1960s blues revival.[20] Long before the blues revival canonised other unknown artists in the early 1960s, several African-American songsters had already embarked on European tours, paving the way for the acceptance of blues singers by a new audience.[21] These tours were promoted by Chris Barber and the traditional jazz scene and included Leadbelly (1949), Josh White (1950), Big Bill Broonzy (1951-2 and 1955-7), and Lonnie Johnson (1952).[22] Many "rediscovered" blues artists, most of whom were virtually inactive when found, ultimately followed in their footsteps with Western European tours in the late 1950s—specifically Walter "Brownie" McGhee and Sonny Terry (a.k.a. Saunders Teddell), Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, "Champion" Jack Dupree and Jesse Fuller. In the 1960s they were followed by the likes of Bo Diddley (a.k.a. Ellas McDaniel), Willie Dixon, "Sleepy" John Estes, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, Eddie "Son" House, Nehemiah "Skip" James, Memphis Slim (a.k.a. Peter Chatman) and Howlin' Wolf, who performed at European-hosted events such as the American Folk Blues Festival.[23] The British blues-rock boom of the 1960s was undoubtedly fuelled by these proceedings, which often had British musicians serving as the rhythm section for these players (Groom, 1971: 7-15; Gray, 2000: 332; Celmins, 2001: xxxi; Weissman, 2005: 115-6).

The second of Weissman's primary elements is the emergence of the first generation of blues scholars and blues scholarship. According to Bob Groom (1971: 88-9), this began to develop in the early 1940s via the jazz magazines of Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, the US, "long before there was any sign of the separate blues literature that exists today".[24] In addition to being among those who helped coax the old blues artists into performing and recording, these writers and researchers helped introduce blues music to the wider population as

more than just a small part of US folksong history. Of these blues scholars, Samuel Charters is of particular significance. In 1956, Charters located and recorded jug band performers Will Shade, Charlie Burse and Gus Cannon. In 1959, he "rediscovered" Lightnin' Hopkins, published his influential book *The Country Blues*, and produced a compilation record for Folkways under the same title[25]—all of which are seen as major sources of momentum for the blues revival that was to flourish the following in the decade. The compilation record, for instance, marked the beginning in a long line of blues reissues in the 1960s, with two of the most significant releases being Columbia's Robert Johnson reissues of 1961 and 1966. Despite this significance attached to Charters, Titon (1993: 227-9) criticises him for introducing blues music to the white public in a manner that framed the genre in a romantic, almost fictional light. This, he posits, only served to delimit the field of commercially recorded "country blues" and promote a blues canon that would only privilege a particular type of blues artist.[26] Furthermore, Titon argues that this approach yields more information about revivalist romanticism than it does the artists being discussed (Groom, 1971: 29, 40-3, 94; Titon, 1993: 223; Davis, F., 1995: 14).

The third and final element Weissman lists is the myriad young white blues aficionados who became professional musicians and began recording and touring. According to Groom (1971: 25), investigating the musical roots of popular musics such as rock-and-roll and skiffle became an increasingly important concern for these aficionados during the 1950s. Eventually, their search would lead them to blues music. In this manner, Peter Guralnick (1971: 22) implies that rock-and-roll served as an introduction to "a black subculture which had never previously risen to the surface," and that this helped set-up the explosion of interest in blues as a "purely" African-American musical culture. To expand upon Weissman's list of influential factors further, Groom (1971: 16, 25) believes that the rapid development of the 1960s blues revival had

a great deal to do with the rock-and-roll, skiffle and urban folk music booms of the 1950s. Whereas the first two of these booms played considerable roles in creating a commercial market for blues records aimed at white record buyers, he insists that the urban folk music boom was more responsible for producing the researchers and white blues musicians of the 1960s. Furthermore, it also contributed substantially to the US-wide awakening of interest in and appreciation of both white and black folk musics.

The folk revival

According to Robert Cantwell (1993: 50), the US folk revival was primarily restorative and dedicated to preserving pieces of American history that had been denied or forgotten. Since folk and blues songs were usually created as the result of the same on-going processes of borrowing and reinterpretation, blues music came to be considered as an African-American folk music.[27] Consequently, the folk revival adopted blues music under its banner in the late 1950s/early 1960s.[28] Although several African-American songsters and blues performers had been touring Western Europe since the late 1940s and late 1950s respectively, such artists did not gain significant exposure in their own country until the early 1960s. One famous example that illustrates this is from 1964 when the Beatles first arrived in the US. Upon saying that they'd like to meet Muddy Waters, one reporter replied "Where's that?" During the first half of this decade, many white American college students developed a keen interest in and knowledge for blues music and, consequently, presented forgotten and/or unknown blues artists with an opportunity to rekindle and/or embark on a musical career. In these years, folk movement impresarios tended to stress the folk aspects of these singers' repertoires and insist that the

performers to use acoustic guitars only (Groom, 1971: 12; Titon, 1977: 211; Robert Shelton, as cited in Gray, 2000: 290; Celmins, 2001: xvi; Dicaire, 2002: 3).[29]

At this stage, many of the people who were interested in blues music had a primary interest in other related genres—jazz, folk and even rock. It was not until much later that blues came to be appreciated and recognised as a distinct musical form with its own traditions (Groom, 1971: 12; Titon, 1993: 224). This is evidenced by the fact that such "rediscovered" performers could only been seen initially at events such as the Newport Jazz Festival and the Newport Folk Festival.[30] Aside from these events, prior to 1960, the main venues for blues artists performing for predominantly white audiences in the US were clubs, bars and university and college campuses. The idea of presenting major open-air blues festivals soon came into being during the 1960s with events being staged in Ann Arbor (Michigan), Berkeley (California), Memphis (Tennessee) and Beloit (Wisconsin).

Artists who were taken in by and influential upon the US folk revival movement include Sleepy John Estes, Lightnin' Hopkins, Son House, "Mississippi" John Hurt, Skip James, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Tampa Red (a.k.a. Hudson Whittaker) and Bukka White (Gray, 2000: 290).[31] Charles Keil is particularly critical of this selection of artists who were canonised by the US folk revival movement because it excluded more contemporary blues artists and forms in favour of older ones. He condemns several other writers for the role they played in this process by mocking their selection criteria:[32]

> *The criteria for a real blues singer, implicit or explicit, are the following. Old age: the performer should preferably be more than sixty years old, blind, arthritic, and toothless… Obscurity: the blues singer should not have performed in public or have made a recording in at least twenty years; among deceased bluesmen, the best seemed to be those who appeared in a big city one day in the 1920's, made from four to six recordings, and then disappeared into the countryside forever. Correct tutelage: the singer should have played with or been taught by some legendary figure. Agrarian*

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milieu: a bluesman should have lived the bulk of his life as a sharecropper, coaxing mules and picking cotton, uncontaminated by city influences. (Keil, 1966: 34-5)

Conversely, Groom (1971: 86-7) criticises Keil's analysis and is adamant that such artists were in full possession of their musical faculties. Furthermore, he insists that this practice of comparing old and new blues artists and forms is a trivial one—they can only be contrasted—and that the blues festivals displayed a wide variety of blues music styles, not just the older ones. Oliver (1969: 168) notes that among the representatives of these other styles that were involved in the folk revival were young "white imitators" such as John Hammond Jr. who often possessed an impressive technical aptitude for playing blues music, even more so than those African-American artists they admired. Their popularity was also concurrent with that of the electric blues artists such as the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the Allman Brothers Band, The Blues Project, Bob Dylan and Johnny Winter, all of which largely consisted of white Americans. Consequently, with the folk revival's focus on old African Americans and young white Americans, African-American youth were largely not interested in the movement. For the most part, the folk revival's embrace of blues music was by whites, for whites and on white terms—producing what can only be described as a white appreciation of blues music.

The British blues-rock boom

> *It's true that the blues will never die, but perhaps only in the sense that there will always be something packaged and sold as the blues. We'll go on stretching our definition to incorporate other forms of black music no longer popular with younger black audiences and in which the blues is merely* inherent *(as a radical theologian would say God is in man).* (Davis, F., 1995: 254)

The large-scale success of British artists in the US during the late 1950s and 1960s is often referred to as The British Invasion. According to Michael Bryan Kelly (1991: 12), this phenomenon can be conveniently split into three phases: pre-1964 (the development of skiffle and British rock-and-roll); 1964 (the rapid success of the Beatles); and, 1965-69 (the diminuendo). The British Invasion can be understood as the amalgamation of the successes of the Merseybeat sound and the British blues-rock boom. The former group was undoubtedly led by the Beatles and also included Jerry and the Pacemakers, the Animals, the Searchers, Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas, and Peter and Gordon; the latter, headed by the Rolling Stones included musicians like John Mayall, Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. Although these separate movements were each influenced by the blues music of African Americans heard on records, the Rolling Stones and the like were often promoted as a more "dangerous" alternative to the likes of the Beatles because their sound was seen as comparatively unadulterated by pop influences. It is this blues-rock boom that not only had the British selling blues music back to its home country (the US), it also made blues more accessible to numerous other parts of the globe (Groenewegen, 1997: 13; Masterson and Gillard, 1998: 15).

After coming into direct contact with some of their musical idols via European tours during the 1950s and 1960s, British musicians began to fuse blues music with rock-and-roll with the guitar as the central instrument. Courtesy of American blues harmonica music, it was during

this era that the harmonica gained a new lease of life and could be heard in the recordings of the Beatles and John Mayall. Though in the 1950s artists like Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies and Graham Bond had found their way into blues through jazz, by the mid-1960s artists like the Rolling Stones, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers and Cream had become exponents of the electric Chicago blues sound. Furthermore, these artists were also known to regularly espouse the talents and merits of those African-American blues artists whose influence had been so integral to their own musical development. Of those who had toured Europe and had assumed particular importance amongst British musicians were Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Willie Dixon, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, Skip James, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson II and Howlin' Wolf—most of whom were aligned with the Chicago blues scene. Where the US folk revival had been primarily concerned with the acoustic downhome styles, the British blues-rock boom had clearly been more interested in the electric blues styles (Brunning, 1986: 11; Grieve, 1995: 90; Celmins, 2001: xxxi).

Among the 1960s British blues-rock artists were Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, Cream, Cyril Davies and the R&B All-Stars, Fleetwood Mac, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, and the Yardbirds.[33] Just as many African-American blues artists toured the UK (and indeed much of Western Europe), many of these British bands ended up touring the US and showcasing their interpretations of the blues genre to an unsuspecting American public. Like the US folk revival, the focus of the British blues-rock boom was specifically on promoting the older African-American male guitarists and the new white British blues-rock artists for a distinctly white audience. While this may have served to significantly boost the profile of blues music (as well as some of its black practitioners) and

greatly assist in the creation of a wider audience for the genre, this movement was once again about the white appreciation of blues music (Groom, 1971: 105; Brunning, 1986: 11).

Blues music and Australian musicians

> *It is not necessary for a people to originate or invent all or even most of the elements of their culture. It is necessary only that these components become their own, embedded in their traditions, expressive of their world view and life style.* (Levine, 1977: 24)

Many musical practices promoting blues music in some manifestation had already been established by the time artists began to form and regularly perform blues music in Australia. While there were certainly many Australian artists performing blues music in the 1960s, interest in the genre continued to grow throughout the decade and eventually peaked in the early 1970s. Prior to this period of peak activity, influences from the US and UK were increasingly streaming into Australia. As early as 1949, Australian jazz musician/bandleader Graeme Bell founded Swaggie Records, a label dedicated to releasing traditional jazz material by US and Australian artists. As part of a series called *The Jazz Makers*, Swaggie eventually released a complete set of recordings by blues artist Sleepy John Estes from the American record label Decca.[34] Ten years after Bell founded Swaggie, Australian Tony Standish began operating Heritage Records in 1959 from London and issued early downhome blues titles by the likes of Papa Charlie Jackson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charley Patton, Memphis Minnie, Ramblin' Willard Thomas, Snooks Eaglin and Lightnin' Hopkins. Standish then returned to Australia in November 1961 and continued to issue new recordings in addition to reissues of pre-WWII recordings (Groom, 1971: 45; American Music website).

From the mid-1960s onwards, the diatonic harmonica—one of many characteristic blues instruments since the 1920s—increasingly became associated with folk music and blues music in Australia. Its popularity developed and grew as Australians heard US harmonica players such as Little Walter Jacobs, Charlie Musselwhite, Paul Butterfield, Bob Dylan and Stevie Wonder. Additional reasons for the harmonica's popularity can be accounted for in its compact size, portability, affordability, and the relative lack of skill and knowledge required to produce basic, pleasant sounds. From 1965 onwards, Australian interest in blues music grew exponentially and provoked tours from numerous US and UK blues artists. These included Taj Mahal, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (1965, c1972 and 1976), the Rolling Stones (1965 and 1966), the Yardbirds (1967), Alexis Korner (1967), Junior Wells (1972 and 1973), Buddy Guy (1973), Phil Guy (1973), Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup (1973),[35] John Mayall (1972 and 1974), Bo Diddley (1973), Muddy Waters (1973), Willie Dixon (1974) and B.B. King (1976).[36] This brought emerging blues artists from Australia into direct contact with some of their influences for the first time (McFarlane, 1995: 11; 1999: 544-5, 643; Tilders, 2000; O'Neal and van Singel, 2002: 200, 363; BluesBeat Music Australia website; MilesAgo website).

While many blues bands existed around the country in the 1960s, the consensus is that Matthew "Dutch" Tilders is one of Australia's first blues artists. Born in Nimagen, Holland in 1941, Tilders was already interested in blues prior to emigrating in 1955. Despite the lack of availability of blues records in Australia, he was able to track down recordings by Lightnin' Hopkins, Josh White, Robert Pete Williams and Big Bill Broonzy. Modelling his guitar playing and singing on Big Bill Broonzy, Tilders began as a solo act playing in coffee houses in the early 1960s as part of the folk music scene that included other musicians such as Shane Duckham (harmonica), Margret RoadKnight (vocals, guitar), Jeannie Lewis (vocals), Graham Squance

(guitar), and Kenny White (harmonica). This was before the Australian pub circuit was established and Tilders was playing in and guesting with blues bands. Despite the fact that Tilders did not record until 1972, he is the self-proclaimed "Patriarch of Australian Blues" (McFarlane, 1999: 643; Tilders, 2000, 2005; Hall, 2003: 87; Standish, pc, October, 2005).

The first blues bands that were active during this decade were the Adderley Smith Blues Band, the Foreday Riders, Bay City Union, The Beaten Tracks, Chain, and Billy Thorpe and the (Sunbury) Aztecs. Regarding the era these bands surfaced in (i.e. the mid-to-late-1960s), David Groenewegen (1997: 15-7) states that the key to the acceptance of such artists in a stagnant Australian market was for them to appear progressive without appearing pretentious. The adoption of blues influences during this blues revival period as a way of reinventing music in this country assisted in constructing such an image. Consequently, this is Groenewegen's reasoning behind why blues- and R&B-influenced rock became the norm of Australian progressive acts in the late 1960s and continued to dominate the local music scene in the 1970s. Coincidentally, another norm established during this period was the constant upheaval of group line-ups and alliances in the quest for success (McFarlane, 1999: 5, 46, 108-9, 228, 628, 636; Hall, 2003: 87).

Like most of the Australian blues bands of the 1960s—including the Foreday Riders and Bay City Union—the Adderley Smith Blues Band (ASBB) based themselves on the Chicago blues sound of Willie Dixon, Jimmy Rogers, Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, Sonny Boy Williamson and Howlin' Wolf. They have regularly been described as a purist group, faithfully paying homage to the genre and intent on educating audiences about the true origins of the music made popular by artists such as the Rolling Stones. Original material was written by guitarist Kerryn Tolhurst, who formed ASBB with pianist Mark Dindas in 1964 and maintained the ever-changing line-up until the band became defunct in 1970.[37] In the mid-to-late-1960s, both

Tolhurst and Broderick Smith (ASBB vocalist/harmonica player) experienced National Service conscription for the Vietnam War causing ASBB to undergo more changes in personnel. Though they never released any recordings,[38] ASBB regularly performed live at dances, discos and clubs around Melbourne during the 1960s. During their active years, Dutch Tilders would occasionally front ASBB as a guest vocalist. In the 1970s, Tilders continued a creative relationship with Tolhurst and Smith in that he would occasionally front their new band, The Dingoes (McFarlane, 1999: 5-6; Tilders, 2000; McHenry, et al., 2001: 3; HowlSpace website; MilesAgo website).

In 1966, brothers Jeff King (guitars) and Ron King (harmonica, vocals) put together the first line-up of their Sydney-based blues band the Foreday Riders and began performing in inner-city public bars and wine bars.[39] Inspired by British blues groups like Manfred Mann, the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds, the Riders' main focus was Chicago blues with additional influence from Ray Charles, Lightnin' Hopkins and Memphis Minnie.[40] In 1969, they independently released the limited edition album *Foreday Riders Blues Band*. Later that year, Jeff King left the group and formed the band Backwater in 1970 with Jill Drury (vocals), Rolf Minder (drums) and John Power (bass). Backwater soon dissolved and Jeff teamed up with brother Ron and John Power between 1971 and 1973 in Blue Spirit. Like the Foreday Riders and numerous other bands of this era, Blue Spirit underwent several changes in personnel during their short existence—Jeff Cripps (now vocalist/guitarist in Mississippi Shakedown) was one of three drummers who served a stint in the group. Sometime in 1973, the King brothers re-adopted "the Foreday Riders" title and have kept the name to the present day, making them not only one of the country's first blues bands, but also one of the longest running (Spencer, 1987: 22, 50; McFarlane, 1999: 228; BluesBeat Music Australia website).

Based in Brisbane between March 1966 and July 1968, Bay City Union (BCU) featured Matt Taylor and Phil Manning—two future core members of the band Chain. However, the first incarnation of Chain grew out of the demise of Perth band the Beaten Tracks in December 1968.[41] Following some early line-up changes which included the adoption of Manning as lead guitarist, vocalist Wendy Saddington renamed the group "The Chain" in reference to the soul track 'Chain of Fools' popularised by Aretha Franklin.[42] Meanwhile, three future members of Chain—Barry "Little Goose" Harvey, Barry "Big Goose" Sullivan and Matt Taylor—had come together in the Wild Cherries.[43] Six months after the split-up of the Wild Cherries in April 1969, the two Barrys were recruited into Chain.[44] After relocating to Brisbane around July 1970, Matt Taylor joined Chain and the band began working on material that would appear on their next album *Toward the Blues* (1971). They soon returned to Melbourne and recorded their most successful single to date, 'Black and Blue/Lightning Ground'. Issued in March 1971, the song hit no. 1 in Melbourne and achieved Top 10 status on the national charts in May, meanwhile the album reached no. 6 on the national charts making this line-up the most popular incarnation of Chain. This line-up, however, soon disintegrated and the Chain name was applied to several more incarnations before being laid to rest for an eight-year period beginning in April 1974. In the meantime, Mushroom Records issued *History of Chain* (1974), Harvey played in the Kevin Borich Express before starting his own band "Harvey", Manning embarked on a solo career, Sullivan played in a variety of groups (including Renée Geyer's Band), and Taylor pursued his solo interests until the formation of Western Flyer in 1977 (McFarlane, 1995: 3-9, 12-3; 1999: 46-7, 109-10, 677-80; Hall, 2003: 87; Stafford, 2004: 12; All Music Guide website; MilesAgo website).[45]

Another key figure in the emergence of blues music in Australia was the English-born Billy Thorpe (a.k.a. William Richard Thorpe). Though he was regarded as Australia's leading beat pop singer for the majority of the 1960s, Thorpe retreated from live performance in 1967 and reinvented his image and musical approach with assistance from Lobby Loyde (lead guitar), Jimmy Thompson (drums) and Paul Wheeler (bass) in the second half of 1968. With his interests firmly set on a loud blues-rock sound, Thorpe relocated from Sydney to Melbourne's burgeoning blues/heavy rock scene, which included Chain, Spectrum, Company Caine and Carson. Additionally, he resurrected the Aztecs' name and began playing guitar live. Though this version of Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs only stayed together until 1970, it was this line-up that helped to establish Billy Thorpe as a significant force in Australian music for many years to come (McFarlane, 1999: 636; Hall, 2003: 87; MilesAgo website).

By the early 1970s, Melbourne had established itself as the definitive centre of Australian blues and the genre was blossoming exponentially. While many blues bands from the previous decade had already fallen by the wayside, several bands managed to stay intact—despite continuing line-up changes—and countless new ones began to form. Margret RoadKnight and Dutch Tilders were among those who continued to perform blues in folk and jazz circles and both shared the track listing for Jazznote's compilation album *Australian Jazz of the 70s Volume 5: The Blues Singers* (1974).[46] Though RoadKnight often performed blues numbers, by the early 1970s her repertoire also included African music, calypso, folk ballads, gospel and jazz material. Among her blues accomplishments, RoadKnight has given concerts and workshops on blues music at local festivals since the 1960s and performed at a show entitled "The Story of the Blues" during the 1970s on the same bill as Judy Bailey, The Foreday Riders and Dutch Tilders (McFarlane, 1999: 531; Homan, 2000: 32; RoadKnight, 2000).

Although some sources indicate otherwise (McFarlane, 1999: 643), Tilders earned himself a recording contract with Ron Tudor after performing at a concert called "Screening the Blues" in 1969 and prior to his 1970 performance on television talent show "New Faces". His subsequent self-titled debut album (1973) was split in two: one side comprising self-accompanied downhome blues tunes, the other Chicago-style electric blues with backing provided by Brian Cadd, Phil Manning, Barry Harvey, Barry Sullivan, Broderick Smith and Laurie Pryor. It was around this time that Tilders first met and formed his lasting friendships with Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee upon their second Australian tour. In 1974, he supported John Mayall's Australian tour, in 1975 he recorded *Break* with members of The Foreday Riders and Company Caine, and in 1976 supported the Australian tours of Terry and McGhee as well as B. B. King. Afterwards, Tilders recorded his fourth album *Working Man* (1977) with assistance from musicians such as Kerryn Tolhurst of The Dingoes, Jim Conway of Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band, and Jeff King of the Foreday Riders. In addition to the five albums he recorded during the 1970s—including *Direct* (1979)—Tilders also prospered on the live circuit by performing regularly in rock clubs and pubs as well as at the Sunbury Festival in 1973 and 1974 (McFarlane, 1999: 643-4; Tilders, 2000).

While Tilders had no desire to break the overseas market, Chain was one of several Australian bands of the 1960s and 1970s whose music was fuelled by the desire for recognition and acceptance from overseas (Hutchinson, 1992: 1). While they may not have received such attention, it was certainly forthcoming from Australian audiences. Groenewegen contends that the 1970s were a critical era for Australian bands like Chain as it was during this time that the conditions for success and criteria for the critique of future Australian acts were formed:

The blueprint was now clear: an emphasis on live performance, a raw, under produced sound, a distaste for pretension and an emphasis on loud, simple music, which was well-suited to the pubs in which music was being played. A visual style had been set by Billy Thorpe and AC/DC, amongst others, and while there was still considerable tension between more respectable artists and ockers, Oz Rock was dominated by the ockers because they were largely based in Australia, while more respectable artists (such as Little River Band) were seen to be distancing themselves from their origins. (Groenewegen, 1997: 24)

He argues further that, lacking any dominant performance models from overseas, local musicians helped develop a separate identity for the Australian scene—one that also became commercially viable under the moniker of "Oz Rock" (ibid: 20, 23). McFarlane (1995: 9) agrees, stating that this era ushered in unprecedented success from previously underground progressive acts like Chain, Spectrum and Daddy Cool, meanwhile interest in solo pop singers waned. Other artists who dabbled with blues music during the 1970s included Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs, Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band, the Foreday Riders, Moonshine Jug and String Band (who evolved into the Angels), Blackfeather, The La De Das, Kevin Borich Express, Carson, Company Caine, The Elks, Chris Finnen, Tim Gaze, Renée Geyer, Dave Hole Band, Levi Smith's Clef's, Madder Lake and Jeff St. John—though not all will be mentioned in detail here.

Like Chain, the Foreday Riders also underwent numerous line-up changes during the 1970s, comprising at one stage or another two future core members of The Bondi Cigars—Shane Pacey (guitar) and Alan Britton (bass). The Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band (1969-80)[47] formed by brothers Mick and Jim Conway, was a vaudeville-style group who played jazz, blues and jug band songs. Instrumentation included banjo, guitar, harmonica, kazoo, mandolin, pedal organ, piano, tea chest bass, washboard, ukulele and vocals. Despite numerous changes in personnel, Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band recorded several albums during the 1970s.[48] However, the most dominant Australian group of the decade who were playing blues tunes was

by far Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs. By the early 1970s, Thorpe was appearing at festivals and pubs regularly all around the country and the electric blues style that he began developing in the late 1960s quickly became the staple for bands wishing to associate themselves with the new nationalism of the "ocker" image. Prior to disbanding in 1975, The Aztecs established themselves as the loudest and heaviest blues band of the decade with Thorpe repositioning himself as "the monarch of Australian rock" (Groenewegen, 1997: 21; McFarlane, 1999: 228, 637-8; Hall, 2003: 87).

According to Masterson and Gillard (1998: 20), Australian rock in the 1960s established a dichotomy between its artists—much like the two schools of British blues-rock. Beginning as one of blues versus pop, it evolved into progressives versus pop and, by the end of the 1970s, the alternative underground versus the commercial/mainstream. Though blues music had remained the basis of many experimental bands in the 1970s, the genre was forced out of the limelight towards the end of the decade by the arrival of new-wave rock and punk rock, and the increased media exposure of international pop acts. Blues became relegated to small venues in the 1980s with an increased interest in more "traditional" acoustic approaches as opposed to the Chicago electric blues style.

In the US, the 1980s saw blues music—broadly defined to include downhome blues, electric blues and gospel music—experience another revival of sorts with the popularity and success of artists such as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Ry Cooder and Bonnie Raitt. The re-release of Robert Johnson's 1930s recordings catalysed further research and exposure including Walter Hill's film *Crossroads* (1986), Peter Guralnick's book *Searching for Robert Johnson* (1989) and the documentary *The Search for Robert Johnson* (Hunt and Moore, 1992). It also sparked interest in artists such as David "Honeyboy" Edwards, Johnny Shines and Robert Jr. Lockwood

because of their connections to Johnson (Weissman, 2005: 131-4). In Australia, Dutch Tilders—who incidentally professes no interest whatsoever in Robert Johnson (Tilders, 2000)—got together with the blues band Kevin Borich Express to record the album *The Blues Had a Baby* (1980). While he remained active performance-wise for the rest of the 1980s, his next recording *The Blues is my Life* (1990) did not eventuate until the following decade after forming his backing band The Blues Club in 1989. From here Tilders' lead guitarist Geoff Achison went on to carve out a solo career of his own in the blues genre. Margret RoadKnight continued to perform a wide variety of styles and released the jazz and blues flavoured album *Moving Target* (1988). Other notable blues-influenced artists of the 1980s included Jimmy Barnes, Kev Carmody, Catfish, The Cruel Sea, Diesel, The Tinsley Waterhouse Band, and Chris Wilson/Crown of Thorns (McFarlane, 1999: 531, 644; RoadKnight, 2000).

Following the release of *The Best of Chain* (1980), Taylor and Manning promptly rejoined forces in the Matt Taylor/Phil Manning Band with a repertoire consisting of blues standards, old Chain songs, solo material and new tunes. Though they disbanded after recording their album *Oz Blues* (1981), Taylor and Manning regrouped with the two Barrys (Harvey and Sullivan) under the Chain name in 1982. This seminal line-up recorded the album *Child of the Street* (1985) but split again in late 1986. A new Chain—Taylor, Harvey, Roy Daniel and John Meyer—recorded *Australian Rhythm and Blues* (1988) with Harvey leaving the band just before its release in 1987. Taylor and Meyer then comprised the core of the group until late 1990 (McFarlane, 1995: 7, 15-9; 1999: 110)

Towards the end of the 1980s, another style of blues band took shape in Sydney under the guise of The Backsliders. A well-known term from the history of blues music in the US, a "backslider" is slang for someone who used to sing in the church tradition but has since defected

to secular music—usually blues (Reed, 2003: x).   Consisting of Dominic Turner (guitars, vocals), Rex Taylor (harmonica) and Peter Burgess (percussion, vocals), The Backsliders formed sometime in 1987. Focussed more on the downhome blues style, their initial material consisted solely of reinterpretations of songs by Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, Skip James, Blind Willie McTell, Muddy Waters (his early acoustic songs), Tommy Johnson, Kokomo Arnold and Charley Patton. With no bass and an unconventional drum kit, the band drew additional influences from Cajun and jug band musics. Not long after recording their debut album *Preaching Blues* (1988), Taylor left the group and was eventually replaced by renowned harmonica player Jim Conway—fresh from the demise of Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band. Before the decade's end the new trio recorded *Sitting on a Million* (1989).

The greater tendency of Australian musicians who have played blues music in the 1990s and 2000s has been to combine the tradition with a wide range of "roots musics" in the development of their own sound (Rosenberg, 1993: 21; Hall, 2003: 87). This trend has quite possibly reached its peak in popularity under the commercial banner of "blues and roots music"—a term likely to have been initiated and perpetuated from the popularity of Byron Bay's annual East Coast Blues and Roots Festival founded in 1990.[49] Since the early 1990s the "roots music" festival circuit has grown dramatically, so much so that one commentator states "there are more arts-based festivals than there are days in the year" (Young, 2004: 3). In many respects, "blues and roots" has transformed the meaning of blues for the contemporary Australian public into a genre where the main criteria for inclusion appears to be a singer-songwriter mode of delivery, the expression of honesty and personal situations within the lyrical content, and an acoustic based style of performance. Consequently, the term "blues" is frequently used in association with recording artists the likes of the Beautiful Girls, the John

Butler Trio, Joe Camilleri, Lior, Mick Hart, Missy Higgins, Pete Murray, Xavier Rudd and the Waifs, whose musical output has little, if any, connection to the blues genre. In 1999, the Australian Recording Industry Awards acknowledged the significance of this musical trend by creating the "Best Blues and Roots Album" category. Although previous winners include blues acts like Dave Hole, Matt Walker and Ashley Davies, Collard Greens and Gravy, Jeff Lang (with Bob Brozman) and Mia Dyson, the category has since been dominated by non-blues performers such as those mentioned above(ARIA website).[50]

Another significant part of this current blues revival—one that began in the early 1990s and is international in scope—is the popularity of the lap steel guitar, most likely catalysed by the international success of Ben Harper in the 1990s (Evans, D., 2001b: 24). Others, however, especially Australian musicians like Jeff Lang and the Backsliders' Dominic Turner, point to earlier influences that have impacted both their own music as well as that of Harper. Here David Lindley and Ry Cooder are seen as common purveyors of the slide guitar aesthetic:

> *anybody who picks up a guitar and lays it over their lap in the modern day has got to be influenced by David Lindley. I remember in the [19]70s and [19]80s, those instruments that Xavier Rudd and Ben Harper play* [Weissenborn acoustic lap steels] *were quite available in music catalogues in the United States... In the 1970s, David Lindley and Ry Cooder, in a way, resurrected the Weissenborn guitar. Their influence* [on 'roots' music] *is just so obvious... but there's very little credit for it.*—Dominic Turner (pc, April, 2006)

> *The main guy for me, lap steel wise, that got me into it was David Lindley... in terms of incorporating world music into your sound, he's been a real influence... I mean, I heard Black Ace. I thought that was pretty cool, but that wasn't one of the things that grabbed me as strongly as some of the bottle-neck guys that I heard—Blind Willie Johnson being the main one, Robert Johnson, Son House and some of the more modern practitioners like Ry Cooder.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

While lap-style slide guitar has been a part of blues music at least since the 1930s, it was most likely not seized upon in the 1960s as its two most prominent exponents, The Black Ace and

Kokomo Arnold, did not participate in the blues revival (Groom, 1971: 36, 49-50). In addition to the lap steel, there has been a complementary rise in the number of solo blues performers and the use of an amplified foot stomp—commonly referred to as a "stompbox".[51] Garofalo (2002: 137) contends that this practice can be traced back to when slaves were stripped of drums upon their arrival to the US Deep South and "other percussive practices such as finger popping, hand clapping, and foot stomping were developed".[52] Consequently, foot stomping became an integral part of blues for many musicians including Blind Lemon Jefferson, Skip James and John Lee Hooker. In many recordings, it even warranted the placement of an additional microphone near the performer's feet (Titon, 1977: 215, 296-7).

Though blues has relied on non-commercial media for promotion and support in Australia (e.g. the ABC Blues Festival), there have been movies (e.g. *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, *Ghostworld* and *Black Snake Moan*) and documentaries (e.g. Martin Scorsese's *The Blues* series, *You See Me Laughin'*, and *Desperate Man Blues*) that have furthered its profile in recent years. With the increasing popularity of a new school of young African-American blues artists (e.g. Ben Harper, Keb' Mo' and Corey Harris), the successful promotion of Fat Possum's older north Mississippi hill country artists (e.g. the late R. L. Burnside, the late Junior Kimbrough and T-Model Ford), and the cult status of modern US blues-rock groups (Blues Explosion, the Black Keys and the White Stripes), Australia's interest in blues music has possibly reached an all-time high. The large sales of Robert Johnson's reissued recordings in 1990 is an indicator of the mass audience that has now come to appreciate this musical form, even if it is one of superficial appreciation. Blues has become part of a reawakened interest in "roots music" and is consistently viewed as a non-commercial alternative to other forms of popular music. However, unlike jazz, which has long been recognised as a valid non-classical

music by educational institutions, education of blues music at secondary and tertiary levels remains in its infancy (Davis, F., 1995: 126, 225, 241; Masterson and Gillard, 1998: 27; Ward, 2001: np; Hall, 2003: 87; Weissman, 2005: 135-41).

Further to the "blues and roots" movement, it has been structured in such a manner so as to principally accommodate the lucrative youth market of music consumers and largely forego the older and more established blues acts that remain active as performers (i.e. Dutch Tilders, Chain and the Foreday Riders). As such, after nearly 40 years of association with blues music in Australia, Chain continues to tour and record as a four-piece featuring three of their five core members,[53] but is not featured as part of the major national blues events like *The dig Australian Blues Project* or the annual blues and roots festivals which are now staged at four different venues across the continent over the Easter long weekend. Instead these older and more established blues musicians are frequently overlooked in favour of younger exponents of blues music like Mia Dyson, Ash Grunwald and Jeff Lang, and are largely relegated to performing in pubs and clubs despite having released numerous albums and having established reputations for playing live from years of experience.

Why blues?

> *There ain't no blues revival goin' on. The music has always been there. Never really gone anywhere. The same cats have been making the same great music all along. What is different now is there's a chance for the music to be listened to by a lot of people again. And that, let me tell you, is good news for everyone.*—Stevie Ray Vaughan (1954-1990) (as cited in Obstfeld and Fitzgerald, 1997: 34)

The 1960s represented the revival, rebirth, rediscovery and reinterpretation[54] of blues music not just in the United States and Western Europe, but also on the other side of the globe in

Australia. Jim O'Neal (1993: 377) poses many questions relating to the blues revival of the 1960s, including "Why were young whites so taken with the music of a culture so alien to their own upbringing? Just what was it about the blues?" Between O'Neal's essay and Urban and Evdokimov's book on the adoption of blues music in Russia, a range of factors applicable to the Australian context takes shape. Both sources discuss involvement with the genre based on its aesthetic appeal and social and political motives, while Urban and Evdokimov additionally discuss parallels with the US experience (O'Neal, 1993: 347, 376-83; Urban and Evdokimov, 2004: 3-16, 21-7, 136-7). Each topic is discussed separately below.

Parallels with the United States and other areas

In *Russia Gets the Blues*, Urban and Evdokimov (2004: 2-5) try to draw parallels between the historical circumstances surrounding the creation and development of blues music in the United States and the conditions prevailing in Russia's engagements with blues music and blues culture as a post-Communist phenomenon. Here they attempt to ascertain whether or not there are similar aspects from each setting that help to account for the reception of the music in different continents by different ethnicities at different times. While several Russian blues performers express the belief that a common thread runs through US slavery and Russian serfdom—or at least through post-Emancipation and post-Communist experiences—the authors are critical and see these parallels as partial at best. There are, however, a few points worth noting. To these Russian musicians and their audiences, blues music is seen as a cultural import that serves to inform their sense of place in an unsettled and uncertain post-Communist milieu— a personal compass of sorts. As Mikhail Mishuris explains, young people needed to find a personal ideology in the post-Communist era that would help them overcome the new set of

troubles they encountered, and blues ideology and mythology was a good place to start. Similarly, Aleksei Agranovskii identifies frustration, money problems and overcoming one's hang-ups as universal parallels to be drawn between different cultures. Additionally, for Iaroslav Sukhov, blues music allows you to remain yourself despite the changes and oppressive forces that may surround you (ibid: 4-7).

These points all attempt to highlight universally common traits and approaches to blues music. It is in this way that many people view the aesthetic approach of blues music as a value system, a lifestyle and a way of dealing with the world (O'Neal, 1993: 378). In the words of Vitalii Andreev, "I think that the problems are quite the same… It's not very important whether we are in America a century ago or in Russia today (Urban and Evdokimov, 2004: 4). While the popularity and adoption of blues in Russia can be tied to the demise of communism in the 1990s, it can also be tied to those universal traits that exist within the musical framework of blues music and apply to most (if not all) cross-cultural engagements with the genre. In regards to the adoption of blues music in Australia, it is safe to say that any historical parallels are equally partial at best. While songs like Chain's 'Black and Blue' may conjure up images of Australia's penal colony past—as it draws from the tradition of American chain-gang work songs—those days and conditions are long gone, at least for white Australia. Additionally, though it may appear obvious to draw parallels between African Americans and Aboriginal Australians, realistically there is little comparable connection.

Blues music, like hip hop, is a simultaneously international and national form whereby elements of different local cultures frequently intersect with each other and, in many ways, serve to define and differentiate each other. Such interaction is repeatedly demonstrated at Australian blues festivals that include an international component of performers alongside national artists.

Still, even though local scenes—such as those of the US and Australia—certainly thrive on their own individual merits, it is significant that Australian manifestations of both hip hop and blues regularly cite the African-American innovators as their inspiration. Unlike hip hop, however, the blues form has not been adopted and adapted on a large scale to express the concerns of ethnic minorities in Australia (Mitchell, 1999: 86-7). Though Aboriginal performers such as Yugul have done so to a certain extent, the Australian blues scene is predominantly inhabited by guitar-based white performers. As Aboriginal musician Jimmy Little states in his interview for *The dig Australian Blues Project*:

> *The blues and jazz—as we all accept—is a deep expression from black Americans, Afro-Americans, and in our case* [that of Aboriginal Australians] *there is some similarity but there's also a vast difference between our distant brothers and sisters abroad. The most obvious is that Afro-Americans were taken to America; indigenous Australians were already there. So we didn't have that slave attitude of being possessed, we were more dispossessed.*—Jimmy Little (2005)

Indeed, while Australia has a history of Aboriginal exploitation that includes genocide (intentional or otherwise), conscripted labour, racial discrimination and blatant disrespect, this is distinct from trading human cargo or owning someone and their family. It is, however, understandable that the above experiences may serve as a source of inspiration for these respective ethnic groupings in their engagements with the blues genre.

The allure of blues music to Australia

> *Blues, like jazz, offered an alternative world that came with a history to explore, opportunities for both connoisseurship and instrument dabbling, and a social climate dominated by adults uninterested in adolescent melodrama...* (Rotella, 2002: 100).

The aspects of blues that appear to hold a particular attraction for Australian performers and audiences include the sense of catharsis that comes with performing blues, its romantic appeal, and the sense of authenticity associated with the genre that separates it from other "banal" forms of popular music. As Urban and Evdokimov identify (2004: 2), both musical content and listener receptivity are at issue here and therefore the discussion concerns the appeal that the music holds for its Australian aficionados as well as those aspects of Australian culture that appear to resonate with the blues idiom. Regarding catharsis, this thesis takes particular note of Urban and Evdokimov's (ibid: viii) suggestion that blues music—for both musicians and audiences—has the capacity to operate as "a template for fashioning and making sense of their lives". Just as Russian musicians and their audiences experienced blues music as an avenue through which they could make sense of their lives and their current situations, it is likely that the music has had the same effect on several other (if not all) cultures to which the genre has disseminated. Regarding the Australian context, identification with this aspect of the idiom's allure would be on a person-to-person basis as, unlike the Russian context, there are no historical parallels. Certainly part of the appeal of blues music rests in the common language shared between the country of origin (the US) and the country to which it has been transmitted: English. The freedom to focus the lyrics in any desired direction is another trait commonly afforded to the genre, essentially permitting the vocalist to cut and paste lyrics as they choose—whether from

their own compositions or from other familiar texts—or even to make lyrics up on the spot during an improvised twelve-bar blues.[55]

As for cathartic motives, it is also likely that this aspect of blues music factors into its appeal to some extent as the blues genre is widely recognised for the overwhelming predominance of first-person perspective lyrics embodied by typical lines like "I woke up this morning"—though one can only speculate. While Australians may not have experienced slavery or serfdom, blues lyrics are habitually geared towards producing catharsis from some form of troubling or oppressive situation. Here the persona transforms complaints into affirmation by approaching their situation with a positive attitude and a facility for language. They accept the necessity for confronting and enduring their difficult and disappointing experiences by addressing the words half to themselves and half to the audience. Consequently, the persona can be seen to represent the triumph over trouble while their resultant song functions as a symbol of that success (Oliver, 1959: 85; Richard Wright, as cited in Oliver, 1960: xiii, xv; Murray, 1973: 104-7; Neal, 1989: 107-8; Crouch, 1998: 158; Cone, 1999: 235; Gruver, 1999: 224).

Regarding the 1960s blues revival, Titon (1993: 225-6) suggests two strains of reception among audiences—the romantics and the record collectors—summarising that the movement was fuelled by "A dialectical energy involving acquisitiveness and fantasy". Concerning romanticism, Groom (1971: 112) agrees and states that young, white, middle-class, and mostly college-age listeners were drawn to blues music by the exotic manner in which topics like sex, failed romance, hard times and travelling were discussed. Furthermore, Titon (1993: 225) adds that this romantic strain projected a kind of false primitivism onto the African-American blues performers—one where they were considered to be unbound by such middle-class conventions as work, family, sexual propriety and worship. Listening to and enjoying blues music was then

seen to go hand-in-hand with a personal revolt against bourgeois standards. Playing blues guitar symbolised such rebellion as it rejected the simplicity of folk music and rock guitar licks, offering instead the new challenge of understanding of blues tonality and an opportunity to flaunt instrumental virtuosity (Groom, 1971: 112).

In Australia, the development of blues music largely took place in isolation from direct contact with European, American and African-American creativity via imported sound recordings. George Lipsitz (1994: 3-4) argues that recorded popular music forms both demonstrate and dramatise contrasts between different cultures by exhibiting the manner in which people from different places create music based on the same principles with differing results. While Whiteoak freely dismisses imported sound recordings as inadequate and "decontextualised" learning tools that serve to encourage "authentic" imitation (Whiteoak, 1999: xiii-xiv), he also believes that it is this decontextualisation which explains the resulting difference in Australia's imported musical cultures. As such, Whiteoak concludes that it is the "tyranny of distance"[56]—the romantic fascination with musical cultures from another time and place—which has led Australians to "explore, experiment, synthesise, improvise" with foreign musical idioms according to their own rules. It is this romanticism coupled with the disillusionment of "banal" pop music that comprises the major impetus behind the allure and adoption of blues music by Australian musicians, though these are also closely linked to rebellion and youth counterculture.

Among his list of prerequisites for folk revivals, Narváez (1993: 244) cites both a perceived need for musical alternatives and the existence and validation of a defined body of culture from the past that is supposedly more aesthetically pleasing than that of the present. In relation to US blues revivalism, Tony Russell (as cited in Weissman, 2005: 76) posits that while

many white American musicians liked blues music and respected its creators, they were also drawn to the idiom as a musical alternative because it liberated them from the clichés of country music. Equally, just as folk music offered the middle-class white American youth of the late 1950s a meaningful musical alternative to rock-and-roll's "vapid intensity", so too has blues music periodically served to provide relief from the banalities of pop music for white Australians (Titon, 1993: 220). The key periods for this are the late 1960s/early 1970s and the 1990s/early 2000s, both of which represent periods of socio-cultural change in Australia. Here opposition to the Vietnam War brought much political change during the late 1960s/early 1970s, meanwhile opposition in the late 1990s/early 2000s was in relation to conservative government and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is only fitting then that Australia's culture deliver a response to such forces in the form of a folk revival, which is currently operating under the guise of a "roots music" revival. According to Narváez (1993: 244), such movements arise out of an intense dissatisfaction with one's own contemporary culture and revivalists subsequently develop the inclination to search for viable alternatives in cultures of the past—usually musical cultures that are considered to be connected to one's own history in some way. Masterson and Gillard (1998: 36) agree, stating that such alternatives are always calculated to be markedly different to other existing options circulating the mass media for two complementary reasons: to separate the listener from the rest of the herd, and; to place the listener in a group with common anti-establishment sentiments. The point here is that the alternative sector of music listeners is characterised by actively searching and seeking its musical delights as opposed to simply choosing preferred music from a readily available menu vis-à-vis the mainstream sector (Coyle, 2002: 147). This is manifested in Billy Thorpe's rejection of pop music in 1967 for the more counterculturally-aligned alternative: loud blues-rock.

Rebellion and youth counterculture

> *The rootlessness and alienation which were so well articulated in the blues and work songs were not solely the reflection of Afro-American culture but of the larger society as well, which was at its heart rootless and deeply afraid of the rapid changes that were transforming it.* (Levine, 1977: 283)

According to Whiteoak (1999: 155), ragtime competitions introduced by singer Gene Greene during his visit to Melbourne in late 1913 seemed "to represent the first manifestation of an Australian youth culture based around African-American derived, vocally oriented music". The momentum of this early wave of Australians directly appropriating ragtime (and, subsequently, African-American) performance practice was soon significantly retarded by the First World War and, despite its short-lived nature, is considered a harbinger of the rock-and-roll youth culture that arrived in Australia several decades later. This was still some five or six years prior to Australian musicians becoming aware of blues effects or the process of "blueing" and some forty or fifty years before blues made its presence felt in Australia as a discrete genre (Whiteoak, 2003: 86). Musical experimentalism played an important role in the widespread interest in blues music in the 1960s, though it was generally ascribed to the more progressive or avant-garde musical genres (Whiteoak, 1999: xv-xvi). This wave of experimentalism was tied to improvisation—an already important ingredient of blues music. While improvisation is often influenced by social context, Whiteoak (ibid: xix-xx) stipulates that it is also a social gesture. Improvisatory music could be interpreted either as "a gesture of rebellion against the prevailing order and taste" or "a gesture of radical experimentalism and political, social and cultural freedom". Fittingly, initial representations of experimental rock in Australia incorporated concepts and repertoires from blues music and recognised African-American blues (and British blues-rock) artists.

Despite the widely-held impression that the emergence of experimentalism was a phenomenon of the 1970s, Whiteoak (ibid: 265) enforces his view that "the 1960s are of far greater significance to the history of improvisatory experimental music in Australia than is generally understood". It is worth noting here that the 1970s saw a whole new generation of experimentalists emerge as well as the advent of institution-based art music and jazz courses, the latter being a particularly important point of distinction between blues and jazz—not just in Australia, but throughout the Western world. In Australia, although rock-and-roll initially coexisted with established jazz at jazz concerts—with blues music understood as being an underlying element to both musics—Hall (2003: 86-7) makes the distinction that "jazz began to distance itself and adopt an intellectual image and respectability as an art form, against the commercialism of the new 'pop' music forms". In spite of this approach, rock-and-roll permanently superseded jazz improvisation as a musical signifier of social and musical radicalism in popular culture from the mid-1950s onwards. Between then and 1967, the influence of youth counterculture music is said to have given rise to experimental pop, with the musical freedom involved here being "something of an illusion" because it was "shackled to a persistent rhythmic ostinato and, more often than not, projected Western notions of love" (Whiteoak 1999: xx-xxii).

In Whiteoak's opinion (ibid: 274-5), the end of this period represents the beginning of an early period of intense social, cultural and artistic experimentation in Australia where there was a "sudden yielding of the old order". This coincides with electric experimental pop music overcoming forces of musical conservatism and opening the door for "an anarchic orgy of eclectic style synthesis". Of this period, Whiteoak states, "the artistic 'revolution' was appropriated by the new 'progressive' or 'psychedelic' rock as the musical emblem of

burgeoning youth counterculture," citing the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album as the most significant early manifestation of psychedelic rock to reach Australia. Australian groups who were influenced substantially by this music and its socio-cultural message of "do-your-own-thing" included Tully, James Taylor Move, Tamam Shud, Sons of the Vegetal Mother, Spectrum and the Twilights. What is more important though is that this music—seen as an avant-garde form of rock—was responsible for introducing extended and individualistic instrumental improvisation into Australian rock, something that Whiteoak (ibid) claims was formerly the province of jazz. Subsequently, this new "avant-garde":

> *…were more or less free to present any potpourri of Eastern mysticism, psychedelia, folk music, visual or sound effects, art music, jazz or whatever, as an artistic gesture or simply as an invitation to 'freak out'. Nevertheless, progressive rock bands were able to incorporate the improvisational talents of jazz musicians. Conversely… jazz musicians incorporated elements of rock into their own jazz.* (ibid: 275-6)

Similarly, Simon Frith (1983) discusses how rock musicians effortlessly gained what had been denied to generations of frustrated jazz and commercial musicians: creative freedom. Whiteoak (1999: 276) sees this as a repetition of what had already happened with the importation of ragtime and jazz to Australia in the 1910s and 1920s whereby the popularity of these African-American innovations allowed musically transgressive elements—such as improvisatory practice and novelty dissonance—to enter mainstream musical practice as new popular culture and eclipse progressive developments in art music. Furthermore, he states that the 1960s revealed the potential of improvisatory musical practice as a universal musical language, "enabling expressive cross-generational, cross-gender, cross-cultural, cross-aesthetic, creative, harmless, educational and joyful human play" (ibid: xx-xxii). It is probably no coincidence then that Australia's first consciously dedicated blues artists began surface, engaging with and interpreting

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a foreign cultural product, between the mid-1950s and 1967—just prior to the musical revolution of the late 1960s, a revolution born of a broader social development (ibid: 276).

> *By the early 1960s a groundswell of youth rebellion against the restrictive aesthetics, morals, education, politics, philosophies and prejudices of the 1950s in Australia had already become discernible. Around the mid-1960s this social ferment rapidly intensified, particularly as a result of the debate over conscription to the Vietnam War… Although the emerging counterculture was most widely reflected at the level of youth fashion, hairstyles and the following of popular music trends such as the Beatles, it was also apparent in a broadening acceptance of unfamiliar, abstract and even 'alien' concepts… This increasing acceptance of new concepts also became manifest in experimental literature, art, theatre and finally experimental rock.* (ibid: 272)

In a sense, the 1960s was a period of personal expression and the rugged individualism of blues music would appear to make an excellent soundtrack for this era. An entire generation seemed to find an affinity with the African Americans who created and promoted the genre, and blues music came to be consumed as both a popular music and a symbol of stylized revolt against conservative politics and middle-class propriety (Oliver, 1969: 167; Titon, 1993: 223). Its connections with rebellion and resistance appear to coalesce effortlessly with the generation's resistance to war, cultural stagnation, and personal conservatism. However, while much disappointment was expressly directed towards the conscription of Australian soldiers to the Vietnam War from the youth counterculture during the second half of the 1960s, the appreciation of blues music by Australian musicians is mostly only tied to this movement insomuch as their audience comprised the youth who were into the latest of popular music trends. The adoption of blues by these musicians was more a reaction to the US folk revival and the British blues-rock boom. While artists such as Chain were more influenced by the latter, there were also artists like Dutch Tilders who had been involved with folk music in Australia since the early 1960s. Such singers often included blues tunes in the repertoires they performed in jazz and folk circles,

however both jazz and folk music became less fashionable when acts like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones brought pop music to everyone's attention (Hall, 2003: 87).

Just as several distinct audiences had developed for blues music by the end of the 1960s in the US and UK—each with their own venues and tastes in blues styles—the same could be said of Australia's reception of the genre. Whether for reasons of aesthetic pleasure or countercultural ties, whether perceived as an extension of jazz, folk or rock-and-roll or as a genre with its own distinct identity, blues music in Australia has been consumed in a variety of ways by a variety of people and continues to do so as the genre persists in its development "down under".

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[1] Both Shefte and Winn associate blues with melancholia, with Winn stating that it "may be classified as melancholy jazz" that is "usually of a slow drag tempo" (Winn, 1925: 2).

[2] See also William Ferris (1978: 101-3).

[3] In direct opposition to these "anonymous genres" were "approved genres" (opera, concert hall recitals, brass bands, choirs, etc.)—"rational recreation" of high socio-cultural status characterised by orthodox musical convention, conservatism and tradition (Whiteoak, 1999: xvi-xix).

[4] To play "a blues" can often mean to play a piece that relies solely on the twelve-bar blues form. Whether being played by ragtime orchestras, jazz bands, jug bands, pop groups or rock groups, all such songs are technically blues (Murray, 1976: 87-90; Davis, F., 1995: 154; Johnson, B., 2000: xv; Wald, 2004: 4).

[5] John Whiteoak (1999: 210-1) describes "novelty blues" as a form typified by harmonic and rhythmic clichés, which "could at best only produce a travesty of this fundamentally African-American sound art form".

[6] These included Reginald Stoneham's *Jazzin' the Blues*, and Edward R Winn's *Winn Method of Popular Music: Rag, Jazz, Blues and Novelty Piano Playing* and *Winn's How To Play Jazz and Blues* (Whiteoak, 1999: 196-9, 203).

[7] Boogie-woogie was another genre that utilised basic blues tonality and form (Whiteoak, 2003: 86). Oliver (1960: 149) describes boogie-woogie as a "loud and rhythmic blues-based piano music".

[8] In an interview with Jack Kerr, Jimmy Little stipulated that country and folk songs were more connected to the Aboriginal outlook on life than blues, which he considers to be a deep expression of the African-American experience (Little 2005).

[9] Influenced by the likes of Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey and Bessie Smith, Lee recorded blues standards such as "Nobody Knows You (When You're Down and Out)" and "Careless Love Blues" with Bell, and "St. Louis Blues" with guitarist Bruce Clarke (Walker, 2000: 57-8).

[10] Clinton Walker (2000: 52) believes that it may represent the second album ever recorded by an Australian woman.

[11] On a radio show compilation tape, Blinkhorn (1997) begins with a version of Rodgers' 'Gambling Polka Dot Blues'.

[12] Among these artists were Eddie "Son" House, Nehemiah "Skip" James, Walter "Furry" Lewis, Lonnie Johnson and Booker "Bukka" White (Davis, F., 1995: 14).

[13] These included Ford "Snooks" Eaglin, Mance Lipscomb, Mississippi Fred McDowell and Robert Pete Williams (Groom, 1971: 31-2; Davis, F., 1995: 14). See John Jackson's account in Usher and Page-Harpa (1977: 76).

[14] One might include "Big" Bill Broonzy, Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins and John Lee Hooker in this group.

[15] Jim O'Neal adds to this list that "Alberta Hunter, Helen Humes, Sippie Wallace, Edith Wilson, and Viola Wells performed only occasionally or not at all" (O'Neal, 1993: 367).

[16] Under this banner one might include Muddy Waters, "Big" Bill Broonzy, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, George "Buddy" Guy, John Lee Hooker, Eddie "Son" House, Nehemiah "Skip" James, Otis Rush, and the three Kings—B.B., Albert and Freddy (O'Neal, 1993: 367).

[17] The "female spot" for the American Folk Blues Festival tour of Europe in the 1960s reads as follows: Helen Humes (1962), Victoria Spivey (1963), Sugar Pie DeSanto (1964), Big Mama Thornton (1965), Sippie Wallace (1966), and Koko Taylor (1967) (Groom, 1971: 81).

[18] Samuel Charters (1977: 112) insists, "There is no more romantic figure in popular music than the bluesman, with everything the term involves. And it isn't a false romanticism."

[19] Additionally, Jeff Titon (2002: 174) mentions that the idealised image of the blues singer is usually one of a wandering minstrel, blind bard, and/or untutored genius.

[20] Bob Groom (1971: 46) states that these artists were usually found, interviewed and recorded as a result of the boundless enthusiasm that 'white' record collectors had for their old 78rpm records.

[21] The years 1963 and 1964 are often identified as being the peak period for the "rediscovery" of early African-American blues artists during the blues revival. The most prominent of the artists that "emerged" at this time are Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, Son House and Bukka White (Titon, 1993: 224-5).

[22] Additionally, Mahalia Jackson and Blind John Davis accompanied Broonzy on his 1952 tour (Groom, 1971: 7-14).

[23] Other notable inclusions from this decade are Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, "Shakey Jake" Harris, Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, "Big" Walter Horton, Helen Humes, "Little" Walter Jacobs, J.B. Lenoir, Eurreal "Little Brother" Montgomery, M.T. Murphy, Speckled Red (a.k.a. Rufus Perryman), "Doctor" Isaiah Ross, Otis Rush, Jimmy Rushing, Victoria Spivey, Hubert Sumlin, Roosevelt Sykes, Theodore Roosevelt "Hound Dog" Taylor, Big Mama Thornton, "Big" Joe Turner, Aaron "T-Bone" Walker, Amos "Junior" Wells, Booker "Bukka" White, "Big" Joe Williams, Robert Pete Williams, Sonny Boy Williamson II and Jimmy Witherspoon.

[24] Notable European jazz magazines include *Jazz-Hot* (France) and *Jazz Monthly* (England). Notable European writers on blues prior to the 1960s revival include Paul Oliver (England), Yannick Bruynoghe (Belgium) and Jacques Demêtre (France). Apparently, American magazines such as *Down Beat* and *Metronome*—along with the professional folk music and folklore journals—seldom printed articles on blues music prior to the 1960s revival (Oliver, 1959: 84).

[25] According to John Hammond Jr. in a radio interview with Andrew Ford (Hammond, 1996), *The Country Blues* compilation record (RF-I) was released in 1957. In addition to the artists Hammond Jr. mentions (Leroy Carr, Sleepy John Estes, Blind Willie Johnson and Robert Johnson), Groom (1971: 40-2) lists Bukka White, Tommy McClennan, Peg Leg Howell, Will Shade's Memphis Jug Band and Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers.

[26] Samuel Charters (1959: xi-xii) admitted to just as much in the preface to the 1975 edition of *The Country Blues*.

[27] A. L. Lloyd's "How a Folk Song May Arise" neatly summarises the correlation between blues music and the concept of a folk song (Usher and Page-Harpa, 1977: 33).

[28] See Peter Narváez (1993: 244) for a list of prerequisites regarding folk revivals.

[29] Referring to this era, Jeff Titon (1993: 221) appropriately defines folk songs as "meaningful lyrics set to simple melodies with simple accompaniment on acoustic instruments".

[30] Founded by George Wein in 1954 and 1959 respectively, these festivals began to present blues afternoons as an offshoot of the main festival program during the 1960s (Groom, 1971: 76). Both events are still held annually today.

[31] Other notable inclusions are Gus Cannon, Ford "Snooks" Eaglin, Walter "Furry" Lewis, Mance Lipscomb, Roosevelt Sykes and "Big" Joe Williams.

[32] This list consists of Samuel Charters, Paul Oliver, Harold Courlander, Harry Oster, Pete Welding, Mack McCormick and Alan Lomax (Keil, 1966: 34-5).

[33] Others include Chicken Shack, the Downliners Sect, Duffy Power (a.k.a. Raymond Howard), the Groundhogs, Long John Baldry & the Hoochie Coochie Men, Mother Earth, Savoy Brown, and Ten Years After.

[34] These were split into two volumes and titled *The Blues of Sleepy John Estes* (American Music website).

[35] Wells, Crudup and the Guy brothers were billed as "The American Blues Festival" at the Hordern Pavilion, Sydney, 1973.

[36] Other touring artists from this period are Freddie King (1967), Hound Dog Taylor (1967), Chicken Shack (1967), Chuck Berry (1973), Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, and Lil' Ed Williams.

[37] Other members of ASBB at one time or another included Broderick Smith (1966-8, harmonica, vocals), "Fat" Fred Bond (vocals), Joe Camilleri (saxophone, vocals), Gary Collier (guitar), Ron Isaac (drums), Paul Lever (harmonica, vocals), John O'Brien (vocals), Doug Stirling, Noel Herridge (1968-70, drums) and Mark Kozuch (1968-70, bass).

[38] Ian McFarlane (1999: 6) does however insist that "demo and live recordings are known to exist".

[39] Some internet sources, however, cite their inception as 1967 (Australian Blues website; BluesBeat Music Australia website).

[40] Although I have been unable to establish the original line-up, members of the Foreday Riders during the late 1960s included—in addition to the King brothers—Peter Anson (guitar), John Baird (drums), Bob Connery (vocals), Clive Disbery (guitar, vocals), Dave Drury (bass), Jill Drury (vocals), Rick Lock (drums), John Murphy (bass, guitar), Mark Punch (guitar), and Rolli Utzinger (piano) (McFarlane, 1999: 228; Australian Blues website).

[41] The Beaten Track's original line-up from 1967 featured Ace Follington (drums), English-born Dave Hole (guitar), Ross Partington (vocals) and Murray Wilkins (bass), with Warren Morgan (keyboards, vocals) joining the group soon afterwards (McFarlane, 1995: 3; 1999: 109).

[42] See McFarlane (1995: 6-8) for a detailed breakdown of the changes in personnel between December 1968 and June 1995.

[43] These musicians represent three of Chain's five core members. Though approximately forty musicians can lay claim to having played in some incarnation of Chain, there are only five musicians—Barry Harvey, Phil Manning, Warren Morgan, Barry Sullivan and Matt Taylor—who have existed in enough versions of the band that, at one time or another, at least one of these musicians has been in the Chain line-up. Though all five have never been together in Chain at the same time, there have been several line-ups with two, three and four of these core members present. The most successful—and probably the most memorable—line-up of Chain included four of these core members: Barry Harvey (drums), Phil Manning (guitar, vocals), Barry Sullivan (bass) and Matt Taylor (harmonica, vocals) (see McFarlane, 1995: 6-8 for "Chain #7" at "Matt Taylor Solo at Sunbury 1973").

[44] According to McFarlane (1999: 109), soon afterwards the band's name was shortened from "The Chain" to 'Chain'.

[45] The A side was originally titled 'We're Groaning' after the refrain featured in the verses (McFarlane, 1995: 5).

[46] Tilders (2000) also mentions Jim Conway and Peter Howell appearing on the album. This album was reissued under the title *Bluesmakers* by Larrikin in 1980 and EMI in 1981 (McFarlane, 1999: 643-4).

[47] During this time, the band was also known as The Soapbox Circus and Matchbox (McFarlane, 1999: 96-7).

[48] These are *Smoke Dreams* (1973), *Wangaratta Wahine* (1974), *Australia* (1975), *Making Whoopee* (1976), *The Great Stumble Forward* (1976), and *Slightly Troppo* (1979) (McFarlane, 1999: 96-7).

[49] This is now a national event staged across four locations over the Easter period, in addition to the sideshows held in major capital cities such as Sydney. For a brief discussion on "blues and roots" terminology, see Al Ward (2001: np).

[50] Prior to the formation of this category, "blues and roots" artists such as Chris Wilson and Matt Walker received nominations in the Best Australian Male Artist and Best Folk/World/Traditional Release categories.

[51] This instrument usually consists of a box (wooden or otherwise) with a microphone placed inside or underneath. The microphone is then run into a mixer where the bass quotient is typically given priority.

[52] These instruments could be used for codes and communication purposes as they had in Africa, and it was feared that they could be employed to incite insurrection (Oliver, 1969: 9-10; Bane, 1982: 26; Garofalo, 2002: 137).

[53] This line-up—now the 26th permutation of Chain—consists of Matt Taylor (vocals and harmonica), Phil Manning (guitar and vocals), Dirk Du Bois (bass) and Barry Harvey (drums).

[54] One might also want to include other "re" words such as rejuvenation, readjust, regroup and redefine.

[55] The practice of making songs up on the spot with a pre-prepared structure has been part of blues music's appeal for several Australian blues performers including Dutch Tilders and Hat Fitz (a.k.a. Darren Robert Fitzpatrick). Here its provides a failsafe for unexpected encores or situations where musicians who do not regular play and rehearse together can find some common ground (Tilders, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2005).

[56] This expression was coined by historian Geoffrey Blainey in *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966) where he discusses how Australia's distance from other countries has impacted its development.

PART II:

CASE STUDIES

<u>Foreword</u>

The following three chapters of this thesis aim to investigate the manner in which Australian performers have engaged with the blues genre and its musical conventions in order to define what is distinct about their specific approach to this foreign musical idiom. Moreover, it aims to identify the extent to which Australian performers are influenced by, and are agents of, the blues canon. Consequently, each chapter is a case study of a specific Australian group or musician that has consistently displayed creative engagement with the blues genre in both performance and recorded output across the duration of their respective musical career. This collection of artists has been strategically selected for five main reasons: their prominence among the Australian blues community; their differing approaches to the genre; the different eras they represent; their current and continued musical activity, and; their reinterpretations of tracks previously recorded by African-American blues musicians.

These chapters comprise a discussion of each artist's biography and recorded output, an assessment of their involvement with blues music in Australia and a musicological analysis of five blues reinterpretations selected from their respective recorded catalogue. Where possible, the selection of these five tracks in each case study has been chosen with the intention of incorporating a variety of influences (different artists, styles, eras, etc.) and approaches to the act of reinterpretation. These recordings accompany this thesis in compact disc format in Appendices B through D. As per the methodology utilised in chapter three, each individual song analysis examines the degree of change occurring between the "model" and the Australian recording through a discussion of its recorded history.

Chapter Five: Chain

Biography and recorded output

For the most part, Chain has been a four-piece band comprising a bass-and-drums backing, two vocalists, and two lead instrumentalists (typically a mix of harmonica, guitar and piano/keyboards).[1] Though approximately forty musicians can lay claim to having played in some incarnation of Chain, there are only five musicians who have consistently appeared and remained in the line-up for significant periods of time—Dirk Du Bois, Barry "Little Goose" Harvey, Phil Manning, Barry "Big Goose" Sullivan and Matt Taylor. Between late 1969 and late 1986, Sullivan functioned as the band's most consistent bass player. He appeared on Chain's most successful album to date—their studio debut *Toward the Blues* (1971)—along with Harvey, Manning and Taylor. Du Bois subsequently came to occupy the bass role in 1991, and the line-up of Du Bois, Harvey, Manning and Taylor remains concrete since 1995 (McFarlane, 1995: 6-8).

The story of Chain begins with several different bands, the first of which was Bay City Union (BCU). Based in Brisbane, BCU were active between March 1966 and July 1968. During this time, Taylor and Manning came to occupy the band's vocal/harmonica and lead guitar roles respectively prior to recording BCU's only single 'Mo'reen/Mary Mary' in April 1968—just three months before the group disintegrated. Both musicians then went on to undertake stints in other groups: Manning in the Laurie Allen Revue and Taylor in the Wild Cherries, Horse, Cam-Pact and Genesis. Although BCU had a decidedly short lifespan, this group is significant in that it is responsible for establishing the initial partnership between Manning and Taylor—one that was soon resurrected in Chain (McFarlane, 1999: 46-7, 93, 389, 628, 680, 686; Stafford, 2004: 12; All Music Guide website).

The first incarnation of Chain was pieced together in December 1968 and was catalysed by the demise the Beaten Tracks, a group whose line-up included Warren "Pig"

Morgan (piano, vocals) and Dave Hole (guitar). Hole soon exited to pursue a solo career only to be replaced by Manning after his stint with the Laurie Allen Revue. The Beaten Tracks then recruited Wendy Saddington (vocals) who dubbed the group "The Chain" after the Aretha Franklin track "Chain of Fools". Around the same time, Harvey, Sullivan and Taylor simultaneously contributed to one incarnation of the Wild Cherries.[2] This union, however, only lasted as long as two weeks. The following project for Harvey and Sullivan began in October 1969 when they combined with Manning and Morgan as "The Chain"—the forth incarnation the band had experienced within the space of a year. Soon shortened to "Chain", the group recorded their five-track debut album *Chain Live* (1970), which includes Manning's original composition 'Gertrude Street Blues' (McFarlane, 1995: 3-6; 1999: 46, 109, 292, 376, 680; Hall, 2003: 87; MilesAgo website).

As more musicians continued to pass through the band's revolving door, Chain entered its seventh incarnation in September 1970. Of particular note here is that this line-up was the first to feature four core members of Chain (i.e. Harvey, Manning, Sullivan and Taylor). Furthermore, it has also been the most successful incarnation of Chain to date as it was these four musicians that proceeded to record the chart-topping album, *Toward the Blues* (1971). Besides featuring reinterpretations of Robert Johnson's '32-20 Blues' and Junior Wells 'Snatch It Back and Hold It',[3] it also boasted the #1 single 'Black and Blue'.[4] This latter track exhibits Chain's additional ties to blues music as it draws on the influence of the African-American work song tradition by incorporating sounds of a chain gang. Despite their early success, the line-up for this album was typical of this era in Australian popular music culture in that it was remarkably short-lived. It is, therefore, likely that the heavily transient nature which characterised the local bands of this period—especially those extolling the influence of blues—is to some degree directly responsible for encouraging and fostering the

ever-present element of improvisation also associated with Australian popular music of this era (McFarlane, 1995: 5-11; 1999: 109).

The next recording to bear the Chain label came when Manning briefly resurrected the same line-up that appeared on *Chain Live* (including Harvey and Sullivan) to record their second instalment of live original material on the aptly-titled *Chain Live Again* (released in October 1972). After this incarnation inevitably split for the second time, the same three core musicians of Chain (i.e. Harvey, Manning and Sullivan) went on to form the group Mighty Mouse. Moreover, this trio also provided instrumental backing for fellow Chain alumnus Matt Taylor at the 1973 Sunbury Rock Festival as well as on his first solo album *Straight As a Die* (1973). Similarly, Manning and Sullivan appeared again on Taylor's second solo effort *Music* (1974). Soon enough Mighty Mouse evolved into another manifestation of Chain (minus Taylor) and it was during this brief period that the group supported Muddy Waters' Australian tour and recorded the collaboration album *Two of a Kind* (1973).[5] After yet another split (and, subsequently, another period of inactivity for the Chain name), Mushroom Records issued two retrospective compilation albums—*The History of Chain* (1974)[6] and *The Best of Chain* (1980)—and Taylor and Manning released their collaboration, *Oz Blues* (1981). Recorded under the guise of the Matt Taylor Phil Manning Band,[7] this album combined new compositions with reinterpretations of previously-recorded Chain songs, solo material and blues standards such as Muddy Waters' 'Mannish Boy' (McFarlane, 1995: 7-15; 1999: 109-110, 677; MilesAgo website).

The Chain name was eventually resurrected once more when the *Toward the Blues* line-up reunited for the Mushroom Evolution Tenth Anniversary concert on the Australia Day long weekend in 1982. Prior to reforming on a permanent basis between late 1983 and late 1986, Manning and Taylor continued their respective solo ventures.[8] Before disbanding once more towards the end of 1986, the *Toward the Blues* line-up recorded what was to be their

second and final studio album together, *Child of the Street* (1985).[9] Afterwards, Taylor

continued to maintain the Chain name and has since been involved in every manifestation of

the group following their January 1982 reunion. Released around the same time as

Manning's solo album *It's Blues* (1988), Chain offered *Australian Rhythm and Blues*

(1987).[10] In addition to original material from Taylor and John Meyer, this eight-track album

resurrects three tunes from the *Toward the Blues* era: 'Judgement', 'Black & Blue', and

'Grab a Snatch' (previously titled 'Snatch It Back and Hold It'). Taylor and Meyer continued

to comprise the core of the group up until late 1990. During this time, the pair combined

their respective influences in blues and metal to produce the aptly-titled *Blue Metal* album

(1990). Though the majority of tracks were Taylor-Meyer co-writes, the album concludes

with a reinterpretation of Elmore James' 'Maddison Blues' (McFarlane, 1995: 7, 18-9; 1999:

110).

Though Manning and Taylor reprised Chain for a tour in early 1991—this time with

the help of new core member, bassist Dirk Du Bois—the following incarnation of the band

did not feature Manning. Dubbed "Matt Taylor's Chain"—regardless of the pre-existing

widespread association between Taylor and Chain—core members Taylor and Du Bois

combined with John Meyer, Jeff Lang (guitar) and Lucky Oceans (lap steel) to record

Trouble in the Wind (a.k.a. *Walls to McGoo*) (1992). Battling further line-up changes, Taylor

began utilising different backing groups when touring in different cities around Australia,

including The Giants in Melbourne and members of the Chris Finnen Band in Adelaide.

Manning and Taylor both continued to release solo recordings up until 1995[11] when a new

combination of four core members gathered to form the 26th permutation of the band.

Although the *Toward the Blues* line-up reformed in April 1996 for a set at the East Coast

Blues and Roots Festival—25 years after the release of their debut album—all Chain

engagements and recordings since have been with the Du Bois-Harvey-Manning-Taylor line-

up. The first of these recordings, *The First 30 Years* (1998), celebrates the 30th anniversary since Chain's inception. Interestingly, while the ten-song repertoire on this live recording is heavily retrospective in that its material is drawn from previous albums released by either Chain, Matt Taylor or the Matt Taylor Phil Manning Band, the following release, *Mix Up the Oils* (1999), consists entirely of new songs—the majority of which are written by Taylor. However, the most recent Chain release represents a further shift. In addition to comprising all new material, the majority of tracks on *Sweet Honey* (2006) are written by the band as opposed to individual members. Also breaking from habit is Chain's employment of a guest musician—this occasion showcasing Broderick Smith (harmonica) on the track 'It Makes No Difference' (McFarlane, 1995: 20-1; 1999: 110, 249).[12]

As Chain celebrates 40 years of association with blues music in Australia, they remain the only blues band to achieve a #1 single in Australia. The current four-piece line-up continues to record and perform at music festivals all around the country as well as recent concert events such as Long Way to the Top and the Lobby Loyde Tribute Night. After achieving gold status in 1998 (twenty-seven years after its initial release), Festival Mushroom Records released a 30th anniversary edition of Chain's landmark *Toward the Blues* album in 2001.[13] Even with the new consistent line-up—one that has now lasted some thirteen years and is thereby the longest-lived of all 26 Chain permutations—some members of Chain continue to perform solo and/or participate in side projects. For instance, following his involvement in recording *Three Aztecs and a Chain* (2001) with three former members of Billy Thorpe's Aztecs (i.e. Warren Morgan,[14] Paul Wheeler, and Gill Matthews), Manning continues to release solo recordings such as *Migrant's Dance* (2002) alongside live solo performances—including support spots during Chain's live tours. Similarly, Barry "Little Goose" Harvey reunited with former Chain member Barry "Big Goose" Sullivan to form the

band Brother Goose and release their self-titled debut album just after Sullivan's death in October 2003.

The premier "Oz Blues" band

I hear what you're playing and I know it's the blues. But it sure don't sound like any blues I've ever heard before!

— Albert Collins on Chain
(MilesAgo website)

They have been described as "The Elder Statesmen of Australian blues music" and "Australia's foremost exponents of the blues" (Spencer, 1987: 85; liner notes to Chain, 2006). Additionally, the annual awards at the Australia Blues Music Festival in Goulburn are named "The Chain Awards" in their honour. The band name itself has repeatedly survived the threat of extinction despite all the line-up changes over the years. The persistence of both Manning and Taylor to employ the title is largely due to their early success in the late 1960s and early 1970s. After having made a name for themselves in the underground scene, Chain then topped the singles charts with 'Black and Blue' and 'Judgement', and later achieved gold status for the album *Toward the Blues* (1971). Beyond that, the name has been routinely resurrected and utilised primarily by Manning and Taylor simply because it makes economic sense to draw on that image:

Matt Taylor and Phil Manning are synonymous with the band, but if Matt Taylor and Phil Manning go and do a gig somewhere with a 20-dollar ticket, we would probably get half the number of people that we would if we did the same show and called it "Chain". So it's become a sort of Chain featuring Matt Taylor and Phil Manning… not using the Chain name when we tour as Chain is really silly.—Phil Manning (pc, February, 2007)

Examining the African-American influences that contribute to Chain's sound, one must first traverse the numerous artists from America and England who initially alerted

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Australians to blues and blues-based musics in the 1960s. This began with the rock-and-roll of Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino and Little Richard, and soon progressed to the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Jimi Hendrix, and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. In addition to reputation and word of mouth, many of these albums contained reinterpretations of previously recorded blues songs and liner notes that mentioned the names of their "original" authors.

Igniting their curiosity, Manning and Taylor each keenly set out on a path of research and discovery that led them to experience the recordings and performances of countless African-American bluesmen. Consequently, Taylor's primary blues influences are Buddy Guy, Slim Harpo, Robert Johnson, Lazy Lester, Jimmy Reed, Little Walter, and Muddy Waters. What is interesting here is that, as a harmonica player, much of Taylor's melodic phrasing is modelled off guitarists. On the other hand, as a guitarist, Manning's key blues influences can be split into two groups of guitarists: electric and acoustic. Impacting his work with Chain the most, the electric guitarists category comprises several groups of artists: African-American blues performers such as Bo Diddley, Buddy Guy, Albert King, B.B. King, Freddie King, and Muddy Waters—all of whom Manning did Australian tours with; British blues musicians like Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, and Peter Green; and, Australian-based blues-rock guitarist Lobby Loyde. Among his dominant acoustic influences are early African-American blues artists like Blind Blake, Big Bill Broonzy, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson and Bukka White. This latter group can also be extended to include John Lee Hooker and Australian country performer John Williamson, both of whom provided Manning with the idea of incorporating a stompbox into his solo act.

With these influences in tow, Chain (and its individual members) aim to create a style of blues music that draws on the idiom's tradition of reinterpretation by reworking previously recorded (old) blues material in combination with their own original ideas. Over their long

careers, Manning and Taylor—both as members of Chain and solo artists—have demonstrated this objective in many different ways. Beginning with *Toward the Blues*, this was achieved with two specifically different approaches: first, by reinterpreting two previously recorded song texts via significant changes to elements of accompaniment and/or lyrics (i.e. '32-20 Blues' and 'Snatch It Back and Hold It'); and second, by incorporating structural elements of pre-blues African-American work songs into a new composition of their own (i.e. 'Black and Blue'). In their live shows, Chain also absorbs the blues doctrine of improvisation, applying it to their blues reinterpretations as well as original—and often incomplete—material:

> *we still needed new songs and everything so Phil would say, "Look, I've got a riff".*
> *I'd say, "What key's it in?" He says, "I think it's in D". I said, "Look just do it third*
> *song". So we go onstage and do something we've never heard in our life. That's how*
> *confident we were and how good we were. No mucking around with that band.*—
> Matt Taylor (pc, February, 2007)

In the lyrics to his 'Fair Dinkum Aussie Blues', Taylor even goes so far as to explicitly discuss his approach to the process of creating original blues material in his own style:

> *And the music I have known*
> *Well you couldn't say it's been home-grown*
> *Though I'm thankful for what I've been shown*
> *What I'd really like to do is play my own*
>
>   — from *Music*
>   (Taylor, M., 1974)

He demonstrates this again on *Pyramids and Spirals* (1995) in the songs 'Memphis Got a Pyramid' and 'Willie Brown'—both of which were, coincidentally, later reinterpreted by Chain in the live recording *The First 30 Years* (1998). Here each song "lifts" lyrics and/or titles from previously recorded blues tracks and sets them within a new blues composition (Evans, D., 1982a: 127-31). In 'Memphis Got a Pyramid', Taylor begins the song with a

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variation of the second stanza from W.C. Handy's 'Memphis Blues' (1912). 'Willie Brown', however, goes further as it also incorporates titles and themes from other recordings. Named after the early bluesman that played in the same region and era as Son House and Robert Johnson, Taylor creates a narrative that features both Brown and Johnson as central characters. Taylor also develops a theme by incorporating phrases and titles from several Johnson tracks within the lyrics. One manner in which he achieves this is through mentioning some portion of the title (e.g. "Phonograph Blues", "dust that broom", "cross road", "Terraplane", "hellhounds on his trail"). The other is via the use clever references to characters or objects Johnson employed in his recordings (e.g. Betty Mae from 'Honeymoon Blues' and the Greyhound bus in 'Me and the Devil Blues') (see Johnson, R., 1990). Finally, this piece also evokes Johnson through its instrumental accompaniment by incorporating the two instruments he was known to play—bottleneck acoustic guitar and harmonica.[15]

Given that not a single reinterpretation has appeared on any Chain studio album since the early 1990s, it becomes clear the band currently finds other avenues through which to pay tribute to their influences. In addition to the aforementioned methods, Chain's approach to original blues composition may sometimes involve revisiting old recordings, distilling a particular artist's musical style, and reinterpreting elements of that style for an original composition with new lyrical content:

> *Say, for instance, if Matt said, "Why don't we think about doing something in a Billy Boy Arnold style? Or Slim Harpo?" And so, what I tend to do then is I go and refresh my mind on what the sound was like, what they were doing, and let that mull around in my mind and you'd find that something would come out and you'd get it into that zone…*—Phil Manning (pc, February, 2007)

For Manning, this helps to differentiate Chain from other blues artists both in Australia and internationally. He feels that for many of the musicians who promote themselves as "blues artists", this label simply symbolizes the act of playing "blues songs"—more specifically,

"covers", "copies" or "the Top 40 of the blues" (ibid). The key difference in approach for Chain as a blues band is to avoid imitation and to progress the evolution of blues music as a form by incorporating some sense of new identity into composition and performance through original ideas and perspectives. For Taylor, this means that performing blues music acts as a conduit for expressing his feelings. As an Australian group engaging with an African-American musical tradition, Chain separates themselves from other local "blues" acts that they believe are more dedicated to mimicking early black bluesmen. This stance is strongly embodied in the concept of "Oz Blues", a phrase that Chain has adopted and championed throughout their career.

According to Taylor, the phrase "Oz Blues" began to surface during the late 1960s. This was particularly in reference to his own musical projects, which Taylor then embraced. As one of the five names synonymous with Chain, Taylor has consistently incorporated such Australian references into his lyrics and titles. Among the obvious examples are the albums *Oz Blues* (1981) and *Australian Rhythm and Blues* (1987), and the songs '(Doin') The Highway '31' Shuffle', 'Oz Boogie' and 'Fair Dinkum Aussie Blues'—all of which were recorded by Chain or members of Chain. Such references also frequently appear in the cover art of Taylor's albums: *Music* (1974) displays a kookaburra; *Always Land On Your Feet* (1983) shows a koala playing harmonica and wearing an "Oz Blues" t-shirt; *Australian Rhythm and Blues* (1987) reveals a map of Australia; and, *Trouble in the Wind* (1992), *The First 30 Years* (1998) and *Sweet Honey* (2006) each carry the symbol of Ned Kelly in chains.

In the eyes of Chain, "Oz Blues" (or Australian blues music) represents a distinctly Australian approach to the African-American blues idiom that draws on and expresses in some way, shape or form the experience and cultural heritage that is specific to the individual(s) engaging with this musical genre. "Oz Blues" is about trying to express and project your own feelings and perspective; it is about injecting something unique and

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exclusive to yourself into the lyrics and music; it is about generating new performance modes and ideas in the blues style and not reverting to imitating established practices and outdated stereotypes. Rather than decontextualise or appropriate the African-American experience as their own for purposes of entertainment and/or profiteering—a process cleverly parodied in the film *Ghostworld* (see Sperb, 2004: 212)—Chain extol the virtues of channelling one's own communicative capacity for expression and implementing those ideas into new manifestations of blues music.

> *What I play is an Australian blues—it's Matt Taylor born in Brisbane in 1948, who grew up listening to Robert Johnson records, and now applying that blueprint to living in Australia. That's what my blues is. It'd be totally irrelevant for me to sing note-for-note the blues of a black Mississippi bluesman from the thirties because I'm not that, no matter how much I loved that man's music…*—Matt Taylor (MilesAgo website)

Whether the nationality of the artist is Australian, American, British, Russian or otherwise: the same principle applies. For Chain, authentic blues music is original. It is built upon a foundation of knowledge and respect for the African-American innovators of the genre, but is not so heavily reliant on them to the point where the music plateaus or becomes staid and transfixed on repetition and/or mimicry. In the words of Manning, "blues alters all the time, and it should too" (pc, February, 2007). Consequently, processes of reinterpretation are integral to their "Oz Blues" approach.

Though they are largely ignored by mainstream commercial radio and promotions such as *The dig Australian Blues Project*, Chain continue to endure within the contemporary Australian music industry through regular tours and releasing their own music independently. The band is also battling against a decline in appearances at Australian music festivals. One reason for this is purely logistical and financial as members of Chain currently live in different parts of the country. As a result, getting the band together is a costly exercise and necessitates performances fees that are able to accommodate for travel, accommodation and

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hire vehicles. Unfortunately, this means that only a limited number of music festivals in Australia that cater for their brand of blues can now afford to have Chain on the line-up. Ironically, this excludes the Australian Blues Music Festival in Goulburn—the same event that gives out the Chain Awards.

Another issue for the decline also pertains to the change in format of some Australian music festivals. Events like The Annual East Coast Blues and Roots Music Festival in Byron Bay, which began with a penchant to primarily promote both local and international blues artists, have progressively evolved to accommodate and cater for a much wider collection of "roots" musics. In many ways, this particular event has become more of a "roots of rock" festival and less of a blues festival. This probably has a lot to do with the event's current organisers—Peter Noble and Michael Chugg—who are also established rock music promoters. To no surprise, Taylor is accordingly disappointed with and cynical of this situation:

> *most of the blues festivals, we hardly ever play them. I think it's because we play Australian blues… I used to have this joke that we couldn't play the Australian blues festival because we were Australian and we play blues. So we had nothing in common with it.*—Matt Taylor (pc, February, 2007)

Although there has definitely been a development of blues-based music in Australia, Chain are convinced that it is far too disparate and divided so as to be referred to as a tradition—especially one united under the banner of "Australian blues music". Much of this sentiment comes back to their perception of other blues artists from Australia being too reliant on blues mythology and African-American models of blues performance. In terms of striving for originality and the way they present themselves as a group, Chain feels very much alone in their quest. Manning succinctly describes this when he says, "as far as the Chain audience is concerned, we're an Oz Blues band and that's it. In fact, we're <u>the</u> Oz Blues band" (pc, February, 2007).

Canonisation and reinterpretation

Out of the six songs on Chain's first studio album, *Toward the Blues*, two were blues reinterpretations—'Thirty Two / Twenty Blues' and 'Snatch It Back and Hold It (adapted from the stage version)'. Though this accounts for a third of the material, the albums that follow keep this practice of reinterpreting previously recorded blues songs to an absolute minimum. Some, especially the more recent releases, feature zero reinterpretations of old blues texts. Despite this pattern, Chain continues to perform blues reinterpretations in the live arena alongside their own original compositions. With regard to their recorded reinterpretations, both of the aforementioned songs have been recorded more than once and by different line-ups of band personnel—as detailed below. Including the other three blues reinterpretations presented in this analysis, at least one manifestation of each track features both Matt Taylor on vocals and harmonica and Phil Manning on electric guitar. This selection of songs is strategic in that these two members of Chain have consistently been the head figures associated with the band. Consequently, one of the songs in this case study is performed by the Matt Taylor Phil Manning Band—an outfit that is basically Chain in all but name.

Among the examples excluded from this analysis are Elmore James' "Maddison Blues" and three songs from the band's collaboration with James "Pee Wee" Madison and George "Mojo" Beauford on *Two of a Kind*—Lowell Fulson's 'Reconsider Baby', Little Walter's 'Blues with a Feeling', and 'Everybody Has to Loose [*sic*] Sometimes'. Overall, this study reflects the ongoing influence of three African-American artists from the blues canon: Robert Johnson, Elmore James and Muddy Waters. Additionally, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition below, Matt Taylor's vocal approach consistently presents distinct timbral differences when compared to these and other African-American blues singers. This outcome is both a conscious and aesthetic choice as Taylor insists on his preference for

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pronouncing each individual word in a way that is not only discernible, but also brings out the flavour of his Australian accent—"I've tried to get rid of the 'can'ts' [spoken in US American accent]" (pc, February, 2007). Further to this point, he expresses frustration at other Australian performers who do not take a similar approach and instead prioritise imitation of a stereotypical African-American blues vocal.

> *I figured out what the essence of the blues was very early on and realised that the blues is just a blueprint for you expressing your emotions and the way you see things… And I think people are still into the mythology of blues but not into what it actually is—expressing who you are.*—Matt Taylor (ibid)

'32-20 Blues'

The first record bearing this title was recorded by Roosevelt Sykes in 1930, under the alias Willie Kelly. Though it is more commonly associated with Robert Johnson's 1936 track of the same name, this recording itself is highly derivative of Skip James' 1931 recording '22-20 Blues'.[16] According to Charters (1967: 72; 1973: 44), during James' recording session, Paramount's Arthur Laiblee requested he improvise a song like '44 Blues' due to that title's popularity. Previously recorded under the title 'Vicksburg Blues' by Little Brother Montgomery in 1929, it was reinterpreted later that year as '44 Blues' by none other than Roosevelt Sykes—thus coming full circle. Although Johnson was not the first blues musician to use the 32-20 gun calibre within his lyrics,[17] the association of '32-20 Blues' with Johnson spawned several songs with similar titles but different lyrics including Arthur Crudup's 'Give Me a 32-20' (1942), Muddy Waters' '32-20 Blues' (1942), and 'Maceo's 32-20' by Big Maceo (1945). Since then, '32-20 Blues'—as recorded by Johnson—has been reinterpreted by artists such as John Hammond (1979), The Backsliders (1988 and 1992), Cassandra Wilson (1996), Peter Green Splinter Group (1997), Rocky Lawrence (1999), Robert Jr.

Lockwood (2000), Eric Clapton (2004) and Rory Block (2006) (Wald, 2004: 149-50; The Originals website).[18]

While Skip James recorded '22-20 Blues' as a self-accompanied pianist, Johnson's subsequent reinterpretation of this text was translated to the guitar—thus explaining its particular appeal to latter-day guitar-based artists. James' initial recording begins with an introduction, features a solo and employs five different lyric stanzas—one of which is repeated (i.e. 1-2-3-4-2-solo-5). Though Johnson's adaptation maintains an introduction and makes use of all five James stanzas (i.e. 1-2-4-1-6-7-3-1-7-5), it also makes some changes: several gun calibres are altered within the lyrics; two stanzas are added; two stanzas are repeated; and, the solo section is removed. Coincidentally, the Johnson reinterpretation begins and ends in the same manner as James' song—with the first and fifth stanzas respectively. Another interesting aspect in the history of this track is that Johnson makes a similar mistake to James in his attempt to copy a previous recording. Just as James articulates the wrong gun calibre, Johnson utters the wrong location in the final repeat of the first stanza—instead of "Hollis Springs", he accidentally says "Wisconsin" as sung in James' recording (Wald, 2004: 149-50, 303).

Crediting Johnson as the original author, Chain has recorded three reinterpretations of the song (1971, 1971 (released 1974), and 1997 (released 1998))—the latter two having been recorded live. Analysing each Chain reinterpretation separately, variables occur in relation to selection of lyric stanzas, song structure, length and content of instrumental passages, performance context and band personnel. However, when compared with Johnson's recording (now taken as 1-2-3-1-4-5-6-1-5-7), each of the Chain recordings exhibit at least fifteen reinterpretive differences, mainly within musical structure and instrumental accompaniment. Although all three Chain recordings contain Johnson's first, fourth and fifth stanzas, the *Toward the Blues* recording also features Johnson's third stanza (i.e. 1-5-4-solos-

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1-5-**3**-4-solo-4), while their most recent recording incorporates Johnson's sixth stanza (i.e. 1-5-4-solos-**6**-5-4-solo-4-4). Therefore, although none of Chain's reinterpretations make use of Johnson's second or seventh stanzas, each one repeats Johnson's fourth and fifth stanzas.

Continuing in the vein of James and Johnson, Taylor makes a change in the lyrics—conscious or not—that reflects a previous reinterpretation of the song recorded by another musician. James' third stanza achieves this by conjuring Sykes' track with the rhyming couplet "You talk about your 44-40, buddy it'll do very well/But my 22-20, Lord it's a burning Hell". Johnson subsequently adopts this as his sixth stanza and changes the couplet to "Got a 38 special boys, it do very well/I've got a 32-20 now and it's a burning Hell". However, in *The First 30 Years* reinterpretation, Taylor alludes to James' recording by altering the stanza to "She got a 22 pistol, I believe it will do well/Come on 32-20, 'cause it's a burning Hell". The other main lyrical change appears in a garbled interpretation of Johnson's fourth stanza, originally sung as "I'm going to shoot my pistol, going to shoot my Gatling gun/You made me love you, now your man has come". Taylor originally misheard the first line in this couplet and consequently sings it as "Got to shoot my pistol, got to shoot my gal and go". This is then followed with a repetition of the final line from Johnson's first stanza—"All the doctors in Hollis Springs sure can't help her now".

Interestingly, all three recorded reinterpretations from Chain begin in the same chronological manner—an introduction, followed by Johnson's first, fifth and fourth stanzas, and then an instrumental passage that includes solos from both Taylor and Manning. In this manner, Chain progressively builds to up to a climax and uses Johnson's recording as a "jumping-off point" by replacing lyrical stanzas with instrumental and solo passages that facilitate their virtuosic talents. During the first instrumental passage, the reinterpretations from *Toward the Blues* and *The First 30 Years* both feature a twelve-bar duet—the former demonstrates this with two guitars, the latter with guitar and harmonica. Prior to the second

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instrumental passage, each Chain reinterpretation also features Johnson's fifth and fourth stanzas (in that order). Following the second instrumental section, all three reinterpretations present Johnson's fourth stanza as the last. As for tempo, instrumentation and spatial positioning, each Chain reinterpretation alters the instrumental accompaniment from Johnson's mono recording of mid-tempo, self-accompanied acoustic guitar to a faster-paced stereo recording of a four-piece electric blues band. The finger-picking accompaniment used by Manning throughout their reinterpretations is basically a twelve-bar pattern applied to portions of lyrical text and melody from James' and Johnson's tracks, and has no relation to these previous recordings of this blues core. In applying these changes, the connection between Johnson's and Chain's recordings of '32-20 Blues' is purely lyrical. Coincidentally, Chain reframes a select group of previously-recorded stanzas the same way Johnson did—by furnishing them with a new instrumental accompaniment.

'Snatch It Back and Hold It'

This song was recorded for the first time in 1965 by Junior Wells' Chicago Blues Band. Though Wells (a.k.a. Amos Wells Blakemore) never really achieved canonic status, he has recorded with numerous high profile names such as Willie Dixon, Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Carlos Santana and Bill Wyman (Russell, et al., 2006: 693-6). Aside from Chain's reinterpretations in 1971 and 1987, 'Snatch It Back and Hold It' was also sampled by hip-hop group Arrested Development in their 1992 track 'Mama's Always On Stage' (Rypens, 1996: 337). Other existing reinterpretations of the song seem to be limited to recordings by low-profile US artists from 1995 onwards.[19] It is worth noting here that Wells' original recording appears in the soundtrack to the recent motion picture comedy *Showtime* (Dey, 2002), starring Robert De Niro and Eddie Murphy. Considering that recorded reinterpretations of this track were few-and-far-between prior to 2002, it is possible

that *Showtime* assisted in boosting the profile of the song—to some extent—among contemporary performers and audiences.

An examination of both Chain reinterpretations reveals variables in song structure, tempo, the selection of lyric stanzas, duration and content of instrumental sections, vocal melody, performance context, instrument timbre and band personnel. Compared to Wells' though, both Chain recordings demonstrate fourteen reinterpretive differences predominantly within instrumental accompaniment and the addition of new musical material. Firstly, both recordings begin with a lengthy introduction and end with a twelve-bar harmonica solo—neither of which is present in Wells' track. On each occasion the introduction is instigated by the harmonica, which is then built to a crescendo by the entire band, and followed by a diminuendo ending with the harmonica. While Wells' recording exhibits a mid-tempo syncopated beat, Chain's reinterpretations straighten out the rhythm and conduct the piece at a much faster pace—more so on *Australian Rhythm and Blues*. As a result, Taylor's vocal melodies in the live recording from 1987 are much different to those in the 1971 studio recording, often lagging behind the beat or incorporating a staccato delivery.

Before Chain's first recording of this track, Taylor and Manning used to perform it together in Bay City Union. It then became part of their repertoire in Chain several years later. Prior to its appearance on *Toward the Blues*, the song's lyrical hook became a point of sexual wordplay. Originally "snatch it back and hold it", Sullivan routinely parodied the line in practice by transforming it to "grab a snatch and hold it"—"snatch" being a synonym for both "grab" and "vagina". Eventually, the new lyric was applied to live performances of the song by Taylor and appeared on their debut studio album under the title 'Snatch It Back and Hold It (adapted from the stage version)'. This was subsequently changed to 'Grab a Snatch' for the live recording on *Australian Rhythm and Blues*. Although Chain provides the original instrumentation from Wells' recording (vocals, harmonica, electric guitar, electric bass and

drums), the lyric stanzas employed by Taylor in both of the aforementioned reinterpretations are largely different. In this manner, Chain uses Wells' recording as a frame and fills it with new material (Evans, D., 1982a: 124).

Further to the lyrics, Wells employs five different stanzas (six in total), the second of which is repeated following a harmonica solo of twenty-four bars (i.e. 1-2-solo-2-3-4-5). In contrast, Taylor—the only member of Chain to feature in both recordings—uses a total of only four in 1971 and five in 1987. This accounts for the only structural difference between both Chain reinterpretations, that being the repeat of Wells' second stanza in 1987 (i.e. 3-2-solos-6-2-[1/3/1]-solo). Interestingly, this is the same stanza Wells repeats in his recording. Moreover, it is the only stanza Taylor reproduces in full from the original. Of the remaining three: one is a variation of Wells' third stanza (including the aforementioned parody); one, a new stanza from Taylor that is thematically consistent with Wells'; and, the other, a combination of lines from Wells' first and third stanzas with minor variations.

Another structural similarity with the Wells recording is the twenty-four-bar harmonica solo that occurs after the first two lyric stanzas. However, Chain "jump-off" from here by extending this first instrumental section in each recording by thirty-six bars. In doing so, the band adds a guitar solo and a call-and-response section. In the earlier studio recording, this call-and-response interplay is achieved through Manning's use of contrasting guitar riffs. Here he follows the call of a stuttering ostinato with a free-flowing response six times throughout the twelve-bar progression. In the live recording, this interplay exists between the harmonica and guitar. While it maintains the six call-and-response cycles, the main difference in this recording is that both harmonica's call and the guitar's response are stuttered melodies. Finally, both Chain guitarists are bestowed with more spatial prominence than that in the original, made easier through their application of sound effects such as distortion.

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'Dust My Blues'

This blues core is considered a standard by numerous sources (Southern, 1971: 509; Herzhaft, 1992: 435-78; Schneider, 2001: 265-6; Wald, 2004: 138; Blues Foundation website). More commonly known as 'Dust My Broom',[20] Chain's only recording of it bears the alternate title 'Dust My Blues'. This is explained via its association with Elmore James (a.k.a. Elmore Brooks), himself an inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Blues Foundation website). James recorded this blues core under several titles, recycling its signature bottleneck guitar riff, melody and lyrics to varying degrees each time. In chronological order, these begin with 'Dust My Broom' (1951) and include the subsequent recordings 'I Believe' (1952), 'She Just Won't Do Right' (1953), 'Please Find My Baby' (1953), 'Happy Home' (1955), 'Dust My Blues' (1955), 'I Believe My Time Ain't Long' (1955) and 'Dust My Broom' (1959).[21] Even so, the recorded history of this blues core is much more complex as it also involves numerous earlier performers. Tracing the song's lineage backwards, it can be seen that James' 'Dust My Broom' and 'Dust My Blues' are both heavily reliant on Robert Johnson's 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom' (1936).[22] The main difference between these two performers is that James plays in a bottleneck style while Johnson plays only with his fingers (Charters, 1973: 29; Obrecht, 2000: 155; Russell, et al., 2006: 305-7; The Originals website).

In contrast to James' 'Dust My Broom' being a near-direct copy of Johnson's reinterpretation, Johnson's recording is a prime example of the blues tradition of reinterpretation at work. This is because there is plenty of evidence that Johnson's recording is the result of borrowing ideas from numerous sources and amalgamating them into the one track. Much of Johnson's inspiration for this song can be attributed to Kokomo Arnold, as his recording of 'Sagefield Woman Blues' (1934) appears to represent the first usage of the phrase 'I believe I'll dust my broom'. Arnold also varied this in another two compositions,

on both occasions as a ten-syllable line. First in 'Old Black Cat Blues' (1935) as "I believe, that I got those black cat blues", and second in 'Sissy Man Blues' (1935) as "I believe, I believe I'll go back home"—the latter also appearing in Johnson's recording. Interestingly, the final three stanzas in Johnson's recording suggest nerves or a lack of preparation due to their reliance on Arnold's lyrics. After starting with three different stanzas, Johnson then resorts to using the first stanza from 'Sissy Man Blues', adding variation to its last line. Followed by a repeat of his own first stanza, Johnson hesitates during the first two beats of the following twelve-bar progression before he launches into a variation of the second stanza from 'Sissy Man Blues'. In particular, Johnson alters the last line from Arnold's "Says the Good Book tells me, that I got a good gal in this world somewhere" to "If I can't find her on Philippines Islands, she must be in Ethiopia somewhere". Keeping in mind that Peetie Wheatstraw was also a significant influence on Johnson's recording career, this variation may have also been derived from Wheatstraw's 'Deep Sea Love' (1936). Recorded just over nine months prior to Johnson's track, 'Deep Sea Love' varies the second stanza of Arnold's 'Sissy Man Blues' in a manner that is much closer to Johnson's subsequent recording: "Well now I'm going to call up in China, just to see if my little girl is there/Well now if she's not in China, ooo well I believe she's in East St Louis somewhere". All of this gives credence to the theory that Johnson had either run out of stanzas or was possibly struggling to recall them.[23]

Regarding Chain's live reinterpretation from *The History of Chain*, Taylor demonstrates an awareness of the history of this blues core in his opening monologue by mentioning James' tendency to recycle the same musical and lyrical elements. Though the title 'Dust My Blues' is clearly taken from James' 1955 track, Chain's reinterpretation also bears some similarities with James' 'Dust My Broom'—this has a lot to do with the limited amount of lyric stanzas James employed throughout all of his recordings. Here Taylor begins

with a variation of the first stanza from James' 'Dust My Blues', making slight changes to the rhyming couplet in the last line. Although Taylor's following stanza adheres to the same order in James' 'Dust My Broom', its content is closer to James' third stanza in 'Dust My Blues' due to its use of the phrase "I'm going to send her a telegram". Meanwhile, despite its minor variations, Taylor's third stanza appears in both James recordings. Interestingly, the only stanza Taylor does not take from James' recordings is that which begins with "I don't want no woman", as the fourth and final stanza used in the Chain reinterpretation is simply a repeat of their first stanza.

Unlike the other reinterpretations examined in this chapter, Chain has not once produced a studio recording of 'Dust My Blues'. As is suggested by this once-off live recording and the decreased number of reinterpretive measures exhibited within this track, it is likely that Chain utilised 'Dust My Blues' predominantly as an opportunity to "jam" and experiment with a well-known blues standard. Apart from being performed in front of a live audience at an outdoor music festival, the remaining differences with Chain's reinterpretation involve instrumental accompaniment and song structure. Here they adopt their standard four-piece electric blues band format as opposed to the line-ups in the two aforementioned James recordings which either exclude drums or incorporate brass instruments. Furthermore, not only does Chain apply more distortion to both the guitar and bass in this recording, the spatial positioning of these two instruments in the right and left speakers respectively are also elements absent in James' track. On another note, although Chain maintains the twelve-bar band introduction that is standard in many of James' recordings of this blues core, their reinterpretation gives more centrality to the instrumental and solo passages. For instance, while James leaves his lone bottleneck guitar solo until the end in 'Dust My Broom', Chain places two instrumental sections in the middle of the song. Each of these is thirty-six bars longer than James' and features solos from both bottleneck guitar and harmonica.

'Mannish Boy'

Inducted by the Blues Foundation as a "classic recording" (1986), 'Mannish Boy' has featured in the soundtrack for films such as *Risky Business* (Brickman, 1983) and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Harlin, 1996) as well as an advertisement campaign for Levi's jeans. It was written and recorded in 1955 as an answer song[24] to 'I'm a Man' by Bo Diddley[25] (1955), itself derived from Muddy Waters' 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man' (1954).[26] Keeping to this trend, Diddley promptly recorded another track in the same vein titled 'I'm Bad' (1956). All four tracks contain a very similar five-note stop-time riff and lyrics that make boastful claims about the performer's sexual prowess. This riff also features in several other titles such as Lightnin' Slim's 'G.I. Blues' (1959), Them's 'All For Myself' (1964), Jack Nitzsche & Captain Beefheart's 'Hard Workin' Man' (1978), George Thorogood's 'Bad to the Bone' (1985) and 'Bridging the Gap' by NAS (2004). Reinterpretations from high-profile artists include: Steppenwolf (1968), The Allman Brothers Band (1973) and Eric Clapton (1994) as 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man'; the Yardbirds (1964 and 1965) and the Who (1965) as 'I'm a Man'; and, the Rolling Stones (1977) and the Band with Muddy Waters (1978) as 'Mannish Boy' (Southern, 1971: 509; Herzhaft, 1992: 435-78; Rypens, 1996: 179-80; Schneider, 2001: 198, 364-5; The Originals website).

Reinterpreted by the Matt Taylor Phil Manning Band (MTPMB) on *Oz Blues* (1981), this group is essentially Chain in all aspects other than name. In fact, the formation of this band was one of the factors that led to the reunion of the *Toward the Blues* line-up of Chain the following year. Furthermore, MTPMB bassist Roy Daniel later fulfilled the same position for Chain between late 1986 and late 1988 (McFarlane 1995: 7, 15, 18). Once again demonstrating an awareness of the history behind the previously recorded blues songs they perform, this reinterpretation concatenates the first two stanzas and refrains from 'Mannish Boy' with the first two stanzas from 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man'—in that order—along

with their respective accompaniments. The change between these two songs is seemingly unnoticeable for two reasons: because these songs use virtually the same riff; and, because neither strictly adheres to the standardised three-line twelve-bar blues progression.[27] One significant point of difference though between the accompanying stop-time riff in Waters' recordings and this MTPMB reinterpretation is the omission of the third note in its five-note sequence, thereby downsizing the riff to four notes and changing the rhythm. Additionally, as a consequence of MTPMB branching the two pieces together, Taylor also omits the third stanza from each Waters recording.

The first of many significant changes to the lyrics within this newly created song structure is the omission of the vocal-and-guitar call-and-response introduction. Taylor then begins the opening stanza by personalising the lyrics to include his own name "Matthew" in the narrative between the song's persona and his mother. The two refrain sections that follow only incorporate select lines from those in Waters' recording, all of which Taylor sings out of their original order. In the latter refrain, he alludes to the upcoming concatenation with 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man' by ending on the line "I'm what's known as a hoochie coochie man". This phrase—"what's known as"—is used on another two occasions throughout the song to add extra syllables to a line. Finally, in addition to the numerous changes applied to the vocal melody, Taylor also garbles the line "You know I'm made to move you honey" to the less comprehensible "I could make love to a little old silver moon honey".

Although there is little change in regard to instrumental accompaniment (i.e. omission of piano), the way in which MTPMB arrange their instrumentation raises many differences. First, where Waters begins the song with call-and-response interplay between vocals and guitar, this band replaces it with a simple drum introduction. This then culminates in a climax whereby the rest of the band enters with the five-note stop-time riff. Further to the thirteen reinterpretive measures embraced in this recording, both Taylor and Manning add

new material through their respective solo passages later on in the track. Taylor's solo occurs between the second refrain of 'Mannish Boy' and the first stanza of 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man', while Manning's solo appears between the first and second stanza of 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man'. Though Waters' recording of the latter track also includes an instrumental section with guitar solos, this occurs between the second and third stanzas instead.

'I Can't Be Satisfied -- Rollin' and Tumblin''

This recording from *Child of the Street* (1985) concatenates two songs originally recorded by Muddy Waters into the one track. Considering that Chain befriended and toured with the bluesman, it is little surprise that this reinterpretation is titled 'A Tribute to Muddy Waters'. Regarding the first portion of the track, 'Can't Be Satisfied' was originally recorded by Waters as 'I Be's Troubled' in Mississippi (1941)—it then became 'I Can't Be Satisfied' when he recorded it in Chicago (1948). This latter title stuck and has been reinterpreted by the likes of the Rolling Stones (1965), George Thorogood (1991), Dave Hole (1993) and Harry Manx (2001) (The Originals website). Due to their selection of stanzas, the Chain recording of 'Can't Be Satisfied' is clearly modelled on the Waters recording bearing a similar name. Though both 'I Be's Troubled' and 'I Can't Be Satisfied' both feature the stanza with the rhyming couplet "shout/out", the chronological ordering undertaken by Taylor suggests that he is omitting the first two stanzas of 'I Can't Be Satisfied' and therefore beginning halfway through that track. This is further demonstrated by his use of the "ring/thing" stanza, which does not appear at all in Waters' 'I Be's Troubled'.[28]

Considered to be a standard by some, 'Rollin' and Tumblin'' is also associated with Waters,[29] despite an earlier recording by "Hambone" Willie Newbern as 'Roll and Tumble Blues' (1929) (Southern, 1971: 509; Herzhaft, 1992: 435-78; Schneider, 2001: 316-7).

Waters is clearly influenced by this track as he begins his own recording with the first and third stanzas from Newbern's. Following the hollered section in the middle of the song, he then inserts two stanzas from other recordings. The first of these may be referred to as the "diving duck" stanza and appears in a number of previously recorded blues.[30] The latter is the fourth stanza from 'Preaching the Blues Part I' (1930), as recorded by one of Waters' key musical influences, Son House. Prior to Newbern's recording, Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers recorded the track as 'Minglewood Blues' (1928).[31] Since then, this blues core has undergone many changes in name due to its numerous reinterpretations. African-American examples include Charley Patton's 'It Won't Be Long' and 'Banty Rooster Blues' (both 1929), Robert Johnson's 'If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day' (1936)[32] and 'Traveling Riverside Blues' (1937), John Lee Hooker's 'Decoration Day Blues' (1950) and Sunnyland Slim's 'Going Back to Memphis' (1954).[33] Some of the other recorded reinterpretations using Waters' title are Elmore James (1960), Johnny Shines (1966), Cream (1966), Canned Heat (1967), Jesse Mae Hemphill (1987), Eric Clapton (1992),[34] R.L. Burnside (1997), and Adam Hole (2006) (Rypens, 1996: 254; The Originals website).[35]

In accordance with their tribute, Chain also follows the trend of using Waters' titles. While based on the three-line twelve-bar blues pattern, neither Waters' recording strictly employs this standardised format: 'I Can't Be Satisfied' adheres to a quatrain-refrain formula of eleven-and-a-half bars duration; and, 'Rollin' and Tumblin'' utilises a three-line pattern of sixteen-and-a-half bars length (five-and-a-half bars each). Chain's medley, however, alters this to eleven and twelve bars respectively. Even so, despite the differing duration between the forms in these reinterpretations, both exhibit stanzas of one progression in length. Chain also changes the instrumentation for both songs within the medley as each of Waters' tracks are performed by a duo (i.e. double bass, electric bottleneck guitar and vocals). This is particularly highlighted by the use of amplified equipment: 'Can't Be Satisfied' is performed

as a three-piece (distorted electric bottleneck guitar, drums, acoustic harmonica and vocals); 'Rollin' and Tumblin'', as a four-piece electric blues band (distorted electric bottleneck guitar, drums, electric bass, amplified harmonica and vocals). Another aspect to these changes is the stark difference in the spatial positioning of the instruments in Chain's reinterpretation—a measure largely afforded by a switch to stereo recording technology. Further alterations to the instrumental accompaniment are evident in Chain's decision to replace the vocal solo in the model recording of 'Rollin' and Tumblin'' with an electric bottleneck guitar solo. Chain also adds a second solo of the same duration two stanzas later, this time via Taylor's amplified harmonica. Furthermore, the new instrumental interchange between the two Waters' songs is used as another opportunity to progressively build upon the dynamic tension through accruing additional instrumentation (i.e. bass) and increasing the tempo.

In addition to omitting the first two stanzas from Waters' 'I Can't Be Satisfied', Taylor only uses one of Waters' stanzas from 'Rollin' and Tumblin'' and adapts the majority of lyrics to a modified vocal melody. Even then, substantial changes are made to that stanza. Here Taylor appears to have combined the lyrical hook "I rolled and I tumble" with the opening stanza of another blues core, 'Rock Me Baby'. Instead of finishing the first line with "cried the whole night long"—as Newbern, Johnson and Waters have—Taylor replaces "cried" with "rocked". Furthermore, he changes the last line from "Well I woke up this morning, didn't know right from wrong" to "I got to rock you pretty baby, like your back ain't got a bone". Interestingly, these closely resemble lines in Waters' recordings of 'All Night Long' (1951) and 'Rock Me' (1956)—themselves reinterpretations of the 'Rock Me Baby' blues core. Considering that Taylor is obviously aware of Waters' recorded catalogue, it is highly likely that these lines were taken from either of the aforementioned tracks—consciously or not—which were also previously recorded by Waters, further adding to

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Chain's tribute.[36] Taylor begins with this stanza and repeats it later on in the piece after each solo passage, utilising it as a point of familiarity—like a chorus. Using Waters' recording as a frame, he then inserts one of his own new stanzas after each "chorus" (three in total).

Analytical results

Considering the sheer volume of recorded output generated by Chain over the last 40 years, it is of particular significance that recordings of blues reinterpretations have been kept to a minimum. More importantly though, those few reinterpretations that have been committed to record by Chain are almost exclusively heavily geared towards promoting a specific African-American blues artist who, at some point, has provided ample influence and inspiration to members of this Australian group. In addition, not only do most of the tracks from the above analysis—including any humorous introductory monologues—serve as tributes to these much-celebrated performers, they also demonstrate a deep knowledge of the historical origins of these musical texts. This reflex is consistently combined with a desire to further impart this knowledge and educate audiences who may otherwise be unaware of the significance Chain bestows upon these performers.

Examining the results produced from the application of the methodology developed in chapter three to measure reinterpretive creativity, several points about Chain's approach to recording blues reinterpretations are readily obvious. First and foremost is that the direct imitation of blues influences does not factor into their engagements with these musical materials. Far from being derivative, Chain utilises a total of twenty individual measures (out of a possible twenty-three) across the eight recordings of the above five tracks. Moreover, the band averages a very high number of reinterpretive measurements (fourteen) per recording, thereby demonstrating that Chain's creative re-engagement with these pre-recorded musical materials is in no way characterised by a limited mindset. Though a large

proportion of their reinterpretive measures are registered in the category "Changing the instrumental accompaniment", significant attention is also given to modifications in musical structure as well as the addition of new lyrical and instrumental passages. This is reinforced further upon an analysis of the reinterpretive practices that are employed in every recording of each reinterpretation discussed above:

> 2. (a) Changing the musical structure through omitting stanzas, instrumental passages or solo passages
> 3. (c) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through timbre and/or tonality
> 5. (d) Changing the lyrical content through garbling and/or readjusting words
> 6. (c) Using a recording as a jumping-off point and adding new solo passages

Collectively forming what is essentially the core of Chain's approach to reinterpreting blues songs for the contemporary Australian context, this four-pronged combination of creative re-engagement is enough to ensure a unique and idiosyncratic approach when compared to their local peers.

It is also worth mentioning that many of the changes enacted by Chain upon the above songs are often due to their significant usage of improvisation and minimal rehearsal of their repertoire. Harnessed over many years of playing together—both live and in the studio—the performative, and thus communicative, history established between members of the band has allowed for copious amounts of creative freedom in arranging song structures, constructing instrumental accompaniments and modifying lyrical content. Interestingly, the capacity to carry out these often improvised changes in the blues reinterpretations above is significantly aided by the fact that all five songs are based on some variation of the twelve-bar blues form. However, even though Chain currently avoids releasing recordings of blues reinterpretations—as exhibited over their most recent albums—this musical approach is still evident in their live performances of such songs. Additionally, improvisation, the twelve-bar blues and solo passages also form a significant basis for much of their original material. This

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demonstrates how reinterpretation of material associated with canonised African-American innovators of blues music has informed the creation of Chain's characteristic approach to producing contemporary compositions in a disseminated representation of the blues genre.

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[1] All the titles of the tracks mentioned in this chapter are reproduced in the upper and lower case formats in which they appear on or inside the cover artwork of the recording package, except where the entire title is either in upper or lower case only. In this case, the title will be standardised with capitals at the beginning of each word. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations attributed to Matt Taylor in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on February 8, 2007. Likewise, all quotations attributed to Phil Manning in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on February 27, 2007 unless stated otherwise.

[2] Though Harvey, Sullivan and Taylor all grew out of the Brisbane music scene—Taylor in BCU, Harvey and Sullivan in Thursday's Children—it was not until October 1968 that they all played together in the Wild Cherries.

[3] Each of these reinterpretations are analysed in full later in this chapter.

[4] The song was originally titled 'We're Groaning' as per the refrain featured in its verses (McFarlane, 1995: 5). Though the single charted in the top ten nationally, it only reached the #1 spot in Melbourne.

[5] In addition to featuring members of Chain, this recording also includes two members of Muddy Waters' band: James "Pee Wee" Madison (guitar, vocals) and George "Mojo" Buford (harmonica, vocals).

[6] Interestingly, this album showcases live performances of Johnson's '32/20' and 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom' (credited to Elmore James).

[7] In addition to Taylor and Manning, this group features Roy Daniel (bass) and Ric Whittle (drums).

[8] For Taylor, this included the release of *Always Land On Your Feet* (1983), which concluded with a medley of Bo Diddley songs.

[9] Of the ten tracks exhibited, half are composed by the band, three by Taylor, and one a co-write between the band and D. Beautyman. The remaining track is a medley tribute to Muddy Waters comprising reinterpretations of 'Can't Be Satisfied' and 'Rollin and Tumblin'.

[10] This Chain album also features fellow core member Barry Harvey (drums).

[11] While Taylor released *Pyramids and Spirals* (1995), Manning released both *Can't Stop* (1992) and *The Back Shed* (1995). Interestingly, *Can't Stop* presents several blues reinterpretations including Arthur Crudup's 'That's Alright, Mama', Willie Dixon's 'Let Me Love You', Robert Johnson's 'Sweet Home Chicago' and T-Bone Walker's 'T-Bone Shuffle'.

[12] In addition to featuring in Adderley Smith Blues Band and Carson, Smith also played with Taylor and Manning in the band Blues Power for a period in 1991. He currently plays with The Backsliders.

[13] This edition includes several tracks not featured in the original—'Judgement', 'Blow in D' and the single version of 'Black and Blue'.

[14] Though Morgan was one of the founding members of Chain, he is best known for his work with Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs.

[15] To be more specific, Taylor plays amplified harmonica in this recording. While it is rumored that Johnson had been heard playing electric guitar in a band prior to his death, evidence of this or any use of amplified harmonica cannot be confirmed in this thesis.

[16] One particularly interesting aspect of James' recording is that in his attempt to rework Sykes' hit he inadvertently slips up in the second lyric stanza by mentioning the wrong calibre—32-20, not the 22-20 calibre mentioned both in his title and throughout the rest of his recording. James rectifies this error in the same recording during a repeat the second stanza.

[17] See Skip James' '22-20 Blues' (1931), Jack Kelly's 'Red Ripe Tomatoes' (1933), Kokomo Arnold's 'Front Door Blues' (1935), and Walter Davis' 'Minute Man Blues Part 2' (1935).

[18] See Arnold Rypens (1996: 385-6).

[19] These include James Solberg (1995), Aron Burton (1996), Shane Dwight Blues Band (2001), Bruce Conte (2002), Shuffle Kings (2002), Café R&B (2002 and 2005), Marshall Lawrence (2003), and Jimmy Thackery and the Cate Brothers (2006)

[20] The phrase "dust my broom" is apparently slang for "leaving town in a hurry" (Obrecht, 2000: 154). Other sources also suggest its possible function as a sexual double-entendre for masturbation. Yet Homesick James insists that "dust my broom" is a misrepresentation of the original saying "dust my room" (ibid: 158).

[21] Analysing the decades that followed James' track, the 1960s appears to have produced the largest number of recorded reinterpretations (The Originals website). The song proved to be popular among both black and white performers, with recorded reinterpretations coming from such high-profile artists as B.B. King (1962), Howlin' Wolf (1963), Chuck Berry (1964), John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (1966), Canned Heat (1967), Fleetwood Mac (1967) as 'I Believe My Time Ain't Long', Taj Mahal (1968), Ike and Tina Turner (1969), Muddy Waters (1976), Z.Z. Top (1979) and John Hammond Jr. (1992).

[22] Only two reinterpretations of this blues core appear during the fifteen-year period between Johnson's and James' recordings: Memphis Slim's 'I Believe I'll Settle Down' (1941); and, Arthur Crudup's 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom' (1949).

[23] To further demonstrate the tradition of borrowing and reusing elements of previously recorded blues songs it is important to draw attention to Johnson's other influences for this piece. In order to produce the opening line of his piece, Johnson may well have combined Arnold's "dust my broom" phrase with the following from Joe Williams' '49 Highway Blues' (1935): "I'm going to get up in the morning Malvina, I believe I'll dust my bed". Arnold's latter variation of "I believe, that I got those black cat blues" also alludes to Blind Lemon Jefferson's 'Broke and Hungry' (1926) where one of the lines is "I believe, my good gal have found my black cat bone". After Jefferson—one of the first male African-American blues performers to record—stanzas beginning with the phrase "I believe" emerge in significant numbers. Some other early examples include Papa Charlie Jackson's 'She Belongs to Me Blues' (1927), Clifford Gibson's 'Levee Camp Moan' (1929), Robert Wilkins' 'I'll Go With Her Blues' (1930), The Sparks Brothers' 'I Believe I'll Make a Change' (1932) and Jack Kelly's 'Believe I'll Go Back Home' (1933). The Sparks Brothers' title was also reproduced by Josh White (1934) and Leroy Carr (1934), the latter functioning as an important influence on several other Johnson titles (Komara, 1998: 205; Schneider, 2001: 265-6).

[24] There are another two answer songs reinterpreted from this blues core in 1955: 'She's a Woman' by Bean Fairley and Jimmy Griffin; and, 'I'm A Woman' by Mickey Champion & Roy Milton (The Originals website).

[25] Contention surrounding his real name suggests that it is either Ellas McDaniel (The Originals website) or Otha Ellas Bates (Russell, et al., 2006: 54-5).

[26] This song was written by Willie Dixon. Incidentally, there is an Australian band called The Hoochie Coochie Men who have recorded this song with Jon Lord and Jimmy Barnes (2003).

[27] 'Mannish Boy' simply repeats the same five-note stop-time over and over. 'I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man' also does this, but only for the first eight bars of each sixteen-bar quatrain-refrain progression. Here the second eight bars incorporate the final two lines of the standard twelve-bar blues form.

[28] Using the *Web Concordance of Michael Taft's Pre-war Blues Lyrics* (http://www.dylan61.se/taft.htm), the first appearance of this stanza on record appears to be in Hattie Hart's 'Coldest Stuff in Town' (1934).

[29] Waters initially recorded the track on the Parkway label as a bottleneck guitarist for the Baby Face Leroy Trio in 1950. This group combined Waters with two of his regular sidemen, "Baby Face" Leroy Foster and "Little" Walter Jacobs. The Chess brothers—owners of the record company he was signed to at the time—then asked Waters to record another manifestation to compete with the Parkway recording. Waters also uses the same melody in his 'Louisiana Blues' (Obrecht, 2000: 104-5; The Originals website).

[30] These include 'Down the Country' by Leola B. Wilson (1926), 'I Will Turn Your Money Green' by Furry Lewis (1928), 'Diving Duck Blues' by Sleepy John Estes (1929), 'Railroad Bill' by Will Bennett (1930), 'She Don't Love Me That Way' by Sonny Boy Williamson I (1941), and 'If the Sea Was Whiskey' by Big Three Trio (1947).

[31] Noah Lewis—Cannon's harmonica player and author of the song—also recorded a follow-up reinterpretation as 'New Minglewood Blues' (1930). This was later reinterpreted by a string of artists including Howlin' Wolf (1968), Johnny Winter (1969), Gentrys (1970, Napoleon Strickland and Othar Turner (1970), Mississippi Fred McDowell (1971) and Memphis Slim (1972). The Grateful Dead went one step further in their recording, titling it 'New, New Minglewood Blues' (1967).

[32] Johnson draws on three of Newbern's stanzas in this track. Here Johnson's third stanza combines lines from the first two stanzas in Newbern's recording. The following stanza then copies Newbern's fourth stanza.

[33] Several white artists followed in this same vein including the Yardbirds' 'Drinking Muddy Water' (1966), Captain Beefheart's 'Sure 'Nuff, Yes I Do' (1967), and Fleetwood Mac's 'Rambling Pony' (1967) (The Originals website).

[34] Clapton also reinterpreted this blues core as 'If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day' and 'Traveling Riverside Blues' on his Robert Johnson tribute record *Me and Mr Johnson* (2004).

[35] Slight variations of this title also include 'Rollin' and Tumblin' Blues' by Blind Teddy Darby (1960), 'I Rolled and I Tumbled' by Mississippi Fred McDowell (1962), and 'Roll & Tumble' by Big Joe Williams (1966).

[36] See discussion of 'Rock Me Baby' from *The dig Australian Blues Project* in chapter three.

Chapter Six: The Backsliders

Biography and recorded output

Beginning in 1986,[1] the original line-up of the Backsliders consisted of Dominic Turner (vocals, guitars, mandolin), Peter Burgess ('kitchen kit' drums,[2] washboard, percussion, vocals) and Rex Hill (harmonica). The only founding member still in the band, Turner began learning guitar and composing songs in the early 1970s. Soon afterwards, he became focussed on rearranging blues songs. While this approach is manifest in much of the Backsliders' recorded output—especially in the initial four albums—it was also incorporated into all of Turner's pre-Backsliders musical projects. Based in Sydney, these early groups from the late 1970s, including Burnt Wood and Hawks Feathers, played mostly at parties and performed very few public gigs. In the early 1980s, Turner and Burgess formed Terraplane Blues. Hill joined the band a little later after attending one of their performances. As an offshoot of Terraplane Blues, Turner and Hill also performed as a duo for six years prior to the formation of the Backsliders. Meanwhile, Turner and Burgess were also performing in the Golden Tones with Peter Eccleston (guitar) and Broning (bass).[3] Although the duo kept performing, by 1982 Terraplane Blues had disbanded. Turner, Hill, Burgess and Eccleston then joined forces to form the Stumblers with English expatriate Robert Dames (bass).[4] Dames had previously appeared among the first wave of Australian blues bands with his stints in the Impacts (1962-4), the Purple Hearts (1964-7), Coloured Balls (1968-9) and Bulldog (1970). Around 1985, Eccleston left the five-piece group and was replaced by Brendan Gallagher (guitar and vocals). Within the following twelve months, Turner, Hill and Burgess formed the Backsliders and managed to keep the two bands simultaneously afloat until the end of the decade. Prior to splitting in 1990, the Stumblers embarked on a lengthy double bill tour with the Backsliders (Turner, pc, April, 2006; MilesAgo website).

Despite having been together for a shorter time than the Stumblers, Turner, Hill and Burgess had been playing together in different bands since the early 1980s and, as the Backsliders, released their first album *Preaching Blues* (1988) before the Stumblers' solitary recording *You Got to Move* (1989).[5] All the tracks on the Backsliders' debut were reinterpretations of pre-World War II blues recordings, half of which were credited to Robert Johnson. While this pattern continued into their subsequent albums, Hill did not stay and was replaced by Jim Conway (harmonica, backing vocals) soon after recording *Preaching Blues*. Along with his brother Mic, Conway had previously achieved fame with the Melbourne-based groups Soapbox Circus (1976-8) and Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band (1969-80), also known as Matchbox and the Matchbox Band. In addition to blues, Matchbox's repertoire also consisted of jug band songs, jazz, swing, popular standards, cabaret and vaudeville routines including slapstick, tap dancing, juggling, magic and fire eating. After Matchbox folded, both brothers moved to Sydney and formed the Hotsie Totsie Band (1981), Carnival (1983) and the Conway Brothers Hiccups Orchestra (1984-8). The brothers then pursued separate careers following the demise of Hiccups Orchestra: Mic in Mic Conway's Whoopee Band (1989) and the National Junk Band (1997-present); Jim in the Backsliders (1988-2006), Tim Gaze and the Blues Doctors (1998), the Hoochie Coochie Men (2001-present) and Jim Conway's Big Wheel (2003-present). During his career, Jim has also toured with international artists such as Brownie McGhee, John Hammond Jr. and Charlie Musselwhite, contributed to film scores, and provided session work for other Australian artists including Dutch Tilders and Brian Cadd (MilesAgo website).

With Conway now on board, the Backsliders had their core line-up, one that was maintained for approximately eleven years (1988-1999). Their second album *Sitting On a Million* (1989) places less emphasis on Robert Johnson and more on Leadbelly and Mississippi Fred McDowell. Co-produced by Conway and Colin Watson, it delivers a mix of

adaptations from pre- and post-WWII (predominantly the former). [6] *Hellhound* (1991) provides this same kind of mixture but with renewed emphasis on Johnson. Part studio recording, part live, it is co-produced by Conway and Mark Taylor. Hinting at their future direction, this album also features the band's first recording of an original composition, 'Mr Johnsons Blues Today' [*sic*], written by Turner. Between albums, the Backsliders contributed a studio recording of Charley Patton's 'Moon Going Down' to the compilation *Real Australian Blues Volume 1* (Various, 1992). This was followed up with *Live at the Royal* (1993), co-produced by Burgess and Paul Petran. Once more, it is largely characterised by a mix of pre-WWII blues reinterpretations along with a few post-WWII reinterpretations. In contrast to their previous recordings, the repertoire and the artists credited on this album are much more evenly distributed across a broader range of African-American blues performers: three songs each by Robert Johnson and Blind Willie McTell; two songs each by Charley Patton and Fred McDowell; and, one song each by Chester Burnett (a.k.a. Howlin' Wolf), Paul Siebel, Skip James, Junior Wells and Huddie Ledbetter (a.k.a. Leadbelly). However, it is significant that more weight is given to the Mississippi-based blues artists on this album. Consequently, this can be seen as the point where the Backsliders began to focus predominantly on the Mississippi Delta sound.

Their next album, *Wide Open* (1995), marks the beginning of the second phase of the Backsliders' career. Continuing in the vein of the last full studio album *Sitting On a Million*, this recording is characterised by the assistance of six guest musicians. [7] Furthermore, it is also co-produced by band members Burgess and Turner with Guy Dickerson. However, contrary to previous releases, this recording is dominated by original compositions from Turner—nine out of sixteen tracks. Another first is that two of these original pieces are instrumentals. Of the remaining tracks, one is written by Burgess (yet another first) while the other six are reinterpretations attributed to six different artists including Siebel,

McDowell/Blind Willie Johnson,[8] Leadbelly, McTell, Son House and Robert Johnson. Moreover, as these reinterpretations are confined to the latter portion of the album, this recording makes a significant statement about the band's new direction. This momentum, however, does not continue into the next release *Downtime* (1998). Essentially functioning as a "best of", this album chronicles the first ten years of the band (1986-96). Comprising almost equal amounts of studio and live tracks (nine to eight respectively) and featuring only one original—Burgess' 'I Just Keep On Drinking'—among a mixture of blues reinterpretations, this recording has a lot in common with their previous release *Hellhound*. One difference, however, is that their original harmonica player, Rex Hill, appears on six of the songs. Additional guests on the live recordings include Chris Wilson (second harmonica, vocals) and George Butrumlis (accordion).

During preparation for the band's next studio album, Turner performed on the Ghostwriters' *Second Skin* (1996) while Conway appeared on the *Blues Remedy* album from Tim Gaze and the Blues Doctors (1998). Conway also became the subject of a documentary, aptly-titled *The Jim Conway Blues* (Roberts, 1998). The film is a mixed account of his life, chronicling his reputation as one of the world's best harmonica players and his battle with multiple sclerosis (MS). Diagnosed with the illness prior to joining the Backsliders, the wheelchair-bound performer continues to pave a musical career in spite of the disease and is a board member of the MS Society. As an extension of the film, executive producer Victor Carson and the Film Buff Productions team organised a benefit concert for the New South Wales MS Society at the Paddington RSL Club in November 1999. Musical performers included Jimmy Little, members of the Hoodoo Gurus, Mic Conway's National Junk Band, and members of Masters Apprentices.

Moving on from *Wide Open*, the Backsliders' final studio release for the millennium features seven guest musicians[9] and is co-produced by Turner, Conway, Burgess and Guy

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Dickerson. Nominated by ARIA for the Best Blues and Roots album, *Poverty Deluxe* (1999) contains only two reinterpretations[10] with the other twelve songs being original compositions from Backsliders' band members: nine from Turner; two from Burgess; and, one from Conway. Some of the lyrics to these new songs are coloured by blues themes with lyrics alluding to "cutting heads" ('House On The Corner'),[11] Blind Willie Johnson ('Radio Waves') and Robert Johnson ('New Love In Vain'). Burgess left the band soon after this album was released, thus completing the second phase of the Backsliders' career.[12] With the first phase revolving almost entirely around rearranging old blues songs, this second era is characterised by the increasing tendency towards composing new songs within the blues idiom. Additionally, since *Sitting On a Million*, the band has repeatedly placed increasing emphasis on self-producing their albums as well as larger instrumental arrangements in the recordings. Finally, by the time *Poverty Deluxe* was recorded, Burgess had abandoned his characteristic "kitchen kit"—complete with washboard and various miscellaneous percussive instruments—for a set-up that more closely resembled the standard drum kit.

Prior to the next recording, Turner pursued his side-project Supro, releasing *Electro Vee* (2000) while Conway teamed-up with Bob Daisley (bass), Tim Gaze and other members of the Blues Doctors for *The Hoochie Coochie Men* (2001). During this time, the Backsliders recruited Rob Hirst (drums, percussion, vocals, guitars and omnichord), formerly of Midnight Oil and founding member of the Ghostwriters. Continuing the tradition of Burgess' makeshift drum kit, Hirst has progressively built his own set-up that includes a 1940s snare drum, an upside-down snare, Vietnamese hi-hats made from cheap metal, an ice bell, a few cymbals and a 28-inch marching drum as the kick drum (Kennedy, 2006). This sound is a distinct characteristic of the third phase of the Backsliders' career with Hirst adding volume and a rock-and-roll intensity to the band. This is demonstrated on *Hanoi* (2002), the only studio album featuring this line-up and their second ARIA Award nomination for the Best

Blues and Roots album.[13] As suggested by the title, this recording also incorporates some Vietnamese influences with Turner playing the dàn bầu[14] throughout the record. In addition, Turner utilises samples for the first time. Further to this phase, the mixing techniques—including effects and spatiality—are much more sophisticated than on previous Backsliders releases. All but one of the twelve tracks are original compositions, six of which are co-written by Turner and Hirst. Of the remaining tracks, three are by Turner, one a co-write between Turner and his wife Ida, and the other a co-write between Conway and Gaze. While the majority of lyrics here are not overtly blues-oriented or reliant on common-stock phrases, the lyrics of this Conway/Gaze track, 'Son Of The Father', discuss Robert Johnson. More specifically, they are a humorous response to an article Conway read about Robert Johnson's rightful heir, Claude L. Johnson, being proven via a woman who claimed to have witnessed the act of his conception by the roadside (pc, March, 2007).

The following year saw the release of two Backsliders-related projects, including their *Live at the Basement* DVD (2003). In accordance with the approach taken on their previous two albums, the sixteen-track setlist here gives prominence to original compositions from each of the three band members as well as tracks featured on their most recent releases: nine from *Hanoi*; three from *Poverty Deluxe*; two from *Downtime*; and, one from *Wide Open*. Among these are three of their staple blues reinterpretations—'Smokestack Lightning', 'Kokomo' and 'You Gotta Move'.[15] Also from the *Live at the Basement* DVD series is *Jon Lord with the Hoochie Coochie Men* (2003), featuring Conway on harmonica and blues standards such as 'Baby Please Don't Go', 'I Just Wanna Make Love to You', 'The Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Dust My Broom'. The following year, Conway's other band, Big Wheel was nominated in the Best Blues and Roots album category for their debut release *Little Story* (2004). Meanwhile, Turner and Hirst formed their side project Angry Tradesmen.

In January 2005, the Backsliders appeared at the "Jazz in the Domain" and "Jazz in Parramatta Park" concerts as part of the Sydney Festival. The theme for these concerts was an exploration of the influence of blues music on jazz.[16] This proved to be a busy year for the group as it also saw them participate in *The dig Australian Blues Project* (Various, 2005a) by contributing a new recording of Robert Johnson's 'Preaching Blues'. This was followed-up in December by the release of a second live album, *Live* (2005). On a separate note, Hirst's side project with former Australian athlete Paul Greene (i.e. Hirst and Greene) also cut two releases that year, an album and a DVD—*In the Stealth of Summer* (2005a) and *Live at the Basement* (2005b). The following year, guitarist Martin Rotsey joined Hirst and Turner in Angry Tradesmen and, as a group, contributed the song 'Big Wave' to the *Delightful Rain* compilation (Various, 2006). Also during this period, Conway resigned from the Backsliders and switched his focus to other musical avenues, including Big Wheel who also released their *Live at the Basement* DVD (2006). The harmonica position in the Backsliders has since been filled by a rotating roster of Ian Collard (of Collard Greens and Gravy) and Broderick Smith (of Adderley Smith Blues Band)—as is demonstrated on the band's most recent studio album *Left Field Holler* (2007). Co-produced by Turner and Hirst, it is fitting that the record is also heavily characterised by compositions written by these two musicians including five co-writes, four tracks from Turner and one song from Hirst track. Furthermore, in addition to the three reinterpretations on this album (including rerecordings of McDowell's 'Write Me a Few of Your Lines' and Skip James' 'Hard Times Killing Floor'), one of the pieces attributed to Turner interpolates many lines and themes from several Leadbelly recordings with biographical information pertaining to Leadbelly. Interestingly, this creative tactic towards composing blues music is a recurring feature in Turner's writing as well as appearing in the blues compositions of other Australian blues performers including Chain.

The Delta "Down Under"

> *Throughout my young life I heard whispers about this or that person who had once sung in the church, but was now out there in "the world" performing secular music. These artists were backsliders, defectors from the faith community, fallen from grace.* (Reed, 2003: x)

Though the term "backslider" has a specific meaning in post-slavery African-American culture, this Australian band simply adopted the title for aesthetic reasons from the Leadbelly song 'Fare Thee Well Backslider'. This is congruent with the rest of their approach to blues music in that they regularly work with material that has originated from African-American culture and modify its content for another time and place. So, while they may not have necessarily turned their backs on the church in order to perform this secular music, they have, however, rejected concepts such as imitation, stasis and the implementation of bass guitar in a band environment—ideas that may be associated with many contemporary music groups, blues or otherwise. An extension of this is that the Backsliders are keen to break conventions and change prevalent misconceptions about what constitutes blues music. This objective is achieved through a respect for the blues genre that entails educating others on its origins, celebrating its African-American performers, and presenting its songs in an entertaining manner for a contemporary Australian context.

A significant portion of the Backsliders' career involves reinterpreting old blues songs by changing and/or modernising the instrumental accompaniment into a band format. Though there are some exceptions,[17] these songs are typically of the pre-WWII downhome sub-style. According to Turner, in the early 1980s, this music was only being played by acoustic solo guitarists and acoustic duos (e.g. guitar and harmonica). Additionally, gigs were often limited to wine bars where the music was expected to provide ambience and be non-intrusive. Therefore, the aim of the Backsliders was to present this music in a modern vein by advancing on the solo/duo format and applying percussion, amplification and

electronic sound effects while still maintaining characteristics of the downhome form. This was only partly achieved by Turner's first band, the Stumblers. Whereas the Backsliders exclude bass from the accompaniment, the Stumblers incorporated it as a fixed element. The resultant effect of this is that, with bass, the music adheres to a more strict tempo and root chord note bass style that is typical of rock-and-roll.

After a visit to the US in 1986, specifically Louisiana, Turner became aware of several Cajun bands that were able to successfully construct a sound around the exclusion of bass guitar that allowed for significant improvisation. Turner later noticed this element in some of the two-piece recordings (guitar and drums) of blues artists such as McDowell and Lightning Hopkins. As a result, percussion became a vital part of the Backsliders' sound, partly for these reasons as well as to advance on the use of foot stomp present in the recordings of other early blues singers such as Blind Lemon Jefferson and John Lee Hooker. This is achieved in a tactical fashion considering the unorthodox, makeshift drum kits each of their percussionists have adopted. First, Peter Burgess built what came to be referred to as his "kitchen kit" around a washboard, a limited selection of cymbals and a kick drum made from a circa 1920s/1930s hat box.[18] Accordingly, Rob Hirst was approached to fill Burgess' position in 2000 due to his tendency to draw on non-traditional percussive sounds as is apparent in his work with Midnight Oil where he often used props to keep the beat.[19] His current drum kit includes an eclectic mixture of separate parts combining standard elements of contemporary drum kits (i.e. snare drum, hi-hats and cymbals), variations of standard elements (i.e. 28-inch marching drum as kick drum) and unexpected and unorthodox elements (i.e. upside-down snare and ice bell). Coincidentally, a similar approach is undertaken by Angus Diggs, another renowned Australian drummer commonly associated with blues music who also appears on *Hanoi*.

The arrangements for the Backsliders' blues reinterpretations are regularly based on Turner working out on the guitar what the key riff or riffs are in a given song. From there on, drums and percussion are added and the song develops as a mutual interaction is established between the two instrumentalists. After harmonica is applied and the group is satisfied with the arrangement, there is still one final ingredient:

> *it's so reliant on improvisation. Even if the song is planned, almost completely planned, they all require tension. You've got to keep a certain amount of tension and intensity going with these songs. If you just try and cover them like a jukebox they lose intensity and they lose interest. They're not meant for that…*—Dominic Turner (pc, April, 2006)

It becomes clear that the Backsliders are strategic with their creative intentions as they draw on and advance elements present in the music of their key influences. The tension provided by their reliance on improvisation is consciously in place to prevent their sound from achieving stasis, thereby allowing them to keep blues music relevant through their constant development the form (Turner, D., 2005). Furthermore, it also allows them to exploit the talents of each musician involved, whether through inserting solo passages, adding new material or giving special privilege in the mix. This latter idea regarding spatial positioning is a more recent phenomenon in their recordings and draws on the influence of artists like Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson. While the former is appreciated for trailblazing the approach of mixing the drums at a high volume, Johnson is regarded by Turner for his utilisation of room acoustics to alter the sound of his instrument:

> *the idea of our recordings is basically that we like to hear the actual room… Robert Johnson, who wrote 'Preaching Blues', was famous for sitting in the corner of the room while recording… what he was actually doing was "corner loading," he was trying to make his guitar sound different… He was experimenting with the sounds, so we're following the same approach.*—Dominic Turner (2005)[20]

Particularly on *Hanoi*, the Backsliders also draw on the idea of diminished sound quality commonly associated with the 78rpm records upon which these songs were initially recorded. This is achieved by blending modern recording techniques (e.g. spatiality, sound effects, etc.) with an array of low-fidelity sounds often provided by recorded samples.

Not limited to their reinterpretations, these creative approaches with spatiality and diminished sound are also applied to their original material. Part of the reasoning behind the switch from reinterpretations to originals in the mid-1990s was to do with an apparent shift in their arranging process. Rather than taking the song as a starting point, reinterpretations started to develop in reverse with Turner applying new guitar riffs to existing songs. As a result, the group found themselves questioning why they were not instead combining this new material with lyrics of their own. Another reason for the change cited by Turner was that other local bands were beginning to adopt their signature acoustic three-piece line-up for the specific purpose of rearranging old blues songs. Consequently, these factors were taken as signs for the band to evolve by moving on to another mode of performance and a new stage in their career.

In addition to McDowell, Wolf and Robert Johnson, other key influences and canonised artists for the Backsliders include Blind Willie McTell, Charley Patton, Skip James, R.L. Burnside, Junior Kimbrough and Blind Willie Johnson. Although the Backsliders perform a range of downhome blues styles from Texas and the Piedmont, the majority of the aforementioned artists hail from the Mississippi Delta and surrounding areas. This defines Turner's thoughts on blues music and functions as a focal point for the band who characterise the artists from this area as being particularly ingenious and not afraid to experiment with their music.[21] This is consistent with the band's agenda of recognising the roots of both blues and modern Western popular music and promoting the Mississippi Delta as the source of influence for these idioms:[22]

In terms of the blues musicians from the latter half of the twentieth century, I'm more into Howlin' Wolf I think because of the direct correlation. Howlin' Wolf came out of the Delta and Howlin' Wolf used to go see Robert Johnson and Charley Patton and those kinds of artists… I see him [Patton] *as being the beginning of music as we know it today. Anything you hear on Triple J* [an Australian radio station]*, there's a line that goes back to Charley Patton somehow or other. Skip James is another one… As far as blues is concerned, that's the area for me and I still like the players from that area today…*—Dominic Turner (pc, April, 2006)

This direct line of musical lineage is constructed as beginning with Patton, who was among the first musicians to ever perform popular music on recordings. The chain then continues and incorporates other Delta-based artists such as the Mississippi Sheiks, Son House, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf. These African-American blues artists have since been canonised by successive generations of performers—including the Backsliders—largely through the reiterative process of recording contemporary reinterpretations of their established blues repertoires.

Further to their commitment to evolve and develop their sound, the band recently combined their blues influences with traditional Vietnamese music on the aptly-titled *Hanoi*, the agenda being that Turner also sees links between blues and countless other traditional/folk/vernacular music forms throughout the world. Here Vietnamese music is compared to blues through its use of improvisation, call-and-response melodies, rough vocal timbre, progressive application of amplification,[23] as well as similarities in instrumentation. One such instrument, the dàn bàu, is used by Turner throughout the album to tie these two musical entities together.[24] Despite this instrument's resemblance to the diddley-bow and, subsequently, the lap steel, Turner's slide guitar is limited to the bottleneck style as he cites a preference for fretting chords in between sliding motions—a concern that neither of the aforementioned instruments can accommodate.

Though Turner and the Backsliders have been fortunate to be involved in recent promotional events that have occurred as part of the current "blues and roots" movement in

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Australia—including the 2005 concerts Jazz in the Domain and Parramatta Park, *The dig Australian Blues Project* and the ABC Blues Festival—none of these events appear to have dramatically affected the band's standing in contemporary Australian culture. Even with blues music's return to favour, the group has been around long enough to be able to rely on a consistently supportive fan base. Further, while Turner believes there is a type of Australian accent that works well within the blues idiom, he is not really into the concept of a distinctly Australian blues tradition or sub-genre. He does, however, offer the notion that if music is a form of language, and if US Americans and Australians each speak and communicate their common spoken language (English) in different ways, it should follow that Australian manifestations of blues music are destined to be decidedly different to representations of blues music elsewhere.

Canonisation and reinterpretation

During Jim Conway's tenure in the Backsliders, only seven of the blues reinterpretations recorded with Rex Hill were rerecorded—two of which, 'Stop Breaking Down' and 'Preaching Blues', were rerecorded twice. Before *Wide Open* (1995), the predominant focus for the Backsliders had been rearranging old blues songs as opposed to writing new material. The situation then reversed as the group dedicated minimal album space to reinterpretations, concentrating primarily on composing new material in the blues idiom. With the exception of 'You Got to Move', every recording of a blues reinterpretation since Rob Hirst joined the group had already been recorded with Peter Burgess and was long-established within the Backsliders' catalogue (i.e. 'Preaching Blues', 'Kokomo' and 'Smokestack Lightning').[25] Even so, the Backsliders continue to perform many of their reinterpretations at live shows, including the aforementioned customary staples, which appear on several releases.[26]

The appearance of any of the Backsliders' recorded reinterpretations is a direct result of Turner selecting some of his favourite songs that the band is able to rearrange successfully and play confidently. Each of the reinterpretations analysed below have been recorded by the Backsliders more than once (with some becoming staples of their repertoire) and reflect the ongoing influence of a select group of African-American artists from the blues canon.[27] The most prominent of these performers are studied and comprise Mississippi Fred McDowell, Blind Willie McTell, Robert Johnson, Leadbelly and Howlin' Wolf.[28] Though there is no single song from either McTell, Johnson or Leadbelly that stands out as a staple of the Backsliders' repertoire, the band has repeatedly drawn on material from the recorded catalogue of these artists.[29] As a means of avoiding needless repetition below, one clear discrepancy between each of these singers and the Backsliders' Dom Turner is his vocal timbre. Characterised by a distinctly Australian annunciation of words, Turner consciously shuns the all-too-easy reflex to imitate the strong African-American vocal qualities of the canonised blues artists in preference for, what he refers to as, "an Australian middle accent" that is just as suited to the blues genre.

'Kokomo'

Based on the twelve-bar blues form, this blues core has a long and varied existence as a blues standard (Herzhaft, 1992: 272, 279) particularly in the 1930s, the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the 1990s and 2000s. Its first recording dates back to Scrapper Blackwell's 'Kokomo Blues' (1928). Though many recordings appear under this (and similar titles),[30] perhaps the most influential is James Arnold's 'Old Original Kokomo Blues' (1934)—the song for which he earned his nickname. Other titles for this blues core include 'Eleven Light City',[31] 'Baby Don't You Want To Go?',[32] 'Sweet Old Chicago',[33] 'Sweet Old Kokomo' (1966),[34] 'Kokomo Me Baby',[35] and 'Sweet Home Kokomo' (2000).[36] In addition to these titles,

Oliver (1968: 93-4) identifies shared core elements with Blind Teddy Darby's 'Pokino Blues' (1935) and another blues standard, 'Red Cross Store'. While Blackwell's recording established the vocal melody and the line "baby don't you want to go?" as core elements, it appears as though Arnold's reinterpretation introduced the "eleven light city" line along with the idea of "adding sums" as part of the lyrics.[37] This lyrical arithmetic subsequently functioned as a significant influence on the popular Robert Johnson song, 'Sweet Home Chicago' (1936).[38]

As a point of difference, all four of the Backsliders' reinterpretations of 'Kokomo' (1989, 1991, 1996 and 2003) have consistently credited Mississippi Fred McDowell as the author, rather than Blackwell or Arnold.[39] This connection is made clear in their retention of two stanzas that consistently appear in McDowell's recordings and not in others—that being those beginning with "Kokomo me baby" and "I ain't ever loved". In addition to being set to an altered instrumental accompaniment, both of these stanzas are delivered by Turner with readjustments to both the words (including garbles) and the vocal melody in McDowell's recordings. In each of the Backsliders' four recorded reinterpretations, Turner simultaneously omits McDowell's "Well one and one is two" stanza and combines the two aforementioned stanzas with a common-stock stanza from other existing recordings (i.e. "Well that Mississippi River"). Furthermore, the reinterpretations recorded in 1991 and 2003 also repeat this "sampled" common-stock stanza at the end of the song. Though Turner's mixture of stanzas appears original, the rhyming couplet in this last stanza also appears in the 1987 Backsliders' reinterpretation of 'Diving Duck'.[40] Additionally, variations of this rhyming couplet also appear in Mississippi John Hurt's 'Got the Blues Can't Be Satisfied' (1928), Gus Cannon's 'Wolf River Blues' (1930), Joe McCoy's 'My Wash Woman's Gone' (1931), Ruby Glaze and Blind Willie McTell's 'Lonesome Day Blues' (1932), Big Bill

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Broonzy's 'Mississippi River Blues' (1934), and Bill Monroe's bluegrass song 'Sitting On Top Of the World' (1957).

'Kokomo' is just as much a fixture of McDowell's repertoire as well considering that he recorded it on at least four separate occasions: once in 1962, once in 1964, and twice in 1969. The first and second of these are self-accompanied tracks on acoustic guitar recorded at McDowell's home in Como, Mississippi by Dick Spottswood and Chris Strachwitz respectively (Russell, et al., 2006: 441). Conversely, the latter two had McDowell on electric guitar, one of which is a largely self-accompanied live recording from the Mayfair Hotel in London. The other was recorded in a Mississippi studio and is particularly interesting in that it features the backing accompaniment of bass and drums—an element lacking in the majority of his recorded output. Consequently, the most readily obvious differences between McDowell's separate recordings and those of the Backsliders can be seen in the instrumental accompaniment—especially through the Backsliders' specific instrumental dynamic of acoustic guitar (with reverberation and distortion effects), harmonica, drums and percussion. Though McDowell himself makes some alterations to the instrumental accompaniment in his latter recordings of 'Kokomo', the Backsliders alter it significantly in their recordings by changing the rhythm, changing the tempo, and adding new instrumental and solo passages—in two reinterpretations (1989 and 1996) these new passages occur in places previously occupied by lyrical content. Another signature modification is the instrumental accompaniment following the quatrain section of each lyric stanza. This creative device works to emphasize the final words in the quatrain of each stanza prior to the refrain, "Baby don't you want to go? / Down to that eleven light city, sweet home Kokomo". There are also two main differences in the guitar part. In the first line of each lyric stanza, Turner's guitar melody is straight and on every beat whereas McDowell's is syncopated and played only when singing. In the last line, McDowell plays a different guitar melody over the phrase

"sweet home Kokomo" whereas Turner does not play a guitar melody at all. Where McDowell plays guitar melodies simultaneously with vocals during each stanza, the Backsliders employ a call-and-response approach instead with Conway inserting harmonica ostinatos between every gap in the lyrics.

Although the Backsliders' first recording of this blues core is a live performance of 'Sweet Home Chicago' credited to Robert Johnson (1987),[41] they began recording it as the McDowell classic 'Kokomo' from 1989 onwards.[42] Despite this, Turner repeatedly—and perhaps accidentally—uses the line "back to the eleven light city" interchangeably with "back to the land of California" in the 'Sweet Home Chicago' recording, suggesting an existing familiarity with 'Kokomo' and its relationship to Johnson's composition. Having been a major part of their live sets for the majority of their existence, it is important to note that this band has consistently used 'Kokomo' as an opportunity to improvise and add new material. In doing so, the Backsliders expand upon the dynamics of tension as they appear in McDowell's recordings and construct a new sense of flow for 'Kokomo' through a series of climaxes and releases in their musical activity. For instance, the introduction to this piece has, over time, transformed into an opportunity for Turner and Conway to playfully interact with each other through call-and-response melodies. Meanwhile, the latter portion of 'Kokomo' typically builds up with a long harmonica solo from Conway, which is then followed by an instrumental passage.[43]

'Warm It Up To Me'

Unlike many of the other blues reinterpretations analysed in this thesis, 'Warm It Up To Me' appears to have originated from its first recording by Blind Willie McTell (1933) who is accompanied by an unnamed backing vocalist and second guitarist—possibly Curley Weaver. Michael Gray (2000: 521-2), however, refutes McTell's authorship in comparing

the song to Jimmie Tarlton's 'Ooze Up To Me'—a track that was recorded in McTell's home town, Atlanta, Georgia, eighteen months prior. While most artists indebted to McTell's influence tend to reinterpret songs like 'Statesboro Blues' or 'Broke Down Engine' (each of which the Backsliders have also reinterpreted), 'Warm It Up To Me' is a much less popular choice and appears to have been reinterpreted by only half-a-dozen artists.[44] In addition to the Backsliders (1988 and 1995), this list includes John Hammond Jr. and Soozie Tyrell (1996), Mike Whellans (2003), Alabama Gravy Soppers (2004), Michael Lee Ammons and the Water Street Hot Shots (2005) and Cora Mae Bryant (2005). Among these recordings— most of which have occurred since the mid-1990s—there are no variations on the title. Like 'Kokomo', this track is also a twelve-bar blues with each stanza comprising one line of rhymed couplet and two lines of refrain. McTell's combination of stanzas appears to be thematic in its repeated references to relationships with women, leading Cone (1999: 244) to suggest that the title phrase is some sort of sexual euphemism.

During the seven years between the two Backsliders recordings of this song, the band also reinterpreted several other songs credited to McTell including 'Statesboro Blues', 'King Edward's Blues', 'Broke Down Engine', 'Dehlia' and 'Georgia Rag'. Moreover, the latter of their 'Warm It Up To Me' reinterpretations is actually the last time the band recorded a McTell reinterpretation. The main differences between both of the Backsliders' reinterpretations are tempo and a change in harmonica personnel. Both recordings, however, show many reinterpretive differences with their model, most of which are concerned with musical structure, instrumental accompaniment and adding new material. Among the lyrical differences, while there is a degree of variance in the first line of the refrain between the stanzas sung by McTell and his accompanist, Turner and Burgess collectively standardise it to "You got to warm it up to me, warm it up to me now". Likewise, though each of McTell's ten rhyming couplets in the original is different, Turner repeats at least one of these in each

Backsliders reinterpretation. Furthermore, Turner only uses six of McTell's couplets in each reinterpretation—five of which appear in both—and delivers these stanzas in a re-ordered fashion. In doing so, Turner also revises the structure of this piece. Here the lyric stanzas are split by the solos differently with McTell's recording being 4-4-2, the first from the Backsliders being 4-2-2, and the second, 3-2-2. This is largely due to the use of fewer lyric stanzas as each Backsliders recording contains two instrumental solos as per the original.

Turner also garbles some of the words within the couplets on three occasions as many of the lines in McTell's recording are difficult to understand and decipher. First is the opening stanza, whereby the locality in McTell's "Show these Florida women how to eagle rock" is amended by Turner to "Southern". On the second occasion, in what appears to be "Don't let these women leave your heart insane" Turner adjusts the last word to "in vain"—as in Robert Johnson's 'Love In Vain' and the Backsliders' 'New Love In Vain'. Both of these changes are understandable and easy to mishear due to the swiftness of McTell's delivery and the recording quality of the original track. The third instance, however, is more difficult to decipher from both artists. Here McTell seems to sing, "Tell you like the Savannah, told the King himself" and Turner, "Yeah can tell you like Savannah to Savannah South"—Savannah being a place in the American state of Georgia, where McTell was born and lived. In this case, it is likely that Turner simply rewrote the latter half of this line due to the unintelligible nature of the original. Moreover, in their 1995 reinterpretation, Turner and Burgess seem to correct an apparent garbled word in the track's refrain from their 1988 reinterpretation by changing the last word in each stanza from "close" to "cold".

The Backsliders also alter the instrumental accompaniment in several ways. With the original accompaniment consisting of lead vocals, a backing vocal and two twelve-string acoustic guitars (one of which, the accompanist's, is barely audible), each Backsliders reinterpretation removes one of the guitars and adds harmonica, drums, washboard and other

percussion. Although the Backsliders' first reinterpretation is performed at a similar tempo to the original, the second is much faster. As a result, Burgess adjusts his playing between recordings, transitioning from using the kick drum on each beat to using it on every second beat for the faster recording (e.g. 1-3-1-3 etc.). This divergence in tempo is also likely to have contributed to the variations in vocal melodies and harmonica approaches. Though there are few variances between the lead and backing vocal melodies of McTell and his accompanist in the Backsliders' 1988 recording, Turner's and Burgess' vocals on *Wide Open* are comparatively less melodic and of a more stern timbre. Furthermore, the band alters the dynamics of this latter reinterpretation by lowering the volume of all vocals and instruments for the last two lyric stanzas before Conway's final solo. On another note, while there are instrumental or solo passages at the end of each Backsliders recording, this element is absent from the original. Another instrumental variation is that the two twelve-bar twelve-string acoustic guitar solos of the original are replaced by two twenty-four bar harmonica solos in each Backsliders reinterpretation—Hill in the first, Conway in the second. Though each harmonica player performs each solo differently, both use the track as an opportunity to add new musical material. This differing approach between Hill and Conway is further illustrated during the lyric stanzas. While Hill follows the guitar line in the introduction and repeats the same twelve-bar part behind the vocals in each stanza, the majority of Conway's accompaniment is limited to call-and-response melodies with the exception of the vamping that occurs on the first line in each lyric stanza.

'Stop Breaking Down'

This song's authorship is attributed to the 1937 recording of 'Stop Breakin' Down Blues' by Robert Johnson.[45] It has since been reinterpreted numerous times, the majority of which have occurred since the early 1990s. Some of the high profile blues and rock

performers who have produced their own recordings include Sonny Boy Williamson I (1945), Junior Wells (1968), the Rolling Stones (1972),[46] Lucinda Williams (1979), the White Stripes (1999), Robert Lockwood Jr. (2000), Peter Green Splinter Group (2001) and Eric Clapton (2004). While some successive reinterpretations have been recorded under the original title,[47] many appear under 'Stop Breakin' Down'[48] as well as 'Stop Breaking Down'.[49] As with 'Kokomo' and 'Warm It Up To Me', this track is a twelve-bar blues with each stanza comprising one line of rhymed couplet and two lines of refrain. Johnson's combination of stanzas presents a consistent theme of troublesome women, with the title phrase translating to a plea for them to "straighten up" or "stop messing around" (Wald, 2004: 179).

As with most of Johnson's tracks, this piece is musically derivative of other recordings from the 1930s. Arnold Rypens (The Originals website) suggests that 'Stop Breakin' Down Blues' is, in one way or another, influenced by four earlier recordings: Lonnie Johnson's 'No More Troubles Now' (1930); Memphis Minnie & Joe McCoy's 'You Got to Move' (1934);[50] Buddy Moss' 'Stop Hanging Around' (1935), and; Memphis Minnie's 'Caught Me Wrong Again' (1936).[51] Though 'Caught Me Wrong Again' and, to a lesser extent, 'You Got to Move' are his strongest examples, the other connections made by Rypens are tenuous and abstract, especially considering that he makes no attempt to explain how these tracks are related. Admittedly, 'Stop Hanging Around' is vaguely linked to the extent that its title bears a close resemblance to Johnson's key repeated phrase, "stop breaking down". However, there are no distinct identifiable similarities with 'No More Troubles Now'. On the other hand, 'Stop Breakin' Down Blues' shares an obvious likeness with both 'Caught Me Wrong Again' and 'You Got to Move' in the lyrical phrasing and vocal melody. Furthermore, the lyric in the third and final line of each stanza from the former is split in two by a high-pitched two-syllable cry: "Well I can't say nothing, ee hee,

you caught me wrong again". This characteristic element is echoed in Johnson's line, "The stuff I got will bust your brains out baby, ooh hoo, it'll make you lose your mind".

The Backsliders' three reinterpretations of this blues core span eight years (1988-1996), with the most recent one serving as the last time the band recorded a Johnson reinterpretation. [52] There are some differences between each of the Backsliders' reinterpretations (i.e. tempo, performance context, change in harmonica personnel and addition of an accordion player), however their creative approach to this Robert Johnson track remains largely consistent across their three recordings with numerous changes to the song's lyrics, musical structure and instrumental accompaniment. The first of the eleven differences to be discussed here are the ordering and usage of lyric stanzas. Johnson's recording contains four different stanzas (i.e. structured as 1-2-3-4-1), whereas Turner only ever uses three in each Backsliders reinterpretation: stanzas one, three and four. Despite this, two of their three reinterpretations (1988 and 1991) maintain Johnson's use of five lyric stanzas (i.e. 1-4-3-[harmonica solo]-4-1-[refrain]). Here the second stanza is omitted and replaced with the forth stanza, which is subsequently repeated after the new solo passage played by the harmonica. Although there are no solos in Johnson's recording, the Backsliders expanded upon this change further in their 1996 adaptation with the addition of an accordion solo followed by the repetition of the previous two stanzas (i.e. 1-4-3-[accordion solo]-4-3-[harmonica solo]-4-1).

The Backsliders also make changes within the lyrics, most of which are minor and preserve the rhymed nature of the couplets. The biggest change, however, exists in the repeated two-line refrain. The first line of each refrain begins with the title phrase "stop breaking down", followed by a caesura, a filler phrase, then a repetition of the title phrase. In Johnson's recording, this filler phrase is always a single monosyllabic word (i.e. "yes" or "please") drawn out over approximately two beats. In each Backsliders reinterpretation, the

length of this filler phrase is maintained but the content is consistently readjusted to "feel the breeze". This change seems logical for several reasons. First, the title phrase that follows the filler phrase in this line is sung as four syllables over the same length of time (i.e. approximately two beats). As a result, the cadence of three syllables over two beats preceding four syllables over the following two beats is one that flows much easier than that with just one syllable. Second, this new phrase rhymes with one of the original filler phrases that it replaces (i.e. please/breeze), thus making the transition slightly more comfortable for the vocalist who is familiar with the original.

In contrast, the instrumental accompaniment between Johnson's and the Backsliders' performances are dramatically different. The track was originally recorded as a self-accompanied piece on guitar with a shuffling 12/8 rhythm. However, each Backsliders reinterpretation straightens out the beat to a standard 4/4 rock rhythm and is characterised by acoustic guitar, harmonica, drums, washboard and percussion, with backing vocals provided on each title phrase in the first line of each refrain. Likewise, while the basic vocal melody is fairly similar, Turner's approach covers a more limited range than Johnson's.[53] Despite the difference in harmonica players, the Backsliders' reinterpretations from 1988 and 1991 are identical in musical structure and instrumentation. However, possibly due to the varied approaches of these two instrumentalists, the accompaniments provided by each musician are dissimilar. Where the 1988 track is performed at a medium tempo with Hill playing at the same time as the vocals during the lyric stanzas, Conway alternates between vamping on the first line of each lyric stanza and playing call-and-response melodies with the vocals at a slightly faster tempo on the 1991 track. Conway uses this same approach once more on the 1996 adaptation and at an even faster tempo.[54] And while all three Backsliders reinterpretations of 'Stop Breaking Down' alter the dynamics of tension inherent in Johnson's recording through the addition of new solo passage, the 1996 adaptation features a greater

variance between climax and release with fluctuations in volume at several points (e.g. around solos, towards the end), changes in percussion, and the absence of harmonica during the accordion solo. Finally, in addition to adopting different instrumentation to Johnson, the Backsliders also make greater usage of the recording space both in terms of volume and the stereo positioning of the instruments.

'(The) Gallows Pole'

Credited to Huddie Ledbetter (a.k.a. Leadbelly), this song tells the story of a prisoner who is due to be hung and is trying to avoid his imminent death by getting his family and friends to pay bribes to the authorities. Based upon an old English children's ballad called 'The Maid Freed From the Gallows', this title was also adopted for Leadbelly's initial recording of this track in 1935, followed by 'Mama Did You Bring Me Any Silver?' (1938), 'The Gallis Pole' (1939) and 'The Gallows Song' (1940). The topic appears to have struck a chord with the songster who periodically faced long term incarceration himself. With the majority of reinterpretations occurring in the 1960s and 1990s, this track has since been recorded under numerous titles: 'Hangman Song',[55] 'Hangman Hangman',[56] 'Gallows Pole',[57] and 'The Gallows Pole'.[58] As is the case with the majority of Leadbelly's recorded catalogue, though this song is not strictly a blues composition, it certainly demonstrates stylistic elements that are consistent with blues music such as subject matter, blues tonality and instrumentation. Furthermore, the accompaniment shares similarities with the twelve-bar blues in that it is strophic and consists of a repeated (twenty-bar) form with a consistent rhyming scheme (i.e. ABCB). Even so, despite some subsequent recordings being from blues and rock performers, the majority of reinterpretations of this song are from performers who are often classified as folk artists (e.g. Odetta, Simon & Garfunkel, Peter, Paul & Mary) (Wolfe and Lornell, 1992: 213, 297-302; The Originals website).

The Backsliders recorded two reinterpretations of this song, four years apart.[59] The first is a studio recording from their 1988 debut album, the second, a live performance from the aptly-titled *Live at the Royal* (1993).[60] The main differences between these two Backsliders adaptations are in tempo, performance context, and a change in harmonica personnel. There are, however, many more differences that exist between the Backsliders' reinterpretations and the Leadbelly rendition identified as the primary model for reinterpretation: 'The Gallows Song'. Unlike his other manifestations of this track—each under a different title—'The Gallows Song' is the only one to exhibit the same three pairs of call-and-response stanzas exclusively. Despite this, the Backsliders' recordings also appear to utilise a secondary model in 'Mama, Did You Bring Me Any Silver' by drawing on a similar stanza ordering as well as borrowing the line "you ought to have thought it"—an element not present in any other Leadbelly renditions.

Although each Backsliders reinterpretation is performed at a different tempo, neither is as fast as that of the primary Leadbelly model. As with other songs under analysis in this chapter, the Backsliders' recordings of this track modify the vocal melody, command a greater usage of spatial positioning and expand upon the instrumentation present in the reinterpreted "original". In this instance, what was initially a self-accompanied piece for twelve-string guitar is now extended to incorporate harmonica, drums, washboard and percussion. Here the role of the harmonica as played by Hill and Conway differs once more: while the majority of Hill's playing follows the vocal melody and is heavily characterised by a manual hand-cupping "wah" effect, Conway's playing uses the effect more sparingly and is predominantly limited to call-and-response melodies between the vocal lines. Meanwhile, Burgess provides a driving rhythm predominantly on washboard and kick drum, with the latter only stopping for the call-and-response sections in the third line of each twenty-bar cycle (i.e. bars 8-16). These changes in accompaniment, along with a broader (stereo)

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utilisation of the recorded space, contribute to the altered dynamics throughout the Backsliders' reinterpretations.

While both Leadbelly and the Backsliders' vocalist, Dominic Turner, deliver the lyrics in a manner that flows like a narrative, the Backsliders place clear and even divisions between the three pairs of call-and-response stanzas in both of their reinterpretations. Here each group of two stanzas is grouped together as a conversation with the first stanza providing a question (or call) from the prisoner and the second stanza providing an answer (or response) from his visitor. This is punctuated each time by a twelve-string-guitar-and-harmonica duet that repeats the main riff from Leadbelly's introductory instrumental passage, an element that is absent in each Backsliders reinterpretation. These changes also contrast Leadbelly's approach in 'The Gallows Song' whereby stanzas are inconsistently divided up by Leadbelly's spoken word interjections and instrumental passages, with little consideration being given to how each stanza flow into the next. An additional (yet minor) lyrical adjustment employed by Turner throughout both of the Backsliders' recordings of this piece is his use of "bought" wherever Leadbelly uses "brought".[61]

'Smokestack Lightning'

Featured in Schneider's survey (2001: 239-40), this blues core has been reinterpreted on countless occasions, earning itself a place on several canonised listings including Herzhaft's blues standards (1992: 278), *Classic Rock* magazine's "Top 100 Blues Anthems" (Obrecht, et al., 2006: 64) and the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame (Blues Foundation website). Although it was popularised in 1956 by Howlin' Wolf (a.k.a. Chester Arthur Burnett), variations of the instrumental accompaniment and the key phrase (i.e. "smokestack lightning, shining just like gold") appear in many blues recordings from the first half of the twentieth century—many of which are attributed to musicians from the Mississippi area.

These variations appear in recordings such as Tommy Johnson's 'Cool Drink of Water Blues' and 'Big Road Blues' (both 1928),[62] Charley Patton's 'Down the Dirt Road Blues' (1929) and 'Moon Going Down' (1930), the Mississippi Sheiks' 'Stop and Listen Blues' (1930), Walter Vincson's 'Stop and Listen Blues' (1930), Fred McMullen's 'Wait and Listen' (1933) Kokomo Arnold's 'Stop, Look and Listen' (1935), Willie Lofton's 'Dark Road Blues' (1935), and Lightnin' Hopkins 'Coolin' Board Blues' (1949-50; also known as 'Thunder and Lightning Blues') (Oliver, 1968: 92; Barlow, 1989: 42; Rypens, 1996: 83). As well as resembling Howlin' Wolf's earlier recording 'Crying at Daybreak' (1951), 'Smokestack Lightnin'' has been heavily reinterpreted since the 1960s.[63] Other titles include 'The Fool',[64] 'LSD', 'She's Fine She's Mine', 'The Last of the Steam Powered Trains', 'Crying at Daylight',[65] 'White Lightnin'' as well as 'Smoke Like Lightnin''.[66] The last of these is particularly interesting in that it suggests the origin of the song's key phrase, "smokestack lightning, shining just like gold":

> *Howlin' Wolf is reported to have been taught by Charley Patton and it may have been a line from Patton's* Moon Going Down*, ''cause the smoke stack's black an' the bell it shine like—bell it shine like—bell it shine like gold', which he had imperfectly learned. Sung to the same tune as* Big Road Blues*, Patton's* Moon Going Down *may have been* [Tommy] *Johnson's inspiration or they may have both stemmed from an earlier source.* (Oliver, 1968: 92)

In contrast to the other artists analysed above, the Backsliders' recorded catalogue only features one other Howlin' Wolf reinterpretation, 'How Many More Years'. [67] Furthermore, the model recording for 'Smokestack Lightning' was initially performed by a band, not a duo or solo performer. The Backsliders have recorded four adaptations of this track over a fourteen-year period (i.e. 1991, 1996, 2003 and 2005). Coincidentally, all four Backsliders recordings of this reinterpretation have been performed in front of a live audience with the track often being used to open their live sets. Correspondingly, this song has long been fundamental to their repertoire and, despite several changes to the band's personnel,

continues to be played live by the band. Although there are some key differences between the four Backsliders reinterpretations (i.e. musical structure, backing vocals, change in drumming personnel and an additional harmonica player), their approach to this song is consistent in terms of tempo, instrumentation and the lyric stanzas used.

In assessing the reinterpretive changes, it can be seen that Howlin' Wolf's original recording is structured so that it presents six different stanzas, equally split by two harmonica solos and with zero repeats (i.e. 1-2-[h solo]-3-4-[h solo]-5-6-inst.). Conversely, each Backsliders reinterpretation exhibits only three or four of these stanzas—each time in a different order—consistently omitting Howlin' Wolf's second and third stanzas. Unlike their model recording, the Backsliders only use one part of the track for any solo passages, that typically being the middle of the song. Each adaptation also begins with Howlin' Wolf's first and sixth stanzas, and finishes with a repeat of the first stanza. Additional repeats occur on two of these recordings—stanza six on *Hellhound* (1991) and stanza five on *Live at the Basement* (2003). Corresponding with the sporadic ordering and selection of lyric stanzas between reinterpretations, Turner intermittently removes the first line of the refrain ("Oh can't you hear me cry?") from stanzas four and five.[68] Due to the live nature of these recordings, it is likely that each reinterpretation differs as the result of improvisation. Among the other lyrical changes that occur is Turner's alteration of the vocal cry (and melody) at the end of each stanza, replacing Wolf's "W'oo hoo" with "A'hee hoo". This cry is also extended and varied between the sounds "hoo" and "hee", but only in the three reinterpretations where Turner is accompanied by backing vocals (1996, 2003 and 2005). The stark contrast between the laid-back Australian intonation of Turner and the rough and raspy vocal timbre of the aptly-named Howlin' Wolf (with the cries additionally treated with reverb) further heightens this difference. Moreover, Turner appears to garble a line from

Wolf's fourth stanza so that instead of "let her coal burn right", it becomes "let a poor boy ride".

Each Backsliders reinterpretation is performed at a faster tempo than Wolf's track, albeit that their 1991 recording is executed at a slower pace than the other three. Compared to the original, the instrumentation also differs significantly in that it changes from a standard Chicago blues accompaniment (lead vocals, harmonica, two electric guitars, piano, bass and drums) to a more minimalistic three-piece line-up (lead vocals, twelve-string acoustic guitar, harmonica, drums and percussion). Though not included in every Backsliders reinterpretation, some of their reinterpretations of this track also feature backing vocals (1996, 2003 and 2005) and/or a second harmonica (1996). It is these elements that most highlight the enhanced utilisation of spatial positioning in the Backsliders' three latter reinterpretations of 'Smokestack Lightning' when compared to Howlin' Wolf's original recording. For instance, the volume of the backing vocals typically rests just underneath the lead vocals whereas the second harmonica (played by Chris Wilson) is positioned in the opposite speaker to Conway's harmonica (i.e. left and right respectively). Additional accompaniment changes occur in the role and content of what some of these instruments play. While the harmonica is confined to playing solo passages and the ending in Howlin' Wolf's recording, Conway also plays during the introduction, between the lyric stanzas and behind the vocal cry. Most of this playing is based on the main guitar riff, the content of which has also been altered from the original. Although the new riff bares a vague resemblance to its counterpart, it now contains nine notes rather than eleven, some of which are delivered with a different pitch and/or emphasis.

Finally, the Backsliders add new content in each adaptation via the instrumental and solo passages in the middle of the song. This typically entails any number of the following: at least one harmonica solo (with Chris Wilson featuring as an additional harmonica player);

band member introductions to the audience, the addition of a guitar change, and; a drum break-beat. The band also uses this section to change the dynamics of tension within the song, usually by progressively lowering the volume. Once the instrumental section ends, a low volume is maintained until the final lyric stanza when the accompaniment increases in volume and builds towards a climax for the conclusion of the piece.

Analytical results

Unlike the recording career of Chain, the Backsliders have been very prolific in offering reinterpretations of previously-recorded blues material. Though this tendency was more pronounced across the first half of the band's career (1988-1998), it remains an integral aspect of their musical approach as the Backsliders continue to perform blues reinterpretations both live and on record. Here their blues reinterpretations reflect their preferred artists and/or model of a given blues song and the act of reinterpreting of these tracks into the Backsliders' contemporary sound simultaneously extols their influences and keeps the music alive and relevant. In the tradition of the African-American blues artists whom they canonise as musical creators and influencers, the Backsliders draw on a range of compositional and arranging techniques in their adaptations of previously-recorded blues songs. This statement applies to both those tracks analysed above as well as the many other pieces routinely featured on their albums and in their live sets. Like Chain, the Backsliders—or, at the very least, Turner—make a habit of displaying their knowledge of the history associated with the blues material they perform. The possession and imparting of this knowledge is another important aspect of the group, further evidenced among the majority of their live tracks whereby Turner's introductions explain the name and author of the given piece. As Turner (pc, April, 2006) makes clear: "That was the point of this band, not to make money or anything else… just to turn people on to this form of music". What is especially

interestingly about the above selection of five tracks repeatedly reinterpreted by the Backsliders is that all feature a repeated refrain, which—like a chorus—functions as a point of reference for the audience.

Reflecting upon the results generated by the reinterpretive methodological tool from this thesis, a total of sixteen individual measures (out of a possible twenty-three) are utilised across the fifteen recordings of the above five tracks. Another outcome of this analysis is that the Backsliders—like Chain again—average a relatively high number of reinterpretive measurements (approximately twelve) per recording. This statistic is reinforced by another result in that eleven different measures are employed across at least four of the five individual tracks, emphasising the point that the Backsliders' level of creative engagement in their blues reinterpretations is consistently moderately high. Those measures that the Backsliders draw on in every recording of each reinterpretation identified above are:

> 2. (a) Changing the musical structure through omitting stanzas, instrumental passages or solo passages
> 3. (a) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through instrumentation
> 3. (c) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through timbre and/or tonality
> 5. (d) Changing the lyrical content through garbling and/or readjusting words

These results show a strong predilection for modification to the structure, lyrics and instrumental accompaniment. This trend is further highlighted by the next group of frequently employed reinterpretive measures, all of which are utilised in at least one recording of each reinterpretation analysed in this chapter:

> 3. (e) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through dynamics of tension, climax and/or release
> 7. (a) Using a recording as a frame for mixing and matching musical material through setting lyrics from a recording to a new/different accompaniment and/or melody
> 2. (b) Changing the musical structure through repetition of stanzas, instrumental passages or solo passages
> 3. (b) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through rhythm and/or tempo

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With all of the above eight measures of reinterpretive creativity also being exhibited in the Backsliders' treatment of 'Preaching Blues' on *The dig Australian Blues Project* (see chapter three), it is clear that both the level of creative engagement with these previously-recorded blues tracks as well as their approach to performing these reinterpretations are consistent. Fundamental to this approach is the freedom to adapt previously-recorded blues songs to the contemporary Australian context through improvisation. This element is particularly evident in their "chop-and-change" approach to the lyrics, structure and rhythm between different incarnations of a given reinterpreted blues song—a vital trait for ensuring that these previously-recorded tracks undergo a considerable degree of change in the process of recontextualisation.

Regarding the measures not utilised by the Backsliders in this analysis, it is clear that the band is not interested in direct imitation. It is, however, worth mentioning that concatenation is another compositional method that the band draws on in their other recorded blues reinterpretations, albeit infrequently. The Backsliders have concatenated parts of two or more recordings in recorded reinterpretations on at least seven occasions. Two of these occur by way of performing medleys,[69] but the other five demonstrate this process by integrating words, lines and stanzas of lyrics from different, but related, recordings into the one reinterpretation. Coincidentally, four of these five examples[70] are in some way related to Robert Johnson—'32-20 Blues', 'Sweet Home Chicago', 'You Got to Move' and 'Preaching Blues'—with the majority occurring in the early portion of the band's career (i.e. pre-1992).[71]

[1] All the titles of the tracks mentioned in this chapter are reproduced in the upper and lower case formats in which they appear on or inside the cover artwork of the recording package, except where the entire title is either in upper or lower case only. In this case, the title will be standardised with capitals at the beginning of each word. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations attributed to Dom Turner in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in Sydney on April 12, 2006. Likewise, all quotations attributed to Jim Conway in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in Sydney on March 3, 2007 unless stated otherwise.

[2] In the liner notes to *Sitting On a Million*, Burgess' drum kit is described as consisting of a "hatbox bass drum and assorted household percussion instruments. This will be discussed further in the next section.

[3] Turner is unable to remember the surname of this individual.

[4] In addition to guitar and vocals, Turner also played accordion in the Stumblers.

[5] *You Got to Move* consisted of five originals and seven blues reinterpretations (including songs performed or written by Little Walter, Willie Dixon, Howlin' Wolf and Tom Waits). Of the latter, one was written by Dom Turner ('No Laughing Matter'), three by Brendan Gallagher, and one a co-write between Lee Williams and Gallagher. Gallagher also produced and arranged all the tracks on the album.

[6] Guests on this album include Margret RoadKnight (backing vocals), Jeannie Lewis (backing vocals), Brendan Gallagher (backing vocals), Rick Ludbrook (backing vocals), Arthur Hubbard (tuba), and Jan Wositzky (bones).

[7] These include Gyan (vocals), Broderick Smith (vocals), George Butrumlis (accordion), Ian Cooper (fiddle/violin), Rory McLeod (trombone, vocals), and Douglas Mills (banjo, Uileann pipes).

[8] Though credited as "Traditional", the song 'Keep your lamp trimmed and burning' can be interpreted as referencing either McDowell or Johnson as Turner sites them both as significant influences. Johnson was the first to record it in 1928, while McDowell recorded his reinterpretation in 1959. As with 'Kokomo', 'Shake 'em On Down' and 'You Got to Move', even though McDowell was not the first to record these tracks, he is consistently credited by the Backsliders as the author.

[9] These include Kara Grainger (backing vocals), Ian Cooper (fiddle/violin), Josephine Constantino (cello), George Butrumlis (accordion), Don Walker (piano), Roy Bookbinder (guitar and vocals), James Greening (tuba).

[10] These are 'Bound To Love Me Some' (Traditional) and 'She Did You A Favour' (Roy Bookbinder).

[11] This phrase describes a practice that is the blues equivalent of hip-hop's rap battles. As demonstrated by John Hammond Jr. and Johnny Shines in the documentary *The Search for Robert Johnson* (Hunt and Moore, 1992) as well as Ralph Macchio and Steve Vai in *Crossroads* (Hill, 1986), this is carried out between two performers with the aim being to upstage one's opponent through superior performance.

[12] Burgess has since contributed to the King Curly album, *Familyman* (2002).

[13] Guests on this album are limited to Angus Diggs (drums), John Jackson (narration) and Alex Terry (backing vocals).

[14] One of two traditional Vietnamese instruments, the dàn bâù is similar in design to the diddley-bow, but with some variations. A single string runs from one end to a small gourd running over the top of a long narrow sound box. The gourd is attached to a tall curved stem. While plucking the string, the player touches the string lightly with the heel of the hand to produce harmonics. The stem is then bent to change the pitch of the string (like a whammy bar on a guitar) (Walley, 2006: np).

[15] On *Hanoi*, this same track was referred to as 'You Got to Move'.

[16] Other performers at these events included Bob Brozman, Renée Geyer, Vince Jones, Jeff Lang and James Morrison.

[17] First, Mississippi Fred McDowell's songs—all of which were recorded post-WWII—have been reinterpreted on several occasions; most would be considered downhome, though some have characteristics of electric blues. Second, though Howlin' Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightning' has antecedents in several pre-WWII downhome recordings, his recording of this track—as with most of his recorded output—resembles post-WWII electric blues.

[18] In order to get a sufficient sound out of this suitcase-like contraption, its microphone was run through a series of compressors and equalizers.

[19] The Midnight Oil recording of 'Beds are Burning' is a classic example of this approach. Additionally, see comments on 'Kokomo' in the next section.

[20] As to whether or not Johnson was in fact "corner loading" is discussed in Pearson (1992: 222) and Schroeder (2004: 25-7).

[21] Here Turner cites the frequent reluctance to adhere to the twelve-bar blues pattern, the showmanship (e.g. playing the guitar behind the head, rolling on the floor) as well as the recent remix projects involving R.L. Burnside.

[22] See also Sharon Kennedy (2006: np).

[23] Correspondingly, Turner's and Conway's adoption of amplified, distorted tones is also a more recent phenomenon in the Backsliders' recordings.

[24] See endnote 14.

[25] Each of these recordings are analysed in this thesis.

[26] Other songs that have appeared on several releases include 'Hellhound On My Trail', 'Saddle Up My Pony', 'Sweet Jiving Mama', '32-20 Blues' (see Chapter Five for an analysis of this track), 'Scottsboro Boys', 'If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day', 'Write Me a Few Lines', 'Moon Going Down', 'I Wish You Would' and 'Hard Times Killing Floor'.

[27] 'Preaching Blues' and 'You Got to Move' are not included in this list due to their appearance in chapter four's case study of *The dig Australian Blues Project*.

[28] As a side note, three of these artists—Robert Johnson, Leadbelly and McDowell—are referred to in the lyrics of the Backsliders' 'Mr. Johnsons [sic] Blues Today', recorded on *Hellhound* (1991). Written by Dominic Turner, this song is the first original composition that the band recorded.

[29] Other blues artists not included in this analysis whose material has been reinterpreted by the Backsliders more than once are Charley Patton, Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt and Yank Rachell. Those blues artists who material has only been reinterpreted once by the Backsliders include Blind Blake, Muddy Waters, Sleepy John Estes, John Jackson, Mance Lipscomb, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Roosevelt Graves, Billy Boy Arnold, Elizabeth Cotton, Jesse Fuller, Junior Wells, Blind Willie Johnson and Bo Diddley. Though not considered a blues artist, the Backsliders also recorded two reinterpretations from folk-country guitarist Paul Siebel.

[30] Other reinterpretations of *Kokomo Blues* include Jabo Williams (1932) as 'Ko Ko Mo Blues', Kokomo Arnold (1934) as 'Old Original Kokomo Blues', Freddie Spruell (1935) as 'Mr Freddie's Kokomo Blues', Mississippi Fred McDowell (1962, 1964 and 1969), Bonnie Raitt (1970 and 1973), Bob Halperin (1998), John Renbourn (2000), Les Sampou (2001), Anders Osborne (2002), John Campbelljohn (2003) and David Jacobs Strain (2004).

[31] Reinterpretations under the title 'Eleven Light City' include Big Boy Knox (1937), Frank Busby (1937) as ''Leven Light City (Sweet Old Kokomo)', and Will Shade, Charley Burse and Furry Lewis (sometime between 1963 and 1968).

[32] Reinterpretations under the title 'Baby Don't You Want To Go?' include Tommy McClennan (1939), Walter Davis (1941), as 'Don't You Want To Go?', Jimmy McCracklin (1945), Dan Pickett (1949), and Smoky Babe (1960) as 'Baby, Don't You Want to Go' (Oster, 1969a: 269).

[33] This reinterpretation was recorded by Roosevelt Sykes (1955).

[34] This reinterpretation was recorded by Big Joe Williams (1966).

[35] Reinterpretations under the title 'Kokomo Me Baby' include Mississippi Fred McDowell (1969), Johnny B. Moore (1992), and Davey Lee Goode and the Bad Cats (2001).

[36] This reinterpretation was recorded by Ben Andrews and the Blue Rider Trio (2000).

[37] While the lyrics to Jabo Williams' *Ko Ko Mo Blues* (1932) were not obtained during the course of this research, Paul Oliver (1984a: 105-6) provides information about the origin of the "eleven light city" phrase. During an interview with Jacques Demetre, Arnold explained that Eleven Light City was the name of a drug store that sold a brand of coffee labelled "Koko". Though Oliver suggests that Arnold devised the phrase "sweet Kokomo" by adding an alliteration of his own, I propose instead that he combined the story of 'eleven light city' and 'Koko' with the song that Blackwell recorded six years earlier. This is suggested by Arnold's modification of Blackwell's first verse as a refrain.

[38] 'Sweet Home Chicago' has since been reinterpreted by Tommy McClennan (1939), Walter Davis (1941), Junior Parker (1954-64), Magic Sam (1957), Luther Allison (1973), Johnny Shines (1974), Robert Lockwood Jr. (1975), Big Chief Ellis (1976), John Hammond Jr. (1978), Foghat (1978), The Blues Brothers (1980), Taj Mahal (1982), Lonnie Pitchford (1994), Peter Green Splinter Group (1998), Status Quo (2000), and Eric Clapton (2004). 'Sweet Home Chicago' was also inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1983 (Blues Foundation website).

[39] Other songs credited to McDowell in the Backsliders' repertoire include 'Mystery Train' (a.k.a. 'The Train I Ride is Fifteen Coaches Long'), 'Black Minnie' (as recorded as 'Big Road Blues'), 'Write Me a Few Lines', 'Shake 'Em On Down' and 'You Got To Move'.

[40] The 'Diving Duck' blues core has been recorded by a large number blues artists including Leola B. Wilson (1926) as 'Down the Country', Furry Lewis (1928) as 'I Will Turn Your Money Green', Sleepy John Estes (1929) as 'Diving Duck Blues', Will Bennett (1930) as 'Railroad Bill', Sonny Boy Williamson I (1941) as 'She Don't Love Me That Way', Big Three Trio (1947) as 'If the Sea Was Whiskey', and Muddy Waters (1950) as 'Rollin' and Tumblin''.

[41] This appeared on the reissue of *Preaching Blues* (1988), performed by Turner and Burgess only.

[42] In 1969, Mississippi Fred McDowell also recorded this blues core under the 'Kokomo' title on the *Shake 'Em On Down* live release, which has since been reissued as *Live at the Mayfair Hotel* (1995) and *London Calling* (2006). This song is not to be confused with Eric Bibb's track of the same name, recorded in 2001.

[43] Moreover, since joining the Backsliders, Rob Hirst expanded on this approach to 'Kokomo' during live performances by regularly stepping out from behind his kit mid-song and continuing to keep the beat (and the song) going as he walked around the stage hitting random objects (e.g. microphone stands, amplifiers, foldback speakers, etc.).

[44] Other songs credited to McTell in the Backsliders' repertoire include 'King Edward's Blues', 'Dehlia' and 'Georgia Rag'.

[45] Despite Elijah Wald's (2004: 179) declaration that Johnson's two takes of 'Stop Breakin' Down Blues' were released interchangeably on 78rpm records, this analysis focuses solely on the first take as it is clearly the manifestation the Backsliders reference. This is obvious from the stanzas that Turner employs: if Johnson's first take is structured 1-2-3-4-1, then his second take is 2-2-3-4-5; meanwhile the Backsliders reinterpretations are 1-4-3-solo-4-1 (1988 and 1991), and 1-4-3-solo-4-3-solo-4-1 (1996). Even with the absence of the second stanza, two reasons suggest that the first take is providing the model. First, the fifth stanza is also absent. Second, each reinterpretation progresses in a similar fashion by beginning with stanza one, presenting stanza three in the middle, and ending with stanzas four and one respectively.

[46] As John Wells (1983: 23) mentions, the Rolling Stones' recording of 'Stop Breakin' Down' from *Exile on Main Street* does not credit Robert Johnson with the authorship—this was also the case for their reinterpretations of 'Love in Vain'.

[47] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'Stop Breakin' Down Blues' include Steve Forbert (1997), Tommy Bolin (1999), Peter Green Splinter Group (2001), Carl Weathersby (2003), Eric Clapton (2004), Billy Branch (2004), and Widespread Panic and John Keane (2005).

[48] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'Stop Breakin' Down' include Junior Wells (1968), Nighthawks (1983), and Jeff Healey Band (1995).

[49] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'Stop Breaking Down' include Sonny Boy Williamson I (1945), 'Forest City' Joe B. Pugh (1959) (see Williams, M., 1980: 44), Rolling Stones (1972), Eddie Taylor (1972), Lucinda Williams (1979), Dim Stars (1992), Big Sugar (1993), Rocky Hill (1994), Lee Baker (1997), the White Stripes (1999), Robert Lockwood Jr. (2000), and Fat Daddy Blues Band (2005).

[50] This particular track was originally recorded as two parts (i.e. Part I and Part II), both based on the same tune and lyric patterns.

[51] Three of these examples appear to be taken from Edward Komara (1998: 206).

[52] Other songs credited to Robert Leroy Johnson in the Backsliders' repertoire include 'Hellhound On My Trail', 'They're Red Hot' as 'Hot Tamales', 'Preaching Blues', '32-20 Blues', 'Come On In My Kitchen', 'If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day', 'Sweet Home Chicago', 'Traveling Riverside Blues' as 'Travelling Riverside Blues', and 'Walking Blues' as 'Walkin' Blues'.

[53] These changes are similar to those in The Rolling Stones' reinterpretation (Schneider, 2001: 262-3).

[54] Other than Conway's presence, another factor that needs to be taken into account concerning the increased tempo in the reinterpretations from 1991 and 1996 is that both performances were recorded in front of a live audience.

[55] This title was recorded by Jean Ritchie (1954).

[56] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'Hangman Hangman' include Kingston Trio (1961), Limeliters (1963), Koerner, Ray & Glover (1963), and Peter, Paul & Mary (1965).

[57] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'Gallows Pole' include Odetta (1957), Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel (1961), the Backsliders (1988), Ben Andrews (1990), The Blue Rider Trio with Ben Andrews (1991), Roger Manning (1993), Jimmy Page and Robert Plant (1994), and Long John Baldry (2001).

[58] Reinterpretations recorded under the title 'The Gallows Pole' include Tex Ritter (1965), Fred Gerlach (1968), Led Zeppelin (1970), Dirk Blanchart & the Groove Quartet (1990), the Backsliders (1992), and Alvin "Youngblood" Hart (1996).

[59] Other songs credited to Huddie William Ledbetter (a.k.a. Leadbelly) in the Backsliders' repertoire include 'Pick a Bale of Cotton', 'On a Monday', 'Scottsboro Boys', 'Out On the Western Plains', 'De Kalb Blues', 'Jean Harlow', 'Black Betty' and 'Fannin Street'.

[60] Although the album was released in 1993, the live recording actually took place in 1992.

[61] Some of the lyrics from Leadbelly's several different recordings of 'The Gallows Pole' are also utilised by Turner in an original Backsliders' composition on *Left Field Holler* (2007) titled 'Parish Pariah'—a song written about Leadbelly himself.

[62] According to Paul Oliver (1968: 92), the "smokes like lightnin', shines like gold" phrase "seems to have been a famous line of Tommy Johnson's and is often associated with his 'Big Road Blues' though it does not occur in his recording of the blues. Some singers would have learned it at first hand from Johnson, while others would have acquired it from later recordings of this extremely influential blues".

[63] These reinterpretations include Manfred Mann (1963) as 'LSD', the Yardbirds (1964), Pretty Things (1965) as 'She's Fine She's Mine', the Animals (1966), John Hammond Jr. (1967), the Kinks (1968) as 'The Last of the

Steam Powered Trains', Quicksilver Messenger Service (1968), Hard Meat (1969), Axis (1969), The Outcasts (1960s), Bintangs (1972), Grateful Dead (1973), Mississippi Fred McDowell (1969) as 'White Lightnin'', Ian Gillan (1982), Muddy Waters (1984), Valerie Wellington (1984), Green on Red (1985), Blues Band (1986), Henry Kaiser (1987), George Thorogood and the Destroyers (1988), Soundgarden (1988), Lynyrd Skynyrd (1991), John Lee Hooker (1992), Fenton Robinson (1993), Things To Come (1993), Jimmy Rogers (1994), Electric Prunes (1997), Groundhogs (1998), Gene Deer and the Blues Band (1998), The Manfreds (2000), Shri (2000), Chris Whitley (2000) as 'Smokestack Lightning', Dave Riley (2001), Lucky Peterson (2003), Etta James (2004) and Watermelon Slim (2004).

[64] This reinterpretation imitated the main guitar riff of Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightnin'' and was recorded by Sanford Clark (1956).

[65] This reinterpretation was recorded by John Hammond Jr. (1998).

[66] This title was recorded by Leon Strickland (1959).

[67] Even so, it is worth noting here that the Stumblers did record a reinterpretation of 'Three Hundred Pounds of Joy', written by Willie Dixon and originally performed by Howlin' Wolf.

[68] Though Turner also removes this line from every application of stanza six, this trait is consistent with Howlin' Wolf's recording.

[69] See 'I'll Be Rested / I Heard Somebody Calling' on *Sitting On a Million* (1989) and 'How Many More Years / Diddley Daddy / Black Betty' on *Live at the Royal* (1993).

[70] The remaining example is 'Parish Pariah' on *Left Field Holler* (2007) and amalgamates aspects of several Leadbelly's recordings with some of his biographical information.

[71] First, Johnson's '32-20 Blues' (1936) was largely modelled on Skip James' '22-20 Blues' (1931). Even though Johnson changes the location of the doctors from Wisconsin in James' reinterpretation to Hollis Springs, he is inconsistent and makes the mistake of reverting to Wisconsin on one occasion, thus revealing his obvious debt to James. For whatever reason, Turner perpetuates this apparent mistake in the band's 1988 reinterpretation, but not in their 1992 reinterpretation. Similarly, as discussed above, Johnson's 'Sweet Home Chicago' (1936) owed much to Blackwell's 'Kokomo Blues' (1928) and Arnold's 'Old Original Kokomo Blues' (1934). Throughout the Backsliders' single recording of 'Sweet Home Chicago' (1987), Turner uses Arnold's line "Back to the eleven light city" interchangeably with Johnson's line "Back to the land of California, or". As mentioned earlier, the vocal melody in Mississippi Fred McDowell's 'You Got to Move' (1964 and 1969) was near identical to that which appeared in many blues recordings of the 1920s and 1930s, including Johnson's 'Come On In My Kitchen' (1936). Prior to reinterpreting 'You Got to Move' for the first time in 2002, the Backsliders recorded a reinterpretation of 'Come On…' on their debut album fourteen years earlier. The first lyric stanza in both Johnson's and the Backsliders' reinterpretations of 'Come On…' begins with a hummed introduction and is followed by the refrain. Although the corresponding stanza in McDowell's recording also ends with a refrain, it begins with "You've got to move, you've got to move / You've got to move child, you've got to move". However, the Backsliders replace these lines by drawing on the same approach employed in Johnson's recording, changing the 'mm' sound to an 'ah'. Finally, Johnson's 'Preaching Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)' (1936) stemmed from Son House's 'Preachin' The Blues (Parts I and II)' (1930). Clearly aware of this relationship, Turner inserts the first lyric stanza from House's recording at the end of their 1991 reinterpretation of Johnson's track. Additionally, where the first two lines in House's recording are, "Oh, I'm going to get me religion, I'm going to join the Baptist Church", Turner replaces the denomination to "Catholic".

Chapter Seven: Jeff Lang

Biography and recorded output

Jeffrey Lang was born in Canberra on November 9th, 1969, and was raised in Geelong from the age of twelve.[1] Prior to learning the guitar, Lang began playing the clarinet at eight years of age. He continued to do so until age fourteen, when he took up the guitar as a consequence of being inspired by his father's record collection—one that included Roy Buchanan, Eric Clapton, Cold Chisel, Ry Cooder, Bob Dylan and Leo Kottke. Though he had been playing bottleneck slide from the beginning, Lang did not begin playing in the lap style until he was sixteen, when he found an electric lap steel at a music store for sixty dollars. By seventeen, he was already performing live with local blues professionals (Australian Blues website). While his earliest songwriting efforts were conscious attempts to create blues compositions, this approach was soon abandoned. Instead, with help from a bassist and drummer, he began to work on his own sound and recorded a five-track instrumental cassette titled *Cramp Your Own Style* (circa 1990).[2] In 1991, he formed the Jeff Lang Band. Based in Sydney, the band mostly played blues-rock material and only lasted for a year or two. Their shows were usually introduced with a solo set from Lang and followed by a band set. It was during this time that he adopted the stompbox into his solo act—an idea that he picked up from watching Phil Manning perform solo (see chapter five). For Lang, the solo sets were far more liberating and he was finding that the sound of the band was not ideal for the songs he was writing at the time. Consequently, the band split in 1992 as Lang went on to begin his solo career. Around the same time, Lang had also been performing with Matt Taylor's Chain—consisting of himself (guitar), Taylor (vocals, harmonica), Dirk Du Bois (bass), Gus Warberton (drums) and Bob Patient (piano)—and recorded the album *Trouble in the Wind* (a.k.a. *Walls 2 McGoo*) (1992).[3]

Lang progressed to a solo career from his brief stint in Chain, releasing many albums throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Following the demise of the Jeff Lang Band, Lang released his first solo recording *Ravenswood* (1994), which features a non-conventional mix of instrumentation[4] with what is mostly original Lang compositions. While the songs on this album showcase his various styles and tastes, a blues influence is certainly discernible through his use of blues progressions (e.g. twelve-bar, single-chord), repeated riffs, interjections (from vocals and slide guitar), AAB rhyming scheme, foot stomp, falsetto vocals and borrowed lyrics.[5] On a similar note, his first live album, *Disturbed Folk* (1995),[6] also encompasses a mixture of originals and reinterpretations, including a recording of Jimi Hendrix's 'Hear My Train A-Comin''. The following year Lang released three recordings including the four-track sampler *'96 Tour Pressie* (1996a). His second studio album, *Native Dog Creek* (1996b), is the first of many with producer Kerryn Tolhurst, former guitarist for the Adderley Smith Blues Band.[7] Continuing in the same vein as the Jeff Lang Band, the album presents his original material in both solo and band formats. *Native Dog Creek* introduces more of a rock flavour into Lang's compositions courtesy of more conventional band instrumentation (bass and drums), increased usage of conventional verse-chorus-solo formats as well as a great tendency for guitar solos. This album does, however, retain much of Lang's idiosyncratic approach to the guitar (e.g. finger-picking, slide) while introducing some new techniques (e.g. repeated use of harmonics, reverse sliding[8] and percussive guitar[9]). Though it is certainly not a blues album, the influence is again apparent through use of blues-related elements such as progression patterns (e.g. twelve-bar, eight-bar), vocal interjections, dominant-seventh chords, and intertwining guitar-vocal melodies. This year also produced the first of Lang's many collaborative albums, *Live at the Vineyard* (1996), with Chris Finnen.[10] In addition to including two originals from each artist, this recording

features half-a-dozen reinterpretations, due to what Lang explains as purely a practical approach:

> *there was a certain number of songs that we had… Chris and I would do gigs together at the time and just maybe jam a bit, I'd do a song of mine and Chris would just play guitar on it… 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia' was just an easy pick of something. It's a twelve-bar and it rocks along so… we ended up using it on the record.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006)

A Crowd in Every Face (1997), continues the live recording theme, offers a comparably even amount of originals and reinterpretations, and re-presents some tracks previously recorded by Lang in a new setting. During this period, Lang also made contributions to four other albums.[11] Further contributing to this prolific bout of recording, Lang also generated another live recording, *Real Scars* (1998a). Taking this album into consideration, Lang's musical approach up to this point in his career had consistently embraced reinterpretations of previously-recorded works alongside his own original compositions and co-written pieces. The subsequent album, however, *Cedar Grove* (1998b), demonstrates a new development within Lang's sound as he records fewer reinterpretations, includes more lap steel-based songs,[12] and the increased employment of a dual-voice amplified guitar set-up.[13] Being only his third studio album, in terms of development since *Native Dog Creek*, Lang's style is still heavily characterised by finger-picking, slide guitar, harmonics, reverse slides and a percussive approach.[14] On *Cedar Grove* though, Lang adds new elements such as controlled feedback,[15] with string bends and solos now featuring in the majority of tracks. Despite receiving an ARIA nomination for the Best Blues and Roots Album, this recording is far from being classified as blues. Even though Lang's playing and songwriting exhibits strong influences from this genre, its presence is limited in his use of certain stanzaic structures (including a twenty-four bar variation of the twelve-bar blues

form), call-and-response melodies as well as intertwining vocal-guitar melodies—an element Lang likely picked-up via his appreciation for the music of Blind Willie Johnson.

This association with Johnson's music is also evident on the following collaborative album with Queensland-based performer Hat Fitz, *The Silverbacks* (1999).[16] Recorded live in the studio with no overdubs, the album consistently exhibits a distinct blues influence through elements such as instrumental accompaniment, improvisation and repertoire. Although most of the tracks are original compositions written by Hat Fitz (many of which appear to be improvised), several blues-oriented songs also feature including Johnson's 'If I Had My Way'. *The Silverbacks* also marks the first appearance of Lang's 'Elvis Is Still Dead', written the day before they recorded in the studio. Exhibiting his awareness regarding the history of the blues genre and the subsequent development of rock-and-roll, the lyrics of this song highlight the dynamics of racism in our society (Garofalo, 2002: 133), particularly in the line: "Chuck Berry's waiting to be crowned as the King of rock-and-roll… Yeah Bo Diddley's waiting too". The reference to Bo Diddley (a.k.a Ellas McDaniel) is further reinforced on this recording of 'Elvis Is Still Dead' through Hat Fitz's adoption of the instrument from which McDaniel drew his stage name—the diddley bow.

Lang's second solo live album, the aptly-titled *Disturbed Folk Vol. 2* (1999), integrates the stompbox into his instrumentation once more over a setlist of material from his three most recent releases. Between this recording and his next studio album *Everything Is Still* (2001a), Lang also contributed to three other albums including the tribute compilation *The Woodstock Sessions: Songs of Bob Dylan* (Various, 2000a).[17] Here Lang contributes 'The Ballad of Hollis Brown' with Grant Cummerford and Ashley Davies—his backing group from the *Cedar Grove* album. This particular choice of reinterpretation exhibits Lang's own blues leanings as the song is based on a variation of the twelve-bar blues form, most easily identified by its three-line AAB rhyming scheme. In addition to earning him a

second ARIA nomination, one especially significant artistic change that occurs in *Everything is Still* (2001a) is that it is the first album where all of the tracks are written by Lang. After spending many years as a solo performer, with or without a backing band, this album represents his first recording as a duo with Angus Diggs (drums).[18] Most of the songs on this album are recorded live in the studio in one take, with Lang playing his now characteristic dual-voice amplified guitar and Diggs bringing his improvisational approach to Lang's songs—both in regards to playing as well as instrumentation:

> *I never want nor need to tell him what to play on my songs. He is a great musician who never stops listening and responding to what I'm doing… At its best this music is a conversation between the voice and the guitar, the guitar and the drums, the lyrics and the mood. Mr Diggs understands the concepts of tension, violence, dynamics, subtlety, deafening silence and synergy. He's also hit on the idea of the random drum kit which has a revolving cast around the central trap set. This has included lighting trees, fire extinguishers, petrol cans, a Zephyr car bonnet, bedpans, hubcaps and all manner of found metal objects…*—Jeff Lang (liner notes to Lang, 2001a)

Even with its Best Blues and Roots Album nomination, *Everything is Still* is far from a straight representation of blues, as Lang's influences are many and varied. Though some borrowings are more subtle than others, there are plenty of markers of Lang's blues influence on this record including intertwining vocal-guitar melodies, call-and-response melodies, stanzaic structures, and blues patterns (e.g. twelve-bar blues variation). Perhaps the turquoise-green colour of the album's cover art can be read as symbolic of this—while not quite "blue", its presence can certainly be felt as it clearly contributes to the overall result. That same year, Lang also contributed to Ashley Davies' concept album *Ned Kelly* (2001) and released his first DVD *Live at the Basement* (2001b), with the latter consisting solely of Lang originals. Accompanied by Diggs once more—with additional backing provided by Don Walker (piano) on four songs—the setlist covers material from *Everything is Still*, *Cedar Grove*, *Native Dog Creek* as well as two unreleased songs.

Lang continues his playing relationship with Diggs once more on *Rolling Through This World* (2002) along with US blues and Hawaiian guitar player, Bob Brozman. Responsible for Lang's first and only Best Blues and Roots Album ARIA Award, this product persists in the same vein as his previous collaborative projects whereby originals from each artist are combined with numerous reinterpretations of previously-recorded material—many of them being of blues origin. Replete with slide guitar, intertwining melodies (both vocal-guitar and guitar-guitar), call-and-response melodies, blues tonality and twelve-bar blues forms, this recording is as close as Lang has come thus far to making a blues record. Lang also produced and performed on Tim Hall's *No Dogs No Disneyland* in 2002, in which he can be heard to be experimenting with guitar sounds and effects more than usual on his own recordings, applying his guitar playing to tracks of a more pop music nature. The Lang/Hall relationship is maintained across Lang's successive studio albums where Hall's influence appears to broaden Lang's sound.

Though Lang made no new studio releases in 2003, he contributed to two compilations, three American artists' albums (i.e. Donna Dean, Last Train Home and Patty Larkin) and released *No Point Slowing Down: Live in the USA* (2003). Like his other solo live recordings, Lang plays acoustic, resonator and lap steel guitars (through his dual-voice amplified set-up) along to his stompbox. This album also follows the trend of other Lang recordings from this period in that less emphasis is placed on reinterpretations. Lang does, however, supply a reinterpretation of 'Blues for Skip' to the compilation *Stories of Me: A songwriters' tribute to Paul Kelly* (Various, 2003b). While this track is a twenty-four-bar variation on the twelve-bar blues form, Lang's reinterpretation of this piece bears little resemblance to a blues song. Played in a minor key with changes to the instrumentation, it features Lang's idiosyncratic dual-voice amplified acoustic lap steel accompanied by the backing of Bruce Haymes on piano. Though discernibly recorded in a 3/4 time signature, the

noticeably irregular meter on this reinterpretation exhibits a creative approach quite unlike anything else Lang has recorded in that it is more abstract and avant-garde. However, what is consistent between this and his next recorded reinterpretation that features on *"Exile On Blues St"* (Various 2003c)—a blues tribute to the Rolling Stones' *Exile On Main St* (1972)— is his choice of instrumentation. This example is certainly more characteristic of his usual style as, although every other artist on the album recorded with a backing band,[19] Lang appears in solo mode on vocals, stompbox and dual-voice amplified acoustic lap steel.

Whatever Makes You Happy (2004)[20] keeps with the trend of his adjacent recordings once more in that it comprises original material only, including four instrumentals—the only exception being a live reinterpretation of 'Too Easy to Kill/Hellhound on My Trail' with John Butler on the limited edition bonus disc. However, it is simultaneously different from the rest of his studio recordings in that there is an absence of any solo performances. Furthermore, while the album is still heavily characterised by Lang's slide guitar, much less emphasis is placed on his own virtuosity as there are fewer Lang solos and several tracks placing more attention on other musicians and instruments. Though *Whatever Makes You Happy* produced yet another ARIA nomination for Lang, its sound is less blues-inflected than most of his previous releases, drawing limited blues influence in the form of stanzaic lyric patterns and twelve-bar blues variations. Even though Lang still performs with his customary finger-picking and string bends, his guitar style on this record is more subtle and less percussive— most likely due to the abundance of instrumentation normally absent from his work.

Prior to his next release, Lang toured around Australia and began 2005 by performing at two concert events held by the annual Sydney Festival—Jazz in the Domain and Jazz in Parramatta Park. In February, Lang began a national tour with Ash Grunwald for Triple J radio. Named after the station's lone blues and roots program, the "Roots 'n All" tour saw these two artists travel the country together, joined by numerous special guests along the way.

Lang also featured in several tracks on Last Train Home's *Bound Away* (2005). Between June and August, he was a key participant in the ABC Blues Festival, hosting the "Roots 'n All" program and contributing a reinterpretation of Blind Willie Johnson's 'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time' to *The dig Australian Blues Project* compilation (Various, 2005a). This track also appears on his subsequent studio album, the ARIA nominated *You Have to Dig Deep to Bury Daddy* (2005b). As with his previous studio release, this album is co-produced by with Tim Hall and interspersed with several instrumentals.[21] However, breaking with the pattern of his adjacent releases, this record features three reinterpretations and two solo performances.[22] Furthermore, Lang gives the impression that he is experimenting with his musical approach, not just with samples and instruments (i.e. drums, percussion, harmonium, ukulele, banjo and cumbus[23]), but also with mixing and recording techniques. This is most evident on his reinterpretation of 'In My Time of Dying' where the vocals are recorded through a guitar pick-up and positioned uncharacteristically low in the mix. Consequently, the main concern of *You Have to Dig Deep...* appears to be the conscious construction of sound-scapes with a recurring theme and/or mood, as many of the songs achieve a dark feel via the application of dissonance and sound effects. Mixed in with his occasional borrowings of Celtic finger-picking, Eastern modes and Indian effects, the album's blues-influence is evident in more than just the use of slide guitar and blues tonality. This is often displayed through the use of stanzaic lyric patterns and intertwining vocal-instrumental melodies.

Approximately fifteen years into his solo career, Lang released a fifteen-track "best of" album titled *Prepare Me Well: An introduction to Jeff Lang* (2006b). Though largely directed towards the American market as an "introduction", the Australian version of the album features alternate recordings of the titles on the track list in addition to a DVD containing an interview, film clips and live footage.[24] The collaboration with Chris Whitley,

Dislocation Blues (2006), soon followed, though it was not released until after Whitley sadly passed away. With Cummerford and Davies providing backing once again, the album is not as blues-oriented as the title suggests despite drawing some inspiration from the genre in terms of instrumentation (e.g. resonator guitars), tonality (e.g. bottleneck guitar and lap steel) and repertoire (e.g. the blues standard 'Stagger Lee'). Further to the track list, Lang and Whitley record two Bob Dylan reinterpretations alongside their own originals and co-compositions. Lang also draws on this Dylan influence on his latest studio album, *Half Seas Over* (2008) in his reinterpretation of 'The House Carpenter'. Conveniently, this release demonstrates the variety of musical approaches Lang has routinely drawn upon over the years. He achieves this here in that he covers several compositional tactics (i.e. original material, co-written material and reinterpretations), incorporates instrumental pieces (i.e. 'The Vaults of Lattanzio'), draws inspiration from a range of musical genres (e.g. world, folk and blues), experiments with sounds and guitar tunings, and utilises a wide range of instruments.[25] The exception to this argument though is that additional accompaniment is essentially limited to Grant Cummerford on playing a variety of bass instruments, with Alison Ferrier (fiddle) and a collection of backing vocalists providing further backing on the final track, 'Newman Town'.

Though labelling him a blues artist would be a disservice in attempting to aptly describe the combination of influences and ideas incorporated into his music, blues music undoubtedly represents a significant source of inspiration in both his efforts to reinterpret recordings from the past and to amalgamate musical elements into his own compositions.

Jeff Lang, a blues artist?

> *I've always felt really strange about it because I've always been described as a blues artist, but I've never really felt like I've set out… to actually make blues records. I mean it's definitely something that I've really been influenced by… and it's in there, but it's mixed in with a whole lot of other stuff.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

After having already examined two Australian bands that have clearly displayed intent to base their performance and musical career on the principles and influence of blues music, Jeff Lang's classification as a blues artist appears to be less concrete. While he admits to the significant influence of blues and its resonance in his approach to music, there are many other musics that exert influence his compositions and playing style. Regarding blues specifically, this inspiration has been derived from artists such as Blind Willie Johnson, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers, Son House, R.L. Burnside, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf—most of whom Lang has reinterpreted. Similarly, he has also been influenced by and recorded reinterpretations of numerous blues-influenced compositions by Ry Cooder, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones and Tom Waits. However, Lang also has a deep interest in folk music. Not simply limited to artists like Dock Boggs and Richard Thompson, this fascination stretches back to the English, Scottish and Irish ballads of the twentieth century and earlier. Further to this rich tapestry of sounds, particularly when playing melodic lines on lap steel, Lang often imagines the style of another artist and attempts to mimic the phrasing of their instrument (ibid). This grouping includes noted session musician and lap steel guitarist David Lindley,[26] jazz trumpeter Miles Davis and uilleann pipes player Willie Clancy.[27]

Thinking about the classification of blues artists, while some may conjure Bessie Smith, others George Thorogood or Stevie Ray Vaughan, Lang immediately thinks of the early Mississippi-based blues artists recorded in the 1920s and 1930s including Son House,

Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson and Skip James (ibid). These are closely followed by a selection of artists from gospel-blues (i.e. Mississippi Fred McDowell, Blind Willie Johnson and Reverend Gary Davis), Piedmont ragtime-blues (i.e. Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Bo Carter and Blind Willie McTell), Chicago electric blues (i.e. Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter) as well as a couple of personal favourites (i.e. Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Robert Pete Williams and Bukka White). Though Lang's own designation as a blues artist lingers, his discomfort stems from his musical intentions and his respect towards past and present performers—carriers of the flame—who he sees as the "real" blues artists. Despite this perspective, Lang admits that assessments on whom or what constitutes as legitimate blues are highly contestable and different for everyone concerned.

Confused by the "blues artist" title himself, Lang attributes his inclusion to an abundant usage of slide guitar:

> *It's kind of baffling. I guess it's mostly been because, as soon as you've got slide guitar, most of the slide guitar feature in the stores would be in the blues section. So people immediately think that what you do is blues music… It could be worse. I love that music so it's really actually very flattering, albeit misleading.*—Jeff Lang (ibid)

Although he happily acknowledges the significant influence of blues music in his own recordings, Lang is adamant that he has never set out to make a blues album. For him, the recording process is less about musical taxonomy and more about honesty and personal expression. However, due to the manner in which he has been promoted on blues radio shows, in blues venues and at blues festivals, Lang has received criticism throughout his career regarding his eligibility as a bluesman:

> *People… through my career have gone, 'God damn it! This is what passes as blues in Australia? This isn't blues music. They should listen to real blues music if they want to hear blues music. What's wrong with these fans? They're idiots! They think that's blues music? Bah humbug!' No, I'm not trying to sell myself as a blues guy at all and I'm not going out there with a funny little hat and trying to sound like I'm from a shack in Mississippi in 1936. It would be silly.*—Jeff Lang (ibid)

Though there is certainly an element of blues to Lang's music, perhaps his style is too eclectic to be solely considered as blues. This appears to explain the origin of the "blues and roots" phrase, as there has been a strong trend since the early 1990s—not just in Australia—where artists have combined blues with a range of other "roots music" influences (folk, jazz, country, soul, reggae, world, bluegrass, etc.) in the development of their own sound (Rosenberg, 1993: 21; Hall, 2003: 87). In turn, this movement has produced a reawakened interest in roots music whereby it is now frequently viewed as a non-commercial alternative to other forms of popular music (Davis, F., 1995: 126; Ward, 2001: np). Accordingly, most Australian artists who fall into the "blues and roots" category are also independent musicians—that is, they release their own material themselves (often with assistance from a distributor like MGM) rather than through a major label record deal—including The Beautiful Girls, John Butler, Mia Dyson, Ash Grunwald, Mick Hart, Jeff Lang, Lior and The Waifs. Another significant part of the current blues revival in Australia (under the guise of blues and roots) has been the increasing popularity of the lap steel guitar. Most likely catalysed by the limited success of Ben Harper in European and North American markets in the 1990s (Evans, D., 2001b: 24), local exponents of the instrument now include Butler, Dyson, Grunwald, Hart, Xavier Rudd and, of course, Jeff Lang. In addition to the lap steel, Lang has played a pivotal role in introducing an amplified foot stomp—commonly referred to as a "stompbox"—into the repertoire of solo blues and roots performers such as Butler, Grunwald and Rudd.[28]

In Australia, it is likely that the term "blues and roots" has been employed and perpetuated as a consequence of the success of Byron Bay's annual East Coast International Blues and Roots Music Festival. Founded in 1990, it prompted a proliferation of blues-based festivals in the years to follow including Blues at Bridgetown (1993-present), Brisbane Blues Festival (1993-present), Thredbo Blues Festival (1995-present), Bruthen Blues and Arts

Festival (formerly Bruthen Blues Bash, 1996-present), The Great Southern Blues and Rockabilly Festival (1996-present), Australian Blues Music Festival (1997-present) and Blues on Broadbeach (2002-present). In 1999, the prevalence of this terminology saw the ARIA Awards recognise its significance by formulating a category for the Best Blues and Roots Album. While this may not acknowledge whether or not this country has a distinctly Australian blues tradition, Lang believes there is such a style of music, even if he does not consider himself to be a significant part of it:

> *I think there's several strains to it. In an overt way, people like Matt Taylor and Phil Manning have definitely... set out to have a very Australian blues form. He's* [Taylor's] *very much into writing songs and performing as a blues performer, but still sounding Australian... They* [Taylor and Manning] *had an album named* Oz Blues... *It was very much a statement, a manifesto in a sense. 'This is what we do. It's very much blues music in the sense that you will hear a direct line from Muddy Waters, you will. But at the same time it will be Australian—we're writing about Australian things—and there's no reason why we can't do that.'*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

In Lang's opinion, there are numerous artists that represent the formation and continuation of an Australian version of this imported musical idiom. For him, this tradition begins with bands like Chain in the late 1960s and continues to thrive today among artists like Chain (specifically Matt Taylor and Phil Manning), the Backsliders, Matt Walker, Collard Greens and Gravy, Hat Fitz, Skip Sail and Ash Grunwald—many of whom hail from the Melbourne music scene. Though he finds it difficult to describe exactly the aspects that make these artists and their music "Australian blues", the general explanation appears to be that they are musicians living and working in Australia who are performing music in their own style with a significant influence from the early African-American blues artists and/or the early white American blues-influenced artists. This style often includes vocal accents that are recognisably Australian.

For example, while Hat Fitz (a.k.a. Darren Robert Fitzpatrick) is influenced by and regularly performs reinterpretations of songs from Bukka White, Blind Willie Johnson, Son House, R.L. Burnside, Leadbelly and Skip James, this is done alongside original material written and performed in a similar style. Based in Cooroy, Queensland (north-west of Maroochydore), Hat Fitz brings his own personality and surroundings into his arrangements and performance persona. Listening to his recordings, the kind of spontaneous ingenuity associated with living in a rural Queensland location can be heard in his arrangements, which frequently include the washboards, jug, bush bass, singing saw and diddley bow. Furthermore, his characteristic deep raspy vocal and distinctive fast-paced finger-picked and slide guitar are additional markers of his particular sound and approach towards the blues idiom. Fitz himself seems to agree with Lang's assessment:

> *All of the players I play with, whether it be… Collard Greens and Gravy and Muddy Puddles, I've got to know them on a good personal mates basis and you get to know their personality off the stage and then you see the way they play and it's their personality coming out. Whether it's with all music I don't know. But in this particular so-called "blues" scene, that's what I see.*—Hat Fitz (Fitzpatrick, 2005)

Regardless of whether or not Lang considers himself to be a blues artist or part of the Australian blues tradition, the same theory applies. Based in Geelong, Lang is strongly influenced by the blues genre yet he sings with an identifiably Australian accent about Australian places.[29] He incorporates blues tonality and improvisation—particularly when playing live—into his melodies and plays both bottleneck slide and lap steel guitar on Australian-made instruments.[30] Regarding lyrics and structure, many of his songs follow the basic formal constraints of a typical blues composition. Instead of alternating between verses and choruses, there are at least nineteen tracks from his recorded catalogue that are built from repetitions of a single harmonic pattern (Brown, 1997: 161),[31] five of which are variations of the twelve-bar blues progression.[32] Though Lang has never really recorded a straight twelve-

bar blues song of his own, he has reinterpreted several others including 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia' (Hound Dog Taylor), 'Call Letter Blues' (Bob Dylan) and 'Somebody's Gonna Get Their Head Kicked in Tonight' (Jeremy Spencer). Above all, though, he remains an avid fan of blues music and strives to draw muse from it in any which way possible:

> *It's just inspiring. To me, it's just another one of those great musical forms; like I hear great jazz music and I hear great folk music or great rock-and-roll music. It's just inspiring and I just get such a lift from it. It's music I can listen to anytime; I don't need a reason to go back... There's something about it that uplifts me every time.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

Canonisation and reinterpretation

Throughout his career, Lang has reinterpreted numerous songs, many of which can be positioned into groups as they are written and/or recorded by the same artist. From this perspective it can then be said that he is reinterpreting particular artists as much as he is particular songs. For instance, the artists that Lang has reinterpreted the most (through recordings) include Blind Willie Johnson, Bob Dylan and Tom Waits—all of whom have been largely influenced by blues music.[33] Other favourite blues artists whose work he has reinterpreted include Hound Dog Taylor, Jimi Hendrix, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Mississippi Fred McDowell and R.L. Burnside. The five songs discussed below represent five different African-American artists who have composed songs within the blues idiom.[34] Finally, as is the case with Matt Taylor and Dominic Turner, Lang too exhibits a strong distinction in vocal timbre when compared to these canonised artists. This is evident in each of the analysed tracks below as Lang's vocal delivery is habitually characterised by his Australian annunciation of words and is typically performed at higher pitches than most African-American blues artists. Here Lang intentionally shies away from being directly imitative and focuses in on his own strengths as a vocalist:

Particularly with the blues stuff, I'm not going to sound like, or even try and sound overtly like, any of these guys whose voices I really love. Sing like Howlin' Wolf? Forget about it! I'm not going to try and sound like that, that'd be silly. As much as I would like to be able to make that noise when I open my mouth, it's just not going to happen.—Jeff Lang (ibid)

'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia'

Although Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers were not the first artist to record this piece, their adaptations of this song are indeed responsible for inspiring other musicians such as Jeff Lang (1996) and Gov't Mule (1998) to record their own reinterpretations. Prior to Taylor's first recording in the 1970s, this track was recorded by three artists in 1964—the year of its initial release. Written by Johnny Mae Matthews and Jake Hammonds Jr., 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia' was originally recorded by Timmy Shaw and swiftly followed by reinterpretations from The Searchers and The Animals, the latter being titled 'Gonna Send You Back to Walker' (see The Originals website). Appearing on *Live at the Vineyard* (1996), part of the appeal for Lang in performing this track was the capacity for improvisation allowed by its twelve-bar blues structure. Being that this is the last track on an album of a live performance, this "jamming" element is not particularly surprising considering that several of Lang's releases feature reinterpretations at their conclusion in which extra musicians are called upon to join in to create a joyous atmosphere.[35] Interestingly, a comparative analysis between Taylor's several recordings of this track and the live collaboration offered by Lang and Chris Finnen reveals the presence of musical material associated with another Taylor song, 'Give Me Back My Wig'. In regards to Taylor's own repertoire, 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia' and 'Give Me Back My Wig' share many common core elements (e.g. twelve-bar progression with refrain, identical instrumental accompaniment and lyric stanzas) and, therefore, may be considered to be part of the same blues core.

The lyrical changes enacted by Lang, intentional or otherwise, seem to reflect some level of awareness of this shared history as he combines stanzas from the two aforementioned pieces recorded by Taylor in this reinterpretation. To begin with, Taylor's renditions of both 'Gonna Send…' reflect a tendency to select and employ random stanzas as each recording progresses. Unlike his recordings of 'Give Me Back…', there is no consistency in Taylor's stanza ordering in any manifestation of 'Gonna Send…' apart from the opening strophe, which introduces the song name and refrain designated to these recordings. Although Lang has only recorded one reinterpretation of 'Gonna Send…', it is clear that he adopts a similar approach to his performance of this song as his selection, repetition and ordering of lyric stanzas is not consistent with any single Taylor recording. Moreover, the wording of the stanzas utilised by Lang exhibit no signs of direct imitation or rote rehearsal due to his many readjustments and garbled lines. For instance, while Lang commences the track with the customary opening stanza from 'Gonna Send…', his second stanza correlates with the second stanza featured in each Taylor's incarnations of 'Give Me Back…'. In addition to this stanza not appearing in any renditions of 'Gonna Send…' recorded by Taylor, Lang changes the second line from "When I get down there I swear, nine-ninety-nine" to "When I get down there you're going to be mine, mine, mine". Lang's third stanza then returns to one of Taylor's 'Gonna Send…' strophes, which is also repeated following a new solo passage from Finnen. Though the rhyming couplet inherent in Taylor's recording is maintained, the second line of this lyric stanza is also altered in each of Lang's two utterances:

Hound Dog Taylor, 1972
Yes I know I love you woman, just can't help myself
Then you're going crazy over, somebody else

Jeff Lang, 1996
And you know I love you baby, I just can't help a-myself
I'm going to take that love I give and give it to somebody else…

Well you know I love you baby, I just can't help a-myself
You take my love I give, you give it to somebody else…

After a series of new instrumental and solo passages occupying the middle portion of the track, and prior to concluding the performance with a variation on the opening strophe, Lang's penultimate stanza is one that consistently features in Taylor's renditions of both 'Gonna Send…' and 'Give Me Back…'. Given this combination of lyrical alterations, the incarnation that bears closest resemblance to Lang's live reinterpretation—due to three common lyric stanzas—is, coincidentally, Taylor's 1972 live recording of 'Gonna Send…'.

Further adding to these changes, Lang applies this seemingly random combination of pre-existing stanzas from Taylor's two different songs to both a new vocal melody and a modified instrumental accompaniment. In addition to being performed at a much faster tempo, Lang only incorporates elements of the original finger-picked guitar riff played by Taylor sparingly throughout the song. The instrumentation in this reinterpretation also differs from Taylor's typical three-piece accompaniment consisting of drums and two electric guitars (one playing treble notes, the other bass notes). With bass guitar and drums providing the backing to the piece and additional support from Kerryn Tolhurst on lap steel, Finnen and Lang complete the accompaniment with their respective electric and amplified-resonator guitars. Even though more instruments are utilised by Lang's recording, his usage of the recorded space does not present any dramatic differences so as to warrant inclusion among the fourteen reinterpretive measures registered by this track. Other alterations collected through by analysis, however, include the three different guitar timbres exhibited throughout—often with assistance from sound effects such as distortion—and the noticeable changes in dynamics. Though this is generally occurs during the solo and instrumental

passages whereby one or more instrumentalists drop-out of the mix for a period of the song, it is most noticeable during Lang's final solo in which the volume of each instrument steady increases once more as the track builds to its ultimate climax at the end of the final stanza.

'Georgia Women'

Unlike most of the tracks analysed in this thesis, 'Georgia Women' appears relatively original in that it was only recorded for the first time in 1997 by its composer, R.L. Burnside. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it seems as though the reinterpretation performed by Lang and Hat Fitz on their *The Silverbacks* album (1999) is one of the very few recordings not by the original author. Though he was recorded in 1967 by folklorist George Mitchell, Burnside had been overlooked as a recording artist for the majority of his life.[36] It was not until the 1990s that he gained large scale exposure, first with his appearance in the documentary *Deep Blues* (1991)—a project conducted by director Robert Mugge, author Robert Palmer, and musician Dave Stewart (guitarist for the Eurhythmics). The years that followed saw his profile increase both nationally and internationally through various tours, his association with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion,[37] the albums released by Fat Possum Records (including his remixed recordings),[38] and his appearance in the documentary *You See Me Laughin'* (2003). Born in Lafayette County, Mississippi in 1926, Burnside learned to play guitar from his neighbour, the more renowned Mississippi Fred McDowell (Palmer, 2002: 10). Burnside settled in Holly Springs, in the north Mississippi hill country, and became a prominent exponent of the local music scene that thrived in the area's juke joints and house parties. Though often confused with the Mississippi Delta and the type of blues it has engendered, the north Mississippi hill country has a history and culture of its own,[39] one that has also produced an identifiably distinctive brand of blues.[40] Firstly, the vast majority of arrangements are characterised by electric guitar and the omission of the bass.[41] Another

difference is that instead of conforming to specific chordal patterns like the twelve-bar blues form, this blues style relies significantly on repeated riffs being played over the top of "bourdon" tones.[42] Here the fundamental reference tone (or tonic) remains the same for the duration of the piece without any notion of change between different degrees of a scale. This musical element characterises much of Burnside's recorded catalogue, including this specific example. Performed with the regular backing of Kenny Brown (guitar) and his grandson Cedric Burnside (drums), Burnside's 'Georgia Women' is an up-beat number with two distinctive and intertwining guitar riffs that are repeated throughout: one is descending and plays the lower notes; the other incorporates higher notes and is split in two like a call-and-response melody.[43] Though it is difficult to ascertain which guitarist is playing which riff, it is likely that the two slide guitar solos and the low descending riff are provided by Burnside.[44] These solos are performed after the first three lyric stanzas and prior to the conclusion of the song.

Continuing in the same vein as Burnside, the Lang and Fitz recording is also recorded with a two-guitars-and-drums accompaniment and replicates the same intertwining riffs. One big difference between the two recordings, however, is that the separate guitar parts are much easier to identify in this reinterpretation. Though this is largely due to the more obvious timbre difference between the two guitars, this point is also emphasised through spatial positioning as, for the entire duration of *The Silverbacks*, all of Fitz's instruments are positioned in the right side of the mix while all of Lang's instruments are located in the left. Moreover, the two riffs are initially separated, with Fitz beginning by playing the higher riff, making a slight change to the instrumental accompaniment by incorporating the final three notes from the lower riff so that the two parts intertwine. Here Fitz begins the track with two cycles of the higher pitched riff, followed by Lang with the lower riff and Itchy on drums. It is also worth mentioning that Lang occasionally switches to the higher pitched riff (or

variations of it) for portions of the song, namely the instrumental passages between each lyric stanza, during Fitz's solo passage and after Lang's solo passage. Regarding both bottleneck slide solo passages, these are performed in call-and-response fashion with Fitz commanding the first and Lang, the second. Meanwhile, even though the musical content of the solo passages is different to those in Burnside's recording, they are identically positioned in the song's structure and played at a similar tempo.

Another distinction is that Lang and Fitz build upon the instrumentation by performing the vocals together simultaneously, with Fitz adding a reprise of last line to each stanza. Fitz also contributes a banter-like monologue during Lang's solo, as if to encourage him to play harder. Though the vocal melody and lyrics are virtually identical to Burnside's, the duet provide an interesting contrast in vocal deliveries with Lang's clear tone and Fitz's raspy timbre—an element not present in the original. What is also particularly interestingly about this example is that it displays how Lang's approach towards the reinterpretation process is rarely governed by premeditated decisions regarding a specific direction or method that will make his recording sound different from the original:

> *I'm not going to sound like, or even try and sound overtly like, any of these guys whose voices I really love… So that's already going to remove it quite a bit. And then I just figure there's no point to actually note-for-note slavishly working something out. You may as well just do it as best you remember it and really just go with how the mood takes you. So certain phrases, certain passages just come into your head as you go. Maybe as you hit a certain note on the guitar or see a certain word of the song you can hear it going somewhere else melodically… so you let it do what it's going to do.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

Interestingly though, this example does not prove to produce a reinterpretation that is vastly different from the original as it only registers seven reinterpretive measures. This is chiefly because this re-play adheres to many aspects of the original such as tempo, structure, lyrics, riffs and vocal melody.

'61 Highway'

The lineage of this song is another difficult one to trace, mostly due to the high prevalence of its main piece of lyrical imagery throughout the entire blues genre—Highway 61.[45] This stretch of road holds specific relevance for blues music in that it was the means by which many African-Americans made their way from the Mississippi delta to northern industrial cities like Chicago and St. Louis in the first half of the twentieth century.[46] Roosevelt Sykes was the first to record 'Highway 61 Blues' in 1932, beginning the proliferation of recordings about the famous route for many years to come. While some followed with Sykes' title,[47] other versions went by the names 'Highway 61', '61 Highway', '61 Highway Blues', 'Highway No. 61 Blues', 'Down the Highway', 'I Went Down 61 Highway' and 'Loneliest Road I Know'.[48] Jeff Lang adds to this list with his two recorded reinterpretations, both of which are titled '61 Highway' and attributed to Mississippi Fred McDowell—another exponent of the north Mississippi hill country sound that consists of strong rhythms, droning bass notes and bottleneck slide guitar. The first of these re-plays appears on *Rolling Through This World* (2002) as a collaboration with Bob Brozman (guitars, vocals) and Angus Diggs (drums) and the second as a live solo performance on his subsequent album *No Point Slowing Down* (2003).

Though McDowell has produced several different recordings of '61 Highway' himself under different titles,[49] many things remain essentially similar in each performance including the song's twelve-bar blues variant structure, vocal timbre, vocal melody, tempo, blues tonality and guitar melodies. McDowell typically begins the piece with an on-the-beat rhythm that alternates between the bass and treble notes of the guitar. Though most call-and-response twelve-bar blues forms typically confine their response melodies to the second half of each line, McDowell's slide responses in this song generally start during the caesura and continue underneath the vocals to the end of each line. The main differences occurring

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between the McDowell recordings, however, are in instrumentation and lyrics. McDowell's earlier recordings are limited to acoustic (or resonator) guitar and vocals, while later recordings are performed on electric guitar, one of which also features the backing of bass and drums. One of the most interesting aspects of this "band" recording is the forced marriage of McDowell's characteristic single-chord blues approach to a typical twelve-bar I-IV-V chord progression, often with awkward results. Although Lang also produces both a solo reinterpretation and a band reinterpretation of this track, these are still dramatically different from McDowell's solo and band recordings respectively. Moreover, unlike McDowell, Lang's first recording of '61 Highway' occurs in a band setting. This initial reinterpretation with Brozman and Diggs exhibits variation primarily through instrumental accompaniment, rhythm, melody and musical structure. A great deal of this change resides in the fact that the trio did not originally set out to reinterpret this song:

> *they were just checking the sound of Angus' drums… And he* [Diggs] *just started this groove. Me and Bob are sitting there with our instruments on our laps and we were like, 'Ah, that sounds really good.' So immediately I just started fooling around with a little riff and Bob's playing… and now it's sounding really good and I thought, 'Wow, we should do something with this first up. Okay, what can I sing?' Again, it's a song I remember, a good one-chord, droning kind of song.*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

In accordance with this approach, this reinterpretation begins with both a much stronger drum beat and very different accompanying riff than those in McDowell's recordings. The remainder of the accompaniment is occupied by Lang's bottleneck resonator (mostly low-end) positioned in the right speaker and Brozman's Hawaiian lap guitar (mostly high-end) positioned in the left speaker—neither of which possesses as harsh a timbre as McDowell's electric slide.[50] Here the virtuosity of both guitarists is on display with plenty of rapid melodies, harmonics and other tricks such as Brozman acoustically mimicking a wah-wah pedal with his tone bar over the end of the strings—a standard "trick" from his repertoire.

Further to this instrumentation is the enhanced utilisation of the recorded space, the incremental ebb and flow of dynamics throughout the piece as well as the new instrumental passages that also incorporate a degree of soloing from each guitarist.

Keeping in mind the impromptu nature of this first reinterpretation, it is likely that the changes in musical structure and lyrics are due—at least in part—to Lang's imprecise memory of the song. Although McDowell himself does not use a static combination of stanzas across his several recordings of this song, the combinations used by Lang in each of his reinterpretations do not precisely correspond with any single McDowell recording of '61 Highway'. Lang's combinations instead appear to reference at least two previous recordings of the track in his own reinterpretations which omit, re-order, garble and readjust several words, lines and stanzas of McDowell's lyrics. In relation to the garbling and readjustments, Lang registers at least one difference in each of the four stanzas he borrows from McDowell's recordings, further indicating a flexible approach to the lyrics in this reinterpretation. Adding to these changes, Lang's solo reinterpretation simultaneously introduces a seemingly generic blues stanza not present in any of McDowell's recordings (i.e. "Well I'm going I'm going, to where I just don't know/I just can't stay around here, the people gonna kill me sure"). Further to the argument of imprecise recollection, Lang follows this strophe with a new solo passage—possibly allowing for time to regroup his thoughts—and resumes singing the lyrics in the same order as his previous recording of the song with Brozman and Diggs. It is, therefore, likely that this couplet resulted from improvisation due to an inability to remember the song lyrics at that particular point in Lang's solo performance. On another note, Lang's flexible positioning of the main solo/instrumental passage—as opposed to McDowell's recordings where it consistent appears after the third stanza—is more likely an aesthetic decision regarding the division of the lyric stanzas into reasonably equal

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portions, much in the same way that McDowell's slide solo in the band recording equally divides his six lyric stanzas.

Apart from having been recorded in front of a live audience, there are also several differences between the respective instrumental accompaniments on McDowell's recordings and Lang's solo reinterpretation. Firstly, Lang begins with a new sparse instrumental passage free of any trace of regular meter, interspersing samples of the riff from his previous recording with Brozman and Diggs between *a Capella* singing of the first lyric stanza. Conveniently, the vocals for this piece are also based around the differing melody adopted by Lang in his previous "band" reinterpretation. Though McDowell keeps the dynamics of his recordings virtually the same all the way through each of his recordings, Lang expands and contracts the dynamics in this reinterpretation in terms of instrumentation, density of musical content and volume. Here Lang's varied utilisation of volume with all three instruments (i.e. vocals, guitar and stompbox) also works to establish dissimilarities between how he and McDowell occupy the recorded space. Further to the dynamics though, key points of change can be heard at the end of the first stanza where Lang's stompbox enters simultaneously providing both the beat and a consistent meter, as well as at during the final line of both the fourth and fifth stanzas where the guitar is removed from the mix. Other alterations come in the form of unassisted sound effects generated by Lang throughout the track including harmonics, percussive hits on the guitar and playing the strings behind the bottleneck slide.

'Hellhound on My Trail'

Similar to his approach on '61 Highway', Lang has recorded two reinterpretations of 'Hellhound On My Trail' that involve Johnson's lyrics being set to both a new instrumental accompaniment and new vocal melodies on each occasion. Each of these recordings is a collaboration with another performer, with both reinterpretations also featuring as bonus

tracks his albums: the first on the limited edition version of *Whatever Makes You Happy* (2004) and the second as one of two unlisted tracks at the end of *Dislocation Blues* (2006). Recorded by Robert Johnson in 1937 and inducted into Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1983, this song has been reinterpreted by many occasions by several prominent blues artists including Big Joe Williams (1966), Fleetwood Mac (1968), John Hammond Jr. (1970) as 'Hellhound Blues', Alexis Korner (1972), the Backsliders (1987 and 1991), Cassandra Wilson (1993), Rory Block (1997), Peter Green Splinter Group (2000), Eric Clapton (2004) and Rory Block (2006).[51] While clearly not a typical blues progression, the structure of this song is unmistakably derived from the twelve-bar blues form in that it is based on a repeated three-line stanza with an AAB rhyming scheme. Interestingly, the twelve-bar blues variation in this particular song appears to be innovated by Skip James who in 1931 employed it in his recordings of 'Devil Got My Woman' and 'Yola My Blues Away'. As identified by Wald (2004: 171-2), Johnson's self-accompanied finger-picked recording is characterised by a repetitive guitar arrangement and a heavily strained vocal, which one could assume to be an attempt to replicate the intensity of James' vocal delivery. Further to the origins of this blues core, Lang's choice of reinterpretation here is particularly relevant in that it simultaneously references two major influences on his compositional and playing style—James and Johnson.[52]

Although each of Lang's two recordings of 'Hellhound On My Trail' share nine of the same reinterpretive measures, the outcomes of these reinterpretations are significantly dissimilar. Regarding the changes to instrumental accompaniment, Lang plays a different guitar in each recording by adopting a dual-voice amplified bottleneck guitar and acoustic lap steel in the first and second reinterpretations respectively. Moreover, his first reinterpretation is a live performance with Angus Diggs (drums) and John Butler (amplified-acoustic twelve-string guitar) while the second reinterpretation is a duet with Chris Whitley (vocals and

resonator guitar). Further to these differences in context, rather than being presented as a singular track, the live reinterpretation is performed as an improvised tangent during a rendition of one of his own original compositions, 'Too Easy to Kill'. Interestingly, Lang often adopts an improvisational attitude to his live reinterpretations in preference to a directly imitative or rehearsed approach:

> *I'll draw a bit of a blank… between songs thinking, 'I wonder what the right song to do now would be?' And then it might just hit you. 'It'll be really good fun to try that song. Would I remember the words to that?'—that's usually the main crux of it… It's not like 'Oh, I'll learn that and make sure I get it all just right.' It's usually much more of a bastardised approach of, just in the spur of the moment, going 'Yeah, I'll pull that one out.'*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

Though he may not have necessarily begun this performance of 'Too Easy to Kill' with the intention of drifting into a "spur-of-the-moment" reinterpretation of 'Hellhound on My Trail', this recording is an example of Lang's tendency to partake in blues reinterpretations as a result of momentary inspiration. In this particular instance, the reinterpretation occupies the middle portion of the recorded track and is punctuated by solo and instrumental passages either side. Prior to the 'Hellhound…' lyrics, Lang delivers a bottleneck guitar solo with feedback sound effects before the dynamics of the instrumental accompaniment quickly become sparse with all three musicians limiting the volume and density of their playing. This sparseness is further emphasised by the spatial positioning adopted in this track whereby Lang's vocal calls in the centre of the mix are met with his own guitar response melodies from the left speaker. Meanwhile, Butler occasionally interjects with soft bottleneck slides in the right speaker as Diggs routinely drops in and out of the back spectrum of the mix with a variety of beats and percussive flourishes. In contrast to Johnson's piece, although there is a faint constant groove implied here through Lang's vocals and Diggs' accents, the accompaniment throughout the 'Hellhound…' portion of Lang's live reinterpretation appears to be largely improvised and freeform.

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This is not so much the case with the duet reinterpretation as although the accompaniment allows for ample improvisation to occur between both Lang and Whitley, the rhythm—albeit different to that in Johnson's recording—is consistent due to a beat which is possibly provided by Lang's stompbox. Here the two respective guitar parts consistently intertwine in an adhoc and dynamic manner, regularly taking turns at occupying the front of the mix. This aspect is most obvious during Lang's new mid-song solo passage as well as both the opening and closing instrumental passages. Keeping with the call-and-response nature of many blues compositions, Whitley and Lang also alternate the singing role in this recording, taking responsibility for the odd-numbered and even-numbered stanzas respectively. Interestingly, although every stanza in each of the two Lang reinterpretations is subject to changes like garbled words, adjustments to the syntax and deleted repetitions of lines in model recording, the duet with Whitley draws on all four Johnson stanzas in their original order. In contrast, though keeping with the same order, the live track omits the final stanza and changes the narrative voice of the third stanza lyrics from second person ("You sprinkled hot foot powder") to third person ("She sprinkled hot foot powder"). Despite these differences, both of Lang's reinterpretations function partway between a re-play and a sampled piece as the main connection to the reinterpretive model is signified solely by the lyrics.

'In My Time of Dying'

Originally recorded by Blind Willie Johnson as 'Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed' (1927), this song has since branched off into several different incarnations under numerous titles (Rypens, 1996: 206).[53] These include Charley Patton's 'Jesus Is a Dying Bed Maker' (1929),[54] Josh White's 'Jesus Gonna Make Up My Dying Bed' (1933),[55] Dock Reed's 'Jesus Going to Make Up My Dying Bed' (1950), Bob Dylan's 'In My Time of Dyin'' (1962), John

Sebastian's 'Well, Well, Well' (1971),[56] and Roebuck 'Pops' Staples' 'Jesus Is Going To Make Up (My Dying Bed)' (1994). Although very little is known about Blind Willie Johnson, it is likely that his recording was in some way derived from a hymn of sorts as is the case with several other songs from his catalogue. These titles include 'Dark Was the Night (Cold Was the Ground)', 'If I Had My Way (I'd Tear the Building Down)' and 'Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning'—each of which has been reinterpreted numerous times over. As with the many reinterpretations that have crystallised since, Johnson's recording is built from repetitions of a single harmonic pattern or stanza of lyrics. Despite that it is not strictly a blues piece—as is the case with many of Lang's compositions—'Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed' follows the basic formal constraints of a typical blues composition in that it refrains from alternating between verses and choruses (Brown, 1997: 161).

Though he was not the first to record this song, it is likely that Josh White's various incarnations of this track under differing titles[57] function as the primary sources for the majority of subsequent reinterpretations. This is possibly due to his clear annunciation of a more completed set of lyrics when compared to recordings from Johnson and Patton. Interestingly, Schneider (2001: 375-6) argues that Johnson's earlier recording is a "distant variant… linked only by the title phrase". However, this is clearly incorrect as it is apparent that White was influenced by Johnson to some degree due to his repeated recorded reinterpretations of the track 'Motherless Children'. Moreover, in his first recording of this song, White utilises portions of two of the stanzas that appear in Johnson's track. Despite dropping Johnson's first stanza in subsequent recordings, White consistently maintains the use of Johnson's third stanza as his own opening strophe. However, this is not without some noticeable changes to the lyrics:

Blind Willie Johnson, 1927
Late on Friday evening, people march and mourn
Jesus said to his friends, 'God's folks come and carry my mother home'
… dying will be easy, I…
… dying will be easy
… dying will be easy
Jesus gonna make up my…

Josh White, 1933
Now in the time of dying, I don't want nobody to mourn
All I want my friends to do, come and fold my dying arms
Well, well, well, so I can die easy
Well, well, well…
Well, well, well…
Jesus going to make up my dying bed

In addition to adopting the line "In the time of dying"—a phrase that eventually achieved dominance over earlier titles—White also fills in some of the lyrical gaps created by Johnson's tendency to substitute words for ostinatos of bottleneck slide. 'In My Time of Dyin'' was subsequently adopted by Bob Dylan as the title for his initial recorded reinterpretation and is the name that is most applied to other reinterpretations of this song.[58] Accordingly, White's 'In My Time of Dying' also appears to be the model recording for Dylan's reinterpretation as, unlike other incarnations offered by White, it features all three of the stanzas employed by Dylan, albeit in a different order. And while Lang's reinterpretation is predominantly instrumental, the one stanza appearing approximately three-quarters of the way into the track most resembles Dylan's own reworking of White's opening stanza:

Bob Dylan, 1962
Well in my time of dying, I don't want nobody to mourn
All I want for you to do is take my body home
Well, well, well, so I can die easy
Well, well, well…
Well, well, well, so I can die easy
Jesus going to make up, Jesus going to make up
Jesus going make up my dying bed

Jeff Lang, 2005
In my time of dying, don't want nobody to moan
All I want for you to do is take my body home
Well, well well, so I can die easy
Well, well, well…
Well, well, well, so I can die easy
Jesus going to make up, Jesus going to make up
Jesus going to make up my dying bed

Though it is probable that Lang is familiar with the incarnations associated with both White and (especially) Johnson, this analysis suggests that Dylan's recording is most responsible for the lyrical content employed by Lang on this occasion. Consequently, Lang's decision to reinterpret this song on *You Have to Dig Deep to Bury Daddy* (2005b)—with assistance from Chris Finnen (percussion)—further confirms both his personal interest in gospel blues as well as his influential debt to Johnson and Dylan. Lang corroborates this again with his reinterpretation of Johnson's 'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time' on the same album as well as his recordings of Dylan's 'When I Paint My Masterpiece' and 'Changing of the Guard' on his following album, *Dislocation Blues* (2006). Coincidentally, these three reinterpretations recorded by Lang also follow the same pattern as his adaptation of 'In My Time of Dying' in that they are all collaborations: 'Motherless Children…' with Ian Collard and Anthony Shorte (of Collard Greens and Gravy), and; 'When I Paint…' and 'Changing of the Guard' with Chris Whitley.

Taking Dylan's recording as the model for which Lang directly bases his reinterpretation upon, it is also important to, at the very least, acknowledge Dylan's debt to White's 'In My Time of Dying'. Not only does Dylan draw on this piece for his selection of lyric stanzas, he also uses this recording—or, for that matter, any of the other incarnations recorded by White—as the source of inspiration for the accompanying guitar part. This stipulation is important as Lang seizes upon the descending ostinato that repeatedly occurs during the introduction in Dylan's 'In My Time of Dyin'', and samples it as the main riff for

his accompaniment—much in the same way that Cream devised the main riff for their reinterpretation of Robert Johnson's 'Cross Road Blues' (Clapton, 1990: 22-3; Headlam, 1997: 69-72). This ostinato, however, is also present in the introductions of White's 'Jesus Gonna Make Up My Dying Bed', 'Well, Well, Well' and 'In My Time of Dying'. Therefore, based on these findings, White's influence upon Lang's recording, however unintended, is indirect and mediated through Dylan.

Further to the differences inherent in the instrumental accompaniment when compared to both White's and Dylan's track of the same name, Lang's ostinato-based riff subsequently alters the rhythm of the entire piece while also being delivered at a much faster tempo. Such dissimilarity with each of the two aforementioned influential tracks is emphasised again as Lang shuns the self-accompanied acoustic guitarist approach and adopts instrumentation that incorporates percussion and numerous overdubs (i.e. cumbus, lap steel, tenor acoustic guitar, bass lap steel and vocals). Furthermore, these instruments are individually spread out across the spatiality of the recording rather being confined to the centre of the mix. Here the percussion sits at a low volume in the middle, with cumbus and acoustic guitar positioned at the right and left respectively. Electric lap steel enters afterwards—positioned front and centre—as Lang employs it to play a solo passage that incorporates the same vocal melody utilised in the lyric stanza that follows. At the same time, though barely detectable amongst the neighbouring instruments, Lang adds a heavily distorted, bass lap steel to the centre as a means of emphasising the main riff. Following a series of new solo passages (in chronological order: cumbus, tenor acoustic guitar, cumbus and lap steel) and just prior to the addition of Lang's vocals, the dynamics are cut back as all the stringed instruments decrease in volume. Sung through a guitar pick-up, the vocals appear at low volume in the centre of the mix. Following this lone stanza, the accompaniment increases in volume as the main riff enters once more underneath solo passages performed by lap steel and tenor acoustic guitar.

Finally on dynamics, the song draws to its ultimate conclusion as the instruments drop out of the mix on an individual basis (in chronological order: cumbus, tenor acoustic guitar, bass lap steel, percussion and lap steel).

Analytical results

Though blues reinterpretations only account for a small minority of tracks within Jeff Lang's recorded repertoire, this tendency to provide adaptations of previously-recorded blues material has been consistently addressed on his albums and at his live performances throughout his solo career. It is worth noting here that—unlike Chain and the Backsliders—Lang's reinterpretations were not limited to only reinforcing the canonisation of acoustic-based early African-American blues musicians (i.e. Blind Willie Johnson, Josh White, Skip James and Robert Johnson). Surveying the recordings analysed above alone, it is evident that these tracks also celebrate several electric-based African-American artists who recorded during and after the 1960s blues revival (i.e. Hound Dog Taylor, Mississippi Fred McDowell and R.L. Burnside) as well as one white American blues-influenced performer (i.e. Bob Dylan). Moreover, these blues reinterpretations reflect certain tendencies in regards to the contexts that Lang routinely chooses to perform and record such pieces. Firstly, all five of these adaptations involve some form of collaboration with another musician who shares a common interest and influence in blues music (i.e. Chris Finnen, Kerryn Tolhurst, Hat Fitz, Bob Brozman, John Butler and Chris Whitley). Many of these recordings are also performed in a live context, either in front of an audience (i.e. 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia', '61 Highway' and 'Hellhound On My Trail') or in a studio setting without any overdubbed tracks (i.e. 'Georgia Women', '61 Highway' and 'Hellhound On My Trail'). Furthermore, in the two instances where Lang has recorded the same reinterpretation twice under both different collaborative and contextual circumstances (i.e. '61 Highway' and 'Hellhound On My Trail'),

these changes are seen to have a dramatic impact upon the final recorded product. In addition

to these results, every recording of each of these tracks also features at least one new solo

passage performed by Lang, confirming that his approach to blues reinterpretations is just as

much about a personal connection with a particular song and/or artist as it is about having fun

with some fellow musicians:

> *When you pick* [a song to reinterpret] *it's because… you feel like, 'There's room for me here to say something about who I am in some kind of way with this song.' At the time it's probably nothing as deep as that, it's just, 'I like this song, it'd be fun to do it.'*—Jeff Lang (pc, February, 2006a)

In regards to the results produced by this reinterpretive analysis, Lang makes use of

nineteen different measures (out of a possible twenty-three) across the seven recordings of

the above five tracks. As was the case with the Backsliders, Lang's level of creative

engagement is consistently moderately high in that he too averages approximately twelve

reinterpretive measurements per recording—a relatively high result—and employs eleven

different measures in at least four of the five individual tracks. Those measures that are

exercised in every recording of each reinterpretation are:

> 3. (a) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through instrumentation
> 3. (c) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through timbre and/or tonality
> 3. (d) Changing the instrumental accompaniment through assisted and/or unassisted sound effects
> 6. (c) Using a recording as a jumping-off point and adding new solo passages

This is proven to be a consistent approach as Lang also exhibits these four measures of

reinterpretive creativity in his rendition of 'Motherless Children Have a Hard Time' on *The*

dig Australian Blues Project (see chapter three). Furthermore, nine of the eleven different

measures employed in at least four of the five different tracks analysed in this chapter are also

used on Lang's 'Motherless Children...'. These results show an especially strong propensity

and concentrated focus for alterations occurring within the realm of instrumental

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accompaniment—many of which are a result of Lang's intentionally improvisational attitude towards reinterpretation. Another consistent element directly related to this point is his incorporation of lap steel into a creative engagements with a genre that is rarely (if ever) associated with this instrument.

Apart from the employment of an Australian accent, Lang is otherwise not concerned about consciously adapting and packaging previously-recorded blues songs to a contemporary Australian context in any particular way. As song titles indicate, three of the five songs studied in this chapter make specific references to geographical locations in the United States. For Lang, his recontextualisation of this material is more a matter of spontaneity and is dependent upon factors such as who he is playing with, what instruments he has at his immediate disposal and how he is feeling at the time of performance—an approach that he also takes towards reinterpretations of non-blues material as well as his own compositions.

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[1] All the titles of the tracks mentioned in this chapter are reproduced in the upper and lower case formats in which they appear on or inside the cover artwork of the recording package, except where the entire title is either in upper or lower case only. In this case, the title will be standardised with capitals at the beginning of each word. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations attributed to Jeff Lang in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in Sydney on February 17, 2006.

[2] This recording was essentially a "demo" whereby the intension was for him to get work as a sideman or lead guitarist.

[3] See chapter five for more information on this album.

[4] For this recording Lang provides vocals, guitars (acoustic, electric, electric resonator and acoustic lap steel), banjo, and foot stomp. Meanwhile, other musicians appearing on this album include Joe Accaria (various percussion, piano), Les Karski (various percussion, bass, producer), Chris Soole (saxophone), Rob Riley (mandolin) and Phil Manning (acoustic guitar).

[5] In 'Scream', Lang borrows the lyric "killing me by degrees" from Robert Johnson's 'Preachin' Blues'.

[6] Lang has often used the title of this album to describe his own music.

[7] Here Lang (vocals, acoustic and electric guitars) enlisted the assistance of fellow Chain alumni Dirk Du Bois (bass) and Chris Finnen (percussion), with additional support from Adam Dicker (drums) and Kerryn Tolhurst (electric guitar, tiple).

[8] Instead of strumming the guitar strings down the sound hole/saddle end of the guitar and in front of the bottleneck slide, this technique sees the player strumming the strings across the fretboard and behind the bottleneck slide.

[9] This technique sees the player apply a drum-like approach to the guitar via slaps, hits, knocks and the muting of the strings.

[10] The majority of the album is limited to Lang and Finnen playing together until the final three songs ('Scream', 'African Market Place', 'Gonna Send You Back to Georgia') where they are joined by more musicians including Kerryn Tolhurst (lap steel) a bass player as well as a drummer.

[11] These are: *Sell Your Soul* by Psycho Zydeco (1997); *Hold On* by Marco Goldsmith (1997); *Two Roads* by Phil Manning (1998), and; *The Edge of the World* by Dave Steel (1998).

[12] The increase in the number of lap steel songs is also further emphasised by the cover art where the only two pictures of Lang show him playing an electric lap steel and a resonator guitar on his lap.

[13] Here Lang's guitars are recorded two ways simultaneously: either acoustically by microphone and electrically by guitar pick-up, or; via guitar pick-up(s) with two outputs (one for acoustic sound, one for electric). A lead from a pick-up output is then run through a guitar sound effects system (usually distortion and/or tremolo). These two sounds are then mixed together. Lang also employs this approach on several other albums. In regards to replicating this set-up when performing live, Lang often uses guitars that incorporate two outputs. The level of the electric output is controlled by Lang onstage via a volume pedal.

[14] With only one solo performance (i.e. 'Bateman's Bay'), this record involved the recruitment of yet another backing band in Grant "Squire" Cummerford (bass), Ashley Davies (drums), Tolhurst (producer, guitars) and Robyn Habel (backing vocals).

[15] This aspect of Lang's playing has no doubt been greatly influenced by Jimi Hendrix. In fact, Lang even alludes to this on the *Native Dog Creek* album. On 'In a town like this', Lang ends the song with the line, "When I saw her I heard Hendrix", which is then followed by the use of controlled feedback. This is further evidenced in his recording of several Hendrix covers including 'Hear My Train A-Comin'', 'Are You Experienced' and 'Voodoo Child'.

[16] Besides Hat Fitz (vocals, resonator guitars, banjo, ukulele, diddley bow, acoustic guitar), this recording also features his band members Itchy (drums, washboard) and Dick Zero (bush bass, trumpet).

[17] The remaining two albums Lang contributed to in this year are Kila's *Lemonade and Buns* (2000) and Peter Maskell's *Accidentally Happy* (2000).

[18] Only two of the eleven songs feature additional musicians including Bruce Haymes (wurlitzer), Rory Boast and Rob Price (backing vocals), and Kerryn Tolhurst (frontalini/producer).

[19] This backing band included Tommy Shannon (bass) and Chris Layton (drums). Otherwise known as "Double Trouble", these two musicians were the former rhythm section of the late Stevie Ray Vaughan.

[20] Co-produced by Tim Hall and himself, it features many of Lang's close musician friends including Angus Diggs (drums, percussion), Grant Cummerford (bass guitar, double bass), Tim Hall (backing vocals, harmonium, loop percussion), Bruce Haymes (piano, Rhodes piano), Chris Finnen (percussion, acoustic guitar), Chris Wilson (backing vocals), Matt Walker (harmonica), Azo Bell (singing saw), as well as the three members of Git, Suzannah Espie, Sarah Caroll and Trish Anderson (backing vocals).

[21] As with *Whatever Makes You Happy*, many of the usual guests appear including Grant Cummerford (basses, backing vocals), Chris Finnen (percussion) and Tim Hall (backing vocals, percussion), with additional support from Ian Collard (harmonica, backing vocals), Anthony Shorte (drums) and Alison Ferrier (violin, percussion).

[22] Here the term "solo" is applied to tracks where Lang performed by himself without any obvious overdubs such as drums or a second guitar.

[23] Of Turkish origin, the instrument is pronounced 'chumbush' or 'joombush'.

[24] While the majority of songs are from his three most recent studio albums at that time (*You Have to Dig Deep to Bury Daddy*, *Whatever Makes You Happy*, *Everything is Still*), this compilation also includes two tracks from his debut album (*Ravenswood*) and another four from *Cedar Grove*. It is worth noting here that this compilation does not include any tracks from Lang's *Native Dog Creek* album—the only studio album not to contribute to this release.

[25] See the album liner notes for more detail on the instruments and tunings used. Here Lang provides his own explanations and anecdotal introductions to each track.

[26] Lindley has recorded for the likes of Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Linda Ronstadt. He also worked with Ry Cooder, Jim Keltner and Jon Hassell on the film score for *Trespass*.

[27] Additional influences listed on Lang's website at MySpace.com include Nina Simone, Neil Young, The Harry Smith Anthology, Bert Jansch, Bill Frisell, John Fahey, Dirty Three, Warren Zevon, Chris Whitley and Debashish Bhattacharya (Jeff Lang's MySpace website).

[28] This instrument usually consists of a box (wooden or otherwise) with a microphone placed inside or underneath. The microphone is then run into a mixer where the bass quotient is given priority.

[29] These include 'Ravenswood' (Ravenswood), 'What's In a Name' (mentions Casino), 'Cedar Grove' (Glennifer), 'Bateman's Bay' (Narooma, Thirroul, Bateman's Bay and Sydney), 'Trainwreck 49' (Swansea and Belmont), 'The Save' (Newtown and the Indian-Pacific train), 'You Should Have Waited' (the Royal Derby

Hotel in Fitzroy), 'The Road is Not Your Only Friend' (Tailem Bend), 'Between the Dirt and Sky' (Brisbane), 'Southern Highlands Daughter' (the southern highlands on Australia's east coast), 'Five Letters' (Hobart) and 'Mooncoin' (Queensland).

[30] Lang plays resonator guitars made by Greg Beeton of Newcastle, New South Wales. He also owns several acoustic guitars made by David Churchill of Ballarat, Victoria.

[31] These are 'Scream', 'Master Plan', 'Killer', 'Bateman's Bay', 'Cedar Grove', 'Can't Raise My Head', 'London', 'The Point', 'No Good Answers', 'Release', 'The Save', 'Alive in There', 'By Face, Not Name', 'The Road is Not Your Only Friend', ''Til They Cut Me Down', 'Unnatural Act', 'Twelve Thousand Miles', 'Five Letters' and 'Mooncoin'.

[32] These are 'Scream', 'Master Plan', 'Cedar Grove', 'No Good Answers', and 'The Save'.

[33] Lang has also reinterpreted several songs by Richard Thompson including '1952 Vincent Black Lightning', 'From Galway to Graceland', 'Beeswing' and 'I Feel So Good'.

[34] An interesting side note to this is that Lang himself is now being canonised by other Australian musicians, particularly aspiring slide guitarists. One clear example is solo artist Adam Hole, whose recording *Why Not* (2006) features reinterpretations of Lang's 'Elvis Is Still Dead' as well as Tom Waits' 'Going Out West'—the latter having long been a staple in Lang's live set (see *Disturbed Folk Vol. 2*). In addition to his regular employment of a stompbox, Hole has also followed in Lang's footsteps by playing and endorsing Churchill guitars—Hole even owns the Jeff Lang signature lap steel model.

[35] Such other examples include Bob Dylan's 'Call Letter Blues' (*Cedar Grove*), Lonnie Johnson's 'Wipe It Off' (*Rolling Through This World*), Robert Johnson's 'Hellhound on My Trail' (*Whatever Makes You Happy* bonus disc and *Dislocation Blues*), and Tom Waits' 'Big in Japan' (*You Have to Dig Deep to Bury Daddy* bonus disc).

[36] In his introduction to *Darker Blues*, Matthew Johnson (founder of Fat Possum Records) tried to explain the relative obscurity of artists like Burnside: "Old bluesmen are supposed to be bad people… I didn't discover anybody, I just record blues guys who were overlooked by other labels because they hadn't toured, or had only limited repertoires, or were unreliable or refused to play standing up" (Johnson, M., 2002: 1).

[37] Burnside toured and played onstage with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion numerous times, including one occasion at Byron Bay's annual East Coast International Blues and Roots Music Festival. The two artists also recorded together on Burnside's albums *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey* (1996) and *Mr. Wizard* (1997).

[38] Seen as a way to boost his profile and widen his audience, some of Burnside's recordings have intentionally undergone a process of being sampled, remixed and re-released as new material under his name. One of the last of these recordings, *A Bothered Mind* (2004), also features prominent US contemporary musicians including Lyrics Born and Kid Rock.

[39] As Robert Palmer (2002: 10) explains, "The Delta is a flat, alluvial cotton land that runs along both sides of the Mississippi River and that was owned long ago by a small number of white families who divided it up into immense plantation tracts. By contrast, there are no big plantations in the hill country of north Mississippi, just small farms, many of them owned by black families for several generations".

[40] Though this blues style is certainly influenced by the fife and drum band tradition that emanated from this same geographic region, for the purposes of this discussion such music is not considered to be blues.

[41] From this one can speculate that it is likely that the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion got their arrangement idea (two guitars and drums) from R.L. Burnside, who regularly played with Kenny Brown on second guitar and Cedric Burnside on drums.

[42] "Bourdon" refers to any continuous bass or basic tone that forms a keynote and sometimes represents the fundamental (tonic) (Kubik, 1999: 110-1, 128).

[43] The "call" of this second riff begins on the higher strings with an ascending melody and ends low on the same three notes as the first riff. The response of this second riff also begins on the higher notes, but with a descending melody, and ends low, once again, on the same three notes as the first riff.

[44] Being that the low descending riff is omitted during the slide solos, it is likely that there are no overdubs and that both were played by the same guitarist. While both guitarists play bottleneck slide, it is likely that Burnside plays slide on this particular track considering his playing on other tracks on this album—specifically 'Over the Hill' and 'You Gotta Move' where he plays solo on electric guitar with bottleneck slide.

[45] Similarly, there are other blues songs about other noted highways including Big Joe Williams' 'Highway 49' (1935), which was subsequently reinterpreted by Mose Allison (1957), Howlin' Wolf (1971), George Thorogood (1987), Omar and the Howlers (1995), and Jeff Healey (2002). Another is Curtis Jones' 'Highway 51 Blues' (1938), which was subsequently reinterpreted by Tommy McClennan (1940), Bob Dylan (1962) and Gordon Smith (1968). Sleepy John Estes also recorded '80 Highway Blues' (1941) under the name Son Bonds, which was later reinterpreted by Tommy Lee (early 1950s).

[46] Paul Oliver (1960: 57) traces the highway from its beginnings in New Orleans, through Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, St. Louis, St Paul and Port Arthur. Michael Gray (2000: 293-6) points out that, ironically, one of the things that varies in this blues core is the described route of the highway itself.

[47] These included Sampson Pittman (1938), Speckled Red (1960s) and James 'Son' Thomas (1974).

[48] Tracks recorded as 'Highway 61' include Joe McCoy (1935), Jesse James (1936), Memphis Willie B (1961), Mississippi Fred McDowell (1962), David "Honeyboy" Edwards (1964), Nathan Beauregard (1968) and Sunnyland Slim (1983). Tracks recorded as '61 Highway' include The Sparks Brothers (1933), Mississippi Fred McDowell (1964), Charles Henderson (1961), Fred Tav Falco (1986), Corey Harris (1995), Guitar Welch (1996), Charlie Musselwhite (2002), File Gumbo (2003) and Hans Theesink (2003). The titles with only one recorded manifestation include 'Highway No. 61 Blues' by Jack Kelly & his South Memphis Jug Band (1933), 'Down the Highway' by Charlie Pickett (1937), 'I Went Down 61 Highway' by Smokey Babe (1961) and 'Loneliest Road I Know' by Guy Davis (2002).

[49] Mississippi Fred McDowell's first recording of this song is titled '61 Highway Blues' and was recorded in 1959. His second recorded recording was titled 'Highway 61' (1962), and his third '61 Highway' (1964). While several other manifestations of this song exist in McDowell's recorded catalogue, the majority of the remaining tracks are titled '61 Highway'.

[50] McDowell plays this song in a bottleneck style, but instead of using an actual bottleneck he uses a bone.

[51] Other recorded reinterpretations have been recorded by David Rea (1969), Roger Hubbard (1970), Johnny Nicholas (1978), Roy Rogers (1989), Matt Walker and Friends (1995), Guido Toffoletti (1996), Daddy Squeeze and the Doctor (1997), Ben Stevens (1998), Ken Hensley (2000), James Cotton (2001), John Sinclair (2001), Geezerphoelia (2001), Blues Goblins (2002), Diunna Greenleaf & Blue Mercy (2002), Konkhra (2003), Leslie West (2003), Miles Nielsen (2005) and Mountain (2006).

[52] Further to this song's history, James learned the tune from his friend Henry "Son" Stuckey (Calt, 1994: 3-4). The title was taken from a lyric in J.T. "Funny Paper" Smith's 'Howling Wolf Blues No. 3' (Wardlow, 1998: 198; Wald, 2004: 274, 316). Other reinterpretations of 'Devil Got My Woman' have been performed by Joe McCoy (1934) as 'Evil Devil Woman Blues', Johnny Temple (1935) as 'Evil Devil Blues', Rising Sons (1965), Dave "Snaker" Ray (1977), Rory Block (1981) as 'Devil Got My Man', Roy Rogers (1986), John Cephas and Phil Wiggins (1992), Big Sugar (1992), Paul Rishell (1993), Del Rey (1993) as 'Devil Call Your Name', Allen Lowe (1993), Diamond Jim Greene (1995), Bob Brozman (1995), Paul Geremia (1995), Djeli Moussa Diawara and Bob Brozman (2001) as 'Maloyan Devil', Alvin Youngblood Hart (2002), Bonnie Raitt (2003), and the Immortal Lee County Killers II (2003) (Rypens 1996: 91; The Originals website). Interestingly, 'Devil Got My Woman' was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 2006—thirteen years after 'Hellhound On My Trail' (Blues Foundation website).

[53] Though Stefan Wirz (American Music website) illustrates that Blind Willie Johnson's recording was first released by Heritage Records as 'Jesus Goin' To Make Up My Dyin' Bed' (1964), all subsequent releases since 1965 carry the title 'Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed'.

[54] Other reinterpretations recorded as 'Jesus Is a Dying Bed Maker/Bedmaker' include John Fahey (1971), James Mathus and his Knockdown Society (1997), and Liz Janes and Create (2005).

[55] Other reinterpretations recorded as 'Jesus Gonna Make Up My Dying Bed' include Mississippi Fred McDowell (1964), Josh White Jr. (1999), and Sam Clanton (2000). McDowell's also released a reinterpretation under the title 'I'm So Glad, Got Good Religion'. Furthermore, McDowell recorded several other reinterpretations of Blind Willie Johnson songs including 'Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning' (1959), 'Mother's Children Have a Hard Time' (1960) as 'Motherless Children' with Felix Dukes, 'Bye and Bye, I'm Going to See The King' (1973) as 'Bye and Bye'.

[56] Not to be confused with another different gospel tune of the same name, the Soul Stirrers (1996) also recorded a reinterpretation under the title 'Well, Well, Well'.

[57] The other titles include Well, Well, Well', 'In My Time Of Dying' and 'He's a Dying Bed Maker'.

[58] Other recorded reinterpretations under 'In My Time of Dyin'/Dying' include Shocking Blue (1973), Led Zeppelin (1975), Big Sugar (1992), Pride and Glory (1994), Beth and April Stevens (1996), John Mellencamp (1997), Lydia Lynch and Rowland Howard (1998), Jimmy Page and the Black Crowes (2000), David Gogo (2000), Mike Barnet (2002), The Be Good Tanyas (2003), Martin L. Gore (2003) and Alvin Youngblood Hart (2005).

<u>Conclusion</u>

Following these case studies of Australian artists it is important to reflect upon arguments made earlier in this thesis regarding canonic material and established reinterpretive practices in blues music, as well as to discuss their relationship to the Australian context. This discussion is divided here into six overlapping areas of blues discourse, each one representing an idea that is integral to the ethos of blues music.

It has been argued throughout this thesis that the blues genre functions as an evolving idiom while still retaining many of its core characteristics. This process of reinvention is not one of chance rather it is an essential aspect that has been integral to the performance of blues music at least as far back as the first recordings from the 1920s. From the first utterance, musical material such as words, phrases, line, half-lines, rhyming couplets, stanzas, instrumental accompaniments and other hallmarks of the genre have been readily and unreservedly learned, shared, borrowed, sampled, copied, garbled, parodied, reused and stolen. This constitutes a vital part of a communal process established by African-American musicians, reinforced by white American copyrighting and recording practices, and upheld by many contemporary performers engaging with blues music in disseminated contexts such as Australia. Even once a blues song has achieved some degree of stability or stasis as a singular entity—most likely through the recording process—those that become immensely popular inevitably appear to subsequent artists as templates for performance, inviting reinvention for a new time and place. Thus the perpetual cycle of canonisation and reinterpretation, with each aspect reinforcing the other, is essential to blues music. Canonised tracks invite reinterpretation, inevitably becoming "standards", and these "standards" warrant recognition through ubiquity and omnipresence, thereby encouraging acknowledgement of their significance. In this regard, contemporary musicians are seen to play an important role as the primary agents of this reinventive process as much of blues music is preoccupied with

finding new ways to approach, play and deliver its older songs. Like an ageing recording artist, the blues genre routinely generates a demand among its audience (musicians) to relive some of the most popular—and even most obscure—hits from its back catalogue, frequently in new and different ways. Here stasis and stereotypes are habitually challenged as the blues text in question is reimagined through all manner of creative avenues including alternative arrangements, advances in technology and amalgamation with additional musical influences.

Even with the significant standardisation of blues music with its fixed stanzaic forms (e.g. twelve-bar blues), common-stock lyrics, recognisable tonal character and canonised repertoire (i.e. "standards"), this standardisation is consistently subjected to and overcome by another vital ingredient: improvisation. Allowing extensive avenues of variation in structure, lyrical combinations, instrumental phrasing, timbre and so on, it is here that the genre's dictum of re-creation in performance is consummated. This marker of creative engagement stems from a history of blues music performance that has been profoundly contingent on individualisation—not just between different performers, but also between different performances of the same song. Consequently, this genre is not governed by fidelity to any form of score, rather fidelity to individual experimentation. Blues songs are typically created through a flexible roster of core musical elements (lyric stanzas, melody, instrumental/solo passages, etc.) that may vary from one performance to the next and are seldom subjected to a doctrine of strict adherence to a singular, set interpretation. This is true of both live performances and recordings as, even though recordings imply stasis, these songs can be repeated, analysed, reinterpreted and rerecorded ad infinitum—both by the same artist and subsequent other performers. Most often, this element of re-creation is demonstrated in blues music when a subsequent (or contemporary) artist reinterprets a previously-recorded track (sometimes a "standard") by using it as a framework for improvised performance. Ultimately, some degree of the core musical elements is maintained in order to generate a point of

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comparison (i.e. past and present, mentor and student, original and reinterpretation). However, such improvised performance builds upon this foundation through spontaneous selection, reordering and altered delivery of existing elements, spontaneous combination with external elements, as well as spontaneous creation of new elements. Here the latter is a particularly popular creative avenue and typically manifests in the form of solo passages, call-and-response interplay between two or more musicians and/or impromptu lyrical composition. Common re-creative approaches such as these in blues music take the reengagement as an opportunity to personally remould a pre-assembled, recognisable and/or successful template in a manner that simultaneously suits the subsequent artist's creative intentions and draws attention to their own performative capabilities.

Also emerging from this research is the importance afforded to African-American performers of blues music and, subsequently, the songs, musical equipment and playing styles intricately associated with these artists. This is the result of a collective stance among consumers (i.e. fans, appreciation societies, record collectors and discographers), scholars (i.e. folklorists, historians and musicologists) and musicians alike who—as agents of the canonisation process—reinforce the significance of these African-American musicians through their decisions, comments and personal beliefs. More specifically, these agents are particularly preoccupied with the reiteration of a canon predominantly comprising African-American recording artists associated with the blues music's early beginnings as well as those who have made a lifelong career as exponents of the genre. As demonstrated throughout, this aspect of blues is just as vital to disseminated contexts like Australia, especially in relation to contemporary musicians who consistently exhibit and espouse the influential sources of their musical enjoyment and creativity. These musicians tend to reiterate this blues canon in at least one of following four ways. First, the option of mimicking the sound and/or appearance of an artist, combination of artists or the bluesman

stereotype is typically adopted by those that are more concerned with imitation, such as C.W. Stoneking. More common though is the act of rerecording well-known, highly successful and/or long-established material from the blues repertoire, often referred to as "blues standards". Another popular approach to canon reiteration is to draw upon archetypal musical equipment that has been responsible for generating the timbres and similar sound qualities associated with a specific blues performer, group, song or album. Much of this can be attributed to a specific instrument (including microphones and amplifiers), a specific make, model and/or edition of an instrument, playing implements (e.g. slides), and/or identifiable instrumentations (e.g. Chicago blues band, self-accompanied guitarist, etc.). The final method of reiteration is the adoption of characteristic playing styles (i.e. classic, downhome and electric) and musical effects associated with the genre (i.e. boogie-woogie bass patterns, repetitive vamping on a singular chord or tone, intricate ragtime-influenced melodies or accompaniments, and sliding between notes or chords).

Given the reiteration of the blues canon, one seemingly inevitable outcome from subsequent performers engaging with blues music is their reinterpretation of existing songs in new ways. This leads to a creative approach that is geared towards producing either a more aesthetically palatable adaptation of a previous recording (e.g. through technological advances), an unconventional twist on assumed genre principles (e.g. adoption of non-traditional instruments), a sound that is more reflective of the contemporary musical climate or taste (e.g. incorporating solo passages) or a performance that is more representative of the subsequent artist's wider repertoire (e.g. three-piece band). As such, this act of recomposition is frequently exploited as an opportunity to advance one's own musical agenda in any number of the following ways. Firstly, it enables musicians to partake in the performance of a favourite song—one that is typically associated in some way with a favourite artist and may even function as a tribute to that artist. Subsequent musicians may

also wish to signify difference from previous renditions of the piece, particularly the model text. In blues music, this avenue typically manifests as a rite of passage in order for one to gain, maintain and cement their acceptance as a "blues artist", with Eric Clapton's *From the Cradle* (1994) and *Me and Mr. Johnson* (2004) albums serving as apt examples. By showing respect for the song, the artist(s) cited as influential inspiration <u>and</u> the blues genre, subsequent performers are seen to simultaneously pass their blues auditioning process and demonstrate the measure of their musical credentials.

As has been established through several analytical case studies in this thesis, the creative act of recomposition in blues music is routinely carried out (to varying degrees) through any number of reinterpretive measures. While this is essentially a constructive and inspired process, it must also be acknowledged that recording artists have participated in reinterpreting blues songs for other reasons. Reflecting upon the historical origins of the term "cover", this recomposition process, at one particular moment in time, was chiefly enacted through the practice of white performers rerecording (and outselling) songs recently released by African-American performers. On a similar note, there is also the possibility that artists engaging in the recomposition process are out to deliver new renditions of familiar songs which, due to previous chart success, are proven to be useful templates for establishing one's own musical career. This specific agenda, however, is of little relevance to blues music in Australia as it is both a minority taste and historically lacking in terms of popular chart success.

On an additional note, the process of subsequent musicians performing reinterpretations of previously-recorded material functions as one of several avenues through which the persistence of the blues genre is asserted. By engaging with blues songs through newly-applied creative approaches and personal agendas, these performers are, in effect, participating in the continued distribution of blues music and its canon. Regardless of

individual artistic intentions, such an activity constitutes as reaffirmation of the blues genre, thereby contributing to the recurring effort being carried out among all blues music supporters to celebrate its significance in the history of recorded music and to keep the music alive. Throughout its lifetime, the music the world has come to know as "blues" has consistently been subjected to a sequence of peaks and troughs in public interest and investment in the genre. Here the troughs typically represent periods in which other musical styles have superseded the foregoing popularity of blues music, whereas the peaks repeatedly signify the introduction of this music to either a wider audience or a new generation. This routine resurrection of fascination with blues has been characteristically realised through a series of revivals comprising elements such as new music festivals and concerts, new and reissued recordings, compilations and/or projects, and new and reissued research and/or written publications pertaining to blues music and/or its accompanying culture. Perhaps fuelled by its contribution to contemporary recorded music culture as the perceived foundation of jazz, rock-and-roll and soul, the argument for blues music's significance and continued relevance is apparently timeless and inevitable. Most recently, this outcome has been strongly reinforced by an accumulative combination of historical and thematic events centred on the celebration of blues music, its core attributes and its contributions to music the world over. In Australia, specifically, this reaffirmation has surfaced as a result of occurrences like The Annual East Coast International Blues and Roots Music Festival, The ARIA Award for Best Blues and Roots Album, The 2005 Sydney Festival concerts, and The ABC Blues Festival (including *The dig Australian Blues Project*).

Finally, considering its beginnings as an African-American innovation in musical expression, blues music has become something of a musical diaspora. Not only has the idiom grown into a music to be enjoyed, adopted and celebrated by all manner of North American ethnicities, such enthusiasm for the blues genre has disseminated and germinated across the

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globe—ranging from Western Europe to Australia, post-communist Russia and numerous other nations in between. An important part of the propagation of a foreign musical idiom such as blues is the recontextualistion that occurs through its marriage to a new, disseminated cultural context. It is here that new creative approaches are formed and new interpretive results are produced as musicians with no direct historical contact with this genre go about concocting their individual internalisation of a blues discourse. Based on the reinterpretive methodology developed in this thesis and the findings from its application to the four case studies, the outcomes of Australian engagements with blues music range from direct imitation (registering approximately one to five measures), minor alteration (six to eight measures), moderate revisionism (nine to twelve), to significant variation (thirteen or more). Here the three Australian artists selected for individual analysis, Chain, the Backsliders and Jeff Lang (all of whom regularly engage with the blues genre), are seen to average moderate-to-high levels of reinterpretive engagement (i.e. between eleven and fourteen measures) in their recorded reinterpretations of old blues songs. When compared with the thirteen recordings comprising *The dig Australian Blues Project*—including performances from numerous Australian musicians who do not regularly engage with the blues genre—this result only varies slightly. Though this broader representation of Australian artists is seen to demonstrate the full gamut of reinterpretive groupings (from direct imitation to significant variation), it still manages to produce a moderate average of approximately nine reinterpretive measures per blues reinterpretation.

Evidently, when musicians in contemporary Australian culture come into contact with blues—one of the oldest musics to be documented on phonographic recordings—it is often an interaction of fascination, one that tends to induce the process of reinterpreting recorded material from another time, another place, and even another race. Regardless of perceived genre affiliations, the Australian performers analysed as part of this study are largely

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respectful of the origins of blues and play a vital role as purveyors of the music in the continued reinterpretation, codification and dissemination of the blues canon. The three key elements of musical change that have been identified as frequent outcomes of this transmission process are the adoption a different vocal timbre (often coloured by some degree of Australian accent), garbled or readjusted lyrics, and altered instrumentation. In specific reference to the three artists identified and studied as key figures in Australian blues music culture (Chain, the Backsliders and Jeff Lang), these performers characteristically differ in their reinterpretive practices by exhibiting a higher number of creative changes from the "model" text and greater interest in reinterpreting blues as a flexible form (i.e. omitting elements of song structure and adding new solo passages). Moreover, as a consequence of being more driven to research and understand the origins of the songs they reinterpret in their subsequent recordings (as well as the blues genre itself), these three artists naturally exhibit a greater dedication to the propagation and development of the genre as embodied through the above six principles of blues discourse: reinvention of the musical material; re-creation in performance; reiteration of the established canon; recomposition of songs; reaffirmation of the genre, and; recontextualisation to disseminated contexts. Even so, although these performers are regularly hailed as exponents of "Australian blues" in local music culture, the reinterpretive and musical traits they share still struggle to unify their disparate styles. While artistic diversity is typical in any genre, this study shows that artists who regularly interact with Australian blues music culture each deliver their own individualistic embodiment of blues music with an overarching sound that is dissimilar. This is mostly due to a given artist's own incorporation of a differing array of musical influences and adoption of a reinterpretive approach comprising varied combinations of core creative measures.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Disc 1 track list

1. Rock Me Baby
   Mia Dyson (2005)

2. Rock Me Baby
   Ike and Tina Turner (1969)

3. Motherless Children Have a Hard Time
   Jeff Lang (2005)

4. Mother's Children Have a Hard Time
   Blind Willie Johnson (1927)

5. Lonely Avenue
   Jackie Orszaczky (2005)

6. Lonely Avenue
   Ray Charles (1956)

7. Red Cross Store
   Lisa Miller (2005)

8. Red Cross Store Blues
   Leadbelly (1935)

9. Cottonfields
   Jimmy Little (2005)

10. Cottonfields
    Leadbelly (circa 1941)

11. Mother Earth
    Geoff Achison (2005)

12. Mother Earth
    Memphis Slim (1951)

13. Spoonful
    Machine Translations and C.W. Stoneking (2005)

14. Spoonful
    Howlin' Wolf (1960)

15. Ragged and Dirty
    William Brown (1942)

16. Preaching Blues
    The Backsliders (2005)

17. Preaching Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)
    Robert Johnson (1936)

18. Drunken Hearted Man Blues
    FourPlay (2005)

19. Drunken Hearted Man
    Robert Johnson (1937)

20. Garbage Man
    The Zydecats (2005)

Appendix B: Disc 2 track list

1. Where's My Woman Been (live)
    Muddy Waters (1972)

2. Got Love If You Want It
    Slim Harpo (1957)

3. You Got to Move
    Fred McDowell (1969)

4. Thirty Two Twenty Blues
    Chain (1971)

5. 32/20 (live)
    Chain (1971)

6. 32 – 20 (live)
    Chain (1997)

7. 32-20 Blues
    Robert Johnson (1936)

8. Snatch It Back and Hold It
    Chain (1971)

9. Grab a Snatch (live)
    Chain (1987)

10. Snatch It Back and Hold It
    Junior Wells (1965)

11. Dust My Blues (live)
    Chain (1971)

12. Dust My Blues
    Elmore James (1955)

13. Mannish Boy
    Matt Taylor Phil Manning Band (1981)

14. I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man
    Muddy Waters (1954)

15. Mannish Boy
    Muddy Waters (1955)

16. A Tribute to Muddy Waters (Can't Be Satisfied – Rollin' and Tumblin')
    Chain (1985)

Appendix C: Disc 3 track list

1. I Can't Be Satisfied
   Muddy Waters (1948)

2. Rollin' and Tumblin'
   Muddy Waters (1950)

3. Kokomo (live)
   The Backsliders (1989)

4. Kokomo (live)
   The Backsliders (1991)

5. Kokomo (live)
   The Backsliders (1996)

6. Kokomo Me Baby
   Fred McDowell (1969)

7. Warm It Up To Me
   The Backsliders (1988)

8. Warm It Up To Me
   The Backsliders (1995)

9. Warm It Up To Me
   Blind Willie McTell (1928)

10. Stop Breaking Down
    The Backsliders (1988)

11. Stop Breaking Down (live)
    The Backsliders (1991)

12. Stop Breaking Down (live)
    The Backsliders and George Butrumlis (1996)

13. Stop Breaking Down Blues
    Robert Johnson (1937)

14. Gallows Pole
    The Backsliders (1988)

15. The Gallows Pole (live)
    The Backsliders (1992)

16. The Gallows Song
    Leadbelly (1940)

17. Smokestack Lightning (live)
    The Backsliders (1991)

Appendix D: Disc 4 track list

1. Smokestack Lightning (live)
   The Backsliders and Chris Wilson (1996)

2. Smokestack Lightning (live)
   The Backsliders (2005)

3. Smokestack Lightning
   Howlin' Wolf (1956)

4. Gonna Send You Back to Georgia (live)
   Jeff Lang and Chris Finnen (1996)

5. Gonna Send You Back to Georgia (live)
   Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers (1972)

6. Georgia Women
   Jeff Lang and Hat Fitz (1999)

7. Georgia Women
   R.L. Burnside (1997)

8. 61 Highway
   Jeff Lang and Bob Brozman (2002)

9. 61 Highway (live)
   Jeff Lang (2003)

10. Highway 61 (live)
    Fred McDowell (1965)

11. Hellhound On My Trail (live)
    Jeff Lang and John Butler (2004)

12. Hellhound On My Trail
    Jeff Lang and Chris Whitley (2005)

13. Hellhound On My Trail
    Robert Johnson (1937)

14. In My Time of Dying
    Jeff Lang and Chris Finnen (2005)

15. In My Time of Dyin'
    Bob Dylan (1962)