

THE BLUES - KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

HISTORY AND CONTEXT



- In the 1600s & 1700s, millions of Africans were captured and sold as slaves. Many were taken to North America.
- It is widely accepted that Blues music evolved from the African spirituals, chants, hymns, work songs and field hollers that were sung on the plantations.
- Over the years, African musical features such as Call & Response singing, blended with European musical influences (like structure) to form the beginning of the Blues.

FEATURES OF THE BLUES

- Started in Southern USA in 1920-30s
- 12 bar blues chord sequence
- Slow tempo
- Features improvisation
- Uses call and response
- Famous blues performers include Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith and Robert Johnson.
- Instruments include piano, trumpet, double bass, drum kit, trombone, guitar and saxophone.



BLUES KEY TERMS

12 Bar Blues	3 chords used over 12 bars in a particular order.
Walking Bass	The bass part in the Blues 'walks' up or down the notes step by step.
Spirituals	A type of Christian song sung by slaves in the 19th century, with themes of yearning for freedom and an end to suffering.
Work Songs	Also called 'field hollers'; songs with a steady beat that slaves would sing to keep them motivated whilst working.
Call and response	A question-and-answer phrase in the melody.
Improvisation	Music that is created on the spot by a performer.
Blues scale	A set of notes used in blues music to improvise.