

The Blues

- In its earliest **commercial** form, the most characteristic features of "the blues" were
 - based more on "Delta" blues than on other styles
 - involved **syncopated** singing
 - involved a "**blue note**" -- a note that falls into the ambiguous space between a major third (4 half steps) and minor third (3 half steps).
 - a 12-bar form, consisting of three main parts.

The 12-bar Blues Form

- Labeled "AAB", and consisting of three parts
 - ▶ the second part repeating or elaborating on the first
 - ▶ the third part (B) is the "punch line"
 - starts out feeling unstable, with intensifying motion
 - proceeds to a strong feeling of "ending", and ends by leading toward the beginning, completing a circle.
- *Common version*: A and B are each associated with one line of a two-line poem -- a "set-up" line and a "knock-down" line.
- Think of Aristotle's "sparagmos." The 'knock-down' jars us loose from our expectations; comically or tragically (or both!)

The 12-bar Blues Form

I hate to see the evening sun go down.

I hate to see the evening sun go down.

It makes me think I'm on my last go 'round.

Feelin' tomorrow like I feel today.

Feelin' tomorrow like I feel today.

I'll pack my trunk and make my get-away.

melody:	A					A'						B				
harmony:	I					IV	I					V	IV	I		
meter:	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9	10	11	12	

The 12-bar Blues Form

I hate to see the evening sun go down. (A)

I *hate* to see the evening sun go down. (A')

It makes me think I'm on my last go 'round. (B)

Feelin' tomorrow like I feel today. (A)

Feelin' tomorrow like I feel today. (A')

I'll pack my trunk and make my get-away. (B)

melody:	A					A'						B					
harmony:	I					IV	I					V	IV	I			
meter:	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9	10	11	12		

The 12-bar Blues Form

- REMEMBER: early country “blues” musicians played forms *like* this, but rarely matched it exactly.
- W.C. Handy and other composers *arranged* the form for the medium of brass bands, or for voice and piano.
- **The strict “12-bar blues form”** was popularized by sheet-music publishers. City blues performers made use of the standard, but not exclusively.
- Commercialization of the blues influenced country “blues” musicians, who adapt the form in order to participate in its popularity.

melody:	A					A'						B				
harmony:	I					IV	I					V	IV	I		
meter:	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9	10	11	12	

The 12-bar Blues Form

- Musically, the blues form offers tension between two elements: a stable, anchoring "tonic" note, and an uneven, asymmetrical process of change.
- Like most European music, the blues' tonic note (Roman numeral "I") is both a starting point for departure and a goal point for return.
- Unlike most European music, in which phrases come in question-answer pairs, and make use of binary opposition, the blues form asserts its conclusion in part 3, precisely when symmetry is lacking.
- In the last moments of B (bar 12), a *turn-around* helps strengthen our sense of completeness for the idea.

melody:	A					A'						B
harmony:	I					IV	I					V IV I
meter:	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9 10 11 12

3x5 only! Please help us by making your last name is legible (for alphabetization).

- Your Name (neatly written is nice!)
- Student I.D. #

QUIZ: What forms of MEDIA impact Irish-American musical identity in the late 19th-century?