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| Comparison of Rural and Urban Blues Styles

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| **Rural Blues** | **Urban Blues Style** |
| 1. Black Folk society | 1. City society |
| 2. Product of an agrarian society and attendant subject material | 2. Urban environment |
| 3. South | 3. North |
| 4. Usually pure and an extension of folklore and folk song | 4. Shows an assimilation of a great many elements of popular music, including popular theater and/or vaudeville |
| 5. Usually find blues singers in three contexts: 1. singing for themselves and their immediate friends
2. blind and/or otherwise disabled blues singers
3. slightly commercial performers working picnics, dances, etc.
 | 5. Professional blues singers found in nightclubs bars, at social affairs, etc. |
| 6. Usually men | 6. Originally mainly women; both men and women |
| 7. In-group directed | 7. Audience directed |
| 8. Broader variety of subjects | 8. Often sex oriented, though veiled |
| 9. Songs about boll weevils, drought, crops, etc. | 9. Songs about bed bugs, roaches, rats, "the block," etc. |
| 10. Bad diction, malapropisms, faulty rhyme, etc. | 10. Sophisticated speech, smooth diction |
| 11. Bleak, austere, but often infused with hope | 11. Hard, cruel, stoical, often speaks of hopelessness |
| 12. Stringing together of stock phrases; lines often disjunct and unrelated | 12. Emphasis often on lyrics that tell a story |
| 13. Rough style | 13. Smooth, theatrical style |
| 14. Harsh, uncompromising, raw | 14. Contains diverse and conflicting elements of black music, plus smooth emotional appeal of performance |
| 15. Improvised | 15. Standardized, formalized, etc. |
| 16. Less structured, "free" form | 16. Classic 6, 8, or 12 measure form |
| 17. Use of pedal points, chord drones, prolonged and indefinite rate of harmonic change | 17. Standard blues changes: I IV I V IV I |
| 18. Unaccompanied voice, or mostly solo, with guitar accompaniment; also ad hoc instruments | 18. Instrumental accompaniment using conventional instruments |
| 19. Spontaneous expression of thought and mood | 19. Written material, formal orchestration, musical arrangements |
| **Cont’d****Comparison of Rural and Urban Blues Style** |
| **Rural Blues** | **Urban Blues Style** |
| 20. Spontaneous beginnings, fade-away endings | 20. Clear cut beginnings (includes use of introduction) and endings |
| 21. Structural elaboration is usually accidental | 21. More elaborate structures (tags, endings, modulations, etc.) |
| 22. Expressive rubato and erratic tempi | 22. Wide tempo choices, but rigidity once established |
| 23. Melody straight, range relatively narrow and confined; nasal quality with restricted use of melisma | 23. Melody influenced by instrumental practices; wide range and extensive use of melisma |
| 24. Rhythms crude, simple and erratic | 24. Rhythms sophisticated, refined, often standardized |
| 25. Scale choices relatively limited -- usually blues, pentatonic, major | 25. Greater scale choices -- blues, pentatonic, diminished, etc. |
| 26. Greater use of vocal ornamentation for personalization (growls, slides, etc.) and to relieve the monotony of solo voice and solo instrument | 26. Stricter vocal technique |
| 27. Solo or ad hoc instruments | 27. Groups usually organized |
| 28. Usually "in-group" black | 28. More readily acceptable to and adapted by white world |

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