



DELTA BLUES GUITAR

EDITED AND TRANSCRIBED BY STEFAN GROSSMAN

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INTRODUCTION

by Stefan Grossman

“There are fashions in music as in anything else, and folk-song presents no exception to the rule.

(For the last several years the most popular type of Negro song has been that peculiar, barbaric sort of melody called ‘blues’, with its irregular rhythm, its lagging briskness, its mournful liveliness of tone.) It has a jerky tempo, as of a cripple dancing because of some irresistible impulse. A ‘blues’ (or does one say a ‘blue’? What is the grammar of the thing?) likes to end its stanza abruptly, leaving the listener expectant for more—though, of course, there is no fixed law about it. One could scarcely imagine a convention of any kind in connection with this Negroid free music. It is partial to the three-line stanza instead of the customary one of four or more, though not insisting on it, and it ends with a high note that has the effect of incompleteness. The close of a stanza comes with a shock like the whip-crack surprise at the end of an O. Henry story, for instance—a cheap trick, but effective as a novelty. It sings of themes remote from those of the old spirituals, and its incompleteness of stanza makes the listener gasp, and perhaps fancy that the censor had deleted the other line.”

— published 1915: *On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs*, Dorothy Scarborough

I have been playing the guitar for years. I started at the age of nine and by the time I reached fifteen I was studying with Rev. Gary Davis, one of the greatest exponents of fingerstyle blues and gospel guitar playing. Over the last forty years of studying, teaching, composing and writing, I still find my musical interests centered around a type of music classified as the Blues.

Much has been written about the story of the blues and its lyrical content. Without doubt, the blues hold a vital story of an oppressed people. Its lyrics are an American form of poetry at its finest. Its influence can be felt in classical compositions as well as to the most avant garde pieces of “sound music.” Everyday we are bombarded by segments of the blues story that have permeated into the mainstream of today’s pop music.

My interest for blues has always centered around the guitar. The sounds of blues guitar, whether finger-picked, flatpicked, played with a bottleneck, played on the guitarist’s lap or strummed simply, has always intrigued me. My first

encounter with blues music came via a Folkways Record of Big Bill Broonzy. I suppose the high powered voice of Big Bill combined with his exciting guitar playing was enough to capture the spirit of any young “city-billy” trying to learn how to tackle those six strings on his newly acquired guitar.

I spent several months buying records that featured Black men holding guitars. I was not familiar with the many names of bluesmen and could only use the album covers as my guide. I soon discovered names like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Son House, Charlie Patton, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Muddy Waters, Mississippi John Hurt, Elizabeth Cotten, and Rev. Gary Davis. The names in themselves held enough attraction for me. Their music was something else completely. Every record produced a new and profound listening experience. I became obsessed to hear *all* the new and old blues records.

As this was happening, I had the fortune to meet and study under Rev. Gary Davis. He patiently taught me many of the marvels of blues guitar playing. I was indeed very fortunate

FUTURE BLUES

as performed by Willie Brown

Open G Tuning: DGDGBD

The first system of musical notation consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody begins with a quarter rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard with fret numbers 0, 3, 2, 1, 0, 3, 2, 1, 0, 3. A large 'A' and 'B' are written on the left side of the bass staff.

The second system continues the melody with more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and slurs. The bass staff includes fret numbers 0, 3, 2, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 3, 3, 3, 0. It also features a 'W' (wide) symbol and arrows indicating string bends or slides. A large 'A' and 'B' are written on the left side of the bass staff.

The third system features a more intricate melody with many beamed eighth notes and slurs. The bass staff shows fret numbers 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 0. It includes a 'W' (wide) symbol and arrows indicating string bends or slides. A large 'A' and 'B' are written on the left side of the bass staff.

The fourth system concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase. The bass staff shows fret numbers 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0. It includes a 'W' (wide) symbol and arrows indicating string bends or slides. A large 'A' and 'B' are written on the left side of the bass staff.

DRY SPELL BLUES, PART ONE

as performed by Son House

Open G Tuning: DGDGBD

INTRO

3-12 12 10-12 12 12-7 2-4 5 5 5

VERSE

5 3 2 0 5 3 2 0 2-4 5 3 2 0 2-4

1., 2.

5 3 2 0 2-4 0 3-12 10-12 12 12-7 2-4

3.

3-12 12 10-12 12 12-7 2-4 5 5 5